Chapter III

Entrapment:

Atrocities and Intimations
Chapter III

Entrapment: Atrocities and Intimations

They lived in narrow streets and lanes obscure,
Ghetto and Judenstrass, in mirk and mire;
Taught in the school of patience to endure
The life of anguish and the death of fire.

—Longfellow (217, 33-36)

In 2004, Philip Roth wrote his novel *The Plot Against America* that revived the elemental Jewish anxieties. The novel is an alternative history imagining the victory of the anti-Semite Charles Lindbergh in the 1940 American presidential election which paves the ground for an American holocaust. The lingering sense of anxiety haunting Roth’s novel suggests that the genocide it imagines has been but a near miss and the fears it raises cannot be so easily ignored. Roth’s contemplation of the possibilities of history is but a belated awakening to the postwar post-Holocaust Angst over the fate of the Jews thrown into an anti-Semitic world. The aspects of that world-wide abyss in which Jews find themselves entrapped occur, however, with an implicit intensity in the Jewish American novel of the fifties and the sixties. In it, the diasporic sense of danger becomes more clearly defined as homelessness (examined in the previous chapter) unveils a fatal hatred lurking everywhere. Anti-Semitism, growing into an active, though elusive, power of persecution, is the subject-matter of this chapter. It discusses how the atrocities of anti-Semitism are rendered in the physical acts of assault and murder as well as in the consciousness of the victims.
sensitive to every change in weather, every sweep of colour, and every object
associated with the Holocaust. Wajnryb identifies three types of the “unspoken text”
in the Holocaust discourse of which “Iconic messages refer to the meanings
embedded in certain tangible objects, certain distinctive behaviours and attitudes, and
certain formal occasions that resonate with Holocaustal significance” (265-66). He
names chimneys, dogs and trains as examples of tangible objects. In this respect,
America “the democratic crucible” (Anti-Semite 40), in Sartre’s words, like all other
places is a land of a potential genocide. But unlike Europe, American anti-Semitism
assumes new forms.

Anti-Semitism is a real and ignoble part of America’s cultural
heritage. . . . Like a genetic disease, it has been transmitted from one
generation to the next but, like a folk tale, it has been added to,
transformed, and adapted to particular times, places, and
circumstances (Dinnerstein xix).

In the novels of Bellow, Malamud and Wallant, the particularity of the American
experience is fused with the residues of the European terrible past.

Bellow’s novels, implicitly and explicitly, indulge into wars of ideas which
determine the weight of responsibility he bears in response to “a crime so vast that it
brings all Being into Judgment” (Bellow, Letters 274). To serve that cause, Bellow
comes up with a two-fold technique which presents the Jewish protagonist either as a
victim entrapped in a real world of anti-Semitism and genocide or as a mental agency
struggling in a world of ideas and besieged by destructive philosophical constructions
that have a causal relationship with the former. Most obviously, Bellow’s battles of
ideas are waged against whatever is relevant to the Nazi ideological thought based on
the principle of natural selection in which a superior race is created by eliminating the weaker elements. Consequently, his novels, from *Dangling Man* in 1944 up to the last one, present a concerted attack on Nazism and on those ideas which give rise to the Nazi phenomenon and ideology. That attack assumes two-fold manner too. On the one hand, there is a systematic deconstruction of the German culture and its philosophical and ideological tenets per se. On the other hand, Bellow creates in each novel at least one aggressive minor character whose German traits are presented pejoratively: Joseph’s childhood friend, Will Harscha and his anti-Semitic parents in *Dangling Man*; Albee and his landlord and landlady in *The Victim*; Dr. Albee in *Seize the Day*; Valentine the cuckold in *Herzog*; Hilda Gruner with her highhanded German mannerism in *Mr. Sammler’s Planet*; and Von Humboldt in *Humboldt’s Gift*.

When *Mr. Sammler’s Planet* sees the light, the whole idea of the Holocaust has already been past the process of fermentation in Bellow’s mindset and, thus, ready to be handled. Coming out after a long period of brooding about the event, the novel is a practical expression of Bellow’s repentance over involving himself in different matters “except the terrible events in Poland.” That detachment Bellow records in a letter to Cynthia Ozick in which he maintains, “Growing slowly aware of this unspeakable evasion, I didn’t even know how to begin to admit it into my inner life” (*Letters* 273). The novel represents Bellow’s first direct confrontation with the theme of the Holocaust through the flashback memories of a survivor. Mr. Sammler does not only stand on the verge of the annihilating abyss but has already fallen into and got out of it. He and his daughter are brought over to America by Dr. Arnold Gruner digging them out of the DP camp in Salzburg, after reading their names in the list of refugees in the Yiddish papers. As for how they end up in the DP camp, Mr. Sammler
is entrapped with Shula and Antonina, his wife, in Poland as they go to liquidate his father-in-law’s estate. Antonina is killed, her father’s optical factory is dismantled while Sammler survives by a miracle but losing one eye in the event. Being acquainted with the brutality of murder, Mr. Sammler’s account of the event, therefore, can never be questioned while his outlook of the collapsing civilisation he sees around in New York is nothing but an echo resonant of the original event—World War II. In Stanley Crouch’s words, Mr. Sammler is “a man for whom none of his questions exist in a speculative air unfouled by the odour of murder” (viii); i.e., the Holocaust incidents and traumas are the shadows cast over every move and thought.

Focusing on the internal process of Mr. Sammler as a Holocaust survivor, the entire Poland’s tragedy is brought forward via fragments of memory that, emerging in the midst of the illusive and degraded present world of New York, represent a reality lying far away in space and time. “He had gone back to 1939. He wanted to refer again to Zamosht Forest, to more basic human characteristics. When had things seemed real true? In Poland when blinded, in Zamosht when freezing, in the tomb when hungry” (205). The wartime horrible experience in Poland is present to Sammler as a series of miseries and macabre images that succeed one another in a snap-like projection:

When Antonina was murdered. When he himself underwent murder beside her. When he and sixty or seventy others, all stripped naked and having dug their own grave, were fired upon and fell in. Bodies upon his own body. Crushing. His dead wife nearby somewhere. Struggling out much later from the weight of corpses, crawling out of the loose
soil. Scraping on his belly. Hiding in a shed. Finding a rag to wear.

Lying in the woods many days. (75)

But that is not the end of it. For three or four months, Sammler is undergoing a death-in-life condition hidden in a mausoleum—a tomb of a family called Mezvinski. There, in order to give a meaning and spirit to a ‘dead life,’ Sammler creates for himself a symbolic environment so as to ensure being safe from the actual world of horror. No spider thread, nor a stain, nor a beetle, nor a sparrow is to pass without being given certain interpretations.

Sammler, however, outlives the murderous acts of persecution but not the prolonged exposure to anti-Semitism. For, even his saviour, Cieslakiewicz, the Polish caretaker of the cemetery, who provides Sammler with shelter and food throughout his hiding, does so not in altruistic sympathy to the wretched Jew but as part of a romantic, heroic role he egotistically wants to play. In his postwar correspondence with Sammler, returning to the state of normalcy, he proves to be an anti-Semite. Bellow contextualises this case within the anti-Semitic sentiments the Western people are fed with milk so that their prejudices become the standard of normal personality:

This was no great surprise, or only a brief one. Cieslakiewicz had had his time of honor and charity. He had risked his life to save Sammler. The old Pole was also a hero. But the heroism ended. He was an ordinary human being and wanted again to be himself. Enough is enough. Didn’t he have a right to be himself? To relax into old prejudices? (74)
The world, therefore, in which persecution levels off with instinctual nature, is a world of evil entrapment. Only through a first-hand touch of horror Sammler can gain an authentic understanding of Augustine’s statement, “The Devil hath established his cities in the north” (25). The anti-Semitic Cracow represents a genuine version of that evil with its “desperate darkness, the dreary liquid yellow mud to a depth of two inches over cobblestones in the Jewish streets” (25). The colour imagery, foreshadowing a catastrophe, leads to a new dimension of the Holocaust treatment in the novel, though at a symbolic level.

Originally associated with the yellow ‘badge of shame’ that Jews have to wear in order to be distinguished, the yellow colour later gains a metaphorical significance in the Jewish American Holocaust literature. In the wartime Poland, the colour epitomises the harbinger of annihilating forces that sweep out Jews leaving them remnants and ashes. There, it is confronted as a direct manifestation of despair and death:

And during this period there was a yellow tinge to everything, a yellow light in the sky. In this light, bad news for Sammler, bad news for humankind, bad information about the very essence of being was diffused. . . . And though the vast over-all design may be of the deepest interest, whether originating in a God or in an indeterminate source which should have a different name, you yourself, a finite instance, are obliged to wait, painfully, anxiously, heartachingly, in this yellow despair. (73)

This is the same suffocating and provocative image that Sammler and Shula-Slawa are exposed to later in the China-cabinet room of the New York apartment when the
“lobby made him ill, tiles like yellow teeth set in desperate grim” (21). In both, Sammler suffers a desperate confinement and monotonous waiting for deliverance. But how fair is comparing a peaceful place in post-Holocaust America to a hiding in cemetery where everything around conspires against his life? True, there can be a vast difference, but for a traumatic psyche, the first exposition to an environment reminiscent of the original traumas is likely to incite a reenactment of the entire scene not physically but psychologically. In the American refuge, Sammler is hardly able to get rid of the past hangovers. After thirty years, he still finds it difficult to detach himself from the implications of “the orange sofa” and “yellow core” of an “umber Finnish rug” (75). Moreover, Sammler always conceives a mental image of the yellow daffodils as grotesquely “open-mouthed” (217). In a word, the yellow colour becomes a persistent hangover of besiegement and extermination.

Sammler is certain that by acknowledging Jewishness he is doomed to be rejected and marked out as something to be eradicated: “I know now that humankind marks certain people for death. Against them there shuts a door. Shula and I have been in this written-off category” (190). Not only Germans, nor Poles that Sammler’s fingers of accusation point at, but humankind in general because nobody does anything to stop the crime. In “Distraction of a Fiction Writer,” Bellow writes:

Man’s hatred for himself has led in this century to the wildest of wars and demolition of the human image in camps and jails built for that purpose. Bodies stacked like firewood we have seen; and the bodies of the massacred exhumed for the gold in their teeth we have seen too. (qtd. in Kremer 62)
And commenting on the moral attitude of persecutors and by-standers alike, he elucidates that many phenomena are redefined by the persecuted who truly realise the meaning of survival, pity, justice and the importance of being oneself. For Sammler, the ironic part of that existence, when hunted by the Holocaust perpetrators, is that in order to live, he has to take refuge into death symbolised by the tomb, “By opening the tomb to me, he [Mr. Cieslakiewicz] let me live. Experience of this kind is deforming” (190). This macabre imagery allies Sammler to Henderson who is entombed and rescued by a native Romilayu, though the purpose and dimension of their torment are quite different.

The same ironical treatment of macabre imagery occurs in the story of Rumkowski, the mad Jewish king of the Lodz ghetto. To Sammler, Rumkowski is no more than a ridiculous actor in a farce, who reigns over death and destruction to amuse the Germans. In a ghetto where famine is everywhere, children seized and deported for extermination, and the corpses of the dead are piled up on the street waiting for their turn of burning, Rumkowski, like Chai in Epstein’s King of the Jews (1979), is a king walking in a pompous royalty. Ironically, he has his court, postage stamps with his picture, pageants, broken coach and ceremonies that he attends in royal robes. In short, this mock king represents the absurd part of the Holocaust that parodies ceremony with tyrannical oppression, “A parody of the thing—a mad Jewish King presiding over the death of half a million people” (191). Connecting the absurdity of the killers’ delight with the Book of Job, Sammler indulges in the existential dilemma in which God requires too much from a miserable anguished man suffering the dissolution into dust, “This too great demand upon human consciousness and human capacities has overtaxed human endurance” (192). The author exposes the
nihilistic nature of Nazism that never hesitates to create a theatre and derive amusement from man’s agony.

Philosophising on the entire historical event, Bellow contextualises it within the ideology that advocates the uniqueness of the self. Commenting on the terror and bloodshed that govern the human beings’ relationship with each other, Sammler clarifies how the standards of historicising the self become purely egotist, as well as sadist. To become historically great means one has to be able to destroy and break all the rules so that he can come out with a new mixture, “When they begin to call for blood, and advocate terror, or proclaim a general egg-breaking to make a great historical omelet” (176). By denouncing the self-centred individualism, Bellow strikes at the stem of the Romantic as well as Faustian traditions on which Nazism is based and, according to Goldman, “where man becomes the measure of all things” (71). In the same context, Goldman comments “Bellow’s later works, Herzog, Mr. Sammler’s Planet, and Humboldt’s Gift, penetrate deeper into the problems of Nazi ideology and German Romanticism” (74). Bellow himself in an interview with Sanford Pinsker admits: “Well, the reason Sammler would be particularly vulnerable to Romanticism is that Nazism was an extremely Romantic movement” (977). Bellow, then, chooses to attack the destructive forces by striking at the root of philosophical ideas in which annihilation gets born.

From a political perspective, Sammler denounces the propagandist methods initiated by the Nazis to disguise their mass murder. When they discuss the problem of evil that begets criminals, Margotte traces that back to the injustice inherent in the mass society in which the weak and marginalised are proliferating at the cost of powerful individuals: “It’s like instead of a forest with enormous trees, you have to
think of small plants with shallow roots” (11). In Margotte’s romantic view, such insignificant people are the outcome of modern civilisation where the great criminals representing great individual phenomena are no more produced. Her wrong and misled ideas of greatness as well as the destructive energy, in Sammler’s opinion, originate in her German manner of viewing the world around and theorising its ways. He sees in her a German spot that he should cleanse, a mass of “earnestness that gave the trouble—considering everything under the sun with such German wrongheadedness. As though to be Jewish weren’t trouble enough, the poor woman was German too” (13).

Deconstructing Margotte’s argument along with Hanna Arendt’s concept of the “Banality of Evil” introduced in her book *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*, Sammler opposes the propaganda of reducing the most brutal crime to mere doing one’s own job:

The idea of making the century’s great crime look dull is not banal. Politically, psychologically, the Germans had an idea of genius. The banality was only camouflage. What better way to get the curse out of murder than to make it look ordinary, boring or trite? With horrible political insight they found a way to disguise the thing. Intellectuals do not understand. . . . The best and purest human beings, from the beginning of time, have understood that life is sacred. To defy that old understanding is not banality. There was a conspiracy against the sacredness of life. Banality is the adopted disguise of a very powerful will to abolish conscience. . . . This woman professor’s enemy is modern civilization itself. She is only using the Germans to attack the
twentieth century—to denounce it in terms invented by Germans. Making use of a tragic history to promote the foolish ideas of Weimar intellectuals. (13-14)

At this juncture, Sammler feels the urgent need to ‘explain’ himself. It is the appropriate moment to interfere enriching the Jewish version of the narrative. For him, the German method does not stop at committing the crime but goes thereafter justifying and theorising it. Theirs is a systematic machinery that before and even after executing the massacre prepares the philosophical, cultural and mythomanic grounds for it. Bellow’s hostility with Nazism goes over to whatever belongs or even comes as a symbol of it. Margotte’s ideas represent a source of that Angst Sammler feels in the same way he reacts to the rats he comes across in the meat section of Manhattan and the cathedral. In Stanley Crouch’s view, the rats in *Mr. Sammler’s Planet*, like in Camus’ *The Plague*, are symbolic. For Bellow, they stand for Nazis—“breeders in filth and spreaders of disease” (Crouch xvi)—and for creepiness that yields insecurity. That symbolic war with Nazism reaches a climatic point in *Humboldt’s Gift* where a Mercedes-Benz becomes a symbol of Nazi lifestyle and luxury that George Swiebel abhors observing: “Murder Jews and make machines” (35). In *Mr. Sammler’s Planet*, even the protagonist’s encounter with black man is suggestively an extension of the Poland experience.

Sammler’s entrapment by the black pickpocket, besides exemplifying the fallennss of the civilised America, does suggest, at a metaphorical level, an encounter with the Nazi oppressor. This can be evident in Sammler’s associating him with Hitler by saying: “The black man was a megalomaniac” (243). In addition, the black, by harassing Sammler, identifies himself with the oppressor in terms of the sex
ideology that always associates the Jew with emasculation. Furthermore, the chase precipitates his memory of entrapment in Poland when, “in the war, in forests, cellars, passageways, cemeteries” (38) he learns not to take things for granted. In New York again he finds himself practising “the art of hiding” to flee the black man’s grip though that can never amount to the horror of being “shot stepping into the street, nor clubbed to death as one stoops to relieve oneself, nor hunted in an alley like a rat” (38-39). The incident, however, never passes without leaving its pain at the heart, blankness of the spirit and stunned mentality in an absolutely exhausted old man. This is why the image of anteater enhances the animal-like conduct of the Black, “As he [Sammler] was thinking of anteater, of the fact that he had been spotted along ago and shadowed by the black man” (45). The same image makes of Sammler a powerless prey that has to fight its way along in a jungle-law-governed world.

The second scene of the black man’s brutality occurs as he corners Feffer fiercely beating him trying to get the camera after the latter has taken snaps of him opening the purse of someone on the bus. The incident reveals to Sammler the passivity of the bystanders reclining to a complete inaction, “Then it struck him that what united everybody was a beatitude of presence. As if it were—yes—blessed are the present. They are here and not here. They are present while absent” (239). There, Mr. Sammler is overwhelmed by the sense of strangeness; nobody wants to hear him, to respond to his pleas to interfere and help the poor Feffer, “No one would do anything, and suddenly Sammler felt extremely foreign—voice, accent, syntax, manner, face, mind, everything, foreign” (238). At this exact moment surfaces the passivity of the helpless multitudes of bystanders to the Holocaust victims. Ironically, the moment Mr. Sammler discovers how important it is to be involved, to help the
victim and to be a part of active humanity, all people surrounding him stand detached unwilling to participate. So, he stands alone resisting a growing horror: “He was a man who had come back. He had rejoined life” (240). The brutality of the scene, the helplessness of the old age and the similar experience of the past reduce Sammler to an abstract dot fighting against blankness:

That was not himself. Someone—and this struck him—poor in spirit. Someone between the human and not human states, between content and emptiness, between full and void, meaning and not-meaning, between this world and no world. Flying, freed from gravitation, light with release and dread, doubting his destination, fearing there was nothing to receive him. (240)

Eisen finally interferes to put an end to the fight. He strikes the black man with a bag full of medallions, David stars and other relics throwing him bleeding and defeated. Eisen does it because he is a Holocaust survivor and knows well what it means to be entrapped by annihilation. In an interview with Sukhbir Singh, Bellow comments on the incident: “It shows how distorted the Jews became in World War II through the Holocaust and the war” (n. pag.). Bellow’s statement justifies for the Jew his action since even if he is aggressive he paradoxically remains a victim of the past oppression.

The mission assigned to Sammler by Bellow goes beyond a mere recollection of the brutal and inhuman scenes of victimisation to a struggle for meaning out of the series of absurd tragedies, and discursive symbols. Accordingly, the entire planet seems to be the objective correlative of Mr. Sammler’s fragmented and anguished soul. Embraced by terrors of all types and embracing lifeless corpses called human
beings, the earth becomes a collective large tomb. “Drunk with terror?” thinks Sammler, “Yes and fragments (a fragment like Mr. Sammler) understood: this earth was a grave” (150). Mr. Sammler’s planet, thus, according to the Holocaust survivor and author K. Zetnick, is Auschwitz where neither time, nor family relations and genealogy, nor elementary physical survival, nor even death itself occurs “according to the laws of this world” (qtd. in Sundquist 365). In short, *Mr. Sammler’s Planet* is a step towards understanding a world of an utter hatred and destructive ideologies in order to gain a space at their cost.

Viewing the entire world as a narrow space in which the Jew has to fight not to live in dignity but to survive, situates the theme of the Holocaust within a broader frame of anti-Semitism that Bellow deals with overtly in his novel *The Victim*. In *To Jerusalem and Back*, nearly three decades after World War II, Bellow refers all Jewish dilemmas to the perennial anti-Semitism that threatens to annihilate people and culture: “What you do know is that there is one fact of Jewish life unchanged by the creation of a Jewish State: you cannot take your right to live for granted. Others can; you cannot” (23). *The Victim*, written at a time when the Holocaust scars are still bleeding, is a thorough analysis of the phenomenon of anti-Semitism with its Nazi overtones and its cultural and political progenitors. It is Bellow’s sensibility that can widen the canvas of the Holocaust in space and time in the novel so that a person’s anguished existence is tantamount to persecution.

The significance of the first epigraph in *The Victim* arises from the fact that it sums up or rather echoes the central idea of the novel. The tale taken from *Arabian Nights* entitled “The Tale of the Trader and the Jinni” indeed foreshadows the unjust charge of ruining one’s life made by an intruder. While a merchant practices his own
habit of eating and throwing stones, a huge ‘Ifrit’ (demon) appears on the scene breaking into his routine and claiming revenge for his own slain son, “When thouatest dates and threwest away the stones they struck my son full in the breast as he was walking by, so that he died forthwith” (The Victim epigraph). The undertone analogy between the tale and the novel unfolds three lines of parallelism: an innocent person whose actions are supposed to unintentionally cause harm to another; an intruder who blames his misfortune or miseries on that innocent person; and a virtual crime with loose threads, baseless accusation and undue punishment.

The intrusion of Albee into Leventhal’s life is much like that of the ‘Ifrit’ in the sense that it turns it upside down. Their relationship, starting long before the immediate meeting, does not end in a mere moment of recognition. To Leventhal, it marks the beginning of a nightmarish encounter. Albee is on a mission of retaliation for what he calls the ruining of his life and, thus, he will not let Leventhal go, “Well, now you’ve found out that I still exist and you’re going home, is that it?” (23). For a moment, Albee’s talk is ambiguous while he looks at the protagonist “like a bad actor to accuse everyone of bad acting” (23). Reproducing an entire drama in his sick mentality, Albee accuses Leventhal of being the reason for losing his job by way of taking revenge for an anti-Semitic remark Albee utters once while drunk at a party in Williston’s house. As if to contempt the way a Jew tries to sing a gentile’s song, Albee at that party makes a funny remark of Harkavy’s singing asking him to sing a psalm or any Jewish song, “Something you’re really got feeling for” (35). What is suggested here is a case in which Jewish singing is prohibited. This, according to L. H. Goldman, reinforces the exclusion of Jews “from German cultural life at the onset of the Nazi reign” and “made official in the Nuremburg Laws” (74) of 1935. The
famous laws forbid persons of more than 25% Jewish blood to play the music of Bach, Beethoven, Mozart, etc. What is suggested, too, is not only that Albee overestimates the power of his insult but also Leventhal goes too far in his ‘bad faith’ that he figures out an anti-Semite’s insult as not insulting.

Besides violating Leventhal’s peaceful life and threatening his very existence, Albee throughout the novel is the mouthpiece of the Nazi propagandist machinery as well as American anti-Semitism. Now and then Albee passes stereotypical remarks that inscribe Leventhal as part and parcel of Jewish thinking and conduct, using as a racist marker “you” and “you people”, repeatedly. When Leventhal, enraged by Albee’s insults, is willing to fight back, the latter generalises: “That’s not how you people go about things. Not with violence” (25). In another context, Leventhal is again reminded of his Jewishness when Albee alludes to his rituals: “But when I remembered it was Saturday—you people don’t do business on Saturday—I postponed it” though Leventhal is not an observant Jew, “I don’t observe the holiday” (124). And accusing Leventhal as a Jew of self-interest for refusing to give him some bucks, Albee says: “Because you people take care of yourselves before anything. You keep your spirit under lock and key. That’s the way you’re brought up. . . . Nothing ever tempts you to dissolve yourself” (130-31). Exposing the negative aspect of the Jewish solidarity, Albee sees in Leventhal a Jew whose commitment and adherence to the group can never fade away. This is why at the end of the novel after the superficial change that presents him anew, Albee still retains his anti-Semitic impulse. Seeing Mary pregnant, he remarks: “congratulations, I see you’re following orders. ‘Increase and multiply’” (262). In short, if a Jew forgets that he is a Jew, an anti-Semite will remind him.
Hence, the ‘you’ persistently used by Albee goes beyond the literal meaning to become a trope of marking certain people as different, of judging their action and weighing them against the mainstream standards, and of putting them in an endless trial. The word reveals to Leventhal the essence of his diasporic being, reducing him to his basic substance: a stranger, a displaced Jew who should accept the status quo regardless of how committed he is to his tribe. He, therefore, rethinks the entire Jewish dilemma in the Old as well as New Worlds:

People meet you once or twice and they hated you. What was the reason; what inspired it? This Albee illustrated it well because he was too degenerate and drunk to hide his feelings. You had only to be yourself to provoke them. Why? A sigh of helplessness escaped Leventhal. If they still believed it would work, they would make little dolls of wax and stick pins into them. (71)

Bellow, here, hints that Albee is only an epitome of the real and hidden face of anti-Semitism that persecutes a Jew for nothing but for being a Jew. The mask that hides boundless hatred amounts to the ‘sympathetic magic’ by which people can cowardly harm a person without the need to encounter him/her.

The people Leventhal comes across in familial relations as well as at job represent one face of that silent hatred. Elena’s mother, the “awfully strict Catholic” is another case of anti-Semitism and Italian xenophobia who never forgives Elena’s alliance with Max, Leventhal’s brother. Infuriated by her deliberate desire “to avert her head from him” (50), Leventhal infers that her visit to Max’s house is not out of care for her grandson, but a sort of rebuke to her daughter who has rebelled against
her will. Her looks blame everything that is happening to the family on account of the mixed marriage. Leventhal thinks:

If anything happened to the boy she should consider it in the nature of a judgment on the marriage. The marriage was impure to her. Yes, he understood how she felt about it. A Jew, a man of wrong blood, of bad blood, had given her daughter two children, and that was why this was happening. (54)

Accordingly, after Philip’s death, Leventhal can read in her face a spiteful triumph, “She was silent, and he was baffled by her look; behind its vindictiveness there was something crazily resembling amusement” (159). Leventhal’s job represents another front where he has to cope with anti-Semitic sentiments that erupts in Mr. Beard’s reaction to Leventhal leave-taking. “Takes unfair advantage,” the manager murmurs in a stereotypical tone, “Like the rest of his brethren. I’ve never known one who wouldn’t. Always please themselves first” (3). Mr. Beard’s disgusting remark can never be a direct result of his immediate leaving the job. It is rather deep-rooted in and fed by a racist hatred, “If a man disliked you, he would dislike you for all the reasons he could think of” (20). Surrounded by that abundance of hatred, Leventhal undergoes certain version of persecution.

Arguably, the complexity of anti-Semitism in the novel portrays the postwar Jewish response to Nazi persecution. The novel marks the beginning of a substantive Holocaust exploration that runs throughout Bellow’s literary career sometimes realistically and sometimes symbolically. S. Lillian Kremer observes: “The Holocaust is subdued, ever present component in Saul Bellow’s fiction. Although, the Holocaust is rarely at the dramatic centre, the works are rich in characters haunted by its specter.
Bellow’s literary response to the Holocaust was muted.” (37). It is that mute treatment of the Holocaust which Bellow projects on a naturalist plane by blending colour imagery with claustrophobia in order to deepen the Holocaust analogy.

At the outset of the novel, the reader is introduced to the image of the New York’s hot night with its lights that seem to “climb upward endlessly into the heat of the sky” (1). Later, Leventhal views the colour of the sky over the city as follows: “There was still a redness in the sky like the flame at the back of a vast baker’s oven” (18). These images, in addition to suggesting the heat of a tense relationship, encompass the implication of a hostile environment likened to a furnace and repeating the scene of the Holocaust but at the symbolic level. Such a recurrent motif appears in other contexts like that of Miami’s shores in Ozick’s The Shawl. Adhering to the naturalistic genre, the hero and his plight in the novel are defined by an internal consciousness finding its concrete parallelism in the image of outside reality. Ralph Freedman notes: “the colors symbolically evoke the chiaroscuro of a threatening city. The description obtains a further meaning, however through the hero’s conscious reflections” (52). What looks like a hostile environment, reinforces the theme of persecution at a macrocosmic level.

Wajnryb’s “iconic messages” maintain their presence in the form of archetypal images of the Holocaust such as the yellow badge of identity, the deportation trains and crowdedness, and gas chambers. The yellowish sunlight always brings to Leventhal’s mind an image of something wild, bestially cruel and torturing. Something that even if he does not mention by name, looms large in every Jew’s consciousness:
The notion brushed Leventhal’s mind that the light over them and over
the water was a kin to the yellow revealed in the slit of the eye of a
wild animal, say a lion, something inhuman that didn’t care about
anything human and yet was implanted in every human being too. (44)

The train imagery that over-repeatedly occurs in the text, sustains the integration of
realistic cityscape and metaphoric Holocaust landscape. This is depicted by the vision
of missing the train as well as by his rumination about the crowded park:

There was an overwhelming human closeness and thickness, and
Leventhal was penetrated by a sense not merely of the crowd in this
park but innumerable millions, crossing, touching pressing. What was
the story he had once read about Hell cracking open on account of the
rage of the god of the sea, and all the souls, crammed together, looking
out? (164)

These images together constitute a silent presence of the Holocaust which occurs
vividly in some stages of the novel either through what can be called Nazi ideology or
by clear hints and scenes.

Illustrative in Bellow’s treatment of the Holocaust is his use of figurative
language and imagery to relate Albee’s anti-Semitic way of thinking to the Nazi
ideology and propaganda. Albee’s allusion to Jews as children of Caliban originates
in the third Reich’s official classification of Jews as a subhuman species. A
descendent of Governor Winthrop, Albee believes that Jews cannot be intellectuals
and can never understand such intellectuals as Emerson. What connects Albee’s anti-
Semitic behaviour to the Nazi is Leventhal’s immediate outburst reminding him of
the Holocaust: “Millions of us have been killed. What about that?” (131). Though briefly mentioned, Leventhal’s statement marks a turning point in his reaction to Albee’s provoking insults. Breaking the false shell of assimilation, Leventhal identifies with his ethnicity as understood from the use of the first-person pronoun “us”. This is the only instance in which the Holocaust is overtly mentioned in the novel though not satisfyingly. Bellow intends to make Leventhal a secular, assimilated Jew who, to a certain extent, does not care about ethnic identity and belonging. He is rather more concerned about living his individual life. Resorting to such a tone of argument comes as a culmination of being provoked by a hard-core anti-Semitic who does not spare any meeting without reminding him of what he essentially is no matter what he pretends to be.

Towards the end of the novel Albee’s anti-Semitic persecution reaches its climatic point with his attempt to commit suicide by turning the stove gas in the kitchen of Leventhal’s apartment open. Though, at its shallow level, the act is intended to vindictively get Leventhal involved in and responsible for a desperado’s suicide, the theme of the Holocaust imposes itself evocatively at the symbolic level. Taking into consideration the fact that Leventhal’s own life is threatened by a crime in which gas is a means that may turn the house into a hell, Leventhal is a potential victim of a microcosmic holocaust. All the elements of the Holocaust are traceable: the kitchen turned into a gas chamber; the anti-Semite lurking there ready to murder; and the desperate act of retaliation as Albee’s own version of the Final Solution.

In Herzog, the protagonist’s sense of entrapment, though having several areas of intersection with Leventhal and Sammler, is somehow distinct in the sense that Herzog is responsible for a considerable share of his suffering. Persecution, however,
whether happens in the past or recently, pushes Herzog to a desperate state of mind and engulfs him with an inevitable anguish. "Herzog," remarks Allen Chavkin, is a novel in which the protagonist, continually meditating upon his ‘great schooling in grief,’ his pitiful childhood suffering in a Montreal ghetto and his later suffering at the hands of the vicious hordes, of ‘reality-instructors,’ desperately seeks for some redeeming ‘truth’ that will justify a life full of anguish. (168)

Herzog’s persecutors are not Nazis but their methods are not different since they turn the large America into a big concentration camp within which the protagonist wanders finding no solution for his dilemma.

At its broadest level, the novel dwells upon a schlemiel Jew persecuted by a Christian wife: cuckolding him, displacing him from his house, depriving him of his daughter, pushing him to the brink of insanity and utilising her own propaganda to turn all people around against him. While all this happens, Herzog stands helpless not only to react properly but to understand the end she leads him to. Writing to Dr. Edvig, Herzog declares: “Especially since Madeline, though Jewish, had had a Christian phase as a Catholic convert and I hoped you might help me to understand her” (53). Discussing this aspect of relationship with the psychiatrist, Herzog explains how his wife’s twentieth century ‘Christian outlook’ always figures him out as a ‘Jewish Pharisee’ who hinders her pursuit of redemption, “Madeline wants a savior, and for her I’m no savior” (54). She rejects the Judaic ways due to a childhood sexual abuse by a grown man who pays her to keep it quiet. She thinks a woman, whose childhood is taunted, needs a saviour; Herzog is a symbol of the molestation that she can never forgive.
Noticeably, in *Herzog*, *The Victim* and *Mr. Sammler’s Planet*, there is a female character whose Christianity causes trouble to the Jewish protagonist: Madeline, Elda and Shula respectively. But, it is in *Herzog* that that religious dichotomy gains a lot of space in the main characters’ conflict. Herzog has to give in to Madeline’s fanaticism and thus to forsake his religious ways in order not to lose the broad who states out her pre-conditions: “You and I have got to marry in the Church, otherwise I quit. Our children will be baptized and brought up in the Church” (116-17). That religious superiority imposed by Madeline is gradually internalised by Herzog. Lying with the reluctant Madeline, he is overwhelmed with an inferiority complex: “While he, the worn, unshaven, sinful Jew, endangering her redemption—his heart ached” (112). In this way their unequal relationship develops; the easily submissive concessions are counterparted by Madeline’s stubborn intransigence.

Herzog has a suggestive explanation about Madeline’s conversion. In a letter to Monsignor Hilton, the priest who has brought Madeline into the church, he discloses how her conversion is that of a college girl who, besides self-fashion, does so as part of a collective Jewish attempt to evade persecution: “*I simply believe you may be interested to find out what may happen, or actually does happen, when people want to save themselves from . . . I suppose the world is nihilism*” (103). But if that is really Madeline’s motivation, then she has gone too far in her self-preservation.

Progressing a step further, Madeline gets involved in a PhD project in Russian studies, the religious history of their ancestors’ exterminators in Herzog’s view. Shapiro, Herzog’s friend who comes seeking his advice, falling under the spell of Madeline’s beauty, starts taking interest in her topic. Forgetting the history of Russian
pogroms to his people, Shapiro is no more than a fool in Herzog’s eyes. Herzog silently observes:

And it was he himself who knew, betraying the knowledge by affectation, that for a Russian Jew from Chicago’s West Side that “How delightful!” [uttered out by Shapiro in response to Madeline’s topic] was inappropriate. (70)

Herzog’s protest against the Russian books that Madeline builds around herself, originates not only in emotional walling but also in his sensibility as a Jew who can never forget the history of his people’s persecution. “Vladimir of Kiev, Tikhon Zadonsky. In my bed! It’s not enough they persecuted my ancestors!” (59). All these, in addition to the “Byzantine profile” in which Madeline always appears to Herzog, associate her with the oppressive team by which a helpless Jew is victimised.

What is portrayed by Bellow is not a conjugal life but a battlefield in which the hero receives successive defeats. Madeline’s wild and disdainful manner gives way to a constant quarrel that marks a deep crack in their relationship which widens with the passage of time. She never spares a chance without practicing her authority over the passive man depriving him of the least of his rights. But reaching the required point of fermentation, Herzog’s feelings of hatred and injustice, his grudges and his sense of defeat develop gradually into a desire of revenge. This happens when he learns that June, his daughter, is in danger at his enemies’ hands, “So now his rage is so great and deep, so murderous, bloody, positively rapturous, that his arms and fingers ache to strangle them” (220). The courtroom scene incites his fears further. Most probably, the crime in which a child is murdered by his eccentric mother while her lover is watching on the bed has its source in the chapter ‘Rebellion’ of
Dostoyevsky’s *The Brothers Karamazov* when Ivan is shocked by cruelty against children. The crime reported in the court touches a sensitive cord in Herzog’s spirit raising his anxiety over June. The very idea of similarity between the case in the court and his own daughter victimised by two lovers, makes Herzog fly to Chicago, take his father’s pistol and directly head to where the persecutors are.

Having been metaphorically or rather psychologically murdered by Madeline, Herzog becomes a loose spirit, but with a real gun in his hand. He is motivated by an indomitable will to murder Madeline and Gersbach so as to protect his own daughter. The impulse to release June from their demonic grip, however, is only one of several reasons that urge Herzog to assume the role of an actively would-be murderer. He reflects on how they displace him, drive him into insanity with cold blood, conspire against his right not only as a husband but also as a father and a human being, and turn his Berkshire house into a painful exile. All these come together in Herzog’s enraged consciousness as reasons, “They had opened the way to justifiable murder. They deserved to die. He had a right to kill them” (254). Like Mr. Sammler, Herzog does not feel the least of remorse or hesitation to commit murder against those who have so long tortured him; he instead feels “an orgastic rapture of inflicting death” (255). But even at the moment of killing, Herzog retains his status as a victim pushed into that state by the demonic indifference of his persecutors.

Evidently, a person who is doomed to suffer weeps as he wins, for he does not believe in victories. Ramona, who can pull Herzog a few steps out of the abyss in which he has been thrown, is a “great comfort to” Herzog, but not a solution. From a psychological perspective, Herzog’s yielding to her sexual exploits affirms the stereotypical image of a masochistic Jew seeking a domineering woman to subjugate
him, adhering to the “psychology of a runaway slave” (189). This is why the night he spends with her gives him a mysterious rejuvenation; mysterious in the sense that it arouses in his heart the fear of breakdown giving way to an emotional mixture of “gratification in pain, or suffering in joy” (207). Herzog, therefore, quotes Shelley’s poetic line, “I fall upon the thorns of life, I bleed” (207) to suggestively describe his sentiments. Hence, by subscribing to the school of suffering, Herzog becomes the real Jew that Sandor advises him to be: “Well when you suffer, you really suffer. You are a real genuine old Jewish type that digs the emotions. . . . I know about suffering—we’re on the same identical network” (84). He, then, exemplifies the Bellovian typical hero as viewed by Lois Symons Lewin: “None of the heroes solves the perplexities and mysteries of life, but they come to respond less critically, to react more openly, to welcome further experience” (197). In other words, Herzog, like Bellow’s other protagonists, does not try to change the situation where he is entrapped.

Coming now to the Holocaust, it maintains its unspoken presence as typical of the Bellovian response through a deconstructive treatment of the Nazi ideology as well as via claustrophobia and colour imagery. Nevertheless, there is an instance in which the Holocaust is confronted directly and that occurs during Herzog’s visit to Poland. Herzog sees Poland a cursed place haunted by the moaning ghosts of deceased victims. He feels as though he is tracing the scenes of the monstrous crime and sensing his absent presence even before actually coming to stand on what is now regarded as history:

Still, he had been continually aware of drab Poland, in all directions freezing, drab, and ruddy gray; the stones still smelling of wartime
murders. He thought he scented blood. He went many times to visit the ruins of the ghetto. Wanda was his guide. (25)

In this sense, his visit to Poland, apart from the amorous exploits that evocatively end with infection, amounts to a pilgrimage in terms of being a site of victims, martyrs and extermination from which Passover takes place and Jews can cross to the safe side.

A great deal of Bellow’s anti-Nazi philosophy in *Herzog* assumes the form of an attack on such tenets of the Romantic philosophy as the emphasis on the uniqueness of the self and the German Faustian ideology, promoting the “luxury of destruction” (319). Herzog’s study of German Romanticism is a revisionist one that questions the entire Western thought leading to annihilation. Bellow himself declares that the protagonist’s vulnerability to Romanticism originates in “that Nazism was an extremely Romantic movement” ("Saul Bellow in the Classroom” 977). When asked whether that Romanticism ends in the concentration camps he answers:

It gets into that. . . . It also gets into art and at certain moments there is a fusion between art and authoritarianism. You read any good book on the concentration camps and you’ll find immediately how much Romantic art there was. . . . It was a sort of terrible surrealistic game.

(978)

Besides, Herzog makes a sharp attack on two major progenitors of Nazi thought: Fredric Nietzsche and Martin Heidegger.

Symbolically, Herzog is surrounded by people and objects that revive the memory of confrontation with Nazi forces. Consequently, Herzog sees in Valentine,
his own perpetrator, a German Nazi, “He had a thick face and heavy Jaws; Moses thought he somewhat resembled Putzi Hanfstaengl, Hitler’s own pianist” (19). This yokes, in Herzog’s character, the image of a persecuted and displaced Jew with that of an emasculated one. It, furthermore, enhances the observation that whenever a Jew is victimised, he undergoes a certain type of Holocaust and whoever his oppressor is, he should be or resembles a Nazi. L. H. Goldman comments: “In most of Bellow’s novels there is at least one minor character whose German traits are presented pejoratively” (72). Valentine robs a Jew’s wife not life like Nazis do though. This, however, proves more fatal. For, taking life puts an end to suffering, whereas taking wife inaugurates it. Apart from Valentine, Herzog’s dilemma with the symbols of Nazism encompasses the rats that he encounters in large numbers in Panama City as well as the Volkswagen truck. The latter is a symbol of the German machinery that rams his Falcon and causes the accident which lands Herzog and his daughter in the police station.

During his weakness after the accident, the aggressive presence of the Negro Police and the hostile Volkswagen’s driver is metaphorically linked to the persecution imagery via the yellow colour bringing forth the Holocaust recurrently in Bellow’s novels. Obviously, Herzog can see, in spite of dizziness, the Negro’s “yellow pencil” and “the letters stitched in yellow thread over” the driver’s pocket (284-85). In the squad car, “he opened his eyes on the yellow ugliness of 22nd street” (288). At Grand Central Station, Herzog confronts the Holocaust situated in the two images: that of the train and the suffocating yellow colour, “He felt it all slipping away from him in the subterranean roar of engines, voices and feet and in the galleries with lights like drops of fat in yellow broth and the strong suffocating fragrance of underground New
York” (33). Moreover, Herzog’s claustrophobic impulse occurs at the outset of the novel when the hot summer of Berkshire drives him out of the house to sleep on a hammock in the reedy yard. This image adheres to the initial images dominating the beginnings of most of Bellow’s novels including *The Victim* and *Mr. Sammler’s Planet*. The context in the three novels is a hot summer that reflects an atmosphere of suffocation in the characters mentality and action. This naturalistic feature in *Herzog* is reinforced by the way the stars appear above the protagonist while lying in the garden are viewed not as objects of celestial beauty but as “[f]ires, of course; gases—minerals, heat, atoms” (1). It is the same image with which the novel ends as Herzog retires in silence. But the silence that follows persecution while all traumas are still lurking afresh in memory is indeed a silence that hides beneath it torrents of an unspeakable agony.

While a great deal of Bellow’s argument against anti-Semitism and Nazism involves his protagonists in wars of ideas and symbols, Malamud’s fictionalisation of the issue problematises a Jew entrapped in an entangled situation. Malamud’s protagonists are always involved in a struggle against destructive forces to which they can be nothing but passive victims. In *The Assistant*, the destructive power is partly crushing poverty, while in *The Tenants* it is racism, and in *The Fixer*, where his tackling of the Jewish problem is more direct, it is anti-Semitism. To begin with, *The Fixer* is based on the incarceration of Mendel Beilis in 1913 Russia. The historical case begins on March 12, 1911 when a Russian boy, Andrei Yushchinsky, is murdered by a gang of thugs lest he reports to the police about their criminal activities. The Russian anti-Semitic organisation exploits the incident to accuse Jews and provoke pogroms. The Tsar’s counsellors encourage sycophants and hoodlums to
persecute Jews and support the charge against Beilis in the trial taking place in Kiev from September 25 through October 28, 1913. Beilis himself writes his own account of the trial in America in a book entitled The Story of My Suffering (1920). In adapting the story of Beilis, previously treated in Franz Kafka’s The Trial (1925), Malamud creates an analogy and a context for the American audience to which the meaning of the Holocaust is not fully grasped. His fictional version of the blood libel, however, belongs to a long tradition of witch-hunting and unjust trials in which The Crucible (1952) by Arthur Miller and Hawthorne’s The Scarlet Letter (1850) are landmarks. The Fixer, in this sense, shares the historical layering with both literary works where anti-Semitic Kiev parallels the Puritan Salem and Boston.

In a real sense, The Fixer is a story of entrapment from its epigraphs to the last paragraph. Although the novel has nothing to do with the Nazi massacre, it is often classified with Holocaust literature in terms of the most inhuman persecution to which its protagonist is subject. “It is true,” notes Stanely F. Chyet, “that . . . the Shoah lurks behind or between the lines of Malamud’s The Fixer” (40). The first epigraph quoted from Yeats suggests a rupture in peace and justice where the “irrational streams of blood are staining earth” (The Fixer 6). One can argue that those irrational streams of blood are the ones caused by pogroms and culminate in genocide. The second epigraph comes in support of the first. Chaucer’s lines divide people into two parties: the slayers and the slain. Ironically, while Hugh of Lyncoln is slain along with the ‘cursed Jewes,’ he is summoned to pray for the slayers because they are the real “cursed” as they call themselves “synful folk unstable’ (6). Such images of bloodshed, sin and racism set off the general tone of the novel.
Bok’s encounter with anti-Semitism begins after leaving the shtetl with the boatman taking him across the river in return for his horse. Unaware that his listener is himself a Jew, the boatman expresses his desire to make Russia free from “the bloody Jews,” “long-nosed, pock-marked, cheating, bloodsucking parasites” who rob the peasants of everything (28). His plan to slaughter the whole tribe and set fire to their corpses anticipates the Holocaust, revealing how the Nazi genocide comes as a culmination of anti-Semitic ideas and sentiments after they have reached the required point of fermentation. Ignorant that Bok belongs to what he calls the ‘split hoof’ bred, the boatman explains:

And then when we’ve slaughtered the whole cursed tribe of them—and the same is done in every province throughout Russia, wherever we can smoke them out—though we’ve got most of them nice and bunched up in the Pale—we’ll pile up the corpses and soak them with benzine and light fires that people enjoy all over the world. (29)

Such a sacred mission of murder in the name of saving the world hides beneath it a Malamudian mockery of the Nazi ideology.

Nicholai, the man whom Bok rescues from death, is a case in point of the hypocritically disguised anti-Semitism. The irony of Nicholai’s character is that he thinks of himself as a pious Christian and a sensitive man while he belongs to the Black Hundreds as the two-headed-eagle button pinned on his coat indicates. His recitations from the New Testament, “Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness’s sake; for theirs is the kingdom of Heaven” (39), appear to Bok as a contradiction to his anti-Semitism. Bok feels a desire to ask him: “Nicholai Maximovitch, will you please explain how you can cry for a dead dog yet belong to a
society of fanatics that urges death on human beings who happen to be Jews?” (41). The irony of their relationship is that by rewarding Bok for saving his life, the anti-Semite, though not deliberately, tights the rope round Bok’s neck. For, it is Nicholai’s employment of Bok as an overseer in his brother’s brick factory that puts him face to face with a world of an absolute hostility. All these, Malamud intends to be a prologue to and harbinger of the central event of persecution where suggestively one man stands for six millions.

By dramatising how a Jew is trapped and framed, Malamud satirises the theatrical and absurd mechanism on which pogroms fall back. When the body of a twelve-year-old boy, Zhenia Golov—one of the troublemaker boys whom he once chased out of the brickyard—is found stabbed to death and bled white, Bok’s life turns upside down. The anti-Semitic Black Hundreds organisations, under the emblem “SAVE RUSSIA FROM THE JEWS” (7), accuse Jews of murdering the child for ritual purpose; that is collecting blood for the making of Passover matzos. In spite of the ridiculous orientation of the charge, Bok cannot hide his anxiety of pogroms because the Lukianovsky District where he works, Jews are forbidden to live. The anti-Semitic organisations make use of the incident to propagate their scheme against Jews: “They want nothing less than our lives and country! People of Russia! Have pity on your children! Avenge the unfortunate martyrs!” (65). Bok’s role in all this is that of a scapegoat whose misfortune throws him into the hands of enemies with no inclination to spare him. The fellow workers in the brickyard conspire against him, the counterfeit paper printer’s place is burnt down, and when, in fear of being a victim of an upcoming pogrom, he wraps his things to leave for New York or Amsterdam, the secret police are lurking to arrest him. Soon after arrest, the
fixer realises what kind of a criminal he is to them: “The fixer readily confessed he was a Jew. Otherwise he was innocent” (66). Jewishness, here, is a guilt that should be confessed.

Bok is a schlemiel rounded up by a gang of investigators wanting him condemned by hook or by crook. He has to cope with the elusive questions of the Prosecuting Attorney where any answer presupposes confession. Introducing him to religious terms that Bok does not know and if he knows he does not observe, Grubeshov asks him about ‘tzadikism’, ‘goyim’, ‘pidion’, ‘afikomen’ and ‘matzo shmuro’ (92-93) in order to trace any thread of relation between the victim and the Judaic rituals. And things that happen to come to his room by chance, unfortunately entangle his standpoint much more: the piece of matzo left by the Old Hasid whom he rescues from anti-Semitic children, the half bag of flour he buys to make bread, the bloodstained rag he uses to wipe the old man’s blood, and the incident in which he chases Zhenia Golov and one more boy out of the brickyard all come together before the Attorney as evidences of Bok’s involvement in the crime.

The most ridiculous part of the investigation is the reenactment planned by the Prosecuting Attorney to prove the fixer’s part in the crime and retrace its threads. Proshko, playing his part in the farce, reconstructs the events from Bok’s arrival till his arrest in accordance to his own anti-Semitic theory and old grudges as well. Mixing true incidents with fabricated ones, Proshko presents himself as a hero in a detective story who, with resourcefulness and intelligence, can trace the criminal step by step up to the moment of conviction. “I felt in my blood,” he accounts, “he was a Jew the same way as you feel in the dark the presence of a ghost” (103). Richter and Serdiuk bear their own witness to the crime that they did not see, “Richter swore
every word was true and Serdiuk crossed himself twice” (106). Obviously, all are actors including the child’s mother Marfa Golov and the priest Father Anastasy who exploits the superstitious mood of Kiev to serve political ends. The superstitious Russia in the novel is somehow reminiscent of the Puritan America while anti-Semitism of Kiev parallels witch-hunt in the 17th century Salem of Arthur Miller’s *The Crucible*. The long theatrical speech by Father Anastasy about the Hasidic rituals of killing Christian children to make the Passover matzos and for cabalist or magical purposes and the absurdity of the Russian officials “waiting impatiently for [Bok’s] menstrual period” (127) are two cases in point.

It is in the prison, however, that Bok meets the most inhuman and humiliating treatment at the hand of officials and prisoners alike. There, Bok rethinks the abyss history has in store for him and the absurdity of his incalculable movement:

He had stupidly pretended to be somebody he wasn’t, hoping it would create ‘opportunities’, had learned otherwise—the wrong opportunities—and was paying for learning. If they let him go now he had suffered enough. He blamed also egotism and foolish ambition, considering who he was, and promised himself it would be different in the future. (68)

At that moment, he realises how ugly and disgusting the face of Kiev, that he once aspired to, is. He naively thinks he can shed his skin off and that would qualify him to put on a Russian one, but the eye that can see through the camouflage again strips him naked. He is then besieged by multiple layers of imprisonment. In the words of Helen Benedict, Malamud uses the metaphor of prison to question the space of freedom man has to win against multiple limitations:
Necessity is the primary prison, though the bars are not visible to all. Then there are the man-made prisons of social injustice, apathy, ignorance. There are others, tight or loose, visible or invisible, according to one’s predilection or vulnerability. (34)

All these metaphorical confinements, in addition to the physical one, lie between Bok and his Self.

Bok’s tormenting experience in the prison records a historical moment of anti-Semitism whose elements of fantasy make it a wild fable. Defending Malamud against what Philip Roth calls scenes of an unjustified and perverse imagination, Joel Salzberg contends, “Malamud’s imagination captures the very essence of Russian anti-Semitism, sadistically manifested in government-sponsored pogroms” (22). The controversial scenes in The Fixer include the humiliation of waiting for Bok’s ‘menstrual period’ and to the daily six searches as emasculating acts to which Bok is subjected. Needless to mention, the prison food—a soup in which dead mice and cockroaches are soaked—represents the state of degradation prisoners are put to. The gothic element is vivid in the scene where Bok wakes from the unconscious state after two prisoners—Akimytch and Potseikin—beat him, “a rat scuttled across his genitals and he bolted up in horror” (99). The scene embodies the insecure creepiness surrounding Bok. As a result, Bok, an innocent Jew imprisoned on a baseless charge, is torn between the overwhelming feeling of hatred towards his haters and the anguished sense of defeat. He takes the anti-Semitic Russia for granted and he has to bear the consequences.

On many occasions, the novel allies the political mechanism with the individual’s experience of history blurring the boundaries between Czarist and Nazi
regimes. By revealing how the methods of persecution Hitler adopted existed much earlier in Czarist Russia, Malamud exposes the ideological origins of the Holocaust. Gershon Shaked observes: “To the post-Holocaust American Jewish audience, the Russian blood libel seems like a harbinger of the horrifying spectacle to come” (180). For, the persecution of one man in *The Fixer* epitomises the destruction of millions and any evidence against Bok is seen as evidence against history. In the words of Ezra Cappell, “While much of Malamud’s fiction seems to be haunted by the Holocaust—one can point toward *The Fixer* and *The Assistant* as holocaust parables, because both deal with Jewish persecution, and both Morris Bober and Yakov Bok seem afflicted by the unnamed Holocaust” (40-41). The intimations of the Holocaust emerge in Tsar Nicholas II’s contemplation of pogroms, in the naturalist elements, and in colour imagery.

The yellow colour, that has its symbolic association with the Holocaust, always appears whenever Bok is not at ease. Galloping on a frightful night, the fixer on the back of horse comes across the “long-steeped church yellow in moonlight” (26) in the peasant village. Proshko’s boots are muddy with yellow clay which is a typical colour for a hardcore villain. In the prison he feels tortured by the “yellow bulb” (227) as well as the nightmarish feeling that he “is surrounded in thick clouds of yellow fog” (247). The archetypal anti-Semite, Grubeshov, always appear in the same “suit with the same soiled yellow vest and black bow tie” (127). Bok’s anxiety with the colour of the Persecuting Attorney’s vest is emphasised by Ortovsky’s description of Grubeshov: “Now he’s famous for his anti-Semitic socks and vests” (274). From a naturalistic perspective, Bok is not spared the claustrophobic encounter with the place. In this respect, persecution extends to the environment surrounding Bok. The
following image is given from his prison: “He was being boiled alive in the smothering heat of the small solitary cell they had thrust him into” (148). Earlier the mere departure of the shtetl exposes Bok to a claustrophobic Angst. The gloomy weather that besieges him with clouds growing dark and heavy, bodes ill for his journey foreshadowing a calamitous end:

Yet as they went through a grove of black branched trees, the leafless twigs darkly intertwined high above Yakov’s head, the small wood grew gloomy, and the fixer still searching for a change in the weather became actively nervous again. (22)

Environment seems to be in league with anti-Semites against the poor wanderer ignorant of what lies ahead.

But the most disastrous as well as ironic part of Bok’s case is his much-awaited trial that is reminiscent of Kafka’s *The Trial*. Bok’s lawyer, Julius Ostrovsky, sums up the true dimensions of his case by disclosing that it is difficult to foretell its limits which mingle with the political situation in a complicated compound. The whole case is “a bad joke from top to bottom” (273) where, while the fixer and Jews are fighting a deadly war to prove their innocence, people around including the judges are playing their theatrical parts to keep the libel status quo. To Ostrovsky, anti-Semitism may occur in “a medieval city full of wild superstitions and mysticism” (273) like Kiev or in such most civilised parts of the world as France during the Dreyfus Affairs. It is, therefore, an inevitable curse that Jews have to endure patiently, “In a sick country every step to health is an insult to those who live on its sickness” (276). At the root of Russian sickness is the Tsar’s attempt to repress the socialist revolutionaries utilising anti-Semitic organisations in the process to distract
the popular attention. To his misfortune, Yakov Bok is a scapegoat who happens to exist in the wrong place. But as he assumes the burden of a Jew championing the cause of his people, Bok, in Sam B. Girgus’ view, appears “to be both the archetypal victim and the hero” (31). His heroism, however, is both belated and imposed upon him.

When the novel comes to an end, Bok’s trial has not started yet which suggests that the Jew is treated as an outlaw who can be persecuted out of the legal boundaries with no standards of justice applied. Bok learns that his trial is a prolongation of a historical one that extends endlessly and in which the Jew is held as a culprit; his only crime is being born Jew. “One thing I’ve learned, he thought, there’s no such thing as an unpolitical man, especially a Jew. You can’t be one without the other, that’s clear enough. You can’t sit still and see yourself destroyed” (299). By deciding to commit himself to resistance envisioning in the process assassinating the Tsar, Bok becomes politically engaged. His final example is Spinoza’s ideal that where there is no fight there is no freedom. Being involved, therefore, Bok deserves to have the audience wave at him and shout his name. Malamud’s final message in *The Fixer* is, therefore, the Jew who chooses safe detachment gets fatally involved by anti-Semitism.

It is, however, in his sixth novel *The Tenants* (1971) that Malamud cultivates a more realistic and mature awareness of the Jew’s dilemma in America of the time. Although the novel deals with conflicts that are personal, history imposes itself powerfully drawing the characters into its devastating maelstrom. Harry Lesser, the Jewish writer, is stuck in a condemned building like the wasteland where the world is too sterile for a writer to produce. Like a bolt from the blue, a black writer, Willie
Spearmint, haunts the building entangling his condition much more and driving him into a conflict that Lesser never desires to be involved in. Like Bok, Lesser is inflicted by the Other’s demonic will to put the collar of history round his neck. Along these two linear threads—the predicament of the space and the nemesis of anti-Semitism—the theme of entrapment in *The Tenants* can be traced.

In naturalistic terms, Lesser’s foremost encounter is with a place that rejects and ejects him, an exile in other words. Constantly, he refuses to depart from an environment that reduces him to a lonely being haunting a ghostly building. Getting stuck in the condemned world of the tenement, Lesser’s process of extricating himself from that meaningless existence does not go beyond a desperate attempt to finish a literary work which, in turn, is doomed to futility by the barren atmosphere of the place. Such a situation represents the climax of the protagonist’s dilemma with the surrounding. Lesser, like Malamud’s other protagonists, is engaged in a naturalist struggle with the forces of “cultural and physical environments and ultimately victimised by those forces” (Handy 65). At the outset of the novel, the reader is introduced to a writer worried over the ending to his novel. Lesser’s despair gets intensified as he thinks that the boundaries surrounding him are hopeless: “Ah, this live earth, this sceptered isle on a silver sea, this Thirty-first Street and Third Avenue. This forsaken house. This happy unhappy Lesser having to write” (5). Apart from the dilemma of the place appearing as “a zoo of homeless selves” (10), Lesser is trapped in time too. A thirty-year-old writer, Lesser publishes two books—the first is a success, the second not. Now after nine and a half years of continuous writing he cannot finish his third book. Because of that rupture in literary career, Lesser suspects if he still exists in a world where his writing is futile.
Linking his existence to the impulse of his writing, Lesser dies symbolically when his manuscript is destroyed. Upon discovering the disappearance of that manuscript, his sense of agony and anguish is boundless. The work of ten years vanishes all at once and with it his soul fades away, “In the bathroom, after looking into the tub and letting out a prolonged tormented sad cry, the writer, on the edge of insane, fainted” (175). His persecution, therefore, assumes a new shape. For, setting fire to Lesser’s manuscript metaphorically amounts to a holocaust with letters and words replacing the flesh and blood of the exterminated people. Eric J. Sundquist observes that “burning of the manuscript is itself a simulacrum of the Holocaust” (433). The final solution is to rob a writer of his hopes for survival and burn those hopes into ashes. Undoubtedly, Malamud intends to represent the Holocaust choosing the writer’s words to embody his soul. The following image is suggestive: “Willie privately burns the vellum manuscripts and its foolscap copy in a barrel in the outhouse, his eyes tearing from the thick smoke—some heartburn. The hot ashes stink of human flesh” (178). The burnt book should be further considered within the tradition of calling Jews ‘People of the Book’ whom Lesser represents, “He saw himself buried in ashes” (179). In addition to that hint of the Holocaust, The Tenants belongs, in Sundquist’s view to a broader context of “the historical literature of persecution and pogrom, culminating in the Holocaust, that is one strain of Jewish literary history” (428). This is emphasised by the interracial conflict embedded within the novel.

Assuming a new form coloured by Malamud’s imagination and the American realities of the time, anti-Semitism in The Tenants feeds on the racial tension and controversies between blacks and Jews that surfaced in the sixties. Cynthia Ozick
who in ‘Literary Blacks and Jews,’ perceives in *The Tenants* a Malamudian depiction of a grotesque Jewish context, comments that the novel is a claustrophobic portrait having its theme in pogroms and mythic, anti-Semitic (qtd. in Field 105). Most likely the novel is inspired by the anti-Semitism of some Black Power proponents as well as by the Ocean Hill-Brownsville School crisis of 1968. It is, on the other hand, “an extreme and transmuted version of the muddled controversy between Ralph Ellison, the author of *Invisible Man*, and the Jewish critic Irving Howe that simmered on throughout the 1960s” (Philip Davis 267). Lesser, a Jew who embraces a liberal thinking and secular enlightenment, is ultimately defined not by his own inclinations but rather by the Other’s view of him. The anti-Semite Other is neither Russian tsarist nor Nazi but a black American.

The arrival of another writer to the building where Lesser is put up, Willie Spearmint the black anti-Semite who never spares a chance to show his racist prejudices against Jews, turns the writer’s life upside down. Introduced to him in the form of creepy “muted cries, distant wailing” and the voice of a typewriter, Spearmint is a second corpse admitted to the graveyard, an intruder whose freakishness leads him to that deadly tenement. Willie’s language is full of slang (‘ass,’ ‘bullshit,’ ‘fuckin’) and he is instinctively ready to act in violence. Rude, moody, short-tempered, ambivalent and paranoid, Willie is inclined to antagonism, carries grudges, and feels unable to accept the Other goaded by a collection of prejudices and stereotypes. In order to emphasise his commitment to blackness, he changes his name to Bill Spear and uses writing as an effective tool to emancipate his people. As a result, he is ambivalent about the title of his book not knowing whether to name it *A Nigger Ain’t Shit*, *Missing Life* or *Black Writer*. Moreover, he is prejudicial against
form and aestheticism since adhering to the form, in his view, means submitting to
the master’s discourse of oppression. His hostility to Jews originates in a core of
conspiracy theory in his mind. He thinks Jews do not want his work published or
successful since it will affect their prominence in America. About the Jewish
publishers he says: “Because I tried ten of those rat-brained Jews and they all turned
it down for a lot of horseshit reasons, because they are afraid of what the book says”
(75). And when Lesser gives his own critical evaluation of his book upon his demand,
Willie is provoked, “Oh, what a hypocrite shitass I am to ask a Jew ofay for advise
how to express my soul work” (165). Thereafter, the racial distrust culminates in
violence with Lesser entrapped in the fatal grasp of the black, “Lesser, in anguished
horror, grabbed Bill’s arms to make him stop. The black twisted out of his grasp,
caught him in a headlock and with a grunt slammed his head into the wall.” (167).
Finding himself a step away from death, Lesser is extremely dreadful and anguished
about his and his book’s fate as well.

Towards the end of the novel, Willie’s anti-Semitism becomes more visible in
the surrealistic delirious stories he writes. The story entitled “Goldberg exits Harlem”
reveals the hatred held in his traumatic psyche towards Jews. The nightmarish story
tells about a Jewish slumlord attacked by three old men and a Jamaican woman,
stabbed to death and becomes a feast for a cannibalistic gang, “He tastes Jewtaste,
that don’t taste like nothing good” (203). In the story resonating with a Blues song,
Willie creates a version of an American pogrom against Jews. In another story
addressed to Mr. and Mrs. Goldberg, the butt of his anti-Semitic discourse, Willie
accuses them of cheating and outwitting the blacks and thus they deserve persecution:
“Goldberg, and Mrs. Goldberg, goodbye goodbye/ coming a big U.S. Pogrom/ Well,
I’m gonna sing and hum‖ (219). Likewise, the story entitled “The First Pogrom in the U.S. of A.” envisions a historical parallel to the Russian pogroms with Blacks playing the role of the Russian peasants. To justify his hatred against Jews, Willie blames it on the victimisation by American Jews. In a note he writes:

It isn’t that I hate the Jews. But if I do any, it’s not because I invented it myself but I was born in the good old U.S. of A. and there’s a lot of that going on that gets under your skin. And it’s also from knowing the Jews, which I do. The way to black freedom is against them. (220)

Hence, the optimist tone that prevails in Malamud’s earlier short stories about black-Jew relations such as ‘Angel Levine’ gets disrupted in The Tenants as it ends on a pessimistic note.

The last scene of the fatal confrontation between the two writers is ambiguous and climatic. It marks a gothic ending that outlives the two preceding fantastic ones. The scene is set against the backdrop of a ‘moonless’ night where the two would-be killers cannot see but sense each other. Lesser and Willie, armed with an ax and a blade respectively, lurk in the darkness to exterminate each other. Their final encounter suggests the ethnic nature of their battle. Before exchanging fatal strikes they exchange racial curses: “‘Bloodsuckin Jew Niggerhater.’ ‘Anti-Semitic Ape’” (229). Thereafter, the ax and the razor-sharp saber find their way into their targets. But while Lesser “jagged ax sink through bone and brain,” the black’s saber “in a single boiling stabbing slash, cut the white’s balls from the rest of him” (230). The black’s strike is castrating as it hits on the weakness of the Jew though each “feels the anguish of the other” (230). It is, however, Lesser who, till the end referred to as a

Noticeably, the motif of prison is central to Malamud’s fiction suggesting an intensive depiction of man’s naturalist dilemma of being an undesired part of a hostile environment. Traceable in almost all of his novels, it is more powerfully present in The Fixer, The Assistant, and The Tenants. Malamud, in an interview, confirms this aspect of his fiction giving it new horizons and meanings:

Perhaps I use it as a metaphor for the dilemma of man: necessity, whose bars we look through and try not to see. Social injustice, apathy, ignorance. The personal prison of entrapment in past experience, guilt obsession—the somewhat blind or blinded self, in other words. (‘The Art of Fiction’ 9)

When soon after this statement, the interviewer asks him if that idea of prison comes out of his experience as a Jew, Malamud answers: “That’s probably in it—a heightened sense of prisoner of history, but there’s more to it than that” (9). A typical representation of that Malamudian existentialist understanding of the trope of prison is reinforced in The Assistant. In addition to the two prisons of the store and the suffocating surrounding, the novel comprises the prison of the self unable to get beyond the bars of necessity.

To begin with, the broader circle of naturalistic imprisonment is a reflection of the narrower ones of the store and the self. In The Assistant, Malamud sets his action within an enclosed world that, like in The Victim, keeps the protagonist within its suffocating embrace. As a result, the ambience of the city, the change of colours in
the sky and the alteration of seasons are important to the action. At the beginning of
the novel, the reader is introduced to an image that, while foreshadowing the gloomy
tone of the novel, gives clue to the general fictional setting created by Malamud in
most of his novels. The lingering darkness of a night that the ushering dawn cannot
scatter evokes a metaphorical analogy with the aftermath of the catastrophe over
which the shadow of a nightmarish night is frozen, “the early November street was
dark though night had ended” (3). Commenting on this exact image, Jonathan Rosen
sees in it a reenactment of the historical context in which the novel is written. After
the “grimmest struggles of immigrant life, after the Holocaust . . .,” observes Rosen,
“Malamud conjured a world in which the long shadow of suffering still blotted out
the sun” (vii). Furthermore, the old age that makes Morris Bober pant under the heavy
weight of the boxes and the ‘clawed’ wind flinging “his apron into his face” (3) are
two signs of the protagonist’s problematic existence. On the one hand, he has to work
at old age to overcome a dire poverty, and he has to cope with hard hostile
environment on the other.

Morris Bober is the owner of an old poor grocery store that instead of
providing a source of livelihood becomes a burden, a gloomy and torturing prison-
like place looking “like a long dark tunnel” (4) and in which the ill-fated grocer is
“entombed” (6). For twenty-one years, Bober spends most of his time waiting for
some change to happen that may better his life, but luck, like customers, has no
currency to supply his cash register. As a committed Jew, Bober always reads the
Forward newspaper though his income can never afford to buy it daily. He is partly
motivated by the desire to kill the long monotonous time of waiting for customers. In
the five-room flat where the Bobers live, the suffocating, “awful” atmosphere is no
different from that of the store. According to Jonathan Rosen, “When the psalmist cries, ‘O Lord, do not let me go down into the pit,’ he may have in mind something like Morris Bober’s grocery store” (vii). The futile and frustrating condition of the store, however, is no more than an ugly front for the entrapment of the New World.

Apart from poverty, Morris Bober has to cope with anti-Semitism that gets inaugurated with the holdup conducted by the hardcore anti-Semite Ward and Frank Alpine. The incidents in which the two holdupniks slug Bober, take his money and humiliatingly curse him is a turning point that changes his life though not for the better. In addition to victimising the old Jew and robbing him of the little amount of the money he can with toil earn, the two shoplifters appear to Bober carrying anti-Semitic traits. The “dirty yellow clotted” (25) handkerchief over the face of one of them means something evocative for the old honest Jew. So do their anti-Semitic remarks: “You’re a Jew liar” (25) and “Your Jew ass is bad, you understand” (26). The blow descending fiercely on Bober’s face by the gun of Ward sends him into a dark abyss that leads toward a gloomy end of his long journey of misery in America. Bober feels sick of himself, of soured expectations, endless frustration, the years gone up in smoke, he could not begin to count how many. He had hoped for much in America and got little. And because of him Helen and Ida had less. He had defrauded them, he and the bloodsucking store. (26-27)

Leslie Field is right when he compares Bober’s Jewish suffering to “the tip of the iceberg. Below the surface are anti-Semitism, pogroms, [and] the Holocaust” (113). This is evident in Ward Mintogue’s character. He does not bother whether his victim is rich or poor as long as he is a Jew, “I don’t care if it’s Karp or Bober, a Jew
is a Jew” (70). His action, therefore, goes beyond the mere crime of thievery to persecution.

The way Frank Alpine invades the Bobers’ life is as creepy and aggressive as that of Albee in Bellow’s *The Victim*. After being denied a space in the store as an apprentice, he steals into the cellar and daily rips off a bottle of milk and two rolls. As though the burdens of their poverty and damned grocery are not enough, the Bobers have to endure the hanging-on and thievery of Frank Alpine who justifies and enjoys the act of stealing from a Jew. Confirming Bober’s theory of the general feeling of goyim patronising his store, Frank “felt good to pluck a buck from under the Jew’s nose” (84). In such a way Malamud reduces the persecutor-victim relationship to low covert levels offsetting in the process the Jewish ethics based on defeating the enemy in the religious game. Alpine has also an evil eye on Helen whom he never spares a scheme or an intrigue to trap. His scheme begins with a silent staring at her body and ends with rape to try what a Jewish girl’s body tastes like. Peeping secretly through Helen’s bathroom window, Frank devours her body with his hungry eyes:

He felt greedy as he gazed, all eyes at a banquet, hungry so long as he must look. But in looking he was forcing her out of reach, making her into a thing only of his seeing, her eyes reflecting his sins, rotten past, spoiled ideas, his passion poisoned by his shame. (75-76)

Helen is reduced first to a mere object of desire, a piece of sweet for which his mouth waters, and an edible item on a table. But, then, since she is out of his reach, Helen is further envisioned as an encased relic only to be watched. In both cases, however, Helen is stripped of her subject status and dwindles into objectness.
Ward’s aggressive attempt to rape Helen is another chapter in the Bobers’ tragedy of being thrown in a hostile world, disarmed and unprotected. The anti-Semite always looks at Helen as some fancy item that will be enjoyable to use and throw. The night she is waiting for Alpine in the park, Helen appears to his drunken animal desire a victim that can never evade his grip, so he demands his share of an unowned cake: “All I want is what you give that wop” (167). He cannot believe such a poor Jewish girl has her own ideals that keep her from cheapening herself. Like a rabbit in the strong grip of a starving tiger, Helen screams, fights, struggles till Frank, her saviour, comes to release her. But the mock saviour, demanding the price for coming to rescue her, proves to be not different from the villain. To her disappointment, Frank, aroused by her half-nakedness, tries to force himself upon her. True, Helen loves him, still she can never accept to be his lay; her religion, education, and the imagined angry faces of her parents prevent that. His, therefore, is a rape and Helen’s cry “Dog—uncircumcised dog!” (168) as Frank exhibitions himself to her implies a cultural gap that remains unbridged and thus causes Helen’s rejection and abhorrence of his advances. In this respect, Philip Davis writes: “Malamud’s The Assistant, he [Roth] argued, re-enforced the stereotypes of Jew as virtuous victim, Gentile as lustful Wild man” (137). Alpine’s last trick to win the reluctant Jewess is, consequently, the suspicious act of getting circumcised and converting to Judaism.

Like many of Malamud’s and the postwar Jewish American novels, The Assistant deals with the Holocaust keeping a metaphorical distance which helps Malamud search for a meaning that can be projected onto the surface of the contemporary realities. In the words of Michael Brown, “Malamud does not depict the horrible, overwhelming reality of the Holocaust, but rather seeks out the meaning
in and of the event” (481). One of the aspects through which the Holocaust gets expressed is Bober’s encounter with German characters. Vogel Otto, the meat provisions man, is one who is associated in Malamud’s view with a pejorative character: “a bushy-mustached German carrying a smoked liverwurst and string of wieners in his oily meat basket” (6). Dealing with him in a touchy inflexible manner, Bober has to pay him cash because “from a German he wanted no favors” (6). Bober’s doubts prove true as Vogel, charged with anti-Semitism, does not hesitate to poison Frank’s mind, “Don’t work for a Yid, kiddo. They will steal your ass while you are sitting on it” (60). It is not by chance also that Bober’s rival—the grocer around the corner—whose grocery causes a severe blow to Bober’s business is a German. In a sense, Bober is a Jew indirectly persecuted by a German, and the torment and poverty caused to him is a version of the Holocaust though the setting of the novel is supposedly in the Great Depression; i.e. chronologically before the Shoah. As if America cannot accommodate a Jew and a German, the latter’s appearance in the scene threatens the existence of the former. Furthermore, the neighbourhood where the Bobers, the Pearls and the Karps live parallels the Holocaust Europe. The destruction of one-third of the world’s Jewry is evoked by the fire destroying Karp’s liquor shop—one-third of the Jewish families (Brown 483).

Morris Bober has, in addition, a symbolic encounter with the Holocaust and gas chamber that simultaneously happens in dream as well as in reality. Anxious about his future after the Norwegians’ handbill announcing reopening of the neighbouring store, Bober absentmindedly turns on the stopcock of the bedroom radiator forgetting to light the gas and goes to sleep. While getting suffocated almost to death by gas, Bober swims in a nightmare of confrontation first with the
Norwegian partners poking into his cash register, and then with Frank smothering him to death. Neither Bober is able to get rid of Frank’s heavy weight on his chest, nor the Norwegians “gabbing in German” pay attention “to his gibbering Yiddish” (173). Apparently, every Jew should have his share of the tragedy, if not in a real experience then in a metaphorical one. Rescued by Frank and Nick, Bober lies “on the floor, his underwear soaked, his face the color of a cooked beet, flecks of foam in the corners of his mouth” (178). Undergoing a death-in-life situation, Bober can outlive with a miracle though he enjoys the moments of death and does not want to go back to a life that is practically worse than death. He survives but his life thereafter is no more than a showdown. Bober, then, represents the climax of Malamud’s vision of the New World. By fictionalising an immigrant’s suffering that hides beneath it multiple layers of persecution, Malamud probably inspires a considerable part of the thematic treatment in Wallant’s fiction.

A distinct feature of Wallant’s protagonists is that they are prone to the dichotomies that primarily originate in the tension between a deprived past and an embittered present. In the words of Philip Codde:

His [Wallant’s] novels feature typically alienated, self-imprisoning Jewish characters who are suffering the consequences of a sudden and tragic loss; a loss that needs to be considered—either symbolically or quite explicitly—in the light of an absurd Holocaust universe. (194)

In this sense, the Holocaust Europe and the Post-Holocaust America are two woes between which the protagonist’s journey extends. On this idea are based both Wallant’s novel The Pawnbroker (1961) and the film adaptation named after it and directed by Sidney Lumet (1965) that first tackles the theme of the Holocaust directly
in America. To give it its due, Sidney Lumet’s adaptation occupies a high place in terms of handling the themes concerning the Holocaust. It skillfully integrates characterisation, social ironies, visual symbolism, and the ambiguities of the time, restoring, according to Frank R. Cunningham, “the essence and spirit of the original” (39). But the film’s success does not detract Wallant’s distinct treatment of the theme.

To intensify the representation of the Holocaust, Wallant uses a double method: depicting the existential problematics of the survivor unable to get rid of the hangovers in the aftermath of the tragedy, on the one hand; and employing a collage of elements from recurring nightmares to reconstruct Nazerman’s experience in the concentration camps of Dachau and Bergen-Belsen on the other. His sleep, thus, is not a way of taking rest but of tormented reenactment of the prototype nightmare, a noisy moaning to which the household is accustomed. In the first dream, Nazerman, crushed by the crowd, stands helpless to rescue his son David sliding and drowning in the filth of the deportation train, “I’m slipping in it, Daddy, in the dirty stuff, I can’t stay up” (37). Forced by two hundred bodies towards one direction that exposes to him the fleeting scenes of the Polish landscape, Nazerman is tortured by a sense of failing David as well as by “his wife’s burning glass eyes in a waxen face” (38) asking him to do something. Unable to move a muscle, he desperately defends his inaction to appease Ruth’s menacing stare, “But I can’t, I can’t. I can do nothing” (38). A Holocaust victim, Nazerman is further victimised by the Angst of helplessness.

The scene recalled in the second dream is so horrible that Nazerman decides not to try for more sleep. Rubin, Tessie’s husband who manages to slip out of the camp’s barbed-wire fence, is doomed to the most monstrous death. Attacked by dogs,
Rubin is left a mass of torn flesh and blood, “Rubin was screaming, one shining red figure of blood, only his mouth definable in all the torn body, and that so vivid because it framed the scream” (100, 101). Bitterly tormented and desperate, the man flings himself up on the thorny wire fence only to be electrocuted to death. But while Rubin is redeemed by death from the hands of perpetrators, Nazerman and others die hundred times eye-witnessing the wild and cruel way their mate’s life is destroyed. In the third dream, he himself is the subject of a strange inhuman medical experiment. He envisions himself lying motionless as Nazi surgeon and nurses saw off parts of his body and drop them into a nearby bucket to watch how the body functions after certain organs are mutilated. “It will be interesting to see how he functions now” (131) the experiment team talk beside the etherised body.

Nazerman’s sleep becomes a channel that connects the reader to the tragic past which he struggles throughout his wakefulness to repress and forget. The fourth dream uncovers one of the most horrible, pathetic and degrading scenes when his wife, Ruth, is compelled to commit fellatio for an SS soldier before raping her. As if that most humiliating crime is not enough, Nazerman is sadistically forced by a Nazi guard to watch the scene of his wife being defiled in the cubicle experiencing the worst torment meted out to a man. The demonic orders of the guard “look . . . look” become a castrating factor reminding him of his inability to act like a man. The same words uttered by Mabel in the shop as she seduces Nazerman urging him to look at her nude breast do no more than emasculate him. Watching the scene sends Nazerman into a mysterious numbness that surmounts the loudest scream of anguish, “And then he went a step further toward the empty blackness of animal relief; he
fainted and felt nothing for a long time” (169). Waking up from the horror of dream is followed by insomnia which for him is more comfortable than sleep.

As if the past that he revisits in dream is a gallery of Picasso’s surrealistic portraits, Nazerman recalls by installing horrible scenes each of which is enough to send him into insanity. The scene of his daughter Naomi’s murder by Nazis is next in order. Naomi is killed by a monstrous hook piercing her body from behind and coming out of the breast. “He [Nazerman envisioning the scene] began screaming, the screams of such unbearable size that the sensation was that of vomiting or giving birth. His grief forced all his blood out of his pores” (193-94). In a strange alteration, the faces of almost all characters he is acquainted with in Harlem—the post-Holocaust phantoms—are envisioned successively on the hook, first the child’s face and then each other like projected slides:

Yet in spite of the unreality, the succession of faces brought him no relief, indeed made his pain grow worse, become cumulative, and each moment he thought to be the ultimate agony was exposed by the next moment’s increased intensity. (194)

Suggestively, they are all no more than multiplied versions of the original terror.

In another dream, Nazerman envisions the mountain of emaciated bodies that he is compelled by guards to throw onto the growing pile of the crematorium. Like Mr. Sammler, Nazerman is filled with shame and dread to see and handle the corpses of familiar faces. Nevertheless, he feels that their fate is no more merciful than his, “Certainly he envied what they had now—a blindness to scenes like this” (197). Furthermore, the nakedness of his wife’s emaciated body and the smell of its burning
flesh persist in Nazerman’s imagination. The smoke recurrently stirs in him a mysterious emotional compound of tearless cry for being too helpless to even offer a prayer (kaddish) to the “fleeing, greasy smoke” (225) carrying forth their spirits. Consequently, several things associate Nazerman with Ozick’s Rosa: the cannibalistic impulse as he feels a hungry lust “for rich meat and heavy pastries” (225); his eyes with no tears like “burning hot balls in the flesh of his eyes” (225); and the problematic post-survival existence after witnessing the murder of their beloved relatives.

The collage of dreams by which the Holocaust experience is retrieved in the novel, however, is paralleled by the technique of flash cuts some of which do not last a second in Lumet’s film adaptation that makes some expressionist cinematic modification to fit into the visual presentation. Lumet’s film juxtaposes scenes from contemporary Harlem with visually analogous flashbacks to Nazerman’s concentration camps’ experience. The dogs barking on the street remind Nazerman of German guard dogs. A gang fight behind a fence with pedestrians indifferently passing-by calls up the memories of Rubin’s torture and death. A young woman who pawns her engagement ring is interrupted by the image of a row of women’s hands held up over a fence so that rings can be stripped off by the S.S. officers. The climatic flashback occurs when Mabel offers her nude body to him. Instead of getting tempted, Nazerman’s vision is taken back in time to Ruth’s rape. But while the novel ends with an optimistic note that anticipates Nazerman’s rejuvenation, the film eliminates any hope when Nazerman leaves the store and wanders aimlessly mourning for the poor Jesus Ortiz’s sacrifice. “The different conclusions,” observes Michael K. Johnson, “of the film and book illustrate two methods of addressing this
paradox—telling a story that must be told, and foregrounding the impossibility of conveying the horror of the Holocaust” (303). Representing the unrepresentable is rhetorically capsuled in Rod Steiger (the actor performing Nazerman’s role in the film) ‘mute scream’ that articulates the inexpressibility of the grief.

S. Lillian Kremer considers *The Pawnbroker* as “a prototypical American Holocaust novel” via which Wallant “moved the Holocaust from the shadowy realm of symbolism and allusion to the foreground of fiction” presenting it as “the central focus of his survivor-protagonist’s consciousness and experience” (63). But focusing on the actual event of the Shoah does not necessarily mean that the novel makes no use of metaphorical tropes that go in parallel with the series of the Holocaust scenes. Harlem itself is thought of as the American version of Auschwitz. In Harlem, the pawnshop with its wire screens and bars stands out as a claustrophobic confinement which reminds Nazerman of the physical and psychological cages that contain him. Lumet sees in the store “a series of cages: wire mesh, bars, locks, alarms, anything that would reinforce a sense of entrapment” (Leff 365). The sense of continued imprisonment is reflected in the novel’s larger setting that elaborates the analogy between the New York experienced by Nazerman and the Nazi concentration camps where violence, brutality and death prevail.

The naturalistic element that is traceable in Bellow and Malamud is present in Wallant’s *The Pawnbroker* where the protagonist is overwhelmed by the hostile environment. The image of the sun coming “out with a cruel brilliance” (190) and the sky staring down at the earth with “a pale-blue monstrous eye” (109) testify to that silent tension between man and nature. Waking up, Nazerman finds himself relieved from nightmares but drowned in a morning that brings no newness. The morning sun,
instead, brings forth an aggressive image: “The bright, pink light of the sun looked like the reflection of some monstrous fire burning a hideous fuel” (225). In his encounter with environment, Nazerman is bewildered by the hostile atmosphere that intensifies his anxiety:

All the bright light threatened him like a single massive flame. And he was filled with mysterious dread for the unusual emotions he now seemed to recognize—a sudden and unbearable loneliness. He saw himself as the last living creature on a burning orb. (205)

Reminiscent of similar contexts in Bellow, Malamud, and Ozick, the hot weather makes a furnace out of the place: “The heat rose to the temperature of an oven, and he sat breathing heavily through his mouth, a gray figure in the motionless car, on the desolate landscape” (205). “The geography of his fiction,” comments Thomas M. Lorch on Wallant’s setting, “consists of the hidden corners of contemporary life, the slums and city hospitals (behind which looms the concentration camps), and their adjacent precincts, the ghettos of the mind” (78).

That hostile surrounding begets hostile people whose fatal encounter with Nazerman extends his persecution a bit further. Murillio, the crime boss, in order to force Nazerman to accept the status quo of their contract, threatens to kill him putting the gun’s barrel in his mouth. The incident takes him back in time and space to the original horror: “It had been so long, so long since his nightmares were as real as taste and touch, since they came to him in waking hours” (163-64). The other incident is that of the stickup when Nazerman is rounded up and almost killed by Robinson, Buck and Tangee. This enhances his withdrawal from people and life. His connection with life does not exceed a mere senseless perception of light and sound, “Now the
one tiny contact with living was an unbelievable agony, a white-hot pressure against his heart” (264). Harlem, in this sense, has its own persecution league to deal with a runaway Jew.

Figuratively, the novel adheres to the train and colour imagery as tightly allied with evocative Holocaust implications. Going to the subway exposes Nazerman to the terror that makes everything in the dirty light of the platform appear “defaced or mutilated—signs, walls, trash cans, everything” (154). The setting causes him to experience tremors that, lurking in a distant dark corner of his mind, surfaces at the exposition to something reminiscent of the catastrophe. As the train, advancing with a “yellow eye,” (154) comes to “swallow him,” Nazerman has “a sour burring in his throat; it tasted faintly of egg” (155). This is a stark realistic imagery symbolising the atrocity and anguish ready to arise fresh. In Kremer S. Lillian’s words: “The yellow light evokes offensive yellow identity badges; the city train suggests wartime boxcar transports carry Jews to concentration camps and crematoria” (69). Hence, encompassing representations, that are both realistic and symbolic, gives The Pawnbroker priority and advanced place in the Holocaust fiction.

The Holocaust imagery is present, though in the most covert way, in Wallant’s first novel The Human Season which Philip Codde considers as a Holocaust allegory (194). It is the symbolic world of the Holocaust that engulfs Berman, a Jew whose bereavement is boundless, and whose confrontation with gas devices and creepy rats are highly suggestive. On May 7, 1954, while having surgery, Berman feels the closeness of death clicking “its teeth menacingly” (36). The presence of death is linked with rubber tubes pumping gas into his penetrated body, “There was the pressure of the gas threatening to blow him up” (34). This is Berman’s version of the
gas chambers while the Nazi nemesis is embodied in his encounter with rats, “A rat suddenly ran over his ankle, splashed through one of the many puddles, then stopped to peer at him with polished eyes” (25). Berman cannot stand the sight of the creature and in a ‘desperate rage’ kills it with a wrench. Most likely, Berman’s violent reaction is to bring forth the bitterness of a man who has experienced an awful loss inflicted by Nazis. His son is killed as he participates in the World War II. The news is brought to him by Riebold and a guard on April 17, 1945 as he is working in an ammunition factory. Upon being informed, he starts wailing, invoking God to help him, “He had never dreamed there could be pain like that. It crushed him, wrenched his bones, trod on his brain” (56). Berman’s loss, however, is less painful than that of Nazerman since his son is not a passive victim of extermination. This is why, unlike Nazerman, Berman sanctifies the memory of his son.

Apart from symbolism, Joe Berman’s childhood in Russia records a flesh-and-blood rather than a metaphorical encounter with anti-Semitism. That phase of his life in Russia cannot be discussed in isolation from the pogroms storming out Jews of the time. Though not described in details, some intimation testifies to those pogroms. At one point, it is mentioned that the windows are still covered with boards from the destructions of the year before. Berman can remember “the terror and the awe, the wonder of his father then” (147). The incident of April, 1909 in the Street of the Butchers exposes another disfigured face of anti-Semitic Russia. Walking on empty streets that foreground the disaster, Reb Berman and Joe Berman are warned by Pyotr of a pogrom prepared for by the peasants that is about to storm Dolmyk, “You’d do well to get wherever it is you folks hide, tell the others, tell them old Grigor passed the word along” (154). Soon after, a peasant approaches them beating the old Berman
with a whip in a humiliating way: “Ey, Jew, Christ-killer, devourer of Christian babies. Down, down on your knees . . . beg for salvation. Pray to Him you murdered. Ey, Jew, down, down!” (155). Witnessing the torment his strong but defenseless father is subject to, Berman begins to cry. That crying, however, is replaced by a sense of pride after his father kills the aggressive peasant with one strike.

In America, where a Jew is given a foothold, anti-Semitism is equally cultivated. Soon after arriving in America, Berman gets involved in a fight with the anti-Semitic Irish foreman (December, 1916), an incident heralding the insecurity that lingers. Fed up with the Irishman’s daily insults that add up to the hardship of the work, Berman is determined to insult him back. Enraged by Berman’s deliberate Hebrew singing and smile, the anti-Semite curses: “Cut out them Jew songs, Yid. [. . .] Standin’ there with that crappy grin on your crappy Jew face . . . I’m gettin’ fed up with you, Yid” (87). Berman insults him back and they start their fatal fight in the muddy trench. Berman shows a brave resistance and can push a rock strike against the Irishman’s face. But he does not match the power and brutality of the foreman who can affect a hole in Berman’s head and mutilate his finger sending him into coma for three days. The incident, though enthralls him with confidence for resisting an invincible power, exposes how danger can be reproduced in America where the Bermans seek refuge. The pangs of fear and anxiety creep into Berman’s thinking as he figures out his existence “in a world of common pain, present in his body and anticipated in his mind” (92). The real dread comes true with the loss of his son and wife after which he suffers alone in a world that does not care about him. Suggestively, the “sound of a lawnmower,” (129) operated by his neighbour that always fills out the background of Berman’s tormented loneliness in the house,
epitomises the noisy surrounding callous to his grievances. Wallant in *The Human Season* as well as in *The Pawnbroker* dramatises a rupture in his characters’ relationship with an anti-Semitic world that neither spares their past nor cares about their present.

From all that has been mentioned thus far, the postwar Jewish American fiction, exemplified by the novels taken for the study, encompasses three aspects of the Jewish persecution: anti-Semitism manifested in sentiments, hints and actions; naturalistic elements of claustrophobic environment; and the haunting presence of the Holocaust. Almost all the protagonists have to cope with anti-Semitic antagonists who single out Jews by stereotypes, contempt, hatred and even aggressive acts. In Bellow, either a Christian female character or an eccentric afflicts certain type of oppression; Madeline, Elda, Shula, Albee, Valentine are stark examples. Malamud contextualises anti-Semitism in historical events: the blood libel of Belies in *The Fixer*; the Great Depression in *The Assistant*; and the Jewish-black tension in *The Tenants*. Wallant depicts the disruption in an effective communication between the protagonists and a world that robs them of their dreams and does not care about their loss. The Holocaust, treated overtly in *The Pawnbroker* and *Mr. Sammler’s Planet*, maintains its unnamed presence in all novels. This can be detected in the characters bringing forth Nazi thinking and arguments and who get engaged in a relationship of oppression against the Jewish protagonists. The Nazi ideology that idolises the individual cleansing, in the process, the weaker elements of society is deconstructed by Bellow’s attack on Romanticism. The Holocaust, however, is evocatively represented through a number of symbols associated with the tragedy and referred to as ‘iconic messages’ by Wajnryb. These include rats, trains, dogs, chimneys, colour
imagery in addition to some symbolic incidents that reenact the original event, such as the exposure to gas torture experienced by Leventhal, Berman and Bober. From a different perspective, those symbols allied with the central metaphor of the prison constitute the claustrophobic environment in which the characters always feel suffocated. It is not surprising then if the mind, that feels besieged by man, nature and symbols and that expects danger to befall any moment, undergoes certain processes of disintegration. This is the subject-matter of the following chapter that explores the way external persecution turns into psychological maladies and internal fragmentation.
Works Cited


<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xNL7wno_wOY>.


