Chapter IV

Fragmented Psyche:

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Neurosis is the way of avoiding nonbeing by avoiding being.

—Paul Tillich (66)

The psychological aspects of the Jewish-American anxiety posit first the significant link of its historical forces, psychic experience and literary expression. And taking into consideration this contextual correlation, the present chapter falls into the right thematic order. It tackles an issue which is often understood as both a consequence and a manifestation of direct and indirect histories of embattled and embittered existence. For, without the anguish of homelessness and the atrocities of persecution along with what they entail, psychological perils hardly afflict diasporas. Several studies investigate the relationship between mental illness and specific groups illustrating that by the way mental diseases are more common among Jews than non-Jews in America. In ‘Mental Illnesses among American Jews,’ Renate G. Armstrong reviews Wechsler’s, Leighton’s, and others’ proposition that the hardships of displacement and atrocities of World War II allow certain functional psychoses such as manic-depression, schizophrenia, paranoia, etc. to take place amid immigrant Jews (103-06). The fear of acculturation, the socio-economic status, the familial commitments that sometimes cause guilt feelings, the environmental hazards, the horror of the Holocaust, and anti-Semitism trigger certain neurotic disorders. Whether
those ailments occur as symptoms of posttraumatic stress disorders or due to an exaggerated anxiety and paranoid delusions, they surely mark a sharp, collective and patterned fragmentation in the Jewish American psyche.

Primarily, fragmentation describes a state of the self that is the opposite of cohesion and integrity. The fragmented psyche is one that either actually undergoes or feels the anxiety of disintegrating into elements that no longer function in harmony. Undergoing actual disintegration is, in most cases, the result of trauma that denotes “an overwhelming experience of sudden, or catastrophic events, in which the response to the events occur in the often delayed, and uncontrolled repetitive occurrence of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena” (Caruth 181). The experience is traumatic in the sense that it has deforming effects on the psyche giving rise to:

repetition compulsion: those reenactments in the present of psychic events that have not been safely consigned to the past . . . and that disrupt the unruffled present with flashbacks and terrifying nightmares, intrusive fragments of an unknown past that exceeds the self’s (relatively) coherent and integrated story about itself. (Forter 260)

These all are designated by the term ‘traumatic neurosis’ that focuses on the moment the patient relives the initial trauma as well as the disturbances arising soon or long after an intense emotional shock. Traumatic neuroses, therefore, can afflict even the people existing on the emotional peripheries. This is exceptionally true in the case of the trauma caused by racist violence. The Jews of America, for example, might be said to suffer certain types of neurosis caused by the original moments of the Holocaust without being direct victims of it. In this respect, Greg Forter emphasises
that “the trauma of historical events affects those who do not live through them with the same force as those who do” since “to inherit a history is to have transmitted to one a disturbance that never stops disturbing” (277). But the collective neurotic disorders sometimes give way to symptoms resulting from exaggerated concerns about annihilation and feelings of anxiety psychoanalytically referred to as ‘delusions of persecution.’

In the language of psychology, the term ‘delusions of persecution’ is used to refer to such various psychological diagnoses as paranoia, schizophrenia, melancholia, and hypochondria which all meet at one point where what a person thinks and feels has, to greater or lesser degrees, nothing to do with the realities of the situation. It is paranoia, however, which, having many areas of intersection with the persecution complex in terms of individual, social and cultural determinants and forms, is used roughly as a synonym. Having its basic impulse in the desire to keep the boundaries built around ego intact in defense against engulfment and invasion, paranoia always feeds on distrust, suspicion, readiness to feel slighted, injured or persecuted. A paranoid person anticipates abuse from others and thus his imagination can adapt to any passing remark to become intentionally abusive. Freud’s formula of paranoia is: “I do not love him—I hate him,” which is transformed by the defence of projection into, “he hates (persecutes) me” (“Psycho-analytic Notes on an Autobiographical Account of a Case Paranoia” 2432). This leads to the social aspect of paranoia when power relations determine individual and collective psychological reaction. Paranoia, in this sense, is an advanced and pathological stage of alienation in which the sense of estrangement develops into magnified feelings that the personal boundaries are trespassed. In their essay “Paranoia and Structure of Powerlessness,”
John Mirowsky and Catherine E. Ross note that “the social position characterized by powerlessness and by the threat of victimization and exploitation tend to produce paranoia” (228). The postwar Jewish-American novel is an outstanding case in point of the genre in which the paranoid characters are meant to epitomise the historical and cultural backgrounds against which they are cast. Patrick O’Donnell in “Engendering Paranoia in Contemporary Narrative” names Saul Bellow along with other Jewish-American novelists as part of contemporary North American novelists who “have represented paranoid characters, communities, schemes, and lifestyles” (181) by way of depicting the oppression meted out by power institutions to disadvantaged minorities.

Focusing on the aforementioned dimensions of mental anguish, the novelists studied here involve their protagonists in a struggle to create a meaningful order out of a psychological chaos. Bellow usually contemplates how the fall into a lost and inauthentic being in the postwar American writing happens as a result of the state of alienation, the absurdity of existence, and the violence of being that constitute altogether the American version of European existentialism. He himself represents part of that postwar mood whose sensibility is further shaped by the pre-requisites of belonging to a collective traumatic consciousness. Consequently, the ghetto experience and hostile environment are always present in the background of his characters’ thought and action and, thus, the disjointed perception is dictated by the mental state of the central character. The Bellovian protagonist is, therefore, partly Dostoevskian in the sense that he is caught in a drama of the mind besieged by cultural and political oppression and partly Kafkian where the agonies of the spirit to
win battle against the powers of darkness come from within. According to Malcolm Bradbury, Bellow is a modern novelist,

who is aware of the tensions of modern selfhood and the crises of history, who understands the dark places of being, the lure of extremity, the power of madness, and the unusual historical and psychological pressures against which selfhood must be won. (vii)

Hence, the focus is shifted to the dramatisation of inward battlefields where the adversary force is mental fragmentation.

Bellow’s *Herzog* is a typical example of the protagonist’s psychological condition dwindling into ‘disintegration products.’ This is a psychoanalytic phenomenon that Arnold Goldberg defines as the lack of self-integrity which becomes visible in the form of “isolated activities” assuming “hallucinatory thoughts, repetitive motor activity and/or hypochondriacal ruminations” (419). Herzog’s life is composed of fragments similar to the fragments of the meaningless scrawls with which he begins his mental rambling. The structure of the novel in what looks like an adapted epistolary genre intends the reader to understand the novel as if he/she is floating on the currents of the protagonists and central consciousness’ chaotic psyche. What seems senseless incoherent syllables, twisted proverbs, and quotations constitute a labyrinthine structure having its meaning in its very fragmented nature; a collage of abstract figures that can express the trauma more than any well-organised composition. Commenting on Bellow’s time shifts, loose associations, and the movement between narrative points of view without specific signals, Lois S. Lewin writes: “The form of the novel is as chaotic as the mind of its protagonist” (185). Apart from the form, the tone of psychological disorder is introduced at the very
outset of the novel where the protagonist says to himself, “If I am out of my mind, it’s all right with me” (1). The statement implies a conflict between the image one holds of himself and the counter-image the others assign him. This sums up the nature of Herzog’s psychological crisis as when the self-image he constructs tends to yield to the one imposed upon him by the external world: “Some people thought he was cracked and for a time he himself had doubted that he was all there” (1). In order to overcome that crisis, he tries to assume self-confidence that he essentially lacks. Herzog is quite aware that there is some oddness in his behaviour which always singles him out in an environment of standardised objects.

The mania of writing letters represents the core of Herzog’s crisis that maintains a short-lived extension of the protagonist’s sanity through giving an outlet to a repressed self-expression. It also adds a sense of loose coherence to a narrative mainly composed of epistles addressed to people of wide varieties and backgrounds, “He had fallen under a spell and was writing letters to everyone under the sun” (1). Herzog approaches a manic-depressive disorder driven by a number of desperate emotional forces. He is, therefore, anxious over the habit of the delirious leaking of letters. Driven by a compulsory impulse to move around so that the overflow of ideas may continue, Moses Herzog cannot resist the desire to find a secret hideout where his communication with the upper and under worlds can be established uninterrupted. Motivated by these disparate drives, Herzog wanders “from place to place with a valise full of papers” of which New York, Martha’s Vineyard, Chicago and the village in western Massachusetts are stations. From his seclusion in the country “he wrote endlessly, fanatically, to the newspapers, to people in public life, to friends and relatives and at last to the dead, his own obscure dead, and finally the famous dead”
(1). Most probably, the disruption in a sane contact with understanding real world is paralleled by an active attempt to connect with an illusory one.

To his students, Herzog becomes not a source of education, but a stage of “odd things,” interrupting his classes to write a note that he can never postpone. Dropping all formalities, Herzog does not scruple to follow the dictates of his preoccupied mind even if it is at the expense of his status in the class, “Professor Herzog had the unconscious frankness of a man deeply preoccupied” (2). While giving a lecture on the “Roots of Romanticism,” a sudden impulse to explain and clarify to an imaginary audience other than the one he is actually addressing overwhelms his thinking and behaviour. As though the American students listening to him are too dull to digest his ideas, Herzog’s audience are abstract entities present only in his own consciousness and designed only to listen to him whenever and wherever he addresses them. “Manic and somewhat frantic,” notes Andrea Mannis, “Moses is writing letters because he desperately needs someone who will listen” (82). As a result, his repressed desire to explain and justify himself turns into a silent but effective language:

His white face showed everything—everything. He was reasoning, arguing, he was suffering, he had thought of a brilliant alternative—he was wide-open, he was narrow; his eyes, his mouth made everything silently clear—longing, bigotry, bitter anger. One could see it all. (2)

In short, Herzog is completely detached from reality and absorbed in his own anxieties.
From an emotional perspective, his compulsive letter-writing, like Sartre’s *Nausea*, and Camus’ *The Fall*, marks a maturity of confessional mode. As a confessional hero, Herzog is disillusioned and groping for meaning. He views his condition not with anger but with a deep internal pain. And since his suffering originates from not only the chaos of the world but also the chaos within the self, the only possible order or value must be found in self-understanding that letter-writing elusively seems to offer. Moreover, some sort of sexual guilt is present in Herzog’s entangled situation. Madeline, abandons him to seek a sexual gratification. Like J. Alfred Prufrock, he touches his head with self-consciousness and his baldness stands for impotence. Keith M. Opdahl, judging that all Bellow’s “protagonists suffer some sort of sensual guilt,” specifies the case of Herzog as “a more general emotional or intellectual anxiety expressed indirectly” (2). That casts light on the libidinal aspect of *Herzog* when the internal perception is determined by the image of the body. His disintegration in this way is pushed into further complications.

By creating a character that nearly crosses the insanity line, Bellow intends to reconstruct the meaning of intellectuality in an absurd surrounding. Herzog, in Bellow’s words, is “a person in a very agitated and almost mad state who is resisting everything, including his own intellectual life” (“Saul Bellow in the Classroom” 977). What indeed intensifies Herzog’s Angst over the eccentricity of the ridiculous abnormal letter-overflow is the awareness that it has an absolute control upon him and that, by no means, he is capable of forcing himself out of its grip. This situation, complicated further, drives him into schizophrenic self-image, “*There is someone inside me. I am in his grip. When I speak of him I feel him in my head, pounding for order. He will ruin me*” (11). The reflexive letter is a case in point. Written by Herzog
to himself, he scolds Herzog for breaking the egotist shell built around himself and
taking interest in social and universal well-being. He writes:

Dear Moses E. Herzog, since when have you taken such an interest in
social questions, in the external world? Until lately, you led a life of
innocent sloth. But suddenly a Faustian spirit of discontent and
universal reform descends on you. Scolding. Invective. (68)

In his case, the awareness of the flaws in the personality leads not to overcome them
but to a severe dichotomy between what he actually is and what he should be.

Schizophrenic manifestations occur at different stages of Herzog’s exposure
to emotional irritants. Suffering from disorganised speech and thought disorder,
Herzog gets engaged in a conflict with a split self that always chooses what he does
not agree with, putting him in an embarrassing situation. Torn between an impulse to
cry over the solitary life he leads and the counter impulse to suppress the former so as
to put a limit to his sadness and deterioration, Herzog addresses the fragile part of his
self: “For Christ’s sake, don’t cry, you idiot! Live or die, but don’t poison everything”
(24). Another instance is the sentiment of self-contempt because of his rash to
Ramona which may lead to another entrapment:

Herzog momentarily joined the objective world in looking down on
himself. He too could smile at Herzog and despise him. But there still
remained the fact. I am Herzog. I have to be that man. There is no one
else to do it. After smiling, he must return to his own Self and see the
thing through. (67)
Here, the self is in struggle with the Sartrean “Being-for-others” as Herzog tries to reconcile between what he himself is, a mass of dreams and ambitions, and what the Herzog constructed and defined by the outside world looks like. This is why looking at the strange parts that naturally belong to him, Herzog says: “I look at myself and see chest, thighs, feet—a head. This strange organization I know it will die” (340). This takes place at the end of the novel when the blur caused by that split reaches a relative stability urging Herzog to reject any definition imposed from the external world and to accept what he is as he really is. Irving Halperin’s view is that “Herzog finally has chosen to be Herzog, recognizing that no one else can be that man for him” (481). Suggestively, Bellow chooses for his heroes the situation referred to by Melanie Klein as “paranoid-schizoid position” where the “persecutory anxiety” automatically gives rise to splitting as a defense mechanism (231).

Bellow never intends the protagonist’s crisis to be understood in isolation from the stigma of the environment surrounding him. Many characters shoulder a considerable part of responsibility and thus Herzog’s psychological anxiety owes much to the will of other characters who conspire against his sanity. To get rid of him so that they can pursue their own amorous affairs, his former friend, Valentine, and ex-wife, Madeline, “spread the rumor that he had collapsed” (2). Practically, they have succeeded in implanting doubts even in Herzog himself who asks: “Was it true?” (2). The internalisation of his insanity gets enacted in a way he sees the reflection of his face “weirdly tranquil,” with “full, silent lip” (2) as well as in the way he reacts with Angst to the failure of his education to help him transcend the oddity with which he is branded. Bellow confirms this fact about Herzog when, in an interview with Roudane, he cites him as an example of the Nietzschean “slippage in
self-valuation” (“An Interview with Saul Bellow” 268). Herzog’s mental condition, however, is too complicated to be described according to that point of view per se. For, Valentine’s and Madeline’s claims can be true provided that Herzog is completely surrendering to that frenzy of abnormal letter-writing. Presumptively, what a mad man thinks and says about others can never be authentic. This view is adopted by Malcolm Bradbury, who rightly comments that while Herzog is aware of his own nature and character of narcissism, masochism and anachronism, “he engages us with all that is unreliable about him” (xvii). That unreliability has many intimations which represent additional versions of his mental crisis.

Herzog’s paranoid outlook causes him to imagine his mother-in-law, Aunt Zola, Mady’s lawyer Sandor Himmelstein, and Dr. Edvig the psychiatrist as part of a conspiracy against his sanity to support Madeline pursue her illicit affair (35). This paranoia gets enacted in the vulnerable manner he reacts to what he figures out as Madeline’s aggressive look. When after the accident they meet at the police station, Herzog feels the “violence of her stare” (301). He can read a vivid message in her eyes, “They expressed a total will that he should die. This was infinitely more than ordinary hatred. It was a vote for his nonexistence” (301). But paranoia transcends the mere oppression of the Sartrean look to dominate every detail in their futile marital life. Heide Karst Elam observes: “In keeping with the novel’s tone of marital discord, persecution, and victimization, paranoia is a fitting trait” (81). The oppression he can never resist in Madeline’s domineering eyes, however, develops into vulnerability to any female’s look. In Grand Central, for example, Herzog feels the power of a woman’s “independent look” penetrating deeply into his helpless body and reaching “him with a force” that strikes at the spot of weakness. The look, in this context,
subjugates Herzog with its sexual power that he feels short of, “But they were bitch eyes, that was certain. They expressed a sort of female arrogance which had an immediate sexual power over him” (34). Hence, Herzog is the victim of his own weaknesses. This, in turn, gives insight into a deeper level of trauma.

Defining the postwar Jewish American novelists by difference to their predecessors, Stanley F. Chyet finds that “they are apt to see man less as a victim of society than as a victim of himself, his own fears, uncertainties and illusions” (38). Although, Chyet sees this trait present in The Victim, Seize the Day, Herzog, Mr. Sammler’s Planet as well as in Philip Roth’s and Malamud’s fiction, it aptly applies to Herzog in light of his paranoid nature as well as masochistic and narcissistic tendencies. Defeated by his own fears and helplessness to overcome his nemeses, Herzog feels lonely and abandoned, so he hunts for pity and sympathy. He wishes for any sort of sickness that sends him to a hospital for a while so that his brothers may rally to him and sister Helen will come to take care of him, “The family would meet his expenses and pay for Marco and June” (13). This is his feeling regarding the physical not the mental health. When it comes to his mental health, Herzog is touchy and hypochondriac. Upon William’s suggestion that he must be put under a supervised medical rest, Herzog reacts with the pleas: “Will, I am excited not sick. I don’t want to be treated as though I were sick in the head” (332). The very idea of going to a psychiatrist sends him to the brink of madness. Referred to as “hypochondriacal maniac” by Madeline, Herzog’s hypochondriac concerns make him typically Bellovian in the same way Tommy Wilhelm, Leventhal and Henderson are. This, too, marks a turning point in his psychological disintegration. Herzog becomes
more sensitively aware of his peculiarities and, therefore, tries to overcome them by looking normal the act that exposes them more vividly.

_Herzog_, which begins with the end of the protagonist’s story, ends circularly by returning to the opening scene which marks the highest level of Herzog’s post-schizophrenic depression. As the novel opens, it is suggested that the present condition comes as a degradation of a glorious and luxurious past. The big house in which he moves around with a ghostly loneliness suggests that; so do the food habits, “Normally particular about food, he now ate Silvercup bread from the paper package, beans from the can, and American cheese” (1); and so do, the overgrown garden over which he moves absentmindedly and the “abandoned marriage bed” (1) on which he sleeps without sheet. The degradation assumes a gothic form similar to that created by Shani Mootoo in _Cereus Blooms at Night_ (1996) because Herzog is depicted as sharing the place with mice and rats, wiping their dropping from the table and eating the bread slices already chewed by them. Absorbed into the heart of nature away from humanity, he is enchanted by the sounds of crows, the thrushes, the owls and birds in the mulberry tree. But while wandering around in his aloofness with nature, Herzog’s mind wanders away excited by “mental letters” that keep him isolated in a world of ideas, unconscious of what is happening around him, “He looked keenly at everything but he felt half blind” (2). Thinking, toward the end, that it will prove his sanity and restoration to normalcy, Herzog makes up his mind to stop writing letters getting, in the process, rid of the spell that begets all his anxieties, “At this time he had no messages for anyone. Nothing. Not a single word” (341). Apparently, nothing remains in his mind to be communicated. His mental machine, completely exhausted,
chokes up nothing but nothingness. Hence, the novel reclines towards the end to a serene but suspicious silence.

In the post-victimisation world of *Mr. Sammler’s Planet*, Bellow’s depiction of madness is vividly perceptible as the crisis of mental chaos covers almost everybody in the novel’s world exceptionally comprising a group of survivors. That crisis, however, gives a clue to a broader one deep-rooted in the nature of the postwar Western civilisation. Figuring out the different aspects of civilisation as various manifestations of madness, Mr. Sammler, the protagonist and central intelligence of the novel, ruminates how what people think to be their duty is indeed reenactment of madness. Man’s anguish, boredom, assumption of responsibility, and desire for discipline take him away from his nature:

Then: a crazy species? Yes, perhaps. Though madness is also a masquerade, the project of a deeper reason, a result of the despair we feel before infinities and eternities. Madness is a diagnosis or verdict of some of our greatest doctors and geniuses, and of their man-disappointed minds. (121)

Sammler sees in the tendency of the modern civilisation to accommodate madness as self-fashion a means to flee moral and legal responsibilities: “A whole nation, all of civilized society, perhaps seeking the blameless state of madness. The privileged, the almost aristocratic state of madness” (73). Bellow, who attributes innovative connotations to psychoses, proposes to distinguish the real symptoms from the counterfeit.
The moon as a central metaphor suggestively enhances the theme of lunatic disorder as one of many themes. In Stanley Crouch’s words the moon rises as “a symbol of both the magnetic force that turns the tides and the mythical influence on the collective madness” (xiv). Ironically, the accounts about other characters’ chaotic mentalities in the novel are reported by Mr. Sammler whose sanity itself is in question. Contemplating how they all share the same territory that lies between sanity and insanity, Sammler insists on calling Wallace a lunatic, though a question arises in his mind, “And was he himself a perfect example of sanity? He was certainly not. They were his people—he was their Sammler. They shared the same fundamentals” (220). The shared “fundamentals” alluded is to suggest that it is no accident such a family embraces members who almost have troubled psyches. Sammler, the patriarch figure, is in fact an archetype whose surrealistic lens of the mind might produce nothing but surrealistic scenes. As a result, to examine his mentality is to filter what is distorted by nature from what is deformed in the process.

As a Holocaust survivor, Mr. Sammler can never regain the pre-traumatic mental faculties, and so his existence in such an apathetic city as New York is another stage of pain devoid of meaning and significance. The novel opens with a note of multi-layered uncertainty that exposes Sammler’s psychological dilemma. First, what looks like dawn is in fact masked or rather disfigured by an abnormal weather, “or what would have been down in a normal sky” (1). Second, Sammler, taking his book and papers of “West Side bedroom,” suspects that they are “the wrong books, the wrong papers” (1). And third, the uncertainty of an old man in his seventies about his exact position among younger generations. There, to insist on one’s own righteousness is to present oneself to them as a ‘crank.’ In the midst of this elusive
world, self-explanation becomes a way to survive as well as an indication of decrepit understanding. Bellow redefines an intellectual man as an “explaining creature” that strikes at the heart of the postwar Jewish-American identity which can be reconstructed only through explanation. Hence, the beginning introduces the reader to the essence of Mr. Sammler’s character as an aging intellectual whose uncertain understanding of the self, surrealistic view of the surrounding, and cynical, snobbish relationship with others are all problematic. In short, he is at odds with everything around him. This is Bellow’s afterthought of Sammler: “I think that Mr. Sammler is a man whose ordinary relations to life have been disturbed, . . . He feels that his condition is exotic” (“A Conversation with Saul Bellow” 8). Accordingly, Sammler’s nervous disorder is brought about by both past victimisation and present estrangement.

As a result, Mr. Sammler becomes prone to isolated activities, building a shell around his emotions so that they cannot be penetrated by those from whom he is alienated. For him, the biggest problem he has to cope with in New York’s West Side is neither the inertia of a jobless, retired person dependent on his nephew’s generosity nor the crisis of old age. It is rather the sense of separatism imposed upon him by the nightmarish experience in Poland and before by the two decades of living in London as a correspondent for Warsaw papers and journals. In the latter, detachment is a prerequisite of adopting the snobbish English manners. His existence in New York, therefore, is a deformed remnant of the two experiences. Not surprising then if Mr. Sammler turns a blind eye to the pickpocket’s crime on the bus: “A dry, a neat, a prim face declared that one had not crossed anyone’s boundary; one was satisfied with one’s own business” (3). Mr. Sammler is quite aware of this flaw as well as of the
fact that such attitudes are “not especially useful to a refugee in Manhattan” (3). Neither detachment nor the remoteness of past persecution is enough to provide a sense of security to a New York’s Jew.

A deeply divided character, Artur Sammler, with his unbearable experience of having been buried alive, envisions a perception of the present that is always blurred by his traumatic past. The sense of insecurity along with some “tightness at his heart” (232) leads him to figure out the sky as a ceiling so low that he feels suffocated. That ceiling should be a high one because finitude gives way to anxiety. The phobia of subway as a “madhouse” is so awful that Sammler would rather take a bus. In his relations with people, Sammler can never resist the paranoiac fragility to their aggressive eyes. Feffer is a case in point. His penetrating look is so powerful that Sammler feels the transparency of whatever stands between it and his inner depth. It is not different from the Sartrean look that possesses the power of objectification, “In his eyes a strangely barbed look appeared, a kind of hooking intensity. Sammler, the earlier Sammler, had little power to resist such looks” (97). Hence, all of “the earlier Sammler,” “barbed,” and “hooking” are residues of the past entrapment which corrupt the present. This is why descending to the subway becomes, for him, a reenactment of a horrible annihilation of the “grave, Elya, Death, entombment, the Mezvinski vault” (98). Viewed profoundly, the external people and objects become a projection of the character’s mind and, in turn, they determine his actions and reactions.

The collective Jewish madness of the Holocaust survivors depicted by Bellow is reinforced by the way people around Sammler suffer, to greater or lesser degrees, fragmentation. This is symbolised by the portraits painted by Sammler’s maniac son-
in-law, Eisen. The surrealistic portraits he paints for family members are in fact embodiments of hollowness and ghostly life after the tragedy. Mr. Sammler astonishingly explains:

An insane mind and a frightening soul made those painting. I don’t know how he did it, but by using color he robbed every subject of color. Everybody looked like a corpse, with black lips, and red eyes, with faces a kind of leftover cooked-liver green. (52)

A paranoid himself, Eisen violently beats Shula-Slawa because she goes to catholic priests and because she is a liar. Rescuing her from him, Sammler has to endure her freakish conduct of collecting clutter that sometimes drives him into nervous and even ‘post-epileptic’ condition. Walter Bruch is another Holocaust survivor who mockingly used to reenact scenes from the tragedy enjoying the mock funerals and imitating Hitler’s speeches in a queer habit that annoys Sammler. Bruch’s loony behaviour always reminds Sammler of the saucepans absurdly bought by the concentration camp prisoners in 1937, while waiting for death:

Hundreds of thousands, new from the factory. Why? Bruch bought as many pans as he could. What for? Prisoners tried to sell saucepans to one another. And then a man fell into the latrine trench. No one was allowed to help him, and he was drowned there while the other prisoners were squatting helpless on the planks. Yes, suffocated in the feces! (46-47)

This is the comic aspect of the tragedy, dreadful, absurd, senseless, and inconsequent stuff. Bruch, moreover, is a queer person who derives sexual gratification from
watching the black round arms of Puerto Rican women. Mr. Sammler refers that sexual perversion or rather fetishism to a repressed past: “The sexual perplexity of a man like Bruch originated in the repressions of another time, in images of woman and mother which were disappearing” (49). In psychoanalytic terms, fetishism results from “castration anxiety experienced to an extreme degree” (Lussier 582). Bruch’s case, therefore, originates in witnessing the women exterminated by Nazis.

Sammler’s daughter, Shula-Slawa, is a perfect example of the Holocaust survivor’s posttraumatic neuroses. Her habit of collecting things from trash baskets like a scavenger annoys her father who understandingly interprets such antics, in Kremer’s words, as “a consequence of Holocaust deprivation” (51). Her character is a collection of oddities and crazy habits, especially her dressing and orthodox Jewish enthusiasm. As suggested by the duality of her name (Shula-Slawa) she is the product of both Jewish and Christian education. Hidden in a Polish convent for four years during the war, she is called Slawa and takes to catholic manners, “Almost always at Easter she was a catholic” (17). Such a dichotomy in her character, almost a cultural schizophrenia, reflects the heavy price surviving the Holocaust entails. Alan L. Berger, comparing the impact of the Holocaust on Jewish identity between Mr. Sammler’s Planet and Susan F. Schaeffer’s Anya, observes that the Holocaust can be detected in the conduct of Shula and Ninka but not in their words: “Neither daughter is ever portrayed as talking bout their war time experience, although the catastrophe plays a decisive role in their lives” (84). According to Berger, Shula’s response to the Holocaust experience assumes the form of exotic dress, eccentric behaviour patterns and “religious schizophrenia” (85). It is the fate of Mr. Sammler to lose his wife in the death camps and to live with a daughter in an eccentric condition. Throughout the
novel, Mr. Sammler gets involved in a chase of his lunatic daughter to restore Dr. Lal’s manuscript she robs thinking by doing so she helps her father complete his Memoir on H. G. Wells. What depresses Mr. Sammler is Shula’s obstinate way of defending the righteousness of her follies complicating in the process her father’s dilemma. He feels his helpless mind as “a field in which many hunters at cross-purposes were firing bird shot at a feather apparition assumed to be a bird” (163). As if Sammler’s agony over what he has experienced and his chaotic psyche are not enough, Shula is an extra burden that he has to carry along in the last stage of a miserable life.

In *The Victim* which comes before *Mr. Sammler’s Planet* and *Herzog*, the protagonist’s psyche is not as fragmented but his relationship with others is determined by some psychological complexes. The novel belongs to “psychological realism” in the sense that it is devoted to analysing the persona’s mind as he reacts to various adversaries some real and some created by paranoia. It is that paranoia, in addition to the real existence of anti-Semitism, that evokes Leventhal’s classification of the world into two camps reinforcing, according to Helge Norman Nilsen, “the persecution complex of the Jew” (184). Though dealing with anti-Semitism as a central rubric, Bellow focuses not only on the phenomenon in its larger social frame but also on the workings of the protagonist’s psyche.

Asa Leventhal, like Joseph in *Dangling Man*, struggles with the nihilistic aspect of himself. That nihilistic aspect assumes the lively role of Albee as a doppelganger modelled on Dostoyevsky’s *The Double*. The appearance of Albee as a double is meant to dislocate the hero through a series of encounters that begin with anti-Semitic remarks and claims of victimisation and ends with a vindictive
displacement. But as an alter-ego, Albee leads the hero from self-enclosure and detached realisation of the world to a better understanding of reality. Heide Karst Elam views Albee as “the double who pursues the hero and even places his life in danger, yet he unintentionally helps the hero to gain a new understanding of social connections and increases his awareness of reality” (127). As a Jew, Leventhal is very conscious of this fact and thus his confrontation with Albee is indeed a confrontation with that part of himself which fears anti-Semitism. Leventhal’s fears originate in the nature as well as limits of anti-Semitic America embodied by the antihero and the sense of guilt reinforced by the way Albee holds him responsible for all his misfortunes. Furthermore, there is the anticipation, that most supports the double thesis, of a simple turn of the wheel of fortune which may bring him to Albee’s position of utter failure. But fortunately, the encounter with the double proves to be cathartic in terms of purging those fears. In the words of Thomas B. Gilmore: “The alienation from or loss of self, however, also marks the beginning of its recovery; or perhaps one should say discovery, for Leventhal has hitherto been too insecure and anxious to know himself” (392). Sometimes, however, rediscovering the self entails a fatal encounter with its destructive powers.

“The ‘double,’” Freud writes citing Heinrich Heine, “has become a thing of terror, just as, after the collapse of their religion, the gods turned into demons” (“The Uncanny” 3688). Otto Rank thinks of the double in literature as “the description of a paranoid state revolving around the persecution of the ego by its double” that reveals “psychopathological dimension (epilepsy, splitting of the personality)” (qtd. in Mijolla-Mellor 434). The novel is suffused with tones of anxiety that comes as a result of the tense atmosphere created by the existence of the double as both part of
the self and an embodiment of the Other. Hence, Albee plays the role of a catalyst in Leventhal’s sense of insecurity. The “short ring of the bell” (19) by unknown hand that Kerby Albee chooses dramatically to be a prologue for his appearance, marks an appropriate beginning of a journey into Angst. The act introduces Leventhal to a world of objectification (of being object to the Other’s look in Sartre’s terms) where he feels the fragility of his lonely existence. That Sartrean anguish starts taking place when, waiting his turn at the drinking spout, Leventhal “had a feeling that he was not merely looked at but watched” (21). His sense of anxiety becomes evident under the recognition that somebody has been all the time observing and gathering information about him. Though, to assure himself, Leventhal tries to undermine the entire matter, deep inside his heart he feels afraid anticipating something bad to fall: “Leventhal suddenly felt that he had been singled out to be the object of some freakish, insane process, and for an instant he was filled with dread” (26). The anxiety of being objectified by the look is the initial harbinger of disintegration.

The sanity of a Jew is jeopardised by the persistent hunt of the anti-Semite that begins as a hidden danger and culminates in a hysterical encounter. The accident in which Albee grapples the hand of Leventhal’s nephew for taking the mustard off his table in the restaurant intensifies Leventhal’s insecurity. It leaves him with the terrifying anticipation of danger to fall at any moment. Feeling that he is seen by while he cannot see his foe exposes Leventhal to a state of weakness and fragility: “Frequently, Leventhal felt that he was watched and he endured it passively” (95). He becomes so self-conscious that he is able to see every detail about his body and appearance as if via “a strange pair of eyes” changing in this way “into his own observer” (95). Goaded by that fear, Leventhal chooses an open space to have a rest
with Philip in the park so that none can approach without being seen. At this stage, Leventhal, alert in mind, recounts the use of countering “absurdity with absurdity and madness with madness” (96). Sometimes one needs to fight his enemy with the same weapon even if that weapon is madness itself.

Apart from Kerby, almost everything around Leventhal seems to play a part in stimulating his breakdown, and to be part of a large plot to persecute him. That, however, comes as a consequence of the sense of abandonment that the absence of his wife ensues. Noticeably, a common feature among most of the novels intended by this study is the anxiety of a man who struggles to overcome his boring loneliness after his wife has gone, either without return since she has been dead, or abandoned him seeking a better-off life, or for a short period as it is in the case of Leventhal. The novel’s plot is designed to draw a picture of Leventhal’s boredom, insecurity, aguish and depression in the absence of Mary who has gone to help her mother move from Baltimore to Charleston after the death of Mary’s father. The empty apartment, the dark and dirty restaurant where he used to take his cheap meals, and his wandering in the streets are all harbingers of Leventhal’s unease which gets enhanced gothically by his hallucinating vision of mice in the apartment and the creepy absent presence of lurking danger in everything around. As a precaution, he gets used to keep the bathroom light burning all night, “feeling that he was threatened by something while he slept” (21). That sense of insecurity culminates in Leventhal’s claustrophobic reaction to the hot weather (which has been discussed in the second chapter).

In a developed implication of his mental state, Leventhal’s anxiety assumes an existential, though fatal form, as it becomes indefinitely oriented to and caused by nothingness. He is afraid of something that he does not know and cannot overcome
that sense. He expects something to happen, but does not know when, where and how, “Something would have to happen, something that he could not foresee. Whatever it was, he would be too muddled and fatigued to deal with it. He was played out. His old weakness, his nerves, had never been so bad” (205). Not surprising then, Leventhal’s distrust of whoever and whatever lies outside his self develops into paranoia that intensifies the problematic relationship between the world of New York and an immigrant Jew.

Obviously, there are many instances throughout the novel in which Leventhal’s sense of paranoia is evident. His encounters with Albee, Elena, her mother, and above all Mr. Beard contribute to it. It is that sense which enables Leventhal to defend his standpoint about Disraeli disclosing in himself what Harkavy sees as “an exhibition of ghetto psychology” (223). When Mr. Beard, whom Leventhal views as a fish, in a meeting states that if a job is worth holding it is worth being loyal to since life without loyalty is like what Shakespeare calls “a flat tamed piece,” Leventhal, touchy to any remark, “knew this was aimed at him” (176). Leventhal’s encounter with the bad-tempered Mr. Rudiger, though makes him feel elated and proud for not letting the cruel man bull his nose, does not pass without leaving a residue of paranoid anxiety over being blacklisted by Rudiger. This experience brings to the surface a dilemma of a Jew whose persecution complex refers the lack of job in the postwar America to anti-Semitism.

Even Williston, the most tolerant and liberal, is viewed by Leventhal’s obsessed imagination as no exception. The hot dialogue Leventhal has with him confirms the former’s doubts. Williston believes that Leventhal is partly responsible for Albee’s losing his job. Leventhal’s open and frank talk to Williston assumes the
form of an address to a broader audience; those Americans who pretend to be liberal but still uphold the same anti-Semitic ideas: “You think that he burned me up and I wanted to get him in bad. Why? Because I’m a Jew; Jews are touchy and if you hurt them, they won’t forgive you. That’s the pound of flesh” (103). Leventhal stands here as a Jew who has to defend himself in a trial that has its historical roots in Shylock’s. Taking all these hangovers of anti-Semitism (real or figments of the imagination) into consideration, America becomes both a modern version and a parody of Tsarist Russia in Malamud’s *The Fixer*.

In his relationship with Elena and her mother, Leventhal can never evade the sense of anti-Semitic hatred that he can read in their eyes, though according to Allan Chavkin, what he sees is no more than a distorted reality. It becomes difficult for the reader “to judge the protagonist, whose perception of reality is distorted by his paranoia” (318). Leventhal is so wary in his interaction to his brother’s wife, Elena; the fear to anger her originates in a similarity he imagines between her and his mother. As Mickey’s situation gets worse, Leventhal feels afraid of Elena’s reaction. She may blame it on him for his insistence on taking the boy to the hospital. This involves him in a guilty conscience entangling his situation much more. The wretched boy looks to him like a “candle flame” affected by the varying amounts of air and responding to “whatever feeds or endangers it” (139). But while that sense of guilt overwhelms Leventhal, he sees in the little Jewish boy a victim of his domineering mother and a shirker father who has gone leaving a house like a tenement behind. After Mickey’s death, Leventhal can see in Elena’s eye an angry look that is terribly unbearable, “The look she gave him was one of bitter anger” (162). He, therefore, avoids letting her eyes catch his. Elena’s mother, whom Leventhal deems as a
hardcore anti-Semite, increases his unease at his brother’s house. For him, the old lady’s existence jeopardises the couple’s relation due to her powerful influence on Elena. His paranoia goes so far that he can see in her eyes a reproaching laughter at Mickey’s death since the marriage is impure.

Another expression of Leventhal’s anxious state of mind is his hypochondriac concerns that Mary always tries to help him get rid of. These are inherent in the image of his mother as an insane woman which his father implants in his mind as a child. Elena is reminiscent of her. When Harkavy asks him carelessly if he has gone out off his rocker, Leventhal interprets it as a hint that he is likely to inherit his mother’s madness. This leads to another flaw in Leventhal’s character; his judgment is always determined by others’ views of him. This is why when alone in bed, Leventhal rethinks the entire scenes and his self-confidence gets shaken. Losing his self-justification and belief in action completely, Leventhal internalises Albee’s, Rudiger’s and Williston’s views about him and what is worse is that he starts suspecting his own intentions. “Had he unknowingly, that is, unconsciously, wanted to get back at Albee?” (108) Leventhal asks himself. These senses of ambivalence and alienation are vivid byproducts of Leventhal’s fear of persecution and manifestations of his Angst that sometimes develop into hallucinatory visions and exaggerating feelings of paranoia. The line between sanity and insanity is no more clear-cut when Leventhal envisions strange and savage things “hung near him all the time in trembling drops, invisible, usually, or seen from a distance. But that did not mean that there was always a distance, or that sooner or later one or two of the drops might not fall on him” (84). From this standpoint, Bellow places the hero’s sanity between the hammer of alienation and the anvil of insecurity delineating the
damaging effects of anti-Semitism on the psyche of an American Jew. These damaging effects are explored with intensity by Malamud for whom the internal fragmentation is predominantly caused by external powers.

The intensive agony and suffering in which Bernard Malamud places his protagonists make it impossible for them to maintain a sane outlook of the self and the world around. Unlike Bellow, Malamud’s characters do not cross the borders into insanity. They, however, sway on the verge unable to keep themselves intact. *The Fixer* is an obvious case in point where the irrational violent torture to which Bok is subject, the torment that goes ceaselessly day and night, and the lack of hope to usher, blur the lines separating sanity from insanity. His hopes develop into daydreams and other hallucinatory visions, while his fears get enacted in bad nightmares and sometimes fly around like lively ghosts. In the best circumstances, Bok is afflicted with paranoiac symptoms and inclination to recoil from the slightest sign of danger. Commenting on Bok’s imposed psychological disintegration, Lisa Ann Edwards sees that

> it is too frustrating, too agonizing, however, to see Yakov Bok as simply a human being driven to the edge of madness and perhaps eventually over that edge by the injustice of society and the inhumanity of a few individuals. (141)

Seasons come and go while Bok’s indictment does not come and with every passing day the cell becomes a hell. A ‘hope deferred makes the heart sick’ and Bok finds both his heart and mind in peril:
He was so nervous, irritable, so oppressed by imprisonment he feared for his sanity. What will I confess to them if I go mad? Each day’s oppressive boredom terrified him. The boredom and the nervousness made him think he might go insane. (207)

Hypochondriac concerns mark the initial precursors of collapse.

Generally, most of Yakov Bok’s psychological disintegration assumes the form of anxiety dreams, hallucinatory visions and surrealistic perception of things and people. The early symptoms of his delirious dreams occur after a police inspector visits him to ask if there is anyone suspected of political unreliability in the brick factory. The sense of insecurity causes him to envision “the stable in flames, burning down with him in it, bound hand and foot unable to move; and the maddened horses destroying themselves” (60). His fears to be unmasked as a hidden Jew, which he keeps as an unshared secret, get manifested in the form of a dream of seeing the German driver carrying a huge black bag on his back. Later in the dream he discovers that it is he himself that the bag contains. Another dream comes as a result of his anxiety as to how to sneak the old Hasid, he rescues from the hands of children, out of the brickyard. In the dream the Hasid asks him, “Why are you hiding here?” (63) and the fixer’s neurotic reply is a blow on the head with a hammer. The dreams, as symptoms of a fearful consciousness, are unconsciously developed as a defensive measure against anxiety.

According to Freud, anxiety dreams happen when

the relaxation of repression at night allows the upward pressure of the traumatic fixation to become active, there is a failure in the functioning
of his dream-work, which would like to transform the memory-traces of the traumatic event into the fulfilment of a wish. ("New Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis" 4642)

Bok’s fears of the unknown future, the mysterious change, and the desire to wake from the nightmarish state he is trapped in turn into hallucinatory dreams in which he imagines himself sneaking out of the cell and searching the Jewish ghetto for the old tsardik to prove his innocence and bear witness to the blood on the rag that has no relation to the murdered boy. But even the dream desperately reaches an impasse as the old man, found after a long search, fails to recognise Bok. Waking to the bitter reality, Bok, desperate over his condition, tortures himself tearing at his hands and face with his nails. What remains of dignity and good to live for? An unfair charge, a traumatic imprisonment and a humiliating investigation all drive an entangled cloud of darkness over his mind. Led manacled and chained to re-enact the crime that he has never commits, Yakov Bok reaches a mental breakdown, especially when he is made to see the murdered child’s room, “Though the room and cot were strange to him, Yakov had a momentary hallucinatory thought that he had seen them before” (108).

Malamud does not stop at a certain point of exposing his protagonist to physical and, as a consequence, mental suffering. In the infirmary, after the sensational scene of crawling from the cell in order to get some aid for his infected feet, Bok sinks into a delirious dream that moves surrealistically between various scenes: his childhood in “the miserable orphan’s home, a crumbling tilted shack;” “Raisl running away from him in terror;” “expiring in a window cell;” “imprisonment for a life time in Siberia;” and the dream in which he himself murders the child
stabbing him thirteen times in the chest draining five litres of his blood (170). Internalising the charge, Bok enacts dream that provides exact details of murder claimed by his perpetrators. This marks a sharp decline into a fractured psyche.

It is, however, in the isolation cell that Bok’s psychological disintegration undergoes a climatic critical stage. There, to avoid the consequences of the lingering silence, he imagines himself in the Podol, talking casually to someone. But that attempt to flee from the real to the imaginary spheres is of no use. Soon, he is brought back to the reality where there are neither fellow actors to interact with nor an audience to applaud. On the eve of his trial, Bok’s hallucinatory visions increase. Eyes and face of those who once occupy the cell appear distorted, “broken-faced, greenish-grey men, with haunted eyes, scarred shaved heads and ragged bodies, crowding in the cell” (284). In a hallucinatory state, Bok envisions many strange things: a man with a knife to rip his throat; a dead boy singing; a bloody horse with frantic eyes; pogroms sweeping out Russian Jews; people he knows appearing and vanishing; and talking to the Tsar who accuses Jews of plaguing Russia. Afraid that delirious state of mind may jeopardise his sanity, Bok does not want to go mad because that will give his enemies a sense of triumph: “He strove with himself, struggled, shouted at him to hold tight to sanity, to keep in the dark unsettled centre of the mind a candle burning” (224). Like Bellow, Malamud creates a climatic point in his hero’s mental disintegration when he is overwhelmed by hypochondriac concerns which, in turn, worsen his condition a step further.

A self-conscious Jew placed in the midst of enemies, Bok can never evade the effect of their menacing look that affects self-splitting as he joins others in seeing himself by a pair of strange eyes. Paralleling the scaffold scene of *The Scarlet Letter*
where Hester feels the stabs of the crowd’s look as though “her heart had been flung into the street for them all to spurn and trample upon” (Hawthorne 50), nothing surmounts Bok’s sense of shame as he is led by the police, “Yakov in a state of unrelieved distress could not blot out the sight of himself marching manacled between two tall columns of gendarmes on horses” (67). Bok is tormented by the piercing objectifying power of the gaze that lashes the “murdering Jew” with no mercy. At the Investigation Magistrate’s office, the portrait of Tsar Nicholas II “staring critically at the fixer” (75) suggests how everything surrounding Bok even inanimate things constitute altogether a big hostile eye that scares him. This is why the “picture added to his discomfort” (75). Moreover, the peephole on the door of the isolation cell is the spot where Bok’s fragility is exposed. A source of threat to his embittered privacy, the peephole is a channel which, via the guards’ gaze, penetrates deep not only into the inside of the cell but also into Bok’s body and soul. He can neither stop the aggressive power of the eyes observing him in a creepy silence nor hide from its scope, “A cold eye stared at him. Ultimately he placed it at the peephole, an eye gazing at his suppurating feet, but the one who looked had nothing to say” (167). As a result, when Bok catches a sight of his own reflection, he is not merely himself but a shrunken, bitter Jew.

In addition to sharing the communal sensitivity to persecution and suffering, Malamud’s Jews are bound by the dark prison of the self that, to a large extent, is inextricably caused by outside forces and demonic agents. Like Bellow’s The Victim, Malamud’s novels and short stories use the mirror-image double to tackle the confrontation with the deep self. In this respect, Ben Siegel comments: “Equally vulnerable to human rage and pain, his non-Jews often become the ‘mirror-image
doubles’ or ‘secret sharers’ of his Jews” (123). Hence, the double as a reflection of some aspects of the protagonist’s self is one way of portraying fragmentation. In *The Assistant*, *The Tenants*, and many of his short stories including (“The Last Mohican”), an American Jew, who seems only marginally Jewish and in the midst of identity crisis, defines or redefines his Jewish self in relation to a threatening alter ego. Such doubling at once reveals the sad disintegration of Jewish identity in the American transformation and the absurdity and illusiveness of finding a psychological anchor in the post-Holocaust world. To present that more effectively, Malamud makes use of surrealism and dreamlike scenes in a way that portrays how fragile the borders between ego and alter ego are. In this sense, Malamud, like Bellow, is influenced by Dostoevsky.

In *The Tenants*, the hero’s psyche is given depth and scope through the motif of the double. Although the novel begins with what Eric J. Sundquist calls ‘solipsism’ (382), the self becomes incomplete and unreal unless and until its own shadow is brought to the fore. As the novel opens, Lesser is portrayed “CATCHING SIGHT OF HIMSELF in his lonely glass” (3) as he wakes up to finish the book that would remain unfinished till the end of the novel. The mirror image foreshadows the existence of a double in Lesser’s life. There are two writers struggling to finish their works: Lesser is one, the other, Willie, is a reflection whose existence would surrealistically grow beyond the two-dimension frame of the mirror and at some stage threaten to displace its source object standing before the mirror. “The theme of the mirror,” observes Edmund Spevack, “introduced in *The Tenants*, is fitting: Harry believes he is sure of his own nature and defined identity, but his being is not complete without his less developed alter ego, Willie” (35). Accordingly, Harry
Lesser follows Willie in being Irene’s weekend guest; in destroying his hope for future—the typewriter; and in disappointing Irene by giving priority to writing over love. In short, they seem to exchange roles in terms of writing, love, and despair, and thus their existence under the same roof in the same place at the same time is unnaturally destructive to both.

The appearance of Willie in the scene causes the symptoms of anxiety to surface and the farther their encounter goes, the more likely Lesser approaches psychological disintegration. Exposed first to the sound of a typewriter in the building, Lesser falls back on the paranoiac fears of a ‘hyperactive imagination’ (4) linking that with a plot that might get rid of him. “Had Levenspiel,” he asks himself, set up a spy office here, CIA sub-headquarter for hunting in on Harry Lesser engaged in writing a subversive novel? Every letter he typed on paper, neatly bugged, flashed on a screen in the Attorney General’s office, Department of Justice, Washington, D.C.? (27)

Even after discovering that the sound comes from a black’s typewriter, Lesser suspects that the squatter is the “latest variation of the landlord’s tactics of harassment” (30). Something in the “large liquid eyes poised in suspension” looks aggressive and menacing (29). If exposing the self to continuous loneliness causes such delusions to occur, mingling with the wrong society has fatal results too.

The encounter with Willie and his black gangs in Mary’s house and the anticipation of a raid by the blacks leave Lesser’s spirit filled with dread. The tenement turns into a ghost house where he expects death to strike at any moment:
At the door he hesitated, momentarily afraid to go up the badly lit stairs. A million stairs, five hundred dreary floors, Lesser living in the top. He had vision of a pack of rats, or wild dogs; or a horde of blacks descending as he tries to go up. His head is ridden with bullets; his brains are eaten by carnivorous birds. There are other fearful thoughts.

(174)

Whereas the rats, wild dogs and bullets contextualise Lesser’s case within a broader discourse of persecution, the images give a clue to the psychology of a helpless writer who desires for peace to finish his book but gets instead a weird horror.

Apart from the nemesis of Willie, Lesser’s distracted psyche, causing his inability to finish his book, drives him into a deep depression feeling failed by imagination:

Depressed, one useless morning, dispossessed of confidence in himself as writer, as he sometimes was, Lesser, shortly before noon at the Museum of Modern Art, stood before a painting of a woman done by a former friend of his, a painter who died young. (106)

For a moment, Lesser, contemplating the fragmented woman in Lazar Kohan’s abstract portrait, thinks of leaving his own book unfinished like the portrait. This is to suggest something beyond the form, “Or perhaps it was the painter’s purpose to complete by abandoning, because abandonment or its image was presently a mode of completion?” (111). That worry over his book, especially its ending, which is actually about his future, makes Lesser an absent-minded person. This occurs when, walking with Irene on the street, Lesser leaves her remembering he has not written a single
word that day. And soon after departing he returns, “Halfway to Madison he stops, experiencing a sense of loss. What a fool I am, he thinks. He walks back to where he has left Irene” (115).

The struggle to drive his book to an ending is practically echoed by Malamud who provides three endings to the novel with none representing the real end. Anxiety and ambivalence about writing are not the preoccupations of Lesser alone, but also Malamud himself; the multiple endings testify to that. The first is a nightmare in which his isolated world ends with fire: “Nobody says no, so the fire surges its inevitable way upwards and with a conclusive roar flings open Lesser’s door. END OF NOVEL” (23). In another dream version, the novel ends with a double hymeneal to miscegenation; Lesser marries Mary, Spearmint Irene. The third ending is an imagined act of violence in which the two writers murder each other. After the third ending, however, there is Levenspiel’s pleading for mercy which leaves the novel surrealistically open-ended giving a clue to the lack of psychological anchor for the writer’s anxiety. For Brita Lindberg-Seyersted, “After the ‘hab rachmones’ passage, there is no ending proper; the book never gets its ‘promised end,’ neither Lesser’s book, nor Malamud’s” (101). The structural end, like the existential one—death—puts an end to suffering. Malamud’s open-ended story allows mental anguish to hang back.

With the passage of time, Lesser’s stay in the tenement becomes negative to his physical and mental health alike. On the one hand, cockroaches and rats become compulsory gothic guests moving around freely while water is badly polluted. On the other, he becomes growingly obsessed with his fears that the landlord or someone would set the house on fire which will destroy the remnants of his hope. His
imagination, which is supposed to focus on the creativity at hand, deviates to a worthless track pushing his fears to their extreme:

He saw himself fleeing naked down the fire escape, holding to his heart his new manuscript. Sometimes as he wrote he would picture the heavy breathing landlord touching a match to a rubbish pile in the cellar to see what came of it. One nervous night Lesser descended to the basement to have a look around. . . . The useless side of my imagination. (195-96)

As he discovers that Willie is taking residence in the house, he becomes afraid and this sense of insecurity leads to hallucinatory visions:

Familiar things are touched with strangers. Green mould on a pencil. A broken pitcher, standing, breaks apart. A dry flower falls to the floor. The floor tilts. A cup of drinks from he cannot recognize. A door opens and bangs, opens and bangs. (224-25)

Even his writing gets affected by the bad mental situation he undergoes, “Reading the words he sees scenes he hasn’t written, or he thinks he hasn’t” (225). Overwhelmed by despair, Lesser has no control even over the pen in his hand which draws “lines but no words” (229). Losing control of himself, too, due to anger and paranoia, his fantasies become hallucinations.

Lesser’s anxiety over the fate of his book, which represents to him the end of civilisation, and the lonely stay in a ghostly house stricken by the necessity of being evicted at any moment all culminate in schizophrenic symptoms. Extremely distracted and fearful, Lesser is bewildered by seeing and hearing strange things
around him that keeps him wakeful and armed with a short-handled ax or kitchen knife. Sometimes he envisions a “[o]ne-eyed” or “[o]ne-legged” (196) man lurking in the basement. Some other time, “he hears stealthy footsteps in the hall” (199). At this juncture, Lesser’s sanity undergoes the most critical passage seeing somebody moving around, yet nobody is really there, “Was it somebody real? Negative presence as though on film? The white figure of a black man haunting the halls?” (199). Afraid that disintegration may develop into psychic disease, he goes to Irene’s psychiatrist.

Irene herself has a degrading and self-splitting present that comes as a result of a traumatic past. Confessing that something hurts her emotion, she gives an account of her history: “I used to an awful lot. Anyway, what it amounted to is acting as a way of getting away from myself. I was a fucked-up kid, I drew men like flies and slept around till I began to wake up frightened” (118). Suggestively, there are some psychological implications in Irene, a Jewish girl, throwing herself in the arms of a black man. She is an actress, and what she calls love with Willie is no more than a profound desire to get away from her self; an unconscious part-playing in other words. From a different perspective, Irene tries to defeat that part of herself which she holds in contempt. But losing an essential part of her identity, Irene becomes an incomplete self, exactly like Lazar Kohan’s portrait. In an attempt to amend her fragmented identity, Irene applies the wrong colour thinking that can put magic touches on her abandoned picture. Unfortunately, the outcome is a surrealist Picasso image that neither retains the original traits nor acquires a new perfect disguise. Her affair with Lesser, who plays the role of a redeemer, embodies a metaphorical journey into the self. Shedding off the previous artificial make-up and stylish camouflage on her body, Irene assumes her own originality, “Her hair grew in like a black cap on her
blond head. . . ; she had redeemed her face something inside her, for she seemed kinder to herself” (154). Simultaneously, Irene decides to quit acting, the step that implies retreating to what is sane and natural. She herself denounces the past as something happening beyond the rational; her visits to a psychoanalyst testifies to it.

In adherence to the post Jewish-American mood, Malamud depicts the intimations of the psychological crisis even in the minor characters. Levenspiel, the landlord, has a mother who is insane. He pleads with Lesser to evict the house explaining his familial misery to gain the latter’s pity:

Also I religiously go one afternoon every week to see my crazy mother in Jackson Heights. All the time I’m with her she stares at the window. Who she thinks she sees I don’t know but it’s not me. She used to weigh ninety bounds, a skinny lady, now she’s two-twenty and growing fatter. I sit there with tears. We stay together a couple of hours without words and then I leave. (18)

Most likely, the insane mother in the postwar Jewish-American context indicates that the generation of war and persecution are implicitly a crucial rupture with sanity and rationality. The segments of that collective mental condition are incompletely restored in the postwar era along with persisting residues of the preceding madness. Autobiographical facts, however, have something to do with Malamud’s fictional preoccupations. His suicidal mother who is institutionalised and his brother afflicted with mental illness have their influence, one way or the other, on his fictional world.

In *The Assistant*, originally called *The Apprentice*, the apprentice character, that appears for the first time in his short story “The First Seven Years,” goes beyond
the mere mentor-apprentice relationship to the synthesis of two egos. David Bruaner notes that Alpine’s relationship with Bober is more than mere assistant, “when Bober collapses with pneumonia, Alpine symbolically removes the grocer’s apron and puts it (like an albatross) round his neck” (41). The change that happens in their relationship is indeed a development from Klein’s paranoid-schizoid position characterised by interpersonal splitting into a more mature depressive position in which the two split personalities are fused into an integrated one (Envy and Gratitude and Other Works 2). Theirs is an advance representation of the double. The self-destructive aspects of that doubling or rather splitting appear in the criminal tendencies of Frank as he steals from the cash register and rapes Helen. In this sense, Frank is a bad id rebelling against its superego—Bober. Frank’s torturing conscience, however, causes him at the end to accept the values of Bober as a compromise between the two selves. That integration of the two selves, however, has to pass through the stages of death and rebirth in order to succeed. The early identification between ego and alter ego takes place in a metaphorical tomb, the store where Frank starts digesting Bober’s values and beliefs. It is, then, the descent into Bober’s grave at the funeral that helps him get symbolically reborn as Bober. As Ida and Helen go up the stairs they hear the cling of the register and know “the grocer was the one who had danced on the grocer’s coffin” (232). Reborn, Frank plays the new role as a resurrected Bober. He rises at six to sell the Polish woman a three cent roll and serves Breitbart, the light-bulb peddler, tea with lemon.

Apart from the double motif, the theme of paranoia occurs in Bober’s and Ida’s reaction to their own miserable condition based on previous prejudices. Bober has his own paranoiac interpretation of the income improvement during Frank’s
existence in the store. Referring to the problem of anti-Semitism, he figures out that the store has improved not because of Frank but because he is not Jewish which is only partly true:

The goyim in the neighborhood were happier with one of their own. A Jew stuck in their throats. Yes they had, on and off, patronized his store called him by his first name and asked for credit as if he were obliged to give it, which he had, in the past, often foolishly done; but in their heart they hate him. (77)

In the light of these new facts occurring to Bober, he decides to overcome that anti-Semitic siege by keeping Frank as an assistant accommodating him in Nick’s apartment. Unlike Bober, Ida’s sense of paranoia is directed in the first place toward Frank Alpine. Her suspicion of Frank and the fear that his presence in the store endangers Helen develop at some stages to xenophobic anguish, “Yet she felt, whenever she thought of it, always a little troubled at the thought of a stranger’s presence below, a goy, after all, and she looked forward to the time when he was gone” (58). Being a Jew can never overcome the sense of insecurity and distrust to a gentile the state that confirms the delusions of persecution characterising the Jewish diasporic worldview. Helen is aware of this trait in her mother’s character that views her relationship with Frank as something impure and against her beliefs. She is, however, against her mother’s instructions that make “every gentile, by definition, dangerous; therefore he and she, together represented some potential evil” (94). The Bobers’ problematic relationship with the world is typically Malamudian in the sense that their anxiety over survival leaves the melancholic scars unhealed. They are,
therefore, sensitive to the least touch. But while Malamud’s characters are victims to
the trauma of history, those of Wallant have a direct personal experience with it.

Influenced by Kafka, Edward Lewis Wallant shows a profound insight into
the human psychological condition that can never be perceived by short-sighted
superficial outlook. Before his death he writes: “I suggest that most people are near-
sighted, myopic in their ability to perceive the details of human experience” (qtd. in
McDermott 5). That deep understanding of the human experience unfolds in a similar
pattern governing his novels which consist of four stages: alienation that keeps the
central character detached from the other people; a series of encounters with unhappy
people to whom the protagonist is indifferent; a violent traumatic experience that
causes the protagonist’s rehabilitation or regeneration; and the final shattering of
numbness and apathy. This pattern is perceived vividly in The Pawnbroker where
Nazerman’s traumatic past makes him fit well into the role of an indifferent money-
lender shutting off his feelings, severing all familial and societal bonds and turning
himself into a stone-hearted man. For him, the only means of survival is through self-
alienation the situation that itself inaugurates a new stage of trauma. Viewing
Nazerman’s psychological condition from the perspective of the trauma theory, Philip
Codde comments: “Nazerman, like all trauma victims, does not fully experience the
traumatic event as it takes place . . . but suffers afterwards from so-called
“abreactions,” visual flashes that make one relive the trauma” (195). The symptoms
of the trauma, in his case, range from alienation to neurosis.

The complexity of the Holocaust traumatic experience that cannot be
integrated within a specific mental framework assumes behavioural reenactment,
horrific nightmares, self-isolation or a combination of all. Nazerman’s alienation is
self-imposed and this he tells frankly to Marilyn Birchfield the ‘voluble American woman’ (140) raising fund for a neighbouring youth centre. Marilyn tries to pry open his ambiguous world of seclusion. Nazerman accepts Marilyn’s invitation for lunch but this does not, by any means, mean that Nazerman undergoes a turning point in his relationship with America, the post-survival refuge. For him, to be himself is to live and for his self no matter if he is considered eccentric because this is not the world where one can be normal. His responses to Marilyn’s advances are disappointing:

I do not wish to inflict a failure on you Miss Birchfield, but I must be frank also. To be honest, I do not welcome your prying, your interest. In most times I probably would have been quite positive and brutal about discouraging you. Only lately I have been . . . not quite myself.

(140-41)

Marilyn, the sociologist and modern logical person, searches his depth to uncover the human submerged by the mysterious past, though Nazerman is immune to any therapy or analysis of the like. “People like you,” Nazerman defends his philosophy of seclusion, “have not let me have peace Miss Birchfield” (147). His grievances, then, are against mankind in general.

Marilyn’s persistent penetration into his privacy causes him to become nervous as the “sweetly laundered” scent that lasts after her departure engulfs him in mysterious feelings. She can identify in his “ugly face” strangeness that she should cross its borders, so she asks him: “If you will forgive my curiosity, you are foreign born, aren’t you?” (103). Mischievously, Marilyn is willing to tame that wilderness in Nazerman. But Marilyn is essentially motivated by an altruistic impulse to help a human being moaning under the heavy weight of unspeakable suffering, “It was as
though a great, distant wailing came to her ears, and she felt she could not live in the same world with that sound without trying to do something about it” (173). She, therefore, decides to be a pest to him, and to keep after him because the pain he has is too much for one person to bear with. But she ends up unable to help him out of that abyss of anxiety and alienation. Declining her invitation for dinner and thus, any covert advances, Nazerman, in a cold, disappointing tone, clarifies that there is no point of building relationship with a ghostly being: “You would be guilty of necrophilia—it is obscene to love the dead” (219). S. Lillian Kremer discovers in Nazerman-Marilyn relationship a way that sets off Nazerman’s perversity: “To convey the survivor’s alienation, Wallant juxtaposes the pawnbroker’s attitudes with those of his ghetto foil, social worker Marilyn Birchfield” (64). Kremer deploys his dilemma, “More complex are his psychological wounds, which are manifested in obsession with the past and alienation and withdrawal from contemporary relationships” (64). This gets enacted in his reaction to the people approaching him, and George Smith, the queer pedophile black customer, is a case in point. Smith pays visits to the shop under the guise of pawning while his real purpose is to have a few moments of talk with the reluctant Nazerman. Talking to George is charity that Nazerman cannot afford in his position of a castled defence against any intrusion, “That damned fool with all his talk—crazy Shwartsa bastard! What does he want from me?” (50). Bertha’s family, Ortiz, and the customers are no exception.

Apart from alienation, the repression of painful memories causes them to move to the unconscious and, thus, to assume various manifestations of psychological disorders. The physical “unlocalized ache” (55) Nazerman feels is accompanied by mental disintegration, “There was this pressure in him, a feeling of something
underneath, which caused the growing tremors on the surface of him” (155). The initial signs of that disorder assume paranoid suspicion of everybody’s intention, and claustrophobic reaction to hot weather, “the sky was burned to the pallid blue of scorched metal. The heat seemed to soften the very stone and brick of the buildings” (226). They, however, end with advanced forms of psychic fragmentation. In the language of psychology, Nazerman suffers from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder in which, according to Cathy Caruth, “the overwhelming events of the past repeatedly possess, in intrusive images and thoughts, the one who has lived through them” (151).

Coming to August 28, the date that marks the anniversary of his survival and his family’s death, becomes an occasion for schizophrenic disorders through which Sol Nazerman’s stormed mentality amplifies sounds and lights to alarming points. The people he encounters in the store suffocate him with what he sees as a huge shapeless mass of human flesh, “Sol could no longer see the features, was blinded by the magnified surface of human skin. . . . He spoke to great walls of skin, to cracked lips, to hairy nostrils, to veinous crusty eyes” (213-14). Their voices and noise are unbearable which along with their faces make him nervous, “By keeping his eyes on the counter and off the faces, he was somehow able to conduct his business with a semblance of normality” (215). The people’s voices are magnified to surrealistic tormenting degrees, “He heard agonized cries in the most uninflected phrases, thunderous bellow in the tiredest sighs of acceptance” (217). His enraged movements and eccentric, xenophobic reaction to people’s existence make Ortiz, his assistant, expect some catastrophe for the poor Jew: “He going, he going fast, Jesus mused. Soon he going to fly in a thousand pieces and there be nothing left. Crazy, he going crazy” (220). It becomes very easy for an ordinary observer to anticipate the despondent fate of a fractured personality. But Ortiz is more than an ordinary
observer. He, somehow, plays the part of alter ego that always stimulates emotions out of Nazerman’s numbness. There is, however, inversion in their destructive relationship. The double sacrifices himself in order to redeem Nazerman.

Like King Lear, Nazerman is a man whose disastrous encounter with the distorted realities of human frailty pushes him through a dark tunnel of insanity where he becomes hypersensitive to the sight, smell and sound of reality. While King Lear prays, “O let me not be mad, not mad sweet heaven!” (King Lear I.v.37), Nazerman protests, “Ah, leave me my brain at least, do not let me go mad” (167). Nazerman is aware that he stands on the verge swaying farther towards madness every moment the novel approaches its ending. The mix-up of grief and healed numbness after Ortiz’s death send Nazerman into a hysterical fit of laughter that causes horrible surprise in the midst of people gathering around the dead body. Ortiz’s mother, kneeling over her slain son, curses him unaware that Nazerman is quite out of his senses, “All around him was a dazzle of faces and textures and voices. He nodded and spoke, negated and agreed, and had no idea of what he was saying” (273). He sees a hallucinatory figure of Marilyn whom he eternally banishes from his region, “No, no, I am too dirty; you must go away from me” (273). The schizophrenic symptoms are more notable when Nazerman, standing beside Leventhal and another policeman, imagines Ortiz’ mother screaming and cursing him which indeed are nothing but the outcomes of his ailing mind. He tries, therefore, to justify himself to the policemen: “All right, all right. I know what hurts her. I hear all them screaming again. What does she want from me?” (277). Getting moved by that sudden nervous breakdown, the policemen tries to restrain Nazerman.
Towards the end of the novel, Nazerman belongs, along with Morton, his nephew, and Tessie, his fellow survivor, to the same world which his vision suggests: “He walked over a strangely desolate and overgrown meadow with Tessie and Morton” (275). Being overgrown implies that their world is not governed by man’s reason, for where mad man’s inhabit, nature is let grow freely as in Mootoo’s above-mentioned novel. Both Morton and Tessie are his close allies in that world of troubled mentalities. The perversity of Nazerman and Tessie making love while Tessie’s old father is dying in the next room reveals how the trauma to which they have been exposed turns them to metallic bodies devoid of any human emotions. The scene is a rhetoric dramatisation of the survivors’ queer psyches that are unable to draw distinction between love and death. Moreover, they are detained in their own post-survival world with its own desires and values which do not necessarily match the real world. “[Nazerman-Tessie] relationship is void of joy, and is but a mere biological coupling of automatons” (Kremer 66). As for Tessie, her eccentric and traumatic psyche is further pestered by Goberman the “professional sufferer” (124) bullying her to donate for the United Jewish fund. Goberman himself is a negative freakish type of survivor who lives on his people’s awe. All, however, are victims of a collective trauma.

Morton, Nazerman’s nephew, driven by strange powers of perverse loneliness towards madness, is pushed into that condition by an always-nagging, acculturate family of absolutely assimilated and parasitic mother, Bertha, his sister, Joan, and hypochondriac father, Selig. Now Morton’s loony conduct always causes a lot of unease to the Americanised family. His talent for drawing, providing an emotional outlet, is a way of succumbing for a world of seclusion. His freakish imagination and
admiration for the sponsoring uncle leads him to draw Nazerman not as he is but as the artist wants him to be, “with a look of gentleness and infinite patience” (245). He does so because the picture is his own and he can create out of painting the ideal world he envisions. It is that mad relationship with the world that links him closer to Nazerman who towards the end of the novel trusts him to be his assistant in the pawnshop. Apparently, Wallant groups his characters by the intensity of their mental anguish marking in the process a definite line between the insane world of trauma and the fake world of sanity.

Joseph Berman, the protagonist in *The Human Season*, is depicted throughout the novel sometimes as resisting and other times as submitting to the shadows of insanity due to the intensive sense of loss. Standing on the verge of depressive breakdown, Berman is unable to come to terms with the death of his wife, so he talks to himself loudly, smashes the things reminiscent of happy days, rooms aimlessly between the rooms of a ghastly house, and goes to the bathroom to pass urine on the toilet in a childish way. He prefers darkness since light shows a “nightmare reality” that he feels afraid of, “The same room, nothing changed. Except everything” (15). To overcome insomnia, he takes sleeping bills but these in turn give him “sleep without rest” (15). As part of claustrophobic symptoms, Joe Berman feels suffocated by the deformations in his house that once was a pleasant haven, “The walls rose up around him, mocking with their rosebuds and gray leaves. The ceiling was a peculiar, arid terrain, crisscrossed by line cracks like dry riverbeds. He had never realized how bad the ceilings were” (23). His daughter Ruthie, whose voice is heard throughout the novel calling her father to assure herself about how he is, persistently asks Berman to come and stay with them anxious that the melancholia he suffers lonely in the house
might harm his sanity. “At least you wouldn’t rattle in the empty house, go crazy with loneliness” (59), Ruthie pleads her father because she is closely acquainted with his condition.

The image of Berman’s reflection on the mirror is repeated suggesting a dichotomy between what a man is and how he appears to the world, “Into the bathroom is where all the mirrors show a strange old man who glances stonily once at you through is dirtied glasses and then pays no more attention” (128). The strangeness separating Berman from his mirror-image marks a downfall in his psychological disintegration that is filled with self-hatred:

His face stared back at him as through a thin solution of blood, big-nosed, furrowed, spectacled in fashionable horn rims. He was bald on top graying on the sides. . . Such an ugly face, he thought. How had it ever been loved?” (13)

The act of rumination in front of mirror represents a method of bemoaning the past. It, moreover, gives clue to how the malady of self-hatred is no accident but originates in a personal history of inferiority complex. After three years of courtship, Mary the beautiful American accepts him as her husband because she is moved by his persistent and pitiable advances. In short, she agrees to marry him in a moment of pity for the “horny-handed, ugly, youth” (73) crying in her lap. Walking together during their honeymoon, Nazerman blames himself for a gloomy touch on Mary’s face thinking she repents for being a wife of a miserable plumber, “Pity had taken her this far, he realized, and now she was doomed to a grotesquely permanent relationship with him” (73). Based on the great value Mary represents to him, her death becomes disastrous to his psyche.
According to Thomas M. Lorch, “[Wallant] brings his characters alive, and by his selection of the most ordinary concrete details, gestures and actions he evokes a deeply moving human situation” (79). The minutest details of Berman’s lonely life testify to Lorch’s statement. Arriving in the house that no longer contains his beloved wife is like entering a cool strange place abandoned for thousands of years. The loneliness of the place, the persistence of the trauma and the great depth of depression are enough to afflict hallucinatory sensations on the fragile mentality of the deprived husband. Sometimes, while cleaning himself, her smell intrudes his nose, “He heard a creak in the back hall, seemed to catch a whiff of perfume. He stood up suddenly, his insider reverberating with an instant’s joy. But then he made a sour face at his insanity. . .” (29-30). On another occasion, while delighted by a T.V. program, he mindlessly calls the name of the deceased wife to come and share amusement: “Mindless with the delight he had achieved and wishing as always to share it, he called out without turning ‘Mary—see this, Mary. . . .’” (33). Living completely attached to a dead wife, Berman suffers a certain type of necrophilia.

With his despair at its peak, Berman attempts to commit suicide by running “the blade across the inside of his wrist in two deliberate strokes” (145). Watching his blood flowing for moments, Berman changes his mind, “It all had such a deliberate feeling that it seemed to Berman less an act and a changed decision than some particular, planned ceremony” (146). When Berman’s condition starts getting more convoluted, he begins seeing scenes of his past in what looks like daydreams but they actually mark a sharp decline in his sane contact with reality. Finding relief as he recalls that remote history, Berman feels free to cry, talk or murmur words to himself. Now washing his upper body in the sink or listening to the rabbi who comes to
remind him of God’s mercy, Berman gets disconnected from the present time and place to be absorbed in a journey with his family from Kiev home “riding in a horse-drawn wagon” (159) and eating ice-cream.

As a result of the lonely wandering in the empty house that can risk his sanity, Berman thinks he exists “only on a thin layer of his consciousness” (149). Seeking an alternative for that ‘fearful emptiness’ of the house, he resorts to the hyperreal world of the T.V., the “ironic reflection of real things” (150). The mania of getting absorbed all the time in the microcosmic world of television represents the climatic point of Berman’s disintegration. The time he spends in front of the device represents an uninterrupted channel with the foggy past in Kiev deriving “strange musing” (169) from the lived memories of his father and the river flowing “into the gold distance, blue and gold there like riches just out of reach” (170). The mental wandering marks a schizophrenic detachment from reality. Furthermore, Berman’s attention is repeatedly attracted to the television pictures shrinking after switching the device off to “a little bright square, a dot, extinction” (130). The image metaphorically reflects an existential dilemma a man like Berman is afflicted by; one moment the screen of life glitters full of colours, the other moment it shrinks into a mere fading dot of light thinning out, besieged by creepy darkness, before eventually vanishing.

One of Berman’s existential and philosophical problems resulting from a sense of deprivation and loss is the blasphemic rupture in his relationship with faith and God. Unable to hide his grievances against God and indulging in a blasphemic war with what he considers as the source of his victimhood, Berman does not scruple to express his contempt to the heavenly justice: “Slowly, almost fastidiously, he began in a low, hoarse voice to curse god, makes it more personal and sincere by
uttering curse in Yiddish there in the carpeted dusty, muffling room‖ (17). His previous prayers and thanksgiving are in his view senseless because they yield nothing. To his daughter’s tears and consolations, he answers: “I prayed, all my life I prayed. There, that’s the good of it” (22). In this sense, Berman is typical of Wallant’s protagonists who are unable to maintain belief in God in the midst of suffering. “An immediate corollary of this loss is the protagonists’ dwindling faith in a benevolent, biblical God—reluctant witnesses to the death of God, they find themselves fully isolated and abandoned in a different world” (Codde 194). That different world is more internal than external. The expressed hostility to God represents the last bond to sever with what is meaningful in life. In Berman’s case the moment he finds himself approaching insanity is the moment his revulsion against God is at the highest. Anguished by the realisation that his calling for Mary to come and watch T.V. is a call to emptiness, Berman enters into a long blasphemic questioning of God:

‘Oh-h-h-h, oh. Oh, you shit God, you terrible filth. . . . Damn you, damn you’ he said in a hoarse voice to the ceiling, his voice the only sound, the television flickering silently, meaningless now. ‘Such a deal you gave me, all my life. My eyes are open, you [. . . .] I’m through with you, do you hear me, through!’ (33)

Upon being advised by the rabbi not to succumb to bitterness about God or hopelessness, Berman bursts unscrupulously, “He is my enemy. I see His face in my nightmares, the joke he has played on me” (161). Marc Bonnet, exploring the areas common to both melancholia and megalomania, states: “Finally, the ultimate persecutor is only a jealous god on the verge of being supplanted by the new god that
is the ego” (1036). Berman’s, then, is an advanced state of melancholia when the hostility to the outside world develops into one against God.

In Freudian terms, Berman’s hatred for God is repressed emotions of repulsion against his stern and strict father who in Yom Kippur forces him to fast till he faints out. The memory flashes of his father that accompany the process of his grief and oral battles with God are handled skilfully by Wallant’s psychological treatment until Berman’s ultimate comprehension of his problem. Both god and father are one and the same in Berman’s oppressed consciousness: “and heard his father speaking above the roar, his father and God in one tumultuous voice with that living water” (191). The bearded God is in fact a bearded father: “For a long time you knew it wasn’t a God with a beard just out to get you. You knew that neither you or anyone else was made in His image” (191). The “repressed hostility to God” as a father (212) that Freud argues in *Moses and Monotheism* is integrated by Wallant to give Berman’s crisis an Oedipal dimension.

To sum up, the psychological crisis, determining a Jew’s relationship with the self and the world, originates in insecurity, the fears of persecution, and the history of trauma. Constituting an entangled enigma, these drives develop into psychopathic symptoms which increase the Jew’s alienation and hypersensitivity that, in turn, allow further complications to take place. To account for the damaging effects of the vulnerable exposure to a hostile environment, the novelists create characters whose fragmented psyches assume a number of manifestations. The motif of the double as a destructive alter ego is employed by Bellow, Malamud, and Wallant. The double is a developed version of anti-Semitism that, internalised and introjected by the hero, harms him one way or the other. That psychological malady makes even explaining
the self so deformed as in Herzog’s mania of writing incoherent letters. The failure to express the self entails isolating it from a world that is not willing to understand. Almost all protagonists are subject, with various degrees, to alienation which, along with their anxiety, gives way to paranoiac exaggeration of danger. Noticeably, paranoia is a landmark in the post-Holocaust Jewish relationship with the world. But paranoia, in their case, does not necessarily mean that the fear of persecution is the outcome of mere baseless delusions. It rather indicates a magnified response to anxiety. Anyway, if persecution is real, it endangers being; if imagined it jeopardises psyche. As a result, the paranoid-schizoid position, from which the dichotomy of the protagonists’ attitude sets forth, embroils them in defense mechanisms including splitting, projection, etc.

The above-mentioned symptoms, however, develop in some cases into severe neurotic and psychotic disorders either due to a direct experience of trauma or as a result of a slippage in self-valuation. Hallucinatory visions, persistent nightmares, and schizophrenic signs are but examples. Leventhal, Lesser, Bok, Berman, and Sammler have hallucinatory and neurotic sensations at certain stages of their disintegration. Nazerman, Helen, Bober, in addition to Bok and Leventhal, are tortured by nightmares with surrealistic connections to their reality. Both hallucination and nightmares, however, represent a distorted projection of the anxieties repressed in an anguished mentality. Needless to mention, schizophrenic disorders mark the climatic point of fragmentation. They give a clue to the crisis of the self trying to redefine and reconstruct identity in the midst of hindrances and in spite of traumas. Trauma in this context can be a direct experience of loss or an outcome of a collective history of victimisation. The Holocaust survivors are examples of the former while the latter is
typified by all other disorders. Besides, the insane mothers in some of the novels indicate a rupture in the people’s history of sanity in the same way characters’ secular ideas and even blasphemy represent a melancholic rupture with their belief in God. This is, in brief, the way a Jewish impaired psyche is portrayed. Nevertheless, the Jew, who seemingly loses many precious things including a great deal of mental faculty, retains a power that he/she values very much and by virtue of which his/her survival acquires some significance. That essence, which shall be deployed in the following chapter, is memory.
Works Cited


