

Ideological Tension in Four Novels by Saul Bellow

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## Abstract

This study examines and evaluates critically four novels by Saul Bellow: Dangling Man, The Victim, Herzog and Mr Sammler's Planet. The emphasis is on the tension between certain aspects of modernity to which many of the characters are attracted, and the latent Jewishness of their creator. Bellow's Jewish heritage suggests alternate ways of being to those advocated by the enlightened thought of liberal Humanism, for example, or by one of its offshoots, Existentialism, or by "wasteland" ideologies.

Bellow propounds certain ideas about the purpose of the novel in various articles, and these are discussed briefly in the introduction. His dismissal of the prophets of doom, those thinkers and writers who are pessimistic about the fate of humankind and the continued existence of the novel, is emphatic and certain. His alternative to apocalyptic thinking and writing presents a view both of life and of the role of the novelist in the twentieth century.

Chapter one considers the plight of Joseph, the protagonist of Dangling Man. In writing his first novel, Bellow set out to prove his American assimilation, and thus Joseph is a prototype of the alienated man (then in literary vogue) in an American, not a European context. His Existential traits suggest comparisons with Sartre's Roquentin and Camus's Meursault. But even in this early work, Bellow's Jewishness disallows a total commitment to certain aspects of modern life. For example, Joseph's community consciousness and

his awareness of a social responsibility offset and oppose his complete alienation.

The Victim is closely examined in chapter two. Like Joseph, Asa Leventhal embodies the thinking and behaviour of one who inhabits a moral and spiritual wasteland, but this is only a partial consideration of his characterisation. Confronted with anti-Semitism, Leventhal begins a painful exploration of his identity. The moral growth which results suggests an interpretation of self that has more in common with the Jewish definition of man than that of Existentialism.

Chapter three considers both the ideas and the characterisation which imbue Herzog with a vibrant force. Moses Herzog seems to epitomise the modern intellectual, suffering an emotional and intellectual breakdown, but is he not "cured" by administering to himself certain pragmatic tenets of Judaism? His moral development and his awareness of a spiritual dimension indicate an instinctive adherence to the temporal laws and the faith which governed his Jewish forebears. It can also be argued that his opposition to so many of the writers and thinkers who have influenced life in the twentieth century is grounded in the philosophical tenets of Judaism.

Chapter four will focus on the role of Arthur Sammler who, in Mr Sammler's Planet, enjoys the intellectual and moral freedom of the enlightened liberal until Hitler brands him Jewish. Sammler's re-evaluation of certain aspects of Enlightenment thinking which have had dire social and political consequences encourage him to turn towards the Christian mystic, Meister Eckhardt. But to transcend his humanity is not the final answer for Sammler. His representative

role as survivor of the Holocaust, his feelings for Israel, the morality he admires (in Elya Gruner, for instance), and finally practises, all suggest that Sammler's answer to the question: "how should a good man live; what ought he to do?" may be expressed in the precepts of Judaism.

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## Introduction

### Bellow and the Prophets of Doom

Writers of fiction have been taking on the role traditionally played by religious leaders, philosophers, metaphysicians. They have returned in deep need to the most primitive poetic purpose: to know; to try to know even when they know not; to invoke knowledge; to ransom the god within by peeling off their skin. They have been driven to asking the ultimate questions. And those who love fiction must nowadays love it partly because it concerns itself with final matters.

These comments by Herbert Gold are particularly relevant to Saul Bellow, who voices his concern about the role of the novelist in the twentieth century in numerous essays and interviews. In "Where Do We Go From Here: The Future of Fiction," he states that novelists now have "the universe itself to face, without the comforts of community, without metaphysical certainty, without the power to distinguish the virtuous from the wicked man, surrounded by dubious realities and discovering dubious selves."<sup>2</sup> His disagreement with novelists such as Lawrence, Joyce, Céline, and Thomas Mann, who believe that a terminal point has been reached for humankind, is emphatic and firmly held.<sup>3</sup> Interviewed by Gordon Harper, he asks whether "the apocalyptic interpretation" is true. "The terminations did not fully terminate. Civilization is still here."<sup>4</sup> To another interlocutor he says that there is "a general feeling abroad that we cannot justify our existence. If I shared

that feeling, I shouldn't be writing novels."<sup>5</sup>

He opposes "the intellectual vogue of 'wasteland ideologies,'" concerned about its pessimistic attitude towards life and its effect on the literary concept of the Self.<sup>6</sup> His own response to existence is hopeful and affirmative: "[E]ither we want life to continue or we do not." But if we do, "we are liable to be asked how. In what form shall life be justified? That is the essence of the moral question."<sup>7</sup> This question is particularly relevant to the modern concept of the Self, which so often emphasises man's impoverished spirituality, his impotence and despair, while Bellow would prefer to see man "in the image of God, man a little lower than the angels," to stress his dignity and nobility.<sup>8</sup> He agrees that "undeniably the human being is not what he commonly thought a century ago." The nineteenth-century Romantic idea of the Self has been annihilated by "stoicism, nihilism, anger, comedy, vengeful violence." But "[t]he question nevertheless remains. [Man] is something. What is he?"<sup>9</sup>

Bellow believes that the novel, if it is to survive and thrive, "requires new ideas about humankind."<sup>10</sup> If novelists have not lost faith in humankind, their writing is an expression of love. He affirms that if "we do care, if we believe in the existence of others, then what we write is necessary."<sup>11</sup> He is confident that certain novels do attempt "to create scale, to order experience, to give value, to make perspective and to carry us towards sources of life, towards life-giving things."<sup>12</sup> Writers who provide "that sense of order, those indispensable standards which in other ages did not originate with novelists or playwrights"

are those who uphold the moral function of art. It is these writers who fulfil the reading public's demand for "an inordinate amount of goodness," who counter the Joyces and Flauberts--those who "explicitly rejected the moral purpose."<sup>13</sup> That Bellow's own novels are written with explicit moral purpose has not gone unnoticed by numerous critics, such as <sup>Robert</sup> Alter, John J. Clayton, and Irving Halperin.<sup>14</sup>

What Bellow is positing is a philosophical division between twentieth-century novelists. The writers he opposes belong, in the main, to what has been defined by Frank Kermode in The Sense of an Ending and by Zbigniew Lewicki in The Bang and the Whimper as the apocalyptic tradition.<sup>15</sup> In his essay "The Apocalyptic Temper," Robert Alter comments that "we bear with us, in ways we don't always realize, the spiritual freight of the past." He writes that the "imaginative modes" of novelists who write in the pre-millennialist apocalyptic tradition "are deeply embedded in a Christian world view, a Christian ethics and politics." They assume the spiritual and moral relevance of the New Testament Book of Revelation to the nightmare of twentieth-century history.<sup>16</sup> This attitude, pinpointed by Alter, encourages the individual to withdraw completely from history, to succumb to spiritual and moral effete-ness, to entropy.<sup>17</sup> Supposing that nothing can be done to avert catastrophe, people become passive about history and human existence. This failure to confront history and wrestle with its choices reduces the personae in apocalyptic literature to impersonal types, to hypotheses, whether comic-ironic (as in Thomas Pynchon's V, John Barth's The Sot-weed Factor), or brutally erotic (the protagonist

in William Burroughs's The Naked Lunch). Novelists of this genre, burdened with their particular "spiritual freight," cannot create modern heroes who are prepared to express individual courage, to grapple with history and challenge a threatening fate.

In contrast, Bellow's "spiritual freight" is of a different kind. It insists that humankind confronts the alternatives of existence. Historically and politically, man is never to accept as a foregone conclusion the prophecies of doom, but must strive for redemption by involving himself in the pursuit of justice on earth. The individual is to assume an active, questioning, decision-making stance with regard to his factual existence. This attitude harks back to the Old Testament prophets, whose task was, in Martin Buber's words:

. . . to confront man with the alternatives of decision. . . . The prophetic faith involves the faith in the factual character of human existence, as existence that factually meets transcendence. Prophecy has in its way declared that the unique being, man, is created to be a center of surprise in creation.<sup>18</sup>

I thus disagree with Leslie Fiedler's argument that Bellow's basic spiritual and moral assumptions are grounded in a Christian or post-Christian tradition, as are those of the American-Jewish writers Nathanael West (The Day of the Locust) and Joseph Heller (Catch 22).<sup>19</sup> Instead, they seem to mirror the tenets of Judaism. The "new ideas about humankind" are not novel as such, but rather explorations of an ancient idea of "goodness" in a new environment.

## Judaism versus Modernity in Bellow's Fiction

An essentially "religious" quality in Bellow's work has been noted by various critics, for example John J. Clayton, Robert Fossum, and Keith Opdahl,<sup>20</sup> while certain Jewish critics discuss the influence of his Jewish background. These include Sarah Blacher Cohen, who notes the depth of perspective afforded by his Yiddish wit, while Josephine Zadovsky Knopp stresses the importance of Jewish Humanism and places Judaism on trial in certain of his novels.<sup>21</sup> Liela Goldman measures Bellow against a standard of religious orthodoxy and a traditional cultural background, and both Robert Alter and Daniel Fuchs offer valuable insights into his Jewishness.<sup>22</sup>

Alfred Kazin discusses the challenging environment Chicago presented to the young author, while Allan Guttman stresses the "marginality," the uncertain identity of Bellow's role as American man-of-letters, as spokesman for intellectual America. (He has been labelled the novelist of the intellectuals by Maxwell Geismar.)<sup>23</sup> Earl Rovit focuses primarily on his Americanization, and considers him "the most significant American to come to maturity since World War II," while Norman Podhoretz illuminates his definitive portrayal of the Jew as American in the character of Augie March.<sup>24</sup> As an American writer, his contribution to the American novel has been discussed and analysed by critics too numerous to mention.

Entering the critical debate, this thesis proposes to explore, not Bellow's Jewishness per se, nor his

Americanness, but rather, the tension that is created by his Jewish heritage and his confrontation with Modernity in America. Because of the prescribed length of this study, it will not be possible to examine the sociological and political evolution of Bellow as North American Jewish writer, an area which has been well researched already by critics such as Leslie Fiedler and Earl Rovit.<sup>25</sup> My scope will thus be confined to a critical exploration of conflicting ethical and philosophical tensions, to the see-sawing balance between the heroes' hereditary Jewishness and their acquired Western modes of thought. This study will not compare and contrast Bellow's thinking with various ideologies (as Daniel Fuchs does intermittently in Vision and Revision) or trace differences and similarities between Judaism and other religions. (Josephine Knopp's introduction to The Trial of Judaism in Contemporary Jewish Writing includes a short comparison with Christianity.) Its purpose, by means of a close critical reading of certain novels, by starting with textual examination and then drawing conclusions, is to determine the dynamic between a tenuous Jewishness and a palpable modernity expressed through characterisation or action.

Space limitations prohibit the inclusion of all Bellow's novels in this discussion, and I regret particularly the omission of The Adventures of Augie March and Seize the Day. Rather than to present a more generalised and therefore superficial criticism of Bellow's entire oeuvre, I have chosen to study four novels intensively, in order to do them justice. A chapter will

thus be devoted to each of four novels (Dangling Man, The Victim, Herzog, and Mr Sammler's Planet) to determine their balance between Judaism and Modernity.

Bellow himself recalls "the queer hunger of immigrants and their immediate descendants for true Americanism," and how he himself planned to enter the mainstream of American literature in the tradition of "Sherwood Anderson, Theodore Dreiser, Edgar Lee Masters, and Vachel Lindsay."<sup>26</sup> Sidra DeKoven Ezrahi observes that the legacy of the 'thirties included a "persistent liberal resistance among Jews and non-Jews to differentiating the Jewish experience,"<sup>27</sup> while Leslie Fiedler notes that certain authors (Bellow among them) who were associated with magazines such as Partisan Review, Commentary, and Encounter felt obliged to maintain "the attitudes of dissent which survives the ideological grounds for dissent" after the general intellectual disillusionment with Marxism. Bellow's first novel, Dangling Man (1944), contains the hallmark, along with the virtual obliteration of a Jewish ethos, of the radical heritage of dissatisfaction with America.

Bellow may reject the category of American-Jewish author: "I have tried to fit my soul into the Jewish-writer category, but it does not feel comfortably accommodated there," but he makes it clear that it is the limitation of categorisation he shuns, the imposition of a label, and not the Jewishness he readily acknowledges.<sup>28</sup> (Any doubt on this score is immediately dispelled by a reading of To Jerusalem and Back.) In an interview with D. J. R. Bruchner in 1984, he stresses the importance of his Jewish background to his work. He recalls reading

the Hebrew scriptures before he was seven, and "'I still do,'" he says. He talks about the "great struggle between the street and the home," between his orthodox religious family background and the chance to become an American:

But the religious feeling was very strong in me when I was young and it has persisted. I would never describe myself as an atheist or agnostic; I always thought those were terms for a pathological state and that people who don't believe in God have something wrong with them. Just say I am a religious man in a retarded condition and the only way I can square myself is to write.<sup>29</sup>

Several years earlier he speaks of inheriting rich blood, and that much of the power of his literary imagination comes from the fact that "in the most susceptible time of my life I was wholly Jewish. That's a gift, a piece of good fortune with which one doesn't quarrel."<sup>30</sup>

It is this "gift" that bequeaths the fundamental principles of morality to Bellow's novels. Yet the tenets of Judaism are never didactically spelt out or superimposed on the structure of his work. His characters, seldom overtly Jewish, scarcely seem aware of Jewish law, and search for "axial lines," for answers to their ontological questions ("[h]ow should a good man live; what ought he to do?" "Man has a nature, but what is it?")<sup>31</sup> They explore a variety of available alternatives: Communism (Joseph); Existentialism (Joseph and Asa Leventhal); Materialism (Tommy Wilhelm, Henderson); the life of the mind (Herzog, Mr Sammler); only to reject them. Their dissatisfaction with these "truths" offered by the "real" world leads them to a tentative exploration of inner values;

to affirm, some hesitantly and unknowingly (Asa Leventhal), others more confidently (Moses Herzog, Mr Sammler, Albert Corde) the value of certain ethical or even spiritual options.

The options they explore are by no means restricted to Judaism. Unquestionably, they could fall within the perimeters of certain Islamic, Christian, or Humanist ideals. (A clear indication that Bellow does not limit the scope of his heroes to explore Jewish avenues only is evident in Mr Sammler's Planet, in Arthur Sammler's enthusiasms for the Christian theologian, Meister Eckhardt, and the alternative of Eastern religions suggested by the Indian Govinda Lal, while in Humboldt's Gift, Charlie Citrine admires the ideas of Rudolf Steiner.) But perhaps the definition of Bellow as a Jewish writer rests, finally, not on the obvious surface of Jewish life (the use of Jewish characters, the recreation of immigrant childhood experience such as Augie March's in The Adventure of Augie March and Moses Herzog's in Herzog, the inclusion of Hebrew words or Yiddishisms), but on certain ontological precepts and ethical concerns which may be discerned in various novels.

Parallels may be drawn between Bellow's posing of a variety of philosophical questions through character and situation and the thinking of certain contemporary American-Jewish theologians. For example, Will Herberg, a Jewish Existentialist (and former communist), considers the plight of modern man and the failure of his "'substitute faiths.'" He concludes that only a "leap of faith" (the leap that Joseph refuses to make in Dangling

Man and Herzog is surprised to find he has made) can restore man to God. In contrast, Abraham Heschel stresses "a leap of action," the performing of mitzvot, good deeds, as the important link with God. (In The Victim, Asa Leventhal is forced to adopt this approach.) Jewish Existentialists such as Emil Fackenheim and Jacob Petuchowski all define authentic existence as the life lived according to the covenant as it is described in biblical and rabbinic Judaism, and Bellow's characters measure their shortcomings by an identical code, as this study will attempt to indicate.<sup>32</sup>

In Dangling Man, for example, Joseph experiences an Existential emptiness, a loneliness and almost complete alienation, but persists in seeking the answers to his ontological questioning in the empirical world, not in a relationship with God; in rational speculation, not in the faith of his forefathers. Asa Leventhal in The Victim finds that a blind obedience to certain ideas of responsibility and obligation accords to him a dignity, hitherto unknown, and a self-respect which disperses the angst and rootlessness of his alienated self. The novel ends with a tentative questioning of "who runs things," with a metaphysical enquiry which is explored more fully in Herzog and in Mr Sammler's Planet. In both these novels, faith in God is unquestioned. Herzog's belief becomes important both to his philosophical idea of man and to his own definition of self, while Sammler's "God adumbrations" begin, paradoxically, for the unbeliever while he is suffering persecution, and continue as his main preoccupation afterwards.

Bellow thus depicts man as lonely, a stranger in his

society, searching for a way to live in the modern world. Alienated from their inmost selves, the heroes strive, consciously or unconsciously, to end this alienation, to make whole the fragmented image of man by uniting the functional and metaphysical aspects. In order to do so, they investigate the consequences of possessing a conscience, and perhaps even a soul ("[t]errible handicap, a soul").<sup>33</sup> Whether or not they succeed will be discussed in the forthcoming chapters.

#### Two Philosophical Ideas of Man

The novels suggest that in his characterisation Bellow considers two alternative ideas of man: the Jewish ideal of his religious background, or the Humanist conception of his secular education. The latter "denotes the elevation and setting up of man in the centre of the universe" and the simultaneous inclusion of "a diametrically opposite principle, that of man's abasement, of the exhaustion of his creative powers and of his general enfeeblement."<sup>34</sup> Initially Humanism exalted man and imbued him with confidence in his apparently boundless possibilities, but this spiritual liberation ultimately leads to his debasement. Robbed of his spirituality, man shares nature's defects (the theory of the Decay of Nature), or if he is still Christian-orientated, his concept of man includes the Fall of Man, but is bereft of the idea of salvation.<sup>35</sup>

Humanism plays down the idea of an almighty being, while in contrast, Judaism stresses faith in the One and Only God: "Hear O Israel! The Lord our God, the Lord is

One" (Deuteronomy 6.4). It pledges allegiance to the covenant, to a commitment to morality in everyday life as laid down in the Torah. It upholds the belief that man is made "in the image of God" (Genesis 5.1), that there is no original sin (in stark contrast to the firmly held Protestant affirmation thereof), that "[even] as the soul is pure when entering upon its earthly career, so can man return it pure to his Maker."<sup>36</sup> Judaism maintains that free will is the assurance that man is the reflection of God, that independent choice is an exercise of conscience expressing an inner allegiance.<sup>37</sup>

May the Jewish idea of man, for which the above precepts are essential, be taken as the prototype for Bellow's characters? But what of the tension in his characterisation? Is it not caused by the conflicting modern philosophies or behaviour patterns explored by his heroes? In his first novel, Dangling Man (1944), for example, the balance is heavily in favour of the latter, and the author's Jewish heritage almost invisible. In The Victim (1947), the dynamic between two hostile ethical codes is evident. Here Bellow combines a Jewish intensity with a then prevalent European literary tendency, namely, the presentation of the alienated man. Thus he suggests the precarious marginality of the newly assimilated Jew, balanced between a traditional, ethical, spelt-out code of behaviour and the vistas of modern liberated thought.<sup>38</sup> He explores the relationship between Semite and anti-Semite and the myth of the Jew which, in its terrible exploitation, served in Europe as ideological justification for a people's virtual extermination. The portrait of

Asa, a Jew, is at the same time that of an alienated individual, who finally destroys the anguish nurtured by an awareness of non-being by his assumption of responsibility for his fellow man (for Allbee, for his brother's family), and for himself, by discovering the value of certain Jewish ethical precepts.

Harold Fisch notes that in Herzog (1964), Bellow presents "a particularization of Jewish experience in the mid-century."<sup>39</sup> He observes that, paradoxically, the more Herzog faces up to his Jewish identity, the more "he seems to function as an image of a collective crisis," as the Jew as symptomatic of a general alienation. This may be so, but is it not Herzog's fundamental Jewishness that prompts his disagreement with "the prophets of doom" who espouse wasteland ideologies, that forbids instinctively an alliance with the "reality instructors," those experts on survival tactics in modern America? Is the precarious hope held out at the end of the novel not based on an affirmation of Jewish values? This question will be considered in due course, as an integral part of the present study. To trace the failure of Herzog's public life and the private, painful growth of an ethical awareness is to disentangle his inherited philosophical precepts from certain concepts of Modernity.

In Mr Sammler's Planet (1969), tension is implicit in the hero's dual roles of Holocaust survivor (he is branded "Jew" by the Nazis) and of erstwhile upholder of Enlightenment thinking. I will endeavour to illuminate which set of ethics finally allows Sammler to face the future without despair. This novel marks Bellow's moving

beyond the American-Jewish experience to confront the most traumatic European-Jewish occurrence in Jewish history (the Holocaust) through his survivor-protagonist, Arthur Sammler. In addition, by resettling Sammler in New York, Bellow allows a fresh perspective, as it were, on the Jewish-American assimilation in the 'sixties. Sammler's judgement of the American life-style will not be considered from a sociological and political point of view, already discussed by numerous critics, but will offer a philosophical assessment of what Sammler considers the irresponsibility engendered by certain liberal ideals. The breadth of his philosophical perspectives, when compared to Joseph's, indicates to the reader the widening horizons of what are perhaps Bellow's own philosophical preoccupations. This study hopes to highlight this development, which is expressed through characterisation.

## Chapter One

### Dangling Man

"'How should a good man live; what ought he to do?'"<sup>1</sup>

#### Introduction

In order to enter the mainstream of American literature, Saul Bellow, the child of Jewish immigrants who grew up in the slums of Montreal and Chicago, had to establish his credentials with the WASP establishment. He writes that during the nineteen-thirties he "thought of himself as a midwesterner and not as a Jew."<sup>2</sup> His first two novels, Dangling Man and The Victim, fill what he calls the "formal requirements" of his apprenticeship.<sup>3</sup> Both novels may be placed in the contemporary tradition of alienated writing, the tradition he was later to decry in a Library of Congress Lecture in January, 1963:

Writers have inherited a tone of bitterness from the great poems and novels of this century, many of which lament the passing of a more stable and beautiful age demolished by the barbarous intrusion of an industrial and metropolitan society. . . . There are modern novelists who take all of this for granted as fully proven and implicit in the human condition . . . viewing modern life with a bitterness to which they themselves have not established clear title, and it is this unearned bitterness that I speak of. What is truly curious about it is that often the writer automatically scorns contemporary life. He bottles its stinks artistically. But, seemingly, he does not need to study it.<sup>4</sup>

Yet a similar "bitterness" and "scorn" for modern life are evident in Bellow's first novel, about which Paul Levine observes that:

In its style, philosophical content, and hypothetical nature, Dangling Man stands in a unique place in our contemporary literature, more closely resembling a novel by Albert Camus than one by any American novelist writing today.<sup>5</sup>

Its self-conscious literary quality is discussed by Robert Alter in After the Tradition, a quality that is not found in the later novels.<sup>6</sup>

Leslie Fiedler thinks Bellow's main protagonists represent the assimilated Jew who is "'in the process of being mythicized into the representative American,'" who is "'living the essential American experience, which is urban, lonely, European orientated, and disenchanted with communism.'"<sup>7</sup> It is significant that very little is told of Joseph's past. In later novels such as The Adventures of Augie March and Herzog, Bellow's own Jewish experiences permeate his characters' childhood or youth in a way eschewed by Dangling Man. Joseph and his circle are presented primarily as worldly intellectuals who share the scholarly preoccupations of their times, not as insular Jews. No Yiddish expressions or turns of speech, no references to an orthodox or traditional background distinguish them from their gentile counterparts.

Yet Robert Alter stresses that both Dangling Man and The Victim "are quite distinct both in their tone and intellectual purview from that fashionable literature of alienation" with which they are frequently linked.<sup>8</sup>

In what way does Bellow therefore undermine the tradition to which he seems to be adhering? The moral tone of Dangling Man presupposes the Hebrew saying: Adam karov etzel atzmo, man is closest to himself.<sup>9</sup> Joseph has to explore his inner resources, his rationalizations about how to live, the importance of a shared emotional life, in order to determine why he suffers from "humanitis" ("when the human condition is suddenly too much for you").<sup>10</sup>

His self-analysis confirms the right of the individual to exist, but his existence is only validated in communal living. This negates the irremediable separation of the alienated man from the community, his isolation among men. Joseph's (theoretical) morality, whether Bellow was consciously aware of this or not, is fundamentally Jewish. To find fulfilment, not individually but communally, is ultimately life-affirming and optimistic. It overcomes the nihilistic pessimism of the truly alienated (such as Sartre's Roquentin) which leads logically to despair and death. Joseph also understands the importance of feelings of the heart (although his actions often suggest the contrary). Unlike certain contemporary rationalists and scientists, he acknowledges the limits of reason. Man cannot be defined by intellect alone. To neglect emotion, heart and ultimately spirit, is to mutilate the Jewish concept of man.

The Enlightenment Discredited

Dangling Man is the fictitious journal of a Canadian alien living in Chicago and awaiting his draft call. The

entries stretch from December 15, 1942, till April 9, 1943, yet little mention is made of the events of World War II of which Joseph, intelligent, socially aware, avidly interested in newspapers, must have been informed. But an acute consciousness of the war seeps through the journal, like gas. The icy winter, with its "general malignancy" (p. 147), suggests a sympathy between the elements and the moral and spiritual climate of the times. But Joseph, in his idealism, would like to believe that the beauty of the winter, "the trees, like instruments, opened all their sounds into the wind," is suited to "a world without deformity or threat of damage" (pp. 118-19).

The entrepreneurial climate the war creates in Chicago encourages an avaricious self-interest expressed in the war profiteering of Mr. Almstadt and Mr. Fanzel and a determination to make the war serve individual career interests, as the rise of Myron Adler and the careers of Joseph's old friends Jack Brill, Robbie Stillman, and the Farsons prove. But Joseph refuses to further any ambition by "climbing upon the backs of the dead, so to speak" (p. 64). As "a moral casualty of the war" (p. 18), his "relative purity," his grand ideals for perfection on earth for himself and his fellow man, may be seen to be irrevocably "polluted" (p. 15) by news from war-torn Europe. May the reader not presume that the inherent evil of National Socialism, as it spread victoriously through Europe, would surely poison the existence of a one-time Humanist? Hitler's triumphs would negate what, as an emancipated Jew, a child of the Enlightenment, Joseph has hitherto accepted as the foundation of all his plans: the intrinsic goodness and

dignity of people and their compassionate responsibility for others. Hitler's self-aggrandisement and self-idolization exemplify the perversion of human greatness promised by the Enlightenment, the full horror of man freed from the moral restrictions of an all-observant God. Germany under the Führer is without the restraints of conscience. The brutal behaviour of the Nazis, the inability of almost all the victims to do more than suffer, the silent acquiescence of so many to the horror and atrocity--all are proof of the dehumanization of man. Joseph's personal cry of betrayal:

Was anyone immune altogether? Intimes like these?  
 There were so many treasons; they were a medium,  
 like air, like water; they passed in and out  
 of you, they made themselves your accomplices;  
 nothing was impenetrable to them (p. 56)

could perhaps be interpreted, with hindsight, as a premonition of evil caused by the spreading European horror.

The pessimism which pervades his journal--whether its origin be internal or caused by external events--speaks poignantly of the disillusionment of a naïve Humanist, aware of the collapse of his belief in the greatness of man. The diary can thus be read as a spiritual preparation for his entering the war and an intellectual reconsideration of the recourses now open to the sensitive individual who retains, despite overwhelming odds, the bias of a liberal Humanist.

Although Joseph concentrates solely on the self, Bellow makes it clear that he is a victim of disillusionment,

of history, along with countless others. His journal voices a private anguish which speaks simultaneously for his generation. His December 17 entry links him with "my generation, my society, my world." All are "figures in the same plot, eternally fixed together" (p. 25). If this is a "condemned" age (p. 25), the suffering is universal. Identifying with the "many people, hundreds of thousands, who have given up all thought of future" (p. 65), Joseph cannot plan one for himself. The microcosm of his world reflects the influence of the macrocosm: "One was constantly threatened, shouldered, and, sometimes invaded by 'nasty, brutish, and short'" (p. 56).

At the same time Joseph's diary may be read, with hindsight, as a record of an assimilated American Jew, who, although physically untouched by the Holocaust, cannot fail to register the demise of the rights of race and religion in Europe. Sidra DeKoven Ezrahi mentions the sense of diffidence, of vulnerability, of the Jewish-American authors in the nineteen-forties, as well as their unwillingness, at this stage, to differentiate the Jewish experience.<sup>11</sup> But by naming his hero "Joseph" and withholding any surname, Bellow could be suggesting that the vestiges of a Jewish identity still cling to him. Like his Old Testament namesake--nothing suggests the New Testament Joseph--he is also a dreamer, an idealist. The Jewish tradition of dreamers is remarked on by Leslie Fiedler, who points out that in the Sixth Satire of Juvenal, it is taken for granted that dreams can be bought for very little "'[f]rom the Jews."<sup>12</sup> Joseph, with his "ideal constructions," his yearnings for a perfect society,

continues this ancient tradition.

His journal records a metamorphosis from the "old Joseph" to a maturer cynic who, in the December 18 entry and elsewhere, describes the self he has outgrown. The December 18 entry is the only one written in the third person, which indicates that the maturer Joseph is attempting an objective self-appraisal. The tone, often cynical, ironically condescending, suggests the distance between the writer and his former self: "Very little about the Joseph of a year ago pleases me. I cannot help laughing at him, at some of his traits and sayings" (p. 26).

The "old Joseph" has much in common with the liberated Jewish intellectual who, free of the restrictions of the European ghetto, could explore alternate (secular) philosophies. He has considered himself a scholar, and surrounded himself with books, those "guarantors of an extended life" (p. 10), which suggests a superior alternative to his routine existence. Now Joseph is unable to read. He resembles Mr Sammler in a later novel, whose war experiences make him suspect his enlightened reading was comprised of "the wrong books, the wrong papers."<sup>13</sup> Joseph contemplates the failure of his own "ideal constructions" (p. 140) along with the utopias of fiction. His planned biographical series on the philosophers of the Enlightenment has been exchanged for his private autobiographical writings.

The Joseph of the year before supported Humanism, an aspect of Enlightenment thinking which upholds the universal goodness and compassion of man and faith in his reasonableness. It involves a principle of universalism in which

Jewishness merges into anonymity, providing a favourable climate for assimilation. Its apparent extension of the basic principles of Judaism made it doubly attractive to Jewish intellectuals. Joseph believed resolutely that the inner life of man was more than its outward expression in terms of city structures (pp. 24-25) and sought evidence to deny the damning analogue of city and citizens. But now, for Joseph, "the idea of community is breaking down."<sup>14</sup> His disillusionment is paired with the idea of the dehumanisation of man, of "the lack of the human in the too-human" (p. 153) which he observes in the cities, and which undermines the fundamentals of both Humanism and Judaism.

A major difference between Enlightenment thinking and Judaism is, in the Enlightenment view, that man's greatness is of his own, not of God's making. Joseph has enthusiastically supported this idea, confident of man's infinite potential for self-realization, stressing individuality, like the Romantics he admired and studied. Severely disillusioned, he now contemplates the success of the "Sense of Personal Destiny" (p. 88) unbounded by conscience, unaccountable to any divinity. It allows self-idolatry, which results in a compulsive power- and position-seeking Joseph finds abhorrent. "In his incredible arrogance, [man] imagined himself entirely sufficient unto himself,"<sup>15</sup> but the sequel is self-violation and hatred of others.

The old Joseph constructed blueprints for behaviour that failed "to take into account all that was natural, including corruptness" (p. 40). He theorised about evil easily enough, rationalising away his childhood fear of

his own "rotteness" as Romantic, as "just the general, poor, human devil" (p. 77). He argued intelligently that:

There might be some justice in the view that man was born the slayer of his father and of his brother, full of instinctive bloody rages . . . an animal who had to be tamed (p. 39),

but found no such instinct in himself. The changed Joseph, aware of his own imperfections, is scathing about this former innocence. He counts himself as one of the masses, one who has grown accustomed to evil and who is seemingly indifferent to murder and massacre:

We do not flinch at seeing all these lives struck out; nor would those who were killed have suffered any more for us, if we, not they, had been the victims. I do not like to think what we are governed by. I do not like to think about it. . . . Its kindest revelation is that our senses and our imaginations are somehow incompetent (p. 83).

This attitude ultimately confirms the nullity of the individual, his spiritual demise. It allows the validity of individual destiny to be questioned, ringing a death knell for the values of the Enlightenment, burying the concepts of man's innate goodness and humanity, his noble individual dignity, his belief in the sacred quality of life. But Joseph does not fall prey to this thinking.

A more experienced person, he now tests his own "senses and imagination." They are acutely competent to register the dehumanisation of man. He preserves himself from becoming "one of the shoal, driven towards the weirs" (p. 119), from spiritual or physical suicide, by retaining the touchstone of the subjective self. He explores a

private inner territory, loaded not with mines but the hidden "craters of the spirit" (p. 66). With passionate intensity or despair, with curiosity and criticism, Joseph's journal records his search for selfhood, a direct challenge to those whose spiritual bookkeeping is done as imperturbably as if they "were examining [their] fingernails" (p. 119). Like the Romantics he no longer reads (though he refers to Baudelaire [p. 123]), he retains the notion of the importance of individuality, fearing the consequences of the "era of hardboiled-dom. . . . the code of the athlete, of the tough boy" (p. 9), the Hemingway tradition of emotional reticence which results in indifference to the plight of others and an insensitivity towards the self. The very tone of the journal, spontaneous, eloquent, honest, resists the understated style of Hemingway. Comparing the Hemingway and the Bellovian hero, Jeanne Braham observes that the former

substitutes rituals for the free play of thought, since thought may paralyse men momentarily in a world where agility is all that counts. In sharp contrast, thought for the Bellow hero is all there is. Actions are thought in motion; values, judgements and decisions surface as the result of the continuous, often compulsive, examination of interior life."<sup>16</sup>

Preoccupied with the "inner life," Joseph, like many twentieth-century thinkers who are concerned with providing purposeful value structures and systems with a rational, not a religious foundation, has tried to live according to a privately constructed moral plan which bypasses the idea of God. He cultivates the "cut flowers" of freedom, justice, brotherhood and personal dignity which flourish

in a Humanistic secular society, severed from their original religious roots.<sup>17</sup> He relies on reason, on planning a rational existence for himself and his circle. Included in his general scheme was Etta, his niece, who was to be "saved" from the trivial values of materialism and converted to those of her uncle (p. 61). More important was the "colony of the spirit" he devised for his friends, which forbade "spite, bloodiness and cruelty" (p. 39), and epitomises an ideal value structure. His earlier political choice, Communism, seemed to offer an absolutist faith, to imbue life with meaning and sustain its values by the force of the Dialectic.

Joseph's interest in Communism places him in an intellectual climate favoured by many fellow intellectuals, including Jewish ones, at the time. Fiedler observes that during the nineteen-thirties, many Jews could "identify themselves with America" and at the same time, "protest against certain aspects of its life" through Communism, while the Party offered a haven for all intellectuals alienated from American society.<sup>18</sup> But Joseph's disillusionment with Marx's idea of society perfecting itself on a grand scale seems based on a conflicting idea of freedom. Joseph, echoing here the responsible individual choice propounded by Judaism, the freedom of conscience and inner allegiance, insists on the freedom of the individual to make his own decisions. As the cameo of Jimmy Burns suggests, blind obedience to the party diminishes rather than enhances the humanity of people. Like other disillusioned radical Jews, he condemns a political system which purports to serve the people, while in fact "any

hospital nurse did more with one bedpan for le genre humain than they did with their entire organisation" (p. 34).

(There is no mention in the novel of the Soviet-Nazi pact, which caused so many Communists to leave the party.)

All Joseph's plans have distorted reality; all avoided his suppressed knowledge of the true nature of man, acquired during his childhood on St. Dominique street. Only here, Joseph confesses, was he "ever allowed to encounter reality" (p. 86). His childhood reveries juxtapose a remembered epiphany of security and serenity while shining the family's shoes in the context of violence and horrific images: a cripple taunting his brother, beggars with deformities and sores, sexual scenes. Joseph knows that reality is composed of both peace and cruelty, of goodness and viciousness, yet unconsciously chooses to block out this knowledge, "to be untrue to himself," to "see things as [he wished] to see them, or, for the sake of [his] plans, 'must' see them" (p. 39).

Because they are based on a distortion which ignores the lesson of Adam's sin, the polarity at the heart of man's moral nature, Joseph's private, social and political blueprints for a perfect existence fail. His wife asserts her independence against his model of "Burckhardt's great ladies of the Renaissance and the no less profound Augustan women" (p. 98). The argument on Christmas Eve confirms the enmity between uncle and niece. In particular, his social illusion of a harmonious group free of spite and evil is shattered at the Servatius party, where Abt's savage instinct to hurt Minna and the tacit consent of the clique to his cruelty mock Joseph's idea of an ideal

colony.

The party marks Joseph's recognition of a hidden inner brutality in people he thought free of its taint. It indicates an enjoyment of malice, a malevolence where it was least expected, and suggests that he himself is not immune to evil. It offers actual proof of an aspect of people he has chosen to disregard, thus shattering his theories of human perfection. It is the principal reason for the change in his personality and thinking.

Perhaps the Servatius party can also be seen as a vignette portraying attitudes prevalent in the outside world: the sadism of the powerful, the suffering of the humiliated, an "object" which "could not resist" (p. 57), the indifferent observation of the bystanders. Joseph sees Minna, the victim, as representative of "a more generalized human being--and a sad one, at that" (p. 52). His response has Humanist as well as Jewish overtones, an empathic reaction to cruelty and a desire to stop it: "'Bring her out of it, Morris, we've all had enough'" (p. 53).

The old Joseph's plans were hypotheses based on theoretical reasoning rather than on experience and the objective assessment of human nature. Their practical failure forces him to acknowledge the impossibility of flawless individuals and the futility of social or political utopias. He admits his error, the exclusion of the human propensity for evil, yet is unable to forego the importance of reason when contemplating the human situation. "'You always have reasons, and with principles. Capital P,'" says Iva (p. 177).

His dual emphasis on reason (despite its proved

shortcomings) and a principled life, one based on a value system that is partial and relative, not prescribed by any religion; his image of man as a rational one; his ignoring of the spiritual qualities in man; all could indubitably be part of the thinking of any atheist or agnostic severed from a variety of religious roots. But recalling Alter's Jewish "intellectual purview" of the novel, can one not regard Joseph as the prototype of the modern, fully assimilated, intellectually orientated Jew in fiction? He is almost totally free of any hint of his creator's Jewish background, almost suspiciously so. There is no hint of Jewish culture or religion in the journal. Yet, as for so many other Jews, Communism first attracts, then repels Joseph. Materialism (never highly regarded by Judaism) offers him no alternative. A typical child of the twentieth century, he understands and accepts the consequences of basing his behaviour on a private standard. For example, his principles impair the progress of a worldly career, as his friend Myron Adler, "realist that he is" (p. 37), is quick to understand. They prevent the acceptance of money from family and friends; they prompt the refusal of "good" jobs. They result in a standard of living which Joseph may liken to that of the early ascetics he once studied, but which his former friends find squalid.

Because Joseph cannot compromise his integrity by joining the pragmatists or materialists who exploit the war situation, is he not forced towards another branch of Humanism, Existentialism? Its insistence on the negative aspects of existence, on the instability and risk of all

human reality is relevant in a period threatened alternately by spiritual and material destruction. The dynamics and change in Joseph's thinking and behaviour support this contention. His philosophical enquiry no longer seeks to determine how he may best serve humanity; rather, it narrows to exclude all but the sole self. A tædium vitae includes humiliation and suffering, while the struggle and guilt involved in limited personal choice and the dread of death become his preoccupations. Identifying in others of his generation a similar "fundamental discontent" (p. 47), he finds its expression in Abt's malice towards Minna, while Jeff Forman, understanding that "some ways in which to be human was to be unutterably dismal" (p. 83), seeks to escape this knowledge in a pursuit of danger and excitement which ultimately kills him. Joseph chooses neither sadism nor adventure, but passive introspection.

#### Joseph as Existentialist

Existence becomes "a narcotic dullness" (p. 18) for Joseph. He pictures himself alternately as "dangling" in a metaphysical void while suspended between army and civilian life, or overcome by inertia and boredom, growing "rooted to [his] chair" (p. 13). He sees existence exclusively as particular and individual, not as communal, or as a manifestation of an absolute. "'With whom can I start but myself?'" he asks (p. 166), echoing the Existentialist precept that human existence projects itself with absolute freedom, and poses itself as a problem. He affirms that the self is the only thing that can be known

and verified, and attempts to establish a relationship to his own being, an understanding of it, a doctrine of individual existence free of any relation to a universal power. By becoming "the earnest huntsman of myself" in order to "know what I myself am" (p. 119), Joseph seeks to become a "whole" man (p. 67).<sup>19</sup>

To achieve this, he confers on himself the position of outsider and alien. Extracting himself from the mindlessness of lemming-like existence, he seeks social isolation, particularly after the Servatius party. He encourages social ostracism and suffers the neglect of his friends and estrangement from his wife. Churlish about invitations from relatives because they pity his poverty, he also accelerates the disintegration of social norms by showing rudeness towards Adler (p. 156), Iva (pp. 176-77), and Sam Pearson, Iva's cousin (p. 108). Overt aggression in the fight with Mr. Gesell (pp. 142-46) and the fracas with Vanaker and Captain Briggs (pp. 178-82) confirms his feeling that he is "a sort of human grenade whose pin has been withdrawn" (p. 147). He finds no acceptable outlets for the stored "bitterness and spite which eat like acids" (p. 12) while he is locked in his anarchistic self.

Joseph loses all sense of relationship, not only with society, but with tangible reality because of his insistence on the importance of subjective experience over objective knowledge. Thus he can reverse the summer and make himself "shiver in the heat" (p. 13). Social isolation is accompanied by a complementary cultural estrangement which may be ascribed to his heritage of an attitude of discernment discussed earlier. Joseph rejects the accepted norms of

his society, the values of materialism and its twin form of avidity, the limitless reaching for recognition, the need "of being consequential" (p. 86) accepted by his brother Amos and his friends Abt and Adler. His maverick opposition to accredited social ambition also suggests a normlessness, although he fails to find an appropriate cultural alternative.

Most frightening is his experience of self estrangement, the yawning emptiness of facing an existence in which he is no longer in touch with himself. A. J. Heschel comments:

If the ultimate is sheer being, the human living has nothing to relate himself to as living. He can only relate himself to nothing. What surrounds him is a void where all life is left behind, where values and thoughts are devoid of all relevance and reference. Facing being as being, man 'discovers himself confronted by the Nothingness, the possible impossibility of his existence.'<sup>20</sup>

Having rejected the "old Joseph" whose existence is defined by an accepted social position, who believes in society and wishes to reform its values, does the new have an identity? Searching for a consistent, unified self, he finds only its absence. The insignificance of the self is mocked, he thinks, in his contacts with people: the maid Marie is impertinent; she smokes defiantly in his presence. A chicken feather he finds floating in his orange juice is a sign of his mother-in-law's contempt for his inactivity. Vanaker, a fellow lodger, taunts him, a nonentity, by stealing small items and with annoying personal habits.

Joseph identifies as a "sort of social activity" (p. 16) odd actions which insist on the recognition of their

instigators. Vanaker, who coughs or fails to shut the lavatory door, the old man whose door was always ajar, and another who frequently left the tap running in his previous lodgings are all seeking attention. These actions are the result of normlessness, the expectation that only unapproved behaviour may bring about desired results.

Joseph demands recognition of his identity through similar actions. In order to become "real," to escape "non-existence," he seeks confrontation. He insists that Jimmy Burns acknowledge his presence, although he knows that the rules of the Communist Party forbid Burns to talk to "renegades" (p. 32). He is abusive towards Mr. Frink, the vice president of the bank who, dubious of Joseph's credentials and identity, refuses to cash Iva's cheque. His anti-social behaviour is his personal appeal for active recognition, or perhaps, his eagerness "for consequences" (p. 82). Later he writes that we attack our enemies "from confused motives of love and loneliness. . . . But for the most part, loneliness" (p. 147).

These aspects of the self suggest a similarity to the alienated figures in fiction created by the French Existentialists, Sartre and Camus. (Dangling Man was originally published in 1944, six years after Sartre's "La Nausée", 1938, and two years after Camus's "L'Étranger", 1942.) Certain critics support the view that Bellow's fiction exhibits Existentialist tendencies, for example Tony Tanner, Howard Harper, and Ralph Freedman, while others such as Helen Weinberg regard him as anti-Existentialist.<sup>21</sup> Ada Aharoni, in "Bellow and Existentialism," gives a fuller discussion of this debate.<sup>22</sup> Critical

opinion seems inconclusive as to whether or not Bellow has been directly influenced by French Existentialism. Talking generally about the influence of Existentialism, particularly Sartre's, on the American consciousness, Hayden Carruth posits the view that its impact was not only philosophical, "'but also and more fundamentally a shift in ordinary human attitudes that has altered every aspect of life in our civilization,'"<sup>23</sup> while Richard Lehan observes that:

The influence of Continental fiction on Bellow . . . is most remote, and it would be indeed difficult to prove that [he has] written conscious existential fiction. The problem is more one of affinity of mind or spirit. . . . The new American hero is similar to the French existential hero because he shares a common world and a similar world view.<sup>24</sup>

He then goes on to draw distinct parallels between Bellow's heroes and those of Sartre and Camus.

Whether the influence of Existentialism on Bellow has been direct or filtered, Joseph's struggle with the meaning of identity, his search for fulfilment, his pre-occupation with limitless freedom, and his formulation of values in an ethical vacuum where God is not acknowledged, all suggest certain similarities with the Existentialist heroes of French fiction, Sartre's Roquentin (Nausea) or Camus's Meursault (The Outsider).

Like certain of Camus's heroes (for example, Dr. Bernard Rieux in The Plague), Joseph, "without negating it, does nothing for the eternal. He prefers his courage and his reasoning,"<sup>25</sup> as his thinking while he listens to a Haydn divertimento indicates (pp. 67-68). On the

one hand, he tries to consider existence as gratuitous, to trust only empirical evidence, to seek identity exclusively in man's appearance in the world, in those conditioning factors Sartre calls "facticity": "No, not God or any divinity. That was anterior, not of my own deriving" (p. 68), yet he does not deny the existence of God. He also evades the question of the mystery of being, which "makes even more for uneasiness" (p. 30). By excluding any relation between Man and God (in religious terms) or between Man and the Absolute (in philosophical terms), he confirms what Martin Buber calls an acknowledgement of the radical separation between the sacred and the profane.<sup>26</sup> Instead, a sense of radical contingency conveys the absurd.

With heightened consciousness he adopts the anthropocentric stand that all promise of value rests in life itself, but is then confronted with the meaninglessness of the universe. "To be pushed upon oneself entirely put the very facts of simple existence in doubt" (pp. 190-91). Having recognised this, can Joseph confront the absurd? This alone will establish his integrity in Existentialist terms as the tensions and conflicts of the absurd itself comprise a source of meaning. The conflict must be experienced, because it alone may be able to free him. If this be possible, Joseph will assume heroic proportions, affirming his humanity through the absurd.

Joseph also has much in common with Roquentin, the minor clerk in Sartre's Nausea. He, too, keeps a journal, prompted by changed circumstances. Both respond to physical stimuli; both are empiricists. Neither has a fulfilling sexual relationship. Roquentin occasionally makes love

to Françoise, the cafe owner; Joseph documents the barren relationship with his wife: "We no longer confide in each other" (p. 12). His affair with Kitty is short-lived. Both Joseph and Roquentin suffer anxiety, boredom, weariness, a disgust for life. Neither can sustain his study of past philosophers, unimportant to his consuming interest, the self. Their daily lives have purposelessness in common, though Joseph has created a routine of sorts, eating, reading the papers, listening to the radio or aimlessly walking about.

Their shared quest is for their true identity. Roquentin's character is plastic, amorphous, moulded to an ideological formula by Sartre, but otherwise unconvincing. Joseph's rejected self possessed a degree, a job, a certain style of dress, a wife and relations, friends who shared his scholarly interests. But at present, "if a question of my identity were to arise I could do nothing but point to my attributes of yesterday" (p. 26).

These comparisons strengthen the idea of Joseph as Existentialist. But does his journal record the growth of alienation only? Is there no evidence to suggest that, like certain other philosophical ideas born of the Enlightenment which Joseph has absorbed and then discarded, Existentialism is but a temporary preoccupation in his intellectual development? Richard Lehan thinks not. He argues that Joseph is alienated from "society, the world, and God." With a clever manipulation of abbreviated quotation, he equates Joseph's rejection of God with that of Roquentin and Camus's Meursault. He states that, for Joseph, "God is born out of 'a miserable surrender . . .

out of fear, bodily and imperious . . . I could not accept [he says] the existence of something greater than myself" (p. 68).<sup>27</sup> Joseph's actual words are:

I was not so full of pride that I could not accept the existence of something greater than myself, something, perhaps, of which I was an idea, or merely a fraction of an idea. That was not it (p.68).

Joseph is not denying the existence of God, as Lehan leads one to believe, since he can accept something greater than himself. Rather, he is pitting the strength of an alternative, his own reason, against religious acceptance.

Lehan argues that Joseph is disillusioned with the "whole nature of creation" and quotes the "feeling of strangeness, of not quite belonging to the world" (p. 30) as proof of Existentialist disillusionment.<sup>28</sup> But in context this phrase is tinged with religious and philosophical colour. Joseph says that not only he, but everyone, to some extent, shares this feeling. There are Platonic reverberations in the idea that "the real world is not here at all and what is at hand is spurious and copied," and Old and New Testament influences in the comment that children feel their "real father is elsewhere" (p. 30). The shared feeling of strangeness is not one of evil, but of the "splendors" (p. 30) of existence. The idea of diversified splendours is coupled with one of wonder. This awareness of "strangeness," "wonder," and "splendors" suggests a spiritual excitement at the secrets of the unanswered mysteries of existence rather than a "disillusionment with the whole nature of creation." Thus Joseph's Existentialist characteristics do not obliterate a latent

spiritual awareness, although he is neither a Jewish nor a Christian Existentialist. To be either, he would have to acknowledge and explore fully the role of a divinity in human existence.

Lehan then argues that Joseph, like all Existentialist heroes, longs for the "purity of the completely self-contained existence, the very internal necessity of an art object."<sup>29</sup> He cites the similarity between Roquentin's reaction to the jazz tune "One of these Days" and Joseph's appreciation of a Haydn divertimento. I agree that for both Joseph and Roquentin an art form, music, shapes a formless reality and suggests how to bear suffering and humiliation. For Roquentin the jazz tune is a symbol of self-enclosed completion, but the Haydn divertimento serves only partially as a metaphor for Joseph's longed-for self-definition. Although the whole scene argues finally for reason in its completeness rather than for art, the conclusion is in tension. To achieve the self-contained existence of an art form, Joseph needs aid. And the music "named only one source, the universal one, God" (p. 68). Joseph does not reject God outright. Rather, he chooses at this point not to consider divine aid.

Joseph cannot achieve the self-sufficiency of an art form. Nor does he aspire to the "acts of the imagination" (p. 91) which allow the artist, for example his friend John Pearl, to transcend the moral and commercial corruption of life in a city such as New York. This transcendence may link John Pearl with what is finest in mankind, but Joseph has "no talent for that sort of thing" (p. 91). The self-contained existence of the world of art or

ceration is too far removed from what he calls "'the real world, the truth'" (p. 141). (The Bellovian heroes' refusal to withdraw via the imagination, via art, has been noted by Earl Rovit, while Cynthia Ozick discusses the restriction on Jewish creativity engendered by the prohibitive commandment against "graven images" in introducing her short story "Usurpation".<sup>30</sup> Bellow's own response to the commandment is a complex one. He himself is an author, but he does not allow his characters--Charlie Citrine is the exception--to express themselves through an art form.)

For Joseph, total self-sufficiency, whether of art or intellect, may lead to the abdication of real existence for static role playing. If this be achieved, communication with others (except those cast in similar roles) ceases, and communal life becomes meaningless. Lehan argues that Joseph, aloof and removed from "the order of men" who "band together for mutual protection . . . [and] assert the group values," rejects people. He adds that Joseph also casts aside his brother and niece and begins to reject his wife.<sup>31</sup>

It can be argued that to begin with, Joseph uses people expediently, that he "clings to the nearest passers-by, to brothers, parents, friends, and wives" (p. 30) to offset "the strangeness in the world" (p. 29). His judgements on all he meets, his aggression and truculence support a view that he finds human relationships inadequate, insufficient. But this is to ignore his changing attitude towards people, and that often his actions are mitigated by kind or understanding thoughts which excuse his friends' actions. "I have not done well alone," Joseph comments (p. 190).

He records that "Iva and I have grown closer" (p. 152), that Steidler visits him often. Adler keeps in contact, Abt writes of his successes, John Pearl of a shared recognition of the evidence in city life of the dehumanization of man. Contact with his fellow man, essential if Joseph is to retain his humanity, has not broken down completely.

Lehan points out that Joseph's talks with his alter ego express an Existential idea, "the ambiguity of ethics, the difficulty of choice between two courses of action that are not morally exclusive of each other."<sup>32</sup> But do these courses really bear the same moral weight? Does Joseph sway, immobilised, between them from the journal's start to finish? Does he make no choice between the irreconcilable orders of death and life, alienation and community? If it were possible to separate the two speakers this neatly, what would Joseph's final decision be?

Comparing Joseph to other Existentialist heroes, Lehan finds that "once Joseph has divested the world of meaning he finds it impossible to act in terms of commitment." Yet finally he compares him to the characters in Camus's The Plague, who "are able to reaffirm their initial identity and to return to the original community."<sup>33</sup> Surely this implies commitment, particularly as Joseph's "return" is to enlist in the army. His "imposed consciousness" begins with a paralysed awareness of the absurd, but the stasis is finally interrupted by action.

Lehan neglects to mention that in his first talk with the Spirit of Alternatives, Joseph denies subscribing wholly to a Sartrean philosophy: "'I didn't say there was no feeling of alienation, but that we should not make a doctrine

of our feeling'" (p. 138). He dismisses the actual possibility of being completely alienated because, firstly, one is the sum of one's education and cultural experience, and, secondly, the world uses individuals as pawns in its games with mankind, regardless of their beliefs (p. 137).

Joseph also questions the supremacy of reason, on which the ideas of Existentialism, denying the spirit, partially rest. Perhaps we are the "feeble-minded children of angels" (p. 137), he says. His January 26 entry records ominously that the mind flaps "like a rag on a clothesline in cold wind" (p. 123), unable to lull the terror of man's contemplation of chaos, of himself as a sport in the vastness, with no fixed definition or meaning. Running counter to the logic of absurdity is the security of feelings, instincts, and the heart, which "can be relied on" if "mind's nature is weak" (p. 136). This security is encountered in the clumsy generosity of Amos, in Iva's patience and loyalty, in Joseph's own heightened sensibility to pain and suffering towards a "generalized human being" (p. 52). But Joseph cannot accept an unstructured formula for living. Despite previous failures, he can only suggest once again to the Spirit of Alternatives "'an ideal construction, an obsessive device'" (p. 140) constructed by reason. In desperation he ignores his abandoned political and social utopias, the warning of the sick Christian Scientist who is obsessed by her memorized message of salvation. Yet his honesty prompts the question: "'But what of the gap between the ideal construction and the real world, the truth?'" (p. 141).

In his second talk with the Spirit of Alternatives Joseph rejects the prodding of what he calls "'a kind of

conscience'" (p. 164), the "'public part'" of himself which is "'the world internalized'" (p. 165). What follows makes it clear that Bellow is considering the pessimism of prevalent wasteland thinking which, taken to its logical nihilistic conclusion, suggests suicide: "'You can't prepare for anything but living,'" Joseph affirms, you "'don't have to know anything to be dead'" (p. 165). This is a direct repudiation of his former attraction to Goethe's sentiment that the "loathing of life has both physical and moral causes" (p. 18) and his sympathy for Shakespeare's Barnadine, whose contempt for life equalled his contempt for death. For Barnadine life is meaningless, and therefore death equally so. But Joseph is aware that his isolation is a support for the "anti-life" (p. 165) and a devaluation of existence. He reconsiders his estrangement from society. In so doing, there is a return to the positive social commitments of the "old Joseph".

By turning inward on the self to explore the craters of the spirit, to consider his existence as finite and absolute, Joseph avoids facing the war as a moral issue with clear-cut implications for Jews. Perhaps his former moral and social indecisiveness may be ascribed partly to this avoidance. But finally it is the fatal shadow of its reality, the suffering and violence it represents, that forces him to overcome his alienation. "'I would be denying my inmost feelings if I said I wanted to be by-passed and spared from knowing what the rest of my generation is undergoing'" (p. 166). His decision to "surrender" is not accompanied by feelings of remorse or humiliation, but by "gratification and a desire to make

my decision effective at once' (p. 183). The paralysis his concern with the absurd produced is over.

His choice of enlistment entails replacing an aimless existence with a planned, everyday, ordinary life. Allan Guttman observes that it is "certainly arguable that Joseph has returned metaphorically from the empty wilderness within in order to surrender himself to a secular equivalent of Chalakah, the Law."<sup>34</sup> His "surrender" is paradoxically an affirmation of life which marks the cessation of the death-in-life he has experienced. His choice, if it be regarded in a recognizably Jewish context, is the right one: ". . . I have set before you life and death . . . therefore choose life" (Deuteronomy 30.19).

#### Joseph's Moral Core

The question which dominates the novel; "'How should a good man live; what ought he to do?'" (p. 39) posits a prototype of human existence inimical to Existentialist thinking. Implicit is its fundamental Jewish premise that man is good, not born into original sin, and that the choice of his actions will reflect this goodness. ("O my God, the soul which thou gavest me is pure.")<sup>35</sup> An Existentialist would never presume this good as "given", believing rather that man may select, in absolute freedom, to be good if he so chooses. The second part of the question--"what ought he to do?"--emphasises that goodness is not theoretical, but needs to be expressed by action in the secular world, as advocated by practical Jewish morality. The open-ended moral possibilities of Existentialism; of man's passive

or static role in the world; his definition of self only in his choice of actions, are of a different nature, as are the Protestant assumptions of original sin. In the Talmud the difference between the righteous and the wicked man is measured according to the preponderance of good over evil deeds.<sup>36</sup> Whether Joseph, according to his journal, would qualify as good on a count of individual acts is dubious, but his preoccupation with goodness is no less valid for being mainly theoretical at this stage of his life.

A subsequent journal entry: "My talent, if I have one at all, is for being a citizen, or what is today called, most apologetically, a good man" (p. 91), suggests that "a good man" and "a citizen" are synonymous. This is strictly in accordance with Talmudic teachings that the command to love one's neighbour as oneself is to be expressed in spontaneous deeds of charity and goodwill towards others. Actions must express a public consciousness, and not be performed for a private salvation.<sup>37</sup> Moses Mendelssohn's definition of Judaism as "revealed legislation" (he refers to Christianity as "revealed religion") underlies this emphasis. He writes: "Do make man's conduct your concern, and judge his actions by his compliance with wise laws."<sup>38</sup> Joseph understands this implicitly. He envies John Pearl his "community." He has only "this six-sided box. And goodness is achieved not in a vacuum, but in the company of other men, attended by love" (p. 92). Unlike those who, sure of their purposes, "break prisons and cross whole Siberias" (p. 92), Joseph is uncertain of the direction his expression of goodness should take, but knows it must

be in community, where "man realizes his personality and actualizes his being."<sup>39</sup>

In direct contrast to his life style, isolated and stagnant, or precisely because that lifestyle has revealed such limitations, Joseph advocates that man's most consuming passion should be to unlock "the imprisoning self" (p. 153). His struggle towards "beingness", waged solitarily and intellectually, is offset by a counter sense of life, one which places conduct and right actions higher than rational theories of "becomingness". He suggests that "what we really want is to stop living so exclusively and vainly for our own sake, impure and unknowing, turning inward and self-fastened" (p. 154). As the pronouns "we" and "our" denote, Joseph here regards himself as a member of society. He presumes that all of us, "while we seem so intently and even desperately to be holding on to ourselves, we would far rather give ourselves away" (pp. 153-54). Unlike the Existentialists who acknowledge no given, shared values, Joseph links his personal quest for freedom with that of all humanity: "We are all drawn toward the same craters of the spirit--to know what we are and what we are for, to know our purpose, to seek grace" (p. 154). The idea expressed here, that all engage in spiritual exploration, that there is a communal moral preoccupation which may ultimately lead to divine absolution, is far closer to a variety of religious concepts than to Existentialist thinking.

Joseph moves away from using intelligence as the sole yardstick of people's worth--"But now I am struck by the arrogance with which I set people apart in two groups:

those with worth-while ideas and those without them" (p. 152)-- to consider other units of measurement. Thus Iva, who frustrates his attempts at her cultural education, is no longer despised, but loved "too much to turn her over to her family" (p. 118). His university friends are not sought out for their intelligent conversation, and are found lacking in moral and spiritual depth. Adler, "hale and business-like" (p. 58), has learnt to "prize convenience" (p. 38) but fails in friendship. Abt's letters, epistles of self-esteem and complacence, go unanswered. Because Joseph's old school friend Steidler personifies a humanity devoid of dignity and honesty, preferring a Hollywood illusion of reality, his visits are corrupting, as if he and Joseph are "practising some terrible vice together" (p. 148). Joseph himself is quite capable of kindness, shielding Adler from embarrassment after the Burns incident by denying his need for a job (p. 38), asking Adler to contact John Pearl, who is lonely in New York (p. 159).

His earlier idea of a "colony of the spirit" (p. 39), despite its failure, suggests a wish to impose a code of moral order on his immediate world, to give structure and meaning to life. Another early entry, that "everything is good because it exists. Or good or not good, it exists, it is ineffable, and, for that reason, marvellous" (p. 30) suggests a spiritual attitude towards the temporal world, an optimism and an acceptance that the wonder of creation is not to be understood by the mind only. John J. Clayton points out that when Joseph faces pure existence he reacts, not with nausea, but with serenity to the mysterious beauty at the heart of life, as the following passage illustrates:

The light gave an air of innocence to some of the common objects in the room, liberating them from ugliness. I lost the aversion I had hitherto felt for the red oblong of rug at the foot of the bed, the scrap of tapestry on the radiator seat, the bubbles of paint on the white lintel, the six knobs on the dresser I had formerly compared to the ugly noses of as many dwarf brothers. In the middle of the floor, like an accidental device of serenity, lay a piece of red string (p. 119).<sup>40</sup>

Morality and a sense of the mysterious, the spiritual, point to religious affiliations. But although Joseph is aware of transcendental qualities, of the "imprint of strangeness," of "not quite belonging to the world" which marks all men; although his first reaction to people is of "wonder" (perhaps denoting a vestigial religious sense), he consciously places his rational judgements before spiritual assessments. As the radical sceptic who regards himself as the measure of all things, the feeling of "wonder" is "trying" and makes for "uneasiness" (pp. 29-30). He reassures himself that it is common to all, and rather than explore "the diversified splendors, the shifts, excitements," he offsets the "strangeness" (p. 30) by concentrating on what is known, mundane.

Joseph may try to repress his sense of wonder and strangeness, but it reasserts itself in the second last journal entry dated April 8. His private revelation of "the ephemeral agreements by which we live and pace ourselves" (p. 190) is kin to the "feeling of strangeness, of not quite belonging to the world" (p. 30) of the December 18 entry. Implicit in both entries is the suggestion that meaning is wrapped in mystery; that we avoid contact with the sublime because it surpasses our comprehension. He

is susceptible to the premise of awe and wonder, to the idea of transcendence, but he chooses not to explore it. Instead he retreats quickly to the "known acceptance" of the everyday, to the "wide agreement" (p. 190) ordinary people share about the nature of reality.

Joseph is unquestionably far removed from conventional or even unconventional belief, but he does not deny outright the existence of God, as I have already indicated. His preoccupation with grace, with divine favour or mercy, suggests a receptivity towards a belief in God: "Grace by what law, under what order, by whom required? Personal, human, or universal, was it (p. 68)?" He longs to accept the hardships of life "with grace, without meanness" (p. 67). He defines as our final aim in life the impulse "to know our purpose, to seek grace" (p. 154). A primary core of religious feeling cannot be suppressed even though there is no conscious acceptance of God, no orthodox participation in ritual or ceremony.

To the simple household chore of cleaning surfaces, sinks, or shoes, Joseph imparts an "importance as a notion of center, of balance, of order" (p. 113) tantamount to a religious rite, and which calls to mind George Herbert's poem "The Elixer", particularly the lines: "Who sweeps a room as for Thy laws / Makes that and the action fine." He himself "grew deeply satisfied" (p. 85) cleaning the family's shoes. For some women, these rituals eventually convey knowledge of "part of the nature of God" (p. 113), but Joseph refuses this knowledge. He is aware of the spiritual in the everyday and he is open to revelations of the ephemeral nature of what we call reality, but he

is not prepared to pursue this awareness.

Although Joseph concurs with contemporary thinking that the major roles played by God and the Devil have shrunk to insignificance, that "the stage has been reset and human beings only walk on it" (p. 89), he is appalled by certain consequences of this recasting. Preoccupied with the "Sense of Personal Destiny" (p. 88), man looks for "salvation" in his own "greatness" (p. 89). Bitterly Joseph cites examples of greatness, which has become synonymous with arrogance, treachery, self-interest and cruelty: the might of the revolutionary, the murderer, the ruler. Since God and the Devil, right and wrong, are now irrelevant, individual advantage is the only consideration. But Joseph knows that the limitless reaching for recognition brings no real fulfilment and leaves people "lifelessly prostrate" (p. 88).

He refuses to pursue "greatness," or to succumb to the equally prevalent pressure to negate the self in a world where man no longer occupies a God-given place. He concentrates on individual moral options in his search for selfhood, rejecting the universal undervaluation of human life which leads to mass suicide, to considering the self "to be of no significance" (p. 119), to accept death during wartime unquestioningly. Although Joseph finds his reasoned alternatives to formal religion to be deficient (his "beliefs are inadequate" [p. 123]), even though he refuses what he considers intellectual suicide, supernatural help, he continues to command a certain moral dignity, to adhere to certain privately defined standards of behaviour.

Can these standards be interpreted as Jewish? Bellow

has not allowed any direct reference to Jews or Judaism into the journal. The portrait presented is that of a universalist, a cultured intellectual, a citizen of the world rather than of one who belongs to a religion or a specific people. Only two entries may have a positive bearing on Joseph as a secularised American Jew. The first is the December 27 entry which recalls his childhood friendship with a German boy, Will Harscha. Liela Goldman discusses the antagonism of Will's mother towards Joseph in terms of German hatred and prejudice towards Jews and the Jewish feeling of guilt for causing this hatred. Alternatively, as Sidra DeKoven Ezrahi points out, the full impact of the Holocaust began to register in America only from the 'fifties onwards, and the incident may have nothing to do with Germany's wartime policies, but might simply be an example of a universal type of anti-Semitism.<sup>41</sup> (Compare the Irish anti-Semitism in James T. Farrell's Studs Lonigan Trilogy.)

The January 26 entry suggests a comparison with the Old Testament Joseph by recording his namesake's dreams. They indicate the conflicting attitudes of the American Jew, geographically but not emotionally untouched by Hitler's atrocities. In his first dream, Joseph is in a slaughterhouse in Bucharest or Constanza. (The Encyclopaedia Judaica records that during a pogrom those arrested "were taken into forests near Bucharest and shot; others were murdered and their bodies hung on meat hooks in the municipal slaughterhouse, bearing the legend 'kosher meat.'")<sup>42</sup> Bellow may have read a report, or have been informed personally about this and similar incidents of the Nazi treatment of Jewish corpses. (Joseph remarks: "I have seen the

pictures" [p. 120].) In the dream, bodies are hanging from hooks, and Joseph has come to identify one. He stresses his neutrality, his part as the "humane emissary" (p. 120), mindful of the warning: "'It's well to put oneself in the clear in something like this'" (p. 120). His careful disinterest suggests a refusal to identify with the victims or to condemn their murderers. He is, after all, in America. But the horror of the dream speaks eloquently of an anguished emotional and psychological identification with European Jewry. It is inherent in the defencelessness of the slaughtered, in the comparison of their bodies to children's. (Ironically, Gehenna, Hell, for Jews, meant the place where pagans practised the human sacrifice of children.) The exaggerated, agonised descriptions of Hell, told to terrify Joseph as a child (p. 121), have become reality.

In the second dream Joseph is no longer neutral. As a sapper, he is dismantling grenade traps, actively involved in the war, disregarding personal danger. This points to his later decision to choose, not neutrality and passivity, but commitment, to enlist. He himself interprets the dreams as premonitions of death while in action.

Numerous critics debate whether Joseph's enlistment registers a surrender, a defeat, or whether it is an affirmation of personal choice. Among the former are Sarah Blacher Cohen, John J. Clayton, Marcus Klein, and Chester Eisinger; Robert Dutton is equivocal, while Ada Aharoni interprets it as an expression of freedom.<sup>43</sup> The ambivalence of the ending may be resolved partially by noting the prevalent tone in the last few journal entries. There is self-directed irony, but no self-abasement or feeling

of shame: "Not even when I tested myself, whispering 'the leash,' reproachfully, did I feel pained or humiliated" (p. 182). Joseph's "breath of relief" (p. 183) is translated into "[u]niversal relief" (p. 187) among his family, and he registers no objection. Having entered the army, he records, without any resentment, that he is now part of a certain group of people, indistinguishable from the other enlisted men drinking at a bar (p. 184), having his blood tested with other new recruits (p. 188). He returns to his reading, with its promise of unexplored ways of being (p. 189).

The tone of the novel's last five lines is in sharp contrast to this acquiescence, particularly the final three phrases:

Hurray for regular hours!  
 And for the supervision of the spirit!  
 Long live regimentation! (p. 191)

Ironic self-castigation, a mockery of his former search for a private definition of freedom are coupled with a derisive snarl directed at the authority he has sought out. It is evident that Joseph's decision is not a facile one, but fraught with conflicting emotions, with tension.

A Sartrean view of Joseph's enlistment might well be that his choice is inauthentic, a passive surrender, rather than a self-creating one. Alternatively, it could be seen in accordance with Sartre's idea that freedom must be directed outside itself, into political commitment for example, if it is to take on meaning.<sup>44</sup> In the latter terms, enlistment would comprise the "action" overcoming alienation.

But again there is the cynical resignation in the tone:

"I am in other hands, relieved of self-determination, freedom cancelled" (p. 191). Might enlistment not be a form of moral cowardice, the resolution of the fear experienced when we try "to govern ourselves"? Then "we choose a master, roll over on our backs and ask for the leash" (p. 167).

Arguing against either Sartrean interpretation of the ending, one might consider the difference in characterization between Roquentin and Joseph. The former is a puppet, lifting intellectual and psychological limbs in obedience to his master's philosophy, while the latter resists complete Existential definition. This occurs when Bellow allows his preoccupation with individual moral choice to widen, to encompass not only a separate, but a social identity. For example, Joseph's attitude towards the war is almost exclusively self-centred, but then a crucial change occurs. Initially, he considers the difference between being a "victim" or a "beneficiary" during wartime (p. 84). He supports the Allies: "between their imperialism and ours, if a full choice were possible, I would take ours" (p. 84). He does not drift unthinkingly into the war as many others do (p. 119), but prepares himself "spiritually" for the army (p. 133). He makes a nice distinction between a willingness to become "a member of the army" (membership implies choice) and not "a part of it" (pp. 133-34), which suggests a questioning of military life. To the Spirit of Alternatives he insists that the war is in no way "essential" to people, that it is incidental to individual spiritual development (p. 168). But he breaks down when confronted with the question of whether he has

a separate destiny (pp. 168-69). This is the crucial point. His subsequent voluntary enlistment may thus be seen as an affirmation of a communal, not an individual morality, a commitment to society. By risking his life, Joseph ensures his humanity, his dignity; while alienation shrivels his communal impulses, turning his potential goodness and sweetness into bitterness and spite.

The moral quality which influences Joseph's thinking in the latter part of his journal could suggest the influence of Bellow's abandoned Judaism. For example, there is a strong movement away from nihilistic thinking, a revival of the life force, implicit in his eagerness for spring to reappear (p. 170). He is aware of its message of "impossible hope and rejuvenation" (p. 172), while the "breath of warm air" after the icy winter is linked with his decision to enlist (p. 183). To achieve this unlikely renewal of faith in himself and in mankind, he needs to commit himself to something other than the self. As Jewish ethical teaching would advise, he chooses to rejoin society. ("Separate not yourself from the community" is a familiar rabbinic dictum.)<sup>45</sup> Again, in accordance with Jewish thinking, which stresses the ordinance to choose, not death and evil, but life and goodness, to see the empirical world as real and significant and life and history as real and meaningful, his choice is the correct one.<sup>46</sup>

## Conclusion

If Dangling Man were Bellow's only novel, it would be impertinent to call him a Jewish novelist. The journal

has little overt Jewish significance. The creation of Joseph as a wholly assimilated American with no hint in speech or background or habits of a Jewish past suggests that in 1944, at a time when it would have been well-nigh impossible to ignore being Jewish, Bellow chose to do so. But one must keep in mind Ezrahi's discussion of the sense of diffidence, of vulnerability, of the Jewish-American writers in the 'forties who feared being singled out as Jews, as well as Norman Podhoretz's observation that Bellow "spoke for and embodied the impulse which had been growing among all the members of the second generation . . . to lay a serious claim to their identity as Americans and to their right to play a more than marginal role in the literary culture of the country."<sup>47</sup> In addition, the emancipation offered alternate interpretations of the self, such as the political definition of Marxism and the psycho-analytical criteria of Freud which novelists could choose to explore. Is Bellow's purpose to prove that the Jew is as human as the gentile, equally capable of angst, of soul-searching, of suffering in an intellectual and spiritual wasteland? Is Joseph the embodiment of a literary era, superbly expressed? Why did Bellow decide to write a war novel that balances on the periphery, but never actually enters the real zones of battle?

Emil L. Fackenheim wrote in 1968 of the strangeness that "until a few years ago Jewish theological thought has observed a nearly total silence on the subject of the holocaust." Among his reasons for this silence are that there is no precedent in Jewish history for the Nazi genocide, that the crime was so appalling that theologians refused

"to rush in where angels fear to tread."<sup>48</sup> Only in 1969 did Bellow choose as his main protagonist a survivor of the Holocaust, and therefore I venture to presume that, like the Jewish theologians, Bellow was unable, during or just after the war, to plunge into a fictitious exploration of what could only have horrified and dismayed his sensibilities and intellect.

Instead, Dangling Man presents the portrait of an assimilated Jew, so at one with his environment that Edmund Wilson called the journal "one of the most honest pieces of testimony on the psychology of a whole generation."<sup>49</sup> It is evidence, contrary to Sartre's assertions that this is well-nigh impossible, of a Jewish writer's success at total cultural and intellectual literary assimilation.<sup>50</sup> Yet simultaneously it is the starting point of a process of ideological evolution which will be discussed in the chapters that follow.

## Chapter Two

### The Victim

"And if you say I am a tough critic, you mean I have a high opinion of what is human. This is my whole idea. More than human, can you have any use for life? Less than human, you don't either."<sup>1</sup>

#### Introduction

Sidra DeKoven Ezrahi, writing about Jewish-American authors' responses to the Holocaust in the nineteen-forties, identifies a "transference of the patterns and fears of anti-Semitism into the American context." This suggests that on one level The Victim may be read as "a probing allegory of the Holocaust as a process whereby prejudice and delusion take possession of the psyche."<sup>2</sup> If this is so, Bellow is exploring the central Jewish experience of the twentieth century--perhaps of history--in 1947, a theme which authors deal with comprehensively only decades later.

His protagonist, Asa Leventhal, eludes definitive classification. The reader who labels him as representative of wasteland ideology is suddenly confronted with his "ghetto psychology" (p. 202), with both its limited tunnel vision and its complementary moral strength. This may reflect an ambivalence in Bellow himself who, though attracted to certain literary and philosophical preoccupations of the time, is clearly allying himself simultaneously with persecuted Jewry. The end of the novel suggests that

assimilation need not be at the cost of Jewish identity.

Certain key occurrences cause Leventhal, a secular Jew seemingly assimilated into the heterogeneous population of New York, to reassess his identity. The first is the absence of his wife, visiting her recently widowed mother in Baltimore. Without her love and support to ballast him, Leventhal finds himself increasingly lonely, isolated in the Existentialist sense, an outsider in his chosen society. Forced into self-awareness through solitude, he is compelled to consider his plight which, particularly in the early chapters of the novel, has much in common with the Existentialist reading of modern man's predicament.<sup>3</sup>

Secondly, an hysterical telephone call from his sister-in-law demands his help because his nephew is seriously ill. By becoming involved in a family tragedy, Leventhal finds himself reconsidering the ideas of duty and responsibility, of family ties, of what have been labelled the "duties of the heart,"<sup>4</sup> of arbitrary punishment and reward.

The third occurrence is the reappearance of Kirby Allbee, an acquaintance who appears out of nowhere to accuse him of causing his downfall to revenge a grudge. His intrusion into Leventhal's privacy provokes the latter to weigh up conflicting ideas of responsibility and its abrogation. It exposes him to evil via a maliciously manipulated relationship, to consider whether a man is guilty of that which he did not intend, to reassess the role of the sufferer. It casts him as both victim and victimizer.

Allbee's accusation is directed against Leventhal because he is a Jew. His anti-Semitism brings Leventhal's Jewishness into sharp focus as he reassesses his identity.

Is he successfully assimilated in the New World? If he is Allbee's victimizer, could he not be asserting the right of the American citizen to fight for survival in capitalist New York? Or is his Jewishness, the most important part of his moral being, an ineradicable component of his personality? Is it not evident in his additional role as Allbee's victim, as the submissive Jew who accepts his suffering as scapegoat of the nations?

Allbee's anti-Semitism is the catalyst that causes Leventhal to confront his position as an assimilated Jew in America. Involuntarily he evokes the values of a vestigial Judaism, juxtaposing them with the alienation and nihilism of certain Existentialist theories, the philosophies of contemporary man released from religion. By the end of the novel he is no longer a man avoiding the essential questions of identity and causality, but one who is becoming interested in metaphysical enquiry.

#### Leventhal as Wastelander

In Dangling Man, the chief protagonist, Joseph, displays certain symptoms associated with alienation: isolation, anxiety, restlessness. His careful diarization of his psychological and mental states informs the reader that Joseph is aware of his condition. In The Victim, Leventhal exhibits similar characteristics. They indicate that he is part of what Nathan Glazer calls "a systemic alienation involved in modern social organization as we know it."<sup>5</sup> But, unlike Joseph, Leventhal does not subject his psychological condition to self-scrutiny. His alienation

manifests itself in physiological, psychological and behavioural symptoms which he is unwilling to diagnose.

When he is in the company of his wife Mary, who loves him, he forgets to feel "nervous, restive and unwell" (p. 59). But when she leaves him to visit her recently widowed mother, her absence allows the dormant feelings of physical dis-ease, of insecurity and anxiety to surface. For certain Existentialists, the primary "ontological" feelings of anxiety, hypochondria, and boredom indicate the grimmer aspects of the Existential condition.<sup>6</sup> Leventhal is prey to all three. He feels amorphous anxieties--he is disliked at the office, continually unsure of personal relationships with people such as the Willistons (a WASP couple he respects), and fearful of having made a bad impression on first meeting acquaintances, with Dr Denisart and Shifcart, for example. His attempts at finding specific causes for his anxiety--his job provides no tenure, his past life has been ugly and hard--evade the true source: a desolating sense of rootlessness. His hypochondria manifests itself mainly away from work:

Since Mary's departure his nerves had been unsteady. He kept the bathroom light burning all night. . . . This was absurd, this feeling that he was threatened by something while he slept. And that was not all. He imagined that he saw mice darting along the walls. . . . He was sure he was unwell (p. 26).

His heart beats "thickly" (p. 24); his nerves are unreliable. Dressing, he is "suddenly powerless to move and fearfully hampered in his breathing" (p. 209). Like Sartre's Roquentin, he takes no pleasure in his physical existence.<sup>7</sup> Leventhal's purposelessness, the inertia indistinguishable from fatigue

or boredom which overwhelms him when he is free of office routine, closely resembles the state described by Heidegger, in which "we are equally removed from despair and joy, and everything about us seems so hopelessly commonplace that we no longer care whether anything is or is not."<sup>8</sup> This feeling is more than the fear of an empty weekend, more than mere unoccupied time passing slowly in the lonely flat. It attests to an inner emptiness and powerlessness. It is an acknowledgement of meaningless existence, undirected by social or religious norms.

Leventhal's pessimism, his depression, his real or simulated indifference towards himself and others strengthen the suggestion, particularly in the opening chapters of the novel, that he is floundering in a senseless and absurd society. Initially he displays no clear guidelines for thought or actions, no desire to formulate a personal or social set of rules. He is the prey of disconnected urges, responsive only to his own inadequate perceptions. His impulsive, arbitrary actions, such as running to answer the summons of his sister-in-law, Elena, leave him "bitterly irritated" (p. 9). He condemns his behaviour when under pressure as that of "a fool" (p. 25). His career has not been planned, and is the result of accidental, haphazard success. After "beginning to drift" (p. 18), he finds an assortment of jobs. He resigns from the customs house, cutting "himself adrift" (p. 20) and arrives in New York with no position confirmed. Having begun job-hunting "in a spirit of utter hopelessness" (p. 21), he eventually lands a job with Burke-Beard and Company. Later he confesses to Mary, "'I was lucky. I got away with it'" (p. 22).

The random pattern of Leventhal's life seems to show in microcosm the lack of a grand design, of a planned meaning to life that lies beyond existence.

Universal meaninglessness is also mirrored in Leventhal's idea of personal invalidity. His wife diagnoses his "illness" as a lack of self-confidence, as his being "'not sure of [himself]'" (p. 49). Her absence allows his pessimism, a private nihilism which complements a universal nothingness, to engulf him. His lack of a positive self-image corresponds to the de-individualisation suggested by the over-crowding in the city, in streets, lifts, restaurants and cafeterias, the packed park, the "thronged" zoo (p. 91). Asa is indistinguishable from countless others, purposely self-effacing, a "faceless man of the masses."<sup>9</sup> His insignificance offers itself as an insignia of urban life. To be singled out from the anonymity of the crowd surprises or embarrasses him. For example, when Harkavy hails him in the cafeteria on Fourteenth Street, he fails to hear him (p. 103). In a subsequent restaurant scene, he misinterprets a detaining arm as the accidental movement of a stranger, not as a gesture of friendship from Williston (pp. 171-72).

Bellow's description of the city, its hostile abrasiveness, its pressures, acts as a metaphor for the general state of alienation. The city is overpowering, treacherous, incomprehensible. New York is crowded with "barbaric fellahin" (p. 9), a stupefied throng dazed by the chaos it has created. Its essence is its masses, physically jostling with Asa, or subtly pervading his subconscious. He is penetrated "by a sense not merely of the crowd in the park but of innumerable millions, crossing, touching,

pressing" (p. 151). Later Allbee remarks bitterly: "There are a hundred million others who want that very same damn thing. I don't care whether it's a sandwich or a seat in the subway or what" (p. 159). Amid this impersonal enmity, Asa must achieve "consciousness".

He fears the city. Its aggression is directed against him by its impersonal opposition. A "concussion of cars, like hammer blows" (p. 86) assaults him en route to the subway; exhaust fumes "[catch] him in the face" (p. 124); his nerves are ripped by "a tearing of gears" (p. 124). His reaction to urban living is aggressive, overwrought. He slams at a moving bus with his open hand (p. 146), forces back a train door (p. 9), forces his way through a crowd, even when dreaming (p. 138). He pushes himself into his clothes "violently" (p. 11); he "unavoidably" (p. 12) pushes against his little known nephew; eventually he pushes against Allbee "with all the force of his powerful arms" (p. 68). His aggression, similar to Joseph's in this regard, may be an unconscious attempt to confirm his identity in a society which is largely unconscious of his existence. It also suggests a blind battering against an inimical, uncaring universe. His emotional response is a protective neutrality. He has schooled himself to be unfeeling and incurious towards himself and others, nurturing a crustaceous impassivity, and so revealing a lack of accommodation, an unresponsiveness. The indifference he attributes to Millican, a colleague, is actually his own. Apprehensive of the life around him, he withdraws "like a shellfish down in the wet sand" (p. 163), thus approximating "the faceless and anonymous hero. . . . The man without an identity."<sup>10</sup>

That Leventhal is close to an acceptance of an absurd universe is evident in the similarities between him and Allbee, whose alienated qualities remain constant throughout the novel. The face of the absurd universe is revealed in Allbee's concept of human insignificance, in his sense of the futility of individual effort: "'Now it's all blind movement, vast movement, and the individual is shuttled back and forth'" (p. 62). When Allbee professes that the world is one of irrefutable contingency where "'if' swings us around the ears like rabbits" (p. 166), Leventhal does not contradict him. He shares Allbee's belief in the arbitrary dealings of fate, attributing both his jobs to chance (pp. 22, 230). He cannot understand how a less fortunate person can envy him, as "neither man had made the arrangements" (p. 69). Allbee's image of people, "'one day we're like full bundles and the next we're wrapping paper, blowing around the streets'" (p. 67), evokes a wasteland of futile existence. Nihilism and despair, not love and hope, are his credo: ". . . most people count on dying" (p. 159). Leventhal's statement that people are full of fear, "fear of death, of life more than of death, perhaps" (p. 128), endorses Allbee's idea of human wretchedness.

Williston remarks that "there were ministers in [Allbee's] family, influences to throw off" (p. 39). In addition to discarding temperance, Allbee has forsworn God and the Christian faith. He dismisses the spiritual quality of man, stressing only the creaturely. "'You mustn't forget you're an animal'" (p. 166), he says, and emphasises that ". . . we're not gods, we're only creatures" (p. 67). Accepting that he is "mulish" and will die like an animal (p. 185)

he questions the Catholic idea that the "'world was created for me,'" and that each soul is "'absolutely required, not only now, but forever'" (p. 159). He understands John the Baptist's charge to repent, to seek self-knowledge, but will not seek his own salvation. Recalling the Oracle of Delphi, he observes: "'Know thyself! Everybody knows but nobody wants to admit. . . . we keep our eyes shut'" (p. 184). The result is the inhuman quality of indifference, an impassivity in the face of suffering which scars him with the mark of modernity. With a multitude of others he will "die like animals" (p. 185), the quarry, not the huntsman, of himself.

Allbee displays certain characteristics which confirm the negative aspects of existence. These include his failed or discontinued relationships (with his wife and with the Willistons); his real physical suffering and grief for that wife who was killed in a car accident--her memory brings a "terrible look of pain . . . to his eyes (p. 237)"--his absurd aspirations to being a banker, broker, preliminary scenario writer, and the actual limitation of his possibilities. Leventhal responds acutely to these misfortunes of Allbee, but more important is the pessimism and despair, the atmosphere of dread and hopelessness Allbee conveys: "Leventhal felt Allbee's presence . . . like a great tiring weight, and looked at him with dead fatigue" (p. 186). Kierkegaard describes a similar dread as the cancellation of all expectation: "'If a man remains without possibilities, it is as if he lacked air.'"<sup>11</sup> And Bellow often describes Leventhal, under Allbee's influence, as "fearfully hampered in his breathing" (p. 209), although he does not present him as a man without hope.

Allbee never moves beyond the negative cynicism of one who inhabits a moral wasteland. Through him, Leventhal becomes aware of the dangers of absurdity. He perceives that if he continues to act as Allbee does, he will be "countering absurdity with absurdity, and madness with madness" (p. 92). Like him, Leventhal no longer practises his religion, but unlike him, he cannot throw off the traditional moral and ethical influences of his Jewish background which strongly oppose the idea of an absurd universe.

By allowing the moral dynamics in Leventhal to illustrate alternatives to wasteland philosophies, Bellow seems consciously to be breaking with an attitude of despondency, both literary and actual, encouraged by Existentialist thinking and writing. Leventhal is initially alienated, both in a philosophical and psychological sense and also socially, as a second generation Jew in New York. His regeneration, the emergence of a more vital life force, of a less selfish enquiry and interest and concern in people other than himself, augurs a new hope for those who are doubly alienated, and expresses a qualified optimism unusual in post-war European or American literature. Precisely because Leventhal displays so many of the characteristics of the wastelander (particularly in the first chapters of the novel), the changes in his behaviour, attitudes and thinking are doubly significant. They stress the moral resilience of the Jew, both to the obvious danger of anti-Semitism embodied in Allbee (whose name contains an ominous play on "all beings"), and to the less evident seductiveness of philosophies unexplored before the Jewish emancipation from ghetto life.

In order to prove this contention it is necessary to examine various aspects of Leventhal's Jewishness: his reactions to anti-Semitism; his role as victim and victimizer; how his assimilation compares with that of his brethren; and, finally, the essentially Jewish nature of his moral enlargement.

#### "Anti-Semite and Jew"

It seems likely that Bellow was reacting to Sartre's "Réflexions sur la Question Juive" (1946) when he wrote The Victim (1947), for his depictions of Leventhal, a Jew, and of Allbee, an anti-Semite, show marked parallels to Sartre's prototypes. (He was living in Paris on a Guggenheim scholarship at the time.)<sup>12</sup> In his initial depiction of Leventhal, certain resemblances to Sartre's Jew are evident. The latter defines the Jew, not by feature, or religion, but by his being considered so by other men, and Leventhal is certainly viewed in the latter terms by certain characters in the novel. He is jerked into an awareness of being Jewish by anti-Semitic remarks. They begin with the comment of his boss, Mr Beard, that he, "like the rest of his brethren" (p. 11), takes unfair advantage. They are continued vitriolically by Allbee: Jews, "you people" (pp. 30, 117, 123, 186), prefer talking to physical violence; Jews are responsible for a "sort of Egyptian darkness" (p. 121) in which Allbee is floundering; Jews place self-interest above all else (p. 123).

Beard's remarks, in keeping with Sartre's ideas, suggest

that he merely tolerates the Jew he employs. He does not consider Asa an assimilated American, and Allbee's continued attacks likewise suggest that the Jew is essentially unassimilable. He is never accepted as a man, but is always singled out as a Jew. Sarah Blacher Cohen, discussing Leventhal's Jewishness, contends that he becomes what Sartre calls the "inauthentic Jew," poisoned by the stereotype that others have of him.<sup>13</sup> Sartre defines the "inauthentic Jew" as one who runs away from his situation, who denies his intolerable isolation and responsibilities. His implicit aim is to destroy a Jewish reality, to escape its limitations.<sup>14</sup>

In the opening chapters of the novel, it is not Leventhal's Jewishness, but his positive attempts at assimilation, to be accepted as an American, which predominate. He dismisses Beard's anti-Semitism as "not important, merely disgusting" (p. 25). That this is a continuation of an earlier attitude is suggested by his "shrug[ging] off" (p. 39) of Allbee's anti-Semitic remarks at one of the Willistons' parties years ago and thinking so little of them that he subsequently asked Allbee for an introduction to Rudiger, for a job interview. Unlike his Italian sister-in-law, whose old-world fear of hospitals he derides ("'[d]on't be such a peasant, Elena!'" (p. 15)), and unlike her mother, whose influence on Max's family he considers primitive (p. 155), Leventhal sees himself as an enlightened American.

In many ways he manifests the Jewish inferiority complex which Sartre says is created when a Jew chooses to live inauthentically.<sup>15</sup> He fears a blacklist in the newspaper trade, although his friend Harkavy gives the assurance that Rudiger can't persecute him (p. 43). He imputes

to Elena's mother a judgement on the Jew, "a man of wrong blood, of bad blood" (p. 56), because her grandson has died. He interprets Mr Beard's mild comment on his brother's "mixed marriage" (p. 45) as being anti-Semitic. He even suspects Williston of siding against him and championing Allbee's cause "because he [Leventhal] was a Jew" (p. 79).

Sartre suggests that the "inauthentic Jew" may be forced into masochism. Because he is humiliated and despised and treated as an object, he may come to think of himself as an inanimate thing, and thus absolve himself of his responsibilities.<sup>16</sup> The indifference which Leventhal displays is surely one of his main defence mechanisms in a hostile society. It deadens both his sensitivity to insults and towards his own self-awareness. It becomes an outward cloak, affording Leventhal the "appearance of composure" (p. 46) he hides under, guarding him from others' suffering and from his own.

Thus Leventhal illustrates Sartre's theories about Jews and Allbee similarly exemplifies his perception of anti-Semitism. In Allbee Bellow has created a spokesman for racial prejudice fearfully reminiscent of the voice of Nazi Germany. S. Lillian Kremer notes that "Allbee's language and imagery correspond to the Nazi propaganda of the 1930's."<sup>17</sup> Allbee himself frequently explains to Leventhal that his insults aren't meant to be personal, but theoretical, partly a joke (p. 132), partly a habit (p. 236). Kremer compares Allbee's insistence on the growing Jewish presence in American civilization to the Nazi accusation that the Jews were dominating German life.<sup>18</sup> He presumes that the Jews are "right at home in this" (p. 119), that they survive and thrive

like salamanders in the flames of New York. They have usurped the authority of the "old breeds" (p. 121), Allbee's ancestors, after whom the streets are named. Instead of the descendents of Governor Winthrop, "the children of Caliban" (p. 121) are running everything.

Commenting on the declining power of the White Anglo-Saxon Protestant élite group from the end of the nineteenth century, Michael Selzer notes that one form their frustration took was an acute aristocratic distaste for the Jews. He writes that the

urbanization and industrialization of America brought about a vicious populist reaction against 'big city' capitalism that pitted the virtues of Jacksonian pastoralism against the vices of an allegedly Jewish modernity during the first quarter of the twentieth century.<sup>19</sup>

Allbee's language illustrates Selzer's point. Mourning his supposed economic displacement by the Jews, he accuses them of acting only for profit, for "percentage" (p. 123), of making their spirit their "business assistant" (p. 123). Later he talks of making a deal with Leventhal, of accepting a "settlement" (p. 188); as he has resigned himself to the loss of his original position of "stockholder" (p. 189) in American civilization. His metaphors are maligning and recall the Shylock caricature of the Jew: grasping, calculating, conniving, heartless towards the gentile in business. He echoes Sartre's anti-Semite, identifying a Jewish will to dominate the world in a Jewish takeover of American business (p. 64).

Like the Nazis, who forbade Jews to be involved actively in German culture (the Nuremberg Laws of 1935), and like

Sartre's anti-Semite, who believes that the art and culture of the country in which a Jew finds himself can never be truly assimilated by the sojourner, Allbee accuses the Jews of polluting the American cultural heritage and wishes them out of it. He resents the fact that a Jew, Lipschitz, has presumed to write a book on the American Transcendentalists, Thoreau and Emerson. He objects to Jews singing "American" songs (which, ironically, include Negro spirituals). "'You have to be born to them,'" he says (p. 38). Jews should confine themselves to their own music, "any Jewish song" (p. 38), not sully the birthright of Americans. Cultural exclusiveness is linked to racial superiority, which the Nazis translated into the "final solution". Leventhal understands this. "'Millions of us have been killed'" (p. 123) is his anguished response to one of Allbee's outbursts. Allbee is similarly capable of murdering a Jew. "[H]e could have killed me" (p. 222), notes Leventhal, after Allbee has tried to asphyxiate him, emulating the method used in the camps.

Yet Bellow's anti-Semite is not a generalised disembodiment of prejudice. He is depicted as an individual, convincingly human, realistic, pathetic. At their first meeting, when he denies being related to Leventhal--"'By blood? No, no . . . heavens!'" (p. 29)--he is expressing a personal disgust at the thought of being "contaminated". That Leventhal is a Jew is of paramount importance to Allbee, far outweighing any similarities they might share as alienated individuals. What he says in general about the usurping Jews and the economically displaced Protestants in New York applies in particular to Leventhal and himself. He blames Leventhal for

a calculated maliciousness, alleging that in revenge for anti-Semitic remarks he passed at a party, Leventhal plotted his dismissal by Rudiger. This marks the start of his deterioration, while subsequently (but by no means as a result of Allbee's downfall) Leventhal has been successful.

His anti-Semitism is a chosen passion, virulent and venomous. Like Sartre's prototype, he affirms his membership of an élite by treating Leventhal as an inferior. He presumes a superiority based on birth, not on personal merit, and imagines that wealth and social prominence and leadership are his birthright (p. 121), so fitting Sartre's description of the Jew-hater as the man who is afraid, not of the Jews, but of his own inadequacies, of change, of society, and ultimately, of the human condition. Because of his fears, Allbee needs his anti-Semitism. If he could not blame his downfall on the Jew, he might be forced to find its cause within himself. Only once, in a drunken mood of self-pity, does Allbee say "I am to blame, I know it" (p. 161).

He is sadistically attracted to Leventhal and an ambivalent love-hate relationship develops. When he praises "'good old Leventhal! Kindhearted Leventhal, you deep Hebrew . . .'" (p. 160), his compliments conceal a mocking quality. Drawn to finger his enemy's hair, he rationalizes that he does so "'just to satisfy my curiosity'" (p. 183). Sadism is kin to the criminal instinct which Sartre affirms is "in the very depths of {the} heart" of the anti-Semite, whose ultimate aim is "the death of the Jew."<sup>20</sup> Even this extreme trait is exhibited by Allbee when he almost murders Leventhal by deliberately turning on the gas in his apartment.

A concept that Sartre fails to note or explore and

one which Bellow underlines emphatically is the unerring knowledge the anti-Semite displays of the Jew's responsiveness, his sensitivity to the accusations and sufferings of others that far exceeds the obligations of everyday intercourse. It is not by accident that Allbee decides on Leventhal for help (Williston is in a much stronger position to offer it), but because his instinct is to lean on the scapegoat of ancient times. The "guilt" of the Jew lies in his susceptibility, his responsiveness to the plight of others, his need to refute the stereotype fostered by the Allbees of this world. He is the victim of his own generous impulses, and thus of whatever demand his fellowman may make of him. A darker dynamic of the relationship involves the "knowledge" the Jew-hater has that his victim feels guilty (which recalls Kafka's The Trial), and the latter's reciprocal defensiveness at being considered guilty of an unspecified or an unjust charge. (Unjust allegations against the Jews in the Middle Ages include their "using blood, desecrating the Host, poisoning wells;"<sup>21</sup> that they killed Christ, and ritually slaughter a Christian child every Passover.<sup>22</sup> In the eighteenth century they were denied entry into the modern world in Europe because of a supposed "antipathy to science and culture, a preference for trade, a preoccupation with money.")<sup>23</sup>

The Jew is expected to behave better than his tormentor while he is being reviled for being worse. Allbee sneers at the Jews, mocking their material success, insulting their customs, putting them beyond the pale of gentlemanly honour. Yet the code of behaviour he demands from Leventhal is far finer than his own. His code does not seem to interfere with his inhuman tormenting of the Jew he accuses

of betraying human values. The "damages" (p. 119) he asks for (while denying that he does) are far in excess of any standards of objective bookkeeping.

Sartre's anti-Semite holds that the Jewish belief in free will is a licence to be evil, that the Jew is to blame for all the malevolence in the world.<sup>24</sup> (This misinterprets the Jewish belief that evil, outside man, tempts him, but the sages are optimistic that he will choose good.)<sup>25</sup> Bellow's presentation of Leventhal questions Sartre's contention. He is depicted as being capable of evil, of having inadvertently hurt Allbee, but he is by no means the devil incarnate. It is Allbee, the lapsed Christian, whose "fallen nature" (p. 219) has no trouble in asserting that "evil is as real as sunshine" (p. 123). Allbee's own corruption is such that he wonders "if anybody is innocent" (pp. 180-81). He epitomizes falsehood though his posturing, acting, lying.

It is Allbee who forces Leventhal to confront evil, both in himself (to accept culpability for Allbee's fall) and in society. So far Leventhal has avoided this knowledge, hiding behind an innocence which is "almost a sin" (p. 76). When he inadvertently witnesses a woman caught in adultery by her husband, he draws the shade (p. 81). But Allbee guides him into a knowledge of "a depth of life in which he himself would be lost, choked, ended. There lay horror, evil, all that he had kept himself from" (p. 224). But, surprising Allbee with a prostitute, he confronts and finally expels him from his apartment. Bellow's Jew is thus taught to recognise and acknowledge evil committed by a gentile, not vice versa, and to reject it.

Leventhal's association with Allbee forces him to "choose" himself as a Jew, to realise his Jewish condition. He moves away from an "inauthentic" identity which separated him from the community and alienated him from the traditional values of his people. To reject his heritage was to reject himself. Acceptance of "authenticity" ends his alienation. It is a moral choice and his actions indicate increasingly that Leventhal has accepted the social responsibility which is the core of being Jewish. In addition, he recognises a moral responsibility towards himself on which his personal dignity is incumbent. Leviticus 19.18 may urge one to love one's neighbour, but not more than oneself, not at the expense of one's self-esteem.<sup>26</sup> In reply to the question of identity, his previous, alienated reply would have been "I am I", that is, I am solely responsible for my morality, my actions. Now his response would be closer to the traditional Jewish answer: "I am the son of my father", that is, I inherit or am influenced by my parents' opinions and moral standards.<sup>27</sup>

Leventhal's own father did not consider himself alienated from his society, nor was he alienated from himself or from the world of affairs. It was his contempt for the gentiles with whom he was forced to do business, and not their opinion of him, that excluded them from his private life. Leventhal now identifies with his father's thinking. At Mickey's funeral, the "chapel displeased him. . . . it was peculiar, after so many generations, to have this. Prompted by an indistinct feeling, he thought to himself, 'Never mind, thanks, we'll manage by ourselves . . .'" (p. 148). His parent's contempt for the gentile now permeates his own attitude, for example his scorn for Beard's moralising, and he repeats

his father's phrase with all its irony: "Grosser philosoph" (p. 162).

That he has returned to "ghetto psychology" (p. 202) is evident in his opinion of Disraeli. He sees him as the prototype of the "inauthentic" Jew whose "boundless ambition" proves both the Jew's wish for recognition as a man amongst men and the actual failure, in Leventhal's opinion, of these aspirations.<sup>28</sup> The gentiles never forgot Disraeli's origins. He was "the monkey on John Bull's chest" (p. 108), "[d]er alter Jude" before being "der Mann" (p. 109). He objects to Disraeli's breaking the archetypal pattern (scorned by Harkavy) of the Jew as spiritual, not political leader in the world: "'Jews and empires? . . . It never seemed right to me'" (p. 108). He dislikes what he imagines to be Disraeli's attitude towards his Jewishness, likening it to "a weakness" (p. 110) which has to be overcome.

Leventhal's growing Jewish awareness stands out in relief against the determined and seemingly effortless assimilation of certain fellow Jews, his companions at a café luncheon, for example. The latter have exchanged an "out-dated" world view for a popular American definition of human life, suggested by their satisfaction with the inadequacies of Livia Hall, the actress. Goldstone (whose name obviously alludes to materialism) and Harkavy do not question their own assimilation, and show themselves eager to affirm the complete integration of Disraeli, "'an authentic Englishman, if citizenship stands for anything'" (p. 108). Shifcart's name ("ship ticket" in Yiddish) suggests the wandering, insecure, unwelcome Jew, and is in ironic contrast to his avid assumption of Hollywood norms and his ostensible ease

in his new surroundings. He now promotes an image of womanhood which devalues the quality of being human, but which can be marketed successfully (pp. 105-07).

Harkavy, when younger, seemed unaware that his party imitations were in fact caricatures of certain Jewish mannerisms and provoked the delighted interest of racists like Allbee (pp. 37-38). But later his reaction to Allbee's blatant anti-Semitism is a cold fury towards Leventhal for allowing the situation to develop: "'Next thing I know he sounds like the Protocols, but it's all right with you. . . . Influence with Jews!'" he shouted (p. 213). Harkavy, unthinkingly sure of his overt assimilation and intrinsic Jewishness, dislikes the threat to both implicit in the Allbee-Leventhal relationship.

His self-assurance resembles that of Mary, Leventhal's wife, whose origins, whether Jewish or gentile, Bellow never clarifies. Her confidence could betoken the fully assimilated Jewess, while her name suggests a Christian background. Mary writes intimacies on postcards, unconcerned who, besides her husband, may read them. Harkavy, too, accepts that "'I have to take myself as I am or push off'" (p. 76). Neither seems alienated from either their society or their roots. Unlike her husband, Mary is not thrown into confusion by a random anti-Semitic remark made by one of the audience at a movie. An inner security makes possible "the value of staying cool" (p. 124). Similarly, Harkavy's spontaneous reaction to Leventhal's premonitions of anti-Semitism in both Williston and Allbee is to dismiss it summarily: "'Oh, you're way off, boy, way off'" (p. 78).

Shifcart and Goldstone, Harkavy and Mary are far closer

to Sartre's definition of the "inauthentic Jew", but they display none of the unease or anxiety Sartre links with this prototype. It is Leventhal, insecure and acutely self-conscious, who displays characteristics which suggest a Jewish inferiority complex. It is he who thinks he is victimized. The historical and religious implications of the Jew as victim, as scapegoat of the nations, is unexplored by Sartre, but accentuated by Bellow, as the title of his novel suggests. Sartre narrows the Jewish role of victim to a foil for the man who chooses the non-human, who needs a scapegoat in order to realize his own negativity, and who would be equally satisfied to persecute a black or a man with a yellow skin. In addition, the persecutor often portrays himself as the victim: "Die Juden sind unser unglück," are the words of Heinrich von Treitschke.<sup>29</sup> But the Bible contains a prophecy, borne out by history, that God's chosen are to suffer guiltlessly: "Know of a surety that thy seed shall be a stranger in a land that is not theirs, and shall serve them; and they shall afflict them . . ." (Genesis 15.13). This inscrutable divine decree (gezeira in Hebrew) is an indirect result of the decree of creation, of divine long-suffering with man in spite of his sins. The choice for the chosen is either acceptance of the divine experience with its attendant burden, or non-existence.<sup>30</sup> Isaiah 53 describes the martyrdom of Israel throughout the centuries, while the calculated near-genocide in the twentieth century placed Jewish suffering on a level difficult for those exempt from it even to imagine.

Zephyra Porat places Leventhal in this religious and historical context. As the victim,

Leventhal mildly and meekly turns the other cheek to his loud-mouthed, aggressive Christian persecutor Allbee, as if whosoever would be a Jew must conquer his aggressive drives, must refrain from avenging insult and injury, must sacrifice himself, love his enemy.<sup>31</sup>

It appears that Leventhal's carefully developed role as victim supports her contention. At their first meeting, he flatly denies any responsibility for Allbee--"What an idea!" (p. 34). At their second encounter, his conventional mutter of sympathy, "'I'm sorry'" (p. 64), is twisted into the acknowledgement of a "charge" (p. 65). Their third meeting is dominated by Allbee's virulent anti-Semitic attack which leaves Leventhal "uncomprehending and horrified" (p. 123). But by turning and walking away, he leaves Allbee victor of this altercation. His subsequent submission to Allbee's will is clear when he allows Allbee to move into his apartment and defile it with a physical and moral corruption that is "'nasty, twisted, bitchy, dirty'" (p. 170). Initially he refuses to consider "a deal" (p. 157), Allbee's idea of "a settlement" (p. 188), but later wavers under the determined pressure of his victimizer. Their changing relationship seems to prove that Allbee has the whiphand. Leventhal emerges as the victim, not only of an isolated anti-Semitic incident, but, by implication, as the scapegoat of historical necessity.

At the same time, however, he is cast as the victim of ironic circumstance. His aggression towards Rudiger (when the latter refused to employ him) unwittingly set in motion the course of events which contributed to Allbee's downfall: the loss of his job, his uncontrolled drinking, his estrangement from his wife, her accidental death, and

his subsequent deterioration. That Leventhal is a Jew compounds the irony, as Leslie Fiedler has been quick to note. He points out the ambiguity of Bellow's title, unexplored by Porat: Bellow is not "'content with the simple equation: the victim equals the Jew, the Jew the victim,'" but "'has had the imagination and the sheer nerve to portray the Jew, the Little Jew, as victimizer as well as victim.'"<sup>32</sup> It is precisely because Leventhal has caused--however unwittingly--Allbee's present degradation, precisely because he comes to accept responsibility for his downfall, that he allows Allbee to browbeat him. As victimizer, he repudiates the role assigned to him by Porat. Inseparably intertwined with his submission to his persecutor is his actual power as the original victimizer.

The ambivalence of Allbee's and Leventhal's shared roles as victim and victimizer is stressed in the presentation of Leventhal as Allbee's "duplicated" identity in the psychological sense. While retaining a clear awareness of Allbee's viciousness, Leventhal nonetheless develops "a curious emotion of closeness--for it was an emotion" (p. 133) for his victimizer. He abhors Allbee's drinking, his dirtiness, the filth he leaves behind in the apartment (p. 169). Yet, moving towards an identification with Allbee, he displays similar reprehensible qualities. He, too, is slovenly in dress and habits, he also gets drunk and sleeps away from home. He seems to ape Allbee's outward behaviour unconsciously. But the latter's presence also forces him to an unwilling confrontation with the darker depths within himself, to face what "everybody knows but nobody wants to admit" (p. 184), the admission of his own imperfection.

Bellow has further complicated the equation by presenting Leventhal not only as the victim and the victimizer, but by adding to his other roles that of indifferent bystander, a role given prominence by Elie Wiesel more than two decades later. Wiesel writes that "[d]own deep . . . man is not only an executioner, not only a victim, not only a spectator; he is all three at once."<sup>33</sup> Leventhal's indifference is the protection of contemporary man in a moral wasteland; his role as victim, the heritage of the children of Israel; while that of victimizer could perhaps anticipate the largely defensive tactics now practised by the Israelis.

Porat (herself an Israeli) contends that for Bellow Judaism and violence are mutually exclusive, that Bellow sees the Jew as the Christian does, as "the true Lamb of God, the true victim."<sup>34</sup> Earl Rovit has a similar idea of the "cautious" position of the Jews, who prefer vacillation and dread to fighting the evils of life.<sup>35</sup> Their censure disregards the Jewish tradition which reveres, not the courage and manliness of the Western ideal as portrayed by Hemingway, but righteousness and wisdom. ("The Midrash . . . extols David the singer of psalms rather than the slayer of Goliath.")<sup>36</sup>

When attempting to "place" Bellow's stand on Jewish aggression, one needs to remember that he is a Diaspora Jew, whose survival, unlike the Israelis', is not contingent on protecting a homeland, and that The Victim was written twenty years before the 1967 Six Day War. Bellow's attitude towards Israel, which lives "with the nightmare of annihilation," where Jews can't "take their right to live for granted," is clear in To Jerusalem and Back (1976). Here both an

admiration for Israeli achievement and the fear that the Israelis have not yet "burst from historical sleep" to confront the reality of possible extinction are shown.<sup>37</sup>

But to return to The Victim, is Bellow's presentation of Leventhal that of a "true victim", of a man totally opposed to physical violence? Indisputably, Leventhal's first confrontation with Allbee indicates that the impulse towards violence (his imaginary assaults if Allbee "starts something" [p. 27] or follows him home [p. 33]), is held in check by social constraints and a heritage of non-violence. His planned physical violence ("'. . . I'll punch him in the jaw. I'll knock him down . . . . I swear, I'll throw him down and smash his ribs for him!" [p. 34]) indicates the frustration of the weak who fear aggression in others.

But when Allbee actually lays hands on Leventhal at their next meeting, he defends himself: "He pushed Allbee with all the force of his powerful arms. He fell against the wall with an impact that sickened Leventhal" (p. 68). Although violence "sickens" Leventhal and takes Allbee by surprise--"[t]hat's not how you people go about things. Not with violence'" (p. 30)--the former is finally turned into the aggressor by Allbee's immoral behaviour. Leventhal ultimately evicts his tormentor from his apartment with physical force. "Leventhal pushed him. . . . made a rush at him. . . . Pinning his arms, he wheeled him around. . . . [and] thrust him out on the landing" (p. 221).

Later Allbee returns to kill the Jew by asphyxiation. Previously accused of avoiding danger, of "keeping his spirit under lock and key" (p. 123) like the rest of his people, Leventhal struggles with his would-be murderer

in mortal combat, acting in accordance with the idea of a Jewish God as a "vengeful God . . . who ordered his people, if a man seeks your life, take his first."<sup>38</sup> The fight also recalls Genesis 32.24-28, when Jacob wrestled with Samael, a prince of darkness. Rabbi Solomon Ephraim Luntschitz equates the angel with a trait in Jacob's personality which he must confront and conquer so that spiritual resilience may be established.<sup>39</sup> Similarly, if the fight is given a psychological interpretation, Leventhal must overcome certain weaknesses, must wrestle with the dark forces of his alter ego, in order to gain moral strength.

Leventhal finally expels Allbee from his apartment, breaking forever their intimate association and exorcising himself of the roles of victim, victimizer, and indifferent bystander. No longer is he a victim, as he has answered Allbee conclusively with brute force, with the language that "was all they understood" (p. 124). Nor can he be the victimizer, as Allbee's attempt to kill him outweighs any previous harm he might have caused Allbee. The actions the above-mentioned roles have forced him into effectively shatter his earlier passivity with regard to himself and society. In this scene, a kind of parable, Bellow might be suggesting what Porat contends he does not: that retaliation of force such as practised by the Israelis may be the only answer to anti-Semitism. Yet the novel does not suggest conclusively that this is so.

At odds with the idea of violence is the halting development of Leventhal's "second sight", of a moral and metaphysical awareness that is rooted in the ethical teachings

and behaviour of his Jewish ancestors, which belie self-interest and violence. The enlargement of his morality, his tentative assertion of values suggests, in Sartre's terminology, that Leventhal is "choosing" himself as a Jew.<sup>40</sup> His "choice of authenticity" is a moral decision which allows him an ethical security far superior to that gained temporarily by violence. The breadth of Jewish morality hinted at in the characterization of Leventhal goes a long way towards refuting Sartre's charge of the Jew as one whose religion has dissolved over twenty-five centuries, and captures what is perhaps the most enduring Jewish quality in a modern Jew: the persistence of a set of ethical values.

These standards are not exclusive to Judaism, but are entertained in various degrees by most of the monotheistic religions and by many agnostics and atheists "whose faith and morals . . . [Judaism] has so largely moulded."<sup>41</sup> But with regard to Leventhal, they will be discussed with particular Jewish reference. By putting certain ethical precepts into action, Leventhal begins to emulate the "authentic" Jew, who asserts himself as being different. In this way he deprives the anti-Semite of his power.

#### Bellow's "Authentic Jew"

What, according to Bellow, would constitute an "authentic Jew" in twentieth-century New York? Schlossberg, a Jewish journalist, defines the prototype. He dismisses the idea of "more than human", the aspiration to rise above the common lot, even to the God-like position of immortality.

He also disregards as "less than human" the concept of people without an inner life who resemble Allbee's "full bundles" (p. 67), prepacked, easily interchangeable, "blank" (p. 113). He advocates a middle state, to be "exactly human" (p. 112), not more or less. This state must contain three qualities, greatness, beauty, and dignity.

This definition seems in line with liberal Humanism, which stresses the importance of man (in contrast with the importance of God) and teaches that the dignity and worth of each individual is to be respected by others. Is the "authentic Jew" for Bellow therefore no more than a universal Humanist? The distinction lies in the interpretation of "greatness," "beauty," and "dignity," and becomes clearer when the definition is considered in its correct context in the novel, and when it is subsequently enlarged on by Leventhal.

John J. Clayton has noted that Schlossberg is an authority figure, an alter Jude whose speech bears the weight of Jewish tradition.<sup>42</sup> Schlossberg stresses that "the specifications" (p. 112) of his definition are not his own, that he is acting as spokesman for a group of Jews: "'Between ourselves we can tell the truth, can't we (p. 112)?" His audience listens attentively. No-one interrupts or contradicts him. Shifcart's joking "'amen and amen'" at the conclusion of his speech is a form of ratification. His approval is in contrast with his previous disagreement with Schlossberg, which suggests an alternate and perhaps a double set of values.

What Schlossberg says has meaning for Jews because it reiterates the Humanistic stance of Judaism. (As Knopp

has argued, there is no definition of Jewish Humanism as such. It is not a separate philosophy, as is European Humanism, but the incorporation of specific Jewish values into a way of life.)<sup>43</sup> The potential greatness and beauty Schlossberg recognises in man would not be the secular ideal of the Renaissance man, highly educated in the humanities and the sciences, but that of the religious, or morally aware Jew, exercising his divinely given free will. Manfred Vogel observes that

[the] inviolable dignity of every man, regardless of his talents or station of life, precisely because he is the bearer of responsibility and thus of the divine image, is perhaps the most important facet of Judaism's relevance for today.<sup>44</sup>

For the Jew, dignity is achieved by the acceptance of individual moral responsibility. The idea of responsibility is implicit in Schlossberg's urging: "'Have dignity, you understand me? Choose dignity'" (p. 113), and is understood by Leventhal, who feels himself "strongly drawn" (p. 105) towards Schlossberg. (The name "Schlossberg", a compilation of "schloss", a castle or a lock, and "berg", a mountain or something ponderous, hints that the alter Jude may have the key to Leventhal's problem of identity.) Clayton argues that Schlossberg's speech has no function in the plot, but, as Leventhal's actions indicate, the theme affects the plot.<sup>45</sup>

Subsequently, Leventhal enlarges on Schlossberg's definition of "human". "But unless one was more than human or less than human, as Mr Schlossberg put it, the payments had to be met" (p. 128). He adds that "he liked to think

'human' meant accountable in spite of many weaknesses-- at the last moment, tough enough to hold" (p. 129). This moral accounting is calculated in two different columns. There are the inevitable H.P. payments, the duties of those who have voluntarily entered a contract (such as Max and Elena). There is also the duty, the accountability of every man (for example Leventhal himself) to prove his humanity by accepting responsibility for his fellow man, regardless of the lack of a "contract" or obligation.

Leventhal's definition is at the centre of Judaism, which holds that man's obligation towards his fellow man is the foundation of the moral universe: "He who transacts his business honestly and is pleasing to his fellow men is accounted as having fulfilled the entire Torah."<sup>46</sup> The responsibility of man is one of the three pillars which purportedly support the universe (the other two are Torah and Service to God). Social responsibility, not individual salvation, is the Jewish ethic. Life is seen as a moral task. The Good Life is one of action, in service of one's fellow men (and thus of God). The moral life is one of personal concern and loving service on earth.<sup>47</sup>

Therefore, to be "exactly human" is to choose the dignity, and the concomitant beauty and greatness that goes with one's accepting of moral responsibility. To refuse it is to obliterate the intrinsic humanity of people and to make it possible for the Allbees to conceive of them as empty parcels of waste paper swept up by the capricious winds of fate. The choice of dignity suggests that Bellow's "authentic Jew", despite his discarding ritual and custom, his neglect of Torah and synagogue services, has retained

the morality inherent in Judaism. It has to be translated into action, into actual "payment". This becomes evident as Leventhal assumes increasing responsibility for Max's family (endorsing the strong family ties among Jews) and for Allbee's welfare.

#### The Implications of Responsibility for the Self

The concept of responsibility is the moral core of Jewish ethics. Its social importance is humorously illustrated by Israel Zangwill in The King of Schnorrers,<sup>48</sup> while the Jewish critic Daniel Fuchs notes the "typical Jewish sense of obligation" in Bellow's "characteristic metaphor" of contract and undertaking in Herzog.<sup>49</sup> Responsibility is also the fulcrum of The Victim, introduced by the first epigraph, which tells of the inadvertent killing of Ifrit's son by a merchant who carelessly threw away some date stones. The incident suggests the following questions: Is a man guilty of an unintentional action? What are the boundaries of human responsibility? How far do one's obligations towards one's fellow men extend? The ideas of causality, contingency, and fortuitous action are also introduced in this epigraph.

Bellow plays on the theme of responsibility with ever-deepening variations. One of its most important aspects is self-responsibility, which involves a knowledge of the self, and Bellow indicates that Leventhal hides from this knowledge. He introduces him as a man whose eyes display "an intelligence not greatly interested in its own powers, as if preferring not to be bothered by them, indifferent;

and this indifference appeared to be extended to others" (p. 17). Leventhal avoids self-knowledge and yet is uncomfortably aware of the importance that self-confrontation, which exposes the "really important things, the deepest issues" (pp. 101-02) may hold. The "operation" (p. 215) he needs to perform to heal himself (Asa means physician, healer) is constantly postponed.

Only once does he confront one of the crucial "deep issues" (p. 102), admitting that self-hatred leads to self-degradation, when Rudiger exposes and confirms his feelings of inadequacy:

he himself had begun to fear that the lowest price he put on himself was too high and he could scarcely understand why anyone should want to pay for his services. And under Rudiger's influence he had felt this. 'He made [him] believe what [he] was afraid of' (p. 102).

This feeling of worthlessness is a complicated tangle of personal, social and Jewish inferiority. He suspects derogatory judgements from Jews as well as gentiles, from both Dr Denisart (p. 58) and Shifcart (p. 114), and from the Willistons (p. 93). Lacking a clear definition of self, he is at the mercy of others' opinions. If they are reassuring, as Mary's are, he feels confident, but a disparaging remark shatters his self-esteem. His inferiority feeling makes him vulnerable to Allbee's attacks and he is unable to don the protective self-confidence which would discourage persecution. Only by assuming moral responsibility for others does Leventhal come to appropriate it for himself, and this, finally, "heals" him.

## Responsibility for Others

Mickey's illness and Allbee's accusations are the direct causes of gradual change in Leventhal. Initially he performs his family duty with exasperated impatience, with anger against both irresponsible parents. Elena is ignorant of elementary hygiene and scientific medicine; Max has chosen to live away from home. "'He sends them money and that makes him a father. That's the end of his responsibilities . . . that's his idea of duty'" (p. 115), Leventhal thinks. Because he is aggrieved at carrying his brother's burden, his mitzvah, his good deed, is robbed of true ethical value which, according to the precepts of Judaism, depends on the underlying intention of the heart.

Intimate contact with Max's family changes his responses. His interest in Philip deepens until, "full of love for the boy" (p. 194), he wishes he could protect him from the realities of death and grief, a wish tantamount to an assumption of total responsibility for his nephew. His reappraisal of Elena's sanity indicates that he feared she suffered from mental illness, like his late mother, while his condemnation of his brother is replaced by a complete identification with his grief. Max may have married out of the faith and be associated with what have been construed as non-Jewish characteristics: he is "a common labourer, an absentee father, a distant brother";<sup>50</sup> while Asa, more in line with Jewish tradition, has risen above the working class and cares for his wife and his brother's family. Yet Max has retained a humanity Asa lacks and can learn from. Max's assessments of his mother-in-law

("a harmless old woman" [p. 196]), of Elena (he recalls her strength during the Depression), even of the nurses who failed to inform him that his son was dead (p. 197), form a direct contrast to his brother's condemnation of these people.

Asa parts with his brother, "feeling his heart shaken" (p. 197) in response to his confession and to the idea of being "half burnt out already" (p. 197). This emotional response suggests the breaking of the studied indifference and contempt under which Leventhal has been hiding his sensitivities. A further implication is that by identifying with his brother, he opens his heart to tenderness and compassion, qualities essential to the Jewish sense of self. Once the heart has fulfilled its duties, his actions towards his relations have true ethical value.

Leventhal's complex attitude towards Allbee undergoes a similar change. At first he vacillates between a reluctant personal acceptance of indirect responsibility ("I may be to blame in a way, indirectly" [p. 33]) and a downright denial of it. But the social implications of responsibility, devoid of private guilt or obligation, are unavoidable. Leventhal feels a kinship with the detritus of humanity, with "horrible images of men" (p. 61), with "the lost, the outcast, the overcome, the effaced, the ruined" (p. 23). Allbee's accusation stimulates a conditioned Jewish response which urges communal responsibility, to "love thy neighbour as thyself," to be thy brother's keeper, to remember that if "I am only for myself, what am I?"<sup>51</sup> Leventhal himself has defined "human" as "accountable" (p. 129). His latent Jewishness encourages him to meet the moral "costs" (p. 128)

demanded by Allbee by caring for him. The "bill of goods" (p. 212) Allbee has sold him is a reminder of a community consciousness submerged until recently by city pressures. Unlike Harkavy, who fails to understand the implications of the Allbee-Leventhal relationship, Leventhal's attitude now suggests a growing awareness of responsibility: "'I must have wanted to buy'" (p. 212). (The money metaphors point to an ironic contrast between Allbee's former accusations that the Jews have ruined the gentiles financially and the value of the Jews' private moral bookkeeping for the gentiles.)

Leventhal's response to Allbee becomes personal, more than a social obligation. At first he resists identifying with his plight (p. 62), but empathy is unavoidable. Allbee is "half revolting . . . but half--ah, half you could not help feeling sorry" (p. 160). A "kind of dismayed pity" (p. 161) fills him, never obliterating his sense of injury, but submerging it sufficiently for him to be kind to Allbee. Again, the duties of the heart are fulfilled.

Leventhal's moral obligations towards his fellow man confer on him a dignity that begins with a conscious exercise of free will, a breaking of the aimlessness of his existence. Although he considers Elena's first call for help "somewhat in the nature of a duty" (p. 10), he answers it. On Allbee's first visit, he chooses confrontation rather than flight:

It occurred to him that he could escape Allbee. . . . he could still get away. . . . He could go even now. . . . Yet he stood firm and strangely enough he felt that he had proved something by doing so (p. 60).

The development of his dignity is balanced against a contra-

dictory definition of man drawn from his observation of people in New York who crush their finer, spiritual inclinations: "Since it was done by so many, what was it but human (p. 128)?" What obliterates the dignity of the wastelander is the "fear of death, of life more than death, perhaps" (p. 128). But Leventhal hearkens to a moral imperative, to the affirmation Judaism demands of man's relation to the world by will and deed, which changes his relationship towards people.

The changes alter his personality. He now questions his former neutrality, the "caution that led to sleep and dullness" (p. 85). He has shared Mrs Harkavy's scepticism about nurturing concern and compassion; her dictum that people "'are bound not to take things too much to heart, for their own protection'" (p.73) is echoed by Leventhal, who agrees that you "couldn't find a place in your feelings for everything, to give at every touch like a swinging door, the same for everyone" (p. 85). Neutrality minimises the danger "of being broken" (p. 85). The realization that this is a denial of life, of being what one is to the utmost, now horrifies him. "'Dear God, am I so lazy, so weak, is my soul fat like my body (p. 139)?" he asks, and proceeds to rid his soul of its harmful corpulence. For example, he reacts to the news of Mickey's death with spontaneous grief--"He could not restrain the play of muscles in his throat. . . . he began to cry" (p. 145). This death is a harsh reality for him, devoid of the artificial falsifying which makes necessary "paper grass in the grave" (p. 207). The fatty layer of indifference no longer protects his heart. The moral insentience of the "less than human" is broken.

Leventhal has also raised himself to the ranks of the "more than human" by judging everyone's actions but his own. He finds Elena and Max guilty of being bad parents; Harkavy, of failing in his duty as a friend (p. 77); the Willistons, of prejudicial judgement of his actions; even his associates at work, of a lack of warmth. That others have judged him and found him wanting comes as a shock to Leventhal. But by responding to their criticism in a way which proves that he accepts its validity, he removes himself from Schlossberg's "inhuman" category and moves closer to being "exactly human".

A variation on the theme of responsibility is the attitude of the Willistons towards Leventhal and Allbee. It is ironic that the censure of an old Kentucky Protestant who upholds the strict biblical dictum of action and consequence forces Leventhal to reconsider the meaning of responsibility (pp. 95-103). In a society where morality has blurred outlines, Williston has, for Leventhal, represented decency and fair play in the old English sense. Obeying the letter of the religious law, he helped Leventhal, a comparative stranger. But, beginning to question the nature of beneficence, Leventhal reconsiders his kindnesses:

You might help a man because he was a bother to you and you wanted to get rid of him. You might do it because you disliked him unfairly and wanted to pay for your prejudice and then, feeling you had paid, you were free and even entitled to detest him (p. 82).

The Willistons and Leventhal agree that to be human means to be accountable. But do they agree on the meaning of compassion? Their actions towards those who suffer

bear out Milan Kundera's inferences about the word "compassion". He points out the etymological differences in different languages which affect its meaning. Coming from the Latin "with" (cum) and "suffering" (passio), the English word means that we sympathize with those who suffer; or, that we cannot observe coolly while others suffer. The word "pity", which has a very similar meaning, also has overtones of condescension towards the sufferer. Kundera concludes that "compassion" is therefore an inferior, second-rate sentiment in English. In languages such as German and Polish the word "compassion" is formed by a noun formed from an equivalent prefix combined with the word that means "feeling". Its usage is approximately the same, but its meaning is broader. It means, to share all emotion, anxiety or joy, happiness or fear.<sup>52</sup> The Hebrew word for compassion, rahamim, has the more encompassing meaning of sharing all emotion. The root of the word is rehem, a womb, which implies the capacity to share all feelings, as well as suggesting the unique care of a mother. The everyday usage of rahmonis is to share (without any condescension) the suffering of others.<sup>53</sup>

The Willistons' interpretation of "compassion" seems to follow its meaning in English. Their pity for Allbee is conveyed as a detached interest for a former friend, a settling of an obligation with cold charity, ten dollars, while they carefully avoid any involvement with the nastiness of his personal life. Their attitude (in contrast to Harkavy's, for example [pp. 212-13]) suggests that Leventhal must shoulder the burden of his real obligation as well as his inherited burden, the suffering for the sins of

others which is the rightful load of the Jew. Allbee may visit them, but he must stay with Leventhal. Leventhal's compassion is far closer to the interpretation of the German word mit gefühl, (literally "feeling with"), or the Hebrew rahamim. He moves beyond interpreting his responsibilities with impersonal, cold efficiency, or grudgingly, or because no-one else will perform them, or because he has the means to. Drawn to Allbee "with a kind of affection" (p. 182), he shares his suffering.

### The "Suffering Servant"

Leventhal practises tzedakah, the righteous discharge of social responsibility. But it affords him no relief from the "spell of confusion and despair" (p. 187) life has cast over him. What he has assumed, with the widening of his emotional sensibilities, is a burden of suffering quite different from his previous one of hopelessness and nervous irritability. He suffers for his part in Allbee's fall. By acting as a surrogate parent, he suffers empathically for his brother as well as for Allbee, because of his acute identification with his plight. Leventhal, far more than the financially and emotionally secure Harkavys, fellow Jews, because of his vulnerability, his self doubt and insecurity, is able to empathise with suffering humanity. He begins to see himself as a part of, not apart from, it. The revelation that "everything, everything without exception took place as if within a single soul or person" (p. 139) is accompanied by "a rare, pure feeling of happiness" (p. 139). This truth, that we are all to a greater or lesser extent mirror

images of one another, links Leventhal with all humanity, and in particular with his persecutor as he recalls "the explicit recognition in Allbee's eyes which he could not doubt was the double of something in his own" (p. 139).

Suffering sharpens his perception of what it means to be human. His theoretical knowledge becomes part of his actual experience--"you couldn't expect people to be right, but only try to do what they must. Therefore hideous things were done, cannibalistic things. Good things as well, of course" (p. 85). A former naïve desire, that it is better to think well of people, is altered when Allbee moves in, violating his privacy by snooping and reading his private correspondence, defiling his conjugal bed with a prostitute, and finally attempting to murder him. Leventhal does not allow evil "to possess his being,"<sup>54</sup> but confronts it and reacts to it: his "heart was what caught it, with awful pain and dread, in heavy blows" (p. 224). Uncorrupted by Allbee, he affirms a "greater power moving through human events than man's brutality to man."<sup>55</sup>

No longer is he diminished by observing others' suffering indifferently. Instead of noting it dispassionately and generalizing about it as he once did: "Suffering? Of course, suffering. . . . everybody experienced it" (p. 36), its pain has contributed to the "expansion" of his heart. The relevance of Bellow's second epigraph is now evident. An unknown aspect of "the human face" has been revealed to Leventhal. He has acknowledged the helplessness of human suffering, of "innumerable faces . . . imploring, wrathful, despairing faces," and has accepted responsibility for a part of it. Awareness of his duty and its accompanying

suffering marks Leventhal as "the eternal Jew, accepting his moral responsibility for a world he never made."<sup>56</sup>

### Conclusion

The coda stresses the differences, both internal and external, between Leventhal and Allbee. The former looks younger, more approachable. He feels better. No longer are anxiety, boredom and nausea his predominant emotions, the expression of the sufferings of the self-centred, of the alienated. Mary is home again. Her pregnancy promises a strong family unity, with Leventhal competently assuming the responsibilities of parenthood. By contrast, Allbee resembles his empty packages, with skin "a fabric quality, crumpled and blank" (p. 236). His outward affluence signifies "something extraordinary, barbaric, rich, even decadent" (p. 235), which suggests his kinship with the "barbaric fellahin" (p. 9) who thrive in New York, but Leventhal discerns an inward "decay" (p. 236).

The reality which preoccupies Allbee at the end of the novel is still the importance of social standing, whether we are conductors or passengers on the train of life. But Leventhal fumbles with the idea that the position one occupies is not necessarily the most important aspect of living. People are mistaken if they believe that promises are made at the beginning of life, safe-guarding one's allocated position. The nature of the promise is different. "Possibly there was a promise, since so many felt it. He himself was almost ready to affirm that there was" (p. 231). But this promise cannot exist in a world where all is "a

shuffle, all, all accidental and haphazard" (p. 231). It can exist only if one believes in an ordered universe.

The reality which is beginning to interest Leventhal at the end of the novel is a metaphysical one. He has moved beyond Allbee's social preoccupation to question him about the force which "runs things" (p. 238), which sets the train in motion. The question remains unanswered, but, by asking it, Leventhal separates himself from the idea of an arbitrary existence. The morality he has practised is religious in essence, although he has yet to acknowledge the God who ordained it.

## Chapter Three

### Herzog

And the peculiar idea entered my (Jewish) mind that we'd see about this! My life would prove a different point altogether. Very tired of the modern form of historicism which sees in this civilization the defeat of the best hopes of Western religion and thought, what Heidegger calls the second Fall of Man into the quotidian or ordinary.<sup>1</sup>

#### Introduction

Herzog presents a challenge to the reader. Is the novel to be read primarily as one of ideas, or is it a novel of character? To investigate either approach would be entirely feasible, but is there no integration between the two? Could Herzog's Jewishness not provide the link? In order to explore this possibility, this chapter will consider first Herzog's family background, then his assimilation to America. In the discussion of ideas which follows, the ethical values of Herzog's orthodox Jewish education will be balanced against certain currently fashionable philosophical and literary ideas. The concluding section will attempt to trace those aspects of his personality which resemble traditional Jewish types. Finally, the development of his character and his moral enlargement, which is bound up implicitly with his emotional and intellectual responses to modernity, will be considered.

Bellow himself draws a dividing line between Herzog and his first two novels. In an interview with Granville

Hicks, he says:

I consider Herzog a break from victim literature . . . .  
 As one of the chieftains of that school, I have  
 the right to say this. . . . Victim literature  
 purports to show the impotence of the ordinary  
 man. In writing Herzog I felt that I was completing  
 a certain development, coming to the end of a  
 literary sensibility. This sensibility implies  
 a certain attitude towards civilization--anomaly,  
 estrangement, the outsider, the collapse of humanism.<sup>2</sup>

Bellow may deny a link between Herzog and victim literature,  
 but surely Herzog shares the guilt and powerlessness, the  
 alienation and self-victimization of Joseph and Leventhal?  
 Are not their similarities of situation evident, their  
 isolation and loneliness? Temperamentally they have in  
 common irascibility, anxiety, hypochondriacal tendencies  
 and the eagerness to suffer. Like Joseph and Leventhal,  
 Herzog may be trying to define his existence in a frightening,  
 uncaring universe, but unlike the former heroes, he has the  
 power of an unquestioned moral vigour, supported by an  
 awesome intellect. These strengths finally overcome personal  
 despondency and generalised pessimism, and find spontaneous  
 expression in his attitude towards both man and history,  
 towards himself and the "crisis" of the twentieth century.  
 While no claims are made to an exclusive Jewish quality  
 in Herzog's moral (and ultimately religious) stamina--other  
 philosophies and religions with which Bellow is familiar,  
 such as Christianity, indubitably have precepts in common  
 with Judaism--in this chapter Herzog's moral resilience  
 will be explored largely in its Jewish context. An  
 identifiable moral stance places Herzog in an historic  
 Jewish tradition and serves as a reminder of the endurance

of the Jews, who have survived previous catastrophes without abandoning the image of man to which they have pledged themselves. Herzog's daily experience seems to mock the dignity of man and fashionable scholarship appears bent on negating all future for mankind. But the novel challenges both the belittling of the individual and defeatist attitudes with the thrust of a positive, life-affirming morality expressed through its protagonist.

Norman Mailer states disparagingly that Herzog and other heroes "of moral earnestness" are "passive, timid, other-directed, pathetic, up to the nostrils in anguish: the world is stronger than they are; suicide calls."<sup>3</sup> But surely this is to ignore the pervasive tone of the novel, its humorous irony, the cutting sharpness of Herzog's Yiddish wit, whether self-directed (admiringly or admonishingly) or aimed at the human condition. Herzog's comic irony becomes a form of moral vision which defines his attitude towards himself and towards the progress of civilization. It is a survival mechanism, earthy, practical, defying philosophical abstractions. It frees the novel from the gloom of Bellow's victim literature and conveys a message of practical salvation for the self.

Liela H. Goldman calls Herzog Bellow's most Jewish novel, but argues that it represents a remembered, not a living Judaism. She slates Bellow's incorrect use of Hebrew, the fact that he writes no letters to past or contemporary Jewish thinkers, and what she interprets as a disloyalty to the Jews evident in certain character depictions (for example the damaging stereotypes of the lawyers, Himmelstein and Simkin).<sup>4</sup> Goldman may not wish

any depiction of a Jew by a Jew to be unflattering, although it be based on valid sociological observation, but Bellow himself voices a contrary opinion: "It may appear that the survivors of Hitler's terror in Europe and Israel will benefit more from good publicity than from realistic representation," but in the final analysis, "[i]n literature we cannot accept a political standard."<sup>5</sup> Goldman does, however, note the "unconscious philosophical" level of Jewishness in the novel which "unknowingly infiltrates the human psyche through generations and expresses itself in an attitude towards life and in the modus vivendi of the individual." She identifies "a basic Jewish ethos" in Herzog which is expressed in his choice of life, not death: "He could not allow himself to die yet. . . . His duty was to live" (p. 33); in his interpretation of personal freedom of choice as meaningful, unlike the "howling emptiness" (p. 45) of contemporary interpretation; in his idea of active social commitment: "I really believe that brotherhood is what makes a man human" (p. 280); and finally, in his acknowledgement of a contract with God, to complete "his assignment, whatever that was" (p. 238).<sup>6</sup>

Bellow never allows Herzog to deny his ancestral roots; instead, he is shown taking pleasure in his Jewish family background. This is in direct contrast with his treatment of his first hero, Joseph, from whom Bellow carefully removed all trace of Jewish--or any other--ancestry. Perhaps Joseph's selling of the birthright of his Jewish identity for a mess of pottage, a universal anonymity, mirrors Bellow's own attempts at assimilation at that time. That Joseph no longer (hypothetically) identifies himself as "the son of

his father" according to Jewish custom described by Daniel Bell, that he denies his Jewish heritage, may be indicated in the withholding of his surname.<sup>7</sup> Franz Kafka, also a Jew, named the protagonist of his novel The Castle K., which suggests both the alienation of the hero from his family roots and a personal lack of identity. But Moses Elkanah Herzog suffers from no such deprivation.

Unlike Leventhal, who has no Jewish family background, no traditional moral upbringing, and who is forced into a halting, agonised moral definition of self, Herzog reaffirms certain moral precepts which may be interpreted as Jewish in origin. His ideas of God, the universe, and man, on which he bases his opposition to Christianity, Alienation, and Romanticism, suggest the basic beliefs of Judaism. So does his awareness of civic responsibility. This responsibility encompasses a generalised "humanism of civilized possibility," of fulfilling moral obligations in the real world in community not in isolation, of understanding that the "real and essential question is one of our employment by other human beings and their employment by us" (p. 280), but it could also recall specifically, Hillel, the Jewish sage's enlarged social vision not to seek separation from the community.<sup>9</sup>

He opposes a passive acceptance of nonentity, of impersonality, aware that he alone is able to define his own identity: "I am Herzog. I have to be that man" (p. 73). His sense of obligation is religious, "I owe the powers that created me a human life" (p. 227), and again could evoke Hillel--this time his stress on personal obligation. Herzog's assertion of a sense of self also affirms the rights of the individual in a compulsively collective society;

it is a refusal to be devalued, to support the prevalent persistent dehumanisation.

His vehement opposition to modernism, defined by Daniel Fuchs as "alienation, fragmentation, break with tradition, isolation and magnification of subjectivity, threat of the void, weight of vast numbers and monolithic impersonal institutions, hatred of civilization itself," imbues the novel with a resilient energy and indicates a realistic, an essentially Jewish inclination, not a visionary one.<sup>10</sup> Thus the humorous irony of the novel rests on the discrepancy between the hero's moral and intellectual propensities and his awareness--often humorous, or self-disparaging, or self-pitying, or complacent--of his failure to realize them.

#### The Jewish Family Legacy

Bellow observes that the

Jewish slums of Montreal during [his] childhood, just after the First World War, were not too far removed from the ghettos of Poland and Russia. Life in such places of exile and suffering was anything but ordinary.<sup>11</sup>

Thus Bellow writes of the shtetl experience virtually firsthand, juxtaposing a ghetto-like insularity with the promise of those widening social and cultural horizons documented by Irving Howe in World of Our Fathers.<sup>12</sup> Life on Napoleon Street reflects accurately both the poverty and the religious spirit of the Jewish immigrant experience. Living in a slum, part of a despised minority, the Jew can still awake, "eagerly loving" what he sees, and pray, "'[h]ow goodly

are thy tents, O Israel'" (p. 146). The paradox, that those who guard the Torah live in squalor, suggests that ordinary existence can be hallowed by faith. (The celebration of the Sabbath has always indicated what Elie Wiesel calls "the divine revelation in Time," that the ideal world can be contained in the everyday world.)<sup>13</sup> Because of the holiness inherent in the common life, it is hallowed.<sup>14</sup> This Jewish belief is at the core of the legend which tells that the world is sustained by the purity of thirty six saints, unknown even to themselves, who live humbly as ordinary people.<sup>15</sup> Herzog, who grows up in a society where the relations between the individual, the community, and God find expression in the solidarity of family life and in the sense of responsibility to the community, later affirms that the "strength of a man's virtue or spiritual capacity measured by his ordinary life" (p. 112) is of paramount importance to the modern age. (In Mr Sammler's Planet, Sammler comes to a similar conclusion: "And what is 'common' about 'the common life'?")<sup>16</sup> Thus the hopefulness of the Jew ("eagerly loving what he sees") endures, despite the course of history.

The background and existence of the Jewish immigrants to Chicago are sketched briefly in vignettes of the Herzog family and their boarder Ravitch. The history of the Russian Jews comes to the Herzog children in their grandfather's letters, in the metaphorically useless Romanoff roubles he sends them, in witnessing the disintegration of the families of Ravitch and Uncle Mikhail. Moses receives the bequest of the historic consciousness of his race, an emotional involvement with the Jewish dead which remains

alert, albeit sporadic and undevout, throughout the novel. Returning from abroad, Herzog observes "it seems to me that I saw everybody but the dead. Whom perhaps I was looking for" (p. 73). Yiskor, remembrance, links him to the dead, to both his father and his fellow Jews, persecuted in Europe:

These personal histories, old tales from old times that may not be worth remembering. I remember. I must. But who else--to whom can this matter? So many millions--multitudes--go down in terrible pain (p. 155).

On holiday in Poland, he "smells" the atrocities (p. 31), and returns frequently to the ruined ghetto (p. 32). He appreciates his "privileged" status as an American Jew, untouched by the Holocaust:

To realize that you are a survivor is a shock. At the realization of such election, you feel like bursting into tears. As the dead go their way, you want to call to them, but they depart in a black cloud of faces, souls. They flow out in smoke from the extermination chimneys . . . (p. 81).

But Herzog never defines himself in terms of a collective Jewish identity. His is an historic awareness, not an active participation. He may visit Israel, and correspond with his cousin Asher who lives there (p. 55), but he has no Zionist fervour. Instead, his Jewish identity seems to rest on the memories of his childhood.

The immigrant family experience takes a patriarchal form, reminiscent of the European. In Russia, Jonah Herzog lived like a gentleman. "In Petersburg there were servants" (p. 142). In Montreal he cleans up the vomit and "drekische pants" (p. 143) of his drunken boarder. Yet despite his

poverty, his business humiliations, his sister's jeers, he retains the respect due to the head of the family, the patriarch, "a sacred being . . . a king" (p. 154). (One may compare the Hasidic Rabbi Aharon Karliner's admonition that "'[w]e are all princes; to forget that, is the gravest sin of all.'" )<sup>17</sup> Inherent in this paradox is the idea that the basic dignity of people is not dependent on wealth or social status, and that no human being is to be denigrated or dismissed or devalued.<sup>18</sup> Each child is traditionally encouraged to regard himself, as Herzog does, "the son of a king,"<sup>19</sup> to aspire to "marvellous" (p. 100) qualities, to believe that the world was created for his sake.

Mother Herzog fulfils the traditional role of the Jewish mother. Moses' idealizing memories of her selflessness suggest an alternative to the mockery and smothering love of the "Portnoy" stereotype of Jewish motherhood. She supports and admires her husband in spite of his failures. Her ambition for her children indicates the Jewish "caste madness of yichus" (p. 147) as well as social ambition. Unlike her sister-in-law Zipporah, "that realist" (p. 153), her imagination is relatively untainted with modern materialism. It is still alive with ancient images of good and evil, a primitive Manicheanism which is part of her legacy to Moses.

Alfred Kazin observes that Bellow "was brought up in a deeply Jewish spirit and with the Yiddish language, the life-thread of a cultural and religious tradition in Eastern Europe," and this is reflected in the Herzogs' family life.<sup>20</sup> Through poverty Jonah Herzog may be forced into bootlegging--the laws he contravened have long since been rescinded--but his is not a criminal mentality. The failure of his "criminal"

career is treated humorously, not judgementally, by Bellow. His moral bequest to Moses, implicit in the domestic comedy which stars his drunken lodger Ravitch, includes a communal concern, a goodness of heart and a receptivity to others' woe. Moses' mother's self-sacrifice suggests the futility of suffering, while her refusal to equate Jews with violence ("'[n]ot Jews! Never! . . . They couldn't have the heart'" [p. 154]) upholds an ancient Jewish principle. Religion is inseparable from family life, evident in the paradox of "the bootlegger's boys reciting ancient prayers" (p. 146). Moses grows up familiar with both Hebrew and Yiddish. He joins in the morning prayers. There is a mezuzah on the doorpost. His mother wishes him to become a rabbi, to continue the family tradition (p. 28).

Yet Herzog consciously breaks the pattern of the traditional Jewish way of life in his own marriages. His rejection of Daisy and the "shelter of an orderly, purposeful, lawful existence" (p. 109) is a refusal to follow the formula of his parents' marriage. Daisy is not a Madeleine or a Ramona. She is "an utterly steady reliable woman, responsible to the point of grimness" (p. 228), a "conventional Jewish woman" (p. 123) who has "good qualities" (p. 109). But Herzog finds her boring. She resembles Phoebe Gersbach who, "orderly . . . self-controlled . . . clean" (p. 267), is also betrayed by her husband but who is determined--even if it involves self-deception--to maintain a home for her son. His second choice, Madeleine, is the complete antithesis of the traditional Jewish wife and mother, representing the product of the artistic side of American-Jewish life. She scorns the sacrifices her mother has made for her impresario

father, for love, for "art", not for religion or tradition.

A sociological interpretation of Madeleine could highlight her representation as an assimilated alternative to conservative Jewish social norms, but Herzog's violent censure of her (which prepares the reader for Mr Sammler's even more vociferous satire of Angela in the later novel) suggests that Bellow himself rejects radical changes in the traditional role of the Jewish woman. The reader may find the hyperbole of Herzog's criticism of Madeleine humorous, but it contains a moral censoriousness. For example, Herzog decries Madeleine's deceit, her lack of everyday standards of decency, let alone "the Herzog standards of 'heart'" (p. 265).

Herzog's failed marriages cast a doubt on whether the values inherent in a traditional moral upbringing can survive without observable precepts and ritual, enforced by a fading memory only. Herzog understands this loss. His longing for Napoleon Street is stronger than mere sentimental nostalgia. He mourns the passing of a traditional way of life, the living embodiment of the Jewish faith. He absorbed moral precepts by watching them put into practice, such as the compassion and brotherhood implicit in his parents' care for their shiker landtsman Ravitch, but his children are denied this influence.

Jewish parenthood is a response to God's commandment to perpetuate the race, while the desire of each Jewish male is to father a kadish, a son who will intone the prayer for the dead on his behalf. (Alfred Kazin remembers that his undevout father, a "hardened working class skeptic," continued to call him "my kadish.")<sup>21</sup> The obligation of parents is to transmit the Jewish moral and ethical inheritance, which takes

precedence over educating the mind, and even over religious observance.<sup>22</sup> "'Cleverness without heart is nothing at all. Piety is false,'" is the saying from the school of Karlin,<sup>23</sup> while modern yeshiva (Talmudic Academy) education further illustrates the point. But Herzog has deprived his own children of this essential education by deserting his first wife and courting disaster with his second marriage. The absence of his children is indubitably "painful to his instincts, his Jewish family feelings" (p. 30). His sincere interpretation of his duty in life in terms of parenthood is evinced in the care with which he prepares the information to give to Marco on their timed outings, his suggestions of holidays to be spent with him, and in his almost obsessive concern about Junie's welfare. But as a Jewish father he is a failure.

If Herzog marries Ramona, the structure of family life may be restored, as she wants a conventional liaison in spite of her philosophy of sexual pleasure. Herzog notes "how kind she was" (p. 204), that her "instincts were good" (p. 209), that she has identified him as "a family type" and "she wants [him] for her family" (p. 205). This union might ensure that he becomes "a patriarch, as every Herzog was meant to be" (p. 210). But is Ramona a family type? Herzog's vacillation is typical of his failure to translate knowledge into acts of commitment. The residue of the Napoleon Street values allows him to appreciate what Ramona is offering, but he lacks the decisiveness to grasp it.

Thus Bellow's own experience of an authentic Jewish background is used, not sentimentally, but ironically, to underline his hero's inability, or disinclination, to live

according to his legacy. He destroys the traditional parental roles, fails to perpetuate Jewish customs and attitudes, dissipates both the moral inheritance and the Jewish historical consciousness. According to the standards of menschlekhkayt he has been taught, his failure as a person is virtually synonymous with his failure as a Jew.

#### Assimilation

The novel abounds with both detailed portraits and two-dimensional sketches of Jews who have attempted to assimilate to an American life-style. Is the force of Bellow's inquiry to reveal the superficial imitation of the WASP society by certain Jews, or is his concern the effects of assimilation on the ethical, social and cultural values of the immigrant? Is the Jew able to exchange his spiritual values for those of the Western Christianised world? Is Sartre correct in stating that a Jew cannot understand or absorb the cultural spirit of his adopted country, that he is "never accepted as a man, but always and everywhere as the Jew"?<sup>24</sup> In 1944, Kazin did not believe that Jews were full participants in American cultural life,<sup>25</sup> an opinion enforced by Lionel Trilling:

As I see it, the great fact for American Jews is their exclusion from certain parts of the general life and every activity of Jewish life seems to be a response to this fact.<sup>26</sup>

Twenty years later, does Bellow agree? Herzog's country home, "symbol of his Jewish struggle for a solid footing in White Anglo-Saxon Protestant America" (p. 316), is

ostensibly a statement of assimilation, but does he not remain "the Jew-man of Ludeyville" (p. 55), with Bellow punning on looney, lewd, and ludicrous?

The caricatures of Himmelstein and Simkin may be Bellow's invective against the Jewish absorption of the worst of the American business and professional world and its blotting out of orthodox Judaism. Alternately, they offer a comparison to Herzog. While both lawyers have prostituted their mental inheritance, the keen Torah-trained Jewish mind, to make money from the legal profession, and while they are contemptuous of their client's failure to know "'what goes on'" (p. 94) in the real world, Herzog retains their respect for continuing academically "the life of the mind."<sup>27</sup> In the old tradition, he prefers learning to material gain. A brute realism and cynicism characterise their advice to Herzog, a callousness ultimately degrading of the Jew and the individual generally. A calculated shrewdness about anti-Semitism and an illusionless realism as to whether true assimilation has occurred, underlies Simkin's advice that Herzog should engage a gentile lawyer in court; while the clearcut emotional duties of the Jew have eroded in Himmelstein to a schmaltzy sentimentalism indistinguishable from heartfelt "American" insincerity: "'Stick with the folks-- with good hearts. With love. Jesus! What d'ye say?'" (p. 96).

Simkin pronounces Gersbach, a professional radio announcer and a (self-proclaimed) poet, to be "a recognizable Jewish type" (p. 224). The crook, the actor, and the exhibitionist in his character all depend on his chutzpah, the brazen effrontery with which he exploits his dubious potential. His salesman qualities (his charm, hypocrisy,

eloquent lying) are equally American and Jewish. But the predominance of "[s]entiment and brutality" (p. 284) in his character, the antithesis of the Jewish ideal, effectively disqualifies him as a mensch.

The gullible Herzog, lonely in the Berkshires, has accepted him unquestioningly as a friend. After being betrayed by Gersbach, his attitude towards the man becomes that of the genuine highbrow towards the pseudo-intellectual who encourages all admirers: "'He's on the make everywhere and cultivates all the Chicago hot-shots--clergymen, newspapermen, professors, television guys, federal judges, Hadassah ladies'" (p. 222). Herzog's disparagement of his rival may be prompted by jealousy, but Gersbach's intellectual claims are backed by no university post, no mention of qualifications or publications. The popular and commercial success of his "cultural" promotions (such as a Reader's Digest presentation of Buber, a reading of his own poetry to a locked-in audience) is a reproach both to the Jewish tradition of learning for the sake of virtue and to his credulous audience, who aid the vulgarisation of culture.

His perfect counterpart is Madeleine, similarly pretentious, self-asserting and conniving, who transfers the competitive spirit of capitalism to her own marriage. Deprived of a traditional, orthodox Jewish background and thus alienated from its culture and religion, fashionably "alienated" in an incoherent world, does she not epitomise a desperate search for meaning in a nihilistic society? Do her ever-changing interests not suggest the fragmentation of the modern personality, no longer whole or wholesome? The sickness of modern society which she represents (underlined by her mother's

concern and Dr Edvig's diagnoses) receives satirical treatment. Madeleine may instigate a short search for salvation via the Catholic church "from . . . I suppose the word is nihilism" (p. 109), but her life is a clever exploitation of the symptoms of the sick society. "She owed her survival to intelligence. It was part of her sickness to be shrewd" (p. 106) is Herzog's conclusion, while he interprets her "conning" (p. 61) of their psychiatrist as a ruse to have him certified. Her single-minded employment of the power principle for her own ends is seen as ultimately degrading and sterile, a futile fury.

Yet Bellow makes clear Madeleine's initial attraction for Herzog, his pleasure in accepting the role of husband-protector (p. 89), his avidity to ally himself with her "modern" ailments: "'But it's she who's sick, sicker than I am'" (p. 62). Only after her deception does he denigrate her, employing a double standard. He decries her adultery, yet his own sexual adventures (Wanda, Zinka, Sono) are related without self-censure. A feminist reading of Herzog would doubtless reveal chauvinist tendencies: Madeleine as sexual object, the right of the male, but not of the female to philander, Herzog's childhood acceptance of his mother's sacrifice of her strength for his pleasure as a male right (p. 145), but it would also have to take into account Bellow's traditional Jewish background in which the male role has always been the dominant one. (Morning prayers include thanks to God "who hast not made me a woman.")<sup>28</sup> This background demands the keeping of the seventh commandment, and both Herzog's father and Polina, Daisy's mother, decry his sexual misdemeanours (pp. 109, 174). Herzog himself wryly pays

lip service only to outdated virtue: "Have all the traditions, passions, renunciations, virtues, gems and masterpieces of Hebrew discipline and all the rest of it . . . brought me to these untidy green sheets, and this rippled mattress?" (p. 178).

Himmelstein, Simkin, Gersbach, and Madeleine may portray certain aspects of assimilated Jewish-Americans, but Bellow's humorous denunciation strips them of dignity, of nobility, of the moral values which supported Herzog's impoverished parents. They are reality instructors, awkwardly flourishing in a modern wasteland of materialism, but deracinated, spiritually empty. Has Herzog's assimilation also caused his soul to shrivel? Is he as superficial, as hollow and grasping as his contemporaries? His lifestyle appears more typical of Jewish-American intelligentsia than of any other group, containing the necessary professional career, choice of mistresses, marriages, frequent visits to doctors and psychiatrists. His American patriotism is certain, as a comparison with Elya Gruner's divided loyalties between Israel and America in Mr Sammler's Planet confirms. He enthuses: "O Smithers, my whiskered brother! what a responsibility we bear, in this fat country of ours!" (p. 34). As befits the onetime class orator who has quoted Emerson, Herzog believes "his American credentials [are] in good order" (p. 167). His break with orthodox Judaism seems final, as he now observes no rituals or holidays, attends no synagogue. At the age of sixteen he was already a free thinker, antagonizing his father by coming home "with that Christianized smirk of the long-suffering son" (p. 257).

There is much that suggests that Herzog represents modern alienated man. He succumbs to gloom and despondency.

He suffers on the periphery of society, of Academe, of family life. He struggles to define his identity. He worries the fashionable problem of alienation:

[W]hat it means to be a man. In a city. In a century. In transition. In a mass. Transformed by science. Under organised power. Subject to tremendous controls. In a condition caused by mechanization. After the late failure of radical hopes. In a society that was no community and devalued the person (p. 208).

Is he not, as Leslie Fiedler has predicted, the Jew as "central symbol, the essential myth of the whole Western World" in this "apocalyptic period of atomization and uprooting, of a catholic terror and a universal alienation"?<sup>29</sup> Is he not the Jew as Marginal Man, an idea which Bellow's childhood friend Isaac Rosenfeld has posited, a "doubly alienated figure, caught--sometimes uncomfortably, sometimes exhilaratingly--between his own inadequate but unalienable heritage and the mirage-like promise of modern civilization"?<sup>30</sup>

Rejected by Madeleine, Herzog's first-hand experience of modern suffering (compare Shapiro's theoretical "knowledge") allows an exploration of Angst and despair, but only so that he can protest the authenticity of man in contemporary America more convincingly. It gives credibility to his attack on wasteland thinking. He attempts to prove that the individual need not become part of a preordained philosophical or literary pattern (for example of "the canon of Joyce and Kafka"),<sup>31</sup> that individual resistance and resilience may reaffirm the existence of the sovereign self. Nor is Herzog's defection from Judaism radical, as his lack of overt Jewish practices might suggest, as his optimistic, realistic, non-theoretical

approach to life (ironically restricted to certain letters and meditations only) indicates the influence of Judaism. Alfred Jospe defines the Jewish conception of life "as a moral task,"<sup>32</sup> and Herzog writes to Dr Bhava: "I've always wanted very much to lead a moral, useful and active life" (p. 54). His academic criticism, the yardstick by which he measures his scholarly colleagues (alive or dead), his lovers, his friends, all suggest his hereditary ethical training. So does his conscience, judging his own former actions and antics and providing the guideline by which he attempts to live. The warmth and sensitivity of his personality, his self-deprecating humour, also suggest Jewish prototypes. A comparison with certain Shalom Aleichem heroes, and then with the non-Jewish writer John Updike's depiction of a fictitious American-Jewish author, Henry Bech, in Bech is Back, helps to illustrate this point. To classify Herzog as alienated is to disregard these counter-indications.

If, as Sartre propounds, true assimilation depends on the genuine conversion to the host country's current idea of man, Herzog is without doubt philosophically and psychologically unassimilable.<sup>33</sup> He may adopt a "posture of collapse on the sofa" (p. 17) and his thinking may be heavily psychoanalytical, but Bellow consistently mocks the restrictive classification of Freudian definition through Herzog.

Daniel Fuchs writes that:

Freudian perceptions are at the heart of twentieth-century life. Freud gives us a view of man which is new, denuding, disillusioned, which is radically

subjective and iconoclastic, which is, in short, modern. Bellow's resistance to Freud begins in opposition to the terms with which these views are given. Freud is a prime instance of modernism, against which Bellow has mounted a sustained critique.<sup>34</sup>

Herzog's encounter with the psychiatrist Dr Edvig bears this out. His use of psychological categorisation is ironic, mocking, as his "anachronistic" (p. 10) character opposes his own and Dr Edvig's textbook labelling of personality "symptoms": "His clinical picture was depressive--not the severest type; not a manic depressive" (p. 10), while Madeleine has a "paranoid mind" (p. 63). Presupposing the uniformity, not the uniqueness of people, psychology has defined categories into which it slots individual idiosyncrasies. Herzog spontaneously rejects a science which regards the human psyche as clinically analysable rather than unique and morally viable, that interprets an act of charity, for example, as sado-masochism (p. 62). To rename moral vice as psychological sickness (for example, Madeleine's guilt-prompted fantasy that a detective is following her and her spending spree, wholly in keeping with her extravagance in the Berkshires, become "paranoid episode[s]" [p. 62]), is simultaneously to excuse people's faults and to reduce their humanity by ignoring their right to a moral conscience. By having Herzog compare the traits of paranoia to the ten plagues of Egypt, does Bellow not suggest, with humorous irony, that paranoia--and, by extension, psychological definition generally--is an affliction (p. 83)?

Man as the sick animal (p. 10) is an unacceptable definition for the Jew, who disagrees with both premises. Eugene Borowitz observes that Jews can't conceive of man

"as nothing more than another animal."<sup>35</sup> This is a brutalising element in modern thought. Herzog talks not of "that long disease, my life," but of "that long convalescence, my life" (p. 10), thus pointing to a fundamental distinction between his thinking and that of the Augustan humanist, Alexander Pope, whose words, "[t]he Muse but served to ease some friend, not wife, / To help me through this long disease, my life" Herzog echoes, only to contradict.<sup>36</sup> Inherent in this distinction is the assumption that he has contracted some of the symptoms of worldliness, of modern stress ("this Western plague, this mental leprosy" (p. 177)). But if weaknesses are acknowledged as moral ailments, if Herzog, the self-capped "specialist in . . . in spiritual self-awareness" (p. 314), can diagnose and seek his own remedy at Ludeyville, he has no need of psychiatry.

#### Herzog's Jewish Alternative to Alienation

Herzog is persistently abstracted, meditative, disconnected from prosaic reality, coping clumsily with its crises (his divorce, his academic commitments, his financial affairs). Yet his internal monologue and his letters protest the primacy, the importance of the everyday. Thus Bellow allows a precarious imbalance of action and intention to upset Herzog's equilibrium. This instability is humorous for the reader, while it also conveys a well-known moral impasse. Herzog the Humanist agrees with Montaigne and Pascal's definition of reality as the "strength of a man's virtue or spiritual capacity measured by his ordinary life" (p. 112), which echoes the Judaic emphasis on "a code of conduct" rather

than a system of thought,<sup>37</sup> but Herzog the impulsive over-reactor rushes to board an aeroplane, to go to Chicago to shoot Gersbach.

Herzog experienced a harsh reality during his impoverished childhood (which reminds the reader of the reality of St. Dominique Street encountered by Joseph and the deprivation of Leventhal's early years). Fortunate that he "didn't have the means to get too far away from our common life" (p. 329), Herzog understands that a moral response to life cannot be practised in élite intellectual isolation, by fleeing materialism (Nachman's Rimbaudesque bohemianism) or by following abstract systems of thought--"One can't become Utopian" (p. 54). Salvation is to be sought in everyday practicality, which recalls the idea that in Judaism "one is damned or saved by one's way of life."<sup>38</sup> For Herzog, theoretically, "the truth of life" (p. 76), of everyday existence, is to be found in the rotten apples peddled by Shapiro's father, in the one fresh egg brought as a gift by his aunt Zipporah, in the sight and smells of a fish store which evoke the memory of his mother. (Bellow's friends talk about the author's "affinity for nature so unexpected in an urban intellectual.")<sup>39</sup> These images suggest an appreciation of a basic simplicity, of the natural life. The "good sense, clarity, truth" (p. 34) sought by so many are more likely to be discovered at this prosaic level of life than in the idylls of the poets or the abstract theories (such as Alienation or Existentialism) of writers or philosophers.

Kierkegaard's insistence that "horrible pain and evil" (p. 324) are necessary to reteach truth to mankind, that

"truth is true only as it brings down more disgrace and dreariness upon human beings, so that if it shows anything except evil it is illusion, and not truth" (pp. 99-100), is echoed in Himmelstein's equation of facts with nastiness and nastiness with truth (p. 92). Herzog challenges this outlook, restating his opposition to it in his question to James Hoffa: "'What makes you think realism must be brutal?'" (p. 225). He rejects it emphatically,

[c]onvinced that the extent of universal space does not destroy human value, that the realm of facts and that of values are not eternally separated. And the peculiar idea entered my (Jewish) mind that we'd see about this! (p. 112)

An alternative to Kierkegaard is found in the Book of Job, which suggests that the lessons of truth are by no means evil. Robert Gordis and Matitياهو Tsewat argue that Job is strengthened ultimately by pain and deprivation. He serves God, not in anticipation of reward or punishment, but as proof that the ethical life generates its own incentive.<sup>40</sup> Herzog's suffering in no way resembles Job's, but he does not "disintegrate and suffer and hate, like so many others" (p. 99). Implicit in the story of Job is the Jewish concept, discussed by Manfred Vogel, of the intrinsic goodness of people, that they will employ their free will to choose good.<sup>41</sup> Herzog's "weakness for good deeds" (p. 115), his refusal to believe "that there was no faithfulness, no generosity, no sacred quality" (p. 100) in people suggests an affinity with this thinking.

Aware of the discrepancy between thought and action, Herzog berates himself: "Where is that human life which is

my only excuse for surviving! What have I to show for myself?" (p. 227). He longs to define his humanity, not in Christian terms of his immortal soul--"Not immortal longing" (p. 227)--but rather along Humanist lines: "No, entirely mortal, but human" (p. 227), which has connotations of fulfilling obligations and responsibilities on earth. An earlier emphasis has been on

{s}urvival! . . . Till we figure out what's what. Till the chance comes to exert a positive influence. (Personal responsibility for history, a trait of Western culture, rooted in the Testaments, Old and New, the idea of the continual improvement of human life on this earth [p. 134].)

Herzog's wide scholarship allows a generalization about the influence of both Testaments on Western civilization, but the idea of survival in the twentieth century may have specific Jewish relevance, particularly if we recall the the passage which begins "[w]e are survivors" (p. 81). Of greater importance, perhaps, is the Jewish spirit of optimism which influences this attitude.<sup>42</sup> Historical experience taught Jews to be stoical in adversity, and as Alfred Jospe says, Judaism believes "that history is not blind. It has direction and a goal."<sup>43</sup> Thus Herzog looks not to the horrific past (perhaps to the Holocaust), but to the future, assured that technology will aid the eventual achievement of perfection on earth for mankind (p. 81). His assumption that each individual has a part to play, a "[p]ersonal responsibility for history" (p. 134), also harks back to Judaism's encouragement of the individual response, that, in Jospe's words, "man is not merely an object of history. He is also the subject of history"

If Herzog were to be successful in stealing his father's pistol and murdering Madeleine and her lover, his actions would support Himmelstein's and Kierkegaard's assertions that nastiness, evil, and truth are synonymous. But in this important instance, Herzog's actions--or rather, his lack of violent actions--and his thinking coalesce. Violence and killing are foreign to Herzog, as they are to the Jew (Jonah Herzog also could not pull a trigger) and his behaviour becomes a parody of law-breaking. Not melodramatic murder, but rather his plea: "'Let life continue--we may not deserve it, but let it continue'" (p. 57) confirms his allegiance to Jewish tradition.<sup>44</sup>

That the influence of ancient teachings absorbed earlier still influences Herzog's life is metaphorically suggested by the comparison between the hall light in the old family home and ner tamid, the eternal light in the synagogue (p. 252). The glow of ancient teachings absorbed earlier still illuminates Herzog's life. It dispels the metaphysical gloom, the lack of spiritual illumination for modern man metaphorically suggested in images such as this: "In dusty niches bulbs burned. Without religion" (p. 47). It is in contrast to the Eliot-like description of the return of spring, which reminds people of "their own failures, of sterility and death" (p. 18).

In contrast, Herzog's focus is foremost on life. Commenting on his memory of his father's death, Robert Alter observes "the Jewishness of Herzog's wry, skeptical, worldly, almost disarming, faith in life" implicit in his "untranslatable verbal shrug" in the Yiddish phrase "'[n]u, maile'" (p. 250). Herzog's ultimate acceptance of death as an inseparable part

of life is suggested by his comparison of the day of Junie's outing with the day of his father's funeral (p. 286). This embodies a Jewish pragmatism learnt from his mother, who taught "that life was life only when it was understood clearly as dying" (p. 189). The Jewish attitude is exemplified in the annual Day of Atonement, Yom Kippur, which in many ways is a rehearsal for death.<sup>46</sup> His mother's acceptance of mortality, "proof" to her son that Adam was created from earth (the Hebrew word for earth is adama) complements her own death, which she turns into a lesson in dying for her son (pp. 239-40). This lies at the root of Herzog's dismissal of the modern concept of death as something to fear, illustrated by Tina Zokóly's theories on how to face death. He discerns that underlying her method is a modern belief in the salutary properties of dread, in death, not in God (p. 279).

In this sense, to him "perpetual thought of death was a sin" (p. 39). People may have polluted life, but Herzog, unlike those who "[play] at crisis" (p. 324), unlike idealists such as Nachman, can still hold that "belief based on reason" (p. 173), people's intelligent interpretation of the will of God, can save them from annihilation. That evidently he continues "to believe in God" (p. 238) takes Herzog by surprise, but it is this belief which gives credence to his opposition to wasteland thinking, to the slogans "God is Dead" or "Death is God". Fuchs observes that it "is not accidental to the novel that Herzog is a Jewish intellectual," and cites as fundamental to Jewish thought the absence of the idea of original sin, the importance of man's own actions in redemption and adherence to the law.<sup>47</sup> For Judaism, the

basis of moral social interaction between people is the contractual relationship between God and man, the covenant, recalled by Herzog in the following metaphor (one of many) of undertaking and obligation: "I wilfully misread my contract. I never was the principal, but only on loan to myself" (p. 238). He queries not the purpose of life, but his interpretation of it.

Belief in God negates the idea that the universe is structureless and meaningless, and thus Herzog cannot but be hostile to this aspect of modernism. Bellow's own opposition is evident in his satire of Tina Zokóly's theories, expressed through Lucas Asphalter. Following Tina Zokóly, Asphalter has tried to confront his own death. Herzog identifies the influence of Heidegger in the affirmation of an "absurd" death, in the attempt to triumph over the quotidian (pp. 277-78). That Bellow finds this idea ridiculous is evident in the comic images (chorus girls playing baseball, the sight of a fat aunt's buttocks) which fill Asphalter's mind as he tries to contemplate reality and truth from his coffin. Herzog opposes Heidegger's "second Fall of Man" (p. 112) which implies that man has sinned irrevocably, albeit in secular terms. He doubts that this is "the full crisis of dissolution" (p. 80), whether "the filthy moment [has] come when moral feeling dies, conscience disintegrates and respect for liberty, law, public decency, all the rest, collapses in cowardice, decadence, blood" (pp. 80-81). He opposes the idea of an absurd universe, the world as "nothing but a barren lump of coke" (p. 296), without substitutes for the loss of traditional religious assumptions, where all facts defy human understanding, where moral revulsion can be overcome only

by total change, by "apocalypse and desperation" (p. 324). The "'fall into the quotidian'" (p. 55) is supposedly accompanied by dread, anguish, terror. Yet the coarse, practical humour of Asphalter's reveries and the enjoyment of the burlesque which formed part of his childhood, effectively undercut the idea of a mental and spiritual disintegration.

#### Language and Moral Realities

Opposing alienation, Herzog allies himself with "thoughtful people and humanists" who "struggle towards suitable words" (p. 279) in an attempt to re-instate an unfashionable moral reality. Through language, "by writing letters helter-skelter in all directions" (p. 279), he challenges the aesthetic, psychological, and pseudo-pessimistic assessments of human behaviour, preferring an ethical standard. Because speech is God's gift to man, the sanctity of the word is to be revered. Will Herberg calls it the human point of contact with God which allows the explorations of freedom and moral responsibility, while Abraham J. Heschel writes that "words are the vessels of the spirit. And when the vessels are broken, our relationship to the spirit becomes precarious."<sup>4</sup> Herzog's "'[s]trict and literal truthfulness'" (p. 195), the urge for "speaking, piercing, making clear judgements, uttering final explanations, necessary words only" (p. 74) is the expression of his concept of a moral reality. Ironically, it is in contrast with his actual behaviour, his marital infidelities, for example, and his vacillating attitude towards Ramona.

He blames creative writers (one thinks of Ezra Pound,

and the early Eliot) for fostering prevalent philosophical attitudes:

Here the responsibility of artists remains to be assessed. To have assumed, for instance, that the deterioration of language and its debasement was tantamount to dehumanization led straight to cultural fascism (p. 82).

Herzog doubts the actual commitment of "[l]iterate people" to the ideas they borrow and parade as "certain crabs . . . beautify themselves with seaweed" (p. 224). To restore to certain words their original, ethical value ("to change it all into language, to force Madeleine and Gersbach to have a Conscience. There's a word for you" [p. 279]), is to stall the acceleration towards moral decadence encouraged by the glib use of such words as "dread": "But it isn't a question of dread, or any such words at all . . ." (p. 279). Certain words need to be defined by actions to retain their original validity. Thus Herzog queries Dr Edvig's professional classification of Madeleine as "religious" (disproved by her actions) and the doctor's definition of "humility" which reduces the concept to "masochistic crawling or cowardice" (p. 70). Edvig's interpretations of these words, if their moral value is taken into account, suggest the debasement, not the uplifting of the human spirit. Words may have lost their moral value, but this (hypothetical) potential is still exploitable. Thus Herzog notes cynically that the strength of an outdated morality is employed for deception and profit, as words are weighted with "goodness" for commercial value. Benjamin Franklin himself recommended "Reliable Appearances," the "honest look," as a business asset (p. 168).

Aware that the choice of language reflects the morality of its users, Bellow employs speech and language ironically to this effect. For example, the conversation between Shapiro (a colleague whom Herzog has known from childhood) and Madeleine, their mastery of "the learned badinage" (p. 82) of academia, echoes not with erudition but with egotism and exhibitionism, an eloquent emptiness. It recalls a rabbinic aphorism, "asses laden with books", which distinguishes between those with real wisdom and the mere carriers of knowledge.<sup>49</sup> The scholarly name-dropping of Madeleine and Shapiro is a mutual confidence trick. Mady's academic exhibitionism presents a fashion show of her dated intellectual interests, while a basic insensate vulgarity (a "sucking snarling undirected laugh" [p. 77]) pierces Shapiro's scholastic sophistication. His imitation of WASP speech patterns, his euphemisms, his approbation of a "Proustian" (p. 76) style of sentence, while suggesting that he affects a certain appropriate academic style, also points to his distancing himself from his background, to an inauthentic Jewishness.

Herzog's scorn for his colleague is unmitigated by the latter's oral erudition (his correct pronunciation of references in seven different languages [p. 77]) because he lacks "the truth of life" (p. 76), the moral core which strengthened his pedlar father. To master one's subject solely for academic and social success is to mistake its final goal. Similarly Herzog ridicules Madeleine's intellectual hopscotch, played indiscriminately with the Russian intelligentsia, Zadovsky, Dostoevski, and Soloviev, or with Josephine Tey. Both compete callously in an intellectual game, as if bridge problems, not the fate of humanity, are their chosen area of study.

Herzog's contempt for Shapiro is both personal and academic. After the Holocaust, how can any Jew deliver a "merely aesthetic critique of modern history" (p. 81)? Shapiro is but another consumer of the "canned sauerkraut of Spengler's 'Prussian Socialism', the commonplaces of the Wasteland outlook, the cheap mental stimulants of Alienation, the cant and rant of pipsqueaks about Inauthenticity and Forlornness" (p. 81). His outlook allows a separation of "the problem of truth from the problem of living, cognition from man's total situation."<sup>50</sup> Functioning in isolation, reason propounds irrelevant concepts of man. Shapiro's writing denies the traditional Jewish integration of mind and morality (mentioned by Moses Mendelssohn and Josephine Knopp),<sup>51</sup> which is implicit in Herzog's make-up, "Some new thought (grips) his heart" (p. 7), while Shapiro negates the "rich blood" (p. 81) of his heritage, clambering to academic success on the emptiness of the void.

#### A View of Christianity and Romanticism

The satiric portrait of Shapiro is based on the irrelevance of his aesthetic approach to history and the harmful influence he and fellow writers exert, while the caricature of Madeleine Pontritter goes beyond a parody of scholarship to include a criticism of Christianity. Deprived of a traditional upbringing by her father, the American Stanislavsky, she turns to the Catholic church with "terrible eagerness and twisted perplexity and appeal" (p. 69). Herzog thinks "'Madeleine wants a saviour'" (p. 60). But the attraction of the church is satirised as a spectacular one: "Ecclesiastical dolls--gold-threaded petticoats, whining organ

pipes" (p. 124). Madeleine's attempt at conversion is comically described as an enthusiastic flight from reality (her theatrical over-dramatisation of the part), characterised by exuberant emotional displays and a longing for a spiritual experience.<sup>52</sup> This divorce between religion and reality is alien to Judaism, as the following story, retold by Martin Buber, suggests: A man "inspired by God" seeks to speak to God alone, because he has had no success with his fellows. But God sends him back to earth, saying that "[He] has sunk [His] hearing in the deafness of mortals."<sup>53</sup> In contrast with Madeleine's aspirations, Herzog "would never grasp the Christian and Faustian world idea, forever alien to [him]" (p. 241). He holds that the "actual world, to say nothing of the infinite universe, [demands] a sterner, a real masculine character" (p. 124).

He dislikes the similarities between Christianity and nihilistic thinking, "the present moment always as some crisis, some fall from classical greatness, some corruption or evil to be saved from" (p. 60). This presumes the idea of original sin, a fall from grace or a golden age inimical to Jewish thinking. For the Jew, "the sin of Adam did not corrupt all mankind . . . if he be condemned, it is through his own works . . . if he be redeemed it is through his contrition and penance."<sup>54</sup> (The Jewish interpretation of the suffering servant in Isaiah 53 is not Christ, but all Israel.)<sup>55</sup> By refusing to accept the world as fallen, Jewish thinking undercuts the potential passivism of Christianity, the need for a saviour or an apocalypse. It allows the final responsibility for the self to be delegated not to faith in a redeemer, but to man's individual moral response for

his active life. For Herzog, Dr Edvig's Protestant Freudianism "reveals a lousy, cringing, grudging conception of human nature" (pp. 63-64). This denies the dignity of man associated with free will and moral choice in Jewish thought and its ensuing confidence in the human potential for goodness, which undercuts the Christian emphasis on evil. In a discussion which further demonstrates the point, Ruth Wisse notes the polarisation of good and evil in certain Christian heroes such as Melville's Billy Budd. Their Jewish counterparts, Herzog, for example, illustrate the mixed condition, an acceptance of a "stained humanity."<sup>56</sup>

The relationship between Christianity and Romanticism is the subject of Herzog's first book. His disagreement with the former is certain, but his attitude towards Romanticism is more ambivalent. Writing to his old tutor Harris Pulver, Herzog notes that:

Romantic individuals . . . accuse this mass civilization of obstructing their attainment of beauty, nobility, integrity, intensity. I do not want to sneer at the term Romantic. Romanticism guarded the 'inspired condition', preserved the poetic, philosophical and religious teachings, the teachings and records of transcendence and the most generous ideas of mankind . . . (p. 172).

Yet, like T. E. Hulme, Herzog is repelled by the "'dampness'. . . and the swarming of Romantic feelings" (p. 135), by the failure of the individual attempt to concretise Romantic abstractions evident in the lives of Nachman (another of Herzog's childhood friends) and his wife Laura. Laura, "a pure soul that understands only pure things" (p. 139) is committed to an asylum after her third suicide attempt. Nachman's allegiance to William Blake and Rilke and his

dismissal of the fat gods of materialism leave him destitute. The grim failure of his life illustrates ironically, defiantly, the subject of his poetry, the unique quality of individuality (p. 14).

Herzog mocks his own propensity towards Romanticism:

"I fall upon the thorns of life, I bleed. And then? I fall upon the thorns of life, I bleed. And what next? I get laid, I take a short holiday . . ." (p. 214). He has little regard for Nachman's Romantic poetry, and they disagree about a definition of man. In the sequel to his published work, Herzog proposes to overturn "the last of the Romantic errors about the uniqueness of the Self" (p. 45). Yet his gentleness with Nachman, in comparison with his censure of other childhood friends such as Shapiro, suggests a sympathy for his idealism.

That Herzog might favour the Romantic sensibility is evident in his attachment to certain ideas of Blake, notably the naïve "blessedness" of existence. Yet although the subjective standards of Romanticism parallel Jewish thought in some ways, ultimately "Jewish feeling resists Romanticism and insists on an older set of values."<sup>57</sup> Hulme thought Romanticism's faith in the infinite potential of man dangerous because, taken to extremes, it suggests that man, without God, can become perfect. Like Hulme, Herzog dislikes the Romantic concept of human perfectibility. His alternate idea of man, remarked on by Nachman (p. 140), is closer to the Jewish definition. Herzog has learned "to accept a mixed condition of life" (p. 140), which echoes Bellow's own position: "We make what we can of our condition with the means available. We must accept the mixture as we find it--the impurity of it, the tragedy of it, the hope of it."<sup>58</sup>

## The Subjective Self

Bellow observes that:

'Ideology commands an end, imposes a law, speaks the first and last words and abolishes confusion. But it has no interest in the miracle of being which artists endlessly contemplate.'<sup>59</sup>

This attitude is the key to Herzog's thinking about the self. He opposes systematised, abstract, objective definitions of man, whether philosophical and alienated or psychological and Freudian. He dislikes both the Romantic propounding of human perfectibility and the Christian opposite, belief in man's inherent imperfection. His resistance to the theories of Inauthenticity and Despair is centred on his inherited idea of man. The choice is between "disintegrating ourselves by our own wills in proof of our 'freedom', or the acknowledging that we owe a human life to this waking spell of existence, regardless of the void" (p. 321). He cannot condone the disintegration of the individual in a post-humanistic society, his lack of identity in an amorphous mass. He is capable of employing irony against the individual: "Three thousand million human beings exist, each with some possessions, each a microcosmos, each infinitely precious, each with a peculiar treasure" (p. 182), but refuses to see individuality as megalomania, or as a bourgeois possession, or to condone its belittlement (p. 99). The alternative of mass man, of the soul of the mob (characterized by soullessness) is too frightening.

The attitude of secular Existentialist pessimists contradicts the biblical idea of living as part of a created

whole. It accepts being as the ultimate. Thus man can relate himself to nothingness only. A void, not a determining presence, surrounds him. His thoughts and values are self-centred and self-defined. Confronted by nothingness, "'the possible impossibility of his existence'" is to be considered.<sup>60</sup> But Herzog finds plausible the biblical idea that life is ultimately real. His opposition to the annihilation of individuality is at root religious because it implies the extinction of the divine spark in man. God's imprint on each individual calls for self respect, a dignity of thought and behaviour, but primarily it allows him the freedom of moral decision. Herzog will not accept the death of morality on which the individual and collective humanity of man rests. He insists that there are "moral realities . . . as surely as there are molecular and atomic ones" (pp. 185-86).

It seems to him that "all he asked . . . was a bit of cooperation in his effort, benefiting everyone, to work towards a meaningful life" (p. 129). He affirms the subjective self and its moral activity against the overwhelming objectification of humanity, accepting that he "was what he was" (p. 31), that "[he [is] Herzog," that he has "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" (p. 73) He rejects classification: "Excuse me, therefore, sir [Gersbach] and madam [Madeleine], but I reject your definitions of me" (p. 306). The subjective capacity is essential if one is to experience one's humanity. It is a prerequisite for what Buber calls the "I" and Herzog his conscious and separate being.<sup>61</sup> In order to "be", he has to "do". That is, Herzog is committed to an idea of action as an expression

of morality. That he, not a saviour or a psychiatrist, is solely responsible for his own salvation is evident: "There is no one else to do it" (p. 73).

This is made clear in the course of the novel, which traces Herzog's moral development. There is a change from a judgemental attitude towards Gersbach and Madeleine, from thoughts of revenge, even of murder, to a tolerance, an acceptance of their shortcomings. His recognition of Gersbach as a particular person, not as a stage villain, is an affirmation both of his rival's and of his own subjective individuality:

As soon as Herzog saw the actual person [Gersbach] giving an actual bath, the reality of it, the tenderness of such a buffoon to a little child, his intended violence turned into theatre, into something ludicrous (p. 265).

The private quest for subjective truth and man's responsibility to be himself are basic requirements of many faiths, epigrammatically expressed for Judaism by Rabbi Zishe: "When I get to heaven, they will not ask me, 'Zishe, Zishe, why weren't you Moses? They will ask me, 'Zishe, why weren't you Zishe?'"<sup>62</sup> Herzog's internal pilgrimage is attempted by self-analysis and self-castigation, ironically lightened by wit. His personality suggests the paradoxical interweaving of two typical Jewish concepts of identity, that of the schlemiel and of a "marvellous" Herzog.

The "Schlemiel" and the "Lamdan"<sup>63</sup>

Ruth Wisse defines the schlemiel as follows: "Vulnerable, ineffectual in his efforts at self-advancement and self-

preservation, he emerged as the archetypal Jew, especially in his capacity of potential victim." He is either berated for his negative qualities, his foolish weakness, or exalted for his inner strength, his endurance of affliction, his innocence against corruption. She describes Herzog as the schlemiel as comic hero who fails in "male initiative, pride, dignity and socioeconomic achievement" but who succeeds in final self-acceptance (the "happy ending"). On this equivocation rests the premise of "loser-as-victor."<sup>64</sup>

The weaknesses of Herzog the schlemiel are evident to Tennie Pontritter, for whom he is "zisse n'shamele, a sweet little soul" (p. 131); to Madeleine and Gersbach, who manipulate his life; to his lawyer Himmelstein, powerfully in control of Herzog's legal affairs, and, ironically, to Herzog himself. He sees himself as that "suffering joker" (p. 17), "suffering at heart like a fool" (p. 97), a victim, although he hates "the victim bit" (p. 88). But what are his alternatives?

Not to be a fool might not be worth the difficult alternatives. Anyway, who was that non-fool? Was it the power-lover, who bent the public to his will--the scientific intellectual. . . . the organizational realist? (p.131)

To court power is unacceptable to the traditional defencelessness of the Jew, whose moral strength dictates the contempt of the weak for the strong.<sup>65</sup> He rejects the shrewd, self-seeking toughness of the reality instructors because, working "under different orders" (p. 131), he has a different assignment. These aims paradoxically link Herzog the schlemiel with the traditional Jewish hero, the wise man or chacham, and with

the revered scholar, the lamdan.

Whether Herzog is aware of the similarity or not, his heroic quest, undertaken largely at the "unconscious philosophical level", resembles the ancient Jewish desire to seek virtue through knowledge and to resist the separation of the one from the other. The old sages did not consider learning as an end in itself, believing that knowledge and reason were the ways to wisdom, of which virtue is the highest form. Rabbi Pinhas said: "I should rather be devout than clever, but rather than both devout and clever, I should like to be good."<sup>66</sup> The obligation of the scholar is to share his knowledge. Learning and social conscience are thus linked. Following the ancient example, Herzog views his career not as the fulfilment of personal ambition only, but as an attempt to remedy incorrect ideas about civilization. "It was not simple vanity, but a sense of responsibility that was the underlying motive" (p. 126).

His preoccupation with morality rather than with pure intellectuality is evident in his attacks on the thinkers to whom he addresses his unposted letters. It is never their reasoning or intellectual prowess he queries, but the underlying idea of man stripped of all dignity and nobility, man devoid of "marvellous qualities" (p. 100), of a sacred quality, of moral certainties. This is at the heart of his opposition to the theories of alienation and inauthenticity predominant in Sartre and Heidegger, to the barren wasteland of Spengler, Ortega y Gasset, and Pound, the merely aesthetic analysis of modern history promulgated by Burckhardt and Nietzsche and aped by Shapiro.<sup>67</sup>

Herzog's scholarship is of a different variety. It

reflects Bellow's temper of "liberal humanism. . . . it posits integrity in the ordinary world."<sup>68</sup> At the centre of his cultural studies lies a moral intellectualism, a belief in civilization and the value of man. Shapiro and Madeleine follow selfish ambitions, but with Herzog it "was not simple vanity, but a sense of responsibility that was the underlying motive" (p. 126). He translates his idea of himself, "a thoughtful person who believes in civil usefulness" (p. 169), into an academic vision of "the man on whom the whole world depended for certain intellectual work, to change history, to influence the development of civilization" (p. 111). To state categorically that "the progress of civilization--indeed, the survival of civilization-- depended on the successes of Moses E. Herzog" (pp. 131-32) is perhaps to emphasise the foolish optimism of the schlemiel. Regarded cynically, Herzog's aims appear monstrously comical, in keeping with the hyperbole often evident in his character. But if taken as a spontaneous expression of "unconscious" Jewish philanthropy, Herzog, like the writers of the Mishna, the Midrash, and the Talmud, is exploring knowledge as a moral obligation for the spiritual education of humanity. Assuming the responsibility of the scholar to correct the degraded image of man, he simultaneously uplifts both his own self-image and that of mankind. To be "a marvellous Herzog . . . to live out marvellous qualities vaguely comprehended" (p. 100) is thus an assertion of Jewish humanism against the powers of dehumanization.

## The Duties of the Heart

Herzog's subjective sense of self includes not only his vulnerability and proposed scholastic philanthropy, but that "[t]errible handicap, a soul" (p. 104). His agreement with Rousseau's statement: "Je sens mon coeur et je connais les hommes" (p. 135) indicates a preference for subjectivity. Knowledge is a product of the individual heart, not of the anonymous sterile intellect alone, as Hulme's followers, the wasteland writers, and modern scientists would have us believe. For Herzog, "reality [opposes] the 'law of the heart'" (p. 129). That Herzog understands the Jewish interpretation of the duties of the heart is clear in his wish that his daughter Junie be educated "according to the Herzog standards of 'heart', and all the rest of it (or) she will fail to become a human being" (p. 265). "Standards of heart" have to be learnt. Mere emotional reaction is not sufficient, but needs to be measured against an emotional set of values which determines its validity. If "standards of heart" exist, a certain objectivity is required and a distinction is made between "softening, heart-rotting emotions" (p. 147) and an objective moral sensibility. Without the latter, one fails "to become a human being". Menschlekhkayt thus depends on the duties of the heart. Particularly in a period which concentrates on the importance of the objective intellect, the stress on subjective spontaneous feeling combined with a moral directive is to be desired.

Herzog finds the "raging consumption of potato love" (p. 183) proliferating everywhere as abhorrent as a total

trust in reason and as effective a way to dehumanize man. He sees the vulgarization and eventual discarding of the duties of the heart as the hallmark of mass man. It cheapens the concept of brotherhood. Politicians use it to manipulate popularity: "The general won because he expressed low-grade universal potato love" (p. 72). As the unique soul becomes part of the soul of the mob (p. 92), indifferent, incapable of free choice, of individual emotional response and moral responsibility, so the divine stamp on man, the concept of man made in the image of God, as stated in Genesis 5.1-2, is obliterated. This corruption or falsification of genuine goodness and kindness, a perversion of the human heart which no longer has a moral touchstone, allows "a second distortion of the divine image" (p. 183) to occur.

The contrast between genuine feeling and its fake substitution underlines the difference between Herzog and Himmelstein (p. 97) and particularly between Herzog and Gersbach. Sarah Blacher Cohen points out that Gersbach caricatures Herzog's emotional excesses and emphasizes their irrelevance, but does this view not ignore the fact that Herzog's moral and emotional sensibilities change and develop, while Gersbach's responses remain predictably the same throughout the novel?<sup>69</sup> The latter's moral posturing (for example his advice to his friend [pp. 65-67]) is meaningless, false. He supplies emotion on demand, like a commercial commodity ("[s]ubtlety for the subtle. Warmth for the warm. For the crude, crudity" [p. 222]). The archetypal phoney, he obliterated the true value of feeling to gain instant popularity. (But the reader must remember that she or he sees Gersbach through Herzog's by-no-means-objective eyes.

Only once is the reader allowed to glimpse him directly, when he bathes Junie with tenderness and affection.)

The caricature of Gersbach is principally that of "an emotional king" (p. 67), manipulating emotion for selfish ends. Herzog may indulge in immoderate emotion, but an ironic self-consciousness smiles at its excesses. Consumed with self-pity, he nonetheless recognises the danger of feeling that swings loose from a moral anchor. He acknowledges the self-centredness of his hypochondria, the emotional indulgence in his appeals to old friends such as Libby Vane and Phoebe Gersbach. He can identify "the insidious blight of nostalgia" (p. 147) which blurs his memories of Napoleon Street and realize that his strong family ties are mocked by his own broken marriages and affairs. He recognises and regrets the weakness implicit in an excessive display of heart, as Madeleine exploits his love and Gersbach his friendship.

Herzog tacitly agrees with Nachman's opinion that he is "'a good man. . . . a good heart. . . . A gentle spirit'" (p. 140), but confuses the concepts of goodness and innocence. His own experiences and actions (the homosexual's assault when he was a child, his own adultery, and hatred, and vanity, his contemplation of revenge, which includes murder) indicate a knowledge of evil, but Herzog has "refused to know evil" (p. 252). He has avoided it consciously. Like the child in the nursery rhyme ("and pussy will love me because I am good" [p. 124]), he anticipates love in return for naïveté and goodness, to be spared the worst of life in return for docility and goodwill (p. 161). This is not true innocence but a form of bargaining, a moral cowardice,

a cultivated falsehood of reaction to both private experience (Madeleine's betrayal) and historical fact. (No historian, and a Jew to boot, dare refuse to confront the slaughter in the twentieth century.) Herzog asserts: "Fountains of human blood that squirted from fresh graves! Limitless massacre! I never understood it!" (p. 83). Yet he does come to terms with the "mixed condition" (p. 140) of life, and of his own self, acknowledging that his heart is "part pure, part wicked" (p. 54), which becomes a confession of moral growth and self-recognition by the end of the novel.

The moral enlargement of Herzog's concept of suffering as opposed to the static quality of Gersbach's exploitative attitude is a clear indication of their essential differences. To suffer--the etymological meaning is to be bent low by an unbearable burden--impairs man both spiritually and physically. Jews do not "choose" to suffer, although their experience points to a history of affliction. But persecution need not necessarily debase the sufferer. This Herzog knows from his own father's example. He can identify genuine suffering because of his early "great schooling in grief" (p. 155) when he absorbed the tales of his father's woe: starvation, imprisonment, poverty, persecution (p. 154). His parent's history is a microcosm of Jewish hardship, a continuation of "a Biblical sense of personal experience and destiny" (p. 155). The memory of this pain is an ongoing guarantee of Herzog's Jewish identity: "I remember. I must" (p. 155). The lesson of this historical suffering is to bear hardship with moral dignity. It is mocked by Herzog's own "suffering", his breakdown following betrayal by his wife and friend. By being "'a victim'" (p. 88) he has encouraged their deceit and

debased and belittled himself. As he learns the extent of their superficiality, he dismisses his "suffering" as ludicrous: "Only self-hatred could lead him to ruin himself because his heart was 'broken'. How could it be broken by such a pair?" (p. 265). To continue to blame Madeleine and Gersbach for his plight suggests that his feelings are as artificial as his victimizers'.

If Gersbach has had Herzog's moral education, he shows no sign of it. Herzog may have a Jewish appreciation of suffering, ". . . under his own rules the man who had suffered more was the more special" (p. 68), but Gersbach's dramatization of the childhood amputation of his leg, his "suffering" as he usurps Herzog's role as husband and father, is a questionable exploitation of its potential. He is part of a modern "brutal standard" (p. 115) that is oblivious to a possible link between morality and suffering. While Gersbach is indifferent to individual anguish, to all but his own desires, Herzog, grasping the full implications of the "new terminal standard" (p. 155), relates its importance to the heart. Himmelstein, whose own morality is questionable, understands this: "'You're not like those other university phonies. You're a mensch'" (p. 87). "'I understand it. . . . I grew up . . . when a Jew was still a Jew'" (pp. 90-91).

#### Social Conscience

For the Jew, the duties of the heart are fully realised in the expression of social conscience which stresses the mutual responsibility of men and the value of community. "The Bible . . . makes its ethical demand compatible with

social reality."<sup>70</sup> The completion of Hillel's much quoted maxim, Im ain anee lee mee lee, "if I am not for myself, who will be for me?" is ukh-sh'anee l'atzmee mah anee, "but when I am only for myself, what am I?"<sup>71</sup> This stresses the movement from a personal to an enlarged social vision, the development in Judaism of correct personal values for the common good. To opt out is to deny a connection with the human, whether general, or particular and familial, and though Herzog has failed, twice, as a father, he insists that his duty "was to live. To be sane, and to live and to look after the kids" (p. 33).

Herzog seems aware both of the Jewish ethic and of his own failure to live according to it. He tells Asphalter that the "real and essential question is one of our employment by other human beings and their employment by us" (p. 280), that he really believes "that brotherhood is what makes a man human. If I owe God a human life, this is where I fall down" (p. 280). He agrees that the individual must strive for social justice during his lifetime and not wait passively for the reign of justice on earth (the Messianic arrival). He exhibits a Jewish practicality about where to begin if one is to aim at a perfect society: "You must start with injustices that are obvious to everybody, not with big historical perspectives" (p. 54). But he fails to confront the question of violence and evil in society. Personally, Herzog is incapable of violence, but as a scholar he (unlike Shapiro) is intensely affected by past wars and mass killings, by modern anarchy which denies man's position as "little lower than the angels" (Psalm 8.5) and confirms his proximity to the brutes. He decries philosophers (Rousseau for example)

who have encouraged revolutions, engineered famines, and in this century, inspired "the demonic nihilism of Hitler" (p. 81). Yet when actually faced with a travesty of private and public concern and justice, the brutal murder of an unknown child, Herzog the human being is totally inadequate. Schooled by his father and his father's fathers, he responds to a courtroom recital of child abuse, a statement of atrocity, with intense horror and pain. He concentrates with "all his might--mind and heart--" (p. 247) and finds, not glib socio-economic facts or psychological apology, but only "his own human feelings" (p. 247).

I fail to understand! thought Herzog. . . . but this is the difficulty with people who spend their lives in humane studies and therefore imagine once cruelty has been described in books it is ended (p. 245).

Here Bellow berates Herzog's passive, unworldly, scholarly "goodness". The murder is senseless, beyond the perimeters of rational thought. Mere "human feelings" cannot restore life to the child, create a just society, or prevent future brutality. Herzog may understand "that human beings would not live so as to be understood by the Herzogs" (p. 245), that they cannot be perfect, but he fails to make any positive contribution to curb corruption or protect the innocent. That this is well-nigh impossible still does not exclude the moral responsibility of the individual to strive for social justice. Herzog's pity for the murdered boy indicates his Jewish propensity for rahamanut, tenderness, but compassion without action can disintegrate into meaningless sentiment. There is a strong sense of self-pity in Herzog's

dramatisation of the court scene as a parallel of his own domestic affairs. His immediate subsequent decision is to fly to Chicago to ensure that Madeleine and Gersbach (already guilty of locking Junie away in a car while they argued [p. 107]) are not mistreating his daughter. Thus the tragedy of the battered child is reduced to a personal warning, and the conscience of the humanist rendered ineffectual.

The above pattern of intense inner emotion or moral fervour seldom finding public expression is characteristic of Herzog. His emotional generosity is all-encompassing: his grief for a dead roommate (p. 125), his devotion to his old tutor Pulver (p. 170), his almost embarrassing family feeling (p. 84). He calls spontaneously on mutual family responsibility (borrowing money from Shura, calling on Will to secure his release from the police), yet is a virtual outsider to the family. He worries constantly about Madeleine's maternal ability, yet he himself has failed his children. His genuine love and concern for their welfare does not alter the facts of his absenteeism, his eccentricity, his unpredictability. That Herzog realizes the extent of his shortcomings ironically underlines his interpretation of Blake: "'Man liveth not by Self alone but in his brother's face'" (p. 280).

## Conclusion

Herzog: Would-be "Mensch"

What is Bellow's purpose in calling his main protagonist Moses Elkanah Herzog, a name trailing banners of biblical and national glory? Is he to be a second, literary, Moses,

leading the twentieth century from a spiritual wilderness to individual and communal freedom? The biblical Moses received God's law at Sinai. Does his namesake continue to carry out its commandments? Elkanah (the father of the prophet Samuel) means one whom God has created, or possesses. The name suggests a belief in the creation and that its bearer is chosen by God, his "possession". His task is to show His way to the gentiles. It has further connotations of individual goodness, of being worthy of God's attention, responsible to duty, responsive to virtue. (Although Bellow's translation of Elkanah into the Hebrew "Hanon" meaning "graced" is, strictly speaking, incorrect, it could have that further connotation.)<sup>72</sup> Herzog means duke, one of aristocratic birth, and suggests social superiority. It also contains the German word herz, meaning heart, courage, mind, spirit, feeling; a further reference might be to Maurice Herzog, a volcanologist and climber, which suggests fearless adventuring.

The promise of these names is ironically mocked, not least by Herzog himself. Herzog aims at academic leadership. His research is to be revolutionary, but his incomplete book lies mouldering in Ludeyville. The letters he writes attempt dialogue, to influence philosophical and political thought. They remain unposted. The acute promptings of his social and family conscience rely on a theoretical knowledge of the Mosaic code, yet he remains guilty of a paucity of good deeds. Neither does he employ the promptings of his heart to any purpose. The realities of perversion and cruelty he witnesses in court appal him, reinforcing his knowledge as a historian that his inadvertent exposure to evil is but

a minute experience of its ubiquitous presence. But the charge of grief is self-circuited, shocking only himself. Similarly his understanding of the suffering of modern man never alleviates him. The heart (herz in "Herzog") is mocked, as is the suggestion of social superiority. Ironically Father Herzog's pretensions ("a gilded little gentleman" [p. 151], an edel-mensch [p. 150], who sends his children to piano lessons instead of to work) are inherited by his son, who refers to himself mockingly as "Squire Herzog. The Graf Pototsky of the Berkshires" (p. 82). In his turn he is convinced his children are of "finer clay" than Himmelstein's "hamsters" (p. 281). (The true superiority of the Herzogs is the adherence of the immigrants to their Jewish tradition, the knowledge of which makes Herzog, middle-aged, twice divorced, financially unsound, a desirable husband for the likes of Himmelstein, even if the proposal is no more than a flattering insincerity on the part of the lawyer.)

Herzog himself is wryly aware of the discrepancy between the spirit of menschlekhkayt which imbues him and his actual failure to put it into practice: "Lord, I ran to fight in Thy holy cause, but kept tripping, never reached the scene of the struggle" (p. 135), which recalls Proverbs 19.2: He who makes haste with his feet misses his way (hotay). (The Hebrew word for sin is het, meaning to miss the intended mark or goal.) Perhaps this is the tragic flaw of the emancipated Jew, whose knowledge of his moral tradition and awareness of his inability to live it through mocks his liberated lifestyle. But the final chapter carries a suggestion that Herzog may yet fulfil the promise of his names. He

is down, but not knocked out by the blows of adversity. A process of self-healing has occurred, and self-knowledge and self-acceptance allow the cessation of self-mockery. The schlemiel has unwittingly won peace of mind.

"I am Herzog. I have to be that man" (p. 73) was his desperate affirmation at the start of the novel. Now he can state tranquilly, "Here I am" (p. 317). He can be "that man". "What a struggle I waged! -- left-handed but fierce. But enough of that -- here I am. Hineni! How marvellously beautiful it is today " (p. 317). The immediate translation of "here I am" into Hebrew changes its implications from a secular Existentialist statement to a religious declaration of obligation inherent in election by God. In submission to God's will, Abraham was prepared to sacrifice his precious only son, Isaac. Hineni (Genesis 22.12). Before services commence for the New Year and the Day of Atonement, the reader prays privately and humbly to God. Hineni.<sup>73</sup> Herzog indicates a similar availability, an "eagerness to begin" (p. 329), to share his life with others.

He exhibits Fromm's three requirements for the religious mentality, wonder, "ultimate concern" (Tillich), and oneness of separate self with All. Wonder is evident in his awareness of God's glory manifest in nature (the oriole's nest [p. 78], the transparency of sea, sun and light [p. 98]), while ultimate concern is evident in his desire "to do your unknowable will, taking it, and you, without symbols. Everything of intensest significance" (p. 333). Finally, oneness of separate self with All is implicit in the peace of the final passages set at Ludeyville.<sup>74</sup> This type of mentality may flirt with modern thought which finally rejects God--

Herzog's relationship with Mady fulfilled "'a very special need. . . . She brought ideology into my life. Something to do with catastrophe'" (p. 341)--but only to renounce it. Fuchs observes that, for Bellow, "God is not simply immanent but transcendent, and, usually, the Jewish God," and claims that the ending of Herzog illustrates this. He finds that Herzog responds emotionally to God ("'Thou movest me'" [p. 347]), that he accepts God's will ("'I am pretty well satisfied to be, to be just as it is willed, and for as long as I may remain in occupancy'" [p. 347]), and that Herzog's faith rests on "an unshakable sense of the ethical" which surprises him: "Evidently I continue to believe in God. Though never admitting it. But what else explains my conduct and my life?" (p. 238).

Herzog's conduct may disqualify him as a mensch, but there is no doubt that he is Bellow's most convincing portrait of an American Jew and that the novel is Bellow's most Jewish, as Liela Goldman maintains. A Jewish imagination describes "the stoop-shouldered sun of the garment district" (p. 110), the "great scrolls of cloud" (p. 125); a Jewish awareness notes the old orthodox women buying kosher meat (p. 186); a Jewish irony underlines the difference between Herzog's memory of the black gaberdines worn in the old country and his vulgar holiday garb. Herzog's Hebrew and Yiddish (despite grammatical inaccuracies) display an intimacy with custom and ritual. Yiddish influences his speech patterns, its word order and rhythm. It is the spice of his asides, "I need this outing like a hole in the head" (p. 182), a loch in kop. Its lack of circumlocution, its idiomatic directness, in particular, the ego-deflating quality of its humour reflect the reality that Herzog experiences far more accurately than

any imitation of the accents and affectations of his WASP colleagues could.

Herzog's humour is essentially Jewish. It is a constant defence against the pain of living. It is the deflator of high seriousness and sententious moral preaching. Its ironic detachment allows his self-analysis a sense of balance, tipping the scale against self-indulgent sentimentalism, or self-righteousness, or self-castigation. It leavens his suffering by alleviating its seriousness. It is the sardonic note in his criticism of society and of himself. Realism is its keynote: "On the knees of your soul? Might as well be useful. Scrub the floor" (p. 9). It delights in metaphorical vividness. Its matter-of-factness undercuts sanctimoniousness: "he might think himself a moralist but the shape of a woman's breasts matter greatly" (p.22).

Herzog employs humour with epigrammatic brevity: "With me, money is not a medium. I am money's medium" (p. 38). His playfulness with words suggests both the Americanization of himself, "Hitch your agony to a star" (p. 22), "Lead me not into Penn Station" (p. 26) and his delight at the absurdity of the aims of the American dream, "--how I rose from humble origins to complete disaster" (p. 159). The quality of his wit gives his pronouncements a flippancy which masks their moral seriousness: "Bless you, you are not nice. But in a false situation. . . . A true situation might well prove unendurable to us all" (p. 26). It elevates his condemnation of his fellow beings from vindictive spleen to an objective clarity which deepens rather than cheapens its validity: Gersbach is likened to Putzi Hansfstaengl, Hitler's private pianist (both degrade culture), while women

like Madeleine "eat green salad and drink human blood" (p. 48).

Herzog's humour is often self-directed. It underlines the difference between lofty intention and actual behaviour: "Moses wanted to do what he could to improve the human condition, at last taking a sleeping pill, to preserve himself" (p. 113). It punctures the pomposity of grandiose ambition: "Herzog, responsible to civilization in his icy outpost, lying in bed in his aviator's helmet" (p. 133). It tauntingly qualifies the tone of sermonizing he sometimes adopts: "A man is born to be orphaned, and to leave orphans after him, but a chair like that chair, if he can afford it, is a great comfort" (p. 35).

The indomitable buoyancy of the humour, its colour and sparkle, its everyday pragmatism as well as its bitterness and pathos infuses the subject matter of the novel with a particularly Jewish brand of optimism. The fate of a grief-stricken Jew reviewing the failure of his life is immanently tragic. The civilization he has become a part of is inglorious, soulless, cruel, cold. But the attitude towards personal and private despair inherent in the humour suggests a wider perspective. Both the individual and the human race have endured similar eclipses of the spirit. Herzog can survive, if not with a smile, with a grimace.

## Chapter Four

### Mr Sammler's Planet

"The soul wanted what it wanted. It had its own natural knowledge. It sat unhappily on super-structures of explanation, poor bird, not knowing which way to fly."<sup>1</sup>

#### Introduction

Sidra DeKoven Ezrahi, discussing the difficulties of employing the Holocaust as a theme in American-Jewish literature, points to the rapid assimilation of the American-Jewish writer, whose psychological and cultural links with the Jews of Poland, Russia, and Germany had become very slight by the nineteen-forties. Lacking direct experience and suffering from a "paralysing sense of the enormity of the unexplored event," these writers hesitated to approach the theme.<sup>2</sup> Ezrahi cites Dangling Man, with its concentration on the primacy of the self, not on the protagonist's connectedness with history, as the prime example of the insulation of the American-Jewish writer in the nineteen-forties. Subsequently, during the nineteen-fifties, writers were exposed to a growing documentation by survivors and historians, while the televised Eichmann trial (1961) provided both facts and a near-personal contact with survivors. In the nineteen-sixties, European Holocaust literature was being translated into English and the novels of survivors writing in English were published, supplying emotional and psychological, as well as factual information.

In the late nineteen-sixties, twenty-five years after the event, Bellow's engagement with the theme indicates his desire to confront the experience and wring some meaning from it. In Humboldt's Gift Charlie Citrine observes that in America,

We weren't starving, we weren't bugged by the police, locked up in madhouses for our ideas, arrested, deported, slave labourers sent to die in concentration camps. We were spared the holocausts and the nights of terror. With our advantages we should be formulating the new basic questions for mankind.<sup>3</sup>

Thankful for the "advantage" of not having been persecuted, Bellow formulates not only certain questions, but provides tentative answers to them in Mr Sammler's Planet. Of central importance is the dehumanization of man, evident in the conscienceless killing of millions during the Holocaust. If the significance of death is nullified, are not the lives of the victims rendered meaningless? With grim humour, he observes a different kind of reduction of the individual in America as a practical result of certain Enlightenment philosophies. How is the single self to assert its individuality, its humanity, to protest an inviolate faith in the continuation of life in the face of so much self-destruction and nihilistic thinking?

By casting Mr Sammler as Holocaust survivor, Bellow attempts to provide a variety of approaches to "the new basic questions." Other survivors in the novel are presented as victims, broken by their past, but not Mr Sammler. In the role of the survivor as witness, he bears silent testimony to the Holocaust. As the survivor as prophet, he denounces

the disintegration of moral standards in New York. But it is primarily as the survivor as hero that Mr Sammler symbolises the possibility of an enduring nobility and dignity for humankind, presented in the growth of his ethical and spiritual awareness.

#### The Survivor as Victim

Mr Sammler's interpretation of Hannah Arendt's theories of how the Nazis thought and felt may be only partially accurate, as Edward Alexander points out, but Sammler's explanation serves to underline a preoccupation in Bellow's thinking.<sup>4</sup> Bellow is dismayed at the idea of a break between the metaphysical and functional parts of man, a split which allows people's actions to be free of the control of conscience. Thus Sammler attacks what he considers to be Arendt's justification of evil, her view that, in certain historical circumstances, it is impossible for men to know or to feel they are committing not only a crime, but a sacrilege against humanity (pp. 14-17). Like certain Joseph Conrad characters in Heart of Darkness who are oblivious of their spiritual sloth, the Nazis were at ease in "the darkness", hollow men who unwittingly destroyed their own spiritual, moral, and emotional wholeness and who thus allowed a fundamental distortion of the human image to occur.

But what of their victims? How are they affected by their inhuman tormentors? There is a tragic irony in the fact that many of those who have suffered from the moral aberrations of the Nazis exhibit certain abnormalities in their turn, and are unable to restore totally their image

of the self. Having been treated as sub-human and denied the elemental right of self-definition, they find it well-nigh impossible to re-establish their unique selfhood, and are presented by Bellow as fragmented, reduced personas. Ezrahi defines the survivor as victim as one who suffers death in life, and a "hollowness" is evident where spiritual and moral cohesion should be.<sup>5</sup> This is not Mr Sammler's lot, but Bellow's awareness of this consequence is used in the characterisations of Sammler's daughter Shula, her husband Eisen, and a relative, Walter Bruch. The strength of Sammler's moral opposition to the diminishment of his own humanity can be measured by these characters' failure to oppose the contraction of their own.

Walter Bruch has escaped the worst of the war, yet he has not emerged whole. Significantly, his surname is a transliteration of the Yiddish noun meaning disaster or break, and also suggests the Hebrew word for blessed, baruch, but a broken version, incomplete without the first vowel.<sup>6</sup> Bruch is a Buchenwald survivor who defines his temporal existence in terms of black comedy. He can comprehend the Holocaust only as absurd (in comparison to Sammler's refusal to make a final judgement [p. 222]), and this fractured vision is transmitted to his life as a survivor. He treats death as comedy, whether it is an actuality (his memory of the prisoner who suffocated in the faeces trench because no-one was allowed to help him out [p. 48]); or his favourite game: he and a fellow refugee delight in "playing corpse," and he still stages mock funerals (pp. 47-48). His gallows humour reveals a desperation to rid death, the unknown, of terror, and calls to mind Jean Francois Steiner's similar

use of humour in Treblinka.<sup>7</sup> Bruch's presentiment of death as something grotesque allows the inference that life, its counterpart, is equally so. This is supported by his distorted sexual interests, which suggest the loss of the ability to love normally. He weeps "because he felt he had lost his life" (p. 51), thus according a triumph to the Nazis. Yet Sammler, whose life the Nazis have altered irrevocably but failed to destroy, muses: "Would it have been possible to tell him that he hadn't?" (p. 51).

Like Bruch, Eisen, Sammler's son-in-law, employs humour to palliate the inhumanity of anti-Semitism. Flung from a moving train into a Rumanian winter by fellow World War II Russian veterans, Eisen bears them no ill will: "'Oh, they were drunk. . . . Good fellows--tovarischni'" (p. 21). The ensuing frostbite necessitated the amputation of his toes. Eisen has lost not only his toes, but all compassionate fellow feeling, all humane values, in the European war. This is made clear in his name, which is the German for "iron", and, like the metal, Eisen exhibits properties of hardness and strength. In certain respects he has become like his enemies. This is evident in his wife-beating (p. 21)--a Russian, not a Jewish pastime, as Lionel Trilling observes--<sup>8</sup> in the death-in-life ideology Sammler discerns in his portraits which depict the living as corpses (p. 53), and in his conscienceless battering of the pickpocket (pp. 232-34). His weapons for the assault are metal medallions with the inscriptions hazak, "strengthen thyself" (God's order to Joshua before he took Jericho), and nahamu, "comfort ye". It is ironic that injunctions formulated originally for the spiritual fortitude of his forefathers are violated by his iron heart and brute

strength, traditionally the weapons of the gentile enemy.

Sammler's daughter does not share her husband's soullessness. Although she has been spared the horror of the camps, her war experiences leave her permanently unable to define her identity. This is evident in her blurring of the roles of child and adult, in her national, social, and religious confusion. Her double name, Shula-Slawa, points to an unresolved dualism, while the débris with which she fills her rooms is a visible sign of inner bewilderment. Child-like, she seems oblivious of the consequences of crime, stealing the manuscript of a visiting Indian scientist, Govinda Lal, planning to keep Elya Gruner's illicit money. But the first theft is planned to re-establish one of the parental priorities of her early years, her father's interest in H. G. Wells, and thus the known security of her English childhood. Yet simultaneously it is a ruse to attract Lal's attention. This deviousness, coupled with her intention to spend Elya's money on clothes to attract suitors (p. 249), is completely adult.

Her ambiguous national identity is suggested in her use of either Polish or English when she talks to her father, while her isolation from those who have been integrated into American society, her derelict state, is indicated by her similarity to the bag ladies of New York. Like them, she raids dustbins and has a mania for collecting rubbish. She does not relate her past suffering to a collective Jewish experience, and vacillates between a Jewish and a Christian religious identity, between rabbi Ipsheimer and the priests. Jewish orthodoxy is parodied in her choice of wig and side curls ("the kosher sidelocks" [p. 160]), while her exposure

to Christianity when hidden in a convent during the war reveals itself in the smudge of ash on her forehead during Lent.

These three victims suffer spiritual death in life, unlike Sammler, who has been literally incarcerated in a mass grave. His refusal to die is the assertion of individual moral choice which, confronting nihilism, a wasteland of the spirit, instinctively rejects it. Instead, the experience marks the beginning of his search for inner cohesion and sanctity.

#### The Survivor as Witness

Sammler's Holocaust experiences provide a structural and thematic unity for the novel. The plot, the three-day account of his life in America, where he has found sanctuary ever since the war, is pierced by the (apparently) spontaneous intrusion of memories of the Holocaust. These recollections provide information about his war experiences and suggest to the reader possible moral responses to the catastrophe. Strategically placed, the graphic flashbacks also present possible parallels between the ideologies which inspired the Nazi madness and those holding sway in Mr Sammler's America, which will be discussed in the section which follows. Above all, the Holocaust has destroyed Sammler's early faith in Humanism, and Bellow elucidates the changes in his thinking.

The variety of techniques employed in describing Sammler's experience of atrocity indicates Bellow's sensitivity about exploiting this theme. For example, Sammler's first recollection of his near-death and escape from a mass grave:

"When he and sixty or seventy others, all stripped naked and having dug their own grave, were fired upon and fell in" (p. 75), is factual and objective. This assuages the reader who accepts information and documentation as an aspect of novelistic art, the critic who would acclaim James T. Farrell's Studs Lonigan Trilogy primarily as excellent sociological documentation.<sup>9</sup> Another memory describes his positive actions to survive: "Had to lift dead bodies from himself. Desperate! Crawling out," and his unmitigated horror at the outrage perpetrated on himself and humanity: "Oh heart-bursting! Oh vile!" (p. 114). This subjectivity calls forth a similar response from the reader, yet Bellow avoids exploiting the theme of horror by stating that even an accidental catastrophe (the hypothetical fall of an Indian into the Grand Canyon) is undesirable. "Nice not to have died? Nicer not to have fallen in" (p. 114).

Instead, Bellow encourages the reader to make moral inferences about the Holocaust. For example, he places in close proximity a comment about Eichmann, who declared himself sickened by walking in the fresh blood oozing from a mass grave (p. 111)--but not sickened because he authorized mass death--and the actual horror of having been buried alive as a result of Eichmann's orders (p. 114). This invites conjecture about the gap between public fastidiousness and private moral obtuseness which results in inhuman cruelty.

In the final, matter of fact description of the mass murder, Bellow has Sammler consider his role as witness: "And since he had lasted--survived . . . was there an assignment implicit?" (p. 220). His testimony is authenticated by his actual experiences as a Jew in Poland, which demand that

Sammler reconsider the practical consequences of the liberal thinking he used to practise.

In his halcyon prewar existence, Mr Sammler defined himself not as an orthodox Jew (p. 69), but as a member of le genre humain. His former faith in the Enlightenment is crystallised in his admiration for H. G. Wells, whose assumption that scientific Humanism could create an earthly utopia he shared. But now Sammler (echoing Herzog's views)<sup>10</sup> wonders whether "the worst enemies of civilization might not prove to be its petted intellectuals . . ." (p. 29). His disillusionment with certain aspects of modernity is further indicated by his disinclination to continue reading its influential shapers, historians and thinkers such as Toynbee, Marx, Freud, and Spengler (p. 32).

As a young intellectual, Sammler, in agreement with Enlightenment thinking, believed in man's ability to bring about perfection on earth without necessarily relying on God's aid. Like the Humanists, he had faith in the individual's ability to develop his physical, intellectual, and moral powers in order to improve himself and the lot of humankind. But Sammler's faith in the goodness of man is shattered by the Holocaust. It seems to offer proof of the failure of Humanism, of the catastrophic consequences of the divorce between the natural and spiritual aspects of people, which results in their alienation from the divine source of their being and their subsequent inadequacy. Molly Mahood discusses this failure, and the truth of Nietzsche's ultimate logical conclusion that man "'is a shame and a disgrace, and should be transcended,'" which, for Mr Sammler, is borne out by the Nazis.<sup>11</sup>

In witnessing their evil, Sammler recognizes the failure of a once-esteemed philosophical ideal built round a noble idea of humankind. But now it "was certainly possible that the historical outlook made it easier. . . . to jettison most of us" (p. 51). The Nazis' loss of all moral and spiritual qualities is implicit in their devaluation of individual existence by employing a sophisticated system of "planned destruction of the human status of their victims," of degrading them "to the extent of losing the last vestige of their self-respect."<sup>12</sup> Sammler himself suffers this degradation. After his exposure to German inhumanity, and at this stage of his life without any religious belief to confirm an idea of the sacredness of man, he describes himself as "not entirely human" (p. 113), "dispensed from pity" (p. 114), "shooting men" (p. 112).

Having experienced the Nazi evil and an answering brutality within himself (his enjoyment when he shot the German [pp. 113-14]) Sammler now has good reason to distrust what Jacques Maritain defines as absolute Humanism. This is exemplified in Rousseau's theory of natural goodness, which posits that man possesses pure goodness, that he is naturally (not divinely) holy.<sup>13</sup>

Theories which play down people's propensity for evil, in comparison with the Christian belief in original sin and the Jewish reasoning that good and evil are not qualities of the mind but relations with reality, that "'man's heart is deceitful above all things and exceedingly weak,"<sup>14</sup> may equally dismiss the moral freedom of choice between good and evil, or between life and death; a choice which Sammler himself has had to make and which begins the painful

exploration of his own humanity. Therefore he rejects utterly Arendt's thesis of the banality of evil, that because of their insignificant historical status in a totalitarian society, the Nazi criminals were not imbued with a "spirit of evil" (p. 15). Arendt, according to Bellow, does not condemn the morality of the individual German, but argues that personal responsibility was swallowed up in a collective decision. The German policy which resulted in a collective, not an individual morality is explained by Ernst Cassirer, but unlike Arendt, he finds it morally abhorrent, a regression to tribal primitivism.<sup>15</sup>

Sammler states emphatically that:

'Everybody . . . knows what murder is. . . . The best and purest human beings, from the beginning of time, have understood that life is sacred. . . . There was a conspiracy against the sacredness of life. Banality is the adopted disguise of a very powerful will to abolish conscience. Is such a project trivial? Only if human life is trivial. This woman professor's enemy is modern civilization itself' (p. 17).

To negate individual conscience is to remove the moral dimension from life, to deny that man is made in the image of God. Sammler declares the Nazi ideology blasphemous, a desecration of the sacredness of human life. If the slaughter of millions is trite, the death of a single person has no importance whatsoever. In Nazism Sammler discerns the return of the demonic forces of darkness the Enlightenment believed, erroneously, it had routed. His individual act of survival signifies a protest against a consequence of Humanist aspirations, the historical reality of National Socialism. Sammler the intellectual and Sammler the physical survivor both bear witness to the translation of certain Humanist ideals into

political policies which results in diminishing or negating the status of man, instead of elevating it. Ultimately, all civilized endeavour is mocked when this occurs.

Half-blind, frail, uprooted, Sammler serves as a reminder of the horror perpetrated within living memory. But his testimony is devoid of accusatory bitterness (he withholds judgement about the silent complicity of the Western world: Churchill's and Roosevelt's decision not to bomb Auschwitz [p. 222]), or public outcry (he declines to give evidence at the Eichmann trial [p. 150]). He qualifies his experiences by stating that the "individual was the supreme judge of nothing. . . . he was necessarily the intermediate judge. But never final" (p. 222). Here Sammler suggests the limitations of mere rational assessment, and simultaneously Bellow avoids taking a conclusive judgemental stand about events from which he was geographically and historically distant. It is left to the reader to draw his or her own (moral) conclusions.

#### The Survivor as Prophet

Through Sammler, Bellow links certain aspects of American civilization in the nineteen-sixties with European life during the war. The Holocaust has left Sammler with an acute sensory perception foreign to unpersecuted Americans. His nervous system registers an involuntary connection between European savagery and unhindered criminality in New York, suggested when Sammler observes the actions of the black pickpocket in New York: "He felt a constriction, a clutch of sickness . . . where the nerves, muscles, blood vessels were tightly interlaced. The breath of wartime Poland passing over the damaged tissues . . ." (p. 6). While Bellow presents Sammler as witness,

with retrospectively painful but carefully disinterested views on what happened in Poland, he also casts him in the role of biblical prophet, one who has the right to declaim against vice and licentiousness with impassioned eloquence. In this role Sammler employs a satiric raillery which links him to the prophetic castigators of the Old Testament and also places him within a literary tradition of satire. Thus Bellow, writing from first hand experience of life in twentieth-century America, can decry what he considers the degeneration of an enlightened Western society. Sammler's scope, the novel's title suggests, is cosmic, but his observations as prophet (as valid in London or Amsterdam as in New York [p. 28]), are drawn from, and apply most cogently to American youth.

Bellow's "prophetic" style has the directness of rebuke and the fierce exaggeration of the Preacher, Koheleth, the writer of Ecclesiastes. The Preacher is always disconsolate, joyless, with a worldly scepticism and pessimism which deviates from an abiding Jewish optimism, an acceptance of God's will.<sup>16</sup> Sammler's words: "My days are vanity. I would not live always. Let me alone" (p. 202) echo Koheleth's misanthropy, "vanity, vanity, all is vanity" (Eccles. 1. 2-3), and invite a comparison with the prophet Elijah, who "requested for himself that he might die; and said, It is enough; now, O Lord, take away my life;" (1 Kings 19.4). Sammler refers to the complaint in the Book of Job that God requires too much from man (p. 186), yet he himself never despairs of society. In his censure there is a humorousness, a contemptuous ridicule which gives the added dimension of literary satire to his scolding, and which echoes the mode of the Roman satirist, Juvenal, who was also motivated by ethical convictions and a strong social

conscience. (The urbane, oblique style of Horatian satire, with its propensity to shun personal engagement or to cause discord, would be inappropriate here.)<sup>17</sup> Satires of a prophetic nature, like Juvenal's, pour indignation and wrath on their subject, but only because the satirist believes implicitly in human beings' capacity for self-correction, their free choice to redeem themselves. Thus Bellow strengthens Sammler's prophetic role with "the act of satire [which] becomes, in the face of human depravity, something very like a moral obligation."<sup>18</sup>

The following extract illustrates the point:

He saw the increasing triumph of Enlightenment-- Liberty, Fraternity, Equality, Adultery! Enlightenment, universal education, universal suffrage . . . the rights of women, the rights of children, the rights of criminals, the unity of the different races affirmed, Social Security, public health, the dignity of the person, the right to justice--the struggle of three revolutionary centuries being won while the feudal bonds of Church and Family weakened and the privileges of aristocracy (without any duties) spread wide, democratized, especially the libidinous privileges, the right to be uninhibited, spontaneous, urinating, defecating, belching, coupling in all positions, tripling, quadrupling, polymorphous, noble in being natural, primitive, combining the leisure and luxurious inventiveness of Versailles with the hibiscus-covered erotic ease of Samoa (p. 28).

Sammler is irreverent about the sacred cows of the past three centuries and employs a sardonic irony to debunk the achievements of the Enlightenment. He adds "Adultery" to the hallowed passwords of the French Revolution, to undermine its ideals of freedom. He is caustically sarcastic about the universal, indiscriminate dispensation of rights both to the responsible and the irresponsible. He distorts Rousseau's noble savage, presenting him as carnal, insisting on his lack of dignity,

his depravity. Man appears ridiculous, an object of humorous contempt, "coupling in all positions, tripling, quadrupling," vulgar, crude, with no self-respect, "urinating, defecating, belching."

The prophetic tone is virulent, chastising, belittling the Enlightenment. The style has an out-of-breath, urgent quality which brooks no interruption as adjectives are piled on adjectives, abstract nouns trip up other equally abstract concepts, and hyperbole is used to build up to a denunciatory crescendo. But its passionate eloquence suggests, not the uncontrolled hysteria of prejudice, but rather the concern of the morally indignant, determined to excite an answering reaction.

This generalised criticism is reinforced by certain incidents and character depictions. For example, the disruption of Sammler's lecture on the British scene in the 'thirties by left-wing militants at Columbia University suggests the collective identity of revolutionary youth in the Vietnam era, a counter-cultural attack on reason itself.<sup>19</sup> Bellow's opposition to "'a radicalism of posture . . . easy and banal'" and his support of "'a genuine radicalism, which truly challenges authority,'" which "'requires homework--thought,'" is indicated in an interview given to The Paris Review.<sup>20</sup> But in this novel he chooses to emphasise the fact that the incident is a logical result of Enlightenment thinking which has allowed not culture, but anarchy (via the Marquis de Sade) into the once sacred places of learning. Sammler's chief antagonist is "a poor man's Jean Genet" (p. 88) who seeks sainthood via murder and homosexuality. As moralist, Sammler notes that for the young, excrement and sex as standards displace older

value systems; that there is a concomitant disintegration of outer control and inner order; that youth destroys discarded ideals as well as individual dignity in its "passion to be real. But real was also brutal" (p. 37).

As satirist, Bellow expresses his contempt for the triumph of Naturalism and the Freudian belief in the primary power of sex in exaggerated statements: "But make Nature your God, elevate creatureliness, and you can count on gross results" (p. 46). It is also evident in extreme gestures, such as the self-exposure of the pickpocket (ironically labelled "a symbol of superlegitimacy" [p. 46]) and in the jeer of the heckler who dismisses Sammler's opinions because his "'balls are dry. He's dead. He can't come'" (p. 36). Satirical distortion is also employed in the depiction of the black, whose arrogant brutality is a mockery of certain popular ideas. Transformed by Sammler into a "great black beast . . . seeking whom he might devour" (p. 14), he portrays the biological accuracy of Darwin's theories of man's animal ancestry and the survival of the fittest, but Bellow's moral viewpoint censures his actions. His creatureliness is also linked to Rousseau's noble savage, suggested by "a certain princeliness" (p. 235), but it is a superiority ridiculed by its disregard of responsibility, a megalomania acting out a criminal version of the "idea of noblesse" (p. 236). His barbaric power, his polished self-confidence, his lofty disregard of man-made laws imitate the anarchy of Nietzsche's super criminal, and he exercises an initial fascination on Sammler. The final shattering of his image of supreme strength in the street fight might suggest that evil has been overthrown, as Bellow's description of the black as a "great black beast

[who] was seeking whom he might devour" (p. 14) also echoes 1 Peter 5.8-9, which likens the devil to "a roaring lion," which "walketh about, seeking whom he may devour."<sup>21</sup>

The presentation of Angela, Sammler's niece, is a mockery of emancipated womanhood, of the "urgency to become," which Robert Alter identifies in the proliferation of women's movements in the nineteen-sixties.<sup>22</sup> Her behaviour is based "on theory, on generational ideology, part of a liberal education" (p. 129), and is characterised by sexual innovation. Moralising about her paganism, Sammler questions whether "release from long Jewish mental discipline, hereditary training in lawful control, was obtainable upon individual application" (p. 60). Her sexual experiments, conducted, perhaps "'to 'liberalize' human existence and show that nothing that happens between people is really loathsome'" (p. 128) express an uncurbed and ultimately self-destructive freedom. The naïve stupidity of the open-minded liberal who fails to discern the difference between a moral confidence trick and a just cause is suggested in her support of black rapists and murderers, her mimicry of certain intellectuals' preoccupations with the romance of the outlaw (p. 11). (The satire here recalls the ethical and artistic clash between Jonathan Swift's spider and bee in the Battle of the Books.) Perfection, for her boyfriend Wharton Horriker, is the aesthetic ideal of appearance--preferably his own--which, like the pickpocket (p. 57), he worships: "You could play sacred music while he had his hair cut" (p. 56). Her brother Wallace, a "high-I.Q. moron" (p. 143), epitomises the waste of intelligence dissipated in self-indulgent schemes. Bellow is aware of his sociological role, that he represents the counter culture's rejection

of identifying with "affluent America, whether old Wasp or second-generation Jewish," in his repudiation of his father, but this does not exempt him from passing a moral judgement on both Wallace and Angela.<sup>23</sup> They are presented as ethically retarded children, Angela "childishly dressed, erotically playing the kid" (p. 237), Wallace "still little brother with the curls, the lips of a small boy" (p. 72), evading their duties to their dying father, unwilling to assume a mature responsibility for their actions.

The morality that underlies Sammler's criticism of the "out of hand" (p. 29) Enlightenment is rooted in his basic assumption that there is a life of the spirit, that the "spirit knows that its growth is the real aim of existence" (p. 189). Conversely, the Enlightenment predicated its interpretation of man on the enlargement of his intellect, on "the elevation and setting up of man in the centre of the universe."<sup>24</sup> For Sammler, this interpretation is unsatisfactory. Bewildered by the vast variety of explanations available to rational man, his soul "wanted what it wanted. It had its own natural knowledge. It sat unhappily on superstructures of explanations, poor bird, not knowing which way to fly" (p. 5). His disillusionment recalls that of Koheleth: "And I gave my heart to know wisdom . . . I perceived that this also is vexation of spirit. For in much wisdom is much grief: and he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow" (Eccles. 1.17-18).

Tiresias-like, Sammler interprets the statement of Broadway (pp. 224-25), metaphor for the soul of New York, as a metaphysical message of spiritual impoverishment and despondency for the age. The actual, urban description of Broadway, "fuming, heaving, fool-heaped, quivering, stinking"

(p. 117) suggests the terror and upheaval, the mental inadequacy, the spiritual filth and discomfort of its citizens. It "knew its own despair. And fear. The terror of it" (p. 118). The conclusion for the local populace is "that reality was a terrible thing, and that the final truth about mankind was overwhelming and crushing" (pp. 224-25). Sammler's rejection of "this vulgar, cowardly conclusion" (p. 225) which passively accepts the doom of mankind, underwrites his resemblance to the Hebrew prophets of old, whose task was, in Alter's opinion, "not to predict but to confront man with the alternatives of decision." Alter quotes Buber, who points out that spiritual and moral weakness is inherent in the apocalyptic imagination, which faces historical challenge by withdrawing passively. In contrast, the prophetic attitude is one of courageous engagement, however ominous the historical threat may be.<sup>25</sup> Just as the prophets bring an ethical message that God works through man in history, so Sammler opposes ideas of entropy because of his basic assumption that there is a life of the spirit. He rejects the apocalyptic hysteria evident in "the colours of panic waving" (p. 224) on Broadway, because he does not share the general "poverty of soul" (p. 225).

The promise of modern history to release the masses into individuality has failed. The manic search for models, for originality, for authenticity, indicates that morally and imaginatively people cannot interpret their selfhood. The result is "a peculiar longing for non-being" (p. 188), a repudiation of the future, of life itself. To "[get]rid of the human being" (p. 189), whether through Christian transcendence or popular wasteland thinking, contradicts the prophetic Jewish tradition of historical confrontation.

Sammler believes that to hasten to "'Kingdom Come'" (p. 177) via an atomic explosion is to annul the bond between God and man, and he refuses to accept that mankind has reached this depth of despair: "'Many say they wish to end [life]. Of course that may be only rhetoric'" (p. 176). By upholding his idea of the real aim of individualism, the enlargement of inner truth by moral observance which allows for spiritual growth (pp. 188-89), Sammler challenges the hollow reflection of individuality as well as social accidie and anomie.

#### The Survivor as Hero

Sammler's repudiation of the Enlightenment is based on the painful sloughing off of his former enlightened persona and the growth and acceptance of a (previously despised) moral and historical Jewish identity. His former hero, H. G. Wells, believed implicitly that man's aggrandisement could be achieved through the benevolent use of his rational, scientific intelligence. World War II destroyed this optimism, and Wells, bitterly disillusioned, died "blast[ing] and curs[ing] everyone" (p. 25). Sammler, who actually experienced the war, exhibits no such bitterness. Wells understood God to be Intelligence (the theme of his novel God the Invisible King), and his disappointment is thus with man. What saves Sammler from despair begins with an awareness of "metaphysical messages" (p. 73) while being hidden in the Mezvinski tomb and finally asserts itself as a belief in God's transcendence. His questions about life are now metaphysical, not functional; his reading matter is Meister Eckhardt and the Bible. The change is registered in the surprise of Walter Bruch, when

Sammler offers to pray for him (p. 52).

That the change is permanent is proved conclusively in Sammler's rejection of Professor Lal's project to colonize the moon and begin a new life for mankind, which offers an alternative to European Enlightenment. Like Wells, Lal is enthusiastic about the benefits of a new society: "'Access to central data mechanisms may foster a new Adam'" (p. 109). "'It may introduce new sobriety'" (p. 174). But Sammler, though attracted to Lal (he "was excellent, solid" [p. 179]), as he was to Wells, queries whether scientific evolution can reach God: "And God? Still hidden, even from this powerful mental brotherhood, still out of reach?" (p. 153). For Sammler, the enlargement of knowledge bewilders rather than clarifies the "natural knowledge" of the soul (p. 5), and he links the "yellow despair" (p. 74), the futility he experienced in the Mezvinski tomb with endless literary hours he wastes in the "yellow light" (p. 75) of Manhattan. His longing is for inner order, coherence (p. 75). He is a "depth" not a "height" man (p. 147), an Oriental, a Jew (like Herzog), shunning Faustian departures for other worlds.

Sammler formulates a definition of "human" that is essentially moral and spiritual, while Lal, professor of biophysics at Imperial College, limits his interpretation to a biological "thing, a creature" which has scarcely begun to use the resources of its brain (p. 180), that belongs to a species that may well have fulfilled its function in reproduction (p. 176), whose desire to live without order is to go against "the fundamental biological governing principle" (p. 173). (The final point suggests that Lal is in favour of a principle of order for people, but he does

not explore its possibilities. Sammler, not Lal, undertakes the search for order.) Lal argues that as no example of duty or morality is set by biology, why should man wish to continue life?

It is Sammler who insists that man has a moral nature:

'When you know what pain is, you agree not to have been born is better. But being born one respects the powers of creation, one obeys the will of God--with whatever inner reservations truth imposes. As for duty--you are wrong. The pain of duty makes the creature upright, and this uprightness is no negligible thing' (p. 177).

To survive is to obey God's will, to live to acknowledge His superiority. The longing for non-being is a result of an ethical void, a denial of moral duty. In assuming responsibility, man begins to define his humanity. The heavy, censorious tone employed here is a reminder of the restrictive commands of the Old Testament, and an implicit Judaism echoes in the first two sentences, the précis of a well known Talmud story. The schools of Shammai and Hillel disputed for two and a half years whether it was better for man to have been born or not. They concluded that man should not have been born, but since he did exist, he should ensure that his deeds are in accordance with the will of God.<sup>26</sup>

For Sammler, the true status of the human being is bound up in a faith in God and an acceptance of a commitment to ethical precepts. He believes the moral life to be clearly defined, as permanent as a geographical fact: "All mapmakers should place the Mississippi in the same location, and avoid originality" (p. 183). In affirming life, not death after virtual extinction, in expressing faith in God despite all

contradictory evidence, Sammler exhibits a moral choice that is evidence of his "unconscious ancestral origin" (p. 160). The growth of his moral identity can be plotted in his changing attitude towards the taking of life which, despite his avoidance of formal Judaism, moves towards the Jewish viewpoint.

The Sammler who, though "nearly a corpse" (p. 113), killed the German in the Zamosht forest, was still the liberally educated rationalist who recognised no God. No inherited Jewish moral code made him hesitate to take life, to obey the sixth commandment. Significantly, his sole memory of the murder is of an ecstatic, vivifying, visceral warmth. But "since Poland, nineteen thirty-nine, [his] judgements are different. Altered. Like [his] eyesight" (p. 169). His reconsideration of the value of life (regardless of whose it is, friend's or enemy's), influences his thinking. This is evident in his caustic reconsideration of writers who inspired revolutions, thus distributing equally the once aristocratic right to kill (p. 116), and particularly in his scepticism of Kierkegaard's Knight of Faith. Like the Knight, Sammler is "entirely at home in the finite" (p. 52), but only before his war experiences. The Knight faces a theoretical temptation of crime, but for Sammler, the test has actually occurred. His experience of Existential freedom, unhampered by any restraining traditional morality, makes him sceptical of breaking "humanly appointed laws, in obedience to God" (p. 52). Surely Kierkegaard and Bellow now have different ideas of God, because the God of the Covenant's "humanly appointed laws," which Sammler now heeds, condemn the taking of life.

The change is confirmed by a later action, when Sammler

asks Eisen to intervene in a fight on the New York streets between the pickpocket and a student, Lionel Feffer, who has filmed the thief in action. Eisen, while brutally beating the black, is "grinning . . . as though he were doing a very amusing thing" (pp. 232-33). His pleasure in violence and the black's "puma silence" (p. 226) suggest that both follow instinctively the jungle law of survival and suffer a total absence of restraining moral thought. Eisen is prevented from crushing the black's skull only by Sammler's intercession. His reasoning is quite logical, practical, the conscienceless soldier's: "'You can't hit a man like this just once. When you hit him you must really hit him. Otherwise he'll kill you. You know. . . . You were a Partisan. You had a gun'" (p. 234)

But Sammler has been both victim and executioner, and regardless of every pragmatic consideration, he identifies with the victim. His abhorrence for killing is a developed moral response that discerns in the celebration of death an absolute evil which is essentially sadistic. To oppose death is to affirm the value of all individual life, whether it be criminal (the pickpocket) or insane (Eisen is a "cheerful maniac" [p. 53]). Sammler's emotional abhorrence for Eisen's attitude is immediate. "'I am horrified'" (p. 234), he exclaims. The sinking of his heart (p. 234) measures the compassionate extension of his sensibilities--inextricably bound to moral responsibility--since he, "without pity" (p. 114), shot the German. For Sammler, whose family were "not compassionate people" (p. 50), who is naturally emotionally cold, aloof from people because he chooses to be so, the development of the duties of the heart has been difficult. Unlike Angela, who thinks that "'everybody was born human,'" Sammler knows

that "'only the capacity is natural'" (p. 244). His pre-occupation with killing, which ranges from the casual observation evident in his concern whether the gaucho nutria breeder can bring himself to slaughter his own flock (p. 22), to philosophical argument, illustrated by his disagreement with Hannah Arendt's theory of evil (p. 17) and Aristotle's choice of suicide as the nobler one (p. 113), is crucial in his unconscious self-definition as a Jew. His conviction that "a splash of God's own spirit" (p. 151) is in every man recalls Martin Buber's belief that the divine spark is in every living thing and indicates his awareness of the divine imprint on man.<sup>27</sup> He believes that only the recognition of this sanctity can prevent murder (p. 151).

This keystone of many ideologies, that life is sacred, the supreme value to which all other values are subordinate, is indispensable to the structure of Judaism. When asked to formulate his ideas on Judaism Albert Einstein wrote: "Judaism seems to me concerned almost exclusively with the moral attitude in life and to life. . . . The essence of that conception seems to me to lie in an affirmative attitude to the life of all creation."<sup>28</sup> This attitude, which makes it well-nigh impossible for a Jew to take life, even for a cause he believes in, is reflected in the stories of Isaac Babel, and Sammler's preoccupation with "the taking of life" (p. 116) is not the private idiosyncrasy he considers it to be, but a sure sign that he belongs to that Jewish tradition Babel fails to escape through Communism.

Sammler's parents "were almost free thinkers" (p. 69), and he himself "had always disliked the ways of the Orthodox" (p. 189). Thus it is not surprising to discern in Sammler

an inclination towards Christian thought. For example, as the survivor who wonders "[w]hat besides the spirit should a man care for who has come back from the grave?" (p. 95) he is attracted--not to the Jewish mystics--but to the Christian message of a thirteenth-century theologian, Meister Eckhardt.<sup>29</sup> Eckhardt urges disinterested purity and unity with God and promises spiritual security if one transcends a disappointing humanity, a concept which is inimical to Jewish thought. Christian influence is evident in Sammler's wish to submerge his human judgement in God's, by "willing as God wills" (p. 189), calling to mind Thomas Becket's definition of the Christian martyr who "has lost his will in the will of God" in Murder in the Cathedral. But Sammler's and Becket's final interpretations of their suffering are radically different.

Unlike those religious Jews whose faith the Holocaust destroyed (in Night, Elie Wiesel's Elisha mourns: "Never shall I forget those flames which consumed my faith forever. . . . Never shall I forget those moments which murdered my God"),<sup>30</sup> Sammler's adumbrations of God begin with his sufferings as a Jew, and they are coupled to his resolution to survive. His spiritual awakening is simultaneously an affirmation of life, and so it is not surprising that in the "second encounter of the disinterested spirit with fated biological necessities, a return match with the persistent creature" (p. 95) he will ultimately allow himself to be drawn back into human affairs, away from the "disinterested purity and unity" of Eckhardt's (Christian) idea of God. His choice of life, of human involvement, illustrates Joseph R. Levenson's conviction that "the Jewish will to survival was a religious will, a reaffirmation of the biblical injunction to 'choose life,'

an acceptance of history and the consequent commitment to action . . . ."31

To disengage oneself from humanity may lead finally to withholding oneself from all moral involvement in the temporal world, thus ironically exhibiting an inertia similar to that of nihilism. But Sammler's behaviour indicates a different philosophy. His "commitment to action" asserts itself in his condemnation of the crowd who refuse to intervene between Feffer and the pickpocket. "They are here and not here. They are present while absent" (p. 232), like the uneasy chorus in Murder in the Cathedral, "living and partly living." With horrified clarity, Sammler suddenly sees himself as similarly uninvolved, and therefore powerless: "Someone between the human and non-human states, between content and emptiness, between full and void, meaning and non-meaning, between this world and no world" (p. 232). Detachment is also suggested in his posture, described "as strangely leaning, as reclining, and peculiarly in profile" (p. 232), as if to avoid a face to face confrontation with responsibility. Previously he cared only for Eckhardt's message, his Christian conviction that he who is "poor in spirit is receptive of all spirit" (p. 203). But for one who has "rejoined life" (p. 232), who has committed himself spontaneously to moral action in the temporal world, to be "poor in spirit" now takes on negative interpretations of apathy, of avoiding responsibility. Sammler's plea to Eisen to stop the fight breaks this moral insentience, qualifying his assertion that "there is still such a thing as a man . . . There are still human qualities" (p. 245). This crucial scene, in which the thinker is confronted with actual violence, is a recurring one in Bellow's novels.

One remembers Herzog's failure to act after hearing the case of the murdered child, while Sammler initiates positive action.

A moral fortitude is also evident in his earlier report to the police about the pickpocket's actions; in his censure of his own daughter's thefts, despite his understanding of her weaknesses; in his forfeiting of Angela's goodwill and possible future beneficence by insisting that she establish "some order within [her]self" (p. 183) through seeking her father's forgiveness. For Jews, religion is the active commitment to morality in everyday life--no specific word for "religion" exists in Hebrew--and Sammler has made a personal discovery of this, that "man can (and must) remain man, not flee to absorption in God out of the conviction that man, if only man, is doomed."<sup>32</sup>

Yet Sammler vacillates between Christianity and certain Jewish preoccupations. His attraction to the former reveals itself in his first visit to Israel, which resembles more a Christian pilgrimage than a Jewish return to the promised land. Liela Goldman comments: "And what Jew would go to Israel and not visit Jerusalem?"<sup>33</sup> But Sammler is drawn to places of Christian interest, to Nazareth, to the sea of Galilee, to Capernum "where Jesus had preached in the synagogue" (p. 23). He quotes Blake: "And did those feet in ancient time," not the Bible, linking Christ with England, so long his spiritual and cultural home.

His second visit, occasioned by the fear of Israel's annihilation in 1967 by the Arabs, is prompted by a complete identification with Israel as a symbol of historic Jewish survival--an immediate, absolute identification--which suggests a spontaneous affirmation of his rediscovered Jewish identity.

The thought of Israel's political extinction, which recalls for Sammler the near-success of the Nazis, causes him to panic, to consider suicide, "sleeping pills, poison" (p. 116). If Israel were to lose, his wish is to die amongst Jews, the "finest death he could imagine" (p. 161). Here Sammler's feeling for Israel has an urgency dearly learned from the Holocaust, an illusionless quality lacking in Elya Gruner's Zionism, which is sentimental. Gruner takes an unthinking pleasure in Israel's material and political accomplishments, a personal Jewish pride in supporting her progress. This, in turn, contrasts strongly with his son's anti-Zionist support of Arab culture (p. 134), his ignorance of Hebrew (p. 137), his general scorn for his heritage: "Roots are not modern" (p. 197)

In Israel, certain complications arise for Sammler. His reaction to evidence of Israeli violence, the use of napalm, the corpses, the wounded prisoners of war (pp. 201-03), is not admiration for Israel's military efficiency or applause for an Israeli victory. Rather, it confirms his by now fully developed moral priorities which include a compassionate response for any victim, regardless of historical or political necessity. He has to control "the trembling of his legs or the wish to cry" (p. 203).

This suggests that for Sammler, Israel, in addition to providing a political homeland for the Jews, is an ideal beyond time and history, existing "in order to cherish the vision of God."<sup>34</sup> Bellow's own idea of Israel, as presented in To Jerusalem and Back, is a similar one, as Irving Saposnik points out in a review of the book.<sup>35</sup> The established state of Israel is less significant to him than its importance as an ideal construction, a symbol of spiritual regeneration

for the West. The importance of Sammler's reaction is its proximity to the religious orthodoxy clearly presented by Elie Wiesel's Elisha, whose upbringing was strictly orthodox: "To me Zion was a sacred ideal, a messianic hope, a prayer, a heartbeat, but not a place on a map or a political slogan, a cause for which men killed or died." Sammler expresses an ancient Jewish humanity in his horror at violence and suffering, while Elisha feels he has murdered this humanity in himself when he is forced, as a member of a Jewish resistance movement before Israeli independence, to execute a hostage, Major John Dawson: "That's it. . . . It's done. I've killed. I've killed Elisha."<sup>36</sup>

Sammler's absolute humanitarian values indicate a religious purity that cannot co-exist with Israeli nationalism. Nationalism demands military defence, fighting, death: "It was a real war. These Jews were tough" (p. 201). "Everybody respected killing" (p. 202). Paradoxically, the continuation of the Judaic message which affirms the sanctity of life depends on the national survival of Israel, on violence and death; while Sammler, like the contemporary Israeli author Amos Oz, would prefer a world of "spiritual civilizations tied somehow to their lands, without the tools of statehood and without the instruments of war."<sup>37</sup> The critics Edward Alexander and Zephyra Porat (the latter is an Israeli) both support the logic of violence, while Porat discerns the meekness of Christianity in what she considers Bellow's refusal to condone violence.<sup>38</sup> And it is true that Sammler, retreating from Israel, seeks again the disinterestedness and spiritual aloofness of comfort with God, a transcendental Christianity because, like Job, he fears God demands too much of man (p. 186).

But Sammler's admiration for Elya Gruner's superior moral sensibility pays tribute to the code of menschlekhkayt which is principally involved, not with man's spiritual perfection, but the improvement of his temporal existence.<sup>39</sup> Though not a practising Jew, Gruner's understanding that goodness is achieved by the regular and often anonymous performance of duty is traceable to his orthodox upbringing. Since the war, for twenty-two years, he has cared for his uncle, Sammler, aware of his historical significance, and for Shula, for whom he invents work. He visits other old relatives in Israel, and his pleasure is undisclosed charities (p. 227). A surgeon by profession--his wife's choice--he "had disliked his trade--the knife, blood. He had been conscientious. He had done his duty" (p. 68). Sammler praises Gruner to the unresponsive Angela:

He did what he disliked. He had an unsure loyalty to certain pure states. He knew there had been good men before him, that there were good men to come, and he wanted to be one of them. I think he did all right. I don't come out nearly so well myself. Till forty or so I was simply an Anglophile intellectual Polish Jew and person of culture--relatively useless. But Elya, by sentimental repetition and by formulas if you like, partly by propaganda, has accomplished something good. Brought himself through (p. 243).

By a devotion to discredited ideas of conduct (p. 209), to honour, virtuous impulse, compassion, Gruner has resisted the modern trend that dismisses life as meaningless, as has Sammler by his refusal to accept death in the mass grave. This affirmation creates a human bond between them, familiar to Sammler since Cieslakiewicz, a Pole, kept him alive in the mausoleum (p. 74). Gruner has also confirmed the covenantal

bond between God and man, the idea of brit, by instinctively understanding "the terms of his contract" (p. 252) which he translates into a responsibility for his fellow man. Sammler senses that his relative is now open to metaphysical rather than mere "insect and mechanical [states]" (p. 208). Gruner needs his uncle's reassurance about a spiritual dimension he intuits only vaguely, to underwrite a bond both human and divine and thus to support him in death.

Sammler arrives too late to reassure Gruner, but his insistence on delivering a eulogy over the body stresses again his nephew's moral value. His laudation in no way resembles the Jewish mourner's Kaddish, which is not so much a personal intercession for the dead as a glorification of God, as Israel Zangwill notes,<sup>40</sup> while its similarity to Yiskor, the prayer for the dead, is confined to its opening phrase only: "Remember God, the soul of Elya Gruner" (p. 251).<sup>41</sup> Christian overtones are found by Robert Dutton, who, presumably with a knowledge of Christian rites, comments that "Sammler assumes priestly duties here . . . he sees himself in the role of Meister Eckhardt."<sup>42</sup> Whatever its religious influences, the eulogy, placed as the final paragraph at the end of the novel, has an undeniable impact on the reader. Once again Sammler's salutation of Gruner's virtues is at the expense of his own: "At his best this man was much kinder than at my very best I have ever been or could ever be" (pp. 251-52). Is one to conclude that Sammler's approbation is elegiac (almost effusively so) in remembrance of morals past, or are Gruner's Old World ethical Jewish values meant to suggest a model for modern Americans? One remembers Sammler's disillusionment with American youth.

Sammler refuses to accept Angela's or Wallace's derogatory assessment of their father, and, in a questionable argument, he dismisses Gruner's offences (the abortions performed for the Mafia) as "permissible criminality" (p. 62) in a corrupt society. But in citing Gruner's criminal connections, a dubious lawsuit, financial speculations and a basically cold marriage; in positing the almost dialectical reactions of Gruner's children (Wallace's exaggerated money-making schemes and Angela's promiscuity--Gruner had "to touch" people), Bellow effectively counters a reaction to Gruner as a moral ideal in a secular age.

In the final analysis, is it not Sammler, the survivor, who emerges as moral and spiritual hero? Gruner's apprehension of virtue is unthinking, spontaneous, like that of Morris Bober in Bernard Malamud's The Assistant, whose definition of a Jewish life is "to do what is right, to be honest, to be good. . . This means to other people." This instinctive grasp of goodness is by no means to be belittled, but Sammler's commitment to virtue is by a different route. His belief in virtue is hard won, and involves an active moral choice made with illusionless realism, in spite of a consciously rational assessment of human behaviour. It is also tied to an investigation of the nature of God, whose presence he has come to acknowledge. Despite the evidence of inhumanity (in Poland or in New York) he upholds a human ideal: "Trying to live with a civil heart. With disinterested charity. With a sense of the mystic potency of humankind. With an inclination to believe in archetypes of goodness" (p. 110). The careful wording of this credo suggests a strong religious inclination.

The Holocaust brands Sammler as Jew, regardless of

national, of Polish or English identification. And it is as homeless alien, as wandering Jew, that he, without nationality, ("I was Polish" [p. 167]), not at ease in either America or Israel, "a past person" (p. 232), redefines himself via various roles as a Jew. As witness, the persecuted presence of the Jew reminds the world of its connection with God, its obligations towards man. The prophet Deutero-Isaiah speaks of the cosmic role of the Jews, a role interpreted here by Mr Sammler, whose martyrdom is evidence of the spiritual immaturity of the world; while Amos remembers Jehovah's prophecy: "You only have I known of all the families of the earth; therefore will I punish you for all your iniquities."<sup>43</sup> As prophet, Sammler performs the traditionally Jewish task of chastising an errant community and Bellow, his creator, reaps the equally traditional reponse of indignation and wrath from critics such as John J. Clayton and Edward Grossman.<sup>44</sup> As hero, Sammler has survived physical catastrophe miraculously, but what if "[t]oo many inside things were ruptured" (p. 114)? Spiritual crippling is evident in the characterisation of Elisha in Wiesel's novel The Accident, where his resumption of normal life as a journalist in Paris after the war masks his loss of the will to live, and he consciously seeks death. But Sammler survives, morally and spiritually unmaimed, committed to regeneration.

Instead of confirming God's absence, the afflictions of the innocent awaken Sammler's belief in God, and his acceptance of a will that is beyond his comprehension, like Job's, is final. He is drawn to Eckhardt's mysticism, in which the impersonal Godhead comes to "birth" in the human soul.<sup>45</sup> But his final acceptance that fulfilment is for the

whole man, not for the disembodied spirit only, without any claims to exclusivity, suggests a definition of God which calls to mind the Jewish deity of morality, a transcendent Person, not a metaphysical principle. (The "God of Judaism is the God of morality.")<sup>46</sup> This is evident in his assumption of "the yoke of the kingdom," in his commitment to duty, however painful (his rebuke to Angela may jeopardise his financial security); in the awakening of rahamut, tenderness, in his own heart (pp. 37, 94, 180), thus reversing his former aim of transfiguring subjective reaction, heartache, "into delicate, often piercing observation" (p. 38). It presents itself in his praise of Gruner, one of the rakhmonim bney rakhmonim, the compassionate sons of the compassionate, in his admiration for Gruner's moral affirmation by will and deed, which manifests religious obligation.

That his daily conduct unwittingly upholds Kidush Hashem, the sanctification of God's name, is evident in the veneration accorded him by family and friends (p. 75) and by the youth, in search of models. For Feffer, the opportunist, he is "practically sacred" (p. 88), while even Wallace (whose prescription for a goodnight's sleep is to "go through a whole lot of people and call them all swine. . . . 'Swine, swine, swine!'" [p. 149]) begs his "good opinion" (p. 196). Interpreting the book of Isaiah, Robert Gordis notes that Isaiah speaks of national suffering occurring not as the consequence of national sin, but as "an indispensable element in the process of the moral education of the race" (Isaiah 52.13; 55.3,4,5,12).<sup>47</sup> Sammler's moral development, measured in the shattering of his intellectual complacency and the growth of compassion, in his upholding of the sanctity of individual

life, illustrates this in individual terms. (The moral deterioration of the Jews, because of the rejection of a traditional Jewish identity, can be read into Wallace and Angela's support of all except Jewish causes, which Emil L. Fackenheim would interpret as "internalized antisemitism".)<sup>48</sup>

Finally, by combining the roles of righteous man and wise man, Sammler resembles the Jewish hero of old, the religious sage whose dignity, knowledge and virtue, not physical valour or material wealth, command universal respect.<sup>49</sup> Furthermore, a contemporary heroism is discernible in his affirmation of "the luxury of non-intimidation by doom" (p. 108). Having survived what can be interpreted as a total disintegration of all virtuous instinct, having faced ultimate evil, having opposed meaninglessness, his refusal to be broken morally and spiritually has a relevance for the present-day world, belying his namesake Arthur Schopenhauer's definition of Jewish optimism as "vulgar" (p. 167). The clear-sighted optimism with which he faces the future highlights a difference between a Jewish perspective and certain Christian attitudes noted, for example, by Louis Landa, who observed that "'Swift probably would have thought an optimistic divine a contradiction in terms.'"<sup>50</sup> Schopenhauer's own philosophy tends towards a tragic nihilism, but Sammler's affirms life, not death, after virtual extinction, and expresses faith, in the face of almost universal pessimism, in the integrity of the individual conscience.

This reading, that Sammler may represent a symbol of spiritual and moral regeneration, is supported by the surreptitious onset of spring during the three day time span of the novel (pp. 38, 94, 222). The connotations of hope

and change and rebirth that are automatically linked to this season are positive, encouraging, with none of the reluctance to resume life the arrival of spring reveals in the opening lines of T. S. Eliot's The Waste Land. Feffer observes that "[i]t's spring. I mean it's the temperature change. . . . Even youth is susceptible to that" (p. 102). Thus Bellow allows the natural, eternal rhythms of change to support the idea that the deadening, wintry gloom and despair of so much twentieth-century writing may be lifted and purified by fresh hope.

## Notes

### Introduction

<sup>1</sup> Herbert Gold, "Fiction of the Fifties. The Writer as Metaphysician," in Recent American Fiction: Some Critical Views, ed. Joseph J. Waldmeir (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1963), p. 38.

<sup>2</sup> Saul Bellow, "Where Do We Go From Here? The Future of Fiction," in Saul Bellow and the Critics, ed. Irving Malin (New York: New York University Press, 1967), p. 214.

<sup>3</sup> Bellow, "Future of Fiction," p. 211; see also Saul Bellow, "Nobel Lecture, 12 Dec. 1976," in Les Prix Nobel En 1976 (Stockholm: The Nobel Foundation, 1977), p. 226; and Saul Bellow, interviewed by Gordon Lloyd Harper, in Writers at Work: The "Paris Review" Interviews, selected by Kay Dick (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972), p. 225.

<sup>4</sup> Harper, p. 226.

<sup>5</sup> Saul Bellow, "An Interview," Wisconsin Studies in Contemporary Literature, No. 6 (1968), p. 157.

<sup>6</sup> Robert Alter, "The Apocalyptic Temper," Commentary, 41 (1966), 65.

<sup>7</sup> Saul Bellow, "The Writer as Moralist," Atlantic Monthly, (March 1963), p. 62.

<sup>8</sup> Saul Bellow, "Distractions of a Fiction Writer," in The Living Novel: a Symposium, ed. Granville Hicks (New York: Macmillan, 1957), p. 14.

<sup>9</sup> Saul Bellow, "Recent American Fiction," Gertrude Clarke Whittall Poetry and Literature Fund Lecture (Washington: Library

of Congress, 1963), p. 12.

<sup>10</sup> Bellow, "Future of Fiction," p. 220.

<sup>11</sup> Bellow, "Distractions of a Fiction Writer," p. 20.

<sup>12</sup> Bellow, "Future of Fiction," p. 216.

<sup>13</sup> Bellow, "Writer as Moralist," pp. 60, 62.

<sup>14</sup> Robert Alter, "The Stature of Saul Bellow," Midstream, December 1964, John J. Clayton, Saul Bellow: In Defence of Man (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1963), and Irving Halperin, "Saul Bellow and the Moral Imagination," Jewish Affairs, February 1978.

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<sup>16</sup> Alter, "The Apocalyptic Temper," pp. 61, 63.

<sup>17</sup> For a fuller discussion of this concept see Lewicki, pp. 71-85.

<sup>18</sup> Quoted by Alter, p. 62.

<sup>19</sup> Discussed by Alter, p. 63.

<sup>20</sup> Robert A. Fossum, "The Devil and Saul Bellow," Comparative Literature Studies, 3 (1966), 197-208 and Keith Michael Opdahl, The Novels of Saul Bellow (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1967).

<sup>21</sup> Sarah Blacher Cohen, Saul Bellow's Enigmatic Laughter (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1974) and Josephine Zadovsky Knopp, The Trial of Judaism in Contemporary Jewish Writing (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1975).

<sup>22</sup> Liela H. Goldman, Saul Bellow's Moral Vision: A Critical Study of the Jewish Experience (New York: Irvington Publishers, 1983); Robert Alter, After the Tradition: Essays in Modern Jewish Writing (New York: Dutton, 1971); Alter,

"The Stature of Saul Bellow"; Daniel Fuchs, Saul Bellow, Vision and Revision (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1984) and Fuchs, "Bellow and Freud," Studies in the Literary Imagination, 17 (1984), 59-80.

<sup>23</sup> Alfred Kazin, "My Friend Saul Bellow," Saul Bellow Journal, 4 (1985), 28 and Allan Guttman, The Jewish Writer in America: Assimilation and the Crisis of Identity (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971) and Maxwell Geismar, "Saul Bellow, Novelist of the Intellectuals," in Saul Bellow and the Critics, ed. Irving Malin (New York: New York University Press, 1969).

<sup>24</sup> Earl Rovit, Saul Bellow, Univ. of Minnesota Pamphlets on American Writers 65 (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1967); Norman Podhoretz, Making It (New York: Random House, 1967).

<sup>25</sup> Leslie A. Fiedler, "Saul Bellow," in Saul Bellow and the Critics, ed. Irving Malin (New York: New York University Press, 1969), pp. 1-9; Earl Rovit, Saul Bellow.

<sup>26</sup> Saul Bellow, "Starting Out in Chicago," American Scholar, 44 (1974-75), 73, 76.

<sup>27</sup> Sidra DeKoven Ezrahi, By Words Alone: The Holocaust in Literature (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), p. 204, and Leslie A. Fiedler, "The Breakthrough: The American Jewish Novelist and the Fictional Image of the Jew," in Recent American Fiction, pp. 105-08.

<sup>28</sup> Bellow, "Starting Out in Chicago," p. 72.

<sup>29</sup> D. J. R. Bruchner, "A Candid Talk with Saul Bellow," New York Times, 15 April 1984, Sec. 6, p. 62.

<sup>30</sup> Quoted from the Chicago Review by Irving Halperin, "Saul Bellow and the Moral Imagination," Judaism, 109 (1979), 29.

<sup>31</sup> Saul Bellow, The Adventures of Augie March (Harmondsworth:

Penguin, 1978), p. 524; Dangling Man (London: John Lehmann, 1946), p. 39; Herzog (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1980), p. 135.

<sup>32</sup> Simon Noveck, ed., Great Jewish Thinkers of the Twentieth Century (New York: B'nai Brith Department of Adult Jewish Education, 1969), pp. 216-19.

<sup>33</sup> Bellow, Herzog, p. 104.

<sup>34</sup> Nicolas Berdyaev, The Meaning of History (London: Geoffrey Bles: The Centenary Press, 1936), pp. 132, 140-41.

<sup>35</sup> Paul Fussell, The Rhetorical World of Augustan Humanism: Ethics and Imagery from Swift to Burke (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965), pp. 8, 112; Jacques Maritain, True Humanism (London: Geoffrey Bles: The Centenary Press, 1938), p. 13; Molly Mahood, Poetry and Humanism (London: Jonathan Cape, 1950), pp. 11-20.

<sup>36</sup> J. H. Hertz, ed., Pentateuch and Haftorahs (London: Soncino Press, 1972), p. 196.

<sup>37</sup> Milton Steinberg, Basic Judaism (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Harvest/HBJ, 1975), pp. 59-61.

<sup>38</sup> Allan Guttman, The Jewish Writer in America: Assimilation and the Crisis of Identity (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), p. 178.

<sup>39</sup> Harold Fisch, "The Hero as Jew: Reflections on Herzog," Judaism, 5 (1968), 42.

## Chapter One

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<sup>2</sup> "Starting Out in Chicago," American Scholar, 44 (1974-75), 72.

<sup>3</sup> Michiko Kakutani, "A Talk with Saul Bellow: on his Work and Himself," New York Times Book Review, 13 Dec. 1981, p. 2.

<sup>4</sup> Saul Bellow, Recent American Fiction (Washington: Library of Congress, 1963), p. 7.

<sup>5</sup> Paul Levine, "Saul Bellow: The Affirmation of the Philosophical Fool," Perspective, 10 (1959), 165.

<sup>6</sup> Robert Alter, After the Tradition (New York: Dutton, 1971), p. 99.

<sup>7</sup> Quoted by Chester E. Eisinger, Fiction of the Forties (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1965), p. 343.

<sup>8</sup> Alter, After the Tradition, p. 97.

<sup>9</sup> Norman E. Frimer, "A Traditional View," in Tradition and Contemporary Experience, ed. Alfred Jospe (New York: Schocken Books, 1971), p. 165.

<sup>10</sup> Saul Bellow, The Last Analysis (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1966) pp. 40-41.

<sup>11</sup> Sidra DeKoven Ezrahi, By Words Alone: The Holocaust in Literature (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1980), pp. 178, 204.

<sup>12</sup> Leslie A. Fiedler, "Master of Dreams," Partisan Review, 34 (1967), 340.

<sup>13</sup> Saul Bellow, Mr Sammler's Planet (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1978), p. 5.

<sup>14</sup> Eisinger, Fiction of the Forties, p. 348.

<sup>15</sup> Will Herberg, Judaism and Modern Man (New York: Atheneum, 1970), p. 7.

<sup>16</sup> Jeanne Braham, A Sort of Columbus (Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 1984), p. 86.

<sup>17</sup> Herberg, Judaism and Modern Man, pp. 98-102, and Hermann Cohen, "Religious Postulates," in Modern Jewish Thought, A

Source Reader, ed. Nahum N. Glatzer (New York: Atheneum, 1970), pp. 47-51.

<sup>18</sup> Leslie A. Fiedler, "The Breakthrough: The American Jewish Novelist and the Fictional Image of the Jew," in Recent American Fiction: Some Critical Views, ed. Joseph J. Waldmeir (Boston: Michigan State University, Houghton Mifflin, 1963), p. 87.

<sup>19</sup> My account of Existentialism is indebted to Nicola Abbagnano, "Existentialism," Encyclopaedia Britannica: Macropaedia, 1974 ed.; Hazel E. Barnes, The Literature of Possibility (London: Tavistock, 1961); William Barrett, Irrational Man (London: Mercury, 1964); William Barrett, What is Existentialism? (New York, Grove, 1965); Alistair MacIntyre, "Existentialism," Encyclopaedia of Philosophy Vol. 3 (New York: Macmillan, Free Press, 1967); John Macquarrie, Existentialism (Baltimore: Pelican, 1973); and Jean-Paul Sartre, Existentialism and Humanism, trans. Philip Mairet (London: Eyre Methuen, 1980).

<sup>20</sup> Abraham Joshua Heschel, Who is Man? (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1969), p. 69.

<sup>21</sup> Tony Tanner, Saul Bellow (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1965), p. 6; Howard Harper, Desperate Faith (Chapel Hill: North Carolina Univ. Press, 1967), pp. 4, 7-8; Ralph Freedman, "Saul Bellow: The Illusion of Environment," Saul Bellow and the Critics, ed. Irving Malin (New York: New York University Press, 1967), pp. 207-10; and Helen Weinberg, The New Novel in America: The Kafka Mode in Contemporary Literature (New York: Cornell University Press, 1970), p. 40.

<sup>22</sup> Ada Aharoni, "Bellow and Existentialism," Saul Bellow Journal, 1 (1983), 42-44.

<sup>23</sup> Quoted by Aharoni, p. 42.

<sup>24</sup> Richard Lehan, "Existentialism in Recent American Fiction: The Demonic Quest," in Recent American Fiction, ed. Waldmeir, pp. 63-64.

- 25 David D. Galloway, "The Absurd Man as Picaro: The Novels of Saul Bellow," Texas Studies in Literature and Language, 6 (1964), 228-29.
- 26 Martin Buber, Hasidism and Modern Man, ed. and trans. Maurice Friedman (New York: Horizon Press, 1968), p. 39.
- 27 Lehan, "Existentialism in Recent American Fiction," p.70.
- 28 Lehan, p. 70.
- 29 Lehan, p. 70.
- 30 Earl Rovit, Saul Bellow (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1967), p. 35; Cynthia Ozick, Bloodshed and Three Other Novellas (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1976), pp. 10-11.
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- 35 Rev. S. Singer, trans., The Authorised Daily Prayerbook (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1962), p. 6.
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- 37 Milton Steinberg, Basic Judaism (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1947), pp. 75-79.
- 38 Moses Mendelssohn, Selections from his Writings, ed. and trans. Eva Jospe (New York: Viking, 1975), p. 143.
- 39 Herberg, Judaism and Modern Man, p. 135.
- 40 John J. Clayton, In Defence of Man (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1971), pp. 121-22.
- 41 L. H. Goldman, Saul Bellow's Moral Vision: A Critical Study of the Jewish Experience (New York: Irvington, 1983), p. 7; Ezrahi, pp. 177-180.

<sup>42</sup> "Rumania, Holocaust Period," Encyclopaedia Judaica Vol. 14 RED-SL (Jerusalem: Keter, 1972), p. 400.

<sup>43</sup> S.B. Cohen, p. 37; Clayton, p. 117; Marcus Klein, "A Discipline of Nobility: Saul Bellow's Fiction," in Saul Bellow and the Critics, ed. Irving Malin (New York: New York University Press, 1967), p. 93; Eisinger, p. 347; Robert R. Dutton, Saul Bellow (Boston: Twayne, 1971), p. 131; Ada Aharoni, "The Search for Freedom in Dangling Man," in Saul Bellow Journal, 31 (1983), 51.

<sup>44</sup> Lehan, p. 73.

<sup>45</sup> Quoted by Herberg, p. 184.

<sup>46</sup> Herberg, pp. 133-211.

<sup>47</sup> Ezrahi, pp. 177-80, Norman Podhoretz, Making It (New York: Random House, 1967), p. 161.

<sup>48</sup> Emil L. Fackenheim, God's Presence in History (New York: Harper and Row, 1970), pp. 71, 72. See also pp. 69-79.

<sup>49</sup> Quoted by Maxwell Geismar, "Saul Bellow: Novelist of the Intellectuals," in Saul Bellow and the Critics. ed. Irving Malin (New York: New York University Press, 1967), p. 10.

<sup>50</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre, Anti-Semite and Jew, trans. George J. Becker (New York: Schocken Books, 1972), pp. 80-85.

## Chapter Two

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<sup>5</sup> Nathan Glazer, "The Alienation of Modern Man," Commentary, 3 (1947), 380.

<sup>6</sup> John Macquarrie, Existentialism (Baltimore: Pelican Books, 1973), pp. 13, 120-34.

<sup>7</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre, Nausea, trans. Robert Baldick (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1984).

<sup>8</sup> Quoted by Macquarrie, p. 132.

<sup>9</sup> William Barrett, Irrational Man, A Study in Existential Philosophy (London: Mercury, 1964), p.8.

<sup>10</sup> Barrett, p. 54.

<sup>11</sup> "Historical Survey of Existentialism," Encyclopaedia Britannica: Macropaedia Vol. 7, 1974 ed., p. 74.

<sup>12</sup> Michiko Kakutani, "A Talk with Saul Bellow: On his Work and Himself," New York Times Book Review, 13 Dec. 1981, p. 2.

<sup>13</sup> Sarah Blacher Cohen, Saul Bellow's Enigmatic Laughter (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1974), p. 43.

<sup>14</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre, Anti-Semite and Jew, trans. George J. Becker (New York: Schocken Books, 1972), pp. 92-93.

<sup>15</sup> Sartre, p. 92.

<sup>16</sup> Sartre, pp. 107-08.

<sup>17</sup> S. Lillian Kremer, "The Holocaust in The Victim," Saul Bellow Journal, 2 (1983), 17.

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<sup>19</sup> Michael Selzer, ed., "Kike! A Documentary History of Anti-Semitism in America" (New York: World, 1972), p. 2.

<sup>20</sup> Sartre, p. 49.

<sup>21</sup> Moses Mendelssohn, Selections from his Writings, ed. and trans. Eva Jospe (New York: Viking, 1975), p. 13.

<sup>22</sup> The accusation levelled at Yakov Bok in Tsarist Russia in Bernard Malamud's The Fixer (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1966).

<sup>23</sup> Mendelssohn, p. 13.

<sup>24</sup> Sartre, p. 40.

<sup>25</sup> Manfred Vogel, "The Jewish Image of Man and Its Relevance for Today," in Tradition and Contemporary Experience, ed. Alfred Jospe (New York: Schocken Books, 1971), pp. 122-23.

<sup>26</sup> Henri Baruk, "Judaism, Morality and the Science of Man," trans. Irving Yass, in Confrontations with Judaism, ed. Philip Longworth (London: Anthony Blond, 1967), pp. 61-63, and Martin Buber, Hasidism and Modern Man, ed. and trans. Maurice Friedman (New York: Horizon Press, 1958), p. 240.

<sup>27</sup> Daniel Bell, "Reflections on Jewish Identity," Commentary, 30 (1960), 471.

<sup>28</sup> Sartre, p. 98.

<sup>29</sup> Quoted by Lucy S. Dawidowicz, The War Against the Jews 1933-1945 (New York: Bantam Books, 1975), p. 47.

<sup>30</sup> Eliezer Berkovits, Faith After the Holocaust (New York: KTAV Publishing House, 1973), p. 125.

<sup>31</sup> Zephyra Porat, "The Living Dog and the Dead Lion," The Jerusalem Quarterly, 4 (1977), 90.

<sup>32</sup> Leslie Fiedler, quoted by Josephine Z. Knopp, The Trial of Judaism in Contemporary Jewish Writing (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1975), p. 128.

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<sup>52</sup> Milan Kundera, The Unbearable Lightness of Being (London: Faber and Faber, 1984), pp. 19-20.

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<sup>56</sup> Maxwell Geismar, "Saul Bellow, Novelist of the Intellectuals," in Saul Bellow and the Critics, ed. Irving Malin (New York: New York University Press, 1967), p. 14.

### Chapter Three

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<sup>5</sup> Saul Bellow, introduction to Great Jewish Short Stories, ed. Saul Bellow (London: Vallentine, Mitchell, 1971), p. 14;

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<sup>19</sup> Buber, Hasidim, p. 113.

<sup>20</sup> Alfred Kazin, "My Friend Saul Bellow," Saul Bellow Journal, 4 (1985), 29.

<sup>21</sup> Alfred Kazin, A Walker in the City (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1951), p. 37.

<sup>22</sup> Jack Riemer, ed., Jewish Reflections on Death (New York: Schocken Books, 1965), p. 11.

<sup>23</sup> Buber, Hasidism, p. 235.

<sup>24</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre, Anti-Semite and Jew, trans. George J. Becker (New York: Schocken Books, 1965), p. 100; see also pp. 97-101.

<sup>25</sup> Alfred Kazin, contributor to "A Symposium on American Literature and the Younger Generation of American Jews," Contemporary Jewish Record, 7 (1944), 10, 16.

<sup>26</sup> Lionel Trilling, "A Symposium on American Literature," p. 16.

<sup>27</sup> Goldman, pp. 142-44, 154.

<sup>28</sup> Rev. S. Singer, trans., The Authorised Daily Prayerbook (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1963), p. 7.

<sup>29</sup> Leslie Fiedler, "What Can We Do About Fagin?" Commentary, 7 (1949), 418.

<sup>30</sup> Quoted by Allan Guttman, The Jewish Writer in America. Assimilation and the Crisis of Identity (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), p. 178.

<sup>31</sup> Saul Bellow, quoted by Granville Hicks, "Fragile Bits and Pieces," p. 39.

<sup>32</sup> Alfred Jospe, "The Jewish Image of the Jew: On the Meaning of Jewish Distinctiveness," in Tradition and Contemporary Experience, p. 143.

<sup>33</sup> Sartre, pp. 80-85.

<sup>34</sup> Daniel Fuchs, "Bellow and Freud," Studies in the Literary Imagination, No. 17 (1984), p. 59.

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<sup>36</sup> Alexander Pope, "Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot," Collected Poems (London: J. M. Dent, 1985), p. 257.

<sup>37</sup> Arthur J. Lelyfeld, "Transient Isms and Abiding Values," in Tradition and Contemporary Experience, p. 177.

<sup>38</sup> Eliezer Berkovits, "The Condition of Jewish Belief," in "A Symposium on American Literature," compiled by the editors of Commentary, pp. 25-26.

<sup>39</sup> Hicks, p. 39.

<sup>40</sup> Robert Gordis, The Book of Man and God (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973), pp. 151-56; Matitiahu Tsevat, The Meaning of the Book of Job and Other Biblical Stories. Essays on the Literature and Religion of the Hebrew Bible (New York: KTAV, 1980), pp. 3-35.

<sup>41</sup> Manfred Vogel, "The Jewish Image of Man and its Relevance for Today," in Tradition and Contemporary Experience, pp. 121-23.

<sup>42</sup> Leo Baeck, "The Optimism of Judaism," in Contemporary Jewish Thought: A Reader, ed. Simon Noveck (Clinton, Mass.: Colonial Press, 1969), pp. 181-83.

<sup>43</sup> Alfred Jospe, in Tradition and Contemporary Experience, p. 1

<sup>44</sup> In "The Breakthrough: The American-Jewish Novelist and the Fictitious Image of the Jew," in Recent American Fiction Some Critical Views, ed. Joseph J. Waldmeir (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1963), p. 90, Leslie Fiedler notes that the cult of violence is alien to American-Jewish writers, while Daniel Fuchs, in Vision and Revision, pp. 23-24, cites Norman Mailer's efforts to make violence respectable as one of the key differences between Mailer and Bellow.

<sup>45</sup> Robert Alter, "Saul Bellow: A Dissent from Modernism," in After the Tradition (New York: Dutton, 1971), pp. 113-14.

<sup>46</sup> Jack Rimer, ed., Jewish Reflections on Death (New York: Schocken Books, 1965), p. 9.

<sup>47</sup> Fuchs, Vision and Revision, p. 166.

<sup>48</sup> Will Herberg, Judaism and Modern Man. An Interpretation of Jewish Religion (New York: Atheneum, 1970), p. 72; Abraham Joshua Heschel, The Insecurity of Freedom: Essays on Human Existence (New York: Schocken Books, 1972), p. 17.

<sup>49</sup> Milton Steinberg, Basic Judaism (New York: Harvest/HBJ Book, 1975), p. 67.

<sup>50</sup> Abraham Joshua Heschel, Who Is Man? (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1966), p. 94.

<sup>51</sup> Moses Mendelssohn, Selections from his Writings, ed. and trans. Eva Jospe (New York: Viking, 1975), p. 170; Josephine Zadovsky Knopp, The Trial of Judaism in Contemporary Jewish Writing (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1975), pp. 11-12.

<sup>52</sup> Her elevation of pure feeling suggests a comparison with Rosie Rosetree, also a convert, in Patrick White's The Riders in the Chariot (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1981), p. 210, while Leo Baeck discusses the romanticising of religion in "Romantic Religion," in Contemporary Jewish Thought, A Reader, ed. Noveck, pp. 204-09.

<sup>53</sup> Martin Buber, Between Man and Man, trans. Ronald Gregor Smith (Glasgow: Collins, 1979), p. 33.

<sup>54</sup> Arthur A. Cohen, The Myth of the Judeo-Christian Tradition (New York: Schocken Books, 1971), pp. 77-78.

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<sup>56</sup> Ruth R. Wisse, The Schlemiel as Modern Hero (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), pp. 101-02.

<sup>57</sup> Saul Bellow, Interview with Nina Steers, "Successor to Faulkner?" Show, No. 4 (Sept. 1964), p. 38.

<sup>58</sup> Saul Bellow, Great Jewish Short Stories, p. 16.

<sup>59</sup> Saul Bellow, unpublished notebooks, C.2.7., p. 6, untitled draft for a lecture on the novel. Quoted by Fuchs, Vision and Revision, p. 37.

<sup>60</sup> Heschel, Who Is Man?, p. 69.

<sup>61</sup> Will Herberg, The Writings of Martin Buber (New York: Meridian Books, 1956), pp. 43-62.

<sup>62</sup> Martin Buber gives a slightly different version of this aphorism in Souls on Fire, trans. Marion Wiesel (New York: Random House, 1972), p. 120.

<sup>63</sup> Leo Rosten, The Joys of Yiddish (London: W. H. Allen, 1970), p. 352.

<sup>64</sup> Wisse, pp. 4-5, 96-97.

<sup>65</sup> Nathan Ausubel, ed., A Treasury of Jewish Folklore (New York: Crown, 1949), pp. 28-29.

<sup>66</sup> Quoted by Martin Buber, Tales of the Hasidim: Early Masters, trans. Olga Marx (New York: Schocken Books, 1961), p. 131.

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<sup>68</sup> Fuchs, Vision and Revision, p. 162.

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<sup>70</sup> Jewish Values (Jerusalem: Keter, 1974), pp. 135-36.

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<sup>72</sup> See Goldman, pp. 118, 128.

<sup>73</sup> Arthur Davis and Herbert M. Adler, eds., Synagogue Service for New Year (New York: Hebrew Pub. Co., 1959), p. 130A; Synagogue Service for Day of Atonement (New York: Hebrew Pub. Co., 1959), p. 123A.

<sup>74</sup> See Fuchs, "Bellow and Freud," p. 70.

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<sup>3</sup> Saul Bellow, Humboldt's Gift (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1979), p. 222.

<sup>4</sup> Edward Alexander, The Resonance of Dust (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1979), p. 192.

<sup>5</sup> Ezrahi, p. 68.

<sup>6</sup> This is pointed out by S. Lillian Kremer, "The Holocaust in Mr Sammler's Planet," Saul Bellow Journal, 4 (1985), 27.

<sup>7</sup> Jean-Francois Steiner, Treblinka, trans. Helen Weaver (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1967).

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<sup>9</sup> John Chamberlain, intro. to Studs Lonigan Trilogy by James T. Farrell (New York: Random House/Modern Library, 1938), p. x.

<sup>10</sup> Saul Bellow, Herzog (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1980), p. 81.

<sup>11</sup> Molly M. Mahood, Poetry and Humanism (London: Jonathan Cape, 1950), pp. 11-16. See also Nicolas Berdyaev, The Meaning of History (London: Geoffrey Bles, Centenary Press, 1936), p. 140.

<sup>12</sup> Eliezer Berkovits, Faith After the Holocaust (New York: KTAV, 1973), p. 78.

<sup>13</sup> Jacques Maritain, True Humanism (London: Geoffrey Bles, Centenary Press, 1938), pp. 14-15.

<sup>14</sup> Milton Steinberg, Basic Judaism (New York: Harvest/HBJ Book, 1947), p. 85.

<sup>15</sup> Ernst Cassirer, "Judaism and the Modern Political Myths," Contemporary Jewish Record, 7 (1944), 115-126.

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<sup>17</sup> Oliphant Smeaton, intro., English Satires (London: Blackie and Son, 1899), pp. xvi-xviii.

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<sup>19</sup> Daniel Bell, "Sensibility in the Sixties," Commentary, 51 (1971), 63-73.

<sup>20</sup> Quoted by Edward Grossmann, "The Bitterness of Saul Bellow," Midstream (Aug./Sept. 1970), p. 15.

<sup>21</sup> My comments on the black are influenced by Robert Dutton, Saul Bellow (Boston: Twayne, 1982), pp. 140-43.

<sup>22</sup> Robert Alter, "A Fever of Ethnicity," Commentary, 53 (1972), 68.

<sup>23</sup> Alter, p. 68.

<sup>24</sup> This forms part of Nicolas Berdyaev's definition of man in The Meaning of History (London: Geoffrey Bles,

Centenary Press, 1936), pp. 140-41, which has much in common with Jacques Maritain's definition in True Humanism (London: Geoffrey Bles, Centenary Press, 1938), p. xii.

<sup>25</sup> Robert Alter, "The Apocalyptic Temper," Commentary, 41 (1966), 62.

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<sup>28</sup> Albert Einstein, "Jewish Ideals," in Modern Jewish Thought: A Source Reader, ed. Nahum N. Glatzer (New York: Schocken Books, 1977), p. 117.

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<sup>30</sup> Elie Wiesel, Night, Dawn, The Accident (London: Robson Books, 1974), p. 43.

<sup>31</sup> Joseph R. Levenson, "Therefore Choose Life," Commentary, 60 (1975), 54.

<sup>32</sup> Levenson, p. 56; see also Hermann Cohen, "Religious Postulates," in Modern Jewish Thought: A Source Reader, pp. 47-49.

<sup>33</sup> Goldman, p. 163.

<sup>34</sup> Abraham Joshua Heschel, God in Search of Man (New York: Meridian Books, 1960), p. 424.

<sup>35</sup> Irving S. Saposnik, "Bellow's Jerusalem: The Road not Taken," Judaism, 109 (1979), 43.

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<sup>37</sup> Amos Oz, In the Land of Israel (London: Fontana, 1984), p. 130.

<sup>38</sup> Alexander, p. 186, and Zephyra Porat, "The Living Dog and the Dead Lion: Saul Bellow's Image of Judaism," The Jerusalem Quarterly, 4 (Summer 1977), 89-90.

<sup>39</sup> See Josephine Zadovsky Knopp's definition of menschlekhkayt in The Trial of Judaism in Contemporary Jewish Writing (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1975), pp. 6-29, and Joseph C. Landis' definition in his introduction "The Moral Centre of Yiddish Literature," to The Dibbuk and Other Great Yiddish Plays, ed. and trans. Joseph C. Landis (New York: Bantam Books, 1966), pp. 1-8.

<sup>40</sup> Israel Zangwill, Children of the Ghetto (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1906), p. 64.

<sup>41</sup> Kaddish and Yiskor may be found in Rev. S. Singer's The Authorised Daily Prayerbook (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1964), pp. 80-81, and in Arthur Davis' and Herbert M. Adler's Synagogue Service for Day of Atonement (New York: Hebrew Pub. Co., 1959), pp. 119, 119a, 119b.

<sup>42</sup> Robert R. Dutton, pp. 143-44.

<sup>43</sup> Waldo Frank, "Prophecy as Politics," Contemporary Jewish Record, 7 (June 1944), 251-52, while Robert Gordis discusses the point more fully in Judaism for the Modern Age (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Cudahy, 1955), pp. 223-24.

<sup>44</sup> John J. Clayton, In Defence of Man (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1968), pp. 254-260, and Edward Grossman, "The Bitterness of Saul Bellow," Midstream (Aug./Sept. 1970), pp. 10-15.

<sup>45</sup> Martin Buber, Between Man and Man, trans. Ronald Gregor Smith (New York: Macmillan, 1948), p. 184.

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<sup>47</sup> Robert Gordis, The Book of God and Man (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973), p. 145; see also pp. 135-56.

<sup>48</sup> Emil L. Fackenheim, "The Human Condition After Auschwitz; A Jewish Testimony a Generation After," in Tradition and Change in Jewish Experience, ed. A. Leland Jamieson (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1977), p. 239.

<sup>49</sup> Joseph C. Landis, Introduction to The Dibbuk and Other Great Yiddish Plays (New York: Bantam Books, 1966), p. 5, and Nathan Ausubel, ed., A Treasury of Jewish Folklore (New York: Crown, 1949) pp. 28-29.

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