Memory, Death And Desire: A New Protean Consciousness In Saul Bellow's Fiction

Mukesh K. Williams

Saul Bellow's fiction stretching from the mid–Forties to the early Nineties spans nearly half a century of swift social and psychological change in the life of an average American, especially in the life of an immigrant Jew. Beginning from a somewhat inchoate awareness of his presence in America, the American Jew, of Bellow's novels, begins to feel more confident about his adopted country and acquires the values typical of American city-life. In the December of his life, the disoriented Jewish victim has finally become an environmentalist, a self-assured campaigner for the Blacks, pulling strings behind the Iron Curtain.[1] Bellow undoubtedly leaves behind something to remember him by. But this maturity carries with it a price tag. The robustness and enthusiasm of Bellow's earlier protagonists, such as Artur Sammler, Moses Herzog or Charlie Citrine' are somewhat lost. Though characters in "late Bellow" are socially well-adjusted they lack the joie de vivre, the youthful buoyancy of "earlier Bellow." No longer do we find either the great agitation to analyze or the imaginative leap into an emotional terra incognita. Albert Corde, staid and settled into a cold contemplation, cannot match the conniving craftiness of a Citrine, nor can the Mnemosyne Institute protagonist of "The Bellarosa Connection" capture the caginess of a Sammler. They look somehow listless and uninspiring. Even the seventeen-year old Louie in *Something to Remember Me By*,[2] seems a weak reflection of the un-

forgettable picaro Augie March. Kenneth Trachtenberg in *More Die of Heart–break*[3] is no Herzog, nor Benn Crader a greater visionary than Von Humboldt Fleisher. Concerns remain but the grip on them has slackened.

The paper is divided into six sections. The first section surveys the criticism of Bellow's fiction and defines the new emerging consciousness. The second section deals with the intellectual background of the protagonists, their Jewish memory in a WASP, urban environment, the dread of death, and significant techniques of survival. Section three discusses the consumeristic relationships characters develop, their subsequent skepticism of various philosophical approaches and money as a symbol of power. The fourth section defines the emergence of the protean consciousness and its attributes; while the fifth section analyses several literary devices employed by the author. Finally, the sixth section discusses sub–themes such as women, desire and symbolism, drawing a general conclusion about Bellow's works.

A typical Bellovian protagonist brings with him a desperate theme of total physical gratification which, as Alexis de Tocqueville points out in *Democracy in America*,[4] is the single most important trait of modern America. Charlie, in *Humboldt's Gift*,[5] explains that the "present demand is for a quick forward movement," for "instantaneous realization ... of eternal human desires and fantasies" (HG, p. 198). From the theme of persecution in the earlier novels Bellow's fiction moves to pleasure, from social discrimination to self-determination and from Jewish insecurity to American confidence. However, social success and familiarity with the American ethos bring new social problems–problems of distancing from an ethnic past, relocation in a new emotional environment, a desire to forge a new identity and a preoccupation with altered aspirations. These themes give impetus to a new life-style, a unique way of relocating the self in a

changed ethos.

Urban and committed to the pleasure of the moment, this new life-style may be termed protean in nature as it does not have a fixed *locus standi*, except shifting self-interest. Self-interest, when extended to inter-personal relationships, heightens impermanence and intensifies insecurity, compelling characters to create new self-equations. Such men, as William James would have us believe, explore the intuitive life from the vantage point of rationalism.[6] Louie cannot really explain to the Winona Street female what he is reading. However, in response to her question, he imagines he "believed that higher knowledge was shared out among all human beings. What else was there to hold us together but this force hidden behind daily consciousness" (STRMB, p. 202). The Bellovian dialectics or dilemma is neatly summed up by Albert Corde, in *The Dean's December*, when he distinguishes between the "clear consciousness" of Valerie Raresh, his dying mother-in-law, and the "equivocal consciousness" of murdered Rick Lester and his own. Corde further expands on the idea of the equivocal consciousness by calling it, "that equivocal queer condition, working with a net of foolish assumptions, and so much absurd unwanted stuff lying on your heart" (TDD, P. 143). In the writing of later novelists, like Ronald Sukenick and Raymond Federman, the pressures of this new sensibility disturb language, dialectic and structure.

Most criticism on Bellow confines itself to an understanding of the multi-faceted aspect of Jewish identity in America and, in that sense, becomes limited. Irving Howe, for instance, finds Bellow "stuggling" to understand the "mysterious ordeal of Jewishness;"[7] while Alfred Kazin sees in his fiction a devotion to Judaism, which expresees "the unreality of this world."[8] The "elegiac and nostalgic" quality of Bellow is highlighted by Josephine Hendin vis-a-vis the theme of

Jewish "victimization and vulnerability."[9] Ellen Pifer's excellent studyon Bellow argues about the psychic rift in the protagonist and how he "is divided against himself."[10] Allen Guttmann finds that Bellow's novels try to understand the issue of "assimilation and crisis of identity" of Jews in America.[11] Irving Malin believes that to Bellow, society seems to act as "a threat."[12] Accordingly, Malin traces aspects of Jewishness, marginality, and alienation in Bellow's fiction after conveniently dividing the novels into broad themes to suit his purpose. Even if Malin notes the tension that exists in Bellow's fiction—the tension between Judaism and skepticism, especially in *The Dangling Man* [13]—he does not pursue the matter to any serious consequence.

Perhaps, one of the few non-Jewish critics who grasps the true meaning of Bellow's fiction is Ihab Hassan. He finds in the fiction of Bellow the emergence of "a new consciousness" that the Jewish protagonist embodies. Bellow's "urban Jewish character" Hassan writes, "conscious of their ancient heritage, embody the perplexities of the American Jew seeking a new consciousness of himself, a new definition of his fate."[14] Lionel Trilling in his persuasive study on Bellow, *Sincerity and Authenticity*,[15] shows how it becomes imperative for the modern Hegalian Spirit to divest itself of "cultural superstructures" and enter a "disintegrated consciousness," if it wishes to achieve authenticity. Characters forging a new life-style, need must relinquish a traditional sensibility. However, Trilling takes the debate in another direction. He argues that the champions of the Spirit possess a predilection towards void, nothingness, or Conradian "heart of darkness." They express a condition of negation or nihilism against which Bellow reacts. And Bellow's emphasis on the "achieved and successful life" causes "discomfort and embarrassment" amongst his readers. It is precisely because Bellow's characters search for a new outlook that they come in conflict with established ways of thinking. Bellow's aim is not, as Frank P. McConnell feels, to "re-

vivify the sanctions and values of Western culture,"[16] but to legitimize a new urban behavior. Therefore, Bellow's protagonists are not "myth preservers" as McConnell believes. On the contrary, they are myth-makers and in that sense terrible iconoclasts.

Leslie A. Fiedler wonders why Bellow changes the philosophical content in every novel. Fiedler points out that Bellow's philosophy in each novel is a based on the "latest book" he has read. Fiedler argues that the ideas of philosophers and psychologists like Rudolf Steiner, Edward Shils and Wilhelm Reich find their way into Bellow's fiction.[17] However, Fiedler gets into some difficulty in understanding why the phenomenon occurs. Perhaps, he refuses to see that the hallmark of a typical Bellovian character is a lack of belief either in his own philosophy or someone else's. The philosophical shifts in Bellow's characters suit the author extremely well, because his characters are undergoing constant transformations. The philosophical shift of characters express their intellectual aporia and the changing nature of their protean personality this paper explores.

II

A new urban class of men emerge in Bellow's fiction—men who desperately seek to know themselves and find a place in the world they live in. They bring to the novels an intellectual force that is lacking in earlier Jewish fiction, especially in the writings of Henry Roth and Daniel Fuchs. The strong contemplative content of Bellow's protagonists provides a new vigor to fiction. Most of them are either academics or creative artists. Herzog and Citrine are professors in American universities, while Asa Leventhal is a news editor and Corde, still a professor, has also become a dean—"somewhere in the middle of the country" (TDD, p. 8). Seventy-year old Sammler is no less intellectual with his "face of a British Museum reader." He has spent "two decades in London, as a correspon-

dent for Warsaw papers and journals" (*Mr. Sammler's Planet*, p. 9).[18] Though old, he considers himself "a man of the modern age," (MSP, p. 31) who once "had been a horny man of labyrinthine extraordinary sensuality" (MSP, p. 29). In fact, protagonists possess an analytical frame of mind and are a prey to the anxiety and distemper of modern Chicago or New York—an anxiety which threatens to overwhelm their highly charged emotional condition and visionary outlook. Invariably, their intellectual machinery gets entangled in the day-to-day events of urban reality and breaks down. One-eyed Sammler hits the nail on the head when he remarks: "Intellectual man had become an explaining creature... . The soul wanted what it wanted. It had its own natural knowledge. It sat unhappily on superstructures of explanation, poor bird, not knowing which way to fly" (MSP, p. 7). Surprised by criminality, street violence and police apathy, Sammler, like "Prospero," honestly wants to improve this very pragmatic, and at times, philosophical planet (MSP, pp. 17, 106). Therefore, he moves away from Freud, Burckhardt, Spengler, Karl Marx, Franz Oppenheimer, Ortega and Valery to "certain religious writers of the thirteenth century—Suso, Tauler, and Meister Eckhart" (MSP, p. 37).

Being deeply introspective and analytical, characters attempt to interpret their experience without much help from either the Jewish or the Christian traditions. In Bellow, Fiedler points out, "ideologies appear played out in a drama, by turns comic and pathetic, whose actors respond to the exchange of thought as to a blow or a kiss."[19] The Jewish sociologist Thorstein Veblen observes this phenomenon amongst European Jews. He writes: The Young Jew finds his own heritage of usage and outlook untenable; but this does not mean that he therefore will take over and inwardly assimilate the traditions of usage and outlook which the gentile world has to offer; or at the most he does not uncritically take over all the intellectual pre-possessions that are always standing

over among the substantial citizens of the republic of learning." Therefore, when such a man is "exposed to the unmediated facts of the current situation ... [he] takes his orientation from the run of the facts as he finds them, rather than from the traditional interpretation of analogous facts in the past."[20] Veblen's observation about European Jews could apply equally well to American Jews. Skeptical of others' traditions and finding his own meaningless, the Jewish intellectual feels a psychological barrenness in his life. The protagonist of "The Bellarosa Connection" laments: "You can never dismantle these modern mental structures. There are so many of them that they face you like an interminable vast city" (STRMB, p. 89). However, he understands that "these historical meditations" resolve "nothing." For: "To think doesn't settle anything." (STRMB, p. 24).

Philosophies and presumptions preoccupy the male protagonists of Bellow from *The Dangling Man* to the very end, till we come to the novella, "The Theft," where a female protagonist, Clara Velde, emerges to take control of her own life and becomes "a complete person" (STRMB, p. 179). Clara, as her name suggest, is clear about her responses to the world. Gina Wegman, the Austrian *au pair* girl, sums up Clara's personality: "You pretty well know who you are" (STRMB, p. 180). A diamond is stolen and mysteriously returned with the help of Gina and Clara's eldest daughter. Clara is pleasantly surprised that her eldest daughter, whom she thought would not do so well in life as her other two daughters, proves to be quite responsible in the episode. Upon Gina's instruction she secretly returns the ring hidden in a handkerchief to her mother's bedside table and remains silent about it. Clara understands Gina's worth but it is too late; Gina is leaving the country. Clara concludes rather ruefully: "The people you mean a lot to just haven't got the time to speak to you about it" (STRMB, "The Theft," p. 177). As Gina leaves, Clara returns "crying down Madi-

son Avenue" like "one of the homeless." Tears came down in torrents as if she was "treading water in New York harbor" till she realizes "who it is that's at the middle of me" (STRMB, "The Theft," pp. 180-1).

Moses Herzog, one of the many "bungling child-men, pure hearts in the burlap of innocence" (H, p. 325), is truly a tortured soul treating his suffering in a singular manner by writing letters to the living and the dead. Death as a subject dominates the discussion with his old Chicago friend Lucas Asphalter. Asphalter's pet monkey, Rocco, has recently died of tuberculosis and Asphalter feels shattered (H, p. 328). He confesses that he is practicing Tina Zokoly's "facing your own death" exercises (H, p. 329). Herzog objects to this sort of "dread" preached by "German existentialists" (H, p. 331). He points out that "human life is far subtler than any of its models, even these ingenious German models" (H, p. 332). The real answer, then, lies in fellowship—"brotherhood is what makes a man human." With great eloquence and conviction Herzog concludes: "The real and essential question is one of our employment by other human beings and their employment by us. Without this true employment you never dread death, you cultivate it. And consciousness when it doesn't clearly understand what to live for, what to die for, can only abuse and ridicule itself" (H, p. 333). It is not without significance that he is an expert on the Romantic Movement writing a book on the "modern condition." Through the book he believes he is "renewing universal connections; overturning the last of the Romantic errors about the uniqueness of the Self" (H, p. 53).

Observing monstrous abnormalities in the modern individual personality, Charlie relinquishes his hold on reality, remonstrating with the dead, trying to discover a deeper meaning of life. In his six decades of intense and eventful life he has gone through the entire gamut of human passions—fame obsession, sex

obsession and money obsession—and found each wanting. At the end of the novel he stands isolated, lonely, divested of his wealth. But, perhaps, by reintering his friend Humboldt at the Valhalla Cemetry, Charlie has at last distilled, through death, the essence of life's flower (crocus), and seems closer to understanding the strange intimations of immortality in the possible reemergence of Humboldt as Charlie himself. Could this be the gift Humboldt finally gives to Charlie? For certainly there seems to be a growing belief in living in the here-and-now. As Humboldt's coffin is enclosed again in a concrete slab, Charlie understands that the dead are dead: "But then how did one get out? One didn't, didn't, didn't! You stayed, you stayed" (HG, p. 474)! The dread of death gets temporarily suspended in the notion of the present being all one has. The changeable and renewing nature of life is once again underscored by the spring season with which the novel ends. There is a strong emphasis on reestablishing connections with the immediate world, as it is with most novels of Bellow, and to enjoy the ordinary things of life.

The "essence of a twice-born philosophy," William James points out, is "the belief that there is an element of real wrongness in this world, which is neither to be ignored nor evaded, but which must be squarely met and overcome by an appeal to the soul's heroic resources, and neutralized and cleansed away by suffering."[21] Like Humboldt, Charlie seems preoccupied with the subject of death throughout the novel. One of the books Charlie is reading early in the novel is Steiner's *Death and Rebirth.* In Charlie's own words, as he explains to Cantabile and his girl—friend Polly Palomino, it is a "fascinating book about the soul's journey past the gates of death" (HG, p. 173). In fact the novel begins with Charlie trying to escape the fact of Humboldt's death and ends with his acceptance of it. Towards the end, Charlie ponders about death at the Pension La Roca, "making esoteric experiments." He studies Steiner for "long hours" and tries to com-

municate with the dead believing in his "postulate" that "there was a core of the eternal in every human being." On the one hand he finds the "strangeness of life" stifling and on the other sees the "core of the eternal in every human being." He seems, "convinced that there was nothing in the material world to account for the more delicate desires and perceptions of human beings." He finds living a bit peculiar with abnormal people like Renata and Doris Scheldt. Therefore, he tries to make contact with the dead—his dead parents, Demmie Vonghel and Von Humboldt Fleisher—in the hope of receiving some illumination about the human condition. He reasons with himself that: "It seems, after all, that there are no non-peculiar people. This was why I looked forward to acquaintance with the souls of the dead. They should be a little more stable." As he dabbles in this "occult peculiarity," he begins to understand the limited nature of his rationalizations: "The soul of a civilized and rational person is said to be free but is actually very closely confined" (HG, pp. 426-30).

Wilhelm (Tommy) Adler is another of Bellow's "visionary sort of animal," a Herzog in the making, wanting to know why he exists and, perhaps, realizes it in the end through his confrontation with death (*Seize The Day*, p. 44).[22] In his mid-forties, a "fair-haired hippopotamus," possessing a soft and brooding nature, Wilhelm cannot make it on his own in the world of New York cheats and tough businessmen (STD, pp. 10, 29). His sense of worth gets further eroded when he moves to Hotel Gloriana, a place where retired people live, reminiscing about their past. Out of work and low on cash, he urgently wants to make quick money; he believes: "While if you didn't have it you were a dummy, a dummy! You had to excuse yourself from the face of the earth" (STD, p. 41). His troubles are compounded by his distressing marital life. His wife Margaret does not want to give him a divorce and his girlfriend Olive refuses to wait forever. His father Dr. Adler, who is in his eighties, does not want to be the burdened by problems

of his middle-aged son and tells him to get off his back (STD, p. 14). One of society's rejects, Wilhelm wishes to achieve success in life, to get the laurels, which have somehow eluded him through these years (STD, pp. 16-8). At this stage Wilhelm meets Dr. Tamkin, who convinces him to invest $700 in lard shares at the stock market and finally swindles him. Crestfallen, low-spirited and gloomy, Wilhelm now must make sense of his life all by himself.

Similarly, Corde, in his mid-Fifties, a mid-Westerner, a Huguenot and already bald, emerges as "the great reader, journalist, highbrow professor, dean, and intellectual," (TDD, p. 97) "gazing Socratically at the ground with large eyes" (TDD, p. 88). Though he reads "too many papers," he believes that, "Nothing true—really true—could be said in the papers" (TDD, p. 59). While skeptical and intensely introspective he intuitively reaches out for a world of feeling. He takes up the cause of other unfortunate victims in America—the Blacks. Similarly young Augie, in *The Adventures of Augie March*,[23] hates the "Machiavellis of small street and neighborhood," typified in his authoritarian "pouncy old hawk of a Bolshevik" Grandma Lausch (AAM, pp, 4-7). Sammler too hopes a new condition of harmony will emerge when he shares, in the last page, "the terms which, in his inmost heart, each man knows" (MSP, p. 286). The consummate ability to empathize, to be able to love another freely, unconditionally, releases the egocentric, contemplative heroes into a world of compassion and fulfillment.

Divested of his "mischievous impulses," Dr. Shawmut seems to agree with old Mrs. Gracewell at the end of "Him With His Foot in His Mouth," that the "Intellect, worshipped by all, brings us as far as natural science, and this science, although very great, is incomplete. Redemption from mere nature is the work of feeling and of the awakened eye of the Spirit" (*Him With His Foot in His*

Mouth And Other Stories, p. 59).[24] Also, when Wilhelm cries he finds "a different life" and finally seizes the day. Similarly, when Corde tells his dying mother-in-law, Valiere, that he loves her too he finds a new meaning, a renewed hope in living in difficult and authoritarian Bucharest and later in tough and violent Chicago. (TDD, p. 141). Willis Mosby, in *Mosby's Memoirs And Other Stories*,[25] cannot open his heart to include the suffering of others. Making rationalism his religion he looks down at the world from his ivory tower. Only to his surprise he discovers that he is imprisoned in his own little world. Finally, his subconscious takes revenge on him in the "fantasy," making him a part of the already dead.

Sammler, however, realizes that it is definitely not intellectual detachment but compassionate attachment to others which is the key to human happiness: "But the important consideration was that life should recover its plentitude, its normal contented turgidity" (MSP, p. 21). Louie delivering flower for Behrens, discovers to his horror that he has just sold flowers to the mother of a dead girl. Looking at the "plain face" of the girl in the coffin Louie ponders about the "continuum of spirit and nature." He writes: "*Ours is the most perfect form to be found on earth. The visible world sustains us until life leaves, and then it must utterly destroy us. Where, then, is the world from which the human form comes*" (STRMB, p. 193)? In a series of picaresque incidents that follow he is utterly humiliated. Looking for Philip Harris, his brother-in-law, Louie goes into Marchek's office where he discovers a beautiful naked woman strapped to the examining table. Conned by the woman into possibilities of an erotic night he goes to her apartment where she seduces him to undress, throws his clothes out of the window and runs away. Louie escapes in female attire into the cold Chicago night. After a few hilarious adventures he steals McKern's clothes and some money and makes good his escape. As he sneaks into his house he is caught by

his authoritarian father and given a thrashing. The "high-minded Jewish schoolboy," believing in his "special destiny" (STRMB, p. 213), and humbled by his experience, concludes: "That our experience of the world was desired by the cosmos, and needed by it for its own renewal" (STRMB, pp. 221-22).

Louie seems another Augie enticed by the erotic and unmanned by unrelenting molls, but grows up in the process, beginning to have a stronger attachment to his sick mother. Augie calls attachment to others "the axial lines of life" when man believes in "Truth, love, peace, bounty, usefulness, harmony!" The axial lines are "older than the Euphrates, older than the Ganges," but they only appear when "striving stops." And then for man the "embrace of other true people will take away his dread of fast change and short life." In short the axial lines help "man be regenerated" (AAM, pp. 454-55).

City-life is central to the consciousness of Bellow's characters—they are attached to it, disgusted by it and cannot leave it for long. Charlie boasts that "Chicago is my own turf" (HG, P. 302). And true enough it has been Bellow's own turf too for over fifty years. Chicago exists between the two poles of greed and generosity where moral law remains weak. It is the "mysterious" city of "the New World" (STRMB, p. 220). In a city, Susanne Langer writes, each individual is "scrambling for himself yet each caught in the stream of all the others."[26] Therefore, feelings of fascination and disgust work subtly into responses to city life. Living in a world of appearances characters sometimes lose sight of the soul's reality. During his convalescence after his hernia operation at County Hospital on Harrison Street, Augie goes up to the roof of the building and details the city's dehumanizing effect: "Around was Chicago. In its repetition it exhausted your imagination of details and units, more units than the cells of the brain and bricks of Babel. The Ezekiel cauldron of wrath, stoked with

bones. In time the cauldron too would melt. A mysterious tremor, dust, vapor, emanation of stupendous effort traveled with the air, over me on top of the great establishment, so full as it was, and over the clinics, clinks, factories, flophouses, morgue, skid row. And before the work of Egypt and Assyria, as before a sea, you're nothing here. Nothing" (AAM, pp. 458-59). Characters feel like Benn Creader that "the city is better to look at than to be in" (MDHB, p. 126).

Bellow wants to put the soul, spirit, feeling back into the city. Corde speaks for all when his sister Elfrida inquires about his teaching assignment at Chicago: "'For me it's more like the front lines. Here is where the action is'" (TDD, p. 147), Ironically, not a practical man himself, Corde has "given up the real world to take refuge with philosophy and art." In a city like Chicago he tells us: "You were tough or you were nothing. In realism and cunning these La Salle Street characters were impressive because they had the backing of the pragmatic culture of the city ... " (TDD, P. 46). Understandably Cousin Scholem, "one of the Jews of the Diaspora" finds out that the force of "the moral law" was "never thicker, in Chicago, than onionskin or tissue paper—was now a gas as rare as argon". He gets a malignant tumor from "the strain of driving ten hours a day in city traffic" ((HWHFHM, p. 276). Louie finds Chicago a "boring, depressed, ugly, endless, rotting city" and realizes that "Its power was tremendous." However, people are not dehumanized: "I refused absolutely to believe for a moment that people here were doing what they thought they were doing. Beneath the apparent life of these streets was their real life, beneath each face the real face, beneath each voice and its words the true tone and the real message" (STRMB, p. 200).

Except in a few novels, Bellow's protagonists are Jews who share the East European world of their grandparents, parents, or have experienced it directly.

Memories of the *sthetl* and holocaust arouse both fond and painful memories in the protagonist. But the memories themselves are inescapable for they are "the roots of memory in feeling" (STRMB, "The Bellarosa Connection," p. 89). Bellow shares a community of fate or *Schicksalsgemeinschaft* by virtue of being a Jew. Remembering Jewish history after what had happened in Nazi Germany is necessary, for "memory is life and forgetting death" (STRMB, "The Bellarosa Connection," p. 63). Characters reach out to a world of Jewish culture or *menschlichkeit* with its strong emphasis on ethical values such as goodness, humanism, dignity and responsibility. However, the meaning of these words are irrevocably altered just as the world to which they belong has been forever destroyed by Hitler.[27] Desirous of making the city their home, characters strongly oppose the Yiddishkeit or *sthetl* life-style as they lean towards an urban life-style. Though this psychological tension affects them in devious ways, it also helps them to understand and adapt to urban environment better.[28]

Augie encounters the Jewish world through his Grandma Lausch, while Herzog, in the novel *Herzog*,[29] through his Russian-Jewish mother. Herzog feels "like bursting into tears" when he remembers how the "nihilism of Hitler" destroyed Jews; how their "souls" flowed out "in smoke from the extermination chimneys." With this thought comes an acute awareness that he is one of the "survivors, in this age" (H, pp. 96-7). He refurbishes his Jewish links when he visits the Polish ghetto with his "Polish beauty" Wanda as guide (H, p. 36). Philip Rahv believes that Bellow has "put a great deal of himself into his protagonist Herzog."[31]

Bellow's own immigrant past, especially his Canadian childhood, enters some of his novels together with his Hebraic heritage.[30] Perhaps, like Herzog, Bellow too desires to refurbish his Jewish past by making this sentimental jour-

ney to Israel. However, the insecurity of the East European world, especially of the holocaust years, gets transferred to the American cities where most Jews live. Though over the years the insecurity has diminished it still continues to affect their lives.[32] Sammler, for instance, is a holocaust victim who has lost one eye and has suffered torture in Nazi Germany. As a partisan in Zamosht Forest, Sammler disarms and disrobes a German soldier before shooting him in the head. The soldier begs for life– "Nicht schiessen ... I have children,–" but Sammler kills him (MSP, p. 128). Sammler's pain and revenge are both represented in this traumatic memory he wishes to forget. He admits that: "He was then not entirely human" (MSP, p. 129).

In the story "The Bellarosa Connection," Harry Fonstein, Aunt Mildred's nephew, escapes from Poland with the help of a New York celebrity Billy Rose, or Bellarosa, after most of his "family were killed by the Germans." An "orthopedic boot" refugee he has successfully "survived the greatest ordeal of Jewish history" (STRMB, pp. 7, 9). However, one wish remains in his heart; he wants to thank his benefactor once for saving his life. Billy Rose himself is not interested in such schmaltz, for his primary interest is to donate a sculpture garden in Israel and gain popularity as a philanthropist. Sorella Fonstein, however, devises a plan to help Harry meet Billy Rose when she inherits a "dynamite journal" from Mrs. Deborah Hamet, one of the secretaries of Billy Rose. Mrs Hamet had kept a "documented file" on all the clandestine and nefarious activities of Billy Rose, which, if handed to the press, would undoubtedly bring him bad publicity he can ill-afford. At the King David Hotel in Jerusalem, Sorella threatens to expose Billy Rose unless he agrees to meet Harry for fifteen minutes. Billy Rose becomes insulting and Sorella in anger throws the document out of the window and walks out calling him "filth" (STRMB, pp. 38-56). As compared to "Mitteleuropa" Fonstein the protagonist lives in a "New World ver-

sion of reality" (STRMB, pp. 76-78). Assimilated in America, married to "a Wasp lady," Deirdre, a Philadelphia "mnemonic success," the protagonist has himself become "half Jewish, half Wasp." However, he has yet to come to terms with the holocaust: "I really didn't understand merciless brutality." He dreams about the past and feels that "illuminated particles of Jewish history were coming" at him (STRMB, pp. 36, 77-78). He shares it through his "innate gift of memory" which is understood as "the themes that collect and hold the memory" (STRMB, pp. 5, 89).

Nevertheless, urban life intensifies insecurity by singling out the ethnic Jewish background of characters. *The Victim* [33] brings this out clearly. Kirby Allbee seeks atonement for the hurt Asa Leventhal has caused him. Leventhal has fought with Allbee's employer, Rudiger of *Dill's Weekly*, and unknowingly precipitated Allbee's dismissal from the job (TV, pp. 36-7). Allbee considers Leventhal guilty and demands financial and emotional help as recompense. As Allbee follows Asa in New York City begging for assistance, the former also mocks at the latter's Jewish origins. Allbee begins by calling New York "a very Jewish city" and links Asa with other Jews of the city with phrases such as "your people" (TV, pp. 70, 34). Allbee's remarks, though thrown in casually, have the desired effect of making Leventhal feel insecure and consequently angry at Allbee. Similarly, Dr. Tamkin tells Wilhelm that "narrow-minded people" in New York "don't like Jews" (STD, p. 87). His statement sounds somewhat disconcerting at a time when Wilhelm has just been a victim of nepotism at Rojax Corporation. Most characters acquire a feeling of being aliens in the city; and are forced to admit like Herzog, "In New York we were wanderers too" (H, p. 165). The feeling of alienation, both from the Jewish and the Christian traditions, quickens their movement in the direction of a protean life-style.

Occasionally, insecurity and alienation generate vulnerability. Characters feel they are being victimized by White Anglo-Saxon Protestants (WASPs). Leventhal wishes that the WASPs give the Jews their "Anglo-Saxon fairness" (TV, p. 85). The WASPs, on the other hand, feel alarmed by the Jewish immigrants. Allbee, who belongs to an "old New England family," finds the Jewish "Caliban" "monster" more successful than he is. His insecurity is heightened when he discovers that "the children of Caliban were runnig everything" (TV, pp. 131, 139). He begins to harbor ill-will and resentment towards Leventhal and his Jewish origins. A similar condition is enacted in *The Dean's December* where the Jews are replaced by the Blacks. Mr. Schlossberg's categories of "less than human" (sub-human) and "more than human" (super-human), in *The Victim*, are distorted images of man through which the WASPs and Jews understand each other. In fact, both groups become victims of fear and mutual distrust generated by the cultural distance between them.

Alienation from the WASP culture makes Herzog despair that being a Jew, "a born Magian," he "would never grasp the Christian or Faustian world idea." It would remain "forever alien" to him (H, p. 286). In other words, Bellow's protagonists ponder over their Jewishness and alienation thay city life accentuates.[34] Herzog buys a house in the Berkshires which he calls a "symbol of his Jewish struggle for a solid footing in White Anglo-Saxon Protestant America" (H, p. 377). However, in "The Bellarosa Connection" the "Americanization of Jews" is complete when Sorella repeats her husband's comment that there is a "Kind of change in the decendants of immigrants in this country" (STRMB, p. 23). Talking about Hyman Swerdlow, the investment counselor in New Jersey, the protagonist comments: "One could assimilate now *without* converting. You didn't have to choose between Jehovah and Jesus" (STRMB, p. 71).

While Bellow's characters experience loneliness in a WASP-dominated city they continue to stay finding its social and economic opportunities attractive.[35] Fonstein sees New York as "a collective fantasy of millions" (STRMB, p. 18). Here the "weak human cry of the Times Square geckos" are superimposed on the spring "crocuses, snowdrops, and new buds" of a "millionaire's private back garden" (STRMB, pp. 24, 59). The ambivalence creates a conflict between a desire to be inner-directed, where there is "less danger of being broken," and a desire to be outer-directed, where there is an opportunity to "flash" or show one's power and privilege (TV, p. 92). The pressures of the city repel the individual, while its privileges attract him. Wilhelm wants to be in the countryside because he cannot bear the pressure, the "too much push" of New York City (STD, p. 49). But he cannot leave the city as here lies everything he desires and has failed to get. Joseph, in *Dangling Man*, accepts the loneliness and anxiety of city life as compensation for the opportunities he gets. "As such places go," Joseph admits about his accommodation, "it is not bad though there are the standard rooming house annoyances: cooking odors, roaches and peculiar neighbors" (DM, p. 8). In the short story "Zetland: By a Character Witness," when Zetland and Lottie arrive at New York City as "refugees from arid and inhibited Chicago" they embrace and kiss uninhibitedly. "They had came to the World City, where all behavior was deeper and more resonant, where they could freely be themselves, as demonstrative as they liked" (HWHFHM, p. 181). In *The Adventures of Augie March*, though Augie runs away from Chicago to Mexico, seeking "a change of pressure," he finds that escape is futile. Once he understands this, he comes back to Chicago (AAM, p. 162). In *Humboldt's Gift*, Charlie cannot match the "shrewd urban faces" but "insisted on living in Chicago" (HG, pp. 93, 277).

Corde too has chosen Chicago as his city. Though he is aware of its "crying ugliness" (TDD, p. 48), "where shadows of loveliness were lacking" (HWHFHM

in "Zetland: By a Character Witness," p. 173), he is still "attached" to it (TDD, p. 129). As Bellow's fiction matures his characters gain this insight: what "... you needed in a big American city was a deep no-affect belt, a critical mass of indifference" (HG, p. 38). Only then can one enjoy the "beautiful and moving things in Chicago" (HG, p. 70). To lament upon the brevity of human contact, as Wilhelm does, can only lead to disappointment. Only by alternating between involvement and withdrawal can urban man exist sanely. Corde shares this insight: "Understanding was at bottom very tiresome" (TDD, p. 90). Yet he does get involved in finding the murderer of Lester who was pushed to death from a window on a hot Chicago night (TDD, p. 94). Though Charlie advocates the "no effect belt" technique of interacting with others, he himself is unable to achieve this fully and is taught partly by the "reality instructor" Cantabile and partly by experience itself.

The "no affect belt" may create its "protective image" but it has its pernicious effect too. It make characters self-centered. Not being able to judge when to be indifferent and when to show concern, they find themselves withdrawing from long-range commitments. Whenever they seek companionship, especially of women, they look for immediate and quick gratification. Purchase of love and sex become important aspects of a urban life-style. Herzog accepts rather ruefully that city life lacks the "epithalamium of gentle lovers." "Amorous Herzog" knows that man's "occupation" is to do his "duty" yet he tries to be "a smashing success in the private realm, a king of hearts" by "embracing his Wandas, Zinkas, and Ramonas, one after another" (H, p. 119). When he fails miserably, he realizes that the satisfaction arising from such relationships is invariably incomplete.[36] In his later fiction, such as *The Dean's December*, the protagonist understands the monstrous consequences of riches: "He was saying that you became an impregnable monster if you had money, so that if to begin with you felt

yourself to be monstrous you could build impregnability by making a fortune. Because then you were a force of nature, although a psychopath. And if you were without any persona, then you *bought* a persona" (TDD, p. 111).

III

The psychological barrenness combines with certain childhood experiences of economic deprivation or psychological repression. Therefore, when characters become adults and acquire riches, they invert the world of childhood deprivation by becoming overtly possessive of their worldly goods. Money becomes the measuring rod of all activities and extends to inter-personal relationships as well. The inversion of economic or sexual deprivation leads to a consumeristic relationship which quickly exhausts leading to rupture or divorce. Incidentally, this exploitative relationship also becomes an expression of the servitude-power syndrome—the servitude men experience in childhood and the power they experience upon its inversion. In brief, consumerism may be rooted in their childhood experiences.

Though they are successful now, most characters remember their childhood pain of penury. Augie and Herzog, for instance, have seen the misery caused by the Depression of the Thirties. Augie remembers how he "often picked up objects off the street[s]" of Chicago hoping they would be coins "thus obviously hoping for a lucky break" (AMM, p. 447-48). In Central Mexico, realizing "anew how great a subject money is in itself," he concludes that "money, if not the secret, was anyhow beside the secret, as the secret's relative or associate or representative before the peoples" (AAM, p. 344).

Worldly goods for Augie become the measure of happiness; and when this attitude extends to inter-personal relationships it results in the sale and purch-

ase of sexual favors. Immediate needs govern Herzog's "imagination of the universe" but it does not bring lasting happiness (H, p. 63), Having bought a twenty thousand dollars house for Madeleine and left a teaching assignment upon her request, Herzog finds he cannot satisfy her: "No man can satisfy a woman who doesn't want him." He wonders what women want: They eat green salad and drink human blood" (H, pp. 54, 56).

In the beginning of *Humboldt's Gift*, Charlie boasts that money was not on his mind: what he wanted to do was good (HG. p. 6). Charlie, however, holds back the money he owes to Rinaldo Cantabile, until Cantabile forces him to pay. Later, during his marital crisis, Charlie laments that his former wife Denise was fleecing him through a protracted legal battle. On another occasion, while in a restaurant with Renata, Charlie plays the "poor-boy bit" as he observes the price of dishes first before reading their names. Renata observes that his "eye goes from right to left," as he reads the menu at the restaurant. She rebukes him not to play "the poor-boy bit. You can always make money, piles of it. Especially if you team up with me ... " (HG, p. 340). Charlie too has grown up in Chicago of the twenties and had "hunted for treasure in the March thaw." This experience colors his thinking. Denise feels that he wants to stay in Chicago because he is "a kid from the slums" (HG, pp. 6, 43). Humboldt tells Charlie that Americans are "obsessed by money" because "money is freedom." Humboldt continues: "What kind of American would I be if I were innocent about money, I ask you? (HG, p. 157). Charlie admits that howsoever he might try "to conceal it" he actually thinks "too much about money." Like "blood" money "is a vital substance, too" (HG, p. 75). Wilhelm resents the wealth of old men like Mr. Rappaport "who control everything" and his father who does not want to part even with a penny: "Old men of this type. Without needs. They don't need therefore they have. I need, therefore I don't have" (STD, p. 109).

Money in Bellow's fiction becomes a symbol of power and indirectly (not having it) of servitude. The power-servitude syndrome extends to love relationships as well. Incidentally, from a purely ideological point of view this position can be interpreted as neo-conservatism. Characters tacitly accept the American system and set out to improve its institutions. Corde stirs up a hornet's nest and alienates most of the Chicagoans by publishing articles "about the noble ideas of the West" (TDD, p. 136) in *Harper's*. He aims to educate them about "our American idea: liberty, equality, justice, democracy, abundance" (TDD, p. 135). He tries to cure them of their "strange form of blindness, the false representations of 'communication'" through these articles. "Therefore the first act of morality was to disinter the reality, retrieve reality, dig it out from the trash, represent it anew as art would represent it" (TDD, p. 136). Even Joseph in *Dangling Man*, who leans toward Communism, gets disillusioned with it eventually and surrenders himself totally to the status quo.

Skepticism toward Hebraism generates a "miserable" spiritual loneliness. Not able to distance himself from his sexual experience Bellow's hero cannot distil its meaning, nor evolve a coherent philosophy to structure life. Joseph finds he cannot believe in God: "No, not God, not any divinity. That was anterior, not of my own deriving (DM, p. 56). However, he cannot believe in any other thing either. Charlie laments, "To be Christian was impossible, to be a pagan also. That left you-know-what" (HG, p. 14). Augie too feels directionlessness; he cannot find the object of his intense longing (AAM, p. 84). Asa feels helpless before the arbitrariness of human conduct. He argues that man made "codes and rules" only to help his "own nature" whenever "the motor started missing." Everything in "nature was bonded." Only man went "in all directions without any limit" (TV, pp. 78-9). Charlie's skepticism turns to exasperation. He admits having experimented with at least five philosophical approaches to understand

life—mysticism, existentialism, nihilism, Buddhism and Christianity—and has found them all wanting.[37] He sighs, "I had had it with most contemporary ways of philosophizing. Once and for all I was going to find out whether there was anything behind the incessant hints of immortality that kept dropping on me" (HG, p. 347). The search for a philosophy of life seems to be constantly thwarted by skepticism till "being right" becomes "largely a matter of explanations" (MSP, p. 7). Corde concludes: "These times we live in give us foolish thoughts to think, dead categories of intellect and words that get us nowhere. It was just these words and categories that made the setting of a real depth level so important" (TDD, p. 99).

Notes and References

1. Saul Bellow, *The Dean's December* (New York: Pocket Books, 1982). All future references to the text are from this edition and marked as TDD, except where the novel is named; the references are incorporated in the chapter itself. Leslie A. Fiedler sees Saul Bellow and Norman Mailer, just as he would see Albert Corde, "alienated intellectuals" who have become "mythical Gentiles: paleface Protestant noble savages." [Leslie A. Fiedler, *Waiting For The End*, (New York; Stein And Day, 1970), p. 97]
2. Saul Bellow, *Something to Remember Me By* [1991; rpt. (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1993). All future references to the text are from this edition and marked as STRMB, except where the novel is named; the references are incorporated in the chapter itself.
3. Saul Bellow, *More Die of Heart—break* (London: Secker & Warburg 1987). All future references to the text are from this edition and marked as MDHB, except where the novel is named; the references are incorporated in the paper itself.
4. Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, Vol. 2 (New York: Vintage Books, 1945). Tocqueville calls the myth of total physical gratification by the individual as the "bootless chase of that complete felicity which forever escapes him" (p. 145).
5. Saul Bellow, *Humboldt's Gift*, [1973; rpt. (New York: Avon Publishers, 1976)]. All future references to the text are from this edition and marked HG, except-

where the novel is named; the references are incorporated in the chapter itself.

6. William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1901-2), [1958; rpt. (New York: The New American Libraty, 1964)]. William James points out that in a rational society people are primarily guided by their intuition in personal life, yet they refuse to admit it in piblic out of fear of social condemnation. William James writes:

> If we look on man's whole mental life as it exists, on the life of men that lies in them apart from their learning and science, and that they inwardly and privately follow, we have to confess that the part of it of which rationalism can give an account is relatively superficial. It is the part that has the prestige undoubtedly, for it has the loquacity, it can challenge you for proofs, and chop logic, and put you down with words. But it will fail to convince or convert you all the same, if your dumb intuitions are opposed to its conclusions (p. 72).

7. Irving Howe, *World of Our Fathers* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1976), p. 593.
8. Alfred Kazin, *Bright Book of Life* [(n.d., rpt. (New Delhi: Allied Publishers, 1973)], pp. 132-3.
9. Josephine Hendin, *Vulnerable People* [1990; rpt. (1978; rpt. Delhi: Oxford Univ. Press, 1979)], pp. 108-10.
10. Ellen Pifer, *Saul Bellow Against the Grain* [1990; rpt. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991)].
11. Allen Guttmann, *The Jewish Writer in America* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1971), p. 12.
12. Irving Malin, *Saul Bellow's Fiction* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois Univ. Press, 1969), pp. 9 and 47).
13. Saul Bellow, *Dangling Man* [1944; rpt. (Harmondsworth: Penguin Bools, 1977)]. All future references to the text are marked as DM, except where the novel is named; the references are incorporated in the chapter itself.
14. Ihab Hassan, *Contemporary America Literature 1945-1972* (New York: Frederick Unger Publishing Co., 1973), P. 27.
15. Lionel Trilling, *Sincerity and Authenticity: The Charles Eliot Norton Lectures, 1969-1970* (Cambridge, Ma: Harvard University Press), pp. 12, 42.
16. Frank D. McConnell, *Four Postwar American Novelists* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1977), p. 10.

17. Masilamoni, Leelavathi, E. H. interv., "The Fiction of Jewish Americans: An Interview with Leslie Fiedler," *Southwest Review*, Vol. 64, No. 1 (Winter 1970), pp. 51-52.
18. Saul Bellow, *Mr. Sammler's Planet* [1969; rpt. (New York: Fawcett World Library, 1971)]. All future references to the text are from this edition and marked as MSP, except where the novel is named: the references are incorporated in the chapter itself.
19. Fiedler mentions sarcastically that Bellow naturalizes certain European ideas stemming from the doctrines of "Freud and Marx, Sartre and Camus and Martin Buber, Jung and Wilhelm Reich," p. 64
20. Thorstein Veblen, "The Intellectual Pre-eminence of Jews in Modern Europe," *The Political Science Quarterly*, 34, (March 1919), rpt. in *Essays in Our Changing Order* ed. Leon Ardzrooni (New York: Augustus M Kelley, 1964), p. 229.
21. James further goes on to add that: "Well, this is exactly what asceticismthinks; and it voluntarily takes the initiation. Life is neither farce nor genteel comedy, it says, but something we must sit at in mourning garments, hoping its bitter taste will purge us of our folly," p. 281.
22. Saul Bellow, *Seize the Day* [1951; rpt. (Harmondsworth Penguin Books, 1971)]. All future references the text are from this edition and marked STD, except where the novel is named; the references are incorporated in the chapter itself. Some critics, like Richard Giannone, feel that Wilhelm grasps the present. Giannone says that Wilhelm "seizes the day" by stripping himself of the Romantic "more-than-human version of himself" (Richard Giannone, "Saul Bellow's Idea of Self: A Reading of Seize the Day," *Renascence*, No. 27 [Summer 1975], pp. 193-205). Perhaps one is reading too much into the last line of the novel. Unlike Tamkin who seizes the day, Wilhelm has yet to distil his experience and seize the day.
23. Saul Bellow, *The Adventures of Augie March*, [1949; rpt. (New York: The Viking Press, 1965)]. All future references to the text are from this editon and marked as AAM, except where the novel is named: the references are incorporated in the chapter itself.
24. Saul Bellow, *Him With His Foot In His Mouth And Other Stories* [1974; rpt. (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1984)]. All future references are from this edition and marked HWHFHM, except where the novel is named; the references are incorporated in the chapter itself.
25. Saul Bellow, *Mosby's Memoirs and Other Stories* [1951; rpt. (Harmondsworth:

Penguin Books, 1977)], p. 159.

26. Susanne Langer, *Philosophical Sketches* (New York: Mentor Books, 1964), p. 96. Langer's views find support in Bellow's own statements about Chicago. Bellow wrote in 1983 that walking on Le Moyne Street he discovered that "only a vacant lot" remained where the Bellow family once lived "half a century ago." He comments on the fast changing Chicago: "It forces you inward, to look for what endures. Give Chicago half a chance, and it will turn you into a philosopher" [Saul Bellow, "Chicago: The City That Was, The City That Is," *It All Adds Up* (New York: Viking Penguin, 1994), p. 245].

27. L. H. Goldman, "The Philosophy of Judaism," *Saul Bellow in The 1980s: A Collection of Critical Essays*, Ed., Gloria L. Cronin and L. H. Goldman, (Michigan: Michigan State University Press, 1989), pp, 59-60.

28. Marshall Sklare points out that the Jews in recent times "have played a major role in supplying others with the amenities and graces of urban life" (amenities and graces, incidentally, which seem to have lost some of their former attraction). [Marshall Sklare, "Jew, Ethics, and the American City," *Commentary*, 53, No. 4 (April 1972)], p. 70.

29. Saul Bellow, *Herzog* [1961; rpt. (New York: Avon Books, 1976)], p. 37. All future references to the text are from this edition and marked as H, except where the novel is named; the references are incorporated in the chapter itself.

30. Philip Rahv, *Literature and the Sixth Sense* (London: Faber and Faber, 1969), p. 394.

31. Bellow elaborates upon this aspect in his latest diary, *To Jerusalem and Back*, which is a personal account of his visit to Israel. In this he says that as he boarded the plane bound for Israel, he found himself in the midst of other traditional Jews. Though their "hats, sidelocks and fringes" were foreign to him, he found that they reminded him of his own Jewish childhood. Bellow says that while sitting with these co-passengers and observing their attire and listening to their conversation, he found as if "It were my childhood revisited" [1976; rpt. *To Jerusalem and Back*. (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1977), pp. 1-2].

32. Bellow remembers an incident, in *To Jerusalem and Back*, about a Harvard professor who feared a second holocaust while in America. This is what Bellow says about the incident: "A Jewish Professor at Harvard recently said to me, 'Wouldn't it be the most horrible of ironies if the Jews had collected themselves conveniently in one country for a second Holocaust?' This is thought that sometimes crosses

Jewish minds. It is accompanied by the further reflection (partly, proud, mostly bitter) that we Jews seem to have a genius for finding the heart of the crisis" (p. 15).

33. Saul Bellow, *The Victim*, [1947; rpt. (New York: Signet Books, 1965)]. All future references to the text are from this edition and marked as TV, except where the novel is named; the references are incorporated in the chapter itself.
34. In this connection, Irving Howe writes, "among all the American Jewish writers he [Bellow] draws upon the richest Jewish culture, which in the circumstances may simply mean that he knows enough to surmise the extent of our dispossession." [Irving Howe, *World of Our Fathers*, p. 593].
35. Fiedler, p. 63.
36. My interpretation finds confirmation in the observation of Sarah Blacher Cohen. She points out that "Herzog's view of himself is linked to his view of Chicago." The consumerism of a metropolitan city like Chicago gets "linked" to the consumerism in interpersonal relationships. Though consumerism is justified, it is also lamented as transitory and as such lacks permanent quality [Sarah Blacher Cohen, "Saul Bellow's as Chicago," *Modern Fiction Studies*, 24, No. 1 (Spring 1978), pp. 139-46].
37. Robert Lifton points out that the protean self is "a post-Freudian, post-modern" phenomenon that marks the collapse of pre-scientific culture and its concomitant metaphors, symbols and life rhythm. Relativism extends to ideas and beliefs and represents itself in an attitude where no point of view or belief is taken seriously for long. It is an attitude which Lifton calls "a post-modern distrust of all thought systems" [Robert Jay Lifton, *Revolutionary Immortality* (New York: Random House, 1968), pp. 153, 14)]. Erik Erikson believes that "the notion that everything is relative has undoubtedly contributed to the character of contemporary identity formation in many blatant ways." (Erik H. Erikson, *Dimensions of A New Identity*, [1974; rpt. (New Delhi: Light and Life Publishers, 1975)], p. 106.