

摘要

索尔·贝娄毋庸置疑是当代最著名的美国犹太作家，他以对“当代文化富有人性的理解和精妙的分析”获得 1976 年的诺贝尔文学奖、三次美国全国图书奖、普利策奖及第一位获得国际文学奖的美国人。他著有 12 篇小说，2 篇非小说文学作品及 6 部文集。

本篇论文运用存在主义理论来分析贝娄的第二部长篇小说《受害者》主人公利文撒尔的自我建构。整篇论文分为六章：

第一章简单介绍索尔·贝娄的生平、作品以及国内外的相关研究，并且陈述此篇论文的目的、意义及方法。

第二章对存在主义的起源、发展、影响及其代表人物作了简单回顾，并分析了贝娄主要作品中的存在主义元素。

第三章着重分析了利文撒尔的异化。利文撒尔被家庭抛弃，又生活在一个荒诞的世界，面对荒诞的行为，猜疑、不安、焦虑、恐惧占据着他的心灵。他渐渐开始自我隔绝、用异化来保护自己，生活在“自欺”之中，并认为“他人即地狱”，以此逃避他所应当承担的责任。

第四章主要论述了利文撒尔的觉醒。利文撒尔开始正视自己：我是谁？我是怎样的人？我应该成为社会自我还是个体自我？我应该缺乏人性还是超越人性？他顿悟到必须扮演好自己的角色，选择尊严。恰如其分的人性才是最佳选择。利文撒尔还醒悟到：“存在先于本质，宿命论是无稽的”，“人是自由的，能自由选择”，并开始自我调整。

第五章见证了利文撒尔的自我认同。在其精神之父斯诺斯伯格的指引下，利文撒尔寻回了真实的自己，重新融入了社会，找到了更好的工作，找回了自己的尊严，开始担当责任、关爱身边的人，和宿命论道别。从此，利文撒尔走上了一条自我重生之路。

最后一章总结了此篇论文的观点以及索尔·贝娄的伟大之处。通过利文撒尔完成自我建构的过程，从自我隔绝、异化，到自我觉醒和自我认同，《受害者》揭示了贝娄的人文关怀。

关键词：索尔·贝娄，自我建构，异化，觉醒，认同

Abstract

Saul Bellow is undoubtedly one of the most written-about fiction writers of the contemporary American literary history. As Nobel Laureate (1976) Winner and winner of numerous awards, Bellow has commanded serious critical attention for more than 45 years. Widely regarded as one of the 20-century greatest authors, Bellow writes 12 novels and 2 non-fictions, having 6 collections. This thesis, consisting of six chapters, focuses on his second novel *The Victim*, using existentialism to analyze the protagonist Leventhal's self construction.

Chapter One gives a brief introduction of Saul Bellow's life, works and the critical reception of his works both home and abroad, especially *The Victim* and its background. The deployment, importance and methodology of this thesis are stated in this chapter.

Chapter Two presents a brief introduction on Existentialism, including its origin, development, its representatives, and its influence which is not only in philosophy, but also in literature, films, theology and other areas. Additionally, this chapter discusses an outlook of existential elements in Bellow's major works.

Chapter Three is about the self-alienation of Leventhal who is not only alienated by the people around and the society, but also by himself. His family—selfish father, insane mother, his early hard times and his Jewishness lead to his insecurity, indifference, self-deception and self-hatred, which are what Sartre called “bad faith.” Leventhal wants to protect himself from the absurd world so as to escape from the anxiety and accordingly being alienated is his own choice.

Chapter Four reveals Leventhal's gradual awakening. He begins to introspect and doubt if he is responsible. He finds that the world is “absurd” as Camus articulated and “Hell is other people” as Sartre said. Consequently, self-questioning follows. Facing the absurd world and people, he wonders whether to choose to believe in determinism or transform, whether to maintain his social self or his private self, whether to be less than human or more than human. His self-analysis is deployed from two perspectives—existence precedes essence and human is condemned to be free.

Chapter Five witnesses Leventhal's self-affirmation. With the guidance of the spiritual father Schlossberg, reality instructor Allbee and his self-adjustment, Leventhal seeks his


authentic life and reintegrates into the society happily. After several years, he finds a better job and looks much younger, being a responsible person, and bidding farewell to determinism. All of these indicate a new hope and a rebirth for Leventhal, which is the aspiration Bellow brings to us.

Chapter Six concludes that Bellow is a great writer, for his caring for all human beings and bringing a rosy picture to us, which is well illustrated in *The Victim*. Although everyone is a victim, this thesis shows Bellow's humanity through Leventhal's self construction, which indicates what we should do on the way to maintaining our humanity.

Key Words: Saul Bellow; self-construction; alienation; awakening; affirmation


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
本论文是我个人在导师指导下进行的研究工作及取得的研究成果。论文中除了特别加以标注和致谢的地方外，不包含其他人或机构已经发表或撰写过的研究成果。其他同志对本研究的启发和所做的贡献均已在论文中做了明确的声明并表示了谢意。

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Chapter One Introduction

1.1 Overview of Saul Bellow

Saul Bellow (1905-2005) is undoubtedly one of the most written-about fiction writers in the contemporary American literary history. As Nobel Laureate (1976) Winner and winner of numerous awards, Bellow has commanded academic critical attention for more than half a century. Widely regarded as one of the 20th century's greatest authors, Bellow writes 12 novels and 2 non-fictions, having 6 collections. He has advanced from the skeletal *Dangling Man* (1944) and the claustrophobic *The Victim* (1947), to the turning point of *The Adventures of Augie March* (1953), the intensity of *Seize the Day* (1956) and the exuberance of *Henderson the Rain King* (1959), exploring the nature of man's freedom, the rich complexity of *Herzog* (1964), the organics of *Mr. Sammler's Planet* (1970), the ambition of *Humboldt's Gift* (1975) and *The Dean's December* (1982).

Ambling through much of Bellow-criticism, we find that critics have described Bellow in significantly different ways. For example, he has been described as

a modernist, a post-modernist...an existentialist, a post-existentialist, a romantic, an 'urban romantic,' a naturalist, a social realist and/or a Dreisarian realist. With a shift in emphasis, others have described him as 'a Jewish American novelist', 'a secular Hasid', 'a Jewish proletariat novelist' a 'Jewish writer of commitment.' (Quayum 2004:2)

No other post-WWII American writer has analyzed so completely and humanely the effects of American cultural anxiety with rationalism, existentialism, and the legacy of high modernism. Bellow and his male protagonists are defenders against the nihilists and rationalists of the void.

Born in Lachine, Montreal, Canada on June 10, 1915, Saul Bellow was the fourth child of Abraham Bellow and Lescha Bellow, both of whom had immigrated from St. Petersburg, Russia. Bellow's father was a produce importer in St. Petersburg. Bellow devoured the works of Shakespeare, the great 19th-century Russians, the *Old Testament* and so on. In 1924, the family left Montreal for the tenements of Humboldts Park, and settled in Chicago, the environment of which shaped so much of his early fictions. After graduation from high school, he entered the University of Chicago and later transferred to Northwestern University, where he received his Bachelor's degree.

Bellow learned both Hebrew and Yiddish and received a trilingual heritage of Yiddish, English and French. Like Bernard Malamud (1914-1986), he has cultivated his Jewishness for his parables of the human condition in the contemporary world. *Dangling Man* is Bellow's first novel and *The Victim* the second, written in 1947. *The Victim* helped Bellow earn a Guggenheim Fellowship that enabled him to live in Paris and travel in Europe while he began working on *The Adventures of Augie March*. In 1952, he received the National Institute of Arts and Letters Award and was made Creative Writing Fellow at Princeton University. In 1959 *Henderson the Rain King* was published, and he received an Honorary Doctor of Letters from Northwestern University in 1962. When his most ambitious book, *Herzog*, was published in 1964, Bellow received the National Book Award and other awards. In 1968, his first short story collection *Mosby's Memoirs and Other Stories* appeared.

During the decade of the 1970s he also published *Mr. Sammler's Planet*, *Zetland: By a Character Witness* (1974), *Burdens of a Lone Survivor* (1974), and *Humboldt's Gift* (1975). In 1971, he won the National Book Award. It seemed, after the rather bitter *Mr. Sammler's Planet*, that Bellow had recovered his comic spirit. The year 1976 proved to be another year of success for him. He was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature and published *To Jerusalem and Back*. It was also in this year he began to work on *The Dean's December*. In 1978 Bellow continued to publish steadily through the 1980s. By 1984 his next collection of short stories, *Him With His Foot in His Mouth*, came out. In 1987 *More Die of Heartbreak* appeared, following by both *A Theft* and *The Bellarosa Connection* in 1989. *It All Adds Up*, Bellow's collected essays came out in 1994 and *The Actual* followed in 1997. In a word, Saul Bellow is an evergreen tree in American Literature.

1.2 Literature Review

Saul Bellow is one of the most important figures in the study of western literature. Bellow and his heroes are analyzed from different perspectives, such as Jewishness, feminism, transcendentalism, existentialism, humanism and so on. Books have been written on his nihilism, his comic vision, his debt to Jewish tradition, his treatment of history, his position in relation to modernism. Since the 1950s, scholars have produced over 30 published volumes and over 1,500 scholarly essays, which attest to his importance. In addition to the annual meetings, the Saul Bellow Society

started *Saul Bellow Journal* in 1981 and the official website in 1998, regularly issuing the related research information. According to the statistics of Saul Bellow Society, over 190 doctorate dissertations in the world took Saul Bellow and his works as the subject of their study. Gloria Cronin and Blaine Hall's *Saul Bellow: An Annotated Bibliography (Second Edition)* involved 46 criticism monographs, and 1200 criticism papers among which 32 on *Dangling Man*, 32 on *The Victim*, 74 on *The Adventures of Augie March*, 90 on *Henderson the Rain King*, 151 on *Herzog*, 64 on *Humboldt's Gift*, 90 on *Mr. Sammler's Planet*, 73 on *The Dean's December*, 20 on *To Jerusalem and Back*, 46 on short stories, and 18 on plays. (Cronin and Hall 1987)

Bellow is usually considered as a traditional writer and Mohammad Quayum regards Bellow first of all is a new transcendentalist. In *Saul Bellow and American Transcendentalism*, he focuses on Bellow's four works to reveal the similarity between Bellow and Emerson and Whitman, for all of them advocate an integration and fusion of the opposite laws governing individualism and society, and advocate of the human soul and yet they maintained faith in the union of body and soul. John Clayton's *Saul Bellow: In Defense of Man* discusses the paradox of Bellow's personal despair and romantic idealism, his Jewish humanism and Jewish guilt and self-hatred. Clayton concludes that Bellow, like his heroes, is life-affirming, love-affirming, and individual-affirming. Bellow persistently refuses to devalue the self even in the midst of the pressure of a vast public life. Furthermore, from Dostoevsky to Sartre and Camus, nearly all representatives of Existentialism in different periods have corresponded to Saul Bellow's different novels. Bellow's heroes are absurd and alienated characters, who also alienated themselves. They are "chosen people"—chosen, yet suffering; highest, yet lowest." (Clayton 1979:36) Additionally, Judie Newman interprets Saul Bellow from the perspective of history. In *Saul Bellow and History*, she discusses the historical elements in Bellow's five major novels, which are history, nature and freedom, such as *The Victim* is the reflection of Anti-Semitism of that age, and *Herzog* is a history of mental disorder.

In China, There are three main schools in Bellow research: Jewishness, Humanism, and Existentialism, but contrarily the research on Bellow is not so hot. From 1979 till now (2009), there appeared about 181 papers on Bellow—83 academic journal essays, 92 master's theses, 6 doctoral dissertations. Among them, there are 24 theses and 3 journal articles from the angle of Existentialism. *Herzog*, as the

best-known masterpiece of Bellow, enjoys an amount of critics and researchers' appreciation. However, the attention to some of his other novels is scarce.

Zhu Ping is one of the Chinese scholars doing research on Saul Bellow, with seven journal essays and one doctoral dissertation, analyzing, combing and summing up the criticism on Bellow. His papers are mainly about the morals of Saul Bellow's works. Zhu Ping claims due to Bellow's complicated themes and methods, criticism on Bellow is pluralistic during the past half century. As to categorizing Bellow into existentialist school, some scholars state it in their papers, such as Deng Hongyi's "Brief Analysis of the Source of Saul Bellow's Existentialist Thoughts in His Works". All these essays have pointed out the relationship between existentialism and Bellow.

Bellow's second novel, *The Victim*, though has received scant critical attention both in and out of China over the past half century compared with Bellow's other works, explores in an intense manner about the ability of 20th-century man to cope with victimization and paranoia. *The Victim* is the story of a man's struggle to free himself from a state of victimization—an ironic struggle of self-encounter. *The Victim* records Bellow's questions about human existence, its mystery, its unanswerable agonies, its paradoxes of evil and suffering, without any surrender to a feeling of despair or nada. The title itself is Bellow's metaphor for modern man. Leslie Fiedler pronounced *The Victim* one of the best books in 1950s. Diana Trilling was of similar mind, reversing her earlier disdain for Bellow's writing and proclaiming *The Victim* "morally one of the further reaching books our contemporary culture has produced." (Kiernan 1989:26) In Bellow's view, people depressed by the war and desolate and void society should choose an optimistic way to go.

Looking back, Bellow once said: 'I was doing nothing very original by writing another realistic novel and calling it The Victim.' There is indeed a messianic tone in these two early novels, almost as if the young Bellow wanted to 'set us straight,' to preach, to insist dramatically that new and more positive definitions of man are called for. (Rovit 1975:41)

However, compared with Bellow's other works, *The Victim* was disesteemed both in China and overseas. There are only one thesis and one journal essay on it in China and none of them is from the angle of existentialism. Some critics think it is either too "cautious" or "careless" or "timid" and it fails to meet the expectations of the author himself. While in my opinion, though it is an apprentice work for Bellow, we cannot ignore it. Instead, we should pay attention to its specific historical

background and the profound theme. It was finished soon after the WW II, which caused a deadly disaster to the Jews, who were then in a survival dilemma and spiritual crisis. Everyone was a victim, a victim of the family, friends, strangers, society, culture, and even a victim of himself or herself. Against that specific historical backdrop, the outside world was so absurd that people kept asking themselves—who I am? Where am I going? What should I do? These lingering questions always come into the mind of existentialists and Saul Bellow as well. This thesis helps to reveal Bellow's implication for modern men to regain their dignity as an authentic being. Despite the inadequate research resources, the present thesis is a tentative study in the hope to lay an initial foundation for the further research on *The Victim*.

1.3 Structure Overview

The present study aims to expound the theme of *The Victim* in the light of existentialism and to exhibit affinities between Bellow and the existentialist thinkers in their common concerns about the human living conditions—the absurdity man faces, the alienation he feels, and the struggle for the authentic existence in this world. The ultimate goal of the study is to call on people to achieve the authentic being or the meaningful existence. This thesis intends to anatomize the hero of *The Victim* Leventhal's self-construction from three processes of his self-alienation, self-awakening to self-affirmation in existentialistic perspective.

This paper is composed of six chapters. Chapter one is an introduction to Saul Bellow—his life, works and criticism on his works abroad and at home. Chapter two displays the origin, development and influence of existentialism. The main part of this thesis, from chapter three to five, presents the process of Asa Leventhal's self construction. Existential philosophy begins with a sense of disorientation and confusion in the face of an apparently meaningless or absurd outside world. At first, Leventhal is abandoned by his family and alienated by the society. Being suspicious and self-hated, he falls into bad faith and escapes from the anxiety caused by responsibility and death. He chooses self-alienation to protect himself. After Allbee crops up and penetrates into his life, and his nephew's illness and later death drive him to self-awakening, beginning his self-quest and self-analysis. Leventhal starts to accommodate himself to the absurd world and finally seeks an authentic self and

affirms himself. He happily reintegrates into the society and regains responsibility, love and dignity, and then his self-construction is consummated. Chapter six concludes the whole paper, pointing out the grandness of Saul Bellow and significance of his work.

From a literary point of view, *The Victim* represents a great step forward for Bellow. The tension between its realistic surfaces and its symbolic implications is admirably sustained. The quality of the achieved ideas, the passionate implication in the fable, and the coherence with the tone and structure make the novel an innegligible success.

Chapter Two Existentialism

2.1 A Brief Introduction of Existentialism

Existentialism is a term applied to the work of a number of 19th and 20th century philosophers, who, despite profound doctrinal differences, took the human subject, not merely the thinking subject, but the acting, feeling, living human individuals and his or her conditions of existence, as a starting point for philosophical thought. Existentialism is a loose title for various philosophies that emphasize certain common themes: the individual, the experience of choice, and the absence of rational understanding of the universe with a consequent dread or a sense of absurdity in human life.

Existentialism attained its zenith in Europe following the disenchantments of the Second World War, with roots in the 19th century romanticism, with its revolt against science and reason, existentialism recognizes no rational basis for our lives and maintains that feelings of apprehension, anguish, and dread are a part of our human experience. In characterizing existentialism, Barrett argues:

This philosophy embodies the self-questioning of the time...Alienation and estrangement; a sense of the basic fragility and contingency of human life; the impotence of reason confronted with the depths of existence; the threat of Nothingness, and the solitary and unsheltered condition of the individual before this threat...A single atmosphere pervades them all like a chilly wind: the radical feeling of human finitude. (Greenberg 2004:131)

2.1.1 Origin and Development of Existentialism

The term “existentialism” seems to have been coined by the French philosopher Gabriel Marcel around 1943 and adopted by Jean-Paul Sartre who, on October 29, 1945, discussed his own existentialist position in a lecture in Paris. The lecture was published as *L'existentialisme est un humanisme (Existentialism is a Humanism)*. The label has been applied retrospectively to other philosophers for whom existence, particularly human existence, was key philosophical topics. For instance, Martin Heidegger, had made human existence the focus of his work since the 1920s, and Karl Jaspers had called his philosophy “Existenzphilosophie” in the 1930s.

Existentialism emerged as a movement in the 20th century literature and philosophy, foreshadowed most notably by the 19th century philosophers Søren

Kierkegaard and Friedrich Nietzsche, though it had forerunners in earlier centuries. The first significant thinker to stress such themes was Danish theologian and philosopher Søren Kierkegaard, whose work is generally regarded as the origin of existentialism. In the 19th century, Kierkegaard took the crisis of human existence as a major theme and then he is regarded as the earliest 19th-century precursor of modern existentialism and has been called “the father of existentialism,” for he lays the foundation for modern religious existentialism. Kierkegaard thinks existentialistic writing both reacts against the view that the universe is a closed, coherent, intelligible system, and finds the resulting contingency a cause for lamentation. “Existential philosophy distinguishes itself by taking as its primary concern individual existence.” (Brosman 2000:4) Friedrich Nietzsche is the one focused on human experience, rather than the objective truths of mathematics and science that are too detached or observational to truly get at human experience. He was interested in people’s quiet struggle against the apparent meaninglessness of life and the use of diversion to escape from boredom. Nietzsche also holds that man should learn to master their human weakness and become a law to himself and Nietzsche’s “God is dead” shocked the whole world.

In the 20th century, existentialist philosophers such as Fyodor Dostoevsky, Franz Kafka, Martin Heidegger, Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir, Albert Camus, Karl Barth, and Maurice Merleau-Ponty came to the stage. Two of the first literary writers who are important to existentialism are the Russian writer Fyodor Dostoevsky and the Czech writer Franz Kafka. Dostoevsky’s *Notes from Underground* details the story of a man who is unable to fit into the society and unhappy with the identities he creates for himself. Kafka often creates surreal and alienated characters who struggle against hopelessness and absurdity, notably in his most famous novella, *The Metamorphosis*, or in his masterpiece, *The Trial*.

Existentialism owes much in its large development as a philosophical doctrine in the 20th century to German philosopher Martin Heidegger. Heidegger’s major effort in philosophy is to discover the meaning of being itself, that is, to discover what it means to be a human being in the world. Heidegger uses the word “Dasein” to refer to man’s authentic existence, a state of existence of the individual himself and of the transcendence of his banality by the individual. For Heidegger, man should transcend his banality and achieve his authentic being, for in the course of over 2000 years of history, philosophy has attended to all the beings that can be found in the world, but

has forgotten to ask what “being” itself is. This is Heidegger’s “question of being,” and it is Heidegger’s fundamental concern throughout his work from the beginning of his career until its end.

Following the World War II existentialism became a well-known and significant philosophical and cultural movement, mainly through the public prominence of two French writers, Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus. Sartre dealt with existentialist themes in his 1938 novel *Nausea* and the short stories in his 1939 collection *The Wall*, and published a major philosophical statement, *Being and Nothingness* in 1943. But it was in the following two years he and his close associates—Camus, Simone de Beauvoir, Maurice Merleau-Ponty—became internationally famous as the leading figures of a movement known as existentialism. It aims at the exploration of human condition and is a call to look inward, to develop one’s own personal philosophy of life, and to get one’s priorities. Sartre’s major contribution to the ideas of existentialism lies in his emphasis on man’s freedom and responsibility for his authentic life. He thinks that there is no fixed human nature or essence and so the individual has to choose his or her own being. For him, man has the freedom for making his own choices and the responsibility for creating his own existence, even in the face of the world’s ultimate absurdity.

2.1.2 Influence of Existentialism

The philosophy of existentialism has a close relation to literature. In the first half of the 20th century, the loss of faith in religious and social order creates an understanding of personal responsibility. This leads to literary works that reflect the existentialists’ universal themes of loneliness, alienation, death and fear of the indifferent universe. In the 20th century, existentialism experienced resurgence in popular art forms. Existentialist novelists were generally seen as a mid-1950s phenomenon that continued until the mid-to-late 1970s. After the 1970s, many cultural activities in art, cinema, and literature contain both postmodernist and existential elements. Existentialist themes are displayed in the Theatre of the Absurd, notably in Samuel Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot* (1952). The play also illustrates an attitude toward man’s experience on earth: the poignancy, oppression, camaraderie, hope, corruption, and bewilderment of human experience that can only be reconciled

in mind and art of the absurdist. The play examines questions such as death, the meaning of human existence and the place of God in human existence.

One of the major offshoots of existentialism as a philosophy is existential psychology and psychoanalysis, which first crystallized in the work of Ludwig Binswanger, a clinician who was influenced by Husserl, Heidegger and Sartre. Therapists often use existential philosophy to explain the patient's anxiety. Psychotherapists using an existential approach believe that a patient can harness his anxiety and use it constructively. By embracing anxiety as an inevitable part, a person can use it to achieve his full potential in life. Humanistic psychology also has major impetus from existential psychology and shares many of the fundamental tenets.

2.2 Existentialistic Elements in Bellow's Works

Bellow experienced the most important and most critical periods in American history, such as the Depression (in the 1930s), the war years (in the 1940s), the Crewcut Era (in the 1950s) and the decade of protest, frustration and social violence (in the 1960s). He observed all changes in people's minds, such as their moral crisis after World War II. At that time, many Americans, especially the intellectuals, embraced the philosophy of existentialism and were influenced greatly by its perspectives. They considered existentialism as an exact theory to explain the confusion of their mind, the awkwardness of their position, and the despair they felt in modern civilization.

Just like many other writers of his age, Bellow was greatly influenced by the philosophical trend of existentialism, which lays much emphasis on the importance of individual and the situation which man is in. Bellow formed his own consideration of human beings and their existence in the modern world, which affected his personal life and his writing. For Bellow who was showing the same concerns for human beings, the philosophy of existentialism gave him a new interpretation on man's condition and his responsibility for his authentic self. Concerning individual existence, Bellow is in line with Existentialism for the alienation, absurdity and powerlessness imposed upon modern human beings, and sets forth to seek authenticity and meaning for individuals.

Both European existentialism and traditional Judeo-Christian humanism reflect Bellow's profound engagement with such writers as Kierkegaard, Dostoevsky,

Heidegger, Nietzsche, Hobbes, and Sartre. Ada Aharoni in “*Bellow and Existentialism*” claims:

A close look at Bellow's novels reveals a profound link between his introspective mode of fiction and modern European existentialism... Traces Bellow's concern with his shift and with the essence of human existence, and sees them as close to those of the existentialists. European existentialism has influenced Bellow's beliefs; his thought is not derivative. (Cronin 1987:45)

In another paper “*The Cornerstone of Bellow's Art*”, Ada Aharoni identifies 6 main elements in all the novels: “1) protagonist in existential crisis, 2) encounter with mentor, 3) confrontation with death or danger, 4) epiphany, 5) environment as a reflection of the character's mind, 6) use of images and symbols as “agents of the introspective process.” (Cronin 1987:45) Richard Lehan in “*Existentialism in Recent American Fiction: The Demonic Quest*” outlines the affinity of spirit that exists between the French existentialists and the contemporary American novelist whose hero is engaged in the same existential quest for self. For example, *Dangling Man*, written in the then popular manner of absurdist diary literature, inherited from Sartre's *Nausea* and Camus' *The Stranger*. Both Bellow and Sartre see that people, uneasy without a consistent and unified self, create roles and limited versions of reality which enable them to be secure amid the chaos of reality and in the face of death. Moreover, Bellow himself has acknowledged many parallels between *The Eternal Husband* and his novel. In *A Sort of Columbus--The American Voyage of Saul Bellow's Fiction*, Jeanne Braham uses a whole chapter to analyze Bellow's indebtedness to Dostoyevsky: Bellow borrowed the entire plot of *Eternal Husband* for *The Victim*, and in all his novels he uses Dostoyevskian imagery, imagery of almost psychotic strain—vivid, seemingly irrelevant impressions that touch at the antennae of the unconscious.

Chapter Three Leventhal's Alienation

"There's a lot of talk about alienation. It's a fool's plea." —Joseph (Bellow 1977:113)

"Alienation" refers to the individual's emotional distance from a group or groups. It is a feeling that one does not belong to a certain group, a feeling of separation or isolation. Existentialists think that in the modern world, man is in an alienated state, and "alienation" is a state of divided selfhood in which one is distanced from one's authentic being and confronts the self as an alien being.

In *The Victim*, as a son of a small dry goods merchant, Asa Leventhal seems unable to feel empowered by his deceased father. Neither can he get over the haunting memory of the screaming madness of his mother. He has little connection with his only brother, and from the beginning he is solitary. He endures unemployment, during which he stays in an awful hotel or lower Broadway. But on top of all these facts, he is a Jew living in a period of penultimate global anti-Semitism. As the news of the Holocaust becomes known all over the world, the increased feeling against Jews in the community during the Depression followed. Jews in other places suffered shock and agonizing sorrow for the systematic slaughter of European Jews, and to this day their thoughts and dreams are filled with horror and doubt of what racial hatred can lead to even so-called civilized people. Leventhal was so self-confined and concentrating too much on his existence that he could neither understand others nor make himself understood. This relationship results in a sense of alienation and victimization in him.

Leventhal is unable to get rid of the feeling that he inhabits an oppressive society whose forces run counter to his aspiration for well-being. He is obsessed by thoughts of madness, persecution, and death, and his anxiety for self-preservation insulates him. Repelled by an ordinary life, he invents an evasive formula to confront its imagined terrors and to support his own marginal existence. As Joseph in *Dangling Man* said alienation is a fool's plea. Leventhal falls into bad faith foolishly and helplessly and he tries his best to shake off the responsibilities oppressed onto him. Reality, however, forces him to come out of the barricades he has built around him and to accept the fact of belonging to a real but absurd world.

3.1 Abandonment

"God is dead. God remains dead." —Friedrich Nietzsche (Solomon 2005:67)

When existentialists speak of "abandonment"—a favorite word of Heidegger—they mean that God does not exist, and life therefore has no intrinsic purpose or meaning. God is dead, as Nietzsche claimed, so humanity has been abandoned in a helpless world and each human being must create his or her own meaning and morality without the help of any divine being. Bellow's characters are all lonely, despairing, cut off not only from society but from friends, relatives and family. Moreover, they are pathological social masochists, filled with guilt, self-deception and self-hatred, forced to suffer and to fail.

In *The Victim*, abandoned by his family, Asa Leventhal was caught in the same dilemma. His selfish father married again after his mother died in an insane asylum. Leventhal struggled alone in the crowded but indifferent society and had little connection with his father, and he is totally a stranger for his brother's family. "Being the stranger is to be alienated. It gives you that sinking feeling of no longer having any point of reference." (Deurzen 1998:54) He depended on his wife Mary in almost all aspects. However, she was then away to look after her mother in another city. Leventhal felt abandoned and threatened especially after the nuisance Kirby Allbee turned up, for he was accused of making Allbee lose everything on purpose. In that absurd society, as a Jew, Leventhal suffered a great deal in history and was persecuted for so many years, he lost his faith in "man" and could only portray himself as an impotent victim of overwhelming forces which were beyond his ability to comprehend or control.

3.1.1 Abandonment by the Family

"Hot stars and cold hearts, that's your universe!" —Kirby Allbee (Bellow 1978:160)

Asa Leventhal had an unhappy and unstable childhood. He is a son of an authoritarian, turbulent father. "His father had lived poor and died poor, that stern, proud old fool with his savage looks, to whom nothing mattered save his advantage and to be freed by money from the power of his enemies." (Bellow 1978:94) It gave

pain to Leventhal to think about his father's sense of money and relationship with others. And Mary's remark added to Leventhal's pain, "The only proof there is of anything wrong with your mother is that she married that father of yours," (Bellow 1978:49) which brought tears into Leventhal's eyes. His mother died in madness when he was eight and his brother Max six. "At the time of her disappearance from the house, the elder Leventhal had answered their questions about her with an embittered 'gone away', suggestive of desertion." (Bellow 1978:17) His mother aroused fear, mistrust and hatred in him. With narcissistic anger he remembers her face as distracted and mad-looking.

His first job as an adult in the senior Harkavy's auction house resulted from an uncle's influence and ended when old Harkavy he appreciated passed away and soon the business closed. Old Harkavy encouraged him to go to college and helped him a lot, so he was dispirited by his death and had a hard time—starved and thin, lived in slums. Months of hardship followed as he worked part time in a shoe store, as a full-time fur dyer, and then as a clerk in a hotel for transients on lower Broadway. By luck, a civil service job in the Baltimore customhouse lifted him out of these sordid surroundings and ultimately led him to Burke-Beard and Company, but he was still haunted by the seamy side of life which he barely escaped, "the part that did not get away with it—the lost, the outcast, the overcome, the effaced, the ruined." (Bellow 1978:23) That the indifferent shuffle of things to such a condition maybe returned is his constant fear.

Leventhal had little to do with his brother Max and Max's family. At the beginning of the novel, Leventhal hurried to look after his sick nephew Mickey, elder nephew Philip asked him who he was. It seemed that his sister-in-law Elena did not know Mary's name, so did Max. They had met Mary only once or twice, which reveal the estrangement between these two families. Leventhal felt he was just an outsider for them and he admitted he never spent even an hour together with Max since the childhood.

Leventhal's marriage to Mary was odd. She remained off-stage, and her little intriguing information was given only through her husband's thoughts. It seemed that she married him because of true love. When they first met, she was a beautiful woman running at a picnic. Leventhal fell in love at first sight, but he broke off his engagement to her when Mary confessed that she found herself unable to break off an old attachment to another man, a married man. Though Leventhal never had real

cause to doubt Mary's fidelity after they were married, he was still troubled by the possibility of being a cuckold, for he mistrusted women and knew human weakness and capacity for evil well. As Kirby Allbee claimed that his wife did not leave him just for his drinking, "A woman doesn't leave her husband for anything—just for a trifle," (Bellow 1978:67) which unintentionally indicated that Mary has been away for such a long time because of the strained relationship between the husband and the wife. Leventhal was ambivalent towards her, but he could not do without her. With Mary's departure, Leventhal was uneasy, his nerves had been unsteady, and he left the bathroom light burning all night. "This was absurd, this feeling that he was threatened by something while he slept." (Bellow 1978:26) This was why Allbee's game disturbed him. If Mary had been at home, he would not be as terrified as he was now. Leventhal constantly hoped that he could hear from her, for she was probably able to deal with the situation, but he was abandoned. For Leventhal, not belonging anywhere leaves him stranded in no-man's land, and to be without a home can give rise to the floundering and fluttering of insecurity or even to that of experiencing panic attacks. Unfortunately, Leventhal's heart becomes as cold as ice.

3.1.2 The Absurd World

"We do not get it in the neck for nothing and suffer for nothing, and there's no denying that evil is as real as sunshine." —Kirby Allbee (Bellow 1978:122-3)

The word "absurd" first suggested by Albert Camus in 1942 in *The Myth of Sisyphus* is a prime theme of existentialism. What is the absurd? It is a title for the pointless or meaningless nature of human life and action in existentialism. It is "the confrontation between rational man and the indifferent universe." (Solomon 2005:183) The phenomenon of disproportion at the heart of the absurd has been the eternal problem for all great literature, and Camus frequently recognized that the concept of the absurd owed much to thinkers other than himself. Many American novelists are considering the same disquiet, the same anxieties, and the same apparent lack of meaning and hope that Camus analyzed in *The Myth of Sisyphus* and his other works, and "they share with Camus a common concern for religious and moral themes, especially in terms of the struggle to find value and fulfillment in a world without God." (Galloway 1970:8) Bellow is among them. If Leventhal were not a Jew, were

neutral, *The Victim* would be simply one of many bleak accounts of a modern life in American naturalism. The fact that he is a Jew gives the story its radical depth. As a Jew, he was “chosen” and yet “rejected”—chosen by God, and rejected by the society. “To be a Jew,” Sartre contends, “is to be thrown into—to be abandoned to—the situation of a Jew.” (Judaken 2006:137) Epiphany came to Leventhal—God is dead, and men are abandoned in this absurd world, so men have to suffer.

The Stock Market Crash in 1929 followed by the Great Depression which impoverished hundreds of thousands of American Jews, as the cities of the United States suffered unemployment rates of over 25%. In 1933, as Hitler and the Nazis came to power, and World War II began in 1939, and then American Jews began to hear reports of the beginning of the Holocaust. In 1941 the United States entered World War II, and hundreds of thousands of Jewish Americans served in the armed forces. The entire world witnessed the explosion of dreadful atomic bomb and was shocked by it greatly. When the war ended in 1945 and the extent of the Holocaust became apparent, American Jews sunk into a long period of grief for the loss of six million of their compatriots, including more than two million children, and the disappearance of European Jewry in the lands of their forefathers. The Holocaust is considered to be the greatest crime in the history of the world. These innocent people were murdered in Germany, Poland, Russia, Hungary, and other European countries. Allbee's words are quite true—evil is as real as sunshine.

However, the murder of Jews won no sympathy for Jews from American citizens. Quite the contrary, Americans may have been angered at the Jews for the sacrifices the war had inflicted upon them. Many Americans felt that Jews were responsible for their plight, they formed numerous anti-Semitic organizations. “According to survey polls of public opinion in the United States, Americans reached...the highest point of American anti-Semitism in the mid 1940s, even during the World War.” (Gilbert 1968: 169) Even for those who did not personally experience it, the Holocaust has made it much harder to have faith in God or belief in an intrinsic goodness in humanity. Most of the Jews regarded themselves as victims of intolerance, suspicion, hatred, and prejudice and they no longer felt they were a part of that nation in which they were alienated by the Gentile. “Whenever they inhabited, they were regarded as strangers, Christ-killer, and enemies.” (Porter 1974:19)

The Victim abounds in Holocaust symbolism, for Bellow uses many archetypal images of the Holocaust centering on the associations with the color yellow, air pressure, bad smells, gas, heat, fire, suffocation and dislocation. Leventhal was under this atmosphere which suffocated him, he cried: "Millions of us have been killed. What about that?" (Bellow 1978:123) Leventhal's distaste for the persecution to which he feels Jews are subject makes him hypersensitive to the possibility of a similar persecuting feeling in himself.

In *The Victim* Leventhal hears a Jewish joke which exemplifies the beautiful absurdity: In a little town in an old country, the Jews were afraid to miss the "Messiah" who would come to the little town, so the people built a high tower and hires one of the town beggars to sit in it the whole day. The beggar's friend met him and asked what he thought of his job. The beggar answered, "It doesn't pay much, but I think it's steady work." (Bellow 1978:206) When people face the helpless world, they feel themselves are lonely strangers and outsiders, so the absurd emotion props up. Absurdity seems to be the only thing that links people and the world. Absurd emotion is a potential and frightening mental state in which people feel they are isolated from the world, lonely, painful, and despaired.

Leventhal simply had a built-in "suffering, feebleness, and servitude" that seem to be totally without help or meaning. He worked hard every day, and his boss Mr. Beard knew how efficient he was and how deadly he was needed, but Mr. Beard treated him like a small potato, so he had to exhaust himself to work. His deeper fear came from an uncertainty about his position and stability in the cruel, indifferent chaos of the modern city. When pressure was put on him, he behaved like a fool, which really troubled him a lot. At the press the linotyper Dunhill sold him a ticket he didn't want, though he protested that he did not care for shows and had no use for one ticket. As Dunhill insisted, he was forced to buy it. Leventhal labored the stone of Sisyphus up the hill, but he walked down for his next effort with a mind that was unable to grasp even a piece of the nobility and the dignity of his humanness.

What's worse, Leventhal was haunted by an old acquaintance Kirby Allbee who unjustly claimed that Leventhal had been the cause of all his misfortune.

The Victim is a work of its period in that Leventhal's victimization by Allbee seems an instance of what European Existentialists were beginning at the time to call absurdity—an eruption of meaninglessness into human affairs that nullifies the world of logical understandings. (Kiernan 1989:28)

Allbee thought he lost the job just because Leventhal insulted his boss Mr. Rudiger deliberately and then his wife left him and subsequently lost her life in an accident. Allbee thought that undoubtedly Leventhal should bear all the guilt, and he scrutinized Leventhal and confronted him several times over the following weeks. He even broke into Leventhal's house and lived there. Leventhal was feeble to encounter him. When he saw Allbee take a whore to his house, lying on his bed, he threw Allbee out. Allbee came back in a mid-night, and wanted to commit suicide which would definitely jeopardize Leventhal to confront death, Leventhal desperately drove Allbee out of his life completely. Allbee, though claiming to be Leventhal's victim, really victimized Leventhal.

There is a fairly universal agreement that anti-Semites, like racialists in general, are the people in quest of scapegoats. They attribute all their own misfortunes, as well as social problems in general to the Jews. It is rather absurd that Allbee, a white Anglo-Saxon protestant of aristocratic New England is obnoxious and spews hatred towards the Jews at every opportunity. When Allbee talks to Leventhal, it is in terms of "you people." At the party where the two met, he is especially offensive to Leventhal's friend Harkavy. Leventhal did not intend to drive Allbee out of job just for Allbee once ridiculed Harkavy. "Leventhal had naturally been angry, but not for long. He had shrugged it off." (Bellow 1978:38)

It is common knowledge that banking, in American, is the one business that Jews have been consistently excluded from. Yet the anti-Semite will insist that all Jews are bankers! Allbee asked Leventhal to help him, "Do you think you can get something for me in a bank?" (Bellow 1978:120) At this point, Bellow indicates that the prejudice is so widespread that even a lie, if repeated often enough, becomes an accepted part of the rhetoric. Leventhal puzzled why Allbee chose him to blame, frowning. Leventhal told Allbee's words to Harkavy:

"He makes out a whole case that I'm responsible for his wife and everything...!" said Leventhal, his voice rising nearly to a cry. "His wife? That's far-fetched, far-fetched," said Harkavy. "I wouldn't listen to stuff like that. He's overstraining the imagination. He must have a loose screw." (Bellow 1978:69)

Leventhal's impulse to fight with Rudiger made himself fear the black list and lived under the shadow till now, so it is impossible for him to calculate the revenge.

In Leventhal's opinion, the behavior of people around him is absurd too. Elena was deadly afraid of hospitals, so she nursed Mickey at home. Leventhal also could

not understand why his brother Max made a living in another city and left two children to a feeble woman to look after. And how could Mary had secret relationship with a married man as they had engaged, and how could she had been away to look after her mother for such a long time. All of those are unreasonable.

The absurd behaviors bring anxiety and fear to Leventhal. "Hell is other people!" (Sartre 2003:223) Undergoing a number of ordeals, Leventhal had bad nerves, headache, and heart palpitations and was often flushed with irrational guilt and self-condemnation. He was neurotically quick to sense or imagine a threat and an insult, a look of blame and accusation, or a general hostility. He felt spied on, threatened, and was beset by endless misgivings and apprehensions.

3.2 Leventhal's Self-Alienation

"This alienated Me remains in principle inapprehensible." —Jean-Paul Sartre (Sartre 2003:400).

Saul Bellow's heroes are not only alienated, unfortunately, they alienate themselves. "Filled with guilt, they (Bellow's heroes) loathe themselves and, in most of the novels, need to keep suffering and indignity on their own heads." (Bloom 1986:74) For Bellow, man's alienation is not only the result of the unbalanced development of modern civilization, but also the result of the separation of man's ideal from reality and the separation of man from others. "The alienation of myself", Sartre once said, "is the fact of being-looked-at" (Sartre 2003:287). The pressure and even persecution force Leventhal to alienate himself from the society to avoid doubt, dread, shame and guilt. Leventhal's afflictions are perceived to be caused by events in his life or the society around him, but to a certain extent, also by his own fault. Leventhal has low self-esteem, and always persuades himself that he is lucky—his job, his wife, which is self-hypnosis. In fact, Mary's affair with a married man rooted in Leventhal's heart, but he loved her and was dependent on her, so he was unable to bear the life without her. He longed for a visitor and opened the lamp when he went to sleep. On the other hand, he acted as he was fine without her. The consequence of a life-long lying about themselves is the loss of contact with their real selves, which Karen Horney (1885—1952) refers to as self-alienation. Self-alienated people have no ability to recognize themselves as they really are, without minimizing or exaggerating;

no ability or willingness to accept the consequences of their actions and decisions; no ability or unwillingness to realize it is up to themselves to do something about their difficulties, and in her view, the need for security is the prime motive in human existence. (Talleat 1978) Leventhal resists changes and prefers the safety of stagnant and unfulfilling patterns of behavior over the risk of trying new behaviors, environments, and relationships. The alienated person remains in principle inapprehensible—Sartre indicates in fact it is a universal phenomenon.

3.2.1 Self-Deception and Self-Hatred

“I was lucky. I got away with it.’ He meant that his bad start, his mistakes, the things that might have wrecked him.” —Asa Leventhal (Bellow 1978:22)

“The human being hides him from freedom by self-deception instead of realizing the authentic being for the human being; this is bad faith.” (徐 1987:205.) Bad faith (*mauvaise foi*) is a philosophical concept first coined by existentialist philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre and it is closely related to the concepts of self-deception and self-resentment. It may involve ordinary evasion of the truth, including lying, but also subtler means, such as role playing, denial, hypocrisy, and other subterfuges. People in bad faith become hypersensitive to others' perceptions and will often elicit feedback from others on their individual traits, their ideal self, and perceptions of others, including current perceptions and historical stereotypical roles, as they form their self-perceptions across the life span. Although these people may successfully move into the future, pursuing personally important goals in a flexible manner, they may still fail to become who they really are. In other words, rather than becoming more authentic, they are becoming alienated from their deepest possibilities, their real needs, and their true selves. Under the look of others, they will feel the alienation of themselves, so they probably become the victim of others, and will fall into bad faith to escape the negative self that the environment afflicts.

Sartre claimed bad faith is to escape what we are doomed to face. People in bad faith use the distortion of reality to protect their self-concept against unpleasant emotions. When Leventhal told himself that he was a victim of circumstances and he

was not to be blamed for Mickey's illness and Allbee's misfortune, he was in bad faith. He judged and acted according to a distorted vision of the world, and his actions were destructive because of the nature of the distortion. He possessed the 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." (Bellow 1978:17) The indifference, however, is a front for turmoil of fears, a strategy of defense, a means of denying known truths concerning the affiliation between himself and others. These feelings color his perception of the world around him, so that the persecution seems real. He once saw "the bottom" during his hard time, while working as a clerk in a flophouse, and thought that perhaps that was where he belonged. He was afraid that the position he occupied in his middle-class world that does not belong to him, and that he, as a Jew, has been and continuously to be persecuted. Leventhal assured Elena he had an afternoon coming, but in fact, he was assuring himself:

He had been with the firm six years, and if he couldn't take a few hours off on a personal matter after six years, he might as well give up. He could get every afternoon for a month without coming close to the number of hours of overtime without pay that he had put in. After he stopped talking his mind ran on in the same strain. (Bellow 1978:14)

He worked around the clock to keep his job, so those words were his self-persuasion. And Leventhal attempts to verify the existence of this, such as the black list, on a number of occasions.

In bad faith one averts one's gaze from facts, or options and choices, as Leventhal who makes up excuses and lies. He thinks he has got away with his bad start and mistakes which wrecked him, which is obviously self-deception. Self-deception causes self-hatred in Leventhal. "It is true that hatred of oneself leads to hatred of others, conversely, judgment of others leads to judgment of oneself." (Clayton 1979:156) In an attempt to avoid feeling alienated or worried about the judgment of other people, people take the initiative and judge all people first in a negative way. The supposition seems to be that the judgment of other person cannot harm one if he consistently judges all others negatively so that his own world is safe and high self-esteem remains. Leventhal thought Elena's mother hated him, for her daughter married with a Jew. Mickey's death would be a punishment for her daughter's marriage with a Jew. Leventhal told Max his mother-in-law should be kicked out of the house because the "old devil" might try to make herself a power in the house. Leventhal insisted the old woman was full of hate, full of hatred himself

indeed. "Hatred is the desire to be rid of the other person, and hence rid of their ability to see one in ways other than the way one wants to be seen." (Webber 2009:141) Leventhal says that Allbee was haunted in his mind by wrongs or faults of his own which Allbee turned into wrongs against himself. But this is equally true of Leventhal himself. Being a Jew becomes a burden for Leventhal. He thinks his boss, Williston, Elena, Elena's mother are all against him because he is a Jew, even though he is never attacked on these grounds and never persecuted at all. Leventhal's sense of persecution or victimhood is a debasement of the self, a form of self-hatred.

Leventhal hates himself to be so anxious and dreadful, and he knows that well, but in order to keep his self-esteem and position, he uses self-deception to help himself out of such a dilemma. That is bad faith Sartre objects in being an authentic being.

3.2.2 Escape from Responsibilities

"Each man is responsible for his actions because he is accountable for their consequences." —Kirby Allbee (Galloway 1970:93)

People who experience low self-esteem have little self-respect. These individuals also frequently blame others for their own condition, so they often behave irresponsibly. In bad faith, the human being shelters himself from responsibility by not noticing the dimensions of alternative courses of action facing him, loses the autonomy of his moral will, his freedom to decide, and imprisons himself within inauthenticity. People who are self-alienated believe that others, fate, or time will solve these difficulties, which is a further indication of their irresponsible behavior. They do not see themselves as the directing forces of their own lives; instead, they think they do not have responsibilities, for fate will solve all the problems. It seems obvious that all Bellow's heroes are heavy men, dragging about with them not only a corporeal weight but a load of cares and anxieties, which they unsuccessfully seek to jettison at every turn, so they are overloaded in the world. In *The Victim* Leventhal feels "intolerably bound and compressed," his very presence is a "great tiring weight." He is anguish and burdened, and he tried to escape from responsibilities.

Leventhal in bad faith had always kept himself aloof from his brother's family, and he went to Elena as to a stranger. Leventhal could not open himself to the Italian

exuberance of Elena, which he explained as madness. When Leventhal was told Mickey, one of his nephews, was seriously ill and he was needed, he was aware it was a duty to go, but he persuaded himself: "It couldn't be so urgent. It was just beyond Elena's power...he told himself several times." (Bellow 1978:10) After returning, he was bitterly irritated, for he thought he wasted the whole afternoon because of Elena's paranoia. He wanted to send Mickey to hospital, for he thought nurses could take better care of Mickey than Elena. A call to the hospital and getting nurses' comforting words were what he needed, so that he could be released from the bundle. When Leventhal knew Mickey got worse in the hospital,

He (Leventhal) got away to the kitchen for a while, ostensibly for a glass of water. Actually he was afraid that if he sat opposite Elena much longer he might lose control of himself. Worst of all, he might ask her why she thought he was to blame, and that would be utterly wrong and possibly dangerous. She did hold him responsible, plainly...They, themselves, the parents, were responsible insofar as anyone was. (Bellow 1978:128)

When Mickey passed away, he believed Elena was bound to blame him and her mother was sure to egg her on. He told himself that it was Elena's fault, if anyone's. It was precisely because of the unreasonableness of the blame that he feared her. He was afraid to let her catch his eyes and did not return her look. He imagined the worst—she began to scream at him, accusing him. He misread every move Elena made, and consistently misinterpreted her behavior. He was unwilling to be a surrogate father for Mickey and Philip, and he wanted to shake off the responsibility. Allbee helps Leventhal to learn that everyone is responsible for his actions because he is accountable for their consequences. All through the novel, Elena did not blame Leventhal for Mickey's worsening illness. It is Leventhal himself knew he had the responsibility, but he escaped, which made him nervous and frightening.

His job and family had already given him too much pressure, all of a sudden he was accused of being responsible for Allbee, Leventhal certainly would not admit. After hearing Allbee's accusation, Leventhal run away and he thought Allbee was crazy. He did not acknowledge the charge. "It couldn't have been my fault. I'm sure you're mistaken. Rudiger wouldn't blame you for the run-in we had. It was his fault, too." (Bellow 1978:33) He thought it was caused by Rudiger's bad temper. Leventhal declared all he wanted was a job and Rudiger was tough, nasty and vicious. He admitted he had not kept his temper down, but it was caused by Rudiger's bad temper, so at most he was to be blamed in a way, indirectly. Then Leventhal brooded over the

affair. Though Rudiger had a rotten bad temper, he would not fire an employee only for the man had recommended someone. Recollecting Allbee's offences to Harkavy and Allbee was a fool for wine, Leventhal firmly believed it was not his fault and responsibility, but it was Allbee himself that reaped what he had sown.

People in bad faith suppose that the nature of human beings is fixed, like Allbee's drunkenness. "Not a good worker, never. Allbee must have been fired for drunkenness. When could you get a drinking man to acknowledge that he had gotten into trouble through drinking? Especially when he was far gone? And this Allbee was far gone." (Bellow 1978:35) In Leventhal's opinion, there was a general wrong, so in a general way, anyone could see that there was great unfairness in one man's having all the comforts of life while another had nothing.

Struggling in the absurd world, Leventhal was already exhausted, Allbee's accusation added to his anguish. He feared Allbee would purposely drive him out of work as what Allbee claimed Leventhal had done upon him several years before, so Leventhal tried his best to get rid of the responsibility and keep his hard-earned peaceful life. He had to insist that he was not responsible, so it is at worst, an unintentional accident. "I'm not under an obligation to you. I'll do something for you if I can. And just remember, it doesn't mean I admit anything." (Bellow 1978:120) When hearing Phoebe, the wife of his friend Williston's said that Allbee was very promising, intelligent, charming and outstanding and Williston corroborated his wife with Allbee was brainy and well read as well. Leventhal tenaciously limited himself to this in order to control his mounting sense of wrong, but at this he almost lost his head, apparently Leventhal did not admit that. If he admitted Allbee was a promising person, he had to discard his fixed thought about the worthless Allbee and take the responsibility, so he was angry and anxious at the fact. Indeed he is angry with this irresponsible himself and he is forced to look into himself.

Chapter Four Leventhal's Awakening

"What is at the center now? At the moment, neither art nor science but mankind determining, in confusion and obscurity, whether it will endure or go under."

—Saul Bellow (肖, 1992:926)

Bellow believes that alienation is not an inescapable part of the modern human condition and modern man can find communion and beauty in the midst of the bleakness and isolation of the modern world. After WW II, the public needed and was ready for a literature of hope and optimism, a literature that would restore dignity to man and a value to men's life. This was the period in which Saul Bellow made his timid, yet intrepid entry onto the American literary stage. In his speech when he accepted the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1976, Bellow addressed that now the central problem in the life was not art or science, but to make the choice to achieve existence or go extinction. Bellow brought a belief in the inherent goodness of man and the basic significance of existence. After lingering in angst and fear, the self-awakening would befall and people would find their own proper place in the society.

In Sartre's opinion, bad faith is a temporary state and man should get over it. Suffering from the sense of alienation in the absurd world, Leventhal is discontented with himself and his situation, so he craves for a change in his life. The reality instructor Allbee told him:

You have to get yourself so that you can't stand to keep on in the old way. When you reach that stage, it takes a long time before you're ready to quit dodging. Meanwhile, the pain is horrible. We're mulish; that's why we have to take such a beating. When we can't stand another lick without dying of it, then we change. And some people never do. They stand there until the last lick falls and die like animals. Others have the strength to change long before. But repent means now, this minute and forever, without wasting any more time. (Bellow 1978:185)

The ordeal Leventhal undergoes in his several encounters with Allbee forces him to look into the hidden recesses of his self, to consider the values he has lived by, and to examine the nature of his relation to the world he lives in. During the same period, Leventhal is compelled to break out of his insulated world and to assume the responsibility for his brother's family. "Leventhal's initiation will be enacted as he is propelled inexorably toward a new comprehension of what human being entails."

(Rodrigues 1981:35) He then started his new journey of self-questioning and self-analysis.

4.1 Self-Questioning

"Conquer yourself rather than the world." —René Descartes (Sartre 1948:39)

Bellow's heroes are marginal men, or "isolatoes" who will have separated themselves from their family and friends and who must discover the significant pattern in their own experience before they can reenter the community. Descartes thinks people have to conquer themselves first and then the world, for only if people know themselves well and then they could find the right place in the world and deal with the relationship with others skillfully. Rooted in a history of personal sacrifice and cultural survival, Bellow's heroes cease to struggle with despair. In *The Victim*, every successive encounter shocks Leventhal out of the comfortable cocoon world he has built around himself. He wishes to investigate in terms of his own private self, and simultaneously he is forced to acknowledge the real relationship existing between that self and its past, its personal history, and the social circumstances in which that self exists.

"Their (Bellow's heroes') quests are presumably for freedom, for knowledge, for love." (Braham 1984:38) The quest is the search for the strength to overcome the fear of choice and avoid public institutions. After a series of affairs—Mickey's illness, Allbee's accusation, the talk with Harkavy and Williston, Leventhal questions: who am I? What kind of person am I? Am I responsible? In what form shall life be justified? In continuing to pose this question to a variety of situations and for a variety of men, Bellow's work projects a sense of the self and a sense of human values which are not only Jewish but American, not only modern but historical.

4.1.1 Social Self or Personal Self

"There will be time, there will be time / To prepare a face to meet the faces that you meet." —T.S.Eliot (Hankiss 2006:55)

Sartre thinks the basic problem of philosophy is the problem of existence, and he divides existence into being-for-itself (pour-soi) and being-in-itself (en-soi). "Being

for-itself is the mode of existence of consciousness, consisting in its own activity and purposive nature, while being in-itself is the self-sufficient, lumpy, contingent being of ordinary things.” (Dutton 1982:2) Unlike the stone whose being can never transcend itself, which is therefore complete and whole in itself, man is forever in a state of self-transcendence. Philosophically, Bellow's heroes are in the Sartrean position of the being-for-itself and the being-in-itself and Bellow's novels are narrative dramatizations of the fact of this dilemma of existence. In “*Distractions of a Fiction Writer*”, he maintains that “novelists in the past have often failed to catch the positive factor in this human equation of the en-soi versus the pour-soi.” (Dutton 1982:2) He feels that novelists have too often depicted the absurdity of man. Taking a position against those who depict man as completely impotent and giving answers about what is after absurdity are all that Bellow seeks for. He believes human beings can regain dignity and humanity during the process of self-transcendence. In *The Victim*, being-for-itself and being-in-itself could be illuminated as Leventhal's social self and private self respectively.

The social self refers to the various masks or social roles people play—student, worker, husband, wife, mother, father, citizen, leader, follower. Sartre in *Being and Nothingness* took the waiter for example. The waiter knows that he is a waiter—it is his job, so that his actions and words are all waiter-like—his movement is quick and forward, a little too precise, a little too rapid. He bends forward a little too eagerly, and his voice, his eyes express an interest a little too solicitous for the order of the custom. (Sartre 2003) The waiter is not a person choosing to exercise those motives and skills, but a mechanism wholly composed of them, and thus the waiter identifies with a proper part of himself, so he is a specimen of bad faith. As for Leventhal, a man with the weight of two hundred and ten, and an editor of a small trade magazine in lower Manhattan, also plays his role.

Leventhal's figure was burly, his head large; his nose, too, was large. He had black hair, coarse waves of it, and his eyes under their intergrown brows were intensely black and of size unusual in adult faces. But though childishly large they were not childlike in expression. They seemed to disclose 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. (Bellow 1978:17)

With everybody except Mary he is inclined to be short and neutral, and this shortness of his is merely neglectfulness. He is most often characterized as “impassive”, giving the impression of an unaccommodating, taciturn, obsequious,

moderately successful businessman. He is pushy and violent. He can even consider smashing the face of an offensive woman behind him and Mary at the movies, he does lose his temper with Rudiger, and he attacks the derelict Allbee. Because Leventhal knows he is under the observation, so he takes the initiative and attempts to look at himself through the eyes of others while he contemplates himself with the “detachment” of another, and he becomes another person, a pure witness. He is just acting, though a bad actor of bad acting as Allbee accused him. This is the social self of Leventhal, but underneath this impassive exterior he is a cauldron of feelings.

Each individual must meet with a strong sense of self, but the sacrifice of self is demanded by the social circumstance. People play at being themselves, which is one way—and a dishonest or “inauthentic” way—of dealing with the problem. Playing roles and wearing masks are adaptive responses to the social world. When entire lives are played behind masks, it may be difficult for others and people themselves to discover inner selves. Leventhal is anxious about self, and is usually to be found exploring his solitude, establishing the inward claim, but experiencing loss of contact and connection. He stands anxiously at the center of the narrative tumbrel that moves steadily toward a guillotine that finally never really appears. That is Leventhal's private self, full of angst, fear and innocence, so he is unwilling to make anybody see through it and prepares a face to meet other faces every day. When he spoke of his fears to Mary late one night, she said with all the firmness of her own confident strength: “That's because you're not sure of yourself. If you were a little more sure you wouldn't let yourself be bothered.” (Bellow 1978:49) He had used every means such as principally indifference and neglect to avoid acknowledging the showdown and he still did not know what it was.

He had done a great deal to make things easier for himself, toning down, softening, looking aside. But the more he tried to subdue whatever it was that he resisted, the more it raged, and the moment was coming when his strength to resist would be at the end. He was nearly exhausted now.
(Bellow 1978:131)

Leventhal's lacking of confidence and security was reflected in his pushy and violent social self so that private self could be protected from the absurd world and people. Leventhal is jolted by this realization and becomes convinced that the “fault” may be within himself. “‘The showdown is coming’—guilty, for at heart he had no hope. Illness, madness, and death were forcing him to confront his fault.” (Bellow

1978:131) From time to time, his private self forced him to listen to his heart and to see what his real self is.

A talk with Williston helped Leventhal come to face the possibility that he cannot be completely free from blame for Allbee's dismissal. Williston told Leventhal Allbee was shaky at Dill's and he lost quite a few jobs because of his drunkenness and bad reputation. Rudiger claimed that Allbee brought Leventhal up to Dill's on purpose and admitted Allbee had stayed on the wagon, but Allbee was not fired because of his drunkenness. Williston told Leventhal not to let himself off so easily and during those days Leventhal was fighting everybody, worst with Rudiger. Indeed, during those months Leventhal had been "despondent and became quarrelsome once again, difficult, touchy, exaggerating, illogical, and overly familiar." (Bellow 1978:38-9) The interview was like a moment of inanity when Leventhal felt possessed by a force he could not control. He was enraged by Rudiger's attitude and words, so he fought back. This is his private self playing the role, for his existence is in danger. Leventhal himself admitted that Rudiger made him believe what he was afraid of. And he lived under the shadow of the blacklist and Rudiger's influence that he imagined, and turned to violence to arm himself.

Leventhal always tried to make people like him and stand on his side, as he wished Williston and Harkavy would be on his side in Allbee's affair. Harkavy told Leventhal:

We're not children. We're men of the world. It's almost a sin to be so innocent. You want the whole world to like you. There's bound to be some people who don't think well of you. Why, isn't it enough for you that some do? Why can't you accept the fact that others never will? Figure it on a percentile basis. Is it a life and death matter? We all have our faults and are what we are. I have to take myself as I am or push off. I am all I have in this world. And with all my shortcomings my life is precious to me. (Bellow 1978:76)

As a matter of fact, Leventhal knows his bad faith can not keep his self-esteem and place in the society, but he is unwilling to have other people catch his cowardice—he is afraid his wife will leave him, other people will blame him, he has to shoulder responsibilities and encounter the death. So he acts as a strong and indifferent man, aloof from others, from the society and his authentic self, but indeed he deadly thirsts for love, dignity, confidence, security and his authentic self. The social self exhausted Leventhal, for it is not a genuine self, and the private self is far away from being a real man for him. Both selves go extremes to some extent. Being a

true self is on the way to an ideal self, which Leventhal is willing to choose afterwards.

4.1.2 To Be Less or More than Human

"Farewell to the monsters, farewell to the saints. Farewell to pride. All that is left is men." —Jean-Paul Sartre (Greenberg & Koole & Pyszczynski 2006:217)

It is characteristic of Bellow to introduce an ideal father who tries to help the son adjust. Schlossberg is the spiritual guide who, in teaching Leventhal, offers Bellow's message underscoring the fundamental worth of life and the possibilities of genuine self-regard. This "large old man with a sturdy gray head, hulking shoulders, and a wide, worn face" compels Leventhal to be strongly drawn to him. "Schlossberg's criticisms of the declining standards of mass taste look forward to Bellow's much more sustained castigation of a puerile public consciousness in later novels such as *Herzog*, *Mr. Sammler's Planet* and *The Dean's December*." (Glenday 1990:47)

The sage Schlossberg's much-quoted speech about the modes of the human is brilliantly used not only as a value-stating passage, but as a means of exposing Leventhal's lack of such values.

It's bad to be less than human and it's bad to be more than human. What's more than human? Can a god have diseases? So this is a sick man's idea of God. Does a statue have wax in its ears? Naturally not. It doesn't sweat, either. Less than human is the other side of it. Good acting is what is exactly human... This is my whole idea. More than human, can you have any use for life? Less than human, you don't either. (Bellow 1978:112-113)

The attraction is increased by Schlossberg's sermon on the "exactly human" principle: People should be firm, and should not be humble one day and proud the next.

A man is nothing, his life is nothing. Or it is even lousy and cheap. But this your royal highness doesn't like, so he hokes it up. With what? With greatness and beauty. I am as sure about greatness and beauty as you are about black and white. If a human life is a great thing to me, it is a great thing... Choose dignity. Nobody knows enough to turn it down. (Bellow 1978:114)

Life is composed of choices and no man knows enough to reject dignity. Leventhal also feels a certain rapport, which he manages eventually to understand at levels deeper than intellect. And there comes a time when Leventhal's conscience beings to enforce upon him the hard truth that to be "human" is indeed to be

accountable in spite of many weaknesses. Humanity is measured by its capacity for genuine feeling.

Leventhal knew clearly that he was in bad faith which was less than human. Either finding the courage to meet the costs or giving way to dizziness is “less than human” and being “human” should be accountable in spite of many weaknesses. He disagreed about “less than human,” since it was done by so many. And “more than human” was for a much smaller number. Sartre describes the desire to be God as “the fundamental project of human reality,” (Sartre 2003:587) so it is too difficult for Leventhal to achieve either. Schlossberg said at party: “You want to be two people? More than human? Maybe it’s because you don’t know how to be one.” (Bellow 1978:208) “How to be one”—to be an authentic human being is what Leventhal searches for.

One of the important ways in which Bellow’s heroes show alienation is in their attempt to go beyond human life: to live detached from mortality and weakness. To be “human” is, throughout Bellow’s fiction, terrifying. In *The Victim*, Leventhal was struggling with the train and bus throughout the whole novel. On his way to humanity, he was always bumpy, which indicates that he is now less than human. In the first scene, Leventhal, riding on the Third Avenue train, almost missed his stop. He shouted angrily at the conductor, squeezed through the closing door and descended to the street, bitterly irritated. On his way to Mickey’s funeral, he almost missed his bus and he had to bang on the door as the bus pulled away from the curb. One of his unclear dreams told Leventhal that he was out of the door of humanity, though changes were given and are being given to him. He was in a railroad station, carrying a heavy suitcase, forcing his way with it through a crowd. He had missed the train, but the loud-speaker announced that a second section of it was leaving in three minutes. The gate was barely in sight and he could never reach it in time. He began to run and suddenly came to a barrier, pushing the suitcase aside. Two men stopped him. ““You can’t go through. This is an emergency; the train’s leaving.” Leventhal turned and a push on the shoulder sent him into an alley. His face was covered with tears.” (Bellow 1978:138-9) The tears show Leventhal’s sorrow and earnest quest for humanity and an authentic self. He could shake off Allbee’s accusation and the responsibility for Max’s family, but he knew it was animal-like and did not account for his understanding of humanity.

Leventhal understands he must accept the darkness within himself, or he could not fulfill Schlossberg's criteria. Leventhal's solemnly keeping the card symbolizes, however obliquely, that he will achieve the "exactly human," neither less than human nor more than human, as Sartre claimed in *The Devil and the Good Lord* to be a genuine man one has to farewell to the monsters and farewell to the saints, which means one should not underestimate or overestimate oneself to find the authentic self and his proper place.

4.2 Self-Analysis

"There isn't a man living who doesn't. All this business, 'Know thyself'! Everybody knows but nobody wants to admit. That's the thing." —Kirby Allbee (Bellow 1978:184)

Sartre's first novel *Nausea* explores ideas concerning noticing situations for what they are in absurdity, for man himself is small and powerless, thus man has a feeling of loss and helplessness. It is similar for Leventhal, who begins to study himself once again and tries to find out his own position in the society and his authentic self. Allbee acts as a reality teacher again—everybody knows to know himself, but nobody wants to admit. Leventhal's unwillingness to face what he knew inwardly drives him to search for the "reason why" Allbee has disrupted his life. He set out to discover the truth for himself, and he was amazed to discover certain facts he did not know before and had not taken into account: Allbee had a brilliant career, being considered intelligent, well read, charming, not a drunk, but a wonderful husband. He gradually came to acknowledge that he was somehow responsible for Allbee's decline: "He (Leventhal) saw that it was necessary for him to accept some of the blame for Allbee's comedown. He had contributed to it, though he had yet to decide to what extent he was to blame." (Bellow 1978:109)

Chester Eisinger sees the central problem of Asa Leventhal as that of "a man who falls short of love and understanding and humanity...his plight is a function of the anti-Semitism, real and imagined that he feels engulfs him." (Porter 1974:30) Only by acknowledging that Leventhal has such a counterpart can he come to terms with the evil in himself and thus consider the nature and extent of one's responsibility to another and become truly human. Man has freedom to choose his own way of life and

to achieve his authentic existence, creating their own meaning and morality without the help of any divine being.

4.2.1 Existence Preceding Essence

“The one thing that the Jew can never choose is not to be a Jew.” —Jean-Paul Sartre (Judaken 2006:137)

“Existence precedes essence” is the central slogan of existentialism. From an anthropological perspective, it means “attenuated instincts and enlarged neocortexes have left us with the highly adaptive capacity to simulate alternative goals and possible selves without having to allocate concrete resources to each.” (Greenberg & Koole & Pyszczynski 2004:182) To put it clearly, it indicates that people have no predetermined nature or range of choices, but are always free to choose, and thereby reconstitute themselves as different persons. From another perspective, as indeed existence precedes essence, one will never be able to explain one's action by reference to a given and specific human nature, and man is unable to explain his or her actions according to a special or fixed nature. As a result, there is no determinism—man is free, man is freedom. As a human, one cannot claim that our actions are determined by forces exterior to the self and one wishes fate will help man out, and man makes himself by the choice of his morality.

Bellow relates the fear of the past to a deterministic philosophy in *The Victim*. Allbee thrusts the philosophy of determinism at Leventhal: “You don't agree that people have a destiny forced on them? Well, that's ridiculous, because they do. And assume they're running their own show.” (Bellow 1978:62) He constantly repeats the idea of destiny, compelling Leventhal to think there was a general wrong. Both see currents drowning them—drowning everyone. Allbee offers himself as an example of victimized humanity in a deterministic world, merely another creature buffeted about by powerful external forces. People are creatures, so they should accept what God arranges. Leventhal believes everything is determined, and he is unable to go against. He thrusts responsibility onto fate, feeling relieved in being helpless and dumb.

The unclear dream also emphasized horrifying determinism. Pushing through the crowd, Leventhal had missed the train—the past overshadows the present! But he had another chance to board the train because a “second section of it” was due to leave in

three minutes, so Leventhal could still change things and impose order. But Leventhal was pushed into the alley, for two men told him that the gate was not open to the public and he could not go back the way he came, either. It seems that “missing the train” is irrevocable and he is doomed to be less than human. “I am a passenger, not a conductor” and “Destiny has arranged everything” has rooted deeply in Leventhal's mind. Absurd emotion made him believe he was manipulated by the invisible power like the black list.

Gradually, Leventhal and Allbee realized it was incorrect. There is no fixed nature and people can change and move forward on the way to perfection. As for Leventhal, he first of all exists, encounters himself, surges up in the world, and defines himself afterwards. Sartre addressed that the one thing that the Jew can never choose is not to be a Jew. He really exists in the despiritualized world, and he will not be anything until later, and then he will be what he makes of himself. He is not simply what he conceives himself to be, instead, he is what he wills. Allbee told Leventhal,

You see, you have to get yourself so that you can't stand to keep on in the old way. When you reach that stage, it takes a long time before you're ready to quit dodging. Meanwhile, the pain is horrible. We're mulish; that's why we have to take such a beating. When we can't stand another lick without dying of it, then we change. And some people never do. They stand there until the last lick falls and die like animals. Others have the strength to change long before. But repent means now, this minute and forever, without wasting any more time. (Bellow 1978:185)

Leventhal or anybody else is not doomed to be good or evil, which should be made by himself through his free choices, because there is no God who creates essence. He should not depressively wait for the arrangement, but change himself and take actions to create his own essence and future.

4.2.2 Humanity Destined to Be Free

“There is no difference between the being of man and his being free.”——Jean-Paul Sartre (Sartre 2003:553)

People deny, create and develop themselves endlessly because existence precedes essence. One should make choices among the possibilities given, and see through the potentials among the choices made in the past and make himself be the one he wants to be. In Sartre's opinion, man does not exist first in order to be free subsequently, for there is no difference between the being of man and his being of

freedom. The whole lifespan is a plan full of free choices so that people create themselves on the road to future. People must know that if they do not choose, that is still a choice, so why not take the initiative to make a choice and take the responsibility, which is the same problem that poses in front of Leventhal.

According to Sartre, man cannot have freedom without a context, and man can always rebel against this oppression, and struggle to interpret it in several different ways. Perhaps a good example of this is that even while we are being tortured, Sartre argues that man still has several different possible modes of actions open to him. "We may want to immerse ourselves completely in our pain and, indeed, consider ourselves as nothing but this pain. On the contrary, we may also attempt to ignore this pain and look defiantly into the eyes of our persecution." (Reynold 2006:56)

Definitely Leventhal is full of burdens, pressures, weights, seemingly having no freedom at all. "On some nights New York is as hot as Bangkok" (Bellow 1978:9) is the opening sentence, and it is a city as a tiny village surrounded on all sides by a jungle that threatens at any moment to spill over and engulf the precarious little human oasis at its center. Allbee appears and threatens him, "crowding" him. After his initial appearance, the clouds are "heavily suspended and slow." Under them Leventhal remembers his burden as a Jew, then in Rudiger's office—no place is free. Everything has oppressed him—the house, his sister-in-law Elena, the sick child. These various pressures—of the body, mind, and atmosphere—are found throughout Leventhal's adventures. He was always crushed, like Mary's letters in his hand. Perhaps the heaviest weight is found here: "He had the strange feeling that there was not a single part of him on which the whole world did not press with full weight, on his body, on his soul, pushing upward in his breast and downward in his bowels." (Bellow 1978:209) When pressure was put on him, Leventhal behaved like a fool, so he did not feel he had freedom.

It is through anguish that we become conscious of our freedom and it is precisely from the encounter with the chaotic world that a healthier self can be forged, for an analysis of the human condition reveals that we are able to control our own lives. We have the capacity to choose, and it is through our choices that we may construct an orderly and meaningful life for ourselves.

As he dwelt on it, the whole affair began to lose much of its importance. It was, after all, something he could either take seriously or dismiss as an annoyance. It was up to him...He had only to insist that he wasn't responsible and it disappeared altogether. (Bellow 1978:83)

Leventhal is aware of being free either to choose to help Allbee or not, or make Allbee one of his colleagues as Allbee wished. Even someone forced him to do something unpleasant he still had free choice—to rebel or to succumb. After realizing this, Leventhal told Allbee:

I feel too low to horse around with you, Allbee. I'm willing to help you out. I told you so already. But as far as having you in the same office where I could see you every day—no! As it is, there are plenty of people over there I don't care to see every day. You'd fit in with them better than I do. I don't have any choice about them. But I do about you. (Bellow 1978:158)

At that time, Leventhal thought he did not have any choice about people in the same office, but he chose to leave the company in the last chapter which indicates his better understanding of having free choices. It was his choice to rebel against Rudiger, and he should be responsible for Allbee. “He saw that it was necessary for him to accept some of the blame for Allbee’s comedown. He had contributed to it, though he yet to decide to what extent he was to blame.” (Bellow 1978:102) What extent his responsibility reached is another choice for him. In *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre concluded that “Man is condemned to be free carries the weight of the whole world on his shoulders; he is responsible for the world and for himself as a way of being.” (Reynold 2006:53)

On the other hand, Allbee still did not understand it was just his choice to help Leventhal so he should face the consequences.

You have a choice. I envy you, Leventhal. Because when it came to the important things in my life, I never had the chance to choose. I didn't want my wife to die. And if I could have chosen, she wouldn't have left me. I didn't choose to be stabbed in the back at Dill's either. (Bellow 1978:158)

And he also can choose to stand on his own feet or still be a drunkard, but it is he himself that chose to rely on his wife’s insurance money to idle away the time.

“Jewish philosophers believe that human beings are born with freedom of choice so that they have free will and sometimes choose to act in immoral ways to fulfill their own desires and intentions, but they will be responsible for their own good and evil.” (Zhou 2005:86) To choose between this or that is at the same time to affirm the value of what is chosen. Leventhal tries to face the worst and cast it off, tries to throw off the burdens of his own past which prevent him from becoming human. He needs to smash the burdens of his life and to break free of his deceptions and miseries. The responsibility to choose, then, is inescapable and heavy, but the exercise of that responsibility is the pathway to freedom and wholeness. As Allbee said it is a blessing,

people have the chance to make a choice and having a few choices in between makes people seem less of an accident to themselves. Allbee failed to grasp that human beings are condemned to be free and destiny is just in people's own hand, but Leventhal managed and grasped it, so his self-affirmation reached.

Chapter Five Leventhal's Affirmation

"To dare is to lose one's footing momentarily. / Not to dare is to lose oneself."
—Søren Kierkegaard (Hankiss 2006:87)

Bellow's heroes are flawed individuals, social, psychological, and emotional cripples, who attempt, through the course of the novel, to alleviate their conditions. These conditions make them human and enable them to struggle for the survival and meaningful existence. *The Victim* tells the tale of a modern man Leventhal in America, his terror in the face of dissolving reasons, his refusal to devalue the self even in the midst of the pressure of public life, his persistent will to alter his destiny, his desire to reaffirm the values of community in an age where loyalties and allegiances to life are fickle.

Kierkegaard thought moral people dare not to lose themselves forever in the absurd world. Leventhal himself felt that he ought to beware of countering absurdity with absurdity and madness with madness, for his own sake. Coming out of self-alienation, introspecting himself and getting self-awareness, he achieves a larger view of himself and his world, a more balanced humanity. Because actions are based on inadequate knowledge of their possible results, the world is absurd and man is, as Sartre said, condemned to freedom. Leventhal is willing to accept some responsibilities for Allbee's plight, but he is not willing to admit any deliberate guilt in the matter, for he is, after all an imperfect and limited creature. "He (Leventhal) accepts his own limitations, and he learns to strike a balance between what he owes to himself and what he owes to others." (Porter 1974:41) Benjamin Franklin thinks that all people possess an essential nature of being self-assured, self-conscious, and self-made. And Sartre defined self-affirmation as "affirmation of one's essential being, and the knowledge of one's essential being is mediated through reason, the power of the soul to have adequate ideas." (Webber 2009:21) Leventhal affirms himself, his authentic being, his dignity, his love and responsibility. Saying goodbye to determinism, Leventhal becomes a new man, leading a different life.

5.1 Allegiance to Life

“The way in which a man accepts his fate and all the suffering it entails...gives him ample opportunity...to add a deeper meaning to his life.” —Viktor Frankl (Greenberg & Koole & Pyszczynski 2004:217)

Bellow's heroes are always bent on the search for the self before they realize the necessity of coming back from a concern with the self to an involvement in the community in the end, for the state of isolation and dissociation from the world causes pain and loss. At the core of *The Victim* there is also a concern for human beings, a concern which is evident especially in the transformation of Leventhal who goes beyond the ideal construction invented by himself and by his reality instructor to come to terms with the reality and recognize his significance. His self-construction is the way to regain his dignity and the process to reintegrate himself to the society. “Human worth, Asa (Leventhal) discovers through his contacts with family and friends, is a quality of life dependent on acknowledging who you are as well as who you are not.”(Braham 1984:22)

Austrian existentialist Viktor Frankl (1905-1997) once in his masterpiece *Man's Search for Meaning* (1959) told people that if one accepts all the suffering that the life entails, he gains more opportunities to add a deeper meaning to life. Giving up his utopian quest for an unattainable life and his cowardice in facing the reality, Leventhal begins to understand his own creatureliness by experiencing the full range of noble and mean emotions and drives that go away in the process of being a man. Neither as a creature nor as God, to be responsible for himself and others is an essential step in Leventhal's acceptance of his humanity and prepares himself to accept and affirm the existence of others in its full complexity and mystery.

5.1.1 Reintegration into the Society

“What is man when no longer connected with society or when he finds himself surrounded by a convulsed and a half-dissolved one? He cannot live in solitude; he must belong to some community bound by some ties, however, imperfect.”—J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur. (Alkana 1997:5)

Appearing after Hitler's attempted obliteration of humanism, Bellow's works strive to reestablish the foundations of a society by reaffirming the world's need for

morality, for the return to the humanism of Judaism. In the Jewish tradition, sages tell "Do not separate thyself from the community. If I am not for myself who will be?" They caution against selfishness with the conclusion of the saying, "And if I am only for myself what am I?" (Goldman 1983:13) Sages hold the belief that the individual should achieve the values and meaning of existence in the community with a sense of communal involvement and of responsibility for one's free choice. Solitude is not a proper condition for man, but an anathema to them. Those laws decree social responsibility, and also state that one must be concerned with his or her own dignity. The French-American writer Michel Guillaume Jean de Crèvecoeur thinks Man cannot live in solitude and must belong to some community bound by some ties. Consequently, Bellow's novels end with the hero's reintegration, happily, into the society. Dissatisfied with himself and his situation, Leventhal in *The Victim* obsessively edges out of an insulted world of the self into a common world and struggles to bridge the gap between the self and the reality.

Several years later, Leventhal has been a successful editor of *Antique Horizons*, a prestigious national magazine. Characteristically, Mr. Beard at first declined to meet the offer and then went two hundred dollars higher, but Leventhal left him, for now Leventhal is a relaxed, better-adjusted man, for "something recalcitrant" seems to have left him. "He was not exactly affable, but his obstinately unrevealing expression had softened. His face was paler and there were some grey areas in his hair, in spite of which he looked years younger. (Bellow 1978:230) As time went on, Leventhal felt "as though that were true work instead of a delaying maze to be gone through daily in a misery so habitual that one became absent-minded about it." (Bellow 1978:231) He has found his place and no longer feels that he "got away with it," his guilty and the accompanying sense of infringement.

"Self-affirmation within a group includes the courage to accept guilt and its consequences as public guilt, whether one is oneself responsible or whether somebody else is." (Webber 2009:73) Man is essentially a social being: to be a human being means to be with other human beings, and to be in an authentic way means to be in an authentic way with others.

Sartre's "Hell is other people!" is usually misunderstood. It is usually taken to express a pessimistic account of interpersonal and social relations as necessarily conflictual and one must inevitably struggle to dominate one another. This is not, in fact, Sartre's view. "His discussion of relations between people in *Being and*

Nothingness is rather concerned with the way in which bad faith distorts our interactions with one another. He is attempting to identify the underlying cause of interpersonal and social problems.” (Webber 2005:118) What Sartre aims to express is to prefer authenticity to bad faith. People in bad faith can only regard others as hell and conflicts are inevitable. Leventhal recognizes his essential role in the society where he feels victimized, and he has yet to realize, and come to terms with, victimization as an ineluctable phenomenon of life. He comes out of bad faith and chooses authenticity, so people are no longer hell for him. “It is true that in the community, institutions fail one and the dishonesty and wickedness of men in action debase one. So to come back to the community means that there should be fulfillment of a meaningful relationship with fellow beings.” (Zhou 2005:133)

From being down-and-out to a small potato and to a truly successful editor, Leventhal is dependent on his efforts to reintegrate into the society and to readjust relationships with others rather than sheer luck, and he comes to recognize a moral responsibility for others and himself.

5.1.2 Responsibility for Others

“We are responsible for everything except for the fact that we are responsible for everything.” —Jean-Paul Sartre (Sartre 2003:554)

When we say that man is responsible for himself, we do not mean that he is responsible only for his own individuality, but that he is responsible for others. Sartre always insists that we are responsible for everything except for the fact that we are responsible for everything. Thus, Sartre rejects what he calls “deterministic excuses” and claims that all people must take responsibility for their behavior. By caring about the people whom he fictionalizes, Bellow manifests his belief in the existence of others and constitutes the writer’s commitment to life. Individuals must accept the full responsibility for their own behavior, no matter how difficult it is. If an individual is to live meaningfully and authentically, he or she must become fully aware of the true character of the human situation and bravely accept it.

What Leventhal learns (sometimes merely confirms his own thoughts) affects his evaluation of himself and his final treatment of Allbee. Allbee is a victim of his own inadequacies and circumstances rather than any malicious action on Leventhal’s part.

Leventhal accepts his responsibility, and he apologizes for his past rudeness and comes close to ask Allbee's forgiveness. By helping Allbee despite his anti-Semitism, Leventhal dramatically undermines the grounds of Allbee's charges and frees himself further from guilt over his relative success and security. Leventhal is cognizant of his duty to his family and friends. His motives and actions are fully explored, completely realistic, and wholly human.

Out of the Mickey crisis a different Leventhal emerges, one who is capable of shedding tears, sharing love, and shouldering up the sense of responsibility. He is now aware of the inexplicable darkness that lodges deep within him and affects his judgment. Sartre defines angst and despair as the emotions people feel once they come to realize that they are responsible for all of their actions, and emphasizes that the action and human responsibility as important to meaningful human existence. Leventhal understands his confused view of others is the result of some flaw, an inner darkness, within himself. He understood Elena was burdened with the care of the children, and Max worked hard just for a better life for his family, and Elena's mother helped the family a lot when Mickey was ill and afterwards died. They were shouldering their respective responsibilities in their own ways.

After being the surrogate father for Mickey and Philip, Leventhal could be a responsible father to his own child. The ending of *The Victim* shows Leventhal escorting his pregnant wife to the theater. His new identification, his fresh sense of himself, the moral strength that he has gained through his combat with Allbee and contact with Max's family, offers an added dimension to his authentic being.

5.2 Authentic Being

"Man, without the help of the Eternal or of rationalistic thought, can create, all by himself, his own values." —Albert Camus (Galloway 1970:8)

"Drifting along, mostly alone, in a world that is so dehumanized, despiritualized and morally divided, the Bellow heroes often strive to retain their selfhood, personal identity and integrity." (Quayum 2004:6) Conscience and guilt are the bases that allow people to find their authentic selves, bearing in mind that this self is not a static, pre-given identity of any sort. Camus admits man can create his own values all by himself. In *The Victim* "absurd" becomes a new and extreme articulation of the

necessity of man's appealing to himself as a source of values, and to embrace life rather than to reject it, with the belief that through this embrace man can arrive at the joy of truth.

Leventhal was plunged by the pressure of concrete circumstances, by the wreckage of hope and the bitter taste in his own life of inauthenticity. Kierkegaard's injunction to "become that self which one truly is" implies that "a person might become someone other than who one really is, or develop a false self which does not authentically represent the person." (Judaken 2006:484) Authentic being is the true existence of the actions and thoughts of the human being, and the desire is innate for every man to have a unique and authentic self to live a good and significant life. By the end of the novel Leventhal is much more confident and at ease with himself. Having the opportunity to justify his feelings of guilt and persecution by projecting onto others, Leventhal seems to be able to overcome his respective feelings of paranoia and accept himself. He wants to be assured of his own existence, questing for the right place for a good man to live and insisting their philosophy on authentic being in view of humanity.

5.2.1 Regaining Dignity and Love

"Life does hold promise, nonetheless, in the sense of opportunity, potential meaningfulness, and love is its greatest possibility." —Asa Leventhal (Bellow 1978:46)

"He (Bellow) has two larger concerns: freedom and love. To him, freedom is the interplay of what is given and what is made in the life of man; love is the interplay between one's identity and his completion in others." (Tong 2008:308) In developing and communicating with the world and personal values he so cherishes, Bellow believes that literature and art play a crucial and indispensable role. Bellow's emphasis on the manifestation of love is of particular significance, for that hero's great concern has been either with learning how to love or with finding an environment in which love can be constructively expressed.

Love in itself affirms the value of human beings, so Bellow sorrows over a world from which nobility, greatness and dignity seem to be missing, so he wishes to reveal the true beauty and dignity of the human being, but this beauty and dignity can be

realized only by admitting that you are merely human, by accepting rather than blaming yourself and others, by loving rather than hating yourself and others.

It sets off a long period of painful introspection for Leventhal about his responsibility to others and a dawning awareness of his need to develop a more peaceful and open-minded view of other people. Leventhal apprehended life does hold promise and love is its greatest possibility. In incremental steps he has come to accept Allbee's inexplicable claim upon him, recognizing that he has refused to allow his knowledge of the evil within. He looked after sick Mickey and took Philip to Manhattan to have a good time. He has apologized for misjudging Elena and her mother. Leventhal understood Elena did not send Mickey to hospital just for better care of Mickey and she did not declare Leventhal to be at fault. He observed that the old woman's ankles, above her unfashionable black shoes, were swollen—probably from walking the long hospital corridors. Her love and concern for the child made Leventhal believe he wronged her as well. He has come to love and respect his brother, and the estrangement melted in his embrace with Max. He even apologized silently to Mrs. Nunez, for he mistook the whore Allbee took home for her. He put down the doubt deep in his heart and call Mary back and Mary's later pregnancy gave the promise of a new life. In the last chapter, although he did not want to watch the play, but Mary wanted, so he accompanied her on such a hot night. Being a loving husband and a qualified father, Leventhal welcomed his new life, full of love.

If human life is perceived by the "heart rather than the eye," as "a great thing", and then "it is a great thing," as Schlossberg claimed. From the affirmation of value—the belief in greatness and beauty, human truth is created. If people do not believe in themselves, and know themselves capable of greatness, they can never achieve it. Leventhal's leaving for *Antique Horizons* indicates he is no longer a small potato at the mercy of Mr. Beard and he regains his dignity. To be human, one must think and feel, but the controlling factor at all times, must be one's own dignity. It is also the solution to the dilemma of how a good man should live. Leventhal begins to love himself and love others. "It ends in beholding in the hero (Leventhal) to be himself a father: a giver, not a receiver; a source, not a supplicant." (Braham 1984:59)

5.2.2 Farewell to Determinism

"It is therefore senseless to think of complaining since nothing foreign has decided what we feel, what we live, or what we are." —Jean-Paul Sartre (Sartre 2003:554)

Existentialism, in its rejection to all forms of determination, in its recognition of the uniqueness and importance of the individual, in its insistence on the freedom and responsibility of human action, and in its call to the authentic life, asserts the meaning of human life in an indifferent universe. Determinism is the doctrine that every event has a cause. "For every event, there is some antecedent state, related in such a way that it would break a law of nature for this antecedent state to exist yet the event not to happen." (Blackburn 2000:102) The past events have assumed overwhelming importance, which destroys the future of people believing in determinism.

Leventhal thought he remained to be passengers, not even knowing who ran things. It is necessary for him first of all to recognize that there may be distortions in his own vision, and he may then be able to take control of his own destiny. Sartre in *Being and Nothingness* affirms that it is meaningless to think of complaining because nothing foreign is able to decide what we feel, what we live, or what we are. There is no God, nor fate, to guide ourselves. In the novel's closing chapter, Allbee and Leventhal's talk is provoking and enlightening. Allbee told Leventhal,

"I'm on the train." (Allbee)

"A conductor?" (Leventhal)

"Conductor, hell! I'm just a passenger. I'm not the type that runs things. I never could be. I realized that long ago. I'm the type that comes to terms with whoever runs things. What do I care? The world wasn't made exactly for me. What am I going to do about it?" (Allbee)

"Wait a minute, what's your idea of who runs things?" (Leventhal) (Bellow 1978:238)

In a world in which the idea of "who runs things" is no reply, the only course left superficially is "to come to terms with" one another, to accept their particular destiny within the general framework of human destiny, to become conscious of the sense of profound responsibility that the interdependence of freedom confers upon them. Recognition of his common origin and mutual "destination" is what finally inspires Leventhal to affirm, and try to fulfill, the "promise" of life—by being, in Schlossberg's terms, "exactly human." Leventhal finally acknowledges being his own mysterious conviction. As Allbee says, apologizing for having attempted to kill them

both, “When you turn against yourself, nobody else means anything to you either.” (Bellow 1978:239) Conversely, accepting yourself, you can accept other people. People are the only conductor of their own destiny, which is the reply.

Bellow suggests that we must accept the past that controls us—but we should come to terms with it by seizing the day, so as to recover our freedom and future. For Leventhal, the miserable past has gone away, determinism rings down the curtain, and a rosy picture is open before him.

Chapter Six Conclusion

Like many other great American writers, Saul Bellow, as a moralist, has essentially one story to tell—the story of a man dangling between the ideal world and absurd world, between social self and private self, ideas, commitments, and value systems. Bellow has repeatedly examined the dehumanized, despiritualized and death-ridden state of the modern man. “He (Bellow) has emphasized a moral crisis that he believes is responsible for an ongoing dichotomy, disunity and dismemberment in the twentieth-century consciousness.” (Quayum 2004:4) Bellow’s works portray the dilemma of a modern hero caught in a history that he must acknowledge, weighted by fears and anxieties he must quell by confrontation rather than evasion, and rooted in a time and place that he is required both to accept and to redeem. Bellow does not avoid conditions of alienation, despair and anxiety, for he believes that a man should at least have sufficient power to overcome ignominy and to complete his own life and he believes in the universality of a unitary self. He is always struggling with the same question: what does it mean to be fully human? Bellow’s answer to that question reveals an attitude which is positive, affirmative, and optimistic, as his novels deal with freedom of choice, social responsibility, brotherly love, the uniqueness of the individual, and the dignity of man.

The Victim is a novel about the self’s trial, about a man’s gradual awakening and adjustment. Leventhal has stumbled into a dark and airless world—where the whole world go against him, where confidence is broken by plies of hardship and little disappointments, where nerves are wrecked by the cheating and estrangement of relatives and friends, where loneliness and low self-esteem prop up because of abandonment, and where the spirit is smothered by all the promises made and found impossible to fulfill. His family, his early hard times and his Jewishness lead to his insecurity, indifference, self-deception and self-hatred. He used to blame others and escape the responsibilities, but gradually, he looks into himself. He makes peace with his heritage and, as the novel ends, begins a lineage of his own and obtains a new awareness of what it means to be himself and real human being. Through self-alienation, self-awakening and self-affirmation, he finds the meaning of being a true human. Leventhal is able to find his place, playing his social role perfectly and being an authentic self, casting off his self-imposed burdens by learning to accept

himself and others, by learning to have an open heart. At last, he bids farewell with determinism and becomes a responsible person with dignity and love.

Asa Leventhal is ordinary enough to be a type of everyman. The problem that confronts him corresponds precisely to the general and widespread crisis that threatens man today. Unrooted from the absurd world and alienated self, the individual can no longer derive meaning from a social structure that is indifferent to him and suppresses human values. For Bellow, human beings in the modern society are not completely devalued, but “somewhere between a false greatness and false insignificance,” and “not gods, not beasts, but savages of somewhat damaged but not extinguished nobility.”(Kulshrestha 1980:37) People are condemned to be free, and it is their free choice to be what kind of person, to play what kind of role, to be less or more than human. Bellow firmly believes people should not live in a depressed atmosphere and human beings can have a promising future after having a better understanding of themselves and others. Pointing out what we should do, Bellow goes beyond absurdity, so he is undoubtedly a significant figure in the landscape of twentieth-century American literature.

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硕士期间发表的论文及参与的项目

一：发表论文

1. 《〈伊芙琳〉的原型批评解读》发表于2009年第12期《青年科学》;
2. 《〈受害者〉中的自我和他我关系》发表于2009年第11期《上海师范大学学报（增刊）》

二：参与的项目