

**The Context of Events in Saul Bellow's The Victim**

**Andras P. Ungar**

**A Thesis  
in  
The Department  
of  
English**

**Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
for the Degree of Master of Arts at  
Concordia University  
Montréal, Québec, Canada**

**February 1985**

**© Andras P. Ungar, 1985**

ABSTRACT

The Context of Events in Saul Bellow's The Victim.

Andras P. Ungar

This thesis is a study of the formal constraints on narrative in Saul Bellow's second novel, The Victim.

Dangling Man, Bellow's first novel, had concluded with a jarring lacuna: Joseph discovered that there was no necessary connection between the ideals and his actions or his perceptions and the world. The tightly plotted realistic narrative of The Victim incorporates this radical skepticism.

From the outset, the symbolism of the novel confines the narrative to the play of appearances, denying it access to definitions of substance in the name of an unanalyzable mystery. The central relationship of Asa Leventhal and Kirby Allbee, a Jew

and an anti-Semite, recapitulates the movement of the narrative: through a series of spontaneous phenomenological intrusions on Allbee's separate being, Asa nearly grasps his distinctness and its mode of expressing the common human substance. The pressure of events prevents this. The meaning of the encounter between Asa Leventhal and Allbee remains unclear.

The Victim also takes up the question whether subjective representations can adequately express events through the imagery of the theater. Two choric alternatives are presented: the high-minded Schlossberg who represents tragedy, and the Harkavys who represent comedy. Neither mode of synthesizing experience can resolve Asa's difficulties. Until the epilogue, he lives in fear of a formless something which is symbolized by drowning. When his fear does diminish, there is no clear moral to be drawn. Neither tragedy nor comedy fits the pattern of his experience. The role of an unwilling member of the audience is the closest image the theater can provide. The manner in which the theater imagery figures in the narrative sustains the initial epistemological reservations of The Victim.

Table of Contents

Chapter 1	1
Chapter 2	23
Chapter 3	78
Bibliography	113

## Chapter 1

There is a tendency in Bellow criticism to group his first two novels, Dangling Man and The Victim, and to contrast them with his later work. This is a separation Bellow himself has endorsed, observing that his later work is related to the impulse of his talent differently from the earlier.

"I think when I wrote those early books I was timid. I still felt the incredible effrontery of announcing myself to the world (in part I mean the WASP world) as a writer and an artist. I had to touch a great many bases, demonstrate my abilities, pay my respects to formal requirements...When I began to write Augie March. [The Adventures of Augie March] I took off many of these restraints. I think I...went too far, but I was feeling the excitement of discovery." (1)

Comparing Dangling Man and The Victim to Augie March, Bellow has belittled the two earlier books as fruits of "a borrowed sensibility" and as too concerned "with formalities...[and] the desire to be correct." (2)

What do these "formalities" consist of? How do they shape the novels? What is it about their pre-occupation

with form that Bellow later thought alien? These questions, I think inevitably arise from Bellow's caveats and disclaimers.

In this paper I look at the formative aesthetic of The Victim, the principles governing the structure which Bellow later found objectionable.

The project suggested itself to me because of the contrast between Bellow's view of the novel and the opinions of some very good readers. Writing in 1964, seventeen years after its first publication, V.S. Pritchett called The Victim "the best novel to come out of American...or England -- for a generation." (3) Karl Miller, in a 1965 number of the New Statesman, wrote that it was "Bellow's most rewarding" work (4); Elizabeth Hardwick commended its "thorough and exquisite honesty" (5); Joseph Baumbach considered it "the best of our nightmare novels" (6); Robert Penn Warren judged it as "a truly distinguished achievement" (7). In order to be clear about our response to the book we must, I think, account for the characteristics of the novel Bellow thought negative but which other readers clearly have not felt detracted from the novel's impact.

In this chapter, I am concerned with the starting point or the design which Bellow later found too formalistic, with what may be called the epistemological stance of the narrative. To locate this point I examine the modulation of concern with form which connects The Victim and Dangling Man.

The earlier novel consists of the diary entries of a young man, known to the reader only as Joseph, who is waiting for induction into the army. In anticipation, he has quit his job and, momentarily, is without responsibilities: he belongs neither to the civilian world, nor to the world of the military -- he "dangles".

After some months, he feels that his situation is becoming desperate. Contrary to his original expectation, he has not been able to profit from his windfall of provisional freedom. He has not, as he had first hoped, been at work on "several essays, mainly biographical, on the philosophers of the Enlightenment." (8) Instead of days filled with contemplation and study, he discovers he is consumed by petty aggravations, most of them the direct result of his loss of social identity. He is bothered by the habits of a neighbour in the rooming house. He suffers

slights from his wife's bank manager. His adolescent niece insults him. He has not got the inner resources to keep to his original purpose. His reading is aimless. He sits in his room

...anticipating the minor crises of the day, the maid's knock, the appearance of the postman, programs on the radio and the sure, cyclical distress of certain thoughts. (9)

He cannot integrate what he daily learns about himself with his original beliefs: the petulant, inconsistent, aggressive and finally nihilistic aspects of himself which events uncover is something he is not prepared for.

Bellow defines this breakdown of Joseph's personality most clearly in the diary entries describing the conversations with Tu As Raison Aussi, a literary device of Joseph's invention which permits him to continue "talking" to some one once the general mobilization and his own truculence have isolated him from all his friends.

In the dialogue with Tu As Raison Aussi the relativistic implications of Joseph's discovery that his ideals do not mean anything to him multiply. The



self is a fiction only, he concludes: an "ideal construction" that focuses human energies but has no independent ontological basis.

"Do you want one of those constructions, Joseph?"

"Doesn't it seem that we need them?"

"I don't know."

"Can't you get along without them?"

"If you see it that way."

"Apparently we need to give ourselves some exclusive focus, passionate and engulfing."

"One might say that."

"But what of the gap between the ideal construction and the real world, the truth?"

"Yes..."

"How are they related?"

"An interesting problem."

"Then there's this: the obsession exhausts the man. It can become his enemy. It often does."

"H'm."

"What do you say to all this?"

"What do I say?"

"Yes, what do you think? You just sit there, looking at the ceiling, and giving equivocal answers."

"I haven't answered. I'm not supposed to give answers."

"No. What an inoffensive career you've chosen."

"You're forgetting to be reasonable."

"Reasonable! Go on, you make me sick. The sight of you makes me sick. You make me queasy at the stomach with your suave little, false little looks."

"Joseph, look here...!"

"Oh, get out. Get out of here. You're two-faced. You're not to be trusted, you damned diplomat, you cheat!" Furious, I flung a handful of orange peel at him, and he fled the room. (10)

This dismissal shows Joseph at his most sardonic.

When Reason proves capricious, and, finally, sterile, he chases it from the stage. His failure to reason through to clarity is presented as pure farce. But there are, he discovers, inevitable consequences, from the abdication of Reason. If the human self is a mere fiction, an "obsession" which reflection cannot render more meaningful, it follows that other postulates of common sense are open to doubt. All epistemological categories may prove arbitrary. There may be no ontological basis for any beliefs. In the penultimate diary entry this realization overpowers him. The sudden, unmediated experience of reality is comparable to the radical disjunctions of perception which plague the hero of Jean-Paul Sartre's novel La Nausée, Roguentin. (11) Joseph's description reads as follows:

"When my father visited yesterday, I went upstairs to my old room...it was suddenly given me to experience one of those consummating glimpses that come to all of us periodically. The room, delusively, dwindled and became a tiny square, swiftly drawn back, myself and all the objects growing smaller. This was not just a visual trick. I understood it to be a revelation of the ephemeral agreements by which we live and pace ourselves...This place had great personal significance for me. But it was not here thirty years ago. Birds flew through this space. Such reality, I thought, is actually very dangerous, very treacherous. It should not be trusted...[There] was an element of treason to common sense in the very

objects of common sense...no trusting them, save through wide agreement...[I saw] that my separation from such agreement had brought me perilously far from the necessary trust, auxilliary to all sanity." (12)

The hero of La Nausée faced with the contingency of existence decides that by writing a traditional novel, by ordering his experience as though it were "une aventure" (13) he might, in retrospect perhaps, be able to tolerate the overfull randomness that he cannot face in the present.

"...il viendrait bien un moment où le livre serait écrit, se fait derrière moi et je pense qu'un peu de clarté tomberait sur mon passé. Alors, peut-être je pourrais, à travers lui, me rappeler ma vie sans répugnance. Peut-être qu'un jour, en pensant précisément à cette heure-ci, à cette heure morne où j'attends, le dos rond, qu'il soit temps de monter dans le train, peut-être qu je sentirais mon coeur battre plus vite et que je dirais: "C'est ce jour-là, à cette heure-là que tout a commencé." (14)

This is a recognition that even if rationality is considered to lead to a consolation and not to truth, even in this role it has a recognizable function in human experience. But Joséph has no rational plan to recover his self. (15) He joins the army because he cannot imagine an alternative, however provisional, to chaos. He welcomes the mere appearance of order in a

mood we have to think of as very un-Bellovian, a mood of despairing irony.

I am no longer to be held accountable for myself: I am grateful for that. I am in other hands, relieved of self-determination, freedom canceled.

Hurray for regular hours!

And for the supervision of the spirit!

Long live regimentation! (16)

The reviewers of Dangling Man had centered on the question whether Bellow the artist had arrived at an aesthetic solution to the problems present in his fiction that is more satisfying than his protagonist's failure to make sense of the experience. The consensus was that Bellow had not managed to do this. Pointing to the digressive journal form of the novel, Mark Schorer in Kenyon Review reminded its author that "form has a creative...not merely a reflexive function", noting that the material is "raw...lumpish and unrefined...the terms of fiction not wholly achieved." (17) Delmore Schwartz at Partisan Review, in a more appreciative review, observed that the design of the novel obliged Bellow to forego a number of important "dramatic possibilities", among them Joseph's relationship with his wife, and that the book was "too...linear in movement and...too small in orbit." (18) Finally, in a

caustic review in The Nation, Diana Trilling dismissed Bellow's effort by declaring herself "deeply opposed to novels of sterility..., to small novels of sterility."  
(19)

In his next novel, Bellow sought, I think, to show that his talent did not suffer from any such permanent handicap. The Victim achieves a synthesis of narrative elements that contrasts sharply with the composition of Dangling Man and is striking enough to have drawn widespread comment. David Galloway has made the novel the one exception to his charge that Bellow's works rely on rhetoric, not on narrative vigour. (20) Tony Tanner has made it the one exception to his observation that Bellow's novels "lack the spine of plot." (21) Joseph Baumbach considers it to be "well-made in the Jamesian sense (22); Frederick V. Hoffman sees "every detail balanced against every other" (23); John V. Clayton considers it Bellow's one "dramatic plot" (24); Ralph Freedman has characterized the balance in the narrative as one wherein, "[c]ausality is matched by self-definition...the environment [serving both] as an index for characters' attitudes...and as an index for the definition of external life." (24); Howard Harper Jr. believes that the novel "may be read either as realism or as symbolism...with each level strengthened

and in no way twisted by the other" (26); M. Gibert Porter distinguishes "a kind of epiphenomenal progression from the realistic to the symbolic...like a little boy on the sidewalk and his elongated shadow..." (27)

This excess of praise should make us pause. What has happened to the skepticism and the profoundly anti-rational conclusions of Dangling Man? For H. Porter Abbott these had amounted to an implicit confession that Bellow "[could not] be a novelist". (28) Has Bellow merely suspended these doubts or has he resolved Dangling Man's explicitly discussed difficulties with the ontological integrity of the world and the self? What form have these quandaries found in a novel which respects the conventions of narrative realism, the adequacy of the principles of possibility, verisimilitude and causality? How has Bellow dealt with those aspects of his vision which Ihab Hassan has called "meta-social" (29)? What form does the concern which C. Kulshresta deemed Platonist, and which he traced through novels as various as Dangling Man, Herzog, Mr. Sammler's Planet and Humboldt's Gift, take in The Victim? (30)

An answer would be easier if all careful readers

agreed that The Victim marks just such a high-point of achievement in Bellow's career. This is not the case. Apart from Bellow himself, several very good readers have reservations about the way the novel marries theme and plot. Brigitte Scheer-Schazler (31) and Keith Michael Opdahl perceive the movement in all of Bellow's novels to be identical: the narrative in the novels, The Victim included, moves away from plot and toward the self-justification of the protagonist "in a universal principle or moral order". (32) Norman Podhoretz believes that in The Victim Bellow "sacrificed realistic narrative" to "the evocation of a nerve-pulling anxiety never adequately defined...." (33) Irving Howe in a remark on which he has not unfortunately expanded alludes to the problematic texture of the novel by characterizing it as "...almost a fable...[about] the difficulties of attempting a secure moral judgement". (34)

The difference of opinion among critics testifies to the concentration Bellow required to tame the enduring anti-realistic bent of his genius and fuse perceptions which denied the adequacy of narrative realism to render them. Because of this effort, the composition of The Victim was very different from Dangling Man's. Bellow had written his first novel

quickly. The Victim required long labour: he "tried to make it letter-perfect" on a "Flaubertian" standard. (35) Two years before the novel went to press, he had already completed two drafts, and during this period he published nothing else. The "terms of fiction", to borrow Mark Schurer's phrase, are here fully addressed.

What does this synthesis consist of? How are the formal difficulties, the legacy of Joseph's failure to see continuity in experience, preserved in the form of the later novel? The formal problem The Victim centers on derives, I believe, from Joseph's failure. Bellow's great difficulties with the novel's composition stemmed from his having decided to present a realistically rendered, causally linked action when his metaphysics already indicated a more equivocal sense of the world.

The difficulty of accounting for experience without ambiguity is already referred to in the novel's title. Who is the victim? Does Kirby Allbee "qualify" for the role? Pleading in his favour, one can cite his social marginalization, his victimization by alcohol, his bad luck as shown in his firing by his employer, Rudiger, and by the accidental death of his wife from whom he had separated after the wreck of his career. In the broadest sense, Allbee believes himself to be a victim



of the historical shift of influence from white Protestant Americans to the benefit of immigrant groups, such as Jews. His failure to be embarrassed by the Holocaust murders -- recent news when Bellow worked on the novel and also in relation to the events of the narrative -- prejudices the reader against accepting his plea for sympathy, however. The reader can finally accept him as a victim only in the sense that we are all victims of the circumstances which define us and which determine our fate without our having originated them.

Should we take Asa for the victim? Asa's claim is based on his role as the novel's protagonist; on his sense of exclusion and victimization as a Jew; on his role as the hopeless son of a "harsh and selfish" father (36); on his daily sense of persecution at his place of work; on his oppression by family cares: good reasons all of them -- and it is Allbee after all, who comes to badger him with his needs and his obsessions. Asa's claim goes deeper than objective circumstances. It is the settled conviction that life has loaded dice against him which makes him a victim. He cannot imagine any other fate. And the long history of Jewish victimization including its recent climax in Europe, argues with him. So potent is the case, that it seems

perverse to insist that Asa's sense of himself is fallacious.

This, however, is just the line that Bellow's plot argues. Through "the ironic revelation of Leventhal's fault", (37) we are led to question the adequacy of Asa's imagination of his situation, which prima facie had seemed to be validated by our moral pre-disposition in favour of the Holocaust victims. Asa is not simply a victim, nor simply a victimizer; nor is Albee easily to be slotted. It is in the nature of reality, the plot seems to be saying, to lead us beyond easy categories of judgement even when these seem vouchsafed by historical experience.

The Victim presents a bifurcated, essentially equivocal view of the relationship between consciousness and reality, the problem, in broadest terms, of appearance and reality. This theme is sounded in the novel's first paragraph. The dominant figure in the passage is the simile. Observe how the individuality of the terms becomes progressively less clearly defined through the series of comparisons.

On some nights New York is as hot as Bangkok. The whole continent seems to have moved from its place and slid

nearer the equator, the bitter gray Atlantic to have become green and tropical, and the people thronging the streets, barbaric fellahin among the stupendous monuments of their mystery, the lights of which, a dazing profusion, climb upward endlessly into the heat of the sky. (38)

The hot New York night recalls the heat in Bangkok: both terms of the comparison are specific. The continent "seems to have moved...nearer the equator" and the Atlantic seems to have been transformed. The comparisons are open-ended. The impressions they leave are diffuse. The specific objects to which the continent and the Atlantic are compared are suggested, rather than named. The direction the imagination should follow seems, at first, to depend on the idea of New York's being like Bangkok, but the comparison of the people of New York to "barbaric fellahin, shatters this hypothesis. For "Bangkok has no fellahin, and Baghdad no greenery", as Russell Baker, erroneously concluding that Bellow had confused his geography, (39) has pointed out. From imprecision the series has moved to logical absurdity, an effect amplified by the circumstance that the human element is in contradiction not only with the series as developed so far, but also with itself.

Consider the noun "fellahin". Russell Baker assumes

that the Near Eastern reference is to Mesopotamia on the basis the novel's epigraph from Thousand and One Nights.

It is related, O auspicious King, that there was a merchant of the merchants who had much wealth, and business in various cities. Now on a day he mounted horse and went forth to recover monies in certain towns, and the heat oppressed him; so he sat beneath a tree and, putting his hand into his saddlebags, he took thence some broken bread and dried dates and began to breakfast. When he had ended eating the dates he threw away the stones with force and lo! an Ifrit appeared, huge of stature and brandishing a drawn sword, wherewith he approached the merchant and said, "Stand up that I may slay thee even as thou slewest my son!" Asked the merchant, "How have I slain thy son?" and he answered, "When thou atest dates and throwest away the stones they struck my son full in the breast as he was walking by, so that he died forthwith."

"The Tale of the Trader and the Jinni"  
from Thousand and One Nights

In so far as the novel's opening paragraph evokes the Arab East one might well expect that the allusion is to Scheherezade's nights of storytelling in Baghdad. The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary notes, however, that the word "fellāhin" in English is usually applied to the peasants of Egypt, a reading which the phrase "stupendous monuments" and its ready association with pyramids, not with ziggurats, supports. As a

consequence of this ambiguity, the identity of "the people thronging the streets" emerges as the least understood term in the series of comparisons.

The emphasis on semantic dissonance is taken a step further by the epithet "barbaric". There are two principal connotations of the word. First, barbarians are in some essential manner not what we are: not Greeks or Romans or Westerners, not inside the valued and the known. They represent some dark, ill-expressed aspect of humanity which the culture of the narrator shuns. By stressing their incomprehensibility, the epithet increases our distance from "the people". They do not understand their surroundings; they are, after all, "fellahin", men of the fields, not citizens of a metropolis. Inhabiting the great city, they are, the passage suggests, heirs to something they do not understand, epigones of the builders, separated from the artifacts about them by walls of ignorance. The dissonance, therefore, does not characterize the human essence, conceived as constituted by internal relations, only; it is also a prominent feature of man's relationship to his environment.

These meanings coalesce in the ambiguous reference of the pronominal possessive "their" in the phrase

"stupendous monuments of their mystery". Are the people conscious of possessing a "mystery"? Is the reference to a sense of awe? To something like participation in a cult? Or is their manner of possessing the mystery impersonal? Do they merely express it in the sense that a giant cone in the desert expresses the social life of ants? Is man, in other words, a moral agent, or does his conscious life merely express a community of purpose with the inhuman, the natural world

...that [does not] care about any- thing  
human...[?] (40)

Bellow's answer to this question in The Victim is a measured refusal to resume the 'either-or' stance of Dangling Man: an insistence on the autonomy of narrative, on its freedom from didacticism.

This insistence on the autonomy of fiction recurs, again and again, in Bellow's critical pieces. Prior to the creative act there are no rules, and, therefore, no antimonies. Like the fictional world which the opening of The Victim announces, the creative act reserves a domain of imprecision for itself where the rules of logic are suspended.

There are critics who assume you must

begin with order if you are to end with it. Not so. A novelist begins with disorder and disharmony, and he goes toward order by an unknown process of the imagination. And...the order he achieves is not the order that ideas have...Art is the speech of artists. The rules are not the same as those in science and philosophy. (41)

According to Bellow it does not, in fact, really matter what an author believes about what he is doing as an artist so long as he is truly creative as an artist. Ideas and aesthetic intuitions are independent of one another. Commenting on Erich Auerbach's observation that Flaubert's ideal of artistic detachment suggested the professional attitude of a psychologist, teacher or priest rather than an artist, for example, he concluded in a 1963 article in The Atlantic Monthly that

[It] apparently makes no difference what the artist should decide about his commitment, whether he considers himself a moralist or a purely objective artist...commitments are far more rudimentary than any "position" or intellectual attitude might imply ... [c]ommittment in a novel may be measured by its power to absorb us, by the energy it contains. (42)

Bellow has no reservations about the dignity of the narrative art.

...[T]here is power in a story. It testifies to the worth, the signi-

ficance of the individual. For a short while all the strength and all the radiance of the world are brought to bear upon a few human figures. (43)

I believe that this insistence on the autonomy of narrative first emerges in The Victim. It is most immediately apparent in the modulation of the language away from substantial realities -- "New York", "continent", "the bitter gray Atlantic", "the people in the streets" -- towards impressions, at times imprecise, at times compounded of contrary associations, which liberate the language and allow it a realm of play independent of earlier definitions. The promise held out by the narrative is that it will transcend the antinomies implicit in the opening between man as maker and man as creature, between knowing and being, between reality and appearance. The mediating category, the appearance which does not yield to analysis, is the mystery: not a thing that is hidden and dark, but something advertised by "a dazing profusion" of lights, which might belong either to the "monuments" or "their mystery" -- the syntax is again imprecise -- and which "climb upward endlessly", still appearances perhaps, but appearances that seem to lead to infinity.

The position the narrative act seeks to occupy at



the outset of the novel, in other words, is one that is pre-suppositionless. Although the initial voice is omniscient, omniscience is disclaimed in the emphasis on semantic dissonance. The manner in which the mystery is proclaimed returns the narrative to an authoritative stance within these limits. Nothing pre-defined is assumed but there is an over-riding certainty that the liberty accorded language will nonetheless result in the discovery of limits.

The second epigraph of the novel, a fragment from De Quincey's Confessions of an English Opium Eater (47) traces the same idea: this time images of human faces are limited by the upward surging sea.

"Be that as it may, now it was that upon the rocking waters of the ocean the human face began to reveal itself; the sea appeared paved with innumerable faces, upturned to the heavens; faces, imploring, wrathful, despairing; faces that surged upward by thousands, by myriads, by generations..."  
De Quincy, The Pains of Opium

The experience in De Quincey is the record of a dream. Just as the city had teemed with beings who were uncomprehending and incomprehensible so the sea -- a dream sea -- tosses with an uncomprehending, contradictory humanity. We only dream Otherness. Even

in crediting Otherness with many-faced, contradictory attributes, the vision of objectivity is centered in an individual mind, the many in the one, in the sea, in society, in history. The limit is the dream and the being of the dreamer. The discovery of this limit would mean the end of the nightmare, a new vision of objectivity, the birth of a different kind of individual, a different mode of co-existence with others. This is the prospect that opens when Asa is confronted by Albee: the subject of the next chapter.

## Chapter 2

The coexistence of individuals is problematic for Bellow. Perhaps the most common criticism of his fiction is that he sacrifices narrative context to his interest in character. "He creates individuals but not relations between them" wrote Norman Mailer in a celebrated article. (1) "His characters" Tony Tanner has observed, "seem to be in a state which reality cannot penetrate for any length of time. (2) "Bellow's recurrent hero...is so concerned with thinking well" writes Alfred Kazin "[that] the imbalance between the hero and his fellows becomes an imbalance between the hero's thinking and the mere activity of others." (3)

The Victim is a studied attempt to right this imbalance. By blurring the identities of the two characters, by intimating that they share some profound kinship which it is beyond the ability of realistic narrative to render, the novel attempts to show that character and context can co-exist without the context's appearing absurd -- as in Dangling Man -- or

its becoming "generalized and symbolic" as in the picaresque romps of The Adventures of Augie March. (4) In Dangling Man, events had shown the protagonist to be de trop. In The Adventures of Augie March, Augie will, for the most part, be relieved from having to suffer the consequences of his actions: "the picaresque", to quote Ralph Freedman, "...establishes the wanderer and his world as distinct entities whose deliberate interactions provide the tragi-comic substance of the episodes." (5) In The Victim, context, represented by Allbee whose very name has ontological connotations, is connected to the protagonist in an essential, although a highly problematical, manner.

The similarity of The Victim's two central characters has struck a number of writers. Keith Michael Opdahl has noted that both Asa and Allbee lack confidence, believe that they are ringed by enemies and are deluded enough to think themselves unsuspecting. (6) Sarah B. Cohen has written that "the longer Allbee stays with him, the more [Asa] becomes his psychic twin." (7). Instances of this confusion of identity include: Asa's defense of Allbee's eccentricities before Harkavy; Asa's guilt when he discovers "Allbee

in his bed with a whore"; and, Allbee's suicide - murder attempt, a "mutual death pact without [Asa's] prior knowledge." (8) John J. Clayton has noted that "as [their] relationship develops...Asa becomes more slovenly...gets drunk...(and) camps out, like Allbee, at another man's house. (9) Eusebio L. Rodrigues has added Asa's truculent demands for jobs when he first arrived in New York, his conviction that he had been unjustly barred from the ordinary pleasures of life and his readiness to take offense and insistence -- in Rudiger's office, for example -- on redress to this list of "Albee-like" behaviours. (10)

Dostoevsky's novella, The Double inaugurated the tradition to which this melding of the central characters belongs. In Dostoevsky's story "the appearance of the double and his success in squeezing out [the hero] from his place show that [the hero's] place was completely illusory to begin with..." (10) The drama centers on the hero's futile defense of his right to the situation in life that he has won for himself against this second self. In The Victim, Asa's encounter with the double figure, Allbee -- and what a radical challenge to humanism this definition of the

common human essence as compounded of the anti-semite and the Jew represents! -- does not cost Asa his place: his sense of himself, however, is imperiled. He experiences moments of perception he does not recognize as his own and finds himself straining to formulate an understanding of the way he is connected to his fellow man which makes no sense in the context of his everyday beliefs.

These moments comprise, I believe, the essential focus of Bellow's craftsmanship in The Victim. This series of symbolic moments do not add up to simply an episodic amplification of a theme which Bellow had already defined for himself. It can be shown, I think, that Asa's moments of extraordinary perception are not indications, as Joseph Baumbach has suggested, that Allbee is ontologically less original than Asa. (12) Simultaneously, however, Keith Opdahl is wrong, I think, when he implies that in this novel, too, Bellow's achievement "...lies in the intensity and complexity of individual scenes rather than in the neatness of plot." (13)

The Victim manages to do several very difficult

things at once. It manages to depict two individuals who are perversely "real" in the sense that their reactions have a complexity greater than that of any stereotype. (14) It manages to postulate and explore a bond between them which, as the analysis of the title showed, challenges easy generalization. Finally, it subordinates the terms of the fictional synthesis to a dramatic sequence which includes the complexity of Bellow's perceptions without its contravening the principles of verisimilitude, probability, and causality. This finely poised synthesis is, I think, a high point of Bellow's craft and the clearest measure we have of the novel's advance over Dangling Man. In this chapter I propose to outline the development of this pattern: the often involuntary movement of Asa's perception toward the recognition that another being might, like himself, exist in the round. The pattern can be traced through the sequence of Asa's moments of heightened confusion from his first encounter with Allbee until his brother Max's visit to Asa's apartment in Chapter Twenty. Once Asa is forced to recognize that Allbee, like himself, is sui generis, it is too much for him. He cannot deal with the kind of world that contains someone like Allbee. The pattern I propose to

trace demonstrates that this movement towards a true community of being, towards the perception that the other is as necessary as one's self, is coupled with a failure to comprehend the meaning of Otherness, a retreat from the belief in the self as a principle of inter-personal synthesis.

The normal operation of cause and effect is in doubt the first time Asa meets Allbee. The event requiring explanation is one of the least complicated imaginable. Allbee has left a note announcing that he will be in a nearby park; Asa arrives in due course. The meeting takes place. There is no agreement on the reason for it however. Allbee assumes a causal link between his note and Asa's arrival. Asa refuses to confirm this: he came to the park on an impulse. He had not been able to sleep and he had not wanted to stay in the partment. His doorbell had disturbed him.

But had his bell really sounded? He believes it did and he connects Allbee's anticipation of his presence in the park with it. Surely Allbee rang the bell and ran off; but Allbee denies this. On the surface there is no reason why he should lie. An acknowledgement



would help him to establish that Asa had an excellent reason to inspect the building entry and his mail-box. Yet, he does not take the step. Each man seems to be conspiring to make the mechanics of their meeting as difficult to fathom as possible.

On his return, Asa in fact finds the note. What has been proven? Why did he go to the park? Had Allbee rung his doorbell? In order to continue in his belief that he heard his bell, he must suppose that the janitor, Nunez, who had confirmed Allbee's story had mistaken the time. The mystery is important in The Victim. For Asa it symbolizes the uncertain dividing line between inner and outer experience. In the context of the novel as a whole it marks the point of transition between ordinary, plausible experience and the permanent mystery.

The location of this point is in question from the outset. Had Asa slept just before going to the park? Or, had he merely imagined that he had? He has become so fearful of the directions his imagination might take that he worries about seeing "mice darting along the walls" and he sleeps with "the bathroom light burning

all night". (15) Did the bell announce a real event, or was it only chiming in Asa's brain? Do Asa's hallucinations extend outside the apartment? Is solipsism a threat? What if there are no signals from the outside?

Asa's hesitation disappears the instant he sees Allbee however. Allbee is introduced in such a manner, Joseph Baumbach has noted, that the description recalls a reflection "as seen in one of those freakishly distorting Coney Island mirrors: "He was taller than Leventhal but not so burly; large framed but not so robust..." a kind of stretched out version of Leventhal." (16) With a glance Asa recognizes the type to which Allbee belongs: he is fundamentally false in both manners and attitude, a poseur.

"Who's this customer?" Leventhal said to himself "An actor if I ever saw one. My God, my God, what kind of fish is this? One of those guys who want you to think they can see to the bottom of your soul."

The irony, of course, is that Asa is doing just what he attributes to Allbee. The essential difference for Asa, however, is that Allbee is examining him only

to appear to be doing so. Allbee is a mere phenomenon -- to himself as well as to others. Asa attempts to stare him down; when this fails, he mentally matches himself against him.

"If he starts something," Leventhal thought, "I'll grab his right arm and pull him off balance...No, his left arm and pull him towards my left; that's my stronger side. And when he's going down I'll give him a rabbit punch. But why should he start anything? There's no reason."

He was squared and resolute; nevertheless there was a tremor in his arms, and during all of it he felt that he himself was the cause of his agitation and suspicion, with his unreliable nerves. Then in astonishment he heard the stranger utter his name.  
(17)

As soon as Asa recognizes Allbee, his curiosity is calmed. He is certain that Allbee cannot matter to him. He is more surprised at having remembered Allbee's name than at the dramatic appearance of the man himself.

"What a box, the mind," Leventhal thought with something approaching a smile. "You'd just as soon expect to grow in your hand as some of the things that come out of it." (18)

When Allbee expresses incredulity at the contention that there is nothing between them, for Asa, even the

incredulity cannot be genuine.

"He appeared to be saying that [Leventhal] knew perfectly well what he was saying and that it was effrontery and bad acting to deny it. "Just like a bad actor to accuse everyone of bad acting," thought Leventhal."

In spite of his belief that Allbee's mannerisms indicate a charade without significance for him when Asa inspects the man "more closely", he notices the dirt, the raggedness, the stigmata of social failure which repel him in a different way than Allbee's histrionic approach had done. He concludes that Allbee has become

"one of those men you saw sleeping off their whiskey on Third Avenue, lying in the doorways or on the cellar hatches, dead to the world or the racket or the straight blaze of the sun in their faces." (19)

Allbee appears to be a social stereotype. So defined Asa is able to deal with him and, for a space, the narrative focuses on causal sequence. Allbee insists that Asa came into the park to see him specifically. Asa denies it. He denies having received any letter. He denies any possible interest in Allbee.

"...What, are we related?"  
"By blood? No, no...heavens!" Allbee  
laughed. (20)

Asa tries to walk off. There is very nearly a  
fight. Finally, Allbee grinning

...with an intimation of a shared  
secret that aroused and vexed Leventhal  
and sickened him... (21)

prevails on him to sit and listen, and by dint of his  
evident familiarity with the circumstances of Asa's  
life -- he knows about his job, about his wife's being  
out of town, about the three steep flights of stairs  
that Asa must walk up to get to his apartment -- he  
forces Asa to acknowledge that there is a relationship  
of some kind between them. Indeed, it is the extent of  
Allbee's familiarity with the circumstances of his life  
that causes Asa to wonder whether this Allbee might not  
be responsible for his most personal perplexity, his  
inability to separate his fantasies from real events,  
his inability to account for the bell he had heard in  
his apartment. When Allbee refuses to validate the  
experience the break with causality leads Asa to again  
see him in a different light. The Allbee of this vision

appears to be an undersea creature, a man who has perhaps drowned, someone outside the normal context of events. This vision of Allbee proves to be central to the symbolic design of The Victim.

Leventhal looked grimly at him, in the light that came through the leaves. He had been spying on him, and the mystery was why! How long had he been keeping watch on him and for what reason -- what grotesque reason? Allbee returned his look examining him as he was examined, in concentration and seriousness, his lower jaw slipped to one side, his glum contemplative eyes filled with a green leaden colour. And in the loom of these eyes and with the warmth of the man's breath on his face, for they were crowded together on the bench, Leventhal suddenly felt that he had been singled out to be the object of some freakish, insane process, and for an instant he was filled with dread. (22)

The dread lasts only the instant and is supplanted by irritation. Allbee cannot manipulate the impression which has so readily touched Asa's inmost sense of himself. Instead, he launches into a complicated explanation of how Asa years before had turned an anti-Semitic remark of Allbee's into a cause de guerre and how he had intentionally insulted Allbee's employer, Rudiger, therewith encompassing Allbee's firing, and his eventual fall into the gutter.

This specious piece of reasoning has a paradoxical rhetorical effect. A far simpler deduction of effect from cause -- the mechanics of how Asa and Allbee had come to meet in the park -- has proven inconclusive but the extravagance of Allbee's deduction of his ruin from a remark dropped at a party is so manifestly inappropriate that it tends to support the idea that, at bottom, there must be some reality to which we all refer, which obeys common-sense understandings of how a cause leads to an effect, and which excludes paranoid reasoning like Allbee's. The enormity of the error seems to imply the stable reality of truth. Asa dismisses Allbee's claims, which unvoiced a moment before, had made him shrink with dread, with off-handed scorn:

"Bah!" Leventhal said contemptuously. He pushed at the bar of the bench and got to his feet.

"Where are you going?"

"I had nothing to do with your losing that job. It was probably your own fault. You must have given Rudiger a plenty good reason to fire you, and I can imagine what it was. I'm not the sort of man who carries grudges. It's all in your mind. I remember all about that night at Williston's, but you were drunk and I didn't hold it against you. Besides it was a long time ago, and I

don't see your object in looking me up  
just to remind me of it. Good night!"  
(23)

Allbee's next appearance tests Asa's common-sense acceptance of reality in a different way. Just prior to his arrival, Asa is composing a letter to his wife Mary. One of her important services to Asa is her desire to disabuse him of fixed, and possibly unfounded, opinions. She has tried to convince him, for example, that his fear of inheriting madness from his mother is based on his father's word that his mother had died insane, on the testimony of an embittered man, whose reliability Asa himself had never investigated. Asa regards Mary as a tower of strength, a treasure house of common-sense, as a being whose love has changed the direction of his life.

The situation of his brother's family is the subject of his letter to her. The younger of the two children has been hospitalized. His brother Max a ship-yard worker is away in Texas. Elena, the mother, seems to Asa to have a very insecure grip on herself. Asa is worried that she will break down. His brother's absence strikes him as a desertion and his feelings against Max are so strong that they overpower him.



Then he found himself telling her about his nephew, writing with sudden emotion, the words beginning to sprawl as his hand raced. In a changed tone he described Elena. He had been afraid to look at her, he confessed, when she got into the cab and he laid the bundled-up child -- she had him in two blankets although the temperature must have been over ninety -- on her lap. All the impressions of the moment returned to him -- the boy's eyes with the light of the meter on them, the leathery closeness of the back seat, the driver's undershot jaw and the long peak of his black cap, Philip's crying, Villani keeping back the children on the sidewalk. The beating of Leventhal's heart rose and his tongue became dry. As for his brother...But when he had written Max's name he stood up and leaned over the paper. He had meant to send the night letter before coming up. The pen was staining his fingers. He dropped it and began looking for his shoes outside the circle of lamplight. He had just found them and was forcing his feet into them without bothering about the laces when his bell rang, piercingly and long. Leventhal straightened up with a grunt of annoyance and surprise, "Now who in the name of hell would ring like that?" he said. But he already know who it was. It was Allbee. It must be. (25)

The bell ring which announces Allbee is no phantom bell and the instant he appears is crucial. Asa has discovered that he cannot express his feelings about his brother, the man most nearly his biological "double", to his wife, who usually helps him with his

obsessions with failure and doom. The moment is a privileged one, for Asa, in a sense, is outside his normal context. He cannot account for what has happened. This failure crystallizes in the sound of the bell and the appearance of Allbee who seems to be an original, a fantastic creature, a magician who "with his outstretched arm" can summon visions. When Allbee with a gesture tries to evoke a sense of what it is to be a derelict,

... [there] rose immediately to Leventhal's mind the most horrible images of men wearily sitting on mission benches waiting for their coffee in a smeared and bleary winter sun; of flophouse sheets and filthy pillows; hideous cardboard cubicles painted to resemble wood, even the tungsten in the bulb like little burning worms that seemed to eat up rather than give light. Better to be in the dark. He had seen such places. He could still smell the carbolic disinfectant. And if it were his flesh on those sheets, his lips drinking that coffee, his back and thighs in that winter sun, his eyes looking at the boards of the floor...? (26)

When Allbee makes a remark about "creatures", he suddenly appears transformed,

...no more human [in Asa's eyes] than a fish or crab or any fleshy thing in the

water. (27)

Although Allbee throughout this scene appears the more potent being, the force really emphasized, as the examples show, is the spontaneous workings of Asa's imagination. It transforms a phrase of Allbee's, a gesture, into an intense visionary experience. Allbee is patient, not agent. For all his histrionics, he is passive in relation to Asa.

In the encounters between Asa and Allbee that follow Bellow's strategy is to show that Asa is forced to recognize more than just this in Allbee. In order to be able to appreciate this strategy we must consider a series of episodes outside the Asa-Allbee nexus which, nevertheless, exhibit the structure of Asa's apprehension of Otherness with unusual clarity.

Asa experiences a moment of rare peace in Chapter Eight, a notable contrast with the usually stressful character of his experience. The moment occurs a week after Asa had decided that it was intolerable to suspect that Stanley Williston, his one-time boss and mentor, might actually believe that he had wittingly destroyed Allbee. He had decided to demand an

explanation as soon as possible. A week later he has not done anything. Nothing happened in the interval to force his hand. Although this relative calm is unusual in The Victim, we know that inaction, a failure to follow up questions that need answering, a desire for respite from the world's demands, is one of Asa Leventhal's dominant characteristics. A week without Allbee, with Mickey in the hospital and apparently improving; Asa allows himself to enter a cocoon of sentiment.

"On Friday night Leventhal felt Mary's absence keenly. Before going to bed, he was tempted to put in a call to Charleston. He even went to the telephone, lifted it, and turned it, untangling the cord, but he set it down and went on undressing. He put on a white cotton robe she had given him on his last birthday, smoothing the lapels lightly and glancing down. She would be sure to feel if he called her now, at the beginning of the week-end, that he found being alone unendurable and was appealing to her to come home. And that would be unfair since she could not come as long as her mother needed her. Also, when he hung up and she was inaccessible again, he would miss her even more than he did now. And she him." (28)

After a few moments he goes to bed and falls into a light sleep. He does not dream but intercalated with

his rest in the manner of a dream he witnesses a scene whose theme is in the sharpest possible contrast to his reverie of the evening.

A woman's voice cried out, and he flung himself up, brushing aside the curtains with a clatter of rings. There was a commotion at the corner. He saw a man start a crazy rush at one of two women; another threw himself in his way, shrieking, and held him off. Across the street, two soldiers stood watching. They had been with the women, it was clear enough, and then the man had caught them -- perhaps a husband, a brother, probably the former -- and they drew off. The man circled with short, sidling steps, and the woman hung back dumbly, with horrible attentiveness, ready to run. Her high heels knocked on the pavement. He had reached her once, her dress was ripped from neck to waist. She shook her head and pulled back her hair. He darted in again, grabbing at her, and the friend, uttering her begging, agonized cries, caught her arms and was swung round by him. The soldiers had an air of being present at an entertainment especially arranged for them, and seemed to laugh to themselves from time to time. The husband's soles scraped on the pavement as he pushed towards his wife, and this time she ran away. She ran up the street awkwardly but swiftly, her soft figure shaking, and the soldiers started off at once in the same direction. The husband did not chase her; he stood still. The other woman with her hands on his arm spoke to him urgently, thrusting forward her face. The rain was rapidly, unevenly drying from the street. Leventhal growled under his breath and wound the robe

around himself more tightly. There was a gleam, as if a naked copper cable was lifted from the water and rose quickly, passing over masonry and windows. The sun was forcing its way through a corner of the gray air. The woman was still speaking to the man, imploring, pulling him the other way. She wanted him to go with her. Leventhal drew the shade and dropped into bed. (29)

Is the sharp contrast between the Leventhal's marital devotion and the scene of adultery in the street intentional? Why does Asa witness this scene, so opposed to his feelings about his wife, occupying the time of night, the space in experience, which usually belongs to dreams?

Although ironic intent is notoriously difficult to establish, the text is very clear on the point that Asa does have reasons for questioning Mary's commitment if he should come to be curious. Most glaringly, he has "decided to accept the fact" that during their engagement Mary was still involved with another man. (30) Malcolm Bradbury has suggested that Asa's final dream before Mary's return -- he dreams of a salesgirl gratuitously "smearing rouge on her sharp face" to show him the colours which a colour chart beside her does as well -- is connected with a residue of anxiety in his

heart. (31) Just as he is managing to live with Stanley Williston's monstrous idea of him, he has no idea of how Mary "could have done that..." (32) Superficially, however, he is content that "she had not chosen him indiscriminately." (33)

Nevertheless, following the violent encounter of the husband and adulterous wife in the time frame usually associated with dreaming, everything seems to change. When Asa awakens, the heat has lifted; the humidity, dissipated. Unassailed by doubts, he feels good about himself. He decides that the Albee affair does not warrant his getting excited; that there is no point to investigating Williston's opinions; that

It was better to think well of people -- there was a kind of command that you should. And on the whole it was Leventhal's opinion that he had an unsuspecting character and preferred to be taken advantage of rather than regard everyone with distrust. It was better to be genuinely unsuspecting; it was what they called Christian. (34)

In the night, Asa, it seems, has been reborn. Like "the morning, with its brilliance and its simple contrasts, white and blue, shining and darkened" (35), he seems to have escaped the earlier, torpid muddle and redis-

covered innocence.

In this unusual state of mind, he decides to invite his nephew, Philip, to spend the afternoon with him in Manhattan. The boy comes over: they ride the subway, take a walk, drink some orangeade, stand in a crowd watching a peddler hawk toy dogs on the sidewalk and go to a movie. Simple activities but rendered with such pronounced symbolic connotations that Asa's movements through Manhattan resemble a naive pilgrim's progress. In the movie Asa falls asleep and the peculiar conditions which his earlier sleep had ushered in end: the landscape, whose features it had become possible to grasp without recourse to imprecise similes, once again fogs with the returning heat. When they come out of the theater, it is as stultifyingly hot as the day before. Shortly thereafter, they meet Allbee.

The success of the allegorical sequence depends, in large part, on Asa's identification with Philip. He sees traces of his childhood in the boy. Philip, too, it seems to him, recognizes some fundamental kinship. Because of this bond, their afternoon in Manhattan



carries a suggestion that it is also a mirror of Asa's dialogue with himself, that Asa's most basic, most intimate mode of apprehending experience, the dialogue of the child and the adult in inner space, receives figurative expression in the encounter he has sought out on this unusual post-cathartic day.

Philip is interested in the underside of things. As soon as he arrives in Manhattan they begin their descent. Asa offers him a choice between taking the Broadway bus or the subway and, with his uncle's obvious concurrence, Philip chooses the underground. Asa, the adult, steers

...him through the turnstile and gloom  
of the platform [where] the distant  
concussion of cars, like hammer blows  
[comes] to them...[.]

Philip talks on "fluently", (36) a fact which is a great relief to Asa who "would have thought he was being reproached for his past neglect, not to be made up for in a single afternoon" had the boy stayed silent. Symbolically, the two are beneath the "stupendous monuments" of the novel's opening paragraph, within the central mystery. Philip's conversa-

tion is concerned with foundations. He is, above all, concerned with the fragility of the city's skyscrapers.

Was it true that they had to have shock absorbers? They must have something to ride out the vibrations of the subway and to take in the play at the top, the swaying. They all swayed. Max had told him that in a ship the plates are arranged in parts of the deck to give when there was bad weather to ride out.

"It sounds reasonable," said Leventhal. "Of course, I'm no engineer."

Philip went on, speculating about what there was under the street in addition to foundations: the pipes, water pipes and sewage, gas mains, the electrical system for the subway, telephone and telegraph wires, and the cable for the Broadway trolley.

"I suppose they have maps and charts at City Hall." Leventhal stopped. "What about a drink?"

The drink Asa proposes to still this curiosity, which, in his mind leads to a commonsensical authority, City Hall, is not called "hemlock" but mortuary echoes, especially from the choric figure Schlossberg's observation that, "paper grass in the grave makes all the grass paper", a condemnation of the studied avoidance of death and the acceptance of artificiality are powerful in the description.

They had a glass of orangeade at a bamboo stand where the paper grass

bristled on the walls. The woman at the tank clapped down the pull with her wrist, holding her fingers with her cameo rings rigid. The drink was slightly bitter with ground rinds. (37)

Following the drink Asa and Philip encounter

a crowd that had formed around a man selling toy dogs that skittered and barked. The peddler, in a flecked sweat shirt and broken shoes, a band with Indian figures on his forehead, pushed them with his wide toe whenever they slowed down. "Run three minutes, guarantee," he said. To wind them he clasped them by the head; his fingers were too big to get at the key easily. "Three minutes. Two bits. They cost me eighteen. That's the con." He made his joke sullenly. His cheeks were heavy, his gaze unconciliating. "Three minutes. Don't pester, don't shtup. Buy or beat it."

There was laughter among the bystanders. "What's he saying?" Philip wanted to know.

"He's telling them in Yiddish not to push," Leventhal replied. (38)

The imagery of dogs, elsewhere in the novel, had been associated with female sensuality: Asa, waiting for Elena, of whose sexuality he is covertly aware had seen that

in one of the other flats, a girl in a parlor chair was brushing a dog that yawned and tried to like her hand. She pushed the muzzle down. A woman in a

chemise passed through the room, back  
and forth from kitchen to hall. (39)

Here the dog, with its desire for closeness repulsed, is as an analogue for Asa's mood. In a later episode, his behaviour with Nunez' dog mirrors the complex of contrary attitudes present in his relationship with Mary. The dog symbolizes simultaneously his elation at receiving a card from her and the open sensuality of her post card. His fooling with the animal symbolizes his high opinion of Mary's judgement -- "Do I pass inspection?" -- and his ambivalent -- part welcome, part rejection -- reaction to sensuality: his feeling that sexuality is beyond decorum, unconstrained and, in some sense, deserving of awe.

There were intimate references [in the post card]. Only Mary could write such things on cards for everybody in the world to read. Amused, proud, pleased with her, pleased rather than embarrassed at the possibility that postal clerks had read the cards, he put them in his pocket. "Do I pass inspection?" he demanded of Nunez' dog. Blow now." "Stooping he caught the dog's head and rubbed it. He started up the stairs and the animal came after him. "Blow now, I say." He barred the way with his leg and whirled inside and slammed the hall-door. "Go home!" he yelled, and laughed uproariously "Go on home!" He pounded the glass and the dog barked raucously and leaped at the pane.

Leventhal told one of the neighbours, whom he hardly knew, "The super's dog is having a fit. Hear him?" An elderly, guarded pale face gave him an uncertain smile and seemed to listen in awe to the racket in the foyer. (40)

Compared to this raucous play, the sidewalk peddler's skittering toy dogs, guaranteed to bark for three minutes, priced at two bits, including the "con", have a nightmarish mechanical quality. The child and the man encounter a sensuality that is a bare commercial proposition, a carnival side-show, a semblance of life.

From this spectacle, Asa and Philip go into a movie theatre on Forty-second Street. For Asa, who dislikes both theater and film, to have suggested the idea demonstrates his strong desire to please and to draw closer to his nephew. Consciously he is trying to compensate him, in some measure, for the fun he has missed since Mickey got sick. In terms of the novel's symbolic structure, Asa, on this day of unusual peace, is allowing an earlier self who, long ago, withdrew into antagonistic reserve to have a say in his fate.

Philip chooses a horror film. The descent into the theatre lobby opens on a view of a faded, already

ghastly, luxury. The suggestion is that life does not matter here. The elegance evokes the grave.

"...they bought tickets and passed over the brown rugs of the sunless lobby, between the nebulous lamps in their shattered, dust-eaten silk shades, and the long brocaded chairs, into the stifling darkness."

The film also lacks the touch of life. For Asa, it is too much of an ordeal.

On the screen an old scientist was seen haunting the dressing room of a theater where he had murdered his mistress many years ago. He had hallucinations about a young star who resembled her and he attempted to strangle the girl. The flaring lights hurt Leventhal's eyes. The music was strident and, after half an hour of it, his nerves jarred, he went down to the lavatory. (41)

In the lavatory, he meets "an old man" who has the "raw" fingers of a dishwasher and who also dislikes the film. Unlike Asa, however, his is the criticism of a true amateur. He faults only the production. The ethos, the ideal of boundless mastery over others, which he associates with Boris Karloff, the star, he admires deeply.

"The stuff they put Karloff in...A man of his ability...Here he's horsing around. It's an inferior vehicle. Even so, he shines. He understands what a mastermind is, a law unto himself. That's what he's got my admiration for." (42)

Asa does not stay to finish his cigarette: he returns to his seat and falls asleep. The theatre is the crowning image of non-life. The horror film celebrates the inhuman. The child, Philip, is fascinated by it. The old man in the lavatory who, on the evidence of his raw hands, has had to work hard, dreams longingly of the power of the inhuman. Suffering has not brought him wisdom; he is a brute. Asa, the survivor, when he falls asleep, shows, perhaps, how it is that he survives.

This sleep concludes the sequence which his awakening had initiated. As he had been during his morning sleep, he is an involuntary witness to a scene which, while not a dream, occurs in relation to him as though it were one. His morning "dream" had signalled a change in the weather; his "dream" in the movie theater signals another. When Asa and Philip emerge, the sharp clear outlines, the nearly allegorical aspect of things is gone.

The street was blazing when they emerged. The lights in the marquee were wan. There was a hot, overrich smell of roasting peanuts and caramel corn. A metallic clapping sound came to them from a shooting gallery. And for a time Leventhal felt empty and unstable. The sun was too strong, the swirling traffic too loud, too swift. (43)

Asa no longer believes "in the understanding" between himself and Philip. Philip agrees to go to the zoo. But does he really want to? Asa wonders. Perhaps he is merely being polite. The opaque imponderability of social connection has taken the place of his earlier belief in their symbolic identity. They stop at a restaurant and as Philip is getting mustard from a table Allbee grabs him.

Allbee's purpose is to impress Asa with the fact that he will not go away. And impress him, he does. Although he does not hurt Philip, his attack emphasizes the separateness of Asa and his nephew. Asa is vulnerable to him through Philip in two distinct senses. By touching Philip, Allbee symbolizes the harsh claim of the world on Asa's younger self. On the realistic plane, he has extended his harassment of Asa to his family.



Asa's altered sense of his vulnerability changes his awareness of Allbee. It introduces a special sense of Allbee's being that cannot be explained as one individual's awareness of another. Asa and Philip continue to the zoo as planned and there

now and then, moving from cage to cage, gazing at the animals, Leventhal, speaking to Philip, or smoking, or smiling, was so conscious of Allbee, so certain he was being scrutinized, that he was able to see himself as if through a strange pair of eyes: the side of his face, the palpitation in his throat, the seams of his skin, the shape of his body and of his feet in their white shoes. Changed in this way into his own observer, he was able to see Allbee, too, and imagined himself standing so near behind him that he could see the weave of his coat, his raggedly overgrown neck, the bulge of his cheek, the color of the blood in his ear; he could even evoke the odor of his hair and skin. The acuteness and intimacy of it astounded him, oppressed and intoxicated him. The heat was climbing again, and the pungency of the animals and the dry hay, dust, and manure filled his head; the sun, overflowing above the topmost twigs and bent back from bars and cages, white and glowing in long shapes, deprived him for a moment of his sense of the usual look of things, and he was afraid, too, that his strength was leaving him. (44)

The next meeting between Asa and Allbee does not

develop this curious feeling of closeness in a novel way. Relations between them are choked and harsh: they regard each other as inhuman monsters. (45) On the next occasion that they meet, however, the symbols associated with the earlier meeting are elaborated.

Once again Asa is trying to write, and again he finds that he cannot. Again there is the emphasis on the doorbell, with the suggestion that the boundary between inner and outer experience is imprecise, and this time the emphasis is more pointed: the bell is harsher; Asa does not have the presence of mind -- which he had had at Allbee's last visit -- to anticipate who the inopportune caller is.

There was paper on the desk, and it occurred to him to send a note to Mary. He sat down, twisting his legs around the legs of the chair, wrote a few words, and stopped to consider what he ought or ought not to say. There was plenty to choose from. That he missed her? That it was still hot? He put down the pen and leaned on the desk, pressing his chest against the leaf. Dumb and motionless in the silent room, he heard the slamming of car doors and the racing of motors outside. Suddenly there was a prolonged, tearing peal of the bell. A finger screwed the pusher mercilessly in the socket. Hurrying to the door he shouted, "Yes?" He heard his name pronounced several times, and

called back, "Who is it?" Stooping over the banister, he caught sight of Allbee on the landing below and he withdrew into the vestibule and shut the door. Presently the handle was turned, turned again quietly, and then shaken.

"Yes, yes, what do you want now? What do you want?" he said. (46)

What can Allbee want? / What can Asa's sterile conversation with life which has left him tongue-tied, unable even to explain matters to his wife, give him?

Standing in the doorway, facing the very confused Asa, Allbee admits that he is "...not entirely under control...Things get away from [him]..." Asa pretends not to believe in his sincerity. In fact, we do not know whether he does or not, and finally, it does not matter. The significant thing is that Allbee's admission in this scene reflects Asa's own confusion and on this basis Asa's involuntary sense of kinship with him again overleaps the limits of his individual sense of self.

"Say, nowadays you can believe almost anything," Leventhal said, and he laughed a little but without relish.

With a grave look Allbee appealed to him not to persist in this. His brows went up, he pushed his fingers

through his dirtyish blond hair, and Leventhal remarked to himself that there was an element of performance in all that he was doing. But suddenly he had a strange, close consciousness of Allbee, of his face and body, a feeling of intimate nearness such as he had experienced in the zoo when he had imagined himself at Allbee's back, seeing with microscopic fineness the lines of his skin, and the smallest of his hairs, and breathing in his odor. The same sensations were repeated; he could nearly feel the weight of his body and the contact of his clothes. Even more, the actuality of his face, loose in the cheeks, firm in the forehead and jaws, struck him, the distinctness of it; and the look of recognition Allbee bent on him duplicated the look in his own. He was sure of that. Nevertheless he kept alive in his own mind the thought that Allbee hated him, and his judgement, although it was numbed by his curious emotion of closeness -- for it was an emotion -- did not desert him. His burly, keen-set figure did not budge from the doorway any more than the spokes in the skylight moved. (47)

This is a far more profound experience of sharing than the earlier one. The sense of oneness includes the conviction that the recognition is shared; it distinguishes, the individual, the living being, Kirby Allbee, from his attitudes, his hatred of Asa and his hatred of Jews.

Asa's decision to allow him to stay overnight, in

spite of their personal antagonism and in spite of the Jewish experience of the Holocaust which their antagonism once again brings to mind, is not simply inconsistency on his part. In his

...feeling of closeness [which] seemed to have superseded and made faint all other feelings (47)

Asa, for the first time, glimpses the reality that there is a human connection, anterior to stereotypes and independent of them.

The awareness of this connection enters into the dream Asa has that night. The essence of this dream experience conforms to Joseph's premonition about "the highest ideal construction...the one that unlocks the imprisoning self". He had had an intuition that "the quest is the same" for everyone, that "[w]e are all drawn toward the same craters of the spirit". (49) In Asa's dream this understanding conditions the entire dream experience.

He slept but he did not rest. He had an unclear dream in which he held himself off like an unwilling spectator; yet it was he that did everything. (50)

The dream concerns a railway station. Asa, hurrying to catch the second section of a train he had already missed, finds his way barred by the crowd.

There was a recoil of the crowd -- the guards must have been pushing it back -- and he found himself in a corridor which was freshly paved and plastered. It seemed to lead down to the tracks. "Maybe they've just opened this and I'm the first to find it," he thought. He began to run and suddenly came to a barrier, a movable frame resembling a saw-horse. Holding the suitcase before him, he pushed it aside. Two men stopped him. "You can't go through, I've got people working here," one of them said. He wore a business suit and a fedora, and he looked like a contractor. The other man was in overalls. "I must, I've got to get to the tracks," Leventhal said. "There's a gate upstairs. This isn't open to the public. Didn't you see the sign on the door? What door did you come through?" "I didn't come through any door," said Leventhal angrily. "This is an emergency; the train's leaving." The second man appeared to be a thoughtful, sympathetic person, but he was an employee and couldn't interfere. "You can't go back the way you came, either," the contractor told him. "There's a sign up there. You'll have to leave through here." Leventhal turned and a push on the shoulder sent him into an alley. His face was covered with tears. A few people noticed this, but he did not care about them. (51)

Lying in the darkness Asa comes half-awake.

He found himself not awake, precisely, but so nearly awake as to be conscious that he lay in the dark. He had a sense of marvelous relief at the end of the dream. He was, it seemed to him, in a state of great lucidity, and he experienced a rare, pure feeling of happiness. He was convinced that he knew the truth, and he said to himself with satisfaction, "Yes, I do know it, positively. Will I know it in the morning? I do now." For what he thought would have been very strange to his waking mind, difficult to accept if not downright foolish. But why was that? "Why?" he reflected. "Dear God, am I so lazy, so weak, is my soul fat like my body?" His heart was jolting painfully; nevertheless he felt confident and happy. What was it? What did he and others do? Admittedly, like others, he had been in the wrong. That was not so important, either. Everybody committed errors and offences. But it was supremely plain to him that everything, everything without exception, took place as if within a single soul or person. (52)

Asa's happy confidence that in an ineluctable, but also unerring, manner, he has solved the mystery of Man evidently parallels his acceptance of Allbee as a guest. The two events indicate a revolution in his outlook: he has re-evaluated the significance of Otherness. His identification with his fellow man is complete. The acceptance of Allbee had meant a de facto acceptance of responsibility for his enemy. Weeping in public without shame seems to mean that he also senses

that others accept him; that there is no essential difference between private actions and public actions; that a circle of common being encloses and enlivens all selves. (53)

Yet, how fragile this simple truth is! Even as he lies in the dark marvelling at its simplicity,

...he suspected, more than suspected, knew, that tomorrow this would be untenable. "I won't be able to hold onto it," he thought. Something would prevent it. (54)

The "something" is the failure of his alarm clock to ring; in the excitement of Allbee's intrusion he had forgotten to set it. The morning is "grey and hot". Asa cannot shave properly; he has no time for breakfast; he cannot manage to awaken the sleeping Allbee and after some desultory attempts decides that he would not, in any case, have the time to get "him out of the house." (55) He leaves for the office -- angry that he must leave Allbee sleeping there -- but the tone of his morning is, nevertheless, congruent with his dream's message of peace. Symbolically, with Allbee in his apartment, it is as though the dividing line between the truth of the dream and the conditions of everyday



life had shifted. Compared to his usual feeling that hostile forces have him at bay, Asa shows a large measure of self-sufficiency in dealing with his environment.

His work at the office goes well. He enjoys a quiet pride in his own efficiency. When he must turn the work in to his boss, Asa forces this normally hostile individual to compliment him. In a rare departure from his habitual taciturn defensiveness he tries to draw close to a colleague whom he had thought sympathetic for a long time. Later, when his one-time mentor Williston calls, Asa, very much in control, dismisses the circuitous politeness he had always thought insincere. He has the satisfaction of hearing Williston accept this bluntness. Because of the responsibility he has accepted for Allbee, his former benefactor is coming to him for a favour. Asa's dream of transcending all opposition has been transformed into a mood of confidence, a readiness to accept things as they are and an insistence that others accept him in a similar spirit.

When he returns from lunch, all this changes,

He was the first to return to the office; the place was empty. A breeze passed over the papers on the desk or left rolled in the typewriters, and shadowed the green linen blinds on the crosspieces of the windows. He stepped out onto the fire escape to finish his cigar, and had just ground it out on the rail and tossed it into the air when one of the phones began to ring. In the violence of his turn, he struck his shoulder on the doorframe and for an instant he could not see -- the interior of the office seemed black. The ringing filled the air wildly, coming from all four corners of the room simultaneously. He felt a clutch of horror at his heart, and the thrilling, piercing run of the bell was infinitely faster than the flow of his blood. He reached his desk. The call was for him.

"Yes? Who wants me?" he cried to the operator.

It was Villani.

Leventhal closed his eyes. It was what he had been expecting. Mickey was dead. (56)

The dream is over. The ringing of the bell, wilder than any of the earlier occurrences, announces the triumph of the reality principle. The door frame Asa collides with, might belong to the door through which the dream figure in "business suit and fedora" had insisted he must have trespassed. The darkness might be the dark sleep during which his morning alarm had not rung. In any event, he no longer has any power over

what happens. In the light of the dream, the conclusion of the chapter is a parody.

He walked with angry energy to the toilet and began to bathe his head. He had a crushing headache. Over the sink, when his face was wet, he began to cry. He snatched a paper towel from the box and covered his eyes. Then he heard someone approaching and turned blunderingly into a stall. He shut the door and, with his back against it, gradually, with silent effort, brought himself under control. (57)

A forceful, synoptic vision of the human condition such as Asa's dream, this passage implies, might leave behind a special mood, a different sense of possibilities, but it cannot create a new set of conditions for human life. When Max's younger son dies, the idealism of Asa's dream makes no sense. He has no defense against his grief. It is difficult to imagine a more vulnerable, more solitary image of man than this view of Asa weeping, not in public, but hiding, from whom he does not know, in a toilet stall. Feelings of magnanimity, even if shared, are not enough.

What is? For Asa, this special dream apart, the possibility of salvation had always seemed connected to his marriage. He believes that Mary represents a more

developed, finer type of humanity. Before he had become engaged, he had "felt that the harshness of his life had disfigured him," leaving him repellent to someone like her. (58) We have seen that it is her absence he blames for his sleeplessness and the uncertain state of his nerves. On each of the two occasions since the attack on Philip when Allbee managed to draw closer to him, his connection to Mary had appeared to be somehow tenuous: pen and paper before him, he had not known what to say. Mary, for Asa, represents a kind of self-sufficiency. In his marriage he imagines that he participates in a privileged continuum of being which is essential to his identity. In order to draw Asa and Allbee nearer to each other, Bellow must intimate that this continuum is not really privileged.

The crisis erupts with Asa's discovery that Allbee had some of Mary's postcards in the pocket of the bathrobe he had borrowed. The bathrobe is a gift from Mary: the one in which Asa had spent his evening of longing for her before witnessing the fight in the street between the man and wife. (59) He is furious. The privacy of his marriage has been violated. He is certain that Allbee has read all his private correspon-

dence. He must, he thinks, be gloating over Mary's unfaithfulness during the engagement and perhaps imagining worse since.

Asa's defence against this imaginary assault is two-fold. Even if he has gone through all his papers, Allbee's surmises are wrong.

What he did not know was that Leventhal's old rival was dead. He had died of heart-failure two years ago. Mary's brother had brought the news on his last visit North. It wasn't to be found in a letter.

Even more fundamentally, "a dirty skunk" like Allbee could not know "anything about a woman like Mary." (60) They belong to different orders of reality. Allbee belongs with "the lost, the outcast, the overcome, the effaced, the ruined", "that part of humanity" which Asa is in the habit of thanking his luck -- and a large portion of that has been Mary -- for having allowed him to escape. (61)

In terms of the novel's symbolism, however, Allbee's attack is devastatingly successful. He has undermined Asa's conviction that he had escaped.

Whatever Asa might pretend, he and Allbee now move in the same element. Symbolically, Asa has drowned.

With the setting of the sun, the colored, brilliant combers of cloud rolled more and more quickly into gray and blue, while red lights appeared on the peaks of buildings, pilot warnings, like shore signals along a coast. The imperfections of the pane through which Leventhal gazed suggested the thickening of water at a great depth when one looks up towards the surface. The air had a salt smell. A breeze had begun to blow; it swayed the curtains and rattled among the papers on the floor. (62)

Until this point in the novel it had been Allbee who had been associated with submersion in water. Asa, on first seeing him, had wondered what "kind of fish" he was (63); in one of his hallucinations, he had thought that Allbee looked "no more human...than a fish or crab or any fleshy thing in the water." (64) Allbee in his turn had, rather pejoratively, defined success as being "handed a bucket when it rained" (65); he had said that "pearl diving [dish washing] is about the only work [he] could get" (66); he had dismissed Asa's claims to experience of poverty with the phrase that they were "not in the same boat." (67)

For Asa water has been associated with the idea of extinction. He thinks of the sea as "numbing in its cold". (68) He connects it with the idea of "freezing, salty, harsh, things, all things difficult to stand", with the "inhuman that didn't care about anything human..." (69) He thinks of the loss, of the self in terms of water imagery. When his "self-possession" seems to him "temporary" he likens it to "a reflection in water that may be wiped out at the first swell." (70) When he imagines that Williston might think him to have acted like a caricature malevolent Jew, the threat to his personal identity appears as a whirlpool.

If he was ready to believe that he was such and such a person -- why avoid saying it? -- that he would carry out a scheme like that because he was a Jew, then the turn he always feared had come and all good luck was canceled and all favors melted away. He looked hopelessly before him. Williston, like himself, like everybody else, was carried on currents, this way and that. The currents had taken a new twist, and he was being hurried, hurried. His heart shrank and he felt faint for a moment and shut his eyes. (71)

He reflects on the implications of the violent marital couple he had seen below his window with a shrinking feeling as though to avoid getting wet.

"...[H]e returned to it every now and then with the feeling that he really did not know what went on about him, what strange things, savage things. They hung near him all the time in trembling drops, invisible usually, or seen from a distance. But that did not mean there was always to be a distance, or that sooner or later one or two of the drops might not fall on him." (72)

When he thinks of humanity as damned in Hell "all the souls, crammed together", the reference is to a story about "the rage of the god of the sea" which had cracked Hell open. (73) For Asa water stands for fear of the experiences which might lie beyond the restricted ambit of his imagination. Bellow's meaning here follows Conrad's use of the sea metaphor in Stein's famous advice to Marlow in Lord Jim.

"And because you not always can keep your eyes shut there comes the real trouble -- the heart pain -- the world pain. I tell you, my friend, it is not good for you to find you cannot make your dream come true...Very funny this terrible thing is. A man that is born falls into a dream like a man who falls into the sea. If he tries to climb out into the air as inexperienced people endeavour to do, he drowns -- nich? warh?...No! I tell you, The way is to the destructive element submit yourself, and with the exertions of your hands and feet in the water make the deep, deep sea keep you up..." (74)



Asa, tensed against destruction (75), cannot, not at any cost, admit that water, Allbee's element, might also be Mary's. Were he to do so, it would be tantamount to the admission that their intimacy, the moments of private happiness from which Asa in his struggle with a hostile world draws strength, is not particularly special, that it, too, is suffused with the Otherness Asa fears.

This intimate confrontation with Otherness is a trial common to the heroes of other Bellow works published shortly after The Victim. Willard, the hero of the 1951 short story, "By The Rock Wall", in the crisis of discovering his wife's adultery, has a

...glimpse of himself as only the figure of a man never seen by others except as a figure...coming, mingling, rising, threatening another, running away... (76)

In The Adventures of Augie March, Mr. Mintouchian tells Augie in love with Stella that.

"...[t]he face you're kissing will change to some other face, and so your face will change...love is adultery..."

and expresses change. You make your peace with change. Another city, another woman, a different bed...You kiss the woman and you show how you love your fate, and you worship and adore the changes of life..." (77)

Asa resists the idea that he and Mary might be subject to some such impersonal inclusion, fiercely. When Allbee returns to the flat, he seizes him. How dared he trespass "like a damned crook and black-mailer." (78) Allbee stands for lewdness and crime; Asa and Mary for decent privacy.

Allbee disarms Asa's rage. With marvelous simplicity, he denies any basis to Asa's demonic vision of Otherness. About Mary's postcards, he says

"I couldn't avoid looking them over. It wasn't intentional. But I took them out of the pocket and so I had to see what they were. It's mostly your wife's fault. She should have put them in an envelope -- things like that. I never would have pulled a letter out of an envelope. But I read this before I realized what it was. It's not so serious, is it? What's so special about your cards? Any wife might write like that to a husband, or a husband to a wife. And an old married man like me ...it's not the same as if a young person, say a young girl, got hold of them. And even then, I wonder if anybody is innocent. And last of all, I don't think it would matter to your

wife. This is not the kind of thing for postcards. If she cared, she'd have written it in a letter." (79)

To believe that Allbee is lying Asa would have to believe that he is a "mental case". (80) If he is not mad -- and he talks such unadorned common-sense that it is difficult to think him puerile -- then he, really, is not, not in any essential way, different from Mary and Asa himself.

Leventhal all at once felt nothing very strongly; he only had a certain curiosity about Allbee. He sat down beside the desk. Allbee sank into the easy chair... (81)

Allbee steps into this absence of intention like a boastful, inquisitive child. He is proud of not having drunk, proud of his new hair-cut. He once again fills Asa with the sense of his presence.

Allbee bent forward and laid his hand on the arm of Leventhal's chair, and for a short space the two men looked at each other and Leventhal felt himself singularly drawn with a kind of affection. It oppressed him, it was repellent. He did not know what to make of it. Still he welcomed it, too. He was remotely disturbed to see himself so changeable. However, it did not seem just then to be a serious fault. (82)

Before Asa could collect himself, Allbee reaches out to touch his hair. He insists that he is fascinated by the texture, by what Asa's hair must be like to comb. Asa recoils from him in confusion and again takes refuge in the idea that Allbee is perverse and mad; however, after the postcard episode, Asa himself cannot bring himself to accept this explanation. Instead, he sees Allbee as though he were seeing him for the first time.

"It's astonishing. It's like an animal's hair. You must have a terrific constitution."

Leventhal jerked his chair away, wrinkling his forehead in convulsion and incipient anger. Then he bawled, "Sit down, you lunatic!" and Allbee went back to his place. He sat forward, ungainly, his hands under his thighs, his jaw slipped to one side, exactly as on the night when he had first confronted Leventhal in the park. The white of his trimmed temples and his shaven face made the blue of his eyes conspicuous.

No further word was spoken for a while. Leventhal was trying to settle his feelings and to determine how to recover the ground he had lost through this last piece of insanity. (83)

At the time of their first meeting, Allbee, sitting in the twilight of the green shade, had the aspect of a drowned man. Then Asa had no difficulty shrugging off

the disturbing vision.

Then he recovered and told himself there was nothing to be afraid of. The man was a crank and irritating, and certainly it was creepy to think of being observed secretly, but there was nothing so alarming about this Allbee. He had become a bum and a drunk and he seemed to have an idea or a twist about him, a delusion; perhaps it was even invented. How could you tell about these drunks? There must be reasons, but they were beyond anybody's ability to find out -- smoky, cloudy, alcoholic, Allbee had taken him by surprise. It was surprising. And in his present state of mind he was, moreover, easily carried away by things. He felt unwell, and that didn't help. (84)

This time "the blue of [Allbee's] eyes is conspicuous". He is sober. He has just bought new clothes. He has shown that he can talk sense. Asa cannot shield himself with stereotypes from the encounter. It is Allbee who raises the issue of what the difference between them might be.

"It's hard to have the right mixture of everything" Allbee suddenly began.

"What are you driving at now?" said Leventhal.

"Oh, this about your calling me a lunatic when I give in to an impulse. Nobody can be sure he has the right mixture. Just to give you an example. Lately, a couple of weeks ago, there

was a man in the subway, on the tracks. I don't understand how he got there. But he was on the tracks and a train came along and pinned him against the wall. He was bleeding to death. A policeman came down and right away forbid anyone to touch the man until the ambulance arrived. That was because he had instructions about accidents. Now that's too much of one thing -- playing it safe. The impulse is to save the man, but the policy is to stick to the rules. The ambulance came and the man was dragged out and died right away. I am not a doctor and I can't weigh whether he had a chance at any time. But suppose he could have been saved? That's what I mean by the mixture."

"Was he yelling for help? What line was that?" Leventhal said with a frown of pain.

"East-side line. Well, of course, when a man is spread-eagled like that. He was filling the tunnel with his noise. And the crowd! The trains were held up and the station was jammed. They kept coming down. People should have pushed the cop out of the way and taken the fellow down, but everybody stood and listened to him." (85)

Asa in his dream, it will be recalled, had also cried in full view, but his tears brought relief, not death; death came later that day when he was alone in his office. The authority figure in his dream had prevented his finding his way to the tracks; but when the call came from Mickey, he had to open his eyes to, in the language of Lord Jim, "the heart pain -- the world pain". Allbee's story is told from the side of

this "world pain". A few sentences further on, his speech even seems to echo Stein's comparison of life to a man swimming in the sea with his eyes shut.

"I'll let you in on something. There isn't a man living who doesn't. All this business, 'Know thyself'! Everybody knows but nobody can hold their breath a long time -- those Greek sponge divers -- and that's interesting. But the way we keep our eyes shut is a stunt too, because they're made to be open." (86)

The story of the subway accident suggests that, somehow, Allbee is able to trespass in the landscape of Asa's dreams. The connection between them is a-rational, subcutaneous. The metaphor of the blind swimmer confirms Asa's worst fears about the reality he dare not face. For Asa, Allbee suddenly has the ontological plenitude his name implies; he includes all of Asa's dreams, fears, and more. Asa at last knows that Allbee is a full human being, not merely an actor with a script.

"What does he tell me this for?" thought Leventhal. "Does he want to work on my feelings? Maybe he doesn't know himself?" (87)

Asa cannot respond to this Allbee, who exists in

the round, who is full of resolutions and dreams. He sinks under the force of his presence, like a drowning man.

At this moment Leventhal felt Allbee's presence, all that concerned him, like a great tiring weight, and looked at him with dead fatigue, his fingers motionless on his thighs. Something would have to happen, something that he could not foresee. Whatever it was, he would be too muddled and fatigued to deal with it. He was played out. He lacked the energy to continue the effort. And anyway the sparks, the clear spark of Mickey's life, the spark of Elena's sanity, the sparks of thought and courage, even courage as confident as Mary's -- how such sparks were chased and overtaken, drowned, put out. Then what good was thinking? His dark, poring face with its full cheeks, and high-rising dull hair was hung toward his chest. He drew a deep, irregular breath and raised his hands from his lap in a gesture of exorcism against the spell of confusion and despair. "God will help me out," passed through his mind, and he did not stop to ask himself exactly what he meant by this. (88)

Allbee insists that Asa must try to get him into movie work. When Asa protests that he has not got the contacts, that Allbee should ask someone else, Allbee gets angry. Face to face with him, Asa is finally sure he has met with nothing like him before.



"I'm giving you a chance to be fair, Leventhal, and to do what's right. And I want what's right from you. Don't drag anybody else in. This is just between the two of us."

"Don't be crazy."

"Just you and I. Just the two of us."

"I never...I never..." Leventhal stammered.

"I can't afford to fool around. The fooling has been kicked out of me. I've been put straight the hard way, the way you pay for with years of your life." He lowered his head and stared at him before continuing. There was a noticeable pulsation in the sides of his face beside his eyes, and in his eyes there was a glint that astounded Leventhal; it resembled nothing in his experience. (89)

Neither of them is ready to yield. Allbee is offering a conditional armistice. Asa knows that the condition -- his expectation that he will use his influence with Jews on his behalf -- is preposterous. If Allbee is not mad, the world is. How is he supposed to deal with someone whose imagination has dressed him as a conspirator in a world-spanning cabal? What is the common ground -- for there is a common ground -- which they share? What can be the common ground between two independent beings?

Instead of an answer there is a knock -- not a ring -- at the door.

### Chapter 3

The knock announces a renewed emphasis on the realistic context of the action. The new arrival is Max, Asa's biological brother. He has come to thank Asa for taking care of the family during his absence and, in the process, he alters the reader's understanding of the events surrounding little Mickey's illness, the crisis which formed the context of Asa's confrontation with Allbee.

According to Max, his wife is in no danger of losing her mind; nor is she obsessed with the irrational desire to avenge her child's death on Asa. Max's "main trouble...with her" -- apart from her grief -- is her unwillingness to leave New York. (1) Instead of avoiding his family, Max has been exerting himself to ready a home for them in Texas. His mother-in-law, in Asa's eyes, a venomous old crone rejoicing in the vengeance of her Catholic God on her half-Jewish grandson, is merely a "worn-out old woman". Max is amused by the paranoid intensity of Asa's feelings.

"I don't see why you're so disturbed about the old woman. If she's the worst I am ever up against..."

It emerges unavoidably from Max's account that Asa's interpretation of the family crisis has been presumptuous in the extreme. While he has been prepared to judge the innermost motives of Max and Elena, he has kept himself so distant from them that the brothers are almost strangers. Neither Max nor Elena knows his wife's name. Neither of them has ever visited Asa's flat. Asa does not know that during the Depression the family was "on relief"; that Max "was laid up"; that, during this crisis, Elena refused to allow Max to go into the rackets and "went out and peddled stuff from door to door" instead.

Asa's credibility is affected. What is the reader to believe? Should he still accept Asa's opinion of the mother-in-law, or Max's view that "[s]he's just an old widow, old and cranky."? Is Elena in danger of losing her mind? Or is Max right when he denies it as follows:

"You don't know Elena when there's a tight spot...She's excitable all in pieces before something happens, but

usually when it happens she is stronger  
than I am." (2)

The effect of these doubts is to undermine the reader's faith in the reliability of Asa as the filter of events. If he has been as presumptuous and hasty as Max suggests, what are we to think of other judgements that his perceptions have committed us to?

The novel does not provide a ready answer. In fact, following his brother's visit, Asa gives up trying to understand the objective context of his actions altogether. Reality has proven to be too overwhelming. Rather than face Allbee, rather than have to talk to his symbolic brother about his real brother's affairs, a conversation which must touch on the kernel of his increasingly indefensible manner of apprehending events, Asa avoids going home. He manages to spend the whole of the next day, a Saturday, away from the apartment. He has decided to give Allbee what he wants. Although it makes no sense to him that Allbee should believe that an interview with Shifcart -- in Allbee's opinion a "power" in the "Jewish set-up" (3) -- will result in anything, he decides to co-operate. To protect himself from reality, he allows Allbee to

fasten a grotesque role on him. His friend Daniel Harkavy's reaction to this willfully inarticulate and unthinking connivance with Allbee's scenario is probably also Bellow's.

"Wake up! What's life? Metabolism? That's what it is for the bugs. Jesus Christ, no! What's life? Consciousness, that's what it is. That's what you are short on. For God's sake, give yourself a push and a shake. It's dangerous stuff, Asa, this stuff," (4)

Asa knows that he cannot will to remain unconscious of the implications of his position.

He postponed thinking about himself. Eventually he would have to -- provided that Max was right about Elena and he wrong. The reason for a mistake like that could not be neglected; it had to be dug out. But dug out when he had the strength for the operation, not now. (5)

At the Harkavy's he escapes by getting dead drunk. On awakening the next day in Harkavy's living room, however, he confronts his inability to account for his experience in a direct unmediated fashion. While getting dressed, he experiences a contact with reality -- quite independent of Allbee, this time -- that is suggestive of the experience of birth. "The world

[pressing] on him and [passing] through him" seems poised to deliver "something of great importance", a truth which his lips anticipate, a new understanding, a new self-alignment to the mystery.

He was about to reach for his shoes and stockings, but his hands remained on his knees and he was suddenly powerless to move and fearfully hampered in his breathing. 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. He concentrated, moving his lips like someone about to speak, and blew a tormented breath through his nose. What he meanwhile sensed was that this interruption of the customary motions he went through unthinkingly on rising, despite the pain it was causing, was a disguised opportunity to discover something of great importance. He tried to seize the opportunity. He put out all his strength to collect himself, beginning with the primary certainty that the world pressed on him and passed through him. Beyond this he could not go, hard though he drove himself. He was bewilderingly moved. He sat in the same posture, massively, his murky face trained on the ferns standing softly against the gray glass. His nostrils twitched. It came into his head that he was like a man in a mine who could smell smoke and feel heat but never see the flames. And then the cramp and the enigmatic opportunity ended together. (6)

The flames which Asa cannot see symbolically

represent a way of life, a connection to life and to death, that is more positive than the associations of the earlier water imagery. Whereas the water had been primarily associated with Allbee, (7) fire appears in connection with characters whose lives are less compromised, who, whatever their feelings, are not, like Asa and Allbee, truants from the consequences of their actions. Harkavy speaks of Schlossberg and his own mother as "dry old fire[s]". (8) On his own testimony, Max is "half-burned out". (9) Asa thinks of "Mickey's life...[, ] Elena's sanity" and his wife's courage as "sparks". (10) He believes that the child dying in the hospital understands his true situation in an imprecise but nevertheless clear fashion.

...affected as a candle flame is by varying amounts of air, as all that wants to be what it was made responds to whatever feeds or endangers it. (11)

On the morning of his hangover Asa also approached the natural immediacy and nourishment associated with flames.

The fire imagery does not, however, furnish a key to the complex morality of this novel. Asa, in not

having been able to see the flames, has drawn back from the glimpse of an epiphany, but there is nothing in the novel to suggest that had he not drawn back, he would have been saved. The imagery of fire points as clearly to destruction as to salvation, as insistently to death as to life. Schlossberg and Mrs. Harkavy are, after all, waiting, in their different ways, to die. In the struggle to do right by his family, Max feels he has been wounded.

The fire imagery does not only evoke a particular kind of effort, a vital kind of tenacity. Like the water imagery, it points to a link between human experience and an order of things that cares nothing "about anything human". The day of Mickey's funeral, the walls seem to flame "coarsely". (12) When Libbie Harkavy is about to blow on her birthday cake, lowering "her face to the ring of candles" Asa notes "the liquid image of them in her eyes", (13) an image which recalls the "light of the meter" in Mickey's eyes the day the taxi had driven him to the hospital where he was to die. (14) When Libbie blows out the candles, in a macabre scene, "the whitish odorous wax smoke" drifts over to the guests who are discussing the morality of



the hard-sell in the life insurance business. (15)

Gratuitous aggression is also a connotation of the fire imagery. Rudiger had burned "like a boiler", (16) his face "aflame" (17) when Asa insulted him. To Allbee the competitive struggle of city life seems to involve creatures

"...like those what-do-you-call.'ems that live in flames -- salamanders. If somebody hurts you, you hit back in any way and anything goes." (18)

Reborn into a world tinged with such flames, Asa would not have been saved; he would, however, have been more of an independent assertive personality, and less an absence playing for time, a shrinking reaction from life's harshness.

Is Asa ever saved? A number of critics feel that the climax of Asa's involvement with Allbee -- their confrontation, Asa's expulsion of Allbee and his prostitute from the apartment, Allbee's return and attempt at murder-suicide and Asa's final barring of his tormentor -- changes Asa fundamentally. M.G. Porter has written that "by coming to terms with Allbee, [Asa]

paradoxically, achieves a larger view of himself and his world, a more balanced humanity." (19) Asa "accepts his complicity in the lives of others rather than rejecting others automatically" according to J.F. McCadden. (20) At the end of the novel, Joseph Baumbach believes "[Asa] has [gone] through a redemption". (21) "The most important thing that happens to [him]" according to Tony Tanner is that he is stirred out of his "indifference" and "recalcitrance" into a sense of general injustice and suffering and then to "an awareness and confession of specific blame and responsibility." (22)

The difficulty with crediting the climax with such an awareness is that during these events Asa shows no sign of it. On his way home from Harkavy he knows the crisis is at hand, but he is barely recognizable to himself. The most familiar surroundings impress him with their strangeness. On his way up his own staircase, he is

rather struck by the number of landings and, until he recognized a fire bucket with cigarettes buried in the sand, wondering why the place did not look more familiar. (23)

In the confrontation with Allbee, Asa's actions are off-centered. There is no coherent explanation of why he acts as he acts. He attacks the door with his fist when Allbee pleads that he come "back a little later". (24) Allbee's pleading to be allowed "ten minutes to be decent" increases his rage.

Leventhal threw himself at the door, whirling around and striking it with the side of his body and his lowered shoulder, his feet gritting on the tiles. He gripped the door posts and pushed. (25)

His behaviour here is no more enlightened than Allbee's aggressive importunities had been. When he hears a second voice inside the apartment -- then there is no mistaking the reason for Allbee's insistence -- his determination to force the door peaks.

He now heard two voices inside. Again, more desperately, he lunged. The chain broke and he was thrown against the wall of the vestibule. He recovered and rushed into the front room.

Asa's assaults on the door parallel Allbee's importunate ringing of his doorbell. His behaviour, his inability to abide the idea that Allbee somehow has usurped his domestic role, parallels Allbee's earlier

charges that Asa had destroyed his life, that Asa has somehow usurped his right to happiness. These parallels, however, only reflect the common humanity of the two men; they point to their shared blindness, not to any understanding.

Once inside the room Asa is brought up short, for his unacknowledged connection with Allbee seems suddenly to have taken a palpable form.

There Allbee, naked and ungainly, stood beside a woman who was dressing in great haste. He was helping her, handing her stockings and underwear from the heap on the chair beside the bed. She had on her skirt but from the waist up she was bare. Brushing aside his hand with the proffered stockings, she bent to squeeze her foot into a shoe, digging her finger in beside the heel. Her hair covered her face; nevertheless Leventhal thought he recognized her. Mrs. Nunez! Was it Mrs. Nunez! The horror of it bristled on him, and the outcry he had been about to make was choked down. (26)

The idea that it should be Mrs. Nunez! The confusion! She belongs in Asa's fantasy life. (27) Asa's confusion of the private and the public realms of his experience, his anger at Allbee's intrusion into his home and his own covert desire to violate the bonds

of marriage, his undifferentiated awareness of the world around him as the sum of his personal possibilities coalesces in this instant of horrified near recognition.

Asa does not meet the crisis as an integrated personality. Obscurely because of Mary, he throws Allbee out. He knows Allbee cannot be there when she comes back. But his eviction of Allbee and the prostitute does not change him. Once he is alone, he begins to shape his memory of the episode so that it is acceptable to his pride. Alone, his habits of thought are as presumptive as ever: he decides that there had been a compact between himself and the woman, a comic appreciation of the low comedy, the absurdity of the gawky, semi-dressed Allbee. The deception is too flagrant however: he cannot bring himself to accept this tamed version of the events. He, again, must face the horror of it all.

...when he sat down for a moment on the bed, all the comedy of it was snatched away and torn to pieces. He was wrong about the woman's expression; he was trying to transform it into something he could bear. The truth was probably far different. He had started out to see what had happened with her eyes and

had ended by substituting his own, thus contriving to put her on his side. Whereas, the fact was that she was nearer to Allbee. Both of them, Allbee and the woman, moved or swam toward him out of a depth of life in which he himself would be lost, choked, ended. There lay horror, evil, all that he had kept himself from. In the days when he was clerking in the hotel on the East Side, he had been as near to it as he could ever bear to be. He had seen it face on then. And since, he had learned more about it out of the corner of his eye. Why not say heart, rather than eye? His heart was what caught it, with awful pain, and dread, in heavy blows. Then, since the fear and pain were so great, what drew him on? (28)

The echoes from Blake's poem "The Tyger" reverberate through this passage but with a difference. In the poem (29) the object of awe had been the nature of the tiger and, by extension, the nature of the Creator. Here, it is the nature of the self. The effect is as if Marlow in the Heart of Darkness -- to which the idea of the "heart" learning about the "horror" might be an allusion -- had stayed in awe the length of the voyage at his own desire to know what lay upriver; as if, instead of the voyage and Kurtz, the trembling self at the wheel had formed the locus of the mystery.

The unity of The Victim cannot be centered on Kasa's consciousness. From the moment, Max unmasks him we look

on his experience with reservations; we take it as an epiphenomenon, not as the work's essential context. When after a lapse of some years, Asa has indeed undergone a change, the text supports this reading by attributing his change of heart to a change in circumstances, rather than to a climactic moment.

The consciousness of an unremitting daily fight, though still present, was fainter and less troubling. His health was better, and there were changes in his appearance. Something recalcitrant seemed to have left him; he was not exactly affable, but his obstinately unrevealing expression had softened. His face was paler and there were some gray areas in his hair, in spite of which he looked years younger.

Mary is pregnant. He has a new job. He no longer assumes that his destiny is

...a delaying maze to be gone through daily in a misery so habitual that one became absent about it. (30)

Something vital in the structure of his imagination has changed.

How does the crisis with Allbee figure in this change? That the issue between them is far from settled

becomes evident when they meet accidentally for the last time. Asa had imagined Allbee "dead and buried in Potter's field" (31); instead, he meets him at the theater escorting a faded movie star. During the intermission, away from the women, they talk in the lobby.

On close inspection Allbee does not seem to have undergone all that drastic a change. He still drinks; "the deepened, wrinkles around his eyes [have] a fabric quality, crumpled and blank." (32) They have a "sensational, terrible look of pain" when he mentions his late wife. (33) Nevertheless, he has a new career, he has accepted his lot, and he can admit his indebtedness to Asa for his hospitality long before. (34)

The meeting does not result in any startlingly new understanding. But when Allbee is already leaving, Asa suddenly asks a question. If Allbee answered it, the answer would give the story of their relationship a clear moral, the story of their meeting a clear context:

"Wait a minute, what's your idea of who



runs things?" (35)

But Allbee is out of hearing. We do not learn how success has really changed him. Is he no longer a threat? Has the nether world, symbolized by the flower in his lapel which had

...struck [Asa]...as a mark of something extraordinary, barbaric, rich ... decadent (36)

become really subordinate to conventional social civility? There is no answer. Asa hears "Mary's voice at his back" and turns away. (37)

Where, then, is the focal point of the novel's design? Is there such a point?

We have to look for it in the opening paragraph of the novel, I believe, in the careful reasoning which seeks to show the difficult connection between consciousness and objects, including the human essence, by showing that simile cannot express it. The plotting of the Allbee-Asa encounters continues this reasoning. While Allbee pursues Asa, Asa also pursues Allbee, through a series of spontaneous empathic approxima-

tions. Each approximation fails. The simile cannot grasp the distinctness of individual being. Asa's final question shows there is a supra-individual context -- the "mystery" of the opening paragraph -- to which comparisons based on individual experience, however powerfully grounded in intuition these might be, are uncertain guides: Allbee's reality still escapes Asa and with it the context of his own actions. As in the opening paragraph of the novel, the mystery is still with us at the end of the last of the Allbee-Asa encounters and it is still unclear whether the mystery is an internal or an external relation; whether it is a darkness inside Man or between men, or an extra-human darkness.

Subject to this studied imprecision, The Victim takes up the question of context with a new vocabulary: the imagery of the theater. One can readily see why this choice is appropriate. The Victim and the theater share the same difficulty: the adequacy of simile. The challenge facing the actor, however, is not merely to be like the character he would portray but to assimilate the Other's identity, to become the Other for the audience. The mystery which disorients Asa in

his encounters with Allbee is that he spontaneously discovers himself in just such a position.

His disorientation is compounded by his total lack of theatrical sense. M.A. Klug's observation that the "internal, lives [of Bellow's characters] become a kind of drama with the divided self as actor or audience" (39) applies to him only with the qualification that, consciously, he has no use for drama.

His characteristic appearance is that of a person who has effortlessly foregone the need for a role -- although his build and features, especially his eyes, have a latent power.

Leventhal's figure was burly, his head large. He had black hair, coarse waves of it and his eyes under their intergrown brows were intensely black and of a 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. He did not look sullen but rather unaccommodating, impassive. (39)

He dislikes the theater. He does not go to plays or to

films unless he has to -- only in order to please Philip, or Mary, or his friend Harkavy -- and Bellow never shows him at anything like a first-rate production. What he sees either puts him to sleep or strikes him as "sentimental and untrue". (40) His experience of the theater matches his irritation with Allbee's melodramatic mannerisms.

The exception to these negative associations is Asa's response to Schlossberg, a critic of the stage and screen, who writes for the Yiddish language press, a man well-on in years. When Schlossberg surveying the small talents who aspire to be great actresses proposes that he himself would be better in the role of Queen Victoria, Asa is so impressed with his histrionic gifts that he concludes

...with more respect than amusement, [that indeed he could] if his voice weren't so deep. (41)

Schlossberg's standard for the theater is Stanislavskian. (48) The theater, he believes, crystalizes the human essence. A successful performance enlivens our understanding of what is truly human; the true context of our everyday experience. By

concentrating his intuitive understanding of the range and complexity of human experience (43), the actor makes the image on stage the measure of our common humanity. A great actor has, therefore, a privileged access to Otherness -- he is not defeated like Asa. Schlossberg expounds this vision in an argument over the merits of contemporary actresses.

"And what am I kicking for?" He checked their smiles, holding them all with his serious, worn, blue gaze. "I'll tell you. It's bad to be less than human and it's bad to be more than human. What's more than human. Our friend --" he meant Leventhal "was talking about it before Caesar, if you remember in the play wanted to be like a god. Can a god have diseases? So this is a sick man's idea of God. Does a statue have way in its ears? Naturally not. It doesn't sweat, either, except maybe blood on holidays. If I can talk myself into it that I never sweat and make everybody else act as if it was true maybe I can fix it up about dying, too. We only know what it is to die because some people die and, if we make ourselves different from them, maybe we don't have to?...More than human, can you have any use for life?" (44)

The less-than-human state is illustrated by Livia Hall's performance in The Tigress, the performance which sparked the discussion:

"This girl...what's the matter with her? She commits a murder. What are her feelings? No love, no hate, no fear, no lungs, no heart. I'm ashamed to mention what else is missing. Nothing! The poor husband. Nothing is killing him, less than human. A blank. And it should be so awful the whole audience should be afraid positively to look in her face. But I don't know if she's too pretty or what to have feelings. You see right away she has no idea what is human because her husband's death doesn't mean to her a thing. It's all in packages, and first the package is breathing and then it isn't breathing, and you insured the package so you can marry another package and go to Florida for the winter." (45)

What does the mean between these two possibilities, the human, consist of? Like Aristotle, Schlossberg finds it easier to indicate the departures from the mean, the "one marked by excess and one by deficiency", (46) than to define the virtue in positive terms. He recalls the pose of the actress Nazimova in Chekhov's Three Sisters when she learns her suitor has been killed; this, it seems, expresses it. (47) Elsewhere, he warns that the human conception of self must include an awareness of limits: although the reach of the mind is boundless, man must understand himself and achieve meaning with the limits of his condition.

There's a limit to me. But I have to be

myself in full. Which is somebody who dies, isn't it? That's what I was from the beginning. I'm not three people, four people. I was born once and I will die once. You want to be two people? More than human? Maybe it's because you don't know how to be one. Everybody is busy. Every man turns himself into a whole corporation to handle the business. So one stockholder is riding in the elevator, and another one is on the roof looking through a telescope, one is eating candy, and one is in the movies looking at a pretty face. Who is left? And how can a corporation die? One stockholder dies. The corporation lives and goes on eating and riding in the elevator and looking at the pretty face. But it stands to reason, paper grass in the grave makes all the grass paper..." (48)

For Schlossberg this condition is an honourable one. He does not accept the modern idea that man's lot is inherently sordid and mean, trivialized by the scale of the universe and the absence of a humanly meaningful context.

"...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. Do you know better? I'm entitled as much as you. And why be measly? Do you have to be? Is somebody holding you by the neck? Have dignity, you understand me? Choose dignity. Nobody knows enough to turn it down." Now to whom should this mean something if not to an actor? If he isn't for dignity, then I tell you there is a great mistake somewhere." (49)

Schlossberg represents this ideal in the world of the novel. (50) His name -- the evocation of a castle, a mountain, and perhaps a keep -- points to this pre-eminence. Although he is old, he is a vigorous and powerful presence, a large man "with hulking shoulders and a wide worn face." (51) He is by far the most impressive character in the two scenes in which he appears: the cafeteria theater-discussion and the Harkavy birthday party. When we consider Schlossberg closely, however, it emerges that Bellow has placed him in such a peculiar light that the ideal he represents is undercut.

Above all, Schlossberg evokes the idea of distance. His name sets him apart. His appearance, too -- the eyes "disproportionately small...their gaze...rather worn" the voice "not always distinct" because of "his heavy breathing", (52) his features "too large" to express "fine degrees of irony" -- subtracts from the immediacy of his reality. His power suggests that of an actor, masked, on a classical stage perhaps, made indistinct by distance.



His distance from the appropriate context is also the salient feature of his relationships with others. He delivers speeches where others talk. Occupied with writing "theatrical reminiscences" (54) for the Yiddish papers, the immediate past no longer registers very dependably for him: he does not recognize Asa the second time they meet. (55) Prophet-like in his moral sweep, in his ability to declaim, one of the first things we learn about him is that his son at thirty-five has no career and depends on him financially. The situation of his daughter is "worse yet". (56) Schlossberg the father figure has failed to reach his children.

This characterization is, I think, part of a deliberate strategy. The Stanislavskian stage which Schlossberg proposes as a norm had also had to meet the criticism that its ideal sapped the drama of coherence: that the "insistence [for] the actor always [to] be true to nature" lacks an exact meaning and that it sacrifices the intention of the playwright to an extra-textual sense of life. (57) Schlossberg's grand speeches, his distance from the action, and his inability to act effectively reflect this criticism. By

force of personality, he can command a stage to appear each time he speaks. He commands a ready audience: as Kaplan cries out at the Harkavy birthday party,

"[t]here's always something new with Schlossberg...What's on his lung is on his tongue." (58)

His performances, with their coupling of the reality of greatness and beauty with the inevitability of human limits, including the final limit death, evoke the moral vistas of tragedy. They cannot, however, convey an enduring sense of context. The failure of his children to be independent adults is a case in point. Asa's invocation of Schlossberg's scale of human significance on the night of his dream of a shared human essence and purpose which little Mickey's death so harshly renders meaningless is another example. (60)

A further reason for thinking that the airy, unfocused characterization of Schlossberg is part of a deliberate strategy is that a set of choric figures, with traits directly opposed to his, appear in the novel. If Schlossberg's description of true humanity may be considered as broadly tragic, the Harkavy family are surely comic in spirit. Nothing throws them off

their stride: death, the ultimate limit, is merely another circumstance. For the love of a good argument, (61) for example, Daniel tells the assembled guests, Schlossberg included, at his niece's birthday party that it is perversely self-seeking to remind people of death "in the daytime". (62) The rug in the family apartment is one their late father

had gotten from the estate of a broker who committed suicide on Black Friday. (63)

Mrs. Harkavy, a moment after appearing devastated on learning how young Mickey had been when he died explodes with the joyous realization that she has no reason to "feel wicked", because, in spite of being old, she herself is not "taking it away from anybody". (64).

"Someday science will conquer death  
...Last Sunday there was a symposium in  
The Times about it." (65)

The Harkavys are sure -- to borrow from Paul Goodman's definition of comedy -- that whatever reversals lie ahead, they cannot "be destroyed". (66) The comic spirit can accomodate any sort of improbability. (67)

This faith allows the Harkavys to complicate people's lives without worrying unduly about the outcome. David nearly wrecked Asa's life when he encouraged him to quit his civil service job, assuring him that his contacts in New York were such that "he could place him on a paper..." without difficulty. (68) The hopeful logic of the Harkavy world is best illustrated in Mrs. Harkavy's exposition of the reasons why she thinks Dr. Denisart, the specialist should be in charge of Mickey's case.

"Oh, he's a fine doctor, Asa; his mother is a lodge sister of mine and I've known him since he was a boy. You can have confidence in him. They gave him the very best education. He studied in Holland."

"Austria, Mother."

"Abroad, anyway. His uncle put him through. He was in jail afterwards, the uncle, for income taxes, but that wasn't the Denisarts' fault. They used to send him pheasant to Sing Sing and they say he was allowed to have card parties in his cell. But they really learn in Europe, you know. That's because their slums are worse; they get complicated cases in their clinics. Our standard of living is so high, it's bad for the education of our doctors." (69)

Corruption, imprisonment, the conviction that the suffering in European slums has allowed for superior

developments in medicine and that even jail becomes bearable through card parties and pheasant for dinner: with a single breath, she makes Evil vanish.

The Harkavy faith in the power of comedy is the ethos of Bellow's hero in The Adventures of Augie March. But in The Victim, Asa is committed neither to comedy nor to Schlossberg's tragic vision of human limitations. Willy-nilly, he tries out aspects of both alternatives, but succeeds at neither. His first reaction to Allbee's assault had been to brazen it out with Harkavy-like self-assurance. In the passage below, the reference to card playing may be a proleptic allusion to Dr. Denisart's uncle in prison.

And why do they pick out this, that, or the other person to hate -- Tom, Dick or Harry? No one can say. They hate your smile or the way you blow your nose or use a napkin. Anything will do for an excuse. And meanwhile this Harry, the object of it, doesn't even suspect. How should he know someone is carrying around an image of him (just as a woman may paste a lover's picture on the mirror of her vanity case or a man his wife's snapshot in his wallet), carrying it around to look at and hate? It doesn't even have to be a reproduction of poor Harry. It might as well be the king of diamonds with his embroidery, his whiskers, his sword, and all. It doesn't make a bit of

2  
difference. (70)

The closest Asa comes to the Harkavy optimism is this attempt to believe that Allbee's malevolence might be a random, meaningless event. When he tries to fit Schlossberg scale of human action to his own sense of life, another kind of redefinition takes place.

"[He]...disagreed about "less than human". Since it was done by so many, what was it but human. "More than Human" was for a much smaller number. But most people had fear in them --- fear of life, fear of death, of life more than death, perhaps. But it was a fact they were afraid, and when the fear was uppermost they didn't want any more burdens." (71)

Asa does not share either Harkavy or Schlossberg's sense of theater. Indeed, his perceptions are so idiosyncratic that the model of the theater is an imperfect analogue for his experience. His sense of himself and of others is too deeply problematic, too troubled, for him to distance the drama without nullifying distortions. Hence, in his approximation of the Harkavy's devil-may-care optimism, he descends to a plea for meaninglessness; in adapting Schlossberg's words, he accepts the necessity of a fear of life.

He shrinks from the more integrated, morally more daring visions of life possible to characters who represent forms of theater. The theater is a potential source of danger. Alone in his apartment after he had evicted Allbee and the whore, the sight of the movie-house across the street fills him with thoughts of a drowned world, of being carried away by tides of noise and humanity,

He flung up the window and bent out. Instantly he heard the tumultuous swoop of the Third Avenue train rising above the continuous, tidal noise of the street. People were walking among the stripes of light on the pavement, light that came from windows opening on carpeted floors and the shapes of furniture; they passed through the radiance of the glass cage that bulged before the theater and into shadows, tributaries that led into deeper shadows and led, still further on, into mighty holes filled with light and stifled roaring. (72)

The descent into the "mighty holes" recalls Plato's parable of the cave in Book VII of The Republic. (73) In Plato the descent from the light of the sun is a movement away from truth. Asa, too small, too timid a man to be concerned with truth, sees that the cave contains power; the sound-track he associates with a "stifled roaring", perhaps of beasts; the descent

figured in terms of a tidal movement receding through tributaries of shadow evokes his earlier fears of being "carried on currents, this way and that", of losing his individuality. (74)

The image of the theater threatens Asa with its insistence that everyone has a role. The world is essentially too hostile a place for him to be able to accept such objective finality. In the closing chapter of the novel -- when he has achieved a more comfortable situation in life, a less resentful accomodation with the world -- he still cannot accept the challenge of this claim. He hopes for another, perhaps a transcendent, standard to apply to experience.

...the error rose out of something very mysterious, namely, a conviction or illusion that at the start of life, and perhaps even before, a promise had been made. In thinking of this promise, Leventhal compared it to a ticket, a theater ticket. And with his ticket, a man entitled to an average seat might feel too shabby for the dress circle or sit in it defiantly and arrogantly; another, entitled to the best in the house, might cry out in rage to the usher who led him to the third balcony. And how many more stood disconsolately in the rain and snow, in the long line of those who could only expect to be turned away? But no, this was incorrect. The reality was different. For



why should tickets, mere tickets, be promised if promises were being made -- tickets to desirable and undesirable places? There were more important things to be promised. Possibly there was a promise, since so many felt it. He himself was almost ready to affirm that there was. But it was misunderstood. (75)

This hope is Asa's alternative to reconciliation with the objective finality of his role. What can this role be? In their final encounter this is the import of the question he shouts after the retreating Allbee.

When there is no answer, he returns to the theater. The bell insisting on the audience's return has begun ringing. Mary wants to see this play.

...[He] heard Mary's voice at his back. Allbee ran in and sprang up the stairs. The bell continued its dinning, and Leventhal and Mary were still in the aisle when the houselights went off. An usher showed them to their seats. (76)

Allbee's flight and the ringing of the bell echo the preliminaries of Asa and Allbee's first meeting, the phantom bell, the note, the curious coincidence of their first meeting in the park. This time the bell is unquestionably objective: Asa and Mary have places reserved. Asa, however, still does not feel he belongs.

(77) He is uncomfortable with the piece: he has a larger sense that a seat in the theater cannot sum up the possibilities of existence. For a brief time after the lights go off, Bellow has Asa and Mary "still in the aisle." Then, they are conspicuously seated in the audience. The play has resumed. The tissue of appearance is intact. The measure of Bellow's achievement becomes clear when we try to interpret it.

What is the result of Asa's trials? As I have attempted to show, nothing very definite can be said to have followed from them. The plot is not at fault: events in The Victim follow from an inner logic. Asa, moreover, is vitally committed to events. His identity and, at times, his sanity are at stake. Why then does nothing definitive happen to him?

The reason, as Keith Michael Opdahl has suggested, (78) is that Bellow has a sense of human complexity which cannot be readily resolved in the gestures and events appropriate to realistic narrative. The Victim is impressive for the way in which it subordinates the narrative to the dictates of this complexity: to Bellow's reservations about the reach of simile, the

adequacy of representation and the ability of either comedy or tragedy to express the distinct quality of Asa's role as a cogniscent subject, moral agent, and historical actor. Nothing happens to Asa because Bellow has fixed him in a world whose constitutive principles exclude the possibility of substantial change. The hero of The Victim dangles, like Joseph between the army and his ideals, between Schlossberg's and Harkavy's versions of reality. To the extent that he moves -- and this under Allbee's prodding -- his unplanned phenomenological intrusions on Allbee's separateness challenge the reality of individual selves. As in Dangling Man, Bellow's epistemological concerns fix the central drama of The Victim on the border of the comprehensible and the issue of the drama is comprehensibility itself.

This carefully situated framework for events, I believe, is the basis for Bellow's feeling that in writing The Victim he had "hobble[d] himself with formalities". Need we share his negative estimate of the book? I think not. As I hope this paper has demonstrated the novel deals with themes of exceptional importance with superb craft. The Victim's exploration

of the consequences of a radically skeptical view of the world, in a dramatic setting which demands the most intense conviction, is not one ever likely to lack appreciative readers.

## Endnotes

### Chapter 1

1. Gordon Lloyd Harper, "Saul Bellow", Saul Bellow: A Collection of Critical Essays. ed. by E. Rovitt (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1975), pp. 8-9.
2. Ibid., p. 9.
3. V.S. Pritchett, "King Saul", New York Review of Books. (October 22, 1964): 4.
4. Karl Miller, "Leventhal", New Statesman. (September 10, 1965): 360.
5. Elizabeth Hardwick, "Fiction Chronicle", Partisan Review. (January 1948): 116-117.
6. Joseph Baumbach, The Landscape of Nightmare: Studies in the Contemporary American Novel (New York: New York University Press, 1967), p. 35.
7. Robert Penn Warren, "The Man With No Commitments", Critical Essays of Saul Bellow. ed. by Stanley Trachtenberg (Boston: G.K. Hall, 1979), p. 11.
8. Saul Bellow, Dangling Man. (New York: The New American Library Inc., Signet, 1965), p. 9.
9. Ibid., p. 9.
10. Ibid., pp. 93-94.
11. Similarities between the first novels of Sartre and Bellow are discussed by K.M. Opdahl, The Novels of Saul Bellow: An Introduction. (University Park and London: The Pennsylvania University Press, 1967), pp. 31 and 49, and by H. Porter Abbott, "Saul Bellow and the Lost Cause of Character", Novel, Spring 1980, pp. 268-269.

Opdahl notes their common indebtedness to Dostoevsky's Notes From the Underground and the use of the journal form by both authors. H. Porter Abbott, whose discussion of the similarity is more extended, emphasizes the use of the journal form in

each "to get to the bottom of a crisis" and the reversion at the end, "of both protagonists... rather abruptly to modes of absolute form" (Abbott, p. 268). In addition, H. Porter Abbott suggests that the minor character John Pearl who seeks selfhood in "an aesthetic credo" might be an echo of Roquentin (Abbott, p. 270).

12. Saul Bellow, Dangling Man. (New York: The New American Library Inc., Signet, 1965), pp. 125-126.
13. Jean-Paul Sartre, La Nausée. (Paris: Gallimard, Le Livre de Poche, 1966), p. 248.
14. Ibid., p. 249.
15. K.M. Opdahl, The Novels of Saul Bellow: An Introduction. (University Park and London: The Pennsylvania State University, 1967), p. 31.
16. Saul Bellow, Dangling Man. (New York: The New American Library Inc., Signet, 1965), p. 126.
17. Mark Schorer, "Fictions Not Wholly Achieved", Kenyon Review, 6 (Summer 1944): 460-461.
18. Delmore Schwartz, Adventure in America. ed. Trachtenberg, pp. 3-4, 348-350.
19. Diana Trilling, "Fiction in Review", The Nation, 158 (April 15, 1944): 455.

Much of the critical notice of Dangling Man was, of course, positive in nature. Nathan L. Rothman in the Saturday Review of Literature hailed the novel as "a successful piece of work everywhere you examine it" and the novelist as "a writer of great original powers". N.L. Rothman "Introducing an Important New Writer", Saturday Review of Literature, 27 (April 15, 1944): 27.

Edmund Wilson called it "an excellent document on the experience of the non-combatant in time of war...well written never dull". E. Wilson, "Doubts and Dreams", Dangling Man and Under a Glass Bell in The New Yorker, 20 (April 1, 1944): 70.

In general, however, the more extended the discussion and the less the novel was looked at as a social document the greater was the likelihood of a qualified, negative response.

Thus in a brief (a hundred words perhaps) mention in The New York Times Book Review, the accent is on Dangling Man's "uncanny delineation of ourselves". Kenneth Fearing, "Man Versus Man", New York Times Book Review 49, March 26, 1944, p. 15.

In the "Books of the Times" column of The New York Times, however, the reviewer tempers his praise of the novel's timeliness and show of talent with the observation that it "is rather haphazard in construction and fuzzy in its subsidiary characterizations. Like Schorer, the reviewer goes on to note that the "diary form is...an excuse for formlessness". John Chamberlain, "Books of the Times", The New York Times. (March 25, 1944): 13.

On balance, I think these reservations outweighed the praise in the eyes of the artist.

20. David Galloway, "Culture-Making: The Recent Works of Saul Bellow", Saul Bellow and His Work. ed. E. Schraepen (Brussels: University of Brussels, 1978), p. 56.
21. Tony Tanner, "The Flight From Monologue", Saul Bellow: Herzog Text and Criticism. ed. I. Howe (New York: The Viking Press, 1976), p. 461.
22. Joseph Baumbach, The Landscape of Nightmare: Studies in the Contemporary American Novel. (New York: New York University Press, 1967), p. 39.
23. Frederick J. Hoffman, "The Fool of Experience: Saul Bellow's Fiction", Contemporary American Novelist. ed. H.T. Moore (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern University Press, 1968), p. 88.
24. John Jacob Clayton, Saul Bellow: In Defense of Man. (Bloomington and London: Indiana University Press, 1979), p. 141.
25. Ralph Freedman, "Saul Bellow: The Illusion of Environment", Saul Bellow and the Critics. ed. Irving Malin (New York: New York University Press, 1967), p. 54.
26. Howard M. Harper, Desperate Faith. (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina, 1967), p. 23.

27. M. Gilbert Porter, Whence the Power? The Artistry and Humanity of Saul Bellow. (Columbia, Missouri: University of Missouri Press, 1972), p. 32.
28. H. Porter Abbott, "Saul Bellow and the Lost Cause of Character", Novel. (Spring 1980): 265.
29. C. Kulshreshta, Saul Bellow: The Problem of Affirmation. (New Delhi, India: Arnold-Heineman, 1978), p. 57.
30. I. Hassan, Radical Innocence: Studies in the Contemporary American Novel. (New York: Columbia University, 1966), p. 315.
31. B. Scheer-Schazler, Saul Bellow. (New York: Frederick Ungar, 1972), p. 5.
32. K.M. Opdahl, The Novels of Saul Bellow: An Introduction. (University Park and London: The Pennsylvania State University, 1967), p. 7.
33. Norman Podhoretz, The Language of Life. ed. S. Trachtenberg, p. 14.
34. Irving Howe, "Down and Out in New York and Chicago", ed. Howe, p. 396.
35. Gordon Lloyd Harper, "Saul Bellow", Saul Bellow: A Collection of Critical Essays. ed. E. Rovitt (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1975) p. 9.
36. Saul Bellow, The Victim. (New York: The Viking Press, 1947), p. 18.
37. K.M. Opdahl, The Novels of Saul Bellow: An Introduction. (University Park and London: The Pennsylvania State University, 1967), p. 55.
38. Saul Bellow, The Victim. (New York: The Viking Press, 1947), p. 3.
39. Sheridan Baker, "Saul Bellow's Bout With Chivalry", Criticism 9, 2, Spring 1967, p. 114.
40. Saul Bellow, The Victim. (New York: The Viking Press, 1947), p. 51.

K.M. Opdahl has noted Bellow's concern with evil "as a principle of nature". He treats it, however,



as a discontinuous strain in Bellow's vision; he does not consider it as a dynamic element in the design of The Victim. C. Eisinger has also pointed out Bellow's awareness of the clash between "the possibilities for social and biological determinism...and free will". Chester Eisinger, Fiction of the Forties. (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1963), p. 352.

41. Saul Bellow, "Distractions of a Fiction Writer", ed. Howe, p. 373.
42. Saul Bellow, "The Writer as Moralist", The Atlantic Monthly, CCIX (March, 1963): 62.
43. Saul Bellow, "Introduction", Great Jewish Short Stories. ed. Saul Bellow (New York: Dell Publishing Co., 1963), p. 11.
44. There are several interesting parallels between De Quincey's book and The Victim.

Irving Malin has connected the rocking motion of the ocean in the De Quincey quotation with New York's apparent change of place in the opening paragraph and Asa's "struggles with the sliding subway door" when he is introduced and with his other "frenetic movements". Irving Malin, Saul Bellow's Fiction. (Carbondale and Edwardville: Southern University Press, 1969), p. 110.

Eusebio L. Rodrigues has noted that both works record the death of a child and combine the imagery of oppressive heat and the confusion of animal forms with the fact of suffering. E.L. Rodrigues, Quest for the Human: An Exploration of Saul Bellow's Fiction. (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1981), pp. 55-56.

There is an additional parallel between the way in which the protagonists of the two works understand their experiences. Asa attributes his unsettled state of mind to Mary's absence. In the 1856 edition of Confessions, De Quincey stated his belief that the nightmare was caused by his "searching for Ann [a prostitute who had befriended him in his childhood] among fluctuating crowds". Thomas De Quincey, Confessions of an English Opium Eater. ed. Alethea Hayter (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1971), p. 223.

## Endnotes

### Chapter 2

1. Norman Mailer, "Some Children of the Goddess", ed. Moore, p. 27.
2. Tony Tanner, "The Flight From Monologue", Saul Bellow: Herzog Text and Criticism, ed. I. Howe (New York: The Viking Press, 1976), p. 460.
3. Alfred Kazin, "The Earthly City of the Jews", ed. I. Howe, p. 487.
4. Ralph Freedman, "Saul Bellow: The Illusion of Environment", Saul Bellow and the Critics, ed. Irving Malin (New York: New York University Press, 1967), p. 59.
5. Ibid., pp. 62-63.
6. K.M. Opdahl, The Novels of Saul Bellow: An Introduction. (University Park and London: The Pennsylvania State University, 1967), pp. 55-56.
7. Sarah Blacher Cohen, Saul Bellow's Enigmatic Laughter. (Urbana, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 1974), p. 56.
8. Ibid., pp. 56-57.
9. John Jacob Clayton, Saul Bellow: In Defense of Man. (Bloomington and London: Indiana University Press, 1979), p. 161.
10. E.L. Rodriguez, Quest for the Human: An Exploration of Saul Bellow's Fiction. (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1981), p. 40.
11. Dmitry Chizhevsky, "The Theme of the Double in Dostoevsky", Dostoevsky: A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. R. Wellek (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1962), p. 116.

The Dostoevsky novella recognized as having influenced Bellow most is not The Double, but The Eternal Husband. The relationship between Velchaninov and Trusotsky, the rake and the

gullible cuckold, each dependent on the other for the definition of his self parallels the need which Asa, the Jew, and Allbee, the anti-semite, have for one another. The most extensive exposition the novella's influence on The Victim is in John Jacob Clayton, Saul Bellow: In Defense of Man. (Bloomington and London: Indiana University Press, 1979), pp. 141-157.

12. Baumbach made his point as follows:

"The two are secret sharers, though in a Dostoevskian rather than a Conradian sense. Allbee is not to Leventhal, as Leggatt is to the Captain, a primordial alter ego, the personification of evil possibilities; he is as Smerdyakov is to Ivan...the grotesque exaggeration of his counter-part". (Joseph Baumbach, The Landscape of Nightmare: Studies in the Contemporary American Novel. (New York: New York University Press, 1967), pp. 41-42.)

13. K.M. Opdahl, The Novels of Saul Bellow: An Introduction. (University Park and London: The Pennsylvania State University, 1967), pp. 52-53.

14. E.L. Rodriguez allows Allbee individuality by granting him the status of Asa's double without, however, insisting on a one-to-one match of their personality traits. Allbee, he believes, has "a number of other roles", and in a more eclectic view of the novel, he proposes that:

Bellow...does not charge the relation between Allbee and Leventhal with psychological tension in the manner of Dostoevsky. Asa's fears of rejection, his feelings of insecurity are not explored in depth... (E.L. Rodriguez, Quest for the Human: An Exploration of Saul Bellow's Fiction. (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1981), p. 51.)

My approach differs from Rodriguez's in that he seems to assume "doubleness" to be a fixed relation between the two men whereas I show its changing, evanescent qualities. I believe, moreover, that the exploration of Asa's fears is implicit in the way Bellow presents his experience. Rodriguez's tolerant eclecticism fails to analyze sufficiently

the relationships among the roles he discerns.

15. Saul Bellow, The Victim. (New York: The Viking Press, 1947), p. 25.
16. Joseph Baumbach, The Landscape of Nightmare: Studies in the Contemporary American Novel. (New York: New York University Press, 1967), p. 41.
17. Saul Bellow, The Victim. (New York: The Viking Press, 1947), p. 26.
18. Ibid., p. 27.
19. Ibid., p. 28.
20. Ibid., p. 29.
21. Ibid., p. 31.
22. Ibid., pp. 31-32.
23. Ibid., p. 66.
24. Ibid., pp. 66-67.
25. Ibid., p. 67.
26. Ibid., pp. 69-70.
27. Ibid., p. 77.
28. Ibid., p. 92.
29. Ibid., pp. 93-94.
30. Ibid., p. 207.
31. Ibid., p. 281.

Malcolm Bradbury draws attention to this possibility. Bradbury, Saul Bellow. (London and New York: Methuen, 1982), p. 45.

Surprisingly, Bradbury is the only one to notice Asa's uneasiness over his wife. Other writers merely accept her importance to him or else emphasize her force of character beyond the degree readily evident in the text.

J.F. McCadden believes that she "...is not an ordinary mortal with foibles, passions and flaws but an idealized figure, a symbol of stability, as well as a sign that the future can be ordered in a rational way". He credits Asa's love for her, his "heightened state of excitement" before her return with saving him from the gas. J.F. McCadden, The Flight From Women in the Fiction of Saul Bellow. (Washington: University Press of America, 1980), pp. 46, 54.

E.L. Rodriguez, in a similar extratextual interpretation, maintains that Mary's strength of character is due to the "anguish of deliberately breaking away from her married lover". E.L. Rodriguez, Quest for the Human: An Exploration of Saul Bellow's Fiction. (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1981), p. 45.

The fact is we know very little about her. As Maxwell Geismar has observed she "is...barely more than a shadow in the story". M. Geismar, "Saul Bellow: Novelist of the Intellectuals", ed. I. Malin, p: 14.

The significant issue, in any event, is not Mary's character but Asa's feeling for her.

32. Saul Bellow, The Victim. (New York: The Viking Press, 1947), p. 207.
33. Ibid., pp. 16-17.
34. Ibid., pp. 95-96.
35. Ibid., p. 94.
36. Ibid., p. 100.
37. Ibid., p. 101. Schlossberg's speech is on p. 256.
38. Ibid., pp. 101-102.
39. Ibid., p. 57.
40. Ibid., pp. 65-66.
41. Ibid., p. 102.
42. Ibid., p. 103.

43. Ibid., pp. 103-104.

44. Ibid., p. 107.

45. Ibid., pp. 139-147.

46. Ibid., pp. 158-159.

47. Ibid., pp. 160-161.

48. Ibid., p. 161.

In the novel's final episode, Allbee recalls his gratitude to Asa on this occasion. He states that he became aware that he was contracting a debt to Asa while taking his first shower. He, too, was stepping away from a stereotype in this encounter. Saul Bellow, The Victim. (New York: The Viking Press, 1947), p. 294.

49. Saul Bellow, Dangling Man. (New York: The New American Library Inc., Signet, 1965), p. 102.

50. Saul Bellow, The Victim. (New York: The Viking Press, 1947), p. 168.

51. Ibid., pp. 168-169.

52. Ibid., p. 169.

53. John J. Clayton has offered this very plausible analysis of Asa's dream.

On the surface the dream represents the defeat of the anguished dreamer by the reality principle (in business suit and fedora), a defeat analogous to death -- there is no way out; one cannot cheat the rules. But far more important, Asa is able to identify himself with the runner unable to catch his train (or, with Allbee, who often asks for a place on "the train"), with the rigid enforcer of the "rules" who prevents him from succeeding, and with the helpless workman (Asa's self-righteousness and conscience, his pity and sense of helpless responsibility). All are within Asa..." John Jacob Clayton, Saul Bellow: In Defense of Man. (Bloomington and London: Indiana University Press, 1979), p. 164.

In Clayton's view, this "vision of the victim and the victimizer as one" is the central truth of the novel". Ibid., p. 164.

54. Saul Bellow, The Victim. (New York: The Viking Press, 1947), p. 169.

55. Ibid, p. 170.

56. Ibid., pp. 175-176.

57. Ibid., p. 176.

58. Ibid., p. 16.

59. Ibid., p. 92.

60. Ibid., p. 208.

61. Ibid., p. 20.

62. Ibid., p. 209.

63. Ibid., p. 26.

64. Ibid., p. 77.

65. Ibid., p. 71.

66. Ibid., p. 163.

67. Ibid., p. 164.

68. Ibid., p. 22.

69. Ibid., p. 51.

70. Ibid., p. 192.

71. Ibid., p. 91.

This image echoes the De Quincey epigraph, the first occurrence of the sea motif.

72. Ibid., p. 94.

73. Ibid., p. 184.

74. Joseph Conrad, Lord Jim. (London: J.M. Dent and Sons, 1937), p. 156.

75. The idea of salvation comes through drowning is a prominent motif in Seize the Day, a novel which, like The Victim, stands out from Bellow's opus by virtue of its tightly-conceived structure. For Bellow's use of the motif, see C.W. Trowbridge, "Water Imagery in Seize the Day", Critique: Studies in Modern Fiction, 9 (Summer): 62-73.
76. Saul Bellow, "By the Rock Wall", Harper's Bazaar. (April, 1951): 207.
77. Saul Bellow, The Adventures of Augie March. (New York: The Viking Press, 1953), p. 543.
78. Saul Bellow, The Victim. (New York: The Viking Press, 1947), p. 220.
79. Ibid., pp. 221-222.
80. Ibid., p. 222.
81. Ibid., pp. 222-223.
82. Ibid., p. 224.
83. Ibid., p. 225.
84. Ibid., p. 31.
85. Ibid., pp. 225-226.
86. Ibid., pp. 226-227.
87. Ibid., p. 226.
88. Ibid., p. 229.
89. Ibid., p. 231.



## Endnotes

### Chapter 3

1. Saul Bellow, The Victim. (New York: The Viking Press, 1947), p. 240.
2. Ibid., p. 241.
3. Ibid., p. 262.
4. Ibid., p. 264.
5. Ibid., p. 265.
6. Ibid., p. 258.
7. The imagery also includes the unsympathetic Millikan in Beard's office who is "like a selfish down in the sand". Ibid., p. 198.
8. Ibid., p. 260.
9. Ibid., p. 242.
10. Ibid., p. 229.
11. Ibid., p. 155.
12. Ibid., p. 179.
13. Ibid., p. 253.
14. Ibid., p. 67.
15. Ibid., p. 252.
16. Ibid., p. 42.
17. Ibid., p. 45.
18. Ibid., p. 141.
19. M. Gilbert Porter, Whence the Power? The Artistry and Humanity of Saul Bellow. (Columbia, Missouri: University of Missouri Press, 1972), p. 41.

20. J.F. McCadden, The Flight From Women in the Fiction of Saul Bellow. (Washington: University Press of America, 1980), p. 43.
21. Joseph Baumbach, The Landscape of Nightmare: Studies in the Contemporary American Novel. (New York: New York University Press, 1967), p. 46.
22. Tony Tanner, "The Flight From Monologue", Saul Bellow: Herzog Text and Criticism, ed. I. Howe (New York: The Viking Press, 1976), p. 31.
23. Saul Bellow, The Victim. (New York: The Viking Press, 1947), pp. 267-268.
24. Ibid., p. 268.
25. Ibid., pp. 268-269.
26. Ibid., p. 269.
27. Ibid., pp. 150-151.
28. Ibid., p. 277.
29. Tyger! Tyger! burning bright  
 In the forests of the night,  
 What immortal hand or eye  
 Could frame thy fearful symmetry?
- In what distant deeps or skies  
 Burnt the fire of thine eyes?  
 On what wings dare he aspire?  
 What the hand dare sieze the fire?
- And what shoulder, & what art,  
 Could twist the sinews of they heart?  
 And when thy heart began to beat  
 What dread hand? & what dread feet?
- What the hammer? what the chain?  
 In what furnace was thy brain?  
 What the anvil? what dread grasp?  
 Dare its deadly terrors clasp?
- When the stars threw down their spears,  
 And water'd heaven with their tears,  
 Did he smile his work to see?  
 Did he who made the Lamb make thee?

Tyger! Tyger! burning bright  
In the forests of the night,  
What immortal hand or eye,  
Dare frame thy fearful symmetry?

(W. Blake, "The Tyger", William Blake: A Selection of Poems and Letters, ed. J. Bronowski (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1958), p. 49.)

30. Saul Bellow, The Victim. (New York: The Viking Press, 1947), p. 288.
31. Ibid., p. 287.
32. Ibid., p. 292.
33. Ibid., p. 293.
34. I believe Joseph Baumbach exaggerates when he writes that:

Allbee, the patina of a man has [in contrast to Asa] achieved a factitious rebirth made possible by some sort of interior death". (Joseph Baumbach, The Landscape of Nightmare: Studies in the Contemporary American Novel. (New York: New York University Press, 1967), p. 46.)

35. Saul Bellow, The Victim. (New York: The Viking Press, 1947), p. 294.
36. Ibid., p. 290.
37. Ibid., p. 294.
38. Other observations of Klug can be seen to apply to Asa. Asa's life "degenerate[s] into theater..." He is "cast as [both] actor and audience...The actor's main job [which] is to put together a convincing disguise...becomes a parody of [Asa's] own desire to create an ideal self..." (M.A. Klug, "Saul Bellow: The Hero in the Middle", ed. Trachtenberg, pp. 186-187.)

In contrast to all later Bellow heroes, except for Tommy Wilhelm, however, Asa is not interested in his own self-awareness. The theater and the audience are more on "the outside", objective phenomena of his experience rather than elements of

his self-awareness.

39. Saul Bellow, The Victim. (New York: The Viking Press, 1947), p. 13.
40. Ibid., p. 288.
41. Ibid., p. 132.
42. In the cafeteria, he commends "...the old Russian style" of acting. Ibid., p. 126.
43. The actor according to Stanisavski "...must be able to listen and observe on the stage as he would in real life, that is to say, to be in contact with the person playing opposite him; he must believe in everything that is happening on the stage that is related to the play". What the actor transmits, in other words, is his "sense of life". (K.S. Stanislavski, Stanislavski's Legacy: A Collection of Comments on a Variety of Aspects of an Actor's Act and Life. trans. and ed. Elizabeth R. Hapgood (New York: Theater Art Books, 1968), p. 11.)
44. Saul Bellow, The Victim. (New York: The Viking Press, 1947), p. 133.
45. Ibid., pp. 133-134.
46. Aristotle, Nicomachean Ethics. Book II, 1107A, trans. Martin Ostwald (New York: Bobs-Merrill Company - The Library of Liberal Arts, 1962), p. 43.
47. Saul Bellow, The Victim. (New York: The Viking Press, 1947), p. 126.
48. Ibid., pp. 255-256.
49. Ibid., p. 134.
50. Most writers recognize Schlossberg's choric role. (Tony Tanner, "The Flight From Monologue", Saul Bellow: Herzog Text and Criticism. ed. I. Howe (New York: The Viking Press, 1976), p. 351. Sarah Blacher Cohen, Saul Bellow's Enigmatic Laughter. (Urbana, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 1974), p. 59. Gordon Lloyd Harper, "Saul Bellow", Saul Bellow: A Collection of Critical Essays. ed. E. Rovitt (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1975), p. 20. Chester Eisinger, Fiction of

the Forties. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), p. 350.)

Rodriguez observes that "he is a choric mouthpiece and deliberately introduced to express the positive values about the human that Bellow could not dramatize". (E.L. Rodriguez, Quest for the Human: An Exploration of Saul Bellow's Fiction. (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1981), p. 55.)

K.M. Opdahl believes, rightly I think, that his values are not those of the novel. (K.M. Opdahl, The Novels of Saul Bellow: An Introduction. (University Park and London: The Pennsylvania State University, 1967), p. 65.)

51. Saul Bellow, The Victim. (New York: The Viking Press, 1947), p. 125.
52. Ibid., p. 123.
53. Ibid., p. 125.
54. Ibid., p. 123.
55. Ibid., p. 251.
56. Ibid., p. 123.
57. R.W. Corrigan, "Stanislavski and the Playwright", Theater in the Twentieth Century: Playwright, Actor and Critic on the Modern Theater. ed. R.W. Corrigan (New York: Grove Press, 1963), p. 184.

By the time he wrote Herzog the connotations of theatricality had become overwhelmingly negative, suggesting falsehood and vacuity.

G. Lemco, in his analysis of the novel notes a pejorative reference to Stanislavski. Referring to Madeleine, Herzog says

...it was not irrelevant that [her] old man...was sometimes called the American Stanislavski. She had prepared the event [of her leaving] with a certain theatrical genius of her own... (G. Lemco, Herzog. (New York: Fawcett, 1965), pp. 16-17.)

Gary Lemco, "Theatrical Elements in Herzog: or, An Act of the Heart", Studies in Jewish American Literature. Vol. III:1, Spring, 1977, p. 12.

In The Victim this negative connotation is present, in connection with Allbee: for example, Saul Bellow, The Victim. (New York: The Viking Press, 1947), p. 105. But the status of theater in itself is problematic, not negative.

58. *Ibid.*, p. 256.

59. This reading is a paraphrase of Paul Goodman's definition of the "tragic" as the "destruction of the serious". A serious plot for Goodman, is one in which "everything converges on the same meaning". Paul Goodman, The Structure of Literature. (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1954), pp. 277, 281.

60. The reference is as follows:

"Speak of black and white", he mused. Black and white were Mr. Schlossberg's words to which he frequently returned. Either the truth was simple, or we had to accept the fact that we could not know it...No the truth must be something we understand at once, without an introduction or explanation...so common and familiar that we don't always realize that it's around us. Saul Bellow, The Victim. (New York: The Viking Press, 1947), p. 169.

61. He admits as much to Asa. *Ibid.*, p. 260.

62. *Ibid.*, p. 254.

63. *Ibid.*, p. 257.

64. *Ibid.*, p. 246.

65. *Ibid.*, pp. 245-246.

66. Paul Goodman, The Structure of Literature. (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1954), p. 182.

67. Willie Sypher, "Appendix: The Meanings of Comedy", Comedy: Laughter. by Henry Bergson and An Essay in Comedy. by George Meredith. ed. W. Sypher (Garden

City, New York: Doubleday, 1956), p. 219.

68. Saul Bellow, The Victim. (New York: The Viking Press, 1947), p. 17.
69. Ibid., p. 83.
70. Ibid., p. 69.
71. Ibid., p. 154.
72. Ibid., p. 274.
73. Plato, The Republic, Book VIII. trans. B. Jowett, pp. 514-520., The Dialogues of Plato (New York: Random House, 1937)I, pp. 773-777.
74. Saul Bellow, The Victim. (New York: The Viking Press, 1947). p. 91.
75. Ibid., pp. 285-286.
76. Ibid., p. 294.
77. Klug believes that all of Bellow's protagonists prefer the role of audience to the life of action. "They want" he writes "to fix life within their vision [and] swallow their environment in consciousness". ed. Trachtenberg, p. 187.  
Asa, significantly, is not very committed to his role as spectator.
78. K.M. Opdahl, The Novels of Saul Bellow: An Introduction. (University Park and London: The Pennsylvania State University, 1967), p. 7.

## Bibliography

### Primary Sources

#### A. Prose Fiction - Novels

The Adventures of Augie March. (New York: Compass, 1960).

Dangling Man. (New York: Meridian, 1969).

The Dean's December. (New York: Harper and Row, 1982).

Henderson the Rain King. (New York: Compass, 1965).

Herzog. (New York: The Viking Press, 1964).

Humboldt's Gift. (New York: The Viking Press, 1975).

Mr. Sammler's Planet. (New York: The Viking Press, 1970).

Seize the Day. (New York: Compass, 1965).

The Victim. (New York: The Viking Press, 1947).



## B. Short Fiction

"Address by Gooley MacDowell to the Hasbeens Club of Chicago", Hudson Review, 4 (Summer 1951): 222-227.

"By the Rock Wall", Harper's Bazaar, 2873 (April 1951): 135.

Him With His Foot in His Mouth and Other Short Stories.  
(New York: Harper and Row, 1984).

"Leaving the Yellow House", Esquire, 49 (January 1958) 112-126.

"The Mexican General", Partisan Review, 9 (1942): 178-194.

Mosby's Memoirs. (New York: The Viking Press, 1968).

"A Sermon by Dr. Pep", Partisan Review, 16 (1949): 455-462.

"The Trip to Galena", Partisan Review, 17 (1950): 769-794.

"Two Morning Monologues", Partisan Review, 8 (1941): 230-286.

C. Non-Fiction

To Jerusalem and Back: A Personal Account. (New York: The Viking Press, 1976).

"A Comment on Form and Despair", Location, 1 (1964): 10-12.

"Culture Now: Some Animadversions, Some Laughs", Modern Occasions, 1 (1971): 162-178.

"Deep Readers of the World, Beware!", New York Times Book Review, 1 (February 15, 1959): 34.

"Distractions of a Fiction Writer", The Living Novel. ed. Granville Hicks (New York: The Viking Press, 1957), pp. 1-20.

"The French as Dostoevski Saw Them", New Republic, 132 (May 23, 1955): 17-30.

"Introduction", Great Jewish Short Stories. ed. S. Bellow (New York: Dell, 1963).

"Literature", The Great Ideas Today. ed. M. Adler and R.M. Hutchins (Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1963), pp. 135-179.

"Pleasures and Pains of Playgoing", Bartisan Review, 21 (1954): 312.

"Some Notes on Recent American Fiction", Encounter, 21 (1963): 22-29.

"Starting Out in Chicago", American Scholar, 44 (1974-75): 71-77.

"Where Do We Go From Here: The Future of Fiction", Michigan Quarterly Review, 1 (Winter 1962): 27-33.

"The Writer as Moralist", Atlantic Monthly, 211 (1963): 58-62.

Robert Boyers, "Literature and Culture: An Interview  
With Saul Bellow", Salmagundi, 30 (1975): 6-23.

Gordon L. Harper, "Saul Bellow - The Art of Fiction: An  
Interview", Paris Review, 37 (1965): 48-73.

Books and Articles Dealing With Bellow

- M. Nault, Saul Bellow: A Comprehensive Bibliography. (New York: Garland, 1977).
- R.G. Noreen, Saul Bellow: A Reference Guide. (Boston: G.K. Hall, 1978).
- B. Sokoloff, Saul Bellow: His Works and His Critics. An Annotated Bibliography. (Folcroft, PA: Folcroft, 1971).
- Porter H. Abbott, "Saul Bellow and the Lost Cause of Character", Novel. (Spring 1980): 265-283.
- Michael Allen, "Idiomatic Language in Two Novels by Saul Bellow", Journal of American Studies, 1 (October 1967): 275-280.
- Sheridan Baker, "Saul Bellow's Bout With Chivalry", Criticism, 9, 2 (Spring 1967): 112-115.
- Joseph Baumbach, The Landscape of Nightmare: Studies in the Contemporary American Novel. (New York: New York University Press, 1967).
- Ben Belitt, "Saul Bellow: The Depth Factor", Salgamundi, 30 (Summer 1975): 57-65.
- Malcolm Bradbury, Saul Bellow. (London and New York: Methuen, 1982).
- Idem., "Saul Bellow and the Naturalist Tradition", Review of English Literature, 4 (October 1963): 80-92.
- Idem., "Saul Bellow's The Victim", The Critical Quarterly, 5 (Summer 1957): 155-164.
- John Chamberlain, "Books of the Times", New York Times, March 25, 1944, p. 13.
- Sarah B. Cohen, Saul Bellow's Enigmatic Laughter. (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1974).

- John J. Clayton, Saul Bellow: In Defense of Man. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1979).
- Robert Gorham Davis, "The American Individualist Tradition: Bellow and Styron", The Creative Present. ed. N. Balakian and C. Simmons (NH: Gordian Press, 1973), pp. 109-142.
- A.S. Downer, "Skulduggery in Chungking and Manhattan", New York Times Book Review, 30 (November 1947): 29.
- Robert Dutton, Saul Bellow. (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1971).
- Chester Eisinger, Fiction of the Forties. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963).
- John Farrelly, "Among the Fallen", New Republic, 8 Dec. 1947, pp. 27-28.
- Kenneth Fearing, "Man Versus Man", New York Times Review, 49 (March 26, 1944): 5
- Leslie Fiedler, "Review of The Victim", Kenyon Review, 10 (Summer 1948): 519-527.
- R.H. Fossum, "Inflationary Trends in the Criticism of Fiction: Four Studies of Saul Bellow" Studies in the Novel, II (Spring 1970): 99-104.
- Daniel Fuchs, Saul Bellow: Vision and Revision. (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1984).
- David G. Galloway, The Absurd Hero in American Fiction: Updike, Styron, Bellow, Salinger. (Austin and London: University of Texas Press; 1966).
- Michael K. Glenday, "The Consummating Glimpse, Dangling Man's Treacherous Reality", Modern Fiction Studies, 25 (Spring 1979): 139-149.
- A. Gordon, "Pushy Jew: Leventhal in The Victim", Modern Fiction Studies, 25 (Spring 1979): 129-138.
- Martin Greenberg, "Modern Man as Jew", Commentary, 5 (January 1948): 86-87.
- James Hall, The Lunatic Giant in the Drawing Room: The British and American Novel Since 1930. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1968).

Howard M. Harper, Desperate Faith: A Study of Bellow, Salinger, Mailer, Baldwin and Updike. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1967).

Elizabeth Hardwick, "Fiction Chronicle", Partisan Review, 15 (January 1948): 114-117.

Ihab Hassan, Radical Innocence: Studies in the Contemporary American Novel. (New York: Columbia University, 1966).

Frederick J. Hoffman, The Modern Novel in America. (Chicago: Gateway, 1951).

Irving Howe, ed. Herzog: Text and Criticism. (New York: The Viking Press, 1976).

C. Kulsheresta, Saul Bellow: The Problem of Affirmation. (New Delhi, India: Arnold Heineman (India), 1978).

Richard Lehan, "Existentialism in Recent American Fiction: The Demonic Quest", Texas Studies in Literature and Language.

G. Lemco, "Theatrical Elements in Herzog: Or, An Act of the Heart", Studies in Jewish American Literature, Vol. III: 1 (Spring 1977): 7-15.

J.F. McCadden, The Flight From Women in the Fiction of Saul Bellow. (Washington: University Press of America, 1980).

Irving Malin, Saul Bellow and the Critics. (New York: New York University Press, 1967).

Idem., ed., Saul Bellow's Fiction. (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1969).

Karl Miller, "Leventhal", New Statesman, 70 (September 10, 1965): 360-361.

H.T. Moore, ed., Contemporary American Novelists. (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern University Press, 1968).

K.M. Opdahl, The Novels of Saul Bellow: An Introduction. (University Park and London: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1967).

Idem., "Stillness in the Midst of Chaos: Plot in the Novels of Saul Bellow", Modern Fiction Studies, 25 (Spring 1979): 15-27.

Norman Podhoretz, Doings and Undoings: The Fifties and After in American Writing. (New York: The Noonday Press, 1964).

Idem., Making It. (New York: Random House, 1967).

M.G. Porter, Whence the Power: The Artistry and Humanity of Saul Bellow. (Columbia: University of Missouri, 1974).

V.S. Pritchett, "King Saul", New York Review of Books, 22 October 1964, p. 4.

Betty Ann Jones Riehl, "Narrative Structure in Saul Bellow's Novels", Ph.D. (University of Texas), DAI 3 (3 Nov. 1975).

Euselsio L. Rodriguez, Quest for the Human: An Exploration of Saul Bellow's Fiction. (Lewisberg: Bucknell University Press, 1981).

Nathan L. Rothman, "Introducing an Important New Writer", Saturday Review of Literature, 27 (April 15, 1944): 27.

Earl Rovitt, Saul Bellow. (Minnesota: University of Minnesota, 1967).

Idem., ed., Saul Bellow: A Collection of Critical Essays. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1975).

B. Scheer-Schazler, Saul Bellow. (New York: Frederick Ungar, 1972).

Mark Schorer, "Fictions Not Wholly Achieved", Kenyon Review, 6 (Summer 1944): 459-461.

E. Schraepen, ed., Saul Bellow and His Work. (Brussels: University of Brussels Press, 1978).

Norman A. Scott, Three American Moralists: Mailer, Bellow, Trilling. (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1973).

Tony Tanner, City of Words: American Fiction 1950-1970. (London: Jonathan Cape, 1971).

Idem., Saul Bellow. (London: Oliver and Boyd, 1965).

S. Trachtenberg, ed., Critical Essays on Saul Bellow. (Boston, Mass.: G.K. Hall, 1979).

Diana Trilling, "Fiction in Review", Nation, 15 April 1944, pp. 454-455.

Idem., "Fiction in Review", Nation, 3 January 1948, pp. 24-25.

C.W. Trowbridge, "Water Imagery in Seize the Day", Critique: Studies in Modern Fiction, 9 (Summer 1967): 67-73.

Edmund Wilson, "Doubts and Dreams: Dangling Man and Under a Glass Bell", The New Yorker, 70 (April 1, 1944): 70.