

Chapter I

Introduction

This chapter consists of background of the study where there will be a description of the reasons why the thesis writer chooses Saul Bellow as the writer, The Victim as the novel for this thesis and Asa Leventhal as the victim of his own identity as the topic of this thesis. Besides, this chapter consists of the statement of the problem, the purpose of the study, the significance of the study, the scope and limitation, the methodology, and the organization of the study,

1.1 Background of the study

Many Jews become successful and rich in America, even they are more successful and richer than the Americans and other ethnic that live in America. They become famous writers such as Saul Bellow and Arthur Miller. Those two writers give contributes to American literature. There are also famous film producer such as Louis B. Mayer and Samuel Goldwyn (MGM). They have famous newspaper such as The New York Times. Even, there are also Jews who become congress committee (Sowell, 1989, p. 129). Out of the many successful Jews, the thesis writer is interested in Saul Bellow since he is a successful Jewish-American writer.

Saul Bellow was born in Lachine, Quebec in 1915 of immigrant Jewish parents and as a child moved to Chicago. He was raised in Chicago. Chicago becomes the town that is connected to Bellow's works. He usually chooses big cities such as Chicago and New York as settings in most of his novels for he wants to describe that the lifestyle and condition of those cities have big influences on the individuals who live there (Bradbury, 1993, p. 169).

He is known as a Jewish-American best living novelist, one among the major representatives of the Jewish-American writers. His works have widely influenced American literature after World War II. In most of his works, he explores Jewish life and culture a great deal. He also uses America's culture and societies, and combines it with Jewish culture as the background of his works (Rovit, 1974, p. 15).

He has produced the works of the highest quality throughout his life. He writes novels, short stories and plays throughout his career as a writer. In contrast to many American writers who produce their best work when they are young and then write poor fiction as they grow older, Bellow has consistently published works of the highest quality (Magill, 1983, p. 224).

His great achievement can be seen from the Nobel Prize for literature and the literary honors that he has received. He received Nobel Prize for literature on December 10, 1976 from King Carl XIV Gustaf of Sweden. In 1948, he was awarded a Guggenheim Fellowship. He also won the National Book Award for his fiction *The Adventures of Augie March* in 1954. His most recent work of fiction, *Humboldt's Gifts* (1975), was awarded the Pulitzer Prize. Besides, his works *Herzog* and *Mr. Sammler's Planet* were awarded the National Book Award for fiction. In 1965, Saul Bellow was awarded the International Literary Prize for *Herzog* and became the first American to receive the prize. In January 1968, the Republic of France awarded him the Croix de Chevalier des Arts et Lettres, the highest literary distinction awarded by that nation to non-citizens. In March 1968, he received the B'nai B'rith Jewish heritage award for "excellence in Jewish literature" and in November 1976, he was awarded the America's democratic Legacy Award of the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith, the first time this award has been made to a literary personage. He has also published short stories and plays. His works still exist until now. His recent works are *All Adds Up* (1994), *The Actual* (1997), *Ravelstein* (2000), and *Collected Stories* (2001) (<http://www.biography.com/cgi-bin/biomain.cgi>).

Moreover, Saul Bellow is the most distinguished novelist of the post-war period in America. He is the most intellectual of American novelists. His works rest upon a conception of becoming or possibility, yet he recognizes the human initiative in creating and pursuing process is limited by powerful determinants beyond human control. His protagonists are all committed to the quest for identity and the salvation of the self (Vinson, 1976, p. 124). Therefore, the thesis writer chooses to study one of his works.

Most of Bellow's works often describe the situation of the modern society which reveal displacement and uncertainty where a man seems no longer to have a

place. He is a modern writer who is not afraid to present complex ideas into his work such as the problems of the modern civilization. He shows deep concern for individuals (Chavkin, 1983, p. 224).

Bellow's works are dominated by a figure who is alienated, victimized, disoriented, dislocated, materially satisfied but mentally damaged. He usually writes about the condition of an ordinary man who concerns much with the quest of his uncertain identity. Besides, his heroes are usually driven by mental and emotional desire to reforge their pact with others, with the human condition, with the universe in all its scale. Most of his works display a deep Jewish humanism, that is, a concern to affirm mankind, to explore moral and metaphysical questions, and to confront the characteristic Jewish themes of victimization and alienation (Bradbury, 1993, p. 169). Thus, the reasons why the thesis writer has chosen one of Saul Bellow's work as her thesis are based on the facts that has been mentioned above.

The thesis writer chooses to study Bellow's second novel, *The Victim*. It receives scant critical attention compared with other works, but explores in an intense manner the ability of a twentieth century man to cope with victimization. It depicts a passive protagonist who is unable to overcome his victimization. Asa Leventhal has been emotionally scarred in childhood by his mother's madness and fails to form a relationship with his father. Then, he loses both of his parents. He enters the post World War American workplace and carries with him his personal fears and a keen sense of the prevailing anti-Semitism (<http://www.saulbellow.org/NavigationBar/TheLibrary.html>).

The main theme of *The Victim* is a reflection of the phenomenon of modern anti-Semitism. The Jewish-Christian relation between Asa Leventhal and Kirby Allbee is at once a theme in itself. Asa Leventhal's encounters with anti-Semitic Kirby Allbee, in New York, elicit the slanders of anti-Semitism used so effectively by the Nazi propagandist machinery that are "the crucifying of Jesus Christ by the Jews, the blood libel, the protocols of the Elders of Zion, and the pound of flesh". Throughout the novel, the relationship between the Jewish Asa and the anti-Semitic Allbee is imbued both openly and by implication with the

two - thousand years history of Judeo Christian relations

(<http://listserv.ac.il/~ada/Bellow's%20Jewish%20Themes.htm>).

Besides, this novel represents the Jews' place in American scene. Asa Leventhal's violence and his patience, his desire to exculpate himself and his sense of guilt, his haunting by the anti-Semite becomes the truth and part of the awareness of the Jew's place in American scene. In *The Victim*, Bellow takes up the theme of liberaloid novel of the forties: anti-Semitism. It contents with the simple equation: the victim equals the Jew, the Jew the victim (Fiedler, 1964, p. 423).

In *The Victim*, Saul Bellow's character Asa Leventhal is an example of someone who suffers from paranoia. As a Jew in post-war America, Leventhal is in a minority and he constantly feels that people dislike him because of his Jewishness. Leventhal is unwell mentally and burdened with guilt. He is afraid that his boss, his brother's wife, his brother's mother-in-law and even his friend Williston are all against him because he is a Jew (<http://www.english-literature.org/essays/bellow.kessey.html>).

He is uncertain of what it means to be a Jew, because he does not know yet what it is to be a man. He becomes the eternal Jew who must deal with a world not of his making. This novel presents the psychological struggle between Asa Leventhal, a Jew, and Kirby Allbee, his gentile "double". A derelict without a job, Allbee suggests that Leventhal is responsible for his grim fate. Leventhal ponders the problem of his guilt and responsibility and tries to get rid himself of his persecuting double. Despite his efforts to assert himself, he is still "dangling" at the end of the book. He is still a victim of forces that, he believes, are beyond his control (Magill, 1983, p. 227).

Asa, is a Hebrew name, meaning "healer". He has to heal himself from the torments of his anti-Semitic entourage that rendered him helpless and weak. He becomes aware of the fact that he knows better how to defend himself when he is personally abused, than when his Jewishness is under attack. He is incapable of responding when his Jewishness is recurrently attacked. Leventhal tries to rationalize that the anti-Semitism in his surroundings is a sign of stupidity, but at length, he becomes increasingly frustrated and ashamed at his lack of his

responsibility toward his Jewish identity. When his frustration grows to an unbearable climax, he realizes that “running away from his Jewish identity means running away from himself, he adopts the Yiddish philosopher’s wisdom by ‘choosing dignity’”

(<http://list.serv.ac.il/~ada/Bellow's%20Jewish%20Themes.htm>).

On the other side, Allbee argues that at one point in his past, Leventhal has wronged him, during an interview with his boss, which causes him the loss of his job and the ensuing ruin of his life. He continuously haunts Leventhal, and insists that Leventhal is in his debt, and has to mend the wrong Leventhal has caused him. Jean Paul Sartre, in *Anti-Semite and Jew*, explains that the scapegoat theory is “the projection of blame or evil onto a minority group, holding its members responsible for what goes wrong in the world-is giving tangible shape to one’s own failures and fears”. Leventhal feels he owes Allbee nothing, yet he is ready to help him out of human solidarity. However, he, later, discovers that Allbee is full of hatred. At the end of the book, Allbee confesses that it is Leventhal’s hopeful Jewish attitude, which has saved him from his profound defeatism and from the gutter. He also has stopped blaming the Jews for his own failures and is no more a ‘victim’ of his own anti-Semitism

(<http://listserv.ac.il/~ada/Bellow's%20Jewish%20Themes.htm>).

The thesis writer chooses Asa Leventhal as a passive protagonist who becomes a victim of his own identity as her topic. It is interesting to analyze this topic since identity is important for a person. When a person as a victim of his own identity like Asa Leventhal, he or she becomes touchy, quarrelsome, lonely and empty in his life. Nowadays, there are many people who become victims of their own identity for example children from mixed marriages. Those children get confused of their own identity. They are confused whether they belong to their father’s race or their mother’s race so that they become victims of their own identity.

1.2 Statement of the problem

Asa Leventhal is a Jew who lives in America. As a Jew, he belongs to a minority group. His identity as a Jew becomes a problem for Leventhal in his later

life for he feels uneasy about his own identity as a Jew. Leventhal is forced to confront his Jewishness by some forces. In confronting his Jewishness, he becomes a victim of his own identity. Here, the thesis writer wants to find out in what ways Asa Leventhal becomes a victim of his own identity.

1.3 Purpose of the study

Through the analysis, the thesis writer wants to show the ways Asa Leventhal becomes a victim of his own identity.

1.4 Significance of the study

Saul Bellow is a great novelist. He is a Nobel Prize winner and wins numerous awards. The thesis writer hopes that the readers will study Bellow's other works since he has produced works of the highest quality throughout his life and many of his works such as *The Adventures of Augie March*, *Herzog*, *Humboldt's Gifts*, and *Mr. Sammler's Planet* won literary awards. Besides, Saul Bellow is one of Jewish-American best living novelists so the thesis writer also hopes that readers will appreciate and have a broader knowledge by studying other works of Jewish-American novelists.

Moreover, the thesis writer hopes that readers will have a better understanding of their own identity since this thesis discusses the main male character, Asa Leventhal, as a victim of his own identity. The main male character of the novel is unable to overcome his condition as a victim of his own identity since he cannot accept the reality that he is a Jew. He feels lonely and empty in his life. This problem can happen to anybody no matter what race he or she is. Through this study, the thesis writer hopes that the readers can appreciate and be proud of their own identity.

1.5 Scope and limitation

The scope of this thesis is Asa Leventhal as a victim of his own identity since he is unable to overcome his own condition as a Jew. The thesis writer limits her study by analyzing Asa Leventhal's inborn conditions as a Jew, the anti-Semitism against Leventhal's family and the anti-Semitism in his surroundings. In

the family circle, the thesis writer analyzes Asa Leventhal's brother's mother-in-law, who is an anti-Semite, is against his family. In Leventhal's surroundings, the thesis writer analyses the anti-Semitism in the society and Kirby Allbee as the reflection of the anti-Semite in the society.

1.6 Methodology

In doing this analysis, the thesis writer uses Saul Bellow's novel entitled *The Victim* which was published by The Vanguard Press, Inc. in New York, 1947. The thesis writer uses library research as her method of research by collecting data, information, and theories related to the topic of the story in order to support her study. The thesis writer also uses the Internet to get data and information related to her study.

Besides, the thesis writer uses literary approach for her analysis, the literary tools used to analyze are characterization and conflict. And she uses the anti-Semitism ideas to support her analysis. The theory of characterization is used by the thesis writer in order to know the attitude of Asa Leventhal toward his Jewishness. Whereas, the theory of conflict is used to help the thesis writer to analyze Asa Leventhal's conflicts, the inner and outer conflicts which show him as a victim of his own identity.

1.7 Organization of the study

The thesis writer divides this thesis into four chapters. The first chapter is the introduction. It includes the background of the study, the statement of the problem, the purpose of the study, the importance of the study, the scope and limitation, the methodology and the organization of the study. The second chapter presents the literary theories, namely characterization and conflict, and the anti-Semitism. In the third chapter, the thesis writer analyzes Asa Leventhal as a victim of his own identity. In the fourth chapter, the thesis writer draws a conclusion of the previous analysis.