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THE SUBANGELIC VISION OF SAUL BELLOW: A STUDY OF HIS FIRST SIX NOVELS, 1944-1964

A Dissertation

Presented to

The Faculty of the Graduate School

The University of the Pacific

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

---

by

Robert Roy Dutton

February 1966

This dissertation, written and submitted by

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INTRODUCTION

While there is an understandable reticence on the part of critics of contemporary American literature to make definitive judgments, there does seem to be a general consensus that the novels of Saul Bellow represent the contemporary American novel at its best. Moreover, this consensus comes not only from critical journals with an exclusive and limited circulation, it also is to be seen in publications of wider appeal, the weekly news magazines and the book reviews of daily newspapers. What is even more astonishing is that the reading public seems to agree with the critics and book reviewers; at this writing, Bellow's Herzog is a "best-seller."

To account for this broad popularity, one can only suggest that Bellow has managed to touch the minds and hearts of his contemporaries in vital areas that would seem to call for new exploration and re-definition. More specifically, one must conclude that Bellow's success is to be found in the skill and in the imagination with which he has set forth those themes which seem to be of dominant interest to contemporary literature, themes attempting to reveal a new interpretation of man that is consistent with a world that has apparently lost what has been called an agreed-upon picture of the universe.

These themes are hardly original, for they include

the old, established counterclaims of the individual versus society and the individual in self-conflict. The originality, of course, lies in the novelist's art. And above all, it is an honest art. In all of his writing, Bellow faces squarely the timely issue of personal effacement and consequent degradation that every social trend seems to manifest. He never draws away from the frightening implications of an impersonal mechanical society.

The distinctive achievement of Bellow, however, lies in his depiction of the individual in such a society, for it is the plight of the individual, not society, that is emphasized throughout his work. In Bellow's world, society is rendered in an almost naturalistic manner, almost as an unchanging, indifferent, yet powerful background against which his protagonists in all of their sensitive awareness, their vitality, their frustrating absurdities, are seen. It is this juxtaposition of a static society and the organic individual that informs all of Bellow's novels. That is, how does the individual in all of his individuality, with his dreams, aspirations, and idealism, along with his ever-present awareness of society as a naturalistic reality, find a place for himself, establish a personal and a unique identity, and still maintain an honest integrity of self? Maxwell Geismar states the dilemma in an implicit correlation between Bellow and his protagonists: ". . . part of

our sympathy and concern with his career lies with his own struggle to break through a predominantly intellectual and moral view of life."[1] Here is precisely the struggle of Bellow's protagonists--to break through to life, to live up to their possibilities, up to their human potentiality, and most importantly, up to their individual potentiality, without, however, the loss of a moral and intellectual humanism basic to their views of themselves.

Bellow's heroes, then, find the complexities of their dilemma not only on the basis of an alienation from society. These heroes are further confronted by a kind of treason within themselves, which creates an even more insoluble problem. In what is perhaps an oversimplification, but a workable one, Marcus Klein states their paradoxical situations: ". . . they face problems which are reducible to a single problem: to meet with a strong sense of self the sacrifice of self demanded by a social circumstance."[2]

It is this "strong sense of self" that seems to be Bellow's greatest concern, for his heroes are forever troubled by the nature of this self. Society, for the most

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[1]Maxwell Geismar, "Saul Bellow: Novelist of the Intellectuals," American Moderns: From Rebellion to Conformity (New York: Hill and Wang, 1958), p. 210.

[2]Marcus Klein, "A Discipline of Nobility: Saul Bellow's Fiction," After Alienation: American Novels in Mid-Century (New York: World Publishing Company, 1964), p. 34.

part, is or becomes a known to them. Perhaps society is uncomfortable for them, indifferent to them, at odds with their behavior and with their ideals, antipathetic to their imaginations, but its mysteries are not beyond their apprehension. They can and do learn of its nature. On the contrary, it is this "self" that eludes them. What is its nature? That it is capable of a god-like reason, that its faculty of imagination is boundless, each of Bellow's protagonists makes evident again and again. But that this same self is also capable of unbelievable stupidities, inane actions, and romantic nonsense is made equally clear. Bellow himself marks the duality in his essay "Distractions of a Fiction Writer," an essay, incidentally, which is perhaps a critical key to an understanding of his fictive intentions. He observes: "There is man's own greatness, and then there is the greatness of his imbecility . . . both are eternal."[3]

Philosophically, the heroes of Bellow seem to be in the Sartrean position of the <u>en-soi</u> versus the <u>pour-soi</u>, the being-in-itself versus the being-for-itself. Unlike the stone whose being can never transcend itself, and which is therefore complete and whole in itself, a being-in-itself,

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[3]Saul Bellow, "Distractions of a Fiction Writer," <u>The Living Novel: A Symposium</u>, ed. Granville Hicks (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1957), p. 15.

man, blessed or cursed with an imaginative consciousness, is forever in a state of self-transcendence, or in a state of being-for-itself, as well as being-in-itself. Through his imagination, man would be something other than what he is or what he seems to be because what he is or seems to be is an irritatingly unsatisfying and discomfiting mystery, a myster to which depth and breadth are given with every stretch of his imagination. So Bellow's protagonists find themselves. And so his work is informed. Bellow's novels are narrative dramatizations of the fact of this dilemma of existence, a working out not to a resolution, perhaps, but to a revelation of a human condition.

Bellow the critic has spoken on this issue. In "Distractions of a Fiction Writer" he maintains that novelists in the past have often failed to catch the positive factor in this human equation of the _en-soi_ versus the _pour-soi_. He feels that they have too often depicted the consequent seeming absurdity of man. Taking a position against those who would depict man as completely impotent, abjectly absurd owing to his nature, he states:

> If man wretched by nature is represented, what we have here is only accurate reporting. But if it is man in the image of God, man a little lower than the angels who is impotent, the case is not the same. And it is the second assumption, the subangelic one, that writers generally make. For they are prone . . . to exaggerate the value of human personality. I don't know whether exaggeration is quite the word, but what it suggests we can certainly agree with. Why should wretched man need

> power or wish to inflate himself with imaginary glory? If this is what power signifies it can only be vanity to suffer from impotence. On the nobler assumption he should have at least sufficient power to overcome ignominy and to complete his own life. His suffering, feebleness, servitude then have a meaning. This is what writers have taken to be the justification of power. And if no other power will do this, the power of the imagination will take the task upon itself.[4]

By the time these comments were set down in 1957, Bellow had written a considerable body of work, beginning with Dangling Man in 1944. Yet his observations here form an important contextual element even in his early novels, which would lead one to believe that he created his stories on intuitive principles that took years to formulate critically. Bellow's work as a whole is organic; the development is toward these principles. That is, with the years of writing, he seems to have learned to create his characters and themes with greater confidence in himself, a greater confidence in his ability to create a work of art that would stand the test of the exigencies of the times as he sees them.

What these exigencies are is a difficult question to answer, but Bellow seems to feel that meaningful dialogue is noticeably absent from our literature at a time when dialogue is especially imperative to any valid examination of our existence; hence, he would build on what seems to him

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[4] Ibid., p. 25.

to be a decisive question of the first importance: Do we want to live? If the answer is "Yes," as it must be, then let's talk, let's discuss, and, yes, let's even choose, in the face of what seems to be today a multiplicity of choice to the degree that there is no knowledgeable choice. For it is in the choosing that man expresses his humanity through his imagination. Bellow would agree that the best part of man, and the part of man that has been neglected in our recent literature, is found not in what he is but in what he would be or wills to be. And what he would be or wills to be is also a job for the imagination.

This is not to say that Bellow is crying out for a new optimism, especially an optimism founded on false postures. But neither would he accept a useless and hopeless pessimism. In an article entitled "The Writer as Moralist," he states: ". . . the idiocy of orthodox affirmation and transparent optimism ought not to provoke an equal and opposite reaction."[5]

And by the "opposite reaction" it is evident that Bellow means a fiction that depicts man as "wretched by nature." It is not that Bellow rejects the validity of such interpretations. It is just that they seem to close all

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[5]Saul Bellow, "The Writer as Moralist," <u>Atlantic</u>, 211:61, (March, 1963).

debate and to make all effort, all life, and the depiction of that life completely ridiculous and meaningless, with suicide at worst or a desperate kind of quietism at best being the only sensible and logical reactions. Furthermore, Bellow would say that as instructive as such interpretations are, they are only just that--interpretations. There are others that are equally valid to consider.

What Bellow urges, then, and what he attempts to create in his novels, is a depiction of man as subangelic. But to define what subangelic man is, just what the term means, and, equally important, what it does not mean, is a difficult task. The difficulty lies in the fact that the term has nothing to do with the figure observed; the meaning is to be found within the observer. Hence, all definition is subjective. "Subangelical," when applied to man, is an attitude toward man, rather than a description of man.

Bellow speaks of the subangelic as the "nobler assumption," an assumption that is based on the concept that man at least has the power to "overcome ignominy" and to "complete his own life." We can conjecture that by the term "overcome ignominy" Bellow means to say that any depiction of man should grant him the power to rise above the indignities of complete subjection to unseen and unknown forces, to give him a nature not totally in the chains of a miserable naturalistic impotency. Further, Bellow would say that this power

must be granted to man, not only because the lack of it closes debate, and not only because its alternative is unthinkable, but because there is good reason to believe that man actually has that power. He has the power to complete his own life. It may be true that this power is difficult to find through a scientific dissection or through an objective cold analysis: its validity is to be found more easily in active man, in man involved. "In action, how like an angel," says Hamlet. Bellow would modify--"In action, how like a subangel."

For no matter what a laboratory experiment indicates, and no matter what a sociological study might conclude, the nature of man is finally defined by no one but himself, and that definition comes only through his total action. If someone explains patiently to us that there are such certitudes as iron bands of heredity and environment, we can only agree. But we can urge our instructor, with equal patience, of the possibility that he has concentrated only on Sisyphus as Sisyphus ascends the hill, and that his trip back to the bottom of the hill, a trip that gives meaning to what Bellow calls his "suffering, feebleness, and servitude," is curiously neglected. We can urge that perhaps there is a confusion between what observed man does and what he actually is. The former is but a partial picture; the latter is total, and much closer to the angels. And Bellow

never forgets this distinction when he sets his figures in life.

To reveal the greatness of man that is founded upon his subangelic nature--this is Saul Bellow's announced intention. To the extent that he reveals such a being, and how he creates that being are the subjects of this study. It is important to understand, however, that this is not a philosophical treatise. Nor has it to do with sociology, nor with psychology. It is a literary study, and as such is concerned with the "how" of Saul Bellow's characters. We would, of course, expect to gain a greater appreciation of his people through this study, more understanding of their well springs and motivations, but the emphasis is to be on Bellow's art. In any case, with the approach of "technique as discovery," to use Mark Schorer's term, it is hoped that an examination of the novels of Saul Bellow published to date will serve to illuminate his strictures on the subangelic figure, as well as to clarify what seems to be one of the major literary achievements of our time.

CHAPTER I

"FEEBLE-MINDED CHILDREN OF ANGELS"

The title of Saul Bellow's first novel, Dangling Man, (1944)[1] precisely depicts an image of the subangelic figure caught in a scheme of being, for the adjective "dangling" with its varying nuances describes the general state in which Bellow sees his heroes, and, by extension, the state in which he sees a condition of humanity. With the use of this word, he seems to indicate a situation of helpless waiting, of ambiguous swaying, of an airy suspension between two worlds. We shall return to a further discussion of this matter, but for the moment let us consider the plight of Joseph, the protagonist in Dangling Man.

Joseph is in a state of alienation and isolation. Through a snarl of red tape he is awaiting the draft. He has given up his job, moved to a low middle-class rooming house, and is being supported by his wife. He has severed relationships with his friends and acquaintances because "the main bolt that held us together has given way." He is patronized almost beyond restraint by his in-laws and by his brother and family. He and his wife Iva no longer seem

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[1]Saul Bellow, Dangling Man (New York: The World Publishing Company, 1960). All subsequent page citations in parenthesis are from this edition.

to have anything to say to each other. Joseph has even stopped reading books, which until this time "had stood as guarantors of an extended life, far more precious and necessary than the one I was forced to lead daily."

With his "freedom" from the usual family and social obligations, Joseph also experiences a loss of self insofar as the self is directive. For within his vacuum, there are no comparatives, none of the established values, no directions that ordinarily serve to channel effort and, thus, to make that effort meaningful. Bellow's hero--perhaps anti-hero[2]--is in much the same situation as those in which the characters of Joseph Conrad often find themselves: he is in strange "territory" where all of his values break down. He is out of context, hence, lost, a condition to which he freely resigns himself at the end of the story when he gives up the struggle to live with his freedom and demands that he be taken into the army without any more delay:

> And I am sorry to leave her [his wife, Iva], but I am not at all sorry to part with the rest of it. I am no longer to be held accountable for myself; I am in other hands, relieved of self-determination, freedom canceled.

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[2]Ihab Hassan's definition of the anti-hero is useful here: "In fiction, the unnerving rubric 'anti-hero' refers to a ragged assembly of victims: the fool, the clown, the hipster, the criminal, the poor soul, the freak, the outsider, the scapegoat, the scrubby opportunist, the rebel without a cause, the 'hero' in the ashcan and 'hero' on the leash." Ihab Hassan, Radical Innocence: The Contemporary American Novel (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961), p. 21.

Hurray for regular hours!

And for the supervision of the spirit!

Long live regimentation! (191)

With this hysterical praise for "the leash," Bellow's hero falls to an unheroic submission.

Inasmuch as Dangling Man is set during the period in which Joseph awaits induction, it is evident that the title refers to his dangling between civilian life and the army, and that the war is directly responsible for a drastic change in his life. In a sense, then, the novel is a war story, the story of what can happen to a man when he is caught up in the exigencies of a national military struggle. But it is a book about Joseph and World War II only in much the same sense that Huckleberry Finn is a book about Huck Finn and the ante-bellum South; that is, the setting of Bellow's work is indeed World War II, but that fact serves only as a background for an experience that extends far beyond the confines of any time and certainly of any war.[3]

In order to understand what Bellow intends in his creation of Joseph, and in order for us to see Joseph as

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[3]Leslie Fiedler's reference to Dangling Man as a war novel seems to be wide of Bellow's intent. The setting for this work is incidentally but not necessarily World War II. See Fiedler's "Saul Bellow," On Contemporary Literature, ed. Richard Kostelanetz (New York: Avon Books, 1964), p. 291. Reprint from 'Prairie Schooner,' Autumn, 1957).

something more than a man who is but an indirect casualty of the war, it is necessary, first of all, to study the author's use of setting. Dangling Man was written during World War II, the period in which most of the action of the novel takes place. Hence, one can only believe that Bellow saw at the time the fictive possibilities in at least two facts that tend to accompany any such modern military engagement: the wartime draft with its possible delays and the removal of self-direction that the military machine forces on the participant. The two necessities here are the delay involved and the abandonment of self-direction, for both are necessary to the progressive alienation and isolation of Joseph. The delay sets him completely free to reflect upon his life. It also sets him apart, isolating him from his busy wartime environment. But perhaps most importantly, this freedom throws Joseph back on his own resources: it is a testing of his ability to live alone. It is an opportunity to define his relationship to society and his relationship to himself. In brief, Dangling Man is an infinitely complex examination of a contemporary Robinson Crusoe. Finally, the fact that the military brings about a removal of self-direction provides for possible conclusions concerning the discovered definition of Joseph as a man.

Bellow, however, would have us understand that the meaning of Joseph is to be found not only in the experiences

that take place during his "freedom." There are other highly important considerations that tend to diminish the war as an influential agent in Joseph's difficulties. Early in the novel, Joseph himself, in what is one of the key statements to our understanding of a complete definition of Bellow's protagonist, confesses this war-involved delay is only a part of his many-sided dilemma:

> It is perfectly clear to me that I am deteriorating, storing bitterness and spite which eat like acids at my endowment of generosity and good will. But the seven months' delay is only one of the sources of my harassment. Again, I sometimes think of it as the backdrop against which I can be seen swinging. It is still more. Before I can properly estimate the damage it has done me I shall have to be cut down. (12)

We learn early, then, that the draft delay with its enforced idleness is only part of Joseph's difficulties. Evidently the deterioration, the "bitterness and spite which eat like acids," have other wells of being not necessarily connected with the war. In fact, Joseph speaks of this vacuous time as a "backdrop" or scenery in front of which he is dangling. He is not a part of it, nor is it a part of him. This is a backdrop of time.

Backdrops can be changed and often are. Certainly this one of time is to change. But-- and here is the important point--Joseph will not change merely with a change in scene. He shall have to be "cut down" to properly ascertain the "damage," regardless of the backdrop. His suspension, then, is only superficially connected with the war. There

are other forces, other "hands," perhaps, that not only keep him dangling but that set him in this midway position, this subangelic posture, in the first place. In any case, Joseph makes clear within the first few pages of his story that the war and its inconveniences play but little part in his total consternation.

That this book is not a war book, that Joseph's private hell is not the result of the war, is made conclusively evident by a close examination of Bellow's use of time. To begin with, Dangling Man is in diary form, a form that is highly effective when it is used to depict the struggles and tensions of a troubled mind. Bellow uses the form loosely, allowing Joseph to recreate incidents that had occurred many months before the story proper. Moreover, in the recreation of these incidents, Joseph is allowed to recall at will verbatim conversations that took place at the time. At this point it is necessary to note that the diary is begun by Joseph in December. He is writing in December when he speaks of his "seven months' delay," which means that he must have received his first draft call no sooner than the previous May. Yet several of these recalled events and conversations take place before May, and, in each case, Bellow is careful to state the time when they occurred. For example, the Servatius party was "last March." And the affair with Kitty Daumler was begun over "two years ago."

Joseph's disillusion with the Communist Party takes place several years before. And his violent quarrel with his first landlord takes place "last winter." Each of these incidents is reported in detail. Together they constitute a substantial part of the story, indicating that Bellow feels that part of Joseph's story before he receives his draft notice is of some significance to his present plight.

A study of each of these events will show just that. First, it was at the party of his friends the Servatiuses that he finally realizes all his efforts toward creating a "colony of the spirit" (good friends, good talk, good wine) were based on romantic idealism, on what he comes to call "ideal constructions," rather than on reality, which he describes in the Hobbesian terms of being "nasty, brutish and short." The discovery is painful to Joseph, so painful that he hasn't bothered to see his friends since that night. Then the turn to Kitty Daumler for companionship takes place after the alienation of Joseph and his wife, who has also failed to live up to Joseph's idealism. Disillusioning, too, are the "high constructions" built on the foundations of Communism. Finally, there is the trouble with his landlord: "My present ill temper first manifested itself last winter. Before we moved out of our flat I had a disgraceful fist fight with the landlord, Mr. Gesell." (142)

This quarrel ends in violence which Joseph describes

as an "early symptom," and a "rebellion against my own principle. It alarmed me; and the treasons I saw at the Servatius party were partly mine, as I was forced at the time to acknowledge." He further describes it as "not like the old Joseph" who was inclined to be "even-tempered."

These incidents take place from three months to several years before Joseph starts "dangling" between civilian life and army life. Furthermore, from the nature of these events it is difficult to see any significant relationship between them and the later draft notice or even the war itself. It would seem, then, that the problems of Bellow's hero are only incidentally or indirectly a result of the war, and that by "dangling," Bellow intends that different and more substantial "strings" are involved. At least one such string may be seen running through the four incidents described as part of Joseph's past. In each of these events we find the basis for an isolation that is to strike more deeply at Joseph during his enforced idleness. We find that step by step he moves toward an alienation from those about him--alienation from the Communist Party, from his wife, from his friends, and even from his own principles, as in the case of his violence with his landlord. And given the nature of Joseph, this alienation seems to have been inevitable if we remember that he founds his relationship to the Communist cause on ideals that do not stand up to reality,

to his wife on ideals that cannot stand the same test, and to his friends on ideals embracing a "colony of the spirit" which also go down to defeat in the face of reality. And Joseph's words that there was involved here a "treason" to his own nature would indicate an alienation even from himself. It would seem that through these experiences Bellow's protagonist is being lowered to a subangelic position that takes into account man's god-like imagination but one which also takes into consideration the limits of man, and punishes those who fail to recognize those limits.

Joseph's past, then, has seen him through experiences that have set the stage upon which is to be played out a most painful reappraisal of his relationship to society and to himself. The ideals of love, friendship, moderation--all humanistic extensions of self--have been placed in serious jeopardy through their encounters with a blunt biological and psychological reality that seems to demand a severe modification of this humanistic self.

To this point, the importance of the "seven months" delay, that period from the time of Joseph's first draft call in May to his first diary entry in December, has been somewhat neglected, but only in the interest of seeing Dangling Man as something broader and deeper than a war book. Now we must turn directly to this period in order to see it in relationship to the intent of the novel as a whole. What

we see is a carrying out to a logical conclusion of the pattern already established, a pattern of continued failure to reconcile satisfactorily the ileal with the real, leading to Joseph's ever increasing alienation. This deterioration is seen as Bellow brings his protagonist into further conflict with those about him.

One of the most interesting and illuminating of these conflicts is found in the working out of Joseph's affair with Kitty Daumler. Briefly, here is the background. Before his draft call Joseph is working in a travel bureau where he meets a very friendly Kitty (whose name, of course, invites speculation that Bellow intends her as a physiological and biological force--which she certainly is). Although attracted by her, Joseph at first fails to pursue the obvious invitation. In time, however, and with an increasing isolation from his wife, Joseph begins visiting Kitty on a platonic basis, a basis that stands only as steady as the biological limits of a subangelic nature. After two months, Joseph, taking the "high road," building "high constructions," explains to Kitty: "A man must accept limits and cannot give in to the wild desires to be everything and everyone and everything to everyone." Then commenting on his moral behavior, he adds:

> She was disappointed but also pleased by my earnestness, the tone I took, and felt honored to have her mind, her superior nature, thus addressed. We agreed that I was to continue to visit her on a friendly basis.

> There was nothing wrong in that, was there? Why not be sensible? She liked me, liked listening to me; she had already learned a great deal. Did she understand, I asked, that my motives had nothing to do with her, personally? (101-102)

This scene is richly representative of Joseph's sub-angelic nature. In order to dramatize his protagonists in self-contradiction, Saul Bellow often has them engage in activities that are in conflict with their ideas and intentions. Here we see Joseph explaining, all quite reasonably, that one cannot be everything to everybody, yet he tries to be just that in continuing to see Kitty. In the beginning he starts this relationship on an idealistic basis. He really believes it can so continue. It is a dream of the "colony of the spirit" again, bound to fail because of the boundaries of reality. When Kitty reacts quite favorably to Joseph's intellectual and moral resolutions, it is important to keep this point of view in mind. This is the way Joseph sees himself and the way he sees Kitty, and the way, no doubt, that Kitty wants to be seen. She is not necessarily insincere. She is probably sincerely flattered and moved.

In any case, once again Joseph is sharply confronted with the <u>sub</u>angelic facts when he visits Kitty to get a book she borrowed from him. He finds her in bed with another man. Upon this discovery he feels "anbiguously resentful and insulted," which is only the result of having his images smashed again, images of "ideal constructions"

made possible through his angelic nature. It is important to understand that Joseph is no fool. His keenness in diagnosing the drives that led to his first and subsequent sexual unions with Kitty shows a man of awareness, of insight into natural motivations, and of a partial understanding of himself. Only an honest and an alert mind that is more nearly allied to the angelic than to the demonic could so accurately chart a course of such complexity. Joseph is far from a fool. He merely fails to anticipate the limits of reason. His last reflection here, concerning her understanding of his motives, is pure irony: poor Joseph's motives are laudably high and well-intentioned while his practical knowledge of basic human needs and relationships is sadly incomplete.

In order to add depth and meaning to the experience with Kitty, Bellow shows Joseph returning home in a setting that symbolically reinforces the discovered world of reality with which he has just been confronted. After Kitty closes the door, Joseph is left standing like a little boy, "staring up at the transom" as if he would see into the life of things were he tall enough. As he walks down the stairs he sees:

> . . . a woman in a slip, sitting before the mirror with a razor, her arm crooked backward, a cigarette on the ledge of the radio beside her, and from it two curling prongs of smoke rising; then, possibly because the sound of my steps had ceased, or sensing that she was being watched, she looked up, startled--a broad,

angry face. (104)

Here is the embodiment of the subangelic nature of humanity: a woman, surrounded by objects of civilization, in the act of attempting to disguise her animalism, and angry at the possibility of being discovered. The correlation between this scene and that which just took place with Kitty a few moments before can hardly be missed. Certainly Joseph feels it, if he does not intellectualize it. And as Joseph proceeds downstairs to the vestibule, his attention is drawn to a lamp; "On a pedestal a bronze Laocoön held in his suffering hands a huge barbarically furred headpice of a lampshade with fringes of blackened lace." (104)

Here again is seen a reflection of the well springs of the affair with Kitty--a human condition, a subangelical station. Man is capable of illuminating insight, of reasoning awareness, of moral humanism; yet he must bear the modifying burden of a biological shade that dims the light of an otherwise angelical nature. His "suffering hands" are forever entwined in his own history, a history out of the sea that shuts out all prophecy of reason and morality, even as the truth of Laocoön was stifled. It is a history that includes a "furred headpiece" and "black lace."

Bellow concludes this episode with Joseph boarding a streetcar:

> "Reg'lar gale," said the conductor, gripping the hand rail.

> A young soldier and a girl got on, both drunk; an elderly woman with a pointed, wolfish face; a seedy policeman, who stood with his hands buried in his pockets so that he seemed to be holding his belly, his chin lowered on the flaps of his collar; a woman in a short skirt and fur chubby, her stockings wrinkling over her knees, her eyes watering, and her teeth set.
>
> "You'd think," said the conductor pityingly as she worked her way through the car, "that a woman like that, who ain't no youngster, would stay home close to the steam on a night like this, instead of knockin' around on late cars. Unless," he added to the policeman and me, "she's out on business," and showed his yellow teeth in a smile.
>
> "Do'ch'ster next. Do'ch'ster!"
>
> I jumped off and struggled homeward against the wind, stopping for a while under the corner awning to catch my breath. The clouds were sheared back from a mass of stars chattering in the hemispheric blackness--the universe, this windy midnight, out on its eternal business. (105-106)

At times the world is an ugly, wind-swept waste. But if the woman is "out on business," it is encompassed within the business of the universe, as are Joseph and Kitty. There is, however, a kind of universal reconciliation here: there are stars "in the hemispheric blackness." Also, Joseph sees no more of Kitty, and when he returns home he and Iva are reconciled.

Bellow is often not so artful as to let setting act as commentary on the action. More often than not he allows Joseph to act as commentator. Probably one of the most significant encounters of this kind takes place when Joseph and Iva visit his brother Amos, Amos' wife Dolly, and their daughter Etta. After an awkward and uncomfortable discussion

at dinner, owing to the patronizing attitudes toward Joseph because of his lack of money and his idleness, Joseph goes defensively to the attic, where he finds a Haydn record which he had given to Etta a year ago. Listening to the music, he is brought to a confession. He sees himself as:

> . . . still an apprentice in suffering and humiliation. I had not even begun. I had, furthermore, no right to expect to avoid them. So much was immediately clear. Surely no one could plead for exception; that was not a human privilege. What I should do with them, how to meet them, was answered in the second declaration: with grace, and without meanness. And though I could not as yet apply that answer to myself, I recognized its rightness and was vehemently moved by it. Not until I was a whole man could it be my answer, too. (67)

This meditation is almost heroic. Here is a man confessing his weaknesses, yet maintaining the dignity of standing on what he is. He says further that he will not "catch at any contrivance in panic. . . . No, not God, not any divinity" in order to meet suffering and humiliation "with grace, without meanness." Surely this is the angelic spirit, a spirit aware of reach exceeding grasp, but still reaching.

But then Etta intrudes on his solitude and demands that she be allowed to play some Cugat records. The result is chaos, with Joseph and his niece shouting, crying, and screaming at each other in childish accusations, and with Joseph's turning to violence and soundly spanking Etta. So once again, his god-like reason which was so evident a few moments before is checkmated by its own treasonous roots.

Saul Bellow is ever concerned with the doubleness of man. At every opportunity he marks the distinction between the _en-soi_ and the _pour-soi_. He depicts Joseph, for example, reflecting upon his sister-in-law Dolly and his niece Etta sometime after their ugly scene:

> Dolly, my sister-in-law, is a pretty woman, still slender, large-bosomed, but attractively so, dark, with fine hair combed upward in a way designed to make the most of her neck. She has a very graceful neck; I have always admired it. It is one of the traits my fifteen-year-old niece Etta has inherited. To me it has always been one of the exquisite characteristics of femininity; I can well understand why it provoked the prophet Isaiah to utter the words: "Because the daughters of Zion are haughty, and walk with stretched forth necks and wanton eyes, walking and mincing as they go, and making a tinkling with their feet: therefore the Lord will smite with a scab the crown of the head of the daughters of Zion, and the Lord will discover their secret parts."
>
> It astonishes me that the same association should be in both our minds, though with a different cast. Certainly it is the "stretched forth necks," or delicacy in conjunction with the rugged ancient machinery of procreation, that has for a long time been identified in my imagination with feminine nature. Here the parallel ends, for I am the very opposite of vindictive in regard to this duality and have indeed, found pleasure in recognizing it. (60-61)

This internal monologue lends support to the implications of the immediately preceding experience with Dolly and Etta, an experience that reminds us of the gulf between Joseph's perspicacity and his demonic actions. Joseph is aware of life's double reality because he is capable of a double vision of life. What he feels concerning the beauty of Dolly and Etta is no less real than what he knows to be their time-out-of-mind earthy biological function. Joseph

the intellectual, moreover, finds great pleasure in his ability to recognize these disparities. The irony lies in his seeming incapacity to apply his insight to his actions. The result, once again, is chaos.

The major theme of Dangling Man centers on the inability of Joseph to live in his "freedom." His own resources are not enough to sustain a self-definition and, therefore, a meaningful life. Saul Bellow supports this thesis with a parallel incident that examines the extent to which one may rely upon his own imagination to find his place in the world.

John Pearl, an artist of whom Joseph is envious, has left Chicago for New York, where he has a position with an advertising agency. He writes to Joseph:

> "I am exhilarated by the tremendous unimportance of my work. It is nonsense. My employers are nonsensical. The job therefore leaves me free. . . . Everybody else takes it seriously. Because this is a fifty-three story building, they think it must be serious. The real world is the world of art and thought. There is only one worth-while sort of work, that of the imagination." (90-91)

Joseph miserably contemplates his own inability to escape the economic trap of society. He reflects that to escape that trap:

> . . . is a victory to celebrate. I am fascinated and a little jealous. He [Pearl] can maintain himself. Is it because he is an artist? I believe it is. Those acts of the imagination save him. . . . those acts of the imagination are in the strictest sense not personal. Through them he is connected with the best part of mankind. He feels this and he can never be isolated, left

> aside. He has a community. I have this six-sided box. And goodness is achieved not in a vacuum, but in the company of other men, attended by love. . . . Who does not recognize the advantage of the artist, these days? (91-92)

In "Distractions of a Fiction Writer" Bellow holds that "Men are active. Ideas are passive."[4] He suggests further that the artist who forgets this truism will become an abject creature, creating contemptible art. The artist, Bellow seems to be saying, is after all a man, and as such he must be involved with man, not only passively through a world of ideas, but actively in concert with man. In John Pearl this pattern is completed. Toward the end of the novel, Pearl writes with deep distaste about his "peeling environment," asking for news of Chicago:

> "Peeling furniture, peeling walls, posters, bridges, everything is peeling and scaling in South Brooklyn. We moved here to save money, but I'm afraid we'd better start saving ourselves and move out again. It's the treelessness, as much as anything, that hurts me. The unnatural, too-human deadness."

John Pearl has found that the imagination has its limits. And Joseph, in his own isolation, understands Pearl's defeat"

> I'm sorry for him. I know what he feels, the kind of terror, and the danger he sees of the lack of the human in the too-human. We find it, as others before us have found it in the last two hundred years, and we bolt for "Nature." It happens in all cities. And cities are

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[4] Saul Bellow, "Distractions of a Fiction Writer," The Living Novel: A Symposium, ed. Granville Hicks (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1957), p. 13.

"natural," too. He thinks he would be safer in Chicago, where he grew up. Sentimentality! He doesn't mean Chicago. It is no less inhuman. He means his father's house and the few blocks adjacent. Away from these and a few other islands, he would be just as unsafe.

But even such a letter buoys me up. It gives me a sense of someone else's recognition of the difficult, the sorrowful, in what to others is merely neutral, the environment. (153)

Through Joseph's reflections on John Pearl's experience, Bellow is saying that man is part of his environment and that he cannot separate himself from his environment. Nor can he separate himself from his past. He is what he is because of what he was. Imagination is a god-like extension of man, but it is of value only when it is rooted in reality, when it remembers that its source is within man. Bellow is saying that the imagination in all its creativity must never attempt to create a world beyond man. It is bound to fail.

Near the end of Dangling Man, Bellow urges Joseph toward complete isolation when Joseph, through the insistence of his wife, who must go to work that day, attempts to cash a check at the bank. Since Joseph has no job, however, the president of the bank, whom he demands to confront, refuses the service. Once again, there is a scene. And once again, Joseph realizes the limits to which he has been pushed: "It was a foolish incident. A year ago I would have accepted his explanation politely and have moved away." (175) The point is that Joseph has no identity. One cannot be identified in a vacuum. Definition requires involvement

in which distinctions can be made. Joseph knows this. But at the time, as usual, he is unable to act on what he knows.

Joseph's effort to build a foundation on which he can establish some purpose and direction is directly dramatized by Bellow, in a rather loose handling of the diary form, through Joseph's philosophical discussions with his Spirit of Alternatives, whom he calls "Tu As Raison Aussi." This Spirit, of course, acts as Joseph's other self. In one of these sessions there is the following exchange, with Joseph speaking first:

> "There's a lot of talk about alienation. It's a fool's plea."
>
> "Is it?"
>
> "You can divorce your wife or abandon your child, but what can you do with yourself?"
>
> "You can't banish the world by decree if it's in you, Is that it, Joseph?"
>
> "How can you?. . . The world comes after you. . . ."
>
> "Whatever you do you cannot dismiss it."
>
> "What then?"
>
> "The failing may be in us, in me. A weakness of vision."
>
> "If you could see, what do you think you would see?"
>
> "I'm not sure. Perhaps that we were the feeble-minded children of angels." (137)

All of Bellow's protagonists are nowhere better described than in this phrase "the feeble-minded children of angels."

Then somewhat later in this discussion, Joseph asks:

"But what of the gap between 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. (141)

As with imagination, then, reason fails at its limits. If one persists in not recognizing and accepting limits, he is thrown back on the natural resources of violence. There is always that recourse for the subangelical man.

The last encounter with the Spirit of Alternatives

prepares for Joseph's surrender. He and "Tu As Raison Aussi" are discussing the proper role for Joseph, whether to maintain a freedom whose "value is decreasing everyday" or to insist that his draft number be called at once. While Joseph maintains that it is necessary to preserve one's freedom, he recognizes that his weariness comes from the inability to be free "because it is not accompanied by comprehension." It is owing to this ignorance that we "soon run out, we choose a master, roll over on our backs and ask for the leash." As for the war, it is but an incident. The real nature of the world will not be changed by it. He adds:

> "The war can destroy me physically. That it can do. But so can bacteria. I must be concerned with them, naturally. I must take account of them. They can obliterate me. But as long as I am alive, I must follow my destiny in spite of them."

To which "Tu As Raison Aussi" replies:

> "Then only one question remains."
>
> "What?"
>
> "Whether you have a separate destiny. Oh, you're a shrewd wiggler," said "Tu As Raison Aussi." "But I've been waiting for you to cross my corner. Well, what do you say?"
>
> I think I must have grown pale.
>
> "I'm not ready to answer. I have nothing to say to that now."
>
> "How seriously you take this," cried Tu As Raison Aussi. "It's only a discussion. The boy's teeth are chattering. Do you have a chill?" He ran to get a blanket from the bed.

> I said faintly, "I'm all right." He tucked the blanket around me and, in great concern, wiped my forehead and sat by me until nightfall. (168-69)

The possibility, and even the probability, that Joseph has no individual meaning, no individual purpose, no personal or individual existence of any consequence, stuns him. If all this is true, such phrases as _individual freedom_ and _personal justice_, and the romanticism of ideal constructions, are surely games of the ego, and games of an imaginary ego at that. It is little wonder that Joseph desperately reaches for the group in order to achieve a degree of self-identification and meaning.

When Joseph gives up the battle and makes preparation to join the army, he feels a great sense of relief. He is quite calm and poised. Once more, he and Iva are at least in a state of peaceful coexistence. There are other positive adjustments that seem to indicate a kind of consolation in defeat. And perhaps they are consoling. But Joseph also returns to his reading, and it will be remembered that he refers early in the novel to his books as "guarantors of an extended life, far more precious and necessary than the one I was forced to lead." Evidently he is being forced into an existence in which he will lose the name of action, in which he will live a life of the passive through a world of ideas. If this is consolation, it surely has its source in desperation.

Also, Joseph makes peace with his fellow tenant Vanaker, an old man, hard of hearing, a drunk, and a thief, who annoys Joseph progressively throughout the seven months' delay. When he first meets Vanaker, and experiences the old man's thoughtless and careless benumbed delinquencies, he sympathizes and understands: "He is a queer, annoying creature. His coughing, I am convinced, is partly alcoholic and partly nervous. I have lived in rooming houses for so long I have acquired an eye for the type." (16) But with Joseph's increasing agitated isolation, he grows belligerent to the point of violence. It is only with his surrender that he once again looks upon Vanaker with a kindly concern: "Once more he seemed to me, as in the early days, simple-minded, perhaps subnormal." (182) These changing attitudes, then, toward his wife, his books, and Vanaker, Bellow uses to trace Joseph's progress toward alienation and accommodation.[5]

There is little doubt that Dangling Man is a story of failure and defeat. Time after time Joseph fails to bring his "high constructions" down to an earthly and functional foundation. His wife fails to reflect his ideals,

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[5]Marcus Klein uses the term in his effort to delineate patterns in post-war novels. Marcus Klein, "A Discipline of Nobility: Saul Bellow's Fiction," After Alienation: American Novels in Mid-Century (New York: World Publishing Company, 1964), pp. 13-37 passim.

as does Kitty, and as do his relatives, friends, political dreams, and books. He is simply forced to admit that in himself he is without meaning and without purpose. It would seem that, through Joseph, Bellow intends a rather dark and hopeless definition of man whether he is viewed as an individual or as part of society. Chester Eisinger's statement is to this point:

> Joseph cannot reconcile his two worlds, and he cannot exist as a whole man with dignity in the real world. . . . Worse than this, Joseph cannot exist in his own independent world, carved out of his own inner resources of mind and will and sensibility.[6]

And Marcus Klein says: "Joseph must give himself to idiopathic freedom, and that way is madness, or submit to the community's ordinary, violent reality. He surrenders."[7]

These interpretations are well within the significance of Joseph's experiences, but they do not take into consideration a point of view separate from Joseph's experiences. I mean the reader's reaction to the novel. For although he fails to live "with grace, without meanness," and finally chooses to merge his identity into the nebulae of society, his struggle is not without nobility. The fact that he loses the fight does not make him or his experiences

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[6]Chester E. Eisinger, "Saul Bellow: Man Alive, Sustained by Love," Fiction of the Forties (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), pp. 346-47.

[7]Klein, op. cit., pp. 35-36.

worthless. We understand Joseph. We identify with him. We sympathize with his suffering because we know that the pain is real. We have felt it. When we laugh at him, we are laughing at ourselves, and we know it. Most of all, perhaps, we understand his reaching for "ideal constructions," reaching for a better self. We have tried that, too.

In a sense, Joseph fails in the same way that our tragic heroes fail: he loses, but we feel that we have seen in action a human being struggling with all the strength and with all the weapons that are given us. Man can do no more. This struggle is Joseph's dignity, and hence ours. We feel a little more of man's greatness for having known him. It is true that through Joseph we are once more made aware of the impotence of man, but it is not a wretched impotence. It is subangelic in spirit, just a step below the angels. Above all, Joseph is not a victim of determinism. He made the decision to give up his freedom. Furthermore, the ability to choose, as a given within the human condition, is not revocable; wherever Joseph is at present, he carries that choice with him. That is the burden of subangelic man.

CHAPTER II

"WHO RUNS THINGS?"

The negative implications of the title of Saul Bellow's second novel, The Victim (1947),[1] are difficult to reconcile with the positive concepts of the subangelic attitude; for by definition, the term "victim" would seem to preclude the dignity, the integrity, and the hopefulness usually assumed within that attitude. Yet we must accept the author's title as a clear indication of intention: he does mean to cast Asa Leventhal, the protagonist, as victim. Furthermore, the text bears out the intention: Asa is trapped by forces that are surely not of his own making.

In this work, however, there are explicit and implicit affirmations which show an unbroken line of development in the work and thought of Bellow. That is, the subangelic spirit is neither forgotten nor laid aside in The Victim; rather it is evidenced through a kind of indirection. Just how Bellow manages this complexity, how he contrives to place in conjunction the demonic and the subangelic, is of primary interest in this chapter.

In order to understand the more specific intentions

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[1] Saul Bellow, The Victim (New York: The Viking Press, 1956). All subsequent page citations in parenthesis are from this edition.

of the author, we may begin by examining the general nature of the novel and the personality of its hero. It would seem that this might best be done through comparisons with his first novel, Dangling Man, inasmuch as both works are founded on the victim theme. The primary action of The Victim develops out of the relationship of Asa Leventhal and Kirby Allbee,[2] "one of those guys," says Asa, "who want you to think they can see to the bottom of your soul." (26) A few years prior to the action of the story, Asa through the help of Allbee had secured an interview from Allbee's superior, Rudiger, in an attempt to obtain a much-needed job. Rudiger was rude beyond Asa's self-restraint, and there ensued between them a loud, chaotic scene filled with general and specific recriminations. Within a few days, Allbee himself was dismissed by Rudiger. Shortly after the novel opens, Allbee presents himself to Asa, whose wife Mary is away for the summer, and insists that Asa had maliciously contrived the scene with Rudiger in order to avenge an anti-semitic remark made earlier by Allbee during a party which Asa had attended. It is Allbee's contention that the sole responsibility for his dismissal and subsequent decline (Allbee is a derelict: his wife had left him and is now

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[2]The name of "Allbee" obviously holds the symbolic intent of Everyman. On one level, he functions as an exposition of the relationship that exists between the individual (Asa) and his fellow man.

dead, he is without money, without work, and he is a heavy drinker) rests solely on the conscience of Asa. At first, the charge seems so ridiculous to Asa that he refers to Allbee as "some kind of nut." But his accuser continues to plague him, both with his presence and with his complaints. Although Asa is convinced that he is dealing with a lunatic, he seeks reassurance from his friends. Harkavy, who has in the past been of some service to Asa, gives him some words of encouragement, but somehow his comments, "outrageous. . . how annoying . . . how disagreeable," fail to bring Asa any peace. Williston, who has also been of help to Asa, seems to agree with his indignant reactions, but is so reserved that Asa demands a concrete and immediate vindication. Williston not only does not insist on Asa's innocence; he states that Asa is probably not without responsibility. Now even Asa doubts his own innocence. But Allbee, what with his unpredictable behavior and slovenly habits, is not an easy one to help, and the working out of this relationship is made up of scene after scene of intense and at times violent confrontations of accuser and accused. Soon it is difficult to tell which is which. After one particularly vicious encounter in theapartment, Allbee tries to commit suicide, almost killing Asa in the process. He then disappears. The two meet several years later at a theater where during the intermission Allbee, now at least

superficially doing well, confesses a debt to Asa and explains that he is "the type who comes to terms with whoever runs things" and that he now realizes "the world wasn't exactly made for me." (294) This primary plot ends with Asa's call to Allbee to "wait a minute, what's your idea of who runs things?" (294) But the curtain is going up, and Asa receives no reply.

There is a second plot in The Victim, which serves as support and counterpoint to the primary action. Asa's brother Max is working in Texas, but he has left his wife Elena and their two children in New York. One of the children is ill, and Asa assumes the responsibility of watching over the family during this time. It is during this caretaking that Asa is forced into another examination of his responsibility, perhaps guilt, through his efforts to help and advise. This subplot ends with the death of the child and the return of Max and his family to Texas.

A comparison of The Victim and Dangling Man will reveal, first of all, general likenesses between the created worlds, for, in both works, Bellow depicts existences that are torn between a frustratingly partial recognition of implacable naturalistic forces and a humanly stubborn insistence upon an active self-determination. Certainly both novels reach their intensities through an examination of this theme of deterministic limits. Then there are general

similarities between the two protagonists: Asa and Joseph both are, in a sense, anti-heroes; both are isolated and alienated; both find that exigencies of the moment are usually beyond their anticipation and restraint; and finally, both are left with an unquiet apprehension of an existence that seems to be beyond their control. In a very real sense, Asa and Joseph are both "dangling" and both "victims."

There are, however, sharp and informative distinctions between Bellow's two works that are of use in defining further the author's concept of man as subangelic. And mainly here the interest in these distinctions lies in showing how Bellow creates a certain amount of Jamesian distance between reader and protagonist, for this rapport is highly functional in the creation of Asa as victim.

Dangling Man has for its center an examination of the meanings of freedom, and the implications of those meanings to the individual. In *The Victim*, the author moves to a consideration of another human condition, the burden of guilt and responsibility. And here the issues become more complex in that they are more immediate, more tangible, less abstract in the sense that their resolutions are called for many times over. In *Dangling Man*, Joseph at least has an alternative: he can continue his struggle toward a personal and individual integrity or he can give

up his freedom, as he does, and "collectivize." For Asa Leventhal, such a choice does not and cannot exist. He is irrevocably of and in the social environs. He cannot give up. He simply must make the best of an existing situation which is largely beyond his control, a situation that calls for decisions and conclusions that are impossible of intelligent and reasonable resolutions owing not only to his confused and limited personality, but owing also to the intricacies of the problem itself, those of determining guilt and responsibility regardless of modifying circumstances.

Certainly there is less drama in the experiences of Asa Leventhal than there is in those of Joseph, simply because Asa has no clear-cut alternative. The question, will Leventhal win his fight? is somehow not germane. Asa has no choice. He seems to live on Arnold's "darkling plain, swept with confused alarms . . . where ignorant armies clash by night." In such chaos, friend and foe are unrecognizable, victory and defeat meaningless. In such conflicts, survival itself is the only end devoutly to be wished.

Then it will be remembered that Joseph is a highly sympathetic figure. The reader identifies with him and participates in his battle for freedom. In spite of his behavioral brinksmanship, he has a keen intelligence that is actively aware, though usually too late, of its own weaknesses.

He is defeated, but his defeat comes about only after a conflict in which there is to be seen a kind of clear-eyed nobility and a searching integrity. The reader trusts Joseph and he trusts Joseph's diary with its confessional approach and candid directness. In his near proximity, then, the reader feels that Joseph, in Bellow's words, "has the power to complete his own life," and to "overcome the ignominy" of the blows of a seemingly mechanical universe. The most important point is that while Joseph has difficulty in determining his relationship with society, he does have a complete understanding of self, not, perhaps, an angelic understanding, but one not too far removed.

Such is not the case with Asa Leventhal, or at least serious modification is called for. In fact, it is just this ignorance of self that is largely responsible for Asa's victimization. Bellow indicates this confusion early in the novel when Asa is first described:

> . . . burly . . . his head large; his nose, too, was large . . . . his eyes under their intergrown brows were intensely black and of a size unusual in adult faces. But though childishly large they were not child-like 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. (13)

The hints here of childish innocence and the clear indications of anthropoidal characteristics make it impossible for us to reach the closeness, the fine degree of

identification, that we immediately attain with Joseph. Moreover, this is just the stuff of which victims are made: a basic inability coupled with an innocence that seem to defy experience.

Asa is also set at a distance from the reader by a "sickness" that is largely owing to a sense of guilt arising from a mind limited by a long history of anti-semitism. He is a victim of a persecution complex. He defines his entire relationship to the world in terms of persecution. Early in the story, Bellow presents his protagonist in this light when Harkavy urges Asa to forget about his encounter with Rudiger and the consequent possibility of his being blacklisted:

> "There isn't a thing he can do to you. Whatever you do, don't get ideas like that in your head. He can't persecute you. Now be careful. You have that tendency, boy, do you know that?" (46)

It is "that tendency" which accounts for the suspicion and defensiveness that are a part of Asa's personality. All of his reflections and conclusions are founded upon "that tendency." It is an excited and apprehensive Jewishness, for example, that makes possible his reactions to Elena's mother, who is a devout Catholic:

> And the grandmother? If anything happened to the boy she would consider it in the nature of a judgment on the marriage. The marriage was impure to her. Yes, he understood how she felt about it. A Jew, a man of wrong blood, of bad blood, had given her daughter two children, and that was why this was happening. No one could have persuaded Leventhal that he was wrong. (62)

It is also this accentuated Jewishness that confuses Asa to the point of inaction when he is confronted by the anti-semitic Allbee, "a Gentile . . . from an old New England family." In what is one of the most illuminating scenes of the novel, a scene that will be discussed in more detail later, Asa fully reveals the pattern of behavior that comes from his persecution complex. In a discussion of Disraeli's role in the political life of England, Asa gives his views on the motives behind the prime minister's success:

> "I don't have it in for him. But he wanted to lead England. In spite of the fact that he was a Jew, not because he cared about empires so much. People laughed at his nose, so he took up boxing; they laughed at his poetic silk clothes, so he put on black; and they laughed at his books, so he showed them. He got into politics and became the prime minister. He did it all on nerve." (130)

Through this interpretation of Disraeli's motives, Asa unconciously reveals the sources of his own actions, or rather the sources of his reactions. He is the victim of tunnel vision: all of his thinking is channeled along the lines of defensive semitism. Furthermore, the reader soon discovers that as a result of this singular sight, Asa has a distorted picture of his environment: Rudiger does not really interfere with his efforts to seek employment; the hidden anti-semitic vengeance of Elena's mother are probably imaginary; and, as will be shown, Allbee's constant negative references to his Jewishness are merely reflected self-

impressions. The point is that as soon as the reader feels or sees the distortion in Asa's thinking, he immediately steps back, and views Bellow's protagonist as a victim. And if one recalls for a moment Joseph in Dangling Man, the contrast is evident. Joseph's view of the world is trusted; therefore, it is easy to make a friendly and sympathetic identification with him.

It should be added that Bellow also sets some distance between Asa and the reader through the practice of referring to his protagonist as merely "Leventhal," rather than by the more familiar "Asa," as if, one might say, Asa Leventhal were the subject of a study, a case report.

Asa's self-entrapment is further intensified by an outer world that Bellow sets to reflect the dark confusion of his protagonist as well as to depict an environment compatible with the tangled and hidden complexities of his theme. Names, colors, and airs of mysterious far-off places are called forth. On such a scene the story opens:

> 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, among the stupendous monuments of their mystery, the lights of which, a dazing profusion, climb upward endlessly into the heat of the sky. (3)

And as Asa is going by ferry across to Staten Island to visit Elena and her children, he looks over the rail:

> The formless, working, yellowish-green water was dull, the gulls steered back and forth, the boat crept

> forward into the glare. . . . Surely the sun was no hotter in any Singapore or Surabaya. . . . The notion brushed Leventhal's mind that the light. . . over the water was akin to the yellow revealed in the slit of the eye of a wild animal, say a lion, something inhuman that didn't care about anything human and yet was implanted in every human being too, one speck of it, and formed a part of him. . . . The Jersey shore, yellow, tawny, and flat. . . . (51)

Certainly Asa's New York has all of the closeness and heaviness, all of the foreboding of a Conradian rain forest.[3] The important point here is that the jungle-like setting is descriptive of a condition felt by Asa. It is descriptive of an alien, mysterious, perhaps sick personality, and the reader tends to withdraw from that personality and to become an observer of the protagonist, who becomes an Everyman through the universal intent of the alien and the faraway. There is an Asa in Bangkok and Singapore, as well as in New York.

In <u>The Victim</u> Bellow achieves a distance between reader and protagonist because the subject of point of view is quite important to the attitude that the author would have us take toward his theme. This is a story in which there are issues of guilt, morality, justice, and responsibility. In such a framework, judgment is necessary; and

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[3]Bellow's use of metaphors in setting seem to shift from the implications of the jungle to those of the sea. His continual use of the adjective "green" and his references to characters as fish (5, 26, 77, 277) are functional to these settings.

that judgment, which must come from the reader, calls for a measure of distance and objectivity. But more directly to the purpose here is that the distance from Asa, which is accomplished through point of view, accounts in large part for the view of Asa as victim. Through the detachment of reader and protagonist there is a certain loss of sympathetic participation. Of course this is not a matter of black and white, and there is some truth in what Jonothan Baumbach states in his Landscape of Nightmare:

> Much of the impact of The Victim resides in Bellow's ability to keep the reader's point of view limited to Leventhal's making the reader a sympathetic participant in his nightmare experience.[4]

Yet Leventhal's point of view is distorted. And when the reader discovers this lack of clear vision, as he does early in the novel, he may remain sympathetic, but his will to participate is subject to the extent of the distortion.

It is difficult at this point to see Bellow's protagonist as subangelic because there seems to be little if anything he can do to "overcome ignominy" and to "complete his own life." He simply has a built-in "suffering, feebleness, and servitude" that seem to be totally without help or meaning. He labors the stone of Sisyphus up the hill, but walks down for his next effort with a mind and nature

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[4]Jonothan Baumback, "The Double Vision: The Victim by Saul Bellow," The Landscape of Nightmare: Studies in the Contemporary Novel (New York: New York University Press, 1965), p. 49.

largely unable to grasp even a piece of the nobility and the dignity of his humanness.

Unlike many other contemporary novelists, however, Saul Bellow never creates his worlds in terms of a complete victimization, nor does he found his characters on absolute grotesques. The subangelic attitude does not permit such a frozen outline. That is, Asa is depicted as victim; yet this condition is shown to be but one, the nature of which is, to an extent, dependent upon the victim himself. And right here, part of what Bellow intends in his use of the term "subangelic" is made clear in the further depiction of Asa's state as complex rather than singular. It has been pointed out that Asa's problems are largely the result of a sickness, specifically, his insecurity owing to semitic feelings of guilt; but it is important to see that this guilt is only a sickness, an unnatural condition, one in which there are possibilities of development and change. Those possibilities are evident if Bellow's protagonist is seen in another light.

Asa has an honest mind: he wants to do what is right. He is even capable of a kind of idealism. When he reflects upon the implications of human responsibility, he does so in strength: ". . . he liked to think that 'human' meant accountable in spite of many weaknesses--at the last moment, tough enough to hold." (154) And more often than

not, at least up to the limits of his ability, he abides by his ideals: he is humanly accountable in the best sense of the term. It is his own effort and his own time, often valuable time, that he gives to help his brother's family. Furthermore, these visits are not perfunctorily passive. When Elena fearfully refuses to allow her sick child to be sent to the hospital, Asa is actively concerned:

> With unconscious grimness, Leventhal prepared himself to struggle with her. . . . The prospect of interfering, rushing in to rescue the boy, was repugnant to him; it made him feel, more than ever, that he was an outsider. (52)

Yet Asa sees the unpleasantness through.

And it is the same with Allbee. In spite of the seeming unreasonableness of his accuser's complaints and demands, Asa cannot completely sever the relationship because regardless of his certainty that he intended no evil toward Allbee, he is not convinced of his own innocence. He understands abstract accountability, and he suffers from this understanding in spite of his attempts to rationalize the subject into non-existence. When he reflects on Williston's reluctance to support his case against Allbee, and on "the whole affair," he concludes:

> It was, after all, something he could either take seriously or dismiss as an annoyance. It was up to him. He had only to insist that he wasn't responsible and it disappeared altogether. It was his conviction against an accusation nobody could expect him to take at face value. And what more was there for him to say than that his part in it was accidental? At worst, an accident, unintentional. (96)

Asa's rationale is quite logical and well within the framework of social dictation. Its only weakness, however, is that it lacks humanity. It does not take into consideration Asa's deep feeling of accountability; hence, it is little wonder that such a cold analysis of his responsibility gives him no comfort whatever. After all, as he says, it is up to him; and laboratory logic cannot remove him from that felt position, a very human position.

"It was up to him," hardly the words of a victim, is another brick in the subangelic foundation. When Bellow says that the reality of this responsibility "may be an exaggeration of the value of the human personality," the fact of Asa's feeling that it is not an exaggeration is also a reality, a truth that must be reckoned with in the depiction of the human personality. Certainly there is a dilemma, and the dilemma often leads to helplessness, to a loss of the name of action; but the very recognition of the problem points to a potentiality. Again and again, Bellow shows that Asa is working in this field of recognition, perhaps blindly, but working. When he is pondering his "meddling" into Elena's family difficulties, he pauses to examine the deeper and more meaningful extensions:

> . . . judging from what he had seen . . . well, her fear of the hospital was an indication of her fitness to bring up children. Some people would say that she loved them and that her love made up for her shortcomings. Love, by all means. But because the mother and the child were tied together in that way, if the

> child died through her ignorance, was she still a good mother? Should someone else--he thought of it seriously--have the right to take the child away? Or should the fate of the two of them be considered one and the same, and the child's death said to be the mother's affair only because she would suffer most by its death? In that case, the child was not regarded as a person, and was that fair? Well, that was the meaning of helplessness; that was what they meant when they said it. Now with that in mind you could understand why little children sometimes cried the way they did. It was as if it were in them to know. Unfair, thought Leventhal, not to say tragic. (52)

Such extensions of meaning as those found in this passage help to inform The Victim above and beyond the immediate issue of anti-semitism. That is, Bellow is concerned with Asa as a victim of a religious inheritance, but he is also interested in him as an issue of a human condition, a condition that exists within the vague and indecisive, the gray and shadowed, area of accountability. Frederick Hoffman concludes ". . . the ultimate issue is one of general morality specifically grounded."[5]

In any case, Asa is aware of the wider implications of his particular dilemma. He sees beyond his immediate confusion. While such an awareness does not necessarily admit of concrete resolutions, it does point to the possible positive in its pursuit of revelations. It affirms man's potentiality. And so it is with Asa, who, while a

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[5]Frederick Hoffman, "The Fool of Experience: Saul Bellow's Fiction" in Contemporary American Novelists, ed. Harry Moore (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1964), p. 88.

victim, embodies what Ihab Hassan refers to as "the basic morality of the eiron" in that Asa's nature and personality allows for an "evoking of possibilities where none but limitations exist."[6]

With these modifying affirmatives introduced into Asa's character, then, Bellow seems to be saying that while Asa's limitations tend to victimize him, his deep and honest feelings of responsibility and accountability, his sense of the real and the ideal, and an empathy for his fellow man, whether founded on logic or not, give him the dignity of development and the possibility of change. Bellow seems to be urging that while man's limitations might be a property of the species, so are man's potentialities. Moreover, it is this positive side of Asa that gives to the reader another point of view, this time, a closer view, one with which he can identify and sympathize more easily. This is not to say that this new position negates or lessens Asa as victim; it merely shows an extenuation, a complexity that denies any view of man that is singular in nature.

In a pivotal chapter in the middle of his book (Chapter 10), Bellow moves his meanings into deeper water. This chapter acts as a wheel upon which the issue of guilt

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[6]Ihab Hassan, Radical Innocence: The Contemporary American Novel (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961), p. 78. Hassan uses the Greek word eiron to define the "humble, self-deprecating man" as his partial definition of the contemporary literary hero. See p. 114.

and responsibility in Asa turns to a consideration of that issue in modern man. Moreover, Asa's dilemma, or the dilemma of contemporary man, is clarified through an examination that sets the conflict in historical perspective. The scene takes place in a cafeteria where Asa and his friend Harkavy join Goldstone, Shifcart, and Schlossberg. Each of this group, with the exception of Asa, is or has been closely connected with the world of the theater. Their conversation in the scene centers on acting in general and specifically on the merits of particular actresses. Bellow often uses images of the theatrical world as metaphors to assert the distinctions between what man is and what he pretends to be. For Bellow, these are images of escape through which he depicts man's attempts to escape the facts of his existence.[7] It is with this metaphor in mind that Bellow turns the cafeteria into a setting whose sights and sounds call up reminiscences of the theater. Asa is described as he steps inside:

> He had come in as much to escape the hot winds as to eat. The glass door shut on the dirty rush behind him, and he advanced a few steps over the green tile floor and paused. . . . The trays were on a stand nearby, and he picked one up and started toward the counter. The cashier called him back. He had forgotten to pull a check from the machine. (122)

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[7]Bellow often extends the scope of these images to include the world of art in general. In <u>Dangling Man</u> it was seen that John Pearl realizes no peace, no sense of value, when he uses his artistic skills as a means of escape.

One can almost see the omnipresent theater signs that read "20° cooler inside." The glass doors, the fading of street noises, the machine from which the patron pulls his ticket--all might be seen as theatrical setting, as well as might the description of the change of menus which recalls the setting up of new programs on the marquee of a theater: "Behind the steam tables, one set of white-lettered menu boards was hauled down and another sent up in the steel frame with a clash." (130) Bellow even puts the scene in motion:

> It was a slow hour in the restaurant. On all sides there were long perspectives of black-topped tables turned on an angle to appear diamond-shaped, each with its symmetrical cluster of sugar, salt, pepper, and napkin box. From end to end their symmetry put a kind of motion into the almost empty place. At the rear, under the scene of groves painted on the wall, some of the employees sat smoking, looking toward the sunlight and the street. (131)

Here are the stagehands standing in front of some scenery, looking out and over what appears to be the setting of and action for a harlequinade. Then when Asa and his companions leave, Harkavy calls to them in the manner of a hat-check girl at the theater:

> "Don't forget your hats, gentlemen."
>
> The musical crash of the check machine filled their ears as they waited their turn at the cashier's dazzling cage. (135)

The last three lines give to the reader the sights and sounds of a ticket line in front of a theater.

Bellow creates the image of the theater primarily for Mr. Schlossberg, whose function is to dramatize an attitude of the past that Asa, as modern man, finds no longer tenable. As a symbol of the past, Schlossberg is provided with Victorian trappings, including a family that might have been drawn from a Victorian novel. His son, who is thirty-five years old, still lives with him--"hasn't made up his mind about a vocation," Harkavy explains to Asa before they join the group, and "there are daughters, too. Worse yet." (123) He is somewhat jaded, but still active:

> He was a large old man with a sturdy gray head, hulking shoulders, and a wide, worn face; his eyes were blue and disproportionately small, and even their gaze was rather worn. But he was vigorous and he must once have been (some of his remarks evoked him, for Leventhal, as a younger man) sensual, powerful, flashy, a dandy--as his double-breasted vest and pointed shoes attested. He wore a knitted tie which had lost its shape with pulling and was made up with a bold, broad knot. Leventhal felt himself strongly drawn to him. (123-24)

Here is the Victorian "dandy" whose tie, vest, and shoes are fasionable for the era. When Schlossberg is deriding the actresses who have attempted the role of Victoria, he says, "I could play a better Victoria myself," with which Asa agrees, "with more respect than amusement." (132)

Schlossberg is extremely critical of every contemporary actress whose name comes into the discussion. None of these new girls can match the performances of the past. He is especially distressed to hear Goldstone praise one

actress, Livia Hall. Goldstone says:

> "I don't know what your standards are. A perfect piece of casting. Who else could have done it?"

Schlossberg then replies:

> "Wood, so help me. She poisons her husband and she watches him die. She wants the insurance money. He loses his voice and he tries to appeal to her she should help him. You don't hear any words. What is she supposed to show in her face? Fear, hate, a hard heart, cruelness, fascination." He shut his eyes tightly and proudly for a moment, and they saw the veins in his lids. Then he slowly raised them, turning his face away, and a tremor went through his cheeks as he posed.
>
> "Oh, say, that's fine!" Harkavy cried, smiling.
>
> "That's the old Russian style," said Shifcart. "That doesn't go any more."
>
> "No? Where's the improvement? What does she do? She sucks in her cheeks and stares. A man is dying at her feet and all she can do is pop out her eyes. . . . She is not an actress because she is not a woman, and she is not a woman because a man doesn't mean anything to her. I don't know what she is. Don't ask me. I saw once Nazimova in _The Three Sisters_. She's the one whose soldier gets killed in a duel over a nothing, foolishness. They tell her about it. She looks away from the audience and just with her head and neck--what a force! But this girl . . . !
>
> "Terrible, ah?" Shifcart said sardonically.
>
> "No, isn't it? And this is a success? This is your success, these days. You said you could pass this Waters [another modern actress] on the street and not recognize her. Imagine!" the old man said, making them all feel his weighty astonishment. "Not to recognize an actress, or that a man shouldn't notice a beautiful woman. It used to be an actress was a woman. She had a mouth, she had flesh on her, she carried herself. When she whispered tears came in your eyes, and when she said a word your legs melted. And it didn't make any difference; on the stage or off the stage you knew she was an actress." (125-26)

At the end of the chapter, Schlossberg gives his final soliloquy:

> "It's bad to be less than human and it's bad to be more than human. . . . Good acting is what is exactly human. And if you say I am a tough critic, you mean I have a high opinion of what is human. This is my whole idea. More than human, can you have any use for life? Less than human, you don't either."
>
> He made a pause--it was not one that invited interruption--and went on.
>
> "This girl Livia in The Tigress. 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. . . . You see right away she has no idea what is human because her husband's death doesn't mean to her a thing. . . . Now maybe somebody will answer me, 'This sounds very interesting. You say less than human, more than human. Tell me, please, what is human?' And really we study people so much now that after we look and look at human nature . . . after you look at it and weigh it and turn it over and put it under a microscope, you might say, 'What is all the shouting about? A man is nothing, his life is nothing. Or it is even lousy and cheap. But this your royal highness doesn't like, so he hokes it up. With what? With greatness and beauty. Beauty and greatness? Black and white I know; I didn't make it up. But greatness and beauty?' But I say, 'What do you know? No, tell me, what do you know? You shut one eye and look at a thing, and it is one way to you. You shut the other one and it is different. 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." (133-34)

Bellow's intentions are clear in these passages only if the reader understands, first, that Schlossberg's

strictures on acting are to be equated with an attitude toward the nature of man, and second, that Schlossberg, as an actor himself--"He shut his eyes tightly and proudly for a moment"--represents an attempt to escape from the facts of that nature. In more detail now, Bellow intends Schlossberg as an ironic figure who does not realize the significance of what he says, or better yet, of what he does not say. His entire criticism of the actress is based on her not responding properly to the death of her husband. He claims that her inappropriate reactions show her to be less than human. And when he says in the final passage, "She commits a murder. What are her feelings?" the irony is especially evident in his blindness to the central issue--she *did* kill her husband. Yet of this act there is no comment. The important issue to him is how she responded. This blindness is again emphasized when Schlossberg, speaking of her response, says, ". . . it should be so awful the whole audience should be afraid positively to look in her face." (134) Again, the act of murder, the fact of a nature that allows murder, and in cold blood as the use of the poison indicates, that animal fact is overlooked. There is an irony, too, in Schlossberg's statement that "good acting is what is exactly human. And if you say I am a tough critic, you mean I have a high opinion of what is human." Here is Schlossberg, the Victorian, deeply anxious

about the forms and missing the substance, or closing his eyes to that substance. Act correctly--that is the key to the Victorian definition of man. The poisoning of a husband can be overlooked if one shows his humanity by clearly suffering the death of the husband. It would seem that Schlossberg's "high opinion of what is human" is founded only on the shows of things rather than on the nature of things.

In the last few lines of the final soliloquy Bellow points directly to Schlossberg as representative of the past. Through self-deception this old Victorian idealist insists upon viewing man as "greatness and beauty" in contrast to what seems to him to be the modern attitude that man is "lousy and cheap." He takes the polar extreme, the Victorian attitude, and he is extremely disturbed at the idea that man is less than that attitude dictates. To him, the actress (mankind) is a goddess. Of significance to this study, she is angelic; he will not subscribe to a lesser vision.

Asa's response to this encounter is intensely meaningful because of its revelation of his dilemma as well as for its statement of that dilemma in terms of modern man. It will be remembered that Asa is drawn to Schlossberg. He admires his opinions on the "greatness and beauty" of man. Some twenty pages after the scene in the cafeteria, Asa is

thinking about his brother's responsibility to his wife and children:

> . . . on Max's side an acknowledgment would be made. After all, you married and had children and there was a chain of consequences. It was impossible to tell, in starting out, what was going to happen. And it was unfair, perhaps, to have to account at forty for what was done at twenty. But unless one was more than human or less than human, as Mr. Schlossberg put it, the payments had to be met. Leventhal disagreed about "less than 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 of death, perhaps. But it was a fact that they were afraid, and when the fear was uppermost they didn't want any more burdens. At twenty they had vigor and so were careless, and later they felt too weak to be accountable. . . . But either they found the strength to meet the costs or they refused and gave way to dizziness--dizziness altogether, the dizziness of pleasures before catastrophe. Maybe you could call it "less than human" to refuse; he liked to think "human" meant accountable in spite of many weaknesses--at the last moment, tough enough to hold. But to go by what happened in the majority of cases, it was the last dizziness that was most typical and had the best claim to the name. (154)

It is precisely in what Asa likes to think--to be human means to be accountable--that Bellow shows Asa's yearning, or the yearning of contemporary man, for the past, or for what he judges to be a less complex interpretation of life and hence, a more solid guide by which to judge the meaning of man. Yet Asa cannot agree with Schlossberg's singular definition of what is less than human. Asa knows that his dilemma, his guilt or innocence in the case of Allbee, is much more complicated than Schlossberg's view allows. And so is the nature of man of greater complexity than the Victorian attitude dictates.

Bellow intends no resolution here, only the revelation of a human condition. Yet it can be said that through this chapter the author shows an attitude toward the present that is positive in its implications. Asa, at least, is looking at the nature of man and the facts of man's existence much more honestly than does Schlossberg, an honesty, Bellow seems to imply, that allows for learning. That learning is to be gained through experience. At the end of Schlossberg's final speech, Harkavy and Shifcart applaud his theatrics with comic condescension:

> "Amen and amen!" Shifcart laughed. He drew a card out of his wallet and threw it toward him. "Come and see me; I'll fix you up with a test."
>
> The card fell near Leventhal, who seemed to be the only one to disapprove of the joke. Even Schlossberg himself smiled. . . . It seemed to Leventhal that Shifcart, though he was laughing, looked at him with peculiar disfavor. Still he did not join in. *He picked up the card* [italics not in the original]. The others were rising. (134)

It is not to the smiling Victorian that the card falls; it falls to Asa, the modern. He accepts the test--a test that will further the examination of what it means to be human.

Up to this point, the investigator has been concerned with Bellow's technique in presenting the duality of his protagonist, a duality that is functional in that it supports the major conflict in *The Victim*--man's struggle with himself. This struggle is to be seen primarily in the strange and mystifying relationship that exists between the

two major figures, Asa Leventhal and Kirby Allbee. Most important for the purposes of this chapter, it is the working out of this relationship that makes clear the nature of Asa as victim and Asa as subangelic.

Kirby Allbee, on one level, is a character who represents an outer force working on Asa: on a deeper and more significant level, he is an inner adversary, an alter-ego,[8] born of Asa's desire of punishment for his assumed and felt semitic guilt and of his personal confusion and indirection regarding his place in relation to society. While Bellow depicts Allbee as a believable character in his own right, he gives ample evidence that he wishes the reader to see the close mental and physical identification between Asa and Allbee. At their first meeting, Asa asks Allbee if they are related. Allbee laughs, "By blood? No, no . . . heavens!" (29) The implication, of course, is that there is another kind of relationship. When in spite of Asa's antagonism, Allbee prevails upon him to sit down, Asa thinks desperately, "Damn him, he's got me, he's got hold of me," (30) as if he were dealing with some sort of mysterious force from which he cannot escape. Staring at Allbee, "Leventhal suddenly felt that he had been singled out to be

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[8]Baumbach, _op_. _cit_., pp. 35-54, thoroughly examines Allbee as alter-ego.

the object of some freakish, insane process. . . ." (31) And so he has, because this meeting with his alter-ego is the beginning of a torturous and painful journey to the depths of himself.

In Allbee, all of Asa's fears, weaknesses, insecurities, and contradictions are seen in their logical extensions. Although the reader sees these extensions, Asa does not. It is the reader who realizes Allbee is source and goad behind the self-exploration of Asa. For example, Asa fears poverty. It is a dark cloud that hovers over his every thought and action. When he honestly and sympathetically appraises the broken condition of Allbee, the reader is told, "It was something like this that Leventhal was thinking of when he occasionally said that he had gotten away with it." (38) Allbee's very presence along with his lamentations gives rise to and sustains these fears of economic insecurity, for in his double, Asa sees, indeed, feels, the threat of his own fears. When Allbee insists that Asa knows nothing of poverty, Asa snappishly replies:

> "What do you mean? I've been down and out." . . . There arose 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. . . . And if it were *his* flesh on those sheets, *his* lips drinking that coffee, *his* back and thighs in the winter sun. . . . Allbee was right to smile at him; he had never been in such a plight. "So I'm mistaken," he reflected. (69-70)

Again and again, Allbee forces Asa to look deeply

into himself, into his confused and frightened frustrations. He recalls the interview with Rudiger:

> He was ready to accept the blame for losing his head. . . . But why had he lost it? Only because of Rudiger's abuse? No, he, he himself had begun to fear that the lowest price he put on himself was too high and he could scarcely understand why anyone should want to pay for his services. . . . "He made me believe what I was afraid of," thought Leventhal. (120)

But such insights as these come to Asa only as a result of Allbee's badgering and baiting him. In effect, what is happening is this: Asa is being forced to face his fears, and in so doing, he is discovering them. More precisely, rather than "being forced," Asa of his own volition makes a choice. Early in the story when he hears Allbee approaching his apartment:

> It occurred to him that he could escape Allbee by going to the roof. If he went out stealthily he could get away. . . . He could go even now. Even now. Yet he stood firm and strangely enough he felt that he had proved something by doing so. "I won't give ground," he thought. (67)

Now whether Asa is being forced or whether he chooses leads to a discussion of determinism and free will, and we will have something to say of these extensions later. For now, suffice it to say, Asa is learning about Asa.

Allbee's words and actions are deeply confusing to Asa. It is impossible to tell when he is lying, when he is just acting, how he really feels, what he wants, and what he expects. He constantly keeps Asa off balance with his intermittent outrages (as when he brings a woman to

spend the night in Asa's apartment), and with his pleas for pity and help. This confusion of Asa's, of course, traces the confusion of his journey into himself. At the end of a particularly violent encounter with Allbee, Mrs. Nunez, wife to Asa's landlord, "who lay on a bed near the window in a white slip," whispered, " 'Que pasa?' Leventhal looked at her in bewilderment." Asa, too, would like to know what is happening. (78)

Asa plunges even deeper into his own being when he returns to his apartment one evening and discovers Allbee and "a woman who was dressing in great haste." (269) His horror at his first thought that the woman is Mrs. Nunez arises from a vague but incisive revelation that occasionally he has had sexual inclinations toward her. When he finds that it is not she, "He felt enormously lightened, but at the same time it gave him a pang to think of his suspicion." (270-71) One can only conclude that the pang arises from an instant's awareness of his own lust.

In any case, Allbee is ultimately living in Asa's apartment, wearing his clothes, eating his food, reading his mail (even the letters from Asa's wife), and sleeping in his bed; for Bellow would make it clear that Allbee is not only Asa's mental counterpart, but that he is also a partner in a kind of negative-positive symbiotic attachment. At the zoo with Philip, Elena's eldest son, Asa is sure that

Allbee is following them:

> Leventhal . . . 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. (107)

This physical duality is depicted by Bellow intermittently throughout the novel, indicative of the intention that the reader see these two as a Dostoyevskian double. (For example, see pages 160, 224)

Allbee, then, symbolically embodies Asa's victimizing characteristics, which are born and extended, given breadth and depth, through Asa's imagination. It is supremely ironic to hear this creature of the imagination exclaim, when Asa demands that he leave his apartment after the bedroom scene:

> "You don't care about the woman. You're just using her to make an issue and break your promise to me. Well, and I thought I had seen everything in the way of cynicism. . . . I guess there's an example in the world of everything a man can imagine, no matter how great or how gruesome." (272)

Here is Asa listening to his alter-ego, a product of his imagination, using him as an example of what a human being can imagine. Bellow is always using just such turns and twists as this exchange in order to show the intricate and complex binding of these two together.

But Allbee leaves, under threats and violence, and it seems that this time we may have seen the last of him.

Even Asa feels so. As he surveys the disarray of his apartment, he is "angry, but exultant also: he felt dimly that this disorder and upheaval was part of the price he was obliged to pay for his release." (274) His final release, however, is not to come until later that night when Allbee returns to the apartment and attempts to commit suicide by gas. Asa awakens in time to prevent his accuser's death as well as to save his own life. With this last outrage, Asa thinks desperately, "I have to kill him now," with the clear implication that the struggle between him and Allbee has reached the point of immediate self-preservation:

> He caught the cloth of his coat in his teeth while he swiftly changed his grip, clutching at Allbee's face. He tore away convulsively, but Leventhal crushed him with his weight in the corner. Allbee's fist came down heavily on his neck, beside the shoulder. "You want to murder me? Murder?" Leventhal gasped. The sibilance of the pouring gas was almost deafening.
>
> "Me, myself!" Allbee whispered despairingly, as if with his last breath. "Me. . .!" (282-83)

Some of the implications of this scene become clear only as the story progresses, but for now it is evident that Bellow suggests the fate of Asa to be closely dependent upon that of Allbee. If Asa had not taken command of the situation, he would have been dead along with Allbee. And with Allbee as alter-ego in mind, it would seem that Asa is brought to the realization that he must destroy this inner force for his own survival.

With this savage scene, Asa successfully casts out his alter-ego, and it is years before he sees him again. The narrator says:

> Things went well for him [Asa] in the next few years. . . . His health was better. . . . Something recalcitrant seemed to have left him . . . he looked years younger. . . . He lost the feeling that he had, as he used to say, "got away with it," his guilty relief, and the accompanying sense of infringement. (285)

Then when we are told that Mary is pregnant, Bellow clearly points to a regained or new power for Asa and a kind of rebirth.

One night at a theater he sees Allbee again, but it is not the old Allbee. He is no longer whining, self-pitying, accusing, and troublesome. Under his gaiety and superficial well-being, he appears old and decayed. He explains to Asa with a "short and faint" laugh:

> "I'm not the type that runs things. I never could be. I realized that long ago. I'm the type that comes to terms with whoever runs things. What do I care? The world wasn't exactly made for me. What am I going to do about it?" (294)

Asa's last desperate question to Allbee, who moves off in the crowd, is, "Wait a minute, what's your idea of who runs things?" (294) Allbee has gone, but the question remains. Its answer will be seen to pierce the heart of Bellow's intentions.

<u>The Victim</u> is the story of man's struggle to free himself from a state of victimization. It is an ironic

struggle of self-encounter.[9] Moreover, it is within this conflict that the reader once again is made aware of the subangelic in action. At the outset of this chapter there was some discussion concerning Bellow's title and its intent. That is, the nature of Bellow's victim was in need of clarification. It is the contention here that in Asa Leventhal one does see a victim, a man whose limitations are indeed severe. Perhaps the most serious of these limitations is his inability to know himself and his place in the scheme of things, an ignorance that might seem to make his apprehension of dignity and integrity impossible. Yet it is also the contention here that the subangelic spirit is manifested in Asa Leventhal, not, perhaps, through a conscious awareness of his potentialities and thence of his nobility, but through Bellow's depiction of him, in the last analysis, as a human being with the "power to complete his own life." It might well seem that with Asa's last question, blindly flung at Allbee, "Wait a minute, what's your idea of who runs things?' Bellow intends his protagonist to

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[9]Any interpretation of The Victim that does not see the relationship between Asa and Allbee as an intense and personal symbolic self-encounter is bound to end in confusion. Such is probably the case when Robert G. Davis states: "What remains unexplained is the meaning and use of Asa's summer of suffering." Robert G. Davis, "Individualist Tradition: Bellow and Styron," The Creative Present: Notes on Contemporary Fiction, eds. Nona Balakian and Charles Simmons (New York: Doubleday and Company, 1963), p. 119.

remain a victim, to embody the title of the work. From time to time, however, we see that Bellow is depicting what to some may be a paradox: a victim with possibilities.

First of all, it will be remembered that Asa, early in the novel, stands up to his fears, in spite of a strong inclination to run away. He does not run away, and, consequently, he does "prove something." That "something" Bellow could only intend to be an element of the subangelic--a measure of free will. Again, Bellow points to the power of Asa when at their first meeting, Allbee says, "I don't want to wrestle. I'm probably no match for you." (29) Taken by itself, this statement might be insignificant; yet throughout the novel it is always Allbee who backs down in the face of Asa's wrath. Moreover, in what turns out to be one of the most illuminating encounters in the work, not only for its philosophical implications but also for its function of foreshadowing, Bellow has Allbee set guidelines for Asa that, in hindsight, clearly anticipate final intentions. Allbee states:

> "Don't you worry. . . . I know what really goes on inside me. 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 wants to admit. . . . Now let me explain something to you. It's a Christian idea but I don't see why you shouldn't be able to understand it. 'Repent!' That's John the Baptist coming out of the desert. Change yourself, that's what he's saying, and be another man. You must be and the reason for that is that you can be, and when your time comes here you will be. There's another thing behind that 'repent'; it's that we know what to repent. How?

> . . . _I_ know. Everybody knows. But you've got to take away the fear of admitting by a still greater fear. I understand that doctors are beginning to give their patients electric shocks. They tear all hell out of them, and then they won't trifle. You see, you have to get yourself so that you can't stand to keep on in the old way. . . . It takes a long time before you're ready to quit dodging. Meanwhile, the pain is horrible. . . . We're mulish; that's why we have to take such a beating. When we can't stand another lick without dying of it, then we change. And some people never do. They stand there until the last lick falls and die like animals. Others have the strength to change long before." (227)

This passage is highly important to an understanding of what Bellow means when he urges the subangelic attitude. That is, Bellow would make it clear that his thesis rests upon an assumption of free will, that man can make choices. As Asa concludes much earlier in the story, it is up to him. Even though it must be kept in mind that Allbee is speaking at this point, it is also to be remembered that the working out of _The Victim_ follows the lines of his argument; for Asa, and Allbee, too, for that matter, "can't stand another lick without dying of it," and then Asa makes his decision to act. Now it is true that the experience of Asa, the fact that it is he who determines his limits of endurance, seems not to have made much of an impression on him, for at the end he is still asking, "Who runs things?"[10] What he does not seem to grasp is the lesson of his experience, that

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[10]Irving Malin, _Jews and Americans_ (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1965), p. 73. Malin suggests that the question calls for a deterministic interpretation. See Appendix A of the present study.

it is *he* who is running things, that it is *his* decision that has brought about a change of direction. And surely to the extent that he remains blind to the meaning of his experience, just to that extent are the possibilities of his victimization. More important, however, is that as surely as he can face himself and say, paradoxically, perhaps, that it is up to him, he will remain within the sphere of the subangelic. His "suffering, feebleness, and servitude" will then have meaning, and he will have "at least sufficient power to overcome ignominy and to complete his own life." And this position is precisely descriptive of how Bellow leaves Asa at the end of his novel.

CHAPTER III

" A BETTER FATE"

The Adventures of Augie March[1] must be read as a multilevel work if it is to be read with any understanding that approaches a full comprehension. First, it is to be seen as a story in which a picaresque-like hero advances through a series of adventures which, in varying degree and in varying nature, are relevant to a general life experience. Second, the work is to be seen as Bellow's strictures on an existing relationship between literature and society. More specifically, on this second level, Augie March is a fictive history of American literature, which serves as an evaluation of the existence of a literary attitude, with that existence being reflected in the experiences of the protagonist and that attitude being seen in the reactions of the protagonist to those experiences. On a third level, the character and experiences of Bellow's hero may be seen as encompassing a contemporary human condition as well as dramatizing a wider and deeper comment on literature and society.

As a character in his own right on the first level, Augie plays the role of the philosophic picaro. He is a man

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[1]Saul Bellow, The Adventures of Augie March (New York: The Viking Press, 1960). All subsequent page citations in parenthesis are from this edition.

of no commitments[2] who wanders from incident to incident and from place to place, never getting involved so deeply in any one of his experiences that he cannot move on in search of what he insists is his "better fate." These experiences are endless in number and infinite in variety. The following examples are only the highlights: he works as a stock boy in a department store, he sells trivia in a railway station, steals and sells textbooks, begins a university education, becomes a coal salesman, enters the fringes of the underworld, helps to manage a professional fighter, takes care of dogs for the socially elite, falls in love (twice), becomes a union organizer, trains an eagle to catch giant lizards in Mexico, skirts the edges of joining Trotsky's cause, joins the merchant marine, and finally marries and settles in Paris, where he is last seen participating in some form of shady international business. Augie is, as he says, "varietistic." Early in the novel he confides, "Saying 'various jobs,' I give out the Rosetta stone, so as to speak, to my entire life." (28)

The reader is likely to feel some confusion when he finishes the story of Augie March, for Bellow's protagonist ends in what seems to be the same situation from which he

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[2]Robert Penn Warren originated the terminology in "The Man With no Commitments," New Republic, CXXIX, (November 2, 1953), p. 22.

set out. He still lacks commitment. He is still without purpose or direction, continuing his uninvolved existence. The main source of this confusion lies in the reader's inability to see through Augie's attractive personality, through his keen awareness and obvious intelligence, and through his independent objectivity down to the blunt facts of his total experience: Augie is one of life's failures. It is a difficult conclusion to reach, for the reader sees in Bellow's hero many of the traits that have long been assumed to be heroic--that is, heroic in terms of what may be called a modern mythology of heroic behavior. This heroism is founded on a rebellion from and on an opposition to, even a separatism from, established institutions. It is a mythology that tends to blind the reader to the facts of the text inasmuch as given this opposition and rebellion, and other qualities that will be pointed to later, there seems to be a predisposition on the part of the reader to judge Bellow's protagonist, both as to character and function, on the basis of issues apart from his actual experience.

For the reader, certainly Augie is a sympathetic character; he has abilities and qualities that are often thought to be foundational to a figure of integrity, nobility, and intellect. One of the most obvious and most immediately apparent of these abilities is his clear vision. He is a

keen observer, with all of the insight of a Huck Finn, with whom he has been compared as many times as the novel has critics. A case in point is evinced in Augie's reactions to one of the major characters of the novel, Einhorn, the shrewd, rapacious, cantakerous, lecherous, money-grubbing, thing-grasping, old man who employs Augie to run his errands and to carry around his crippled body. Of him, Augie says:

> And Einhorn? Jesus, he could be winsome--the world's charm-boy. And that was distracting. You can grumble at it; you can say it's a ruse or feint of gifted people to sidetrack you from the viper's tangle and ugly knottedness of their desires, but if the art of it is deep enough and carried far enough into great play, it gets above origin. Providing it's festive, which sometimes it was with Einhorn, when he was not merely after something but was gay. He could be simple-hearted. Nevertheless I was down on him occasionally, and I said to myself he was nothing--nothing. However, in the end, I every time had high regard for him. For one thing, there was always the fight he had made on his sickness to consider. . . . weighing it all up, the field he was put into and the weapons he was handed, he had made an imposing showing and, through mind, he connected with the spur gear. . . . So why be down on poor Einhorn, afflicted with mummy legs and his cripple-irritated longings? (99 -100)

Such keen descriptive insight along with the objective ability to see both sides of a person, indeed, all sides, helps to convince the reader of Augie's reliability. Then his sympathetic fairness, his ability to see the good in people, comes to light. Finally, if it is true that the ability to generalize is a mark of intelligence, Augie must be seen in this passage as a figure of intellect.

Augie is also trusted and admired for his knowledge

of the limits of his understanding and for his measurable honesty to self. When he is reflecting upon Einhorn's fear of death, he states, "Often I thought that in his heart Einhorn had completely surrendered to this fear," but he quickly adds:

> But when you believed you had tracked Einhorn through his acts and doings and were about to capture him, you found yourself not in the center of a labyrinth but on a wide boulevard; and here he came from a new direction--a governor in a limousine, with state troopers around him, dominant and necessary, everybody's lover, whose death was only one element, and a remote one, of his privacy. (83)

And then he says of the simple and natural Willa, who is one of his many romances, ". . . I think I could have been perfectly happy with Willa and lived all my life in a country town if the chance had ever presented itself. Or, anyhow, I sometimes tell myself that." (204) The point is that the reader cannot help being impressed with such candor, such an open willingness on Augie's part to suspend judgment even when his own ideas and conclusions are the subjects of consideration. Understood also is his yearning for simplicity.

Moreover, there is an admiration for Augie in his generous acceptance of people for what they are. "However, I had a high regard for him," he says of Einhorn. And when he sees Joe Gorman, a thief with whom he has been involved over a stolen car, sitting in the back seat of a police car, dazed and beaten, Augie laments, much in the fashion

of Huck to the tar-and-feather fate of the King and the Duke, "I felt powerfully heartsick to see him." (165) Here is unconditional humanitarianism, for he knows that Gorman had lied to him, that he was carrying a gun and would have used it, which would have implicated Augie far more than was anticipated. But Joe Gorman is a human being; therefore, Augie accepts him as such, and feels for him.

And so it is with Grandma Lausch, his mother, his brother Simon, Mimi, the Renlings, Thea, Bateshaw, and all the rest. Augie sees them clearly, sympathetically, knows what they are and what they want, accepts them, and, without malice, removes himself from their spheres of influence. "He has a better fate."

Augie makes one of his strongest appeals for the reader's sympathies when he is philosophizing on his personal destiny of high ideal. It is a destiny peculiarly American and immediately recognizable. Early in the story he recalls his reactions as a young boy to the plans of his Aunt Anna that he will someday marry her daughter, Freidl; "Even at that time I couldn't imagine that I would marry into the Coblin family. . . . My mind was already dwelling on a better fate." (28) These words, "a better fate," or their equivalents, are asserted by Augie again and again, each time, in fact, that some person or institution attempts to make of him a convert. When he leaves his job as union

organizer, his last words on his decision are; "It wasn't what I was meant to be." (310) At one point he admits to his brother Simon, who has become wealthy, that he would like to have money, too, but there is the silent postscript; "I didn't say that I had to have a fate good enough, and that that came first." (423) Anyone knows that it takes a great deal of strength to say honestly that money comes second to anything, much less to a something as nebulous as a better fate. But whether it is marriage, a career, or money, nothing stands in the way to his future. Bellow's protagonist would certainly seem to be a figure of strength, courage, and foresight.

And so it is with his view of life, his weltbild. He simply refuses to see the world as a Valley of Despair, in spite of the obvious painful wounds and the scars of thunder sitting entrenched around him: age and deterioration are catching Grandma Lausch; his mother is growing blind; his younger brother Georgie is born an idiot; Simon's early ideals have been replaced by his mad and dismal search for money and power; Augie is surrounded by the greedy, the cynical, the shameful, the ignorant, the hopelessness of the poor, the arrogance of the rich, and by other elements that would undermine the most resolute of stoics. Yet Augie does not despair. When he explains why he will not stop reading, even though he knows nothing will come of it,

he states:

> Why, I knew there were things that would never, because they could never, come of my reading. But this knowledge was not so different from the remote but ever-present death that sits in the corner of the loving bedroom; though it doesn't budge from the corner, you wouldn't stop your loving. Then neither would I stop my reading. I sat and read. I had no eye, ear, or interest for anything else--that is, for usual, second-order, oatmeal, mere-phenomenal, snarled-shoelace-carfare-laundry-ticket plainness, unspecified dismalness, unknown captivities; the life of despairharness, or the life of organization habits which is meant to supplant accidents with calm abiding. . . . Why, everybody knows this triumphant life can only be periodic. So there's a schism about it, some saying only this triumphant life is real and others that only the daily facts are. For me there was no debate, and I made speed into the former. (194)

So Augie's reality lies in a vision of life as triumphant, a vision that he is ever speeding toward. He is the soul of cultural optimism and great self-destiny. All is possible, even in a world not the best possible. This generous, high-minded spirit is seen when Mimi urges Augie to agree or disagree with her negative opinion of Einhorn, to speak up, and to say what he thinks:

> "No," I said, "I don't know. But I don't like low opinions, and when you speak them out it commits you and you become a slave of them. Talk will lead people on until they convince their minds of things they can't feel true." (209)

While there may be other truths to consider in what Augie says, he is right. Low opinions are uncomfortable companions, and not the companions of nobility. Of course, Mimi does not accept his "speak no evil" attitude, which he seems to have retained from Grandma Lausch's strictures on

the three idols that sat in their house (9), but then Mimi has a heatedly cynical view of life and society and of man's goodness. As for Augie, even if Mimi's cynicism is well-founded, he "couldn't think all was so poured in concrete" (225) that change is impossible. It is quite understandable that he observes with pleasure Thea's snakes as they shed:

> Toughest of all was the casting of the skins. . . . But then they would gleam out, one day, and their freshness and jewelry would give even me pleasure, their enemy, and I would like to look at the cast skin from which they were regenerated in green or dots of red like pomegranate seeds or varnished gold crust. (369)

Augie refuses to see a world of deterministic ugliness and low opinions. Such a world is not compatible with his "spur-gear" of enthusiasm nor with his anticipation of a better fate.

Part of the mythology of our cultural hero is his opposition to whatever would cause him to lose his individuality, and it is a proud and exciting moment for Augie when Einhorn discovers that such a distinction is an element of Augie's personality. When Einhorn is lecturing him to stay away from the likes of Joe Gorman and "those thieves," Einhorn suddenly exclaims:

> "But wait. All of a sudden I catch on to something about you. You don't slide through everything. You just make it look so." (117)

Augie is delighted to hear this, and so is the reader; for the reader, too, is an admirer of opposition. He, too, would be an individual, different, unique, not on the market of

malleable commodities as is the world around him.

Another source of pride in Augie is his refusal to become really involved in any action or cause that does not arouse his enthusiasm. He will go along, for a time, but with only a passive acceptance; it all depends on how he <u>feels</u> about the issue. When he is working in Einhorn's poolroom, Mrs. Einhorn asks him to clean up the floor of the rest room; he agrees to do so, not minding the distastefulness of the chore, because:

> Nevertheless I was getting paid. For unspecified work of a mixed character. I accepted it as such; the mixed character of it was one of the things I liked. I was just as varietistic and unfit for discipline and regularity as my friend Clem Tambow; only I differed from Clem in being a beaver, once my heart was attached to a work or a cause. (65)

When Simon makes it clear to him that if he does not "make time," in his brother's words, with Lucy Magnus, sister to Simon's wife, and heiress to great wealth and social position, it will be owing to what Simon calls a "chicken-heartedness," which Augie translates into his reluctance to become involved. Augie is not disturbed; "I didn't mount the step of power. I could have done so from love, but not to get to the objective." (248) It is a part of the culture of the hero that he remain detached and coolly observant, until he feels a strong emotional call to involvement. And all the world knows that one is not to marry without love: Augie is to be admired.

Bellow's drawing on the voices of America's literary past and assigning them to his protagonist also helps Augie's prestige from the point of view of the reader. Through these faint echoes, especially to the literary minded, Augie acquires an added depth, wisdom, authority, and, equally important, a certain nostalgic and romantic aura of courage and integrity. The presence of Twain's Huck has already been noted, and he is omnipresent throughout the story. When the fear of one of Einhorn's lectures is upon Augie, he describes his fright:

> . . . the candles were now as genial to me as though they had been the ones stuck into loaves of bread by night and sailed on a black Indian lake to find the drowned body sunk to the bottom. (180)

When Mimi becomes sarcastic over his letting Simon lead him to the practice of having his nails polished, Augie merely thinks, "I let it be done. I didn't consider my fingers much." (223) Then reminiscences are sung of Whitman when Augie is forced to remember his "parentage, and other history, things I had never much thought of as difficulties, being democratic in temperament, available to everybody and assuming about others what I assumed about myself." (147) Echoes of Emerson (and perhaps of Thoreau) are heard when Augie looks out over the landscape:

> Meanwhile the clouds, birds, cattle in the water, things, stayed at their distance, and there was no need to herd, account for, hold them in the head, but it was enough to be among them, released on the grand as they were in their brook or in their air. I meant something

> like this when I said occasionally I could look out like a creature.

Then immediately thereafter, Augie asks in Emersonian terms, with the style of Huck Finn, "How is it that human beings will submit to the gyps of previous history while mere creatures look with original eyes?" (330)

There are other voices of the past, as will be shown later. For now, the point is that the reader tends to identify Augie with the free-wheeling style and the independent spirit of these eminent figures. Their honesty, integrity, and courage are judged to be part of Augie's character. Their heroic stance becomes his.

Bellow gives to Augie other cultural "advantages": he comes from a poor family; he does not know the identity of his father; he refuses to be trapped by fine clothing, social position, or wealth; he admits that he "gives his affections too easily" and that "he has no grudge-bearing power." It would seem that Bellow has endowed his narrator with the entire list of requisites to a folk hero of our time and culture; consequently, it is difficult for the reader to imagine Augie as one of life's failures. But the whole point is--Augie does fail. In spite of his objective insights, his intelligence, his self-knowledge, his generous and humane spirit, his personal ideals and sought-for destiny, in spite of the nobility of his opposition and his discriminating enthusiasm, and, finally, in spite of the

powerful and impressive voices of the past, through which he often states his case, he does fail. His better fate that he constantly exhorts is never realized. In fact, as will be seen in more detail later, there are implications at the end of the novel of a general deterioration not only of Augie's purpose but of his character. And it is the thought here that any confusion over Bellow's final intentions, at least one of them, is centered exactly in this irony of the failure of greatness; for it is all too easy, once again, to see Bellow's protagonist in the light of what has been called here "the mythology of heroic behavir," and to close one's eyes to the obvious deficiencies of that mythology, as, strangely enough in view of the textual facts that leave Augie in a position of ignominy, Irving Malin seems to have done when he states, "He [Bellow] favors Augie's ideal, without completely noting its inadequacy."[3] Malin is misled by what Augie says, not noting carefully enough what he does.

But Bellow knows that for every action there is an equal and opposite reaction, and for every strength, the possibility of a weakness or a disability. Or, as he has Augie say on the opening page of the book, "Everybody knows there is no fineness nor accuracy of suppression; if you hold down one thing you hold down the adjoining." (3) So it is

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[3]Irving Malin, Jews and Americans (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1965), p. 97.

that Augie's keen ability to observe accurately seems to carry with it the curse of estrangement. That is, his clear insight into the characters and motivations of others has as its companion an emotional and, therefore, a functional immaturity of purpose. Consequently, he drifts from incident to incident, using as his rationale "a better fate." Then Augie's generous and humane acceptance of others is open to question. At one point the shady and cold Mintouchian asserts, "You think I'm a bandit, only you wouldn't say it on a bet. You fight your malice too much." Augie replies, somewhat proudly it seems, "Everybody says so. It's as if you were supposed to have low opinions. I'd never say I was angelic, but I respect as much as I can." (479) Perhaps Augie respects too much, or at least too widely; for it is just this non-discrimination, this life without malice, that permits him to dissipate his ideals through his objective passivity toward every one of his confrontations with people or their institutions. From the very beginning he passively and acceptingly joins, first, Grandma Lausch and her deceptions, then with Simon's misplaced ambitions, and so on through his aunt's plans for his marriage to Freidl, stealing at the department store, his education, Joe Gorman, Einhorn, the Magnuses, the Renlings, union organizing, Thea and Mintouchian. In each case he refuses to take a stand, to assert his ideals in

the form of action and positive commitment. Someone calls him to join a parade; he does so, and stays, until someone calls him to join another.

The enthusiasm that Augie calls his spur-gear, as he terms Einhorn's well-springs to resolute commitment, is also double-edged. There is little doubt as to its worth-while function in great and little enterprises, but Bellow would seem to say that as a key to action it may open the wrong doors. As a guide it is faulty. Augie manages a deep enthusiasm just twice in the novel: he falls in love twice, first with Thea (his infatuation with her sister Esther is only temporary) then with Stella: the first exper-ience fails completely and the second, as the novel ends, is in the process of failure. Evidently, Bellow seems to say that, with or without enthusiasm, some work is to be done and some direction and function assumed.

It was said that Augie is proud of what he likes to think of as his "opposition," or his refusal to be drawn into the plans of others, unless they are temporary plans, of course, or unless they have the sanctions of his enthus-iasm. Here again Bellow depicts the hero of rebellion, one who will not be deprived of his individuality. But also, again, he depicts the consequences: one can alienate himself to the point of uselessness and absurdity, even grotesqueness, by pushing this rebellion to its farthest extensions.

Bellow makes this quite clear. At the end of the novel, one of Augie's missions for the cynical Mintouchian can only be described as grotesque:

> And what have I been doing? Well, perhaps I had a meeting with a person who used to be in Dachau and did some business with him in dental supplies from Germany. That took an hour or two.

And then he adds, "After which I may have gone to the cold halls of the Louvre and visited in the Dutch School. . . ." (522) Bellow could only be intending a comment on the dismal and useless existence of Augie. What kind of life is it that casually profits from the dentistry that took place in Dachau? And surely the sensuous paintings of Rubens along with Vermeer's depiction of the isolated, comfortable burgher, removed from the world of involvement, interested only in his pipe and shipping trade, are reflections of Augie's life.

In any case, one wonders about Augie's "better fate" and about his enthusiasm, about his high-spoken ideals concerning man's potentialities, and his generous acceptance of all living things, and certainly about his pride of opposition. One thinks about his language and words, noble and courageous, and wonders if they were not mere tools to a self-betrayal.

But this is an overly bleak and slightly distorted picture in view of the way in which Bellow would have us see Augie. He is not a figure of fatalistic determinism.

Through Augie, Bellow is not saying, "Look at man with all of his endowments, to these depths he comes." Rather he is saying that man comes to these depths only through his mistaken goals and wasted abilities. For Bellow gives to Augie all of the weapons that are needed to achieve a better fate, "to overcome ignominy," if he will only see the contradictions between his ideals and reality. And at times, Augie does see. When Thea and he come to the end of their romance, Augie makes an attempt at self-examination:

> Now I had started, and this terrible investigation had to go on. If this was how I was, it was certainly not how I appeared but must be my secret. So if I wanted to please, it was in order to mislead or show everyone, wasn't it, now? And this must be because I had an idea everyone was my better and had something I didn't have. But what did people seem to me anyhow, something fantastic? I didn't want to be what they made me but wanted to please them. Kindly explain! An independent fate, and love too--what confusion! (401)

So Augie _is_ willing to examine his own life honestly. And in this particular passage it is evident that he at least has a temporary insight into the center of his problem. Augie, for the most part, sees himself clearly. And he sees others with a fine facility. His whole trouble is in seeing himself _in relation to_ those others. It is just that he does not take the rest of the world into consideration when he is asserting his better fate, his ideals, and his "spur-gear" of enthusiasm. When thinking of the causes behind his break with Thea, he concludes, "My real fault was that I couldn't stay with my purest feelings." (402)

Exactly! The real as opposed to the ideal is not an uncommon problem. The only way that one can stay with his purest feelings is by living in a cave. "An independent fate and love too" is an impossible combination even as is a marriage of purest feelings and a functional existence. Something must give, or one ends in a cave, useless and isolated, as Augie does. But the point is, that Augie can and does learn, even though such self-insights are partial in self-revelation. Intermittently throughout the novel he will summarize a reflection by adding that he did not know "that" at the time, as when he says, "You do all you can to humanize and familiarize the world, and suddenly it becomes more strange than ever. . . . I see this now, at that time not." (285) And then describing his feeling for Thea, he says:

> Not even the eagle falconry distressed me as much as that what happened to her had to happen to me too, necessarily. This was scary. This trouble of course wasn't clear to me then. . . . (323)

This ability, the capacity to grasp even a piece of the significance of experience, is a structural cornerstone of Bellow's subangelic ideology. Augie still does not see that the thing everybody has that he does not have is direction and focus, purpose, involvement with life, even though these involvements might leave room for criticism. The full meaning of his experience is yet lost to him, as his rather pathetic assertion, while not hopeless, at the end of his

story would indicate:

> It must be clear, however, that I am a person of hope, and now my hopes have settled themselves upon children and a settled life. I haven't been able to convince Stella yet. . . . Therefore while I knock around. . . it's unborn children I pore over far oftener than business deals. (529)

Augie will probably go his picaresque way, with hope, and with children still unborn, for hope alone creates nothing but despair or an "animal ridens," as Augie describes himself at the end of the book. (536) Yet perhaps Augie will come to know, even as does Joseph in Dangling Man, that there is no identity, no integrity, no better fate, no creation, of children or anything else, without a social commitment, without an understanding of one's relationship to others. It is only hoped that he comes to this knowledge with less hysteria and less despair than did Joseph. Bellow leaves Augie, for the time being, in a position that would seem to be a comment on those who rest on the claim that the game is not to their liking, not to their enthusiasms, and that they are waiting for a higher and freer reality. But he would also leave to them Augie's abilities and his hope, pathetic or otherwise. Bellow makes his position clear when Augie closes the story:

> I may well be a flop at this line of endeavor. Columbus too thought he was a flop, probably, when they sent him back in chains. Which didn't prove there was no America. (536)

All of which is to say that Augie knows his ideals are

right, in spite of his less than high fortune. In Augie's view of himself as Columbus, Bellow intends an illumination for his protagonist, a discovery of likenesses between himself and another explorer. While both would seem to have failed, their hope, vision, judgment, and courage are realities of their natures, which give to them powers and potentialities that allow them the possibilities of a "better fate." Bellow would leave it to the reader to understand that Augie's failure lies not in his high ideals, but in his refusal to live them through positive action and personal involvement, and in his seeming willingness to be used by those who are actively involved but who do not possess his vision of existence as subangelic.

In his introduction to Literature in America, Philip Rahv states:

> Art has always fed on the contradiction between the reality of the world and the image of glory and orgastic happiness and harmony and goodness and fulfillment which the self cherishes as it aspires to live even while daily dying.[4]

Here is the theme of the second level of The Adventures of Augie March, a theme that one suspects was of primary importance in Bellow's conception of the novel. For although Augie March is a meaningful work in its depiction of a

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[4]Philip Rahv, Literature in America (New York: Meridian Books, 1957), p. 22.

human condition, much of that meaning is to be found in the ideas of its protagonist, in his reflections, rather than in his confrontations with life. To be sure, reflection follows confrontation; but one senses that something is out of balance, that perhaps reflection outweighs confrontation, giving philosophy a major role and literature the minor. Somehow incident fails to support the weight of narrative. Robert Penn Warren hits close when he concludes:

> . . . if Augie plunges into the aimless ruck of experience, in the end we see that Saul Bellow has led him through experience toward philosophy. That is, the aimless ruck had a shape, after all, and the shape is not that of Augie's life but of Saul Bellow's mind. Without that shaping mind, we would have only the limited interest in the random incidents.[5]

While Warren is rather vague here, inasmuch as he does not trace the "shape" of Bellow's mind, the statement has a general validity--if the novel is confined in meaning to its first level, that of the depiction of a human condition. In that case, there is an "aimless ruck of experience" and the incidents in Augie's life would indeed be "random" and of "limited interest." Once again, philosophy would seem to be the glue that holds the work together. Furthermore, if the novel is read with Augie as a fictive creation in his own right, it is difficult to place much value, in spite of National Book Awards, on either the theme or its dramatization. It is the old theme of non-conformity, the

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[5]Warren, op. cit., pp. 22-23.

refusal to be entrapped in social quagmires, the commitment to self and the exploration of that self. In American letters, such breastbeating goes back at least to Melville, Emerson, and Thoreau; growing to tribal orgies in the twenties, it still has an army of adherents. Moreover, the ignominious state in which the protagonist ends, owing to this age-old conflict, the individual against society, is hardly a revelation to the reader who has been schooled in Norris, Crane, Dreiser, Anderson, Hemingway, Dos Passos, Farrel, and all of their many disciples. As Frederick Hoffman says, "In the end there is something wrong with the picture: there is too much to know, and the knowing and the living have too little to do with each other."[6] Once again, this is not to say that Bellow's novel on a first level is not meaningful; at the very least it is an intellectual picaresque that cannot be ignored no matter how thin the total structure and development, no matter how tired the theme, and no matter if the philosophy exceeds the rendered life.

In any case, this section will examine the work as something other than a philosophical travelogue, as something more than an "aimless ruck of experience" and "random

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[6]Frederick Hoffman, "The Fool of Experience: Saul Bellow's Fiction," Contemporary American Novelists, ed. Harry Moore (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1964), p. 90.

incidents." It is given to the thought that Augie March is not so much "the shape of Bellow's mind" as it is the shape of the relationship between literature and society in general and the condition of American literature in particular. As for its concern with American literature, Maxwell Geismar's comment and question are to the point:

> Thus the novel which opens in the Chicago slums ends with the exotics and expatriates of Mexico and Europe: which is also a curious parable on the course of literary realism during the last half-century. But what can we make of all this?[7]

Geismar's question deserves an answer, for within the story of Augie, Bellow has included materials that can best be accounted for only in metaphoric terms. It was said earlier that Augie March may be read as a study of the relationship between the artist or literature and society. What Bellow does is to show that relationship as it exists universally, through a dramatized depiction of American realism. Bellow has made his position clear on this subject of the artist and society in works other than fiction. In a speech at his acceptance of the National Book Award for his novel Herzog, he said:

> The fact that there are so many weak, poor, and boring stories and novels written and published in America has been ascribed by our rebels to the horrible squareness of our institutions, the idiocy of power, the

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[7]Maxwell Geismar, "Saul Bellow: Novelist of the Intellectuals," American Moderns: From Rebellion to Conformity (New York: Hill and Wang, 1958), p. 218.

debasement of sexual instincts, and the failure of writers to be alienated enough. The poems and novels of these same rebellious spirits, and their theoretical statements, are grimy and gritty and very boring too, besides being nonsensical, and it is evident now that polymorphous sexuality and vehement declarations of of alienation are not going to produce great works of art either.

There is nothing left for us novelists to do but think. For unless we think, unless we make a clearer estimate of our condition, we will continue to write kid stuff, to fail in our function; we will lack serious interests and become truly irrelevant. Here the critics must share the blame. They too have failed to describe the situation. Literature has for generations been its own source, its own province, has lived upon its own traditions, and accepted a romantic separation or estrangement from the common world. This estrangement, though it produced some masterpieces, has by now enfeebled literature.

The separatism of writers is accompanied by the more or less conscious acceptance of a theory of modern civilization. This theory says in effect that modern mass society is frightful, brutal, hostile to whatever is pure in the human spirit, a waste land and a horror. To its ugliness, its bureaucratic regiments, its thefts, its lies, its wars, and its cruelties, the artist can never be reconciled.

This is one of the traditions on which literature has lived uncritically. But it is the task of artists and critics in every generation to look with their own eyes. Perhaps they will see even worse evils, but they will at least be seeing for themselves. They will not, they cannot permit themselves, generation after generation, to hold views they have not examined for themselves. By such willful blindness we lose the right to call ourselves artists; we have accepted what we ourselves condemn--narrow specialization, professionalism, and snobbery, and formation of a caste.

And, unfortunately, the postures of this caste, postures of liberation and independence and creativity, are attractive to poor souls dreaming everywhere of a fuller, freer life. The writer is admired, the writer is envied. But what has he to say for himself? Why, he says, just as writers have said for more than a century, that he is cut off from the life of his own

> society, despised by its overlords who are cynical and have nothing but contempt for the artist, without a true public, estranged. He dreams of ages when the poet or the painter expressed a perfect unity of time and place, had real acceptance, and enjoyed a vital harmony with his surroundings--he dreams of a golden age. In fact, without the golden age, there is no Waste Land.
>
> Well, this is no age of gold. It is only what it is. Can we do no more than complain about it? We writers have better choices. We can either shut up because the times are too bad, or continue because we have an instinct to make books, a talent to enjoy, which even these disfigured times cannot obliterate. Isolated professionalism is death. Without the common world the novelist is nothing but a curiosity and will find himself in a glass case along some dull museum corridor of the future.
>
> We live in a technological age which seems insurmountably hostile to the artist. He must fight for his life, for his freedom, along with everyone else--for justice and equality, threatened by mechanization and bureaucracy. This is not to advise the novelist to rush immediately into the political sphere. But in the first stage he must begin to exert his intelligence, long unused. If he is to reject politics, he must understand what he is rejecting. He must begin to think and to think not merely of his own narrower interests and needs.[8]

Augie March is a dramatic rendering of a good part of these same strictures. Bellow sets his protagonist-narrator in motion in order that these ideas come alive. That is, Augie, too, practices a "separatism"; he, too, is one of the "poor souls dreaming . . . of a better life"; he dreams of "a perfect unity of time and place";[9] and there is

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[8]Saul Bellow, "The Thinking Man's Waste Land," Saturday Review, (April 3, 1965), p. 20.

[9]Augie is a great believer in what he calls his "axial lines"--the attainment of a life founded on "truth, love, peace, bounty, usefulness, harmony." See pp. 414, 454.

good reason to doubt that he will create children (or works of art) through "declarations of alienation." And more, Augie has "failed to make a clear estimate of [his] condition"; he "has failed in . . . function"; he "lacks serious interests"; and he has "become truly irrelevant." There are other parallels between Bellow's speech and the characterizations of Augie, which will be seen later, but for now these will serve. The important point is to see that through his protagonist, Bellow is making the same observations concerning the state of contemporary literature in its relation to society.

If we can accept Augie as paradigm for artist, as that artist reflects the state of contemporary literature, then part of his role is that of the contemporary American writer who is a product of the roots of his own national literature. In order to cast his protagonist in this role, Bellow gives to Augie what might be thought of as heredity and environment, that is, past and present literary influences. Augie's heredity manifests itself in a mind and tongue that are highly reminiscent of nineteenth century American authors, all of whom are representative of the kind of artistic integrity that would define them as rebels of one sort or another. Such names as Emerson, Thoreau, Whitman, and Twain have already been mentioned in the earlier part of this chapter. There are others. When

Augie is stranded after his abortive career in crime with Joe Gorman, he reports:

> I took the excursion to Niagara Falls where nobody seemed to have any business that day, only a few strays beside the crush of water, like early sparrows in the cathedral square before Notre Dame has opened its doors; and then in the brute sad fog you know that at one time this sulphur coldness didn't paralyze everything, and there's the cathedral to prove it. (165)

So Augie finds proof in the cathedral of the existence of an active, warming force that sets itself against the numbing coldness of the fog just as Henry Adams found proof in cathedrals of Europe of the driving force of the Virgin as against the cold, detached, god-like power of the steam engine or dynamo.

Again, in Mexico while training the eagle Caligula, Augie philosophizes:

> When Caligula soared under this sky I sometimes wondered what connection he made with this element of nearly too great strength that was dammed back of the old spouts of craters. (338)

Even as Melville's Ishmael, in the chapter entitled "The Symphony," ponders the relationship of the sun, "aloft, like a royal czar and king," with the sea and the sky, so does Augie wonder at the soaring Caligula, this king of birds, and his connection with the earth and sky around him.

Of particular interest is the fact that all of the writers Bellow calls up from the past created work of a kind that speaks for a philosophic and idealistic alienation

or rebellion. This is precisely the nature that Augie brings into the world. From the beginning he sets a course of idealistic non-involvement in the interests of a "better fate."

Bellow points directly to Augie's environment when he has his protagonist state early in the novel:

> All the influences were lined up waiting for me. I was born and there they were to form me which is why I tell you more of them than of myself. (43)

For the most part, Bellow sets these influences in motion through the people with whom Augie associates. That is, these people, in a complex and at times confusing way, are symbols of literary movements, trends, ideas, fictive characters, and authors that have in one way or another made lesser or greater marks on American literature during the last fifty years. A few examples will serve to illustrate Bellow's technique in the treatment of symbolic function of character.

Augie is born in Chicago, where he lives with his brother Simon, his mother, his idiot brother Georgie, and Grandma Lausch, who is the first influence to be reckoned with. This old woman is really no relation to the Marches: sometime earlier she had rented a room in their house and has stayed to exercise a dominant authority over the entire family. As Simon says to Augie, "She's really nothing to us, you know that, don't you, Aug?" (33) Her roots are in

Europe, and Augie as a young boy is fearfully impressed:

> That isn't to say that I stopped connecting her with the highest and the best--taking her at her own word--with the courts of Europe, the Congress of Vienna, the splendor of family, and all kinds of profound and cultured things as hinted in her conduct and advertised in her speech. . . . (30)

She often sends Augie to the library after books:

> Once a year she read Anna Karenina and Eugene Onegin [also Manon Lescaut, we learn later, p. 14]. Occasionally I got into hot water by bringing a book she didn't want. "How many times do I have to tell you if it doesn't say roman I don't want it?" (11)

Grandma Lausch is symbolic of the Victorian mores to which American literature was largely bound during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. With the references to "the courts of Europe," "the Congress of Vienna," "the splendor of family," along with Grandma Lausch's stage-appearance and her interest in Russian and French romances, Bellow intends this figure to represent a literary authority based on reaction and tradition. It is a fading authority, one that must find its comfort through the romantic past and by steadfastly denying the ugly present, or at least by not speaking of it. Augie recalls:

> Monkey was the basis of much thought with us. On the sideboard, on the Turkestan runner, with their eyes, ears, and mouth covered, we had see-no-evil, speak-no-evil, hear-no-evil, a lower trinity of the house. . . . the monkeys could be potent, and awesome besides, and deep social critics when the old woman would point . . . [and] say, "Nobody asks you to love the whole world, only to be honest, ehrlich. Don't have a loud mouth. The more you love people the more they'll mix you up. A child loves, a person respects. Respect is better than love. And that's respect, the middle monkey."

> It never occurred to us that she sinned mischievously herself against that convulsed speak-no-evil. (9)

In the last line Augie notes the duplicity and hypocrisy of this Victorian tyrant. And of course Grandma Lausch's second monkey is the cultural primate that the artist had to battle during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

When Augie comments on Grandma Lausch's failing authority, he explains, "I never repudiated her that much [as much as Simon did] or tried to strike the old influence, such as it had become, out of her hands." (58) Here Augie might be seen as a paradigm of our national literature; and it is particularly suitable to his passive character that he, like literature in general, accepts, for a while, all influences. He is neutral. He makes no direct attempt to hold aloof from them nor to diminish their influences on him: Grandma Lausch simply grows old, and she is sent to an old-folks home. Her loss of power is noted by Bellow through Augie:

> The house was changed also for us; dinkier, smaller, darker; once shiny and venerated things losing their attraction and richness and importance. Tin showed, cracks, black spots where enamel was hit off, threadbarer, design scuffed out of the center of the rug, all the glamour, lacquer, massiveness, florescence, wiped out." (58-59)

This passage depicting a house of the realistic is at the close of Chapter IV: the next chapter begins with Augie's statement that "Einhorn was the first superior man I knew"

for whom Augie "went to work while . . . a high school junior, not long before the great crash." (60) While it is difficult to state the precise significance of Bellow's use of time here, the publication dates of the following works are provocative: The Sound and Fury (1929), Look Homeward Angel (1929), The Sun Also Rises (1926), Farewell to Arms (1929), The Great Gatsby (1925), Sartoris (1929), An American Tragedy (1925). In any case, it was indeed a time for dispossessing the old and looking to the new; for with these novels, and on the chronological fringes, the work of Anderson, Lewis, Dos Passos, O'Neill, and Mencken, the full tide of a new wave of literature was to flood the land, a realistic literature, something on the order of the personality and character of Einhorn, who becomes the second major influence on Augie.

Einhorn is a complete figure of the twenties, or perhaps of the myth of the twenties, what with his pursuit of money, power, and sex, his absolute confidence in his own strength and abilities, in spite of his crippled legs.[10] His is a cynical view of life, overriding all opposition, demanding, knavish, petty, knowing, yet confused and driven by a sexual greed that is without limits, "singlemindedly

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[10]Einhorn's useless legs can be seen as symbolic of frustrated desires, much in the way that Hemingway uses physical disabilities in order to depict creative inabilities.

and grimly fixed on the one thing, ultimately the thing, for which men and women came together." (78) Einhorn is utterly devoid of illusions. He knows the well-springs of man and draws on them, with staggering jerks or sly pulls. He is above all social dictates. As he tells Augie:

> "Besides, there's a law, and then there's Nature. There's opinion, and then there's Nature. Somebody has to get outside of law and opinion and speak for Nature. It's even a public duty, so customs won't have us all by the windpipe." (67)

In such a voice does naturalism and realism announce its presence. When one thinks of Einhorn, he thinks of a powerful determinism, as does Augie when his "superior man" falls a victim to the depression: "I'm thinking of the old tale of Croesus, with Einhorn in the unhappy part." (106) It will be recalled that the story of Croesus is a story of the reversal of simple fate, the god of determinism.

Einhorn's activities are instructive. Primarily in real estate, his interests are without end, as Augie relates:

> The stuff had to be where he could lay his hands on it at once, his clippings and pieces of paper, in folders labled Commerce, Invention, Major Local Transactions, Crime and Gang, Democrats, Republicans, Archaeology, Literature, League of Nations. . . . Everything was going to be properly done, with Einhorn, and was thoroughly organized on his desk and around it--Shakespeare, Bible, Plutarch, dictionary and thesaurus, Commercial Law for Laymen, real estate and insurance guides, almanacs and directories; then typewriter in black hood, dictaphone, telephones on bracket arms and a little screwdriver to hand for touching off the part of the telephone mechanism that registered the drop of the nickel . . . wire trays labeled Incoming

> and Outgoing, molten Aetna Weights, notary's seal on chain, staplers, flap-moistening sponges, keys to money, confidential papers, notes, condoms, personal correspondence and poems and essays. . . . (66)

And the end is nowhere in sight. For as Augie concludes, "He had to be in touch with everything." (70) The point is that through this walk down Main Street Bellow's creation is to be seen as an embodiment of the naturalistic or the realistic, the distinctions between which are somewhat fine for precise delineation here at this point. But Einhorn's drives are certainly reminiscent of the "chemisms" of Dreiser, while the style in which Bellow chooses to indicate the activities of the old man is blatantly realistic with its enumeration of every last detail.

While Einhorn may be read as a generalized depiction of the new art and emerging culture of the twenties, there is some evidence that Bellow means to be more precise, that he intends this figure to be representative of Hemingway, or, in part, to be seen as a Hemingway creation. Admittedly conjectural, the likenesses are interesting: Augie carries Einhorn on his back, even as Hemingway during this period was the master, guide, and controlling force of American literature. Einhorn's useless legs recall the wounds suffered by several Hemingway characters; he has a deep concern, perhaps even fear, of death, which is an everlasting omnipotent subject of Hemingway's; his stocking cap is

in the Hemingway mode; Hemingway's almost fanatical emphasis on physical endurance and well-being is seen as Augie describes Einhorn at the table:

> Then Einhorn took a white spoonful of Bisodol and a glass of Waukesha water for his gas. He made a joke of it, but he never forgot to take them and heeded all his processes with much seriousness, careful that his tongue was not too coated and his machinery smooth. . . . he was zealous about taking care of himself; and with this zeal he had a brat's self-mockery about the object of his cares. . . . Ah, sure, he was still a going concern, very much so, but he had to take thought more than others did about himself, since if <u>he</u> went wrong he was a total loss, nowise justified, a dead account, a basket case, an encumbrance, zero. (74)

But there is more at issue here than Hemingway's stamina, and the further significance lies in the references to the "tongue" and "machiner," as well as to the "self-mockery about the subject of his cares." While it was Hemingway's manner to behave with a bravado in spite of his bodily fears, of more importance here was his inclination to speak disparagingly of literary technique while taking an almost obsessive care with his own work. Bellow shows this high degree of fidelity to art through Einhorn's son, Arthur, who attends the university and in whom Einhorn puts all his hopes and trusts, counting on him to carry on the Einhorn name. Augie is made ever aware of his position in relation to that of Arthur:

> I wasn't ever to get it into my head that I was part of the family. There was small chance that I would, the way Arthur, the only son, figured in their references. . . . I don't think I would have considered myself even remotely as a legatee of the Commissioner

> [Einhorn's father] if they hadn't, for one thing, underlined my remoteness from inheritance, and, for another, discussed inheritances all the time. (72)

And then later, ". . . Arthur's brainy authority made his dad occasionally hesitate to sound off. . . ." (293)

The threads of Bellow's intent here are closely woven and of complex design; but it would seem that the passages must be read as a specific comment on Einhorn as Hemingway or as a general comment on the writers of the twenties, and perhaps both. In any case, Bellow is pointing to a weakness of these writers in that they refused to admit into their thinking the uses and values of American literature (symbolized by Augie) as it had been handed down to them, inasmuch as their single-visioned emphasis on artistic technique (represented by Arthur) made them somewhat blind to their function as artist, a function that Bellow unfolds in his speech previously quoted.

At this point it is necessary to say a word about the Commissioner who, again conjecturally, acts the role of Mark Twain. Hemingway's repeatedly acknowledged debt to Twain is a possible parallel to Einhorn's realization of his debt to his father. Augie states the case:

> He [Einhorn] had his father to keep up with, whose business ideas were perhaps less imaginative but broader. . . . The old Commissioner had made the Einhorn money. (66)

Then when Augie describes the Commissioner, the personality of Mark Twain is clearly evident:

> The Commissioner, in a kindly, sleepy, warm-aired, fascinated way, petted and admired all women and put his hands wherever he liked. . . . You couldn't say it was a common letch he had; it was a sort of a Solomonic regard of an old chief or aged sea lion. . . . You could feel from the net pleasantness he carried what there had been between him and women now old or dead, whom he recognized, probably, and greeted in this nose or that bosom. . . . His sons didn't share this quality. Of course you didn't expect younger men to have this kind of evening-Mississippi serenity, but there wasn't much disinterestedness or contemplation in either of them. . . . Einhorn . . . took the joking liberties his father did, but his jokes didn't have the same ring; which isn't to say that they weren't funny but that he cast himself forward on them toward a goal--seduction. (76-77)

Evident in this passage is the relationship between the sensibilities of Twain and Hemingway. Furthermore, with Twain's renowned lack of business sense in mind, the Commissioner, it is discovered upon his death, "had made loans to these men and had no notes, only these memoranda of debts amounting to several thousand dollars." (105) Then in what may be Bellow's opinion of the relative merits of Twain and Hemingway, Augie says:

> Kreindl, who did a job for him once in a while, thought he was as wise as a god. "The son is smart," he said, "but the Commissioner--that's really a man you have to give way to on earth." I disagreed then and do still, though when the Commissioner was up to something he stole the show. (61)

It is through Grandma Lausch, the Commissioner, Einhorn, and Arthur, then, along with Augie, that Bellow shows the drift of literary influences, with those influences playing directly upon his protagonist, the artist or symbol of American literature.

Even as naturalism or realism remains a force in literature, so Einhorn remains a figure throughout the book, but in a somewhat weakened condition, or changed position, from his earlier throne of power. Augie reports the change:

> His spirit was piercing, but there has to be mentioned his poor color, age-impoverished and gray; plus the new flat's ugliness; dullness of certain hours, dryness of days, dreariness and shabbiness--mentioned that the street was bare, dim and low in life, bad; and that there were business thoughts and malformed growths of purpose, terrible, menacing, salt-patched with noises and news, and pimpled and dotted around with lies, both practical and gratuitous. (155)

And Einhorn has grown bitter. When Simon, who is distracted by love, fails to send money to Augie so he can get back home, it is Einhorn's contention that Augie should "take advantage" of the situation, should "have satisfaction" and not let Simon off easy. Augie guesses at the reasons for Einhorn's vindictive manner:

> He intended that, as there were no more effective prescriptions in old ways, as we were in dreamed-out or finished visions, that therefore, in the naked form of the human jelly, one should choose or seize with force; one should make strength from disadvantages and make progress by having enemies, being wrathful or terrible; should hammer on the state of being a brother. . . . (183)

Finally, Bellow makes additionally clear what the realistic movement has become, how it has, in the words of his speech, "enfeebled literature," through Einhorn's reaction to Augie's becoming a union organizer. Augie asks him, "Then you think it's a waste of time, what I'm doing?" And Einhorn

replies:

> "Oh, it seems to me on both sides the ideas are the same. What's the use of the same old ideas? To take some from one side and give it to the other, the same old economics. . . . You think that with a closed shop you're going to make men out of slobs. . . . Look here, because they were born you think they have to turn out to be men? That's just an old fashioned idea." (293)

The possibility of man bettering himself is an old idea, held by such romantic dreamers as Grandma Lausch. Einhorn is clearly preaching ideas of isolation here, a non-involvement, the uselessness of effort, the same behavior that Bellow condemns in his speech and, ultimately, in his depiction of Augie's existence, high-phrased though it is. Yet Einhorn has seen better days. Augie recalls that "you could get part of the truth from Einhorn." (386) Much earlier he tells Augie:

> "But I'm not a lowlife when I think, and really think. . . . In the end you can't save your soul and life by thought. But if you think, the least of the consolation prizes is the world." (117)

This is the voice of Bellow, it will be recalled, speaking to his fellow novelists, saying, "there is nothing left for us novelists to do but think."

Through his The Great Gatsby, Fitzgerald left his mark not only on the literature but on the culture of this country; for it is Jay Gatsby who embodies the sad estrangement, the disappointment, and the disillusion of those who feel that the twenties saw the death of the American dream.

In Augie March, Bellow gives this role to Augie's brother Simon. Like Gatsby, who during his childhood was faithful to Benjamin Franklin ideals and dreams of self-improvement, so does Simon begin his adolescence. When Augie describes Simon's not participating in the deception of the Charities, he explains that his brother "was too blunt for this kind of maneuver and, anyway, from books, had gotten hold of some English schoolboy notions of honor." (4) Simon, unlike Augie, never has trouble with the neighborhood gangs; he has other interests:

> School absorbed him more, and he had his sentiments anyway, a mixed extract from Natty Bumppo, Quentin Durward, Tom Brown, Clark at Kaskaskia, the messenger who brought the good news from Ratisbon, and so on, that kept him more to himself. I was a slow understudy to this, just as he never got me to put in hours on his Sandow muscle builder. (12)

Simon even gets odd jobs and works diligently. But one summer, and in this case, much in the manner of Dreiser's Clyde Griffith, Simon leaves home to work in a resort hotel. When he returns it is evident to Augie that something has happened, ". . . he went through a change the summer he waited on tables . . . and came back with some different aims from his original ones and new ideas about conduct." (31) And Simon, like Gatsby or Dreiser's protagonist, begins his long road in search of power and wealth, chasing his phantom. He even talks like Gatsby. When he announces his engagement, he says to Augie, "Well, sport, we may be married in the next few months. You envy me? I bet you do." (150)

Augie, too, gets his chance to play the role of a Fitzgeraldian figure. When he takes up with the Renlings, one can't miss the tone and flavor of indolent glamour. With Chapter VIII, Augie announces his new life:

> From here a new course was set--by us, for us: I'm not going to try to unravel all the causes. . . . I don't know how it all at once came to me to talk a lot, tell jokes, kick up, and suddenly have views. When it was time to have them, there was no telling how I picked them from the air. (125)

Then Augie describes himself during this period:

> There was a spell in which I mainly wished to own dinner clothes and be invited to formal parties and thought considerably about how to get into the Junior Chamber of Commerce. Not that I had any business ideas. . . . It was social enthusiasm that moved in me, smartness, clotheshorseyness. The way a pair of tight Argyle socks showed in the crossing of legs, a match to the bow tie settled on a Princeton collar, took me in the heart with enormous power and hunger. I was given over to it. (134)

Bellow's attempt to define Augie as a cultural and literary wind is obvious in the choice of words. "I picked them from the air" and "I was given over to it" appropriately describe Augie not only as character but also as symbol, representative of the way in which an institution such as literature picks up and, ultimately, is taken over by a particular inclination or influence.

Here is the Fitzgeraldian world in which Augie lives:

> It was sundown, near dinnertime, with brillian darkening water, napkins and broad menus standing up in the dining room, and roses and ferns in long-necked vases, the orchestra tuning back of its curtain. I was lone in the corridor, troubled and rocky, and trod on slowly to the music room, where the phonograph was playing

> Caruso, stifled and then clear cries of operatic mother-longing, that ornate, at heart somber, son's appeal of the Italian taste. Resting her elbows on the closed cabinet, in a white suit and round white hat, next thing to a bishop's biretta, bead-embroidered, was Esther Fenchel; she stood with one foot set on its point. (142)

Making it complete, Esther turns out to be something of Gatsby's Daisy, a "deadhead," as her sister Thea describes her, one incapable of accepting or fulfilling Augie's dreams.

But Augie leaves the Renlings, for good reason, as he says:

> Just when Mrs. Renling's construction around me was nearly complete I shoved off. The leading and precipitating reason was that she proposed to adopt me. . . . Why should I turn into one of these people who didn't know who they themselves were? And the unvarnished truth is that it wasn't a fate good enough for me. . . . (151)

So Augie is ready to leave the twenties and its influences. He is moving into the thirties and new pressures, new longings, new ideas and new adoptive-minded people.

The entire track that Bellow lays down cannot be traced here. But Augie's association with the Magnuses, the unions, his trip to Mexico, the near association with the dreams of Trotsky, Basteshaw, the merchant marine, Mintouchian and all the rest are reflections of different literary and cultural interests at various times. Augie's function within this framework is highly complex; for he is both a part of the framework and outside it. He is outside it

insofar as he fails to get enduringly involved with any particular force or influence. Pursuing "a better fate," he moves on. In this role, Augie is intended by Bellow to be what one may call the backbone of American literature, or, as he has been referred to here, the spirit of that literature. At the end of the novel, as will be seen, Bellow shows the present state of literature through his protagonist, as all of the influences finally come to rest on him, and make of Bellow's hero a symbolic figure of contemporary writing.

But for now, the interest is in Augie as participant, inside the framework, responding to these influences. And there is added complexity to Bellow's protagonist in this role: for on the one hand, he represents a specific trend in the particular literature of the period, as when he assumes a Fitzgeraldian guise; and on the other hand, he represents what may be best called the artist responding to these various pressures. Augie as artist may be seen, for example, when he is in that period of self-examination which was referred to in the first part of this chapter. It will be recalled that Augie is searching his own character right after Thea has left him. For convenient reference, here is the passage again:

> Now I had started, and this terrible investigation had to go on. If this was how I was, it was certainly not how I appeared but must be my secret. So if I wanted to please, it was in order to mislead or show

> everyone, wasn't it, now? And this must be because I had an idea everyone was my better and had something I didn't have. But what did people seem to me anyhow, something fantastic? I didn't want to be what they made me but wanted to please them. Kindly explain! An independent fate, and love too--what confusion! (401)

On the surface, Augie's self-appraisal arises from his realization that he seems to be unable to commit himself, to become really involved with life. It is more important, however, to see Augie here as an artist of whom Bellow is asking questions, the same questions he proposes in his National Book Award speech. When Augie asks, "But what did people seem to me, something fantastic," Bellow is commenting on that theory of literature that seems to demand a theme of alienation, or, as he states, "This theory [that] says in effect that modern mass society is frightful, brutal, hostile to whatever is pure in the human spirit, a waste land and a horror." Bellow questions the vision that sees only a society uninhabitable and grotesque, not only as to its validity, although "it produced some masterpieces,"[11] but for its consequence--"the separatism of writers." Then Augie says, "I didn't want to be what they made of me but wanted to please them." Of course, here is often the contradictory position of the artist: he refuses to become actively and positively involved, either in his art or in his personal life, with the very group from which he seeks

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[11]And Augie's words that "you could always get part of the truth from Einhorn" shows Bellow's appreciation of the positive aspects of the literature of alienation.

approval. As Bellow says more directly, "This is not to advise the novelist to rush into the political sphere. But in the first stage he must begin to exert his intelligence, long unused." And Augie has every right to be confused in his impossible demands for "an independent fate and love too," for here is the confusion manifested by the artist who, as Bellow says, exhibits "postures of liberation and independence and creativity." It is just that love and independence are mutually exclusive: Modification of one position or the other is an absolute necessity. So it is with independence and creativity: for as Bellow makes clear, ". . . vehement declarations of alienation are not going to produce great works of art either."

Augie's adventures in the field of love are extremely germane to his role as artist. To Bellow, love is a symbol of creation; and as such, he often equates love with the creative abilities of the artist. In his essay "Distractions of a Fiction Writer," he has this to say:

> "To believe in the existence of human beings as such is love," says Simon Weil. This is what makes the difference. It is possible--all too possible--to say when we have read one more modern novel: "So what? What do I care? You yourself, the writer, didn't really care." It is all too often like that. But this caring or believing or love alone matters. All the rest, obsolescence, historical views, manners, agreed views of the universe, is simply nonsense and trash. If we don't care, don't immediately care, then perish books both old and new, and novelists, and governments, too! If we do care, if we believe in the existence of others, then what we write is necessary. . . . A book, any book, may be superfluous. But to manifest love--can that be

superfluous? Is there so much of it about us? Not so much. It is still rare, still wonderful. It is still effective against distraction.[12]

Ihab Hassan, while he does not pursue its significance, draws a useful distinction: "For Thea love is a preparation to a more exalted state; for him [Augie] it is a worthy end."[13] It is true, and all very romantic. All for love or the world well lost. But this is precisely the issue. Augie loves in a vacuum. He loves his ideas and ideals. He does not "believe in the existence of human beings _as such_." [Italics not in original.] His Emersonianisms and Whitmanisms are kept apart from the actual human condition. As Thea says to him, "But perhaps love would be strange and foreign to you no matter which way it happened, and maybe you just don't want it." (396) Yes, love, real love, would seem strange and foreign to Augie because he would not be able to reconcile his ideals with the real.

And so it is, Bellow says, with the artist. He must care, and care immediately and now, within the framework of the human condition, and not only in some abstract way. Caring in the abstract is worse than useless. It has a deteriorating effect. Bellow makes this clear in his essay:

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[12]Saul Bellow, "Distractions of a Fiction Writer," _The Living Novel: A Symposium_, ed. Granville Hicks (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1957), p. 20.

[13]Ihab Hassan, _Radical Innocence: The Contemporary American Novel_ (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961), p. 307.

> But it is not only ideas of evil that become destructive. Ideas of good, held in earnest, may be equally damaging to the passive thinker. His passivity puts him in self-contempt. This same contempt may estrange him from ideas of good. He lives below them and feels dwarfed. On certain occasions a hero in thought, he has become abject in fact, and he cannot be blamed for feeling that he is not doing a man's work. . . . Men are active. Ideas are passive.[14]

Bellow is talking to the novelist, but here is exactly the condition of Augie. He lives below his ideas of good. He has become, at the end of the novel, abject in fact. His idea of love, high and noble, is barren and uncreative, indeed self-damaging, because it is not based on the real condition of its object--the human condition. How ironic the statement of David Galloway: "Augie's point of view--the maintenance of an intention which is opposed at almost every turn by reality--begins to gradually define him as an absurd man."[15] So Bellow would define the artist who insists on a "separatism," until a "fuller, freer life" arrives, and who spends his time in "dreams of a golden age."

This paradigm of Augie as artist, once understood, is evident throughout the novel. Indeed in almost every word that Augie speaks, one can see Bellow's dual intent: first, that of developing Augie as a character in his own

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[14]Bellow, "Distractions of a Fiction Writer," p. 13.

[15]David G. Galloway, "The Absurd Man as Picaro: The Novels of Saul Bellow," Texas Studies in Language and Literature, Vol. VI, No. 2, (Summer 1964), p. 238.

right; and second, that of developing him as a symbol of literary issues.

Up to this point, Augie March has been seen as a comment on American literature, but Bellow has set his novel on a wider stage. That is, he would have his work read as a depiction of the relationship between literature and society as that relationship seems to exist throughout the western world. In his "Distractions" essay, he says:

> But I should like to point out that impotence has received more attention from modern writers than any other subject. . . . Here is a brief list:
>
> Oblomov: he spends his life in bed.
>
> Moreau in Flaubert's The Sentimental Education: a life spent on trifles, utterly spoiled.
>
> Captain Ahab: "I have lost the low enjoying power." He means that he is distracted. Natural beauty is recognized by his mind but it doesn't move him.
>
> Clym Yeobright in The Return of the Native: empty of the feeling which Eustacia desires.
>
> The hero of Henry James's "The Beast in the Jungle": empty of feeling.
>
> Dostoevski's hero or anti-hero in Notes from Underground: his spite, his coldness, his venom, combined with the greatness of his mind, give him an exceptional stature.
>
> Leopold Bloom: the distracted and impotent man.
>
> I could add hundreds more to this list, from Lawrence or Proust or Hemingway and their innumerable imitators. They all tell the same story. The dread is great, the soul is small; man might be godlike but he is wretched. The heart should be open but it is sealed in fear.[16]

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[16]Bellow, "Distractions of a Fiction Writer," p. 14.

So Bellow is not only concerned with American literature; he sees the stain on a larger canvas. For this wider picture, he turns to mythology.

Augie's travels and relationships have their counterparts in mythology; there are, for example, some striking similarities in Augie as archetype of both Aeneas and Apollo. It will be remembered that Augie, in his own words, is born the result of ". . . the by-blow of a traveling man," (125) and that he has no father, at least none living with him. His mother is an "object lesson in her love-originated servitude." (10) Moreover, Augie says of his mother:

> [She] occupied a place, I suppose, among women conquered by a superior force of love, like those women whom Zeus got the better of in animal form and who next had to take cover from his furious wife. (10)

As far as the punishment which was administered to "those women" by the "furious wife. . . . Grandma Lausch was there to administer the penalties under the standards of legitimacy, representing the main body of married womankind."[17] (10) This background parallels the birth of Apollo to Zeus and Leto, and Leto's subsequent difficulties. Inasmuch as Apollo is the god of poetry, it would seem that in this

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[17]Grandma Lausch is a good example of how Bellow builds and supports the functions of his characters. Grandma Lausch represents authority, both in the March household and in the history of literature. Here, Bellow widens her role by showing her as a figure of middle-class standards, likening her authority to that which held realism to be immoral.

relationship Bellow means to reinforce the view of Augie as a spirit of literature.

Augie is also Aeneas. First, both are travelers. Then, as Aeneas carries his father on his back from Troy, so does Augie carry Einhorn (literary father to Augie) on his back. In fact, Augie speaks of this ancient event in connection with Einhorn. (122) More than in any other way, however, it is the travels of Aeneas and his destiny that are of significance. It will be remembered that several times before reaching Carthage and Dido, Aeneas, whose fate it is to found Rome, starts to build a city; but each time he, with his followers, is driven off by various omens and misfortunes. So it is with Augie as he tries his constructions on crime, education, social position with the Renlings, wealth with the Magnuses, on a career as a union organizer, and so on through his travels. Each time, he, too, moves on to his "better fate."

There is also a close parallel between the stay of Aeneas in Carthage with Dido and the short time together of Augie and Thea in Mexico. Both Dido and Thea are beautiful widows. Both dress their men in lavish fashion. (314) Of particular interest is that Venus, mother to Aeneas, contrives a plan which will make it certain that Aeneas' feeling for Dido should be of no greater depth than that he would, at the proper time, have the strength of purpose to continue

his fated journey to Rome. This is precisely the case of Augie, who seems to exist with Thea not as a person but as a kind of extension, on her terms, as a passive but highly willing and obedient follower. He, like Aeneas again, has "a better fate." Both Dido and Thea plan hunting trips for their men. Then, both Aeneas and Augie leave their women crying in anguish and despair, Aeneas to build the foundations of Rome, and Augie, appropriately enough, reaching for Stella (or "star").

Another archetypal pattern springs from Aeneas' search for the Sibyl in order that she may guide him through the underworld where he is to seek out his father for advice and guidance. The Sibyl tells Aeneas he must find in the forest a golden bough, break it off the tree, and carry it in his hand as a passport throughout Hades. All is accomplished as fated, and Aeneas, through the aid of the Sibyl and his father, is set on the right track to his destiny. Bellow, however, is not so generous to his protagonist. When Augie is in Rome toward the end of the novel, he gives one of his hours to visit the gold doors of the Baptistery on which one may see depicted the history of mankind. There, he is accosted by an elderly woman, "this aged face of a great lady covered by mange spots and with tarry blemishes on her lips," (517) who is carrying a stick with a purse on it. She wants to act as guide to Augie, to explain the

story on the doors, but he doubts her knowledge. Besides, he does not want to be bothered. When he refuses her services, she begs:

> "Give me five hundred [lire] and I'll show you the cathedral and I'll take you to Santa Maria Novella. It's not far, and you won't know anything if someone doesn't tell you." (519)

But Augie dismisses her: "As a matter of fact, I have to meet a man right away on business. Thanks just the same." (519) So unlike Aeneas, Augie turns away from his "better fate," perhaps because he is drawn away by a very immediate personal fate. One may conjecture that Bellow intends a comparison here, not only in that Aeneas heeds the Sibyl and Augie doesn't heed his prophetess, but in the nature of their two goals: Aeneas is engaged in the creation of Rome, an act that extends beyond himself; Augie's goal has deteriorated to personal, even perhaps illicit, trivia. And Bellow's final words of his speech are to be heard again: "He [the novelist] must begin to think, and to think not merely of his own narrower interests and needs."

Both Aeneas and Augie have the same destiny--to create. But the latter has lost his way. At the end, Augie, it will be remembered, spends his time in "the cold halls of the Louvre." (522) Bellow describes his fallen state, even as he speaks to his fellow-novelists:

> For unless we think, unless we make a clearer estimate of our condition [but Augie doesn't listen to the Sibyl] . . . we will lack serious interest and

> become truly irrelevant [surely Augie's job with Mintouchian fits] . . . he dreams of a golden age [as does Augie] . . . Without the common world the novelist is nothing but a curiousity and will find himself in a glass case along some dull museum corridor of the future [And Bellow seems to have left Augie looking for a likely spot for his case].

The failure of Augie to estimate his condition is central to Bellow's meaning of Augie both as a depiction of a human condition and as a depiction of contemporary literature and the artist. He is still a man of hope in the face of his reality of sordid and irrelevant affairs. But his deterioration is almost complete. When he and his maid Jacqueline are walking across the fields in the freezing cold, she urges him to sing in order to prevent his stomach from freezing:

> And because I didn't want to argue with her about medical superstitions and be so right or superior wising her up about modern science I decided, finally, what the hell! I might as well sing too. The only thing I could think to sing was "La Cucaracha." I kept up La Cucaracha for a mile or two and felt more chilled than helped. (535)

Here is what Augie as modern man has become, and here, Bellow intends, is too often what modern literature has become--victims of microscopic vision. Life is only what may be seen in the laboratory. Augie tries to sing, but all he can manage is a song reminiscent of Kafka's "Metamorphosis" in which the protegonist slips to a lower form of life because he has not recognized his condition, because he has refused to face reality and suffer his freedom. It is

little wonder Augie feels more chilled than helped.

Bellow points to this alienation from reality when Augie and Jacqueline are approaching a farmhouse, where her uncle lives after their car stops and leaves them stranded:

> Then she pointed. "Vous voyez les chiens?" The dogs of the farm had leaped a brook and were dashing for us on the brown coat of the turf, yelling and yapping. "Don't you worry about them," she said, picking up a branch. "They know me well." Sure enough they did. They bounded into the air and licked her face. (536)

Jacqueline and nature are friends. They know each other. One does not fear nor frighten the other. But immediately after, in the last paragraph of the novel, Augie says:

> . . . I cut out for Dunkerque and Ostend. Where the British were so punished the town is ruined. Quonset huts stand there on the ruins. The back of the ancient water was like wolf gray. Then on the long sand the waves crashed white; they spit themselves to pieces. I saw this specter of white anger coming from the savage gray and meanwhile shot northward, in a great hurry to get to Bruges and out of this line of white which was like eternity opening up right beside destructions of the modern world, hoary and grumbling. I thought if I could beat the dark to Bruges I'd see the green canals and ancient places. (536)

Through a careful choice of words, Bellow equates the dogs running to greet Jacqueline with the landscape and its threat to Augie. Augie is still retreating from reality. Like fragmented modern man, he is frightened by his vision of a destructive nature. He yearns for what Wallace Stevens calls the "old complacencies" in his poem "Sunday Morning." Augie would escape to the artificiality of Bruges, a city born of Hanseatic man, with its canals and palaces of the past where he feels comfortable, as he does with his coveted

and protected philosophies. And he cannot help laughing at the image of poor, unattractive, middle-aged Jacqueline, "yet still hopefully and obstinately seductive":

> What's so laughable, that a Jacqueline, for instance, will still refuse to lead a disappointed life? Or is the laugh at nature--including eternity--that it thinks it can win over us and the power of hope. (536)

Here is Augie, still fighting nature, still not believing in the reality of the human condition, setting up his battle lines between their real and his ideal--_ils ne passeront pas_. Again, all very noble, but self-defeating.

Of course Augie's state, Bellow would say, is too often the state of the contemporary novel and that of too many novelists. They, like Augie, practice a separatism from the world. They are frightened by it, as if it would contaminate them. They hurry to their laboratories to gain evidence of the world's worldliness, and profess great single truths. Once again, they see only Sisyphus struggling up the hill with his task; they are blind to his trip back down. It is Jacqueline who lives on the hill, and senses if she does not see. Unlike Ahab, she has not lost the "low enjoying power."

In the last few lines, Augie assumes the role of literature as Bellow contemplates its present and future:

> Why, I am sort of a Columbus of those near-at-hand and believe you can come to them in this immediate _terra incognita_ that spreads out in every gaze. I may well be a flop at this line of endeavor. Columbus too thought he was a flop, probably, when they sent him back in chains. Which didn't prove there was no America. (536)

Augie's statement is, first, in interpretation of the func-

tion of literature--to establish lines of discovery and communication. At the present time, though, literature is in chains of denial, "in the bondage of strangeness for a time still," (523) as Augie describes himself, which does not prove that literature (or the novel) is dead. Everybody knows that August-March is a dormant period; and if winter comes . . . . .

To return to Philip Rahv's statement concerning the natural contradiction between art and reality, it is important to understand that Bellow is not asking for a dissolution of that relationship. Once again, the distinction between Augie's ideals and reality is not the problem: the problem is the failure on the part of the artist to "estimate his condition," to see himself within the framework of the ideal-real nature of this world, and not to proclaim himself above and beyond that relationship. Augie says that he does not claim to be angelic,[18] but he turns out to be a fallen angel, what with his wasted ideals, because he removes his abilities from the human condition in the name of "a better fate" that has its roots only in his imagination. So it is with the artist of alienation. It is the subangelic attitude that Bellow calls for, an attitude that will create within the existing state, and not above it nor below it.

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[18] See page 87 of this study.

CHAPTER IV

"SUNK THOUGH HE BE"

Seize the Day[1] (1957) is a clear example of what Bellow means when he urges the novelist to depict man as subangelic, as having the power to overcome ignominy. For in this novel, or novelette, the protagonist Tommy Wilhelm does just that. De profundis he arises to some positive apprehension of what it means to be a human being. More specifically, he achieves a reconciliation, first, with an unsympathetic society that neither knows nor cares to know of his existence; second, with a world that offers no helpful spiritual guidance; and third, with a self that seems to be a piece of flotsam driven by dark forces of malevolent intent. Tightly interwoven and often overlapping, these are the three levels of meaning in Seize the Day. It is the purpose of this chapter, then, to state how Bellow develops these themes and to understand the significance of their resolutions.

Bellow is concerned with the well-worn dilemma of the individual desperately isolated and profoundly alone, intermittently shunned and used, in a society whose only

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[1]Saul Bellow, Seize the Day (New York: Viking Press, 1961). All subsequent page citations in parenthesis are from this edition.

God is Mammon. As the story opens, Tommy is in just such a state of ignominy. Forty-three years old, huge, bear-like, lumbering, over-emotional and heavily dependent, he is caught in a world devoid of heart, where there is no caring and no real communication among men. In this lower middle-class, densely populated section of New York City where Tommy lives in the less than swank Hotel Gloriana, people talk to each other, do business, pass the time of day, but somehow all is on the surface; the human heart is never reached; masks and deceptions are the rule; there is no compassion, no understanding, and no love but that it is frustrated. Tommy is nakedly and miserably alone.

This theme of ignominious isolation is established in the first several pages of the novel when Tommy stops to get his morning newspaper from Rubin, the newspaper vendor. They talk, but only about the weather, Tommy's clothes, last night's gin game; for even though both men know many details of each other's intimate personal lives, know of affairs closer to the heart, "None of these could be mentioned, and the great weight of the unspoken left them little to talk about." (6) And a few lines later, during the same meeting, Tommy thinks:

> He [Rubin] meant to be conversationally playful, but his voice had no tone and his eyes, slack and lid-blinded, turned elsewhere. He didn't want to hear. It was all the same to him. (8)

Even Tommy's father, Dr. Adler, refuses to become

involved in his son's desperate loneliness. Tommy is in need of money which his father could easily supply; but Dr. Adler is greatly pained, even shies away, when the subject is mentioned. More than money, however, Tommy needs communication with an understanding heart; again and again, he appeals to his father for compassion, at the same time hating himself for being so weak as to do so. The appeal is always futile, for his father's response is ever a cold, detached, yet bitter and angry, analytical denunciation of Tommy's past failures and present ignominy:

> It made Tommy profoundly bitter that his father should speak to him with such detachment about his welfare. Dr. Adler liked to appear affable. Affable! His own son, his one and only son, could not speak his mind or ease his heart to him. . . . couldn't he see. . . . couldn't he feel? Had he lost his family sense? (10-11)

And so it is, in a different way, with the rather mysterious figure of Dr. Tamkin, a sort of a second father to Tommy. Here is a person to whom Tommy feels he can talk and by whom he can be understood. Yet here, too, there is a barrier of communication, for in the words of Dr. Tamkin it is impossible to separate truth from fiction, intellect from idiocy. At times there is no doubt in Tommy's mind that in Dr. Tamkin's counsel and advice, in his philosophical and psychological teachings, there is truth, even profound truth; at other times, he knows that he is being victimized by this combination psychologist, psychiatrist, broker, poet, gambler, counselor, father and world-traveling

philosopher. Hence there is no consolation from this quarter. It is only toward the end of the novel that Tommy decides finally that he has merely been used, that Dr. Tamkin is not really interested in him, and does not truly care about him or his problems:

> I was the man beneath; Tamkin was on my back, and I thought I was on his. He made me carry him, too, besides Margaret [Tommy's estranged wife]. Like this they ride on me with hoofs and claws. Tear me to pieces, stamp on me and break my bones. (105)

There are other characters with whom Tommy finds no comforting solace: his wife Margaret,[2] who will not agree to a divorce, but who will not free him; his children; Maurice Venice, the talent scout, another agent of disillusion; Mr. Perls, German refugee from a concentration camp; and Mr. Rappaport, an elderly clutching player of stock markets. The role of each of these figures only serves to reinforce the issue of Tommy's aloneness.

One of the major themes of Seize the Day, then, is the isolation of the human spirit in modern society. The appeal is for caring, for a sincere feeling of involvement with mankind. Bellow is urging that a loving recognition

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[2]The relationship between Tommy and Margaret acts as support for the two major conflicts. Tommy is estranged from Margaret, not divorced, as he finds it impossible to break the tie once and for all. He hopes that she will come to sympathize with him and help in his plight, all of which is close to the situation he faces with both Dr. Adler and Dr. Tamkin.

of the natural bond between hearts is the only answer to a society which seems to have lost or seems to be denying all social kinship. At the end of the novel, Tommy comes to a recognition of just this kinship when he finds himself at a funeral, while searching for Dr. Ramkin. As he looks down on the corpse, a stranger, he understands or at least feels the basic relationship between himself and all men--a relationship established, in spite of superficial and man-made barriers, by the bond of mortality. Tommy is no longer isolated. He absorbs into his being the full meaning of the line of poetry that earlier had slipped his mind, "Love that well which thou must leave ere long." (12) This understanding, Bellow implies, allows Tommy the dignity of position, of place in a social order. There is no triumphant promise here, but neither is there cause for miserable and hopeless lamentation, that is, no reasonable cause, for Bellow is stating a case beyond dispute. All shall die--live with joy and live in harmony. It is the only answer to the ultimate design. Tommy sees it, even if the other "mourners" do not when he looks down into the casket on his own fate:

> The great knot of ill and grief in his throat swelled upward and he gave in utterly and held his face and wept. He cried with all his heart.
>
> He, alone of all the people in the chapel, was sobbing. No one knew who he was. . . .
>
> "Oh my, oh my! To be mourned like that," said one

> man and looked at Wilhelm's heavy shaken shoulders, his clutched face and whitened fair hair, with wide, glinting, jealous eyes.
>
> "The man's brother, maybe?"
>
> "Oh, I doubt that very much," said another bystander. "They're not alike at all. Night and day." (118)

But the point is, they are alike. Here is the reality of brotherhood, not to be diminished by illusory trivia that constructs fortresses of sand among the living.

There is no doubt that <u>Seize the Day</u> may be read with accuracy as the state of the individual trapped in the chaos of an egoistic and driving society, a society detached and cold, refusing the pleas of the individual for a meaningful and enduring relationship, as in the blunt rejections of Dr. Adler and in the disillusioning promises and confusions of Dr. Tamkin. Yet Bellow has in mind a wider scope of universal intent, one much in the nature of that seen in Matthew Arnold's "Dover Beach." Here, spiritual guidance has grown old and useless, seemingly offering no answer to the exigencies of man. Moreover, man finds nothing but disillusion as he sets up his own gods of materialism. These are the second and third states of ignominy in which Tommy progressively finds himself.

To examine Bellow's methods of expression at these deeper levels, there must be a consideration in some depth of source, structure, setting, techniques of characterization,

and imagery, for it is in these materials that one may see Bellow's further intentions more clearly.

The source of Seize the Day may be traced to a single paragraph in Dostoyevski's The Brothers Karamozov, specifically, to the incident in which the Grand Inquisitor confronts Christ with angry accusations. It will be remembered that in this passage Christ visits Seville "during the most ghastly period of the Inquisition when, to the greater glory of God, bonfires blazed day in and day out all over the land. . . ."[3] Christ is promptly arrested by the Grand Inquisitor, who feels that the Son of God blundered when He left a burden too difficult for man to carry, for He left him, regardless of intent, his freedom. The Inquisitor points to Christ's refusal to turn rocks into bread, to jump off the pinnacle, in short, to give man miracles. Christ's reasoning that man should not turn to miracles but to God is unrealistic, says the irate Inquisitor: it is even meaningless, in view of man's limitations. He says to Christ:

> "But Thou didst not know that no sooner would man reject miracle than he would on the instant reject God as well, for it is not so much God as miracles that man seeks. And since it is beyond man's strength to remain without miracles, he is bound to create for himself a mess of new miracles, this time all his own, and

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[3]Fedor M. Dostoyevski, "The Grand Inquisitor," The Portable Russian Reader, ed. Bernard G. Guerney (New York: The Viking Press, 1947), p. 147.

> will bend his knee this time to the miracle of the witch-doctor, to the black magic of the witch-woman, though he may be a rebel, a heretic and an atheist a hundred times over."[4]

What Bellow does in Seize the Day is to show his protagonist in the position of man as described by the Inquisitor--rejected by divinity and disillusioned by his own contrivances.

For the working-out of Tommy's rejection and disillusionment, Bellow creates a kind of morality play, a drama whose structure falls into a pattern of function. Allowing for flashbacks, the action of this drama takes place in five acts. The first act serves as an introduction to the characters and presents Tommy's relationship to those characters in a manner that describes the nature of his isolation. The second act is set during breakfast in the hotel cafeteria at which time the confrontation between Tommy and his father further clarifies their deteriorated relationship. In the third act, Tommy and Dr. Tamkin visit the stock market where their mutuality is made evident. The fourth act shows Tommy eating lunch with Dr. Tamkin and Tommy's subsequent disillusion. In the final act there is the dramatic gathering of loose ends, a recapitulation of former actions, and a resolution of conflicts. Of course much has been omitted from this outline, but the major

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[4] Ibid., p. 161.

actions take place within this framework.

The function of this structure is evident, especially when Dostoyevski's passage is kept in mind: Dr. Adler fails Tommy even as Christ may be said to have failed man; then Tommy turns to Dr. Tamkin just as the Inquisitor says that man will "create for himself a mess of new miracles, this time all his own, and will bend his knee this time to the miracle of the witch-doctor. . . ." As a matter of fact, Tommy himself describes the plot early in the work when he reflects upon his father's unsympathetic attitude: "I wouldn't turn to Tamkin. . . . If I could turn to him."

The technique, then, is clearly allegorical. Bellow intends that Tommy's story be seen as a general condition of man beset by rejection from both divine and materialistic sources. And in a sense, there are shades of the old morality dramas here--body versus soul. Even as the body and soul fight over their respective influences on man, so there is a struggle between Dr. Tamkin and Dr. Adler as to whose constructions, whose teachings, shall prevail with Tommy. Dr. Adler makes his animosity toward the influence of Tamkin on his son quite clear in his warnings against trusting him. (40) Tamkin's opposition to Adler is less open, but it exists in his promises of a get-rich-quick formula as oppposed to the work-hard advice of Adler.

With his extended purposes, then, Bellow expands the

setting of Seize the Day in order that his allegory have a universal state. He manages this additional breadth and depth, first, by paralleling Spenser's The Fairie Queene and by drawing on the allegorical figure of Gloriana. The reader learns almost immediately that even as the quest of the Red Cross Knight begins with his setting forth from the court of Gloriana, so Tommy starts his day of fate when he steps out of the Hotel Gloriana. While there are few likenesses between these two protagonists, they do have common situations: both figures are involved in quests; there are confrontations to be suffered; their fields of action are filled with a confusion of guile, love, deceit, innocence, truth, falsehood, envy, lust, and other projections of humanity. Dr. Tamkin is a forest of confusing ambiguities in himself. Finally, both are victorious, although in the case of Tommy one must call again upon Sisyphus to understand the nature of his victory. Or better yet perhaps, learn to count the dubious blessings of being a man. However, through the use of Spenser's materials, Bellow serves notice that his work is to be an allegory. It is through Tommy's experiences that the allegory is carried out, a universal action dealing with no lesser subjects than man's relationship to society, self, and God.

Bellow extends his setting in yet another way. Again early in the novel one finds Tommy's world peopled

with figures and supplied with settings whose names are reminiscent of the long-ago and far-away. The lobby of the Hotal Glorania has "French drapes" (4); Tommy is wearing "a Countess Mara necktie" (5); "the Hotel Ansonia" is only a few blocks away and "it looks like a baroque palace from Prague or Munich" (5); Tommy's shirt is "a Jack Fagman--[from] Chicago" (5); in a window are boxes of cigars with "the gold-embossed portraits of famous men, Garcia, Edward the Seventh, Cyrus the Great" (6); Dr. Tamkin knows a "guy at the Hotel Pierre" (9); the talent scout, Maurice Venice, who is related to Martial Venice, works for Kaskaskia Films (19-20). And the names of other characters show a wide distribution of nationalities--Adler, Tamkin, Margaret, Olive, Paul, Perls, Rappaport, Rowland, Rubin, and Catherine. There is even an "Estonian woman with all her cats and dogs" (10) living at the Hotel Gloriana. Altogether, such exotic inclusions serve to transport the reader beyond geographical boundaries and, in the case of such names as Countess, Edward the Seventh, Cyrus the Great, and Martial, to set the matter deep in history, as if to say that the issues in Seize the Day, while especially evident at the moment, have really been operative throughout the history of man.

Through structure and setting, then, Bellow creates a field of action in which his characters may function in

their symbolic roles as guiding forces on Tommy. Such forces are Dr. Adler and Dr. Tamkin, both of whom assume a far greater meaning than those of father and counselor.[5] Bellow creates their further meanings largely through a linguistic ambivalence that in the case of Dr. Adler appears within the first few pages of the story. His role as divinity, probably God, is evident when his person is described:

> The handsome old doctor stood well above the other old people in the hotel. He was idolized by everyone. This was what people said: "That's old Professor Adler, who used to teach internal medicine. He was a diagnostician, one of the best in New York, and had a tremendous practice. Isn't he a wonderful-looking guy? It's a pleasure to see such a fine old scientist, clean and immaculate. He stands straight and understands everything you say. He still has all his buttons. You can discuss any subject with him." The clerks, the elevator operators, the telephone girls and waitresses and chambermaids, the management flattered and pampered him. That was what he wanted. He had always been a vain man. To see how his father loved himself sometimes made Wilhelm madly indignant. . . . The doctor had created his own praise. People were primed and did not know it. And what did he need praise for? He could be in people's thoughts for a moment; in and then out. He could never matter much to them [italics not in original]. (11-12)

The symbolic implications are clear: Dr. Adler's role as divinity is especially evident when he is described

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[5]For an interesting but overly-winding psychological interpretation of Seize the Day, which makes much of father-son motifs, see Daniel Weiss, "A Psychoanalytic Study on the Novel Seize the Day, By Saul Bellow," Psychoanalysis and American Fiction, ed. Irving Malin (New York: E. P. Dutton and Company, 1965), pp. 279 f.

as "idolized," a teacher of "internal medicine," "immaculate," and "created his own praise." This last phrase--"created his own praise"--is typical of much of Bellow's ambivalencies. It is, in a sense, but not in a very clear sense, appropriate to Dr. Adler as a character in his own right. Yet if the phrase is so read, it seems somewhat useless, at least gratuitous. If its function is symbolic, however, Bellow's intent is immediately evident: Dr. Adler, in addition to being Tommy's father, is God.

This lengthy description of Dr. Adler takes place in Tommy's mind before Dr. Adler actually makes his appearance. With his appearance, Bellow supports his role as God with at least four direct references to the Deity. Within the dialogue there are interspersed such introductory expletives as "God knows!" and "Lord knows why . . ." (33); "God, they have some queer elements in this hotel" (34); "God alone can tell why." (35) Before these pages and after, there is no further like references. It would seem that Bellow deliberately announces the allegorical arrival of Dr. Adler.

If Dr. Adler's function of God can be accepted, it would appear that Tommy, his son, must be seen as Christ. And there are some such vague indications. When Dr. Adler is hiding Tommy's financial failures by praising him to Mr. Perls, Tommy thinks, "It's Dad . . . who is the salesman.

He's selling me. He should have gone on the road"--again, a highly gratuitous remark, in view of Dr. Adler's background and profession, unless one interprets the comment in the light of Tommy as Christ "on the road," selling Christianity. Again, when Tommy is explaining his complaint against his former employers, he says:

> "I have to do something to protect myself. I was promised executive standing. . . . I was the one who opened the territory for them. I could go back for one of their competitors and take away their customers. My customers."
>
> "Would you offer a different line to the same people?" Mr. Perls wondered. (37)

In business jargon, Christ might be thought of as the one who "opened the territory." And in the same sense, all western cultures are "customers" of Christ. Then Mr. Perls' question, while appropriate enough to the conversation, could refer to the same point that Dostoyevski makes, that Christ's first "line" has no value or even a negative value, especially when Tommy answers Mr. Perls: "Why not? I know what's wrong with the Rojax product." (Rojax is the name of the company for which Tommy worked.) There are other suggestions of support for Tommy in this role, but none more telling than those cited. A point that should be kept in mind, however, is that Bellow's symbolic patterns are often quite complex and overlapping, not restricted to one-to-one relationships. Hence, it is possible that Bellow intends Tommy as Christ, but perhaps only in the sense of his

suffering and his possible disillusionment with his historical and theological roles.

In any case, a more substantial argument can be made for Tommy as Adam or mankind in general; for example, in the passage just cited, Adam was promised "executive standing," or perhaps immortality; and Adam certainly "opened up the territory." Then at another point Tommy reflects upon his decision to change his name:

> The changed name was a mistake, and he would admit it as freely as you liked. But this mistake couldn't be undone now, so why must his father continually remind him of how he had sinned? It was too late. He would have to go back to the pathetic day when the sin was committed. And where was that day? Past and dead. Whose humiliating memories were there? His and not his father's. (25)

In one sense, these words fit Tommy as Dr. Adler's son, for Tommy has made mistakes that his father never ceases to recall. Yet here, too, are dramatized implications of Adam and his fall, of the tortured questionings to which man is ever subjecting himself and to which he is also ever subjecting God.

The complexity of Bellow's symbolism is further evident in the references to Tommy's mother. There are strong hints that she may be identified as Eve, which would be appropriate to Tommy as mankind, but hardly in keeping with him as Adam, nor in keeping with him as Christ, nor with Dr. Adler as God, inasmuch as she was his wife. In any case, Tommy's thoughts on his own inheritances are

interesting:

> In middle age you no longer thought such thoughts about free choice, Then it came over you that from grandfather you had inherited such and such a head of hair which looked like honey when it whitens or sugars in the jar; from another, broad thick shoulders; an oddity of speech from one uncle, and small teeth from another, and the gray eyes with darkness diffused even into the whites, and a wide-lipped mouth like a statue from Peru. Wandering races have such looks, the bones of one tribe, the skin of another. From his mother he had gotten sensitive feelings, a soft heart, a brooding nature, a tendency to be confused under pressure. (25)

Here, through a juxtaposition of anthropology and the specific inherited characteristics of Tommy, Bellow attempts to place the mother deep in history or even in pre-history. Then the shift from the anthropological physicalities to the emotional qualities of Tommy and his mother are interesting. One might assume that since Tommy is the protagonist, and therefore the primary focus, that Bellow is more interested in just these qualities than he is in the other, that he merely uses the facts of anthropology in order to show the universal and timeless intent of his subject. Aside from technique, however, the description in the last line could well be applied to Eve, especially in the last phrase. Although Tommy, too, has "a tendency to be confused under pressure," if his mother is meant to be allegorical, and if she is to be placed in the far distant past, Eve's fatal decision may be seen as a result of the same tendency.

Whatever the identity of Tommy's mother, if we can accept Dr. Adler as divinity and Tommy as mankind, the

relationship that exists between the two is precisely that described by Dostoyevski. With God's inability or refusal to alleviate man's anxieties or to actively sympathize with his weaknesses and limitations, there is a loss of mutual trust, respect, and communication. This complete lack of understanding shows itself, for example, when Tommy and his father are discussing the death of Tommy's mother:

> Then Wilhelm had said, "Yes, that was the beginning of the end, wasn't it, Father?"
>
> Wilhelm often astonished Dr. Adler. Beginning of the end? What could he mean--what was he fishing for? Whose end? The end of family life? The old man was puzzled but he would not give Wilhelm an opening to introduce his complaints. He had learned that it was better not to take up Wilhelm's strange challenges. So he agreed pleasantly, for he was a master of social behavior, and said, "It was an awful misfortune for us all."
>
> He thought, what business has he to complain to <u>me</u> of his mother's death? (28)

Interpreted allegorically, this whole passage has echoes of the enduring problem of free will. On the one hand, Tommy as mankind, as a child of Eve, is vaguely blaming Dr. Adler as God for the death of his mother. Yet Dr. Adler as God never questions but that free will was operative when Eve made her mortal choice. He is surprised and puzzled by Tommy's insinuations. It never for a moment occurs to him that he (He) might have been involved in the event. Communication and understanding between these two have reached such a point of deterioration that hints as to responsibility

are merely regarded as "strange challenges," which Dr. Adler as father, and most appropriately here, as God, refuses to dignify with answers. And as for Tommy as man, he is equally puzzled as he timidly, obliquely, searches for those answers.

In the last few pages of the novel, in the final act, Tommy makes one more attempt to seek help from his father. Here, Bellow turns to Aeneas again, or to the mythological tales in which the hero seeks wisdom and advice in Hell. Tommy finds his father deep in the basement of the hotel taking a steam bath. Under the guidance of Dr. Tamkin, Tommy has just suffered a ruinous loss on the stock market:

> "You took some gamble? You lost it? Was it Tamkin? I told you, Wilky, not to build on that Tamkin. Did you? I suspect--."
>
> "Yes, Dad, I'm afraid I trusted him."
>
> . . . .
>
> "Well, I won't remind you how often I warned you. It must be very painful."
>
> . . . .
>
> "Nobody likes bad luck, eh Dad?"
>
> "So! It's bad luck now. A minute ago it was stupidity."
>
> "It is stupidity--it's some of both. It's true that I can't learn. But I--"
>
> "I don't want to listen to details," said his father. "And I want you to understand that I'm too old to take on new burdens. I'm just too old to do it. And people who will just wait for help--must <u>wait</u> for help. They have got to stop waiting."

"It isn't all a question of money--there are other things a father can give a son." He lifted up his gray eyes and his nostrils grew wide with a look of suffering appeal that stirred his father even more deeply against him.

He warningly said to him, "Look out, Wilky, you're tiring my patience very much."

"I try not to. But one word from you, just a word, would go a long way. I've never asked you for very much. But you are not a kind man, Father. You don't give the little bit I beg for."

He recognized that his father was now furiously angry. Dr. Adler started to say something, and then raised himself, and gathered the sheet over him as he did so. His mouth opened, wide, dark, twisted, and he said to Wilhelm, "You want to make yourself into my cross. But I am not going to pick up a cross. I'll see you dead, Wilky, by Christ, before I let you do that to me." (108-110)

With clear echoes of the crucifixion, then, Bellow shows the end of all hope that this relationship can come to anything of value, as Tommy walks slowly away, "a helpless captive to misery." (110)

It is quite clear that Dr. Tamkin, to whom Tommy turns in the face of his fathers rejections, is Dostoyevski's "witch-doctor." Bellow certainly describes him in this light. He is "shrewd and wizard-like . . . secret, potent." (64) "There was a hypnotic power in his eyes." (62) He smiles "like a benevolent magician." (81) Even his bathrobe is patterned with "lightning streaks of red and white." (106) And the fraudulent deceit is evident in his physical appearance, which, if not intended to be that of the devil, is surely devil-ish:

> What a creature Tamkin was when he took off his hat! The indirect light showed the many complexities of his bald skull, his gull's nose, his rather handsome eyebrows, his vain mustache, his deceiver's brown eyes. . . . His bones were peculiarly formed, as though twisted twice where the ordinary human bone was turned only once, and his shoulders rose in two pagoda-like points. At mid-body he was thick. He stood pigeon-toed, a sign perhaps that he was devious or had much to hide. The skin of his hands was aging, and his nails were moonless, concave, clawlike, and they appeared loose. His eyes were as brown as beaver fur and full of strange lines. (62)

This is the creature of Tommy's hopes for a "mess of new miracles."

In order to serve his expanded purposes, those of showing the stretch of man's octopus-like reach for "new miracles," in the absence of a helpful divinity, Bellow adds many distinctive touches to Dostoyevski's figure. Tamkin, it was noted earlier, is a little bit of everything --psychologist, psychiatrist, poet, broker, gambler, counselor, traveler, philosopher. He is still more--ex-husband, doctor, lover, benefactor, teacher of Greek, scientist and inventor, with hints, from himself of course, of even wider knowledge and abilities. He generously and confidently offers the benefits of his never-ending capacities to Tommy. He assures him, "I read the best of literature, science and philosophy. . . . Korzybski, Aristotle, Freud, W. H. Sheldon,[6] and all the great poets." (72) Of course Bellow

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[6] See Appendix B.

intends here a catalogue of grails which man everlastingly seeks in his pursuit of happiness and well-being, quite hopelessly because they offer no satisfactory answer to "the heart's ultimate need" by which Bellow means a feeling of place, of value, with the integrity of identity. They are only toys that amuse, dry grails, empty of any real and lasting nourishment. Tamkin is a combination of all the elixirs and panaceas for whatever ails man.

In Tamkin there are undertones of the alter-ego, the same device Bellow uses in the figure of Allbee in The Victim. At several points in the story there are strong hints that Tamkin is intended, at least on one level, to be a creature of Tommy's imagination; and it will be remembered that in Dostoyevski's passage, it was suggested, for the lack of miracles, man "was bound to create for himself a mess of new miracles, this time all his own." When Tamkin, the "confuser of the imagination," (93) but from whom "one could always get some truth," (63) (like Allbee) tells Tommy of his dead wife, a suicide, he adds:

> "I tried everything in my power to cure her. . . . my real calling is to be a healer. I get wounded. I suffer from it. I would like to escape from the sickness of others, but I can't. I am only on loan to myself, so to speak. I belong to humanity." (95)

And he belongs to that part of humanity that is Tommy. Tommy's revelation that all the time it was he who was carrying the burden of Tamkin, rather than Tamkin's carrying him,

is appropriate to the discovery of the alter-ego. One is reminded of Thoreau's townsmen who spent their lives pushing their "seventy-five foot by forty" barns down the "road of life," never doubting that their happiness depended on those barns, never discovering, as Tommy does, that the barn is their curse, even as Tamkin is Tommy's sickness.

There is a pattern to Bellow's alter-egos: they always prevail over their counterparts just to the degree that they are allowed to do so. So it is with Tamkin. In the course of one of his wild stories, Tommy thinks, ". . . if you encouraged Tamkin by believing him, or even if you refrained from questioning him, his hints [of his measureless experiences] became more daring." (80) At one point Tommy gets annoyed:

> "Damn it, Tamkin!" said Wilhelm roughly. "Cut that out. I don't like it. Leave my character out of consideration. Don't pull any more of that stuff on me. I tell you I don't like it."

Tamkin therefore went no further; he backed down. (88) It was the same with Allbee. Bellow is saying again that man controls his own existence, if he <u>will</u> control it, and not leave it at the mercy of outer forces.

It is Tamkin who provides the irony of Bellow's title <u>Seize the Day</u>. Again and again, he urges Tommy to act on the moment. Within the first few pages, Tommy recollects some advice given by this financial wizard:

> "The whole secret of this type of speculation . . . is in the alertness. You have to act fast--buy it and sell it; sell it and buy in again. But quick. Get to the window and have them wire Chicago at just the right second. Strike and strike again. Then get out the same day." (8-9)

And when he is explaining economic efficiency, he says:

> "The spiritual compensation is what I look for. Bringing people into the here-and-now. The real universe. That's the present moment. The past is no good to us. The future is full of anxiety. Only the present is real--the here-and-now. Seize the day." (66)

Later he urges, "Be in the present. Grasp the hour, the moment, the instant." (90) The irony of such advice lies in its truth, but in a way that Tamkin never suspects. His counsel is founded on materialistic achievement, on making one's way in an envious, belligerent world. At the end, Tommy discovers another meaning of the phrase, and the one Bellow intends: "Love that well which thou must leave ere long." Again, Bellow is stating a case seemingly beyond dispute--Seize the day, for the night cometh. Choose dignity, live in harmony, complete your own life: don't waste it lamenting and suffering from past mistakes, from old and lost constructions (Dr. Adler) and disillusioning new constructions (Tamkin).

Ultimately, with the loss of hope in his father and with the realization of the nature of the tie between him and Tamkin, Tommy is thrown back on his own inner resources. He is now free. Bellow prepares for this moment all through

the novel as he projects Tommy's struggle for survival through the use of the imagery of water. Within the first dozen lines of the book, the setting is imagerially formed:

> . . . the elevator sank and sank. Then the smooth door opened and the great dark red uneven carpet that covered the lobby billowed toward Wilhelm's feet. In the foreground the lobby was dark, sleepy. French drapes like sails kept out the sun. (3-4)

From this moment on, Tommy is in deep water, calling and reaching for help, but unable to find a lifeline. Moreover, Tommy is not unaware of his situation: he feels as if he were drowning. Perhaps he is even in some strange way attracted to the idea, as if it were a deliverance. In any case, he remembers and pronounces beautiful and compelling the line from "Lycidas": "Sunk though he be beneath the wat'ry floor." (13) This is not to say that Tommy has suicidal tendencies, only that vaguely and quite unconsciously he identifies himself with the drowned Lycidas.

Bellow even uses this imagery to trace the movements of his protagonist. After a violent scene with Dr. Adler, Tommy is made aware of the presence of Dr. Tamkin: "The sight of Dr. Tamkin brought his quarrel with his father to a close. He found himself flowing into another channel." (57) Here, however, the waters are equally dangerous, and he wonders shortly afterwards, "But what have I let myself in for? The waters of the earth are going to roll over me." (77)

The reader especially feels the aptness of this water

image when Tommy struggles but fails to establish some understanding and caring between himself and his world. In a particularly disagreeable scene with his father, his father asks, "What do you want from me? What do you expect?" To which Tommy cries:

> "What do I expect?" He felt as though he were unable to recover something. Like a ball in the surf, washed beyond reach, his self-control was going out. "I expect help." (53)

Even like anyone drowning, Tommy wants and expects help. Of course he receives none from the merely annoyed Dr. Adler, and Tommy, leaving the scene, is "horribly worked up . . . his neck and shoulders, his entire chest ached, as though they had been tightly tied with ropes. He smelled the salt odor of tears in his nose." (56) Recalling Lycidas a second time, he wonders if it would not be better for him to sink beneath the watery floor: ". . . would that be tough luck, or would it be good riddance?"[7]

There is an irony evident in Bellow's imagery. Water is precisely the cure that Dr. Adler recommends for Tommy. He uses it himself, constantly lauding its beneficial affects: ". . . there's nothing better than hydrotherapy when you come right down to it. Simple water has a calming effect and would do you more good than all the barbiturates in the world." (44) Later the reader is told, "It was all

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[7]See Appendix C.

he had to give to his son and he gave it once more. 'Water and exercise,' he said." (45) In the final scene with his father, Tommy is greeted with the question as to whether or not he has taken a swim yet. (77) All of this, of course, has echoes of baptismal rituals, which, coming from his father, Tommy rejects as hopelessly useless. Yet it is a kind of baptism that Bellow depicts as the setting for Tommy's rebirth. Tommy is at the funeral where he breaks down in great grief. As he looks down on the corpse of the stranger, "With great stifling sorrow, almost admiration, Wilhelm nodded and nodded." (117) As he gazes with new understanding:

> The flowers and lights fused ecstatically in Wilhelm's blind, wet eyes; the heavy sea-like music came up to his ears. It poured into him where he had hidden himself in the center of a crowd by the great and happy oblivion of tears. He heard it and sank deeper than sorrow, through torn sobs, and cries toward the consummation of his heart's ultimate need. (118)

Here, Tommy indeed sinks "beneath the wat'ry floor," sinking "deeper than sorrow" to the "heart's ultimate need." And one might recall the line from "Lycidas," "Sunk though he be beneath the wat'ry floor" with particular attention to the word "though." It is obviously Milton's intention that the drowned Lycidas shall rise spiritually, shall be reborn. So does Bellow intend that though "the sea-like music came up to his ears" and though he "sank deeper than sorrow," Tommy is to have just such a rebirth. For Tommy sinks <u>deeper</u> than

sorrow, not to sorrow, but beyond, to a certain peace. Interestingly enough, then, one of the major themes in the novel might well lie in the single line from Milton's elegy. In any case, it is Tommy's own tears that supply the waters for this baptism. They come from deep within, from his own resources, from the personal and immediately heartfelt understanding that man in his mortality has little choice but to seize the day. It would seem to be an ignominious condition, one in which all constructions turn to dust: but man in his subangelic power does have this choice--he can choose dignity to overcome the ignominy, along with Sisyphus, and live in harmony at least with himself. This is Tommy's revelation, and Bellow's answer to the Dostoyevskian dilemma. It is a revelation that calls for a revision of the Horatian _carpe diem_ theme. In his ode (I, 11), Horace urges that the day be seized because the future is unknown. Bellow makes the same plea, but for a very different reason: let us seize the day because the future _is_ known.

CHAPTER V

"OH, MY CONDITION"

Millionaire Eugene Henderson, huge of frame and heavy of flesh, world-weary and life-weary to the point of extreme irascibility, is one of a large group of fictive heroes who "light out for the territory," in this case, Africa. As protagonist in Bellow's Henderson the Rain King[1] (1959), he states his case in the opening lines of the novel:

> What made me take this trip to Africa? There is no quick explanation. Things got worse and worse and worse and pretty soon they were too complicated.
>
> When I think of my condition at the age of fifty-five when I bought the ticket, all is grief. The facts begin to crowd me and soon I get a pressure on my chest. A disorderly rush begins--my parents, my wives, my girls, my children, my farm, my animals, my habits, my money, my music lessons, my drunkenness, my prejudices, my brutality, my teeth, my face, my soul! I have to cry, "No, no, get back, curse you, let me alone!" But how can they let me alone? They belong to me. They are mine. And they pile into me from all sides. It turns into chaos.
>
> However, the world which I thought so mighty an oppressor has removed its wrath from me. (5)

The passage will come into critical focus again, but for the moment it is the final line that should be noted. Here it would seem, superficially at least, that Bellow intends his novel to be a success story. That is, through

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[1]Saul Bellow, Henderson the Rain King (New York: Popular Library, 1963). All subsequent page citations in parenthesis are from this edition.

whatever experiences are in the offing, his protagonist has evidently achieved some measure of peace and contentment. This chapter has to do with that achievement, for its clarification is directly germane to the concept of man as subangelic.

As a general guide for this discussion, the narrative will be followed. Its essentials can be stated quite briefly. First, Eugene Henderson relates the story of the dismal circumstances under which he left for Africa. He then narrates his experiences with the natives of Arnewi, then with the Wariri, after which he recounts his departure for home.

First, however, since Bellow's point of view is extremely important to an understanding of his intentions toward his protagonist, it will be helpful to see some likenesses between Swift's _Gulliver's Travels_ and _Henderson the Rain King_.[2] Both protagonists are interested in medicine (Gulliver is a physician and Henderson wants to become one); both are placed beyond civilization through unforeseen circumstances; both visit fanciful peoples in strange cultures; both have extended philosophical discussions with the kings, queens, and princes of these cultures; both suffer experiences that shake their established worlds; and both return home in a condition far removed from that in which they had

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[2]See Appendix D.

set out. These are general parallels; but, as will be seen, they are by no means the only ones. Indeed in order to clarify many of his final meanings, Bellow invades Swift like a monarch. For now, the importance of recognizing Swift as an influence lies in understanding that even as the major meanings of Gulliver's Travels are to be found in the responses of Gulliver to his experiences, so do Bellow's intentions lie within the experiences of Henderson. As in Swift's work, the education of Bellow's protagonist has meaning only insofar as the reader brings his knowledge and insight to bear on the experiences of the protagonist, all of which will become clear in the discussion of this safari of the intellect.

In the opening passage of the novel, previously cited, the clear echoes of Melville's Ishmael serve as a general introduction to the motives behind Henderson's escape to Africa. As the chapter progresses, the likenesses between the two travelers become clearer. It would seem that Henderson is suffering from the same social and philosophical maladies that motivate Ishmael to sign on board the Pequod: both are afflicted with a morbid depression of the spirits, or, as Ishmael explains, his "Hypos" had "the upper hand"; and while Henderson doesn't exactly have a yen for "methodically knocking people's hats off" in the city of "old Manhatto," he does feel compelled to battle drunkenly the

state troopers of Danbury, Connecticut, as well as to argue unreasonably with his wife Lily, to alienate his son and daughter, to refuse his tenants heat during the winter, to fire his forty-five automatic at their cat, to shout over a petty disagreement in such a voice that the elderly maid succumbs to a heart attack, to raise pigs from which the only pleasure comes from their annoying presence to family and neighbors, and in a dozen other ways to continually harass family, friends, acquaintances, and community with his unpredictable, irrational, and often violent behavior. Then again, while he doesn't exactly join Ishmael in "pausing before coffin warehouses," the situation is much the same when he thinks of his "condition at the age of fifty-five. . . . [and] all is grief": both men are desperate in their longing to find some meaning to a turbulent life that is seemingly without purpose and that is quickly passing them by. It has been a long search for Henderson. Within a few paragraphs of the end of the novel when he tells of a job he had as a boy that called for him to ride a roller coaster with a bear named Smolak, he remembers his words to his boss: "We're two of a kind. Smolak was cast off and I am an Ishmael, too." (299) What could be more obvious?

Eugene Henderson is a rich, frustrated American running away from personal problems that soon take on implications of a well-recognized general condition, one far from

original in literature, that of a search for meaning amid a life of plenty. This means integrity, identity, utility and purpose, which depend on place and function. Henderson recognizes his displacement, for he even sees himself as inferior in value to his pigs:

> Taxwise, even the pigs were profitable. I couldn't lose money. But they were killed and they were eaten. They made ham and gloves and gelatin and fertilizer. What did I make? Why, I made a sort of trophy, I suppose. A man like me may become something like a trophy. (23)

And he painfully searches for an answer to his feelings of uselessness:

> What do you do with yourself if you have a temperament like mine? A student of the mind once explained to me that if you inflict your anger on inanimate things, you not only spared the living, as a civilized man ought to do, but you get rid of the bad stuff in you. This seemed to make good sense, and I tried it out. I tried with all my heart, chopping wood, lifing, plowing, laying cement blocks, pouring concrete, and cooking mash for the pigs. . . . It helped, but not enough. Rude begets rude, and blows, blows; at least in my case; it not only begot but it increased. Wrath increased with wrath. (23)

Here is Henderson trying to clean the Augean stables, trying to purge himself of a violent spirit through violent action. In any case, given the recognition of his situation, and all of his effort, there still seems to be no solution to his problem. His grief only flourishes.

All of this would seem to point to Henderson as symbolic of a group whose immediate necessities--food, shelter, clothing, and general well-being--have been met, but whose

need for peace of mind and sense of direction has not. As such, he is certainly representative of a segment of our nation. But that Bellow would not limit function so narrowly, that he would state Henderson's existence to be operative on a wider and deeper scale, is evident in the early part of the novel when he shows his protagonist to be the descendant of a rather select group of people. For example, Henderson imagines what bystanders are saying about him, as he sits on the beach idly shooting stones at bottles:

> Do you see that great big fellow with the enormous nose and mustache? Well, his great-grandfather was Secretary of State, his great-uncles were ambassadors to England and France, and his father was the famous scholar Willard Henderson who wrote that book on the Albigensians, a friend of William James and Henry Adams. (8)

And later when he is accounting for the immense proportions of his nose:

> I was once a good-looking fellow . . . but it certainly is a nose I can smell the world with. It comes down to me from the founder of my family. He was a Dutch sausage-maker and became the most unscrupulous capitalist in America. (74)

Bellow seems to be indicating that his protagonist is a product of the auspiciously successful, with that success based on such "high-minded" pursuits as politics, finance, science, history, and scholarship in general. However, lest Henderson be thought of as a phenomenon peculiar to this country, it will be noticed that his background includes diplomats whose lives are closely related to peoples abroad.

Furthermore, he is depicted as a world traveler, both as a soldier of World War II and as a civilian. He has lived in England, France, Italy, and Germany. (15-18) To this point, then, Henderson is probably to be seen as symbolic of affluent elements of western culture, but it must be remembered that by affluent Bellow would describe lives relatively rich and comfortably secure in a variety of ways--intellect, prestige, talent, money, authority. It is an affluence that could easily persuade its possessor that only his approach to life is the answer to any spiritual despondency, an affluence that would tend to shunt into the background, and there lie festering, the fundamental and universal fact of man's existence--his mortality.

Aside from the main theme of Henderson the Rain King, but certainly related to the novel, is Bellow's concern with just this seeming paradox--the spiritual malaise in an environment of sufficiency. In one of his book reviews, he states:

> The lives of the Castros with their new wealth stand as a warning that the heart may be empty as the belly fills. . . . now that technology extends the promise of an increase of wealth we had better be aware of a poverty of the soul as terrible as that of the body.[3]

This would seem to be close to the case of Henderson, who is

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[3]Saul Bellow, "The Uses of Adversity," The Reporter, 21:45 (October 1, 1959).

a "graduate of an Ivy League school" (6) and the inheritor of millions. In spite of his wealth and distinction (he is a holder of various war medals for valor), he is subjected to just such a "poverty of the soul," as if the removal of want has brought about the removal of a meaningful reality. That is, once victory over basic needs is achieved, what is there left to fight for? What remains of real concern? All other wants, in the last analysis, are luxuries, which, like all luxuries, pale into insignificance upon the acquiring.

Henderson would seem to be aware of all this, yet he does want. Again and again, he hears an inner voice that makes its demands:

> . . . there was a disturbance in my heart, a voice that spoke there and said _I want_, _I want_, _I want_! It happened every afternoon, and when I tried to suppress it it got even stronger. It only said one thing, _I want_, _I want_! (23)

What he wants, he does not know. He only knows that what he has, as much as that is, is not enough.

In any case, because things are in the saddle and ride mankind, Henderson, with Emersonian authority, leaves his wife and children to follow his genius, a most appropriate decision for anyone blessed with the name of Eugene. Africa is his destination; but "all travel is mental," says Henderson, (148) and this journey is no different. This Africa is an Africa of the mind. It is the _Pequod_ or

Lilliput, where values can be reconsidered and reality subjected to new perspectives.[4]

On the way to the land of the Arnewi, Bellow sets the scene for the deeper implications of his work. As Henderson and his native guide Romilayu trudge through the dry and barren land, ever deeper into the heart of Africa, Henderson says:

> I got clear away from everything, and we came into a region like a floor surrounded by mountains. It was hot, clear, and arid and after several days we saw no human footprints. Nor were there many plants; for that matter there was not much of anything here; it was all simplified and splendid, and I felt I was entering the past, no history or junk like that. The prehuman past. (42)

And a little later when he remembers this period:

> I was so sure that I had left the world. And who could blame me, after that trip across the mountain floor on which there was no footprint, the stars flaming like oranges, those miltimillion tons of exploding

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[4]Bellow offers several hints that Henderson is really on another Malvern Hill, as when he has Henderson describe the encounter in the desert with an old man who points the way to the Wariri village: ". . . the wrinkled old black-leather fellow who had sent us into the ambush. The one who had arisen out of the white rocks like the man met by Joseph. Who sent Joseph over to Dothen. Then the brothers saw Joseph and said, 'Behold, the dreamer cometh.' Everybody should study the Bible." (151) And again when Henderson describes his awakening one morning in the Wariri village: "As for the remoteness of the Wariri, this morning, owing to the peculiarity of my mental condition, the world was not itself; it took on the aspect of an organism, a mental thing, amid whose cells I had been wandering. From mind the impetus came and through mind my course was set. . . ." (139) There are other such hints; but as with Hawthorne's stories, for example, one can take Bellow's novel as dream or fact--the issues are not affected.

> gas looking so mild and fresh in the dark of the sky; and altogether that freshness . . . like autumn freshness. . . . (48)

Bellow places in conjunction here anthropological and geological pre-Adamic conditions, a fitting trail to follow if one is in search of essentials, and if one is trying to discover the roots of the soul's poverty.

As for the Arnewi village itself, Henderson comments again and again on its atmosphere of antiquity. He asks Romilayu, "How old is this place anyway? . . . I have a funny feeling from it. Hell, it looks like the original place. It must be older than the city of Ur." (43) Then his description of the landscape is significant. He repeatedly uses such terms as "glitter," "gold," "light," "brilliant," "radiant," and "sparkling," as if he were looking upon a life new-born, trailing clouds of glory. When Henderson explains to Prince Itelo, "Your Highness, I am really on a kind of quest," (58) it is clear that Bellow means this quest to take place deep in the Edenic past at the time of man's first appearance.

Appropriate to the antiquity of these peoples, the Arnewi are cattle raisers. When Henderson enters their village, he finds them in tears and sadness, helplessly wringing their hands, because their water supply has been contaminated by the mysterious appearance of a multitude of frogs. Since their cattle are not only sacred, but also

considered to be members of their families, their grief is deep. Their cattle are dying and nothing can be done. Romilayu explains the situation to Henderson:

> "Dem cry for dead cow," he said. And he explained the thing very clearly, that they were mourning for cattle which had died in the drought, and that they took responsibility for the drought upon themselves--the gods were offended, or something like that; a curse was mentioned. Anyway, as we were strangers they were obliged to come forward and confess everything to us, and ask whether we knew the reason for their trouble. (46)

There are two points of significance within this passage. First, the statement that "a curse was mentioned" is meaningful to the allegory, for only a few pages earlier Henderson is lying drunk on a bench in the Danbury station, swearing loudly, "There is a curse on this land. There is something bad going on. Something is wrong. There is a curse on this land!" (35) Although the specific nature of these curses is yet unknown, it is evident that the two are to be seen as one. They are really the same curse, with the grief in Danbury having its roots in man's beginnings. Bellow draws the analogy when Prince Itelo and Henderson are examining the cistern. When they are through with the inspection, Henderson says:

> As we turned away I felt as though that cistern of problem water with its algae and its frogs had entered me, occupying a square space in my interior, and sloshing around as I moved. (55)

The other point is this: the natives, says Henderson, "were obliged to come forward and confess everything to us, and

ask whether we knew the reason for their trouble." It is important here that the reader see beyond Henderson's interpretation of what is happening. It is Henderson who chooses these words, which are clearly echoes of the confessional, and his choice would indicate a presumption of his possessing qualities of divinity. In this connection, his entrance to the village is significant. To announce his arrival, like God, he sets a bush on fire with his cigarette lighter. The implications of the fact that <u>this</u> bush burns to a spot of ashes, unlike the one on Mt. Sinai, are lost on Henderson; but Bellow intends that the reader see the mistaken pretensions and unlimited assumptions that seem to be within the character of Henderson.

Among the Arnewi, Henderson meets Queen Willatale, who has achieved the high distinction of being named "woman o' Bittahness." When he exclaims that she hardly looks bitter in all her evident poise and comfort, with her huge mass obviously well cared for, Itelo explains:

> "Oh, happy! Yes, happy--bittah. Most bittah," said Itelo. . . . A Bittah was a person of real substance. You couldn't be any higher or better. . . . She had risen above ordinary human limitations and did whatever she liked because of her proven superiority in all departments. (67)

Henderson is highly impressed with the queen, and it is through his lavish descriptions that she comes into focus as an Earth symbol:

> To me she was typical of a certain class of elderly

> lady. . . . Good nature emanated from her; it seemed to puff out on her breath as she sat smiling with many small tremors of benevolence and congratulation and welcome. Itelo indicated that I should give the old woman a hand, and I was astonished when she took it and buried it between her breasts. . . . there was the calm pulsation of her heart participating in the introduction. This was as regular as the rotation of the earth . . . my mouth came open and my eyes grew fixed as if I were touching the secrets of life; but I couldn't keep my hand there forever and I came to myself and drew it out. Then I returned the courtesy, I held her hand on my chest and said, "Me Henderson. Henderson." The whole court applauded to see how fast I caught on. So I thought, "Hurray for me!" and drew an endless breath into my lungs. . . . The queen expressed stability in every part of her body. (64-65)

The symbology of Queen Willatale is rather obvious, but what might be overlooked is the Adamic role of Henderson; the "endless breath" that he draws marks the beginning of mankind.

But this man is plagued with problems. He feels that the queen can help him:

> I believed the queen could straighten me out if she wanted to; as if, any minute now, she might open her hand and show me the thing, the source, the germ--the cipher. The mystery, you know. I was absolutely convinced she must have it. The earth is a huge ball which nothing holds up in space except its own motion and magnetism, and we conscious things who occupy it believe we have to move too in our own space. We can't allow ourselves to lie down and not do our share and imitate the greater entity. You see, this is attitude. But now look at Willatale, the Bittah woman; she had given up such notions, there was no anxious care in her, and she was sustained. Why, nothing bad happened! On the contrary, it all seemed good! . . . It comforted me just to see her, and I thought I might learn to be sustained too if I followed her example. And altogether I felt my hour of liberation was drawing near when the sleep of the spirit was liable to burst. (71)

And Queen Willatale does indeed see to the roots of this

newcomer's longings:

> "Grun-tu-molani," the old queen said.
>
> "Say, you want to live. Grun-tu-molani. Man want to live." [Itelo translates.]
>
> "Yes, yes, yes! Molani. Me molani. She sees that? God will reward her, tell her, for saying it to me. I'll reward her myself. I'll annihilate and blast those frogs clear out of that cistern. . . . Not only I molani for myself, but for everybody. I could not bear how sad things have become in the world and so I set out because of this molani. Grun-tu-molani, old lady--old queen. Grun-tu-molani, everybody!" (76)

With joyous gratitude, Henderson, in a moment of illumination, couples his desire to live with the necessity to eliminate the frogs from the cistern. He is now eager to get started on what he considers to be his personal project. Feeling sure that he can help the Arnewi, he says to Itelo:

> "Itelo, you leave this to me," and [I] drew in a sharp breath between my teeth, feeling that I had it in me to be the doom of those frogs. . . . I realized that I would never rest until I had dealt with these creatures and lifted the plague. (55)

The prince allows him to do as he pleases, merely cautioning him, "Mr. Henderson. . . . Do not be carry away." To which Henderson replies, "Ha, ha, Prince--pardon me, but this is where you are wrong. If I don't get carried away I never accomplish anything." (78)

The remedy, as Henderson sees it, is a home-made bomb, which he fashions with an almost childish enthusiasm. He is a practical man, and here is a job he can do. With Yankee ingenuity, he uses his shoelace as a fuse, lighter

fluid on the fuse, powder from his bullets, and a flashlight case for the shell. He is going to blow the frogs out of the water. And he does, with results that are god-like as well as man-like in their indiscriminate destruction--the end of the cistern is blown out, too, and all the water escapes into the arid soil.

Henderson is overcome with grief and frustration. Once again his life stands revealed. He simply cannot understand his everlasting failure to achieve something of value. In tears he asks, "Why for once, just once! couldn't I get my heart's desire? I have to be doomed always to bungle." (99)

Bellow seems to be saying that this curse, born with Adam and traveling its course up to the present, leaving in its wake a poverty of the soul, is not to be lifted through the genius of scientific and technological achievement; that man in his prideful manipulation of the measurable is likely to be persuaded of god-like abilities and capacities that he does not possess; finally, that this blind and wilful misapprehension of his limited potentialities can drive man, in spite of good intentions, to destroy the value of life itself, just as the water loses value as it soaks the Arnewi sands. Briefly, Bellow would say that man is not God, and for him to mistake his human nature can only result in a disillusioning and despairing sickness of the heart.

While these are the general implications of Henderson's battle with the frogs, Bellow intends a more specific statement. Henderson actually undergoes an existential experience. It will be recalled that the plague of frogs is analogous to the curse that Henderson feels to be his particular burden. The frogs in the water (water being a symbol of life) are the equivalents of the voices within Henderson's life that cry I want, I want. The issue is the same: to rid life of its contaminating and frustrating elements, whether those elements be frogs or voices. But these frogs, and, by analogy, the voices, are a condition of life. They belong where they are. Bellow points to the issue when his protagonist notes how the frogs seem to fit in their environment:

> There really was a vast number of these creatures woggling and crowding, stroking along with the water slipping over their backs and their mottles, as if they owned their medium. (54)

And again:

> There in their home medium were the creatures, the polliwogs with fat heads and skinny tails and their budding little scratchers, and the mature animals. . . . (95)

It is difficult to say precisely what the frogs symbolize, but there is a hint in Bellow's descriptive references to "their emotional throats." (54, 79) In conjecture, they represent those elements within man that are the sources of his imaginative urgings, his intuitive quests, his cravings

for extensions of self, his dreams and desires, as well as his memories of past wrongs, his despairs and frustrations, and over all, the absolute negation of his deep longings for immortality.

In any case, Henderson accepts the Arnewi fears as his own problem, or he senses in the frogs a symbol of his own problem, and he is most anxious to destroy them in the attempt to purge himself. What he learns, of course, is that man is finally defined by his human condition, which includes his mortality. It is this illumination that suggests an existential discovery. Henderson's reactions to the catastrophe that he brings about are directly to the point:

> The explosion had blasted out the retaining wall at the front end. The big stone blocks had fallen and the yellow reservoir was emptying fast. "Oh! Hell!" I grabbed my head, immediately dizzy with the nausea of disaster, seeing the water spill like a regular mill race with the remains of those frogs. "Hurry, hurry!" I started to yell. "Romilayu! Itelo! Oh, Judas priest, what's happening! Give a hand. Help, you guys, help!" I threw myself down against the escaping water and tried to breast it back and lift the stones into place. The frogs charged into me like so many prunes and fell into my pants and into the open shoe, the lace gone. . . . It was a moment of horror. . . . Romilayu waded up beside me and did his best, but these blocks of stone were beyond our strength. . . . Anyway, the water was lost--lost! In a matter of minutes I saw (sickening!) the yellow mud of the bottom and the dead frogs settling there. . . . Under me the water of the cistern was turning to hot vapor and the sun was already beginning to corrupt the bodies of the frog dead. (97-98)

The words "dizzy with the nausea of disaster" call up the terms of Sartre and Kierkegaard in their attempt to

describe man's reaction to his discovery of his state of absurdity and, further, to describe the consequences of that discovery. Henderson's cry of "Oh! Hell!" which immediately precedes the above phrases, may be seen as Sartre's "cry of nauseé." Moreover, Henderson is "sickeningly" aware of the filth and corruption of the landscape and of the dead frogs around him, which is reminiscent of Sartre's description of the world as viewed through the eyes of the "absurd" man. Bellow's careful choice of the word "dizzy" is suggestive of Kierkegaard's term "the dizziness of freedom," which he uses to describe man's reaction to the responsibility that he inherits as a consequence of his discovery of freedom. If man is free, then he is responsible in his actions for no less than the fate of mankind. There are parallels in Henderson's case. It will be remembered that he is specifically allowed the freedom to act, the freedom to choose, in his decision to destroy the frogs. No one attempts to stop him. His "dizziness" comes as a painful illumination of his responsibility to the Arnewi.

There are even echoes of Camus in this passage when Henderson fails to lift up the blocks of stone, as if in his present state of chaos and confusion he is not yet ready to enact the role of Sisyphus. It will be seen that this failure has its sequel as the story progresses. Henderson's inability to estimate properly his mortal con-

dition is reflected in a line of poetry that Henderson finds returning to his thoughts again and again, either in its entirety or in part. The line reads, "I do remember well the hour that burst my spirit's sleep." (For example, pages 60, 61, 69, 70, 71, 188.) He feels that somehow the words are indicative of and perhaps harbingers of his own awakening and release from his spiritual bondage. The line is from Shelley's "Revolt of Islam," (l.31) a poem dedicated to a throwing off of customs and traditions that everlastingly exert a tyranny over the lives of mankind.[5] Shelley uses this particular line as he explains how he felt when he first saw below the superficial mores of his society and beyond the hypocritical pretensions being passed on from generation to generation that would deny the facts of man's nature, one of which is his mortality. There will be later occasions to refer to Bellow's use of this line, but for now the motto of the poem is especially to the point, not only to Shelley's work but to one of Bellow's major purposes in <u>Henderson the Rain King</u>:

> There is no danger to a man that knows
> What life and death is; there's not any law
> Exceeds his knowledge: neither is it lawful
> That he should stoop to any other law.

The first line and one-half is of particular significance here, for Henderson has yet to discover "what life and death

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[5]See Appendix E.

is." His condition springs from the judgment that took place in the Garden of Eden, that man shall die, that he is mortal. That is the source of his human condition. It is not, however, the source of his curse. He is the source of that. Not fully aware of "what life and death is," it is he who insists upon god-like illusions, refusing to come to terms with his human condition. Bellow gives numerous instances of this unconscious arrogance that seems to be deeply imbedded within the character of Henderson. The incident of the burning bush has been cited. Then at another point Henderson relates how, in his opinion, Itelo sees him as a totem pole or as "a human Galapagos turtle," (59) both indicative of his illusions of extended durability. Again, he is given to threats that could only be carried out by a Gulliver in Lilliput, such as the time he and Romilayu are taken prisoners as they approach the Wariri lands. He says of his captors, "For a small inducement I would have swept them up in my arms, the whole dozen or so of them, and run them over the cliff." (105) And a few sentences later, "I could have grabbed his gun and made scrap metal of it in one single twist. . . ." (106) His gift of a raincoat to Queen Willatale is also related to these illusions. This event is especially significant as it puts to use one of Bellow's favorite symbols--rain as "an emblem of the shared condition of all." Here, Henderson is setting himself up as

a power that will protect Queen Willatale from the rain, or from that shared human condition--mortality.

Shelley's line of poetry, then, would seem to be something of a still small voice, intermittently calling Henderson to reality, urging him to burst his spirit's sleep, and to awaken to his role in the drama of man. Until he does so, it is certain that he will be chasing phantoms of immortality which can lead only to a despairing negation of the powers that he does possess, and so to a useless admiration of the less-than-human. That is, when he is continually confronted by the failure of his attainment of the ideal, there is the inclination to renounce the real, his humanity. Such a result is evident as he relates his thoughts during this grief-filled period:

> I had been very downcast, what with the voice that said I want and all the rest of it. I had come to look upon the phenomena of life as so many medicines which would either cure my condition or aggravate it. But the condition! Oh, my condition! First and last that condition! It made me go around with my hand on my breast like the old pictures of Montcalm passing away on the Plains of Abraham. (58-59)

What he seems not to understand is that all of the medicines of human constructions will not cure him of his condition of mortality. Contrive and build as he will, compute and analyze as he might, the frogs will still be there. As for the frogs, it is little wonder that he envies them:

> They say the air is the final home of the soul, but I think that as far as the senses go you probably can't find a sweeter medium than water. So the life of those frogs must have been beautiful, and they fulfilled their ideal. . . . (79)

What Henderson fails to see is that the frogs have no ideal; therefore, they do not suffer the stretches of the imagination, constructing dreams of existence beyond their nature. "I should have been a pair of ragged claws," says Prufrock, with much the same envy of the less-than-human.

To this point, then, Bellow's protagonist would seem to be the archetype for all those beings who have discovered that the victory over the realities of physical need is not the final battle; that there is another obstacle to an unsullied existence, to a life without frogs, and that that obstacle is the reality of death, the fact of which is ever a check upon the most triumphant moment. Moreover, unlike the reality of want, this reality, the "I want" reality of Henderson, is always victorious; it greets man each morning with the sun in spite of his magnificent achievements the day before, leaving him in despair. More generally, of course, Bellow projects his protagonist in the role of all men in the process of examining their position in nature and coming to an existential illumination.

In the same way that Swift's meaning in Gulliver's Travels is complete only with Gulliver's several voyages, Bellow's purposes are dependent on both of Henderson's encounters in Africa, first with the Arnewi and then with the Wariri. That is, the two experiences are a whole. They supplement each other. This connection between the two

adventures is established by Bellow as soon as Henderson and Romilayu begin their long, hot journey to the land of the Wariri. Henderson's description of the landscape is significant: "Behind us the high mountains we had emerged from showed their crumbled peaks and prehistoric pines." (103) Ahead of them, however, "there was more wood on the mountains," and there are stone shapes of "towers and acropolises," (101) along with "giant spiders" whose webs are "set up like radar stations." (102) Then with their arrival at the Wariri village, Henderson notes "bigger buildings, some of them wooden," (105) with flowers and fences a part of the scene. Moreover, the social organization is relatively sophisticated, with advisers, police chiefs, soldiers, ministers, and other official positions that mark an advanced society. It is evident that Henderson is moving from a prehistoric culture, that of the Arnewi, to a culture that bears a greater resemblance to what is known today as civilization. And while it is impossible to name, date, and locate this civilization, the use of such terms as "radar" would indicate that Bellow intends at least to include within his scope elements of contemporary civilization. In any case, the contrast seems to function in the interests of bringing Henderson's problems up to date, offering new perspectives on the same issues.

Through a somewhat detailed analysis of the two major

actions, in Wariri land, Bellow's foremost aims may at least be conjectured. The first of these actions has to do with Henderson's appointment as the rain king. Here is the situation: King Dahfu, with whom Prince Itelo had gone to college in Beirut, and of whom Itelo had spoken to Henderson several times, invites Henderson to be present at the rain ritual. The Wariri need water too, although not so desperately as the Arnewi. The ritual consists of two parts: first, Dahfu and a young lady play a nightmarish game of catch with two skulls which Henderson finds out later to be the remains of Dahfu's father and grandfather. While Henderson cannot help admiring the grace and skill exhibited by Dahfu and his opponent, he feels there is something ominous about the game. The main part of the ceremony is equally weird. A large number of wooden gods are placed in the center of an arena. These idols are whipped, kicked, and subjected to all kinds of indignities by a large number of the Wariri people, all of this much to the joyful shouts of the audience. Then, one by one, the figures are picked up and carried to another location some twenty feet away. Finally, only two figures are left, Hummat the mountain god and Mummah the goddess of clouds. One of the local strong men manages to move Hummat, but he fails in his effort to budge Mummah, the larger of the two. Henderson offers and then even begs to be of assistance; he succeeds:

> I stood still. There beside Mummah in her new situation I myself was filled with happiness. I was so gladdened by what I had done that my whole body was filled with soft heat, with soft and sacred light. The sensations of illness I had experienced since morning were all converted into their opposites. The same unhappy feelings were changed into warmth and personal luxury. . . . My spirit was awake and it welcomed life anew. Damn the whole thing! Life anew! I was still alive and kicking and I had the old grun-tu-maloni. . . . I went back to sit beside Dahfu's hammock and wiped my face with a handkerchief, for I was annointed with sweat. (171)

So with this epiphany does Henderson burst his spirit's sleep. He is now Sungo, or rain king. And with the use of the terms "sacred light" and "annointed with sweat," Bellow would have it understood that this is an experience of depth, a spiritual enlightenment of great significance. Bellow also intends a comparison here between Henderson's failure with the Arnewi and his success with the Wariri. The differences are highly functional. In the case of Mummah, Henderson relies only on his own strength, contrary to his exhibition of technical ingenuity with the frogs. Obviously Bellow is saying that the bursting of the spirit's sleep must be accomplished by man's own resources. "I had the old grun-tu-maloni," he shouts, and he feels "life anew," but only because he of himself worked at it. He of himself did something of value.

There are other implications in this event. In the "Revolt of Islam," in the first several lines of the third stanza of the Introduction, Shelley writes:

> Thoughts of great deeds were mine, dear
> Friend [Mary Godwin], when first
> The clouds which wrap this world from
> Youth did pass.
> I do remember well the hour which burst
> My spirit's sleep.

This is precisely what has happened to Henderson, for it will be remembered that Mummah is goddess of the clouds. He moves the clouds which had wrapped his world in the same way that the world is wrapped or hidden from the child. He comes to an awareness much like Wordsworth describes in his Tintern Abbey ode when the poet explains, "For I have learned/To look on nature, not as in the hour/Of thoughtless youth. . . ." And if for the moment we can return to the Arnewi, it is Queen Willatale who informs Henderson that he is still looking at the world as a child might. As Itelo translates it, "She say . . . world is strange to a child. You not a child, sir." (75) But Henderson has lived the vision of a child, what with his world wrapped in clouds, not knowing "what life and death is."

To this point, then, it would seem that Henderson's experiences have been a clearing away project, a pushing aside of the dead wood that he has been stumbling over, namely, the clutter and confusion of the mind of a man unwilling or unable to see himself as a human being, to see himself without illusions and without the need for mad, furious constructions to support those illusions. And when the rains come down in deluge, Bellow is once again depicting

this purgation of confusion through a dramatization of the shared condition of humanity.

Henderson's triumphant happiness, however, is short-lived. No sooner is he appointed Sungo than he is subjected to indignities that completely shatter his spirit. He is stripped of his clothing, garbed in a few thin weeds, and is forced to become a part of a wild, howling mob that dashes about the village. His bare feet are bruised and cut, he is lashed by the blind, frenzied and indiscriminate whips, and finally he is seized and thrown into a muddy, stinking cattle pond:

> Nor was any humor intended. All was done in great earnestness. I came, dripping stale mud, out of the pond. I hoped at least this would cover my shame, for the flimsy grasses, flying, had left everything open. (176)

Bellow's intentions are clear here. He is saying that the first reaction of man upon the realization of his humanness is a feeling of pain, degradation, and shame in his spiritual nakedness, just as Adam and Eve felt a like reaction when their mortality was established. Henderson's arising from the ooze and mud is an obvious reference to man's origins, as well as an indication of Henderson's final immersion into the facts of his own existence. As he surveys the effects of his "life anew," these facts appear most brutal and discouraging:

> This is how I became the rain king. I guess it served me right for mixing into matters that were none of my

> damned business. But the thing had been irresistible, one of those drives which there was no question of fighting. And what had I got my self into? What were the consequences? On the ground floor of the palace, filthy, naked, and bruised, I lay in a little room. The rain was falling, drowning the town, dropping from the roof in heavy fringes, witchlike and gloomy. Shivering, I covered myself with hides and stared with circular eyes, wrapped to the chin in the skins of unknown animals. (180)

In a Lear-like setting, and certainly with Lear-like implications of the stripping of man down to essentials, Henderson looks like nothing so much as a half-drowned tarsier, with its staring "circular eyes." He has reached the depths. But it must be understood that these are not the depths of understanding like those that confront Lear. It is the reader who sees while Henderson experiences. When Romilayu asks him, "Whu fo' you did it, sah?"--Henderson can offer no explanation:

> "Oh, Romilayu . . . if I could explain that I wouldn't be where I am today. . . . The whole thing is so peculiar the explanation will have to be peculiar too. Figuring will get me nowhere, it's only illumination that I have to wait for." And thinking how black things were and how absent any illumination was I sighed and moaned again. (181)

In any case, with the bursting of his spirit's sleep and with the shattering beginnings of his "life anew," Henderson turns to King Dahfu, who introduces him to the extensions of grun-tu-maloni. Dahfu tells him:

> "I know that Arnewi expression. . . . Yes I have been there, too, with Itelo. I understand what this grun-tu-maloni implies. Indeed I do. . . . Granted, grun-tu-maloni is much, but it is not alone sufficient. Mr. Henderson, more is required. I can show you something

> now--something without which you will never understand thoroughly my special aim nor my point of view." (193)

Thus begins another descent into the depths toward illumination, for Dahfu takes Henderson to a chamber deep in the underground where he keeps Atti, a lioness. Henderson is half out of his mind with fear, but Dahfu insists that he become friends with Atti. Many hours (and many pages) are spent in these surroundings, with Dahfu and Henderson philosophizing on the nature of man, although it is Dahfu who is the instructor. Briefly, it is Dahfu's contention that one may become whatever he chooses. He explains to his student:

> "It is all a matter of having a desirable model in the cortex. For the noble self-conception is everything. For as conception is, so the fellow is. Put differently, you are in the flesh as your soul is. And in the manner described a fellow really is the artist of himself." (237)

Day after day there follow lion lessons with Dahfu assuring Henderson that if he acts like a lion, he will take on the attributes of the lion. He will achieve the fearless equanimity of Atti because, as he explains, "Observe that Atti is all lion. Does not take issue with the given. Is one hundred per cent within the given." (233) In spite of his doubts, Henderson gets down on his hands, posterior in the air, balances on his toes, and roars like a lion, all of the time following Atti and trying to imitate her every move. Yet he never manages a great deal of faith: "I would

never make a lion, I knew that; but I might pick up a small gain here and there in the attempt." (263) His admiration for Dahfu is the only thing that keeps him at his transformative efforts.

Henderson does indeed have a great deal of faith in Dahfu as a person because, to his mind, here is one man who faces the world and its reality without illusion and totally without fear, in short, with the courage of a lion.

> Why . . . there's something about danger that doesn't perplex that guy. Look at all the things he has to fear, and still look at the way he lies on that sofa. . . . But on the table near him he has those two skulls used at the rain ceremony, one his father's and the other his grandfather's. (246)

So Dahfu seems to live the lesson that Henderson learned when he burst his spirit's sleep. In the midst of life he is in death. He knows "what life and death is," and keeps ever-present reminders about as a part of that existence. It is the attitude of Atti, acting "one hundred per cent within the given," accepting precisely that which one is and no more. Yet, again, Bellow shows his protagonist as a doubtful student. He simply cannot share Dahfu's confidence:

> But then what could an animal do for me? In the last analysis? Really? A beast of prey? Even supposing that an animal enjoys a natural blessing? We had our share of this creature-blessing until infancy ended. But now aren't we required to complete something else--project number two--the second blessing? I couldn't tell such things to the king, he was so stuck on lions. (255)

To understand the full significance of the lion

symbology, it must be recalled that the Wariri system of political progression is based on this animal. As Dahfu explains, when Henderson is envying him all of the attention he receives from his many wives:

> "These same ladies, so inordinate of attention, will report me [when he has lost his youthfulness and strength] and then the Bunam who is chief priest here, with other priests of the association, will convey me out into the bush and there I will be strangled. . . . I am telling you with utmost faithfulness what a king of us, the Wariri, may look forward to. The head priest will attend until a maggot is seen upon my dead person and he will wrap it in a slice of silk and bring it to the people. He will show it in public pronouncing and declaring it to be the king's soul, my soul. Then he will re-enter the bush and, a given time elapsing, he will carry to town a lion's cub, explaining that the maggot has now experienced a conversion into a lion. And after another interval, they will announce to the people the fact that the lion has converted into the next king. This will be my successor. (139-40)
>
> . . . .
>
> Well, then . . . this very young animal, set free by the Bunam, the successor king has to capture it within a year or two when it is grown." (186)

Dahfu's authority, then, indeed his very existence, is founded upon the contrived relationship between him and lions. And so taken is he with this relationship that his only real pleasure seems to come from the strengthening of this relationship. Dahfu seems to look upon his people with extreme indifference, even his mother, whom he rarely bothers to see. In fact, at times he shows only disdain for those about him.

In view of all the winding philosophical discussions

between Dahfu and Henderson, concerning man and his life and destiny, Bellow's purposes are apt to get lost in the confusion. But essentially what Bellow has in mind here, with Dahfu and his lions, is the same thing that Swift depicts in the relationship that evolves between Gulliver and the Houyhnhnms. Gulliver, too, reaches the point at which humanity seems inferior to the animal, in his case, horses. And just like Gulliver, Dahfu attempts to imitate and even to become the animal. What Bellow does, however, is to introduce a healthy doubt as to the efficacy of this animal-human relationship, although, as Henderson says, he "might pick up a small gain here and there."

In order to understand more clearly the position of Dahfu in this story, it is necessary to go into some detail concerning the lioness Atti and Dahfu's final days. Atti is _persona non grata_ to all of the Wariri except Dahfu. She is an imposter. She is not the lion that holds the spirit of Dahfu's predecessor. However, Dahfu will not forego her companionship because he feels that she is largely responsible for his strength of spirit and for his ability to live "one hundred per cent within the given." Toward the end of the novel, the lion that is thought to hold the "right" spirit is located, and Dahfu must try to capture it. He invites Henderson to share the extremely dangerous venture. Finally all is re[illegible]. Perched on a precarious strip of wood,

high above the trap into which this lion is driven, Dahfu prepares the net with which he is to make the capture. Henderson, alongside Dahfu, related the scene:

> Then, at the very doors of consciousness, there was a snarl and I looked down from this straw perch--I was on my knees--into the big, angry, hair-framed face of the lion. It was all wrinkled, contracted; within those wrinkles was the darkness of murdur. The lips were drawn away from the gums, and the breath of the animal came over me, hot as oblivion, raw as blood. I started to speak aloud. I said, "Oh my God, whatever You think of me, let me not fall under this butcher shop. Take care of the king. Show him Thy mercy." And to this, as a rider, the thought added itself that this was all mankind needed, to be conditioned into the image of a ferocious animal like the one below. I then tried to tell myself because of the clearness of those enraged eyes that only visions ever got to be so hyper-actual. But it was no vision. The snarling of this animal was indeed the voice of death. And I thought how I had boasted to my dear Lily how I loved reality. "I love it more than you do," I had said. But oh, unreality! Unreality, unreality! That has been my scheme for a troubled but eternal life. But now I was blasted away from this practice by the throat of the lion. His voice was like a blow at the back of my head. (271-72)

Here is reality. Here is the truth that Henderson has always felt comes in blows. (22, 188) This lion is death itself, not an Atti ("Compared with this creature, Atti was no bigger than a lynx.") (272) that one plays games with, deceiving himself that he is living with the truth well in hand. And the idea that mankind should for one moment allow itself to be cast into such an image horrifies Henderson. Even Dahfu could not completely know this vision. How ironic that he places such a high value on Atti, who turns out to be just another construction to shield him from the

fact itself, and ironic too when he urges Henderson to learn from Atti: "The poet says, 'The tigers of wrath are wiser than the horses of instruction.' Let us embrace lions also in the same view." (230) Well, Dahfu is killed by this lion in an embrace of lightning-clawed murder, as if Bellow is saying that to base one's existence and position on the fiction of a claimed animal nature can only result in death. Besides, it turns out that the lion isn't the right one anyway. So perhaps Bellow intends the reader to understand that the whole Wariri system is a fiction through which Dahfu is deceived into destroying himself.

To bring the story to a close, Dahfu, as he is dying, tells Henderson that as Sungo he is the next king. But he and Romilayu manage to escape this fate; and after several days of agonizing travel, on foot, subsisting on worms and locusts, they return to civilization. Before leaving the Wariri, however, Henderson insists on taking the lion cub that was staked out by the corpse of Dahfu, the cub that is supposed to hold within it the soul of the dead king. Bidding Romilayu good-bye, Henderson, with his cub, flies toward home. On the plane he makes friends with a small boy, a refugee, an orphan "bound for Nevada with nothing but a Persian vocabulary." (300) The boy is going to live with some people who are adopting him. He and the lion cub are Henderson's only companions. When the aircraft sets

briefly, and significantly in Newfoundland, Henderson playfully and joyfully takes the boy on his back and runs, leaping and laughing, around the plane:

> And the lion? He was in it, too. Laps and laps I galloped around the shining and riveted body of the plane. . . . The great, beautiful propellers were still, all four of them. I guess I felt it was my turn now to move, and so went running--leaping, pounding, and tingling over the pure white lining of the gray Arctic silence. (301)

Henderson's two visits in Africa really make for a whole as far as Bellow's intentions go. If understood as a whole, it seems that once again Bellow puts his protagonist through experiences that suggest the subangelic position of man. First, we see through Henderson's life with the Arnewi that man is not divinity, is not God. On the other hand, as Henderson lives with Dahfu and the Wariri, it is clear that neither is he animal. One cannot become an animal any more than can one become God. Perhaps there is a little of both in man, as Bellow seems to hint when he gives to Henderson as companions the cub and the boy who, Henderson sees, is "still trailing his clouds of glory." But Henderson adds to this observation, "I dragged mine on as long as I could till it got dingy, mere tatters of gray fog. <u>However, I always knew what it was</u> [italics not in original]," (300) as if to say that while he has been divested of painful and hopeless illusions of immortal divinity, he has not been reduced to the animal state that denies all the implications of these

"clouds of glory," perhaps his god-like reason, his imagination, and most of all his ability to love. For within the last few paragraphs, he asserts, "Once more. Whatever gains I ever made were always due to love and nothing else." (299)

In any case, the optimism of Bellow can be seen if the return of Henderson is compared with the return of Gulliver. Swift's protagonist is shattered beyond repair. He has seen his yahoo nature and cannot recover from the vision. His only salvation lies in becoming like the Houyhnhnms, the impossibility of which drives him beyond peace and sanity. Henderson is exposed to the same dismal vision of himself as he suffers the consequences of bursting his spirit's sleep. Like Gulliver, he is almost drawn into this animal world, first by Dahfu's educative efforts and then through the laws of the Wariri. But through his own strength, and with much suffering, he walks away from and out of this fate. He returns to his home with an attitude completely contrary to that of Gulliver. As he tells the airline stewardess:

> "You know why I'm impatient to see my wife, Miss? I'm eager to know how it will be now that the sleep is burst. And the children, too. I love them--I think." (296)

The story of Henderson the Rain King, then, is a success story. It is the story of a man who achieves peace and contentment (or at least "the world has removed its wrath" from him) through an illumination of his subangelic

nature, an illumination not to be confused with knowledge--Bellow leaves that to the reader. Henderson does know, however, that ". . . there is justice. I believe there is justice, and that much is promised. Though I am not what I thought." (290)

CHAPTER VI

"A FAUSTIAN SPIRIT OF DISCONTENT"

As the novel Herzog[1] (1964) opens, the protagonist Moses E. Herzog is strolling around the grounds of his neglected, weather-beaten house located in the mountains of Massachusetts. He is pale, weak, and distracted. Yet, as he enjoys the details of his natural surroundings, there is an air about him that hints at convalescence, as if, in spite of his distraction, his life has taken on a certain tranquility, a new meaning, and a promising expectancy. The narrator observes that "though he [Herzog] still behaved oddly, he felt confident, cheerful, clairvoyant, and strong." (1) And within a few pages it is clear that Herzog is now indeed in a relatively healthy state, for this hopeful beginning is juxtaposed to a backward flight in time that depicts the slough of despair from which he has just emerged.

Through these hints of well-being at the beginning of the novel, it is evident that Bellow intends this work to be another depiction of man's subangelic possibilities. That is, one can anticipate that the protagonist, after

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[1]Saul Bellow, Herzog (New York: The Viking Press, 1964). All subsequent page citations in parenthesis are from this edition.

confrontations that call for intensive soul-searching examinations, will manage to reach a viable position from which he can live a life founded on a measure of dignity and integrity.

This chapter will look at Bellow's work on three levels of meaning: at the first level the protagonist will play the role of the innocent in the time-honored plight of illusion versus reality, of naivete versus experience; on the second level, he will assume the figure of the intellectual who is suffering from self-doubts concerning his own social relevance; finally, he will act as symbol of a general human condition. Each level is to be evaluated in terms of its meaningfulness to the form of the novel as a whole as well as to the extent that it satisfies a rounded interpretation of Bellow's hero. These levels are constantly overlapping in the actual working-out of the novel; but in the interests of clarifying the author's intentions, the attempt here will be to see them as entities.

Some light must be shed on the condition of the protagonist as Bellow sets the backward action in motion. Moses E. Herzog is living in a small apartment in New York City. In the evening he teaches a couple of adult classes. He is in a state of emotional and intellectual chaos, spending much of his time in random, disconnected thought that often takes its form in mental letter writing. Small

wonder that he has much to think about. Consider his position: twice married; twice divorced; turned out of his own house by his second wife Madeleine, adulteress; betrayed by his best friend Gersbach, adulterer; deprived of his young daughter; ignominiously bullied and used by his psychiatrist, his lawyer, and his doctor; pitied by his family and friends; unable to pursue his academic profession; and financially desperate. It is understandable, then, that:

> Late in spring Herzog had been overcome by the need to explain, to have it out, to justify, to put in perspective, to clarify, to make amends. (2)

Herzog cannot make any sense out of his present situation nor out of the forces that brought him to that situation, his career still largely before him, settled in his personal life with his first wife Daisy, and shortly thereafter his world is turned upside down. Herzog himself is clearly bewildered and offers only vague information:

> What actually happened? I gave up the shelter of an orderly, purposeful, lawful existence because it bored me, and I felt it was simply a slacker's life. (103)

The innocent has lost himself in deep woods. With a full heart he has wandered out of his element and has caught the full force of a reality that is challenging his sanity. The conflict is Herzog versus the world and its ugliness. Time and again, Bellow's protagonist finds himself face to face with walls of brute fact, as when he learns of the deceptions of Madeleine and her mother, or when he discovers

the affair between Gersbach and his wife, or again in the courtroom scene when as a casual observer he leaves the room in a sickened state because he gets an insight into man's inhumanity and into the callous workings of the law. Almost every character that Bellow introduces into his work becomes for Herzog a source of what is often a very painful illumination. It is a case of the instructor instructed, with one of the high points of irony arising when one of the professor's students, his baby-sitter, assumes the role of instructor and teaches him of the infidelity of his wife. In her letter, Geraldine Portnoy also feels it necessary to explain to Herzog the psychology of his relationship to Madeleine, not to mention a few lines concerning child psychology in the interest of his young daughter. This constant exposure to brutality is too much for Herzog. He comes to regard life as his personal instruction in reality, even bitterly giving the name of "reality instructors" to his many teachers.

Herzog, the romantic, cannot cope with a world based on principles alien to his own heartfelt visions and to his own orderly view of life. This man who "practiced the art of circling among random facts to swoop down on the essentials" (10) finds that the facts are blinding and the essentials are lost in the dark. But, paradoxically, he cannot give up his private view of the world. In one of

his many desperate letters he refutes the apocalyptic implications of his recent experiences, "Very tired of the modern form of historicism which sees in this civilization the defeat of the best hopes of Western religion and thought. . . ." (106) In spite of the indignities to which he is subjected, Herzog cannot take on the worldly cynicism that seems to surround him. He insists (like Augie) on a better fate.

While Bellow's novel is clearly concerned with the theme of innocence versus worldliness, any consequent resolution can end only in a partial vision, or worse, in a distorted vision. This theme bypasses the storm that rages within Bellow's protagonist. It is the storm that the novel is all about. Such a theme ordinarily takes place in the struggles of the protagonist with the world; in Bellow's novel, that struggle fails to lend itself to any sustained development. The reason is simple. Though Herzog is an innocent and though he does confront reality, that confrontation takes place for the most part within the protagonist.

The understanding of a broader scope in Herzog, however, depends to some extent on seeing in the first chapter, Bellow's indications that his protagonist is going through a form of psychoanalysis. It is not an accident that the backward action begins with Herzog lying on a sofa

and ends, on the last page of the book, with Herzog lying on his Recamier couch. Over and over Bellow repeats the description of his hero's physical position in connection with his self-examination:

> Lying on the sofa of the kitchenette apartment he had rented on 17th Street, he sometimes imagined he was an industry that manufactured personal history, and saw himself from birth to death. (3)
>
> . . . .
>
> He went on taking stock, lying face down on the sofa. (3)
>
> . . . .
>
> Satisfied with his own severity, positively enjoying the hardness and factual rigor of his judgment, he lay on his sofa. . . . (5)
>
> . . . .
>
> Herzog from his sofa in New York now contemplated. . . . (8)
>
> . . . .
>
> In his posture of collapse on the sofa, arms abandoned over his head. . . . (10)

Obviously Bellow wants the reader to see Herzog in the position of a mental patient trying to create some order out of his personal chaos. Thus Herzog's mind is the setting for the action, much of it backward moving. Many of the events, scenes, characters are thus, in terms of good psychiatric dogma, abstractions or symbols of forces that play upon his mind. For example, Daisy, in all her orderliness, is a symbolic reflection of his life at the

university. If the novel is a study of man's mind, as indeed it is, the reader is forced to interpret what goes on in that mind. The difficulty of such examination is compounded by the fact that the mind is in a state of rebellion, a condition symbolically established when the reader is told that Herzog carries in his pocket a copy of Pratt's History of the Civil War. (105)

The scope of the novel broadens if we are to recognize that Bellow is projecting the image of an intellectual (humanist, writer)[2] who cannot reconcile his own existence with the world in which he lives. Herzog suffers a sense of non-involvement as he comes to doubt his relevance to the life around him. These self-immolating feelings of inutility to which the intellectual often subjects himself are precisely responsible for Herzog's view of himself as "leading a slacker's life" at the university.

Bellow makes this conflict clear in a number of ways. For example, when Herzog was finishing work on his volume Romanticism and Christianity, the "heavy silence" he feels is representative of his demeaning self-appraisal:

> Of course a wife's duty was to stand by this puzzling and often disagreeable Herzog. She did so with heavy neutrality, recording her objections each time--

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[2]For the view of Herzog in the specific function of writer, see Appendices F and G.

> once but not more. The rest was silence--such heavy silence as he felt in Connecticut when he was finishing Romanticism and Christianity. (127)

He issues a like judgment on his own value through another incident that takes place when he returns to his long-vacated house in Massachusetts:

> Someone came in the night and left a used sanitary napkin in a covered dish on his desk, where he kept bundles of notes for his Romantic studies. That was his reception by the natives. A momentary light of self-humor passed over his face. . . . (48-49)

Herzog cannot help contrasting the bluntly realistic function of the napkin, and its immediate utility, with the function of his own work, whose content is transcendental by nature and whose utility seems to be far from immediate. At least his own personal life hardly offers itself in support of the value of a romantic and idealistic interpretation of existence.

Then in other ways Bellow makes clear Herzog's felt isolation. The "greased tracks, power, efficient black machinery" of the elevator that Herzog hears (26) suggests to him a denigrating contrast to his own endeavors. This elevator is functional. There is no doubt as to its value and place in our society. So it is with the construction work going on outside his window:

> They were demolishing and raising buildings. The avenue was filled with concrete-mixing trucks, smells of wet sand and powdery gray cement. Crashing, stamping pile-driving below, and, higher, structural steel, interminable and hungrily going up into the cooler, more delicate blue. . . . He had to get to the seashore

where he could breathe. (32)

In this world, things are happening, tangible things, of a value that all society recognizes and pays homage to. Such is not the case in Gerzog's world. His value, he feels, is in serious doubt. His book which "younger historians" have praised for the way it looks "at the past with an intense need for contemporary relevance" (5) provides us with an excellent clue into Bellow's symbolic intent. The phrase "an intense need for contemporary relevance" is a clear and an appropriate description of Herzog's insecurity, and incidentally, a good description of the contextual framework of the novel itself. It would seem that wherever Herzog looks, indeed whatever he senses, regardless of whether his attention is given to the past or to the present, he feels an alienation, and even worse, a uselessness, as if his life were an activity of wasted and misplaced effort.

This second approach has other merits, not the least of which is the exposition of the dilemma that often comes from an intellectual suspension of judgment, an attitude not without its value but also one that at times leads to a passivity of purpose, a loss of the name of action, reminiscent of a Hamlet personality.[3] When Herzog goes to his

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[3]See Appendix H.

lawyer for advice, he is bullied into buying an insurance policy; he allows Ramona, his mistress, to lecture him endlessly, in spite of his annoyance; in silence, he passes over the rudeness of a store clerk. The sharpest instance of his quietude is shown when he allows Gersbach to take Madeleine's diaphragm to Boston, where she is visiting. He is aggressive enough to question her later about the matter, but he has nothing to say when she tells him that he is unworthy of an answer.

The roots of this passivity are deep. Herzog recalls his childhood stay in the hospital where a "Christian lady" visits him:

> "Where do you live, little boy?"
>
> "On Napoleon Street."
>
> Where the Jews live. [he adds to himself]
>
> "What does your father do?"
>
> My father is a bootlegger. He has a still in Point-St. Charles. The spotters are after him. He has no money.
>
> Only of course Moses would never have told her any of this. Even at five he would have known better. His mother had instructed him. "You must never say." (23)

Even in the present, Herzog never speaks out, never makes his attitudes known in a clear, strong voice.

One of Bellow's meanings, then, concerns the intellectual who lacks confidence in the value of his work. By nature, Herzog is passive, unable or unwilling to express

his own importance to himself in meaningful terms, unable to define his value in a society that does not seem to pay him what he feels to be his due respect. All of his work and all of his ideals seem to be at odds with the activity and the facts of the world about him. When Herzog leaves the university, when he becomes so irascible and unstable that Daisy leaves him, self-doubts are at the bottom of his anxiety. Briefly, his trouble lies in a lack of self-definition, which leads to a confusion that can find an outlet only in an ironic view of himself. In this view he sees himself as something like a patient etherised upon a table:

> That had brought him to consider his character. What sort of character was it? Well in the modern vocabulary, it was narcissistic; it was masochistic; it was anachronistic. His clinical picture was depressive. . . . Resuming his self-examination, he admitted that he had been a bad husband--twice. Daisy, his first wife, he had treated miserably. . . . To his son and his daughter he was a loving but bad father. To his own parents he had been an ungrateful child. To his brothers and his sister, affectionate but remote. With his friends, an egotist. With love, lazy. With brightness, dull. With power, passive. With his own soul, evasive. (4-5)

Here is the non-committed intellectual, the observer, living in no-man's land, a self-loving egotist who keeps on drinking and cursing the light, half believing that by nature his case is hopeless.

Bellow develops this theme of the socially maladjusted intellectual or humanist by projecting Herzog

through a series of experiences that culminate in purging his mind of distractions. These experiences, for the most part, consist of confrontations with characters who act out their roles in the forms of these distractions. That is, they are symbols of forces that lead Herzog into his confused state. These confrontations occur throughout the novel and serve as appropriately placed stepping stones to the next level of meaning.

Herzog as a universal figure represents a struggle that has been operative since man's beginnings. The struggle is particularly evident today when, owing to all kinds of developmental knowledge along with a run-way population, man seems to be especially subjected to a thwarting, masochistic, disintegrative self-examination that often leaves nothing more substantial than a few cents worth of chemicals, which are already a drug on the market. Specifically, this ultimate theme is built upon man's inability to come to terms with his own nature, with Moses E. Herzog acting as Everyman, torn between elements, ". . . more or less stable, more or less controllable, more or less mad." (16) It is an old theme, going back to the medieval debates between body and soul, and even further back to the dramatic agonies of the Greeks. On this level, Bellow projects his protagonist through three stages: first, he accounts for Herzog's disturbed condition; second, he renders the manifestations

of that condition; and third, he offers a resolution which sees a release from that condition.

To understand what Bellow intends concerning the well-springs of Herzog's conflict, it is necessary to recall that the story may be envisioned as a psychiatric venture, an accounting for motives through a search into Herzog's past. This is precisely why in the first chapter Bellow has his protagonist "lying on his sofa" going over his past. And the important point is this: Herzog himself merely re-creates his experiences; it is the reader who must interpret those experiences in order to make them meaningful. For example, as the backward action begins, Bellow carefully specifies (through Herzog as narrator) the academic accomplishments of his hero, and in so doing sets up his thesis:

> He had made a brilliant start in his Ph. D. thesis--*The State of Nature in 17th and 18th Century English and French Political Philosophy*. He had to his credit also several articles and a book, *Romanticism and Christianity*. . . . The Narragansett Corporation had paid him fifteen thousand dollars over a number of years to continue his studies in Romanticism. The results lay in the closet, in an old valise--eight hundred pages of chaotic argument which had never found its focus. It was painful to think about. (4)

And then a few paragraphs later, he explains one of his motives in moving to Ludeyville, Massachusetts:

> In the peaceful Berkshires where he had friends (the Valentine Gersbachs) it should be easy to write his second volume on the social ideas of the Romantics.

Herzog did not leave academic life because he was

> doing badly. On the contrary, his reputation was good. His thesis had been influential and was translated into French and German. His early book, not much noticed when it was published, was now on many reading lists, and the younger generation of historians accepted it as a model of the new sort of history, "history that interests us"--and looks at the past with an intense need for contemporary relevance. As long as Moses was married to Daisy, he had led the perfectly ordinary life of an assistant professor, respected and stable. His first work showed by objective research what Christianity was to Romanticism. In the second he was becoming tougher, more assertive, more ambitious. There was a great deal of ruggedness, actually, in his character. He had a strong talent for polemics. . . . But he couldn't deceive himself about his work. He was beginning to distrust it. His ambitions received a sharp check. Hegel was giving him a great deal of trouble. Ten years earlier he had been certain he understood his ideas on concensus and civility, but something had gone wrong. He was distressed, impatient, angry. At the same time, he and his wife were behaving very peculiarly. She was dissatisfied. (5-6)

These few representative passages should serve to show how the author intends Herzog's past in general and the academic side of that past in particular to mirror the causes and effects of his rebellion and subsequent condition.

Bellow sets his universal conflict in motion through the implications of the titles of Herzog's thesis and book. These two works are representative of the mind of his protagonist. First, there is the thesis, whose content directly suggests a life of the reason and intellect. Second, and in manifest opposition, there is the book, whose materials clearly imply an impulse of the motions and of the heart. These counterclaims make for Herzog's struggle, and the everlasting struggle of all men. Let us set aside Herzog's

academic work for the moment to concentrate upon Bellow's development of his protagonist as a universal figure caught between these two forces.

The conflict is evident in the feelings of Herzog toward his mistress Ramona. He is fully aware of the biological phenomena involved in his sexual encounters with her. When she enters from her bedroom to her living room, she is greeted with a kind of eager passivity:

> She knew what she was up to. The warm odor, the downy arms, the fine bust and excellent white teeth and slightly bowed legs--they all worked. (16)

Herzog is contemptuous of himself for being a part of this biology, of being drawn to an activity that he knows holds no answers for him, that in fact only seems to demean him. He feels compelled to speak to her on this subject, via mental letter:

> You are a great comfort to me. . . . It's true. I have a wild spirit in me though I look meek and mild. You think that sexual pleasure is all this spirit wants, and since we are giving him that sexual pleasure, then why shouldn't everything be well? (16)

In spite of his knowledge, there is no escaping Ramona's appeal. At the end of the novel, Ramona visits him in Ludeyville:

> . . . as almost always, he heard the deep, the cosmic, the idotic masculine response--_quack_. The progenitive, the lustful quacking in the depths. _Quack_. _Quack_. (337)

Through the medium of sex Bellow is showing Herzog to be deeply bewildered and genuinely disturbed by forces that

drive him to activities that are, in the last analysis, everlastingly unsatisfying. This is a clear debate between the body and soul, between the reason and the emotions, a struggle that is reminiscent of the dilemma of Prufrock, who, too, is captivated and repelled by "downy arms." Herzog, like Prufrock, is feelingly aware of his plight: "When he jeered in private at the Dionysiac revival it was himself he made fun of." (186)

Herzog writes his disgust to Governor Stevenson at the outcome of the presidential elections: "Bah! The general won because he expressed low-grade universal potato love." (66) And again, as he shies away from the idea that the world is run by madness, he corrects himself:

> Do not deceive yourself, dear Moses Elkanah, with childish jingles and Mother Goose. Hearts quaking with cheap and feeble charity or oozing potato love have not written history. (77)

Here, too, Herzog is contemptuous of the very emotions he feels, for he admits this same brand of love for his family and friends (78, 267) and at times for all mankind. (176)

In other instances of these contradictions, he looks with disdain upon the underworld, the hoodlum element with their crime czars, yet he is attracted by their power, and confesses that he is flattered to be in the company of one who is on the fringes of that world. (35) He is repelled by violence, but he feels its strong pull almost to the point of murdering Gersbach and Madeleine. This man of the

intellect and heart admires physical strength and raw power, against his better judgment.

Herzog does not always see the source of his chaos so clearly. There are those _felt_ cases in which an irony of circumstances infringes on his consciousness but does not gain the focus of his attention. At one point, for example, his cab is stopped in a district in which a wrecking crew is working. Reflecting upon the world's anarchic condition, he desperately insists in one of his letters, "'Reason exists! Reason . . .' He heard the soft dense rumbling of falling masonry, the splintering of wood and glass." (165) This image of destruction shows Herzog's inner sense of doubt concerning the viability of what he stands for. In the same ironic vein, Bellow's hero feels or at least senses the irony of a cold and distant institution such as the Narragansett Corporation subsidizing studies in Romanticism. What Herzog senses is a charitable gratuity, a pat on the head from this machine. It is enough to make a man subconsciously doubt his value.

It is easily understandable that in his projected study Herzog fails to find a focus and fails to make coherent the social ideas of the Romantics, for his personal failures lie in his inability to integrate _himself_ into a social coherence. It is equally understandable that he no longer understands Hegel, the master synthesizer.

He once understood him, ten years ago at the university, when "objective research" was possible. But with the completion of his book <u>Romanticism and Christianity</u> together with his thesis, the opposing armies--the mind and the heart--clashed in "heavy silence"; and now all he knows about Hegel's dialectic is that like prayer for Huck Finn it does not work for him. Yet a synthesis is exactly what he cries out for, a positive relationship between the mind and heart, between thought and action. There is a heartfelt urgency to his jotted parody, "What this country needs is a good five-cent synthesis." (207)

Through his protagonist, then, Bellow projects the image of a man who lacks a self-definition. Much like Young Goodman Brown he has discovered seemingly contradictory truths about himself and, also like Hawthorne's figure, is thrown into depths of self-doubt through that discovery. Bellow's Everyman has feelings of love, sex, and power that affront his intellect. He has ideals that are subjected to sharp modifications and even blunt denials. He cannot stand the inconsistency, and he insists that there must be some breakthrough into an existence that reconciles these warring elements and brings them working together in harmony. The vision of such a Utopia, or rather the frustrated longing for such a Utopian existence, is what leads Herzog into rebellion; and when the backward

action begins, he is seeking within himself for some meaning for his failure to achieve that reconciliation after his rebellion.

In the first chapter of the novel, Herzog goes to see Dr. Emmerich for a physical examination. Dr. Emmerich says, "I heard of your divorce--who told me? I am sorry about it." Herzog replies aphoristically in a quick note, "Looking for happiness--ought to be prepared for bad results." Then the narrator states, "Emmerich put on his Ben Franklin eyeglasses and wrote a few words on the file card." (14) So Poor Herzog's Almanac takes shape. Herzog leaves his "orderly, purposeful, lawful existence" to look for the synthesis that will bring him happiness, and in so doing is confronted by a series of events that leads him to his sofa in his New York apartment, feeling much the same, no doubt, as Johnson's Rasselas feels at the end of his journey: to look for happiness is to chase the horizon. And Herzog does chase--Wanda, Sono, Zinka, Madeleine, Ramona. "(What a lot of romances! thought Herzog. One after another. Were those my real career?)" (166) "A strange heart," he scribbles of himself. "I myself can't account for it." (14) ". . . Winning as he weeps, weeping as he wins. Evidently can't believe in victories." (16)

Herzog's life since he left the university is intended by Bellow to reflect the twisting and turning search of man

as he seeks a higher self, a synthesis. Each of his confrontations with other characters represents a segment of that search. But it must be remembered that it is Herzog's mind that is being examined; hence, each of these characters may be properly thought of as extensions of that mind. That is, Daisy is a reflection of his academic life, and in this sense, she is a part of Herzog's condition:

> His early book . . . was now on many reading lists, and the younger generation of historians accepted it as a model of the new sort of history . . . [it] looks at the past with an intense need for contemporary relevance. *As long as Moses was married to Daisy, he had led the perfectly ordinary life of an assistant professor, respected and stable.* [Italics not in original.] His first work showed by objective research what Christianity was to Romanticism. (5-6)

In one brief sentence in strategic juxtaposition the author encompasses his intentions that Herzog's relationship to Daisy and Herzog's intellectual endeavors are to be thought of as pieces of a whole, that whole being a state of mind. And if one reads closely in the following passage it is possible to recognize in the description of Daisy characteristics from which Herzog is escaping:

> Moses stood behind her on the carbolic-reeking platform when she gave her transfer slip to the conductor. From her bare neck and shoulders he inhaled the fragrance of summer apples. Daisy was a country girl, a Buckeye who grew up near Zanesville. She was childishly systematic about things. It sometimes amused Moses to recall that she had a file card, clumsily printed out, to cover every situation. Her awkward form of organization had had a certain charm. When they were married she put his pocket money in an envelope, in a green metal file bought for budgeting. Daily reminders, bills, concert tickets were pinned by

> thumbtacks to the bulletin board. Calendars were marked well in advance. Stability, symmetry, order, containment were Daisy's strength. . . . By my irregularity and turbulence of spirit I brought out the very worst in Daisy. _I_ caused the seams of her stockings to be so straight, and the buttons to be buttoned symmetrically. _I_ was behind those rigid curtains and underneath the square carpets. Roast breast of veal every Sunday with bread stuffing like clay was due to _my_ disorders, my huge involvement--huge but evidently formless--in the history of thought. She took Moses' word for it that he was seriously occupied. Of course a wife's duty was to stand by this puzzling and often disagreeable Herzog. She did so with heavy neutrality, recording her objections each time--once but not more. The rest was silence--such heavy silence as he felt in Connecticut when he was finishing _Romanticism and Christianity_.
>
> The chapter on "Romantics and Enthusiasts" nearly did him in--it almost ended them both. (The Enthusiastic reaction against the scientific mode of suspending belief, intolerable to the expressive needs of certain temperaments.) Here Daisy picked up and left him alone in Connecticut. (126-27)

"Stability, symmetry, order, containment" are not only Daisy's strength but the elements of the protected and orderly existence that stir Herzog to rebellion. Then the entire description of Daisy, including her name, calls up the image of innocence which, like Hawthorne's Goodman Brown, or in greater scope like Mother Eve, Herzog finds incompatible with deep, inner urges that call for expression. The last few lines of the passage are extremely telling. Daisy, representative of innocence and order, leaves him when his impulses, his "Enthusiastic reactions," rise up against his "stable and respected" scholarly life, when he practiced the "Scientific mode of suspending belief."

Hence, when he states that it was he who was behind her idiosyncrasies, Bellow intends just that. Daisy and all she stands for is a part of Herzog's mind; and Bellow depicts in this relationship the thesis that man can stand only so much reason and order, and only so much innocence, that he longs for subjective research, to stretch himself, to flee from a world cold with intellect alone. After all, man is also a creature of the heart--certainly *Herzog* is.

After Herzog's escape from old barren reason and innocence, a meaningful pattern develops. He turns to Sono (he had been seeing the Japanese girl even before his divorce), who is the precise antithesis to Daisy. She is warm, loving, subservient, admiring ("T'es philosophe. O mon philosophe, mon professeur d'amour. T'es tres important. Je le sais."), catering to all of his moods:

> But often he sat morose, depressed, in the Morris chair. Well, curse such sadness! But she liked even that. She saw me with the eyes of love, and she said, "Ah! T'es melancolique--c'est tres beau." (170)

But especially does Sono take care of his sensory needs:

> She loved massages, believed in them. She had often massaged Moses, and he had massaged her. . . . She had a tender heart. . . . During the troubled time when he was being divorced from Daisy and he came to visit Sono in her West Side apartment, she would immediately run the little tub and fill it with Macy's bath salts. She unbuttoned Moses' shirt, she took off his clothes, and when she had him settled ("Easy now, it's hot") in the swirling, foaming, perfumed water she let drop her petticoat and got in behind him, singing that vertical music of hers.

"Chin-chin
Je te lave le dos
Mon Mo-so." (167-68)

Bellow's implications are varied, but they are centered around a retreat into romantic melancholy and sensualism. The massages are direct appeals to the senses. The bath is a return to the womb, with Herzog enacting the role of the small child complete with a bathing lullaby. As Herzog recalls Sono, he writes, "To tell the truth, I never had it so good. But I lacked the strength of character to bear such joy." And then he reflects:

> That was hardly a joke. When a man's breast feels like a cage from which all the dark birds have flown--he is free, he is light. And he longs to have his vultures back again. He wants his customary struggles, his nameless, empty works, his anger, his afflictions and his sins. In this parlor of Oriental luxury, making a principled quest--principled, mind you--for life-giving pleasure, solving for Moses E. Herzog the puzzle of the body (curing himself of the fatal disorder of worldliness which rejects worldly happiness, this Western plague, this mental leprosy), he seemed to have found his object. But often he sat morose, depressed, in the Morris chair. (170-71)

Sono, symbolic of Herzog's sensual nature, fails to content Herzog, the man. Happiness, the great synthesis, is not to be found in the indulgence of the senses. By nature, man is restless, and must push on from the lotus eaters: ". . . she didn't answer my purpose. No serious enough." (103)

With Madeleine, Herzog moves in another direction to look for happiness, and, as he says, he ought to have

been prepared for bad results. Madeleine serves a complex function in Bellow's work, but her central purpose is to represent the object of man's pursuit and adoration of what is nebulously called "success." In fact, she is described as a bitch so often and by so many various people in the novel (for example, 16, 21, 61, 82, 194, 254) that one can only conclude that Bellow has in mind the proverbial "bitch-goddess" of success. Certainly her personality supports the idea. Everyone admires her great beauty. She is vain, demanding everyone's admiration and attention. She insists on dominating every situation. Deceitful and nasty to those in her power, she is always looking for new recruits to her standard. She is especially anxious to attract those who are ambitious:

> Should he have been a plain, unambitious Herzog? No. And Madeleine would never have married such a type. What she had been looking for, high and low, was precisely an ambitious Herzog. In order to trip him, bring him low, knock him sprawling and kick out his brains with a murderous bitch foot. (93)

Herzog knows that Zelda has been caught up in her service:

> Madeleine had convinced Zelda that she too was exceptional. Everyone close to Madeleine, everyone drawn into the drama of her life became exceptional, deeply gifted, brilliant. It had happened to him. By his dismissal from Madeleine's life, sent back into darkness, he became again a spectator. (38)

This "bitch" has made her mark on most of the people around Herzog. Dr. Edvig the psychiatrist is taken with her, as are Sandor Himmelstein, the Monsignor, Gersbach, and even

Herzog's student Geraldine Portnoy, who speaks favorably of Madeleine even as she tells Herzog of his wife's infidelity.

Like success, Madeleine moves from object to object, and from interest to interest:

> But when all was said and done, Madeleine didn't marry in the Church, nor did she baptize her daughter. Catholicism went the way of zithers and tarot cards, bread-baking and Russian civilization. And life in the country. (118)

For as she angrily asks Herzog, "What makes you think I intend to have a life-long affair with you?" (116) Her complete irresponsibility with money bears mentioning, too. She spends outrageous sums on everything she buys or charges, from maternity clothes to cigarette boxes. (56)

Appropriately enough, Madeleine takes everything that Herzog can give her--his name, money, reputation, and even his learning--and when he can give nothing more she moves to Gersbach, that "public figure" of a man, "that loud, flamboyant, ass-clutching brute. . . ." (102)

> "He started out in educational radio, and now he's all over the place. On committees, in the papers. He gives lectures to the Hadassah. . . . readings of his poems. In the Temples. He's joining the Standard Club. He's on television! Fantastic! He was such a provincial character, he thought there was only one railroad in Chicago. And now he's turned out to be a terrific operator--covers the city in his Lincoln Continental, wearing a tweed coat of a sort of salmon-puke color." (196)

But Gersbach, too, will go the way of all flesh. As Herzog tells Phoebe, Gersbach's wife, toward the end of the novel,

"He'll lose his value to Madeleine as soon as you withdraw. After the victory, she'll have to throw him out." (263)

Through the sequence of Daisy, Sono, and Madeleine, Bellow would seem to intend that with man's disillusion in his intellect and emotions, he turns to the pursuit of worldly success--fame, money, position--only to find that its achievement is barren. Happiness is not here, and the lesson is long, costly, and painful, one not gotten over too easily.

Ramona, the object of Herzog's final pursuit, represents another retreat, this time from the ego-shattering experience with Madeleine. Ramona is an earth-goddess (she runs a floral shop) who "had made herself into a sort of sexual professional (or priestess)." (17) She is more than willing to salve all of Herzog's wounds, to reassure him of his intelligence and masculinity, his virility and value:

> "Nonsense--why talk like that! You know you're a good-looking man. And you even take pride in being one. In Argentina they'd call you macho--masculine. You like to come on meek and tame, and cover up the devil that's in you. Why put that little devil down? Why not make friends with him--well, why not?" (15)

It is under Ramona's tutelage that Herzog goes shopping for new clothes, a coat of crimson and white stripes and a straw hat, reminiscent of the twenties and reflective of Herzog's retreat. Ramona does take good care

of this sick Herzog, offering him "asylum, shrimp, wine, music, flowers, sympathy, gave him room, so to speak, in her soul, and finally the embrace of her body." (199) Her sexual antics attract him, but they also bewilder him:

> It was odd that Ramona should sometimes carry on like one of those broads in a girlie magazine. For which she advanced the most high-minded reasons. An educated woman, she quoted him Catullus and the great love poets of all times. And the classics of psychology. And finally the Mystical Body. And so she was in the next room, joyously preparing, stripping, perfuming. She wanted to please. (202)

Ramona, Bellow intends, is another aberration of Herzog's mind. Notice the similarity in the attitudes of these two life-beaten people:

> She was thirty-seven or thirty-eight years old, he shrewdly reckoned, and this meant that she was looking for a husband. . . . She wanted to give her heart once and for all, and level with a good man, become Herzog's wife and quit being an easy lay. (17)

Then Herzog writes one of his imaginery letters to her:

> Dear Ramona, you mustn't think because I've taken a powder, briefly, that I don't care for you. I do! I feel you close about me, much of the time. And last week, at that party, when I saw you across the room in your hat with flowers, your hair crowded down close to your bright cheeks, I had a glimpse of what it might be like to love you.

Herzog shows signs of Ramona's desperate resignations: "He exclaimed mentally, Marry me! Be my wife! End my troubles!" but then he catches himself "and was staggered by his rashness, his weakness, and by the characteristic nature of such an outburst, for he saw how very neurotic and typical it was." (66)

What Herzog comes to discover through all of these experiences--his love affairs, which Bellow intends to be reflective and subjective, inclinations of personal gratification--is that he will never be content or at ease with himself through his misguided efforts to exploit a part of his nature, nor will he find a viable life through a denial of any other part of his nature. On one level he is trying to do the impossible--to find happiness through outer sources, to supplement himself, so to speak, through these love affairs. But on a deeper, universal level, these attachments and attractions are symbolic of elements to be found in all men, and all men will find that their ease of heart will come from within themselves if it comes at all.[4]

This lonely truth is brought home to Herzog when he dashes to Chicago to protect, he tells himself, his daughter from Gersbach and Madeleine, who are living together. As he sneaks up to the house and looks through the bathroom window, with murderous intent, he is greeted by a scene that goes far to dispel his mistaken pretensions of self and his misinformed idea of his relation to others. He sees the hated pretender Gersbach tenderly and affectionately giving his daughter a bath. Little Junie squealingly delights in

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[4]For additional symbolic extensions of the figures of Daisy, Sono, Madeleine, and Ramona, see Appendix C.

the scrubbing. Herzog looks at Gersbach and thinks:

> The hated traits were all there. But see how he was with June, scooping water on her playfully, kindly. . . . Steady and thoroughly he dried her, and then with a large puff he powdered her. The child jumped up and down with delight. . . . Moses might have killed him now. . . . There were two bullets in the chamber. . . . But they would stay there. Herzog clearly recognized that. . . . Firing this pistol was nothing but a thought. [Herzog writes a quick note] The human soul is an amphibian, and I have touched its sides. [And then he thinks] Amphibian! It lives in more elements that I will ever know; and I assume that in those remote stars matter is in the making which will create stranger beings yet. I seem to think because June looks like a Herzog, she is nearer to me than to them. But how is she near to me if I have no share in her life? Those two grotesque love-actors have it all. And I apparently believe that if the child does not have a life resembling mine, educated according to the Herzog standards of "heart," and all the rest of it, she will fail to become a human being. . . . As soon as Herzog saw the actual person giving an actual bath, the reality of it, the tenderness of such a buffoon to a little child, his intended violence turned into theater, into something ludicrous. He was not ready to make such a complete fool of himself. Only self-hatred could lead him to ruin himself because his heart was "broken." How could it be broken by such a pair? Lingering in the alley awhile, he congratulated himself on his luck. His breath came back to him; and how good it felt to breathe! It was worth the trip. (257-58)

Herzog sees that he has been using his daughter in much the same way he has been using his affairs with women--as an imagined source of happiness. He had thought that little June needed him, that she was even a part of him. Obviously this is not so. It is even more important that he loses his intense hate of Gersbach and Madeleine, and hence, Bellow intends, no longer hates in himself those elements for which these two actors stand. It is a release

from a self-imprisoning self-hatred of elements in his own nature.

But Herzog still wants custody of his daughter, and upon leaving this scene he goes straight to the house of Phoebe Gersbach and urges her to divorce her husband, with the possible consequence that in the process he may yet get June. It is here that he is bluntly told the direction he must take when Phoebe refuses to do anything about Gersbach's affair with Madeleine:

> "What good would that do you?" she asked sharply. "And also, what are you prepared to do for me?"
>
> "I? I'd help . . ." he began. But he checked himself. It was true, he couldn't offer much. He really was useless to her. With Gersbach she could still be a wife. He came home. She cooked, ironed, shopped, signed checks. Without him, she could not exist, cook, make beds. The trance would break. Then what?
>
> "Why do you come to me [Phoebe asks], if you want custody of your daughter? *Either do something by yourself or forget it.* [Italics not in original] Let me alone, now, Moses."
>
> This, too, was perfectly just. . . . "You're right. This was an unnecessary visit." (264)

With this last effort so obviously ill-conceived, Herzog returns to his house in Ludeyville, where he faces himself and finds his synthesis. He writes:

> Why must I be such a throb-hearted character . . . But I am. I am, and you can't teach old dogs. Myself is thus and so, and will continue thus and so. And why fight it? My balance comes from instability. Not organization, or courage, as with other people. It's tough, but that's how it is. On these terms I, too--even I!--apprehend certain things. Perhaps the only way I'm able to do it. Must play the instrument I've got. (330)

All men must come to terms with their nature. Herzog realizes that in the past he has been victimized by that nature owing to his inability to define it and accept it for what it is. He is beginning to understand himself as man:

> And terrible forces in me, including the force of admiration or praise, powers, including loving powers, very damaging, making me almost an idiot because I lacked the capacity to manage them. (326)

Herzog puts all of the blame for his problems squarely on himself, facing the necessity to accept what he is and his role in living with what he is--a human being subject to "terrible forces," but only at their mercy if he fails to understand them.

It is little wonder that, as the story opens with Herzog back in Ludeyville, he states in the first line, "If I am out of my mind, it's all right with me." (1) And at the end of the novel, the line is repeated. (315) The importance of this remark far exceeds its seeming casualness, for Bellow intends it to be interpreted literally, at least in a sense: for it is Herzog's mind that has failed to manage these "terrible forces." Furthermore, with the concluding scene, which finds Herzog closely involved with nature, Bellow intends that Herzog is out of his mind, (italics not in original) that is, no longer subject to the "terrible forces" of the mind, and that he has found his place in the natural order of things:

> Then he thought he'd light candles at dinner. . . . But now it was time to get those bottles from the spring . . . He took pleasure in the vivid cold of the water. . . . Coming back from the woods, he picked some flowers for the table. He wondered whether there was a corkscrew in the drawer. . . . A nail could be used, if it came to that. . . . Meanwhile, he filled his hat from the rambler vine, the one that clutched the rainpipe. . . . By the cistern there were yellow day lilies. He took some of these, too, but they wilted instantly. And, back in the darker garden, he looked for peonies; perhaps some had survived. But then it struck him that he might be making a mistake, and he stopped. . . . Picking flowers? He was being thoughtful, being lovable. How would it be interpreted? (He smiled slightly.) Still, he need only know his own mind, and the flowers couldn't be used; no, they couldn't be turned against him. So he did not throw them away. . . . Walking over notes and papers, he lay down on his Recamier couch. . . . At this time he had no messages for anyone. Nothing. Not a single word. (340-41)

It is significant that this is the first time in the novel that Herzog has left his position as an observer of nature, which he is throughout the book, to become a participant. And then there is the observation on the part of Herzog--not a knowledgeable conclusion, but an illumination--that he too must remain in nature, like the flowers, if he is to prosper. The novel ends as the backward action begins, with Herzog's lying on a couch. Only this time it is the couch of reason, a "Recamier couch," much like the one, no doubt, upon which Madame Recamier reclined when the French classicist David painted her likeness. Bellow implies that his protagonist is recovering his balance and is entering a world of the reasonable.

And perhaps Bellow's entire novel is to be inter-

preted in the light of the classic dictum, know thyself. At least Moses E. Herzog, "a solid figure of a man," (9) has learned its importance. In any case, "at this time" there will be no more attempts to define himself through communication with the world, no more insistent intellectualization of the world or his relationship to that world. For now he is content to be--Moses E. Herzog. He writes his last letter:

> "But what do you want, Herzog?" "But that's just it--not a solitary thing. I am pretty well satisfied to be, to be just as it is willed, and for as long as I may remain in occupancy." (340)

One might even say that Herzog has attained a state of sweet reasonableness.

The dramatic frame of the novel contributes to the final meaning also. Bellow intends that the reader see this work as a drama, with Herzog, if it may be imagined, at times sitting in the audience as critic or commentator on the action and at other times watching himself take part in the play. It is a point of view that is made evident within the first few pages of the novel, specifically during Herzog's self-analysis:

> Lying on the sofa of the kitchenette apartment he had rented on 17th Street, he sometimes imagined he was an industry that manufactured personal history, and saw himself from birth to death. (3)

This vision is strengthened by Bellow's device of giving to his protagonist the use of the third person even though

Herzog is the narrator. It is a device that contributes to his role as both actor and observer. One of the clearest examples of this dual point of view is to be seen when he recalls the meekness of his response to Madeleine's plans for a divorce. It will be remembered that he listened to her silently, and then returned to the garden to work:

> In his posture of collapse on the sofa, arms abandoned over his head and legs stretched away, lying with no more style than a chimpanzee, his eyes with greater than normal radiance watched his own work in the garden with detachment, as if he were looking through the front end of a telescope at a tiny clear image.
>
> That suffering joker. (He writes) (10)

It is almost as if Herzog is sitting in the audience watching himself perform on stage and is commenting on his performance. The same projection is seen when he says at the end of a passage in which he has been particularly self-critical:

> Self-development, self-realization, happiness--these were the titles under which these lunacies occurred. Ah, poor fellow!--and Herzog momentarily joined the objective world in looking down on himself. (67)

Obviously many of the other characters have their roles in this drama. When Madeleine tells him she wants a divorce, he says of her:

> Her speech continued for several minutes. Her sentences were well formed. This speech had been rehearsed and it seemed also that he had been waiting for the performance to begin. (9)

And the stage is even readied for her performance:

> In the window on glass shelves there stood an ornamental collection of small glass bottles. . . . The sun now caught them. They were pierced with light. Herzog saw the waves, the threads of color, the spectral intersecting bars, and especially a great blot of flaming white on the center of the wall above Madeleine. (9)

Here, one can see Madeleine standing on the stage in the glare of spotlights. She and Gersbach are, in Herzog's eyes, "grotesque love-actors." (258) It will be recalled that Ramona was "delighted . . . to come on in the role of a tough Spanish broad." (16) When she disappears into her bedroom "for a few minutes. . . . her reappearance was always worth waiting for." (200) Sono too joins the troupe: "Her face was elaborately made up," (171) and proudly Sono showed her nostrils, made her eyes heavy and dangerous." (169) At times Bellow points directly to his intentions, as when Herzog is making his brief visit to Vineyard Haven, "Big gilt letters shone on red store fronts. The shopping center was as bright as a stage set." (92) Finally, Herzog sees Ramona as an operatic figure (184), as does Gersbach:

> "To me he's a curiosity, like a Mongolian idiot singing Aida. But to them. . ."
>
> "By golly, you are worked up," said Simkin. "Why are you suddenly talking about the opera? As you describe him, it's perfectly plain to me the fellow is an actor, and I know damn well Madeleine is an actress. That I've always realized." (217)

Bellow often uses the images of actors and theaters to reflect man's attempts to be something other than what

he is, his attempts to escape the reality of himself and of his environment. So it is with <u>Herzog</u>: witness the antics of Madeleine, Gersbach, Ramona, and all the others. Here, however, Bellow has a particular dramatic tradition in mind, and that tradition is the Faust myth, with Herzog playing the role of Faust.

Bellow provides an endless variety of hints that point to his protagonist as Faust: for example, when Herzog writes a letter to himself:

> Dear Moses E. Herzog, Since when have you taken such an interest in social questions, in the external world? Until lately, you led a life of innocent sloth. But suddenly a Faustian spirit of discontent and universal reform descends on you. Scolding. Invective. (68)

Within the first few pages, he is describing his studies:

> His first work showed by objective research what Christianity was to Romanticism. In the second he was becoming tougher, more assertive, more ambitious. . . . He had a strong will and talent for polemics, a taste for the philosophy of history. . . . digging in at Ludeyville, he showed a taste and talent also for danger and extremism, for heterodoxy, for ordeals, a fatal attraction to the "City of Destruction." (5-6)

Here is Faust with his ambition, polemics, philosophy, and tastes, and certainly his "fatal attraction" to Bunyan's "City of Destruction." Herzog is a university professor who is, in his words, "bored" even as Faust was. The flight that Herzog takes while in Poland is reminiscent of Faust's travels under the will of Mephistopheles:

> They flew through angry spinning snow clouds over white Polish forests, fields, pits, factories, rivers dogging their banks, in, out, in, and a terrain of white and brown diagrams. (32)

The geography of Herzog's trip is significant because it encompasses the area in which Faust was operative, the Eastern European area, where Herzog lectures "in Copenhagen, Warsaw, Cracow, Berlin, Belgrade, Istanbul, and Jerusalem," (7) and specifically in Cracow, where there "was a frightening moment . . . when the symptom appeared," (24) just "a little infection he had caught in Poland." (13) In Goethe's work, Cracow is the precise setting for Faust's teaching and for his bargain with Mephistopheles. And it is Mephistopheles that Herzog feels inside himself when he writes, "There is someone inside me. I am in his grip. When I speak of him I feel him in my head, pounding for order. He will ruin me." (11)

Bellow intends that, as in the case of Faust, Mephistopheles be seen as a creature of Herzog's imagination; and when Herzog says, "I do seem to be a broken-down monarch of some kind," (39) it is with the idea that this spirit is a part of Herzog. And then, keeping in mind the view that the other characters in the novel are symbolic of forces within Herzog, Bellow has his protagonist say:

> "Take me, for instance. I've been writing letters helter-skelter in all directions. More words. I go after reality with language. Perhaps I'd like to change it all into language, to force Madeleine and Gersbach to have a Conscience [italics in original]. . . . If they don't suffer, they've gotten away from me. And I've filled the world with letters to prevent their escape. I want them in human form, and so I conjure up a whole environment and catch them in the middle. I put my whole heart into these constructions. But

they are constructions [italics not in original]."(272) This passage has within it the clear indication that Bellow have the reader see his work as an exposition of a psychological condition. This condition, he intends figuratively and dramatically, is the result of diabolic forces. It will be remembered that Herzog decides Madeleine would never have married an unambitious person: "What she had been looking for, high and low, [italics not in original] was precisely an ambitious Herzog." (93) She had "the will of a demon," he says. (102) So Madeleine is an extension of the Mephistophelean spirit in Herzog, as is Gersbach:

> "He's a ringmaster, popularizer, liaison for the elites. He grabs up celebrities and brings them before the public. And he makes all sorts of people feel that he has exactly what they've been looking for." (215)

And even as Mephistopheles suggests to Faust that he could peacefully lead a sensuous existence, so does Ramona try to convince Herzog that life with her would be ideal.

In addition to the aptness of the Faust legend as a description of the mental condition of Herzog, Bellow intends that the myth be seen as part of the resolution to his novel. Herzog states the case when he tries to explain his work to Zelda:

> Herzog tried to explain what it was about--that his study was supposed to have ended with a new angle on the modern condition, showing how life could be lived by renewing universal connections . . . revising the old Western, Faustian ideology. . . . (39)

In Goethe's drama, Faust finds his contentment in social usefulness. He creates a vast area of productive land out of the swamps, where people can live in freedom and in pragmatic activities. This is his achievement, and through it he finds peace and harmony. At one time Herzog has similar ideas. He thinks about giving his land and house in Ludeyville to a utopian group. (48) The idea remains with him, but in the end he decides against it.

This house, "an old ruin of a place but with enormous possibilities," (48) suggests the condition of Herzog, as Bellow implies when his protagonist sees "the shadow of his face in a gray, webby window." (2) And when Herzog tells his brother Will at the end of the story that "I could go to work and become rich. Make a ton of money, just to keep this house," (331) it is with the illumination that he himself is worth saving, that the first and most important step is to work with himself, which means knowing and enjoying himself in his human condition. It is a condition admittedly beset with many limitations and countless liabilities, but also one with "enormous possibilities." Through his hero, Bellow seems to be saying that man's earthly salvation is not to be gained in social movements, utopian visions, political nostrums, scientific investigations (and this compulsive activity is what Herzog's letters are all about), but in learning to live with himself as he exists in the subangelic position ofman.

AFTERWORD

Bellow is consistent in his affirmation of man's potentialities. In all of his novels, he shows his protagonists to be responsible for their particular conditions, their dilemmas and conflicts, and also to be capable of altering these conditions, whether or not they are aware of these responsibilities and powers. It is within this matter of awareness that a pattern becomes evident. In *Dangling Man* and *The Victim*, Bellow depicts protagonists who fail to recognize their human possibilities. Both Joseph and Asa Leventhal remain mystified, unable to see themselves as decision-makers, mistakenly assuming that they are in the grip of unknown and perhaps deterministic forces. *Augie March* and *Seize the Day* project different states of consciousness. Both Augie and Tommy Wilhelm become aware of the dignity of their human condition. Augie is a failure, but he senses that his failure is not substantive to a definition of himself or of others as human beings. And Tommy Wilhelm sees through a glass darkly, through a bedimmed and tearful vision, that a definition of self depends on the living of that life--day by day. He nods in vague understanding that tomorrow brings in irrevocable removal of his defining power. Bellow's final two novels are success stories. The protagonists of *Henderson the Rain King* and *Herzog* come to a

clear illumination of their human condition. Both Henderson and Herzog achieve new lives on the power of that awareness. Henderson feels that "the world has removed its wrath" from him: Herzog feels "confident, cheerful, clairvoyant and strong."

If this pattern from non-awareness to awareness is intended by Bellow, it is possible that his work as a whole is meant to set forth the same hopeful affirmations that are projected within the scope of each individual novel. Then again, if this pattern is meaningful, it is also complete; and in his future work it would seem that Bellow must strike off in different directions.

There is another reason to believe that Bellow might change course. Joseph experiences the freedom to choose when he decides to join the army. Asa Leventhal and Henderson are involved in the issues of responsibility, and both commit themselves to acts of courage. Henderson discovers his human condition even as he discovers his sub-angelic condition. Augie examines the extensions of involvement or commitment. Tommy Wilhelm experiences abandonment and despair as he looks down into the coffin of a stranger. Herzog awakens to the values of subjectivism when he finally refuses to be defined by his history or by his environment. All of Bellow's protagonists define themselves, whether or not they realize it, through their experiences, because they

are <u>being</u> rather than <u>essence</u>. All of these themes are existential; and while that philosophic framework cannot be described as limited in its fictive possibilities, it does seem that Bellow has perhaps exhausted the main tenets within the system as he sees it.

Whatever the case, it seems likely that any future work of Saul Bellow will continue to exalt the nature of man. To forsake that position would be unthinkable in the light of the affirmative stance he has taken to this point. Undoubtedly he will stay within the humanist tradition, centering his fiction on a being whose imagination refuses to rest content at home within the sphere of the subangelic.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Irving Malin feels that Asa's final question of "what's your idea of who runs things?" indicates that "Bellow suggests that we must accept the past as controlling us--but we should come to terms with it by seizing the day. Only this act recovers our freedom." This reading seems self-contradictory and even textually contradictory to the point of meaninglessness. It is only Asa's ignorance that causes him to ask the question. If, as Malin says, Bellow does mean to suggest that the past controls us, the entire meaning of <u>The Victim</u> would have to be found in naturalistic terms, which Bellow certainly does not intend. It is true that the story supports deterministic elements in the character of Asa; but in the last analysis those elements are finally shaped by the will of Asa, whether or not he is aware of his shaping power.

APPENDIX B

Bellow's use of the name of W. H. Sheldon has possibilities of extended significance. At one point, Tamkin says to Tommy:

> "As a matter of fact you're a profound personality with very profound creative capacities but also disturbances. I've been concerned with you, and for some time I've been treating you." (73)

Since Sir Wilfred (Henry Percey) Sheldon is the author of a book entitled <u>Text Book of Diseases of Infancy and Childhood</u> (1955), (<u>Who's Who</u>, 1963, page 2768), one might conclude that Bellow was quite thorough in his preparation for the depiction of many of Tommy's childlike characteristics, especially his oral propensities--cigars, cigarettes, pills, cokes, heavy and unmannerly eating habits. In any case, the inclusion of the name of Sheldon, with his work in mind, would also seem to show Bellow's intentions toward Tommy, that he is sick, of course only in the sense of a rather universal affliction. In connection with this, Tommy's reply to Tamkin is interesting, within the novel and beyond to Bellow's other work:

> "Without my knowing it? I haven't felt you doing anything. What do you mean? I don't think I like being treated without my knowledge. I'm of two minds. What's the matter, don't you think I'm normal?" And he really was divided in mind. That the doctor cared about him pleased him. This was what he craved, that someone should care about him, wish him well. . . . But he was worried, too, and even somewhat indignant. For what right had Tamkin to meddle without being asked? (73)

Bellow is saying that Tommy, with what Tamkin calls his "profound creative capacities," is indeed "of two minds," one his own and the other that of his alter-ego, the extension of his creative capacity, Tamkin. But one notices a pattern here in connection with another work of Bellow's, Augie March. When Einhorn tells Augie:

> "All of a sudden I catch on to something about you. You've got opposition in you. You don't slide through everything. You just make it look so."

Augie thinks in return:

> This was the first time that anyone had told me anything like the truth about myself. I felt it powerfully. That, as he said, I did have opposition in me. . . . The discoverer of this, who had taken pains to think of me--to think of me--I was full of love of him for it. But I was also wearing the discovered attribute, my opposition. I was clothed in it. So I couldn't make any sign of argument or indicate how I felt. (117, Augie March)

At first glance, it might seem that the response of Tommy and Augie have only superficial resemblances. Both are delighted that someone thinks about them. But there are several points of greater significance. Their responses also have in common a dual reception: both are pleased, but while Augie plays his passive role of acceptance, surely appropriate to his final fate, Tommy explodes. Therein lies his hope of freedom, the ability to react. For in both cases, Bellow's protagonists are dealing with influences that are stifling, that restrict their realization of self-

power. After all, Einhorn is on Augie's back even as Tommy discovers Tamkin to be. One might conclude that Bellow is emphasizing the necessity of seeing beyond the sometimes fraudulent, and at least the useless, insights of outer forces, be they people or institutions, and that value only comes from one's own self-insight. Augie never achieves such a vision, or at most, only partially: Tommy does; consequently, he is able to properly assess his human condition, and come to a measure of self-equanimity.

APPENDIX C

Of technical importance is the way in which Bellow gives imagistic support to Tommy's struggle for life. The many times that Tommy experiences the mental isolation of a drowning man, he is also enveloped in all of the appropriate accompanying physical pain. While describing to his father the effect that his wife has on him, he "began to choke himself," complaining "she's strangling me." He "can't catch his breath." He will "be struck down by suffocation or apoplexy." (48) Tommy is ever feeling chest pains. (49, 89, 91) He has trouble breathing. (109, 113, 114). And Bellow uses the word "congestion" at least seven times to describe Tommy's appearance or state of being. (17, 30, 36, 43, 52, 53, 96)

APPENDIX D

Owing to the large number of parallels between Henderson the Rain King and Gulliver's Travels, it seems possible that Bellow intends his work, at least in one light, as a commentary on or a counter statement to Gulliver's Travels. While it would serve no purpose to list all of the likenesses, the following are good examples of the uses to which Bellow puts Swift's work:

1. Gulliver gains the title of Nardac even as Henderson is named Sungo. Both receive their titles for aiding their hosts, and their troubles are caused by this same assistance.

2. The Bunham or chief priest of the Wariri is remarkably similar in his role of villain to that of Swift's Bolgolam.

3. Henderson's remark that he is a descendant of a Dutch merchant echoes Gulliver's masquerade as a Dutch merchant when he enters Laputa.

4. In order to secure his position as king, Dahfu must stand on a narrow board, high in the air, from which he is to capture the lion, all reminiscent of the Lilliputians qualifying for political office through their rope dancing.

These are incidental likenesses, and there are many more. But the important point is that through these specific

instances Bellow supports a theme that finds its impulses in the thesis of Swift concerning the perspectives of man on himself and on his relation to his environment.

APPENDIX E

In his Preface to "The Revolt of Islam," Shelley sets down thoughts that are reflected both in Henderson the Rain King and in some of Bellow's announced attitudes toward our age and its literature. Consider the following passage from his Preface, in which he is discussing certain social reactions to the turn toward anarchy of the French Revolution:

> Could they [the rebels of France] listen to the plea of reason who had groaned under the calamities of a social state according to the provisions of which one man riots in luxury while another famishes for want of bread? Can he who the day before was a trampled slave suddenly become liberal-minded, forebearing, and independent? This is the consequence of the habits of a state of society to be produced by resolute perseverance and indefatigable hope, and long-suffering and long-believing courage, and the systematic efforts of generations of men of intellect and virtue. Such is the lesson which experience teaches now. But, on the first reverses of hope in the progress of French liberty, the sanguine eagerness for good overleaped the solution of these questions, and for a time extinguished itself in the unexpectedness of their result. Thus, many of the most ardent and tender-hearted of the worshippers of public good have been morally ruined by what a partial glimpse of the events they deplored appeared to show as the melancholy desolation of all their cherished hopes. Hence gloom and misanthropy have become the characteristics of the age in which we live, the solace of a disappointment that unconsciously finds relief only in the wilful exaggeration of its own despair. This influence has tainted the literature of the age with the hopelessness of the minds from which it flows. Metaphysics, and inquiries into moral and political science, have become little else than vain attempts to revive exploded superstitions, or sophisms like those of Mr. Malthus, calculated to lull the oppressors of mankind into a security of everlasting triumph. Our works of fiction and poetry have been over-shadowed by the same infectious

> gloom. But mankind appear to me to be emerging from their trance. I am aware, methinks, of a slow, gradual, silent change. In that belief I have composed the following poem. (David Lee Clark, ed. Shelley's Prose or The Trumpet of a Prophecy. (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1954) pp. 316-17.)

First, there are incidental parallels here with Bellow's novel. Shelley's reference to Malthus is interesting in view of one of Henderson's comments:

> This planet has billions of passengers on it, and those were preceded by infinite billions and there are vaster billions to come. . . . In the history of the world many souls have been, are, and will be, and with a little reflection this is marvelous and not depressing. Many jerks are made gloomy by it, for they think quantity buries them alive. That's just crazy. Numbers are very dangerous, but the main thing about them is that they humble your pride. And that's good. (143-44)

Then Shelley's comments on the literature of his age are remarkably similar to many of Bellow's statements on our contemporary writing. (See Chapter IV, pages 95-96 for his Book Award speech.) But perhaps of greater interest and importance is the possibility that Bellow sees a connection between Shelley's comments on the reactions toward the French Revolution and what is to Bellow a very similar intellectual position today, a position manifested in Henderson the Rain King. That is, in effect Shelley is saying that people had such high hopes for the French Revolution and its liberalizing potentialities that with the terror and anarchy that followed its inception, their disappointment led them to disavow the revolution as a

whole. Then Shelley points out that this disappointment comes largely from a lack of any real understanding of revolutionary movements. In a sense Bellow uses this framework of thinking in his development of Henderson's intellectual journey. With his bursting of his spirit's sleep, Henderson too has high hopes of a new spiritual freedom, hopes that are shattered in despair with the first consequences of his new freedom (his wild chase, his shame, his mud bath). Ultimately, Bellow seems to be saying much the same as Shelley: that a feeling of betrayal when the high principles of an intellectual or social movement are subjected to newly recognized realities is natural. Shelley and Bellow are saying that this transitional period of despair is pyschologically understandable. Furthermore, beyond the particular novel under discussion, much of Bellow's thought toward our age and its literature finds its premises on this same optimistic argument. He would say that a large part of any spiritual despondency, whether it be manifested in literature (see Chapter IV, page 119) or in our daily lives, could be the result of an awakening that has yet to be meshed with realities that are only newly discovered and but vaguely understood. For example in literature, Melville, Dostoyevski, Chekov, Dreiser, Hemingway, Fitzgerald, and a host of lesser contemporary figures are crying out through their art from the

same pain, or birth-throes, that Henderson suffers when his spirit bursts its sleep. With a specific in mind, the so-called death of the American dream, a common enough theme in American literature, need not be a death at all, but only a despair born of the ignorance of the nature of spiritual awakenings.

It would seem probable, then, that Bellow had Shelley deeply in mind during the writing of _Henderson the Rain King_. And in view of Shelley's ever-present concern with the unleashing of the human spirit, it is not at all surprising that Bellow should find within his work an inspirational compatibility.

APPENDIX F

In his essay "Distractions of a Fiction Writer," Bellow examines the issue of the contemporary humanist or artist who doubts his relevance to the world around him. In his essay Bellow writes:

> "I loafe and invite my soul," says Whitman.
>
> Well, perhaps his counterpart does, too. Perhaps. I hope so, because his imagination requires the tranquil attitude. (10)

Bellow describes Herzog as the story opens, with the depiction of his protagonist in a state of newly-won health:

> He was taking a turn around the empty house and saw the shadow of his face in a gray, webby window. He looked weirdly tranquil. (2)

In effect, Herzog as artist has managed to reach a level of tranquility necessary to creation because he was able to slough off distractions.

Again in the essay Bellow says, "Remember Thoreau sitting beside his pond. The industry of his neighbors failed to break his connection with nature." (11) Of course this is what Herzog discovers, that he must see himself in active connection with nature.

Bellow also says regarding the novelist, "But once in a while, he is visited by the thought that he is setting still in the midst of the most widespread destruction." (11-12) The same thought is seen to be a part of Herzog's consciousness. (See page 200.) And when Herzog in his

self-analysis looks upon himself as anachronistic, he (see page 203) is echoing Bellow's words, ". . . the writer, like the minister of a religion, feels that perhaps he is anachronistic." (12) Finally, and in some depth, Bellow states:

> "The priest departs, the divine literatus comes," said Walt Whitman. He felt that the office of the poet absorbed the sacerdotal one. In Democratic Vistas he gave the poet the responsibility of creating a type of man, an archetype he called it, and he offered himself as a model or representative. We have to begin somewhere. Touch me, he said, and you touch a man. I am not different from others; they are not different from me. What I assume you shall assume. This is not always understood for the act of love that it was. Between the radically unlike there is no love. So the creation of an archetype was to belong to the poet--and the humanist, the scholar. Well, now, where are these people? You can see them around the country in various places, most commonly in colleges and universities. They are different, though many of them try not to be. They are powerless. The universities are the warehouses of culture. Let us imagine a man who lives in Akron, Ohio, and teaches the history of the Italian Renaissance. It is dreadful to think what he has to reconcile. Or he teaches ethics, and takes part in departmental politics. He behaves shabbily and his own heart cannot bear the contrast. What I am trying to say is that certain ideas can't be held idly. Attempted containment of them is ruin. . . . Ideas of good, held in earnest, may be equally damaging to the passive thinker. His passivity puts him in self-contempt. On certain occasions a hero in thought, he has become abject in fact, and he cannot be blamed for feeling that he is not doing a man's work. . . . Men are active. Ideas are passive. (23-24)

Again and again in this passage one can see a profile of Herzog. It would seem evident that Bellow's protagonist is in part artist, but of course more generally, on the second level, an intellectual, scholar, and humanist.

APPENDIX G

Herzog's experiences with Daisy, Sono, Madeleine, and Ramona are to be seen on two levels of meaning: first, these women act as women to evidence the physicality of Herzog. As physical man he is in need of their feminine nature. He is driven to them through the facts of his own biological nature. This view of the function of these women supports Bellow's intentions toward his protagonist as a man in conflict with himself, if it is understood that the women serve another fuction, that of manifesting Herzog's role of intellectual. As a universal figure, this is Herzog's conflict--a struggle between the body and soul, between the senses and the intellect.

Yet there are further intellectual significances. Bellow sets Daisy, Sono, Madeleine, and Ramona in a meaningful historical sequence in order that they represent certain cultural and literary influences on Herzog. In this light, Herzog may be seen as contemporary man who looks back upon the forces that have shaped his present, or he may be seen more specifically as a writer who looks back upon literary movements that have formed the present literary situation.

As a matter of literary and cultural history, the periods of Neo-classicism, Romanticism, Victorianism, and the modern era are mirrored in the sequential appearances

of these women. Herzog has an association, in sequence, with each; and allegorically his progress from one to the other is largely motivated by many of the same impulses and pressures that were the cause of the changes in these literary and cultural movements. During the discussion of third level meanings, much is said of Daisy and Sono to support this historical approach to interpretation. Hence briefly at this point, Daisy's "stability, symmetry, order, and containment" are Neo-classical attributes while Sono's appeal to the senses and the concern with the person, as well as her specific admiration for the melancholy disposition of Herzog, show her to be a figure of the Romantic temperament. Madeleine follows as representative of the Victorian Period. Her personality shadows forth the <u>bitch-goddess success</u> reigning in those days, the corruption and greed. She images the deception and hypocrisy of the time. Moreover, Bellow points specifically to her place in history as he describes the setting in her apartment:

> The fixtures were old-fashioned in this place. These had been luxury apartments in the 1890's. The broad-mouthed faucets ran a shattering stream of cold water. She dropped her pajama top so that she was bare to the waist, and washed herself with a cloth, purifying herself with angry vigor. . . . Silent, barefooted, wearing his trench coat as a robe, Herzog came in and sat on the edge of the tub watching.
>
> The tiles were a faded cherry color, and the toothbrush rack, the fixtures, were ornate, old nickel. . . . His open curiosity, the fact that he familiarly shared the bathroom with her, his nakedness under the trench coat, his pallid morning face in this setting

of disgraced Victorian luxury--it all vexed her. (110)
Here is Madeleine, the Victorian, in the act of compromise. Unmarried, she has stayed the night with Herzog, and now in the morning, as she prepares herself for church, she blames Herzog for her moral duplicity. She is angry at him for what she feels to be a betrayal of her better self, and hence is a mirror for many of the same feelings of self-betrayal that Herzog experiences. One of the most effective scenes in the book depicts Madeleine in the act of self-transformation, as if through this change, which Bellow shows through a detailed description of Madeleine putting on her make-up, she could live two lives. (110-112) The self-imposed restraint of the Victorian Period is mirrored in Madeleine's costume:

> Decisively, but awkwardly, she left the bathroom, her stride hampered by the long ugly skirt. She wanted to fly, but with the cartwheel hat, the tweeds, the religious medals, the large pectoral cross, her heavy heart, getting off the ground was not easy. (113)

Her taste in furnishings in the Ludeyville house is Victorian. (120) Her great interest in Russian studies reflects the triumphs of Russian literature of the age.

Ramona is Herzog's final attachment, and through her Bellow is reflecting the modern concern for sex as a panacea for the life that is without focus or direction. Sex is Ramona's stated road to happiness. She attempts to teach Herzog, to persuade him that his salvation lies within her vision of existence. Herzog says, "I lost weight

last winter, in Poland and Italy." Ramona replies:

> "Nonsense--why talk like that! You know you're a good-looking man. And you even take pride in being one. In Argentina they'd call you _macho_. You like to come on meek and tame, and cover up the devil that's in you. Why put that little devil down? Why not make friends with him-well, why not?"(15)

But it is significant that Ramona is somewhat jaded and somewhat frightened, looking for a husband, by which Bellow intends that the contemporary concern with the physical is an escape from desperation that has seen its day.

Through these women, then, Bellow encompasses a statement on literature through its history as well as a statement on the position of the artist as he is subjected to that history, along with prognostications for the future of literature and the artist. Also, Bellow sets contemporary man in historical perspective, pointing to his intellectual backgrounds and setting forth directions for his future. At the end, Herzog realizes his debt to these influences, but he rejects them as definitive of him. He is now on his own.

APPENDIX H

Bellow makes several references to Hamlet in order to convey the image of Herzog's divided personality as well as to show his reticence to action. For example, when Herzog is thinking about his alleged madness, he discovers an advantage; "There was a certain wisdom in it, he thought, as if by staggering he could recover his balance, or by admitting a bit of madness come to his senses." (23) As if to say, like Hamlet, that his madness would serve a purpose. Of course this idea is germane to the meaning of the whole work in that what Herzog finds it necessary to do is to admit and to accept certain "mad" elements dormant within himself and to control them.

Then in the scene in which Herzog looks through the bathroom window at Gersbach giving little June a bath, the narrator, who is one degree off dead-center of Herzog's consciousness, says:

> Moses might have killed him now. His left hand touched the gun. . . . He might have shot Gersbach as he methodically salted the yellow sponge rectangle with cleansing powder. There were two bullets in the chamber. . . . But they would stay there. (257)

One is greatly tempted to add, "Up, sword," as Herzog's judgment takes control, and thoughts of murder disappear. Gersbach with sponge and cleansing powder is clearly reminiscent of Claudius at the altar, but Herzog senses a reversal of Claudius' ironic position (his "words fly up"

while his "thoughts remain below"). Herzog, unlike Hamlet, sees his adulterous arch-enemy in the role of a kindly human being busily engaged in a warm and moving gesture of love. It is enough to give Herzog second thoughts about his view of Gersbach, and ultimately, second thoughts about his own amphibian nature. He exclaims, "The human soul is an amphibian and I have touched both sides." (257-58)