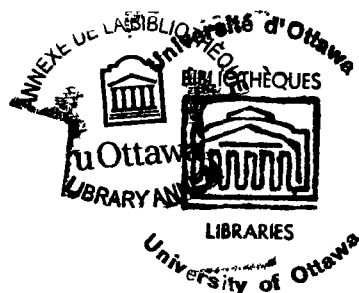


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SAUL BELLOW: DANGLING MAN AND HERZOG



Thesis presented to the Department of English
of the University of Ottawa
in partial fulfillment
of the requirements
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Judith Merker

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

We cannot judge what the accomplishments of our own time may be, and presumably this is the reason so many of Bellow's critics guard their praise with words such as "probably":

Saul Bellow is probably the most important living American novelist.¹

Probably the most significant American novelist to come to maturity since World War II has been Saul Bellow.²

With the publication of Henderson the Rain King, Bellow confirms he is just about the best novelist of his generation.³

Many of the critics that I read, suggested that Bellow is or could be one of the leading American novelists of our generation. His novels justly demand such high respect and correspondingly, they deserve critical attention. However, at this time, criticism of the

¹Irving Malin, Saul Bellow's Fiction (Carbondale, 1969), p. xi.

²Earl Rovit, Saul Bellow (Minneapolis, 1967), p. 5.

³Richard Chase, "The Adventures of Saul Bellow", Commentary, 27 (April 1959), 323.

author's novels involves several problems--one being that Bellow continues to write--and consequently, we cannot develop a complete picture of his fiction. And, because his novels so closely reflect the contemporary mood, objective evaluation is difficult. Furthermore, the very nature of Bellow's work limits certain kinds of critical approaches. For example, an investigation of the novelist's background--a coalescence of Russian, Jewish and American traditions--would require highly specialized knowledge. In addition, the number of Bellow's publications, which include articles, reviews, plays, stories and seven novels, and their complex, intellectual character, necessarily confines a relatively short discussion to one or two facets of his work.

These were some of the limitations determining the boundaries of my thesis; another significant factor was the kind of criticism already completed. Until recently, it consisted primarily of periodical articles and book reviews: some merely plot summaries, some offering brief insights into theme and style. However, within the last five years, several full-length studies of the author have been published. One such, Irving Malin's Saul Bellow's Fiction (1969), studies Bellow's work through a detailed discussion of themes, characters, styles and images. Malin is more concerned with presenting a formal analysis than

with illustrating Bellow's development; his exploration of images and styles is comprehensive, but his study of themes and characters is somewhat narrow. In contrast to Malin's book, Tony Tanner's Saul Bellow, published in 1965, offers a general analysis of each of the novels except Mr. Sammler's Planet. Tanner's interests lie particularly with the philosophical issues raised in the books. He concentrates upon Bellow's profound understanding of the dilemmas of the alienated man in a modern urban milieu, and the author's insistence upon the need to move beyond alienation.

Tanner's ideas are very similiar to those set forth in David Galloway's The Absurd Hero in American Fiction (1966), and in Howard Harper's Desperate Faith (1967), both of which contain long sections on Bellow. Using Albert Camus's novels as his basis, Galloway discusses Bellow's characters as absurd heroes who oppose the meaningless universe and affirm the humanity of man. Harper focuses upon the same theme: he sees the author's protagonists as men who cope with existential dilemmas by a rejection of nihilism and a search to find positive grounds for belief.

Both of these critics, like Tanner, deal with an issue which I believe crucial to Bellow's novels: the

idea of a movement beyond negativism to an affirmation of life. Substantially, this is the theme of my thesis, but my expression of it and approach to it differs considerably. I have not attempted to relate Bellow's work to existentialism or to other novels. Rather, I preferred to rely upon a close reading of the work itself. And instead of reviewing all of Bellow's novels, I have chosen only two of them, in fairness to the complexity of his books and to my particular theme. I believed that a demonstration of the Bellovian hero's faith in life necessitated not only an analysis of the character and his struggle to make an affirmation, but also a review of stylistic and formal elements which support and clarify this affirmation. Considering the length of my thesis, such requirements confined my discussion to two books.

The selection of two novels rather than one not only strengthened my thesis but also enabled me to explore Bellow's development over a space of years. Dangling Man (1944) and Herzog (1964) provided an ideal basis for such a comparison because among all of Bellow's heroes, Joseph (the dangling man) and Herzog most closely resemble one another. Alienated intellectuals, both men face a crisis in their lives, a time of dislocation when they must choose between a negative or positive approach to the value of life. Joseph relates his struggle by means

of a journal; Herzog is a unique kind of journal--one pushed beyond the normal limits of the form--but still bearing similarities to Bellow's first novel. The likenesses between these two books, which at the time I began my thesis were the first and last ones published by the author, offered a good foundation for the demonstration of affirmation--then and now. Although Bellow published Mr. Sammler's Planet early in 1970, I did not change my selection because Mr. Sammler--old and wise, neither alienated nor verging on breakdown--differs in many ways from his predecessors. But in order to outline Bellow's movement after Herzog, I have added an epilogue on the seventh novel.

In my study of affirmation in Dangling Man and Herzog, I have attempted to show that to a different degree, the central character reveals a limited, provisional affirmation of life based upon a vulnerable belief in the value of existence. Neither protagonist can explain satisfactorily why life is meaningful nor can he construct a system of life based upon his hopeful stance. But in responding to the wreckage of self and the chaos of society, both Joseph and Moses Herzog reject pessimism and move in a direction which is definitely affirmative. Herzog, by far the more complex character, arrives at a stronger affirmation, in spite of his finer perception

of life's absurdity and brutality. But it is important to underline that like their Biblical namesakes, neither Joseph nor Moses enter the Promised Land.

CHAPTER TWO

DANGLING MAN: JOSEPH IN EXILE

Saul Bellow had published several short stories before his first novel, Dangling Man, appeared in 1944. Seemingly, the author has never encountered serious difficulties being accepted as a writer, although he was recognized primarily in academic circles until the general public acclaimed Augie March in 1953. On the whole, Dangling Man was received favourably, although with some reservations. Reviewing the novel in a 1944 issue of The Nation, Diana Trilling admired the control and precision of Dangling Man, but labelled it a "small novel of sterility."⁴ A Kenyon Review article of the same year praised the novel's brilliance, topicality and psychological depth, yet found it unsatisfying as fiction.⁵

⁴D. Trilling, "Fiction in Review", The Nation, 158, April, 15, 1944, p. 455.

⁵Mark Schorer, "Fictions Not Wholly Achieved", Kenyon Review, VI (Summer 1944), 460.

Most reviewers at the time agreed that Bellow was a promising new writer with remarkable talent. Criticism of the book has not altered significantly since 1944, although now it attracts more interest as the first of seven novels by a leading author.

I have stated in my introduction that one of the important, underlying concepts of Dangling Man is an affirmation of life. An affirmation of life in Bellow's work involves faith in the value of existence and in the possibility of individual fulfillment. His characters believe in--or want to believe in--the goodness of humanity. To be meaningful, such an affirmation must be built upon an adequate perception of reality and an awareness of all that destroys and negates. Consequently, a positive approach to existence can be demonstrated, in part, by the rejection of a negative outlook: affirmation by means of negation. For example, in Dangling Man, Joseph spends much of his time refusing a negative stance; he must first overcome his indifference and pessimism in order to construct a foundation for the exercise of future positive energies. His success is limited but significant. In order to introduce this theme and to provide an over-all perspective, I have chosen to briefly analyse the relation of the theme to certain aspects of form and environment.

Dangling Man appears in the form of a journal, written by Joseph after he receives his draft notice:

There was a time when people were in the habit of addressing themselves frequently and felt no shame at making a record of their inward transactions. But to keep a journal nowadays is considered a kind of self-indulgence, a weakness, and in poor taste. For this is an era of hardboiledness. Today, the code of the athlete . . . is stronger than ever. . . . Do you have emotions? Strangle them.⁶

But Joseph does not begin his journal simply to keep a record of his thoughts or to defy the Hemingway code.

He writes to himself because he must:

In my present state of demoralization, it has become necessary for me to keep a journal--that is, to talk to myself--and I do not feel guilty of self-indulgence in the least. The hardboiled are compensated for their silence; they fly planes or fight bulls or catch tarpon, whereas I rarely leave my room. (p. 7)

Alone ten hours a day in one room, Joseph discovers that he must keep a diary in order to maintain his sanity. To counter his inability to converse with other human beings, Joseph communicates by means of the journal. And it provides him with a daily measure of order and activity to offset his present state of apathy and uncertainty. In other words, Joseph uses the journal to keep himself on the positive side of existence. His resistance to his

⁶Saul Bellow, Dangling Man (New York, 1944), p. 7. Future references will be to this edition and will follow the quotation in parentheses.

Note: Footnote number seven is non-existent, due to a typographical error.

deterioration and his effort to counterbalance it with honest self-expression, discipline and purpose, inherent within the very form of the novel.

The same concept underlies the kind of records Joseph sets forth in the journal. For instance, some days he merely writes a brief weather report: "Rain, yesterday, that turned into snow overnight. Cold Again" (p. 108). Entries such as this suggest not only the tedium of the dangling man's existence but also his desperation: on certain days his knowledge and expression of the weather represent the only way he has to relate to external reality and to assert his existence in the world. Frequently Joseph feels as if he lives totally alone, in a kind of vacuum. But reporting the weather, or recording what he ate for breakfast or who moved into the boarding-house enables him to keep in touch with life.

At the same time that he struggles to find some hold on existence, Joseph searches for understanding of his demoralization, and thus, fills the journal with records of his memories, moods, arguments and dreams. He does not attempt to follow a particular pattern; he seldom finishes a train of thought or relates a complete incident. As a result, criticism of the novel's disorganization and lack of dramatized action has been

common:

One occasionally has the feeling that problems, preoccupations, and scraps of random reading are tumbled onto the pages rather unrelatedly.⁸

Dangling Man talks about its theme too much and presents it too little and too baldly.⁹

Remarks such as these are justifiable, but at the same time, disorder and lack of drama reflect the central character's position. Joseph cannot focus or control his thoughts. A young, disturbed intellectual, he strives desperately to attain self-knowledge--not by taking part in the outside world--but by thinking and writing. For purposes of realism, Bellow mirrors the condition of his inward and confused hero with a certain amount of randomness and bareness of form. He over-uses this technique, but succeeds in drawing attention to Joseph's dangerous inner disorder and his single-minded drive to comprehend his debasement.

We must keep in mind that this drive, which continues throughout Dangling Man, represents positive energy. At times we lose sight of this perspective, in part because of the static, anti-dramatic nature of the form, and in part because of the novel's atmosphere. In

⁸Tony Tanner, Saul Bellow (Edinburgh and London, 1965), p. 25.

⁹M. Schorer, Kenyon Review, VI (Summer 1944), 460.

the background World War II casts a shadow of destruction and horror. The weather shifts dismally from snow to sleet to rain. Adding to this depressing picture, the city appears decayed and ugly:

Not far off there were chimneys, . . . ranges of poor dwellings, warehouses, billboards, culverts, electric signs blankly burning, parked cars and moving cars, and the occasional bare plan of a tree It was my painful obligation to look and to submit to myself the invariable question: Where was there a particle of what . . . had spoken in man's favor? There could be no doubt that these billboards, streets, tracks, houses, ugly and blind, were related to interior life. (p. 17)

Joseph admits that he no longer asks this question; he cannot look beyond the sterile wasteland before his eyes to see reason for optimism. Such resignation, combined with the war and the weather, effectively produces an atmosphere of futility and deadness.

But Bellow counters this environmental pessimism; although most of Dangling Man occurs during the winter, the overall movement in the novel is towards spring and regeneration. The journal covers the months from December through to April, and shortly before the conclusion, Joseph describes a bright spring day:

In the upper light there were small fair heads of cloud turning. The streets, in contrast, looked burnt out; the chimneys pointed heavenward in openmouthed exhaustion. . . . And the houses, their doors and windows open, drawing in the freshness, were like old drunkards or consumptives taking a cure. Indeed, the atmosphere of the houses . . . was one of an impossible hope, the hope of an impossible rejuvenation. (p. 114)

In Joseph's eyes, rejuvenation of the diseased wasteland seems impossible; paradoxically, the city has not given up hope. Everywhere he looks, the first signs of spring and the promises of nature materialize:

Nevertheless, a few large birds, robins and grackles, appeared in the trees, and some of the trees themselves were beginning to bud I even saw . . . an untimely butterfly, . . . somehow alien to the whole condition of the century.

And there were children, on skates and bicycles

The room, when I returned to it, was as full of this yellow as an egg is of yolk. In honor of the transformation in the weather, I decided to clean up for supper. (pp. 114-15)

The butterfly, representing frivolity and optimism, exists out of time, season and place to notify Joseph that hope is not dead and must not die. And the hero responds to the life and growth, hope and beauty of the scene with an openness and sensitivity which departs from his earlier outlook. He still perceives the foulness of the city, but refuses to accept this as the total picture. By deliberately selecting a time period ending with spring, Bellow is able to point out Joseph's movement towards affirmation. The hero's room on that day, "as full of this yellow as an egg is of yolk" symbolically represents the change, but at the same time, the kind of "rebirth" Joseph experiences--departure for army training--minimizes this positive current. Nonetheless, as we shall see, even this rebirth holds out more promise to the hero than the creeping deterioration he experiences.

We have briefly looked at the way form and environment point to affirmation, and now must consider Joseph himself: the kind of man he is, how he became demoralized, his struggle to overcome nihilism, and what "affirmation" means in his case. The only information we have comes from Joseph, and his details are frequently scanty--for instance, we never learn his surname or his religion. But these omissions suggest several things. Throughout Dangling Man, Joseph tries to discover who he is--in a fundamental sense--and the external identification of a family name means little to this search. The lack of a surname underlines his alienation and anonymity: his inability to find, and society's failure to give, a viable identity. Joseph's neglect in acknowledging his religion involves the same idea. Apparently religious matters, at least in a conventional sense, have little relevance to his dilemma. Some critics assume that Joseph is Jewish, yet Dangling Man never specifically refers to anything Jewish. In fact, Joseph makes a point of describing Christmas dinner with his brother and mentioning his wife's purchase of Christmas greeting cards. But he never mentions Easter as spring approaches. Bellow does not clarify this situation, but apparently he was unwilling to affiliate Joseph to a particular religion in order to strengthen his hero's

representative stature and to limit the focus to his intellectual turmoil. Nonetheless, the protagonist's given name, standing without surname, immediately suggests the ancient Jew of the Old Testament, who, somewhat like Bellow's Joseph, must struggle for life in an alien country, deprived of family, religion and freedom.

Joseph not only lacks a family name and religious heritage, but early in the journal he informs us that he has lost his identity:

For legal purposes, I am that older self, and if a question of my identity were to arise I could do nothing but point to my attributes of yesterday. I have not tried to bring myself up to date, either from indifference or from fear. Very little about the Joseph of a year ago pleases me. I cannot help laughing at him, at some of his traits and sayings. (p. 18)

Joseph rejects his old identity but fails to replace it, which leaves him in a transitional, "dangling" state. The old Joseph thought of himself as a scholar; the present one discovers that although unemployment gives him the time to read and study, he cannot concentrate: "After two or three pages or, as it sometimes happens, paragraphs, I simply cannot go on" (p. 8). The cast-off Joseph--amiable, restrained, reflective and complacent--"worked everything out in accordance with a general plan" (p. 20). In contrast, the hero of Dangling Man

is irritable, impulsive, introspective and exasperated with plans. He dislikes his friends and admits a general contempt for humanity; formerly he believed that "everything is good because it exists. Or, good or not good, it exists, it is ineffable, and, for that reason, marvelous" (p. 21). Joseph believed in humanity, in himself and in his ideals; now, the futility of his life makes him doubt everything. He reports that "In all my life I have never felt so stock-still" (p. 10). The dangling man perceives the change in himself and the extent of his quiet desperation when reading Goethe's Poetry and Life:

"It is said of an Englishman that he hanged himself that he might no longer have to dress and undress himself everyday." I read on and on with unaccustomed feeling. . . .

Nevertheless, I could not help seeing how differently this would have affected me a year ago, and how much I had altered. . . . Then, I might have been amused by that Englishman but not moved. (pp. 13-14)

Joseph has not reached the point of desiring death because of his distaste for existence, but his emotional identification with the Englishman reflects a deep existential despair. This despair and the consequent negative approach to life which Joseph experiences is the most severe part of his transitional identity and presents the sharpest contrast to his former self.

Strangely enough, Joseph frequently discusses the loss of his old identity and the resultant changes, but he never clearly explains what transformed him from a reasonably well-adjusted man to one on the verge of breakdown. He does say that the war and the long wait for induction account for part of his deterioration, "But the seven months' delay is only one of the sources of my harassment" (p. 9). In any case, long before his draft notice, certain incidents warn him that he is changing:

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. (pp. 94-5)

The old Joseph was even-tempered. Why then does he assault Mr. Gesell for a trivial matter involving heat in his flat? The incident "alarmed" him but his only explanation is generalized:

Only, in my opinion, . . . we are too ignorant and spiritually poor to know that we fall on the "enemy" from confused motives of love and loneliness. Perhaps, also, self-contempt. But for the most part, loneliness. (pp. 97-8)

Joseph never investigates this idea nor does he return to it when other outbursts follow. But his low frustration tolerance and reversion to childish displays of temper plainly signify an inner disturbance which began prior to the dislocation effected by his induction call.

We never specifically learn what factors

initiated the change in Joseph's temperament--in fact a good deal of background information is missing--but the hero does describe an event responsible in part for his disillusionment with life. Some time before he completely repudiates his old identity, Joseph and his wife Iva attend a party hostessed by Minna Servatius. All of the protagonist's Chicago friends are present, and at this time, Joseph still has idealistic plans for them:

What he wanted was a "colony of the spirit," or a group whose covenants forbade spite, bloodiness, and cruelty. . . . The world was crude and it was dangerous and, if no measures were taken, existence could indeed become . . . "nasty, brutish, short." It need not become so if a number of others would combine to defend themselves against danger and crudity. (p. 27)

But Joseph fails "to take into account all that was natural, including corruptness" (p. 27). Consequently, when a close friend cruelly hypnotizes Minna, the hero feels "revolted by the rage and spite which emerged in the 'game'; it had been so savage because its object could not resist" (p. 38). This grievance marks the beginning of the end: "In the months that followed I began to discover one weakness after another in all I had built up around me" (p. 39). Eventually, Joseph completely discards his friends:

I have not been too eager to meet them. Possibly some of our differences could be mended. But, as I see it, the main bolt that held us together has given way, and so far I have had no incentive to replace it. And so I am very much alone. (p. 9)

This statement illustrates Joseph's immature conception of friendship. Seemingly, affection, companionship and give-and-take relationships do not interest him. Instead, friends are objects to be manipulated according to ideals. The "bolt" joining him to his friends is a theoretical plan for defense against crudity. As a result of this cold, inflexible attitude, the dangling man now finds existence unbearably lonely.

Furthermore, his reaction to the Servatius party--entirely out of proportion to the event--reveals an inability to cope with reality. Joseph not only depended upon his friends and his ideals, but he also naïvely believed in himself: "He believed in his own mildness, believed in it piously" (p. 27). The party exploded his faith in both: "The treasons I saw at the Servatius party were partly mine, as I was forced at the time to acknowledge" (p. 98). The hero consequently suffers a disillusionment so severe that instead of compromising his standards with reality, he withdraws from society and dissociates himself from his former identity. And this leaves him dangling because "Foolish or not, it [the plan] had answered my need. The plan could be

despised; my need could not be" (p. 38). In effect, Joseph still wants to defend himself against corruption, but discovery of it within himself and all that he built up around him, tears down his defense and alienates him from society.

Both the Servatius party and the landlord incident exemplify Joseph's inability to meet tensions and his disgust with life. And as mentioned earlier, the hero's induction notice--although not causing this situation--aggravates it and demoralizes Joseph even more. At first, he resigned from his job, expecting immediate army service. But seven months elapse--months during which the army treats him like a misplaced number, relatives scorn him and his wife supports him. Living as neither civilian nor serviceman, without employment, money or political convictions, Joseph discovers that not only does he reject himself, but also that society treats him like a non-entity. Also, instead of filling his idle time with a temporary job, the dangling man relies upon his own resources:

I have thought of going to work, but I am unwilling to admit that I do not know how to use my freedom and have to embrace the flunkydome of a job because I have no resources--in a word, no character. (p. 9)

As the journal proves, his resources are inadequate.

His "freedom" leads to self-absorption, anxiety and an inability to act:

I grow rooted to my chair. It is a real, a bodily feeling. I will not even try to rise. It may be that I could get up . . . but to make the effort would put me in a disagreeable state. (p. 10)

And in addition to dislocating his life, undermining his identity, destroying his faith in his capabilities and furthering his withdrawal, Joseph's induction call adds yet another source of anxiety. He dislikes war but feels guilty because he remains free while others die. The death of an old friend in the war particularizes his guilt and concurrently, evokes his fear. The possibility of his own death and the uncertainty of his future prey upon the protagonist's mind, hastening the process of his deterioration. Sleep brings death-haunted nightmares and after such a session, Joseph reflects:

My beliefs are inadequate, they do not guard me. I think invariably of the awning of the store on the corner. It gives as much protection against rain and wind as my beliefs give against the chaos I am forced to face. (p. 82)

The war victimizes Joseph and forces him to face death as the only reality, but his own weaknesses make him vulnerable to the chaos he confronts.

I have examined Joseph's state of being and some of the factors which caused his deterioration. In order to demonstrate his attempts to understand and master his problems, I have isolated and investigated several

incidents and ideas in the journal. Following this, I have dealt with the novel's conclusion. The conclusion of Dangling Man is crucial to our understanding of Joseph's affirmation because, in his terms, he is not "cut down" (p. 9) until then.

To start with, I have chosen an event which occurs early in the journal--Joseph's Christmas dinner with his brother Amos--because it closely resembles several other incidents, and thus, can be analyzed as representative behaviour. Essentially, what happens is that someone opposes Joseph's will and he loses control of his temper. After dinner, Joseph plays a record but his niece Etta demands her turn before he finishes. The hero refuses, Etta taunts him and the following ensues:

"You're a little animal," I said. "As rotten and spoiled as they come. What you need is a whipping."
"Oh!" she gasped. "You dirty . . . dirty no-account. You crook!" I caught her wrist and wrenched her toward me.
I could hear the others running upstairs as the first blows descended and I hurried my task, determined that she should be punished in spite of everything, in spite of the consequences; no, more severely because of the consequences. (pp. 47-8)

There are many interrelated factors causing Joseph's outburst, because his antagonism for Etta extends back several years. However, one primary factor is Joseph's inability to contend with the frustration of his authority. When frustrated, Joseph displays

divergent patterns of behaviour: either he angrily insists upon his rights, as in this case and several others, or he withdraws from the source of trouble. Joseph's relationship with Iva demonstrates the latter:

Iva and I had not been getting along well. I don't think the fault was entirely hers. I had dominated her for years; she was now capable of rebelling. . . . Hence our difficulty. There were nervous quarrels. She, in brave, shaky new defiance, started to enjoy her independence. I let her alone, pretending indifference.

(pp. 65-6)

Iva's independence and assertion of will endanger the hero's precarious egotism, so he prefers to ignore the situation. Similarly, when his friends disappoint him, he retreats from their society. And this negative response reflects an unwillingness to accept and an inability to cope with all of life, along with a refusal to enter into meaningful relationships. In contrast, the incident involving Etta shows Joseph reacting to a problem aggressively and emotionally. Although he over-reacts to a trivial occurrence (and he recognizes the futility of spanking his niece), his hostility and outrage are better than resignation and alienation. He takes part in life, insists upon the recognition of his will and releases pent-up emotions. In a way, he asserts a need for life--which leads to a second point that Joseph makes himself:

The circumstances . . . were provoking enough, but I could have avoided making scenes if I had wished. It may be that I am tired of having to identify a day as "the day I asked for a second cup of coffee," . . . and so want to blaze it more sharply, regardless of the consequences. Perhaps eager for consequences. Trouble, like physical pain, makes us actively aware that we are living, and when there is little in the life we lead to hold and draw and stir us, we seek and cherish it, preferring embarrassment or pain to indifference. (p. 55)

Joseph's outburst represents his assertion of existence and manifests his repudiation of the meaningless void in which he lives.

The dangling man spans Etta not only to demand recognition of his significance as a living, willing human being, but also to defend his ideals. Etta annoys him mainly because of her materialistic values:

Ours was not a rich family. Amos tells frequently how he struggled . . . how little my father could give him. And he and Dolly have brought up Etta to identify poverty not so much with evil as with unimportance I am in no way a credit to her. (p. 41)

Indifferent to money, Joseph deplores the wealth standard of measurement:

"It's your [Amos's] fault too," I retorted. "Look how you've brought her [Etta] up. It's mighty fine, isn't it. You've taught her to hate the class and yes, the very family you come from. There's a whatsoever for you. Are people to be null because they wear one pair of shoes a year, not a dozen? Try your teeth on that whatsoever!" (p. 49)

By taking a stand against shallowness Joseph again evinces a positive spirit. However little he accomplishes, he stands by definite values, and does so by acting, instead of retiring to brood. Affirmative energy of this nature could lead to disciplined activity and give more "to hold and draw and stir" him in life.

A constant alternation occurs between positive impulses, as in the incident just described, and negative moods:

When I neglect to look carefully at the newspaper I do not know what day it is. If I guess Friday and then learn that it is actually Thursday, I do not experience any great pleasure in having won twenty-four hours. (p. 55)

Similarly, Joseph cannot stabilize his ideas: he focuses upon affirmative values, strives to defend them, but either he allows contrary arguments to interfere or he cannot move beyond the abstract theory. For example, he becomes preoccupied with the problem of freedom: man's freedom to find and govern his fate, his freedom from society, and, freedom from subjective imprisonment. This preoccupation coincides naturally with Joseph's situation. The nagging suspicion that his resources cannot meet the challenge of free time troubles him: "If I were a little less obstinate, I would confess failure and say that I do not know what to do with my freedom" (p. 100). Alone and free from involvement, the dangling

man cannot give meaning to his existence: "To be pushed upon oneself entirely put the very facts of simple existence in doubt" (p. 126). Nor can he escape self-enclosure: "My perspectives end in the walls" (p. 61). When Joseph attempts to affirm positive beliefs, his own experiences seem to negate them; in the end, his failure to solve the freedom question leads to his voluntary enlistment.

Joseph's reflections on the subject of freedom are divergent and fragmentary, but they are vital to our understanding of his concluding decision. At one point in the journal he states that mankind suffers from a "bottomless avidity" (p. 59) to fulfill his ultimate possibilities; this quest is based upon man's faith in his freedom to self-create and self-govern:

It is because we have been taught there is no limit to what a man can be. Six hundred years ago, a man was what he was born to be. Satan and the Church, representing God, did battle over him. . . . But, since, the stage has been reset . . . and, under this revision, we have, instead, history to answer to. We were important enough then for our souls to be fought over. Now, each of us is responsible for his own salvation, which is in his greatness. And that, that greatness, is the rock our hearts are abraded on. (p. 59)

Joseph's probing, intellectual nature allows him to see the complexity of the problem. He cannot assert man's limitless capacities and freedom without perceiving the currently debased images of greatness, the burden of

responsibility and the fear of failure. Furthermore, if "civilization teaches that each of us is an inestimable prize" (p. 79), "Great pressure is brought to bear to make us undervalue ourselves" (p. 79). Fate counters our limitless powers:

Because, of course, we are called upon to accept the imposition of all kinds of wrongs, to wait in ranks under a hot sun . . . to be those in the train when it is blown up . . . to be of no significance, to die. The result is that we learn to be unfeeling toward ourselves and incurious. Who can be the earnest huntsman of himself when he knows he is in turn a quarry? Or nothing so distinctive as quarry, but one of a shoal, driven toward the weirs.

But I must know what I myself am. (pp. 79-80)

Does chance govern man, or is each individual a significant, responsible being? Joseph wants to believe the latter but cannot. Relying extensively upon reason, distrusting feeling and instinct, the dangling man can find no means of transcending the problem as he presents it. Yet he stubbornly refuses to resign himself to determinism: somehow he must discover a personal destiny and identity.

Depression sometimes reduces Joseph's tenaciousness to resignation: "I know now that I shall have to settle for very, very little. . . . Personal choice does not count for much these days" (p. 83). Nonetheless, in an argument with his alter-ego, Tu As Raison Aussi, he reaffirms man's freedom to control his mind or spirit:

"The mind. Anyway, the self that we must govern. Chance must not govern it, incident must not govern it. It is our humanity that we are responsible for it, our dignity, our freedom." (p. 111)

According to Joseph, the war is merely an incident which cannot change the real nature of the world nor rescue mankind spiritually:

"In no essential way is it crucial--if you accept my meaning of essential. Suppose I had a complete vision of life. I would not then be affected essentially. The war can destroy me physically. That it can do. But so can bacteria. . . . They can obliterate me. But as long as I am alive, I must follow my destiny in spite of them." (p. 112)

The dangling man seems to have discovered a solution to his previous questions by separating the physical and spiritual realms and finding freedom in the latter. But when The Spirit of Alternatives tests his convictions, Joseph cannot defend his assertions:

"Then only one question remains."

"What?"

"Whether you have a separate destiny. . . ."

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? . . ."

I said faintly, "I'm all right." He tucked the blanket round me and, in great concern, wiped my forehead and sat by me until nightfall. (p. 112)

The split in Joseph's consciousness--one part wanting to believe in a separate destiny, the alternate part mocking this desire--wrenches him physically and forces him to retreat from a decision.

Another problem accompanies Joseph's struggle to believe in the freedom of self-government. He tells his alter-ego:

"We are afraid to govern ourselves. Of course. It is so hard. We soon want to give up our freedom. It is not even real freedom, because it is not accompanied by comprehension. . . . And soon we run out, we choose a master, roll over on our backs and ask for the leash."

"Ah," said Tu As Raison Aussi.

"That's what happens. It isn't love that gives us weariness of life. It's our inability to be free."

"And you're afraid it may happen to you?"

"I am." (p. 111)

The frightening aspect of freedom, as the hero has learned, lies in the failure to direct one's self toward a valuable existence. The dangling man does eventually request a "leash" but not in complete defeat and not entirely because of the burden of self-government. We have examined many other factors which have helped to create his weary, negative outlook: disillusionment with human nature, an inability to replace a former identity he now holds contemptible, a bleak future, and the collapse of his faith in himself and life. Also, he adds to his difficulties by trying to assert another kind of freedom: liberation from self.

Joseph withdraws from society, represses affection, stays alone in his room--victimized only in part by society--but instead of enjoying his independence, he becomes self-imprisoned:

I, in this room, separate, alienated, distrustful, find in my purpose not an open world, but a closed, hopeless jail. My perspectives end in the walls. Nothing of the future comes to me. Only the past, in its shabbiness and innocence. (p. 61)

Joseph believes that imaginative talents can prevent such imprisonment. But his talent "is for being a citizen, or what is today called, most apologetically, a good man" (p. 61). But to achieve good, he must free his self: "And goodness is achieved not in a vacuum, but in the company of other men, attended by love" (p. 61). Joseph does not know how to reach other men, nor can he overcome his subjectivism. Nonetheless, by recognizing that self-enclosure is destructive, and by affirming his trust in the achievement of good through love and commitment, Joseph has in fact travelled the first steps out of his "hopeless jail".

He repeats his convictions later when he writes that all mankind strives perpetually to free itself: "When what we really want is to stop living so exclusively and vainly for our own sake, impure and unknowing, turning inward and self-fastened" (p. 102). We struggle to unlock the imprisoning self in order "to know what we are and what we are for, to know our purpose, to seek grace" (p. 102). In other words, self-absorption destroys self-knowledge, meaningfulness and purpose, whereas transcendence of self leads to goodness.

fulfillment and wholeness of self. But Joseph cannot go beyond his theory of self-transcendence--at least not by himself--and this brings us to the novel's conclusion, when the dangling man places himself in other hands.

The night Joseph decides to enlist, several incidents occur, dramatizing his plight and decision. He and Iva argue because Joseph refuses to cash his wife's cheque. Previously a bank refused to cash one of her cheques because he carried insufficient identification. "'How do I know you're this person?'" (p. 115), a vice-president asked him, and now Joseph anticipates the same experience. The event not only underlines the hero's anonymity and his lost role as provider, but also demonstrates his fear of an indifferent reality. And in the midst of his argument with Iva, Joseph hears the next-door roomer, Vanaker, and begins to quarrel with him. Vanaker is both a petty thief and a drunk; he has been an increasing source of irritation to Joseph because he forgets to close the bathroom door. Instead of ignoring, helping or even laughing at Vanaker, Joseph has permitted his distaste for the man to assume excessive importance in his thoughts. Therefore, when he hears Vanaker in the bathroom this night, he is overcome with rage, and a loud fight ensues. Vanaker exemplifies the complete

demoralisation which Joseph can expect unless his situation changes. In him, Joseph sees the meaningless, debased reality from which he has fled, and through him, the futility of his own rage. And this final argument proves to be the turning point for the hero:

I believe I had known for some time that the moment I had been waiting for had come, and that it was impossible to resist any longer. I must give myself up. And I recognized . . . relief at my decision to surrender. I was done. . . . Not even when I tested myself, whispering "the leash," reproachfully, did I feel pained or humiliated.
(p. 121)

In making this choice, Joseph accepts his failure and thus, rejects the possibility of complete debasement.

Joseph's decision changes him. He wants to enlist immediately, and refuses the usual ten-day furlough: "It is merely that I do not want any more delays" (p. 124). His brooding self-involvement and feeling of fixity disappear. The day of his physical examination, he reads all day: previously this was impossible. Furthermore, he can reflect back on his dangling experience with some objectivity. Visiting his childhood room prior to departure, he notes the ephemeral agreements by which we live, and says:

My separation from such agreement had brought me perilously far from the necessary trust, auxiliary to all sanity. I had not done well alone. . . . Perhaps the war could teach me, by violence, what I had been unable to learn during those months in the room. Perhaps I could sound creation through other means. Perhaps. (p. 126)

Faintly yet stubbornly, Joseph thinks "perhaps". And his final civilian day brings these light-hearted but ironic words:

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

Hurray for regular hours!
And for the supervision of the spirit!
Long live regimentation! (p. 126)

The dangling man fails to give meaning to his freedom; he replaces the burden of self-government with institutional supervision of body and spirit.

All of Bellow's conclusions present interpretive difficulties, and criticism of the end of Dangling Man exhibits a variety of opinions. On the surface, Joseph suffers defeat: "I had not done well alone". But looking back, we can see that his defeat encompasses an affirmation of life. A year before he begins the journal, the hero starts to change; his attitudes and behaviour displease him; he quickly loses his temper. Too rigid and unfeeling to compromise, he becomes disillusioned when his ideals betray him, and he effects a withdrawal from life. He repudiates his former identity but does not fill the void. Induction dislocates his life: he resigns from his job, loses his role as provider, faces a bleak future and spends his time brooding. Rooted to

a chair in one depressing room, spiritually locked within himself, Joseph is on the verge of complete breakdown. Negativism creeps in everywhere: indifference, corroding self-absorption, pessimism, frustration, fear, disgust and uncertainty. He has turned away from everything that had or could have meaning in his life: friends, family, religion, politics, books, beliefs and feelings. And in turn, he becomes the very kind of person he detests: apathetic, indecisive, spiteful, vulgar and violent. But instead of burying himself in nihilism and accepting his deterioration, Joseph rebels.

His struggle is not a victory, nor do Joseph's positive impulses steadily outdistance his negative moods. He oscillates between the two--never accomplishing much beyond maintaining his fight--until the conclusion, when he enlists. But throughout Dangling Man, Joseph expresses resistance to his demoralization by means of his journal, which in itself represents his drive to understand, to reach out and to find purpose. At times, the dangling man reaches out aggressively to prove his existence and claim recognition of his will. He defends his ideals in face of opposition, affirms the possibility of goodness, and hopes for something beyond a deterministic existence. Without knowing why, he trusts in a fundamental human spirit struggling for self-knowledge, purpose and grace. But Joseph's beliefs are weak; often he cannot maintain

them, and usually they remain theories and ideals, out of touch with compromising reality. Joseph cannot put constructive energy into his convictions. Nevertheless, when one part of his consciousness suggests he prepare himself for death, he says: "'You want me to worship the anti-life. I'm saying that there are no values outside life'" (p. 110). Similarly, when Tu As Raison Aussi taunts him with his alienation, Joseph replies: "'It's a fool's plea'" (p. 91). In the same way, he refuses "hardboilddom", insisting upon his need and capacity to feel; he loathes his jail, and yearns for the company of men. Neither does Joseph "want to be humped protectively over my life" (p. 110) while the war carries off so many men. Yet while he puts himself on the positive side of existence by repudiating these things, he is, in fact, living a life-in-death, alienated, unfeeling, imprisoned and protected.

Perceiving that he cannot resolve these problems, Joseph chooses to enlist. Significantly, he chooses-- that is, freely and voluntarily determines his future. He describes himself as a man who is dangling and he realizes that "Before I can properly estimate the damage it has done me I shall have to be cut down" (p. 9). In effect, he cuts himself down. To survive, Joseph must

submit to regimentation. "I'm a chopped and shredded man" (p. 109) he tells himself; his mind prods him "to the point where I shall no longer care what happens to me" (p. 109). By enlisting Joseph defeats nihilism and disintegration, and commits himself firmly to life. And just as he defeats, so he is defeated. But he knows and accepts this, and thus, he can never revert to his former, unacceptable identity. His experience has meant something: he has been able to reassert an affirmation of life with a fuller understanding of suffering, chaos and corruption. He embraces "the leash" with eyes wide open. And coinciding with the promise of spring, the dangling man obstinately insists that "Perhaps I could sound creation through other means" (p. 126).

CHAPTER THREE

HERZOG: MOSES AND THE PROMISED LAND

Four novels and twenty years separate Dangling Man and Herzog. Each new book increased Bellow's literary standing, but until, and even including, Herzog, his novels always slightly disappointed his readers. A typical review of the author would read somewhat as follows: "Bellow has the potential to be a significant figure in American literature. After a promising beginning with his first two novels, he wrote a great, inventive, but faulty book, The Adventures of Augie March. Too loosely structured, its spirit unconvincing, this novel nonetheless demonstrates Bellow's versatility. Seize the Day, concentrated and intense, is probably the author's best work, but it is only a novella. Henderson the Rain King, an admirable novel, seems too fantastic, and for Bellow, remains a 'tour de force'." These statements exemplify a review of Bellow's work before Herzog; everyone interested waited for the author to write "the" book--the one which would make him a major novelist. If Herzog did not

satisfy this demand exactly, most reviewers considered the novel very important and acclaimed it as Bellow's "finest achievement".

My discussion of Herzog begins with an examination of certain aspects of the form which are relevant to the theme of affirmation. I believe that such a review provides a good introduction to this theme and a basis from which to study the hero's movement toward affirmation. The events, structure, setting, humour and time scheme in the novel help to illustrate Herzog's state of mind and his unusual struggle to defeat chaos and retain a positive outlook. Following this formal analysis, I have dealt with the protagonist himself, the causes of his breakdown and his progress toward peace.

Herzog most closely resembles Bellow's first novel in form, because like Dangling Man, it autobiographically exposes a mind, not a series of events. And, as in a journal, nearly everything in Herzog occurs as recollection. The first page and a half of the book take place in the present, when Herzog stays in Ludeyville. He then relives the four days just prior to his arrival in Ludeyville, and the conclusion of the novel returns to the opening time and place. On the first day of the flashback sequence, Moses Herzog, currently without family or

employment, decides to leave New York and visit friends in Vineyard Haven. He returns to the city that evening after realising that his visit represents an attempt to escape from his problems. The following day he writes letters until his mistress, Ramona, invites him to dinner. He spends the night with her and the next day plans to initiate court action to regain custody of his daughter June. But while waiting in the courthouse for his lawyer, Herzog witnesses several trials which compel him to fly to Chicago in order to confront his second ex-wife and her lover. This marks the first turning point in the action. Leaving that day, Herzog obtains a gun, but cannot shoot his intended victims, Madeleine and Valentine. After this second crisis and purgation, the hero spends the following day with his daughter. A car accident ends their afternoon together and brother Will bails Herzog out of jail. Moses then leaves for his country estate in Ludeyville, and his sojourn there concludes the novel.

The events of the extended flashback do not compose a traditional plot, although Herzog has more in the way of a story with defined turning points than Dangling Man. The action takes place within the hero's mind; the surface activities provide pace and serve as the framework for Herzog's thoughts. Also, the aimless, abortive episodes which he recalls reflect his state of being.

Chance and impulse govern his actions: he leaves the Cape; never sees his lawyer; cannot confront his betrayers; almost kills June. However, the later events do suggest a trend toward more responsible behaviour. He does not try to flee his problems. For example, he plans a day to entertain June; a car accident interrupts their happiness, "But he had to pay an earlier reckoning."¹⁰ He learns from the accident that he must discipline himself before seeing his daughter again. And the final move to Ludeyville, which may appear to be a further retreat from the world, shows Herzog's final attempt to "straighten myself up a bit" (p. 306). Temporarily and partially, he succeeds.

Actually, the whole course of the novel presents Herzog struggling to "straighten" himself and this struggle takes form as a complex interweaving of letters, reflections and events. What commonly happens in Herzog is this: Moses begins a letter, only to stop in mid-sentence to pursue a different train of thought; then he returns to his sentence a page later, only to allow some event currently happening (in his recollections) to interrupt him, and this may in turn motivate a letter to an entirely different person or stimulate a memory of a

¹⁰Saul Bellow, Herzog (New York, 1967), pp. 300-301. All future references to Herzog will be from this edition and will appear in parentheses after the quotation.

childhood incident. These elements are then combined in a variety of patterns throughout the novel. The constant and abrupt changes and the lack of balance and order demonstrate the tremendous strain and turbulence within Herzog's mind and the haphazardness of his attempt to recover from this state. He cannot control or focus his thoughts. But if the form reveals how dangerously close he is to disintegration, it also exhibits his continuous drive "to explain, to have it out, to justify, to put in perspective, to clarify, to make amends" (p. 2). Involuntarily and frantically, he searches for an answer from the events, memories, letters and ideas which surge in his mind. One thought streams into another, and although his self-examination is disorganized, his single-minded drive to understand his experiences unifies them. While the intensity and energy of Herzog's consciousness reveal the urgency of his fight to discover a meaningful existence, his inadequate control of his mind could eventually destroy his sanity.

We can particularize this balance between affirmative and negative impulses by examining Herzog's approach to time. The hero's mind, for the most part, does not recognize normal time. He loses track of whole days: "He looked at the calendar one morning, and tried to guess the date, counting in silence, or rather groping over

nights and days" (p. 327). A confused victim of his thoughts, Herzog can look at his watch and still not know the hour: "Glancing at his watch, Herzog, with an appearance of efficiency or purpose, failed, anyway, to fix the time in his mind" (p. 154). Time stops for Moses; he turns inward and spends hours in the historical past, his childhood, or the recent past. But he never withdraws completely; reluctantly, he allows external reality to draw him back to the present:

The telephone rang--five, eight, ten peals. Herzog looked at his watch. The time astonished him-- nearly six o'clock. Where had the day gone? The phone went on ringing, drilling away at him. He didn't want to pick it up. But there were two children, after all--he was a father, and he must answer. (p. 150)

The past, however, has more importance for Herzog because it is here he must find acceptance of the present and the possibility of a future. At times we sense that Moses just barely manages to escape from his retreat into the past: in order to help himself he must also gamble with the possibility of losing an existence altogether.

The same ideas can be explained in different terms. The book has an outer time frame of the present; the inner frame of the novel begins at a point in the past very close to the present. Often there are sudden time-scene shifts to the distant past, and thus, movements occur between the past and the present of the telling which

is already past. The hero must journey through his nightmare a second time in order to reinterpret and overcome the sources of his suffering; in so doing, he risks the possibility of not surviving the experience. The quick shifts and disarrangement of the time scheme, along with Herzog's inability to fix the time in his mind, show his confusion and withdrawal and also reveal the urgency he feels. Thrown off balance, Moses seems to be working against a time limit: he has no sense of time to re-order his life. And while this intensity is a sign of life, Herzog cannot regulate the speed of his thoughts or the resulting agitation.

Moses does manage, however, to gain control by the end of Herzog, and he begins to slow down, mark the passage of time, and even consider the future:

I mean to share with other human beings as far as possible and not destroy my remaining years in the same way. Herzog felt a deep, dizzy eagerness to begin. (p. 322)

He passes the immediate crisis and feels the relief of having time enough to start again. By reliving and reconciling the past, he effects a regeneration. The circular time structure of the novel suggests that as the Biblical Moses reaches the Promised Land, Moses Herzog fights through to a new beginning upon which to build a present existence. Nevertheless, his renewal may be short-lived: "The bitter cup would come round again, by and

by" (p. 326). The idea that events repeat themselves in time--implied by the novel's time scheme--reinforces Herzog's impression of transience and diminishes the force of his regeneration.

Bellow also communicates the hero's movement toward affirmation and concurrently suggests doubt about the stability of this movement through changes in the setting. The shift in scene from the city to the country parallels the change in Herzog from disorder, obsession and alienation to peace and well-being. In New York, Moses cannot maintain his sanity:

In the crowds of Grand Central Station, Herzog in spite of all his efforts to do what was best could not remain rational. He felt it all slipping away from him in the subterranean roar of engines, voices, and feet and in the galleries with lights like drops of fat in yellow broth and the strong suffocating fragrance of underground New York. (p. 33)

The nightmarish, disintegrating city appropriately gives way in the final chapter to the life and harmony of Ludeyville:

As soon as the sun lost its main strength the hermit thrushes began, and while they sang their sweet fierce music threatening trespassers, the blackbirds would begin to gather in flocks for the night, and just toward sunset they would break from those trees in waves, wave after wave, three or four miles in one flight to their waterside nests. (pp. 339-340)

Herzog describes many such country scenes at the end of the novel: pastoral descriptions outnumber urban ones, indicating that the hero's awareness of his surroundings increases as does his readiness to move back into the world.

When Moses arrives in Ludeyville, he finds his house musty and messy, and the garden overgrown:

He stopped in the overgrown yard, shut his eyes in the sun, against flashes of crimson, and drew in the odors of catalpa-bells, soil, honeysuckle, wild onions, and herbs. (p. 310)

He knows that he will never have the strength to hammer, prune and spray again, as he did when he bought the house for Madeleine:

That house was one of his biggest mistakes. It was bought in a dream of happiness, an old ruin of a place but with enormous possibilities. (p. 48)

Herzog's innocent illusions of happiness were destroyed in Ludeyville. Consequently, the fact that time and nature have somewhat erased the alterations he and Madeleine made, and have transformed the estate into a kind of sanctuary or Eden, suggests that Moses has truly been freed from the burden of sorrow his marriage created.

Nonetheless, certain factors qualify the affirmative suggestions in the setting. Herzog never feels quite at home in Ludeyville because the house symbolizes "his Jewish struggle for a solid footing in White Anglo-Saxon Protestant America" (p. 309). Moses cannot convince himself that he belongs in such a place:

He went to sit under the trees. His trees. He was amused, resting here on his American estate, twenty thousand dollars' worth of country solitude and privacy. He did not feel an owner. (p. 322)

He cannot resolve this problem, nor can he decide what to

do with this "monument to his sincere and loving idiocy" (p. 309). Furthermore, his response to the countryside suggests that Ludeyville may have superimposed an illusion of peace upon the hero:

He walked quietly into the woods, the many leaves, living and fallen, green and tan, going between rotted stumps, moss, fungus disks; he found a hunters' path, also a deer trail. He felt quite well here, and calmer. The silence sustained him, and the brilliant weather, the feeling that he was easily contained by everything about him. (p. 325)

Herzog's newly-acquired cheerfulness and tranquility cannot be tested in this setting. In other words, while he has overcome many difficulties, the stability and quality of his achievements are uncertain.

Herzog's letters are another device which Bellow employs to reveal moods and changes in the hero. Moses rarely mails or completes his letters; many of them are mere fragments scrawled on a scrap of paper. Late in spring, he falls under a spell and begins writing to everyone:

He was so stirred by these letters that from the end of June he moved from place to place with a valise full of papers. . . . Hidden in the country, he wrote endlessly, fanatically, to the newspapers, to people in public life, to friends and relatives and at last to the dead, his own obscure dead, and finally the famous dead. (p. 1)

Why does he write them?

He knew his scribbling, his letter-writing, was ridiculous. It was involuntary. His eccentricities had him in their power.

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 (p. 11)

The need to "explain, to have it out, to justify" (p. 2) overcomes Herzog physically and mentally. His letters seize him unexpectedly, becoming part of his consciousness and a substitute for the external world:

A dining-car steward rang the chimes for lunch, but Herzog had no time to eat. He was about to begin another letter. (p. 46)

The kind of letters he writes provides an index not only to his frame of mind but also to the number of distractions and problems he confronts. Although to other characters Herzog's letter-writing appears peculiar, in the novel they seem normal--a natural way for an intellectual to cope with distress. Paradoxically, by their very nature letters reflect a desire to communicate, yet Herzog never posts his notes. He wants to justify and make amends, but only to himself. Abortive communications intensifying his estrangement from society, the letters are nonetheless one of the ways by which Herzog finds his way back into the world.

¹¹In *Herzog*, letters are indicated by means of italics; in my thesis, I have differentiated between normal quotations and letters by underlining the latter.

To put it another way, Herzog must write letters to release inner pressure, and in this way he furthers his recovery. But he over-uses this mechanism of relief; his letters become part of his sickness and he almost traps himself in a construction of words:

"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. There's a word for you. . . . I put my whole heart into these constructions. But they are constructions." (p. 272)

The hero has come a long way from the beginning of the novel when he had no understanding of his obsession with letters. But at the time of this quotation, he has not yet finished writing. The pattern of development begins with letters which are mere words or fragments, proceeds through long weeks of writing, and finally ends at the point of saturation when Herzog no longer needs his letters:

Perhaps he'd stop writing letters. Yes that was what was coming, in fact. The knowledge that he was done with these letters. Whatever had come over him during these last months, the spell, really seemed to be passing, really going. (p. 341)

Herzog's final few letters anticipate this end and suggest the tranquility he achieves. Many of them are longer, more direct and confident. He sends messages to himself, to God, to his son, to his second wife and to his mother:

The life you gave me has been curious, he wanted to say to his mother, and perhaps the death I must inherit will turn out to be even more profoundly curious. I have sometimes wished it would hurry up, longed for it to come soon. But I am still on the same side of eternity as ever. . . . I want to send you, and others, the most loving wish I have in my heart. This is the only way I have to reach out--out where it is incomprehensible. I can only pray toward it. So . . . Peace! (p. 326)

In contrast to the beginning, when Moses "scarcely knew what to think of this scrawling" (p. 3), in this letter-prayer he sees his existence and his future in a transcendent perspective. Love, peace and an affirmation of life are the messages he chooses to send.

Having considered some of the elements in Herzog which suggest and limit the hero's affirmation, I want to deal briefly with wit in the novel. In some ways the book's wit tends to make us view the hero's position lightly. Herzog laughs at himself so frequently we minimize the acute strain under which he lives, and thus miss the significance of his development and recovery. Many times in the novel, Moses dispels self-pity, bitterness, depression and similiar feelings by the means of mockery. For example, after spending a night with Ramona, Herzog sentimentalizes about love and the simple life, but follows with these words:

Herzog considered what matters were like: I fall upon the thorns of life, I bleed. And then? I fall upon the thorns of life, I bleed. And what next? I get laid, I take a short holiday, but very soon after I fall upon those same thorns with gratification in pain, or suffering in joy--who knows what the mixture is! (pp. 206-207)

An important thorn in Herzog's life is his aging appearance: losing hair and gaining weight worry him, but he regains some dignity with comments such as this:

And next came his specific self, an apparition in the square mirror. How did he look? Oh, terrific--you look exquisite, Moses! Smashing! (p. 159)

At times however, instead of offsetting his problems, Herzog's wit underlines them:

I brought all this on myself by telling Ramona the story of my life--how I rose from humble origins to complete disaster. But a man who has made so many mistakes can't afford to ignore the corrections of his friends. Friends like Sandor, that humped rat. Or like Valentine, the moral megalomaniac and prophet in Israel. . . .

Ramona paused, and Herzog said, "It's true--I have a lot to learn."

But I am diligent. I work at it and show steady improvement. I expect to be in great shape on my deathbed. . . . The senior dead will be proud of me. . . . I will join the Y. M. C. A. of the immortals. Only, in this very hour, I may be missing eternity. (p. 152)

Moses reveals a harsh vindictiveness toward Valentine and all the friends who "betrayed" him during his second divorce. Usually he reserves his invective for Madeleine, and women in general: "They eat green salad and drink human blood" (p. 42). Purged of his anger at the end, Herzog becomes less spitefully sarcastic, and ironically gives Valentine his blessing. The second comment Moses

makes in this quotation could be interpreted as a light-hearted joke, although at this point in the novel he probably is serious about the futility of his "steady improvement". Yet if he partly accepts the stupidity of his existence--
"Lord, I ran to fight in Thy holy cause, but kept tripping, never reached the scene of the struggle" (p. 128)--at the same time he defies it with wit. And his ability to undercut himself and to laugh at the gravest social ills helps the hero immeasurably to lighten his suffering (and the novel's oppressiveness) and emerge from his breakdown.

This introduction to some of the structural and stylistic elements related to the central character's affirmation has established only a general impression of Herzog: a self-concerned, intelligent and stubborn Jew with a sense of humour, single-mindedly trying to cope with the collapse of his life. The cause of this breakdown, the subsequent change in Herzog, and his journey toward peace, hope and the love of life are the subjects which comprise the remainder of this chapter. First, however, we must briefly review the kind of man Herzog was before the crisis. A professor of intellectual history, Moses Herzog made a brilliant start (so he tells us) with his doctoral thesis, and afterwards wrote a successful book.

Research grants became accessible and he continued studying and teaching. Marriage to Daisy, "a conventional Jewish woman" (p. 126), brought many problems. As Herzog admits, many of them were his fault: "By my irregularity and turbulence of spirit I brought out the very worst in Daisy" (p. 126). Eventually he divorces her:

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. (p. 103)

Following several affairs, Moses marries Madeleine and moves to the Berkshires:

As long as Moses was married to Daisy, he had led the perfectly ordinary life of an assistant professor, respected and stable. . . . In marrying Madeleine and resigning from the university (because she thought he should), 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." What he planned was a history which really took into account the revolutions and mass convulsions of the twentieth century. (pp. 5-6)

After a year in the country, Herzog knows "something had gone wrong" (p. 6) with both his projected book and his marriage. Before long, Madeleine divorces him and Herzog stops working.

These two factors--divorce and his work--are the immediate causes of Herzog's breakdown, although they by no means account entirely for it. We discover other causes as the hero delves into his personal history, but these two precipitate the change in Moses. The divorce

especially upsets him: "The strain of the second divorce was too much for Herzog. He felt he was going to pieces--breaking up" (p. 7). Attempting to escape the strain, he travels to Europe, but upon his return he learns that his friend, Valentine Gersbach, had been Madeleine's lover long before the divorce. Shortly afterwards, Moses gives up all pretense of leading a normal life and begins his course of frenzied letter-writing. His studies "lay in the closet, in an old valise--eight hundred pages of chaotic argument which had never found its focus" (p. 4). Moses partly blames Madeleine for the difficulties he encountered with his book, but confesses that from the beginning he seriously began to mistrust his ideas. Later he says: "But he, Herzog, had committed a sin of some kind against his own heart, while in pursuit of a grand synthesis" (p. 207). Herzog betrayed his own mind by viewing human life as a subject and human nature as a definition; intellectually sophisticated, he had applied his encyclopaedic knowledge superficially. He finds it impossible to order history in a grand synthesis. And now his mind rebels, rejecting former beliefs and demanding the negation of almost any idea he considers.

Divorce, deceit and the inability to work leave Herzog verging on madness: "Some people thought he was

cracked and for a time he himself had doubted that he was all there" (p. 1). Unable to control the dangerous forces which possess him, he appeals to all his mistresses, past and present, for help:

Dear Wanda, Dear Zinka, Dear Libbie, Dear Ramona,
Dear Sono, I need help in the worst way. I am
afraid of falling apart. (p. 11)

Strangely agitated, withdrawn and despairing, he knows he must "calm down these over-strained galloping nerves, put out this murky fire inside" (p. 27). Moses dreads his feelings and tries to escape them. So he leaves the city for the seashore:

He was getting away from all burdens, practical questions, away also from Ramona. There were times when you wanted to creep into hiding, like an animal. (p. 27)

Emotionally, Herzog escapes by swimming in self-pity or concentrating upon his health and appearance. Or he lashes out in hatred against Madeleine and Valentine. Entirely self-absorbed, Herzog fails to acknowledge any hurts he may have inflicted. Instead, he fills his conversations and letters with criticism of his ex-wife and her lover, and implied, or stated, self-praise. He says "I'm not even greatly impressed with my own tortured heart. It begins to seem another waste of time" (p. 17), but in truth, his suffering dominates his every thought.

Herzog is a man breaking down: a man crazed, wracked by the past, driven to write unposted letters, withdrawn and self-absorbed, vain, neurotic, and thoroughly immersed in his grief. "He realized that he had mismanaged everything" (p. 3), but he continues to do so. His mismanagement evokes his laughter, but it also terrifies him: what can a man, forty-seven years old, with two ex-wives and two children, once a scholar but now an outcast, do, and where can he turn? He is in the midst of a crisis from which he may not recover. There is no love in his life or in the world, as he sees it. His mistress only worries him, and his one friend, Lucas Asphalter, wants to die because a pet monkey died. Other friends deceive him or mock him. Religious beliefs, modern thought and psychiatry hold no security or certainty. He cannot perceive anything positive in his personal life and the outside world only compounds his own chaos:

The description might begin with his wild internal disorder, or even with the fact that he was quivering. And why? Because he let the entire world press upon him. For instance? Well, for instance, what it means to be a man. In a city. In a century. In transition. In a mass. Transformed by science. Under organized power. Subject to tremendous controls. In a condition caused by mechanization In a society that was no community and devalued the person Which spent military billions against foreign enemies but would not pay for order at home. Which permitted savagery and barbarism in its own great cities. (p. 201)

The inhuman, negative world creates further anguish for

Moses. We feel he experiences on all levels--emotional, spiritual, social, intellectual--a disaster with which he cannot cope. A lifetime of thought, work, loving and procreating has become a wilderness.

Before examining more fully the causes of Herzog's madness and his struggle to survive, we should understand the depths of his breakdown in order to see his affirmation in perspective. As mentioned before, Herzog's journey is laughable and pathetic at times--he himself mocks every step--and thus, we must underline his disorder and despair. But desperate as he becomes, Herzog never accepts a stance so pessimistic that he wants to forego existence entirely. He wonders why he survives, he hopes for sickness, and he does write his mother that he sometimes longed for death, but his thoughts usually show that he "never stopped asserting anyway, or feeling" (p. 314). One critic writes: "His commitment is always to life"¹², although others analyze Herzog as being close to nihilism. The point is this: Herzog never really repudiates affirmation; he is in a period of inquiry and reconstruction. He suspends his

¹²Howard M. Harper, Jr., Desperate Faith (Chapel Hill, North Carolina, 1967), p. 57

commitment to life while he searches "for a change of heart, a change of heart--a true change of heart!"

(p. 201). He arrives at a point where he must choose:

What good, what lasting good is there in me? Is there nothing else between birth and death but what I can get out of this perversity--only a favorable balance of disorderly emotions? No freedom? Only impulses? And what about all the good I have in my heart--doesn't it mean anything? Is it simply a joke? (p. 207)

As this quotation indicates, Herzog always gives the impression that he cares about humanity and goodness. Except for some very bleak moods, while he questions, he seems to infer an innate hope for life's significance. As soon as his collapse occurs, he begins to fight it, regenerating his positive vision of the gift of existence.

Herzog's struggle involves an investigation of and reconciliation with the sources of his madness: Madeleine, his intellectual pretensions, his past, his evasive innocence, his contempt for human nature, and his alienation. The hero does not resolve his difficulties neatly, but sometimes, simply by examining them, he can put them in perspective and live with them more peaceably. For example, he frequently returns to his past, reliving his childhood and perceiving the determining influences upon his character. He cannot change his past, but he can accept it and shed it, and clarify related and

present problems. Herzog must come to terms with many things which originated in childhood, and perhaps this is the best place to begin tracing his development.

As a child, Moses lived in an environment of poverty, strong family ties, immigrant parents, religious observances, and Hebrew school. Feelings and attitudes such as moral earnestness, tenaciousness, suffering, love and ambition surrounded him. Moses recalls his early life with such intensity that his descriptions and conversations have the immediacy of the present:

The morning light could not free itself from gloom and frost Moses and his brothers put on their caps and prayed together,

"Ma tovu ohaleha Yaakov. . . ."

"How goodly are thy tents, O Israel."

Napoleon Street, rotten, toylike, crazy and filthy, riddled, flogged with harsh weather--the bootlegger's boys reciting ancient prayers. To this Moses' heart was attached with great power. Here was a wider range of human feelings than he had ever again been able to find. . . . All he ever wanted was there. His mother did the wash, and mourned. His father was desperate and frightened, but obstinately fighting. (p. 140)

Moses cherishes the reality of his early years. His childhood family was strong and close; it offered a point of reference from which he could identify himself and relate to the world. Even more, the family shared love and grief, and provided a secure refuge from reality. And this is part of the reason Herzog suffers now: comparison of the empty present with his vision of the past can only further his despair.

Yet Moses must review the past in order to see a lost reality when he was not self-imprisoned but a member of a community. He realizes the danger: "To haunt the past like this--to love the dead! Moses warned himself not to yield so greatly to this temptation" (p. 143). He clings pathetically to special memories: "But he had not forgotten the odor of his mother's saliva on the handkerchief that summer morning" (p. 33). Herzog must go back in order to accept the present: the death of his parents, the fragmentation of the family structure and his loneliness. Because of his heritage, he will always mourn the family loss and judge himself by his ideals: "It was painful to his instincts, his Jewish family feelings, that his children should be growing up without him" (p. 23). But he must acknowledge that the family of forty years ago has no present relevance. Divorce separates him from his children, death divides him from his parents, and distance and different ways of life inhibit his relationship with his sister and two brothers.

By the end of the novel, Herzog has in part lost the anguish created by his family-mindedness. In the beginning, loneliness brings tears: "He went out, fighting his sadness over this solitary life" (p. 24). Towards the close of the book, he says his "present loneliness did not seem to count because it was so

consciously cheerful" (p. 311). By reliving painful childhood memories, he continuously wears them down until his emotions subside. Furthermore, certain events change the protagonist's attitudes to his own children. He sees June and realizes that she is not in danger. Then the car accident forces him to admit that at the present time he is a poor influence upon his daughter. Vowing to return to her "only when he was ready to do June good, genuine good" (p. 303), Herzog condemns his foolish behaviour:

Running to Chicago to protect his daughter, he almost killed her. Coming to offset the influence of Gersbach, and to give her the benefit of his own self . . . what did he do but bang into a pole. And then the child saw him dragged out fainting, cut on the head, the revolver and rubles sliding from his pocket. (p. 285)

When Moses arrives in Ludeyville, he stops mourning his separation from June and his son, and instead, finds pleasure in planning to see Marco at camp and in painting a piano for his daughter. (Symbolically, he paints the piano green: he is in the midst of regeneration.) He seems able to tolerate his isolation because he is happier within himself.

But Herzog can never yield his vision of a family entirely. When his brother Will visits him in the country, he says:

"It can be lovely here. But you know, we might make it a Herzog summer resort. For the family. Everyone put in a little money. Cut the brush. Build a swimming pool." (p. 331)

He knows the impracticality of such an arrangement, but yearns for the impossible, and this is part of Herzog's affirmation: to see fragmentation, to suffer because of it, yet to hope absurdly instead of remaining aloof.

Concurrently, we suspect that the hero prefers independence and enjoys his freedom from the demands of children and kin. The novel ends with the possibility of a third marriage and the renewal of Herzog's role as Jewish patriarch. In other words, he has achieved some peace of mind, but found no new solutions to his need for the love of a family and his desire to remain uncommitted.

Along with family-mindedness, another source of anxiety with childhood roots is Herzog's attitude to suffering. His most vivid childhood recollections centre upon his father's grief:

He showed his cut face. He spread his arms so we could see his tatters, and the white of his body under them. . . . As he did this, he began to cry, and the children standing about him all cried. It was more than I could bear that anyone should lay violent hands on him--a father, a sacred being, a king. . . . My heart was suffocated by this horror. I thought I would die of it. Whom did I ever love as I loved them? (p. 147)

Love and suffering become inextricably bound in Herzog's

memories. He inherits the grief of his parents and of all Jews, and it becomes part of his identity:

So we had a great schooling in grief. I still know these cries of the soul. . . . But all these are antiquities--yes, Jewish antiquities originating in the Bible, in a Biblical sense of personal experience and destiny. What happened during the War abolished Father Herzog's claim to exceptional suffering. We are on a more brutal standard now But I am still a slave to Papa's pain. The way Father Herzog spoke of himself! That could make one laugh. His I had such dignity. (pp. 148-9)

Father Herzog gained dignity through pain, at least in his son's eyes, yet Moses also sees the degradation which suffering creates in the world. Because of the prominence of emotionalism in his early life, Moses attaches significance to man's feelings. He wants suffering to be meaningful and dignified; it is a part of his heritage which he cannot surrender. But when he faces his own anguish, these beliefs betray him, and suffering becomes a problem in itself.

Herzog becomes so obsessed with suffering that he loses sight of its origin. He mentally compares his sorrow to that of others, as in competition. Although he states that "Grief Sir, is a species of idleness" (p. 3), Herzog becomes vain about his ability to endure sorrow, and he subjects others to his self-pity. As Himmelstein, Moses' lawyer, remarks: "'Well, when you suffer, you really suffer. You're a real, genuine old Jewish type that digs the emotions'" (p. 84). This

preoccupation with sorrow produces a negative energy inhibiting Herzog's ability to reinterpret the past. When he tells his story of "how he was swindled, conned, manipulated, his savings taken, driven into debt, his trust betrayed by wife, friend, physician" (p. 156), he understands that "he had no right to tell, to inflict it, that his craving for confirmation . . . was unclean" (p. 157). But "like an addict struggling to kick the habit" (p. 156) he repeats his grievances and his distorted version of their cause many times.

Eventually Moses decides to kill Madeleine and Gersbach, because to him they appear to be the primary source of his anguish. But when he sees them, he perceives the absurdity of his plan: "Only self-hatred could lead him to ruin himself because his heart was 'broken'. How could it be broken by such a pair?" (p. 258). After this, Herzog begins to view his suffering more rationally. He can permit it to run a normal course, and near the end, he seems able to control it: "And this Jewish art of tears must be suppressed" (p. 276). Under his "new dispensation" he knows he will always "be such a throb-hearted character" (p. 330), but he manages to overcome an obsession with suffering, without becoming emotionally dead.

After Herzog subdues his emotions, he tries to express some of his attitudes toward grief. In a letter to a professor of philosophy, he writes:

But to get to the main point, the advocacy and praise of suffering take us in the wrong direction and those of us who remain loyal to civilization must not go for it. (p. 317)

The world is grim enough without a theology of suffering, and if man is to affirm life, he must look instead for the truths on this side of existence. Because of his own experience, Moses knows the dangers of exaggerating pain. Except for certain religious people, suffering is destructive and unilluminating, and Herzog "will never expound suffering for anyone or call for Hell to make us serious and truthful" (pp. 317-18). He especially derides those "safe, comfortable people playing at crisis, alienation, apocalypse and desperation" (p. 316): an ironical opinion in light of his own self-dramatized grief. In contrast to these views, in which Herzog seems to deny the value of suffering, he writes the following to Nietzsche:

I also know you think that deep pain is ennobling, pain which burns slow, like green wood, and there you have me with you, somewhat. But for this higher education survival is necessary. You must outlive the pain. (p. 319)

Moses never resolves the problem. Because of his heritage, he hopes that pain dignifies man; because of his society, "unified by the horrible wars" (p. 75), he demands some meaning from grief. But he also sees that

before the reward of pain must come survival--the power and time to be illuminated. Man must live and value existence first. Herzog has ventured a long way toward peace and sanity in comparison to when he was "sick and angry--broken by this lousy grief" (p. 79).

Bellow's protagonist must grapple with another problem originating in childhood: his moral vision. In particular, Moses' confidence in his own goodness and his innocent world view become subjects of his intense investigation. He questions the relevance of his moral education to twentieth-century life: "Young Jews, brought up on moral principles as Victorian ladies were on pianoforte and needlepoint, thought Herzog" (p. 231). Although he saw much brutality in his youth, family protectiveness prevented a complete vision of reality: "he had required so many people to lie to him, many, many, beginning naturally, with his mother" (p. 232). And just as other people shielded Moses from evil, so he "refused to know evil" (p. 245). Because of his intellectual studies, he must acknowledge in theory the horror of modern life. But it has no real meaning to Herzog. A nursery rhyme expresses his personal creed:

I love little pussy, her coat is so warm
And if I don't hurt her, she'll do me no harm.
I'll sit by the fire and give her some food,
And pussy will love me because I am good. (p. 118)

During the weeks of his despair and crazed exhaustion, Herzog mocks this former code. He begins to examine his self-deceptive innocence:

He wondered at times whether he didn't belong to a class of people secretly convinced they had an arrangement with fate; in return for docility or ingenuous good will they were to be shielded from the worst brutalities of life. (p. 154)

Herzog admits to himself that he leads "a life of innocent sloth" (p. 68). When others insist that "truth is true only as it brings down more disgrace and dreariness upon human beings" (p. 93), Bellow's hero upholds the opposite:

Herzog, predictably bucking such trends, had characteristically, obstinately, defiantly, blindly but without sufficient courage or intelligence tried to be a marvelous Herzog, a Herzog who, perhaps clumsily, tried to live out marvelous qualities vaguely comprehended. (p. 93)

Lacking clear ideas, believing in goodness without an underlying respect for evil, Moses naturally fails. Thus, when his world falls apart, the hero has nothing to grasp but a confused and flimsy faith in marvelous qualities.

At times he seems to repudiate his former faith in mankind and morality:

No true individual has existed yet, able to live, able to die. Only diseased, tragic, or dismal and ludicrous fools who sometimes hoped to achieve some ideal by fiat, by their great desire for it. (p. 67)

But he cannot, in the long run, deny "his longing for the good, the true" (p. 166), and so he constantly returns to this question: "And what about all the good I have in my heart--doesn't it mean anything?" (p. 207). Yet Herzog rarely thinks of his goodness in matter-of-fact terms. In a letter to the leader of a charitable group he writes: "I've always wanted very much to lead a moral, useful, and active life. I never knew where to begin" (p. 48). Herzog wants to effect the moral values of his Jewish home, but lacks direction and practicality. He self-righteously declares himself on the side of high ethical behaviour, but reveals acts of adultery, unkindness, bitterness and selfishness. Ironically, Herzog can perceive and condemn the contradictoriness of his position, his indecisiveness and evasiveness. But he must actually confront and experience certain facts of existence--evil and death--before he can progress beyond the diagnosis.

The change and confrontation begin when Moses decides to meet his lawyer at the courthouse. He plans to gain legal custody of June, but more than custody, Herzog wants to punish Madeleine and Valentine:

So now his rage is so great, and deep, so murderous, bloody, positively rapturous, that his arms and fingers ache to strangle them. So much for his boyish purity of heart. . . . I am a mess, and talk about justice. I owe the powers that created me a human life. And where is it! Where is that human life which is my only excuse for surviving! (p. 220)

At first, yielding to his hatred for Madeleine and her lover, Moses cries out for murderous justice. Then he realizes the supreme comedy of his demand: what right has he--a messy, broken neurotic--to ask for justice, especially when what he really wants is revenge? At the courthouse, he watches the administration of social justice. The trial of a male prostitute and thief drives him from the room: "He felt as though something terrible, inflammatory, bitter, had been grated into his bloodstream" (p. 230). Seeing anyone in the hands of the law agitates Herzog, but this case particularly upsets him because the prisoner seems to give the world joke for joke:

With his bad fantasy he defied a bad reality, subliminally asserting to the magistrate, "Your authority and my degeneracy are one and the same". (p. 229)

To see "Nastiness in the transcendent position" (p. 229) horrifies Moses. He hopes for a heart attack:

But no, he was really very strong and healthy, and no . . . what was he saying? He finished his sentence, however: no such luck. He must live. Complete his assignment, whatever that was. (p. 231)

Herzog quells the impulse he has had since the beginning of his breakdown "for some definite sickness which would send him to a hospital for a while" (pp. 12-13)--a negative method of regeneration--and turns toward responsibility. Feeling as if he swallowed poison, "He now grasped the floating suspicion that this poison

rose from within. He knew in fact that it did. What produced it?" (p. 231). He wonders if his intense desire to outdistance himself, "the force of balked longings" (p. 232) now returns as evil. If so, how long can he endure this inner beating? As his mental pain reaches a pitch, Moses turns back in time to the death of his mother. He confesses how carefully he had avoided the acceptance of her death: "I chose not to read this text" (p. 234). Jarred by his experience with genuine evil, Herzog thinks back to his mother's protectiveness and unselfishness. He wishes now he had not been such "A bookish, callow boy" (p. 235) at the time of her death, and regrets his evasiveness.

This scene prepares the way for the next case Moses witnesses: a grotesque murder trial involving a retarded whore who had drunkenly beat her child to death. At first Herzog cannot understand: "but this is the difficulty with people who spend their lives in humane studies and therefore imagine once cruelty has been described in books it is ended" (p. 238). Physically sickened, he leaves the courtroom again, and asks himself whether he should pray for the dead child:

And what was there in modern, post . . . post-Christian America to pray for? Justice--justice and mercy? And pray away the monstrousness of life, the wicked dream it was? He opened his mouth to relieve the pressure he felt. He was wrung, and wrung again, and wrung again, again. (p. 240)

Bellow's protagonist transcends his shallow version of humanity to discover a reality of monstrous evil. His recognition and reaction form the climax of the novel and mark the beginning of an inner change. At this point, evil as the sole reality of life overwhelms him; but instead of becoming preoccupied with evil and death, he begins to reaffirm his faith in the goodness of humanity. And now, instead of mouthing an attack on pessimism, he can defy nihilistic attitudes meaningfully, and concurrently, affirm the need for a positive outlook.

As yet, however, Herzog's purgation is incomplete. After leaving the courthouse he flies to Chicago, intending to murder Madeleine and Gersbach, not only to save June from mistreatment, but because "They deserved to die" (p. 254). In spirit, Madeleine is his murderess; thus, Herzog believes he can kill her without remorse:

He felt in his arms and in his fingers, and to the core of his heart, the sweet exertion of strangling--horrible and sweet, an orgasmic rapture of inflicting death. (p. 255)

The last trial arouses Herzog's unnatural intensity, exposing his need for final power over the woman who

drove him to chaos. And his emotional excitement appears strong enough to effect action. But we never believe he will murder them: first, because he is by nature incapable of physical violence, and second, because of his preceding thoughts. Memories of his father just before death cause Moses to acknowledge how closely he resembles his father. Father Herzog had threatened to shoot his son with the same gun Moses now carries. Moses, full of egotism, "with that Christianized smirk of the long-suffering son" (p. 250), had argued with his father; now he regrets his foolishness and thinks of the finality of death. Herzog is slowly coming to terms with parts of his past, with guilt and responsibility, and with his own identity. For him, violence is as inconceivable as it was for his father. Furthermore, when he sees his victims through a window, he realizes they are not the monsters of depravity he had imagined. Thus, "his intended violence turned into theater, into something ludicrous" (p. 258). He says to himself:

Only self-hatred could lead him to ruin himself because his heart was "broken." How could it be broken by such a pair? . . . His breath came back to him; and how good it felt to breathe! It was worth the trip. (p. 258)

Herzog assures his recovery at this stage. Triumphant over his illusion of revenge, he convinces himself that June does not suffer and frees himself from much of his hatred.

Herzog has achieved some understanding of evil, including that which lies within himself; he has succumbed in part to impulses which negate his childish belief in his goodness; he can admit his previous failure to accept his parents' death. His jail experience after the accident continues his education in humiliation, but first, he has a long conversation with Lucas Asphalter about death. "Do I want to exist, or want to die?" (p. 96) Herzog asks in the beginning. Theoretically he believes that to consummate existence man must "abide with death in clarity of consciousness" (p. 165). But in reality, he knows the "infantile terror of death that had bent and buckled his life into these curious shapes" (p. 266). Enlightened by the murder trial, by his memories and by his planned murder, Herzog now attempts to express to Lucas how death affects life.

Since the ultimate reality of existence is death, man shapes his life in accordance with his view of death. According to Herzog, the existentialist belief that dread of death can make a meaningless life authentic "threatens the heart of civilization" (p. 272). Instead, he tells Lucas, man must turn to affirmation:

"The real and essential question is one of our employment by other human beings and their employment by us. Without this true employment you never dread death, you cultivate it. And consciousness when it doesn't clearly understand what to live for, what to die for, can only abuse and ridicule itself." (pp. 272-73)

Herzog elevates love as the supreme moral value. In part, this is his answer to his own self-abuse and ridicule; his ability to act upon his new awareness will be discussed shortly. He exchanges evasiveness for a healthy awareness of death. His perceptions lead to an affirmation of life:

Since the last question, also the first one, the question of death, offers us . . . the acknowledging that we owe a human life to this waking spell of existence, regardless of the void. (After all, we have no positive knowledge of that void.) (p. 314)

Herzog can now embrace life more fully because his vision encompasses more of its reality. Although we cannot know the permanent effect of his experiences, his return to the nursery rhyme creed and to abstract ideas about death and evil seems improbable. Understanding produces a revaluation of life and love.

Herzog's assertion of "true employment" conflicts with his self-centredness. Bellow's heroes constantly waiver between alienation and commitment to society, between individualism and relationship with others. Herzog, extremely self-absorbed and a "prisoner

of perception" yearns to be in and of the world. He responds to a crucial phase of his life by an escape into self; he moves away from reality and society, towards insanity. Paradoxically, he condemns alienation, recognizing the consequent deformation. Before his breakdown, Moses was inclined to self-centredness, in part because of his faith in the significance and uniqueness of each individual. Yet as we have seen, he still needs the security and love offered by social attachments. This ambivalent position--detachment countered by the need for involvement--is another of the problems Herzog must examine in his struggle to reorder his life.

At one point, he rejects the possibility of fulfillment from inter-relationships:

He survived. And for what? What was he hanging around for? To follow this career of personal relationships until his strength at last gave out? Only to be a smashing success in the private realm, a king of hearts? . . . But this is a female pursuit. (p. 94)

Herzog's own failures precipitate this sarcastic attack upon personal relationships. He similarly criticizes "Amorphous, swelling, hungry, indiscriminate, cowardly potato love" (p. 91), a degenerate form of collective love born out of despair. Yet he is subject to fits of this kind of love. Nor can Herzog determine the value of physical love. When Madeleine first divorces him,

he thinks that her destruction of his sexual powers has ruined his hope of recovery: "It was in this respect that he felt most like a convalescent" (p. 5). But he never sincerely believes in salvation by means of physical love alone, a solution his mistress offers him. The only time Moses appears certain of his convictions is when he speaks to Lucas: "'I really believe that brotherhood is what makes a man human'" (p. 272). But if his ideals of "brotherhood" and "true employment" imply some kind of admirable relationship with society, Moses never clarifies his intentions. And he cannot reach ordinary reality with vague, speculative dreams.

But whatever "brotherhood" means, Herzog's resolution gives him peace and happiness:

I mean to share with other human beings as far as possible and not destroy my remaining years in the same way. Herzog felt a deep, dizzy eagerness to begin. (p. 322)

If we accept this decision at face value, then we must interpret the novel's conclusion as very positive. Herzog has discarded a messy personal life for one with clear, selfless goals. But we know he is a dreamer and a man who dislikes involvement. Is this solution another illusion, a momentary decision? "We never see them [Bellow's heroes] emerge from the boundless and lonely confines of their uninterrupted . . .

subjectivism."¹³ Herzog never tests his decision to transcend subjectivism. "The protagonist is frozen in a gesture of readiness to embrace mankind. However, the dynamics of his character make such an embrace patently impossible."¹⁴ Doubt about Moses' ability to act out his words lessens the affirmative mood. But several factors support his resolution.

The central character's relationship with Lucas provides evidence of his capacity to take part in a genuine friendship. Secondly, Herzog has undergone "a true change of heart". The reward of his dangerous self-absorption has been increased self-awareness:

"Why must I be such a throb-hearted character . . . But I am. I am, and you can't teach old dogs" (p. 330).

He has an accepted identity, a basis from which he can relate to common humanity: "I am Herzog. I have to be that man" (p. 67). "I am the specialist in . . . in spiritual self-awareness; or emotionalism; or ideas; or nonsense" (p. 307). Typically ironical, Moses nonetheless senses his peculiar position in society. His self-

¹³Tony Tanner, Saul Bellow, pp. 105-106.

¹⁴Earl Rovit, Saul Bellow (Minneapolis, 1967), p. 25.

conception precludes a normal participation in the common world, but permits some relationship with it.

Louis Rubin writes:

Herzog finally accepts the fact that he will not ever be able fully to belong to his world, that though he's dependent on it, there is that spirituality which will make him a displaced person until he dies. Bellow's genius comes in his being able to make this special uneasiness . . . a symbol of man's unending discomfort with his human state.¹⁵

The words "displaced until death" distort Herzog's position; if he has no final solutions, he is at least working positively toward a reconciliation between self and his need for and obligations to society. And further, he has overcome a morbid, wasting subjectivism and is prepared to "play the instrument" (p. 330) he has, as he reaches out to all with "the most loving wish I have in my heart" (p. 326).

We never know definitely how Herzog will effect his plan to participate in the world or if he is capable of it. We do know he reaches this affirmation and that it has a religious slant. In speaking to Lucas about brotherhood, he expresses his intentions Biblically:

¹⁵Louis Rubin, The Curious Death of the Novel (Baton Rouge, 1967), pp. 275-76.

"But let's stick to what matters. I really believe that brotherhood is what makes a man human. If I owe God a human life, this is where I fall down. 'Man liveth not by Self alone but in his brother's face. . . . Each shall behold the Eternal Father and love and joy abound'." (p. 272)

Near the close of Herzog, Moses' letters frequently include prayers; his language becomes spiritually coloured.. And he writes to God:

To God he jotted several lines.
How my mind has struggled to make coherent sense. I have not been too good at it. But have desired to do your unknowable will, taking it, and you, without symbols. Everything of intensest significance. Especially if divested of me.
(pp. 325-26)

Moses cherishes the conviction that unwittingly he has shaped his life in accordance with God's will. And, in turning to God, he hopes he has escaped from "The life that exhibits itself" (p. 324). As Solotaroff remarks, Herzog turns away from subjectivism and finds simplicity: "a proper estimate of the interest of one small and ailing self against the claims of all there is in this world that isn't Moses."¹⁶ Apparently, with spiritual help, Herzog is confident that he can transcend self and affirm significance in the outer world. Furthermore, he places himself and his estate in the hands of a Mr. Tuttle of Ludeyville:

¹⁶Theodore Solotaroff, "Napoleon Street and After", Commentary, (December 1964), p. 66.

"He [Mr. Tuttle] runs everything. He's the master spirit of Ludeyville. . . . He's the demon of these woods. He can have the lights burning here within an hour. He knows all. He overcharges, but very, very shyly." (p. 334)

Just as the importance of Herzog's spiritual trend is never made clear, so the meaning in Mr. Tuttle's position is vague. Possibly Mr. Tuttle represents the trust and dependence Herzog now finds in God. Etymologically we can trace "tuttle" back to Latin words meaning "protection" and "all". Evidently Mr. Tuttle imposes high payment (perhaps in terms of pain) for his work as both demon and spirit; however, Herzog seems to appreciate the fact that this master exerts his authority shyly. Adding to the ambiguous religious trend, Herzog's final letter includes the following:

I look at myself and see chest, thighs, feet--
a head. This strange organization, I know it will
die. And inside--something, something, happiness
. . . "Thou movest me." That leaves no choice.
Something produces intensity, a holy feeling, as
oranges produce orange. . . . But this intensity,
doesn't it mean anything? . . . But I have no
arguments to make about it. "Thou movest me."
 (p. 340)

Who is "thou"? How long will this spiritual radiance last? God, self-transcendence, spiritual ascendancy-- Herzog never thinks out these things--he arrives at a moment of inspired intensity which makes death insignificant and existence holy.

Irvin Stock, who frequently writes about Bellow's novels, sees the author's heroes as men striving to harmonize their lives with God's will. Describing Herzog he says:

And that, I take it, is the point: to show how a man thus richly equipped to suffer and understand the problem of being human is driven past all illusory consolations, deeper than reason, to the original, the inexhaustible source of the energy by which we live.¹⁷

The novel gives no definite evidence that Herzog consciously or unconsciously strives to find God. He does connect his reaffirmation of the value of existence with God, but obscurely. Because of the ambiguity surrounding Herzog's spiritual feelings, and because they occur only at the end of the novel, we cannot determine their validity or permanence. But still, Herzog's intimations of God are necessary to complete his movement away from self toward rebirth. And he can only turn toward his personal religious feelings at the conclusion because until then he is struggling with intellectual pretensions.

I have been talking about religion and God without mentioning Judaism or Jewishness, but I believe the latter deserves more space than I can permit. However, I have related briefly a particular incident

¹⁷Irvin Stock, "The Novels of Saul Bellow", Southern Review, 3 (January 1967), p. 19.

which illustrates the protagonist's betrayal of his inherited religion and his relationship with Madeleine. Herzog accepts his Jewish identity and although he does not speak of it often, his Jewishness seems to mean a great deal to him. He recalls the weeks shortly before marriage to Madeleine, at which time she was a fervent Catholic convert:

"Maybe I have become a fanatic about conventional things," said Madeleine. "But I won't have it any other way. You and I have got to marry in the Church, otherwise I quit. Our children will be baptized and brought up in the Church." Moses gave a dumb half-nod. (pp. 116-17)

Herzog's willingness to overlook his Jewishness reveals as much weakness and vacillation as Madeleine's eventual abandonment of Catholicism. The incident could be interpreted differently, however; is Herzog's love of Madeleine so strong it overcomes other considerations? His confusion elsewhere suggests that he began with a certain insecurity in relation to his Jewishness, but affection for Madeleine must have played a large part in his submission to her.

The two factors disclosed by this incident and by others--love and submission--largely explain Herzog's inordinate reaction to his divorce. As mentioned earlier, the divorce is the immediate cause of his crack-up; to respond to rejection and betrayal with such

drawn-out bitterness and anguish, Moses must have loved his ex-wife deeply. We can only hypothesize because he almost always speaks critically of her, but one of his remarks shows his understanding of their relationship:

There was a flavor of subjugation in his love for Madeleine. Since she was domineering, and since he loved her, he had to accept the flavor that was given. (p. 8)

The loss, not only of her love, but also of her authority, produces a frightening void in Herzog's existence. Denied her domination, his world falls apart and his love changes to hate. The following exemplifies the manner in which he expresses his hate:

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. (p. 93)

Valentine Gersbach, because he replaces Herzog, humiliates him and robs him of his role as husband and father, receives like treatment.

As described earlier, Herzog's hatred and fear reach a climax when he plans to kill Madeleine and Gersbach. After seeing them and his intended violence realistically, he feels cleansed. For the first time, he breathes easily. Herzog cannot reverse his critical opinion of Madeleine, but when he sees her following the car accident he reflects:

But hard ruthless action taken against a man is the assertion by evildoers that he is fully knowable. They put me down, ergo they claimed final knowledge of Herzog. They knew me! . . . Excuse me, therefore, sir and madam, but I reject your definitions of me. Ah, this Madeleine is a strange person, to be so proud but not well wiped-- . . . But I make no last judgment. That's for them, not me. I came to do harm, I admit. But the first bloodshed was mine, and so I'm out of this now. Count me out. (p. 299)

Herzog frees himself from his hatred, and by the time he reaches Ludeyville, the burden of sorrow Madeleine helped to produce, has dissipated:

For perhaps the first time he felt what it was to be free from Madeleine. Joy! His servitude was ended, and his heart released from its grisly heaviness and encrustation. Her absence, . . . was simply sweetness and lightness of spirit.
(p. 313)

The hero feels as if a diseased growth has been removed from his flesh. His bondage to Madeleine and to his love-hate despair ended, Moses can now recall pre-divorce incidents without rancor, and later concede to his brother that "She seems to have filled a special need" (p. 334):

"A very special need. I don't know what. She brought ideology into my life. Something to do with catastrophe." (p. 334)

Moses senses that his existence required a reconstruction, a rebirth through catastrophe, and Madeleine hastened an inevitable crisis. Ironically, Ramona brings a sexual ideology to Herzog, and with his "'talent for making a fatal choice'" (p. 338), the possibility of a third marriage cannot be discounted.

Yet for the time being, Bellow's hero is "pretty well satisfied to be, to be just as it is willed" (p. 340). He has found peace of mind, quite literally, and this brings us to the last problem Moses meets and partly resolves. During his breakdown, he frantically tries to understand everything; because he is by nature and profession a sensitive intellectual, the resulting chaos of ideas hastens his madness. To find tranquility, he must stop intellectualising, discard superfluous thoughts, limit his reliance upon reason and overcome his pretensions. At one time, Moses had attempted to synthesize the chaos; he believed vainly in his ability:

He was going--he smiled secretly now, admitting it--to wrap the subject up . . . show them what was what, stun them, expose their triviality once and for all. (p. 119)

Not only egotism but also an innocent conviction of his responsibility to the world inflated his self-conception:

The progress of civilization--indeed, the survival of civilization--depended on the success of Moses E. Herzog. (p. 125)

Progressively, and with Madeleine's help, Moses becomes disillusioned; his mind rebels against his beliefs, his superficiality, his impotent, intellectual privacy:

He used to be able to keep going, but now he worked at about two per cent of efficiency, handled every piece of paper five or ten times and misplaced everything. It was too much! He was going under. (p. 121)

His intellectualism, emotionally and realistically inadequate, affords him no protection and eventually

he cannot write, review or lecture any longer; he is reduced to scrawling random thoughts on scraps of paper.

The hero's natural distrust of platitudes and fashionable intellectual postures, plus his conviction that many ideologies have been perverted, help him to reject many of the ideas teeming in his consciousness. Further, he perceives that much of modern thought, which has shaped his existence, has harmed him by encouraging his suffering, his alienation and conceit. At first, his attacks on modernism end only in self-satire; but as one critic notices, his letters increasingly question the applicability of sophisticated modernism to his personal hurts and hopes.¹⁸

Definitions of human nature do not solve problems, he discovers. Towards the end, Herzog launches an extensive attack on organized despair and other negative cultural attitudes. He talks more about the limitations of the mind and the incomprehensibility of existence. Life is a mystery eluding analysis; constant explanation becomes unnecessary. To his former psychiatrist Moses writes: "Allow me modestly to claim that I am much

¹⁸James Hall, The Lunatic Giant in the Drawing Room (Bloomington, London, 1968), p. 170.

better now at ambiguities" (p. 304). Although he "couldn't say definitely that he would not finish his study" (p. 203), Bellow's hero finally realizes the stupidity of his former way of thinking and working:

But then he realized that he did not need to perform elaborate abstract intellectual work--work he had always thrown himself into as if it were the struggle of survival. But not thinking is not necessarily fatal. (p. 265)

Through a change of heart Herzog effects a change of thinking.

He does not mean to cease thinking:

And after all, he continued by the fire, the human intellect is one of the great forces of the universe. It can't safely remain unused. (p. 311)

Herzog's final statements, such as "to be just as it is willed" (p. 340) imply complacency. But he recognizes the dangers of unused intellect, and even if he wished it, the intensity of his mind and its capacity for exploration would not permit more than a temporary passivity. Herzog has simply liberated himself from his destructive compulsion to explain and understand everything: "Go through what is comprehensible and you conclude that only the incomprehensible gives any light" (p. 266). He moves beyond intellectual analysis to imagination and sensitivity, to "the possibility for some new commencement and calm somewhere on the other

side of 'explanation'."¹⁹ After all, he writes, "The light of truth is never far away, and no human being is too negligible or corrupt to come into it" (p. 314).

Moses Herzog's journey, through great pressures toward spiritual peace, hope and life, is suggested by his name. His Biblical namesake, Moses, leads the Israelites out of slavery, overcomes a lifetime of difficulties--the wilderness, war, starvation, false worship, rebellion--and finally arrives at the Promised Land. As a prophet, Moses spends much time alone, talking to God and constructing laws for his people. But because he once doubted God's promise, God refuses to allow Moses to enter Israel; instead He only permits him to see it. Bellow's Moses also withdraws from the world, but he must disentangle and strengthen his beliefs alone. Only at the end of his struggle does he hope that he has been fulfilling a God-given assignment. Moses Herzog also travels a wilderness--an inner one--and leads only himself to the vision of a promised land. Incapable of living permanently there, Moses nonetheless travels far enough to envision it and rest content in existence.

¹⁹Tanner, p. 90.

The protagonist's given name and surname, in combination, also communicate a facet of the conclusion. "Herzog", harsh, secular and Germanic, united with "Moses", ancient prophet and lawgiver, suggests the reconciliation the hero achieves with the world. Toward the close of the novel, as we have seen, Moses realizes that everyone has his own assignment in life, his being as the specialist in "spiritual self-awareness; or emotionalism; or ideas" (p. 307). His perception of a place and an identity in society enables Moses to relate partially to the everyday world--in effect a combination of spiritual and physical or prophet and common man.

I do not believe any precise conclusions about the nature and strength of the protagonist's affirmation can be reached, but Herzog unquestionably moves in a positive direction, as this chapter has demonstrated. At the start, Moses Herzog was a negative factor--socially, emotionally, mentally and physically. Spiritually sick, suffering from a peculiar form of madness, incapable of affirming the value of his existence, the hero confronts public and private chaos. Destructive forces shape his life, but in order to go up he must reach bottom. To live in the present, he must relive the past; to find simplicity he must suffer

disintegration; to discover the world he must withdraw; to see reality he must experience it; to overcome an obsession with words he must surrender his life to letters; to escape grief he must first permit the negative energy of suffering to overwhelm him. The examples are countless, but the point is that when Herzog does reach bottom, he does not find himself spiritually empty and thus he can effect his regeneration.

At first Moses tries to escape--to Europe, to the seashore, to a hospital--but the fight to recover soon controls his entire existence. He writes letters, haunts the past, confronts evil and death, explores his moral indecisiveness, his self-centredness, reviles his morbid intellectualism, wears down his suffering and purges himself of hatred for Madeleine and Gersbach. Doubting, questioning and condemning, Moses thrashes through the values and beliefs which have shaped his life. Liberated from his compulsions and obsessions, freed from a state of being at once "eager, grieving, fantastic, dangerous, crazed and, to the point of death, 'comical'" (p. 92), Herzog achieves a mood of peace and well-being.

Bellow underlines the mood of tranquility and rebirth by his choice of a vibrantly alive pastoral

environment, through the use of a circular time structure, and by closing the novel with a description of Herzog in repose as Mrs. Tuttle cleans his house. Moses has found spiritual calm and health; he can now allow himself to be: "I am pretty well satisfied to be, to be just as it is willed, and for as long as I may remain in occupancy" (p. 340). Something produces an intensity, a holy feeling within Moses and he knows only that it represents a transcendent awareness of existence. Having undergone a change of heart, living now under what he terms a "new dispensation", Herzog believes he has an assignment in life: "I have certain things still to do. And without noise, I hope" (p. 326). Having fought through to new self-knowledge and a wider vision of reality, Bellow's central character has attained a renewed faith in the possibilities of life and the promise of an existence he can value. He does not overlook the absurdity and chaos of life, but affirms that we have no proof that this is all there is.

The novel closes with a mood of hope and affirmation. Bellow tempers the force of Herzog's affirmation by suggesting its transience and by leaving many problems unsolved. Moses remarks:

The bitter cup would come round again, by and by. This rest and well-being were only a momentary difference in the strange lining or variable silk between life and void. (p. 326)

He discovers no new solutions or meanings, as Tanner points out:

Externally there is still mess extending in all directions, but he has won through to a new attitude to it and seems at least able to re-enter it in a more tranquil spirit.²⁰

Herzog still has Ramona and a possible third marriage; he must eventually face his studies; he never decides upon the value of suffering; he cannot resolve the question of self versus society. But he works positively toward a balance between personal integrity and love of mankind, and if he never tests his determination to transcend self and share with others or clarifies his vague religious feelings, we know that his expressions are more than mere rhetoric because of "the drama of Herzog's own despair and recovery, in which the way down has proved the way up."²¹ Herzog emerges on the affirmative side of his crisis.

²⁰Ibid. p. 101.

²¹James Hall, The Lunatic Giant in the Drawing Room, p. 176.

CHAPTER FOUR

CONCLUSION

My study of Dangling Man and Herzog has been limited to an examination of the novels themselves; for the most part, I have omitted references to biographical material and to the author's non-fiction articles. However, in this concluding discussion, I want to present some of the novelist's remarks which are pertinent to my theme. Bellow seldom mentions his first novel, but in a 1966 interview, he describes Dangling Man and The Victim as timid, repressive and well-made: "I felt the incredible effrontery of announcing myself to the world (in part I mean the WASP world) as a writer."²² But he got tired of the "solemnity of complaint"²³ which characterizes these books. After writing 100,000 words of a third novel,

²²"Saul Bellow: An Interview", Paris Review, 9, no. 36 (1966), p. 55

²³Ibid. p. 62.

"a grim book, in the spirit of the first two", the novelist "suddenly decided, 'No'. Actually . . . I felt a great revulsion."²⁴ Subsequently he wrote The Adventures of Augie March and then reports that he had to tame his style for Henderson and Herzog. He believes Herzog marks a turning point in his writing:

I consider Herzog a break from victim literature. As one of the chieftains of that school, I have the right to say this. Victim literature purports to show the impotence of the ordinary man. In writing Herzog I felt that I was completing a certain development, coming to the end of a literary sensibility. This sensibility implies a certain attitude towards civilization--anomaly, estrangement, the outsider, the collapse of humanism.²⁵

It is difficult to apply these statements to Bellow's novels; although his books illustrate the helplessness of the private will, they never portray a man who eventually is overcome by the external world, nor do they reveal, either through the hero or the narrator, a belief in the collapse of humanism. As early as Dangling Man, an affirmative spirit is evident. Joseph will not submit to the pressures threatening to obliterate his humanity; he does not find, but still believes in the possibility of freedom and fulfillment. The truth in Bellow's remarks lies in his recognition

²⁴"The Author", SRL, 36, September 19, 1953, p. 13.

²⁵"About the Author", SRL, 47, September 19, 1964, pp. 38-9.

that Herzog, more positively and sincerely than any previous novel, speaks of the need for affirmation and asserts the futility of pessimism.

Perhaps the problem with interpreting the above quotation arises from defining the word "victim". To some extent, the heroes are victims of their hostile environment; yet as Bellow himself acknowledges, his protagonists still demand free choice:

I seem to have asked in my books, How can I resist the controls of this vast society without turning into a nihilist, avoiding the absurdity of empty rebellion. I have asked, Are there other, more goodnatured forms of resistance and free choice? . . . But I don't feel satisfied with what I have done to date, except in the comic form.²⁶

Bellow's heroes perceive the limitations imposed by their world, yet they stubbornly defend free choice. In contrast to Joseph, Herzog responds to this paradox with a sense of humour; in fact, his ironic outlook becomes a means of defying nihilism because it diminishes his suffering and dispels solemnity.

Moses Herzog uses wit to offset the senselessness of existence. Like all of Bellow's heroes, he perceives the depravity and barrenness of the contemporary world, and this awareness characterizes the

²⁶Paris Review, 9 (1966), p. 72.

type of affirmation presented in all of the author's novels. Because his heroes are burdened (in different degrees) with knowledge of the apparent meaninglessness of life, they cannot be foolishly optimistic; concurrently, their opposition to despair is rooted in reality. They attack nihilism and look beyond for meaning and fulfillment. They do not have a concrete basis for their hopes--only an intuitive or God-sent belief that life, in all its mystery, holds out more to mankind. In effect, they know more about what they are against than what they want. Consequently, they achieve an affirmation of life founded in part upon the repudiation of pessimism. This is why, when I speak of an affirmation in Bellow's novels, I qualify my words with adjectives such as vulnerable, tentative and incomplete; his heroes have only taken the first few steps toward the promised land.

Bellow has expressed these very ideas in his interviews and essays; his opinions are identical to those set forth by Moses Herzog. The author frequently attacks the literary establishment which asserts a pessimistic world picture:

But on the whole, American novels are filled with complaints over the misfortunes of the sovereign Self. Writers have inherited a tone of bitterness from the great poems and novels of this century There are modern novelists who take all of this for granted . . . and who complain as steadily as they write, viewing modern life with a bitterness to which they themselves have not established clear title²⁷

Bellow not only dislikes unearned bitterness, but he finds nihilism itself futile and barren. To those authors who deny individualism and accept meaninglessness, he asks: "'After nakedness, what?' 'After absurdity, what?'"²⁸ Admitting that "The human being is not what he was commonly thought to be a century ago"²⁹, Bellow insists that:

We cannot make the final assessment of human value I cannot agree with recent writers who have told us that we are nothing. We are indeed not what the Golden Age boasted us to be. But we are Something.³⁰

Like his heroes, the author cannot tell us what we are or why our existence is significant, but he refuses to believe that absurdity is the only fact of life: "Modern writers sin when they suppose that they know, as physics knows. The subject of the novelist is not

²⁷"Recent American Fiction", Encounter, XXI, v (November 1963), p. 26.

²⁸Ibid.

²⁹Ibid. p. 29.

³⁰Herbert Gold, (ed.) Fiction of the Fifties (New York, 1959), p. 19.

knowable in any such way."³¹ Speaking more positively, he says: "Can the intellectual, esthetic, and moral genius of the human race have come to a stop? That's impossible."³² Believing that genius still exists, asserting that life, in all its incomprehensibility, holds out more promise to mankind, Bellow affirms the need for a renewal of optimism:

It may be . . . that truth is not always so punitive. . . . There may be truths on the side of life. . . . I'm not at all ready to stop hoping. There may be some truths which are, after all, our friends in the universe.³³

If he did not believe this, but shared the general feeling that we cannot justify our existence, he would not write novels: "If we do care, if we believe in the existence of others, then what we write is necessary."³⁴

I have not presented Bellow's views in order to prove that he borrows from himself when he writes but to enlarge the context of the theme of affirmation. Confidence in the promise of life forms the basis of the

³¹"Recent American Fiction", p. 29.

³²Granville Hicks, (ed.) The Living Novel (New York, 1957), p. 10.

³³Paris Review, p. 73.

³⁴The Living Novel, p. 20.

author's non-fiction articles as well as his novels, and while it is only one of many recurring themes, it is vital to our understanding of his work. If we were to trace the positive spirit in all of Bellow's books from Dangling Man through to Herzog, we would discover that the affirmative mood develops and deepens with time, although to say only this simplifies the kind of progress which occurs. But in contrast to the bleakest of Bellow's novels, Dangling Man, and his most light-hearted one, Augie March, Herzog is the only novel which presents a protagonist who has earned his hope in life.

A comprehensive examination of Bellow's development would, of course, include all of the novels, but I hope to illustrate some of the differences and similarities in his work by briefly comparing Dangling Man and Herzog. Both novels are semi-autobiographical confessions. In each book, the form reflects the breakdown of the hero and the ways he uses to counteract this crisis. By writing down their thoughts, Joseph and Herzog relieve tension and try to understand and resist their disorder. Their random, fragmented notes mirror their disintegration and inwardness. But Herzog transforms the bare, static

journal of Dangling Man into a loose, complex diary of imaginary letters, reflections, events and memories. Moses Herzog's rich, detailed memory acts with the force of the present and compensates for the lack of action. His thoughts flow and erupt more spontaneously; his letters, a substitute for society and reality, help to integrate his ideas. Words are part of his sickness yet become a means to his recovery. Unlike Dangling Man, distinct events occur in Herzog: the trial, the murder attempt, and the accident mark turning points in the hero's state of mind. Toward the end, Herzog's actions become more responsible and he finally ceases writing letters. In contrast, Dangling Man is characterized by a fairly uniform pace until the very end, when the hero enlists. Joseph's struggle to affirm human possibility and to discover meaning in his existence does not move forward like Herzog's; instead, it dangles, like the course of the journal.

Compared to Herzog, Bellow's first novel seems monotonous, not only because of its pace and lack of narrative flesh, but also because it contains little wit or humour. Furthermore, in the first book, there is little experimentation in the handling of time. Joseph does go back in time but he does not relive the

past in the same way Herzog does. Like the latter, Joseph frequently loses track of the hour, but this happens because he has lost interest in life. On the other hand, Herzog's absorption in himself and the past prevents his response to external stimuli. He must endanger his sanity in order to retrace the collapse of his life; eventually he meets the present again and even plans his future. A significant difference, of course, lies in the future Joseph faces. War and possible death await him, increasing the seeming hopelessness of his situation and adding to the bleak atmosphere of the novel. Consequently, the seasonal change in the journal, from winter to spring--from death to rebirth--involves a certain irony because it coincides with Joseph's enlistment. But spring also points to the dangling man's escape from his death-in-life existence and it suggests the possibility of a more positive life for Joseph. Bellow indicates changes in Herzog more through shifts in the setting than through differences in season. Moses' movement from the city to the country parallels his movement toward peace and well-being, although certain things about the Berkshire estate, such as its isolation, suggest limitations on the hero's new-found tranquility.

Generally speaking, the differences in form and technique between the two novels can be explained in terms of the skill, confidence and maturity Bellow gained in the twenty years separating the books. The solemnity and restraint of Dangling Man carries through to the hero. Joseph is clearly Herzog's forefather, but he is not as particularized or complicated as the latter. Both men are introspective intellectuals; both experience a crisis which could destroy their sanity and their desire to life. Their breakdowns derive in part from sociological events--a draft notice and a divorce--but the heroes also must deal with inner weaknessess and problems. During their struggle to re-order their existence, both men are withdrawn, confused, impulsive, despairing and incapable of constructive action. Joseph responds to his dilemma primarily on an intellectual level; he finds existence depressing and he tends to alternate between apathy and aggression. In contrast to Herzog, the dangling man seems one-dimensional; he supplies little information about himself, except on the level of brooding, abstract thought. On the other hand, Herzog is a multifaceted character; his crack-up disorders him completely. His intense reaction produces wild fluctuations between sanity and madness, humility and egotism, wit and

despair, passivity and impulsiveness. Above all, he is obsessed with and possessed by his suffering.

We can see more clearly the differences between the two heroes by reviewing the problems they confront. Both attempt to resist pessimism and find answers to alienation, disillusionment and subjectivism. In particular, Joseph suffers from a loss of identity; he rejects but fails to replace his former self and now encounters difficulty in achieving recognition of his worth. While he waits for final notification from the army, he can neither employ his free time nor escape feelings of guilt. However, on the whole, Joseph's anxiety and discontent seem to be generalized; his distaste for existence does not have a distinct focus. Herzog, as Solotaroff points out, is more specific in this respect:

The principal problem of Bellow's fiction, stated in Dangling Man, his first novel, as "How is a good man to live?" has come down to the more specific and desperate question . . . how is a middle-aged failure to be reborn from an empty heart?³⁵

Herzog must contend with a lifetime's mismanagement. Whereas Joseph is a dissatisfied youth facing the draft, Moses seems to have endless problems. Incapable of

³⁵Theodore Solotaroff, "Napoleon St. and After", Commentary, 38 (December 1964), p. 63.

sustained thought or work, burdened with a warped view of suffering, grieving over the loss of his family, he tries to locate and subdue the forces destroying his sanity. Moses must examine and discipline his subjectivism, his superficial and theoretical intellectualism, his hatred of Madeleine and Gersbach, and his deliberate moral evasiveness. To do this, he confronts evil, reviews the death of his parents, attacks modern thought, and relives his past, exhausting and purging his emotions. And although he must endure far more than Joseph, Herzog nonetheless attains a more positive stance.

Both men decide, at the end, to rejoin society: Herzog intends to do so because he wants to share with other human beings; Joseph enlists because he has no other choice. The dangling man admits he cannot cope with self-government. Rather than be destroyed in his self-enclosed vacuum, he chooses army supervision. He realizes that "goodness is achieved not in a vacuum, but in the company of other men, attended by love" (p. 61). Herzog also perceives that he cannot continue to exist separate from the world: "'I really believe that brotherhood is what makes a man human'" (p. 272). He eagerly plans a life of sharing with others and identifies this plan as a God-directed assignment. Yet neither Joseph or Moses demonstrate a capacity for

effecting their vaguely expressed intentions to be good and human in society. But Herzog at least maintains his identity and achieves self-knowledge; thus, he has a basis from which to form connections with the world. Furthermore, he gains confidence in his ability to master subjectivism through a new trust in God. Joseph relies only upon reason and consequently lacks the additional help which Herzog gains from his religious impressions. And although, like Moses, the dangling man knows more about himself and his weaknesses, he has not been able to determine his identity or destiny; thus, his entry into the world, especially the army world, is fraught with difficulties.

The heroes decide to turn away from loneliness and subjectivism toward society; although their plan is theoretical it is affirmative. They base their intentions upon the assumptions that good can be achieved and that man, in fulfillment of his identity as a human being, can share with others. Joseph and Herzog could have adopted a nihilistic outlook, but both refuse it. Instead, they uphold human possibility. If they cannot praise the twentieth century, they will not condemn it: "It's too easy to abjure it or detest it. Too narrow. Too cowardly" (Dangling Man, p. 91).

The conclusion of Dangling Man may appear bleak because Joseph relinquishes his freedom. But this action encompasses a victory: Joseph puts an end to his progressive debasement. He now has the opportunity to practice his longing to be good and to sound creation with other means. The end of Herzog, in contrast to the journal, is more positive. Moses Herzog, with a wiser, firmer knowledge of reality and death, declares his faith in and reverence for life. He travels beyond the need for intellectual analysis and explanations to a vision of the wonder and mystery of existence. More so than Joseph, he recognizes the futility of negativism, and thus, he places his trust in dignity, truth, love and joy. At the same time, many factors qualify the affirmative mood. Like Joseph, Moses leaves problems unsolved and personal weaknesses unchanged. But if his life remains confused externally, he temporarily attains peace of mind and rests at ease with himself and existence.

As I stated in my introduction, I do not believe that Saul Bellow's place in American literature can be assessed for a number of years. I do think that as one of the most erudite, intelligent and consistently challenging authors of the post-war

period, he is pertinent to an understanding of the post-war American novel. The strength and the distinction of Bellow's books derive, in part, from their affirmative attitude towards man's destiny--a concern especially meaningful to our time but one which also endures.

APPENDIX

MR. SAMMLER'S PLANET

In this appendix on Saul Bellow's latest novel, Mr. Sammler's Planet, I have attempted to point out some of the developments after Herzog. Comparing Mr. Sammler to Bellow's other novels, I find it impossible to judge the book "better" or "not as good", but prefer to say that it adds appreciably to his work. As Irvin Stock comments:

A remarkable feature of Saul Bellow's career is that it is a kind of model of organic growth, his novels both alike and different, like a human being getting older.³⁶

Primarily, my concern here is to examine the differences between Mr. Sammler's Planet and Herzog, and they can best be approached by an analysis of the central character.

A Polish Jew of seventy years plus, Mr.

³⁶Irvin Stock, "Man in Culture", Commentary, 49 (May 1970), p. 89.

Sammler lives in New York, supported by his nephew, Elya Gruner. To the extent that he is an intellectual Jew in an urban milieu, and a relentless investigator of himself and the world, Sammler resembles Bellow's other protagonists. But in contrast to Joseph or Herzog--brooding, alienated self-communers--Sammler is a sage old man, both aware of and committed to his external environment. Age and survival of a mass burial during the war have made him both tough and humble, realistic yet remote. Unlike Herzog or Henderson, Sammler evinces no self-pity; he refuses to complain or to rage against the world. Hardened to disaster, alive only by chance, he stands in awe of life: "'The best and purest human beings, from the beginning of time, have understood that life is sacred.'"³⁷ And while all of Bellow's heroes, until Sammler, scramble despairingly and indiscriminatively for an acceptable construction to meet the chaos of existence, Mr. Sammler has attained, as far as possible, a position of dignity and peace. He describes himself as follows:

³⁷Saul Bellow, Mr. Sammler's Planet (New York, 1970), p. 18. All future references will be to this edition and will follow the quotation in parentheses.

Trying to live with a civil heart. With disinterested charity. With a sense of the mystic potency of humankind. With an inclination to believe in archetypes of goodness. (p. 136)

He believes that he must fulfill a particular assignment in life: "to figure out certain things, to condense, in short views, some essence of experience" (p. 274). In opposition to Bellow's other novels, Mr. Sammler's Planet begins with a central character who has stabilized his identity and his goals.

Bellow's style is influenced by the kind of protagonist he created: the mood in Mr. Sammler is more subdued and reflective, the prose more economical than in the other novels. Sammler's specialization in condensation leads to a compressed complexity of thought, although the complexity of technique apparent in Herzog is not in evidence. Whereas irony and self-mockery dominate the latter novel, farce and humour characterize Mr. Sammler's Planet. One of the major episodes is structured upon a farcical situation: Shula-Sława, Sammler's strange daughter, steals a valuable manuscript for her father and before he can return it, she steals it again. At the same time, she tries to gain the admiration of the manuscript's author, Dr. Lal. This incident also provides Sammler with an opportunity to talk to Dr. Lal, a brilliant moon scientist, and

their conversation continues for thirty-three pages. This dialogue climaxes a central question in the novel: should we, as Dr. Lal believes, place all our hopes in space travel? Unlike Bellow's other heroes, Mr. Sammler has a choice between faith in our civilization or the promise of settlement in the universe. Age does not protect him from the madness of New York, and thus, he acknowledges that at times he is "more than ever pleasantly haunted by moon-visions" (p. 67). But Sammler never seriously believes his planet is doomed. Yet it is interesting to note the way in which Bellow varies his use of environment. In Herzog, the hero feels threatened by urban life; eventually he regains his stability, but this occurs in the country. Mr. Sammler transcends the here-and-now and considers two worlds, real and remote. Bellow presents him with a tempting alternative to the present, and Sammler, alone among the author's heroes, has the sagacity and detachment necessary to evaluate the problem in terms of all of society.

The action of the novel, as mentioned, includes the theft of a manuscript, but the main event is the hospitalization and death of Sammler's benefactor. Bellow structures other incidents around this one event, and thus, supplies a unifying factor which

Herzog lacks. Characteristically, thought and dialogue dominate plot, but differently than in Herzog. The frenzied, fragmented introspection of the latter novel gives way to calm, philosophical reflection. And unlike Moses, Sammler has as many conversations as monologues. The few days of anxiety and hospital visits, precipitated by Gruner's illness, are interrupted by confrontations between the protagonist and a group of related characters who test his strengths and provoke his questions and memories. In other words, in contrast to Herzog, Sammler moves around in the disintegrating city of New York, and there must defend and reassess his ideas.

Sammler's involvement with the world marks a definite change from Herzog. But he never entirely commits himself. Sammler "remained touchable, vulnerable to trifles" (p. 197), and he observes "that one was always, and so powerfully, so persuasively, drawn back to human conditions" (p. 118). Nonetheless, he feels "somewhat separated from the rest of his species, if not in some fashion severed--severed not so much by age as by preoccupations" (p. 43). At times, "he wanted, with God, to be free from the bondage of the ordinary and the finite" (p. 117), yet "you could not

be an old-fashioned setting sage" (p. 74). This leaves Sammler in an unusual situation: old, detached and sane, he is part of society yet distant enough to retain his sanity, and to allow himself freedom for his special preoccupations.

What kind of world induces Sammler's distant involvement?--a chaotic, crazy and monstrous society which is drowning under "the awful volume of cumulative consciousness" (p. 227), "the invading sea being a metaphor for the multiplication of facts and sensations" (p. 4). To live in this world, Sammler concentrates upon ignoring superfluities and condensing ultimate views. He refuses to allow fads and fashion to distract him, yet he keeps pace with jet-age phenomena:

Thus Sammler knew, through many rapid changes, Warhol, Baby Jane Holzer while she lasted, the Living Theater, the outbursts of nude display more and more revolutionary, Dionysus '69, copulation on the stage, the philosophy of the Beatles; and in the art world, electric shows and minimal painting. (p. 31)

No other protagonist in Bellow's novels explores so compellingly and directly the contemporary scene: discussions about Apollo moon shots, youth, sex, drugs, student defiance and international crises mingle with Sammler's philosophical monologues and private memories. And he not only talks about, but is caught up in, the current happenings, For example, Sammler watches and

reports a Negro pickpocket on the bus and this man later sexually exhibits himself to the hero; not long afterwards, Mr. Sammler takes part in a street fight and must restrain his son-in-law from murdering this pickpocket. Also, when Sammler lectures to a university group, a bearded student rebel shouts him down with obscenities. Lawlessness, violence and rebellion are only some of the contemporary problems in which Sammler becomes entangled. As Bellow told a Time correspondent after publication of the novel:

"The incidents in Mr. Sammler are meant to be typical of the madness in New York City middle-class life. That was one of the things I was trying to say in Herzog, too. Today you can simply be distracted to death. Tearing the self apart has become a social duty."³⁸

The difference is that Sammler directly participates in the madness, whereas Herzog's absorption with his own madness keeps him out-of-touch with external reality.

Sammler's relationship with his friends and relatives parallels his response to the environment. Wanting to remain aloof, he nevertheless is vulnerable to people he loves and admires. Furthermore, the combination of age, politeness, experience and detachment make him very popular. In contrast to the

³⁸"Saul Bellow: Seer with a Civil Heart", (anon. rev.), Time, February 9, 1970, p. 67.

confessional nature of the other heroes, Sammler is often the listener: "often in demand these days, often visited, often consulted and confessed to" (p. 55). Each confessor presents the hero with the opportunity of philosophizing, and usually he discovers that they dramatize various modern failures to realize individuality and the promise of life.

In one of his monologues on this subject, Sammler says that "many have surged forward in modern history, after long epochs of namelessness and bitter obscurity, to claim and to enjoy . . . a name, a dignity of person" (p. 235). But this surge has brought only misery because the forms of individuality have little scope for the generous powers in mankind:

The idea of the uniqueness of the soul. An excellent idea. A true idea. But in these forms? In these poor forms? Dear God! With hair, with clothes, with drugs and cosmetics, with genitalia, with round trips through evil, monstrosity, and orgy, with even God approached through obscenities?
(p. 229)

His half-crazy daughter, "with the little Jewish twists of kinky hair descending from the wig . . . affirming . . . her right to be whatever--whatever it all came to" (p. 23), his niece, representative of the "sexual madness . . . overwhelming the Western world" (p. 66), and his ex-reader, leading "a high-energy American life to the point of anarchy and

breakdown" (p. 39) are some of the characters embodying these incoherent and false forms of individuality.

Sammler finds that instead of truth, twentieth-century man brings forth theatrical forms of individuality, casts himself into madness, and eventually desires his own death. "But individualism is of no interest whatever if it does not extend truth" (p. 234). Concurrently, liberated modern man, like a greedy child, demands infinite, instantaneous gratification:

For what it amounted to was limitless demand--insatiability, refusal of the doomed creature (death being sure and final) to go away from the earth unsatisfied. A full bill of demand and complaint was therefore presented by each individual. Non-negotiable. (p. 34)

Sammler constantly attacks the way Americans are trying to attain boundlessness, wholeness and originality. In fact, some reviewers have called the book reactionary because it seems to negate a conviction that Bellow's heroes have held from the start--a belief in the significance of each person and in the possibility of fulfillment. But as Irvin Stock writes, "what Bellow is now trying to show is how the most prevalent ways of asserting that belief are actually, . . . ways of caricaturizing it, vulgarizing it."³⁹ Sammler

criticizes debased forms of individuality but he defends his belief in humanity by insisting that "we are an animal of genius" (p. 305) and by praying for "The greatness of eternity which shall lift us from this present shallowness" (p. 89). And he offsets his negative attack by offering his admiration for two characters closer to the ideal: the disciplined pickpocket and Dr. Lal.

In other words, Sammler continues the affirmation of life which all of Bellow's central characters share, but his terms are different. Like them, he cannot supply easy answers to our troubled age, but as the above quotation hints, Sammler supports his faith in life with a belief in God and eternity: "'But very often, and almost daily, I have strong impressions of eternity'" (p. 237). (Moses approaches this stance at the end of Herzog.) Furthermore, his direct experience with life's cruelty, the approaching death of his beloved nephew, and the debasement of his values by modern man stabilize Sammler's affirmation. His defense of life may be less joyous than that of Herzog or Henderson, but it is also more exact, honest and firm.

Sammler's affirmation takes into account a bond which exists between all human beings; he believes that each man has a responsibility to manifest or create this bond:

Still, signs could be made, should be made, must be made. One should declare something like this: "However actual I may seem to you and you to me, we are not as actual as all that. We will die. Nevertheless there is a bond. There is a bond." . . . But Elya at this moment had a most particular need for a sign and he, Sammler, should be there to meet that need. (p. 261)

He tells Elya's son that he prays for this form of psychic unity, but knows that individuals often cannot realize it:

"It's based on the belief that there is the same truth in the heart of every human being, or a splash of God's own spirit, and that this is the richest thing we share in common. And up to a point I would agree. But . . . I wouldn't count on it." (p. 189)

Sammler admits that man cannot always depend upon this inter-relatedness because circumstances interfere: he himself once killed another man. Nonetheless, he tries to persuade Gruner's daughter, Angela, just before her father's death, to make some sign of her love and to ask forgiveness for the suffering she inflicted. This is her duty as a human being, this would fulfill the bond between her and her father: "'He's been a good man. And he's being swept out. Can't you think of something to say to him?'" (p. 306).

Sammler never has the chance to give a sign to Elya but at the close of the novel he offers this prayer over his nephew's lifeless body:

"Remember, God, the soul of Elya Gruner, who, as willingly as possible and as well as he was able, . . . was eager . . . to do what was required of him. . . . He was aware that he must meet, and he did meet--through all the confusion and degraded clowning of this life through which we are speeding--he did meet the terms of his contract. The terms which, in his inmost heart, each man knows. As I know mine. As all know. For that is the truth of it--that we all know, God, that we know, that we know, we know, we know." (p. 313)

Gruner is a man who satisfied his contract with humanity. In answer to those convinced "that reality was a terrible thing, and that the final truth about mankind was overwhelming and crushing" (p. 280), Sammler has found a man who met the requirements of being a human being.

This concluding prayer, sadder and quieter than the resolutions of Bellow's other novels, may seem to reverse the optimistic trend in the author's work. Henderson the Rain King ends in this manner:

I guess I felt it was my turn now to move, and so went running--leaping, leaping, pounding, and tingling over the pure white lining of the gray Arctic silence.⁴⁰

⁴⁰Saul Bellow, Henderson the Rain King (New York, 1959), p. 341.

Rapturously, Henderson leaps hopefully toward a new career, a loving family and peace of mind. So too, the conclusion of Augie March laughingly appeals to the promise of life:

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.⁴¹

In contrast, our last impression of Sammler is of an old man utterly heartbroken in the face of death. The lightness and promise have disappeared, yet Sammler's last words are strangely uplifting. He knows the terms of his contract with existence, knows that he has an assignment to fulfill and spiritual growth to continue. The very fact that he prays for another human being illustrates that he is meeting his terms--closing off a meaningful relationship with Gruner, acknowledging the bond between them, and transcending self to pray for and praise another's soul.

Bellow's newest hero remains loyal to the fundamental convictions expressed by his predecessors. But he is more conservative in his hope, and openly dependent upon God. His faith in life is tied

⁴¹Saul Bellow, The Adventures of Augie March (New York, 1965), p. 536.

into his conception of an existential contract and assignment--not a new idea in Bellow's work, but never emphasized in this manner before. Sammler also gives expression to the experiences of our time, and as he expresses, so he experiences. Involved in yet detached from the planet he wants to save from madness and collapse, Sammler depicts the world he lives in with immediacy, wisdom and compassion. Not as intense or innovative a novel as Herzog, Mr. Sammler's Planet is both calmer and deeper because of the hero's perspective.

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