

LINKED CHARACTERS

IN THE NOVELS OF SAUL BELLOW

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THE NOVELS OF
SAUL BELLOW

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SCOPE AND CONTENTS:

Saul Bellow's six novels all show the same pattern, an inward quest by the protagonist with a double, or alter-ego as teacher, guide or saviour. The device of alter-ego is used in different ways in each of the novels, sometimes centrally, sometimes marginally, but seems to be an essential part of Bellow's fiction.

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INTRODUCTION

Over the past few years, the work of Saul Bellow¹ has excited a good deal of critical interest. That his main theme is "alienation and accommodation", and the accompanying one of the nature of "reality" has often been pointed out. David Galloway, for example, interpreting Bellow's work in the light of Camus' Myth of Sisyphus, is able to describe² it in the language of Existentialism and Absurdity.

1

The most important scholars who have written on Bellow are: Tony Tanner, Saul Bellow, (Edinburgh, 1965), who interprets Bellow as the novelist of man suffocating in society; Keith Opdahl, The Novels of Saul Bellow: An Introduction, (Pennsylvania, 1967), who sees Bellow's central concern as being the conflict between "the skeptical and the believing"; Irving Malin, Saul Bellow's Fiction, (Carbondale, 1969), who gives a basic examination of Bellow's themes, characters, styles and images; and John J. Clayton, Saul Bellow: In Defense of Man, (Bloomington, 1968), who sees Bellow's novels as an assertion of human dignity and human possibilities even in a dehumanized age. There have also been many articles on Bellow in periodicals, and in books on contemporary American fiction, covering his significance as a Jewish writer, his importance in American fiction, and most internal aspects of his work. Opdahl's book contains an extensive bibliography.

2

David D. Galloway, The Absurd Hero in American Fiction, (Austin, 1966). See also Richard Lehan, "Existentialism in Recent American Fiction: The Demonic Quest", collected in Recent American Fiction: Some Critical Views, ed. Joseph J. Waldmeir, (Boston, 1963). Lehan draws parallels between Bellow and both Sartre and Camus. It must be pointed out that although it is possible to talk about Bellow's work in the language of Existentialism, he himself rejects the existentialist view, as he rejects pessimism. See, e.g. "The Writer as Moralizer", Atlantic Monthly, CCXI (March, 1963) 58-62

Bellow himself has warned against looking too hard for meanings and messages. The deep reader, he says, "is apt to lose his head. He falls wildly on any particle of philosophy or religion and blows it up bigger than the Graf Zeppelin."³ But elsewhere he has suggested that deeper meanings are inevitable: "Almost nothing of a spiritual ennobling character is brought into the internal life of a modern American by his social institutions. He must discover it in his own experience, by his own luck as an explorer, or not at all."⁴ This search, or quest, for what is spiritually ennobling is at the heart of all of Bellow's novels, prompting judgements such as Irving Malin's that: "If we read him carefully, we see that as modern as his heroes are, they enact mythic trials."⁵ Pursuing elsewhere his quest for myths and archetypes, Malin discovers seven patterns of images in Bellow's novels, the last of which is imagery concerned with the idea of the mirror or the reflection. Over and over, Malin points out, Bellow has his characters

3

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

4

Saul Bellow, "Where Do We Go from Here: The Future of Fiction", collected in Saul Bellow and the Critics, ed. Irving Malin, (New York, 1967), p.215.

5

Irving Malin, (ed.), Saul Bellow and the Critics, (New York, 1967), Intro. p.x.

examine themselves in mirrors, or confronts them with mirror-
 6
 images of themselves. I think that Malin fails to see the full significance of this last idea. In each of the novels, plot or theme revolves to a greater or lesser extent around the confrontation of the protagonist by someone who is, in some way, his double, and who will act as teacher or saviour for him. It is this concept which I wish to develop more fully.

It seems fairly clear that in Bellow's novels characters, actions and backgrounds are often largely symbolic. Richard Chase points out that Henderson the Rain King is a "romance" rather than a "novel". The Africa there created is a symbolic one, a projection of the protagonist's psyche, and the characters who people it are extensions of that symbol. Elsewhere in Bellow we find that backgrounds create mood, reflecting the hero's state of mind. And throughout Bellow's work we have the hero in relationships which create a symbolic rather than a social pattern. Joseph creates an alter-ego for himself in Dangling Man; in The Victim, Asa Leventhal has an alter-ego whom, in a sense, he too creates. As Jonathan Baumbach points out:

If Allbee is Leventhal's antagonist, and double, he is also Leventhal's savior, the unwitting means to his

6

Ibid., pp.168-173.

7

Richard Chase, "The Adventures of Saul Bellow: The Progress of a Novelist", collected in Malin, Saul Bellow and the Critics, p.25.

redemption. A similar ritual process takes place for Tommy Wilhelm in Seize the Day and Henderson in Henderson the Rain King. Allbee, like Tamkin, like Dahfu, is a kind of fraud-saint, a redeemer in spite of himself. All of Bellow's novels, with the possible exception of The Adventures of Augie March, deal with the sufferer, the seismographic recorder of world guilt who, confronted by a guilt-distorted correlative of himself, seeks within the⁸ bounds of his own hell the means to his own heaven.

The Adventures of Augie March, too, can fit into Baumbach's pattern, for Augie has not one symbolic "correlative", but the "thirty-odd Machiavellians in his adventures."⁹ Herzog too has an alter-ego, the comic parody of himself, Valentine Gersbach.

I do not wish to suggest that this symbolic linking of characters is merely a mechanical device common to all Bellow's novels. It is rather, as I hope to show, something which grows out of the very nature of Bellow's vision. In Dangling Man, Joseph finds himself isolated from any real external contact, so that his whole conflict has to be shown to be worked out within himself, and reaches a climax in his creation of an alter-ego. In The Victim, Leventhal battles with an externalized alter-ego, in the figure of Kirby Allbee, but is essentially, like Joseph, struggling with himself. Augie March pits his identity against the

8

Jonathan Baumbach, The Landscape of Nightmare: Studies in the Contemporary American Novel, (New York, 1965), p.52.

9

Marcus Klein, "A Discipline of Nobility: Saul Bellow's Fiction", collected in Malin, Saul Bellow and the critics, p.106.

various alternatives offered to him by the Machiavellians. He may learn from each of them, but his final lesson concerns the necessity of retaining intact one's identity.

In the next two novels the "correlative" is a teacher as well as a saviour. Tommy Wilhelm has Dr. Tamkin as teacher. Tamkin, cheat and charlatan though he is, is nevertheless instrumental, albeit unintentionally, in showing Wilhelm the way towards his reality. Henderson's fraud-saint, Dahfu, is an infinitely more noble figure than Tamkin, although he holds the same key for Henderson as Tamkin seems to hold for Tommy. Herzog, finally, has a grotesque comic alter-ego in Valentine Gersbach, a character who does not have the central importance that Allbee, Tamkin and Dahfu have in the earlier novels, but nevertheless has great importance in the structure of the novel.

In the following chapters I wish to examine more fully the symbolic relationships in each of Bellow's novels, to see how each is centrally relevant to the quest of the protagonist, and to attempt to explain why this device appears throughout Bellow's work.

I

DANGLING MAN

The education of Bellow's protagonists generally centres round the juxtaposition of two characters, protagonist and double, and is essentially symbolic--that is, the protagonist learns not so much from what the other says, as from what he comes to represent. So the education of the protagonist is often something which is apparent to the reader, but not to the protagonist himself. We see the working-out of a pattern, with the hero at its centre, but with the double taking a necessary part.

With this idea in mind, it is of interest to examine Bellow's first short story, "Two Morning Monologues".¹ This story consists simply of the juxtaposition of two monologues, one by a young man, Mandelbaum, out of work and waiting for the draft, the other by a gambler. Each is alienated from society. Mandelbaum is passively "driven", the gambler accepts what he thinks is a bad system, because he believes he can control it: "it's up to me to cover all the angles. There's a way through the cracks." (TMM p.235) The mere fact of the juxtaposition of the two characters implies a comment on each: "The boy and the gambler are not as unlike as they

¹
"Two Morning Monologues", Partisan Review, VIII (May-June, 1941), 230-236.

appear; Bellow's tale lies in the revelation of a psychology shared by both characters....For all their differences...both characters are responsible -- in similar ways -- for their own defeat."²

In this story, Bellow simply presents the two characters without comment, but throughout his fiction, paired characters recur and interact in different ways.

Bellow's first novel, Dangling Man,³ seems to be a contradiction of this idea, as it contains, essentially, only one character. But as I will show, Joseph's gradual alienation from all social contact is accompanied by an attempt to identify with people around him, an attempt, that is, to find a double. His split with society, paralleled by a split within himself, culminates in the creation of an alter-ego, the "Spirit of Alternatives", the embodiment of the other side of the argument, of what Joseph could have been.

Published in 1944, Dangling Man tells of a single winter of its protagonist, Joseph. Written in the form of a journal, it describes the months he spends out of work, waiting for the draft. He gradually becomes alienated from his friends,

2

Keith Opdahl, The Novels of Saul Bellow: An Introduction, p.13.

3

Saul Bellow, Dangling Man, (New York, Vanguard Press, 1944). All subsequent references are to this edition.

his brother and family, his mistress, even his wife, Iva. Being too disillusioned with society to try to get along with others, he turns more and more inward upon himself, finally creating the alter-ego as a means of saving his sanity and of testing the strength of his ideas. Unable to bear the burden of his freedom, he finally capitulates and writes to the draft board asking to be called up.

Joseph is the most alienated of Bellow's heroes, the one who lives most fully the absurd experience. His alienation derives, first of all, from his peculiar situation. Waiting for the draft, with nothing to do, he is faced with the experience of war, the "vastest experience of [his] time." (165)

The first paragraph of the novel is a statement of Joseph's alienation. He sets up the past against the present, and, associating himself with the past, presents himself as a man of sensitivity in opposition to the general feeling of his time, the Hemingway code of the "hardboiled":

Today, the code of the athlete, of the tough boy -- an American inheritance, I believe, from the English gentleman -- that curious mixture of striving, asceticism, and rigor, the origins of which some trace back to Alexander the Great -- is stronger than ever. Do you have feelings? There are correct and incorrect ways of indicating them. Do you have an inner life? It is nobody's business but your own. Do you have emotions? Strangle them. (9)

Joseph's sense of defeat in isolation is already being shown here.

It might be well here to remark upon the point of view in Bellow's novels. In all of them, the point of view is that

of the consciousness of the protagonist, and this is true even of the novels which do not have a first person narrator. There is no feeling whatever of the novelist's intervention between reader and protagonist. But in no case is the protagonist a reporter likely to give an unbiased picture, so that we always have to examine what he thinks or says in any particular situation in the light of what we can gather from his general character. There is no external check. This means, of course, that judgement of a situation is always complex and ambiguous, becoming one of the major sources of Bellow's irony.

In this particular case, we have to take into account the kind of man Joseph is and the kind of mental state he is in, to understand the world he describes. Because of his concern with himself, because of his inward seeking, Joseph has turned to his journal as a means of exploring his own condition. The journal form accounts for the stifling atmosphere of the book, for Joseph is neither an interested nor a generous observer of others. He presents them in a light flattering to no one -- even his friends are viewed without sympathy. As one critic puts it: "the effect of suffocation is further intensified because the novel lacks any real dramatic conflict except for the highly abstracted struggle that Joseph undergoes, in the recesses of his own tortured spirit."⁴ In other words, Joseph's "talking to himself" becomes the book's conflict.

⁴ Earl Rovit, Saul Bellow, (Minneapolis, 1967), p.17.

The diminishing of Joseph's consciousness parallels his diminished outward experience. He feels that his room has become a cell in which he is imprisoned, and his circle of social contacts is likewise diminished. Even his vision of the physical world is affected. He sees all the litter and refuse of life, the "junk" from which Eugene Henderson will later run. The kinds of thing he sees reflect his mental state, and, in turn, only serve to make it worse. He sees "ranges of poor dwellings, warehouses, billboards, culverts, electric signs blankly burning, parked cars and moving cars"(24) an empty, monotonous world.

Joseph sees from the beginning the significance of his keeping a journal: "in my present state of demoralization, it has become necessary for me to keep a journal -- that is, to talk to myself."(9) Because of his growing disappointment with his friends, his loss of interest in social contact, all questioning is turned inward. The answer to his problems can, apparently, only be discovered if he talks to himself.

A little later in the novel, Joseph notes his splitting into two: "all at once I saw how I had lapsed from that older self."(26) He goes on to describe himself in the third person, for he now sees the Joseph of the past as a totally different person, and one whom he rather despises. The old Joseph had lived to a "general plan", what elsewhere he calls an "ideal construction". This plan was a pattern into which the world would fit, and thereby be given meaning: "Into this plan have.

gone his friends, his family, and his wife. He has taken a great deal of trouble with his wife, urging her to read books of his choosing, teaching her to admire what he believes admirable. To what degree he has succeeded he does not know." (29) This idea he has of making Iva think in the way he does, making her into a second self, is part of the "double" motif which recurs throughout the book. Later in the novel, he admits that "she is as far as ever from what I once desired to make her." (152)

The feeling of loss of identity implicit in this splitting of Joseph grows to a point where he can no longer understand the motives for his actions. In a restaurant, he is guilty of an "unusual explosion of temper" when a former acquaintance from his days in the Communist party refuses to recognize him. He says he "behaved unaccountably", surprising himself. But the action is explicable. That the man will not speak to him seems to Joseph to be a tacit denial of his identity, so that he has to cause a scene to force the man to admit to knowing him, and will only then be satisfied: "'That's what I wanted to hear,' I said. 'I just wanted to be sure.'" (36) A parallel incident occurs later in the novel when Frink, the bank manager, also questions his identity: "How do I know you're this person?" (174) Again Joseph is moved to an angry outburst. He is especially disturbed that the man does not use his surname -- this seems to Joseph to be a complete denial of him. But as he says, "A year ago I would have accepted his explanation politely and have moved away." (175) His

feeling of loss of identity is directly caused by his situation as "dangling man", by the total freedom he has, for he has lost the meaning given to life by the rhythm of activity, and by having an occupation.

This loss of meaning is also partly caused by Joseph's disillusionment with his friends. He tells how the old Joseph, the Joseph who believed in an "ideal construction", had hoped to create a "colony of the spirit", in order to refute the Hobbesian idea of life as "nasty, brutish, short." Then he describes the Servatius party, where he is sickened to discover the mean violences of which his friends, these people he has seen as belonging to his "colony of the spirit", are capable. Soon afterwards, however, he describes an incident, his beating of his niece Etta, which shows that he himself is capable of the same sort of violence.

This incident is a complex and important one. First, Etta seems to be denying Joseph's identity in the same way as does Frink. Her parents, Joseph says, "have brought up Etta to identify poverty not so much with evil as with unimportance." (61) So, like Frink, she refers to Joseph simply by his christian name. She does not respect him, because of his poverty. She is, he is right in thinking, a thoroughly mean girl, as she shows by the manner in which she removes his Haydn record from her phonograph in order to play her Cugat record. On the other hand, Joseph shows the same petty meanness in the way in which he quarrels with her. After all, he has

played the record twice, and she is only a child. But her attitude is a denial of the usual uncle-niece relationship, so Joseph beats her because he feels humiliated. The irony of all this is that, only minutes before, when listening to the Haydn divertimento, he has thought:

Its sober opening notes, preliminaries to a thoughtful confession, showed me that I was still an apprentice in suffering and humiliation. I had not even begun. I had, furthermore, no right to expect to avoid them. So much was immediately clear. Surely no one could plead for exception; that was not a human privilege. What I should do with them, how to meet them, was answered in the second declaration: with grace, without meanness. (67)

And, thinking about the incident afterwards, he persuades himself that he and Etta have nothing more in common than their physical resemblance -- that he does not share in Etta's meanness.

The account of the actual incident is rather more complex than this, however. Etta is associated with the image of the mirror, when Joseph says: "Etta is a vain girl. I am sure she spends a great many hours before the mirror." (62) He goes on immediately to point out the abnormal resemblance between himself and his niece: "I am sure, also that she must be aware of the resemblance she bears to me. It goes beyond the obvious similarities pointed out by the family." (62) And immediately after he has been caught by her family in the act of beating her, he thinks: "I wonder if any of them were capable of observing how exactly alike we looked at that moment." (71) It is clear that in beating the meanness in Etta, Joseph is beating the objectification of his own meanness,

the meanness he insists is not in him. It marks a further stage in Joseph's fragmentation.

We have seen, then, that throughout the novel, Bellow introduces images of mirrors and of doubles, as a method of illuminating Joseph's state of being, his splitting-up, or fragmentation.⁵ The final movement is the conscious creation by Joseph of an alter-ego, the Spirit of Alternatives, with whom he can discuss his problems, as he has no other confidant. This, of course, is the logical end of his journal, of his talking to himself. The creation of this alter-ego is a necessary act to save his sanity, for as he says at the end of his journal, "To be pushed upon oneself entirely puts the very facts of simple existence in doubt." (190) He knows that his friends and relatives will not give him the kind of sympathy he needs. His brother cannot understand any of his attitudes, and even his best friend, Myron Adler, provokes him into saying: "We're temporarily in different classes, and it has an effect on us." (157) The effect it has had on Joseph is that he no longer wishes to attempt to explain himself to

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Opdahl, (The Novels of Saul Bellow: An Introduction, p.172, n.17) referring to an article by Mark Schorer, notes other related parallels: "Joseph is paralleled by his landlady, who lingers with a fatal illness until Joseph's induction, and by Vanaker, a noisy alcoholic neighbor who moves from the rooming house shortly before Joseph leaves." He further points out that "Joseph actually identifies with almost everyone around him." As I pointed out earlier, we have no means of seeing outside Joseph, other than the way in which Joseph himself sees. It seems clear that Bellow is creating in his protagonist a state of mind in which identity is so far lost that Joseph, in his bewilderment, sees reflections of himself in every direction.

anyone. So, his alter-ego, "Tu As Raison Aussi", is called on to present opposition to his arguments. (It is significant that Joseph is willing to accept that such opposition may be as valid as his own views, as can be gathered from the two names he gives to his alter-ego.)

These two sections in which Joseph talks with the Spirit of Alternatives are central to the meaning of the novel, though their importance is somewhat obscured by the comic manner of their presentation. In his first confrontation, Joseph goes over the whole question of his alienation:

"There's a lot of talk about alienation. It's a fool's plea."

"Is it?"

"You can divorce your wife or abandon your child, but what can you do with yourself?"

"You can't banish the world by decree if it's in you. Is that it, Joseph?"

"How can you? You have gone to its schools and seen its movies, listened to its radios, read its magazines. What if you declare you are alienated, you say you reject the Hollywood dream, the soap opera, the cheap thriller? The very denial implicates you." (137)

This is an admission, a recognition that he is in the world, that alienation is an attitude rather than a fact. A little later, Joseph says: "I didn't say there was no feeling of alienation, but that we should not make a doctrine of our feeling." (138) As Tanner says: "In a word, alienation is felt but refused. Joseph is an intellectual, a solitary thinker; yet even he feels that true reality is somewhere out there in the muck and mire of the world." His denial is not total.

As a way of living in the world, he goes back to his ideal construction, but is then faced with another problem: "But what of the gap between the ideal construction and the real world, the truth?" He cannot answer that, and his Spirit of Alternatives will not answer it. Much of what Joseph learns is, in fact, to do with this question. Ideal constructions are too demanding; we are ruined by them because we cannot live up to them. This is the lesson he learns from his ideas about a "colony of the spirit."

In his second confrontation with the Spirit of Alternatives, Joseph elaborates on these ideas -- he is troubled by the part of him that has to relate to society, what he calls the "world internalized." By now, this part of him is provoking him into giving up the way he is living. Soon, in fact, he himself is putting forward an argument that one would rather expect from his alter-ego:

"I would be denying my inmost feelings if I said I wanted to be by-passed and spared from knowing what the rest of my generation is undergoing. I don't want to be humped protectively over my life. I am neither so corrupt nor so hard-boiled that I can savor my life only when it is in danger of extinction. But, on the other hand, its value here in this room is decreasing day by day. Soon it may become distasteful to me."

"There, you see it yourself."(166)

He is admitting that the feeling of boredom caused by his isolation is becoming too oppressive for him. The final stage in the argument is the most important, however, for in it Joseph sees that he can no longer rationalize his position:

"The war can destroy me physically. That it can do. But so can bacteria. I must be concerned with

them, naturally. I must take account of them. They can obliterate me. But as long as I am alive, I must follow my destiny in spite of them."

"Then only one question remains."

"What?"

"Whether you have a separate destiny. Oh, you're a shrewd wiggler," said Tu As Raison Aussi. "But I've been waiting for you to cross my corner. Well, what do you say?"

I think I must have grown pale.

"I'm not ready to answer. I have nothing to say to that now." (168)

Joseph's whole stance of isolation and "freedom" amounts to being a claim to a separate destiny. But this is something he sees he cannot claim. The reality he has to face seems to be that he is "one of a shoal, driven towards the weirs." (119)

In the light of this conversation, and the final breaking of Joseph which takes place in the subsequent pages, we can see the meaning of his final words:

Hurray for regular hours!
And for the supervision of the spirit!
Long live regimentation! (191)

It is, it seems to me, an ironic capitulation. As Joseph says a little earlier, "I had not done well alone." (190) He is going back into society because he can no longer bear the pressure of his freedom.

In Dangling Man, the alter-ego device appears only briefly, but in its close relation to the essential problem of the protagonist, and the manner in which it comes into being, it is very important. Dangling Man describes the internal landscape of its hero, in which social relationships fade, so that the important relationship is between Joseph and his alter-ego. Within this relationship, the protagonist's

struggle to comprehend the world in which he must exist is contained. This is essentially the pattern of Bellow's later novels -- a hostile or fragmenting world where the hero is, for some reason, a misfit, where all social relationships fail, but where the hero meets a double of himself who offers self-knowledge and, perhaps, salvation.

Dangling Man is, then, the re-creation of its protagonist's struggle to accept the "reality" of the world while trying to preserve intact his own individuality. The dramatic conflict, however, takes place completely within the protagonist: "Joseph's main opponent is himself and though ostensibly well-equipped to deal with him...he comes off second best; he is ultimately self-defeated."⁷ The conflict is expressed through various metaphors for the fragmentation of the protagonist, and especially the creation of an alter-ego, as a result of the questioning of his identity. The problem of identity, again using the metaphor of the double, or alter-ego, is pursued in Bellow's second novel, The Victim.

7

Baumbach, The Landscape of Nightmare, p.37.

II

THE VICTIM

1

Bellow's second novel, The Victim, appeared in 1947. Asa Leventhal, a middle-class Jewish newspaper editor, lives in New York. His wife has gone to look after her mother, so he is temporarily left alone. In a park he meets an old acquaintance, Kirby Allbee, who accuses Leventhal of being the cause of the loss of his job, and his resulting disintegration. Leventhal denies the charge but feels guilty, and is unable to resist Allbee's demands, even allowing him to move into his apartment. When one day he discovers Allbee in the apartment with a woman, he throws him out. Allbee returns and attempts to gas both himself and Leventhal, and Leventhal drives him away again, this time permanently. They meet once more, some years later; Leventhal is much happier and more secure, and Allbee, though socially better placed, is no less degenerate. A sub-plot tells of the family of Leventhal's brother, of the illness and death of a nephew, and of Leventhal's involvement in it.

Although The Victim deals with a broader world than does Dangling Man, the patterns of the two novels are alike.

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Saul Bellow, The Victim, (New York: Vanguard Press, 1947). All subsequent references are to this edition.

Leventhal, without his wife, is in a peculiarly vulnerable position, as is Joseph with his "freedom". Like Joseph, Leventhal feels alienated from the world; this feeling is in part caused by the guilt and paranoia which his Jewishness makes him feel, and is in part something which grows upon him in his developing relationship with Allbee. Joseph's problems are worked out in an internal dialogue with an alter-ego; in Leventhal's case, the problems are still essentially internal ones, but they are worked out in a confrontation with an externalized alter-ego.

Although The Victim is a third-person narrative, it nevertheless takes the point of view of its protagonist -- Leventhal's consciousness is the consciousness of the novel. It is consequently of prime importance to understand the workings of Leventhal's peculiar anxieties. The first thing to note is that much of what Leventhal believes about himself and the world he believes because he thinks it ought to be true. Thus, he feels that he ought to be persecuted, and so believes that he is persecuted -- in fact, he largely accepts the anti-Semite's picture of the Jew.

This accounts also for the largely symbolic atmospheric background to the novel. Bellow is often praised for the realism of his descriptions, but it is a highly charged realism -- one which stresses a strong element of terror. So although Bellow describes the city realistically, he is able to transform his description into a symbol of the oppressive

forces of civilization. In The Victim, descriptions form a perfect background to what happens to Leventhal, precisely because they are what he sees. He is paranoiac, and sees everything as oppressing him. Early in the novel there is this description:

There was still a redness in the sky, like the flame at the back of a vast baker's oven: the day hung on, gaping fierily over the black of the Jersey shore. The Hudson had a low lustre, and the sea was probably no more numbing in its cold, Leventhal imagined, than the subway under his feet was in its heat; the trains rushing by under the gratings and along the slanting brown rock walls seemed to set off charges of metal dust. (22)

The Staten Island ferry takes on Stygian or Dantesque overtones: "The ferry crawled in the heat and blackness of the harbour. The mass of passengers on the open deck was still, like a crowd of souls, each concentrating on its destination." (64) Images of fire and darkness, of heat and wildness are everywhere, converting New York into Leventhal's Hell, intensifying his suffering, and weakening him for the accusations of his antagonist and double, Kirby Allbee.

These accusations and their results constitute the centre of the novel. Leventhal must learn the extent of his guilt and his responsibility for the suffering of others. The working-out of this problem takes place on a symbolic level, for as an alter-ego, Allbee sums up all Leventhal's fears about the world, and also contains within himself all Leven-

thal's worst feelings.

Leventhal suffers from feelings of guilt and paranoia about his position in society and in the world. He has once seen "the bottom", while working as a clerk in a flophouse, and feels that perhaps that is where he belongs. He fears that he occupies a position in his middle-class world that does not belong to him, that he has usurped a place rightfully belonging to someone else. Further, he feels that he, as a Jew, is everywhere persecuted. The man immediately in control of his social destiny, his employer, Mr. Beard, seems to Leventhal to be anti-Semitic, and to want to be rid of him. Indeed, Mr. Beard is implicitly equated with Allbee, for Leventhal refers to both of them as "fish".³ (5,26) But Leventhal sees the forces of persecution on a grander scale than this. He believes in a plot against him, a "black-list" which worked against him when he was looking for a job, and the existence of which he attempts to verify on a number of occasions: "There were black-lists, that was well known." (47)

We are told of all these fears before Allbee is

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Later, (p.77) this image is expanded with reference to Allbee: "The skin of his forehead, even-grained by the light of the lamp, was wet, and that of his jaw and throat was creased in a way that made Leventhal think of gills. Allbee's remark about creatures had touched his imagination in a singular way, and for an instant he was no more human to him than a fish or crab or any fleshy thing in the water." This idea of the inhumanity of the water creature (Allbee) is surely parallel to the image of the octopus as symbol of death in Henderson the Rain King. Perhaps Leventhal sees his death in Allbee and Beard, as Henderson sees his in the octopus.

introduced; we are also told of Leventhal's unusual vulnerability at the moment, of his feeling that he is lost in an alien and hostile universe. The covered chairs in his apartment seem threatening. He thinks he sees mice, but cannot be sure he has not simply imagined them. He is greatly disturbed by the unexplained ringing of his doorbell, and an unpleasant scene in the street makes him think that: "he really did not know what went on about him." (94)

So the appearance of Allbee is foreshadowed before he appears, and when he arrives he reveals himself to be an embodiment or externalization of Leventhal's fears, to have, in effect, a symbolic existence. His symbolic relationship to Leventhal is rather more complex than this, however. Anti-Semite though he is, he is shown to be very like Leventhal. He too is paranoiac; he has suffered, and has to blame his suffering upon some persecuting force, so he believes in a conspiracy of the Jews: "It's really as if the children of Caliban were running everything." (144)

But in a sense, he is more Jewish than Leventhal, for his hatred of Jews has involved him in a far deeper knowledge and understanding of Jewish culture than Leventhal has. As Baumbach explains it: "Allbee manifests the very qualities he claims to hate in Leventhal: his self-pity, his aggressiveness, his defensiveness, his self-righteousness, his, in Allbee's anti-Semitic notion, Jewishness." ⁴ The

⁴ Baumbach, The Landscape of Nightmare, pp.42-43.

working out of the relationship between the two involves their gradual identification, and Leventhal's symbolic purging of his corrupt alter-ego.

This relationship, worked out in dramatic conflict, is the centre of the novel, but the conflict is essentially Leventhal's internal one. Allbee embodies for Leventhal all that he fears, but is a necessary teacher; Leventhal is "afraid of Allbee as an image of his own possible failure and a projection of his own self-hatred,"⁵ and in learning to face Allbee, he is learning to face himself.

The fastening of links between the two happens in carefully worked-out stages. On first meeting Allbee in the park, Leventhal finds that he remembers his name easily, even though he has not seen or thought much of him before: "He had never liked this Allbee, but he had never really thought much about him. How was it, then, that his name came to him so readily? He had a poor memory for names; still he saw the man and recognized him in a moment." (27) This immediate recognition seems⁶ to suggest some abnormal connection between the two men. In

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Clayton, Saul Bellow: In Defense of Man, p.42.

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This is parallel to Tommy Wilhelm's feeling about Dr. Tamkin: "And so, from the moment when he tasted the peculiar flavour of fatality in Dr. Tamkin, he could no longer keep back the money." (Seize the Day, p.58) With all these double, or teacher figures, Bellow seems to be suggesting a kind of spiritual or mystic connection with the protagonist.

this same confrontation there is a further implication of a close relationship between the two:

"I haven't thought about you in years, frankly, and I don't know why you think I care whether you exist or not. What, are we related?"

"By blood? No, no...heavens!" Allbee laughed.(29)

The fact that Leventhal asks the question at all, and the manner in which Allbee replies to it imply some sort of relationship beyond that of blood. As Tanner says, "the latter's answer...opens up the central theme of the book. How is man related to man -- not brother to brother, or Jew to Jew, but men as seemingly remote as the anti-Semitic degenerate failure from an old New England family, and the wary, cautious, increasingly successful immigrant Jew."⁷

Later, during a visit to the zoo with his nephew Philip, there is a momentary identification of Leventhal and Allbee, when Leventhal feels Allbee's presence so strongly that it is as if he himself were Allbee:

But now and then, moving from cage to cage, gazing at the animals, Leventhal, in speaking to Philip, or smoking, or smiling, was so conscious of Allbee, so certain he was being scrutinized, that he was able to see himself as if through a strange pair of

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Tanner, Saul Bellow, p.27. Tanner seems to be closer to the truth here than is Opdahl, who suggests that Bellow started out with the intention of writing a social-problem novel, but somehow failed, because he became involved with larger metaphysical issues, (The Novels of Saul Bellow, p.52ff.) It seems clear, however, that Bellow uses the Jew/anti-Semite conflict just as he intended to -- as a metaphor to explore the general questions of a man's obligation to his fellows, and the extent of his responsibility for his actions.

eyes: the side of his face, the palpitation in his throat, the seams of his skin, the shape of his body and of his feet in their white shoes. Changed in this way into his own observer, he was able to see Allbee, too.(107)

He seems to be at one and the same time, Allbee watching himself and himself watching Allbee. This feeling of identification is repeated just before he accepts Allbee into his house as a "guest", so that at the moment when Allbee begins to take over his life, Leventhal feels it most acutely: "But suddenly he had a strange, close consciousness of Allbee, of his face and body, a feeling of intimate nearness...he could nearly feel the weight of his body and the contact of his clothes...and the look of recognition Allbee bent on him duplicated the look in his own."(160)

Leventhal's growing awareness of Allbee becomes a sort of love. In spite of the revulsion the two feel for each other, there is, just before the climax, a mutual recognition of something valuable beyond their differences: "Allbee bent forward and laid his hand on the arm of Leventhal's chair, and for a short space the two men looked at each other and Leventhal felt himself singularly drawn with a kind of affection. It oppressed him, it was repellent....However, it did not seem just then a serious fault."(224) When, a little later, however, Leventhal comes home to find Allbee in his bed with a woman who resembles Mrs. Nunez, (Leventhal's landlady, to whom he himself has been attracted,) he drives Allbee out of his house, through mixed emotions of anger and pro-

jected guilt, and a feeling that Allbee, in usurping his bed, is usurping his life. So, when Allbee returns that night and attempts to gas himself and Leventhal, the confusion of identity is complete:

"You want to murder me? Murder?" Leventhal gasped. The sibilance of the pouring gas was almost deafening.

"Me, myself!" Allbee whispered despairingly, as if with his last breath. "Me...!" (283)

Allbee tries to kill himself, or perhaps to destroy himself by destroying Leventhal. "All suicide is murder, and all murder is suicide." ⁸ When, years later, Leventhal meets Allbee again, Allbee says to him: "That night...I wanted to put an end to myself. I wasn't thinking of hurting you...I suppose you would have been...But I wasn't thinking of you. You weren't even in my mind." (293) So the actual meaning of the action is left ambiguous, but the result is that Leventhal's double dies a symbolic death, thus freeing him.

From this relationship, Leventhal has to learn the extent of his participation in the suffering of others, and the extent of his responsibility for his own actions. At the beginning of the novel, the impassivity of his appearance is stressed, with the suggestion that he has little concern for others, he is too "comfortable". But underneath this impassive surface is a fearful and guilt-ridden reality. When Allbee first brings his story to him, Leventhal denies res-

possibility, even though Allbee says that he is "entirely to blame." (33) But underneath Leventhal's denial there is a lack of certainty: "He had only to insist that he wasn't responsible and it disappeared altogether....And what more was there for him to say than that his part in it was accidental? At worst, an accident, unintentional." (96) To admit to the possibility that he was responsible, even if only accidentally, is a stage between complete denial and acceptance. However, when he confronts Williston, a mutual friend of his and Allbee's, he discovers that at least part of Allbee's allegation is true. Allbee's boss, Rudiger, had fired him because of Leventhal's behaviour at an interview which Allbee had arranged for him. This raises two new questions for Leventhal: first whether he could have intended, unconsciously, to "get back at Allbee", (121) though he is sure he did not so intend; second, and more important, as well as difficult, is the question of blame: "he saw that it was necessary to accept some of the blame for Allbee's comedown. He had contributed to it, though he had yet to decide to what extent he was to blame." (120)

At this point it is useful to examine the sub-plot. One of Leventhal's nephews is taken ill, and, partly on Leventhal's advice, is sent to hospital, where he dies. Leventhal is angry with his brother Max, who has been working away for a long time, for neglecting his responsibilities. He has to learn to temper judgement with compassion. At a point where

he is unwilling to accept responsibility for his own actions towards Allbee, Leventhal can think of his brother's case that although, perhaps, it seems unfair to have to account for what one has done innocently, still "there was a chain of consequences", and "payments had to be met." (154) What his relationship with his double must teach him is how to apply this to his own situation.

In his own case, Leventhal finds it difficult to contemplate the facts, but he believes that his torment will end with a "showdown". He recognizes that he has a "fault" of some sort that he has been ignoring, although he does not know what it can be:

But what he meant by this preoccupying "showdown" was a crisis which would bring an end of his resistance to something he had no right to resist. Illness, madness and death were forcing him to confront his fault. He had used every means, and principally indifference and neglect, to avoid acknowledging it and he still did not know what it was. But that was owing to the way he had arranged not to know. He had done a great deal to make things easier for himself, toning down, softening, looking aside. But the more he tried to subdue whatever it was that he resisted, the more it raged, and the moment was coming when his strength to resist would be at an end. He was nearly exhausted now. (157-158)

This is Leventhal's admission that the conflict between himself and Allbee is really his own internal conflict. The answer to it, the "showdown", will solve his problem with Allbee, but it will really mean a coming-to-terms with himself and his "fault".

However, the "showdown", Leventhal's recognition of his fault, is not a conscious admission of guilt, but a

symbolic confrontation of guilt -- his own guilt externalized in his alter-ego, Allbee. After he has caught Allbee in his apartment with the woman, and driven them out, after his anger has subsided, he has a sudden vision of the possible depth of suffering of others: "Both of them, Allbee and the woman, moved or swam towards him out of a depth of life in which he himself would be lost, choked, ended. There lay horror, evil, all that he had kept himself from." (277)

The climax of the novel is, as I said earlier, a symbolic act. Once Leventhal has achieved recognition of suffering, Allbee, symbol of guilt and evil, must be exorcised. Allbee's attempted murder/suicide becomes a symbolic death for Allbee, and symbolic rebirth for Leventhal. It is significant that part of Allbee's philosophy concerns the possibility of rebirth through repentance: "'Repent!' That's John the Baptist coming out of the desert. Change yourself, that's what he's saying, and be another man... There's another thing behind that "repent"; it's that we know what to repent...I know. Everybody knows. But you've got to take away the fear of admitting by a still greater fear...I know that I don't have to be next year what I was last year." (227) So Allbee takes his place as Bellow's first "Saviour" figure. Like Tamkin, he is a figure of evil who knows the truth, and who saves in spite of himself.

The final chapter of the novel is an epilogue, in which Leventhal and Allbee meet again after a number of years. Leventhal appears to have changed very little; but we are

shown that he has in fact changed a great deal, and is now much happier: "The consciousness of an unremitting daily fight, though still present, was fainter and less troubling." (285) Allbee on the other hand, although apparently much changed, is really very much the same. And here we have a hint that Leventhal, if happier, is nevertheless no wiser; he still sees life as the same puzzle: "Wait a minute, what's your idea of who runs things?" (294) There is, of course, no answer. However, Leventhal has developed some sort of conscience. The split and duplication in Dangling Man, which is used as a metaphor for Joseph's alienation, is never really healed. Joseph's return to society is enforced, an ironic capitulation. Leventhal's on the other hand, finds the split somewhat healed; his daily fight is "less troubling" - his confrontation with his alter-ego has done this for him, at least. Clayton puts it, perhaps a little unfairly to Bellow's third novel: "Beginning, like Joseph, as a solitary, separated from his wife and hostile to the few friends he has, he goes much farther than Joseph in joining humanity without surrendering to society. His success heralds the over-eager affirmation of Bellow's next novel, The Adventures of Augie March."⁹

Leventhal can now approach his brother's family out of a feeling of love, instead of duty; he is on the way to becoming, in Schlossberg's phrase, "exactly human". (133)

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Clayton, Saul Bellow: In Defense of Man, p.165.

In fact the sub-plot, concerning Leventhal's brother, is very important in the thematic structure of the novel, offering certain ironic parallels. Because, as I pointed out earlier, everything is seen through Leventhal's consciousness, it is difficult to achieve much distance from the protagonist; the sub-plot helps with this. Leventhal's own evasion of responsibility is paralleled by that of his brother Max, so that his thoughts about his brother provide an ironic commentary on his own situation. Besides this, Leventhal's feelings about the possible anti-Semitism of Elena and her mother give us some light on the level of "reality" in the novel. Leventhal believes that, for some reason, Elena blames him for the death of her son, and that her mother, an Italian Roman Catholic, resents Leventhal, (and Max,) because they are Jewish. Max, however, tells him that he is wrong about the two women (and there is no reason to doubt this.) Leventhal thinks: "If he were wrong about Elena...the mistake was a terrible and damaging one; the confusion in himself out of which it had risen was even more terrible." (240) If Leventhal's perceptions are wrong in this case, then there is doubt about all his perceptions, including those concerning Allbee. Thus, the final moral perspective of the novel is, intentionally, ambiguous.

Plot and sub-plot therefore interact in important ways. The main plot demonstrates a growth in moral awareness in the protagonist, and the sub-plot exists as a means of testing the validity of Leventhal's impulses. Within the main

plot relationship between Leventhal and Allbee, interaction takes place on two main levels. On the level of dialogue there is the working-out of the extent of Leventhal's guilt and responsibility for the sufferings of others; on the symbolic level there is the identification of the two characters, culminating in the spiritual rebirth of Leventhal after the symbolic death of his depraved alter-ego.

III

THE ADVENTURES OF AUGIE MARCH

Leslie Fiedler sums up the conflict in The Victim thus: "Nothing renders them [Leventhal and Allbee] more 'dependent for the food of spiritual life' upon each other than Allbee's indecent need for Jews to define his existence by defining a difference, or Leventhal's secret hunger for a hatred that can mark off the boundaries of his identity."¹ In The Adventures of Augie March,² Bellow again gives us a character who is defined by his difference from his antagonists.

The Adventures of Augie March is a picaresque novel.³ It takes its protagonist from the Chicago of the Depression, through Mexico, to post-war Europe, and from a boyhood "larkiness" to a more mature inward search for truth. During his travels, Augie meets a great many people, each trying to

¹ Leslie A. Fiedler, Love and Death in the American Novel, (New York, 1967), p.364.

² Saul Bellow, The Adventures of Augie March, (New York: The Viking Press, 1953). All subsequent references are to this edition.

³ Tanner quotes Bellow himself: "I...wrote catch-as-catch can, picaresque." (Saul Bellow, p.42). Opdahl, however, points out that the book is really a Bildungsroman, because Augie "turns inward and discovers himself -- and gains substance as a character." (The Novels of Saul Bellow, p.74). I agree, as will become clear, with Opdahl, that Augie develops.

influence or "adopt" him, and from each of whom he manages to escape in his quest for identity, or what he considers to be a distinctive fate. Grandma Lausch, the old woman who dominates his household; Einhorn, the "first superior man" he meets; Mrs. Renling, who wants to adopt him; Thea Fenchel, with whom he falls in love; and Stella, whom he finally marries, all exert their influence upon his course. Parallel to his adventures runs the success-story of his brother Simon, who falls into all the traps Augie tries to avoid.

In my remarks on Dangling Man and The Victim, I stressed the importance of the novels' point of view. Dangling Man has the protagonist recording things as they happen; in The Victim too, things are recorded as they happen. In The Adventures of Augie March, however, the story is told in retrospect by the protagonist. This, although it gives ironic distance, tends to confuse the novel. Although changes take place in Augie during the course of the novel, it is difficult to say whether they are changes caused by his immediate experiences, or whether they are superimposed by the extra wisdom of the older narrator. In general it seems that Augie changes less as an immediate result of his adventures than through reflecting upon them afterwards.

Again Bellow places his protagonist at the centre of a symbolic world, because again the world is one seen, and so largely created, by the protagonist alone. I have pointed out that in each of Bellow's novels there is a character

symbolically linked to the protagonist, and in spite of appearances, The Adventures of Augie March is not an exception. Here, however, it is not one single character, but a whole series of the same type -- the "Machiavellians". It is quite clear that it is Bellow's intention to confront Augie over and over with what is essentially a single type of character. Of Grandma Lausch, Augie says, "she was one of those Machiavellis of small street and neighborhood that my young years were full of." (4) A little later he says of Einhorn: "What would Machiavelli advise...? What would Einhorn think?" (60) And near the end of his adventures, Augie says: "To tell the truth, I'm good and tired of all these big personalities, heavy-water brains, Machiavellis and wizard evildoers, big-wheels and imposers upon, absolutists." (524) The point would be clear enough even if Bellow had not originally intended to call his novel "Life Among the Machiavellians."⁴

Bellow is clearly setting up a problem here in which his protagonist is tested by a single world view, that each individual has an image of what he wants the world to be, and will use whatever power he can to protect and consolidate that image. Augie is pitted against these Machiavellians in an effort to discover how a man of love and good will can stand up against such a philosophy. The chief representative of the Machiavellians is Augie's brother Simon.

⁴ Opdahl, The Novels of Saul Bellow: An Introduction, p.78.

In the portrait of Simon we see in greatest detail the way in which a single "version" of the world, and a lust for power over that world can take over and corrupt a man. And although the Machiavellians are all symbolic opposites for Augie, Simon is most nearly an alter-ego. Ihab Hassan calls Joseph's alter-ego, the Spirit of Alternatives, the "spirit of unchosen choices",⁵ and this is surely what Simon represents for Augie. As Malcolm Cowley describes him, "He is determined to get rich, he makes a brilliant marriage, and at the end of the book he is an overbearing, pot-bellied man of affairs."⁶ The brothers have the same beginning, but whereas Augie resists temptations to take power, Simon embraces them all. He makes a marriage without love, because of the money it will bring him, and his one driving passion is to make more and more money. Further, he is always trying to persuade Augie to follow his example. He tries to arrange a marriage with his own wife's wealthy cousin, but Augie ruins any chance of success here. As Augie and Simon have the same origin, we see a pattern forming: Augie keeps a sort of integrity against the attractions of the Machiavellians, as Simon loses his by making the choices Augie shuns. At the end we see some justice -- Augie, although he does not by any

⁵ Ihab Hassan, Radical Innocence: Studies in the Contemporary American Novel, (Princeton, 1961), p.295.

⁶ Malcolm Cowley, The Literary Situation, (New York, 1955), p.92.

means triumph, does not suffer the spiritual death that his brother does.

Early in the novel, Grandma Lausch describes to Augie and Simon the way life is, (at least to the Machiavellian), "the trustful, loving and simple surrounded by the cunning-hearted and tough," (10) thus setting out the pattern of the novel from the very beginning. This pattern prompts Malin to ask: "Does he tend to duplicate characters so much...that we care little about the spiritual guides encountered by the hero? Does he sacrifice personality to philosophical design?"⁷ But it seems reasonable to answer that although each of these characters serves the same function as regards his relation with Augie, Bellow endows them with such vitality of action and thought that they maintain interest as individuals.

The Adventures of Augie March is about power. Each of the Machiavellians wants to control the world, and those whom Augie meets usually try to submerge him in their own picture of the world. In fact, these Machiavellians are very much like the "ideal constructors" of Dangling Man, each with his own picture of what reality is, each creating a world of what he wants that reality to be. And having made that world, he ruthlessly wields power to protect his vision, by trying to force others into his mould. Augie himself says: "Everyone tries to create a world he can live in, and what he can't use

⁷ Malin, (ed.) Saul Bellow and the Critics, Intro., p.ix.

he often can't see."(378) Having created such a world, one has to convince others of its validity: "That's the struggle of humanity, to recruit others to your version of what's real. Then even the flowers and the moss on the stones become the moss and the flowers of a version."(402)

The result of this is that the Machiavellian, accepting only his own version of the world, cannot leave himself open to love, because love means a weakening, the acceptance of possible other versions. This is the force of what Grandma Lausch teaches the March children: "The more you love people, the more they'll mix you up. A child loves, a person respects. Respect is better than love."(9) Augie, of course, is the means by which these "versions" are put to the test -- and at the same time, Augie is put to the test. Augie himself is on the side of love; although he respects Grandma Lausch, he rejects her after her action of putting his idiot brother George into an institution. For him, love is better than respect.

Einhorn, the man who has the greatest influence on Augie's early life, has a philosophy similar to Grandma Lausch's, though on a wider scale. He believes that "one should choose or seize with force; one should make strength from disadvantages and make progress by having enemies, being wrathful or terrible."(183) With Einhorn too, however, Augie learns, whilst feeling the power of this "superior" man, to understand its failings.

After Einhorn, however, Augie falls into the hands of another manipulator, Mrs. Renling. She wants to make him "perfect", by which she means she wants to take him into her world, by dressing him, educating him, and finally by adopting him. By this stage, Augie is able to see his own position more clearly; he wants to discover his own version, not to be taken into someone else's: "Why should I turn into one of these people who didn't know who they themselves were?...I was not going to be built into Mrs. Renling's world, to consolidate what she affirmed she was." (151) This then becomes the pattern of the book -- Augie being drawn into someone else's version, but escaping from it before it overwhelms him, to continue his search for his own identity. He sums up his own character at the same time: for Grandma Lausch, "I had been pliable and grateful seeming an adoptee. If not really so docile and pliable, this was the hidden ball and surprise about me." (151) Augie himself is, to some degree, a manipulator; in him there is always a tension between the simple, good-hearted man he wants to be, and the manipulator he can never fight down, (simple-heartedness is, in effect, his version.)

This pattern leads up to his relationship with Thea and the episode which is the turning point of the book. Up to that point, Augie is learning about the external world; afterwards he moves towards self-examination. Thea, like the earlier Machiavellians, has a monomania; her project, to hunt

iguanas in Mexico with an eagle, is a reflection of her vision of a fierce nature. Her influence on Augie is stronger than others, because he falls in love with her. She loves him, too, and so assumes he will fall in with her plans, which at the beginning he is powerless to resist. Yet she is really no different from the earlier Machiavellians: "The motive of power over her, the same as afflicted practically everyone I had ever known in some fashion...carried and plunged us forward."(337)

The lizard-hunting incident is symbolic. Thea expects that the eagle, Caligula, will hunt the lizards, because her concept of nature is one of total savagery, the full use of power, devoid of human emotions; she criticises Augie for making pets of the smaller lizards: "You get human affections mixed up with everything, like a savage."(347) She is therefore shattered when Caligula proves to be a coward. Augie identifies with the eagle: "I felt implicated, because he had been tamed on my arm,"(355) and the eagle's final failure is also his: "Caligula's washout and my being such a chump as to spur poor Bizcocho from the top of a bluff terribly disappointed her."(363) So their relationship begins to disintegrate for they have different conception of life, and Augie cannot accept Thea's concept, because it entails his domination. So when Augie goes off with Stella, and expects Thea to understand his action, he is really taking the step to break off with her. His behavior here is a measure of how

passive a character he is. He is in the car with Stella, and Thea wants him to stay with her: "My real desire was to get out. But already the car had gone a way over the cobbles and it seemed to me that having just got it under way I couldn't check it. That's so often what it is with machinery: be somewhat in doubt and it carries the decision." (387) A nonsensical excuse for leaving what should have been a decision to chance. Afterwards, he regrets his action and paradoxically, Augie, who believes in love and a distinctive fate for himself, loses Thea through a failure of love, and through being "just like everybody else." (396)

Near the end of the novel, Augie meets a Machiavellian who sums up in himself all these earlier characters. It is during wartime, and his ship having been sunk, Augie is alone in a lifeboat with the ship's carpenter, Basteshaw. Basteshaw tells Augie how he too had felt destined for a special fate, and how he had a vision in a municipal swimming pool: "The shoving multitude bears down, and you're nothing, a meaningless name, and not just obscure in eternity but right now." (503) This vision determined him to fight obscurity, to climb out of the swimming pool: "You, Hymie Basteshaw, Stupor Mundi!" (503) Basteshaw claims to have discovered the secret of life, and that by eliminating boredom, he can give happiness to all mankind. He says: "I am not God," (505) yet wishes to play God. The arch-Machiavellian, he is claiming power over life and death, in the cause of humanity. Yet he shows no love of

the individual; he hated his father, and callously hastened the death of his sick cousin. Augie is finally able to see him exactly: "I felt sorrow and pity for him too. I realized how much he was barren of, or trying to be barren of in order to become the man of his ideas." (512) The Machiavellian, in trying to control reality to fit his ideas, loses most of what is valuable in man.

These Machiavellians are like Allbee, whose existence depended upon a particular vision of life, and they, like him, will resort to any violence, (physical in Basteshaw's case, emotional in Grandma Lausch's), to maintain that vision. There are, however, other Machiavellians that Augie meets who do not try to force a "version" upon Augie, though they share the vision of the manipulators, and so function as teachers. Mimi Villars, a girl Augie meets before his affair with Thea, pursues her personal vision of what love should be, and in its cause, goes through an abortion because "You can't let your life be decided for you by any old thing that comes up," (272) a philosophy that should appeal to Augie. On the other hand, she acknowledges that suffering is a general condition: "maybe you like the way you are, but most people suffer from it. They suffer from what they are, such as they are...they have what they have; and if that's their truth, where are we?" (254-255) Augie, however, cannot accept this view. At this point he is still able to express an unguarded optimism:

Me, I couldn't think all was so poured in concrete and

that there weren't occasions for happiness that weren't illusions of people still permitted to be forgetful of permanent disappointment, more or less permanent pain, death of children, lovers, friends, ends of causes, old age, loathsome breath, fallen faces, white hair, retreated breasts, dropped teeth; and maybe most intolerable the hardening of detestable character, like bone, similar to a second skeleton and creaking loudest before the end.(255)

Augie wants to believe that there can be happiness in the face of reality, not just that which comes with the protection of a false version of reality.

Almost immediately afterwards, however, Mimi's view is underlined by Kayo Obermark, a student who lives in the same house as Augie and Mimi: "Everyone has bitterness in his chosen thing." (260) Even one's version of reality will not bring happiness. With this, Augie is not so quick to disagree: "I was both drawn to Kayo's view and resistant to it." (260) He is torn between what can be hoped for and what can be expected.

The most important of these teacher-Machiavellians is Mintouchian, a man whom Augie meets late in the novel, and for whom he is working as an agent for black-market goods when the novel ends: "He was another of those persons who persistently arise before me with life counsels and illuminations throughout my entire earthly pilgrimage." (478) He tries to give Augie practical advice about his impending marriage, with his parables and their moral, "love is adultery," but Augie does not want to believe him. Thematically more important, however, he explains the inevitability of the

Machiavellian's position: "Disguises, vaudevilles, multiple personalities, diseases, conversations. Even in a few minutes conversation, do you realize how many times what you feel is converted before it comes out as what you say?"(484) Pretending is the natural condition of man.

This image of the mask or dissimulation is used on many occasions. Thea "painted her mouth with carnation lipstick,"(317) Jacqueline has a "mouth that lipstick doesn't do a great deal to change. She is highly painted."(534) In a card game in Mexico, Augie is told that he looks too innocent, and he thinks: "This was true, though I would have said that I actually did intend to be as good as possible. That's how much I myself knew. But Jesus, Lord! Dissembling! Why, the master dissemblers there are around!"(369) Here, in an incident earlier than his conversation with Mintouchian, Augie is recognizing the condition Mintouchian diagnoses, seeing it to be in himself also.

I began by saying that Simon is Augie's alter-ego, and then went on to discuss at length the relationship between Augie and the various Machiavellians. This is inevitable as, although Simon has this role, he is really only the main representative of what the others also represent. Augie has no existence apart from the Machiavellians he meets, being defined by his rejection of them. Simon, growing gradually more corrupt, accepting all that power offers, implies

a comment upon Augie; his corruption shows how well Augie is able to preserve his integrity. So Augie represents a principle of love and integrity in opposition to the Machiavellians.

But the love that Augie represents has an additional complexity because it exists side by side with the urge of the manipulator: "But what did people seem to me anyhow, something fantastic? I didn't want to be what they made of me but wanted to please them. Kindly explain! An independent fate, and love too -- what confusion." (401) This "independent fate" is what causes difficulty, because it is hardly distinguishable from a "version".

Augie, like Joseph, like all Bellow's heroes, is looking for a "separate destiny", to avoid "those great currents where I can't be myself." (416) But being himself is what causes him such pain, partly because of the conflicting temptation to fit into someone else's version, partly also because of the difficulty of knowing the value of what he is. Like all Bellow's heroes, he sees his own personality as a burden he has to carry. This question of what Augie actually is seems to me to be important in answering the question mentioned earlier of whether or not Augie changes, and of whether or not the book actually ends, or merely comes to a point of rest.

Augie's idea of a distinctive fate is one that is his own, not necessarily one that is unique. He has pursued his quest, but his fate is not what he expected it to be,

and he has discovered the answer to his earlier question about "an independent fate and love too." Love has become his monomania; when he talks to Stella about love, he says, "I seemed to sound like a fanatic, and maybe sounded to her as other people had to me, sounding off about their idea that they were trying to sell or to recruit you for. This made her a mirror, like, where I could see my own obstinacy of yore..."(522) The book is resolved, it seems to me, in Augie's defeat. In a conversation with an old friend, Clem Tambow, Augie describes an insight he has had about "the axial lines of life, with respect to which you must be straight...lately I have felt these thrilling lines again. When striving stops, there they are as a gift...Truth, love, peace, bounty, usefulness, harmony."(454) Here at the end he has lost his vision; he has trouble being still, to find the axial lines again.

Augie March is, on the surface, a different sort of character from Joseph or Leventhal. On three occasions he describes himself as "larky", and elsewhere uses the image: "the lark, who doesn't need to spit or clear his throat, goes up."(303) It is clear that Bellow intended his character not to be tied down to what is mundane in existence, but to "go up", like the lark.

I think that it is because of this conception of Augie's character that the pattern common to Bellow's other novels seems to be submerged in this novel. Because Augie is

not introverted, like the characters in the two earlier novels, Bellow has opened out the very form of the novel in order to accommodate him, allowing him to wander amongst many social levels. Nevertheless, the pattern is there. The protagonist's problem is still worked out by the use of symbolic doubles. Just as Leventhal needs Allbee in order to define the bounds of his own existence, so Augie's identity is defined in his relationship to the Machiavellians. And Simon's existence is a comment upon Augie's progress, just as in Herzog, the presence of Valentine Gersbach is a comment on Herzog himself. In fact, the structure of The Adventures of Augie March is even more overtly symbolic than those of the earlier novels.

In spite of the lighter tone and affirmation of this novel, there is an undertone of unrest and alienation always present, a suggestion that Augie's movement is not caused only by curiosity: "It was not only for me that being moored wasn't permitted; there was general motion, as of people driven from angles and corners into the open, by places being inhospitable to them...."(160) The form of the novel may have opened out, the style be more exuberant, but the hero is essentially the same -- divided and anguished man, in search of himself.

IV

SEIZE THE DAY

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Bellow's next novel, Seize the Day, -- really, a novella -- was published in book form in 1956. Set in New York, it concerns a one-time actor, now out-of-work salesman, Tommy Wilhelm. Wilhelm, short of money, lives in the same hotel as his father, Dr. Adler, who despises him for his lack of success, and Dr. Tamkin, a psychologist-trickster to whom Wilhelm has entrusted his last seven hundred dollars in a joint investment. The story tells of one day in which Wilhelm, unable to get either sympathy or financial aid from his father, and hounded for money by his wife who will not give him a divorce, loses his investment. Unable to find Tamkin, and totally rejected by his father, he wanders into a funeral parlour where, confronted by a corpse, he experiences an outburst of emotion which seems at the same time to be a transcendent vision.

The book marks a return to the tight form of Dangling Man and The Victim, though it is by no means so claustrophobic as these books. The symbolic pattern of Seize the Day also follows that of the two earlier books: the protagonist suffers

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Saul Bellow, Seize the Day, (New York: The Viking Press, 1956). All subsequent references are to this edition.

from a spiritual disease which is cured in his relationship, that between Wilhelm and Dr. Tamkin, is similar to that between Leventhal and Allbee, for Tamkin, though victimizing Wilhelm, nevertheless leads him towards salvation. Further, as with Leventhal, the conflict which is brought to light with the antagonist is essentially an internal one.

The pattern is very clear. In the early part of the novel, the character of Wilhelm is defined, in relation to the world in which he lives -- again a symbolic world, dedicated to the making of money. Within this definition arises the protagonist's problem, his failed relationship with this world, and its chief representative, his father. From this, his suffering arises, but he is led to salvation by the false double, Tamkin, who, setting out as Wilhelm's tormentor, is unwittingly his saviour.

Wilhelm's problem is that he is an outsider or victim in a world governed by the money principle. He has failed at all he has tried, but the world's criterion of a man's worth is the extent of his financial success. Wilhelm's father, himself a success, lies to his friends about Wilhelm, saying, "His income is up in the five figures somewhere," (13) and then despises his son for not living up to this lie.

The idea of money in the novel is involved with images of decay and death, or of falsity and inversion. Dr. Adler is "a master of social behaviour," (28) but feels no natural paternal affection for his son. The suggestion here

is that the social mask hides emptiness. The Hotel Ansonia, the "neighbourhood's great landmark...looks like a baroque palace from Prague or Munich enlarged a hundred times, with towers, domes, huge swells and bubbles of metal gone green with exposure, iron fretwork and festoons." (5) Here is an image comprising both falsity and decay -- just as Dr. Adler hides reality behind a mask, so the money principle attempts to change reality by creating a great false dream-palace, but cannot stop its domes from going "green with exposure."

The men who inhabit the money-world, as Bellow describes it, are old, afflicted or dying. Dr. Adler is plagued by a fear of imminent death; his friend Mr. Perls has "a bone condition which is gradually breaking him up." (42) Wilhelm's two acquaintances at the brokerage office are "Mr. Rowland, who was elderly, and Mr. Rappaport, who was very old." (79)

Money and death are equated even more explicitly than this; money seems to have replaced the very life-blood. Tommy thinks of the past, when he had money; "I flowed money. They bled it away from me. I haemorrhaged money." (40) Mr.

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There is a further symbolic equation here between Mr. Perls and Mr. Rappaport, and the idea of Wilhelm's own death. Wilhelm's first impression of Mr. Perls is described in imagery of fish: "Who is this damn frazzle-faced herring with his dyed hair and his fish teeth?" (30) Mr. Rappaport, in a foreshadowing of Wilhelm's experience in the funeral parlour, tells him of a wartime incident when he discovered two bodies on a beach: "I think one of them was called Fish." (102) It can hardly be coincidence that Bellow uses the name, "Fish" for the dead man; the use of this image is consistent with the point I made earlier, (p.22,n.3.)

Rappaport is a man "who had grown rich by the murder of millions of animals, little chickens." (86) And one of Tamkin's theories concerns the relationship between aggression and the need to make money: "People come to the market to kill. They say, 'I'm going to make a killing.' It's not accidental. Only they haven't got the genuine courage to kill, and they erect a symbol of it. The money." (69) Tamkin is expressing here what Wilhelm himself thinks, though he could not articulate it, and what Bellow suggests everywhere in the novel, through different images.

Wilhelm himself is dying in this world, and it is his attempts to save himself that Seize the Day is about. He is not a very sympathetic character -- he is dirty, weak, a masochist.³ But he is heroic, because he alone in the novel is willing to assert something in opposition to the money-principle, and this assertion is the basis of his conflict. He believes in a spiritual reality, a love, which is quite alien to lucre, but he is too weak to find this reality, and so he suffers. "And though he had raised himself above Mr. Perls

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See Daniel Weiss, "Caliban on Prospero: A Psycho-analytical Study on the Novel Seize the Day, by Saul Bellow", collected in Malin's Saul Bellow and the Critics, pp.114-141, for a full study of Wilhelm's masochism and his relationship with his father. The essay is rather misleading, for it allows Weiss to conclude: "I can see in the character of Tamkin...only an ironic portrait of a psychoanalyst." (141) This is equivalent to dismissing Allbee or Dahfu as of marginal importance, and suggest that Weiss has failed to see what is a significant pattern in Bellow's vision.

and his father because they adored money, still they were called to act energetically and this was better than to yell and cry, pray and beg, poke and blunder and go by fits and starts and fall upon the thorns of life." (56) Here Wilhelm is defining his own conflict; he has an ideal which is beyond money, and so is potentially superior to the father who torments him. But in spite of this, Dr. Adler and people like him are able to act successfully in the world, but Wilhelm, overwhelmed by self-pity and self-hatred, is not. This, as I shall demonstrate, is why Dr. Tamkin seems attractive to Wilhelm -- he apparently unites knowledge of the superior with understanding of the money-world, and the ability to "act energetically".

Evil, then, has a solid physical existence in Seize the Day, embodied in money and what it creates. Money represents death, and Wilhelm is dying. He complains that he is "choked up and congested", and chokes himself in front of his father to show what he feels his wife is doing to him. Images of congestion and of suffocating burdens are common: "He pressed his lips together, and his tongue went soft; it pained him far at the back, in the cords and throat, and a knot of ill formed in his chest." (14) The unifying metaphor of the novel is of drowning; early in the story Wilhelm remembers a line from "Lycidas":

Sunk though he be beneath the wat'ry floor...
When he fears that Tamkin is going to lose all his invest-

ment, he thinks: "The waters of the earth are going to roll over me." (77) The final movement of the novel, recording Wilhelm's moment of insight in the funeral parlour, is also the resolution of this metaphor, for he experiences an actual sensation of drowning:

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

And, of course, the metaphor of sea-death encompasses also the sea-creature.

In his illness, Wilhelm seeks to be healed. Both his father, Dr. Adler, and Dr. Tamkin are "healers", but his father, the man who can give him the healing words of love and sympathy, prefers to "remove himself from the danger of contagion," (108) and give him nothing. So Wilhelm turns to Dr. Tamkin, the man who, it seems, can heal him.

Just as there are, throughout Dangling Man, images of mirrors, reflections and doubles, there are in Seize the Day, images of the distorted reflection. None of the alter-egos of the other novels presents such a false image as does Tamkin, not even Allbee, and long before he actually appears in the novel, his presence has been foreshadowed by the creation of images of falsity and misrepresentation. The Hotel Ansonia provides the first of these distortions: "This morning it looked like the image of itself reflected in deep water, white

and cumulous above, with cavernous distortions underneath."(5) Immediately afterwards Wilhelm sees his own reflection, similarly distorted: "He saw his reflection in the glass cupboard....You had to allow for the darkness and deformation of the glass."(6) And his memory of the screen test he once had shows another distortion: "In those days Wilhelm had had a speech difficulty. It was not a true stammer, it was a thickness of speech which the soundtrack exaggerated. The film showed that he had many peculiarities, otherwise unnoticeable."(27)

It is ironic, if inevitable, that, surrounded by distortions, Wilhelm should turn for help to another distortion. For Dr. Tamkin too is a false image, in spite of the hope he seems to hold out for Wilhelm. Wilhelm, in need of the healing that his father will not give him, turns to Tamkin, who seems at first glance, to be the man Wilhelm would like to be: "He spoke of things that mattered, and as very few people did this he could take you by surprise, excite you, move you."(82) He gives the appearance of comprehending the "things that mattered", the things higher than money that concern Wilhelm, and seems at the same time to understand and control the real world. Most important, he has "the peculiar flavour of fatality"(58) which gives him the same hypnotic hold as Allbee gains over Leventhal.

Wilhelm and Dr. Tamkin are apparently opposites. Wilhelm is burdened, sluggish, defined by images of weight:

"Though he called himself a hippopotamus, he more nearly resembled a bear." (23) Tamkin, on the other hand, speaks for alertness. If Wilhelm is a hippopotamus, he is a bird: "What a rare, peculiar bird he was, with those pointed shoulders, that bare head, his loose nails, almost claws." (82) His language and ideas are bird-like; articulately he flits from idea to idea, a master and lover of words. Wilhelm, on the other hand, is inarticulate, finds difficulty with words, often using them like clubs, without regard to their meaning: "Too much of the world's business done. Too much falsity. He had various words to express the effect this had on him. Chicken! Unclean! Congestion! he exclaimed in his heart. Rat race! Phony! Murder! Play the Game! Buggers!" (17)

However, if Tamkin is a bird, he is an unreal one. At the point where Tamkin is described as a bird, the image of the bird is used three times in three different ways. It is used to describe Dr. Tamkin; it is also used to describe the noise of the working of the stock-board, "which sounded like a huge cage of artificial birds." (81) And it is used in a vision of the countryside, of Wilhelm's one-time home in Roxbury:

He breathed in the sugar of the pure morning.
He heard the long phrases of the birds.
No enemy wanted his life. (82)

This third image is related to a belief that Wilhelm, suffering in the city holds, that hope and love exist, somehow, in the country: "there are also kind, ordinary, helpful

people. They're -- out in the country." (72) This is what the bird, and by association Tamkin, means to him -- the realization of his dreams, the key to the world of love. But the bird Tamkin is really associated with the artificial birds of the brokerage office, not with the birds of pastoral. In fact, Wilhelm has already noticed this about Tamkin, that beneath the appearance there lie the same weaknesses and fear that characterize Wilhelm: "When his hypnotic spell failed, his big underlip made him look weak-minded. Fear stared from his eyes, sometimes, so humble as to make you sorry for him." (96) So the images of falsity, apparent throughout the novel, point to a definition of Tamkin.

Tamkin is nevertheless essential for the lesson Wilhelm has to learn. Wilhelm's illness is defined in his relationship to his father, his cure in his relationship to Dr. Tamkin. Although Wilhelm sees that Tamkin is a fake, he throws himself upon him, not merely because of Tamkin's "flavour of fatality", but because of the rightness of Tamkin's insight: "True, true! thought Wilhelm, profoundly moved by these revelations. How does he know these things? How can he be such a jerk, and even perhaps an operator, a swindler, and understand so well what gives? I believe what he says." (99) Tamkin can diagnose the illness of the world, and Wilhelm's illness too, so Wilhelm looks to him for a cure. Tamkin's theory of the two souls is what really moves Wilhelm: there are two souls, the real soul and the pretender soul, the

pretender soul sapping the strength of the real soul, and the real soul wanting to kill the pretender soul because of its falsity. This seems to Wilhelm to define his own problem. He sees Tommy as the pretender soul, because Tommy is a stage name, of course, being Wilhelm Adler. Tommy, then represents the life he took up in rejection of that urged him by his parents. So his real soul is, perhaps, the boorish Wilky; Wilky represents the part of him that relates to his father, and to what his father has created in him. Wilky is a childhood nickname, a name that Dr. Adler still uses to define Wilhelm as a child, and with which Wilhelm occasionally reviles himself: "You fool, you clunk, you Wilky!" (25) Whatever the truth, Wilhelm recognizes that Tamkin is talking about a split in him that he himself has noted before. Long before this Bellow writes: "Wilhelm had always had a great longing to be Tommy. He had never, however, succeeded in feeling like Tommy, and in his soul had always remained Wilky." (25)

Although Wilhelm looks to Tamkin as a saviour, he finds him to be a fraud-saviour. Wilhelm's investment is lost and Tamkin disappears. It then becomes clear that Tamkin is the most obnoxious manifestation of the money-world, for although he seems to transcend it, he is its worst representative. Wilhelm learns from Tamkin's lessons, but to Tamkin himself they mean nothing. He is impressed with his own rhetoric, a lover of ideas and theories, but the ideas he articulates are in no way a part of him. He points the way,

but cannot follow it himself. This is deeply ironical; Wilhelm hates cynicism, he "was especially horrified by the cynicism of successful people. Cynicism was bread and meat to everyone." (16) He looks for it everywhere, but torn between his realisation that Tamkin is a fake, and his need to believe in him, he fails to see how cynical he is.

Still, Tamkin has taught Wilhelm much, and is to lead him to one more, the most important, lesson, in the symbolical ending of the novel. After the loss of the investment, Tamkin disappears, and Wilhelm is led to a funeral parlour through following a figure which appears to be Tamkin. Instead of finding the doctor, however, he is confronted by a corpse in a coffin: "On the surface, the dead man with his formal shirt and his tie and silk lapels and his powdered skin looked so proper; only a little beneath so -- black." (117) In this one image come together all the images of false appearance in the book: Dr. Adler with his false social manner; the old women in the cafeteria, who "were rouged and mascaraed and hennaed and used blue hair rinse and eye shadow," (91); the eccentric Estonian lady, "a rouged woman in her fifties" (105); Wilhelm himself, thinking he can hide behind a cigar and a hat; Tamkin, the artificial bird, hiding his fear. Wilhelm, faced with the blackness underneath, weeps for himself, for mankind, and finally for reasons greater than these, and beyond his ability to explain: "Soon he was past words, past reason, coherence. He could not stop. The

source of all tears had suddenly sprung open within him...The great knot of ill and grief in his throat swelled upward and he gave in utterly and held his face and wept. He cried with all his heart."(117-8)

So Tommy Wilhelm achieves a moment of vision and insight which none of the earlier Bellow heroes has known, a vision which, if it cannot change his condition, must change him. He learns more than Joseph, more than Leventhal, achieving a state through which Henderson will have to pass.

This is achieved through the application of the same symbolic pattern as we have seen before; in each case the connections between the protagonist and the world are undermined. Joseph's "freedom" drives him towards insanity, Leventhal's paranoia destroys his relationship with his society. Wilhelm's inability to make money and his rejection of the money-principle make him an isolate in a materialistic world. In each case it is the hero's assertion of his individuality in a hostile world which is the root cause of his problem. And in each case, faced with an alternative version of himself he is led part way towards salvation. But it is a salvation which gives the hero the strength to accept himself rather than to accept society. This, perhaps, is why we do not see the hero's return to society -- neither Wilhelm's, nor, in the next novel, Henderson's.

HENDERSON THE RAIN KING

During one of his ferry-journeys to Staten Island, Asa Leventhal in The Victim, meditating on the light, thinks it "was akin to the yellow revealed in the slit of the eye of a wild animal, say a lion, something inhuman that didn't care about anything human and yet was implanted in every human being, one speck of it." (V.51) Bellow's fifth novel, ¹ Henderson the Rain King, published in 1959, is essentially an extension of this image. The lion is the central metaphor of the novel which is, at least in part, an examination of the "something inhuman" shared by man and animal.

Briefly, Henderson the Rain King concerns Eugene Henderson, twice-married millionaire, violent and eccentric, who, driven from his native America by a vision of life as a piling-up of "junk", and an unsilenceable inner voice which says only "I want!" and will not let him rest, journeys to Africa. With his guide Romilayu, he visits first the Arnewi, a gentle, cattle-worshipping people, suffering from a drought and a water supply polluted with frogs. After befriending their prince, Itelo, and trying to learn from the queen,

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Saul Bellow, Henderson the Rain King, (New York: The Viking Press, 1959). All subsequent references are to this edition.

Willatale, he attempts to destroy the frogs, but blows up the reservoir itself, and so flees. He then visits the Wariri, a more violent tribe of people, befriends their king, Dahfu, and after lifting their rain-idol Mummah, is made Sungo, or Rain King. Dahf teaches him much, and attempts to give him some of the properties of his lioness, Atti. The climax comes during a hunt for the lion Gmilo, supposedly the re-incarnation of Dahfu's father, when Dahfu, falling on the lion, is killed by it. Henderson again flees, with a lion cub containing the spirit of Dahfu, and returns to America with the cub and an orphan boy he meets on the plane home.

I have pointed out in earlier chapters the subjective nature of Bellow's novels --their world is that seen by the hero, who is the centre of consciousness, and reflects his fears and prejudices. In Henderson the Rain King, Bellow takes this to its extreme. Henderson's Africa is an internal, not an external one, described as if real, but quite fantast²ic. Richard Chase says the novel is really a romance; Keith Opdahl goes even further and says that Bellow's novel represents "a waking dream"³. It is, in spite of Bellow's warnings to "deep readers" in search of meanings, published

²
Chase, "The Adventures of Saul Bellow: The Progress of a Novelist." Reprinted Malin, Saul Bellow and the Critics, p.25

³
Opdahl, The Novels of Saul Bellow, p.123.

earlier the same year,⁴ his most symbolic and "meaningful" book.

Essentially, it tells of a quest. David Galloway refers to the book's connection with the "grail tradition", with the journey through a waste land, a cleansing with rain, the cyclic death and resurrection of the king.⁵ But Henderson's quest is a more personal one than this. He says to Itelo, "Your Highness, I am really kind of on a quest," (65) and his quest, as it turns out, is for his double, Dahfu, and what Dahfu can give him. So that the traditional form of the quest is built on to the pattern that Bellow has used in earlier novels, while Henderson is a parody of the earlier heroes.

From the beginning, Henderson is driven by "a voice in my heart that said I want, I want, I want, oh, I want," (12) a voice which he cannot silence, and which will not explain itself by indicating an object. It is only in his relationship with Dahfu that Henderson begins to understand this voice. But, fully to understand Henderson's relationship with Dahfu, it is necessary to see the pattern of the quest which leads towards him.

The novel begins, as do the earlier ones, with the

⁴ In "Deep Readers of the World, Beware!" New York Times Book Review, LXIV (Feb. 15, 1959), 1.

⁵ Galloway, The Absurd Hero in American Fiction, p.111.

protagonist's alienation from society and from himself -- part of Henderson's problem is his own uselessness. However, unlike the earlier heroes -- Augie excepted -- he goes in search of salvation. The earlier heroes are passive, their doubles come to them; Henderson seeks Dahfu. In the early part of the novel, his problem is defined. Driven by a lack of meaning in his life, and by visions of death, he discovers amongst the Arnewi that he is in need, mainly, of two things: to find something that only he can do, which leads to his destroying the Arnewi reservoir; and to understand the meaning of life, and, more important, the meaning of death. This latter leads him to Dahfu, for Dahfu is the embodiment of what he would become. Henderson has to learn to face the lion; Dahfu is the lion, and he is also Henderson's double. So Henderson is learning to face himself. Thus Henderson's search in Africa for Dahfu is really a search within for himself.

Henderson is different from Bellow's earlier heroes, in that he suffers no economic pressures. He is liberated from the forces which cause Wilhelm's suffering. Nevertheless, he suffers; "excessive sadness has made me physically heavy," (64) he says. Henderson is, as I have said, a parody of the earlier heroes. Leventhal and Wilhelm are both large men, continually hindered by the physical world. With Henderson, this property is exaggerated. Wilhelm's suffering is manifested in physical sensations; so is Henderson's, but

with comic inflation. He suffers, as he insists on repeating, from his teeth; he also suffers from haemorrhoids, and is generally grossly tied to the physical world. He is continually made to suffer physical degradation, being stripped or thrown into mud. His physical appearance is extraordinary, and he describes it in an extraordinary way: "my face...is no common face, but like an unfinished church,"(76) and: "My face is like some sort of terminal; it's like Grand Central, I mean,"(51) Just as Wilhelm was unable to hide his feelings, Henderson is unable to suppress his: "Whole crowds of them, especially the bad ones, wave to the world from the galleries of my face."(53) Bound to the grotesque physical comedy there are a self-pity and a self-mockery not unlike those of Tommy Wilhelm.

Henderson, then, is a parody of the earlier sufferers. This puzzles Tanner, who is concerned "that profound notions seem to flirt with their own parodies and a genuine seriousness of inquiry is jostled and tripped by the immense comic gusto which hurtles the book along." I think that Tanner is wrong in feeling that the comedy of the book cannot accommodate the seriousness; I think that it does, and again, this is concerned with the relationship between Henderson and Dahfu. Dahfu, apart from the basic joke of the Reichian thinker lost in the wilds of Africa, is not comic. On the

contrary, he is a figure of great nobility, almost a genius. As he stands as Henderson's double, and reveals the possibilities in the latter, our attitude towards Henderson changes, so that we can accept without laughter the picture of Henderson returning to his world, with the lion-cub containing Dahfu's spirit, and the orphan child, representing the possibilities of love, running, "leaping, leaping, pounding and tingling over the pure white lining of the grey Arctic silence."(341)

Henderson's quest, then, starts with his dissatisfaction with his life in New York. At fifty-five, rich enough to do as he wishes, he nevertheless leads an empty life. His dissatisfaction is shown in his violence against everything, and in his "ego-emphasis", but he himself is inarticulate about it. But this is the cause of his inner voice, and of his drunken cries that "There is a curse on this land. There is something bad going on. Something is wrong. There is a curse on this land!"(38) It is not just the land that is cursed, however. Henderson's violence against everything is caused by his inability to understand the people the society, against which his violence is directed, and his consequent feeling that he is an outsider. This belief is exactly the same as Asa Lev-⁷enthal's: "Nobody truly occupies a station in life any more. There are mostly people who feel that they occupy the

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See above, p.22.

place that belongs to another by rights." (34)

The immediate cause of Henderson's search for the self that Dahfu represents is his confrontation with an image of himself in the corpse of his home-help, Miss Lenox. He finds her cottage full of useless objects, the collection of a lifetime, and thinks:

Why do we allow ourselves? What are we doing? The last little room of dirt is waiting. Without windows. So for God's sake make a move, Henderson, put forth effort. You, too, will die of this pestilence. Death will annihilate you and nothing will remain, and there will be nothing left but junk. (40)

This, in fact, is an image of his own life, not simply externally, but internally also, for as he later says to Prince Itelo, "My soul is like a pawn shop. I mean it's filled with unredeemed pleasures, old clarinets, and cameras, and moth-eaten fur." (81) The old woman is also, of course, an image of his own death. Henderson is constantly confronted by images of death. There is the experience he has in the aquarium at Banyules, with the octopus, which haunts him ever afterwards:

The eyes spoke to me coldly. But even more speaking, even more cold, was the soft head with its speckles, and the Brownian motion in those speckles, a cosmic coldness in which I felt I was dying. The tentacles throbbed and motioned through the glass, the bubbles sped upward, and I thought, "This is my last day. Death is giving me notice." (19)

There are more corpses, skulls, a shrunken head, and, of course, the lion itself. And although he believes himself to be well acquainted with death, he constantly flies from it,

and is unable to face the fact of his own mortality. This is one of the things Dahfu teaches him in the den of the lioness: "You fled what you were. You did not believe you had to perish."(260)

So, driven by this vision, Henderson sets out on his quest, which takes him first, with his guide Romilayu, to the Arnewi. These are, like Tommy Wilhelm, masochistic sufferers. They worship their cattle, but allow them to die of thirst, because their water is polluted with frogs, and their superstition will not allow them to remove the frogs or to use the polluted water. So for them there is no escape from their predicament. (The Arnewi allow their religious beliefs to dominate them. The Wariri are the reverse of this -- they violently flog images of their gods. Dahfu characterizes the Wariri and the Arnewi as, respectively, ibai and nibai, lucky and unlucky, but the distinction is really one which forms one of the central tensions in Bellow's work -- between the principles of gentle acquiescence, and of willful seizing of power.)

In the midst of the suffering of the tribe, however, their queen, Willatale, is happy, and seems to Henderson to be in possession of the answer to his quest: "I believed the queen could straighten me out if she wanted to; as if, any minute now, she might open her hand and show me the thing, the source, the germ -- the cipher. The mystery, you know."(79) All she can tell him, however, is "Grun-tu-molani. Man want

to live."(85) Henderson sees much in this; it is his burning rage to live, rather than simply to exist, which has driven him on his quest. But he destroys his chance to learn more from her by destroying the Arnewi water-supply. However, the truth behind her serenity and "happy light" is to do not with life, but with death. Henderson notes: "she was wrapped in a lion's skin. Had I known then what I know now about lions, this would have told me much about her."(72) Her happiness comes from an acceptance of the inevitability of death, symbolized by her wearing of the skin; it is this that Henderson has yet to learn.

So he is led to Dahfu, and his real education begins. What he has to learn from Dahfu concerns two things -- reality, and death. Henderson constantly attempts to convince himself that he knows about reality; "Me? I love the old bitch just the way she is and I like to think I am always prepared for even the worst she has to show me."(150) But he also thinks, "It's you who makes the world what it is. Reality is you."(123) In other words, like the ideal constructors and the Machiavellians, he has a picture of reality which he has convinced himself is the true one.

This self-deception about the nature of reality accompanies a self-deception about death. During his flight to Africa, Henderson thinks: "having dreamed at the clouds from both sides as no other generation of men has done, one should be able to accept his death very easily."(42) But, far from

accepting death easily, Henderson hides from it. The dead man in the hut of the Wariri seems to say to him; "Here, man is your being, which you think so terrific. And just as silently I replied, "Oh, be quiet, dead man, for Christ's sake." (137) And having dismissed death in this way, he goes further and carries the body away from the hut, only to find the next morning that it has been returned to him, and is "sitting in very much my own posture." (144) The identification is later completed, when Henderson discovers that the body is of the previous Sungo.

There is a pattern here; having passed over identification with the dead Sungo, whom he is to become, Henderson is then led to the living king, Dahfu, whom he is also to become. Henderson himself recognizes this pattern at one moment, for when confronted with the body in the hut, he thinks: "What could be the meaning of this? Why was I lately being shown corpses?" (135) This is a recognition of a pattern to his quest, pointing him onward to a meaning.

The whole of the novel up to this point has been a definition of Henderson himself, setting out his problem, and hinting at answers as a preparation for the confrontation with his double and saviour, Dahfu. When Leventhal meets Allbee, he finds the man has made an unusually strong impression on his memory. Wilhelm feels the "flavour of fatality" in Tamkin. In each case Bellow is suggesting ties between the men which are more than social ties. He makes the same sug-

gestion here: "Some voices once heard will never stop resounding in your head, and such a voice I recognized in his from the first words." (154) Bellow is stressing the importance which the double, or "linked character" has for the protagonist alone.

Marcus Klein says, "Tamkin is recreated in King Dahfu, Henderson's guiding spirit...another prince of darkness."⁸ This is partially true, but it must be added that whereas Tamkin is an artificial bird, Dahfu is a real lion, and on the whole benevolent towards Henderson. Clayton suggests that "In general Dahfu is the exceptional man Henderson desires to be."⁹ One could add that Tamkin seems to be the exceptional man Wilhelm desires to be.

Henderson's first impression of Dahfu sums up their relatedness: "Like myself, he was a big man, six feet or better by my estimate, and sumptuously at rest." (153) Here is on the one hand the equation of the two: "like myself", and on the other hand the difference between the two. Dahfu is "at rest" in contrast to what we know about Henderson's feverish unrest; so he must have the knowledge that defines the difference, and can bridge it. A little later, Henderson states more explicitly their difference: "He seemed all ease,

⁸ Klein, "A Discipline of Nobility: Saul Bellow's Fiction", collected in Malin, Saul Bellow and the Critics, p.97.

⁹ Clayton, Saul Bellow: In Defense of Man, p.182.

and I all limitation. He was extended, floating; I was contracted and cramped... he was soaring like a spirit while I sank like a stone."(160)

The secret which Dahfu can give to him concerns a different version of reality, encompassing the acceptance of death, a secret which Willatale shares, Dahfu lives constantly amongst reminders of the closeness and inevitability of his own death. The multitude of wives whom he must service will bring death upon him once he can no longer perform this function; he plays a life-and-death game with the skulls of his father and grandfather, as one day his successor will play with his skull; his very palace is built upon the "darkness", a darkness containing the lioness Atti, in which are united the principles of reality and death. Dahfu has overcome fear of these principles, not by hiding from them, as does Henderson, but by embracing them in the lioness; and by imitating the lioness, he has absorbed them into himself.

Ironically, Henderson is also surrounded by reminders of his own death; as Sungo, he has the lesson of what has happened to the previous Sungo. Also, as successor to the king, he faces exactly what Dahfu faces. But Henderson is left ignorant of this until he has learned his real lesson from the lion-hunt.

What Henderson learns from Dahfu he learns on three levels: there is what Dahfu tells him, in their longphilo-

sophical discussions; there is what Dahfu shows him, in their confrontations with the lioness; and there is what Henderson learns from his response to the way Dahfu lives, to what he is, and especially, to the way he dies.

What Dahfu tells him is, as many critics have pointed out, based largely upon the teaching of Wilhelm Reich.¹⁰ The main idea derives from the theory that there can be psychological causes of physical disease, or that psychological illness can have physical manifestations. Dahfu extends this into a theory that mind and body exert a two-way influence: "He had some kind of conviction about the connexion between insides and outsides, especially as applied to human beings." (236) The implication of this is that physical disciplines can be spiritually beneficial. So, by imitating the lion, by taking over certain physical properties or manners of the beast, Henderson can develop something of the spirit of the beast: "this is what you need, as you are an avoider. Oh, you have accomplished momentous avoidances. But she will change that. She will make consciousness to shine. She will burnish you. She will force the present moment upon you." (260) This is very much like Tamkin's exhortation to Wilhelm to "seize the day", and it is apt advice for Henderson.

Dahfu's ideas allow for a great deal of optimism; he

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See, amongst others, Tanner, Saul Bellow, p.78,; Clayton, Saul Bellow: In Defense of Man, p.180.

is insistent upon the future for nobility, and upon the creative power of the imagination: "What Homo sapiens imagines, he may slowly convert himself to." (271) This is what most impresses Henderson, and gives him hope. So Henderson follows Dahfu into the lion's den not out of trust, or because he thinks Dahfu is right, (this part of the theory he receives with some skepticism,) but because he is carried away by the king's affirmation, and in spite of his fear, does not want to lose Dahfu's respect.

So he descends into the darkness with Dahfu. But in confronting the lioness he is not learning the qualities that Dahfu intends him to learn; instead he is facing a new vision of reality. What he sees is very like what Leventhal saw in the image quoted at the beginning of the chapter: "Everything was black and amber down there in the den. The stonewalls themselves were yellowish...The dust was sulphur-coloured. The skin of the lioness lightened gradually from the dark of the spine, toward the chest a ground ginger shade...But her small heels were black. Her eyes also were ringed absolutely with black." (273-4) So, faced with a terror which he has never known before, he roars. Somehow, from this ordeal, he does learn something. He sees that he has been guilty of what Dahfu calls "ego-emphasis": "I had a voice that said, I want!- I want? It should have told me she wants, he wants, they want. And moreover, it's love that makes reality reality. The opposite makes the opposite." (286) And he sees through his self-pity.

But Henderson's real education is worked out on a metaphorical level, in his identification with Dahfu. The king's death makes possible a rebirth for Henderson, and this is his function, to be sacrificed. Moments before the fall of Dahfu, Henderson himself looks into the face of death, and finds a yet greater terror in reality:

at the very doors of consciousness, there was a snarl and I looked down from this straw perch -- I was on my knees -- into the big, angry, hair-framed face of the lion. It was all wrinkled, contracted; within those wrinkles was the darkness of murder. The lips were drawn away from the gums, and the breath of the animal came over me, hot as oblivion, raw as blood....The snarling of this animal was indeed the voice of death. And I thought how I had boasted to my dear Lily how I loved reality....But oh, unreality! Unreality, unreality! That has been my scheme for a troubled but eternal life. But now I was blasted away from this practice by the throat of the lion. His voice was like a blow at the back of my head.(306-307)

This is the moment of fullest vision for Henderson, when he comes face to face with the things he has always avoided. Once he has seen it, his double, who brought him to it, no longer has a function. But in spite of his terror, Henderson is able to leap into the pit and bind the lion in an attempt to save his friend.

The burial of Henderson and Dahfu in the same tomb leads to a resurrection: "As I had tried to stop his bleeding, there was blood all over me and soon it was dry. I tried to rub it off. Well, I thought, maybe this is a sign that I should continue his existence?"(314) However, on one level, Henderson rejects Dahfu's teaching; he succeeds Dahfu as king

of the Wariri, but has to fly from this version of reality to one of his own. Nevertheless, he carries Dahfu's spirit out of the tomb in the form of the lion-cub which is supposedly the reincarnation of the king. This is a ritual rebirth into the world armed with the self-knowledge that Dahfu has given him. But it is a knowledge that he must apply in his own way. What he learns from Dahfu and from the lion can never turn him into Dahfu, and this is why he cannot stay on as king. But he can live a changed life. He says at the beginning of the story, "living proof of something of the highest importance has been communicated to me,"(22) and takes back to the real world a new attitude.

Essentially, then, Henderson the Rain King follows the pattern of the earlier novels -- an internal quest whose answer revolves round the protagonist's relationship with an alter-ego. This novel is like The Victim insofar as it uses the symbolic identification of protagonist and double, and the symbolic death of the double, leaving the protagonist cleansed, a new man, able to go back into the world. Like Seize the Day, it shows how the aspiring individual, the man trying to find the means of living a good life, a life of love, must seek the answer from the Machiavellian, the man who appears to be in control of his environment. It seems that each of these novels illustrates the same strongly philosophical or moralistic pattern. Man, ultimately isolated from society, must seek inwards the means of his salvation.

The point of view is almost solipsist, the protagonist suffers in the world, because the world is largely of his making. Leventhal feels persecuted, but his perspective on the world is what causes the feeling, not the world itself. So it is with Wilhelm. He cannot make money, and because he is in need of love, he seeks a reality beyond the money-principle, and consequently sees the world as being dominated by the money-principle, and totally devoid of love. And Henderson, a lonely, brutal man, with no aims, sees a world full of "junk", and lives amongst pigs. This solipsist viewpoint, and a related externalization of what is essentially an internal problem, makes natural the metaphor of the double. The only real relationship the hero can have is with this symbolic representative of his own fears and desires, who can provide the answer to his problems. So Henderson the Rain King is ultimately not very different from Dangling Man.

In his latest novel, Herzog, Bellow uses the device of the alter-ego in a slightly different way, but as I will show, the reasons for using it, and the relationship between protagonist and alter-ego, are essentially the same.

VI

HERZOG

Bellow's latest novel, Herzog,¹ published in 1964, again uses the device of the double, or alter-ego, in the relationship between Herzog and Valentine Gersbach. The device is not, on this occasion, used as a means of exploring the central conflict of the novel, as it is in The Victim, Seize the Day, or Henderson the Rain King. It is used marginally, partly at least to throw an ironic light upon the protagonist.

Moses E. Herzog, a teacher in a New York school, is recovering from his divorce from his second wife, Madeleine, who is having an affair with Valentine Gersbach, once Herzog's best friend. Little happens in the present of the book. Herzog goes to Vineyard Haven to try to relax, but finds he cannot stay there, so he returns to New York and spends a night with his mistress Ramona. Overhearing a court-case in which a man and woman are being tried for the murder of a child, Herzog, out of concern for his own daughter, June, is overwhelmed by the urge to go to Chicago to kill Madeleine and Gersbach. This urge leaves him, however, when, looking through a window he sees Gersbach bathing June, and suddenly

¹ Saul Bellow, Herzog, (New York: The Viking Press, 1964). All subsequent references are to this edition.

sees the comedy of the situation. The next day he takes June to a museum, and crashes his car. Picked up carrying a gun by the police, he has to spend some time in jail. These events have led him to peace and strength, however, and he is able to retire to his country-house in Ludeyville.

This is not, however, the important action of the book. In his spiritual turmoil, Herzog writes letters, which are never sent, to relatives, friends, philosophers, historians and politicians, dead and alive, finally even to God. All his thoughts and preoccupations about his past, and especially about his relationship with Madeleine, are exposed in these letters, and in flashbacks relating to the letters. So the important action is an internal one -- a frenzied quest into Herzog's total experience, in an attempt to give order and meaning to his life.

As with the other novels, the point of view is a closed one. Bellow switches back and forth from first to third person narrator throughout the book, thus blurring the distinction between himself and Herzog. But we are never able to see events through any eyes but Herzog's -- and he is not exactly a reliable observer. His first words are: "If I am out of my mind, It's all right with me." (1)

Herzog repeats a pattern set up in Bellow's earlier novels. The protagonist, in his attempts to find a key to an alien world, finds or creates for himself an alter-ego upon whom to project his own guilt and fear, and who leads,

directly or indirectly, to the protagonist's salvation. If Gersbach is less central a figure than Allbee or Tamkin or Dahfu, he nevertheless plays a similar role.

It is necessary to say immediately that Gersbach is a grotesque exaggeration, a parody of Herzog himself. This is explicitly stated in the novel: "People say that Gersbach imitates me -- my walk, my expressions. He's a second Herzog." (190) And just as in Dangling Man Joseph created his alter-ego for himself, so Herzog, at least metaphorically, created Gersbach. He was himself responsible for "aggravating Valentine's ambitions -- Gersbach the public figure, Gersbach the poet, the television-intellectual, lecturing at the Hadassah on Martin Buber. Herzog himself had introduced him to cultural Chicago." (58) As comic double to Herzog, Gersbach serves a number of purposes. He provides an ironic commentary upon Herzog, he is target for Herzog's projected guilt, and he is instrumental in Herzog's eventual salvation.

Before further examining Gersbach and the part he plays, more must be said about Herzog and his world. About this world Irving Howe says, "there is no pretense in this novel that we are being shown a world which exists self-sufficient, apart from the neurotic inflammations of the central figure."² Reflecting on his own character, Herzog

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Irving Howe, "Odysseus, Flat on his Back", New Republic, (September 19, 1964), p.21.

thinks: "He might once have had the makings of a clever character, but he had chosen to be dreamy instead, and the sharpies cleared him out." (3) And this is how he still sees the world. He is "dreamy", the representative of burning love in the form of "heart" -- his very name suggests the connection, just as "Valentine" suggests the sloppy parody of love. So we see one of the images which comes most often to Herzog's mind is of the heart. An oriole's nest is "in the shape of a grey heart"; (72) in New Jersey "red lights like small hearts beat or tingled"; (178) he sees himself as a "throb-hearted character"; (330) and the threatening message he sends to Gersbach reads, "Dirt Enters At The Heart." (216) Outside him are the "sharpies", the realists or "Reality Instructors", such as his lawyer-friend Sandor Himmelstein; they want to show him that reality is brutal, that "Facts are nasty." (86) Their substitute for "heart" is "potato love", a meaningless, sentimental pretense at emotion.

Herzog's quest is a serious one, and he himself certainly takes it seriously. But there is always a comic check upon this seriousness. His letters are full of important thoughts and ideas, but we nevertheless see that Herzog is pompous and rather foolish. Richard Poirier makes a serious accusation against Bellow when he complains about "Bellow's failure to acknowledge the comic preposterousness of the kind of mental activity going on...a pretension that might itself characterize the hero were he not...montaged with the au-

thor....What is missing is any indication that Bellow is aware of the essential irrelevance, the essential pretension and shabbiness of the self-aggrandizing mind at work in, and for, the hero."³ In other words, Bellow has failed to create a truly comic character, because he has failed to achieve sufficient distance from Herzog. Howe, on the other hand, thinks that "Bellow manages skillfully to avoid the kind of identification which might lead one to conclude that he 'favors' his central character or fails to see through his weakness and falsities."⁴ I think that Howe is right, and that Poirier grossly misreads the novel. There are many indications that Bellow does see through the pretensions of his hero: Herzog's self-mockery; his anger at the infidelity of his wife and friend while excusing his own affairs; and, most important, the introduction of Valentine Gersbach as a comic reflection of Herzog.

On this level, Bellow uses Gersbach as an ironic check on Herzog's perceptions about himself. In a letter to his first wife, Daisy, Herzog tells her that he has been under the doctor's care, and Bellow says, "He noted with distaste his own trick of appealing for sympathy. A personality had its own ways. A mind might observe without approval. Herzog did not care for his own personality, and at the moment

³ Richard Poirier, "Bellows to Herzog", Partisan Review, XXXII (Spring, 1965), 269-270.

⁴ Howe, "Odysseus, Flat on his Back", p.22.

there was apparently nothing he could do about its impulses."(12) Herzog criticises himself, but dismisses the criticism. Later, however, he thinks about Gersbach, "He knows how to make the most of it, emotionally, with his lurid sob stuff."(190) Herzog overlooks the same fault in himself, but Bellow does not. He points it out by duplicating the fault in Gersbach, and having Herzog criticise that. Similarly, when he learns from his friend Asphalter about Madeleine's infidelity with Gersbach, Herzog recognizes, and indirectly mocks, his own emotionalism. Although "he could burst into tears easily enough", he does not, because "Gersbach was a frequent weeper of distinguished emotional power."(45) By having Herzog isolate one of his own weaknesses in this way, and showing the same weakness in Gersbach with comic exaggeration, Bellow shows that he recognizes the weakness to be comic in Herzog too.

Gersbach is also a parody intellectual, "a talentless buffoon double of the talented hero [who] booms out the latest highbrow cant in his great bearish voice."⁵ He is a debased version of the teacher, in love with his own ideas and productions, who hires a hall in which to read his own poetry and weeps before a vast audience, who misuses ideas as he misuses Yiddish expressions, a pop-intellectual. He reads lectures to Herzog which "were so spirited, so vehe-

⁵
Howe, "Odysseus, Flat on his Back", p.21.

ment, gross, they were ludicrous, too, a parody of the intellectual's desire for higher meaning, depth, quality."(60) This surely provides an ironic comment upon Herzog's own approach to thinking, and especially upon his letters. Although he is talented, as Gersbach is not, he too is guilty of taking his thinking too seriously, is blinded by pretension.

Bellow uses Gersbach to clarify his attitude towards Herzog's suffering too. Herzog claims to have suffered greatly, but, as Poirier points out: "Nothing but nothing in Herzog's career...suggests that his self-hood or self-développement has been 'this great bone-breaking burden.'⁶" Of course, nothing does. But Poirier seems to have overlooked the many suggestions that Herzog, like Wilhelm, like all of Bellow's heroes to some extent, is a masochist, and that in his self-pity he tends to exaggerate. His suffering is given more perspective by the idea of the suffering of his double, Gersbach: "Valentine spoke as a man who had risen from terrible defeat, the survivor of sufferings few could comprehend."(61) Everything about Gersbach is described in hyperbole; like everything else, his suffering is exaggerated to a degree where it becomes little more than a histrionic gesture, making absurd the apparent extent of Herzog's suffering, too.

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Poirier, "Bellows to Herzog", p.269.

So with all this -- his self-pity and suffering, his vanity, his ideas -- the presence of Gersbach casts ironic light on Herzog, so that when Herzog says: "At moments I dislike having a face, a nose, lips, because he has them,"(45) he is essentially passing judgement upon himself.

However, as a double, Gersbach serves other purposes than simply acting as a parody-version of Herzog. He has also a symbolic role close to that of the doubles of the earlier novels. As with the doubles of Leventhal, Wilhelm and Henderson, Bellow suggests a special, hypnotic sort of tie. Comic though he may be, Gersbach suggests special powers and depth to Herzog: "He had the eyes of a prophet, a Shofat, yes a judge in Israel, a king. A mysterious person, Valentine Gersbach."(59) He also fills a special need for Herzog. Tamkin, Dahfu, even Allbee, seem to the protagonists of their novels to have knowledge of things which are hidden from those protagonists; Gersbach too appears as adviser, even as teacher to Herzog: "When he needed a feeling reaction, Herzog had to get it from Valentine Gersbach."(58)

On another level, Gersbach reveals Herzog's own projected guilt (as does Allbee for Leventhal). Herzog has failed as father and husband, whilst Gersbach has assumed Herzog's position as both. Herein lies Herzog's chief resentment: "if he took away my wife, did he have to suffer my agony for me, too? Because he could do even that bet-

ter?...does he have to be also the greatest of fathers and family men?"(216) There is bitter irony in Herzog's words here, not directed at Gersbach's performance, but at his own failure. Because he has retired into a world of ideas, he has evaded reality: "Moses refused to know evil. But he could not refuse to experience it. And therefore others were appointed to do it to him, and then to be accused (by him) of wickedness."(245) But he has to acknowledge, just as Leventhal does, that he shares in the guilt.

In The Victim, Leventhal's rebirth comes with the symbolic death of his double, Albee. Henderson's rebirth is conditional upon the sacrificial death of Dahfu. In Herzog, a key scene, involving the partial rebirth of Herzog, brings Gersbach close to a sacrificial death. Herzog witnesses a court case concerning a child who has been murdered by its feeble-minded mother, whilst her lover looked on. He here learns of an evil far greater than any that he, sufferer that he is, has ever known; aptly, it causes a pain in his chest, "as if the valves of his heart were not closing."(239) He immediately decides to go to Chicago to confront Madeleine and Gersbach (he feels the situations to be parallel -- he thinks of Gersbach's apparently cruel treatment of June; and the murderess, like Gersbach, is red-haired and lame.) On the way, he picks up a gun -- one with which his own father had once threatened to kill him. When he gets to the house, he sees June through the bathroom window, and feels over-

whelming love because "Her face was the Herzog face." (265) When he sees the tenderness with which Gersbach bathes her, however, he is unable to act: "Firing this pistol was nothing but a thought." (257) He sees clearly the absurdity of his whole position: "As soon as Herzog saw the actual person giving an actual bath, the reality of it, the tenderness of such a buffoon to a little child, his intended violence turned into theater, into something ludicrous." (258) Seeing the absurdity of Gersbach, he sees also his own, and gains an insight which proves to be healing: "Only self-hatred could lead him to ruin himself because his heart was 'broken'. How could it be broken by such a pair?" (258) At this moment, the burden he has carried, from the blow of the infidelity of Madeleine and Gersbach, is lifted from him, and his new freedom leads him towards the silence at the end of the novel.

I have tried in this chapter, without exaggerating the importance of what Fiedler calls "the most moving and credible relationship in the book,"⁷ to show how the use of the linked-character device in Herzog parallels that in earlier novels, and how, in using Gersbach as an ironic commentary on Herzog, Bellow finds a new use for the device. As he uses it in some form in all of his novels, it seems that the linked character, the alter-ego, or double, is an essential part of Bellow's vision.

⁷ Fiedler, Love and Death in the American Novel, p.364, n.

CONCLUSION

In all his novels Bellow introduces the device of the double in some form. Sometimes the double is used as a means of commenting upon the protagonist; sometimes the relationship between protagonist and double is the central concern of the novel. It remains to ask why this device should apparently be inseparable from Bellow's creation.

It arises from the nature of the characters Bellow chooses as protagonists. Bellow's heroes are all lonely, isolated men, incapable of making real social relationships. "They yearn to commence a proper life, to participate in ordinary existence but, like Herzog, they never quite 'reach the scene of the struggle.' We never see them emerge from the boundless and lonely confines of their uninterrupted (and often uninterruptible) subjectivism."¹ They are unable to move outside their own mental worlds. Because Bellow is interested in the lonely individual, he makes the point of view of his novels the consciousness of the protagonist, and rarely moves outside that consciousness, even where the protagonist is not the narrator of the story.

The world of Bellow's novels is consequently not the "real" world, but one apprehended through the consciousness

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Tanner, Saul Bellow, p.105.

of a single individual, an individual who, in most cases, is more or less mad. Joseph is overtaken by uncontrollable rages, Leventhal is paranoiac, Wilhelm is masochistic, and Herzog may or may not be insane. So the world takes on the colour of the protagonist's mind. Leventhal's New York is a hot, oppressive, frightening place; Henderson's Africa allows him to confront the embodiment of his inmost fears and needs.

Because the world is one "created" by the protagonist, the relationships too depend upon the needs of the protagonist. For Bellow is not concerned with an analysis of social relationships, but with the essential inability of his heroes to relate. This is why the relationship with the alter-ego is always the most important one, and why, in each case, the alter-ego answers a psychic need in the hero, not a social need. The double is, in effect, a symbolic complement to the hero.

As an example, in The Victim, Allbee is foreshadowed before he appears: we are told that Leventhal feels that he is being persecuted, that he believes his social position is not rightfully his, and that he fears that someone will come to claim that position. When Allbee appears, he proves to be the embodiment of these fears. The fact that he exists is a confirmation of Leventhal's view of life. Conversely, he only exists because Leventhal has this view. Similarly Tamkin, charlatan though he is, is important to Wilhelm because he talks of the things Wilhelm believes in, and therefore seems

to hold the answers to the riddle of life. And Henderson's quest leads him inevitably to Dahfu, who also has all the answers.

Dangling Man can be taken as a pattern for all the later novels, with the possible exception of The Adventures of Augie March. We see the gradual breakdown of all external contact, the disintegration of all social relationships, to a point where, to save his sanity, Joseph is forced to create an alter-ego for himself. This near-solipsist action can almost stand for all the novels, for in every case there is the same breakdown of social relationships, the same dependence on one other character who, objectively, is not fully a character, but rather a projection of certain needs of the protagonist. Thus, as has been pointed out in the cases of The Victim, Seize the Day and Henderson the Rain King, the relationship between protagonist and double takes place upon the two levels of dialogue and symbolic action. Fiedler seems to be suggesting something similar when he says of The Victim: "We suspect that Leventhal...is dreaming Allbee dreaming him, but Bellow does not tell us this."² The suggestion is not of a social relationship, but of a symbolic pattern closely worked out.

These remarks about the inability of Bellow's protagonists to make working social relationships seem to be

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Leslie A. Fiedler, Waiting for the End, (Penguin, 1967), p.111.

true even of the most gregarious of Bellow's heroes, Augie March. His novel has a different sort of structure, but there are the same preoccupations. Augie's world is populated by numerous repetitions of the onefigure, the machiavellian. Augie's isolation is accentuated because he, struggling not to be a machiavellian, is opposed to them. The fact of the machiavellian's monomania makes affection impossible. Nevertheless, a world has again been created which, in essence, complements the character of the protagonist. Augie's world is an extension of Augie himself.

This is not to say that the worlds of Bellow's novels are narrow or badly drawn. On the contrary, they teem with vitality and colour. But it is significant that, of Herzog, a novel with upwards of twenty well-drawn characters, Irving Howe should pick out Gersbach as being the most "utterly alive",³ whilst Fiedler calls him "the most vital and believable human being created in the book."⁴ This is because, as alter-ego, Gersbach is the only character who has much real meaning to Herzog.

This all suggests a great deal about the kind of novelist Bellow is. Much of the strength of Bellow's work comes from the sheer vitality of his language. But behind

³ Howe, "Odysseus, Flat on his Back", p.21.

⁴ Fiedler, Love and Death in the American Novel, p.364,n.

the language, Bellow is an ardent moralist. Artists have to be teachers, Bellow has said, "their art is as strong as their intellectual position -- or as weak."⁵ This may or may not be true, but either way it suggests a weakness in Bellow as a novelist. If it is not true, then Bellow is, perhaps, striving too hard for a moral pattern, which would explain the recurrence of the same device in all his novels. If it is true, then his intellectual position is perhaps not strong enough.

Again in "The Writer as Moralist", Bellow says: "the art of the novel itself has a tendency to oppose the conscious or ideological purpose of the writer, occasionally ruining the most constructive intentions."⁶ This tendency appears in Bellow's own fiction -- the moral pattern implicit in the form of the novel militates against the intellectual-moral position stated by the novelist.

David Galloway suggests that Bellow has, in effect, only written one book from six different points of view, with Herzog as the summation of all of them.⁷ So we can take this latest novel as representative. In Herzog, Bellow rejects the

⁵ Saul Bellow, "The Writer as Moralist", Atlantic Monthly, CXXI (March, 1963), 62.

⁶ Ibid., p.61.

⁷ Galloway, The Absurd Hero in American Fiction, p.138.

Existentialist view of man which comes largely from French fiction. Herzog dislikes:

the commonplaces of the Wasteland outlook, the cheap mental stimulants of Alienation, the cant and rant of pipsqueaks about Inauthenticity and Forlornness. I can't accept this foolish dreariness. We are talking about the whole life of mankind. The subject is too great, too deep for such weakness, cowardice.⁸

He urges instead an optimism which relies on integration, on man embracing society. This is the moral stand Bellow as well as Herzog would take. But the form of Herzog is a contradiction of this same stand, for while urging a move outward into the social sphere, Bellow nevertheless shows his protagonist remaining in isolation. He seems unable to create a metaphor for the vision he talks about.

Irving Howe expresses the hope that Bellow's next novel "will not be confined to a single besieged consciousness, but will negotiate the kind of leap into the world which he proclaims, to savor the world's freshness and struggle against its recalcitrance, perhaps even to enter 'politics in the Aristotelian sense!'"⁹ Bellow has been content, especially in his later novels, to perfect a type of fiction which he does well, but he has said of Herzog: "In writing Herzog I felt I was completing a certain development, coming to the

⁸
Herzog, p.75. This is not simply Herzog's view; it is Bellow's also -- see, e.g. "The Writer as Moralizer", p.61.

⁹
 Howe, "Odysseus, Flat on His Back", p.26.

end of a literary situation."¹⁰ It may be that Bellow, with his moral need to affirm, cannot come to terms with his aesthetic vision, which indicates the "wasteland" theme he rejects, and that he has reached a point where he can take the novel no further.

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David Boroff, "About the Author", Saturday Review of Literature, XLVII (Sept. 19, 1964), 39.

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