Chapter - IV
CHARACTERS AND CHARACTERISATION
Characters and characterisation are mere means which give a clue to a novelist's intentions or themes. The dominant thought of the novelist governs his selection of events and characters, the relative range of presentation of characters and their treatment. Characters act out the novelist's story and explain his viewpoint. Depending on the novelist's purpose, either by bold strokes or subtle suggestion, characters either representative of a type or highly individual are created. The devices of characterisation are equally relevant as they give an insight into the motives for actions and the inward turns of the mind of the characters. Physical descriptions, accounts of habits, manners and dress, names of characters, the language put into the character's mouths, all reveal the intention of the author. Modern literature rarely offers characters of the status of Oedipus or Hamlet, but it has been remarked that most often the hero of "the modern novel is the author himself, present either through a sympathetic protagonist or in style."\(^1\) C.Barry Chahot also points out how Bellow's characters share their statements with Bellow himself.\(^2\) Bellow, through his characters illustrates the experience and


suffering of the intellectuals of this century. In his Nobel Prize lecture delivered on Dec.12, 1976, at the Swedish Academy, speaking about Art and Man, Bellow expressed the opinion that characters pre-exist and they have to be found and represented, and if this is not done Bellow would blame the novelist. Analysing Robbe-Grillet's statement that the novel of characters has come to an end, and become entirely a thing of the past; Bellow is of the view that even though finding characters and defining the condition of the human being has become very difficult in a time of masses and statistics, art should not follow culture, especially when it is in such a state as in modern times. While rejecting the view that individuality is dependant on historical and cultural conditions, Bellow nevertheless suggests that solutions should be found by looking "into our own heads."

Bellow, doing so himself, discovers that he is still able to think, to discriminate and to feel, and the Bellow character is perhaps a prototype of Bellow himself, "a kind of person, one who has lived through terrible, strange things, and in whom there is an observable shrinkage of prejudices, a casting off of disappointing ideologies, an ability to live with many kinds of madness, an immense desire for certain durable human goods - truth ..... or freedom, or wisdom."³ Bellow arrives at this conception of man only after going through the phases of alienation, isolation and experience of

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³ - 'A nobel Prize Winner Speaks of Art and Man.' **Saul Bellow's Nobel Prize Lecture.**
crisis. Thus, it has often been noted that Bellow's characters are lonely, insulated and self-absorbed individuals who are driven inward by external chaos. They do not also find strength and sustenance inside themselves. It is only by accepting the world outside themselves that they become normal.

All Bellow characters are hypersensitive, intellectual and philosophical. They are complex human beings with rich inner lives. First, they want to be free from others, then they want to be free of themselves.

All his characters are terrified of death and try to run away from it. They are typical products of modern life. Allbee in The Victim, for example, is a symbol of outer confusion. The characters do not know how to relate themselves to other characters. They are all lonely thinkers and dreamers, giving rise to more confusion in their minds. The confusion results in withdrawal and enlightenment, emotion, sentiment and yearning and belief, all things that are nebulous but are the very essence of a person's reality. We see that only Augie's problem is slightly different from that of the others. He does not withdraw into himself. His reconciliation is on a different plane with life itself.

Solitary self-communing is really the main subject of Bellow's novels, as it is the habit of his heroes. So hyperactive are their minds and memories that their life is led in confusion.
Bellow's characters want to understand the world but they do not know how to act in it. They want to establish relationship with other individuals and participate meaningfully in society but they do not know how to do so.

The inner world seems more real to them than the outer public world. We see that the central characters of his novels are very important in all his works, (the titles of the novels too indicate this) since much of Bellow's work addresses itself to the problems, worth and responsibility of modern self-hood; for Bellow, a major problem is that of the single self in the midst of mass.

Bellow shows contemporary man in all the comedy and anguish of his trying to cope with the disorderly mass of modern life. Confusion pouring in from all sides, haunted by failure, threatened by insanity, modern man finds himself pushed into himself, which Bellow refers to as the "inner darkness."

Bellow's fiction, enacted through his characters, makes it clear that if we do not find ourselves, we are likely to lose ourselves. The sick soul is the same everywhere, but what the Bellow hero seeks is recovery, not rebirth. In Dangling Man, we see how Joseph's friend survives, because he faces the outward more than the inner dark.

Bellow's alienated hero, before he is alienated, is a terribly oppressed individual, and it is with the feeling of this oppression that the fiction, no doubt, begins. Human beings crowd upon the Bellow hero and attempt to subjugate him
and thus they become burdensome to him.

It is the sheer weight of chaotic existence that first of all defines them. Under the mass of such chaos in the external world, Bellow's hero makes his first move towards unburdening and sloughing off. Civil society is too much, and he is activated by the need to rid himself of the weight of chaos. Harmony with nature could have provided some relief, but Bellow's city imagination is so vivid that he is not comfortable with the laws of nature. But we do see nature brushing the characters for a brief moment. In The Victim we see nature as a transcendant reality touching Leventhal lightly in his half sleep. It is Henderson who moves more clearly towards harmony with the natural laws. A voice within him says constantly, 'I want', and that is what he ultimately wants, "Truth and Reality." His soul's progress is marked by a succession of emblematic beasts.

Dangling Man consists of the diary entry of an unemployed man waiting for his call from the army. From the first page the journal reveals "a man approaching complete demoralisation." 4 He rarely leaves the room and is often alone all day. The faster the outer world seems to move, the more 'stock-still' does he become until he feels "rooted to my chair." 5 His freedom is a void in which he hangs, unable to reach any solid reality. Edmund Wilson says of the book, it is "one of the most honest pieces of testimony on the

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4 - Tony Tanner, Saul Bellow, p.15.
5 - Saul Bellow, Dangling Man, p.10.
psychology of a whole generation who have grown up during the war. 6

Yet the book is not totally sealed off, for Joseph does make occasional forays into the outside world. But these forays usually end up in a mess or a row, ironically helping to throw Joseph deeper into himself. He is at odds with society and with his immediate surroundings. This pattern of attempting to take part in the outside world and then a disgusted withdrawal from it is the external shape of his internal problems. Disillusion thrusts Joseph back into himself where at least he can cherish a sense of individual value and importance. In spending himself he wasted himself, saving himself he is now losing himself.

Anxious to be positive, Joseph nevertheless spends much of his life negating. Such is his 'freedom.' As Bellow has written, "you must manage your freedom or drown it." 7 And the end is a kind of drowning. The book follows a man trying to manage his freedom. His final entry in the diary adds up to a summary abandonment of the values he has struggled with throughout the book:

I am no longer to be held accountable for myself. 8

This is not necessarily total despair, but it does represent a defeat, for what Joseph has to admit reluctantly to himself is true: I had not done well alone. 9

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7 - Saul Bellow, Dangling Man, p.9.
8 - Ibid., p.159.
9 - Ibid., p.158.
Another aspect to be noted is that Joseph wants to be free from himself - which represents for him a new idea of freedom. But although Bellow attacks individuality in *Dangling Man*, he does so through a character who is a complex human being with a rich inner life. Joseph is not a shallow character; he is a creature capable of salvation.

Joseph is terrified of death, as is the case with Tommy in *Sieze the Day*. But the approach of death is not purely negative. First, the metaphysical death is partly the death of the old self - the egocentric individual who must die before Joseph can become human. Secondly it is a representative of the physical death Joseph must face.

If death can be taken to be a metaphor for the chaos outside, there are essentially:

three ways in which the hero hides from death: 1) he plays the suffering victim, 2) he garbs himself in a sense of importance, of special destiny, he isolates himself from others to avoid confrontation, 3) he turns reality into a construct in which he can live safely. 10

By desiring individuality Bellow's characters are caught in the chaos. But in their moments of truth they merge, they stop to be individuals, and they admit they are part of humanity. Thus, we see that Bellow's heroes are not perfectly transformed, but they are capable of salvation, they are touched with truth and they do learn to confront darkness.

In Bellow's novels, at the beginning of the hero's transformation the pain is particularly terrible. In Dangling Man, Joseph submits himself to a painful trial of loneliness and self-scrutiny. He has to put down his burdens and make certain adjustments in life. The insights Joseph gains in the course of the novel are brought to focus in his dialogues with the spirit of alternatives. These dialogues offer an additional angle from which to view Joseph's situation, but more significantly, they help Joseph to arrive at the truth about himself through a process of self-analysis.

Like Joseph, Asa Leventhal in The Victim is a solitary with few friends, and a depressive. Asa, a city Jew of guilt and duties - the city, his job, his brother's family are all weights on his back - blames everyone and assumes that everyone is blaming him.

Asa, the character, is a means of conveying this basic atmosphere of alienation, insecurity and the desperate graceless motion of this atomic age:

Leventhal's figure was burly, his head large; his nose too, was large. He had black hair, coarse waves of it... He was dishevelled, and he was not ordinarily neat. His tie was pulled to the side and did not close with the collar.... 11

This was absurd, this feeling that he was threatened by something while he slept. He imagined that he saw mice darting along the walls. 12

11 - Saul Bellow, The Victim, p.17.
Also Bellow powerfully evokes the crowded unrelated density of New York; and his ability to pour the city on to his pages is used to bring home to us its sudden savageries, its terrible loneliness:

It came to him slowly that in New York he had taken being alone so much for granted that he was scarcely aware how miserable it made him.\(^\text{13}\)

It is in this atmosphere of guilt and solitude that Asa Leventhal comes to a 'kind of recognition' of man's responsibilities and his relationship with other men. The most important thing that happens to Leventhal is that he is stirred out of his 'indifference' into a sense of general injustice and suffering, and thence to an awareness of responsibility. He realises that instead of timidly wrapping himself up in his too simple concept of 'good-luck', he must emerge and be exposed to the problems of environmental pressures; he must move beyond his paranoid sense of himself as victim and realise that there are more complex and subtler forms of victimisation.

Gradually, as he dips down into his own mixed motives and looks over the past, as he hears the comments of other friends and feels the force of Allbee's contentions, he realises, "he had contributed to it, though he had yet to decide to what extent he was to blame."\(^\text{14}\)

Asa never formulates the exact extent of his blame, but his confession of it is spelled out in his increasing

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\(^{13}\) Ibid., p.18.
\(^{14}\) Ibid., p.92.
weakness in the face of Allbee's intrusion, into his life. Yet Asa begins to get intimate with him, he even makes an effort to help Allbee. The showdown comes when he sees Allbee in his apartment making love to a strange woman. He throws them out in a spasm of violence and disgust. This appears to be a symbolic release.

The final stage of dangerous involvement is reached when Allbee attempts suicide in such a way as to endanger Asa Leventhal's life as well. Just in time, Asa turns off the gas and ejects Allbee, this time forever. It would be proper to call this a symbolic death of the old self, and, afterwards, Asa certainly feels a different, healthier, calmer man, "Born again into a truer vision of reality." 15

Asa Leventhal is the eternal Jew, accepting his moral responsibility for a world he never made. And overcome by illness, treachery and malice in the social air around him, struggling desperately not to 'get ahead', but simply to survive, he is also in Bellow's view, a typical product of modern urban life.

However in a curious twist in the narrative. Allbee is more Jewish than Leventhal himself. He taunts this sweating hero with perverted references to Jewish folklore and history that Asa is ignorant of; "he is almost the symbol of the cultural heritage that the Bellow spokesman has cast aside unconsciously and that now returns to strangle him in this

15 - Tony Tanner, Saul Bellow, p.32.
twisted and evil form."\(^{16}\)

Moreover in touching Allbee, Asa touches all of humanity, indeed he becomes all of humanity. Asa, who is guilty and blamed by Allbee is also the symbolic projection of his own consciousness. He tries to deal with Allbee, to get rid of him, to understand him and to help him. Allbee, on the other hand interferes more and more deeply into Asa's life - visiting him, living with him, following him. Allbee is an image of his own self - hatred. Thus, a stranger forces the hero to see his own spiritual failings, and then departs. Now Asa, a changed man can call his wife home. By the end of the book Asa Leventhal is portrayed as a stronger, more relaxed, open figure. A man gains such a strength only after he has suffered greatly and has survived, thus enhanced by a deeper wisdom. But, Bellow does not show us a changed wiser man, but a more confident, less neurotic man.

At the beginning of the novel we see Asa, who is continuously struggling to keep his place. He is a nervous man, not usually neatly dressed. His nervousness is reflected by his actions, as we see him pushing through doors. In the office he becomes particularly aggressive and avoids the receptionists. In return he is met with coldness and anger. Even at home he feels unsure and unwell. But, by the end after his transformation Asa is more comfortable, since the change is a spiritual change. However, Bellow emphasises that Asa's change is partial. But, Asa's change is more successful

\(^{16}\) - Maxwell Geismer, "Saul Bellow," in Saul Bellow and the Critics, (ed) Irving Malin, p.16.
than Joseph's in *Dangling man*, 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*.

Augie is a picaresque character, somewhat different from Bellow's earlier heroes, Joseph and Asa. Critics inevitably commented on the picaresque nature of the book, approving of its euphoric variety. And indeed great variety is offered to us with more than eighty characters passing before us. Incidents and episodes are numerous, and Augie himself looks like a picaresque hero. Yet there is an important difference between the traditional picaresque hero who is fully formed and whose adventures multiply without issuing in wisdom, and Augie on the other hand who is trying to discover what he himself is, in the deepest sense. The structure of the book therefore, in spite of its tone of strolling, is directed and controlled by the hero's deeper concern. The adventures turn out to have contained a quest.

There are different types of characters in the book. But the more important ones are Grandma Lausch who imparts instruction, Einhorn who gives advice, Mrs. Renling who wishes to adopt Augie, Simon, his brother who forces his ideas onto Augie, Thea symbolising seduction, and Bateshaw concerning violence. The hero is constantly enticed or pushed or drawn by other people's versions of what life is or how it should be lived.
Through his adventures, Augie realises that the attempt to achieve material progress only devalues a man's life and makes him inhuman. Bellow is clearly using these various characters to display his own versions till the end when Augie resigns, he is 'teased out of thought' to abandon the quest for a meaning of true life.

But for all the bravado and independence of his tone, Augie in fact is a very passive character, amenable to suggestions and offers, pliant and apparently with little momentum of his own. He seldom initiates any course of action, seldom makes a positive forward moving creative decision. For his employment he is totally dependent on the offers and ideas of other people. Simon gets him a job with the dog - service, padilla teaches him to steal banks, Ruber offers him a job, Thea, a sharp critic, tells him that he simply plays everyone's game. People are adoptive towards him. When Frazer offers him a strange job, he prays to God, "to keep me from being sucked into another of those great currents where I can't be myself." 17 This suggests Augie's docile nature, yet he wishes to gain the strength to find and be himself.

Augie's world is a corrupt world, and apparently he can only define and maintain himself through negative acts. However, he has one positive scheme - to set up a school of his own so that he never has to, "loan myself again to any other guy's scheme." 18 But that comes to nothing and he clings

18 - Ibid., p.526.
on to his freedom, refusing to be drawn into other people's version of what's real. He seems only capable of temporary emotional attachments, and brief monetary intensities.

Augie leaves situation after situation because it does not offer a good enough fate. The adventures are a sort of Augie's pilgrimage and in the end, he does reach a sort of reconciliation, not with society but with life itself. He can look back at his life and ponder upon the errors he committed.

Like so many picaros, Augie is singularly 'adoptable'; almost everyone he meets wants to either adopt him or at least plan his life. It seems essential to the picaresque structure of the book, that we leave the hero as we found him — a wanderer. However, Augie does have his moments of promise, not enjoyed by Asa or Joseph.

Augie is caught in a mode of motion. He cannot sit still. He responds to suggestions, allows himself to be given momentum by other people's schemes, permits himself to be adopted in any number of ways and then slips away. The feeling that, in part, keeps him on the run is a conviction that he is constantly running into or getting involved in versions, visions, fabrications of reality and not reality itself. However, one of the problems for Augie, as for many American heroes, is about where 'reality' is to be found. But Augie being a dreamer has a number of utopian dreams of a more satisfying reality, and at one point insists that: Reality is also these private hopes the imagination invents. 19

19 - Ibid., p.384.
Augie himself follows a characteristic sequence of movements. He will make a temporary commitment or succumb to one, and attempts to turn this choice into a value; "then he will run into some sort of brutal physical encounter, and the commitment will be dissolved till he tries to find a place to 'lick his wounds'." But whether he is nearest to reality while moving in hope toward the physical blow which will end the episode, or away from it in disillusionment - Augie never learns. The fact that the book ends with Augie's recollection of himself standing in some 'empty fields', may seem to indicate that he has broken to "the bleak terrain of reality."

'A man's character is his fate', Augie says at the beginning and at the end of his story. Because Augie himself is basically restless - the first condition of the picaro - he is always on the move, never knowing quite when the key to his fate will show itself. He is boisterous, high-spirited and even optimistic in the sense of what one of his friends calls the "data of experience."

Thus we may note that "one of the problems revealed by Bellow is that while the American hero may feel a yearning to reconcile himself with the universe, he may feel an even stronger reluctance to be reconciled to society." 21

Augie is different from the two earlier characters, Joseph and Asa, in the sense that he is not burdened in any way. Augie's affirmation may sound a little unearned since he

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20 - Tony Tanner, City of Words, p.69.
21 - Ibid., p.70.
had not encountered any sort of opposition which makes this affirmation difficult. The world is not heavy on him, and, in consequence, he sometimes seems a rather light weight figure.

However, in his next important work, the novella, *Sieze the Day*, Bellow portrayed a character on whom the world's weight is heavy, indeed a man "stripped and kicked out," spurned by his wife and victimized by a confidence trickster.

Augie saw his life as a series of mistakes, but his mistakes did not catch up with him. Tommy Wilhelm's life is also a sequence of errors, but everyone seems to limit his freedom and slow him down till we find him choking, constricted and unable to move. Tommy meets the world's full opposition.

To appreciate the success of the book, we should look more closely at the character of Tommy. Tommy Wilhelm has gone crazy in this world where money reigns supreme. Money has reached into people's hearts and has spoiled all human relations. At the beginning of the book we see Tommy who is at a point where he has no money and his 'obligations' threaten to destroy him. He has learnt some of the harder facts of freedom; "Don't talk to me about being free. A rich man may be free because nobody cares what he does. But a fellow in my position has to sweat it out until he drops dead." 23

22 - Tony Tanner, *Saul Bellow*, p. 56.
23 - Saul Bellow, *Sieze the Day*, p. 49.
This is more in line with hard reality than Augie's euphoric hurdling. Tommy is not at home in this money world, he fears its adverse effects. He feels congestion and pressure to a degree which Augie never does.

As we see him at the start, Tommy is a representative sort of failure. He has arrived at a point where self-deception can no longer be sustained. As we see him, Tommy is a middle-aged man, has big stooped shoulders, and has a clumsy gait:

Fair-haired hippopotamus! - that was how he looked to himself. He saw a big round face, a wide, flourishing red mouth, stump teeth. 24

The book follows Tommy having a close look at truth. He goes over his past life. His attempts at succeeding in life have failed. Dr. Tamkin, Tommy's doctor, tells him that there are two main souls, "The real soul and the pretender soul." 25 Tommy feels the truth of this and wonders where his real soul is.

Tommy is a real victim of the heavy world which money has created; yet even in his last extremity when he is almost a wreck, an unkempt slob in his father's eyes, ("his father was ashamed of him, the truth, Wilhelm thought was very awkward." 26) he holds on to his intimation that this money world is not the final reality, that the soul's business must be different from the world's business.

24 - Ibid., p. 6.
25 - Ibid., p. 71.
Sieze the Day is a bitter comedy of an urban character. In the book which covers one day, Tommy moves from a mounting experience of suffocating congestion to a moment of total release which is also a moment of vision. For Tommy there is no way out of the material pressures, the human density, the exhausting physical experience of life in New York. For him there is no flight nor any solutions. His father is of no help to him. Dr. Adler lived in an entirely different world; "His own son, his one and only son, could not speak his mind or ease his heart to him." 27 We leave him with his financial problems still unsolved, weeping over the body of an unknown man at a strange funeral. The end is a necessary physical release of tensions and emotions which can no longer be contained. The image of the dead man arrests Tommy. Soon he was past words, past reason and coherence. He could not stop the source of all the tears that had suddenly sprung open within him, black, deep and hot, and they were pouring out in convulsions.

Tommy weeps for his own symbolic death, the death of the self. Tommy's tears are both for humanity and for himself. Yet they also reveal an awareness of the supreme value of life, beyond the assessment of financial success or failure.

Moreover, in weeping for his own death, Tommy in a way is making a gesture of love towards life. But more important than this general love is Tommy's changing attitude

27 - Ibid., p.10.
towards the burden of life. Tommy, like Bellow's other characters, would like to be free, to cast off impositions and the pressure of determinism.

Tommy comes to the realisation that he was "assigned to be the carrier of a load which was his own self." He moves towards an acceptance of his life, and he learns to take a positive attitude towards his mistakes. He affirms the value of love and life. But we cannot say that Tommy, in the end, has learned to seize the day; one could as well suggest that he has succumbed to it.

Bellow has created one of the most convincing characters - Dr. Tamkin. His ideas penetrate and permeate Tommy. He is the guide, philosopher as well as Tommy's doctor friend. In trying to escape from his wife and father, Tommy Wilhelm comes under the influence of Tamkin. Tamkin is a guide to Tommy and tells him about truth and reality. Tommy is greatly influenced by him, hardly knowing that one day Tamkin would fool him. Tamkin, the cunning philosopher, makes Tommy invest wrongly, thus making him lose all his remaining money.

Tamkin is rather like Allbee in The Victim, a dubious character. Although no one is quite certain of his profession, Tamkin claims to be a psychologist and calls himself chiefly a theoretician of life:

28 - Ibid., p.56.
I am at my most efficient when I don't need the fee, when I only love, without a financial reward. I remove myself from the social influence, the spiritual compensation is what I look for. The past is no good to us. The future is full of anxiety, only the present is real - the here-and-now - seize the day.  

This shows Tamkin's importance since Bellow's ideas are projected through him.

In his next book, *Henderson the Rain King*, Bellow created a character opposed directly to Tommy Wilhelm, a character liberated from the constrictions of money and society, who moves outside the pressing determinism which brought Wilhelm so low - a character big enough and free enough to confront man as a pure spirit. Henderson has been compared to Don Quixote, Tarzan, Gulliver, Huck finn.

At the beginning, we see mainly a man of 'mad habits' - drinking, chaotically involved with women, raising pigs, flailing around with his strength and shouting at life in a voice loud enough to bring sudden death to an old servant, "Well, I've always been like this, strong and healthy, rude and aggressive and something of a bully."  

Like most Bellow characters, he does not know how to relate himself to other people. He is too rich and too strong to submit to society's net. Henderson decides to find salvation, not in civilisation but in the primal savage state;

29 - Ibid., p.66.
30 - Saul Bellow, *Henderson the Rain King*, p.25.
he leaves his wife and goes to Africa.

We shall understand his yearnings better it we examine his motives in making his trip to Africa; one, his room - it is insulated, carpeted, so 'swept and garnished' that he feels he is turning into a mere 'trophy', the second belongs to his daily help who dies so suddenly, and her room reminds him of death. The suffocating things of life oppress Henderson and he goes to Africa to make an effort of disburdenment, mentally and physically. His inner voice keeps repeating "I want I want."

Thus, trekking deep into Africa, Henderson comes across two tribes. In the first tribe, the meek Arnewi, Henderson gains wisdom from the Queen who tells him 'grun - tu - molani' - man wants to live. However he gets humiliated when he blows out the walls of the cistern. He leaves this tribe and wanders to a more dangerous tribe, the Wariri- a tribe dealing in death. By lifting up their wooden idol, Henderson becomes their Rain King. He becomes friends with Dahfu who guides him and educates him.

At the age of fifty five, Henderson feels that life as well as death is closing in on him, "the facts begin to crowd me and I soon get a pressure in the chest."31 This feeling of strangulation is familiar to most of the Bellow heroes. According to Howard Harper, "Henderson is caught in the familiar existential dilemma of Bellow's heroes."32

31 - Ibid., p.35.
Yearning for order and meaning in his life, he finds only chaos and meaninglessness. He feels helpless, trapped by two inescapable facts of life. The first, as we have seen, is death; the second is man's inability to know reality when he sees it.

In the primitive civilisation of Africa, he hopes to find certain fundamental values which have been submerged by his own. It is only in the lion's den under the tutelage of King Dahfu, when Henderson tries with everything in him to become a lion, that he finally learns what the voice had been saying.

King Dahfu is the most important of all Henderson's guides, Dahfu gives him lessons in submission to reality and transcendence. Submission, Henderson learns by going down literally into the lion's den. He wishes to discover the real animal self. Dahfu is to Henderson what Tamkin is to Tommy - healer, teacher. Henderson fed up with the material civilisation is trying to seek wisdom in the savage, but Dahfu the savage, paradoxically heals him with wisdom brought back from civilisation. For Dahfu, the full significance of life is to be found not in the future, but in the present moment or, as Tamkin puts it, the "here and now." The key to a meaningful life, according to Dahfu, is to live in the present moment and to use all the power of the mind to heighten the intensity and meaning of the moment.

Dahfu is optimistic. Thus, Henderson feels exhilarated and uplifted by him. Dahfu is killed in a lion
hunt, and when Henderson stares down at a real wild lion, he realizes the principle of horror and death in reality. Effectively this means that his instruction ends with nothing settled. Reality turns out to be more ferocious and alien than he realised. In the end, we see that Henderson has no new solutions perhaps, but he does have some convictions. Much of his egotism has fallen and his life promises to exhibit more peace and purpose. Even by the time of his letter to Lily, Henderson is changed. He has partially entered the given, the real, as it is. He understands that he had tried to avoid death, and, in doing so, he had avoided life. After the death of Dahfu, Henderson is at peace with reality. He is a kind of holy man coming home to do God's work. He runs in joy around the airplane, he is ready for love, for Lily and for America.

Another character worth mentioning here, is Henderson's African guide Romilayu, who guided Henderson throughout his adventures, and without whom Henderson would have got lost in Africa.

If we think for a moment of Henderson, not as a simple individual character but as the very incarnation of individualism, it is possible to see the book in a different light. The book contains the ideas of Zarathustra which concern the three metamorphosis of the spirit into a camel, a lion and a child.

Moses E. Herzog is the first of Bellow's heroes to earn his living as an intellectual. One of his problems, in
fact, is that his response to life is an intellectual rather than a more natural one. He is clearly a descendant of Bellow's other main characters - worried, harrassed, messed-up. His private life is in chaos. He is terribly isolated and cut off wandering about the streets, brooding in lonely rooms; "some people thought he was cracked."  

"His white face showed everything - everything. He was reasoning, arguing, he was suffering - he was wide open, he was narrow; his eyes, his mouth made everything silently clear."  

Yet Herzog had had all the credentials of the 'promising' intellectual, a Ph.D., teaching positions at metropolitan universities, two respectable books on the 'history of ideas,' and several grants from a large foundation. But like all Bellow heroes, he is now undergoing a crisis. His second marriage has ended in divorce, and he has had to abandon his teaching. His first wife, Daisy, has the custody of his son Marco, and his second wife Madelaine has got his daughter June. His brothers do not understand him, and his closest friend Gersbach has become Madelaine's lover. Herzog's only real human relationship is his affair with Ramona.  

Thus, we see Herzog contemplating the wreckage of his life. The novel contains very few actual incidents, and the actions mainly take place in his head. Herzog pours out

33 - Saul Bellow, Herzog, p.7.  
34 - Ibid., p.8.
his grievances in countless letters - some real most imagined - to his wives, his lovers, his doctors, friends and even the President and God.

Similar to Bellow's other heroes, Herzog is hypersensitive. As Howard Harper says of the book, "Herzog is the typical crisis of the contemporary intellectual." 35 Herzog's problem is the same as Augie's and Joseph's and Asa's and Tommy's and Henderson's - to maintain his identity and integrity and to find a solid ground for belief in the flood of advice which people try to force on him.

Moreover, Herzog is haunted constantly by his childhood memories, by the mystery of his mother's love. As a theorist himself, he has come to distrust the systematic interpretations of human nature. The effect of suffering is important, but his optimism helps him to pull through.

It must be emphasised that Herzog is in no normal state. His mind is in pain, he cannot select or filter his thoughts which show his neurotic attitude. He lives in an imaginary world, corresponding with imaginary people. He is alienated from the others, he is a self-created victim and a guilt ridden masochist like Tommy Wilhelm. Until his transformation his consciousness is composed of words, he is living in words and not in the world. Actually it is his sense of separation from his childhood family world that is at the root of his alienation. It is his self-pity that makes Giesmar call Herzog a "wailing infant," complaining that his

life has been ruined. Moreover, guilt is at the root of Herzog's masochism. He is a disgrace to himself, unable to live up to his Jewish 19th century ideal of a man. This ideal comes from his father who, according to him, was a "sacred being, a king." It is from his father that Herzog derives his belief in the dignity of the individual.

Thus we see that Herzog relates his ideas of himself to the image of his father and also Jewish standards. The most obvious is that his thinking is compulsive, he has to think and write in order to stay balanced. He must vent his feelings somehow. Secondly he transmutes his private despair into public despair. His letter to the editor concerning radio activity is a good example of how Herzog handles a personal problem by generalising it to a cultural one: "Dr. Strawford says we must adopt his philosophy of Risk with regard to radioactivity. Since Hiroshima life in civilised countries stands upon a foundation of risk." 36

Ultimately it is Herzog's fear of death which is at the core of his guilt. However, Herzog's visit to Phoebe Gersbach is one of Herzog's first displays of spontaneous affection for another person. He is on Asa's road back from alienation. He has partially forgiven Mady and Gersbach, and hence himself, and is therefore less afraid of dying, he is able to admit that he had a fear of death. And now his recognition of his need for others leads him to telegraph Ramona, and impels him to visit Lucas Asphalter. Now he is

36 - Saul Bellow, Herzog, p. 56.
ready to visit his daughter June, to give her his love without becoming outraged about Gersbach. Here one may recall the idea of redemption through love of a daughter in T.S. Eliot's *The Elder Statesman*. Herzog is thus free of guilt and able to enter into community. In the end he feels a strange joy, relaxed and liberated. Liberated not only from Madelaine, but from his own exhausting egotism. His final acceptance of Ramona in the aftermath of the crisis, is a more meaningful acceptance, it goes beyond acceptance, in fact, to commitment. However, despite his hurt and his jealousy towards Madelaine and Gersbach, he manages to be affirmative. Thus, *Herzog* seems to be the fullest statement of Bellow's own view, and perhaps Herzog is closer than any of the other heroes to Bellow himself.

Ramona is an important character in the book, helping Herzog to remain balanced and listens to his ideas. June revives Herzog's feeling of love.

*Mr. Sammler's Planet* scarcely represents an advance in Bellow's work. Sammler is a recognisable Bellow character, a more pessimistic Herzog with something of Mosby's European sceptical disinterestedness of vision. He is another lonely thinker. He has spent seven decades of internal consultation and he thinks that this planet Earth has just about had its day. He feels that the Earth is a glorious planet, but "wasn't everything being done to make it intolerable to abide here?"

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37 - Saul Bellow, *Mr. Sammler's Planet*, p.38.
In Mr. Sammler's Planet, Bellow characterises the publicity intellectual. He also creates the ideal intellectual in the figure of his protagonist, Sammler. A European Jew, Sammler is over seventy years old. As a young man he was a journalist in London. Sammler later experienced the atrocities of World War II; he was shot, then buried alive in a mass grave before managing to escape. Like Eliot's protagonists, he may also be thought of as a Lazarus returned from the grave, in a position to look at things from a special point of view. Through such fictional circumstances, Bellow gives to his protagonist a symbolic significance. Having lived through the range of human experiences, Sammler has an impersonal viewpoint.

As Bellow's ideal intellectual, Sammler makes it his primary activity to evaluate social phenomena - "to think and to see." Sammler's final meaning as a character lies in his role as a seer, for he reads events as signs that are laden with a historical significance. Sammler's verdict that civilisation is in collapse derives mainly from the behaviour of his relatives, Angela and Wallace Gruner. As their father lies dying in a hospital these children engage in immoral behaviour regardless of their father's illness. Bellow leads Sammler to the recognition that the enlightenment was a false direction in the development of Western history, "the ideals of personal happiness were increased and the result was

38 - Ibid., p.232.
a weakening of the traditional social allegiances." Sammler also realises that social problems cannot be remedied through the application of science and technology. Sammler sums up that all human progress must be individual and inward.

Thus, Bellow's characters and, through them, Bellow himself are searching to discover the significance of the forces of nature and the purpose of life.

The two characters - Angela and Wallace are the typical example of the American youth who have lost all values of life and are caught in the materialism of the world.

Bellow's criticism of intellectual attitudes begins in his novel *Herzog*, but this criticism is indirect since Herzog is portrayed in a sympathetic manner. However, in *Humboldt's Gift*, Bellow dramatises the impact of public life upon an intellectual's sensibility. The book brings out the bad influence of money on the life of its protagonist, Charles Citrine. Citrine is a famous writer who has won a Pulitzer Prize. His play produced on the Broadway has made him even more famous. As we read the book we see that Citrine is leading the life of a Hollywood celebrity, rather than as an intellectual. He is living in a world of glamour and has also bought a mercedes to show off to his friends. However, soon he realises that he is making a mess of his life, and he tries to free himself of these distractions. He begins to

practise meditation and he tries to simplify his existence. The subject of his meditation is his dead friend Von Humboldt.

Thus, Humboldt's Gift has not one but two heroes: Charles Citrine, the book's narrator, and Humboldt—an American poet who died early in poverty and despair. Humboldt's death makes Citrine ponder upon the philosophy of life, about the meaning of life and indeed about death.

The novel has a range of characters. The figure of Humboldt is brought to life through Citrine's memory. Humboldt is not satisfied to be simply a writer. He secures a teaching position at Princeton, buys a house in New York in order to sustain an increasingly materialistic way of life. In addition to this evident materialism, Humboldt desires political power. As Citrine remembers, Humboldt fervently hopes for election to the U.S. Presidency. However he dies before his dreams are fulfilled.

Through Humboldt and Citrine, Bellow indirectly criticises such intellectuals primarily for a sensibility that is entirely commercial. Capitulating to the public's desire for sensation, these intellectuals exploit culture for its commercial value.

Like Sammler, the hero of The Dean's December is an exemplary intellectual. Both a journalist and a Dean of Chicago university, Albert Corde is a man well studied in cultural history. In the book we see that he has accompanied his wife Minna to Rumania to visit her dying mother, Valeria
Raresh. Through the history of the Raresh family, Corde becomes aware of the difficulties that intellectuals have to face in Eastern Europe.

Corde himself is a disillusioned character who reviews and compares the conditions in the U.S. and the Eastern Europe. Corde has had a troubled career in Chicago and has got caught in the urban chaos and decay in America. His bad experiences have made him a very disillusioned and miserable person.

Bellow has also portrayed various characters to depict the ever-increasing crimes in America. Corde himself gets involved in the controversy of a black murder case. He is also publicly accused of committing treason. Corde himself fails to understand why he wrote so critically about life in Chicago. Other characters also wonder why he stated urban problems so forcefully, but at the moment Corde was greatly moved by the confusion of urban life, and felt he must do justice to it.

In the last analysis, however, Corde is motivated by aesthetic truth. We see that through this figure, Bellow is defending the novelist's obligation to 'truth'. Moreover, Bellow asserts that truth was the hero of the novel.

It must be noted that in all the novels, Bellow is a failure where he tries to portray women characters. The women in his novels are unrealistic and crude. They are like the men, a sad, crazy, mixed-up lot. In most of the novels women
are very important to the hero, but he often finds them strange, illogical and disturbing. "They represent one more pressure on his already over - burdened psyche." 40 His relations with the women are fraught with tension and pain. Bellow's women are not merely sex objects, but their role is only that of girl friend, wife or mother. They have no other role such as a friend, colleague, doctor or lawyer. Almost all Bellow's ex-wives have cold eyes and cold voices. Bellow does not attempt to penetrate their skulls; they have no monologues. We never see Madelaine's point of view, or Ramona's or Margret's or Lily's. Thus Bellow's women are unconvincing.

Finally we see that each of Bellow's novels creates its own unique view of human nature. Bellow has presented a fine portrait of the problems and anxieties of contemporary intellectuals. Moreover, his heroes are all initiated into what Leventhal called, "the depth of life," and "it is their discovery of this depth which enables them to discover their own humanity." 41

Classified as novels of ideas, Bellow's fiction nevertheless presents memorable characters who though uncommon, are not difficult to find. They register as real people, not simply as "zones of consciousness" as a critic remarks about .

Eliot's characters. While most writers in America were engaged in writing about the "consume, civil servant, football fan, lover, television viewer," Bellow writes about the intellectual misfits, of men who cannot "bear too much of reality nor too much unreality, too much abuse of the truth," and demonstrates through his characters his hope for humanity by proclaiming that "we are too much more limber, versatile, better articulated, there is much more to us, we all feel it."

Thus, Bellow's character seems to conform to a type that may be called "the alienated urban man;" yet the little details of their personality, of their peculiar circumstances, distinguish one from another and give them a "solidity of specification."

42 - Bellow's Nobel Prize Speech.