Chapter V
OTHER ASPECTS OF TECHNIQUE

(Narrative Point of View, Use of Symbolism, Prose Style, etc.)
The first breakthrough in American literature, particularly in American fiction, was made in the years immediately succeeding the first world war and, since then, there have been a series of breakthroughs resulting in the "emergence of a form variously called surfiction, Fabulism."

The main concern of this fiction was social life, its lack of stability, continuity, values and community. The various ways chosen by different American writers to deal with their predicament is strikingly different. A nostalgia for the past, a relationship with the cultural and social past, a complete rejection of the past and looking forward to the future for solutions, and resorting to imaginative and fictious constructs as solutions to man's predicament resulted in diverse and correspondingly different formal techniques.

Style or technique is not only a tool or a medium adopted by the writer to convey his reactions to life, but has an organic relationship to content and theme, and has a cognitive function to perform. In the case of many modern writers, the style itself has become a mode of quest for

reality, reflecting the stance or disposition of the artist's being and personality. The diversified verbal patterns discerned in a novel, the range and flexibility of style which these verbal patterns demand are ways and means by which a writer gives concretion to the abstractions and ideals of his point of view. Use of image, metaphor, and symbol lend 'solidity of specification' to abstractions and characters. The moods and emotions of characters, the drama that takes place in their consciousness, all are presented, and made convincing by the settings provided, the language, attitude and the costumes attributed to them. Technique or style is the tool used to bring the creatures of the writer's creation closer to life.

According to Barbauld, there are three ways of telling a story: by narration, flashback or memoirs where a character relates his own story and by epistolary correspondence carried on between the characters of a novel. The novelist's handling of a story, plot and theme, his mood and tempo is often conveyed by the point of view chosen and, as Miriam Allott says, "usually the author's temperament and sensibility may be felt in the novels of the 1930's, with even more vividness than in the freer style of the omniscient narrator." Modern fiction, since its renaissance in the


twenties, has been particularly aware of technique, perhaps because of the subjective nature of the themes so that even pure novelists like James or Conrad or Flaubert are often compulsive artists who recognise that the subjective nature of their themes needs a special discipline. Saul Bellow, an intellectual writer, a novelist of ideas and a philosophical writer, is a technical innovator. Each of his novels is a unique and new conception where the writer's view of the human condition is presented in such a way that form itself becomes meaning.

The titles of the novels of Bellow characteristically include the name of a character: *Herzog*, *Mr Sammler's Planet*, *Henderson the Rain King*, *Dangling Man*, *The Victim*, *The Dean's December*, which highlights the importance of the character involved. Though they do not pin down the character to a name, they certainly define the nature of the character involved. As such, the interest is in these characters and their activities, whether engaged in conversation or monologue, the voice and what it has to say are more important in Bellow's novels than say the plot or the technique adopted. Nevertheless, the mode of presentation chosen from each novel is different from that of the other, and we have Bellow making use of the realistic, fantastic, comical and psychological, journalistic and epistolary elements to provide a focus for his ideas and their resolutions.
Bellow is one of the most successful fiction writers, and has excelled in bringing out the most serious philosophies of life with a humorous touch and has thus succeeded in defending humanity in this modern urban life; his style is amazingly vivid and energetic, graphic in its descriptive force and dazzling in its expression of thought:

"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 fiercely 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." 4

"Africa reached my feelings right away even in the air, from which it looked like the ancient bed of mankind. And at the height of three miles, sitting above the clouds, I felt like an airborne seed. And I dreamed down at the clouds, and thought that when I was a kid I had dreamed up at them, and having dreamed at the clouds from both sides as no other generation of men have done, one should be able to accept his death very easily." 5

As Tony Tanner aptly remarks,

"It can be exhilarating in its robust assimilatory zeal, very humane in the attention it loves to lavish on the humblest particulars of ordinary life. It can be comic and woeful, physical and metaphysical- whatever the mood of the central character." 6

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4 - Saul Bellow, The Victim, p.24.
5 - Saul Bellow, Henderson The Rain King, p.43.
6 - Tony Tanner, Saul Bellow, p.107.
"Between white tablecloths and glassware and glancing silverware, through overfull light, the long figure of Mr. Perls went away into the darkness of the lobby. He thrust with his cane, and dragged a large built-up shoe which Wilhelm had not included in his estimate of troubles."  

In Bellow's work a great deal is talked about and thought about, but very little enacted or actually experienced. His subject is a lone individual, passive and locked up in himself; yet Bellow's style can evoke all this with great authenticity:

"In a city where one has lived nearly all his life, it is not likely that he will ever be solitary; and yet in a very real sense, I am just that. I am alone ten hours a day in a single room."  

Bellow is such a remarkable novelist that it is hard to place him; he refuses to rest in one style; he asserts that there is more than one way - realistic, fantastic, comic - of confronting life. Bellow's concern with 'eternal' tensions - alienation versus accommodation, fathers versus sons, Jew versus Gentile, prisons versus voyages, demands these responses and it is appropriate that his various styles oppose one another, they are human, reflecting the plurality of life itself. They make the

7 - Saul Bellow, *Sieze the Day*, p.42.
8 - Saul Bellow, *Dangling Man*, p.8.
confident reader uncomfortable, dramatising for him the painful struggle of existence, and perform the function of providing a steady centre to the author. In the words of Irving Malin, such a style "organised and mastered, symbolises an even deeper message - the novelist like his reader can govern himself. In the shaping process lies sanity, freedom and power." 9

There are at least five styles or modes of perception used by Bellow: realism, fantasy, comedy, pastoral and prophecy. Many critics however, do note stylistic tensions. Leslie Fiedler believes that the language is at times 'centrifugal' and sometimes 'centripetal' -in *Sieze the Day* the two tendencies find a sort of 'perilous rest'. 10

"And not only in death on his mind but through money he forces me to think about it too. It gives him power over me. He forces me that way, and then he's sore. If he were poor, I could care for him and show it. The way I could care too, if only I had a chance." 11

Among the critics, Marcus Kline mentions the city-country opposition as realism and pastoral. Ralph Freedman and Daniel Hughes emphasise the struggle between realism and fantasy. Forest Read attempts to put *Herzog* in a tradition but he finds that it contains elements of historical,

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9 - Irving Malin, *Saul Bellow and the Critics*, p.vi.
10 - Ibid., p.vi.
11 - Saul Bellow, *Sieze the Day*, p.36.
ideological, metaphysical, romantic, anti-romantic, erotic and picaresque novels, of the novel of manners, the anti-

novel and the romance. But, above all, it is a great comic novel. Earl Rovit comments on the narrative tension in

_Herzog_; he says, "The device of multiple perspective tends to cancel out the actual lack of movement since awareness of self-awareness creates a dynamic psychic motion in itself, and it is this rhythm that dominates the novel."\(^{12}\)

Dialogue is used by a novelist to express the style of a character and to authenticate the experience of communication. Dialogue, as one of the novelists' aids to characterisation, certainly deserves a section to itself as one of the most exacting techniques of fiction. The novelists get many of their best effects through dialogue, an element which imparts into the novel something of the dramatist's discipline and objectivity.

"It must be somebody real close to carry on so."

"Oh my, Oh my! To be mourned like that,"

"The man's brother, may be?"\(^{13}\)

Since Bellow's style is based on a certain conversational ideal at once intellectual and informal, dialogue is for him necessarily a distillation of his strongest effects. Sometimes one feels his characters' speeches as the main events of the books in which they occur.

\(^{12}\) Irving Malin, _Saul Bellow and the Critics_, p. vi.

\(^{13}\) Saul Bellow, _Sieze the Day_, p. 118.
"Got back at me. Got even with me. I say entirely to blame, Leventhal." 14

Implicit in the direction of his style is a desire to encompass a world larger, richer, more disorderly and untrammeled than that of any other writer of his generation; it is this which impels him toward the picaresque, the sprawling, episodic manner of The Adventures of Augie March. But there is a counter impulse in him toward the tightly, rigidly organised, underplayed style of The Victim.

Bellow possesses a fortunate negative talent, a constitutional inability to dissolve his characters into their representative types, to compromise their individuality for the sake of a point. They are themselves portrayed as being conscious of their struggle. That struggle is indeed the essence of their self-consciousness, their self-definition. Their invariable loneliness is felt by them and by us not only as a function of urban life and the atomization of culture, but as something willed, the condition and result of their search to know what they are,

"Come on tell me. What's the complaint. But the demand came louder I want, I want. And I would cry, begging at last, Oh tell me what you want. And finally I'd say, okay then, one of these days, stupid." 15

Saul Bellow's first short story is in the form of monologues. His first novel Dangling Man is in the form of a

14 - Saul Bellow, The Victim, p.33.
15 - Saul Bellow, Henderson the Rain King, p.27.
journal or diary of an unemployed man awaiting his draft call. The book is rigid and a little too facile on the much discussed issues of alienation and freedom. Time commented that the book was "Very carefully written." 16 In his Paris Review interview, 17 Bellow stated that Dangling Man and The Victim, his first two novels, did not give him a form in which he felt comfortable, as the two books sought to project American experience through a borrowed European idiom and sensibility.

The novel Dangling Man is a journal which Joseph keeps from December 15, 1942, to April 9, 1943, his last day in civilian life. At the time of his first entry, he has been 'dangling' between the civilian and the military worlds for about seven months. Paradoxically, in giving up his stubborn fight for 'identity', he achieves his true identity. As his isolation grows more pronounced, he begins to speak of himself in the past tense and in the third person, as if 'Joseph' were merely the name of his former identity. For example, at one point in the analysis of his former character, he says:

"To turn now to Joseph's dress (I am wearing his cast off clothes) it adds to his appearance of maturity." 18

16 - Time 43, May 8, 1944, p.104.
18 - Saul Bellow, Dangling Man, p. 22.
A basic rhythm is set up even in this book by the most alienated of Bellow's characters. Approach and retreat, immersion and emancipation, involvement and disentanglement plunges into what William James called "the rich thicket of reality." However, Irving Malin comments, to which we do not agree, that Bellow's first novel is in some ways crude; according to him, "it is a little mannered, a little incoherent." 

The book is an impressive technical achievement. Bellow's choice of the journal form is appropriate, so apparently natural and not so widely used by other writers that we could easily overlook its originality in the American fiction of that period. He chose a form which suited his theme and characters, as Howard Harper comments: "The journal is the perfect form for the portrayal of a man imprisoned within his own mind, within the awareness of himself alone." 

Joseph's consciousness is the subject of the novel, and the journal form permits Bellow himself to maintain a certain distance from that consciousness and at the same time he makes the conscious itself overwhelmingly immediate. Joseph's narcissism is not Bellow's own, and this shows how new the narrative conception was. The sharp focus on one character is typical of Bellow's later fiction - and Joseph is the prototype of the later heroes.

20 - Irving Malin, Saul Bellow and the Critics, p. 5.
The seemingly fragmented diary form is the product of an artistry conscious of its aims because the novel is so well constructed that it can be said to be a logical consequence of its beginning; the limitations of the first person narrative are overcome by certain technical devices - irony, situational flashes, and remarks, and the spirit of alternatives which are built into the structure of the novel:

"We had an enormous sunset, a smashing of gaudy colours, apocalyptic reds and purples as must have appeared on the punished bodies of saints." 22

The insights Joseph gains are brought to focus in his dialogues with the spirit of alternatives. Bellow uses these dialogues to give the reader an additional view to Joseph's situation. Bellow uses two other names of the spirit of alternatives, 'but on the other hand' and 'Tu as Raison Aussi'.

"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?" 23

The author employs these devices to provide a double view of the protagonist, to bring out the contradictions inherent in his personality, and finally to point at the novelist's stance:

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22 - Saul Bellow, Dangling Man, p.102.
23 - Saul Bellow, Dangling Man, p.140.
"For legal purposes, I am that older self. Very little about the Joseph of a year ago pleases me. I cannot help laughing at him." 24

The Victim is written in the third person, but is focused upon Leventhal's perceptions; it does not enter into the minds of other characters or into scenes in which Leventhal is not present. This technique allows Bellow to organize the events and to provide some atmospheric commentary. It achieves an immediacy approaching that of first-person narrative, but with tighter control:

"He came up on the kerb breathless. His head ached. There was a spot between his eyes that was particularly painful; the skin itself was tender. He pressed it. It seemed to have been the dead centre of all his concentration." 25

The first twenty-three chapters of the novel cover a period of about two weeks. The twenty-fourth chapter is an epilogue set on an evening several years later.

In the novel, reality is done up as a dream - in a style of realism that is rather symbolic:

"The lamps were yellowed, covered with flies and moths. On one of the paths, an old man, sunburnt, sinewy, in a linen cap was shining shoes." 26

The colour yellow, used throughout the book, symbolises the dullness of the atmosphere.

24 - Ibid., p.21.
25 - Saul Bellow, The Victim, p.124.
"He had, an unclear dream, in which he held himself off like an unwilling spectator; yet it was he that did everything. He was in the railroad station, carrying a heavy suitcase, forcing his way through the crowd." 27

To drive home this basic atmosphere of alienation, insecurity and the desperate, graceless motion and collision of this competitive age, Bellow powerfully evokes the crowded unrelated density of New York. Bellow's ability to pour the city on to his pages is used to bring home to us its sudden savageries, its terrible loneliness. 'Stifling', 'thronging streets', 'dazing profusion', 'brassy air', 'smouldering factories', 'muggy air', are some of the words used to describe the city of New York.

The book is also written on two levels— the first is about individual suffering, and the second is about suffering of humanity at large.

The Victim makes a sharp advance in Bellow's craft even while it was an elaboration of Dangling Man in certain aspects. There was again the use of a purely literary source for the new novel in Dostoevsky's 'The Eternal Husband'. This derivation has been noted by a number of critics. Bellow himself says that the parallel is obvious to him now, although not at the time he wrote the novel. Like Asa, Alexey is also unwell physically and is burdened with guilt.

27 - Ibid., p.138-
However, Bellow's spokesman for his conception of humanity is Schlossberg, the old Yiddish journalist. Bellow intends to suggest through the name Schlossberg, which literally means 'view of life', his own views on elevating life.

*The Victim* is a magnificent achievement. In it the philosophical richness, characteristic of all of Bellow's work, is given its perfect form. The conception of Allbee (everyman) is brilliant. He is equally real as the symbolic manifestation of Asa Leventhal's darker nature. But it is not a simple allegorical relationship. Ironically, Leventhal as a Jew is dark, and Allbee a Gentile is light. The moral overtones and reverberations of the novel seem to be inexhaustible. In trying to heal Allbee, the clumsy Asa heals himself, though only partially.

The structure of the book is also impressive because of the double role of Allbee as realistic character and as Leventhal's projection of his consciousness. Bellow was faced with the problem of making *The Victim* convincing at both the realistic and symbolic levels. He merges the two so successfully that the novel may be read either as realistic or symbolic, without reference to the other level; yet each level is powerfully presented, and in no way weakened by the other. Bellow's economy and control in the book are masterful; they enhance rather than limit its richness.
Finally, *The Victim* achieves, to a considerable extent, an overwhelming reality and relevance as a vision of life.

Howard Harper rightly observes that "*The Adventures of Augie March* represents a dramatic reversal in Bellow's technique." The unifying principle of the novel is Augie's search for a worthwhile fate and, though the first-person narrative gives immediacy to that search, it lacks the objective complexity of the narration of *The Victim*. At the time of its publication, *Augie* seemed to be a technical breakthrough, the mirror opposite of *The Victim*, and because of the episodic structure of the story as well as its title, comparisons with *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* were inevitable. Augie, whose adventures won the National Book Award for Bellow, was seen as the picaresque Schlimazl, a Jewish Huck Finn whose "failures are not only accidental, they are in a sense designed as a commentary on the successful."  

The best part of *Augie*, however, is the least picaresque— the early chapters dealing with the boyhood in Chicago. In these chapters Bellow achieves a sense of life which the later, more expansive, chapters dissipate.

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In an interview, Bellow talked about the writing of the book, "the great pleasure of the book was that it came easily. All I had to do was be there with buckets to catch it. That is why the form is loose." And he goes on to complain that the novel has been imitating poetry far too much, "there was diversity of scene, a large number of characters. So I kicked over the traces, wrote catch-as-catch can picaresque, I took my chance."30 Thus, adoption of first-person narrative enabled him to let everything flow. Clearly Bellow wanted to counter-act the aesthetic outlook with its implicitly negative attitude to life.

The characters in the early Chicago chapters of the novel are created with all the nostalgic love of the narrator, and perhaps of the author himself. They come alive as none of Bellow's other subordinate characters do, and through them he creates a sense of the reality of Chicago in the early nineteen-thirties:

"We would go back to the shed to meet the paper trucks that came booming down the alley, tearing off leaves, with punks on the tail gate."31

30 - 'Saul Bellow - an Interview', in Tony Tanner, City of Words, p.68.
31 - Saul Bellow, The Adventure of Augie March, p.34.
"After this it wasn't hard for Jimmy to induce me to go downtown with him, to ride, if there was nothing better to do, in the city hall elevators with his brother Tom from the gilded lobby to the Municipal courts." 32

There are different types and modes of manipulation at work in the book - instruction, Grandma Lausch; advice, Einhorn; adoption, Mrs. Renling; familial coercion, Simon; seduction, Thea; and violence, Batershaw. The individual self is constantly enticed or pushed or drawn by other people's version of what life is or how it should be led. Bellow is clearly using these speakers to display his own versions.

For all the adventures, the end of the novel is unsatisfying in certain ways. The novel is as Jonathan Baumbach remarks 'over extended' or as Leslie Fiedler puts it, "Augie which begins with such richness, such conviction, does not know how to end, shriller and shriller, wilder and wilder, it finally whirls apart in a frenzy of fake euphoria and exclamatory prose." 33 This, however, is not true; one cannot call it fake, since, it is natural for a character to achieve euphoria after a great struggle, and it is natural for the style to become exclamatory.

32 - Ibid., p.49.
33 - Leslie Fiedler, Prairie Schooner, Summer 1957.
Yet, Augie's voice is the style of the book. And this style, this voice does communicate the identity of Augie March. The style is hospitable, omniverous, assimilatory. Sometimes, indeed, the lavishing of epithets is excessive, for example, Jaqueline's "freezing, wavering, goblin, earnest, mascara lined, membraneous yet gorgeous face."  

But the style as a whole is very American in its preference for wonder, enumeration, a welcoming inclusiveness, a generosity in the face of planitude, as opposed to those modes which select, rearrange and analyse. Augie's voice with its wide - ranging delight and wondering openness to experience, does justify the move towards wisdom and affirmation. The style like the man, is a circulating one.

"Despite the informal, idiomatic, often delightful, way in which Augie tells his story, it has an underlying pedagogic tone which becomes increasingly obtrusive and annoying as the story goes on."  

However a great change is seen in Bellow's style in The Adventures of Augie March. He has used a metaphor - saturated style, mixing grandiose, philosophy and slang, peculiar facts and eccentric theories:

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"I was no child now, neither in age nor in protectedness, and I was thrown for fair on the free spinning of the world." 36

From the expansive style of Augie, Bellow returned to his earlier, tightly controlled technique for *Sieze the Day*. In it he recreates the claustrophobic atmosphere of *The Victim*.

The narrative technique of *Sieze the Day* is closer to that of *The Victim* than of other Bellow novels. Although the narrative enters the mind of Dr. Adler for a few moments, Wilhelm's point of view entirely dominates it. Wilhelm is both expansive and withdrawn. Like Augie he is an open person, "I am an idiot, I have no reserve," 37 he says. Like Leventhal, he is tortured by guilt and insecurity. He is another dangling man with a deep need to believe in himself, in others and in life, this atmosphere is brought out through the various devices used by Bellow.

In *Sieze the Day* as in much of the other work, the characters move in a double dimension. Wilhelm lives with both the past and the future looming in and out of focus. And perhaps the strangest thing about it is that it is comic; page for page, *Sieze the Day* is Bellow's richest comic achievement. In spite of the novel having a serious subject of a strained father-son relationship, it is written in a

comic vein. The comedy lies not in the characters, or in the ridiculous situations, but in a coherent criticism of life.

"I should have done hard labor all my life (Tommy) he reflected. Hard honest labor that tires you out and makes you sleep. I'd have worked out my energy and felt better. Instead I had to distinguish myself - yet." 38

The comedy persists until the very last paragraph where Tommy cries loudly like a child, yet he has reached a stage of realisation:

"He alone of all the people in the chapel was sobbing. No one knew who he was. The man's brother may be?" 39

The ultimate irony is of course that Wilhelm is the man's brother - that they are alike; and in the last paragraph which itself is darkly comic, Wilhelm sinks "deeper than sorrow" to ultimate realisation. Wilhelm's realisation is the climax of the comedy - and the novel ends where comedy and tragedy finally merge in perfect artistic truth:

"The flowers and the lights fused ecstatically in Wilhelm's blind, wet eyes; the heavy sea-like music came up to his ears." 40

38 - Ibid., p.7.
40 - Ibid., p.118.
The book, which consists of the events of a single day, has an authentic density, real pain and genuineshouldering of problems, and it earns its lyric moment. Even the beginning of the novel is comic where Tommy's looks are described:

"His glance was comic, a comment upon his untidiness. He liked to wear good clothes, but once he had put it on each article appeared to go its own way." 41

Tommy learned something more important about following his real self as opposed to his pretender self; he learned more than Augie did about the carrying of burdens. This is symbolicaly described: "He was beginning to lose his shape, and he looked like a hippopotamus." 42

The power and honesty of the book are undeniable and Tommy's crucial discovery is firm and fully earned. Thus in Siege the Day, Bellow is able to fuse the psychological naturalism of Dangling Man and The Victim with the lyrical, comic quality of Augie March. This is a lyrical novel of high intensity in which the concrete, everyday world is intensely present. Amidst the materialistic brutality of the city, Tommy's story hints at a world of beauty and mystery.

The richness of Augie's style is not lost in Siege the Day. The third person narrative cannot be as exuberant and as lyrical as Augie's first person narrative, but the

41 - Ibid., p. 5.
42 - Ibid., p. 29.
perceptions are fantastic, they have an intensity and clarity which makes them seem to grope out toward a realm of psychological or metaphysical reality.

The revelation of the final scene of *Sieze the Day* becomes the central theme of Bellow's next novel, *Henderson The Rain King*. In twentieth century America Henderson says, our greatest problem is "to encounter death," this encounter and its meaning become the focal point of Henderson's story. Here Bellow evokes the primitive and, as critics have pointed out, has achieved "some of his best effects by playing all the civilised against the archaic." 43

With the publication of *Henderson the Rain King*, Bellow confirms one's impression that he is just about the best novelist of his generation. For much of its length Henderson is a 'romance' rather then a novel. It forfeits some of the virtues of the novel, but gains some of the virtues of romance, freedom of movement, extreme expression of pathos, beauty and terror. However the book is sometimes farcical and melodramatic.

It is set in Africa, and the atmosphere of the remote lands is finely drawn by Bellow:

The streams were all dry and the bushes would burn if you touched a match to them. We marched over that hot and slightly concave plateau, a kind

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of olive-coloured heat mist, like smoke, formed under the trees." 44

Henderson had gone to Africa not to explore, but:

"Geographically speaking I didn't have the remotest idea where we were, and I didn't care too much. My object in coming here was to leave certain things behind." 45

In Henderson we find symbolism in abundance. Bellow, like the naturalistic novelists, makes use of animal imagery. Just as Tommy caricatures himself as a Hippopotamus, in Henderson, the lions, the frogs are all symbols. In learning to face the lion in its den, Henderson also learned to face death without fear.

In a romantic yet comic manner, Bellow depicts how Henderson enters Africa, leaving behind the wreckage of his life, and humanity in general, refusing to accept the fact that he must perish. He emerges from his African encounters, having faced death knowingly and willingly, and bearing in his arms its living symbol - the lion cub containing the spirit of Dahfu. Henderson is conspicuously removed from the urban Jewish world which Bellow evokes in all his earlier novels. In fact the removal is too conspicuous. The prose of Henderson echoes the rhythm and idiom of Jewish speech. It is also to be noted that, for the Jews, symbolically, the

44 - Saul Bellow, Henderson The Rain King, p. 47.
45 - Ibid., p. 45.
frogs depict social evil. Yet Henderson is Bellow's first novel with no Jewish characters.

The novel is a wildly comic conception of the all American hero and Henderson's adventures are often hilarious. The ironies involved in the confrontations of the various cultures are endless. The main irony is perhaps that Henderson who appears as saviour to the primitive cultures brings salvation only to himself. The Arnewi are rid of the frogs, but lose the water too; the Wariri are given rain, but robbed of their God king. **Henderson** thus, is full of ironies

"I heard shrieks from the natives, and looking to see what was the matter I found that the dead frogs were pouring out of the cistern together with the water. The explosion had blasted out the retaining wall at the front end; the reservoir was emptying fast." 46

Like all of Bellow's novels it is a technical tour de force, a unique achievement. Unlike the others, however, it is acted out in regions entirely removed from the real world. Henderson's America is no more real than his Africa. Because of the vast conception and scope of **Henderson**, its effect is necessarily more diffuse. In **Henderson**, the real world is only implied, shown only through the looking glass. This conception is more suggestive, more open-ended than the double vision of **The Victim** and **Sieze the Day**, but lacks its

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46 - Saul Bellow, **Henderson The Rain King**, p.103.
inherent strength, in which the real and the Imagery worlds actively reinforce each other.

In **Henderson**, the real world of contemporary America and the symbolic world of Africa are juxtaposed:

But at least Lily didn't laugh at me as Frances had. If I knew science, I was thinking now, I could probably think of a simple way to eliminate those frogs. 47

Moreover, in the 'real' episodes we are led to expect clearly relevant satire, for through it the hero's search for commitment and meaning is to be defined:

You don't know the meaning of true love if you think it can be deliberately selected. You just love, that's all. A natural force. Irresistible. He fell in love with his lioness at first sight. 48

But, however, as some critics have pointed out, the satire is disappointingly broad and generalised, and it is left without a base. Lacking control of his world, Bellow is impatient to hurry on to his main task - the symbolic satire in the African setting.

As in the early novels, Bellow produces his symbolic and 'illusory' vision through a convenient shift from one level of reality to another which coincides with the social and psychological theme.

47 - Ibid., p. 76.
48 - Ibid., p. 240.
Though the concerns and difficulties the author explores are still serious, Henderson is rich in comic element:

"And now I have told you the history of these teeth, which were made of a material called acrylic that's supposed to be unbreakable. My striving wore them out. Or may be I've kissed life too hard and weakened the whole structure." 49

Henderson is not the first novel by Bellow to be symbolical. But the symbolism is more visible here, and it is of a different kind. It is not the psychological symbolism like that of the gun in Herzog: it is more like the symbolism of myth. The symbolic use of the colour yellow in the Victim is transpersonal, universally valid as signifying the Darkness. Asa finds everything yellow, but in Henderson the symbolism is schematic. When symbolism gets schematic, it verges on the allegorical. The entire novel is symbolic. Henderson's leaving America and going to Africa in search of truth, his encounter with the Arnewi tribe which he has to leave following a disgraceful explosion of the water cistern, his second encounter with the Wariri and his direct contact with death among the lions - all is symbolic and described with a deeper significance. It is also a schematic symbolism.

49 - Ibid., p.121.
Herzog is written in the freewheeling style which Bellow unveiled in Augie and developed in Henderson. Philosophically too, Herzog represents an amplification of Bellow's earlier ideas rather than a radical departure.

Experimental fiction after the Second World War concerned itself 'mainly with the mechanism and conduct of the individual's mind and life with a search for a different adaption, an angle of vision, a mode of feeling or behaviour which will alter the protagonist's condition.' The technique used was the stream of consciousness. Throughout Herzog the stream-of-consciousness technique, developed by Virginia Woolf, can be seen predominant:

"But to accept ineffectuality, banishment to personal life, confusion.... Why don't you try this out, Herzog, on the owls next door, those naked owlets pimpled with blue."

Herzog, Bellow's most impressive novel to this date, seems to summarize and contain all the questions, the problems and the feelings, the plights and the aspirations worked over in the earlier novels. Herzog is a worried, harried, messed up man, contemplating the wreckage of his life. The book is in the form of letters which Herzog writes to nearly everyone on this earth. Herzog's is a representative modern mind, swamped with ideas, metaphysics.


51 - Saul Bellow, Herzog, p. 321.
and values. The book brings to us not only the excitement of ideas, but the strain, the futility, the near insanity that Herzog experiences:

If I am out of my mind, it's all right with me. 52

The thoughts and the letters flow one into the other like a troubled stream. There are sudden interruptions, extremely vivid evocations of New York or Chicago - significant human contact is minimal, and even with Ramona he feels detached. Bellow excels himself in this book by presenting not only the importance, but also the curse and the comedy of intense consciousness.

Moreover, Bellow is not concerned to give a chronological biography of Herzog. He only wants to show a middle-aged confused man, beset by fragments from the past, trying to relate them, seeking coherence, and trying to disentangle himself from them. The stream-of-consciousness technique is very well-suited to the presentation of a mind like Herzog's. The letters are a way of relieving the accumulating pressures on his mind. These letters and notes are symptoms of a plight and a desire which are basic in Bellow's work:

He had fallen under a spell and was writing letters to everyone under the sun. 53

52 - Ibid., p. 7.
53 - Ibid., p. 7.
Disjointed as they seem to be, the ideas nevertheless, when taken as a whole, define a philosophy of life which is deep, comprehensive and coherent. It seems to be the fullest statement of Bellow's own view, and despite the irony and comedy inherent in the narrative conception, Herzog is, perhaps, closer than any of the other heroes to Bellow himself.

Although the story is told in the third person, the narration becomes so deeply involved in Herzog's consciousness that the effect is close to that of Dangling Man; the portrait of a man trapped in his own consciousness. However, the novel is saved from being static by the vivid scenes in which Herzog encounters the real world:

He held her hand as they mounted the aquarium staircase, feeling himself to be the father whose strength and calm judgement she could trust. 54

The account of Herzog's emotional crisis is formed between the first page and a halt and the last chapters. The prose of this last chapter is lyrical. It communicates Herzog's new delight in the simple objects of his house, and the loveliness of the summer garden. He is surcharged with a strange joy:

Coming back from the woods he picked some flowers for the table. 55

54 - Ibid., p.286.
55 - Ibid., p.348.
The novel ends in a rich lyrical style. Herzog speaks simply without irony. The sentences become shorter, less complex in structure. They are rich in concrete imagery, lovingly recorded. He thinks in metaphor, parable and epigram:

Something produces intensity, a holy feeling, as oranges produce orange, as grass green, as birds heat. Some hearts put out more love and some less of it, presumably. 56

More genuinely than in any previous book by Bellow we feel a novel, a joyous sanity growing out of the neurotic exhaustion. The way in which both the real and the imaginary worlds are made to re-inforce and explain each other is Bellow's major technical achievement.

Bellow has developed as a writer, but in the final analysis, his central theme, the defense of man, and the psychic core from which his theme derives, have been constant - the six novels - blending the naturalistic, the picaresque, the philosophical, the psychological, the comic, the depressive - have been six ways of pointing at the same thing.

Bellow's next novel, the controversial Mr. Sammler's Planet is firmly anchored in a contemporary situation. This novel is totally contemporary in regard to the immediate which is its subject, the modern crisis of culture in America 56 - Saul Bellow, Herzog, p.347.
- a crisis that has to do with drugs, sexual primitivism, the break-up of the family, the craving for violence, the death of manners and values.

Sammler is a figure of the old world and he is the instrument Bellow chooses to describe the range of the new world. The quality of Arthur Sammler, a refugee's meditations is what gives the book its distinction. America is seen through a European's consciousness - an old European refugee's consciousness.

In Mr. Sammler's Planet, Bellow tries to present reality in all its complexity and, though the question asked by Sammler and many of the Hemingway heroes is the same, that is how to be human in an inhuman world, the methods adopted by Bellow and Hemingway are different. While Hemingway "externalises in order to simplify, to impose a moment of order on disordered movements; Bellow internalises to achieve a maximum complexity of impressions that are real."

Like Seize the Day, Mr. Sammler's Planet is a novel that ends with its hero reflecting over a corpse. Once again Bellow shows himself supreme in capturing the combined madness and sanity, oddity and dignity of the human animal.

"New York makes one think about the collapse of civilisation, the end of the world," this is Sammler's interpretation. As Bellow's ideal intellectual, he makes it

57 - Wright Morris, 'On Reading Fiction', Literature And Life (New Delhi, American Centre), p.77.
58 - Saul Bellow, Mr. Sammler's Planet, p.244.
his primary concern 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. Bellow has adopted the prophetic tone here, and Sammler presents himself as a prophet giving sermons on humanity.

The use of irony is very prevalent in the novel and Bellow uses the method of recounting a crime and telling its effect on Sammler, and how Sammler is disillusioned by the modern world.

"He was aware that he must meet, and he did meet - through all the confusion and degraded clowning of this life through which we are speeding - he did meet the terms of his contract. The terms which, in his inmost heart, each man knows." 59

The immediate subject matter of *Humboldt's Gift* is the fate of the artist in his quest for success in America. A long sprawling novel covering some three decades, spanning two continents, *Humboldt's Gift* is dense with descriptions of urban landscape, with a wide range of characters and insights - there is even a full disquisition on the history of boredom in the middle of the book - with a tone of playful seriousness that has come to be the Bellow trademark.

The narrator of the book is Charles Citrine, a successful author, who through his thoughts brings out the

59 - Ibid., p.252.
picture of Von Humboldt, an American poet who had died in poverty and despair. Through the figure of Humboldt, Bellow gives a short history of the intellectual trends since the late nineteen thirties.

The book is a first - person narrative. The narrator even evaluates his narration by saying:

"I thought about Humboldt with more seriousness and sorrow than may be apparent in the account." 60

In Humboldt's Gift, Bellow attempted social analysis in a rather comic vein. Yet, in his latest novel, The Dean's December, Bellow returns to important questions of class conflict and of national identity.

The Dean's December is Bellow's comparison of conditions in the U.S. with those in Eastern Europe. The book is written in the third - person narrative, Bellow is telling the story of Corde's life. Dean Corde is the intellectual protagonist of the book. The rigid socialistic atmosphere of Rumania is very finely depicted by Bellow in contrast to the free American life:

"Corde saw how it was. In the oppressive socialist wonderland she had depended on her sister to protect her. Now her sister was dying and she assumed the senior role." 61

Dean Cord's unpopularity with the media may perhaps be Bellow's own estrangement from his readers. Bellow

60 - Saul Bellow, Humboldt's Gift, p.13.
61 - Saul Bellow, The Dean's December, p.57.
reveals a fine contrast between the two worlds through the ordinary things of life.

Finally, a classification of the imagery used by Bellow in his novels has been undertaken by Irving Malin⁶², and according to him Bellow has used seven types of images in his narrative:

1. **Weight** - Bellow often uses images of weight to express these 'pressures' of existence which disturb his heroes. Tommy Wilhelm sees himself as a hippopotamus, carrying his own weight. The physical environment is a burden for most of the novels. These various pressures of the body, mind and atmosphere are found throughout his novels.

2. **Deformity** - Bellow often uses images of deformity or disease to express the painful condition of mortality. *Dangling Man* presents the 'deterioration' of Joseph living in a 'narcotic dullness'. *The Victim* begins on a note of sickness; Asa finds out his nephew is bed-ridden. This illness is repeated throughout the novel. In *A Sermon by Dr. Pep*, the doctor leans on a crutch. The cripples multiply in *Augie March*. Augie loves depicting the various deformities of people. Tommy Wilhelm also lives in a world of 'freaks'; Tommy looks at himself and thinks he is sick. Henderson is also deformed; he describes himself as being 6 feet 4 inches tall with a great nose, enormous head etc. He says that 'humanity is never healthy'.

⁶² - Irving Malin ed. *Saul Bellow and the Critics*, p.162.
3. Cannibalism - One image which is less important than weight or deformity is cannibalism. Bellow associates cannibalism with our diseased condition, people consume each other as the germ consumes the body.

The imagery of food, of starvation and parasitism, strongly asserts itself in Dr. Pep's Sermon, "humanity kills and devours." Dangling Man gives us the example, "I am deteriorating." Allbee is a parasite in The Victim. Augie is disgusted by the immense needs of Anna. Henderson sees parasitism wherever he turns. He remembers the octopus in the aquarium.

4. Prison - The so far considered images suggest that life is dangerous, ugly and heavy, thus Bellow's characters consider themselves imprisoned. In Dangling Man, Joseph is locked in a room, barely leaving it. The boarding house is itself a prison, and there is 'no exit' for him. Tombs, prisons, rigid confinement, all these reappear in The Victim. Asa's mind is a box, he sees prison around him; he suffers from claustrophobia. Augie also contains many prisons. On the first page he tells us, "he will knock on the door of life." He finds that there are many doors which remain closed. Tommy's hotel is a perfect setting for confinement. The lobby is not his only prison; he sees himself in a pit. He sees a moth trapped by the window pane. Like the corpse in the coffin, Tommy 'recognises' death. Some of the short
stories also contain the same kind of images. Bellow implies that the 'sink' is a kind of womb. In *Leaving the Yellow House*, we again find the prison. Henderson resembles Augie and the Wrecker in trying to destroy all prisons.

5. **Beast** - Another crucial image in Bellow's fiction is the beast. Not only are his characters pressed, trapped, devoured or deformed, they are turned into animals. In *Dangling Man*, we find several beasts, the werewolf Joseph is convinced that 'existence is a Jungle'. In *The Victim*, Asa calls Mr. Beard a 'fish'. At home he thinks of mice darting along the walls. Asa begins to see animals everywhere. Augie is also at home with the beasts. He loves the nature of the birds and worms. Bellow suggests that one needs courage to accept the bestial soul. Tommy sees himself as a 'hippopotamus'. Many critics have discussed the beasts in *Henderson The Rain King* - the entire novel is described in relation to beasts, pigs, frogs, lions - the different stages leading to ultimate truth; the animal images in Henderson are 'deep'.

6. **Movement** - Because Bellow's characters feel trapped, pressed and even devoured by the environment, they want at least consciously to move. They search for answers to their predicaments. But their movements are usually erratic, circular, violent or non - purposive. In *Dangling Man*,

...
Joseph sees himself 'dangling'. His 'fearful walks' and 'mad paving', are useless movements. In The Victim, Asa jumps up, struggles with the sliding subway door and squeezes through it. Other frantic movements follow, and Asa pushes his arm violently. Augie in itself is 'open' in motion. Augie continually travels from one place to another seeking real answers. Sieze The Day has many movements which are useless, "sinking, drowning." He thinks of constantly running out to move his car, gesturing wildly while driving. The short stories also contain images of movement. In Africa, Henderson again sees violent movement, he wrestles with Itel, he blasts the cistern, "a man must move, he cannot stand still under blows."

7. Mirror - Bellow's heroes are obsessed by vision. They tend to see existence in unbalanced ways, the mirrors demonstrate that their quests are distorted. Joseph in Dangling Man is unnaturally self centered, the 'others' reflect his pre-occupations, they are inversions of his true image. Thus he sees the athlete, the tough boy as an alien, who does not conform to the right code - his own. Again self and environment reflect each other. Always subject to hallucinations he can 'reverse' the summer, making himself 'shiver in the heat'. The Victim presents the same kind of mirrors implying that the environment serves as an index for the exploration of character's attitudes towards themselves
and their world and at the same time as an index for the definition of an external life. After Allbee enters we are confronted by the 'double' - this stranger holds Asa's secret desires for punishment and guilt. The mirrors also persist in *The Adventures of Augie March*. Augie constantly meets people who reflect each other. In *Sieze The Day*, Tommy cannot see clearly, the environment mirrors his failures.

Thus Bellow uses natural images to portray the truths of existence. These images are shaped to symbolise our destiny. As Howard M Harper Jr. has put it, "the intensity of Bellow's ultimate concern is magnified by his technique. Each of his novels is a brilliant and original conception, each creates its own unique view of the human condition in which the form itself becomes meaning."63

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