Chapter - II
THE THEMES

(NOVELS AND SHORT STORIES)
Saul Bellow is America's most important living novelist, a giant in the modern literary field. This statement would have been challenged if he had just stopped after writing about the usual alienation, maladjustment, ambivalence and the urban malaise. He has dealt with these themes with a deep insight and has adopted a philosophical approach. His concern is not merely to depict the confusion and the craziness around him but to declare human life to be "far subtler than any of its models," and to ask, "Do we need theories of pain and anguish?"1 To Saul Bellow the soul lives in more elements than we can ever know and "initiation into these elements is the central theme of his fiction: his heroes are initiated into a larger, transcendental conception of humanity - transcendental in the sense that it transcends the limited and limiting dimension of 'pure reason'."2

Bellow is a writer in the humanistic tradition with a deep human concern, wanting to lift human types who have become false and boring. He deals with problems that are central to our times, a time when the individual has been wiped out, a time which is rather one of administrative numbers. Individuals and their crises are his themes, and his reactions to what he sees around him is grounded in his

belief that, "art is an attempt to render the highest justice to the visible universe....to find in that universe what is fundamental, enduring, essential." It is to find out the enduring and the fundamental that Bellow's characters descend into themselves, analysing and introspecting in detail the several moral concerns of the individual. Thus his fiction deals with themes such as the problem of identity, of moral responsibility, of man's search for a good enough fate, the problem of social success and failure, the problem of encountering death, the problem of the intellectual in the modern society, the failure of the West and finally the meaning of life itself.

In most of Bellow's fiction there is an alienated hero struggling to redeem his own life, - often the burden weighing down the hero is his own ego, which is the accumulation of the past. This is why Asa heaves under the weight of New York heat (The Victim), and Tommy sees himself as a hippopotamus "the carrier of a load which was his own self (Sieze the Day)." It is the struggle which proves that the individual's life is not irrelevant, but that dignity can be salvaged from the wreckage. Moreover, at the core of all of Bellow's novels there is concern for other human beings, a concern that is evident in the tranformation of the hero. Bellow's humanistic concern provides him with themes relevant to fundamental human problems, or, rather, variations of a central theme of how to live a life of dignity.

3 - "A Nobel Prize Winner speaks of Art and Man", Saul Bellow's Prize lecture, Dec.12, 1976, printed by American Centre, New Delhi.
This concern for human beings flows throughout Bellow's novels, which end in the transformation of the alienated hero. The only significant moment in *Dangling Man* is the one in which Joseph feels a flow of affection for his wife. Asa's story in *The Victim* is one of learning to care about other people -- his brother and his enemy Allbee. The proof of his transformation is that he can call his wife home. Augie sings of love throughout the novel in which, at the turning point, he discovers that he has never fully loved. Henderson cries out at the moment of truth, "I want, I want." Herzog's story turns partly on a new awareness of other people as real and on his love for his daughter.

The obstacles to learning to go beyond the self and be concerned about others make up much of the substance of Bellow's novels. His characters and he himself pay allegiance to life. What man is and what he chooses to become are a matter of personal choice and, because of the range of human possibilities, he can choose to be great.

Saul Bellow is the favourite novelist of the American intellectuals. According to Maxwell Geismer, "part of our sympathy and concern with his career lies with his own struggle to break through a predominantly intellectual and moral approach to life."\(^4\)

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Saul Bellow's novels, altogether the most exciting fiction of these years, work within the motion "from alienation to accommodation." Bellow's themes, despite the variety of mood and style of his work, remain much the same; "the dialogue between alienation and accommodation is what first of all they are about."\(^5\)

Thus, in the course of his novels, Saul Bellow touches upon a number of themes concerning humanity. The alienation a man feels in an irrational world, and his need to believe in reason, and the need for a sense of community form the primary motifs of his novels. The intensity of life in the face of the ultimate fact of death, the acceptance of human finitude, the incomprehensible complexity of truth, and the significance of choice in determining the dignity of life are some of the themes touched upon by him. In addition, the place of the individual in the modern world, man's infinite desire and longing, the problem of moral responsibility, the difference between being and becoming, the problems of anti-semitism and the importance of the here-and-now, also provide the themes of Bellow's novels.

In his fiction he makes it clear that if we do not find ourselves, we are likely to lose ourselves. "The sick soul is the same anywhere, but what the Bellow hero seeks is recovery, not rebirth."\(^6\)

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In *Dangling Man*, Bellow pushed the hero from the impossibility of alienation to death in accommodation. In *The Victim* he discovers that he has a moral obligation in every direction. In *Augie March* we see the acceptance of community, and love. In *Sieze the Day* we see the hero who must find the principle of life in this world that has beaten him or else die. In *Henderson* we see the various stages a man must go through to face truth and reality. In *Herzog*, the personal problems are generalised and hence, the concern for humanity arises. In Bellow's later novels we find him greatly concerned with the future of mankind in this chaotic material world.

Let us take into consideration each of Bellow's novels and bring out the various themes chosen by him —

**Two Morning Monologues**

Bellow's first piece of published fiction appeared in 1941 and was entitled *Two Morning Monologues*. Not an ambitious work, it nevertheless shows him sounding out certain problems and themes which are to recur and deepen in various forms throughout his work. The two monologuists in the novel then, are - one nearly 'sunk', the other mainly a loser, both unwilling to participate in the routines of society. Both are alienated from the accepted values of society. They serve to define one of Bellow's major areas of inquiry, namely, *how should a man live?*
Dangling Man appeared in 1944 when few readers had fiction on their minds. But the hero Joseph was "neither the first nor the last victim of modern perception. The marks of his anguish are visible in much of Twentieth Century literature." 7

Bellow's first novel was ostensibly autobiographical and, as Denis Donoghue remarks, "in some of its passages it caught the experience of a young intellectual in the uncertain days of our involvement in World War 2." 8

Dangling Man is about a modern man caught between the military and the civilian worlds. The hero, in a state of demoralisation, is waiting for his draft call from the army. He has become indifferent to his friends and family. He lives in solitude in a single room, while his wife becomes the bread-winner. He resigns himself to a "narcotic dullness" 9 broken by fits of hysterical anger at those who do not understand his devotion to principles.

He is already a moral casualty of the war. He finds urban life particularly joyless and hideous. Joseph is


8 - Richard Chase, The Adventures of Saul Bellow, Saul Bellow and the Critics, ed.by, Irving Malin, p. 27.

conscious of being in an interim situation, waiting either for nothing or for something answerable to his dignity and his imagination. He is in prison. "His deepest feeling is a sense of displacement."^{10} Wherever he is, he feels 'out of place'. He has no contacts, no roots. The theme of alienation is brought out here, when Joseph feels himself imprisoned in one room:

"I, in this room, separate, alienated, distrustful, find in my purpose not an open world, but a closed hopeless jail. My perspectives end in the walls."^{11}

Being in the form of a journal, it records the day to day incidents in the life of the narrator-protagonist, Joseph. Since Joseph's consciousness is central to the novel, and all else being peripherel, a valid approach to the theme can be made through an analysis of his view of himself. Joseph is faced with the problem of identity. To himself, Joseph is the I, the participant in experiences and the source of contemplation, as well as the he, an object to be discussed and commented upon. This ability to view himself as a separate entity "brings into perspective not only the two planes on which Joseph lives, but also the crippling inability of the viewer in him to remedy the sickness from which the viewed suffers."^{12} This reminds us of the much

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celebrated Laforgnian irony (employed by T.S.Eliot), by which the speaker is at once the sufferer and a languid, ironical observer.

"How should a good man live, what ought he do? 13 Dangling Man is about Joseph's confrontation with this question, during the period of waiting which follows after his resignation from his job in the American Travel Bureau to respond to the army's call for induction. He wishes to seek the answer to this question by submitting himself to a painful trial of loneliness and self-scrutiny. In the process he discovers that all possible avenues of escape into life - status, religion, family, friends, have been barred to him. Being unemployed, he has lost his sense of identity and security in the society. The superior world of imagination of art and books which represented to him earlier "an extended life far more precious than the one I was forced to lead daily" 14, now appears inadequate for his purposes. His own talent, he feels, is for being 'a citizen'. He also turns away from his family and friends, thus rejecting another source of purposive and cohesive living. He refuses the offer of his brother, Amos, to help him out of his difficulties and does not feel impelled to renew contacts with his friends. From his wife, he already feels alienated, though he continues to live with her and be supported by her.

13 - Saul Bellow, Dangling Man, p.39.
14 - Saul Bellow, Dangling Man, p. 8.
In his failure to make a necessary distinction, Joseph can be compared with the protagonist of Dostoevsky's *Notes from Underground*. Both can theorize efficiently about ideal possibilities but cannot transform them into existential realities.

Bellow has also been influenced greatly by the great French writer of his age, Sartre. But it seems especially strange that Bellow, a defender of man against writers of alienation and the void, should create in *Dangling Man*, a novel so close in form and spirit to that classic novel of alienation and the absurdity of existence Sartre's *Nausea*, a similarity. There are so many similarities that it seems very likely that Bellow, in 1944, was consciously drawing on Sartre's 1938 novel. The heroes in both the novels are isolates; both feel boredom and weariness and a disgust for life. But the two writers attack the self from different perspectives. Sartre's is metaphysical, Bellow's is moral. Sartre denies the reality of the self; Bellow may agree but is not concerned.

However, in *Dangling Man*, Joseph soon learns that all the things that constitute reality cannot be avoided. His day-to-day encounters with relatives and friends and even with total strangers force on him the recognition that he is too earthy and common, vulnerable to anger, suspicion and humiliation, often an object of pity. His maid servant arrogantly smokes in his presence, making him feel that he is
of no consequence. He quarrels with his wife when she asks him to cash the pay-check, and suspects that she is making him run errands because she supports him. This brings out the central theme of the novel, the problem of identity. Moreover, accused by his niece Etta of attempting assault on her person, Joseph is struck by her facial resemblance to him and recalls with discomfiture that the mother of a boyhood friend had once called him Mephistopheles. Joseph is unable to rid himself of the feeling that in his resemblance to Etta and to Mephistopheles he shares with mankind, its evil. Identified, thus, with the sordid aspects of life, almost involuntarily, he discovers that there is another fact of reality — the fear of death — which he cannot evade. The thought of mortality comes to him when a man collapses in front of him on the road. This fact of death is seen as a limitation of man. Just as Joseph accepts his evil propensities, as a limitation, the shortcomings of reality as a limitation, death also has to be accepted as one of the major limitations of man.

Although, in his working hours, Joseph tries to ignore his fear of death, in his dreams he is unable to control its projection. In his first dream, Joseph finds himself on a mission to reclaim a dead man in a chamber cluttered with the victims of a massacre. The dream implies that in his efforts at evading death, Joseph has only succeeded in making a deal with it. The inescapable truth of mortality dawns upon Joseph in yet another dream. He hears a
footstep behind him in a muddy backlane, and then "the lips kissed me on the temple with a laugh and a groan. Blindly I ran......." 15 The dream suggests that howsoever strong one's claims to uniqueness, the kiss of death is implanted on every face. Joseph is shocked and sickened by the suddenness and inevitability of death.

Joseph's uneasiness and confusion arise mainly out of his search for an autonomous self. The insights Joseph gains in the course of the novel are brought to focus in his dialogues with the spirit of Alternatives. Bellow uses these dialogues to double advantage - they offer the reader an additional angle to view Joseph's situation, but more significantly they help Joseph to arrive at the truth about himself through a process of self-analysis.

The highest ideal construction according to Joseph is the "one that unlocks the imprisoning self." 16 Obviously Joseph here is distinguishing between the "public self" and the "true self" - this theme is similar to that of Sieze the Day where Tommy talks of the "real soul" and the "pretender soul." Joseph is conscious of duality of his position but cannot reason it out.

However, Bellow ends the novel in an affirmative tone when Joseph feels that loneliness has not helped him in

16 - Ibid. p. 56.
his struggle and hopes to evolve a more accommodating attitude to reality by participating in war and violence.

However the pattern of Joseph's self discovery has greater affinity with Antoine Roquentin's in Sartre's Nausea. Both the heroes, alienated from themselves and their environment, view their respective situations as observers and hope to find security in the neat roles they attempt to construct for themselves to overcome the nausea of a meaningless life.

The conclusion of Dangling Man, like that of Nausea can hardly be said to be a positive one. Like Sartre, Bellow qualifies his affirmation in proportion to the limitations of his hero and makes it more a matter of perspective than of explicit statement and overtly suggestive actions. There is only Joseph's assurance that he would be a member of the army but not a part of it.

Right from the first page of the novel, we see a man approaching complete demoralisation. Edmund Wilson says of the book, "it is one of the most honest pieces of testimony on the psychology of a whole generation who have grown up during the war." 17

Joseph, by not joining the army voluntarily, is avoiding responsibility. Enlistment would have been an admission of his inability to use his freedom and an acceptance of responsibility for involvement in the war. He

17 - Edmund Wilson, The New Yorker, 20, April, 1944, p.78.
would rather prefer to be drafted and be absolved of all responsibility. Joseph is a philosopher and his familiarity with the philosophers of the Enlightenment leads him to believe absolutely in reason, and hence hold man rather than God responsible for his fate. As Howard M. Harper says, "it is this overwhelming responsibility which Joseph, despite his keen mind, his courage, and his will cannot live with. Although he is able to carry on his struggle for almost a year, he finally chooses the comfortable irresponsibility which the army affords." \(^{18}\)

THE VICTIM

In 1947, Bellow published his second novel *The Victim*. It was well received by the critics, one of whom commented that it is, "morally one of the farthest reaching books our contemporary culture has produced." \(^{19}\) In this novel again, Bellow is probing the problem of what the self owes itself, and what the self owes the rest of the world: to what extent should a man permit himself to be limited by the claims of other people, and where does the privilege of individuality run up against the responsibilities of inter-relatedness? The book is concerned also with the problem of responsibility.

The surface story simply told. Like Joseph, Asa Leventhal is a solitary depressive with a few friends. He


feels burdened by a constant struggle against the world, because of a difficulty which is at once psychological and moral, as in the case of Joseph. This brings out the theme of alienation.

The novel brings out also the importance of "the casting off of his self - imposed burdens by learning to accept himself and others rather than to judge and blame, by learning to have an open heart." 20

Asa's chief burden is his pride which is the very antithesis of true dignity. Bellow wishes to reveal the true beauty and dignity of the human being, but this beauty and dignity can be realised only by admitting that one is merely human, by accepting rather than blaming oneself and others.

The book has two epigraphs - the first is about individual suffering, and the second is about suffering of humanity at large. Partly this is the question of Dangling Man, - the relationship of the individual and the mass. It brings out the question of moral responsibility. Partly it is an image of futility, of the immensity, of the helplessness of humanity's suffering. What can you do to stop this suffering? Many are called but few are chosen. Why one and not the other? Those precisely are the questions raised in The Victim.

Asa Leventhal, with the city, his job, his brother's family, all weights on his back, blames everyone and assumes that everyone is blaming him. Kirky Allbee, another victim, does indeed blame him, accusing Asa of intentionally having cost him his job, the loss of which led to his poverty and his wife's death.

The novel is written on two levels. In the first, guilty Asa tries to deal with Allbee, to get rid of him, to understand him and also to help him. Allbee, who is symbolicaly Asa's projection of his own consciousness, does not reveal what he is after, but enters more and more deeply into Asa's life - visiting him, living with him, locking him out of his own house, and finally trying to kill Asa and himself. Asa begins by refusing to acknowledge responsibility, moves towards helping Allbee, and ends by expelling him. He is no longer conscious of Allbee as an image of his own possible failure, and a projection of his own self-hatred. Thus, a stranger forces the hero to see his own spiritual failings and then departs. Now Asa can call his wife and ask her to come home.

On the second level, Asa is cured due to his acceptance of responsibility. He takes charge of his brother's family when Max is away. Asa soon becomes aware that a man is not flawless, that in humanity he must take up responsibility even for what he is hardly responsible for. Thus, the core of the problem is the self and its relation to
the surrounding world. In the end, however, Asa looks younger; the burden of guilt and also of struggle is lighter now. Asa is externally the same, but essentially changed owing to an "expansion of the heart,"\textsuperscript{21} and a recognition of his human status.

When Asa beats up Allbee and expels him in the end, the situation symbolises the death of the old self. Asa afterwards feels different, a healthier, calmer man "born again into the truer vision of reality."\textsuperscript{22}

However, Bellow's theme founded on an active conflict between the individuals is based directly on a novella by Dostoevsky, \textit{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 he was not aware of it at the time he wrote the novel. The theme of Dostoevsky's novel is the dignity of man. Like Asa, Alexey is unwell physically and burdened with guilt.

Obviously to be a victim is to reject dignity. The victim despises himself, "I feel worthless" Allbee weeps. Asa's selfhatred and his role as a victim also come from present failures to live up to what he wants to be or to accept himself as he is. A better example of his refusal to accept himself is his fear of sexual indulgence. Throughout

\textsuperscript{21} Saul Bellow, \textit{The Victim}, (London : Penguin books, 1966) p.74. All future references to the book are from the same edition.

\textsuperscript{22} Tony Tanner, \textit{Saul Bellow}, p. 32.
the novel, with his wife away, Asa is tempted by Elena and Mrs. Nunez.

Moreover, because he feels unworthy, he is engaged in a continual struggle to keep his place. Like Joseph, he has the problem of identity, and to assert himself we see him shoving through doors and pushing into buses.

Again in this novel, truth emerges out of sleep. There is a reaching out for some ultimate truth about the self, a truth just out of reach. Asa dreams; here, it seems like a kind of birth, hence the significance of the birthday party. It is Asa himself newborn, it is the birth of the elusive truth. It is the personal rebirth arising out of the acceptance of moral responsibilities. In touching Allbee, Asa touches all of humanity; indeed, he becomes all of humanity.

However, Bellow emphasises the fact that Asa's change is partial. But far more successfully than Joseph the dangling man, Asa ends his alienation. Beginning like Joseph as a solitary, separated from his wife and hostile to the few friends he has, he goes much farther than Joseph in joining humanity without surrendering to society. His success heralds the overeager affirmation of Bellow's next novel, The Adventures of Augie March. (1953)

Before this next novel, Bellow published three important short stories which, in effect, were monologues --
1. A Sermon by Dr. Pep (1949);
2. The Trip to Galena (1950);
3. Address by Gooley MacDowell to the Hasbeens Club of Chicago (1951).

In these, Bellow offers an attack on the excesses of civilisation.

THE ADVENTURES OF AUGIE MARCH

_Augie March_ was greeted very enthusiastically when it appeared in 1953; it received the National Book Award, and critics inevitably and almost invariably commented on its picaresque nature, approving of its euphoric variety. Augie himself is a picaresque hero.

The theme of _Augie March_ is his search for a good life. In this search, he is shown participating in a variety of actions such as falling in and out of love, friendships, taking up and quitting jobs, and affiliations to various political and social groups. The restrictions and limitations offered by each way of life are rejected by Augie, and he is pushed forward by the determination to go on searching without resigning himself to a disappointing life. Both the attempts - to be less than human and more than human - are rejected by Augie; he is in search of a fate which would give him the opportunity to be fully human; he is in pursuit of "primal innocence."

It would be interesting to know what led Saul Bellow to turn suddenly from a method in which he was expert
and in which he certainly would have scored triumph, to write this loose picaresque novel. Ihab Hassan answers that, in "portraying a victim who is ruled by necessity, a writer will be led to a closed form, while following up a rebel who gives the illusion of escaping from necessity, he will be drawn to an open form." 23

Augie's search for a good enough fate is the theme of the novel, and the explanation for his rejection of the restrictive fate which many of the characters offer him. In rejecting Anna Coblin's plans for him he says, "my mind was already dwelling on a good enough fate." 24 He refuses to be adopted by the Renling's because, "it wasn't a good enough fate" for him. In his quarrel with Thea, he tries to tell her that all his life he had looked for the right thing to do, and he had opposed people in what they wanted to make of him. And he refuses to follow his brother Simon into the worship of money and power, because he had a good enough fate which came first.

Augie realises that material progress only brutalises a man and devalues his life. But, beyond this material exploitation, there are also people who try to impose a theory, a version and a system of life on Augie.

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Fate, then, is of two kinds: the kind we choose and the kind which is chosen for us. Though Augie is not sure of the difference between the two kinds, he chooses to choose. Augie's 'fate good enough' is concerned with the idea of "full humanity in the face of ultimate uncertainty, to accept them and to choose dignity."\(^{25}\) Simon becomes less than human; he first hardens himself to human suffering and finally inflicts it simply for pleasure and for indulging in a sense of power. Thea, who carries Augie off to Mexico tries to be more than human. She feels that "there must be something better than what people call reality,"\(^{26}\) and has contempt for faulty humanity. Thea, Simon and all the others, who try to transform reality into something they can bear, become less than human.

According to Augie, the meaning of being human is also shrinking, because of the increasing abstractions and specializations of modern life. Augie, seeking the whole meaning of life, finds only specialised interpretations of it. In this technological world, man is seen in terms of function; this is an attitude that Augie develops. During the war, Augie joins the merchant marine, but soon gets disillusioned. He knows that, "where there once had been men like Gods, there would be nothing but this bug-humanity."\(^{27}\) In America, Augie has seen men like his brother Simon getting caught in the material things and losing their identity, but

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27 - Ibid., p. 547.
the choice had been theirs. To accept such deformation is to become anonymous, less than human.

Augie himself refuses to take people for granted and to merely use them. He persists in seeing people as people, and as intrinsically worthy because of the essential purity of their deepest desires. He believes in the ultimate goodness of human motives, however grotesque and perverted human behaviour may seem.

Augie's difficulty is in finding a focus. Yet, something can be affirmed by what William James called, "self-governing resistance of the ego to the world," and, in the course of Augie's various moves towards experience, a wisdom and a sense of positive values do emerge.

But, Augie's attempts to find a distinctive fate are hardly successful, and indeed, at times he tires of the pilgrimage. But, in his search, he has moved towards a form of reconciliation, not with society but with life itself. He can look back at his life as a series of mistakes, and, as he stands in the cold winter fields with the old French maid Jaqueline, Augie can make a tentative and provisional gesture of affirmation.

Thus, Augie's adventures and his experiences indicate his move towards wisdom and affirmation, and, in the end, Augie says, "after much making with sense, it's senselessness you submit to." 29

28 - William James, quoted by Tony Tanner, Saul Bellow, p.50.
SIEZE THE DAY

In Sieze The Day the cloisteral atmosphere of The Victim is recreated. The protagonist, Tommy Wilhelm, is burdened by his past and by anxieties for the future. As a result he is helpless in the here - and - now. The theme of the novel is a man's desire for achievement and for recognition of his individuality.

When Bellow published Sieze The Day in book form in 1956, he included with it three short stories which should be mentioned here, as they not only show us some of the themes haunting Bellow at this time, but touch on the major concern of Sieze The Day - the terrible power of money.

1. A Father to be is an amusing and perceptive story about a young research chemist going to visit his fiancée, who suddenly sees in the man sitting next to him on a subway a terrible premonition of what his son might be like - a dull complacent, bourgeois. Is man born to be free? How can be achieve a mode of affirmation? These questions are of central concern for Bellow.

2. Looking for Mr. Green - the next story (1951) is a suggestive parable of the Depression period. A man who has to deliver relief cheques in a Negro district, finds it oddly difficult to locate a Mr. Green. Finally, after an encounter with a drunken negress, he gives her the cheque to give it to Mr. Green, and consoles himself with the thought, that "after all he (Mr. Green) could be found." This evokes powerfully the feeling of how easily a man might
simply disappear, "fading away out of his identity in obscure anonymity until his name no longer corresponds to any abiding reality."\(^{30}\)

3. The third story, *The Gonzaga Manuscript*, concerns another quest. Clarence Feiler searches for some lost manuscripts of Gonzaga, a Spanish poet now dead and whom he admires. He admires Gonzaga's work because it expresses content with simply being a "creature," accepting the world without wishing to change it. He was "natural," and it is very hard to be natural. In this world the dominant values are money values, and the profit motive is uppermost. This in fact is the theme of *Sieze the Day*.

Tommy is a complete victim of the "world's business," and it has driven him crazy. Money pervades the world, it has reached down into people's hearts until they are cynical and, most of all it has also corroded human relations.

When the book opens, we see Tommy brought to the point where he has no money, and his "obligations" threaten to destroy him. Tommy is a real victim of the heavy world which money has created - a complete wreck, an unkempt slob in his father's eyes. Bellow nowhere makes us more vividly aware of the material pressure, the human density, the exhausting physical experience of life in New York. And for Tommy there is no way out. For him there is no flight, nor any easy solutions. We leave him with the financial problems still unresolved, weeping over the body of an unknown man at

\(^{30}\) Tonny Tanner, *Saul Bellow*, p.61.
a strange funeral. Tommy realises the power of money when he says, "a rich man may be free on an income of millions."31

The book also contains the theme of a strange father-son relationship, where the father continuously insults the son for being idle, and for being a failure in life. But, although Tommy is helpless to remove himself from this money world, he is also not at home with it. He fears its adverse effects. He feels congestion and pressure to a degree which Augie never feels: and indeed the book, which covers one day, is a mounting experience of suffocating congestion to a moment of total release which is also a moment of vision.

The book also brings out the theme of the here-and-now. Dr. Tamkin teaches Tommy, that the spiritual concept is, "bringing the people into the here-and-now. The real universe, that's the present moment, only the present is real - the here-and-now, Sieze the day."32 This message to seize the day, rather than to submit to it, is the idea brought out by Bellow. Tamkin also tells him that there are two souls, the "real soul" and the "pretender soul." According to him, "the pretender soul is a lie. The true soul loves the truth. And when the true soul feels like this, it wants to kill the pretender."33

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32 - Ibid., p.66.

33 - Ibid., p.71.
The end of the book is also a reminder of our common mortality. The image of the dead man arrests Tommy. Tommy harrassed by nearly all the distractions of modern life, reaches a state where he is beyond all distractions. Finally, he was past words, past reason, and he could not stop: "tears had suddenly sprung open within him, black, deep, and hot. He cried with all his heart." 34

In the context of the theme, however, the ultimate and only universal reality is death. In the face of this anonymous corpse, Wilhelm has seen himself and humanity. The truth "deeper than sorrow" is the recognition of this ultimate reality, man's inevitable fate. In that fate, Wilhelm discovers his own humanity, it might be proper to recall Wordsworth's *Tintern Abbey* here, "the still sad music of humanity." And the "heart's ultimate need," is the acceptance of that truth and a commitment to life. Here again we see Tommy's quest for reality.

The dead man is also a reminder of the inevitable death of the self. Tommy's tears are both for humanity and for himself. In weeping for his own death. The death of his pretender soul, Tommy is in a way making a gesture of love towards life. He wants to live; money and its influences have not killed his heart.

The theme of freedom from external impositions is also one of the themes of *Sieze the Day*, as it is in Bellow's

34 - Ibid., p.117.
other novels. Tommy, like Bellow's other characters, would like to be free and cast off impositions. Tommy does finally move towards an acceptance of his life. He adopts a positive attitude towards his mistakes, and he affirms the value of life and love.

Thus, this book has an authentic density, real pain and genuine confrontation with problems of life and the concern for humanity is handled beautifully by Bellow.

**HENDERTON THE RAIN KING**

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.

*Henderson the Rain King* which appeared in 1959 is the thousandth retelling of Don Quixote — the dissatisfied idealist, the bourgeois, longing to fulfil his life, to transform himself and the world into something more noble. The theme of *Henderson*, like that of *Augie March*, is this two-fold comedy of life, the individual moaning or shouting 'I want, I want'.

Eugene Henderson is a huge man, and his life is in a state of chaos. He is a millionaire, and leads his own kind of life. Henderson's vocation reflects his concern with the dead, and his attitude towards life in general: "the dead are my boarders, eating me out of house and home." 35

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Like other heroes, Henderson also has the problem of identity; he does not know how to relate himself to other people. His violence is really an expression of extreme frustration. His wild habits and disordered life finally drive him out to Africa in a quest for "essentials." His prime need is to release his vehemence and awaken reality. His quest is similar to Augie's quest in search of truth.

It is a confrontation with death which drives Henderson to Africa. His fear of death leads him to search for a true life.

Henderson flees from the piled up burdens of his life and from the inevitable death he sees before him. He decides to find salvation not in civilisation but in the primitive savage state, and leaves his wife, his home, and goes off to Africa.

Henderson is caught in the familiar existential drama of Bellow heroes: yearning for order and meaning in his life. He feels helpless and trapped by two inescapable facts of life: the first is death, the second is man's inability to know reality. Because reality is always beyond his grasp, man feels alienated from the world, from others and from himself.

The destiny of his generation, Henderson believes, is to go out into the world and try to find the wisdom of life. He feels also that there is some kind of service motivation behind his yearning. It is this desire to serve, together with his spiritual dissatisfaction, which leads him to Africa.
Trekking deep into the country with a guide Romilayu, Henderson comes upon two tribes. The first, the meek cattle-loving Arnewi, he tries to impress with his deeds. He takes up the job of killing with a hand-made bomb, the frogs which are spoiling the cattle's drinking water. The bomb destroys the cistern too, and Henderson leaves the Arnewi in disgrace. However, from the gentle Arnewi, Henderson learns the concept of grun-tu-molani, which is their name for man's great desire to live, and is their philosophy. This concept greatly appeals to him, since it is close to his determination not to agree to the death of his soul. He interprets the phrase to mean that life must not be preserved, but given transcendent meaning.

With this ambiguous truth, Henderson goes to the Wariri, a dangerous tribe dealing in death. By lifting up their wooden idol, Mummah, at the rain ceremonies, Henderson becomes their rain king. He and the king Dahfu become friends. Dahfu promises to redeem Henderson by teaching him to appreciate and imitate a lioness. Henderson roars, walks on all fours, and claims that his soul is being jolted out of its sleep. By learning to face the lion, he learns to face death. But Dahfu is killed in trying to capture another lion. Henderson flees and brings back with him to civilisation a lion-cub, containing the spirit of
Dahfu. Reconciled to reality, Henderson is now returning home, to be a better husband, and to start belated medical training.

In a sense, Henderson is a caricature of all the Bellow characters who seek salvation. Henderson's quest for redemption, for salvation is similar to Tommy Wilhelm's. Both heroes begin as alienates, both are prepared, during the progress of the novel, for a partial return to community. Both have to seize reality as it is. But Henderson the Rain King is the comic version of the quest, a romance - satire on the American Quixotic self which rebels against life's terms and, like Augie, demands a special fate.

The humour lies in the quest itself - the egotistic quest for personal fulfilment, and through Henderson, Below is possibly laughing at his own questing spirit.

Moreover, according to Clayton, Bellow seemed to intend a "parallel between Henderson's conversion and Zarathustra's."\(^{36}\) As zarathustra goes through three stages - camel, lion and child-so Henderson goes from pigs and cattle to lion and to child, ending in the holy joy of self transcendence.

More important, in Henderson the Rain King as in the Last Analysis, Bellow is making fun of his own propensity for self - examination and his own longing for rebirth. Here once again we see the Laforgnian irony in which the sufferer is

\(^{36}\) John J. Clayton, Saul Bellow In Defence of Man, p.168.
also his own mocking critic. Obviously this is a device for reducing the sorrow by seeing it in perspective.

Reality is what Henderson says he wants, and perhaps it is what he finds, but it is not really what he wants. Instead he wants reality to fulfil his hope. Henderson wants to affirm - like Joseph, Augie and Herzog, and other Bellow characters,- the meaningfulness of human life, to show that a man's life is not like a stone falling from life to death. The affirmation comes in fever (as Asa's in half-sleep), in the midst of absurd Africa, but it is made.

Finally, then, Henderson wants not to die. He says: "I wouldn't agree to the death of my soul."37 It is specifically from this death he flees.

As in Dangling Man and The Adventures of Augie March, the desire for individual greatness directly results from the desire for immortality; ordinary humans die, not the magnificent Henderson who can lift the Mummah.

However the theme of the novel is not only that of compromise with reality but escape from death. Dahfu calls him an "avoider." In his running from death, he is running from life. Just as Augie longs to live in reality rather than in his version of reality, so Henderson needs to learn. To enter into reality as it is, he must accept death as well as beauty. Then only can he be redeemed and man's life affirmed.

Henderson who is fed up with civilisation wishes to seek wisdom in the savage, but Dahfu heals him with wisdom.

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37 - Saul Bellow, Henderson The Rain King, p.277.
brought back from civilisation. Thus in the end, Henderson has partially entered and accepted life as it is. He understands that he had tried to avoid the presence of death and in doing so he had avoided life. After the death of Dahfu. Henderson is at peace with reality. However, the comic tone makes it difficult to take the transformation seriously. It is worth mentioning here, that Bellow was, according to Tony Tanner, at this time "influenced by the ideas of William Reich, who had similar notions of re-discovering the real animal self."\(^{38}\)

According to Dahfu, the lion is unavoidable, "she will force the present upon you."\(^{39}\) If a man can relax, he will pass into a new beauty with all "unhealthy ego emphasis" removed. Dahfu is killed in a lion hunt and, when Henderson stares down at a real wild lion, he realises that principle of horror and death in reality. He has learnt to accept Truth. Much of his egotism has fallen and his life promises to be more peaceful and purposeful.

The novel asserts the supreme importance of "love" and when the book reaches away from negation towards celebration we feel the full force of Bellow's refusal to accept despair, and it takes hold of us in a positive way.

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38 - Tony Tanner, Saul Bellow, p.78.

39 - Saul Bellow, Henderson the Rain King, p. 213.
HERZOG

Herzog combines all the previous themes of Bellow's earlier novels. Presenting the crisis experienced by a contemporary intellectual whose life has become a wreck, Bellow touches upon several themes: "man's need to believe in reason, his alienation in an irrational world, his need for a sense of community, the intensity of life in the face of the ultimate fact of death ...... the deformation of character which results from our shutting others out of our lives, the meaning of being human, the acceptance of human finitude, the incomprehensible complexity of truth, and the significance of choice in determining the quality of life, the acceptance of the risks involved in exposing one's inmost being to others, the need to oppose the modern view of man as a specialized functionary rather than an intrinsically valuable person, the essential purity of man's desires, and the dilemma of the modern man who must make rational choices without enough facts...... man's infinite 'want' or longing in the face of his finitude, the power of the human mind, the difference between becoming and being." 40

It would seem that through Herzog, Bellow has asked all the possible questions about human existence and human problems and attitudes. Perhaps it was for this complete analysis of the modern intellectual's predicament that Bellow was awarded the Nobel Prize.

Hegzog himself is clearly a descendant of Bellow's main characters - worried, harrassed, brought down, and messed up. His private life is at a point of chaos. He is terribly isolated and cut off, wandering about the streets, brooding in lonely rooms. The book begins with the theme of alienation, and it contains only a few actual incidents in the present.

Like Dangling Man, The Victim, Sieze the Day, it conveys the sense of a real sufferer hedged in by circumstances and neurotic attitudes; like Augie March and Henderson, it possesses an exhuberance and a sense of infinite possibilities, as John Clayton aptly observes, "this is not the novel of a sufferer in the city, but of a sufferer who contains the city within himself." 41

The significant action takes part mainly in his head. His mind seems to take on itself the burdens of the whole world, all problems of mankind. Bellow excels himself in this book by presenting not only the importance, but also, as Tony Tanner rightly says, the "curse and comedy of intense consciousness." 42

In this book, Bellow once again brings out his theme of affirmation, and affirms human possibilities - not of preserving the self, but of dissolving the self in a brotherhood. The casting off of selfhood has been the dominant theme in Dangling Man, The Victim, Sieze the Day and Henderson the Rain King. Once again it is true in Herzog.

42 - Tony Tanner, Saul Bellow, p.87.
Bellow also believes that, to be redeemed, one must lose one's individuality, not to lose it to the crowd, but lose it by becoming one with fellow men. "Brotherhood is what makes a man human." 43

Man seems to have a compulsive need to make coherent sense out of the absurdity of the world; he feels that his life has some transcendent meaning. Herzog's problem is Augie's and Joseph's and Asa's and Wilhelm's - to maintain his identity and integrity and to find a solid ground for belief.

The novel tells us of his divorce and confusion, of his thinking, his compulsive thinking about Mady and Gresbach. He thinks about his women and his life, and he thinks especially about ideas, examining the wreck of himself, to see if both can be saved. The theme is his quest for sanity - from New York to Martha's vineyard back to New York, then to Chicago and finally to his country house. His quest is into his own past, especially his childhood past. Herzog is haunted by his childhood, by the mystery of his mother's love, by her gesture of moistening her handkerchief to wipe his face, which he remembers now forty years later. To him the gesture is symbolic of man's dilemma:

All children have cheeks, and all mother's spittle to wipe them tenderly. 44

The current systematic views of man offend Herzog. He feels man's life is too complicated, too mysterious, too

43 - Saul Bellow, Herzog, p.324.
44 - Ibid., p.45.
real, too immensely significant to be reduced to a formula, Herzog writes:

    We mustn't forget how quickly the visions of genius become the canned goods of the intellectuals.\textsuperscript{45}

Herzog does not submit to the imprisonment of the soul. The soul, he feels, lives in more elements than we will ever know. A man can choose to live an insulated life, to make a deal with fate and to ignore the existential abyss. But in doing so he loses his soul, for the transcendent meaning of the soul lies not only in its relation to the infinite but also in its individuality. Herzog has made a conscious, admirable, perhaps even a heroic choice. Although he is a failure, a fool, a ridiculous figure by popular standards, he has kept his soul alive.

Adrift in an indifferent world, burdened with a soul whose longings he does not understand, Herzog still manages somehow to remain afloat. This constant struggle - intellectual, spiritual, emotional, - against drowning seems to be inherent in the human condition. Man's struggle then does not have to be given a meaning, but the reality instructors try to assign a meaning because they hope for immortality and they cannot live in the here - and - now.

In the last few pages, the novel tends to become a summary of its ideas and themes. This is so because of the

\textsuperscript{45} - Ibid., p.81.
nature of the book which is a vast observation of the human condition, and it brings out a philosophy of life.

Passionate intellectual concern is another theme of Herzog. Intellectual anguish is powerful in Herzog, and the honest, and inspired examination of the human condition has given the work a supreme interest.

In the course of the novel, Herzog is partially redeemed because he accepts himself and he accepts death. The trip to the court is a symbolic quest for justice. In the end, taking his daughter out, he has a car accident. He has some troublesome hours with the police because of the revolver found on him. And this is where he starts to relax. Bailed out by his brother, he returns to his old country house. He experiences a strange joy and feels liberated and relaxed — liberated not only from Madelaine, but from his excessive exhausting egotism. A new calm starts to grow in him, the curse is lifting and he is on the verge of a new health, stirred by "indefinite music within,"— thus the transformation takes place.

Thus, the defense of man and the "psychic core from which this theme derives" has been the central concern of Bellow's Herzog.

Criticim of modern American society is the central concern of Mr.Sammler's Planet. In the novel we see Sammler disgusted with the lack of law and order in America, with the youths in revolt and with the blacks. In this novel we see a new Bellow, who has sympathy for the frenzied young, caught in the computerized social bureaucracy. Some reviewers have professed surprise at this novel; they find in it a now ageing Bellow, exhibiting a new irrational fear of the young.

Arthur Sammler is an elderly pensioner, dependant on his nephew Elya Gruner. Sammler only wants the calm to live with a "civil heart." A firm observer of the American scene, and an exponent of old-style humanism, he rejects the modern lunacies; "Is our species crazy?" he asks.

Sammler has learnt that without a conscience, man is merely an intellectual animal. Wanting to understand this planet's creatures he tries to look and listen without judging. But, so doubtful is he of man's future on earth, that he finds tempting the possibility that man will "blow this planet" and move to the moon. Modern man having exhausted his planet's resources looks to the moon for a fresh start.

Yet, Sammler soon rejects this idea of a lunar heaven; it strikes him only as a wasteful "circus." In his criticism of America he says, "New York makes one think about the collapse of civilization, the end of the world."\textsuperscript{47} Instead

\textsuperscript{47} - Saul Bellow, Mr.Sammler's Planet, (London : Penguin Books Ltd. 1971), p.244.
All further references to the novel are from this edition.
of the moon, he opts for this "rotting sinful earth," for whatever its flaws it remains man's only home. Sammler's sympathies are with the confused young. There are only a few young who see that dealing with the near, the commonplace, the responsible, is what makes saints and heroes.

In the final events of the novel, the two figures Elya Gruner and the pick-pocket, are brought low. Elya dies before his time, and the thief lies beaten and is arrested.

As he does in each of his novels, Bellow here shows his readers man at his worst and his best: he reminds us again that, regardless of circumstances, the individual can do something more than merely lament his fate.

In the magazine version of the novel, Bellow has Sammler provide a direct answer - act reasonably, moderately.

Before publishing Mr.Sammler's Planet, Bellow published Mosby's Memoirs and other short stories in 1968. Mosby an ageing ex - diplomat sits in Mexico, sipping mescal and writing his memoirs. Like other Bellow figures, he is a lonely thinker. It seems that he has been involved in most of the politics and history of his time and has acquired human wisdom. He writes of himself in the third person. For some comic relief in his memoirs, he remembers Lustgarten, a sloppy and emotional jew, who was a man for whom everything went wrong, who, nevertheless, had reached happiness in a state of "passionate fatherhood."

This story has real depth and complexity, and at the same time Bellow's most basic subject is still there at the
heart of the story - "the realisation that all things live in
the shadow of their own imminent departure that flowers are as
transient as they are vivid."48 We recognise that Mosby is
another typical Bellow character in the constant awareness of
that endless black behind the green and red.

Bellow's other story, The Old System (1967), ends in
a similar way. Once again Bellow portrays a man of middle
age, caught in a moment of prolonged pause, lying in bed for
much of the day, moving slowly about his lonely house and
giving up his "afternoon to the hopeless pleasure of thinking
affectionately about his dead."49 Unlike Mosby, Dr.Braun is a
Jew and, although he is a scientist with an orderly analytic
mind, he soon finds himself hopelessly entangled in the "crude
circus of feelings," re-enacted in his mind by his now dead
relations.

Braun specifically rejects the contemporary
"unhealthy self-detachment" and succumbs to his "useless love"
for the past, the dead.

At the end of the story, after concluding a moving
death-bed scene, Bellow meditates on the mystery of human
emotions - their poignancy, their futility.

48 - Tony Tanner, City of Words : American Fiction 1950-70

49 - Saul Bellow, The Old System, in Mosby's Memoirs and Other
It is noticeable, however, that both men, Mosby and Braun, can be seen moving not towards any re-engagement with society, but towards a lonely encounter with the ultimate mysteries. This seems indeed, the direction of all Below's work, and it is also proper to add that such lonely encounters are a recurrent feature in the central tradition of American literature.

**HUMBOLDT'S GIFT**

Below's most recent novel *Humboldt's Gift* (1973), is his most American novel, since it concerns mainly the fate of an artist in his quest for success in America. Bellow views his country from a distance, removing himself from it.

*Humboldt's Gift* marks a new turn in Bellow's thinking; "As he set out earlier in his career to ask, how ought a good man live? he now more than thirty years later asks, how to prevent the leprosy of souls?" 50

Humboldt's death sets off Citrine's mental wanderings, melancholy, comic, philosophical, about the meaning of life, and indeed of death itself. Through the figure of Humboldt, Bellow gives a short history of the intellectual trends since the 1930's. At the same time when intellectuals formed an adversary culture, Humboldt gains success with his first book, with it he also gets caught in

the materialism of life. He wishes to gain both money and power, by joining politics. Bellow criticises these intellectuals primarily for a sensibility that is entirely commercial. Also capitulating to the public's desire for sensation, these intellectuals exploit culture for its commercial value. In his criticism, Bellow states,

"What civilisation has accumulated they treat as fuel and burn up the culture of the nineteenth, the eighteenth, the seventeenth century, of all centuries, of all ages." 51 As Mark Christhiff comments, "in their use of art and literature, publicity intellectuals relegate the cultural past to meaninglessness." 52

Thus according to Bellow, having joined the society's business element, these publicity-minded intellectuals have become production oriented and have lost all concept of the serious purpose of culture.

**TO JERUSALEM AND BACK (1979)**

**DEAN'S DECEMBER (1982)**

In Dean's December, Bellow's recent novel, published in 1982, he extends his criticism to American Universities. He suggests that universities are bureaucratic and are controlled by the top administrators.

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51 - Saul Bellow, 'Culture Now', *Intellectual Digest*, 2 Sept., 1971, p.79.

To Jerusalem and Back, more a travelogue, and in the Dean's December, Bellow criticises the intellectual community for, "speculative attitudes that ignore the evidence of historical tendencies and facts." 53

To Jerusalem and Back is a non-fictional journal that chronicles Bellow's trip to Israel in 1976. In it Bellow seeks to understand Israel's conflict with the Arabs, and since this conflict is closely connected with the tension between the Soviet Union and the U.S., Bellow's perspective on these two "superpowers" also clearly emerges. Bellow regards the Soviet Union as a distinct threat to the existence of the Western democracies.

In these comparisons between democracy and communism, Bellow perceives a threatening abuse of freedom. For Bellow freedom is a privilege not a right. It should not be taken for granted because it is an historical occurrence. Freedom is achieved through hundreds of years of political struggle at the cost of countless lives. According to Bellow the idea itself that freedom is a perennial right is wrong.

Dean's December is Bellow's comparison of conditions in the United States with those of Eastern Europe. Through this novel, Bellow communicates the absence of personal rights in Eastern Europe. As Dean Corde waits in a Rumanian apartment for the death of his mother-in-law, he notices an appalling lack of the freedoms of speech and of assembly.

53 - Ibid., p.60.
"All conversations with foreigners had to be reported .... It was one of the greatest achievements of communism to seal off so many millions of people."\textsuperscript{54}

Another parallel focus of the novel is America's urban chaos and intellectual attitudes towards it. In a 1981 interview, Bellow stated that he had written the novel, "to impart the truth about the deterioration of life in American cities." This focus emerges as Corde reviews his troubled career in Chicago. He had aroused public controversy by publishing two articles on conditions in the city jails and hospitals. Corde understands that urban decay is part of a larger cultural problem.

In conversation with his friend Spangler, Corde indicates that his effort is like that of the artist, "to recover the world that is buried under the debris of false description and non - experience."\textsuperscript{55}

Thus, Corde discloses Bellow's concern for the extreme social problems prevalent in America.

Having thus far reviewed the themes and the motifs in the novels and stories of Bellow, we may now proceed to an examination of how he has given a local habitation and a name to the ideas inspiring his work. We shall consider first the plots and plot - situations which constitute the "action" of the novels and see how the "chain of events" ministers to the exposition of the themes.

\textsuperscript{54} Saul Bellow, \textit{Dean's December}, p.14.
\textsuperscript{55} Ibid., p. 120.