Chapter - III
PLOTS, PLOT SITUATIONS

AND EVENTS
"Plot is generally understood to refer to the variety of incidents a novel contains, the amount of suspense and surprise it evokes and the ingenuity with which all the happenings in the beginning and middle are made to contribute to the resolution in the end."¹

A work of fiction necessarily contains characters, action and thought; of these three elements, whichever dominates, decides the structure of the plot; thus there can be three kinds of plots - plots of action where there is a perceptible change in the fortunes of the protagonist, plots of character where the moral character of the protagonist changes resulting from the actions and events described in the novel and thirdly we have the plot of thought where there is a change in the thought of the protagonist because of the actions and events he has experienced. Modern fiction, primarily concerned with the exploration of the self, with an examination of the private and the inner life of the central character, does not give much scope for external action.

The structure of an action or actions, thus pieced together and presented in a fiction is the plot. This structure of action forms the pattern within a story

consisting of a series of events, having a significant movement through time, thus possessing unity. The novel consists of these kinds of plots as a network of interrelated events. Plot brings out effectively the theme of the story.

As we have seen in our discussion of themes, we may, broadly speaking, describe a Bellow novel as an exploration - intellectual or emotional - for understanding oneself as well as the nature of life. Action in the sense of activity cannot be expected in any great degree. As Henry James would say, something very ordinary such as the way one enters a room or pours tea could be significant. It could have a meaning, an emotional charge. The Bellow characters, sensitive, often morbid, react to small commissions and omissions of daily life, and they do their searching or building on such apparently ordinary incidents.

"The single self in the midst of the mass or species," its moods of bitterness, nihilism and futility, its response to new philosophical, psychological and physical theories are the subject matter of many of Bellow's novels, but as he himself says after having completely rejected the romantic idea of the individual, the writer who does not try to provide an answer to the question - what a human being is, somehow fails as a writer.

Bellow himself, in so far as he sought to find a condition in which the self could have a "genial relation to

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its world," provides a setting in his novels, in which his characters undergo a change of thought, moving from alienation to accommodation through a series of confrontation of the self with other human beings, through events in the external world where the attitudes result in actions. Bellow's plots thus can be described as plots with a broader range, a synthesis of particular materials of character, thought and action capable of affecting the readers' opinions and emotions.

As many critics of Bellow have pointed out, Bellow's characters have an "essential sensibility" aware of despair, alienation and emptiness of modern life, yet all of them take a stand against the "wasteland attitude" and "favour brotherhood and community." This change in thought, in character whereby individual preoccupation is replaced by concern for others, accommodation and compliance is perhaps Bellow's ideological contribution to human understanding, and the situations in which his characters are placed help them to move towards this ideology. Only in so far as this end is achieved can Bellow's plots be said to be successful; otherwise as "his characters don't do much, his books lack the spine of a plot, they lack the impact of a sequence of linked incidents, they have no dramatic necessity." 3

Joseph, the Dangling man, is caught in a strange situation, waiting for nothing. His deepest feeling is a

sense of displacement. He may live in a hotel like Wilhelm in Sieze the Day, but wherever he is he feels out of place, and he has no contacts, no roots. Henderson keeps hearing a voice within him which repeats "I want, I want," but he is not sure what he wants. These characters are in search of an equilibrium, or they want to know how to live; as Joseph says "to know our purpose, to seek grace." It is a search for the truth, a message or a revelation.

Basically Bellow's novels wish to seek what Denis Donoghue has said, "an earthy condition in which body and soul may live."\(^4\) Moreover, Bellow's mode of affirmation from novel to novel has somewhat increased and this is clearly seen through the various plots and events that he has adopted in his novels.

However, Robert Gorham Davis finds that in the novels "the stated themes have not been resolved nor the questions answered,"\(^5\) and perhaps his opinion can be evaluated only through a careful analysis of the plots and events of the novels.

Dangling Man being in the form of a journal records the day to day incidents in the life of the narrator Joseph. The novel is in an absurd form and the reader is rather confused since everything happens within the enclosure of a


single consciousness, and Robert Gorham Davis has claimed that in Dangling Man "the thematic progress lacks uniformity and cohesion." 6

The novel consists of Joseph's confrontation with the question, "how should a good man live?" 7 He seeks the answer to this question by first submitting himself to a painful trail of loneliness and self scrutiny. Being unemployed, he has lost his sense of place and security in society. He also turns away from his family and friends and thus rejects all social obligations. He felt uneasy at the Servatius party and he "began to regret that he had not been more firm in refusing," and for months he was angry with his friends. From his wife, Joseph already feels alienated, though he continues to live with her and be supported by her.

Moreover Joseph does not share Almstadt's acceptance of life's ordinariness. When a friend tells him that he is all "fenced up," Joseph ignores the remark, only believing that by withdrawing from the suffocating actuality of life, it is possible to arrive at a more refined conception of the self.

However in the middle of the novel at the Servatius party, Joseph is revolted by the insult heaped on his drunken hostess Minna Servatius by Abt, an old suitor she had rejected long ago. His own wife gets drunk and has to be

6 - Ibid.
7 - Saul Bellow, Dangling Man, p.21.
helped into the cab. Joseph begins to realize that everything is self-defeating because an ideal may never be reached. Moreover he also learns that the ordinary and the dismal and all that constitutes 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 too is earthy and common, vulnerable to anger, suspicion and humiliation. 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 her pay-check and suspects that she is making him run errands because she supports him. He flares up when an old communist acquaintance deliberately ignores him in a restaurant. Then Joseph remembers his boyhood friend who had called him Mephistopheles, and thus he becomes aware of the fear of death. This idea dawns on him when a man collapses in front of him on the road. Although in his waking hours Joseph tries to ignore his fear of death, in his dreams he is unable to control its projection. In one of his dreams, Joseph hears footsteps and feels the kiss of death on his forehead. Joseph is shocked by the suddenness of death brought close to him through his dreams.

Further the insights Joseph gains in the course of the novel are brought to focus in his dialogues with the spirit of alternatives. In one of the dialogues we find Joseph distinguishing between the "public self" and the
"true self." Through these various events, realisation dawns on Joseph at the end of the novel. He realises that loneliness has not helped him in his struggles and he hopes to evolve a more accommodating and comprehensive attitude to reality. Thus, this pattern of Joseph's self-discovery constitutes the action of Dangling Man illustrated through the events.

Similarly in the Victim we have the hero, Asa, who is burdened by guilt. In the first incident we find Asa strolling in a park. Suddenly he feels that he is being watched. The man keeps following him making Asa tense and nervous. He introduces himself to Asa who recognises his friend Allbee. Allbee blames Asa for ruining his life by taking away his job and thus leading to his wife's death. The entire novel is based on similar incidents where Allbee imposes himself on Asa making him feel more guilty each time they meet. To add to this burden, there is Asa's brother's family to whom he feels responsible when his brother Max is away. His nephew Mickey falls seriously ill and Elena asks him to help her out. These burdens, along with his constant struggle against the world, make Asa feel he is a victim.

Asa, like Joseph, is an isolated burdened hero, living apart and away from social obligations. He is completely suffocated by the guilt imposed on him by Allbee. At the beginning of the novel, because he feels unworthy, Asa is continually struggling to assert his place; we see him pushing into buses and through subway doors. To drive home
this basic atmosphere of alienation Bellow describes powerfully the crowded density of New York and the vivid picture of urban life is used to bring home its sudden savageries and its terrible loneliness.

In the novel two plot strands develop. In the first, Asa tries to deal with Allbee, to get rid of him, to understand him. In spite of Allbee's accusations, Asa begins to get intimate with him, and even makes an effort to help him, and allows him to stay with him:

I see you've got your heart set on sleeping here tonight. I could see that all along. You're just inviting yourself in.8

However, the final showdown comes when he finds Allbee in his apartment, making love to a strange woman. Asa had decided that he had had enough of Allbee. He throws Allbee and the woman out of the flat in a spasm of disgust and violence. This event is a kind of a symbolic release for Asa. The final event is reached when Allbee attempts suicide in such a way as to kill Asa as well. Just in time Asa turns off the gas and throws out Allbee this time for good:

Suddenly, he rushed from the bed and ran into the kitchen. He collided with someone who crouched there. The air was foul and hard to breathe. Gas was pouring from the oven... 9

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8 - Saul Bellow, The Victim, p.136.
9 - Ibid., p.129.
Asa clutched and hit at Allbee's face, and, getting scared, Allbee left and ran from the flat. This event again can be called a symbolic death of the old self, since Allbee is a projection of Asa's consciousness. Asa then feels a different, healthier and calmer man.

However, Asa is healed partly due to the second plot strand. Out of a sense of duty, he takes charge of his brother's family when Max is away. Partly on Asa's responsibility, Max's son is sent to the hospital, where he dies. Asa's emotional involvement, changing his attitude of blame for Max to love for him, and from duty to concern, helps make Asa aware that a man is not flawless, that "in humility, he must take responsibility even for what he is hardly responsible." 10

Thus, "clasping Leventhal's hand and stooping over it, he (Max) burst into tears. He whispered, but occasionally one of his sobs broke out...." 11

It is between these events that Leventhal comes to a "kind of recognition" 12 of man's responsibilities and his relationship with other men. The most important thing that happens to Leventhal is that he is stirred out of his "indifference" into a sense of general injustice and

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11 - Saul Bellow, The Victim, p.149.
12 - Tony Tanner, Saul Bellow, p.29.
suffering, and thence to an awareness of and adjustment to
the various responsibilities in life. Bellow's conception of
Allbee as everyman is brilliant.

However, Asa's change and transformation is far
more successful than Joseph's, and at the end of the book Asa
Leventhal is portrayed as a stronger, more relaxed and
balanced figure. At the end of the novel we find that truth
approaches Asa in his half-sleep state. The event of the
birthday party signifies a kind of birth. Asa himself
newborn, doubled over, unable to breathe or cry, at the same
time it is Asa giving birth to the elusive truth:

He had the strange feeling that there was not a
single part of him on which the whole world did
not press with full weight, on his body, his
soul, pushing upward in his breast and downward
in his bowels. He sensed that despite the pain
it was causing, it was a disguised opportunity
to discover something of great importance.13

At the other end the birthday party is in full
progress, Julia put the cake with its seven candles on the
table. The child lowered her face to the clear ring of
candles. On waking up, Asa felt easier and lighter and, by
the end of the novel, Asa is more comfortable.

Both the books, in spite of being powerful, have a
rather vague ending; nothing very remarkable happens after
the numerous disturbing and dramatic moments, and the ending

13 - Saul Bellow, The Victim, p.209.
is muted. At the end, Bellow does not really show us a changed and wiser man, but a rather more confident, less neurotic man.

Moreover, Bellow alone among our novelists has had the imagination and the sheer nerve to portray the Jew, "the little Jew as victimiser as well as victim." The victim is thus Bellow's most specifically Jewish book.

The Adventures of Augie March is written in a picaresque style. There are too many scenes and too many characters all linked up by the main character Augie March. The book indeed has variety with more than eighty characters passing before us. Incidents and episodes are just too many to describe even briefly.

The adventures turn out to have been part of a quest. Augie is, in fact, trying to discover the meaning of life. The events, therefore, are controlled and directed by deeper concerns. The adventures are typical of a picaresque hero; he drifts in and out of love affairs, friendships, jobs, political and social groups - all of which proffer a fate on him. But none of these fates is good enough for him, they all threaten imprisonment within some restrictive view of life.

Augie March is panoramic. Here, instead of the encapsulated worlds of Joseph's Chicago or Leventhal's New York, we get the open free world of Augie. Augie is

primarily evasive in terms of the action of the book. He seldom if ever initiates any line of action, he responds to suggestions, allows himself to be given momentum by other people's schemes, permits himself to be adopted in any number of ways, and then slips away. Thus Augie rejects most of the things the others offer him. In rejecting Anna Coblin's plans for him, he says, "my mind was already dwelling on a good enough fate."^15 After Augie has heard of his grandmother's death he tries to imagine an end to all that interfering energy. He, then, refuses to be adopted by Mrs. Renling:

She said she couldn't think of going out to Michigan alone and that I would drive and keep her company in the hotel. Afterwards I understood.^16

Augie, then, quarrels with Thea and tries to tell her that he had looked all his life for the right thing to do, and that he had opposed people in what they wanted to make of him. He also refuses to follow his brother Simon, into the worship of power and money. Simon's confrontation with his mother made Augie realize the faults his brother had made. Simon had married for money, hoping to achieve the luxury and the power that he longed for; but he soon realized what "he had taken on himself."^17 On the other hand, Manny Padilla, __

^16 - Ibid., p.159.
^17 - Ibid., p.269.
Augie's friend, who steals books, teaches Augie the trick of stealing, but Augie rejects this too.

Augie too has a rich girl lined up for him, but again he evades the trap of success in life and drifts into a quixotic love for a working girl, Mini. And then comes the curious and prolonged episode in the novel where Thea Fenchel returns to Augie, overwhelms him with desire and transports him to Mexico.

Augie has seen men like his brother become "faceless functions of the social structure, but the choice was theirs. " Augie realises that to accept such deformities is to become anonymous. Augie himself refuses to see people as functions, or to merely use them. Simon advises him for example, to seduce Lucy Magnus so that she will have to marry him and share her inheritance with him. Augie, however, persists on seeing the people as people.

Augie is vulnerable, "susceptible," he says; he inherited the trait from his mother. But after his ship is torpedoed and his trust in Bateshaw, his companion in the life boat, almost costs him his life, he says, "I took an oath of unsusceptibility." But he does not keep it.

However, although Augie distrusts the theories of other people, he has a few of his own. He wished to start a school of his own and he longed for simplicity. Thus, in the course of the novel, Augie realises that material progress

18 - Howard Harper, Desperate Faith, p.27.
only devalues life. Augie's difficulty like that of Joseph and Asa is in finding a focus. The whole setting is a sort of a corrupt game, and Augie's entry into each is followed by an effort of self extraction. Augie leaves each situation, but through them 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 errors. Augie's main affirmation is his refusal to "live a disappointed life."

In **Sieze the Day**, Tommy Wilhelm's life is also a series of errors and each one serves to limit his freedom, till we find him choking and suffocating.

The plot of the book covers one single day, and the movement is from a mounting experience of suffocating congestion to a moment of total release which is also a moment of vision.

Tommy Wilhelm's life is a history of failure. After seven wasted years trying his hand at various professions including film acting at Hollywood, now he feels it is too late to take up any profession. He is now living in Hotel Gloriana with his retired father with whom he has a strained relationship, Dr. Adler, Wilhelm's father, is a selfish and vain old man, and he boasts of Tommy's successes, which were rather failures, to his friends. During breakfast, Dr. Adler tells his friend Mr. Perls, "my son's figure was up in five figures."²⁰ This plot brings out the strain of the father -

²⁰ - Saul Bellow, **Sieze the Day**, p.36.
son relation, when Tommy does not understand "why I have to
lay my whole life bare to this blasted herring here."\(^{21}\)

When Tommy asks for help, his father responds only
with gratuitous advice, and gets angry and resentful when
Tommy's pathetic pleas for help expose the father's
selfishness. The novel depicts human failure through the
image of a drowning man. Tommy has made a mess of his life
and now is gasping for breath. He is still paying heavily for
his mistakes, his wife Margaret would not give a divorce, and
he had to support her and the two children. However, there
isn't any dramatic incident or event in the book, but the
atmosphere of being burdened is finely brought out through
Tommy's consciousness.

Thus Bellow performs a feat similar to that of
Flaubert in Madame Bovary. Tommy moves through time from his
pre-breakfast appearance outside the hotel room to his
attendance at the funeral of a stranger in the mid-afternoon;
the narration renders this successive movement in a series of
eight stills, or scenes. Instead of cutting back and forth
between levels of action in time -present as Flaubert does,
Bellow's narration often cuts back and forth between time
present and time past in the mind of Tommy.

Tamkin is an interesting person and his ideas
penetrate Tommy, but he is equally cunning; he has invested
Wilhelm's last seven hundred dollars in the commodities
market. At the stock market Tommy suddenly panics when he

\(^{21}\) Ibid., p.35.
sees the figures. He makes calculations with numb fingers.
He looks for Tamkin who has suddenly disappeared. He feels
that he would cry; but hardening himself he walks on. This
incident leads him to go to his father again for money. His
father is in the health club, and when Tommy pleads his father
gets furious and calls him a slob. To add to this burden
Tommy receives a phone call from his wife. She asks him for
money as usual, she reminds him that it was he who had left
her and now he has to pay the price of bringing up his
children. These events lead him to walk on desolately on the
streets where he gets into a funeral procession.

Tommy, in search of Tamkin after losing his last
penny, runs frantically through the streets. He is soon
captured in a crowd of people and pushed into a chapel for some
funeral service. Inside it was dark and cool, and within a
few minutes, he forgets Tamkin. He stands beside the coffin
and suddenly he begins to cry. He cries at first softly, but
soon he begins to sob loudly. He is past words, past reason,
coherence; he is unable to stop. "The source of tears had
suddenly sprung open within him...." 22

This final event of the book depicts the ultimate
release from sufferings. The end is Wilhelm's death by
drowning, and every scene in the book has pointed towards
this culminating moment. Tommy cries for the failure that he
has been, for the death in life that he has experienced. He
cries for the death of his pretender soul, now put to rest.

22 - Saul Bellow, Sieze the Day, p.117.
He cries for the time he has wasted and the mistakes he has made. His tears are the tears of grief. But because he is able to transcend his personal grief, Wilhelm's tears are also tears of joy. In destroying the pretending soul he prepares for the coming of the true soul. The events make it clear that Tommy's drowning is also a baptism, a rebirth.

"The book has an authentic density, real pain and genuine shouldering of problems and it earns its lyric moment." \(^{23}\)

After realism, Bellow turned to romance and 
Henderson the Rain King appeared. Henderson is a somewhat different type of person compared to the isolated and meek ones like Joseph, Asa and Tommy. Henderson is big and strong enough to confront his problems. He is too rich and too strong to succumb to society's net. Henderson's education through the course of the novel comes in stages. First comes the decampment from civilisation - and Henderson plants himself in Africa. At the age of fifty five Henderson is in a state of chaos, he feels that life as well as death is closing upon him. This feeling of strangulation came to him when he had gone to Europe with Lily and saw an octopus beckoning through the glass in a marine aquarium:

The tentacles throbbed and motioned through the glass, the bubbles sped upward and I thought, this is my last day. Death is giving me notice. \(^{24}\)

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24 - Saul Bellow, Henderson the Rain King, p.22.
A voice constantly says within him "I want, I want." Moreover it is the confrontation with death which drives Henderson to Africa. The event described here is when Henderson is shouting at Lily in a violent quarrel, their old housekeeper Miss Lenox, dies of a heart attack in the kitchen. He decides for everyone's sake that he must leave. The second event comes when Henderson encounters the first tribe, the Arnewi, who are gentle, kindly and powerful people. He learns from the Queen that "Man wants to live." Their cattle are dying because they could not drink water from the cistern which has become populated with frogs. His first act among the Arnewi is to set fire to a bush with his cigarette lighter. Then shamed into a wrestling contest with prince Itelo, Henderson wins. The queen's sister Mtalba, betrothes herself to him. Failing to persuade the Arnewi that the frogs will not harm their cattle, Henderson plans to kill the frogs with a homemade bomb. Unfortunately the bomb destroys the cistern too, and Henderson leaves the Arnewi in disgrace,

"I have made disaster, Itelo kill me. All I've got to offer is my life, so take it." 25

After this humiliating event, Henderson returns to the desert to embark on a second harder education. The Wariri greet Henderson with an ambush, put him in a cell with a corpse and offer no hospitality. This situation finds Henderson facing death very closely. However, their King Dahfu is an educated man and soon becomes Henderson's friend

25 - Ibid., p.104.
and guide. Henderson attends a rain ceremony with the king, impulsively performs a feat of strength at which a large native had failed, and finds that he has become the Sungo, or Rain King of the Wariri. This incident where Henderson lifts the wooden idol Mummah at the ceremony is described with great intensity:

As I came closer I saw how huge she was, how overspilling and formless. She had oiled and glittered before my eyes. Never hesitating I encircled Mummah with my arms. I wasn't going to take no for an answer. I pressed my belly upon her and my knees somewhat ..... The wood gave to my pressure and benevolent Mummah with her fixed smile yielded to me: I lifted her from the ground and carried her twenty feet. The Wariri jumped up and down, screaming, singing, raving and praising me. 26

Dahfu gives Henderson lessons in submission to reality and transcendence. Dahfu begins to take him along on his daily visits to his lion's den. Dahfu teaches Henderson that the lion is unavoidable. "She will force the present upon you." 27 If a man can relax he will pass through fear into a new beauty, with all unhealthy ego emphasis removed. The event when Henderson goes down into the lion's den for the first time is described in a comic vein:

I can't help myself. It's what I feel. I'm scared of her, I'm scared all right. 28

26 - Saul Bellow, Henderson the Rain King, p.180-81.
27 - Ibid., p.219.
28 - Saul Bellow, Henderson the Rain King, p.211.
Through this device Dahfu makes it clear that, the key to a meaningful life is to live in the present moment, the here and now, and to use all the power of the mind to heighten the intensity and meaning of that moment.

In the last incident of the book, when Dahfu is killed, and Henderson stares down at a real wild lion, he realises the horror of death in reality. His instruction ends here rather unsettled:

Then at the very doors of consciousness, there was a snarl and I looked down from this straw perch into the big, angry, hair framed face of the lion. It was all wrinkled, contracted: within those wrinkles was the darkness of murder.\(29\)

Then Henderson saw Dahfu falling --

"The king had fallen on to the lion. I saw the convulsion of the animal's hindquarters. The claws tore instantly, there came blood...."\(30\)

Thus the priceless lesson which Henderson learns from the doomed God-king is the meaning of death and suffering. In learning to face the lion, Henderson learns to face death. We see that much of his egotism has fallen and now his life promises to be more peaceful and purposeful. The book ends on affirmation and acceptance on the part of Henderson. He is at peace with reality. He kisses the earth and calls the grass his cousins. He runs in joy around the airplane. He is ready for love, for Lily, for America.

\(29\) Ibid., p.287.

\(30\) Ibid., p.290.
Bellow's next novel, Herzog, combines the two main impulses of his fiction: realism and romance. This is Bellow's most impressive book and it seems to summarize and contain all the questions, the problems, the feelings, the plights, and the aspirations worked over in the previous novels. Like Dangling Man, The Victim, Seize the Day, it conveys the sense of a real sufferer hedged in by circumstances and neurotic attitudes. Herzog is a psychological novel. Herzog is a worried, harassed, brought down, messed up man and at the point of chaos. He is terribly isolated and cut off, wandering about the streets and brooding in lonely rooms. The book contains only a few actual incidents in the present.

The significant action mainly takes part in his head. His mind seems to take on itself the burdens of the whole world, the problems of mankind. Herzog begins and ends with a partially reborn hero, Moses Herzog - at peace with the world, living amid nature with nature growing up raggedly about him, the stars overhead like spiritual fire, his food shared with rats. The rest of the novel tells the process of arriving at this stage of his initial need, "to explain, to have it out, to justify, to clarify, to make amends." 31

The novel tells of his divorce and confusion, of his thinking, compulsive thinking, about Mady, his ex-wife and Gersbach his friend. He thinks and writes letters to the

31 - Saul Bellow, Herzog, p.10.
people all over the world. He writes, "I am afraid of falling apart, I need help in the worst way. I don't know why I should write to you at all." 32 He thinks about the various women in his life, and he thinks of the wreck of our culture, as he examines the wreck of himself, to see if both can be saved. Mostly this is all that happens in the novel, and the plot, such as it is, is what happens in the mind of the hero.

Herzog is living in words, not in the world; he keeps writing letters to everyone on earth. He is unable to live with Lilly and Arnold at Martha's vineyard. He visits them, has dinner and later feeling uneasy he leaves after writing a note saying, "Have to go back. Not able to stand kindness at this time." 33 He also runs away from Ramona's kindness; waiting on her bed for her to appear, Herzog considers Rousseau, Kant and Hegel. Through his thoughts we see that during his marriage to Mady, he either ignored her or fought with her. Even from his family, Moses, like Tommy, felt cut off once he had grown up. In the course of the novel we see that, "Herzog is and therefore for Bellow, man is partially redeemed, because he accepts himself and he accepts his death." 34

However, towards the end of the novel, the incident in the court is a symbolic quest for justice, it is both his enemies and himself on trial. This visit to the New York city

32 - Ibid., p. 17.
33 - Ibid., p.104.
courthouse is a melodramatic sequence. He witnesses the trial of a woman who had beaten her child to death, while her lover lay smoking on the bed. At this point in the novel, Herzog's inner and outer worlds are joined and he becomes a man of action. Impulsively he flies to Chicago, steals an old revolver that had belonged to his father. He projects his guilt on to Mady and Gersbach, just as Asa projected his into Allbee. Of course, no reader expects Herzog to pull the trigger. Seeing them as real people, he is on the road to transformation. Gersbach's tenderness to June has freed Herzog of the desire to murder him and Madelaine.

Bellow indicates a second significance of Herzog's inability to shoot Gersbach and Mady. Herzog is continuing to act out his role as Papa Herzog. Just as Papa was unable to shoot him, so he is unable to shoot them. Thus, even, here, he is imitating his father, and is still controlled by his father's values.

And now, his need for others leads him to telegraph Ramona, and leads him to visit Lucas Asphaltter. If once he had run away from his friends at the vineyard, now he welcomes their kindness and now, for the first time, instead of telling Luke his own troubles, he discusses Luke's problems. He is ready now to visit his daughter June, to give her love without becoming enraged about Gersbach.

But then comes the automobile incident. The accident has a rather obvious significance. The whole
incident is a closure, a completion of the action that began the morning. Herzog walked into court, through his trip to Chicago, his attempt to murder, his accident; one large pattern develops. If on that morning in court he feels symbolically put up for trial-and leaves-now he submits to judgement. It is as if he had to sin in a small way and be taken by the police in order to be released from his guilt.

"A little volkswagen truck was on his tail. He touched the brakes meaning to slow up and let the other driver pass. But the brakes were all too new and responsible. The falcon stopped short and the small truck stuck it from behind and rammed it into a utility pole. June screamed and clutched at his shoulders as he was thrown forward against the steering wheel." 35

Then comes the painful trial of being interrogated by the policeman for having a gun on him. Then there is the confrontation with Madelaine in the police station. He saw her at last for the bitch she really was, and realises that he is better off without her. Herzog is ready for the world again.

The casting off of selfhood has been the dominant movement in the Dangling Man, The Victim, Sieze the Day, and Henderson the Rain King; once again it is true of Herzog.

Later in the woods, the discarding of selfhood is described as escape from "the life that exhibits itself." 36

35 - Saul Bellow, Herzog, p.289.
Herzog thus discards his individuality. Now he is living in reality, the reality that Henderson enters. And as a start in the woods, he writes this exquisite note to God:

How my mind has struggled to make coherent sense. I have not been too good at it. But have desire to do your unknowable will, taking it, and you without symbols. Everything of intensest significance, especially if divested of me.37

Like Henderson the Rain King, this novel ends with the promise of accommodation to society. Thus Bellow through the various incidents, has presented us with a careful unfolding of Herzog's psychological transformation.

"We are talking, "writes Herzog in a letter to an academic colleague," of the whole life of mankind,"38 and this continues to be Saul Bellow's subject. Mr. Sammler's Planet provides a clue to his treatment of the subject, "no matter where you picked up, humankind knotted and tangled, supplied more oddities that you could keep up with."39 No previous novel of Bellow was so firmly anchored in a contemporary situation. Mr. Sammler's Planet contains regard for the immediate situation of the modern crisis of culture in America and in the West, a crisis that had to do with sexual primitivism, drugs, the break up of the family, craving for violence and much more.

37 - Saul Bellow, Herzog, p.333.
38 - Ibid., p.105.
39 - Saul Bellow, Mr. Sammler's Planet, p.94.
Arthur Sammler is himself a refugee, in his seventies; he is a Polish Jew whose youth was spent as a journalist in London among sophisticated intellectuals and artists. The Nazis had murdered his wife, but Sammler being left for dead, crawled out of a mass grave to survival. Now tall and lean, he walks the streets of New York, totting an umbrella, wearing tinted spectacles to protect his one good eye.

The plot of Mr. Sammler's Planet is one of extraordinary complication, but behind its machinations is the problem of what now is to be done in a world, where once firmly believed-ideas of conduct seemed discredited. The question raised by the novel is how does one stay human in a world that often seems determined to shed humanity.

The novel begins with the incident where Sammler is invited to a lecture in a seminar at the Columbia University by Feffer. When Sammler arrives at the University, Sammler's suspicion deepens, for Feffer leads him to a large auditorium filled with unruly students. After beginning his lecture, Sammler is shouted down by a student; shaken and unable to find Feffer, the old man leaves the auditorium. Feffer who wanted only publicity as well as capital, did not bother about what happened to Sammler, and just disappeared from the scene. Thus Bellow elaborates the image of Febber as an intellectual who is unreflective and unprincipled.
"New York makes one think about the collapse of civilization; the end of the world." 40

This verdict that civilisation is in collapse derives mainly from the behaviour of Sammler's relatives, Angela and Wallace Gruner. These are the grown up children of his nephew Elya Gruner, a wealthy physician who has supported him. Elya has given his two children a stable home and a good education. Yet, now, as he lies dying in a New York hospital, they engage in immoral behaviour. Spoilt by too much money, Angela flies to Mexico with a young lawyer. On his death bed, Angela's father hears of her sexual escapade, and he becomes greatly disheartened. Yet Angela considers it beyond her capacities to ask her father's forgiveness. Wallace is intelligent but unstable in character. In Wallace's reply about his instability, Bellow communicates an absence of social awareness on the part of middle-class youth.

In Sammler's Planet, Bellow also refuses the enlightened vision of scientific progress as a path to social harmony. He incorporates into the plot of the novel, an intellectual debate on this critical western concept. Govinda Lal, an Indian biologist, has written a paper on the possibility of human colonies on the moon. Confronted with the slums of New York city and the impoverished behaviour of the Gruner children Sammler argues against the idea of colonisation. "In his belief social problems cannot be remedied

40 - Ibid., p. 244.
through application of science and technology. All human progress must be individual and inward.\textsuperscript{41}

Thus in the end Sammler says, "The terms which, in his inmost heart, each man knows. As I know mine. As all know. For that is the truth of it - that we all know, that we know......"\textsuperscript{42}

Sammler acknowledges his social impotence and futility and advocates an individual awareness, his view takes into consideration man's selfishness and his role in society, implying that man has the capacity to feel and know. Bellow affirms his faith in man and also absolves him of responsibility for society's evils and as Kumkum Sangari has said, this novel "depicts a social reality in which the individual's impotence becomes a universal category and must therefore, along with his subjectivity, be elevated if some semblance of humanism is to remain intact."\textsuperscript{43} Thus Sammler's Planet also affirms and desires more involvement of the self in non-self.

Humboldt's Gift has been described as Bellow's "most American novel."\textsuperscript{44} This is true since its immediate subject


\textsuperscript{42} - Saul Bellow, \textit{Mr. Sammler's Planet}, p.252.


matter is the fate of an artist in his quest for success in America. Bellow dramatically points out the impact of public life upon the sensibility of an intellectual; he also describes the ruinous influence of money and notoriety on the life of Charles Citrine.

Citrine is a famous historian and playwright who has won a Pulitzer prize. A play produced on Broadway has added further fame to his reputation. In addition, he is editing a journal of thought that is studying boredom as an American social problem. As the novel unfolds, we see that Charles has been living the "art-life." When he should be engaged in intellectual labour, he has been acting like a Hollywood celebrity. Citrine has also bought the prestigious Mercedes at the urging of his girl friend. Realising that he is making a muddle of his life, Citrine tries to free himself from these distractions. He begins to practise meditation, turning inward; he attempts to simplify his existence. The subject of his meditation is his dead friend Von Humboldt Fleisher, a writer who had encouraged him at the beginning of his career. Humboldt's Gift is a script for a play that he left to Citrine in his will. This gift enables Citrine to live modestly, after his former wife and his friends have taken most of his money. More significant, however, is the example of a writer whose life was ruined by his craving for public approval.

Through the figure of Humboldt, Bellow gives a short history of intellectual trends since the late 1930's. Brought
back to life through Citrine's memory, Humboldt appears as a poet whose career had begun in Greenwich village. At the time when intellectuals formed an adversary culture, Humboldt succeeds with his first book. But he is not satisfied simply to be a writer. He secures a teaching position at Princeton University. Humboldt then buys a house in a New York suburb, and wishes to maintain a comfortable way of life. Citrine remembers how Humboldt had hoped for the election of Adlai Stevenson to the U.S. Presidency, and Humboldt expects to become a "cultural adviser" to him. But when Stevenson loses, Humboldt is crest fallen and he dies before his dreams can be realised.

Humboldt's Gift is thus a long sprawling novel, it is dense with descriptions of urban landscape, with a wide range of characters, with insights. There is even a full description of the history of boredom in the middle of the book in a tone of playful seriousness.

Thus, Charles Citrine says "I've been attached to Humboldt for nearly 40 years. It's been an ecstatic connection. The hope of having poetry - the joy of knowing the kind of man that created poetry ....... Now I begin to understand what Tolstoy was getting at when he called on mankind to cease the false and unnecessary comedy of history and begin simply to live. It's clearer and clearer to me in Humboldt's heartbreak and madness." 45

45 - Saul Bellow, Humboldt's Gift, p.464.
Thus Citrine understands the essence of life as the ability to transcend matter and self.

Similarly, in the *Deans December*, Bellow's latest novel, Bellow has compared the conditions in the U.S. with those of Eastern Europe. Emphasising differences rather than similarities, the novel is set in Bucharest, Rumania, and in Chicago. Albert Corde, both a journalist and a dean of Chicago University is a man well studied in cultural history.

At the beginning of the novel, we see an incident where Albert Corde has accompanied his wife Minna to Rumania to visit her dying mother, Valeria Raresh. Through the history of the Raresh family, Bellow comments upon the way of life of intellectuals in Rumania. Valeria Raresh was banished from the communist party because she had accepted medical supplies from Western countries. When the grim realities of the Rumanian "prison state" becomes plain to her, she helped her daughter, Minna, flee the country. For this crime, the old woman is made to die in isolation in a hospital she herself had founded. The secret police permits Corde and Minna just to visit the dying woman in an eight day period. Through this plot, Bellow brings out the absence of personal rights in Eastern Europe. He also extends this dismal picture as Corde observes the general social environment. As he waits in her apartment for the death of his mother-in-law, Corde notices a lack of the freedom of speech and of assembly.

The other focus of this novel is America's urban chaos. This emerges as Corde reviews his troubled career in
Chicago. Corde had instigated public controversy by publishing two articles on the poor conditions of the city, jails and hospitals. In the course of the novel, Bellow represents correct and incorrect intellectual attitudes towards such urban problems as crime and justice. According to Corde, urban decay is part of a larger cultural problem.

Corde learns that improper intellectual attitudes complicate the urban crisis. In his investigations of jails and centres for drug addicts, he experiences the despair of the blacks who form an underclass. They are a larger social group incapable of any values and are beyond the reach of education. Bellow narrates the case of a black criminal named Spofford Mitchell whom Corde is investigating. The incident shows how Mitchell had abducted and raped a white woman named Sally Sathers, and then locked her in the trunk of his car and drove around during the day, taking her out on occasion to rape her again. After holding the woman captive overnight, Mitchel returned her to the trunk of his car and drove to court to stand trial for a previous rape. Acquitted for lack of evidence, he came to his car, raped Sally and then drove to a dump where he killed her. Apprehended and jailed, Mitchel confesses, but he receives a public defence. Corde visits the public defender Vareness. Through this incident Bellow exposes the horrors of crime and the wrong judgement on the part of the judicial system which encourages crimes even more. Thus although, he is determined to save Mitchell from the death
sentence, Varenness is not sure why he should do so. Through Corde's interview with Varenness, Bellow portrays a man lost in abstractions of ideology. In Varenness' shocked reply, Bellow exposes a mind without a sympathetic imagination:

Mr. Varenness did not care for what I was telling him. He had put himself in a posture to make an effective argument for his client. 46

Moreover, in the novel, Bellow extends his criticism of American Universities, which are only controlled by some top administrators. In his capacity as Dean, Corde identifies a murdered graduate student. The student had a good record, yet on the night of his death, he comes under the influence of two criminals. Feeling sympathy for the dead boy, Corde becomes involved; he encourages the University to offer a reward for information about the murders. Two black suspects are brought to trial, but because they are black, damaging publicity results. Dean Corde is blamed for committing treason. This incident makes Corde realise the lack of initiative by the intellectuals. Thus, Corde concludes that he is compelled by a "truth passion." He may be isolated but he will always be truthful, and he writes:

What if death should be like this, the soul finding an exit. The rest beyond it, drew you constantly as the completion of your reality. 47

46 - Saul Bellow, The Dean's December, p.194.
47 - Ibid., p. 286.
Thus we see that the themes of the novels are brought out very finely through the situations and the various incidents described by Bellow, and although the plots are on the surface level, they reveal the underlying serious themes in a fine and delicate manner. Finally, according to Chester Eisinger, Bellow, through events and incidents "lays bare the thoughts and emotions of the subject," which are the concerns of not only Bellow's characters but of every thinking intelligent individual in a crisis-ridden society.

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