In Iris Murdoch's *The Bell*, there is no belly laughter, absurd clowning or buffonery as in Bellow's *Henderson the Rain King*, instead Murdoch resorts to unintentional comedy, crankiness and provokes simple laughter through her protagonist Dora Greenfield. The unselfing of Dora is quite peculiar in unconventional fragments without much attentiveness or care to the character herself and therefore the laughter at times is merely implied in the form of some amusing joke or demeanour wrought more by the obligation of contingencies or sheer accident.

There are more of symbolic raptures in Murdoch's Dora than in Bellow's Henderson. The self-indulgent Dora provokes laughter more by her frivolous and flippant attitude than by the gesturous gaiety of Henderson. However, in comparison with Bellow's *Rain King*, Murdoch's *Bell* resigns to something of a silly and simple comedy owing to the crude traits attached to
each character in the novel. But, all the same, both the novels are concerned with the consciousness of one or more communities and Dora's unselfing begins with her arrival to Imber Court to join her husband Paul. On her arrival, she amusedly learns about the hypocrisies of the Imber community and her own increasing loathesomeness about her husband Paul. Even the 'relationships' in Imber court are fleeting and superficial. And Dora virtually escapes all illusions only after the symbolic (laughter-provoking) discovery of the bell, the implied significance of which is its ringing sound that would undo all mysteries of false existence and lead to a wakefulness of the Self.

Dora is an erratic Bohemian who has a talent for happiness but is clumsy at religion. But Dora has her own amusing scruples which she exploits at odd instances thus attracting undue attention to herself and the situation. However silly this 'funny' character would seem to be, her naivety compensates for all the humour and command which Henderson shows in his own context, and therefore does not fall very low in the standards of unselfing. Dora, in contrast to Henderson, blows up the hypocrisy and flippancy of the members at Imber court specially that of Michael Meade, Toby, Nick Fawley, Catherine and Paul himself but fortunately or unfortunately unselfs in all earnest as any other Murdochian
protagonist but is left quite at loggerheads with her the Imber community directly or indirectly but is unable to make a radical, fixed choice about her life with Paul, though she loves him and loathes his aggravating tendencies simultaneously. In this context, it is obvious that Dora is a symbolic parody of existence itself, who seems not to attach herself permanently or fixedly to any relationship as existence itself would have.

Dora is a foolish romantic who flirts about from the very beginning of the novel, unable to cope with the ruggedness of her life with her husband Paul. She whimsically deserts and returns to him each time some new perplexity exhorts her mind. The character of Dora is so exploited by Murdoch that even in her fleeting, temperamental love-life, she seems to signify the rootlessness and the lack of profundity in human relationships. The rain king has his own questions about existence and sets out in search to clear the Africa of his soul, identifying himself mostly with animals. Dora's intention on the other hand, is to turn a riotous witch to the otherwise apparently peaceful community at Imber Court and to strip their illusions to threadbare extents, in which of course she does succeed. Besides, being inexplicable and foolish, Dora is also perplexed by her own cruises in and out the
predicaments of life. What perplexes her most is the ceaseless temptation of love-life, the menacing moralisations on the one hand and the thoughtless sexual commitments on the other, the perpetual emphasis for God and religion, and the deliberate renunciation of it, the tenderness that melts out of emotions in the presence of animals, and the efficacy with which individuals could annihilate other individuals, the reality that flees past in pace with time, and disillusionments that make existential predicament even more adverse. All these, however, are analysed by Murdoch in a marathon session of dialogue, with each member of the Imber community, who are all entangled with Dora in a strange way. Dora's role and the irony of it lies in the fact that all the other members at Imber court ease themselves out of their psychological deterioration while Dora remains static and unresolved until the close of the novel.

The perplexity in Dora's character is her natural flair for sexual flamboyance which she more or less flaunts about through the novel. Dora indulges in this emotion with several characters in the novel such as Michael, Noel and Toby. She senses a beam of physical desire (B 75) for Michael which in turn offers her ego an elevation in the consolation of which she prefers to bask rather than refining her own consciousness. This lowly trait debases the otherwise convalescent nature of
Dora (in terms of her awakening of the Imber consciousness). Dora seems to seek a hideout in various men, each in turn, as long as this helps her shun any mental proximity with her own husband Paul. For Paul's love is a bit too overwhelming for a fickle woman as Dora.

Dora is unable to perceive the potential in her own self, though at times she makes it evident to the other characters who notice her individuality, female prowess involved in the awakening of the Imber consciousness. The members at Imber court begin their own self-diagnosis only after Dora makes her visit there and has an individual encounter with each of them. But there is yet another factor that determines Dora's fallacy. And this factor is resolved by the author herself. Murdoch prefers to give importance to characters who act with a sense of deliberation and balance instead of characters who made rash decisions "impelled by some romantic inner-force", over which the characters seldom have any control. Romantic love does not take the individual beyond any human control but each individual is victimized by himself and puts himself under some spell or fantasy, (Whiteside, "Novels of Murdoch" 28) for it is simply "a desire for what you do not have". In this context Dora suffers from a kind of instability or discontent with regard to her relationship with Paul and therefore she writhes between her
choice and sense of loss that becomes the cause for her wretchedness in the novel.

Humour, in the novel, is stifled owing to the other dimensions involved therein. Besides Dora's unselfing in the premises of the Imber Abbey, she herself is symbolic of the unfaithful, legendary nun who drowned herself in the lake, owing to her erratic character, and also owing to her deliberate, wilful designs to unravel and expose the mystery of the bell by hauling it up from under water in order to bare the shame of the past upon the inmates of Imber court. Above all, Dora with witch-like tendencies schemes the uncovering of the bell as she is made cheerless by the constant moral judgement made on her at the Imber court. Dora is too wary of this and uses the (image of) the bell to cast an obscure shadow perpetually upon the Imber community.

Unlike Henderson who leaves the audience in an uproarious laughter about existence itself, Dora by the follies and idiocies of her own nature has others laughing at her. Dora seems to be quite gullible and almost a hoax or a humbug in certain contexts when she instantaneously obeys the instruction of Mrs. Mark, for instance, to lay a handkerchief on her head and only after obeying this implicitly she removes the "idiotic handkerchief" (B 34) from her head. Quite amusingly
she begins to run alarmed by the mere sound of a bell, soiling herself like an idiotic school girl "past caring what anyone saw or thought" (B 75). The most effective of Murdoch's technique in evoking something of a foolish comicality is made evident in Dora's scooping up of a butterfly to rescue it from being "homicidally" stampeded to death under the feet of her fellow-passengers. She is indeed embarrassed by her own frivolous concern for a mere butterfly - but Murdoch perhaps has other intentions to reveal the flirtatious flutterings of her own protagonist whose Self is lost and found amidst a remotely grave Imber community, only to be lost again, like the protagonist's own lost suitcase or shoes.

Dora scarcely exists as an intelligent protagonist in the novel. Her husband's high profile, and the disciplined systematic routine at Imber displease her and are definitely not Dora's way of life at all. This waywardness in her and makes her all the more ridiculous in the view of both the readers and the fellow characters in the novel, which perhaps also is the very intention of the novelist.

Dora is apparently 'fixed', believing firmly in the enthralling shadow of her emotions as true and eternal. She spares no time for herself to make precisions about the 'real' needs and necessities of life/ existence as does Henderson.
Dora lacks exactitude about her own commitments and the profundity they require specially in such matters as love, marriage and reality above all. Oates is of the opinion that "...for most people life is a matter of sequential enchantments, a halequinade in which many seek salvation but few find it, because they are captivated by mere shadows and blind to the true source of light" ("Love and Illusions" 20).

This illusion is no reservation for Dora alone. Strangely, Dora has a sexual drive for both Michael and Toby and unabashedly flirts beyond the feminine limits of transgression. There is nothing much to her expectation in Paul, and Dora is scarcely ill-at-ease to leave or to return to him. Paul too does not reciprocate or cater to her needs even as to an ordinary fellow-human being and therefore (as in several instances):

Dora felt the need to show him that she could still act independently. She was not his slave. Yes, she would go: and the idea, now it existed more fully for her, was delightful, she would make no drama of it. She would come back jauntily, casually, almost at once... what a tonic it would be for her. (B 183)

It is meant, not as a blow merely to Paul but also to Imber which Dora describes as "a slap in the face for Imber" (B 183). Dora is worked to being an ingrate. However, here even the comic operative falls low owing to Dora's prolonged
displacement of Self, too much disengagement from serious consideration of existence and over-exertion and anxiety shown upon the Imber community when Dora herself is lost to her Self. As a result of all this, the comic fragrance that should have comingled with existential contemplation is trivialized by the trivial cast (Feo, "Mechanical Murdoch" 356) of Dora in the novel. Groping in her illusory world, Dora is obstinate about her pessimism and merely anticipates failures and desolation even at the faintest probability of a possible reconciliation between Paul and herself.

The state of affairs between Paul and Dora is so unstable and loosely contingent that Dora who is quite dumb, is unable to integrate the reality of their relationship. She prefers to desert him at one instance though she feels thoroughly melted when she recalls his undaunted love for her. This becomes her very weapon of defence which she uses in opposition to the patient show of love Paul exercises upon her. Where love and her relationship with her husband Paul are concerned, Dora is given to numerous misconceptions of it and cannot compromise with any attitude even slightly lesser than what is romantic. This causes the completion of the first failure in the otherwise jolly character of Dora, for whom the institution of marriage is to be enclosed in the aims of another (B 18).
The paradoxes in Dora's self are carefully manoeuvred by the novelist to remain imperfect and still seize the weaknesses in the other characters to her own favour. This mockery gives Dora the tenacity to perform her role as the protagonist though not intellectually as Henderson does.

Dora is a type who enjoys her freedom to her own whims and fancies and basically she believes that behind all the ostentatious disciplinary system in Imber, there is something quite unreliable about it specially keeping in mind young Catherine becoming a nun. Dora, therefore, naturally loathes the idea that such an institution flimsy in its own stance should comment upon her morality:

...which she at times resented. Often it seemed to her that the community were easily, casually even, judging her, placing her. The fact that so little was expected of her was itself significant. This was distressing. The sense that the judgement occurred... automatically... was still more distressing. (B 133)

The pattern of will and action woven within the Imber community apparently defeats immorality but it is only an illusory freedom as the defiance is merely external and not much in practice. It is this fallen condition of Imber that Dora dislikes. She prefers not to be assessed by such a community, even though the number of the community's transgressions and the mishaps within its campus is quite negligible in comparison
with her own individual contribution to it. Dora, by way of revenge, would love to magnify this fallen condition of Imber by hauling up the bell for which she seeks Michael's help (Beams, "Fortunate fall" 424). Mrs. Mark's hinting explanation runs as follows:

'It is true', said Mrs. Mark, 'that these women lay upon themselves austerities from which you and I would shrink in terror. But just as we think the sinner is better than he is when we imagine that suffering enables him, so we do less than justice to the saint when we think that his sacrifices grieve him in the way they would grieve us. (B 69)

This astringent remark about the reality of good is quite abhorred by Dora. But, of course Dora is "still stirred and affected by what she had seen," (B 69), trodding or "blundering on in her uncomfortable shoes" (B 69), symbolic of her own incongruous presence at Imber court. Within the Imber premises men like Michael and Toby explore reality unlike Dora. These characters visualise reality never really once, guarding themselves against the devouring forces of 'commitments' of existence such as love, marriage, happiness and sex. Their predicament reveals their own admonitions about life and its ruthlessness. Inspite of all evil censures that take the toll in Michael's life, Michael is vaguely aware that no definite solution is quite accessible to him. Michael's mind is suffocated by the fallen world of his own consciousness and
that is why Michael sees the Abbess alone as one of the 'most powerful' and relies heavily upon her for moral consolation and seeks the assuring warmth of her words. Toby, on the other hand, is a sensuous youth whose plight is made all the more vulnerable at the hands of perverse (homosexuals) men as Michael. Even Toby feels that he has received:

...One of the earliest lessons of adult life: that one is never secure. At any moment one can be removed from a state of guileless serenity and plunged into its opposite, without any intermediate condition, so high about us do the waters rise of our own and other people's imperfection. (B 160)

These men do see 'reality' without effecting much utility for themselves in some effort to lead themselves away from being further entrained by such existential fatality. Therefore they seem no better in their predicament in comparison with Dora who is not so tormented by 'wakefulness' nor by the absence of it. At such junctures both Dora and the other characters are on par with each other for these men like cowards are fatalistically 'giving up,' while Dora, whose cowardice is restrained by the limits of her own attitudes and behaviour (specially towards Paul), is 'giving way' to a fatalistic distortion of her Self (Kaufmann, Existentialism, 301). Young men like Toby, therefore, are easily penalised by the heavy moralising of Nick Fawley that almost sounds like a threat in the name of religion. The menacing sermon is made in
a symbolic reference to the entire Imber community including Dora and Paul:

...We are come of a fallen race, we are sinners one and all. Gone are the days in the Garden,... when we loved each other and were happy. Now we are set each man against his fellow and the mark of Cain is upon us, and with our sin comes grief and hatred and shame. What is there to lighten our darkness? ... to ease our pain? ... there is a consolation and remedy, the very word of God. (B 257)

Nick's speech is meant to make each individual in Imber feel dissatisfied with their state of vulgar existence and the apparent doctrines they strive to follow. The speech is a kind of defiance to the wayward life led by Michael, Dora, Catherine and Toby and also is meant to freeze their misdoings at least from then on (Kaufman, Existentialism 25). The entire experience at Imber is distorted for almost all of them, except Dora, who is faintly or controversially exempted from the rest, owing to the faint show of improvisation towards the close of the novel.

Sequential to Nick's sermon to Toby, it becomes essential to analyse whether God or religion has a role (at all) to play in the novel or if these concepts alter the lives of the characters - specially Dora. Life has been quite distortive to Dora with not many instances that she would relish to recall, as she declares to Michael in a certain
context. But even this fruitless existence does not impel her towards seeking a resort in either God or religion. So the existence of Imber court itself appears naturally queer to her:

What in any case was a lay religious community? Dora's ignorance of religion, as of most things, was formidable. She had never in fact been able to distinguish religion from superstition, and had given up her own practice of it when she discovered that she could say the Lord's prayer quickly but not slowly. She lost such faith as she had without pain and had not the occasion to reconsider the matter. (B 14)

One has to be irrational in order to be spiritual, according to Unamuno. This perhaps would help to explain Dora's indifference to God and religion. There prevails a certain animosity in her own personal rationalisations and the ideal life set at Imber court. The animosity is owing to her freakish demeanour and her inability to lead an ideal life (Illie, Unamuno 170). And as far as Dora is concerned such things are trifles and for a character as Dora who indulges in unpremeditated, impulsive activities, pleasant for the moment alone, such set concepts and ideals bear no value.

Murdoch, however, seems to come to the rescue of her protagonist through James Tayper Pace in the novel who claims that "The chief requirement of the good life... is to live without any image of oneself" (B 131). A protagonist as Dora created with the intentions of evoking laughter and fun-finally
is seen to conform to this view and does not impress the minds of the audience with any particular specificity of an image of herself as does Henderson. She arrives into the reader's view and departs silently as she walks in and out of the lives of the male characters in the novel similar to her ascension and descension in the process of unselfing. It is as if to justify Dora's nature that James adds that:

Ideals are dreams. They come between us and reality - when what we need most is just precisely to see reality. And that is something outside us. Where perfection is, reality is. And where do we look for perfection. Not in some imaginary concoction out of our idea of our own character - but in something so external and so remote that we can get only now and then a distant hint of it. (B 131)

The reader is unable to place her exactly a forbidding task too drunken and surreptitious to advance or decipher. It is on listening to James' sermon that Dora begins to feel socially inferior.

There is no set pattern about the character of this protagonist but Edwin J. Kennedy, Jr. makes a general observation about Murdoch's trend in her characterization technique. If Murdoch creates a character who is philosophical, comical or absurd or all of them, it is merely to combine both "the uniqueness and mysteriousness of human personality and (therefore) the play of forces in human life are reduced to dull mechanical alternation" ("Psychoanalyst"
The protagonist Dora in *The Bell* thus, automatically yields to this combination requiring to remain under the constant surveillance of the members at Imber court and also of the readers, though this aggravates her self-willed independence.

Comicality plays a dominant role in many of Murdoch's other novels but is quite attuned to the grave sequences and questions embedded in *The Bell*. However, this novel wanders further beyond simple fun and laughter and much of it is unintentional or ironical (Kane, Iris Murdoch 44). For instance, Mrs. Mark tells Dora that Imber-Abbey "... is an enclosed order of nuns. No one goes in or comes out" (B 64), but points out to a firmly shut door which is meant to be a 'special gateway' for the new bell - a rather impressive ceremony or for only a postulant. This strategic condition confirms the repetitive enactment of abstract concepts by the Imber-inmates that further alienates Dora from any kind of complicity with them.

Unlike Michael, not even the Abbess would change Dora's life style to make her spiritual life increase and flourish. Each observation she in her turn makes of Imber-court, leads her finally to see it merely as a prison; just as every other human being is 'deliberately' trapped
All along the novel, Imber-Abbey has had a nagging assertion upon the person of Dora. But it is Dora, who quite out of spite, seriously involves herself in the hauling of the old tell-tale bell and has Paul telling her finally "I suppose you realize you have probably done permanent damage to these excellent people?" (B 283) - which perhaps is the actual blow Dora had been eager to give Imber and had been stealthily waiting for. Dora is seen to suffer throughout the novel at the hands of her imperceptible relationship with Paul or by her illicit relationships with other men or at the instance of Imber-court and its stringent rules. And Murdoch prefers people not to suffer in excess. Murdoch has never always tolerated suffering and admires characters who defy and brave suffering. Her protagonist Dora, here, dispossesses the binding forces of existence, realises that personal relationships keep changing and prefers to carry on in some possible manner or the other (Kane, "Psychoanalyst" 378). This dimension makes Dora progressive at least by the end of the novel and the complex paradoxes incorporated in her character are gradually forced to recede to extinction.
James's sermon to the distracted Dora lets loose a serious cue of what she would soon be upto:

The image that occurs to me is here is a topical one, the image of a bell. A bell is made to speak out. What would be the value of a bell which was never rung? It rings out clearly, it bears witness, it cannot speak without seeming like a call, a summons. A great bell is not to be silenced. Consider too its simplicity. There is no hidden mechanism. All that it is plain and open, and if it is moved it must ring. (B 135)

And sure enough Dora does not let the symbolic great old legendary bell in the Imber lake, be silenced. All she needs, as she puts it, is an engineer to help her haul up the object.

And indeed as she stood there in the moonlight, looking at the quiet water, she felt as if by the sheer force of her will she could make the great bell rise. After all, and after her own fashion, she would fight. In this holy community she would play the witch. (B 199)

Dora decides to play the witch more against the abstract convictions and practices of the Imber community. She expresses a sadistic pleasure in her will to undo the so called tale behind the bell that flew by itself into the lake after a clandestine infidelity of a nun who later drowned herself. Imber members had until then lavished upon her quite ironically and this tale alone could aptly return all the 'moralizations.' One cannot say for sure that Dora does this in a hasty desire for revenge or in agitation to hide her own
defaults. Rather Dora is 'cool' about these issues, schemes it with Toby and quite unapologetically reveals the long evidence with a playfully sardonic satisfaction. Thus, Dora relieves herself of all her nagging tensions by unraveling the mystery of the drowned bell to the Imber audience and installing a 'new wakefulness' in their consciousness.

Dora's characterization as the protagonist in the novel takes a peculiar dimension, as Linda Kuehl observes about Murdoch's general technique in creating characters. There is something quite antirational about the character of Dora here as in the case of many other characters of Murdoch. Dora seems to be the very embodiment of a 'messy' person, of one who is very particular in her random choice and someone whose nature has to be explained endlessly. Murdoch seems to have given Dora total freedom of thinking, performing, and even in expressing her views, as a result of which all the three functions race towards their own goals and therefore cannot be even held down intact by the character concerned herself. Inspite of exhibiting a bogus bearing of Self, Dora has intense potential for mockery and eccentricity. So, while Dora seeks to avenge the ridicules and humiliations meted out to her by exposing the mystery of the bell to the audience she provokes playful suspense between her own fictive form and what is real in her as a depiction of a human Self.
Dora is quite unassuming and unpretentious which makes her as all the more distinct and ridiculous in the context of the novel. She finds it increasingly difficult to let her predicaments to their fatalistic destiny and at the same time to establish 'Self', which she could call the real one, through constant unselfing as Henderson does in Rain King or Albert Corde in Dean's December or even Bruno in Bruno's Dream. It is this lack of aspiration that determines her destiny in the novel - as a mere existential entity, ridiculed by others and needing to be explained and contemplated upon by an austere community (Illie, Unamuno 75). She gyrates in her effort to unself to Michael in the undeclared hope of finding the origin and source that make up all her complexity. But there is no definite proof in the novel, until the end, that supports this. Instead initially, Michael merely figures the following details:

She had talked a great deal about herself, and ... in the stories ... she told without bitterness of her unwanted childhood, some of the roots of her present being. No one had inspired her to place the least value on herself; she still felt herself to be a socially unacceptable waif, and what made her unpretentious also made her irresponsible and unreliable. Paul.. was the worst partner she could have chosen. (B 303)

Dora does unself but she does not manage to positively assert her Self against her own fallibilities and the austerities of Imber court. She is caught between her own
chaotic physical commitments and the intermittent moving, therapeutic sermons of James or Michael which she listens to quite distractedly. Though she has least intentions of abiding by these sermons, she exploits them to her own favour when she senses a need for it. Until she hauls the bell and Paul criticises her for having blown out the peace of the innocent lot at Imber court, Dora acts quite unplannedly impelled by mere thoughtless instinct, unable to foresee the aftermath of such an atrocious exposure of a community of austere beings.

Michael alone notices her potential despite all her misappropriations, misdoings and blunders:

How wonderfully, ... [he] thought, Dora had survived. She had fed like a glutton upon the catastrophes at Imber and they had increased her substance. Because of all the dreadful things that had passed there was more of her. Michael looked with a slightly contemptuous envy upon this simple and robust nature. (B 304)

Although Dora's predicament prohibits her from painstakingly sharing her Self - as Illie observes, Unamuno is of the opinion that at one point or the other, the Self that communicates with the rest or the one that is socially active becomes the chief instrumental one and is at least made obvious to the others (Unamuno 108). In this context here, Dora has not much of her own pronouncements, as a result, the Self that Michael draws out for us is the only reliable acknowledgement which the
reader has to receive or behold with a certain feeling of 'benediction' about Dora.

Dora evidently does not speak of Self though she deliberately and indeliberately 'unselfs' as well as listens to the approximation made by others. However, one cannot overlook that much to the relief of the reader as well as to that of the fellow characters she expresses a desire for freedom.

She felt intensely the need and somehow now the capacity to live and work on her own and become, what she had never been, an independent grown-up person. (B 301)

This excessively complicated character devises the fate of Imber court, manoeuvring its members to expose the plain, blatant truth of their predicament in all its vulgarity. But she herself has no intentions of revealing her real inner-self or dissolve her erroneous contingencies in the consolidation of unselfing. Dora justifies herself amply, shields herself from blind commitments unlike the other characters and playfully ridicules the nonsensical predicament both of the members at Imber-court and Abbey, and of Paul too. She is capable of offering a final verdict to all the characters with regard to their existence, desires, disillusionments, hypocrisies and convictions, but never can easily venture to comment upon herself, unless she borrows the assessments they have made in turn, of herself. Like Henderson's desire of 'want', Dora's
haunting impulse is to disengage herself from an over-demanding, angry, bully of a husband. Dora's only consciousness is restricted to her breaking up with Paul and her aversion for the dominant critical outlook of the Imber community. She succeeds with the latter quite assertively and as far as the former is concerned Dora is seen to revolve around an unresolved dilemma. If Henderson's Self is concrete then comparatively Dora's is abstract in truly the modernist sense of the term where one cannot have a whole image of oneself.

Murdoch has created Dora as realistically as possible. Dora satirises the Imber community perhaps in order to alert them of 'a fall' as that of the first fall (of Adam) and her irritation against them is their inability to relieve themselves of their exaggerated conventionalities - inspite of her obtrusive exclamations and remarks opposed to them. The secondary characters and their unprecedented remarks confuse her, staggering her a long way through the novel thus making her plight primitively comic or ridiculous. The various selves battle with each other within Dora, such that, at times, something dependable emanates from her consciousness and at other times, acts or words totally deplorable result and this urges her to either indulge in funny, laughable emotional participation (her tears at silly instances) or mute retreat at crucial sequences (Feo, "Mechanical Murdoch" 356).
Whiteside's observation about Murdoch's love themes quite explicated Dora's obsession with love (or physical love):

When you fall in love, what you do is endow the one you love with a personality of your own invention, and this is what you love. ("Novels of IM" 28)

There is no such identity cast into the Dora, Paul relationship and so Dora substitutes other men for want of such a spell. But Dora is not driven by any external force but she is victimized by her own indulgences. She fails to see that her love is tentative and is merely an "illusory idealization (Whiteside, "Novels of IM" 29)" where even the acquaintance who indulges along with her does not fit her frame exactly. Too much self absorption on the part of the Imber members, self-obsession on the part of Paul and physical wantonness in Dora lead to Dora's unresolved self in The Bell.

In the current discussion, the novelists mark the potentiality of the selves of their respective protagonists to a state of 'ascendancy' from that of the category of selves discussed in the previous chapters. The selves of the protagonists in this chapter reveal a certain tickling mood of exhilaration, hilarious laughter and jokes in their unselfing. These are symbolically directed against the idiosyncrasies and hypocrisies of two respective communities in the two novels.
through their protagonists - Henderson and Dora. Each explores the clownish absurdity of the selves of the other characters who belong to certain communities - the community in Imber court in Murdoch's Bell and the Arnewi and Wariri tribes in Bellow's Rain King. Dora and Henderson are protagonists who dissolve their unselfing in redemptive laughter, against frivolity and flippancy of the other characters. The bell and the rain are symbols of this redemption. The tingling extravagance of the sound or the unravelling of the bell and the cleansing function of the rain clears out the opacity in Henderson's and the tribal King Dahfu's mind in the case of the latter and in the community at Imber court in the former. The unselfing process comes forth from roguish, hilarious, uproarish selves ridiculing more than the mere reality of absurd existence.

Henderson, the Rain King opens spontaneously, flows lucidly but with much of the laboriousness of Bellow's revisions made quite evident. Henderson's predicament in the novel can be explained by Rovit's observation on humour that Henderson cannot find truth in the modern century, but he makes a strenuous effort to cultivate this in his intelligence in order to comprehend of how little he is aware after all. Amidst the tribes of Africa Henderson is aware that he cannot build a beautiful life in a world which according to his Self
is ugly and skunkish as of pigs or dogs or lions - but then Henderson can learn to laugh - at his own existence and at the predicament of the other characters. Laughter then becomes a certain form of prayer to redeem man from his debased, sinking plight ("Jewish Humour" 238).

The protagonist in *Rain King* rejects and deserts the American life for an experience more highly realistic than his apparent American stability. Urged by a 'wanting' desire, the connotation, of which seems varied in the novel, ranging from 'physical', 'psychological' to a definite release of all that is irrelevant and illusory to existence, Henderson hopes to find fit and apt means of existence from among the Arnewi and Wariri tribes specially from King Dahfu, Queen Mtalba, Atti - the Lion, in a symbolic bursting of the spirit. Henderson's unselfing runs through a marathon comprehension of his personal life and relationships with wife, children and friends, love, fear, death, existential desire, beliefs, reality pursuits, human disease, leading to dislocation and waste. The efforts that Henderson undertakes relieve him from a divided state of existence to a comparatively reconcilable state. Karl observes that "the early American... Even though he well knew ... was a divided man - part picaro and part visionary" ("Picaresque" 198-99). Karl's comment on the American picaro is found to be apt in describing the life of Henderson.
Frequently, the American's self-conceived image is that of the picaro himself; rebellious but decent, hardy but flexible, resourceful but God-fearing, rugged but loving, Quixotic but virile, realistic but visionary. ("Picaresque" 197-98)

Henderson's inimitable uniqueness is in his capacity to evoke laughter and share in it by participating in the clownish, illusory practices and beliefs of the Arnewis and Wariris. In the destruction of these forces, in the death of King Dahfu, as well as in the destruction of the cistern of the frogs the raging spirit that had all the while duped King Dahfu and Henderson himself is burst and all that Henderson anticipates is presented in a sequence of remarkable comic intervention. This aspect once again marks a distinct difference in the predicaments of the protagonists who figure in the last two chapters.

There is a specific reason why Henderson brings forth crucial clownish laughter in the midst of a chaotic and complex world. Both the countries that figure in the novel - America and Africa - suffer their own violence, disfigurement, alienation, futility and illusory convictions matched much against the penetrative intelligence, comprehensiveness and sensibility of Henderson. The other characters in the novel remain casual observers who suffer from incomprehensibility and lead their lives strengthened or brazened by the very negative virulence of existential conflicts (Galloway, "Clown and Saint"

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The greater the increase of existential calamities, the more the hilarious resonance from a comic perspective.

In this context it would be appropriate to say that a protagonist could see himself or his Self in the light of perpetual comedy. According to Finney:

When a writer looks at his... [Self] in a comic light it seems more likely than not that he will see himself as an innocent victim of circumstances... that would help him ridicule the hard rigours of life however intense they may be. ("Comic perspective" 109)

Henderson goes through several phases of awkward experiences in Africa acquiring a transition from Self to Self. The animals that figure add comicality to the transitory self of Henderson and in the more or less fresh identity that Henderson bursts into the novel. He restructures not only his own tensions and dilemma between choice and knowledge, thought and experience, docility and rebellion, narcissus and communion, fear and courage but also that of the consciousness of the two communities he meets in the novel. His wife Lily, for instance, moralizes always in a make-believe effort that one has to live for that and not this, for good, not evil, for life not death, for reality and not illusion. At the same time, Henderson mocks her unhygienic habits and queerly compares it with her state of imperfect existence as follows: "The pigs on
my farm are cleaner than you are, ... The earth itself is like that, corrupt. Yes, but it transform itself" (HRK 16).

Henderson's comparison has an underlying humour, specially keeping in mind the objects of comparison. Still despite the comic exuberance in the tone of his words each statement in the aforementioned quotation takes a step deeper into the unselfing process. The prime step made in the first statement is the aggravated shocking recognition about the meaninglessness of the universe. The second reveals the effort to assert the falsities of life and the helpless conflict in existence between the deliberate human strife and reality. The third statement is an optimistic appeal suggesting change in human existence rather than merely theorizing in defense of predicament and contingencies.

Henderson's plight of Self gradually ascends from illusion to reality. In this ascension, the Self identifies itself with animals in a jocular manner symbolising the splitting of illusions and the fusion of reality leaving the protagonist in a light-hearted, ideal mood of a little child, at the close of the novel. Henderson's initial identification of Self commences with the pigs, the most meagre representation of Self in all its passivity and his identity rises from a consciousness of being persecuted endlessly.
"How comedy works can be seen in the most primitive kind of joke, in the dirty story... without objective distance," says Freidrich Durrenmall in his comedy and the modern world. It is also essential to note that if the word tragedy anticipates guilt, despair and the like, comedy written by a creative writer strives to create an order out of chaos (Palmer, Comedy Developments 131). For in the fun and laughter a writer creates he cleverly traps the audience into his own world of imagination and manoeuvres them according to the way he would want them to. Very often a writer who makes an attempt at this cannot escape falling into one or the other kind of its variety even such as a light-hearted indulgence in gaiety and manoeuvring the characters into situations that are frivolous and flippant and at times even absurd merriment as Bellow does to Henderson (Palmer, Comedy Developments 135).

Identifying himself with pigs, Henderson seems to exaggerate here of man's decayed state of existence lost to Self, the spirit fattened by illusions merely to be butchered by agonizing contingencies. In yet another context, Henderson effects comicality doubly when he senses the incongruity of human existence on looking at the dumb frogs and compares their looks with his own Self (or to human beings in general). Henderson notices their peculiarly marbled eyes, red and green and white: "I shook my head much more at myself than at them,
thinking that a damned fool going out into the world is bound and fated to encounter damned fool phenomena" (HRK 60). Such is the state of human existence ill-matched against the calamities of life. The human predicament or contingencies pervade man's life to occur and seems to mock him in its own recurrences and reappearances and makes man appear a 'bally-eyed fool' on the face of his failures. And man is compelled to mutely accept the fool-phenomena manipulated upon him by these forces.

Much later in the novel Henderson meets King Dahfu of the Wariri tribesmen who instigates a 'lion identity' in Henderson as a means to locate the "old self" in him and make him resistant to the agonies of existential predicament once more. Henderson is compelled by the king to roar like a lion in order to be one, and Henderson is feared by the others for the performance he makes during this identity trial. In order to please King Dahfu, Henderson unwillingly agrees that the roaring relieves him of his fears, though he realises that such irritable practices are but a reflection of the wilderness of Africa or fear of the existential debris within the mind that need to be expelled from therein. At the end of this vivacious practice Henderson feels:

... may be every guy has his own Africa. Or if he goes to sea, his own ocean. By which I meant that I was a turbulent individual, I was having a
turbulent Africa. This is not to say, however, that I think the world exists for my sake. No I really believe in reality. (HRK 275-76)

Henderson's realisation here is that he has ventured into Africa among the wild tribesmen because at some point in the urban life he realised that his Self was decaying into passivity - which is almost death-like. He needs to burst the slumber of his spirit. He needs to heave up his Self from such perilous state and therefore he allows almost any kind of force to impel him to act, even if it involves indulging in an operatic performance as roaring, watched theatrically by King Dhafu and Atti the lion that evokes hilarious laughter. At one instance, Henderson seems to exchange identity with a bear called Smolak justifying the deal as a creative or imaginative support to undo what is false and unreal in him. Henderson says:

... if Smolak and I were outcasts together, two humorists before the crowd, but brothers in our souls - I enbeared by him, and he probably humanized by me - ... It only stands to reason. Something deeply already was inscribed on me. (HRK 338-39)

Henderson claims that both the bear and himself are bound "by a common bond of despair" (HRK 338), and he who is broken and ruined as the bear, in their condemned predicament attempt to allow 'change' which is the very purpose of Henderson's exchange in identity.
This belly laughter provoked by Henderson is common to most of Bellow's 'often clowns'. Here, Henderson attempts to draw up his Self in comic extravaganza discarding existential pressures in favour of laughter, jokes, comicality and even clownish buffoonery. Henderson's performances do not require any clinical study or aid. Henderson can be seen as "wise men seem foolish" or the "foolishness of simple men... seen as a kind of shrewdness" (Rubin Jr., Comic Imagination 353). As in most Jewish novels or comic novels in general, Bellow's Rain King has a purpose though subtle - the purpose of defence opposed to the existential draggle - that hauls up the 'Self' to the protagonist. To add to the realistic nature of the character of the protagonist, the verdict is neither always favourable nor always unfavourable to him.

Henderson discovers something of Self in every minute identification of himself with animals. He does not absurdly surrender himself to the mercy of the wild identity, instead, he gapes into the boorish face of the murderous lion and admits reprisal or resilience of Self moving away from the brutal identity as he advances each step towards the reality of self:

... I then tried to tell myself because of the clearness of those enraged eyes that only visions ever got to be so hyper-actual. But it was no vision. The snarling of this animal was indeed the voice of death.... how I had boasted... I loved reality.... But oh, unreality!... That has
been my scheme for a troubled but eternal life. But now I was blasted away from this practice by the throat of the lion. His voice was like a blow at the back of my head. (HRK 307)

Though it is a mere roar of a lion, Henderson's psychological impulses seem to compete with it in a trial to pick and choose between what is real and unreal.

Henderson voluntarily participates in the maddening sports of the tribesmen in order to break open to them the absurdity of it all and the endless comicality it incorporates. But though Dahfu shows mastery of instructions and guidance, Henderson alone 'unselfs' and the entire emptiness of their foolhardiness becomes evident in the death of King Dahfu. Inside a hut with Romilayu, the two of them sense the presence of a dead body and on looking at him Henderson suffers silently, listening to the dead man apparently sending them a message - a message to the colossal existence of man -"Here, man, is your being, which you think so terrific." In this context, Henderson's humour is his defensive weapon, for he replies in all earnest to the dead man's message "Oh, be quiet, dead man, for Christ's sake" (HRK 137).

Henderson is no saint and only makes a compromise with a basic, elementary acceptance of death. He has no sage-like love for death and fears it as any other being. But Henderson
reveals an improvised feeling about death that averts all wasteful pursuits after the make-believe perpetuality of human existence. For instance, Henderson

...believe[s] in Lazarus. I believe in the awakening of the dead. I am sure that for some, at least, there is a resurrection. I was never better aware of my [own] belief [until I felt the weight of the dead man on my back]. (HRK 140)

The "resurrection" Henderson speaks of here seems to bear a symbolic implication of the renunciation of the mind's ignorance, the Self's immunization to reality, or the "spirits sleep" as Henderson himself describes. Klug is of the opinion that Bellow does not abandon his protagonist to a futile, destructive quest after perfection or even to an unpremeditated, sudden death of the inner-self as occurring to any ordinary person. Bellow's Henderson has made the falsity of his Self dissolve and shows an inclination towards overwhelming it of further repressions and obscurity. This broad acceptance itself leads the protagonists to experience perfect reality. This again is the point of perfection gained by the protagonist in suspending his Self into a total sense of freedom, free from the shackles of the binding forces of human predicament (Klug, "Saul Bellow" 472). Before the end of the novel Henderson has already begun to say that he himself has become "ultra familiar" with death and "death and I are just about kissing cousins" (HRK 174).
Suffering does keep recurring in Henderson's mind. The discussion Henderson has with Mtalba, Willatale, Itelo, King Dhafu and Romilayu all converge towards failures, dread, life, love, desire, beliefs and other crucial problems of existence. As the discussions rotate around such problems, Henderson is given to a more analytic and comprehensive view of existence itself. Gradually, Henderson gains the ability to decipher the hypocrisy, resentment and cruelty involved in the blind, meaningless and absurd practices of the tribals done under the guise of rituals.

In Henderson's self-explorative journey or unselfing done in the wilderness of his mind, Henderson shows a positive clarity and natural impetus to discuss the problems of existence in a prolific and deliberate manner. There is almost a dissemination of existence itself in the following words of Henderson, and life itself is made to look bare or threadbare when viewed from his own point of view:

Oh, it's miserable to be human, you get such queer diseases. Just because you are human and no other reason. Before you know it, as the years go by you're just like other people you've seen, with all those peculiar human ailments. Just another vehicle for temper and vanity and rashness and all the rest. Who wants it? Who needs it? These things occupy the place where a man's soul should be. (ERK 83)

Henderson is nothing less than a questioning, self-affirming protagonist who exploits the vague perspectives of his African
tribal counterparts to render them further explications of their own still unprogressive, intransitory state of existence. For instance, the above words are uttered to Itelo and Mtalba to complement the issue they raise about his own poor health and the long journey undertaken to Africa.

King Dahfu, is the finest epitome of tutelage to Henderson who does not allow the protagonist to dissolve in his grief or sense of loss. Instead King Dahfu, ironically, compels Henderson to indulge in almost acrobatic performances (symbolic of the ventures of existence); and he frames him into a fix of numerous relationships that become the cause for Henderson suffering from restlessness, despair and even frustration at times. Unwillingly, Henderson begins to rely largely upon King Dahfu, his discussions and the imposed performances to view himself partly, in the partial distortion that this character impinges upon him. King Dahfu placates Henderson to follow instructions:

I knew that you went out from... America because of a privation of a high conduct. You have met your first opportunities of it well, ... but you must go on. Take advantage of the studies I have made, which by chance are available to you.... [My forefathers] all acted the lion.... If you do as I wish, you too will act the lion be on all the fours. (HRK 265)

King Dahfu gets on all fours and urges Henderson to do the same. Henderson gets on all fours in a symbolic effort to
purge himself of the drawbacks he suffers. The reader here is allowed a full view of the King's imaginative absurdity and Henderson's intellectual effort and the hilarious clash of it all. This perverse comicality lasts until tears, but, other than the expected change, Henderson is at least urged to return or flee to the civilization of America from where he had set out with obscure views about the human predicament, now set right perhaps with a renewed version of Self. The hangover of this acrobatic performance dies out completely, only when Henderson learns that the lifting of the Mummah was framed on him deliberately by the Wariris and by the king himself, just as the earlier kingship was similarly forced on Dahfu. King Dahfu's death strikes the end of all illusions in Henderson and he is left finally with only the option to return to America.

King Dahfu himself sees Henderson as rooted to reality, as 'existence' itself, a creature who incorporates within him all types that Dahfu has studied that far. King Dahfu's claims about Henderson show Henderson's generous sensitivity of being an all-type protagonist. King Dahfu says:

...I see the world in your constitution... as: The agony. The appetite. The obstinate. The immune elephant. The shrewd pig. The fateful hysterical. The death-accepting. The phallic-pround or hollow genital. The fast asleep. The narcissus intoxicated. The mad laughers. The pedantics. The fighting Lazaruses. (HRK 217)
But then Dahfu seems to discourage the rapidity with which Henderson anticipates implicit responses to his queries. Dahfu complains that Henderson is anxious about immediate salvation. Henderson's comic self-presentation already has a piquant response to this contempt. Nothing seems to oppress the desire for maturity. But Dahfu's secret intentions might have been to keep Henderson as a reserve to succeed in his place if anything fatal should happen to Dahfu. Henderson, on the other hand, is an absurdly, intelligent clown who answers Dahfu's questions with his own. He is not outwitted or flattered by Dahfu's observations even when his mind is taken unawares, unaccompanied by the vitality of his unselfing (Rovit, "Jewish humour" 241). Henderson sees the world as an aspect of an organism, a mental thing, amid whose cells he has been wandering. "From my mind the impetus came and through mind my course was set, and therefore nothing on earth could really surprise me utterly" (HRK 156).

Henderson is concerned about exposing the rigours of life and the bleakness of existence and wishes to make articulate the necessary reality essential for life alone. The rest of the pursuits are a kind of false displacement in existence that only renders life a mere wasteland. Henderson manages to slowly gather himself up from the earlier victimized, vulnerability that the world, the world as a whole,
had set against life and was opposed to it - "just down on life,... I was alive and somehow found it impossible to go along with it" (HRK 132) to a later reaffirmation of a new identity, a revised version of Self and reality. Reality, according to Henderson is rooted to life itself and is not vested in King Dahfu's animal exercises nor in any world beyond simple existence. The very world that seems chaotic seems comprehensible and adjustable too, once the consciousness or unselfing fixes the individual in an unpretentious state of understanding.

Henderson's potent comedy heightens to serious efficacy when he begins to analyse even the most minute details of life and sometimes even the popularly oft-quoted lines:

Now take a phrase like "Father forgive them; they know not what they do". This may be interpreted as a promise that in time we would be delivered from blindness and understand. On the other hand, it may also mean that with time we will understand our own enormities and crimes and that sounds to me like a threat. (HRK 162)

Henderson's life is packed with laughter, queries and responsibilities - all indulged in by the protagonist to acquit the world of anguish and extinguish it from his own consciousness. Henderson has committed himself to a cause and does not wish to flee from it as does King Dahfu himself. He receives truth "in blows" and hears truth speak to him -
Henderson! When Henderson is almost a prisoner of the Wariris he is compelled to oblige to their needs and necessities. Henderson, in this context, recalls that he had chosen Africa more out of an urge for self-exploration and now he senses that the very choice of Africa as a place for unselfing sounds comical owing to Africa's backwardness in civilization as well as its immersion in beastly atrocities in the name of spiritualistic rituals. It is then that again the question arises of what can uncivilized Africa do to a civilized Henderson. This predicament of Henderson is once again Bellow's effort to reinstate the comic plight of Henderson, who resorts to frantic prayers awaiting death literally at the 'homicidal hands' of the Wariris. Even Henderson's prayers reveal an amused knack of crankiness:

Oh, you...something,... something because of whom there is not Nothing. Help me to do Thy will. Take off my stupid sins.... Heavenly Father, open up my dumb heart and... preserve me from unreal things. Oh, Thou who tookest me from pigs, let me not be killed over lions. And forgive my crimes and nonsense and let me to return to Lily and the kids. (HRK 253)

Time and again Henderson tries to remain ever rooted to the world merely to the reality of it, but perhaps it is his comic excitement that arrests the fruition of his Self. There is perhaps a specific reason why Bellow attaches comic-importance to an intellectual "eccentric" as Henderson. When the Self has
not unravelled the mystery of existence and mortality then humour becomes the most handy and harmless sort of weapon that protects Henderson here even at the most crucial hour of imprisonment and death at the hands of the Wariris.

Henderson tries to cure himself of all pretensions and makes an effort to seek comfort by rationalising even the most remote factor of existence. He believes that perhaps time was invented so that at some point in life, misery would come to an end. These rationalisations are offered to his Self as a timely anodyne to his perplexed state of predicament in Africa. And these parodic or self-parodic humour helps Henderson to provide himself with at least a certain minor release of tensions though his efforts to liberate the Wariri community from its idiosyncratic practices stands impaired. But as humour is made an integral part of the novel, those emotions and moods stand severe, erect and in opposition to all defiances meted out to the protagonist. And Henderson maintains its vivacity without much rigidity throughout the novel upto its end.

By the close of the novel, Henderson loathes his isolation and incongruity amidst the aggressive community of Wariris. With Dahfu dead Henderson experiences utmost irreverance among the tribesmen. He regrets having ever made
it to Africa and finally believes that it could be his vanity that suspended him into such remote loneliness. The most significant ingredient that forms his person now is that he does not wish to indulge in any more illusions though it inevitably hangs on to the other foot of existence (HRK 318). He refers to the insanity of his clowning as dead days of the past which he hopes would stop bothering him (HRK 329). Without much psychological struggle Henderson returns to America provided afresh with intelligence uncontaminated by affectations or illusions or hypocrisies.

Henderson is initially torn between an urban foredoomed struggle in the States and an alternative offered by the wide, attractive fluidity of the world outside. But towards the end, Henderson regains a radiant vision of not merely himself in the States, but of the entire universe. The 'Self' he has been thirsting for all the while seems to have arrived to his rescue.

The luxuriating self-indulgent radiance of Dora in Murdoch's Bell and the laborious manifestations of the Imber community are both at two extremes and clearly well at loggerheads with each other. The aversion each holds for the other, elicits even a hidden laughter. Therefore, the comic efficacy subtly revealed holds the novel in tact, giving a
touch of 'ridiculousness' to the Self of Dora. Whereas in the latter novel, Henderson is the only genuine, unhypocritical comic-hero in the novel amidst the exaggeratedly ritualistic Arnewis and Wariris. Henderson, in comparison with Dora, shows a firm command over various aspects of existence. He acts with a firm command over various aspects of existence. He acts as a perfect mediator between his Self and the tribal consciousness, between reality and illusion, maturity and eccentricity. Though Rain King is quite a stable, old American novel, Henderson's hilarious attempts to emancipate his own Self and the consciousness of the tribal communities make all the difference and aptly suit the phraseology "Comic Unselfing".