THE HOMEWARD FLIGHT: 'THE AXIAL LINES'

Wherefore unsatisfied soul... Whither O mocking life?

... ... ...

Passage, immediate passage! the blood burns in my veins!
Away O soul! noist instantly the anchor!

Walt Whitman

Richard Chase writes: "What is so far missing in Bellow's writing is an account of what his heroes want to be free from."

This does not seem to be a difficult task, however. The concept of freedom, in Bellow's fiction, as has been already seen is very much related to the hero's commitment to or unconcern for his conjugal family. Either the hero runs away from the home in sheer fright as in the case of Wilhelm or cling to it, like Asa Leventhal, as his only valid reason for existence. Among the runners Augie and Henderson form a curious pair. Chase continues: "Augie March is prodigiously circumstantial, but the circumstances are never marshalled into a controlling image, and Henderson is bundled off to Africa before we see enough of him in his native habitat to know fully, by understanding the circumstances of his life, what his character and his fate are. But who can complain when, once he is in Africa, we see him in episodes which make us think him the momentary equal, for tragi-comic madness, for divine insanity, of the greatest heroes of comic fiction?"

Much has been said about the picaresque mould in Augie March, and the tradition of Don Quixote and Parson Adam in which the code hero Henderson is cast. The sense of direction that seems

1 Chase, Saul Bellow and the Critics ed. Malin, 37
2 Chase 37.
to be vague, if that is what Richard Chase means in the quote, in Augie March may be a result of the swirl of events and the panoramic vision. Beneath this torrent however, there is an underlying truth, which many critics, in their exuberance, have not cared to pursue with the attention it deserves. No one who gives sedulous attention to Augie's 'axial lines' speech will miss the truth. This inspired speech, no doubt has been discussed by all the critics most of whom have tried to place it in the context of a totality of vision. None however has related the speech to the immediate circumstances and has brought out the essential truth embedded in it so well as the reviewer of Augie March in Time has done, without so much as mentioning the phrase "axial lines." The truth is:

Augie knows that what he has been running after is to stop running.3

The casual and unpretentious way in which this statement is worded should not underrate the validity of the finding. This significant truth is linked with two important events of dramatic and symbolic value in Augie March: Augie's Mexican adventure and the epic encounter with Basteshaw on the seas. Another event of equal significance occurs in Henderson the Rain King. That is Henderson's confinement in and escape from the death cell. These episodes serve somewhat like passages of rite in the transformation of the two picaros, the one young and the other middle-aged. Both have difficulties in growing up. One might say, they grow up absurd, as Goodman's adolescents.

The loss of the parental home, as Simon sells the flat, affects Augie deeply. He meanders with odd jobs, cooiping dogs, stealing, smuggling. He becomes union organizer, and then goes to Mexico with Thea Flenchel where he pays for the folly of his exotic tendencies, carrying the eagle Caligula on his arm 'some forty hours without sleep' (AM 390) in Nue vo Laredo. When the Caligula project fails, Thea turns to pit vipers and soon the parch becomes a snake gallery. In order to wean her away from this dangerous game, Augie suggests to her to have another try with Caligula. Jacinto brings horses the next morning. Augie desperately goading Caligula to fly, rides fast on Bizcocho, and crashes on the turrety white rocks along with the horse. Bizcocho's hoofs hit him square in the head and Augie, a sack of meal, with his skull nearly cracked pays the price of 'being in nature' (AM 421). This bloody accident is the first passage of rite for Augie. He begins to understand that 'personality is unsafe' and that 'it's the types that are safe' (AM 466). He falls out with Thea who is determined to proceed to Chilpanzingo in her next bid for flamingoes. Then he befriends Stella who is leaving Oliver. Thea and Augie look over each other's shoulders at Talevera and Stella. Fed up with 'the bazaar of red nature' and dizzy with deaths and noises Augie decides to get back to the States. He borrows two hundred pesos from Paslavitch and leaves. On the way to Chicago he goes to Pinckneyville to see his brother George after many years. From now onwards 'the social sugars' (AM 421) which had dissolved begin to coalesce. His homeless mother and brother are living in institutions and he goes from the one to the other. The first thought that strikes him on seeing the invalid brother
and blind mother is that he must do something about them. Almost instantly he decides to meet Simon knowing 'what money could do' (AM 486) for this noble aim. He feels very much for meeting both Georgie and Mama 'as prisoners' and is sore with himself for 'tooting freely around while they were confined' (AM 487). He sees Simon and Charlotte rolling in affluence. He dumbly receives the money and the outfit he gives, all the time thinking about his fragmented family. He is reminded of Padilla's words that he is 'going against history' and that 'this junketing around' (AM 498) must stop. Augie's family awareness becomes keener and keener.

It is against this background that 'the axial lines' speech must be considered. Clem Tambow takes Augie to the Oriental Theatre and orders Chinese dinner. Clem tells him, that he thinks of him always 'in terms of something exceptional,' that is, 'on the level of achievement' (AM 501). Augie no longer given to romantic longings for adventures repudiates this high talk and replies that 'there's plenty that's wrong' (AM 501) with him. 'I can see you pissing against the wind,' says Clem. 'What you need is some of Dr Freud's medicine' (AM 501). Now Augie tells him about his peculiar dream: He has a house of his own - It was enough of a surprise to have a house of my own - and he is stending in the beautiful front room, entertaining a guest. He has two grand pianos. Clem tells him that he is "the greatest collection of unknowns ever to lie on a couch," that he has "a nobility syndrome" and also that he wants Man with great stature "capital M" (AM 502). Augie does not dispute Clem's psychological insight but the patent simple truth is: Augie frequently dreams
about his lost home, his splintered kin, his mother and brother. Again, to Kayo who suggests marriage, Augie tells about another dream: Augie comes home from work and his handsome wife, filled with tears, tells him about the children suddenly born that afternoon, the one a bug and the other a calf, hidden behind the piano. He goes over to find that on a chair behind the piano he finds his mother sitting and tells him "You must do right," and Augie sobs. Kayo understands the problem better than Clem and feels sorry for him. Augie knows his malady too well to go wrong as he says "I really should simplify my existence" (AM 519). And that is the truth. He must have a family life. Kayo quite appropriately tells him that it is moha, the "opposition of the finite" (AM 519) that has afflicted him and invites him to visit his wife and child.

Sophie Geratis who fixes up his room at Owens' with the hope of divorcing her husband and getting married to Augie, is afraid that Augie might never set foot "on a path of life and stop looking over the field" (AM 522). But that is not at all the truth.

Why, there was nothing that I longed for more than that. Let it come! Let there be consummation and superfluity be finished from the next drop of the pendulum onward! Let the mystical great things of life, which, not satisfied, lives in us as the father of secret miseries, be fulfilled and have a chance to show it's not the devil himself. Did Sophia think I didn't want to have a wife, and sons and daughters, or be busy at my appropriate daily work? I stood up then and there and told her how entirely wrong she was about me. (AM 522)
These reflections shed much light on 'the axial lines' speech. The 'mystical great things of life' are nothing but the artifacts of quotidian existence, marriage, family and the practical concerns which go with them. What is amazing is that Augie is expressing these sentiments in overblown style. It is his passion for grandiloquent expressions. But it is more probable that his expressions indicate his actual state of mind. Augie is bruised because of the loss of home; and his fears that it might never again become actual in his life, makes it an unattainable ideal for him. Ordinary human existence becomes an elusive goal and that is why it haunts his dreams. It is no wonder then that, he talks in the same vein to Clem, in a celebrated passage, when he arrives with a proposal. Clem wants Augie to join in his new venture: a vocational-guidance and marriage counselling center. He proposes to get an office in one of the skyscrapers on Dearborn near Jackson. Clem will give the aptitude tests and Augie will conduct interviews with what Clem calls 'the new Rogers non-directive technique' (AM 524). But Augie who is unwilling to entertain Sophie Geratis has already come to 'some particularly important conclusions' (AM 523). He is not going to be recruited any longer in another's version of reality. Augie expounds in rich mystical style:

I have a feeling ... about the axial lines of life, with respect to which you must be straight or else your existence is merely clownery, hiding tragedy. I must have had a feeling since I was a kid about these axial lines which made me want to have my existence on them, and so I have said no like a stubborn fellow to all my persuaders, just on the obstinacy of my memory of these lines, never entirely clear. But lately I have felt these thrilling lines again. (AM 524)
The romantic properties of the lines carry the commentators away. There is no critic who does not take note of this most beautiful speech; who at once in his exuberance plunders the speech for his own ends and fails to connect it to the immediate context. But Augie's direction is clear as he progresses.

When striving stops, there they are as a gift.
I was lying on the couch here before and they suddenly went quivering straight through me.
Truth, love, peace, bounty, usefulness, harmony....
And I believe that any man at any time can come back to these axial lines, even if an unfortunate bastard, if he will be quiet and wait it out.

(AM 524)

Clem unable to understand this formless reaction to his professional proposal asks Augie at the end of his speech: "Well, come on, what are you trying to prove?" Critics, are bewildered, too.
"It is not entirely clear," says Caplan, "what he means, though he means something imposing when he uses words like harmony and joy and love." 4 Still he goes on to observe very rightly, without exactly saying so. Augie tries to locate "the epiphanies of self-affirming life." What makes him doubt his own finding is that the "axial lines" talk with the mystical intuition of the "oldest knowledge, older than the Ganges" apparently sounds like "a spiritual exercise."

"Augie is something of an Emersonian when he thinks this way, but the spiritual exercise here is vague. The knowledge is more of a household knowledge closer to the needs of survival."

The finding is quite apt. The problem is that the critic presumes that Augie set out to expound some spiritual truth, some trans-

cendental vision of life. The fact is that Augie never
tries to make it a spiritual exercise. He merely employs
mystical, spiritual categories to drive home his longing for a
quite ordinary life, the home. He sheds this mystical termino-
logy and makes it very clear to Clem when the latter expresses
his inability to follow him. Perhaps this is Bellow's conception
of "transcendence downward." We come back to Clem's query."... 
what are you trying to prove?" To this specific question, Augie
gives a categorical answer:

Do you think I have this kind of ambition to stand
out and prove something? ... I don't want to be
representative or exemplary or head of my generation
or any model of manhood. All I want is something of
my own, and rethink myself. This is why I'm sounding
off now and am so excited. I want a place of my own.

(AM 526)

Continuing in the same vein, he asserts that he will go to
Greenland if it was on Greenland's icy mountain and never loan
himself to another guy's scheme. Clem desperately asks him to
let him know what exactly it is before he dies of impatience.
Augie replies:

I aim to get myself a piece of property and settle
down on it ... what I'd like most is to get married
and set up a kind of home and teach school. I'll
marry - of course my wife would have to agree with
me about this - and then I'd get my mother out
out of the blind-home and my brother George up
from the South. (AM 526)

Augie wants to marry and weld together the broken family. To man
who is used to the bazaar of red nature, this appears a monu-
mental task. Hence the high-sounding language.
Oh, I don’t expect to set up the Happy Isles. I don’t consider myself any Prospero. I haven’t got the build. I have no daughter. I never was a king, for instance. (AM 526)

Clem is taken by storm; he confesses that 'this is the most fantastic thing' (AM 526) he ever heard coming out of Augie. He adds: "It's a scheme worthy of your mind." Now in retrospect 'the oldest knowledge' that Augie talks about earlier becomes very clear.

The ambition of something special and outstanding I have always had is only a boast that distorts this knowledge from its origin, which is the oldest knowledge, older than the Euphrates, older than the Ganges. At any time life can come together again and man be regenerated, and doesn't have to be a god or public servant like Osiris who gets torn apart annually for the sake of the common prosperity, but the man himself, finite and taped as he is, can still come where the axial lines are ... And this is not imaginary stuff, Clem, because I bring my entire life to the test. (AM 525)

What is evident here is a hysterical devotion to the concept of home, the idea of community. The picaro who has seen his home fragmented, is going all out, on the mental level, first to reconstruct it. It is actually the Happy Isles that he wants to establish and rule. With the members of the broken parental home brought together in the conjugal home it will be a patriarchate, a benevolent Prospero island. George will be rehabilitated in this new home as a shoemaking instructor and mother will look after the animals, the roosters and the cats, sitting on the parch. And there could be a tree nursery too. As Clem accuses in mirth, Augie wants to be 'the kind goddam king over these
women and children' (AM 527) and his half-wit brother. Such an extended family is a well-nigh impossible ideal in Bellow's fiction where even the nuclear families are continually bombarded into its constituent elements, the single selves. That is why Augie's talk sounds like a war measure, an exotic project much more adventurous than the Caligula venture in Mexico. An enviable family ideal is never reached in Bellow. There are too many impediments to the realization of the ideal. Augie survives fears of adultery and marries. But Basteshaw stands between him and his just established conjugal home and frustrates all his dreams and desires. When Augie successfully escapes from his clutches and gets back home, he realizes that Stella has her own concerns and identity in marriage. George and the blind mother cannot get anywhere near her tinsel world.

The exotic encounter between Augie and Basteshaw on the high seas is as much fraught with symbolic significance as the Bisagocho fall in Mexico. This encounter is another passage of rite for the already chastened Augie. After just two days of honeymoon Augie ships from Boston. On the fifteenth day the Sam Mac Manus is torpedoed. Augie makes for a boat that floats a hundred yards off and also helps Hymie Basteshaw, the ship's carpenter into the boat. This cranky biologist who refused to marry, after trifling with his cousin's affections, just in order to thwart his father's will, propounds his idea of the physiology of boredom and his research in this direction. He claims that he created life, protoplasm; and when Augie derisively says that a new a chain of evolution might ensue, Basteshaw seriously considers the possibility and falls into fascinated thought.
Augie has another strange dream—it tones in with his plight—where Ugly Face appears asking 'Must I wash my forty-fifty windows every day of life' and begs him. Augie gives her money and she, a dwarf, offers to treat him to a beer. Augie declines: "No thanks, mother, I've got to go. Thanks all the same."

I felt kindness in the depth of my breast. In kindness, I touched her on the crown of her old head and a great thrill passed through me from it. (AM 584)

Augie's bosom is filled with "stormy surprises and dark bursts of happiness," during the dream. He wakes unwillingly as the window-washer dwarf blesses him saying 'God send you truth,' and goes. The dwarf is none but his poor, uncomplaining, blind mother in the institution. Augie is continually haunted by memories of the mother who was born to suffer and his children who are yet to come. He wants to integrate his conjugal unit and the parental home, perhaps before children are born and induct the grandma in power. Basteshaw shakes him off his dreams; pulling his scientific rank on him, he informs Augie that they are going to lend in the Canaries and pursue research for the rest of the war. He invites Augie to join him in the project and declares: "I am going to create a serum—a serum like a new River Jordan. With respect to which I will be a Moses. And you Joshua. To lead an Israel consisting of the entire human race across it. I don't want to go back to the United States" (AM 586-587). Augie, no longer a Columbus evinces little interest in Basteshaw's apocalypse. He promptly rejects the offer of "doing things to the entire human race" (AM 586) and says: "I need my wife" (AM 587). But Basteshaw will not let him have his
wife and family. He asks Augie to extinguish the smoke that he has rushed into the water to attract a ship sighted in the western horizon. Augie refuses. With unbelievable Cucumber coolness Basteshaw clobbers him with the oar and binds him hand and foot with his own clothes. The struggle that consumes half a night for Augie to break free, and continues with his landing in Naples in bad shape along with the murderous maniac, his internment in the hospital for six months and the eventual union with Stella whom he left after just two days of marriage assumes epic proportions. Basteshaw represents the dark forces that stand between Augie and his goal, which is all that he stands for now, the home. In Basteshaw there are compounded many Theas. He is more malignant than the seas which separate Augie and his family. It turns out that Basteshaw had no idea at all about the Canaries, and no sense of direction. But in the hospital in Naples he is still confident about his project and funnily laments the insouciance of the world to big-time ideas: "The power of an individual to act through his intellect on the reason of mankind is smaller now than ever" (AM 591). One September night, at last, a taxi brings Augie to Stella's door and "she came running down the stairs" to him.

Henderson's flight from the death cell is equally significant. Noting the meaning of Corde ('string' in French), Sheppard observes that Bellow has "never had much patience for furtive symbolism." The symbolic inclinations lying behind the primary character referents in Augie March and Henderson are not far to

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seek. In king Dahfu we find another Basteshaw and a male Thea. The Rain King's escape and homeward flight is as much dramatic as Augie's. Henderson too undergoes the same excruciating learning process, like Augie at the end of which he realizes the value of the home. But Augie has lost his home not entirely because of his impulses but because of circumstances, among which one finds Simon's selfish machinations. Henderson, on the contrary chooses his doom and strides into primitive evil. The mad push and pull of the Wariri tribe when he takes over as Sungo and the confinement in the death cell as he is named Yassi after the death of Dahfu are very much passages of rite. Walking for about ten days towards the town of Baventai, a dreary distance, with his companion Romilayu. He and Henderson undergoes much the same suffering as Augie before he reaches Naples, thoroughly worn out. Baventai and Naples are the excruciating preliminaries for the eventual homeward flight of both Henderson and Augie. Henderson begins to feel, as soon as he becomes Rain king, that he has not chosen the right life. Far removed from culture and civilization Henderson yeans for "the cocktail hour" at home. It is ridiculous to see the Wariri men and women dance and push during the ceremony. Caught between the king and the Bunam's anti-lion forces Henderson shuns the life he has chosen and devoutly prays:

Take off my stupid sins ... Oh, Thou who tookest me from pigs, let me not be killed over lions.
And forgive my crimes and nonsense and let me return to Lily and the kids.

He is no longer the husband who was cross with his wife for not bringing the kids into the zero weather to sleep with him under skins like Eskimos in the igloo he had built. Henderson realizes his blazing indiscretions as a crazy husband. The cranky Wariri
tribe and their crazy king make him realize this. Still his intimacy with Dahfu is so good that he is unwilling to snap the ties all at once. It is an ununderstandable fascination for Dahfu, who dismisses all talk about "mothers", when Henderson conveys his mother's reservations about his Atti experiment. He declares: "First come the phenomena" (HRK 216). Henderson persuades himself that Dahfu is a genius like Pascal who at the age of twelve "discovered the thirty-second proposition of Euclid all by himself" (HRK 217). "But why lions?" Henderson wonders and is never able to fully convince himself about this irrational project. When at the hopo block and pully finally smash down on the stone on Dahfu's great day, and Dahfu falls towards the fatal lion, Dahfu's 'lie' about 'phenomena' and 'being' is nailed. The madness and mortality of Dahfu is indisputably established. The king is after all another Banteshaw, and if anything, a nobler and more highminded crank. As Augie sees and slums in Banteshaw his once-iconoclastic self, Henderson realizes through Dahfu his own folly, more enduring than Augie's. Dahfu, as a matter of fact has now landed Henderson in big trouble. He has to succeed as "the bush-league" king because he gave in to the impulse of lifting Mumah, and is now confined in the death cell, in conformity with the rites. For making good his escape Henderson has to conceive a grand scheme, execute commando tricks, mercilessly crack the skulls of the amazons and flee at last, leaving a trail of bloodshed and violence. It is another epic encounter like the one between Augie and Banteshaw. "This is the twentieth century, "says Henderson and "they can't make a king of me if I don't let them." And astonishingly these words, it must be underscored, come gushing from the one who did not
"wish to live by any law of decay" (HRK 161) and accordingly
"rushed out into the world" (HRK 162). He realizes the value of
clinging to reason and history and the danger of getting lost in
the cauldron of nature. Like Augie, Henderson too has to pay the
price for being in nature. Mexico and Africa symbolise the
irrational dark forces which are out to uproot family and civiliza-
tion and the values that go with the home. It takes ten days
for Henderson to reach Baventai and on the way he develops a bad
case of 'homesickness.' But for his survival instructor, Romilayu,
who knew the water, roots and insects Henderson might never have
made it home. This ten-day trial and the confinement in the cell
together constitute the rite of passage which signals his complete
transformation from a fenciful adolescent into a responsible
family man. The hell he goes through as Rain King is the first
rite of passage which initiates him into the new understanding.
When Henderson offers his jeep to Romilayu along with a letter
to Lily, after his enquiries about his family and children,
Romilayu breaks down saying "you introuble, sah." Henderson,
after all his bluffing about the holobility of the lion experiment
admits it is so: "But since I'm a reluctant type of fellow, life
has decided to use strong measures on me. I am a shunner, Romi-
layu, and so this serves me right." Henderson realizes the value
of the home and the duties he shunned. The same afternoon, after
sending off Romilayu with the promise that he will meet him in
Baventai as soon as 'his business' with the king is finished, he
writes to Lily. In the letter he maintains that the African
experience has been "tough" and "perilous" and that he has
"matured twenty years in twenty days." Significantly he adds.
Lily, I probably haven't said this lately, but I have true feeling for you, baby, which sometimes wrings my heart. You can call it love. Although personally I think that word is full of fluff. 

(HRK 239)

His view of husband's love and wife's love as valueless stuff is now part of his crusted baggage, his insular prejudice, which is now melting. Still trying to insinuate that Lily has been responsible for his flight into madness, he complains like a cheated child: "you said your mother was dead when she wasn't which was certainly very neurotic of you ... you conned me. Is this how love acts?" Then he makes concerned enquiries about the arenas resting in the cornices at home. He once crashed all the branches in his dislike of the birds. The terror of the lion has now taught him about the harmlessness of these innocent beings. In the same way he realizes the worth of his wife. This becomes evident when after the death of Daphu bursts out before Romilayu that he cannot take over 'that bunch of females' in his capacity as king. "I have all the wife I need. Lily is just a marvelous woman."(H 264)

As Opedahl observes, "Henderson is not just a code hero,... but an unhappy one."

An unhappy Henderson emphatically rejects kinship. "No, I'd break my heart here trying to fill his position. Besides, I have to go home. And anyway, I am no stud. No use kidding." (H 265) In the same spirit, he masterminds the scheme to flee the death cell. When Romilayu is skeptical about his ability to make it to Barentai he says "he could walk across Siberia" (HRK 268) on his hands. "It's the Valley Forge clement in me," he asserts. His prowess, redoubtable as it is, is not

the only reason for the declaration. Home has now become the crying need. Whatever Henderson utters betrays his frenzy and anxiety in his bid to reach home at the earliest. There is "one thing" he keeps saying to himself and Romilayu in the midst of his ailments, his fatigue and dysentery during the incredibly difficult journey; this is "that I had to get back to Lily and the children." "I would never feel right until I saw them," he says frantically, "and especially Lily herself" (HRK 275).

Henderson comes into all this trouble just because this consciousness did not hit him earlier. But now he has restored scale and is able to put the truth simply.

What's the universe? Big. And what are we? Little. I therefore might as well be at home where my wife loves me. And even if she only seemed to love me, that too was better than nothing. Either way, I had tender feelings toward her. (HRK 275-276)

Henderson has now reached the ultimate in realization. Again he expresses it magnificently when he says: "You can't get away from rhythm, Romilayu" (HRK 276).

Time comments: "Author Bellow's Africa is vivid with colors and temperature changes, but essentially it is a climate of the soul much like Hamlet's castle at Elsinore. Henderson's moral dilemma is more real than Hamlet's."7

The drama heightens, when after several weeks in Baventai Henderson and Romilayu proceed to Baktale, where Henderson takes some sulfa for his dysentery. Then Romilayu drives to Harar, as Henderson sleeps in the back of the jeep with the lion cub, the symbol of the price he paid in Africa, and that takes six days.

Finally he says goodbye to Romileyu as he proceeds to board the Khartoum plane and gloats over his flight from raw nature. "I'm unkillable. Nature has tried everything. It has thrown the book at me. And here I am." But the journey towards home and civilization appears interminable and is fraught with anxiety all the while. In Khartoum, there is a hassle with the consular people about the arrangements and "quite a squawk about the lion" (HRK 277). The longing for home now reaches a feverish, queer pitch when Henderson tells the authorities: "I'm in a hurry to get home. I've been sick and I can't stand any delay." (HRK 278) Henderson is still more tense when he cries on the transatlantic phone, flying into Cairo, the same evening: "It's me baby; 'I'm coming home Sunday." This crisp, highly charged telegraphic message betrays the inner frenzy. Because of partial deafness and absolute anxiety he is not able to hear Lily properly. Nonetheless the world of rhythm, reason and love emerges more distinctly as Henderson settles more surely with the phone.

"Gene!" I heard, and after that the waves of half the world, the air, the water, the earth's vascular system, came in between. "Honey, I aim to do better, can you hear? I've had it now." (HRK 278)

Henderson cannot bear to be cut off by space and time anymore. Nature has stood so long between him and civilization, and it now defeats technology, the man-made cables in the slimy Atlantic floor.

Space with its weird cries came between. I knew she was speaking about love; her voice thrilled, and I guessed she was moralizing and calling me back. (HRK 278)
On Thursday he flies to Athens. Friday, he reaches Rome. Other passengers are distinguishable because they are not "coming from mid-Africa" like Henderson and they are by no means "discontinuous with civilization" (HRK 279). They have risen from Paris and London into the skies with their books. With the home still far away and beyond immediate reach, Henderson shares his tormented thoughts with the stewardess, a mid-western young woman who is "all sweet corn and milk": "You make me think of my wife. I haven't seen her in months" (HRK 280). He calls her "kid" and tells her that he got sick in Africa and "lost count of time." He adds: "then you go in deep you run that risk, you know that don't you kid?" It becomes amply clear that he regrets in no small measure for leaving the family when he says: "Instead of coming to ourselves, we grow all kinds of deformities and enormities." And he adds that something should be done for this while we wait for the day" (HRK 280). Henderson now has no illusions around him. He is very clear that his irrational individualism, his daring Lindbergh solo flight across Africa, and all the rest of it is just a stage to pass through. He has crunched out of his illusions as he tells at once in question and answer.

"You know why I'm impatient to see my wife, miss? I'm eager to know how it will be now that the sleep is burst. And the children, too. I love them very much ... (HRK 281)

It is unfortunate that the critics have not underscored the intensity and expectations with which Augie and Henderson fly homeward bouncing from their own follies; and the forces of darkness which represent the conflict, "the savagery and stridency
of these Africans who mauled the gods and strung up the dead by their feet" (HRK 163). From commencement to finish the actions and utterances veer around this motif in both the novels. whereas Augie romanticizes and mystifies the family ideal Henderson cries it up as the most basic need for emotional stability. Of course, Henderson's big talk as a self-styled adventurer about his mission to fulfill the national need for achievement, long after "white Protestantism and the Constitution and the Civil War and capitalism and winning the West" deserves our attention. Henderson boasts with characteristic bombast: "Millions of Americans have gone forth since the war to redeem the present and discover the future... I am a high-spirited kind of guy. And it's the destiny of my generation of Americans to go out into the world and try to find the wisdom of life! Now let us compare Matthiessen's celebration of the ideals of initiative, individualism and self-reliance he locates in Whitman Emerson, Hawthorne, Thoreau and Melville explaining how they "felt it was incumbent on their generation to give fulfilment to the potentialities freed by the Revolution, to provide a culture commensurate with America's political opportunity." Bellow appreciates individualism but here in Henderson's words he is making a mere burlesque, because the hulking adventurer it is mere infantile initiative. The context in which Henderson's grandiloquence comes bears this out. He tells Romileyu all this in an apologetic way to cover up the shame of his lion experiment with Dahfu. He tells him that "the human race needs guys like this king more than ever." But much earlier he comes to the

conclusion that Dahfu is "completely lacking in what we all
know as civilized character." This is Henderson’s castigation of
Dahfu’s lion-and-being experiment and his own complicity in it.
"A fellow may do many a crazy thing," Henderson rationalizes,
"and as long as he has no theory about it we forgive him. But
if there happens to be a theory behind his actions everybody is
down on him. That’s how it is with the king" (HRK 232). It is
evident, therefore that when in a short while he praises Dahfu,
it is mainly a cover-up exercise. But he gives himself away, it
must be noted, when Romilayu brushing aside all his apologetic
encomium, cries over Henderson’s involvement in the risky,
yelling experiment. Henderson admits that he is being served
right for fleeing his family obligations. It has to be emphasi-
zed, therefore, in unmistakable words that Augie March and
Henderson are beneath their diaphanous picaresque veil family
novels. And if Henderson jumps and leaps and pounds in joy
"over the pure white lining of the gray Arctic silence" (HRK 286)
at the end of the novel, it is not for vague universals and the
possibilities of self-reliance. It is the joy of a concrete
reality, the home that is so close. Boulton says: "Bellow’s
Africa is as much a territory of the mind as a geographical area:
the hero moves towards insight, a spiritual explorer making a
spiritual journey." Our contention is that it is a spiritual-
looking homeward journey.

Sammler’s Rolls Royce flight from New Rochelle to the
hospital as Elya lies dying with "the mortal bulge" (MSP 209)

Marjorie Boulton, The Anatomy of the Novel (London:
comes under the same category. Verily Elya is all the 'home' that Sammler has and his exit would mean an absolute void. Here again as in the case of Henderson and Augie something stands between the passionate runner bound for the 'home' and his destination. Emil suddenly stops the car when it is nearing Lincoln centre. "But why at such a time,' Sammler wonders anxiously 'should he have stopped for anything?" (MSP 228). Feffer is found fighting the black youth the pickpocket and what follows is an unseemly, bloody spectacle. Eisen steps in but does not stop short of the goal; he chooses to carry the war to ominous proportions for sheer delight. The black man becomes a 'megalomaniac' and Eisen 'a homicidal maniac' in the eyes of Sammler; they too join the ranks of Dehfu and Basteshaw - of course not on the same level-in hindering the hero's homeward quest. The squad car too arrives and Sammler is afraid of "getting mixed up with the police" because "they might detain him for hours" (MSP 235). Not only Eisen and Feffer, but the whole of the younger generation including Shule and Angela contribute to the hindrance. Shule has diverted Sammler from his concentration on Elya in the hospital with her theft of Lal's manuscript, thus necessitating a trip to New Rochelle. Angela kills his critical time, refusing to budge, when Sammler persuades her with apologetic might to "make some sign" (MSP 245) to the departing soul. The avaricious Shule again disturbs him over phone about the money she has found in New Rochelle. Finally, as a result Sammler is not able to see Elya alive; his 'home' crumbles. And for an audience with the dead man, Sammler, in his accumulated gripe, turns into an adolescent
threatening Dr Crosbie in the most uncharacteristic manner. How could a septuagenarian of Sammler's calibre ever fall into a tantrum? The kinship that at once raises man above creatureliness and also pushes him into it is our final concern.