CHAPTER-I
INTRODUCTION

Novel, among the literary genres, is the most problematic one. When we are concerned with epic, with tragedy, or with lyric poetry, there are some definitions available that are more or less agreed upon by different scholars and critics. Thanks to the long tradition of arguments, debates and criticisms that have their roots deep in history down to the Greek world, there is now hardly any problem in finding the identity of these genres. The definitions of these classical genres are established. Now, reading an epic, we know that we are dealing with the old heroic days of a nation or a culture; or, reading a lyric poem we know that we are reading the emotions of a sensitive mind. We can study poetry per se; it has no serious relation to epic, to comedy, or to tragedy. The type of poetry used in the other genres is a distinct one. Almost all the classical genres can be studied distinctively. Perhaps this is why Aristotle -- and his followers -- could draw clear lines between the genres. Novel, on the other hand, is a hybrid genre. Discussing it, we have already begun a discussion of the other genres. At times, indeed, discussions of the other disciplines intrude: politics, sociology, psychology, philosophy, economics, etc. It may be possible to study the classical genres from a pure aesthetic point of view and with no regard to the other disciplines. Indeed, these genres tend to be specific. They limit themselves and any discussion of them comes to be limited and one-dimensional. Novel, however, involves itself with many different subjects, if not with everything concerning life.

Beside its involvement with many subjects, novel looks at each subject from many different points of view. It is impossible to write a novel with just one voice and with no social surrounding. As soon as the second voice is inserted into the novel, a
different perspective is introduced. These different perspectives and ideas in the novel are in a constant process of give and take. The presentation of ideas is so complicated that it becomes impossible for the reader to identify the voice of the author from the plurality of voices present in the novel. Actually it becomes “a field of battle for others’ voices” (Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics 89). Reading it, as the author neither affirms nor repudiates any idea but presents all the ideas with some sort of artistic distance, there always arises certain complications and ambiguities for the reader that which one of these ideas are intended to be glorified as textual representations and which ones are the author’s own ideas, his personal code.

Mikhail Bakhtin (1895-1975), a Russian literary scholar, through a life-long study on the novel came to the idea that novel is that exceptionally unique genre in which the author cannot give privilege to one specific idea. Studying Dostoevsky, Rabelais, Goethe, and indeed all the European and Russian novelists he could lay hands on, he came to the essential difference between epic and novel: epic is the genre in which there is one dominant, ruling ideology. The main distinctive feature of this genre is that no other ideology except that of the author (which is identical with the dominant ideology of the society, that of the hero, the narrator, and even of the reader) can find an expression. Novel, in contrast, is a genre in which there is a plurality of ideas and each idea finds expression only among and in relation with other ideas. As the writer has to present characters with different ideas to those of his or her own, imposing or propagating one specific idea is impossible in the novel.

The distinction between epic and novel by Bakhtin is based on the distinction between dialogic literature and monologic literature. Dialogic literature presents the ideas
in a relative way. The ideas have to be alive and act with/among the other ideas. These ideas are embodied in different characters. In a fully dialogic work, the author does not take sides with one or another character/idea. Ideas are presented with a sort of 'artistic distance.' They are neither affirmed nor repudiated directly by the author. Other ideas/characters may, and do challenge them, but, still, they are all there without being absolutely accepted or rejected. This challenge, however, is important as it enables different ideas to develop within their own unique worldviews. Much in the same way as a city is a place of contact between different personalities, novel, and most especially novel of ideas, is that place of contact between worldviews, ideologies, and voices.

In monologic literature the worldview of the author is the force working on the text. “The one who knows, understands and sees is in the first instance the author himself” (Dostoevsky’s Poetics 82). The author is actively present there to either accept or reject one idea. The values in a monologic work are absolute values, and the author takes sides with the ‘good’ party. The other characters are there as either friends and defenders of the dominant values, or ‘foes’ and evil. A binary system is working there: either -- or. There is no third party, no one to see the events from another point of view. “The appearance of a second account would inevitably be perceived as a crude contradiction within the author’s worldview” (Dostoevsky’s Poetics 82). When a work is monologic, “the genuine interaction of consciousness is impossible, and thus genuine dialogue is impossible as well” (Dostoevsky’s Poetics 81). There is only one consciousness that knows what the ‘truth’ is, and this version of truth is dictated to other consciousnesses. In this mode of presentation of ideas, the flow of ideas tends to move unilaterally, from top to bottom, from author to hero, from hero to other characters, from
the writer to the reader. There is no give and take between the consciousnesses, only
dictation of one powerful and dominant idea. Ideologically, even the hero is a passive
character and ironically the most passive one as the ideas spring from a source above
him/her: the author. The hero cannot question them, he or she cannot choose but to act
according to the code of the author.

On the theoretical level, Saul Bellow, the contemporary American novelist, views
the novel in a similar way. In an essay entitled “Where We Go From Here: The Future of
Fiction” he makes the distinction between “a didactive novelist like D.H. Lawrence and
one like Dostoyevskysic” (1967: 146). Bellow maintains that whereas the first group of
novelists, like the monologic authors of Bakhtin, have nothing to offer but their own
“didactive” purposes, the other group, like dialogic artists, while being didactive, are “the
bravest” because they “have taken the risk of teaching religion, science, philosophy and
politics. Only they have been prepared to admit the strongest possible arguments against
their own positions “ (146; emphasis added). Very much like Bakhtin, Bellow in theory
believes that a novel “becomes art when views most opposite to the author’s own are
allowed to exist in full strength. Without this a novel of ideas is mere self-indulgence,
and didacticism is simply axe-grinding.” We are not sure how much Bellow was familiar
with the ideas of Bakhtin when he was writing his essay, but there are articulations that
one could find in Bakhtin as well: Bellow believes, “[t]he opposites must be free to range
themselves against each other, and they must be passionately expressed on both sides”
(146). To have a theoretical framework similar to the dialogical methodology of Bakhtin
does not necessarily mean that all the artistic productions of Saul Bellow are dialogic as
well.
American writers have often described themselves as loafers, vagabonds, beggars and bums. Thoreau sits apart from the community in idleness beside the Walden Pond. Walt Whitman describes himself as one of the “roughs.” Writers have stood aside from the ordinary duties of their fellow citizens. (“Distractions of a Fiction Writer” 9-10).

Naturalists were interested in the study of the life of an individual in communities. In fact this experimental study formed the base of their artistic creativity. But they too failed to recognize the full, plural nature of reality. Relying on the scientific theories of Darwin, Marx, and Freud in their approach to reality, the Naturalists saw the struggle of the individual either with a crude, blind environment, or with his or her own dark psychological forces.

Great American writers have always been disposed to different forms of quest in their works as one of their main preoccupations is with the nature and the creation of the Self. Quests recover essential things to human life in encounters between cultures, with alien surroundings, people, animals, nature, or the Other; namely, the waking of individual in the knowledge of himself, knowledge about others, the world, and the meaning of life.

American novels of quest lay emphasis on the nature of human freedom as the heroes of quest novels more often than not balance between their fear of being entrapped into some fixed forms of existence and that of having an amorphous identity or no identity at all. Contemporary American literature may be said to have taken two main directions: Post modern literature or the “the literature of exhaustion” which reveals a nihilistic attitude to individual existence and life in general and considers humanist values useless in a world devoid of absolutes. The humanist wing representatives of which
argue that the novel has not been exhausted and defend its moral humanism and educational power. Bellow, one of the most erudite and intellectual writers of the second half of the twentieth century, belongs to the latter direction as he is a unique spokesman for humanitarian values and ideals in American literature.

Bellow is regarded as one of the most celebrated authors of the 20th century and American literature's most resourceful writer for all times. He has come to his prominence slowly through a careful building up of a body of work, an oeuvre displaying greater insight, range of power, with each new novel. Since his appearance on the literary scene in the mid-forties, Saul Bellow, recipient of the 1976 Nobel Prize for literature, has left his mark on the international literary world. His writings, which combine prophetic wisdom with human comedy, have always elicited extreme response: reverence or condemnation. He is one the few contemporary authors who has been able to sustain the interest and dominate the field of academic and scholarly inquiry for over four decades. His fiction typically addresses the meaning of human existence in an increasingly impersonal and mechanistic world. Writing in a humorous, anecdotal style, Bellow often depicts introspective individuals sorting out a conflict between the Old world and the New world values while coping with personal anxieties and aspirations. Saul bellow has been a most persevering chronicler of America's restless search for a definable self, articulating more common needs and ills of American society at large. Each of his novels feels the pulse of its decade, exposing the social and intellectual issues at hand. None of his works allow for easy identification or rejection. As a consequence, none have gone uncontended—the controversies they address beckon our response.
In his works it is possible to trace a clear line of ideological and narrative development. They suggest a wholeness of vision: man must change himself with understanding the nature of the experience that he rejects as well as of that which he affirms in order to live in the full recognition of his life’s worth. Bellow’s narratives tell the tale of modern man in America, his terror in the face of dissolving reason, his persistent will to alter his destiny, his desire to reaffirm the values of community in an age where loyalties are fickle and allegiances of life are undertaken in the face of flimsy, often conflicting evidence.

His novels are constantly and dynamically engaged with contemporary history. With few exceptions, his fiction takes place at the historical moments at which they were written, and taken as a body his work reflects the flux of ideas and the major political and cultural tensions that have affected the western world in the decades since World War-II, Bellow’s America is metonymic of the West, representing, in effect, the modern world.

In one sense it could be said that the central tension that creates history is between high idealism and mundane reality, and that a key manifestation of this in Bellow’s novels is the American city as represented by Chicago. In most of his works, Bellow resists the nihilistic view of modernism according to which the present time is that of the decline of civilization and the modern world is a dreadful, gruesome abyss where everything is repulsive and sickening. He has made conscientious efforts, however, to help his readers to overcome that gloomy outlook, because he is intensely aware of the forces that intimidate such efforts in the modern world. By facing those forces, instead of denying them, he attempts to expose that the alleged void and futility of modern life can be eliminated by making endeavors to regain our ostensibly missing human dignity.

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Therefore he can be considered an idealistic writer whose insightful sensitivity to the problems of modern life doesn’t impel him to admit defeat, rather to make efforts to overcome them.

Bellow’s efforts to fight against moral and spiritual void is manifest in his writings where he proves himself to be highly concerned with the proper way of life in a materialistic society and in a mass productive age, where human values seem to be deficiently diminished. Although he is keenly aware of the complexity of modern problems, he believes in human’s redeeming capability, and hence the possibility of pursuing a dignified, meaningful existence. His most famous mouthpiece confirms in a novel named after him, “I’m certain that there are human qualities still to be discovered” (Herzog 171), and this very notion helps him defy ‘the Wasteland outlooks’ (81). Refuting the claims of nihilistic ‘Waste Landers’ (82), therefore, Bellow propounds a particular kind of optimism that is rooted in his deep awareness of the existence of the forces that perpetually threaten the possibility of actualizing his dream.

Bellow is the inheritor of a long tradition of false starts and abject retreats and grey inconclusions. There is a sense in which he fulfills the often frustrated attempt to possess the American imagination and to enter the American cultural scene of a line of Jewish fictionists who go back beyond the post war generation through Ben Hecht and Ludwig Lewisohn to Abe Cahan. As Leslie A. Fiedler has rightly observed, “A hundred, a thousand one-shot novelists, ephemeral success and baffled eccentrics stand behind him, defining a subject; the need of the Jew in America to make clear his relationship to that country in terms of belonging or protest – and a language, a speech enriched by the dialectic and joyful intellectual play of Jewish conversation” (1967: 2).
Bellow's own story, like the archetypal Jewish dream is success story.—“He has worked himself up in America.” He emerges at the moment when the Jews for the first time moved into the centre of American culture and he must be seen in the larger context. The background is familiar enough: the gradual breaking up of the Anglo-Saxon domination of the American imagination—the relentless urbanization which makes rural myths and images no longer central to their experience and a sense of exhaustion as vital themes of the Midwest and of the movement from the provinces to New York or Chicago or Paris; the turning again from West to East, from one’s own heartland back to Europe; and the discovery in the Jews of a people essentially urban, essentially Europe - oriented, a ready-made image for what the American longs to or fears he is being forced to become.

On all levels in the years since World War–II, the Jewish American writer feels imposed on him the role of being The American, of registering his experience for his compatriots and for the world as The American Experience. Not only his flirtation with Communism and his disengagement, but his very sense of exclusion, his most intimate awareness of loneliness and flight are demanded of him as public symbols. As Leslie A. Fielder has rightly put it, “The Southerner and the Jew, the homosexual out of the miasma of Mississippi and the ex-radical out of the iron landscape of Chicago and New York – these seem the exclusive alternatives, contrasting yet somehow twinned symbols of America at mid century. Partisan Review becomes for Europe and Life magazine the mouthpiece of intellectual America, not despite but because of its tiny readership and its specially determined contributors; and in Saul Bellow a writer emerges capable of transforming its obsessions into myths” (1967: 186).
His appearance as the first Jewish-American novelist to stand at the centre of American literature is flanked by a host of matching successes on other levels of culture and subculture. Bellow is considered a quintessential post-war American writer. His Russian Jewish upbringing as well as his exuberant and candid voice, are all essential aspects of his unique portrayals of the American spirit in the raw energy of Chicago. What Saul Bellow is for highbrow literature, Salinger is for upper middle brow, Irwin Shaw for middlebrow and Herman Wouk for lower middlebrow. The acceptance of Bellow as the leading novelist of his generation must be paired off with the appearance of Marjorie Morningstar on the front cover of *Time*. On all levels, the Jew is in the process of being mythicized into the representative American.

There is a temptation in all this to a kind of assimilation with the most inspired values of bourgeois life in the United States. It is to Bellow’s credit that he has at once accepted the full challenge implicit in the identification of Jew with America, and yet has not succumbed to the temptation; that he has been willing to accept the burden of success without which he might have been cut off from the central subject of his time, and that he has accomplished this without essential compromise. Increasingly, in his later fiction, Bellow reveals his opposition to the modernist sensibility and its art. Unconvinced by modernist coldness, materialism, and skepticism, Bellow instinctively allies himself to older traditions, the 19th century tradition of English romanticism and the traditional Jewish humanist outlook with its Old Testament vitality and emphasis on moral seriousness and spiritual quest.

Saul Bellow, like his illustrious modernist predecessors T.S. Eliot, James Joyce, Ernest Hemingway, and William Faulkner, explores the waste-land theme and succeeds
in projecting a world-view that moves beyond the waste land. However, this process of affirmation is operationalised through a palpable waste land motif. Thus the atmosphere of the wasteland lingers persistently in Bellow’s fiction till the protagonist achieves clarity in his consciousness. While Bellow excoriates the modernist “wasteland ideology” he is himself ostensibly given to a venial vision of wasteland and spiritual atrophy. But such despairing moods in Bellow are part of a comprehensive vision which goes beyond what one understands by the terms ‘optimism’ and ‘pessimism’. A closer study of Bellow’s fiction reveals that although the mood of the wasteland is inescapable for Bellow to start with, the Bellow-protagonists usually wring out of themselves the antidote that would counteract the wasteland and bring in redemption.

Modernists are particularly repelled by the 19th century romantic concept of the individual or ‘soul’ which they regard as an illusion. Although Bellow shares a similar outlook with the English romantics regarding their faith in the power of the imagination to redeem the everyday world and regenerate the alienated individual, he feels that the romantic glorification of the self is excessive at times. Yet he abhors the modernists’ disdain for the romantic concept of the self, believing that they are incorrect in considering it as an outmoded concept. In “A Comment on Form and Despair”, Bellow implies that modernism originates with the birth of French realism in the middle of the 19th century; a realism that portrays the ordinary individual as “extraordinarily limited” (2000: 11). Such an outlook has become the intellectual orthodoxy of our time.

Saul Bellow’s The Victim confirmed the emergence of a new protagonist in American literature: modern, Jewish, as alienated from his surroundings as Kafka’s Gregor Samsa in The Metamorphosis. Along with Bernard Malamud and Norman
Mailer, Saul Bellow was soon to form the triumvirate of Jewish – American post-war fiction. Writing in the aftermath of Fitzgerald’s and Hemingway’s mythic self-inventions, Mr. Bellow and his contemporaries replaced that gentility with a far more equivocal, even precarious world-view: if the new Augie Marches were worried to the point of anguish, they were also profoundly, sometimes profanely, alive. And they stood at the entrance to literature’s shadowy post-atomic age, in a decade shared by Ralph Ellison’s *Invisible Man* and David Riesman’s *The Lonely Crowd*. The backbone of 20th century American literature has been provided by two novelists: William Faulkner and Saul Bellow, novelist Philp Roth said, “Together they are the Melville, Hawthorne, and Twain of the 20th century”. Armed with a renaissance reach – he could quote Milton with showing off – and a wit as biting as the Chicago wind, Mr. Bellow set out to capture the human condition, if not remedy it, in all its bruised beauty and sweet-drenched Sisyphean days. He wanted to span the moral fissure left in modernity’s wake, and did.

For though he drew from two of the strongest traditions of English literature, the tale of the wanderer and the novel of ideas, Mr. Bellow was most of all a realist of the modern age. He wrote with a brainy, urbane acuity, uncluttered by sentimentality and unblemished by polemic. Heralding modernism’s tacit creed, he believed in art above all else. “Truth is higher than the sun” writes the title character in *Herzog*, his creator mastered that refrain over the years with the thunderous range of a downtown choir.

Saul Bellow is perhaps the foremost among a handful of post-war novelist to have successfully thrown over the preoccupation of the moderns with cultural and religious dissolution, metaphysical loneliness, romantic agony and estrangement. And he has been the foremost enemy of those derivative post-war novelists who, unable or unwilling to
question the existentialist foundations of the modernist orthodoxy they inherited, have found a permanent home in the wasteland or its neighbouring ghettos. Likewise, he has condemned the other popular literary alternatives to modernism – the clever but shallow comic celebration of absurdism, the naïvete of a shaky, hastily refurbished neo-humanism, or the pseudo literary muckraking naturalism of yet another group. Instead, he has sought to steer a moderate course between the excesses of disappointed idealism and nihilistic rage, characteristic of much modern literature. Through the antiseptic and corrective device of parody, he has held up for our scrutiny the false intellectual assumptions behind modernist ideologies concerning death, absurdity, mass society, estrangement, and stoicism, while at the same time he has turned upside down the reasoning of the wasteland ideologists, the Lawrentian, primitivists, the Freudian psychoanalysts, the Camus stoics and the logical positivists. Bellow recounts the decline of individualism and the novel in the twentieth century, but he argues that contemporary writers can, by confronting the critical tradition of despair and fragmentation, redirect their efforts and respond to the persistent human desire for art to represent the essential qualities of life. He refers to Conrad’s definition of art as a search for “what was fundamental, enduring, essential” in the universe, an intuitive appeal to the commonality of human experience. Conrad’s theory is the foundation of Bellow’s argument, which he supports by references to other masters of characterization such as Proust, Tolstoy, and Dostoevsky.

Bellow sees the destruction of individualism in society as parallel to the emphasis of character in literature. He recounts how he, like others who matured between the two great wars, “was convinced that the horrors of the twentieth century had sickened and
killed humanistic beliefs with their deadly radiation,” abandoning the sensitive individual to “solidarity with other isolated creatures” (Bellow, 1994: 89).

Bellow identifies several factors that have worked to undercut the stature of the individual: the sense that each nation’s culture is increasingly dominated by “identifiable personalities,” stereotypes created by national literatures, the inflexibility of a psychoanalytic view of character; and the opposition of totalitarian regimes to bourgeois individualism. He argues that this sense of alienation has been accepted by artists and become an inflexible critical tradition. As an extreme example, he cites Robbe-Grillet’s reductive theory of “thingism” that assumes the demise of character.

Yet Bellow argues that, despite the special difficulties modern writers face in creating character and describing the essential, they should not allow themselves to be intimidated by the defeatist tradition of modern criticism. In fact, he argues that “the terrible predictions we have to live with, the background of disorder, the vision of ruin” (1989: 320), make an artistic effort to describe the essential more necessary and more likely of success. He agrees that modern man stands “open to all anxieties” and that “the decline of everything is our daily bread,” but he believes that man’s “purer, subtler, higher activities have not succumbed to fury or nonsense” (2000: 131).

Bellow asserts that modern writers do not do justice to mankind, and he believes that readers recognize the falseness of these limited portrayals. Readers are weary of “all the usual things about mass society dehumanization,” for “there is much more to us; we all feel it.” This dissatisfaction creates an opportunity for writers, writers who are willing to re-examine the formulations of our age and strive to be “simple and true.” Bellow believes that the novel can still be an appropriate vehicle for moral judgment, offering
"meaning, harmony, and even justice," and although he does not predict that the modern novel can return to the glories of the nineteenth century, he says it can serve as "a sort of latter-day lean-to, a hovel in which the spirit takes shelter" (2000: 133).

Like the characters who are continually searching for a way to apprehend reality, Mr. Bellow tends to regard fiction as a kind of tool for investigating the society around him; he sees the novelist as "an imaginative historian, who is able to get closer to contemporary facts than social scientists possibly can" (1981: 11). But while the madness of the modern world, manifested in everything from sexual profligacy to random violence, has always reverberated in his characters' lives – a phenomenon that became more pronounced in *Mr. Sammlers Planet* – specific public issues have remained largely in the background. With *The Dean's December*, such matters as oppression in Eastern Europe, the plight of the American "underdust", student militancy and the deterioration of life in American cities are more directly addressed.

As far as Mr. Bellow is concerned, those writers who substitute analysis for imagination have estranged literature from the common world and removed one of its original and most important purposes: the raising of moral questions. Contemporary writers, he adds, are also easily tempted by the sensational, for they are faced with "the Ancient Mariner problem" – like Coleridge's seaman, "they need something to buttonhole the wedding guests with, as they go from wedding to wedding or orgy to orgy; they need something that has the power to penetrate distraction" (1994: 183).

Saul Bellow seeks fictional answers to fundamental questions about human existence and action in our day: "Why were we born? What are we doing here? Where are we going"? (1981: 9).
Bellow’s dominant theme is the onward and upward quest for the human. Man today, even more urgently than in the past, has to discover who and what he is. “The great question,” writes Bellow, “seems to be when will we seek new and higher forms of individuality, purged of old sicknesses and corrected by a deeper awareness of what all men have in common?” (1962: 112). Each of Bellow’s eight protagonists—Joseph in Dangling Man, Asa Leventhal in The Victim, Augie in The Adventures of Augie March, Tommy Wilhelm in Seize the Day, Henderson in Henderson the Rain King, Moses Elkanah Herzog in Herzog, Albert Corde in Deans December and Sammler in Sammler’s Planet (who are different manifestations of contemporary man) travel in search of humanness, the search gathering momentum, height, and complexity as one fictional stage succeeds another.

Bellow’s humanity and compassion radiate from every novel; his interests are the interests of American culture—he knows “where we’re at”; his skill is incredible—in particular, his ability to describe experience in a human voice so that the texture of the experience comes through, and his ability to convey the philosophical-moral complexities of human life without losing that life itself.

Bellow is a spokesman for American culture, he voices its uncertainties, its complexities, its paradoxes. First—Bellow takes a stand against the cultural nihilism of the twentieth century: against Dada, against the Wasteland, against the denigration of human life in modern society. Second—Bellow rejects the tradition of alienation in modern literature, and his fiction emphasizes the value of brotherhood and community; yet his main characters are all masochists and alienates. Third—Bellow is particularly hostile to the devaluation of the “separate self” in modern literature, and he values
individuality nearly as highly as did Emerson. Yet in novel after novel he is forced to
discard individuality, not simply because the individual is insignificant in the face of
terrible forces, but also because individuality is undesirable, a burden which keeps the
human being from love. The state of grace which his heroes approach is an anonymous
state which is the polar opposite of the individuality Bellow loves and wishes to defend;
but it is a state which enables Bellow to keep faith in the human being and in the
possibility of his union with others.

Saul Bellow, with over thirty years of active publication behind him, has been
more successful than most writers in standing up to the rigors of the chase and in resisting
the processes of marmoreal exegesis. On the basis of his first two novels, Dangling Man
(1944), and The Victim (1947), he was categorized rather stringently as an academic,
Partisan Review- oriented, New Critical, Jewish novelist. However, the appearance of
the free-swinging picaresque The Adventures of Augie March (1954) startlingly shattered
this restrictive definition. The Jamesian “paleface” seemed to have broken out of his
bookish tower in order to roam the literary prairies as a full-fledged “redskin.”
Undaunted, the critical cavalry laid chase, only to be ambushed by Seize the Day (1956).
The wide open spaces of Augie’s catch-as-catch-can world had been inverted into the
claustral, introspective labyrinths of Tommy Wilhelm’s upper Broadway. The critics
were naturally wary. Was this move regressive or progressive? Had Bellow, like a
fighting bull, returned to his querencia for a respite, or had he again eluded his pursuers
with a brilliantly deceptive feint? Henderson the Rain King (1959) compounded the
confusion: Bellow’s high-spirited African romance was part spoof, part high jinks, part
fantasy, and wholly serious in a comically open way. With the publication of Herzog
(1964) and *Mr. Sammler's Planet* (1970), Bellow returned with a vengeance to the enclosed urban mindscapes of Joseph, Leventhal, and Tommy Wilhelm. In general, criticism has come to accept these latter as the most characteristic boundaries of Bellow's fiction. Perhaps the critics had become fatigued by the long pursuit and were now content to remain on the peripheries of Bellow's world; and perhaps the sheer quantity of his work had grown sufficiently large that it was impossible for him to do anything completely new and unprepared for in his earlier work. Whatever the reasons the topographical contours of Bellow's fictional world have come to be considered more or less settled.

Most of Bellow's novels articulate positions that reject the wasteland, but such rejection always come after investigating the claims of the wasteland view of reality. Hence the incremental dose of passion and polemics in a Bellow novel. Characteristically the affirmation that is achieved at the end is redolent of humanity's constant struggle to overcome its imperfections. Thus Bellow's vision recognizes the presence of the enduring in human life without divorcing itself from the pain and suffering that life entails. A Bellow novel projects a wasteland ambience which lingers till the protagonist's consciousness attains clarity, and the change from chaos to clarity in the protagonist's consciousness is symbolized by a corresponding movement in the mood of the novel from one of waste to that of a pastoral. The motif of renewal and the figure of the Holy Grail Knight which are clearly part of the rejection of the wasteland thus become recurring features in Bellow's fiction; these, in turn, are inextricably tied to his *Welanschauung*. A dialectic of radically opposed values is typical of a Bellow novel and this feature is again associated with the wasteland myth, notably expressed in T.S. Eliot's
The Waste Land. Bellow employs this feature not simply to bemoan the degenerate state to which human values have fallen, but also to evoke a moral earnestness in contemporary man which would enable him to retrieve the essential human values.

One major issue in Bellow’s fiction that has drawn conflicting responses is that of affirmation. Some critics have faulted Bellow for the "faked out" quality of his affirmation. On the other hand, there are critics who consider his affirmation balanced and meaningful, which is earned in "the teeth of life-denying tendencies" in the contemporary world.

Bellow’s works exhibit vivacious writings and freewheeling ideas but all that changed when he released his 1956 novel, Seize the Day. It was considered by many literary critics as one of the greatest books of the 20th century. The plot of the story revolves around the theme of isolation. Isolation is defined as the idea of being cut off from the society. It’s one of the most widely used subjects in modern literature because of the broadness of its concepts and philosophies. Moreover, isolation, also known as alienation, is a psychological feeling of not belonging to a certain sector of the society.

In Seize the Day, Bellow introduced the character of Tommy Wilhelm, a broke man and frustrated actor in his forties. Because of his troubles, mostly financial, Wilhelm undergoes a period of isolation wherein he realizes his past mistakes and failures. He experiences a day of reckoning where he burdens himself of his struggling state. Wilhelm becomes isolated and feels foreign to the environment where he is living. Since his birth, Wilhelm has seen confusions and mishaps haunting him, from his real name to his foiled marriage among others. Wilhelm apologizes for the life he has lived. He realized the wasted time and the opportunities that he took for granted. It was very clear that Wilhelm
is deeply alienated from his environment. He was simply crushed by his troubles and as the pressure gets higher, Wilhelm succumbs and finally hit rock bottom. An integral part of the technique of isolation is the process of realization and Bellow clearly manifested it through the character of Wilhelm. Despite the troubles, Wilhelm seems to show some glimpse of hope and was quite optimistic. He asks God to help him to be “out the clutch” he is into. It was just overflowing profound wisdom straight from the personal philosophies and ideals of Bellow. Wilhelm was transformed into a man of emotions and innate feelings. Through Seize the Day, Bellow was able to paint a portrait of man’s inner precepts and feelings. Bellow put onto paper probably the most delicate and sensitive nature of humanity’s conscience.

In an interview in the March 7, 1988 New Yorker, Nobel prize-winning novelist Saul Bellow sparked a controversy when he asked, concerning literature, “Who is the Tolstoy of the Zulus? The Proust of the Papuans? I’d be glad to read him.”

These comments have since been discussed in great detail. Many interpretations saw this as a brash taunt denying any relevance to non-European or American literature. Initially, Bellow claimed to have been misquoted. Later, in a piece he wrote in his defense in the New York Times, he said: “The scandal is entirely journalistic in origin... Always foolishly trying to explain and edify all comers, I was speaking of the distinction between literate and preliterate societies. For I was once an anthropology student, you see” (1994: 3).

Coming as it did from a highly-respected American novelist, this comment ignited many a debate concerning political correctness and multi-culturalism. Some would say that if Bellow truly believed that there weren’t any great writers from any developing
societies, why shouldn’t he say it?, “Political Correctness” is a waste of time. Nonetheless, the courage to voice a controversial opinion does not in itself make that opinion valid.

Some critics, especially those who have studied Bellow’s fiction in the light of a psychological—religious paradigm, have tended to question the genuineness and raison d’être of all his novelistic affirmations. John Clayton, for example, argues that Bellow’s longing to be “Hassidic” accounts for his affirmation. Writing about *Herzog*, Clayton observes, “If Bellow has attempted in *Herzog* to bridge the gap between the isolated self and society, he has not succeeded. *Herzog* is man communing with God and nature, not with men” (*In Defense of Man* 227.) David Galloway, like Clayton, views Bellow trying to “reaffirm the values of community,” under the influence of an inherent “Hassidic” strain. Galloway sees the material of Bellow’s fiction arguing for the presence of the wasteland, though Bellow’s rhetoric would have none of it. Discussing the treatment of the city in *Mr. Sammler’s Planet*, Galloway argues that “the sterile landscape of the modern city, collects his [Bellow’s] impressions, but [he] refuses to concede that such an apparently hostile landscape is the final statement of man’s spiritual condition” (“Culture-Making” 53). Stanley Trachtenberg finds Bellow’s affirmation “unconvincing,” and views Herzog’s withdrawal at the end as “paralytic” rather than “regenerative” (“Saul Bellow’s *Luftmenschen*” 58). In one of his more recent essays, Trachtenberg argues that despite Bellow’s attempts to work out exuberant affirmation, his world-view exhibits an essential affinity with the Schopenhauerian kind of pessimism (“Saul Bellow and the Veil of Maya” 39-57). Richard Poirier argues: “It seems to me that Bellow cannot break the stalemate with alienation implicit in his comedy without surrendering to the Wasteland
outlook and foregoing the mostly unconvincing rhetoric which he offers as an alternative" ("Bellows to Herzog", 270-71).

The critical positions stated above seem to suggest that Bellow does not effectively transcend the wasteland darkness of his fictional world and that his affirmation is born out of a religious longing, rather than evolving as an indispensable component of his fictional experience. Although Clayton has sympathies with the deep humanistic and religious aspirations that characterize Bellow's affirmative stance, yet he views Bellow's Weltanschauung as not wholly transcending the wasteland vision of the modernists. The tentativeness of Bellow's affirmation points to the complex and varied nature of human experience which has a purpose and even a deep religious significance. To the extent that Bellow's protagonists do not give in to the "crisis-mentality" typical of the wasteland vision, and envision the possibilities that life still affords, his world-view rejects the wasteland view of life completely.

There is another school of critical opinion which finds Bellow charting a course of recovery with his balanced world-view. Writing about Herzog, Sanford Pinsker, perhaps the earliest critic to observe the presence of the wasteland situation in Bellow's fiction, observes: "With Herzog, Bellow begins to suggest some directions out of both the wastelands of the twentieth century and the peculiar paranoia which afflicts the contemporary sensibility" ("Moses Herzog and the Modern Wasteland" 23). Pinsker argues that redemption becomes possible for Herzog because of his "distinctively Jewish vision" that reasserts the values of innocence, the law of the heart and a manly refusal "to indulge in orgies of despair" ("Moses Herzog and the Modern Wasteland" 26). Daniel Fuchs views Bellow as "the heir of the first modernists, the Romantics, rather than the
arch modernists" (Saul Bellow : Vision and Revision 9), Allan Chavkin traces the source of Bellow's complex sensibility to his unqualified "repudiation of ... the wasteland outlook of modernism and in his allegiance to the older tradition of early nineteenth-century Romanticism" (Bellow and English Romanticism" 7). Daniel Majdiak, in his essay on Henderson, observes that Bellow "reaffirms the still valid insights into the self which the Romantics discovered while exploring their individualism" ("The Romantic Self and Henderson the Rain king" 129). Gilbert Porter views Bellow as a neo-transcendentalist who not only shares "important philosophical perspectives" with "the yea-sayers" – Emerson, Thoreau, and Whitman but like them also affirms the essential sacramity of life ("Hitch Your Agony to a Star" 87). L.H. Goldman argues that Bellow's "writings epitomize the moral vision that is an integral part of the Jewish outlook" (Saul Bellow's Moral vision vii). Similarly Robert Alter holds the distinctive Jewish "moral self -exploration" responsible for the Bellow-protagonist's spiritual recovery from the wasteland that threatens to smother him (After the Tradition 111). Malcolm Bradbury considers Bellow a metaphysical comic writer "at [the] meditative end" of the affirmative tradition" (Saul Bellow 22) who tries to "bring new meaning to contingency" (Saul Bellow 12).

Viewed in this light, moreover, Bellow's novels assume a different relationship to traditional realism, the genre with which his fiction is customarily identified. In novels from Dangling Man to The Dean's December, from Seize the Day to More Die of Heartbreak, Bellow defines, in rich and graphic detail, the individual's relationship to his environment. For these effects, and for the traditional narrative techniques he employs to achieve them, he has been alternately praised – especially by those who expect novelists
to fulfill their traditional obligations to “reality” – and dismissed as old-fashioned. What has generally been ignored in Bellow’s work, however, is the extraordinary way that this massive accumulation of material fact and concrete detail tends to undermine itself – subverting the realist’s traditional faith in material circumstance and the world of appearance.

In Bellow’s novels the densely woven background of historical and social fact, of physical event and psychological crisis, does not play back the old vision of “bourgeois realism” or shelter in its cultural authority. Rather, this dense mimetic fabric constitutes the background against which a character discovers an entirely different order of fact: the “internal fact” of revelation. Critics have had at least an inkling of this development in Bellow’s literary career for some time now. Like others, M.A. Klug notes the “growing importance of the religious sense in Bellow’s work.” The “heroes of Bellow’s later novels all experience what Sammler calls ‘God Adumbrations,’” Klug points out. “Since Seize the Day, the force and significance of these ‘adumbrations’ have increased with each subsequent novel” (1991: 3).

Beyond all philosophies, Western and Eastern, Bellow’s vision consists of charged insights and intuitions that he does not define (for that would be reductionist) but embodies in his fiction. His later fiction still seeks answers to fundamental questions but demands a “more comprehensive account of what we human beings are, who we are, and what this life is for” (Nobel Lecture: 325). His vision has widened its spectrum to take in the full mystery of human life. The two essential elements of his dynamic vision are the powerful forces of love and the human imagination.
For him literature was a high minded enterprise for sensitive and fine-tuned intellectuals who believe that human nature and the human condition are the same all over the world and that the individual creates his own destiny through his/her choices. Unlike the case of some of his contemporaries, in all his novels is noticeable his opposition to everything that may be said to be characteristic of a postmodern literature since he admires the principles of value, meaning, control, identity of the writing. His characters' debates are sometimes political, place and time-bound reflecting their historical context, but most are first and foremost intellectual; they are not ideologically driven constructions that are a vehicle for power and participate in the making of history.

When asked to identify himself as being either Jewish or American or Jewish-American, Bellow answered that he was simply a “writer”, or at best “an American writer of Jewish origin”. But later on he also added that his Jewish history gave him an entirely different orientation and that a “writer had no choice but to be faithful to his history”. Such an apparent variation may be indicative of a kaleidoscopic American ethnicity and also of the writer’s reluctance to embrace labels in a troubled 20th century.

Bellow’s fiction does not overtly tackle religious ideas, the daily life of his characters is constructed on a profane basis. Yet one of the main statements of his fiction has its roots in Judaism’s religious precepts. Life is sacred and must be protected from nihilism, alienation and all the “wastelands of the modern condition”. Herzog, one of his main characters asks the pivotal question around which all Bellow’s fiction revolves—“How shall a good man live?” The answer brought forth by his novels pertains both to morality and religion and it concerns the communion with one’s fellowman.
His characters do not attend the synagogue or the church, they do not perform the mitzvoth required of every pious Jew (with a few exceptions they are all Jews), they do not pray very often or think about God, but all of them, sooner or later, experience a sense of awe and of personal insignificance in front of a nameless greater, larger-than-human-life entity, existence, as well as in front of the implacable mechanism of historical, social and cultural evolution. Their sense of the “sacred” differs very much from that of the theologians, but nevertheless, they have inherited from their ancestors all the Biblical knowledge they have to know and which they often use to illustrate and support their otherwise worldly arguments. At the same time they yearn for something which might fulfill their lives, be it a connection with a higher, transcendental level of communion with their fellow beings built upon an ethical, religious, Jewish basis. Invariably, at the end of his novels, the heroes discover that the way out of their tormented intellectual and spiritual (waste) lands is through the acceptance of human suffering and responsibility for their own deeds as well as through the fulfillment of duties towards their fellow beings. Yet there is an ambiguous, volatile ending in Bellow’s novels. The author doesn’t suggest that once they have found salvation, his protagonists will also necessarily embrace it or at least adopt it for a longer term. Realistically enough, these characters cannot completely get out of their state of “becoming” and enter that of “being”; each and every day they must take the same affirmative choice all over again, each day the individual must decide to live a worthy life and love his/her fellowman.

His interest in European literature, especially French and Russian, is manifested in his novels through frequent inter texts and references to European traditions and intellectuals, especially in Herzog and Mr. Sammler’s Planet (1970), which are
considered his most intellectually-loaded works of fiction. Saul Bellow’s characters are almost invariably male American Jews preoccupied with themselves and their inner lives. Likewise, almost all are in pursuit of a meaningful existence.

The hint that Bellow gives at the end of his novels – the necessity for a continuous renewal, for a permanent fight which the individual is supposed to carry day in and day out against his/her overgrown ego, against despair and isolation – may lead the reader to make a distinction between religion, the goal of which is the preservation of a given doctrine, and religiosity, the aim of which is a perpetual spiritual rebirth. The details and sometimes even the principles of dogma seem irrelevant to the Bellovian characters, yet in their intellectual life (this is where they are at their best) they struggle to find a way to lead a meaningful existence in a society and culture that has lost all meaning and content.

Bellow was easily the greatest American writer of his time, may be of all time. In the words of the Swedish Nobel Committee, his writings exhibit “exuberant ideas, flashing irony, hilarious comedy and burning compassion... the mixture of rich picaresque novel and subtle analysis of our culture, of entertaining adventure, drastic and tragic episodes in quick succession interspersed with philosophic conversation, all developed by a commentator with a witty tongue and penetrating insight into the outer and inner complications that drive us to act, or prevent us from acting, and that can be called the dilemma of our age” (1976).

Along with the poet, Robert Lowell, he is one of the three or four writers of his generation whose name and accomplishments come first to mind as the legitimate heirs of the giants of the 1920s, who dramatically launched American letters into international significance. Thrice a recipient of the National Book Award for Fiction, he has been
generously honored as one of the foremost contemporary novelists. A resounding commercial success since his publication of *Augie March*, he has been far from neglected by the academic critics. Doctoral dissertations, theses, monographs, book-length studies, and a host of learned essays attest to the widespread concern that his novels have generated in the scholarly community. Almost every critic occasionally concerned with modern literature has found the time to focus his attention on Bellow, and there is an abundance of interesting and relevant material readily available to the Bellow student.

There have been many assessments of Bellow's fiction and reviewers note that he is one of the most scrutinized writers in contemporary American literature. Scholars have traced his development from an initially formal, realistic style to a more lively, discursive manner. His cultural and social commentary has also been a topic of critical discussion, and Bellow has been praised for producing insightful and compelling fiction that explores such issues as mortality, memory, family relationships, and friendship. Critics have also examined how his work addresses the gap between private and public experience, the effects of materialism and technological progress, and the role of the artist in society. *Herzog* received praise for its exploration of various Western intellectual traditions, its poignant evocation of events, and its colourful minor characters. Reviewers have applauded Bellow's resiliency and adaptability, his philosophical musings, and his longevity, noting that his career stretches over more than fifty years. *More Die of Heartbreak* has been praised as witty and compassionate meditation on friendship and mortality. *Humboldt's Gift* has been hailed as a compelling work that treats spiritual matters within the context of commercial world. Other reviewers have panned this novel, faulting passages they deemed unrealistic. Several critics have asserted that the beliefs of
protagonist Citrine reflects those of Bellow himself. Most reviewers have described Bellow as an artist who affirms Judeo-Christian religious and social values in his work. He has been analyzed as a Jewish writer, and the theme of Jewish assimilation into American society has been a recurring theme in his fictional works. Ethan Goffman wrote: "By exploring Sammler’s history as embedded in a larger Jewish history, *Mr. Sammler’s Planet* gradually unveils a counter narrative of terror inflicted upon marginalized peoples culminating in moment of identification between Jew and black" (CLC 200: 89). Despite debate over Mr. Sammler’s validity as a social commentator, critics generally agree that Sammler is one of Bellow’s most fully realized protagonists. Some commentators have alleged that Bellow’s novels lack convincing plots, while others have viewed Bellow’s treatment of women and people of colour as inadequate at best. Another major topic of debate of critics has centered on the autobiographical aspects of Bellow’s fiction, bemoaning the similarities between the lives of Bellow’s protagonists and the author’s own. Overall, critics have favourably assessed Bellow’s literary achievement and have celebrated his works as valuable contribution to American literature.

(i)

The son of Russian-born parents, Bellow was born on the 10th of June 1915 in Lachine, Quebec, Canada, to Russian immigrant parents. He was raised in an impoverished suburb of Montreal, Quebec, where his father, Abraham, was a bootlegger and a businessman. Abraham pushed his children to take full advantage of every opportunity they were afforded, and Liza, his wife hoped to see her sons grow up to
become Talmudic scholars. As a child, Bellow spoke French, English, Yiddish, and Hebrew, and was encouraged to pursue diverse academic interests.

Following the example of their relatives, Bellow's parents and their three young children had immigrated to Montreal, in 1913, in hope of finding a better life. The family was one of the three hundred Jewish families who populated Montreal at that time; Lescha (later called Liza) and Abraham Bellows were of Russian Jewish origin. Because Saul Bellow was the only member of his immediate family to be born in Canada, he felt that he "was always the one apart" (James Atlas 8). His life verified the truth of this statement. While his father and brothers pursued business opportunities and focused on turning a profit in Chicago, the youngest of the family stubbornly held on to his boyish dream of becoming a writer.

Despite the difficult living conditions endured by the family and the failure of every enterprise that Abraham took up in Canada, Saul Bellow remembered his birthplace as "a pastoral, idyllic village," and the outskirts of Montreal – the home to many other Eastern-European immigrants – was "the world as I first knew it" (James Atlas 11). His happy childhood memories were partly marred by the fact that at the age of eight he fell ill with peritonitis and pneumonia. The six months that he spent alone at Royal Victoria Hospital in Montreal engendered by his mother's overprotective attitude and a sense of separation from his family that would accompany Bellow throughout his life. Yet he also remembered this experience as leading to his initiation into the stories of the New Testament and viewed his recovery as a symbol of triumph, joy and light (James Atlas 16).
Raised by his Russian- and Yiddish-speaking parents, Bellow early encountered a cultural and linguistic diversity. At the age of four, he began to attend Hebrew classes at a neighborhood rabbi's; in the streets he heard and spoke French, later he went to English speaking schools and started speaking English with his siblings. It was only natural that after relocating to Chicago in 1924 English became his primary language. However, Bellow's knowledge of other languages did not wither. He was able to read Russian and Yiddish literature in the original and he translated into English the short story “Gimple the Fool,” by Isaac Bashevis Singer, the 1978 Noble Laureate in Literature. He also translated into Yiddish T.S. Eliot's *The Wasteland*. When a renowned Professor of English dismissed Bellow's chances of becoming a quintessentially American novelist on the basis of Bellow's non-Anglo-Saxon origin, and, hence, his perceived lack of 'feeling' for the English language, the author-to-be took it as an offence and belittlement of his talent. If anything, the move to the United States gave young Bellow enormous faith in his creative potential. This conviction was shared by his parents, who eagerly nurtured their children's artistic talents in Montreal. Both Jane, Bellow's sister, and Saul played a musical instrument. Although Liza hoped that her son would become a rabbi like her father, Bellow never pursued this goal. In Chicago, the father made sure that his children continued their education in the principles of Judaism, but he also preached "the gospel of improvement" to them (Bello as quoted in Bostonia 256). At the same time, Bellow immersed himself in Russian, French and English literature; Ralph Waldo Emerson and William Wordsworth were his favourite poets, and the words of the latter he employed to describe his youth in Chicago: "Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive, / But to be young was very heaven!" (Wordsworth as quoted in James Atlas 22). In these formative years of
Bellow’s life, the convergence of two very different cultures, Jewish and American, played a significant role in the development of the sensibility of the writer-to-be. On the one hand, he was brought up in the old Jewish tradition, an “ancient world,” as he used to call it; on the other hand, in Chicago he became a part of an undefined American civilization (James Atlas 26). He was fascinated by both. These two worlds would often collide in his later life. Bellow would grow to consider himself an American, a Chicagoan, and he would refuse to be labeled exclusively Jewish. In modern America, Bellow felt stifled by the traditional Jewish religious life, and thus he chose to break away from it. He comments on that decision as follows: “the religious vein was very strong and lasted until I was old enough to make a choice between Jewish life and street life. The power of street life made itself felt” (Bellow as quoted in Bostonia 256). About his Jewish roots he had the following to say: “I simply deal with the facts of my life – a basic set of primitive facts. They’re my given” (Bellow as quoted in Steers 33) and “(...) at a most susceptible time of my life I was wholly Jewish. That’s a gift, a piece of good fortune which one doesn’t quarrel” (Bellow as quoted in James Atlas 128). Even though Bellow successfully assimilated into American society and culture, “he found in his ethnic past an anchor, a story, a mental homeland” (James Atlas 290). The themes of identity, memory and childhood also made their way into his writing.

His time at Tuley High School instilled in him an even stronger desire to read and write and provided inspiration and opportunities to compose poems and stories. In engrossing himself in literature and the observation of city life, Bellow, like his friends, escaped the pains of the Depression in the early 1930s: “Our only freedom was in thought,” he explained (quoted in James Atlas 30). Liza died in 1933 when Bellow was
seventeen, and the loss of the person who had loved him most had a devastating effect on him. He was not able to come to terms with his mother’s death throughout his life: “My life was never the same after my mother died” (Bellow as quoted in James Atlas 35).

Bellow’s parents thus instilled in him both an intense desire to succeed and a sincere thirst for knowledge. Bellow’s family moved to Chicago in 1924, and as Bellow grew older he became increasingly interested in writing. In 1933, he enrolled in the University of Chicago where he studied literature. After two years, Bellow transferred to Northwestern University where he graduated with honors in Anthropology and Sociology.

Bellow then pursued a master’s degree in anthropology at the University of Wisconsin. After finishing his studies, he returned to Chicago and married a sociologist named Anita Goshkin. During World War II, Bellow attempted to join the Canadian Army but was turned down for medical reasons; this experience provided the basis for his first novel, Dangling Man (1944). In 1943 Bellow worked on Mortimer Adler’s “Great Books” project for the Encyclopedia Britannica. Bellow then returned to New York, where he briefly earned a living as a freelancer before accepting a teaching position at the University of Minnesota in 1946. In 1963 Bellow accepted a permanent position with the Committee on Social Thought at the University of Chicago. He served as a war correspondent for Newsday during the 1967 Arab-Israeli conflict, and he taught at New York University, Princeton, and the University of Minnesota. He continued to write fiction and essays and had received numerous awards for his work.

Bellow became involved with the Works Progress Administration Writers’ project (WPA), an organization with ties to the Communist party that was dedicated to providing
support to young intellectuals and writers, the editorial department of the Encyclopedia Britannica and the Merchant Marine for the World War II. Bellow composed short biographies of Midwestern writers and taught classes for the Pestalozzi-Froebel Teachers’ college in Chicago. His first story, “Two Morning Monologues” appeared in Partisan Review in 1941, and shortly thereafter his son Gregory was born.

In 1944, Bellow published his first novel Dangling Man and went on to assume a wide variety of teaching posts. In 1947, he won a Guggenheim fellowship for his second novel, The Victim, and moved to Paris. During the two years he spent abroad, Bellow abandoned two nearly-completed manuscripts in order to complete an extensive novel that would become The Adventures of Augie March. Augie March, published in 1953, exhibited Bellows’ considerable skill and marked a profound stylistic break from his previous two works. The novel went on to win the National Book Award.

When Bellow returned to the United States, he settled in New York for ten years, and quickly became an integral member of the Partisan Review Set, a circle of Jewish intellectuals. Bellow published Seize the Day in 1956, and shortly after, married Alexandra Tachacbasov. They had a son, Adam, but after only four years of marriage the union dissolved. Soon after, Bellow published Henderson and the Rain King, and in 1959 he married yet again—this time a teacher named Susan Alexandra Glassman. Glassman bore him another son, Daniel, and the family moved to Chicago, where Bellow assumed a Professorship in Letters and Literature at the University of Chicago. He was also named a fellow of the University’s Committee On Social Thought, a small prestigious program of interdisciplinary graduate study in 1964, Bellow published Herzog, which won him a second National Book Award. In the wake of the deaths of
both Hemmingway and Faulkner, Bellow was widely hailed as the new “major”
American writer.

Shortly after the dissolution of his marriage to Glassman, Bellow published
Mosby's Memories (1969) and Mr. Sammler's Planet (1970). Humboldt's Gift was
awarded the Pulitzer prize in 1975, and Bellow married yet again; Alexandra Ionescu
Tulcea, a Romanian-born Professor of Theoretical Mathematics at Northwestern.

In 1976, Bellow won the Nobel prize in Literature. The committee commended
him for his outstanding portrayal of “a man who keeps on trying to find a foothold during
his wanderings in a tottering world, one who can never relinquish his faith, that the value
of his life depends on dignity, not its success, and that truth must triumph at last”. A host
of other works followed, including plays, journalistic accounts, short stories, critical
essays, and social and political commentary.

Bellow lived in various locations throughout his life, including a two-year sojourn
in Paris, which was made possible by a Guggenheim Fellowship (1948). He also often	ravelled through Europe, Israel and Mexico. In the United States he lived in Chicago,
New York City and Boston and had a country house in Tivoli, New York. He always
regarded Chicago as his true home, however, and it served as a setting in many of his
novels and short stories. He felt that his knowledge of life was inseparable from that of
Chicago. He was a recognizable figure in the city and Allan Bloom said of him: “Saul is
to Chicago what Balzac was to Paris” (Bloom as quoted in James Atlas 555).

Bellow wrote several plays, the most important of which is probably The Last
Analysis. First performed in 1964, it tells the story of a comedian who has fallen from
grace, and thus resembles, in its narrative trajectory and vision of flawed humanity, much
of Bellow's other work. Bellow likewise tried his hand at literary criticism, publishing pieces in *The New Republic, The New York Times Book Review, The New Leader*, and other journals. In a notable break from fiction writing, he served as a war correspondent during the 1967 six-day war, employed by *Newsday*.

Towards the end of his life, Bellow frequently commented on the decline of culture and the urban environments failure to meet the demands of the soul. In 1987, Bellow composed the foreword to the controversial book, *The Closing of the American Mind* written by the University of Chicago's conservative social philosopher Alan Bloom. Bellow's final novel, *Ravelstein*, is a homage to the man and their friendship.

In 1989, Bellow married Janis Freedman. The couple moved to Boston, where their daughter, Naomi, was born in 1999. Bellow died in his home on April 5, 2005.

Saul Bellow's literary career began in Tule liiah qcliool In Chicaqao where he and friends such as Sydney Harris, who became a newspaper columnist, shared their precocious enthusiasm for literature in the leftist politics. At seventeen, Bellow and Harris ran away to New York City in an unsuccessful attempt to sell their first novels.

After graduating from Northwestern, Bellow wanted to study literature, but having been advised that anti-Semitism would limit his chances for a literary career, he accepted a scholarship in anthropology at the University of Wisconsin. After only one semester, he boldly decided to leave graduate school and began by 1938 dedicating himself to writing. Success came slowly. In Mexico during 1940, Bellow wrote the never-published novel *Acatla*, but in the following year the *Partisan Review* accepted "Two Morning Monologues," his first published story. Before the end of World War II, Bellow had published the first in a series of critically acclaimed novels that have
established him as the most consistent and enduring serious American novelist since Faulkner.

Bellow's first two published novels, *Dangling Man* (1944) and *The Victim* (1947), form the first phase of his literary career, a period in which he was writing in reaction to the "hard-boiled" style and deterministic message of naturalism. In both novels, Bellow creates anti-heroes who struggle against the carceral pressures of the modern world. Although Bellow's careful depiction of the forces that entrap modern man shroud these initial novels with a claustro sense of limitation, his protagonists refuse to resign themselves to alienation and isolation; instead, they struggle to maintain a sense of human dignity and to oppose indifference.

Bellow transformed his own frustrating experiences with the draft board into *Dangling Man*, a novel presented as a rambling series of journal entries in which Joseph, the protagonist, futilely attempts to withstand the regimentation of the modern world. From the opening paragraphs, Joseph's self-pitying voice attacks the Hemingway model of manly restraint: "the code. . . . of the tough boy." Joseph uses his confessional style to confront the world of limits, but in the end he must resign himself to the regimentation of army life.

In *The Victim*, the psychological harassment of the contemporary world is personified in the character of Kirby Allbee, a bigot who accuses Asa Leventhal of ruining his life and asserts that Leventhal is, thereby, indebted to him. Although the tone of the novel is somber, Leventhal refuses to deny his responsibility for his fellow man. The complex relationship that develops between Jew and anti-Semite bothered some commentators because the two characters seemed psychologically similar, but most
reviewers recognized the young author's potential, and Bellow was awarded his first
Guggenheim Fellowship in 1948. The fellowship allowed Bellow to give up teaching
temporarily and travel to Europe. There he worked on a new novel and published stories
that were later collected in *Moseby's Memoirs and Other Stories* (1968). In 1952 he
received the National Institute of Arts and Letters Award.

The publication of *The Adventures of Augie March* (1953) marked the beginning
of the second phase of Bellow's literary career, a period in which he also published *Seize
the Day* (1956), and *Henderson the Rain King* (1959). In this period, Bellow was more
consciously reacting against the apathy and ascetism of modernism. In particular, the
picaresque humor of *The Adventures of Augie March* and *Henderson the Rain King*,
which contrasts with the relative darkness of the earlier books, established Bellow's
reputation as a life-affirming author. *Seize the Day*, which Bellow may have worked on
before *The Adventures of Augie March*, is also an affirmative work, but this concise and
somber masterpiece is often read as the coda to Bellow's first phase.

With *The Adventures of Augie March*, Bellow established himself as a leading
American novelist. The book is a picaresque narrative chronicling the adventures of a
compelling and sympathetic protagonist, Augie March, from his childhood in Chicago to
his adult years in Mexico and Europe. The protagonist of *The Adventures of Augie March*
is unlike Bellow's previous characters, for Augie March is an intellectual Huck Finn who
holds back the oppression of the modern world by refusing to embrace it. This energetic,
comic novel describes a world in which surfaces are worth behold ing and through its
protagonist argues that humans have an intuitive awareness of eternal virtues such as
truth, beauty, and love. Although Augie's ability to accept the world is inevitably
tempered by experience, the novel won Bellow his first National Book Award and his second Guggenheim Fellowship on the basis of its qualified exuberance.

*Seize the Day* recounts one climactic day in the life of Tommy Wilhelm, a man who has failed in his attempts to accommodate himself to American society and desperately tries to disguise his deep need for authority and truth. This tightly plotted narrative takes Wilhelm through a painful rejection by his father and a betrayal by the phony psychologist/investment counselor Dr. Tamkin to a cathartic final scene in which Wilhelm is finally able to experience his deep anguish and his sense of human sympathy at the funeral of a stranger.

After winning a Ford Foundation Grant in 1958, Bellow published *Henderson the Rain King* (1959), often cited as the work that marks the beginning of Bellow’s maturity as a novelist. Despite the unconvincing nature of its conclusion, the novel extends Bellow’s consideration of the human condition by seriously exploring the connection between the essential human spirit and the universe. A broadly humorous parody of the primitivism of D.H. Lawrence and Hemingway, the novel also exemplifies Bellow’s unpredictability. At a time when the Jewish-American novel was becoming popular, Bellow created his first WASP protagonist, a bullying, violent man who travels to Africa to escape from his pervasive anxiety over death. There he confronts the horror of the naturalistic world symbolized in the brutal, white heat of the barren landscape, and with the guidance of the ironic King Dahfu, learns to accept his existence and to stop his typically American struggle to become something different.

After winning the Friends of Literature Fiction Award in 1962, Bellow published *Herzog* (1964) with the assumption that his intellectual dramatization of an eccentric
consciousness moving toward recovery, might sell a few thousand copies; instead, *Herzog* was named a Literary Guild selection, was on the best-sellers list for six months, and won Bellow his second National Book Award. *Herzog* marks the beginning of the third phase of Bellow's literary career, a period in which Bellow's novels have been characterized by a new wholeness of vision. These books present Bellow's affirmative belief in essential humanistic values as well as his clear-eyed descriptions of modern America's moral, social, and intellectual depravity.

With *Herzog* Bellow fuses the formal realism of his early works with the vitality of his picaresque novels in the 1950s. *Herzog* is an animated but tormented Jewish intellectual who has difficulty maintaining human relationships, especially with women. Moses Herzog's rambling account of his effort to move from the emotionally charged personal life that has caused him so much suffering to a calmer, more rational existence is interspersed with a stunning series of eccentric letters written to a broad range of public figures. The epistolary method permits Bellow to blend the public and the private in a way that enriches the historical relevance of his fiction. In recognition of *Herzog*, Bellow received the Fomentor Award and the James L. Dow Award.

Following the success of *Herzog*, Bellow experimented with drama and journalism. *The Last Analysis*, premiered in 1964, but despite several glowing reviews, this intellectual farce was a financial failure and closed after twenty-eight performances. Three one-act plays written by Bellow, "A Wen", "Orange Souffle", and "Out From Under", were performed unsuccessfully in Europe and the United States with the title "Under the Weather" in 1966. In 1967 Bellow turned to journalism, covering the six-day war for *Newsday*. In the following year he was presented with the Jewish Heritage
Award by the B'nai B'rith, and the Croix de Chevalier des Arts et Lettres from France. *Moseby's Memoirs and Other Stories*, which brought together several of his early uncollected stories, kept Bellow’s fiction before the public.

As though stubbornly resisting the flow of this youth-oriented period of American history, Bellow created a seventy-two-year-old protagonist named Arthur Sammler for his next novel, *Mr. Sammler's Planet* (1970). *Mr. Sammler's Planet* has often been identified as Bellow's most pessimistic novel. Mr. Sammler, an elderly man, has experienced the promises and horrors of 20th century life. He offers an extensive critique of modern values and speculates on the future after observing a pick pocket on a bus. Sammler steadfastly pursues duty, dignity, and essential goodness in the face of a violent and selfish world. His admiration for H.G. Wells underscores his belief in rationality and his desire to believe in literature as a vehicle for creating social harmony. The good he pursues, however, is intellectually abstracted from the physical world, an environment that is consistently portrayed in the novel as cheap and monstrous. *Mr. Sammler's Planet*, rightly regarded as Bellow's least affirmative novel, won the author an unprecedented third National Book Award. Although many critics disagreed whether Mr. Sammler succeeds as a perceptive commentator who ruminates on contemporary existence, Bellow’s portrayal of this character has generally been commended.

*Humboldt's Gift* (1975) was a Book-of-the-Month-Club selection and earned Bellow the Pulitzer Prize for Literature. Its publication immediately preceded Bellow’s Nobel Prize in 1976, but critics have not generally considered it his best work. Like many of his works, *Humboldt's Gift* concentrates on memories and centres on the conflict, between materialistic values and the claims of art and high culture. The protagonist
Charles Citrine, an historian and playwright, reminisces his friendship with the flamboyant artist Humboldt Fleischer. Fleischer is the epitome of the self-limiting modernist, but he leaves Citrine with an ironic pair of gifts that help him combat the brutality and confusion of the world. One is a trashy movie scenario which eventually earns Citrine a great deal of money, and the other is a scribbled assertion of the supernatural quality of man. Fleischer is a composite of several American writers who despaired in their inability to reconcile their artistic ideals with the indifference and materialism of American society. Citrine finally concludes that he can maintain artistic order by dealing with the complexities of life through ironic comic detachment.

As though trying to apply the message of his Nobel lecture, Bellow, in later years, more openly applied his art to the social problems of his time. This effort is evident in his journalistic account of his travels in Israel, *To Jerusalem and Back* (1976), in which he combines humorous anecdotes with political analysis. In 1979 he covered the signing of the Israeli-Egyptian Peace Treaty for Newsday.

In *The Dean's December* (1982) Bellow directly attacks negative social forces that challenge human dignity. Set in depressed areas of Chicago and Bucharest, Romania, this novel focuses on Albert Corde, a respected journalist who returns to academic life to revive his love of high culture. Corde rebukes politicians, liberal intellectuals, journalists and bureaucrats in both democratic and Communist nations for failing to maintain humanistic values. *The Dean's December* was a Literary Guild main selection and sold over 100,000 copies in hardback. In it Bellow uses Dean Albert Corde's journey to Bucharest to be with his dying mother-in-law to compare the similar inhumanity of Capitalist and Communist societies. The isolation and inactivity Corde
endures in Bucharest provide him with the necessary distance from which to view the social chaos of Chicago and the lack of engagement in his own academic life. Like his Nobel lecture, the novel argues that the failure of political specialists warrants the entry of humanists into the social debate. Although *Him With His Foot In His Mouth and Other Stories* (1984), a collection of five lengthy stories, disappointed some critics who saw it as an indication of Bellow’s weariness, *Most Die of Heartbreak* (1987), reassured readers that Bellow could still produce fresh and challenging fiction. The novel explores the human desire for connection through an ironically meditative and philosophical prose. In this case, the relatively simple story of world-famous Botanist Benn Crader’s disastrous marriage to the beautiful but avaricious Matilda Layamon is narrated, interpreted and embellished upon by Kenneth Trachtenberg, Crader’s nephew. This self-absorbed and self-deprecating narrator, who is playfully named after Bellow scholar Stanley Trachtenberg, conducts an incessant search for hidden meaning. His obsessive obtuseness and self doubt hint that Bellow may be making gentle fun of his own literary efforts to resurrect the essential in humanity. Although the novel satirizes a sexual revolution that has taught people not to take one another seriously, discloses the pervasive greed of American society, and details the pollution of biological and social environments, Bellow continues to be optimistic. In an interview regarding *More Die of Heartbreak*, he affirmed that “our humanity is in so many ways intact... ordinary people can still see *King Lear* and weep.” In 2001 a selection of Bellow’s short stories, *Collected Stories*, was published. Another wide-ranging collection of Bellow’s essays - *It All Adds Up: From The Dim Past To The Uncertain Future*, was published in 1994. These selected essays, travel pieces, lectures, literary appreciations, and autobiographical recollections
reflect Bellow’s diverse interests. Just as J.D. Salinger, by the middle Fifties was the literary spokesman of the college undergraduates, Saul Bellow was the favourite novelist of the American intellectuals. This is a heavy burden for a fiction-writer to bear and Bellow’s work is interesting to the degree that it conforms to the prevailing values and standards of his ‘class’ and to the degree that it goes beyond them. His career lies with his own struggle to break through a predominantly intellectual and moral approach to life.

Bellow’s novels are characterized by the ‘Bellow hero’ – a term referring to the typical Bellow protagonist who is a Jewish, male, intellectual urbanite struggling to find a meaning in a materialistic and chaotic world. In developing his characters Bellow emphasizes dialogue and interior monologue, and his prose style features sudden flashes of wit and philosophical epigrams. That Bellow’s protagonists struggle, often comically, to make connections between the metaphysical and the quotidian is true enough; but the fact that they continue their efforts to discover and act upon what one character calls “the terms of our human contact” – which in our hearts “we know we know we know” – is even truer. Bellow’s protagonists collect data about the mental designs that, taken together, comprise an urban landscape; Bellow himself always submits that data to the inevitable question underlying his most important fictions: “what, in all of this speaks for man?” The rumination appeared, significantly enough, in Bellow’s first novel, Dangling Man (1944), and it has remained an abiding concern ever since. One of the important ways in which Bellow’s heroes show alienation is in their attempt to go beyond human life: to live detached from mortality and weakness. In his analysis of the [man] who makes himself into an image, Bellow is extremely close to the analysis of Sartre in
in the culture and because of his own temperament. We find his characters weighed down
and crushed by the weight of self and the rejection of self. But the hero is his own desparate, both because of what he sees
meaningful life in our civilization, and so he attacks the theory that despair and
despair is the essence of character. The hero is to be able to attain the possibilities for the individual to live a
despair they feel they deserve.
face the terror of pure being; they cannot face the terror of their own being or the
reflected image of their world into this likeness. Bellow's characters do the same. They cannot
in relation to human consciousness but beyond consciousness, the hero into a safe ego, an in-role,
secure's man. For example, runs from the terror of a world of pure existence, a world not
such constructions. Here again Bellow's analysis is close to that of Sartre and Heidegger.
More important than the construction of ideal selves and worlds is the need for
Go away.

they can live. A self and a world: the real human being and the "real" world don't
these images, they only have themselves more, and create a version of reality in which
more than human. They create ideal versions of themselves, and then, unable to live in
those they love, cut off from humanity by their need so go beyond human life - to be
Bellow's heroes are moral masochists, cut off by despair and self-hated from
world is a consistent theme in Bellow.

the world into one in which they can live safely. This double creation of a self and a
themselves into ideal images in order to protect themselves. At the same time they aim
To be "human" is, throughout Bellow's fiction, terrible. And so his heroes
defense of human dignity.

Nausea or God in The Balcony, writers from whom Bellow separates himself in his
by guilt, masochism, and the burden of themselves imposed upon reality. They fear the Darkness and set up a world in which they can live, a self to sustain them. But this strategy is crippling; it is a terrible burden. And so Bellow sees elimination of selfhood as the way to redemption of the individual. The state of grace which Bellow arrives at as a solution is an anonymous state in opposition to the individuality he loves and would like to defend; but it is a state which allows him to keep faith in the value of the human being and link him spiritually with others.

Bellow’s protagonists are not passive; they are active, high-energy people. Unlike Faulkner, Greene, and Silone, who carry religious feelings into secular enterprises, Bellow gives us an intensity about and the redirection of his cultural inheritance. Unlike those to whom suffering and austerity means expansion and fun, Bellow portrays the Great Depression as a gigantic betrayal and mismanagement that must be accepted and lived with. Bellow’s heroes want to be self-created, but the process is a scary one—ambiguous, tension filled. And where do we find guides? Where do we find representations of reality and the language of truth? Certainly not in the language of TV or the newspapers. Such speakers have forgotten how to speak to themselves of anybody else. Instead, advises Bellow wryly, readers must look.

Joseph in Dangling Man (1944) is a rootless man in search of a life of reason and disciplined feeling. Unable to function in the social vacuum of complete freedom, he breaks down. He thus personifies Goethe’s dictum: “To live as one likes is plebeian; the noble man aspires to order and law” (qtd. In Ortega Gasset 8). That is, one must have a job or a heaven. One needs to belong to the community of many, as Maremeladov phrased it in Crime and Punishment, or be part of the magnetic chain of humanity,
separation from which Hawthorne termed a great sin. Most human beings, when they
recognize their essential loneliness, seek to rediscover their identity. In some cases, this
disorder and loneliness result from the actions of others and from materialistic society, as
in Dangling Man and The Victim. In other works, individual shortcomings are the main
problem, as in Seize the Day, The Victim (again), and Augie March. In either case,
Bellow's protagonist is a man who falls short of love, understanding, and humanity. To
be a "good man," a mensch, is the highest degree of humanity achievable. Even though
the mood of waste remains a backdrop in Bellow's novels, the protagonist out of his
struggle in the chaotic world discovers the depths of consciousness without being
overwhelmed by the panorama of waste in the city. Bellow refuses to accept it as the
ultimate human condition as many of his predecessors and contemporaries have done.
His opposition to these confirmed pessimists takes the form of a running battle in most of
his fiction and public pronouncements. This polemics of Bellow with modernist
wasteland ideologues is given careful treatment bringing out its rationale and necessity to
life and literature. The investigation of both Bellow's cityscapes and his quarrel with the
wasteland ideologues leads us to examine his melioristic vision. From his first novel,
Dangling Man (1944), to his latest fiction, Saul Bellow has created a virtually unbroken
series of protagonists doing mental battle with the world around them. Lone
contemplatives in a society bristling with activity – an America dedicated to the glories of
matter and motion – Bellow's heroes are acutely conscious of their failure to warm upto
this world of practical affairs and palpable profits. Still, they are defiantly protective of
their right to ponder existence and plumb its mystery. Riddled with contrary emotions,
Bellow's protagonists, it is often observed, waver uneasily between alternate
commitments – to action, fellowship and worldly self-assertion on the one hand and to stillness, contemplation and solitude on the other. Each of Bellow’s protagonists is divided against himself. Joseph, the protagonist of Bellow’s first novel, *Dangling Man*, suffers such intense inner strife that the perils of physical combat promise diversion as well as relief. Thus, at the end of the novel, Bellow’s Dangling Man enlists in the Army, to fight in World War II. Joseph’s conflict, and that of subsequent protagonists, stems from his polarized consciousness. Joseph is unable to reconcile two distinct modes of comprehending reality: he is torn between the alternate claims of reason and faith. The conflict that arises in Bellow’s characters stems, rather, from the tendency, so prevalent in a culture enamoured of scientific rationalism, to confuse reasoned analysis with metaphysical truth – and to uphold analytic methods as proof against the exigencies of spirit. The central impetus of Bellow’s fiction is the search for a language and a literary form by which these “dumb intuitions” can be voiced and heard over the volubility of “rationalistic talk” (Ellen Pifer, 1991: 4). Before Bellow’s characters can discover this “secret” language or inner “speech,” however, they experience monumental forms of resistance, both internal and external. As Bellow’s novels consistently demonstrate, the “loquacity” of rationalist thought and its assumptions – and especially of its offspring, scientific materialism – resounds not only in the public world of contemporary “head culture” but in the solitary head of each troubled protagonist.

The “God Adumbrations” gleaned by Bellow’s characters are by no means the product of complacency. Punctuated by lacerating self-doubt and recurrent bouts of despair, their revelations are not the reward of obedience – of pious subjection to authority, orthodoxy or dogma. Rather, Bellow’s characters must undergo the terrors of
personal and cultural loss: that divestment required, as Lionel Trilling eloquently pointed out, of all modern heroes. In *Sincerity and Authenticity*, Trilling convincingly argues that authenticity is the crucial value and generative force of modern literature, if not of modern culture itself. Striving to achieve "authenticity," says Trilling, the modern Hegelian "Spirit" must divest itself of all cultural supports and descend in a "downward movement through all the cultural superstructures to some place where all movement ends, and begins." Abandoning itself to the unknown, "disintegrated consciousness" must forsake all manner of received wisdom, all established conventions of conduct, all inherited systems of ethics and beliefs: the whole world, in short, of "material and social establishment and what it is presumed to assure in the way of order, peace, honor, and beauty as emblems of the spiritual life" (1991: 6).

The radical conflict operating in the psyche of Bellow's characters arises, from this potent dread of the inauthentic: the fear of surrendering to false pieties or, as Albert Corde says in *The Dean's December*, to "false consciousness." Yet as Bellow has shown with increasing urgency in his fiction, contemporary "head culture" may be charged with the propagation of some potent pieties of its own.

Bellow's major heroes, compelled to live beyond the lyrical moment, confront the beast within and the human propensity to murder, and they cannot rest in their perception. They must — each of them — as well confront the moral conditions of civilization, the cost of which would seem to be precisely the self.

Each of the major protagonists is forced, like Augie, to suffer confusion between love and an independent fate. Not only that, he must strain to reconcile those impossible opposites. That is what the struggle for accommodation comes to. Joseph strains and
fails—or he ends not quite in failure but in a desperate attempt to reacquaint himself with ordinary communal reality. Asa Leventahl, a self-enclosed, self-righteous victim, is assaulted by the imperative of brotherhood, which at the end he cannot accept. But he does reach a large idea of what it is to be exactly human. An old man in the lavatory of a movie theatre tells him that Boris Karloff is a law unto himself. One wouldn’t be Boris Karloff. To be neither more not less than human, as a discovers, is to be “accountable in spite of many weaknesses,” and with that discovery he achieves a tentative goodness. Augie, not hurt enough by the fate of other people, particularly fails the severe test of romantic love. The test, his affair with Thea, is most particularly rich in confusion—not only for Augie; Bellow too has groped his way through it. Thea’s love is murderous. But it is real love, a way of discovering other people. If it is strange to Augie, then, Augie himself comes to admit, that it is his own fault. The struggle for Augie is to make it less strange. And Tommy Wilhelm and Henderson, too, struggle to admit love to their freedom, to be themselves and at the same time to have a place in the human community.

The Bellow protagonist, slowly questing for the truly human condition, desiring answers to fundamental questions about life and death finds himself compelled, inexorably, to modify his view of human nature: he has to abandon the profane and reach out to the sacred.

Bellow’s protagonists are born with an intuitive knowledge of the soul which they forget but which their ordeals force them to remember. Augie March recovers the thrilling axial lines that had passed through his soul when he was a kid. In Arnewi land Henderson sees the pink light had soothed his five-year-old soul in America, and he senses that he “might find things here which were of old, which I saw when I was still
innocent and have longed for ever since, for all my life - and without which I could not make it" (HRK, 92).

His typical protagonists live their daily routines of work, play, and crisis so exclusively and introspectively that when they do meet a friend or stranger, the encounter tends to be charged with a passion that the meeting hardly merits. Preeminently, it is an explosively comic world — frequently grotesque, sometimes poignant, occasionally maudlin or bitter. Bellow consistently aims his ridicule at both the absurdly deficient culture within which his protagonist strives to live a meaningful life, and the pathetic illusions and self-deceptions that his protagonist brings to this desperate struggle. In a statement that might serve as a thematic emblem of much of his work, Bellow once wrote: “It is obvious that modern comedy has to do with the disintegrating outline of the worthy and humane Self, the bourgeois hero of an earlier age” (1975: 2). Bellow has tried to guard against the varied temptations that this statement implies. He has tried to resist a sentimental nostalgia for the unrecoverable values of that earlier age; he has insisted intently that the new is not necessarily good just because it is new, nor is it even inevitably better than what may be left of the old. His is fundamentally an uncomfortable middle-of-the-road position, the tense stance of the rationalist who despairs of rational solutions to human frustration but who is constrained to accept no guide superior to rationality — crippled, incomplete, and irresolute as it may be.

Con artists and their cons, tricksters and their trickery, are an important part of American literary heritage. Herman Melville, Mark Twain, William Faulkner, and Nathanael West all turned their attention to the operator, the flim-flam man, and the confidence man, well before the type was taken up by Ellison and Bellow. The
unvarying function of such a character is to affirm, through the sophisticated rhetoric at
his command, the provisionality of whatever value or belief one might wish to assert as
stable or fixed – including, perhaps most importantly, the trust that the creative artist puts
in language to do an accurate job of translating his experience of the world.

The con men in Saul Bellow’s novels fall into two categories, both derived from
traditional characterizations of the trickster as sophist. On the one hand we have the
demonic “tricksters” like Dr. Tamkin in *Seize the Day*, who brings Tommy Wilhelm to
his knees by taking him around to making some foolish investments in the commodities
market while Tamkin himself takes a cut out of what he knows to be the last of
Wilhelm’s savings, or Dr. Layamon in *More Die of Heartbreak* (Bellow has a penchant
for charlatan doctors), a heartless wheeler-dealer scheming a marriage for his daughter to
an unworldly Botanist because he hopes to finagle a killing in downtown real estate out
of the Botanist’s family connections.

On the other hand, there are the hieratic tricksters like Mintouchian in *The
Adventures of Augie March* or Dahfu in *Henderson the Rain King*, characters who, while
their genius for persuasion rests “on doubtful underpinnings,” nevertheless impart
messages that, initially anyway, appear to have real import and value for the protagonists
that are.

Inevitably, whether the con man/trickster is demon or priest, the hero learns of his
hidden agenda and promptly severs his ties to him. However, the persistent presence of
such characters in Bellow’s novels and the mutual exigencies that evolve from the
symbiotic relationships of the tricksters and the tricked suggest some singularity of
purpose. As Jonathan Wilson has observed, “the legacy that the con men deposit in the
heroes' consciousnesses is perhaps an uneasy suspicion that the real con game is language itself. Bellow is not a postmodern game player, strutting his stuff on lexical playing fields; but his heroes, motivated by uncovering the easy manipulations of language to which they have fallen victim, are often led to affirm their faith in a transcendent world beyond words, a world of the silent soul (1989: 131).

Characteristically, con men themselves are often deeply suspicious of language—and with good reason, for, more than anyone, they are aware of the Machiavellian uses to which it can be put.

Another group of characters also frequent Bellow's novels; and while its members appear to come from a corner opposite to the tricksters/con men, in fact they have a con game of their own going. In The Adventures of Augie March, they are called “destiny moulders” or “imposers upon” (524), while in Herzog they are classified as “reality instructors,” a term very useful for describing all the hard-hearted rationalists that populate Bellow's novels. These characters generally claim, like Einhorn in Augie March, to be able to “show what could be done with the world, where it gave or resisted, where you could be confident and run or where you could only feel your way and were forced to blunder” (67). For the reality instructors, a successful life in America can be achieved only through an unrelenting manipulation of others, power comes through money and vice versa.

The supposed rationality of the reality instructors is central to the authority they assume. Whether it is the autocratic Grandma Lausch making the “rational” decision to send Augie March's retarded brother George into a home, old Dr. Adler in Seize the Day berating his son for being overly subject to the vicissitudes of his feelings, or the crazed
lawyer Sandor Himmelstein dressing down Moses Herzog for displaying a terminal
naivete in legal matters, the reality instructors present a solid front in confirming the
ruthlessness of the world in which they operate and which they simultaneously promote.

In a way that sheds light on the rhetorical battles in this novels, Bellow's quarrel
with the antagonistic characters that he creates can be seen as akin to Nietzsche's quarrel
with Socrates. Like Socrates, the reality instructors usually attempt to elicit the truth of a
situation through a carefully contrived encounter of their supposed wisdom with the
"ignorance" of the protagonist with whom they are dealing. In Nietzsche's radical
critique of Western philosophy, Socrates himself is revealed as simply yet another wily
rhetorician who scores points by sheer tactical cunning.

Bellow's characterization of his reality instructors similarly exposes a
fundamental will to persuade craftily disguised as rational knowledge of how the world
turns. Lausch, Adler, Himmelstein, et al. claim to have a handle on Absolute Truths, but
their behaviour and the persuasive methods that they employ to achieve their ends often
contrast starkly with the supposedly rational purity of their thought. Paradoxically for
such a hard-headed group, the reality instructors (who are mainly Jewish professionals –
lawyers, lecturers, doctors, psychologists, etc.) are often sentimentalists, exponents of
what Herzog calls "potato love" (91), and they use their largely phony feelings to sucker
their charges into seeing things their way.

Bellow has a keen interest in the suffering of humanity. His fiction includes
blistering criticism of post World War II life in modern America. It has been claimed that
he is one of the greatest humanistic authors of his time. He is also an ardent socialist who
believes that "it [is] the rights of the individual that [matter]" (James Atlas 65). His
concerns about humanity and advocacy of individuality are, however, dualistic in nature as they include certain races and exclude others. His portrayal of the suffering of some human beings remains incomplete because it makes an “Other” of some nations, a colonial practice objected to and exposed by postcolonial literary theory and criticism.

In the colonial discourse, the concept of the “Other” (the reference to people outside the self) is integral to racial representation and the colonialist enterprise. The concept of otherness derives its significance from diversity between opposite poles of power. It is instrumental to the marginalization of the colonized and self-identification of the colonizer. Bill Ashcroft exposes this colonialist meaning saying that “it can refer to the colonized others who are marginalized by imperial discourse, identified by their difference from the centre and, perhaps crucially, become the focus of anticipated mastery by the imperial ‘ego’” (Post-Colonial Studies: Key Concepts 170). The colonizer’s creation of the “Other” as peripheral creates him as a centre. The purpose of establishing difference between the colonizer and the colonized maintains the colonial relation which is characterized by the superiority of the colonizer and inferiority of the colonized. Othering is necessary to the colonizer’s self-definition. Without the presence of the colonized as the “Other,” the colonizer cannot practice hegemony in a way that attests to identity. Bellow’s racial presentation of the “Other” is essential to the formation of his identity. His Othering practice suggests the perception of him as a racist, although he denies being a racist. On being asked about the relations between the Jews and Blacks in America, he replied: “I do not consider myself a racist, and I think people who call me a racist are very wrong” (1981: 6).
His fiction contradicts this statement. His racialized attitude towards both Arabs and Blacks places his fiction at the centre of controversy. Bellow segregates between his people, Jews and Americans, and Arabs and Africans. He depicts the American and Jewish people in his work as victims. Americans are victims of World War II and the various antagonistic forces of modern society. The American protagonists of his fiction usually suffer depression, self-alienation, failure, dismay, self-loathing, self-punishment and spiritual agony as a result of the upheaval of both World War II and modernism. In addition, Jews are represented as victims of the injustices of Arabs' and Nazis' persecution. By contrast, there seems to be a stream of racism and prejudice against Arabs and Africans that runs throughout his fiction. He strategically devalues their cultures and dehumanizes them by representing them as uncivilized, barbaric and sluggish. His misrepresentation and segregation compel a postcolonial reading of his fiction, for it is important to expose how Bellow's presumed humanistic presentation denigrates Africans and the Arabs of Palestine, in favour of Americans and Jews.

Identity plays an important role in the life and art of Saul Bellow. He is highly aware of ethnic identity as an identifier of the individual, as well as a determining factor of the individual's fate. Therefore, he insists on being identified as an American writer rather than a Russian, Canadian, or Jewish immigrant. He seems keen on rejecting any classification of himself as a minority member and refuses to be marginalized (Cronin xi). Bellow voices his rejection of Jewishness in several interviews. Unwilling to be fettered by his past, he refers to his roots in an interview in 1973 with Joyce Illig as "tangled old wires" (107). More emphatically, Bellow asserts in an interview with Rockwell Gray in 1984: "I knew there would be no place for me as a Jew in that kind of
civilization” (220). Bellow’s inferiority complex stimulates him to assimilate into the dominant American culture. Nonetheless, many scholars assert that Bellow is Jewish “to the marrow.” In his biographical work on Bellow, James Atlas indicates that “however secular, American and universal, [Bellow’s] work was profoundly rooted in his identity as a Jew. His characters, so robustly American in their actions and appearance, were unmistakably Jewish in their sensibilities and the intonations of their speech” (291). In short, there is a contradiction between what Bellow really is and what he claims to be. Although he renounces his Jewishness, he cannot escape it because, “the marginal Jew oscillates forward and backward, out of his group and then back into his group” (Stonequist 33).

Bellow assimilates into one group but his attention turns back to another. His self conception as both Jew and American generates a crisis of identity, as he “fluctuate[s] from one position to another—at one time reaching a satisfactory adjustment, then being thrown back again into a condition of conflict” (Stonequist 123). This fluctuation between ethnic identities—in terms of national origins—can be seen in Henderson the Rain King and To Jerusalem and Back. Bellow’s American ethnicity is brought to the fore in the former, whilst his Jewish ethnicity supersedes in the latter.

The intense conflict of Bellow’s double consciousness and ethnic adjustment is mirrored in the paradox of his character and writing, thus creating ambivalence. Everett V. Stonequist in The Marginal Man locates “ambivalence of attitude and sentiment” at “the core” of the marginal personality (146). Because of Bellow’s racial and cultural hybridity, he develops a divided loyalty between old identity and new identity with an
ambivalent attitude. This duality and paradoxical nature accounts for Bellow’s contradictory opinions and actions.

Saul Bellow is regarded a philosophical writer who is not afraid of touching upon any topic in his work. Many critics see his work as a collection of wisdom for life. Bellow’s work is unique. Judging by other preceding Jewish authors work, it might be expected that a Jewish author will deal with Jewish way of life or simply reflect an important moment from the Jewish history. In case of Saul Bellow, someone insisting on this assumption would be mistaken. Bellow's novels are much better developed.

Bellow's novels reflect his experience and views on life. Howard M. Harper, Jr. asserts that “every era has its own climate of ideas in which the artist must live and respond to them and moreover transform his experience into the work of art” (1944: 4). Bellow's work unambiguously proves that statement. As a child of Russian immigrants, Bellow lived in the climate of immigrant ghettos, which gave him the sense of the immigrant experience in a new country. Living in big cities such as Chicago and New York impressed him so much that almost all characters live in big urban centres. The experience of living in poor conditions is deeply rooted in Bellow because he transforms the experience of poverty into several novels which depict a poor individual desiring to get rid of his tough situation. Later as a grown-up man, he experienced unworried days and led a bohemian life style, which persuaded him about the bad influence of materialism. To sum-up, Bellow transforms his experience of an immigrant boy into his work. Therefore, it is not difficult to observe that Bellow deals with the themes of poverty, fortune, materialisms, loss of identity, discontinuity and purpose in life.
In his novels, Bellow philosophically and even psychologically meditates on the difficulties which the Jews have to face in a host country. And as a proper philosopher, he gives his own views on the life itself. These views are not placed in the words of the characters, which would pathetically be too obvious, but rather these are put in the passages seemingly unrelated to the main plot in order to let the readers find them by themselves. Therefore, the fiction by Bellow might be viewed as wisdom of life. And it is quite interesting to study what conclusions about life Bellow came to.

The wisdom of life that Bellow presents in the novels is closely connected with the issues he criticizes. Bellow mainly attacks the American dream, which promises a poor boy to make a fortune, because he sees that a disillusion awaits these young hard workers on their way to the success. They all suddenly feel trapped in materialism that buries all human feelings and values, which one of Bellow’s characters confirms, “Human life is [then] simply the raw material of technological transformation, of fashion, salesmanship, industry, politics, finance, experiment, automatism, etcetera, etcetera” (Harper 54). The fact is that Saul Bellow is on one hand open to the opportunities America offers but on the other he criticizes its risks and often comments on the negative impact of affluence which swallows basic human values such as love, honor, friendship, purpose in life, sense of duties and belief. In one of the numerous interviews Bellow himself cited his mother who said about people making money very quickly that “they dropped down in a hole full of fat”. Bellow then added that this hole was transformed into vast mire and perhaps the only human beings who are truly happy are those who have not tasted the pleasure of prosperity yet (Ulmanova 35). Thus, there seems to appear a question whether Bellow refuses any kind of wealth and view life as a struggle to avoid
prosperity. It is not the case. What Bellow is most likely to point out here is that materialism together with the material things and misused progress represses and prevents human natural spirit from developing freely and from keeping real life values.

According to Bellow, the only possibility for human beings is to find some harmony in the present chaotic world and to “be straight” (Uimanova 36). It means that Bellow calls for the natural state of human spirit which should remain unspoilt by materialism and should always keep its life values. Therefore, no matter whether you are a wealthy man or a poor boy it is necessary to stay yourself. There is no point in pretending to be someone else. It is better to keep your own personality. And the wisdom of life Bellow offers in his fiction is that for fulfilling human life it is not sufficient to exist but to be truly “yourself” (Uimanova 43). Bellow’s entire work might be compared to a big mosaic where every single stone perfectly fits and thematically forms with other stones -- novels a picture of the immigrant Jewish experience in America.

As mentioned earlier, Bellow always considered writing to be his vocation. He was also convinced that the purpose of writing was “the raising of moral questions” (Kakutani183). Bellow regretted that “America had failed to address the spiritual needs of its citizens”(James Atlas 563), yet he himself “was gullible about spirituality,” “had a weakness for it” (James Atlas 580). Therefore, he would tirelessly address the nature of the soul in his novels, short stories and essays, and he viewed his writing to be an odd act of faithfulness “to things you learned as a boy” (Bellow as quoted in James Atlas 229). Herzog, like many other Bellow’s novels, apart from being a novel of intellectual ideas, is a story in which the author considers the question of moral values. Owing to Bellow’s upbringing, many of these values belong to the Judeo-Christian tradition and, therefore,
the writer is often referred to as an advocate of humanism. His art is an attempt to defend humanity and show that “there may be truths on the side of life,” which indicates his defiance of the exclusively hostile vision of the world (Bellow as quoted in Harper 76).