CHAPTER FIVE

HENDERSON THE RAIN KING

_Henderson the Rain King_ is different from Bellow’s other novels. In this novel, Bellow departs from the familiar ambience of Chicago city. The protagonist, Henderson, is an American aristocrat who wants to get rid of his fear of death engraved deep inside. Surprisingly, Bellow made him go to Africa for this purpose. Africa has been shown through two particular tribes, Arnewi and Warari, which are far removed from any civilization. The protagonist and narrator, Henderson is a strong man in his fifties. He has married twice. He has not been much descriptive about his first marriage, and has given a detailed discussion of his second marriage with Lily. Henderson’s problems are different from Bellow’s other protagonists. He has no financial crisis like Wilhelm, no after-divorce bereavement to cope with like Herzog, and no threatening person behind him like Citrine and Leventhal. He has everything, yet has no peace of mind. Unable to come to terms with life, he is aggressive and bitter by nature. Because of his dejection, he very often causes harm to others. Basically, he always hears a voice inside him, “_I want, I want, I want, oh, I want._ . . .” (Bellow 12). But he does not know what exactly he wants. He has everything—a good fortune, high social status, relations and a good physic. Still he is not contented; he wants something more.

In _Henderson the Rain King_, Bellow has worked on a different theme and in a different manner, though he has handled it smartly. It is not hard to guess the
reason behind Bellow’s choice of theme of death. Bellow always scrutinized the psychological factors, which cause human mind to suffer. Prior to *Henderson the Rain King*, he has published four novels, dealing with the problems of wrong-going relations and those of individuality. Henderson represents those who have everything, still are unhappy because of their fear of unknown. Through Henderson, Bellow has dealt with the common ennui and anxiety, which is rooted in every being because of its unintelligible existence on earth. Moreover, it is particularly the unavoidability of death and the resulting fear in human being, which has been dealt by Bellow in *Henderson the Rain King*. Though, in *Seize the Day*, Bellow has reflected similar anxiety in Wilhelm, Bellow was shy in his thoughts and tried to say things implicitly. But in this fiction, he has openly conveyed his thought through the narrator. In *Henderson the Rain King*, the narrator is highly verbal in his philosophic search and the reader has no difficulty ever to grasp his thoughts. In this way, this novel stands apart from the other Bellowian novels, in which the scenes are cryptically described and where more than one explanation is possible. Henderson considers himself to be a burden on civilization, for he is unable to have good terms with others; reciprocally civilization seems to be an encumbrance for Henderson, as he once reflects:

> What was I going to tell this character? That existence had become odious to me? It was just not the kind of reply to offer under these circumstances. Could I say that the world, the world as a whole, the entire world, had set itself against life and was opposed to it—just
down on life, that’s all—but that I was alive nevertheless and somehow found it impossible to go along with it? (Bellow 132)

His frustration with civilization led him to the interiors of African continent, where he could find humanity in its essential primitivism. He tried to resolve his inner quest and remove his fear of death through unplanned adventures in Africa. One of the many causes of going to Africa was Henderson’s hatred with the society, especially American. Henderson could never appreciate the general routine life of an American. Henderson maintains that everyone is pursuing material success but their pursuit causes them suffer spiritually. “America is so big, and everybody is working, making, digging, bulldozing, trucking, loading, and so on, and I guess the sufferers suffer at the same rate,” The more one participates in this pursuit, the deeper one finds oneself immersed in the slough of suffering. Henderson names this material pursuit as “madness,” and present age as “an age of madness” (25), in which it is hard to keep one’s sanity untarnished. Bellow, apart from being mildly antithetical to materialism, also maintains that death, as inevitable, always occupies human mind. All human possessions are worthless in the view of human morality. Henderson is bogged by this very question. No matter how rich one is, death is unavoidable. Death is unbiased in its choice of bad people and good people. Sometimes, there is an inner voice in Henderson which says, “Scorch the earth. Why should a good man die? Let it be some blasted fool who is dumped in the grave” (Bellow 182). There were more questions in Henderson’s mind which troubled him. What did exactly his inner
voice want? And, if death can’t be avoided what is the incentive of being good? How can one handle the hollow activities of civilized humanity?

These questions are not exclusive to Henderson; rather, they arise in every mind. Other thinkers have also considered similar questions. Fyodor Dostoevsky in his novel *The Brothers Karamazov* argues if there is no God, everything is permitted. Other thinkers too have dealt with the issue of incentive of being good. Bellow has given his own vision regarding these questions and human existence, in general, through Henderson’s ordeals in Africa.

Henderson went to Africa along with Charlie and his wife, for whom it was a honeymoon trip. Charlie’s wife was not much pleased with Henderson. Henderson “had forgotten to kiss his wife after the ceremony” (Bellow 43-44) that was the reason why Charlie’s wife was at no good terms with Henderson. Henderson, too, did not enjoy their company as it was not merely to film the localities and the animals that he had gone there. Thus, he took one jeep and two natives with him and moved on in the interiors leaving Charlie and his wife. To further simplify his adventure, Henderson kept just one native, Romilayu, with him. Romilayu worked as a guide, translator, and as a friend for Henderson. First they visited a tribe, Arnewi, where the people welcomed the guest with mourning. Gradually, Henderson came to know that the cause of mourning was lack of water. Arnewi people loved their cattle like their relatives, and were very upset because their cows were dying in absence of water. Henderson noticed that there was a water body which could be used as a water supplier; but it was filled with frogs, the fact which refrained the tribal people from fetching water. It was
against the morality of the tribe to harm any kind of animal; and thus, Henderson tried to help them to clear the water. In his hurriedness, Henderson not only killed the frogs but broke the dam-like cistern too, resulting in wasting of the entire reserved water. Prior to this incident, Henderson was being taken in high esteem by the Arnewi people because of his physical strength. He had met with the women of bittahness, queen Willatale and her sister Mtalba, who were impressed by his looks and strength.

Henderson’s conversation with Willatale proves to be a mild blow to his “spirit’s sleep” (Bellow 77). Though, Willatale was scarce in her remarks, her little words were of supreme importance to Henderson. During the conversation, Henderson felt dejected at the thought of rotten human existence. He remarked:

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

As his thoughts were translated by Itelo to Willatale in their native language, she replies, “world is strange to a child. You not a child, sir?” (84). It was the first answer for Henderson that he got in his quest of self. He felt excessively excited on the receiving of such an insight into his own existence.
He explains to himself that a child is never afraid of anything. A human being wants to be like a child and he wants to avoid the knowledge of sufferings and death. For this purpose, he tries to indulge himself in different adventures which put him in strange conditions. In other words, one may feel boredom and fear of death while staying at one place. A gypsy, who never stays at one place, does not face this problem because he is involved in facing different situations which divert him from the question of death and evil. This insight helped Henderson to understand his own desire of coming to Africa and under-going through different adventures. Henderson reflects over the psyche of a human being, “he arranges to have himself abducted like a child. So what happens will not be his fault” (Bellow 84). Avoiding one’s responsibility posits bad faith as one of the main causes of human sufferings. One always tries to justify one’s mistakes with needless explanations. In this way, one deceives oneself for being better than what one actually is.

Astrid Holm writes that Henderson accepts Willatale’s words as the affirmation of life. But in her affirmation of life Willatale avoids the question of facing death. Holm argues that queen Willatale’s “defective eye” (72) symbolically indicates her avoidance of facing death. One of her eyes has “a cataract, bluish white” (72), due to which Henderson refers to her as “the mother-of-pearl eye” (Bellow 79). Holm has associated deeper meaning to the physical defect of Willatale:

The eye with which it should be possible for Willatale to see death is blind, and so her outlook on reality is one-sided. . . . But so is
Henderson for he can only accept death as a part of the reality of others. He fails, however, to recognize this parallel to his own behavior and instead he makes an attempt to master reality by mastering the death of others: he prepares a bomb to kill the frogs which pollute the cistern. His bomb, however, eventually blows up the entire reservoir, and he has to leave the Arnewi tribe very quickly. (Holm 102)

After his misadventure in Arnewi, Henderson had to run away from Arnewi with his guide Romilayu. They took another expedition and visited Wariri, a tribe which was described by Romilayu as the children of darkness. Henderson’s experience in Wariri was just opposite to that of in Arnewi. The people in Wariri made Henderson wait for long hours and stayed him in a hut with a dead body. These incidents were irritating for Henderson, but next day his meeting with the King, Dahfu, proved to be magical tonic for his irritations. King Dahfu, who himself was a medical graduate and was having a mysteriously charming personality, invited Henderson for the local festival. Henderson accepted the honor and participated in it by removing the effigy of Mummah, the goddess of clouds. The result of this action was a heavy rain, which ended the drought of the particular area. Thus, unknowingly, Henderson became, “the Sungo” or the rain king which was just next to king in status for the tribal people. Henderson became a good friend of Dahfu, who took Henderson in the den of lion with him to remove his fear of death. Initially scared by the lioness, Atti, Henderson slowly became comfortable with it. Dahfu explains several reasons of Henderson's
sufferings and tried to remove them in his own way. He made Henderson perform some exercises in lion’s posture. He made Henderson to roar, and through it throw all his irritations, miseries out of his body. The method worked for Henderson. He explained:

And so I was the beast. I gave myself to it, and all my sorrow came out in the roaring. My lungs supplied the air but the note came from my soul. The roaring scalded my throat and hurt the corners of my mouth and presently I filled the den like a bass organ pipe. This was where my heart had sent me, with its clamor. This is where I ended up. (Bellow 267)

This physical exercise helped Henderson to restore his spiritual health. This encounter with lion can be explained with the help of different viewpoints. Bellow himself has asserted the influence of the Austrian-American psychiatrist Wilhelm Reich, “All the while I was writing Dahfu I had the ghost of Rosenfeld near at hand, my initiator into the Reichian mysteries” (qtd. in Atlas 272). Reich developed a theoretical and practical bodywork therapy named “Vegetotherapy”. In this therapy, involuntary mechanism of the body is restored to health through specialized body work technique and simple working with the breath. Helge Normann Nilsen has also explained the den scene with Reichian insight. Nilsen contends that the king Dahfu works just as a Reichian therapist. He co-relates Dahfu’s philosophy of natural goodness of a man with Reich’s Vegetotherapy. Dahfu argues that good cannot be labored and conflicted. Nilsen provides a better understanding of Dahfu’s words, and explains that once man’s core of vital
energy has been freed from oppression and inhibition, he will act and think in a benevolent way:

Henderson agrees to undertake a therapeutic process under the king's guidance, and the crucial stage of this process occurs when the former undertakes a number of roaring sessions in the lion's den with Daifu and Atti the lioness. The king, speaking exactly like a Reichian therapist, explains that "I intend to loosen you up, Sungo, because you are so constricted," and Henderson begins to observe Atti and learn from her how to recover the natural grace, the deep respiration and sense of oneness with the body that he as a civilized Westerner has lost. (Nilsen 88)

It may be noted that Reichian therapy has a dynamic, almost aggressive dimension in that it involves an attack on the patient's defenses, a breakdown of the muscular armor. In other words, Reich employed an active therapy, which also included a certain amount of pure technique, all in an attempt to recreate the natural man. When Henderson makes roaring like the lion, his stiff body is loosen. Once the body armoring begins to dissolve, layer by layer, the life-energy begins to flow again more freely. The therapists suggest that this biodynamic process offers the opportunity for a fundamental biological and psychological purification. As neurosis is cleared out of the body on all levels the person becomes free from all constriction and the "Primary Personality" is recovered in all its aspects. Thus, King Daifu cures Henderson of his neurosis by acting as a Reichian therapist. Atlas also argues Bellow's debt of Paul Schilder's *The Image*
and Appearance of the Human Body as essential in the conception of the den scene. Atlas quotes one of Bellow’s arguments regarding this issue:

> It was from Schilder that I got the notion that one’s physical self really does represent an inner picture, and that we are perhaps responsible for the way we come out,” Bellow explained, “this carries one step forward the doctrine that a man fate is made by his character. (273)

To further simplify, Tanner has rightly presented a parallel between Bellow’s *Henderson the Rain King* and Nietzsche’s *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. In this work, Nietzsche describes three metamorphoses of the heavy laden spirit—camel, lion, and child. The three stages of metamorphoses are the stages through which a soul moves during its transformation. “Now of course there is no exact copying or even a direct parallel: but there are hints and clues that Bellow has included some deliberate echoes of Nietzsche’s work” (Tanner 82). In the first stage, Nietzsche talks about a heavy loaded spirit, camel, that represents Henderson when he was living in the society before going to Africa. His spirit is burdened with the meaningless struggle of human beings after material success and with general ennui. He is scared of death and puzzled over transient nature of the world.

Oh, shame, shame! Oh, crying shame! How can we? Why do we allow ourselves? What are we doing? The last little room of dirt is waiting. Without windows. So for God’s sake make a move,
Henderson, put forth effort. You, too, will die of this pestilence. Death will annihilate you and nothing will remain, and there will be nothing left but junk. Because nothing will have been and so nothing will be left. While something still is—now! For the sake of all, get out. (Bellow 40)

According to Tanner it is this suffocation, which forces Henderson to disburden himself physically and mentally both. To enter into the second stage of Nietzsche’s metamorphoses, Henderson needs the utter privation, which he could find only in Africa. Nietzsche writes; “But in the loneliest wilderness happeneth the second metamorphosis: here the spirit becometh a lion; freedom will it capture, and lordship in its own wilderness” (34). In Tanner’s views, it is freedom for new creation, which Daifu tries to teach Henderson down the lion den. The transformation of a soul into a lion is necessary to cast off the burden of camel. This burden may represent the established values by religion and morality. When Henderson thinks of helping the Arnewi people by killing the frogs, he reflects over morality, “The Jews had Jehovah, but would not defend themselves on the Sabbath. And the Eskimos would perish of hunger with plenty of caribou around because it was forbidden to eat caribou in fish season. Everything depends on the values. And where is reality?” (87). The statement of Henderson has a clear doubt in connection between truth and morality. Rather, he further associates morality with irrationality. He comments, “where the Arnewi are irrational I’ll help them, and where I’m irrational they’ll help me” (Bellow 87). Thus, Henderson’s journey into the wilderness of Africa helps him to get free
from all bondages of established wisdom and to adventure with the truth of his own soul. In the den of lioness, Atti, Henderson is temporarily freed from his deep rooted dissatisfaction and meaninglessness.

After that Henderson enters into the third stage of metamorphosis, at which, he becomes a child again. A child is innocent and submissive. As Nietzsche writes; “Innocence is the child, and forgetfulness, a new beginning, a game, a self-rolling wheel, a first movement, a holy Yea. Aye, for the game of creating, my brethren, there is needed a holy Yea unto life: its own will, willeth now the spirit; his own world winneth the world’s outcast” (35). It is important to enter in a child like phase after having strengthened oneself in the desolation. Like a forgetful child, Henderson forgets the heavy burdens upon his soul. He no longer longs for freedom from society because he is already free from his fears. He is enthusiastic to revisit his family and his society. He no longer remembers his bitter memories of his past existence and he has embraced a new beginning. Now he lives only for moment, he gets up from his spirit’s sleep and starts a new life. Bellow’s thinking is akin to Nietzsche who declared the death of the God, only to enable man to overcome one’s childish dependency upon God:

The greatest need of civilization now is to develop a new type of individual, superman who will be hard, strong and courageous, and who will be intellectually and morally independent. They will break the stone slabs on which the old Judeo-Christian moral laws are inscribed, the old life-denying moral laws to which the masses are
still enslaved. The only morality of the superman will be to affirm life: to be powerful, creative, joyous, and free. (Lavine 325)

It is the spirit of Nietzschian superman, which Bellow has tried to impart to each of his protagonists. Though in *Henderson the Rain King* Bellow seems to follow Nietzsche most explicitly, he has followed the sequence of events recommended by Nietzsche. In most of the fiction, the protagonist starts with a heavy-loaded spirit, goes through a period of solitude enhancing one’s strength and then turns into an innocent child, starting life with a new hope.

One can have a better understanding of the novel *Henderson the Rain King* with Sartre’s views regarding consciousness. The fear of death and anxiety over existence makes one resort to bad faith. Bad faith is a way to avoid freedom and responsibility engrained in human being. Bad faith is one of the most common examples of this craving. According to Sartre, man is condemned to be free. But one cannot stand one’s own freedom because it makes him a maker of his own fortune, whether it is good or bad. In *Seize the Day*, Wilhelm himself tells a lie about his aptitude and possibilities in Hollywood, chooses Hollywood career instead of a medical career, spoils his job as a salesman due to drinking and affairs with girls, and after that he blames his father that had he supported him as a father, he would not have turned toward Tamkin and he would not have lost his remaining money. Actually, Wilhelm like any other human being is a free being, who cannot accept that he himself is the cause of his misfortune. That hurts his self-imposed ideal self which he always tries to save. Henderson, too, is a victim
of bad faith. His dialogue on the first page of the novel defines his psychological dilemma and helps to fathom his deep emotions:

When I think of my condition at the age of fifty-five when I bought the ticket, all is grief. The facts begin to crowd me and soon I get a pressure in my chest. A disorderly rush begins—my parents, my wives, my girls, my children, my farm, my animals, my habits, my money, my music lessons, my drunkenness, my prejudices, my brutality, my teeth, my face, my soul! I have to cry, “No, no, get back, curse you. Let me alone!” (Bellow 3)

Astrid Holm, in his paper named “Existentialism and Saul Bellow’s Henderson the Rain King,” writes that Henderson has taken on certain “roles” in his relationships to those people and to those occupations, and when he tries to answer his own question “Who am I?,” he inevitably points to those relations, thus identifying himself with all his social “roles.” This is a false self and Henderson finds himself caught in the web of unreality. On the other hand, the inner urge of Henderson is to be a perfect person and also not to face death ever. Due to his craving for unachievable goals, he is unable to come to good terms with society. His fear of death led him to Africa, “the ancient bed of humanity”. In Africa, there was no civilization. The absence of civilization provided Henderson with removal of artificiality, of pretentions. At the same time, he experienced humanity with its basic passions without much pruning. In the solitary space of Africa, Henderson’s adventures helped him to unload the useless burdens over his spirit; in other words, he encounters a “the hour that
burst in spirit’s sleep” (77). Henderson terms himself as “becomer.” And at the same time, getting impressed by the personality of Dahfu he calls him a “be-er” (Bellow 191). This distinction is suggestive of Sartre’s first two states of consciousness and Henderson’s craving to be transformed into a perfectly satisfied person.

Bellow’s vision towards life can be squeezed out of the dialogues of Henderson. “Grun-tu-molani” (85)—the wish to live, is the key word of Bellow’s optimism. Bellow does not merely perceive life as elongation of consciousness stretched over time. It is not merely avoidance of death which constitutes life in a respectable human sense, however, the threat of death surely belittles the spirit called life. The fear of death is present in every one. Henderson tries on the recommendation of the local sorcerer, Dahfu, to bring forth such fears and conquer it. Henderson followed the recommendation of Dahfu and played a lion in a lion’s den. This adventure jolted him into life. Before real lion Henderson was face to face with Grun-tu–molani. It is this feeling that Bellow wanted to capture and publicize. Grun-to–molani is structured into human consciousness. Bellow maintains that it is congenial and coterminous with our fear of death.

It is true that, according to Bellow, the fear of death is essential factor of human consciousness and that therefore, it cannot be altogether eliminated; it is also true that Grun-to-molani is the twin and equally compulsory component of human consciousness. To the extent Grun-to-molani dominates our fear of death, Bellow is optimistic. The tussle between the desire to live and the fear of
death is a matter of degrees. One can come out of such fears. Henderson does it. Everyone can.

If Henderson the Rain King is existential in its outlook, it is the most romantic novel of Bellow in its structure. The frequent quotations from such romantic writers as Wordsworth, Shelley, and Coleridge prove Bellow an imaginative and romantic writer. Henderson’s dissatisfaction with the society, love for solitude, quest for meaning and melancholy all enable him to be classified as a romantic sufferer. He condemns the material pursuit of society and finds the conventional wisdom as enslaving. Dahfu, who works as a spiritual mentor for Henderson, helps him overcoming his excessive anxiety over death. Dahfu helps Henderson in gaining spiritual rebirth by recognizing the power of imagination, “Imagination, imagination, imagination! It converts to actual. It sustains, it alters, it redeems!” (Bellow 271). Allan Chavkin writes:

Bellow believes that his faith in the imagination is not shared by contemporary society, which is materialistic and hostile to those who suggest ways of knowing that cannot be scientifically explained. The conflict is clearly elucidated in an important article of his published in 1975, aptly entitled “A World Too Much with Us.” He suggests that the problem that Wordsworth worried about in 1807, in which man squandered his powers in the dreary routines of daily life, has become much worse now. (69)
Chavkin suggests that by the end of the novel, Henderson bursts the spirit’s sleep and awakens to a universe redeemed by the imagination. The seemingly insatiable voice, “I want, I want,” no longer haunts him. As Henderson was compelled to undertake his quest because of spiritual alienation through his adventures, he “gains self-knowledge and feels reconciled to world radiant with life and hope” (Chavkin 70). Having experienced death so closely, he is no longer scared of it. After this transformation, He decides that he will enter medical school and acquire a useful profession. He recognizes the importance of Lily in his life and prepares his mind to return to her with great enthusiasm, “I developed a bad case of homesickness. For I said, What’s the universe? Big. And what are we? Little. I therefore might as well be at home where my wife loves me. And even if she only seemed to love me, that too was better than nothing” (Bellow 328-329).

The basic issue troubling humanity, according to Bellow, is their fear. Fear of death is just an example of nonacceptance of reality. One doesn’t want to face reality. One avoids truth with the help of bad faith which causes anxiety. This truth may be regarding one’s individuality or regarding general life; human mind always wants to believe in a less painful version of reality. This is mind’s defense mechanism against depravity and pain. But the farther one goes from the truth, the deeper one finds oneself engulfed into the web of sufferings. Bellow has tried to portray this reality through a fictional world. His characters are in muddle, they don’t need anything outside their mind to solve the problem. Yet they try to find the solution outside, but in vain. Herzog goes place to place, Wilhelm puts all the
money at risk and urges for his father’s help desperately; Leventhal searches his psyche to reach at a decision; Henderson goes to Africa in search for the answer of his inner voice, but the solution lies within the mind. The different people and situations just uncover the reality. The lioness is a personification of death and helps Henderson to stand the idea of his own death. As Henderson loosens his body in presence of Atti, he gets rid of his deep-rooted fear of death. In the end, he accepts the reality which removes his fears. Here, Bellow gets separated from the romantic melancholic and rebellious outlook. The manner Bellow closes his fiction makes him an existentialist rather than a romantic. In the end, most of Bellow’s protagonists get reunited with the society. They accept the importance of humanitarian values, love, fraternity and generosity as all feelings are essential for a meaningful existence. Bellow ends his fiction with the reunion of his protagonist and the society as if he just wants his protagonist to accept human condition full-heartedly. John Jacob Clayton writes:

We find his characters weighed down 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 human being and link him spiritually with others. (Clayton 135)

The trust in human values and importance attached to the society indicates Bellow’s frame of mind as a preserver rather than a destroyer. He tries to bind all men together with the thread of humanitarian values. He knows that it is easy to destroy everything but it is really tough to create. L.H. Goldman writes that Bellow’s protagonists are “ethical individuals” (55). Although most of Bellow’s protagonists belong to a fractured nuclear family, the family is nevertheless of great importance to them. “There is a strong attachment to children, a closeness to brothers, and a reverence for the past which each protagonist, through the course of the novel, attempts to reclaim for himself. They love being in society. Bellow ends his novels with the hero’s, reintegration into society” (Goldman 56-57). Asa Leventhal finally waits happily for his unborn child, Kirby Allbee is seen well settled with his new girlfriend, Herzog is hopeful about his future with Ramona, Henderson ends up in Newfoundland waiting for a plane that will return him to his home and his family. Bellow writes:

If we have only to say “humanity stinks in our nostrils” then silence is better, because we have heard that news. Our own bones have broadcast it. If we have more than this to say we may try but never require ourselves to prove—oh, no, that is not shit but the musk of the civet, it smells bad because it’s so concentrated. Diluted it’s the base of beautiful perfumes. No amount of assertion will make an ounce of art. (qtd. in Atlas 274)
Bellow is not a champion of humanity in a foolish or hypocritical sense. Humanity does have its weaknesses. It is a known fact. It is displayed and therefore broadcasted in every one of us. Bellow is critical of those who criticize humanity in a routine and fashionable manner. At the same time Bellow is also against those who dogmatically assert human greatness. If the stink is real then it cannot be claimed that in reality the apparent piece of shit is a concentrated musk which when diluted would result in fragrance. Such proofs or assertions are similar to that of a hypocritical citizen who proclaims his country’s greatness despite of pervasive famines and corruption. Neither dogmatic assertions nor the self proclaimed fashionable critics are needed to restore human dignity. Thus, Bellow dismisses both, the fashionable critic and the foolish champion of humanity. What is needed is action and self-correction. The cause of humanity can be championed in individual’s action and not through lip service and dogmatic assertions.
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