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SAUL BELLOW'S DEFENSE OF MAN: The Pattern of Alienation, Purgation and Reconciliation in Saul Bellow's Fiction

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ABBREVIATIONS

1- DM - Dangling Man

2- V - The Victim

3- AM - The Adventures of Augie March

4- SD - Seize the Day

5- H - Herzog

6- HRK - Henderson the Rain King

7- HG - Humboldt's Gift

8- SP - Mr. Sammler's Planet

A B S T R A C T

Through three decades - from 1944 to 1975 - Saul Bellow has written one highly acclaimed novel after another. Winner of three National Book Awards, he has been regarded by critics and the reading public alike as one of the greatest American writers nowadays.

This study deals with eight of his novels - from Dangling Man (1944) to Humboldt's Gift (1975), and is an attempt to depict a cycle that may be seen at the bottom of each book: the cycle of alienation and masochism which are purged so that the hero can enjoy life again. Alienation is manifested in the protagonist's tendency to withdraw from the world, and masochism consumes him with guilt feeling, often indeterminate and obsessive. But the role of victim confers dignity on him, so, on the other hand, he pursues a superior life nourished in his world of thought. This transcendental impulse may represent a false solution, merely an extension of the hero's egotism. Finally Bellow submerges his hero in purgatory so that he faces his human frailty and finds potential redemption through self-acceptance and the search for human community.

Such a pattern reveals Saul Bellow's attitude toward man: while the author examines the dilemmas of modern man, he also looks for an optimistic solution to them, showing his belief in human dignity and possibility. We note the author's undogmatic moral concern which is eased by his touches of humor and his playful innovations of style.

R E S U M O

Ao longo de três décadas - de 1944 a 1975 - Saul Bellow escreveu sucessivos e muito aplaudidos romances. Vencedor de três "National Books Awards", ele tem sido considerado pelos críticos e pelo público leitor como um dos maiores escritores americanos da atualidade.

Este estudo aborda oito de seus romances - desde Dangling Man (1944) até Humboldt's Gift (1975) - e é uma tentativa de descrever um ciclo que pode ser acompanhado na essência de cada livro: o ciclo de alienação e masoquismo que são expiados de modo que o herói possa apreciar a v i d a novamente. A alienação é manifestada na tendência do protagonista se retirar da sociedade, e o masoquismo o consome com o sentimento de culpa frequentemente obsessivo e indeterminado. Mas o papel de vítima lhe confere dignidade, então, por outro lado, ele persegue uma vida superior alimentada no mundo do seu pensamento. Este impulso transcendental pode representar uma solução falsa, meramente uma extensão do egoísmo do herói. Finalmente Bellow mergulha seu herói no 'purgatório' de modo que ele encare sua fragilidade humana e encontre uma 'redenção potencial' através da aceitação própria e na procura da comunidade humana.

Tal modelo revela a atitude de Saul Bellow em relaçao ao homem: enquanto o autor examina os dilemas do homem moderno ele busca também uma solução otimista dos mesmos, demonstrando sua confiança na dignidade e possibilidade humanas. Nós observamos a preocupação moral não dogmática do autor, a qual é mitigada por seus traços de humor e por suas jocosas inovações do estilo.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTORY

1.1. Statement of Problem

This thesis on Saul Bellow is an attempt to show that his novels reflect a cycle of alienation resulting from some innate massochism which is purged, so that the hero can re-enter society. In dealing with eight of his major works of fiction I try to see that very 'emergent' pattern and Bellow's final attitude toward man: while he examines the dilemmas of modern man, he also looks for an optimistic solution to them, showing his belief in human dignity and possibilities.

Erich Fromm describes the phenomenon of alienation as a modern problem, as an effect of Capitalism on personality. This is a world in which the individual has become hostile and estranged; he feels alone, isolated, insecure, powerless, doubtful and full of anxiety. Fromm writes:

> By alienation is meant a mode of experience in which the person experiences himself as an alien. He has become, one might say, estranged from himself. He does not experience himself as the center of his world, as the creator of his own acts and their consequences have become his masters... The alienated person is out of touch with himself as he is out of touch with any other person.[1]

In Humboldt's Gift, Saul Bellow says that alienation is a phenomenon humankind has experienced from the beginning under the name of "boredom," but in modern times the question has been dealt with as "anomie" or "alienation." And he adds through his narrator:

> In myself I could observe the following source of tedium: 1) the lack of personal connection with the external world... The educated speak of the disenchanted (a boring) world. But it is not the world, it is my own head that is disenchanted. The world cannot be disenchanted. 2) For me the self-conscious ego is the seat of boredom... For to be fully conscious of oneself as an individual is also to be separated from all else.[2]

The problem of alienation as it is treated by Saul Bellow, is differently characterized, but reviewers often reach a common agreement where we may trace Bellow's universal intentions.

Keith Michael Opdahl points out that Existentialist and Romantic influences on Bellow's work are concerned with the "strangeness" that defines alienation. In the view of men such as Sartre and Emerson, the meaning of alienation is diametrically opposed, so Existentialists and Romantics "represent opposing poles which correspond to Bellow's contrasting views of strangeness." Bellow's psychological interpretation of strangeness follows Sartre's view. "His hero is intensely sensitive to historical conditions and feels that man finds his true self only in communal action. But"Bellow's transcendent interpretation of strangeness allies him with Emerson, Wordsworth, Whitman and Thoreau who clearly believe in God." These Romantics base their faith "on what is perhaps the source of all religious belief - man's infrequent but persistent intuition of a spiritual reality" - where they discover the spiritual self.[3]

But the most pervasive aspect of alienation is concerned with Bellow's Jewish heritage. According to Opdahl, Bellow describes the Jewish experience in terms that makes it representative of historical alienation and determinism. "The problem of alienation, identity, mobility and powerlessness all form a link of kind, though not of degree, between the oppressed Jew and the faceless modern man."[4]

In a study of Henderson the Rain King, Jeff H. Campbell points to Bellow's knowledge of "the angst and isolation of the modern individual." Henderson "can be seen as a modern Everyman ... a modern man who is aware of certain contemporary answers to estrangement and alienation..."[5]

And dealing with Herzog, Richard Poirier says that

> the life of the urban Jew, far from being special, is assumed to be the life of Modern American Everyman... For accomodation to the city the type of Bellow's Jewish hero demands to be its victim. What he wants to do is nothing less than possess our minds with a portraiture alternative to the alienated waste land figures of earlier twentieth-century literature.[6]

In the same regard, Abraham Bezanker states that

> all of the characters are Jews or respond to Jews, or act like Jews, and yet, in spite of this, Bellow's concern with morality appears to be secular and non-Jewish. He seems, in short, to be trying to achieve universal statements within a rather narrow, non-Christian framework... All of his key characters have a singular capacity for self-astonishment which cannot be equated with naiveté or immaturity... All are given to us *in extremis*, and it is their Jewish gift for desperate feeling that moves the reader.[7]

Other critics, such as Harold Kaplan, Rueben Frank, Seymour Epstein and many others - including Maurice Samuels, Leslie Fiedler and Irving Malin who deal specifically with Jewish traits in Bellow's work - partake of the same opinion: that is, Jewish experience was a means of expressing Bellow's universal intentions, for, according to Fiedler, "it is the Jew who has been best able to recast this old American wisdom - that home is exile, that it is the nature of man to feel himself everywhere alienated..."[8] And in Bellow's own words, "the artist must evidently find in his own spirit the strength to resist the principal alienating power of our time."[9]

Concerning the view of Bellow's fiction, critics, as a whole, have made way for different approaches and Bellow's own attitude seems often ambivalent and ambiguous. That is to say that the view I will have throughout my work could possibly be contested and viewed from other angles. Opdahl says that Bellow's current position as our leading novelist "creates several problems for the reader. The chief of these is Bellow's ambiguity. Realizing that his novels invite contradictory interpretations, reviewers complain that his final meaning is unclear." Opdahl continues explaining that the confu-

sion derives from Bellow's different structures, different styles and the new kind of characters which result from his continual experimentation. His ambiguity also "results from the very ambition of his quest for meaning ... but his intention has remained intensely moral."[10]

John J. Clayton sees Bellow as a spokesman for our (American) culture, who voices its uncertainties, its complexities, its paradoxes, so his fiction contains three interrelated contradictions:

> First - Bellow takes a stand against the cultural nihilism of the twentieth-century: against Dada, against the Wasteland, against the denigration of human life. Yet Bellow is himself essentially a depressive... 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 alienatees. Third - Bellow is particularly hostile to the devaluation of the 'separate self' in modern literature, and he values individuality... Yet in novel after novel he is forced to discard individuality...[11]

On the other hand, we can hardly define Bellow's own feelings toward his heroes. He seems to manipulate them, to be ironic, to laugh at them, to be an outsider. But sometimes he seems to assume their pains. Opdahl writes about this:

> His relationship with his protagonist is as ambivalent as his relation with the world. Bellow has been accused of identifying too closely with his hero and of being too detached from him. He often alternates between empathy and irony, identification and distance - between imaginatively surrendering to his character and consciously manipulating him.[12]

However, that may not matter much, for it is the role of the artist to let the reader see things differently, and this art has made Saul Bellow stand as one of America's most important novelists since the Second World War.

1.2. Review of Criticism

Besides an introductory definition of alienation, I have

already talked about Bellow's treatment of alienation as it is seen by some critics, and also his ambivalence which opens path for different approaches. In this review of criticism I will try not to summarize each critic's opinions about Saul Bellow but chiefly those points which are relevant to my thesis. Although their ideas do not chart Bellow's fiction into a kind of cycle as I will try to do in the following chapters, their opinions are very germane to my work.

In his very perceptive and highly acclaimed book Saul Bellow: In Defense of Man, John J. Clayton says about Bellow's work in general:

> In spite of his desire to be affirmative, Bellow's depressive tendencies are seen in nearly all his fiction. One would expect in a writer who wishes to affirm the human life and to defend the individual to find characters with strength, grace, even nobility. But Bellow's characters are lonely, despairing, cut off not only from society but from friends and wives. Moreover, they are pathological social masochists, filled with guilt and self-hatred, needing to suffer and to fail.[13]

As he deals with Bellow's single novels, Clayton continues emphasizing the heroes' alienation and masochism:

> Bellow's heroes are not only alienated; they alienate themselves. Filled with guilt, they loathe themselves and, in most of the novels, need to heap suffering and indignity on their own head. Joseph, Asa, Tommy, Henderson, Herzog - all are moral (social) masochists.[14]

According to Clayton, the hero's sense of guilt is often sexual. Pursuing Bernard Berliner's earlier study, Clayton affirms that "masochism does not result from the individual directing early sadism against the ego but rather begins with another person and is from inception a pattern, literal or symbolic, directed toward a figure of both love and authority, a strong superego figure, generally a father."[15] Then he adds that this explanation does not cancel Freud's idea that masochistic behavior is self-punishment to remove guilt, generally oedipal.

But the heroes' self-hatred is the other side of their gigantic idealism, Clayton further argues. They have the noblest, loftiest sentiments; they are full of loving-kindness, and, although they are the first to recognize their baseness, they feel superior to those who ridicule them. So, if on one side sufferings are meant to alleviate their guilt, on the other they are sign of their higher nature. They raise themselves up by putting themselves down.

> One important way in which Bellow's heroes show alienation is in their attempt to go beyond human life: to live detached from mortality and weakness... to be "human" is, throughout Bellow's fiction, terrifying. And so his heroes turn themselves into ideal images in order to protect themselves. At the same time they turn the world into one in which they can live safely. This double creation of a self and of a world is a constant theme in Bellow.[16]

Clayton explains then that Bellow's concept of ideal construction is a created self and a created reality. While on the one hand Bellow defends individualism, on the other he sees the aggrandizing individualism as an error. The search for salvation through greatness is both self-destructive and isolating.

> They create ideal versions of themselves, and then, unable to live in these images, they only hate themselves more and create a version of reality in which they can live. A self and a world: but the "real" human being and the "real" world don't go away... They cannot face the terror of pure being; they cannot face the terror of their own being or of the death they feel they deserve.[17]

According to Clayton, there are three ways in which the hero hides from death: 1) accepting a role as victim, as sufferer. This not only reduces guilt but justifies the hero as morally superior. 2)The hero constructs a self to which ordinary laws and limitations do not apply: hence death does not apply. The sad, guilty boy becomes the unique individual with a "special destiny." 3) In the same way he turns reality into a construct in which he can live safely. Instead of living in the here-and-now, he transmutes living reality into

philosophical problems which he can handle in verbal form.[18]

Another critic, M.A. Klug, approximates Clayton's ideas, saying that the most consistent aspect of Bellow's fiction is the psychology of his heroes. From Joseph, the dangling man, to Artur Sammler, Bellow's central characters all have pretty much the same psychological conflict.

> Each of his heroes hungers for what he instinctively knows is a decent life, for love, for human brotherhood, for communion with God. At the same time each is betrayed by the demands of his own ego, which insists upon absolute freedom, absolute power, absolute understanding. The traitor ego seeks to create an ideal self and flies beyond all limits... In its extreme form it perverts the instinctive need to be at one with other men and with God into a desire to control all other men and to become God.[19]

But Bellow's heroes live the negation of their desire, Klug maintains. They cannot create their own natures because they have inherent natures that are finite and imperfectible, and the external reality brings them messages of death. That conflict determines the way they see the world; they condemn all reality. The modern city is the image of the reality of death.

> They see the buildings, the institutions, the multitude of unknown bodies as the substance of death itself. The city exists as a machine for mass-production and mass-murder. To be part of it is to be swallowed into nothingness, to lose not only the hope of immortality but also the hope of a unique or individual life.[20]

Yet, just as the ego is in conflict with the external reality it is inevitably in conflict with another part of the self, so all of Bellow's heroes despise themselves for falling short of perfection. Like Clayton, Klug says that

> What lies behind this is a perverse urge for pure states. If the self cannot be perfect, then let it be worthless. The essential dynamic of Bellow's heroes arises from the pull of these two extremes. On the most active level of their being, they are romantic egoists drawn to some pure and absolute freedom. Denied this pure state, they turn in disgust from their environment and from their own natures.[21]

Dealing with the problem of alienation, I will consider also the sense of religiousness in Bellow's heroes. Opdahl emphasizes that "the problem and the goal of all Bellow's heroes is religious transcendence - the problem in that their rages derive from balked religious longing and the goal in that only transcendence will finally answer the problems they face." Later he adds that Bellow has become increasingly certain of his protagonist's transcendent vision, but he has to date portrayed not the victory of faith, but its difficulties. His heroes enjoy a sense of transcendence which they are unable to make count in their lives. After showing the coincidence of Romanticism and Judaism in Bellow's religious concern, Opdahl says that Bellow's religious insight requires the hero to surrender to God or to involuntary perception.[22]

Believing that Saul Bellow continues in the spirit of Emerson, Thoreau and Whitman, M. Gilbert Porter allies him with the neo-transcendentalists. They restored human possibilities. Their faith in Divine included faith in the human. "Seeing the visible world as symbolic of a higher spiritual reality, the transcendentalists affirmed a belief in the strength, imagination, dignity and moral perfectibility of man..."[23] And refering to Bellow's work he adds:

> His fiction testifies to the resiliency and the aspiration of the human spirit and, in a nondoctrinaire way, to a force larger than the individual somewhere "out where it is incomprehensible." Herzog "can pray toward it" as does Mr. Sammler in the midst of his pain. God, Love, Prime Mover, Life Force, Elan Vital, or simply Creative Spirit, it is a Universal that has the power properly intuited, to give meaning to human existence, to inspire brotherhood, to sustain the dream.[24]

Porter concludes his point saying that a reader does not need to believe in an orthodox divinity in order to understand and appreciate Bellow's fiction, but he will find it helpful to know something about the 'Yellow Brick Road' and the 'Second Star to the Right'.

Clayton also deals with the problem of transcendence when he writes on Humboldt's Gift. He remembers that nearly all of Bellow's fiction asks one question: Can Man be saved?

> In the world of Distraction, the world in which the ego, the social self moves, the answer is NO. But there is always another world in a Bellow novel: it is a world of love, of search for the light of God and the will of God, a world in which the person is no fool, or is a holy fool, in which the soul is worthy of salvation.[25]

Clayton explains that these two opposed worlds are expressed in two opposed voices: the external world of Distraction is given to us with comic energy and the Inner world, the world of love, is given to us lyrically. It is full of quiet mystery.

> ... the beauty behind the comedy is in the intimation of the other world, of a 'home world'... Without this sense of a home-world Bellow would be simply a skillful, realistic and comic writer. But infused through his narratives, encountering manic or oppressive distractions, is the "inner miracle," the "core of the eternal in every human being," intimation of a truer, higher, deeper life than this crazy mess we are surrounded by, this crazy mess that is, finally, our absurd, hungry selves.[26]

E a r l R o v i t notes the ambiguous role that religion plays in Bellow's works:

> There is a persistent, usually muted, religious reference in all his fiction, ... but this belief in God, common to all Bellow's protagonists, is merely an additional burden for them to carry. It increases their suffering of shame or guilt, without being in itself an alleviation of that suffering or a source of moral strength. Their belief in God may be slightly more than a mere religious sentimentality, but it is certainly a good deal less than a fundamental mode of defining what is legitimately human.[27]

Tony Tanner sees religiousness in Bellow's work this way:

> Failing to experience any specific sense of relationship with other people and contemporary society, Bellow's characters respond to a more mystical sense of one-ness with some "larger body" which is transpersonal and relates them to the very current of being.[28]

Klug, who also partakes of other critics' view, points

out the growing importance of the religious sense especially in Bellow's later novels. But, according to him, none of his heroes arrives at any intellectual belief in God or achieves faith. God is not a conclusion. The mystical sense of God's presence frees them from the necessity of proofs, explanations, intellectual constructions. And the moments of mystical union can never become a place of permanent residence. "It is at best a corrective to the pure states of ego-mania and despair, and to the illusion that these states correspond to reality..."[29]

In connection with the problem of alienation I will deal in my work with the hero's world of thought. It is there in the chaotic privacy of his mind that Bellow's man struggles with himself and the world at large. In his essay "Bellow's Thinkers," Ronald Weber remarks that Bellow's work is a fiction of ideas. Ideas become the possessions of characters and find open expression.

> But the very act of expressing thought through characters gives rises to doubt and contradiction. Ideas exist not in a void of abstraction but within the chaos of human consciousness and here they inevitably call forth to play the opposites Bellow admires in the novel of ideas. They also call forth, for both character and reader, doubts about the value of thought himself. As Bellow's characters struggle with ideas they run the risk of losing their grip of the world of physical and practical reality; thought both frees and limits them...[30]

Thought is thus a perilous gift, as dangerous and deceptive as ennobling, as capable of leading one way from true life as toward it.

Opdahl adds that "because Bellow's point of view is almost always that of his protagonist, the society he describes may be a reflection and projection of his hero's consciousness. His portrayal of it is often an exploration of the psychology of the character who sees it."[31] Robert R. Dutton says also that Joseph's "Spirit of Alternatives acts as his other self."[32] Jonathan Baumback, like most of the critics, shares the same idea and adds that Allbee is Leventhal's

reflection.[33] As I will show later, the hero's world of thought may be a way to alienation and masochism, for there he keeps himself uncommitted. That is why I will keep in mind that it is the hero himself who completes his own alienation. Klug says that Bellow's heroes seek a kind of personal immortality in the past. "Over and over again they return to the scenes and memories of their childhoods as a permanent retreat against time... The life of mind becomes a substitute for creative life."[34]

Bellow's own words in "Distractions of a Fiction Writer" are meaningful:

> On the nobler assumption he (man) should have at least power to overcome ignominy and to complete his own life. His suffering, feebleness, servitude then have a meaning. This is what writers have taken to be the justification of power. It should reveal the greatness of man. And if no other power will do this, the power of imagination will take this task upon itself.[35]

So far I have recorded critical appreciations which can be related to the way Bellow's heroes show alienation. Following through the cycle I will try to chart the purgative situation undergone by his heroes in order to achieve reconciliation.

John Clayton refers to purgation as 'Darkness' which is Bellow's term for all those forces beyond human encompassing which impinge upon man. Death is the ground of darkness. The heroes must face it and learn to stop constructing a world and a self to keep them safe.

> The process of transformation is amazingly similar in all of Bellow's novels. The hero must enter the world that <u>is</u> as a simple human creature, giving up his constructed reality and his constructed self. These are indeed his burdens. He has to put them down.[36]

Comparing Bellow to Sartre, Clayton says that both writers move toward a new idea of human life without selfhood. But "Bellow's novels work toward selflessness of a different, more traditional sort - closer to religious brotherhood and the mystical death of the self."

The approach of death, adds Clayton, is not purely negative for two reasons: first, the metaphorical death is partly the death of the old self - of the egocentric individual who must die before he can become human. Second, it is representative of the physical death he must face. By approaching death he can be reconciled to humanity.[37]

Dealing with Herzog, Opdahl says that he is provided with a 'purgation' that explains his release.

> Because all of Bellow's heroes feel the same ambivalence toward the world that Herzog feels toward his past, this cycle illustrates and summarizes the form and the meaning of the other novels as well. Each of Bellow's heroes finds the climax of his story - and a sense of great release - in a confrontation with death ... The confrontation of the death figure may be viewed as a vicarious release of the hero's masochism or death wish.[38]

Denis Donoghue also says that "Henderson, after his purgative experience in Africa, is redeemed, set free with a symbolic lion cub and the warmth of a child's friendship."[39]

I have already talked before about Bellow's ambiguity. However,it is specially the conclusion of his novels - the hero's transformation - that permits different points of view (often ambivalent and ambiguous)which have even made critics complain about Bellow's lack of capacity for ending his novels. Although I will discuss the problem when dealing with separate novels, we may review some general ideas:

Marcus Klein says that Bellow's novels display the movement from alienation to accomodation.

> Alienation, the sense of separate and unconciliating identity must travel to accommodation. Bellow's inspiration is finally in other, deeper sources, but as the novels have worked themselves out they have dealt in terms presented by the history in which they found themselves. The dialogue between alienation and accommodation is what first of all they are about.[40]

According to him, Bellow's hero is tempted frequently to epiphanies of love for mankind in general (though never for things), and his

motion is brought to various thematic conclusions, but he is in the first instance activated by the need to rid himself of the weight of chaos.[41]

Patrick Morrow, who ranks Bellow as the leading figure among novelists who believe that man's living within society is preferable to self-imposed alienation, shares Klein's opinion:

> Bellow is highly concerned with how the sensitive individual can live to fulfillment within a society sometimes hostile, always chaotic. To this end, the heroes of his novels find accommodation more valuable than rebellion.[42]

F.J. Hoffman also contends that Bellow's hero is bent on finding some kind of accommodation with society, on changing his separation for conformity, his rebellion for adaptation. He says: "Bellow's hero moves into society, with a desperate hope that the human dilemma will be solved in community recognition and action."[43]

David Galloway sees Bellow's hero as engaged in an unending quest for an identifiable role in society forever "faced by crossroads where 'one path leads to the society, the other away from the community'." He also asserts the movement from isolation to affirmation of existence in the world.

> All of Bellow's heroes begin by trying to throw off responsibility and the chaotic weight of the world, but love for mankind finally brings them back to the business of living in the real world, even when the real seems chaotic and destructive.[44]

Klug asserts that Bellow does not allow his heroes to die within the walls of their conflicts, and the resolution that his heroes move towards springs from a triumph over the ego rather than the simple destruction of it. He adds:

> They go beyond their own striving for absolute perfection and in so doing they experience the sense of a new reality... One of the recurrent moments of freedom that Bellow's heroes realize springs from a sudden emotional acceptance of the inherent limits of life. It begins with a surrender to the knowledge that there is no way of beating these limits, that striving against them is futile.[45]

Then Klug adds that the lack of any final solution in Bellow's novels must be emphasized. The inner divisions are never totally healed over. The instincts for withdrawal and fear of reality are never completely overcome. At best, the mixed condition of humanity is accepted.

Robert R. Dutton, whose book shows the sub-angelic nature of Bellow's heroes, states that Bellow is consistent in the affirmation of man's potentialities:

> In all of his novels, he shows his protagonists to be responsible for their particular conditions, their dilemmas and conflicts: but they are also regarded as capable of altering those conditions, whether or not they are aware of these responsibilities and powers.[46]

Another critic, Max Schulz, points out that a qualified resurrection characterizes the ending of Bellow's novels, and attitudes guided by heart (love) save the heroes. Each hero faces the attractions death offers and resists its appeal. Each triumphs with the heart over the corrosive experience of the mind. Each demonstrates that the individual, while partaking of the social order, may preserve the integrity of his soul without submerging in his fate.[47]

Opdahl argues that the goal of Bellow's heroes is religious transcendence, an immolation of the immature self as a means of achieving loving union with a community.

> Bellow insists that his hero stop holding on to himself, but he creates a situation in which the victory of love is a throwing away of the self. He creates protagonists who desperately need community, but portrays a community in which the price of admission is destruction.[48]

Clayton asserts that throughout Bellow's novels there is a concern for redemption in the here and now, and also that at the core of all his novels there is concern for other human beings, a concern which is evident especially in the transformation of the hero. "The obstacles to learning to go beyond the self and be concerned for others make up much of the substance of Bellow's novels. Bellow's characters and Bellow himself pay "allegiance to life."[49] Later on

Clayton adds that

> 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 on the human being and link him spiritually with others.[50]

In his perceptive essay about Herzog Tony Tanner asserts:

> His (Herzog's) thoughts are valuable, but in the end it is the comic futility of his thinking that strikes him. Throughout the book we are aware of a growing desire to pass beyond all ideas, all mental 'explanation', all 'abstract intellectual work', in an attempt to reestablish contact with ordinary reality... The monologist desperately wants to advance to dialogue. Too much thinking has dislodged him to a dangerous degree.[51]

Considering the ending of the novels Tanner also remarks that all have tasks and journeys unfinished, problems unresolved, resolutions untested. "These endings are vivid pictures - momentary gestures of hope, readiness and reconciliation. They are often vibrantly, emotionally "right": yet they could be called "conclusions in which nothing is concluded."[52]

Earl Rovit, whose pamphlet emphasizes the intense moral seriousness of Bellow's concerns, says also that no other elements of his work have been subject to more confusion and critical disapproval than the conclusions of his novels. "The interpretative confusion is endless and I do not propose to offer a judicious settlement. But the habit of ambiguous conclusions suggests a radical deficiency in Bellow's capacity to bring his structures to an inevitable termination."[53] Rovit goes on to say that Bellow's curiously incomplete fictional structures seem to reflect accurately the basic indecisiveness of his moral position:

> Viewed in a harsh light, his final scenes may seem confused and contradictory - mere devices to terminate the fictional posturings of a brooding consciousness which lacks the moral energy to uphold a fully responsible position. But from a more sympathetic point of view they may be fruitfully ambiguous in that they

> leave his meanings honestly suspended between commitment and withdrawal.[54]

We might say that Bellow's ambivalent attitudes and conflicts shown in his novels do not allow us to take a one-sided vision. Anyway, Opdahl maintains that Bellow's starting point is his protagonist's social experience, but Bellow's imagination is basically metaphysical and religious, passing from the historic fact to the larger, universal issue. He shifts from social issues to the ultimate problems of evil and death. According to Opdahl, one of the most striking characteristics of Bellow's work is his view of the personal and the metaphysical as a continuum, in which personality finds justification in a universal principle or moral order which it reflects.[56]

Porter sees an affirmative tone of celebration in Bellow's novels and that is why he allies him with the neo-transcendentalists. He remembers also that Bellow shows that, beside individual heroism and renewal of universal contacts, the delicate balance between what a person owes himself and what he owes to others is never easily reached and it must constantly be reconfirmed in the light of the Other.

Clayton, who examines Bellow as a psychological novelist, states also that the affirmative tone is the substance of Bellow's fiction. He believes in human dignity and possibility, attacking despair. But on the other side Clayton emphasizes that Bellow has within him the seeds of despair which he attacks. That is what generates the main controversies seized on by critics in Bellow's work.

For Dutton, Bellow is consistent in his affirmation of man's potentialities. What he urges, as well as what he attempts to create in his novels, is a depiction of man as sub-angelic, and the nature of man is finally defined by no one but himself.

In short, many critics, including Klug, Rovit, Tanner and others, differ in their view of the solution Bellow proposes for his protagonists' dilemmas, but they all consider Bellow primarily optimistic. They seem to take a mixed view, for Bellow seems actually a mixed author. Like his heroes we may be left dangling after reading his books.

1.3. Statement of Purpose

Critical opinion, which I have organized to serve my purpose, has shed some light on the problem I am going to deal with in the following chapters. My thesis will be thus organized:

The second chapter will first show the alienation of Bellow's hero in his tendency to withdraw from society. Examining the life of each hero we see that he is uncommitted, a stranger toward others and toward himself, often unemployed, divorced from wife and from life, closed in by the walls of his room or his mind. The protagonists' masochism, which may be considered as both cause and result of alienation, is examined in its various manifestations: the hero is lacerated with obsessive guilt feeling which makes him convert people around him into instruments for punishment. He feels the necessity to fail and does so even in sex. The other manifestations of masochism, or alienation, are seen in the hero's quest for perfection through greatness, which shows the character's lack of self-acceptance willing to be "more than human," to flee also the reality of death. It is from this perspective that I deal also with the hero's glimpses of transcendence. I will not side with Opdahl's or Porter's approach to religiousness, but rather hold with Rovit, Tanner and Klug that the protagonist's sense of transcendence may be an escape from reality. I view the hero's thought as the central

source for alienation and masochism, since his mind is the creator of the "ideal constructions" which he surfeits on.

Chapter three will chart the purgative situation undergone by Bellow's hero. He is immersed in a period of darkness. He not only feels surrounded by death, but faces as well a figurative death, for the ideal self and world crumble before him. I agree with Opdahl who thinks that death may be seen as the release of the hero's masochism. Then I see that the purgative situation opens the path to reconciliation, which is at least implied. The hero tries to overcome himself, his alienation and looks for communion, through self-acceptance, acceptance of the others and optimistic attitude toward life, escaping the tyranny of mind. This is the essential pattern I will trace in my work and it constitutes the essence of my dissertation. Last, but not least, chapter three discusses the problem of Bellow's ambiguity, his moral concern and the charge he indulges in 'melodrama'. I focus on Bellow's ambivalence and ambiguity, especially concerning the end of his novels, which invite contradictory interpretations that may also reveal Bellow's moral indecisiveness. With Porter, Opdahl, Schulz, Clayton and others, I agree that Bellow is after all a writer with a moral function. And with the support of the same critics, plus Irving Malin and Earl Rovit I try - on the other side - to show how Bellow surpasses melodrama. It is largely due to the expedients of different dramatic settings and especially having in mind the effects of Bellow's humor, which is a very important trait in his fiction.

In the development of chapter two and three I will use four of Bellow's novels: Dangling Man (1944), The Victim (1948), Mr. Sammler's Planet (1969) and Humboldt's Gift (1975). They correspond to the first and last works of Bellow's; therefore they are especially useful to see a very consistent pattern in his fiction as

a whole.

The next four chapters of the thesis are named after the novels that I will deal with. They are: The adventures of Augie March (1953), Seize the Day (1956), Henderson the Rain King (1959) and Herzog (1964). These works are widely considered to be Bellow's greatest achievements. After supplying the summary of the plots I will analyse each of them within the cycle shown in the second and third chapters, charting also critics' different views about each one. Although I deal with 'masochism' within each novel, I am going to discuss it in more detail on pp. 89-92 of the chapter on Seize the Day.

The conclusion will contain a general view of the pattern as shown throughout the development of the work. I will affirm there Bellow's moral concern, his ambivalence and ambiguity. Moral earnestness may seem at odds with the author's penchant for ambiguity - but the seeming conflict does not, I believe, impair the author's final achievement. Like most of the critics I think the affirmative tone that does exist by the end of Bellow's novels shows his belief in human possibility.

If we share Bellow's idea that man "should have at least sufficient power to overcome ignominy and complete his own life," it seems that alienation in Bellow's fiction is only a transitional condition.

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CHAPTER TWO

ALIENATION AND MASOCHISM IN DM, V, SP AND HG

Bellow's hero shows alienation in his tendency to withdraw from the world. Using the word 'tendency' I have in mind Bellow's distinctive depiction of man in society. Dutton says that like others writers, such as John dos Passos, Theodore Dreiser and Nathaniel West, Bellow sees the city as oppressive, as a force of alienation, "as a setting in which man is caught up in a confusing jungle of distorted aims and values." The city is actually a"powerful background", but while those writers see the environment "as central to and definitive of man's ignominy, Bellow sees it as only a peripheral factor to man's fate." Dutton adds that Bellow's protagonists struggle "to break through to life and to achieve their possibilities, their human potentialities; and, most importantly, their individual potentiality." In order to protect their strong sense of self against an impersonal society they tend to alienate from it. Only later, through their experience, they learn that withdrawal is not the answer and that "they need not be defined by the grey ugliness of the city."[1]

We may see that withdrawal is the path followed by the hero of Bellow's first book - Dangling Man. The novel is a journal of a young man called Joseph whose surname we never learn. It covers the period between December 15, 1942 and April 9, 1943, his last day in civilian life. But it contains a good deal of thinking back to the times before he felt the compulsion to write the diary. Joseph is a graduate of the University of Wisconsin, married for five years. He gives up his job because of his pending induction in the army, so he lives on his wife Iva's earnings. In his diary he seeks relief from his worries becoming more and more introspective and isolated. But pressures around and within him seem to become overbearing and to threaten his sanity. At last he realizes he finds no answers in his

detached state, so he writes to the draft board requesting his immediate induction.

In Joseph's story we can first see that the estrangement from the world pervades not only the relationship to his work but to his fellow man, to his relatives and to himself. After resigning his job, Joseph moves step by step toward alienation from everything and everybody around him. His social isolation grows with his leaving the Communist Party and then increasingly affects personal relationships. In spite of having lived in Chicago nearly all his life, he is a solitary and "alone ten hours a day in a single room."[2] He changes restaurants regularly so as not to become too familiar. He recognizes he is not getting along well even with his wife Iva; she complains: "... It's months and months since you took an interest in me. Lately, for all you care, I might just as well not be here. You pay no attention to what I say. If I didn't come home for a week you wouldn't miss me."[3]

At last Joseph grows isolated from himself. He is a weak man who does not command his will: "... while we seem so intently and even desperately to be holding on to ourselves, we would far rather give ourselves away. So at times, we throw ourselves away."[4] As the novel narrows from society to the self we have Joseph quarreling with his alter-ego, which is nothing more than a creation of his sick mind. He says to this Spirit of Alternatives: "'Oh, get out. Get out of here. You're two faced, you're not to be trusted, you damned diplomat, you cheat!'" He flings a handful of orange peel at him and the double flees the room.[5]

Having turned introspective and detached from the world and from himself, Joseph projects his own image over the others, becoming defensive and overreacting; he is critical of his friends and angry at everything and everybody. He feels slighted by a bank man-

ager, by other tenants, by his mistress, by some relatives and even the maid who smokes while cleaning up his room. David Galloway says that "his contacts with the world became little more than open hostilities."[6] He himself recognizes that he sees people so seldom that he has forgotten how to act. In a short time he is required to change residence twice because he does not get along well with the neighbors and is not able to bear them.

Asa Leventhal, a solitary man sprung from an environment of poverty and personal tragedy, is the protagonist of Bellow's second novel The Victim. And Kirby Allbee, who turns out to be Asa's alter ego, is his protagonist. Before he found his present job and relative security as an editor of a small trade magazine, Leventhal went through a period of drifting, of being down and out. Allbee appears from nowhere, down and out too, to accuse Leventhal of having contrived his ruin. Leventhal denies even the possibility of having committed such a petty act and only seeks to get rid of him, but Allbee gradually takes over his life and haunts his sleep. The two are locked in a death struggle and Allbee is thrown out. Later they meet accidentally and both men seem to have come to terms with their personal problems. In the subplot of the novel, Leventhal is involved with his brother's family, but much more out of a sense of duty than from good relationship. (It is actually his sister-in-law Elena who asks for his help.) As his brother Max is away and his nephew Mickey is sick, he tries to help send Mickey to the hospital where he dies.

Leventhal's story is an example of Bellow's other heroes, namely Tommy Wilhelm, Augie March, Henderson, Herzog, Sammler and Charlie who are alienated characters. They are alienated because they reject the particular society around them. Thus, they often live among people, yet are overcome with feelings of total isolation.

Leventhal's wife is away helping her aging mother, and, before his nephew's sickness he "had very little to do with his brother and his brother's family."[7] As he feels cut down by Rudiger, who was Allbee's former employer, Asa fights him because "I never was any good at rubbing people the right way. I don't know how to please them."[8] When he joins his friends he is reluctant to speak and has "a fleeting feeling that it was a mistake to be drawn or lured out of his taciturnity."[9] That is to say that Asa is a stranger out of place, unable to work out a satisfactory balance with those around him. Things are that way because he is a stranger toward himself, does not have a conscious destination and is "under the dread of being the only person in the city without one."[10] Like Joseph, he at times throws himself away, for he tries to get rid of Allbee who - as we will see - may be seen as a kind of alter-ego, like 'Tu As Raison Aussi' in DM.

Mr.Sammler's Planet reveals still an increasing alienation from the world. Mr. Artur Sammler is a survivor of the Nazi holocaust. His wife's nephew, Dr. Elya Gruner,rescued him and his daughter Shula in 1947 and brought them to New York. Sammler lives now in his niece Margotte's apartment. In his monologues, and pursuing fervidly the possibility of mankind's leaving this earth for the moon, Sammler shows his estrangement and rejection of the particular world around him. The action of the novel gathers several complications: As the story begins,Sammler accidentally sees a black pickpocket working an uptown bus.To his surprise,he finds himself fascinated.Later he discovers crime in his own family.Shula steals a Hindu scholar's manuscript on the moon because she thinks it essential to her father's research. Compounding this disillusionment Sammler is begged by Wallace Gruner, son of his benefactor Elya Gruner, to discover the whereabouts of money he believes the old man to have illicitly earned and then hidden. The many

threads of the narrative are drawn together in the six chapters, wherein Dr. Lal Govinda recovers his manuscript, the pickpocket is struck down by Sammler's son-in-law and Elya Gruner dies.

Mr. Sammler concentrates in his fantasy to fly to the moon because human life in this world is too much heavy and sad:

> Wasn't it time - the very hour to go? For every purpose under heaven. A time to gather stones together, a time to cast away stones. Considering the earth itself not as a stone cast but as something to cast oneself from - to be divested of. To blow this great blue, white, green planet, or to be blown from it.[11]

"The tone of the novel is Sammler's real spaceship," says Clayton. "I mean simply that the abstract contemplation, the resigned disdain for this turbulent rebellious world, lifts Sammler off, away from the planet."[12] He does not want to partake this very life anymore. His relatives feel him like an "old hermit." In his room he "stood apart from all developments. From a sense of deference, from age, from good manners, he sometimes affirmed himself to be out of it, not a man of the times."[13] He was near to others, but, in some essential way, he was companionless:

> He is an uncle to the world, which brings its problems to him in baffled rage or despair. He does his best to counsel his relatives and friends, but more often he is sunk in an endless dialogue with himself and his memories.[14]

Charlie, the protagonist of Bellow's recent book Humboldt's Gift is often accused by those around him of alienation from everybody. It seems that Charlie cannot bear a serious relationship, and that is why he has got rid from wife and children. He is actually going over and over his abstractions and especially his boredom notes all the time. Charlie suffers "from morbid aberrations about grief" and admits to be a "cemetery bit."[15] This sad portrait is tempered by many adventures which make of Charlie an aging Augie March: A hit Broadway play 'Von Trenck' gives him financial independence. But with the appearance of a mafioso - Rinaldo Cantabile - things begin

cracking apart. Furious that Charlie stopped payment on a check given to cover losses at poker, Rinaldo clubs his Mercedes into a shapeless wreck in order to force an honoring of the debt. Charlie submits and is subjected to repeated humiliations. Next lawyers who work on his impendimg divorce swindle him. He is also duped by his partner in 'The Ark' and finally used and then abandoned by his mistress Renata. Von Humboldt Fleisher is a brilliant poet and intellectual whom Charlie set out to meet after reading his poems and they become close friends. Gradually, however, ambition wears him down. Feeling that his work is losing its original force, and discerning acts of betrayal everywhere, Humboldt sinks into madness. Years later Charlie sees him, broken and dishevelled, and turns away. Before dying, Humboldt leaves a movie script for his wife Kathleen and Charlie. It is 'Humboldt's gift' since it turns out to be a great commercial success that rescues Charlie from some of his financial distress.

When we stick to the fact that Charlie has achieved as much as possible in the way of worldly goods from his career, and his personal life, while containing an impending divorce and a voluptuous mistress half his age, we may perhaps forget that at the bottom he lives apart, an aloof, as disdainful of fashions and conventions of New York as he is unneedful of the academic post that usually helps writers to live with some comfort. And suddenly Chicago is not his town at all. "It was totally unrecognizable. I merely imagined that I had grown up here, that I knew the place, that I was known by it. It was that I had ... freed myself from umpleasant realities."[16] At home, Charlie does not know how to be cheerful, hospitable or even friendly toward his wife's friends. He is "alone with tons of book and papers in that apartment."[17] He actually realizes that

> if Socrates was right that you could learn nothing from trees, that only the man you met in the streets could teach you something about yourself, I must be

> in a bad way, running off into the scenery instead of listening to my human companions. Evidently I did not have a good stomach for human companions.[18]

Thus, withdrawal from the world, either physical or due to a deteriorated human relationship, is the path followed by Bellow's alienated man. A deteriorated human relationship is seen especially in Asa,Sammler and Charlie. They actually live among men, but are overcome with feelings of total isolation since they avoid commitment and do not accept the particular society they live in. When some involvement is required - as in Asa's example - it comes out of pure duty, not from his choice.

Now we shall say that this man who withdraws from society is often a masochist. Masochism and alienation grow very close in Bellow's work and we could hardly talk about alienation without including the idea of masochism. However, it is difficult to establish any relation of cause and effect, and if we ask whether masochism precedes or follows alienation, we are probably playing with the question of the'chicken and the egg'. When we will be dealing with the various manifestations of masochism, we will say that it may either lead to or increase alienation. On one side the masochistic despair and guilt seems to make the protagonist retreat from communion. He despises himself as inferior and assumes the role of victim. It seems, after all, the best way for him to protect his self, since, assuming the role of victim,he anoints himself with dignity,which makes him consider himself better than others. Then he creates an ideal world to nourish the ideal version of himself. Therefore he shows alienation,for he is not accepting the world that <u>is</u> and the reality of his human frailties.

We may also remind here that both alienation and masochism are typically Jewish traits. Bellow is "opressed" by his moral tradition of Judaism. Many critics have seen Bellow's idea of alienation

and masochism as particularly Jewish; however they also believe that the Jewish writer now speaks for all men. As we said on p.2-3, Bellow's Jewish experience is valid for the twentieth century man. In his book "Saul Bellow: In Defense of Man", Clayton writes extensively about Bellow's Jewish culture. Although the Jew may be "simply the prototypal human being," I am sometimes tempted to believe that, examining the particular behavior of Bellow's hero - his estrangement, his guilt, his despair, his masochism as well as his moral concern, his faith, his hope, his idealism, his strong sense of self - this portrait seems much more 'Jewish' than merely general and 'modern'.

I come back now to the idea of masochism which, on one side, is felt as the orientation of any kind of inner destructive tendency toward oneself. Usually masochistic behavior is thought to be a response to a need, often an extreme, distorted form of sexual need. But I hold also the theory that guilt feelings may lead to masochistic behavior either as a means of self-punishment or as a source of pain. The strong sense of guilt shared by Bellow's heroes generates the masochistic behavior, as we can feel in the protagonists' sense of persecution and passive submission. Erich Fromm writes:

> ... people feel guilty about hundreds of things; for not having worked hard enough, for having been too protective - or not protective enough - toward their children, for not having done enough for mother or for having been too kindhearted to a debtor; people feel guilty for having done good things, as well as for having done bad things; it is almost as if they had to find something to feel guilty about. (My Italics)[19]

That is the way we feel the Bellow hero. Joseph suffers "from a feeling of strangeness of not quite belonging to the world, of lying under a cloud and looking up at it."[20] It is a formless depression like a 'cloud' coming out of nowhere. Baumbach would call it a'ghost': "Joseph's sense of guilt, indeterminate and obsessive, haunts him like an idiot ghost..."[21]

There are several ghosts haunting Joseph: he suffers because his niece Etta strongly resembles him. He thinks she is vain and reminds him of his limitations. He beats her and she succeeds in victimizing him, letting her parents infer that his attack was sexual. Joseph's masochism makes him unable to deny it. Vanaker, one of his neighbors, and "a death-in-life figure," according to Porter, is another ghost who stands daily before Joseph, as his own consciousness, warning him of the fool he is:

> When I step out of the door to reprimand and stop him I am merely a nervous or irascible young man and I feel the force on me of a bad, harsh mood which I despise in others... Iva gasps 'Oh, the fool!'... I suppose she means Vanaker; but may she not also mean me? [22]

Vanaker portends the shape Joseph will have if he fails to unlock the imprisoned self.

The Victim is also full of burdens, pressures, weights, as if Leventhal had to find something to feel guilty about too. The muggy air presses continually down upon him, he sees mice darting along the wall and has the feeling that he is threatened by something while he sleeps. He believes his sister-in-law Elena holds him responsible for his nephew's death; therefore, his dread of her is intense. He thinks she gives him "frightful glances of spite... as though he were the devil...His panic was as great as if he had never foreseen this."[23] Besides his failure to save Mickey, he feels guilty even for his brother's apparent failure as a father.

But the main ghost, which makes Leventhal v i c t i m of imaginary persecution is Allbee. Dutton writes about him:

> On one level, Kirby Allbee is a character who represents an outer force working on Asa; on a deeper and more significant level, he is an inner adversary, an alter ego, born of Asa's desire of punishment for his personal confusion and indirection regarding his place in relation to society.[24]

Allbee appears to accuse Leventhal of having destroyed his

life, for Leventhal would have caused him to lose his job. Because of that Allbee is now living in poverty and semi-alcoholism. In one of the meetings a scene occurs in which Allbee says:

> 'You try to put all the blame on me, but you know it's true that you're to blame. You and you only. For everything. You ruined me. Ruined! Because that's what I am, ruined! You're the one that's responsible. You did it to me deliberately, out of pure hate. Out of pure hate!'... 'You're crazy!' Leventhal shouted in his face. 'You're a crazy stumblebum, that's what you are. The booze is eating your brain up. Take your hands off me. Off, I say!' He pushed Allbee with all the force of his powerful arms. He fell against the wall with an impact that sickened Leventhal.[25]

Regarding Allbee as alter-ego, we could say that this quarrel comes out of Asa's own heart, from his severe guilt feelings, as a means for his punishment. Though he vehemently denies his alter-ego accusations, Asa feels strangely responsible for Allbee's deterioration. He saw it was necessary for him to accept some of the blame for Allbee's comedown. He had contributed to it though he had yet to decide to what extent he was to blame. As it was apparent that he himself was considered the great offender, Leventhal increasingly behaves in ways that admit his culpability. According to Baumbach,

> Leventhal is not so much Allbee's victim as his own. A kind of materialized ghost from Leventhal's haunted psyche. Allbee is not the cause but the occasion of Leventhal's victimization - the objectivation of his free-floating guilt.[26]

In Humboldt's Gift Charlie is another alien eaten up by his guilt feeling. Humboldt had lectured him: "You are a guilty, anxious man. Depressive."[27] Later, when he last saw Humboldt, a near-dead-man, he rushed away, so now "it struck me that I had sinned against Humboldt... I return again and again to that day because it was so dreadful."[28] Success itself baffled him. It filled him with guilt and shame. Therefore, he not only feels guilt over his denial of dying Humboldt but over his own survival. It is that guilt feeling that makes him submit so passively to Rinaldo Cantabile - a mem-

ber of the mafia, a bluffer eaten up with conceit, violent egomania. Cantabile plays the role of victimizer and Charlie submits to his injuries and almost ends up in jail. He also takes care of Rogelio, the son of his ex-mistress Renata because he feels guilty. To himself he says he should have married her long ago, he was a man of little faith, his hesitancy was insulting and it was quite right that he should be left to mind her child during her honeymoon with another man.

Bellow's alienated hero shows also the masochistic tendency to belittle himself through self-accusation and self-criticism, which he would scarcely bear if this criticism were initiated by others. Listening to Haydn's music, Joseph stresses his individual insignificance. It "showed me that I was still an apprentice in suffering and humiliation... I had furthermore no right to expect to avoid them. Surely no one could plead for exception; that was not a privi-ledge."[29] In the bed Leventhal "went over his mistakes. Some of them made him wince; others caught at his heart too savagely for wincing and he stifled his emotion altogether and all expression, merely moving his lids downward."[30] The time we hardly separate the two of them, because everything "took place as if within a single soul or person," Leventhal's double says: "I feel worthless. I know what I am. Worthless." And delirious tears came to his eyes.[31]

But the masochistic striving of Bellow's alienated men goes further: they often torture themselves with self-frustrating sexual behavior. They are unable to lead a satisfying and stimulating sex life.

We are reminded that Joseph has not gotten along well with his wife Iva and is further rejected by his mistress Kitty. Only on his way to 'reconciliation', is Leventhal able to call his wife home. It is surely because of masochism that we find Bellow's heroes living

with castrating women. "They are dangerous, a challenge," says Clayton. "They cause the hero premature ejaculation, they weaken him sexually, they may betray him. They are rule givers, they demand... The protagonist is certain that they desire his death and feels they are in fact destroying him."[32]

Sex is ungratifying because the masochist sees sexuality as something evil and unclean. That is pretty clear in SP. Sex is here represented as Sammler's ghost emerging everywhere in the most strange situations to torment him. The black pickpocket forced him into a corner and Sammler was required to gaze at the pickpocket's penis for a long interval. The fact is often recalled, as Sammler's relatives know about it. People often look for Sammler to confess their sins, which are sexual. Walter Bruch, for instance, a man over sixty, falls in love with women's arms and masturbates against his attaché case. "And with Walter, as with so many others, it was always, it was ever and again, it was still interminably, the sex business... Sammler was sorry. He was annoyed and he was sorry."[33] Probably he projects into others his own guilty desires. He seems obsessed with the sex ghost, for, in the bathroom, "mirrors on four walls showed Mr. Sammler to himself in more aspects than he wanted" and "the soap was spermy sandalwood."[34]

The sense of sexual sin pursues Charlie too: he sleeps with too many women and, although he seems proud of that, he is obsessed with the uncleanness and criminality of his sexuality. Renata was wonderful to him because she "was in the Biblical sense unclean, had made my life richer with the thrills of deviation and broken laws."[35] As for Demmie, "there was always a trace of crime in the way Demmie did the thing, and there had always been a trace of the accessory in me."[36] Under his superficial pride there was always 'the accessory', that is, the guilt feeling resulting from illicit sexuality.

However, to belittle oneself, to suffer, to make oneself

utterly insignificant is, according to Fromm, only one side of the masochistic strivings. Referring to V, Dutton says that the term 'victim', by definition, "seems to preclude the dignity, the integrity, and the hopefulness usually assumed within that attitude."[37] Bellow's hero also shows the other side of the coin in the masochistic strivings. The other side is the quest for eminence and perfection, the search for salvation through greatness. The individual nourishes an exalted sense of himself and tries to lead a superior life, detached even from mortality. After all, such attitudes show alienation, for the individual is not accepting himself as he is. According to Fromm, this side of the coin seems the opposite of the masochistic tendency but, psychologically, it is the outcome of one and the same thing: the willingness to protect oneself.[38]

As far as the hero tries to distinguish himself he increases his ideal world and becomes more and more estranged from the others and from his own reality. We may follow Joseph who recalls the Joseph of yesterday: he did not live his reality, did not mix w i t h others, but was greatly concerned with keeping intact and free from encumbrance a s e n s e of his own being. He believed in his own mildness, he felt himself different, better than others, so he asked and still wonders "how should a good man live; what ought he to do?" That belief interfered with his behavior in such a way that his friends could not give him what he wanted. Consequently he separated from them, from what he considered a nasty, brutish and short existence and aimed at "a colony of the spirit," or a group whose covenants forbade spite, bloodiness and cruelty.[39] But he forgot the world was in himself and he could not banish it by decree. That is why he remembers Spinoza saying that no virtue could be considered greater than that of trying to preserve oneself.[40] And talking with 'Tu As Raison Aussi' - his imaginary double - he states

his belief that "we were the feeble-minded children or angels." He is wandering after those capacities which had made man's greatness, which conferred on him a child's innocence or an angel's perfection.

He justifies his quest by the fact that "we have been taught there is no limit to what a man can be" and claims "each of us is responsible for his own salvation which is in his greatness: and that, that greatness is the rock our hearts are abraded on."[41]

Joseph's anxious quest shows that he is not living his reality, for he does not accept himself as he is but insulates himself in an ideal world. Asa does not live his reality either. Like Joseph he believes there is no limit to what a man can be and we go in all directions without any limit. Like Joseph he regards other people as inferior. When he feels slighted in his work he explains that "it showed the low quality of the people, their inferiority and meanness."[42] That is to say that he was better and deserved attention. He wants the whole world to flatter him; therefore he is upset, his heart shrinks and he feels faint when somebody does not like him.

Charlie also tried to think himself away from the American world "to satisfy certain great questions." Like the others he wanted to do good. "I was dying to do something good." But his search is full of anxiety and as he thinks himself good, he despises people: "I hoped to lay them all low. In fact it is one of my cherished dreams and dearest hopes."[43] This distressing search shows - as we have said above - the lack of self-acceptance of Bellow's alienated hero. While he strives for insularity as a kind of human perfection, he is trying to be "more than human." He thinks there is no limit to what a man can be, but Schlossberg reminds him: "There is a limit to me ... You want to be two people? More than human? Maybe it's because you don't know how to be one."[44] Asa's attitude toward Allbee, shows, in a way, that the former does not know how to be one, for he fights his double.

The name 'Allbee' means "universal being, or Everyman," says Harper, and "he is equally real as a symbolic manifestation of Leventhal's darker nature."[45] At one point Allbee seems to speak as Asa's own conscience:

> All this business,'know thyself'! Everybody knows but nobody wants to admit. That's the thing. Some swimmers can hold their breath a long time... and that's interesting. But the way we keep our eyes shut is a stunt too, because they're made to be open.[46]

Leventhal has kept his eyes shut toward himself as a human being with limitations and weaknesses. He is a stranger to himself.

So, the quest for eminence and perfection is a way of escaping the human condition and eluding death. Bellow makes that trajectory clear in his "Distractions of a Fiction Writer":

> We are not perfect. We must perfect ourselves, we must exhaust ourselves. Maybe, too, there is a perverse desire for freedom in this. Dominated by no single activity, we are free; free but not tranquil; at leisure but not idle, since all the while we strive for perfection. No, the face, the neck, the bust, the skin, the mind are not good as they are, and we must tirelessly improve them. By so doing we deny the power of death over us because as long as we're getting better there's no reason why we should die. (My italics) [47]

Death would be the symbol of all human limits. So we often see Joseph denying that reality is his too. In one of his dreams he makes it clear to the guide he is simply an"outsider," not personally acquainted with the deceased. (He had dreamt that he was looking for somebody among the victims of a massacre.)[48] Like Joseph, Asa, Charlie and all Bellow's heroes fear death, because of their lack of self-acceptance. And if on one side they try to evade it, in an attempt to go beyond human life, on the other, Bellow often brings death near them. During a speech about death, Mr. Schlossberg says: "You don't have to remind them (people) of anything: they don't forget. But they're too busy and too smart to die."[49]

Since Humboldt - whom Charlie loved - looks like death,

Charlie flies home, refusing a connection with him. We have said that his desertion and his survival convert into an intense guilt feeling, for the scene is brought back again and again. Charlie, however, goes further in his striving to deny death: he tries to resuscitate Humboldt.

> I cannot accept the view of death taken by most of us. ... I am obliged to deny that so extraordinary a thing as a human soul can be wiped out forever... The dead are about us shut out by our metaphysical denial of them... Our ideas should be their nourishment.[50]

Charlie not only tries to keep Humboldt alive in his mind, but in the mind of the world through his poems.

Artur Sammler preaches that "however actual I may seem to you and you to me, we are not as actual as all that. We will die."[51] He preaches the reality of death as an outsider, for he often seems a little beyond it. That attitude is due to the fact that he, in a way, had been "inside death": when his wife was killed in a mass execution, he miraculously survived. Having passed through death he seems now to believe that he is above human interest and limitation. His damaged eye "seemed to turn to another direction, to be preoccupied separately with different matters."[52] He did feel somewhat separated from the rest of his species, human in some altered way. He was most the human being at the point where he attempted to obtain release from being human. Thus, Sammler who actually passed through death and therefore must admit it, even he, does not accept death, but believes himself a little beyond it.

Brigitte Scheer-Schazler says that Sammler betrays a feeling of superiority toward all figures except Elya Gruner.[53] But even Gruner, like the others,believed he had some unusual power, magical perhaps, to affirm the human bond. He is felt as a symbol; someone "sacred" and "venerated." His friends and family had made him a judge and a priest. Beside his special position as someone who came from

the dead "assigned to figure out certain things," Sammler increases his alienation nourishing his perfection: "Sometimes I wonder whether I have any place here among other people. I assume I am one of you. But also I am not."[54] He aims to reach something beyond finite. Thinking of man's going to the moon he says that "distant is still finite" but he hopes "the powers that had made earth too small could free us from confinement."[55]

The heroes' sense of religiousness, their sense of transcendence may also be examined in the light of their quest for eminence and perfection. Erich Fromm sees it as part of the masochistic strivings. The quest for eminence and perfection is an "attempt to become a part of a bigger and more powerful whole outside of oneself. ... This power can be a person, an institution, God, the nation, conscience, or a psychic compulsion."[56] Thus, religious transcendence may be the harbor, the refuge of Bellow's alienated men.

According to Opdahl, Bellow's protagonist walks about a center traditionally occupied by religious faith.

> His desire "to know what we are and what we are for," ... his attempt to account for evil and death, and his search for a more abiding reality beneath the temporal are all religious issues. His temporary withdrawal from the world, his sense of its mystery, and his quest for grace are attributes of the religious man."[57]

Opdahl's idea is also Clayton's and other critics'. I completely agree, but my point is that the hero's glimpses of religiousness may be just another manifestation of alienation and masochism. I support the idea with Tanner's, Rovit's and also Klug's view, which I have quoted in the review of criticism. According to Tanner, the characters' mystical response occurs because they fail "to experience any specific sense of relationship with other people." For Klug, it is a "corrective" and an "illusion" and it becomes - to quote Rovit - "an additional burden for them to carry."

It is from this perspective that we may recall Joseph's meditations in his niece's music room. He and Iva were at his brother's house for Christmas. Instead of joining everybody, he retreated to Etta's room. Listening to Haydn's music he tried to humiliate himself: the music made him see the universal source of grace, God. But the sincerity of his attitude crumbled soon after with his fighting his niece who humiliated him.

When Asa Leventhal had the strange feeling that the whole world pressed on his body, he sensed that this interruption of the customary motions he went through unthinkingly on rising was a "disguised opportunity to discover something of great importance" (my italics) and he was "bewilderingly moved." But as the discovery did not come - unlike Moses who saw God in the flames - "it came into his head that he was like a man in a mine who could smell smoke and feel heat but never see the flames."[58] This and other insights reveal Leventhal's hope of a transcendent promise, a promise which would free him from the limits of his existence. Although one could think of that attitude as a kind of 'resignation', I rather hold that the nourishment of such thought is a means of escaping his human reality full of frailties.

But if we find hints of religiousness in Bellow's first books, there is no doubt that the religious sense has a growing importance in his more recent heroes.

We have already talked of Sammler's superior attitude toward others. He considers himself someone sacred and venerated. His detachment is shown also in his giving up reading Freud, Spengler, Marx, Max Weber, Marcuse and many others. After four or five years of that diet, "he wished to read only certain religious writers of the thirteenth century - Suso, Tauler and Meister Eckhart. In his seventies he was interested in little more than Meister Eckhart and

the Bible."[59] Sammler's attitude seems also that of an escapit. He prefers to ignore the world problems and to hide himself in the peaceful of heaven. He himself states that transcendence may be just man's willingness to get rid of himself, "to transcend his unsatisfactory humanity."[60]

Thinking of HG, we find also that Charlie was too haughty to bother with Marxism, Freudianism, Modernism, the avant-garde, or any of these things, and suffered from an illusion, perhaps a marvelous illusion, or perhaps only a lazy one, that by a kind of inspired levitation he could rise and dart straight to the truth.[61] If Sammler read Meister Eckhart, Charlie reads that modern mystic Rudolf Steiner, whose anthroposophy lies in the immortality of the soul.

> Under the recent influence of Steiner I seldom thought of death in the horrendous old way. I wasn't experiencing the suffocating grave or dreading an eternity of boredom,nowadays. Instead I felt unusually light and swift-paced, as if I were on a weightless bicycle and sprinting through the star world. Occasionally I saw myself with exhilarating objectivity, literally as an object among other objects in the physical universe. One day that object would cease to move and when the body collapsed the soul would simply remove itself.[62]

It seems that the transcendent thought gives Charlie relief and that is comprehensible since he aims for a different life and is not able to accept his life as it is, and especially the reality of death as it is.

Clayton says that in HG "the yearning for transcendence is much more complete - a Platonic transcendence, stretching towards an unrealized, abstract world of light, rejecting this 'tragic earth'... Charlie flees a world of death, a world in which he himself will die. And he asserts, or at least receives intimations of immortal life in the spirit."[63]

As for Bellow's own attitude toward transcendonce, it would

be again pretty hard to define. I rather think that Bellow acts the outsider and plays with his heroes. It seems that he has created a desire for mystical release from the overwhelming responsibility and from anxiety. Seymour Epstein's words are fit to conclude my point:

> Bellow characters declare their hunger for spiritual transcendence, and their author plays with as many means as past religions and philosophies can supply; but while there's a scintilla of pleasure to be wrung from the body, that's where the body is - in good restaurants, in expensive clothes, in the arms of dream - sexy lovers.[64]

We have thus seen that the cause of Bellow's alienated heroes' withdrawal from society may lie in the masochism which consumes them with guilt, often indeterminate and obsessive. Because of it they need to belittle themselves, to fail and suffer, particularly in sex. But the role of victim confers dignity on them, so they pursue a superior life, striving to escape mortality, and have glimpses of transcendence which may be still a manifestation of their alienation and masochism.

Now we shall emphasize that the mental environment plays a large role in all that struggle. It is especially in his world of thought that the alienated hero seeks refuge and where he tries to keep himself intact. Opdahl writes: "Afraid of life, and even more afraid of death, man attempts to overcome limitation by dedicating himself to abstract and therefore limitless-idea; he alienated himself from the flesh and blood that are his being."[65]

That is the world Joseph wants to live in and complains Iva is not able to follow him. She is as far as ever from what he once desired to make her. He is afraid she has no capacity for that. She is not able to share his ideal world, "the world of unshakable values and pure ideas, a world distinct from the material world of disorder...," says Porter.[66] And Dutton adds:

> Through imagination, man would be something other than what he is or what he seems to be; for what he is or seems to be, is an irritatingly unsatisfying and discomfiting mystery, a mystery to which depth and breath are given with every stretch of his imagination.[67]

Bellow's stories are controlled by the hero's thought and imagination. Therefore, Joseph's journal is pervaded by a desperate need for "an ideal construction, an obsessive device." First he plans the "colony of the spirit" and, as it fails, he remains closed in his mind where he creates 'The Spirit of Alternatives' whom he named 'Tu As Raison Aussi'. We have said that it is a kind of alter-ego. Patrick Morrow calls it "playmate of the intellect, cancer of the spirit, a phantasmagoria with a powerful rhetoric all its own."[68] It is with him that Joseph discusses the "ideal constructions" to replace the old plan. He could name hundreds of these ideal constructions, each with its assertions and symbols, each finding its particular answer. The real world becomes the world of art and thought: "there is only one worth-while sort or work, that of the imagination."[69]

We have also said that in SP the protagonist's conspicuousness was on his mind. Sammler himself states that

> human beings, when they have room, when they have liberty and are supplied also with ideas, mythologize themselves. They legendize. They expand by imagination and try to rise above the limitations of the ordinary forms of common life.[70]

In his moon manuscript, Dr. Lal says that the imagination is innately a biological power seeking to overcome impossible conditions. In other words, Bellow affirms that human mind is man's source of greatness.

Since he was young Charlie believed that his intellectual world would assure him a higher life. Later on he kept dreaming he was the best and confessed: "All I had was the subjective, anxious

pleasure of thinking myself so smart."[71] That made him see evil only in others, never in himself. It is still to overcome limitation and fear of death that we find Charlie thinking all the time, in a way that it becomes even comic. "Watch Charlie's mouth... You'll notice that it moves even when he isn't talking. That's because he is thinking. He thinks all the time."[72] Clayton says about that: "Charlie gets on a place and thinks. He is arrested and thinks. He is about to make love and thinks."[73] As we have said above, thinking is also a way of fleeing death and keep oneself alive. Because he fears death, or does not accept death he remembers Humboldt as he remembers his own past to keep him alive.

Leventhal also lives in the world of thought, for his friend Harcavy must call him to come down of the clouds to get next to himself. We have talked about the role Allbee plays with Leventhal. Be it Leventhal's alter-ego, his conscience, his dark side or a real person, the fact is that the torment he represents to Leventhal is utterly the fruit of his sick imagination, for Allbee never raises a hand against him. "...there was a tremor in his arms, and during all of it he felt that he himself was the cause of his agitation and suspicion, with his unreliable nerves." (My italics)[74] Later on he feels he is watched: Leventhal was so conscious of Allbee, so certain he was being scrutinized, that he was able to see himself as if through a strange pair of eyes; the side of his face, the palpitation of his throat, the seams of his skin, the shape of his body. The acuteness and intimacy of it astounded him, oppressed and intoxicated him. He recognizes that Allbee's look duplicates the look in himself up to a point that he could not doubt it was the double of something in his own. He must also admit that Elena's hatred and enmity existed only in his imagination.

Leventhal, like the others, can only see his own image in the environment because he cannot get out of himself. "Who were the enemies? The world, everyone. They were imaginary."[75] Ralph Freedman states: "Society was no longer only opposed to the hero, whether knowing or blind. Rather, it ironically reflected the hero's consciousness - functioning as his symbolic mirror..."[76] After all, the hero's mind seems to function as an important agent of alienation and masochism.

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CHAPTER THREE

PURGATION AND RECONCILIATION IN DM, V, SP AND HG

After showing his hero as alien - because he withdraws from society and from a base of masochism strives for greatness and seeks transcendence in a world of thought - Saul Bellow submerges the protagonist in a purgative situation. We may see extreme alienation on one side, and on the other the price the hero must pay for his alienation. The last appears as a period of darkness where the hero is charged by great anxiety and is surrounded by an environment of 'death'. As we have seen quoting Opdahl, the confrontration with death may be considered as a release from masochism.

We are reminded again of Fromm's words: the alien "has to pay more and more and, like a peon, he only gets into greater debt without ever getting what he has paid for."[1] His way was indeed a way down and right now he seems to be dangling in a maelstrom. The pressures around and within the hero, which where created by himself, become overbearing and seem to threaten his sanity. Joseph who withdrew from society to preserve his integrity, sees himself "deteriorating, storing bitterness and spite which eat like acids."[2] He realizes he is experiencing a loss of self, "for", Dutton says, "within his vacuum, there are no comparatives, none of the established values, no directions that ordinarily serve to channel effort, thereby, to make that effort meaningful."[3] He has no identity anymore, for, when he wants to cash a check, the vice president does not recognize the cards as his and does not call him by his surname. Dutton adds: "one cannot be identified in a vacuum. Definition requires involvement in which distinctions can be made."[4]

Joseph's many distinctions between the old Joseph and the new, his mind and his will, his mildness and his nasty temper, define his failure. The more he insists upon his identity, the less success-

ful he is in maintaining it. The world he had been building up in his mind to keep himself intact is crumbling. In the months that follow he begins to discover one weakness after another in all he has been building up around him. He also finds himself increasingly incapable of formulating and answering the question "How should a good man live?", for he becomes aware his own life provides no answer at all.

Joseph rejects the order of man, finding no meaning in social life, but "he suddenly realizes that his friends band together for mutual protection, behaving the way the group expects them to behave, asserting group values, and ridiculing anything that threatens their mutual definition."[5] Joseph, however, grows beligerant to the point of violence. By the end there is a terrible quarrel, first with Iva, then with Vanaker, Briggs and the tenants. He had never used to be so ugly-tempered. "Because he is a Canadian alien," says Harper, "he cannot be drafted without an investigation, and the red tape has delayed his induction to the point that it seems the war has passed him by... The dangling man must use his own resources to fill the void which his withdrawal from society has created."[6] That is why Joseph writes to the draft board requesting his immediate induction.

Joseph's attitude of giving himself up to the army has caused much controversy, and several critics regard it as defeat. Brigitte Scheer-Schazler sees the fact as

> an escape from what he recognized as destructive, as an attempt to share the fate of his generation, but also as a rash act of giving in to despair and rejecting, for the time being, the responsibility for his own life... No matter which way we regard the final scene, it remains tinged with irony. What Joseph regards as a solution bears strong marks of defeat.[7]

For Dutton there is little doubt that DM is a story of failure and defeat. And Clayton draws a distinction between giving oneself and throwing oneself away:

> To become a mass, to join, to belong to a movement in which you can eschew personal choice, in which you can avoid thinking and feeling for yourself - this is throwing yourself away; it is partly what Joseph is doing by putting himself up for immediate induction. ... But a different loss of selfhood - a giving yourself away, joining the human brotherhood, longing for such a loss of selfhood, is also implicit in Joseph's giving himself to the army.[8]

I will come back to this second point in the following pages.

Thus, on one level, Joseph ends his journal in failure. He had actually been trying to transcend everybody, even death, but as long as he put himself afar, he brought death closer with increasing frequency. Besides dreams, which lead him into the Underground world, there are many human forms which he recognizes as death's functionaries and provide him with a "prevision": he often runs into a Christian Science woman, who shows up sicker and sicker. She talks of salvation, but her body speaks of death. Lately her skin is the colour of brick dust. As he is going downtown to meet Iva for dinner on their sixth wedding anniversary, Joseph sees a man sprawl out in front of him. At home, he is always reminded not to speak aloud because there is a dying woman downstairs.

Joseph admits defeat and recognizes:

> We know we are sought and expect to be found. How many forms he takes, the murderer. Frank, or simple, or a man of depth and cultivation, or perhaps prosaic, without distinction. Yet he is <u>the</u> murderer, the stranger who, one day, will drop the smile of courtesy or custom to show you the weapon in his hand, the means of your death.[9]

To the 'Spirit of Alternatives' - this 'alter ego' that Joseph has created in his room - he confesses he is harried, pushed, badgered, worried, nagged, heckled. Yet, he, himself, was the omen of his approaching death.

We feel, therefore, that Joseph entered a dark way to be purged and approaches some sort of death, whose fear had closed his eyes to mortality and humanity.

Leventhal also sees a "showdown" coming, for Leventhal is nearly exhausted. The disorder and dirt of the place he lives in sickens him more and more. The inability to deal with himself is revealed in his increasing unwillingness and inability to deal with Allbee. The truth is that he feels he is stealing away and leaving Allbee in possession of the house. He goes to a birthday party, but the main subject at the table is Death, and Schlossberg remembers there is a limit to human being. Leventhal gets drunk and feels powerless to move and fearfully hampered in his breathing. He meditates on his weakness, on how weak he is becoming, for everybody makes him tremble and he feels damned.

Leventhal, himself, believes the 'showdown' is a crisis which brings an end of his resistance to something he has no right to resist. Illness, madness, and death are forcing him to confront his fault. Certainly he has no right to resist facing his own true self, his humanity full of limitations, which Allbee has made him confront. As that happens he has the strange feeling that there is not a single part of him on which the whole world does not press with full weight, on his body, on his soul, pushing upward in his breast and downward in his bowels.[10] It is his ideal image, his ideal world that must be destroyed, and his true humanity that must be accepted.

But the final purgation, the ultimate 'showdown' is Allbee's attempt to commit suicide by gas in Leventhal's apartment. The air is foul and hard to breathe. Gas is pouring from the oven. "I have to kill him now," Leventhal thinks as they grapple. He catches the cloth of Allbee's coat in his teeth while he swiftly changes his grip, clutching at his face. Allbee tears away convulsively, but Leventhal crushes him with his weight in the corner. Allbee's fist comes down heavily on Leventhal's neck, beside the shoulder. "You want to murder me? Murder?," Leventhal gasps. The sibilance of the pouring gas is

almost deafening. Allbee whispers despairingly, as if with his last breath, that he wants to murder himself. Then his head shoots up, catching Leventhal on the mouth. The pain makes Leventhal drop his hands and Allbee pushes him away and flings out of the kitchen.[11]

In this complicated passage Leventhal thinks desperately he has to kill Allbee. However, to save his own life, he prevents his accuser's death. Dutton comments on the scene:

> At that moment it is evident that Bellow suggests that the fate of Asa is closely dependent upon that of Allbee. If Asa had not taken command of the situation, he would have died with Allbee. And with Allbee as alter ego in mind, it would seem that Asa is brought to the realization that he must destroy this inner force for his own survival.[12]

Baumback says that "if Allbee is Leventhal's antagonist, and double, he is also Leventhal's savior, the unwilling means to his redemption... Leventhal crosses the threshold of hell, descends to its deepest parts and, heroically, for Leventhal is finally a hero, comes back again, better if not greatly wiser."[13] Leventhal wrestles with the spectre of evil which is the shape of his own guilt, and wrestles successfully, for he refuses to be dominated by it. It is meaningful to say that gas, an unseen substance that produces a poisonus and asphixiating atmosphere,is needed to destroy the also unseen forces that had poisoned and asphyxiated Leventhal's life.

If on one hand Sammler nourishes his conspicuousness, on the other we find him immersed in

> endless literal hours in which one is internally eaten up. Eaten because coherence is lacking. Perhaps as a punishment for having failed to find coherence. Or eaten by a longing for sacredness.[14]

Instead of surviving to do something great, he was only suffering purgatory. He feels powerless, a superannuated person. When Elya Gruner, who was a close friend of his, died he felt that what was

left of him was being destroyed. He was breaking up, those irregular big fragments inside him were melting, sparkling with pain, floating off. Like Leventhal, Sammler's utopian world is melted by an invisible fire, the purgative fire.

Charlie is full of remorse and, as a source of purgation, he needs to recall over and over his wrong attitude toward Humboldt, when the latter needed his help. "On that day I made a poor showing. I behaved very badly. I should have gone up to him, I should have taken his hand."[15] Besides that he is often oppressed to the point of heartbreak by fear of death. At last he comes to realize that, because of the fact that he had tried to be "more than human," to stand apart from his own frailties and the absurdities of his character, he was a little dead himself.

We have thus seen that Joseph, Leventhal, Sammler and Charlie are led to a purgatory where they feel that something in them is destroyed, melted, purified.

The physical world the hero sees often reflects his soul:

> The streets ... looked burnt out ... the turf ... bedraggled with the whole winter's deposit of deadwood ... the grass yellow ... the houses were like drunkards or consumptives taking a cure ... this atmosphere was one of an impossible hope, the hope of an impossible rejuvenation.[16]

The hero's painful conclusion is that the wasted experience of his time has not had much to do with living. This is the purgatory Saul Bellow leads his heroes to. But it is, so to say, a necessary step, for it is only after they pass through these purgative situations that we feel they deserve to survive. It is a kind of blessed guilt, a Fortunate Fall through which the heroes become worthy of reconciliation, of salvation.

As we have said before, Bellow's aim is to defend human dignity and man's possibilities, so he refuses to abandon his heroes

in that anxious and dark atmosphere but brings them back to light. Through suffering and facing death, the figurative death of a false self, they come to realize that alienation had been destructive, so Bellow leads them back to an effort to overcome themselves, their alienation. As we said, quoting Schulz, Clayton and Tanner, communal life will save them, so they must reenter the world giving up the utopian one they had been living in. To get there, to reconcile with society, the hero must show self-acceptance, acceptance of the others, concern for other human beings and escape the tyranny of mind. Let's go through the novels and then discuss Bellow's attitude.

Porter writes about Joseph:

> ... once he has confronted his own death, examined it exhaustively, and acknowledged its inevitability, he can either accelerate it by suicide, go insane or turn back to life. Joseph refuses to worship the anti-life. He exclaims "there is nothing outside life. There is nothing outside life." He turns, then, back to life despite its disorder and apparent meaninglessness and despite his alienation from it.[17]

Joseph's attitude is the request to be taken at the earliest possible moment into the armed services. "He discovers," says Baumbach, "there is no freedom without choice and no choice without commitment, that while he is an isolate, his spiritual quest is a fraud."[18] Mrs. Kiefer's funeral seems to commemorate the end of his alienation. He walks in the rain and takes a deep breath of warm air, symbol of baptism, of a new life.

Anxiety vanishes, for he feels "relief" at his decision to surrender. The attitude of self-acceptance is present: he did not feel pained or humiliated. As we have seen, some critics consider Joseph's surrender a failure, but I rather hold Hoffman's position: "That Joseph should have hastened into the army is not evidence of the failure of his wish to remain free, but rather a desire to move into the society of his fellows."[19] He celebrates the end of his

long, painful isolation, the return to community experience, however imperfect, and the bare possibility that he may indeed find answers to his questions in a new way of life. Only community can provide the setting for one to survive. Joseph realizes he "had not done well alone" and what might save him is the acknowledgment of a common humanity: "Goodness is achieved not in a vacuum but in the company of other men, attended by love."[20] Vacuum was in his isolation, in his ficticious world of thought, in his ideal constructions.

Joseph had recognized previously that the ideal constructions are the way to meet chaos. They often exhaust the man and can become his enemy. So, in a c c e p t i n g himself J o s e p h tries to escape the tyranny of mind. Saul Bellow shows that

> imagination, a godlike extension of man, is of value only when it is rooted in reality, when it remembers that its source is within man. To Bellow the imagination in all its creativity must never attempt to create a world beyond man. It is bound to fail.[21]

Joseph's surrender to the army implied a self-acceptance and acceptance of the others. We feel Joseph in a state of peaceful coexistence with Iva, his relatives, acquaintances and even Vanaker who had annoyed him progressively throughout the seven months' delay. Now he seems to regard Vanaker once again with kind concern: "once more he seemed to me, as in the early days, simple minded, perhaps subnormal."[22] These changing attitudes toward people and himself trace Joseph's adjustments that we may call reconciliation.

Leventhal also has "made peace with things as they are." He can achieve salvation only after he has come to terms with the lower depths of his being - his Allbee. He actually realizes that "when you turn against yourself, nobody else means anything to you either." He senses that "Allbee had no real desire to be malicious."[23] His final purgation helps him make peace with himself, through self-acceptance, so things went well for him in the following

years. His health is better and there are changes in his appearance. Something recalcitrant seems to have left him, he looks years younger. Consequently he makes peace with others around him: his friend Harcavy gets him a better job, for which Leventhal is thankful. He is lucky because there were not many better jobs in the trade field. Critics, (namely Dutton, Clayton, Porter and Baumbach,) say that his deep feelings of responsibility toward his brother's family developed the possibility of change.

"His conscious acceptance of responsibility," says Baumbach, "is a moral act that makes possible his ultimate redemption."[24] It was a school that made him learn to grow close to others, because inner life divorced from the possibility of outward participation is futile. His potency and Mary's pregnancy points to a regained or new power, and a kind of rebirth. In a word, Leventhal made peace with life and with humankind. Leventhal's change is certainly partial "but far more successfully than Joseph the Dangling Man," says Clayton, "Leventhal ends his alienation. Beginning, like Joseph, as a solitary, separated from his life and hostile to the few friends he has, he goes much farther than Joseph in joining humanity."[25]

We do not feel Sammler's transformation. However, in a moment, after a bath, "Sammler stopped shaving, paused and stared at himself, his dry, small 'cured' face undergoing in the mirror a strong inrush of color. Even the left, the swelled, the opaque guppy eye, took up some light from this."[26] Therefore there are hints in which he sees things in a different way, in a positive light. We feel also his recognition of brotherhood and the necessity to partake it: his personal idea was one of human being conditioned by other human beings, and knowing that one should be satisfied with such truth as one could get by approximation. Trying to live with a civil heart, with disinterested charity.

Edward Alexander states:

> ... Sammler, who has come closer to experiencing death and rebirth than any man, knows that the real answer lies not in death and rebirth but in survival and recovery. He climbed out of the mass grave, not to change life or to emerge into a new self but because man "has something in him which he feels it important to continue. Something that deserves to go on.[27]

We could say that Sammler's isn't a transformation but a positive attitude toward life.

As for Charlie in HG, Saul Bellow also leads him back to society. Charlie shows self-acceptance and concern for others. He says he speaks as a person who had lately received or experienced "light-in-the-being," which is "like the breath of life itself," He knew that light in the early years "and even knew how to breath it in." Then he had given it up for the sake of his hysterical, abusive and unjust fight for self-preservation, for survival, which was to become "more than human."[28] When he confesses to his friend Huggins he has given up on that, Huggins answers that he has returned to his mental home. He also no longer believes that the only worthwhile life is a life of thought. At last, he wants to remedy what he did wrong: "to efface the faults or remedy the defects of five decades I'm prepared to try anything. I am not too good to work in the movies. You little know how much it would please me to be an extra in the historical picture."[29]

Besides the hints through which we feel Charlie willing to become a businessman again, engaged in society, we have him concerned with other people. He worries about Waldemar, an old uncle of Humboldt's. Thinking of him he decides to stand up for his rights about the movie scenario. Then he fixes him up properly and gives him a large sum of money. After all Charlie buries the dead and decides to live.

After reconciliation the hero sees nature and the weather changing. Winter turns to Spring:

> ... robins and grackles appeared in the trees, and some of the trees themselves were beginning to bud. The large rough cases cracked at the tip, showing sticky green within, and one tree was erupting in crude red along its higher branches... There were children playing ... the sound was magnified and vision enlarged.[30]

Irving Malin says that "Because the seasons change, they signify that human beings can also change." In honor of the transformation in the weather, mirrors of the transformation in his soul, Joseph decides to clean up for supper. "Perhaps the thrilling aspect of nature is light," adds Malin. "Throughout the bad season he is gloomy, dark, like the atmosphere. Spring brings new light, new vision."[31] The Victim has the same kind of plot movement. It begins in the sweltering New York summer, with the air heavy and tropical. But when Leventhal feels better he sees a brilliant morning with its simple contrasts white and blue, shining and darkened. Leaving the cemetery, symbol of the place he had been living for decades, and walking toward the limousine, on the way to the world of business, a Spring flower - crocus - is shown to Charlie.

I have tried to show in chapter one and two an emergent pattern as part of Bellow's fiction as a whole; that is, Saul Bellow exhibits a protagonist who withdraws from society and progressively increases alienation and masochism striving for greatness and seeking transcendence in a world of thought; then the hero is led to a purgative situation through which he becomes worthy of salvation, found in communal life.

I shall insist that this is only one angle from which we can view Bellow's work, since we have said before he is ambivalent and ambiguous, especially concerning to the end of his novels. If there is one constant criticism about Bellow's work, it is that he

does not show why his heroes end as they do. We have already quoted critics' different opinions about the end of DM. V also suggests the presence of other levels of meanings. Tanner says that "the end of the book scarcely presages a new sense of relationships and communication. There is, however, a hint that life might contain "a promise" which has not yet been properly explored."[32] Peter Buitenhuis also claims that

> like so many things in The Victim the issue is left undetermined and ambiguous. Although the novel ends with Allbee restored to some kind of prosperity, and Leventhal reunited with his wife, its essential conflict is not resolved.[33]

Dealing with SP, Sarah Blacher Cohen asserts that unlike the hopeful endings of the other novels where there is a strong indication that the protagonists will act upon their new insights and effect a positive change in their lives, there is no easy triumph intimated in SP. When the novel concludes his soul-searching vigil and returns to the ever recurring vexations of the earth, Artur Sammler, at the age of 70-plus, will remain pretty much the same. Still about SP Charles Thomas Samuels writes:

> Bellow shows himself incapable of presenting a convincing argument for his conservative position. Since its negative side is not proven by the plot or characters, this failure to be persuasively positive confirms the book delightful. Others, I suspect, will find it provocative, entertaining and ultimately frustrating.[35]

Concerning HG, Jack Richardson states that it "is a sad, shallow book, a statement of intellectual and artistic surrender that has as its only interesting quality that crude sense of humor a writer can sometimes wring out of the willful abasament of his characters." Later Richardson adds that, on one level, Charlie's story seems a simple parable of ants and grass-hoppers, and concludes that as "a burnt-out case, drifting into cosmic views, Charlie Citrine will neither be missed nor mourned by those of us who stay behind on

Sammler's planet."[36]

Clayton also questions HG:

> But how seriously should we take this gift? Does Bellow mean us to read Charlie's transcendence of the world of distraction as credible or as, in the psychoanalytic sense, denial? Both, I suppose. If Bellow spins out his longing into his character, he does not, unlike Charlie, permit himself any easy spiritual solutions.[37]

To conclude, it is worth recalling Rovit's thought that we have quoted in the review of criticism. According to him, the habit of ambiguous conclusions suggests a radical deficiency in Bellow's capacity to bring his structures to an inevitable termination, and seems to reflect the indecisiveness of his moral position.

Though critics may differ in their judgement of Bellow's work, the truth is that we glimpse with the heroes the beauty of a state beyond alienation, a positive end. Because of that, Bellow is sometimes charged with being a didactic or moralistic writer, whose hells always have back doors opening on paradise. This is true, and many critics have remarked upon Bellow's moral concerns.

Dealing with SP, Porter complains it is a novel in which Bellow's moral indignation seems to overshadow his artistic control:

> His reflective hero emerges not so much a fully realized character with a life of his own as much as he does a thinly disguised mouthpiece for the author's didacticism. This didacticism is timely, sound even admirable, but it is too expositive, nonfictive, and therefore, distracting from the novel 'qua' novel.[38]

As for Bellow's fiction in general, we have already mentioned Opdahl's statement that Bellow's intention has remained intensely moral. And he continues:

> Critics complain that Bellow's novels drive toward a revelation which seems imminent, generating excitement, but then lose that revelation in the final pages. To those who demand a tidy art, of course, this is a serious shortcoming. To those who enjoy his rich characterization and event, his moral purpose is a donneé happily granted.[39]

For Klug, the concept of humanity as a "larger body" or a "single soul" is central to the morality that is implicit in all of Bellow's novels.[40] Schulz asserts that each of Bellow's heroes has triumphed with the heart over the corrosive experience of the mind. For all its impracticality and inefficiency, the heart's affection is portrayed by Bellow as a sextant of moral precision. Schulz reminds us that, interestingly, it is Leventhal's violent visceral reaction or irritation, disgust, anger and guilt toward Allbee which caused in some indefinable psychic way his moral and social rehabilitation. And he continues:

> If the pattern is at best only dimly discernible, each demonstrates that the individual while partaking of the social order, may preserve the integrity of his soul without submerging his fate... In the crisis of their lives Bellow refutes the prevalent axiom that the intellect is a surer guide than the feelings.[41]

Schulz concludes his study saying that in the lives of the heroes Bellow rejects rationalized death in favor of "moral realities" and "divine image" of man.

Buitenhuis mentions as one constant in Bellow's novels "the moral atmosphere in which they have been worked out."[42] And Earl Rovit claims that, in a sense, the Bellow hero can be justly termed a 'schlemiel' type. If he is a victimized figure, he is a victim of his own sense of right and wrong - his own accepted obligation to evaluate himself by standards that will inevitably find him lacking. He concludes naming Bellow "a moral ironist."[43]

Clayton also makes clear that more important than the fantastic is Bellow's use of parable for the discovery of moral and metaphysical truth.

> In fact this is true of Bellow's fiction in general: it is moral fiction; it is not concerned with style for its own sake, nor even with psychological revelation for its own sake; it considers such moral-metaphysical problems as the demarcation of human respon-

> sibility and the relationship of the individual to the world of power... Always it is concerned with the question of goodness - the failure or success of the sympathetic heart. It believes in man and in the potentiality of holiness and joy within the common life, the possibility of meaningful existence.[44]

Comparing Bellow to Mathew Arnold, Clayton says that, like the latter, Bellow wishes to serve the cause of truth and virtue. "He has called the nineteenth century writer a "curer of souls" and has regretted the writer's loss of this function. He, himself, has not lost it."[45]

I conclude with Bellow's own remarks which illustrate how solidly he sees himself as a writer with a moral function. He has said that in his own work the crux is believing in the existence of human beings. This caring or believing alone matters. "All the rest, obsolescense, historical views, manners, agreed views of the universe is simply nonsense and trash... If we do care, if we believe in the existence of others, then what we write is necessary."[46]

The emergent pattern I have shown in the second and third chapters is confirmed by the general agreement about Bellow's optimistic view of human being. But someone still may get the impression that Bellow's work is consistently a moral melodrama which plays with guilt, masochism and alienation, but rather designedly turns toward a happy ending. But I think that Bellow does not fall into melodrama, for, if the pattern is consistent, the treatment of it changes, and the dramatic settings change.

Irving Malin charts Bellow's novels in an interesting way. He says that "although tensions recur in all of Bellow's novels, they are shaped differently. DM is a journal; V is a frantic, tight narrative; AM is sprawling, 'lighthearted' picaresque; SD a 'blest nouvelle'; HRK is a parodic romance; and H has faint elements of all these."[47] Clayton portrays Bellow's style as repertorial in DM; naturalistic in V; joyous and full-blown in AM; lyrical in SD and H;

symbolic in HRK. According to him, there is a deadness of style in SP and in HG it is again lyrically comic. Unlike Clayton's opinion about SP, Dutton believes that "the intricate weaving of form and content in SP represents Saul Bellow's highest technical achievement."[48]

Concerning Bellow's characters, Earl Rovit asserts that

> the creation of a recognizable character type, the Bellow hero, is Bellow's major accomplishment. The faces and individual circumstances of this hero have varied from fiction to fiction. He has been rich and poor, well and ill-educated; he has grown from youth to middle age, gone to war, multiplied his wives and mistresses, narrowed and extended his field of operations with the world.[49]

But then Rovit explains that if we compare the personae of his earliest and latest works we realize that the alterations in the hero are surprisingly superficial. The variations among the individual protagonists seem largely to be due to the expedients of their dramatic settings. That is to say that although we have a consistent moral pattern, it comes out disguised under different forms. Besides that we shall take into account "the mollifying and humanizing effects of humor which is so basic a part of Bellow's craft and life style," says Rovit. And he adds:

> From his earliest work to the present, Bellow's natural sphere has been comedy, and if it is true that his most significant recurrent theme has been despair, it is also true that this despair has been projected prismaticaly through a consistently comical lens.[50]

That is why Rovit calls Bellow "a moral ironist" and it is certainly Bellow's humor that contribute to include a larger ambivalence to the end of his novels.

To come back to my point, I shall emphasize that Bellow's defense of man and of his possibilities is not an easy and superficial one. Above all, Bellow has made the move toward affirmation a process of some subtlety and a journey variously paced and affected

by many useful digressive incidents. But he has maintained that it is possible and necessary to affirm. Thus, Bellow's lonely men search their souls, search community, attempting to get over the impasse of alienation. Actually, alienation is too high a price to pay for anything one is protecting. As we have heard many critics saying, we feel that the transformation is never completely fulfilled but, in spite of the absurdity of the world, it seems that alienation in Bellow's work is only a transitional condition. Like Herzog, all Bellow's heroes believe that is not their sphere; "he was merely passing through.Out in the streets, in American society, that was where he did his time."[51] In fact "man can fulfill himself only if he remains in touch with the fundamental facts of his existence, if he can experience the exaltation of love and solidarity as well as the tragic fact of his aloneness and of the fragmentary character of his existence."[52]

Bellow's own words are the best to conclude this chapter:

> If the human pride of artists has indeed exhausted the miracle of this world then nothing in art is necessary, all is superfluous. But there is the living man, and the last word concerning him cannot be imagined. We shall never know him in his entirety. Now, waiting in the darkness to be reanimated by a fresh impulse we feel painfully the weight of everything superfluous... But we know that something necessary, something not to be evaded, is due and overdue.[53]

In chapter two and three I have dealt with Bellow's early and late novels trying to chart in the former as well as in the latter the same emergent pattern in Bellow's fiction. I have also discussed the problems of ambiguity and morality that may arise from such a pattern. In the next four brief chapters I am going on dealing with the four middle novels, which are generally considered Bellow's major achievements, working on the same pattern.

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CHAPTER FOUR

THE ADVENTURES OF AUGIE MARCH

After DM and V Saul Bellow published The Adventures of Augie March in 1953. It marked a change in Bellow's style - for the protagonist, Augie, goes through adventure after memorable adventure. He is a kind of picaresque hero who tells his own story. The early chapters deal with the influences which were lined up waiting for him. The family into which he is born is no family at all. His father has deserted his mother. He lives, with this mother and his brothers Simon and Georgie, under the domination of 'grandma' Lausch who is actually no relative of the Marches. She fills Augie's young years. He learns she is dishonest, hypocrital and tyrannical, but admires her power of resistence.

Then Augie is set in the orbit of William Einhorn, the first superior man he knows, who wants him as a retainer, servant and disciple. Augie works for him as a high school junior and remains under his influence until graduation, which is celebrated with the initiating experience of a sexual ritual. From Einhorn's sphere of influence Augie moves on that of the Renlings, into the experiences of his young manhood. Refusing the Renlings' adoption, Augie leaves them and falls on bad times. Under the influence of Gorman he attempts to run immigrants across the Canadian border in a stolen car. Gorman is arrested and beaten, and Augie escapes to find his way back to Chicago as a fugitive.

Next Augie takes a job as an attendant in a dog club, but soon after he is persuaded by Padilla to give up his job and become a book thief. Later his brother Simon wants him to marry, as Simon has, into the Magnus family. He arranges Augie's engagement with Lucy Magnus, but Augie becomes involved with Mimi and the engagement is off. The consequent schism with Simon takes him back to his books.

Then Thea Fenchel appears to carry him off to Mexico. Thea's plan is to train an eagle to hunt iguanas and Augie is soon excited by the idea. But the eagle - Caligula - is found to be a coward.

After further adventures Augie marries Stella whom he had helped to evade her lover. By then he wants to set up a kind of home and teach school. He wants to get himself reconstructed. But soon after his marriage he ships out with the merchant marine, survives a torpedo and the insane Basteshaw, with whom he shares an open boat, moves to France and writes his autobiography. The book is closed with an ironic and ambiguous laugh, since Augie is a 'Columbus' in this 'terra incognita'.

Every critic agrees that AM represented a large step in Bellow's development as a fiction writer. Ralph Freedman states that Bellow's large novel, AM, constitutes the mainstay of his reputation not merely because of its bulk or the multitude of the themes, or even because of the unusual amount of favorable critical attention it has deserved, but primarily because of the freshness and innovations it has brought to the form of the novel.[1] For Hoffman, Bellow turned to an entirely different kind of work, the "moral picaresque."[2] Having in mind the heroes of the first and second novel, Hassan asserts that "Bellow's comic, roguish, and rebel hero - the other side of the coin - appears in AM."[3] In another article Hassan writes:

> It is not unfair to say that in the first two novels, Bellow had not yet discovered the dramatic equivalent of joy. His heroes sweat continually, suffer from nausea and headaches, and their crotchety imagination broods on the spectacle of unrelieved moral sordor. They are heirs to a metaphysical drabness, their power, at best, is a pained blistered power. The change to AM seems therefore, wondrous and staggering, so much so that critics whose pride is their sophistication must contrive to see in this trend busting novel a subtle elaboration of Bellow's earlier concerns. Insofar as the concerns of this novel are still with personal character, social environment and human destiny, the critics are no doubt right.[4] (My italics)

It is actually because Bellow's concern is being human that we find more similarities then may appear at first sight between Augie and the characters we have previously examined. Although these similarities show up in a very different way, in the next pages I will try to chart Augie's alienation and masochism, and the purgation he undergoes to continue his journey with renewed hope and belief in the possibilities of the human being.

Clayton says that Bellow's affirmation hides negation and despair and that the novelist of V and SD can be heard beneath Augie's lyric exuberance.[5] Or, as Tanner puts it, "underneath his exhilaratimg rhetoric one sometimes hears a faint echo of that saddest of lines from that loneliest of characters, Melville's Bartleby, who could only say "I would prefer not to."[6]

Like Joseph, Leventhal and the other heroes who would appear later - Sammler and Charlie, Augie is detached and lacks commitment. He ventures into the world but is not a part of it. "His constant movement," says Opdahl, "is an evasion rather than engagement of life."[7] It seems that engagement would "suffocate" him, so he does not want to be determined and claims he would not become what other people wanted to make of him. Consequently he complains that while others had got the idea there was a life to lead and had chosen their direction, he was circling yet. He does not know even how to answer the question "where do you go?". "I touched all sides, and nobody knew where I belonged. I had no good idea of that myself."[8]

Augie also lacks a good relationship toward others. He keeps an "uncommitted smile" and people must tell him to "speak up more, make a few jokes, laugh when all laughed." He tries to make himself "more acceptable, even welcome." "I didn't want to be what they made of me, but wanted to please them. Kindly explain! An independent fate and love too - what confusion!"[9] The result of such con-

fusion is that Augie does not establish any real relationship. "The book is really the long monologue of a lonely man," says Tanner.[10]

In his privation Augie knows boredom and suffering. He realizes that

> a man could spend forty, fifty, sixty years... inside the walls of his own being. And all great experience would only take place within the wall of his being. And all achievement would stay within those walls.And all glamour too. And even hate, ... enviousness ... would be inside them. This would be only a terrible hideous dream about existing. It's better to dig ditches and hit other guys with your shovel then die in the walls.[11]

Although Augie thinks that would be a terrible hideous dream about existing, he, in a sense, lives like that, within the wall of his being. Instead of being committed to others he is committed to himself and to his"special fate." Reviewers comment on Augie's lack of commitment as the underlying cause of his shadowy projection. "It is hard," says Robert Penn Warren, "to give substance to a character who has no commitments."[12]

Thus Augie may be,like Joseph, a typical dangling man who "has no vision of society as familial, within which a person might have due autonomy while acknowledging mutual responsibility."[13] So, "happy-go-lucky Augie March," says Clayton, "may seem an exception but he, too, is an alienatee."[14] And like his predecessors Joseph and Leventhal, he is also a masochist. Clayton states that "AM is not a novel about a social or moral masochist." Yet "there are still hints of Bellow's depressive, masochistic characters."[15]

From the beginning Augie seems to choose not to succeed. He grows under the tyrannical Grandma Lausch whose words are always a threat. His brother Simon is better than he and succeeds at school while he is considered a "cat-head" and a"fool." Simon is distant to him and considers that he has the right to treat Augie like that because he is making progress while Augie is making a fool of himself.

"He didn't appear to care what I had been up to, or notice that I was, behind my casualness, miserable."[16] Warnings and predictions are of work certificates, stockyards, shovel labor, penitentiary rockpiles, bread and water, and lifelong ignorance and degradation. Before that Augie confesses he suffers like a beaver. He not only is blamed for everything bad, but his masochism makes him realize very well he is the main cause of it. Simon feels that Augie is "something of a 'schlemiel'."[17]

Gerald Jay Goldberg asserts that

> for most of the novel Augie is life's customer, but even those few times when he becomes its trencher bearer the consequences are unfortunate. Though Augie's fortunes oscillate with the dramatic verve of a bouncing ball in a sing-along short, he is basically luckless.[18]

It seems that nothing really works out for Augie: besides his hard childhood we are reminded that he has gotten the boot from his first job. His Christmas thievery is discovered. The sinecure which Mrs. Renling offers he refuses and falls upon hard times. The money-making scheme of illegally running immigrants fails. The assistance which Mimi requests leads to his rejection by the Magnuses. The job which Mimi arranges for him results in his being beaten up. The expedition to hunt iguana lizards in Mexico ends in his being critically injured. At last, on his first voyage as a merchant seaman the ship is torpedoed.

Frustrations like these show that the masochistic tendencies of Bellow's heroes are present in AM. The masochistic tendency to belittle oneself, through self-criticism, is also felt. His thought is that anyway there would still be black forces waiting to give him the boot, and if he had a degree the indignity would be all the greater, and he would have heartburn from it. And he says further of himself and his foolishness:

> Oh, you chump and weak fool, you are one of humanity that can't be numbered and not more than the dust of metals scattered in a magnetic field and clinging to the lines of force, determined by laws, eating, sleeping, employed, conveyed, obedient and subject.[19]

However, Augie, like all Bellow's alienated characters, manifests also the other side of the masochistic strivings, the other side of the coin, since at the bottom he is sure of being good. If on one side he says he is not like others, "with a special talent," on the other he thinks the world owes him "distinctness."[20] Throughout the novel, Augie is a seeker after what he terms a "special fate." Because he believes in his goodness he tries to discover "a good enough fate,"[21] "a 'higher', independent fate," a "worthwhile fate."[22] He sees his life as triumphant, a goal he is ever speeding toward. Like the other heroes he wishes "to do right and not lead a disappointed life."[23] And like them he does not take the rest of the world into consideration when he is asserting his better fate, his ideals. So he is always saying "no" to the schemes and plans of others and tries to remove himself from their spheres of influence as if they led a disappointed life. Since he manages to come out better than those near to him he sees himself "about like a king."[24] In his anxious climb to become a great man, he jumps the gun instead of taking things step by step. If Joseph believed that "we were feeble-minded children or angels," "among us poor drips at the human masquerade (Augie comes) like an angel."[25] One of his friends, Clem, makes Augie realize his wish to be a "godlike man":

> What I guess about you is that you have a nobility syndrome. You can't adjust to the reality situation. I can see it all over you. You want there should be Man, with capital M, with great stature. As we've been pals since boyhood, I know you and what you think. Remember how you used to come to house every day? But I know what you want. O 'paidea'! O king David! O Plutarch and Seneca! O chivalry, O Abbot Suger! O Strozzi Palace, O Weimar! O Don Giovanni, O lineaments of gratified desire! O godlike man![26]

It is surely Augie's quest for greatness and perfection that makes him follow Thea to Mexico. Brigitte states that "Thea, as her name indicates (Thea is the Greek word for goddess), has something superhuman about her."[27] Augie describes her as having a "perfect life" and she aims at perfection in everything she does, from love-making to eagle-training. She fits well into his aims, for, like him Thea thinks

> there must be something better than what people call reality. Oh, well and good. Very good and bravo! Let's have this better, nobler reality![28]

To get this nobler reality, the masochist Augie submits himself to suffering and humiliation through Thea's whims. The eagle may be the synthesis of his torture for the sake of his willing to be "more than human." When his dreams crack apart Augie still blames himself and we are reminded of Clayton's idea that the hero raises himself up by putting himself down. "You see," says Augie, "I missed out. I should have been more pure, and stayed with it. There was something wrong with me." It is also an old pal, Padilla, who warns him of his wrong attitude: "You take too much blame on yourself and the real reason is not a good one. It's because you're too ambitious. You want too much, and therefore if you miss out you blame yourself too hard."[29]

Such facts show that Augie, like Joseph or Leventhal, lacks self-acceptance. He does not live his reality and he himself understands it: "My real fault was that I couldn't stay with my purest feelings."[30] He does not accept the reality of human weakness either:

> The reason why I didn't see things as they were, was that I didn't want to; because I couldn't love them as they were. But the challenge was not to better them in your mind but to put every human weakness into the picture.[31]

Augie's glimpses of a transcendent reality, his moments of 'epiphany,' seem also to manifest alienation and masochism. While he was reading in his room he had no eye, ear or interest for anything

else - that is, for usual, mere-phenomenal, for the life of despair-harness or the life of organization-habits. He wonders about the triumphant life of prophets and gods, and sees that "there is a schism about it, some saying that only this triumphant life is real and others that only the daily facts are. For me there was no debate, and I made speed into the former."[32] Thus, transcendent life, the life of prophets and gods may be just Augie's refuge. This fact becomes clearer when he talks of the "axial lines." "I have said 'NO' like a stubborn fellow to all my persuaders, just on the obstinacy of my memory of these lines..." According to Augie, to get the "axial lines of life" you mustn't go entirely by appearances." Although they are"never entirely clear" he defines them as

> Truth, love, peace, bounty, usefulness, harmony! And all noise and grates, distortion, chatter, distraction, effort, superfluity, passed off like something unreal. And I believe that any man at any time can come back to these axial lines... The ambition of something special and outstanding I have always had is only a boast that distorts this knowledge from its origin, which is the oldest knowledge, older than the Eufrates, older than the Ganges.[33]

Trying to get where those axial lines are, Augie thinks he is "looking for something lasting and durable."[34]

Harold Kaplan makes a good remark about Bellow's use of such 'epiphanies':

> ... in Bellow they have more moral weight - more of a need to redeem consciousness in his characters. Such a revelation is given by Augie when after experiences, ideas, people, emotions, have unrolled without stint, almost without selection, his mind returns to focus, to what he calls the "axial lines of life." It is not entirely clear what he means though he means something imposing when he uses words like harmony and joy and love.[35]

It is Augie's mind which turns to the "axial lines." This leads us to find in Augie's mental environment the propellent agent of his alienation and mascchism. Like his predecessors, Augie lives in a self-invented world of avoidances and rejections. The "better

fate" he seeks has its roots only in his imagination, for since the beginning he says: "My mind was already dwelling on a good enough fate," and "my thoughts took their own directions."[36] His preference is for useful thoughts which answered questions that moved him. We know he is moved, but out of reality, since "glorious constructions" begin to rise in his mind, "golden and complicated."[37] He is born with a high mind and aims for the best, but he becomes "a victim of his own fantasies."[38]

Up to now I have tried to show that there are many similarities between AM and DM and V, not to mention the last books I have dealt with before. That is to say that, although in a very different way, Augie March - because of his alienation and masochism - is detached, plays the victim, garbs himself in a sense of importance showing lack of self-acceptance. His glimpses of transcendence may be just a refuge from reality, and all this fictitious world is nourished in his mental environment. But like Joseph, Leventhal and the other heroes, the picaro Augie may also find the way to redemption undergoing a purgative situation where he faces darkness and death.

An interesting fact here is that Augie enters purgatory and is invited to change during the course of his life. Let's follow him through some of these significant hints: soon after he leaves the Renlings for the sake of his "better fate" he falls on hard times. He does not succeed in his job and laments he has fallen "below the standard." "The way I was living was becoming crude, and I was learning some squatter lessons... Vigorous at nine, my hope ran out by noon, and then one of my hardships was that I had no place of rest... I had the face of someone pretty much beat."[39]

After attempting to run immigrants in the stolen car, he must also pay for his foolishness: as happened with Peter who denied

Jesus, there is a rooster which crows to remind Augie of his guilt. Besides being jailed, he is forced to take a longer trip to get back to Chicago. During the trip he must face unfriendly and wet towns, boring and dark days, deadly cold nights. He is dry and hungry. Everything makes him feel over-all general misery and dejection. When he gets back he looks "too sick - low, gaunt, pushed to an extreme, burned."[40] Many other times Augie is immersed into "that darkness in which resolutions have to be made" in order to live the "shared condition of all."[41]

Mexico may be the symbol of Augie's purgatory and it is there that he faces death most nearly and feels most dead. He follows Thea because of her superiority - she resembles a goddess. But he is severely knocked down from his dream to be "more than human." He is badly kicked on the head by a horse he has fallen from. If that were not enough, Thea's response is to sever herself from the loser and goes off with another man. Augie must listen to perhaps the hardest words of his life:

> I thought you knew all about what you could do and you were so lucky and so special... I'm sorry You're here now. You're not special. You're like everybody else. You get tired easily. I don't want to see you anymore.[42]

After that Augie realizes he had done wrong. "And as I lay and thought of it I felt my eyes roll as if in search for an out... My mistakes and faults came from all sides and gnawed at me." A pal of his says that has got to happen to him before he gets anywheres. "You always had it too good. You got to get knocked over and crushed like this." Augie complains that he "was only trying to do right, and ... had broken (his) dome,... got burned in (his) progress, a mighty slipshod campaigner."[43]

We have thus seen that the hero's touching the ground and being burned is again Bellow's way to redeem him and let a path open

for grace. Clayton writes:

> AM is meant to be a picaresque novel rather than a novel in which the hero changes. But there are hints of change, and again they rise out of a new condition. The condition is his near death and his loss of Thea. It is the first time he loses his larkiness.[44]

He recognizes he had made of himself a fictitious man, and close to tears he makes his grand acceptance of himself, promising to take his chance on what he is: "I suppose I better, anyway, give in and be it. I will never force the hand of fate to create a better Augie March, nor change the time to an age of gold."[45] As he believes "there must be a way to learn to do better" and knows what he wants now, he wishes another chance. He wants to get himself reconstructed, "to get married and set up a kind of home and teach school."[46] His marriage to Stella may be seen as a symbol of his acceptance of society and his commitment to humankind. His favorite project is that of establishing a foster home for orphaned children somewhere out in the country where he can unite around him his old mother and his idiot brother Georgie. "I am a person of hope and now my hopes have settled themselves upon children and a settled life."[47] Augie manifests here also his concern for others. We shall remember that, like Leventhal, Augie is ever ready to assume responsibilities, to keep promises that others should have kept. More than Leventhal he never refuses his help to his friends whatever the risks and the losses he will incur. The scenes in which he assists Mimi in getting into the hospital,and Stella in escaping from her jealous lover, are good samples of that. He feels the responsibility to come back to the family. It is, after all, he who periodically returns to Chicago to visit his blind mother and idiot brother Georgie.

Thus in AM we may find the same emergent pattern we have depicted in chapter two and three: the picaro Augie is, up to a certain point, alienated and masochistic, and, although he seems at

the end to go on with his adventures - as we shall see next - he must undergo darkness, he must be knocked over the ground to get the grace of survival.

Concerning the end of AM, Bellow makes it again enigmatic and ambiguous, so that critics take different positions. Laughing Augie says:

> That's the 'animal ridens' in me, the laughing creature, forever rising up... Look at me, going everywhere! Why, I am a sort of Columbus of those near-at-hand and believe you can come to them in this immediate 'terra incognita' that spreads out in every gaze. I may well be a flop at this line of endeavor. Columbus too thought he was a flop, probably, when they sent him back in chains. Which didn't prove there was no America.[48]

David Galloway says that "it seems essential to the picaresque structure of AM that we leave the hero as we found him - a wanderer."[49] Tanner has a more direct assertion thinking that "after all the collisions, the embraces, and the flights he (Augie) remains at the end related to no one - unattached, uncommitted, undefined."[50] Like Tanner, Hassan states that "Augie is confirmed into no society, he is finally bound to anyone by ties or allegiances."[51]

Although some critics view Augie ending uncommitted, most of them harbor the hopeful view about him. Goldberg writes:

> Hope is Augie's spur, and his continued hope in the face of experience is either lamentable imbecility or something truly sublime in human nature. The sympathy Bellow evokes for Augie leaves no doubt that it is the latter.[52]

Clayton explains that "the name Augie comes from augury, from the latin augur; ... Augie, like all Bellow's heroes is Bellow's representative in determining whether life can go on." And saying that the style means that life is open, is possibilities, Clayton quotes Howe: the style of AM functions "to communicate above all the sense that men are still alive."[53]

In his voyage Augie is a 'Columbus' toward himself and toward others. If he has not reached his aim yet, if he has been a flop, that does not mean that his 'America' does not exist. Opdahl believes that Augie defines his fate as a struggle with the world and himself:

> His claim that he is "a sort of Columbus of those near at hand" who believes that "you can come to them in this immediate 'terra incognita' that spreads out in every gaze," is less a summary of his character than a recognition of what has been true throughout the novel, that he has to make a long voyage to reach his fellow man.[54]

Thus AM may be seen as suggesting even more than that 'emergent' rebirth we have found in the end of the other books examined. Augie is seen in a way of hope: he defines himself as "a person of hope." After undergoing purgation he learns to face himself and reality, and seems to know what he aims for. Reaffirming that he must take his chance on what he is, Mr. Mintouchian tells Augie not to sit still, for "if you sit still you will decay."[47] Therefore, the final movement seems necessary. Augie is aware his way will not be easy:

> Hard, hard work, excavation and digging, mining, moling through tunnels, heaving, pushing, moving rock, working, working, working, working, working, panting, hauling, hoisting. And none of this work is seen from the outside. It's internally done.[56]

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CHAPTER FIVE

SEIZE THE DAY

After AM Saul Bellow wrote Seize the Day (1956) which is the shortest of his novels. In it he recreates the claustral atmosphere of V, for the protagonist, Tommy Wilhelm, is paralysed by his remembrance of things past and by anxieties for the future. When the story begins he is mainly a victim of his own wrong decisions. He gave up college to become an actor against the evidence of an unsuccessful screen-test, against the wishes of his parents, and against the advice of a talent scout whose most important clients, it turned out, were whores. After seven years of stubborn work as an extra he returned and got a job as salesman of playground equipment. But he left the company when an outsider received the promotion he had been promised. He also broke up his marriage because, for reasons he cannot clearly explain, he feels unable to continue to live with his wife. Now Wilhelm has to support her and the two children, although he has no job. He lives with his father, Dr. Adler, - or at least in the same building - the Hotel Gloriana.

Dr. Adler is a selfish and vain old man of eighty who leads a dull and circumspect life in the hotel. While he boasts to the friends of Wilhelm's success as a salesman, he refuses to become involved in his failures. When Wilhelm asks for help he responds only with gratuitous advice. Accustomed to deference and flattery from generations of his medical students and from his aged friends in the hotel, Dr. Adler is resentful when Wilhelm's pleas for help expose his father's selfishness.

Equally grotesque is Wilhelm's relationship with Dr. Tamkin who has invested Wilhelm's last seven hundred dollars in the commodities market. Tamkin claims to be a psychologist and his fantastic stories about his patients are obviously a violation of the

truth as well as professional ethics. Although Wilhelm recognizes that Tamkin is a charlatan, he needs him,for Tamkin is the only person who has any real interest in Wilhelm's problems, even if his motive is exploitation. He promises Wilhelm salvation, financial as well as otherwise. For this purpose he indoctrinates Wilhelm in his philosophy of "seize the day" and introduces him to the art of speculating in the commodities market. Tamkin disappears with Wilhelm's last money. Wilhelm who tries to trace him in the crowded streets of New York, is carried forward by the pushing masses into a funeral parlor, where he finally breaks down weeping.

Almost all critical opinion of SD reveals a general agreement that this novella is possibly Bellow's most well-made work, because of its technical discipline which resembles V. Porter says that plot, character, mood and language are skillfully interwoven to produce a kind of "figure in the carpet" that Henry James prized so highly. "Even more than V," adds Porter, "SD achieves a sustained intensity and a unity of effect that approaches the condition of poetry."[1] For J. R. Raper, in SD "Bellow seems to have discovered a structure unusual, if not unique, in the impact achieved by what it leaves out. From the start, Bellow points every incident toward the final scene."[2]

After stating, like other critics, that the free-wheeling style and pace of AM appear again in SD, but under a much tighter organization, a return to the discipline apparent in the earlier novels, Buitenhuis claims that "the formlessness is all in the character of the hero, Tommy Wilhelm, the chaos of whose summer day in New York Bellow admirably seizes in this novel. The potential ruin that faces the heroes of all Bellow's novels is fully realized in Tommy."[3] We can see, then, that SD contains elements that are familiar from former works and we may soon agree that the emergent pattern of the

alienated and masochistic hero who needs to undergo purgation and face death to deserve the grace of survival is present in SD, perhaps even stronger than in the previous novels. Seymour Epstein's words fit well and carry ahead the treatment of our theme:

> The only genuine thing in Tommy's life is his capacity to suffer - and this is what SD is about: the suffering of a totally alienated man. In all his subsequent novels, Bellow hasn't limned this much overdramatized and overpublicized condition as truly and poignantly as he did in this novella... Indeed, so well did he state his theme in SD that it became the microcosm from which the author fashioned the rest of his literary universe.[4] (My italics)

Like Bellow's other heroes Wilhelm is separated from the world, uncommitted. When we see him he is already in his middle forties, an established failure in the business as in the private world. He is unemployed because he quit his job in indignation when his promised promotion to an executive position was filled by a young relative of his. He is also separated from his wife Margaret and their two children. He feels that his children's affections have been poisoned against him and that his wife wishes him dead. His father has rejected him as a slob and he has no friends. "My dad is something of a stranger to me, too," he says, and "Catherine - she won't even talk to me anymore, my own sister."[5]

The novel happens in the walls of the hotel he lives which is ironically named 'Gloriana'. Its guests are primarily the retired and superfluous. "They had nothing to do but wait out the day," and "among these old people at the Gloriana, Wilhelm felt out of place."[6] Wilhelm's isolation is further emphasized in the first several pages of the novel when, on his way to breakfast he stops to get his morning newspaper from Rubin. They talk only about the weather, Wilhelm's clothes, last night's gin game, for, even though both men know many intimate details about each other, "none of these could be mentioned, and the great weight of the unspoken left them little to talk about."[7]

The previous night he had not seen the gin game not only because "he was tired of losing" but because he was "tired also of the company, and so he had gone by himself to the movies."[8] Tommy wanders in his mind:

> And was everybody crazy here? What sort of people did you see? Every other man spoke a language entirely his own, which he had figured out by private thinking; he had his own ideas and peculiar ways... You had to translate and translate, explain and explain, back and forth, and it was the punishment of hell itself not to understand or to be understood... The fathers were no fathers, and the sons no sons. You had to talk with yourself in the daytime and reason with yourself at night.[9]

Since Wilhelm talks with himself in the daytime and reasons with himself at night, he makes, again like the other heroes, a victim of himself. According to Epstein, Wilhelm "is the single natural 'schlemiel' in Bellow's entire cast of losers."[10] And as a 'schlemiel' it seems to be his "avocation and profession to miss out on things, to muff opportunities, to be persistently, preposterously and ingeniously out of place."[11] Stating that SD is still more obviously about a moral masochist, Clayton says also that "Tommy is his own most difficult obstacle, his own worst enemy."[12] His past is a history of failure because of bad decisions:

> Ten such decisions made up the history of his life. He had decided that it would be a bad mistake to go to Hollywood, and then he went. He had made up his mind not to marry his wife but ran off and got married. He had resolved not to invest money with Tamkin, and then had given him a cheque.[13]

Because of his past mistakes he lives out of place in the present as if trying all the time to punish himself for his sins through suffering. He makes of people around him weapons for his punishment. His father, Dr. Adler, turns out to be the most important person upon whom Wilhelm projects the masochistic need for punishment. In his "Psychoanalytic Study On the Novel SD ," Daniel Weiss explains that "the broadest psychoanalytic category within which Tommy Wilhelm

operates is that of the moral masochist, the victim for whom suffering is a 'modus vivendi', a means of self justification." And "the person to whom Wilhelm is masochistically attached is, of course, his father, Dr. Adler, before whom he exhibits his helplessness."[14] Wilhelm "has the masochistic necessity to fail, to be destroyed at the hands of the punishing father in order, under the terms of the moral masochistic commitment, to retain his love..."[15]

Next, Weiss reports Bernhard Berliner's idea of masochism. While accepting Freud's motivational basis for masochism (guilt, need for punishment), Berliner describes moral masochism, not as a pathological way of hating, but as a "pathological way of loving." According to Berliner, it is not, as Freud described it, an intrapersonal problem, but one involving an interpersonal relationship. For Berliner, the subject

> relives and re-enacts ... in interpersonal relations a submissive devotion to and need for love of a hating or rejecting love-object, ... originally a parent or a preferred sibling or some other unfriendly person of his childhood, and who lives in his superego. It is the superego that keeps the original situation alive through transference to any suitable person or set of circumstances in later age.[16]

Because Wilhelm pursues this masochistic submissive devotion, we find him living in his father's hotel, dressing and behaving badly, as if looking for punishment. Clayton says that Wilhelm "constantly provokes his father into punishing him." We are reminded that knowing his father's attitude toward his drug-taking, Tommy nevertheless (or rather therefore) waits until they are together to swallow a phenaphen. He begs for pity although he can expect no pity. "Tommy knows," conclude Clayton, "he is tiring his father's patience, and he wants to do so."[17]

Dr. Adler's answer is actually coldness, detachment, selfishness.

> What a selfish old man he was! He saw his son's hardships; he could so easily help him. How little it would mean to him, and how much to Wilhelm! Where was the old man's heart? Maybe, thought Wilhelm, I was sentimental in the past and exaggerated his kindliness - warm family life. It may never have been there.[18]

Wilhelm undergoes his father's accusations and inquisition to prove himself worthy of a sympathetic word. And in a loud, wild, frantic cry Wilhelm says: "I expect help!" But all he gets is a pathetic reply: "I want nobody on my back. Get off!"[19]

Besides his father, Wilhelm finds in his ex-wife Margaret another ghost, another means for suffering. He allows her to place burden upon burden on him, when he knows that "no court would have awarded her the amounts he paid."[20] And he thinks she hits him, beats him, batters him, and wants to beat the very life out of him. Wilhelm feels that a husband like him is a slave with an iron collar, and he complains to his father:

> I feel that she's strangling me. I can't catch my breath. She just has fixed herself on me to kill me. She can do it at a long distance. One of these days I'll be struck down by suffocation or apoplexy because of her. I just can't catch my breath.[21]

Dr. Adler and Margaret are, after all, projections of Wilhelm's burden, of his search for punishment, and so is Dr. Tamkin. Dr. Tamkin is a charlatan who deprives Wilhelm of his last money, since "from the moment when he (Wilhelm) tasted the peculiar flavour of fatality in Dr. Tamkin, he could no longer keep back the money."[22] Critics see Dr. Tamkin as Wilhelm's ideal father, or substitute father. "He discovers, says Irving Malin, "that his ideal father is as evil - narcissistic, materialistic - as Dr. Adler. But he still loves him. Unconsciously, he can't live without such tyranny - he wants to remain "castrated."[23] And Clayton remarks that

> to lose under the influence of Tamkin - to "take a licking" on the market - is to take a licking from his own father, a punishment which is a form of love.

> As Wilhelm Reich puts it, the masochist makes "demands for love in the form of provocation and spite.[24]

Although Clayton agrees with Berkiner's point about masochism, he adds Freud's concept that such masochistic behavior as Wilhelm's is self-punishment to remove guilt. He is indeed full of a morbid guilt feeling, he tears himself apart and Tamkin tells him: "You have lots of guilt in you."[25] Like Joseph, Leventhal and the other heroes, Wilhelm belittles himself through self-accusation and self-criticism which he is not able to accept when it is made by his father. He often calls himself "ass! Idiot! Wild boar! Dumb mule! Slave! Lousy, wallowing hippopotamus!"[26] To his father he says he "never made a success" and when he is drunk he reproaches himself horribly as 'Wilky' which was his father's nickname for him. "You fool, you clunk, you Wilky!"[27] In his depths Wilhelm

> received a suggestion from some remote element in his thoughts that the business of life, the real business - to carry his peculiar burden, to feel shame and impotence, to taste these quelled tears, - the only important business, the highest business was being done. Maybe the making of mistakes expressed the very purpose of his life and the essence of his being here. Maybe he was supposed to make them and suffer from them on this earth.[28]

But as we have said before, this masochistic attitude of candid failure, dependency, willing self-humiliation, this image shown by the alienated hero is only a step to rise above others.

Throughout his life he has been chasing delusions of success, of wealth, of happiness, of fame. Allen Guttmann states:

> He has set his goals too high and has failed to reach them. Augie March, knowing that greatness was a complex fate, settled for less, but Tommy continues to rush, more and more frantically, up and down the closed corridor of his life.[29]

Wilhelm's first great mistake, now recognized by him as foolishness, was his desire to become an actor bacause "<u>he was to be freed from anxious and narrow life of the average</u>."[31] (My italics) In Hollywood,

which "was his own idea" he tried to change his name: he dropped 'Adler' and adopted 'Tommy'. Wilhelm's attempt to become an actor reveals his will to escape his true self, reveals his world of ideal constructions, which is common to all Bellow's alienated heroes. In Dr. Tamkin's words, Wilhelm is serving his "pretender soul," instead of the "real soul" or the "true soul."[31]

Now the masochistic posture of sufferer has come to mean being worthy of love. Clayton says that "Tommy's worthiness of pity is in itself rewarding - whether or not he is actually pitied. It makes him feel, like Joseph, morally superior to his cold father."[32] Like Joseph, Asa and Augie, Wilhelm raises "himself above Mr. Perls and his father because they loved money."[33] While he nourishes his goodness and consequent superiority, Wilhelm enables himself, like the other heroes, to feel safe from death. This reminds us again of the strong role played by the hero's mind in his masochistic striving. The past, the present and the future are Wilhelm's own constructions. It is Tamkin who proposes the "here-and-now" mental exercises to immerse him in the present. Tamkin tells Wilhelm:

> The spiritual compensation is what I look for. Bringing people into the here-and-now. The real universe. That's the present moment. The past is no good to us. The future is full of anxiety. Only the present is real - the here-and-now. Seize the day.[34]

"The very title of SD, says Clayton, "indicates how Tommy, like Joseph, has run from reality... To seize the day, to live in the here-and-now, is to live outside a masochistic construct."[35]

We have, thus, seen that Tommy Wilhelm is one more of Bellow's heroes whose alienation is here particularly shown through morbid masochism. Wilhelm charges himself with a huge load which is his own creation. He is not able to carry it; therefore, we find Saul Bellow again drowning his hero in his own tears to get him purified, under the figurative death of the'pretender soul'. Several

critics have already dealt with the drowning imagery and they believe it is one of the most beautiful Bellow has ever created.

From the beginning Tommy is at the edge of a crisis. The elevator he is in "sank and sank. Then the smooth door opened and the great dark red uneven carpet that covered the lobby billowed toward Wilhelm's feet. In the foreground the lobby was dark, sleepy." [36] "From this moment on," writes Dutton, "Tommy is in deep water; but calling and reaching for help, he is unable to find a lifeline."[37] Next, Wilhelm feels himself in a hole and that he will soon die. "The waters of the earth are going to roll over me," he says.[38] Then "his unshed tears rose and rose, and he looked like a man about to drown."[39] If Leventhal almost died by gas, Wilhelm also feels "New York is like a gas."[40] He often says "I just can't breath... I just simply can't catch my breath."[41] And "I'm at the end of my rope and feel that I'm suffocating... I feel I'm about to burst."[42]

Wilhelm must drown, must sink into the waters of salvation by himself; therefore he is left completely alone. Dr. Adler cries: "Go away from me now. It's torture for me to look at you, you slob.'"[43] Margaret hangs up and Dr. Tamkin vanishes with Wilhelm's last money. So Wilhelm leaves the hotel Gloriana. Patrick Morrow is careful in observing that this is the first time he goes "out of the hotel nest and joins the sea of humanity."[44] He finds himself in an immense street,"and it quaked and gleamed and it seemed to Wilhelm to throb at the last limit of endurance. And although the sunlight appeared like a broad tissue, its actual weight made him feel like a drunkard." He is moved forward by the pressure of a crowd, and "the pressure ended inside, where it was dark and cool."[45]

At last he wanders into a funeral parlor and finds himself weeping at the bier of a stranger. He drowns in his own tears. He

cannot stop crying, for the source of all tears has suddenly sprung open within him, black, deep, and hot, and they are pouring out and convulse his body, bending his stubborn head, bowing his shoulders, twisting his face, crippling the very hands with which he holds his handkerchief. His efforts to collect himself are useless. The great knot of ill and grief in his throat swells upward and he gives in utterly and holds his face and weeps. He cries with all his heart. Then

> the flowers and lights fused ecstatically in Wilhelm's blind, wet eyes; the heavy sea-like music came up to his ears. It poured into him where he had hidden himself in the centre of a crowd by the great and happy oblivion of tears. He heard it and sank deeper than sorrow, through torn sobs and cries toward the consummation of his heart's ultimate need.[46]

As in the other novels, there are diverse views of the end: James C. Mathis states that "the drowning image enforces Wilhelm's feelings that he is a victim of the world's injustices, carrying the burdens of the world on his shoulders."[47] Guttmann has still a more extreme position: after charting other critics' conclusion of SD as a rebirth, he remarks that the book does "not enable the reader to conclude that Tommy has been reborn... Able neither to struggle greatly, nor to adjust to mediocrity, he is the victim of his own weakness and confusion."[48] Nevertheless, the other critics keep rather a middle position stating Bellow's usual ambiguity. Opdahl sees the ambiguity of Wilhelm's drowning as both a failure and a triumph.[49] For Patrick Morrow the ending is "moving and ambiguous."[50] Like them, Abraham Bezanker states: "the grief is infantile and in this sense it is a measure of man's imperfection and disfigurement; yet in another sense it is a kind of self anointed baptism which enobles Tommy Wilhelm."[51] Peter Buitenhuis shares the others' opinion depicting the book as "open-ended."[52]

However, I think it useful to remark that although critics chart Bellow's ambiguity, they often emphasize the ending as positive. Clayton says that "Tommy is fishing in himself for himself. And if this fish is an image of his soul, his soul seems safe: fish don't drown in water." According to Clayton, it seems likely that the "drowning" at the end is not an accession to masochistic failure but a hint of new life for Tommy's true soul.

> If the final breakdown of Tommy's armoring signifies despair, more crucially it signifies hope. It is the wail of a baby at his birth. And if this ambiguous ending points toward possible redemption, it also affirms the beauty and dignity of Tommy Wilhelm and of all men.[53]

After pointing that Wilhelm feels better than usual at the end, and that his tears are a triumph over masochism rather than a symptom of it, Opdahl argues:

> If he is a sick man, like Bellow's previous heroes, he is also - again like them - a potentially healthy one. He achieves a healing insight into himself, for he passes beneath self-pity to "the source of all tears," and then "deeper than sorrow," to a center which is beyond grief.[54]

Wilhelm's figurative death is not purely negative, "for in the death of the old self," writes Porter, "there is the birth of the new self who will be, the novel implies, more capable of dealing with his own temperament and the world around him."[55] Marcus Klein also points out that "at the moment of death, his motion is toward existence, the vitality that defines and unites everyone, and his weeping is an acceptance of it and therefore an act of love toward life."[56]

Many other critics, such as Cohen, Harper, Hassan, Klug, Brigitte, Dutton and Raper share the same opinion; that is, they believe that SD does not end in Tommy's masochistic acceptance of his role as victim; it ends in hope for a new life. And if the final scene is a symbolic drowning, it is also a symbolic rebirth out of water. I, myself, agree about the ambiguous ending, but like most

of the critics, I think it can also mean the release from masochism and alienation, the acceptance of his true self and of humankind. Before the ending, we find Wilhelm thinking: "There is a larger body, and from this you cannot be separated... There truth for everybody may be found, and confusion is only - only temporary. (My italics) Wilhelm gets the idea of the 'larger body' in an underground corridor, a place he hates and where he reads the words 'Sin No More'.

> And in the dark tunnel, in the haste, heat and darkness which disfigure and make freaks and fragments of nose and eyes and teeth, all of a sudden, unsought, a general love for all these imperfect and lurid-looking people burst out in Wilhelm's breast. He loved them.[57]

SD is, thus, one more of Bellow's works which can be tallied with our emergent pattern: we have followed Tommy Wilhelm who is alienated and immersed in his masochism - a world he, himself, created. Then he approaches death, drowning in his own tears to release from masochism and embrace his "true soul" and the"larger body" from which he cannot be separated.

To conclude I shall add a note from Clayton's about the author: SD

> is not a novel expressing the author's masochism, but a novel about a masochist. There is, to be sure, a persecuted little man here, but as in DM and V, it is a self-persecuted individual, created with the full awareness of the author. In other words, this is a far different thing from the authorial self-pity and masochism which Harvey Swados feels and attacks in Jewish writers.[58]

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CHAPTER SIX

HENDERSON THE RAIN KING

Henderson the Rain King (1959) appears to be a comic version of Bellow's previous novels. "In a sense," says Clayton, "Henderson is a caricature of all Bellow's characters who seek salvation."[1] Eugene Henderson is fifty-five, a huge man of immense physical strength and bad teeth. As the name Eugene implies, he is "of noble race": "his great-grand-father was secretary of State, his great-uncles were ambassadors to England and France, and his father was the famous scholar Willard Henderson who wrote that book on the Albigensians, a friend of William James and Henry Adams."[2] His father's fortune of three million dollars has enabled him to choose the kind of life he wants to lead. His choice is to raise pigs. He makes of his estate "a pig kingdom with pig houses on the lawn and in the flower garden."[3] But neither pigs nor his marriage to Frances and later to Lily is enough.

Like Augie March, Henderson is in quest and suffers from an inner voice that says incessantly, "I want!" So, when his old housekeeper, Miss Lenox, dies of heart attack in the kitchen, he decides to leave for Africa, leaving his wife and children. A faithful guide, Romilayu, takes him to the remote tribe of the Arnewi, whose chief, Itelo, has been educated in Beirut. Henderson is welcome, although the land of the Arnewi has been stricken by what is referred to as a curse, which is a drought during which most of the cattle have died. A large reservoir of water is still full, but thousands of frogs bar the Arnewi from using it. Henderson immediately takes up the cause and tries to impress by his deeds. While he embibes the wise words of old Queen Willatale who teaches him "grun-tu-molani" - that is, man wants to live, all creatures want to live - he plots the desctruction of the frogs.

He constructs a bomb of flashlight case, shoelace and Band-Aid and plants it in the cistern. He succeeds in killing the frogs but destroys also the cistern and all the water is lost. Then he moves in shame and Romilayu takes him to the Wariri who capture the two visitors like enemies, before Henderson is allowed to see the king. King Dahfu is also a well educated man and knows something of medicine as well as philosophy. He and Henderson soon develop mutual admiration and friendship. The next day Henderson watches ceremonies to induce rain and tries to show again his powers: he attempts to move the gigantic idol Mummah that no native was strong enough to move. He succeeds and becomes the Rain King. Whereupon Amazons chase him through a cloudburst and pound him, throw him into the mud and leave him, finally "in my coat of earth, like a giant turnip."[4]

Dahfu then acquaints Henderson with the lioness Atti and promises he can redeem Henderson by teaching him to appreciate and imitate the lioness. Henderson roars and walks on all fours. Dahfu is killed when he tries to capture a lion which is supposed to contain the spirit of his father Gmilo. After that Henderson runs from the tribe bringing back with him a lion cub, containing the spirit of Dahfu. Claiming to be reconciled to reality, Henderson is, at the end, returning home, promising to be a better husband and to start belated medical training. When the plane stops at Newfoundland, he runs and leaps around the plane in the snow, holding in his arms an orphan who is being sent to live with some relatives in Nevada.

Richard Chase believes that with the publication of HRK Saul Bellow confirms one's impression that he is just about the best novelist of his generation.[5] Henderson resembles Augie March, since, like the latter, he is on a pilgrimage searching for something. But Cohen draws some distinctions: "While the intent of Augie's and Henderson's quest is the same, the outward form differs." Cohen ex-

plains further that in AM the gravity of the undertaking is seldom minimized, its speculative definition seldom undermined, and the earnestness of the seeker seldom wavering. To avoid the monotony of an identical search for essentials, Bellow places Henderson's mission in the context of a whimsical fantasy. "Here ... established truths from previous novels vie with recent travesties, and Henderson himself vacillates between commitment and clowning." Cohen concludes that "HRK is clearly Bellow's most full-blown comic novel. The dreaded nightmare experiences of the earlier realistic novels are transformed into the playful and dreamlike episodes of romance."[6]

Like Cohen, Clayton sees HRK as "the thousandth retelling of Don Quixote," and compares it to SD:

> Both heroes begin as alienatees, both are prepared during the progress of the novel for a partial return to community. Both have to learn to plunge into the here-and-now, to seize reality as it is. But HRK is a comic version of the quest, a romance-satire on the American quixotic self who rebels against life's terms and, like Augie, demands a special fate.[7]

Brigitte shares the same opinion but stresses also that the book calls forth certain doubts about the level of parody. Two aspects of "the book stress the serious concern underlying the comic surface: the nature of the revelations through objects and colors that Henderson shares with most of Bellow's other protagonists, and the conjuring powers attributed to the imagination..."[8] Henderson is therefore a recognizable Bellow character. As Donald Markos puts it, "in the character of Henderson himself we find both the destructive symptoms of alienation as well as a potential vitality for regeneration."[9]

The considerations above are meant, firstly, to remind us that HRK is one more of Bellow's remarkable achievements, different from the other books especially on the level of parody. Secondly, they allow us to carry ahead our study for - as Irving Malin main-

tains - "similar themes, characters and images" are employed.[10] Clayton connects the two ideas: "It appears that in writing HRK Bellow consciously decided to plunge his character into the Darkness. But with laughter."[11](My italics)

Henderson shows up almost as a prototype of the alienated man who is unable to live committed with society, with family and with himself, trying to withdraw from everybody and everything, even himself. In a word, he attempts to flee from reality. Like Joseph he is unable to keep a good relationship and continually harasses in a dozen of ways family, friends, acquaintances and community with his impredictable, irrational and often violent behavior. He first retires to the country but there too "I was adjusted to a bad life." He raises pigs from which his only pleasure comes from their annoying presence to family and neighbors. "So I said, or my demon said for me, 'I'm going to start breeding pigs.' And after these words were spoken I knew that if Goldstein had not been a Jew I might have said cattle and not pigs."[12]

When he breaks a leg he walks for months on crutches and hits everyone who crosses his path, man or beast. "With the bulk of a football player and the colour of a gipsy, swearing and crying out and showing my teeth and shaking my head - no wonder people got out of my way."[13] He has divorced his first wife Frances and now gives Lily - his second wife - hell. He treats her as a stranger like the rest. He raves at her in public and swears at her in private. Lately Henderson threatens Lily he is going to blow his brains out. He actually fires his forty-five automatic at his cat and, as he is shouting over a petty disagreement, he sees the elderly maid succumb at a heart attack. Henderson admits he is "very fierce in character" and even his pigs are afraid of him.[14] The pigs, however, seem to warn him of his alienation from life, since he continually recalls

Daniel's admonishment to King Nebuchadnezzar: "They shall drive thee from among men, and thy dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field."[15]

Unable to get along with the living he spends many hours alone in his room seeking to reach his dead father by playing on his father's violin. "But the violin and the singing," says Galloway, "do not relieve his frustrated feeling that he is only another of the countless persons without a station in life."[16] So he decides to take a trip to Africa - which may be a mental trip to his dark interior - trying "to leave certain things behind."[17]

He buys a one-way-ticket and soon separates also from the other fellows of the expedition. He asks Romilayu to take him as far as possible, since he believes the farther the better to find out the answer to the ceaseless voice in his heart that said "I want, I want, oh, I want!"[18] But his 'I want', as always in Bellow's fiction, says Clayton, "alienates Henderson from community and makes impossible the redemption he seeks."[19] Like Bellow's other h e r o e s, Henderson is a great "avoider". Leaving for Africa he describes himself:

> A millionare wanderer and wayfarer. A brutal man driven into the world. A man who fled his own country, settled by his forefathers. A fellow whose heart said 'I want, I want'. Who played the violin in despair, seeking the voice of angels. Who had to burst the spirit's sleep or else.[20]

Insulated, "dying of misery and boredom" like his predecessors, Henderson is aflicted with the disease of alienation and of masochism. Wherever he goes he carries all the sorrows of his life, for he cannot separate from his self. He realizes this with grief:

> 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 the 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 drunkennees, my prejudices, my brutality, my teeth, my face, my soul! I have to cry, 'No, no, get back, curse you, let me alone!' But how can they let me alone? They belong to me, they are mine, and they pile into me from all sides. It turns into chaos.[21]

Feeling guilt, like Joseph, Asa and Tommy, at being a beneficiary, Henderson cannot accept the beauty of his estate, the moments of serenity he could find in it:

> When the air moves the brilliant flowers move too in the dark green beneath the trees... I am there and I am looking for trouble. The crimson begonias, and the dark green and the radiant green and the spice that pierces and the sweet gold and the dead transformed, the brushing of the flowers on my undersurface are just misery to me. They make me crazy with misery. To somebody these things may have been given, but that somebody is not me in the red velvet robe.[22] (My italics)

Guilty and unable to take the here-and-now he feels like an intruder, a displaced person. Clayton says that "he must run to Africa to escape his sense of intrusion... Henderson sees himself as sinful and unworthy of his place."[23] Recognizing his displacement, the masochistic Henderson also despises himself as a "pig man" an even regards himself as inferior in value to his pigs: "Tax wise the pigs were eaten. They made ham and gloves and gelatine and fertilizer. What did I make? Why, I made a sort of trophy, I suppose. A man like me may become something like a trophy." And he painfully searches for an answer to his feelings of uselessness, to get rid of the bad stuff in him. But that does not help, and his grief only flourishes, since "rude begets rude, and blows, blows; at least in my case; it not only begot but it increased. Wrath increased with wrath."[24]

The masochistic necessity to put himself down makes Henderson claim he is "a regular bargain basement of deformities."[25] "I may be nothing but an old failure, having muffed just about everything I ever put my hand to," he says, and "I can't name three things in my whole life that I did right."[26] He has himself "down for no-

thing but a bum" who has done "a hell of a lot of things" and therefore cannot "survive without disfigurement."[27] Such statements and especially that old prophecy of Daniel to Nebuchadnezzar make Henderson imply that he is not entirely fit for human companionship. In a word, Henderson worships inflicting suffering upon himself and claims that nobody can suffer like him. Like Augie, he is exuberant on the surface but guilty on the inside.

But here also the other aspect of the masochistic striving shows up even stronger than in the previous characters: at the bottom Henderson strives for greatness and believes that suffering ennobles him. "Since I am a suffering type of man anyhow, I am glad at least it served a purpose for a change." He feels pride at the thought that nobody in the world can suffer quite like him.[28] Thus, he seeks prestige by making of himself a scapegoat. Yet, again as in DM, AM and others, the desire for individual greatness reflects Henderson lack of self acceptance and rejecting of the reality of human limitation. Ordinary humans die, so Henderson tries to escape death, or at least to make it "more remote" by attempting to magnify himself and seeking after immortality. It is worth saying that if Henderson's self-debasement sounds funny, his running from the absoluteness of death makes of him a regular clown.

As he is a survivor of World War II, he is convinced that he is "unkillable." The demand "I want, I want" that consumes his heart makes him feel "from his soul that he has got to carry his life to a certain depth," for he shall "live and not die." Like Charlie in HG, Henderson has never been able to convince himself the dead are utterly dead, therefore he plays the violin to communicate with his dead mother and father.[29] Cohen remarks: "A ludicrous victim of his psychic inelasticity, he spends the greatest portion of his time trying to flee from death."[30] Yet his attempt to reach the deceased

is interrupted by a fresh encounter with Miss Lenox lying on the floor, and he is reminded of the grave:

> 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... While something still is - now! For the sake of all, get out![31] (My italics)

Henderson is, thus, prompted to make a move. He seeks to outdistance death by buying a one-way ticket to Africa. Then he gets clean away from everything and after several days he sees "no human footprints" anymore, as if he, too, were leaving his humanness behind. He feels he is entering the past, "the prehuman past." He loses count of the time. As he reaches the Arnewi village he feels like Adam in Paradise, for he describes the land using terms as "glitter," "gold," "light," "brilliant," "radiant," and "sparkling." "I have a funny feeling from it," says Henderson. "Hell, it looks like the original place. It must be older than the city of Ur... I have a hunch this spot is going to be very good for me."[32] But unlike the role of Adam he assumes that of divinity: "They were obliged to come forward and confess everything to us, and ask whether we knew the reason for their trouble."[33] Dutton states that Henderson's choice of these words "indicates a presumption of his possessing qualities of divinity."[34] And, like God on Mount Sinai, Henderson does announce his arrival by setting fire to a bush with his lighter. In other words Cohen says that Henderson appoints himself as "the administrator of death."[35] He wants to prove he deserves to live:

> And my idea was that when I had performed my great deed against the frogs, then the Arnewi would take me to their hearts. Already I had won Itelo, and the Queen had a lot of affection for me, and Mtalba wanted to marry me, and so what was left was only to prove (and the opportunity was made to order; it couldn't have suited my capacities better) that I was deserving.[36]

Cohen adds that "by letting 'fall the ultimate violence' upon the

detested frogs, he deludes himself into thinking he is immune to such violence and can therefore relish what he is doing. He feels a "different person" with "some powerful magnificence not human."[37] Anticipating successful results from his ingenious contribution he gloats: "This is going to be one of my greatest days." His soul rises with the water and he cries to himself:"'Hallelujah! Henderson, you dumb brute, this time you've done it!'"[38]

When his greatest day turns out to be a disaster he is still unable to turn back to reality, to accept himself and quit his fabrication of unreality. Like Augie he goes on pursuing a better fate, for "at home I'd be a dead man."[39] He leaves the Arnewi in disgrace and humiliation, still fighting against himself: "Oh my body, my body! Why have we never really got together as friends? I have loaded it with my vices, like a raft, like a barge. Oh, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?"[40]

Although Henderson is not able to avoid death, he seems to forget soon his failure with the Arnewi. Among the Wariri he tries again to get released from mortality. To king Dahfu he says:

> Your Highness, I really do not wish to live by any law of decay. Just tell me, how long has the world got to be like this? Why should there be no hope for suffering? It so happens that I believe something can be done, and this is why I rushed out into the world as you have noted.[41]

Dahfu, king of the Wariri, is perhaps meant to symbolize the fully integrated human being, someone that resembles God. Henderson in a way envies him. "He seemed all easy, and I all limitation," says Henderson. And later he adds:

> I stood there, half deaf, half blind, with my throat closing and all the sphincters shut. Meanwhile the king had taken one of those easy position of his, and was resting on his elbow. He had such a relaxed way about him, and every moment of his earthly life the extra shadow of brilliance was with him - the sign of an intenser gift of being.[42]

Before the king he reasons with himself that some people find satisfaction in "being." Others are taken up with "becoming." "Being people have all the breaks. Becoming people are very unlucky, always in a tizzy." This is the kind of situation Henderson cannot bear. He wants to fly high, so he complains to the king: "King, I am a Becomer. Now you see your situation is different. You are a Be-er. I've just got to stop Becoming. Jesus Christ, when am I going to BE? I have waited a hell of a long time."[43]

Henderson thinks his opportunity to Be, to become like Dahfu and to achieve real greatness before the Wariri people has appeared. During their ceremony to induce rain, the strongest man of the tribe - Turombo - is not able to lift the giant wooden goddess Mummah, therefore he volunteers to move it. "I still couldn't pass up this opportunity to do and to distinguish myself," says Henderson. "Here was my chance. I knew I could do this."[44] Cohen sees again his extraordinary feat of lifting Mummah "not only as a means of distinguishing himself but also as a bid for immortality."[45] In a way Henderson "wrestles with God and wins," says Porter.[46] Because of that he becomes the Rain King. He is so gladdened by what he has done that his whole body is filled with soft heat, "with soft and sacred light." The sensations of illness he had experienced since morning are all converted into their opposites. His fever is transformed into jubilation. His spirit is awake and it welcomes life anew.[47]

Yet the fever that has caught the alienated and masochistic Henderson does not allow him to realize that he is in a balloon inflated by the longings of his ideal constructions and which is at the point of bursting. So, after letting Henderson get at the top, Bellow makes him fall and touch the ground of his reality again, like the other heroes. In his article "Reality and the Hero," Daniel Hughes writes that below the comic surface of HRK "a serious purgation takes

place." He will turn home in triumph but first he has "to become naked."[48] Lifting Mummah he gets the title of "Sungo" - Rain King of the Wariri, but he does not know the consequences: the tribe undresses him and he is left naked. "I was dry, I was numb, I was burning... I thought I would give a cry and fall and perish of shame."[49] He must run a hard course through the town. His feet are lacerated and cut over the hot stones. He is sunk in a pond and in the mud. Then, on his knees he is struck until the rain, which he feels like the deluge and the end, falls over the Wariri and over his body.

Subsequently Dahfu leads him downward to the cage of the lioness Atti where he faces the darkness without which he wouldn't deserve to see light anew. On his way down he sees a staircase descending. It is black ahead. From the darkness rises a corrupt smell. He extends both arms but finds no rail or wall and has no alternative except to follow downward. A small passage and narrower stairs lead him to the bottom "the last few steps being of earth and the bases of the wall themselves mixed with soil."[50] It is like a grave and the snarling of the lion is the voice of death. It is here that Henderson is required to restore the full consciousness of his own nature. Following the lioness' lessons he gets down on his hands and knees and roars like a lion:

> 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... This was where my heart had sent me with its clamour. This is where I ended up.[51]

His roaring is still choked but the king says it is natural, as he has "such a lot to purge."[52] When Henderson can do no more he falls flat on his face. If such lessons were not enough for Henderson "to burst the spirit's sleep," there is, on top of it all, Dahfu's death which "has hurt me too much. I am stricken down and I can't function at all. This has broken me."[53]

After Dahfu's death Henderson is supposed to be the king. But he and Romilayu manage to escape. And after several days of agonizing travel on foot and of subsisting on worms and locusts they are on the way home. Entering in a kind of self examination, Henderson, like Joseph, senses he had been looking for something eternal, because he could not bear to be so cheap. Maybe he should have stayed at home. Maybe he should have learned "to kiss the earth" as he has done now. And he concludes: "I'm not what I thought I was."[54]

In a letter that could not be delivered to Lily we feel Henderson is changed. He knows that he will never "leave the body of this death." He understands he had tried to avoid death and in so doing had avoided life: "I wanted to raise myself into another world." He senses he needs"human voices and intelligence." He realizes that commitment and brotherhood must be his answer. "I had a voice that said, I want, I want, I? It should have told me <u>she</u> wants, <u>he</u> wants, <u>they</u> want." He promises Lily "everything is going to be different from now on."[55] Despite the apparent ridiculousness of his decision, he determines to enter medical school and learn to serve humanity by healing.

On the journey home he is attracted by a small orphan who is being sent to live with relatives in Nevada. When the plane lands briefly - significantly in Newfoundland - Henderson gathers the boy up in his arms to give him something of the warmth and joy that he now feels for life. Slipping on the ice, he runs around the plane exultantly:

> I held him close to my chest. He didn't seem to be afraid that I would fall with him. While to me it was like medicine applied, and the air, too; it also was a remedy... Laps and laps I galloped around the shining and riveted body of the plane... I guess <u>I felt it was my turn now to move</u>, and so went running - leaping, leaping, pounding, and tingling over the pure white lining of the grey Arctic silence.[56] (My italics)

For Clayton, the orphan is "an image of his (Henderson's) true self, the child he had been and had become alienated from."[57] Porter says that the scene shows

> the fully regenerate Henderson joyously celebrating the new life that he has discovered. His fluid, lion-like motion contrasts with the stillness of the landscape and the rigidity of the plane. It is a dance of life, his inner vision transforming the winter scene into the promise of spring... The place is Newfoundland, covered with the pure white snow; The time is morning, Sunday, the eve of Thanksgiving week. The scene is a riot of affirmation, a powerful celebration of all that is positive in life.[58]

We have, thus, followed Henderson's journey which, aside from its peculiar trajectory, has much in common with Bellow's other creations. Like Joseph, Asa, Augie or Wilhelm, we see that Henderson is alienated and masochistic. Such diseases make him search for another world, which is ultimately his own creation, to flee the harsh reality of his humanness. But when he is at the top of his dream, Henderson must descend and "kiss the earth" of his limitation in order to get back to the living.

Earlier in this chapter (p. 99-100), we have drawn some parallels between HRK and the other novels, namely AM and SD, to chart some similarities and differences. And throughout the development we have seen that, like Joseph, Asa, Augie, Wilhelm - not to name the later heroes Herzog, Sammler or Charlie - Henderson is uncommitted: an "avoider" like his fictional brethren. He is bowed under burdens - a victim - and despises himself as useless, but, like them, he searches for a superior life through ideal constructions within which he hopes also to get rid of death. At last, again like his predecessors, Henderson is immersed in darkness, in purgatory, where he is made ready to return to communion. The main difference between HRK and the other books is that, unlike the latter, HRK is worked out chiefly on the level of parody, so that Henderson seems often a bit quixotic. It is especially this comic tone and the picaresque

style so clearly that of romance that cause Clayton to observe that it is "difficult to take the transformation seriously... We see desire to change, symbols of change; we are told that the change has occurred. But we do not see the change."[59]

This is in a way the same charge we have found in the previous novels, that is, the resolution is completely internal. We do not see the hero's new, good intentions in action. There are other critics who take a harsh view of the 'happy end' of HRK. Baumbach says it is "at least in part ironic. Otherwise why have Henderson's affirmation of life take place on a lifeless wasteland?"[60] Tanner also states that, though Henderson "learns many new ideas, it is hard to feel, at the end, ... that his ebullient and tormenting individualism will ever be really surmounted or transformed."[61] And Campbell maintains that "we are left with intimations, but these intimations remain unstated against the background of an eternal silence. What Henderson has found that has burst his spirit's sleep can be intimated and perhaps intuited, but it cannot be more definitely stated."[62]

We may recall here what we have discussed on chapter three (pp.61-66), that is, Bellow's ambiguity, his moral intention, and the constant touch of humor in his work. We saw then that, according to Rovit, the habit of ambiguous conclusions may reflect Bellow's indecisiveness in his moral position. With many other critics we agree that Bellow's intention has remained intensely moral; that does not imply he has fallen into melodrama bacause the treatment of the constant pattern changes. In the case of HRK it comes out of parody. So we could say, with Rovit, that Bellow is a "moral ironist." On the other hand we have also said that Bellow's humor has contributed to include ambivalence to the end of the novels. But here - as in the other novels - Bellow's humor has certainly been a means of

setting himself beyond his alienated and masochistic characters.

I believe that, through HRK, Bellow has once more succeeded in showing his final belief in human being, that is, "rather than endorsing alienation as a life style, Bellow emphasizes Henderson's basic decency, his desire to be a good man, to take some constructive action, to live for something more than himself."[63]

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CHAPTER SEVEN

H E R Z O G

Saul Bellow's sixth novel - Herzog - was published in 1964. The book is chiefly a compulsive reworking of the past by Moses Elkanah Herzog, who has been deeply hurt. In the 'present' action of the novel we may follow Herzog who decides, at the end of the school term in New York, to flee from his mistress, Ramona, to some friends at Martha's Vineyard. Once there he decides to return immediately to New York, without staying a night on the island, and continues writing letters. He never mails his letters but he writes endlessly to the living and dead. After spending the following evening with Ramona, Herzog goes to consult with a lawyer and wanders in to observe a series of courtroom scenes. Then he flies to Chicago, goes to his stepmother's house, takes his father's gun and some Czarist money. Next he comes close to murdering his ex-wife Madeleine and her lover Valentine Gersbach - his ex-best friend. Finding Gersbach bathing his daughter June*, Herzog has not the heart for murder, so he departs unseen. He takes his daughter June to an aquarium the next morning, has an auto accident and appears before a police court for carrying a concealed weapon. Then he flies to the country, where he has a house. The story ends as his brother Willy and his sweetheart Ramona come to visit him.

The bulk of the novel is a flashback which, although fragmented, reveals the story of Herzog's former life. Mainly because he was bored, he had divorced his first wife Daisy, who now takes care of their son, Marco, and had given up a respectable existence as university professor and scholar of some promise. After a series of love affairs he married Madeleine Pontritter, the beautiful and in-

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* This name is spelled either "June" or "Junie" throughout the novel.

telligent daughter of a once-famous empresario. She wanted Herzog to concentrate wholly on his scholarly work, so he bought a house in the Berkshires, in Western Massachusetts. At that time Madeleine betrayed Herzog with his best friend Gersbach. Then, because she could not bear to be buried in a village, away from intellectual life, Madeleine insisted that Herzog could save their marriage only by moving to Chicago and taking their friends, the Gersbachs, with them. Once there she insisted that Herzog see a psychiatrist, and saw him herself at the doctor's request. Although Herzog still loved her, Madeleine announced her decision for divorce. Herzog went to Europe to recover from his misery, returned to New York worse than before and, only then, found out that Madeleine and Gersbach were lovers since they had been living in the country. Besides being betrayed and deprived of his daughter, Herzog was ignominiously bullied and used by his psychiatrist, his lawyer and his doctor; he was unable to pursue his academic profession and financially desperate. It is understandable, then, that "late in spring Herzog had been overcome by the need to explain, to have it out, to justify, to put in perspective, to clarify, to make amends." [1]

Critics' general agreement allows us to tally H with the emergent pattern we have tried to develop so far. They also remind us of what we have said at the end of chapter three and in the following chapter's, that is, the pattern may be consistent, but the treatment changes, so that Bellow's work has not been consistently a moral melodrama. In his article "My Friend, the Late Moses Herzog," Maurice Samuel asserts, for instance, that Bellow chose "the Joycean mode of narration" for H. Samuel asserts that "from a certain point of view, Ulysses and H may be regarded as two major modern studies in Jewish assimilation." Among other comparisons between the hero/or anti-hero of Ulysses - Leopold Bloom - and Herzog, Samuel states

that both are "inveterate thinking men" and "they have in common a strain of masochism."[2] According to Forrest Read, H "has the tragic dimension which Joyce defined, but it is bathed in what Joyce called the perfect end of art, joy, which is most fully realized in comedy." Read goes on to say that

> One might call it (Bellow's voice) a combination of Cervantes's nostalgic voice and the agonized voice of Shakespeare's Hamlet, which is driving willy-nilly toward the future. I feel, as I read the book, that Bellow has opened up a new quixotism, a new hamletism, weighted with and weighted down by the very world which impinges upon us.[3]

For Opdahl, "Bellow finds drama ... in detail, thought and characterization, but most of all in the act of reminiscence."[4] Earl Rovit also points out that this novel is a novel which takes place, after all, in the mind of Herzog and, after saying that "Bellow successfully persuades his reader that reading H is an act of moral consequence," he shows that "this is a highly comic novel of ideas..."[5]

Most of the other critics a g r e e that H e r z o g represents a kind of summary or continuation of Bellow's earlier work. Let's record only some statements: Tanner says that H is, in many ways, Bellow's most impressive book to date and "seems to summarize and contain all the questions, problems, feelings, plights and aspirations worked over in the previous novels, and it follows them to their extreme conclusions. Herzog himself is clearly a descendant, if not a summation of Bellow's other main characters - worried, harassed, brought down, messed up."[6] Cohen details and complements Tanner's idea stating that

> like Joseph, Leventhal and Wilhelm, those lachrymose obstructed heroes of Bellow's victim literature, his vulnerable psyche is assailed with specious "wise counsel and good precept." His head is throbbing with painful recollections and warring insights. But like Augie and Henderson, those plucky challengers of Bellow's rebel literature, Herzog can "ease his disgusted heart" by calling into play his resilient sense of humor. He can eventually unload his weighty egotism and affirm the value of community.[7]

Thus, it seems that, without being a recapitulation of his earlier ideas, Bellow unites in H the best of his former work: the meditative, highly ratiocinative heroes of DM, V and SD on one side; and on the other, the comic, even rebel heroes of AM and HRK. The same ideas are shared by Guttmann, Harper, Galloway, Brigitte, Clayton and others.

Because of some critical misunderstanding of the novel, it is worth saying with Clayton that "Herzog is not Bellow. In spite of difficulties, Bellow has maintained ironic distancing, creating a character whose development is typical of his fiction."[8] It is also Clayton's thought that leads us back to the development of our thematic. He writes:

> The ideas of the novel must be read as the ideas of an alienatee, a self created victim - a guilt ridden masochist like Tommy Wilhelm. Clearly Herzog is alienated from other people.[9]

Within this drama of alienation Herzog lacks commitment, like his predecessors. As Cohen puts it, "he is blinded to ordinary reality and the existence of other human beings."[10] Herzog is "marginal" in the practical world and says that from civility he now has some pain in his belly. He thinks he has more enemies and hatreds than anyone could easily guess from his thoughtful expression. So, as the night-school term comes to an end, Herzog convinces himself that his wisest move is to get away from Ramona too. He decides to go to the Vineyard but once there he flees again from the friends who invite him to stay in their house. He is "getting away from all burdens, practical questions" and argues that he is "confused," "muddy," "feverish, damaged angry, quarrelsome and shaky." So, at times, he wants "to creep into hiding, like an animal."[11]

Therefore, besides being divorced from two wives, Herzog is "divorced" from all the others and from himself. He recalls that he has quit his university post and his second scholarly work, which

promised so much, is a chaos of old notes. In the country, with Madeleine, he takes on hackwork to raise money, while his desk is covered with unpaid bills. University presses send manuscripts for his professional judgement, but they lie in bundles, unopened. He picks up the oboe, but his music is absent-minded and sad. He realizes he is going under. His self-examination summarizes the whole situation:

> ... he admitted that he had been a bad husband twice. Daisy, his first wife, he had treated miserably... To his son and daughter he was a loving but bad father. To his own parents he had been an ungrateful child. To his country an indifferent citizen. To his friends an egotist. With love, lazy. With brightness, dull. With power, passive. With his own soul, evasive.[12]

Herzog's estrangement and withdrawal is emphasized by his engaging in imaginary communication with people here and hereafter. Clayton says that "Herzog is corresponding really with the president and the bishop of his own mind; he is in an imaginary, not actual community." Clayton goes on to say that

> Until Herzog's transformation, his consciousness is composed of words, he is living in words, not in the world, and the letters, far from attaching him to other people, make them more distant and unreal.[13]

Like Clayton, Cohen states that Herzog "ends up erecting verbal structures which only further distort the view of the world ... and further separate him from people..."[14] We see again, as we have said in chapter two, that the hero's thought plays a large role in his way to alienation and masochism. "He is condemned to perpetual compulsive introspection," says Tanner, "the victim of endless nagging cerebration. He is the silent monologist 'par excellence'."[15] And Sidney Finkelstein writes:

> He thinks of people he knows, family and friends, either with an alienated revulsion or with detachment, as if to imply that even the well-meaning among them are in a strange world different from his, and can neither understand him nor make real contact with him.[16]

"Victim of his own interior monologue," as Tanner puts it,

Herzog is enlisted among Bellow's masochistic heroes.[17] Cohen writes that

> like Tommy Wilhelm, he is another 'schlemiel' that "agent of cultivated disability... (who) runs toward his goal over an obstacle course where he himself is responsible for strewing about most of the obstacles."[18]

Like Wilhelm, Herzog often realizes he has made "still another characteristic mistake"[19] and, considering his entire life, he has mismanaged everything, everything." His life is, as the phrase goes, ruined. As a "narcissistic," "masochistic," "anachronistic" and "depressive" character he asks "to be beaten" and lends "his attackers strength,"[20] so, "what he was about to suffer, he deserved; he had sinned long and hard; he had earned it. This was it."[21]

If Margaret was a weapon for Wilhelm's punishment, Madeleine is Herzog's 'desired' hell. He has a masochistic need for the love of those who reject him and submits passively to them: "There was a flavour of subjugation in his love for Madeleine. Since she was domineering, and since he loved her, he had to accept the flavour that was given."[22] It is surely Madeleine who rides him after their marriage; her will is triumphant. He resigned from the university, bought the house in the country, moved out again - everything because "she wanted." He is shoved out of his house also because she wanted. In her hands he has lost the right for an answer. Her choice is "to trip him, bring him low, knock him sprawling and kick out his brains with a murderous bitch foot."[23] And as "she jumped at him with her fists, not pummelling womanlike, but swinging like a street fighter with her knuckles, ... Herzog turned and took these blows on his back. It was necessary. She was sick."[24] Madeleine's cry is "it'll be these rulers or nothing."[25]

"Certainly Bellow does not mean us to believe that Herzog was unaware of what was going on," says Clayton. "We must believe

that he unconsciously needed to be the ground-under-heel cuckold."[26] Even after Madeleine demands the divorce with her theatrical genius,

> he still thought perhaps that he would win her by the appeal of passivity, of personality, win on the ground of being, after all, Moses - Moses Elkanah Herzog - a good man, and Madeleine's particular benefactor. He had done everything for her - everything![27]

Herzog, himself, realizes that "such idiotic passivity or masochistic crawling or cowardice" are "terrible decadence. Loathsome."[28] And if "you want to win by sacrificing yourself ... it's hard to imagine a more masochistic situation."[29]

In chapter two we have said that Bellow's alienated and masochistic characters often torture themselves with self-frustrating sexual behavior. We can see that Herzog is perhaps the best example among them. Clayton deals extensively with the problem of Herzog's sexual masochism. He points out that Herzog's sin is essentially sexual and that "sex is terribly guilt-producing." It "leads to death," so Herzog must wash his hands."[30] Madeleine is here again the main instrument for his suffering. Herzog complains his sexual power has been damaged by her. "She has her heel in his groin," states Clayton. "She wishes to do him in, she votes for his non-existence. She (like Margaret, Tommy Wilhelm's wife) wants to bleed him, to take all his money, or symbolically, to castrate him."[31] Herzog believes that all psychiatric opinion agrees that a woman who squanders her husband's money is "determined to castrate him."[32] Women "eat green salad and drink human blood."[33] Madeleine's aunt charges Herzog with selfishness, because of"the ejaculatio praecox."

But it is not only Madeleine who seems to discharge "a gun" to castrate Herzog. He sees even the warm, gentle Ramona as a "devoradora":

> She entered a room provocatively, swaggering slightly, one hand touching her thigh, as though she carried a knife in her garter belt... He thought often of that imaginery knife when he watched her in her underthings.[34]

Herzog complains he is a prisoner of sex, but we shall emphasize again that he is chiefly a prisoner of his thought. His masochistic mind is murdering itself, since it creates and recreates situations to cause pain. "All the while his heart is contemplating aching."[35] As Tanner puts it, "the prison he has to break out of is not so much society as his own head. The enemy is inside."[36] Like Wilhelm and Leventhal, Herzog relishes his heartache:

> When a man's breast feels like a cage from which all the dark birds have flown - he is free, he is light. And he longs to have his vultures back again. He wants his customary struggles, his nameless empty works, his anger, his afflictions and his sins.[37]

But "unlike his tormented fictional brethren,"Cohen observes,"Herzog recognizes the perverse delight he derives from anguish and can see the humor in such masochism."[38] In this aspect Herzog gets close to Henderson. He smiles at Herzog the victim, he calls himself "that suffering joker," he tries to make his lust comical, to show how absurd it all is, "easily the most wretched form of human struggle, the very essence of slavery." His state of being is so curious that he is compelled, himself, to see it - eager, grieving, fantastic, dangerous, crazed and, to the point of death, 'comical'.[39] He charts such an existence with a peculiar account:

> I fall upon the thorns of life, I bleed. And then? I fall upon the thorns of life, I bleed. And what next? I get laid, I take a short holiday, but very soon after I fall upon those same thorns with gratification in pain, or suffering in joy - who knows what the mixture is![40]

Dealing with the other novels we have seen that the 'victim' puts himself down, but secretly raises himself up, because suffering has made him morally superior and suited for good. This way the

alienated hero shows the other side of his masochistic striving. He looks for greatness, creating an ideal world. Herzog also plays by rules which say that the man who suffers more is more special and can claim a certain distinction. He thinks he can understand and improve humanity through his sages speculations about it. He regards himself as "the man on whom the world depended for certain intellectual work, to change history, to influence the development of civilization."[41] And if he grants he is in the wrong he asks "a bit of cooperation in his effort to work towards a meaningful life." As Augie March pursues a better fate and Henderson is driven to transcend human limitation, so Herzog pursues a meaningful life and cares "only about the very highest things," willing to survive "till the chance comes to exert a positive influence." His dream of superiority makes him want "to shine all the time." He is confident he can pass for "a grand-looking-man," so he has "characteristically, obstinately, defiantly, blindly ... tried to be a marvellous Herzog, a Herzog who, perhaps clumsily, (has) tried to live out marvellous qualities vaguely comprehended."[42]

Such attitudes parallel Herzog to Henderson again, for he seems a bit quixotic in his high cravings. His obsession with being an exceptional individual makes him humorous. However, these high cravings - ideal constructions - show like with the previous heroes, Herzog's lack of self-acceptance and his will to flee the reality of death. "To him, perpetual thought of death was a sin," and"knowledge of death makes us wish to extend our lives at the expense of others... this is the root of the strugle for power."[43] As Herzog's mother is dying and, therefore, shows him what death is, he choses "not to read this text" because his heart is "infected with ambition" and hopes that things will change.[44]

Herzog makes also of his intellect and words a means of

avoiding death. Clayton writes: "For Herzog, intellectuality has always been a way of humanizing reality through words so as to stifle the reality of death."[45] His version of the real is a verbal version: "I go after reality with language. Perhaps I'd like to change it all into language." But he comes to realize that he is creating a meager substitute for the real: "I put my whole heart into these constructions. But they are constructions."[46] Later, after his transformation has begun, he recognizes his fear and avoidance: "Did I really believe that I would die when thinking stopped?"[47]

Therefore, Herzog joins Bellow's other heroes who also fall in love with ideal constructions amd tend to live in compulsive, abstract ways. These abstract ways include also the hero's glimpses of religiousness. As we have seen, especially in chapter one and two, these glimpses may still manifest alienation and masochism. With a "yes" and "no", at the same time, Herzog wanders:

> If existence is nausea then faith is an uncertain relief. Or else - be demolished by suffering and you will feel the power of God as he restores you. Fine reading for a depressive!... All who live in despair.(?) And that is the sickness unto death. (?) It is that a man refuses to be what he is. (?) [48]

In another passage he confesses to his priestess Ramona that he thought he had entered into a secret understanding with life to spare him the worst. "On the side, I was just flirting a little with the transcendent."[49] And in one of his letters he writes:

> 'Synthesize or perish'. Is that a new law? But when you see what strange notions, hallucinations, projections, issue from the human mind you begin to believe in Providence again.[50]

Thus, it seems that for Herzog - like for the other characters we have examined - the glimpses of religiousness may be a refuge for his alienation and masochism.

Herzog is, after all, "sick with abstractions" and, like the other Bellow's heroes he must recover, he must learn to face

reality as it is; Bellow, then, leads him through purgation and reconciliation. The best way is to make him face the crudest reality of all, which is death, a figurative death. Several scenes cumulatively form the turning point of the novel. Carrying his father's gun and vengeance in his heart Herzog looks for his ex-wife Madeleine and her lover Gersbach. But while he watches Gersbach giving his little daughter June a bath "the evil drains out of Herzog's heart with the bath-water," says Forrest Read.[51] While he steps down, he reflects that the human soul is an amphibian and he has touched its sides. The next morning Herzog picks up June for a walk and has an auto accident. His eyes g r o w dark, he faints away and stretches limp, seemingly dead. Schulz sees this scene as Herzog's s y m b o l i c death.[52] Herzog is a r r e s t e d for carrying the gun. Opdahl states that

> the result of his arrest is even more telling, for Herzog finds himself subject in court to the power he once thought himself immune to: "He could now feel for himself what it was like to be in custody. No one was robbed, no one had died. Still he felt the heavy, deadly shadow lying on him." If he had come close to violence in the previous section, he now comes close to being a criminal.[53]

Leaving the courthouse Herzog decides that his foolishness must stop. "He'd leave Chicago immediately, and he'd come back only when he was ready to do June good, genuine good." The situation he has been in is not definitive. "He was merely passing through. Out in the streets, in American society, that was where he did his time."[54] From now on we can see Herzog's attempt toget free from the burden of his mind, his effort toward self-acceptance and acceptance of the others, moving toward commitment. He states: "I really believe that brotherhood is what makes a man human... 'Man liveth not by self alone but in his brother's face.'"[55]

Herzog's attempt to move from selfhood toward brotherhood

makes him will to put some order into his life and, before that, some order into his thoughts, so as to live and complete his assignment. The children needed him. His duty was to live and to look after them. To accomplish his assignment we have Herzog - for the first time - asking for his family's help. His brother Will offers every sort of help and visits him in the country. But his love and affection is directed not only toward the family - children and brother. He also proves his new manhood in his private relations with Ramona. He washes in her bathroom and recalls that "it was obligatory also to wash when you returned from the cemetery."[56] Schulz says that surely this is "a reminiscence calculated to indicate Herzog's own return from the dead, that is, his rebirth."[57] Afterward Herzog listens to Ramona characterize him as one who has experienced the worst sort of morbidity and come through by a miracle. "Here was a man ... who knew what it was to rise from the dead.[58]

Now, in the country, he feels,perhaps for the first time, what it is to be free from Madeleine - from masochism. His servitude is ended, and his heart released from its grisly heaviness and encrustation. He feels confident, cheerful, weirdly tranquil, relieved. He takes upon himself the duty to see reality, his reality. Awareness is his work. This leads him to assert that

> Myself is thus and so, and will continue thus and so.
> And why fight it? My balance comes from instability...
> Must play the instrument I've got.[59]

Opdahl claims that "more than in anything else, Herzog earns his salvation by practical acceptance of the mixture and ambivalence within himself..."[60]

His mind had been the main instrument for struggle toward the ideal constructions to make coherent sense. Now he recognizes and says, like Augie, that he has not been good at it. According to Cohen,

> Herzog comes to understand that "habit, custom, temperament, inheritance and the power to recognize real and human facts have equal weight with ideas." This does not mean that Herzog will never return to his intellectual endeavors, yet we are assured that he will not rely exclusively on solitary intellection and thereby lose his grasp on that ordinary reality. He has already discovered what distortions and strange views such separatism produces.[61]

We can say that, like the other Bellow's characters, Herzog has been an alienated and masochistic hero and that undergoing purgation he starts to re-acquaint himself with the ordinary world, recognizing that he can achieve meaning not in isolation but in the midst of other men. Let's recall Herzog's own words to close our thought. Near the end of the novel he reflects that he is lucky to be such a "throb-hearted character" because this has kept him in contact with the other human beings:

> Luckily for me, I didn't have the means to get too far away from our common life. I am glad of that. I mean to share with other human beings as far as possible and not destroy my remaining years in the same way. Herzog felt a deep ... eagerness to begin.[62]

The chief criticism of H, as well as of Bellow's other novels, is that the story is contained within the mind of the protagonist; therefore, the resolution is completely internal. And Rovit reminds us again of Bellow's ambiguity: "He tells himself that he has accepted the dull brutal fact of existence, but neither he nor we are able to know whether it is affirmation or sheer exhaustion that puts an end to his cerebration." Rovit explains that, as he takes it, this is the result of comedy.[63] And Forrest Read asserts that "H seems to make great claims, but perhaps its comic tone musters sufficient ironies to enable us to feel that exuberance and catharsis can be real."[64] Clayton also doubts that Herzog's transformation is a permanent one, but he points out that

> more than in any other of Bellow's novels we have been given full blown discussions of Bellow's essential beliefs. The defense of man, which has been central in all the novels, is more obviously so here.[65]

Thus, the optimistic end, the end of alienation in H, as in other novels, shows Bellow's belief in human dignity and possibilities, or "his refusal to relinquish a sense of possible individual worth."[66] Last, but not least, we shall recall that Herzog - as the other heroes - is Bellow's instrument for 'defense' and 'refusal'. However, "Saul Bellow has not created an author-surrogate," says Clayton, "but gives us a character who, while he may be extremely similar to the author, is ironically distanced from him."[67]

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8. CONCLUSION

The view we derive after going over eight of Bellow's major novels is that each of them may be charted into an emergent pattern that reflects the hero's alienation and masochism which is purged, so that the hero can re-enter society.

Bellow's hero shows alienation in his detachment from the world. Joseph is alone ten hours a day in a single room. Asa Leventhal is a stranger toward others, toward himself and is under the dread of being the only person in the city without a conscious destination. Augie March ventures into the world, but instead of being committed to others he is committed to himself and his "special fate." Tommy Wilhelm is, like Joseph, unemployed, separated from his wife and children, rejected by his father and tired of others. Henderson is divorced and leaves also his second wife to go to Africa. Herzog is twice divorced and wanders to and fro to creep into hiding like an animal. Mr. Sammler concentrates on his fantasy to fly to the moon. And Charlie Citrine, who is also divorced, stays alone with tons of books, since he claims he does not have a good stomach for human companions. Detachment assumes the varying forms of reflectiveness, idealism, narcissism, messianism - but always it is only another mode of imprisonment within the self.

Bellow's alienated man is essentially masochistic. Guilt feeling and the consequent need to suffer and to fail pursue him like a ghost. He generally makes of people around him instruments for punishment; they are converted into ghosts or opponents. Among them are Allbee in V; Dr. Adler, Margaret and Dr. Tamkin in SD; Madeleine in H and Cantabile in HG. Furthermore the alienated masochistic hero often tortures himself with self-frustrating sexual behavior. Sex is felt as something evil and unclean. He often lives with castrating

women who seem to carry a knife in their garter belts, and the hero feels humiliated because of the "ejaculatio praecox," as in H. Besides that the masochist belittles himself through self accusation. He claims he is "worthless" (V), "deformed and obsessed" (SP); "an ass, an idiot, a lousy a wallowing hippopotamus" (SD); "a regular bargain basement of deformities" (HRK);"one of humanity that can't be numbered" (AM).

Nevertheless, suffering and self-debasement is only one side of the masochistic striving showed by Bellow's alienated hero. He has made himself 'victim' and that attitude precludes dignity. Clayton observes that the hero raises himself up by putting himself down. So, he shows the other side of the masochistic struggle in his attempt to lead a superior life, detached from mortality and human weakness, creating an ideal image of himself. He wants to be freed from the anxious and narrow life of the average, for he believes there is no limit to what he can be (DM, V, SD). The world owes him distinctness and he seeks after a special fate, a meaningful life, willing to shine all the time, even in megalomania (AM, HRK, H).

This distressing search manifests the lack of self-acceptance of Bellow's alienated and masochistic hero. He tries to be "more than human," a "godlike man" to elude the reality of death or, at least, to make it more remote. The hero's sense of religiousness, his glimpses of transcendence, seem also a means of avoiding reality. It seems an easy flight from the reality of human existence. The hero wants to transcend his unsatisfactory humanity (SP), and faith gives him relief (H). He wants "to BE", not to partake the hard situation of "becoming" (HRK). He retreats to pray, not to join his fellow man (DM). He believes in the immortality of the soul because he wants to flee his own death (HG). Therefore, the hero's glimpses of religiousness may be (we recall Klug) a "corrective and an "illusion."

The hero's mental environment is perhaps the most important agent for the creation of his ideal world, since thought often leads him away from true life. On one side he creates 'doubles' to punish himself (DM, V), and on the other his mind is pervaded with "ideal constructions" (DM, H). He mythologizes himself and seeks to overcome impossible conditions (SP). He tries to rise above the limitation of the ordinary forms of common life and stifle the reality of death (H, HG).

But Saul Bellow refuses to abandon his hero in a compulsive search that would only lead to his personal destruction. The author submerges his protagonist in a purgative situation, so as to reconcile him with his true self and true life. This purgation appears as a period of darkness in which the protagonist is surrounded by an environment of death and often must face the figurative death of the false image of himself and the ideal world.

Joseph is surrounded by several persons who are dying and feels his world is crumbling. Leventhal also sees a showdown coming and his final purgation is the attempt of his double - Allbee - to commit suicide by gas. Sammler is internally eaten up and,when his friend dies, he feels he is being destroyed, is melting, floating off. Charlie realizes that, because he has tried to be more than human, to stand apart from his own frailties, he is a little dead himself. Augie falls off a horse, is badly kicked and feels death near. Tommy Wilhelm, weeping at the bier of a stranger, is drowned in his own tears. Henderson is sunk in a pond and deeply hurt by his friend's - King Dahfu's - death. Herzog runs into a car accident and is arrested, feeling the heavy, deadly shadow lying on him.

Through purgation the hero comes to realize that alienation has been destructive and Bellow seems to nudge him back to light. The protagonist, then, attempts to overcome himself, his alienation, so

as to approximate his fellow man. Self-acceptance, the acceptance of others are important steps in the hero's reconciliation. If he finds salvation, it is by practical acceptance of the mixture and ambivalence within himself, making peace with things as they are. He escapes the tyranny of mind and no longer believes the only worthwhile life is a life of thought. The hero realizes he has not done well alone. He recognizes that brotherhood is what makes a man human and feels the necessity to partake it. To remedy what he did wrong, he is prepared to try anything. He wants to reconstruct himself - to share with other human beings and is eager to begin. He is, above all, a person of hope. Confusion seems only temporary, he is merely passing through.

This is the pattern we have tried to show throughout this dissertation, that is, Saul Bellow's heroes withdraw from society because they are alienated and masochistic. On one side they are consumed with guilt, often indeterminate and obsessive. Because of it they need to belittle themselves, to suffer and to fail, even in sex. But the role of victim confers dignity on them, so - on the other side - they pursue a superior life, have glimpses of transcendence and - in the ideal self and world created in their mind - they strive to escape mortality. Then the heroes are led to a purgative situation facing their own frailties. From a more sympathetic point of view, this purgation seems a means of reconciliating them with themselves, with others and with life.

We have insisted from the beginning of this work that this is only one angle from which we can view Bellow's novels, since his own attitude - often ambivalent amd ambiguous - invite different approaches, even contradictory interpretations. We have done justice to Bellow's ambivalence,especially concerning the final solution, which has made some critics complain about Bellow's lack of capacity

for ending his novels. As we have said in chapter one, quoting Rovit, the ambiguous conclusions seem also to reflect "the basic indecisiveness of his (Bellow's) moral position."

But though critics differ in their judgement, the truth is that we do glimpse with the heroes the beauty of a state beyond alienation, a positive ending. I agree, then, with those who charge Bellow with being a moralistic writer, whose hells always have back doors opening to paradise. We have discussed the point in chapter three and concluded that Bellow's intention has remained intensely moral.

If Bellow's novels rather designedly turn toward a happy ending - I mean, an optimistic ending - what could save the author from falling into a consistent "moral melodrama"? As we have said in chapter three, the moral pattern comes out disguised under different forms. The faces and individual circumstances of each hero has varied from novel to novel, because of the expedients of Bellow's dramatic settings. So, the treatment of the pattern is shaped differently. But more important is - to recall Rovit's words - "the mollifying and humanizing effects of humor which is so basic a part of Bellow's craft and life style."[1] Bellow's humor and irony have certainly spread different effects on his work and on the critical attitude toward him. On one side, humor may ease Bellow's moral concern, but on the other, may add richness and feeling to the end of his novels. Rovit appropriately calls Bellow "a moral ironist." Humor and irony seem to be also an important instrument for Bellow to maintain himself distanced from his heroes, as we have also asserted through critics. Each hero is created with the full awareness of the author, and, though sometimes he seems to assume the hero's pain, he maintains ironic distancing.

Reviewing Bellow's work, we are finally struck by his belief in human dignity and possibilities. He does show the movement

toward joy, the dawning recognition that reconciliation is possible. We feel that the transformation is never completely fulfilled. There are tasks and journeys unfinished, resolutions untested. But after all, the affirmative tone of the end seems to reflect that alienation in Bellow's work is only a transitional condition. There is the possibility of a new start in life.

Tanner quotes Bellow who takes issue with the other writers - such as Flaubert, Melville, Dostoyevsky, Lawrence, Proust and Hemingway - who almost sadistically diminish the human image in their work:

> I do not believe that human capacity to feel or do can really have dwindled or that the quality of humanity has degenerated.[2]

I think Tanner's own words, which I make mine, are best fit to conclude my work:

> His (Bellow's) position is dignified - never didactic or glib. It is not folly to stress a need for new positive values - it may be dangerous to become too domiciled in the abyss... Bellow is one of the few writers likely to bring us news of the next "necessary thing," uttering words about the living man to which the living man will keenly listen.[3]

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