SAUL BELLOW'S HERZOG: THE QUEST FOR REALITY

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Leonor Cozzolino

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ABSTRACT

SAUL BELLOW'S HERZOG: THE QUEST FOR REALITY

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This thesis seeks to analyze the crisis of identity in contemporary Western society as manifested in Saul Bellow's Herzog. It discusses Herzog's struggle in relation to his social context, the choices society makes available for him, and his own capacity for defining his individual self under cultural pressures.

Herzog's quest for identity - which he tries to actualize through a partial and temporary identification with religious, philosophical and political patterns - renders his attempts at self-definition futile. His determination to continue striving toward selfhood, even though he is conscious of his inability to reach his goal, arouses in him the feeling of absurdity. His recognition of the absurdity of his quest for identity through abstractions enables him to perceive his own estrangement from concrete reality.

In his desire to recapture his lost sense of reality, Herzog strips himself of his ego-consciousness and of the culturally created image which this consciousness implies. He is able to recognize within himself a universal selfhood.

Through a mystical experience, he feels in harmony with the surrounding system. Thus he achieves insight into the reality of pure selfhood. However, the peculiar emotional state which enables him to apprehend the meaning of life is only temporary. Herzog's insight into reality is followed by his decision to integrate with mankind, which implies a reentry into mundane life and a consequent acceptance of alien standards.

Toward the end of the novel, Herzog reaches a degree of consciousness whereby he is able to recognize and accept the inevitable coexistence of reality and artificiality which, for Bellow, is the core of human destiny.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

A Commentary on the World of Saul Bellow's Fiction

> Man today is confronted with the most fundamental choice; not that between Capitalism or Communism, but that between robotism (of both the capitalist or the communist variety), or Humanistic Communitarian Socialism. Most facts seem to indicate that he is choosing robotism, and that means, in the long run, insanity and destruction. But all these facts are not strong enough to destroy faith in man's reason, good will and sanity. As long as we can think of other alternatives, we are not lost; as long as we can consult together and plan together, we can hope. But, indeed, the shadows are lengthening; the voices of insanity are becoming louder. We are in reach of achieving a state of humanity which corresponds to the vision of our great teachers; yet we are in danger of the destruction of our civilization, or of robotization. A small tribe was told thousands of years ago: 'I put before you life and death, blessing and curse - and you chose life.' This is our choice too.[1]

The closing passage of Erich Fromm's The Sane Society, expresses the main concern reflected in the work of Saul Bellow, namely, man's capacity to overcome the alienating cultural pressures which threaten to annihilate him.

The concept of what it means to be a man has undergone significant changes since the rise of Capitalism in the

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[1] Erich Fromm, The Sane Society, (Fawcett Publications, Inc., Greenwich, Conn., 1969), p. 315

seventeenth century. These changes have largely been determined by a sudden increase in technological progress. Technology has considerably reduced human labor. The limitations of man's role in the production process have aroused in him a feeling of dependency on the forces which have substituted for his own work. His sense of dependency implies a submission to the very forces he has created. This submission leads to man's loss of his sense of reality. The loss of a sense of reality generates the phenomenon of alienation, defined by Fromm as "a mode of expression in which the person experiences himself as alien."[2] Since the alienated individual lives in an unreal world of symbols and archetypes, his concrete self can be overtaken by an ethnic, religious, social or intellectual trait which constitutes a category. The classification of man into categories entails the annihilation of the individual as a unique entity, since millions of men meet the requirements of a single category. Jewishness, for example, has become a stereotype which expresses a series of traits by which Jews are identified. That is, the reality of the individual Jew is ignored; the richness and complexity of his personality is reduced to a label, an abstraction. Moreover, as a result of being sterotyped, the Jew can only perceive himself in terms of those traits which identify him as a Jew. The stereotype thus relieves him from the responsibility of

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[2]Fromm, p. 112

seeking his personality within himself. The liberal, the racist, the negro, have become, like the Jew, categories which have simplified and limited the individual and his perspective. Immersed in a world of abstractions and pressured by society to fit into a category, contemporary Western man is labeled and classified. Once classified, he is bound to play the role demanded by the category.

Man's sense of his own value is entirely dependent upon external factors. Man does not experience himself as an individual because he is no longer the subject of his feelings, thoughts, actions or decisions. His acts result from the demands of his role and are independent of his real drives. The role man plays in society compensates for his lack of a real identity; "...Public life drives out private life. The more political our society becomes (in the broadest sense of 'political' - the obsessions, the compulsions of collectivity), the more individuality seems lost..."[3]

The crisis of identity creates in man an anxiety which drives him into an irrational craving for security. Conformity to a pattern or stereotype frees man from individual responsibility and endows him with a feeling of certainty and security. By conforming to an existing stereotype, the individual becomes alienated from himself; he is unable to follow his natural drives and is largely unaware of his own estrangement.

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[3] Saul Bellow, Herzog, (Penguin Books Ltd., Harmondsworth, England, 1967), p. 170

Saul Bellow's fiction illustrates the phenomenon of alienation and the consequent debasement of humanity in contemporary American society. It expresses a preoccupation with the reality that lies beneath the facade of a "mode of existence that, like a Hollywood set, is only an elaborate front with nothing hehind but a few props to shore it up."[4] In Herzog, for example, the protagonist struggles to emerge from an artificial environment into a concrete, real world:

> ...Infinite forms of activity - Reality. Moses had to see reality. Perhaps he was somewhat spared from it so that he might see it better, not fall asleep in its thick embrace. Awareness was his work; extended consciousness was his line, his business...[5]

The artificiality of the world from which Herzog strives to emerge is emphasized by recurrent theater images:

> ...Literate people appropriate all the best things they can find in books and dress themselves in them just as certain crabs are supposed to beautify themselves with seaweed. And then there was the audience of conventional business people and professionals who look after their businesses and specialties well enough but seem confused about everything else and come to hear a speaker express himself confidently, with emphasis and fire and direction and force. With a head like a flaming furnace, a voice like a bowling alley and the wooden leg drumming the stage. To me he is a curiousity. Like a Mongolian idiot singing Aida...[6]

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[4] Snell Putney and Gail J. Putney, The Adjusted American, (Harper and Row, Publishers, Inc., New York, 1966), p. 74

[5] Bellow, p. 285-6

[6] Bellow, p. 224

Frequent references to Hollywood or Broadway reinforce the idea of selflessness. Wilhelm Adler, the protagonist of Seize the Day, changes his name to Tommy Wilhelm when he decides to become a Hollywood actor. His acting name provides him with a borrowed identity which releases him from the burden of his own responsibilities as Wilhelm Adler:

> By that time Wilhelm too had taken his new name. In California he became Tommy Wilhelm... Well, now, Wilhelm was thinking, the paper crowded in disarray under his arms, there is really very little that a man can change at will. He cannot change his lungs, or nerves, or constitution. They are not under his control. When he is young and strong and impulsive and dissatisfied with the way things are, he wants to rearrange them to assert his freedom... He cannot overthrow the government or be differently born; he only has a little scope and maybe a foreboding too, that essentially you cannot change. Nevertheless, he makes a gesture and becomes Tommy Wilhelm. Wilhelm had always had a great longing to be Tommy. He had never, however, succeeded in feeling like Tommy... He had cast off his father's name, and with it his father's opinion of him. It was, he knew he was, his bid for liberty. Adler being in his mind the title of the species, Tommy the freedom of the person. But Wilkie was his inescapable self.[7]

However, Wilhelm does not react against authority (his father) to assert his own individuality. Rather, he substitutes the role of Tommy Wilhelm for that of his father's son. That is, both Tommy Wilhelm and Wilhelm Adler are forms of self-delusion; they are artificial identities which disguise the concrete reality of a human being.

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[7] Saul Bellow, Seize the Day, (Penguin Books Ltd., Harmondsworth, England, 1959), p. 28-9

Self-delusion, a consequence of the alienating character of contemporary society, leads to a quest for power and superiority. The loss of identity creates in the alienated person a feeling of uncertainty and inferiority which he tries to overcome by compensatory mechanisms such as the degradation of others and the constant demand for attention and admiration. This is the case with Madeleine in Herzog:

> She does not live between two contradictory testaments. She is stronger than Wellington. She wants to live in the delirious professions, as Valery calls them - trades in which the main instrument is your opinion of yourself and the raw material is your reputation or standing.[8]

Madeleine's compensatory mechanisms are aimed at an assertion of power and authority. Her attempts at degrading and humiliating Herzog stem from her wish to gain power over him and thus to overcome a deeply-felt inferiority:

> I understood that Madeleine's ambition was to take my place in the learned world. To overcome me. She was reaching her final elevation, as queen of the intellectuals, the castiron blue-stocking. And your friend, Herzog, writhing under this sharp, elegant heel.[9]

The desire for power in Bellow's alienated characters stems from the conscious or subconscious frustration created by an artificial way of life. Insecurity gives rise to a craving for power which, in turn, generates the likelihood of manipulation. In contemporary Western society (as in the

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[8] Saul Bellow, Herzog, p. 84

[9] Bellow, p. 83

world of Bellow's fiction), man no longer orders or commands, he coaxes or manipulates; most relationships largely presuppose the submission of one or more individuals to the covert authority of another (or others).

The phenomenon of manipulation determines the classification of men into two main categories; the victimizer and the victim. Bellow's characters easily fit into either of these two categories. His heroes are always victims of covert authorities such as their wives, their friends, the system or the state. A passage from Henderson The Rain King illustrates this phenomenon;

> ...Lily in her marvelous way - always marvelously - began to suffer. 'You think you can live without me, but you cannot', she said, 'anymore than I can live without you. The sadness just drowns me... Because of me she had come all the way from America, and I would not let her accomplish her mission... From the start Lily had just this one topic, moralizing; one cannot live for this but has to live for that; not evil but good; not death but life; not illusion but reality. Lily does not speak clearly... The tour continued and I was a double captive-one, of the religion and beauty of the churches which I was not too drunk to see, and two, of Lily, and her glowing and mumbling embraces. She said a hundred times if she said it once, 'Come back to the States with me. I have come to take you back.'[10]

In The Victim, Bellow presents an extreme case of manipulation; the victimizer, Kirby Albee, torments Asa Leventhal, by blaming him for having deliberately ruined his chances of

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[10]Saul Bellow, Henderson the Rain King, (Penguin Books Ltd., Harmondsworth, England, 1959), p. 19

getting a job several years before:

> 'Then you went in and deliberately insulted Rudiger, put on some act with him, called him filthy names, deliberately insulted him to get me in bad, Rudiger is hot-blooded and he turned on me for it. You knew he would. It was calculated. It worked out just as you thought it would. You were clever as hell. He did not even give me a week's notice. He turned me out.'
>
> 'That is all wrong. I heard you were not with Dill's anymore. Harkavy told me. But it could not have been my fault. I am sure you are mistaken...'
>
> 'I say you are entirely to blame, Leventhal.' He opened his mouth and appeared to hold his breath an instant as he smiled. Leventhal's attempt to keep a clear head came to nothing; he felt himself slipping into confusion.[11]

The victimizers are an expression of destructive external forces acting on the individual. Bellow's recurrent images of suffocation emphasize man's oppression by society:

> Everything here oppressed him - the house, his sister-in-law, the sick child...[12]
>
> A thick, hot pressure filled his chest. His heart felt ill and his forehead instantly wet.[13]

The feeling of suffocation is reinforced by food images:

> ...It would give the victory to the other side to let himself grow fat, yowly, sullen, with broad hips and a belly and breathing hard...[14]

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[11] Bellow, The Victim, (Penguin Books Ltd., Harmondsworth, England, 1959), p. 33

[12] Bellow, The Victim, p. 15

[13] Bellow, Herzog, p. 45

[14] Bellow, Herzog, p. 40

> He felt it all slipping away from him in the subterranean roar of engines, voices and feet and in the galleries with lights like drops of fat yellow broth and the strong, suffocating fragrance of underground New York.[15]

Alienating cultural elements result from a defense mechanism through which society guarantees its survival:

> ...We speak less of progress than of survival; and survival may be had only by adapting human nature to existing conditions of human life.[16]

Those elements which serve to consolidate and confirm the status quo are readily absorbed into the system while all elements which threaten stability are rejected. Thus, the system generates two human types; the conformist and the misfit.

By seeking roots in an ethnic, religious, national, ideological or political group, the conformist sublimates uncertainty and a sense of selfness. By integrating in a group he gives up his individuality. Although accommodation to group patterns gives the conformist the illusion of having an identity, it actually obscures his self-awareness and arouses in him a craving for limitless conformity. The conformist is an alienated individual who is increasingly absorbed by the group to which he conforms. By accommodating to artificial patterns, he gradually loses his sense of reality. Furthermore, he is unable to make moral judgments. As Allen Wheelis observes in

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[15] Bellow, Herzog, p. 40

[16] Allen Wheelis, The Quest for Identity, (W. W. Norton and Co., Inc., New York, 1958), p. 138

The Quest for Identity, "the group has gained in authority at the expense of the conscience."[17] In contemporary Western society, behavior standards no longer stem from individual conscience; they are conditioned to the degree of adjustment shown by the individual. Thus, morality has become "synonymous with adjustment."[18] In The Wager of our Generation, Albert Camus comments on society's new morality and on the crisis of individual thinking:

> ...I loathe society's dreadful morality because it results, exactly like absolute cynicism, in making men despair and keeping them from taking responsibility for their own life with all its weight of errors and greatness.[19]

Since the conformist loses his sense of self and of reality, he is unable to use reason, for,

> Reason requires relatedness and a sense of self. If I am the passive receptor of impressions, thoughts, opinions, I can compare them, manipulate them, but I cannot penetrate them. Descartes deduced the existence of myself as an individual from the fact that I think, - I doubt, so he argued, hence I think; I think, hence I am. The reverse is true too. Only if I am I, if I have not lost my individuality in the It, can I think, that is, can I make use of my reason.[20]

While the conformist is well adjusted to existing conditions, the non-conformist is a stranger to his fellow men and to the

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[17] Wheelis, p. 20

[18] Wheelis, p. 127

[19] Albert Camus, Resistance, Rebellion and Death, (Modern Library Edition, New York, 1963), p. 184

[20] Fromm, p. 152-3

system; he lives with the uncertainty of non-commitment, non-participation and the use of reason. (In The Sane Society, Erich Fromm makes a distinction between intelligence - logic at the service of a practical purpose - and reason. According to Fromm, intelligence has totally substituted reason.) Reason frees him from the chains of the alienating system and confronts him with the unknown;

> The chains that enslave also guard us from the unknown. The uses of reason have cut away most of our immemorial myths and superstitions, and without them we cringe in the sharp winds of uncertainty, to reach an absolute, to bind the course of human events to a final end. Reason cannot serve such a purpose and yet remain reason.[21]

Bellow's hero is a non-conformist. He stands apart from a vast gallery of characters who somehow belong in the various sub-human categories established by society. He is a marginal man, a man who refuses to compromise with artificial forms of reality. He is not a "realist"; "I know I am not a realist. I have not got the strength to make all the judgments a man must make in order to be realistic."[22] He is an idealistic searcher of truth and selfhood;

> ...It is true I am often confused but at the same time I am a fighter. I fight very hard. 'What do you fight for, dad?' said Edward, 'Why', I said, 'What do I fight for? Hell, for the truth. Against falsehood. But most of the fighting is against myself.[23]

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[21] Wheelis, p. 135

[22] Bellow, Herzog, p. 220

[23] Bellow, Henderson The Rain King, p. 117

The hero's idealism is constantly challenged by external demands for adjustment. The protagonist of Bellow's novels is confronted with one or a series of "reality instructors," that is, with individuals who, after having adjusted to a version of reality, are willing to instruct others in what they consider to be "the lessons of the real."[24] They provide the hero with artificial models of happiness and success. Their function in relation to the hero is to teach him "what the 'normal' person is and, correspondingly, what is wrong with him; they devise methods to help him adjust, be happy, be normal"[25] according to their own visions of reality.

In Herzog, the protagonist is a humanist, "the kind of man who has one foot in the world of speculative intelligence and one in the active life."[26] Hence, his pursuit of an authentic value is counter-balanced by his need to share the destiny of his fellow men and accommodate to existing standards. Herzog's attempts to conform to stereotyped forms of reality - expressed in the different roles he plays in society - are met with failure or frustration, for they involve the limitation of his living experience and the loss of his sense of self; "The hero oscillates between his need to operate in

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[24] Bellow, Herzog, p. 132

[25] Fromm, p. 151

[26] Irving Malin, Saul Bellow's Fiction, (Southern Illinois University Press, 1969), p. 10

reality and the anxiety of his powerlessness once he gets there."[27]

Herzog's reluctance to conform permanently to any partial or static reality determines the movement pattern of his life. The movement resulting from the substitution of one role for another reflects the anxiety arising from an unsuccessful search for identity through accommodation to artificial standards:

> ...Two marriages, two children and he was setting off for a week of carefree rest. It was painful to his instincts, his Jewish family feelings, that his children should be growing up without him. But what could he do about that? To the sea! To the sea!...[28]

The use of reason allows Herzog to perceive the fullness of reality and prevents him from permanent conformity to the demands of a role:

> I gave up the shelter of an orderly, purposeful, lawful existence because it bored me, and I felt it was simply a slacker's life. Sono wanted me to move in with her. But I thought that would make me a squaw man. So I took my papers and books, and my Remington office machine with the black hood, and my records and oboe and music down to Philadelphia.[29]

By using reason, Herzog assumes the responsibility of individual thinking and thus transcends the limitations of environment

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[27]Stanley Trachtenberg, Saul Bellow's Luftenenschen - The Compromise with Reality, (Critique, Vol. 9, Ner 3)

[28]Bellow, Herzog, p. 30

[29]Bellow, p. 109

and culture. His response to Lucas Asphalter's platitudes on the reality of life and death illustrates his awareness of the deceiving character of "truths" and absolutes:

> ...And we live in a hedonistic world in which happiness is set up on a mechanical model. All you have to do is open your fly and grasp happiness... But human life is far subtler than any of its models... Do not abuse yourself too much, Luke, and cook up these fantastic plots against your feelings. I know you are a good soul, with real heartaches. And you believe the world. And the world tells you to look for truth in grotesque combinations. It warns you also to stay away from consolation if you value your intellectual honor. On this theory truth is punishment and you must take it like a man. It says truth will harrow your soul because your inclination as a poor human being is to lie and live by lies.[30]

Herzog refuses to compromise with alienated forms of reality. Unwilling to make a lasting choice for any artificial, ready-made truth, he avoids the mutilation of reality which the choice implies. His non-conformity evinces an aspiration for the kind of reality that transcends spatio-temporal limitations. This aspiration suggests faith in the existence of pure reality (the reality of human nature) and in man's capacity to apprehend it or recover it; "Evidently I continue to believe in God. Though never admitting it - But what else explains my conduct and my life."[31]

Since Herzog wishes to strip reality of all artificial

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[30] Bellow, p. 279

[31] Bellow, p. 238

garments, his search begins with introspection, that is, he hopes to find reality within himself. However, Herzog's search finally transcends the personal level; by seeking the reality of a single man, Moses E. Herzog, he aims at discovering every man's truth; "The progress of civilization - indeed the survival of civilization - depends on the successes of Moses E. Herzog."[32] Herzog thus conceives of himself as a redeemer of mankind, his personal success determining the success of humanity. In order to save man from annihilating cultural forces, Herzog attempts to redefine human nature;

> Where is that human life which is my only excuse for surviving? What have I to show for myself?... My God! Who is this creature? It considers itself human. But what is it? And what can it be! Not immortal longing. No, entirely mortal, but human...[33]

Testing ideas of human nature by the actual happenings of his mundane life, as a citizen of the United States, with a particular domestic history, Herzog engages in a two-fold quest which attempts to reconcile the universal with the particular; the knowledge of what it is to be a man in a specific cultural and historical context;

> ...The description might begin with his wild internal disorder, or even with the fact that he was quivering. And why? Because he let the entire world press upon him. For instance? Well, for instance, what it means to be a man. In a city. In a century, In transition. In a

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[32] Bellow, p. 227

[33] Bellow, p. 208

> mass. Transformed by science. Under organized power. Subject to tremendous controls. In a condition caused by mechanization... In a society that was no community and devalued the person. Owing to the multiplied power of numbers which made the self negligible. Which spent military billions against foreign enemies but would not pay for order at home. Which permitted savagery and barbarism in its own great cities. At the same time, the pressure of human millions who have discovered what concerted efforts and thoughts can do. As megatones of water shape organisms on the ocean floor. As tides polish stones. As winds hollow cliffs. The beautiful super-machinery opening a new life for innumerable mankind. Would you deny them the right to exist? Would you ask them to labor and go hungry while you enjoy delicious old-fashioned values? You - You yourself are a child of this mass and a brother to all the rest. Or else an ingrate, dilettante, idiot.[34]

Thus, Herzog reflects a recurrent subject in contemporary literature: The exploration and definition of the individual self and its capacity for existing in a private and a social setting.

In his desire to define himself, Herzog explores his individuality in relation to ethnic, religious, national and philosophical structures. The following chapter discusses Herzog's search for identity through a partial and temporary identification with stereotypes patterned according to the structures.

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[34] Bellow, p. 208

CHAPTER II

Herzog's Quest

> In the nineteenth century man lived in a society of relatively stable values. These were transmitted to him by his parents and established within his character as a relatively permanent and autonomous agency. A drive conflicting with this agency was repressed. If sufficiently strong, this drive achieved a distorted symptomatic discharge which constitutes the illness. Neurotic suffering in the present is coming more and more to derive from a quite different process. Society does not embody such generally accepted patterns of value, and the individual is caught in a dilemma; if out of the multitudinous choices of modern life he commits himself to certain values and with them builds a durable identity, he is apt to lose contact with a rapidly changing world; if he does not commit himself, but maintains an alert readiness to move with the current, he suffers a loss of the sense of self. Not knowing what he stands for, he does not know who he is. This occasions the anxiety which is coming to be the name of our age.[1]

Herzog, a contemporary hero reluctant to commit himself to fixed values, experiences the anxiety of the age. His anxiety is expressed in a compulsive search for his lost identity. The purpose of his quest is to gain perception over a culturally determined self-image and to create (or recreate) his authentic self.

The first step in Herzog's quest for identity is an awareness of his own physical presence, as being independent from

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[1] Allen Wheelis, The Quest for Identity, p. 129

the false image imposed on him by culture. This awareness of his physical presence is revealed in detailed descriptions. Herzog's recognition of his physical reality goes through different stages which do not follow one another chronologically but constantly overlap;

1 - An awareness of his physical presence.

Herzog's self-descriptions evince an intensification of sense perception in relation to his physical appearance. They reflect Herzog's awakening to his own physical reality;

> The breeze swelled out his light clothes and then fitted tightly to his body. And what a look he had - such a face! Just then his state of being was so curious that he was compelled, himself, to see it - eager, grieving, fantastic, dangerous, crazed and to the point of death... 'comical.'[2]

Through recurrent self-objectifications, Herzog projects himself outward and describes himself as if he were another person;

> The mirror of the gum machine revealed to Herzog how pale he was, unhealthy - wisps from his coat and wool scarf, his hat and brows, twisting and flaming outward in the overfull light and exposing the sphere of his face, the face of a man who was keeping up a front...[3]

His detached self-perceptions are emphasized by the use of the second and third person. When in Ramona's bathroom,

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[2] Bellow, p. 99

[3] Bellow, P. 111

for example, he contemplates his image reflected in the mirror, he addresses himself in the second person;

> And next came his specific self, an apparition in the square mirror. How did he look? Oh, terrific - You look terrific, Moses! Smashing![4]

Mirror images, expressing Herzog's desire to objectify his self-perception, recur throughout the novel. Although the vision of himself in the mirror allows Herzog to gain perspective over his physical identity, it is tinged with subjectivity, for the mirror only reflects or duplicates his subjective reality;

> He went, and Herzog undid the chased buttons. They had used the head of some Roman emperor to adorn the jacket of a pleasure-seeker, he noted. Alone, he put his tongue out at himself and then withdrew from the triple mirror. He remembered how much pleasure it gave Madeleine to try on clothes in shops and how much heart and pride there was in her when she looked at herself, touching, adjusting, her face glowing but severe, too, with the great blue eyes, the vivid bangs, the medallion profile...[5]

This passage illustrates how the objectified self-image gradually becomes more and more subjective, to the point that Herzog's vision of himself shifts into a vision of Madeleine. Thus, his outward projected image is pervaded with his own feelings, concerns and obsessions. His

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[4]Bellow, p. 166

[5]Bellow, p. 27

inability to attain an objective vision of himself accounts for Malin's conclusion in regard to Herzog's perception of life; "Life is a comic, distorting, treacherous mirror."[6]

2 - An awareness of the physical presence of others.

Herzog's desire for self-knowledge and self-recognition motivates his keen observations of the physical appearance of others. That is, his detailed physical descriptions of other people are, to a great extent, a displacement of his search for self-definition.

Since Herzog is an introspective hero, his human descriptions do not usually express an observation of the people's surrounding reality. Rather, they result from a free association process by which Herzog reflects on life. That is, by and large, his observations do not include specific references to time, place or context. By excluding all reference to the external reality of the persons described, these observations seem to reach for substance or real function of people. This substantial presentation of individuals is conveyed through an intensification of visual perception. The sheer existence of people seems to be the aim of Herzog's observations;

> Valentine was a dandy. He had a thick face and heavy jaws; Moses thought he somewhat resembled Putzi Hanfstaengee, Hitler's own pianist. But Gerbach had a pair of

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[6] Irving Malin, Saul Bellow's Fiction, p. 118

> extraordinary eyes for a red-haired man, brown, deep, hot eyes, full of life. The lashes, too, were vital, ruddy-dark, long and child-like. And that hair was bearishly thick. Valentine, furthermore, was exquisitely confident of his appearance.[7]

As this passage shows, Herzog's descriptions of others appeal primarily to the visual sense, which, being the sense that best establishes distances, allows the viewer to perceive reality fairly objectively. Through an intensification of visual perception, Herzog begins to escape the pressures of cultural determinants. His descriptions do not express a pre-existing idea of reality; rather, they are Herzog's own surrealistic renderings of the external world; "In this world of multitudes, self-awareness tends to reveal us to ourselves as monsters."[8]

Although Herzog's descriptions of people show a partial freedom from cultural pressures, they do not reveal freedom of observation. He does not actually see external reality. Rather, everything he observes reflects his own preoccupations and obsessions. The projection of his anxiety into external reality accounts for the "visionary" character of his perception. Thus, Herzog shares with Bellow's other heroes what Malin considers to be their characteristic tendency: "Bellow's heroes are obsessed by vision. As visionaries, they tend

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[7] Bellow, p. 25

[8] Bellow, p. 244

to see the world in oblique and unbalanced ways."[9] Herzog's "visionary" perception determines the grotesque imagery which results from the exaggeration of the unpleasant:

> ...Thus stepping away from the door he stumbled into a woman with a cane. Black-browed, her hair very black though she was middle-aged, she pointed downward with the cane, instead of speaking. He saw that she wore a cast with metal clogs on the foot and that her toenails were painted. Then, getting down the loathesome taste, he said, 'I am sorry.' He had a sick, repulsive headache, piercing and ugly. He felt as if he had gotten too close to a fire and scalded his lungs...[10]

Indeed, Herzog's human descriptions evince an exaggerated appreciation of sickness and physical deformity:

> ...Better puritan restraint than the exhibition of pitiful puckered knees and varicose veins, pelican bellies and the indecency of haggard faces under sporty caps. Undoubtedly, Valentine Gerbach, who had beat him out with Madeleine, surmounting the handicap of a wooden leg, could wear those handsome, brilliant candy stripes.[11]

These unpleasant images become, in his obsessive mind, an expression of the total reality of the individuals he describes. It appears as if physical deformity were symbolic of spiritual debasement.

Herzog's obsession with the grotesque is also

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[9]Malin, p. 116

[10]Bellow, p. 247

[11]Bellow, p. 25

illustrated by images of bestiality. The use of animal imagery in descriptions of human physical traits is a recurrent device in the novel:

> His face was red as a carnation and he had a meat-flavored breath, a dog's breath. Shapiro's snarling teeth, his salivating greed, the dagger of an ulcer in his belly gave him true insights, too...[12]

The emphasis on deformity, sickness and bestiality in Herzog's physical descriptions suggests his awareness of the sickness of modern man, that is, of his alienation from his real nature. The atmosphere of unreality created by these images implies that man's sickness, perpetuated by habit, is perceived by modern society as sanity or "normality." In The Quest for Identity, Allen Wheelis explains this phenomenon:

> ...What we call 'normal' in psychology is really a psychopathology of the average, so undramatic and so widely spread that we do not even notice it ordinarily. The existentialist's study of the authentic person and of authentic living helps to throw this general phoniness, this living by illusions and by fear into a harsh, clear light which reveals it clearly as sickness, even though widely shared.[13]

3 - An awareness of the physical presence of others in relation to his own.

Herzog's exploration into the physical reality of

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[12] Bellow, p. 26

[13] Wheelis, p. 41

others causes him to become aware of the sickness or imperfection in men. Since his observations of people are a displacement of his own search for identity, he finds that the imperfection that exists in others actually expresses his own: "...At moments I dislike having a face, a nose, lips, because he has them."[14] It appears as if he conceived of other people's short-comings as a projection of his own. Thus, he not only observes but almost becomes those he observes. This projection can be noticed, for example, in Herzog's attitude in court:

> ...There were two broken ribs, one an older break. The more recent one had done some damage to the lung. The boy's liver had been ruptured. The hemorrhage caused by this may have been the immediate cause of death. There was also a brain injury...
>
> All this seemed to Herzog exceptionally low-pitched. All - the lawyers, the jury, the mother, her tough friends, the judge behaved with much restraint, extremely well-controlled and quiet-spoken. Such calm - inversely proportionate to the murder? He was thinking. Judge, jury, lawyers and the accused, all looked utterly unemotional. And he himself? He sat in his new madras coat and held his hand straw hat. He gripped his hat strongly and felt sick at heart. The ragged edge of the straw made marks on his fingers.[15]

By contrasting the impersonality and insensitivity of the people in the court-room to his own empathic response, Herzog attempts to express the apathy of society in

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[14] Bellow, p. 51

[15] Bellow, p. 244

regard to human life, the remarkable state of alienation into which man has fallen. Herzog's intense emotional response to the scene reflects his awareness of the bond of humanity. His feeling of sickness reveals the fear aroused by his consciousness of the link existing between himself and the alienated people in the court-room, between himself and mankind.

Herzog's search for identity is also expressed in relation to his ethno-religious background. Classified by society as a Jew and unable to fully sense the significance of his Jewish role, Herzog explores different aspects of Jewishness. His desire to identify himself with the Jewish tradition is primarily expressed in an obsession with physical resemblances, a passion for reminiscence and a masochistic tendency.

1 - Herzog's obsession with physical resemblances.

His human descriptions often focus on members of his family and on his own physical resemblance to them. His interest in family resemblances stems from his desire to feel rooted in his Jewish background. By localizing his search on the family, Herzog establishes a relationship between family and religion. This relationship expresses the traditionally Jewish concept that divinity is to be found at home, that domestic life embodies religious transcendence. As Malin observes, in Herzog, "Jewishness and family life are inextricably bound."[16]

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[16] Malin, p. 147

Herzog's obsession with physical resemblances involves an observation of himself in relation to the Jewish stereotype represented by the Herzogs, and a preoccupation with the connexions existing between old and new generations of Herzogs:

> The bathing trunks were a little tight. But the oval straw hat pleased him, floating on the hair which still grew tightly at the sides. In it he looked like his father's cousin Elias Herzog...[17]

> Marco would look at him with clear eyes, his pale child's face, the Herzog face, freckled, his hair crew-cut, by his own choice and somewhat alien. He had his grandmother Herzog's mouth.[18]

His recognition of the perpetuation of distinctive family traits through successive generations appears to induce in him a sense of belonging:

> Her face was the Herzog's face, the large dark eyes, his eyes, the nose his father's, Tante Zipporah's, his brother Willie's nose and the mouth his own. Even the bit of melancholy in her beauty - that was his mother. It was Sarah Herzog, pensive, slightly averting her face as she considered the life about her.[19]

Although Herzog's perception of family resemblances emphasizes his bonds to his ethno-religious background, he feels that these resemblances alone do not define him as a Jew:

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[17] Bellow, p. 27

[18] Bellow, p. 27

[19] Bellow, p. 263

> Herzog's mother had had a weakness for Jews with handsome beards. In her family, too, all the elders had beards that were thick and rich, full of religion. She wanted Herzog to become a rabbi now in his trunks and straw hat, his face charged with heavy sadness, foolish, utter longing of which a religious life might have purged him. What mouth! - heavy with desire and irreconcilable anger, the straight nose sometimes grim, the dark eyes! And his figure! The long veins winding in the arms and filling in the hanging hands, the ancient system, of greater antiquity than the Jews themselves... Bare-legged, he looked like a Hindu.[20]

The closing irony in the passage - Herzog's comparison of himself with a Hindu - shows his reluctance to accept the labels with which society identifies him. By comparing himself to an individual of a different race, he seems to affirm man's concrete value as opposed to the artificial classification imposed on him by society. He looks beyond the dimensions of Jewishness and emphasizes his relation to mankind, "the ancient system, of greater antiquity than the Jews themselves." Thus, his search for a culturally created identity drives him toward a more universal goal, namely, a recognition of humanity:

> The family look, the eyes, those eyelights. And though he recalled his mother's sad face with love, he could not say, in his soul, that he wanted to see such sadness perpetuated. Yet, it reflected the deep experience of the race, its attitude toward happiness and toward mortality. This sombre human case, this dark husk, these indurated

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[20] Bellow, p. 28

> lines of submission to the fate of being human, this splendid face showed the responses of his mother's finest nerves to the greatness of life, rich in sorrow, in death.[21]

Herzog's dialectic evinces a movement from the particular into the general and universal; "the deep experience of the race" transcends the family experience; "the fate of being human" transcends "the deep experience of the race."

2 - Herzog's passion for reminiscence.

His passion for reminiscence stems from the same motive which determines his interest in family resemblances, viz, the desire to assert his identity as a Jew. His continuous recollection of past events expresses an attempt at recapturing his identity out of the past. By delving into the family past, he intends to recover a sense of continuity, a feeling of being related to his Jewish ancestors and to the coming generations of Jews;

> My ancient times, remoter than Egypt. No dawn, no foggy winters...
>
> Napoleon Street, rotten, toylike, crazy and filthy, riddled, flogged with harsh weather - the bootlegger's - boys reciting ancient prayers. To this Moses' heart was attached with great power... All he wanted was there. His mother did the wash and mourned. His father was desperate and frightened, but obstinately fighting. His brother Shura with staring, disingenuous eyes were plotting to master the world, to become a millionaire. His brother Willie struggled with asthmatic fits... His sister Helen had long white

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[21] Bellow, p. 236

> gloves which she washed in thick suds... His soft prim sister played the piano... Oh the music! thought Herzog. He fought the insidious blight of mostalgia in New York - softening, heart-rotting emotions, black spots, sweet for the moment but adding a dangerous acid residue... The music rang in the street.[22]

Allen Wheelis views this type of retrospective approach as a symptom of the crisis of identity in modern man:

> The Historical approach is a symptom of our trouble. We are trying to recapture the sense of continuity, to find again the durable patterns of life - hoping we shall not lose altogether our connexions with those who have lived before and those who will live after.[23]

3 - Herzog's masochistic tendency.

Traditionally victimized, the Jew has learned to conceive of himself as a victim. Unable to overcome the cultural forces which have victimized him, he has developed an infatuation with his own suffering.

In Alienation and Masochism, John J. Clayton defines Bellow's hero as "a social masochist who needs to heap suffering on his own head."[24] Herzog does not escape this definition. His reflections on his life and feelings are charged with self-pity. They reveal his consciousness of his victim role and thus emphasize his bond to the race. Indeed, Herzog's masochism is an expression of

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[22] Bellow, p. 146-7

[23] Wheelis, p. 24-5

[24] John J. Clayton, Saul Bellow: In Defense of Man, (Indiana University Press, Bloomington, Indiana, 1968), p. 53

his need to identify himself with his Jewish background:

> What he was about to suffer he deserved; he had sinned long and hard, and he earned it. This was it.[25]

> The wide brim over her anxious forehead, her childish intensity, her fear, her religious will - the pity of the whole thing! While he, the worn, unshaven, sinful Jew, endangering her redemption - his heart ached.[26]

Conscious of his masochistic tendency, he often mocks it:

> In his posture of collapse on the sofa, arms abandoned over his head and legs stretched away, lying with no more style than a chimpanzee, his eyes with greater than normal radiance watched his own work in the garden with detachment, as if he were looking through the front end of a telescope at a tiny clear image. That suffering joker.[27]

Herzog's ridiculing attitude stems from his awareness of the irony resulting from the gap between his aspiration for truth and the limitations of his actual achievements. Herzog, an idealistic searcher of reality, is constantly being beaten by overwhelming forces which deprive him of any sense of dignity or self-esteem. The irony of his individual destiny is indeed the irony of the permanent condition of his race, doomed, as it were, to be crushed by the guilt-ridden anger of the world. Herzog's recognition of sharing suffering and self-pity with all Jews implies an identification with his Jewish background:

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[25] Bellow, p. 69

[26] Bellow, p. 70

[27] Bellow, p. 17

> When you suffer, you really suffer. You are a real genuine, old Jewish type that digs the emotions. I will give you that. I understand it. I grew up on Sangamon Street, remember, when a Jew was still a Jew. I know about suffering - we are on the same identical network:[28]

However, suffering is not only the Jew's fate; it is the human fate. If to be a Jew is, as Bernard Malamud says, to accept suffering, to be human presupposes the burden of suffering as well. Therefore, the Jew is the "prototypal human being." Herzog seems to find, as does Malamud, the universal significance of the Jewish fate:

> ...And, as you indicate, private suffering transformed from masochism. But we know this. We know, we know, know it! Creative suffering, as you think...at the core of Christian belief.[29]

By establishing a relationship between his private experience and the experience of all Jews with the Christians "creative suffering," he expresses his recognition of suffering as inherent in the human condition. This recognition reflects a transcendence of the original motive of his quest. That is, Herzog's search for identity in relation to his ethno-religious background leads him to an awareness of the unique experience of individual existence:

> ...Three thousand million human beings exist, each with some possessions, each a

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[28] Bellow, p. 90

[29] Bellow, p. 227

> microcosmos, each infinitely precious, each with a peculiar treasure.[30]

Failing to assert his ethno-religious identity, Herzog seeks roots in his national background. An American citizen, born in a Montreal slum, of Russian-Jewish origin, he lacks a genuinely felt national identity. His search for American roots is reflected in his exploration of his family's past and in his concern with the American socio-political life.

1 - Herzog's exploration of his family history.

His desire to develop a sense of nationality drives him into a recollection of his family's past. The mobility of his family, their wandering through different countries in search of a permanent destination greatly determines Herzog's sense of disassociation from American life. His father's recurrent failures in various countries are indicative of the family's inability to integrate in any national group:

> First Father Herzog failed in Petersburg, where he went through two dowries in one year. He had been importing onions from Egypt. Under Pobedonostev police caught up with him for illegal residence. He was convicted and sentenced... He never served his sentence. He got away. Because he was nervy, hasty, obstinate, rebellious. He came to Canada, where his sister Zipporah Jaffe was living.
>
> In 1913 he bought a piece of land near Valleyfield, Quebec, and failed as a farmer. Then he came into town and failed as a baker;

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[30] Bellow, p. 182

> failed in the dry-goods business; failed as a jobber, failed as a sack manufacturer in the War, when no one else failed. He failed as a junk dealer. Then he became a marriage broker and failed - too short and blunt. And now he was failing as a bootlegger, on the run from the provincial Liquor Commission. Making a bit of a living.[31]

Although Herzog's parents die in the United States, they never feel a part of American society, nor are they regarded as such by Americans. Their attitudes and their ways forever carry "Jewish and Eastern European flourishes." Thus, Herzog's search for his national identity through an exploration of his family background only reinforces his feeling of estrangement from American society.

2 - Herzog's concern with the American socio-political life.

His need to assert his nationality is also expressed in a marked interest in American affairs. His reflections on national matters, often expressed in letters to leading political figures of the country, evince a desire for political involvement. This desire, however, is never actualized, for his unmailed letters to political leaders do not deal with concrete national problems in a coherent, consistent way. Although his letters express a concern with specific national issues, this concern

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[31]Bellow, p. 143

invariably develops into philosophical generalizations which have little relation to the issues which motivate his response. His letter to Eisenhower, for example, opens with a commentary on the former president's cold war policy. The subject of the discussion soon develops into reflections on human nature, the question of individual freedom and the modern concept of democracy:

> Dear General Eisenhower,
> In private life perhaps you have the leisure and inclination to reflect on matters for which, as Chief Executive, you obviously had no time. The pressure of the Cold War... which now so many people agree was a phase of political hysteria, and the journeys and speeches of Mr. Dulles rapidly changing in this age of shifting perspectives from their earlier appearance of statesmanship to one of American wastefulness. I happened to be in the press gallery at the UN the day you spoke of the risk of error in precipitating nuclear war... I was also present when Premier Khrushchev pounded the desk with his shoe. Amid such crises, in such an atmosphere, there was obviously no time for the more general questions of the sort I have been concerned with. Indeed, put my life into... Perhaps you will be asking yourself who your present correspondent is... So let us say he is a thoughtful person who believes in civil usefulness. Intelligent people without influence feel a certain self-contempt, reflecting the contempt of those who have real political or social power, or think they do... For knowledge of death makes us wish to extend our lives at the expense of others. And this is the root of the struggle for power. But that is all wrong! thought Herzog, not without humor in his despair. I am bugging all these people - Nehru, Churchill and now Ike, whom I apparently want to give a Great Books course. Nevertheless there was much earnest feeling in this, too. No civil order, no higher development of mankind. The goal, however, is freedom. And what does a man owe to the state?[32]

[32] Bellow, p. 168

The above passage illustrates Herzog's characteristic thought pattern, which consists of drawing general conclusions out of concrete, specific facts. This dialectic reflects Herzog's inability to remain on the level of concrete experience. All these attempts at national involvement vanish in the context of philosophical speculations on human life. Since Herzog does not become involved in American politics, his wish to assert his nationality through participation in the American sociopolitical life is not fulfilled.

People's attitude toward Herzog's nationality reinforces his feeling of estrangement from American life. In Father Herzog's funeral, for example, his brother Shura accuses him of behaving like an immigrant,

> Then as the coffin was lowered and Moses and the others wept, Shura said to him, 'Do not carry on like a god-damn immigrant.' I embarrassed him with golfing friends, the corporation presidents. Maybe I was not entirely in the right. Here he was the good American. I still carry European pollution, am infected by the old world with feelings like love - filial emotion. Old stuporous dreams.[33]

To his American mates, Herzog bears the stigma of Jewishness; thus he is excluded from the group and regarded as an intruder:

> In the service, his mates saw him as a foreigner. The Chicagoans questioned him

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[33]Bellow, p. 286

> suspiciously. What is on State and Lake?
> How far is Austin Ave? You are a spy.
> That proves. One of them smart Jews.[34]

Ramona, a foreigner herself, does not recognize Herzog as an American, either:

> What remained to bother him was that
> she did not recognize him as an American.
> That hurt! What else was he?[35]

The alien picture of himself which Herzog reads in people's eyes contributes to emphasize his own feeling of alienation.

Since contemporary Western society seems to negate man's individual existence unless it conforms to culturally acknowledged patterns, Herzog feels pressured to seek self-definition through an identification with philosophical categories. In his desire to be somebody, Herzog feels compelled to fit into culturally accepted definitions of man.

In his search for a philosophical category with which he can identify, he finds himself torn between conflicting ideas such as realism and idealism, nihilism and signification, finitude and transcendence. The conflict between these opposite ideas in Herzog's mind is expressed on the level of active life and on the level of ideas. On the level of active life, Herzog's choices largely define him as a romantic:

1 - His Ludeyville experience expresses a transcendental

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[34] Bellow, p. 167

[35] Bellow, p. 167

aspiration for self-knowledge and self-sufficiency;

> With Madeleine, Herzog had made his second attempt to live in the country. For a big-city Jew he was peculiarly devoted to country life. He had forced Daisy to endure a freezing winter in Eastern Connecticut while he was writing Romanticism and Christianity, in a cottage where the pipes had to be thawed with candles and freezing blasts penetrated the clapboard walls while Herzog brooded over his Pousseau or practised on the oboe.[36]

While in Ludeyville, Herzog makes several attempts at self-assertion. Painting his own home, for example, is symbolic of his striving toward selfhood;

> Herzog learned masonry, glazing, plumbing. He sat up nights studying the Do-it-Yourself Encyclopedia, and with historical passion, he painted, patched, tarred gutters, plastered holes. Two coats of paint counted for nothing on old, open-grained wood...
>
> A year of work saved the house from collapse.[37]

His solitary walks in the woods recall Thoreau's Walden and express Herzog's desire to commune with nature in order to attain self-realization;

> It was a winter of rocklike ice. The pond like a slab of halite - green, white, resonant ice, bitterly ringing underfoot... The elms, giant harp shapes made cracking noises... He returned from his solitary walks on the pond, in the woods, and found pies in

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[36] Bellow, p. 125

[37] Bellow, p. 126

> big pyrex plates on which he warmed his numb cheeks and fingertips...[38]

2 - Academically, Herzog's interests are greatly determined by romantic ideals. His writings deal with topics such as "Social Ideas of the Romantics," "What Christianity was to Romanticism" and "Studies on Eastern Christianity." Moreover, he lectures on "The Roots of Romanticism" and "The Romantics as Social Philosophers."

3 - His flight from the present into obsessive recollections of past events in his life is a form of what the existentialists call "romantic self-deception":

> To haunt the past like this - to love the dead! Moses warned himself not to yield to this temptation, this peculiar weakness of his character. He was a depressive. Depressives cannot surrender childhood - not even the pains of childhood...[39]

4 - His idealization of children inasmuch as they retain what man loses in the process of growing up in a society, viz, purity, authenticity, sincerity:

> But there was now a real matter between him and Madeleine, a child, a reality - June. Out of cowardice, sickness, fraud, by a bungling father out of a plotting bitch, something genuine! This little daughter of his![40]

On the level of ideas, Herzog's romanticism can be noticed

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[38] Bellow, p. 133

[39] Bellow, p. 149

[40] Bellow, p. 79

in his defense of individuality and freedom. His faith in these romantic values is expressed in his reflections on personal experiences and in his generalizations on modern life. Very often such reflections are included in letters:

> Herzog made himself dull by repeating what was right. He was maddening, too. He realized it. He appeared to know how everything ought to go, down to the smallest detail under the category of 'free concrete mind,' misapprehension of a universal by the developing consciousness - reality opposing the 'law of the heart,' alien necessity crushing individuality.[41]

> Finally, Pulver, to live in an inspired condition, to know truth, to be free, to love another, to consummate existence, to abide with death in clarity of consciousness... is no longer a rarefied project.[42]

Although Herzog's attitude toward life largely defines him as a romantic, his desire to apprehend the significance of death as a fundamental human experience reveals an existentialist concern:

> The books in his pocket were Pratt's short history of the Civil War and several volumes of Kierkegaard... Sitting in a dirty plush seat he took out a book and read, For dying means that it is all over, but dying the death means to experience death, trying to think what this might signify...[43]

The coexistence of romantic and existentialist elements in Herzog's life arouses a tension which is reflected in his speculations on reality. Unable to resolve this tension by

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[41] Bellow, p. 129

[42] Bellow, p. 172

[43] Bellow, p. 111

making a philosophical choice, he dangles between conflicting ideas without engaging in any intellectual movement or embracing any particular doctrine. Herzog's philosophical non-commitment results from a careful introspective analysis of conflicting ideas. His dialectic consists in opposing one idea to another and drawing a conclusion out of the confrontation of two or more different ideas. This dialectic appears to show him that all doctrines prove to be, once tested, lacking in universal truth. Herzog's dialectic is illustrated by the following passage:

> ...The old propositions of Pascal. That man is a reed, but a thinking reed, might be taken with a different emphasis by the modern citizen of a democracy... Herzog tried another approach. Tolstoy (1828-1920) said, 'Kings are history's slaves.' The higher one stands in the scale of power, the more his actions are determined. To Tolstoy, freedom is entirely personal. That man is free whose condition is simple, truthful, real. To be free is to be released from historical limitations. On the other hand, G. W. F. Hegel (1770-1831) understood the essence of human life to be derived from history, memory - that is what makes us human, that, and our knowledge of death.[44]

In this passage, Herzog opposes Pascal's and Tolstoy's faith in free will to Hegel's belief in historical determinism. The result of such confrontation of ideas is an awareness of the mutilation exercised on reality by any form of systematic thought. Hegel's historical determinism, for example, implies a negation of Pascal's faith in individual freedom. On the

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[44] Bellow, p. 169

other hand, Pascal's ideas on free will are incompatible with Hegel's views on historical limitations.

Herzog's mistrust of systematic thought does not express skepticism as regards ideas but, rather, as regards the doctrines which evolve from ideas. Hence, systems of thought are viewed by Herzog as "the definitions which hold mankind at the level of pride (or masochism) asserting too much and then suffering from self-hatred as a consequence."[45] In his letter to Nietzsche, Herzog suggests that the natural evolution of an idea in an organized social group is likely to lessen the authentic value of the idea;

> ...You want to make us able to live with the void. Not lie ourselves into goodnaturedness, trust, ordinary middling human considerations but to question as has never been questioned before, relentlessly, with iron determination, into evil, through evil, past evil, accepting no abject comfort. The most absolute, the most piercing questions. Rejecting mankind as it is, that ordinary, practical, thieving, stinking, unilluminated, sodden rabble with its books and concerts and lectures, its liberalism and its romantic, theatrical 'loves,' and 'passions' - it all deserves to die, it will die. Okay. Still, your extremists must survive. No survival, no Amor Fati. Your immoralists also eat meat. They ride the bus. They are only the most bus-sick travellers. Humankind lives mainly upon perverted ideas. Perverted, your ideas are no better than those of the Christianity you condemn. Any philosopher who wants to keep his contact with mankind should pervert his own system in advance to see how it will really look like a few decades after adoption...[46]

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[45] Bellow, p. 170

[46] Bellow, p. 326-7

Herzog's views on the deceptive character of all doctrines are shared by Nietzsche himself who expresses, in Ecce Homo, his terrible "fear that someday one will pronounce him holy,"[47] that, someday, his own version of reality will be systematized and regarded as absolute truth.

Herzog's dialectical analysis of ideas leads to the conclusion that all philosophies utlimately flatter human vanity by fostering the illusion of the self. That is, Herzog perceives in all philosophical doctrines, man's infatuation with his own role in the universe; the romantics emphasize the perfectibility of man and express optimism in man's capacity to overcome limitations; existentialists, nihilists and "absurdists," on the other hand, emphasize the anguish of man's cry at the void. All theories ultimately exalt man and his predominant role in the world. Thus perceiving in all philosophies a projection of man's dream of signification, and a mutilation, distortion or mystification of reality, Herzog refuses to commit himself to any philosophical theory. His non-commitment reflects his inability to find a satisfactory explanation of reality in the realm of ideas.

Herzog's refusal to make a lasting philosophical commitment implies his realization of man's inability to comprehend the meaning of life. His dialectical analysis of ideas reveals to him the absurdity of man's attempts at coherent explanations

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[47]Walter Kaufmann, Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre, (Meridian Books, Cleveland, Ohio, 1969), p. 112

of the universe, and thus the absurdity of his own quest. Chapter three deals with Herzog's awareness of the absurd and with the different devices through which the feeling of absurdity is conveyed to the reader.

CHAPTER III

The Absurd

In his striving toward selfhood, Herzog sees reality as having dissolved in appearances. His attempts at conformity - expressed in his desire to identify himself with religious, ethnic, national and ideological groups - are futile. His inability to attain self-knowledge by identifying with cultural rubrics determines the cyclical movement of his quest. That is, before Herzog is able to know his identity, he must perceive the deceptive character of the values by which he wishes to define himself. Failing to reach his goal, he is once again confronted with the uncertainty resulting from his sense of selflessness:

> ...We must be where we are. That is necessity. And what are we?... Self-development, self-realization, happiness - these were the titles under which these lunacies occurred. Ah, poor fellow! - and Herzog momentarily joined the objective world in looking down on himself. He too could smile at Herzog and despise him. But there still remained the fact. I am Herzog. I have to be that man. There is no one else to do it. After smiling, he would return to his own self and see the thing through.[1]

The cyclical movement of the quest suggests the influence on Bellow of the doctrine of the "eternal return," which has come to be the philosophical source of a great many works in

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[1] Bellow, p. 72-3

contemporary literature. This doctrine conceives of life as a perpetual movement which never reaches an end but endlessly flows back to its original source to resume its circular motion. It expresses the fusion of two philosophical antinomies, viz, Zeno of Elea's denial of motion - illustrated by well-known paradoxes such as that of Achilles and the turtle, and Heraclitus' conception of life as constant flux - expressed in the image of the river, whose waters perpetually flow and are never the same. In Herzog, the cyclical development of the quest, expressed in an identification of permanence and flux, of life and death, suggests the "eternal return"; "He wrote, for instance, Death - die - live again - die again - live."[2]

The circular pattern described by Herzog's quest links him with Camus' "Sisyphus," the absurd hero par excellence;

> The gods had condemned Sisyphus to ceaselessly rolling a rock to the top of a mountain whence the stone would fall back to its own weight. They had thought with some reason that there is no more dreadful punishment than futile and hopeless labour.[3]

According to Camus, only once man becomes conscious of the absurd can he attain full awareness of his own existence and of his humanity. In The Myth of Sisyphus, Camus explains the significance of man's awareness of the absurd;

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[2] Bellow, p. 7

[3] Kaufmann, p. 312

> At the end of his long effort measured by skyless space and time without depth, the purpose is achieved. Then Sisyphus watches the stone rush down in a few moments toward the lower world whence he will have to push it up again toward the summit. He goes back down with a heavy, yet measured step toward the torment of which he will never know the end. That hour like a breathing space which returns as surely as his suffering, that is the hour of consciousness. At each of these moments when he leaves the heights and gradually sinks toward the lairs of the gods, he is superior to his fate, he is stronger than the rock...the lucidity that was to constitute his torture at the same time crowns his success.[4]

Herzog's search for enculturated forms of selfhood (discussed in Chapter II) stems from what Camus calls "the temptation to write a manual for happiness"; that is, the temptation to avoid consciousness by delivering himself completely to the designs of a group. Perceiving that all the stereotyped realities in which he seeks refuge are only facades which conceal meaning, Herzog retreats into the feeling of anxiety and selflessness that drives him into his quest. In so doing, he becomes conscious of the absurdity resulting from the "motionless movement" of his quest; "Lord, I ran to fight thy holy cause, but kept tripping, never reached the scene of the struggle."[5] After each unsuccessful attempt at apprehending reality, Herzog reaches, as does Sisyphus, consciousness of the futility of the enterprise. The obstinacy of his search

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[4] Kaufmann, p. 314

[5] Bellow, p. 135

defines him as an absurd hero;

> ...But of course he, Herzog, predictable bucking such trends, had characteristically, obstinately, defiantly, blindly, but without sufficient courage or intelligence, tried to be a marvelous Herzog, a Herzog who, perhaps clumsily, tried to live out marvelous qualities vaguely comprehended. Granted he had gone too far, beyond his talents and his powers, but this was the cruel difficulty of a man who had strong impulses, even faith, but lacked clear ideas. What if he failed? Did that really mean that there was no faithfulness, no generosity, no secret quality? Should he have been a plain unambitious Herzog? No...
>
> He wondered, even why he should have wanted to survive. Others in his generation wore themselves out, died of strokes, of cancer, willed their own deaths, conceivably. But he, despite all blunders, fucky-knuckles that he was, he must be cunning, though. He survived. And for what?...[6]

Furthermore, his inability to recognize himself in the definitions society has made abailable for him arouses in him the feeling of estrangement which, in Camus' view, causes the awareness of absurdity; "The divorce between man and his life, the actor and his setting, truly constitutes the feeling of absurdity."[7]

The absurd is often conveyed by the vision of man as lost in a labyrinth. The Greek myth of the labyrinth, which, through Kafka, has been a source of inspiration to modern writers such as Sartre, Giraudoux, Anouilh, Borges and Robbe-

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[6] Bellow, p. 100

[7] Martin Esslin, The Theater of the Absurd, (Doubleday and Co., Inc., New York, 1969), p. 5

Grillet, appears to have inspired Bellow's cyclical treatment of Herzog. Herzog's perpetual search - a search in which all paths invariably lead him back to the point of departure - is the characteristic theme of the literature of the absurd:

> Oh, what a thing I am - What a thing! His driver raced the lights on Park Avenue, and Herzog considered what matters were like: 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![8]

The cyclical vision of life, which implies the idea of perpetual flux, is reinforced by Herzog's frequent train rides. Although the various train rides have different destinations, they share one significant characteristic, they stimulate Herzog's flashes of insight and induce in him the desire to comprehend his flash-like states of consciousness:

> Quickly, quickly, more! The train rushed over the landscape. It swooped past New Haven. It ran with all its might toward Rhode Island. Herzog, now barely looking through the tinted, immovable sealed window felt his eager, flying spirit streaming out, speaking, piercing, making clear judgements, uttering final explanations, necessary words only. He was in a whirling ecstasy.[9]

The recurrence of these rides and their common characteristic confuse the reader, who fails to find distinctions between

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[8] Bellow, p. 214

[9] Bellow, p. 74

the different rides. Since they fuse in the reader's (and in Herzog's) mind as if they were one and the same, they convey the idea that there is no backward or forward movement, but rather, absence of movement;

> Dear Governor Stevenson, Herzog wrote, gripping his seat in the hurling train. Just a word with you, friend...[10]
>
> The wheels of the cars stormed underneath. Woods and pastures ran up and receded, the rails of sidings sheathed in rust, the dipping racing wires and on the right the blue of the sound, deeper, stronger than before...[11]
>
> A dining car steward rang the chimes for lunch, but Herzog had no time to eat. He was about to begin another letter...[12]

By emphasizing the "motionless movement" of Herzog's quest, these train rides arouse in the reader the recognition of absurdity.

The cyclical handling of time, which conveys the vision of life as a labyrinth, also expresses the absurd. Since Herzog is an introspective hero, past, present and future overlap in his reflections. His memories of the past, his concern with the present and his thoughts of the future are experienced simultaneously. Thus, the novel unfolds progressively and regressively at the same time. There is a deliberate play on time; while the continuous movement in the narrative

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[10] Bellow, p. 72

[11] Bellow, p. 53

[12] Bellow, p. 53

expresses chronology, the absence of movement in the actual development of the action expresses stillness;

> With Madeleine, Herzog had made his second attempt to live in the country... He had forced Daisy to endure a freezing winter in Eastern Connecticut while he was writing Romanticism and Christianity in a cottage where the pipes had to be thawed with candles and freezing blasts penetrated the clap-board walls while Herzog brooded over his Rousseau or practised his oboe...
>
> But with Madeleine it was going to be different... The house in Ludeyville was bought when Madeleine became pregnant... A year of work saved the house from collapse... Mornings he tried to reserve for brain work... Elbows on his papers Moses stared at half-painted walls, discolored ceilings, filthy windows. Something had come over him... He picked up the oboe. In his dark study, vines clutching the bulging screen, Herzog played Handel and Purcell..., absent-minded and sad... The kitchen was foul enough to breed rats. Egg yolks dried on the plates, coffee turned green in the cups - toast, cereal, maggots breeding in narrow bones, fruit flies, dollar bills, postage stamps and trading stamps soaking on the formica counter. Madeleine, to get away from his music, slammed the screen door, slammed the car door... When she was gone, he dried the oboe, looked over the reeds, shut the frowsy plush case...
>
> Madeleine said quickly, firmly, accurately, 'you will never get the surroundings you want. Those are in the twelfth century somewhere... Okay - Let us hear your sad story. Tell me about your poor mother. And your father, and your boarder, the drunkard. And the synagogue, and the boot-legging...'
>
> Herzog noted from a favorite source - Oposition is true friendship. His house, his child, yeah all that a man hath will he give for Wisdom... A sweet little soul, Tennie had called Moses. At forty, to earn such a banal reputation! His forehead grew wet. Such stupidity deserved harsher punishment - a sickness, a jail sentence. Again, he was only being lucky (Ramona, food and wine,

> invitations to the seashore)... Now Daisy had been a different person, cooler, more regular, a conventional Jewish woman... The chapter on 'Romantics and Enthusiasts' nearly did him in... Here Daisy picked up and left him alone in Connecticut. She had to go back to Ohio... Moses was invited to play the oboe accompanying Mrs. Ilwall, who played a melodeon, on Sunday evenings...[13]

The thought of life with Madeleine in Ludeyville reminds him of his first attempt at living in the country with Daisy. His thoughts soon shift back to Madeleine and, through a recollection of his life with her, he regresses into memories of his family, and then progresses again into the vision of Daisy. The thought of Ramona, a reality of the present, momentarily crosses his mind. Thus, Herzog's multiple associations dislocate chronological time. The annihilation of chronology is emphasized by the use of unifying motifs such as the vision of Herzog playing the oboe, the reference to his romantic studies in the country and the images of decay which precede or follow the reference to his writings. Although the evoked scenes take place in different times, the recurrence of the motifs appears to express that no time has actually elapsed between them.

A number of stylistic devices reinforce the awareness of absurdity implicit in the theme of the labyrinth:

1 - The inhibition of the reader's identification with the hero.

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[13] Bellow, p. 125-33

The attempt to alienate the reader from the protagonist's point of view is aimed at eliciting in the reader a critical and objective response to the hero's reality. The reader's alienation from the character supersedes his traditionally complacent attitude toward the world of fiction. It prevents him from thinking with the hero, allowing him to think about him. Unable to identify with the protagonist, the reader feels free to see the reality of fiction as independent from his own. As he ceases to see in the character a projection of his own fears, concerns and longings, he is able to recognize the absurdity reflected in the hero's attempts. Martin Esslin has this to say in relation to the reader's inhibition from identification and his consequent recognition of absurdity:

> ...If we identify ourselves with the main character in a play, we automatically accept his point of view, see the world in which he moves with his eyes, feel his emotions... Brecht argued that this time-honored psychological link between the actor and the audience must be broken. How could an audience be made to see the actions of the characters in a play critically if they were made to adopt their point of view?[14]

Although Herzog is narrated from the protagonist's point of view, the reader is prevented from identifying with the character. The reader's detachment is primarily

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[14] Esslin, p. 360

achieved by,

a) the creation of a character with whom it is difficult to identify, a character who is suspected of insanity;

> If I am out of my mind, it is all right with me, thought Moses Herzog. Some people thought he was cracked and for a time he himself had doubted that he was all there...[15]

> He had moments of sanity but he could not maintain the balance for very long.[16]

> He was afraid for his own sanity, living like this, especially after the death of Daisy's father...[17]

b) the use of grotesque caricature;

> If our tendency to identify has been inhibited by making the character grotesque, we laugh at this predicament. We see what happens to him from the outside, rather than from his own point of view.[18]

Savage caricatures - marked by the exaggeration of unpleasant traits - have become traditional elements of the literature of the absurd. These devices inhibit identification since the reader is repelled by them. The grotesque imagery in Herzog aims to shock or stupefy the reader by presenting a reality which combines laughter

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[15] Bellow, p. 7

[16] Bellow, p. 134

[17] Bellow, p. 173

[18] Esslin, p. 361

and horror:

> In his posture of collapse on the sofa, arms abandoned over his head and legs stretched away, lying with no more style than a chimpanzee, his eyes with greater than normal radiance watched his own work in the garden with detachment, as if he were looking through the front end of a telescope at a tiny clear image. That suffering joker.[19]

Instead of imitating, in the manner of photography, a preexisting reality, Bellow creates, in Herzog, an expressionistic picture of the world, a picture which transcends the dimension of the quotidian. Bellow's expressionistic descriptions shock the reader by revealing to him a reality which escapes his vision scope. This revelation arouses in him a feeling of estrangement from the world of fiction. The alienating effect of grotesque images enables him to become conscious of absurdity.

2 - Herzog's letter-writing.

Herzog's compulsive letter-writing stems from his meta-physical preoccupation with the question of being. It is an attempt to apprehend reality through language. Herzog's urge to write is motivated by flash-like states of being during which he experiences lucidity, hyperactivity and emotional intensity:

> ...His state was too strange, this mixture of clairvoyance, and spleen, esprit de

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[19] Bellow, p. 17

> l'escalier, noble inspirations, poetry and nonsense, ideas, hyperaesthesia - wandering about like this, hearing forceful but indefinite music within, seeing things, violet fringes about the clearest objects. ...To God he jotted several lines...[20]

In order to comprehend these flashes of insight which suddenly seize him, he attempts to verbalize them. Thus, whenever he feels overwhelmed by intensity, he writes:

> But now, though he still behaved oddly, he felt confident, cheerful, clairvoyant and strong. He had fallen under a spell and was writing letters to everyone under the sun. He was so stirred by these letters that from the end of June, he moved from place to place with a valise full of papers. Hidden in the country he wrote endlessly, fanatically, to the newspapers, to people in public life, to friends and relatives and, at last, to the dead, and finally, the famous dead.[21]

His attempt at conceptualizing insight is not successful, since his perception loses meaning as soon as it is verbalized. The futility of his attempt arouses in him the consciousness of the absurd, which is expressed in:

a) Incoherent and inconsistent letters;

Herzog's inability to sustain a theme implies his frustration at the disintegration of his idea as it becomes expression. Soon after he starts developing an idea, his mind is blocked by other

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[20]Bellow, p. 332

[21]Bellow, p. 7

thoughts or concerns which obliterate the central idea:

> Dear Dr. Mossbach: I am sorry you are not satisfied with my treatment of T. E. Hulme and his definition of romanticism as 'split religion'... Modern science, least bothered with the definitions of human nature. Knowing only the activity of investigation, achieves its profoundest results through anonymity, recognizing only the brilliant functioning of intellect. Such truths as it finds may be nothing to live by, but perhaps a moratorium of definitions of human nature is now best.
>
> Herzog abandoned this theme with characteristic abruptness.
>
> Dear Nachman, he wrote. I know it was you I saw on 8th Street last Monday. Running away from me...[22]

b) Incomplete letters:

Before even starting to develop a thought, he abandons it. In so doing, he expresses his frustration at his inability to convey meaning through language:

> Dear Dr. Edvig, the fact is that madness also has been denied me. I do not know why I should write to you at all. Dear Mr. President, Internal Revenue regulations will turn us into a nation of bookkeepers. The life of every citizen is becoming a business... Dear Daisy, he wrote to his first wife, I know it is my turn to visit Marco on Parent's Day...[23]

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[22] Bellow, p. 135-6

[23] Bellow, p. 17

c) Unwritten letters addressed simultaneously to different persons;

These letters are an expression of Herzog's frustrated attempts at communicating;

> Dear Wanda, Dear Sinka, Dear Libbie, Dear Ramona, Dear Sono, I need help in the worst way. I am afraid I am falling apart.[24]

They are calls for help which stem from Herzog's need to relate meaningfully to people. The fact that these letters are not fully expressed reflects Herzog's consciousness of the gulf between man's aspirations and the world's capacity to satisfy them. This gulf is, for Camus, absurdity;

> Absurdity is in neither man nor things, but in the impossibility of establishing between them any relation other than strangeness.[25]

Herzog's letters are never mailed, and, most likely, never even "written." These characteristics of his imaginary correspondence suggest his awareness of the absurdity of man's attempts at relating to the world meaningfully. By engaging in an absurd, apparently purposeless scheme, he appears to be defying an absurd world. He seems to be attacking the present condition of human existence by way of absurdity. Like the homosexual in

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[24] Bellow, p. 17

[25] Alain Robbe-Grillet, For a New Novel, (Grove Press, Inc., New York, 1965), p. 63

the court-room, he seems to be "giving the world comedy for comedy, joke for joke... With his bad fantasy he defied a bad reality, subliminally asserting to the magistrate. 'Your authority and my degeneracy are one and the same.'"[26]

3 - The devaluation of language.

In Herzog, Bellow criticizes the present meaninglessness of language and its inability to express or reveal reality. Herzog's awareness of the divorce existing between language and reality finds expression in a series of linguistic devices which convey the dominance of language over content. Herzog's word games - which include the use of puns, aphorisms, paradoxes, bathos, nursery rhymes and nonsensical combinations of words or letters - reflect an attempt at breaking the determinism of verbal logic and reducing language to its proper function, that is, the expression, rather than the concealment, of reality:

> And, instead of concluding this letter to Monsignor, he wrote out, for his own use, one of June's favorite nursery rhymes.
>
> I love little pussy, her coat is so warm. And if I don't hurt her, she'll do me no harm. I'll sit by the fire and give her some food, And pussy will love me because I am good.[27]

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[26] Bellow, p. 236

[27] Bellow, p. 236

> You did not tell me about the most-most... There is this association that people belong to. They are the most of every type. There is the hairiest bald man, and the baldest hairy man. The fattest thin lady! And the thinnest fat woman. The tallest dwarf and the smallest giant. They are all in it. The weakest strong man, and the strongest block-head. Then they have things like crippled acrobats, and ugly beauties. And what do they do, papa? On Saturday night they have a dinner-dance. They have a contest. ...and if you can tell the hairiest bald-man from the baldest hairy man, you get a prize.[28]

By parodying famous literary lines, Herzog expresses his contempt for those linguistic cliches which have completely dominated thought:

> Oh, Lord! he concluded, forgive all these tresspasses. Lead me not into Penn Station.[29]

> Why God forbid! Herzog looked for something to write a note with, having left a pencil and paper in the dressing-room. He jotted on the back of the salesman's pad. A bitch in time breeds contempt.[30]

By reducing aphorisms to meaningless patter, he attacks the traditional literary jargon. His mocking attitude toward literary language evinces the anti-literary feeling which is characteristic of the literature of the Absurd and of contemporary literature in general.

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[28] Bellow, p. 124

[29] Bellow, p. 303

[30] Bellow, p. 27

Antonin Artaud explains the goals of this anti-literary trend:

> As our knowledge becomes separated from life our culture no longer contains ourselves (or only an insignificant part of ourselves), for it forms a social context into which we are not integrated. So the problem becomes that of bringing our life back into contact with our culture, making it a living culture once again. To achieve this, we shall first have to kill the respect for what is written down in black and white...to break up our language so that it can be put together again in order to re-establish contact with the 'absolute,' or, as I should prefer to say, 'with multiple reality;' it is imperative to 'push human beings again toward seeing themselves as they really are.'[31]

Thus, Herzog's word games are aimed at the annihilation of verbal logic in-as-much as it perpetuates an artificial order and ties the individual to conventional, alienating patterns which prevent him from attaining consciousness of being:

> ...The loss of language brings with it an increase in loving unity with living things. In other words, individual identity, defined by language, having a name, is the source of our separateness and the origin of the restrictions imposed on our merging in the unity of being. Hence, it is through the destruction of language - through nonsense, the arbitrary, rather than the contingent naming of things - that the mystical yearning for unity with the universe expresses itself.[32]

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[31] Esslin, p. 356

[32] Esslin, p. 298

Herzog's verbal nonsense implies a striving to break down the barriers of debased standards and shock the reader out of an existence which has lost meaning and become trite, mechanical and complacent.

CHAPTER IV

Conclusion

Although Herzog has become aware of the absurdity of his striving for identity through abstractions, he has not been able to free himself from "verbal constructions" and is thus estranged from concrete reality.

The physical action of the novel - included in the last three chapters - incorporates a series of incidents which temporarily shock Herzog out of his world of ideas and cause him to become in touch with his feelings;

1 - The Court-Trials;

These trials emphasize sordidness and brutality. The vision of real people displaying their inhumanity in court confronts Herzog with a concrete reality of which he was unaware;

> ...But this is the difficulty with people who spend their lives in humane studies and therefore imagine once cruelty has been described in books it is ended. Of course, he really knew better - understood that human beings would not live so as to be understood by the Herzogs. Why should they?[1]

Herzog's identification with the child beaten to death by his mother in the presence of her lover reveals his

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[1] Bellow, p. 246

momentary merging in a reality other than his own:

> He wondered whether he was going to come down with sickness. Or was it the terror of the child that had gotten into him? Anyway, he felt stifled, as if the valves of his heart were not closing and the blood were going back into his lungs.[2]

Although the court trials stimulate Herzog's awakening to concrete reality, he is still too involved in himself to be able to see the reality of the court as independent of his own subjective reality. After a flash of perception, he falls back into his characteristic dialectic. He intellectualizes what he sees. He draws conclusions, establishes connexions, seeks definitions. Thus, he associates the brutality of the prosecuted couple toward the dead child, with the presumable brutality of Madeleine and Gerbach toward his daughter June:

> The child screamed, clung, but with both arms the girl hurled it against the wall. On her legs was ruddy hair. And her lover, too, with long jaws and zooty sideburns, watching on the bed. Lying down to copulate, and standing up to kill. Some kill, them cry, others, not even that.[3]

The association of the objective reality of the courtroom with his own obsessions implies that, after momentary glimpses at external reality, Herzog is again absorbed in his own world of abstractions.

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[2] Bellow, p. 246

[3] Bellow, 247

2 - Herzog's trip to Chicago;

Although he goes to Chicago with the purpose of killing Madeleine and Gerbach, the vision of Gerbach bathing June again shocks him out of his world of abstractions and confronts him with a real human being. Herzog's recognition of Gerbach's humanity prevents him from shooting. Having defined Valentine as brutal, he had not conceived of the possibility of his being tender;

> To shoot him! - an absurd thought. As soon as Herzog saw the actual person, giving an actual bath, the reality of it, the tenderness of such a buffoon to a little child, his intended violence turned into theatre, into something ludicrous. He was not ready to make such a fool of himself.[4]

Herzog's awareness of the manifold aspects an individual is capable of revealing implies his insight into concrete reality, as opposed to the artificiality of "verbal constructs" which limit human possibilities by polarizing human traits;

> Sentiment and brutality - never one without the other, like fossils and oil. This news is priceless.[5]

However, this insight into reality is only a passing phase in Herzog's developing consciousness. His visit to Phoebe Gerbach stems from his determination to convince

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[4] Bellow, p. 265

[5] Bellow, p. 135

her to accuse her husband of adultery and to sue for divorce so that he can gain custody of his daughter. This determination reveals Herzog's withdrawal into his own world. Again, Madeleine and Gerbach have become, to Herzog, the embodiment of viciousness. Again, they have lost their humanity and become unreal:

> 'If you would sue for divorce,' he explained, 'as you have every right to do, you would name Madeleine for adultery. I would help raise the money. I would underwrite the whole cost. I want Junie. Don't you see? Together we could nail them. You have let Madeleine drive you here and there. As if you were a nanny goat.'[6]

Herzog's self-centeredness, however, soon changes into a genuine understanding of Phoebe. As he gains perception of her own feelings, he becomes affectionate toward her. Having been able to recognize in Phoebe a real individual, with her own burden of suffering, he has achieved, once again, a free, unbiased vision of reality:

> There was a softer kindliness in Herzog's expression, not often seen. Rather awkwardly, he took Phoebe's hand, and she could not move fast enough to avoid his lips. He drew her closer and kissed her on the head. 'You are right. This was an unnecessary visit.'[7]

3 - Herzog's visit to Lucas Asphalter:

His attitude toward Asphalter clearly illustrates

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[6] Bellow, p. 269-70

[7] Bellow, p. 270

his growing awareness of human dependencies. By expressing sympathy for Asphalter's grief over his dead monkey, he reveals his ability to share another person's feelings and, at least temporarily, forget his own interests and obsessions:

> Do not feel bad, Luke. Now listen to me. Maybe I can tell you something about this. At least I can tell you how I see it. A man may say, 'From now on I am going to speak the truth.' But the truth hears him and runs away and hides before he is even done speaking. There is something funny about the human condition, and civilized intelligence makes fun of its own ideas...[8]

Herzog's words show, for the first time in the novel, the actual communication of his own feelings and ideas to another person. For the first time, he is able to cast off his individual self completely and become absorbed in the other person's world. While comforting Asphalter, he feels overwhelmed by a feeling of brotherhood which enables him to recognize his own humanity:

> I really believe that brotherhood is what makes a man human. If I owe God a human life, this is where I fall down. 'Man liveth not by self alone but in his brother's face.'[9]

Herzog's empathy with Asphalter anticipates, on a human level, what he experiences in relation to nature when he returns to his Ludeyville home. In its mingling of natural

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[8] Bellow, p. 278

[9] Bellow, p. 280

growth and decay, the old estate becomes a living display of reality. In contact with nature, Herzog appears to achieve a feeling of fulfillment, of being in harmony with the surrounding system and with himself:

> On the mattress much nest litter had fallen - straws, wood threads, down, bits of flesh (mouse ends) and streaks of excrement. Unwilling to disturb these flat-faced little creatures, Herzog pulled the mattress of his marriage bed into June's room. He opened more windows and the sun and country air at once entered. He was surprised to feel such contentment...Contentment? Whom was he kidding? This was Joy! His servitude was ended, and his heart released from its grisly heaviness and encrustation.[10]

Transfigured by the joy of sharing with nature, Herzog discards abstractions and surrenders himself completely to the surrounding world which contains him. The intensity of his joy causes him to feel alive and integrated. Through the recognition of his intense feeling of oneness with nature, he attains consciousness of selfhood:

> Anyway, can I pretend I have much choice? I look at myself and see chest, thighs, feet - a head. This strange organization, I know it will die. And inside, something, something, happiness... 'Thou movest me.' That leaves no choice. Something produces intensity, a holy feeling, as oranges produce oranges, as grass green, as birds heat... My face too blind, my mind too narrow. But this intensity, does not mean anything? Is it an idiot joy that makes this animal the most peculiar animal of all, exclaim something? And he thinks this reaction is a sign; a proof of eternity? And he has it in his breast? But I have no

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[10] Bellow, p. 320

> arguments to make about it. 'Thou movest me.' But what do you want, Herzog? But that is just it - not a solitary thing. I am pretty well satisfied to be, to be just as it is willed, and for as long as I may remain in occupancy.[11]

However, Herzog does not attain ego-consciousness. Rather, by recognizing within himself the force that drives all living things, he appears to discover his cosmic identity. The attainment of a feeling of universal unity evinces a significant transformation in Herzog's original goal. That is, his search for an individual identity gradually leads him into an awareness of a cosmic identity. The sense of universal unity is achieved through Herzog's movement from conceptualization to sheer perception, from dialectical analysis to intutition. Thus, instead of attaining a conceptual definition of himself, he gains insight into himself in relation to the universe. It is only when he loses his ego-consciousness that he is able to recognize a universal selfhood and a common humanity. By losing consciousness of his individual self, Herzog reaches the state of incomprehensible exhilaration which Emerson describes as a mystical experience:

> Standing on the bare ground, - my head bathed by the blithe air, and uplifted into infinite space, - all mean egotism vanishes. I become a transparent eye-ball. I am nothing. I see all. The currents of the Universal Being circulate through me; I am part or particle of God...[12]

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[11] Bellow, p. 347

[12] Sealts, Merton and Ferguson, Alfred, Emerson's Nature, (Dodd, Mead and Company, Inc., New York, 1969), p. 8

Herzog's sense of integration in the universal order causes him to rejoice in the mystery of the incomprehensible; "Go through what is comprehensible and you conclude that only the incomprehensible gives any light."[13]

When, in Toward a Psychology of Being, Abraham Maslow describes the characteristics of what he calls "a peak experience," he seems to be describing Herzog's emotional state after his return to Ludeyville;

> ...An experience in which the person feels integrated (unified, whole, of one piece), than at other times. He also looks (to the observer) more integrated in various ways, e.g. less split or dissociated, less fighting against himself, less split between an experiencing self and an observing-self, more one-pointed, more harmoniously organized...[14]

According to Maslow, this state of mind enables a person to become aware of his identity as a human being, regardless of cultural determinants. Thus, Herzog may have achieved, in Ludeyville, the real object of his search, viz, pure selfhood.

Whether Herzog's feeling of self-fulfillment will be lasting is doubtful. Herzog himself admits that his cheerfulness and joy are only temporary phases in the course of his existence;

> Everything horrible, everything sublime and things not imagined, yet. And you, part-time visionary, cheerful, tragical mammal.[15]

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[13] Bellow, p. 273

[14] Maslow, Abraham, Toward a Psychology of Being, (Van Nostrand Rheinhold Company, New York, 1968), p. 98

[15] Bellow, p. 266

His words suggest that his achievement is not final; that cosmic perception and harmony with men and nature are not possible permanent states for man, but only temporary reliefs to his endless struggle. After re-establishing connexions with civilization, Herzog will inevitably be caught up in those patterns, systems, categories and "ideal constructions" which constitute life in a society. Although he is contemptuous of the artificiality of such a world, he cannot deny the fact that he belongs in it:

> You, you yourself are a child of this mass and a brother to all the rest, or else an ingrate, dilletante, idiot...[16]

Thus, Herzog seems to conclude that he is unable to reach a permanent state of bliss. He knows that, after flashes of insight, "ideal constructions" will take over once again, and he will again be imprisoned in an artificial, theatrical, verbal world. However, his awareness of the inexorability of the world of abstractions is compatible with his recognition of the reality of insight. For Herzog, both the experience of cosmic harmony and that of being embedded in an artificial world are man's reality. The coexistence of the real and the unreal in human existence is brilliantly expressed by Rainer Maria Rilke in <u>In the Notes of Matte Laurids Brigge</u>:

> We discover that we do not know our role; we look for a mirror; we want to remove our

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[16] Bellow, p. 134

> make-up and take off what is false and be real. But, somewhere, a piece of disguise that we forgot still sticks to us. A trace of exaggeration remains in our eyebrows; we do not notice that the corners of our mouth are bent. And so we walk, a mockery and a mere half; neither having achieved being, nor actors.[17]

Rilke's words express the inevitable mingling of reality and "theatre" which, for Herzog (and Bellow), appears to define the human condition.

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[17] Kaufmann, p. 120

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