THE EDUCATION OF A WRITER: LITERARY INFLUENCE AND INTERTEXTUALITY IN SAUL BELLOW’S EARLY NOVELS

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ABSTRACT

Saul Bellow is considered one of the towering figures of American literature in the second half of the twentieth century, an original and compelling voice of post-war realism. And yet Bellow was not only powerfully influenced by earlier works of literature in defining his own vision, but actively engaged with specific works in his early novels in order to come to an understanding of and define his own vision. In each of his first three novels, Dangling Man (1944), The Victim (1947) and The Adventures of Augie March (1953) Bellow develops in accordance with techniques of conscious literary intertextuality. These works reflect increasing originality and ambition as Bellow moves from exploring the obstacles and potential dilemmas inherent in individual subjectivity to asserting the self-fulfilling potential of individual freedom and selfhood. Therefore these novels demonstrate the crucial evolution of the role of literary intertextuality within Bellow’s artistic strategies as he establishes his position as a novelist.

Chapter 1 analyses Bellow’s first novel Dangling Man. Bellow explores the desire for an impossible degree of individual freedom by constructing a dilemma with allusion to several earlier works of literature which explore similar notions of freedom and authenticity. In particular, Bellow defines his authorial vision of the limits of individual subjectivity by rebutting the central ideas of Jean-Paul Sartre’s novel Nausea. Chapter 2 analyses Bellow’s technique in The Victim which appropriates the artistic strategy of Dostoevsky’s The Eternal Husband in order to explore the foundations of human interaction. Specifically Bellow extends Dostoevsky’s literary technique to consider complex questions around the conditions of human responsibility, discord, empathy, and dignity, particularly in regard to the limits of individual subjectivity. In The Adventures of Augie March, Bellow’s third novel and the subject of Chapter 3, Bellow embarks on an ambitious project of liberation: to portray his innovative vision of the potential fulfilment of individual freedom and selfhood. For this purpose Bellow no longer constructs his novel in direct relation to literary precedents. Instead he draws upon the relevant qualities of earlier literary works and their characters to create an original quixotic protagonist who embarks on a series of self-perpetuating adventures. In this novel then, Bellow rejects the mood and techniques of his first two novels and depicts the potential of individuals to define their own reality.

The analysis of these chapters attests to the fact that as an emerging novelist Bellow consciously applied methods of intertextuality towards developing his original vision as an author. The nature and extent of Bellow’s intertextual techniques evolved as his literary ambitions expanded. This thesis provides insights into the function of literary inheritance and intertextuality during the developmental phase of Saul Bellow’s career as a novelist, and in this way delivers an original contribution to understanding the evolving artistic strategy of one of America’s great novelists.
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DECLARATION

The thesis is my own composition, all sources have been acknowledged and my contribution is clearly identified in the thesis. This thesis contains only sole-authored work, some of which has been published and prepared for publication under sole authorship.

Parts of Chapter One have been published in:

Parts of Chapter Three have been prepared for publication in a forthcoming volume:
INTRODUCTION

[Int]Young writers are and should be imitative ... After all, composers would be considerably handicapped if each had to invent the form of the sonatas for himself. No one is or should be entirely original. Each writer has his ancestors, and he knows perfectly well who they are. ... I know perfectly to whom I owe.¹

In 1952, as Saul Bellow neared the completion of his third novel, he insisted in a letter to Lionel Trilling that “man’s heart is ... itself the origin and seat of importance,” and that to “prove and proclaim it with all one’s powers—that is the work and duty of a writer now.”² Bellow’s heart was orientated by a passion for literature, and the epigraph above attests that he found inspiration in the legacies of previous authors as he endeavoured to conceive his own literary vision and method of fulfilling the “duty of a writer.” Moreover, Bellow’s reliance on literature to understand the world and then to express this understanding often manifests in his novels. Bellow’s novels can be interpreted as multi-faceted dialogues between his literary influences and his personal historical context. Self-conscious intertextual construction is an integral aspect of Bellow’s original approach to the predominant subject of his literature: America and its avenues of individual freedom and selfhood.

This study analyses the self-conscious techniques of intertextual artistic construction which Bellow employed in his first three novels: Dangling Man (1944), The Victim (1947) and The Adventures of Augie March (1953).³ These novels not only attest to Bellow’s reliance as a developing novelist on preceding

³ Saul Bellow, Dangling Man (London: Penguin, 2007); Saul Bellow, The Victim (London: Penguin 2008); Saul Bellow, The Adventures of Augie March (London: Penguin, 2001). Further references to these novels are included within the text between parentheses with the abbreviations DM, TV and AM respectively.
literature, they also succinctly reveal his conscious literary engagement with this reliance. Bellow intentionally intertwines his literary influences into these novels in a manner which directly impacts upon their meaning and which serves to convey his own original perspective as an author. Furthermore the evolution of literary intertextual construction across these works reflects Bellow’s development in confidence and ambition during this formative stage in his career. Hence the literary intertextuality of Bellow’s first three novels provides profound insight into the evolution and establishment of his unique sense of individual freedom and selfhood, and subsequently his vision as a novelist.

**Literary Models**

Bellow was born in Montreal in 1915 into a Jewish émigré family from St. Petersburg.\(^4\) His family moved to Chicago in 1924, and it was here that Bellow immersed himself in the subject that would form the engine of his novels, America, declaring himself, like the protagonist of *The Adventures of Augie March*, “an American.”\(^5\) Furthermore, Bellow immersed himself in literature, which became synonymous with his American experience: “I was getting through America by reading. I don’t know how else I would have done it.”\(^6\) In Chicago Bellow progressed from reading voraciously, to forming literary friendships, to amateurishly dabbling in fiction, to teaching literature, to writing biographies of novelists and eventually to becoming a novelist himself.\(^7\) Literature marked Bellow’s formation.

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Introduction

In the essay “Summations” Bellow recounts how on a voyage to Mexico as a young man his bus passed by a chain gang working on the roads and he found himself juxtaposing the physical image before him with the fictional world of the book he was reading at the time, Stendhal’s *The Red and the Black*. Bellow evokes this event to exemplify how literature affected his interpretation of reality, and he acknowledges that he would look at such scenes, at America, through the lens of literature. The same tendency manifests explicitly on numerous other occasions. For instance in a letter to Alfred Kazin from Paris Bellow expressed his frustration with the French cultural and intellectual terrain:

> It’s also rather interesting that people don’t believe Balzac, Flaubert and Stendhal when they write of French life and Paris—much less Dostoevsky in that queer little book called *Le Bourgeois de Paris*. They prefer to trust Henry James, or Henry Miller or even Carl Van Vechten and all that happy American throng that lived around Montagne Ste. Geneviève. But if Stendhal were alive today, he might very conceivably choose to live in Washington D.C. considering what has become of his beloved Milan.

Thus even in his contention with other people’s perspectives Bellow employed literary examples or, in this case, affirmed allegiances. The pervasiveness of literary influence on Bellow’s outlook meant that he not only interpreted other people according to literary examples—“In Paris you could identify your Balzacian or Molieresque characters …. Similarly, in London, with people being Dickensian or Trollopian, or whatever it was”—he also discerned the reverse process: “I began to see that modern man’s character is also derivative from literature or history.” Literature and the world at large were two complementary, dialectic realities for Bellow.

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Bellow viewed and forged his own identity through a literary lens. For example, he often compared himself to certain protagonists, such as Julien Sorel who proved that “[g]ifted young men from the obscurest bottom of society can rise in the world despite their subjective complexity and singularity.” On a trip to Spain Bellow alluded to himself as Don Quixote. Bellow’s literary influences were so manifest in his identity that others recognised him accordingly: when he and his friend Isaac Rosenfeld entered the New York literary scene they were referred to as the “Chicago Dostoyevskians.” Above all, Bellow attempted to place himself in relation to his favourite authors, which included reading his reality into theirs. In the same letter in which he complains of Paris, Bellow adds that Stendhal would do as I do with his copy of Les Temps Modernes, that is scan the latest sottises, observe with brutal contempt the newest wrinkle in anguish and then feed Simone’s articles on sex to the cat to cure her of heat and give the remainder to little G[regory] to cut dollies from; he can’t read yet and lives happily in nature.

In his essay “The French as Dostoyevsky Saw Them” Bellow describes reading Dostoevsky’s Winter Notes while in Paris and sympathising with the Russian’s hatred of the French bourgeoisie from what Bellow considered to be their shared position: “I too was a foreigner and a barbarian from a vast and backward land.” In these examples Bellow not only enforces but also expresses his sentiments, opinions and outlooks by aligning himself with the views of his literary idols.

In terms of his aspirations in life and in writing, too, Bellow found inspiration in literary examples. For instance, D. H. Lawrence’s Mornings in

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13 Atlas, Bellow, 123.
14 Atlas, Bellow, 84.
Introduction

_Mexico_ inspired Bellow’s first trip out of the U.S to the neighbouring state,¹⁷ and when he won a Guggenheim grant he decided to live in Paris, not so much in imitation of American ex-patriot writers during the 1920s such as Hemingway, the “quintessential tourist,” but more because writers such as Zola, Balzac, Baudelaire, Rilke and Proust had for a long time sparked his imagination about the French capital.¹⁸ Julien Sorel again served as an inspiration as Bellow sought, in his writing aspirations, an equivalent level of rebellion and self-determination against his surroundings and family.¹⁹ Bellow also drew inspiration from the biography of such writers as Sherwood Anderson, who sacrificed a great deal for their literary pursuits.²⁰ Furthermore, Bellow’s recourse to the views of his literary idols demonstrates that he sought to consider himself as sharing their views and continuing their enterprise. As James Atlas notes, “[i]n his own quiet way, Bellow measured himself against the modern giants of form” and “aspired to belong in their company.”²¹ During Bellow’s early trips to New York as an aspiring writer, Kazin met the Chicagoan and would later recall Bellow as “ambitious and dedicated. He had pledged himself to a great destiny. He was going to take on more than the rest of us.”²²

Bellow felt a particular affinity with those writers who wrote their own lives into their works of fiction. While he was employed with the Works Progress Administration, created during the Depression by President Roosevelt, Bellow wrote biographies of contemporary American authors including James T. Farrell

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¹⁷ Atlas, _Bellow_, 66.
²⁰ Atlas, _Bellow_, 63-64. Atlas writes that Anderson “made his name in Chicago after walking out on his job and marriage,” and that “Anderson’s decision to throw over a successful career in business for the sake of literature struck a chord with Bellow.”
²¹ Atlas, _Bellow_, 185.
whom Bellow described in these terms: “Farrell’s writing is founded on his life. Even in his short stories it is always himself who somehow is involved.”\textsuperscript{23} Bellow’s own biographer, Atlas, adds that this quote describes “an approach Bellow was to emulate.”\textsuperscript{24} It was also an approach Bellow admitted to, though with clarifying comments. In an interview Bellow affirmed Alberto Moravia’s claim that “every novel [is] a form of higher autobiography” but with the qualification that “that doesn’t mean there’s any one-to-one relation between the facts and the facts about your own life.”\textsuperscript{25} Bellow also asserted that it is “very difficult to be absolutely factual about yourself” and therefore, although the “[t]hings that you write are in some degree autobiographical” because “you may draw on facts from your own life;” these facts inevitably result in a fictional narrative whose artistic merit depends on their cohesion: “if they’re not in harmony with your story, they’re worse than useless. You stumble over them.”\textsuperscript{26}

As someone who saw the world with literary eyes, Bellow was adept at identifying the literary merit of aspects of reality, which drove his success as a novelist.

At one point in the essay “Summations” Bellow asserts that his concern for the essay is “the formation of a writer’s overview” and he “invoke[s] Stendhal again” because Stendhal “believed that he had a philosophy through which he looked at the world, and thought no writer could do without one.”\textsuperscript{27} As this example itself demonstrates, Bellow’s own “overview” reflected the pervasive influence of literature and the views of literary figures. Thus when Bellow drew

\textsuperscript{23} Bellow, quoted in Atlas,\textit{Bellow}, 63.
\textsuperscript{24} Atlas,\textit{Bellow}, 63.
\textsuperscript{26} Saul Bellow, “Saul Bellow at Ease,” Howard County Poetry and Literature Society presents: The Writing Life, www.youtube.com/watch?v=u-wMQIm_4Vw.
\textsuperscript{27} Bellow, “Summations,” 188.
upon his own experiences and sense of reality in writing novels, he invariably
employed literary influence.

Within Bellow’s novels literary influence is evident in a number of ways. There are few Bellow protagonists who do not on numerous occasions draw literary analogies, and many do so frequently. Several protagonists reflect Bellow’s consuming passion for literature. Meanwhile, in his task of creating an artistic form Bellow also had conscious and unconscious recourse to literary influences and interpretations. At the most conscious level, Bellow transposed and acknowledged his literary relationships in his literary constructions, as he intertextually integrated their influence into his artistic strategies and novels. Thus the influence of literature played a direct role in the narratives of Bellow’s novels.

**Influence and Intertextuality**

The aim of this thesis is to establish and analyse how Bellow consciously engages with previous works of literature within and across his first three novels, thereby arriving at his own unique approach and vision as a novelist. The terms influence and intertextuality are employed in a manner applicable to literary criticism and relevant to the aims of this thesis.

Graham Allen claims that due to a common tendency to employ the term intertextuality without critically engaging with its complexities, it is in danger of meaning “more than whatever” each critic wishes it to mean.\(^\text{28}\) However, he also argues that any attempt to establish a fundamental definition is doomed to failure.\(^\text{29}\) The term intertextuality has garnered friction beyond its theoretical roots due to the lack of coherence in the formulation of the term by Kristeva and other

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theorists, the large number of often conflicting theoretical approaches, and lastly its functional potential beyond these theories. There arises a gap between theories of intertextuality and a functional employment of the term in analysing intertextual relationships in literary criticism.

Several critics perceive that the theories of intertextuality proposed by post-structuralists such as Kristeva and Barthes were intended to counteract so-called ‘influence’ studies, which they considered too reliant on tradition and the individual, thereby tending towards dubious normative judgements, biographical studies, assumed author authority and promoting an outworn humanism. However, their theories did not replace traditional influence studies per se, but shifted emphasis towards an expansive consideration of the way in which innumerable systems, as opposed to figures and works, impact upon a text and its meaning. Consequently, as a malleable term intended to denote the relationships between texts, intertextuality encompasses or relates to influence studies and a range of other literary theories ranging back to Aristotle.

In regards to literary criticism, by removing the agency of the author in favour of the agency of the reader and language, the post-structuralist theories of intertextuality are so expansive as to make them inapplicable, as they stand, to textual analysis—the full intertextuality of a text cannot be mapped. Hence critics note that Kristeva and Barthes appear to perform precisely what they seek to undermine— influence or source studies—when they attempt to apply their

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theories for literary analysis. After attempting to defend Barthes against numerous such criticisms, Allen acknowledges that the French theorist’s writings “refuse to develop a rigorous theory of how intertextuality might be applied to other texts.”

Theorists such as Riffaterre and Genette, on the other hand, who attempt to construct more structuralist oriented theories of intertextuality applicable to literary criticism, are often criticised for not acknowledging the full breadth of (post-structuralist) intertextuality. Yet for the purposes of literary criticism, the parameters for exploring intertextuality must be narrowed and defined.

This thesis approaches influence and intertextuality predominantly in agreement with their treatment by Bloom, Irwin and Genette. I am concerned with the author’s intentions and evolution, and examine these in regard to the intertextual makeup of given literary texts. I agree with Irwin’s assertions that “[a]uthorial intention is unavoidable; intertextual connections are not somehow magically made between inanimate texts but are the products of authorial design.” However, while Irwin calls for intertextuality to be abandoned in place of notions of ‘allusion,’ the two concepts are distinct and Irwin himself recognises the latter as a subcategory of the former: “While, in a sense, allusions are intertextual phenomena, they are more properly and precisely described as authorial-textual phenomena.” Genette also seeks to “keep transtextual relations within a

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38 Coincidentally—and perhaps this is where influence studies and post-structuralist intertextual theories merge—the analysis of Bellow is consistent with Kristeva’s notions of “the rise of self-consciously intertextual art” from Modernism onwards. See Allen, *Intertextuality*, 50.
determinate and determinable field.”\footnote{Allen, Intertextuality, 107.} He reorientates terminology by creating numerous subcategories (paratextuality, metatextuality and so on), whereby he restricts the term intertextuality to refer to “the effective presence of one text in another which takes place by means of plagiarism, quotation or allusion.”\footnote{See Alfaro, “Intertextuality,” 280.} Thus in this thesis I employ the term ‘intertextual’ in its functional potential, as an umbrella category for “inter-textual phenomena” in order to denote the relationship to other texts (intertexts) within a text.

This thesis functions beyond the bounds of any particular intertextual theory, working within the parameters of examining the particular literary influences which Bellow employs both explicitly and implicitly within his novels. Close analysis of the author’s conscious literary intertextual construction reveals new insights into Bellow’s techniques and intentions in his works. Thus this thesis focuses on close textual analysis as its guiding logic and aims to reveal a significant tactical intertextual evolution in Bellow’s early career as a novelist.

**Formation Novels**

Bellow’s first three novels exemplify the transposition of the author’s his literary influences into works of fiction. Furthermore they demonstrate a dramatic, “revolutionary,”\footnote{Philip Roth, “Rereading Saul Bellow,” in Shop Talk (New York: Vintage International, 2001) 139.} evolution in Bellow’s career which corresponds with the development in literary intertextuality in his art. As an emerging writer Bellow draws influence from, assesses, appropriates and expands on elements from earlier works of literature to construct his unique artistic vision. The degree and nature of this method depends on the scope of Bellow’s task in each novel, and therefore on his increasing experience and confidence as a writer. Bellow’s first three novels
contain the greatest and most clearly discernible degree of literary intertextuality within their artistic strategies, and this evolves from each work to the next as Bellow progressively gains a more coherent sense of his original “summations” as a novelist.

Bellow’s conscious recourse to defining his works and ideas in relation to earlier works of literature correlates with the sentiments he felt as a young and aspiring novelist. In a 1979 interview Bellow referred to *Dangling Man* as his M.A. and *The Victim* as his Ph.D. as a novelist. In other words they were graduate pieces preceding more mature creations: “I was still sitting for my qualifying examinations.” When he wrote *Dangling Man* and *The Victim* Bellow was “timid”:

I still felt the incredible effrontery of announcing myself to the world (in part I mean the WASP world) as a writer and an artist. I had to touch a great many bases, demonstrate my abilities, pay my respects to formal requirement. In short, I was afraid to let myself go.

Bellow’s timidity in asserting his own “summations” correlates with the fact that critics tend to consider these two novels his most “European.” Indeed, their “European” quality stems from the strength of the influence of a number of European literary works in Bellow’s artistic strategy. Philip Roth is not alone in his consideration that the “novelistic ethos of these works [is] indebted to” Kafka and Dostoevsky. However, these European influenced novels, “though useful,” and “real enough,” did not give Bellow a “form in which [he] felt comfortable,”

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48 Roth, “Rereading Saul Bellow,” 139.
49 Bellow in Roudane and Bellow, “An Interview,” 179.
or able to “express a variety of things [he] knew intimately.” Bellow found a more suitable form in The Adventures of Augie March.

Bellow explains that when he wrote The Adventures of Augie March he “no longer cared about examinations,” and so he removed the “restraints” of his first two novels and “let himself go,” creating an extensive account of a world he knew intimately, that of immigrants in the Chicago ghetto during the Depression. Yet Bellow’s first ‘true’ novel still represents a distinct developmental phase in his evolution as a novelist. Bellow would later admit that as he removed the previous restraints he “took off too many.” Furthermore, intertextuality remains intrinsic to Bellow’s artistic strategy. The literary intertexts of Augie March indicate that Bellow was still reliant on previous works of literature as he attempted to find a more comfortable mode of conveying his experience and understanding of the world. At the same time the intertextual influences reflect the drastic evolution in Bellow’s writing as they express almost directly opposing world-views and sentiments to those of Dangling Man and The Victim, and consist of a mixture of European and American texts which are integrated into the novel in an altogether different and less imitative fashion. Thus the intertextuality of Augie March marks Bellow’s evolution towards a different mode of writing and a more confident ability to discern and portray his original vision as an author.

The interrelated development in ambition and intertextuality across Bellow’s first three novels correlates with an evolving perspective of individual freedom and selfhood. Throughout his oeuvre Bellow demonstrates a fundamental
concern for the means by which the individual can successfully discern and address the demands of society, reality and himself. Bellow’s first three novels are pivotal in shaping this concern, as Bellow develops from exploring, discerning and portraying what he considers to be certain obstacles to individual fulfilment in *Dangling Man* and *The Victim*, to asserting an outlook and literary form which he deems capable of withstanding the pitfalls of selfhood in *The Adventures of Augie March*. In each novel, Bellow’s intentions for exploring individual freedom and selfhood determine and manifest in the selection, integration, and dynamic of intertextual construction.

*Dangling Man* and *The Victim* both draw upon earlier works of literature to explore crises of individuality caused by the limits of subjectivity. Intertextuality plays a central role in *Dangling Man* as Bellow alludes to, imitates and repudiates literature relevant to the dilemma of the novel: the pursuit of a “separate destiny” (*DM*, 169). In *The Victim* Bellow appropriates the artistic strategy of one of Dostoevsky’s novellas, *The Eternal Husband* (1870), as his primary method for exploring the novel’s scenario, a Jewish protagonist’s individual crisis as he confronts an anti-Semitic Doppelgänger. After exploring particular obstacles to individual fulfilment in his first two novels, in *The Adventures of Augie March* Bellow portrays a protagonist who overcomes all obstacles by embracing both the limits and the potential of individual subjectivity. In this more exuberantly ambitious novel, Bellow draws upon only the aspects of several works of literature and their protagonists which are relevant to his construction of a character who comically accepts and asserts his reality through

many phases of life. Thus the explicit and direct relationship between the role of intertextuality and each novel’s artistic strategy and meaning gradually diminishes across these works as Bellow gradually employs his influences more subversively and moves towards more comprehensively asserting his original vision of individual freedom and selfhood.

Just as Bellow draws upon his own personal experiences and literary influences, he also writes in relation to the historical and literary climate around him. He conveys his own vision of individual freedom in contemporary America as he contends with contemporary visions of individuality. Hence the intertextual construction of his novels relates to both contemporary and past works of literature. *Dangling Man* and *The Victim*, as several commentators identify—often while noting the texts’ “European-ness”—are reminiscent of the existential novels which were in vogue when Bellow wrote his novels. In *Dangling Man* Bellow scrutinises nihilistic themes which were present in the literature around the outbreak of World War II and in *The Victim* he explores issues and assumptions of anti-Semitism and human disharmony which were present in the post-war years. In *The Adventures of Augie March*, Bellow abandons altogether the genre of post-war, modernist, existential and pessimistic literature as he asserts an alternative and affirming sense of individual freedom and selfhood. Instead, he draws upon more traditional works, forms and artistic strategies he deems more capable of portraying his own experiences and perspectives, “the kind[s] of

thing[s] that … [came] naturally to a kid who had grown up in Chicago in the twenties and thirties,” and who then emerged into the fifties an adult.\footnote{Bellow in Rockwell Gray, Harry White, and Gerald Nemanic, “Interview with Saul Bellow,” 1984, in \textit{Conversations with Saul Bellow}, ed. Gloria L. Cronin and Ben Siegel (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 1994) 217.}

Bellow’s first three novels reflect the development of a writer towards a coherent sense of individual freedom and selfhood in relation to literary influence. These novels attest that Bellow had a natural recourse to earlier literature as he attempted to perceive, understand and then portray reality. He was conscious of this process which he therefore employed and demonstrated within the artistic strategies and constructions of his novels. Hence analysing the primary intertextual method within the artistic strategies of Bellow’s first three novels illustrates the formation of one of America’s greatest writers of the post-war period and beyond.

**Allusions and Acknowledgements**

The task of discerning the literary influences which form the intertextuality of Bellow’s artistic strategy in his first three novels requires a variety of methods, which differ from text to text as Bellow’s technique evolves. Intertextual allusions occur on a number of levels and vary in significance. Although it frequently occurs in Bellow’s novels that characters demonstrate familiarity with or draw analogies to particular texts, for the most part these events indicate the personality and state of mind of the subject and seldom indicate a text fundamental to the novel’s overall artistic strategy. As Atlas recognises, \textit{Dangling Man} is “defiantly literary.”\footnote{Atlas, \textit{Bellow}, 97.} The exploration of the principal dilemma of this novel is formed according to elements from previous works of literature to which Bellow deliberately alludes in order to suggest his own implicit original vision. In The
Victim the purpose of the novel has no explicit relationship to its intertextuality and therefore it contains almost no intertextual allusions, yet the influence of the Eternal Husband is clear, and was confirmed by Bellow in interviews.58 In The Adventures of Augie March Bellow draws upon the strengths of elements of previous works and their protagonists in order to assert his own life-affirming vision. The intertextual makeup reflects Bellow’s shift in concern towards particular values and themes and away from exploring a specific philosophical situation. Therefore the artistic strategy of The Adventures of Augie March requires no explicit intertextual allusions, although there are several, which often appear as an almost ironic homage to the novel’s influences. Hence the influences can be discerned through a mixture of Bellow’s comments in interviews and letters, his manuscript notes, and the existing intertextual allusions.

This study analyses the intertextuality of Bellow’s first three novels according to works of literature whose influence he alludes to within his texts, or whose influence he acknowledged in some other manner. The study also focuses on the literary intertextuality that informs each novel’s artistic strategy and explorations of individual freedom and selfhood. These parameters differentiate this thesis from previous critical texts which mention or analyse comparisons between Bellow’s works and preceding literature. It is not my intention to discredit such speculative and often useful comparisons. Instead I seek to discern a more solid, detailed and fundamental intertextual component in Bellow’s development as an emerging novelist. Furthermore, as opposed to those scholarly works which selectively conduct comparative analysis between one of Bellow’s

first three novels and particular literary influences, this thesis addresses the
detailed complexity of each novel’s intertextual construction and how this process
develops across this formative stage in Bellow’s career. At the same time, by
focusing on specific works this study conducts more detailed comparative
analysis than those studies which examine Bellow’s general position in relation to
historical bodies of literature.

This thesis establishes the pivotal function of self-conscious literary
intertextuality from *Dangling Man* to *Augie March* in Bellow’s development of a
vision of individual freedom and selfhood relevant to his personal and historical
context. While in his first two novels Bellow scrutinised particular dilemmas and
obstacles in relation to preceding literary perspectives, in *Augie March* he
revolutionised his writing career by aligning himself with the comic, energetic
and life-affirming qualities of other works of literature. Bellow’s three novels
demonstrate the range of his literary approach to the inherent dangers and
potential of individual subjectivity, freedom and selfhood. *Dangling Man, The
Victim* and *The Adventures of Augie March* develop and establish a novelistic
vision which reverberates throughout Bellow’s subsequent career.
Bellow’s first novel *Dangling Man* was published in 1944. In 1979, when Bellow had written most of his major works, he referred disparagingly to *Dangling Man* as his M.A. in novel writing. Dangling Man does not contain the signature style, scope and energy generally referred to by critics as ‘Bellowian,’ yet it does contain, as Bonnie Lyons notes, the “clearest exposition of one pole of his work—his ‘No, in thunder.’” Along with *Seize the Day* and *The Victim*, *Dangling Man* belongs to what Bellow referred to as the “victim-group.” These works portray individuals faltering under the pressures of modern existence predominantly as a result of restrictions in their subjective perception. *Dangling Man* differs from the later “victim” novels in that it explores the extreme example of a vision which culminates in a desire for ‘pure’, subjective freedom and redemption, and a crisis of selfhood. Bellow’s own novelistic exploration of this dilemma is characterised by an intertextual technique of allusion to and assessment of literary works which also explore the desire for pure freedom. For this reason *Dangling Man* has been dubbed Bellow’s most “self-consciously literary” work.

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59 Bellow in Simmons, “Free to Feel,” 161.  
60 Bonnie Lyons, “From Dangling Man to ‘Colonies of the Spirit’,” *Studies in American Jewish Literature* 4, no. 2 (1978) 47.  
This novel explores and refutes the desire for “a separate destiny” \((DM, 169)\) through extensive allusions to Jean-Paul Sartre’s \textit{Nausea} (1938),\(^63\) and Rainer Maria Rilke’s \textit{The Journal of My Other Self} (1910).\(^64\) In addition Bellow alludes to Diderot’s \textit{Rameau’s Nephew},\(^65\) Dostoevsky’s \textit{Notes from Underground} (1864),\(^66\) Kafka’s \textit{The Trial}\(^67\) and Hemingway’s \textit{oeuvre} in his narrative, and these works are brought into a productive relationship with one another. In a broader sense, Bellow’s critique of the dilemma of human selfhood and freedom is most indebted to Dostoevsky’s vision in \textit{Notes from Underground} which extensively foregrounds obstacles to individuality according to the inherent perils within individual psychology. At the same time Bellow exposes insufficiencies of the visions of this dilemma presented by his literary predecessors and thereby produces a novel line of thinking. Bellow thus asserts his original literary interpretation of the limits of individual freedom and selfhood.


\(^{64}\) Rainer Maria Rilke, \textit{The Journal of My Other Self}, trans. John Linton (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1930). References from this volume are included in the text between parentheses with the abbreviation \textit{J}. Subsequent English editions generally translate the title as \textit{The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge}, such as, Rainer Maria Rilke, \textit{The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge}, trans. Burton Pike (London: Dalkey Archive Press, 2008). However, at the time he wrote \textit{Dangling Man} Bellow was familiar with the 1930 translation: see Atlas, Bellow, 97; Grobel, “Saul Bellow,” 57; Neal, “Chicago Writer,” 179.


\(^{66}\) Fyodor Dostoevsky, \textit{White Nights and Other Stories}, trans. Constance Garnett (London: William Heinemann Ltd, 1950). References to \textit{Notes from Underground} from this volume are included in the text in parentheses with the abbreviation \textit{U}. Garnett was the first English translator of many of Dostoevsky’s works such as \textit{Notes from Underground} which is included in this volume first published in 1918. It is likely that Bellow was most, if not only, familiar with this version.

\(^{67}\) Franz Kafka, \textit{The Complete Novels}, trans. Willa and Edwin Muir (London: Vintage Books, 2008). References to this volume are included in the text in parentheses with the abbreviation \textit{T}. Written from 1914 onwards \textit{The Trial} was published posthumously in 1925. Willa and Edwin Muir’s translation into English was the first, originally published in 1938. It is likely that this was the version which Bellow was familiar with when he wrote \textit{Dangling Man}. 
Chapter One

Critics have always been interested in the literary influences in *Dangling Man*. However, none of them have comprehensively analysed the full extent of the novel’s intertextual construction. Some critics briefly remark on general affinities between *Dangling Man* and several of the texts to which it contains allusion. Robert Schulman and J. M. Coetzee, for example, make one-sentence comments on the influence of *Notes from Underground*, *Nausea* and Rilke’s *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge* (The Journal of My Other Self). Sarah Blacher Cohen summarily notes allusions to Hemingway and to *Notes from Underground* but does not undertake more extensive analysis. Moreover, the scholarship which engages in thorough comparative analysis only focuses on one or two intertexts. For example, John Jacob Clayton and Keith Michael Opdahl

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69 Coetzee, “Bellow’s Gift,” 4; Shulman, “Bellow’s Comedy,” 114. Similar comments regarding a variety of the works can be found in Bradbury, *Saul Bellow*, 26; Hyland, *Saul Bellow, 17*.

70 Cohen, *Saul Bellow’s Enigmatic Laughter*. 
both analyse similarities between *Dangling Man* and *Notes from Underground* and *Nausea*, while Helen Weinberg examines the potential influence of Kafka.\textsuperscript{71} Several critics identify a deliberate intertextual technique in *Dangling Man* but only provide select or brief analysis. For example, Harold Fisch hints at Bellow’s technique when he states that the “August archetypes drawn from Kafka or Dostoevsky are recognizable, but they appear through a screen of reductive irony.”\textsuperscript{72} Fisch also notes that Bellow performs a “comic or semicomic reduction of a received literary form,” and that his conscious employment of “the archetypal patterns of his predecessors” exhibits “latter-day disenchantment with the archetypes themselves.”\textsuperscript{73} Robert Alter recognises that “Bellow’s first novel is more self-consciously literary than any of his later novels,”\textsuperscript{74} but as in Fisch’s article this aspect of *Dangling Man* is not the primary focus of Alter’s study.\textsuperscript{75} H. Porter Abbott recognises a deliberate technique of allusion in *Dangling Man*—and in much of Bellow’s career\textsuperscript{76}—but his study only addresses in detail the relationship of *Dangling Man* to *Nausea*.\textsuperscript{77} Thus no critical study to date addresses the full range of literary intertextual allusions in *Dangling Man* and their critical function.

This chapter comprehensively analyses Bellow’s intertextual method in *Dangling Man*. Bellow draws from earlier works that address the same fundamental dilemma of the individual’s desire for complete freedom and selfhood, creating a novel which acknowledges this inheritance. Bellow clearly

\textsuperscript{71} For example, see Clayton, *Defense of Man*; Opdahl, *Novels of Saul Bellow*; Weinberg, *The Kafkan Mode*.
\textsuperscript{72} Fisch, “Bellow and Kafka,” 163.
\textsuperscript{73} Fisch, “Bellow and Kafka,” 164.
\textsuperscript{74} Alter, “Dissent from Modernism,” 99.
\textsuperscript{75} Fisch’s work focuses on the influence of Kafka in several of Bellow’s work, while Alter’s “Dissent from Modernism” explores Bellow’s development in regards to pre-existing traditions of literature with particular concern for his relationship to modernism.
\textsuperscript{76} Abbott, “Lost Cause,” 270 (footnote).
\textsuperscript{77} Abbott, “Lost Cause.”
alludes to these texts in his own narrative in order to indicate his technique and his assessment of their merit or contemporary applicability. By way of this comparison Bellow presents his own relevant and original vision. Bellow incorporates the chosen texts into his novel in order to assess them against one another and against the contemporary situation. In this manner Bellow locates his novel within a tradition of literature with a common concern, but identifies the absence of an adequate response to the dilemma of individual selfhood and freedom to distinguish his own debut as a novelist.

**The Tradition**

The choice of texts to which Bellow alludes suggests that he considers these works important in relation to his own conception of the dilemma of individual freedom, and to the establishment of his vision as a novelist. Bellow’s grouping of many of these texts together is not unprecedented, as together they encapsulate important developments in the literary exploration of individual freedom. As Bellow demonstrates in *Dangling Man*, these works represent a literary dialogue on the condition of individuality. Other literary works are referred to in *Dangling Man*, but *Rameau’s Nephew, Notes from Underground, The Journal of My Other Self, The Trial, Nausea* and Hemingway’s *oeuvre* have the most confluence with the technique and purpose of Bellow’s novel.  

Diderot’s *Rameau’s Nephew* takes the form of a philosophical debate between Diderot’s literary rendered self, “Moi,” and “Lui,” the nephew of the famous French composer Jean-François Rameau. The debate predominantly concerns which character’s vision and lifestyle is the most truthful: the naïve moral and philosophical idealism of Moi, or the pragmatic cynicism and

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78 For instance Joseph struggles to retrieve a copy of James Joyce’s *Dubliners* from his ex-mistress, and he also discusses Shakespeare’s *Measure for Measure* and Dostoevsky’s *Crime and Punishment*. 

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debauchery of Lui. Each is fundamentally challenged by the other’s position and neither of their individual ‘truths’ triumphs. Hence they part “enlarged but not enlightened.”

Meanwhile, Lui sets a literary precedent as a character who carries materialism to its horrifying extreme and who, despite his deterministic convictions and pragmatic cynicism, abandons happiness to assert his individuality: “[t]o have freedom of personality for Lui is to accept anti-heroism.” Lui thus embodies the contradictions that form the basis of subjectivity.

The folly of materialism and idealistic rationalism, along with man’s need to assert his free will despite destructive and anti-heroic results, is the focus of Notes from Underground: “What man wants is simply independent choice, whatever that independence may cost and wherever it may lead.” (U, 69) Joseph Frank raises the possibility that Rameau’s Nephew influenced Dostoevsky and states that “the two works spring from much the same moral-philosophical dilemma and employ the same artistic strategy.” Yet Dostoevsky locates the two opposing extremes within one character at war with himself. Unable to assimilate his freedom, his deterministic rationalistic ideals and his cynicism, the Underground Man remains trapped in his own ego, thus rendering him a perverse and self-destructive anti-hero.

Rilke’s diary-protagonist in The Journal of My Other Self also follows an erroneous ideal into a dilemma of selfhood and freedom, but as an artist seeking “that other language, that other vision uncontaminated by the spatial and temporal

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80 Brans, “Hero and Anti-hero,” 441.
contingencies of modern life.” As Andreas Huyssen describes, Malte’s goal is pure vision, freedom and selfhood, and his technique is to turn inwards beyond social constructions through a process of “overcoming of the self, letting go of the ego.” Rilke advised a friend that his novel should be read “contre son courant.” In other words Rilke does not condone Malte’s quest and suggests through its failure that it is an “impossible, even dangerous desire.” For Rilke, this portrayal achieves a type of artistic redemption which the character of Malte seeks in his own journey.

Some critics locate Sartre’s Nausea as directly indebted to Notes from Underground and The Journal of My Other Self. Sartre’s protagonist, Roquentin, begins to perceive the external world as alien. These perceptions cause him to experience “nausea” and inspire a diary-quest to understand his existence. Eventually Roquentin discovers the ‘truth’ of existence, namely that there is no self or meaning, only omnipresent freedom. In response to his discovery Roquentin proposes to write a novel as a tentative solution to his meaningless freedom, thus reflecting Sartre’s own sense of artistic justification.

Kafka’s The Trial marks a significant evolution in the literary portrayal of the plight of the individual to understand his freedom in relation to forces beyond his comprehension. In this comic nightmare scenario, Joseph K. awakes to find himself under trial by a mysterious and seemingly omniscient court, for undisclosed crimes and with no foreseeable outcome. Throughout the novel

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Joseph K strives for his freedom yet the narrative remains deliberately ambiguous as to whether the trial governs Joseph K’s actions or whether Joseph K’s actions facilitate the trial and his guilt. At the level of discourse, the tale remains enigmatic: “What calls out for interpretation in Kafka is his refusal to be interpreted, his evasiveness even in the realm of his own Negative.”87 Thus the very ambiguity of individual comprehension and freedom merges into Kafka’s artistic technique.

Hemingway might seem out of place among this collection of psychologically charged and philosophical European novels, but his works also regularly depict an isolated individual facing an indifferently hostile reality. In his writing career which spanned the period from 1923 to 1952, Hemingway constructed an original approach to selfhood and freedom by portraying the external results of internal struggles.88 Bellow respected Hemingway “as a man who developed a significant manner as an artist, a life-style which is important.”89 Hemingway promoted a particular outlook in his novels: silent acceptance coupled with stoic and dignified resilience. Hence Hemingway’s corpus shares the same “moral-philosophical dilemma”90 as the other intertexts explored here, although his artistic response to this dilemma differs significantly from theirs.

**Artistic Strategy**

In *Dangling Man* Bellow, like the authors whose works he draws upon, explores issues of freedom and selfhood through a protagonist experiencing a crisis of individuality. *Dangling Man* is written in the form of a diary by the protagonist

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88 Saul Bellow, “Hemingway and the Image of Man,” *Partisan Review* 20, no. 3 (May-June 1953) 338.
90 Frank, *Stir of Liberation*, 311n.
Chapter One

Joseph during the period of American involvement in the Second World War. Joseph begins his diary after seven months of “dangling” caused by delays in his induction into the army and a preceding crisis which shattered his trust in his previous outlook on life. The diary is a response to his “dangling” and his troublesome future, as an attempt to turn inwards and discover his “real and not superficial business as man”—to know his ‘essential’ self, in order to preserve it (DM, 166-7). Unfortunately, as Joseph stubbornly attempts to retreat from the “superficial” world, he is frustrated by his limited ability to do so, and by a failing sense of selfhood that accompanies this journey. Desperation exacerbates both of these frustrations until Joseph abandons his quest. Hence Joseph’s situation exemplifies problems of individuality within the historical context in which Bellow was writing. At the same time, Bellow contextualises and positions Joseph’s situation within a literary context by imitation and allusion to particular earlier works of literature.

In the works alluded to in Dangling Man each author implants a degree of fictional representation of himself in his protagonist’s struggles. Against a common misinterpretation of the “conceptual level” of Notes from Underground, Frank insists that the Underground Man is not “Dostoevsky’s mouthpiece,” but all the same, “[t]ime and time again we can hear Dostoevsky speaking about himself through his fictional guise, and he unquestionably endowed the Underground Man with some of his deepest and most intimate feelings.”91 In Rameau’s Nephew, Diderot exposes his own ideas for exploration and parody in both characters, but particularly through the semi-autobiographical “Moi.”92 Similarly, Kafka ties himself to his protagonist through the abbreviated surname and Martin Walser

91 Frank, Stir of Liberation, 315.
The Education of a Writer

contends that Joseph K is an enigma of Kafka’s self. Both Rilke and Sartre adopt the technique of artistically portraying a fictitious version of their attempt to create art. Hemingway’s *oeuvre* contains examples of self-parody but predominantly he idealises his outlook and experiences in fictional form. For instance, the recurrent character in several of Hemingway’s short-story cycles, Nick Adams, is a semi-autobiographical figure who demonstrates Hemingway’s life approach. Hence these authors all transpose, portray and test their personal struggles with individual selfhood and freedom in literary fiction. Each protagonist’s difficulties and failings provide each work with a broader wisdom than the protagonist’s perspective.

Bellow employs this artistic strategy by writing a novel which contains a parody of his own situation as a civilian in wartime America in order to deliver insight into the climate of individual freedom and selfhood in this context. Both Edmund Wilson and Delmore Schwartz praised Bellow for having captured the experience of a generation. Many of Joseph’s predicaments mirror Bellow’s experiences. As a Canadian “alien,” Bellow experienced delays in his induction into the army. Having quit his job with the expectation of immediate induction Bellow was unable to return to his work and found himself similarly “dangling.” A letter from this period written to Melvin Tumin reveals that Bellow experienced a similar turmoil to Joseph. In this letter Bellow describes his tumultuous emotional state, caused by fruitless job-hunting that he claims reduced him “a

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95 Atlas, *Bellow*, 78.
charity case,” and made him “a casualty of the war.” He writes of embitterment caused by his “ugly, bastardly pride,” abandonment and loneliness: “I have been a spectator to my own victimization, have watched the terrific beating and endured it bodily too.” He blames this state on the delays and ironically experiences a desire for immediate induction: “Was it any wonder that I longed to be called? Is it strange to prefer no future to an uncertain one?” Like Joseph’s, Bellow’s desire for induction is also fuelled by the guilt of benefiting from the peace paid for with the hardship and blood of others. Bellow transposes his experience into Dangling Man, and admits in his letter to Tumin that this artistic pursuit rescued him from the desperation he felt in his dangling position. In contrast the delays that Joseph experiences lead him into a stubborn quest for pure selfhood, at the end of which he collapses and joins the army. Therefore Bellow achieved an artistic solution by portraying an equivalent self suffering and failing.

Bellow signals that he is constructing a novel which adopts, scrutinises and parodies the works of his predecessors. The title “Notes of a Dangling Man” in the original Partisan Review version of 1943 indicates not only that Bellow is working in relation to Dostoevsky’s text, but also that he wants to make this imitation and parody evident to the reader. Similarly Bellow names his protagonist Joseph, and never discloses his surname, thereby suggesting affinity with the character of Joseph K in Kafka’s The Trial. In Bellow’s novel, Joseph evokes a life-code which he refers to as “hard-boiled,” clearly alluding to the particular mode of existence which Hemingway developed in his oeuvre. Joseph also makes explicit reference to Diderot’s Rameau’s Nephew (DM, 127), and

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more general details of Joseph’s character and quest, along with specific scenes, demonstrate allusions to Sartre’s *Nausea*, and Rilke’s *The Journal of My Other Self*. These references alert the reader to the significance of the relationship between *Dangling Man* and its influences, as this relationship is integral to the meaning of Bellow’s novel.

Allusions to these intertexts appear through the protagonist’s character, his diatribes, his quest, other characters and their diatribes and quests, specific scenes, and the structure and style of the novel. Bellow maintains consistency between these works and the form of the novel by creating a protagonist who reflects his author’s artistic strategy. Just as Bellow intellectually incorporates and assesses the artistic strategies of these works, Joseph is constructed with allusion to their protagonists and also encounters and assesses in his diary—Bellow’s novel—characters whose life-strategies also contain allusions to these works. In other words, Bellow’s autobiographical situation around the time he wrote the novel and the allusions in *Dangling Man* intertextually intertwine as follows: Joseph lives Bellow’s contemporary personal situation, but is a Kafka-esque everyman under ‘trial’ with naïve philosophic tendencies akin to Diderot-Moi. He rejects the Hemingway mode and embarks on a quest which bears an affinity to the quests of the protagonists of *Nausea* and *Journal of My Other Self*, Roquentin and Malte Laurids Briggs respectively. As a result of his situation and his quest he finds himself bordering on the state of the Underground Man.

**Intertextual Repudiation**

Bellow draws together these works in order not only to portray the situation of the individual in wartime America, but also to thoroughly test the intertexts’ envisagement of individual freedom and selfhood against one other and against
the situation of wartime America. Joseph’s quest defines the novel’s adventure and most closely imitates those of Malte and Roquentin. Therefore Bellow predominantly assesses the novels of Rilke and Sartre against his personal experience and literary vision of the dilemma posed by the desire for pure vision, freedom and selfhood.

Sartre presents Roquentin’s introspective quest for pure freedom and selfhood as an authentic adventure towards the truth. In *La force de l’âge* (1960), Simone de Beauvoir writes that *Nausea* was initially written as a “lengthy, abstract, dissertation on contingency,” which she and Sartre referred to as “Factum on Contingency.” This work only took on a novel form after Simone de Beauvoir insisted that Sartre give it “some fictional depth” as in “detective novels.” In an interview in 1971 Sartre also described *Nausea* as a detective story which sees Roquentin’s investigation lead him to the truth behind his dilemma: “The criminal is contingency.” Hence Roquentin’s quest is intended as a fictional philosophical treatise that proves the truth.

In his rebuttal of *Nausea*, Bellow adopts Dostoevsky’s strategy in *Notes from Underground*. Frank quotes from a “perceptive” remark by the Russian critic A. Shaftymov as he argues that Dostoevsky’s “strategy is that of destroying his opponents ‘from within, carrying their logical presuppositions and possibilities to their consistent conclusion and arriving at a destructively helpless blind alley.’” For instance, the Underground Man is a satirical parody of the results of a
“philosophy of ‘rational egoism,’” particularly as expressed in his contemporary, Chernyshevsky’s, novel *What is to be Done?* (1863).  

Bellow’s most contemporary adversary is Sartre and he carries the presuppositions and possibilities—the quest—of *Nausea* to failure. Bellow is aware that this failure is assured in a more restrictive setting, but it is also pre-empted by the other works alluded to in *Dangling Man* which all envisage limits to individuality which make Sartre’s assertions of pure freedom, vision, subjectivity, and reason impossible. As Peter J. Conradi states in regard to Dostoevsky’s work, and which could also apply to the texts of Diderot and Rilke, “if *Notes from Underground* is a good overture to ‘existentialism,’ it is also a most cogent rebuke.” Thus Bellow’s intertextual technique draws Sartre’s ideas into multiple angles of contention, carrying them to an undesirable extreme. For instance, because of the restrictions of Joseph’s Kafka-esque circumstances, he struggles with the quest and, enflamed by the disappointment, tends towards the Underground Man’s embitterment and volatility. In particular, since they follow a similar quest, Roquentin’s experience is brought into extensive contention with Malte’s and meets the same ultimate failure Rilke depicts. Thus in *Dangling Man* the Sartrean quest collapses both under the pressure of Joseph’s situation in wartime America and also under the fictionally re-applied findings of a whole body of earlier literature.

Bellow’s primary intertextual objective in *Dangling Man* is to align himself with aspects of the envisagement of individual freedom and selfhood found in the works of Diderot, Dostoevsky, Kafka, Rilke and Hemingway, against Sartre. Accordingly Bellow’s original interpretation of the desire for pure vision

emerges in opposition to *Nausea*. Yet *Dangling Man* is not simply a ‘Dostoevskian,’ ‘Diderotian’ or ‘Rilkian’ reading of *Nausea*. Bellow pits all of the authors’ ideas and artistic strategies against one another, mediating them through the climate of wartime America to assess their relevance and subsequently portray an original rendition of the dilemma of individual freedom and selfhood.

**JOSEPH’S CRISIS AND QUEST**

Joseph’s first diary entry, dated “December 15, 1942” (*DM*, 9), introduces the reader to the protagonist’s situation and problems and to Bellow’s intertextual arrangement of *Dangling Man*. As Joseph explains why he has decided to begin a diary, his characterisation and the nature of his situation exhibit several intertextual allusions. Even at this early stage these allusions serve to invite scrutiny of Joseph’s proposal of a diary-quest, the limits he faces, and the potential failure of wisdom behind the very premise of the quest.

In the opening paragraphs of the novel, Bellow rejects Hemingway’s life-approach through Joseph’s criticism of those people he refers to as “hard-boiled.” The allusion to Hemingway is made clear through reference to common scenarios from Hemingway’s fiction. Joseph comments that the hard-boiled “fly planes or fight bulls or catch tarpon.” (*DM*, 10) According to Joseph the hard-boiled code is dominant in his contemporary environment and while he admits “it does have a limited kind of candor” he criticises its tendency to stifle and neglect “feelings,” “inner life,” and “emotions.” (*DM*, 9) Because of this “inhibitory effect” the hard-boiled are ignorant of “[m]ost serious matters,” “unpracticed in introspection” and “badly equipped to deal with opponents whom they cannot shoot like big game or
outdo in daring.” (DM, 9) Ruth R. Wisse and Jonathon Baumbach suggest that through Joseph’s criticisms Bellow avenges Hemingway’s character Robert Cohen in *The Sun Also Rises* (1926), who is depicted as a pathetic and continually humiliated man in his Jewishness and inability to abide by the stoic code. Baumbach even considers the possibility that Joseph is characterised with Robert Cohen in mind. However, there is no specific evidence that relates Joseph to Robert Cohen and their resemblance is explained by the fact that Joseph and Robert Cohen are both constructed in opposition to Hemingway’s endorsed strategy. Joseph simply reflects his creator who is Jewish and “so at odds with the Hemingway code that the two form a significant polarity.” Joseph’s criticisms of the hard-boiled express Bellow’s own criticisms of Hemingway, and match those found in Bellow’s 1953 review of the Hemingway biography *Ernest Hemingway* by Philip Young. In the review, Bellow defines Hemingway’s Code hero as: “the soldier or the bull-fighter or hunter or gambler who has beaten his fear and has learned to live by a rule of honor.” He finds Hemingway’s characters attractive because they offer “the promise of a strong and victorious identity.” But on a deeper level Bellow considers it problematic that Hemingway refuses “to acknowledge ‘impoverishment’ and intends to win a full victory.” Like Joseph, Bellow finds the Hemingway-hard-boiled “Code” a constructed and “exclusive” pursuit, a type of “game not all can play.” By positioning these criticisms at the opening of his debut novel Bellow rebuts the towering figure of American literature. As Allan Chavkin explains, Bellow treats

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113 Baumbach, *Landscape of Nightmare*, 36.
115 Bellow, “Image of Man.”
Chapter One

Hemingway as “the domineering ‘Papa’” and “oppressive influence” that he had to “repudiate in order to forge his own art.”\(^{120}\) Through Joseph, Bellow exposes flaws in Hemingway’s method and justifies his decision to explore “the values of which Hemingway is suspicious.”\(^{121}\) Joseph, like Bellow, must try another route.

Even if Joseph were to desire the hard-boiled path it is not open to him because he is not one of the exclusive few who possesses opportunities for exclusive heroic actions; he is a citizen, an everyman. Atlas claims that the lack of “even an initial for a last name” makes Joseph “even more allegorical than Kafka’s Joseph K.”\(^{122}\) As a “petit bourgeois subject,”\(^{123}\) Joseph is subject to societal pressures and procedures which have caused his predicament. With allusion to Joseph K’s “trial,” Joseph is undergoing “a sort of bureaucratic comedy trimmed out in red tape.” (\(DM\), 10) Like Joseph K, Bellow’s Joseph has been dragged out of his normal daily life by an omnipresent force which now subjects him to endless tribulations. Almost seven months previously Joseph quit his job with “Inter-American Travel Bureau to answer the Army’s call for induction” only to encounter endless delays while investigations, blood tests and reclassifications take place. Facing an overwhelming, incomprehensible and unpredictable bureaucratic situation which will determine his fate, Joseph, like Joseph K, feels “condemned.”\(^{124}\) Joseph’s situation therefore explores themes found in *The Trial*, such as “arrest, guilt, self-victimization, alienation and the inability to use freedom positively and creatively when relieved of routine occupations.”\(^{125}\) Yet, partly through the fact that the protagonist is the narrator, *Dangling Man* demonstrates “more verbal reasoning than Kafka’s symbolic

\(^{120}\) Chavkin, “Fathers and Sons,” 449.
\(^{121}\) Chavkin, “Fathers and Sons,” 454.
\(^{122}\) Atlas, *Bellow*, 94.
\(^{125}\) Weinberg, *The Kafkan Mode*, 55.
presentation of Joseph K’s dilemma in *The Trial.*”  

Therefore Bellow “makes statements directly about the dilemma.” Bellow’s novel presents an individual’s self-reflective attempt to know himself and his freedom and thus employs clearer self-conscious realism. He draws upon Kafka’s enigmatic and revolutionary portrayal of an extreme situation threatening individual freedom and selfhood in order to envisage and suggest the oppressiveness of the contemporary situation for an everyman. The Kafka-esque situation induces Joseph’s quest for freedom, but Joseph’s methods draw *Dangling Man* closer to other more philosophically introspective works.

The former Joseph—during his diary Joseph considers his former, pre-“dangling,” self as an estranged entity—deemed that his role as a good citizen was only the strategic and socially conforming side of his life, whereas he considered his more important personal self as a humanist scholar (*DM*, 28-29). This endeavour and perspective gave him a sense of meaning above the life he was “forced to lead daily.” (*DM*, 10) This position also alludes to the conceited philosophical moral idealism of Diderot-Moi in *Rameau’s Nephew*. The former Joseph proudly believed that he knew how to “strike a balance” between society’s demands and his own, formulating a “general plan” for his life. He upheld the philosophical mantra “tout comprendre c’est tout pardonner” and envisaged everything as “good because it exists. Or, good or not good, it exists, it is ineffable and for that reason, marvellous.” (*DM*, 27-29) But in the course of writing his diary Joseph recognises the weaknesses of this former outlook. Against “a feeling of strangeness” resembling a conspiracy, the former Joseph would philosophically rationalise or flee into human relationships: “one clings to

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the nearest passers-by, to brothers, parents, friends, and wives.” (DM, 30) Accordingly he desperately pursued humanist studies and formed the idea of a “‘colony of the spirit,’ or a group whose covenants forbade spite, bloodiness, and cruelty.” (DM, 39) This latter ideal resembles the utopianism the Underground Man both desires and mocks. Thus, like Diderot-Moi’s, the former Joseph’s idealism neglected or attempted to paint over the less pleasant elements of existence.

Joseph admits in his first diary entry that “the seven months’ delay is only one of the sources of my harassment.” (DM, 12) After all, the delay only marks the disarray of his civilian side, and he remarks that “about a year ago”—around December 1941, the month America entered the war—he “ambitiously began several essays, mainly biographical, on the philosophers of the Enlightenment.” (DM, 11) As Jo Brans notes, if this “seems a somewhat quixotic project to work on during a world war, that is Bellow’s intention.” It is also a prime example of the former Joseph painting over unpleasant reality in pursuit of lofty human ideals. Inevitably something brought an end to his Diderot-Moi days, as he acknowledges with explicit reference to the French philosopher: “I was in the midst of one [essay] on Diderot when I stopped.” (DM, 11) Further into his diary Joseph discloses an event which occurred “last March [1942]” at a party at the Servatius’ house and ended his former idealism. While Diderot-Moi is shocked by and evasive of Lui’s stories of cynical cruelty, Joseph is brought to directly witness his friends behaving maliciously, and a cynical character named Jack Brill confirms Joseph’s recognition: “I saw what Jack Brill had seen, but knowing it better, saw it more keenly and severely.” (DM, 57) Joseph writes: “In the months

that followed I began to discover one weakness after another in all I had built up around me.” (DM, 57) As a result he abandoned his humanist pursuits, including his essay on Diderot. The collapse of his personal justification predates his Kafka-esque induction woes, which have only exacerbated his crisis. Joseph’s personal life is in as much disarray as his civilian life because it has suffered the failings related to Diderot-Moi’s naïve moral outlook. Joseph’s wife supports him with the expectation that he will pursue his studies, but he does nothing (DM, 11).

Due to the perceived failure of his humanist idealism Joseph tries to dissociate from his “older self,” scorning his lack of “natural shrewdness” (DM, 39): “I cannot help laughing at him, at some of his traits and sayings.” (DM, 26) The failure of his “Diderot-Moi” has led him to the cynicism and self-loathing found in Lui. At the same time, remnants of his former self remain and thus, as Brans writes, “Bellow internalizes the opposition of … the high mindedness of Moi and the low opportunism of Lui.”129 Thus Joseph is brought to the position of the Underground Man who internalises the polarities of Rameau’s Nephew.130 As Frank declares: “No book or essay dealing with the precarious situation of modern man would be complete without some allusion to Dostoevsky’s explosive figure.”131 Indeed, Bellow alludes to the Underground Man in Joseph’s precarious crisis. Both characters mock their former idealism and utopian humanism. The Underground Man blames his reading for his idealistic corruption,132 and Joseph can no longer read the books he used to collect “as guarantors of an extended life.” (DM, 10) Cut adrift from their former bureaucratic lives and private idealism, both protagonists consider themselves free. Yet it is a bastardised and

130 Frank, Stir of Liberation, 311n.
131 Frank, Stir of Liberation, 310.
132 Frank, Stir of Liberation, 335.
self-contradictory freedom, as they both express longing for the very things they reject. In addition, while they mock their former selves, they fail to recognise that they are continuing the same inconsistencies. As Sarah Blacher Cohen writes of Joseph, although he “is deft at revealing the comic elements of his former self, he is inept at discovering the humorous inconsistencies of his present self.” But Joseph has not yet reached the internal state of conflict and absurdity of the underground. While Lyons claims that Dangling Man is “Bellow’s dive into the underground, to the cellar floor of Dostoievskian alienation,” Joseph is still resistant to the underground and consciously uncomfortable with his worsening state: “I am deteriorating, storing bitterness and spite which eat like acids at my endowment of generosity and good will.” (DM, 12) As the title suggests, Joseph is not underground but “dangling,” with the inherent potential to fall.

Joseph and the Underground Man justify their writing method according to their differing extents of deterioration and conceptions of character. The Underground Man claims he is free because he lacks character: “a man of character, an active man is pre-eminently a limited creature.” (U, 52) Meanwhile, “he hates the world for its indifference and falls into self-loathing at his own humiliating dependence.” Despite his occasional claims to the contrary, the Underground Man resents his situation; this is why he writes his notes, a ramble of contradictions in which he addresses the reader and argues with all his effort that no one will read his notes. Although he claims to reject the world and conceptions of character, writing the notes represents an attempt to escape his “freedom” and prove his character. In Part One, the Underground Man’s notes resemble a manifesto, and in Part Two, a memoir of a past event intended to prove

133 Cohen, Saul Bellow’s Enigmatic Laughter, 31.
134 Frank, Stir of Liberation, 334.
his freedom from character, but which in fact reveal a longing for character, and
thus paradoxically establishes his character, a character of anti-heroism. Joseph’s
decision to write displays an underground logic. While he argues that he writes
because he refuses to suffer silently like the hard-boiled, because of the strained
relationships with those around him, including his wife, he does precisely that,
venting his spleen to himself in the confines of his room: “it has become
necessary for me to keep a journal—that is, to talk to myself—and I do not feel
guilty of self-indulgence in the least.” (DM, 9-10) As Clayton recognises, “to
write the journal is in itself to choose to lacerate oneself—though at the same time
to give oneself comfort by admiring the size of the wound.”¹³ Yet unlike the
Underground Man, Joseph admits that he writes from the insistence that he can
find his character in freedom: “I am unwilling to admit that I do not know how to
use my freedom … because I have no resources—in a word, no character.” (DM, 12)
The diary is Joseph’s last resort to discover the ‘truth’ of his character.

Although the first entry only hints at the nature of Joseph’s quest, Bellow
already draws attention to the manner in which Dangling Man will expose its
flawed premises. Having not yet reached the extreme state of the Underground
Man, Joseph adopts the same quest and method as Malte and Roquentin. Joseph
intends to introspectively investigate himself on a daily basis through a diary.
Bellow situates this quest within an external crisis comparable to that of The Trial
and an internal crisis comparable to that of the Underground Man and with
affinities to the ideas in Rameau’s Nephew. But even though the quest, the diary,
differs from the Underground Man’s tactic, it is still saturated in underground
logic. The decision to write a diary as a means of discovering character in

¹³ Clayton, Defense of Man, 63.
freedom, contains the Underground Man’s self-deception and impotence, the self-contradictory impulse to affect the world while claiming independence from it. This is an impossible desire which in itself implies reliance on the world. Joseph begins his diary in response to his underground tendencies, unaware that the quest belongs to the same tendencies. Bellow suggests that the diary quest is based on the same desperate and flawed reasoning as is evident in the Underground Man’s and Rameau’s nephew’s interpretation of freedom, and therefore it similarly leads to anti-heroic characterisation.

**Malte, Roquentin and Joseph: A Common Quest**

Ultimately Joseph has the same objective as Malte and Rilke, to subjectively measure himself against existence using a personalised method of introspection. The experiences of the three protagonists are often comparable. During their quests all three perceive the external world as hostile and absurd in its foreignness and indifference. They stubbornly push onwards despite their deteriorating state and morale, convinced that doing so will lead them to understand and act authentically. Yet the discernable ways in which Joseph alludes to one protagonist more than the other indicate Bellow’s artistic strategy. The superficial elements of Joseph’s character and situation, along with his fidelity to subjective reason in the conduct of his quest, align him with Roquentin. But his overall experience is closer to that of Malte, especially in his confrontations with the impossibilities of his ambitions. In this manner Bellow rebuts *Nausea* by challenging its quest against the overall limits to individual freedom and selfhood which Malte encounters and which belong to the artistic strategy of Rilke.

Beyond scant references, no scholars have analysed the relationship between *Dangling Man* and *The Journal of My Other Self*. Conversely, many of
the similarities in the details of the character and quest-conduct of Roquentin and Joseph have been addressed in critical literature. Clayton recognises that both protagonists are “isolates,” that their emotional lives “are equally barren,” that they “feel boredom and weariness, a disgust for life,” and that “neither acts purposefully while he writes his journal.” Abbott and Clayton both recognise that Joseph and Roquentin are “lapsing” intellectuals, “amateur writers” who arrive at a point where they can no longer continue their studies of eighteenth-century figures because their previous ideas no longer seem relevant. Roquentin and Joseph both come to perceive that their environment is “fragmented and trivial,” a manifestation of “inner formlessness.” Above all, as Richard Lehan argues, Dangling Man and Nausea follow the same “dramatic pattern.” This closeness in dramatic pattern is evident in the fact that while the artist Malte’s “Aufzeichnungen”—“Notebooks”—are scattered and elusive in time and reality, Joseph and Roquentin write dated, chronological, diaries, possibly as a residual effect of their scholarly pasts. Clayton and Abbott also identify a similar technique between Roquentin and Joseph as they begin their journals in order to understand their crises and the changes that are taking place. Their technique, as Opdahl recognises, consists of introspection and insistence upon reason. Their respective quests spiral until they end their diaries with a decision on a course of action—though their decisions are very different.

136 Clayton, Defense of Man, 57-58.
138 Clayton, Defense of Man, 58.
139 Clayton, Defense of Man, 58.
142 Pike notes that the German term from the original title can also be translated as “sketchbooks.” Pike, “Introduction,” v.
144 Opdahl, Novels of Saul Bellow, 49.
145 Opdahl, Novels of Saul Bellow, 31.
While many critics point to Bellow’s imitation of *Nausea*, few recognise that he imitates in order to carry Sartre’s presuppositions to failure. Opdahl claims that Bellow and Sartre both “create rational heroes who suffer symptoms of Dostoevsky’s anti-hero, and both insist, ironically enough, upon the rationality Dostoevsky rejects.” Yet Opdahl fails to recognise that Joseph is not a reflection of Bellow’s position, but rather he is a character through whom Bellow parodies Sartre’s ideas of absolute individual freedom and reason as they lead Joseph to failure. Opdahl also claims that Joseph’s “rejection of the Marxism which Sartre accepts parallels Dostoevsky’s rejection of rational utopianism.” This statement confuses the Sartre of *Nausea*, whose protagonist also criticises idealistic socialism (*Ln*, 166-176), with the later militant Sartre. Clayton believes that Bellow closely allies his novel “in form and spirit” with *Nausea*, and though Bellow does not “deny the existence of a self” he questions along with Sartre “its consistency and unity.” Clayton finds this alliance with Sartre a contradiction of Bellow’s general position: “How strange for a writer committed to the defense of the individual!” Indeed it would be a great contradiction, but Clayton neglects to consider the implications of Bellow’s carrying of the Sartrean quest to a failure, which thereby calls into question all its premises. Although Abbott proposes a similar interpretation to Clayton—that Bellow imitates Sartre in exploring the “imminent dissolution of character”—he acknowledges that the ending calls the entire vision into question: “It is as if Bellow were to say that Sartrean ‘existence’

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146 Opdahl, *Novels of Saul Bellow*, 49.
147 Opdahl, *Novels of Saul Bellow*, 49.
148 (*Ln*, 166-176)
149 Clayton, *Defense of Man*, 57.
were not a fact but the creation of Roquentin.” 153 In other words, “the
degeneration of self that Joseph glimpses might not be a discovery he is led to but
a product of the quest he pursues.” 154 This hypothesis considers the basic
intertextual role of *Nausea* in *Dangling Man*, however it concludes Abbott’s
analysis of the relationship and so he does not provide a full analysis of this
intertextual aspect of the structure of Bellow’s novel. Abbott is, however, the only
critic to date to recognise that Bellow directly challenges Sartre’s position in
*Nausea*.

Rilke’s novel portrays the ultimate impossibility of a quest similar to that
evident in *Nausea* and *Dangling Man*. The reason for a lack of critical attention
on the relationship between *Dangling Man* and *The Journal of My Other Self* may
be due to the fact that the similarities are often of a more general thematic nature,
both novels have endings open to interpretation which are similar but also
markedly different, and lastly Rilke’s novel is not unique in exploring the pursuit
of pure freedom, as *Nausea* proves. What makes the lack of critical attention
surprising, however, is that there are clear allusions to Rilke’s work including a
character named Captain Briggs, and moreover Bellow referred to the influence of
the novel on his own text. Interviewed in 1979 Bellow commented, “Since young
writers are and should be imitative, in my first book … I imitated Rilke’s *Journal
of My Other Self.*” 155 In a later interview Bellow reformulated the statement: “No,
I didn’t imitate Rilke, I was very stirred by that book, it had a great effect on me
and I thought I would write something in that manner. So I did.” 156 The claim that
he chose to “write something in that manner” would appear to suggest the very act

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156 Grobel, “Saul Bellow,” 57.
of imitation which Bellow’s statement attempts to deny. It may be possible that
Bellow disqualifies the term “imitation” because he makes apparent allusions, or
perhaps he is suggesting that it was less a process of imitation per se, and more
about adopting part of the same artistic strategy with the same themes, as part of a
larger intertextual objective. The greater subtlety of the allusions to The Journal
of My Other Self suggests that it is not a target of contention or parody. Rather, its
application in Dangling Man occurs through the serious and almost homage-like
adoption of its sentiments and artistic strategy. Nonetheless, Dangling Man takes
Rilke’s novel as an inspiration, and by alluding to its overall mood, style and
themes, Bellow makes the inspiration clear and involves The Journal of My Other
Self in the dilemma of Dangling Man.

Malte, Roquentin and Joseph all desire the ultimate freedom and clarity of
vision. All three protagonists encounter differing obstacles to and consequences of
their quests through which each author comments on his protagonist’s objective
and struggles. In Bellow’s case this commentary includes assessment of the
novels of Sartre and Rilke. Because Bellow and Rilke, unlike Sartre, take their
protagonist through experiences which suggest to the reader that the quest is
flawed, the most significant elements of intertextual allusion in Dangling Man
serve to undermine Roquentin’s quest and the foundations of Sartre’s novel.

For the Sartre of Nausea, to see clearly is to comprehend that existence
has no essence, no inherent meaning. Roquentin’s crisis is facilitated by his
isolated and free situation void of any obstacles—which gives him the objective indifference required to see the truth.
Roquentin’s nausea is recognition of the truth: naturally and spontaneously
occurring, eternally present, free and meaningless, existence. Therefore to
discover the truth Roquentin simply has to bravely acknowledge and understand reality. His diary is presented as a scientifically objective method of rationally understanding the truth, his nausea: “To keep a journal in order to understand. … I must fix the exact extent and nature of this change.” (N, 9) From this exercise in objective reason Roquentin realises why he could not see the truth previously, and why so many other people deny the truth of existence. Nausea implies that the meaninglessness of existence is an unpleasant truth which society and individuals cowardly deny with constructed false truths. Roquentin meanwhile is somewhat less inauthentic to begin with, and in a position closer to discovering the truth, since he has never actively sought to deny reality, he has just never questioned it: “The thing is that I very rarely think.” (N, 14) This statement indicates Roquentin’s indifference, which also equates to qualifying his discovery with objective reason. Hence Roquentin is perfectly characterised and situated to discover the objective truth of reality: he has never established personal beliefs, he possesses objective rationalism and he is outside and independent of society. Once Roquentin begins to discover this “truth” a deeper crisis occurs as he wonders how to live in a meaningless world.

Early in his notebooks Malte too notes that he is “learning to see.” (J, 5) Walter H. Sokel writes that this learning is “the theme of the book” along with the notion that the understanding Malte desires “can only come about by a surrender of the ego.” For Malte this ambition is an artistic pursuit through which he hopes to release the ultimate level of creativity detached from all limitations. Although the changes in his perspective have probably also been affected by his

157 “Tenir un journal pour y voir clair. … Il faut déterminer exactement l’étendue et la nature de ce changement.” (Ln, 13)
158 “Ce qu’il y a, c’est que je pense très rarement.” (Ln, 18)
miserable situation as a poor foreigner in Paris, Malte claims that he can no longer write letters because he is a new person (*J, 5*), there is no clear indication that Malte has begun his notebooks with the direct intention of investigating his changes. The notes are constructed more obliquely as a trace of Malte’s scattered thoughts which document but do not directly form part of his attempts to achieve his goal. Rilke presents the notebooks as the unsystematic thoughts of an artist hoping to achieve the impossible. Thus the notebooks reflect Malte’s ambitions and his dissolving self. While Malte regrets the loss of his self, he sees it as an essential loss and continues in order to try to abandon the rest of his ego to achieve pure freedom and selfhood.

Joseph argues that he writes because of his isolation and fear of characterlessness. Thus, unlike Malte’s and Roquentin’s, Joseph’s writing is not instigated by a sense that he is beginning to see or learn clearly, though he shares their intention of documenting his daily experiences towards discovering a pure vision. When Roquentin discovers that there is no meaning and therefore no inherent self he realises that his experience defines him and proposes to write a novel on the subject: *Nausea*. In writing a diary, Joseph expects to achieve the same objective Malte pursues: his pure character severed from his former social self. Meanwhile he insists on the same conditions as Roquentin, namely faithfulness to individual truth and reason. Hence Joseph combines Roquentin’s tactic to assert reason and identity by writing, and Malte’s tactic to discover clarity of vision through separation from social pretences. Joseph employs archetypes found in these other protagonists’ quests as he seeks a solution to his dilemma.
The Unravelling of the Quest

Bellow introduces elements of Malte’s and Roquentin’s quests into his novel to assess them against the conditions of his circumstances. For the most part this tactic involves more stringent obstacles which predominantly produce results that contradict the conclusions of *Nausea*. Ada Aharoni notes that “Bellow purposely chooses a society which grants minimal individual freedom to illustrate the point he wants to make.”

Perhaps more to the point is that Bellow has not chosen this society; this is his society. In Bellow’s contemporising and normalising process Joseph is often denied the experiences of Malte and Roquentin because of differences in situation and character. Roquentin and Malte are recent arrivals in their respective cities, which are described without any contemporary historical context. They are anonymous and also financially independent due to their inheritances. They are therefore relatively free to pursue their interests: Roquentin is preparing an historical biography and Malte is attempting to evolve his artistic vision. Joseph, by contrast, lives in Chicago, where he presumably has always lived. While he claims his isolation has forced him to talk to himself, he nonetheless attempts to enforce this isolation, deliberately avoiding acquaintances and remaining in his room. Inevitably, encounters with family and friends occur, and they frequently end in conflict. In clear contrast to Malte and Roquentin, Joseph is married and survives on his wife’s earnings. She unavoidably encroaches on his solitude and so they fight until Joseph flees into the streets. In a further difference, Joseph lives in mobilised, wartime America. While Roquentin and Malte have no time limits or social pressures, Joseph is undergoing a Kafkaesque process and at any moment could find himself on the front line. As a

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result, Joseph faces far greater obstacles in his quest than do Malte and especially Roquentin. A great portion of his obstacles relate to his characterisation as an Everyman situated in wartime America.

Bellow even limits Joseph’s pre-diary experiences in his narrative rebuttal of *Nausea*. Both Sartre and Bellow allude to a notable contemporary author in order to rebut him. Bellow opens *Dangling Man* with a critique of Hemingway through a protagonist with no possible affinity with the hard-boiled mode. Sartre rejects the contribution of his dominant contemporary, André Malraux, through a character who has experienced and rejects Malrauxian adventures. Like Hemingway, Malraux dominated his nation’s writing scene, and he was an adventurer and a writer directly concerned with individual freedom and meaning. Malraux advocated extreme action not as a means to an end but as the end itself, and saw meaning as arising from the way in which an individual faces life’s most extreme challenges. Prior to living in the fictitious city of Bouville where he writes his diary, Roquentin travelled and experienced adventures reminiscent of Malraux’s novels. His travels ended when in Indochina he was invited to embark on an archaeological dig, a scenario found in Malraux’s *La voie royale*. While Malraux’s hero accepts the invitation and the adventure begins, Roquentin suddenly realises that his adventures have been a meaningless diversionary tactic: “My passion was dead. For years it had submerged me and swept me along; now I felt empty.” *(N, 15)* Hence Sartre rebuts the Malraux mode since it is the very failure of this mode which has led Roquentin to a completely un-Malrauxian setting, Bouville, where an authentic existential adventure takes place. It is

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164 “Ma passion était morte. Elle m’avait submergé et roulé pendant des années; à présent je me sentais vide.” *(Ln, 20)*
possible that Bellow alludes to the Sartre-Malraux relationship in Joseph’s identification that the hard-boiled “fly plane.” While aeronautical scenarios are not a typical Hemingway subject, they dominate Malraux’s *L’espoir*, a fictional rendition of the author’s role organising and flying with the Republican air force during the Spanish Civil war.\(^{165}\) While Roquentin is an ex-Malrauxian adventurer Joseph only knows of the hard-boiled code second-hand. As if to highlight the fact that Joseph is denied any access to Roquentin’s privileges, even past privileges, prior to his diary period Joseph worked for “Inter-American Travel Bureau” despite no evidence of ever having travelled (*DM*, 10).

As Joseph’s quest unfolds certain scenes demonstrate Bellow’s tactic of differentiating his protagonist’s experiences from those of Malte and Roquentin, particularly in order to rebuke Sartre’s novel. For example, Abbott illustrates that Joseph lacks Roquentin’s “ideological fixity” and “ability to conclude” by contrasting scenes in which they regard themselves in the mirror.\(^{166}\) Roquentin examines his face so closely that “nothing human is left.” (*N*, 31)\(^{167}\) The physical nature of his face is “far below the monkey, on the edge of the vegetable world, at the polyp level,” but at the same time it is “familiar”. (*N*, 31)\(^{168}\) Abbott maintains that Roquentin’s experiences of defamiliarisation become “a part of what eventually emerges as the novel’s thesis.”\(^{169}\) When Joseph regards himself in the mirror he also notes the distinguishing features of his face. Unlike Roquentin, however, he notices with displeasure that these landmarks have changed over time, though he does not brood on the matter: “tying my tie, I shrugged them off as inevitable, the price of experience, an outlay that had better be made

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167 “il ne reste plus rien d’humain.” (*Ln*, 34)
ungrudgingly, since it was bound in any case to be collected.” (DM, 173) Abbott interprets this difference as evidence of Joseph’s unease with abstract discourse and systematic thinking. Yet Joseph displays ample capability of abstract thought, constantly entering philosophical ponderings into his diary. It seems to be more the case that Joseph does not have the occasion or perhaps the requisite indignation to draw ideological conclusions. Lacking ‘freedom’ to narcissistically look at himself every day he notices only the effect of the passing of time. He accepts the futility of human will regarding physical appearance and “shrugs” it off. Thus Bellow demonstrates that without the ideal freedom and “ideological fixity” which Roquentin supposedly rejects, Roquentin’s conclusions are not met.

Similar dynamics of imitation and repudiation occur in the reactions of Malte, Roquentin and Joseph to occasions of the loss of all human will. Roquentin drives himself to terror imagining the potential death of a café owner who is absent from work (N, 106-119). While Malte believes that he witnesses the horror of dying in the face of a fellow diner at a Crémerie (J, 47-49). Both protagonists flee in terror without verification, haunted by imagined possibilities. In another episode in The Journal of My Other Self, Malte witnesses a man in the street with a cane who attempts to disguise his bodily tics in order to remain cohesive with society. Despite Malte willing the man to resist succumbing to his spasms the inevitable occurs:

The cane was gone, he stretched out his arms, as if he was about to fly away, and it broke out of him like a force of nature and bent him forward and tore him backward and made him nod and bow and hurled the power of dance out of him among the crowd. For many people were already around him, and I saw him no more. (J, 66)

From these events both Malte and Roquentin recognise unpleasant possibilities which, as Sokel argues in regard to Malte, undermine the security of “the

\[170\] (Ln, 106-119).
fashionable bourgeois world” because in “anonymous isolation … individuality falls away with the illusion of special privilege contained in the idea of dying one’s own death.” Yet while Roquentin simply draws the existential conclusion that anything is possible, Rilke draws out further implications related to his protagonist’s quest. Malte remarks: “I was only able to understand that man [in the Crémerie] because something is happening to me too, that is beginning to draw me away and separate me from everything.” (J, 49) This sense of self-identification also relates to the man with the cane. Sokel argues that there is a sense of euphoric liberation in the man’s “expansive gesture,” though Malte is dismayed that “[w]ill and consciousness prove impotent.” Malte constantly evokes saints, lovers and artists who he suggests achieve eternal-liberty through self-abandonment and defying and transcending the crowd. The scenes he witnesses contain the self-abandonment he desires, yet lack the willpower and the aesthetic beauty he also hopes to achieve.

In the equivalent scene of Dangling Man Bellow aligns his novel closer to Rilke’s but differentiates Joseph’s experience from that of Malte. Joseph sees a man “sprawl out in front of” him in the street who, like Malte’s man with the cane, is in bourgeois attire (DM, 114). While Rilke’s dancer loses his cane, this man has crushed his signifier of bourgeois status, his hat (DM, 114). Yet in contrast to Malte, who remains on the verge of the crowd, Joseph finds himself playing a role “in the center of a large crowd” even when police arrive and until the ambulance leaves. Roquentin and Malte flee in terror or dismay, while Joseph tries to help the man and tears open his collar. Roquentin would argue that such bravery comes through the inauthentic denial of the existential significance of

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death, but Joseph, like Malte, is very preoccupied with death. Later, Joseph wonders if the man will die or whether “it was only an epileptic fit” which resembles Malte’s speculative responses to the man in the Crémerie. Also like Malte, Joseph identifies with the dying man, but, unlike Malte and Roquentin, not as part of an exclusive individual experience: “To many in the fascinated crowd the figure of the man on the ground must have been what it was to me—a prevision.” (DM, 116) Hence Joseph reflects more consciously on the implicit self-identification and thus goes beyond Roquentin and Malte in realising that the fear of the unpredictability of death is something everyone experiences and which brings humans together through concerted action and concern. However, like Malte, he fails to understand the full implications of this thought, refusing to confide in his wife, Iva, who subsequently thinks he is ill (DM, 116). While Joseph’s experience undermines Malte’s, Roquentin’s and his own logic, it results from his position in the quest where he remains, unable to connect certain discoveries towards realising the fallacy of his quest.

**Flaws in the Quest**

The greatest indictment of Joseph’s quest which foregrounds its eventual failure is the evidence of its shortcomings and contradictions. Unlike Roquentin, Malte and Joseph encounter endless obstacles which hinder their attempts to remove themselves from all external and internal influences past and present. Roquentin’s adventure suggests that people who do not admit their freedom and alienation are self-deceptive. Joseph and Malte do not fit into this category as they also see the human world as false and the natural environment as indifferent. Nor are they property owners, which Roquentin claims is essential to having a past: “The past
is a property-owner’s luxury.” (N, 97) What they lack, however, is Roquentin’s freedom, privileges and—Bellow implies—ideological fixity. They do not live in an idealised and alienated void but have memories, habits, beliefs, and, in Joseph’s case, acquaintances, which continue to assert influence on their identities. Thus Malte and Joseph encounter resistance within themselves. For instance, despite claiming he has changed too much to write to people he once knew because he considers his changes to have made any human bonds unrecognisable or obsolete, Malte constantly writes about them or as if he is writing to them. Joseph ridicules his former self but then is enraged when people do not acknowledge him or treat him with the same respect as they did previously. Furthermore he often resembles his former self and admits that he still pursues the answer to the same question: “How should a good man live; what ought he to do?” (DM, 39) Sartre portrays Roquentin achieving pure freedom and vision which reveals that the world is meaningless and his selfhood is a matter of interpretation. Bellow and Rilke, by contrast, suggest that pure freedom and vision are impossible by creating protagonists who desire pure freedom, vision and selfhood but cannot abandon their past and present selves and visions because they remain ingrained in their ontology.

Evidence mounts against the quest not only through Joseph’s struggle, but also through contradictions that suggest the quest is leading him towards the very opposite of what it is intended to achieve. Joseph and Malte attempt to separate from external forces and isolate themselves in order to discover a pure vision which will release their pure self at one with reality and the human will, but instead they begin to encounter a point of estrangement or “freedom” which will

173 “Le passé, c’est un luxe de propriétaire.” (Ln, 99)
sever them from self-consciousness, reality and active life. As Opdahl states, “Joseph is the victim of his striving rather than his despair—of his attempt to evade the limits of his life.”175 Howard M. Harper similarly recognises that “Joseph’s isolation causes a loss of identity. The more he pursues his individuality and identity the more he loses them.”176 Joseph finds himself on a similar course to that which Walser identifies with Kafka’s heroes: “further and further removed from their goals.”177 Abbott claims that “where Sartre’s hero bravely shoulders the burden of nothingness, Joseph resists it,” which makes him “a reluctant Roquentin.”178 Yet Rilke and Bellow suggest that the resistance of Malte and Joseph respectively is not due to “reluctance” but is engendered by the inherent limits of individual will and possibilities which make such a quest an impossibly dangerous exercise. It emerges that to carry their quests to their logical conclusion would take the protagonists to where their desires, and all means of human will, are impossible.

Through the signs of inherent contradiction within and the eventual failure of the quest, Bellow suggests that the quest restricts rather than expands the individual’s vision. In this fashion Bellow implies that Roquentin does not discover that existence is meaningless, rather he occupies a position in which existence is meaningless to him. Thus even Roquentin’s vision is an act of will with an implicit degree of selfhood, which negates the notion of both pure freedom and meaninglessness. Although Joseph argues, as does Roquentin, that the quest is the only path left him by his circumstances, Bellow demonstrates that the situation is of the individual’s own making. Joseph and Malte, like Roquentin,

175 Opdahl, Novels of Saul Bellow, 38.
are unable to see this because a demarcated subjective endeavour has led them into the quest and therefore made their subjectivity more limited and unable to see certain contradictions. Thus like Roquentin, Malte and Joseph consider their difficulties to be weaknesses, or, to use Sartre’s term, examples of “bad faith.” From their untenable positions each continues on his quest more desperately, without realising that the quest is related to and increasingly responsible for his untenable position.

The allusions to the Underground Man are present from the beginning of *Dangling Man* and increase as the novel progresses. The facts which emerge about Joseph’s crisis along with his own admissions of deteriorating within the diary’s pages confirm that his quest contains evidence of ‘underground’ incentives. With less freedom than either Malte or Roquentin, Joseph experiences more keenly the inability to transcend the realities which he claims are false or indifferent and therefore irrelevant to an individual’s subjectivity. Moreover the plentiful reminders of his previous identity accentuate his brooding against the world and himself. As Jean-Françoiz Leroux notes, the Underground Man and Joseph “begin with the self and so end,” estranged from life—“a state of hellish indifference or accidie [acedia].”

Though both protagonists shun and claim freedom from the world, they nonetheless hold it close as they begrudgingly rely on it for their sense of self-worth. Hence their volatility increases with their inability to fulfill their ideals, ideals which should counter their problems: for Joseph this is his quest, and for the Underground Man his “belief in material determinism and the law of nature.” Both Joseph and the Underground Man swing from high idealism to cynicism and spite. To assert their remaining

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character, escape their state bordering on inertia and enforce their loathing of the world and themselves they resort to creating petty scandals. This reflects on their decision to write. Like the Underground Man, Joseph is writing—undertaking the quest—not only to discover some form of character in freedom, but also to prove his character to himself from a state of acedia. Thus Dangling Man suggests that the quest derives from a calculated process of over-consciousness comparable to the Underground Man’s notes. The quest is therefore a similarly desperate and to a degree unwitting and self-contradictory attempt to escape and glorify a deteriorating state of subjective reliance. In this manner Bellow suggests that not only is the Sartrean vision and quest impossible, it contains the Underground Man’s pride and subjective imprisonment, which is self-destructive and dangerous.

Bellow draws on Dostoevsky’s artistic strategy to portray the quest as a flawed attempt at exemplariness, a subjectively narrowed vision which posits itself as the ‘Truth’ or on behalf of the ‘Truth.’ The same artistic strategy exists in Rameau’s Nephew although Dostoevsky’s protagonist contains “the full head of self-consciousness, historical awareness and philosophical depth,” 181 and is therefore more extreme and tortured than Rameau-Lui: “the Underground Man knows more than the nephew and enjoys less; he is isolated and, generally, impotent.” 182 Rameau too, sees the world as imperfect and false but, forced to live in it, he reluctantly adopts the position of a cynical parasite. Moi, on the other hand, attempts to negate or deny rather than embrace the problems he sees. As the characters oppose each other they claim that their own positions afford an authentic existence away from the hypocrisy and falseness practised in society. In

181 Fuchs, Vision and Revision, 31.
182 Fuchs, Vision and Revision, 31.
this manner Diderot reveals that their self-assurance is in fact their weakness. Brans writes that Moi’s evasion of Lui’s unpleasant truths makes the reader “alert to his more deep-seated evasion, an evasion of life itself, and we are not surprised when he finally pleads exemption.”\(^\text{183}\) This evasion is confirmed when Moi suggests that Rameau should follow the path of the philosopher, such as Diogenes (\(R\), 86-87),\(^\text{184}\) and remove himself from society’s corruptions: “it would be better to shut oneself up in garret, eat a dry crust, drink plain water and try to find oneself.” (\(R\), 81)\(^\text{185}\) Although he critiques Lui, Moi’s own philosopher-vision and lifestyle proves to be weak when confronted with Lui’s cynical truths. Hence in his narrative, Diderot envisions the potential for individuals to construct a means, a vision, of engaging with the world which supports their subjectivity, but which paradoxically restricts their ability to understand the world and themselves.

**INADEQUATE IDEAL CONSTRUCTIONS**

All of the works alluded to in *Dangling Man* address the individual’s desire to understand reality and to live a fulfilling existence. This enterprise is complicated by interaction with other individuals with conflicting desires and the demands of society. Rita D. Jacobs describes this dilemma in *Dangling Man* as “man’s difficulty of reconciling his desire for individuality and greatness with his desire for community and love.”\(^\text{186}\) In *Dangling Man* Bellow primarily depicts an extreme quest which aims for “community and love” but which in fact harms the individual’s ability to harmoniously engage with reality. Yet as part of this quest

\(^{183}\) Brans, “Hero and Anti-hero,” 429.  
\(^{184}\) (\textit{LndR}, 127-8)  
\(^{185}\) “Il vaudrait mieux se renfermer dans son grenier, boire de l’eau, manger du pain sec, se chercher soi-même.” (\textit{LndR}, 120)  
Bellow’s protagonist, like the protagonists of many of the works alluded to in *Dangling Man*, considers the potential for, and other characters’ attempts at, fulfilment.

Like the protagonists in *Rameau’s Nephew, Notes from Underground, The Journal of My Other Self* and *Nausea*, Joseph recognises that individuals often adopt a system of perspectives and values in order to give their lives a sense of meaning. Often this strategy means adopting a role which is designed to produce meaning. But because the beliefs and values of society and of an individual’s own formulation may become unrealistic, a conflict can occur such as that which causes Joseph’s crisis. Moi and Lui both agree that society demands from individuals certain behaviours incompatible with human nature and thus performed in hypocritical pantomime. The Underground Man considers “character” to be something which belongs to the “stupid” “normal man” who is able to act because he lacks consciousness and trusts his sense of entitlement in a ridiculous world (*U*, 52, 56). Malte considers that people need an external self to act, and that a role offers composure, ideals, comfort, and an avenue to release inner energy. But Malte also realises that if the roles people adopt to live by, comparable to masks or lids for pots, do not fit properly, they can destroy the individual (*J*, 5-6, 97-101, 172).

Roquentin, the protagonist with the most ideological fixity, considers society, its roles and the people who abide by them to be inauthentic. He regards most of human reality as demonstrating a cowardly false order of conventions and myth making. In all of these works the protagonists perceive that the reality which most people interpret and follow is inaccurate and incompatible with broader aspects of reality, but that such people struggle and
clinging to their subjective individuality, unable to admit that their sense of significance is erroneous.

As the protagonists of the works of Diderot, Dostoevsky, Rilke and Bellow formulate criticism of other people, they unwittingly diagnose their own problems. All the protagonists critique other characters with the presumption that their own position or quest is outside of societal norms and therefore more truthful, but contradictions arise which prove otherwise. In *Rameau’s Nephew* Lui claims that since everyone plays a pantomime, his role as a cynical *bouffon* is the most authentic because it inherently contains the awareness that it is a pantomime and it reveals the absurd acting of others (*R*, 87-88). Moi, on the other hand, claims that everyone should refuse pantomimes and follow their own sense of decency and truth. In his view the philosopher does not play a pantomime and follows both a personal and universal path unaffected by society’s hypocrisies which therefore is the most genuine path, capable of revealing the fallacies of others. Lui contradicts his own claims when he tells of being evicted from his ideal abode because his pride prevented him from bending to a certain degree of submission to others (*R*, 40, 52-54). Moi’s claims appear as naïve evasions, which are challenged by Lui’s cynicism. Moi even admits that Lui is not compatible with the philosopher lifestyle, which therefore lacks universality. Dostoevsky similarly demonstrates that his protagonist’s claim to exemption, or hyper-consciousness, as he rails against the normal man in favour of “conscious inertia,” is in fact the result of pride, narrow subjectivity and the desire to hypocritically justify oneself by claiming independence and rejecting others. While Moi, Lui and the Underground Man incorrectly claim freedom, full

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187 (*LndR*, 129).
188 (*LndR*, 72, 86-89).
awareness and exemption from the inauthentic roles of others, Malte and Joseph partly claim but ultimately envisage and seek this end. Sartre presents Roquentin as obtaining this ultimate position and therefore accurately criticising other people. Joseph follows a similar pattern to Roquentin, however, Bellow portrays contradictions and self-diagnosis in Joseph’s criticisms and in this manner demonstrates that the quest, and therefore Sartre’s position, contains hypocritical and self-righteous intolerance towards other people’s attempts to satisfy themselves and be accepted and confirmed in the world. Such tactics form and enforce the justification for the quest. Thus Bellow turns the polemical aspects of Roquentin’s discourse into a self-contradicting cycle.

Reflecting his characterisation as a synthesis of previous protagonists in a work constructed in relation to previous works, Joseph develops a succinct interpretation of the discrepancies that arise in an individual’s attempt to meet the needs of his personal, active and social self. The novel begins with this problem as Joseph’s crisis involves the rejection of his previous life-philosophy. Late in the novel Joseph raises the term “ideal construction” which he defines as “a plan, a program, perhaps an obsession.” (DM, 140) He acknowledges that ideal constructions appear essential to action and living: “Apparently we need to give ourselves some exclusive focus, passionate and engulfing.” (DM, 141) However, the problem is that ideal constructions are subjectively interpreted and enacted and so there exists a “gap between the ideal construction and the real world, the truth.” (DM, 141) It is impossible for an individual to adopt an ideal construction which encompasses all objective and subjective reality, yet individuals have a need to convince themselves that they achieve this goal. Joseph’s crisis, which predates the diary, is an example of the inevitable collapse of a narrow vision and
also the existential danger of an individual perceiving a gap between the ideal and reality.

**Economic Rationalism and the Soldier**

Bellow scrutinises the techniques for living that he observes in his society and in the artistic strategies of his literary predecessors, and Joseph reflects the same process by scrutinising the ideal constructions of the people surrounding him whose ways of life often reflect certain trends within wartime America. As Cohen recognises, although Joseph’s “findings more accurately reflect the ills of the diagnostician” he “does, in part, correctly diagnose certain genuine ills of society.” Like many of his predecessors, Joseph, through his flawed hyper-cynical position, manages to deliver severe, astute and valid criticisms of his society, its roles, and its contents—the people who abide by inauthentic systems. Bellow often instils Joseph’s acquaintances to whom Joseph applies the critical tool of ideal constructions with allusion to examples from the works of Bellow’s predecessors and their artistic strategies. Therefore Joseph’s scrutiny draws the existential situation of the citizen in wartime America and the insight and artistic strategies of Bellow’s predecessors together to be examined in light of one another and independently.

Within the setting of wartime America, Joseph examines the dominance of values based on American capitalism and the war effort. Joseph considers patriotic sacrifice and capitalist self-interest to be incompatible, but the exponents of self-interest view their vision as essential to the war effort. For instance, Joseph’s brother Amos sees the war as another setting in which money and success indicate an individual’s worth, and so he recommends that Joseph “get in

189 Cohen, Saul Bellow’s Enigmatic Laughter, 27.
there and become an officer candidate.” (DM, 64) Amos argues that the competitive attitude is critical to the betterment of the army (DM, 64). Similarly, Joseph’s tailor Mr Fanzel responds to the economics situation of wartime America by charging exorbitant prices, his philosophy being “Supply is supply and demand is demand.” (DM, 110) He advocates President Hoover’s plans to let capitalism reign so that, inspired by profits, people “will work harder and we will win the war faster.” (DM, 111) Joseph sees flaws in the ideal constructions of Amos and Mr Fanzel. Amos has denied his own family past of poverty and raised a spoilt daughter who identifies “poverty not so much with evil as unimportance.” (DM, 61) Through Mr Fanzel, Joseph also realises that the capitalist mentality is reductive and asks, “should we pay [businesses] to save the country? Have they no other reason to manufacture things?” and then “Mr. Fanzel, when you sew a dress for your wife do you charge her for it?” (DM, 111) He also compares Mr Fanzel’s mentality to that of “the suitor Luzhin in Crime and Punishment” who, influenced by the “English economists,” advocates self-interest for the greater good (D, 112). Thus Joseph, like his creator, explicitly draws on Dostoevsky’s thought as a critical vehicle. Amos and Mr Fanzel dismiss Joseph’s retorts as ignorant, but Joseph correctly recognises that the capitalist mentality neglects individual sentiment and human bonds.

Despite his valid criticisms of Amos and Fanzel, Joseph unwittingly reveals some negative tendencies in his own quest through his stance of moral superiority and rejection of worldly superiority. Amos offers Joseph money, which in a sense acknowledges their bond, but Joseph rejects it, claiming there “is no personal future anymore,” which stands in contrast to the ambitions of his entire quest (DM, 65). Against the idea of climbing the army ranks he claims that
“Socrates was a plain foot soldier”, which may allude to Moi’s idealistic exemplification of Socrates and other philosophers as model citizens in *Rameau’s Nephew* (*R*, 12-13). Many of Joseph’s criticisms of Amos and Mr Fanzel—that they are self-seeking, war-benefiting, individualistic—are to an extent applicable to his own quest, yet he dismisses them in similar fashion to their dismissal of his ideas.

As an adventurous soldier, Joseph’s late college friend Jeff Forman represents the other dominant ethos of wartime America and is characterised with reference to the hard-boiled action philosophy of Hemingway’s Code heroes. Bellow recognises that in Hemingway’s vision “to think is to feel one’s powerlessness, and that is why Hemingway himself, and his heroes as well, are in extreme need of movement.” Similarly Joseph suspects that Jeff Forman’s “love with excitement” was inspired by a discovery that “there were some ways in which to be human was to be unutterably dismal, and that all his life was given over to avoiding those ways.” (*DM*, 83) As Chavkin writes, the “stoicism and the continual wanderings and ritualistic activities of Hemingway’s sensitive characters can be considered defense mechanisms against despair.” For the most part Hemingway’s heroes are survivors who produce their identity through a strong desire for or sense of “separate peace.” In the midst of death, defeat and futility Hemingway is, according to Bellow, “forever trying to make his heroes virile and dominant.” But despite following the same code Jeff Forman has not

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190 *(LndR*, 37-38).
193 Phrase quoted from Ernest Hemingway, *A Farewell to Arms* (London: Everyman’s Library, 1993) 232. Examples of this notion can be found in Hemingway’s novel and also in Hemingway’s short stories concerning Nick Adams whose experience during World War I influences his lone fishing trips which represent a type of separate peace.
194 Bellow, “Image of Man,” 32.
gained the “[s]trong and victorious identity”\textsuperscript{195} of Hemingway’s Code hero. The mass violence and death of World War II denies this possibility: “Jeff, under water, is beyond virtue, value, glamour, money, or future.” (\textit{DM}, 84) Joseph only recalls Forman when he reads his name among the listed dead. A member of the merchant marine, Forman died in a seaplane, which may allude to Malraux’s aviation ties, and Joseph makes the sarcastic remark: “I suppose the submarine danger was not enough for him.” (\textit{DM}, 83) Jeff Forman’s reduction to a name on a list is comparable to the loss of self in the anonymous dying in poverty and hospitals which Malte is surprised to recognise in what he perceives to be the “personal” death of the man at the creamery.\textsuperscript{196}

Following his discovery of Jeff Forman’s death, Joseph also rejects the Hemingway-esque idea of a separate peace in individual defiance of the world: “we have a habit of making these things issues of personal morality and private will, which they are not at all.” (\textit{DM}, 84) J. Bakker notes that in contrast to the character of Frederic Henry, who in \textit{A Farewell to Arms} views the war as a personal injustice which he must escape, Joseph accepts the war as an inherent limit on his life.\textsuperscript{197} Such things, Joseph realises at one point, are beyond the individual: “Certain blood will be given for half-certain reasons, as in all wars. Somehow I cannot regard it as a wrong against myself.” (\textit{DM}, 84) In what can be read as another criticism of Hemingway, when Joseph discusses Forman’s death with a friend and is reprimanded for commenting “\textit{C’est la vie}” he argues: “I was just quoting from the last war. I didn’t mean to be funny.” (\textit{DM}, 159) Hemingway made his name writing about the brutal experiences and psychological effects of World War I, to which Joseph is referring. Bellow thus rejects the Hemingway

\textsuperscript{195} Bellow, “Image of Man,” 341. 
\textsuperscript{196} Sokel, “Devolution of the Self,” 177. 
\textsuperscript{197} Bakker, \textit{Survival Strategy}, 23.
hero’s virility and desire to defy or escape the world’s limits on the individual:  
“Alternatives, and particularly desirable alternatives, grow only on imaginary trees.”  
\((DM, 84)\) Although this conclusion is relatable to his own quest, Joseph considers the quest only a temporary measure and realises that eventually he must face the world, hopefully with greater understanding.

Joseph sees the discrepancy between the soldier’s sacrifice and capitalist self-seeking endeavour as a severe indictment of the “spiritual climate”  
\((DM, 110)\): “Jeff Forman dies; brother Amos lays up a store of shoes for the future”  
\((DM, 84)\); “[even with] the shadow of Jeff Forman’s falling plane crossing his security, [Fanzel] resolves to protect himself by charging eighty dollars for suits worth forty.”  
\((DM, 110)\) He knows that neither Amos nor Fanzel are inhuman and so he feels “less injustice or inhumanity than bewilderment.”  
\((DM, 84)\) The irony is that Joseph is taking advantage of the delays in his induction to pursue an assignment of self-improvement. Even though Joseph’s is a more humanist pursuit, and against his claim that he does not feel self-indulgent writing a diary, guilt gnaws away at his conscience. If he had to choose, Joseph “would rather die in war than consume its benefits.”  
\((DM, 84)\) While the soldier’s code seeks to defy the banality of life and death, the capitalist sees only profits and margins. But such claims remain philosophical posturing while his quest continues.

**Greatness and Failure**

Another dilemma which Joseph believes the individual faces is that “each of us is responsible for his own salvation, which is in his greatness.”  
\((DM, 89)\) This dilemma is found in Rameau’s Nephew and Notes from Underground in particular, and the influence of these texts is present in Bellow’s own exploration. In Joseph’s view talents are both intrinsic and relative, and so often people do
horrible things in order to feel superior to others, or they carry natural vices to extremes, hoping for greatness even in bad qualities. The majority of people never achieve the greatness of the “Werthers,” “Don Juans” and “Napoleons” (DM, 89), and in Dangling Man this sense of failure brings “a storm and hate and wounding rain out of us.” (DM, 89) Furthermore greatness is related to an individual’s “Sense of Personal Destiny” which influences his “plans, idealizations” to make sure his life does not “by one thousandth of an inch fall short of its ultimate possibility.” (DM, 88) In the belief that life is redeemable by greatness the individual seeks to know what path is their calling, but since we can only guess, individuals create unrealistic goals which “can consume us like parasites, eat us, drink us, and leave us lifelessly prostrate.” (DM, 88) Thus ideal constructions become altogether unrealistic. Once again, Joseph diagnoses a predicament without realising its applicability to his own quest.

Joseph recognises the negative results of this dilemma in his friend Abt. As something of a prodigy, Abt excelled at everything in college, causing Joseph to avoid the same subjects for the sake of his self-worth. Although one “winter [Abt] was Lenin, Mozart, and Locke rolled into one,” to achieve greatness it “was necessary to make a choice.” (DM, 87) Abt “passed through a crisis” to decide his Sense of Personal Destiny, knowing that “whatever it was he chose, that, would be the most important” since this is how ideal constructions work: “How could it be otherwise?” (DM, 87) Abt chose to be a political-philosopher and “in dead earnestness he followed greatness.” (DM, 87) As Abt “fell short of his models” he became “increasingly angry at himself, and unable to admit that the scale of his ambition was defeating him.” (DM, 88) Presently Abt resorts to petty means of obstinately asserting a sense of superiority: he “cannot be wrong” (DM, 88), turns
“aside everything he has no desire to understand” as unimportant, and expects praise (DM, 86). Indeed, Abt treats his ex-fiancée at the Servatius party with “cruelty and desire for revenge,” and this is the event which crystallises Joseph’s humanist crisis (DM, 56). Abt’s quest for greatness has made him his own enemy, and in Jack Brill’s words, “a bad case.” (DM, 55)

The exploration of the dilemma of greatness in Dangling Man has particular affinities with Rameau’s Nephew. Joseph writes: “Abt, more than anyone I have known, has lived continually in need of being consequential.” (DM, 86) Rameau-Lui repeatedly uses the same turn of phrase when he proudly claims that he is, and has the freedom of “no consequence.” (R, 45, 49)

Moi observes that Lui’s character is fragmented since he clearly desires to be more than “a common man.” (R, 12) Living in the shadow of his famous uncle, Lui embodies the dilemma of greatness, wishing he could “on the chance of being a genius, a great man.” (R, 16) He wonders “what’s the use of mediocrity?” and only appreciates the sublime, which leaves him, like Abt “vexed at being mediocre.” (R, 10, 16) Unlike Abt, Lui is consciously aware of the problem he faces, since he is, as Brans notes, “a realist, well acquainted with all manners and conditions of men.” Lui expresses in relation to himself the same sentiments Joseph recognises in Abt:

I do know what self-contempt is like, that torment of the soul due to neglect of the talents entrusted us by Providence. It’s the cruellest form of remorse. Better a man had never been born. (R, 23)

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198 “sans consequence.” (LndR, 45, 82)
199 “un homme commun.” (LndR, 37)
200 “au hasard d’être un homme de génie, un grand homme.” (LndR, 42)
201 “À quoi bon le médiocrité?” “fâché d’être médiocre.” (LndR, 34, 42)
203 “je connais le mépris de soi-même, ou ce tourment de la conscience qui naît de l’inutilité des dons que le Ciel nous a départis ; c’est le plus cruel de tous. Il faudrait presque autant que l’homme ne fût pas né. (LndR, 50)
Chapter One

Like Abt, Lui is unable to live up to his own measure of greatness, which leaves him with a sense of unattainable personal redemption and inner torment. Conscious of this dilemma, Lui claims that people who achieve greatness defy and denigrate both commonness and decency and therefore “[t]he world needs men, but men of genius, no.” (R, 11) However, this remains a theoretical wish, and meanwhile Rameau, like Abt, lives with the burden of not living up to his unrealistic expectations of himself.

Abt and Rameau both practise ideal constructions which bestow a belief in their own superiority, and yet they suffer. While Abt continually struggles to achieve greatness as a political philosopher, Rameau claims that his natural inclinations are at odds with society and traditional visions of greatness. As a result, Rameau develops an ideal construction, that of the cynical buffoon, which deems normality, traditional society and ideals of greatness corrupt and reprehensible. Though he claims that he only wants the materialistic and exploitative benefits, Rameau still desires confirmation and greatness to fulfil his sense of self-worth (R, 43). As Brans notes, failing “to be a genius, Lui has tried to be a genius of corrupt expediency.” Rameau “wants to be the hero of an anti-heroic society.” The idols which Rameau admires are those who, with an artistic flair, exploit society with “wickedness” (R, 60) Yet Rameau again falls short, partly because of a lack of talent but more because something in his character is incompatible with this role—a sense of dignity. Therefore despite basing his worth on cynically claiming that he knows and can exploit the hypocrisy and weaknesses of men, Rameau, like the Underground Man, finds himself jealous of

204 “il faut les hommes; mais les hommes de génie, point.” (LndR, 36)
206 Brans, “Hero and Anti-hero,” 441.
207 “méchanceté” and “mal” (LndR, 95)
and subservient to people he considers fools (R, 21-23). Also like the Underground Man, Rameau does not consider the error in his vision, but rather employs his failings to reinforce his conviction that society and existence are absurd and that ‘success’ is a reward for inferior people. While Abt still clings to petty measures of enforcing his ideal construction, Rameau remains a buffoon and cynic of merely enough talent to exploit naiveties to attain survival, pleasures, entertainment, reassurance and a minimal confirmation of his “Sense of Personal Destiny.”

In a 1984 interview Bellow stated that part of what appealed to him in Rameau’s Nephew was that it showed “what it meant to be a parasite and a failure in an elite society and to be a low man among the aristocrats.” In Dangling Man this aspect is embodied by Alf Steidler whom Joseph introduces with reference to Diderot’s character: “I think of Rameau’s nephew, described by Diderot as ‘… un (personnage) composé de hauteur et de bassesse, de bon sens et de déraison.’” (DM, 127) Yet Joseph differentiates between the two characters, stating that Steidler is “less emphatic, more sentimental (after his own fashion), and not nearly as shrewd.” (DM, 127) This identification has drawn the attention of several critics who have analysed comparisons between the texts. Sanford Pinscher notes that Rameau and Steidler are both drawn into theatrical and musical circles, develop “their own moral codes,” envision the world as “absurd falsehood,” and enjoy playing the pantomime. But more importantly Steidler introduces into Dangling Man the exploration of the anti-heroic ideal construction

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208 (LndR, 48-50).
210 See for example, Brans, “Hero and Anti-hero; Fuchs, Vision and Revision; Pinsker, “Rameau’s Nephew and Dangling Man.”
211 Pinsker, “Rameau’s Nephew and Dangling Man,” 23.
of a failure who sees society as a charade and exploits its rules with skilful cynicism.

Halfway through the novel Joseph runs into Alf Steidler whom he has not “seen in years.” (DM, 126) The diary entry is written largely in the form of a dialogue with only minor narrative commentary from Joseph, which reflects the style of *Rameau’s Nephew*. Like Rameau, Steidler enjoys recounting and even re-enacting scandalous experiences and anecdotes. Also like Rameau, Steidler had found his ideal environment—L.A.—but had had to leave to meet other obligations, in Steidler’s case when he received an induction call from the army (DM, 128). He regards life as an absurd joke in which the only worthwhile pursuit is entertainment. When Steidler’s brother incorrectly accuses and beats his wife for stealing money which Steidler in fact stole, Steidler regards the whole incident as burlesque entertainment: “They [his brother and sister-in-law] got a big kick out of it.” (DM, 132) Steidler is a self-confessed “deadbeat” who, like Rameau, has chosen a path which he believes harnesses his natural talents, or lack thereof, as the most important and authentic qualities.

During their encounter Steidler laughingly recounts stories which reveal the fallacies in Joseph’s vision. Like Rameau, Steidler provides a comic but acute assessment of the self-righteous narrator-protagonist:

> Steidler asked me how I was using my liberty. I answered that I was preparing myself spiritually, that I was willing to be a member of the Army, but not a part of it. He thought this a very witty answer. He believes I am a natural comedian and laughs at everything I say. The more serious I become, the harder he laughs. (DM, 134)

As flawed as the visions of Steidler and Rameau are, they manage to identify profound critical truths about society and human nature which expose some of the respective narrator-protagonist’s hypocrisies. More consequential to the artistic strategies of Bellow and Diderot is that Steidler and Rameau expose but also
exhibit themselves the worst tendencies of Joseph and Moi respectively, and this is their critical function as *Doppelgängers*. Aspects of Rameau’s and Steidler’s ideal constructions are discernable in the positions and quests of Moi, the Underground Man, Malte, Roquentin and Joseph. Rameau’s and Steidler’s cynical rejection of society, their materialism and rationalism, and their claims to exemption, reflect the respective narrator-protagonist’s position. Moi and Lui enjoy the company of their antagonists as they think it reinforces the rightness of their own vision, until they find themselves fundamentally challenged. As Andrew Gordon states, Joseph “can feel intellectually and morally superior to [Steidler] until [he] recognizes the uncomfortable similarities in their character and situation.”212 Joseph attempts to evasively dismiss the implications of his Steidler’s example, mirroring Moi who fears “the inroads that contact with Lui’s sophistry might make into his own delicately balanced moral philosophy”—in Joseph’s case, his quest.213

In *Dangling Man* the comparison between Joseph and Steidler is extended as their relationship runs a different course than that which occurs between Moi and Lui who meet only once for their debate. Steidler permanently lives “the unstable and inauthentic existence which Joseph has chosen temporarily.”214 Steidler is rejected from the army while Joseph is only temporarily delayed in his induction (*DM*, 126). At their first meeting Steidler declares “it’s up to you normal bastards to do the fighting,” but from his repeated appearances at Joseph’s apartment the protagonist deduces that: “[Steidler] seems to find me congenial … he assumes we are in the same boat.” (*DM*, 148) This comment suggests that

because “Joseph places inordinate value on his freedom and individuality, he has been brought, like Lui, to parasitism and solipsism.” Joseph finds reasons to criticise Steidler’s ideal construction, accusing him of having “a notion of admirable style” and of wanting “[n]obility of gesture” but basing it on “a shallow idea of drama.” (DM, 140) Against the possible interpretation that Rameau is redeemed on an artistic level through his literary anti-heroic merit, the experience of repeated encounters renders Steidler tedious: “It would have shocked Alf to know that he was boring me, for he considers himself a first-class entertainer.” (DM, 150) Despite their increasing familiarity Joseph feels guilty for the time they spend together, uneasily witnessing his own decadence. In Steidler, Joseph “is brought face to face with the worst of himself, with the physical realities of his philosophical posturing,” as Steidler’s attitude reflects his own: “There is no dignity anywhere, nothing but absurd falsehood.” (DM, 148) Joseph criticises Steidler and fails to acknowledge that his quest is leading him in the same direction. When Joseph encounters his civil friend Myron Adler who warns him against Steidler, Joseph plays the “Rameau” role and offends someone who can be considered as equivalent to the former Joseph. Again Bellow suggests that the quest leads to the underground, as far as Rameau foregrounds Dostoevsky’s anti-hero.

The flawed logic of Joseph’s quest manifests most dramatically through his outbursts which are reminiscent of the Underground Man. Like the latter, these often occur when Joseph senses that his identity is being denied and that he is powerless. His deterioration exacerbates the situation because not only does he despairingly struggle to gain an impossible independence from the world, but as a result he also reduces his significance and identity within it. Thus, like the Underground Man, Joseph is “at war with everyone.” This consequence further undermines the intention of the quest which is to discover, through rationalism, a stronger sense of selfhood and freedom, and thus Joseph is racked with guilt and a sense of impending failure. Frank states that “[r]eason tells [the Underground Man] that guilt or indignation is totally irrational and meaningless; but conscience and a sense of dignity exist all the same as ineradicable components of the human psyche.” In each outburst Joseph hypocritically appeals to “principle,” which resembles the manner by which the Underground Man, in a “frantic desire to assert his ‘equality,’” demonstrates “ludicrous vanity rather than staunchly independent self-respect.” As Stanley Trachtenberg explains, Joseph’s outbursts are filled with the “shrill impotence of Dostoevsky’s Underground Man, who requires recognition even in blows.” The outbursts further reflect Joseph’s impossible state as they reveal his increasing desperation to assert some kind of identity.

Three significant outbursts occur during the time Joseph writes his diary, besides the climactic episode. When a former acquaintance from Joseph’s

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218 Conradi, *Fyodor Dostoevsky*, 38.
220 Frank, *Stir of Liberation*, 337.
221 Trachtenberg, “Saul Bellow’s Luftmensch,” 39.
communist days, Burns, ignores Joseph at a diner, Joseph creates a scene and then, reminiscent of the Underground Man’s utopian idealism, defends his actions to his embarrassed companion as “principle” and standing up to tyranny (DM, 34-37). Several critics have compared this scene to the Underground Man’s ordeal with the officer who does not recognise him, yet although the sentiment is the same, Joseph is different from the Underground Man because he acts on his anger: he is dangling, not underground. On another occasion Joseph listens to a Haydn record and muses about spiritual redemption and answering despair with grace. These sentiments disappear when his niece interrupts and then ignores him to put on her own record. Joseph grabs and spanks her violently (DM, 70-71). Again Joseph’s companion, this time Iva, acts ashamed which only fuels Joseph’s indignation. The most explicit outburst against a loss of identity occurs when Joseph’s identification document is rejected at the bank. Again he creates a scene, arguing with the bank manager, this time on behalf of politeness (DM, 175).

Further evidence that Joseph’s quest is both the result and the cause of underground tendencies appears when Joseph discloses the account of a previous violent outburst. Late in the diary, which suggests difficulty confronting the event, Joseph recounts how prior to the Servatius’ party he violently beat his landlord after the latter repeatedly ignored his requests for property maintenance (DM, 146). Thus even before the party Joseph’s outlook was already unravelling, incapable of accounting for certain contradictions. During the quest Joseph acknowledges and examines the problem of irrational behaviour. He identifies “mad fear of being slighted or scorned,” the ignorance and spiritual poverty which mean we fail to recognise the “confused motives of love and loneliness,” and

222 Aharoni, “Search for Freedom,” 49; Opdahl, Novels of Saul Bellow, 36.
“[p]erhaps, also, self-contempt.” (DM, 147) Here, Joseph again recognises some profound elements of human despair, but fails to apply them to his own quest which is characterised at least in part by ignorance, spiritual poverty, self-contempt and loneliness. Although his volatility inspires his quest, Joseph does not recognise that the quest consists of the same elements which cause his volatility, and so he remains a “human grenade whose pin has been withdrawn.” (DM, 147)

The other significant indicator of the deterioration and danger of Joseph’s quest is in relation to the issue of death. Death “is ever-present in Joseph’s subconscious, though he tries to think his way clear of it.” Joseph argues that his quest is to discover and govern that which death does not control—the mind, “the self that we must govern”: “It is our humanity that we are responsible for it, our dignity, our freedom.” (DM, 167) His quest for pure freedom treats death as peripheral because it represents “the loss of freedom.” Joseph’s treatment of death often reveals his anxiety and hypocrisy since he adopts Hemingway-style bravado in his melodramatic “colloquies with himself” and “knotty philosophical disquisitions on its nature.” Thus signs emerge that Joseph is terrified of death, and this terror is fundamental to and inseparable from the nature of his quest.

Joseph’s relationship to death demonstrates similar qualities to Malte’s. Their manifest anxiety towards death and encounters with death produce an enigma within their respective quests. In The Journal of My Other Self, the Briggses, Malte’s paternal line, view death as “fruition and fulfilment, and each death confirm[s], as it seal[s], the unique character of the life it end[s].” The

225 Cohen, Saul Bellow’s Enigmatic Laughter, 34-5.
perception of death as something that should be subservient to human will could create rigid and inhuman expectations, such as when Malte’s grandmother, Frau Margarete Brigge is “indignant” about the “most inconveniently” timed death of Malte’s mother (J, 115). The Brigges’ attitude contrasts with the Brahes’ (Malte’s maternal line’s) “refusal to recognize death at all” in their almost submissive acceptance of the mystery of existence. But Malte and Joseph also recognise another, more miserable and possibly also more vacuous, selfless and submissive death; which for Joseph is found among the lists of war-dead, and for Malte in the “anonymous assembly-line deaths in the Parisian hospitals.”  

Both protagonists’ quests estrange them from a sense of humanity as they try to gain full independence. They become estranged from life and the very freedom they consider irrespective of death, which they interpret as pure negation. In a sense, death is akin to the pure freedom they desire. Thus because Joseph, in his pursuit of pure freedom, does not acknowledge death as integral to and not separate from his being, his life begins to resemble death. This problem further fuels his evasive or reductive treatment of death because he begins to identify the resemblances of death to his life. To emphasise the point, in one scene Joseph, like Roquentin and Malte, contemplates a carcass. In Dangling Man the carcass is a “half-cleaned chicken, its yellow claws rigid, its head bent as though to examine its entrails.” (DM, 24) Here, the text suggests that Joseph has a moment of self-recognition, that his inward investigation is comparable to a lifeless carcass considering its own insides. By trying to refuse both the significance of death and the human will which has the power to encapsulate death, Joseph’s quest for pure freedom prevents him from living fully.

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The Education of a Writer

The threat of death and loss of identity are discernable within Joseph’s apartment building, and manifest the same polarities found in Rilke’s work. This setting also reflects Rilke’s concern with the anonymity, estrangement, and intimacy of mass living. Despite his attempt to retreat to the confines of his room, Joseph, like Malte, still has constant ‘interaction’ with other humans, even if at times it is only through walls. One such primary interaction in his apartment building is with the family who own the building and who suggest allusion to Malte’s paternal line. Mrs Kiefer owns the building and her son-in-law, Captain Briggs, is a figure of order and authority. From the beginning of the novel Mrs Kiefer is dying and “not expected to live long” (DM, 16), yet endures the length of the novel and affects the entire building, resembling the prolonged death of Malte’s paternal grandfather: “All the superfluous pride, will and mastery he had been unable to consume even in his peaceful days, had passed into his death.” (J, 15) Reflecting Malte’s thoughts on the Brigges and the Brahes, Joseph struggles to understand Mrs Kiefers’ decline as much as he fails to understand the deaths of millions of men being sent to war.

In Joseph’s apartment scenario the character Vanaker represents the other side of the spectrum, that of Malte’s Brahes. However, both Vanaker and Captain Briggs manifest elements more relevant to Joseph’s situation and are therefore not direct translations of Malte’s Brahes and Brigges. While Captain Briggs represents order and Mrs Kiefer represents a life-filled death—Joseph compares her to a loaf ready for the oven (DM, 171)—Vanaker represents the complete absence of form and order. Vanaker lives a ghostly existence; heard but never seen, in Joseph’s view he is a “queer, annoying creature.” (DM, 16) Joseph is driven to despair by Vanaker’s coughing, urinating with the hall door open,
setting his armchair on fire, throwing empty liquor bottles out the window and stealing from other tenants. The more Joseph learns about Vanaker the more he encounters inconsistencies in trying to define him: “Vanaker is at once everything and nothing.”\textsuperscript{228} However, this difficulty is also indicative of the fact that Joseph fails to recognise that Vanaker is his quest \textit{Doppelgänger}, as his quest is carrying him from the side of the Briggs to the state of Vanaker, “the shabby disintegration of character.”\textsuperscript{229} The text hints at this link when Joseph tries to ambush Vanaker for his indecent urinating and Iva gasps “Oh, the fool,” which forces Joseph to wonder: “I suppose she means Vanaker; but may she not also mean me?” (\textit{DM}, 142) Joseph even conceals Vanaker’s stealing so Iva does not find out (\textit{DM}, 126). Just as the Underground Man claims that people will moan for the pleasure of afflicting the world with their presence (\textit{U}, 59-61), Joseph claims that Vanaker “coughs to draw attention to himself.” (\textit{DM}, 16) In both cases the protagonist projects and thus reveals “his own perversities”—their writing is itself passive moaning—and Joseph also resembles the Underground Man’s projection of his “own sadistic traits to his fairly innocuous servant Apollon.”\textsuperscript{230} When Joseph claims he understands Vanaker well because he has “acquired an eye for the type” he reveals simultaneously his vain sense of superiority and his similarity to Vanaker. Joseph’s confusion with Vanaker signifies his inability to identify the real ambition and results of the quest he is leading.

The drama located within the apartment indicates Bellow’s portrayal of the diary-quest as effectively blurring the balance between order and civility, and death, chaos and insignificance. The climax occurs in this setting as Joseph confronts Vanaker, the symbol of his own deterioration, who has hitherto been a

\textsuperscript{228} Abbott, “Lost Cause,” 275.
\textsuperscript{229} Abbott, “Lost Cause,” 275.
\textsuperscript{230} Cohen, \textit{Saul Bellow’s Enigmatic Laughter}, 34.
phantom presence. While denying the scene he caused at the bank Joseph is cornered by Iva for his ridiculous principles with a “Capital P,” his unpredictable volatility and warped reasoning, and his “mean and ugly” temper (DM, 176-178). As he tries to leave Iva, who is sobbing, he yells, “This is no sort of life,” before he hears Vanaker’s “protesting cough” and “customary splash” and launches towards his double, forcing the inevitable showdown (DM, 179). While Joseph believes he is reprimanding Vanaker for lacking decency, civility and principles, his own actions have demonstrated a similar absence of these qualities and in the present scene he creates an even more reproachable event of chaos which disturbs the dying Mrs Kiefer. When Captain Briggs arrives he reprimands Joseph with the same accusations Joseph directs at Vanaker (DM, 181). Yet while the harmless Vanaker slinks away Joseph goes a step further and almost begins a fistfight with Captain Briggs before Iva intervenes and Joseph runs into the night. At this point Joseph’s actions reveal the depth of his deterioration as he viciously confronts his double, ostracises himself from his neighbours, gives the impression that he is a menace to civility, disturbs the individualised death of Mrs Kiefer, and embarrasses his wife. Most importantly, he is forced to see the position he now occupies on the spectrum of human possibilities.

Art, Love and Spirituality

Joseph’s quest for pure freedom places him on an unsustainable path. Against Sartre, Bellow portrays the extreme existential ennui and volatility his protagonist experiences as the result not of authentic vision but of a vision warped by impossible ideals. In the meantime, Sartre’s work hints towards a subsequent implicit solution to his protagonist’s predicament. Similarly, Diderot establishes two opposing visions of individual freedom and selfhood which, due to their
polarity, expose, engage, critique and resemble each other, and therefore his artistic encapsulation suggests the necessary requirements towards achieving a possible solution. Dostoevsky wrote *Notes from Underground* as an implicit example of why spirituality is necessary, as a means of transcending the ego. Like Dostoevsky, Malte in *The Journal of My Other Self* considers spirituality—along with love and art—as an endeavour that through selfless dedication to a reality beyond individual subjectivity enables full individual freedom and selfhood. Rilke demonstrates an artistic sense of redemption by portraying his fictional equivalent struggling to achieve an impossible objective: “Malte is a weaker artist standing in for the strong artist who is actually writing the book and who succeeds in creating art where the surrogate character fails.”231 In a similar but different fashion *Nausea* ends with Roquentin’s proposal to write a novel about the truth he has discovered, which is both his diary and the justification for the novel Sartre has written. In *Dangling Man* Bellow considers the implicit and explicit solutions of these authors to the dilemma of individual freedom and selfhood, as Joseph struggles to find a way out of his crisis. For the most part Bellow rejects their solutions as inapplicable to Joseph’s contemporary situation and the deterioration he suffers.

Bellow most closely aligns himself with Rilke’s artistic solution, which is flooded with Malte’s ideals of love as a universal force of engagement that is also individual, pure and free. Malte perceives a traditional division between men as conventional, authoritarian, forceful, rational and ordered and women as nurturing, warm, harmonious and accepting of existence. Malte considers that “for centuries” certain women, “valiant lovers,” would assume “the entire task of love”

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for men who “only echoed them, and badly.” (J, 127-8) Thus the valiant lovers would pursue the impossible, loving without return and despite “the stress of endless need,” (J, 128). Their selflessness was different from the loss of selfhood of the poor and dying, because like saints, the lovers “deliberately refused destiny.” Thus the valiant lovers “rose above their man,” and achieved “such supreme farewells” that their hearts became “the heart of nature itself,” resulting in the ultimate level of individuality, freedom, power and immortality (J, 227). According to Malte, by defying the masculine forces and by loving without hope or union the valiant lovers reached the abandonment of the self which releases the pure self.

The narrative in *Notes from the Underground* also demonstrates a similar idea through the character of Liza the prostitute who, in her “complete disregard of her own humiliation, her whole-souled identification with [the Underground Man’s] torments—in short, her capacity for selfless love—is the only way to break the sorcerer’s spell of egocentrism.” Yet the Underground Man has incapacitated himself to too great an extent for Liza to succeed and so he chooses to remain in his state of acedia. At the close of *The Journal of My Other Self*, Malte’s position implies that his idealistic vision of love is based on a miscomprehension similar to the Underground Man’s, which makes love impossible.

Joseph has an idealistic vision of love, similar to Malte, which leaves him disappointed in his marriage. Malte admires “those women who remained with their bullies and drunkards” and in their selfless struggles with adversity attained an inner, untouchable and pure strength which gave them a “radiant” and

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233 Frank, *Stir of Liberation*, 344.
“blessed” aura (DM, 128-9). When Iva raises the subject of her friend, Susie Farson, who remains with her abusive husband, Joseph tries to apply the Maltian ideal, arguing that Susie “doesn’t want to lose her husband.” (DM, 117) Iva rejects this principle as well: “Lose him? I would have shot him by now. And she believes she’s doing it for love.” (DM, 117) Joseph admits that throughout their marriage he has tried to dominate Iva, to guide and form her to think like him, “to prize the most truly human traditions, the heavenly cities” (DM, 29, 98). Unable to convince her of his ideals, Joseph has for some time given up altogether on Iva: “I let her alone, pretending indifference.” (DM, 98) Brans claims that Bellow “underscores and deepens Joseph’s alienation and solitariness by making him lonely in marriage.” However, it is more the case that Joseph’s idealism has rendered him incapable of accepting Iva, and therefore he resorts to a quest which further alienates him from her.

Cohen argues that Joseph overlooks the answer of love, along with nature and life, but in fact for the major part of his quest Joseph is too cynical to accept love. Leafing through Goethe’s work Poetry and Life, Joseph is drawn to the discussion of the “disease” which results when “the regular occurrence of external phenomena” no longer brings pleasure, but he is disappointed by Goethe’s assertion that “[n]othing occasions this weariness more than the recurrence of the passion of love.” (DM, 18-19) Joseph finds himself feeling a greater affinity with the Englishman whom Goethe describes as having committed suicide “that he might no longer have to dress and undress himself every day,” and with the indifferent murderer Barnadine in Shakespeare’s Measure for Measure (DM, 18-19). He dismisses Goethe’s guidance—“What would Goethe say to the view from

235 Cohen, Saul Bellow’s Enigmatic Laughter, 38.
this window, the wintry, ill-lit street, he with his recurring pleasures, fruits, and flowers” \textit{(DM, 78)}—and later asserts that “[i]t isn’t love that gives us weariness of life. It’s our inability to be free.” \textit{(DM, 168)} Therefore Joseph considers the beauty of naturally occurring phenomena and love, but dismisses them both and posits, in line with his quest, his own idealism of rational freedom as more important.

Disappointed with Iva, Joseph has been conducting an affair which he describes halfway through the novel. Just as his quest is a reaction to the world contradicting his ideals, the affair is a reaction to Iva’s “rebellion.” The affair contains elements reminiscent of Malte’s “valiant lovers,” but ends in unremarkable collapse. Kitty and Joseph met two years previously, and initially the relationship was platonic, with Kitty claiming acceptance of Joseph’s marriage and acting as his confidant and loyal soul mate. Kitty spoke of love irrespective of marriage, like Malte’s “great lover” who knew that “nothing is meant by the union of two beings save increased loneliness.” \textit{(J, 227)} But when the relationship became physical and Kitty began making demands, Joseph ended the affair, citing the struggle of limits, guilt and marital strains \textit{(DM, 101-102)}. Subsequently they rekindled their initial platonic relationship, which suits Joseph perfectly. However, at this point in the novel when Joseph recounts the details of his affair, he flees an argument with Iva caused by a “missing” book—lent to Kitty—and seeks out Kitty’s company, only to find her with another man \textit{(DM, 102)}. Against his objective reasoning he finds himself “ambiguously resentful and insulted.” \textit{(DM, 105)} Again he is forced to confront contradictions within his beliefs.

Several scenes in \textit{Dangling Man} contradict Joseph’s assessment of his marital relationship and suggest that he has unjustly rejected Iva because his
flawed vision is incapable of realising she is a devoted, loving wife \((DM, 98)\). Tenderness between the pair is infrequent and occurs only when Joseph is resigned, weak or has a fever and Iva cares for him \((DM, 124)\). Towards the end of the novel, a month after the end of his affair with Kitty, Joseph realises that Iva accepts him even with his deteriorating lifestyle, and he admits, “Iva and I have grown closer.” \((DM, 152)\) He even states, “I am struck by the arrogance with which I set people apart into two groups: those with worth-while ideas and those without them.” \((DM, 152)\) Joseph now realises that he has been unwilling to accept broader manifestations of freedom, selfhood and love. Thus Joseph demonstrates that quest and selfish ideals remove the individual from what love offers: warmth, companionship, and engagement with human nature and understanding. Bellow gives no credence to the notion of absolution in pure, devotional love.

Bellow also rejects the solution of spiritually selfless devotion for his protagonist. According to Malte, the saint rejects fate, destiny and the crowd and strives for the few things “whose magnitude is not measurable by us… as opposed to God,” thereby calling forth “the fatality inherent in all love-relationships.” \((J, 194)\) Dostoevsky also invokes in spirituality, according to Bellow, “a higher [than Western] individualism to which the desire for fraternal love is natural, an individualism which is self-effacing and sacrificial.”\(^{236}\) In \textit{Dangling Man} the ideal construction of spiritual self-sacrifice is parodied by “a woman who goes through the neighborhood with a shopping bag full of Christian Science literature.” \((DM, 161)\) She tries to ‘save’ men going to war. Yet her speech is memorised, inaudible and disengaging, and she appears a helpless sickly figure who has “lost all sense

\(^{236}\) Bellow, “The French,” 42.
of her whereabouts” and is at the “mercy” of the pedestrians she accosts (DM, 162-3). Clayton considers her an exemplar of a consuming ideal construction, and Opdahl notes that by sacrificing “her life to her faith that man can evade death, the woman appears to be destroyed by the very ideal that sustains her.”

She is not a figure of redemption but rather a ghostly presence who by choosing a source of redemption outside of life is absent within it. Although the woman manages to correctly reprimand Joseph for being proud (DM, 163), such submissive and unworldly spirituality does not present a viable solution to the individual freedom and selfhood within Joseph’s context, particularly when it leads to personal estrangement from the world.

Joseph also rejects God according to the requirements of his quest to abide solely by individually subjective reason. Bellow alludes to Nausea and rejects the possibility of universal truths such as that which Roquentin discovers. Throughout Nausea, Roquentin listens to a jazz song called “Some of these days” which, through its ideal form of existence, exposes, as it offers a reprieve from, the contingency of existence: “you must suffer in strict time.” (N, 249) At the end of the novel as Roquentin wonders what to do with his freedom among meaningless existence, he listens to the record and imagines the composers who, like him, perhaps “thought they were lost right until the very end, drowned in existence” (N, 251), but because of their song they are “saved.” (N, 251) Roquentin realises that art transcends the meaninglessness of existence with the potential to bestow some transcendence on the life of the artist: “So you can

237 Clayton, Defense of Man, 80.
238 Opdahl, Novels of Saul Bellow, 35.
239 “il faut souffrir en mesure.” (Ln, 246)
240 “se sont peut-être cru perdus jusqu’au bout, noyé dans l’existence.” (Ln, 249)
241 “Sauvés.” (Ln, 249)
justify your existence? Just a little?” (N, 251) Roquentin resolves to write a novel that will prove that existence is meaningless according to his own experience, which will make the work truthful and bestow some sense of meaning on his life. Therefore through Roquentin’s diary Sartre claims to achieve that which Roquentin, like Malte, desires—a work of art which accesses the truth (M, 53-54). In Dangling Man, Joseph too considers the solution of art which expresses universal truths when he listens to “a Haydn divertimento for the Cello.” (DM, 67) Lehan declares that it “is difficult to believe that Bellow wrote this scene without conscious recall of Sartre’s Nausea. Joseph echoes the exact sentiments and ideas of Roquentin.” Yet Joseph is less ideological in the way that he recognises in the music his own “suffering and humiliation” on a quest to face existence “with grace, without meanness.” (DM, 67) Among the three “quarters” Joseph lists in which to “look for help,” the “[p]ersonal, human or universal,” the music names “only one source, the universal one, God.” (DM, 68) Although he does not dismiss the possibility of God, his quest requires “the verdict for reason” as opposed to a solution “anterior, not of [his] own deriving.” (DM, 68) Otherwise the solution risks contradictions: “From the antidote itself another disease would spring.” (DM, 68) So while Roquentin claims he recognises in his record the universal truth of meaninglessness which he then proposes as the basis for a novel, Joseph recognises an opposing universal truth, which he dismisses as anterior to the conditions of his quest. Bellow instantiates a relationship between Roquentin and Haydn to suggest that Roquentin has not discovered a universal truth, but instead constructed the only form of truth available to the individual—personal truth. In his insistence upon the same individual reasoning

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242 “Alors on peut justifier son existence? Un tout petit peu?” (Ln, 249)
which Roquentin purports to possess, Joseph rejects God because he considers that faith unjustifiably—‘irrationally’—relies on an ontological claim that defies individual reasoning to claim universal truth, but in fact this also serves as a profound rejection of Roquentin’s equivalent claim in regards to a universal truth of meaninglessness.

Art is intrinsic to the methods of all the novels alluded to in *Dangling Man*, but above all to *The Journal of My Other Self* and *Nausea* which consider and present art as a solution to the dilemma of individual freedom and selfhood. Rilke and Sartre claim a degree of redemption through portraying their protagonists’ attempts to achieve the ultimate art form. Bellow introduces this solution through Joseph’s consideration of his artist friend, John Pearl, whose name suggests an allusion to Jean-Paul Sartre. Like Roquentin’s jazz musicians “on the twentieth floor of a New York skyscraper,” (*N*, 249) John Pearl lives and works in a New York skyscraper. Bearing similarities to Roquentin, who declares, “The world was so ugly, outside me,” (*N*, 247) as well as to Malte, Steidler, Rameau and the Underground Man, John Pearl rejects everyday existence as “pish, nonsense, nothing!” and advocates that the only “worth-while sort of work [is] that of the imagination” since the “real world is the world of art and thought.” (*DM*, 91) Joseph finds the solution of art attractive. Like Roquentin, who imagines the musicians transcending their lives of hardship, poverty and “ennuis,” Joseph considers that “in spite of the calamity, the lies and moral buggery, the odium, the detritus of wrong and sorrow dropped on every heart,”

244 Abbott considers that it “may well be that Bellow had the conclusion of La Nausée in mind when he introduced the artist, John Pearl.” Abbott, “Lost Cause,” 269. Atlas mentions that in some of his earlier writings Bellow had used the pseudonym John Paul, misspelling Jean Paul, the pen-name of the German satirical novelist Johann Paul Friedrich Richter. Atlas, *Bellow*, 48. However, the abundant evidence suggests that in *Dangling Man* “John Pearl” alludes to Sartre.

245 “au vingtième étage d’un immeuble de New York” (*Ln*, 247)

246 “Le monde était si laid, hors de moi” (*Ln*, 244)
Chapter One

John Pearl maintains “a measure of cleanliness and freedom.” (DM, 91)
Furthermore the artist is a socially esteemed role which connects John Pearl “with the best part of mankind.” (DM, 46)

Joseph’s relationship to John Pearl contains parallels with Bellow’s literary relationship to Sartre. Similar to the manner in which Bellow would have received Nausea, as a literary text from a distant writing-colleague, Joseph receives one-way correspondence from John Pearl. Though Joseph does not disclose his replies, he expresses his thoughts in the diary, just as Bellow expresses his reaction to Nausea through Dangling Man. However, Joseph’s sympathy for John Pearl does not necessarily reflect Bellow’s sentiments towards Sartre. Rather, Joseph sympathises with John Pearl because he is pursuing the same ideals and suffering the same dilemma, and in this manner Bellow aligns his protagonist with the ideas of Sartre in order to reject the solution of Nausea on several levels. Firstly it is rejected as a possibility for Joseph who realises, like Rameau, his exclusion from the elitism of such a solution: “My talent, if I have one at all, is for being a citizen, or what is today called, most apologetically, a good man.” (DM, 91) As Brans recognises, “Joseph is forced to seek a common solution, a way out of or beyond alienation that is generally applicable.”

Furthermore, Joseph realises that the ‘artist’ is another ideal construction in which the individual may try to claim exemption from life, such as a captured Italian General who evaded questioning by claiming he was a poet: “Who does not recognise the advantage of the artist, these days?” (DM, 92) The last Joseph hears of Steidler is that he is in New York with John Pearl which is symbolically

appropriate as they both live squalidly and indecently but claim redemption through an aesthetic rejection of ordinary existence.

Roquentin tentatively reaches a solution involving art which is not escapist, as he proposes to create a work which proves the universal truth of existence. Roquentin admits that he is not sure if his solution will provide him with a sense of meaning outside of his art or when he is not creating, but this greater truth supports Sartre’s own artistic justification. However, in addition to Joseph’s record scene which rebuts the idea of an individually attainable universal truth, John Pearl’s situation undermines the possibility of living redemption through artistic production. In an allusion to Roquentin’s jazz fantasy in which he romantically envisages the musicians composing from the “twentieth floor” of a New York skyscraper and transcending existence, John Pearl has moved to New York for his art and works high in a skyscraper. However, in the skyscraper he does not work on his own art-for-art’s-sake; instead he draws cartoons for an advertising agency in order to survive. John Pearl makes a comment which rebukes Roquentin’s aesthetically idealistic “twentieth floor” scenario: “Because this is a fifty-three-storey building, they think it must be serious.” \(DM, \ 91\) Despite claims that his art exempts him from the unpleasantness of reality, John Pearl must face ‘reality’, and in his last letter to Joseph, he is reminiscent of Roquentin and Malte as he complains of “deep distaste about his ‘peeling environment’” and “the lack of the human in the too-human.” \(DM, \ 153\) Joseph is moved because the letter gives him “a sense of someone else’s recognition of the difficult, the sorrowful, in what to others is merely neutral, the environment.” \(DM, \ 153\) It is sympathy as a fellow individual attempting exemption from life and struggling with an environment perceived as indifferent. In a conclusive
rejection of Sartre’s musician-fantasy, John Pearl’s final letter reveals that he has not found the redemption which he claims art offers in New York. Instead, he desires to return to Chicago, which in some ways resembles Roquentin’s decision at the end of *Nausea* to leave Bouville for his hometown of Paris. Like Roquentin, Joseph sees this desire as futile since John Pearl’s dilemma “happens in all cities.” *(DM, 153)* Joseph considers John Pearl’s longing to be nostalgia caused by the fact that memories render familiar places more meaningful, or human. As Bellow alludes to *Nausea*, he rejects narratives of art as narratives of redemption and suggests that a more universally applicable solution is required.

### The Spirit of Alternatives

Joseph eventually rejects what he considers all the likely solutions to his problem whether historical or based on his contemporary environment. At this juncture Joseph debates his alter-ego, “the Spirit of Alternatives,” also known as “‘But on the Other Hand,’ or ‘Tu As Raison Aussi.’” *(DM, 134-141, 164-169)* These two entries encapsulate Joseph’s quest as he is forced to defend its premises to himself.

Brans interprets the Spirit of Alternatives as a mechanism of “Mephistophelean negation or as a healthy antithesis to Joseph’s Faustian quest.” However, other critics identify the Spirit with Ivan’s “devil” in *The Brothers Karamazov*. Ivan, a character who is reminiscent of the Underground Man, debates this manifestation of his alter-ego *(BK, 634-650)*, and Bellow makes clear allusions to this scene as he creates an equivalent confrontation in *Dangling Man*. The French name of Joseph’s Spirit, *Tu As Raison Aussi*, parallels Ivan’s

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French-quoting devil, and Joseph, like Ivan, criticises the “suave little, false looks” of his Spirit (DM, 141). Joseph’s first encounter ends in similar fashion to Ivan’s unique encounter with his alter-ego, as both characters, in fury, fling an inanimate object at the figure, which Ivan’s devil claims is an act in mimicry of Luther who is said to have flung an “inkstand,” at an apparition of the devil (BK, 649). The scene in Dangling Man can be seen as imitating both these scenarios.

Daniel Fuchs differentiates that Goethe’s Mephistopheles desires evil but does good, while Dostoevsky’s Mephistopheles is “much more attuned to the modern saturation of alienated consciousness … and desires good but does only evil.”

Ivan’s devil reflects his worst thoughts which result from his strained subjectivity, since Ivan threatens destructive ideals in his militant love for humanity. Fuchs identifies the same technique in Joseph’s spirit’s embodiment of his “own worst, his own ‘stupidest’ ideas and tendencies”:

in his equivocal manner, his indeterminacy, his inevitable drift to the negative, the alienative, his flirtation with ideology, his attitudinizing in a vacuum of conviction, and above all, in his compulsion to the centre of indifference, to death.

Like Ivan, Joseph is forced to confront the consequences of his ideas through their manifestation in an alter-ego who repulses him.

While The Brothers Karamazov only portrays one encounter between Ivan and his devil, Joseph conducts two debates with the Spirit, which are recorded as pure dialogue with minor extra-diegetic narrative. In contrast to the speculations of Ivan and the narrator in The Brothers Karamazov as to the nature of Ivan’s apparition, no speculation is raised about the Spirit’s existence. While Ivan’s devil displays constant and infuriating self-recognition, Joseph’s Spirit suggests opposing ‘alternatives.’ Here the comparison of a “Mephistophelean negation” to

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250 Fuchs, Vision and Revision, 41.
251 Fuchs, Vision and Revision, 42.
Chapter One

a “Faustian quest” is possible. Sanford Pinsker claims that the “configuration” of the Spirit “suggests certain affinities with those French philosophers who tried to disentangle inner life and to analyze those ‘ideal constructions’ which are at the root of human behavior.” Pinsker does not specify who “those French philosophers” are, though presumably Diderot is one of them. This element of externalising and then questioning the polarities of the internal process of a dilemma accounts for the difference in Joseph’s and Ivan’s alter-egos. Trachtenberg compares Joseph’s recourse “to ideal projections of himself” to the Underground Man who “through his protest…hopes to find where reality lies.” The logic of Joseph’s introspection leads him to a ‘formal’ debate with himself which he induces internally, without surprise, question or protest. While Cohen states that “Bellow has to personify one part of Joseph’s divided self to remove certain errors in his vision,” the event also suits the narrative structure since Joseph has rejected the world and thus only has himself to scrutinise. Joseph’s Spirit is still symptomatic of the premises and worst manifestation of the protagonist’s personal, rationalistic and contemporary enquiries, as he applies the logic of Joseph’s quest to itself.

Joseph’s first debate with the Spirit bears the greatest resemblance to Ivan’s interaction with his devil. Joseph attempts to counter the spirit who coyly suggests alternatives in logical responsive succession. Joseph rejects the suggestion of ‘unreason’: “what are we given reason for? To discover the blessedness of unreason?” (DM, 136) His own reason has made him lonely and unhappy and so the Spirit raises the concept of alienation but Joseph insists that “[y]ou can’t banish the world if it’s in you,” and to blame the world is “too easy,”

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254 Cohen, Saul Bellow’s Enigmatic Laughter, 35.
“narrow” and “cowardly.” (DM, 137) Still unprepared to draw conclusions to his quest Joseph argues that the “failing may be in us, in me. A weakness of vision.” (DM, 137) He claims that if he could see clearly he would “see where those capacities have gone to which we once owed our greatness.” (DM, 138) Like Malte, Joseph’s disillusionment is such that he believes the sources of authentic greatness are lost. When Joseph concedes that he feels alienated but that “we should not make a doctrine of our feeling” the Spirit asks, “Is that a public or a private belief?” (DM, 138) The question challenges Joseph’s presumptions of independence and freedom, but he feigns miscomprehension to avoid responding. Eventually Joseph raises his dilemma according to the concept of ideal constructions, that it seems impossible to live without one, but with one it seems impossible to bridge “the gap between the ideal construction, and the real world, the truth.” (DM, 141) The gap in his previous ideals instigated his crisis and quest. When the spirit cannot provide an answer to the issue of the gap, Joseph forgets “to be reasonable” and calls his alter-ego “two-faced,” a “damned diplomat,” and a “cheat” and ends in the manner of Ivan, but not with Luther’s inkstand or Ivan’s glass: “Furious, I flung a handful of orange peel at him, and he fled the room.” (DM, 141)

Orange is a symbol of life in Dangling Man and suggests a confluence with imagery from The Journal of My Other Self. Malte considers that during the early stages of life “we knew (or perhaps we just guessed) that we carried our death within us, as fruit bears its kernel.” (J, 9) Furthermore Malte imagines a recluse contemplating an apple and thinking, “How my life centres in this fruit! … Around all that is perfected arises and grows that which has still to be achieved.” (J, 226) Hence full fruit is a symbol of complete, personal life. The
poor and outcast without selfhood are “husks of humanity that fate has spewed out.” (J, 38) As Sokel argues, this metaphor “conjures a fruit which has lost its inner core and flesh, and has been reduced to the worthless frame of its former being.”

In Dangling Man, when Joseph observes the dead chicken, a feather has fallen into his orange juice (DM, 24). Just as the dead chicken observing its entrails represents Joseph, the feather in the orange juice represents inanimate solipsism spoiling the pleasures of life and the vitality which fill the shell of an otherwise spiritless body. Joseph symbolically pours the juice down the drain. On another occasion after a fight with Iva, Joseph looks back at their apartment windows and what he is losing through his quest: “two orange rectangles, trademarks of warmth and comfort.” (DM, 95) This metaphor is most important in Joseph’s first discussion with the Spirit. At the outset Joseph offers oranges to the Spirit, thereby offering his vitality to bring the Spirit to life. Reduced to a near spiritless state, Joseph sacrifices the remaining part of himself to continue the last option of his quest. The Spirit leaves only pips in an ashtray and peel. In other words, as the culmination of Joseph’s quest, the Spirit devours Joseph’s vitality, leaving only death and a shell. When Joseph evicts the Spirit by flinging the orange peel, it suggests that Joseph’s final defence, after he has reduced himself to a hollow vessel, is the remaining flimsy structure of his character.

By the time of the second discussion Joseph is “a chopped and shredded man … harried, pushed, badgered, worried, nagged, heckled” by his conscience, the “world internalized.” (DM, 164-5) Despite the value of his life “decreasing day by day” he insists he must remain faithful to his mind and freedom (DM, 167). The Spirit criticises the weakened Joseph’s quest more openly in this

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discussion, asking him: “What makes you think you can handle these things by yourself?” and calling his insistence “foolishness” and “impossible.” (DM, 167)

When Joseph insists that his quest for pure individual comprehension and selfhood must continue irrespective of the natural or historical forces which oppose and limit, the discussion climaxes:

“… They can obliterate me. But as long as I am alive, I must follow my destiny in spite of them.”

“Then only one question remains.”

“What?”

“Whether you have a separate destiny. Oh you’re a shrewd wriggler,” said Tu As Raison Aussi. “But I’ve been waiting for you to cross my corner. Well, what do you have to say?”

I think I must have grown pale.

“I’m not ready to answer. I have nothing to say to that now.”

“How seriously you take this,” cried Tu As Raison Aussi. “It’s only a discussion. The boy’s teeth are chattering. Do you have a chill? He ran to get a blanket from the bed.

I said faintly, “I’m all right.” He tucked the blanket round me and, in great concern, wiped my forehead and sat by me until nightfall. (DM, 169)

Fuchs claims that “Bellow’s devil-double emerges as one who ascertains one’s doubt of selfhood, uniqueness, ‘separate destiny.’”256 Yet there is a catch, since the Spirit-devil ascertains these doubts by revealing a repugnant manifestation of the tendencies which lead towards these doubts. The Spirit manifests Joseph’s quest of introverted rationalism which, when applied to Joseph’s own quest, discovers a gap—that the assumption of individual selfhood, a “separate destiny” faithful to reason, has no objective or subjective foundation. There can be no destiny separate from the forces which limit and therefore define individuality. Thus pure individual rationalism denies the very elements of life which allow individual freedom and selfhood. This revelation is possible due to the Spirit’s ambiguous and ambivalent nature which enables him to question everything, including his own creator and creation. Though the first discussion ends with an allusion to Ivan chasing his devil, the second discussion ends with the Spirit caring for

256 Fuchs, Vision and Revision, 43.
Joseph in the same manner as Alyosha does for Ivan. Therefore in *Dangling Man* the Spirit reflects multiple facets of life, alternatives which serve to reflect and illuminate Joseph’s flawed and pitiable position.

**UNHEEDED LESSONS AND SURRENDER**

The episodes with the Spirit of Alternatives reveal the difficulties of Joseph’s dilemma, but also of the inherent contradictions within his quest. Bellow explores individual freedom and selfhood by portraying an extreme pursuit which can result in their loss, and in this manner the lessons of *Dangling Man* are close to those of *The Journal of My Other Self*. Both protagonists confront numerous reasons throughout their quests to question their conduct. By the end of their respective journeys they appear to be on the brink of discovering their errors.

At the end of *The Journal of My Other Self*, Malte interprets the story of the “prodigal son,” as “the legend of one who did not want to be loved.” (*J*, 235) As a child, sensitive to the “tenderness” and expectations of “them” which “he” felt annulled his freedom, the prodigal son sought “inner indifference of spirit.” (*J*, 235) He left home with the intention “never to love, in order not to put anyone in the terrible position of being loved.” (*J*, 237-238) The mission proved “impossible” as he “loved and loved again in his solitude, each time with wasteful expenditure of his whole nature and with unspeakable fear for the liberty of the other.” (*J*, 238) In a further evasion of human bonds he eventually became a shepherd and began the “the long way of love to God—the silent, aimless labour.” (*J*, 240) Aware of “the extreme remoteness of God” (*J*, 240), the objective took the shape of loving God’s creation and obtaining “sa patience de supporter une
âme.” (J, 241) With this objective beyond himself, from “the roots of his being there sprang the sturdy, ever-green plant of a fertile joy.” (J, 241) As his love grew he “thought of his childhood … unfulfilled.” (J, 242) Now, “this time in reality … he, estranged, turned home.” (J, 242) Upon his return he re-encountered “their” love, initially with dismay before realising that their love was an expression of freedom, intrinsically containing misinterpretation and forgiveness, and thus “the love of which they were so vain, and to which they secretly encouraged one another, did not concern him.” (J, 243) Only at this point was the prodigal son able to understand and accept himself and others, though he “was now terribly difficult to love, and he felt that One alone was capable of loving him.” (J, 243)

Malte’s interpretation of the legend of the prodigal son and its placement at the end of the novel suggests that Malte is beginning to understand that like the prodigal son he has sought freedom from limits which in fact are not limits but the expression of freedom. Love is a universally practised sentiment, personal and impersonal, and therefore it is in the individual’s power to accept its sense. Malte realises that his quest is impossible because it is based on misinterpretation of individual freedom. The prodigal son attained his greater vision not through the periods of pain and separation, but during the period when he lived in nature and submitted to the universal love of God and simply aimed not to ‘know,’ but merely to support, his soul. It is not entirely clear that Malte is thereby abandoning his quest, since his interpretation also contains some remnants of his idealisation of separation and clarity. Burton Pike interprets the placement of the legend of the prodigal son at the ending as signifying a “not yet” for Malte: “Refusing the world’s terms, Malte is unable to rejoin the world on his own, and
he is unable to transform the real into art.”257 However, the ending of Rilke’s novel suggests that Malte is closer to understanding the wisdom, the larger picture which the author wields on an artistic level.

Certain moments of insight during Joseph’s quest cleave with the sentiment of Malte’s interpretation of the legend of the prodigal son. In one of a series of entries shortly after his first discussion with the Spirit, Joseph considers his own struggle and decides, “If I had Tu As Raison Aussi with me today, I could tell him that the highest “ideal construction” is the one that unlocks the imprisoning self.” (DM, 153) He realises that people hold onto themselves because they desire but do not know how to give themselves away (DM, 153-4). Above all, Joseph recognises the commonality of all ideal constructions, in that they are each the manifestation of a “striving for one end … pure freedom.” (DM, 154) Though Joseph does “not entirely understand this impulse,” the realisation challenges the very premise of his quest to locate his selfhood divorced from a ‘common’ destiny: “if the quest is the same, the differences in our personal histories, which hitherto meant so much to us, become of minor importance.” (DM, 154) As Bakker states, Joseph “realizes that his destiny is bound up with that of his fellow men in a much more complex and mysterious way than he can account for at this stage in his life.”258 His quest has denied the possibility of freedom and meaning beyond his individual subjectivity, which is one of its greatest failings. The final discussion with the Spirit forces him to apply this finding to his quest, and, like Malte, to approach the recognition that the limits he has envisaged have resulted from his narrow perspective. Similar to the role of love in the legend of the prodigal son, ideal constructions answer a human

258 Bakker, Survival Strategy, 23.
necessity. They are imperfect but in this imperfection they enable the enactment of freedom and thereby form part of a greater human endeavour.

These insights contrast with the ideological militancy with which Sartre, through the supposedly authentic Roquentin, claims a superiority from which he attacks those he considers inauthentic. Roquentin believes that his purpose is to prove to everyone the truth of the meaninglessness of existence, to write an adventure that will be “beautiful and hard as steel and make people ashamed of their existence.” (N, 252)²⁵⁹ In contrast, Dangling Man implies that every quest, “whether it be for money, for notoriety, reputation, increase of pride, whether it leads us to thievery, slaughter, sacrifice,” strives for the same objective and claims the same truths as Roquentin claims (DM, 154). Hence Bellow shares with Dostoevsky a concern for the potential of individuals to militantly claim and assert their sense of a superior truth. Frank recognises Dostoevsky’s portrayal in Notebooks from Underground of “the danger that the egoist, concerned only with himself, will cause others to suffer with the excuse of helping to purify their souls.”²⁶⁰ Throughout Bellow’s novels ideological militancy is portrayed as a prominent problem which individuals must avoid in themselves and combat in the assertions of others. Bellow identifies Roquentin and the quest with underground militancy and appeals, like Dostoevsky and Rilke, to a more objective and humane tolerance.

The conclusions of both The Journal of My Other Self and Dangling Man involve reconsideration of the past with connection to ideas of childhood. Throughout The Journal of My Other Self Malte reflects on his past “traumas” and, as Huyssen notes, it is never clear “whether the city triggers childhood

²⁵⁹ “belle et dure comme de l’acier et qu’elle fasse honte aux gens de leur existence.” (Ln, 250)
²⁶⁰ Frank, Stir of Liberation, 344.
memories or whether these memories structure and shape Malte’s city experience in the first place.”

Similar to the prodigal son, Malte believes that in childhood he was sheltered by “appointed boundaries.” (J, 94) Glimpses of reality—“incomprehensible experiences”—occurred seldom and the child would surpass adults in maintaining the appearance of events (J, 137-138). Yet several experiences, such as isolation, role playing (J, 95-102) and finally reading, which ended his belief that adulthood included understanding, made him question destiny, and thus “separated” him “still more from others.” (J, 188) Thus, like the Underground Man, Joseph and Roquentin, Malte has come to question constructions of reality from his isolated position and aesthetic convictions. Malte’s quest is an attempt to remove the final limits, as “the severing of all bonds to his vanished and relatively sheltered past, the kind of weaning of existence from the maternal grounds of being.”

Yet the prodigal son comes to recognise in his return to childhood that his separation was shaped by misrecognition. Unlike Malte, Joseph did not have a spoilt or sheltered childhood, but even still he grew up accepting the confronting aspects of existence and thus now considers childhood “the only place where I was ever allowed to encounter reality.” (DM, 86) Yet for Joseph, as for Malte, the quest has further removed him from the understanding which he held as a child, and which his quest actually seeks. The quest is the culmination of cynical individual tendencies in the perception of reality which separates Joseph from an innocent and tolerant engagement with reality.

Similar to Malte, it is only in Joseph’s penultimate diary entry that he expresses the suspicion that his quest may have followed erroneous intuitions. He

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visits his childhood bedroom and while considering his mortality experiences “one of those consummating glimpses that come to all of us periodically.” (DM, 190) At first he reacts with a Roquentin-esque paradoxical summation, thinking there is “an element of treason to common sense in the very objects of common sense.” (DM, 190) The statement suggests that the logic of his quest has removed him from the very possibility of logic. But then Joseph considers another possibility:

Or that there was no trusting [“the very objects of common sense”], save through wide agreement, and that my separation from such agreement had brought me perilously far from the necessary trust, auxiliary to all sanity. … To be pushed upon oneself entirely put the very facts of simple existence in doubt. (DM, 190-191)

In other words, Bellow suggests that rational introspection cannot possibly grasp the full meaning of existence. As a child, Joseph’s vision was more open and accepting of the discrepancies, the ambiguity and freedom, of existence, and therefore contained the “necessary trust, auxiliary to all sanity.” Like the prodigal son, Joseph reconсидers his childhood and understands another, possibly more viable, vision of existence. But in contrast to Malte, who hints that he is on the verge of working towards recovery, Joseph’s approaching awareness comes too late—his fate is already sealed.

The End of the Quest

Joseph never applies or demonstrates the full lessons of these insights. After the Spirit’s question about a “separate destiny,” Joseph’s shivering, uncommitted reply suggests that such scrutiny “is something [he] is not ready for, and he withdraws once again from an acknowledgement of the truth.”

Hence Joseph continues to deteriorate until his fight with Vanaker and Captain Briggs, after

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263 Hyland, Saul Bellow, 22.
which he declares, “it is impossible to resist any longer” and decides “I must give myself up.” (DM, 183) He writes to the army offering immediate induction. Yet even here there is no explicit indication that he fully understands his failure, and critical responses to this event are varied. Opdahl rules out an “optimistic interpretation” because Joseph has not reconciled his vision of an evil world and he has not achieved an “essential, transcendent self.” The ending is indicative of a quest that “should have ended before it began.” At the other extreme Peter Hyland, Robert R. Dutton, Ada Aharoni and Howard M. Harper view the decision as positive because they argue Joseph’s abandonment of his quest is based on a greater understanding of individual freedom and selfhood. J. C. Levenson also interprets the ending positively, arguing that Joseph’s abandonment of his “freedom” is in fact an act of freedom. In a more ambivalent reading, Abbott claims that no position is taken at the end of Dangling Man and that Joseph is simply embarking on another path of inquiry. Yet these more positive interpretations tend to neglect the irony in Joseph’s decision, the lack of any explicit enlightenment about his freedom, the lack of any hope for better understanding in the army and the key motive of desperation. Some critics take a position between these two extremes, for example Malcolm Bradbury and John Jacob Clayton, who both regard the ending as ambiguous because Joseph abandons his quest, but also abandons himself to the army. Brans similarly identifies a mixture of heroism and irony in the ending. But analysing the

264 Opdahl, Novels of Saul Bellow, 48.
265 Opdahl, Novels of Saul Bellow, 41.
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ending of *Dangling Man* in light of its deliberate intertextual components reveals a less ambiguous ending. Joseph’s quest is based on misconstrued ideas of individuality and freedom which remove him from his aim, and place him in such a desperate and problematic situation that he prefers to submissively embrace that which he has been hoping to transcend: the army and death.

A letter Bellow wrote in 1944 which appears in a recently published collection provides some clues in unravelling the ending:

> I don’t advise others to follow the *Dangling Man* into regimentation. That was not advice. When you read *Dangling Man* you will see that I was only making an ironic statement about the plights of the Josephs. I don’t encourage surrender. I’m speaking of wretchedness and saying that no man by his own effort finds his way out of it. To some extent the artist does. But the moral man, the citizen, doesn’t. He can’t.

The letter confirms the irony, the surrender and the impossibility of full victory against “wretchedness” in the ending of *Dangling Man*. The timing and language of Joseph’s decision also suggest that his decision represents neither victory nor enlightenment. Joseph argues to the Spirit that weariness of life is caused by the “inability to be free” whereby “we run out, we choose a master, roll over on our backs and ask for the leash.” (*DM*, 168) Joseph refers to his decision to abandon the quest as “surrender” in terms suggesting such indifferent submission: “Not even when I tested myself, whispering ‘the leash,’ reproachfully, did I feel pained or humiliated.” (*DM*, 183) Hence Joseph does not condemn his quest, but rather sacrifices himself because he is “unable to endure the continuous emptiness and humiliation of his life.”

In this regard Joseph’s action “implies the defeat of other instincts which he had felt important,” since “the pressure of the times has compelled his surrender.” In other words, Joseph’s decision is an indictment of the quest and the climate of wartime America which have reduced Joseph to such

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273 Wilson, “Doubts and Dreams,” 890.
a narrow path and vision that, as Trachtenberg contends, “little remains of Joseph’s humanism.”

Joseph still misconceives human freedom and views the world as hostile and human society as false, so his submission is acknowledgement that he is reduced to a state of indifference to the things he resents. As Tony Tanner asserts, this “is not necessarily total cynicism, but it does represent a defeat.”

The parallels between Dangling Man and The Trial confirm this reading of the ending. Both novels follow a similar narrative pattern according to the same “essential paradox” which Fisch sees as “freedom versus confinement.” In a statement which equally applies to Joseph, Walser argues that Joseph K’s “whole thinking is a sustained attempt to affirm his existence—an attempt which is automatically nullified by the episodes incorporated in the action.” Joseph’s decision, like Joseph K’s ending, is not a promising alternative but a humiliating submission without hope. After being found guilty Joseph K complies with his executioners until he sees activity behind a window and a figure lean out which he interprets as a last glimpse of hope. In response he makes a gesture of protest, to which the executioners react, violently taking his life as he gasps the final words: “Like a dog!” (T, 198) Similarly, in Dangling Man Joseph rushes outside and looks back at the apartment hoping to see “Iva’s shadow on the blind” but there is no presence—no hope (DM, 182-3). Joseph’s symbol of the “leash” also suggests allusion to Joseph K’s final words and in both cases this imagery indicates submission and loss of humanity to that which each character has resisted. So Joseph “fails, as Joseph K. does, to free himself, remains imprisoned inside

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275 Tony Tanner, Saul Bellow (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1965) 23.
himself, and finally gives himself to the authorities of social death.” Both endings entail guilt, victimhood, violent disgrace, loss of freedom and self-sacrifice.

In contrast to the glimpse of hope for Malte at the end of *The Journal of My Other Self*, and even Joseph K’s brutal execution, Joseph’s decision has more terrifying consequences. The prodigal son reconnects to existence and eventually humanity through the universal principle of God’s love, while Joseph abandons himself to the army, to violence. While Joseph suspects in his penultimate diary entry, as Malte does in his ending, that he has removed himself from the “wide agreement” of “necessary trust” for fulfilment in existence, this remains a fleeting thought of an avenue in which he is no longer invested. It is difficult to understand why some critics consider Joseph’s decision to join the army positive engagement when his hypotheses about necessary trust are immediately juxtaposed with his actual strategy: “Perhaps the war could teach me, by violence, what I had been unable to learn during those months in the room.” (*DM*, 191) It is not an about-face adoption of the hard-boiled, “that should be looked upon as the result of ‘a personal morality and private will,’” since Joseph follows with two more “perhaps” and concedes: “things were now out of my hands.” He continues: “the next move was the world’s. I could not bring myself to regret it.” (*DM*, 191) Joseph has not assumed responsibility for the errors of the quest, but rather abandoned responsibility altogether. So while Malte’s final consideration is the story of the prodigal son, Joseph’s final entry reflects the Underground Man’s statement: “The long and short of it is, gentlemen, that it is better to do nothing! Better conscious inertia! And so hurrah for the underground!” (*U*, 78):

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I am not at all sorry to part with the rest of it. I am no longer to be held accountable for myself; I am grateful for that. I am in other hands, relieved of self-determination, freedom cancelled.

Hurray for regular hours!
And for the supervision of the spirit!
Long live regimentation! (DM, 191)

At the beginning of the diary Joseph claims that he will only be able to “properly estimate the damage” of his dangling once he is “cut down.” (DM, 12) The moment has arrived, but instead of properly addressing the damage he has chosen a destructive means of evasion. Joseph has landed in a similar locus to the underground which is supposed to provide an escape from inertia, but appears to be a greater form of submission with more violent consequences. The ending mirrors Dostoevsky’s artistic strategy in the conception of the ending of *Notes from Underground*, which “still requires the Underground Man to remain trapped in the negative phase of his result.”\(^{280}\) In *Dangling Man*, as in *Notes from Underground*, an “alternative is suggested only as a remote … unattainable possibility.”\(^{281}\) Bellow more explicitly draws out what Frank considers a profound prophesy in the character of the Underground Man:

> The Underground Man, it becomes clear, has lost any capacity for simple and direct human feeling in relation to others. Instead, his vanity and sense of self importance have become inflated to a degree out of all proportion to his actual social situation; and the conflicts engendered by his discrepancy provide a comic analogue to the fratricidal war of all against all arising in Western European society from the dominance of the principle of egoistic individualism.\(^{282}\)

Thus like Dostoevsky, Bellow portrays the challenge of finding “wide agreement,” the counter-productive role of certain ‘individualistic’ inclinations. In this process Bellow delivers a warning of the underground and possibly even

\(^{282}\) Frank, *Stir of Liberation*, 335.
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fascist consequences to which disillusioned cynical intolerant individual
“truths”—such as Roquentin’s—may lead.283

BEGINNINGS IN DESPAIR

*Dangling Man* represents Bellow’s manifesto for a new approach to individual
freedom and selfhood appropriate to his American context. Bellow defines and
justifies his own vision by taking into consideration previous works which he
deems important. *Dangling Man* represents an artistic manifestation of Bellow’s
own psychic extrapolations in which he draws these works into relation with one
another in a visible and multi-faceted fictional dialogue. In particular, he
considers and rejects one extreme outcome of the dilemma of individual freedom
and selfhood by exploring the misconceptions which can lead to individual and
mass destruction of freedom and selfhood. Joseph’s quest follows those found in
*Nausea* and *The Journal of My Other Self*, as quests which take the technique of
individual introspection as the starting point for reality. *Dangling Man* presents a
thorough anti-thesis to Sartre’s portrayal of a quest and technique towards ‘pure’
vision. Although Bellow follows Rilke’s artistic strategy in his rejection of the
premises of the quest for pure freedom, he presents a much more pessimistic
result, one which is indebted to Dostoevsky’s scathing vision of the egotism of
individual rationalism in *Notes from Underground*. As a citizen without artistic
release, who refuses the Rameauian debauchery of Steidler, rejects spirituality,
and has a negative view of the Hemingway-style heroism demonstrated by the

283 For this fascist-warning interpretation I am also indebted to Judie Newman’s paper “‘Bellow and
Trotsky’”, presented on the panel “New Perspectives on Saul Bellow’s Life and Work” organised by the Saul
Bellow Society, at the American Literature Association’s 22nd Annual Conference in Boston, 26th May
2011.
hard-boiled, Joseph pursues the impossible quest for pure freedom. Joseph ends not with Rilke’s artistic wisdom or the intellectual stagnancy of the Underground Man, but with a move of militant self-sacrifice more alarming than Joseph K’s through its apocalyptic vision of violence on a mass level against the world.

Opdahl argues that Joseph fulfils the same “‘proofs’ of faith apparent in *Notes from Underground.*”\textsuperscript{284} Although the novel is Bellow’s “starting point away from the Underground Man,”\textsuperscript{285} he is not seeking the same path of affirmation as Dostoevsky. Rather he is only in agreement with Dostoevsky’s keen perception of the counter-productive inclinations of overreliance on individual subjectivity that are harmful to individual freedom and selfhood: the “sick soul is the same anywhere, but what the Bellow hero seeks is recovery, not rebirth.”\textsuperscript{286} In *Dangling Man* this recovery does not take place and several critics consider it Bellow’s most pessimistic novel.\textsuperscript{287} Yet the pessimism is not Bellow’s vision as much as it is his assessment of his contemporary environment, the extreme of individual alienation, and previous works attempting to define individual freedom and selfhood. Through this pessimistic assessment Bellow is in fact asserting his own justification as an author to fulfil a more contemporarily viable and affirmative sense of individual freedom and selfhood. As an author releasing his debut novel, Bellow both performs and justifies his own artistic strategy as he draws upon those of his predecessors to consider the extremities of what he is aiming to work for and against.

Bellow’s next novel, *The Victim* (1947), does not portray an active solution to achieving a fulfilling sense of individual freedom and selfhood. As

\textsuperscript{284} Opdahl, *Novels of Saul Bellow*, 44.
\textsuperscript{285} Lyons, “Colonies of the Spirit,” 47.
\textsuperscript{286} Levenson, “Bellow’s Dangling Men,” 5.
\textsuperscript{287} Lyons, “Colonies of the Spirit,” 47; Scott, *Three American Moralists*, 114.
many critics have recognised, it is not until *Augie March* that Bellow begins to present his own affirmative path. Instead, *The Victim* develops a more complex analysis of some of the challenges to universal humanity and individual freedom and selfhood. While *Dangling Man* considers the extreme of “the strategy of alienation” in the context of World War II, *The Victim* “launches an assault on the prudence, caution and spiritual timidity” of the post-war context. This difference is reflected in the conscious literary intertextuality of both works.

In *Dangling Man* Bellow critiques a trend of alienation which he sees as pervasive in his contemporary social climate but also in previous literature, and so he draws upon both, though he is most indebted to Dostoevsky’s insight into the psychology of alienation. In *The Victim*, Bellow identifies in the post-war climate another more immediately consequential aspect of alienation across humanity which causes division and estranges men from one another. In this case his perception is once again predominantly indebted to Dostoevsky to whom he turns more thoroughly in structuring his second novel. Similar to *Dangling Man*, *The Victim* applies Dostoevsky’s artistic brilliance in exploring individual freedom and selfhood, in particular issues surrounding individual subjectivity and alienation, but Bellow resists Dostoevsky’s implicit solution of spirituality. Unlike in *Dangling Man*, he is less concerned with a philosophical and artistic extreme and more concerned with exposing a precise, problematic source of social division perpetrated by individuals in society. In this instance therefore, Bellow does not intertextually consider all the previous literary contributions to make clear his assessment of them, but rather adapts Dostoevsky’s artistic method in *The Eternal*
Chapter One

*Husband* of exploring victimhood and victimisation, in order to portray the dilemma of *The Victim*. 
In his second novel, *The Victim* (1947), Bellow considers the psychological and environmental conditions which unite and divide individuals. *The Victim* takes as its primary concern the limitations of individual subjectivity which have the potential to threaten the individual’s relationship to other people’s, and his own, humanity. In contrast to *Dangling Man*, in *The Victim* Bellow demonstrates less concern with defining himself against his literary predecessors and a greater intention to express his own vision through his exploration of a particular dilemma of victimhood and victimisation. There are no deliberate intertextual allusions in *The Victim* as the intertextual technique is not explicitly relevant to Bellow’s intended meaning. However, imitation remains a fundamental feature of the narrative as Bellow’s exploration is heavily indebted to Dostoevsky’s *The Eternal Husband*. Bellow manipulates and extends Dostoevsky’s artistic strategy towards conveying his own sense of more contemporary issues involving the ambiguous nature of individual reality and human relationships. Furthermore, Bellow progresses his exploration of the limitations and potential of individual freedom and selfhood and asserts his vision of the basis for human dignity.

**A New Objective and Technique**

“From the point of view of Bellow’s quest for a new orientation to the world around him,” writes Norman Podhoretz, “*The Victim* is not so much an advance
over *Dangling Man* as a companion piece to it.” The *Victim* and *Dangling Man* both explore the consequences of an overreliance on individual subjectivity. However, *The Victim* represents an advance in that while Bellow’s first novel explores an impossible quest his second explores everyday conditions which hold the potential for either discord or dignity. In *Dangling Man* Joseph’s loss of faith in his naively idealistic vision of a “colony of the spirit” (*DM*, 39) precipitates his quest. In *The Victim* the primary question is how individual subjects can accept their shared human condition. Asa Leventhal, the protagonist of *The Victim*, does not embark on an intellectual quest, but stumbles through his life, unsure of himself, isolated and plagued by prejudices and fears, until he is brought into confrontation with all that he attempts to repress. While Joseph dangles, Leventhal tries to forge ahead despite a troubling sense of victimhood.

Leventhal’s confrontation occurs with the appearance of a *Doppelgänger* in a scenario which strongly imitates the plot structure in Dostoevsky’s *The Eternal Husband*. Dostoevsky’s protagonist, Alexei Ivanovich Velchaninov, is a vain womaniser who comes face to face with Pavel Pavlovich, the now widower of a woman with whom he had an affair years previously. Pavel Pavlovich embodies everything the protagonist scorns, but also represents the protagonist’s guilty conscience. Bellow employs Dostoevsky’s plot structure to pit his wary Jewish protagonist against Allbee, an anti-Semite with a grievance from the past. Allbee fulfils Leventhal’s fear of persecution, but Allbee’s dilapidation and distress also reflect the state Leventhal fears that he may be reduced to by persecution, which is the true source of his fears and also the potential source of his compassion. Thus the plots of *The Eternal Husband* and *The Victim* employ a

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double who stands before the protagonist as a representative of accusation and obligation. The protagonist is unable to accept or reject the double because, as Bellow writes in regard to his own novel, both characters are “aspects of one another.” In this manner Bellow and Dostoevsky explore the psychological conditions which can turn the individual against others and himself, potentially destroying his humanity.

Even though there are no explicit allusions to The Eternal Husband in The Victim the parallels are so pervasive that “the borrowing seem[s] overt.” Atlas argues that Bellow “denied that his borrowing of [Dostoevsky’s] plot was conscious.” Subsequently, Atlas asserts that it was typical of Bellow “to both acknowledge and deny his sources, as if asserting that no deliberate agency had been involved somehow meant that he was not being derivative.” Yet although Bellow’s accounts are inconsistent, Atlas’ claim only corresponds to one of Bellow’s earliest interviews in which he declared: “The parallel is obvious now, but not then (when writing The Victim). I was in a high state of excitement.” In subsequent interviews Bellow readily admitted that he was “very much under the spell of Dostoevski’s The Eternal Husband,” and in a 2001 interview goes so far as to say: “I thought I might be able to use that plot to my own ends and in a way I did.” It appears probable that later in his career Bellow was more confident admitting to imitation, as is evident in his assertions that imitation is “a perfectly legitimate enterprise.”

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292 Atlas, Bellow, 125.
293 Atlas, Bellow, 125n.
294 Atlas, Bellow, 125n.
Before Bellow admitted to deliberately appropriating Dostoevsky’s novella, several critics had observed the similarities between *The Victim* and *The Eternal Husband*. Opdahl’s *The Novels of Saul Bellow: An Introduction* (1967) and Clayton’s *Saul Bellow: In Defence of Man* (1968) provide comparative analysis of the two texts. However, to justify the comparison these studies provide detailed evidence of the similarities, and furthermore their discussion belongs to a broader argument on Bellow’s *oeuvre*, both of which limit the extent of their analysis of Bellow’s deliberate intertextual technique. Since the publication of both of these works, the most substantial comparative study to appear has been the second chapter of Fuchs’ *Saul Bellow: Vision and Revision*, entitled “Saul Bellow and the Example of Dostoevsky.” Brevity and a broader argument also limit this study, which focuses on how Bellow’s thought sits with regard to Dostoevsky’s. All three of these scholarly works focus on the most clearly demonstrable similarities and differences and therefore miss some of the more subtle and complex parallels between *The Victim* and *The Eternal Husband*, intrinsic to Bellow’s artistic objective. The focus of this chapter is to analyse in detail these parallels towards discerning Bellow’s intertextual technique and intentions.

In *The Victim* Bellow appropriates Dostoevsky’s artistic strategy from *The Eternal Husband*, but manipulates and expands it to portray a scenario relevant to contemporary and urgent concerns regarding the ambiguous nature of human responsibility. Employing Dostoevsky’s technique, Bellow considers the relationship between Jew and Gentile in the wake of the Holocaust as a paramount example of a division within humanity which is not only often considered

299 Clayton, *Defense of Man*; Opdahl, *Novels of Saul Bellow*.
300 Fuchs, *Vision and Revision*, 28-49.
Chapter Two

problematic but also frequently treated as predetermined. Through the construction of his double scenario Bellow exposes the causes of division within and between individuals in order to discern that which lies beyond conflict and forms the basis of the shared human plight. Bellow increases the complexity of Dostoevsky’s plot by shrouding his scenario in even greater ambiguity and fragmentation as these represent the very conditions which lie at the centre of individual reality, and govern human relationships. Thus Bellow traces the foundations of individual reality which possess the potential to cause disharmony, but which also possess the potential for a common human understanding. In doing so Bellow implicitly traces a concept of a human dignity which equates responsibility to others as responsibility to oneself.

APPROPRIATION AND EXTENSION

The Victim draws upon Dostoevsky’s strengths in revealing the psychological wrangling and fragmentation of a protagonist struggling to see or trust beyond the confines of his subjectivity. As Frank writes of The Eternal Husband, it presents “a crisis that can be surmounted only by the self-transcendence of the ego.”301 The respective authors thus demonstrate that elements of pride, misunderstanding and fear cause the individual to rely heavily on his subjectivity and dangerously sever him from a broader reality and humanity. The individual falls into a vicious cycle, in which the more he defends his subjective vision the more hostile the world appears, this leading him to cling more desperately and aggressively to his subjective vision.

In both novels the protagonist’s internal issues manifest and are explored through the apparition of a *Doppelgänger*. Fuchs points out that the precursor to both *The Victim* and *The Eternal Husband* is Dostoevsky’s *The Double* (1846).302 This novel involves a petty bureaucrat protagonist named Yakov Petrovich Golyadkin and his confrontation with a man of identical physical appearance who possesses his worst qualities in their extreme. The double is a conniving opportunist who eventually expropriates the original Golyadkin of all he holds dear before literally sending him to an asylum.

The plot of *The Eternal Husband* is more complex than that of *The Double*, involving not an “identical” but an “antithetical” *Doppelgänger*, “a means of avoiding guilt by projecting responsibility for one’s actions away from one’s own ego.”303 Drawing on the theories of Otto Rank and Sigmund Freud, Judie Newman notes that “doubling,” “the narcissistic splitting and reduplication of the ego,”304 is “originally a preservation against extinction on the part of the self, in its narcissistic self-love.”305 Therefore the double symbolises an extreme method of the original to repress part of his psyche, and simultaneously an ultimate manifestation of the qualities which allow the original to cling to the processes of his troubled subjectivity. However, because the double is a fragmented “aspect” of the original, he becomes a threat, “the uncanny harbinger of death.”306 The more the original tries to reject his double the more dangerous the situation becomes: “the impulse to rid oneself of a double by violence is an

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302 Fuchs, *Vision and Revision*, 43. In the first full-length scholarly work published on Bellow, Tony Tanner in fact connects *The Victim* to this work by Dostoevsky. See Tanner, *Saul Bellow*, 27.
essential feature of the motif—though yielding to the impulse is often fatal.”

These aspects of the traditional double motif are consistent with Dostoevsky’s text, and, as Newman notes, with Bellow’s.

Both Dostoevsky and Bellow construct their antithetical double scenarios according to categories traditionally regarded as mutually hostile or estranged: adulterer and cuckold; Gentile and Jew. Through the double scenario the authors complicate these categories to suggest a more intricate and important relationship than the supposed presumptions of opposition. Indeed Bellow and Dostoevsky question the causes of division as they explore the ambiguous conditions of individual reality which function in internal and external estrangement. These conditions attest to a wider sense of individuality and humanity whereby the individual forms a union with others within himself. In Dostoevsky’s case this union is founded on a spiritual recognition, and in Bellow’s on recognition of the common individual struggle to understand oneself and reality.

_The Eternal Husband_ and _The Victim_ construct a scenario of almost impenetrable ambiguity to explore the confusion and tension between the doubles. Both novels work according to a taut mode of “ironic juxtapositions.” Kenneth Lantz remarks that _The Eternal Husband_ is often ranked as Dostoevsky’s most technically accomplished text because nothing “is superfluous to the action.” Bellow’s novel is also tightly written, and in interview he claimed that in writing this text he “accepted a Flaubertian standard.” In response to Bellow’s comment, Atlas claims that _The Victim_ “is less Flaubertian than Kafkaesque.”

However, Bellow’s comment refers to his attempt to give the novel a tight artistic

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309 Opdahl, _Novels of Saul Bellow_, 56.
312 Atlas, _Bellow_, 125.
form, the fact that he “tried to make it letter perfect,”\textsuperscript{313} while the “Kafkaesque” component of the novel lies in its pace and atmosphere. This constrained mode of continuous confusion, together with the succinctly written third-person narrative voice, extracts the protagonist’s thoughts, his bewilderment, despair, terror and fury, but with enough “ironic distance”\textsuperscript{314} to reveal his more objective condition, his failings. The novels divulge the protagonist’s contradictions within himself, and subsequently in his double relationships, as the protagonist ignorantly continues to struggle against recognition. Hence the meaning, as Bradbury recognises in \textit{The Victim}, is “greater than the experience of the hero.”\textsuperscript{315}

\section*{Scenario and Categories}

Working to explore conditions of enmity in order to convey a greater spiritual reality and source of redemption for the individual, Dostoevsky’s double scenario unites a sinner with the sinned-against. As a symbol of Velchaninov’s victims and repressed conscience, Pavel Pavlovich is distraught and ruined after having discovered evidence of his deceased wife’s infidelities. However, he never clearly indicates knowledge of or accuses Velchaninov of being one of his wife’s lovers. With this mystery between them, Velchaninov tries to enforce the interpretation that they are natural enemies, resorting to traditional categories and thereby refusing to either acknowledge or repent of his injury to Pavel Pavlovich.

\textit{The Victim} explores an altogether different scenario involving a different set of opposing categories and their universal implications. Bradbury recognises that Bellow was one of several Jewish writers who emerged in the post-war years with an “intimate attentiveness” to the crisis of the post-war years, with “feelings

\textsuperscript{313} Bellow in Harper, “Art of Fiction,” 63.
\textsuperscript{314} Hyland, \textit{Saul Bellow}, 23.
\textsuperscript{315} Malcolm Bradbury, “Saul Bellow’s \textit{The Victim},” \textit{Critical Quarterly} 5, no. 2 (1963) 23.
Chapter Two

of the perils of humanism.”\textsuperscript{316} In a 1995 interview Bellow acknowledged in regards to writing \textit{The Victim}, “I thought to myself that if Dostoevski had been Jewish, he might have come up with something like this.”\textsuperscript{317} It is through his exploration, aided by Dostoevsky’s technique, of a personally relevant scenario, that Bellow expresses his particular vision of individual freedom and selfhood. Hence as Bruce Cook claims, “\textit{The Victim} is about anti-Semitism in the same sense that \textit{Moby Dick} is ‘about this whale,’”\textsuperscript{318} though a more relevant formulation would be “in the same sense that \textit{The Eternal Husband} is about ‘adultery.”” Bellow admitted in a 1990 interview that during his early career he struggled to incorporate the Holocaust into his literature.\textsuperscript{319} Yet \textit{The Victim} “is suffused with a consciousness of that unprecedented crime,”\textsuperscript{320} and heavily embedded with its symbolism: “[\textit{The Victim}] is, in a sense, about the Holocaust, because it is not ostensibly, about the Holocaust.”\textsuperscript{321} Moreover, it is predominantly through the double scenario of a Jew and anti-Semite in North America in the post-war context that Bellow implicitly evokes and explores the questions of universal human culpability and obligation raised by the horrors of the Holocaust.\textsuperscript{322} Thus through Dostoevsky’s artistic strategy Bellow portrays this situation and explores questions of division, guilt and responsibility beyond the Christian-Orthodox framework of \textit{The Eternal Husband}.

Leventhal is often described as “impassive,” (\textit{TV}, 5, 10, 51, 63, 210, 222, 255), because this is the position he assumes in order to repress and “hid[e] his

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\item[316] Malcolm Bradbury, “\textit{The Victim},” \textit{New Statesman} Nov 29, 1992, 84.
\item[317] Bellow in Boyers, “Moving Quickly,” 39.
\item[319] Bellow, “Half Life,” 276.
\item[320] Atlas, Bellow, 126.
\item[322] Although it is difficult to ascertain when Bellow began \textit{The Victim}, it is apparent that it was well after the rise of the crisis of anti-Semitism posed by Nazism, and he was re-writing and revising after the full horrors of the Holocaust had surfaced. Sam Freifeld remembers that by 1945 he had seen it in two versions. See Cook, “Mood of Protest,” 15.
\end{footnotes}
dread” \( (TV, 210) \), his fear of persecution. In association with his ethnic, historical and personal characterisation, Leventhal carries a personal and general connection to and awareness of the forces of victimisation, loss, disillusionment and estrangement which World War II provoked on an unprecedented scale. Leslie A. Fiedler praises Bellow’s skill in creating a protagonist who “becomes, deeply as he is a Jew, human, and, infinitely as he is particularized, universal.”\(^{323}\) Furthermore, Bellow constructs Leventhal such that “[e]verything that stamps [him] … as a Jew, stamps him at the same time as a representative homo urbis.”\(^{324}\) Leventhal is highly sensitive to the threats to individuality in his urban setting of New York. Leventhal struggles with his “relation to the social fabric which makes him and yet of which he feels himself to be insufficiently a part.”\(^{325}\) If he is not “a paranoiac,” he “is at least an extremely suspicious person.”\(^{326}\) Leventhal lacks a significant amount of trust in his environment, society, fellow man, and, as a result, himself.

The remoteness of Leventhal’s relationship to Allbee, “not brother to brother, or Jew to Jew,” but between “the anti-Semitic degenerate failure from an old New England family, and the wary, cautious, increasingly successful Jew,”\(^{327}\) raises questions regarding indirect responsibility and irreconcilable estrangement. Allbee accosts Leventhal for his part in causing Allbee to lose his job and begin a steady decline into degeneracy. Like Velchaninov, Leventhal wishes to see his antagonist as only one thing—an anti-Semite—and consistently perceives himself to be singled out for persecution. But like Pavel Pavlovich, Allbee never definitively reveals the nature of his hostility with the result that the protagonist

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\(^{323}\) Leslie A. Fiedler, “Review: The Fate of the Novel,” \textit{The Kenyon Review} 10, no. 3 (1948) 527.
\(^{325}\) Bradbury, “Saul Bellow’s \textit{The Victim},” 127.
\(^{326}\) Greenberg, “Modern Man as Jew”. 87.
\(^{327}\) Tanner, \textit{Saul Bellow}, 27.
resorts to misconceptions, denial, fury and evasion. Allbee manifests that which Leventhal fears in human nature—degeneracy, mass mentality, irrationality, persecution, victimisation and despair. The novel therefore explores Leventhal’s unwillingness to address, and his subsequent susceptibility to, the forces of persecution and prejudice which threaten his internal and external conditions of compassion and responsibility. On one level their relationship teases out tensions between anti-Semite and Jew. On a deeper level, the situation explores the notion that all relationships—including those of the individual with him or herself—are constituted through opposition and recognition, through the confusion between subject and other that characterises subjectivity.

In their attempt to expose a deeper sense of human recognition Bellow and Dostoevsky question contemporary theories of human categories. Frank explains that Dostoevsky’s contemporary, Apollon Grigoryev, proposed a theory of the “placid” and the “predatory,” which “were understood not only as moral-psychological categories but, in addition, possessed a strong social-cultural significance.” In the year before The Eternal Husband was published, Nikolai Strakhov wrote an article praising Tolstoy’s War and Peace for having “borne out Grigoryev’s views to perfection.” Velchaninov raises these categories, with reference to Strakhov’s article, as he attempts and fails to explain the insuperable difference between himself and Pavel Pavlovich (EH, 149-151). Instead of conforming to a clear divide of cuckold and cuckolded, predator and placid, Velchaninov and Pavel Pavlovich demonstrate intricate similarities and bonds. They are united as the complementary opposites of a psyche. Against the concept

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328 Frank, Writer in His Time, 595-96.
329 Frank, Writer in His Time, 596.
of “pure personality types” Dostoevsky creates a situation in which there is “no simple aggressor-and-victim conflict but a complex blend of love and loathing.” The narrative suggests that the men are not natural enemies but part of one another, of a greater whole, through a bond which has been distorted by false and harmful subjective patterns and abstract categories.

Bellow can similarly be interpreted as writing back antithetically to the theories of a contemporary, as The Victim demonstrates contention with the implications of Sartre’s Réflexions sur la question juive. Abbott claims that Bellow resented Sartre who, “on more than one occasion, not only told the Jews who they [were] but [went] on to tell them how they should therefore behave as Jews.” Adopting the viewpoint of his protagonist Herzog in a 1966 interview, Bellow argued that for Sartre the sole reason “the Jew exists [is] because he is hated … because he is designated, created, in his Jewishness by an outrageous evil.” Indeed Sartre posits that it is only by accepting his Jewishness in these terms as a product of anti-Semitism that the Jew can authentically respond to the anti-Semite. Bellow declared that Sartre’s views belonged to the “mass of irrelevancy and nonsense” that must be dismissed by the Jew “in order [for him] to survive.” In The Victim Bellow does not explicitly contend with Sartre’s theory, but the scenario complicates and thereby implicitly refutes aspects of Sartre’s theories.

330 Frank, Writer in His Time, 596.
331 Lantz, “The Dostoevsky Encyclopedia,” 129.
335 Sartre, la question juive, 152.
Bellow portrays the potential for subjectively constructed categories of division within all issues of identity. As Fiedler remarks, “Bellow alone among our novelists has had the imagination and the sheer nerve to portray the Jew, the Little Jew, as victimizer as well as victim.” Bellow demonstrates why the Jew, facing senseless persecution or the “sufferance” of others, may have as many fears and as deep a need for order as the bigot; he too may be tempted to posit an absolute evil and locate it—perhaps in a second minority. Both persecutor and victim might live in a Manichean universe, both victims of fear, both oppressed by their own humanity.

Thus Bellow delves beyond Sartre’s argument of “authentic” acceptance of supposedly unavoidable categorisations and suggests that potential enmity resides in the universal tenuousness of individual subjectivity, selfhood and freedom. He manipulates the power dynamic of Dostoevsky’s novella towards conveying the shared ambiguity of existence and therefore the shared potential of the diversity of individual reactions. Velchaninov presumes that as the adulterer he is the predator type, leaving the cuckolded Pavel Pavlovich as the placid type. Yet in The Victim it is the Jew, the member of a traditionally persecuted minority, who occupies a seemingly more powerful position, and who is haunted by a ruined member of the former dominant class-ethnicity. Bellow accordingly considers Leventhal’s sense of victimhood and victimisation. Clayton notes that while in The Eternal Husband “the essential relationship [is] complementary—cuckold to cuckolder,” in The Victim “it is parallel—the polarity of the Anti-Semite/Jew merely lends irony to their similarity.” Bellow blurs the lines of distinction between his antithetical doubles to convey a more complicated understanding of what human reality and relations involve.

338 Opdahl, Novels of Saul Bellow, 51.
339 Clayton, Defense of Man, 161.
While Dostoevsky works according to a religious-moral framework and scenario, Bellow develops a double relationship between two historical enemies, inverts and distorts it, and then places it within a much broader and more complex setting, in which many individuals are struggling against each other in a mass society in which humanity is difficult to discern. Thus Bellow’s double relationship, and in fact the entire novel, is more fragmented and complex than Dostoevsky’s, including many more characters, relationships, burdens, and points of contention and contradiction. In *The Victim* the world is perceived as a labyrinth with no clear right or wrong, reality or unreality, humanity or inhumanity, victim or victimiser. The double-pair not only emerge from and merge with each other, but they emerge from and merge into a general human condition.

**Orienting Frameworks**

Critics who compare *The Victim* with *The Eternal Husband* draw attention to Bellow’s inclusion of an epigraph and two series of monologues from a wise old man named Schlossberg, as these have no precedent in Dostoevsky’s novella. As almost pure metaphysical digressions, Schlossberg’s scenes stand out from the otherwise Kafkaesque tightness and relentlessness of plot and atmosphere, and Bellow had to defend them against his publisher’s accusation that they were “set-pieces.”\(^{340}\) Opdahl claims that the insertions serve to clarify and affirm the novel’s message “because Bellow transcended his subject”\(^{341}\) such that several critics including Alan S. Downer complain that “[i]t is never clear what *The Victim* is...

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341 Opdahl, *Novels of Saul Bellow*, 52, 59.
However, these inclusions can be read as working in succinct cohesion with the novel’s primary plot. They also correspond with the fact that Bellow is attempting to do something beyond that for which Dostoevsky’s plot, with its evidently implicit Christian-Orthodox framework, was designed. Bellow seeks to explore urgent questions of general human responsibility in the wake of an unprecedented catastrophe which had brought the conditions of humanity into question. Within the dilemma of *The Victim* Bellow attempts to discern a broader and thus more ambiguous framework which lies beyond tradition or dogmatic precedent, and therefore he includes several elements to indicate this purpose and avenues towards a solution, to avoid that his novel be read as a completely pessimistic situation.

Opdahl claims that Bellow lost control of his novel and therefore “argues for the acceptance of the world” while portraying a world “which can hardly be accepted.” Such a reading neglects Bellow’s Dostoevskian strategy of portraying and delving into the psychology of an individual plagued by uncertainty and contradictions because he lacks the ability or framework to transcend his subjectivity. In *The Victim*, as in *Dangling Man*, the unacceptable world appears so because it is filtered through the protagonist’s confused thoughts: “the perceived world reflects the mental state of the mind that perceives it.” Thus the insertions serve as tools of clarity and affirmation but remain consistent with the events and meaning of the double plot. It would be more correct to suggest that the problem of clarity and affirmation in *The Victim* arises because Bellow so intimately and convincingly divulges the ambiguity of reality.

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343 Opdahl, *Novels of Saul Bellow*, 65.
The Education of a Writer

in which Leventhal realises the perception of a world “which can hardly be accepted.”

Bellow implicitly seeks an outlook compatible with, and therefore emerging from “a sombre account of modern urban life and its physical and social hardships” and “the effects of this environment upon a protagonist whose mental make-up is somewhat unbalanced in the first place.” Jonathan Baumbach recognises that in *The Victim* the individual’s relationship to existence “seems all but prohibitively complex”:

> Each discovery that Bellow permits us to make takes us farther away from a pure and simple answer, yet nearer to the final discovery that there is no discoverable final truth, only a profound and ambiguous approximation of it.

Bellow artistically creates an intricate scenario which refuses the reader, like the characters, any discernable clarity of right or wrong, innocence or guilt: the “truth of *The Victim* is complex, and Bellow refuses to be conclusive. … [T]here is always another possibility, a further ambiguity.” In this manner Bellow conveys the reliance of individual reality on ambiguous approximations of the truth. Therein lies the potential of humanity: for the individual to choose to see these conditions as absolving him of responsibility and therefore humanity, or for the individual to transcend his subjectivity enough to accept that these conditions are shared by all individuals thereby making us all humanly responsible. *The Victim* suggests that if Jew and Gentile have equal potential in the modern urban world to become victim and/or victimiser, then there is a deeper bond at stake. Bellow creates a novel which affirms the complexity of existence, the certainty of uncertainty.

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345 Opdahl, *Novels of Saul Bellow*, 65.
348 Baumbach, *Landscape of Nightmare*, 42.
The epigraph to *The Victim* contains two quotes which “clearly reveal that Bellow wants his work to be considered as more than an examination of social prejudice.” The first is from ‘The Tale of the Trader and the Jinni’ in *One Thousand and One Nights*, and tells of a merchant who, after throwing away some date stones, is confronted by an Ifrit who, because the stones struck and killed his son, demands the merchant’s life. The quote raises many correlated themes: “coincidence and chance”; the unpredictable and “terrible consequences of our ‘unintentional acts’; and the “general nature” or the “limits” of human responsibility. The second quote is from De Quincey’s *The Pains of Opium* which describes a sea in which “the human face” “reveals itself,” consisting of “innumerable” suffering faces “upturned towards heaven.” This quote raises “the relationship of the individual to the mass” as it evokes “the loss of the individual in the oppressive, suffering masses of the people,” as constituent of “the suffering of humanity at large.” It also “offers a disquieting image of a multiplication of the individual,” and, as a drug-induced hallucination, “raises questions about the reality of subjective perception.” Fuchs combines the two quotes into a concise statement: “Responsible or not, we are responsible. There are, after all, these faces in a sea of suffering.” These epigraphs indicate that Bellow is concerned with the fact that not all responsibilities are direct, evident or reasonable, which can make the relationship of the individual to general suffering...
appear repressively confusing: “death, responsibility, guilt, racial prejudice, the emergence of a double, all combine.”

Through the character of Schlossberg, Bellow elucidates the implicit call of *The Victim* for an acknowledgement of the ambiguous but present responsibility between the individual and humanity. When Leventhal is invited by his friend Harkavy to join a group of fellow Jews in a diner, he encounters Schlossberg, a journalist who writes on predominantly theatrical subjects for Jewish newspapers. During an argument on acting with Shifcart, an actors’ talent scout, Schlossberg asserts “It’s bad to be less than human and it’s bad to be more than human.” (*TV*, 119) As he explains, the desire to be more-than-human is a “greed for limitless life,” exemplified by Caesar who tried to be a God and defy his epilepsy and mortality (*TV*, 119). Clayton and Fuchs each recognise that the more-than-human is comparable to the concept of “ideal constructions” in *Dangling Man*. Less-than-human is to accept defeat, perceive existence as meaningless, hostile and worthless, and therefore “ignore the human condition” and “avoid all exhausting engagement with life.” More-than and less-than human steer a similar course to the same outcome, since “[b]oth deviations involve a detachment from humanity, a refusal to admit that one is like other men.” Schlossberg poses the ensuing, and paramount, question: “Tell me, please, what is human?” (*TV*, 120) Exactly human is, as Tanner asserts, accepting that “[m]an’s aspiration is limitless, man is not.” Schlossberg advises belief in

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362 Tanner, *Saul Bellow*, 34.
365 Opdahl, *Novels of Saul Bellow*, 62.
367 Tanner, *Saul Bellow*, 34.
human potential with acknowledgement that we all have common limitations and are human. In conclusion, he appeals: “Have dignity, you understand me? Choose dignity. Nobody knows enough to turn it down.” (TV, 120) Thus Schlossberg “speaks for an extra-social standard that is neither environmental nor moralistic, a standard that is simply constituted as a lyrical hymn to human possibility.”368 The discussion ends with the assertion that actors achieve great performances when they first understand what it means to be human. Therefore by understanding the possibility and limits of individuality and humanity, the individual and humanity can meet their full potential.

Schlossberg appears a second time to deliver a message about death and humanity. According to Schlossberg, too many people try to deny or forget about the ultimate human limit, death, by trying to be “a whole corporation” (TV, 229). As a result they become a machine because denying death “makes life less significant by taking away its existential seriousness.”369 Schlossberg connects this message to the story of a funeral where the grave was covered in grass, and extracts an important proverb: “paper grass on the grave makes all the grass paper …” (TV, 229-230) A human who denies his own inevitable death to become more-than-human instead becomes a less-than-human machine, as lifeless as artificial grass, and this is a loss, a potentially self-perpetuating loss, for all humanity. Those who try to be more-than-human “don’t know how to be one” (TV, 229), and thus they deny and threaten humanity. Again Schlossberg urges dignified acceptance: “There’s a limit to me. But I have to be myself to the full. Which is somebody who dies isn’t it?” (TV, 229) Opdahl argues that the proverb offers the possibility of a reverse process of self-perpetuating humanity. Firstly,

368 Bradbury, “Saul Bellow’s The Victim,” 124.
369 Clayton, Defense of Man, 153.
“man may find a home in the world if he accepts its inevitable limitations,” 370 and, secondly, “man can obtain ‘salvation’ by merely accepting the richness and multiplicity of the physical world.” 371 This acceptance in turn enriches humanity: real grass will make all grass real, and therefore acting with a dignified vision of humanity can afford the world and its inhabitants dignity.

Opdahl suggests that Schlossberg “states the theme of the novel Bellow was actually writing when he says ‘it’s bad to be less than human, and its bad to be more than human.’” 372 In contrast, Downer argues in regard to Schlossberg that “so much contrivance in a realistic novel is acceptable only if it contributes to an understanding of what the novel is about.” 373 Whether or not Schlossberg’s construction is contrived, his character seems to provide some clues towards understanding the “actual” novel. Schlossberg provides the sense of humanity that Bellow is appealing to, the implicit meaning of Leventhal’s struggles, and is similar to Bellow in that he “doesn’t go in for diagnosis.” 374 Schlossberg’s message remains relatively ambiguous because he evokes that which lies behind the façade, the performance, of human reality, beyond easily identifiable categories and subjective interpretations. Schlossberg also serves to indicate Leventhal’s ability to broaden his scope to other people’s humanly expansive sense of reality. Although Schlossberg expands Leventhal’s perspective it is left to Leventhal to internally construct his own individual wisdom. Schlossberg is consistent with his assertion of human dignity, which accepts the power of individual discernment and therefore resists polemics. This element of Schlossberg’s wisdom is confirmed when the reader learns that Schlossberg is

370 Opdahl, Novels of Saul Bellow, 64.
371 Opdahl, Novels of Saul Bellow, 64.
372 Opdahl, Novels of Saul Bellow, 62-3.
supporting his thirty-five year old son who cannot make up his mind what to do, and daughters who are “[w]orse yet.” (TV, 110) Schlossberg offers “the possibility of a wide and open perspective,” but, accordingly, only to those prepared to accept this possibility, as this choice is the essence of human dignity.

Schlossberg’s position as a wise old man providing an orienting framework for the novel is reminiscent of the saintly figure of the Elder Zosima in The Brothers Karamazov, the novel in which Dostoevsky most comprehensively attempts to portray his spiritual philosophy, particularly through the characters of Alyosha and his mentor, Zosima. The resemblance and differences in the messages of Schlossberg and Zosima reflect the fact that in The Victim Bellow attempts to explore an even more intrinsic sense of human responsibility than Dostoevsky’s spirituality, but remains indebted to the Russian author’s techniques for conveying the necessity for “self-transcendence of the ego.” Zosima argues that the individual causes his own suffering in isolation because he separates from the harmony of “the general wholeness of humanity” with the desire “to experience the fullness of life within himself.” (BK, 303) Zosima advocates love, as a response to and made possible by the mystery of life (BK, 292), and the fact that “truly, each of us is guilty before everyone and for everyone, only people do not know it.” (BK, 298) At one point Leventhal experiences a revelation reminiscent of Zosima’s thoughts: “it was extremely plain to [Leventhal] that everything, everything without exception, took place as if within a single soul or person.” (TV, 151) Thus Zosima and Schlossberg each guide the protagonist, and the reader. They locate human transcendence, or dignity, in the individual’s

375 Hyland, Saul Bellow, 30.
376 Allan Chavkin discusses a clear reference to The Brothers Karamazov in The Victim and its symbolic meaning in the latter text, which will be discussed later in the chapter. Chavkin, “Ivan Karamazov’s Rebellion.”
377 Frank, Writer in His Time, 596.
responsibility for that for which he is not responsible. Schlossberg’s words are “sentiments to which [Dostoevsky] would say ‘Amen.’”\footnote{Fuchs, \textit{Vision and Revision}, 48.} However, Schlossberg and Zosima differ according to the objectives of their respective authors, such that Schlossberg is less dominant and pious, and his wisdom is, unlike Zosima’s, more elusive and non-dogmatic.

**DOUBLES: DIVISION AND EVASION**

Dostoevsky and Bellow portray the divisive—doubling—crisis of a protagonist who desperately needs, but precisely for that reason is unable to fathom, the author’s implicit orienting framework. The signs of the protagonist’s unstable state are evident from the outset of both novels. Velchaninov and Leventhal are found in the sweltering summer heat of their respective metropolises, St. Petersburg and New York. Neither is a native to the city; Velchaninov the bachelor has few acquaintances and though Leventhal has lived in New York for some time his wife, Mary, is away and his friendships are strained. In this situation the protagonist of each novel has symbolically and literally ‘let himself go,’ wavering under the oppressiveness of the atmosphere and isolation, living in a dishevelled state and allowing his presumptions, fears and negative tendencies to arise without objection or release. Thus each novel, as Helge N. Nilsen writes in regard to \textit{The Victim}, is “limited to the point of view of one central character and devoted to the analysis of that person’s mind as it reacts to the recurring confrontations.”\footnote{Nilsen, “Anti-Semitism,” 183.} Each protagonist is in a state which invites the encroachment of
the double who embodies precisely what the protagonist attempts to repress in himself, which has left him unprepared for confrontation.

*The Eternal Husband* begins with Velchaninov running around St. Petersburg in pursuit of a lawsuit, which is irrelevant to the plot besides indicating Velchaninov’s self-interested enterprises. In comparison to Dostoevsky’s novella, the first chapter of *The Victim* reveals a more complex scenario in which the protagonist’s sense of persecution surfaces in relation to an urban environment and work and family responsibilities. Under the summer heat, New York is introduced as overflowing with “barbaric fellahin” amongst the “stupendous monuments of mystery.” (*TV*, 1) From this crowd Leventhal emerges, almost missing his train stop. Symbolically, Leventhal is taking himself off, but also falling off and “cursing” at this symbol of progress, a mass and automated machine carrying collective man through time and space (*TV*, 1). In *The Victim* Leventhal has spent the afternoon guiltily rushing out of his work against his boss’ wishes—even though Mr Beard tells Leventhal to use “own judgement”—to come to the aid of his estranged brother’s wife, Elena, whose son is ill (*TV*, 3). As Leventhal leaves he overhears Mr Beard comment that Leventhal “[t]akes unfair advantage … [l]ike the rest of his brethren” (*TV*, 3). Thus Leventhal is already located within a social environment which contains prejudice and competing demands, and according to which he must weigh up multiple responsibilities.

In this opening chapter Bellow already hints at negative and contradictory possibilities not just in the environment, but also in the protagonist’s psyche. Leventhal is appalled by Beard’s comments, but then considers Elena in terms of “Italian excitability” and calls her a “peasant.” (*TV*, 8) Leventhal even condemns his absent brother Max, who works on shipyards in another state, assuming that
Max chooses to work elsewhere because he wants “novelty and adventure” after having married too young (TV, 2). There is also a stark contrast between Leventhal’s silent shock in the face of real prejudice when he overhears Beard’s comment, and his verbal and physical reactions to indirect and impersonal conflict such as when he curses after the train which almost departed before he had alighted. Like in *The Eternal Husband*, the protagonist of *The Victim* demonstrates inconsistencies of weakness, prejudice and volatility which suggest his unease coping with his environment.

The second chapter of *The Victim* returns to the example of *The Eternal Husband* by exposing the protagonist’s internal struggles. In *The Eternal Husband* Velchaninov suffers a crisis of conscience, attacks of that which he calls “higher causes.” (*EH*, 69) These episodes involve the remembrance of regrettable events of humiliation, cruelty, pride and vanity in which he was either the culprit or the victim. However, in moments of composure Velchaninov upholds a self-protecting temerity and dismisses these “tears of repentance and self-condemnations,” claiming that he does not have a “drop of independence” anyway, so “[i]f some such temptation should happen again tomorrow,” he still “wouldn’t flinch.” (*EH*, 74) While Velchaninov is internally riddled by past events of maliciousness and plagued by violent attacks of conscience, certain events in Leventhal’s past have made him subtly but consistently fearful of the balance of his position in society and consequently adopt a pessimistic attitude and a demeanour of “impassivity.” (TV, 210) Leventhal fears madness because, according to his father, Leventhal’s mother died in an insane asylum when he was a child; although his wife, Mary, suggests to Leventhal that his father may not be a reliable source (TV, 46). More recently, several years previous to the novel’s
present, Leventhal fell from a prosperous position into tentative hardship. After his fiancé confessed to a continued affair with a married man Leventhal inadvertently knocked her down in an ensuing scene, rashly quit his job and moved to New York where he struggled, becoming increasingly desperate, aggressive and volatile. He recovered with the help of connections and reconciled with his fiancée, now wife, but the experience left Leventhal telling himself, “I was lucky. I got away with it.” \((TV, 16)\) He considers that he avoided, by chance, that which he feared, “the part [of humanity] that did not get away with it – the lost, the over-come, the effaced, the ruined.” \((TV, 16)\) Neither Velchaninov nor Leventhal has properly come to terms with his past, and therefore himself. Each protagonist resorts to generalisations to avoid confronting his guilt or fears. Velchaninov sees himself, in his own words, as a “depraved, underground, vile” person, in a world of similar people \((EH, 203)\). Leventhal regards himself as a natural victim, who from a mass of victims managed to rise due to luck.

In both *The Eternal Husband* and *The Victim* the protagonist’s internal conflict, within a scenario of dream-like confusion, leads to a symbolic splitting of the psyche and the emergence of the double. Ellen Pifer recognises that Bellow employs “Dostoevsky’s characteristic device for heightening the sense of mystery: he deliberately blurs the boundary between his character’s waking and dreaming states of consciousness.”\(^380\) As a symbol of the protagonist’s repressed conscience, a man in mourning crosses Velchaninov’s path on several occasions and though Velchaninov becomes uncontrollably fixated with the figure he fails to make the recognition. After he collapses from the exhaustion of his weary state and haunting memories, Velchaninov is awoken by a bell which is

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indistinguishable as reality or dream. From his window he glimpses his double
emerge out of the night air and approach his door. The dream-like encounter
seems unavoidable and emerges from within and without the protagonist. Once
the figure is before him he immediately recognises Pavel Pavlovich.

*The Victim* follows a similar strategy, although Leventhal’s double emerges in accordance with the more ambiguous nature of Leventhal’s anxieties. There are no advance sightings. When Leventhal is awoken by a phantom bell after his own weary collapse he assumes it has been rung as a mistake or a prank—bad luck or persecution—before questioning his nerves. Like Velchaninov he eagerly runs to the door, signalling his desire to escape his oppressive isolation. He expresses hope that someone has “come to keep him company.” *(TV, 19)* In Leventhal’s case no one appears and so he goes to the park where he mingles with a throng of strangers sweltering in the summer heat. However he remains aloof and impassive until a figure, a face of the masses, emerges from the crowd and accosts him. In stark contrast to Velchaninov, and indicative of Leventhal’s difficulty of “recognition”—of the human, including his own repressed aspects—he fails to recognise Allbee. Allbee believes that Leventhal’s ignorance is an act, having left a note for Leventhal to meet him at that precise place and hour. Thus the encounter also accesses Leventhal’s repressed fears of chance, irrationality, persecution and the demanding masses. Pifer again observes a comparison to Dostoevsky in Bellow’s hint at “a powerful though hidden reality beneath appearances, one largely inaccessible to reason.”381

Allbee’s emergence is symbolic of Leventhal’s repressed aspects, which differ

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from the clear moral-conscience aspect of Dostoevsky’s scenario, but match the same artistic strategy.

**Evasion**

In both *The Eternal Husband* and *The Victim* the antagonist confronts the protagonist with the qualities the protagonist has repressed—now externalised and beyond control—and in so doing, acquires the guise of an enemy. In both novels, the protagonist attempts to evade his double by trying to categorise and dismiss him with a determined identity. Ironically, in so doing, Velchaninov exposes the complexity of both his and Pavel Pavlovich’s subjectivities. Leventhal reveals that he and Allbee lack both responsibility for themselves and for their other.

As a representative of Velchaninov’s conscience, a victim of Velchaninov’s sin, Pavel Pavlovich seems passive and weak, never directly accusing Velchaninov of having had an affair with his wife. At certain points Velchaninov assumes that Pavel Pavlovich knows of the affair with his wife and is seeking revenge, and at others he believes that Pavel Pavlovich is an ignorant, weak and naïve cuckold whom he can easily manipulate. In this manner Velchaninov practises his techniques of simplification, denial and evasion in order to subdue any sense of guilt and need for repentance. Concurrently, Velchaninov is tormented by the weight of silent accusation and his inability to act against his vanity and denial by bringing the matter into the open.

In *The Victim* Allbee’s accusation reflects Leventhal’s reluctance to account for responsibility beyond himself and accepted and coherent obligations. Allbee discusses an event that Leventhal wishes to forget, and raises its consequences, of which Leventhal has been unaware. Some years ago, during his desperate period, Leventhal acquired a job interview through Allbee, with
Allbee’s boss, Rudiger. When Rudiger treated him with dismissive hostility Leventhal deliberately provoked Rudiger into losing his temper. Allbee informs Leventhal that he was consequently fired and fell into ruin, and he considers that this outcome was Leventhal’s malicious intention because of an earlier anti-Semitic remark Allbee had made. Allbee subsequently demands full responsibility from Leventhal: “you’re to blame. You and you only. For everything. You ruined me.” \((TV, 68)\) In contrast to Pavel Pavlovich, it is Allbee’s lack of silence which troubles the protagonist, as Allbee is not “entirely right: but he is not entirely wrong.” \(^{382}\) Allbee thereby forces Leventhal to address that which he prefers to avoid, questions of guilt and responsibility, the dilemma of being human: “and nothing less is at stake.” \(^{383}\)

Despite being guilty before Pavel Pavlovich, Velchaninov continues to mistreat his antagonist. The irony is furthered by the fact that Pavel Pavlovich continuously contradicts the logic by which Velchaninov justifies his mistreatment. Both characters are thereby limited to opposing but inseparable positions which could, if brought together in earnestness and repentance, form a transcendent rather than destructive, complementary union. In *The Victim*, Leventhal’s inability to discern either guilt or obligation renders him “unable to help or ignore Allbee.” \(^{384}\) While Velchaninov tries to divine Pavel Pavlovich’s motives, Leventhal asks “Why me?” \((TV, 70)\) To question his responsibility terrifies Leventhal who assumes that any responsibility entails all or no responsibility. He is unable to come to terms with a wider conception of humanity.

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\(^{382}\) Tanner, *Saul Bellow*, 32.

\(^{383}\) Fiedler, “Fate of the Novel,” 527.

\(^{384}\) Opdahl, *Novels of Saul Bellow*, 55.
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and existence—his Allbee, whose name signifies all-being, or all-be. Leventhal’s wife has discerned the problem which causes Leventhal’s worries, telling him that he is too ready “to believe anything and everything about himself” because he is unsure of himself (TV, 46). Instead of seeking greater self-awareness Leventhal tries to gain greater security by avoiding the questions which entail uncertainty. Ironically, Leventhal and Allbee “appear to be opposites, the secure and the ruined, the victim and the oppressor, but both suffer from a sense of persecution.” Leventhal believes he is being persecuted as a Jew, and Allbee believes he has been persecuted for having insulted a Jew, and “there is no authorial word to tell us whose side to take, to say which of the two is the victim, which is the persecutor.” Thus Leventhal’s difficulty accepting the possibility of responsibility places him in the same position as and leaves him vulnerable to Allbee, who shuns responsibility and wants to blame Leventhal for everything.

Clayton argues that The Victim is “not about victims” but is instead about “self-created” victimhood with the ensuing loss of “greatness and beauty.” The minor role of characters with potentially greater hardships—such as a Filipino busboy, a “Negro” butler, and so on—signals the limited perception of both Allbee and Leventhal. These secondary characters form part of Bellow’s portrayal of “the importance of social conditions and pressures as catalysts of anti-Semitic and other ethnic antagonisms.” But while the presence of these characters may to a certain extent justify Leventhal’s and Allbee’s fears of injustice and suffering, it also highlights the fact that the doubles are pre-empting their victimhood. Hence

386 Clayton, Defense of Man, 164.
387 Opdahl, Novels of Saul Bellow, 55.
their claims of persecution in fact display a degree of their failing empathy and objectivity. These minor characters are the victims of the economic, social and historical forces which Allbee and Leventhal claim persecute them. These outcasts are subtly scattered in the narrative but without conscious recognition from the central characters, even Leventhal who claims to be mindful of such possibilities.

Leventhal and Velchaninov both reveal an extensive array of psychological wrangling as they evade responsibility, primarily by condemning their respective antagonist, the symbol of their repressed consciousness. This task is facilitated by their established repugnance for that which the antagonist represents and they subsequently focus on the antagonist’s inconsistencies in order to defend their own. Velchaninov views Pavel Pavlovich as a weak and pathetic man who either deserved or desired his position as an “eternal husband.” Instead of feeling compassion for Pavel Pavlovich’s erratic and distraught behaviour, which includes drinking, womanising, clowning, crying and so forth, Velchaninov interprets such behaviour as further proof of Pavel Pavlovich’s ‘type’, with recourse to the predator-placid categories. Leventhal similarly criticises Allbee’s desperate erraticism, which includes many of Pavel Pavlovich’s ‘vices.’ In *The Victim* Leventhal condemns Allbee for his drinking, and Allbee identifies this criticism as a traditional Jewish prejudice against Gentiles, which he paradoxically claims as evidence that he is being persecuted. But primarily Leventhal resorts to dismissing Allbee’s claims by determining him as a persecuting anti-Semite. As Nilsen argues, Leventhal has a vision of warring ethnic camps and instead of exploring the facts tends to immediately interpret
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events through the prism of anti-Semitism. Leventhal adopts the extreme Jewish-Gentile divide to justify his condemnation of Allbee and maintain his narrowed outlook.

Velchaninov and Leventhal increasingly struggle to completely assign blame to their respective antagonists. If Pavel Pavlovich is a helpless pathetic man then Velchaninov is all the more guilty for his abuse. In Leventhal’s case he realises that if he really does consider Allbee a dangerous and despicable anti-Semite then maybe he did deliberately desire Allbee’s sacking. In *The Eternal Husband* the protagonist and antagonist become both increasingly intimate and increasingly hostile as Velchaninov’s evasion increases Pavel Pavlovich’s sense of injury. In *The Victim*, Leventhal’s inability to address Allbee without prevarication hints at their similarities in opposition.

In further tactics of evasion, Velchaninov and Leventhal extend their psychological wranglings to consider external parties to the double-relationship. When Velchaninov discovers Natalia, Pavel Pavlovich’s wife, had other affairs he decides she is to blame as a fickle, born seducer and Pavel Pavlovich is the born husband of such an adultress, an “eternal husband.” In *The Victim*, Leventhal tries to blame Rudiger and/or Allbee for the disastrous outcome of the job interview. Until it is proven otherwise Leventhal insists that Allbee’s drinking had caused troubles with his work, and that the overly touchy Rudiger had been looking for an excuse to fire him. Mirroring each other, Leventhal and Allbee also resort to theories of conspiracy. Allbee blames Leventhal and a “Jewish point of view” with teasing insinuations of conspiracy (*TV*, 130), while Leventhal for his part is also guilty of perpetuating stereotypes and conspiracy theories. He tries to blame

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everything on Allbee’s drinking, and he suspects the existence of a “black list”
shared by companies with the names of people not to hire (TV, 77). He extends his
blaming to Gentiles in general and even to his Jewish friends who do not accept
his interpretation of events.

At their most desperate Velchaninov and Leventhal resort to postulations
of irrational forces of luck, hatred and violence. In both cases their anticipation of
violence or persecution reflects or reveals their own repressed tendencies. In the
past Velchaninov had shot off the leg of a young man who had insulted him,
while Leventhal, after being the victim of an anti-Semitic slur by a woman in the
cinema, had wanted to respond with violence: “What was the use of wasting
words on such people? Hit them! That was all they understood.” (TV, 133) Above
all Velchaninov and Leventhal are most prone to violent urges when, perceiving
themselves to be contradicted or threatened, they interpret forces of hatred. As his
placid-predator theory fails Velchaninov resorts to considering himself and his
double as underground men, whereby Pavel Pavlovich desires, even if
unconsciously, malicious revenge. Leventhal perceives a world of hate and
persecution, but the scenario differs from The Eternal Husband as Leventhal and
Allbee equally accuse the other of maliciousness (TV, 21, 71). The emergence of
actual persecution at the hands of Allbee reflects Leventhal’s tendency towards
“hopeless despair in the face of what he regards as an ancient, evil current of
human history which is larger than any individual and against which all are
powerless.”392 The irony in both novels is that when the protagonist prepares for or
acts with violence, the antagonist immediately and passively capitulates, except in
each novel’s climax. In response Velchaninov still insists that Pavel Pavlovich

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wants to murder him but is too much of a coward, and Leventhal follows the same reasoning: “He hated me enough to cut my throat. He didn’t do it because he was too much of a coward.” (TV, 249) In *The Victim* there are fewer premonitions of violence than in *The Eternal Husband* and so Leventhal’s reaction appears particularly absurd. In both novels the protagonist’s expectations of violence reflect his own incorrect interpretations and over-reactions.

In their evasion of responsibility both Velchaninov and Leventhal direct themselves and their antagonists towards despair and potential self-destruction. As they refuse to expand to a more open and compassionate attitude to their double as themselves, to understand that the antagonist’s reprehensible behaviour stems from suffering, they create an intolerance which affects their own self. If Velchaninov fails to transcend his vanity, he risks being tormented into insanity, being killed, or having future attacks of conscience. If Leventhal fails to acknowledge Allbee’s humanity, he will come to approximate that which he most hates in Allbee. As Baumbach writes, Allbee “represents Leventhal’s failings carried to their logical insanity.”

Thus Leventhal and Allbee begin to merge, bringing to mind Schlossberg’s notion of the paper grass: a vision lacking humanity, unprepared to accept full variety, renders everything inhuman. In addition Leventhal is increasingly unprepared to accept the opinion not only of Allbee, but also of all the people around him. Unlike Velchaninov, many people interact with and give Leventhal their opinion, but Leventhal refuses to trust beyond his own assumptions: “But, my God, how could anyone say that he was sure? How could he know all that he needed to know in order to say it?” (TV, 46) Most people admit that they are guessing at the truth and that there is always room

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393 Baumbach, *Landscape of Nightmare*, 41.
for error. Schlossberg’s wisdom directly addresses this issue: “What do you know? No, tell me, what do you know? … Do you know better? … Choose dignity. Nobody knows enough to turn it down.” (TV, 120) Yet, just as he is unable to transcend his own vision, Leventhal is unable to accept these other visions which challenge his own, because he sees them as a threat to his selfhood.

**EXTERNAL PERSPECTIVES**

*The Eternal Husband* and *The Victim* both contain several significant relationships besides that of the double which expand the readers’ perspective of the protagonist’s ordeal. Bellow frequently transcodes key elements from the secondary relationships in *The Eternal Husband* across several relationships in his novel. Both novels present alternative relationships as possible avenues for a greater perspective of reality, redemption and dignity. Moreover, these relationships seem to reside just beyond the reach of the protagonist.

**Children**

In *The Eternal Husband*, at the time of their affair, Natalia thought she was pregnant and instructed Velchaninov to leave town in order to allay possible suspicions which might discern that he was the father. While away, Velchaninov received a letter from Natalia informing him that the pregnancy was a false alarm and at the same time declaring an end to their affair. However, in the narrative’s present Velchaninov discovers from Pavel Pavlovich that soon after he left Natalia had a child, Liza. Certain that he is the father, Velchaninov bullies Pavel Pavlovich into ceding Liza to his care and that of his friends, the Pogoreltsevs. Liza becomes another person Velchaninov ‘steals’ from Pavel Pavlovich due to
his vanity and need for intimacy. Reminiscent of his state of mind during his affair with Natalia, Velchaninov is swept with passionate feelings of hope and intimacy with Liza. To take Liza, Velchaninov manipulates and bullies Pavel Pavlovich while hypocritically reasoning to himself that Pavel Pavlovich is a “mean drunken creature” and bully to Liza, and therefore “wishes it himself: otherwise why would he torment her.” (EH, 122) Velchaninov extends Pavel Pavlovich’s suffering and his own guilt by insisting that Pavel Pavlovich is a fixed being who deserves, knows and wants the betrayal and abuse he receives. Through this episode, Dostoevsky demonstrates that due to the narrowness of Velchaninov’s vision he creates harm even when he seeks love, because his love is distorted by his own corruptness.

*The Victim* contains a secondary plot similar to that in *The Eternal Husband*, though less directly related to the double scenario and accordingly functioning more to broaden the exploration of the scope of responsibility which troubles Leventhal. This plot involves the family of Leventhal’s estranged brother, Max, which consists of his wife Elena, eldest son Philip, and sick child, Mickey. Leventhal begrudgingly accepts some responsibility for looking after the children while he suspects Elena of madness and negligence, and the Sicilian Grandmother of anti-Semitism. Indeed, Philip and Mickey mirror Liza’s function as Philip induces Leventhal’s desire for an ideal and innocent bond, and Mickey exposes Leventhal to the innocent suffering which he has tried to avoid thinking about. Through his growing awareness of the children, Leventhal is able to accept a more complex relationship, albeit with reservations, involving family, race, innocence, suffering and death.
In *The Eternal Husband* Liza functions as an extension of Pavel Pavlovich’s suffering and Velchaninov’s guilt. In contrast to Velchaninov who sees Liza not for who she is—the loving daughter of Pavel Pavlovich—but as an ideal symbol of his own selfish love and vanity, Pavel Pavlovich tries to love Liza for who she is but cannot help but in his distress treats her as the result of the sin and betrayal against him. In his confused torment he neglects her. When Pavel Pavlovich allows Velchaninov to take Liza, she believes that her father’s love has failed, and after a prolonged illness she eventually dies. Fuchs notes that while Liza dies “as a result of humiliation derived from the guilt of both men, the child-victim in *The Victim* dies from a fated physical disease”\(^{394}\): Mickey has “a bronchial infection of the rare kind.” (*TV*, 56) Thus Mickey’s helpless and innocent suffering demands human empathy, it demands a responsibility where no one is responsible. Leventhal is not to blame for Mickey’s condition, but through his unavoidable relationship to the sick child his capacity for compassion, his humanity, is called to attention.

Liza and Mickey respectively expose Velchaninov’s and Leventhal’s compassion as it is thwarted by their inability to transcend their reliance on their own subjective outlooks. For example, in *The Eternal Husband*, Velchaninov’s ecstasy over Liza’s innocence allows him to admit his obligation to Pavel Pavlovich and confess to Klavdia Petrovna Pogoreltsev: “I took her myself, by force.” (*EH*, 144) Yet when Liza becomes ill and Velchaninov realises that he must seek out Pavel Pavlovich if she is to have any chance of recovery, he wavers, and when Liza dies he blames Pavel Pavlovich. In *The Victim*, Leventhal is exposed to a real victim in the silently suffering Mickey whose fate is

\(^{394}\) Fuchs, *Vision and Revision*, 45.
controlled by adults and chance, and Leventhal does open himself to some broader implications on a theoretical level: “Well, that was the meaning of helplessness … Unfair, thought Leventhal, not to say tragic.” (TV, 25) And on another occasion: “They said that God was no respecter of persons, meaning that there were the same rules for everybody.” (TV, 57) But he fails to apply this logic to his own role as he acts with minimal good will and inwardly begrudges and blames others. Like Liza, Mickey provides a limited challenge to the protagonist’s egoism. Leventhal responsibly encourages Elena to send Mickey to hospital, but at other moments he inwardly condemns Elena’s and Max’s parenting. Similar to Velchaninov, who knows it is his responsibility to find and bring Pavel Pavlovich to Liza’s bedside but nonetheless blames Pavel Pavlovich for his absence, Leventhal condemns Max’s absence, even though Max has asked Leventhal to tell him when he is needed, a duty which Leventhal leaves to the decision of a specialist, the doctor. While Liza’s death could be a point of unity in sorrow for the doubles, Velchaninov decides to reject Pavel Pavlovich altogether. Similarly, when Mickey dies, Leventhal immediately resolves to reproach Max, his brother and the father. Thus in both works, while the death of an innocent child temporarily alleviates the suspicious nature of both protagonists, they become entrenched once again in self-defeating hostility.

Elements of the relationship between Velchaninov and Liza can also be traced in Leventhal’s relationship to Max’s elder son, Philip. Velchaninov loves Liza as a symbol of innocence. However he also loves her from his vain belief in their incontestable kinship, which is challenged by her love for and demise in the absence of Pavel Pavlovich. Thus, fittingly, as an extension of the double relationship, Liza’s fate is a consequence of Velchaninov’s inability to accept his
guilt. Leventhal approaches Philip in a similarly idealistic manner, identifying firstly a family resemblance in the “outcurving nose” (*TV*, 5), which stands out from the otherwise dominant Italian features, and later interpreting a deeper bond: “Elena’s blood might show in his features but not in his nature.” (*TV*, 90) In such conditions, which resonate with his narrow vision of human kinship, Leventhal, like Velchaninov, unrealistically expects an uncomplicated bond in line with his desires. In one instance he imagines that “he would go to any lengths to save” Philip from Elena who he suspects is insane, Max who he suspects is irresponsible, and the “devil” Grandmother (*TV*, 169, 238). Furthermore, in a more direct manner the problems from the double scenario impact upon the relationship. Allbee interrupts Leventhal and Philip’s one and only outing which immediately affects Leventhal’s ease and openness towards Philip:

> [Leventhal] had a mind to talk about it. But he did not want to betray his anxiety; furthermore, he was afraid to begin a conversation without knowing in advance where it would lead. And maybe he was giving the boy credit for too much discernment. But the mood of the outing had changed. (*TV*, 96)

Leventhal thus returns to suspicion and impassivity. Unlike in *The Eternal Husband*, Leventhal never sees in Philip anything close to the redemptive possibility Velchaninov sees in Liza. Instead, Leventhal’s relationship to Philip remains uncertain and therefore distant, though Leventhal desires more.

**Companions**

In both *The Eternal Husband* and *The Victim* the relationship to children reveals the protagonist’s difficulties forming healthy bonds, even with an innocent and blood-related child. Through Leventhal and Velchaninov’s relationships with other adults, both novels expose the inconsistencies in the protagonists’ behaviour. Velchaninov’s friendship with the Pogoreltsevs suggests a more open
and responsible alternative to Velchaninov’s relationship to his double. In his more complex social setting Leventhal has several acquaintances and varieties of interactions. In particular, his friend Harkavy, his benefactor Williston, and his brother Max challenge Leventhal’s assumptions.

In a reversal of the situation with Pavel Pavlovich, Velchaninov once loved a character named Klavdia Petrovna who, however, chose to marry Pogoreltsev. Although Velchaninov could be considered the condemned placid type in this scenario, through warmth and honesty he and the Pogoreltsevs overcame the past, leaving a serene and quiet friendship… Here everything in Velchaninov’s memories was pure and irreproachable, and all the dearer to him in that it was perhaps so only here. In this family, he was simple, naïve, and kind, helped with the children, was never affected, admitted everything and confessed everything. (EH, 123)

Here Velchaninov comes closest to the truth, openly discussing the issue of Pavel Pavlovich with Klavdia, and even declaring: “I condemned myself for everything long, long ago.” (EH, 125) However, there exists in the novel a clear divide between Velchaninov’s relationship to the Pogoreltsevs and the truth he attains with them and his relationship to Pavel Pavlovich in which all objective insight vanishes. After Liza dies—and with her his hope of redemption—Velchaninov shuns the Pogoreltsevs, not wanting even the friendliest challenge to his self-consuming interpretation of blame.

Harkavy, Leventhal’s Jewish friend and his former employer’s son, plays a role comparable to the Pogoreltsevs by offering an opportunity for the protagonist to confide his problems with complete openness and honesty. However, Leventhal begrudges Harkavy’s bluntness and gradually resists being honest. Lilian S. Kremer claims that Harkavy is a delusional, silent sufferer who represents Bellow’s condemnation of “Jewish acquiescence to overt anti-
Semitism.” However, her argument misinterprets a number of scenes. At the past party where Allbee had incensed Leventhal, Harkavy had attempted to sing “spirituals and old ballads” but Allbee had interrupted, suggesting Harkavy should sing Jewish songs instead: “You shouldn’t sing those old songs. You have to be bred into them.” (TV, 35) Kremer claims that “Harkavy’s obsequious silence is counterpointed by Leventhal’s angry refutation,” and then continues: “[i]mmediate and vociferous denunciation of Allbee by other guests, Christians and Jews alike, follows.” The scene does not support this interpretation, nor does the novel as a whole in which there is “always another possibility, a further ambiguity.” Harkavy does not remain silent; he tries to defy Allbee’s interruptions and vocally refuses to be offended by Allbee. Leventhal, who is offended, provides no “refutation” and broods in silence. The only “vociferous” and unanimous “denunciation” of Allbee is group awkwardness and the hosts’ attempts to “explain away the insult.” (TV, 35) Even Leventhal claims to have “shrugged it off.” (TV, 35) This scene demonstrates that The Victim does not allow any explicit interpretation of victim and victimiser, in contradistinction to its protagonist who immediately and inwardly projects and judges.

When Leventhal gathers with Harkavy and his Jewish friends in a diner, he and Harkavy debate the significance of Disraeli. While Harkavy argues that Disraeli was a credit to the English and to the Jews, Leventhal argues that he was neither because he sought to deny his Jewishness in order to gain acceptance as an Englishman. Kremer claims that “Leventhal’s position is confirmed by other characters when they join him in public rebuke of Harkavy. In this instance, the

396 Kremer, “Acquiescence to Anti-Semitism,” 28.
397 Baumbach, Landscape of Nightmare, 42.
novel’s moral registrar, Schlossberg, endorses Asa’s position.” 398 Yet when Leventhal asks, “What’s the good of such greatness?” Harkavy replies, “Why, you’re succumbing yourself to all the things that are said against us,” in response to which Leventhal resentfully withdraws from the conversation (TV, 116). Leventhal tries to project his own fear and “image of himself as someone inferior” into the discussion about Disraeli’s ambitions and the result is he “cuts himself off from his fellow Jews.” 399 Neither Harkavy nor Leventhal is forcefully rebuked because those present, unlike Leventhal, accept various opinions. Schlossberg agrees with Leventhal that it is wrong to be “more-than-human”, but he does not conclude that this is applicable to Disraeli. Furthermore, Leventhal’s rejection of all human greatness “goes against the doctrine of humanism preached by Schlossberg.” 400 Schlossberg argues that given the ambiguity of existence he is “as sure about greatness and beauty as you are about black and white.” (TV, 120) For Schlossberg dignity is produced via a greatness which accepts humanity such that “good acting represents the authentic and appropriate response to human experience.” 401 The amicable Harkavy understands this message and cries “Bravo!” after Schlossberg’s speech, as a joke but also as ironic evidence of the authenticity of Schlossberg’s own ‘performance.’ Leventhal appears “to be the only one to disapprove of the joke,” further confirming his begrudging isolation (TV, 120)

The true difference between Leventhal and Harkavy, which particularly manifests in their responses to Allbee, is that while Leventhal assumes persecution, Harkavy speculates while resisting judgement. When he learns of

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399 Nilsen, “Anti-Semitism,” 183, 89.
400 Nilsen, “Anti-Semitism,” 189.
401 Hyland, Saul Bellow, 28.
Allbee’s accusations Harkavy remarks that Allbee is “overstraining the imagination. He must have a loose screw… But the story went round that he was canned, and then I heard he couldn’t get another job.” (*TV*, 77) As the closest thing to a friend or confidant, Harkavy is Leventhal’s bridge to both Gentile and Jewish *milieus*. Although Harkavy does not aggressively stand up to Allbee’s insistence that he sing a Jewish song at the party, when he hears Leventhal’s claim that Allbee believes “Jews have influence with other Jews” Harkavy is furious:

> ‘No!’ Harkavy cried. ‘No!’ … First you come to complain about him. Next thing he sounds like the Protocols, but it’s all right with you.’ He furiously pounded the metal table, his face and his elongated throat flaming. ‘Influence with Jews!’ he shouted. (*TV*, 236)

Thus Harkavy does not acquiesce to anti-Semitism as Kremer suggests; he is in fact angry with Leventhal who he believes is willingly consenting to an anti-Semite. However, this outburst also reveals Harkavy’s weakness. Harkavy is comfortable in himself and ignorant of the fact that other people may not be. He often offends Leventhal by bluntly and too easily rejecting Leventhal’s concerns. Harkavy assumes that Leventhal accepts “that even one’s friends may be critical toward one,”402 but instead Leventhal is resentful and even accuses Harkavy of treachery. Ironically, at the party where Leventhal takes offense to Allbee’s anti-Semitic remarks, he himself responsively adopts the perspective of Allbee’s potential anti-Semitism, apprehensively discerning Harkavy’s Jewish features, and positing his own insecurity onto another (*TV*, 34). Thus like the Pogoreltsevs Harkavy demonstrates a more balanced, perhaps naively idealist alternative, which contrasts with the protagonist’s behaviour but is ultimately unable to help. Like the Pogoreltsevs, Harkavy recommends that the protagonist avoid his

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antagonist, which neglects the protagonist’s inability to transcend his ego which occasions his obligation and compulsion towards the antagonist.

Through Harkavy Leventhal had, in the past, met Williston, his Gentile “benefactor.” (TV, 85) During Leventhal’s period of struggle Williston had helped him to find work, and was the host of the infamous party that introduced Leventhal to Allbee. Harkavy informs Leventhal in vague terms of his recollection that Williston may have suspected Leventhal was intentionally responsible for Allbee’s sacking. Even though Leventhal considers this hypothesis himself, he automatically assumes he is being condemned for his Jewishness and therefore considers Williston with assumptions of prejudice: “He’d rather take that drunk Allbee’s word for it. Where’s their Anglo-Saxon fairness … fair play?” (TV, 79-80) In the narrowness of his reactivity Leventhal even attacks Harkavy and assumes that Williston must think exactly like Allbee. When Harkavy points out that Leventhal’s summation completely contradicts Williston’s generosity towards them both Leventhal resorts to his interpretation of eternal and uncontrollable forces of hatred: “That’s what makes it so bad, horrible! That’s the evil part of it.” (TV, 80) And on the following page: “Williston, like himself, like everybody else, was carried on currents, this way and that.” (TV, 81) In his subsequent course of action “Leventhal’s behavior towards his former employer and friend Williston curiously parallels Allbee’s toward Leventhal.”403 Leventhal broods before confronting Williston with indirect accusations, while claiming Williston is being evasive. Yet Williston is not Leventhal or Allbee and refuses to succumb to such tactics. When Williston bluntly responds that he “think[s] it” is Leventhal’s fault Allbee was fired, Leventhal tries to accuse Williston of blaming

403 Baumbach, Landscape of Nightmare, 50.
him as a Jew (*TV* 102-3). Williston’s rebuttal identifies Leventhal’s tendency to presume and condemn:

> The Jewish part of it is your own invention. You take it for granted that I think you got Allbee in trouble purposely. I didn’t say that. Maybe you aimed to hurt him and maybe you didn’t. My opinion is that you didn’t. But the effect is the same. You lost him his job. (*TV*, 103-104)

Thus Williston directly addresses the greater issue of the novel, which Leventhal has tried to avoid, namely a responsibility based not on intention, but on effect.

Before the idealistically open Pogoreltsevs, Velchaninov confesses his duty to Pavel Pavlovich: “after all, I am guilty before him.” (*EH*, 126) Ironically, it is not before his Jewish friend Harkavy that Leventhal makes a similar declaration, but before the supposed Gentile ally of Allbee: “In a way it really seems to be my fault doesn’t it?” (*TV*, 104) Yet neither protagonist carries the lesson of these relationships into their broader outlook. For example, after Liza dies Velchaninov refuses all responsibility, such that he avoids the Pogoreltsevs who would no doubt force him to consider otherwise. After his admission to Williston Leventhal decides “He [himself] had contributed to it, though he had yet to decide to what extent he was to blame.” (*TV*, 106) Thus Leventhal senses the potential of his fault, but instead of seeing the ambiguity as a reason for him to attempt responsibility, he employs it to avoid responsibility. He also rejects Harkavy’s advice to stay away from Allbee, and avoids the Willistons who offer assistance. Thus Velchaninov and Leventhal both resist the implications of events and fall further into isolation and the double dilemma.

### Another Recognition

In both novels, at the height of the climactic showdown in which the antagonist powerfully asserts his position, a character who is simultaneously something of a
stranger and brother to the protagonist interrupts and confuses the protagonist’s sense of recognition in others, and eventually his sense of reality. Velchaninov and Pavel Pavlovich have returned from an evening with the family of Pavel Pavlovich’s fifteen-year-old bride to be, Nadezhda Fedoseevna, over the course of which Velchaninov returns to his former role and competes with, dominates and humiliates Pavel Pavlovich. On their return to Velchaninov’s they are interrupted by the young Alexander Lobov who insists that he and “Nadezhda Fedoseevna” have pledged themselves to each other and that Pavel Pavlovich should abandon any pursuit of marriage. Velchaninov finds himself literally and symbolically caught between the two. Like Lobov he too was once a young suitor who competed with Pavel Pavlovich. But because over the course of the evening he has emerged as a competitor for Nadezhda Fedoseevna, Velchaninov now finds himself, like Pavel Pavlovich, challenged by an insolent younger suitor. Velchaninov struggles to confirm his own position as he mediates between the obnoxious Lobov and the surprisingly aggressive Pavel Pavlovich.

Max is the intruder in the equivalent scene in *The Victim* which exposes Leventhal’s fraternal confusion and inadequacy. While Leventhal acts with awkward hesitancy towards Max, Allbee openly engages. First of all he acknowledges an ambiguous sense of affinity with Leventhal: “I don’t know what made me think you were an only child, like me … I often used to wish there were two of us.” (*TV*, 210) This comment suggests Allbee’s and Leventhal’s shared condition of doubling, and also Allbee’s longing to consider Leventhal as a type of brother. Allbee also acts with compassion towards Max on learning of Mickey’s death, and reprimands Leventhal: “I’m really surprised. Here this happens to you – your nephew. I’m in the same house and you don’t even say a
word about it.” (*TV*, 211) Even Allbee, who has already told Leventhal “Hot stars, and cold hearts, that’s your universe!” (*TV*, 174), is astounded at Leventhal’s impassivity. Allbee’s concern particularly contrasts with Leventhal’s behaviour given that the protagonist has avoided his brother since Mickey’s funeral. At the funeral Leventhal abandons his intention to scold Max when he identifies his brother’s grief. But instead he projects his inability to accept his own pain onto Elena, and assumes she blames him: “Leventhal does not pause to think that a look of bitter grief might easily be mistaken for anger directed at others.” For this reason, and also possibly because he is ashamed to face Max whom he is guilty of having condemned and of helping his family begrudgingly, Leventhal avoids the family after the funeral.

Velchaninov identifies himself with Lobov as he is simultaneously repulsed by the young suitor’s impertinence, whereas Leventhal accepts Max as his brother and the pair bond. Furthermore, Max emerges as an exemplar of human dignity, like the Pogoreltsevs in *The Eternal Husband*, except that it is during the plot of the novel that Leventhal’s relationship with Max progresses from estrangement, to recognition, and to a sense of potential profound companionship which deeply affects Leventhal. As someone in whom Leventhal can see commonality—shared history and heritage—Max represents a kindred spirit of sorts for Leventhal. Leventhal is able to identify Max’s pain at the funeral because it is on an immediately recognisable face:

> The sight of him hit Leventhal with a terrible force. He had been prepared to meet him in anger; his very first word was to have been a rebuke. But now, instead of speaking, he took in his brother’s appearance, the darkness and soreness of his swollen face, the scar at the corner of his mouth from a cut received in a street fight years ago in Hartford. Outdoor work had weathered him; the loss of several teeth made his jaw longer. His suit – it was a suit such laborers used to buy in his father’s store. (*TV*, 161)

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Max reveals a face of human suffering which Leventhal can accept. Later, at the apartment, he takes confidence in Max’s humility and seeks to confide in and convert Max to his point of view. Yet Max offers a new perspective which Leventhal cannot reject, and which subsequently broadens his reality.

Max gradually challenges all of Leventhal’s pessimistic presumptions. While Leventhal assumed Max was shirking family obligations to work out of state he now learns that Max has struggled to find work in New York and Elena has forbade him from doing anything illegal. Leventhal also learns that Elena does not blame him, and instead is upset that he has not visited. All the same, Leventhal tries to warn Max of the supposed madness of Elena and her mother. In a perfect example of his negative presumptions Leventhal, who incorrectly assumes that Elena’s mother does not understand English and therefore he never communicates with her, concludes that she is a vengeful anti-Semite from her silent stare and Elena’s vague comments that her mother was angry that she did not marry a Catholic. Max unequivocally dismisses Leventhal’s erroneous conclusions. He even reverses the accusations onto Leventhal: “I guess you think I should have married a Jewish girl.” (TV, 215) In other words, Max posits that perhaps it is Leventhal who is prejudiced: “you’ve sure turned into a suspicious character.” (TV, 216) As a result, the reader is “jarred into re-evaluating the import of Leventhal’s entire experience.”405 But more importantly so is Leventhal:

If he were wrong about Elena, thought Leventhal, if he had overshot the mark and misinterpreted that last look of hers in the chapel, the mistake was a terrible and damaging one; the confusion in himself out of which it had risen was even more terrible. (TV, 216)

Thus Max’s “balanced view has a sobering effect on the protagonist and turns his attention on himself.”406 In Hyland’s view Schlossberg suggests that “delusion

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405 Baumbach, Landscape of Nightmare, 49.
begins with self-delusion … [and] any attempt to deny one reality brings all other reality into question.”

Leventhal’s relationship with Max has challenged his perspective and “the confusion in himself.”

During his encounters with Max, Leventhal begins to feel sincere empathy for his brother. Despite making no claims of victimhood Max has suffered from economic hardships which have strained his family’s welfare and caused him to miss his son’s death. He wants to move the family to the town where he works for a fresh start but tells Leventhal: “I don’t expect much. I feel half burned out already.” (TV, 217) Leventhal tries to respond with disbelief before conceding: “There have been times when I felt like that, too … That’s a feeling that comes and goes.” (TV, 217) As Max departs on a subway train, Leventhal for the first time genuinely extends himself:

‘If you need me for anything …’ Leventhal said.
‘Thanks.’
‘I mean it.’
‘Thank you.’ He extended his hand. Leventhal clumsily spread his arms wide and clasped him. … ‘Call me,’ Leventhal said hoarsely in Max’s ear. (TV, 218)

The relationship is never cemented as a permanent bond because social and historical forces, symbolised by the subway train, carry Max away. Leventhal remains behind, still off the train of humanity, isolated and unable to manage his Allbee. But as Leventhal leaves the station he feels “faint with the expansion of his heart.” (TV, 218) Max’s dignified humanity begins to bring out Leventhal’s own, to widen his perspective, although there remains a great distance to travel: “his eyes moved from the glare of the cars flowing up in the street to the towering lights that stood far ahead, not quite steady in the immense blackness.” (TV, 218)

Leventhal is left facing the ambiguity of existence with a vision he suspects is faulty but which he is not yet prepared to abandon. In this episode, Bellow

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407 Hyland, Saul Bellow, 28.
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portrays the possibility of a relationship of human dignity which can develop in the face of adversity. Although this scenario resembles the function of Velchaninov’s relationship with the Pogoreltsevs in Dostoevsky’s novella, Leventhal and Max’s relationship is estranged prior to the period of the narrative and it is never entirely consolidated. Leventhal’s relationship with Max offers hope, but it is a glimpse which suggests the tenuousness of human bonds.

FAILURE, CONSEQUENCES AND AFTERMATH

Despite the important secondary relationships in both Bellow’s and Dostoevsky’s texts, their protagonists fail to accept new perspectives and thus react in even greater desperation to maintain their double-stance. The plot of each novel escalates in a cyclic pattern as the protagonist’s resistance increases his inability to understand and manage his double. The narratives of The Eternal Husband and The Victim thus build in tension as each protagonist’s situation deteriorates while he struggles to maintain his perspective.

In the relationship between sinner and sinned-against in The Eternal Husband, tension builds because Velchaninov refuses to acknowledge his guilt to Pavel Pavlovich which only increases his remorse. It is required of Velchaninov to transcend his vanity, admit his crime and embrace his counterpart. Often he has a temporary breakthrough of empathy but then recovers his composure. In The Victim Leventhal clings to his subjective interpretations to escape Allbee’s presence, but this attitude increases Allbee’s vehemence to be acknowledged. Leventhal resists responsibility which ironically is why he cannot perceive the truth and decisively manage Allbee. Leventhal must widen “his moral system into
an inclusive sense of humanity and a larger sense of human possibility.” In addition to the challenges to his vision from other people, Leventhal often appears on the brink of breaking through the barrier of his subjectivity to a greater perspective. Bradbury suggests that “the shape of the book is a development towards a perception that Leventhal cannot permanently adopt in his life, but only recall from time to time.” For instance, Leventhal has the nocturnal revelation that he knows “the truth”, that all people are connected into one living “soul”, a truth which he has escaped through laziness of the heart, and which he knows is a truth which he will not and does not remember under daylight (TV, 151). He senses the ambiguities beyond individual perception and that “the truth must be something we understand at once, without an introduction or explanation, but so common and familiar that we don’t always realize it’s around us.” (TV, 151-152) Similar to Joseph in *Dangling Man*, Leventhal’s vision has distanced him from broader truths. Yet broader reality remains intrinsically present, and therefore elements nonetheless emerge to infiltrate Leventhal’s outlook from a place to which they were seemingly banished.

Rather than openly confront their fallacies and their antagonists, Leventhal and Velchaninov resist opening up to the mounting evidence of a broader truth. Instead they focus on and relish an approaching, inevitable, fated climax. They are eager for everything to be revealed and yet they are unprepared to willingly consider this challenge themselves. Whereas in *The Eternal Husband* the antagonist raises the idea of “squaring accounts” (EH, 198), in *The Victim* Leventhal unites all his problems and sense of the inevitable under the banner of a “showdown,” a point where the pressure of the world will be such that he will

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408 Bradbury, “Saul Bellow’s *The Victim,*” 125.
409 Bradbury, “Saul Bellow’s *The Victim,*” 123.
have to confront “his fault.” \((TV, 141)\) Here Leventhal again appears to be on the brink of opening up his reality, and demonstrates greater insight than Velchaninov. The ensuing passage vaguely diagnoses Leventhal’s ordeal. Leventhal is aware that he has “used every means, and principally indifference and neglect, to avoid acknowledging it and he still [does] not know what it [is].” \((TV, 141)\) But “whatever it [is] that he resist[s]” has only increased and he recognises that “the moment [is] coming when his strength to resist [will] be at an end.” \((TV, 141)\) This passage is another example of the fact that although many of Leventhal’s insights “tend to be treated as emotional, visceral,” others “are allowed to stand.”\(^{110}\) Even so, like Velchaninov, Leventhal refuses to address the problem himself and approaches the climax of the narrative with a sense of predestination and an attitude of resistance.

The initial, verbal climax in \textit{The Eternal Husband} occurs when Pavel Pavlovich reveals, in contradistinction to all Velchaninov’s theories, that he naively and idealistically loved and still loves Velchaninov: “I always counted on you, that is, as on a man of great feeling … that is, I believed, sir—despite all, sir.” \((EH, 203)\) When Velchaninov refuses to accept that Pavel Pavlovich has come to him for anything but revenge, that Pavel Pavlovich is anything other than an “underground” man, Pavel Pavlovich insists: “I wished to make peace with you, Alexei Ivanovich!” \((TV, 203)\) Pavel Pavlovich desires what Velchaninov needs but resists by claiming Pavel Pavlovich has other purposes. In a further act of evasion Velchaninov tries to raise Liza’s death as a reason why he cannot forgive Pavel Pavlovich, but here Pavel Pavlovich will not submit:

\[\ldots\ \text{“how do you know what that little grave means here … inside me, sir!” he cried out, stepping up to Velchaninov and, with a ridiculous but terrible gesture, striking himself on the heart with his fist. “I know}\]

\(^{110}\) Miller, “Leventhal,” 360.
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that little grave here, sir, and we two stand on the sides of that grave, only my side has more on it than yours, more, sir.” (EH, 204)

Despite Velchaninov’s self-righteous efforts Pavel Pavlovich retains his emotional truth. Suddenly Velchaninov is faced with the fact that his attempts to condemn Pavel Pavlovich have failed, and that he is unquestionably guilty for his past acts.

The equivalent scene in The Victim consists of more preparation and detail according to Leventhal’s difficulties in discerning and admitting responsibility. Allbee appears at Leventhal's apartment and, like Pavel Pavlovich’s, his behaviour contradicts all the protagonist’s presumptions. Allbee is sober, clean cut, shaven and freshly dressed. His manner is calm and reasonable. Leventhal tries to attack Allbee but relents in light of Allbee’s composure. Allbee then proceeds to explain his philosophy which implicitly applies to Leventhal’s dilemma and surprisingly resembles Schlossberg’s even-handed words. Allbee’s conspiracy theories disappear and are replaced by an argument about favours and “influence”—which is how Leventhal was in fact rescued, thanks to Williston, from his difficulties finding work in the past. Allbee recounts a recent event that powerfully depicts problems associated with a resistance to empathy. In response to a man dying on a subway track a policeman ordered that no one approach. Everyone obeyed, resisting the impulse to help, as the man howled in pain, bleeding to death. Allbee comments on the bystanders: “They’re not for God and they’re not for the Old Scratch. They think they’re for themselves but they’re not that either.” (TV, 202) Following suit, Allbee explains his theory about the ability of people to change, noting Leventhal’s shock at his fresh appearance. Allbee suggests that repentance is essential in order to survive and evolve: “How?” Allbee rhetorically asks Leventhal, “I know. Everybody knows. But you’ve got to
take away the fear of admitting by a still greater fear.” (TV, 203) Allbee matches Schlossberg’s idea of human dignity in accepting limits and striving for greatness: “Even if I should miss being so dazzling, I know the idea of it is genuine.” (TV, 204) Allbee’s communication seems to culminate in the idea that there are elements of humanity which allow progress, and others which are destructive, and that both strains constitute human endeavour, making it necessary to repent for sins and seek improvement. Allbee’s vision here is superior to Leventhal’s as indicated by the fact that like Pavel Pavlovich, Allbee demonstrates a relative degree of compassion for his antithesis: “Well, I thought I would try to explain it to you.” (TV, 204) Allbee demonstrates his capability beyond categories as he argues for a broader human potential.

Though Leventhal, like Velchaninov, tries to undermine his antagonist’s ideas, he feels Allbee’s presence “like a great tiring weight.” (TV, 205) Similar to Velchaninov and Pavel Pavlovich’s symbolic impasse over Liza’s grave, Allbee returns to the cataclysmic initiation of the double relationship by demanding a return favour, a job interview. Here, Allbee offers exactly what Leventhal has claimed he requires in his relationship to Allbee, a concrete price for his ambiguous guilt: “I know you want to settle. And so do I.” (TV, 207) Allbee wants an introduction to Shifcart with the hope of entering the film industry. Yet when Leventhal, like Velchaninov, still refuses to admit any obligation, Allbee reacts in the same manner as Pavel Pavlovich:

He shocked Leventhal by clenching his fists before his breast as if passionately threatening to tear loose from all restraint. ‘I’m giving you a chance to be fair, Leventhal, and to do what’s right.’ (TV, 207)

Despite Allbee’s cogent attempts at reconciliation, Leventhal still resists acquiescing to any demands which entail accepting responsibility.
In the same scene Bellow differentiates his orienting framework from Dostoevsky’s. In what can be interpreted as Bellow acknowledging the commonality between his and Dostoevsky’s call for transcendence of narrow subjectivity, Allbee remarks: “It’s a Christian idea but I don’t see why you shouldn’t be able to accept it. ‘Repent!’” (TV, 203) Like Schlossberg, Allbee indicates that it is essential to accept life and humanity with its ambiguities, limits and potentials. Allbee, like the novel, delivers a “religious message,” but one which resists the Dostoevskian dogma of salvation: “I’m not religious or anything like that.” (TV, 204) In fact in something of a rebuttal of the spiritual option Leventhal turns to God not as a source of transcendence but of evasion. As Leventhal feels oppressed by Allbee’s argument and presence the text reads: “‘God will help me out,’ passed through his mind, and he did not stop to ask himself what he meant by this.” (TV, 205) When Allbee expresses that he has accepted the limitations of life, that “God disposes,” Leventhal almost asks for divine help by looking above as if to ask, “‘You follow? I don’t.’” (TV, 208) Here Leventhal wants God to defend him and provide something more-than-human, something determinable. Yet, Bellow appeals to another more basic course for transcendence, involving humility and acceptance of the unknowable.

In a series of penultimate confrontations with their doubles, Velchaninov and Leventhal experience complete role-reversals and moments of semi-repentance. Velchaninov has an attack of an ailment of the liver, symbolic of his suffering conscience. Helpless before Pavel Pavlovich who does not seek advantage but rather nurses him, Velchaninov admits “you—are better than I! I understand everything, everything … thank you.” (EH, 219) In The Victim

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Leventhal gradually succumbs to Allbee’s state from “his unwillingness and inability to deal with Allbee” (*TV*, 219). Towards the end of the novel Leventhal has shared many of Allbee’s experiences: he misses his wife who is temporarily absent, whereas Allbee’s left him and then was killed in a car accident; he has jeopardised his employment; through Allbee he has been unluckily picked out both randomly and deliberately for punishment; and he has faced death and his home is in disorder. In his exasperated state Leventhal also follows Allbee’s example as he turns to alcohol, the final characteristic he attributed solely to Allbee as a principal divide between Gentile and Jew. Leventhal attends a party and intoxicates himself into a “pleasurable” sense of “illumination” (*TV*, 223). Leventhal thereby undergoes as Baumbach identifies, “the ultimate degradation, a way of sharing Allbee’s private hell.”  

Consequently Leventhal merges with and senses commitment “to his victimizer-self.”

The next morning, in the aftermath of the crossover, Leventhal’s mental and physical conditions are vulnerable and he appears to be on the verge of a breakthrough. Leventhal senses that “he [is] like a man in a mine who could smell smoke and feel heat but never see the flames.” (*TV*, 232) For the first time in broad daylight, Leventhal approaches the understanding of his overwhelming connection to the world, even while it remains ineffable. Later, when he tries to suggest to Harkavy that Allbee’s demand for a job introduction arises from the belief that “it’s all a Jewish setup” he immediately wonders: “Why did I let it slip out? I’m not even sure Allbee means that.” (*TV*, 236) After all, Leventhal sought the same from Allbee and only obtained his job through a Gentile connection—Williston. With this thought, Leventhal demonstrates a greater sense

412 Baumbach, *Landscape of Nightmare*, 43.
413 Baumbach, *Landscape of Nightmare*, 43.
of self-awareness. However, he refuses to extend this understanding with more openness to Harkavy who, though initially outraged, then offers assistance (TV, 237). Now Leventhal’s closing ranks on himself includes, to a degree, Allbee and so he resists Harkavy’s “misguided good intentions.” Throughout this episode, Leventhal’s perspective remains limited and by the time he leaves he has returned to self-protectionism. He is angry and fearful of Allbee, resolving to give him an introduction in order to be done with him.

In The Victim a second volatile verbal confrontation occurs which parallels Velchaninov and Pavel Pavlovich’s confrontation over Liza’s grave. Leventhal returns to his apartment to find an excuse to withdraw from responsibility. Allbee is sexually engaged with a woman Leventhal initially believes to be the caretaker’s wife whom he himself has desired. Sexuality is another potentially destructive force which Leventhal tries to repress by projecting it onto his double and, as Clayton observes, “here again, Bellow expands on hints in Dostoevsky.” Mirroring one of Velchaninov’s avenues for attacking Pavel Pavlovich, Leventhal accuses his double of being a hypocrite for expressing sorrow over his wife and then womanising: “You’re not even human, if you ask me. No wonder she left you.” (TV, 245) However, just as Pavel Pavlovich asserts himself over Liza’s grave, Allbee fights back, calling Leventhal a manipulative cynic who “knows where to jab.” (TV, 245) Reminiscent of Velchaninov’s assumptions of a supreme bond with Liza, Leventhal presumes a position of sympathetic solidarity with Allbee’s wife as a fellow victim of the double. But Allbee recognises this and retorts: “She was like me. What do you think of that? We were alike.” (TV, 245) Thus, like Pavel Pavlovich, Allbee confronts the protagonist about his unfounded

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414 Baumbach, Landscape of Nightmare, 43.
415 Clayton, Defense of Man, 151.
assumptions—including his selective claims of familiarity with certain people—and his attempts at claiming higher moral ground. This episode brings Leventhal closer to Allbee and the truth, as it is presented to him that he, Allbee, and Allbee’s wife form a triangle of common links. Symbolically, Leventhal and Allbee have now shared the same bed, and claimed a sense of affinity over Allbee’s wife. Yet Leventhal violently expels Allbee from the apartment, after which he believes he has achieved victory and ended the ordeal.

**The Climax**

After Pavel Pavlovich nurses Velchaninov to some semblance of health, the latter falls asleep, setting the scene for a violent climax. Awakening from a nightmare in which he is judged and condemned by a crowd and Pavel Pavlovich, Velchaninov has the presentiment that he must urgently ambush Pavel Pavlovich. Instead he finds that Pavel Pavlovich is already above him holding a razor. Both men are suddenly attacked by what they have avoided all along: Pavel Pavlovich is overcome by his resentment of Velchaninov, and Velchaninov is attacked by his victim who now manifests everything he has feared and presumed. Because Velchaninov has not allowed any penance or forgiveness, the two embrace not in love but in hatred.

Eventually Velchaninov overcomes the physically smaller Pavel Pavlovich. Believing the ordeal over, Velchaninov decides that Pavel Pavlovich desired to murder him but did not know it himself because he is a deranged “eternal husband,” a “Schiller in the shape of a Quasimodo,” “a monster with noble feelings.” (EH, 228) The narrator diagnoses Velchaninov’s thought process: “the sick head of this former ‘man of the world’ worked in this way, pouring from empty into void, before he calmed down.” (EH, 230) However, Velchaninov has
still failed to accept his conscience and to his “unexpected horror” he wakes up the following day, knowing that he will “of his own free will, end it all by going to Pavel Pavlovich.” (EH, 230) Velchaninov still carries his sin and carries a need to repent to Pavel Pavlovich, but now he misses his double who has left by train, leaving only a letter written by Natalia and addressed to Velchaninov at the time that she ended the affair. In contrast to the letter Velchaninov received, in this unsent letter Natalia informs Velchaninov that Liza is his daughter. Upon learning this information, which proves his guilt together with the double’s knowledge, Velchaninov suddenly feels an empathetic bond with Pavel Pavlovich, imagining himself in his double’s place, discovering this letter after Natalia’s death:

‘He also must have gone pale as death,’ he thought, chancing to notice his face in the mirror. ‘He must have been reading it and closing his eyes, and then suddenly opening them again, hoping the letter would turn to simple blank paper …’ (EH, 234)

The letter suggests that contrary to Velchaninov’s “eternal husband” theory, Pavel Pavlovich may have discovered the affair only after Natalia’s death. Above all the letter brings Velchaninov face to face with his crime, and his judge. Pavel Pavlovich knew of the affair and he only sought to “embrace and weep” with his friend and wife’s lover (EH, 228). It is left to the epilogue to suggest whether this final revelation changes Velchaninov.

The narrative sequence of The Victim fragments the structure of The Eternal Husband’s climax. After he evicts Allbee and the prostitute from his apartment, Leventhal believes this is the end of his encounters with Allbee and expresses the same relief as Velchaninov after the violent struggle with Pavel Pavlovich. Leventhal is more self-critical than Velchaninov, and immediately after his first attempt at classifying Allbee and the woman’s behaviour he realises that his interpretation is inaccurate: “he was trying to transform it into something
he could bear. The truth was probably different.” (TV, 249) Even knowing he has misunderstood “the truth” and that he “handled things badly,” Leventhal returns to his methods of absconding from responsibility: “[Allbee] hated me. Enough to cut my throat … I had to do something with him.” (TV, 249) His spirit rises as he believes he has “got away with it again” and would have the reader believe the novel is drawing to a close as he reconciles with his wife, asking her to return, and has a warm final exchange with Max, admitting his errors. However, Leventhal’s refusal to understand Allbee, who stands in for Leventhal’s own repressed aspects, creates an even greater danger, precisely because he believes there is none.

Whilst the violent climax of The Eternal Husband occurs before the protagonist reflects back over and re-interprets the entire affair—before Velchaninov discovers Natalia’s letter—in The Victim it occurs afterwards. Believing he has ended and understood the saga with Allbee, Leventhal falls asleep and, as in The Eternal Husband, a threat emerges as if from a dream. Leventhal awakes full of the terror “released by the breaking open of something within him.” (TV, 254) He finds himself struggling to make the decision to act: he might face his fears or his potentially unfounded paranoia. After eventually launching himself into the kitchen he collides with Allbee who is crouched before the oven which pours gas. As the two struggle Leventhal thinks “I have to kill him now” but gasps:

‘You want to murder me? Murder?’ … The sibilance of the pouring gas was almost deafening.

‘Me, myself!’ Allbee whispered despairingly, as if with his last breath. ‘Me…!!’ (TV, 254)

In the climactic confusion the protagonist and antagonist blend. The exchange maintains a degree of ambiguity to further the sense that destruction of either
party entails the destruction of the other. In contrast to the climactic struggle in *The Eternal Husband*, Allbee overpowers Leventhal, but flees the scene without further violence. This climax has more symbolic complexity than the corresponding scene in *The Eternal Husband*. By failing to expand his understanding and acceptance of human nature Leventhal has literally and symbolically left the door of his home open to destruction—Allbee still had a copy of the key. The gas oven evokes the Holocaust, an event which, according to its symbolism here, threatens the lives, the humanity, of Jew and Gentile alike. Leventhal interprets Allbee’s action according to his own unacknowledged desires. Leventhal wants to kill Allbee as he believes Allbee seeks to murder him, because Allbee is the manifestation of Leventhal’s unacknowledged desires. In this act Allbee would be performing a murder which would mean the same to both characters, as he “would be destroying the objectification of his debased self, killing himself symbolically.”

Leventhal meanwhile experiences a desire to kill due to his fear of being killed. By acting, Leventhal saves Allbee and himself, ironically in an attempt to kill Allbee and save his own life: “If Allbee is Leventhal’s antagonist, and double, he is also Leventhal’s savior, the unwitting means to his redemption.” Just as their initial encounter in the park involves ironic chance, so does their violent climax, with vague impulses merging into a chaotic and united ball of catastrophe.

While the primary narrative of *The Eternal Husband* concludes after the violent climax with the twist delivered by Natalia’s unsent letter, in *The Victim*, the *denouement* is comprised of the violent climax itself. In both cases the climax

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416 Baumbach, *Landscape of Nightmare*, 45. Baumbach tends more to the interpretation that Allbee’s “suicide” primarily summates to murdering Leventhal, but the entire episode remains ambiguous and this interpretation is too reliant on Leventhal’s subjective supposition. On the most practical level it appears that as “parts” of each other any harm will be inflicted on both parties.

shatters the protagonist’s false sense of security. In *The Eternal Husband* Velchaninov’s failure to transcend his ego leads to lost harmony and redemption, but in *The Victim*, Leventhal’s failure to accept responsibility leads to all-encompassing chaos and a battle for survival with his double.

**The Coda**

Both novels contain a coda set several years in the future in which the protagonist encounters his double again, and which provides clues as to whether the protagonist’s outlook has developed. Among the critics who interpret change in Leventhal, there are those who consider the change justified, and those who do not. Other critics interpret the action contained within the coda as a demonstration of Leventhal’s inability to change or a display of an insufficient change. These varied responses attest to the ambiguity of the novel, the fact that Bellow portrays a situation in which there are numerous possibilities, to delve beyond fixed constructions towards a profound, never completely knowable, human existence. Comparative analysis with *The Eternal Husband* confirms this objective and provides clarity in regards to Leventhal’s final situation.

After “almost exactly two years” Velchaninov has returned to his former vitality (*EH*, 234). He is making use of the nation’s newly opened railways—a symbol of progress and choice in *The Eternal Husband*—to pursue his womanising habits. At one station he stops to decide whether to take a train to visit one woman or to continue to Odessa in the hope of making the acquaintance of another. At the station he spies another “remarkably pretty” object of desire, travelling with a “very handsome officer” who is drunk and causes a scene in

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419 Opdahl, *Novels of Saul Bellow*, 59.
which Velchaninov comes to the rescue of both (EH, 236-238). At the very moment when Velchaninov discovers that the woman in this scene, Olympiada, is Pavel Pavlovich’s new wife, Pavel Pavlovich suddenly rejoins his companions, bringing the doubles face-to-face.

Clayton claims that Leventhal and Velchaninov “encounter their doubles again, but greet them now as whole men who have regained their dignity.” However, in The Eternal Husband the text furnishes no evidence to support this conclusion; rather, as Lantz suggests, “in the story’s epilogue each character has again taken on the roles with which they began.” Fuchs also recognises that “Velchaninov does not seem to have changed” and “Pavel remains the eternal husband,” and Opdahl concludes that “Dostoevsky uses the leap in years to demonstrate the permanence of his types”, whereby the doubles are “still trapped by their respective characters.” The scene parodies through repetition the dynamic of the preceding plot. Any changes are superficial and ineffectual. Velchaninov assumes that the Officer is another Lobov-Velchaninov, Olympiada’s lover, and Pavel Pavlovich is now suspicious, but helplessly so, as the Officer remarks that Pavel Pavlovich is always checking for “lovers… under the bed” (EH, 240). Velchaninov proceeds to seduce Olympiada and humiliate the “eternal husband” even obtaining an invitation from Olympiada to come and stay with them. But Velchaninov’s conceited enjoyment is shattered when he tries to assert moral superiority, evoking Pavel Pavlovich’s murder attempt:

In an instant something strange happened with the two men; they both as if transformed, ...

‘If I, if I offer you this hand here,’ he showed him the palm of his left hand, on which there clearly remained a big scar from the cut,

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421 Clayton, Defense of Man, 142.
422 Lantz, “The Dostoevsky Encyclopedia,” 129.
423 Fuchs, Vision and Revision, 48.
424 Opdahl, Novels of Saul Bellow, 59.
Chapter Two

‘then you might well take it!’ he whispered with trembling and paled lips.

Pavel Pavlovich also paled and his lips also trembled. Some sort of spasms suddenly passed over his face.

‘And Liza, sir?’ he murmured in a quick whisper—and suddenly his lips, cheeks, and chin quivered, and tears poured from his eyes. Velchaninov stood before him like a post. (EH, 243)

Velchaninov, trying to force his conditions of a reconciliation, forgets that Pavel Pavlovich’s “side has more on it.” (EH, 204) Velchaninov remains estranged from his other half, his conscience, and repentance. As always, a confrontation with the truth shocks Velchaninov, affecting his decision on his choice of destination, but without permanently changing his attitude: “He did not go to the right, to his provincial lady acquaintance—he was much too out of sorts. And how sorry he was later.” (EH, 244) This final line symptomises Velchaninov’s narrowed subjectivity, which traps him in an unresolved cycle of unconscionable behaviour.

Opdahl asserts that Bellow’s coda serves to continue the emulation of Dostoevsky, to insist against despair, but above all to counteract issues of clarity: “Having denied Leventhal and Allbee any perception of their fault as a result of their experience, he uses an unjustified change in character to insure our perception of it. Yet during the primary plot the characters do occasionally perceive their faults, albeit without drawing the full implications. Allbee demonstrates a capacity to change in the scene in which he appears clean, respectable and calm, and Leventhal’s momentary glimpses of understanding depict him as constantly on the brink of transcending his problems. In addition, through the principal narrative adventure with Allbee, Leventhal is “stirred out of his ‘indifference’ and ‘recalcitrance’ into a sense of general injustice and suffering and thence to an awareness and confession of specific blame and

425 Opdahl, Novels of Saul Bellow, 59.
responsibility.” Furthermore the coda occurs several years after the main adventure, which itself ends immediately after a climax containing severe repercussions. These two points alone would justify a degree of change in the protagonist. Meanwhile, Opdahl’s claim that the changes are forced techniques aimed at clarity is counteracted by the discrepancy among critics which attests to the subtle ambiguity of the novel. To remain consistent with the nature of the novel, any change must be ambiguous, as Fiedler suggests: “Leventhal is realized with such passionate patience and skill, achieved with such scrupulous regard for detail rising from a sense that the meanings of each trivial fact are inexhaustible and mysterious.” Clayton argues that the change is not forced but “grows subtly out of Asa’s experiences: subtly, as in life.” Both characters appear slightly healthier, and Leventhal’s wife is pregnant. Although when it comes to “transcending his humanity, making his life meaningful … Leventhal still falls short,” he is more prepared to handle Allbee. Hence Fuchs notes that Leventhal has changed but the coda also “affirms the dubious character of the double.” Allbee and Leventhal are still aspects of one another, and though they are more amicable, certain elements remain beyond their grasp, perhaps forever.

In contrast to Velchaninov, a broader outlook accompanies Leventhal’s improvement in appearance when he is represented to the reader attending a theatre performance with his wife. Leventhal’s “consciousness of an unremitting daily fight” is “fainter and less troubling” and so he has “softened” with the departure of “something recalcitrant.” (TV, 256) In regards to success Leventhal no longer feels the guilt of having “got away with it” because so much modern

426 Tanner, Saul Bellow, 31.
427 Fiedler, “Fate of the Novel,” 527.
428 Clayton, Defense of Man.
429 Bradbury, “Saul Bellow’s The Victim,” 127.
430 Fuchs, Vision and Revision, 48.
society is “a shuffle, all, all accidental and haphazard.” Tanner finds it disappointing that “Leventhal still embraces a view of the world as pure chance.”\(^\text{431}\) However, Leventhal’s view of the world can also be seen as accepting the equalising force of the mystery of existence which is common to all humans. It is an improvement from his previous view that persecuting forces control his livelihood and that he is a natural victim who has escaped by sheer luck. He would simultaneously contradict this perspective by placing high value on himself and treating others, such as Allbee, as deserving of their downfall. Bradbury claims that Leventhal has a better “understanding about the nature of a general responsibility,” and he has radically changed in his view “of what constitutes humanity, and of what way the social system works.”\(^\text{432}\) Podhoretz similarly argues that Bellow is recommending that “anti-cautious impulses be acknowledged and accepted.”\(^\text{433}\) He also offers a reason why the ending may be read negatively: “that nothing more ambitious can be offered [perhaps] accounts for the pessimistic tone of the novel.”\(^\text{434}\) Here lies the crux of Bellow’s objective. To offer any more would require that Leventhal completely transcend his subjectivity which, as Joseph in *Dangling Man* discovered, is impossible. Leventhal appears to accept his subjectivity with its limitations and potential, thus reflecting Schlossberg’s conception of dignity, involving hope in light of limitations. Bellow would later regretfully admit that he limited the novel by refusing to go “beyond probabilities for the two men.”\(^\text{435}\) However, these remain the limitations of his characters and the orienting framework within which Bellow is working. He remains consistent with his appeal to a humanity which upholds

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\(^\text{431}\) Tanner, *Saul Bellow*, 36.
\(^\text{432}\) Bradbury, “Saul Bellow’s *The Victim*,” 122.
\(^\text{433}\) Podhoretz, “The Adventures of Saul Bellow,” 214.
individual selfhood and freedom by accepting the power and the limitations of subjectivity.

Leventhal also demonstrates awareness of the inherent problems of subjectivity and rigid interpretations of human existence. Leventhal considers that people often believe existence has made a promise to them, which he compares “to a ticket, a theatre ticket.” (TV, 257) This ticket might designate a place which the person considers an error, believing a promise was made for better seats or that they are out of place and should be in a worse position. Yet while those on the inside might claim injustice, Leventhal wonders “how many more stood disconsolately in the rain and snow, in the long line of those who could only be expected to turn away?” (TV, 257) Thus Leventhal reflects that the whole concept of “promises” or “tickets” is wrong:

> The reality was different. For why should tickets, mere tickets, be promised if promises were being made – tickets to desirable and undesirable places? There were more important things to be promised. Possibly there was a promise, since so many felt it. He himself was almost ready to affirm that there was. But it was misunderstood. (TV, 257)

As Chavkin recognises, the metaphor of a ticket suggests allusion to Ivan Karamazov’s rebellion against God in Dostoevsky’s novel *The Brothers Karamazov*.⁴³⁶ Ivan believes that “unrequited suffering” is “too high a price on harmony,” and so he declares: “It’s not that I don’t accept God, Alyosha, I just respectfully return him the ticket.”⁴³⁷ Chavkin claims that Bellow sides with Ivan Karamazov on behalf of humanity against God and Dostoevsky’s “unworldly attitude,” and therefore portrays Leventhal as “too weak-willed to move beyond his role as passive victim,” and therefore tending “on the verge of affirming a

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⁴³⁷ Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, 245.
transcendent promise.” Chavkin bases his argument on Bellow’s comments in “Where do we go from here?” In this essay Bellow notes that after Dostoevsky completed the chapter on Ivan’s rebellion he “wrote to one of his correspondents that he must now attempt, through Father Zossima, to answer Ivan’s arguments. But he has in advance all but devastated his position.” (33) Chavkin considers from this statement that Bellow agrees with Ivan and is “not sympathetic to [the] unworldly attitude” Dostoevsky is attempting to promote.” However, Bellow’s point is not concerned with Dostoevsky’s worldview but with the fact that the Russian maintained truthfulness to the realm of fiction where “views most opposite to the author’s are allowed to exist in full strength.” (33). In “The French as Dostoyevsky Saw Them,” Bellow similarly elaborates on this moment in Dostoevsky’s career, and commends Dostoevsky’s sense of artistic justice by avoiding “polemics” and forcing his convictions to “be tamed by truth.” Therefore Bellow by no means suggests that he favours Ivan’s “rebellious” love over Alyosha’s “unworldly attitude,” especially given that Ivan demonstrates harmful despondent pride reminiscent of the underground man’s. If anything, Leventhal’s flaws and suffering are closer to Ivan’s than Alyosha’s, as Ivan also fails to show compassion because of his subjective “rebellion.”

In contrast to Chavkin’s argument, Leventhal’s consideration of “tickets” can be viewed as expressing Bellow’s rejection of both Ivan’s rebellion and the relevance of spirituality to the novel’s core concerns. Bellow again differentiates his orienting framework from Dostoevsky’s even as he acknowledges the Russian author’s influence. By rejecting the metaphor of tickets Leventhal affirms that life

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and responsibility are more subtle and complex than Ivan’s black-or-white choice of either accepting a transcendent belief or rejecting innocent suffering. Thus Leventhal’s thoughts suggest that Ivan’s figuration of the choice facing the individual assumes a promise and therefore neglects and prevents not divine transcendence, which can also be treated as a presumed promise, but a more tolerant and inclusive consideration of human dignity based on accepting individual limits and potential. Chavkin asserts that Leventhal is Bellow’s vision of “twentieth century man” struggling to assert Ivan or Alyosha’s position. Yet Bellow does not endorse either of these positions and allows Leventhal to suggest a more subtle and complicated middle ground, one which does not make selfish demands or claim victimhood in the face of other forms of suffering.

In reflection of Leventhal’s encroaching sense of human dignity, there are modest improvements when he re-encounters his double at the theatre—a contrast with Velchaninov’s later encounter with Pavel Pavlovich. They are not close and Allbee remains, as Fuchs notes, a somewhat dubious figure, such that “Bellow, like Dostoevsky does not end with tearful wallowing in Bruderschaft ... the gain for Leventhal is ... not in a new relationship.” Leventhal is still not particularly fond of Allbee, and has made certain corresponding assumptions. He considers that they are now “even by any honest standards” and predicts that his double continued along the path towards self-destruction, although of this he “does not care to think too much, or too literally.” (TV, 258) At the same time he allows more space for doubt, writing to the Willistons in a “careful and moderate manner” and resisting the impulse to accuse Allbee of attempted murder (TV, 257). When he recognises Allbee on the arm of a wealthy, famous, but now

442 Fuchs, Vision and Revision, 48.
unemployed actress, Leventhal re-evaluates his predictions and assumes that Allbee has “gone places” and has “that woman under his thumb.” (*TV*, 259) Allbee approaches, declaring: “I knew it would be all right with you if I acted a total stranger, so it’s up to me.” (*TV*, 262) Although Leventhal would not have approached Allbee he does not mind the latter’s advance. Again they try to predict the others’ thoughts, but evidence mounts that Leventhal is no longer as anxious about Allbee’s behaviour and comments. Their discourse is more measured, and even when Allbee remarks on Mary’s pregnancy “I see you’re following orders, ‘Increase and multiply,’” Leventhal feels that “Allbee has no real desire to be malicious; he [is] merely obedient to habit.” (*TV*, 262) Furthermore Leventhal notes error in his initial judgement that Allbee has been successful as he senses “the decay of something … intimate” and notices the “terrible look of pain” in Allbee’s eyes at the mention of his late wife. In fact Leventhal actually empathises with his double: “Leventhal saw that he could not help himself and pitied [Allbee].” (*TV*, 263) Clayton recognises that “blame gives way to perception of a person and finally to identification,” even though the “change is partial.”

Thus Leventhal now has the capacity to identify Allbee as a suffering individual. Jew and Gentile emerge at the end of *The Victim* with a measure of dignity which derives from the fact that they no longer insist on exclusive categories of persecution and victimhood, but accept a vague human bond.

Similar to the coda in *The Eternal Husband*, an incident occurs which involves a discussion of the past violent confrontation, an awkward handshake, an unexpected remark from the antagonist, and an abrupt reaction from the protagonist. However, the incident differs in several ways in *The Victim*. Allbee

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443 Clayton, *Defense of Man*, 159.
The Education of a Writer

claims that on the night of their violent struggle he “wasn’t thinking of hurting” Leventhal. The latter laughs in disbelief but Allbee insists:

‘When you turn against yourself, nobody else means anything to you either.’ Bitterly shame-faced and self-mocking, he took Leventhal’s hand and pressed it. ‘But I want to say that I owe you something. I was trying to get around it when I talked about trying to kill myself only.’ He spoke with great difficulty. ‘I don’t want to exaggerate, but I don’t want to play it down either. I know I owe you something. I knew it that night when I was standing in your shower….’

Leventhal pulled his hand away.

‘What do you do out there, are you an actor?’ (TV, 264)

Allbee is referring to the fact that Leventhal allowed him to stay with him in his apartment for several nights. Bellow later complained that critics failed to recognise this handshake as a scene of reconciliation: “Allbee means that he was aware that Leventhal recognized his humanity at a time when no one else was willing to.”444 In other words Bellow considered the fact that Leventhal never succumbed to dismissing Allbee altogether, despite reluctance and susceptibility to the more-than-human, as a testament to an irrevocable humanity which the handshake confirms. Therefore the scene of the coda suggests that although the doubles still mirror each other in opposition, it is a subtle opposition with human acceptance. If this point is missed it is because Bellow keeps the scene in tune with the subtle ambiguity of the rest of the novel, avoiding any indication of the emotions of Leventhal’s response to Allbee. Leventhal’s action of pulling his arm away could suggest that he is unprepared for Allbee’s confession. His comment could imply that he is dismissing Allbee as an “actor,” or it could suggest that he is being ironic, now in possession of Schlossberg’s wisdom on the performance of life. In either case, Leventhal does not react erratically, he does not condemn Allbee, and the two appear to move towards a middle ground where they can recognise and respect each other’s humanity.

444 Atlas, Bellow, 130.
Chapter Two

The image of the train runs throughout both narratives as a symbol of modernity, social movement, historical forces, time, choice and opportunity. It appears in both codas in symbolic relation to the characters’ current positions. Velchaninov is thriving like the “newly opened railways,” a representation of “the marvellous and incredible that [is] being accomplished all over Russia,” but not on behalf of any moral or human advancement (EH, 235). Rather, Velchaninov takes advantage of the train to pursue his womanising, and therefore it is this same vehicle which carries away Pavel Pavlovich, Velchaninov’s lost opportunity for repentance. Allbee has earlier adopted the train metaphor when he wanted an introduction to Shifcart: “I’m like the Indian who sees a train running over the prairie where the buffalo used to roam … I want to get off the pony and be a conductor on that train.” (TV, 207) In the coda he returns to the analogy:

‘Conductor, hell! I’m just a passenger. … I’m the type that comes to terms with whoever runs things. What do I care? The world wasn’t made exactly for me. What am I going to do about it?’
‘What?’ Leventhal smiled at him.
‘Approximately made for me will have to be good enough.’ (TV, 264)

Both characters have come to a greater acceptance of the world and are therefore symbolically riding the train again, as passengers.

While in The Eternal Husband Pavel Pavlovich leaves Velchaninov behind by jumping onto a departing train whose bells are ringing, Allbee’s comments about “whoever runs things” are interrupted by the theatre’s bells:

‘Anyway I’m enjoying life… Say, I’ve got to run. Yvonne will send them out looking for me.’
‘Wait a minute, what’s your idea of who runs things?” said Leventhal.

Again the exchange is ambiguous and critics have made multiple interpretations. Chavkin suggests that Leventhal is as ignorant as ever. 445 Hyland claims

Leventhal’s question acknowledges that there are still unjust social forces controlled by people without dignity, such as Rudiger, and an individual must face them with dignity.\textsuperscript{446} Nilsen suggests that the exchange hints at “paranoia of anti-Semitism” and “a faint repetition of the old quarrel, but this time none of it is really taken seriously.”\textsuperscript{447} Indeed Leventhal’s question could be read with a tone of irony, and it could even be read as ironically connecting Allbee’s comments about “whoever runs things” with his anxiety about not vexing Yvonne, who Leventhal had earlier assumed to be under the thumb of Allbee. Above all their parting words acknowledge that certain questions will remain unanswered, while the best hope for the individual is to accept what he can with dignity. An usher then leads Leventhal and his wife to their seats through the darkness of the theatre. Allbee and Leventhal are not sitting together and there is a world of darkness between them, but they are comfortably back on the train, in the theatre, in the human fold. They can enjoy the “performance” that, as Schlossberg suggests, has the potential to make humanity human, and therefore great.

The ending of \textit{The Victim} exemplifies Bellow’s strategy of appropriating and modifying \textit{The Eternal Husband} in order to explore the relationship between two men who seem diametrically opposed and to therein expose their intrinsic similarities and the function of empathy. In \textit{The Victim} Bellow portrays the common human dilemma of the protagonist and his antagonist, and how their shared experiences locate a source for them to empathise with one another. Leventhal learns that he and Allbee share “the obscure intricacy of life, the universality of death, and a need to nourish the human in the world of mechanical

\textsuperscript{446} Hyland, \textit{Saul Bellow}, 29.
\textsuperscript{447} Nilsen, “Anti-Semitism,” 191.
Chapter Two

competition.”

Having “touched bottom” and suffered “their deepest fears before one another … Allbee and Leventhal see that they are both victims of the inherent confusion and mystery of existence.” Furthermore, though human suffering remains for those who stand “disconsolately in the rain and snow” (DM, 257), Leventhal and Allbee no longer make claims to such victimhood. This progression towards human dignity with self-accountability above self-victimisation offers hope to those who are suffering and therefore to humanity in general. Clayton asks, “How far can a man be held responsible for the unintentional consequences of his acts?” and declares that “Bellow never wholly resolves the question.” Bellow demonstrates in The Victim that this question cannot be answered, which is precisely what makes everyone responsible for humanity.

**PREPARING DIGNITY**

Bellow appropriates Dostoevsky’s artistic strategy from The Eternal Husband in order to delve into the external and psychological conditions of the individual’s relationship to his fellow man. Moreover, he extends Dostoevsky’s plot-structure to consider an ambiguous scenario with implicit significance for the questions of human empathy and responsibility raised by the Holocaust. From exploring the seemingly irreconcilable psychological divide between two characters who struggle to claim victimhood in order to comprehensively reject the other, Bellow conveys their common human condition, the fact that they are “aspects of one another” hampered by the same issues and narrow responses. The Victim reveals

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448 Bradbury, “The Victim.”
449 Opdahl, Novels of Saul Bellow, 67.
450 Clayton, Defense of Man.
that all human relationships are subject to the limits of individual subjectivity, and this creates the potential for division and acceptance, and, in the worst case, the destruction of humanity. The equal susceptibility of Leventhal and Allbee to victimhood and victimisation reveals their shared condition which contains the possibility for them to recognise each other as individuals representing humanity. Bellow manipulates and fragments Dostoevsky’s plot in such a way as to display in form and content the subtle and ambiguous bond between individuals, a bond which stems from the most essential limitations of individual subjectivity.

While the deliberate literary intertextuality of *The Victim* may be seen as a continuation of the pervasive influence of Dostoevsky in Bellow’s fiction, it also marks an evolution from *Dangling Man*. Bellow is less concerned with alluding to, imitating and repudiating his predecessors in order to define himself as a novelist, and more concerned with employing imitation to address important issues of the day. *The Victim* remains limited to predominantly conveying Bellow’s vision of individual freedom and selfhood through exploring the limitations of individual subjectivity in a crisis which threatens their destruction. Yet Bellow’s second novel is still more complex than *Dangling Man* and within that complexity Bellow more comprehensively divulges his sense of the avenues for individual fulfilment. In contrast to Dostoevsky’s demand to “embrace and weep,” Bellow calls for human dignity, which bestows greatness through the acceptance of the potential and limits of individual selfhood and freedom. In Bellow’s next novel, *The Adventures of Augie March*, this implicit call from *The Victim* is answered with an ingénue shout.
CHAPTER THREE

“EASY OR NOT AT ALL”: INGÉNU RESISTANCE AND AFFIRMATION IN THE ADVENTURES OF AUGIE MARCH

After the publication of *The Victim* Bellow wrote in response to Kazin’s thoughts on the novel:

There’s a great deal of truth in your remark that the book is harshly conceived. If I thought this harshness were a result of character or temperament I should be extremely disquieted. I understand it, however, as the result of an incomplete assimilation of suffering and cruelty and an underdevelopment of the elements that make for harmony. I sense them but I don’t see them as plainly as others and haven’t mastered them as elements of fiction. I could simply invoke them, state them flatly, but I’d feel false if I did.451

On another occasion Bellow admitted: “I will have to write a few more books before people begin to see what I was after in *The Victim.*”452 These sentiments anticipate Bellow’s novelistic approach in *The Adventures of Augie March* (1953): “my attitude there was—to hell with it, here I come, ready or not.”453 In his first two novels Bellow relies on the imitation of earlier works predominantly in order to discern certain associated dangers which threaten individual fulfilment. In *Augie March* however, Bellow sets out to portray a protagonist and adventures which affirm Bellow’s distinctly original vision of America and its conditions of individual freedom and selfhood. Augie hurdles over the dilemmas of Joseph and Leventhal and has an intuitive grasp of their lessons as he upholds with all his

453 Bellow in Roudane and Bellow, “An Interview,” 279.
being the sense of human dignity which Bellow traced in the previous two novels. In a similar fashion, *Augie March* represents a revolutionary milestone in Bellow’s writing career as he liberates himself from the limitations of his first two works and approaches the concept of individual freedom from an original and opposite angle.

*The Adventures of Augie March* heralds the arrival, in Bellow’s and most critics’ view, of his first mature work and his signature style which has come to be known as “Bellovian.” In this evolution Bellow abandons the dilemma plot and creates a scenario of continuous adventures, fuelled by a vision of ingénu marvel. In contrast to the “victim” protagonists of *Dangling Man* and *The Victim*, Augie March is a character with the strength to resist unnecessary limitations and to affirm his own sense of life. Consequently, the intertextual influence of novels which portray introverted, claustrophobic and despairing existential dilemmas is generally absent. In their place Bellow turns to works from the picaresque and Bildungsroman traditions that portray independent and adaptable protagonists who forge their way through seemingly endless obstacles. Moreover, the intertextual function evolves in relation to Bellow’s more ambitious task of originality. Bellow no longer relies on defining his own vision as a novelist through a process of imitation in which he examines, repudiates or appropriates earlier works of literature. Rather in *Augie March* Bellow turns to the novel’s intertexts for inspiration, insight and elements towards his purpose. Bellow now adapts, integrates and incorporates qualities, rather than scenarios, from earlier literature. As Bellow draws upon literature that he deems important to affirming his approach to the potential for individual fulfilment he creates an

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454 Bellow in Simmons, “Free to Feel,” 161.
455 See for instance, Atlas, *Bellow*, 188.
altogether original style of writing and delivers a rebellious, ingenuous and comic testament to individual freedom and selfhood.

This chapter examines the pivotal influence of the following works according to the ways in which Bellow interweaves them into the textual fabric of *Augie March*: Cervantes’ *Don Quixote* (1605, 1615),\(^{457}\) Henry Fielding’s *Joseph Andrews* (1742),\(^{458}\) Voltaire’s *The Ingenu* (1767),\(^{459}\) Stendhal’s *The Red and the Black* (1830),\(^{460}\) Mark Twain’s *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1885),\(^{461}\) and Sherwood Anderson’s *Winesburg, Ohio* (1919).\(^{462}\) The protagonists of these novels each possess distinct conviction and willpower that characterises their numerous adventures and therefore the style and form of their respective novels. Bellow draws on the relevant strengths of the protagonists of these novels and associated narrative approaches to create an original comic-ìngénu, a character who is comical because his ingenuous vision stands in stark contrast to the surrounding cynical attitudes and in fact proves to be more capable of surviving and affirming itself against the endless pressures associated with the pre-war years and beyond. Augie evades the potentially destructive problems of individual subjectivity and freedom, maintains his humanity, and literally writes his own history.

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\(^{457}\) Miguel de Cervantes, *Don Quixote*, trans. Edith Grossman (New York: Ecco HarperCollins, 2005). Further references to this novel are included within the text between parentheses with the abbreviation *DQ*.

\(^{458}\) Henry Fielding, *Joseph Andrews and Shemela* (London: Everyman’s Library, 1998). Further references to this novel are included within the text between parentheses with the abbreviation *JA*.


\(^{461}\) Mark Twain, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (London: Penguin Books, 1994). Further references to this novel are included within the text between parentheses with the abbreviation *HF*.

\(^{462}\) Sherwood Anderson, *Winesburg, Ohio* (New York: Dover Publications, 1995). Further references to this novel are included within the text between parentheses with the abbreviation *WO*.
Beyond *Dangling Man, The Victim, and Dostoevsky*

Hyland recognises that Bellow’s first three novels are “concerned with issues of identity, freedom and responsibility.” The difference between the first two novels and *Augie March* lies in the approach to these issues. As the titles *Dangling Man* and *The Victim* suggest, these novels each explore an extreme example of a crisis which limits and characterises the protagonist. In both cases Bellow implies that the protagonists have fallen prey to a narrow perception of the external world which causes ‘dangling’ in Joseph’s case and victimhood and victimisation in Leventhal’s. These situations threaten the protagonists’ selfhood, dignity and humanity.

Through his portrayal of protagonists struggling within dangerous dilemmas in *Dangling Man* and *The Victim*, Bellow implicitly indicates more viable alternatives for approaching individual freedom and selfhood. Bellow suggests the need for a degree of individual transcendence or expansion, which accepts the limits and potential of individual subjectivity. In *Dangling Man* Joseph attempts to rely solely on his individual reason to achieve a “separate destiny” (*DM*, 169). He fails to consider that freedom only exists relatively and that individual subjectivity cannot encompass or exert pure reason and freedom over reality. Similarly, in *The Victim* Leventhal fails to recognise a basic human responsibility beyond himself, and thereby within himself. Hence, in both novels Bellow suggests the need for a more open and responsible individual outlook. Further, Bellow asserts an argument for a human dignity which entails an implicit understanding of the problematic nature of individual subjectivity as a responsibility which is common to and constitutes humanity.

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463 Hyland, Saul Bellow, 31.
Chapter Three

In both *Dangling Man* and *The Victim*, Bellow’s diagnosis of the respective dilemmas is predominantly indebted to the influence of Dostoevsky. However, while the Dostoevsky texts upon which Bellow draws explore the individual dilemmas of flawed, confused and struggling protagonists to implicitly argue for the necessity of Russian-Orthodox spirituality, Bellow deliberately avoids suggesting a religious solution in his first two novels. Instead he endorses a non-religiously aligned path, centred upon human dignity independent of spirituality. Thus while Bellow relied on the Russian author’s strategies for exposing dilemmas which the individual may face, when he attempted to explicitly portray his vision of individual dignity and freedom in action he relinquished the example of Dostoevsky.

The novels in which Dostoevsky most comprehensively attempts to portray the validity of his orienting framework of fraternity and spirituality in practice are *The Idiot* and *The Brothers Karamazov*. Of these texts *Augie March* most resembles *The Idiot*, in that it too draws inspiration from *Don Quixote* in an attempt to create a character whose actions manifest an anti-heroic beauty capable of redemption. But Bellow’s novel has no affinity with the mood, dramatic structure, psychological intensity, tragedy and spiritual overtones of Dostoevsky’s novel. Bellow’s comments on *The Brothers Karamazov* shed light on why he was unprepared to accept Dostoevsky’s vision of a life-affirming character. In *The Brothers Karamazov*, Dostoevsky attempts to portray the application, survival and success of his philosophical system particularly through the characters of Father Zosima and the novel’s hero, Alyosha. In Bellow’s opinion, Dostoevsky’s notions of redemption never extend beyond a few central characters: “*The Brothers

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Karamazov is not brimming with lovable human beings. Here and there, yes—a child, or an Alyosha, or a Zossima.” Even the lovable characters are specific to Dostoevsky’s world; as Bellow asks, “Can Americans swallow Father Zossima?” In Bellow’s opinion, Dostoevsky’s solution, his conception of fraternity, is extreme because it “has to overcome, first of all, a heavy dose of neurosis, and secondly, a kind of deadly accurate sadistic insight into the motives of people.” This dynamic results in notions of “true—…Russian—identity…. Slavic nationalism and the anti-Semitism that goes with it.” Thus although Bellow owes a great deal to Dostoevsky’s insight into the perils of individual psychology he cannot accept the full extent of Dostoevsky’s alternative vision.

Bellow had to draw upon his own experiences and resulting outlook, influenced by a milieu altogether different from Dostoevsky’s, to create an estimable character whom Americans could “swallow.” Raised in the Chicago ghetto, Bellow claimed to have been shaped by two forces. Christopher Hitchens writes that at Bellow’s memorial meeting, Martin Amis “vividly remembered” Bellow telling him that “if you are born in the ghetto, the very conditions compel you to look skyward, and thus to hunger for the universal.” This “hunger for the universal” was anchored by the experience of the ghetto, and in a 1987 interview Bellow admitted that he “might easily” have followed his mother’s wishes and “gone on to the rabbinate if the great world, the world of the streets, had not been so seductive.” With fascination Bellow experienced the immense scope of

468 Bellow in Gray, White, and Nemanic, “Interview,” 214.
humanity in the ghetto, which functioned beyond the strictures of religion. Thus Bellow’s heritage and experiences separated him from Dostoevsky’s vision of humanity and universality. When Bellow spoke about the Slavic nationalism behind Ivan Karamazov as something which “[y]ou cannot expect a Jewish reader, however sympathetic, to grow enthusiastic over,” he concluded by saying: “Let’s descend from the heights a bit. My own temperamental preference is for comedy.”

His preference for comedy starkly contrasts with the Dostoevsky-influenced *Dangling Man* and *The Victim*, which Bellow in 1966 criticised as “plaintive, sometimes querulous”: “Obliged to choose between complaint and comedy, I choose comedy, as more energetic, wiser, and manlier.” Thus from *Augie March* onwards, Bellow’s unique vision emerges dominant.

*Augie March* is Bellow’s attempt to convey his own sense of an individual vision capable of withstanding and asserting itself against the hardships surrounding individual freedom in the modern climate which are exposed in *Dangling Man* and *The Victim*. As its title suggests, *The Adventures of Augie March* is not a novel about a situation which defines the protagonist. Rather, it is a novel about a character whose vision is too capacious for any specific situation, and who therefore creates adventure after adventure: “[t]he claustral quality of [Bellow’s] first novels gives way to a wide open world, depression to larkiness, obsession to ease.”

Augie embodies the avenues towards dignified human selfhood and freedom implicitly suggested by the dilemmas of *Dangling Man* and *The Victim*. He is characterised as an *ingénue*, with the “necessary trust” (*DM*, 190) which generates the energy to freely embrace experience and maintain his dignity. No longer relying on Dostoevsky’s skills for exposing the dangers of subjectivity,

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471 Bellow in Gray, White, and Nemanic, “Interview,” 214.
Bellow draws on his own unique experience and vision to create an altogether un-Dostoevskian comic-ingénu. When asked in an interview, “Does Augie March’s desire for fraternity differ very much from that which Dostoevsky describes in The Brothers Karamazov?” Bellow responded with an emphatic “Yes.” As Bellow turns away from the example of Dostoevsky in his attempt to display his own response to the obstacles to individual freedom and selfhood, he “descend[s] from the heights a bit” and adopts his own “temperamental preference” of comedy. Bellow creates a comic-ingénu who is able to assert and fulfil his sense of individual freedom and selfhood in the modern environment.

Another Experience

Alter writes that from Augie March on Bellow demonstrates “a sustained attempt to shake off” his sensitivity “to the often hypnotic influence of the preceding age’s great literature.” What distinguishes this attempt in Augie March from the rest of Bellow’s novels is that the author firmly rejects the influence of the dominant contemporary and immediately preceding modes of literature by turning to a more traditional form of the novel. Fuchs identifies that by “proclaiming his unity with the large, expansive quality of the older novel, Bellow is trying to bypass the modernist syndrome.” Bellow’s first two novels question the validity of certain presumptive notions related to the modernist syndrome, and this contributes to the groundwork for his third novel. In Augie March Bellow sets out to assert a plausible view of existence, which bypasses or simply refuses to accept the “modernist syndrome.” To do so he turns to works which often precede, or are simply unaffected by the modernist syndrome. Bellow rebels against his

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475 Bellow in Gray, White, and Nemanic, “Interview,” 214.
476 Alter, “Dissent from Modernism,” 95.
477 Fuchs, Vision and Revision, 13.
contemporary literary environment and draws on literature which places significance on other, contemporarily neglected qualities. Bellow comically refuses complaint through a rebellious comic character who refuses to complain.

Bellow commented in a 1953 interview that when he wrote *Augie March* he “kicked over the traces, wrote catch-as-catch-can picaresque.” Many critics relate *Augie March* to the picaresque form, and several scholars perform detailed analysis of this relationship. The picaresque form owes its appeal to “the extrovert and rather optimistic attitude the hero has to adopt, his independence and ingenuity, his marvellous resourcefulness.” Bellow employs these qualities as he “exhume[s] … the picaresque novel [to] serve the needs of the twentieth-century writer.” As in the picaresque, in *Augie March* the “narrative is a series of more or less loosely-strung adventures [and the] protagonist, although virtuous, is now and then literally a *picaro*.” However, Trilling also notes that the novel’s “affinity with the picaresque does not preclude its equally close connection with another genre, that of the *Bildungsroman*, for it is a novel of growth and education.” Many critics identify this dynamic in *Augie March*. Thus John

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480 Rosu, “Picaresque Technique,” 191.

481 Alter, “Dissent from Modernism,” 102-03.


Aldridge notes that although the “adventures are formed in the pattern of the traditional picaresque, [Augie’s] character demands exposition through the developing form of the more modern bildungsroman.” In other words the picaresque becomes, as Alter writes, “the vehicle for a Bildungsroman, a novelistic search for the true self.” These traditions function together in Augie March as Bellow portrays the progress of an energetically expansive character who holds a vision capable of adapting and evolving through numerous conditions and genres of experience.

Despite its similarities with both the Bildungsroman and the picaresque forms, Augie March conforms to neither genre absolutely, nor does it represent a compendium of the two. Augie March shares this equivocal quality with its primary intertextual influences: Don Quixote, Joseph Andrews, The Ingenu, The Red and the Black, The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn and Winesburg, Ohio. These works borrow elements from the Bildungsroman and/or picaresque but do not conform to a template form. For instance, Thomas Pughe considers that both Augie March and The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn are “hybrids: picaresque novels of formation – or anti-formation.” Augie March shares with these works qualities more specific than any particular form, as Bellow’s artistic ambition reaches for priorities beyond form.

Bellow explained his attraction to what he called “catch-as-catch can, picaresque” with the comment: “Today, the novelist thinks too much of immortality and he tries to create form … But you have to take your chances on

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487 Pughe, “Reading the Picaresque,” 60-61.
Bellow also described *Augie March* as a declaration “against the constructivist approach,” a movement “away from Flaubert, in the direction of Walter Scott, Balzac and Dickens.” Thus Bellow turned to the picaresque qualities which rebel against form. Bellow’s primary concern in *Augie March* is to portray an organically rebellious life-attitude in practice and so he selectively harnesses the relevant techniques of a number of earlier novels. Bellow does not simply adopt the elements of certain works to impose favourable qualities that ignore the modern condition. Rather, he identifies qualities absent in contemporary literature and turns to the elements of earlier works which highlight these qualities. Therefore, in *Augie March* traces of the pivotal elements of the works Bellow draws upon are primarily evident in their functional employment. Bellow picks and chooses those elements relevant to his construction of a fictional twentieth-century comic-ingénu.

Furthermore, Bellow applies these intertextual elements in conjunction with his real experiences of the qualities he seeks to affirm. Against accusations that in *Augie March* he had created “a naïveté or innocence of character who couldn’t possibly exist,” Bellow insisted, “I knew such people as Augie.” In a letter to Trilling he wrote, “I was thinking of some of the best men I have ever known,” and in the essay “I Got a Scheme!” he describes how he began the novel as a “speculative biography” of a childhood friend, a “handsome, breezy, freewheeling kid.” Schwartz claims that the theme of *Augie March* is America, and Bellow himself stated, “I wanted to be able to do American...
society in a way in which it had never been done before.”\textsuperscript{494} \textit{Augie March} reflects the America that Bellow knew, the people of the immigrant neighbourhoods of Chicago during the depression. In a 1984 interview Bellow described “the spirit” of this setting as once “remarkably wide-spread and now gone, leaving hardly a trace.” Against the calamity of the depression everyone was called upon to “pitch in and help” to turn everything “right-side-up.”\textsuperscript{495} Immigrants possessed additional energy through their malleability and self-fortitude to become American.\textsuperscript{496} Thus Bellow considered that Augie expresses something “probably very genuine … for adolescent Americans of immigrant background” of this era: “the desire for fraternity, the wish to be the lover of experience for its own sake, the lover of novelty.”\textsuperscript{497} In fact Bellow comments, “I don’t know whether a book like \textit{Augie March} is so much a \textit{Bildungsroman} as it is a piece of ethnography.”\textsuperscript{498} Like the literature Bellow draws upon in \textit{Augie March}, the “[modern theme] wasn’t the kind of thing that would come naturally to a kid who had grown up in the twenties and the thirties.”\textsuperscript{499} Even if, as Bellow states, Augie “wanted to enjoy his situation, wanted to play the American naïf” without acknowledging that there “was a price to pay,”\textsuperscript{500} this still accurately reflects a certain attitude of the day.

Bellow later criticised \textit{Augie March} for neglecting the “modern theme” and the protagonist for being “too effusive and uncritical,” but he still admitted, “it does reflect one side of my character.”\textsuperscript{501} Bellow’s childhood friend and fellow-novelist Isaac Rosenfeld wrote to him shortly after reading the novel: “It’s

\textsuperscript{494} Bellow in Grobel, “Saul Bellow,” 30-31.
\textsuperscript{495} Bellow in Gray, White, and Nemanic, “Interview,” 210-11.
\textsuperscript{496} Bellow in Gray, White, and Nemanic, “Interview,” 209.
\textsuperscript{497} Bellow in Gray, White, and Nemanic, “Interview,” 210.
\textsuperscript{498} Bellow in Gray, White, and Nemanic, “Interview,” 209.
\textsuperscript{499} Bellow in Gray, White, and Nemanic, “Interview,” 217.
\textsuperscript{500} Bellow in Gray, White, and Nemanic, “Interview,” 209.
an ocean-full of everything you’ve been & not been & dreamt & wanted, a tremendous spouting proclamation of someone struggling up from the depths.”

In a similar vein, Trilling wrote to Bellow’s editor: “it’s Saul’s gift to see life everywhere. He really believes in the living will.” Augie March is Bellow’s most revolutionary rebellion against the “modern theme” in favour of living dignified individual freedom and selfhood through qualities of innocence, perseverance, love, optimism and humour. To convey these qualities Bellow draws upon his historical and literary experience of them. In fact Bellow would occasionally compare his life to the works he draws upon in Augie March. Bellow constructs a work with elements of the adolescent-immigrant energy of depression era Chicago and the literature he had read, which serve to evoke the life-affirming, picaresque, comic-ingénue, adaptable and forever striving side of his vision as a novelist. The intertextual function of Don Quixote, Joseph Andrews, The Ingenu, The Red and the Black, The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn and Winesburg, Ohio suggests the manner by which Bellow attempts to demonstrate an alternative to the modernist dilemmas of individual freedom and selfhood.

The Texts

The influence of Don Quixote can be traced through Bellow’s sentiments when he wrote Augie March and through intertextual allusions. At the time when Bellow began the novel he often expressed frustration with the intellectual climate of “melancholy and boredom.” In one instance he wrote:

I’m out for sursum corda. Lift up the heart. Still, the bad tidings keep coming in and that makes it a kind of Quixotic job. There’s no other worth taking however.

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502 Letter to Saul Bellow from Isaac Rosenfeld quoted in Atlas, Bellow, 206.
503 Letter from Lionel Trilling to Pat Covisci, quoted in Atlas, Bellow, 202.
Though the term ‘Quixotic’ is widely used beyond reference to Cervantes’ text, Bellow was a great admirer of Cervantes’ work, such that shortly before he moved to Paris where he made the statement above and began *Augie March*, on a 1947 teaching trip to Spain, Bellow visited the birthplace of Cervantes, and referred to one of his students, Robert Johnson, as “the Sancho Panza of our Spanish summer,” thereby himself assuming the role of Don Quixote, which Johnson confirmed: “Saul tilted at windmills, and I came along.”\(^{506}\) Furthermore, one particular episode in *Augie March*, in which Augie attempts his own chivalric endeavour—hunting with an eagle—contains a series of allusions to Cervantes’ novel. Don Quixote’s energy and comedy relate to the imitative pursuit of greatness, on which Bellow commented in a 1973 interview: “[Don Quixote] says, in so many words, that the individual has to learn greatness from others, to which he will add his own.”\(^{507}\) The spirit and lesson of *Don Quixote* is evident throughout *Augie March* as Augie gains flexibility and strength in pursuit of a greatness which he sees as pre-existing.

Bellow admitted to Fuchs that “he had been reading … off and on during the composition of his novel,” Henry Fielding’s *Joseph Andrews*.\(^{508}\) The full title is *The History of the Adventures of Joseph Andrews, and of his Friend Mr. Abraham Adams. Written in Imitation of the Manner of Cervantes, Author of Don Quixote*. However, *Joseph Andrews* is not a parody of Cervantes’ novel “since parody of romances was already built into *Don Quixote*.\(^{509}\) Bellow turns to Fielding’s work as another, perhaps more extensive, example of a novel which insists “on a reality that [is] not heroic by means of a comedy that is an inversion

\(^{506}\) Atlas, *Bellow*, 123.


\(^{508}\) Fuchs, *Vision and Revision*, 69.

of the heroic.”

Furthermore, Augie belongs to the development signified by Joseph Andrews’ companion, Parson Adams, who is “part of an eighteenth-century trend to turn Quixote from a crack-brained eccentric into a ‘sentimental’ paragon whose oddities are the product of a deep and unguarded goodness.”

Both Parson Adams and Augie March represent an “upward reformulation, even an unparodying” of the “Cervantic original.”

Bellow also drew on the influence of Stendhal, a writer who “aspired to make himself a worthy heir of Fielding.” The influence of The Red and the Black is evident in a note in the manuscript of Augie March: “Doesn’t want to be what others want to make of him. Stendhal exceptional champion of this.” This description suits Julien Sorel, the protagonist of The Red and the Black, a book which profoundly affected Bellow as a young man, and which he often taught, once in a course entitled “The Ambitious Young Man.” Bellow “compared himself to Stendhal’s Julien Sorel” and admired the figure of this “young man from nowhere,” who resists being determined by others, a quality Bellow also claimed: “My resistance – and Augie’s – to what I was ‘born to be’; a son of my family like my brothers.” Drawing upon The Red and the Black Bellow passes this picaresque-quixotic quality of resistance and ambition on to Augie, though Augie remains enough of a comic-Ingénu to resist Julien’s ruthlessness and...
eventual tragic fate. The effects of these self-harming qualities appear around Augie in Bellow’s novel.

Although the full title of *Joseph Andrews* also contains “The Adventures of,” in an American context Bellow’s use invites comparison with *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. From the moment of publication reviewers compared the two, and subsequent criticism has followed suit. Furthermore Bellow appears to allude to Twain’s novel at precisely the point when his novel goes beyond Huckleberry Finn, when Augie goes to Mexico and experiences his first adult adventure. Pughe regards “Bellow’s novel as a successor of Twain’s.” The novels share much in common from the comic-ingénu protagonist striving for the minimal conditions of freedom and selfhood, to the structure of the novel around the protagonist’s development, and especially to the unique, shrewd, colloquial and genuine voice of the protagonist which delivers the adventures to the reader. Perhaps most importantly, Bellow and Twain transform the comic from “a satiric tool of castigation into a mode of seeing.” Yet Bellow portrays a protagonist who evolves in a different age and environment, and who evolves beyond childhood and the example of Huck Finn.

In several letters and interviews Bellow related *Augie March*, often negatively, to the “Sherwood Anderson ingénu vein,” with the “Gee whiz, what

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523 Pughe, “Reading the Picaresque,” 59.
524 Pughe, “Reading the Picaresque,” 60.
wonderful people what a mysterious world,”\textsuperscript{526} and the “‘Gee whiz, I’m just a naïve kid’ attitude.”\textsuperscript{527} Bellow’s comment that Anderson “overdid it,”\textsuperscript{528} mirrors his criticisms of \textit{Augie March} in his later life, although when he wrote the novel he was feeling inspired. Bellow keenly read Sherwood Anderson as a schoolboy,\textsuperscript{529} wrote a biography on him for the WPA (Works Progress Administration),\textsuperscript{530} and taught \textit{Winesburg, Ohio} in his first teaching job.\textsuperscript{531} According to Atlas, Anderson’s sacrifices in pursuit of his literary career “struck a chord with Bellow, like Anderson a self-proclaimed ‘nut’ determined to resist his family’s wishes and follow his vocation.”\textsuperscript{532} This theme is present in \textit{Augie March}, but the key similarity with \textit{Winesburg, Ohio} lies in the construction of an \textit{ingénue-Bildungsroman}-memoir. Both Augie and the principal character, George Willard, develop their perspectives through their independently affectionate relationships to the people they encounter. Moreover, George Willard appears to be the fictional author of the short story cycle later in life, and thus in both works a fictional protagonist-cum-author stands in for the author to portray and demonstrate through writing the process of discovering, creating and confirming individual identity.

Another work which Bellow appears to draw upon in \textit{Augie March} is Voltaire’s \textit{The Ingenu}. There are many similarities, often according to the fact that Voltaire’s novel portrays a stereotypical \textit{ingénue} and Bellow admitted he “felt like doing the ingenu, that’s all.”\textsuperscript{533} But there are also more specific resemblances.

\textsuperscript{526} Bellow in Simmons, “Free to Feel,” 162.
\textsuperscript{528} Bellow in Grobel, “Saul Bellow.” 57.
\textsuperscript{529} Neal, “Chicago Writer,” 257; Bellow, “Half Life,” 275.
\textsuperscript{530} Bellow in Steers, “Successor to Faulkner?,” 28.
\textsuperscript{531} Atlas, \textit{Bellow}, 62.
\textsuperscript{532} Atlas, \textit{Bellow}, 64.
\textsuperscript{533} Bellow in Roudane and Bellow, “An Interview,” 279.
Both Augie and the Ingenu are of European descent (Central or Eastern European Jewish in Augie’s case) and consider themselves ‘native’ Americans. Their formation in ‘wild’ America has facilitated the maintenance of a keen, natural, sensible perception of existence. Both characters learn emotional and intellectual lessons as they contend with cynical civilisation, especially when they both find Paris, their final destination, more a citadel of hypocrisy hostile to their innocence than a centre of culture on behalf of humanity. Augie and the Ingenu resemble one another in their trajectories, inherent common sense, development and articulation of compassionate human logic, and therefore The Ingenu serves as a useful comparison for Augie March.

Literary scholars to date have rarely performed extensive comparative analyses between Augie March and any one of the works that Bellow draws upon. The exception is Pughe’s “Reading the Picaresque: Mark Twain’s The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, Saul Bellow’s Augie March and More Recent Adventures,” which provides a detailed comparative study of the two novels.\(^{534}\) Literary scholarship also seldom compares Augie March with several of these works simultaneously. Alter’s chapter “Heirs of the Tradition” provides relevant and detailed analysis of Don Quixote, The Red and the Black, Huckleberry Finn and Augie March.\(^{535}\) However, Alter’s primary concern is the relationship of these works to the picaresque tradition, which means that the comparison between the texts, or between Augie March and its literary influences, is generally of secondary, complimentary, concern. Other critical studies tend towards minor coincidental comparisons, often in an attempt to demonstrate the picaresque and Bildungsroman elements of Bellow’s novel. Therefore they do not consider the

\(^{534}\) Pughe, “Reading the Picaresque.”

\(^{535}\) Alter, “Heirs.”
broader intertextual technique of Bellow’s novel, though some contain relevant insight, such as Trilling’s brief comparison of *The Red and the Black* and *Augie March*.536 There is thus opportunity to analyse *Augie March* in terms of these diverse literary influences and their intertwining role in an intertextual technique essential to the performance and modalities of Bellow’s ground-breaking novel.

It is possible that in *Augie March* Bellow draws upon other as yet undetermined literary sources. Moreover, many fictional and non-fictional literary works are mentioned in *Augie March*, but they tend to only function as indicators of Augie’s *ingénu* education and the historical weight with which his *ingénu* qualities must contend. Augie reads such works as *Tom Brown’s Schooldays* and *The Iliad* as a child, and later, as an adult reads such texts as “Dr Eliot’s Classics” and the works of the great utopianists, such as More’s *Utopia*, and “selections from St. Simon, Comte, Marx and Engels.” (AM, 356). Tracing the influences of *Don Quixote*, *Joseph Andrews*, *The Ingenu*, *The Red and the Black*, *Huckleberry Finn* and *Winesburg, Ohio* reveals fundamental aspects of Bellow’s artistic intentions and techniques. They can be traced through the general sentiment of *Augie March*, and more specifically, in the construction of a vision capable of withstanding the obstacles associated with individual freedom and selfhood, and asserting dignified human individuality.

**Augie’s World: Character and Environment**

The world in which the protagonist exists in *Augie March* is not any less challenging than the social environments of *Dangling Man* and *The Victim*. Augie

536 Trilling, “Introduction.”
lives in a competitive urban environment; beginning from and often falling
towards that lower end of the social scale which Leventhal fears. Augie
experiences the great socio-historical changes from the Depression through to
Joseph’s setting of World War II and Leventhal’s environment of the post-war
years. Historical and social forces constantly impact on Augie and the characters
who surround him. Furthermore, it is through the agency of the individuals
surrounding Augie who adopt, assert or rebel against such forces that he often
encounters anti-individualistic tendencies. Just as in his first two novels Bellow
portrays the manner by which, given the limits of individual subjectivity, people
may resort to idealising and distorting their reality and they may even attempt to
assert and impose their sense of reality onto others. Augie March was “originally
entitled Among the Machiavellians because of its theme of society’s concerted
efforts to trap and arrest the wary, resilient self.” 537 As Opdahl argues, the
Machiavellians in Augie March represent the very “harsh universe” against which
they are responding. 538 Augie is set “in motion” among characters who believe
they “see and understand the world as it is and wish to control it through
manipulation and deception.” 539 These Machiavellians, with their “gap” (DM, 141)
and attempts to be “more than” or “less than human” (TV, 119) threaten human
individuality.

Many of the literary influences in Augie March contain a similar dynamic
of an innocent character struggling through a world of desperate, cynical,
inauthentic, ineffective and self-righteous Machiavellians who represent society.
Sherwood Anderson demonstrates this diagnosis in the opening story of
Winesburg, Ohio. Entitled “The Book of the Grotesque,” it describes an old writer

537 Tanner, Saul Bellow, 12.
538 Opdahl, “Bellow’s Hidden Theme,” 7.
539 Hyland, Saul Bellow, 36.
who potentially represents the fictitious author of the ensuing short story cycle. This writer believes the world is made up of endless “beautiful” truths, each “a composite of a great many vague thoughts.” \(^{(WO, 2)}\) His theory is that “the moment one of the people [takes] one of the truths to himself, call[s] it his truth, and trie[s] to live his life by it, he [becomes] grotesque and the truth he embrace[s] [becomes] a falsehood.” \(^{(WO, 3)}\) Fielding also diagnoses the condition in which “the vain Man seeks Pre-eminence \((sic)\)” \(^{(JA, 198)}\) to the point where he can completely convince others, and even himself, of something he originally knows to be not true \(^{(JA, 279)}\). All of the works Bellow draws upon in \textit{Augie March} are filled with these “grotesque,” Machiavellian characters—Trilling describes them as “heroic personalities”\(^{540}\)—who vainly believe that they know \textit{the} truth, and therefore have the right to impose it on others.

A potent example of this grotesqueness occurs when individuals construct their self-worth according to will-power and ideals of greatness. In \textit{Augie March} Bellow draws upon aspects of \textit{The Red and the Black} to explore this issue. In “Summations” Bellow evokes Stendhal together with the ideal—the “truth”—of “total mastery,” found in the “great Faustian or Napoleonic or world-historical” views which now belong “to another age.”\(^{541}\) Yet, reminiscent of Joseph in \textit{Dangling Man} \(^{(DM, 89)}\), Bellow considers that from “the nineteenth century we inherited the notion of a personal parity of individual capacities or intellect with the full complexity of the world.”\(^{542}\) He then argues that “[t]his is the Napoleonic consciousness, which came forward to encircle the whole of civilization as an antagonist, an equal and opposite power.”\(^{543}\) Stendhal’s novel is the prototype

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541 Bellow, “Summations,” 186.
fiction in which the protagonist “directs his heroic ambitious will upon the world of power and glory.” Bellow explains that “the young man from nowhere,” imitates Napoleon in his ascent, “improvising as he goes, a prodigy of rapid adaptation whose career culminates in Napoleonic success.” Julien owes his “heroic” outlook to three works: “Rousseau’s Confessions …, [t]he collected bulletins of Napoleon’s great army and the St Helena Chronicle.” (RN, 22) While “Julien inherits an exaggerated sensibility” from Rousseau, from the influence of Napoleon “Julien sets out to become a Superior Man by following a career of ruthlessness, aggressiveness, and unprincipled scheming.” These ideals result in Machiavellian conduct, which Mathilde de la Mole recognises (RN, 430). Julien is in fact a noble soul manqué, because he denies his true nature, “his delicate sensibility,” (RN, 41) which is in fact the unrecognised germ of his ambitions. Julien’s success and eventual fall serve as a lesson to himself and the reader: “Julien is a self-made man who in the end does not care for what he has made of himself.”

Augie and his other literary forbears do not succumb to Julien’s ruthless ambition, but the works often contain equivalent figures of “heroic” imitation, as do Bellow’s first two novels. In Augie’s case this potential Napoleonism confronts and follows Augie’s trajectory. Trilling notes that while “Julien had the Napoleonic major to form his ideas of the great world Augie has the redoubtable Grandma Lausch,” the March’s matronly boarder during the opening chapters.

546 “Confessions de Rousseau … Le recueil des bulletins de la grande armée et le Mémorial de Sainte-Hélène.” (LRN, 66)
547 Alter, “Heirs,” 111.
548 (LRN, 547).
549 “qui n’est qu’ambitieux parce que la délicatesse de son cœur … ” (LRN, 88)
While Augie happily accepts Grandma Lausch’s rule, it is Simon, Augie’s brother and Doppelgänger, who, with his own heroic ideals, eventually becomes her true heir and a type of American Napoleon. Simon resists Grandma Lausch’s rule from early on because from his “hero’s library” (AM, 23) he asserts “some English schoolboy notions of honor.” (AM, 4) In this fashion Simon is comparable to Huck’s alter-ego Tom Sawyer, who insists on rigidly abiding by the rules of certain chivalric novels—even Don Quixote, which demonstrates the “heroic” inability to understand irony (HF, 22). The mention of “English schoolboy notions of honor” also draws parallels with the hard-boiled code in Dangling Man, and therefore with Hemingway. In an interview Bellow mentioned his attempt to shake off the influence of Hemingway in Augie March: “Hemingway’s personal attitudes intending to redefine American manhood were too constricting and too exclusive.”552 Simon demonstrates the consequences of these tendencies as he eventually becomes driven by success and power at all costs, mirroring Julien’s “unshakable determination to risk a thousand deaths than to fail to make his fortune.” (RN 26)553 As Simon ascends in wealth, Augie recognises that despite feigning indifference to Grandma Lausch Simon has absorbed her lessons and “both borrowed from her and burlesqued her.” (AM, 217) Hence Simon represents the Napoleonic consciousness, and Augie often evokes the analogy (AM, 29, 53, 251). It is therefore Simon who provides a similar lesson in Augie March to Julien Sorel in The Red and the Black.

A character of Napoleonic consciousness in Winesburg, Ohio, Jesse Bentley, wants “terribly to make his life a thing of importance” and regards others as “clods,” something “that he could not bear to become”: “He was a man born

552 Bellow in Grobel, “Saul Bellow,” 32.
553 “résolution inébranlable de s’exposer a mille morts plutôt que de ne pas faire fortune.” (LRN, 71)
out of his time and place and for this he suffered and made others suffer.” (WO, 32, 33) Julien and Simon similarly desire power in order to gain independence from what they envisage as a ruthless world. But the obsession to wilfully conquer the world is exposed as an impossible and vain quest which counter-intuitively makes Julien and Simon completely dependent on the world. Simon resorts to desperate and violent measures to maintain his fragile—deluded—sense that he is more powerful than the world. Furthermore Julien and Simon suffer as they deny and lose their real sensitivity, their internal self, to focus on their “forefront abilities” and meet their ambitions (AM, 110). Simon deforms and compromises himself to get ahead, and Augie evokes Machiavelli’s principal work: “[t]o make this of himself, the prince, [Simon] went through a metamorphosis.” (AM, 216) However, Simon never achieves a moment like Julien’s awakening at the conclusion of The Red and the Black. Augie provides the successful alternative image as Simon meets the full consequences of his actions, and becomes, in Bellow’s words, “the greatest Machiavellian of them all” and the victim in “a final, tragic” episode of the novel.554 Simon pragmatically marries into a wealthy family of which he quickly becomes the figurehead. He convinces himself that he can have everything he wants, including other women and “love,” despite the ruthless path he has chosen. However, after a messy affair Simon’s wife, Charlotte, demonstrates where the real power lies, leaving him heartbroken, submissive and disgraced. Augie learns of this outcome from Charlotte herself, who publicly insults Simon and divulges his secrets, including his desperate lamenting sense of defeat: “I might as well get knocked off. I’ve wasted my life anyhow.” (AM, 532-3) As Newman notes, “Simon finds in his own

power only emptiness.” Unlike Julien, who realises the emptiness of power and thereby achieves an independent death, Simon is beyond rescuing or redeeming his selfhood.

Although Julien and Simon exemplify the extreme condition of Napoleonic consciousness, *Augie March*, like its influences, is filled with “big personalities, destiny molders, and heavy-water brains, Machiavellis and wizard evildoers, big-wheels and imposers-upon, absolutists.” (*AM*, 524) Because the Machiavellians come to represent the very harshness—which equates to non-trusting inauthenticity—of the universe they are reacting against, any Machiavellian practice has a potential domino effect, leading others to resort to Machiavellianism to withstand external pressures. Joseph and Leventhal demonstrate how anti-individual and uncompassionate practices can cause a vicious circle of escalating and self-fulfilling reciprocity: “paper grass in the grave makes all the grass paper” (*TV*, 230). The Machiavellians stake their individual worth on a perception of the world as an inauthentic, unheroic realm, which necessitates their ruthless attempts to outmanoeuvre and overcome, and occasions the very environment they claim to perceive. They enforce a vision of a reality which suggests that superiority is essential and at the same time facilitates their claims to superiority.

As Sherwood Anderson’s definition of the grotesque suggests, the Machiavellians must feel that the truth they have chosen to live by is the one and only Truth. Therefore they need ‘others’ to maintain their perception of reality and their truths. The Machiavellians attempt to manipulate, convert or dominate people according to their truths, which further advances an environment in which

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The individual may resort to Machiavellianism to withstand domination. More often than not, the Machiavellians are so convinced of their subjective vision that they believe they are influencing an individual for his wellbeing, to reach his Machiavellian-defined potential or to avoid falling victim to the brutal world and other less ‘truthful’ Machiavellians. Figures from Don Quixote’s home village constantly try to deceptively entice him to return to his house and sanity; in *Huckleberry Finn* the adults of Huck’s hometown either place him in the custody of his malevolent father or try to impose hypocritical religiosity on him; Lady Booby banishes Joseph because it is impossible for her to consider that he is not attracted to her; and the Ingenu and his love-interest, Mademoiselle de St. Yves, are constantly manipulated and restricted, supposedly for their own good. In *Winesburg, Ohio* each story reveals the respective character’s truth as he or she tries to convince George Willard of its supremacy. *Augie March* could similarly be divided into episodes in each of which a particular Machiavellian tries to “adopt” Augie (*AM*, 103).

Augie understands the risk for those who cannot withstand or adopt Machiavellianism as he witnesses the abuse of the unfortunate, the helpless and the downcast during his brief experience in prison, and feels the mistreatment of his benevolently simple mother and mentally handicapped brother, Georgie. Grandma Lausch asserts her power over the March family on one occasion by insisting that Georgie be institutionalised. In a sign of the contagion of Machiavellianism, and that he is Grandma Lausch’s protégé, Simon treats her in a similar fashion when she becomes too frail to dominate. Furthermore, when Simon is in financial desperation, he even sells the house and institutionalises the March boys’ mother. Thus Machiavellian acts threaten the humanity of the
Machiavellians and their victims on several fronts in *Augie March*, as in many of the novel’s predecessors. It is the challenge of Bellow’s protagonist to demonstrate an alternative to Machiavellianism.

**Augie the Ingénu**

While like his Bellovian predecessors Augie lives in a world which poses multiple potential threats to individual freedom, he is able to both evade and refuse the worst consequences of those threats. Roth notes that in *Augie March* the “pervasive threat that organized the outlook of the hero and the action” in Bellow’s first two novels “disappears,” and Leventhal’s “bottled up aggression” and Joseph’s “obstructed will” now “emerge as voracious appetite.”

Hyland remarks that in contrast to Joseph and Leventhal, Augie “tries to locate his identity by constant experience of the external, social world, and this accounts for the open, inclusive form of the novel.”

However, Augie does not so much “try” to locate his identity externally as he intuitively locates where the possibilities of freedom and identity lie. Augie’s outlook derives from a comic-*ingénu* character mode, with attributes drawn from the protagonists in the novels to which Bellow turns. These earlier protagonists demonstrate a similar appetite for experience. Augie and his forbears stand in stubborn quixotic opposition to the corrupting influences of society through their expansive and energetic hunger, skill, strength-of-will and occasionally sheer naïve optimism. Their qualities distinctly contrast with their environments, while also ironically enabling the ease by which they continuously move through them. It is through their strong and contrasting personalities that these protagonists define their respective novels and fulfill Saint Real’s definition: “A novel is a mirror you turn this way and that as you go down

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556 Roth, “Rereading Saul Bellow,” 139-40.
Common to the picaresque tradition is “the motif of illegitimate birth,” which Alter claims functions firstly “to parody the mysterious birth of the traditional hero.” Evolution of this motif can be traced through Augie’s literary predecessors. The exception is Don Quixote whose madness renders his past irrelevant. In *Joseph Andrews* the motif becomes a farce, as a series of revelations continually shifts the social status of the protagonist until the novel’s conclusion establishes noble parentage. A similar discovery occurs at the beginning of *The Ingenu* when, after being raised as an orphan among Native Americans, the Ingenu arrives in France and discovers his relatives. When it comes to *The Red and the Black* the convenient loophole of a revelation of noble birth is teasingly parodied through unresolved hints that Julien may be of different and higher blood than his father and brothers, although these hints never reach Julian. The later texts exclude such romantic hints altogether, and both Huck Finn and George Willard are forced to reckon with their parental influences as they stand. With *Augie March* the motif has run full circle, as Augie himself fantasises about heroic origins, imagining that his missing father was a soldier—a symbolic figure of masculine heroism—only to be rebuked by Simon: “Like hell. He drove a truck for Hall Brothers laundry on Marshfield.” (*AM*, 9) Such a loophole is now pure fantasy, and the protagonist must directly face the harsh facts of his familial relations.

558 “Un roman: c’est un miroir qu’on promène le long d’un chemin.” (*LRN*, 134, 479)
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Alter writes that another function of the motif of illegitimate birth is to stress that “the protagonist is a man alone in the world without home or progenitors, not limited in his future career by the unknown nature of his parents.” Thus the *picaro* is born symbolically confronting the unknowability of modern society. Again, *Augie March* and the works Bellow draws upon progress this motif whereby the protagonist’s character and freedom emerges in relation to the uncertain circumstances surrounding his parentage. Joseph Andrews, Julien Sorel, Huck Finn and George Willard assume that they know the facts of their parentage, and this suggests limits on their future. Hence their independence derives not from illegitimacy but from their own initiative, as they are unwilling to submit to certain circumstances. Joseph Andrews’ noble character contrasts with his initial low social rank, and the eventual resolution confirms his higher birth. Stendhal goes further, as the fact that the issue of Julien’s parentage remains unresolved suggests that Julien’s opposition and ambition occur irrespective of his lineage. Julien, Huck and George make an intuitive and conscious decision to defy their seemingly pre-determined familial circumstances. All three lack a parental figure to whom they can relate, or who does not threaten their individuality. As a result the protagonists demonstrate quixotic strength in their endeavours to be, or make, themselves. They emerge as children of the greater world, with aspirations towards a more universal claim than that which is practised in their immediate surrounds.

Augie is similarly born into social, financial and familial circumstances which would seem to limit his opportunities and future potential: “[h]is social origins are even lowlier than Julien’s well-to-do peasant stock.” Augie’s father

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abandoned the three sons and their “simple-minded” mother \((AM, 3)\), and consequently Augie only learnt “object lessons” from his parents \((AM, 3)\). Grandma Lausch, who stands in for the absent father, delivers many of these lessons. She suggests that for Augie to escape his lineage—which in her view he should want to do at all costs—he must share her view of the condemnatory condition of his family. Grandma Lausch is not alone in interpreting for Augie the choice of two opposing trajectories, ruthlessness or helplessness, which is symbolically represented by his father and mother, and by his siblings. Augie is the middle child, literally and temperamentally between Simon, the “greatest Machiavellian,” and Georgie, the happy, loving, impulsive, mentally handicapped eternal child, who is unequipped to handle the world independently. Thus Augie, like Julien Sorel, Huck Finn and George Willard, is born into circumstances which some would have him believe determine his fate: “All the influences were lined up waiting for me. I was born and there they were to form me.” \((AM, 43)\)

Yet Augie neither envisages nor accepts the polarities of Napoleonic aspiration or helplessness. Bellow explained in a 1984 interview: “I think Augie’s attitude is: ‘Nevertheless, I am personally free. No matter how I happened to get here.’”\(^{563}\)

Augie seeks his own individual balance beyond, but not against, his situation.

Like his forbears Augie has the necessary endowments to survive and succeed. He has good looks which he employs to his advantage, particularly when, like Julien Sorel, he successfully brandishes numerous attires as he adeptly moves through the upper echelons of society. Augie also demonstrates flexible thinking, in line with Huck Finn’s shrewdness, which enables him to pragmatically identify, handle and evade dangerous influences and situations.

Like many of his predecessors Augie also possesses a natural intelligence: he is an avid reader, and he learns quickly. All of these assets imply that Augie has the potential to reach great heights.

Augie insists that irrespective of his circumstances he is free, and like Julien, is motivated by a quest to exercise his full potential. When Bellow wrote to Trilling that Augie was inspired by “some of the best young men” he had known, he added that many “found nothing better to do with themselves than Augie” and therefore they “reached the place where they fixedly doubted that Society had any use for their abilities.” These men succumbed to great “negativism” because they lacked Augie’s “fairly innocent singleness of purpose,” the quixotic insistence that he must have a worthy individual fate. This singleness of purpose is where Augie and Julien coincide, as they both exert quixotic will in their ambition. Their form of quixotism differs from that of Don Quixote and Parson Adams, and also George Willard who works as a cadet reporter and longs to be a novelist, because each of these characters pursues a career which perfectly expresses his personal singleness of purpose. Meanwhile, Augie’s singleness of purpose becomes a quest for such a career for himself, capable of fulfilling his desire for individual freedom and selfhood. Hence Augie, like Julien, derives great impetus in his defiant, searching ambition to meet his full potential.

Although both Julien’s and Augie’s “singleness of purpose” derives from a willpower founded upon naïve innocence, Augie’s ingenuousness prevents him from succumbing to Julien’s—and Simon’s—Machiavellian tactics and distortion to meet his ultimate potential: “Augie begins with the knowledge with which

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Julien ends his life—that the fruits of the will are ashes in the mouth.” As Aldridge recognises, Augie is pulled by two distinct objectives: “a life in which he can accept the full risks of his humanity, [but also] a specific fate and function, a destiny worthy of his talents and ideals.” In his own words Augie is after a “good enough fate” (*AM*, 28), which he also describes as “trying to refuse to lead a disappointed life.” (*AM*, 432) Such phrasing contains ambition bound by an acknowledgement and respect for limits to individual freedom. Hence Augie’s quest for a satisfying life-pursuit implicitly acknowledges that success is subjective, and there is a myriad of possibilities to consider. Augie is not intent on conquering the world, in contrast with Julien who stakes all his worth on societal success: to say “good bye to his career, to any future imagination: it was death.” (*RN*, 195-96) Instead, Augie’s ambition lies in achieving a suitable balance for himself in society, according to which he may fulfil his personal potential and character. So while Julien betrays his deeper self, and makes the “conscious decision to act the part of a hypocrite in order to get ahead,” Augie is too ingenuous to do anything which does not resonate with his natural sentiments. He is not after the fulfilment of his willpower; he is after the fulfilment of his freedom and selfhood.

When Augie’s friend Padilla expresses the idea that life should be approached with an attitude of “Easy or not at all,” Augie immediately embraces this “slogan.” (*AM*, 192, 436) This phrase struck a chord with Bellow, who as late as 1992 would raise it, in an essay about Mozart: “Easily or not at all—that is the

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566 Trilling, “Introduction,” xi.
568 “plus de carrière, plus d’avenir pour son imagination: c’était mourir.” (*LRN*, 269)
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truth about art.” In the context of Augie March the motto represents an elemental reconfiguration of the ingénu outlook. In Augie’s case the motto implicitly contains, as Pughe argues, the propensity for unity of “the soul and the mind,” similar to Huck’s unity of “heart and conscience.” Augie—similar to his ingénu forbears—will only pursue avenues that correspond with his innate sense of honesty, love and pleasure, what he understands to be the fruits of individual freedom and selfhood. His ingénu motto reflects the notion that if the individual is honest with himself and follows his sensibilities, he will acknowledge when an ambition or situation does not match his talents or heart—it will not be “easy.”

Don Quixote and Parson Adams have a clear doctrine through which they express and unhesitatingly enact their ambitions and character sensibilities. Without such a clear doctrine, in the world of the Machiavellians, Augie is considered hedonistic: “I didn’t have [Simon’s] singleness of purpose but was more diffuse, and anybody who offered entertainment could get me to skip and do the alleys for junk.” (AM, 29) Grandma Lausch critically tells Augie that though he is “just as smart as anybody else” he is “too easy to tickle”: “Promise you a joke, a laugh, a piece of candy, or a lick of ice-cream, and you’ll leave everything and run.” (AM, 29) In fact Bellow’s protagonist is following, through his “Easy or not at all” motto, a “singleness of purpose” deeper than the Machiavellians are able to recognise. Augie manifests a most basic level of ingénu resistance and rebellion against Machiavellianism, which finds expression and upholds individual human dignity through innocent—childish—pursuits of pleasure. Like Huck, Augie, “does not begin the novel committed to a cause,” because he follows the same source: “If Huck is committed, it is only to be faithful to the

571 Pughe, “Reading the Picaresque,” 65.
572 Levine, “Philosophical Fool,” 168.
impulses of his own heart.” Against the reading that Augie “resists every function,” Bellow wrote to Trilling that he “wished to say” that “[t]o love another, genuinely to love, is the inception of function.” Augie’s “Easy or not at all” motto implies a doctrineless doctrine through which he is able to remain loyal to his immediate ingénu feelings and therefore to himself and individual dignity.

Augie’s “Easy or not at all” motto guides his ambitions according to his inherent sensibilities, but also acknowledges an inseparability between the world and individual fulfilment. The ingénu engages with reality as the source of all potential, a myriad of possibilities for the fulfilment of the self through honesty, love and pleasure. The outlook corresponds to Bellow’s own experience: he explained in an interview that in contrast to those people who would claim to know the answers to life’s questions, he saw it as “something of a miracle”: “this existence is so engaging, so passionately interesting that I could never stand away from it sufficiently to take a sophisticated view of it.” Joseph’s quest for the “highest ‘ideal construction’” (DM, 153) can be considered an extreme case of over-sophistication which consequently condemns existence as unacceptable. In contrast, Augie and his ingénu predecessors reject the premises of the “sophisticated view” and retain the “necessary trust” to authentically enjoy existence. They often employ such terms as ‘fortune,’ ‘providence,’ ‘destiny’ and ‘fate,’ not so much because they believe in a higher power, but because they accept that ambitions can only be fulfilled if there is a cohesion between individual desires and external possibilities. According to the ingénu, reality and

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573 Alter, “Heirs,” 118.
individuality are equally marvellous because they are both equally free, and so there is no reason to fight either: “Easy or not at all.”

In their unsophisticated marvelling at the world and its diversity, Augie and his ingénu predecessors are not submissive, because in fact they resist the many forces which try to restrict their marvel, their ingénu imagination and sense of freedom. Augie asserts that no one can prove that his outlook and pursuit of a “good enough fate” which is “Easy or not at all” are invalid. Thus Augie demonstrates Bellow’s conviction that “man’s heart is … itself the origin and seat of importance … and to prove and proclaim with all one’s powers—that is the work and duty of a writer now.” 576 This assertion can be traced back to Don Quixote who comically suggests in word and deed—practising Knight Errantry out of its age—that legitimacy lies not in “sophistication” or cynicism, but in noble and compassionate ideals. Although generally speaking “the picaro’s imagination is pragmatic, the Don’s idealistic,” 577 Don Quixote’s idealism demonstrates flexibility in his shrewd and telling ability to compensate for contradictions to his fantasies, and hints that he is aware that he is enacting fantasy. Thus Don Quixote enacts what Augie and his other ingénu forbears inherently understand: that individual reality is subjective and any attempt at claiming “truth” is hostage to imagination. Therefore the only real validity lies in the potential for self-fulfilment. The ingénu regards the mystery of existence not as reprehensible but as the space for freedom and potential fulfilment, and intuitively heeds Schlossberg’s sentiments: “Choose dignity. Nobody knows enough to turn it down.” (TV, 120) Augie has the intuitive, pragmatic imagination

and sensitivity to maintain the belief in the possibility of dignified opportunities of “Easy or not at all” self-fulfilment—no one can prove the opposite.

In a 1966 interview Bellow claimed that his books ask: “How can one resist the controls of this vast society without turning into a nihilist, avoiding the absurdity of empty rebellion?” In his search for “other, more good-natured resistance and free choice,” Bellow admitted that “like most Americans [he] involuntarily favored the more comforting or melioristic side of the question.” Thus his only works which gave him satisfaction were those “in the comic form.” Augie must comically rebel on behalf of traditionally non-rebellious qualities, what Claude Rawson describes in relation to Fielding’s moral outlook as “positive forms” of human individuality: “natural decency, the good heart, openness, an instinctive benevolence, and sexual feelings which are affectionate and giving rather than merely selfish.” Such values are at odds with the general practices in each ingénue character’s environment and ironically require a naïve, stubbornly quixotic rebellion to survive. Therefore it is imperative for the protagonist to be, like Joseph Andrews, “slightly absurd, likeable though he is and certainly not a phoney.” Absurdity is relative and accordingly evolves across the works Bellow draws upon, and his own novel continues this evolution. In the “unparodying” of Don Quixote, who chooses an obviously absurd, contrarian role from a previous age as a ‘Knight Errant’, the later comic characters are not so much “mad” as they are ingenuous, with modest and unassuming expressions of positive ideals, which ironically still meet with as much difficulty as if they were practising Knight Errantry. With later comic characters such as Huck and Augie,

578 Bellow in Harper, “Art of Fiction,” 76.
579 Bellow in Harper, “Art of Fiction,” 76.
the *ingénu* protagonist rebels not on behalf of any obvious idealistic “commitment”; instead he rebels simply against unnecessarily limiting situations which do not resonate with his natural inclinations. Hence the absurdity is more obviously an indictment of the oppressive forces in the world. Bellow propels the dynamic a step further, since Augie wants “to be used” in society,\(^{583}\) without being disappointed in reality as it stands: “We may not be strong enough to live in the present. But to be *disappointed* in it! To identify oneself with a better past! No, no!”\(^{584}\) In a sense Augie represents the ultimate unparodying of Don Quixote in that he wishes to understand and meet reality on its present terms. Augie desires a compromise, a place in society, but the forces of control want more, compelling Augie to rebel on behalf of the most basic positive expressions of individuality.

**Augie Among the Machiavellians**

Augie’s comic rebellion manifests in his interaction with the Machiavellians who insist on their interpretation of the world and try to enforce certain limits. Augie engages on an unsophisticated level, individual-to-individual, very often taking things at face value and according to factors which resonate with his quixotic-*ingénu* quest and natural impulses. Like his literary forbears, Augie’s outlook constantly engages him in scenarios where he contends with and, to the reader at least, exposes the opposing and discrepant schemes of other characters. This dynamic creates the comic and episodic nature of *Augie March* as Augie ingenuously encounters a sequence of Machiavellian attitudes and maintains his integrity. *Augie March* furthers the insights—portrayed earlier in *Dangling Man* and *The Victim*—into the fallacies to which individual subjective presumptions

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can lead, but from a diametrically opposed perspective which avoids such pitfalls in favour of a more tolerant and noble humanistic view.

Common to *Augie March* and the comic works Bellow draws upon is the scenario of a protagonist with a particular vision and personal desires, which contrast with those of the secondary characters and lead to inevitable comic misunderstanding. As Pughe notes, the comedy of *Huckleberry Finn* and *Augie March* functions according to the discrepancies between envisioned reality and reality itself.\(^{585}\) Trilling argues that the comic-tradition harnesses the “created illusion of reality” to “affirm the importance of people who do not conform to the heroic tradition.”\(^{586}\) The very creation of a comic character, writes Trilling, asserts against the “heroic personality” who “will scarcely believe” what is being shown to him, that in fact “such people really do exist.”\(^{587}\) Furthermore, comic characters “believe in their reality” as much as the “heroic personality” does in his—“indeed they go so far in their presumption as to raise questions about the reality of heroic personalities.”\(^{588}\) Bellow commended the “brilliant perception” of Trilling’s reading of the heroic in *Augie March* but stated: “I was myself more conscious of satirizing this disagreement over the normative.”\(^{589}\) Against the “sophisticated” and “heroic” Machiavellians, the *ingénu* protagonist, through his ingenuous stubbornness, his innocence or madness, accepts the discrepancy between individual subjectivity and reality, and exploits its freedom such that he has the widest, and therefore the most insightful and capable approach to existence. The comic protagonist intrinsically harnesses and demonstrates the heroically comic potential of the normative.

\(^{585}\) Pughe, “Reading the Picaresque,” 61.
\(^{586}\) Trilling, “Introduction,” viii.
\(^{587}\) Trilling, “Introduction,” vii-ix.
\(^{588}\) Trilling, “Introduction,” ix.
As Trilling’s comment suggests, the “heroic personality,” who in comic works becomes the “Machiavellian,” the “Ridiculous” and the “grotesque,” is cynical and less inclined to believe or accept other people’s subjective realities. The comic protagonist exposes the comic foolishness of the “heroic personalities” because, as Paul Levine states in reference to Augie, he “is committed to the public, real world, while they are committed to their private worlds of imagination.” In their desire to fulfil a “heroic” ideal, or simply to feed their vanity and feel a sense of worth, the Machiavellians claim an ultimate “truth,” which they believe objectively interprets, but which in fact imposes on, reality. Fielding writes: “Great Vices are the proper Objects of our Detestation, smaller Faults our Pity: but Affectation appears to me the only true Source of the Ridiculous.” (JA, 8) According to Fielding, then, affectation reaches its ultimate ridiculousness not out of deliberate and conscious hypocrisy, but out of pride and vanity such that a person convinces himself of his own deceit and treats others accordingly (JA, 9, 259). The Machiavellians, and the antagonistic secondary characters in the works Bellow draws upon all fall prey to precisely this genre of affectation as their “truths” limit their vision. For instance, Augie’s friend Mimi envisages herself as an original, exemplary, expert and powerful lover to the extent that she refuses to take Augie seriously when he claims to be in love. The Machiavellians’ belief that they know more than others in fact restricts their knowledge and they become completely disjunctive with their own, and broader reality—they become grotesque. While they consider the comic-ingénu a fool, they prove to be greater fools because they consider themselves beyond foolishness—they deny created illusion in their individual realities.

590 Levine, “Philosophical Fool,” 172.
Contact with the innocently—or absurdly—honest, open and accurate outlook of a comic-"ingénu," exposes the secondary characters as parodies of what they believe or wish themselves to be. They would be condemned by their own standards, and hence Rawson notes of Joseph Andrews that “all parody risks damaging what it touches.” Yet the comic-"ingénu" exposes the discrepancy as he follows an opposing vision of reality, from which he identifies qualities in the Machiavellians which their Machiavellianism would deny. Unlike the grotesque secondary characters, the comic protagonist’s individual outlook and integrity derives from an innate acceptance of the differing circumstances and realities, the truths of other people. Furthermore, in the case of Augie March and several of its influences, the comic protagonist functions according to a sense that the human heart is the origin and seat of importance and thereby upholds the dignity of other people. As they accept—to employ Trilling’s phrase—“the created illusion of reality,” Augie and his comic-"ingénu" predecessors ingenuously accept, engage with and expose the real qualities in the secondary characters. As a result the secondary characters are exposed to the protagonist’s sense of the positive forms of individuality and human interaction. Thus the "ingénu" reveals the Machiavellians’ grotesqueness, their fragmentation, as he identifies a more positive version of their essential valuable self which they deny. The irony is that the naïve protagonist, whom the secondary characters would manipulate, limit or condemn, actually exposes the latter’s authentic, human and redemptive value.

The pattern according to which the comic character enacts another outlook of existence evolves in conjunction with an “unparodying” of Don Quixote across the works Bellow draws upon and into Augie March. Exemplary of the “created

illusion of reality,” Don Quixote demonstrates that his vision of Knight Errantry can even accommodate the behaviour of the cynical and scheming characters. While these characters try to exploit Don Quixote’s “madness,” he maintains the composure of noble dignity, and turns them into key personages of his own fantastical adventures. Parson Adams, on the other hand, treats the secondary characters according to his estimable—in the scheme of the novel—Christian-humanism, and thus bestows a redemptive quality on those who behave reprehensibly. Both Don Quixote and Parson Adams uphold traditional moral codes that reflect their intrinsic nature and according to which they compassionately acknowledge the value of every individual being. Later characters such as the Ingenu and Huck Finn uphold their and other people’s dignity through their lack of a code, their artlessness, and in some ways their lack of a “created illusion of reality.” In fact the evolution is made explicit in Huckleberry Finn, as Huck interacts with a Don Quixote equivalent in the character of Tom Sawyer. Tom Sawyer has read Cervantes’ work and constantly stipulates a proper, heroic way of treating each event. He serves as a contrast to Huck who “does not trouble himself much about purely formal definitions of truth or honesty,”\textsuperscript{593} which means his noble behaviour, his ingénu empathy, emanate from his character: “[c]ompanionship and affection play a very important part in Huck’s life, and consequently human beings are valuable creatures in his eyes.”\textsuperscript{594} George Willard also displays Huck’s childish, innocent, affection, but unlike Huck he is not directly threatened by the secondary characters, or on a quest for freedom which requires constant movement. Living side-by-side over a period of time with the grotesque characters, George’s affection takes him deeper into their

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\textsuperscript{593} Alter, “Heirs,” 120.  
\textsuperscript{594} Alter, “Heirs,” 118-19.  
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lives to discover the human behind the condition. In *Winesburg, Ohio*, the adventure is not so contained in the conflict between the protagonist’s reality and that of the other characters. Rather George creates adventures in his ability to discover the causes of the secondary characters’ grotesqueness through his *ingénu* approach.

In his relationship with the Machiavellians, Augie displays, like Huck Finn, innocent, unconventional, unsophisticated, undogmatic but stubbornly rebellious ingenuousness, and like George Willard, affectionate fascination. Yet while Huck and George both ‘unparody’ Don Quixote in that their quixotic objective lies in their lack of a specific objective—they simply wish to be true to themselves—Bellow takes the next step, as Augie actually aspires to discover an objective. Alter notes that Augie shares the “picaroon’s unquenchable thirst for experience, for a continual variety and multiplicity of experience,” but differs in that he “does not seek experience for its own sake but rather as a means for finding himself.” Augie wants a fulfilling role in society. Therefore the “Easy or not at all” motto derives from basic *ingénu* values, but is also moulded to the particular shape of Augie’s quest, what Bellow considers “the greatest human desire—not the deepest but the widest—…to be used.” Hence the emphasis on pleasure: “[i]f there were no will to be used the social process would be pleasureless, wholly pleasureless.” Augie seeks pleasure, like Huck, and understanding, like George, but is even more actively engaging of others in his quest to find a “use,” of which love is the inception. Bellow writes in a letter to

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Edith Tarcov, “To me Augie is the embodiment of willingness to serve.” Augie attaches himself to the Machiavellians, not just as a fascinated confidant or ally but as an apprentice, eager to experience their realities according to his own potential and intrinsic sensibilities, and to assess whether the fates they envisage for him are “easy” and “good enough.” In this manner Augie’s comic-ingénu quest strongly embraces the lives of the secondary characters and enacts what Trilling identifies as integral to Bellow’s “comic vision”: the belief that “people who live in ‘conditions’ really do live.” All the comic characters engage according to what resonates with their outlook, but because Augie’s outlook is particularly ingenuous, he extricates the essential human qualities of the Machiavellians.

The evolution of the comic-ingénu from Huck to Augie is evident in the relationship to criminality. In the unparodying of Don Quixote both Huck and Augie commit petty crimes. They inherently understand that an individual’s value is not necessarily relatable to his crime, his “condition,” and Augie mirrors Huck’s empathy “even for those whom society would condemn out of hand.” Yet while Huck’s greatest criminal act is an act of noble compassion—helping the slave Jim achieve freedom even though he has been told and believes that it is wrong and will send him to hell (HF, 50, 95, 208)—Augie’s criminal activities lack any such evidently noble motive. When he agrees to commit a robbery his reason is simple: “I didn’t say no to him” (AM, 114). When he accepts a job as a people smuggler—reminiscent of Huck—it is to gain financial independence, and because he senses no objection to the enterprise: “Hell why shouldn’t they be here with the rest of us if they want to be?” (AM, 162) The absence of any obviously

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600 Trilling, “Introduction,” ix.
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noble motive suggests that Augie’s recourse to criminality reasserts the most basic of ingénue values: willingness and freedom. As Bellow explained to Edith Tarcov, “Augie misses the love, harmony and safety that should compensate our obedience.”602 Leslie Fiedler suggests that Bellow “risked the final absurdity … . Huck Finn is transformed into the footloose Jewish boy.”603 Discussing Augie’s “bent for the illicit,” Bellow argued that “the effort to lead a normal, respectable American life,” to accept a ‘function’ “in which all higher disciplines die of disuse” is bound to make those “unable to accept so much control,” like himself and Augie, “outlaws.” 604 Augie’s noncommittal criminality reflects the impossibility for even the ingénue who desires to be used to meet society’s Machiavellian expectations and his own individual integrity. This goes beyond Huck’s empathy for criminals: as Martin Amis notices, in Augie March “[c]riminals are attractive because their sharply individualized energies seem to operate outside the established social arrangement.”605 Some Machiavellians involved in illicit deals lecture Augie about not wasting his life as a criminal, but he unflinchingly uncovers this hypocrisy as he regards the Machiavellians on an individual and personal level and understands, or even admires, their need to assert their individuality against certain conditions.

Like George Willard, Augie recognises that the grotesqueness of the Machiavellian characters is produced by their efforts to defy being reduced to a condition, to complying with circumstance, even as it becomes a war against the “normative.” In the final entry of The Journal of My Other Self Malte Laurids Brigge interprets the legend of the prodigal son as the story of “he” who learnt

that the love exerted by “them,” which he initially thought was a threat to his freedom, was in fact affection trying to account for and being inseparable from human freedom. George and Augie engage according to an intuitive sense of the relationship between love and freedom. They do not see the “grotesqueness,” or a “gap” in the Machiavellian conduct but rather an expression of individual freedom and selfhood. Instead of perceiving a Machiavellian trying to manipulate and dominate circumstances, they see an individual struggling with reality, needing to believe and express a truth, and wanting companionship. At one point Augie accepts Simon’s domineering influence, sensing his brother’s violent suffering: “it wouldn’t be enough to say it was from solicitude, it was downright fright.” (AM, 226) Augie also recognises that the Machiavellians act according to a type of love while they attempt to limit him to a particular function. Bellow wrote that “the man of will is easier to see clearly, and seeing clearly is a sort of love, I suppose.” He added that these men might be “dangerous in that their decision will be not to love,” but “that doesn’t prevent me from loving them, or my more affectionate characters from doing so.” Augie, like Bellow, “admires those who know their minds.” Even more than George Willard, Augie exposes the redemptive qualities of the Machiavellians because he can even love and admire them for their Machiavellianism. Though love may not be the inception of Machiavellianism, Augie recognises that it is the inception of their will and ambition, that it represents a refracted philosophy of his own quest not to lead a “disappointed life.”

Augie comes to admire the Machiavellians and insists on their possession of dignity. Augie ingenuously follows a form of human dignity and therefore

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reveals human dignity within the Machiavellians’ attempts to be more-than or less-than human: “Augie does not have to choose dignity; it is a quality of the world he inhabits.”609 In the Machiavellians’ efforts to refuse disappointment and disgrace, Augie recognises an ultimate expression of human nobility, and goes so far as to draw comparisons with “historical personages and large cultural examples.”610 Tanner considers that these comparisons to “figures from myth, history, and classical legend” serve partly, “perhaps, to suggest a humorous discrepancy, but more certainly to suggest that great men and significant events are not over for all time.”611 Augie makes this argument explicitly when he justifies comparing one character, Einhorn, to such figures as Caesar, Machiavelli and Ulysses (AM, 60) Not only does Augie reject “the view that man is in decline from some former golden age,”612 he “rejects the past as a golden age,”613 and instead, as Newman notes, “argues from a belief that human nature is a constant and that man therefore shares with others a common humanity.”614 As a great reader Augie approaches literature and history as he approaches the Machiavellians, with his ingénu lens, identifying synergies with his impulses. He compares the Machiavellians to great historical figures because he locates a common eternal struggle for human dignity. As Trilling writes, Augie may perform the comparisons with “an extravagant, an enforced, a slightly false ease,” but in doing so he brings all the characters “so to speak, into the full light of civilization and their reality is by that much still further enhanced.”615 So while Joseph in Dangling Man tells the Spirit of Alternatives that he would like to know

609 Fuchs, Vision and Revision, 13.
610 Trilling, “Introduction,” x.
611 Tanner, Saul Bellow, 53.
612 Newman, Saul Bellow and History, 27.
613 Fuchs, Vision and Revision, 13.
615 Trilling, “Introduction,” x.
“where those capacities have gone to which we once owed our greatness” (DM, 138), Augie, like Don Quixote, realises that the capacity does not change, only the illusion of reality does.

In Augie’s view a “universal eligibility to be noble” resonates in all people, though “[w]ithout a special gift of vision, maybe you wouldn’t have seen it in [the rest of] us.” (AM, 29) Augie perceives nobility in the Machiavellians and furthermore he judges their efforts equal to the feats of historical greats. In the unparodying of Don Quixote, Augie’s relationship to the secondary characters is such that he does not see them as fools for their illusions. He sees them as fascinating and thus they appear in the same light that Cervantes sheds on his protagonist: they emerge as extraordinary comic characters harnessing the human will and freedom to sustain a “created illusion of reality.” Twain creates a similar dynamic between Huck Finn and the also quixotically dangerous but loveable Tom Sawyer, whereas Bellow advances this quixotic element to cover the efforts of human individuals generally. Milan Kundera once remarked: “Don Quixote is practically unthinkable as a living being. And yet, in our memory, what character is more alive?” Through Augie’s comic-ingénu vision, Bellow attempts to bring the Machiavellians to this type of “living” Quixotic stature. Augie’s vision perceives and exposes the redemptive qualities of the characters he meets.

**Augie’s Circling Development**

Augie constantly engages with the Machiavellians due to his own affection and they engage with him for his attractive qualities: “something about me suggested

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adoption.” (AM, 151) Like George Willard’s, Augie’s eagerness attracts many parental figures. In fact, the Machiavellians are attracted to the very source of Augie’s independence, his free and open outlook. Like Julien Sorel, he has a profound and immovable inner strength: “there must genuinely be something there.” (RN, 460) Therefore, to feed their own vanity, the Machiavellians attempt to influence Augie, insisting that he needs their assistance to understand and succeed in the world. Indeed, according to their respective truths, the Machiavellians pre-envisage Augie’s function and set about manipulating him to reach what they decide is his destiny. The Machiavellians are inevitably disappointed when Augie resists their unrealistic expectations. They fail to realise that the quality that attracts them to Augie is precisely that which will resist compliance.

The limitation of Augie’s outlook, particularly in the first half of the novel, is that he fails to recognise what the Machiavellians ultimately desire from him. Eventually Augie is asked to make an unwelcome pledge of loyalty, or he behaves in a way which disappoints the Machiavellian, or he identifies a more appealing—fulfilling—avenue. In other words, Augie senses that he cannot meet the confines of the Machiavellians’ predetermined roles for him, and so he must move on. As is the case with his comic predecessors such a move comes easily to Augie because his engagement and disengagement derive from the same source of ingénue marvel, affection and independence. In a letter to Opdahl, Bellow wrote: “The affectionate characters are stubborn too, and go their own way. They have powerful will, and affection suits them because it removes obstacles and resistances.” Like Don Quixote who “always believed and thought that

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617 “Il y a là quelque chose de réel” (LRN, 581)
everything that happened to him had to be adventures and more adventures” (*DQ*, 559), Augie sees the endless array of Machiavellians as fascinating opportunities by which he may refine his sense of usefulness. As Ralph Freedman suggests, “[i]n the fashion of the picaresque *Bildungsroman* … Augie must subject himself to these various ‘teacher’ figures.”

Like George Willard, Augie eagerly engages with and learns from the many people he encounters and their disparate realities. His temporary subjection is the form of Augie’s adventure, which confirms or strengthens his expanding vision. Augie’s quest for a “good enough fate” which is “easy or not at all” leads him easily into a variety of scenarios, but also out again when the situation no longer meets one of these categories.

*Augie March*, like the works Bellow draws upon, follows a loose picaresque episodic structure, as Augie’s outlook draws him in and out of consecutive adventures. The episodic structure of Augie’s forbears’ stories tends to manifest a linear trajectory, comparable to Stendhal’s “mirror you turn this way and that as you go down a path,” reflecting the protagonist’s character. For Don Quixote the trajectory is the open road from his village, into a world “that open[s] wide before him, …apparently unlimited,” free for physical and imaginative errantry and the destination of glory. For Joseph Andrews it is the road from London leading to his home village, where he hopes to marry and achieve pastoral bliss. As a free drifter Huckleberry Finn’s road is the Mississippi river and his destination the free states and then the “Territory” (*AM* 281)—freedom. The Ingenu is driven by curiosity from America to Europe, and eventually Paris. For Julien the trajectory is, in Bellow’s words, “upward bound,” “to the top of

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society.” Winesburg, Ohio resembles more closely the form of a Bildungsroman as George Willard’s consciousness expands by learning the townsfolk’s stories until he is prepared to independently seek his career as a writer. There is in fact an ever-present railroad, which brings people to and from the town. It is only when George is prepared to take his first true step—“[a]ny Bildungsroman … concludes with the … first real step”—that he symbolically embarks on the train journey which ends the book. All of these characters have an established setting and objective which they move towards and according to which their character is challenged and defined.

Given that Augie’s quest “to be used” for “a good enough fate” that is “easy or not at all” is in essence a search for his own character, it is unsurprising that his trajectory, a clear action-manifestation of his character, is “diffuse.” (AM, 29) As Marcus Klein notes, though Augie is like Huck Finn because he “eludes” control and “won’t be determined,” the difference is that Augie’s “only territory is his personality, which he must keep free.” This duty is complicated by a longing to be part of society, his affection and desire for the “love, harmony and safety that should compensate [his] obedience.” Against the clarity of the “men of will” Augie is criticised for both his susceptibility and his inability to settle and accept a function, for his passivity and his opposition, for his love and flightiness. Some critics have expressed misgivings about Augie’s lack of commitment which

occasionally resemble the misgivings of the Machiavellians. Bellow admitted to Trilling: “I suppose I didn’t quite make [my point] convincingly.” Yet he still “thought of Augie in terms of strength, independence,” according to a dynamic which “speaks to the opposite of strength, to innocence as ignorance.” Augie March is indebted to the heritage of Don Quixote: “To take, with Cervantes, the world as ambiguity, to be obliged to face not a single absolute truth but a welter of contradictory truths.” In this world, “to have as one’s only certainty the wisdom of uncertainty, requires no less courage.” More than any of his literary predecessors, Augie reverses the heroic certitude and seeks to understand before judging. Augie only commits to each Machiavellian perspective for what it is—one of many. Moreover, like Huck, Augie is a “passive resister” as he never formally challenges the Machiavellians, instead accepting them for their claims of who they are. As Huck argues, “If they wanted to call themselves kings and dukes, I hadn’t no objection… the best way to get along…is to let them have their own way.” (HF, 126) Bellow writes that Augie’s “War of Independence,” demonstrates a type of passivity that “is so deep that we do not recognize that the active spirit underneath has meanwhile organized an opposition, an opposition that wears the face of passivity.” Augie’s affection and opposition are the same,

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629 Fuchs, Vision and Revision, 58.


632 Kundera writes: “Man desires a world where good and evil can be clearly distinguished, for he has an innate and irrepressible desire to judge before he understands. Kundera, The Art of the Novel, 7. In the French original: “L’homme souhaite un monde où le bien et le mal soient nettement discernables car est en lui le désir inné et indomptable, de juger avant de comprendre.” Kundera, L’art du roman, 17.

as Bellow indicated: “Some sense of life acts through [the affectionate characters], and that is their passion.” Thus in his passivity Augie actively “retains his own ideals, ideals founded on a larger historic vision of humanity.” While Augie appears uncommitted and directionless, his sustained—to employ Kundera’s phrase—“wisdom of uncertainty,” provides a more positive form of commitment in which strength is found in passivity.

No avenue is off limits to Augie as he seeks maximum experience. The “foot-loose Jewish boy” in Chicago, Augie is constantly on the move, physically, socially, educationally and in terms of the American road of “wealth.” He has all the shrewdness, naivety, ambition, quixotism and luck of his literary forbears. Like Huck he demonstrates an evasive element when he abandons a task and a drifting element between and over the general course of his adventures. He most resembles Julien Sorel through his skill at ascending into the upper echelons of society. But like George, Augie spends most of his childhood in the one town, Chicago, and thus his movement is governed by his interaction with the Machiavellians. Augie’s uncertainty means that his direction is forever switching within or according to many avenues of experience. Augie’s quest takes on a multi-dimensional dynamic as it is shaped by numerous influences in his search for a “use.”

This multi-dimensional movement has a shape which often corresponds to Augie’s characterisation as a piecemeal product and an evolution of his forbears’ respective journeys. In a letter to Monroe Engel, Bellow explained: “My own figure for the shape of the book is that of a widening spiral that begins in the

635 Newman, Saul Bellow and History, 37.
parish, ghetto, slum and spreads into the greater world.”  

Tanner notes Augie’s circling which clearly manifests in his parallel relationship with an eagle in one episode. This circling is shaped by the expansiveness of Augie’s constant search for a “good enough fate,” together with his pivoting fidelity to “Easy or not at all,” through which he tests the limits of his experiences. Geographically a series of adventures draws him incrementally further from Chicago. Another strain of exploits propels him into more elevated social positions. But with each adventure Augie reaches a limit and returns to the city of his origins for a period of recuperation and reassessment. As part of his “Easy or not at all,” ingénu nature, Augie always keeps an eye on his positive impulses and values, and this includes being true to himself and his origins. Frequently he is promised greatness by the Machiavellians in exchange for abandoning his past and family. But Augie reflects Bellow’s description of his own attitude: “To turn away from those origins … has always seemed to me an utter impossibility.”

For example, in one episode Simon goes as far as to dismiss his upbringing to impress the Magnuses—his new wife’s family (AM, 217-18), whereas Augie, like Bellow, risks being considered “archaic” and escapes “the horrors of an identity crisis.” Thus Augie’s ingénu quest not only sets the parameters of his circling, it also designates the pivot around which his journey circles.

The “widening spiral” also relates to the cumulative nature of Augie’s adventures. With each new adventure, Augie gains another truth, another perspective, and therefore a wider understanding of the world and himself. As Amis argues, if Augie “has a destination it is simply a stop called Full
Consciousness. A similar approach is evident in *Winesburg, Ohio* as George Willard alternately passively listens to or actively participates in the adventures of the townspeople. In both scenarios the secondary characters profoundly influence George and his self-awareness is directly related to his awareness of them as he develops the impetus to independently seek his own destiny. Augie’s relationship to the Machiavellians displays the same dynamic and each experience becomes a part of his life, and his character, enabling and defining his further expansion. However, as Pughe identifies, both *Augie March* and *Huckleberry Finn* interpret “roguishness and outsiderdom in terms of a quest for self,” such that they “fit the teleological pattern” of the *Bildungsroman*, but then turn the *Bildungsroman* “on its head” as the protagonist’s education in fact reinforces his original convictions, his character. Thus Augie’s experiences accumulate in conjunction with a growing awareness of his character. In fact at the end of an adventure Augie recalls the ideas of or returns to see several Machiavellians to keep in touch with their truth and its relation to him. Augie remains true to his origins and the diversity of his experiences as the Machiavellians contribute to his assessment of himself, and his past and future adventures. Thus Augie’s circling also reflects his cumulative educational trajectory as he branches out, internalises an experience which expands his character, and then expands out to the next adventure, more prepared with self-awareness each time.

On several occasions the Machiavellians provide Augie with direct insight into his character which, when he senses it is accurate, opens up a whole new degree of self-awareness. One crucial example correlates with a scene in *The Red and the Black*. In his pursuit of priesthood—because he considers the Church an

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642 Amis, “Chicago of a Novel,” 117.
643 Pughe, “Reading the Picaresque,” 60.
important avenue “to make his fortune”—Julien is mentored by the sincere and somewhat quixotic curé Chélan who compassionately recognises a truth behind Julien’s deceptive façade: “in the depths of your character a smouldering ardour which doesn’t signal the sort of moderation and complete renunciation of worldly advantages that are essential in a priest.” (RN, 48) Chélan’s concerned recognition moves Julien’s true sensitive nature—“for the first time in his life he could see that someone cared for him” (RN, 49)—and therefore the realisation that he has behaved with an ignoble, hypocritical and naïve attitude towards Chélan: “I’m a mere idiot.” (RN, 49)

The Chicagoan equivalent of Chélan in Augie March is found in the character of Einhorn. While Chélan suffers physical ailments Einhorn is crippled, and both have a quixotic, uncompromising dynamism with which they readily make enemies. Chélan refuses to abide by the rules of the dominant factions in the Church, while Einhorn, in his refusal to submit to his physical condition, sets about trying to manipulate the many avenues of power in Chicago: real estate, investment, illicit dealings, and other financial ventures. With the crash Einhorn, like Chélan when he is struck a power blow, finds himself barely part of the system to which he has devoted himself. For a period Augie acts as Einhorn’s arms and legs and receives a full dose of his wisdom: “I didn’t mind being Alcibiades, and let him be in the same bracket with Socrates in the bargain, since that was what he was driving at.” (AM, 75) At one point Einhorn, trying to discern Augie’s motives for the robbery, discovers something hitherto unrecognised by other people and Augie himself: “All of a sudden I catch on to something about you. You’ve got opposition in you. You

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644 “au fond de votre caractère, une ardeur sombre qui ne m’annonce pas la modération et la parfaite abnégation des avantages terrestres nécessaires à un prêtre.” (LRN, 97)
645 “pour la première fois de sa vie, il se voyait aimé” (LRN, 97)
646 “je ne suis qu’un sot.” (LRN, 97)
don’t slide through everything. You just make it look so.” (AM, 117, emphasis in original) Augie admits, “This was the first time that anyone had told me anything like the truth about myself.” (AM, 117) Not only does Augie feel this truth “powerfully,” he is “full of love” for Einhorn: “The discoverer of this, who had taken pains to think of me—to think of me.” (AM, 117, emphasis in original) Thus in similar fashion Augie and Julien receive glimpses of their true character through loving consideration of dynamic figures.

The results of these scenes of The Red and the Black and Augie March differ. In both cases the protagonist is deeply moved, but unable to completely confess his feelings. Despite his love for Chélan and recognition of his hypocritical behaviour, Julien remains completely faithful to his Napoleonic ambitions, and so he resists confessing the truth or drawing full implications. Augie also remains faithful to what is identified, but in his case it is because he ingenuously identifies it as an integral aspect of his character: “I was also wearing the discovered attribute, my opposition. I was clothed in it. So I couldn’t make any sign of argument or indicate how I felt.” (AM, 117) The truth, which Einhorn identifies, resonates through Augie’s whole being, including past and present experiences: “I never had accepted determination and wouldn’t become what other people wanted to make of me.” (AM, 117) With this truth in hand Augie is even able to assess its messenger: “Einhorn had seen this in me. Because he too wanted to exert influence.” (AM, 118) Thus in Augie’s case the revelation brings greater clarity to pre-existing sentiments or characteristics and moves him closer to “Full Consciousness.”

In his employment of the “widening spiral” analogy for the narrative structure of Augie March, Bellow continued by describing his intention that, with
the expansion “into the greater world,” Augie “comes to the fore because of the multiplication of people around him and the greater difficulty of experience.”)

There are several consequences of this intention. Firstly, Bellow admits, “[i]n childhood one naturally lives as an observer. And it may be that Augie doesn’t sufficiently come forward at first.” Also, as Augie’s life progresses his outlook exuberantly swells, and new challenges—sometimes as a consequence of his development—become all the greater. The model of the outward spiral reflects the fact that Augie’s experiences produce a desire in him to seek even greater challenges. While he was writing Augie March Bellow wrote in a letter to Monroe Engel:

> Sometimes I’m not sure that Augie will bear so much traffic, and again think that he must bear it, be sent through the bitterest of contemporary experience if my purpose is to have its real test.

Pushing Augie through increasingly greater challenges forms part of Bellow’s attempt to prove the validity and independent strength of his protagonist’s outlook which is demonstrated in an increasing number of scenarios. The more certainty Augie establishes the more his position of uncertainty is enforced, creating a paradoxical movement through which Augie’s development takes shape.

**Augie in Mexico**

On his path towards “Full Consciousness,” Bellow propels his protagonist across the threshold from childhood to adulthood—a development that does not occur in any of the novel's intertexts. A particular episode in which Augie travels to Mexico with his love interest Thea marks this transition and thereby occasions a series of first-time experiences for Augie: he leaves America, has his first adult

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love-affair, attempts to fulfill a heroic role and suffers profound consequences which propel him towards a new level of awareness. The episode contains allusions to and comparisons with the works which Bellow draws upon as he attempts to test and expand his comic-protagonist beyond these influences.

Augie’s love affair with Thea is foregrounded earlier in the novel. In Chapter Eight Augie chaperones Mrs. Renling, the Machiavellian wife of his employer, to her lakeside holiday resort where he falls in love with Thea’s sister, Esther. Both sisters suspect Augie to be having an affair with his patroness. Julien successfully seduces his patroness in *The Red and the Black*, while Joseph Andrews continually and unwittingly evades the advances of his mistress. Augie shows his *ingénus* colours through his outrage when he learns of the sisters’ suspicions. Yet in a fashion more reminiscent of Julien Sorel, Augie then calculatingly sets about charming the elder members of the Fenchel family with the aim of seducing Esther. When Esther rejects Augie Thea confesses her love for him, but to no avail. However, Thea leaves a prophecy—“You’ll see me again” (*AM*, 147)—and reappears in Chapter Thirteen, knocking at Augie’s door while he is in an intimate situation with his lover at the time, Sophie. He immediately falls for Thea and their affair begins.

Trilling and Fuchs both recognise an affinity between Thea and Mathilde de la Mole from *The Red and the Black*, “the aristocratic girl who dreams of great deeds and can love only a man ready to die for a cause.” Mathilde’s heroic inspiration is the legend of her ancestor, Boniface de la Mole. Boniface was executed after trying to “abduct his princely friends, who were being kept

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prisoners at Court by Queen Catherine de Medici.” (RN, 314)\textsuperscript{651} Afterwards, Marguerite de Navarre, Boniface’s lover, heroically managed to take possession of his head for burial (RN, 314).\textsuperscript{652} Against this legend Mathilde finds the aristocracy of her generation decadent, and she considers the handsome and talented Julien, her father’s secretary, “as a mysterious, dark rebuttal to the life of privileged boredom which surrounds her.”\textsuperscript{653} He appears a heroic figure in an anti-heroic society. But after she first dramatically confesses her love for Julien she feels humiliated for condescending to offer her love to someone below her class. Julien resorts to systematically seducing an older friend of the de la Mole family to make Mathilde jealous. In a climactic scene Julien seals his victory when he loses his patience and in an act of rage barely manages to restrain himself from slaying Mathilde with a sword. Mathilde, with her ideals of dying for a cause, for love, is won over by what she regards as an act of rebellious heroic passion. She severs her class ties and until the end of the novel enacts the part of the dedicated romantic and tragic lover to her hero, Julien: “Julien and I have no signed contract between us, no solicitor, everything is heroic.” (RN, 324)\textsuperscript{654}

While Esther refuses Augie in a similar style to Mathilde’s rejection of Julien, it is Thea who displays the dramatic strength of heroic conviction centred on love. Yet, like Mathilde, Thea battles her pride when she considers “her weakness in having come to him,” although “in her more confident moments she [thinks] of it instead as strength and [is] proud of it.” (AM, 317). Thea signals reservation about a future with Augie due to her “weakness for being successful in social circles.” (AM, 313) Thea is most reminiscent of Mathilde in her heroic

\begin{itemize}
  \item[651] “enlever les princes ses amis, que la reine Catherine de Médicis retenait comme prisonniers à la cour.” (LKN, 412)
  \item[652] (LKN, 412).
  \item[653] Fuchs, Vision and Revision, 68.
  \item[654] “Entre Julien et moi il n’y a point de signature de contrat, point de notaire pour la cérémonie bourgeoise; tout est héroïque.” (LKN, 424)
\end{itemize}
conviction in the power of love to transcend lesser values. However, Thea and Mathilde are not simply looking for a function with love as the “inception.” Love is their truth, their claim to heroic thrill and greatness, and Thea’s conviction gives her the power to “fight for them in the body.” (AM, 316) In Machiavellian fashion Thea’s outlook narrows to dismiss anything beyond the heroic potential of love: “All intervening things and interferences were of the same unreal kind and belonged—out there.” (AM, 311) Her truth sheds light on Augie’s character as she tells him he is too susceptible to flattery and the opinions of people who: “don’t want you to care for them as they really are … only as they love to be seen.” (AM, 318) But like the other Machiavellians, Thea attacks points which are precisely the foundation of her own relationship with Augie, while claiming that her truth offers superior exemption: “you don’t really matter to them. You only matter when someone loves you.” (AM, 318) Similar to Mathilde’s, Thea’s outlook demands a particular kind of behaviour to fulfil the heroic potential of love. Thea is someone “for whom life must always be a stretch of adventure, for whom love is a preparation for action.”

In what appears an allusion to The Red and the Black, Augie asks Thea if she would bury him if he died, and she replies, “Because you’re my lover. Of course.” (AM, 347) With her self-assured attitude Thea treats Augie in a manner reminiscent of Mathilde’s treatment of Julien: “as an inferior being, who can be made to love one when it suits.” (RN, 367)

Mathilde and Thea regard Julien and Augie respectively as possessing the necessary attributes, which, when combined with their truth of heroic love, will bring about greatness. Thea desires “the extremist test of her thoughts” (AM, 316), and expects Augie to accept her ideals and provide heroic results.

656 “en être inférieur dont on fait la fortune quand et comment on veut et de l’amour duquel on ne se permet pas même de douter.” (LRN, 475)
Julien and Augie both fall for their love interests because they identify qualities embedded in their respective quests. Mathilde represents a vain victory and status for Julien’s ambitions. When Julien seduces Madame de Renal, the narrator notes: “His love still stemmed from ambition, from the joy of knowing he, a poor wretch so deeply despised, could possess such a noble and beautiful woman.” (RN, 96) Mathilde presents a similar opportunity for Julien, with the added incentive that he will trump Mathilde’s aristocratic suitors and gain a higher social position. Fuchs claims that “Julien never really loves Mathilde; he uses her to achieve advancement in the world. For her part, Mathilde is at least romantically in love with the idea of Julien.” But this differentiation is inadequate given that Julien is also influenced by sentimental ideas by way of Rousseau, and hence each party loves the other inaccurately, not for who they are but for what they represent of a heroic ideal. Augie is susceptible to certain elements—though more modestly constructed—of Julien’s vain and idealistic love. Augie realises when Thea reappears that he is being offered an exceptional opportunity and he ingenuously lets himself go, “hurrying to fulfil the prophecy Thea Fenchel had made.” (AM, 310) While Julien turns his affair with Mathilde into a calculated manoeuvre, Augie “is the opposite … in his willingness—one almost says his eagerness—to conceive of love as surrender.” The reason is, as Fuchs notes, that “[i]n the absence of function, love becomes the sole object of headlong commitment.” Augie is above all attracted to Thea’s belief in the truth and power of love. He perceives that her conviction gives her every action grace, and he loves everything about her: “There were some people who were too slow

657 “Son amour était encore de l’ambition: c’était de la joie de posséder, lui pauvre être si malheureux et si méprisé, une femme aussi noble et aussi belle.” (LRN, 152)
658 Fuchs, Vision and Revision, 68.
659 Fuchs, Vision and Revision, 68.
660 Fuchs, Vision and Revision, 68.
in their life … or too fast. But as far as I was concerned, Thea had perfect life.”

(*AM*, 312) Through Thea’s clarity of vision Augie gains some of his own: “I had looked all my life for the right thing to do … but now that I was in love with her I understood much better what I wanted. (*AM*, 318) Because he searches for a function of which love is the inception, when Augie recognises that Thea’s conviction is based on love he surrenders to her power.

Augie admits: “I was never before so taken up with a single human being.” (*AM*, 316) As a result he narrows his own vision: “whatever touched me had me entirely, and whatever didn’t was like dead, my heart not giving it a tumble.” (*AM*, 315-16) In regards to Thea Augie only consciously acknowledges the things which he likes, and later admits: “I let a lot of things go past.” (*AM*, 315) But the very act of letting things go past demands a degree of awareness: “What I did at times realize was how I was abandoning some mighty old protections which now stood empty.” (*AM*, 316) From the beginning of their relationship previous warnings Augie has received—“because of my mother, and on my own account” (*AM*, 316)—sow some doubts: “such as whether I was in danger of falling in love to oblige.” (*AM*, 302) Even when Thea first confesses her love Augie realises he is “with someone extraordinary, delicate but full of strong nerve, with the recklessness that gives you as much concern as admiration.” (*AM*, 145) Thea plans to go to Mexico to finalise her divorce and also to train an eagle to hunt, in order to make money, because her family threaten to disinherit her. As Augie prepares to go along with this plan more hesitations arise: “as if I were a fielder in a demons’ game and would have to gallop here and there and catch a burning stone in the air.” (*AM*, 321) Yet he never thinks of disobeying or opposing Thea, justifying this to himself and others with the phrase: “I love her.”
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(AM, 321) Augie does not question whether he “should go with her,” he simply worries about how many “adaptations” he is “going to have to try to make” to fit in with her upper-class adventuring lifestyle (AM, 321, 320) When he considers the idea of training an eagle he admits, “my bottom scepticism of West-Side Chicago nagged after me and asked, ‘Nah, what is this!’” (AM, 326) But instead of acknowledging his uneasiness at sacrificing a great deal of his independence and even opinions to Thea, Augie attributes all his foreboding to “Mexico and the hunting.” (AM, 323)

As Augie leaves America for the first time, symbolic signs appear that he is beginning to shed his childish naivety. Bellow alludes to Huckleberry Finn and highlights the differences between the protagonists at this very moment when he takes Augie into unchartered territory. In The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, Huck and Jim, constantly naked, drift along timelessly, camping beside the Mississippi at day and rafting at night: “We had the sky, up there, all speckled with stars, and we used to lay on our backs and look up at them, and discuss about whether they was made, or only just happened.” (HF, 120) Thea and Augie, on their way to Mexico, camp by the Mississippi which Augie is “eager to see”: “I was terribly excited.” (AM, 326) As he and Thea lie “beside a huge tree,” he considers the richness of natural phenomena, “continuous and dense as the stars.” (AM, 326) The parallel with Huckleberry Finn ends in the next chapter with descriptions of not only Augie and Thea’s nakedness, but also more adult, non-Huck Finn, subjects, such as lovemaking, and jealous arguments. Also marking a contrast with Huck Finn, Augie reflects on his urban conditioning, which renders him unable to see as creatures do, “with their original eyes.” When he looks up into “any air” he sees the Chicago cityscape: “sometimes misery came over me to
feel that I myself was the creation of such places.” (*AM*, 330). Thus Bellow waves an *adieu* to childish innocence and in the ensuing episode Augie receives a baptism of fire with a disastrous love affair in a foreign country.

At the moment when Augie appears to lose his childish, evasive innocence, he plunges as an adult into his most absurdly Quixotic adventure. During this episode allusions to Don Quixote’s adventures appear as Augie embarks on a chivalric profession: “few people since the middle ages had manned eagles.” (*AM*, 336) Ample comparisons arise from the old weather-beaten horse Augie rides to the donkey-mounted side-kick—in Augie’s case the son of a domestic—and even to the setting in a Spanish-speaking country. But Augie resembles Julien Sorel in that the heroic feats he endeavours to enact are intrinsically at odds with their true nature. In this foreign terrain, and like Julien, Augie commits to an unrealistic and unfulfilling enterprise because he chooses a “love” without synchrony with his *ingénu* motto “Easy or not at all.”

Augie names the eagle ‘Caligula’, and it becomes the object through which Augie and Thea’s differences emerge. The features which Augie initially apprehensively identifies in the eagle match certain features present in Thea, such as dark eyes, ruthlessness and a naturally self-assured aura of nobility and power. At first Augie feels he is in competition with the eagle, a dynamic that mimics a scenario in *The Red and the Black* in which Julien Sorel feels threatened by one of Mathilde’s suitors, the Comte de Caylus, considered by Mathilde’s social group as “the eagle of their little circle.” (*RN*, 326) Yet it is Augie who trains the eagle, his first experience of training and influencing another being, and Caligula soon emerges as Augie’s “emblematic beast.”

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661 “l’aigle de ce petit cercle.” (*LRN*, 427)
662 Trilling, “Introduction,” xii.
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an appearance that seems designed towards a noble destiny and heroic capabilities. But both Augie and Caligula lack a killer instinct. Thea scolds Augie for empathising with the iguanas Caligula is meant to hunt, calling him a “screwball” who “gets human affection mixed up with everything savage,” which she claims leads to extinction (AM, 347). Caligula also fails the test of the iguanas, baulking when they bite him, returning to the skies to circle again. Thus Caligula, like Augie, accepts “training for a heroic function” but ultimately refuses the heroic role with “the calmest comic indifference.”

Bellow’s satirising of disagreement over the normative manifests in Thea’s outrage. Thea condemns Caligula as a “damned crow,” a “chicken,” and a “phony” for not living up to his pedigree, his natural destiny, while Augie now empathises with the “offended” beast, recognising a fellow creature unjustly condemned, who has “never been outside [a] cage since practically from hatching.” (AM, 331) He argues to Thea that Caligula “doesn’t have to be as terrible as he looks” because he is “still young,” and furthermore “he doesn’t feel in the wrong. He simply isn’t used to animals that fight when he grabs them.” (AM, 348, 355) The disagreement leads to the following insight:

I knew that, both in love, we were not quite the same in our purpose. She had the idea of an action for which love makes you ready and sets you free. This happened to be connected with Caligula. He meant that to her. But as she suspected now that he preferred meat to prey, perhaps she thought also, about me, whether I could make the move from love to the next necessary thing. (AM, 349)

Thus Augie begins to realise that for Thea love is not the end but the means to an end. If the end is not achieved then the love or the object of love is condemned. So instead of being appreciated for who they are, for their character shaped by

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663 Trilling, “Introduction,” xii.
664 Letter to Lionel Trilling, October 11, 1953, Barrytown, N.Y., Taylor, Letters, 123.
their experiences, Augie and Caligula are expected to fulfil myths of essential heroism.

Realising that he and Caligula share the same lot, Augie insists on one more hunting attempt, and at the moment of truth he experiences an epiphany and quixotic inspiration about what it means to hunt with “a living creature you had to know how to teach because you’d inferred that all intelligences from the weakest blink to the first-magnitude stars were essentially the same.” (AM, 360) In an allusion to the common outcome of most of Don Quixote’s adventures, Augie’s escapade ends with master and horse sprawled over and the hero minus several teeth: in one particular episode, for example, Don Quixote attacks a group of shepherds and sheep and loses his teeth, thus earning the title *The Knight of the Sorrowful Face* (AM, 362; DQ, 130, 139). But unlike Don Quixote in all but his final duel, Augie does not bounce back from *his* chivalric escapade: he cracks his skull, his horse breaks its leg and is shot, and Caligula is sent off in a cage, “the white patch of maturity … beginning to show on his head.” (AM, 363) Now an adult facing an adult situation and test, there is no larking away unscathed from this failure, which marks a fall from Eden as Thea turns to hunting and storing vipers in the house and Augie turns to alcohol and gambling. Augie feels the weight of Thea’s disappointment, but resolves that Caligula was “enough of a trial” and is unwilling to join the snake-enterprise: “I knew at last that definitely was one thing that was not for me.” (AM, 370) As usual Augie remains passive in his opposition, until another opportunity arises. Aware from her own success in seducing Augie who “can’t stand up to flattery,” Thea forewarns his eventual betrayal, unwittingly recognising that Augie’s independent strength is related to his easy love. (AM, 317, 319)
Stella, the actress-girlfriend of a volatile man, Oliver, provides Augie with the attractive opportunity which fulfils Thea’s prophecy. She offers sentiments Augie can relate to and an opportunity to test himself when she requests assistance to escape her partner: “you and I are the kind of people other people are always trying to fit into their schemes. So suppose we don’t play along, then what?” (AM, 384) Stella appeals to Augie as Jim does to Huck, as fellow creatures of freedom. In a further parallel with Huck and Jim, Augie and Stella flee in what they later discover to be a redundant escapade: Stella’s boyfriend is arrested at the moment of their departure. Augie also rebels in defiance of Thea and against her pleas: “I can’t outflatter everyone in the world!” (AM, 387) Fuchs notes that in an earlier manuscript Augie’s night with Stella remained chaste, and thus Thea’s ensuing accusations of infidelity fitted with earlier Joseph Andrews-style sequences in which Augie is unjustly accused of promiscuity; the episode with Mrs. Renling, and another episode in which he helps his friend Mimi procure an abortion and he is incorrectly accused of being the father. But in the final version of the text, Augie and Stella have sex, which adds to the significance of the episode: Augie can no longer be the larky naïve childish ingénue and must accept responsibility for his actions.

Augie realises that he still loves Thea and returns to face the consequences of his infidelity. His relationship to Thea is Augie’s most committed engagement, and upon his return he consequently learns about the invested sentiments of the ‘other.’ Recognising Thea’s devastation, Augie is exposed to the full extent of the feelings of a Machiavellian in her disappointment. When Thea realises that for Augie her escapades were “a game,” something “fantastic,” she replies: “Maybe I

Fuchs, Vision and Revision, 69.
Fuchs, Vision and Revision, 69.
am peculiar, that I only know these strange ways of doing something. Instead of sticking to the ordinary way and doing something false.” \( (AM, 395) \) Augie immediately recognises “the right on her side of this.” \( (AM, 395) \) Similar to in his relationships with all the Machiavellians, Augie has passively let Thea believe what she wants without honestly revealing his own position, and therefore he is just as responsible for the result. Thea makes Augie realise that her search for him, for someone special, was a search for a connection to escape loneliness and to be less afraid of people: “Because my feelings can’t be other people’s fault so much.” \( (AM, 396) \) Thus Thea forces Augie to see the suffering he can cause the Machiavellians with his non-committal love.

When Thea leaves, Augie reflects on recent events, and his own “Spirit of Alternatives,” Iggy, an acquaintance in the Mexican town, urges him to accept responsibility: “You always had it too good. You got to get knocked over and crushed like this. If you don’t you’ll never understand how much you hurt her.” \( (AM, 400) \) Through his anguish Augie discovers that his passive “simplicity” has made him “a fraud.” \( (AM, 401) \) Bellow disclosed in a letter to Opdahl: “To me [such characters’] affectionate charm often appears as a disguise.”\(^{667}\) Augie learns this fault, which has ramifications for his outlook: “An independent fate, and love too—what confusion!” \( (AM, 401) \) The problem for Augie has been his persistent belief that “everyone else had more power of being,” despite a deeper knowledge that “it wasn’t so but merely imagination, exaggerating how you’re regarded, misunderstanding how you’re liked for what you’re not, disliked for what you’re not, both from error and laziness.” \( (AM, 401) \) At this moment Augie becomes aware not only of his fault, but also of the basic humanity he shares with the

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Machiavellians. Because Augie had “wanted simplicity and denied complexity,” he had been “as devising as anybody else.” (*AM*, 402) From his understanding of the problems which are now making him suffer Augie realises that “so many [people] must all suffer the same way.” (*AM*, 402-3) In this way Augie reaches an unprecedented self-awareness, realising that his playing the passive naïf has been a convenient ploy.

At this point Augie’s naïve hope still requires a dose of reality. With a newfound awareness of himself and the Machiavellians, Augie optimistically seeks out Thea for a second chance. He neglects a key difference: the Machiavellians do not necessarily share his ingenuousness and may be unable or refuse to acknowledge and seek to overcome their shortcomings and deceptions. Thea has more-than-human standards such that she cannot accept flaws or the normal, the human in other people, something which Augie should have realised when she dismissed him with claims he was “not special” and instead like “everybody else” who gets “tired easily.” (*AM*, 396) The difference between them is apparent even before Augie searches for Thea when he learns that while he was recovering from his accident Thea made expeditions into the mountains with Talavera, an ex-flame and professional hunter and horseman—reminiscent of Mathilde’s Comte de Caylus (*AM*, 405). While Thea condemns Augie for an act she commits, Augie is still resolved to recover their relationship, and when he finds Thea he argues: “Most people are probably in the same condition I’m in. But there must be a way to learn to do better.” (*AM*, 409) Thea, however, does not care for “most people” and replies, “Must there … I guess you would think so.” (*AM*, 409) Unlike Augie, Thea cannot acknowledge her own errors, which means she cannot accept other people’s faults.
So Augie is taught a lesson about expectations and reality: “Nothing as I had foreseen it.” (*AM*, 410) With even his *ingénu* belief in hope proving fruitless, Augie comes close to wallowing in misery, but discovers that this too is a convenient ploy. He tries, and fails, to induce sympathy from two tortured souls into whose company he falls. The first, a Russian man stranded after being dismissed by his Cossack chorus, tells him: “You are lucky to be disappointed in life. Later it may be even more terrible.” (*AM*, 412) From this wisdom Augie deduces the following: “Not that life should end is so terrible in itself, but that it should end with so many disappointments in the essential. This is a fact.” (*AM*, 412) Augie becomes aware that though he “died somewhat” his heart is “not continually in the utmost despair.” (*AM*, 413) When he then stays with Paslavitch, a Yugoslav, Francophile, Chopin-playing, “*lacrimae rerum* type,” Augie decides nothing is “more dreadful than to be forced by another to feel his persuasion as to how horrible it is to exist, how deathly to hope, and taste the same despair.” (*AM*, 415, 417) Augie returns to Chicago with the reflection that despair does not suit him and therefore confirmed in his resolve not to abandon hope, despite the suffering it may precipitate.

The climactic crisis and development which Augie experiences in the Mexico adventure occasion elements which only occur in the conclusions of, or do not occur at all in, the novels Bellow draws upon. Neither Huck Finn nor Joseph Andrews experience or take to heart such intense challenges in the first place, and they both end with their outlook almost entirely intact or even reaffirmed. The same can be said for George Willard, who, always in his home town, remains an innocent child whose vision expands but remains unchallenged until the penultimate chapter of *Winesburg, Ohio*, when he “for the first time takes
a backward view of life.” (WO, 145) The narrator comments: “Perhaps that is the moment when he crosses the line into manhood.” (WO, 145) The other protagonists end in a defeat which mirrors the conclusion of Augie’s Mexico adventure. When Don Quixote suffers a defeat cohesive with his fantasy and which therefore cannot be converted into another convenient imagining, he returns to his home village, renounces his madness and dies. In similar fashion, Augie’s defeat cannot be avoided because it is tied to his outlook’s pivot of love, the quality he claimed to be intrinsic to his quest. The Ingenu’s adventures end when, like Augie but in more tragic circumstances, he loses his love interest. The tragedy seals his education on the corruption of civilisation. Julien similarly gains awareness of his previous naivety towards the conclusion of his story. However, while Julien discovers that his ambitions denied his innocent sensitive side, Augie’s fall forces “him to realize that life is brutal and that no one can remain as idealistic and youthfully innocent as he [has] been.” Unlike its literary influences, Augie March continues after the protagonist has experienced his first adventure as an adult, his most harrowing crisis, and he has obtained an unprecedented degree of self-awareness such that he knows he can no longer passively submit himself to the Machiavellians. Augie has still not found a “good enough fate.” The Mexico episode marks the end of Augie’s first Julien Sorel and Don Quixote-style heroic pursuit, his George Willard and Huckleberry Finn childishness and development, his Ingenu-style ignorance of civilised society and his Joseph Andrews-style innocent passiveness. From this point, Bellow tries to test or prove the relevance of his protagonist and his protagonist’s quest beyond their literary precedents and into a new form, through a new era.

AUGIE’S FULL CONSCIOUSNESS

Particularly from the Mexico episode onwards, a tension emerges as Augie reaches a new degree of self-awareness but still strives to uphold picaresque and comic-<i>ingénu</i> values pivoting around uncertainty. Several critics read an awkward balance between Augie’s intellectual development and persistent ingenuousness in terms of the relationship between the picaresque and the <i>Bildungsroman</i>\textsuperscript{660}. The issue revolves around the notion that if Augie becomes too wise he risks shedding the values associated with simplicity, potentially becoming a Machiavellian himself. In a letter to Robert Penn Warren, Bellow revealed that he feared making Augie too sophisticated, trying “to speak the last word,” and so he had to “throw away about two hundred pages at the end and re-write them”: “Augie was very difficult for me in the last half. I suppose I succumbed to … seriousness. My slogan was, ‘Easily or not at all,’ but I forgot it.”\textsuperscript{670} Fuchs also deduces from the changes made to the manuscripts that Bellow consciously wanted Augie to “remain vulnerable, not become masterful.”\textsuperscript{671} He suggests that Bellow’s narrative strategy was “to have Augie necessarily fall short of the self-knowledge that the <i>Bildungsroman</i> hero has—he is left with the limited perception of the picaro.”\textsuperscript{672} In this way Augie never becomes Machiavellian and he also remains forever striving.

Yet limiting Augie’s expanding awareness risks undermining the lessons of Augie’s experiences and his very quest of understanding. Like Alter, Aldridge and Freedman note that Augie’s picaresque story is one of developing

\textsuperscript{660} Aldridge, “Society,” 33; Alter, “Dissent from Modernism,” 103; Hyland, <i>Saul Bellow</i>; Tanner, <i>Saul Bellow</i>.
\textsuperscript{671} Fuchs, <i>Vision and Revision</i>, 72.
\textsuperscript{672} Fuchs, <i>Vision and Revision</i>, 61.
consciousness, and Trilling and Amis see Augie’s (perhaps unattainable) destination as “Full Consciousness.” Given what Augie experiences and learns, Alter writes that he can no longer “really participate in the traditional picaro’s insouciance, his picaresque knack of adopting an untroubled attitude toward a very troubling world” and therefore the “picaresque buoyancy and comedy of the book either diminish or become forced.” Coetzee raises the issue as a question: “To what extent has Bellow had to dumb him down to make him into a positive hero?” Moreover, Bellow confirmed in an interview: “Augie March starts out as a naïve person and I don’t let him get too sophisticated—that’s a limitation in the book.” All these points highlight the risk that Bellow recognised in the last third of the novel of undoing either Augie’s development or his ingénue qualities. However, within the novel Bellow still attempts to account for this risk by insisting on the compatibility of Augie’s ingenuousness with self-awareness, by portraying a self-aware comic-ingénue. Thus the final third of the novel is significant in terms of Augie’s quest and Bellow’s evolution of the comic-ingénue protagonist.

Pughe notes that Huck and Augie both reach a point where their “passive resistance to civilisation seems to turn into active opposition,” yet their authors’ “fictional discourse” requires they remain “‘nature’s’ fool.” Twain counters this issue and rescues his protagonist from “self-contradiction” in the climax of his novel by delegating the active role to the re-introduced Tom Sawyer and sending

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674 Alter, “Dissent from Modernism,” 103.
675 Alter, “Dissent from Modernism,” 103.
678 Pughe, “Reading the Picaresque,” 66.
Huck into the “territories.” By contrast, “in its final chapters Augie March turns ironically against itself – or, differently put: the anti-climax is already implied in the climax.” Augie’s development is governed by, and therefore confirms rather than evolves, his character. Furthermore Bellow demonstrates that ingenuous trust intuitively accepts the created illusion of reality and facilitates an authentic and continually expanding awareness. Augie’s ingenuousness defines his quest, his engagement, and therefore his learning, which means he achieves genuine self-awareness consisting of and determined by the maximum individual freedom and selfhood he can achieve. Thus the very quest to discover his character is indicative of his character. As Aldridge writes, Augie achieves a “destiny which his character fated … [and] like the rogues of literature in the past, he is not changed but confirmed.” In this manner Augie cannot become too sophisticated, or masterful, or actively oppositional, as even his ambitions and efforts for greater understanding are defined by and thus confirm his ingénu limits and character. In an interview Bellow asserted that “[y]our modern “Fool” has a sharply comic sense of himself.” The “self-contradiction” is intrinsic to Augie’s status as a modern comic-ingénu whose quest is to discover a self, and also to the comic evolution which Augie March attempts, beyond its heritage.

As Trilling notes, the Mexico adventure “brings the ‘idea’ to full consciousness.” The Mexico episode occasions Augie’s consciousness of his character’s relationship to the world. When Augie criticises his former “simplicity” it is not a rejection of his ingénu outlook; rather, the criticism signifies his realisation that everyone functions according to an individually

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679 Pughe, “Reading the Picaresque,” 66.  
682 Bellow in Gray, White, and Nemanic, “Interview,” 213.  
created illusion of reality and therefore has equal “power,” at least in theory. Thus if one reads Don Quixote’s adventures as a consciously enacted fantasy to take advantage of, or even prove, the created illusion of reality, one can suggest that Augie arrives at a similar stage. The difference is that while Don Quixote’s comic ‘madness’ actively embraces an absurd and rebellious mode of living, Augie’s comic ‘madness’ is to seek to be himself, which paradoxically makes him what he discovers he is: a comic-ingénue. His ingenuous quest for a “good enough” and “easy or not at all” position in society, to be “used” in a fulfilling manner, ironically puts him at odds with the cynical consensus found in society. Augie’s realisation, his awareness of his position in relation to society does not disqualify him from this position, as it is in tune with his heart and derives from his ingenuously comic character, and so he embraces his role without hesitation.

Augie also discerns that the uncertainty of greater reality for the individual is what makes “man’s heart … the origin and seat of importance.” Therefore he understands that his own outlook contains, and its presence validates and asserts, this very fact, against the hegemony of Machiavellianism which denies other realities, especially the comic. Augie now begins “to play at being ‘nature’s’ fool,” engaging with the world as a clown who appreciates the significance of mockery and self-mockery. So he continues as before with, or despite, or because of, greater self-awareness and assurance. Augie “is still a seeker, a hoper, but a seeker and hoper aware of the comedy of seeking and hoping.” In fact Augie wants to prove by his own example that “our best hope is hope.” Augie realises that he is a fool, and that his quest for a “good enough fate” which is

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685 Pugh, “Reading the Picaresque,” 67. Emphasis in original.
“easy or not at all” is foolish. Yet in possession of the wisdom of his foolishness he stubbornly forges ahead, and perceives a duty to uphold the wisdom of foolishness, the affectionate independence of uncertainty: “The one thing I could say was that though I wanted this independent fate it wasn’t merely for my own sake that I wanted it.” (AM, 424) Augie enacts Schlossberg’s conception of human dignity from The Victim, ironically as a comic-ingénue.

Post-Mexico Augie begins—in comic-ingénue fashion—to champion his comic-ingenuous outlook. His quest remains the same but the method changes as Augie is no longer willing to follow in “simplicity” other people’s truths. Consequently Augie is less active and more pensive, less impulsive and more vocal, resisting instructions and thinking his way to a solution. When Padilla asks him what he is doing or going to do he responds: “I’m still collecting my thoughts.” (AM, 431) Warren notes that “if Augie plunges into the aimless ruck of experience, in the end we see that Saul Bellow has led him through experience toward philosophy.” Trilling similarly claims “efforts to recruit Augie to some fixed principle or plan of life are now repeated as intellectual farce or burlesque.” But Fuchs summarises the intention best:

Bellow gives Augie a fragmentary nobility of assertion but not of activity, a heroism of sentiment but not of event, an unheroic heroism. The function of the final section of the novel is to show that even this is comically qualified.

Lengthy dialogues with the Machiavellians are now commonplace and pit Augie’s outlook against their cynicism: “discourse becomes much more salient than event and drama.” Although he draws upon all his intelligence, experience and compassion, Augie remains the “fool,” arguing on behalf of an impossible quest.

689 Trilling, “Introduction,” xii.  
690 Fuchs, Vision and Revision, 67.  
691 Trilling, “Introduction,” xii.
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But he asserts this foolishness for its intrinsic opposition to more dangerous and less-fulfilling outlooks: “It can never be right to offer to die, and if that’s what the data of experience tell you, then you must get along without them.” (AM, 435-36) Augie even goes so far as to construe a philosophy of the “axial lines of life, with respect to which you must be straight or else your existence is merely clownery, hiding tragedy.” (AM, 454) Pughe notes that Augie espouses this theory with self-aware irony since he himself is not straight to these lines, “and hence a clown (hiding tragedy) by his own definition.”692 From this theory Augie proposes his first ‘original’ solution, to buy some rural land, bring Georgie and Mama, “get married and set up a kind of home and teach school.” (456-57) Hitchens identifies a similarity between Augie’s solution and that of Holden Caulfield in Catcher in the Rye.693 Such a solution would remove Augie from the Machiavellians and secure his affectionate independence in a nurturing and tolerant environment. But in typical Augie fashion it is an impossible hope and the ease with which Augie lets it fall suggests that he is as happy to concede as he is to appear ridiculous: “my foster-home and academy dream was not a preoccupation but one of those featherhead millenarian notions or summer butter-flies.” (AM, 516)

Bellow portrays and tests a modern evolution of the comic hero. Augie remains comically flexible, especially when it comes to his ingénu pitfalls, such that within and without his new philosophical independence adventures continue to unravel. When World War II breaks out, as if to demonstrate his complete contrast with Joseph’s solipsistic quest in wartime in Dangling Man, Augie declares: “Overnight I had no personal notions at all.” (AM, 457) He even makes rallying speeches which allude to the underground man’s descriptions of the

692 Pughe, “Reading the Picaresque,” 67.
The two principal characters Augie is involved with at the novel’s close are Stella and Mintouchian, who are more subtle in their Machiavellianism because they accept the created illusion of reality and function accordingly, often in consciously scheming or deceptive practices. While living in Paris to support Stella’s acting career, Augie works for her acquaintance Mintouchian in “illicit dealing[s]” (*AM*, 529), in the form of entrepreneurship on the European black market. Mintouchian espouses a philosophy of necessary deception to protect
oneself and loved ones. Stella’s only talent for acting consists in lying “more than average,” and as stories of her continued liaisons with a former lover and powerful man emerge, she claims that she kept it a secret from Augie because she loves him. Ironically these characteristics are associated with the very reasons why Augie’s relationship to them is closer to his natural freedom and character. Augie himself is susceptible to the illicit, infidelity and powerful figures. Mintouchian and Stella offer Augie greater freedom, sympathise with his ideals, his human faults and needs, because their truths take into account the malleability of truth and the need for fantasies, adaptability and independence.

However, as the malleability of reality shapes their truths, Stella and Mintouchian still manifest grotesqueness which Augie is able to expose because he recognises his similarities with them from a very different angle. He too is seeking a compromise between his ideals and reality, but unlike them he approaches the situation with comic-ingenuousness. Despite the dubiousness of his business and his marital problems, to society Augie gives the appearance of being a successful businessman with a beautiful actress wife. Even Simon praises Augie as a “regular man of the world.” (AM, 530) But Augie remains honest with himself, admitting he is submissive to Stella because he “love[s] her most” (AM, 515). Augie never claims masterfulness with deceit and still strives for clarity of truth. Thus on an immediate level Augie recognises that Mintouchian is not the smooth powerbroker of the truth he claims to be, and he also highlights Stella’s ridiculousness as he suffers from her deceits. Furthermore he realises that deceitful behaviour is not compatible with his “Easy or not at all” slogan because it causes great suffering: “[h]ard, hard work …[is] internally done” (AM, 523) He realises he too is suffering from his own attempts to adapt, to mask the truth: “I
was doing hard work too. And what for?” (AM, 523) In these moments of suffering, and in Augie’s realisation that he may never achieve the balance or the truth he wants, several critics note a tone of despair. Augie realises the eternal struggle of his comic desire for something he is not meant to achieve, that he must adapt against, in order to continue his quest, more dutiful to his “Easy or not at all” the more impossible it appears. Yet the comedy remains because Augie recognises that he “is both less and more of a fool: less (to society) because he adapts and also more (to himself) because he adapts.” Although Augie leaves “images of toil and isolation,” it is “creative labor, and creative loneliness.” It is as a writer that Augie enhances his awareness of his comic Sisyphean position and quest.

Augie the Author

The most significant event that Augie describes in the concluding chapter of the novel is his decision to write. Comparable scenarios of the writing-ingénû exist in The Ingénû, Huckleberry Finn and Winesburg, Ohio. The Ingénû is not the narrator of Voltaire’s story, but he becomes an author. After travelling to Paris he is imprisoned at the Bastille where he educates himself on contemporary arts and philosophies of the elite French civilisation and realises they neglect even the existence of, and therefore are unsatisfactory in contrast to, his own, broad ingenuous outlook: “It may be that my idea of real life is far from perfect. But sometimes it may also be that the majority of people don’t much bother to judge according to real life.” (I, 226) Hence he decides to write a book outlining his

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697 “il se peut que chez moi la nature soit très imparfaite ; mais il se peut aussi qu’elle soit quelquefois peu consultée par la plupart des hommes.” (LI, 356)
own uncorrupted and therefore common sense views. Over the course of *Augie March* Augie similarly embarks upon a reading practice that is “serious, even by University of Chicago standards,” and together with what he experiences through the course of the narrative he comes to “articulate what he knows from the beginning.” Moreover, Augie, like the Ingenu, and like Bellow, begins to write from his final fixed destination of Paris. On several occasions, and often referring to the period when he was living in Paris and began writing *Augie March*, Bellow complained of the corruptive stagnancy of France’s cultural scene and even sympathised with Dostoevsky’s vehement hatred of bourgeois Paris in *Winter Notes*. Like the Ingenu Augie finds the so-called “City of Man” incongruous with his own vision: “if it was for Man why shouldn’t it be for me too? If it wasn’t, perhaps that wasn’t one hundred per cent my fault.” (*AM*, 521)

Augie derives a greater understanding of his contradistinctive and somewhat neglected vision in his contemporary intellectual *milieu*, particularly in Paris, and it appears that this inspires him, like the Ingenu, and Bellow, to write his own, neglected version of reality. But while the Ingenu writes from prison, Augie, only based in Paris, writes during the spare time he has on travels for his work, in between endless movement. Further, although his motives to write reflect those of the Ingenu, instead of turning to philosophical treatises Augie turns to prose-narrative in the form of a memoir such as is found in *Huckleberry Finn* and *Winesburg Ohio*.

Like *Winesburg, Ohio, Augie March* depicts a protagonist’s development within and towards the very task of portraying this development. In Sherwood

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Anderson’s short story cycle George Willard, the town’s cadet reporter, is the principal character of the final story, “Departure,” and features in every story as a confidant or catalyst for each principal character as he or she reveals their respective “truth.” Moreover, *Winesburg, Ohio* implies that a later George Willard, standing in for Sherwood Anderson, has written the fictional narrative as a portrayal of his development through an *ingénu* ability to accept and learn from others. Thus the stories are glimpses into the lives of the townspeople and pivotal moments of understanding in George Willard’s development towards his eventual departure from Winesburg, and eventual feat as a self-conscious author. Augie similarly stands in as an author whose memoir portrays events in his development towards self-awareness. As Amis writes, Augie’s destination of “Full Consciousness” includes “the point where he will become the author of his own story.”  

Writing is a moment of ultimate consciousness because “[l]iterature, Bellow believes, interprets the chaos of life, gives it meaning.” With man’s “heart,” as “the origin and seat of importance,” Augie and George are as protagonists, as individuals *within* their lives, also the authors of their immediate actions and significance. They ingenuously accept, marvel at, extract, absorb, develop and link immediate and numerous realities which they encounter into a personally constructed whole, their intellectual being. As this process develops they adopt literature, according to which they reflect, repeat, demonstrate, and portray this very process in a climax of self-reflexivity. Through the artefact of their writing, the two characters demonstrate that writing is a natural evolution of their development, as it is another method of engaging with the world and

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701 Amis, “Chicago of a Novel,” 117.
constructing an illusion of reality which, with the wisdom of uncertainty, accepts the created illusions of reality.

A key difference between *Winesburg, Ohio* and *Augie March* lies in the feature that Bellow’s narrator does not employ intentional fictional devices, such as a short story cycle and treating his former self as a fictional character. Closer to the deployment of Huck Finn’s narrating role, Augie writes not as an ‘author’ but as an individual narrating his past in a memoir. Hence the novel explores on several levels the role of fictional nuances already present in individual subjectivity. It is possible to question whether the events narrated have the significance Augie ascribes to them or whether he is fictionalising those events. But more importantly, Augie’s version, which he like all the characters in the novel has the power to believe and assert, is his reality: “Augie is the novelist of himself, and as such encounters a host of other such fabricators.”  

Augie writes according to the same attitude that takes him through his adventures, declaring at the opening of the book: “I have taught myself, free style and will make the record in my own way: first to knock, first admitted, sometimes an innocent knock, sometimes a not so innocent.” *(AM, 3)* Augie writes an account of his experiences, in which the only literary pretences are those which derive from his intrinsic individual outlook, including a desire to expose all and hide nothing: “there is no fineness or accuracy of suppression; if you hold down one thing you hold down the adjoining.” *(AM, 3)* The meaning Augie discovers in writing belongs to the process of his ingenuous reflection and marvel. He does not set out to deliberately create fiction, but rather to search for reality and understanding in his own unique fashion.

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One principal vehicle of Augie’s exposition and employment of his individuality is his narrative voice. Like his fellow comic-ingenue narrator-protagonist Huck Finn, Augie has an “unmistakable voice” which delivers his story and personality to the reader synchronously. Alter writes that Twain “fashioned a language completely appropriate to the ideal of individual integrity embodied by his hero.” Huck’s voice, with its disregard for the language “books pretend they speak” and for “school rules and formalism … reports experience more precisely and reproduces it more honestly.” Bellow pursued a similar endeavour: “I wanted to invent a more energized language that would allow me to move much more freely than I had hitherto been able to move.” Huck’s and Augie’s “narrations are both accumulative rather than ordered and they are immediate even though they are retrospective.” Critics describe Augie’s language in such terms as: “energetic temperament … personal, … speaking through the contraries, making one,” “wide-ranging delight,” “wondering openness to experience,” “free flow,” “boisterous colloquial larkiness,” “adventurous and adaptable.” But Augie’s language also contains elements unique to his personality, forged to “capture contemporary life,” to do “American society in a way in which it had never been done before.” His street upbringing manifests through a Chicago-ghetto vernacular. At the same time he has a “civilized voice [which] tells us that his education has gone well beyond the

705 Pughe, “Reading the Picaresque,” 59.
706 Alter, “Heirs,” 120.
709 Pughe, “Reading the Picaresque,” 60.
710 Fuchs, Vision and Revision, 41.
711 Tanner, Saul Bellow, 56.
712 Tanner, Saul Bellow, 56.
715 Schwartz, “Adventure in America,” 114.
716 Hyland, Saul Bellow, 32.
college of hard knocks into the school of soft abrasions.” Critics also describe Augie’s voice in terms reflecting his quest: “speaking through the centuries,” “circling” and “contrived so as to say everything about the characters with whom the narrator makes his life.” The voice “is the style of the book,” and like the book “this voice, this style, does communicate the identity of Augie March.”

Thus Augie’s narrative language demonstrates how his particular outlook absorbs resonating aspects of the world and manifests a unique pattern of identity, in this case through writing.

Through the act and the subject of his writing Augie expresses and interprets his path towards consciousness of his own character. Richard Chase discerns a contradiction in Augie March between one view of character as determined by “heredity and environment,” and another view of character as the “autonomous self,” unchangeable. But Augie’s approach, experiences and writing attest to the fact that it is the individual’s unavoidable freedom to perceive the world and to construct his own individual illusion of reality, and that these elements operate synchronically. Newman notes that Augie may have “an essential nature” or “he may appear as an existential being, whose actions in time alone define his character.” Augie’s writing portrays, demonstrates and extends Bellow’s insistence that Man’s heart is the origin and seat of importance. Although Don Quixote lives as a Knight Errant, to the secondary characters he is a fool, and to the reader something between—a comic character who nobly fulfils his albeit absurd sense of reality. On his ultimate ingénu “Easy or not at all” quest

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718 Fuchs, Vision and Revision, 13.
719 Fuchs, Vision and Revision, 41.
720 Tanner, Saul Bellow, 56.
722 Tanner, Saul Bellow, 55.
723 Chase, “Progress of a Novelist,” 30.
Augie’s awareness and self-creation expands beyond Don Quixote. The height of this process is reached when Augie defines himself to himself and the reader through writing. Augie begins the novel claiming “a man’s character is his fate, says Heraclitus, and in the end there isn’t any way to disguise the nature of the knocks by the acoustic work or gloving the knuckles.” (AM, 3) Because his writing is again a clear and open knock, he receives a coherent echo, a portrayal of his self. Concluding his writing, in the opening to the final chapter, he notes:

I said when I started to make the record that I would be plain and heed the knocks as they came, and also that a man’s character was his fate. Well, then it is obvious that this fate, or what he settles for, is also his character. (AM, 514)

Thus as a result of writing Augie discerns that his fate reflects his engagement with and reception of the world; the conditions of his engagement and their discernable result define his character. Because Augie’s willingness has shaped his adventures, his acceptance of his fate, he discovers he is a comic-ingénu. In fact at the stage of “Full Consciousness” from which he writes, Augie fulfils, understands and portrays the process of his character development/confirmation, and therefore he is a comic-character who comically makes himself a comic character. Augie is “novelist of himself,” and thus his own Don Quixote. In an additional dimension of irony, the very act of fictionalising himself as a comic-ingénu confirms his role as a comic-ingénu.

Augie’s description of the axial lines to his friend Clem reveals his objective:

He [Man] will be brought into focus. He will live with true joy. Even his pains will be joy if they are true, even his helplessness will not take away his power, even wanderings will not take him away from himself; even disappointment after disappointment need not take away his love. Death will not be terrible to him if life is not. The embrace of other people will take away his dread of fast change and short life. And this is not imaginary stuff, Clem, because I bring my entire life to the test. (AM, 455)

Augie’s writing has brought his life to the test and delivers a moment of “focus.” Paradoxically the focus he achieves is that his quest for focus, for certitude, is continual and will never be fully obtained. Writing forms another stage, a momentary and perhaps the highest possible focus, on the spectrum of his quest and life. But as a comic-ingénu, and corresponding with his description of the axial lines, in this moment of focus he is not begrudging: “It probably is too much to ask.” (AM, 514) Huck Finn never develops this degree of self-awareness as his attitude towards writing reflects: “if I’d knowed what a trouble it was to make a book I wouldn’t a tackled it and ain’t agoing to no more.” (HF, 281) In contrast, Augie reflects on the task with comic-ingénu self-awareness:

I sat at a table and wrote that I was an American, Chicago born, and all these other events and notions. Said not in order to be so highly significant but probably because human beings have the power to say and ought to employ it at the proper time. When finally you’re done speaking you’re dumb forever after, and when you’re through stirring you go still, but this is no reason to decline to speak and stir or to be what you are. (AM, 519)

Augie realises it is in his power to forever strive, and so this is what he will do, ironically in his longing for a point where he can stop striving: “Maybe I can’t take these very things I want.” (AM, 514) Augie’s memoir attests to his development as a comic-ingénu, who in the modern context is aware of his destiny of a continual quest for self-awareness and “a good enough fate.” It is in his character to be forever hoping in a forever-changing world. But this is how Augie “retains humanity.” 726 He leaves the reader having demonstrated his ability not only to write himself, but also to laugh at himself, at his absurd enterprise to be himself, and even at the very absurdity of laughing:

That’s the animal ridens in me, the laughing creature, forever rising up. … [I]s the laugh at nature—including eternity—that it thinks it can win over us and the power of hope? Nah! Nah! I think. It never will. But that probably is the joke, on one or the other, and laughing is an enigma that includes both. Look at me, going everywhere! Why I

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am some sort of Columbus of those near-at-hand and believe you can come to them in this immediate terra incognita that spreads out in every gaze. I may well be a flop at this line of endeavor. Columbus too thought he was a flop, probably, when they sent him back in chains. Which didn’t prove there was no America. (AM, 536)

Augie realises his fate is to be forever searching for fate in the absurd comedy of his reality. Nonetheless, the desperation of this situation holds prospects of hope and laughter. He has portrayed his quixotic quest as a quixotic adventure, and with his balance of humour, love, openness and trust has forged a self-perpetuating vision.

**GARGANTUAN REBELLION**

Later in his career Bellow would often remark that when he wrote *Augie March* he went too far and lacked moderation, yet he never criticised the sentiment behind the novel. His comments in a 1984 interview sum up his most commonly expressed regret. Firstly he “had no control over” the novel that he began and “couldn’t say no to any of its excesses,” and secondly it became too “disingenuous” because he denied his knowledge of “darkness” and “nihilism”: “I had no excuse for being such an ingénu.” Certain remarks suggest that Bellow had already begun to sense the limitations of Augie by “the last third of the book.” In the first half he “was stirred to the depths” but later “recoiled from the excesses,” admitting: “[t]here were things in the depths I wasn’t glad to see.”

Despite his reservations Bellow always maintained that *Augie March*

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728 Bellow in Roudane and Bellow, “An Interview,” 279.
730 Bellow in Simmons, “Free to Feel,” 161.
“transformed”731 his career as a novelist and reflected “one side”732 of his character. In fact the criticisms relate to the strengths, to the exuberant sentiment Bellow felt as he wrote and released an energy which, because it had been hitherto unacknowledged, burst through without balance. Bellow had “discovered that one could free oneself” and became “wildly excited”: “I had just increased my freedom, and like any emancipated plebeian I abused it at once.”734

In contrast to the limitations Bellow felt writing his first two novels, with *Augie March* his attitude was “to hell with it, here I come ready or not.”735 In a spirit of not only liberation and excitement, but also ambition and defiance, Bellow audaciously set out to demonstrate his allegiance to a particular vision of individual freedom and selfhood with the creation of his own unique version. Shortly after publication Bellow commented that Augie’s “war, like any war, produces exaggerations.”736 The war in which Augie and his author are engaged is a “War of Independence,” against the “devaluation of the person,”737 by asserting “that man’s heart is … itself the origin and seat of importance.”738 Sensing that this objective, and associated values and qualities, were lacking in the contemporary condition and his own literary work to date, Bellow wrote *Augie March* with conviction: “I feel that I have kept things from obscurity which should not sink.”739 In another letter, to Oscar Tarcov, in which he listed many reservations about the novel he also noted: “I can’t allow myself to forget that I took a position in this book.”740 Bellow was “out for *sursum corda.*”741

731 Bellow, “I Got a Scheme!,” 72.
732 Bellow in Steers, “Successor to Faulkner!,” 34.
735 Bellow in Roudane and Bellow, “An Interview,” 279.
Bellow’s third novel seeks to portray the full power, adventures, and fulfillment possible when “Man’s heart” is accepted and asserted as the very root of love, freedom and selfhood. Thus *Augie March* is not only one pole, “one side” of Bellow’s vision, it is a pinnacle, an exuberant manifesto of his faith in individual freedom and selfhood. Bellow threw everything into this enterprise, and admitted that it felt “like giving birth to Gargantua.” The manifesto may lack moderation, but it set a benchmark in Bellow’s career. Hitchens considers it the “gold standard” in the sense that “novels that came before *The Adventures of Augie March* aspired to it, and the novels that came after drew their confidence and breadth from *Augie*.“ *Augie March* is not only Bellow’s assertion of a defiantly immersed-in-life individual; it is his attempt at defiantly immersed-in-life literature.

The spirit with which Bellow wrote, and the subject of *Augie March*, is in defiance of modern preoccupations with form, originality and heroism. Bellow not only turned to earlier works of literature, he turned to those works with a similar message, bound in comic and picaresque attitude, indebted to Cervantes. In his interpretation that Don Quixote suggests the individual must learn greatness from example, Bellow noted that therefore what the individual “adds is only an increment to the rest.” *Augie* intuitively follows a similar notion by learning from those around him and Bellow performed this same act meta-narratively by writing *Augie March*. Bellow forged his manifesto from his own experiences and from previous literary works which contain forms of those qualities he wished to rescue from obscurity. He also employed the spirit and dynamic of certain works

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744 Bellow in Pinsker, “Saul Bellow in the Classroom,” 100.
which demonstrate a capacity to overcome or even bypass harmful situations of individual freedom and selfhood, and to instead absorb immense and multitudinous situations—adventures. In particular he turned to the comic tradition as the most capable of conveying man’s power, resulting from and in response to the uncertainty of existence. All of the crucial strengths of this vision derive from the inheritance of Cervantes’ portrayal of the wise power of uncertainty, traceable within the approaches of all the works Bellow draws upon which posit man’s heart as the seat of importance. Drawing inspiration from the pivotal figures of these works, who each might be described, like Julien, as possessing a “generous heart,” (RN, 156)\textsuperscript{745} Bellow constructed Augie as an energetic, loving, and estimable comic figure, capable of enriching reality by embracing existence.

In this way, Augie is not simply a piecemeal synthesis of his literary antecedents. Firstly, as a combination of multiple elements from multiple characters and scenarios, Augie evolves in a unique fashion according to the world of Bellow’s text. Secondly, it is specifically Bellow’s intention for Augie to evolve beyond his literary forbears and to face the full weight of modern existence. In a unique and possibly ultimate “unparodying” of Don Quixote, Augie pursues a modern quest for the self. Conscious of the tradition he is drawing upon and the evolution of humanity, Bellow develops his character in accordance with a new literary intertextual context, whereby the wisdom of uncertainty translates into a process of purposeful and self-aware seeking, self-construction and self-confirmation. Augie’s attitude, life and writing are a testament to the comic-

\textit{ingénu} vision which leads him to the awareness that his

\textsuperscript{745} “un homme de cœur” (LRN, 222).
fate is to never know his fate, and his character is to always search for his character. Thus Bellow takes the necessary elements from Augie’s predecessors to the contemporary, ultimate level, where they may be seen in full circle. Bellow indicates his allegiance to a particular vision of man, and seeks to portray the full scope of its power on the level of individual consciousness. Augie reaches a level of “Full Consciousness” according to which he both practises and portrays the wisdom of uncertainty. As he finds certainty in uncertainty Augie recognises the individual as the vehicle for an eternal quest for individual meaning, a quest which is the essence of human dignity and life.
CONCLUSION

*The Adventures of Augie March* concludes with the protagonist on the road, racing the sun to his next destination. This image reflects Bellow’s own position as a novelist at the point when he wrote these very pages. Having already published two “correct” and “plaintive, sometimes querulous” works, with his third novel Bellow discovered a more confident means to assert a fundamental aspect of his vision as a novelist, thus revolutionising his future career. As Newman asserts, “[t]he risks which Bellow takes with the form of [*Augie March*] are amply justified by the wider horizons opened up at its close.” Furthermore, in this revolution Bellow identified a tendency which would shape his career: “it has been a lifelong pattern with me to come back to strength from a position of extreme weakness: I had been almost suffocated and then found that I was breathing more deeply than ever.” Indeed in his next novel (*Seize the Day*), Bellow returned to a “victim” scenario and claimed in several interviews that one of his objectives was to rein in the excesses of *Augie March*. But more significant is the fact that the book which brought Bellow his greatest fame, and which many consider his *chef-d’œuvre*, his “grandest creation,” *Herzog*, combines the polarities of his writing patterns and vision across his first three novels; as Bellow stated in a 1966 interview: “*Herzog* makes comic use of complaint.” The characters of Joseph and Leventhal in *Dangling Man* and *The Victim* respectively struggle to overcome their subjective dilemmas, while the eponymous protagonist in *Augie March* intuitively follows an ingenuous outlook.

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748 Bellow, “I Got a Scheme!,” 75.
750 Roth, “Rereading Saul Bellow,” 147.
which enables him to continually experience and develop according to a Bildungsroman-picaresque pattern that confirms the intuitive comic-ingenue sense of himself and of reality which he has followed all along. Moses Herzog, “that labyrinth of contradiction and self-division—the wild man and the earnest person” experiences a personal crisis that initiates a “negative Bildungsroman” adventure, in which “he must rid himself of superfluous ideas,” the “roles” he has unsuccessfully tried to fill, until he can regain “a point of personal balance.” Thus in a sense Herzog moves from a subjective dilemma to a more ingenuous sense of reality in a novel which unites Bellow’s polarities of darkness and comedy. The evolution from Dangling Man to Augie March thus resonates within the text of Herzog, and indeed throughout Bellow’s writing career.

As an emerging author, Bellow drew upon earlier works of literature as a way of developing his primary concerns and literary approach. The intertextual methods of Dangling Man, The Victim and Augie March reveal not only Bellow’s perception of the condition of the individual in his contemporary environment and how he constructed this perception according to preceding literary explorations, but also how he incorporated the artistic strategies of his predecessors towards discerning and, in time, more confidently asserting his own personal temperament and vision of individual freedom. Across these novels Bellow’s intertextual techniques evolved as he became less reliant on imitation to define and express his vision as a novelist. Thus these novels reveal Bellow’s gradual liberation from his literary influences towards more confident originality in his writing. In this

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752 Roth, “Rereading Saul Bellow,” 147.
753 Bellow in Gray, White, and Nemanic, “Interview,” 214.
formative period Bellow evolved from *Dangling Man*, in which his vision emerges through his imitative assessment of previous works of literature ranging from *Rameau’s Nephew* to *Nausea*, to *The Victim*, in which he expresses his vision through his expropriation of Dostoevsky’s artistic strategy in *The Eternal Husband*, to eventually, with *Augie March*, comprehensively affirming his vision by drawing upon the relevant qualities of a number of earlier works from *Don Quixote* to *Winesburg, Ohio*. These works demonstrate the scope of Bellow’s sense of the limits and the potential of individual freedom and his developing confidence in portraying this sense, both of which are reflected in his choice of intertexts and their application.

In *Dangling Man* Bellow portrays a quest defined by ideals of human reason, freedom and selfhood which can destroy “the necessary trust, auxiliary to all sanity.” (*DM*, 190) He constructs his protagonist’s dilemma and quest through deliberate allusions to previous works of literature which explore the individual’s struggles to achieve a certain level of knowledge of and freedom from the world. Bellow constructs his own vision of individual freedom and selfhood in regards to the protagonist’s dilemma through a fictional assessment of ideas from *Rameau’s Nephew*, *Notes from Underground*, *The Journal of My Other Self*, *The Trial* *Nausea* and Hemingway’s *oeuvre*. In particular, Bellow rebuts the implications of *Nausea* as his protagonist Joseph fails to achieve an impossible purity of vision of reality. Through his intertextual strategy Bellow implicitly rejects certain concepts of individual freedom and upholds others within a quest which is meant to solve, but in fact causes, a dilemma that traps the protagonist in his subjectivity.

In *The Victim* Bellow attempts to map the most basic level of individual reality which forms the minimal basis necessary for understanding humanity
within individual to individual relationships, and which contains the potential for both division and harmony, victimisation and dignity. In order to express this vision Bellow draws upon the artistic strategy of Dostoevsky’s *The Eternal Husband*. As a result of this appropriation Bellow’s vision remains limited to exploring a crisis situation where the individual struggles to ascertain a greater sense and acceptance of the complexity of existence in order to fulfil his freedom and selfhood. Thus, as in *Dangling Man*, Bellow portrays the struggles and potential collapse of certain avenues of individual freedom in order to implicitly suggest more viable alternatives. Yet in contrast to *Dangling Man*, in *The Victim* Bellow more extensively indicates what he considers to be more viable approaches towards existence, stemming from an insistence upon a human dignity which accepts the limits and potential of individual subjectivity. Bellow explores the double relationship between a Jew and Gentile and reveals the limitations of individual subjectivity which entail and create the necessity for human empathy. Despite the intense struggles between the protagonist and his antagonist, the conditions for human dignity remain ever-present. Thus as Bellow appropriates and extends Dostoevsky’s technique he creates a vision of the complex and ambiguous nature of human responsibility more relevant to the post-war American climate in which he was writing.

With *The Adventures of Augie March* Bellow aimed to explicitly portray the potential for individual fulfilment which his first two novels implicitly indicated. Bellow’s ambition was enormous, and even quixotic, as he made it his duty to affirm that Man’s heart is the seat and origin of importance. In other words Bellow sought to demonstrate the full potential of the individual to choose and to be himself, and to choose and uphold his own reality. For this purpose he
adopted and adapted the picaresque and Bildungsroman forms and wrote a fully-fledged comic work with an exemplary comic hero. As Bellow later declared: “Augie is the freest of the free.”\footnote{Bellow, “I Got a Scheme!,” 83.} In order to construct this work Bellow drew upon the following main texts: Don Quixote, Joseph Andrews, The Ingenu, The Red and the Black, Huckleberry Finn, and Winesburg, Ohio. Yet Bellow no longer relied on methods of imitation in order to construct his vision against or through his predecessors. Rather Bellow drew inspiration, insight and elements from earlier literature relevant to his creation of an original protagonist and series of adventures. Bellow sought to evolve a comic vision and the central figure of the comic-ingénu into an ultimate “unparodying” of the legacy of Don Quixote, reflecting and capable of withstanding the modern context. Thus Augie’s rule is “Easy or not at all,” and he follows a quest for the self which ends in the realisation that his desire to know who he is and where he belongs defines his character. Thus Bellow’s intertextual strategy does not define the meaning of the novel, but only serves the author to construct a protagonist capable of absorbing numerous original scenarios while upholding a comic sense of human dignity. In Augie March Bellow revealed a side of his novelistic vision, which sought to explore, through comedy, the full potential of individual freedom and selfhood.

Through these formative novels, Bellow’s narrative trajectory evolved from exploring what he saw as extreme threats to individual fulfilment in Dangling Man and The Victim, to presenting his vision of the ultimate potential for individual fulfilment in Augie March. The function of intertextuality in Bellow’s development confirms his own insistence that “young writers are and should be imitative,”\footnote{Bellow in Neal, “Chicago Writer,” 179. See thesis epigraph for full statement.} but it further reveals that he consciously employed
imitation as a means of establishing his creative perspective. The influence of previous literature never left Bellow, as “[n]o one is or should be entirely original,” but from *Dangling Man* to *Augie March* it gradually evolved so as to play a less explicit role in defining his own original voice and objectives as a writer. In a sense, it evolved from serving a defining role, to serving a supporting role of Bellow’s vision. Intertextuality pervades the artistic strategies of all three works, but its significance in directly relating to the meaning of each novel decreases, and Bellow increasingly asserts his own comprehensive vision of the nature of individual reality, culminating with the exuberant *ingénue* rebelliousness of *Augie March*. Furthermore, the intertexts of these three novels mark Bellow’s progression from complaint, which coincides with the influence of predominantly claustrophobic, psychological and philosophical literature, to comedy, whereby Bellow draws a narrative dynamic from preceding texts which uphold the qualities of quixotic-ness, ingenuousness, affection and independence, generally through a comic vision. Thus Bellow, one of the towering figures of American literature in the second half of the twentieth century, was not only powerfully influenced by earlier works of literature in defining his own vision, but actively engaged with specific works in his early novels to create his own vision. In each of his first three novels Bellow's intertextual technique is developed together with the orbit of his literary approach, thereby setting the foundations of his future as a novelist.

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The Education of a Writer


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