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Searching for Truth in Saul Bellow's Dangling  
Man, Herzog and Henderson the Rain King

Hledání pravdy v dílech Saula Bellowa - Dangling  
Man, Herzog a Henderson, král deště

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## **Abstract**

The aim of this bachelor thesis is to examine three novels written by Saul Bellow – *Dangling Man*, *Henderson the Rain King*, *Herzog*, which portray heroes searching for ultimate truth about life. The work covers the analysis of novels and comparison of representations of the theme in the texts. The first chapter deals with a depiction of author's experience in each novel and the following chapters are focused on the interpretation of the theme. The purpose of the last chapter is to summarize the findings and to make a conclusion.

## **Anotace**

Náplní této bakalářské práce je interpretace tří románů Saula Bellowa, *Dangling Man*, *Henderson, král deště*, *Herzog*, které spojuje téma hrdiny hledajícího smysl života. Práce se zabývá analýzou zmíněných děl, se zaměřením na dané téma, a následným porovnáním ztvárnění cesty za smyslem života v každém z nich. První kapitola rozebírá autobiografické prvky skryté v textech a další kapitoly se zaměřují na ztvárnění tématu v jednotlivých dílech. V poslední kapitole jsou shrnuty poznatky předchozích kapitol, ze kterých je pak vyvozen závěr.

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## Preface

### The Paradox of Our Time

We have bigger houses but smaller families.  
We have more degrees but less sense;  
more knowledge but less judgements;  
more experts but more problems;  
more medicines, but less healthiness.

We've been all the way to the moon and back,  
but we have trouble crossing the street  
to meet the new neighbour.

We build more computers  
to hold more information,  
to produce more copies than ever,  
but we have less communication.

We have become long on quantity  
but short on quality.

These are times of fast foods,  
but slow digestion;  
tall man, but short character;  
steep profits, but shallow relationships.

It is time when there is much in the window  
but nothing in the room.<sup>1</sup>

Dalai Lama XIV

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. [http://www.goodreads.com/author/quotes/570218.Dalai\\_Lama\\_XIV](http://www.goodreads.com/author/quotes/570218.Dalai_Lama_XIV)  
[cit. 2013- 6- 4]

## I. Introduction

"There is an immense, painful longing for a broader, more flexible, fuller, more coherent, more comprehensive account of what we human beings are, who we are and what this life is for."<sup>2</sup>

This quotation is taken from a Nobel Lecture presented by Saul Bellow at the Nobel Prize Award Ceremony at the occasion of winning the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1976. The notion of a quest for the truth constitutes a central theme of various author's works.

### 1.1 Biographical Background

All three analysed novels contain autobiographical features and each of them reflects some period of the author's life. Firstly, Bellow's writing was largely influenced by the origins of his family, for his parents emigrated from Russia to Canada in 1908 and later, when Saul was 9 years old, they moved to Chicago. As a result, the author did not avoid depicting similar details in some of his works. Mainly *Herzog* carries those features, for a part of the plot is set in Chicago and the main character has Russian ancestors. Yet, not only had his parents influenced the novels, but mainly strong disillusionment with his marriages was the major motif for his writing. Both Henderson and Herzog went through a complicated divorce. *Henderson the Rain King* was released in 1959. To that date, Bellow had undergone two divorces. At the time, when *Herzog* was published in 1964, the author was just recovering from the third break-up. The story of Moses Herzog is based on Bellow's personal experience with his ex-wife and her lover. Therefore, immense feelings of hatred of the main protagonist are really convincing.

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. [http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel\\_prizes/literature/laureates/1976/bellow-lecture.html](http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/1976/bellow-lecture.html)  
[cit. 2013- 6- 4]

Secondly, Bellow was proclaimed a spokesman of the wartime generation by many critiques. Owing to his personal experience of the war years, he managed to depict truthful opinions and real feelings of his generation in the first novel, *Dangling Man*. According to Fiedler, Bellow “has realized that for his generation the war itself is an anti-climax (too foreknown from a score of older novels to be really lived), that their real experience is the waiting, the dangling, the indecision before the draft.”<sup>3</sup>

The plot of the novel *Dangling Man* is set in Bellow’s favourite city – Chicago. Like the author, the Jewish protagonist was a member of the American Communist Party. However, they both became strongly disappointed with the programme and the ideology of the Party. As a result, their former comrades were no longer willing to encounter them. His general disappointment with those modern values as well as the personal crisis caused the estrangement of the main protagonist.

Thirdly, an interest in Africa, where a substantial part of *Henderson the Rain King* is set, arises from the author’s background to a great extent as well. Provided that he was raised in Chicago of 1930s, when an enormous influx of refugees took place, an exposure to a multi-cultural environment inevitably influenced his way of thinking. Chicago used to be a refuge of people not only from Europe and other continents, but also from the South. Therefore, African Americans constituted a considerable amount of inhabitants of newly-arising Chicago. As Koy points out: “In this sense, Saul Bellow shared an experience with African Americans, the other major 'outsider' group of recent Chicago immigrants.”<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> FIEDLER, L.A. Saul Bellow, In Saul Bellow and the Critics. New York: New York University Press. 1967. p. 5

<sup>4</sup> KOY, Ch. *Saul Bellow and His Fictions of Black Culture*. Antropologické symposium III. Plzeň: Aleš Čeněk, 2004, p. 157.



Not only the exotic setting, but also the author's anthropological education is presented in *Henderson the Rain King*. His interest in a theme of "primitive conditions" could be traced to Bellow's study years. The author received a degree from a bachelor program in anthropology in 1937. The fact, that he ended his studies with a thesis on Eskimos, is also hidden in the novel about Eugene Henderson. The attraction of studying anthropology was, according to Bellow, in the idea of "immunity from Anglo-Saxon custom"<sup>5</sup> and also "the study of sexual life of savages"<sup>6</sup>.

All analysed novels written by the Nobel Prize laureate Saul Bellow, presenting a hero searching for the essence for life, imply certain autobiographical allusions ranging from the family background and failed relationships to notions of ideology and values.

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<sup>5</sup> KOY, Ch., The Reformulation of Ethnological Sources and Orientalist Discourse in Bellow's *Henderson the Rain King*, *American and British Studies Annual* 1 (2008), p. 26.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid*, p. 26.

## II. *Dangling Man*

As the title implies, Joseph is a “dangling man”. According to Levenson (1967), dangling men belong to the discourse of American literature. They do differ in particular attributes, in compliance with the author’s imagination and the historical era.<sup>7</sup> Freedman, who examined the role of environment in Bellow’s prose, suggested that in *Dangling Man* Bellow “explores the life and consciousness of a disaffiliated urban hero”<sup>8</sup>.

Essentially, Joseph is caught between two dimensions – the war and the conventional life he used to have, or as Nilsen adds: “...between commitments and value systems.”<sup>9</sup> A year before the narration begins, he had to quit his job as he was drafted into the U.S. Army. Yet, there came no other impulse and he was ordered to stay at home. Returning to a job was impossible, for he could be called to war any time. Consequently, his wife is earning money and he is merely waiting at home, doing nothing in particular. Even his former interests in literature and intellectual life faded away. His present state is dim, without any stimuli, and his life involves no desired excitement. Not only Joseph lacks any determination in terms of his professional and intellectual life, but he also experiences a strong estrangement from his family, and society in general. He feels totally isolated from other people, even if he has to encounter them on a daily basis. His condition results in a discrepancy in moral and intellectual values caused by his current negative frame of mind. As a consequence, his means of communication with the outer world is malfunctioning so that many difficult situations come about.

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<sup>7</sup> LEVENSON, J. C. *Bellow’s Dangling Men* In Saul Bellow and the Critics. New York: New York University Press. 1967. p. 39.

<sup>8</sup> FREEDMAN, R. *Saul Bellow: The Illusion of Environment*. In Saul Bellow and the Critics. New York: New York University Press. 1967. p. 60.

<sup>9</sup> NILSEN, D.L.F. *Humorous Contemporary Jewish-American Authors: An Overview of the Criticism*. In Melus, Vol. 21, No. 4, Ethnic Humor (Winter, 1996), p. 75.

A form of a journal influences the general perception of the novel. Owing to a thorough intrusion in the main character's privacy, readers are allowed to enter the space of absolute openness. Presumably, there exists no more intimate entity than a diary. Since readers are allowed to share his thoughts, feelings and impressions, a desolate condition of Joseph inevitably manifests itself in the expressions he uses. Considering the form, all the action is displayed as an inner action for everything is set in the mind of the main character. As a result, there is scarcely any outer action in the plot. On the whole, the main purpose is apparently not to describe any action, but to tackle pressing questions and portray a dismal atmosphere of wartime.

Additionally, the estrangement Joseph recently undergoes stems from his status. Once, he had been a member of the Communist party, but the ties with his former comrades were severed because of their general disagreement on the ideology. Nonetheless, Joseph undergoes not only the loss of former friends, but also a dissension with the family of his brother, not to mention his wife. Financially Joseph cannot be equalized with his brother, because he possesses nothing in particular, unlike his brother. There arose a tension between the two of them for Joseph refused to accept financial aid from his brother. Yet, the main problem remains the behaviour of Joseph's niece. She literally humiliates him, considering him a nonentity. The conflict culminates when Joseph gets so upset that he spans her. This act results in a quarrel and Joseph's subsequent isolation. Hence, the main character suffers feelings of being a nobody and the state of feeling helpless compels him to behave angrily. His inner helplessness manifests itself as anger. According to Fuchs, Joseph is a prototype of modern qualities – "passivity, victimization and nonentity."<sup>10</sup> Fuchs also suggests the change in Joseph's character, which he defines as a change from enlighten

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<sup>10</sup> FUCHS, D. *Saul Bellow and the Modern Tradition*. In *Contemporary Literature*, Vol. 15, No. 1 (1974), p. 78.

Joseph to “modern” Joseph.<sup>11</sup> However, not only helplessness causes Joseph’s anger. The vagueness of the wartime burdens him as well. Principally, he observes that his daily existence is fulfilled with any sense and that nothing can distinguish one day from another. For that reason, he wants some activity to happen for he cannot bear the vacuum he has got into.

It may be that I am tired of having to identify a day as “the day I asked for a second cup of coffee,” or “the day the waitress refused to take back the burned toast,” and so want to blaze it more sharply, regardless of the consequence. Perhaps, eager for consequences. Trouble, like physical pain, makes us actively aware that we are living, and when there is little in the life we lead to hold and draw and stir us, we seek and cherish it, preferring embarrassment or pain to indifference.<sup>12</sup>

A state of a total apathy became agonizing not only for himself, but also for his surroundings. Therefore, he decided to put his life in motion again. In one of this “talks with the spirit of alternatives”<sup>13</sup>, Joseph concludes:

“We are afraid to govern ourselves. Of course. It is so hard. We soon want to give up our freedom. It is not even real freedom, because it is not accompanied by comprehension. It is only a preliminary condition of freedom. But we hate it. And soon we run out, we choose a master, roll over on our backs and ask for the leash.”  
“Ah,” said *Tu As Raison Aussi*.  
“That’s what happens. It isn’t love that gives us weariness of life. It’s our inability to be free.”<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> FUCHS, D. *Saul Bellow and the Modern Tradition*. In *Contemporary Literature*, Vol. 15, No. 1 (1974), p. 78.

<sup>12</sup> BELLOW, S. *Dangling Man*. New York: Penguin, 1988. p. 82.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid*, p. 164.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 167- 8.

Essentially, Joseph believes that the quest for freedom unites all people as it is generally perceived as means of purification, which could ensure the ascertainment of the sense of life. Joseph describes the desire as follows:

All the striving is for one end. I do not entirely understand this impulse. But it seems to me that its final end is the desire for pure freedom. We are all drawn toward the same craters of the spirit – to know what we are and what we are for, to know our purpose, to seek grace.<sup>15</sup>

Because the status of freedom does not fulfil Joseph and he thinks his role in society is of no significance, he is determined to end this state and terminate his “freedom”. He therefore enlists himself and leaves for war on his own accord. Correspondingly to his personal experience Joseph finally attains the knowledge that the acquisition of subjective freedom does not necessarily result in salvation. He assumes that:

We struggle perpetually to free ourselves. Or, to put it somewhat differently, while we seem so intently and even desperately to be holding on to ourselves, we would far rather give ourselves away. When what we really want is to stop living so exclusively and vainly for our own sake, impure and unknowing, turning inward and self-fastened.<sup>16</sup>

Nevertheless, the freedom of the main character could be perceived as relative as he got imprisoned in a rather restricted area, where the opportunities are limited. Conversely, Fuchs mentions that “Joseph proves too weak to be free and welcomes the regimentation of army life”<sup>17</sup> for, at the end of the novel, Joseph claims:

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<sup>15</sup> BELLOW, S. *Dangling Man*. New York: Penguin, 1988. pp. 153-4.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid, p. 154.

<sup>17</sup> FUCHS, D. *Saul Bellow and the Modern Tradition*. In *Contemporary Literature*, Vol. 15, No. 1 (1974), pp. 78-9.

“I am no longer to be responsible for myself; I am grateful for that. I am in other hands, relieved of self-determination, freedom cancelled.  
Hooray for regular hours!  
And for the supervision of the spirit!  
Long live regimentation!”<sup>18</sup>

In contrast to Fuchs, Goldman believes that in Joseph’s choice Bellow conveyed a transformation of his thoughts and a movement from isolation to the acceptance of his role in society<sup>19</sup> and Levenson points out that “the act of choice implies an affirmation of freedom as well as the loss of it.”<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> BELLOW, S. *Dangling Man*. New York: Penguin, 1988. p. 191.

<sup>19</sup> GOLDMAN, L.H. *The Holocaust in the Novels of Saul Bellow*. In *Modern Language Studies*, Vol. 16, No. 1 (Winter, 1986), p. 73.

<sup>20</sup> LEVENSON, J. C. *Bellow’s Dangling Men* In *Saul Bellow and the Critics*. New York: New York University Press. 1967. p. 42.

### **III. *Henderson the Rain King***

#### **3.1. The Duality of Life**

The story of Henderson is not just a narration about an expedition to Africa. However, the main motif of this text is a journey. Physically, Henderson travels to the cradle of humankind – Africa. Nonetheless, the hidden action is meant as the one of a higher importance. During the process of “bursting the spirit’s sleep”, he manages to find and bring to life his real, deepest and suppressed self. As Henderson says: “... travel is advisable. And believe me, the world is a mind. Travel is mental travel. I had always suspected this. What we call reality is nothing but pedantry.”<sup>21</sup>

Reality as such is a crucial subject of the whole plot. The author often compares and contrasts the outer reality, tangible and perceivable by our senses, and the inner one, the one of our thoughts, emotions and psyche. According to Ralph Freedman: “..., Bellow moved towards a reinterpretation of reality. Gradually, the minute examination of consciousness against the background of the external world is supplanted by a human charade played against the scenery of a spurious environment.”<sup>22</sup> The closer Henderson comes into contact with Africa, the more he discovers the inconsistency of the phenomena that we perceive as reality and a sphere of our thoughts. Our senses can mislead us, according to our frame of mind and state of health. Likewise behaviour is being acquired during life. Behaviour is not inherited, therefore there does not have to be congruence with our soul in all respects. People can act with different masks depending on the surrounding environment, and yet not to show their real self. As a result, those aspects we judge as good do not

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<sup>21</sup> BELLOW, S. *Henderson the Rain King*. New York: Penguin, 1971. p. 157.

<sup>22</sup> FREEDMAN, R. *Saul Bellow: The Illusion of Environment*. In *Saul Bellow and the Critics*. New York: New York University Press. 1967. p. 53.

necessarily prove to be good. Still, the most frequent option is that we do not know our real self, but we just think we know it. The outer balance does not have to correspond with the inner balance. Before the journey to Africa, Henderson finds himself in such a dissonance. He realizes that he is in want of settling an argument between his ego and his soul. The way to settle mental peace proves to be inevitable. Indubitably, this truth hidden is expressed in Dalai Lama's saying: "The very purpose of our life is to seek happiness."<sup>23</sup>, and constitutes the central issue of Henderson's life.

### **3. 2. Henderson's Relationships**

Henderson is not the archetype of a good character, nor is he primarily the archetype of a bad one. He is a comfortably well-off man; a son, a husband, a father; with his better as well as worse qualities. Sometimes it may seem there is no love in his heart as he acts as a ruthless and unscrupulous person who cares about no one but himself. Still, this outer display of his personality is not the one corresponding with his real self. Every person acquires certain behavioural patterns in the course of life as a result of experience and the environment. That applies to Henderson as well. He had inherited a remarkable physique. Being heavy and sturdy along with having rugged features has affected his life to a great extent. Not surprisingly, having such remarkable looks has helped him to bear some difficult situations better than others would. On the other hand, he has not behaved well since his teenage years. Craving for his father's acceptance, he tried to attract attention in a rather inappropriate way. As a result of his desire to gain paternal respect, he married a woman of a high society who was well-educated, good-looking and fertile, yet reserved and cold-hearted. No matter how noble Henderson's intentions were, the marriage

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<sup>23</sup> Cf. [http://www.goodreads.com/author/quotes/570218.Dalai\\_Lama\\_XIV](http://www.goodreads.com/author/quotes/570218.Dalai_Lama_XIV)  
[cit. 2013- 6- 4]



was not happy and ended up with a divorce after years of struggles and suffering. Their relationship, based on something that could be called a treaty on common life, has been malfunctioning since the very beginning for both of the participants did not know how to share love and please one another. They were too individualistic to manage it. Nevertheless, they are not to be blamed for this. They were raised in the modern era of individualism and separation, in the age of chasing wealth, education and supremacy over other people.

His second wife, Lily, was completely unlike the first one. From the outset of their relationship, she has displayed herself as full of love, optimism and joy. Her ability to show love was manifested without any hesitation. We can say that it was due to her family environment. Even if her father was a heavy drinker and caused many problems, he lavished love on her. She experienced the feelings of a beloved child and that is why she could have developed the skill to express her love to others as well as she could have developed the sense of self-respect. Compared to Lily, Henderson had not experienced such an affectionate treatment. As a consequence, he could not retain those basic skills. His father acted rather impassively and seemed unapproachable. This posture came from his high position in society. Having had a high social status, he disciplined himself to show a certain, scholarly face. As a result, Henderson did not know how to behave when someone showed him love. The source of such manners was unidentifiable for him as he had not met a behavioural pattern like that before. Had he known the truth, he could have been more affable. On the other hand, Lily thought she found her truth when she met Henderson. She thought of them as kindred spirits and wanted to live with him in any event. Regrettably, her happiness did not correspond with Henderson's state of mind. The enclosure of his thoughts was predominantly caused by his self-image. The behavioural patterns he had developed since his childhood did not incorporate thoughtfulness, affection or solicitude. It could not as he did not feel the self-esteem. Since his childhood he had lived in an indifferent

environment, so he started to act ruthlessly. That does not mean he was a ruthless person, even if he thought so. He had just become accustomed to this “reality” and he completely accepted having a bad character and behaved this way. Playing the role of a reprehensible man, he suffered and according to Dalai Lama: “All suffering is caused by ignorance. People inflict pain on others in the selfish pursuit of their own happiness or satisfaction.”<sup>24</sup>

His relationship with Lily has been complicated since the beginning. When they met for the first time, Eugene was still married to Frances but the relationship was a mere formality. Lily showed deep affection for Henderson and that surprised him. He did not expect such emotions. An unexpected expression of feelings was unbelievable, as he explains:

When she took off her clothes she started to speak out in a trembling voice, “I love you! I love you!” And I said to myself as we embraced. “Oh, how can she love you – you - you!”<sup>25</sup>

As soon as their relationship became closer, Lily formed a really heartfelt attachment to Henderson and he felt certain affection for her as well. Nonetheless, they had certain misunderstandings. Primarily, it sprang from their different way of thinking and perception of reality. Both of them had a different point of view, therefore they could not get into closer contact. It was as if they shared the same room, which was divided in two purely individual halves by an invisible barrier.

Under her breath, pale with terror but consumed also with her damned exalted glory, she mumbled as I was sobbing at the wheel about pride and strength and soul and love, and all of that. I told her, “Curse you, you’re nuts!”  
“Without you, maybe it’s true. Maybe I’m not all there and I don’t understand,” she said. “But when we’re together, I *know*.”

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<sup>24</sup> Cf. [http://www.goodreads.com/author/quotes/570218.Dalai\\_Lama\\_XIV](http://www.goodreads.com/author/quotes/570218.Dalai_Lama_XIV)  
[cit. 2013- 6- 4]

<sup>25</sup> BELLOW, S. *Henderson the Rain King*. New York: Penguin, 1971. p. 14.

“Hell you know. How come I don’t know anything! Stay the hell away from me. You tear me to pieces.”<sup>26</sup>

The changeability of any relationship is quite normal. In each relationship there are ups and downs and the values upon which the relationship is based may change as well. The problem in the case of Henderson and Lily was that even if they had feelings for each other, their common life was a torture. It was hard for them to get on well because of the instability of Henderson’s self. He treated her as badly as he treated himself. He could not appreciate her more, because she was merely his wife, the wife of a deplorable man.

No, I treated her like a stranger before the guests because I didn’t like to see her behave and carry on like the lady of the house; because I, the sole heir of this famous name and estate, am a bum, and she is not a lady but merely my wife – merely my wife.<sup>27</sup>

### **3. 3. Attempts at Escape**

Whenever people suffer from considerable pressure for a longer period of time, the easiest way to release the tension is to opt for some form of escape. Henderson’s crisis required an escape from issues of everyday life. His first attempt to relieve the strain was in taking the decision to fight in World War II. Despite his lucky survival, his demand for freedom of mind was not met. Not only did he return as desperate as he was before the war but he apparently suffered even more than ever. His family life was a complete disaster as his marriage with Frances was no longer sustainable. Pig breeding was a further form of escape. However, it did not ease him of the burden of the crisis either. Depreciating the estate of his ancestors with pigs and sublimating his troubles in manual labour did not prove to be a successful way to salvation. The more he vented his anger on inanimate matter, the more violent and desperate he

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<sup>26</sup> BELLOW, S. *Henderson the Rain King*. New York: Penguin, 1971. p. 22.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid*, p. 10.

became, not to mention a voice in his heart expressed lust for something undetectable which gradually started to nag his mind.

Henderson did not want to yield to this voice, for he had a character of a battler. He tried to sooth it with alcohol and alcohol has the power to cloud the mind. When drinking, people usually do not feel the need to look for a genuine solution to their problems as alcohol serves as an attempt at escaping these problems. Although Henderson tried really hard to force the stifling reality out of his mind by drinking great amounts of alcohol, he still suffered. Neither outer, nor inner oppression dissipated. Contrary to his expectations, drinking was not an efficient means of relief. The effect of his drinking caused more harm than good and:

The demand came louder, *I want, I want, I want, I want, I want!*  
And I would cry, begging at last, “Oh, tell me then. Tell me what you want!” And finally I’d say, “Okay, then. One of these days, stupid. You wait!” This was what made me behave as I did.<sup>28</sup>

Yet, on no account was he able to suppress the voice in his heart since it had developed because he had not been satisfied with his life, not to mention his encounters with reality. He felt enormous discontent over the position he was born in. Even if he did not always perceive this, the deeper layers of his consciousness displayed it rather ostentatiously. Like a lot of other people, Henderson did not appreciate himself. He did not know where he belongs. That is why he felt such enormous despair and discontent. He felt he should be somewhere else, doing something different. He was not embedded in this current life role as:

Nobody truly occupies a station in life any more. There are mostly people who feel that they occupy the place that belongs to another by rights. There are displaced persons everywhere.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> BELLOW, S. *Henderson the Rain King*. New York: Penguin, 1971. p. 27.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid*, p. 35.

Had he known where the lust came from, he would not have been in such despair. He only knew that neither money nor any of the people surrounding him could relieve him of his strain. Not only had he suffered, but he made his family's life a real hell above all. Conditions got so harsh that one incident of losing his temper with his wife scared an elderly woman from their neighbourhood to death. What necessarily followed was the moment of his ultimate decision to make a real escape - a flight to Africa. Since he had always been interested in tribes living in primitive conditions, he did not hesitate to use the opportunity of going to Africa with an old friend of his. Yet, the purpose and circumstances of the expedition did not come up to Henderson's high expectations. After some time he started to hear the inner voice again and the pressure in his chest was increasing every day. Considering the arising restlessness, he was forced to separate from his friend and travel on his own. Romilayu, a native African, was hired to accompany him and promised to show him the real, indigenous Africa where, in his opinion, Henderson should have the chance to find the essence of his self. As Koy stated on account of the purpose of Henderson's journey in his article *Saul Bellow and His Fictions of Black Culture*: "In his escape to Africa, Eugene Henderson sought to achieve self-purification and moral accountability, to strive spiritually and seek out a new personal destiny in Africa."<sup>30</sup>

### **3. 4. Uncovering the Truth**

The first place Romilayu and Henderson got to was a village of the Arnewi tribe. From the beginning, Henderson had mixed feelings about contact with Arnewi people. He was scared not to offend them by his sturdy appearance or rough behaviour and tried to act, with varying degrees of success, cautiously.

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<sup>30</sup> KOY, Ch. *Saul Bellow and His Fictions of Black Culture*. Antropologické symposium III. Plzeň: Aleš Čeněk, 2004, p. 160.

Yet, he was actuated by desire to fulfil the purpose of his journey, which was grounded in discovering the wisdom of African people, and he would do anything to reach it. Trying to help Arnewi with their seemingly insoluble problem with contaminated water, he strained to do his best. He hoped to be revealed at least a bit of the truth in return. As he thought:

Everything depends on the values – the values. And where’s reality? I ask you, where is it? I myself, dying of misery and boredom, had happiness, and objective happiness, too, all round me, as abundant as the water in that cistern which cattle were forbidden to drink. And therefore I thought this will be one of those mutual-aid deals; where the Arnewi are irritable I’ll help them, and where I’m irritable they’ll help me.<sup>31</sup>

However, unlucky as he was, he caused severe damage to the tribe and was compelled to leave the village without being enlightened. Seeking help in the outer reality did not prove to be the right way to learn the wisdom of life. When amongst the Arnewi, Henderson thought that Mtalba would convey the truth to him directly. However, she had only revealed some of his qualities and hidden thoughts and emotions. Finding out so little information made him depressed, so he started to have doubts about the desired attainment of the journey. On account of uncontrollable fears of not being able to reach his real self, he would rather die in Africa than return home unpurified of an unwanted part of the self.

Nevertheless, there were moments during the days in the village of the Arnewi when intense feelings of truth surprised him. His spirit was slowly awaking.

My soul was in quite a condition, but not heretically excited; it was a state as mild as the colour itself. I said to myself, “*I knew* that this place was of old.” Meaning, I had sensed from the first that I might find things here which were of old, which I saw when I was still innocent and have longed for ever since, for all my life – and

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<sup>31</sup> BELLOW, S. *Henderson the Rain King*. New York: Penguin, 1971. p. 83.

without which *I could not make it*. My spirit was not sleeping then, I can tell you, but was saying, Oh, ho, ho, ho, ho, ho!<sup>32</sup>

Such an exhilarating experience directs him to think about his childhood. Childhood is thought to be the age of purity. Provided that children are not corrupted by the outside world, they are still blameless. Their overall perception of the world is innocent. Not only can they be captivated by the world's beauties but also seemingly unexceptional and ordinary things attract them. Their interest in the outside world is enormous. Enthusiasm, vitality and joy are typical of this age as children derive pleasure from the most common things. Contrary to what is actual to the little ones, adults take a different stand on the world. Their attitude is influenced to a great extent by various fears.

The world may be strange to a child, but he does not fear it the way a man fears. He marvels at it. But the grown man mainly dreads it. And why? Because of death. So he arranges to have himself abducted like a child. So what happens will not be his fault. And who is this kidnapper – this gypsy? It is the strangeness of life – a thing that makes death more remote, as in childhood.<sup>33</sup>

The more inspiring was experience he went through among peaceful Arnewi, all the bigger was the shock of the warlike Wariri. Even if the tribe was significant with a fighting spirit, their king, Dahfu, behaved as the exact opposite. Henderson sensing Dahfu's spirituality decided to acquire about some of his wisdom. Therefore he was "put to lessons in self-transcendence. He had to learn to contain humiliations and overcome fear. Like Zarathustra, he had to empty himself in order to become a man again."<sup>34</sup>

Setting in such an adverse environment contributed to the pressure Henderson was confronted with. The outer difficulties intensified his inner distress. In

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<sup>32</sup> BELLOW, S. *Henderson the Rain King*. New York: Penguin, 1971. pp. 96-7.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid, p. 81.

<sup>34</sup> KLEIN, M. *A Discipline of Nobility: Saul Bellow's Fiction in Saul Bellow and the Critics* London, University of London Press LTD, 1967, p. 94.

contrast with sinister surroundings, Henderson became closer with king Dahfu, who inducted him into the wisdom of life. Thanks to their dialogues their relationship developed and Henderson became able to see the root of his troubles. As he discovered:

The world of facts is real, all right, and not to be altered. The physical is all there, and it belongs to science. But then there is the noumenal department, and there we create and create and create. As we tread our overanxious ways, we think we know what is real. And I was telling the truth to Lily after a fashion. I knew it better, all right, but I knew it because it was mine – filled, flowing, and floating with my own resemblances; as hers was with *her* resemblances. Oh, what a revelation! Truth spoke to me. To *me*, Henderson!<sup>35</sup>

Nevertheless, even Dahfu was not completely safe in his life role. He had to finish the task of capturing a lion to become a legitimate king. Unluckily, the chase ended with Dahfu's death. Accordingly, that threat of death was the impulse for Henderson to leave Wariri. Even if he had to escape from Wariri, he felt blessed with knowledge that:

Despite all circumstances of oppression, despite the violence of nature and the violence of men, despite the cocky, assertive "I", despite all determinism and despite finitude and death, the individual *is* free and free to choose. He can become better.<sup>36</sup>

### 3. 5. The Rendering of Africa

Henderson's interest in living in the most basic conditions had developed since his years of study. As if he felt that even though the life without modern technologies and convenience is not quite leisurely, it has other more crucial qualities. Thanks to his interest in physicians who helped diseased people in different parts of the world, he was familiarized with some facts about life in

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<sup>35</sup> BELLOW, S. *Henderson the Rain King*. New York: Penguin, 1971. p. 157.

<sup>36</sup> KLEIN, M. *A Discipline of Nobility: Saul Bellow's Fiction in Saul Bellow and the Critics* London, University of London Press LTD, 1967 p. 110.



such “disadvantaged” milieus. His first attempt at discovering some verities about primitive tribes failed as Lily refused to spend their honeymoon among the Eskimos. Eager as Henderson indubitably was, he reluctantly accepted postponement of his dreamed-of journey. Nevertheless, the idea itself did not disappear from his mind. Therefore, when circumstances at home got insufferable and he was absolutely dragged down, he did not vacillate on accepting the invitation of his friend to travel around Africa.

Provided that his preceding travelling experience was rich, mainly thanks to his participation in the Second World War as well as affluent background, his ideas of journeying in simple conditions were clear. For that reason, the decision of detaching himself from the well-appointed facilities of his wealthy friend inevitably arose. The very first native African who came in closer contact with Henderson happened to be Romilayu, his guide. Their relationship eventually matured in a friendship, since they had to rely on one another in countless arduous situations. Had Romilayu not accompanied Henderson, he would have definitely not survived for Romilayu was well-accustomed to the African habits. Thanks to his ability to hold talks with dignitaries as well as ordinary people, they avoided many misunderstandings.

Romilayu and Henderson came from different backgrounds and their characters were formed in different conditions. However, even if the number of differences was not particularly insignificant, they reached some form of harmony in their relationship, as if the language was not so important for mutual understanding. This fact could be supported not only by the relationship of Henderson and Romilayu, but more importantly by the relationship of the main character and the king of the Wariri tribe, Dahfu. Admittedly, both natives mastered English to some degree, thus there still remained words they could not translate. Therefore the communication had to be based on some degree of empathizing with the American. Considering the vastness of Africa

and the quantity of its inhabitants, not to mention the lack of education of people living in isolated tribes, it was quite fortunate for Henderson to encounter people, who could communicate in English. Romilayu was expected to speak English, as he made living as a tourist guide. The others, the Prince of Arnewi and the King of Wariri, were distinct from other natives not only owing to their social status, but also thanks to their knowledge of English, which they gained in an industrial and more developed African city, where they studied at the same university. Surprisingly, even if their tribes differ in location as well as the general conventions, both royal natives became friends.

The vivid descriptions of Africa and customs of the native people contribute to the genuineness and integrity of the novel. Considering that the author had a degree in anthropology and took a particular interest in the culture of African Americans, detailed descriptions of African tribes could be recognized as trustworthy in some respect. Yet many scholars highlighted their limitedness and one-sidedness. Bellow based those descriptions on several studies on East and West African tribes that were issued in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and early twentieth century. Not only a time discrepancy, but also an inaccuracy of some facts led anthropologists to severely criticise Bellow.<sup>37</sup> Real customs of African tribes are depicted in the fictional tribes of Arnewi and Wariri. Whereas the area of Arnewi should represent eastern part of Africa, Wariri's territory should stand for its western part.<sup>38</sup>

Most of the plot is set in the background of two entirely dissimilar tribes. The first tribe which Henderson visited is situated in the eastern part of Africa. Arnewi, as they called themselves, lived on raising cattle. However, the role of their cattle was considered as sacred since its meat did not provide nourishment

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<sup>37</sup> KOY, Ch. *Saul Bellow and His Fictions of Black Culture*. Antropologické symposium III. Plzeň: Aleš Čeněk, 2004 p. 166.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid, p. 160.

to Arnewi. They lived on milk, not on meat. Henderson, not aware of this fact, experienced a shock when he came to Arnewi. The moment he saw them approaching in a heart-breaking cry, he thought of going back to the isolation of savage African plains. Disconcerted as he was, he assumed the cause of their mourning was his outstanding physique. On the contrary, their representative explained that the root of the grief dwells in perishing of the cattle thanks to the contamination of a water supply where the cattle were watered. The formerly mentioned anthropological information as well as other data ranging from the custom of wrestling which initiated friendships to the “aesthetic view the cattle tribe men held of the women of their tribe”<sup>39</sup> were directly integrated to the novel from Bellow’s anthropological sources with only a few alternations.<sup>40</sup> A concept of Wariri tribe, whose people are depicted as warlike and hostile; practising human sacrifices and other rituals that seem rather terrifying to strangers, not to mention the army of women warriors, has its roots in reality. In addition, according to Koy:

By far the most substantial integration of anthropological literature in *Henderson the Rain King* is cited in the “*Wariri*” tribe section of his novel based on studies on the Dahomey. Bellow extracts heavily from Richard Burton’s popular book. Making particular use of Burton’s description of King Gelele, taken from his visits to the king in 1863-1864, Bellow created Henderson’s mentor “*King Dahfu*”. The physical description, demeanour, clothing, eating habits, and behaviour of the wives of Burton’s King Gelele and Bellow’s “*King Dahfu*” are virtually identical, down to detailing the exact manner in which tobacco was consumed.<sup>41</sup>

The most captivating of all rituals was the ritual of rain-making. As the title introduces, Henderson became “the Rain King”, which means that his brave

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<sup>39</sup> KOY, Ch. *Saul Bellow and His Fictions of Black Culture*. Antropologické symposium III. Plzeň: Aleš Čeněk, 2004, p. 161.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid, p. 161.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid, pp. 161-2.

deeds caused the long-missing rain to fall. Even this ritual was based on the authentic ritual of the Dahomey Kingdom.<sup>42</sup>

The fact that Henderson deals with water in both tribes symbolically denotes the importance of water. As a medium giving life, it proves to be essential for all living beings. Provided that Henderson was not able to deal with water among Arnewi without causing any harm, he still was not bereft of his former fear of death. Without the acceptance of death as well as life, he could not succeed in his quest. Given that the ritual of rain-making went off sufficiently, the real perception of existence drew closer. Owing to Henderson's act of bravery, Dahfu, "the comic and semi-philosophical king"<sup>43</sup>, was willing to teach Henderson his wisdom of life. A change from failure to success also symbolizes the possibility of Henderson's desired transformation. He realized that the inner strength may trigger delight when it is used with an appropriate determination. At one highly tense moment before the ritual of rain-making, Henderson enquired of Dahfu:

King, I am a Becomer. Now you see your situation is different. You are a Be-er. I've just to stop Becoming. Jesus Christ, when I am going to Be? I have a hell of a long time. I suppose I should be more patient, but for God's sake, Your Highness, you've got to understand what it's like with me. So I am asking you. You've got to let me out there. Why it is, I can't say, but I feel called upon to do it, and this may be my main chance.<sup>44</sup>

### **3. 6. The Being People and The Becoming People**

On his quest, Henderson discovered that people could be classes as either "Be-ers" or "Becomers". During the process of awakening, he realized he has

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<sup>42</sup> KOY, Ch. *Saul Bellow and His Fictions of Black Culture*. Antropologické symposium III. Plzeň: Aleš Čeněk, 2004, p. 164.

<sup>43</sup> KOY, Ch., The Reformulation of Ethnological Sources and Orientalist Discourse in Bellow's *Henderson the Rain King*, *American and British Studies Annual* 1 (2008), p. 32.

<sup>44</sup> BELLOW, S. *Henderson the Rain King*. New York: Penguin, 1971. p. 179.

belonged to the group of Becoming people without any tangible fulfilment all his life. Becoming people, depicted as individuals struggling for survival in the world full of distress and injustice, submit to artificial rules of society created by unconscious people. Their real self is dominated by their ego. Given that the power of the ego is enormous, they are dragged by its lust. Everyone wants to gain something – wealth, power, a lovely partner, a luxurious car. Requirements of ego take precedence over the soul. As a result, Becoming people do not perceive the needs of their spirit. After his visit to Arnewi, Henderson noticed certain changes in his perception of reality. When he met Dahfu for the first time, he thought:

And if I had really been capable of the alert consciousness which it required I would have confessed that Becoming was beginning to come out of my ears. Enough! Enough! Time to have become. Time to Be! Burst the spirit's sleep. Wake up, America!<sup>45</sup>

In order to transform himself, Henderson undergone a process of overcoming his terrors under the supervision of king Dahfu, who experienced the same tutoring some years ago with his father. The tuition consisted in exposing to a lion and trying to acquire some of his manners. In contrast with Dahfu, who was communing with his lioness, Henderson succumbed to dismay at first. According to Daniel Hughes:

It soon becomes apparent that the lion kept under the throne by Dahfu is precisely what Henderson is not, something external, powerful, real. For all his boasting about reality, Henderson must undergo a savage encounter with something entirely foreign, and from this discover reality in himself.<sup>46</sup>

While Henderson followed the teachings of Dahfu, he slowly overcame his fears and learned more about reality. As Marcus Klein points out about the lioness:

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<sup>45</sup> BELLOW, S. *Henderson the Rain King*. New York: Penguin, 1971. p.150.

<sup>46</sup> HUGHES, D. Reality and the Hero: *Lolita* and *Henderson the Rain King* p.85.

She is the way to Being, the end of Becoming, the unchanging truth prior to the cycle of desire and fear. She will force Henderson to the present moment. “She will make consciousness to shine. She will burnish you.” She *is* Being – or, as it turns out, penultimate Being – itself.<sup>47</sup>

The lioness was not the only significant beast Henderson met at Wariri. At the end of Dahfu’s quest for becoming a rightful king, he encountered another lion. Provided that this lion caused Dahfu’s death, there he emerged as an undeniable symbol of death and Henderson’s image of reality was accomplished. Therefore, the strenuous way back home seemed more bearable to Henderson as he reached some form of transformation. Marcus Klein adds that Henderson’s transformation “is a progress of the soul through its freedom, from isolation to affirmation of ordinary life in the world.”<sup>48</sup>

Not only that Henderson “burst the spirit’s sleep”, but he also found out he is “a true adorer of life”<sup>49</sup>, and therefore he would not give up his life. In addition, another truth was revealed:

[Henderson] I had a voice that said I want! I want? I? It should have told me *she* wants, *he* wants, *they* want. And moreover, it’s love that makes reality reality.<sup>50</sup>

Henderson’s concluding notion of reality means that the essence of life dwells in love.

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<sup>47</sup> KLEIN, M. *A Discipline of Nobility: Saul Bellow’s Fiction in Saul Bellow and the Critics* London, University of London Press LTD, 1967, p. 102.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid*, p. 94.

<sup>49</sup> BELLOW, S. *Henderson the Rain King*. New York: Penguin, 1971. p. 150.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid*, p. 267.

## **IV. Herzog**

### **4. 1. The Foundation of Crisis**

Herzog, the main character of the novel, is a man in his forties, usually the most productive period of a human life, and he has to face a personal crisis he has got into. A total breakdown of former values, beginning with the break-up of his second marriage, leads him to reassess his view of reality and his existence. His desire to put some in order the injustices he did to others and especially the need of some explanation about why others treated him unfairly initiate the quest to find the real values of life. He feels oppressed by other people and as Marcus Klein points out: “Bellow’s alienated hero before he is alienated is a terribly oppressed individual, and it is with the feeling of his oppression that the fiction no doubt begins.”<sup>51</sup> As a result, the grievance Herzog has against his ex-wife Madeleine and her accomplices on his personal catastrophe provokes the majority of his inner and outer actions. As a well-educated intellectual whose book on Romanticism won a lot of esteem among other academics, he appreciates all philosophers and scholars who influenced the way of thinking of each historical era. Accordingly, he experiences a requirement to make a synthesis of their ideas to find a universal truth about human life and happiness. Simultaneously, he looks for a narrative that will set the history of developing human consciousness in a clear order. (cf. Corner, 2000) The analysis of social and private tasks should help him to come to a definite conclusion about the worth of life.

He appraises reality with eyes of an alienated individual whose personal life has been completely ruined. He feels estranged from society and its values, but also from those Jewish values and history his Jewish parents brought from

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<sup>51</sup> KLEIN, M. *A Discipline of Nobility: Saul Bellow’s Fiction in Saul Bellow and the Critics* London, University of London Press LTD, 1967, p. 95.

Russia. Herzog himself was brought up very modestly, his family not having money to waste. Yet when he returns to the days of his childhood in his memories, an image of a contented family arises. The more they lacked money, the more their lives were rich in emotions, especially love. Father Herzog was admired by his wife and his children, no matter what peculiar situation he has got himself into, no matter how little money he earned. Their love was not limited by any criteria, for he was loved as a bread-winner and a similar immense love Herzog felt for his mother. She yearned for an exquisite life of her children, regardless of the cost. Thanks to flashbacks Moses now realizes that his first marriage with Daisy was not as imperfect as he thought. It was quite peaceful, Daisy being an obedient and caring wife trying to manage the household the best way she could. They had some problems as in every partnership, but it was not anything serious. Regardless of how much Daisy tried, Herzog was not gratified. He thought life with her too ordinary, thus he craved for something more. As he later says: "I gave up the shelter of an orderly, purposeful, lawful existence because it bored me, and I felt it was simply a slacker's life."<sup>52</sup> His relationship with Madeleine was something diametrically opposite. Madeleine was more of a beauty than a home-bird. She had spectacular ambitions, starting from her conversion to Christianity and finishing with Herzog's defeat as a highly-esteemed scholar. Thanks to her faculty of an unnoticed manipulation of people, she managed to push Herzog to marry her and after some time she almost succeeded in the destruction of his life.

#### **4. 2. The Illusion of Sanity**

At the beginning of the novel, the main character claims: "If I am out of my mind, it's all right with me."<sup>53</sup> This seemingly self-contradictory statement

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<sup>52</sup> BELLOW, S. *Herzog*. London: Penguin, 1971. p. 109.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid*, p. 7.



expresses one of the most essential notions of the novel. At first, the affair of Herzog's insanity appears quite straightforward. He occupies a broken-down old house that he once bought with a vision of a happy rural family life with his second wife. He is now sharing his refuge with wild animals only, having almost no contact with people. Furthermore, he pens letters that are scarcely sent. Most of them are kept within the borders of his mind. Such a state usually does not correspond with a commonly accepted idea of sanity. Writing highly emotional letters about his private life at one moment and serious, precisely elaborate letters of social, political or philosophical concerns in the other - without any apparent connection to mental state of an individual - could be hardly considered as sane. However those signs could be misleading, because sanity is only a label constructed and judged by man. In addition, the construct of Herzog's insanity was a part of Madeleine's well-plotted plan to defeat him and enthrone herself to his position as a highly regarded intellectual. She wanted his surroundings to think he is insane and it got so far that even he, for some time, had doubts about his own sanity. In a letter addressed to Madeleine's aunt Zelda, he wrote:

As long as I was Mady's good husband, I was a delightful person. Suddenly, because Madeleine decided that she wanted out - suddenly, I was a mad dog. The police were warned about me and there was talk of committing me to an institution...You took Madeleine's word as to my mental condition and so did others.<sup>54</sup>

During the process of raising questions about life and death matters, the "healing process", he realizes that no such a person could honestly say what is or is not insanity. Having experienced how vulnerable people are towards ingeniously thought-out fables and half-truths when they hear them from a persuasive actor such as Madeleine or her lover Gersbach, he decides to find out his own real truth. As Sidney Finkelstein enhances Herzog's point of view:

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<sup>54</sup> BELLOW, S. *Herzog*. London: Penguin, 1971. p. 41.

“...sanity is only an adjustment to a respectable conventional life that has no real values.”<sup>55</sup> Moreover, Herzog realizes that people living under the rules of modern life accept values which are, in his opinion, superficial, because they remain under the influence of ideologies. Ideology plays a part in the life of every human being, but the question is whether we really need such ideologies. He adds that Madeleine “brought ideology into his life”<sup>56</sup>. Her own ideology she accepts as the real one. This is not to say he had not been under the influence of ideologies before he met her. He just admits the inevitability of their closer contact, and without this experience he would not become conscious of the shallowness of the life he used to live. The years of struggles and suffering, but also happiness with Mady should have shown him some important facts about reality and about himself as well. Nevertheless, other people tried to show him how reality works. He called them “Reality Instructors”:

A very special sort of lunatic experts to incalculable his principles. Sandor Himmelstein, Valentine Gersbach, Madeleine P. Herzog, Moses himself. Reality instructors. They want to teach you – to punish you with – the lessons of the Real.<sup>57</sup>

However, Herzog himself was labelled as a “reality instructor” provided that he had his own subjective view of reality, which he tried to share with his surroundings. Accordingly, Moses tutored people in “reality” as well.

Valentine Gersbach, his ex-friend, was not honest with Herzog and did not tell him about his affair with Madeleine. Yet he gave comfort to him when Moses was in despair, not to mention that Gersbach felt confident enough to advise Moses about the way Madeleine should be treated, even pampered. Valentine

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<sup>55</sup> FINKELSTEIN, S. *Existentialism and alienation in American literature*. NY: International Publishers, 1965, p. 65.

<sup>56</sup> BELLOW, S. *Herzog*. London: Penguin, 1971. p. 341.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid*, p. 132.

posed as Herzog's all-knowing adviser and a friend. Likewise Himmelstein, a lawyer who believes only in money, the rottenness of people and society, tried to lecture Herzog in the principles of reality. Yet, even he as a wise guide through reality has some psychological problems, and thus has to visit a psychiatrist.

On that account, not being normal is nothing surprising for Herzog. Nonetheless, we have to admit that Herzog acts quite oddly in some situations. When he starts to write letters in the middle of the lecture or when he addresses his letters to dead people, it may seem a bit peculiar. However, he tries to clarify his behaviour to his brother: "Will, I'm excited, not sick"<sup>58</sup>. Moses is aware that his manners may seem strange to others but he thinks it a part of the process he has to go through to touch the truth. In any case, he feels the need to defend himself when his relatives want him to go to hospital:

Well, you mustn't be distressed about me. I'm in a peculiar state, but not in a bad one. I'd open my heart to you, Will, if I could find the knob. There's no reason to be upset about me. By God, Will, I'm about to cry! How did that happen? I won't do it. It's only love. Or something that bears down like love. It probably is love. I'm in no shape to buck it. I don't want you to think anything wrong.<sup>59</sup>

#### **4. 3. The Letter-Writing**

The letter-writing is meant to be a means of dealing with questions Herzog tries to answer. The most serious ones are concerned with modern society and the values of human life. Through the letters he could be in contact with people living or dead, even with God. One of the characters says: "A letter gives one a chance to consider – think matters over, and reach a more balanced view."<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> BELLOW, S. *Herzog*. London: Penguin, 1971. p. 339.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid*, p. 339.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid*, p. 107.

Yet, the communication he tries to undertake is only one-sided, thus non-functional. This could be one of the significant reasons why he gets into such a desperate state of existence. He never gets answers to his questions of the highest importance. Additionally, there is the incapability of a meaningful two-sided communication among other characters. They are much too individualistic to find any common interest and there is always one of them subordinated to the other in some manner. Madeleine, Herzog's second wife, feels the strong need to humiliate Herzog and one of her tools is communication, both verbal and non-verbal. Verbal communication is connected with the system of sounds - language. Moses wants to reach the truth with written language as he is not very skilful when it comes to outer contact with people. Language is a tool he masters perfectly and feels confident using it. As Corner highlights: "His [Herzog's] mind is predominantly verbal; because he experiences the world as a text, he seeks to represent it as a text."<sup>61</sup> However, as he realizes during the metamorphosis of his self, the truth is hidden neither in questions, nor in answers. The core lies in the process itself. On that account, Martin Corner explains in his article on Herzog:

Thought can be no liberation from the confusions of life if it gives in to "the delusion of total *explanations*" (*H*, p.166), the idiocy of having an answer for everything: "readiness to answer all questions is the infallible sign of stupidity" (*H*, p. 155). Truth, even the absolute truth of metaphysics, is not a claim to explain everything, to have all answers. Such a claim would represent the ultimate absorption of reality into thought, and Herzog, though engaged on an inclusive project of his own, is made to sense that total explanation is the defeat, not the fulfilment, of understanding.<sup>62</sup>

Each individual has his own "truth" or is influenced by other "truths". This fact can be traced in history, as well as in the present day. Any ideology is based on

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<sup>61</sup> CORNER, M. "Moving Outwards: Consciousness, Discourse and Attention in Saul Bellow's Fiction" In: *Studies in the Novel* 32:3 (Fall 2000): p. 372.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid, p. 372.

something that people accepting such an ideology call a truth, although such a phenomenon is not transmittable, but is highly subjective.

The arrangement of people to whom the letters are addressed is seemingly accidental. It is a mixture of different personalities and characters, from influential philosophers to people who are in some way related to the fate of Herzog. Yet, each letter and each person plays his own important part in the search for truth of the main protagonist. He wants to find something he could believe in. It should be something real and deep, the essence of a human being and the sense of life. Herzog finds it very difficult in the modern time, under the influence of different ideologies, not to speak of science and modern technologies. This inner struggle is intensified by the fact that he is not able to deal with the outer world. He is not successful when it comes to contact with other people. He is imprisoned in his inability to act in the outer world and the crisis of his self, of his ideologies. Because the inner and the outer world influence each other and one cannot function without the other, he needs to solve both problems in his inner and outer world. The crisis starts off with the break-down of his outer world: both his two marriages were a failure. The break up with his first wife Daisy was not easy and the only positive result which came from this relationship was their son Marcus. With Madeleine, it was a total catastrophe. It nearly ruined him. He tries to resolve his situation with letters, real or mental, because he is not able to defend himself when it comes to a face-to-face situation. The question is to what extent he is really incapable of taking a step forward and what is just laziness and fear of getting too involved with people (cf. Finkelstein, 1965).

#### 4. 4. The Theatre of the Absurd

Each person takes part in the theatre called the world. In our life we play many parts from doctor to gardener, or grandson. There are excellent actors as well as poor actors and some roles we handle better than other. Someone can be a highly regarded expert on earthquakes but is otherwise an indecent citizen. As years go by and we grow older and more experienced, we give up roles and acquire new ones. It depends on your point of view and what style of drama you perform.

The modern world, according to Herzog, seems to be absurd with grotesque elements. Consequently, the society appears alienated and excessively influenced by the idea of decline. He thinks that: “Living amid great ideas and concepts, insufficiently relevant to the present, day-by-day, American conditions...”<sup>63</sup> is the cause of many of the present problems. The way people behave appears immoral and he directly encounters the lack of humane values. Moses comments on freedom rather sceptically: “...people can be free now but the freedom doesn’t have any content. It’s like a howling emptiness.”<sup>64</sup> The notion that nothing really occurs as it follows from reality could be petrifying. His own self is ambiguous. His appearance is of a man from a working class, yet he is an intellectual. Furthermore, the world apparently full of paradox seems absurd. Although self-assured Himmelstein instructs Herzog in reality, he regards him as an intellectual and asks him to talk to his daughter Carmel about books and even the marriage of Herzog and Carmel comes to his mind:

“Prof, while you’re here, I don’t ask anything from you”(in return for bed and board, he meant) “but I’d appreciate it if you’d take an interest in her mental development. This is her chance to know an intellectual – a famous person – an authority. Will you talk to her?”  
“About what?” “Books – ideas. Take her for a walk. Discuss with

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<sup>63</sup> BELLOW, S. *Herzog*. London: Penguin, 1971. p. 112.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid*, p. 45.

her. Please, Moses, I'm begging you." ... "If Carmel was a little older, I'd say, marry her."<sup>65</sup>

In his despair, Herzog longs for revenge and nearly murders Gersbach, as a traitor and seducer, and Madeleine for her betrayal and all the torment she has brought to his life. However, he finally finds himself unable to commit such an inhumane act. Not only heartlessness of such a deed manifests itself, but also the absurdity, which he formerly did not notice, suddenly arises in his mind. Finally, Herzog gained the ability to see the world beyond his own interpretations. (cf. Corner, 2000) He managed to perceive "reality" without being subjective exclusively.

... Gersbach, when he looks so sugary, repulsive, poisonous, not an individual but a fragment, a piece broken off from the mob. To shoot him! – an absurd thought. As soon as Herzog saw the actual person giving an actual bath, the reality of it, the tenderness of such a buffoon to a little child, his intended violence turned into *theatre*, into something ludicrous. He was not ready to make such a complete fool of himself. Only self-hatred could lead him to ruin himself because his heart was "broken". How could it be broken by such a pair?<sup>66</sup>

This experience is significant for his further mental development. The grotesqueness and absurdity of the world is revealed to full extent. Nonetheless, Herzog refuses to share the opinion of modern intellectuals as he once did.

This little demon was impregnated with modern ideas, and one in particular excited this terrible little heart: you must sacrifice your poor, squawking, niggardly individuality – which may be nothing anyway (from an analytic viewpoint) but a persistent infantile megalomania, or (from a Marxian point of view) a stinking little bourgeois property – to historical necessity. And to truth. And truth is true only as it brings down more disgrace and dreariness upon human beings, so that if it shows anything except evil it is illusion,

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<sup>65</sup> BELLOW, S. *Herzog*. London: Penguin, 1971. p. 96.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid*, p. 265.

and not truth. But of course he, Herzog, predictably bucking such trends, had characteristically, obstinately, defiantly, blindly but without sufficient courage or intelligence tried to be a marvellous Herzog, a Herzog who, perhaps clumsily, tried to live out marvellous qualities vaguely comprehended.<sup>67</sup>

The worthiness of survival and life is, after a harsh period of reflections, considered of the first magnitude, no matter how absurd the world may seem. Giving up his career as an intellectual should help him reach harmony. Herzog also puts off the shield of suffering that he applied as a means of protection from reality. At the end, formerly perceived hatred is dissolved and Herzog's heart is no longer burdened with negative emotions. "Dear Madeleine-You are a terrific one, you are! Bless you!"<sup>68</sup> He comes to terms even with Gersbach. In one of the last mental letters emerges a wish to Valentine: "Enjoy her, rejoice in her."<sup>69</sup> As his majesty Dalai Lama XIV says: "The true hero is one who conquers his own anger and hatred."<sup>70</sup> Presumably, Herzog has finally found the condition of balance. At the end, he reflected: "' But what do you want, Herzog?' But that's just it – not a solitary thing. I am pretty well satisfied to be, to be just as it is willed, and for as long as I may remain in occupancy."<sup>71</sup> Apparently, a state of acceptance of the outer world together with profound love of life was finally reached.

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<sup>67</sup> BELLOW, S. *Herzog*. London: Penguin, 1971. p. 99.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid, p. 325.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid, p. 325.

<sup>70</sup> Cf. [http://www.goodreads.com/author/quotes/570218.Dalai\\_Lama\\_XIV](http://www.goodreads.com/author/quotes/570218.Dalai_Lama_XIV)  
[cit. 2013- 6- 4]

<sup>71</sup> BELLOW, S. *Herzog*. London: Penguin, 1971. p. 347.



## V. Conclusion

All novels portray a hero in a difficult, life-changing situation that leads to reconsideration of his present life and a subsequent quest for truth. Even if the main theme is identical in many respects, and all heroes finally find their answers, the circumstances of the quest as well as the point of view of each hero differ.

*Dangling Man* presents a rather existentialist hero, one who is typical of the period of the first half of the twentieth century, unexpectedly imprisoned between two positions. The position of a working man is fully engaged in his role in society, and yet he also holds a position of a soldier taking part in the WWII. Sudden incidents cause the estrangement of the main hero from his former self as well as the isolation from his friends and close relatives. A difference of opinion and certain principles initiate his separation from his comrades of the American Communist party.

The amount of free time allows the Jewish protagonist Joseph to think about his former moral and intellectual values. Finally, he comes to conclusion that freedom, even if it is relative, generally does not prove to be beneficial because people usually do not know how to manage the state of being free. On account of his considerations, he solves his problem with enlisting himself. Truth in this novel is represented by providing service and being helpful to society.

The second analysed novel, *Henderson the Rain King*, tackles the same theme – a hero searching for truth. Nevertheless, in the case of Eugene Henderson, the hero comes from a wealthy Protestant background and his position in society is rather stable and secured. Yet, the fact that he is financially secure does not provide him with psychical stability. The feeling of being unbalanced compels him to sublimate his dissatisfaction by breeding pigs, drinking alcohol, playing

the violin, and finally with an escape to Africa where he desires to find his suppressed self.

In this novel, the representation of searching for truth is displayed more attractively as the hero travels to exotic Africa where he encounters many remarkable native personalities. The form of a narration about a journey to Africa implies that the narrator describes not only an inner action, in the form of thoughts of the main character, but also the outer action, which is, thanks to the unusual settings and brilliant wit of the author, gripping.

Henderson finally manages to overcome his fears and reaches the long-desired state of balance. However, he has to undergo many dreadful situations and uphill struggles to unburden himself of his fears and suffering. At the end, he realizes that a person is stable and balanced only if full of understanding and love, and then he can be beneficial for other people.

*Herzog*, the third analysed novel, depicts a hero in a nearly mad state of mind, who undergone a complicated divorce with his second wife. Owing to this break-up, he is forced to reconsider his former life and values and the letter-writing serves as a unique means of dealing with the oppressive reality. Herzog isolates himself in an almost demolished house where he pens his letters and thinks about his life. At first, he appears full of hatred accompanied by feelings of injustice. His anger nearly directs him to a violent act of revenge. Yet, this act is not accomplished as he realizes the pointlessness of it, in a view of the absurdity of life. Therefore, he returns to the countryside, where he finally reaches mental balance. The truth in this novel is found after a total rejection of any intellectual or modern values. The hero enjoys the state of not being involved in any institution.

The author often depicts reality and the world as absurd and comic entities. The absurdity of the world is tangible mainly in the story of Henderson and Herzog. The main heroes and other characters behave comically in certain situations. Yet, the conclusion, or the truth, remains the same. Every life is worth living, no matter how absurd it may be.

## VI. Summary

Náplní této bakalářské práce je provést analýzu tří děl Saula Bellowa – *Dangling Man*, *Henderson, král deště* a *Herzog* – které různým způsobem znázorňují hrdinu hledajícího smysl života.

Úvodní kapitola pojednává o faktech z autorova života, které jsou do různé míry ztvárněné v analyzovaných dílech. Autobiografičnost je znatelná především u prvotiny *Dangling Man*, a u díla oceněného Nobelovou cenou za literaturu, *Herzog*. V románu *Henderson, král deště*, jehož děj se z velké části odehrává v exotické Africe, nejsou autobiografické prvky příliš početné.

V druhé kapitole je analyzováno dílo *Dangling Man*, které vyšlo jako autorova prvotina. Hlavní hrdina tohoto románu je okolnostmi donucen zabývat se smyslem života. Ve stísněné době druhé světové války dochází k závěru, že raději položí život za vlast v kolektivu ostatních vojáků, než aby žil v relativní svobodě, separován od ostatních.

Třetí kapitola rozebírá příběh milionáře Eugena Hendersona, který se po předchozím psychickém strádání vydává do vzdálené Afriky, aby našel sám sebe a odhalil smysl života. Díky moudrým učitelům z řad afrických domorodců se mu podaří, za doprovodu různých více i méně komických situací, které z velké části vznikají díky jeho temperamentní povaze, poodhalit roušku tajemství života. Zpět domů se pak vrací s nabytým vnitřním klidem a poznáním, že člověk musí být nejprve zlomen, aby mohl poznat sám sebe, a tak být užitečný i pro společnost.

Čtvrtá kapitola pojednává o životní krizi Mosese Herzoga, jehož stav, zapříčiněný složitým rozvodem a celkovou skepsí ze společnosti, téměř hraničí

se šílenstvím. V tomto díle je rozebírán smysl života spíše po etické a morální stránce. Hrdina nakonec nachází kýžený klid, a to díky naprostému odevzdání se životu a všem životním okolnostem.

Všechna díla se zabývají stejnou otázkou – jaký je vlastně smysl života. Od prvního textu se idea smyslu života nemění. Hlavní hrdina vždy dochází k závěru, že smysl života tkví v poznání sebe sama, čehož je většinou dosaženo skrze utrpení, a v následném začlenění se do společnosti. Hrdina se nejprve separuje od ostatních, aby se k nim po svém prohlédnutí mohl opět připojit. Díla se liší v úhlu pohledu, ve kterém je na otázky o smyslu života nahlíženo a který je do značné míry determinován životními okolnostmi hlavního hrdiny.

V závěrečné kapitole je uvedeno shrnutí poznatků, které se soustřeďují na porovnání všech tří děl. Ačkoliv jsou hrdinové každého z textů v mnoha rysech odlišní, mají společný cíl – poznat smysl života a vypořádat se se složitou životní situací. Všichni hrdinové nakonec docházejí k závěru, že život, ačkoliv se mnohdy zdá být absurdní, má velkou cenu, a my bychom se měli snažit žít jej bez zbytečných negativních emocí a bojů jeden proti druhému.

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