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CHARACTER AND IDENTITY

IN MY LIFE AS A MAN, PICTURES OF FIDELMAN AND HERZOG

by

Ronne Friedman

Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts in
Hebrew Letters and Ordination

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Referee, Dr. Warren Bargad

To Sol, may his memory

be for a blessing, who would

have understood.

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I am deeply grateful to my advisor, Dr. Warren Bargad for his insightful criticism and for his understanding; to Dr. Stanley Chyet, who allowed me to raid his library, to Rabbi Herbert Bronstein for an important insight into Saul Bellow; to my friends for their encouragement; and most of all, to Irene, whose shaking kept me steady.

DIGEST

This thesis provides a study in characterology of the protagonists in three American-Jewish novels: Philip Roth's My Life As A Man; Bernard Malamud's Pictures of Fidelman; and Saul Bellow's Herzog. An attempt is made to focus on character and identity in each novel through a careful textual analysis.

The three protagonists, Peter Tarnopol, Arthur Fidelman, and Moses Elkanah Herzog share a number of characteristics - each is an American Jew, each deals with a conflict between life and art each resembles the schlemiel type, and each struggles toward self-liberation by attempting to overcome the nightmares of his past.

Peter Tarnopol is characterized as an "unredeemed schlemiel," and the similarity between Tarnopol and Portnoy (of Portnoy's Complaint) is noted and explored. In addition, attention is paid to analytical errors of some of Roth's critics.

Arthur Fidelman is characterized as a comic figure who struggles toward redemption by resolving his conflict between life and art. Attention is paid to Malamud's self-parody in this work, a novel which nevertheless deals with the problem of acquiring a freedom within the circumscribed limits of the modern world.

Moses Herzog is characterized as a distracted humanist-philosopher who must choose action over pure thought in order to redeem himself.

The brief introduction serves to focus on a comparative typology, and attempts to isolate the similarities of the three characters who are the subjects of this study.

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INTRODUCTION

The three novels included in this study were chosen for two primary reasons: first, Bellow, Malamud and Roth are distinctive voices in American Jewish literature; second, each novel focuses on a single character whose experience reflects upon American Jewish life in particular, and the general human condition.

Though the world view of each author is decidedly different, the three novels share in common several themes and motifs. Each novel deals with the conflict of illusion and reality - it is significant that each protagonist is an artist of sorts: Tarnopol is a writer, Fidelman a painter, Herzog an intellectual and cultural historian. The psychological probe of human identity is another primary theme. Each character pursues a quest for the holy grail of self-understanding. Though each novel may be read as a comedy - satire, irony, and parody are employed throughout - it is clear that each author maintains a clear understanding of the pain and anguish which lurks beneath the comic surface.

Roth, Malamud and Bellow seem to reflect points on a continuum in their attitudes regarding the existential possibilities of moral redemption and self-reclamation. Each deals with the struggle of his character to free himself, a struggle which involves the necessary realization that imprisonment is a strictly personal affair - each character is a prisoner of his own illusions and delusions. Each character represents, at the outset, the fragmented, disintegrated man of

twentieth century literature. Each is characterized by an inability to communicate, the basis of which is the fact that he is unable to communicate straightforwardly with himself. Each novelist examines whether it is possible for contemporary man to experience a psychic healing of the schismatic self.

Roth leaves this question unresolved; he apparently sees moral transformation as unrealistic and expresses negative reservations with regard to the progression from disease to health. Malamud, while he affirms the potential for redemption, sees freedom as possible only within narrowly circumscribed limits. Freedom-self-liberation-is possible only insofar as an individual acknowledges that he lives in a world governed by unknown but moral laws. Bellow views self-reclamation in both personal and social terms. The potential not only exists for the individual to reclaim his identity, but also by these very means, an individual contributes to the reclamation of society from the false gods of chaos, nihilism and mass culture.

Tarnopol, Fidelman and Herzog as artists (Herzog's approach to history is creative and artistic) share a certain alienation from society. Each lives as an observer of humanity rather than as a participant. In choosing art over life, each falls into a fatal trap from which he must attempt to extricate himself. Although each possesses a certain degree of talent, his narcissism - which is a function of his failure as a human being - blocks his attempts at artistic success.

Tarnopol struggles with himself and with his unresolved past throughout the entire novel. The novel itself is presented as a picture of failure and frustration, neither Tarnopol's "True Story" or his two fictional pieces demonstrate that he has resolved his inner conflicts through self-imposed "art therapy." Fidelman makes comic attempts to achieve an identity as an artist, but his talent is a delusion of grandeur. At the end of the novel he reluctantly returns to life by giving up his artistic pretensions. He is a caricature of the split self; his name, Art Fidelman, is proof that Malamud wants no one to miss the point. Herzog, romantic and failure, must break through the intricate maze of his own intellectual abstractions. In his anguished cries, he appears to be a relative of both Tarnopol and Fidelman - all three give voice to a series of primal screams to indicate their feelings as victims and prisoners - but Herzog appears not to have withdrawn quite as far from society as Tarnopol and Fidelman, for Herzog is more self-aware throughout. His redemption is clearly indicated at the end of the novel.

Each character is presented as a tragicomic figure. All three possess characteristics of the schlemiel, luftmensch, quixote and naif. They each possess a self-deprecating humor which functions to relieve the tension and despair of their respective pursuits of identity. They are also marginal men, directed by a subconscious realization that their "half-life" is a real condition. They are not ingenues, but somehow have never managed to move beyond an adolescent-like fantasy

world. Each, therefore, struggles with that which he does not want to accept: the responsibilities to self, to other human beings and to society.

Roth, Malamud and Bellow regardless of their world views and techniques, seem to share one element of realistic appraisal of identity. Despite the degree to which their characters do or do not overcome their assumed identities, each is left in the process of beginning. Tarnopol, attempting to achieve a breakthrough, Fidelman with his new life as a glassblower, and Herzog with professed re-dedication that has still not been realized. The "moral ending" is drawn in each novel with perception of the frailities of human will.

CHAPTER I

MY LIFE AS A MAN

Any attempt to treat the protagonist of Philip Roth's My Life As A Man[1], Peter Tarnopol, must necessarily involve analysis of the various devices which Roth employs in order to focus upon obscure and refocus upon the character himself. In addition, it would be impossible to consider the character or novel in isolation from Portnoy and Portnoy's Complaint[2] as well as the war between Roth and his critics for which My Life As A Man serves as battleground.

Perhaps preliminary explanation and example will illustrate the problem involved in approaching Roth's work vis-a-vis his critics. It is apparent that Roth has, since the publication of Portnoy's Complaint (and perhaps even before), occupied a center-stage position with regard to many contemporary literary and lay critics. Within American-Jewish society and letters, he has been something of an event, provoking angry and heated reaction to his work. Roth's critics have too frequently become entangled in a snare, that is, they have tended to assume the roles of psychoanalyst and rabbi, questioning Roth's psychological

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1 Roth, My Life As A Man, New York, 1974.

2 Roth, Portnoy's Complaint, New York, 1969.

stability and sermonizing at length regarding Roth's "antisemitism".

Three examples of critical reductivism should suffice to illustrate the point. Sylvia Rothchild writes:

> In my generation it was not paganism but murderousness that was the foundation for the hatred (Jewish anti-Christian sentiments)....
>
> In Portnoy's Complaint it is clear that this is one of the facts Alexander Portnoy cannot face. Instead, he attacks the victims. He blames his parents for being the parents he would not have chosen if he had been given a choice. In spite of all the disclaimers, it is hard to avoid seeing Alexander Portnoy as a nutty Jewish anti-Semite. (My italics). It is hard to tell from his ravings whether he hates his parents because they are Jews or whether he hates Jews because they become parents.[3]

Ms. Rothchild reveals her complaint with Portnoy by directing her attach upon Roth himself:

> In spite of his realism and candor, Roth can't seem to cope with the fact that Jews who "just happen to be Jews" are not the same as Americans who happen not to be Jews....

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[3] Rothchild, "Philip Roth - Out of His Time," Response, Spring 1972 (#13), p. 148.

> ...If the issues in the early stories seemed ahead of their time, the complaint of Alexander Portnoy seemed only a livelier and more controversial variation on earlier themes....It didn't take much bravery to carry on a diatribe against controlling Jewish mothers, ineffectual fathers, Kashrut, Jewish fearfulness, when practically all were obsolete.[4]

The issue seems to be with what Roth did not write, rather than with the work itself. Ms. Rothchild is offended by Portnoy's Complaint, and her criticism reveals an inability to deal with the work on an objective level. In this respect, Portnoy's Complaint represents, for her, an "event" and not a novel.[5]

Gerda Charles, in a far less angry review has written of "Roth-Portnoy" in an apparent attempt to connect the protagonist and the author:

> In one sense this book is a narrow one, the characters are few, the area small. And there are faults, yes. But Roth-Portnoy is still quite young. Time yet for him to raise his eyes from the female...well, choose your own synonym (he supplies plenty).... to a somewhat more highly situated organ. That's it, Alexander! The heart!

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[4] Ibid., p. 148.

[5] Roth, soon after the publication of Portnoy's Complaint, observed prophetically in a talk-show interview, that Portnoy's Complaint was being evaluated as an event and would not be evaluated as a novel for years to come. Cf. My Life as a Man, p. 230, for evidence that Roth satirizes the battle.

Irving Howe has maintained that:

> Alex speaks for imposed-upon, vulnerable, twisted yet self-liberating humanity; the other characters, reduced to a function of his need, an echo of his cry, cannot speak or speak back as autonomous voices but simply go through their paces like straight-men mechanically feeding lines to a comic. Even more than in Roth's earlier work, the result is claustrophobia of voice and vision; he never shuts up, this darling Alex, nor does Roth detach himself sufficiently to gain some ironic distance.[7]

The function of criticism should be to explicate and to illuminate the work rather than to erroneously interpret it in light of the life of the artist. "Honest criticism and sensitive appreciation is directed not upon the poet but upon the poetry."[8] Middlebrow attempts to read Portnoy's Complaint as an autobiography have as much critical value as David Susskind's production of "Jewish Mothers on Portnoy's Complaint." Theater, yes, criticism, hardly.

Roth has attempted to redirect the attention of critics to the work itself with satiric criticism directed against the attacks of mass culture. One may wonder why Roth feels the persistent need - almost to the point of compulsion - to answer the inane comments which would view him as inseparable from Portnoy, but there is little question that his satiric barbs direct attention to the problems involved in abandoning

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7 Howe, "Philip Roth Reconsidered", p. 75.

8 Eliot, "Tradition and the Individual Talent", Literary Criticism in America, ed., Albert Van Nostrand 1957, p. 233.

the objective correlative as a criteria for analyzing art:

> Jacqueline Susan, discussing her colleagues with Johnny Carson, tickled ten million Americans by saying that she'd like to meet me but wouldn't want to shake my hand. Didn't want to shake my hand - she, of all people? And from time to time the columnist Leonard Lyons had a ten-word tidbit about my fiery romance with Barbra Streisand: "Barbra Streisand has no complaints about her dates with Philip Roth." Dot dot dot. True enough, in a manner of speaking, since, as it happened, the famous Jewish girl celebrity and the newly-minted Jewish boy celebrity had and still have never met.[9]

Ruth R. Wisse, in analyzing Portnoy's Complaint, exclusive of Roth, restores criticism to its high office. She directs our attention to both the satire (without acknowledgement of which the book must be consistently misread) and the angst which lies beneath its surface:

> Despite the resemblance of this extended monologue to earlier schlemiel writings, it is a reaction to, not an addition to, the genre. The author defines his hero's complaint as "a disorder in which strongly-felt ethical and altruistic impulses are perpetually warring with extreme sexual longings, often of a perverse nature." The book does not mediate but exacerbates the conflict between these warring claims without ever suggesting that their mutual coexistence may be the cheapest price to be paid for "civilization." Portnoy's complaint presents the schlemiel condition as unbearable; and for all its dialect -

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[9] Roth, "Imagining Jews", The New York Review of Books Vol. XXI, No. 15, October 3, 1974, p. 22.

> humor the punch-line seriously implies that the purgation of the narrative ought to be the starting point in the care. The Jewish Joke was conceived as an instrument for turning pain into laughter. Portnoy's Complaint reverses the process to expose the full measure of pain lurking beneath the laughter, suggesting that the technique of adjustment may be worse than the situation it was intended to alleviate.[10]

Portnoy's Complaint, while autobiographical in form, is a fictional autobiography.[11] Portnoy, and not the pantheon of caricatures from Sophie Portnoy to the Monkey, provides the raw material for Roth's statement of theme.

For Portnoy, as for Stephen Dedalus in Joyce's Ulysses, "history is a nightmare from which ....to awake."

> Dr. Spielvogel, this is my life, my only life, and I'm living it in the middle of a Jewish Joke! I am the son in the Jewish joke - only it ain't no joke!...Doctor, I can't stand any more being frightened like this over nothing! Bless me with manhood! Make me brave! Make me strong! Make me whole!"[12]

Self-liberation is counterposed against the demands of history (in this instance, personal history.)

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10 Wisse, The Schlemiel as Modern Hero, Chicago and London, 1971, p. 120.

11 Ibid., p. 121.

12 Roth, Portnoy's Complaint, pp. 36-7.

The purpose here is not to attempt a complete analysis of Portnoy's Complaint, but rather, to suggest that My Life As A Man must be read in light of its predecessor. The similarities between the two works are legion. Perhaps, (with the exception of Dr. Spielvogel) the names have been changed to protect the innocent, but virtually every character in My Life As A Man finds a parallel identity in Portnoy's Complaint. It would seem that Roth attempts in My Life As A Man to deal with some of the technical deficiencies of Portnoy's Complaint.

In My Life As A Man, Roth works toward achieving greater ironic distance through the use of various devices although at the same time, he raises questions regarding the relationship (or distance) of the artist to his art by means of these same devices. This is in the nature of a satirist for whom a certain ambiguity functions as an asset in extending the shades of meaning. Roth insistently maintains that while detachment is important, the writer still must draw on his life experience in order to produce a work of substance and meaning. In an interview with Walter Mauro and Elena Clementelli, Roth states most clearly the relationship between his life and his art (the interviewers' question is italicized).

> The relationship in your work between reality and imagination. Have the forms of power we have mentioned (family, religion, politics) influenced your style, your mode of expression? Or has writing served to free you from these forms of power?

> Inasmuch as subject is considered an aspect of "style," the answer to the first question is yes: family and religion as coercive forces have been a recurrent subject in my fiction, particularly so in the work up to and including Portnoy's Complaint.....
>
> A story like "The Conversion of the Jews," for instance,....reveals.... my concern with the oppressiveness of family feeling and with binding ideas of religious exclusiveness,..... Primitive as the story may seem to me at this point,.....nonetheless it treats their (Oscar Freedman and Rabbi Binder) struggle for power as a species of comedy .....At a later stage of development similar preoccupations led me to invent Alexander Portnoy, an aged incarnation of claustrophobic little Freedman, who cannot cut loose from what binds and inhibits him quite so magically as the hero I imagined humbling his mother and rabbi in "The Conversion of the Jews." Ironically, where the boy in the early story is held is subjugation by figures of real stature in his world whose power he for the moment at least is able to subvert, Portnoy is less oppressed by these figures - who have little real say in his life anyway - than he is imprisoned by the rage which persists against them. That his most powerful oppressor by far is himself is what makes for the farcial pathos of the book - ...[13]

Roth, having spoken of his objectives in his art, turns to their relationship (as he sees it) to his life:

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13 "Writing About the Powers That Be: An Interview", conducted by Walter Mauro and Elena Clementelli with Philip Roth. American Poetry Review, July-August, 1974, p. 19.

> In fact, the loyalties, affections, and affinities that I continue to feel toward the forces that initially shaped my life, having withstood to the degree that they have the assault of the imagination and the test of sustained psychoanalysis - with all the aloofness and coldbloodedness the latter entails - would seem to me by now to be at the very core of my identity. I have, I am sure, refashioned these attachments enormously through the very effort of testing them, and too I have developed over the years an attachment superceding all others to the test itself.[14]

Peter Tarnopol also has "an attachment superceding all others to the test itself," but in his case, it is unclear as to whether the test is a vehicle of self-liberation, or his psychological cell-block. That, like Portnoy, he is his own jailer - his protestations notwithstanding - becomes clear when the pieces to the puzzle provided by Roth are put together.

Although Roth still makes extensive use of the first person narrative technique, he introduces other devices which were absent from Portnoy's Complaint, which allow us "perhaps to begin." In addition to Tarnopol's autobiographical statement, My True Story, which forms the major part of the novel comprising its third (and longest) section we are asked to view Tarnopol from a series of perspectives which include two stories by Tarnopol; letters to and from his sister Joan; analyses of his two stories; Tarnopol's analysis and Spielvogel's treatment: Spielvogel's article for a psychiatric journal which contains

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[14] Ibid., p. 19.

an analysis of Tarnopol: Karen Oakes' literary analysis as imagined by Tarnopol of the two Zuckerman stories: imaginary letters to and from his deceased wife, Maureen; Maureen's diary; and various conversations between Tarnopol and Susan McCall, his brother Morris, his parents, and other minor characters who are included in his life.

The irony of the title, My True Story (which suggests a gossip magazine), is that even Tarnopol understands that:

> ....There is no reason to believe that by keeping his imagination at bay and rigorously adhering to the facts, Mr. Tarnopol will have exorcised his obsession once and for all. It remains to be seen whether his candor, such as it is, can serve any better than his art (or Dr. Spielvogel's therapeutic devices) to demystify the past and mitigate his admittedly uncommendable sense of defeat.[15]

Instead we are asked, a la Rashomon or Six Characters in Search of an Author, to move further and further from the direct testimony, and to filter the raw data in such a manner as to refine it and achieve a unified picture of the character. The central theme of identity and self-liberation is simply stated: "I wanted to be humanish: manly, a man."[16] Despite the fact that Tarnopol would have us believe that "being married and then trying to get unmarried would become my predominant activity and obsession,"[17]

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15 Roth, My Life As A Man, pp. 100-1.

16 Ibid., p. 173.

17 Ibid., p. 173.

it is rather his attempt to free himself from the constraints of those outer-directed forces (including those that he himself romantically imposes) which would attempt to guide, manipulate or direct his development as a man.

Tarnopol must first contend with the romantic conception of life and love which provides him with a working definition of "manliness" prior to his marriage to Maureen. Confronted by the (fabricated) evidence of Maureen's pregnancy, Tarnopol considers telling Maureen to get out of his life, but instead, suffering from both his romanticized notions of "right," and from "strongly-felt ethical and altruistic impulses,"[18] he determines his actual course:

> ...I walked..., concluding...that the truly manly way to face up to my predicament was to go back to the apartment, pretending that I still did not know the result of the pregnancy test, and deliver the following oration: "Maureen,...I don't care if you're pregnant or not. I want you to marry me, regardless of how the test comes out tomorrow. I want you to be my wife."[19]

Tarnopol, viewing the scene in retrospect, attempts to rationalize his romaticism on the basis of a fear that Maureen might otherwise commit suicide, but this merely represents the attempt of the older and more disillusioned Tarnopol to erase his past naiveté. He is unable to detach himself, as he is at thirty-four, from his younger self. Not

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18 Roth, Portnoy's Complaint, p. 1.

19 Roth, My Life As A Man, pp. 192-3.

that Tarnopol lacks introspective vision - he possesses abundant insight into his own character - but, just as he appears to analyze (and affirm the analysis of) his own character, he sidesteps, rationalizes, and consequently fails to fully perceive. Tarnopol consistently gives voice to a "yes, but..." in his quest for self-knowledge, and it is precisely this need to turn aside the probe just at the point of epiphany which precludes his ability "break through."

The closest that Tarnopol is allowed to get to the "truth" is his fleeting realization that self-knowledge is unobtainable. Tarnopol imagines a critique of his Zuckerman stories as written by his former prize student and "love," Karen Oakes, which, while it is Roth's satire on contemporary criticism, also functions to define the circumscribed limits that Roth sets upon knowledge of self. Tarnopol in his invention of Karen Oakes' critique, chooses for her two poems: the second, from Simone de Beauvoir,is worth quoting: "On ne peut jamais se connaitre, mais seulement se raconter."[20] One is never able to know oneself, but only to tell about oneself. Tarnopol, as teacher-lover, comments upon his student's critique, and so doing, echoes the same thought.

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20 Ibid., p. 226.

> ...Tarnopol, as he is called, is beginning to seem as imaginary as my Zuckerman anyway, or at least as detached from the memoirist - his revelations coming to seem like still another "useful fiction," and not because I am telling lies. I am trying to keep to the facts. Maybe all I'm saying is that words, being words, only approximate the real thing, and so no matter how close I come, I only come close. Or maybe I mean that as far as I can see there is no conquering or exorcising the past with words.[21]

Tarnopol, in attempting to deal with art and life, is reminiscent of Malamud's Fidelman, who, in considering Yeats' observation, "The intellect of man is forced to choose / Perfection of the life, or of the work...." responds, "Both."[22] Tarnopol's three creations (the two Zuckerman stories and the autobiography) are muddled and confused, largely, owing to his inability to separate art and life. His fictions, "useful," or not, suffer from his intrusions.[23] Similarly, his imagination interferes with any attempt to tell his "true story" accurately.

Tarnopol is entrapped, not by his marriage to Maureen, but rather, in the labyrinth of his own ambivalence. Roth sets the same trap which he had set in Portnoy's Complaint, and critical reaction to My Life As A Man will undoubtedly, once again, fail to perceive the culprit. Tarnopol is capable of seducing the reader, as was Portnoy, and just as attention was focused on Sophie Portnoy, so, too, will Maureen Tarnopol undoubtedly

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21 Ibid., p. 231.

22 Malamud, Pictures of Fidelman. New York, 1970, p. 7.

23 Cf. Roth, My Life As A Man, p. 31, where Tarnopol trespasses the bounds of omniscient narration in the story, "Salad Days."

be seen as the consummate bitch. Roth has been criticized for his stereotypes, but, at least in Portnoy's Complaint and in this novel, it would appear that Roth's caricatures serve his purpose, for he seems to suggest that it is the reader's job to determine why Tarnopol and Portnoy must dehumanize the people in their lives. A fully developed portrait of Sophie P. or Maureen, would inevitably detract from the main event.

Morris Dickstein maintains that:

> The fatal flaw of his protagonists, which Roth never sees, is their self-righteousness, from Neil Klugman's smug dismissal of Brenda Patimkin, to Portnoy's dogged attempts to blame everyone but himself, to Peter Tarnopol's post-mortem revenge on his monster of a wife. In situations like this, Roth seems to lose all perspective - no one but his surrogate exists, no other viewpoint has meaning - and the judgmental parents and the arrogant, smart - ass kid speak directly through the mouth of the thwarted, furious adult.[24]

But, it is Dickstein, and not Roth, whose vision is flawed. Peter Tarnopol is a manipulative figure, unable to "let go" of the cast of characters in his life, but Roth provides ample clues for an understanding of Tarnopol as he really is. Just as the Zuckerman of "Courting Disaster" is imprisoned by his guilt and exile in Rome, so Tarnopol imprisons and exiles himself. Tarnopol's exile, however, is not his retreat to a writer's colony, but rather, the psychological exile of the solipsist. He is unable to deal with his own 'non-being", he must always be the

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24 Dickstein, New York Times Book Review, June 2, 1974.

cynosure, and so, manipulates (in centrifugal/centripetal fashion) his relationships. Tarnopol cannot rid himself of Maureen, even in death, simply because he does not want to be rid of her. No less than Maureen, he thrives on the battle, feels the need to be defined by her, only to rail against her because, like Spielvogel, she hasn't gotten it right.

Spielvogel's article entitled "Creativity: The Narcissism of the Artist," also arouses Tarnopol's passions. Despite the professed anger and his charge that Spielvogel has breached psychoanalytic ethics by risking the identification of Tarnopol, it becomes clear that Tarnopol is angry because Spielvogel has not been precise enough and has instead attempted to "disguise" his patient. Tarnopol cannot abide his life as fiction, unless he himself is writing (and rationalizing) it. The irony is clear - Spielvogel's "fiction" is nearer to reality than Tarnopol's "true story." Tarnopol's desire to manipulate Spielvogel, whom he has established as a new super-ego ("Why did I stay with Spielvogel? Let us not forget his Mosaic prohibitions..."),[25] is clear in that he forces the argument over Spielvogel's ethics to continue "unabated through my sessions for a week."[26] Only when Spielvogel suggests that they discontinue treatment, does Tarnopol retreat:

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[25] Roth, My Life As A Man, p. 261.

[26] Ibid., p. 247.

> What kind of choice is that?... I have been your patient for over two years. I have an investment here - of effort, of time, of hope, of money. I don't consider myself recovered...."[27]

Tarnopol wants badly to beat Spielvogel into submission, but not at the risk of his own "non-being," that is, not at the risk of finding himself removed from Spielvogel's concerns. Even after retreating, Tarnopol quickly regroups and launches a new offensive. Unable to conquer Spielvogel on his own turf, Tarnopol tries another desperate and comic plot:

> "Maybe what it comes down to is a problem of self-expression, maybe it's that the writing isn't very precise."
>
> "Oh, the writing is also a problem?"
>
> "I don't like to say it, but maybe writing isn't your strong point."[28]

Spielvogel, however, is unwilling to permit Tarnopol to squirm out from under:

> "But why should it matter so much to you?"
>
> "Why? Why?.....Because.....I am the subject of that writing! I am the one your imprecise language has misrepresented!..... You were my friend, and I told you the truth. I told you everything.

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27 Ibid., p. 248.

28 Ibid., p. 251.

> "....But this is your narcissism again. Your sense that the whole world has nothing to look forward to but the latest information about the secret life of Peter Tarnopol."[29]

Spielvogel says the magic word, and the duck comes down and gives Peter a slap in the face. "Narcissism" is too close, and forces Peter to attempt to deflect it as an issue. He, Tarnopol, sees psychoanalytic treatment as an opportunity for extended monologue, a chance to entangle one more individual in his snare, and so doing, to assure himself of "being". But, only on his own terms.

Even as Tarnopol decides to discontinue treatment and exile himself to Vermont, he feels compelled to test his relationship with Spielvogel, to assure himself of his importance to Spielvogel, by sending copies of his two Zuckerman stories to the psychiatrist. Spielvogel's professional and detached response immediately triggers Tarnopol's recriminations:

> This is the doctor whose ministrations I have renounced? Even if the letter is just a contrivance to woo me back onto his couch, what a lovely and clever contrivance. Then was ridding myself of him wrong, too?....[30]

The reply is far too casual and uninvolved to suit Tarnopol, and he considers returning to Spielvogel's couch, once again, to reaffirm his existence. The solipsist cannot tolerate the idea of being "phased-out."

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29 Ibid., p. 252.

30 Ibid., p. 224.

So, too, we must assume that Karen Oakes has continued to exert a powerful attraction merely because she has had the strength to escape.

Once again, as in Portnoy's Complaint, the constraining effects of family upon the development of the individual are held under scrutiny by Roth. In this novel, however, Roth's technique is much more subtle, and consequently, more successful. The family is not a monolithic and devouring ogre, but rather, exerts its influence out of concern and (smother) love. In Morris and Joan, we see two dimensions of Tarnopol's character which continually war with one another. Morris, as "the public man (the university, the U.N. commissions, political meetings and organizations ever since high school) and very much the paterfamilias,"[31] serves as an extension of the "strongly-felt ethical and altruistic impulses,"[32] while Joan represents the pleasure-seeking side of Tarnopol's character. Apparently, the war between id and superego continue long past childhood for Tarnopol, for while Joan invites him to "Come, West, young man!" [33] to a life of pleasure at poolside, Morris invites him to his lecture at Boston University on "Rationality, Planning, and Gratification Deferral."[34]

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[31] Ibid., p. 188.

[32] Roth, Portnoy's Complaint, p. 1.

[33] Roth, My Life As A Man, p. 115.

[34] Ibid., pp. 118-9.

Tarnopol, in his obsession with Maureen, refuses (as Spielvogel observes) to deal with his childhood in clinical terms. Tarnopol's problem is not so much that "he has 'fallen in love with those complicated fictions of moral anguish' he keeps reading about,"[35] but rather that he has been unable to divest himself of the lower middle class Jewish dreams that were showered upon him. "Peppy" has been doted upon (and still is) by an entire family. Joan wooes him to the West, Morris pulls his head out of the toilet, and his parents call continually, still playing upon his "Jewish Guilt." The point is that Peppy still adores it. He is still victim of his parents' definition of manliness, and it is to this identity that he thinks he aspires, but because it is not truly internalized, one to which he cannot truly accede. Spielvogel, in his article, suggests that "His father was a harrassed man, ineffectual and submissive to his mother...."[36] to which Tarnopol reacts:

> My father was harrassed, all right, but not by his wife - ...He was harrassed by... his overpowering commitment to the idea of Family and the religion he made of Doing A Man's Job.
>
> .....Good Christ, Spielvogel, from whose example did I come associate virility with hard work and self-discipline, if not from my father's?[37]

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35 Maddocks, "Make It New", Time Magazine, June 10, 1974, p. 92.

36 Roth, My Life As A Man, p. 241.

37 Ibid., p. 241.

From whose, indeed? "Manliness, "humanness," "Being a man," are consistently defined in negative terms. Thus, we understand, where Tarnopol does not, his inability to free himself even in Maureen's death. Maureen was neither his muse, nor his dybbuk. His ambivalence about "manliness" stems directly from his childhood experience and his extended childhood vis-a-vis his family relationships.

When Peter receives word in Atlantic City that Maureen has been hospitalized, the dialogue is revealing:

> (Susan) "She's not your business any more, Peter. She is not your concern...."
>
> "Look, if she dies, I'd better be there."
>
> "Why?"
>
> "I ought to be, that's all."

Peter is unable to explain, and reacts defensively when Susan accuses him of stupidity: "You keep trying to do the 'manly thing', and all you ever do is act like a child."

"Oh, do I?"

He attempts to rationalize his actions, although in reality, he does not understand himself:

> Look, I am trying to get out of a trap. I stepped into it back when I was twenty-five, and now I'm thirty-three and I'm still in it -

It remains for Susan to deliver the obvious truth: "But the trap is you. You're the trap...."[38]

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38 Ibid., pp. 290-1

When Maureen finally does die, we are brought full circle. We learn, though Tarnopol still must figure it out, why he "ought to be" there. Peter calls his parents to tell them that Maureen is dead, and little Peppy's life is once again the subject for the family conference call, subject, the funeral:

> "The funeral - I tell you, I haven't had time to think through the funeral..."
>
> "Maybe he's not even going." My mother said to my father.
>
> "You're not going?.... You think that's a good idea, not going?"
>
> "Dad, I haven't thought it through yet. Okay?..."
>
> "Be smart,...listen to me. You go. Wear a dark suit, put in an appearance, and that'll be that."
>
> "Let him decide," my mother told him.

But for once, Peter's father will have his say:

> "...You go to the funeral, Peter. That way nobody can ever call you pisher."

Being a man means not being a pisher. It means listening to those voices "out there." This is a working definition of manliness that Tarnopol must exorcise - he has been educated to care about what "they" say, even to thrive on it. His being is defined by others and although he protests: "I think they'll call me pisher either way, those disposed in that direction." It is apparent that he is unable to hold the fort against the inevitable assault:

> But they can never say you weren't there. Listen to me, Peter, please - I've lived a life. Stop being out there on your own, please. You haven't listened to anybody since you were four-and-a-half years old...[39]

Perhaps not, at least not consciously, but if he has disobeyed, he has learned his lessons well.

Roth leaves the question of redemption unanswered. Tarnopol's self-imposed exile to a writer's colony in Vermont is an ambiguous ending, but ultimately, a realistic one. Tarnopol vaguely realizes that the pieces must be put together without the voices to which he so easily responds, but we are left wondering whether his art will serve as a therapeutic device. Certainly the letter to Spielvogel, his visit to Susah (who has "attempted" suicide), his inability to rid himself of Maureen and his communications with his siblings all suggest that he may be unable to succeed, but Roth leaves the door open - there is always a chance. "On ne peut jamais se connaitre, mais seulement se raconter." In his search for self-knowledge, his desire to become a man, perhaps Tarnopol may at least be able to tell his "True Story."

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[39] Ibid., pp. 328-9.

CHAPTER II

PICTURES OF FIDELMAN

Malamud's Pictures of Fidelman, subtitled An Exhibition,[1] represents a departure for Malamud from his classically conceived novel of redemption through suffering (i.e., The Assistant and The Fixer). Malamud, as his title would suggest, is conscious of the fact that he is presenting "pictures" rather than a novel which maintains unbroken linear control of plot and character. In this regard, Philip Roth has observed that:

> In Pictures of Fidelman Malamud sets out to turn the tables on himself and, gamely, to take a holiday from his own obsessive mythology.[2]

The title suggests the intended ambiguity. The "pictures" are "of Fidelman," suggesting that both Fidelman's art and life are on exhibition. This implication is carried further by the protagonist's name, Art Fidelman, for Art and humanity are counterposed throughout the novel.

Alan W. Friedman has written of Malamud's characters and world view:

> The antihero is predicated as beaten from the first: he is either willless or too feeble to translate his will, his personality, into a viable pattern of action....Modern man is so very much smaller than his environment that such a quest is foredoomed to ludicrous and dismal failure; instead, something like the reverse occurs. The

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1 Malamud, Pictures of Fidelman: An Exhibition. New York, 1969.

2 Roth, "Imagining Jews," The New York Review of Books Vol. XXI, No. 15, October 3, 1974, p. 26.

> world thrusts itself against him, eroding his physical and spiritual resources until, stripped and shivering, he is reduced to a Cartesian minimum: "I suffer, therefore I am."
>
> But Malamud's characteristic writings not only define themselves by force of existential anguish, they derive their special quality from the ancient Jewish teachings and spirit embodied in the Torah...and the Talmud...The vision is dual - simultaneously experiencing the harsh realities of limited mortality and affirming an abiding faith (perhaps a little condescendingly) that God really is in control of things,[3] and does indeed know what He is doing.

The theme of limited freedom - self-liberation only in imprisonment - is a constant one for Malamud. Though most of his work expresses such an existential view of man's condition, it is most explicitly stated in a recent short story, "Talking Horse,"[4] wherein Malamud deals with freedom as an ambiguity. The protagonist, Abramowitz, as a talking horse, is naturally unable to accept his predicament of being:

> All I know is I've been here for years and still don't understand the nature of my fate; in short If I'm Abramowitz, a horse; or a horse including Abramowitz.

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[3] Friedman, "The Hero as Schnook", reprinted in Bernard Malamud and the Critics, ed. Field and Field, New York and London, 1970, p. 288.

[4] Malamud, "Talking Horse", Rembrandt's Hat, New York, 1974, pp. 164-90.

The action centers on Abramowitz's repeated attempts to discover his true identity. His struggle with his deaf-mute master, Goldberg, is both comic and intense, for Abramowitz is certain that Goldberg possesses the answers to his questions, but deliberately keeps him imprisoned in order not to lose his meal-ticket (they are a circus side-show act). Abramowitz's probing attempts at self-knowledge, his desire to resolve the paradox of his condition, are met with threats and violence from Goldberg. Frustrated, Abramowitz tries a new ploy; taking advantage of Goldberg's inability to hear he pleads with the circus audience "requesting, urging, begging their assistance."[5] Of course, the response is first one of tension, then laughter, as the audience interprets Abramowitz's desperation as a part of the act. Finally, in a serio-comic struggle, Goldberg unintentionally pulls Abramowitz's "horse's head and neck" to reveal "a man's pale head."[6] Malamud underscores his vision of the limited possibility of human freedom when he tells us that Abramowitz "cantered across a grassy soft field into a dark wood, a free centaur"[7] (my italics). This

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[5] Ibid., p. 185.

[6] Ibid., p. 189.

[7] Ibid., p. 190.

paradox is the condition of humanity in Malamud's view. The "free centaur," that exquisite oxymoron, brings us full circle. Freedom is always restricted, never absolute, liberation with bonds and bounds. For Malamud, what is past is indeed prologue, and epilogue as well. It remains, however, for the character to find a means of affirming his identity within the set limits provided.

Robert Alter deals with this idea, suggesting that Malamud takes Jewishness as a metaphor:

> Imprisonment, like the condition of being a Jew with which it is elsewhere identified, is seen here as a general image for the moral life with all its imponderable obstacles to spontaneous self-fulfillment: it is living in concern for the state of one's soul, which means knowing with an awful lucidity how circumscribed the will is in its ability to effect significant change, how recalcitrant and cowardly it can be, and shouldering the terrible onus of responsibility for one's acts, especially as they are implicated in the lives of others. The prison, like the shlemiel who is usually its chief inmate, is Malamud's way of suggesting that to be fully a man is to accept the most painful limitations; those who escape these limitations achieve only an illusory self-negating kind of freedom, for they become less than responsible human beings.... Malamud sees, moreover, in the collective Jewish experience of the past a model not only of suffering and confinement but also of a very limited yet precious possibility of triumph in defeat, freedom in imprisonment.[8]

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[8] Alter, "Jewishness as Metaphor" reprinted in Field and Field, pp. 34-5.

It is with this understanding of Malamud's Weltanschauung as a backdrop that we turn to Pictures of Fidelman. Sheldon N. Grebstein has suggested that "the novel may be viewed as a kind of comic Bildungsroman, intermixed with the International Theme and structured as a picaresque story cycle."[9] It is possible, however, that the novel is a novel of degradation, a reverse Bildungsroman, as it were. The protagonist, Arthur Fidelman, is introduced as "a self-confessed failure as a painter."[10] Ruth Wisse sees Fidelman as an "unredeemed schlemiel," a "poor stumblebum whose failures remain unmitigated,"[11] and Malamud has been criticized by many critics who find the ending unconvincing.[12] It is suggested, however, that Fidelman, in his mythic quest for self-realization, is consistent with such anti-heroes as Yakov-Bok (of The Fixer) and Frank Alpine (of The Assistant). It is rather Malamud's self-conscious technical treatment of the novel, his "neo-Joycean, comitragic, surrealistic, stream-of-consciousness, visionary"[13] voice which tends to present his world-view in ambiguous fashion. It is clear, however, that Malamud's self-parody (in Pictures of Fidelman) of his earlier works supports rather than detracts from

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9 Grebstein, "Bernard Malamud and the Jewish Movement", reprinted in Contemporary American Jewish Literature: Critical Essays. Ed., Irving Malin, Bloomington, 1973, p. 195.

10 Malamud, Pictures of Fidelman, p. 11.

11 Wisse, The Schlemiel as Modern Hero, Chicago and London, 1971, p. 120.

12 Cf., for example Sandy Cohen Bernard Malamud and the Trial by Love Rodop: N.V. Amsterdam 1974 p. 103.

13 Grebstein, Op. Cit., p. 209.

his central theme. It is not that Fidelman is "unredeemed," but rather that Malamud's vision of redemption is limited here. The ambiguity, as in "Talking Horse," is intended. Freedom is still to be found only within the imprisoned self. Thus, to be redeemed, Fidelman need not reach revelatory heights, but merely begin to understand the fundamental limitations and responsibilities that are part and parcel of the human condition. While Roth is correct in pointing to a tone of self-conscious irony, Malamud's mythological superstructure still remains unaltered.

The first picture in the gallery, entitled "Last Mohican" is the introduction to Fidelman's pursuit of self. The Jamesian parody is apparent - Fidelman exiles himself to Italy "to prepare a critical study of Giotto,"[14] and it is immediately brought to our attention that Fidelman's image of himself is decidedly false. "Fidelman experienced the sensation of suddenly seeing himself as he was, to the pinpoint, outside and in, not without bittersweet pleasure."[15] Fidelman has deluded himself in the belief that his briefcase, manuscript and "mustache of recent vintage" have provided him with an identity as an art critic. His delusions are shattered by his confrontation with Shimon Susskind, an Ahasueras and true luftmensch, who ultimately initiates him into the harsh realities of life. Susskind serves as a comic foil, a moral guide, through whose actions Fidelman is stripped of the first layer of his false identity.

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[14] Malamud, Pictures of Fidelman, p. 11.

[15] Ibid., p. 12.

In Fidelman's attempts to rid himself of his unwanted presence, Malamud introduces two primary themes which underlie the novel: freedom and responsibility. Fidelman, unwilling to give Susskind his second suit, attempts to escape from his shadow's request by suggesting that he turn to a Jewish organization. The following dialogue ensues:

"The Jewish organizations wish to give me what they wish, not what I wish," Susskind replied bitterly.

"The only thing they offer me is a ticket back to Israel."

"Why don't you take it?"

"I told you alread, here I feel free."

"Freedom is a relative term."

"Don't tell me about freedom."[16]

Later, when Susskind returns to confront him again, Fidelman is forced to deal with the concept of responsibility:

"I still think going back would be the best thing for you."

"No," cried Susskind angrily.

If that's your decision, freely made, then why pick on me? Am I responsible for you, then, Susskind?"

"Who else?" Susskind loudly replied.

"...Why should I be?"

"You know what responsibility means?"

"I think so."

"Then you are responsible. Because you are a man. Because you are a Jew, aren't you?"

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16 Ibid., p. 16.

> "Yes, goddam it, but...I refuse the obligation. I am a single individual and can't take on everybody's personal burden...."[17]

This, then, is what Fidelman the student must learn, and though Fidelman turns down Susskind's offer to serve as a guide to the sights of Rome, Susskind imposes himself upon Fidelman as a moral guide to the facts of life and art. Fidelman has been enraptured by the beauty of Rome "by walking around in all this history."[18] Only after Susskind steals his manuscript on Giotto - in his pursuit of the refugee - is Fidelman finally forced to experience the darker and more immediate historical past. Fidelman's pursuit takes him into the Jewish ghetto where he must meet "the present day poor" and smell the stench of urine, and on to the Jewish cemetery where the spectre of the holocaust is recalled by the words on a marble slab:

> My beloved father/Betrayed by the damned Fascists/
> Murdered at Auschwitz by the barbarous Nazis/
> O crimine Orribile.[19]

Fidelman has begun his descent into self, and dreams of "Virgilio Susskind," but has yet to integrate the fragmented pieces that occur in his (waking and sleeping) dreams.

As the chapter ends, it is clear the Fidelman has just begun his journey. Although he finds Susskind, he is unable to entice him (with

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17 Ibid., pp. 22-3.

18 Ibid., p. 18.

19 Ibid., pp. 34-5.

a reward) to return the manuscript. He follows Susskind and searches his squalid room - to no avail. Finally, he visits Susskind, suit in hand, and, depositing it upon Susskind's table, leaves the room. His "selfless" plot almost produces the desired result. Susskind runs after him and delivers the pigskin briefcase. Fidelman, upon learning that Susskind has burnt the manuscript, pursues the refugee. In that moment, he begins to serve his moral apprenticeship:

> Fidelman...moved by all he had learned, had a triumphant insight. "Susskind come back," he shouted, half sobbing. "The suit is yours. All is forgiven."[20]

Although Fidelman demonstrates that he has far to go, Susskind has at least served to disabuse him of the idea that he has an identity as a critic. The portrait leaves Fidelman with one suit of false armor removed, with an understanding that he still has much to learn about art, life and himself.

The following three chapters, "Still Life," "Naked Nude" and "A Pimp's Revenge" emerge as a vision of Fidelman's baptism in the world of experience. Although he appears to have retrogressed, once again putting on the cloak of the painter, he does begin to deal directly with the shadowy characters that people the underside of Malamud's world. Much

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[20] Ibid., p. 41.

has been made of the "series of job-like humiliations and failures"[21] that Fidelman experiences, but to draw this allusion seems inappropriate. Unlike Job, Fidelman is hardly the innocent victim of a whimsical test. Rather, he is reminiscent, in this three chapter section, of the American Adam who was conceived as a figure separated "from history and its habits... an individual emancipated from history, happily bereft of ancestry, untouched and undefiled by the usual inheritances of family and race."[22] Of course, Malamud merely plays upon this myth, Fidelman can hardly be a true innocent abroad, but until he confronts and comes to grips with the past he has discarded, he is doomed to travel laterally, without progression.

Fidelman, in "Still Life," is depicted in schlemiel-like servitude to his pittrice, Anna Maria Oliovino. Enraptured, Fidelman attempts to win this object of his unrequited love by taking her to lunch and dinner, overpaying his rent and performing household chores, but in return, he receives only scorn and derision. Masochistically, Fidelman returns for more. Returning momentarily to the business of art, he determines to paint her as "Virgin with child," holding "in her arms the infant resembling his little nephew, Georgie."[23]

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[21] Fleischer, "Fidelman's Follies", Congress Bi Weekly, May 26, 1969, p. 21.

[22] Lewis, The American Adam, Chicago and London, 1967, p. 5.

[23] Malamud, p. 55.

In a delightfully comic scene, Annamaria sees the painting and rushes into Fidelman's arms, sobbing, "You have seen my soul."[24] Fidelman manages thus to lure her into the bedroom, only to fail as a lover: "Although he mightily willed resurrection, his wilted flower bit the dust." Once again, Fidelman is relegated to the role of stable boy. He learns how to grovel, but his romantic idea of love from afar is mercifully shattered when Annamaria discovers him in a priest's vestments painting "Portrait of the Artist as Priest."[25] Begging absolution for her sins, Annamaria demands penance. Fidelman, learning that the ways of the Lord are strange indeed, manages to improve upon the formulaic Pater Nosters and Ave Marias: "She clasped his buttocks, he cupped hers. Pumping slowly he nailed her to her cross."[26] Our hero has begun to trade innocence for experience.

In "Naked Nude," Fidelman appears in still more degraded circumstances as the captive of thieves who demand that he copy Tiziano's "Venus of Urbino" in order that they might steal the original. Fidelman, after great effort, is able to paint a copy, but he falls prey to narcissistic appreciation of his work. In a feat of duplicity Fidelman

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24 Ibid., p. 56.

25 Ibid., p. 65.

26 Ibid., p. 67.

persuades Scarpio that his painting is the original. He escapes with his reproduction, leaving the thieves in his wake.

We see that Fidelman has traded his priest's vestments, but only to return to his delusion that he is an artist. For whether the object of his affections is a flesh and blood fake or the reproduction of a painting, Fidelman has yet to relate to either art or life on more than a superficial level.

"Still Life" suggests a stasis, a lack of movement that is descriptive of Fidelman's life at that point. In "Naked Nude" we see that the stasis is carried over into Fidelman's art as well, for Fidelman responds to nothing more than a "still" of life, this naked nude, which is merely symbolic of the surface of self that he has not penetrated.

Malamud hints at a progression that Fidelman must further pursue if he is to come to terms with self. Throughout the novel, there are two lifelines to humanity. One is Susskind, the other, his sister, Bessie. In "Still Life" Fidelman is conscious of Bessie only in that she sends him money and packages. In "Naked Nude," Bessie appears as the subject of an erotic reminiscence from his adolescence. As symbol of the past with which he must reunite himself, Bessie is central to Fidelman's redemption. The journey into the past has just begun, on a symbolic level, it is important that Bessie appears to Fidelman as a naked nude, for it signals an ironic regression to childhood in order that Fidelman might begin to discover life as it really is.

"A Pimp's Revenge" finds Fidelman further ensnared in the myth of the artist, the false notion that art may be created exclusive of life. Nevertheless, even as he descends, he begins also to climb toward self-discovery. In this chapter, Fidelman begins a sincere struggle with art and life, struggling far more self-consciously to deal with the images of his own past.

Fidelman continues to struggle with a creative object that has eluded him for five years. He seeks to paint a picture of Mother and Son from a photograph taken of him and his mother. In choosing this theme, he is still preoccupied with form, with creating a classic "copy," his struggle is with the past that he denies, for Bessie, not his mother, is the true maternal figure in his life. And thus he is unable to succeed. For he has not resolved a major question, "How do you paint a Kaddish?" [27] But his struggle brings him nearer and nearer to self-knowledge: "The truth is I am afraid to paint, like I might find out something about myself." [28]

Unrealized as an artist, Fidelman is also unrealized as a man, though here, too, he progresses. His relationship with Esmeralda is a hopeful sign that he may begin to face life, although as usual, he must be educated. The irony is that, although Fidelman believes that he has "experienced" and is prepared to teach, Esmeralda's is the voice of wisdom:

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27 Ibid., p. 107.

28 Ibid., p. 109.

"In this picture you're painting of me, what's the mystery?"

"The mystery is you've been captured, yet there's more - you've become art."

"You mean it's not me any more?"

"It never was. Art isn't life."

"Then the hell with it. If I have my choice I'll take life. If there's not that there's no art."

"Without art there's no life to speak of, at least for me. If I'm not an artist, then I'm nothing."

"My God, aren't you a man?"

"Not really, without art."

"Personally, I think you have a lot to learn."

"I'm learning," F sighed.[29]

Fidelman is decidedly not an artist, but despite his statement, he is potentially more than "nothing," for he <u>is</u> "learning." His involvement with life, however, frustrates his "art."

Esmeralda does Fidelman the favor of burning the snapshot which has blocked him for the past five years. Though furious at first, Fidelman is forced to deal with the realities that pertain to his only near-human relationship, to create art out of life. He paints "Prostitute and Procurer," "my most honest piece of work. Esmeralda was the now the nineteen-year-old prostitute - and he,... a fifteen-year-old procurer."[30]

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29 <u>Ibid</u>., p. 116.

30 <u>Ibid</u>., p. 132.

But Fidelman cannot abide his own success. The serpentine Ludovico persuades him with a subtle suggestion that "the picture was dark and could stand a touch a light."[31] In his temptation to "perfect the work," to make it "salable," Fidelman destroys it, and so doing, falls from Eden. In a comic denouement, Fidelman seizes the knife that Esmeralda intends to use on him, and plunges "the blade into his own gut."[32] It is apparent that Fidelman has plunged the knife into his canvas image. Having created and destroyed art that "lives," Fidelman attacks "Art," the artist. This scene represents, metaphorically, the death of innocence, for when Fidelman reappears in "Pictures of the Artist," he has indeed fallen to the depths of life.

The theme of death and resurrection is dominant in this surrealistic chapter which parodies Joyce, Eliot, Plato and the New Testament. Malamud plays on the underwater imagery of Eliot in Prufrock to reveal a canvas of "Fidelman pissing in muddy waters discovers water over his head."[33] The progression of the chapter is a comic descent from purgatory to hell and towards resurrection. Fidelman's mode of artistic expression has been reduced to the digging "of spontaneously placed holes, each a perfect square."[34] Ruth Wisse points out that "the holes are graves, the death of expression."[35]

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[31] Ibid., p. 132.

[32] Ibid., p. 137.

[33] Ibid., p. 138.

[34] Ibid., p. 140

[35] Wisse, The Schlemiel as Modern Hero, p. 115.

Ms. Wisse further explains that Malamud's technique serves to underscore Fidelman's complete disintegration:

> ...by this point the lines between realism and symbolism have disappeared, as in the mind of one who can no longer accurately distinguish between fact and fancy.[36]

Fidelman demonstrates that he has not yet redeemed himself, that he is still lost in the pseudo-sophistries of art which obscure his vision of life. In response to a desperate plea from a young man that he return the price of admission to his "exhibition" in order that the young man might buy bread for his starving children, Fidelman offers instead a nonsensical discourse on the meaning of his art. Fidelman is given a second chance to respond on a human level by returning the ten lire, but instead, "Tough titty if you can't comprehend Art," Fidelman is said to have replied. "Fuck off now."[37] Here, Fidelman, the faithful man, attempts to rid himself of his alter ego, "art." The punctuation here is symbolic of Fidelman's split personality.

The youth reappears as a stranger whose "nether limbs, clothed in coarse black stockings, were short and bowed."[38] Malamud permits Fidelman first to reveal his deficiency, a preoccupation with form rather than content, before coming to a full understanding that he is facing

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36 Ibid., p. 116.

37 Malamud, Pictures, p. 145.

38 Ibid., p. 145.

his Mephistopheles. In a beautifully executed double entendre, Malamud has Fidelman maintain that: "Form may be and often is the content of Art."[39] Art Fidelman's myopia with regard to both himself and his art, revolves around his celebration of form over content.

Self understanding still comes slowly to Fidelman. Realizing that the stranger is indeed the devil, Fidelman cries out "Quid ego feci?" (What did I do?) The stranger replies tersely, "This I will tell you. You have not yet learned what is the difference between something and n othing,"[40] and with a blow to the head, sends Fidelman into his hole. The comic death scene is resolved with an ethical (and aesthetic) moral: "So it's a grave, the stranger is said to have muttered. So now we got form but we also got content."[41] Fidelman's comic descent is complete. The remainder of the chapter deals with the theme of resurrection.

In a New Testament parody, Malamud has Susskind reappear (as the figure in a mosaic), "preaching the new gospel."[42]

> ...Tell the truth. Don't cheat. If it's easy don't mean it's good... Be nice, don't fight...Love, mercy, charity. It's not so easy believe me.[43]

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[39] Ibid., p. 147.

[40] Ibid., p. 148.

[41] Ibid., p. 148.

[42] Wisse, p. 116.

[43] Malamud, p. 149.

Redemption entails giving up art. Once again, Susskind functions as moral guide. Fidelman's first impulse is to paint his "master". He is, however, reminded "No graven images."[44] Susskind predicts that he will be betrayed and counsels Fidelman to "give up your paints and your brushes and follow me where I go."[45] Fidelman, as Judas, retains one brush, and with it, his dreams of immortality through art: "If I could do a portrait of him...I will be remembered forever in human history."[46] Fidelman still must learn that an assumed identity betrays both Susskind and himself. With his "heavy hand...filled with thirty-nine pieces of silver," Fidelman "runneth out to buy paints, brushes, canvas."[47] Susskind is crucified, and Fidelman still "watcheth from behind a mask," his repentance incomplete.[48] Fidelman is reduced to mad gyration and his thoughts reflect the powerful struggle that goes on in his psyche. In the midst of incoherent images and ramblings, Fidelman gives voice to the primal scream: "veyizmirveyizmirveyizmir...." indicating that despite the betrayal, he is unable to choose so easily between morality and art.[49]

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44 Ibid., p. 150.

45 Ibid.

46 Ibid., p. 151.

47 Ibid., pp. 152-3.

48 Ibid., p. 153.

49 Wisse, p. 116.

The scene shifts rapidly to a new picture of Fidelman masquerading as Plato, in a cave, still dealing with the problematic of perfection of form. The moral possibilities once again increase, however, for Fidelman is plagued by visions of Bessie "ill and possibly dying."[50] Although Fidelman attempts once again to lose himself in his work, he is troubled by "a presence, immenent or otherwise," represented by a lightbulb which hangs in the cave. Wisse suggests that:

> Susskind reappears in the cave of shadows as the source of light...The bulk is the Hebraic light giving out its moral message to the Hellenized painter, telling him to go upstairs to "say hello to your sister Bessie who hasn't seen you in years.[51]

It is also possible to interpret this passage as Fidelman's battle with "art." Fidelman, as Susskind, as a talking light bulb, attempts again to assert himself against art, the "artist." Fidelman is still absorbed in the desire for immortality through art ("Leaving my mark...For the ages to see."),[52] but as the bulb (Susskind) encourages him to assume human and moral responsibility, Fidelman finally comes to grips with the source of his conflict: "The truth is I hate the past. It caught me unaware."[53] Fidelman tries again to deny his responsibility for humanity

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50 Malamud, p. 157.

51 Wisse, p. 116.

52 Malamud, p. 158.

53 Ibid., p. 158.

as he argues with the light bulb: "It's no fault of mine if people die. There's nothing I can do about it." The light, however, refuses to allow him to escape the real issue: "Nobody is talking about fault or not fault. All we are talking about is to go upstairs."[54] All that is demanded is a simple affirming act of love.

The light bulb, stripping Fidelman of his armory of defenses, warns him to avoid the sin of pride:

> Don't be so proud my friend....Remember what happened to the Greeks.
>
> Praxiteles?....Phidias....Who have you got in mind?
>
> No, the one that bestore out his eyes. Watch out for hubris. It's poison ivy...[55]

This theme, though treated with humorous and surrealistic detail, is a constant for Malamud. Moral progress involves divestiture of hubris.[56]

At long last, Fidelman, stripped to his "leafy loincloth," begins his ascent, his return to life. This fallen Adam, having dealt with the world of experience, is finally prepared (though uncertainly) to trade the false value of immortality for a simple act of human concern. The multiple allusions are clear as Fidelman requests of the bulb (Susskind):

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54 Ibid., p. 158.

55 Ibid., p. 159.

56 Cf. "Talking Horse", p. 184, where Goldberg warns: "Watch out for hubris, Abramowitz."

"Be my Virgil, which way to up the stairs?" [57]

The portrait of Bessie has changed considerably from the one that appears in "Naked Nude." Here, Bessie is the dying sister, Fidelman has conjured a true-to-life image, a mature vision.

It is in Susskind's response, though comic through syntax, that Malamud provides the key to his view of the moral universe. Malamud's message is usually delivered in comic fashion, but there is no question that its underlying tone is serious: [58]

> I will show you which way but I
> can't go with you. Up to a point
> but not further if you know what
> I mean. A bulb is a bulb. Light
> I got but not feet. After all, this
> is the Universe, everything is laws. [59]

Fidelman has indeed wasted life and energy by "resisting the rules," but the Malamudian cosmos provides room for moral regeneration. Wisse observes:

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57 Malamud, p. 160.

58 Cf. "Talking Horse," p. 179, where Goldberg tells Abramowitz: "The law is the law, you can't change the order. That's the way things stay put together. We are mutually related, Abramowitz, and that's all there is to it. If it makes you feel any better, I will admit to you I can't live without you and I won't let you live without me...The true freedom...is to understand that you live with it so you don't waste your energy resisting the rules; if so you waste your life.

59 Malamud, p. 160.

> The closing line is "natura, morta. Still life," echo of a previous motif, counterpoint of dead nature, still, life.
>
> Because he is a human animal, the artist dare not deal in Platonic purities; there is someone dying in the room upstairs to whom he is accountable and whose imperfections he shares.[60]

Still, life, or life/death, it is important to realize that Malamud's universe provides "two lives...the life we learn with and the life we live with after that. Suffering is what brings us toward happiness."[61]

While Wisse and others find the last chapter, "Glass Blower of Venice," unconvincing, it should be understood that Malamud must provide Fidelman a life "after that." Though Fidelman has begun his metamorphosis, his redemption must be confirmed. Only by proving that he is capable of avoiding the same mistakes, may Fidelman prove that he has truly learned to understand the rules of the moral universe. Malamud's intention is that we understand, through Fidelman, that reclamation of oneself is never a fait accompli. Temptation to return to delusions of grandeur persist, and Fidelman must continue to "watch out for hubris." In this final "picture," Fidelman establishes relationship with two human beings, and it is through this contact, bizarre as it may be for him, that his

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60 Wisse, p. 116.

61 Malamud, The Natural, p. 126.

return to the world is made complete.

Fidelman's affair with Margherita signals the beginning of the process of regeneration. "Her matchstick street...led into Fondamenta Nuove" (New Foundation).[62] Malamud intends no irony here. New foundations must be built to support a new life. In bedding first Margherita and then her husband, Beppo, Fidelman finally learns the meaning of love. Beppo, homosexual and craftsman (a glassblower, no less!), destroys Fidelman's "bad art" and counsels him with wisdom "If you can't invent art, invent life."[63]

Fidelman learns Beppo's craft, but as always, there are the familiar dangers. Beppo must warn him not to treat glassblowing as he had treated art: "A fanatic never knows when to stop. It's obvious you want to repeat your fate." Fidelman, though hurt, apparently realizes that Beppo is right. Love and life supersede bad art.

Having learned to love, Fidelman reaffirms his progress in the area of human and moral relationships. Margherita begs him to "leave Beppo and go someplace else," for,

> Beppo may be a homo but he's a
> good provider and not a bad father
> when there are no men friends around
> to divert him from domestic life.[64]

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62 Malamud, p. 170.

63 Ibid., p. 181.

64 Ibid., p. 185.

Fidelman demonstrates that he has finally become "faithful man." By accepting his responsibility toward Margherita and her children, he accepts himself and his fate. His odyssey must be completed. prepared to deal with "the past," he returns home where, we are told, "In America he worked as a craftsman in glass and loved men and women."[65] Though Malamud has been criticized for the contrived and unconvincing tone of the ending,[66] it is suggested that the irony and ambiguity are intentional, and that we, just as Fidelman, must understand that even the "new life" is still, life, and therefore that the trials and dangers are ever-present. The condition of human existence is narrowly drawn, like the "free centaur" in "Talking Horse." Fidelman's "freedom" is intended to be tenuous and paradoxical.

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65 Ibid., p. 190.

66 Cf. Wisse, p. 118 and Time Magazine, May 9, 1969, p. 108 "Goodbye, Old Paint."

CHAPTER III

HERZOG

Saul Bellow's Henderson the Rain King[1] has been dismissed by many of Bellow's critics as a work inferior to Bellow's other novels. Milton Hindus reduces the novel to a parody of the "Hemingwayesque 'he-man- school of American literature," and concludes that the book is "artificial, cerebral and pointless."[2] Robert Alter, in a more insightful analysis, acknowledges that "Henderson is a composite parody of all the memorable 20th century novels of personal or mythic quest into dark regions," but probes the author's serious intent which underlies the picaresque and comic parody:

> For the great novelists of the recent past, whether moral pessimists or moral revolutionaries, the journey into dark continents was logically implied by the failure of western civilization. Their fabulous voyagers discovered in the primal gloom of the jungle either how pitifully inadequate the civilizing process was to restrain man's chaotic instincts, or, on the other hand, how by turning to non-western, primitive sources of renewal they could escape the withering of heart and mind that Western culture had become.

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1 Bellow, Henderson the Rain King.

2 Hindus, " 'Herzog': Existentialist Jewish Hero", p. 12. Jewish Frontier, December, 1964.

> Bellow in contrast, has never taken this dramatic but dangerous stance of giving up on our civilization. Henderson does not want to die to his past, he does not seek a new self in the jungles. Rather, he attempts - as truly civilized people have always done - to make rational sense of the self he has, to decipher the confused urgings of his heart so that he can put his life in order.[3]

This theme, the progression of the individual from chaos to order, is a key to the understanding of Bellow's work. Bellow's complex view of the human condition is complemented by an abiding faith in the potential of the individual to struggle towards psychic health, a process that involves regeneration through self-affirmation. The achievement of this state of _soterios_ does not involve cataclysmic action, but rather, an inward odyssey, a rational ordering of mind and soul.

The opening paragraphs of Henderson set forth the condition of disorder which must be overcome:

> What made me take this trip to Africa? There is no quick explanation. Things got worse and worse and worse and pretty soon they were too complicated.
>
> When I think of my condition at the age of fifty-five when I bought the ticket, all is grief. The facts begin to crowd me and soon I get a pressure in the chest. A disorderly rush begins - my parents, my wives, my girls, my children, my farm, my animals, my habits, my money, my music lessons, my drunkenness, my

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[3] Alter, "The Stature of Saul Bellow", _Midstream_, December, 1964, p. 10.

> prejudices, my brutality, my teeth, my face, my soul! I have to cry, 'No, get back, curse you, let me alone!.' But how can they let me alone? They belong to me. They are mine. And they pile into me from all sides. It turns into chaos. (my italics.)[4]

While Bellow chooses a particular genre, the mythic quest in parody form, with Henderson in order to state his theme, it is clear that Henderson's triumph over his own inner voices, his refusal to succumb to the forces which press upon him, indicates a mock-heroic victory. As Tony Tanner has observed:

> ...When the book reaches away from negation towards celebration; when we feel the full force of Bellow's refusal to accept despair, then it takes hold of us in a positive way beyond the scope of mere parody.... Henderson is a kind of a fool, but persistent enough in his folly to reach the threshold of wisdom, and when he struggles to grasp and hold the notion of a new mobility attainable by men, then,....comic or profound, we listen to him; and listening we suddenly seem to glimpse what it might mean to burst the spirit's sleep.[5]

In Herzog, although the genre and protagonist are radically different from Henderson, we once again find Bellow dealing with what he has called

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[4] Henderson, p. 7. I am indebted to Rabbi Herbert Bronstein for this insight.

[5] Tanner, Saul Bellow, Edinburgh and London, 1965, pp. 85-6.

"the worst disease of mind, the corruption of consciousness."[6] Like Henderson, Herzog must pursue his quest for order and for affirmation of self. He must struggle to perceive a moral universe within the chaotic labyrinth which appears to be an aspect of the human condition. The similarity between Henderson and Herzog ends abruptly: parody (Henderson) gives way to an ironic treatment of the philosophical-psychological novel in Herzog. While both characters share a certain bravado, Henderson's swagger is physical, Herzog's is intellectual. Henderson is a parody of the All American Boy in middle age. Herzog, though he appears in many guises - intellectual, romantic, victim, schlemiel, luftmensch, Jew, disintegrated man, to name a few - is a complex, multi-dimensional character. He is not an "everyman," but rather, a particular human being.

Herzog is first and foremost a cerebral character. Thought is both a symbol of sickness and a vehicle for health. Distracted and confused by his failures, the disorder of his life, he is seized by both a furor scribendi and a furor loquendi that has been described by Harold Fisch as an "interior dialogue."[7] Perhaps interior machloket or Talmudic-style argument would be an even more appropriate description

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6 Bellow, "Culture Now", Intellectual Digest, September, 1971, p. 80.

7 Fisch, "The Hero as Jew: Reflection on Herzog", Judaism, Winter, 1968, p. 49.

of the manner in which Bellow has Herzog reveal himself: Herzog argues with two voices in an attempt to come to an understanding of himself. His obsessive desire to make order of his world entraps him. He forces himself to probe every nuance, every word, and to attack every thesis, whether they are a product of his own introspective self-analysis, or the reactions to the ideas of others. Herzog lives as a prisoner of his own intellectual and psychological obsessions. His disorder is characterized by his abstractions of life. He lives in a realm of "thought thinking thought" which he must escape in order to reclaim himself as a complete human being.

The chaos which confronts Herzog is two-dimensional. First, there is the chaos of his own particular life; the collapse of his second marriage, his uncontrolled agony and rage, directed against Madeleine and Valentine Gersbach, his awareness that he is professionally impotent, his various guilts and self-recriminations, and finally, that symbol of personal chaos, "Herzog's Folly," the house in Ludeyville:

> ...he inspected the house as if for the first time. It was unpainted, gloomy, with rotting Victorian ornaments. Nothing on the ground floor but a huge hull like a shell crater. The plaster was coming down - moldy, thready, sickening stuff hung from the laths. The old fashioned knob-and-tube wiring was dangerous. Bricks were dropping from the foundations. The windows leaked.

> ...Two coats of paint counted for nothing on old, opengrained wood. In the bathroom the nails hadn't been set and their heads worked through the vinyl tiles, which came loose like playing cards. The gas radiator was suffocating. The tub was a relic,...At night he heard the trickle that was exhausting the well.[8]

Second, there is the chaos that appears as a general condition of modern life. Herzog reflects upon this theme constantly, and relates it to his own personal disunity of thought and action:

> The description might begin with his wild internal disorder, or even with the fact that he was quivering. And why? Because he let the entire world press upon him. For instance? Well, for instance, what it means to be a man. In a city. In a century. In transition. In a mass. Transformed by science. Under organized power. Subject to tremendous controls. In a condition caused by mechanization. After the late failure of radical hopes. In a society that was no community and devalued the person. Owing to the multiplied power of members which spent military billions against foreign enemies but would not pay for order at home. Which permitted savagery and barbarism in its own great cities. At the same time, the pressure of human millions who have discovered what concerted efforts and thoughts can do.[9]

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[8] Bellow, Herzog, p. 150.

[9] Ibid., pp. 247-8.

This final thought, the struggle for perception of an underlying order even amidst the chaotic drift of modern life controls and dominates much of Herzog's mental energy.

In a series of ironic castigations of self, we learn that Herzog indeed desired to be a 20th century Moses, leading a mixed multitude of humanity to a promised land. By ordering and revising human experience in a Meisterwerk of Intellectual and Cultural History that even he is aware he will never write, he hoped to energize a radical restoration of social behavior:

> What he planned was a history which really took into account the revolutions and mass convulsions of the twentieth century, accepting, with de Tocqueville, the universal and durable development of the equality of conditions, the progress of democracy.[10]

Herzog becomes increasingly aware of his earlier follies. His thoughts turn abruptly from his visit with his son to self-mockery:

> The mirror...revealed to Herzog how pale he was...Herzog smiled at this earlier avatar of his life, at Herzog the victim, Herzog the would-be lover, Herzog the man on whom the world depended for certain intellectual work, to change history, to influence the development of civilization. Several boxes of stale paper under his bed in Philadelphia were going to produce this very significant result.[11]

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10 Ibid., p. 13.

11 Ibid., p. 131.

Robert Alter, in attempting to characterize Hegzog, has pointed out that "the bits of High Holiday liturgy he recalls...catch up in themselves the underlying attitudes with which Herzog takes his stand on life."[12] It might be added that the novel itself takes on the cast of the penitential period between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, that the interior rhythms of Herzog's thoughts and memories with their recurrent emphasis on life/death, chaos/order, justice/injustice, and self-accusations/pleas for mercy, form an important structural foundation of the novel:

> Late in the spring Herzog had been overcome by the need to explain, to have it out, to justify, to put in perspective, to clarify, to make amends.[13]

This process is further amplified by an ironic Al Chet!

> Resuming his self-examination, he admitted that he had been a bad husband - twice...he was a loving but bad father...he had been an ungrateful child. To his country, an indifferent citizen. To his brothers and his sister, affectionate but remote. With his friends an egotist. With love, lazy. With brightness, dull. With power, passive. With his own soul, evasive.[14]

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12 Alter, "The Stature of Saul Bellow", Midstream. December, 1964, p. 14.

13 Bellow, Herzog, p. 8.

14 Ibid., pp. 11-12.

And then, in a masterful stroke which is characteristic of his sardonic wit, Bellow has Herzog "clarify" and amend: "But how charming we remain, notwithstanding."[15] This stylistic technique, the abrupt shift from the third person voice of the omniscient narrator to the first person stream of consciousness, functions to demonstrate effectively the intellectual schism which Herzog must overcome. The thoughts that appear in the first person voice have not been incorporated as a part of Herzog's active identity. They represent the human need to rationalize and withdraw from the introspective analysis of self. Herzog, the patient, must withdraw from Herzog, the psychiatrist. Time is needed for him to absorb the full impact of his revelations. He progresses slowly toward health, but realistically, attempts to avoid the immediate force of his own insights. Consequently, his progressive self-awareness is not linear, but circular; it involves three stages: approach, avoidance and resolution.

Bellow makes clear that the actual plot of the novel is Herzog's painful resolution of these inner conflicts. Keith Opdahl has demonstrated that the stories told in Herzog, the literal action of the novel are simple in and of themselves. He distinguishes "the actual present of the novel," the four days that frame the time span of the novel's action, from the "past events which he remembers as he travels," and establishes that both sequences form "a straightforward story."[16]

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15 Ibid., p. 12.

16 Opdahl, The Novels of Saul Bellow: An Introduction, University Park, Pennsylvania and London, 1967, p. 140.

Consequently, we see that the true distance which Herzog travels is interior in that the events, past and present, are revealed as they are interpreted by Herzog.

Thus, we are provided with a double vision of Herzog, filtered through the screen of his imagination and recollection. Even the "actual present" is presented in medias res; the past, whether immediate or distant, is offered in a series of flashbacks within flashbacks, seemingly discontinuous, but ultimately related. The discontinuity, although a manifestation of Herzog's mental and emotional disorder, functions descriptively to reveal his attempts to overcome his ambivalent attitudes toward life.

The catalyst which triggers Herzog's awareness of his disorientation is his rejection by Madeleine accompanied by bits and shreds of information concerning the details of her manipulation of him and her adulterous relationship with his "friend," Valentine Gersbach. Herzog's grief over Madeleine's summary dismissal of him is rendered as bathetic as he begins to realize the false basis on which his marriage was formed.

Herzog had conceived of himself as the comic knight errant on white charger, prepared to do battle against the Catholic Church and Monsignor Hilton for Madeleine's soul. Even before Herzog reviews the story of the collapse of his marriage (once again in a series of fragments which circle and circle, trying to focus), he indicates that he has achieved a state of self-awareness in that he begins to apprehend vaguely that his marriage was a piece of theater. He begins to perceive

that he had cast himself (with Madeleine's help) in the role of a pathetic pawn, a character completely dominated by the manipulative bitchery of his wife. As he reviews various scenes, he pauses, and as if with a shrug and a sigh, comically struggles to overcome the hurt, to heal the wounds. Considering Madeleine and Gersbach, Herzog remarks to himself: "The paltriness of these sexual struggles."[17] Recalling the scene wherein Madeleine gave him his final notice ("...I never loved you. I never will love you, either,"), Herzog first reports his immediate reaction, "I do love you, Madeleine," then wonders whether a violent reaction would have been more effective, but dismisses this idea. Finally, after drifting in reverie, he views himself "as if he were looking through the front end of a telescope at a tiny clear image" and wryly observes "That suffering joker."[18] It is apparent once again that Herzog is attempting to assuage his genuine pain. Although his new insights reveal truths about his former self, they also mask the depth of his genuine reactions.

Madeleine's rejection of Herzog, while an exquisite piece of theater, is a real event with which he must deal. Although he begins to perceive that his marriage was a sham and his former life a delusion, Herzog is still in danger of merely replacing the old fantasy with a new one. His compulsive letter-writing is an indication that he still attempts to replace life with illusion, and to live within another false world which he has created.

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17 Bellow, Op. Cit., p. 12.

18 Ibid., pp. 17-19.

A real event, the dissolution of his marriage, has forced him to confront the reality of his former self, and it is a continued series of real events - not his compulsive letter writing and philosophical abstractions which direct him toward health. While Herzog's cerebral meanderings and unsent letters represent his own attempted psychological application of the dictum, "Physician, heal thyself," it is Herzog's experience as an observer in a courtroom that moves him to cease reacting on a purely reflective level. Herzog sits through an infanticide trial, and after nearly retching as a result of the oppressive force of this contact with wretched humanity, he is shocked into action. He associates the murder of this anonymous child with the letter he has received from Geraldine Portnoy concerning Madeleine, Gersbach and June. The jolt of the trial unleashes the emotions which Herzog has formerly kept locked in thought, and he races to Chicago:

> New York could not hold him now.
> He had to go to Chicago to see
> his daughter, confront Madeleine and
> and Gersbach. The decision was
> not reached; it simply arrived.[19]

Herzog, visiting the home of his step-mother, is reminded of a scene wherein his father threatened him with a gun. He stumbles upon this same gun, takes it, and rushes toward Madeleine's home with the thought of using the two bullets inside it on Madeleine and Gersbach. Peering through the window, however, he watches Gersbach tenderly bathing June and realizes:

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19 Ibid., p. 295.

> There were two bullets in the chamber...But they would stay there. Herzog clearly recognized that...Firing this pistol was nothing but a thought.

This realization functions as an epiphany of sorts, for it releases Herzog from his romantic illusions of love and hatred:

> As soon as Herzog saw the... reality of it, the tenderness of such a buffoon to a little child, his intended violence turned into theater 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!...His breath came back to him; and how good it felt to breathe! It was worth the trip.[21]

Herzog continues to probe himself, but this time on an entirely new level. After visiting Phoebe Gersbach with the apparent thought of enlisting her aid against Madeleine and Valentine in a plot to obtain custody of June, Herzog further pierces his own armor of thought:

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[20] Ibid., p. 315.

[21] Ibid., p. 316.

> Herzog could not say what the significance of such generalities might be. He was only vastly excited - in a streaming state - and intended mostly to restore order by turning to his habit of thoughtfulness. Blood has burst into his psyche, and for the time being he was either free or crazy. But then he realized that he did not need to perform elaborate abstract intellectual work - ...But not thinking is not necessarily fatal. Did I really believe that I would die when thinking stopped? Now to fear such a thing - that's really crazy.[22]

Herzog continues to struggle to overcome his illusory self in a scene with his friend, Lucas Asphalter. In an outburst of concern for Asphalter, who has accepted the counsel of Tina Zokoly, a "Reality-Instructor," Herzog reveals one of his own basic problems:

> The new attitude which makes life a trifle not worth anyone's anguish threatens the heart of civilization. But it isn't a question of dread, or any such words at all...Still, what can thoughtful people and humanists do but struggle toward suitable words? Take me, for instance. I've been writing letters helter-skelter in all directions. More words. I go after reality with language. Perhaps I'd like to change it all into language, to force Madeleine and Gersbach to have a Conscience. There's a word for you. I must be trying to keep tight the tensions without which human beings can no longer be called human. If they don't suffer, they've gotten away from me. And I've

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[22] Ibid., p. 324.

> filled the world with letters to prevent their escape....I conjure up a whole environment and catch in the middle. I put my whole heart into these constructions. But they are constructions.[23]

It is clear that "to go after reality with language" yields only "constructions". Herzog clearly and precisely analyses the disease, but Bellow demonstrates ironically that his character has yet to take the cure. His attempts to pull his friend toward life and away from the false pariahs who peddle psychological placebos of death and dread indicate Herzog's desire to participate in life, but underscore the fact that he is still struggling to do so:

> But let's stick to what matters. I really believe that brotherhood is what makes a man human. If I owe God a human life, this is where I fall down. 'Man liveth not by Self alone but in his brother's face....' When the preachers of dread tell you that others only distract you from metaphysical freedom then you must turn away from them..The real and essential question is one of our employment by other human beings and their employment by us. Without this true employment you never dread death, you cultivate it. And consciousness when it doesn't clearly understand what to live for, what to die for, can only abuse and ridicule itself. As you do with the help of Rocco and Tina Zokoly, as I do by writing impertinent letters....[24]

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[23] Ibid., pp. 332-3.

[24] Ibid., p. 333.

This verbal act of commitment to brotherhood (to Asphalter) is a sign of Herzog's struggle toward life. It is also an ironic proof that the struggle has not been resolved.

After his accident, humiliated by the policemen's discovery that he is still carrying a pistol, Herzog continues to shed the layers of his former self deceptions:

> When he had put on his jacket in the morning and felt the awkward weight on his chest (the gun), then and there he might have stopped being quixotic. For he was not a quixote, was he? A quixote imitated great models. What models did he imitate? A quixote was a Christian, and he, Moses E. Herzog, was no Christian. This was the post-quixotic post-Copernican U.S.A., where a mind freely poised in space might discover relationships utterly unsuspected by a seventeenth century man sealed in his smaller universe. There lay his twentieth century advantage.[25]

In this consideration of himself as twentieth-century man, Herzog commits himself to his own time, he is no longer a confused romantic, an anachronism mistakenly cast into the wrong century.

This series of epiphanies is bounded by Herzog's experience with Madeleine in the police station. As Madeleine comes into the station to reclaim June, Herzog considers her and attempts to put their relationship into present perspective:

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25 Ibid., p. 349.

> I came to do harm, I admit. But the first bloodshed was mine, and so I'm out of this now. Count me out. Except in what concerns June. But for the rest (i.e., Madeleine and Gersbach), I withdraw from the whole scene as soon as I can. Good-by to all.[26]

For a moment Herzog comes perilously close to losing this perspective, for it is an abstraction, another self-deception. In this scene, however, his emotion saves him, for Madeleine's vindictive attacks inspire a rage which forces him to move from thought to action:

> Madeleine now spoke to Herzog for the first time, pointing with a rigid finger to the two bullets and looking him in the eyes. "One of those was for me, wasn't it!
>
> "You think so? I wonder where you get such ideas? And who was the other one for?" He was quite cool as he said this, his tone was level.[27]

This minor victory, a comic piece of retribution, signals Herzog's recovery from Madeleine's spell. Herzog, by acting, has further freed himself from the paralysis of pure thought. His letters to the host of confederates (imaginary or real) who conspired against him - the Edvigs, the Himmelsteins, the Tennies, and others - are now put into perspective.

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[26] Ibid., p. 365.

[27] Ibid., p. 367.

Herzog has no further need to deal with these ghosts. His letters, whether emotional outpourings of grief or rage, have served a function, but it is only by means of this direct confrontation that he is able to exorcise his demon, his own compulsive thought. His obsession with a mental retribution becomes unnecessary in that he finds that he has beaten Madeleine at her own game.

Herzog resolves to leave Chicago and pursue the narrow thread of self-reclamation that he has begun. He has not achieved a complete victory in his pursuit of order, but it is clear that he is moving forward:

> The dream of man's heart, however
> much we may distrust and resent it,
> is that life may complete itself
> in significant pattern. Some
> incomprehensible way. Before death.
> Not irrationally but incomprehensibly
> fulfilled. Spared by these clumsy
> police guardians, you get one last
> chance to know justice. Truth.[28]

In a final letter to Edvig, Herzog dispenses with the accusatory tone he had previously employed:

> Dear Edvig,...you gave me good
> value for my money when you
> explained that neuroses might
> be graded by the inability to
> tolerate ambiguous situations....
> Allow me modestly to claim that
> I am much better now at ambiguities.
> I think I can say, however, that
> I have been spared the chief ambiguity
> that afflicts intellectuals, and this

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28 Ibid., p. 370.

> is that civilized individuals hate and resent the civilization that makes their lives possible. What they love is an imaginary situation invented by their own genius and which they believe is the only true and the only human reality....[29]

Herzog has begun to cast some of the ghosts out of his life, but demonstrates that he does not fully understand the imaginary situation which he had conjured as his own personal "reality."

The past events upon which Herzog reflects, particularly those that deal with childhood experiences and family relationships, also indicate a progression from chaos to order. While Madeleine's rejection of him serves as a casus belli for Herzog's internal war, the unfolding of his conceptualization of that relationship serves as a necessary corrective for the reader. As Herzog puts the pieces of his conjugal life into perspective, we are forced to return to the seemingly distracted and diffuse meanderings of his mind, and to recognize that Herzog's divorce is only one manifestation of the disorder in his life.

Herzog deals with two aspects of the past (which often seem to converge in his thoughts); as a philosopher-historian, he is concerned with the broad currents of human development and progress, as an individual, he must also deal with his own personal history. Herzog's letters and memories serve to indicate the two categories of human experience with which he must deal.

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[29] Ibid., p. 370.

> the newspapers, to people in public life, to friends and relatives and at last to the dead, his own obscure dead, and finally the famous dead.[30]

We learn, however, that Herzog fails to perceive that his attempts to deal with the images of the past are abstract and ineffective:

> At first there was no pattern to the notes he made....Trepverter - retorts that came too late, when you were already on your way down the stairs.[31]

It becomes clear, however, that Herzog's soterios, his return to a state of well-being, depends upon achieving an ability to sort his thoughts and letters and to come to grips with them.

The random quality of Herzog's thoughts is an indication of his reluctance to deal with life on other than an abstract level. Unable to deal with his personal past, he skips to the historical past; unable to write his book, to deal with the historical past in a unified manner, he jumps from letters to philosophers, statesmen, colleagues, etc., to his own personal past.

Herzog's memories of Napoleon Street date back to his early childhood when "even at five he would have known better" than to tell a stranger what his father did for a living.[32] Herzog experiences

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[30] Ibid., p. 7.

[31] Ibid., p. 9.

[32] Ibid., p. 33.

the ambiguity of existence from earliest childhood; he understands that his father, Jonah, was truly a stranger in a strange land, senses alienation from society, and recalls that:

> In 1913 he bought a piece of land near Valleyfield, Quebec, and failed as a farmer. Then he came into town and failed as a baker; failed in the dry-goods business; failed as a jobber; failed as a sack manufacturer in the War, when no one else failed. He failed as a junk dealer. Then he became a marriage broker and failed - too short-tempered and blunt. And now he was failing as a bootlegger, on the run from the provincial Liquor Commission. Making a bit of a living.[33]

Nevertheless, Herzog is flooded with warmth when he thinks back to his childhood:

> Napoleon Street...To this Moses' heart was attached with great power. Here was a wider range of human feelings than he had ever again been able to find....What was wrong with Napoleon Street? thought Herzog. All he ever wanted was there.[34]

Moses' guilt toward his parents, particularly his father, is a manifestation of his sense of incompleteness. He recalls a scene from his adult life wherein his father threatened him with a gun because of his irresponsibility, and wonders:

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[33] Ibid., p. 171.

[34] Ibid., pp. 174-5.

> Who knows whether Moses shortened his (father's) life by the grief he gave him. Perhaps the stimulus of of anger lengthened it. He could not die and leave this half-made Moses yet.[35]

Herzog sees his father as a moral force, demanding that he recognize his responsibilities. Herzog's memories of his father inevitably trigger his guilt over his sense of failure as a parent (it is clear that he sees his father as a success in this respect):

> It was painful to his instincts, his Jewish family feelings, that his children would be growing up without him.[36]

The aftermath of Herzog's confrontation with Madeleine in the police station provides him the opportunity to begin to resolve his inner guilt with regard to his family. Herzog, lacking the money to meet his bail, calls his brother, Will. In this scene of tender family concern, Herzog attempts to recommit himself verbally to the family he has not seen since the summer before. As Will attempts to understand what has happened to his brother, Moses asserts himself:

> "I know what it is," Herzog said. 'You're worried." He had to lower his voice to control it. "I love you too, Will."
>
> "Yes, I know that."[37]

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35 Ibid., p. 306.

36 Ibid., 34.

37 Ibid., p. 372.

The importance of this scene is evident on a symbolic level as well, for Herzog identifies Will with his father:

> Standing with folded arms he favored one heel, somewhat like Father Herzog, and had a bit of the old man's elegance but not his eccentricities....He's a good man, a very good man....He has to be political, and deal, and wangle..and pay off and figure tax angles. All that Papa was inept in but dreamed he was born to do.[38]

Herzog, touched by Will's loving concern, turns inward, his thoughts a supplication for self-realization:

> A loving brute - a subtle, spoiled, loving man. Who can make use of him? He craves use. Where is he needed? Show him the way to make his sacrifice to truth, to order, to peace. Oh, that mysterious creature that Herzog! awkwardly taped, helped into his wrinkled shirt by brother Will.[39]

Herzog has not completed the human connection, but he does realize that he must live in an actual world, rather than in an imaginary one.

Herzog's philosophical thoughts and letters represent both his inability and his need to communicate, to order existence. Despite the distracted quality of this "interior dialogue," Herzog's nobility

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[38] Ibid., p. 374.

[39] Ibid., p. 375.

of thought is perceptible. He is unable to compose a rational system which would order the chaos of human existence, but as he comes tc realize, this is an impossibility. What he offers instead is a series of "negative attributes" in which he rejects the facile, formulaic or reductivist conceptions of history, humanity and cosmos. His random attacks thus form the framework whereby he is able to at least apprehend a moral order by recognizing that which it is not. Herzog's imaginary attacks on the "Reality-Instructors," the utopians, the doom-sayers, the existentialists, and other assorted false pariahs, reveal him as a probing seeker of truth.

Questioning Heidegger's "second Fall of Man into the quotidian or ordinary," Herzog wryly (and with a note of self-mockery) comments:

> No philosopher knows what the ordinary is, has not fallen into it deeply enough.[40]

In reaction to a colleague's work, Herzog writes:

> I think it must have started in that seminar...and the long arguments we had...about the decay of the religious foundations of civilization. Are all the traditions used up, the beliefs done for, the consciousness of the masses not yet ready for the next development? Is this the full crisis of dissolution? Has the filthy moment come when moral feeling dies, conscience

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[40] Ibid., p. 133.

> disintegrates, and respect for liberty, law, public decency, all the rest, collapses in decadence, blood?...But we mustn't forget how quickly the visions of genius become the canned goods of the intellectuals. The canned sauerkraut of Spengler's "Prussian Socialism," the commonplaces of the Wasteland outlook, the cheap mental stimulants of Alienation, the cant and rant of pipsqueaks about Inauthenticity and Forlornness.

Rejecting nihilism, Herzog rambles; but in his rambling, he moves toward his intellectual and emotional objective: an affirmation of both the terror and the wonder of life.

> I can't accept this foolish dreariness. We are talking about the whole life of mankind. The subject is too great, too deep for such weakness, cowardice - too deep, too great Shapiro....A merely aesthetic critique of modern history! You are too intelligent for this. You inherited rich blood. Your father peddled apples.[41]

Herzog continues the same plodding movement towards an expression of the human condition in a "letter" to Harris Pulver, former teacher and present editor of Atlantic Civilization:

> Listen, Pulver,...a marvelous idea for a much-needed essay on the "inspired condition"!...The inspired condition is therefore no visionary matter. It is not reserved for gods, kings, poets,

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41 Ibid., p. 96.

> priests, shrines, but belongs to mankind and to all of existence... And to belief based on reason. Without which the disorder of the world will never be controlled by mere organization. Eisenhower's report on National Aims, if I had anything to do with it, would have pondered the private and inward existence of Americans first of all...Each to change his life. To change![42]

Herzog's inability to communicate his ideas directly attests to his lack of direction, but even in his "madness," Herzog retains a lucidity of sorts - a desire for life and order which he must express.

In the final chapter, the various underlying threads of Herzog's life converge. His return to Ludeyville becomes symbolic of his inner change and his redemption, for it is at Ludeyville that Herzog commits himself to life in its complexity rather than to a romantic abstraction. Herzog's redemption involves a victory over himself, a decision actively to pursue order in his life. The house, purchased with his inheritance from Papa Herzog, has provided Herzog with feelings of guilt toward his father. The house, like his inheritance of twenty thousand dollars, symbolizes for Herzog the visible remains of his father's life. In his recommitment to the restoration of the house, Herzog demonstrates his ability to complete the "half-made man" his father knew.

The process of redemption involves the affirmation of a new awareness of self. In a simple statement, Herzog takes responsibility

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[42] Ibid., p. 205.

for his destiny by dealing with himself as a part of the present:

> But enough of that - here
> I am. Hineni! How marvelously
> beautiful it is today.[43]

The word Hineni indicates both a presentness and a preparedness for action. In a series of letters, Herzog demonstrates a control over his situation, a new perception of self. To Mermelstein he writes:

> We've reached an age in the history
> of mankind when we can ask about
> certain persons, "What is this
> Thing?" No more of that for me -
> no, no! I am simply a human being,
> more or less.[44]

He confirms his freedom from Madeleine with a note to her and to Gersbach:

> Dear Madeleine - You are a terrific one,
> you are! Bless you! What a creature!
> And you, Gersbach, you're welcome to
> Madeleine. Enjoy her - rejoice in her.
> You will not reach me through her,
> however....I am no longer there.[45]

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[43] Ibid., p. 377.

[44] Ibid., p. 387.

[45] Ibid., pp. 387-88.

In a letter to Rozanov, he criticizes the intellectual as a "Separatist," and having done so, appears to be possessed of a new energy:

> Luckily for me, I didn't have the means to get too far away from our common life. I am glad of that. I mean to share with other human beings as far as possible and not destroy my remaining years in the same way. Herzog felt a deep, dizzy eagerness to begin.[46]

The desire to begin, to start anew, indicates that in addition to self-affirmation, Herzog wants to function as a social being, to participate in society, rather than to merely view it as an observer. The two voices merge here, indicating that Herzog has begun to become whole.

Herzog's reclamation of himself is evident in a final letter which expresses the resolution of his past and an ability to live with the ambiguities of life:

> To God he jotted several lines. How my mind has struggled to make coherent sense....The life you gave me has been curious...and perhaps the death I must inherit will turn out to be even more profoundly curious.... But I am still on the same side of eternity as ever. It's just as well, for I have certain things still to do. And without noise, I hope....I want to send you, and others, the most

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[46] Ibid., p. 392.

> loving wish I have in my heart. This is the only way I have to reach out - out where it is incomprehensible. I can only pray toward it. So..Peace![47]

This final letter, Herzog's prayer, is a paean to life. With this flourish, finis coronat opus; Herzog is prepared to confront life as an integral human being. The change is not cataclysmic, for Herzog realizes that:

> My balance comes from instability. Not organization, or courage, as with other people. It's tough, but that's how it is. On these terms I, too, even I! - apprehend certain things.[48]

Herzog translates his revelatory experiences into action, seemingly insignificant, but action which demonstrates his ability to cope with life. Herzog rejects Will's suggestion that he take a 'supervised rest':

> ...just as I begin to be a little rational you want to hand me over to a psychiatrist....Going to the hospital would be fine...But it would be just the wrong thing to do.[49]

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47 Ibid., pp. 396-98.

48 Ibid., p. 402.

49 Ibid., p. 406.

Will, with practical concern for his brother, asks, "But what do you intend to do here now?" With his answer, Herzog proves that he has begun to be able to create the order which his life has lacked:

> I may as well stay on. I'm not far from Marco's camp. Yes, that's it. If Daisy'll let me, I'll bring him here next month. What I'll do is this,...I'll have the lights and the phone turned on. Tuttle'll come up and mow the place. Maybe Mrs. Tuttle will clean up for me. That's what I'll do." He stood up. "I'll get the water running again, and buy some solid food. Come, Will, give me a lift down to Tuttle's.[50]

This determination to finally, irrevocably, take control over his destiny represents a commitment to the future. By making plans to bring Marco to Ludeyville, Herzog proves himself prepared to accept the responsibilities of being a father. He takes his place as a link between past and future, acknowledging thereby, that humanity is dependent upon the individual.

The novel ends with Herzog's beginning. He has emerged from a spiritual wilderness, and is able to survey his unknown destiny with a sense of peace and serenity:

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[50] Ibid., p. 406-7.

> I am pretty well satisfied to be, to be just as it is willed, and for as long as I may remain in occupancy.[51]

Herzog is able to stand and face life without the artificial crutches which he had constructed. And thus:

> Perhaps he'd stop writing letters. Yes, that was what was coming, in fact. The knowledge that he was done with these letters....At this time he had no messages to anyone. Nothing. Not a single word.[52]

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[51] Ibid., p. 414

[52] Ibid., p. 416.

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