



## IMAGES IN SAUL BELLOW'S SELECT NOVELS

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### ABSTRACT

Bellow has interest in metaphysical question. He realizes that he is able to pass his message through images. There images came spontaneously. They produce the characters. Through these images one can experience the pains of existence. Bellow frequently uses images of weight. The purpose of these images is to express the pressures of livelihood which give disturbances to his heroes. To express the painful mortality that human beings tolerate, Bellow uses images of deformity or disease. He applies such images very traditional. Cannibalism is one of the images which is given less importance. Cannibalism is like a disease, says Bellow. The very important image in Bellow's novels is the beast. Bellow's characters feel the weight, they are diseased or deformed they are imprisoned, they are devoured, and also they become cruel animals. As Bellow's characters feel imprisoned, pressured and devoured by the circumstances and by themselves, they need to escape from the present situation. They are questers. They search for answers to their predicaments. Bellow's protagonists are obsessed by vision. As visionaries they try to see existence in oblique or unbalanced ways. The mirrors demonstrate that their quests are frequently distorted.

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### WEIGHT:

Bellow frequently uses images of weight. The purpose of these images is to express the pressures of livelihood which give disturbances to his heroes. In *Dangling Man* Iva supports Joseph. She believes that she can make life more tolerable for him. But her effort is futile. Life continues to be a

heavy burden. This burden is often a kind of weariness of life—as Goethe says.

The physical environment is a detesting burden for many of the novels. Wind feed Joseph on his daily walks. He envisions the battered chicken on his mother-in-law's sink and the ravelled entrails are a dark remainder of his own. He spreads his vision outside at the Christmas preparations. "Immense wreaths were mounted on buildings in the green, menacing air:" Human bodies are burdens.

Abt Pinched Minna's body when he hypnotises her. Her eyes flinch under her lids. Joseph beats Etta after she disturbs him. She shrieks

to his repeated slaps. The spanking reminds him of his own childhood haircut style. What hurt his curls? And his grandfather is part of the memory, and his head hangs over his grandson threatening him, weighing him down. He remembers another incident which occurred earlier. He sees blood on a quarrelling drunkard's face as it's the first slow drops of a heavy rain in summer. The current burdens of nature then reassert themselves, fog hovers over Joseph. Each and every new day is very dark, and burdensome.

*The Victim* consists of burdens, depressions, stress and weights. One could see the weight from the epigraph: The Ifrift's son is killed by stones which have been thrown at him and Asa is compelled by Elena's pressures to come to Staten Island.

These multi pressures of the body, mind and atmosphere are found in Asa's adventures. These pressures are found in many of the chapters. Albee appears before Asa and threatens him by crowding him on the park bench. After his maiden appearance, the clouds are heavily suspended and slow. On account of all these Asa thinks his burden as a few at a party. Asa realize that no place is free a Jew. As a Jew he is segregated. Eventhough Asa look free, he has to carry his cross on his shoulder. He remembers the labourers in the engine room who has been working the huge thing, Each and everything, every person realises versions pressures.

"Oh, there was a smashup somewhere, certainly, a smashup and a tragic one.... Something crushing, a real smach." Later " his high, thick chest [feels] intolerably bound and compressed, and the [lifts] his shoulders in an effort to ease his breathing." But what's the use? He continues to be crushed-like Mary's letter in his hand.

The images used in the latter half of the novel are very deep. When Asa goes to the park he finds there an overwhelming human closeness and thickness.

Albee also added some meaning to this feeling when he tell his victim that "The world's a crowded place". He says even the dead "get buried in layers". His presence itself is a "great tiring weight".

When comparing the adventures of Asa and Joseph, Augie's adventures are lighter, because the

hero is luftmensch that is a man of air. Although Augie's adventures are lighter, there are burdens. Even if Augie comes from Chicago, a sombre city, full of crowds, pressure winds, he feels very free. He is very much interested in the burdens of the history as Joseph and Asa. They continually think of their family weighing them down than the physical environment.

When other eras, previous greatness lie on him, he must breathe. One could see the recurring image throughout his adventures that he carries Einhorn.

[I] got him on my back. He used to talk about himself as the Old Man of the Sea riding Sinbad. But there was Aeneas too, who carried his old dad Anchises in the burning of Troy....

Most of the characters carry someone in their life. As Augie carries Einhorn, Grandma Lausch carries the March family and Simon carries his relatives late. Wherever people travel they carry things. Augie is not out of it. He is also a part of his dark, burdensome location that even his language itself is burdened with things. He is loaded with lists of people or heavy things or feelings. His epic catalogues are really laboured list of items.

There are various images of weight. Augie thinks people tread on him. Wherever Augie goes, he feels insecure and he feels burden. He feels "How can I remove the mass of uniform things? His question is never answered.

Wilhelm, the man of sorrows attempts to make his burden less by casting off his real name but he is not able to do this, as he is not able to get rid of his own thickness of speech. No one in this world is ready to bear any load on their own. Even Dr. Adler refuses to carry anyone including his own son on his back.

Bellow has shown the 'pressure' in the *Henderson the Rain King* on the first page itself as "pressure in the chest". He shows Henderson's disorderly life. Henderson's whole body is a mass weight. He believes that he is able to lessen the existential loads by transferring them by doing manual work. But his inner self pressures him. He feels as if "there were strangulation in (his) heart". He handles the violin, trying to reach his dead father. The weight still persists.

He envisions life in America as a waste full of junks like the "bottles, lamps, old butter dishes", etc. He finds all these wastages in the old woman's cottage. Henderson finds junk even in Africa. For example the frogs in the cistern. By bombing them out, he is able to carry some of the burdens of the Arnewi tribe and his own. He destroys the frogs as well as the cistern.

The Wariri ruler, Dahfu stays in a deep forest who sees 'volupte' of the Amazons which presses them both Wariri and Henderson. The purpose of the rituals are to set free humanity from divine pressure. This is the reason, why Henderson is not able to carry mummah. Henderson and Dahfu realises that the pressures, burdens, and weights of life are never lifted.

Deformity:

To express the painful mortality that human beings tolerate, Bellow uses images of deformity or disease. He applies such images very traditional. In most of the epics the heroes are deformed for instance, Oedipus in Oedipus Rex and Samson in Samson Agonists. Bellow like many ancient writers asserts that human body is deformed but the will or spirit is not handicapped. The spirit is more beautiful than the outer body.

In *Dangling Man* one can see the deterioration of Joseph. He lives in a drug like dullness and he is sick like his neighbour coughing Vanaker or his father-in-law. In the view of Joseph sickness is universal, and physical deformity is also universal, for example Minna's hypnotized body, the crooking vein on Iva's temple, his own cramped feeling at his heart, his grandfather's withered fist. Every character has a deformity. The atmosphere is also filled with crippled, deformed, humbled and wounded people. Bellow focuses that his hero Joseph realizes that the body is crippled, imperfect or deformed but the spirit (or) will is very strong.

The victim has a note of sickness in the beginning itself. Asa realises that his nephew is bedridden. This illness is a recurring one throughout the novel. Mr. Beard's enlarged face, Elena's eyes Asa's unreliable nerves are all instances for illness. Illness and deformity is a part and parcel of life. One cannot separate them Man has to accept these

Cripples and deforms. Everyone is affected by illness and deformity.

In the Adventures of Augie March the cripples multiply. Augie shows the types of deformities of people. He is not worried about the deformities are Joseph and Asa. Everyone here in this novel has imperfections. For instance Mama has few teeth left, large feet, Georgie with stiff feet, also the dog winnie is loud breathing.

Augie is a little healthy person but he suffers from mental agony. The friends and relatives are deformed and diseased. Friedl Coblin, Anna Coblin, Mama March and Einhorn are crippled or diseased. Augie thinks that this world itself is a place of special disfigurement. At last he repeats this comment when he looks at the West side station;

It was very dark. It was spoiled, diseased, sore and running. And as the mis-minted and wrong-struck figures and faces stooped, shambled, strode, gazed, surrendered, didn't care... you wondered that all was stuff that was born human and shaped human, and over the indiscriminateness and lack of choice.

Tommy Wilhelm too lives in a world of half-breeds. He notices the man's eyes, when he greets Rubin. Another man looks at him and makes his self-conscious. Then Tommy looks at himself in the mirrored and he thinks that he is sick.

As Bellow says:

"A wide wrinkle like a comprehensive bracket sign was written upon his fore-head, the point between his brows, and there were patches of brown on his dark blond skin".

Added to that Dr. Adler take care of his body. But this in itself is a type of sickness Mr. Perls, Dr. Tamkin, and Mr. Rappaport are deformed in any way. The world is a hospital, Everywhere there are disease and there are no medicines to cure those diseases.

In *Henderson the Rain King*, Bellow has exaggerated the images of deformity. As Bellow's other heroes, Eugene Henderson is also deformed. In Bellow's view: "At birth I weighed fourteen pounds, and it was a tough delivery. Then I grew up Six feet four inches tall and Two Hundred and thirty pounds. An enormous head, rugged, with hair like

Persian lambs' fur". Everyone who is acquitted with Eugene also deformed or diseased, Lily, Miss. Lenox, Willatale in Africa are deformed anyway. Though Henderson has physical deformities he seems longing for Spiritual vision. As Irving Malin says:

Humanity is a regular bargain basement of deformities. Dahfu a medicine man, can help in curing Henderson. His conversation circles around notions of health. Man is an artist. His principal work of art is body. Disease is the speech of the psyche. Because no one is ever completely free. Divine. He is always sick., developing bodily symptoms. It seems that Dahfu has read Thomas Mann, Nietzsche, and Dostovsky as well as Wilhelm Reich.

Thus disease and deformities continue.

Cannibalism:

Cannibalism is one of the images which is given less importance. Cannibalism is like a disease, says Bellow. For instance, In *Dangling Man*, Joseph says "I am deteriorating, storing bitterness and spite which eat like acids at my endowment of generosity and good will". He is bored. In *Almstadt's*, he expresses in detail of the consumed chicken, "its yellow claws rifid, its head bent as though to examine its entrails which ravelled over the sopping drain board". Though he had a large diner, he remains hungry like a beast.

In adventures of *Augie March*, Augie does not preach any Sermon about cannibalism, parasitism or the true consumption of food, he is disgusted and fascinated by the immense meals Anna Coblin prepares. Most of Augie's friends and relatives are cannibals.

Henderson is always hungry for some reason. He says "I want! I want!". His desire is like a child's need for food. Wherever he moves he sees cannibalism. He realizes that love is the only thing that can transform food.

Prison:

The images of weight, deformity and cannibalism suggest that life is dangerous, ugly and heavy. Bellow here shows his characters are imprisoned. They themselves consider as imprisoned.

In *Dangling Man* Joseph always lock himself in his room. He never leaves the room. The living

place itself is a jail for the inhabitants, for instance, Vanaker and the landlady. The mind itself is a prison. He always keep himself inside the room and be reserved. Everyone here in this novel keep silent. Joseph says:

"I in this room, separate, alienated, distrustful, find in my purpose not an open world, but a closed, hopeless jail. My perspectives end in the walls. Nothing of the future comes to me. Only the past, in its shabbiness and innocence. Some men seem to know exactly where their opportunities lie; they break prisons and cross whole Siberias to pursue them. One room holds me" (*Dangling Man*. P.?)

Joseph even in his nightmares, he finds him in a low chamber full of corpses. It represents the tomb of his present existence and it suggests that Joseph is in Hell. There is no exit as it is one way.

In *The Adventures of Augie March* one can find many prisons. In the very first page itself is, Augie says he will knock at the door of life. It may be an innocent knock or harsh knock. He finds that there are many doors which remains unopened, though it received many knocks. George's room, Grandma Lausch's institution are instances for the prison. The existence of these prisons of the spirit compel Augie to picture life a bit different towards the end of the novel. Everyone in this novel has a secret room including Augie.

As Irving Malin says:

"The walls of his being, and all high conversation would take place within the walls of his being. And all achievement would stay within those walls". (Seven images p. 156).

Henderson and Augie resemble the same. They try to destroy all prisons. Henderson thinks that his expensive house does not yield happiness, even his books are sinister containers of money. Everything signifies entrapment, eg. the cage in the aquarium, the rubbish cottage, the cistern etc. Henderson finally realizes that Africa is a continent which resembles the prison.

V.BEAST:

The very important image in Bellow's novels is the beast. Bellow's characters feel the weight, they are diseased or deformed they are

imprisoned, they are devoured, and also they become cruel animals.

Bellow, In *Dangling Man*, shows many beasts for instance, the Wolf, Vanaker. He is an irritating creature. As beasts search for prey, the characters in this novel also try to get a chance to destroy one another. Joseph realises that the limitations between bestiality and humanity is very thin at times. Sometimes humanity comes out from bestiality.

In *Adventures of Augie March*, Bellow shows that Augie lives with beasts. Augie tries to accept the evil things around him. He loves the bestial nature of birds and worms. Here also Bellow says the specialization of human nature is that it could be animalistic as well as god like. This is known as 'exactly human'. The animalistic nature contains greed and fear. Through bestial nature human can achieve something he likes stubbornly.

Bellow recommends that one has to have courage to accept the bestial soul. In *Henderson the Rain King*, Bellow shows the bestial nature as stubborn, fierce and very strong. Henderson has many confrontations with beasts. These confrontations affirm the relationship between animal and human being. Towards the end of the novel Henderson profits from his savage encounters: He understands that he will not be able to escape from his dark heart. Mr. Daniel Hughes comments that:

As with any resonant poetic symbol, no linear meaning can be attributed to the lion and lion-king of this novel. Indeed, this is a symbol, wholly integrated with Henderson's quest, thus forming an interesting contrast with the eagle-ritual that Augie March undergoes in a partly real, partly symbolic, Mexico... The lion kept under the throne by Dahfu is precisely what Henderson is not, something external, powerful, real. For all his boasting about reality, Henderson must undergo a savage encounter with something entirely foreign, and from this discover reality in himself.

Kinetic:

As Bellow's characters feel imprisoned, pressured and devoured by the circumstances and

by themselves, they need to escape from the present situation. They are questers. They search for answers to their predicaments.

There are two various types of movements or escapes. They are useless and purposeful motions. Vanaker's mad pacing, Joseph's fearful walks are useless movements. Rocketing of Tad to Africa or regular seasonal change are purposeful movements. Fierce winds or rain, the blood-sopping draining board the grinding moment of Christmas shoppers the violent gestures of Joseph are taken as useless, purposeless movements.

In the *Adventures of Augie March*, Bellow shows motion in the beginning itself. Augie's adventures and his travels from one place to another are shown. Augie's travels or movements are not that much important. In the first chapter Grandma Laush instructs Augie and the others how to go on their mission to the charities office-how to travel. Augie listens carefully and is a lonely adventurer finding his own sights in his own way. He says, "Sometimes we were chased, stoned, bitten, and beat up for Christ-killers". The travels give a progressive and never-ending voyage.

Bellow shows the blind process of *Dangling Man* as: the "Shipping, cooing hubbub of paper-chain making" in Georgia's school; the sly, often criminal movements of young Augie; the watchfulness of Mama, the giddiness of grandma Lausch etc. Augie is very much disturbed. He sees the problem as:

It was not only for me that being moored wasn't permitted; there was general motion, as of people driven from angles and corners into the open, by places being valueless and inhospitable to them. In the example of the Son of Man having no place to lay His head; or belonging to the world in general... I, with my can of paint, no more than others. And once I was under-way, street cars weren't sufficient, nor Chicago large enough to hold me. (*Dangling Man* p.?)

Augie does not move very fast, but moves gradually and he begins to recognize that in "the free spinning of the world," breaking out of the small circle is not always completely successful. Out

of one circle, he sees others" "Around some people the space is their space, and when you want to approach them it has to be across their territory.." it is not that easy to bound "the exploding oceans of universal space." The best one can hope for, according to Augie, is that he becomes aware of the "axial lines of life, with respect to which you must be straight or else your existence is merely clownery, hiding tragedy." Augie tries, if not to be straight in his movements, to be aware of the circular experience of the race- the cyclical return of greatness.

In Henderson the Rain King, Augie is a quester, searching for reality and searching for humanity. His movement offers clues to the meaning of this novel. Henderson's is a mixed movement. He moves towards Africa, the dark continent. When he moves he does not know Africa will be a chaos or heaven to him. Henderson's is a violent movement. He wrestles with Itelo, falling to the ground. He thinks then that his spirit's sleep burst he blasts the eastern.

The two kinds of movement continue after Henderson meets Dahfu. The ruler seems to "float" gracefully, even when he throws the skulls- he soars while Henderson thinks that he sinks. During the ritual "gouts of water like hand grenades burst all about and on him" not destroying but creating Henderson. When Dahfu tells him about cosmic force, the imagery reasserts itself- *man must move, he cannot stand still under blows*. Then it does not matter that Dahfu falls into the cage and is killed. Reality continues to flow, drowning some. But there are spots where it stops for a moment-they are as calm as the pink light." As Henderson thinks "*Light itself was all Einstein needed.*" Perhaps he puts it better this way: "The opposite makes the opposite." Chaos implies order; wildness implies peacefulness. And the last time Henderson, is running "over the pure white lining of the gray Arctic silence." He is a pinpoint of moving light, " a little world made cunningly' of changing order.

Reflections:

Bellow's protagonists are obsessed by vision. As visionaries they try to see existence in oblique or unbalanced ways. The mirrors

demonstrate that their quests are frequently distorted.

Joseph, In Dangling Man is artificially self-centred. The others reflect his preoccupations. They are inversions of his original images. Thus he sees the athlete, the tough boy, as an alien, who doesn't conform to the right code-his own. Always subject to such hallucinations, he is able to come back to the summer, making himself shiver in the heat. When he looks at the ugly houses, streets, tracks, he wonders if the people who lived here were actually a reflection of the things they lived among. Self and the environment mirrors each other.

To emphasize the mirrors of self, Bellow gives us Mina's party. Everyone here remains same. Others remained grouped, together. Abt in hypnotizing Minna, dims the lights and closes her eyes. Later Joseph describes his brother, Amos and his family.

Like the tough boy mentioned earlier, Amos is an inverted image of his younger brother, who regards him as a stranger. Etta Amos' daughter bears a great resemblance to Joseph: "this resemblance goes beyond the obvious similarities pointed out by the family. Brooding about his niece, Joseph discovers that the face, all faces, had a significance for me duplicated in no other object. A similarity of faces must mean a similarity of nature and presumably of fate". One can understand why Bellow includes the double.

When Joseph sees a stranger fall from some kind of attack, he sees himself in the man. The fall reminds him of his own illness, his mother's death, Aunt Dina's scratching. He calls it a pre-vision. It results from his melodrama and a fragmented view of existence. Everything is double-his two Joseph, Amos and Joseph, because life is a broken self-image, true vision, epiphany, is rare. Seeking it, Joseph constantly runs into distortions, grotesque reflections, as in his dream-double: he feels a touch on his back and turns: "Then that swollen face that came rapidly toward mine until I felt its bristle and the cold pressure of its nose; the lips kissed me on the temple with a laugh and groan. Our seer resembles Brydon of The Jolly Corner in love with a grotesque double, or Poe's William Wilson. The

interior darkness is dangerous only cats can see it truly.

After leaving Joseph in his old room, still not seeing wholly. The room is delusive; it seems to “dwindle” and become a small square. This is not a visual trick, he informs us. The visual trick-like the other ones in the novel-is a *revelation* of life’s ephemeral agreements. No wonder that Joseph rises unsteadily from his rocker- he sees clearly that life is a cosmic, distorting, treacherous mirror.

The mirrors persist in the *Adventures of Augie March*, but they are less destructive. The general pattern is clear: Augie constantly meets people who reflect each other-Einhorn resembles Mintouchian who resembles Thea, etc. His world is a kind of “funhouse”. Because his range of experience is so great (and, curiously, so limited to authoritarians), he must avoid becoming another reflection.

Here are some of the images of faulty vision, fragmentation, and distortion. There are several “mirrors” in the first chapter: the March family prepare to help Mama get new glasses-Grandma Lausch teaches her children how to get correct vision? Augie mentions the photograph of Grandma’s husband; the photograph “doubled back between the portico columns of the full-length mirror”. This *doubling back* is evident in all the adventures; When he notes, for example, that he can’t see his father as a “marble-legged Olympian” or his big mother as a “fugitive of immense beauty,” he is suggested that his friends and relatives are distorted, incorrect reflections of the gods: perfect beauty (or vision) exists in Heaven; earthbound people never see themselves properly. The three monkeys-see no evil, speak no evil; hear no evil-are fragmented deities. Augie begins to travel and meets other mirrors. Anna Coblin insists on seeing him as her own Howard, refusing to perceive that he is not a simple double of her son but a different person. Her religion is described this way: she “had things *segmented, flattened down, and telescoped* like the stages and floors of the Learning Tower....”. A poor visionary with her “own ideas of time and place”! No wonder we see her “bothering the morning mirrors with her looks.” Simon resembles her in having an “oriental, bestowing

temperament”; he becomes the missing father. Contrasted to him, an inverted image is George, who doesn’t stare at the world; on the contrary, he has a “subtle look” set on who knows what- a “seraphic” appearance.

The “true vision of things is a gift, particularly in times of special disfigurement and world-wide Babylonishness.” But faulty vision is everything. Augie is taken for Mrs. Renling’s lover; he thinks of Mr. Renling as a nightbird that “knows all about daylight” but flies toward darkness; Mama March is blind; Augie cannot become a “sun of the world,” “phoebus’s boy”- he remains in the dark; Simon who undergoes a grotesque metamorphosis runs through lights and almost kills pedestrians; Caligula wears a hood. The net result of these “intimidations” for Augie is simple. Existence, he believes, is double, mysterious, fragmented-as Mintouchian claims: “Do you say a double life? It’s secret over secret, mystery and then infinity sign stuck on to that. So who knows the ultimate and where is the hour of truth?” in Henderson the Rain King the crucial problem is how to achieve insight –not an essay task when the hero is surrounded by duplication (he is like Lily’s father in his suicide threat; the orphan at the end parallels Ricey’s child); grotesque reflection that the lions are stronger than Henderson; one lion is a killer, unlike the other faulty vision as Willatale sees despite her cataract; Henderson sits in darkness or peculiarity of light. But Henderson does have vision: when he sees pink light-all that Einstein needed- he is no longer aware of the upside-down universe of things.

Then he sees Deity-reality itself- as two-side and one at the same time. Light, fire-these move but are steady; they distort but are clear; “The opposite makes the opposite.” Or as he pictures his epiphany:

“It is very early in life, and I am out in the grass. The sun flames and swells; the heat it emits is it love, too. I have this self-same vividness in my heart. There are dandelion. I try to gather up this green. I put my love-swollen cheek to the yellow of the dandelions. I try to enter into the green.” Every one, he says later, is “given the

components to see: the water, the sun, the air, the earth....”(p.?)

Bellow uses natural images-movement, resemblance, diseased limbs- but he uses them to portray the truths of existence. These images are shaped to symbolize our destiny. When he uses such exotic ones as those Henderson meets, they are still *natural in that particular Africa*.

The fascinating thing about these seven images is that because they are so real, they recur in all periods-they are archetypal. The pressures felt by Tommy Wilhelm or Asa Leventhal are “crosses’ like the one borne by Christ; the disease appears again and again as a symbol and fact of our human condition not only in Oedipus Rex (remember Bellow’s choice of Oedipus’ feet as a true symbol) but in Moby Dick or the Magic Mountain; the beast is in medieval romance or Gulliver’s Travels; the voyage is in- you name it. If we read Bellow’s fiction with care-even the early Dangling Man- we see that as modern as his heroes are, they enact mythic trials. The images make Bellow’s novels traditional; at the same time they don’t destroy freshness or contemporaneity.

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