Henderson the Rain King Study Guide

Henderson the Rain King by Saul Bellow

BOOKRAGS

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Plot Summary

Henderson, a troubled middle-aged man, decides to go to Africa to escape the complications and sadness that plague him at home. Henderson is a large man, often bumbling and loud, with a surprising physical appearance and great physical strength. He has a distinguished family, and his father, a famous author, left him three million dollars when he died. He is a World War II veteran and a pig farmer, but has a secret desire in his heart to become a doctor. His first wife, Frances, laughs at this desire.

Henderson is plagued by a voice inside his heart that says, *I want*, and he seeks salvation from and satisfaction of this longing in a number of ways, through playing the violin, drinking, shouting at his wife, but none make him feel better. He believes his wife Lily fails to live in reality, although Henderson believes he is on good terms with reality. One day, while he is shouting at Lily, his housekeeper has a heart attack and dies. Wracked with guilt and shame, Henderson decides to go to Africa with his childhood friend Charlie Albert and his wife. Henderson is fifty-five when he buys his ticket.

In Africa, Henderson finds Charlie's traveling style too pampered, and decides to take leave of Charlie and his wife and set off on his own with Romilayu as a guide. Henderson and Romilayu travel for many days until they reach the Arnewi tribe. The Arnewi are a kind and gentle people, but they are plagued by frogs in their water reservoir that have rendered the water undrinkable. Their beloved cattle are dying of thirst. Henderson wins the respect of their prince, Itelo, by wrestling him, and then meets the Queen, a wise and wonderful woman who teaches him about the desire to live, "grun-tu-molani," Henderson loves the Arnewi and is determined to rid them of their frogs. He builds a bomb to kill the frogs in the cistern, but ends up blowing out the cistern wall and draining away all of their water supply. Henderson is heartbroken that he has bumbled his good intentions so miserably.

Henderson next goes to the Wariri tribe, where he befriends the king, Dahfu, and becomes the Sungo, or rain king, when he lifts a heavy idol during the rain ceremony. Dahfu tries to help Henderson end his suffering by forcing him to spend time with his lion, Atti, and teaching Henderson to emulate her. Dahfu also tries to share with Henderson his belief that a connection exists between the inside and outside appearance of people, and emotions and characteristics are physically manifested. A faction of the Wariri led by a priest named Bunam disapprove of Dahfu's activities with the lion, and they try to use Henderson to manipulate the king. When Dahfu dies trying to capture his lion he believes hold the spirit of his father, Henderson, as Sungo, automatically becomes the next king. Heartbroken over the death of his friend, and distrustful of the Bunam's faction, Romilayu and Henderson flee the Wariri. Henderson takes with him the lion cub, which according to Wariri tradition now holds the spirit of Dahfu. On the journey home, Henderson takes care of an orphan boy who is traveling alone. Henderson has realized that the meaningful relationships in his life have been founded on love. He has also decided to follow his dream and enroll in medical school.

Chapter 1

Chapter 1 Summary

The novel begins as Henderson directs a question to the reader. "What made me take this trip to Africa?" he asks, and then proceeds to explain how things had become so bad for him that the journey became necessary. He describes himself as a rich man, who inherited three million dollars from his father, a well-known author. Henderson also inherited thousands of books, into he reads for guidance when he is unhappy. He is particularly moved by the phrase, "The forgiveness of sins is perpetual and righteousness is not required," although he promptly forgets which book he read it in. Often when he searches through the books, money, which his father had used as bookmarks, falls out.

Henderson describes himself as an ivy league graduate, tall and big with a huge head and nose, suspicious eyes and blustering ways. He is one of three siblings, but the only surviving child, for which his father never wholly forgives him. He marries Frances, an attractive girl from his social class to please his father, but she is a schizophrenic, and they divorce after twenty years and five children. Henderson concedes that he is also probably mad, and that he drinks too much, often early in the day.

Henderson divorces Frances soon after he returns from World War II, and then he marries Lily. He and Lily have twins, but he confesses that he gives her a terrible time, by drunkenly raving and swearing at her, getting into brawls, and embarrassing her in front of her society friends. He blames this in part on the fact that he overheard her call him "unkillable" on the telephone, though he concedes she may have been joking. Henderson and Lily and their twins go to the Gulf one winter, where Henderson gets drunk every morning and breaks bottles on the beach with a slingshot. Lily is upset, and begins to moralize and cry, and Henderson threatens to commit suicide with a pistol. Lily runs away in anguish, and Henderson promises to explain why in the next chapter.

Chapter 1 Analysis

Henderson introduces himself to the reader in the first chapter with disarming bluntness and honesty. His limitations and neuroses and the complications of his life are evident from the first pages of the novel. They are critical to understanding the importance of his African journey. Both his cruelty (in his actions towards Lily) and his sensitivity (in the actions taken to please a disapproving father) are both immediately apparent. It is this duality, which marks much of Henderson's actions throughout the novel. In spite of the evident enormity of his emotional problems, Henderson also informs the reader on the first page "the world which I thought so mighty an oppressor has removed its wrath from me." This suggests his story will be one of salvation and redemption.

Chapter 2

Chapter 2 Summary

Henderson reveals that Lily's father committed suicide with a pistol. Lily's father is also a drunk, who accidentally knocks out Lily's front teeth while they are playing golf when Lily is in high school. When Henderson meets Lily, her father has been dead for ten or twelve years. Lily idolizes her father. Shortly after he dies, Lily marries a man from Baltimore. During the war, they get a divorce and she returns to Danbury to live with her mother. Frances and Henderson go to a party in Danbury, but Frances leaves abruptly in the car, forgetting about Henderson. Lily offers him a ride home. Her car skids on the ice and slides gently into a snowdrift. They talk in the car, and Lily tells him he should divorce his wife.

The following summer, Lily and Henderson meet again in Danbury, and Lily asks him for a ride home. Lily and Henderson have sex in her mother's house, and she tells him repeatedly that she loves him. He doesn't understand how that is possible. When they go downstairs, Lily's mother is in the living room. Lily had called her and told her not to come home for a while. Henderson believes that she did this to ensure her mother would rush home and find them together. He leaves, telling Lily she is beautiful, but she shouldn't do that to her mother.

They meet again later in New York City, where Lily has moved into a squalid flat. As Henderson climbs the stairs, he hears a voice in his heart that says "*I want, I want, I want, oh, I want - yes, go on*." (12). Henderson recalls the hopelessness of his situation with Frances and a conversation they had recently in which he told her his dream of becoming a doctor and she laughed at him. Lily tells Henderson that they must be together, and she needs to have a child soon. Henderson is unconvinced.

A year later, Lily suddenly marries a man named Hazard. Henderson, Frances and their two daughters go to France for the year. Henderson recalls that he spent several years of his childhood in France, and reminisces about his mother and father. Henderson is still plagued by the voice inside saying, "*I want*." Lily shows up in Paris, and tells Henderson that her husband punched her in the eye when she tried to run away before their wedding. She also tells him her mother is dead. Lily and Henderson rent a car and drive around France visiting cathedrals. He is drunk most of the time, and she moralizes about life and love, and asks him to come back to the U.S. with her. Henderson tells her if she doesn't quit, he will kill himself. In Vyzelay, they break up, and Henderson, weeping, drops Lily off at the train station. He drives south and stops at an aquarium, where he looks at an octopus, and feels cold and as if he is dying.

Chapter 2 Analysis

Much of this chapter paints a picture of Lily as needy and manipulative. It is possible that Bellow intends some irony in naming Lily's husband "Hazard;" Henderson later suggests that he doesn't believe that he actually hit Lily. The reader also learns in subsequent chapters that Lily's mother hasn't actually died when she tells Henderson she has. Henderson says that Lily has a marvelous way of making him suffer, and it later becomes clear that on some level, Henderson needs to suffer to survive.

This chapter introduces for the first time the concept of Henderson's all consuming and vague longing, epitomized in the voice that says, "I want." This longing is a primary motivation in Henderson's trip to Africa. Henderson's preoccupation with death is also addressed here. In his threat to kill himself, and in strange experience with the octopus, Henderson's fear and obsession with death is introduced. Both themes reappear throughout the novel, and the octopus becomes a central symbol of death and loss.

Chapter 3

Chapter 3 Summary

Henderson continues to explain his reasons for going to Africa, first recounting how he became a pig farmer because of an off-handed comment to a fellow soldier during the war. His neighbors are scandalized by how the pigs have taken over his father's beautiful land, but he enjoys studying those "clever doomed animals" though he is traumatized by their intelligence. While in the Army, Henderson is wounded by a land mine and receives the Purple Heart.

While chopping wood one winter, Henderson is struck in the nose by a wood chip, and as he feels the blow, he thinks "*truth*." Henderson believes he has a soldierly temperament, and tries to take out his anger on inanimate objects like wood and cement, but finds it only increases his wrath. The voice that says "*I want*!" continues to torment him, and he tries to figure out what it actually desires. He feels that his search for sanity is becoming a sort of madness. He takes up the violin, which also makes him feel closer to his father.

In New York City for a violin lesson, Henderson runs into Lily, who tells him that she is engaged to a decent man. She also says her mother is dead, which she had said in France but this time it is true. Lily and Henderson court for eighteen months, get married and then have the twins. Lily decides to have her portrait painted. Henderson continues to play the violin, but the voice that says, "*I want*," arises again. He tries to reach his dead parents through playing the violin. Beautiful things make Henderson feel miserable, and make his gums ache.

Chapter 3 Analysis

In this chapter, Henderson reveals his theory that "truth comes in blows." (23) Henderson's quest for truth and reality is a central theme of the novel. Though he plays with this idea in the future, it is evident from his useless attempts to find truth through brute force in this chapter that this theory is insufficient. Henderson refers to his "soldierly temperament," his tattoos and highly masculine appearance, and his aggressive ways, but he also shows a tender sensitive side in introspection and his attempts to feel close to his father through the violin. He also attests that he loves life, and was glad that his life was spared in Europe. Henderson's special relationship with the pigs on the farm is also a first glimpse of the important role that animals play in the novel.

Chapter 4

Chapter 4 Summary

Before Henderson leaves for Africa, his daughter Ricey comes home from boarding school for Christmas. Ricey takes a day trip to Danbury, sees a black newborn baby in the back of a car, brings it back to the house and hides it in her closet. Though he pretends to his family that he cannot hear the baby crying upstairs, Henderson goes and looks into Ricey's closet, and is impressed with the solemnity and sorrow of the child. Ricey runs away with the baby after Christmas, and is expelled from boarding school. Henderson makes Ricey return the child to its parents, but is depressed by how sad this makes Ricey.

During this time, Lily is having her portrait painted, which will be hung in the hallway with other portraits of Henderson's family. Henderson mocks this plan, and Lily accuses him of being prejudiced against her social origins, but he insists he is more disturbed by displaced persons like himself who occupy the place that rightly belongs to another. Henderson then recalls how his older brother Dick, who was "the sanest of us," was like Henderson in his death. Dick dies after shooting a broken fountain pen with his pistol, crashing his car into an embankment when the police give chase, and jumping in the river and drowning when his cavalry boots fill with water.

However, Henderson describes the "actual day of tears and madness" as the day he and Lily fight over breakfast about the tenants staying in a building on their property. While Henderson is yelling and pounding his fist on the table, Miss Lenox (the woman who comes to fix their breakfast) has a heart attack and dies. Henderson, shamed and overwhelmed by her death, decides to go to Africa with Charlie and his wife. Lily agrees.

Chapter 4 Analysis

Class issues are raised in this chapter though Lily's portrait and Henderson's disdain of her plan. Even as Lily aspires to enter Henderson's social class, he feels like a "displaced person" in it, who has taken the rightful place of his dead brother Charlie, who would have been heir to their father's fortune. Henderson's concern with money and class is interesting - on one hand he genuinely doesn't seem to care, but on the other hand, he seems completely obsessed with it. These issues are also raised with the baby that Ricey takes. Henderson cannot conceive of taking in a child of another race and class. This moment stands in stark contrast to Henderson's relationship with the orphan at the end of the novel. Death is also raised again in this chapter, as Henderson feels implicated in the death of Miss Lenox through the violence of his words. It is his sense that death will annihilate him and leave behind junk if he doesn't get out, and this provides the final motivation for his African journey.

Chapter 5

Chapter 5 Summary

Henderson buys a one-way ticket to Africa and departs with Charlie and his wife. Henderson immediately loves Africa, and its heat and colors. However, he soon starts to hear the voice that says, "*I want*," again, and decides to part ways with Charlie. With his guide Romilayu, he heads off on foot towards the more remote parts of Africa. After walking for a many days in the heat and through regions that Henderson feels are wonderfully "prehuman," they arrive at the village of the Arnewi tribe.

They are met first by children screaming and then by a delegation of naked villagers weeping loudly. Henderson's feelings are hurt until Romilayu explains that they are mourning cattle that died in a drought. The Arnewi are very close to their cattle, and feel responsible for the drought. Henderson resolves to do something to help them. Henderson meets Itelo, an Arnewi prince, and is a little disappointed to learn that he speaks English. Henderson is moved by the hardship of the Arnewi whose beloved cattle are dying of thirst. Henderson also learns that the Arnewi have a reservoir of water in the village but cannot use any of the water because the pool is infested with frogs, and the Arnewi believe it is wrong to drink it now. Henderson resolves to kill the frogs.

Chapter 5 Analysis

Some of Henderson's colonial mindset is revealed in the chapter through his disappointment that Itelo speaks English and his affectionately patronizing view of the Arnewi's culture and traditions. At one point, he says, "I shook my head much more at myself than at them, thinking that a damn fool going out into the world is bound and fated to encounter damned fool phenomena." Although Henderson considers himself above the superstitions of the tribe, his kindness is also revealed in his desire to help them. The antiquity and simplicity of the village - emphasized by Henderson's reference to the plague of frogs in Egypt - appears to be what Henderson thinks the voice that says *I want*, actually desires. Henderson's bumbling in the next chapters makes this outlook seem exceedingly ironic.

Chapter 6

Chapter 6 Summary

Itelo informs Henderson that as wresting champion of the village, he must wrestle any new arrival. Henderson does not want to wrestle, and in the first round submits to Itelo and allows him to push his face into the dirt. Henderson feels like sadness in his life has made him slow and heavy, and realizes he has lost Itelo's respect. For these reasons, Henderson removes his shirt and wrestles Itelo again, this time throwing him to the ground twice. When Itelo strikes him, Henderson is struck again by sudden words. This time: "I do remember well the hour which burst my spirit's sleep" (67). Itelo, defeated, puts dust on his head, and makes Henderson place his foot on top of his head. Henderson feels depressed because he could never make himself lose a contest, even against his own children. However, Itelo then hugs Henderson, calls him his friend, and tells him that he knows Henderson now.

Chapter 6 Analysis

The wrestling match between Itelo and Henderson is interesting because Henderson gains the respect of Itelo through his brute strength. It is this very strength that gets Henderson into trouble in subsequent chapters. Henderson's epiphany about "the hour which burst my spirit's sleep" adds another layer to his spiritual quest.

Chapter 7

Chapter 7 Summary

Henderson is touched when the Arnewi people celebrate his wrestling victory. Itelo takes him to meet his aunt, Willatale, the queen, and her sister Mtalba. Willatale greets Henderson by pressing his hand between her breasts and laughing and smiling, and Henderson is very impressed with the sense of stability and good nature she exudes. Henderson pledges to Willatale that he will rid the water of frogs, and gives her a gift of a plastic raincoat brought for the purpose. He also gives Mtalba, who is overweight and pampered-looking, a gift and she tells him she admires him. Willatale pulls Henderson to her belly and he believes he makes contact with some power there.

Itelo explains that Mtalba and Willatale are women of Bittahness, which means they are persons of great substance, revered above all others. Willatale asks Henderson, though translators, who he is and where he comes from, and Henderson struggles painfully in trying to think of how to explain himself, until Willatale changes the subject. Henderson continues to think of the words that came to him while fighting Itelo, and thinks that perhaps suffering and love might be the only things that could burst the spirit's sleep. Henderson feels that Willatale might be the person to sort him out, and feels overwhelmed with love for her and Itelo and the entire town.

Henderson asks Willatale what she sees in him, since he has such a hard time telling her who he is. She replies that he has a large, strong personality, with some fundamentals of Bittahness, and he loves sensations. She also tells Henderson that his heart is "barking" with "frenezy" and suffering. She asks Henderson why, with his age and weight, he has hiked all the way to the village, and Henderson tries to explain his emotional sickness. Willatale tells him that the world is strange to a child, and Henderson believes this to have great meaning, and sings some of Handel's *Messiah* in appreciation. Willatale has Henderson say "grun-tu-molani," which means man wants to live, and Henderson repeats it passionately. Mtalba looks on at Henderson lovingly.

Chapter 7 Analysis

Henderson's difficulty in describing or explaining himself to Willatale is part of his identity struggle. He considers and rejects calling himself a millionaire, a wayfarer, a violent man, a man who plays the violin, and a man whose heart says, *I want*. Henderson's quest for truth and reality is also a quest of identity. Henderson is also plagued again by the sensation that he is in a place that would be better filled by someone else - in this case a doctor, who might operate on Willatale's cataract. He is frustrated by his unfulfilled dream of becoming a doctor and feels like he is too old to begin now. However, his sense of worthlessness is also combated by Willatale's wisdom and the concept of "grun-tu-molani." Henderson's obsession with death and suffering are temporarily blasted away by the concept, and he feels an overwhelming desire to

live and also for everything else in the world to live. He believes he may have set out on his journey because of this "molani," which is a much different reason than the death he cited in previous chapters.

Chapter 8

Chapter 8 Summary

Henderson muses that his family has been as full of lunatics as heroes, and recalls a few heroic and kind things he did during the war. He feels that the Arnewi have surrounded him with happiness when he was in misery, and plans to give them back the water which they are unable to drink. He and Romilayu walk down to the cistern in the dark and observe the frogs. He experiences mixed feelings of pity for the frogs and excitement about killing them. These feelings remind him of an experience that his been weighing on his conscience. Henderson had evicted tenants from his land, and when they left, they abandoned their cat. Lily tells Henderson that they will come back for the cat, but he is determined to kill it before it goes wild. Henderson puts the cat in the attic and sends the ex-tenants a letter giving them until 4:00 on the next day to come and pick up the cat. At 3:59 the next day, he has received no response, and shoots at the cat at short-range with a pistol but misses. The sound of the pistol terrifies Lily, who associates it with her father's suicide. Henderson can't understand how he starts out with good motivations, but his actions always go so wrong.

Henderson decides to use a bomb to kill the frogs, in spite of Romilayu's dismay at the idea. They go to bed, but Henderson cannot sleep for thinking about the events of the day, the cat, the frog and the grun-tu-molani. He decides to build a bomb using a flashlight case and gunpowder. He fantasizes about the gratitude of the Arnewi when he kills the frogs. Mtalba comes to the tent in the night and caresses and kisses Henderson. Henderson feels guilty and undeserving of her affection, and wakes Romilayu. He tells Romilayu to ask Mtalba for the purpose of her visit, and she says she has brought the "bride price" so that Henderson can buy her as his wife, per the tribe's custom. To show off the dowry, Mtalba puts on robes and dances for Henderson. The beauty of her dancing makes Henderson's gums ache. After she leaves, he lies awake feeling happy.

Chapter 8 Analysis

At the outset of the chapter, Henderson observes that the different values of societies dictate behavior, and wonders where the reality exists in this scheme. Henderson's desire for objective reality may be one of the reasons his views toward Africans appear patronizing and superior at times. Henderson feels pity for the frogs in the cistern but also thrills at the thought of killing them. He observes that even as humans fear death, they lust for it too. His complicated feelings for the tenants' cat are a great example of this. Henderson also raises the Biblical prophecy of Daniel that "thy dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field." Henderson's feelings about cat and the frogs are an important part of the web of human and animal relations in the novel. Henderson also mentions again that happiness makes his gums ache, which ties into the idea that Henderson's emotional well-being is tied up in his mouth to some degree.

Chapter 9

Chapter 9 Summary

Henderson wakes up at dawn, still feeling happy from the night before. He thinks to himself that it will be one of the greatest days of his life. The pink morning light on a clay wall reminds him of the color of the sky on an evening from his boyhood, in the town where his family vacationed and his brother later drowned. His gums ache with the beauty of the light on the wall. He is so moved that he presses his face against the wall, lest he miss the moment, and his spirit swells. The light feels like a good omen to Henderson (the opposite of the octopus in France), and he turns to the bomb project intently. As he prepares the bomb, Mtalba returns and dances and recites to the court her love for Henderson. He believes she has fallen in love with an imaginary Henderson, a "Henderson of her mind," and does not pay her love declarations too much attention. Romilayu looks on skeptically, and Henderson gives him a speech about how he must kill the frogs in order to reach a certain depth in his life.

The villagers all arrive at the cistern. Henderson goes to the edge of the cistern alone and holding the bomb and the lighter, looks at the frogs and feels afraid. He lights the fuse (his old shoelace) and hold onto the bomb until what he believes to be the last possible moment, and then throws it into the cistern. The bomb sinks and then the water in the middle of the cistern begins to swell, and then shoots upward, raining frogs and mud. Henderson begins yelling happily to Romilayu and Itelo and then realizes the bomb has blown out the retaining wall at the front of the cistern and all the water is draining out of the reservoir. Henderson jumps into the pool with the dead frogs rushing past and tries to rebuild the wall, but all the water escapes back on to the ground. Henderson, distraught, pulls his shirt over his head and begs Itelo to kill him.

Chapter 9 Analysis

In this chapter, Henderson feels the highest of high feelings followed by the lowest of low feelings in the course of a few hours. His memory of the moment of pink light from his childhood is likewise conflicted - the moment of great beauty occurs in the very place where he will later lose his brother. There is also irony in the fact that Henderson's brother drowns in a pond, while the Arnewi and their cattle are dying of thirst because they cannot drink from an infected pool. The imagery of the explosion and the rain of dead frogs is apocalyptic, and coincides with Henderson's feeling that he has "blown up everything else" along with the cistern.

Chapter 10

Chapter 10 Summary

Mtalba tells Henderson goodbye forever, but Itelo refuses to kill him because they are friends. Henderson feels so distraught he wishes the bomb had gone off in his hands instead. He feels that his life-pattern has been revealed and it shows he is "doomed always to bungle." Henderson and Romilayu leave the village in humiliation and disgrace. Romilayu wants to return to Baventai, the village where their journey started, but Henderson feels that going home now would kill him. Romilayu does not want to let him travel on alone, and suggests they visit the Wariri, though he immediately expresses doubts about his suggestion.

Romilayu and Henderson travel eight or ten days towards the Wariri over difficult terrain, desert and mountains populated with giant spiders and ostriches. Romilayu warns that the Wariri are not good people like the Arnewi, but are "chillen dahkness," which Henderson takes as a good sign, as it will be difficult to do too much damage to tough savages. Finally, they encounter a Wariri herdsman, carrying a twisted stick, who directs them with his stick to the village without making any expression whatsoever. They climb a rocky path up a hillside, until they are met by a military group carrying a dozen rifles. Henderson is disarmed and he and Romilayu are made to march for several miles to the town. Henderson expects to be taken immediately to the Wariri king, Dahfu, who went to school with Itelo, but instead they are led into a yard and left to wait in the darkness. Henderson, who is terrible at waiting, becomes upset. He bites into a hard biscuit and breaks one of his bridges.

With his broken teeth in his hand, Henderson recalls the history of his dental work. This includes the insertion of his original bridge by a dentist in Paris after the war, and the subsequent bridge, made in New York by a dentist named Dr. Spohr, the cousin of the Spohr who paint Lily's portrait. Henderson recalls waiting in Dr. Spohr's office in New York, and brooding over Lily and his children, especially his eldest son, Edward. He recalls visiting Edward in California, and trying to explain to him the importance of fighting for truth. After this Edward brings home a poor girl from Honduras whom he says he loves, and Henderson refuses to believe it. He also recalls kissing Clara Spohr, the painter's wife, in full view of Lily and the painter, moved by foolish feelings he cannot explain.

Chapter 10 Analysis

Although it is clear that Romilayu is much better equipped to deal with the perils of African life, Henderson calls Romilayu's prostrate pose before the military guard, "will-less, in an African manner." Henderson's racism is also evident in his description of Edward's girlfriend from Honduras, with her "dark blood, a narrow face, and close-set eyes." Henderson cannot approve of her or even believe Edward really loves her. We

also learn that Henderson has taken down his portrait from the great hall rather than hang Lily's there. This classism and racism seem inconsistent with Henderson's openness to ideas and people in Africa.

Henderson's story about kissing Clara Spohr is further evidence of the way he bumbles his good intentions - moved by pity and sympathy, he kisses a woman he does not desire, but ends up embarrassing them both. An obvious parallel exists between this story and the bombing of the frogs. Finally, Henderson's broken bridge foreshadows his future troubles with the Wariri. He has already suggested that beauty and happiness is tied up in his teeth and gums, and the broken bridge suggest the loss he will experience in this village.

Chapter 11

Chapter 11 Summary

Henderson's bridge was made of unbreakable material, but he believes his "striving" has worn his teeth out. As they wait, Henderson and Romilayu hear a lion roar from inside the town. They are then ushered into a hut, where they are met by an official who interrogates them about their travels and purposes. Again Henderson struggles to explain himself and his purposes, and instead flatters the Wariri. The examiner tells them the Wariri are going to have a ceremony to make rain, and Henderson tries to hide his skeptical expression. The examiner ignores Henderson's requests to meet with the king. Henderson and Romilayu are taken to another hut and left for the night.

Henderson decides to make a fire, and they heat some soup and prepare for bed. As Romilayu is finishing his prayers, Henderson notices a large corpse against the wall of the hut. Frightened and then furious, Henderson believes they are the victims of a practical joke and bullies Romilayu to go wake somebody and get an explanation. Henderson realizes this plan is rash, and decides instead to drag the body out of the hut. Romilayu is terrified of the dead man, but Henderson makes him carry the feet of the man and Henderson carries the bulk on his back. Romilayu hears someone coming and gives the feet a push, which makes Henderson fall forward onto the ground. He pushes the corpse into a gully (silently begging him for forgiveness) just before a man with a gun arrives and leads them back to the examiner. The examiner doesn't mention the corpse and instead questions Henderson about his children, asks for his signature, and asks him to remove his shirt so the examiner can study his chest. He tells Henderson the king wants to see him the next day. Romilayu and Henderson return to their hut. When they awake the next morning, the dead man has been fetched from the ravine, and seated inside the doorway.

Chapter 11 Analysis

Henderson's feelings about death are further explored in this chapter. The reader does not learn until much later that the corpse in the hut is the body of the old Sungo. The Sungo, or rain king, is the position that Henderson later takes in the tribe. When Henderson is carrying the corpse, he hears a voice ask him if he loves death so much, and his fear and revulsion is even more significant for the fact that he is about to assume the man's post. The return of the corpse to the hut in the night also suggests that Henderson, like all men, is powerless over death.

Chapter 12

Chapter 12 Summary

Henderson believes the tribe is trying to brainwash him. He feels a strange sensation in his chest, similar to longing, and believes he is coming down with a fever. He walks through town and observes people preparing for the festival, drinking and arguing, painting and ornamenting each other, and dressing their idols. A procession with drums and umbrellas arrives at Henderson's tent, and Horko, the king's uncle, greets Henderson warmly. Henderson is very comforted by this warm welcome. As they march towards the palace, Henderson notices that the people are much more animated than the day before. Horko explains that the day before was a sad day of fasting. Henderson also sees in the distance several bodies hanging upside down from scaffolding, and Horko evades his questions about whether it was an execution. Henderson wishes Lily were there, because he wants to see how this would square with her ideas of reality and goodness. Henderson believes he loves reality.

Horko entertains Henderson with food and drink before taking him to the king. On entering King Dahfu's quarters, Henderson is first aware of twenty or thirty naked women crowded all around him. Dahfu is at the opposite end of the room lounging on a sofa. He is a large man wearing purple silk drawers, and he has with him a bowl of skulls to be used in the rain ceremony that afternoon. Henderson is impressed with his size and his resounding voice, and feels comforted. Dahfu apologizes for not rising to meet Henderson, and explains that he must reserve energy. Dahfu asks Henderson if he envies the king. When Henderson suggests that Dahfu has a good situation and is clearly valued by his people, Dahfu tells him that when he weakens one day, his wives will report him and he will be taken into the bush and strangled.

Dahfu suggests that Henderson may be prone to envy, and though Henderson is offended, he doesn't ask for explanation.

Henderson tells the king about the events of the night before and the king acts sincerely indignant and apologizes, although he doesn't question Henderson further about it. Dahfu invites Henderson to be his guest in the palace, and asks him what brings him to the Wariri tribe. Henderson responds that he is a traveler, and is then struck by the notion that some people are satisfied with Being while others are always concerned with Becoming, and he is tired of always Becoming and simply wants to Be. Henderson likes the king's manner, but also feels his fever is increasing, and tries to stay on guard. Dahfu continues to inspect Henderson, and tells Henderson he is impressed with his obvious strength. The king's interest in his physique makes Henderson anxious and he shares with Dahfu that he feels feverish, broke his bridge the night before, has hemorrhoids and is prone to fainting spells. Henderson tries to take his leave of Dahfu, but Dahfu insists that he accompany them to the ceremonies.

On the way to the ceremony, Dahfu tells Henderson that the Arnewi are widely considered to be unlucky, while the Wariri are considered very lucky. Henderson is struck again by the sense that he hasn't really grasped reality before - that "what we call reality is nothing but pedantry." He is struck by a moment of intense truth, and understands that bombing the cistern was not his last chance. The conversation is interrupted as they near the stadium, which is full of noise and color and thousands of villagers. Henderson sees the wrinkly senior priest who had directed them to the village with his twisted stick the night before. The crowd salutes the king and then Henderson with many cheers. The ceremonies begin as a priest is cut all over his face, and then Dahfu and a woman toss two skulls back and forth in a beautiful ceremony. Henderson is inspired by this but too reticent to tell the king. Although the crowd seems to barely notice, Henderson then observes a cow killed in sacrifice.

Chapter 12 Analysis

This chapter introduces the king, Dahfu, whose wisdom and demeanor impress Henderson very much although much of what he says appears to be a meaningless sort of prattle. Dahfu gives a lengthy speech rejecting the idea of common good or niceness in favor of a concept of high or great good, which inspires Henderson, but might leave the reader wondering if he is not merely attempting to justify cruelty. This concept is reinforced at the end of the chapter, when Henderson observes the cow slaughtered without great ceremony. These scene stands in stark contrast to the extreme kindness shown the cattle of the Arnewi.

Henderson is also struck by the concepts of "Being" and "Becoming" in this chapter, and clearly defines himself as a Becomer, though he believes that Be-ers, like Dahfu have a happier road in life. It is worth noting of course, that if Henderson had not been in the process of Becoming, he wouldn't be on this journey in Africa. Henderson continues too his interest in concepts of reality. He seems particularly taken with the idea of relative reality, which he now sees as a good thing, and feels that travel has opened to him a new world of the mind.

Chapter 13

Chapter 13 Summary

Henderson notices the sky is still free of clouds and makes a wager with Dahfu that it will not rain. Dahfu bets his garnet ring in exchange for Henderson's promise that if he loses, he will stay as Dahfu's guest for some undefined length of time. Henderson learns that Dahfu attended medical school, and Henderson shares with him some of the scientific theories on how rain is created. Henderson is shocked to see the way the villagers kick and mock the small idols of their gods as part of the ceremony. Strong men come down to the arena to lift and carry the bigger idols. Finally, only two giant idols are left, Hummat and Mummah, and several strong men try and fail to lift them. A man named Turombo manages to lift and move Hummat, but cannot lift Mummah. Dahfu says this happens every year because he wears himself out on the first idol, but Henderson believes he is defeated by memories of past defeats.

Henderson feels suddenly filled with hope and ambition and knows he can lift Mummah. The feeling is stronger even than his old desire to help the Arnewi. Henderson also thinks the Bunam communicates to him without words, telling him to act and overcome. Henderson realizes the corpse may have been put in his hut as a test by the Bunam. Henderson asks Dahfu for permission to try to lift the idol, and Dahfu warns him there may be consequences of doing it. Henderson tells Dahfu that he must undertake this task in order to stop Becoming and just Be. Henderson goes into the arena with his heart full of desire and puts his arms around Mummah, who smells like a living woman. He lifts her and carries her twenty yards. As the Wariri people explode into cheers, Henderson feels filled with warmth and happiness, and all the bad feelings of the morning turn into the opposite. He is so grateful to Dahfu for the opportunity that he feels love for him.

Chapter 13 Analysis

The reader who has followed Henderson's bumbling to this point may sense warning signs in this chapter that in spite of Henderson's success in lifting the idol, everything is not necessarily okay - Dahfu warns of consequences, and seems to trap Henderson though the bet. Later it is revealed that Henderson has become the rain king by lifting Mummah, and that Turombo's failure to lift Mummah is because he does not want to become the rain king. Henderson's ominous success in lifting the idol, also casts doubt on the simplicity of being vs. becoming. This is explored further. It is also interesting that the rain ceremony actually works, seemingly overcome Henderson's scientific logic. It is unclear to what extent the various cultural and religious beliefs of the characters in the novel can actually comfortably co-exist.

Chapter 14

Chapter 14 Summary

The Wariri continue to cheer for Henderson, and the sky begins to fill with clouds. Bunam, the priest with the twisted stick, and several women carrying whips present themselves before Dahfu and Henderson, and Dahfu announces that the man who moves Mummah becomes Sungo, the rain king of the Wariri. Henderson feels afraid, but Dahfu tells him he need not fear because he must only help the group "cleanse ponds and wells." The women remove all of his clothes and hand him a whip, and together they run naked through the town, chanting. When they arrive at the cattle pond, the women throw Henderson into the dirty, shallow water and he sinks into the mud. They pull him out again and begin to run anew. Henderson cries to heaven first for mercy, then justice, then truth, before settling for "Thy will be done! Not my will but Thy will!" As the sky fills with clouds, Henderson continues to run with the crowd, and tries to remember who he is. Frenzied, the women begin violently hitting the idols in their arena with their whips, and Henderson, appalled throws himself to the ground. Tatu, the general of the women, pulls him to his knees and forces his hand to move the whip against the idol, as Henderson fights against her. As they struggle, it begins to rain hard. Dahfu tells Henderson that the gods now know them, and observes that Henderson has lost their wager.

Chapter 14 Analysis

Henderson's identity crisis while running through the town as the rain king brings to a head the identity-confusion he has been having since he arrived in Africa. Here Henderson has been handed a new identity, but knows immediately it is not him. Henderson also seems to embrace Christian thought for the first time, as he throws pleas to the sky, although like his emotional struggles, he cannot decide what he wants - mercy, justice, or truth. Finally he settles for asking for God's help and His will done. Henderson also rejects violence in this chapter -further distancing him from the masculine ideal of soldierly temperament he ascribed to in the first chapters.

Chapter 15

Chapter 15 Summary

After the ceremony, Romilayu tends to Henderson in a room in the palace and tries to calm his fears about losing the bet. Romilayu asks Henderson why he did it, but Henderson is unable to think of a reason, and hopes one will be illuminated. Henderson is comforted as Romilayu says his prayers, and sleeps well. In the morning, women bring him green silk garments to wear as the Sungo, and Henderson puts them on over his jockey shorts. The women offer to walk on his back, but Henderson declines. They also make him put his feet on their heads and feed him some pineapple. Henderson is brought to see the king, who tries to explain the situation to him. Dahfu tells Henderson that on seeing him for the first time, he and Bunam had both felt Henderson could move Mummah, but even then the rain was not certain to come. Dahfu tells Henderson the story of his childhood and education, and how he had returned to the Wariri from abroad when his father died. Henderson feels that like Lily and Willatale, Dahfu has a strong gift of life, which makes him give off an extra shadow. Dahfu tells Henderson he must capture the lion Gmilo to be confirmed as king, and complete his Becoming. Henderson is again comforted by Dahfu's presence, and is struck by how his wisdom contrasts with the savagery of the day before. Henderson feels that Dahfu's trustworthiness is a separate issue.

Henderson and Dahfu make a pact to expect only the truth from each other, even if it takes an unanticipated form. Henderson tells Dahfu his theory about truth coming in blows, and Dahfu shares his theory that the soul dies if it cannot make another suffer the feelings it suffers. This is why Henderson and the gods had to be beaten. Henderson realizes that he believes that some people can return good for evil. Dahfu, with qualifications, agrees that the noble will sometime win out in the world. Henderson is greatly moved by Dahfu's words and his physical appearance and dignity. Dahfu tells Henderson that he is fierce-looking, but that everything about him cries out for immediate salvation, which is not a good thing. Henderson and Dahfu discuss the Arnewi concept of grun-tu-molani, and Dahfu tells Henderson that something more is required, and promises to show him.

Chapter 15 Analysis

Dahfu tells Henderson that everything about him cries out, "'Salvation, salvation! What shall I do? What must I do? At once! What will become of me?' And so on. That is bad." (217). This is similar to Willatale's analysis, yet it is difficult to trust Dahfu, who seems to hand out philosophical insights as if salvation was, in fact, his job. Dahfu's idea of causing suffering, as a means of ending suffering is also questionable, but Henderson trusts Dahfu. The fact that this trust is misplaced becomes evident in later chapters.

Chapter 16

Chapter 16 Summary

Dahfu leads Henderson down a complex series of corridors and stairs beneath the palace. Henderson wants to turn back, but doesn't want to risk losing Dahfu's respect. Dahfu passes through a large wooden door, and Henderson hears a low sound and realizes Dahfu is in the lion's den. Henderson feels terrified, and must utilize all his strength to enter the den and let the lion, Atti, sniff him. Dahfu shows relief that Atti will easily accept Henderson, and dances and plays with the lion, speaking to her affectionately. Henderson is so frightened he cannot move at all, and harbors a secret fear that the lion knows how he tried to kill a cat. Dahfu makes Henderson draw nearer to the lion, and Henderson cries, and tries to explain to Dahfu that it is the mixture of feelings, fear and something else, that makes him cry. Dahfu tries to comfort Henderson by putting his entire arm inside Atti's mouth, and Henderson is moved by how much Atti appears to love Dahfu, but still feels frightened. Dahfu shows delight in Henderson's physical manifestations of fear, but lets Atti out of the den and into a separate enclosure.

Dahfu explains to Henderson that Atti was caught while Dahfu was trying to catch his father, Gmilo. By bringing him to the palace, Dahfu caused severe opposition from his advisors who believe that all lions except the father-lion are evildoers. Dahfu did this because he missed having a relationship with a lion too much after he was parted from his grandfather-lion when he went abroad for school. Henderson tells Dahfu about the voice that says, *I want*, and Dahfu is very impressed, and believes that Henderson's "imprisoned want" helps explain how he succeeded in lifting Mummah. The men discuss the importance of dwelling in reality. Henderson believes that Dahfu has a hunch about the lions and the human mind, but may have been swept too far out by his enthusiasm and vision.

Chapter 16 Analysis

When Dahfu takes Henderson beneath the palace, Henderson is reminded suddenly of the octopus he saw in France, a main death symbol of the novel. This foreshadows the intense fear that Henderson feels in the presence of the lion. Henderson also raises again the biblical prophecy made by Daniel to Nebuchadnezzar, "They shall drive thee from among men and thy dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field," and wonders if it means that he is not fit for human companionship. Henderson's thought about animals in this chapter - pigs, frogs, the cat, and now the lion - tie in with Dahfu's theories about what man can become in the next chapter. Henderson also discusses with Dahfu the voice that says *I want* for the first time, and Dahfu sees this longing or "imprisoned want" as the driving force behind Henderson's strength.

Chapter 17

Chapter 17 Summary

The king and Henderson talk for hours, and Henderson summarizes Dahfu's conviction that a connection exists between the inside and outside appearance of people, and emotions and characteristics are physically manifested. Henderson can see Dahfu's resemblance to lions, and Dahfu points out the Arnewi's resemblance to cattle. Henderson wonders if he resembles pigs. Henderson feels terrible to think he is responsible for his own physical appearance, because it is so shocking. Dahfu lends Henderson several books and tells Henderson that his dream of being a doctor is attainable.

Henderson's routine as Sungo includes lunches with Bunam and others high-ups, visits to Mummah, and marching through town distributing cups of water to villagers. He tries to read the literature the king gave him, but finds it difficult because he isn't "calm enough to read." Henderson does find reference in some of articles to the relationship between body and brain. Henderson thinks about some of Lily's good traits, mainly her body and white face, and her bad traits, especially her lying and blackmailing. One day Bunam, Horko and Dahfu's mother, Queen Yasra pay Henderson a visit, and the queen begs Henderson to make Dahfu get rid of the lion, who contains the soul of a sorcerer. Henderson tries to deflect the subject by praising the king, but she continues to beg, and the Bunam tells Henderson he is implicated in the witchcraft by going into to the lion's den. The Bunam shows Henderson the small dried head of the sorceress who now occupies the body of the lioness Atti. Henderson feels like the head speaks to him in the same way as the octopus in France had, and again feels the end is near.

Chapter 17 Analysis

When Henderson discusses trying to read Dahfu's scientific books, he mentions the story first told in Chapter One about finding a passage in one of his father's books about perpetual forgiveness of sins. Then, he was deeply moved by the words, but promptly forgot the book. There is irony in the fact that Henderson is so driven to find answers, but lacks the patience or control to search for them. This chapter provides first foreshadowing that Dahfu will cause Henderson future troubles, as Henderson observes that he might get into "hot water" because you "can't expect people who are in a class by themselves to be reasonable." The death-symbol of the octopus is raised again, and Henderson hears again the same voice that he heard when dragging the corpse through the Wariri village, and he wonders why he can't escape death.

Chapter 18

Chapter 18 Summary

For the first time, Henderson joins Romilayu in his pre-bed prayers, and prays to "Something" for forgiveness and preservation. Henderson feels he is trapped between Dahfu and Bunam's wishes. In the morning, Henderson goes to see Dahfu, who is watching his wives dancing. One of them puts burning coals on her thighs while gazing into Dahfu's eyes and he tells Henderson she is a very good girl. Henderson and Dahfu go down towards the lion den, and Henderson tells the king about his meeting with Bunam and the Yasra and warns him that he feels trouble. Dahfu assures him that the Bunam is just trying to manipulate Henderson with fear, and when Dahfu captures Gmilo all will be all right. Henderson tells Dahfu he doesn't want to go into the lion den because he is afraid, and Dahfu replies that fear must be overcome, and if Henderson can't see that they should say good-bye.

Under the threat of loss of friendship, Henderson agrees to try, and Dahfu tells Henderson that he is an avoider, but the lion is unavoidable, and has much to teach Henderson. Henderson again submits to the lion's examination and finds himself paralyzed by fear. Dahfu makes Henderson imitate the lion's behavior by first running after her, and then standing on hands and knees in a lion's posture, and roaring like a lion. As he roars, Henderson feels sorrow come out of him with the noise of roaring, but his human longing remains. Henderson roars until he collapses. Afterwards, as they rest, Dahfu is ecstatic, but Henderson feels increasingly bitter about implications of Dahfu's theory, specifically that he is responsible for his outrageous looks, and his similarity to the pigs he raised. Dahfu suggests that grun-tu-molani cannot mean anything against a mere background of cows, and Henderson realizes the same could be said of pigs. Henderson wonders how greatly he resembles a pig, but is too scared to ask Dahfu. Dahfu tells Henderson he believes that what people imagine, they become - that imagination can be converted to actual.

Chapter 18 Analysis

The reader may find Henderson's warning to Dahfu that he is "mediumistic" and can sense trouble coming, as he has missed so many warning signs of trouble in the course of his African journey thus far. Dahfu's disregard for women displayed in his lack of interest in his mother's wishes and his praise for the wife who burnt herself for him, ties into Dahfu's sense that some animals are better and more noble than other animals. Just as Dahfu values men above women, he values lions above animals like cows and pigs. The reader may feel that Dahfu is trying to force Henderson to be his ideal of man instead of addressing Henderson's actual wants and needs - which may be more like a pig's than a lion's.

Chapter 19

Chapter 19 Summary

When Henderson emerges from the lion's den, he is aware that his roaring was probably heard by the king's enemies. Romilayu does not shy away from him and Henderson is impressed with his loyalty. Henderson feels more like a pig on the outside than a lion. He is losing faith in Dahfu's science, and fears Atti as much as ever, but continues to try to improve his roaring for Dahfu's sake. Henderson still feels feverish, and is worried that the villagers know he spends the mornings roaring. Henderson defends his sessions with Dahfu and Atti to Romilayu by explaining he came to Africa because he "wouldn't agree to the death of my soul" (277) and he believes that Dahfu has the secret. Henderson decides to send Romilayu to Baventai with a letter for Lily, and also gifts Romilayu his jeep. Romilayu cries because he fears Henderson will be killed.

Henderson writes Lily a letter, in which he tells her about his flight to Africa, his split from Charlie, and his impressions of the African landscape, and gives a skeletal account of his time with the Arnewi and the Wariri. Henderson tells Lily that he has true feeling for her, but thinks the word "love" may be full of bluff. He also informs her of his plans to give up the violin and enroll in medical school when he returns home. He writes, "Lily, I'm going to quit knocking myself out." He tells her to sell the remaining pigs. Henderson drinks more and more as the letter goes on and is almost relieved that Romilayu loses the last pages, but believes he said at the end, that the voice that says *I want* should have said *she* wants, *he* wants, *they* want. And love makes reality, reality.

Chapter 19 Analysis

It seems Henderson most envies Dahfu's lack of fear in the face of danger, and one has the sense that Henderson's fear has been one of the most crippling of his emotional problems. Henderson's letter to Lily reveals some interesting insights into Henderson's altered state of mind. His vow to stop messing around and his decision to pursue his dream of becoming a doctor are both significant. He also reveals the bad blood between him and Charlie's wife had to do with wedding misconduct beyond a forgotten kiss, which casts the whole of Henderson's narrative under a cloud of some doubt, since the reader has only his account on which to rely.

Chapter 20

Chapter 20 Summary

Henderson has a bad feeling as Romilayu sets off with the letter for Lily. As he tries to mentally prepare himself for the day's session with Atti, he is struck by the idea that, contrary to Dahfu's thinking, the lion may not be the complete answer, and he wishes for a moment that he could be learning the grun-tu-molani under Willatale.

However, he also feels he would do much more than the painful lion sessions in order to keep the friendship of Dahfu. Dahfu comes to Henderson's chambers and tells him it is time for catching his father, the lion Gmilo, and the two men set off into the bush. The executioner has dressed in white, which is a bad omen, and Henderson feels angry and defensive of Dahfu. Dahfu tells Henderson not to worry about the Bunam and the executioner, who are from "the old universe," but Henderson sees that Dahfu is involved in both the old and the new. Henderson realizes that Dahfu intends for them to capture the lion unarmed, so that they will avoid harming Gmilo, and though Henderson is scared, he promises to help Dahfu with all his power. Henderson is thinking of death, and Dahfu points out that the cycle of fear and desire is not broken by death and burial, but good men must try to break the cycle in their lifetime.

The men mount the hopo, and climb up to a platform approximately 30 feet in the air. Henderson suddenly begins sobbing and thinks that all the roaring has loosened something in him. Henderson feels worried when he sees the flimsy cage that is to be dropped on the lion when it is chased into the hopo. To pass the time on the platform, Henderson shows Dahfu pictures of Lily and his children, and his Purple Heart citation, and Dahfu observes that Henderson is proud of his suffering. The men hear the lion approaching, and Dahfu steps out onto a narrow pole, and as the huge animal arrives at the hopo, Dahfu drops the net cage. However, the cage fails to catch the lion's hindquarters, and as the king tries to work the net over the lion's kicking legs, he falls from the platform onto the lion, and is fatally clawed.

The Bunam checks the lion, realizes it is not Gmilo, and shoots him in the head. With his dying words, Dahfu tells Henderson that the corpse in his hut on his first night with the Wariri was the former Sungo, killed because he could not lift Mummah. Turombo hadn't lifted Mummah because he didn't want to become the Sungo. As Sungo, Henderson must take Dahfu's place as king of the Wariri, because Dahfu has no heir of age. They are taken into a house with two chambers, and Dahfu's body is placed in one, and Henderson is locked in the other.

Chapter 20 Analysis

As Henderson heads to the bush to capture Gmilo, he curses reality to himself. The author encourages the reader to compare Dahfu's passion for capturing the lion with

Henderson's passion to lift the Mummah. It seems in this chapter that Henderson may be realizing that in spite of his love for Dahfu, they have different life philosophies. However, Dahfu's observation about Henderson's pleasure in suffering strikes home to Henderson. Even as Henderson tries to release himself from fear of death, Dahfu dies, and in doing so, reveals his betrayal of Henderson.

Chapter 21

Chapter 21 Summary

Henderson weeps for Dahfu's death as he is put into the stone room by the Bunam, and then realizes Romilayu is in the room too. Henderson is devastated that Dahfu is dead and tries to think of ways of carrying on his existence. He also weeps for everything he has messed up in his own life. Suddenly, Henderson realizes the king's death was not an accident and decides he and Romilayu must escape. He feels such a violent desire for revenge that he thinks maybe the crueler aspects of the lion, if not its grace, were transferred to him during the sessions with Atti. He finds a hole in the wall between the two chambers, and sees Dahfu's body, guarded by the Bunam's assistant, next to a small lion cub.

Horko pays Henderson and Romilayu a visit, and tells Henderson he is now the king, and Henderson pretends to be excited about the prospect. Henderson is disgusted by Horko's hypocrisy and decides to escape that night. Henderson has Romilayu shout that Henderson has been bitten by a snake. When the Bunam's assistant and two women arrive at the door, Romilayu jams a stone below the hinge. Romilayu prevents Henderson from strangling or beating the Bunam's assistant, and instead locks him in the room with the two amazon women. Romilayu and Henderson go into the other chamber, and Henderson says goodbye to Dahfu, and they leave with a basket of yams and the tethered lion cub.

Chapter 21 Analysis

Even in this very dark time, Henderson notices the sky is pink through the bars on the door of the stone room. This is the same observation of beauty he made with the Arnewi, and with his brother before he died. Henderson fears that he has absorbed the lion's cruelty from his sessions with Atti, but Romilayu saves him from evil, by preventing Henderson from exacting revenge on the Bunam's assistant. Henderson tells Romilayu there is murder in his heart, but by stopping the act, Romilayu also helps save his heart.

Chapter 22

Chapter 22 Summary

Romilayu protests Henderson's decision to take the lion cub, but Henderson insists, and names him Dahfu after the king. Henderson and Romilayu travel for ten days to Baventai, and Romilayu saves Henderson's life by finding water and grubs and worms to eat. Henderson is demented and raving from fever. When they arrive at Baventai, Henderson is dismayed by his sense of the inescapable rhythm to life and the fact that his "dead days" or "bad stuff" keep coming around for him, but he takes comfort in the fact that the lion cub is thriving. Eventually, they arrive in Ethiopia and Henderson buys Romilayu expensive presents and sends him off, but Romilayu trails Henderson until he gets on the plane to make sure he is okay.

Henderson manages to get the lion through customs, and begins the journey home, which involves stops in many European cities. Henderson is too sick to visit. Henderson befriends a sweet flight attendant, who tells him it is almost Thanksgiving, not September like he thought, and he is sad to realize he missed enrollment for medical school. The stewardess tells Henderson there is a sad little orphan boy on the plane who might be cheered up by the lion cub. The little boy, who speaks only Persian, goes to Henderson's heart, and they play with the lion cub and then the boy goes to sleep in Henderson's lap. Henderson remembers how his father, saddened by Dick's death, had taken his anger out on Henderson - and at the age of sixteen, Henderson hadn't been able to understand. On the day of Dick's funeral, Henderson's father had shouted at him and Henderson had left, hitchhiked to Ontario and spent a month at a fairground taking care of an old bear named Smolak, who had been abused and embarrassed his whole life. Henderson had felt a real kinship with the bear, a fellow outcast. He can't wait to get home and tell Lily all about this. As the orphan in Henderson's lap wakes, the stewardess tells Henderson that they are landing in Newfoundland to refuel. Henderson and the boy get off the plane, and with the boy in his arms, Henderson runs around and around the plane on the ice, feeling full of happiness and expectation. He feels it is his turn to move.

Chapter 22 Analysis

Henderson believes there is an inescapable rhythm to life and his "dead days" or "bad stuff" keeps coming around for him. However, the final moments of the book see him making a real connection with another human, a child, which is something he had been unable to do with Lily. Henderson's certainty about his medical school plans and his eagerness to get back to Lily and start anew all show signs of an invigorated Henderson. When Henderson remembers Smolak the bear and the kinship they had, he says, "Whatever gains I ever made were always due to love and nothing else." This realization, and his bonding with the orphan boy, seems to set Henderson up well for a previously unknown happiness in his human relationships.

Characters

Eugene Henderson

Henderson is the anti-hero of the novel. Bumbling, angry and confused, he ultimately finds redemption through his African journey. He is a large man, with a shocking physical appearance and great strength. He has a distinguished family history, and his father, a famous author, left him three million dollars when he died. He has been married twice and has five children, although he isn't particularly interested in parenting. Although he was too old for combat duty, he pressured people in Washington until he was allowed to fight in World War II. In the Army, he was wounded by a land mine and received the Purple Heart. He was forty-six or forty-seven when he returned from fighting in Europe. He has a pig farm, but has a secret desire in his heart to become a doctor.

Henderson is plagued by a voice that says, "I want." He tries many activities to satisfy this longing, including playing the violin, getting drunk and shouting at his wife, Lily, but none make him feel better. One day, while he is shouting at Lily, his housekeeper has a heart attack and dies. Wracked with guilt and shame, Henderson decides to go to Africa with Charlie Albert and his wife. Henderson is fifty-five when he buys his ticket to go to Africa.

In Africa, Henderson decides to take leave Charlie and his wife and set off on his own with Romilayu as a guide. Henderson and Romilayu first visit the Arnewi tribe, who are a kind and gentle people, plagued by frogs in their water reservoir that have rendered the water undrinkable. Henderson tries to help them by bombing the frogs with a homemade bomb, but ends up breaking the cistern and draining away all of their water supply. Henderson is heartbroken that he has done them such a disservice. Henderson next goes to the Wariri tribe, where he befriends the king, Dahfu, and becomes the Sungo, or rain king, when he lifts a heavy idol during the rain ceremony. Dahfu tries to help Henderson end his suffering by forcing him to spend time with his lion, learning to emulate him.

When Dahfu dies trying to capture his father-lion, Henderson, as Sungo, automatically becomes the next king. Heartbroken over the death of his friend, and distrustful of the Bunam's faction, Romilayu and Henderson flee the Wariri and return to civilization. Henderson takes with him the lion cub, which according to Wariri tradition now holds the spirit of Dahfu. On the journey home, Henderson takes care of an orphan boy who is traveling alone. Henderson has decided to follow his dream and enroll in medical school.

Frances Henderson

Henderson describes his first wife Frances as handsome, tall, elegant, and sinewy. He marries her to please his father, but they later divorce. She laughs at his dream of becoming a doctor.

Lily Simmons Henderson

Henderson's second wife, Lily, is described as sweet-faced, and very white and large. Henderson says she is not prone to scolding, but instead moralizes. Henderson also suggests that she is a liar, a con-artist, and not very clean. Her maiden name is Simmons, but she is married twice before she marries Henderson: To a man from Baltimore and to an abusive broker from New Jersey named Hazard

Edward Henderson

Edward is Henderson's eldest son by Frances. Henderson describes him as clean-cut and buttoned-down with a "faceless face." He drives a shiny sports car. He lives in California and plays in a jazz band. Henderson loves him, but is troubled by him, and says the most independent thing Edward ever did was ride around in his car, with a chimpanzee dressed as a cowboy. However, when Edward brings home a girl from Honduras and tells Henderson he loves her, Henderson refuses to believe it.

Ricey Henderson

Ricey is Henderson's eldest daughter by Frances and she is something of a beauty. She takes a child from the backseat of a car one Christmas, and is eventually expelled from boarding school.

Alice Henderson

Alice is Henderson's youngest daughter with Frances.

The Twins

The twins are Henderson's two children by Frances.

Charlie Albert

Charlie is a childhood friend of Henderson's (they took dancing classes together in 1915), and he is a year younger and a bit richer than Henderson. During the war, Charlie is a cameraman in the Army, and Henderson joins Charlie and his wife on the

first part of their honeymoon to Africa. Henderson was Charlie's best man at his wedding, but Charlie's wife resents Henderson because he forgot to kiss her at the wedding.

Dick Henderson

Gene Henderson's older brother is Dick Henderson. A World War I hero, Dick is the "sanest of us," although he dies in a ridiculous way. After jokingly shooting a broken fountain pen with his pistol, Dick flees from the police and crashed his car into an embankment. He jumps into the river and drowns when his cavalry boots fill with water. When he dies, Henderson becomes his father's heir.

Klaus Spohr

Klaus is the artist who paints Lily's portrait. He and Lily once observe Henderson passionately kissing Klaus's wife Clara in the entry of his home.

Doctor Spohr

Dr. Spohr is the dentist who replaces Henderson's bridgework. He is the cousin of the Klaus Spohr

Romilayu

Romilayu is Henderson's guide and translator in Africa. He says he is in his late-thirties, but looks wrinkly and much older. He has tribal scars on his cheeks and ears, but is now Christian, and prays every night. Visiting the Arnewi and the Wariri is Romilayu's idea, and he proves to be a loyal and patient companion to Henderson.

Arnewi Tribe

The Arnewi are the first tribe that Henderson visits in Africa. The Arnewi are a gentle people who love their cattle, and warmly welcome Henderson. They are suffering from a drought and many of their cattle are dying. They are ruled by Willatale.

Itelo

Itelo is a prince of the Arnewi tribe. He speaks English because he went to school in Beirut with the Wariri king, Dahfu. He is as tall as Henderson, and strong, but Henderson beats him in a wrestling match.

Willatale

Willatale is the queen of the Arnewi tribe and Itelo's aunt. She is a Bittah woman, which means she is the best and most revered type of person, and has husbands as well as wives. She has a cataract in one eye and wears a lion skin as a robe. She exudes happiness, good nature and stability, according to Henderson.

Mtalba

Mtalba is the queen's sister, and is also a Bittah woman. Mtalba is obese, but beautiful and very pampered looking with indigo hair and hennaed hands. She fancies Henderson, and brings him the bride price on his first night with the Arnewi so that he can become her husband. The relationship is never consummated, and she rejects Henderson after he bobs the frogs in the cistern.

Wariri

The second tribe that Henderson visits in Africa, with whom he stays for around a month. Henderson becomes the Rain King of the Wariri, and becomes a close friend and confidant of their king, Dahfu.

Dahfu

The king of the Wariri tribe, Dahfu is also the childhood friend and schoolmate of the Arnewi prince, Itelo. Dahfu studied to be a doctor, but had to leave medical school and return to the Wariri on the death of his father. He is a large and impressive man with a wonderful voice, and sweeps up Henderson with his charm and philosophy. Dahfu keeps and trains the lion Atti, and has taken on many lion-like characteristics. He tries to teach Henderson how to emulate the lion. His possession of the lion angers a faction lead by the Bunam, and Dahfu dies while trying to capture his father-lion, Gmilo.

Horko

Horko is the uncle of King Dahfu and the man sent to meet Henderson on the day of the rain festival. Horko speaks some English and French because he traveled with Dahfu when he studied abroad.

The Bunam

The head priest of the Wariri tribe is the Bunam. He believes that Henderson can lift the god Mummah from the first time he sees him, and Henderson believes the Bunam communicates to him without words during the rain ceremony and encourages him to lift the idol.

Turombo

Turombo is the strong Wariri man who lifts Hummat at the rain ceremony, but cannot lift Mummah. Henderson thinks he is unable to life Mummah because he is demoralized by past defeats, but it is later revealed that he doesn't want to become Sungo because it is too dangerous.

Queen Yasra

Dahfu's mother, and the widow of Gmilo. She begs Henderson to make Dahfu get rid of the lion Atti, because the Bunam has convinced her that the lion is the incarnation of an evil sorceress.

The Executioner

The Bunam's assistant is the executioner of the Wariri tribe. He has a very narrow face and leathery appearance. He dresses in white on the day of the lion hunt, and guards the corpse of the king Dahfu after he dies.

Gmilo, the King

Gmilo is Dahfu's father and the former king of the Wariri.

Objects/Places

Danbury, Connecticut

Danbury is the closest town to Henderson's home. It is also Lily's hometown and the so-called hatter's capital of Connecticut. Lily and Henderson first meet at a party in Danbury. Ricey later takes a newborn from the backseat of a car parked in Danbury.

The Dycapotable Deux Cent Deux

The Dycapotable Deux Cent Deux is the small convertible car that Lily and Henderson drive on their cathedral tour of France. It has a flat tire the first time the couple breaks up, in Vyzelay

Vyzelay

The town in France where Lily and Henderson first end their relationship is Vyzelay.

The Voice That Says "I Want

"

Henderson is haunted by a voice in his heart that says, *I want*. He is unable to identify what it is that is wanted, or how to get it, and this is part of his motivation for going to Africa.

Frogs

Frogs infest the drinking water reservoir used by the Arnewi tribe, which renders the water undrinkable according to their customs. In an attempt to help the Arnewi, Henderson bombs the cistern, and kills all the frogs. Henderson also alludes to the Biblical plague of frogs in Egypt.

Cattle

Henderson describes the cattle in Africa as smooth-skinned and hump-backed. They make low deep grunts instead of lowing noises. The Arnewi people worship and revere cattle while the Wariri use them brutally for sacrifice.

Lily's Portrait

Lily wants to have her portrait painted to hang with the other Henderson family portraits in the hall of their home. The portrait, which Lily sits for regularly over a period of several months, becomes a point of contention in the Henderson family, and becomes a symbol of class relations in the book - Lily sees it as a ticket to the Henderson family's somewhat elevated class, and Henderson sees it as ridiculousness. Henderson insists on taking down his own portrait from the hall, rather than hang Lily's there.

Baventai

Baventai is the closest African city to the Wariri and Arnewi tribes. It is the first place that Henderson and Romilayu go when they leave the Wariri.

Gran-tu-molani

The Arnewi's belief that man wants to live. The idea is first suggested to Henderson by Willatale, and haunts him thereafter.

Hummat and Mummah

The two massive Wariri idols play an important role in the Wariri rain ceremony. Henderson successfully lifts Mummah, and in so doing becomes the rain king. Henderson believes Hummat and Mummah are married, but this is uncertain.

Gmilo, the Lion

Gmilo is the lion that holds Dahfu's father's spirit. In order to be confirmed as king, Dahfu must catch Gmilo. Gmilo is never caught.

Atti

Atti is the lioness that Dahfu captures and keep beneath the palace. This causes much concern among his advisors and wives, who believe any lion that does not have the king's spirit is a bad lion. They believe Atti is the spirit of an evil sorceress.

Sungo

The Wariri rain king. Henderson becomes Sungo when he lifts Mummah at the Wariri rain ceremony. Henderson later learns that the corpse in his hut on his first night with the Wariri was the former Sungo. If the king of the Wariri dies without an appropriate heir, the Sungo becomes king.

The Hopo

The contraption used by the Wariri to capture lions is a giant funnel or triangle of dead plant growth built into the bank of an old river, the height of a cliff. A platform is suspended about 30 feet above the hopo, where Henderson and Dahfu wait. On the platform, there is a bell-shaped woven cage to be dropped over the lion once it enters the hopo. Men with spears stand around the hopo to pin down the cage and trap the lion.

Smolak

The bear that Henderson tends at the Ontario fairground when he is sixteen. The bear was beat by his owner and embarrassed as a circus animal, before being retired due to his age. Henderson takes care of him and rides the roller coaster with him, and believes that they take real comfort in each other.

Social Sensitivity

Although Saul Bellow had established his position as an important American novelist with his previous four novels, Henderson the Rain King expanded his readership and firmed up his career as a comic writer.

In an interview with George Plimpton for the Paris Review and reprinted in Writers At Work: The Paris Review Interviews, third series (1968), Bellow refers to his earliest two novels, Dangling Man (1944) and The Victim (1948) as "literature of complaint" and in that commentary vows to embrace a more comic perspective in his future writings.

With Henderson's comic-epic style and snappy vaudevillian one-liners, Bellow emerges from the literature of complaint, in which characters like Tommy Wilhelm, the suffering hero of Seize the Day (1956), mournfully discover their marginal position in the contemporary American experience, both as Jews and as men discovering their psychological dependency. In only one earlier novel, The Adventures of Augie March (1953), is the hero, or the author, able to see consistent humor in the problem of existing creatively in twentieth-century America.

With Henderson, Bellow's first gentile protagonist, the author successfully treats the pathos of living an alienated and perhaps existentially meaningless existence through the medium of humor. This goodnatured fun often derives from Henderson's own perception of the absurdity of his response to social situations; for example, when his wife (a social climber, cultivating the prestige of the Henderson family name) is entertaining some local ladies, he greets them wearing a hunting cap, a soiled bathrobe, and crutches, which are keeping him mobile while his broken leg recovers. But this broad, farcical humor is also the author's vehicle for evaluating his hero's predicament as well as the absurd cultural environment that compounds the hero's sense of alienation and purposelessness.

In addition to his being a gentile, Henderson is unique among Bellow's early protagonists because his life is, by the material standards of modern civilization, something to be envied, a version of the American dream. He is wealthy, whereas the typical protagonist of the earlier novels worries constantly about having enough money to survive. As heir to a distinguished American family of intellectuals, diplomats, and occasional exploiters of indigenous Americans, Henderson manages to make money even as he attempts ventures, such as raising pigs, that promise no immediate return.

He has wealth, influence, and leisure. He sends his children to expensive private schools, takes up whatever vocation or avocation that may appeal to him at any given moment, and vacations in Europe whenever he pleases.

With all these material advantages, the central fact of Henderson's life is his lack of fulfillment. This emptiness, which for Bellow is symptomatic of the void that is the inevitable end of materialism, haunts Henderson in the form of an inner voice that cries out, "I want!" The problem is that the voice does not state exactly what it wants, so

Henderson's life in America, and western Europe, is a series of efforts to silence, temporarily, his inner voice by throwing himself compulsively into new pursuits.

These run a wide gamut: from taking a mistress, to playing the violin, to taking a belated interest in his son Edward's development, to raising pigs on the ancestral estate, to bullying a tenant in the guest cottage (an event that is based on an experience Saul Bellow and his wife had when they rented the guest cottage of an estate outside Barrytown, New York). One core social issue of the novel is, then, the wasteland at the heart of American materialism in the middle of the twentieth century.

At one point in his reflections, Henderson generalizes from his personal experience that there are "displaced persons everywhere." Bellow thus echoes the title of a magnificent short story of the same decade, Flannery O'Connor's masterpiece about a refugee from Nazi Poland and his tragic reception in the American South. The hero of "The Displaced Person" is a victim of political intolerance, both in Georgia and in occupied Poland. By contrast, Henderson's sense of displacement is more a philosophical than a political matter, the sense of not having a true role in life. Henderson prefaces his "displaced persons" generalization with the complementary statement, "Nobody truly occupies a station in life anymore." Personally, he feels displaced because his elder, serious brother was killed in a madcap episode that resembled his own youthful irresponsibility, and he feels that his family, especially his father, never forgave him. He also feels displaced because the one time his life seemed to make sense was his career as an Army officer during World War II when the mission was clear, and the notion of duty was unquestioned. Significantly, Henderson maintains the illusion of a military relationship with his farmer, Hannock, referring to the tenants as "those civilians." When he meets the Arnewi tribe in Africa, he performs a manual-of-arms display to greet the weeping villagers, and then he tells Prince Itelo that he is reluctant to participate in the ceremonial wrestling because he fears that his commando training will cause him to take unfair advantage of his host—a fear that proves prophetic. When he and his guide are ambushed outside the Wariri village, Henderson controls his fears by admiring the warlike precision of his captors.

Bellow's concern in this cluster of incidents is that only when a purpose was defined clearly for him, such as when he was in the military, did his alienated hero have a sense of belonging, of living authentically and purposefully.

As has been hinted in the above paragraphs, however, the dilemma Henderson faces is specific as well as universal. As critic Bruce Michaelson comments in Twentieth Century Literature (1981), Henderson's feeling of uselessness, except for his heroic efforts to rescue wounded comrades during World War II, traces to another American tradition, the notion that certain families have a type of noblesse oblige, or the obligation to serve as a consequence of their status and social position. Michaelson affiliates the ancestral Hendersons with prominent WASP families of the nineteenth century, including the Sumners, the Lodges, and the Adamses (Bellow cites Henry Adams several times in the novel), to which list the more recent Rockefellers and Kennedys might be added. Because Henderson cannot locate an appropriate way to return useful service to his fellow human beings, and therefore to live up to the ideal of a family tradition that

includes statesmen and scholars, he instead dedicates his life to parodying those obligations and traditions.

The beautiful family estate he transforms into a foul-smelling pig farm. At a prestigious, exclusive resort on the Gulf coast, he drinks excessively and shoots at bottles with a slingshot he found in his suitcase. Bellow makes clear that an unconscious motivation for Henderson's behavior is this parody of family tradition when Henderson attributes similar prestigious lineages to the other guests: "Do you see that great big fellow with the enormous nose and the mustache? Well, his greatgrandfather was Secretary of State, his greatuncles were ambassadors to England and France, and his father was the famous scholar Willard Henderson who wrote that book the Albigensians, a friend of Henry Adams." Not content to accept passively the role of wealthy American family, and unable to find a meaningful outlet for his service ideal, Henderson creates his life as a travesty of the tradition he inherits.

A related social concern Bellow explores for the first time in Henderson the Rain King, but one that will pervade several of his later novels, notably Mr. Sanimler's Planet (1970) and The Dean's December (1982), has to do with the role of older people in American culture. At fifty-five years old, Henderson fears that his useful life has passed him by, and many in his culture, including his first wife, Frances, support that belief. He has always been a voracious reader of biographies, especially those of medical missionaries, such as Sir Wilfred Grenfell and Dr.

Albert Schweitzer. These heroes embody three elements central to Henderson's desire to complete his personal evolution and, therefore, are worthy of his emulation. As a missionary, Henderson would heal and serve; he would travel; and he would experience a life of adventure. In order to become a medical missionary, however, one has to go to medical school, and society offers little encouragement for fifty-fiveyear-old medical students. In Africa, meeting the Arnewi queen Willatale, Henderson again laments his lack of medical knowledge, wishing to minister to the old woman's cataract induced blindness. At home, however, there is no question of a man almost old enough to retire entering medical school.

His first wife simply laughed in his face when he mentioned this goal a decade or so earlier. Therefore, much of Henderson's African adventure is concerned with his developing a sufficiently individuated sense of self to go against the grain of America's assumption that to be old is to be useless and to acquire the individual will to enroll in medical school as Leo (the lion) Henderson. By demanding this training, Henderson claims the right to determine for himself what the purpose of his life will be, and it will involve healing and serving. His claiming the autonomy to determine what use the remainder of his life will serve challenges those cultural definitions of age that would deny his ownership of the years he has left, however many these will be.

A final social concern, one not frequently noted in commentaries on Henderson the Rain King, is Bellow's treatment of American imperialism. Perhaps Michaelson overstates the case in one of the few commentaries on imperialism when he affiliates Henderson's attitudes toward Africa with defoliation in Vietnam and other instances of American

foreign policy, calling Henderson's attitude toward the Arnewi tribe a "vanguard of the American Presence." Although this reading seems excessively allegorical (many critics, however, read Henderson the Rain King as an allegory; Kathleen King entitled her 1988 essay "Henderson the Allegory King"), clearly Bellow intends Henderson's journey to Africa as a critique of imperialism and as a plea for transcendence. Bellow's critique of EuroAmerican cultural condescension is best illustrated in Henderson's encounter with the Arnewi village.

Bellow portrays the Arnewi as a tribe right out of the National Geographic magazine, a journal Henderson reads intermittently. These are gentle, primitive people that are very much in touch with the rhythms of nature but are passively suffering a drought they believe expresses their gods' disapproval. The tribe has little to teach Henderson because they do not challenge his Eurocentric assumptions about "primitive" African cultures. His initial regret upon meeting the Arnewi is that the prince speaks English as a result of going away to school, so Henderson is denied the ego gratification of being the first explorer to arrive in the village. When he meets their androgynous queen, he is intuitively persuaded that she has a wisdom that can help him correct his path and help him find a more meaningful existence. Certain that Willatale possesses "the source, the germ, the cipher" or the intuitive wisdom that can help Henderson to transform himself, he proposes "one of those mutual-aid deals" (another echo of Cold War American diplomacy). Despite protestations by Itelo and his guide Romilayu, Henderson decides to eliminate thousands of frogs that pollute the tribe's water reserves, thus compounding the effect of the drought. He offers western technology, in the form of poison or a bomb, as an antidote to the Arnewi "irrationality" in obeying an ancestral prohibition on drinking polluted water. Of course, he incorrectly calculates the explosive charge in his flashlight bomb, resulting in the destruction of a dam that is the only hope the Arnewi have to survive the drought without relocating. Forced relocations of African tribes have been a frequent consequence of western colonialism, much as forced relocation of indigenous peoples have followed inevitably on the settling of the Americas by European cultures.

As the novel's narrator, even in retrospect, Henderson does not see the contradiction Bellow places before the reader, that those traditions that inform the wisdom of the Arnewi are inseparable from the possession of that wisdom itself. Like many European and American explorers before him (several of whom Bellow names in the novel), Henderson uncritically assumes the superiority of western culture and technology, while admiring and even envying the serene wisdom that may come from its absence. In any case, when he turns a deaf ear to Itelo and Romilayu's warnings about interfering, Henderson represents the arrogance of western civilization in assuming automatically that western values are superior to those of "primitive" cultures. Moreover, his insensitivity to the relationship between tradition and culture suggests one contradiction of cultural condescension, the assumption that primitive peoples may be "wise" in their relationship with nature, but they should do things the way highly developed industrial nations tell them to do them. This theme of cultural condescension and arrogance is treated somewhat more crudely in Humboldt's Gift (1975) when a minor character, a Chicagoan in his twenties, enrages a Nairobi guide by repeatedly demanding that he teach the American the Swahili word for an obscenity often associated with African-American slang. When the American finally makes the Nairobi aware of what concept it

is that he wants to translate, the guide is so offended by the very concept that he beats the young man to a pulp.

Techniques

Like most of Bellow's best novels, Henderson employs traditional narrative devices with subtlety, but innovation is not really the author's rhetorical strong point. This book, like The Adventures of Augie March, is a variation on the picaresque novel, or an anecdotal narrative of the adventures of a scoundrel or a rascal narrated in related satiric or comic scenes. Often the picaro, or picaresque hero, comes to an understanding of his nature, his origins, and his role in life, as a result of his adventures. Certainly, this is the case in Bellow's application of the genre. Henderson casts a huge, funny figure in America and early in his adventure in Africa, but, as he confides early in the novel, "living proof of something of the highest importance has been communicated to me so I am obliged to communicate it."

Bellow's employment of the picaro who grows to an understanding of his station as well as his purpose in life, as well as the comic vision informing much of the author's fiction, are reinforced by his subtle variation on the retrospective first-person central narration.

The first four chapters of Henderson seem to jump from incident to incident in Henderson's life in America, without making the kind of connections among events readers may be accustomed to seeing. This confused narrative serves Bellow's thematic purpose well, and readers who follow the journey into Africa (beginning in chapter five) find themselves in a more comfortable, sequential narrative punctuated by occasional flashbacks, the relevance of which become readily apparent as Henderson integrates present with past experiences (for example, he recalls his misadventures with a French dentist after his bridgework breaks in the Wariri village). These flashbacks serve two purposes at the same time: they enable him to assess his current situation in the light of a previous one and force him to reevaluate the interpretation of past events with which he may have become a little too comfortable. Thus, the novel's form mirrors its content; it captures the web of conflicting experiences in the hero's present per ception and forces him to engage in a continuing process of rethinking his past. Bellow's technique involves watching Henderson reinvent himself by reexamining his memory; one example of this texturing of memory occurs when a series of events that took place long before either of Henderson's marriages are related in the final chapter, which narrates the airplane journey back to America. While Henderson takes care of the Persian child, he is able to examine his memory of the terrible summer of his brother Dick's drowning, his father's rage, and his own escape into Canada, as well as the story of his riding the roller coaster with the aged bear Smolak. Able to recover this memory, he also reevaluates it and focuses on the bonds of fear and love between a selfdespising boy and an aged, useless bear.

This awareness enables him to declare the truth central to his transformation, and to the novel as a whole, that all the gains in his life were due to love.

The first four chapters, however, seem deliberately confused in sequence and transition. This may be due to the composition process. The first four chapters were published both as a novella and serially before the remaining eighteen were completed.

Still, Bellow, whose biographer calls him an "obsessive reviser," would surely have reworked the four chapters if he did not feel that the contrast in style served his thematic purposes. At times he deliberately calls the reader's attention to the "disorderly rush" of events through which his narrator attempts to sift. This chaotic method of narrating events in what seems to the reader nearly a stream-of-consciousness method complements Bellow's theme well. Henderson's problem, prior to the African journey, is that he has not taken control of his life, and part of the reason one cannot comprehend one's life is that one has not acquired perspective. Thus, the sudden starts and stops, the unexpected shifts among events, in which narrative sequence is never resolved, even the occasional confessions of Henderson's inability to establish sequence are part of Bellow's strategy of immersing the reader in the confusion of Henderson's soul before he began his journey toward purpose and sanity. As he comes to understand his role in the larger scheme of things, Henderson gains a sense of proportion, and, as he does this, the narrative smoothes out to a traditional episodic plot.

As is true of most of Bellow's fiction, the plot empowers several objects to acquire symbolic meanings beyond their literal ones.

The recurrent octopus, associated with Henderson's persistent intimations of his death, has been discussed above, and many other animals function figuratively. At various points in his life, Henderson relates to bears, pigs, frogs, a cat, the Arnewi cattle, a lioness, and two lions. Each set of animals corresponds with some element of Henderson's self-conception. He tells his wife that the pigs have become "a part of me," and hears himself grunting like such an animal in Africa. Dahfu encourages him to "become the lion" in his therapy with Atti, an order that is indirectly carried out when he changes his name to "Leo" and insists on taking the lion cub "Dahfu" back to America.

Finally, Bellow punctuates the narrative with references to music, both classical and modern. Henderson plays pieces by Mozart, Handel, and other composers on the violin as part of a frustrated effort to communicate with his dead parents, both to reassure himself that people are immortal and to seek reconciliation. In one of the novel's several funny variations on an otherwise serious scene, he sings an oratorio from Handel's Messiah when the Arnewi queen asks him who he is. He includes Mozart in his roaring from the den beneath the palace as he "becomes the lion." On the plane ride home, he sings from the Messiah to a young stewardess. In each case, the allusions to music, like the frequent allusions to poems, missionaries, and African anthropology (which Bellow studied in graduate school), suggest variations on, or enrichments, of the self-conceptions with which his protagonist is working in each case.

Themes

Themes

Although Henderson the Rain King uses humor and even parody to get at its core issues, it does treat seriously the themes that are central to all of Saul Bellow's fiction: the search for meaning, the notion of an existence rendered absurd (in the philosophical as well as the more general sense) by the omnipresence of mortality, the relation of esoteric philosophy with practical action, and the need for transcendence. For more than half of a century, the author has wrestled with the often tenuous relationship between ideas and practical actions.

His novels are among the most allusive of the later-generation modernists, summoning the works and thoughts of philosophers, scientists, writers, and anthropologists.

As has been suggested in the "social concerns" section, Henderson lives an existentially and literally absurd life, largely because he cannot locate a purpose that offers consistency and meaning. Behind this uncertainty about one's goal in life, however, Bellow explores his most omnipresent theme, the dilemma of mortality. Henderson's equation, and the thematic problem central to Henderson the Rain King, can be stated thus: how can existence have a purpose when it is limited, and even mocked, by an awareness of mortality as its inescapable end? For Henderson, the certainty that existence is bounded by death leads to a philosophy of denial and an existence without a point. His journey to Africa is initiated by his witnessing someone dying, and much of that voyage is concerned with learning how to live creatively in the face of certain death. King Dahfu of the Wariri tribe categorizes Henderson as one of the "fighting Lazaruses," suggesting allusively and comically that Henderson's struggle is to defeat mortality. By his own account, Henderson explicitly associates obsession with mortality and mortality with the inability to find a suitable purpose for one's life: "All the major tasks and the big conquests were done before my time. That left the biggest problem of all, which was to encounter death. We've just got to do something about it." Critic Ellen Pifer, in Saul Bellow: Against the Grain (1990), perceptively notes that his "antisocial outbursts and impulsive acts of cruelty stem from his fury at mortality itself."

Anxiety about death, a prior condition of "doing something about it," is what motivates Henderson to begin his quest into Africa. While he and Lily argue loudly, the housekeeper dies suddenly, presumably of a heart attack, in the kitchen. Bellow imposes a sly cause-and-effect error when Henderson discovers the body, attributes the housekeeper's death to his and Lily's quarrel, then goes to Miss Lennox's house full of memorabilia, and makes his decision to strike out for meaning in the face of certain death: "You [Henderson, speaking reflexively] too will die of this pestilence.

Death will annihilate you and nothing will remain, and there will be nothing left but junk." He undertakes his journey burdened with several images of death, all of which he will need to transform to become a purposeful human being.

Late in the novel, Henderson quips that the dead are his "boarders." He needs to alter his relationship with the dead, much as Charles Citrine needs to reconfigure his memories of and associations with the genius poet Humboldt von Fleischer and his own great love Demmie Vongel in Humboldt's Gift. The first image Henderson needs to reformulate involves his brother Dick, whose death was a travesty of Henderson's youth.

Acting irresponsibly—Henderson feels that this is the one time Dick emulated his own behavior—Dick created a chain of events that ended with his drowning. His absurd death imposed the family legacy on a younger brother who felt inadequate to assume it, and his bitterness was so great that he even refused to attend Dick's funeral. Moreover, his father could not forgive Henderson because the lesser brother survived to carry on the distinguished family tradition, and that resentment followed Henderson's father to the grave. As an adult, Henderson powerfully feels this paternal rejection, and for a while plays a violin as a means of reaching across the grave to restore contact with his dead, judgmental father. So, when Henderson associates Miss Lenox's trip to the cemetery with his own journey to Africa, he sees it as simple cause-and-effect. Bellow and the reader, however, know that this is a catalytic, not a causal, event.

He also carries into Africa an image of an octopus he saw in an aquarium in France, a symbol both Henderson and Bellow associate with the omnipresence of death. Running away from his mistress's demand that he make a commitment to her, Henderson in Southern France observes the "pale and granular" flesh of a captive octopus, as well as its "Brownian motion" (an allusion to Sir Thomas Browne's Hydriotaphia, or Urn-Burial [1658], an account of various funeral practices and meditations on life and death) that gave him cause to reflect on his own mortality: "death is giving me notice." The octopus, like the cat Henderson tried to kill when the boarders abandoned it on his estate, recurs as a "memento mori," or reminder of mortality, three times during Henderson's African adventures. While he plans the destruction of the Arnewi frogs, he recalls the despair he felt when viewing the octopus and contrasts it with the excitement he feels while preparing to kill the frogs. Later, descending at King Dahfu's insistence into a subterranean lion's cage, he vividly recalls the dread he felt upon seeing the octopus. Finally, when Dahfu's mother and a Wariri magistrate show him the shrunken head of a woman believed to have been a sorceress, Henderson affiliates the terror this skull represents with that of the octopus as well.

170 Once he gets into Africa, however, Henderson finds immersion in, rather than freedom from, the notion of death and its corollary, the purposelessness of existence. While he is in the Arnewi village, cattle are dying, and the drought implies a similar fate for the villagers if they do not change their attitudes toward their traditions or if they do not relocate. In the Wariri village, Henderson begins his reluctant immersion therapy in mortality, or the difficult process of learning that one's awareness of mortality is not a cause for living a purposeless life, but rather it is the reason to insist on a purpose, whatever the cost of selecting or pursuing it.

In fact, his very first impression of the tribe was Christian convert and guide Romilayu's warning about "chillun dahkness" (children of darkness who are, therefore, satanic or

evil). His initial encounters threaten him and his guide with death. A minor official, whom Henderson associates with the Biblical angel of Dothan, who, Henderson believes, sent Joseph into captivity in order to complete a larger destiny for Israel, solemnly directs Henderson and Romilayu into an ambush, in which they fall prostrate before several rifles poised to fire. While being unceremoniously marched into the Wariri village, Henderson believes he sees corpses hanging from scaffolds around the town's perimeter, an impression he later confirms. After being interrogated, the captives are placed in a hut with a corpse (the former rain king's), which brings to mind the octopus because, once again, Henderson is attributing communication skills to an inanimate object. He feels that the dead man is telling him, "Here, man, is your being, which you think is so terrific." When, after Henderson tries to place the corpse in a ditch, he finds it back in the hut, he concludes that the Wariri "deal in [corpses] wholesale." Later, when he becomes the ceremonial rain king, he makes it his business to minister to those on trial, for Wariri justice is swift, severe, and often lethal.

His personal encounter with death further involves what critic M. A. Quayum in the Saul Bellow Journal (1992) calls "lion therapy." His friend King Dahfu insists that Henderson confront his fear of death and come to love and honor a lioness that is capable of ripping him to shreds. Dahfu ministers to Henderson's dread of Atti and the death she represents for him by reminding him that she, like death, is "unavoidable." He begins his journey to self-transcendence by partially mastering his fear of Atti, enough that Dahfu invites him to accompany him on his quest to capture the lion Gmilo, which is believed by the tribe to hold Dahfu's father's spirit and thus must be conquered by Dahfu for him to be confirmed as king. But when Henderson sees the larger, nondomesticated lion believed to be Gmilo, he realizes that his interaction with Atti was merely a preparation for this ultimate existential confrontation: the "snarling of this animal was indeed the voice of death." Indeed, the beast kills Dahfu when he falls from a platform. The factional Wariri take Henderson and Romilayu to a charnel house (a building where bones and dead bodies are kept), where once again Henderson must rub elbows with death, now in the person of the man he has admired more than anyone else.

Much has been written about Dahfu's role in instructing Henderson, and this essay shall soon enter into a discussion of his esoteric theories. For the moment, however, it is best to state directly that Dahfu's primary role in Henderson's overcoming his anxiety about death is as a role model, an exemplar of Ernest Hemingway's (a writer on whom Henderson's character is in part based) notion of grace under pressure. It is Dahfu's example, not his theories, that enable Henderson to take control of his life. In fact, this control will require that he rethink his notion, derived from Walt Whitman, about the desirability of a state of "being" over one of "becoming." According to this analysis, the only character who has arrived at a state of "being" in the novel is Willatale, who is essentially static. Henderson must overcome his illusion that Dahfu has completed his being, in order to learn that Dahfu has successfully come to terms with the process of becoming.

Because Henderson is initially impressed by Dahfu's physical presence and easy manner when he is reclining, standing, loping, or even when he is playing a game involving the tossing of ancestral skulls during the rain ceremony, Henderson leaps to

the conclusion that Dahfu has accomplished his personal evolution. Like his friend Itelo, Dahfu has been to the colonial school in Malindi, has completed a significant portion of a medical education, has bummed around the world as a hand on a freighter, and only then has returned to this remote African plain to succeed his father as king of his people. Seeing the apparent adoration of Dahfu's sixty-seven wives as well as the rest of his tribe, Henderson sees the king as a man at peace, surrounded and supported by the affection of a loving people. The inference is of course false. He is a probationary king and will become king only on the successful capture of the lion containing his father's spirit. A powerful political faction of the Wariri, led by his Uncle Horko and the Bunam, a priest/magistrate, conspire against him, to the point of intimidating his mother to act against Dahfu.

They also try to enlist Henderson, the new rain king. As is seldom mentioned in commentaries on the novel, the fall that results in Dahfu's death is the result of a conspiracy by the Bunam and his people. The rope governing the net that must be dropped by Dahfu onto the lion jams because it is "stopped in the pulley by a knot." If there is a knot, there must be a knotter. The knot is strategically placed at just the point in the rope that the net will partially capture, but not contain, a heavy, raging lion while the handler stands on a slender pole, and the entire apparatus shakes.

The point is that Henderson misconstrues Dahfu's completion and moreover misreads the political situation in the Wariri village.

Dahfu's life lesson for Henderson centers on dealing with the pressures of mortality and being true to one's own idea of one's destiny. Although the Wariri opposition objects to his keeping the lioness, mistakenly captured in a previous quest for Gmilo, in the palace, Dahfu loves and draws inspiration from the creature. He defies the tribal conventions, knowing his political enemies will use this to stir up doubts about his worthiness to be king. He rejoices in the attentions and beauty of his wives, knowing that a single report of sexual impotence will result in his death. He plays the game of catch with his ancestors' skulls, knowing full well that one day his own skull will be used by a successor. Throughout his experience with the Wariri, Henderson encounters an example of a man too self-directed to be intimidated by thoughts of his death.

Moreover, Dahfu's strength as a character is his refusal to be intimated by mortality; he lives a short but intense life, "becoming" again and again. To "be," Bellow understands even if Henderson does not, is stasis or death. To "become" is to be dynamic.

The powerful change that has come over Henderson at the end of the novel—as he nurtures the lion cub he has named Dahfu, takes care of the orphaned Persian child, and prepares for medical school, which in turn will lead him into a practice that will have to be developed—is his willingness to look death squarely in the eye and to refuse to blink; he now recognizes that an awareness of death should lead toward a purposeful life. He has mutely acknowledged that the solution to "becoming" is not to complete it but to keep moving toward a destiny of one's own choice.

What all this implies is that it is Dahfu's example, of a brave man who faces death and social disapproval in the service of what he believes to be right, that leads Henderson out of this state of unproductivity toward a valid state of becoming. Part of the process is also Dahfu's instruction. Like Tommy Wilhelm of Seize the Day, Henderson listens to a collection of esoteric theories about self-creation and a variety of theosophic theories about reincarnation.

Many critics, notably Eusebio Rodrigues in Quest for the Human: An Exploration of Saul Bellow's Fiction (1981), trace certain of Dahfu's theories to the writings of Wilhelm Reich about the creation of the physical from the spiritual. In fact, Rodrigues suggests that the character himself is a composite of King Gelele of Dahomey (found in the writings of explorer Richard Burton, whom Bellow mentions in the novel), the "passionate convictions" of poet-mystic William Blake, and the "strange, daring theories" of Wilhelm Reich. There can be little doubt that these writers' theories, which appear in various guises in Bellow's novels, can be found in many of the theories Dahfu expounds to Henderson, such as "Imagination is a force of nature" or "the career of our specie . . . is evidence that one imagination after another grows literal." What is to be questioned, however, is the nature of Henderson's absorption of these esoteric teachings. He sits enraptured by Dahfu's charisma, not really sorting out the logic of the statements his mentor makes but rather overjoyed to converse with such a guru. Much as he, Dahfu, confuses Willatale's diagnosis that Henderson exhibits "grun-tu-molani," or the will to life, as wisdom (it is very good common sense but not original thinking), Henderson assimilates Dahfu's thinking uncritically, as the teaching of a savant. He does not, however, do most of the homework Dahfu assigns. When he tries to read the monographs his mentor brought back from medical school, he becomes impatient and confused, then sets the readings aside and plays solitaire. In summary, there is compelling evidence that Dahfu plays the key role in Henderson's transformation; but the vast majority of that evidence suggests that it is Dahfu's exemplification of the grace and dignity with which one can rise to accept one's mortal condition rather than the persuasive power of his arguments that has the greatest influence on Henderson.

Not the least of Dahfu's influence is his representation of the power of love. In his rambling letter to Lily from the Wariri village, Henderson still exhibits a pedantic fastidiousness about the concept of love, telling his second wife she "can call it love.

Although personally I think that word is full of bluff." Henderson's low self-esteem has persuaded him that he is unworthy of love, and he therefore withholds expressions of it. At one point he cheerfully acknowledges that he has "plenty of children" by his two wives, but only two are named. Ricey, in a desperate plea for affection, kidnaps a black infant and persuades herself that she is the child's mother. While Henderson eloquently defends his daughter's kindness and natural virtue when the puritanical headmistress decides to expel Ricey from the exclusive boarding school she attends, he ultimately defers any direct intervention in his daughter's crisis to Lily, the child's stepmother. He ignores the black baby's cries as well as the diapers and other evidence of an infant in the house. Moreover, while he defends Ricey's character to the headmistress, there is no indication that he takes any action at all to help his daughter through the crisis that led her to kidnap a baby as a cry for affection.

Similarly, he makes a journey to visit his eldest son, Edward, in California, because he disapproves of Edward's lifestyle as a beach bum. The irony of this paternal disapproval may escape Henderson, but it does not escape the reader who is aware of Henderson's own rejection crisis. He urges Edward to become a physician, or in other words, to complete an ambition Henderson was too intimidated to undertake—in this, he acts out the cliche of the American father, demanding that his son complete his life for him. He later panics over Edward's marriage to a woman from Central America, worrying that his son will be manipulated by her. In neither case does he allow himself to express his love for Edward, only his anxieties and expectations.

More urgently, Henderson does not allow himself to reciprocate Lily's love. His first marriage, with a woman from his family's social class, failed, and by that time he had drifted into an affair with Lily Simmons, who may have been as interested in his wealth as in his person. When they first become intimate, Henderson wonders "how can she love you—you—you!" Because he believes himself unworthy of being loved, he represses the affection he can permit himself to express for Lily, even after they marry. They quarrel constantly, and he resents her desire to hang her portrait in the estate's great hall. He deliberately embarrasses her when the ladies of the community reluctantly call on her, and he complains constantly about her personal untidiness.

Much of his hostility toward the boarders who leave their cat in the guest cottage traces to the fact that Lily arranged the rental and welcomed the companionship.

At least twice, he threatens suicide knowing perfectly well that Lily's beloved father took his life, so the threat will have a devastatingly compound impact on her. In summary, although he admires Lily's zest for life and adores the glow she has when she is excited about something, he cannot permit himself the full expression of love because love makes one vulnerable to others who do not share that emotion, and he does not consider himself worthy of being loved by anyone.

After he returns from Africa, Leo Henderson is a changed man, willing openly to express and receive love. As he has come to accept his mortality, he realizes that the only sure human antidote to mortality is love. He is able to recover a repressed memory of a broken-down bear with which he rode on a roller coaster to entertain fairgoers in Canada, and he realizes that what he and that bear shared was love; they were "brothers in our souls." From this repressed memory, Henderson articulates the central theme of Bellow's master narrative, the one that informs all his novels: "Whatever gains I ever made were always due to love and nothing else." He openly expresses his love for Romilayu when he leaves Africa and promises to "do better now" when he returns to Lily. While on the airplane, he offers love and comfort to a Persian orphan who is traveling alone to America. The novel ends with one of modern literature's great moments of affirmation, Henderson carrying the child wrapped in a blanket and romping joyfully across the frozen tarmac in Newfoundland while the plane refuels.

How has Dahfu figured in the central transformation of Henderson's voyage, from a man suffering a type of emotional constipation to a man fully and joyfully able to give love and to appreciate its role in his becoming? Originally, he offers Henderson something no

one else seems willing to offer: unconditional friendship. A man of such charisma deeming him worthy of cultivating is a revelation for Henderson.

Moreover, he appears to offer Henderson the truth. As an act of love, he insists that his new friend begin his journey toward transcendence. He discusses his original theory of love with Henderson, much as he discusses a theory of courage. His real impact, however, is modeling a loving man who possesses honor and courage. He loves his tribe, enough to abandon his career in the "new world" to return to his people, even knowing that life expectancies are not very long for Wariri kings. Although they have a political system that plots against him, his love for his people far outweighs his anxiety about the threat of rebellion. He adores his wives, knowing full well that his virility will eventually fail and one of them will report his impotence; then he will be strangled. He adores Atti, a creature that at one time would have devoured him and now is a flash point for political rebellion.

And when Henderson falls short of his expectations, Dahfu loves him despite himself. As in the matter of courage, Dahfu is Henderson's wisdom-teacher in the matter of love, not merely by words but by exemplifying a person whose love for his world is his principal animating force. And his death also teaches Henderson that love is the only thing one has in the face of mortality.

Longing and Satisfaction

Henderson feels that he has a disturbance in his heart, in the form of a voice that says, "I want, I want!" When he tries to suppress it gets stronger, and it will not ever tell him exactly what it wants. Henderson tries many things to satisfy this longing, including playing the violin, getting drunk and shouting at his wife, but the sense of dissatisfaction only begins to dissipate when he travels to Africa. King Dahfu tries to show Henderson that this longing or "imprisoned want" is the driving force behind Henderson's strength. Dahfu also likens the voice to a "long prison term" and suggests that the voice will persist until Henderson has replied. (p. 233.)

Henderson later realizes that he has gone about finding out what the voice wanted in the wrong way because instead of saying "*I* want," the voice "should have told me *she* wants, *he* wants, *they* want." (p. 286). In Africa, Henderson has learned to free him self from his self-obsessed desires, and to consider the needs of others around him, and the world at large. He thinks, "All you hear from guys is desire, desire, desire, knocking its way out of the breast, and fear, striking and striking. Enough already!" (p. 297.) Just as Henderson's desire and the voice that says "I want" are two of the motivating forces of his character, Henderson's liberation from his own longing, and his satisfaction of his own wants, is a critical part of his development as a character.

Death

Before traveling to Africa, Henderson is obsessed with death, and the narrative tracks this interest. In the novel's beginning, Henderson sees an octopus in an aquarium, and

as he and the octopus look at each other, Henderson has the terrifying sensation that he is dying. Earlier that day he had threatened to commit suicide in front of Lily, but as he looks at the octopus, "the tentacles throbbed and motioned through the glass, the bubbles sped upward, and I thought, 'This is my last day. Death is giving me notice.' So much for my suicide threat to Lily. " (p. 19). Henderson is afraid of death, and feels that he tricked death early in his life, and should have died in his older brother's place. He goes to Africa for many reasons, but one is his sense of shame and responsibility for Miss Lenox's death. He feels that Death is coming for him, and Henderson realizes that when he is gone, nothing will be left. Henderson justifies the trip to Africa by saying to himself "Because nothing will have been and so nothing will be left. While something still *is - now*! For the sake of all, get out." (p. 40).

In Africa, Henderson's obsession with death and suffering are temporarily replaced away by the concept of "grun-tu-molani," and he feels an overwhelming desire to live and also for everything else in the world to live. Filled with this feeling and a desire to help the Arnewi, he offers to kill the frogs in their cistern. Henderson feels pity for the frogs in the cistern but also thrills at the thought of killing them. He observes that even as humans fear death, they lust for it too. Henderson begins to realize that human feelings about death are complicated, and when he finds a corpse in his hut, he hears a voice ask him if he loves death so much.

As Henderson's sessions with the lion continue, he is reminded of the frightening feeling the octopus gave him, and he starts to believe he has a "great death potential," and asks himself "why is it always near me - why! What can't I get away from it awhile!" (p. 252). Henderson eventually believes that he came to Africa because he "wouldn't agree to the death of my soul." (p. 277). Dahfu teaches him that the cycle of fear and desire is not broken by death and burial, but good men must try to break the cycle in their lifetime. Although Dahfu dies after teaching this lesson, it somehow frees Henderson, and he is able to return to his old life able to care for other people because he is not crippled by fear of dying.

Reality

Henderson defines himself in the first half of the novel as someone with a firm grasp of reality, in contrast to the women of his life. He says, "I have always argued that Lily neither knows or likes reality. Me? I love the old bitch just the way she is and I like to think I am prepared for even the worst she has to show me." (p. 150.) He sees his trip through Africa as a quest for truth and reality, and when he sees something particularly grim or gritty, like the executed bodies in the Wariri village, he wishes Lily was there so he could show her this piece of reality. However, as Henderson's time in Africa continues, he comes to realize that he hasn't really grasped reality before - that "what we call reality is nothing but pedantry." (p. 167). He is struck by a moment of intense truth, and understands that there is a world of real facts, and also a nominal world, which we create ourselves.

Dahfu teaches Henderson that "men of most powerful appetite have always been the ones to doubt reality the most." (p. 232). Henderson, with his voice that constantly says, "I want," is a man of appetite, and Dahfu shows him how he has been running from the truths around himself. Henderson finally realizes that it is "love that makes reality. The opposite makes the opposite." (p.286). In ultimately finding the root of reality in love, Henderson rejects his earlier idea that reality is rooted in facts or perception, and opens up the possibility of a richer, more real life.

Style

Point of View

The novel is told in the third person from the point of view of Eugene Henderson. The style is conversational, and Henderson often addresses the reader directly, even ending one chapter with "I'll tell you why," and beginning the next with "Because...." Henderson addresses the reader and other characters with his unique, rambling style which incorporates very informal prose, Biblical references, wild nonsequiturs and humorous inconsistencies. The whole of the story is told as Henderson looks back and reminisces not only about his journey to Africa, but also the forces and experiences that led him there. The only real perspective offered is Henderson's, as he does not often ruminate about the mental state of other characters. Likewise, there is some dialogue, but the majority of the story is conveyed simply through Henderson's descriptions and inner monologue.

At one point in the novel, Henderson casts doubt on the veracity and trustworthiness of his own narrative, by conceding that he hadn't told the whole true story of Charlie's wife's grudge against him. By having Henderson reveal to the reader at a late stage in the novel that he hasn't told the whole truth (arguably because it wasn't flattering to him) the author invites the reader to look beyond Henderson's account and interpret his story in the context of what Bellow has revealed about Henderson's character.

Setting

The majority of the story is set in Africa, in the mid-1950s, but the author also carefully constructs other worlds in Connecticut, New York City, and Europe during World War II, which Henderson jumps between during his rambling narrative. The action in Africa largely takes place in the village of the Wariri, the village of the Arnewi, and the African plains as Henderson and Romilayu travel through them. Henderson's African journey is both a spiritual and a physical one, and the physical setting often seems to have a symbolically spiritual aspect - in the beautiful pink of the sky that reminds Henderson of his childhood sky, or the sharpness of the rocks surrounding the Wariri village. Henderson observes that there is an ancientness or prehuman quality to the landscape, and this is a useful backdrop to Henderson's realizations about himself and reality.

Interestingly, the final setting of the novel is Newfoundland, where Henderson deplanes for the last page and a half of the book, and runs around on the ice. By choosing a completely different and unconnected setting for Henderson's final moment, the author allows a break from Henderson's spiritual voyage in Africa and suggests a qualified hope for Henderson's future. It is not clear if Henderson will be able to make use of his new knowledge and self-awareness and optimism when back home, but he has clearly escaped Africa with it, and it is evident in the icy final setting.

Language and Meaning

Henderson's word choice is the novel is very interesting. Although his style is informal and colloquial, he makes reference to the Bible, historical events and psychological theory in an offhand, but very knowledgeable way. Henderson is a very descriptive narrator, and successfully conjures up a variety of detailed worlds through particular attention to color and sound. The majority of the novel is told not through dialogue, but through Henderson's recorded observations, so this mixed quality of Henderson's words becomes very significant. The use of African words also appears in a limited way, which makes concepts like "grun-tu-molani" even more significant and memorable when they arise. Henderson's inability to communicate directly with the majority of characters and his subsequent reliance on Dahfu and Romilayu as translators further complicate the characters' language and word choice in the novel.

Structure

The novel consists of twenty-two chapters of roughly equal length. The first three chapters involve Henderson's reminiscence about his reasons for going to Africa, and the setting jumps around wildly between Connecticut, New York and Europe, and through various time periods in Henderson's life. Subsequent chapters are set in Africa, but Henderson still revisits places and time periods from his earlier life through flashbacks and asides. The author employs tools such as foreshadowing and even cliffhangers at the end of chapters to keep the reader engaged in the outcome of the story.

Quotes

"But privately when things got very bad I often looked into books to see whether I could find some helpful words and one day I read, 'The forgiveness of sins is perpetual and righteousness is not required.' This impressed me so deeply that I went around saying it to myself. But then I forgot which book it was." Chapter 1, pg. 3

"Now I have already mentioned that there was a disturbance in my heart, a voice that spoke there and said, *I want, I want, I want*! It happened every afternoon, and when I tried to suppress it got even stronger. It said only one thing*, I want, I want*! And I would ask, 'What do you want?' But this is all it would ever tell me." Chapter 3, p. 24

"So for God's sake make a move, Henderson, put forth effort. You, too, will die of this pestilence. Death will annihilate you and nothing will remain, and there will be nothing left but junk. Because nothing will have been and so nothing will be left. While something still *is* - *now*! For the sake of all, get out." Chapter 4, p. 40.

"I myself, dying of misery and boredom, had happiness, and objective happiness too, all around me, as abundant as the water in that cistern which cattle were forbidden to drink. And therefore I thought, this will be one of those mutual-aid deals; where the Arnewi are irrational I'll help them and where I'm irrational they'll help me." Chapter 8, p. 87.

"I have always argued that Lily neither knows or likes reality. Me? I love the old bitch just the way she is and I like to think I am prepared for even the worst she has to show me. I am a true adorer of life and if I can't reach as high as the face of it, I plant my kisses somewhere lower down." Chapter 12, p. 150.

"Once again I brought to mind that old prophecy Daniel made to Nebuchadnezzar, '*They shall drive thee from among men and thy dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field*.'...there returned to my thoughts the frogs of the Arnewi, the cattle whom the venerated, the tenants' cat I tried to murder, to say nothing of the pigs I had bred." Chapter 16, p. 229.

"But why lions? Because, Mr. Henderson, I replied to myself, you don't know the meaning of true love if you think it can be deliberately selected. You just love, that's all. A natural force. Irresistible. He fell in love with the lioness at first sight - coup de foudre." Chapter 18, p. 258.

"All the major tasks and the big conquests were done before my time. That left the biggest problem of all, which was to encounter death.... And it's the destiny of my generation of Americans to go out into the world and try to find the wisdom of life. It just is. Why the hell do you think I'm out here, anyway?...I wouldn't agree to the death of my soul." Chapter 19, p. 276-7.

"I had a voice that said, I want! *I* want? I? It should have told me *she* wants, *he* wants, *they* want. And moreover, its love that makes reality. The opposite makes the opposite." Chapter 19, p.277.

"All you hear from guys is desire, desire, desire, knocking its way out of the breast, and fear, striking and striking. Enough already! Time for a word of truth. Time for something notable to be heard. Otherwise, accelerating like a stone, you fall from life to death. Exactly like a stone, straight into deafness, and till the last repeating *I want, I want, I want*, then striking the earth and entering it forever!" Chapter 20, p. 297.

"Hell, we'll never get away from rhythm, Romilayu. I wish my dead days would quit bothering me and leave me alone. The bad stuff keeps coming back, and it's the worst rhythm there is. The repetition of a man's bad self, that's the worst suffering that's ever been known." Chapter 22, p. 328.

Adaptations

Henderson the Rain King, itself informed by many and disparate literary and cultural sources, has itself been adapted as an opera, Lily. Leon Kirchner's 1977 score treats only the first third of the novel. One emphasis in this manifestation of Bellow's narrative is on the woman for whom Henderson so joyfully learns to express his love, having realized how much his love for her centers his life. Kirchner, affected by the war in Vietnam and concurrent concerns about American imperialism in developing countries, focuses on Henderson's failure with the Arnewi rather than following the novel's emphasis on the process of Henderson's recovery at the Wariri village.

Key Questions

Almost any discussion of Henderson the Rain King will focus on the protagonist and Bellow's ways of guiding readers in their evaluation of him. The first several questions narrow that topic, then the others suggest other directions by which readers may enjoy other aspects of the novel.

1. Why do you suppose Bellow, whose other novels are so richly immersed in Jewish-American culture, selects Handel's Messiah as Henderson's "subtext"?

2. Would you characterize Henderson as a hero, an antihero, a comic figure, or a character out of popular rather than "serious" literature? Why?

3. Does Henderson's apparent neglect of, or indifference toward, his children compromise his role as the hero of this narrative?

4. How do you feel about Henderson's conflicted roles as a son? Consider both the breach with his father and Henderson's playing the violin as a way to communicate with him.

5. Do you think the reconciliation with Lily will last? Why, or why not?

6. Would you go to a medical doctor you knew as well as you know Henderson?

7. Trace the elements of the political conspiracy among the Wariri tribe. How do these conspiracies relate to the theme of Euro-American colonialism?

8. Is Willatale wise? Or is she merely telling Henderson the obvious? Does his delight in her wisdom come from the content of what she says or Henderson's receptivity toward hearing things he wants to hear?

9. How does Bellow lead us to characterize Dahfu, surely the other great character of Henderson the Rain King? Is he a genius? A truly original thinker? A life force gone imprudent? A madman? Can two of more of these categories describe a single literary character?

Topics for Discussion

To what extent is Dahfu correct that all imagination can be converted into actuality?

Are there limits on this ability? To what extent does Dahfu experience them in his own lifetime?

Discuss whether peoples' inside emotions and character are reflected in their physical appearance. To what extent is this true for characters in the novel? Is Henderson's physical appearance an accurate refection of his nature?

Henderson seems to suggest that longing is one of the few characteristics that separates humans from animals. Discuss whether you believe this.

Discuss issues of "good" and "bad" in the novel - Do you think the Arnewi or the Wariri tribe is inherently more "good"? Into which category would Dahfu fall? What about Henderson?

Do you believe that the author's depiction of Africa and Africans is racist? Why or why not?

Henderson believes that he may not be fit for human company, based on the Biblical prophecy of Daniel, "*They shall drive thee from among men and thy dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field*." Discuss Henderson's relationship with animals in the novel. What role do animals play in Henderson's problems and in his quest for reality?

Is Henderson's assertion that he has a "soldierly temperament" an accurate one? Discuss what Henderson meant by this phrase, and why it is or isn't true.

Reread Henderson's description of the deaths of Lily's father, Henderson's brother and Dahfu. What trends emerge in these depictions of death, and what does it reveal about Henderson's changing feelings about death?

Literary Precedents

An element central to Bellow's humor in Henderson the Rain King involves a subtle balance between allusion and parody. As many observers have suggested, the military disposition, the insistence on going to Africa, the claim to a soldier's honor, and even the protagonist's initials suggest that to some degree Bellow is evoking the image of Ernest Hemingway. Hemingway, one of the major writers of the generation preceding Bellow's, liked to write about existential confrontations in which the hero (always male) finds his meaning by acting courageously, with his integrity intact despite the overwhelming odds fate stacks against him.

Writing in MidAmerica (1988), scholar David Anderson points out several other parallels between Hemingway's final African safari, in 1953, which attracted worldwide attention because of an airplane crash in which Hemingway was feared lost, and incidents in Bellow's novel. One other episode may involve a direct allusion to Hemingway's work as well. A section of his autobiographical The Green Hills of Africa (1935) describes the Masai tribe, who refuse to eat their cattle and get their protein from mixing the cattle's blood, which they extracted delicately from the living animals, with milk from the same animals. It is likely that Bellow, a voracious reader intent on critiquing the egocentrism of the Hemingway hero's quest (which always results in increased alienation as the price of integrity whereas Bellow wants to focus on human solidarity), had the Masai tribe Hemingway describes in mind when he created the loveable Arnewi.

Cartoonist Edgar Rice Burroughs created decades of popular culture entertainments, leading to commercially successful films and television series, in which a European interacts with African peoples, albeit usually as a ruler, leader, or savior. Bellow parodies the assumptions about European colonialism found in the Tarzan comic strips (in one series, Tarzan, by a feat of strength, becomes the king of an African tribe much as Henderson becomes the rain king by lifting the heaviest Wariri statue) when his bungling hero makes incorrect assumptions about the cultural and technological sophistication of the Wariri, as well as when he fails to connect Arnewi cultural mores with the tribal wisdom discussed earlier in this essay. It is not Henderson's learning courage that brings him to authenticity but rather his accepting his own and others' radical imperfection and connectedness.

Since the publication of James Atlas's Bellow: A Biography (2000) substantial documentary evidence has confirmed the extensive reading in African anthropology Bellow did at Northwestern University and its probable impact on the creation of Henderson the Rain King. One of his mentors, Melville J. Herskovits, was writing The Myth of the Negro Past while Bellow studied with him; later, his undergraduate thesis concerned an Eskimo tribe that starved rather than eat foods forbidden by their gods, much as the Arnewi refuse to drink water with living animals in it. In his 1981 work, Eusebio Rodrigues makes a compellingly detailed case that Bellow drew on Sir Richard Burton's A Mission to Gelele the King of Dahomey, John Roscoe's The Souls of Central Africa, and Herskovits's The Cattle Complex in West Africa for details about Henderson's venture, and especially the brief episode among the Arnewi. Joni Adamson

Clarke in the Saul Bellow Journal (1991) advances the thesis, perhaps less persuasive than the documentable debts to cultural anthropology but nonetheless intriguing, that Bellow draws upon the Trickster figure central to African folklore in his creation of Henderson.

At this point, this essay has discussed a major American writer, popular culture, anthropology, and esoteric philosophy as backgrounds for Henderson, but perhaps the most important resonance is one of the greatest novels of the end of the Colonial period, Joseph Conrad's Heart of Darkness (1899). It could be said that Henderson the Rain King is a modern, postcolonial, response to Conrad's very pessimistic narrative of an exceptional man (Kurtz) driven to savagery by his stay in the Congo, during which time he succumbs to megalomania because the natives deify him. Henderson is not an exceptional man; he lacks Kurtz's demonstrated talents for journalism, oratory, trading, and philanthropy. He is rather a lucky man but one whose good fortune in life has not been enough to give him a positive sense of his own worth. When he arrives at the Arnewi village, however, he acts as if he has claimed the role of an exceptional person, absurdly exhibiting a manual of arms to weeping villagers and assuming that there "must be something that only I can do." As we have seen, his assumption of being exceptional derives from his carrying with him Euro-American culture, and in this way too he resembles Kurtz.

Henderson, however, fails in his effort to save the Arnewi and leaves a trail of disaster behind him, one in which he departs the village a shunned, not a revered, figure because he failed to understand the relation between their religion and their value system. His encounter with the Wariri is almost an exact inversion of Kurtz's adventure in the Congo. Instead of being acclaimed, Henderson is captured, interrogated, and placed in a hut with a dead man. Instead of receiving royal or godlike treatment as a result of his European culture, Henderson is tricked into accepting a role in Dahfu's shaky cabinet because he is strong enough to lift the former rain king (he would have been strangled if he could not perform this feat) and the ceremonial goddess Mummah.

As a result, he is entrapped in a role whose complications are not explained to him until immediately before his best friend's death—Dahfu helped the Wariri trick Henderson into the ceremonial position that would succeed the king, and Henderson finally figures out (too late to do anything except run) that the Bunam and his party have set him up to be a figurehead king until they can strangle him because they know that he cannot live up to the potency required for Wariri royalty.

At the heart of Bellow's intention, however, is not a mockery or parody of Conrad's colonial narrative but a repudiation of its implications. It is precisely because the Wariri deceive and use Henderson that he can realize his potential for spiritual and personal growth. He learns humility and love through his experience in the African interior, rather than the arrogance and savagery that emerged from Mr. Kurtz's unconscious. The result is that Henderson indeed may return as an exceptional man, one who has the will to choose his life and dedicate it to service. In a sense, Henderson the Rain King could be subtitled "Heart of Light," for Bellow's picaresque hero is stripped of his cultural

arrogance when the female general makes him undress to run the course and bring the rain. He learns the value of his own culture by appreciating others.

Related Titles

The Masai tribe described in Ernest Hemingway's The Green Hills of Africa (1935) can be seen as a model for Bellow's Arnewi.

The assumptions about European colonialism found in the Tarzan comic strips of Edgar Rice Burroughs are parodied in Bellow's novel.

Among the sources in cultural anthropology that Bellow may have drawn upon are Sir Richard Burton's A Mission to Gelele the King of Dahomey, John Roscoe's The Souls of Central Africa, and Herskovits's The Cattle Complex in West Africa.

Joseph Conrad's Heart of Darkness (1899), one of the greatest novels of the end of the Colonial period, presents ideas that contrast with those in Bellow's novel.

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