Herzog Study Guide

Herzog by Saul Bellow

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Contents

Introduction

After its publication in 1964, *Herzog* became a bestseller, cementing Saul Bellow's reputation with the public□as well as the critics□as one of the most important American writers of the twentieth century. The novel won the National Book Award for fiction and earned Bellow the International Literary Prize, honoring him as the first American recipient. The novel has won praise for its penetrating, sometimes humorous, portrait of a middle-aged man searching for meaning and selfhood in the anxietyridden America of the 1960s.

The novel is a series of fragmented reflections, often revealed in an epistolary, or letter, format. Moses Herzog, the main character, becomes obsessed with writing letters to "everyone under the sun," living or deceased, including his family, friends, enemies, and historical figures. Over the past few months, he has experienced a spiritual and emotional paralysis, triggered by the breakup of his marriage and his contemplation of the wasteland of modern life, "down in the mire of post-Renaissance, post-humanistic, post-Cartesian dissolution, next door to the void." In the letters, Herzog examines and evaluates various philosophical theories, recalls fond images of his childhood, apologizes to ignored friends and lovers, and especially berates those, like his wife and her lover, who have caused his suffering. Seymour Epstein, in his article on Bellow for *The Denver Quarterly*, notes that the letters reflect a need "to feel a passionate faith in some higher order, intelligence, or idea that will do as medium through which one can seek transcendence."

During the course of the novel, Herzog is forced to cope with his sense of alienation and displacement as he analyzes his past and tries to determine his future. By the end of the novel, his search has resulted in a tenuous, but nevertheless satisfying, restoration of his faith in himself and in humanity.

Author Biography

Saul Bellow was born in Lachine, Quebec, Canada, in 1915, the youngest of four children, to Russian immigrant parents. He and his family later moved to the Rachel Market section of Montreal and then to Chicago. The feelings of dislocation he would experience in his youth emerged as a dominant theme in *Herzog* and in many of his other works. Another theme that would surface in his works was a questioning of religion. Bellow was raised as an orthodox Jew but rejected that background during his college years. In 1937, he earned a degree with honors in anthropology and sociology from Northwestern University. During World War II, he served in the merchant Marines. His first novel, *Dangling Man*, was critically acclaimed when it was published in 1944, as was his next novel, *The Victim*, which was published in 1947.

After winning a Guggenheim Fellowship in 1948, Bellow lived in Europe for two years, where he wrote *The Adventures of Augie March*, which along with his later novels, *Herzog* and *Mr. Sammler's Planet* (1970), won the National Book Award for fiction. *The Adventures of Augie March*, along with the novels that followed, earned him popular as well as critical acclaim. In 1965, he became the first American recipient of the International Literary Prize, for *Herzog*□which became a bestseller in America. In 1968, France awarded him the Croix de Chevalier des Arts et Lettres. Bellow was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for his novel *Humboldt's Gift*, published in 1975. His highest award came in October of 1976, when he received the Nobel Prize for literature.

Bellow has taught at Boston University, New York University, Princeton, University of Chicago, Oxford, and Yale. He continues his literary endeavors, including his highly praised novel, *Ravelstein*, published in 2000.

Plot Summary

Part I

Herzog opens with Moses Herzog at his country house in Ludeyville, Massachusetts, in the Berkshires, in midsummer. He is described by the narrator as having "fallen under a spell," and as a result has been writing letters to "everyone under the sun," including family□dead and alive□friends, exfriends, and historical figures. While there, he thinks back over his life, focusing especially on the past few months. His memories of this short period make up the narrative of the rest of the novel until the story returns, at the end, to the present time, with Herzog in Ludeyville. He has recently learned that his ex-wife, Madeleine, is living with his friend Valentine Gersbach and that the two had been lovers while she and Herzog were still married. Herzog writes the letters because of his overwhelming need "to explain, to have it out, to justify, to put in perspective, to clarify, to make amends."

The first line of the novel is given to Herzog, as he admits, "If I am out of my mind, it's all right with me." The narrator notes that some people thought he was "cracked" and "though he still behaved oddly, he felt confident, cheerful, clairvoyant, and strong." He soon goes back in time to the beginning of his "trouble" a few months ago, when he had been teaching classes in New York City. Gradually he noticed his mind starting to wander during class. He then shifts back further into his past, reviewing his life and the choices he has made. In the past, he was considered to be a noted scholar, but "his ambitious projects had dried up," including a study on romanticism.

His memory then turns to his relationship with Madeleine. He claims that he quit his teaching position to write, after encouragement from her, and so he buys the house in the country. There they meet Valentine and his wife, Phoebe. Herzog claims that soon, "Madeleine considered herself too young, too intelligent, too vital, too sociable to be buried in the remote Berkshires" and so convinced Herzog to move to Chicago, where she could finish her graduate studies in Slavonic languages. In Chicago, Herzog returns to teaching. One year later, Madeleine announces that she wants a divorce.

Feeling that he is "going to pieces" after the divorce, Herzog first moves to Europe for six months and then returns to New York. There he meets and begins a relationship with Ramona, an attractive businesswoman, who is a student in one of his classes. Although Herzog considers her to be "full of charm," "problems" soon develop. She quickly becomes serious about him, but Herzog is annoyed by her frequent lectures on his sterling capabilities and his future.

Part II

Herzog decides to take a break from Ramona and his thoughts about Madeleine and spend some time with friends in Martha's Vineyard. However, his depression throws him

into an agitated state, and he immediately returns to New York. There, he receives a letter from a former student who is now working as a babysitter for Madeleine. The student writes that one night she found Junie, his daughter, locked in a car outside Madeleine's house while she and Valentine were arguing inside. Crying and shaking, Junie explained that Valentine had put her there.

Deeply concerned for his daughter's welfare, Herzog asks Simkin, his lawyer, to help him gain custody of her. Simkin, however, warns him that he would most likely fail in his attempts to get his daughter away from her mother. Herzog's frustration turns into a rage against Madeleine and Valentine "so great and deep, so murderous, bloody, positively rapturous, that his arms and fingers ache to strangle them."

When Herzog appears at the city courthouse where he is scheduled to meet Simkin, he sits in on a few court cases that are being tried that day. As he watches testimony about a mother who beat her son to death, he becomes incensed and runs out of the courtroom. He determines that "New York could not hold him now," and so flies to Chicago to see his daughter and to confront Madeleine and Gersbach.

As soon as he arrives in Chicago, he goes to his father's house, where he reminisces with his stepmother, Tante Taube. He remembers that at one point his father had wanted to shoot Herzog because of his "look of conceit or proud trouble. The elite look." He soon leaves with his father's pistol in his pocket.

At Madeleine's house, he watches Gersbach tenderly giving his daughter a bath. As a result, his anger dissipates, and he insists, "firing this pistol was nothing but a thought." At this point, he realizes "only self hatred could lead him to ruin himself because his heart was 'broken.'" Not yet giving up on his plans to get custody of Junie, he tries to convince Phoebe to sue her husband for a divorce, offering evidence of his adulterous relationship with Madeleine. He insists that together "we could nail them." Phoebe, however, refuses to help him, and suggests he "get away from this now."

After leaving Phoebe, Herzog picks up his daughter and spends the afternoon with her. Their time together is cut short, however, when they get into a car accident. At the scene, the police find his father's gun in his shirt and take him to the police station, where they book him for a misdemeanor. When they call Madeleine down to the station to pick up Junie, the police ask her whether Herzog has given her any trouble. Madeleine replies that while he has never physically harmed her, he has a terrible temper and his psychiatrist has warned her about him.

Part III

After the police determine that Herzog poses no threat to Madeleine, they put him in a cell until his brother, Will, comes to bail him out. He then decides to leave Chicago and go to his house in the Berkshires, which he considers fixing up and selling. There, he begins to experience a measure of contentment as he determines that he has freed himself of his "servitude to Madeleine." Beginning his final week of letter writing, Herzog

writes to his son, Marco, asking him to come for a visit. When Will arrives, he tries to convince Herzog to spend some time in a mental hospital, but Herzog assures him that he is finally finding some peace.

Ramona soon arrives in a neighboring town looking for Herzog. When she calls, he invites her for dinner, even though it "troubled him slightly." As he waits for her, he determines, "I am pretty well satisfied to be ... just as it is willed," for "whatever had come over him during these last months, the spell, really seemed to be passing, really going." The novel concludes on the note that "at this time he had no messages for anyone. Nothing. Not a single word."

Chapter 1

Chapter 1 Summary

The setting for this story is an unstable one. Moses Herzog moves from town to town with his many relationships, jobs and wives. His work life is in a downward spiral thanks to his recent ex-wife, Madeleine. She insisted when they married that Herzog quit teaching and move to the country. When this did not make her happy, they moved to Chicago so Herzog could teach again. Madeleine insisted they take their neighbors, the Gersbachs, with them. One year later, Madeleine divorced Herzog and began a relationship with Valentine Gersbach.

Herzog teaches college level courses in Romanticism and receives grants to continue his studies. He received $15,000 over several years to finish a paper on Romanticism and Christianity. When the story takes place, Herzog's paper is in the bottom of his closet, unfinished.

Herzog is slowly becoming detached from reality. The author uses letters to show the reader that he lives mostly in his head. This detachment, and Herzog's feelings that someone else is taking over his body, mind and life sends him to the doctor. The doctor feels Herzog needs to relax and wants to prescribe sleeping pills. Herzog refuses all the doctor's suggestions but one, a vacation.

Herzog decides to call an old friend, Libby Vane. Libby and he had once considered having an affair but decided against it. They remain good friends instead. Libby tells Herzog he can stay as long as he likes. He feels awkward about this but accepts the invitation anyway. He even gets new clothes that are "light" in color and weight for his vacation. Herzog wants to fit into the relaxed lifestyle, and maybe he will actually feel relaxed.

Chapter 1 Analysis

Moses Elkanah Herzog's story takes place in third person narrative. The narrator only has insight into Herzog's feelings and actions. The novel takes place in the main character's mind, and also in New York City, which echoes his fast-paced feelings and erratic emotions. The reader learns of Herzog's fragile mental state early on. Herzog has many conversations in his mind in the form of letters to other characters, especially characters to whom he should be speaking directly or who are dead.

Saul Bellow places his audience inside the mind of Moses Herzog, who is not a stable man. This is demonstrated in several ways. His love life, his location, his professional life and his mind are all unstable. Herzog often holds complete conversations in his mind when he should be having them with the person in front of him. He is also not sure that he controls his mind.

Bellow makes Herzog's character very interesting through the use of letters he writes to people in his head and on scrap pieces of paper. This gives the audience two stories to follow. One is the narrative, the storyline from beginning to end, and the other is the story within the lines of these letters and conversations.

Herzog intellectual life coincides with his personal life in an interesting fashion. The author tells the audience that Herzog is a professor of Romanticism at the same time Bellow describes Herzog's love life. Both seem to be crashing at the same time, and both are scattered, from Herzog's many lovers to the paper scraps on which he write his thoughts. This adds depth to the novel by mirroring its' theme.

It is important to look at the theme and setting in a novel. Herzog is the main focus of this novel. His character is used to develop both the theme and the setting. Herzog is a romantic, depressed person, and Romanticism and Depression are two themes in this novel. The setting takes place within Herzog's mind and his recollections of relationships, people and places. He focuses on his love life and mental condition, which mirrors the theme and setting.

Chapter 2

Chapter 2 Summary

Herzog is off to the beachfront property of his friend Libby Vane. She is on the honeymoon of her third marriage. She insists Herzog come and stay as long as he likes. This chapter takes place during his journey to the property by cab and train.

As Herzog rides out of the city, he remembers many people and conversations. He remembers visiting his mother-in-law, Tennie, and buying her cigars at the corner store. Tennie has been divorced from her husband, but they maintain a relationship. Tennie's apartment is filled with awards from her ex-husband's accomplishments. Tennie thought their relationship was a good one and wonders why Herzog quit visiting her. She sends Simkin, her lawyer, with a message of her disappointment.

Herzog also recalls Valentine Gersbach's visit to Herzog's house with his daughter, June, after he returned from Europe. Gersbach took him to a motel on the other side of town. Herzog was unable to visit his family the next day because of a blizzard. Instead, Herzog sought out Madeleine's Aunt Zelda, with whom he also had a very good relationship. He is not sure he should trust her any longer. She has Madeleine's interests at heart and Herzog is leery of women in general. Aunt Zelda tells Herzog she and her husband are still his friends, and that she will keep an eye on his daughter.

Herzog writes to Aunt Zelda on the train and many others, people he knows personally and people he doesn't know. He even starts a letter to the president to state his worries about the current situation of overpopulation.

The most informative letter is the one written to Dr. Edvig. Herzog is positive Dr. Edvig has played a part in his divorce. Madeleine, Valentine and the doctor had all suggested to Herzog he become religious, something Herzog had never been. Herzog investigated religion, especially the writings of Jewish theologian, Martin Buber. Exemplifying Buber's ideas in *I and Thou,* he believes they all made Herzog an object instead of a person, a soul. Herzog forgives Madeleine for this, but he does not forgive the doctor, whom he had trusted.

Chapter 2 Analysis

In the letter to his psychiatrist, the audience realizes Herzog is either more than a little paranoid or Madeleine is a bit mentally unstable as well.

Although the narrator is removed from Herzog, Herzog is a narrator as well. Both voices are important to the novel. The audience plays a different role with each voice. The audience is active in their role with third person narrative. They are being told a story. The audience plays an inactive role in the first person narrative of Herzog's character.

Bellow removes the audience from Herzog's narrative. By doing this, the author accomplishes two views into the main character.

It is interesting that Herzog has better relationships with his ex-in-laws than he does with his own family. The author hints at the bad feelings Herzog harbors about his family before he goes to visit Madeleine's Aunt Zelda. This also suggests how this man might have developed into an unstable character. The audience can expect to read more about these relationships. This is a foreshadowing technique.

Bellow develops doubt in his story by introducing parts of Madeleine's mental instability. Madeleine often ordered furniture and other things they could not afford and later forgot she had done so. Knowing this, the audience is unsure of which character to believe. Were Valentine and Madeleine trying to get rid of Herzog by causing him to second-guess his mental stability? Or is the main character of Herzog really distrustful of other people as part of his depression?

Chapter 3

Chapter 3 Summary

Herzog composes more letters as he continues his trip to his friend's house. He starts a letter to Ramona, his current lover. He would love to marry her, but his two failed marriages hold him back. He also starts a letter to a woman named Zinka, another one of Herzog's lovers.

Herzog remembers reviewing a paper by a man named Shapiro. Herzog thought his paper to be simple and repetitive. Herzog wonders in his letter to Shapiro if the intellectual world has come to a stopping point, if "they" are not ready for the next great "development" in thought and teaching.

Shapiro had visited Madeleine and Herzog in the country while the Gersbachs were there as well. Shapiro and Madeleine hit it off as they talked of Madeleine's studies. This made Herzog uncomfortable, for he often dismissed his wife's intellectual life. He saw how stimulated his wife became while talking with someone who appreciated her knowledge and intelligence. Meanwhile, Herzog hints to the audience that Shapiro and Madeleine had a false intelligence. They were simply repeating other scholars' discoveries.

In contrast, Herzog experienced what he thought was true intelligence with his friend Sandor, with whom he stayed in Europe after his divorce. Sandor tells Herzog he is a "*mensch,*" unlike Madeleine and his other egghead friends. Sandor knew other members of Herzog's family, and they were all successful. He had confidence Herzog would be okay. He told him to "get over it" and get on with his life. His imminent guest status at Libby's house reminds him that this conversation happened the last time he was anyone's houseguest.

When Herzog finally arrives and sees Libby, he immediately knows it was a mistake to come. Maybe, he thinks, he only needed the long train ride to sort things out in his head. He tells Libby he is going to leave, and she tells him he's crazy. Libby introduces Moses to her new husband, who is very welcoming. Herzog has a drink with him, and then goes to rest in the guestroom. He waits until the house is quiet and escapes through the side door to catch a plane home. Before long, Herzog is in his own bed.

Herzog reads a letter he keeps by his bedside before he goes to sleep. This letter is from one of his old students, Geraldine Portray. In the letter, she tells him she regularly watches June, Herzog's daughter, in Chicago. She wrote to inform him that Valentine had left June in the car while he and Madeleine fought. She thought a father had a right to know such things.

Chapter 3 Analysis

Herzog's mind and letters seem very random and scattered. The audience sees that the main character has a sense of humor in his letter to Commissioner Wilson. This humor also surfaces when he starts a letter to himself. Herzog also reveals his self-doubt here. He makes fun of his interest in social politics. Herzog's letters become increasingly irrational as he approaches his destination.

It is becoming clear that Herzog does not believe in the value of his intellectual life, despite his lifelong dedication to his studies and teaching. What does this leave Herzog besides emptiness? This gives the audience an *existential* character. It should now be apparent that Herzog disconnects himself from everyone in his life. He is disconnected from other intellectuals because of his distrust in the reality of the field. Herzog believes all the intellectuals simply claim the ideas of real geniuses as their own. Herzog is disconnected from lay people such as Sandor because of his intellectual life. Moses allows himself to become alienated from his family. Madeleine has a restraining order that prevents him from coming close to the house or June. , Herzog believes his other ex-wife, Daisy, to be a wonderful mother to his son and chooses to stay away from this relationship. He doesn't want to interrupt his son's stable life.

Chapter 4

Chapter 4 Summary

The morning after Herzog returns from his trip to Libby's house, he starts a letter to Monsignor Hilton, the priest who had converted Madeleine. In Herzog's letter to the monsignor, he tells how Madeleine would change her appearance when she would went to church. She would dress in serious clothes and put on heavy makeup. Madeleine wanted to get away from her parents' bohemian roots.

When Herzog purchased the house in the country for Madeleine to settle down and raise their family, the house took over his waking hours. Everything in the house was falling apart, and he had to tend to it. He was no longer getting any writing or research done. Herzog and Madeleine often fought about money and lifestyle. To Madeleine, social status was important, even if it was a lie.

Herzog recalls his one-year teaching stint in Pittsburgh. He rode the train from Pittsburgh to New York to visit his son, Marco. He was still married to Daisy and sleeping with both Madeleine and Sono, a Japanese woman who lived in Pittsburgh. Before these visits, Herzog would memorize facts of the Civil War to engage his son and attempt to be a good father.

Herzog could see that his son sympathized with him. He accepted this gift of from his father, for he had nothing else to offer the suffering man. Herzog knows his children love him, and he loves them, but he questions what he has to offer them.

Herzog remembers sympathizing with his own father's life when he was a child. On Napoleon Street where Moses grew up, he remembers his father was desperate. J. Herzog was an illegal citizen who had failed numerous jobs ranging from his wife's family business to bootlegging.

J. Herzog had a sister named Zipporah who was very critical of her brother's pursuits and life style. She and her family were successful financially but were not generous with their wealth. Zipporah felt she would be supporting her brother's poor decisions if she supported him with money. She judged him for letting his small children play and learn things such as musical instruments. Zipporah wanted her nephews to earn money for the household. In contrast, J. Herzog and his wife wanted their children to grow up thinking they could be more than laborers. Zipporah saw that Sarah, J. Herzog's wife, had lofty goals for her children and held her responsible for her brother's failures.

Herzog remembers one of his father's bootlegging pursuits. The deal and gone bad, and J. Herzog was beaten and his booze stolen from him before he could make any money. Moses remembered his father arriving at their home on Napoleon Street bruised and broken from his failure. His father cried at his failure, and so did the rest of the family. His wife told him he had to give it up, saying "You must." Herzog will always carry this

dark memory of his father and his family with him. Herzog's "king" had fallen. He had never loved and hurt as much as he did that day.

Chapter 4 Analysis

Bellow uses the phrase "the realm of facts and that of values are not eternally separate" to explore Herzog's character and others throughout the book. Madeleine's struggle with religion showcases this idea. Madeleine seeks to escape her parents' unconventional lifestyle and live within the boundaries of the Catholic faith. She is shameful when she, sleeps with Herzog before they are married, despite the warning from the dogma of the church. The physical love she shares with Moses darkens her bright ideals for herself.

In Herzog's life, Bellow plays with the idea of fact and reality meeting and not meeting. Herzog's intellectual life dives when he and Madeleine purchase a country house that requires Herzog to spend hours fixing it. At the heart of the main character's life, there is conflict when reality meets ideals and values. Herzog moved to the country to raise a family and work on his studies, but ends up working on his property as his marriage starts to crumble instead.

Bellow also uses this common idea as a theme within the stories of Herzog's youth. Mrs. Herzog wants her children to grow up playing musical instruments and having nice things. Herzog's sister always wore long white gloves. These things did not match their living situation on Napoleon Street. Their family was poor, but had a piano in their small home. The children sent to school and music lessons when they should have done manual labor. Mrs. Herzog's ideals stretched to meet her family's social reality. His mother's story emphasizes the depth of this theme of reality versus value in Herzog's life.

Chapter 5

Chapter 5 Summary

Herzog receives a phone call from Ramona, his current lover. She wants to know if he is running away from her. One of Ramona's friends saw Herzog at Grand Central Station with his valise. Ramona tells Herzog that his instincts returned him to her. She invites Herzog to dinner and after some convincing, he accepts.

As Herzog prepares for his night with Ramona, the narrative reveals more of their history. Ramona has been the best thing to happen to Herzog since his relationship with Sono, his Japanese lover. Sono used to bath and feed Herzog in her home, which she decorated in remembrance of her home in the Far East. Herzog ultimately could not accept the happiness Sono had brought him. He is not yet ready to accept this from Ramona either. He still mourns the loss of his relationship with Madeleine. Ramona thinks Madeleine was very disrespectful to Herzog's great character and has no respect for her. Ramona wants to marry Herzog, pamper him, allow him to continue his studies and make him into the man she thinks he can be.

While Herzog prepares for his date, he writes a letter to Harris Pulver, a tutor of Herzog's in 1939, and suggests an idea for a research paper. He states the time is right for an essay on the "inspired condition." Individuality, Herzog believes, is calling an inspired condition. This condition is no longer for kings and nobility. It is now for everyone. It presents itself in so many ways in individuals that it is impossible to deny. "Each to change his life, to change!" Is this the idea that Herzog's intellectual life revolves around? Herzog craves it in both his private and intellectual lives. This is the change he would like to present in his studies in Romantics. Each person can be inspired in their own way, and it doesn't have to be through familiar methods such as drugs or erotic behaviors. It can be attained in positive ways as well. Herzog would like the intellectual world to embrace this change and progress to a new level of intellectualism. Herzog believes they must accept this train of thought before they can move forward.

Herzog and Ramona enjoy their evening together. She makes Herzog happy with her beauty and pampering. She provides an enormous meal and engages Herzog in conversation. Herzog insists that he do the dishes. Ramona does not want him to, but he says that he enjoys it. Ramona is very good at entertaining men in her home. They end the night by making love, and they are both happy and satisfied.

Chapter 5 Analysis

Herzog's character battles with the difference between his ideals and reality throughout the book. When he presents his idea for a research paper to Pulver, the audience sees

how Herzog desires to bring his values and reality together. All Bellow's character's face this struggle.

It is interesting to note that Herzog, a professor of Romantics, cannot stay in a successful, romantic relationship even when one like his relationship with Ramona falls in his lap, His relationship with also exemplifies how Herzog cannot accept true love. Instead, he accepts love from a woman who doesn't know love. She knows the ideas and intellect of love. She also knows how to hurt people with the love they give her. Herzog does not know how to obtain the reality of love, even if he accepts that it exists. That love reveals the truth. Love, or the "inspired condition," ultimately *is* truth. What questions does Bellow present to his audience with the use of this conflicted character? Why can't Herzog accept the truth in his personal life as the same truth he finds within his intellectual life?

Bellow's use of symbolism is particularly apparent here. Both Sono and Ramona are very maternal. This symbol appears in Sono's use of the bath. Bellow also made Ramona and Sono very good cooks. Ramona's profession as a florist is symbolic as well, implying that she is matronly and connected to the earth. Madeleine is mainly described as very rigid and dressed in drab clothing. These symbols add to the depth of the characters.

Chapter 6

Chapter 6 Summary

Herzog wakes in Ramona's apartment. They walk to Ramona's flower shop. Herzog is happy with Ramona and her looks. He does not hold back and kisses her passionately in the street before she goes to work. Herzog's past still consumes him, and he goes to seek advice from his lawyer, Simkin.

Simkin is enraged with Madeleine and Gersbach's actions toward Herzog. Herzog feels Gersbach has stolen his wife, child, style and career from him. The child abuse accusations and their theft of Herzog's practical life give Simkin motivation to sue them.

Herzog plans a visit to his son, Marco, on the school's Parent's Day. He has not enjoyed this in the past, but he wants to spend time with his son. His ex-wife, Daisy, could also use the break having fallen on hard times herself. She is unhappily caring for her elderly mother and her young son. Her mother, Polina, thinks she is a prostitute and this is why Herzog left her. Daisy is actually a statistician for a large company. Polina's continual pleas for Daisy to do something good with her life instead of being a hooker cause Daisy significant stress.

After washing at home, Herzog catches a cab with a driver who had spotted him earlier that day kissing Ramona. Herzog gets out at the courthouse to meet Simkin. He is early and he waits in a courtroom where the judge is hearing pleas. Herzog is overwhelmed as he connects with these people and feels as though he is going to die. He leaves to breathe some air and call Simkin.

Simkin is still in trial, and Herzog wanders into another room where there is a jury trial in progress. The woman on trial was abused as a child and is accused of killing her son. He hears the incriminating evidence against her and is so appalled by the violence that he has to leave the courtroom again.

Herzog feels so much pain in this emotional time that he is reminded of his father's heart attack. This thought of death forces Herzog to remember his childishness during his mother's illness and impending death. Herzog was sixteen when his mother passed. At the time, he was reading philosophy and building himself into an intellectual. He avoided his mother during her illness until her last day, when he watched her die.

Chapter 6 Analysis

It is interesting how Hegel's philosophy plays out within the lines of the novel. Herzog wants to find synthesis, or a new *truth* within his studies. He desires for there to be an intellectual shift by combining the current state, or thesis, with an opposite state, antithesis, to birth a new truth, or synthesis. Herzog is bored within the current intellectual world. He believes his colleagues are rehashing existing schools of thought.

He longs for something new and exciting. He longs for people to think for themselves and discover their own truths.

This does not differ from what Herzog wants within the walls of his personal life. He wants change. He feels as though he hides behind the work in his relationships instead of being involved directly in them. Ramona could change this for him, but he cannot fully participate in a relationship with her until he addresses his past with Madeleine. This tension of reality verses ideals appears again as the main theme in Herzog's personal and intellectual lives.

The setting is especially important in this chapter. Herzog is seen kissing Ramona in the street by a cabbie who later gives him a ride to the courthouse. The setting is New York City, and it is rather significant for the same person to see Herzog twice in one day. Herzog also makes a big impression on this driver during both encounters. First, the driver will not soon forget the kiss in the street because of its passion and Ramona's beauty in her red dress. Second, the driver notices Herzog's elegant, unique style when he waves down the cab. Bellow makes Herzog more interesting with these impressions. The audience is given the same main character in a different light. In the chapters before, the audience has sympathy toward this sorrowful man. In this chapter, Bellow shows that others might view him with envy and respect.

Chapter 7

Chapter 7 Summary

Herzog flies to Chicago to find Madeleine and Gersbach. His intentions are to take June, his daughter, back into his custody. He firsts visits his father's home where his stepmother, Taube, lives to claim the rubles his grandfather had bought during the Czarist period in Russia. He wants to give them to his son. During his talk with his stepmother, Herzog remembers a terrible fight he has with his father years ago. The older Herzog was unhappy with his son's life choices. Moses responded with a smug look, which so upset his father that he held a pistol to his son's head and ordered him out of the house. When Herzog claims the rubles out of his father's desk, he also takes the pistol. There are two bullets left.

Herzog leaves his stepmother and drives through the streets of Chicago. He describes the city as "stinky and tender." Chicago had been his home only two years ago. He does not know all the new streets, but he manages to find Madeleine's home. He sneaks through the backyard and looks in the windows. As Madeleine finishes the dishes, Gersbach gives June a bath. He seems to be very tender toward the girl. Herzog has the pistol with him but cannot shoot Gersbach. In fact, he cannot shoot anyone, a characteristic he obtained from his father

Herzog leaves the windows of Madeleine's house and drives to Phoebe Gersbach's house. He tries to convince her to divorce Valentine on charges of adultery, which would help Herzog get custody of June. Phoebe will have no part of this and insists she is happily married to her husband. She blames Herzog for her family's discontent. Herzog can see that Phoebe is in denial about her marriage. He gives her a tender sign of affection and leaves.

Lucas Asphalter is Herzog's good friend who lives in Chicago and teaches at the university. Asphalter had once tried to save his pet monkey through the use of C.P.R. The monkey had tuberculosis, and Asphalter had to get tested periodically to discover he had caught the disease. Herzog thinks his friend is crazy but understands that the monkey had meant everything to his friend.

Herzog stays with his friend, and Asphalter tries to discuss his discoveries of reality through the use of an existential psychological exercise where a person tries to imagine that he is dead. To his friend's disappointment, Herzog dismisses the idea, insisting that the only reality exists within the bonds of relationships, or Brotherhood.

Chapter 7 Analysis

The setting changes subtly when Herzog travels to another city. He describes Chicago as "clumsy, stinking" and "tender," which symbolizes his feelings toward the past. He

also has a hard time navigating within the changing city, which symbolizes his distance from his past.

In this chapter, the tempo of the story changes to one of thoughtful reflection. The familiar setting forces Herzog to remember his past. Herzog holds almost no bad feelings toward Madeleine or his father, and the audience now sees how the main character has grown throughout the novel. He is now interested in the truth of today. He only wants custody of his daughter. He does not want to torment Madeleine with a lawsuit. He only desires Phoebe to sue so he can get his daughter back.

As Herzog dismisses Asphalter's idea of truth through existential thought, he develops a new idea of truth. He now believes truth lies within the walls of real relationships. With this statement, Bellow succeeds in developing a thesis for the novel. The thesis is seeking brotherhood for truth. The author has developed a synthesis throughout the novel with the use of Hegel's philosophy. In this chapter, the audience sees the application of this philosophy, a new ideal of truth.

Chapter 8

Chapter 8 Summary

After sleeping on Asphalter's couch, Herzog meets June at the museum downtown. They are happy to see each other. Herzog asks June about her life. He notices that she gets physically upset when he mentions Gersbach. June tells him she is not supposed to talk about Gersbach, calling him her stepfather in front of Herzog for the first time. He tells June they will not speak of Uncle Val again, but and if they do, she will not be in trouble. June tells her father that his stories are better than Uncle Val's, and Herzog tells his daughter one of her favorite stories.

June tells her father she would like to go to the Aquarium. Herzog is anxious to please his young daughter and they go. When June tires, they leave the Aquarium to eat sandwiches. Herzog's rented car is rear-ended when they leave the parking lot. June is not hurt, but Herzog's side hurts and his head is bleeding. He tries to stay conscious, but he feels himself black out. When he comes to, the cops are there with June. Herzog remembers his father's gun is in his pocket.

The policemen ask him a series of questions and decide to take him downtown to the station because of the loaded gun. Herzog requests that June accompany him, and they agree. Herzog insists on calling Asphalter to retrieve his daughter. The police finally take his address book and call Madeleine.

Madeleine is very worried for June's safety and uses the opportunity to create more trouble for Moses. She tells the police that his psychiatrist said that Herzog's feelings toward her are dangerous, and she should stay away from him. Madeleine looks crazy as the officers ask more questions about Herzog. They decide it would be better if she took her daughter home. Herzog decides the next visit to his daughter would be a calm, pleasant one, not one filled with snegative emotion.

Herzog calls his brother, Will, to post bail. Will worries for his brother and makes him see his doctor before he heads back east. Will wants his brother to come to his home for a visit, but Herzog will not consider visiting the family in his condition. He would rather see them when he can get himself more together and makes plans for a visit the next weekend at his place in the Berkshires.

Chapter 8 Analysis

It is interesting to see the shift back to the more familiar Herzog. In the previous chapter, Herzog seemed more positive and willing to make his life change with the help of Ramona. In this chapter, when he returns to the city of his past, Herzog returns to his unlucky, sorrowful self, with good reason. The audience learns that a stranger had molested Herzog in a back alley in Chicago and paid him when he was through. Bellow gives his audience this significant piece of history late in the novel to bring more

understanding and depth to the main character. If the reader had not developed a feeling of sympathy for Herzog prior to this point, Bellow tries to develop it now. It leaves the audience to wonder what other horrible things about this character's life they do not know.

Herzog reverts back to his self-loathing character again when he judges himself while observing the many bail bondsmen waiting in the lobby of the police station to bail someone out. He decides for them that he is not worth the risk of their investment., Bellow shares with the audience Herzog's self-consciousness around his successful brother when Herzog calls his brother to bail him out instead. This leaves the audience with a sense of Herzog's loneliness, but this time it is colored with the love Herzog's family has for him. It gives opposition to the new thesis of brotherhood Herzog has just developed. Why won't he embrace this thesis in his practical life? Why *can't* he?

Chapter 9

Chapter 9 Summary

Herzog catches a plane from Chicago and heads to his place in the Berkshires. He brings matches to start a fire in the fireplace and looks around. He is happy to realize the youth of the community had used his room to make love. Herzog actually feels *joy* being at his house in the Berkshires. It is the first time he has felt free of Madeleine. He writes letters to his son and Ramona. He sends them to Luke in Chicago to have him post the letters for him. He doesn't want Ramona to worry about him.

Herzog composes a long letter to his colleague, Professor Mermelstein. Mermelstein has written a book that includes content from Herzog's book. He writes to his colleague to congratulate him and criticize him at the same time. He asks to have input on future edits to ensure his thoughts are correctly expressed. He also says Mermelstein has a "taste for metaphor," and calls on Mermelstein to make him into a metaphor as he has done so sophomorically with other philosophies and doctrines. Herzog proclaims he has always sought after the *truth* for himself and tried not to hide behind the dogmas of others.

Herzog begins his final week of letters. He writes to Nietzsche, Madeleine, Panama City about their rat problem and Dr. Zozo. Dr. Zozo was the naval psychiatrist during Herzog's service as a communications officer. He told Herzog he was immature over thirty years ago. Herzog still holds a grudge against this man and was physically angered when he and Ramona saw him at an art museum in New York.

Herzog continues to go through the house. He discovers that Madeleine has left every picture containing his image. He sets up a hammock and a couple of chairs. He also discovers the old piano and some green paint and decides to paint it and send it as a gift for June, who is very musically talented. Madeleine could not argue if he paid for the shipping. His brother, Will, had told him he could have as much money as he needed to make it through the summer.

Herzog shaves in the sink with laundry detergent and well water. Just after he finishes, his brother arrives to see how he is doing and what needs to be done to sell the place. Will thinks his brother looks pale. Moses assures him that he is fine and that he always looks pale after shaving.

Herzog is ready to give himself over to his brother and sister-in-law. He will go along with whatever they decide is best. He knows they may have already selected a psychiatrist and maybe even a psychiatric facility to care for him. Herzog is not going to argue with this decision. He wants to ease his family's worries about his condition and embrace the idea of true brotherhood.

As Will and Herzog are discussing what would be best, Ramona calls Herzog to tell him she is just eight miles away. She would like to see his place in the Berkshires and meet his brother. Will agrees to bring Moses into town to meet Ramona. Ramona demonstrates to Will how close she is to Herzog by touching him and instructing Herzog on her expectations when she arrives at his place later that afternoon.

Will and Herzog seek out Mrs. Tuttle to help get Moses' kitchen in working order for his company. Ramona blows Will away. He thinks she is beautiful and responsible. He decides to leave his brother in her capable hands and maybe visit on his way back from Boston.

Moses takes a short walk in the woods on his property after bidding is brother goodbye. After his walk, he washes up for Ramona as Mrs. Tuttle cleans his kitchen. Herzog rests as he listens to the meditative sweeps of her broom.

Chapter 9 Analysis

Bellow seems to place Herzog in the setting where the book started. The many letters Herzog composes mirrors those in the first chapter, except that they have become more focused and purposeful. Stating this will be the last week of letters, Bellow brings a sense of finality to both this chapter and the book.

The tranquil setting of the Berkshires reflects the tranquility of Herzog's mental state. He is no longer upset with Madeleine or Gersbach. He writes Gersbach a letter to tell him he is welcome to Madeline, which signals that this part of Herzog's life is over. Herzog has freed himself to love again.

Bellow again demonstrates Herzog's love for his children. He wants his son, Marco, to stay with him after his summer camp ends. The piano he paints for June is a green color that symbolizes his fresh outlook on life. Bellow gives his character a new characteristic by bringing him to the countryside.

Bellow creates *synthesis* within Herzog's life by placing in the setting in which he introduced the character to the audience. Herzog accepts the destruction, decay and skeletons of animals he finds on his rundown property. This is a great symbol for Herzog's finally acceptance of his past and present. With this, the audience is reminded of Hegel's philosophy of synthesis, which happens when an old idea and an opposite idea merge to form a new, fresh reality.

Bellow further expounds on this idea of synthesis his depiction of Herzog resting and enjoying his time before his pending visit with his new love at the end of the novel.

Characters

Luke Asphalter

Herzog's zoologist friend, who takes him in during his trouble with Madeleine, is "a good soul, with real heartaches." Luke is devastated by the death of his monkey, with whom he had formed a strong bond.

Phoebe Gersbach

Phoebe is Valentine's estranged and mousy wife. Herzog notes she lacks self-confidence, which suggests why she accepts her husband's adulterous behavior. She has been a passive wife to Valentine, feeling "her dowdiness and insufficiency." The narrator notes that she is a weak woman with limited energy, with only "enough feeling for the conduct of her own life." Unwilling to accept any responsibility for her failed marriage or the reality of her husband's shortcomings, she blames Herzog for aggravating Gersbach's ambitions. Her critical nature emerges in the guise of a disciplinary "head nurse."

Valentine Gersbach

Herzog's previous best friend and Madeleine's current lover, Valentine is a charismatic charmer yet Herzog notes his overwhelming nature. Dealing with Valentine was like dealing with "an emotional king, and the depth of his heart was his kingdom." Herzog explains that Valentine "appropriated all the emotions about him, as if by divine or spiritual right" because he felt he could "do more with them, and therefore he simply took them over." Valentine experienced tragedy in his childhood. He lost his leg and his father died of sclerosis, which he was sure he would also contract. As a result, he "spoke as a man who had risen from terrible defeat, the survivor of sufferings few could comprehend." Valentine suggests that he feels superior to others because he has suffered more and that his own trying experiences have enabled him to feel others' suffering more intently.

Herzog notes that he often took control of conversations with his booming voice and aggressive manner. Valentine was "so emphatic in style, so impressive in his glances, looked so clever that you forgot to inquire whether he was making sense." As a result of his commanding personality, Herzog allows him to practically run his life when they are all living in the Berkshires.

Daisy Herzog

Daisy is Moses's first wife and the mother of his son Marco. He deserts her after he enters into an affair with Madeleine. Moses acknowledges her loyalty to him as she

endured freezing winters in their isolated home in eastern Connecticut while he was writing his book. He admits that his preoccupation with his work and his incessant playing of melancholy pieces on his oboe must have been difficult for Daisy to endure, even more so than Connecticut's inclement weather. Daisy is a conventional Jewish woman whose manner is "shy but also rather stubborn." He claims she is stable and organized, which are her strengths, yet sometimes her desire for order would prompt her to be overly systematic. Herzog admits that his impulsiveness and emotionalism encouraged her negative qualities when he claims, "I was behind those rigid curtains and underneath the square carpets."

Jonah Herzog

Jonah is Moses's Russian immigrant father, who has died before the novel begins. Herzog periodically reminisces about his father, who, although he "did everything quickly, neatly, with skillful Eastern European flourishes," failed at every business he attempted. Moses admits that his father had a bad temper and was often "nervy, hasty, obstinate, and rebellious." According to his son, Jonah's failures resulted from his lack of "the cheating imagination of a successful businessman." One day, incensed by his son's "Christianized smirk of the long suffering son," Jonah threatens to shoot Moses, who concludes that he caused his father a great deal of heartache.

Junie Herzog

Junie is Moses's adored and affectionate young daughter. He becomes obsessed with gaining custody of her when he thinks Madeleine is not properly taking care of her.

Madeleine Herzog

Madeleine is Herzog's second wife. We never get a clear picture of her since she is seen through Herzog's subjective vision of her, which may be distorted by his rage over her affair with Gersbach and the destruction of their marriage. Readers only glimpse fragments of his bitter memories about her and the pain that she caused him. From all the characters' responses to her, it appears as if she had great charm, beauty, and a brilliant mind. Herzog apparently felt overwhelmed by these qualities, admitting, "Compared with her he felt static, without temperament." At one point, he confesses that as was the case with himself, "everyone close to Madeleine, everyone drawn into the drama of her life became exceptional, deeply gifted, brilliant."

Yet, most of his descriptions of her are extremely negative. He describes her egotism when he insists, "The satisfaction she took in herself was positively plural□imperial." He suggests that she has an enormous capacity for hatred when he claims that she had a strong desire that he die, or at least be nonexistent in her life. This sense of her personality is reinforced by his assessment of her reasons for marrying him. He argues that what she had been looking for was an ambitious man, and that she had found one

in him, "in order to trip him, bring him low, knock him sprawling and kick out his brains with a murderous . . . foot."

Marco Herzog

Moses's son is at the present time "entering an age of silence and restraint" with his father. Yet during his visits, Marco offers his father sympathy and patience. Moses notes that Marco has a good, strong character and is "one of the more stable breed of Herzogs."

Moses Herzog

Middle-aged scholar and educator Moses Herzog is at the point of mental collapse for most of the novel. His inability to accept his failed relationship with his wife Madeleine has triggered a sort of spiritual paralysis. In his book on Bellow, Dutton writes that Herzog "feels an alienation and, even worse, a uselessness, as if his life were an activity of wasted and misplaced effort." This uselessness prompts his search for fulfillment through scholarly activity, self examination, and relationships with others, especially women.

The novel's narrator characterizes Herzog as a complex narcissist with masochistic and depressive tendencies. Herzog himself admits to many of these same faults as he continually indulges in an obsessive self-examination to the point where he feels he cannot function as a scholar, educator, or father. He admits that he has failed as a husband, father, son, sibling, friend, and citizen and also has often failed to be truthful to himself about his and others' characters.

As he continually reassesses himself and his life, he incorporates into his worldview his judgments of the morality of his and others' actions. He inevitably finds everyone unable to measure up to his high standards. Ironically, however, this process provides him with a measure of satisfaction as he praises himself for his ability to take an honest and painful look at his own shortcomings.

Ultimately, it is difficult for us to get a clear picture of his interactions with other characters since all the events recounted in the novel have been filtered through Herzog's subjective viewpoint. In his descriptions, he appears to be a passive bystander to the collapse of his marriages, but others suggest that he may have had a more active role. Madeleine notes his frequent rages, and the narrator suggests that his first wife Daisy suffered from his ambitious nature.

Herzog finally finds a sense of peace at the end of the novel when he declares himself to be free of his obsessive pursuit of Madeleine. Although he has not come up with any firm answers to the questions he has been raising throughout the novel in his letters, he determines "I am pretty well satisfied to be ... just as it is willed."

Mother Herzog

As Moses idolized his father, he also idolized his long-suffering mother. He remembers that she "had a way of meeting the present with a partly averted face" and a "dreaming look." Even in her Old World melancholy, she found the resources to spoil her children.

Shura Herzog

Moses's wealthy brother is generous yet misanthropic. Moses claims that toward him, his brother's "contempt was softened by family feeling."

Will Herzog

Moses's brother Will bails him out of jail when he is arrested for carrying their father's loaded gun. He describes Will as undemonstrative and reticent, yet also substantial and shrewd. In his support of Herzog, he proves himself to be "a balanced, reasonable person" who is pained by his brother's suffering.

Sandor Himmelstein

Sandor is a Chicago lawyer who had looked after Herzog when he split with Madeleine. He sympathizes with Herzog through his raging sexism. Sandor continually refers to women, including his daughters and his wife, in pejorative terms. In an effort to console Herzog, Sandor announces, "so you were a sucker! Big deal! Every man is a sucker for some type of broad." While Herzog insists that at times Sandor could be "generous, convivial, even witty," his recreation of this scene provides no evidence of those qualities.

Fitz Pontritter

Madeleine's father, a powerful, intelligent man, was a famous acting teacher and theatre director in New York. He had "many of the peculiar and grotesque vanities of theatrical New York in him." Madeleine hints that he might have abused her as a child.

Tennie Pontritter

Tennie, Madeleine's mother, sacrificed her life to her husband's ambitions. Herzog notes her longsuffering expression when he meets her. Madeleine is determined not to end up like her mother.

Ramona

Ramona is a woman Herzog becomes involved with in New York after his divorce from Madeleine. Thirty-year-old Ramona, who owns a flower shop, enrolls in one of his evening courses. Herzog describes her as well educated, "slightly foreign" looking, and charming. She loves to talk and engage in philosophical discussions about his behavior and character, and she is an excellent cook. Her interest in Herzog quickly becomes serious, and he suspects that she wants him to marry her. She becomes convinced that she could repair some of the damage Madeleine has done to his psyche, and thus, he would be better off if he married her.

He admits that she would make a good wife for several reasons: she is understanding, well-educated, and enjoys living in New York, where she is financially independent. Her most important quality, from his point of view, is her expertise in the bedroom. In her selflessness, she contains "an enormous desire to help him," to build him up, and so tries to renew his spirit through sexual pleasure. She offers him "asylum, shrimp, wine, music, flowers, sympathy, gave him room, so to speak, in her soul, and finally the embrace of her body." Yet, he continually resists becoming actively involved in a relationship with her. While he appreciates her ability to articulate her ideas and point of view on a number of topics, he feels that her discussions with him often deteriorate into lectures about his capabilities and his future, which annoys him. At one point he tells her, "I think your wisdom gets me. Because you have the complete wisdom. Perhaps to excess." He notes that she is good for him but that he "evidently can't believe in victories."

Throughout the novel, Herzog keeps Ramona at arm's length, yet he occasionally admits that she is "a great comfort" to him. While a night with Ramona invigorates him, he concludes that his newfound strength "revived his fears ... that he might break down, that these strong feelings might disorganize him utterly." By the end of the novel, Herzog has reached an uneasy acceptance of her.

Shapiro

Shapiro has been Herzog's friend since school days. Herzog agreed to write a review of his analysis of modern history but delayed it because of his problems with Madeleine. He eventually reviews the work in one of his letters. Shapiro is polite yet high-strung, pompous, and ill-humored.

Simkin

A lawyer Moses turns to for help in gaining custody of his daughter, Simkin is clever, yet has "a weakness for confused, high-minded people, for people with moral impulses" like Herzog. Simkin is a practical realist with "a certain amount of malice" that keeps him "in condition." Moses became "irresistible to a man like Simkin who loved to pity and to poke fun at the same time." After Simkin explains the realities of the legal system,

Moses considers Simkin to be, along with Madeleine and Gersbach, one of his "Reality-Instructors."

Themes

Search for Meaning

At the beginning of the novel, Herzog admits he has been engaged in a desperate search for meaning □for insight into his own troubled existence and human existence in general. As he writes his letters, he conducts that search, entering into dialogues with people who have made an impact on his life and others-philosophers and thinkers who he trusts will give him guidance. Through this process, he hopes to gain knowledge and acceptance of self.

One of the dialogues he engages in concerns religion. As he searches for answers to the questions he raises, he contemplates the Orthodox Jewish religion in which he was instructed as a child. When Madeleine decides to convert to Catholicism, Herzog is again forced to reexamine his beliefs. During this process, he writes letters to philosophers who have written on the subject. In a letter to Nietzsche, for example, he considers the philosophy that God is dead, but ultimately rejects it, insisting that the philosopher's ideas "are no better than those of the Christianity [he] condemns." By the end of the novel, he discards traditional theology and embraces humanism. Earl Rovit notes in his article on Bellow for *American Writers* that Herzog, like Bellow's other characters, ultimately concerns himself with "defining what is viably *human* in modern life□ what is creatively and morally possible for the displaced person that modern man feels himself to be."

Anxiety

Throughout most of the novel, Herzog makes no progress in his search for meaning. His confusion and acknowledgement of the disorder that defines his life produce a mental and spiritual paralysis that leads him to the brink of collapse. His personal anxiety is compounded by historical reality. His is an "Age of Anxiety," where tensions boiled beneath the prosperous surface of America. Studies like John K. Galbraith's *The Affluent Society* noted that the rapid changes Americans were experiencing often left them confused and anxious. David Riesman, a sociologist at the University of Chicago, and a colleague, Nathan Glazer, argued in *The Lonely Crowd* that Americans had been coerced into conforming to social dictates set by politicians, religious leaders, and the media and, as a result, had difficulty maintaining individual values and beliefs. Although this often resulted in surface unity and serenity, it could also produce underlying feelings of alienation and frustration, thus creating the sense of being alone in a crowd. Many of Herzog's letters deal with the frustrations that resulted from living in his cultural moment.

One historical factor that caused Herzog grief was the emergence of the women's movement. Part of the problem in his relationship with Madeleine is that she is a strong woman who wants to be commended for her intelligence rather than her domestic skills. Herzog notes that when they were living in the country, he became angry when she did

not clean the house, expecting her to fulfill her "duties" as a wife. He admits that in response, Madeleine accused him of "criticizing her mind and forcing her back into housework," and being "disrespectful of her rights as a person."

A related issue that causes Herzog anxiety is sexuality. He confesses that Madeleine's displays of independence and strength often left him feeling inadequate sexually. Most likely as a result of these emotions, he suggests that while he was married to her, he had sexual relationships with other women. Herzog's anxiety is compounded when he discovers that his best friend, Valentine Gersbach, was having an affair with Madeleine while she was still married to him.

His suffering is increased by the fact that he cannot seem to finish his second volume of a study on romanticism. Once a noted scholar who gained critical acclaim for his early work, Herzog feels he has not lived up to his academic, or personal, promise. These feelings of failure contribute to the paralysis he feels throughout most of the novel.

Madeleine's rejection of Herzog is the primary cause of his suffering. He concludes that he is "going to pieces" after she asks him for a divorce. His discovery of Madeleine's affair with Gersbach, carried on while Herzog was still married to her, compounds his despondency. His acknowledgement of her betrayal leads to feelings of rivalry with Gersbach. All of these emotions prompt Herzog to create verbal portraits of Madeleine and Gersbach that justify his hatred of them. As he struggles to "explain, to have it out, to justify, to put in perspective" his feelings about the two, he tries to determine what role he has in this mix.

Madeleine's rejection, coupled with his feelings of failure, causes Herzog to consider himself to be a victim and to engage in self-pity. Rovit argues that Herzog is "a victim of his own moral sense of right and wrong□his own accepted obligation to evaluate himself by standards that will inevitably find him lacking." He notes that Herzog suffers "intensely and rehearse[s] [his] agonies at operatic volume for all to hear."

Toward the end of the novel, Herzog transfers his feelings of victimization into an intense anger directed toward Madeleine and Gersbach. He finds an outlet for this anger after he receives a letter from a former student, informing him that she saw his daughter Junie being mistreated by the two. In response, Herzog departs in a rage for Chicago, and a confrontation with both of them. At this point, he admits that his anger is "so great and deep, so murderous, bloody, positively rapturous, that his arms and fingers ache to strangle them." After obtaining his father's loaded gun, Herzog goes to Madeleine's house, with the intent of shooting one or both of his nemeses. Yet, his anger is partially dissuaded when he faces the reality of the situation as he watches a tender moment between Gersbach and Junie.

Peace

Herzog finally finds a measure of peace when he is able to free himself from his obsession with Madeleine. Rovit argues that by the end of the novel, Herzog has

climbed out of "the craters of the spirit," ridiculing "[his] defeats with a merciless irony, resolved to be prepared with a stronger defense against the next assault that is sure to come." Daniel B. Marin, in his article on Bellow for the *Dictionary of Literary Biography*, suggests that Herzog's "final silence expresses his trust in the intuitions that motivate him, even though they lie ultimately beyond his understanding."

Style

Herzog contains a unique narrative structure that helps illuminate its themes. Part of the novel is composed in an epistolary form, the narrative strung together by the series of letters Herzog writes to various people, deceased and living. The remainder consists of brief sections of narrative introduced by an omniscient narrator, who quickly turns things over to Herzog, expressing in the first person his observations and analyses of his world, either through his letters or in recreations of events that have occurred in the last few months. The resulting fragmented form illustrates Herzog's feelings of alienation and disconnection throughout the novel. The structure also reinforces his need to find some kind of order for his life.

Chester E. Eisinger, in his overview of Bellow for the *Reference Guide to American Literature*, argues that the structure of the novel provides "a vehicle beautifully appropriate for the self-communing protagonist in a book which is largely a meditation." He concludes that "the story of an alienated intellectual imprisoned in the self needs a medium that promises privacy and turns in upon itself."

Epstein, in his article on Bellow for *The Denver Quarterly*, praises Bellow's successful structuring of the novel, noting that "the true fictional function of the first-person form is to give the creating mind the instantaneous freedom to turn on itself and reveal the mockery in every posture." Bellow creates this string of monologues compiled in Herzog's letters and remembrances to illustrate how his main character has created, in large part, his own world. The structure allows his voice to control the entire narrative. Every now and then, in a self-reflective moment, Herzog recognizes his tendency to focus inward and pokes fun at himself, which provides delightful moments of irony and humor in the book.

Historical Context

Sexuality in the 1950s and 1960s

Most Americans in the 1950s retained conservative attitudes towards sexuality: they did not openly discuss sexual behavior, and promiscuity□ especially for women□was not tolerated. However, traditional attitudes about sex began to change during this era. Dr. Alfred Kinsey's reports on the sexual behavior of men and women (1948, 1953) helped bring discussions of this subject out in the open. Although many Americans clung to puritanical ideas about sexuality, they could not suppress questions that began to be raised about what constituted normal or abnormal sexual behavior. Movie stars like Marilyn Monroe and Brigitte Bardot, who openly flaunted their sexuality, intrigued the public, and *Playboy* magazine, begun in 1953, gained a wide audience. Many regarded the magazine's pictures of naked women to be symbols of the end of Puritanism in America. *Playboy* itself promoted a new attitude towards sexuality with its "playboy philosophy" articles and its centerfolds of naked "girls next door." In the 1960s, relaxed moral standards would result in an age of sexual freedom. Herzog reflects these new attitudes towards sexuality as he seeks relationships with several different women, often while he is married.

Redefinition of Family

Divorce rates began to rise dramatically in the 1960s, which led to a redefinition of the American family. As the nuclear (sometimes called "traditional") family unit broke down, new family structures emerged and a more flexible definition of family was created. Families now could consist of two parents and their children, a couple who decided to have no children, a single parent and his or her children, a parent and stepparent and their children, or grandparents and their grandchildren. Children and their foster parents were also considered to be a family unit. Herzog's frequent absences from his children and their acclimation to new family units causes him much angst in the novel. He slowly comes to terms with his childrens' new living arrangements by the end of the novel, when he accepts the fact that they are content in their redefined families.

Existentialism

Existentialism was a popular element in literary works in the 1960s. The theories of this movement emerged from the writings of nineteenth-century Danish theologian Soren Kierkegaard and German philosophers Martin Heidegger and Friedrich Nietzsche. Existentialist themes can be found most prominently in literary works by Franz Kafka, Fyodor Dostoevsky, Albert Camus, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Samuel Beckett.

The philosophy of existentialism presents a specific vision of the condition and existence of men and women and an examination of their place and function in life. Existentialism after World War II came to be defined by its main argument, that

existence precedes essence. According to this philosophy, men and women are responsible for their own existence and how they choose to behave gives essence or meaning to their existence. Existentialists believe we are all born into a meaningless void with no hope of spiritual salvation. Humans have the choice to remain passively in this void, which would cause intense moral anguish, or to exercise their power of choice and become engaged, through some form of action, in social and political life. These types of commitments will, according to this philosophy, provide us with a sense of accomplishment and meaning.

Throughout *Herzog*, the main character struggles with his "void" and his response to it. For most of the novel, Herzog remains passive in his condition, except for his letter writing, which has brought him to the point of near madness. By the end of the novel, he must make a decision to remain passive or to become more actively engaged with his world.

Critical Overview

Herzog gained popular and critical success after its publication in 1964. Critics praised its examination of Western intellectual traditions, its colorful characterizations, and its innovative narrative structure. Keith M. Opdahl, in an article on Bellow for the *Dictionary of Literary Biography*, notes the novel's historical relevance when he writes, "The prose is charged, rich, full of the specifics and precisely defined impressions that create the feel of mid-1960s American life." Opdahl argues that *Herzog* "is perhaps most notable for the style, which represents Bellow at his very best." He concludes, "Herzog's double remove permits Bellow to dote on detail, to slow the action when necessary to make the scenes live."

Eisinger finds *Herzog* to be "one of the finest novels of ideas written by a 20th-century American." Eisinger also praises the structure of the book, claiming that Bellow's adaptation of the epistolary novel provides "a vehicle beautifully appropriate for the self-communing protagonist in a book which is largely a meditation." Eisinger notes that while the novel is "deficient in action," Bellow has written it in a "flexible, breathless, lively, energetic style which at the same time is restrained by the wry, skeptical, sometimes bitter expression with which [he] endows Herzog."

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
- Critical Essay #2
- Critical Essay #3
- Critical Essay #4
- Critical Essay #5
- Critical Essay #6
- Critical Essay #7
- Critical Essay #8
- Critical Essay #9
- Critical Essay #10

Critical Essay #1

Perkins is an associate professor of English and American literature and film at Prince George's Community College and has published several articles on British and American authors. In this essay, she examines images of women in Bellow's novel.

"Nobody truly occupies a station in life any more. There are mostly people who feel that they occupy the place that belongs to another by rights. There are displaced persons everywhere." Earl Rovit, in his article on Saul Bellow in *American Writers*, determines that these words spoken by Eugene Henderson in Bellow's highly acclaimed novel *Henderson the Rain King* "could have been spoken by almost any of Bellow's characters or, for that matter, by Bellow himself." Rovit finds that a major theme in Bellow's fiction is how we cope with a sense of alienation and displacement.

This is also the case with Moses Herzog, the hero of Bellow's award-winning novel *Herzog*. Throughout the novel, Herzog experiences overwhelming feelings of disconnection that have resulted in a kind of spiritual and emotional paralysis, which has brought him to the brink of mental collapse. As he searches for insight into his troubled existence, he often resorts to blaming the women in his life for his suffering. As tries to understand and cope with his predicament, he composes selective and subjective portraits of these women, ignoring, to a great degree, his contribution to his own depressive state.

Bellow has employed an innovative structure in the novel to illustrate Herzog's limited view of his life. Part of the novel is composed in an epistolary form, the narrative strung together by the series of letters Herzog writes to various people, deceased and living. The remainder consists of brief sections of narrative introduced by an omniscient narrator, who quickly turns things over to Herzog, expressing in first person his observations and analyses of his experiences, either through his letters or in recreations of events that have occurred in the last few months. Thus, most of the narrative presents Herzog's subjective point of view. Bellow creates this string of monologues compiled in Herzog's letters and remembrances to illustrate how his main character has created, in large part, his own world.

Herzog's world is peopled with harshly stereotypical women. The three main female characters in the novel represent clear types: Daisy is the loyal, mousy wife; Madeleine is the aggressive "goddess"; and Ramona is the complete hedonist or pleasureseeker. Herzog's portraits of these women illustrate distinct stages in his life. Martin Corner, in his article on Bellow in *Studies in the Novel*, argues that Herzog perceives these women as "instances in an argument, as exemplifications of moments in the history of freedom and self-awareness." As such, they become part of his subjective view of his world. Corner concludes that they are, for Herzog, "voices in an argument that he is passionate to refute."

Initially Herzog was comfortable with his marriage to Daisy, his first wife, because she enabled him to live the typical, ordinary life of an assistant professor. He describes her

as a loyal wife who endured freezing winters in their isolated home in eastern Connecticut while he was writing his book on romanticism. He notes Daisy's loyalty when he comments, "Of course a wife's duty was to stand by this puzzling and often disagreeable Herzog. She did so with heavy neutrality, recording her objections each time□once but not more."

Herzog suggests that his uncontrollable infatuation with Madeline caused his final split with Daisy, which, although not commendable, could not be helped. However, his portrait of his relationship with Daisy has not been complete. The narrator suggests another reason for the destruction of Herzog's union with Daisy in descriptions of the trouble Herzog had writing his second volume on romanticism. The narrator notes that he was "becoming tougher, more assertive, more ambitious." His marriage to Madeleine and subsequent resignation from the university "showed a taste and talent ... for danger and extremism, for heterodoxy, for ordeals, a fatal attraction to the 'City of Destruction.'" Madeleine proved a better partner for the more ambitious Herzog, a fact he himself never acknowledges.

Herzog paints Madeline as a complete monster, concerned only with her own gratification. Her treatment of him, he claims, has no justification. He insists that she revels in her supremacy over him, claiming at one point, "she had beaten him so badly, her pride was so fully satisfied, that there was an overflow of strength into her intelligence ... one of the very greatest moments of her life." Her greatest goal in life, according to Herzog, is to "strike a blow." He is convinced that when Madeleine had been looking for an ambitious man "in order to trip him, bring him low, knock him sprawling and kick out his brains with a murderous ... foot."

Herzog's view of Madeleine as an aggressive, not very nice woman is reflected in his reaction to a woman he sees at the train station while on his way to Martha's Vineyard. There he sees a "softfaced," "independent" woman, whom he claims has "b□-ch eyes." Women are the enemy to Herzog, always ready to "kick out his brains." He concludes that he will "never understand what women want.... They eat green salad and drink human blood." Referring to Madeleine's affair with Gersbach, Herzog argues "female deceit ... is a deep subject" involving "sexual complicity, conspiracy." Yet he conveniently ignores his own infidelities when he was married to Madeleine and to Daisy.

Herzog's vision of Madeleine leaves out any clear motives for her seemingly demonic behavior. In his article on Bellow for *The Denver Quarterly*, Seymour Epstein notes that she "turns on Herzog with such hatred that one is prompted to go back and pick up the overlooked reasons for all that venom." There are passages in the novel that do, in fact, suggest that Herzog may have triggered some of Madeleine's outbursts, and that she might have had grounds for some of her actions. Aunt Zelda, Madeleine's aunt, informs him that he is "overbearing" and "gloomy" and "very demanding." She insists that he has to have his own way and that he "wore [Madeleine] out asking for help, support." She tells him, "you've been reckless about women." When she gets him to admit he was unfaithful to his wife, he tries to shift the blame back on Madeleine, claiming, "she made it tough for me, too. Sexually." Tired of hearing Zelda's support of her niece, he concludes "what crooks they were□Madeleine, Zelda ... others. Some women didn't

care how badly they damaged you." Zelda finally gets him to acknowledge that he could not satisfy Madeline because she did not love him, suggesting that she did not have an inherent desire to torture him.

Another criticism Herzog hurls at Madeleine has to do with her ambitions. He concludes that her desire was to take his "place in the learned world," to "overcome" him. While they were married, he insists, "she was reaching her final elevation, as queen of the intellectuals, the castiron bluestocking." Yet Herzog never acknowledges her right to be "in the learned world" and drops hints that he has tried to prevent her by constantly nagging her about attending to housework and leaving her books scattered around the house. At one point, he acknowledges, "she thinks I'm criticizing her mind and forcing her back into housework" and being "disrespectful of her rights as a person," which he appears to be guilty of but will not admit. The narrator reveals Herzog's overwhelming ambitions and ego, noting his attitude that "the progress of civilization□indeed, the survival of civilization□ depended on the successes of Moses E. Herzog. And in treating him as she did, Madeleine injured a great project."

Herzog claims that her hatred for him causes her to banish him from the house. However, the narrator notes that "his behavior was so strange and to her mind so menacing, that she warned him through Gersbach not to come near" her. Herzog validates Madeleine's fears about his violent temper when he comes to her house with the intention of shooting her and/or Gersbach, claiming that the two have "opened the way to justifiable murder." Herzog soon learns, however, that both have been good parents to Junie.

Herzog presents Ramona as another distinct stereotype: the complete hedonist. Robert R. Dutton, in his article on Bellow for *Twayne's United States Authors Series Online*, argues, "Ramona, the object of Herzog's final pursuit, represents another retreat, this time from the ego-shattering experience with Madeleine." In Herzog's portrait of her, Ramona's goal is to provide him with a complete "life of pleasure," without asking anything in return. She becomes the perfect woman to him, fulfilling his every desire and making no demands on him. Yet he blames her, rather than his own inability to commit to her, for damaging their relationship. With Ramona, he admits that "this asylum was his for the asking" but will not commit to a relationship with her "because today's asylum might be the dungeon of tomorrow."

During his stay at Ludeyville, Herzog begins to free himself from his "servitude to Madeleine" and so finds a measure of peace and contentment. Whether or not he will be able to establish a lasting relationship with a woman remains a question, however. He does invite Ramona to dinner at the end of the book, but this still "troubles him slightly." Herzog has not come to any clear vision of his relationship with the women in his life, which suggests that he will continue to have problems in that area. Corner argues that "the condition of his moral recovery ... is not some abstract choice for community over individualism, but the ability to see the world beyond his own interpretations." Herzog appears to be more open to the possibilities of a relationship with Ramona, but his subjective view of her still defines her as problematic by the end of

the novel. His failure to fully "see the world beyond his own interpretations" provides an ambiguous conclusion to the book.

Source: Wendy Perkins, Critical Essay on *Herzog*, in *Novels for Students*, The Gale Group, 2002.

Critical Essay #3

Consider the following passages from the first chapter of Saul Bellow's *Herzog*. Moses Herzog is riding in a cab through the streets of New York on his way to catch the train to Vineyard Haven:

> They made a sweeping turn into Park Avenue and Herzog clutched the broken window handle. It wouldn't open. But if it opened dust would pour in. They were demolishing and raising buildings. The Avenue was filled with concrete-mixing trucks, smells of wet sand and powdery gray cement. Crashing, stamping pile-driving below, and, higher, structural steel, interminably and hungrily going up into cooler, more delicate blue. Orange beams hung from the cranes like straws. But down in the street where the buses were spurting the poisonous exhaust of cheap fuel, and the cars were crammed together, it was stifling, grinding, horrible!

What we see here is as much Herzog as it is New York. Everything becomes a symbol of his inner state: the noise and violence of the streets, the derelict condition of the cab, the pressure, congestion and confinement. Even the girders of the new building, "interminably and hungrily going up into cooler, more delicate blue," are Herzog's desperate search for some zone of resolved consciousness and his sense of oppression at the city's greedy appetite for the projection of its life to the utmost possibility.

But as he rides to Grand Central, Herzog recalls family departures of his childhood from the Grand Trunk Station in Montreal: "The locomotive cried and the iron-studded cars began to move. Sun and girders divided the soot geometrically. By the factory walls the grimy weeds grew. A smell of malt came from the breweries. The train crossed the St Lawrence. Moses pressed the pedal and through the stained funnel of the toilet he saw the river frothing. Then he stood at the window. The water shone and curved on great slabs of rock, spinning into foam at the Lachine Rapids, where it sucked and rumbled." Here the child is looking outwards; everything is allowed simply to be itself. In the first passage, the world is drawn inwards, to become a symbolic confirmation of one man's consciousness. In the second, everything is held delicately free of the assimilating pull of symbolism; the world resists incorporation, remains itself. The first assimilates the world to character; the second moves outwards in attention to the world itself.

These distinct modes of representation offer a starting-point for a fresh look at the two principal tendencies within Bellow criticism. On the one hand, there are those who see his fiction as the record of an inward journey, from outer to inner truth, from the confusions of discourse to the truth of the heart. For such critics, Bellow is one kind of romantic: the romantic of inner, immanent truth, of direct illumination, of the ascetic

inward journey to self-knowledge. On the other hand, those who have argued against this view tend to see Bellow as a different kind of romantic, a devotee of inclusion, brotherhood and community. For them, the important journey that he describes is that from the separateness of individual life to the morally sustaining connectedness of a shared humanity.

It will become clear that my broad sympathy is with the second position; Bellow does, in the end, insist that full humanity is found in the acceptance of a contract that links us to others in ethical mutuality. But the power of his work does not lie in what, so stated, is a familiar and unexceptionable position. The sharpness of Bellow's insight emerges in his dissection of what is involved in mutuality as against individualism, and of what, in extreme conditions, the precursors of such a shift might turn out to be. To move to community rather than individuality, commitment rather than separation, is for him an act neither of pure freedom nor of simple moral illumination; it is the product of a history which begins in the preethical, at a stage in which consciousness is hardly aware of acting morally, but out of which moral action is born.

Bellow, in his mature fiction, offers two precious things: a pathology of average twentiethcentury consciousness as it is formed within discourse, and a rooting of moral action in the pre-ethical category of attention. The first part is particularly evident in *Herzog* (1964); the second in *Mr Sammler's Planet* (1970). Between them they compose a history of the ethical, which begins with a recognition of how average discursive consciousness defeats the moral, and continues through a painful and not fully resolved account of the conditions of moral awareness and human interconnection. It will be my argument that the important journey for his central characters is outwards from a confining inwardness, away from the terms of discourse which give this inwardness its form; and that this involves an act of attention away from the self.

Critical Essay #4

Bellow's characteristic fiction is, in Bakhtin's terms, a representation of discourse. His Herzogs, Sammlers, and Cordes are images of distinct ways of talking and thinking about the world. Each is a life-position, a structure of valuation; each is also a formal construction of reality, directed toward a particular shaping of the world. But it is here, also, that the self begins; Bellow understands the modern self as formed in discursive consciousness. We know ourselves as a specific discursive practice, and we know the world as that practice forms it for us. That, for his central characters, is where they find themselves at the start of their narratives. For Bellow, this is the inwardness of modern Western humanity, within a specific discursive practice. It is for that reason that Bellow's novels start from thought, discourse, and self-reflection, rather than from event or social relationships.

But with this inwardness there goes, unavoidably, self-enclosure. As Levinas would have recognized, Bellow's main characters use the characteristic thematizations of their discourse as a way of attaching the world to themselves; so described, the world becomes an extension of themselves, of what they already know. The pathology of discursive consciousness is, for Bellow, the difficulty that it has in looking beyond itself, in moving beyond the order of its own formulations. This is where the main characters of *Herzog* and *Mr Sammler's Planet* live: within their accounts of the world, within an unceasing discursive effort to describe the world coherently to themselves. True, each distrusts his description: Moses Herzog believes that he may be going mad, and Artur Sammler is almost persuaded that he has spent his whole life with the wrong books and the wrong explanations. But the fiction holds them within the discursive frame they have made for themselves; it is thus that they, and we, know who they are.

In this, Herzog and Sammler are alike. But it is important to recognize that each central character attempts a different discursive construction in his effort to make sense of the world. Herzog gropes toward the inclusive pattern of intellectual history; his mind works sequentially; he looks for a narrative that will set the history of developing human consciousness in clear order. Sammler, on the other hand, is overwhelmed by a simultaneity of memories and impressions; he looks for some unique key or cipher, some Kabbalistic node that will reveal the hidden coherence of the world, resolve all particulars into a simultaneous pattern.

Herzog's project is the more classically intellectual; he approaches the world as a historian of ideas (he has written a major work on Romanticism and Christianity). His mind is predominantly verbal; because he experiences the world as a text, he seeks to represent it as a text. The project fails, as the fragmentary nature of his letters shows. But it is important not to see this as Bellow's rejection of the intellectual project, not to go on to conclude that he is systematically antiintellectual, a devotee of immediate illumination. He places Herzog in a distinguished tradition of understanding, which is adumbrated through the unsent letters, and he makes Herzog see that the future of humanity may well depend on the success of understanding. As one of the letters says, an intolerable flood of explanations may indeed be overwhelming the world, but this is

no reason for giving up the attempt to understand: *"And these explanations are unbearable, but they have to be made. In the seventeenth century the passionate search for absolute truth stopped so that mankind might transform the world. Something practical was done with thought . . . But our revolutions, including nuclear terror, return the metaphysical dimension to us."* The project of understanding cannot be abandoned; the crisis of modern civilization is as much its withdrawal from certain efforts of understanding as it is the proliferation of explanations.

Nevertheless, even a necessary discursive tradition can, on the level of the individual life, become a pathology, a prison. Thought can be no liberation from the confusions of life if it gives in to "the delusion of total *explanations*", the idiocy of having an answer for everything: "readiness to answer all questions is the infallible sign of stupidity." Truth, even the absolute truth of metaphysics, is not a claim to explain everything, to have all the answers. Such a claim would represent the ultimate absorption of reality into thought, and Herzog, though engaged on an inclusive project of his own, is made to sense that total explanation is the defeat, not the fulfilment, of understanding. Nevertheless, for the time being, he continues with his effort to draw reality into the forms of his own argument.

This reality has two aspects, and between them Herzog is constantly searching for the explanatory links. On the one hand, there is his private world of failed relationships, peopled by such as Gersbach and Madeleine. On the other, there is publichistorical reality, inhabited by the makers of thought and of history, the Heideggers and Eisenhowers. As a historian of human consciousness it is Herzog's necessary conviction that the two are connected, that one may even serve as an instance of the other. Herzog is Hegelian in his view of the world; he sees the same historical processes reaching self-awareness in the lives of individuals and in historical events. Thus his primary perception of people is as instances in an argument, as exemplifications of moments in the history of freedom and self-awareness. They become for him essentially ideological positions, embodiments of general truths. In this way he assimilates them to his understanding and makes them part of the construction of his world. He experiences them first of all as varieties of discourse. Himmelstein is the voice of the brutal-realist understanding of the world; Ramona, that of a spiritualized hedonism. They are, for him, voices in an argument that he is passionate to refute.

For Herzog, Madeleine and Gersbach are exemplifications of the demand for freedom in selfexpression which has, in the later twentieth century, become irresistible, ceased to acknowledge any limits. He sees them as embodiments of the unrestrained conative self, trying all available stances (of love, friendship, faith, intellect, betrayal); they understand themselves in terms of that enterprise, and that is their selfhood. As an ideological position, Gersbach is defined by Herzog as a greedy, omnicompetent, but essentially fraudulent self-production; he is Hegelian modern man playing all the roles which come to consciousness in a high and articulate intelligence. Gersbach writes poetry, lectures on Buber, is a television intellectual; he is the modern equivalent of "a prophet, a *Shofat*, yes, a judge in Israel, a king." He is one version of the impulse to leave no possible life unlived. His speech embodies all that; it mixes worldly knowingness with intellect, clumsy Yiddish with a blunt psychosexual analysis. All this

Herzog detests, with an added intensity because Gersbach has stolen Madeleine from him. But Madeleine herself is, for Herzog, also a false discourse, a vacuous statement of what it means to be human. She is intellect as style, the sham life of the mind that changes its cut and color as often as a Fifth Avenue couturier. Her intellectual and spiritual commitments are tedious because they are rootless; apart from her sexuality, Madeleine is seen by Herzog as no more than a false position in the argument of twentieth-century history.

The consequence of seeing others primarily as discursive positions is that Herzog cannot act morally toward either Madeleine or Gersbach, or indeed toward any others, such as Himmelstein, whom he sees in the same way. The condition of his moral recovery (which is a large part of the interest of the novel) is not some abstract choice for community over individualism, but the ability to see the world beyond his own interpretations. To read the world as one's own text is part of the pathology of discursive consciousness; believing that it sees, even understands, the world, such a consciousness sees only its own inscription. Herzog's moments of freedom from this are few, and most powerfully they include his memories of childhood. Then he could see without the itch to describe, to interpret, to explain. The model, for Bellow as for Herzog, is that moment on the train leaving Montreal, when the world still held its vivid separateness: "sun and girders divided the soot geometrically. By the factory walls the grimy weeds grew."

Because, for Bellow, childhood can supply a model of pure attention, it is not surprising that Herzog's journey away from the pathology of discursive consciousness begins in memory. Though he sees the present world as a symbolization of his own inner pressures and conflicts, and in that sense does not see the world at all, he can recall a time when the world was real for him, when its existence was hard, unassimilable and distinct. Besides his memory of riding the train across the St. Lawrence from Grand Trunk Station, another such moment is his recollection of the family home in Napoleon Street: "No dawn, the foggy winters. In darkness, the bulb was lit. The stove was cold. Papa shook the grates, and raised an ashen dust. The grates grumbled and squealed. The puny shovel clinked underneath. The Caporals gave Papa a bad cough. The chimneys in their helmets sucked in the wind. Then the milkman came in his sleigh. The snow was spoiled and rotten with manure and litter, dead rats, dogs." Here the syntax of Bellow's sentences, their primal predicative form, reflects the directness of the child's experience; this is a world revealed in its otherness by a simple attention that does not yet seek to read the world as text. When, as here, Herzog remembers himself as a child, he is remembering someone who could still see the world apart from himself, and who for that reason could love what he saw: "what was wrong with Napoleon Street? thought Herzog. All he ever wanted was there." An important part of Herzog's ethical incapacity□and this is, for the most part, a novel of vengeance□comes from his inability to love his world. The more he stitches it to himself through his discursive accounts, the more paradoxically distant and unlovable it becomes. His childhood memories show him that the ability to love the world (ugly as it may have been) has its root in an attending to otherness, to the world apart from himself. This is the pointer to the outward journey that he must make.

Memories of childhood may indicate the direction, but they cannot replace the journey itself. Herzog's movement advances as he notices aspects of people that he cannot inscribe into his own text. Valentine Gersbach is a striking example. Of all the characters in the novel, he attracts the largest share of Herzog's antipathy; yet even here Herzog is compelled to see more than a false and vicious ideology of life. As well as discourse, Gersbach is also a physical presence. Herzog is confronted by something that cannot be assimilated, a strangeness, a remainder, something resistant. He feels this when Gersbach tells of how as a child he lost his leg under a railway car:

> Gersbach almost always cried, and it was strange, because
> his long curling coppery lashes stuck together;
> he was tender but he looked rough, his face broad
> and rugged, heavy-bristled, and his chin positively
> brutal. And Moses recognized that under his own
> rules the man who had suffered more was more special,
> and he conceded willingly that Gersbach had
> suffered harder, that his agony under the wheels of
> the boxcar must have been far deeper than anything
> Moses had ever suffered. Gersbach's tormented face
> was stony white, pierced by the radiant bristles of his
> red beard. His lower lip had almost disappeared beneath
> the upper. His great, his hot sorrow! Molten
> sorrow!

Under Herzog's rules of interpretation, Gersbach counts for something because he has suffered greatly; he embodies the cultural claims of suffering as a category, its authority as intellectual currency in the later twentieth century. But the man that he sees before him escapes this emblematic reduction through his physical presence and oddity. The particularity of the description, its attentive and defamiliarizing gaze, recovers a Gersbach outside Herzog's discursive identifications.

This recognition is at the heart of Herzog's change of mind when, looking through the bathroom window as Gersbach bathes Junie, he gives up the idea of shooting him. This is not simply a concession to Gersbach's fondness for the child, though that has its effect; when Herzog is forced to attend to the actuality of the man in front of him he can distinguish between what is generated inside his own head and an outward reality. "To shoot him!—an absurd thought. As soon as Herzog saw the actual person giving an actual bath, the reality of it, the tenderness of such a buffoon to a little child, his intended violence turned into *theater*, into something ludicrous." The theater, he recognizes, is of his own making; once again, as in his memories of childhood, Herzog feels the world pull away into a tangible otherness, and Gersbach, for the first time, becomes more than a construction of his own resentment. With this, moral action becomes a possibility.

In a parallel way Madeleine eludes Herzog's reduction of her to a false discursive position, a willed and fraudulent statement about the possibilities of life; and again it is her physicality, in her case her sexuality, that stands as a remainder outside all his

descriptions of her. Bellow's way of creating character parallels the two modes of descriptive representation in the passages compared at the outset of this discussion. On the one hand, characters exist as terms in the internal argument of the novel's central consciousness, just as the streets of New York are absorbed into Herzog's inner turmoil. On the other hand, some aspects of these figures are left to be what they are; they stand independent of the central character's drive for comprehension and coherence. The details are trivial: Gersbach's chin, Madeleine's nose. But for a moment Herzog is prepared simply to attend to the resistant particularity of things, to notice the inexplicable as a remainder outside the bounds of discourse. This at least opens the possibility of moral action.

Critical Essay #5

These remainders strike Herzog as surds, as unaccommodatable particulars, evoking attention and troubling his attempt to shape a world continuous with himself. But his project of understanding is not defeated. If the escape through attention from the pathology of discursive consciousness is the condition of moral awareness (something that will emerge more fully in *Mr Sammler's Planet*), it is also for Bellow the condition of true comprehension. The resistant otherness of people changes Herzog's understanding and brings him closer to a true statement about the world.

Again, the most telling examples occur in Herzog's memories of childhood. He recalls his mother just before her death, when he was sixteen years old. His first memory is once again an act of intellectual assimilation; he thinks of her as a type of Jewishness, as an instance (like Gersbach) in the history of consciousness:

> Though he recalled his mother's sad face with love, he couldn't say, in his soul, that he wanted to see such sadness perpetuated. Yes, it reflected the deep experience of a race, its attitude toward happiness and toward mortality. This somber human case, this dark husk, these indurated lines of submission to the fate of being human, this splendid face showed the responses of his mother's finest nerves to the greatness of life, rich in sorrow, in death. All right, she was beautiful. But he hoped that things would change. When we have come to better terms with death, we'll wear a different expression, we human beings. Our looks will change. *When* we come to terms!

But even as he intellectualizes this memory of his mother, Herzog is struck by his failure to engage with the reality of her living and dying. He can see her face only as a text to be read, one that is inscribed with an outdated understanding of death. As that understanding changes, other faces, other texts, will appear. But to "come to better terms with death"? He finds the phrase on his lips, but what could it conceivably mean? Self-mockingly, he realizes that he has missed what was in front of him, his mother's death; that the discursive gesture has deflected his attention.

It is not further interpretation that takes him forward; it is what his mother was able to show him of death. In memory his mother takes the initiative; instead of being one instance of Jewishness that Herzog can dispose of in his categories of historical understanding, she steps forward as one who exists beyond all those categories and whose own act of explanation mocks, but also transcends, all explanatory discourse. Herzog recalls the moment when, six years old, he asked his mother about Adam's creation from the dust of the ground:

She was about to give me the proof. Her dress was brown and gray-thrush-colored. Her hair was thick and black, the gray already streaming through it. She had something to show me at the window. The light came up from the snow in the street, otherwise the day was dark. Each of the windows had colored borders □yellow, amber, red□and flaws and whorls in the cold panes. At the curbs were the thick brown poles of that time, many-barred at the top, with green glass insulators, and brown sparrows clustered on the crossbars that held up the iced, bowed wires. Sarah Herzog opened her hand and said, "Look carefully, now, and you'll see what Adam was made of." She rubbed the palm of her hand with a finger, rubbed until something dark appeared on the deep-lined skin, a particle of what certainly looked to him like earth. "You see? It's true."

Now his mother is no instance of anything; she belongs with the hard particularity of the 1930s street, a world of resistant objects not yet converted into symbol. When she rubs the skin of her palm into a semblance of earth she confronts Moses with the ungeneralizable particularity of death; she prepares him for the moment ten years later when she will show him her dying hand. "As he stared, she slowly began to nod her head up and down as if to say, 'That's right, Moses, I am dying now. ' ... Her fingers had lost their flexibility. Under the nails they seemed to him to be turning already into the blue loam of graves."

The resistance and recalcitrance of such memories compel Herzog's attention and defy his attempt to absorb experience into the familiar terms of interpretation. But his sense of understanding is not diminished. It is at these moments that he has the sharpest feeling of having understood what is most important to him. Perhaps the trick with the palm of the hand was his mother's joke, a way of protecting him; but he finds truth in its comedy, honesty in its wit. "Maybe she offered me this proof partly in a spirit of comedy. The wit you can have only when you consider death very plainly, when you consider what a human being really is." At such moments Herzog's thought has the greatest solidity, is least the gyration of an overful brain; they are moments of contact with what resists inclusion within the project of comprehension, moments when he turns outwards.

The importance of such moments in the novel makes it clear that Herzog's career is a discipline of attention. Through memory, through his encounters with the unmanageable otherness of such as Gersbach, the interpretive itch begins to subside, and he can begin to look beyond it to the world. Toward the end of the novel, when he is back at Ludeyville, his mind continues to chase speculative possibilities and he launches on a few last letters. But he now knows that there is more help in the simple externality of objects around him. It is that, he feels, which enables him to turn away from madness: "I have wanted to be cared for. I devoutly hoped Emmerich would find me sick. But I have no intention of doing that□I am responsible, responsible to reason. This is simply

temporary excitement. Responsible to the children. He walked quietly into the woods, the many leaves, living and fallen, green and tan, going between rotted stumps, moss, fungus disks; he found a hunter's path, also a deer trail. He felt quite well here, and calmer. The silence sustained him, and the brilliant weather, the feeling that he was easily contained by everything about him." Instead of seeking to contain the world within himself, now he allows the world to contain him. What Herzog experiences here is not the defeat or reason and understanding, but their restoration, a restoration that is marked by a new awareness of his responsibility to what exists apart from himself. The pathology of discursive consciousness is being overcome.

Again it is attention to objects in their separate existence that gives Herzog's thought its solidity and firmness. This is apparent in the opening of his last letter of all, his letter to God, in which he is able at last to see the nature of his project and the terms under which it should be conducted: "*How my mind has struggled to make coherent sense. I have not been too good at it. But have desired to do your unknowable will, taking it, and you, without symbols. Everything of intensest significance. Especially if divested of me."* The conditions for understanding are that he turn away from himself, that he resist symbolizing the world into an extension of his own mind; that he acknowledge a reality absolutely not himself. "Intensest significance" requires him to move outwards.

Herzorg's journey is not from an outer to an inner reality, but from his self-awareness as discursive consciousness outwards to the otherness of the world. Yet, paradoxically, it is in this movement that he is restored to himself. Instead of knowing himself as a nexus of discourse, he becomes aware of a stability and substantiality in his being that before had been hidden from him. *"I look at myself and see chest, thighs, feet a head. This strange organization, I know it will die. And inside something, something, happiness . . . 'Thou movest me.' That leaves no choice."* The form of this recognition is address: "*Thou* movest me." Herzog's deepest inward vision is inseparable from the attention that moves outwards, from that lookingaway which his experience has taught him.

Herzog dramatizes, in one man, the overcoming of the pathology of discursive consciousness through memory and acts of attention. Moses Herzog begins to recover the gift that he had as a child, to see the world apart from himself; and with that, the possibility of moral action is re-opened to him. Though attention, in itself, is not a moral category, it is, nevertheless, the condition of the moral, and in *Mr Sammler's Planet* Bellow explores the consciousness of a man for whom attention is far less of a problem, but who still has to make terms with the ethical...

Critical Essay #6

These two novels trace different stages in a history of outward movement away from the selfenclosure of discursively contructed consciousness to the otherness of the world. In this movement his main characters return to at least the possibility of moral action. But the movement itself may confront them with the reductive and negating otherness of evil, an otherness that calls the whole ethical project into question. The impulse that drives this movement is an attention that does not seek to assimilate others and the world to self-securing discursive structures. It may be a recollection of the benign attention of childhood that moves a character forward, as it does Herzog, or it may be the brutally inescapable attention of a Sammler on the brink of a mass grave. Bellow is in no doubt about the course that his characters need to follow. But he can offer no guarantees; this course may destroy them. All he can say is that, for all its risks, this is the only course that can lead to the possibility of moral action, to the realization of ethical community. Bellow is far from sentimentality in the conclusions of these novels. The possible good that he adumbrates in their conclusions is offered in full awareness of its slightness, a slender bridge thrown across the gulf which opens when the security of self-enclosure is left behind and attention looks across to what is not itself. It does not assure us of everything; but if we refuse the outward movement, we shall have nothing at all.

Source: Martin Corner, "Moving Outwards: Consciousness, Discourse and Attention in Saul Bellow's Fiction," in *Studies in the Novel*, Vol. 32, No. 3, Fall 2000, pp. 369-85.

Critical Essay #7

In the following essay excerpt, Dutton examines Herzog's pursuit of "earthly salvation."

Critical Essay #8

In the first chapter of the novel, Herzog goes to see Dr. Emmerich for a physical examination. Dr. Emmerich says, "I heard of your divorce□who told me? I am sorry about it." Herzog replies aphoristically in a quick note, "looking for happiness□ ought to be prepared for bad results." Then the narrator states, "Emmerich put on his Ben Franklin eyeglasses and wrote a few words on the file card." So Poor Herzog's Almanac takes shape. Herzog leaves his "orderly, purposeful, lawful existence" to look for the synthesis that will bring him happiness; in so doing, he is confronted by events that lead him to his sofa in his New York apartment, feeling much the same, no doubt, as Johnson's Rasselas feels at the end of his journey: to look for happiness is to chase the horizon. And Herzog does chase□Wanda, Sono, Zinka, Madeleine, Ramona. "(What a lot of romances! thought Herzog. One after another. Were those my real career?)." "A strange heart," he scribbles of himself. "I myself can't account for it." "Winning as he weeps, weeping as he wins. Evidently can't believe in victories."

Herzog's life after he has left the university is intended by Bellow to reflect the twisting and turning search of man as he seeks a higher self, a synthesis. Each of his confrontations with other characters represents a segment of that search. But we must remember that Herzog's mind is being examined and that each of these characters may be properly thought of as extensions of that mind. Daisy is therefore a reflection of his academic life; in this sense, she is a part of Herzog's condition:

His early book ... was now on many reading lists,
and the younger generation of historians accepted it
as a model of the new sort of history ... [it] looks at
the past with an intense need for contemporary relevance.
As long as Moses was married to Daisy, he
had led the perfectly ordinary life of an assistant professor,
respected and stable [italics mine]. His first
work showed by objective research what Christianity
was to Romanticism.

The line italicized that describes Herzog's domestic life seems to be out of context, placed as it is within an account of Herzog the scholar. But with this strategic juxtapositioning the author encompasses his intentions that Herzog's relationship to Daisy and Herzog's intellectual endeavors are to be regarded as pieces of a whole, a state of mind. And, if we read closely in the following passage, it is possible to recognize in the description of Daisy the characteristics from which Herzog is escaping:

She was childishly systematic about things. It sometimes
amused Moses to recall that she had a file card
... to cover every situation ... When they were married
she put his pocket money in an envelope, in a
green metal file bought for budgeting. Daily reminders,
bills, concert tickets were pinned by thumbtacks

to the bulletin board. Calendars were marked
well in advance. Stability, symmetry, order, containment
were Daisy's strength ... By my irregularity
and turbulence of spirit I brought out the very worst
in Daisy. *I* caused the seams of her stockings to be
so straight, and the buttons to be buttoned symmetrically.
I was behind those rigid curtains and underneath
the square carpets ... Of course a wife's duty
was to stand by this puzzling and often disagreeable
Herzog. She did so with heavy neutrality, recording
her objections each time□once but not more. The
rest was silence□such heavy silence as he felt in
Connecticut when he was finishing *Romanticism and
Christianity*.

"Stability, symmetry, order, containment" are not only Daisy's strength but the elements of the protected and orderly existence that stir Herzog to rebellion. Then, when he states that it was he who was behind her idiosyncrasies, Bellow intends just that. Daisy and all she stands for are a part of Herzog's mind; and Bellow depicts in this relationship the thesis that man can stand only so much reason and order; that he longs for subjective research, to stretch himself, to flee from a world cold with intellect alone. After all, man is also a creature of the heart□certainly Herzog is.

After Herzog's escape from old barren reason, a meaningful pattern develops. He turns to Sono (he had been seeing the Japanese girl even before his divorce), who is the precise antithesis to Daisy: she is warm, loving, subservient, admiring ("T'es philosophe. O mon Philosophe, mon professeur d'amour. T'es tres important. Je le sais"); and she caters to all of his moods: "But often he sat morose, depressed, in the Morris chair. Well, curse such sadness! But she liked even that. She saw me with the eyes of love, and she said, 'Ah! T'es melancolique c'est tres beau'."

But Sono takes care especially of his sensory needs: "She loved massages, believed in them. She had often massaged Moses, and he had massaged her ... She had a tender heart ... " Bellow's implications are varied, but they are centered around a retreat into romantic melancholy and sensualism. The massages are direct appeals to the senses. As Herzog recalls Sono, he writes, "To tell the truth, I never had it so good. But I lacked the strength of character to bear such joy." And then he reflects: "That was hardly a joke. When a man's breast feels like a cage from which all the dark birds have flown□he is free, he is light. And he longs to have his vultures back again. He wants his customary struggles, his nameless, empty works, his anger, his afflictions and his sins." Sono, symbolic of Herzog's sensual nature, fails to content Herzog, the man. Happiness, the great synthesis, is not to be found in the indulgence of the senses. By nature, man is restless, and must push on from the lotus eaters: "she didn't answer my purpose. Not serious enough."

With Madeleine, Herzog moves in another direction to look for happiness; and, as he says, he ought to have been prepared for bad results. Madeleine serves a complex

function in Bellow's work, but her central purpose is to represent the object of man's pursuit and adoration of what is nebulously called "success." In fact, she is described as a bitch so often and by so many various people in the novel that we can only conclude that Bellow has in mind the proverbial "bitch-goddess" of success. Certainly her personality supports the idea. Everyone admires her great beauty; she is vain, demanding everyone's admiration and attention; she insists on dominating every situation. Deceitful and nasty to those in her power, she is always looking for new recruits to her standard. She is especially anxious to attract those who are ambitious: "Should he have been a plain unambitious Herzog? No. And Madeleine would never have married such a type. What she had been looking for, high and low, was precisely an ambitious Herzog. In order to trip him, bring him low, knock him sprawling and kick out his brains with a murderous bitch foot." Indeed, this "bitch" has made her mark on most of the people around Herzog. Dr. Edvig the psychiatrist is taken with her, as are Sandor Himmelstein, the Monsignor, Gersbach, and even Herzog's student Geraldine Portnoy, who speaks favorably of Madeleine even as she tells Herzog of his wife's infidelity.

Like success, Madeleine moves from object to object, and from interest to interest: "But when all was said and done, Madeleine didn't marry in the Church, nor did she baptize her daughter. Catholicism went the way of zithers and tarot cards, breadbaking and Russian civilization. And life in the country." For, as she angrily asks Herzog, "What makes you think I intend to have a life-long affair with you?" Her complete irresponsibility with money also bears mentioning; she spends outrageous sums on everything, from maternity clothes to cigarette boxes.

Appropriately enough, Madeleine takes everything that Herzog can give her□his name, money, reputation, and even his learning; and, when he can give nothing more, she moves to Gersbach, that "public figure" of a man, "that loud, flamboyant, ass-clutching brute ... " "He started out in educational radio, and now he's all over the place. On committees, in the papers. He gives lectures to the Hadassah . . . readings of his poems." But Gersbach, too, will go the way of all flesh. As Herzog tells Phoebe, Gersbach's wife, toward the end of the novel, "He'll lose his value to Madeleine as soon as you withdraw. After the victory, she'll have to throw him out."

Through the sequence of Daisy, Sono, and Madeleine, Bellow intends that with man's disillusion in his intellect and emotions, he turns to the pursuit of worldly success□fame, money, position □only to find that its achievement is barren. Happiness is not here, and the lesson is long, costly, and painful, one not too easily survived.

Ramona, the object of Herzog's final pursuit, represents another retreat, this time from the egoshattering experience with Madeleine. Ramona is an earth-goddess (she runs a floral shop) who "had made herself into a sort of sexual professional (or priestess)." She is more than willing to salve all of Herzog's wounds, to reassure him of his intelligence and masculinity, his virility and value: "Nonsense□ why talk like that! You know you're a good-looking man. And you even take pride in being one. In Argentina they'd call you *macho*□masculine."

Under Ramona's tutelage Herzog goes shopping for new clothes, a coat of crimson and white stripes and a straw hat, reminiscent of the 1920s and reflective of Herzog's retreat. Ramona does take good care of this sick Herzog, offering him "asylum, shrimp, wine, music, flowers, sympathy, gave him room, so to speak, in her soul, and finally the embrace of her body." Her sexual antics attract him, but they also bewilder him: "It was odd that Ramona should sometimes carry on like one of those broads in a girlie magazine. For which she advanced the most high-minded reasons. An educated woman, she quoted him Catullus and the great love poets of all times. And the classics of psychology. And finally the Mystical Body. And so she was in the next room, joyously preparing, stripping, perfuming. She wanted to please."

Ramona, Bellow intends, is another aberration of Herzog's mind. As such, the similarity in the attitudes of these two life-beaten people should be noted: "She was thirty-seven or thirty-eight years old, he shrewdly reckoned, and this meant that she was looking for a husband ... She wanted to give her heart once and for all, and level with a good man, become Herzog's wife and quit being an easy lay." Herzog writes in his imaginary letters to her: "Dear Ramona, you mustn't think because I've taken a powder, briefly, that I don't care for you. I do! I feel you close about me, much of the time. And last week, at that party, when I saw you across the room in your hat with flowers, your hair crowded down close to your bright cheeks, I had a glimpse of what it might be like to love you." Herzog shows signs of Ramona's desperate resignations: "He exclaimed mentally, Marry me! Be my wife! End my troubles!" but then he catches himself "and was staggered by his rashness, his weakness, and by the characteristic nature of such an outburst, for he saw how very neurotic and typical it was."

What Herzog comes to discover through all of these experiences□his love affairs, which Bellow intends to be reflective and subjective, inclinations of personal gratification□is that he will never be content or at ease with himself through his misguided efforts to exploit a part of his nature, nor will he find a viable life through a denial of any other part of his nature. On one level he is trying to do the impossible□to find happiness through outer sources□to supplement himself, so to speak, through these love affairs. But on a deeper, universal level, these attachments and attractions are symbolic of elements to be found in all men, and all men will find that their ease of heart will come from within themselves if it comes at all.

Critical Essay #9

This lonely truth is brought home to Herzog when he dashes to Chicago to protect, he tells himself, his daughter from Gersbach and Madeleine, who are living together. As Herzog sneaks up to the house and looks through the bathroom window, he is greeted by a scene that goes far to dispel his mistaken pretensions of self and his misinformed idea of his relation to others. When he sees the hated pretender Gersbach tenderly and affectionately giving his daughter a bath and little Junie delighting in the scrubbing, Herzog looks at Gersbach and thinks:

> The hated traits were all there. But see how he was with June, scooping water on her playfully, kindly ... The child jumped up and down with delight ... Moses might have killed him now ... There were two bullets in the chamber ... But they would stay there. Herzog clearly recognized that ... Firing this pistol was nothing but a thought. [Herzog writes a quick note] The human soul is an amphibian, and I have touched its sides. [And then he thinks] Amphibian! It lives in more elements than I will ever know; ... I seem to think because June looks like a Herzog, she is nearer to me than to them. But how is she near to me if I have no share in her life? Those two grotesque love-actors have it all. And I apparently believe that if the child does not have a life resembling mine, educated according to the Herzog standards of "heart," and all the rest of it, she will fail to become a human being ... As soon as Herzog saw the actual person giving an actual bath, the reality of it, the tenderness of such a buffoon to a little child, his intended violence turned into theater, into something ludicrous ... Lingering in the alley awhile, he congratulated himself on his luck. His breath came back to him; and how good it felt to breathe! It was worth the trip.

Herzog realizes that he has been using his daughter in much the same way he has been using his affairs with women□as an imagined source of happiness. He had thought that little June needed him, that she was even a part of him. Obviously he is mistaken. It is even more important that he loses his intense hate of Gersbach and Madeleine; hence, as Bellow intends, Herzog no longer hates in himself those elements for which these two actors stand. Herzog is released from a self-imprisoning self-hatred of elements in his own nature.

But Herzog, since he still wants custody of his daughter, goes straight to the house of Phoebe Gersbach and urges her to divorce her husband; for the consequence may be

that any scandal revealing Gersbach's infidelity may yet bring June back to him. But he is bluntly told the direction he must take when Phoebe refuses to do anything about Gersbach's affair with Madeleine: "'Why do you come to me [Phoebe asks], if you want custody of your daughter? *Either do something by yourself or forget it* [italics mine]. Let me alone, now Moses.' [Herzog admits] This too, was perfectly just ... 'You're right. This was an unnecessary visit'."

With this last effort that is so obviously ill-conceived, Herzog returns to his house in Ludeyville, where he faces himself, finds his synthesis, and writes: "Why must I be such a throb-hearted character ... But I am. I am, and you can't teach old dogs. Myself is thus and so, and will continue thus and so. And why fight it? My balance comes from instability. Not organization, or courage, as with other people. It's tough, but that's how it is. On these terms I, too□even I!□apprehend certain things. Perhaps the only way I'm able to do it. Must play the instrument I've got."

All men must come to terms with their nature. Herzog realizes that in the past he has been victimized by that nature because of his inability to define it and accept it for what it is. He is beginning to understand himself as man: "And terrible forces in me, including the force of admiration or praise, powers, including loving powers, very damaging, making me almost an idiot because I lacked the capacity to manage them." Herzog, who now puts all of the blame for his problem squarely on himself, faces the fact that he is a human being subject to "terrible forces"; but he also realizes that he is only at their mercy if he fails to understand them.

It is little wonder that, as the story opens with Herzog back in Ludeyville, he states in the first line, "If I am out of my mind, it's all right with me." And, at the end of the novel, the line is repeated. The importance of this remark far exceeds its seeming casualness, for Bellow intends it to be interpreted literally, at least in a sense: for Herzog's mind has failed to manage these "terrible forces." Furthermore, with the concluding scene, which finds Herzog closely involved with nature, Bellow intends that Herzog is *out of his mind* [italics mine]: he is no longer subject to the "terrible forces" of the mind, and he has found his place in the natural order of things:

Then he thought he'd light candles at dinner ... But
now it was time to get those bottles from the spring
... He took pleasure in the vivid cold of the water
... Coming back from the woods, he picked some
flowers for the table. He wondered whether there was
a corkscrew in the drawer ... A nail could be used,
if it came to that ... Meanwhile, he filled his hat from
the rambler vine, the one that clutched the rainpipe
... By the cistern there were yellow day lilies. He
took some of these, too, but they wilted instantly.
And, back in the darker garden, he looked for peonies;
perhaps some had survived. But then it struck
him that he might be making a mistake, and he
stopped ... Picking flowers? He was being thoughtful,

being lovable. How would it be interpreted? (He smiled slightly.) Still, he need only know his own mind, and the flowers couldn't be used; no, they couldn't be turned against him. So he did not throw them away ... Walking over notes and papers, he lay down on his Recamier couch ... At this time he had no messages for anyone. Nothing. Not a single word.

Significantly, this is the first time in the novel that Herzog has left his position as an observer of nature, which he is throughout the book, to become a participant. And then there is the observation on the part of Herzog□not a knowledgeable conclusion, but an illumination□that he too must remain in nature, like the flowers, if he is to prosper. The novel ends as the backward action begins, with Herzog's lying on a couch. Only this time it is the couch of reason, a "Recamier couch," much like the one, no doubt, upon which Madame Recamier reclined when the French classicist David painted her likeness. Bellow implies that his protagonist is recovering his balance and is entering a world of the reasonable.

And perhaps Bellow's entire novel is to be interpreted in the light of the classic dictum, *know thyself*. At least Moses E. Herzog, "a solid figure of a man", has learned its importance. In any case, "at this time" there will be no more attempts to define himself through communication with the world, no more insistent intellectualization of the world or of his relationship to it. For now he is content to be□Moses E. Herzog. He writes his last letter: "But what do you want, Herzog? But that's just it□not a solitary thing. I am pretty well satisfied to be, to be just as it is willed, and for as long as I may remain in occupancy." We might even say that Herzog has attained a state of *sweet* reasonableness.

Critical Essay #10

Bellow often uses the images of actors and theaters in order to convey the idea that "all the world's a stage, and all the men and women merely players." In *Herzog*, Bellow casts his protagonist into the dramatic tradition of Faust, which allows us to interpret Herzog's experiences and dilemmas through the Faustian myth, and further, to see Herzog as representative of the intellectual development of man since the Renaissance.

Bellow provides an endless variety of hints that point to his protagonist as Faust. For example, Herzog writes a letter to himself: "Dear Moses E. Herzog, Since when have you taken such an interest in social questions, in the external world? Until lately, you led a life of innocent sloth. But suddenly a Faustian spirit of discontent and universal reform descends on you. Scolding, Invective."

Within the first few pages, he is describing his studies: "His first work showed by objective research what Christianity was to Romanticism. In the second he was becoming tougher, more assertive, more ambitious ... He had a strong will and a talent for polemics, a taste for the philosophy of history ... digging in at Ludeyville, he showed a taste and talent also for danger and extremism, for heterodoxy, for ordeals, a fatal attraction to the 'City of Destruction'." Here is Faust with his ambition, polemics, philosophy, and tastes, and certainly his "fatal attraction" to Bunyan's "City of Destruction." Herzog is a university professor who is, in his words, as "bored" as Faust was. The flight that Herzog takes while in Poland is reminiscent of Faust's travels under the will of Mephistopheles: "They flew through angry spinning snow clouds over white Polish forests, fields, pits, factories, rivers dogging their banks, in, out, in and a terrain of white and brown diagrams." And the geography of Herzog's trip is significant because it encompasses the area in which Faust was operative, the Eastern European area, where Herzog lectures "in Copenhagen, Warsaw, Cracow, Berlin, Belgrade, Istanbul, and Jerusalem", and specifically in Cracow, where there "was a frightening moment ... when the symptom appeared", just a "little infection he had caught in Poland." In Goethe's work, Cracow is the precise setting for Faust's teaching and for his bargain with Mephistopheles. And Herzog feels Mephistopheles inside himself when he writes, "There is someone inside me. I am in his grip. When I speak of him I feel him in my head, pounding for order. He will ruin me."

Bellow intends that, as in the case of Faust, Mephistopheles be seen as a creature of Herzog's imagination; and, when Herzog says, "I do seem to be a broken-down monarch of some kind", it is with the idea that this spirit is a part of Herzog. And then, keeping in mind the view that the other characters in the novel are symbolic of forces within Herzog, Bellow has his protagonist say:

> Take me, for instance. I've been writing letters helter-skelter in all directions. More words. I go after reality with language. Perhaps I'd like to change it all into language, to force Madeleine and Gersbach to have a *Conscience* [italics in original] ... If they

don't suffer, they've gotten away from me. And I've filled the world with letters to prevent their escape. I want them in human form, and so I *conjure up a whole environment and catch them in the middle. I put my whole heart into these constructions. But they are constructions* [italics mine].

This passage contains the clear indication that Bellow would have the reader see his work as an exposition of a psychological condition. This condition, he intends figuratively and dramatically, is the result of diabolic forces. It will be remembered that Herzog decides Madeleine would never have married an unambitious person: "What she had been looking for, *high and low* [italics mine], was precisely an ambitious Herzog." She had "the will of a demon," he says. So Madeleine is an extension of the Mephistophelean spirit in Herzog, as is Gersbach: "He's a ringmaster, popularizer, liaison for the elites. He grabs up celebrities and brings them before the public. And he makes all sorts of people feel that he has exactly what they've been looking for." And, even as Mephistopheles suggests to Faust that he could peacefully lead a sensuous existence, so does Ramona try to convince Herzog that life with her would be ideal.

In addition to the aptness of the Faust legend as a description of the mental condition of Herzog, Bellow intends that the myth be seen as part of the resolution to his novel. Herzog states the case when he tries to explain his work to Zelda: "Herzog tried to explain what it was about□that his study was supposed to have ended with a new angle on the modern condition, showing how life could be lived by renewing universal connections ... revising the old Western, Faustian ideology ... "

In Goethe's drama, Faust finds his contentment in social usefulness. He creates a vast area of productive land out of the swamps, where people can live in freedom and in pragmatic activities. Through this achievement he finds peace and harmony. At one time Herzog has similar ideas. He thinks about giving his land and house in Ludeyville to a utopian group. The idea remains with him, but he finally decides against it.

This house, "an old ruin of a place but with enormous possibilities", suggests the condition of Herzog, as Bellow implies when his protagonist sees "the shadow of his face in a gray, webby window." And when Herzog tells his brother Will at the end of the story that "I could go to work and become rich. Make a ton of money, just to keep this house", he does so with the illumination that he himself is worth saving, that the first and most important step is to work with himself, which means knowing and enjoying himself in his human condition. Although this condition is admittedly beset with many limitations and countless liabilities, it is also one with "enormous possibilities." Through his hero, Bellow seems to be saying that man's earthly salvation is not to be gained in social movements, utopian visions, political nostrums, scientific investigations (and this compulsive activity is what Herzog's letters are all about), but in learning to live with himself as he exists in the subangelic position of man.

Source: Robert R. Dutton, "*Herzog*," in *Saul Bellow*, edited by Warren French, G. K. Hall & Co., 1982, pp. 124-34.

Topics for Further Study

Using the historical section in this entry and other research sources, determine whether Herzog has followed an existentialist philosophy in the novel. Report on what you find and provide examples to support your conclusion.

Research one of the historical figures Herzog writes a letter to, and answer it as you think that person would□or write Herzog a letter from a fictional character, expressing that person's point of view about Herzog and his actions.

The novel has never been adapted to film, probably because of its complex narrative structure. Try to think of ways that Herzog's story could be made into a film. Take one scene and write a storyboard for it.

Note the different things about contemporary American society that upset Herzog, as reflected in his letters. Investigate whether these subjects bothered other Americans during this period and whether they made any effort to voice their complaints.

Compare and Contrast

1963: *The Feminine Mystique,* by Betty Friedan, is published. The book chronicles the growing sense of dissatisfaction American women feel about the unequal treatment they receive in the home, the workplace, and other institutions.

Today: Women have made major gains in their fight for equality. Discrimination against women is now against the law.

1960s: Divorce rates steadily increase during the decade. The Census Bureau reports that in 1970 there are 4.3 million divorced adults in America. Sociologists link the high divorce rate to what they consider to be the breakdown of the American family.

Today: The growing divorce rate has prompted a redefinition of the American family that includes the nuclear unit□two parents and their children□as well as new family units including those headed by single-parents, foster parents, and step-parents.

1960s: Developments concerning the rights of individuals and of groups generate conversations on the "Death of God," compulsory prayer or Bible reading in the public schools, and birth control.

Today: These conversations continue and have become more prominent as Republicans gain control of the Senate and the presidency. A number of conservative Christian groups, usually referred to as the "religious right," are lobbying for a return of prayer in the classroom and are urging schools to promote sexual abstinence.

What Do I Read Next?

Bellow's *The Adventures of Augie March* (1953) follows the hero's coming of age as he tries to make sense of his life in the middle part of the twentieth century in America.

Bellow's *Mr. Sammler's Planet* (1970), which won the National Book Award for fiction, tells the life story of Artur Sammler, a Holocaust survivor living in New York, and his penetrating observations on the human condition and contemporary American culture.

Walter Kaufmann's *Existentialism: From Dostoevsky to Sartre* (1984) anthologizes existentialist thinkers, and includes the arguments between Kierkegaard and Nietzsche on the subject of Christianity, a topic Herzog writes about in his letters.

Stuart A. Kallen's *Life in America During the 1960s (The Way People Live)* (2001) presents a comprehensive overview of the history and culture of the period in which Bellow's novel takes place.

Albert Camus's *The Stranger*, published in 1942, is a widely known novel dealing with existentialist themes.

Further Study

Dutton, Robert R., *Saul Bellow*, Twayne Publishers, 1982. Dutton presents a thoughtful study of the themes in Bellow's novels.

Fuchs, Daniel, *Saul Bellow: Vision and Revision*, Duke University Press, 1984.

The first two chapters provide informative background information on Bellow's place in the modern tradition and his relationship to Dostoevsky. The remaining chapters offer penetrating analyses of his novels, including studies of his manuscripts.

Kiernan, Robert F., *Saul Bellow*, Continuum, 1989.

The first chapter of this book presents valuable information on Bellow's life and career. The remainder of the work critiques one novel per chapter. Kiernan draws interesting comparisons between Bellow and William Faulkner.

Malin, Irving, ed., *Saul Bellow and the Critics*, New York University Press, 1967.

This collection of critical essays considers the general trends in critiquing Bellow's fiction, including concentrations on themes, characterizations, imagery, style, and sources. The last chapter, written by Bellow, considers the author's view of the future of the novel.

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Corner, Martin, "Moving Outwards: Consciousness, Discourse and Attention in Saul Bellow's Fiction," in *Studies in the Novel*, Vol. 32, No. 3, Fall 2000, p. 369.

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Epstein, Seymour, "Bellow's Gift," in *Denver Quarterly*, Winter 1976, pp. 35-50, 423.

Marin, Daniel B., "Saul Bellow," in *Dictionary of Literary Biography*, Volume 2: *American Novelists Since World War II, First Series*, Gale Research, 1978, pp. 39-50.

Opdahl, Keith M., "Saul Bellow," in *Dictionary of Literary Biography*, Volume 28: *Twentieth-Century American-Jewish Fiction Writers*, Gale Research, 1984, pp. 8-25.

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Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Novels for Students (NfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's□For Students□ Literature line, NfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on □classic□ novels

frequently studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of NfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of NfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel;and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of □classic□ novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members□educational professionals□ helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in NfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- Introduction: a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- Plot Summary: a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed□for instance, the narrator in Invisible Man-the character is listed as □The Narrator□ and alphabetized as □Narrator.□ If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. □ Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name □Jean Louise Finch□ would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname □Scout Finch.□
- Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- Style: this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- Historical Context: This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- Critical Overview: this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- Criticism: an essay commissioned by NfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).

- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an □at-a-glance□ comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author's time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

NfS includes □The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature,□ a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children's Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Novels for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the NfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the NfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.

Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

Citing Novels for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Novels for Students may use the following general forms. These examples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed. When citing text from NfS that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

□Night.□ Novels for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234-35.

When quoting the specially commissioned essay from NfS (usually the first piece under the □Criticism□ subhead), the following format should be used:

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on □Winesburg, Ohio.□ Novels for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 335-39.

When quoting a journal or newspaper essay that is reprinted in a volume of NfS, the following form may be used:

Malak, Amin. □Margaret Atwood's □The Handmaid's Tale and the Dystopian Tradition,□ Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9-16; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133-36.

When quoting material reprinted from a book that appears in a volume of NfS, the following form may be used:

Adams, Timothy Dow. □Richard Wright: □Wearing the Mask,□ in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69-83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59-61.

We Welcome Your Suggestions

The editor of Novels for Students welcomes your comments and ideas. Readers who wish to suggest novels to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to contact the editor. You may contact the editor via email at: ForStudentsEditors@gale.com. Or write to the editor at:

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