

decides to become a boxer, and devotes himself to the physical regimen of the boxer, though he continues to doubt the wisdom of his choice. He is capable, however, and he wins bout after bout until he is matched with the middle-weight champion, Ape McGonigle. They fight, and Stuy almost loses; he is woozy from a tricky blow. But he recovers, he knocks Ape out, and Dorothy confesses her love for him. She is won.

The story is not well crafted, and though the “public voice” is not as prominent as in “The Ash Heel’s Tendon,” the prose is undistinguished, even clumsy: “. . . Stuy’s right swung to a spot a little to one side of the point of the jaw of a certain Hebrew Gentleman with an Irish name, and Stuy stooped and putting his gloves under the Celtic Semite’s arms carried him to his corner while the crowded auditorium shouted and yelled for Slam Bing.” The “current,” says Stuyvesant, is that constant love he has had for Dorothy for many years. But nothing in the story gives credence to the idea of constant love on the part of either Stuy or Do (as he calls her) and the story of handsome Stuy’s development into a middleweight champion is not credibly motivated.

Hemingway had yet to demonstrate the skill that we have come to appreciate in his short stories. But all artists need time and room to grow, and these stories reveal glimpses of what was to come. It was essential experimentation; the artist had still to perfect his metier.

A New Kind of Male-Female Relationship: A Note on Saul Bellow’s *The Dean’s December*

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In most of Bellow’s novels the relationships between the protagonists, all male, and women, can best be described as failures. Characters like Tommy Wilhelm of *Seize the Day* (1956), Eugene Henderson of *Henderson the Rain King* (1959), and Moses Herzog of *Herzog* (1964) are either separated or divorced, and though they have affairs, they seem to be in perpetual flight from any kind of stable, trusting union with a female partner. Artur Sammler of *Sammler’s Planet* (1970) is an elderly widower, but his view of women, especially his sexy relative Angela Gruner, verges on the misogynic. In *Humboldt’s Gift* (1973) Charlie Citrine repeats the pattern established in *Seize the Day* and *Herzog*, trying to flee the wrath of his ex-wife and acting the part of an ageing Lothario to his beautiful mistress Renata.

The Bellow heroes have typically suffered from a phobic and paranoid reaction to women and their expectations of love and emotional commitment. As a result they become isolated, lose contact with their children, and suffer from the guilt feelings that follow. Their new girl friends they regard with a mixture of wariness and desire, and seem incapable of surrendering themselves in devotion and love to any one of them. Herzog is attracted to Ramona, but fears entrapment by her, and Citrine loses Renata to another man because of his indecision about her. Without fully realizing it, these protagonists maintain a distance between themselves and women which blocks the development of a lasting relationship. The women, however, perceive this clearly, also Ramona, who tries to break down Herzog’s reserve

by offering him her love. But more often both wives and mistresses accuse the hero of egotism and evasion of his responsibilities, presenting a litany of complaint that is essentially the same whether it emanates from Margaret Wilhelm, Renata, or Denise Citrine. Even Madeleine Herzog, with all of her own madness; is exasperated by Herzog's remoteness and what she sees as his inability to involve himself genuinely in their marriage.

Denise is perhaps the one who expresses this grievance most eloquently, emphasizing the suffering Charlie has caused her and their children: "You took it into your head that you were some kind of artist. *We* know better, don't we. And what you really want is to get rid of everybody, to tune out and be a law unto yourself. Just you and your misunderstood heart, Charlie. You couldn't bear a serious relationship, that's why you got rid of me and the children."¹

At the end of each novel the Bellow hero achieves a certain amount of stability and peace, but he remains alone and isolated. A convincing, viable partnership with a woman is never realized in the novels that were published up to 1973, with the possible exception of *The Victim* (1947), an early work in which the protagonist, Asa Leventhal, seems to be a devoted husband. But even here, the wife, Mary, is absent during almost the entire action of the novel, and the success of their marriage is a postulate rather than a fiction fully realized. It was not until *The Dean's December* (1982) that Bellow created a hero whose attitude to women has undergone a real and significant change.

Malcolm Bradbury has written that "In *The Dean's December*, Bellow explores a new hero, a new man of feeling, who, like Sammler and Citrine, knows his own complicity . . ."² But Bradbury has nothing to say about the manner in which this newness is manifested in the male-female relationship. The protagonist, Albert Corde, seems to be much more profoundly aware of his complicity, or guilt, than either Sammler or Citrine. His humility sets him apart from characters like these and is part of his new attitude. Corde is indeed a man of feeling, but some of his emotions are entirely new in a Bellow hero and represent a radical break with the almost total self-absorption of the earlier characters. For the first time in the Bellow canon, a protagonist feels compelled to transcend the boundaries of his ego and actually make the lives of a few other people an integral part of his existence.

This means that Corde is able to sustain an intimate relationship with those who are close to him, his wife Minna and her ageing Rumanian mother Valeria. He recalls how he, when spending time with them in London, had preferred to remain in their company, "didn't care to go off by himself."³ Paranoia and isolation have given way to a new appreciation of the social skills of women and the friendship that they offer. Corde allows himself to be domesticated and finds it easy to surrender his former habits of male independence and skirtchasing. The rewards of closeness and love are greater than the egosatisfactions he has been trained to look for and indulge in. At this stage in his life he reserves his energies for different tasks, directs his anger and indignation against the decaying capitalist order of Chicago and the totalitarian oppression he encounters in Bucharest, where he and Minna are visiting the dying Valeria. Here he makes friends with Valeria's sister Gigi, an elderly lady, and allows himself to be inspected by her, assuming that she doubts his reliability: "Could he really, but *really*, be trusted?" (p. 53). The answer is yes, and the novel leaves no room for doubt about it.

¹ *Humboldt's Gift* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1973), p. 43.

² *Saul Bellow* (London: Methuen, 1982), p. 93.

³ *The Dean's December* (New York: Harper and Row, 1982), p. 12. Subsequent references are to this edition.

Corde has arrived at an understanding of what he regards as the true values in life: love, a concern for others, escape from the confines of self, and it so happens that he meets and experiences these values mainly in his relations with women. During a conversation with his sister Elfrida Zaehner he disregards what he calls her "suburban maternal psychology" (p. 89) in characteristic Bellovian fashion, but responds to her genuine concern for her son Mason. Corde points to the importance of the "depth level" (p. 89) in human affairs, the bond of love and respect for others that at all times represents the vital human connection that is mankind's only hope. This level is found in simple, spontaneous feelings, in "the natural warmth of his sister" (p. 89). Our era, plagued by "dead categories of intellect and words that get us nowhere" (p. 90), is in desperate need of such a fixed point of reference.

Visiting Valeria in the hospital in Bucharest, Corde realizes that his "essential message" (p. 128) in this situation is to tell her that he loves her. His teachers are the women, and he perceives the importance of "the woman connection" (p. 129) in the Communist capital, how they help each other, possessing a secure knowledge of what matters most between people. The same connection operates in America. Valeria reacts violently to Corde's words, making efforts to move and speak though she is paralyzed. She responds not just because her son-in-law speaks the right words, but because he is sincere. This fact is surprising, even to himself, but still true.

Corde's relationship with his wife is harmonious and his behavior subdued and cooperative throughout the entire novel. She, in turn, loves and respects him, though both are also aware of the considerable differences that exist between them. She is an astronomer, devoted to science and familiar both with higher mathematics and the vastnesses of space. He is, among other things, a late version of the traditional Bellow hero, a thinker and humanist endlessly speculating upon the human condition, history, society and politics. His weakness, as well as his new strength, in his approach to Minna, is evident in the central scene of the novel where the two of them experience a small altercation which cannot really be called a quarrel because Corde backs down immediately.

After her mother's death Minna is greatly upset and turns to her husband for help, believing that he, the expert on human relations, on the soul and its emotions, can assist her and explain her to herself. She feels an inexplicable anger with Valeria for dying and leaving her, but as soon as she asks Corde for help he feels that "the strength drained out of him" (p. 256). This reaction is an old one with him, and he shares it with the protagonists who have gone before him and who are too full of themselves at all times to be able to give much support to their wives or lady friends, or anyone else for that matter. But Corde is different in that he at least recognizes squarely the legitimacy of Minna's need as well as his own inadequacy.

In her grief, Minna is in a state bordering on hysteria, filled with an uncontrollable mixture of sorrow and rage, and when she turns to Corde he responds with a lecture in the typical fashion of the intellectual Bellow hero. Minna, predictably, expresses her "tigerish" (p. 263) rage, feeling let down in her hour of need, and then Corde perceives his mistake and refrains from trying to shield himself from her attack. By absorbing her anger in this situation he shows her that he is aware of her pain, and she, in turn, relents and quickly forgives him. For his part he accepts the chastening and promises himself to do better by her in the future. The Bellow hero has certainly come a long way from his former pouting, sulking ways toward women and his rejection of their claims on his care and attention.

Minna is hospitalized upon the couple's return to Chicago, and weakened and irritable as she is, she tends to find fault with everything her husband does. However,

when he feels wounded, as he does by her remarks, he realizes that this is not really so, that "the old self would have been wounded" (p. 283). Something decisive and perhaps rare has happened to Corde, and a new generosity has enabled him to see beyond surfaces and his preoccupations with his own self. At the same time he is mercilessly realistic in his view of himself, admitting that his new attitude may not last forever. For him, "goodness might just be a mood, and love simply an investment that looked good for the moment . . . The intention was to recognize yourself for what you (pitifully, preposterously) were. Then whatever good you found, if any, would also be yours" (p. 289).

Corde would hardly be a Bellow hero unless he had some last-minute second thoughts and reservations to add to whatever new insight and value systems that he develops and acquires. But his love and goodness, such as it is, lasts to the end of the novel, suggesting that they are real enough and that his doubts about himself have no great significance. Above all, he has found a stability within himself which enables him to risk a real emotional commitment without fearing any threat to his own identity and having to keep his options open.

George Orwell and Iris Murdoch: Patterns of Power

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In *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949), Big Brother's henchman declares: "The Party seeks power entirely for its own. We are not interested in the good of others, we are interested solely in power . . . The object of power is power."¹ Emphatic and explicit, the statement underscores the centrality of power as the defining concept for Orwell's novel. Similarly, Iris Murdoch dramatizes in her works man's obsessive passion for power. Her major and minor characters illustrate patterns of master-slave relationships, initiated and controlled by a single domineering figure exercising an uncanny influence over others to achieve selfish goals. Reminiscent of Big Brother, this charismatic power figure may play the role of an enchanter, "god," demon, or saint.

The centrality of power to Orwell and Murdoch does not, however, entail identical treatment of it. While Orwell envisions power from a political and social perspective to expose the tyranny of totalitarian bureaucracies over the people, Murdoch handles power from a moral and philosophical angle within the confines of individuals' treatment of each other. Thus, while social forces and institutions concern Orwell, the individual as a moral (or amoral) entity preoccupies Murdoch. In other words, Orwell, the journalist, social commentator, and partisan fighter, approaches fiction from the world of politics. Murdoch, the disciplined moral philosopher, approaches the genre from the world of ethics. Consequently, Orwell focuses on institutionalized political structures that regulate and restrict the lives

¹ George Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (London: 1949; rpt. Penguin, 1984), p. 27. Subsequent references to this edition will appear in the text.