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TRACES OF AGING

OLD AGE AND MEMORY
IN CONTEMPORARY NARRATIVE



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Marta Cerezo Moreno, Nieves Pascual Soler (eds.)

Traces of Aging

Old Age and Memory in Contemporary Narrative

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This collection consists of eight essays that examine the way narratives determine our understanding of old age and condition how the experience is lived. Contributors to this volume have based their analysis on the concept of »narrative identity« developed by Paul Ricoeur, built upon the idea that fiction makes life, and on his definition of »trace« as the mark of time. By investigating the traces of aging imprinted in a series of literary and filmic works they dismantle the narrative of old age as decline and fore-closure to assemble one of transformation and growth.

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Horror mortis, structural trauma, and postmodern parody in Saul Bellow's *Henderson the Rain King*

Francisco Collado-Rodríguez

1) Introduction. The novelist's game with frameworks: Criticism, Freudian psychoanalysis, and myth symbolism

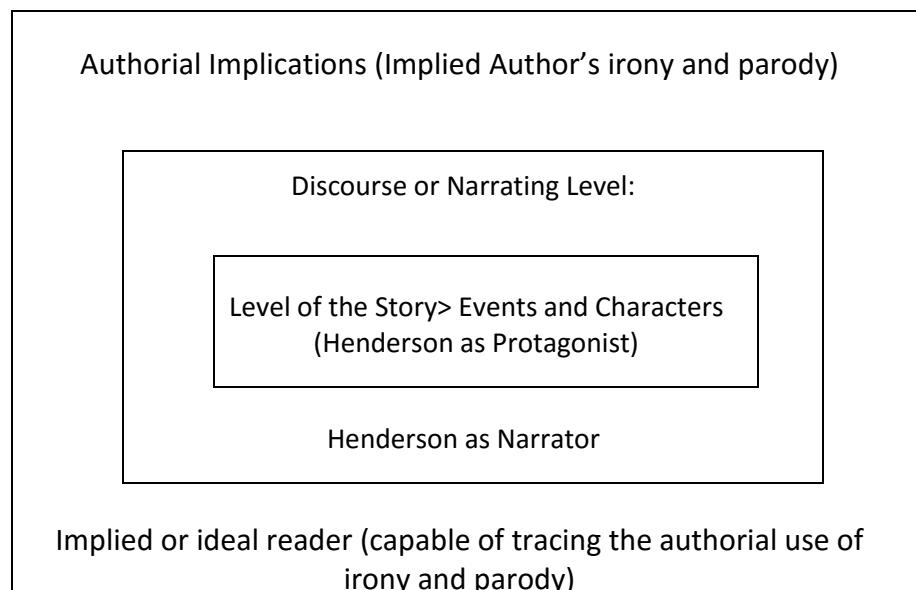
This paper starts by showing its critical aims, evaluating existing criticism on Bellow's novel *Henderson the Rain King* (1959), and adding to it a narratological analysis that may reveal the ideological significance of one of the writer's most remarkable aims in his work: the parody of two critical frameworks that had become rather popular in the postwar period, even if they had originated in modernist times. Symbols and conceits taken from Freudian psychoanalysis—eventually revitalized in contemporary Trauma Studies—and myth criticism, as well as their persistent symbol-hunting methodology, result in what seems to be a comical entertaining novel that, however, hides a profound criticism of WASP ideology and its resulting manifestation in 20th-century American colonialism. In his essay "A Jewish Writer," published soon before his death, Bellow evaluated the condition of being an American writer of Jewish stock and elaborated on his belief that the "dislike of Jews was a ready way for WASP literati to identify themselves with the great [American] tradition," giving names of famous poets and intellectuals of the early 20th century and explicitly citing Henry Adams' anti-Dreyfusard position (2011, 3). Protagonist Eugene Henderson, a psychologically castrated and castrating individual who is also structurally traumatized by the notion of death, offers in his own self-descriptions a *condensation* (remember Freud's interpretation of dreams) of the most contemptible traits frequently attributed to the American right-wing of Anglo-Saxon puritan descent. Additionally, Henderson tries to *displace* (remember Freud again) his problems to the alleged primitive cradle of civilization, Africa, where he undergoes some of the most well-known stages of the hero's quest.

The following pages aim at discovering that Bellow's basic strategies to carry out both his parody of the two modernist frameworks and his ideological attack are

the use of a narrator whose words cannot be trusted and the deployment of an excessive use of symbols and motifs. In so doing, the essay's final aim is to relocate *Henderson the Rain King* as a postmodern novel for its overloaded staging of humans as symbol-making creatures, trapped in the world as text, but also to link such relocation to Henderson's portrait as a structurally traumatized and pathetic WASP "hero" who tries to find in Africa the existential and sociological answers that may quench his necessity to know what *he wants*. Thus, this paper also challenges the frequent critical assumptions that locate Bellow's protagonist as a neo-humanist hero who represents his author's concern with a Freudian, transcendentalist or existentialist interpretation of life and who is finally able to reach wisdom and improve his character and mental stability.

As mentioned above, narratology is used as a critical method of enquiry. This well-known textual method for narrative analysis is based on the scrutiny of the two ontological levels existing in any narrative text, the story and the discourse or narrating process. The method also draws upon the importance of different elements for the construction of the narrative world: the voice or narrator (evaluating its different types), the focalization or point of view (also recognizable in various forms), and the use of space and temporality (see Genette 1980). The following diagram summarizes the most important levels and notions that our analysis needs to address in *Henderson the Rain King* to uncover the writer's ideological and parodic aims:

External level: Bellow and Readers



Once the aims and methodology of this paper have been put forward, it seems necessary to establish the research territory by revising significant studies on Bellow's novel that, even after realizing—in some cases—the writer's parodic approach, have interpreted the novel as a (modernist) Bildungsroman or as the narrative of a (comic) successful quest for existential meaning. Some examples and quotations to demonstrate the persistent popularity of this traditional understanding of the novel should be cited to validate the aims that our approach adds to the existing criticism on the novel. Fuch's classic interpretation of Bellow's novel, to start with, remarked the writer's (modernist) mythic mood while also acknowledging the importance of parody in the novel: "Myth serves the cause of personal transcendence; the primitive, the voice of civilization; the heart of darkness, the heart of light. As some of the critics have noticed, [Henderson] is a parody of Conrad, Lawrence, Hemingway, rather than another note on the decline of the West" (1974: 79). However, Fuch's significant study still evaluated the novel as Bellow's attempt to create a new comedy where the protagonist's hypochondriac condition is only a source of humor (1974: 81–82). More recent criticism, though, has been concerned with other issues that analyze Henderson's role from multiple perspectives, but the narrator's unreliable condition and the textual and ideological trap to the readers that the excessive parody and symbolism imply have not been given sufficient attention in any of them. A few years

ago, Dan Muhlestein quantified the most relevant critical aims the novel had received since its publication in 1959:

The philosophical underpinnings of Henderson have been discussed almost ad nauseam, including whether—and to what extent—the novel either embodies or critiques existentialism, transcendentalism, Jamesian psychology, Reichian ideas, alienation theory, and science. Literary sources and influences have also been traced, including debts to such diverse authors as Blake, Browning, Cervantes, Eliot, Wordsworth, and the authors of the Bible. The most consequential intertextual analysis has focused on Bellow's use of anthropological source material—especially the work of Burton and Herskovits—and on his anxiety-of-influence reaction against Conrad, Hemingway, and the modern novel generally. (2005: 59)

This paper questions previous critical understandings of Bellow's novel as a modernist piece and denies that its author developed a neo-humanist critique. On the contrary, it elaborates further on Fuch's (and others') perception of the book's parody, by arguing that Bellow's hyper-parodic tools become a strategy to criticize and condense in the figure of Henderson white patriarchal self-righteousness, cold fascist modernist intellectualism, and American colonialism. Such authorial critical tools systematically present death as the enervating drive that forces the protagonist into pathetic and anti-heroic deeds.

However, even in later years, some critics are still haunted by Henderson's "success" as a mythic hero. Along the conventional line of criticism mentioned above, Thomas concludes in her study on the metaphysics of fear in the novel that "during his African quest, [Henderson] discovers a new purpose for life. The power of love, fear's opposite, awakens his soul to the beauty present in the world, even if the world contains suffering. The reality of love, past or present, transcends all fear" (2006: 45; see also, among others, Schechner 1979: 220–26; Cronin 2001: 31; and Zarate 2004: 41). However, already in 1979 Clayton quoted Bellow's ironic words on *Henderson*, which apparently many critics have disregarded ever since: "You want a symbolic novel?" the novelist asked, "I'll give you the most symbolic novel you ever wrote a critical article about" (169–70).

2. Henderson as hyper-traumatized hero and *Henderson the Rain King* as parodic novel

In the first chapters of the novel, following in the best bourgeois convention of the genre, the protagonist offers a comic description of his previous life and social status. When filtered by a narratological analysis, Henderson's account and self-description already throws some light to show that, despite earlier and current criticism, Bellow writes his book framed in a postmodern perspective, which is saturated with *too many* modernists concerns on the meaning of life, its brevity, and the necessity of mythic transcendence, a condition of excessive symbolism that already discloses the importance that cultural parody acquires in the novel. By parodying two recurrent frameworks of the first decades in the 20th century, Freudianism and the Eliotian "mythic method," Bellow's ironic approach to modernist existential worries stresses the human incapacity to know reality in fully objective terms. Henderson is a grotesque mentally-wrecked person and all his digressions about death and mortality only reveal that he is parodically trapped in circularity; he may become aware of cultural traces and long for an alleged better past, as the high-modernists did, but he can never retrieve the (myth of the) origins of his personal want. In other words, the novelist *methodically* unfolds his postmodern frame by resorting to an excessive number of symbols and situations that typify both an exaggerated (post- and) Freudian understanding of being as structurally traumatized, and a modernist (naïve and proto-fascist) interpretation of the individual as a heroic mythic quester in search for a never-attainable illumination that might dispel the ghosts of human mortality.

By the time the novel was published, some writers were already carrying out a sustained use of parody as a literary correlate of the pervasive (and poststructuralist) notion that the human being is trapped in a semiotic web, the world as text, from which it is impossible to escape. Often, relevant theorists of postmodernism, such as Patricia Waugh (1984), Linda Hutcheon (1988), or Edmund Smyth (1991), stressed this meaning to explain that experimental strategies are mostly the result of metafictional and parodic practices related to the consideration of life as the prison-house of language. The issue led Canadian critic Linda Hutcheon to formulate her well-known definition of (postmodern) parody as "repetition, but repetition that includes difference ... it is imitation with critical ironic distance, whose irony can cut both ways.

Ironical versions of ‘trans-contextualization’ and inversion are its major formal operatives, and the range of pragmatic ethos is from scornful ridicule to reverential homage” (1985: 37). As the following pages show, Bellow’s use of parody in *Henderson the Rain King* is much closer to scornful ridicule than to any reverential homage dedicated to the American rich white class.

The narratological analysis discloses, from the first page of the book, Bellow’s ironical approach to his narrator’s report by overtly questioning the latter’s reliability as reporter of truthful events. Thus, the postmodern cultural relativist assumption that narrative can never represent reality in truthful or objective terms becomes enforced from the beginning of the story. The narrative strategies that the writer deployed to construct his book helped him to turn it into a sustained parody of Freudianism and myth criticism, but the type of narrator-protagonist he chose for his novel insistently points at his purpose of denouncing the American WASP ideological colonialism of the other. Our narratological evaluation starts, then, by considering that Henderson is a figure that functions both as narrator and as protagonist of the story. This mere fact discloses at the very beginning of the book, *pace* many of Bellow’s critics, that his alleged quest for existential renewal has failed. Being a narrator in retrospect, the events in the story he tells are already finished at the time when he starts to narrate them, but he still offers clear indications of his traumatized condition, which clearly shows that his modernist quest for meaning and mental health has been unsuccessful:

What made me take this trip to Africa? There is no quick explanation. Things got worse and worse and worse and pretty soon they were too complicated.

When *I think* of my condition at the age of fifty-five when I bought the ticket, *all is grief*. The facts begin to crowd me and soon *I get a pressure* in the chest. A disorderly rush *begins*—my parents, my wives, my girls, my children, my farm, my animals, my habits, my money, my music lessons, my drunkenness, my prejudices, my brutality, my teeth, my face, my soul! *I have to cry*, “No, no, get back, curse you, let me alone!” But how can they let me alone? *They belong* to me. They *are mine*. And they *pile* into me from all sides. It turns into chaos.

However, the world which I thought so mighty an oppressor has removed its wrath from me. But *if I am to make sense* to you people and explain why I went to Africa I must face up to the fact. I might as well start with the money. I am rich. From my old man I inherited three million dollars after taxes, but I thought myself a bum and had my reasons, the main reason being that I behaved like a bum. But privately when things got very bad I often looked into books to see whether I could find some helpful

words, and one day I read, 'The forgiveness of things is perpetual and righteousness first is not required.' This impressed me so deeply that I went around saying it to myself. But then I forgot which book it was. It was one of thousands left by my father, who had also written a number of them." (1959: 3. Emphasis added)

We should first notice the contrastive deployment of different tenses. Henderson frequently uses the present to refer to his condition at the moment he is narrating (see the added emphasis) and the past to refer to the anxious situations that led him to take the trip to Africa, thus hoping to find some existential regeneration. The present tense discloses that at the moment he decides to narrate his adventure—once his African experience is over—Henderson is still a highly neurotic person who shows clear symptoms of paranoia. Remembering his condition when he bought his ticket to Africa, all is still "grief" and he suffers again from the disorderly rush exemplified by an accumulation of factors that eventually cause a somatic reaction manifested as a pressure in the chest, which results in the fact that his life—in his narrating present—"turns into chaos." Despite all, he is not ready to admit that his mental troubles have not disappeared: "the world which I thought so mighty an oppressor has removed its wrath from me." Has it? Has his African quest brought about a (modernist) epiphany to end his troubles? Clearly, it has not. Henderson—as many other narrator-protagonists—is totally unreliable.

The next pages in the book offer Henderson's report about his infancy, as well as his manners, economic situation, and some specific events. As narrator, Henderson thinks that such events and manners—especially his rage, which could have caused Miss Lenox's death—motivated his decision to go to Africa in search of an existential solution for his anxiety. The sense of increasing problems in Henderson's life is one of the main keys played by Bellow to describe his personage's hyper-problematic condition and carry out his parody on Freudianism and his criticism of WASP ideology. Readers interested in psychology may conclude that Henderson *perfectly* qualifies as a Freudian castrated man who, in his self-confessing report, epitomizes many situations described in *The Interpretation of Dreams*. As referred in the quotation above, Henderson illustrates the existence of a demanding castrating father, an intellectual—friend to William James and anti-Dreyfusard Henry Adams—who wrote several books, played the violin, and always favored Henderson's brother... whose name was Dick.

“My father,” the narrator confesses, was a big man, solid and clean” (13). He also had a particular use for money. The symbolic fatherly link between finances and culture becomes rather explicit in his case: “I search through dozens of volumes, but all that turned up was money, for my father had used currency for bookmarks” (3). As reaction to his super-ego’s demands, Henderson decides to breed pigs in the property he has inherited from his exclusive WASP family, where his great-grandfather had been Secretary of State and his great-uncles had been ambassadors to England and France (7). The result of his present condition, as he himself realizes, is modernist decadence—“December ruins of my frozen state” (33). In addition, Henderson has money in excess: three million dollars after taxes, inherited from his family. Accordingly, he also features a disproportionate weight and size. Even his sentimental life needs to be excessive. He describes his divorce from his first wife following his cheating on her, the intricacies of his second marriage, and the fact that he also mistreats his second wife, that he has had several mistresses, and that women suffocate him (4–7). He refuses to acknowledge that his 15-year-old daughter has given birth to a mixed-race baby (32–37). To add further to the long list of circumstances in the narrator’s life that would “prove” his extremely neurotic condition and his masochistic need for punishment, Bellow incorporates another symbolic event that befalls Henderson when he is already in Africa. He breaks an artificial bridge in his teeth (“My whole body was trembling when I spat out those molars, and I thought, ‘Maybe you’ve lived too long, Henderson,’” 129). The episode soon called the attention of early critics of the novel, who understood it as a metaphor that decadent Henderson had broken his bridge with reality, but also as symbolic proof that he was a castrated man, the loss of teeth being such a well-known symbol in *The Interpretation of Dreams* (Freud 1932: 244–45).

Along the first pages in the novel, the authorial irony on Henderson’s figure is recognizable not only in the protagonist’s excessive number of traumatizing episodes, as considered above, but also in his incapacity to recognize his own humor as racist and the fact that he is continuously mistreating people. Henderson is a white Anglo-Saxon millionaire who decides to breed pigs in his property while talking to a Jewish friend (20) but he is also ready to make a joke about the exclusion of Jewish-Americans from vacation resorts (7). Other events and manners reflected in his self-portrait progressively mark him as a pathetic, even if at times comical, idiot, and an ill-

tempered rich man. So, when he goes to Africa looking for an answer to his existential anguish, he does so literally as chaperone of a just-married couple who had decided to go to Africa for their honeymoon. He needs to keep his head covered at all times, and his behavior is frequently violent and aggressive—he has a pistol range in his mansion and joined the Army to fight in WW2 even if he was already too old for the service. In other words, Henderson becomes a condensation of the most hideous and aggressive traits frequently attributed to the American WASPs and, more specifically to the builders of American political supremacy in the 20th century (from lion-hunter President Roosevelt to post-war Presidents Truman and Eisenhower): he is rich but inconsiderate, behaves like a bum even if he owns an ample library, embraces violence, weapons and militarism, mistreats women and non-whites, and fails as father, husband, and friend. He is anything but a hero-figure. And Bellow's astute revenge on the American WASP centers on the understandable existence of an internal voice in Henderson's repressed self, which he frequently hears: *I want, I want!* What may a WASP want?

3. Henderson's structurally traumatized self: horror mortis, animal symbolism, and the Call into monomythic adventure

The first pages of the novel also introduce three motifs whose obsessive repetition and self-conscious nature point to the undefeated state of Henderson's horror mortis condition. Persistently, he confesses that he hears an internal voice, whose meaning he cannot interpret; he also compares himself to different animals on several occasions; and he blames himself for the death of Miss Lenox, reporting on the event at different moments in the narrative.

The first time he reports on the existence of the internal voice he is climbing up a staircase to have sex with Lily, his would-be second wife: "a ceaseless voice in my heart that said, *I want, I want, I want, oh, I want—yes, go on*, I said to myself, *Strike, strike, strike, strike!*" (12). Although the passage seems to associate Henderson's want to his sexuality, it also anticipates (*strike*) that in his African adventure his *want* will always lead him to do something violent: in Freudian classic terms, from libidinous his want will progressively turn into thanatic. The insistent repetition of his inner voice along the pages of the book clearly points at an unsatisfying desire, and as soon as the

protagonist establishes contact with the first native tribe in Africa, its meaning will be associated by Queen Willatale to existentialist despair ("Man wants to live," pp), an interpretation that Henderson understands as an epiphany but that will relieve his anxiety only momentarily.

The narrator's second obsession consists of comparing himself to different animals, and it also leads readers from the beginning of the story to existentialist issues, finally crystallizing in Henderson's perception of King Dahfu's theories on animals as another transcendental or ultimate answer to his plight. In a visit to France with Lily, which precedes his journey to Africa, the protagonist visits an aquarium where he experiences a negative (modernist) epiphany at a moment of the day, the twilight, which brings direct echoes from the stoppage of the mythic circle in Eliot's *The Waste Land*:

They keep a marine station there, and I had a strange experience in the aquarium. It was twilight. I looked in at an octopus, and the creature seemed also to look at me and press its soft head to the glass, flat, the flesh becoming pale and granular—blanched, speckled. The eyes spoke to me coldly. But even more speaking, even more cold, was the soft head with its speckles, and the Brownian motion of those speckles, a cosmic coldness in which I felt I was dying [...] "This is my last day. Death is giving me notice." (19)

For its apparent symbolism, the passage has been quoted frequently by critics who focus on Henderson's condition as an existentialist trap but, within the spectrum of the different interpretations the event may offer, I wish to call the attention to two aspects that strengthen the perspectives provided in this paper: 1) Henderson as *narrator* uses a synesthesia—*The eyes spoke to me coldly*—that combines three different senses or attributes in the same feeling, thus stressing the impact of an experience that still persists in the narrator's present, a *horror mortis* or negative revelation that has not abandoned him since the original moment when it took place. 2) The animal chosen for this bleak epiphany is built as a huge head with big eyes and eight tentacles that allow it to take food to its beak. The octopus is supposed to be the most intelligent of the invertebrates and in his act of reflection Henderson becomes

attracted to its pale skin, which however presents many speckles, or dirty spots. Brains, killing power, white skin, dirt, the octopus and its many tentacles may also be understood as a condensed metaphor of American WASP colonialism and of Henderson looking at his own reflection in a mirror. Together with the inner *I want* phrase, the octopus experience will come back to the narrator's mind in several occasions along his report on the African adventure, where his final aim, as recommended by Dahfu, will be to become a lion even if he is still aware as narrator that he can never be more than a bear (page and little quote?).

The third event that he also repeats obsessively is Miss Lenox's death. Apparently, this character plays a minor role in the story; she is an old lady who comes daily to Henderson's mansion to fix his breakfast—"this was my only need at the time" (26). One winter morning, in which he has been yelling at the table, he finds her dead in the kitchen, an added existential experience that terrifies again Henderson both in his past as protagonist of the story and in his present as narrator of it:

During my rage her heart had stopped [...] I turned off the gas. Dead! Her small, toothless face, to which I laid my knuckles, was growing cold. The soul, like a current of air, like a draft, like a bubble, sucked out of the window. I stared at her. So, this is it, the end—farewell? And all this while, these days and weeks, the wintry garden had been speaking to me of this fact and no other; and till this moment I had not understood what this gray and white and brown, the bark, the snow, the twigs, had been telling me. (39)

The narrator's ambiguous metaphysical position in the passage above should be pointed out. At this new horror mortis experience, he is ready to mix the Christian belief in the soul with the more primitive belief, brought back by modernist intellectuals, in the mythic cycles of nature as mirrors of human life. Once Nietzsche had proclaimed the death of God, modernist artists turned again to more primitive interpretations of life for existential support, and many found in the field of anthropology and comparative religion, epitomized in James Frazer's *The Golden Bough*, relevant scholarly sources to justify the return to a mythic understanding of reality (see Manganaro 1992: 1–67). Miss Lenox's death produces in Henderson an

impacting metaphysical shiver, inducing him to abandon his former life in his family property and go to Africa in search of existential replenishment. He talks to himself in a new process of self-reflection, again showing apparent ambiguous beliefs about religion and mortality: "So for God's sake make a move, Henderson, put forth effort. You too will die of pestilence. Death will annihilate you and nothing will remain, and there will be nothing left but junk or the sake of all, get out" (40). Despite invoking the name of God in vain, his existentialist shiver when contemplating Miss Lenox's cadaver produces in him what qualifies as a mythic but parodic "Call to Adventure" (Campbell 1968: 45–54). His decision to take arms against the sea of his WASP existential troubles contrasts also with the many times he has warned his wife Lily with committing suicide or his confession that he is also exposed to melancholia (14). Obviously, readers may see in his choice also a parody of Camus' Sisyphus (1942), who decides to face the odds and discard suicide as a way out of a universe where man is out of harmony. Within the more recent critical field of Trauma Studies, it is interesting to mention that in Dominick LaCapra's views structural trauma results from the realization of the intrinsic mortality of the human condition. Thus, this scholar associates trauma to the existentialist plight, a condition that is shown in frequent states of anxiety and melancholia, as well as in other symptoms including uncontrollable repetitions or tags, or states of panic, which also fit in Henderson's self-portrait (LaCapra 2001: 76–85). Following Camus' existentialist thinking and LaCapra's consideration above, we might think that the mortal and traumatic fate of the individual becomes tragic in the moments in which it becomes conscious but, once he has become conscious of his mortality, Henderson's fate becomes more parodic than tragic.

4. The hero's quest or the anti-heroic American WASP

Once in Africa, Henderson experiences a number of adventures that critics have abundantly linked to *Heart of Darkness* or Ernest Hemingway's stories about the African continent. Certainly, parodic connections between Eugene Henderson and the narrator of Conrad's novel or sharing the same initials with the famous author of *The Snows of Kilimanjaro* are rather obvious topics to be ignored but there is another issue much more interesting for the purpose of this paper: Bellow's excessively traumatized

protagonist also fulfills a Jungian quest to get rid of his personality troubles, a quest that basically coincides with Joseph Campbell's pattern in *The Hero With a Thousand Faces* (1949; compare Rodrigues 1983). Once again, a typical modernist framework—myth narrative—is followed in an excessively detailed way. We should not forget that in 1937 Saul Bellow had already graduated with honors in anthropology and sociology, which means that he was acquainted with modernist anthropology and the Jungian archetypical or mythic process of individuation (Jung 1971). Ten years before the publication of *Henderson the Rain King*, the American anthropologist Joseph Campbell had published the first edition of his influential book *The Hero With a Thousand Faces*, in which the would-be significant scholar developed a cultural model that he named *the Hero's quest* or monomyth, the pattern that Bellow follows to an almost impossible perfection in *Henderson the Rain King*.

Campbell asserts in the first pages of his book that his anthropological approach mostly combines Freud's and Jung's frameworks and relevant symbolism to interpret human behavior (1968: 4–13). The anthropologist works from premises that qualify him as a believer in the modernist master narrative of myth (see Manganaro 1992: 151–85). He develops the pattern of the monomyth in an attempt to demonstrate that many rituals, legends and stories in many different cultures and times reflect the Jungian idea that the ultimate meaning of life can be found in one's inner self, a notion that critics have systematically associated to the modernist motif of the "inner gaze." Therefore, the monomyth represents both, the physical journey of the hero in different cultural manifestations, and the psychic journey of the individual questing for the meaning of his or her own life.

Campbell divides the hero's pattern into three main stages—departure, initiation, and return—that he then splits into minor motifs, symbols or situations. It is interesting to point out his assertion that the monomyth motifs cannot be "identical in the various parts of the globe" (1968: 389). However, in the case of *Henderson the Rain King* the narrator describes his African adventure in terms that perfectly fit into every one of Campbell's motifs. Henderson is "called into adventure" (first motif) when, as already mentioned, he *interprets* that one of his fits of anger has killed Miss Lenox. Then, he mentally condemns his anger and addresses himself: "So for God's sake make a move, Henderson, put forth effort" (40), and decides to accompany his

friend Charlie and his wife in their honeymoon to Africa, “the ancient bed of mankind” (42). The event signals the early association of his quest to the idea of death and existential panic.

However, once in Africa Henderson becomes a hilarious parody of the white explorer, always wearing his helmet, where he hides the ultimate protection humans have in contemporary society: money, a few thousand-dollar bills that will play “magic” and finally get him out of trouble when he decides to flee Africa. He soon has an argument with Charlie and follows his own adventure with the sole company of a black employee, Romilayu. The assistant’s wisdom and experience qualifies here as the first “(Supernatural) Aid,” another Campbellian situation. Then, Henderson needs to “cross the first threshold” that will take him into what Campbell denominates “the land of magnifying power” where the Jungian quest for the meaning of life is going to unfold. The first threshold—representing a dive into the waters of the unconscious—is symbolically crossed when, led by Romilayu, Henderson walks across the Arnewi river, a pathetic version of the Stygian lake because, due to a long-lasting drought, the river is dry (47).

Once the hero is on the other side of the threshold, the process of initiation starts, which frequently means that the protagonist has to begin his “Road of Trials” by defeating the guardian of the threshold—the Can Cerberus that represents the first manifestation of the Jungian shadow (Campbell 1968: 77–98). In Henderson’s case, the crossing of the first threshold manifests in his confrontation with Prince Itelo—“Your Highness,” Henderson tells him, “I am kind of on a quest” (65). Itelo is a cultivated Prince of the naïve Arnewi tribe; he can speak English and has attended a mission school in Syria in the company of Dahfu, the present king of the violent Wariri tribe, which Henderson will visit after his experiences among the Arnewi. Tradition commands that newcomers have to fight in a ritual against Itelo and so Henderson does, becoming the winner (63–70). The Arnewi Prince also tells him what his people’s main problem is: their water reservoir is infected with frogs and the tribe think it is a curse. Then, Henderson is introduced to Willatale, Queen of the Arnewi and Itelo’s aunt, and to her sister Mtalba. Both are big women “ob substance” but whereas the Queen represents the motif of the “Meeting with the Goddess” or Jungian encounter with the archetype of the anima, her sister becomes an archetypical “Temptress” who

tries to lure Henderson into a sexual bond (Campbell 1968: 109–26). In Jungian terms, the part of our personality symbolized in the anima archetype may be both positive and negative, goddess and temptress, but in the novel, both sides manifest to Henderson at once, in one more moment of parodic excess. From the Queen, Henderson will receive what he thinks is an existential epiphany: His anxious interior voice that repeats *I want, I want* is translated by Willatale as *Grun-tu-molani*, literally “man wants to live.” However, Henderson receives the epiphany while noticing at the same time that Mtalba “was looking into my eyes meltingly” (85)!

Self-confident that his is the role of the white explorer who has come to help the poor natives, Henderson decides to get rid of the reservoir frogs by killing them with a homemade bomb. In effect, he kills the frogs but the explosion also breaks the dam and releases the water, which the dry soil immediately drains (109–10). His paternalist behavior and pathetic self-assurance brings about again the misery of others. Still believing in his role as hero, Henderson leaves the Arnewi in shame to cross a second threshold that, this time, is activated by a different Campbellian situation: the “Belly of the Whale,” a symbol of the hero’s passage into the land of magnifying power metaphorized by Jonah’s biblical story (1968: 90–94). Henderson and Romilayu are captured by the Wariri and put into a dark hut where the WASP millionaire, while eating a hard biscuit, breaks some of his teeth and their bridge. As happened to Jonah, this becomes a long dark night of expiation for him (120). The parodic hero is ready to “resurrect” once again and finally encounter the last of the Jungian archetypes that should bring him to the final revelation about his life and his anxious reactions to it. The motif of the “Atonement with the Father,” a Campbellian symbol for the assimilation of the Jungian archetype of meaning (or the Wise Man), is fulfilled by Henderson when Dahfu, King of the Wariri, decides to mentor him. From Dahfu he will learn about the supreme male power represented in the lion and will experience his Campbellian “Apotheosis” when he becomes, in one more ritualistic act, the Rain King of the tribe. He raises the heavy image of Mummah, the earth mother, an event that as narrator he remembers as a further moment of revelation: “My spirit was awake and it welcomed life anew. Damn the whole thing! Life anew! I was still alive and kicking and I had the old grun-tu-molani” (193).

Ironically, Dahfu's teachings to Henderson depict not only the peculiar situation of a young black man giving advice to a bigger white older American man dressed as an explorer, they also add to many other symbolic references to animal life present all along the novel. Henderson breeds pigs but he thinks of himself as a bear, he trembles at the sight of an octopus but then follows Dahfu's indications to meet a lioness. When Dahfu is killed by a lion, he is fulfilling a rite that perfectly fits in the fertility rituals described by Frazer in *The Golden Bough*. He is the King who represents the land; as such, his strength is reflected in the land and when he dies, Henderson as Rain King has to replace him and occupy the throne. However, our hero prefers to escape, the main reason for his flight being that as new King of the tribe he has to fertilize the land symbolically. In the practice, it means that the American "explorer" needs to give satisfaction to over thirty wives and concubines, which does not seem to be the best job for his apparently castrated self ("And anyway, I am no stud," 315). In such a ritualistic narrative, the hero's escape from the Wariri fits again into more Campbellian situations. He has to escape by fighting against another guardian of the threshold, this time an amazon (324). However, he takes his prize with him, the lion cub that symbolizes Dahfu's royal spirit, and, as he literally indicates, together with Romilayu they start a [Campbellian magic] "flight" (326). When already in a safe village, Henderson becomes the "Master of the Two Worlds" by experiencing some weeks of dreams and hallucinations that keep him neither conscious nor totally unconscious (328–29). When he finally takes an actual flight back to America, his plane lands in the symbolic Newfoundland for refueling and, with the help of the lion cub, he establishes a friendship with a little Persian boy whose words he cannot understand: but who needs words after having experienced all those revelations? Campbell's last motif, "Freedom to Live" (1968: 238–43), represents the final epiphanic moment in which the hero becomes allegedly conscious of the meaning of life. Henderson, in his role as narrator, cannot refer more explicitly to his *freedom* at that moment in Newfoundland, and he ends his narrative in an apparent condition of happiness that, however, is heavily charged with authorial irony: "The great, beautiful propellers were still, all four of them. I guess I felt it was my turn now to move, and so went running—leaping, leaping, pounding, and tingling over the pure white lining of the fray Arctic silence" (341). The realization of pure white in the cold North appears to make him happy, but

such landscape, which ends in silence, resembles again in its whiteness and cold Henderson's description of his existential state of panic while contemplating the octopus' "cosmic coldness" (19). Furthermore, the implications that the narratological analysis discovers in Henderson's narrative clearly indicate that even if his remembrance of the Newfoundland episode makes the narrator temporarily happy, Henderson's mental condition does not qualify as the one of the hero who has understood the meaning of life. By playing with the post-war critics' methodological propensity to look for Freudian and myth symbols, Bellow elaborated a sustained parody of modernist frameworks but he also linked white Anglo-Saxon intellectuals and their proto-fascist high-brow ideology to the cold stare associated to the realization of death.

This chapter, then, has aimed at analyzing Bellow's parodic postmodern approach in his novel *Henderson the Rain King*, with specific examples corresponding to each one of the two frames targeted by the novelist: the excessive (Freudian) neurotic condition of Henderson as both protagonist and narrator, and his too perfectly detailed fulfillment of the monomyth pattern. In cases such as *Henderson the Rain King*, textual strategies that respond to the authorial criticism of different but complementary frameworks may lead scholars, as I think the case is here, to conclude that such strategies are symptoms of the artist's cultural shift from the modernist into the postmodernist ethos but also that there is an underpinning, more covert purpose in the author's conscious manipulation of the traces of a past cultural period to force in his readers ideological reflections on a present still suffocated by the colonialist cold stare of the white oppressors.

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