

OVERCOMING THE PSYCHOLOGICAL EFFECTS OF BEING IN A
DYSFUNCTIONAL FAMILY: AN EXAMINATION OF SAUL
BELLOW'S PROTAGONISTS THROUGH THE LENS
OF BOWEN'S FAMILY SYSTEMS THEORY

by

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A thesis submitted to the Graduate Council of
Texas State University in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts
with a Major in Literature
December 2019

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I extend my sincerest gratitude to Dr. Allan Chavkin for his assistance in bringing this thesis into fruition. His writing advice and his wealth of knowledge on Saul Bellow's works were of tremendous help as I proceeded through the process of meticulously crafting this document. I would also like to thank Dr. Daniel T. Lochman and Dr. Robert T. Tally for being on my thesis committee and providing me with invaluable insights on how to improve my thesis.

I am also grateful to my family. The support my mother, father, and older sister have provided has allowed me to reach this crucial moment on my path towards education.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	iv
CHAPTER	
I. INTRODUCTION.....	1
II. AUGIE’S JOURNEY TO HIGHER SELF-DIFFERENTIATION	8
III. WILHELM’S PATH TO FINDING HIS IDENTITY	27
IV. REACHING HIGHER SELF-DIFFERENTIATION IN AFRICA.....	39
V. OVERCOMING EMOTIONAL TURMOIL.....	52
VI. SAMMLER’S RETURN TO EARTH	63
VII. REACHING SELF-DIFFERENTIATION FROM BOTH PARENTS	74
VIII. CONCLUSION	81
WORKS CITED	88

I. INTRODUCTION

Saul Bellow is an author whose exceptional writing skills are reflected in each sentence he crafted. He is the 1976 winner of the Nobel Prize in literature and has been recognized as one of the greatest American writers. Though each of his many works is unique, there is a common preoccupation in his most well-known works with family dysfunction. The protagonists of these works, each a member of dysfunctional family, often experience great hardships during the narrative and their stories end ambiguously. For this thesis, I have selected the novels *The Adventures of Augie March*, *Seize the Day*, *Henderson the Rain King*, *Herzog*, and *Mr. Sammler's Planet*, along with the short story "A Silver Dish," because the protagonists of these works all must cope with the difficulties of being in a dysfunctional family. Using Murray Bowen's family systems theory, I will analyze those protagonists, Augie Wilhelm, Henderson, Herzog, Sammler, and Woody, respectively, along with relevant secondary characters. According to Roberta M. Gilbert in her book *The Eight Concepts of Bowen Theory*, Bowen's family systems theory is "based on the family as the emotional unit, not the individual, though the individual is most important to the theory. Further, it is based on observation rather than on what people think, feel, or say about themselves and others" (1-2). Bowen's theory explains how family composition shapes many facets of an individual's personality.

In their book *Family Evaluation: An Approach Based on Bowen Theory*, Michael E. Kerr and Murray Bowen explain: "The emotionally determined functioning of the family members generates a family emotional 'atmosphere' or 'field' that, in turn, influences the emotional functioning of each person. It is analogous to the gravitational

field of the solar system... One cannot 'see' gravity, nor can one 'see' the emotional field. The presence of gravity and the emotional field can be inferred, however, by the predictable ways planets and people behave in reaction to one another" (55). Through extensive observation, Bowen was able to identify emotional and behavioral patterns in individuals who share the same positions within a family as well as in individuals who are a part of a dysfunctional family. Those same patterns are exhibited by Bellow's well-crafted fictional characters. As indicated by Andrew M. Gordon in his essay "Psychology and the Fiction of Bellow," spurred by his own difficulties relating to dysfunctional family relationships, "he [Bellow] went through two decades of exploring various forms of psychotherapy and being analyzed by therapists of different persuasions. He kept looking for help and put himself in the hands of analysts on four occasions when a marriage was disintegrating or he was suffering through a divorce" (37). Bellow's interests and experiences led him to become knowledgeable in psychology. With such knowledge, Bellow became capable of creating realistic characters who are suffering from emotional issues due to being or having been in a dysfunction family that can be best understood by analyzing them through the lens of a human behavior theory such as Bowen's family systems.

Bowen's family systems theory is comprised of eight major concepts: triangles, differentiation of self, nuclear family emotional process, family projection process, multigenerational transmission process, emotional cutoff, sibling position, and societal emotional process. While a number of these concepts will be employed in my discussions about the protagonists of my selected Bellow works, there are two that are especially important for my discussion: differentiation of self and emotional cutoff. In his

explanation of the concept of differentiation of self, Michael E. Kerr on The Bowen Center website, an official source of information for Bowen's family systems theory, states: "Families and other social groups tremendously affect how people think, feel, and act, but individuals vary in their susceptibility to a 'groupthink' and groups vary in the amount of pressure they exert for conformity. These differences between individuals and between groups reflect differences in people's levels of differentiation of self. The less developed a person's 'self,' the more impact others have on his functioning." Children can begin having low self-differentiation if one or both of their parents or guardians have too much influence over their thoughts and actions. Some parental figures will try their utmost to make their child to set out on a life path that has been entirely determined by them while others might display certain opinions about their child and inadvertently cause that child to adopt that same view of themselves and act according to its parameter. One's level of differentiation has a large effect on their way of thinking; those with low self-differentiation are emotionally fused to their families and are greatly influenced by their emotions while those with high self-differentiation are more independent of their families and are more logical in regards to problem solving.

A number of the protagonists I will be analyzing display clear symptoms of someone experiencing low levels of differentiation of self. Through Bowen's family systems theory, it is possible to identify that those characters are indeed suffering from low self-differentiation based on their relationships with key members of their family and the symptoms of anxiety they display. As indicated on the Bowen Center website, "Everyone is subject to problems in his work and personal life, but greater vulnerability of less differentiated people and families to periods of heightened chronic anxiety

contributes to their having a disproportionate share of society's most serious problems" (Kerr). One problem that those who have low self-differentiation experience is that they often begin to feel they are missing something significant in their lives; there is a void within them created by lack of self-development and the inability to satisfy their innermost dreams and desires. The capability of being able to identify such problems as being a result of low self-differentiation allows for a much greater understanding of the characters in question. Since the families of the protagonists from the selected works are in a dysfunctional state, it is possible to deduce that each character's struggle with low self-differentiation is directly correlated with his struggle with his dysfunctional family. Each of those characters undergoes an emotional journey in his narrative, a journey that is only chronicled to a point in which the character's future is seemingly left unclear or appears to be headed in a negative direction. By gaining the understanding that Augie, Henderson, and Woody are indeed struggling with differentiating themselves from their family or other people, and by being able to identify what the root causes of their problems are, it becomes possible to find out what each of those individual characters needs to gain in order to obtain a higher level of self-differentiation and be able to improve his mental state. Something that is common to most of the works I am analyzing is that Saul Bellow conveys the protagonist's growth so subtly that it is easy for readers to miss that it does indeed occur or for them to not fully understand how significant that subtle growth is for the character. By identifying what their main causes of distress are, it is easier to note the significance of those subtle changes and why they will positively impact the protagonists after the narrative of his work has concluded.

Using Bowen's family systems theory, I can explain how each character's family system shaped who he is; the reasoning behind his thoughts and actions becomes clear. Emotional cutoff is the other one of the eight concepts of Bowen's family systems theory that is especially important for my discussion because it offers a look at another problem that is often seen in dysfunctional families. Kerr, on the Bowen Center website, provides a precise definition of emotional cutoff: "The concept of emotional cutoff describes people managing their unresolved emotional issues with parents, siblings, and other family members by reducing or totally cutting off emotional contact with them." Emotional cutoff can exist without the presence of physical barriers. Communication between two individuals when one of them has emotionally cut off the other will be superficial, if it exists at all. Two of the characters I will be discussing, Augie and Wilhelm, experience being emotionally cut off by a family member while one of them, Sammler, is the one who cuts himself off from his daughter, who often acts in a peculiar way that annoys him. These elements of emotional cutoff provide additional insight into the minds of these characters. For example, in *The Adventures of Augie March*, Augie is emotionally cut off by his older brother, Simon, after the two of them have an argument; although Augie is greatly bothered when this occurs, he quickly forgives Simon about two years later when the latter wishes to reestablish their friendship (460). The fact that Augie so easily forgives his brother shows how deeply he cares for those in his family and how much he values the close relationships he has with them, a significant of his character as it drives his many actions and decisions. This is one way in which analyzing the emotional cutoff aspect of dysfunctional family relationships is useful in gaining an

understanding in the intricate ways in which Saul Bellow's complex protagonists function and what they must find in order to attain happiness.

Saul Bellow's masterful writing shines through in the many different sets of complex family systems he creates as much as it does with the complex characters he creates to be a part of those different families. The dysfunctional families in the Bellow works I have selected are all completely different. In *The Adventures of Augie March*, the protagonist's family is dysfunctional because an authoritarian person outside the family seized power as head of the single-parent family and enforced strict rules that do not allow any of the members to be themselves. In *Seize the Day*, Wilhelm struggles to form a close emotional connection with his remote father while at the same time he endeavors to satisfy the financial demands of his wife from whom he is separated but has been unable to divorce. In *Henderson the Rain King*, the protagonist is so emotionally damaged by his dysfunctional relationship with his judgmental father that he begins to exhibit intense anxiety, a problem that is largely responsible for his divorce from his first wife and one that causes him to put severe strain on his relationship with his second wife and his children.

In *Herzog*, a divorce causes the crumbling of the protagonist's mental state and his dysfunctional relationship with his two children becomes difficult to mend. In *Mr. Sammler's Planet*, the elderly protagonist suffers from the traumatic experience of being a Jewish man who had been persecuted by the Nazis during World War II; his trauma causes him to feel separated from everyone else, including his own daughter, Shula, who is also traumatized by her own experiences during World War II. Sammler and his daughter are in a cycle of anxiety that is caused by his being emotionally cut off from her.

Finally, Woody in “A Silver Dish” is abandoned by his father and is then forced to fit a certain mold determined by his fundamentalist mother and his aunt. All of the dysfunctional family circumstances seen in each work are completely different from one another, explore varied themes, and affect the respective protagonists in unique ways. As a result, each analysis of the protagonists of these selected works will be as varied and distinct as their families and the situations that are unique to their circumstances.

II. AUGIE'S JOURNEY TO HIGHER SELF-DIFFERENTIATION

In order to gain a better understanding of Augie's character in *The Adventures of Augie March*, it is imperative to look at the conditions he faced in his young life while living with his family of origin. During this time, Augie's grandmother figure, Lausch, seized power over the family from Augie's single mother, and she ruled over them by enforcing her authoritarian views. Because of Lausch, Augie grows up to have a low level of self-differentiation. As a result of this, Augie goes through life giving more priority to the needs of his friends and lovers than to his own. Augie undergoes his various adventures as the novel progresses because he so readily goes on adventures that other people want him to go on. It is through his experiences in those adventures that Augie begins to recognize that many people have only been using him to achieve their own selfish goals. Even though, at the end of the novel, Augie is married to a woman who is only using him, there is evidence that suggests that the lessons he learned throughout his adventures have helped him to overcome his low level of self-differentiation and to reach a breakthrough that will allow him to care for his own needs as much as he cares for the needs of others,

The Adventures of Augie March is a bildungsroman of the eponymous hero. The narrative follows Augie across many periods in his life, from his preteen years up to early adulthood. Neither of Augie's parents have much involvement in his life. His father is completely absent, having abandoned the family, and is not seen once throughout the narrative, while his mother, Rebecca, is meek. The person that has the most parental authority over Augie in his young life is his so-called grandmother, Lausch, who is a

boarder in the same household as Augie's family and rules over them with authoritarian power. Lausch is one of the reasons why Augie's mother, Rebecca, lacks any authority over her children; Rebecca is obedient when Lausch is giving her instructions to stay quiet in a certain situation: "Mama was too obedient even to say yes, but only sat and kept her long hands folded on the bottle-fly iridescence of the dress the old woman had picked for her to wear" (6). Lausch has an overbearing personality and is strict in enforcing her vision of how family life should be and how people should act. "Grandma came and put a regulating hand on the family life... And as for vengeance from a woman, Grandma Lausch was there to administer the penalties under the standards of legitimacy, representing the main body of married womankind" (9). With severe disapproval of Rebecca's pregnancies outside of marriage, Lausch shames her into submission and seizes power as the head of the household.

Having his supposed grandmother as the head of the family while his own mother has little authority might be seen as merely an untraditional family setup that does not necessarily have to be dysfunctional; however, in Augie's situation, it does prove to be. Right from the first chapter of *The Adventures of Augie March* the reader is shown that Augie commits illegal acts despite Lausch's strict authority, showing a rebellious side that can only be a result of his not being able to develop his self due to Lausch's excessive focus on the good of the family rather than each individual member. In his article "Family Systems Psychotherapy, Literary Character, and Literature: an Introduction," John V. Knapp states: "In functional families, each member develops a solid self, able to act, think, and feel so that the inside and outside of the self are usually congruent. In dysfunctional families, fear and anxiety usually force members to create a

pseudo-self, so that one's inner feelings and outer behavior are often not congruent” (223). In Augie’s case, the fear that leads to the creation of a pseudo-self is of being punished and lectured by his grandmother. Augie’s pseudo self is a clear indication of the dysfunctional state of Augie’s family. He fears Lausch rather than feeling love or respect for her. In one instance, Augie returns home with minor injuries after having been involved in a fight with other kids. As he is being lectured by her, he feels relief that she does not know the other nefarious acts he has been involved in: “I thanked God she didn’t know about the stealing. And in a way, because that was her schooling temperament, I suspect she was pleased that I should see where it led to give your affections too easily” (12).

Augie knows well that if his grandmother was aware that he has done much worse than being involved in fights, he would face severe consequences. It is logical for Augie to feel relieved that his pseudo-self convinces Lausch that getting into fights with other kids is the full extent of the misdeeds he has been involved with. However, Lausch does have a point that Augie needs to learn a lesson on giving his affections to others too easily, as him doing so is exactly what led to him into stealing and getting involved in a fight. Augie states: “I was pals longest with Stashu Kopecs... but Stashu was a thief, and to run with him I stole too” (11). The fact that Augie committed crimes simply because he wished to maintain another’s friendship provides good evidence of his lack of having a differentiated self. He would follow another’s example into doing something such as stealing without caring about how immoral it is to commit such an act just to obtain another’s approval and “earn” their friendship. At this moment, Augie does not offer any look into how he personally feels about the stealing or any other acts he committed with

Stashu; with this being the case, it is clear that Augie did not bother to consider his own feelings on those acts. If the person he wishes to maintain a friendship with commits certain actions, he will mimic that those actions without question in order to gain the person's approval.

In his young life, Augie engages in many other questionable activities like stealing that have the consequence of his constantly being reprimanded by Lausch. About such instances Augie writes: "From taking my punishments very hard, consulting Mama as to how to be forgiven and asking her to approach the old lady for me, and shedding tears when I was pardoned, I got to the stage of feeling more resistant, through worldly comparisons that made me see my crimes more tolerantly. That isn't to say that I stopped connecting her [Lausch] with the highest and the best—taking her at her own word—with the courts of Europe, the congress of Vienna, the splendor of family" (31). This passage shows how seriously Augie takes his grandmother's moral teachings even though his behavior does not necessarily reflect his acceptance of them. The most significant part of Lausch's teachings that seem to affect Augie is the "splendor of family." According to Gilbert, one's self can be adversely affected if one puts too much focus on family rather than the self: "Togetherness is the force that tries to pull one back to the group when one is being 'too much' a self. It says, 'Be like us,' 'Be for us more than for yourself,' or 'Think as we think.' It can feel so good. And it can feel so bad. It can be protective. Or it can prevent our becoming the best we can be" (9-10). Lausch's efforts to push Augie to meet the tough requirements of fitting the mold of a person she finds to be agreeable and to be a significant part of the family are what cause him in his early life to be unable to

develop as an individual. Augie's lack of self is what allows him to be easily influenced into engaging in all sorts of activities by those he wishes to befriend.

While Augie clearly does care about his grandmother and her vision of the kind of person he should be, Augie's behavior when he is following the examples of the unruly children he wishes to befriend demonstrates a rebellious attitude within him. Though Lausch's strict teachings and rules prevent Augie from differentiating himself from his family, he shows a clear inclination to follow in the footsteps of those who break the rules or act in otherwise unconventional ways rather than of those who act in a way Lausch would approve of. In *Family Therapy: An Overview*, Herbert and Irene Goldenberg explain how the rebelliousness of one's offspring can reveal problems within the parental subsystem in a family: "Problems within this subsystem, such as serious intergenerational conflicts involving rebelliousness, symptomatic children, or runaways, often reflect underlying family instability and disorganization" (88). For Augie, Lausch is the one who takes the role of being a parent who tries to guide the child with her own wisdom. A child and parental grandparent relationship is not inherently dysfunctional, so there must be a different reason for Augie's and Lausch's relationship being dysfunctional. As previously alluded to, the source of dysfunction in the parental subsystem involving Augie and Lausch is Lausch's overbearing personality and her enforcement of strict rules to guide Augie and his older brother into being the type of people she wants them to be. Augie's situation is unusual in that his mother, the only one of his parents that is involved in his life, has no authority in his household because his grandmother is the one who wishes to be in control; as a result, at least in his young life, Augie's mother is more like an older sister to him than a mother.

One significant example of Lausch enforcing her strict views of personhood onto Augie and his older brother is that they were forced to have summer jobs once they passed twelve years of age: “After the age of twelve we were farmed out in the summer by the old woman to get a taste of life and the rudiments of earning” (13). Although American society has changed much since the time in which *The Adventures of Augie March* is set, twelve years old is still a drastically early age to expect a child to go out and learn about adult life. Lausch’s desire for Augie to begin learning about living independently at a young age likely contributed to Augie’s rebelliousness. As Herbert and Irene Goldenberg explain: “Contemporary middle-class American society expects adolescents to behave differently from younger children or from adults; young adults, economic circumstances permitting, are encouraged to develop independence and autonomy. However, developing competencies in a dangerous inner-city environment may call for survival skills that the larger society may consider inappropriate” (27). This quotation helps us understand why Augie develops into the young adult that he does. He is being sent out into the city in order to become more acquainted with “life,” knowledge which Lausch is clearly intending for Augie to gain in order for him to become more independent of his family.

The novel begins with this sentence: “I am an American, Chicago born—Chicago, that somber city—and go at things as I have taught myself, freestyle, and will make the record in my own way” (1). As a first person narrator writing in the past tense, Augie is in this moment reflecting on his life and has realized that living in the city of Chicago had affected his development as he grew up. The way in which Augie describes Chicago as a “somber city” adds a sense of gloom to Augie’s words, clearly indicating that recounting

his own past is not an activity that brings him much joy. Augie's first sentence shows how he has matured from the time he was a child who had not been able to develop a differentiated self due to the dysfunctional family he is a part of. In his youth, the most significant survival skill that Augie gained as a result of Lausch's pushing him to be more independent from so early of an age is his adaptability. Since he lacked having a well-developed self because of his low level of differentiation, Augie needed to adapt in order to be able to adequately engage in questionable activities, such as stealing, in order to befriend those he was interested in befriending. Walking the streets of Chicago without any adult to oversee him surely filled Augie with the sense of independence that his grandmother wanted him to gain. Being in this large city unsupervised is what allowed Augie to engage in activities without being easily seen and identified by anyone close to him, as larger cities are less likely to have communities that look out for the well-being of each individual member. As a result, Augie feels that he is safe doing what he feels he needs to do in order to survive. In Augie's youth, what he needs to do in order to survive is find companionship, which he is willing to do even if it means he must rebel against the teachings and wishes of his grandmother.

What ultimately causes the biggest strain on Augie's and Lausch's relationship is Lausch's decision to send Georgie, Augie's younger brother who was born with a mental deficiency, to live in an institution separate from the rest of the family, something that Augie strongly opposed her doing. When this issue first comes up, Augie writes: "The old woman hit out in her abrupt way and declared it was time we did something about Georgie, who was growing up.... She said Georgie should go to an institution... She got this across, in her granny grimace of repugnance, and left us with her horror" (53). After

a conversation with his older brother, Simon, Augie reveals how Lausch's enforcement of her decision changes both how he feels about her as well as the overall power structure of the family. He states "I couldn't any longer acknowledge Grandma to be the head of the family, and it was to Simon that some of the old authority became attached" (56).

Having to remove Georgie from the household is likely the first big change that occurred in Augie's family while Lausch was still the head. In *Systems of Psychotherapy: A Transtheoretical Approach*, James O. Prochaska and John C. Norcross indicate how a healthy family would react to a change that occurs in or around them: "Families are open systems that continually face demands for change.... Healthy families respond to demands for change by growth on the part of each individual in the family, each subsystem within the family, and the family as a unit" (367). Augie's family clearly experiences no growth as a direct result of the change they faced. Their family unit did not bond or grow closer to each other and no individual member changed in a positive way as a result of the change; rather, there is a complete restructuring of the family that occurs as a result of Augie and Simon, Augie's older brother, losing respect for and obedience to Lausch.

Augie's family experiences major change after Lausch sends Georgie away, though it is not a positive one: "After that we had a diminished family life, as though it were care of Georgie that had been the main basis of household union and now everything was disturbed" (61). It becomes clear how fragile Lausch's leadership over Augie and Simon truly is. Up to that point, they had lived their lives under her strict guidance. They were forced to work towards becoming what Lausch envisioned the ideal person to be even though neither of them had any true interest in becoming that person.

Lausch never respected Augie's and Simon's individuality, and, in turn, she never fully earned their love and respect. When Lausch enforced her decision to send Georgie away, Augie viewed it as an unforgivable act. What solidified Augie's loss of respect for Lausch was her refusal to see Georgie off before he was taken to his new home: "She didn't have the strength to go and look at the results she had worked hard to get and then still keep on trying to hold power in her hands. And how was I supposed to interpret this refusal if not as feebleness and a cracking of organization?" (60). The passage indicates Augie had always seen Lausch as more of an authoritative figure rather than his grandmother. The moment she showed a sign of weakness, he decided that she could no longer have authority over him. This is certainly not the way a child or a young adult should view one of their main parental figures. As a result of the fragile state of Lausch's leadership, Augie's family fell apart after Georgie was sent away. No member exhibits the positive growth described by Prochaska or Norcross as a result of that change, showing how dysfunctional the family had truly been.

The dysfunctional state of Augie's family ultimately has a significant impact on his personality as he progresses through his life. As Gilbert indicates, for better or worse, one's family life is a major factor in determining one's personal traits: "No matter how we may try to deny it, or cut off from it, that larger organization, the family, determines a great deal about us, both our weaknesses and our strengths. To that family as well as our reactions to it and principles learned there, we are indebted for much that is good or great about ourselves. On the other hand, the same forces went into creating the patterns we wish were different, those that get us into trouble" (9). What is most significant about Augie's childhood is the lack of love he received from his parental figures. Lausch would

not be the kind of person to express love in any way and Augie's mother, because of Lausch, was not in a position to openly display her love for her son. As Augie grows up and is involved in various adventures throughout the novel, he is involved in various romantic relationships. Thea, Augie's most significant lover before his eventual marriage, offers him hurtful, but true, words during their final argument as a couple: "perhaps love would be strange and foreign to you no matter which way it happened" (431). The effect of not receiving love in his young life is that Augie treasures the relationships he naturally has with his family and the ones he forms throughout his life. Despite the fact that his family is largely dysfunctional, Augie deeply cares for his familial connection to his mother and his two brothers. When he receives an offer to be adopted by a rich couple he had grown close to, Augie states: "There was a little in it of Moses and the Pharaoh's daughter; only I wasn't a bulrush-hidden orphan by any means. I had family enough to suit me and history to be loyal to, not as though I had been gotten off of a stockpile" (165). Augie posits that the Renlings, the couple who wish to adopt him, feel that they would be sparing him from a life of certain suffering by removing him from a family that offers him nothing in terms of love and wealth. Regardless of the state of Augie's family, however, he utterly refuses to be adopted, giving the matter no consideration. Augie is satisfied with the family he has, and the unusual proposition presented to him by the Renlings forces him to refuse their "kindness," despite the fact that his refusal will more than likely cause the end of his good relationship with them.

In the novel, the family member who Augie interacts with the most is his older brother, Simon. In Augie's life, Simon serves the role of a typical older brother; he guides him and wants him to be successful in life. Although Simon is often times a genuinely

caring older brother towards Augie, there is one aspect about him that makes eventual conflict with Augie inevitable—he is much like his grandmother, Lausch. Augie states “I saw Grandma’s satire in him... yes, the old woman’s hardness of invention and travesty savagery, even certain Russian screams. I didn’t know Simon had gotten so much from her... He both borrowed from her and burlesqued her” (236). Like Lausch, Simon has a strict view of what makes a successful person, and he would do whatever is necessary to achieve that image. For example, as he views being wealthy as a sign of success, he marries a woman who is a part of a rich family regardless of what his feelings for her are. He subsequently sets up Augie to marry into a rich family as well; however, that arrangement does not end successfully because during his engagement Augie is caught aiding a female friend and is misunderstood as being romantically involved with her. Viewing Augie as a detriment to his image, Simon quickly cuts him out of his life without bothering to hear any explanation; he tells him “I can’t carry you along anymore... You’re not with me from here on... Stay away, that’s the last thing I’ll ever ask you” (300-301).

Once he sees Augie as being beyond help, Simon would rather preserve his good image than his relationship with his brother. This turn of events hurts Augie tremendously, but he has no choice but to carry on and live without his older brother in his life—that is, until he eventually meets with Simon some time later and once again shows how much he values his relationship with him and the rest of his family. Of that time, Augie writes “I thought he was sorry about the fight we had over Lucy and Mimi. I wasn’t angry any more but was looking ahead...I found out that I couldn’t be critical of Simon when I saw him after a long interval. No matter what he had done or what he was

up to now, the instant I saw him I loved him again. I couldn't help it. It came over me. I wanted to be brothers again. And why did he come running for me if he didn't want the same?" (460). Augie sums up the harsh words he received from Simon as a mere "fight" and finds himself completely forgiving of the situation only because Simon wanted to reestablish contact with him.

Augie treasures his brotherly relationship with Simon and wishes for there to be continued emotional support provided between them. Reporting on the work of Mark Karpel, a psychologist who specializes in couples therapy, Herbert and Irene Goldenberg write: "As Karpel (1986) emphasizes, even chaotic, disorganized, abusive, and multi-problem families have resources. Here he is referring to the rootedness, intimacy, support, and meaning a family can provide" (12). When Simon decided to cut off Augie, he was only thinking about Augie no longer being useful to him. The fact that Simon reaches out to Augie later demonstrates to Augie that his brother also values their emotional connection the support that they can provide each other with, which is enough for Augie to overlook what had transpired between them. Simon is the family member whom Augie spends the most amount of time with in the novel. It is no surprise that Augie, who values his close relationships so highly, would be willing to forgive Simon regardless of how terribly he was treated by him.

The situation that had caused the conflict between Augie and Simon occurred when Augie suddenly became involved in assisting his friend Mimi through the process of her abortion and her subsequent recovery. Before beginning the procedure, Augie has this crucial, and telling, interaction with Mimi: "I helped her off with her fur-collared coat, and she took me by the hand as if it were I that had to be led to the needle. At the

moment of putting my arm around her—feeling her need and wanting greatly to do all I could to meet it—she broke into sobs” (280). Augie sympathizes with Mimi’s desire to have a person support her during her emotionally trying situation, and he feels intensely motivated to adequately fulfill that role. Feeling that he was so greatly needed by Mimi made Augie willing to undergo any inconvenience in order to help her. This situation is somewhat similar to how Augie forgives Simon only because Simon desired for there to be contact and support between them again; except, in that case, there was a reestablishment of a mutually beneficial brotherly relationship while with Mimi, Augie seemingly acts selflessly. When helping Mimi, Augie values his relationship with her above most other things, even himself; he ultimately never displays feeling any regret for helping Mimi despite the fact that the situation resulted in his falling-out with Simon. Augie displays symptoms of a placator, one of the potential coping patterns that someone with low self-worth can possess. John V. Knapp explains: “The placator tries to soothe everybody else's ruffled feathers at the expense of or denial of self because the self is just not worth a whole lot in its own (metaphorical) eyes” (223). Augie’s having low self-worth would be another side effect of not having received much love as a child and would help explain why Augie so easily forgives Simon and goes to such great lengths to help Mimi. He values his relationships with others because those relationships help him to feel needed by others, something he greatly desires. For this reason, Augie’s actions in helping Mimi in her time of need are only somewhat selfless; his actions are for his own benefit as much as they are for Mimi’s.

Another significant aspect of Augie’s character is his inclination to be involved in romantic relationships. Augie’s romantic relationships show that he is in a desperate

search for a partner who makes him feel needed. In his article “Saul Bellow: *The Adventures of Augie March*,” Donald Pizer describes the novel as “a series of circles, of repetitive patterns without end as Augie encounters again and again characters whose involvement with him represents a reappearance of one of the basic ways in which one person affects another” (155). For Augie, his romantic relationships are what go in circles the most throughout the narrative. He can become involved in another one as soon as the previous one ends; it is a cycle of him committing the same mistakes multiple times. If Augie is dissatisfied with a relationship, or if he has his sights already set on a potentially better one, Augie can let go of that relationship easily, as seen when he ends his relationship with Sophie because Thea has presented herself as a potential romantic partner: “Augie, you and me will never get together again, will we?”... ‘I think not, Sophie. There is this other girl’” (336). This simple interaction is how Augie’s relationship with Sophie ends, and he soon after begins his relationship with Thea. Augie’s relationship with Thea takes place primarily in Mexico on a trip planned out entirely by her. Augie once again displays his low self-worth by taking part in this trip despite not much wanting to: “She assumed that I’d go to Mexico with her, and I never seriously thought of refusing. I knew I didn’t have what it took, of pride, or of a strong feeling of duty, to ask her to come back another time when I was ready, or at least in better position” (342).

One of Augie’s biggest adventures takes place during this trip to Mexico. He joins Thea in her endeavor to train an eagle to listen to specific commands. Augie eventually admits to Thea that he thought activities such as training the eagle merely to be things she was “so fantastic about” (430), which indicates that his lack of interest in performing

these activities. Augie had spent months engaging in Thea's preferred activities, yet this instance, the moment of their break-up, is the first time she heard Augie complain about it. This scenario is similar to the one with Mimi, as Augie once again gets involved in a situation that does not necessarily concern him so that he may feel happy fulfilling the needs of another person. At the point when Augie admits to Thea that he felt her to be "fantastic" about the activities she likes to engage in, he already has his eyes set on another potential relationship with Stella, the woman he goes on to marry at a later point in time. Augie's first major interaction with Stella once again shows how strongly he desires to feel needed. When she pulls him out of a crowded party to ask for his assistance in an important matter he states "that she chose me to consult with and to ask for help—for what else can she do but ask for help?—was like a kindness she did me and I was under obligation to her before she spoke even a word" (415). Because he feels that Stella will fulfill his most powerful need, Augie is once again ready to involve himself in any situation in order to support her.

Stella's situation, though, is not the only thing that draws Augie into helping her. Later in their first conversation, she tells Augie the exact words he needs to hear: "one of the things I thought is that you and I are the kind of people other people are always trying to fit into their schemes" (418), to which Augie reacts with strong emotion: "To these words that she spoke I responded tremendously. I melted toward her. I was grateful for her plain way of naming a truth that had been hanging around me anonymously for many long years" (418). It is ironic that Augie is pleased to hear from Stella the truth that he is often manipulated by other people while she is manipulating him to fit into her plans. Other indicators also suggest that Augie's eventual relationship with Stella will end just

as badly as all his previous ones did. After helping Stella and having an intimate moment with her while still in a relationship with Thea, Stella tells Augie “I wouldn’t let her be too rough on me if I were you” (427); then, as Augie proceeds to go find Thea, he expresses his own feelings on the matter: “I wasn’t going to let her be rough, I thought as I went to face and to lie to Thea” (427). Augie wants to maintain his relationship with Thea, so he is ready to lie to her and prevent himself from being berated by her even though he strongly deserves to be. Augie does not think about how wrong his own actions are, and he lets Stella steer him into thinking that he is in any position to try to justify his actions to Thea after he committed a wrongful act. As with Thea, Augie is used to fit into other’s plans. Because he was so thoroughly flattered by Stella, Augie was willing to do whatever she said all the while not realizing that he is being used by her in the same way so many others have used him before.

Although Augie does go on to marry Stella, he realized important things as a result of his relationship with Thea that eventually help him come to the conclusion that Stella is not the right person for him to be with. In his initial conversation with Stella, Augie is finally able to recognize how much he has been used by other people in his life. Later, after Thea has broken up with him, Augie despairs at the thought of taking on a job posing as someone else: “Please God! I thought, keep me from being sucked into another one of those great currents where I can’t be myself” (453). Clearly, Augie has grown tired of being put into situations that he does not want to be a part of. Despite Augie’s strong conviction, he remains oblivious to how Stella used him and retains strong feelings for her that shine through when the two of them eventually reunite and marry some time afterward. After their second encounter, there is reason for readers to believe that Stella

only wishes to use Augie for one reason or another and does not actually have any romantic interest in him; early on, Augie continues to have no idea that Stella's intentions are not what they appear to be. For example, when Stella tells Augie that she owes money to people, Augie tells her: "'Why, darling, don't worry, we'll pay everybody' ... When I was loved and sitting in a fine bed like this, I was just like royalty and disposed of all matters with a word" (519). Based on the first conversation Augie had with her, Stella seems to understand Augie's needs and desires; it is suspicious that she once again comes into Augie's life when she happens to be having financial troubles.

Several other factors call into question Stella's true intentions. First, there is what the character Mintouchian tells Augie about her: "she's no different from the rest of us except more gifted and beautiful. It is absolutely certain that she has thought of the future both with and without you" (523). Augie has an angry response to Mintouchian's words because at this point he feels no suspicions towards Stella. However, as time goes on and Augie becomes more acquainted with Stella, he notices that she often lies to him: "I said that Stella lied more than average, unfortunately. She told me a number of things that weren't so; she forgot to tell me others that were so" (571). The more Augie learns about Stella, the more he realizes how much vital information about herself she keeps from him. At the conclusion of *The Adventures of Augie March*, Augie nevertheless finds himself married to Stella. After spending much of the novel trying to make up for the lack of love he received as a child who was a part of a dysfunctional family by searching for a relationship in which he is genuinely loved and needed, Augie does not learn from his past mistakes and marries someone who only wishes to use him.

Even if he eventually gets a divorce, one might think that Augie is doomed to keep repeating the same mistakes over and over again. But a closer look at Augie's closing words reveals that Augie is on the right track to improving himself and eventually finding the woman of his dreams. In the final paragraph, Augie reflects both on his life and the life of Jacqueline, a maid who traveled with him on a business trip in order to visit her family. Augie describes himself as grinning; he writes "That's the *animal ridens* in me, the laughing creature, forever rising up. What's so laughable, that a Jacqueline, for instance, as hard used as that by rough forces, will still refuse to lead a disappointed life? Or is the laugh at nature—including eternity—that it thinks it can win over us and the power of hope? Nah, nah! I think. It never will" (585). Augie thinks of how Jacqueline still lives her life happily despite having overcome rough obstacles in life. He recognizes the power of hope within her and that it has the power to withstand anything the world can unleash upon it. Augie describes his desire to laugh at these things as something enigmatic (585), though it is clear that his own rough life and the mistakes he has made have brought Augie to the brink of losing hope for the future.

As Pizer states, "*Augie March* is about the 'rough forces' of experience, about all that compels and conditions and shapes man, particularly the shaping power of other human wills. It is also about the darkness of nature... about the human effort to maintain hope despite these realities, the hope which musters as much grace and wit as is possible in the face of the permanent and insoluble enigma of man's condition" (150). Augie's failed relationship with Stella forces him to once again come to terms with the dark realities of the world. However, Augie does indeed show that he intends to continue moving forward when he admits near the end of the novel that he has not lost hope and

has a positive outlook on the future: “Why, I am a sort of Columbus of those near-at-hand and believe you can come to them in this immediate terra incognita that spreads out in every gaze. I may well be a flop at this line of endeavor. Columbus too thought he was a flop, probably, when they sent him back in chains. Which didn’t prove there was no America” (586). Augie compares himself to Columbus in that he has traveled to many places and met different people. He also recognizes that he has failed to find the woman he desires, one that makes him feel loved and needed without her having any intention of using him for her benefit. But, just as Columbus’ failings did not mean there was no America, Augie knows that, if he continues his search, he will one day be successful in finding what he is looking for. By attaining continual growth, such as learning to value himself more after his endeavors with Thea and coming to such mature conclusions about the future after realizing the inevitable fate of his relationship with Stella, Augie shows that he will overcome the personal problems plaguing him because of his dysfunctional family and that he has the capability to acquire the romantic partner he desires.

III. WILHELM'S PATH TO FINDING HIS IDENTITY

Tommy Wilhelm in *Seize the Day* becomes involved in two dysfunctional families as a result of his quarrels with both his father and his wife. Wilhelm finds that his father has emotionally cut him off and will not provide any financial support when he so desperately needs to pay off his wife's financial demands. The relationship with his father grows worse as he continues to call into question whether the man actually cared about Wilhelm's mother. The novella leaves Wilhelm emotionally devastated as he has been betrayed by Tamkin, his father figure, and left with nothing. However, in his continued search for his own identity, in which Tamkin ironically assisted him, Wilhelm found the answer he needs to overcome his difficulties and continue onward.

In *Seize the Day*, Wilhelm is a middle-aged man in a dysfunctional family as a result of conflicts with both his father, Dr. Adler, and his wife, Margaret, from whom he is separated but has been unable to secure a divorce. Both Dr. Adler and Margaret cause Wilhelm emotional pain throughout the novella as he struggles to satisfy the high expectations they both have of him. Wilhelm has disappointed his father throughout his life by going against his wishes when he dropped out of college and moved to Hollywood to start an acting career. Most of all, both Dr. Adler and Margaret want Wilhelm to be financially successful, something that is difficult for him in the present of the story because he has been unable to procure another job after quitting his previous one of ten years as a result of a dispute with his bosses. To best understand Wilhelm and the problems he has with his family, one must look at the dysfunctional relationships he has with his wife and father from a family systems approach. As Herbert and Irene

Goldenberg explain: “Bowen, the developer of family systems theory, conceptualized the family as an emotional unit, a network of interlocking relationships, best understood when analyzed within a multigenerational or historical framework” (175). From a family systems perspective, Wilhelm can best be understood by looking at the kind of relationship his mother and father had as well as the relationship he had with both of them. From what can be gathered from Wilhelm’s dialogue with his father as well as his inner monologues, Dr. Adler seems indifferent about the death of his wife. When questioned by Wilhelm, Dr. Adler is unable to recall the year of his wife’s death and makes an excuse about it: “You must realize, an old fellow’s memory becomes unreliable” (24). Wilhelm interprets his father’s failure to remember the year of his wife’s death as evidence of his indifference to her. Wilhelm’s reaction suggests that he is trying to be fair but finds it difficult not to be critical of his father: “Yes, it was age. Don’t make an issue of it, Wilhelm advised himself. If you were to ask the old doctor in what year he had interned, he’d tell you correctly” (24). Wilhelm is clearly displaying dissatisfaction with the attitude his father has about his mother’s death; he believes his father values memories about his work more than he values memories of his own wife. From Wilhelm’s point of view, Dr. Adler’s attitude indicates that he did not have a loving relationship with his wife. More evidence of this is displayed in Dr. Adler’s reaction to his wife’s gravesite being vandalized: “He [Wilhelm] wanted the doctor to pay for a new seat, but his father was cool to the idea. He said he was going to have himself cremated” (30). Dr. Adler is so nonchalant about his wife’s gravesite that he is reluctant to pay for a replacement seat and he affirms that he has no intention of joining her in that same spot.

This attitude is obviously not one that a loving husband would have towards his deceased wife.

Although Dr. Adler does not seem to care much about his wife, that attitude did not seem to hinder family life for Wilhelm when he was younger. Now that he is older and fails to get the kind of support from his father that he expected, he questions whether his family was ever a happy one: “Where was the old man’s heart? Maybe, thought Wilhelm, I was sentimental in the past and exaggerated his kindness—warm family life. It may never have been there” (23). In the present of the novella, the conflict between Wilhelm and Dr. Adler stems from the older man’s disappointment in his son for his continued inability to attain financial success. As a result of not having a steady flow of income and having to pay his wife large amounts of money for the supposed purpose of child support, Wilhelm asks his father for money, but the old man always refuses him despite Wilhelm’s desperate circumstances. Dr. Adler imposes very rigid boundaries between himself and Wilhelm so that he can minimalize contact with a son who only seems to bring him trouble. As Prochaska and Norcross indicate, “An organized family will have clearly marked boundaries... The parental subsystem will have clear boundaries between it and the children, but not so impenetrable as to limit the access necessary for good parenting” (366). The boundaries that Dr. Adler has placed between him and Wilhelm are so strong that they prevent him from being a good parent to Wilhelm; it does not matter that Wilhelm is forty-four years old because he has maintained a civil relationship with his father and still desires to receive guidance from him.

The emotional barriers Dr. Adler has constructed between himself and Wilhelm are intended to prevent close communication with his own son; he refuses even to have sympathy for Wilhelm as he upholds his steadfast desire to avoid involvement in his problems. After Wilhelm tells his father about the emotional pain his wife has caused him, the narrator shows Dr. Adler's continued lack of understanding for Wilhelm's problems: "Wilhelm was greatly moved. He wiped his face at all corners with his napkin. Dr. Adler felt that his son was indulging himself too much in his emotions" (44). Dr. Adler's harsh attitude leaves Wilhelm without the kind of attention he desires from his father. In being so emotionally cut off, Wilhelm's issues with Dr. Adler rise above being simply about the old man's stinginess. The fact that his father refuses to give him money takes on an entirely different meaning after Wilhelm nearly begs him for help and still does not receive any. In Wilhelm's final conversation with his father he tells him: "It isn't all a question of money—there are other things a father can give to a son" (106). Unfortunately, Wilhelm is unable to convince his father to see the situation as he does; he only succeeds in angering Dr. Adler more than before.

Although Wilhelm had dropped out of college and caused a crisis within his family, Wilhelm's relationship with his father was relatively functional until Wilhelm reached middle age; as previously mentioned, when he was younger, Wilhelm had believed that his family was a happy one. Now, he feels disdain towards his father for seemingly not caring about his mother and making that happy past an illusion. That being the case, Wilhelm is likely to have been aiming to recreate the family of his childhood with his wife and his two sons since it would be hypocritical of him to act like how he perceives his father and care about them enough. Wilhelm's mother died sometime

during when his marriage to Margaret was proceeding without issues; after her death, Wilhelm would have begun to see Dr. Adler's indifferent attitude towards his mother's death. Sickened by the emotional distance that his father has placed on his mother, Wilhelm would strive to act in a more caring way towards his own wife. Although he is the one who broke their marriage, Wilhelm suggests that he put much effort into keeping the relationship intact: "I just couldn't live with Margaret. I wanted to stick it out, but I was getting very sick. She was one way and I was another" (47). The ongoing problem with Wilhelm and Margaret is that they are not formally divorced. Thus, in their separation, they are experiencing a state known as distancing between two family members. On this topic, Gilbert writes: "Partners may not speak to each other for months. Externally, they seem disconnected. Internally, however it is a different story. Distanced persons think about each other, the relationship and the conflict that led to it, a great deal. By distancing, they are far from free of the problem. They are still emotionally bound and defined by it" (16). Gilbert's insight applies well to Wilhelm; except, in his case, the constant need to have a large sum of money ready to send to Margaret is mainly what keeps him thinking about the relationship.

The emotional and financial problems that Wilhelm faces occur as a result of his failed relationship with Margaret; in low emotional state, Wilhelm has no choice but to dwell on his past mistakes and failures and be defined by them. One of those past failings that Wilhelm dwells on is his inability to be with his sons. Wilhelm greatly loves his two sons and he would pay any amount of money to provide for them. After Dr. Adler tells Wilhelm to no longer give so much of his money to Margaret, Wilhelm responds with: "Oh, but my kids, Father. My kids. I love them. I don't want them to lack anything" (43).

This is an instance in which Wilhelm is acting towards his family in a manner that contrasts with the way in which Dr. Adler is acting towards his. Wilhelm's love for his kids is shown to be powerful by how thoughts of them influence him to regret the outcome of his marriage to Margaret: "They [his sons] did not know how much he cared for them. No. It hurt him greatly" (90). Wilhelm is desperate to be near his children: "I'm deprived of my children... I pay and pay. I never see them. They grow up without me. She makes them like herself. She'll bring them up to be my enemies" (94). The physical boundary of distance makes Wilhelm unable to see his sons grow and spend time with them. Despite his efforts, the motif of boundaries between father and son is consistent among two consecutive generations in Wilhelm's family; he knows well the pain of having his father put powerful boundaries on him and it is indeed a cruel fate that his sons will grow up thinking that he has done the same to them.

Because of the rigid boundaries Dr. Adler has erected, Wilhelm feels so distanced from his father that he is forced to look for someone to provide the support only a fatherly figure can. The person that Wilhelm finds is Tamkin, someone who can only be described as a con-man. He comes to Wilhelm in his emotionally vulnerable state and presents him with a convenient way to pay off his debts, requiring only that he entrust a large sum of money to him. Tamkin is such a suspicious person that Dr. Adler warns Wilhelm about him. However, Dr. Adler's distant way of providing that warning only serves to increase Wilhelm's frustrations with his father: "Dr. Adler liked to appear affable. Affable! His own son, his one and only son, could not speak his mind or ease his heart to him. I wouldn't turn to Tamkin, he thought, if I could turn to him. At least Tamkin sympathizes with me and tries to give me a hand" (8). Wilhelm is so desperate

for both money and fatherly attention that he turns to someone who he knows is more than likely trying to use him for his own monetary gain. Tamkin provides Wilhelm with the sympathetic treatment he so strongly desires: “the doctor cared about him and pleased him. This was what he craved, that someone should care about him, wish him well. Kindness, mercy, he wanted” (69). For being such a shady character, Tamkin’s sympathy alone would likely not have been enough for Wilhelm to be able to trust him as a father figure; another factor that makes him a person worthy of that position is the compelling way in which he speaks of various deep topics that interest Wilhelm. In one instance in which Tamkin and Wilhelm have a deep conversation, Tamkin states: “The real universe. That’s the present moment. The past is no good to us. The future is full of anxiety. Only the present is real—the here-and-now. Seize the day” (62). These words resonate well with Wilhelm, considering how he is constantly reflecting on his past mistakes and becoming depressed about the sad situation they have led to. It is also intriguing that Tamkin, the man who ultimately betrays Wilhelm, is the character who utters the words that title the novella. It indicates that the lesson that is most important for Wilhelm to learn in order to alleviate his emotional pain is indeed that he must start focusing on the present and no longer worry about his past mistakes or his uncertain future.

Wilhelm certainly takes Tamkin’s words seriously since they provide compelling insights into the human mind; after Tamkin speaks of his belief that most people eagerly await death, and that Wilhelm is not one of those people, Wilhelm deeply relishes his words: “True, true! thought Wilhelm, profoundly moved by these revelations. How does he know these things? How can he be such a jerk, and even perhaps an operator, a swindler, and understand so well what gives? I believe what he says. It simplifies much—

everything” (95). Receiving from Tamkin deep insights that appear to be meant to help him is better support for Wilhelm than what he has received from his father over many years. Even though he knows that Tamkin likely has ulterior motives, the attention Wilhelm receives and the value of his words make Wilhelm want to believe in him even more than what his desperate situation calls for him to do. If Tamkin were not the dishonest man that he proves to be, he would have remained a father figure that Wilhelm could look up to in place of Dr. Adler.

What is most important about Wilhelm’s previously mentioned conversation with Tamkin is that Wilhelm agrees with him in that he wants to continue living. Even though his life is currently miserable because of the struggles he is experiencing, Wilhelm wants to overcome them and find a way to continue forward. At the end, however, Wilhelm is betrayed by Tamkin and is left penniless, crying at a funeral over the corpse of a person he does not know. It seems as if though there can be no future in which Wilhelm can attain happiness. However, it is in those conversations with Tamkin that Wilhelm finds the way to overcome his struggles and live on happily. To better understand Wilhelm, it is important for readers to note what is ailing Wilhelm’s emotional state: his loss of self. Much like Augie in his young life, Wilhelm has no sense of his own identity. Wilhelm’s anxiety in the present of the novella deters him from thinking clearly about his self as well as his overall situation: “As Robert Kegan [American developmental psychologist] (1982, 1994) argues... when chronic anxiety rules, making it impossible for the self to examine its own emotional response, the self cannot, without such examination, contemplate its own motivations and make the best possible choices” (Knapp 223). Since before the beginning of the novella, Wilhelm has struggled with anxiety due to his

seemingly insurmountable problems. As a result, Wilhelm makes the questionable decision to entrust all of his remaining funds to Tamkin, someone he highly suspects to be unworthy of his trust. At the end of the novella, Wilhelm's anxiety has risen exponentially because his situation is worse than ever. During a phone call with his wife, Wilhelm admits that his mind has fallen into a state of complete disarray: "I've had some bad luck. As a matter of fact, it's been so bad that I don't know where I am. I couldn't tell you what day of the week this is. I can't think straight. I'd better not even try" (108). In the present of the story, Wilhelm is clearly exhibiting the symptoms of chronic anxiety. As Sandra Stephen, et al, explain in "Chronic Anxiety and Embodied Mindfulness Meditation: A Multicenter Study," "Anxiety is a common emotional state often characterized by constant worrying or feelings of dread and apprehension with symptomatic effects ranging from, but not limited to, interrupted sleep patterns, increased muscle tension, hyper-vigilance and irritability" (269-270). As a result his anxieties, Wilhelm is not thinking clearly; his inability to identify his true self, his self that is differentiated from his family, brings him more turmoil than ever before, thus inhibiting his emotional state even further.

Wilhelm's struggle to establish his identity first appears during a look back at his past: "In California he became Tommy Wilhelm. Dr. Adler would not accept the change. Today he still called his son Wilky... He had never, however, succeeded in feeling like Tommy, and in his soul had always remained Wilky... He had cast off his father's name, and with it his father's opinion of him. It was, he knew it was, his bid for liberty, Adler being in his mind the title of the species, Tommy the freedom of the person. But Wilky was his inescapable self" (21). Wilhelm struggles to be the person he believes himself to

be, Tommy, as he continues to feel that he is Wilky, the person whom Dr. Adler considers to be a failure. Wilhelm desperately struggles to rid himself of the name Wilky and all of the negative sentiments attached to the person who goes by that name, but it is all in vain. Wilhelm's anxieties constantly rise throughout the novella as he attempts to get Dr. Adler to accept him as Tommy; the failure that effort contributes to Wilhelm's not procuring any money from his father, thus intensifying Wilhelm's anxiety. What Wilhelm's desperate need for Dr. Adler's money shows is that he is also not attaining the freedom from his father that the name "Tommy" is supposed to indicate. For Wilhelm, attaining financial success would have proven to those around him that he is a capable person; falling into debt and requiring his father's money puts him in the terrible position of being constantly reminded of his failures. In the present of the story, Wilhelm is the least free he has been of his father in his adult life.

Although Wilhelm's situation only becomes worse, his conversations with Tamkin allow him to gain a higher level of maturity and become closer to discovering his self. After Tamkin remarks that there appear to be different souls contained within one person, a real soul and a pretender soul, Wilhelm reflects on himself and the different names he has gone by: "It was the description of the two souls that had awed him. In Tommy he saw the pretender. And even Wilky might not be himself. Might the name of his true soul be the one by which his old grandfather had called him—Velvel?" (68). Wilhelm realizes that his true self is neither Tommy nor Wilky, but rather someone else entirely. In his young life, he tried to establish his identity by dropping out of college and trying to have a career in Hollywood. Now, he still continues to be in search of whom he might be, but he has realized that he cannot let his father or the mistake of his foolish

younger self define who he is. As Darryl Hattenhauer explains in his article “Tommy Wilhelm as Passive-Aggressive in ‘Seize the Day,’” Wilhelm “realizes that he has not just one false self but two. He realizes that both his normal adult self, ‘Tommy Wilhelm,’ and his adolescent self, ‘Wilky,’ are both false... He thereby intuits that Wilky is the boyish self that his father created, and that Tommy is the self that grew out of Wilky” (271). Wilhelm’s discussion with Tamkin about souls endows him with the purpose in life of trying to discover his true identity. This realization, along with the one he gained from the conversation about people’s desire for death, indicates that Wilhelm is not going to give up on living at the end of the novella because of his unfortunate circumstances.

Near the novella’s conclusion, Wilhelm finds himself thinking: “I am trying to stay alive and work too hard at it. That’s what’s turning my brains. This working hard defeats its own end. At what point should I start over? Let me go back a ways and try once more” (95). Wilhelm recognizes that his fixation on making efforts to meet the expectations his father and wife have of him has only diminished the quality of his life. In being able to examine his self critically, Wilhelm recognizes that he is capable of overcoming his anxieties in order to think of ways in which he can continue forward through life without letting his emotional pain be the center of his existence. Considering his growth and progress towards bettering himself, Wilhelm’s situation is less tragic than it appears to be at the novella’s conclusion: “the heavy sea-like music came up to his ears. It poured into him where he had hidden himself in the center of a crowd by the great and happy oblivion of tears. He heard it and sank deeper than sorrow, through torn sobs and cries toward the consummation of his heart’s ultimate need” (114). Wilhelm cries as his soul continues to lack what it needs in order to live happily; he falls to a state deeper

than sorrow as he continues to be enveloped in his emotions. However, he is crying towards the fulfillment of his need. Wilhelm does not appear to have relinquished all hope of reaching that fulfillment. With his desire to start over, Wilhelm can pick himself up from being at the deepest level of despair and continuously rise up until he finally reaches his heart's need and identifies who his true self is.

IV. REACHING HIGHER SELF-DIFFERENTIATION IN AFRICA

Eugene Henderson's struggle in *Henderson the Rain King* is rooted entirely in the dysfunctional relationship he has with his father, similar to Wilhelm in *Seize the Day*. Henderson's father always viewed Henderson as being inferior when compared to his older brother, Dick. Henderson adopted the same view of himself, and he continued living with it until he could no longer bear his growing anxieties. Those anxieties cause Henderson to become easily irritable and to act in ways that are detrimental to his family relationships. Because Henderson is on the verge of causing the downfall of his second family, he travels to Africa in search of himself. Through his journey, Henderson uncovers that he has been living his life in constant fear; he returns home a changed man.

Henderson is a middle-aged man who experiences emotional issues as a result of his struggles with several dysfunctional families. The root cause of Henderson's issues is his inability to differentiate himself from the unfortunate relationship he had with his father. As Prochaska and Norcross explain, "Emotional illness arises when individuals are unable to adequately differentiate themselves from their families of origin. Differentiation of self is the ability to be emotionally controlled while remaining within the emotional intensity of one's family" (373). Before I demonstrate instances of Henderson's emotions being uncontrolled during his life with his current family, it is first important to understand what caused the dysfunctional state of Henderson's relationship with his father and why he is so profoundly affected by it years after the fact. To begin with, at some point during Henderson's life, his older brother, who was understood to be smarter than Henderson and thus the father's favorite of the two, died as a result of an

unfortunate incident. At a later point in the novel, Henderson explains how he believes his father felt about what had occurred: “I suppose my dad wished, I *know* he wished, that I had gotten drowned instead of my brother Dick, up there near Plattsburg. Did this mean he didn’t love me? Not at all... He loved both his sons. But Dick should have lived” (308). As Allan and Nancy F. Chavkin in their article “Family Dynamics in *Henderson the Rain King*” explain: “The father, Willard Henderson, is devastated by Dick’s death, and adolescent Eugene is made to feel that the family line has ended with Dick’s drowning” (16). Because Henderson feels himself to be an inferior person to his brother, he agrees with the sentiment that he is the one who should have died instead of Dick.

Henderson displays his feelings of low self-worth on many occasions. When he first mentions his brother’s death along with its cause, Henderson writes “for one moment he resembled me, his kid brother, and that was the end of him” (31). Under the influence of drugs, Dick had committed a stunt that resulted in his being chased by police; after crashing his vehicle, he attempted to flee by swimming into a river and subsequently drowned as a result of being weighed down by the boots he had on. Henderson is profoundly affected by his father’s low opinion of him; he thinks so little of himself that he would see this moment of Dick’s extreme foolishness as the one time his older brother resembled him. In his low self-worth Henderson demonstrates his lack of differentiation from his family of birth; he believes himself incapable of being a successful person because that is the way his father views him. Living under such belittlement from his father, Henderson would equate the smallest of his mistakes to be a sign of a low level of intelligence; because of his supposedly inadequate intelligence, Henderson believes that his life holds little value. Now, Henderson is admittedly not in a position most would

consider successful, in that his primary occupation is operating a pig farm, something he chose to do out of spite towards the conditions he has faced in life: “When I came back from the war it was with the thought of becoming a pig farmer, which maybe illustrates what I thought of life in general” (18). Henderson does not aim for a better occupation because he believes that no other job would more accurately display the state of his life.

How differentiated one’s self is decides that person’s path in life. Gilbert writes: “through the lens of Bowen theory, by definition, one’s level of differentiation of self makes for success in life, or lack thereof. That level can be quite different among siblings” (67). The higher one’s level of differentiation, the more likely they will be successful in life, as Henderson and his brother demonstrate. In comparison to Henderson, Dick’s differentiation of self was likely high, as he was often praised and believed to be capable of achieving anything he set his mind to. Meanwhile, Henderson has to commit to great tasks if he wants to please his father, although he is ultimately incapable of changing his behavior: “while I got an M.A. to please my father I always behaved like an ignorant man and a bum” (21). Although it is implied that he did not do it because he wanted to, Henderson got an M.A., an achievement that most people do not have. Ironically, Henderson believes himself to be incapable of great achievements even though he has proven himself to be capable of them in the past. In this reflection on his past, Henderson indicates that his actions and behavior are above all what prove him to be a man of inferior standing. Of course, if Henderson believes what his father believes, and he has resigned himself to the fate of being inferior to his brother regardless of what he does, then it is unsurprising that he would judge himself harshly for any mistakes he makes, especially when those mistakes involve other people who will also judge him. As

the supposedly inferior younger sibling to a more intelligent older one, Henderson is incapable of separating himself from the image his father has of him.

However, when he travels to Africa, he escapes from his family and all of the negative perceptions attached to him, Henderson shows a desire to be helpful to the people he comes across in order to prove, to himself as much as to others, that he is truly a good person: “So inflamed was my wish to *do* something. For I saw something I could do. Let these Wariri whom so far... I didn’t care for—let them be worse than the sons of Sodom and Gomorrah combined, I still couldn’t pass up this opportunity to *do*, and to distinguish myself. To work the right stitch into the design of my destiny before it was too late” (178-179). The fact that Henderson’s powerful desire to do something of worth comes out so strongly while he is away from everyone and everything he knows shows how controlling his father’s perceptions of him have been in his life. In Africa, no one knows Henderson and there are no negative sentiments attached to his person; he has the opportunity to establish his identity, one which he hopes will separate him from everything that has been hindering him for most of his life.

Henderson’s inability to differentiate himself from his relationship with his father also has a significant effect on his relationships with others he is close to, particularly his ex-wife, his current wife, and his children. It is important to note that feeling worthless has brought Henderson to the point that he needs people who will make him feel he has a place of value in the world. During a meeting with Dahfu, king of the Wariri people, Henderson explains why he finds himself to be envious of Dahfu’s position as king of his people: “Why do I envy you? You are in the bosom of your people. They need you. Look how they stick around and attend to your every need. It’s obvious how much they value

you” (150). Henderson’s explanation implies that he has not been made to feel like a valued person by the families that he has established, which is something that has brought him much emotional pain over the years. Something that had a great negative impact in Henderson’s relationship with Frances, his first wife, is the reaction she gave him when he voiced his desire to attend medical school: “Frances opened her mouth... and laughed at me” (11); as Henderson later admits, “After Frances laughed at my dream of a medical career I never discussed another thing with her” (12). Frances shows how little she values Henderson as a person when she laughs at him and deems him incapable of achieving his dream. When Henderson feels that he is of little value to his family with his current wife, Lily, a certain voice that had been resounding within him for years, demanding the attainment of something emotionally crucial to him, grows much stronger; “there was a disturbance in my heart, a voice that spoke there and said, *I want, I want, I want!* It happened every afternoon, and when I tried to suppress it it got even stronger” (22). This voice calling out from within him is what leads Henderson into taking his trip to Africa so that he may search for a way to quell his inner turmoil.

Henderson’s trip to Africa is therapy-seeking, as he looks for an answer that will cure him of his emotional pain. One person seeking therapy for their emotional pain, as Herbert and Irene Goldenberg explain, indicates the high likelihood of that person’s family also experiencing emotional pain: “Family therapists were among the first to recognize that when a symptom-bearing person... came for help, his or her entire family was hurting and needed help” (20). If many members of a family are experiencing depression and enduring that pain in solitude, the family is clearly dysfunctional. As one of the heads of the family, Henderson’s deteriorating emotional state would be easily

noticed by the others; if one who holds a high position within the family is struck by depression, other family members are more likely to experience the same or similar symptoms, especially the person's offspring. For example, when Henderson's fifteen year old daughter, Ricey, brings home a baby whom she found abandoned, his initial reaction is to completely ignore it, which shows how his mental state has negatively affected how he interacts with his family members. He ignores his parental responsibilities and forces his wife to take full responsibility over an issue that should require both parents' attention. When Lily attempts to convince him to address the issue, he tells her "I don't want to hear anything... you are in charge and it's your show" (30).

Bringing home an abandoned child with the intention of taking responsibility for it is obviously not typical behavior for an adolescent girl. Still, even if Ricey's adolescence plays a role in her questionable decision-making, Henderson appears to lack the mental fortitude to be a good parent to his child. The Goldenbergs explain: "When children reach adolescence, the family faces new organizational challenges, particularly around autonomy and independence. Parents may no longer be able to maintain complete authority, but they cannot abdicate authority altogether" (40). Rather than be a good parent and immediately address the problem at hand, Henderson abdicates his authority over his daughter and attempts to have Lily be in charge of the situation. A situation such as this one shows that Henderson's family is dysfunctional, and that they are emotionally suffering alongside him. Henderson cannot be entirely blamed for his behavior as his depression is so great that it prevents him from thinking clearly during emotionally trying situations. Of course, Henderson eventually does resolve the issue with his daughter,

though the overall situation only serves to increase her frustrations with him and severely strain their relationship.

Another example of dysfunction in Henderson's family is Henderson's relationship with his wife, Lily. Arguments between them can escalate to a point that Henderson threatens to commit suicide: "as it got her nowhere to discuss it with me she started to cry, and when I saw tears I lost my head and yelled, 'I'm going to blow my brains out! I'm shooting myself. I didn't forget to pack the pistol'" (5) What makes Henderson's threat especially cruel is that he is well aware that Lily's father died as a result of a suicide. Clearly, Henderson's family is undergoing a crisis that is highly likely to result in their downfall if it continues as is. Even though Henderson is the center of the crisis, it is questionable whether it is appropriate for Henderson to go to Africa and try to resolve his issues while being completely separated from his family. According to Herbert and Irene Goldenberg, "Successfully managing a crisis together deepens the family bond and strengthens its confidence in its capacity to prevent or manage future adversities" (12). However, there is no chance that Henderson will try to resolve his issues by having personal conversation with his fellow family members because the answer to what he needs to clear his mind of anxieties cannot be found amongst them.

The whole situation is rather unfair to Henderson's family as they are being made to suffer as a result of his emotional pain. As Allan and Nancy F. Chavkin explain: "He [Henderson] suffers from chronic anxiety and constantly reacts emotionally to even minor stress. As a consequence of the chronic anxiety and his emotionally reactive way of interacting with people, anxiety becomes endemic in his family" (18). Henderson causes the anxiety in his family yet he is not working with his family to overcome the

crisis they are experiencing. However, there is another key component to a family's happiness that Herbert and Irene Goldenberg describe: "Family stability is actually rooted in change. That is, to the degree that a family is functional, it is able to retain sufficient regularity and balance to maintain a degree of adaptability while preserving a sense of order and sameness. At the same time, it must subtly promote change and growth within its members and the family as a whole" (85). While Henderson's family is in desperate need of change, what mainly needs changing is the state of Henderson's mind. If Henderson's deeply rooted emotional problems are the main cause of the instability in his family, then it is not unfair to them that he goes to search for the answers he needs on his own; were Henderson to voice his concern that he is not made to feel needed by his family, it would only put more strain on them as it would appear that he is blaming them for his problems. Henderson's powerful desire to feel needed is, after all, rooted in his issues with his father and his low self-worth. Resolving his inner conflicts may lead to Henderson being able to acknowledge that he is adequately needed by his family and making efforts to be a husband and father who is central to his family.

Another significant aspect of Henderson's search for inner peace is the fact that he is unaware of what it is he is searching for. When he hears his inner self crying out "I want!" three times he responds with a question he does not get an answer to: "I would ask 'What do you want?'... But this was all it would ever tell me. It never said a thing except *I want, I want, I want!*" (22). Finding the answer to what that voice wants is the key to Henderson attaining happiness. There are various potential answers, but most are superficial and are not directly what Henderson is searching for. For example, he feels strongly that attending medical school would make him a successful person. He feels so

strongly about his failure to attend medical school that he projects onto Edward, his eldest son with Frances, that he should attend medical school so that he may change the course of his so far unsuccessful life: “You should become a doctor. Why don’t you go to medical school? Please go to medical school, Edward.” (117). Increasing his level of success would not be what Henderson’s inner voice truly wants, as his desire to strive for higher and higher levels of success is derived entirely from his desire to please his father and to show him that he is as capable as his older brother was, a desire that has only caused Henderson pain and put him under the incorrect impression that he is worth less than his older brother because of a supposed difference in intelligence.

Henderson appears to judge himself harshly for the way he acts towards other people, as seen in when he states he attained an M.A. but that it did not raise the way he valued himself because of the rude way he has acted towards others. Early on in his trip to Africa, after having hiked a great distance, Henderson believes himself to have already achieved personal growth. However, upon entering the first village he encounters on the way, the village of the Arnewi people, a young girl begins to sob; believing himself to be responsible for the girl’s sobbing, Henderson’s confidence quickly deteriorates: “‘Shall I run back into the desert,’ I thought, ‘and stay there until the devil has passed out of me and I am fit to meet human kind again without driving it to despair at the first look?’...I was still not ready for society. Society is what beats me. Alone I can be pretty good, but let me go among people and there’s the devil to pay” (46). Henderson knows that discovering why he acts rudely to others is more likely to help him find what his inner voice is searching for than his having successfully attended medical school. Doing the latter will only satisfy Henderson’s imposed need to prove his value while discovering

the former will perhaps allow him to see how negatively affected he has been by his father. Henderson wanted to be a better person, but because he had partly resigned himself to being inferior, he had not bothered to try and improve his social skills until his trip to Africa. For this reason, Henderson believes that the girl in the Arnewi village is sobbing because of him. If he had not improved his image or social capabilities at all, it would mean that all of his efforts to change thus far had been for naught, which might indicate that he has no hope of ever changing himself.

At the end of the novel, Henderson finds himself on an airplane going towards his home as he brings with him a lion cub; he does not appear to have put much thought into what his family's reaction to the lion will be and if they will be safe around it. Based on Henderson's behavior, it can easily be assumed that he leaves Africa as the same kind of person he was when he entered it, a man with certain mental and social issues who has a family life that is sure to end in disaster. However, Henderson is so attached to the lion because he feels that it carries on the life of his dear friend, Dahfu, who had changed his life for the better. During his stay with the Wariri people, Henderson has a series of deep conversations and insightful moments with Dahfu; they form a deep friendship that eventually helps Henderson find both the answer to what his inner voice wants and finally establish his true self. One moment during which Henderson feels a powerful friendship with Dahfu occurs when Dahfu states his belief that noble acts will one day be committed more than nefarious ones: "I would have given anything I had to hear another man say this to me. My heart was moved to such an extent that I felt my face stretch until it must have been as long as a city block... Sometimes Dahfu seemed to be three times his size, with the spectrum around him. Larger than life, he loomed over me and spoke

with more than one voice” (207-208). Henderson sees Dahfu as someone who has immense wisdom. For Henderson, Dahfu is the perfect person to assist him in finding the answers about, and Dahfu does give him insight on how to improve his mental state and to feel needed by someone. Dahfu tells him, “Imagination is a force of nature. Is this not enough to make a person full of ecstasy? Imagination, imagination, imagination! It converts to actual... What Homo sapiens imagines, he may slowly convert himself to. Oh, Henderson, how glad I am that you are here! I have longed for somebody to discuss with. A companion mind. You are a godsend to me.” (262). As someone with whom Henderson has a deep bond of friendship, Dahfu, who fully cares for Henderson’s wellbeing, tries to convince him that a person has the capability to change fully by using the power of imagination.

Because of his father, Henderson has always thought himself to inferior to others; this image of himself has shaped his actual appearance and has affected how people such as Frances view him. Weighed down by his father’s opinion of him, Henderson has had the lifelong struggle of ridding himself of self-doubt; this self-doubt has caused him to be more concerned with surpassing his father’s expectations of him, or being fearful of not surpassing them. As a result, Henderson was inhibited from establishing a differentiated self because he has not been able to be too concerned with his own desires for his life. Thus, Henderson has been unable to feel the beauty in his own life, as Dahfu tries to explain to him by using Henderson’s fear of Atti, Dahfu’s pet lion, as a metaphor of life itself: “I believe when the fear has subsided you will be capable of admiring her beauty. I think that part of the beauty emotion does result from an overcoming of fear. When the fear yields, a beauty is disclosed in its place” (253). Until he died, Dahfu tried to instill

into Henderson the lesson he needs to learn in order to be able to live his life happily: he must overcome his need to please others and focus more on his own desires. With his fear of being a disappointment to his father subsided, Henderson will be able to overcome his anxieties and his life will change for the better.

Though he is devastated by Dahfu's death, Henderson displays crucial changes that indicate that his life will surely improve after the events of the novel. Henderson establishes a differentiated self and he begins to gain an understanding of it, as indicated when he is writing a letter to Lily and he begins to reflect on his belief that the word "love" is meaningless: "*Especially for somebody like me, called from nonexistence into existence: what for? What have I got to do with husbands' love or wives' love? I am too peculiar for that kind of stuff*" (274). Henderson states that he has been called into existence, indicating that his encounters with Dahfu have indeed helped him to develop his differentiated self; he is able to acknowledge that he is a "peculiar" person without any shame, showing that he is both starting to understand who he is and be more accepting of himself. Henderson also comes to understand what the meaning of his inner voice calling out "I want" is: "'I had a voice that said, I want! *I want? I? It should have told me she wants, he wants, they want.*'" (277). Henderson realizes that he has spent most of his life trying to satisfy both his father's and society's wishes in regards to him being the kind of person they find to be satisfactory; he focused so much on trying to meet others' expectations that he allowed them to construct his identity instead of him doing so himself. With these realizations and acknowledgements in mind, Henderson has reached a state in which he is no longer plagued by anxieties and he can be satisfied with his existence; though the wound of his friend's death is fresh at the end of the novel, he

will be able to overcome his pain, improve himself, and become a better central figure that does not cause anxieties within his family.

V. OVERCOMING EMOTIONAL TURMOIL

Growing up, Herzog's surroundings caused him to become acutely aware of the suffering that failure can bring into one's life. He witnessed his father return home from an illegal job battered, bruised, and so regretful of his inadequacies that he began to cry. As a result, Herzog grew up to be desperate to differentiate himself from the previous generation by becoming successful. Herzog goes on to gain a stable job as a college professor; however, his two divorces, along with his quarrels with his second wife, have caused Herzog to begin considering himself an inadequate person and a failure. Herzog's journey might end with him living in a run-down home, but, through the events of the novel, Herzog regains his self-confidence and his capability to connect emotionally with those whom he cares about, particularly his children and his lover, Ramona.

Moses Herzog, the main character of the novel *Herzog*, suffers from deep emotional turmoil as a result of his sudden divorce from his second wife, Madeleine. One of Herzog's main driving forces is the love he feels for his two children—his son, Marco, whom he had with his first wife, and his daughter, June, whom he had with his second wife. At one point Herzog reflects: “that he had been a bad husband—twice. Daisy, his first wife, he had treated miserably. Madeleine, his second, had tried to do *him* in. To his son and daughter he was a loving but bad father” (7). Although he had been a bad husband to Madeleine, their divorce ultimately had a dramatic effect on him because he both failed to be an adequate person for her and because he was put into a position in which he could not be around his own child to raise her. Although any person would lament these circumstances, it is a lot more painful for Herzog because of the person he

was shaped into being by his experiences with his family of origin. Despite some personal issues his parents faced, Herzog adored his family: “What was wrong with Napoleon Street? thought Herzog. All he ever wanted was there. His mother did the wash, and mourned. His father was desperate and frightened, but obstinately fighting. His brother Shura with staring disingenuous eye... His brother Willie struggled with asthmatic fits... His sister Helen had long white gloves which she washed in thick suds” (154). In both of his marriages, however, Herzog has failed to create a stable family setting in which all members deeply value their bonds with each other. As he has achieved the position of being a professor for a night school (4), Herzog is more successful than his father in terms of having a stable job. For Herzog, achieving a stable family setting with the help of a steady flow of income would not be a recreation of his family of origin, but rather an improvement upon it. It would be a setting in which Herzog can find himself living comfortably and consider himself a success.

From a young age, Herzog was made aware of the topic of failure within his family. One day, his father had returned home having been injured during a bootleg whisky transportation operation; he was assaulted by thieves who took everything in his possession (162). Subsequently, Herzog’s father began to recount to his family the unfortunate story of his life, crying as he did so. The narrator shows Herzog’s thoughts as he reflects on this moment: “I suppose, he was thinking, that we heard this tale of the Herzogs ten times a year. Sometimes Mama told it, sometimes he” (162). The constant retelling of his family’s story had and continues to have a major effect on Herzog’s life by shaping his personality, values, and goals. In “A Family Systems Theory Approach to Saul Bellow’s *Herzog*,” Alan and Nancy F. Chavkin explain: “His [Herzog’s father’s]

numerous failures and the dire financial situation of the family produce in him extraordinary anxiety, which radiates throughout the family” (58). As Knapp indicates: “Families and individual family members are influenced by themes that are present in the preceding generation and are transmitted from one generation to the next through narratives, family stories, assumptions of ‘correct’ behavior, etc.” (223). The narratives of Herzog’s family caused him to have a high level of self-differentiation that was spurred on by the anxieties permeating his family. Herzog’s self-differentiation pushes him to surpass his father both by attaining a stable career and leading a calmer and happier life with his own family. His fervent desire to successfully attain the latter is what causes Herzog to be so dramatically affected by the outcome of his relationship with Madeleine. Herzog is mentally distraught by his second divorce, which he reveals in one moment of critical self-reflection “It was enough to make a man pray to God to remove this great, bone-breaking burden of selfhood and self-development, give himself, a failure, back to the species for a primitive cure” (102). Herzog considers himself a failure because of his two failed marriages.

Herzog’s and Madeleine’s marriage was far from perfect; they engaged in such frequent marital conflict that the two had to resort to seeing a psychiatrist: “The strain of the second divorce was too much for Herzog. He felt he was going to pieces—breaking up—and Dr. Edvig, the Chicago psychiatrist who treated both Herzogs, agreed that perhaps it was best for Moses to leave town” (9). Eager to keep the family together, Herzog had committed to restoring his marriage with Madeleine to its once peaceful state; he saw his visits to the psychiatrist as a way to save the marriage, and Madeleine claimed to have similar intentions for seeing the psychiatrist. When Madeleine brought

her demand for a divorce forward to Herzog, he “was not entirely unprepared for this. But he had really thought matters were improving” (10). However, as Herbert and Irene Goldenberg indicate, “Most people who seek help for their marriage are attempting to cope with a crisis... that has caused an imbalance in the family equilibrium. Each partner enters marital therapy with different experiences, expectations, and goals and with different degrees of commitment to the marriage” (109). One of the main crises in the relationship is Madeleine’s affair with Herzog’s best friend, Valentine Gersbach, which was occurring unbeknownst to Herzog. As Herzog’s and Madeleine’s marriage continued to deteriorate, another crisis, Madeleine’s struggle with mental illness, made life increasingly difficult for both partners; she would become paranoid of action Herzog did not commit (62), and occasionally she would physically assault him over the smallest of issues (64). Ultimately, Madeleine’s commitment to the marriage had not been nearly as strong as Herzog’s; the results she hoped to achieve by seeing a psychiatrist were more for her own benefit than for both of them. In the moment when she told Herzog they would be getting a divorce, “She had never looked more glorious. There was an element of theater in those looks, but much more of passion” (12). The factors that make the divorce the most personally damaging for Herzog are his own failures to keep Madeleine happy in their marriage and to secure a stable family setting for his daughter.

For Herzog, the way Madeleine simply discards him from her life amplifies the personal damage he receives from their separation. He valued his relationship with her highly; one of the more important characteristics of their relationship was Herzog’s being many years older than Madeleine. At one point, he remembers a time when Madeleine looked in the mirror and reflected on her youth in comparison to his age: “‘Still young,’

she said, taking inventory, ‘ young, beautiful, full of life. Why should I waste it all on you.’... Why, God forbid! Herzog looked for something to write a note with” (25). Upon recalling this memory, Herzog grows so angry that he immediately seeks to write his thoughts down, a therapeutic act that he frequently resorts to throughout the novel. There is a clear conflict between Herzog and Madeleine based on age.

From a family systems theory perspective, Herbert and Irene Goldenberg suggest that “psychopathology or dysfunctional behavior can be redefined as more the product of a struggle between persons than simply the result of opposing forces within each of the participants” (14). An obvious byproduct of Herzog’s struggle with Madeleine and his own worth as a person is his letter writing, which he uses as a way to express his emotions in a realm outside of his own mind. In those letters, Herzog addresses specific people and usually tells them how he feels towards them while discussing moments that were significantly affected his relationships with them; however, he never actually mails those letters out. Herzog’s therapeutic writing happens impulsively and without his fully understanding the reason why he does it: “Herzog scarcely knew what to think of this scrawling. He yielded to the excitement that inspired it and suspected at times that it might be a symptom of disintegration” (5). Herzog has become detached from society as a result of the emotional damage caused by the divorce; he is unable to show his face in public and communicate well with others because he has failed in his desired level of success and thus he feels unworthy of people’s attention. Herzog’s lack of communication with others is what makes his letter writing such an essential emotional outlet for him. At times he becomes ecstatic after writing a few letters in a row: “He was in a whirling ecstasy. He felt at the same time that his judgments exposed the boundless,

baseless bossiness and willfulness, the nagging embedded in his mental constitution” (75). Though the letter writing is helpful to Herzog, it is an activity that came to be as a result of Herzog’s painful conflict with Madeleine. One major effect of Herzog’s inability to express himself in front of other people is that it hinders his relationships with the individuals who are most significant in his life, such as Ramona, his most notable romantic interest after his divorce.

Ramona is a significant source of emotional support for Herzog. Early in the story, due to his feelings of unworthiness, Herzog is afraid to engage frequently with Ramona because he fears that she is interested in marrying him: “So now she must yearn for stability. 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” (21). Of course, if Herzog were to marry her, stability for Ramona would mean stability for him as well, something that he does not feel worthy of. Herzog also feels unworthy of stability when he fails to reside with his old friend Libby, from whom he sought help. After he reaches out to Libby and her husband for help in getting some time away from his living space, and traveling hours on a train to go to their summer home, Herzog is unable to stay for long. After being there for less than an hour, he writes: “*Have to go back. Not able to stand kindness at this time. Feelings, heart, everything in strange condition. Unfinished business*” (108) and leaves. This letter reveals one reason that Herzog would be reluctant to have a stable life with Ramona; it would be a kindness from her that he feels himself not deserving of. The short fragmented sentences in Herzog’s letter show that, although his emotional pain is intense, he is not open to talking about it. In a show of how emotionally closed off he is, Herzog begins a letter to Ramona with “*Dear Ramona—Very dear Ramona. I like you*

very much—dear to me, a true friend. It might even go farther” (19). Herzog writes to Ramona about how he might feel about her, but his letter is emotionally disconnected. He seems to be unable to write in complete sentences, showing how difficult he finds it to express his romantic feelings for her. Herzog knows the possible result of revealing those true feelings for Ramona; if they were to get together, he is afraid the relationship would end in disaster. Herzog’s inability to share his emotions with others is something that he clearly works through by the end of novel. In letter he composes at a later point he writes: “*Dear Ramona. Only ‘Dear’? Come, Moses, open up a little. Darling Ramona. What an excellent woman you are*” (341). Herzog’s change to becoming more open with his emotions is an example of his overcoming the pain of his divorce. Despite now living in a run-down home, Herzog has an improved life and mental state by the end of the novel.

It is also important to note that even though Herzog opens up to Ramona, he is not really ready to marry her. Herzog’s fear that Ramona wants to marry him might have been a projection of his own fears onto her. Within the last few pages of the novel, Herzog states: “It’s about time I stop laboring with this curse... I see exactly what I should avoid. Then, all of a sudden, I’m in bed with that very thing” (363). By the end of the novel, Herzog is capable of having a relationship without being afraid of suffering another failed marriage. When he has set up a dinner date with Ramona, Herzog promises his brother, Will, that he will not be marrying her that night: “I’ve asked her to dinner. Only that. She goes back to the party at Misseli’s—I’m not going with her... I won’t elope with her. Or she with me, as you see it” (368). This change in Herzog is significant because it indicates that he has regained his capability of being in a relationship without fearing marriage. He can allow himself to be emotionally invested in Ramona, and if his

relationship with her does not end well, then he has the potential to secure another relationship if he sees fit to do so. Herzog makes a change within himself by identifying a bad habit that he has had in the past and then makes the effort to improve that aspect of himself. By being capable of such efforts at the end of the novel, Herzog shows that he has overcome his feelings of unworthiness and can continue onward in his desire to better himself and further differentiate himself from his father.

Another way in which Herzog's overcomes his feelings of unworthiness is that he gains more acceptance of himself as a person and is willing to show himself around his son Marco. Early in the novel, the narrator states just how important Herzog's children are to him: "*He could not allow himself to die yet. The children needed him. His duty was to live. To be sane, and to live, and to look after the kids*" (31). No matter how much turmoil he finds himself in, Herzog never loses any love for his children; as they are family members, loving them is one of the basic principles that guides him (86). As Gilbert states, "Basic self is guided by well thought-through *principles*, arrived at through the best thinking, based on logic and fact, that one can do. It is not subject to group or relationship pressure" (40). At this early point, however, despite the children's importance to Herzog, he does not feel himself capable of facing Marco because he is old enough to have made judgments on the divorce of Herzog and Madeleine; as a result of his feelings of unworthiness, Herzog lacks the self-confidence to take any criticisms his son may have about him: "*I know it's my turn to visit Marco in camp on Parents' Day but this year I'm afraid my presence might disturb him... It is unfortunately true, however, that he blames me for the breakup with Madeleine and feels I have deserted also his little half-sister*" (14). Herzog's inner turmoil is clearly strongest at the beginning of the novel.

It is likely true that Marco puts some blame on Herzog because of the divorce, but Herzog's decision to avoid seeing him clearly stems from his inability to justify his own actions.

As seen in his letter to Ramona, Herzog is so emotionally closed off that he lacks the capability to explain himself; evidently, that applies even to his own child. Eventually, however, Herzog reevaluates his own self-worth and decides to see Marco. He states "I have to visit Marco at camp on the sixteenth. That's Parents' Day and he's expecting me" (362). At this point in the novel, Herzog seems like he is ready to face his own child even if he might blame him for the divorce. Herzog's mental state recovers to the point that he is ready to explain his actions should he need to. One of Herzog's main motivators for improving his state of mind is the responsibility he feels towards his children: "I am responsible, responsible to reason. This is simply temporary excitement. Responsible to the children" (354). It can also be said that Herzog's habit of note and letter writing, a symptom of severe mental strain, came into being as a way to help Herzog be able to once again express himself without fear in order to improve his relationships with his children. Herbert and Irene Goldenberg, using "IP" as an abbreviation for "identified patient," write that "They [family therapists] concluded that the IP's symptoms represented stabilizing devices used to help relieve family stress and bring the family back into the normal range of its customary behavior. In this sense, the IP's actions may be based on a desire, although not usually a planned or premeditated one, to 'help' other family members." (20). Though Herzog is twice divorced and can no longer restore the families to how they were, he can still restore and improve his relationships with his children. Since he has been the main cause of stress in these

relationships, he is the one who most needs to improve in order to relieve that stress.

With the resolve to take responsibility for his past actions and be responsible to his children, Herzog shows at the end of the novel that he has overcome his low self-worth and has achieved an improved mental state.

Herzog's decision to be responsible also shows how much his overall mental state improves by the end of the novel. This decision is significant because it relates to his previously stated want of having people who are responsible for him; "He had been hoping for some definite sickness which would send him to a hospital for a while. He would not have to look after himself" (16). This desire eventually shows how Herzog has progressed by the end of the novel. The personal decision to take responsibility for himself is a big one for Herzog; when he arrives at it near the end of the novel, Herzog has reached the highest emotional point he ever displays. However, his lowest point was seen shortly before then when he set out to murder Madeleine and Gersbach, who continue to be romantically involved with each other. "Moses might have killed him now. His left hand touched the gun, enclosed in the roll of rubles... There were two bullets in the chamber...But they would stay there" (280). At this moment, Herzog overcame his desire to kill Gersbach after seeing him display kindness to June. Seeing his daughter caused Herzog to stop himself from committing a terrible act and regain his rationality. Subsequent moments, like his getting arrested and having the opportunity to confront Madeleine, give Herzog the chance to reflect further upon himself and come to terms with his own identity. In deep contemplation, Herzog states "He [Gersbach] was unknowable. And I myself, the same... They put me down, ergo they claimed final knowledge of Herzog... Excuse me, therefore, sir and madam, but I reject your

definitions of me” (325). Herzog’s realization that only he can define himself allows him to overcome the emotional turmoil caused by his divorce, which ultimately causes him to be able express his emotions to Ramona and be capable of facing Marco and standing up for himself should he need to. In the end, Herzog admits that he has overcome the mental instability that was causing his impulsive letter writing: “Perhaps he’d stop writing letters. Yes, that was what was coming, in fact. The knowledge that he was done with these letters. Whatever had come over him during these last months, the spell, really seemed to be passing, really going” (371). Despite Herzog’s bad living situation at the end of the novel, he has overcome his feelings of unworthiness and can continue living his life happily as he tries to reach a level of success that his father could not.

VI. SAMMLER'S RETURN TO EARTH

In *Mr. Sammler's Planet*, Artur Sammler's traumatic experiences during World War II led to feel severed from society and most people in the world. That includes his daughter Shula from whom he has emotionally cut himself off due to her strange behavior. Sammler has little hope for the future of humanity, and his daughter, along with his great niece Angela and his great nephew Wallace, lower his opinion of future generations. The one person Sammler does feel connected to, Elya Gruner, is on the verge of death, and it seems like Sammler is close to giving up on his own life. However, Sammler does have a reason to live: his daughter, with whom he must try to reconnect.

The elderly Artur Sammler and his daughter, Shula, have a dysfunctional family relationship that resulted from outside forces that interfered with the course of their functionality as a unit. In the present of the novel, the dysfunctional state of their family brings additional anxiety to both father and daughter. Sammler and his family are Jewish, and they had lived an uneventful life in Europe until the Second World War began and Germany commenced its conquest of many nations; naturally, their lives would never be the same after this point. "The war had caught him, with Shula and his late wife, in Poland." (12). Herbert and Irene Goldenberg use the term "horizontal stressors" to describe outside factors that are stressful to a family: "Horizontal stressors describe the events experienced by the family as it moves forward through time, coping with changes and transitions of the life cycle—the various predictable developmental stresses as well as unexpected, traumatic ones... Traumatic experiences—terrorism, war, economic depression, and natural disasters—are included here, as are social policies affecting the

family” (33). The damage caused by the horizontal stressors that Sammler and the young Shula experienced was indescribably high; although they were separated for much of the time in which the war occurred, the traumatic events they both experienced led them to change from who they previously were and become individuals who will face problems as they return to living peaceful lives. Of course, what is equal to both of them is the loss of wife and mother Antonina, who was shot and fell into a mass grave as she stood next to Sammler. In this horrible situation, Sammler miraculously escaped death and later went on to live for many more years. As a wise old man, many younger family members go to him in search of advice; wondering why he is sought out, Sammler reflects: “Was it because he had survived? He hadn’t even done that, since so much of the earlier person had disappeared. It wasn’t surviving, it was only lasting. He had lasted. For a time yet he might last” (71). Sammler feels that he emerged from the horrors of World War II a completely different person and that he deserves no praise or admiration simply for living through it all. As the new individual who emerged from the conflict, Sammler is unable to have a good relationship with his daughter, someone who also underwent various horrors because of the war and emerged a different person from it, yet he gives her no sympathy for it.

Despite the changes brought on by the war, Sammler maintained feelings of love and care for his daughter. As Herbert and Irene Goldenberg observe: “Affection, loyalty, and a continuity or durability of membership characterize all families. Even when these qualities are challenged, as in a family crisis situation or where there is severe conflict between members, families are typically resistant to change, and are likely to engage in corrective maneuvers to reestablish familiar interactive patterns” (4). In contrast to the

pattern that the Goldenbergs typically see, Sammler engages in no apparent corrective maneuver to maintain a happy relationship with his daughter. After Shula moved to New York, after Sammler had to go separate her from her abusive husband, the father and daughter spent some time living together; however, that arrangement did not last long, as “She had too many oddities for her old father” (17). The third person narrator, who is limited to Sammler’s perspective, describes Shula’s typical appearance: “She wasn’t old, not bad looking, not even too badly dressed, item by item. The full effect would have been no worse than vulgar if she had not been obviously a nut” (17). Shula is described unsympathetically as a person who is suffering from some level of mental distress; her mental state is not viewed by the narrator as the product of the horizontal stressors that she and her family experienced long ago. Even if the narrator’s own views on Shula do not represent Sammler’s, there is clear evidence that Sammler views his daughter in a similar way: “It filled him with heartache and pity that he and Antonina had not blended better. Since she was a child he had seen... a pitiful legacy, loony, frail, touching him with a fear of doom” (89-90). Sammler’s pity is a result of his dissatisfaction with how the child whom he and his wife produced did not meet any of his expectations. Sammler doubted Shula’s capabilities since she was a child, but her traumatic experiences during World War II clearly played a role in shaping the person she became. As Allan and Nancy F. Chavkin indicate in their article “Child of the Holocaust in *Mr. Sammler’s Planet*,” “Shula-Slawa’s inability to cope with normal life during the 1960s in America is largely because of Sammler’s attitudes and behavior, which discourage Shula-Slawa from confronting her painful memories of the Holocaust” (37-38). Sammler could help Shula

cope with her trauma and improve her mental state by being supportive of her. However, he instead acts in ways that hinder Shula's capability to overcome her difficulties.

Sammler is aware that Shula's past has had an effect on her; however, at times when he is greatly inconvenienced by her actions, he finds it to be a waste of time to consider such concepts. After Shula has stolen Dr. Lal's manuscript, Sammler sends Margotte, his niece and current roommate, to deliver a note from him to Dr. Lal, assuring him that it shall soon be returned. As Margotte makes preparations to make the delivery and makes the necessary phone calls, the narrator states that: "He [Sammler] suspected that things were being done the least efficient way. But Margotte was prompt to help when difficulties were real. She didn't start discussions about Shula—the effects of the war or Antonina's death or puberty in a Polish convent or what terror could do to the psyche of a young girl... Margotte was a good soul. Not persisting mechanically in her ways when the signal was given" (102). Through this description of Sammler's thoughts, the narrator indicates that Sammler is made anxious by the inconvenience his daughter has brought him and that he refuses to bother with any thoughts about why Shula has become the way she is. Although the quotation reflects Sammler's uncaring thoughts in one instance, his reoccurring incapacity to feel empathy towards his daughter is significant; in many instances, especially when he has been inconvenienced by her antics, Sammler appears to be emotionally cut off from Shula. There is a clear lack of communication between Sammler and Shula for which Sammler is responsible. When Shula asks Sammler a personal question, he does not bother to answer her honestly, as when she asks him how his H. G. Wells book project is going and he pretends to still be working on it (27). Shula's desire to help her father in this project leads her to steal Dr.

Lal's manuscript because it explores a similar topic. Yet, Shula clearly does talk to her father about personal topics, as when he shows to have extensive knowledge of her needs and lists many of her personal needs followed by explanation for why he would never bother to help her attain any of them: "Shula, like all the ladies perhaps, was needy—needed gratification of numerous instincts... needed the exercise of the mind, needed continuity, needed interest—*interest!*—needed flattery, needed triumph... No scarcity was acknowledged. If you tried to deal with all these immediate needs you were a lost man. Even to consider it all the way she did... was neither affection for her, nor preservation for her father" (27). Sammler shows how detached he is from his daughter's problems in that he believes helping her is very much not worth the effort. Again, he appears to lack any sympathy for Shula and does not consider the emotional pain she must be going through.

Sammler's and Shula's dysfunctional relationship does not usually involve verbal confrontations; however, in one instance, Sammler does verbalize anger towards her when he has located her after running away with the stolen manuscript. With increased anxiety due to her father's anger, Shula begins speaking in Polish: "Severe, he denied her permission to speak that language. She was trying to invoke her terrible times of hiding—the convent, the hospital, the contagious ward when the German searching party came" (150). Sammler absolutely refuses to let Shula use her past as an excuse for her current behavior; he does not want to understand her, especially after she has caused him anxiety and inconvenienced him by stealing the manuscript. Sammler refuses to acknowledge any of Shula's problems, so it is made apparent that their usual interactions consist of shallow conversation and Sammler's pretending to care about her struggles. According to Herbert

and Irene Goldenberg, “The more rigid the family’s interactive pattern, the less likely the members will be able to negotiate differences, the more the family will struggle against and be stressed by the need to change, and the more likely symptoms will develop within the family system” (30). Something must change in Sammler’s and Shula’s relationship if they wish to maintain their family bond and quell many of their anxieties, and that something is Sammler’s indifferent attitude toward Shula.

Unfortunately, as the detached person he became because of his experiences in World War II, Sammler has difficulty changing into a man who cares about his daughter’s, and other people’s, personal problems. After Sammler was rudely interrupted by a student during a campus lecture and then forced by the crowd to leave the room, the narrator states “He was not sorry to have met the facts, however saddening, regrettable the facts. But the effect was that Mr. Sammler did feel somewhat separated from the rest of his species, if not in some fashion severed—severed not so much by age as by preoccupations too different and remote, disproportionate on the side of the spiritual, Platonic, Augustinian, thirteenth-century” (34). Sammler feels himself to be separated from all other humans. He has taken a keen interest in the spiritual and the progress people can make to better themselves. Sammler wants to go beyond the limits of living a typical life: “He wanted, with God, to be free from the bondage of the ordinary and the finite. A soul released from Nature, from impressions, and from everyday life... a man who has been killed and buried should have no other interest” (91). What Sammler wants sounds similar to what some people believe happens to a human soul after the physical body has died. However, it is significant to note that Sammler does not necessarily want to die. He wants separation from others, and he wants to lead an atypical life unhindered

by set schedules and regulations. He would wish to achieve that state through any means possible. For this reason, Sammler has intense interest in space travel and human colonization of other planets. Upon reading a line from a book questioning how long earth will be the only planet humans call home, Sammler asks: “How long? Oh, Lord, you bet! Wasn’t it the time—the very hour to go?” (40). It appears that Sammler’s emotional cutoff from Shula is the result of Shula being just another human from whom he feels himself to be severed.

Of course, Sammler is not completely severed from Shula, as indicated by how he cleans up after her mistakes even if doing so causes him anxiety. Besides Shula, there is another person whom Sammler cares about: Elya Gruner, Sammler’s nephew and the man who has financially maintained both Sammler and Shula since the latter moved to the United States: “Since 1947, he [Sammler] and Shula had been Dr. Gruner’s dependents. He paid their rents, invented work for Shula... He was generous” (58). Gruner’s kind personality and his generosity lead Sammler to care for his nephew in way that goes above simple gratefulness for the support he has provided him. Unfortunately, due to an aneurysm, Gruner becomes gravely ill, a fact that weighs more heavily on Sammler as the novel progresses: “He was very full of his nephew, a man quite different from himself. He admired him, loved him. He could not cope with the full sum of facts about him” (81). Gruner seems so unique that Sammler believes that he will never feel as close a connection as the one he has with him. One reason that Sammler feels a connection with Gruner is how close in age the two are with one another. Because Sammler is only six or seven years older than Gruner, he considers him to be from the same era. This fact is significant to Sammler because, while he does feel severed from

most people, he is especially so from those who are much younger and more adapted to live in the modern world. He feels that Shula, along with Angela and Wallace—Gruner’s adult offspring—are all in this group: “Shula, Shula stealing, was contemporary—lawless. She was experiencing the Age. In so doing, she drew her father along with her. And possibly Elya, with the screw in his throat, had not wished to be left behind either, and had delegated Angela to experience the age for him” (125). Sammler feels that Angela and Wallace are doing to Gruner what Shula has done to him: causing him unnecessary anxiety and making him experience the modern era whether he wants to or not. Sammler’s and Gruner’s family systems are closely tied, so Sammler has frequent interactions with Wallace and Angela; they are among the few younger people with whom Sammler engages. Against his will, Angela often tells him detailed stories about her sexual adventures (54-55). Wallace, in contrast, is addicted to gambling (60); Sammler witnesses his misdeeds as he goes against Gruner’s wishes by searching for money he believes his father has hidden somewhere within their home (184).

Needless to say, Sammler does not like the way in which Wallace and Angela act. In many instances, Sammler’s interactions with those much younger than him are unpleasant. His own family members increase his feelings of isolation from other people because he sees how truly different he is from them. Sammler goes as far as viewing those much younger than him, including Shula and Wallace (205), as lunatics; on this topic Allan and Nancy F. Chavkin write: “Sammler associates Shula-Slawa with what he regards as the lunatic younger generation—the disenfranchised young and poor—whose attitudes and behavior are a threat to civilized society” (48). Sammler’s poor relationships with his family members increase how much he cherishes his connection to Gruner,

someone who is of the same era as he. As a result, Sammler is very distraught about Gruner's condition. If the person he values most dies, Sammler will feel himself even more severed from the rest of humanity; his intense loneliness and isolation will only grow stronger. Since the technology to travel to other planets will remain undeveloped for many years to come, Sammler has little choice but to await for death for him to have the freedom from the ordinary that he desperately desires. When Gruner's death occurs at the end of the novel, the narrator makes Sammler's devastation evident: "He felt that he was breaking up, that irregular big fragments inside were melting, sparkling with pain, floating off. Well, Elya was gone. He was deprived of one more thing, stripped of one more creature. One more reason to live trickled out" (241). Sammler is unconcerned with his financial situation in regards to Gruner's death. Sammler's main focus is on the death of a person who was dear to him.

Although the despair that Sammler feels upon Gruner's death seems to be so powerful that he will never recover from it, Sammler is not ready give up on his life, despite his feelings of being severed from others and wanting to transcend the boundaries of everyday life. Sammler mentions that he has identified a problem that many people have had after attaining freedom and the opportunity to develop their own individuality: "It is clear that this revolution, a triumph for justice in many ways—slaves should be free, killing toil should end, the soul should have liberty—has also introduced new kinds of grief and misery... It is bewildering to see how much these new individuals suffer, with their new leisure and liberty" (176). Sammler does not specify that he himself has suffered from the problem of being an individual, that problem seemingly being the struggle to find purpose in life. However, it is evident that he is describing what he has

struggled with since the end of World War II. After having been so close to death and gaining a new view on life as a result, Sammler lives on unable to find a purpose and unable to form meaningful connections with most people. When asked about what one could do to prevent having the problem he described, Sammler answers “Perhaps the best is to have some order within oneself. Better than what many call love. Perhaps it *is* love” (176). Feeling love for someone or something is what helps to establish order for someone who wanders through life aimlessly and without purpose; for this reason, the death of Elya Gruner brings Sammler great pain.

Gruner’s death deprives Sammler of another reason to live, but it certainly does not deprive him of his last and only reason to continue living. If love is what brings order to an individual, then Sammler can still have order within himself because of Shula. Despite his indifferent attitude towards her, Sammler does indeed feel love for his daughter: “His only begotten child. He never doubted that she performed acts originating far beyond, in the past, of unconscious ancestral origin. He was aware how true this was of himself... Just now he asked to understand why he so much loved this fool woman” (154-155). Albeit reluctantly, Sammler admits that there is an undeniable connection between him and Shula and that he feels an unexpected love for her. Sammler admits this when, only shortly before, he was mentally lashing out at Shula for the trouble she had caused him by stealing the manuscript: “And of course in Shula’s view he had been getting too delicate for earthly life, too absorbed in unshared universals, excluding her. And by extravagance... she wished to implicate him and bring him back, to bind him and keep him in the world beside her. Some world! Some her!” (152). Sammler laments that Shula keeps him tied to the world he so desperately wishes to leave behind; however,

since this means that Shula is giving him a reason to stay in the world, a purpose for living, Shula is easing Sammler's pain as he continues to live on. There is conflict within Sammler because he is being given a purpose to continue living an everyday life even though he does not want to. At that point, there is clear disorder within Sammler—and that disorder shall be remedied by his love for Shula.

VII. REACHING SELF-DIFFERENTIATION FROM BOTH PARENTS

In “A Silver Dish” Woody Selbst’s peculiar family situation led him to be at odds with his father’s personality. Woody grew up in a Jewish household until his mother was converted to Christianity by her brother-in-law. After Woody’s father abandoned the family, Woody hated the idea of being like him in any way, so he let his mother guide him down the path she had set for him: becoming a priest. However, Woody is eventually caught up in a scheme his father concocted, which inadvertently sends him down a path that differentiates him from both of his parents.

Woody’s story begins with a look at his future before it recounts a significant event that had occurred in his youth, an event involving his father that changed the course of life forever. Woody’s relationship with his father, Morris, is dysfunctional, and the source of that dysfunction is Morris’s insurmountable selfishness: “Woody was fourteen years of age when Pop took off with Halina, who worked in his shop, leaving his difficult Christian wife and his converted son and his small daughters” (15). From this point in Woody’s life, his father’s selfishness becomes the central feature of their relationship. Woody’s personality contrasts with Morris’s; he is kind and tends to be honest while his father is so self-centered that he would tell any lie and betray anyone who would trust him as long as he had something to gain. Of his father, Woody is well aware that “He wanted me to be like himself—an American” (22). Woody viewed his father’s personality as a result of his wanting to be more American. However, no amount of pushing from Morris would ever convince Woody to become more like him—the force of his own individuality is too powerful to allow such a thing to occur. As Gilbert explains,

“This force says, ‘Be yourself, be an individual. Don’t be so glommed into the group. Be the best you can be!’ It encourages a part of us that is uniquely human... In relationships this part of self communicates and defines self to others, cooperates or not, all directed by its principles. It pushes us to be, in Bowen theory terms, a more differentiated self” (28). Woody’s differentiation of self, built up to distinguish himself from his father, allows him to reject any reasoning his father may have had for wanting his son to be more like him. Woody’s morals conflict too strongly with his father’s, and allowing himself to become more like him would mean going against his own values. Although the story offers no information about Woody’s relationship with Morris before the man abandoned him and his family, it is obvious that Morris would have had more of a chance of influencing his son if he had stayed with his family. Having been abandoned by his father, Woody has experienced the pain and damage that such selfishness can cause, which makes him more adverse to being like his father and leaving a trail of pain of destruction in his wake.

Sometimes, a parent acting for his own gain can help the entire family, as when Henderson temporarily leaves his family so that he can improve his mental state, which in turn will help him to reduce the anxiety in his family. On this topic, Gilbert writes: “Often, as parents become more involved in their own pursuits... resolving, instead of projecting anxiety and working on their own relationships—in their own marriages and families of origin—the child will behave like a bird let out of a cage, dropping symptoms and showing better development” (72). Morris, however, abandoned his family to satisfy his own desires and nothing more. Because of Morris’ actions Woody is kept in a cage of anxiety. Because he absolutely refuses to be a selfish person like Morris, Morris can use

Woody's selflessness to make him commit acts that go against his moral standing.

Woody has to prove how unlike his father he is not only to himself but to others in his family; one of those family members is his aunt Rebecca: "Whenever she looked at him, he knew that she was seeing his father. In the curve of his nose, the movements of his eyes, the thickness of his body, in his healthy face, she saw that wicked savage Morris" (17). The fact that Woody inherited his father's physical features provides an obstacle in his desire to differentiate himself. Sometimes, Woody's anxieties about being like his father skyrocket, such as when he gives an empty pitch, just as his father often did when he would lie about something (21): "Woody had the makings of a salesman, a pitchman. He was aware of this when he got to his feet in church to testify before fifty or sixty people... he moved his own heart when he spoke up about his faith. But occasionally, without notice, his heart went away as he spoke religion and he couldn't find it anywhere... It took everything he had to keep looking honest" (22). Even though Woody's life with his mother as his only parent, attending seminary and having strong religious faith, is a life that is different from Morris's, the fact that he has his father's blood, shaping his appearance and, seemingly, his emotions, causes Woody to reflect on himself and his actions so constantly that he begins to needlessly question whether there is much of a difference between him and his father.

In the present of "A Silver Dish" Woody appears to be living a successful life. He is a business man who built up his knowledge through independent study (12) and he has gone on trips to many places world (13). This being the case, it is initially uncertain whether Woody has been able to live his adult life with his conscience cleared of fears of being like his father. As seen at the beginning of the short story, the narrator indicates

that Woody is unsure about how to feel about Morris' recent passing: "What do you do about death—in this case, the death of an old father? If you're a modern person, sixty years of age, and a man who's been around, like Woody Selbst, what do you do?... How, against a contemporary background, do you mourn an octogenarian father, nearly blind, his heart enlarged, his lungs filling with fluid... As Woody put it, be realistic" (12). In Woody's "contemporary" times, newspapers bring awareness of death and tragedies occurring around the world (12); having such awareness, Woody is unsure whether to take his father's death as just another tragedy in the world or whether he should mourn it as a personal loss. Woody's internal conflict makes it clear that he has not forgotten nor completely forgiven his father for the pain he caused him during his young life. It is also important to note that Woody still, on many occasions, has seen his father after was abandoned by him, so he most certainly was never given the chance to simply forget about him. In fact, the story about the silver dish shows that Woody's life continued to be shaped by his father's actions even after the abandonment had occurred, and, additionally, it serves as a reminder of a time in which Woody obeyed his father despite their different values.

Around the age of seventeen, Woody helped Morris to acquire fifty dollars from Mrs. Skoglund, the woman who was paying his tuition to the seminary. Morris took advantage of Woody's good nature by giving him a false story about why he needed the money, and he countered Woody's reluctance by saying "Why not? You're my kid, aren't you?" (20). Morris disrupts Woody's calm and religious life through his subsequent actions. Religion is significant in Woody's conflict with his father; Woody hails from Jewish people, but "his mother had been converted more than fifty years ago

by her brother-in-law, the Reverend Doctor Kovner... [he] had given Woody a partly Christian upbringing. Now, Pop was on the outs with these fundamentalists” (15).

Woody’s uncle Kovner helped and encouraged Woody, at seventeen years of age, to enroll in the seminary. Because Woody was so focused on differentiating himself from his father, he neglected to differentiate himself from his mother as well as his aunt and uncle; he subsequently became dependent on them to help forge his identity. Herbert and Irene Goldenberg indicate that, in the transition from being dependent on their parents to being independent, “Adolescents must strike a balance on their own, forging an identity and beginning to establish autonomy from the family” (40). In the story, Woody’s dependence on his family far outweighs his independence, and his continued enrollment at the seminary and his being liked by Mrs. Skoglund represents that dependence. Woody was risking his future livelihood when he agreed to help his father attain his desired fifty dollars. This situation became more difficult for Woody when his father decided to steal a silver dish from Mrs. Skoglund’s mansion; unable to accept his father’s actions, Woody had a brief physical altercation with him (27-28). It ended quietly, but without Morris returning the dish. He got fifty dollars and the silver dish, and, as a result, Woody is expelled from the seminary and he realized his worst nightmare of being regarded as similar to his father. When the family hears that the silver dish was stolen, they blame both father and son. As a result, Woody’s aunt Rebecca tells him “You are a little crook, like your father. The door is closed to you here” (30).

Despite the terrible situations Morris has caused him to endure, Woody, at sixty years old, ultimately finds himself genuinely grieving at his death. Sunday morning church bells stir his emotions as they remind him of days he had spent with his father:

“He was still in bed when he heard the bells, and all at once he knew how heartbroken he was. This sudden big heartache in a man of sixty, a practical, physical, healthy-minded, and experienced man, was deeply unpleasant” (15). Woody has not lived his life, at least in recent years, feeling hatred towards his father. Woody’s initial hesitation to genuinely grieve Morris’s death shows that there was some emotional distance between the two, understandably so. But that distance did not amount to produce an emotional cutoff between them. In fact, Woody loves his father. The two once discussed the incident with the silver dish, a discussion in which Morris had insisted that getting Woody expelled from the seminary was doing him a favor: “It was too strange of a life. That life wasn’t *you*, Woody” (31). Shortly afterward, the narrator states: “Pop had carried him back to his side of the line, blood of his blood, the same thick body walls, the same coarse grain. Not cut out for spiritual life. Simply not up to it” (31). Because Woody has become agnostic, he cannot deny that the life of priesthood was not for him (14). By stealing the silver dish, Morris allowed Woody to become differentiated from both his mother and his father. Woody’s two sisters show how his life might have been if he had continued following the path his mother set; according to the narrator’s description of them, they are living with their in their fifties mother and have not accomplished much in their lives (13-14).

Fortunately, Woody did not have to live the life his mother wished and he continued being his selfless self, which differentiated him from his father. Woody was able to attain the life that only his differentiated self would have been happy living, and he lives with the awareness that, in a strange way, his father is the one who helped him attain it. Although Woody has been unable to live free of Morris’s negative influence, his

love for Morris prevails and allows him to grieve his death, showing that he has not lived his entire life in fear of being like him: “Woody gave Pop his heart because Pop was so selfish. It’s usually the selfish people who are loved the most. They do what you deny yourself, and you love them for it. You give them your heart” (31). Woody’s selflessness and love for Morris allowed him to stay by the dying man’s side. Although Woody did not completely forgive his father, he accepted that what occurred led him to become someone who is happy with the person he grew up to become.

VIII. CONCLUSION

The theme of family has an important place in many of Saul Bellow's works. In them, the protagonist, as well as sometimes one or more secondary characters, is in a dysfunctional family situation that has great influence over the ways in which they think, feel, and act. In the works examined, characters undergo intense emotional struggles as a result of being part of a dysfunctional family. By applying Murray Bowen's family systems theory, especially his concepts of differentiation of self and emotional cutoff, and current research in family psychology, I have shown ways that Bellow's characters' conflicts and emotional struggles relate to their being in a dysfunctional family. In the preceding chapters, I answered the implicit question of whether or not the characters' dysfunctional families determine their future: can these characters overcome their emotional struggles and go on to live better lives? Since Bellow's works typically end ambiguously, it is difficult to state with certainty what kind of fate lies in store for the protagonists after the end of the narrative. However, there is evidence in the texts to suggest that the characters have indeed achieved a breakthrough that will enable them proceed through life in a happier state.

In some of the works, such as *Herzog* and *Henderson the Rain King*, the main character is a father whose childhood experiences in a dysfunctional family later led them to experience issues with their own spouses and children. In works such as *The Adventures of Augie March* and "A Silver Dish," the main characters are seen as youths who they experience emotional problems as a result of being in a dysfunctional family. The characters' struggles in life that occur as a result of having been and/or currently

being in a dysfunctional family are the main focus of these works, but there is one other factor that ties the narratives together: all have no conclusive ending that directly shows whether these characters are ultimately happy at the end of their struggles. One could look at the ending of *Seize the Day* and conclude that it is likely Wilhelm will never feel happiness in his life again or, having sunk so low, his life can only improve. *Seize the Day* offers the most extreme example of an inconclusive ending, but all of the Bellow works I have examined conclude in an open-ended way. Like *Seize the Day*, the works typically will have the average reader wondering if main character's life will be getting any better after the story's conclusion or if Bellow's protagonist is doomed to continue on a downward path. Leaving the character arcs without a definitive conclusion might lead one to believe that Bellow is indicating that the damage caused by being in a dysfunctional family is permanent and unfixable. I have argued, however, that each of those works provides evidence that points towards the main characters being able to become happy.

In *The Adventures of Augie March*, the protagonist has an absent father and a mother whose parental authority is low because of his overbearing grandmother figure, Lausch. However, Lausch is not the right kind of an authority figure for Augie because, once he gets old enough, he mostly disregard her rigid teachings of what makes a proper person. Lausch's overbearing attitude causes Augie's low level of differentiation, which in turn leads him to undergo many adventures motivated by the desire to help his close friends and lovers achieve their goals or solve their problems. Augie clearly values the relationships he makes with people, which stems from the lack of love he felt as a child as a result of having an authoritarian grandmother, a meek mother, and an absent father.

One of Augie's former lovers, Thea, is accurate when she tells him "perhaps love would be strange and foreign to you no matter which way it happened" (431). Thea is a woman who Augie suddenly fell in love with after she confessed to having genuine romantic interest in him. Their passionate affair does not end well and seems to indicate that Augie's relationship with Stella, whom he is married to at the end of the novel, might also fail. In fact, there are indications that Stella might be using Augie for her own personal benefits and that she might not actually care about him as a person. Nevertheless, the conclusion of the novel seems to suggest that, in his adventures, Augie has picked up lessons that will allow for him to live a happy life regardless of what happens with his relationship with Stella.

The main character of *Seize the Day*, Wilhelm, is in a dysfunctional family situation with his father and his wife and children. Wilhelm's father refuses to help him financially regardless of how desperate his son is. There is also some tension between them because Wilhelm believes his father never really loved his wife and that he felt that he was set free when she died. Wilhelm struggles to fulfill his wife's financial demands; in a desperate situation, Wilhelm allies himself with Dr. Tamkin, a shady character, in hopes of being able to make money investing in the stock market. When Wilhelm's father warns him that Tamkin might not be trustworthy, Wilhelm reflects to himself: "I wouldn't turn to Tamkin... if I could turn to him. At least Tamkin sympathizes with me and tries to give me a hand" (8). This quotation indicates that Wilhelm is relying on Tamkin for both financial support and emotional support. Wilhelm has many deep conversations with Tamkin that offer Wilhelm new perspectives on his struggles and cause him to reflect on his past and realize that he has not been able to establish his

identity. At the end of this novella, Wilhelm finds himself betrayed by Tamkin and crying uncontrollably in a funeral over the body of a person he does not know. It seems like all hope is lost for Wilhelm, but what he learned with Tamkin's assistance will help him to form an identity, overcome this obstacle, and begin to improve his life .

The protagonist of *Henderson the Rain King* is dramatically affected by his dysfunctional family relationship with his father. As a middle aged man, he experiences anxieties as a result of being unable to disregard his father's view of him as an inferior and a disreputable person; he becomes focused on satisfying others' expectations of him rather than forming and satisfying his own. Being on his second marriage and having problematic relationships with his children, Henderson's anxieties have caused issues within his families. He is eventually overwhelmed by his anxieties and begins to feel the need for spiritual growth: "there was a disturbance in my heart, a voice that spoke there and said, *I want, I want, I want!*" (22). This voice is what prompts him to travel to Africa, where he eventually meets Dahfu, the king of an African tribe. Dahfu provides Henderson with much emotional support and helps him gain a new understanding of himself. At the end of the novel, it appears as if though Henderson's experiences in Africa will not culminate to fruitful spiritual change within him. However, evidence suggests that the lessons Henderson learned in Africa are indeed substantial and that they helped him overcome his anxieties and go on to live a happier life with his family.

The protagonist of *Herzog* is similar to Henderson in that both had family issues growing up and both had issues with being a good father and husband or lover. Herzog is unable to maintain his job as a professor, and he has the habit of constantly writing letters to people that he will not actually mail out. The letters are a symptom of his emotional

illness and an indication that he is struggling to understand the causes of the breakdown of his marriage and of his past and present failures. Herzog greatly values his relationship with his two children. Due in part to his dysfunctional relationship with them, and his inability to save his second marriage, Herzog considers himself to be a failure like his father was. As child, Herzog witnessed, and was told stories of, his immigrant father's desperate struggle to attain success in the New World. Because of these factors, Herzog has lived with the necessity to differentiate himself from his father by being successful. For this reason, Herzog's failures weigh so heavily on him that they cause extreme anxiety. As life becomes more difficult, his kids are what keep him going in: "*He* could not allow himself to die yet. The children needed him. His duty was to live. To be sane, and to live, and to look after the kids" (31). Herzog's situation at the end of the novel is ambiguous, and the story concludes without a firm resolution. Nevertheless, I have shown factors that indicate that Herzog does indeed experience growth and that, at the end of the novel, he is doing better emotionally and will be able to live his life happily.

Mr. Sammler's Planet offers a look at Sammler's dysfunctional relationship with his daughter, Shula, in New York during the year 1969. A Holocaust survivor who witnessed the murder of his wife in a massacre, Sammler is physically present for Shula but not emotionally. As a result of their traumatic experiences during the Holocaust in Poland, both Sammler and Shula are haunted by memories of that time. Shula is often seen by Sammler as being emotionally unstable and irrational in her actions, such as when she steals a scientist's manuscript to help her father finish a book he no longer wants to work on. There is a lack of communication between Sammler and Shula. When Shula tries to communicate, Sammler is completely uninterested in listening to what she

has to say. When she tries to speak to him in Polish, trying to remind him that their troubles in New York are a consequence of their experiences during World War II, Sammler refuses to go along with her, refusing to allow her to use these experiences as justification for her actions in the present: “Severe, he denied her permission to speak that language. She was trying to invoke her terrible times of hiding” (150). As a result of his traumatic experiences during World War II, Sammler feels cut off from most of human society; his spirit is in disarray. One of the few people Sammler does feel connected to is his nephew, Elya Gruner, who is dying from an aneurism in the brain. At the end of the novel, Gruner succumbs to his condition, which has Sammler devastated and sobbing over Gruner’s corpse. Although things do not seem to be heading in a positive direction for Sammler, his love for Shula will allow him to find order within himself and to find purpose in life.

“A Silver Dish” is a short story in which the main character, Woody, is tricked by his father to be his accomplice in stealing a silver dish from Mrs. Skoglund, a wealthy woman who is paying Woody’s tuition for attending seminary. Woody’s father is a morally corrupt man who tries to get his honest son to be more like him, which makes tension between the two inevitable. Woody spends most of his young life expending efforts to differentiate himself from his father. His intense focus on this one goal causes Woody to overlook differentiating himself from the religious person his mother and aunt want him to be. Morris’s theft of the silver dish, perhaps inadvertently, ultimately helps Woody become a person who is completely differentiated from both of his parents. He is expelled from the seminary and given the opportunity to forge his own path through life. The narrative ends with Woody as an adult embracing his father as the old man passes

away in a hospital. Woody is able to mourn his father's death, showing evidence that he is satisfied with the course his life has taken.

Using Bowen family systems theory, I have explored how the various dysfunctional family systems in Saul Bellow's works helped shaped the personalities of Augie, Wilhelm, Henderson, Herzog, Sammler, and Woody as well as their interactions with those around them. I have argued that while the conclusions of Bellow's works lack a firm resolution and a clear indication of future happiness for his protagonists, there are significant pieces of evidence in the text which suggest that their dysfunctional families do not doom them to repeated failures in broken families; my argument has instead shown that before the ambiguous conclusions of Bellow's works, these protagonists have achieved some kind of emotional or spiritual breakthrough and are on new path towards happiness.

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