

Acts of Narrative Confession in Selected Fiction of Saul Bellow

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by

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Abstract

This thesis examines selected fiction of Saul Bellow by problematizing the universal and static conditions of traditional narrative confession as well as its one-sided perception of reality. It analyses the concept of polyphonic confession, illustrating how Bellow's oeuvre shows a gradual movement from a monophonic mode of confessional discourse in his early fiction into a more inclusive, ethical, and polyphonic one in his later novels. Examining novels of Saul Bellow in the light of the literary and social theory of confession as developed by Mikhail Bakhtin and Michel Foucault respectively, this research argues that as distinguished from social and cultural contexts, the context of art opens up a new space for the emergence of a more dynamic and reciprocal mode of truth-telling in Bellow's writings.

Chapter One initiates a dialogue between the Christian and Jewish context of confession, justifying the application of Foucault's Christian theory of confession in order to read Bellow's Jewish novels. Combining Bakhtin's theory of dialogism, carnivalesque, and aesthetic with Foucault's social and cultural theory of truth and power relationships, his theory of transgression, and aesthetic theory of communication, Chapter Two develops a combined literary-social theory of confession that accounts for the confessional reading of Bellow's fiction. Chapter Three links Bakhtinian theory of monologic discourse with Foucauldian arguments about the interrelationship between truth and authoritative power structures in order to examine the conservative and monophonic mode of confession in Bellow's three early short novels: *Dangling Man*, *The Victim*, and *Seize the Day*. This chapter argues that Bellow launches in these novels a model for argumentative confession, especially in the private dialogues of the protagonists with their doubles. Chapter Four blends the Bakhtinian concept of polyphonic discourse with Foucauldian theories of transgression, parrhesia, as well as truth and micro-power relationships in order to examine *Herzog* as a polyphonic novel. The chapter argues that Herzog's transgressive writings help him create a balance between social authorities and plural narrative voice. Combining Bakhtin's theory of carnival with Foucault's theory of transgression, Chapter Five develops a theory of confession which accounts for the polyphonic qualities of carnival confession in *Humboldt's Gift*. It argues that the novel's polyphonic and carnival free space provides the chance for Charlie and Humboldt to connect their desired truth with external realities. Chapter Six integrates Bakhtin and Foucault's theory of aesthetic discourse in order to illustrate a more polyphonic, harmonious, and creative mode of reality presented in *Ravelstein*. It argues that the distance between desired and authorized realities can be reduced when the two protagonists enter the confessional communication as equals and friends who feel responsible for and share concern and love for one another.

The Conclusion illustrates the gradual creation of a more responsive, creative, and dynamic mode of polyphonic confession in Bellow's oeuvre. It concludes that it is more ethical and aesthetic to practice the discourse of confession in a dialogic, that is both monologic and polyphonic, rather than in a conventionally monologic style.

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Contents

Acts of Narrative Confession in Selected Fiction of Saul Bellow

Abstract	ii
Acknowledgments	iii
Contents	iv
Chapter 1:	
1.1. Introduction: Disinterring Reality	1
1.2. Jewish and Christian Contexts of Confession: Bellow and Foucault	18
1.3. Dialogic and Social Theory of Confession: Bakhtin and Foucault	24
Chapter 2:	
Narrative Confession: A Theory	
2.1. Introduction: Bellow-Dostoevsky-Bakhtin Connections	37
2.2. Key Confessional Concepts	42
2.2.1. Confession	42
2.2.2. Voice	59
2.2.3. Style	61
2.2.4. Authority	64
2.2.5. Humour	68
2.2.6. Borderline	73
2.3. Modes of Confession	78
2.3.1. Monophonic Confession	78
2.3.2. Polyphonic Confession	83
2.3.3. Carnavalesque Confession	86
2.3.4. Aesthetic Confession	90
Chapter 3:	
Acts of Conservative Confession in the Early Fiction of Saul Bellow	
3.1. Introduction: Social Domination and Conservative Confession	96
3.2. Confession and Journal Writing in <i>Dangling Man</i>	107
3.3. Confession and Conversations with the Double in <i>The Victim</i>	123
3.4. Confession and Humour in <i>Seize the Day</i>	131

Chapter 4:	
Acts of Polyphonic Confession in <i>Herzog</i>	
4.1. Introduction: Intellectual Struggles and Polyphonic Confession	143
4.2. Confession and Power	152
4.3. Confession and Transgression: Letter Writing	164
4.4. Confession and Polyphony: Narrative Voice	175
4.4.1. Heteroglossia	178
4.4.2. Seriocomic Confession	184
4.4.3. Dialogic Relationships	193
4.4.4. Intertextuality	197
4.5. Confession and Silence	202
Chapter 5:	
Acts of Carnavalesque Confession in <i>Humboldt's Gift</i>	
5.1. Introduction: Border, Transgression, and Confession	209
5.2. Dialogic Relationships	229
5.3. Power, Knowledge, and Materialistic Impulses	237
5.4. Carnavalesque Confession: Subverting Distractions	240
5.5. Parrhesiac Confession: Exposing Boundaries	252
5.6. Threshold Confession: Crossing Death	256
5.7. Aesthetic Confession	260
Chapter 6:	
Acts of Aesthetic Confession in <i>Ravelstein</i>	
6.1. Introduction: Aesthetic and Political Confession	266
6.2. Confession and Political Truth	284
6.3. Confession and Aesthetic Truth	292
6.4. Aesthetic Relationships, Judgment, and Truth	296
6.5. Aesthetic Confession, Social Boundaries, and Freedom	302
6.6. Confession and Humour	309
Conclusion	318
Bibliography	324
Appendix: Translation of Yiddish/Hebrew Expressions in <i>Herzog</i>	343

Chapter 1

1.1. Introduction: Disinterring Reality

“the first act of morality was to disinter the reality, retrieve reality, dig it out from the trash, represent it anew as art would represent it”.¹

“Reality didn’t exist ‘out there.’ It began to be real only when the soul found its underlying truth” (*Dean* 266).

In his Nobel lecture (1976), Saul Bellow (1915-2005) discusses the modern condition of public and private existence:

In private life, disorder or near-panic. In families—for husbands, wives, parents, children—confusion; in civic behavior, in personal loyalties, in sexual practices (I will not recite the whole list; we are tired of hearing it)—further confusion. And with this private disorder goes public bewilderment. In the paper we read what used to amuse us in science fiction—The New York Times speaks of death rays and of Russian and America satellites at war in space.²

Not only in his Nobel lecture but also in his novels Bellow engages with the question of the management of reality and unreality in an individual’s personal and social life. Bellow inveighs against contemporary Western fiction, for despite its “show of

¹ Saul Bellow, *The Dean’s December* (New York: Harper & Row publishers, 1982) 123. Hereafter cited internally as *Dean*.

² Saul Bellow, *Nobel Lecture*, 12 Dec 1976. 27 Apr 2006
<<http://nobelprize.org/literature/Laureates/1976/bellow-lecture.htm>> par. 12. Hereafter cited internally as *Nobel*.

radicalism and innovation,” it is extremely conservative in manner (*Nobel* par. 20). He disapproves of modern writers, conceding that: “we do not, we writers, represent mankind adequately” (*Nobel* par. 21). However, Bellow’s criticism against the modern attitude of conservatism does not mean that his own style is not influenced by his contemporary mode of communication. He admits that the borderline between reality and unreality cannot always be kept clear and that under certain circumstances it is understandable to be conservative, notwithstanding the fact that extreme conservatism can be destructive. He states:

We put into our books the consumer, civil servant, football fan, lover, television viewer. And in the contractual daylight version their life is a kind of death. There is another life coming from an intense sense of what we are which denies these daylight formulations and the false life-the death in life-they make for us. For it is false, and we know it, and our secret and incoherent resistance to it cannot stop, for that resistance arises from persistent intuitions. Perhaps human kind cannot bear too much reality, but neither can it bear too much unreality, too much abuse of the truth. (*Nobel* par. 21)

This interplay of reality and unreality in various public and private places fashions the discourse of confession in Bellow’s novels.

The development of the confessional discourse in Bellow’s novels, at the discursive and public level, depends on the nature of corresponding cultural as well as narrative power relationships. In the presence of authoritative cultural powers—that is, World War II, Post-war Jew-Gentile oppositions, and American materialism that are presented in *Dangling Man* (1944), *The Victim* (1947), and *Seize the Day* (1951), respectively—a more

monophonic and conservative style of confession is produced. In addition, the first-person mode of narration in *Dangling Man* and the third-person omniscient narrator in *The Victim* give voice to a rather monophonic narrative voice. This rather conventional mode of monophonic confession develops into a double-voiced style of narration in *Seize the Day* and *Herzog* (1964). However, whereas Tommy Wilhelm in *Seize the Day* is subjected to the powers of American materialism, Herzog retaliates against rationalist culture with his letter writing. As the authoritarian cultural power in the early novels is handed over to the pastoral, normalizing, and enlightening culture of the rationalists in *Herzog*, the mode of narration takes the form of polyphony, that is, a caring, double-voiced, Free Indirect Discourse. Although polyphony remains the major technique for the representation of both discourse and character in these two novels, it turns out to function as an essential element of identity in *Herzog* as well. Whereas Tommy Wilhelm remains a victim of his cultural powers, Herzog ultimately arrives at a polyphonic understanding and identity not only of himself but also of others. He gains this new identity through writing letters, the letters that are transgressive and subversive in their essence and form. In these letters, Herzog is far from being submissive and conservative. He speaks out his truth to all cultural authorities who in one way or another tend to define and finalize his presumed state of identity and madness. The shift in the confessional orientation from self to other consciousness which started with *Herzog* is even more intensified as we move from *Herzog* towards *Humboldt's Gift* (1975) and *Ravelstein* (2000). The place of art and aesthetic confession in Bellow's novels is transformative in that confessional writings change the angry intonation presented in the form of a journal in *Dangling Man*

and in the style of letter writing in *Herzog* into a more peaceful, mature and humorous auto/biographical writing in his final novel, *Ravelstein*.

The significance of the shift from hesitation towards confidence is that it introduces a new dimension into the convention of confession. This change in the narrative point of view is accompanied by a significant change at the cultural level: the cultural change from the power of rationalistic culture in *Herzog* to the power of art culture in *Humboldt's Gift* and *Ravelstein*. The predominant mode of confession in these two novels alters from polyphonic style into a rather carnivalesque, subversive, and transgressive form in *Humboldt's Gift*. The novel is transgressive in form mainly because it departs from the tradition of the hierarchical and irreversible relationship between the confessor and the confessant and constructively subverts this relationship. It is carnivalesque for all the turnovers that Cantabile plays in order to take advantage of the high cultural position of Charlie as a playwright. In addition, creative confession is presented in the way Charlie recollects his memories of Humboldt in order to forgive him. While doing so, Charlie aesthetically creates images in order to fill the gaps in his information and memory. He creates Humboldt through critical thinking, and Humboldt creates a new identity for himself through his posthumous letter. This creative and aesthetic aspect of the confessional mode is further empowered in *Ravelstein* where Chick becomes the biographer of Professor Abe Ravelstein. In writing his biography, Chick creates a holistic and realistic image for Ravelstein, the image and the personality that has gone so far unnoticed by all Ravelstein's devoted students and disciples who rather blindly admire him to the extreme. Furthermore, Chick, rather deliberately, links the genre of biography with autobiography when he writes about himself while writing

about Ravelstein. He clarifies the image of himself in relation to Ravelstein, putting forward facts about their mutual friendship: that Ravelstein has been wrong in considering Chick as one of his frantic fans who is unable to argue with him.

The impact of the development of the discourse of confession from the earlier monophonic and conservative style into polyphonic, transgressive, and aesthetic forms is that the confessional discourse progressively becomes multi-dimensional, directed towards both self and other consciousness. The creation of the new dimension, that is self and other consciousness, is because Bellow's heroes respect the border between public and private discourse yet they gradually tend to incorporate more and more features of creative confessions into their writings. As such, they modify their identity from being the subjective, objective, and/or assimilative self into a personality who can also create an identity not only for himself but also for others, and possibly for the culture they inhabit.

There are critics of Bellow who have examined the relationship between public and private spheres of communication in his writings. Discussing *Humboldt's Gift*, Michael K. Glenday writes: "it is inner life against outer life, the here as against the there, the world of flesh against that of spirit, public life swallowing private life" (Glenday 128). Charlie in *Humboldt's Gift* reflects:

under pressure of public crisis the private sphere is being surrendered. I admit this private sphere has become so repulsive that we are glad to get away from it. But we accept the disgrace ascribed to it and people have filled their lives with so-called 'public questions'. What do we hear when these public questions are discussed? The failed ideas of three centuries. (*Humboldt* 250)

Against these “public spheres,” Bellow’s protagonists return to their inner and private lives where they defend their inner selves mostly in writing. The public and the private are somehow brought together and balanced within a third realm, the larger and more inclusive realm of the narrative voice. However, Bellow’s fiction provides the space for the public and the private realities to integrate. Bellow explains:

A novel is balanced between a few true impressions and the multitude of false ones that make up most of what we call life. It tells us that for every human being there is a diversity of existences, that the single existence is itself an illusion in part, that these many existences signify something, tend to something, fulfil something; it promises us meaning, harmony and even justice. (*Nobel* par. 27)

Daniel Fuchs argues that from *Augie March* on there is always in Bellow’s fiction “an energetic temperament, a personal voice speaking through the contraries, making them one. There is neither the sort of irony that implies the split between public and private, nor is there coterie appeal”.³ In like manner, Edmond Schraepen discusses Bellow’s belief that

the realm of the unconscious presents the novelist with a large field to be explored, and he sees this reconnoitring of a largely uncharted territory as part of a resistance movement against the colonization of the ‘private spheres’ by the ‘public spheres;’ in other words, investigating the unconscious is bound up with a defence of the self against stifling, destructive forces. (Schraepen 205-206)

³ Daniel Fuchs, “Saul Bellow and the Modern Tradition,” *Contemporary Literature* 15. 1 (Winter 1974): 75. Hereafter cited internally as “Modern Tradition”.

Here, the “stifling, destructive forces” seem to stand for all external structures such as familial, social, cultural, religious, and political powers that tend to control and limit the outer lives of the individuals.

This definition of truth is founded on a particular concept of knowledge. In “Epistemology as Narrative Device in The Work of Saul Bellow,” Brigitte Scheer-Schäzler argues that “Bellow’s concept of knowledge is based on his dualistic concept of reality. Bellow’s discussion of reality assumes Platonic overtones when he divides reality into the reality of distraction and the reality of concentration or contemplation” (Scheer-Schäzler 105). She explains that the reality of distraction stands for the world of business, institutions, and technology, consisting of nature and artefacts. The world of distraction “overpowers the individual, especially when the individual attempts to conduct ‘the world’s business’ as Tommy Wilhelm, Herzog, and Citrine so desperately try but fail to do” (Scheer-Schäzler 105). For Bellow, “the true human enterprise”, as Scheer-Schäzler explains, “can only be conducted in the other world, on the other level of reality which is only inadequately described as the reality of contemplation” (106). Bellow’s concept of knowledge is therefore twofold: factual and implicit. The factual knowledge is, as in the words of Scheer-Schäzler, presented to us via schools, newspapers, and media. This is the kind of knowledge that is made available by those whom Bellow calls “reality instructors” and it is the form of knowledge that Bellow’s protagonists reject. The implicit knowledge, on the other hand, is not readily available in books but is “to be patiently sought throughout one’s life” (Scheer-Schäzler 109-110).

M. Gilbert Porter explains more about the dichotomy of public and private knowledge, arguing that the distinction is Kantian in origin.⁴ Porter points to the fact that in *Humboldt's Gift*, Charlie Citrine makes use of a Kantian metaphor in order to explain the relationship between the interior and exterior life: "I stand at the edge of a psychic pond and I know that if crumbs are thrown in, my carp will come swimming up. You have, like the external world, your own phenomena inside" (*Humboldt* 49). For Kant, as Corey McCall explains, "reason's public employment is that of the scholar who writes and speaks before a public audience and speaks for everyone. The same individual might also employ reason in its private aspect, through her role within a state or institutional apparatus" (McCall 11). To further explain the problem, McCall notes that religious institutions could either help or hinder the process of Enlightenment: "Kant presents the example of the member of the clergy who has the private duty to speak in conformity with given institutional norms, but also has the duty to speak out against these very norms when employing reason in its public aspect" (McCall 11). This discussion is central to Kant's view of Enlightenment which he defines as the demand for the departure from a "self-incurred immaturity" (McCall 11). He explains that Enlightenment requires courage for it emphasizes institutional change. Therefore, an essential technique to approach a more inclusive version of truth is to link creatively the public and the private forms of knowledge.

This particular understanding of enlightenment and creativity is central to Bellow's style in his confessional novels. Bellow's version of truth, as he explains in his Nobel lecture, is inclusive of various forms of knowledge. It is comparatively a

⁴ M. Gilbert Porter, "Hitch Your Agony to the Star: Bellow's Transcendental Vision," *Saul Bellow and His Work*, ed. Edmond Schraepen (Brussels: Centrum Voor Taal-En Literatuurwetenschap Vrije Universiteit, 1978) 74. Hereafter cited internally as *Hitch*.

polyphonic version of truth which is not based on either one or the other concept of reality. In their public confessions, Bellow's heroes employ techniques such as meditation, reflection, and writing, not only to put forward what they know about themselves but also to create themselves aesthetically. This creative style of confession which increasingly develops throughout Bellow's oeuvre, is presented through the narrative construction that relates to both public and private styles of discourse in a mutually inclusive way. The narrative voice seems to have access to a perspective much broader, in both time and space, than that of the protagonist. It seems that this voice is viewing events right after they have taken place; therefore, the narrative persona can smile even when the protagonist is still in trouble. This voice can see events both as the protagonist can see them from his limited, internal, and private point of view and as they occur in relation to the external and public world. However, this narrative voice does not separate the public from the private but initiates dialogues with the protagonist, questioning, supporting, and at times making fun of him in order to bring to his attention that his private sphere is only part of a larger reality and that the private world is a different world when viewed from the public standpoint and vice versa.

It seems that for Bellow the observer's point of view is central to his perception of reality. In fact, he seems to share the Kantian views of his protagonist, Mr Artur Sammler who notes: "Things met with in this world are tied to the forms of our perception in space and time and to the forms of our thinking".⁵ Bellow's Kantian understanding of the truth runs throughout his fiction. Therefore, in order to explain the stylistic and cultural problems of truth-telling in Bellow's writings, I refer to the theories of confession as

⁵ Saul Bellow, *Mr Sammler's Planet*. (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1969) 57. Hereafter cited internally as *Sammler*.

developed by two neo-Kantian thinkers: Mikhail Bakhtin (1895-1975) and Michel Foucault (1926-1984). In his article, “Neo-Kantianism in Cultural Theory: Bakhtin, Derrida, and Foucault,” Craig Brandist argues that Bakhtin, Derrida, and Foucault “share roots in a common philosophical tradition: neo-Kantian, especially that of the Marburg school”.⁶ However, each is attracted to a different aspect of the tradition. While Foucault is more inspired by Kant’s question about the concept of “Enlightenment”, Bakhtin is more attracted to Kant’s emphasis on the category of “process” and, more importantly, by a particular concept of the “self/other” relationship in dialogue.

Michel Foucault argues that “in order to autonomously fashion one’s existence meaningfully [...] the individual must be willing to write and speak against intolerable conditions in the present, a task that is made much easier, as Kant notes, if institutions exist to foster this activity” (McCall 11). Foucault’s argument is founded on the concept of “critical thinking” which is “an analytic philosophy of truth” that will take the form of “an ontology of ourselves, an ontology of present”.⁷ It is derived from the question that Kant poses: “What is Enlightenment?” While Kant himself was thinking of Enlightenment as contemplating the possibility of constant progress for mankind, Foucault takes Enlightenment as contemplating “What is our present? What is the present field of possible experience?” (*Art* 148). Foucault argues that Enlightenment, as such, was not

⁶ Craig Brandist, “Neo-Kantianism in Cultural Theory: Bakhtin, Derrida, and Foucault,” *Radical Philosophy*. Issue 102. July/August 2000. 5 Aug. 2005. <E:\bakhtin and neo-Kantianism\radical philosophy-print friendly.htm>. Hereafter cited internally as *Neo-Kantianism*.

⁷ Michel Foucault, “The Art of Telling the Truth.” *Critique and Power: Recasting the Foucault/Habermas Debate*. Ed. and intro. Michael Kelly (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: The MIT Press, 1998) 148. Hereafter cited internally as *Art*.

a theory, a doctrine, nor even a permanent body of knowledge that is accumulating; it must be conceived as an attitude, an ethos [...] in which the critique of what we are is at one and the same time the historical analysis of the limits imposed on us and an experiment with the possibility of going beyond them. (qtd. in Danaher 10-11)⁸

Foucault values the 'notion of the critique' not only as "an investigation into what we are (how we think, what we value, how we understand ourselves, how we treat others)" but also as "thinking what else we might be—how we could be different from ourselves" (Danaher 10). Confession, according to this approach, reconsiders such possibilities. Within this new context, the confessant is not always the one who acknowledges the same truth circulated by the dominant culture, but is also the one who is able to consider the other possible version of reality, a different side of the problem.

Whereas Foucault's argument is founded on "critical thinking," Bakhtin's literary theory of dialogism is rooted in participative or dialogic thinking. Dialogism for Bakhtin illustrates a spectrum which slides between extremely monologic to extremely polyphonic discourse. Dialogism as such includes both monophonic and polyphonic modes of communication. In other words, as Mika Lähteenmäki states:

'Monologic' is opposed to 'polyphonic' as a different compositional principle of the novel. Dostoevsky's novels would be polyphonic, while Tolstoy's novels would be monologic. However, both are dialogical in the sense that all utterances

⁸ See Michel Foucault, *Ethics: Essential Works of Foucault, 1954-1984*, Vol. 1. Ed. Paul Rabinow (London: Penguin, 1997) 319.

(a novel can be understood as an utterance) are created by someone and addressed to somebody.⁹

In other words, both monophonic and polyphonic modes of thought and discourse are dialogic in that they are means of addressivity (responsiveness) as well as interaction. Therefore, we can talk about degrees of polyphony or monophony within a text.¹⁰ In chapter Two, I will further discuss the similarities and differences of monophony and polyphony. The main point here however, is that “participative thinking”, in its Bakhtinian sense, conceives life as communication: “To live means to participate in dialogue: to ask questions, to heed, to respond, to agree, and so forth”.¹¹ This kind of thinking accounts for Bakhtin’s specific notion of dialogue and the philosophy of dialogism. From a Bakhtinian perspective, life is seen as a great dialogue in which human beings actively participate through their responses. The genre of the novel can therefore be considered as “a great dialogue” in which the heroes compete and respond through such dialogic interactions.

This study combines the Foucauldian concept of critical thinking with the Bakhtinian concept of dialogic thinking in order to examine the presentation and the development of the discourse of confession in Bellow’s novels. Creativity and dialogue are therefore two key concepts in this study and are helpful in the illustration of the discourse of narrative confession as an ongoing process in Bellow’s novels. In fact, it is

⁹ Mika Lähtenmäki, email to the author, 18 October 2005.

¹⁰ There is a fine distinction between monologic and monophony. Whereas monologic is a more general term inclusive of philosophy and structure, monophony stands for discursive features such as method of addressivity and voice.

¹¹ Mikhail Bakhtin, “Towards a Reworking of the Dostoevsky Book.” (1961). *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics* (1929). ed and trans. Caryl Emerson. Intro. Wayne, C. Booth (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984) 293. Hereafter cited internally as *Reworking*.

through resourceful conversations of the protagonists that most consolidated norms of their contemporary society are destabilized and creatively reconstructed.

Bellow's heroes, in their confessional writings, destabilize these cultural powers. Bellow considers the "up-to-date teachings, concepts, sensitivities, the pervasiveness of psychological, pedagogical, political ideas" (*Nobel* par. 10) as totalitarian and believes that they "have attacked bourgeois individualism, sometimes identifying character with property" (*Nobel* par. 4). "The intelligent public," Bellow states, is waiting to hear from art what it does not hear from

theology, philosophy, social theory, and what it cannot hear from pure science. Out of the struggle at the center has come an immense, painful longing for a broader, more flexible, fuller, more coherent, more comprehensive, account of what we human beings are, who we are, and what this life is for. (*Nobel* par 24)

Bellow suggests that individuality is not so dependent on historical and cultural conditions, "those conditions that we are so authoritatively given" (*Nobel* par. 7) and thus he proposes that "we must not make bosses of our intellectuals" (*Nobel* par. 9). As such, we see that Joseph in *Dangling Man* stands up to the "hard-boiled;" Herzog assaults the "Reality Instructors;" Charlie Citrine in *Humboldt's Gift* argues against the "hard-headed" and Chick in *Ravelstein* speaks up against the "mankind benefactors".

Bellow's confessional style can be considered as postmodern. According to Jean-François Lyotard, postmodernism can be defined as "incredulity towards metanarratives" (xxiv). As Stephan Baker explains, Lyotard identifies the postmodern with "a sceptical stance towards the legitimating function of narrative" (Baker 65). More

specifically, Lyotard “posits the postmodern as a critique of narrative legitimation that extends beyond the specific instance or condition of that particular narrative to encompass a general or totalising truth” (Baker 65). The fictions of Bellow represent the genre of postmodern confession in which the protagonist does not merely reiterate the truth of the social, religious, and cultural forces, but has the power to question the power structures and is capable of reciprocal communication with them. As such, postmodern confession launches an original tradition for the discourse of truth-telling.

Even though this study is oriented towards cultural imperatives, its method is distinguished from the existent transcendental, historical, and prosaic readings of Bellow’s novels in that it not only acknowledges the limitations imposed on the private reality by American culture but also explores the areas in which the external structure can be productive of personal truth. Whereas most critics of Bellow discuss the problems of public realities in his fiction, this study is also oriented towards the features of private versions of truth-telling as well as the interactions between the public and private modes of communication. M. A. Quayum examines Bellow’s major fiction in the light of the universal context of American Transcendentalism outlined by Ralph Waldo Emerson and Walt Whitman: “Being opposed to the excesses and extremes of modern life, like Emerson and Whitman, they [Bellow’s heroes] advocate the philosophy of reconciliation and union, or order and equilibrium” (Quayum 31). But Quayum’s argument does not fully account for the private transgression and disobedience of Bellow’s heroes. In *Saul Bellow and History*, Judie Newman approaches Bellow’s novels from an historical point of view, challenging the critical consensus that presents Bellow as a writer “more concerned with the universal than with the particular, with the timeless than with the

historical” (Newman 1). Newman argues that the particular social and cultural context in which the hero is situated directly influences his private reality; yet she does not further the discussion to include the problems of discursive, personal realities within the network of social, political, and cultural power relationships. Glenday concentrates his argument on the presentation of truth within the context of everyday life rather than its conventionally universal context. In *Saul Bellow and the Decline of Humanism*, he discusses the problems of private authenticity in relation to American culture, arguing that Bellow uses the novel

as his means of exposing the inauthenticity of the everyday, that system of reality which is dominant in American life. This system derives its imperatives from the worlds of business, technology, entrepreneurial guile, from the submission of the humanistic channels of thought and feeling to the ascendancy of scientific rationalism. (Glenday 1)

It is evident that there is a communication gap between personal and social modes of reality and between the confessor and the confessant in various public and interpersonal contexts in Bellow’s novels. Glenday addresses the problem of the American discrepancy between public and private authenticity as well as the eventual subordination of private to public truth. Having said that, one is faced with the central question that is integral to this research project: Is it possible for the supposedly monophonic discourse of confession to narrow these textual, intersubjective, and cultural gaps by being practised in a more polyphonic style of a dialogue rather than a monologue? In order to challenge the conventional monophonic view of confession, I will analyse a number of Bellow’s novels in the light of the development of the reciprocal mode of confessional style in them,

arguing that Bellow's novels show the development of dialogic confession towards polyphony at textual and interpersonal levels; but that at their social and cultural levels these novels show little or no progression towards a mutual style of confession between the protagonist and his society.

The significance of this research is that it fills a gap in the systematic confessional studies of Bellow's fiction. There are critics of Bellow who have generally considered his novels as confessional. In studies of particular novels, there are critics of Bellow who have considered *Dangling Man* as a novel of confession.¹² Julius R. Raper argues that Joseph in *Dangling Man* wants to substitute "a confessional literature that feels no shame in being introspective and self-indulgent" for the tradition of "close mouthed straightforwardness" (Raper 73). In "'The Nightmare in Which I'm Trying to Get a Good Night's Rest': Saul Bellow and Changing History," Malcolm Bradbury considers *Herzog* as "the confessional and therapeutic novel of the wasteland world".¹³ Edmond Schraepen in "*Humboldt's Gift: A New Bellow?*" remarks that "the confessional narrator gives the novel's discourse a strong communicative focus, emphasizing Citrine's urge to convey to his readers his strong sense of mission" (Schraepen 205). Porter makes a comparison between the American confessional themes of guilt, sin, and redemption presented in *The Victim* (1947) by Bellow and in *The Scarlet Letter* by Nathaniel Hawthorne (*Hitch* 74). In addition, book-length bibliographies have been published on Bellow's works;¹⁴ however,

¹² See David Galloway, "Culture-Making: The Recent Works of Saul Bellow." *Saul Bellow and His Work*. Ed. Edmond Schraepen (Brussels: Centrum Voor Taal-En Literatuurwetenschap Vrije Universiteit, 1978) 51. Hereafter cited internally as "Culture-Making".

¹³ Malcolm Bradbury, "'The Nightmare in Which I'm Trying to Get a Good Night's Rest': Saul Bellow and Changing History." *Saul Bellow and His Work*. Ed. Edmond Schraepen (Brussels: Centrum Voor Taal-En Literatuurwetenschap Vrije Universiteit, 1978) 22. Hereafter cited internally as "Nightmare".

¹⁴ See Francine Lercangee, *Saul Bellow: A Bibliography of Secondary Sources* (Brussels: Center for American Studies, 1977); Nault, Marianne. *Saul Bellow: His Works and His Critics: An Annotated*

no systematic and detailed study of confession in the fiction of Bellow has yet been carried out.

It is the function of the present study to fill a gap in the realm of theory as well as practice of confessional studies. Combining the narrative theories of confession presented by Bakhtin with the social theory of confession proposed by Foucault, this study suggests an original approach towards the study of the discourse of confession in general and the examination of Bellow's confessional novels in particular. The anatomy of confession outlined in the next chapter can be employed in the readings of other works of Bellow as well. In this study, I will benefit from methodologies such as dialogic and social theories of confession, comparative analysis, and close reading of the novels of Bellow.

In the comparative analysis, I will compare the Jewish context of Bellow's novels to the Christian context of Foucault's theory in order to justify the ways in which Foucault's argument can enlighten Bellow's fiction. Also, I will compare the key confessional concepts presented in the theories of Bakhtin and Foucault in order to develop a combined theory of narrative-social theory of confession that accounts for Bellow's confessional fiction. In doing so, wherever relevant, I will link certain themes in Bakhtin's narrative theory with the corresponding concepts from Foucault's social theory of confession: Bakhtin's notion of monologic relationships with Foucault's concept of relations of domination, Bakhtin's idea of polyphonic relationships with Foucault's concept of relations of micro-powers, Bakhtinian concept of narrative carnival and the Foucauldian theme of transgression. Such comparisons are made in this chapter except

for the comparison between transgression and carnival which will be discussed in chapter Two.

1. 2. Jewish and Christian Contexts of Confession: Bellow and Foucault

The question that initially needs to be addressed here is how Foucault's theory of confession, which particularly investigates the problems of confessions within Christian and particularly Catholic contexts, can be applicable to the Jewish context of Bellow's novels.¹⁵ To answer this question, I should mention that there is a strong historical link between the Jewish and Catholic traditions with regard to the concepts of truth and confession presented in them. Lambert Zuidervart explains that Judaism appropriated Greek mythologies, introducing the concept of "reconciliation" into their belief in "reification," that is, the belief in the power of fate and domination central to the Greek myths (164). The concept of "reconciliation" as understood by Theodor Adorno is "a process bringing nature and culture together without arbitrarily imposing culture on nature" (Zuidervart 164). If "culture" stands for public and social realities and "nature" signifies personal and human values, then the Jewish context of Bellow's novels brings these two into reconciliation and dialogue.

¹⁵ I need to acknowledge that Foucault's treatment of Christian models of confession is only one version of Christian concepts of confession, which differs from other models, including Puritan confession, confession in the Eastern Orthodox Church, the Inquisition, or the confessions of the Spanish mystics Saint John of the Cross and St. Teresa of Avila (also known as Saint Teresa of Jesus). Unlike Catholicism, Puritanism offers a more direct style of confession in which salvation is achieved through the individual's relationship with God with no intervention by the priest. In the Eastern Orthodox Church, however, the penitents confess their sins to God before a Parish priest or a spiritual guide. Confession in the form of the Inquisition refers to the judgment of the Roman Catholic Church of various forms of heresy, including sorcery, blasphemy, and witchcraft (Bowker 474). The confessional model in the practices of the Spanish mystics Saint John of the Cross and St. Teresa of Avila involves a more contemplative and private version of confession based on one's love and friendship towards God. Saint John of the Cross practiced confession in his silent prayers, imprisonment, and torture. Likewise, St. Teresa of Avila, one of the foremost writers on mental prayer, has a distinctive perception of confession and prayer based on one's "love for confessors [including God]" (31).

Foucault's initial examination of the confessional discourse, as James Bernauer explains, concentrates on its practices after the Council of Trent (1545-63) (Bernauer 79). Foucault examines the problem of governance that appeared in the sixteenth century. It was the concept of governance that intensified his "exploration of the crisis of Reformation and Counter-Reformation which provoked in that period an anxiety over the matter of governance" (Bernauer 79). Bernauer explains that Foucault explores the changing meaning of confession in general and the parrhesiac mode of confession in particular within the Judaeo-Hellenistic texts (Bernauer 84-86). In Judaeo-Hellenistic texts, parrhesia appears as the mode of divine manifestation which gives "the courage to tell the truth on the part of those who are pure and noble in spirit" (Bernauer 86). In the texts of the New Testament, on the other hand, parrhesia applies to the human rather than the divine. It applies first to the Christian in general, manifesting one's unspoken confidence in God, the confidence which is founded on one's obedience to God's will. Secondly, it applies to the apostles, manifesting "their personal courage to preach the truth of Christ even at the risk of one's own life. In this way, it [the concept of parrhesia in the New Testament] is very similar to ancient Greek Parrhesia" (Bernauer 86). In the early ascetic texts, however, parrhesia is ambiguously invested with both positive and negative meanings. In its positive sense, it is an attitude of good Christians towards others: the virtue of the martyrs. In its negative sense, it signifies presumption and arrogance, shamelessness, and disrespect for it implies that one could find salvation on one's own, pushing away the fear of God and divine punishment (Bernauer 86-87). Bernauer explains that while the parrhesiastic pole is based on the love of God, the anti-parrhesiastic pole or ascetic tradition is grounded on the fearful obedience to God.

Foucault suggests that “any modern movement toward the parrhesiastic pole entails an escape from the positivist, obedient human reality that has been created in the technologies of Western thought and practice” (Bernauer 87).

Neither Foucault nor Bellow was a biased religious thinker. Foucault’s belief in uniqueness is in disharmony with religious belief in universalism, the fact that provides the grounds for the initiation of a conversation between Foucault’s Christianity and Bellow’s Judaism. Foucault’s argument on Christian confessional goes against the grain of the totalising Christian pastoral power. John D. Caputo explains that what Foucault holds out as “the negative freedom of the individual to be different” contradicts “the positive production of individuals in keeping with some normative standard” (Caputo 129). The pastor needs to know “what is going on in individuals’ hearts, to get inside their minds, to have them ‘confess’ their innermost secrets, in order to give spiritual direction. Pastoral power depends upon producing the truth, the truth of truth in order thereby to produce good Christians” (Caputo129). In contrast to this normalising production of subjects, Foucault holds out for “the individual who resists all secret codes, who has no identity, who is not reducible to one or another of the hermeneutic techniques of pastoral power, who is marked by the right to be different” (Caputo 129). Comparatively, the Jewish contexts of Bellow’s novels represent the heroes who stand out in the crowd of their immediate familial, historical, cultural, political, and intellectual community. They feel isolated, alienated, and estranged mostly because they feel and think in ways different from their contemporaries. However, they feel love for, and an urgent need to communicate and join, that community. Therefore, they turn to their inner world of discursive reflections and writings.

Foucault was an atheist (Carrette xi). Not only does he rarely side with Christianity in his writings, but also he does not believe in the mode of subjectification practised by some Christians (Simons 75). His preferred mode of confession, which is in essence Catholic, borders on the Hebrew style. Foucault believes that the Christian concept of confession is founded on self-renunciation.¹⁶ In Christianity, “confession is an act of submission to the Church and through the Church to Christ who gave the apostles and their successors the power to forgive and to retain sins” (McDonald 86). Confession as an inherent ritual of the Catholic Church “brought about a new ethics of self through the process of self-renunciation” (Carrette 24). The origin of this ritual is Socrates’ principle to ‘take care of the self’ which develops in “a whole process of writing and speaking about oneself in order to develop care for the body and satisfaction of one’s needs” (Carrette 24). Christianity, as such, “is seen to rest fundamentally on the act of speech, the verbalization of truth. To speak is to believe and to speak is to know the truth. Therefore, Christianity is viewed as the religion of utterance, a submission into speaking, believing and acting” (Carrette 27).

As Simons explains, Foucault’s concept of Christianity is very close to his understanding of humanism, entailing tight bonds between truth, power and morality (Simons 75). Simons goes on to state that “modern humanist power is conceived as pastoral power, which was an originally Hebrew concept, but one preserved and modified by Christianity” (Simons 75). In Judaism, the rabbis conceive atonement as “a genuine expression of sorrow for sin and a sincere desire to reform” yet “it is now made possible through the individual confession of sins, apart from any cultic ritual” (Fry 208). If

¹⁶ Michel Foucault, “On the Genealogy of Ethics: An Overview of Work in Progress.” *The Foucault Reader*. Ed. Paul Rainbow (London: Penguin Books, 1986) 366. Hereafter cited internally as *Genealogy*.

Foucault is believed to be an atheist, it is in the sense that he unsettles the certainty of Christianity as the dominant Western religion. He disrupts its traditional concepts and introduces new dynamics into it (Carrette xi). The problem that Foucault finds with Christian confession is the cost of Christian truth about oneself: the self-denial; instead of which Foucault turns to the Greek concept of self-discipline.¹⁷

In like manner, Bellow's heroes show defiance against powers that tend to define and restrict their personalities. They resist definitions and seek ways to unrestrained thoughts and feelings. Bellow develops a conception of truth that accounts for both Jewish and Christian perception of reality: "[C]uriously, it was the gentiles who possessed the Tree of Knowledge (in the form of science), while the Tree of Life was a one-hundred-percent Jewish property. Eventually, Science and Life would unite".¹⁸ Bellow's neutral standpoint towards religion is partly due to his experience as a Jew in general and a displaced American Jewish novelist in particular. Having experienced multiple dislocations—from the *shtetl* life of East Europe (Russia) to Montreal and to Chicago, Bellow, as Earl Rovit¹⁹ explains, is devoid of religious prejudices. He has been equally influenced by his Jewish and Christian learning. Although he was born a Jew, he soon became familiar with the New Testament. As documented by James Wood, Bellow's biographer, in 1923 the young Bellow fell ill with peritonitis and pneumonia and spent six months in Royal Victoria Hospital, Montreal, where he read, and was deeply affected by, the New Testament Gospels (Wood 999). Of this unforgettable event,

¹⁷ Michel Foucault, *The Care of the Self: The History of Sexuality*. Vol. 3. Trans. Robert Hurley. (New York: Vantage, 1988) 43. Hereafter cited internally as *Care*.

¹⁸ Saul Bellow, *More Die of Heartbreak*. (London: Secker & Warburg, 1987) 56. Hereafter cited internally as *Heartbreak*.

¹⁹ Earl Rovit, *Saul Bellow* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1967) p. 8. Hereafter cited internally as *Bellow*.

Bellow writes: “Well, I had a great shock at about eight. I was hospitalized for a half year or so. A missionary lady came and gave me a New Testament for children. I read that. I was very moved by the life of Jesus, and I recognized him as a fellow Jew”.²⁰ Bellow explains: “At the age of about four, we began to study Hebrew and read the Old Testament [...] I felt very cozy with God, the primal parent, [...] I felt they were much like members of my family—Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and the sons of Jacob, especially Joseph” (*Life* 288). However, in his “Foreword” to Allan Bloom’s *The Closing of the American Mind* (1987), Bellow asserts:

In traditional orthodox families small boys were taught to translate *Genesis* and *Exodus*. So I might easily have gone on to the rabbinate if the great world, the world of the streets, had not been so seductive. Besides, a life of pious observance was not for me. Anyway, I had begun at an early age to read widely, and I was quickly carried away from the ancient religion. (13-14)

In Bellow’s novels, therefore, narrative irony targets not only his Jewish background but also his Christian experience—the two shaping ideologies in his life. Bellow received orthodox religious education which “may have lingered artificially in the old Montreal ghetto, but they rapidly dissolved in the secularism and relative prosperity of Chicago in the 1920’s and 1930’s” (*Bellow* 8-9). The place of religion in Bellow’s novels is ambiguous. Rovit notes that “there is a persistent, usually muted, religious referent in all his fiction” but “the ritual has become incontrovertibly dis severed from daily behavior and the Bellow heroes are driven to justify his own life—to press his

²⁰ Saul Bellow, “A Half Life.” (1990). *It All Adds Up: From the Dim Past to the Uncertain Future: A Non-Fiction Collection* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1994) 288. Hereafter cited internally as *Life*.

actions into his own idiosyncratic rites of worship, since the traditional laws bear little relevance to his present need” (*Bellow* 9). From one point of view, it might seem that private and public spheres of communication in Bellow’s novels are portrayed as incompatible. The domineering external world is imposing its rules on the individuals and demands certain confessional rejoinders from them. Unlike most characters in the novels, Bellow’s protagonists are unable to provide such authorized statements and they, therefore, create private responses of their own. However, it is this liminality in attitude towards definitions that qualifies Bellow as a non-biased religious thinker. In fact, his view of forgiveness overlaps with that of his protagonist Henderson. It is in *Henderson the Rain King* that Bellow repeats his favourite quotation about forgiveness which says: “The forgiveness of sins is perpetual and righteousness first is not required” (*Henderson* 3, 77, 244). Henderson’s rule of forgiveness does not conform to the orders of Christianity or Judaism. However, the protagonist’s sense of humour always creates multiplicity of meaning in the novel and generates multiple versions of reality.

1.3. Dialogic and Social Theory of Confession: Bakhtin and Foucault

“Everything overhead was in equilibrium, kept in place by mutual tensions” (*Dean* 311). This study combines Bakhtin’s dialogic theory of confession with Foucault’s social and cultural theory of power and knowledge relationships in order to develop a theory of narrative confession that accounts for the development of the confessional discourse in Bellow’s novels—the progression from an earlier static, serious, and one-sided mode of conversation into a more dynamic, seriocomic, and reciprocal version of discourse in his later works. In order to account for the concept of “progression,” I initially concentrate on

the idea of “process”. I will examine the ways in which Bakhtin and Foucault evaluate this concept and how it can help me trace the progression of the discourse throughout Bellow’s writings. Bakhtin values “process” as an integral part of making confessions. From the founder of the neo-Kantian school, the Jewish philosopher Hermann Cohen, Bakhtin received the idea of “*process*, the radical ‘un-givenness’ of experience, with its openness and energy – the loopholes in existence”.²¹ This means that “the world is not something that is given to the senses but something that is “conceived”.²² In his first philosophical book, *Towards the Philosophy of the Act*, Bakhtin celebrates the discourse of confession for what it signifies as the “acknowledgment of the uniqueness of my participation in Being”.²³ It is this emphasis on the *process* of *becoming* rather than arriving at the final product that underlies Bakhtin’s understanding of genuine confession in this book and also what he calls confessional self-accounting in his later essay “Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity” (1920-1923). In his essay “Epic and the Novel,” published in *Dialogic Imagination* (1929), Bakhtin extends the idea of process in the discourse of confession to the discourse of the novel. He praises the becoming genre of the novel: “the novel is the only developing genre and therefore it reflects more deeply, more essentially, more sensitively and rapidly, reality itself in the process of its unfolding. Only that which is itself developing can comprehend development as a

²¹ Michael Holquist, *Dialogism: Bakhtin and His World* (London and New York: Routledge, 1991) 7. Hereafter cited internally as *Dialogism*.

²² Craig Brandist, *The Bakhtin Circle: Philosophy, Culture and Politics* (London, Sterling, Virginia: Pluto Press, 2002) 17. Hereafter cited internally as *Circle*.

²³ Mikhail Bakhtin, *Towards a Philosophy of the Act*. (1919-1921) Translation and notes by Vadim Liapunov. Ed. Michael Holquist and Vadim Liapunov (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1993) 41. Hereafter cited internally as *Act*.

process”.²⁴ Narrative confession can therefore be regarded as a dialogue in process, representing various voices in competition. This is because every voice in the novel represents a world view and has its own force.

Both Bakhtin and Foucault interpret truth in terms of mutual relationships of domination. Bakhtin refers to two types of forces that generally exist in the compositional structure of the novel: “centripetal” and “centrifugal” forces. Centripetal forces attempt to centralize and unify the language.²⁵ On the other hand, whenever centrifugal forces are at work in the novel, the novelist, “does not acknowledge any unitary, singular, naively (or conditionally) indisputable or sacrosanct language;” rather, the orientation of discourse in the novel is “an orientation that is contested, contestable, and contesting” (*Discourse* 332). Bakhtin coined the term “heteroglossia” or “multispeechedness” to refer to the multiplicity of languages and their interactions in the novel. Heteroglossia shows how language is being “pulled in opposite directions: centripetally, towards the unitary centre provided by a notion of a ‘national language;’ and centrifugally, towards the various languages which actually constitute the apparent but false unity of a national language” (Dentith 35). The nature of the relationship that exists between centripetal and centrifugal forces determines the relevant form of confession. If centripetal forces dominate the discourse, the compositional structure of the confession will be more monologic, whereas the domination of centrifugal forces secures polyphonic form.

²⁴ Mikhail Bakhtin, “Epic and the Novel” *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays* (1929). Trans. Caryl Emerson and M. Holquist. Ed. Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990) 7. Hereafter cited internally as *Epic*.

²⁵ Mikhail Bakhtin, “Discourse in the Novel.” *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*. (1929). Trans. Caryl Emerson and M. Holquist. Ed. Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990) 271. Hereafter cited internally as *Discourse*.

Comparatively Foucault argues against the authority of the author in determining the text's signification, arguing that "we must entirely reverse the traditional idea of the author".²⁶ He reasons: "the author does not precede the works; he is a certain functional principle by which, in our culture, one limits, excludes, and chooses; in short, by which one impedes the free circulation, the free manipulation, the free composition, decomposition, and recomposition of fiction" (*Author* 118-119). In ways similar to Bakhtin, Foucault perceives truth in connection with relationships of power. Foucault's architectonics of force and power relationships operate within an ongoing process. He argues that power must not be understood as institutions that subjugate and exercise power over another group but as

the multiplicity of force relations immanent in the sphere in which they operate and which constitutes their own organization; as the process which, through ceaseless struggles and confrontations, transforms, strengthens or reverses them; as the support which these force relations find in one another, thus forming a chain or a system, or on the contrary, the disjunctions and contradictions which isolate them from one another; and lastly, as the strategies in which they take effect, whose general design or institutional crystallizations is embodied in the state apparatus, in the formulation of law, in the various social hegemonies. (*History I* 92-93)

²⁶ Michel Foucault, "What is an Author?" *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews by Michel Foucault*. Ed. and intro. Donald F. Bouchard. trans. Donald F. Bouchard and Sherry Simon (Ithaca and New York: Cornell University Press, 1977) 118. Hereafter cited internally as *Author*.

Both Bakhtin and Foucault prefer multiplicity to unity. Michael Holquist holds similar view, asserting that Bakhtin prefers Kantian multiplicity to Neo-Kantian unity.²⁷ Foucault, likewise, states that what concerns his theory of genealogy is “local, discontinuous, disqualified, illegitimate knowledge against the claims of a unitary body of theory which would filter, hierarchise and order them in the name of some true knowledge and some arbitrary idea of what constitutes a science and its objects”.²⁸ Accordingly, what both Bakhtin and Foucault consider as truth is not necessarily a single, unitary, and authorized truth. Rather, truth is to be found in the multiplicity of social, cultural, and inter-personal relationships.

As the discourse of truth-telling in Bellow’s novels depends on the operations of cultural powers, I return to the theories of Bakhtin and Foucault and explore the ways in which narrative confession is influenced by social and cultural power structures. I therefore examine the concepts of power and domination in connection with the production of truth and reality in both theories. Foucault links the production of truth with the orders of domination and/or interactions among micro-powers, stating that authoritarian power structures cannot be generative of genuine truth. It is rather the system of micro-powers, operating within circular and developing power relations, that produces authentic forms of knowledge. He writes: “by truth I do not mean ‘the ensemble of truths’ which are to be discovered and accepted” (*Truth and Power* 132), and that: truth is not “the bearer of universal values” (*Truth and Power* 132). He states instead:

²⁷ Michael Holquist, “Introduction: The Architectonics of Answerability”. *Art and Answerability: Early Philosophical Essays*. Ed. Michael Holquist and Vadim Liapunov. Translation and Notes by Vadim Liapunov (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990) xv. Hereafter cited internally as *Introduction*.

²⁸ Michel Foucault, “Two Lectures”. *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and other Writings 1972-1977*. Ed. Colin Gordon. Trans. Colin Gordon, Leo Marshal, John Mephram, Kate Soper (UK: The Harvester Press, 1980) 83. Hereafter cited internally as *Two Lectures*.

'Truth' is to be understood as a system of ordered procedures for the production, regulation, distribution, circulation, and operation of statements.

Truth is linked in a circular relation with systems of power which produce and sustain it, and to effects of power which it induces and which extend it. A 'regime' of truth.

This regime is not merely ideological or super-structural; it was a condition of the formation and development of capitalism. (*Truth and Power* 133)

Comparatively, Bellow explains the arbitrary process of knowledge formation: "You announce what you are going to do. Then you do it. Then you publicize what you did. At last it becomes a fact. In lawyers' language, it's *res judicata*"²⁹ (*Heartbreak* 140).

The effects and functions of Bakhtinian centripetal and monologic forces are comparable to the function of what Foucault refers to as relations of domination and power. In the first volume of *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault contrasts the functions of the authoritarian relations of domination with those of the pluralistic and egalitarian relationships among the micro-powers, a relationship that can be "exercised from innumerable points, in the interplay of nonegalitarian and mobile relations".³⁰ Here, he argues that power must not be understood as institutions that subjugate and exercise power over another group but as "the multiplicity of force relations immanent in the sphere in which they operate and which constitutes their own organization; as the process which, through ceaseless struggles and confrontations, transforms, strengthens or reverses

²⁹ In Latin "res judicata" means "a matter [already] judged". In legal system it stands for a case which is no longer subject to appeal.

³⁰ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction*. Vol. I. 1976. (London: Penguin Books, 1990) 94. Hereafter cited internally as *History 1*.

them” (*History I* 92-93). In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault explains that relationships of domination are “univocal”³¹ whereas relationships between micro-powers are pluralistic (*Discipline* 27). Relationships of domination are in power because they claim to possess a form of knowledge. He explains that power is not a commodity to be possessed by a single authority figure; rather, it can be exercised by everyone. He also explains that since effects of power are interconnected with claims of knowledge, there is a chance for nearly every micro-power to exercise power positions. The way to exercise it is to claim a different form of knowledge or truth (*Discipline* 26-27). Therefore, it is the through interactions of power and domination that the discourse of truth-telling is presented as an unending process.

In Bellow’s novels, the operations of the authoritarian and monologic power structures are presented in the form of the dominant culture including, war, Jew-Gentile opposition, American materialism, and art culture. Such hegemonic cultural orders enforce certain commandments and demand specific confessional responses from the protagonist. In contrast to such external and one-sided mode of communication, there exists a more private space for Bellow’s protagonists wherein they communicate with themselves and with the public in their writing and meditative acts. This private space functions like a Foucauldian micro-power where the protagonist can communicate freely and resist the hegemony of that larger cultural structure mainly through his amazing sense of humour. It is a micro-power because it comes from below, the depth of their heart and soul and also from numerous places such as journal, letters, biographical writing, as well as meditations. It is pluralistic and polyphonic, for every single word is

³¹ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. Trans. Alan Sheridan. (New York: Vintage Books, 1995) 27. Hereafter cited internally as *Discipline*.

charged with multiple meanings and intonations when considered in its dialogic interactions with other words, expressions, sentences, and texts.

Apart from comparative analysis, I will use close reading as the methodology to examine the novels of Bellow. In doing so, I will be looking for the gradual development of the discourse of confession in his key novels, exploring the presentation of the metaphor of writing and character relationships. I will explore, for instance, how the protagonists' discourse and "technology of the self"³² enter the sphere of dialogic interactions in Bellow's novels and contribute to the creation of meaning.

Combining the narrative theory of dialogic confession as developed by Bakhtin with the social theory of confession introduced by Foucault, I will develop a narrative and social theory of confession in order to read the novels of Bellow. This original narrative-social theory of confession accounts for the argument that in Bellow's novels the discourse of confession is influenced by the dominant power structures and is generative of various styles of confession. The discourse of confession is studied not in isolation but in its constant relationship with cultural exigencies.

In doing so, I will undertake a chronological study of selected novels of Bellow, tracing the development of the discourse of confession from one style to another. As I examine specifically chosen novels of Bellow decade by decade, I will consider how the discourse of dialogic confession is influenced in parts by cultural changes as well as the Bellovian developmental, confessional model of paired-character dialogues. Bellow's protagonist-intellectuals are situated in these novels in various cultural circumstances from war-culture in his first novel to the culture of post-war anti-Semitism, rationalism,

³² See Michel Foucault "Technologies of the Self," *Technologies of the Self: A Seminar With Michel Foucault*. Ed. Luther. H. Martin, Huck Gutman, and Patrick H. Hutton. London: Tavistock, 1988.

and materialist culture in the later selected works. As part of the cultural study of confessional discourse, I will examine in selected novels the nature of the relationship and the possibility of the development in the relationship between the protagonist and environment. Alongside this cultural study, what is also significant for my work is the analysis of the development of Bellow's protagonists from a common man in his earlier novels into intellectuals and academics like Herzog, Humboldt, Charlie, Chick, and Ravelstein who develop in their perception of reality and unreality and perhaps more evidently in their reciprocal confessional responses within more private contexts. In doing so, this study takes into consideration both public and private spaces as two significant areas in which the confessional discourse can not only be practiced but also evolved. However, I have selected for investigation certain novels in which Bellow's special confessional mode of paired-character dialogue is illustrated best with philosophical depth; in detailed, reciprocal, and analytical style; and explored over a long period of the characters' intellectual friendship so that the study illustrates best the gradual development in each protagonist towards a more polyphonic perception of reality as a direct result of having sustained dialogic confessional relationship with another character who is also his close friend in the novel. Therefore, in this confessional study, I have selected for study the fictional texts of Bellow which give more opportunity for truth to develop over time through dialogic narrative technique.

Therefore, for instance, I have not included novels such as *The Adventures of Augie March*, *Henderson the Rain King* and *Mr. Sammler's Planet* in which brief or multiple confessional moments are integral to the novel's reality. *The Adventures of Augie March* seems to be more a novel of adventure than a novel of philosophical depth. Moreover,

rather than presenting a unique, focused, and mutual confessional relationship with a close friend, which is significant for this study, Augie's memoir presents his multiple confessional relationships with numerous characters, including his grandmother Lausch, his brother Simon, Clem Tambow, and Robey as well as a number of Augie's girl friends, including Mimi, Thea, and Stella. Moreover, the development in Augie's character throughout his life and as illustrated in the novel is not the direct result of having one sustained, mutual, and developing confessional relationship with one special character confidant. Likewise, the singular dialogue that takes place in one scene between King Dahfu and Henderson in *Henderson the Rain King* is an earlier example of Bellovian philosophical confessional dialogue between two people as equals and friends; however, this confessional friendship does not happen between two intellectuals; it is not extensively dealt with; and is not given the chance to develop over their life span. *Mr. Sammler's Planet*, on the other hand, includes an example of an intellectual confessional dialogue between Mr. Artur Sammler and Professor V. Govinda Lal; yet, the communication between the two does not evolve and grow over time. Therefore, the idea of change in character as a result of mutual confessional interaction between them is not fully explored in this novel.

I have not included *The Dean's December* in this study because even if in its essence the novel presents an in-depth analysis of the problems of extremely authoritarian truth and power relationships within the contexts of Eastern European Communism as well as Black and White oppositions in America, it does not illustrate the dialogic style of the particular character-double relationship, which is significant for selection in this study, as its main confessional narrative technique. *The Dean's December* has an

intellectual and academic as its protagonist, however, the confessional design of the novel is hardly based on the dialogic model of the conversation between two central characters. Instead, the novel's confessional design is based upon the special style of double-voiced discourse that Bakhtin introduces as "hidden dialogue", an "active type" of double-voiced discourse that presents "the reflected discourse of another" (Dostoevsky 199). In *The Dean's December*, hidden dialogues create numerous embedded arguments mostly within the narrative voice which are indicated throughout the novel by punctuation marks such as brackets, commas, and dashes. An example of such hidden and polemic confessions can be found in the novel's opening sentence: "Corde, who led the life of an executive in America—wasn't a college dean a kind of executive?—found himself six or seven thousand miles from his base [...]" (1). Such hidden arguments and private communications create various effects in the novel, including criticism, humour, and satire. Critical tone is more evident when the narrative voice argues: "You could say nothing publicly, not if you expected to be taken seriously, without the right clearance" (301). On the other hand, a more seriocomic style of criticism is presented in private statements of the narrative voice such as: "The cities decayed. The professors couldn't have prevented that, but they could have told us (as the Dean himself somewhat wildly tried to do) what the human meaning of this decay was and what it argued for civilization" (302-303). The novel's third-person narrative voice remains argumentative and polemical throughout the novel, a distinctive technique that focalizes the protagonist, criticizes him while giving voice to his possible criticisms.

More Die of Heartbreak, on the other hand, is more similar to *Humboldt's Gift* and *Ravelstein* in its confessional design: an intellectual narrator-confessor who is also the

protagonist's close friend makes confessions for himself and for the other person. The novel illustrates the close friendship between Kenneth the narrator and his Uncle Benn over years; however, the novel is not included in this study because it emphasizes the detrimental effects of Capitalism on human relationships more than it studies the development of Ken and Benn's special connection. The special bond between Ken and Uncle Benn is damaged when Ken realizes that his uncle has betrayed their friendship and has secretly planned a marriage. The way their bond of friendship is weakened is comparable to how the connection between Humboldt and Charlie Citrine is destroyed when Humboldt betrays their blood-brother pact. However, unlike *Humboldt's Gift*, *More Die of Heartbreak* is more concerned with how capitalism and its ideology are responsible for the protagonists' miscommunication without emphasizing how their mutual connection could overcome the limitations of the external world. The fact that Ken is critical of Uncle Benn's unexpected marriage to Matilda is not so much because Uncle Benn had kept the information from him and had betrayed his trust as it is because his uncle's choice of marriage is based on the capitalist's standards of overvaluation of money rather than love. Moreover, unlike the confessional relationship between Humboldt and Charlie in *Humboldt's Gift* and Chick and Ravelstein in *Ravelstein*, the dialogic relationship between Kenneth and Uncle Benn in this novel is not fully reciprocal.³³ Their comparatively unidirectional relationship might be part of the reason that Kenneth cannot influence Uncle Benn's critical decision making about marriage and cannot eventually restore order to his eventual, tragic disorder. Additionally, Kenneth has

³³ One might also argue that the dialogical relationship in *Herzog* is not fully reciprocal; however, Herzog assertively communicates with himself, the external world as well as the intrusive narrative voice in his reflections, pauses, and letter writings. His perpetual, meticulous, and critical personal communications might explain why, unlike Uncle Benn in *More Die of Heartbreak*, Herzog eventually arrives at a more polyphonic perception of reality and can forgive himself, Madeline, and Gersbach at the end.

more than one focused confidant in the novel: Uncle Benn, his own mother-in-law, and his friend Dita Schwartz; and these compounded, multiple dialogic relationships give further reason for not including this novel in my study.

Confessional discourse exists at the heart of Bellow's *A Theft* and is integral to the novella's eventual dramatic revelation. However, instead of one focused and lasting dialogic confessional relationship, which is important for this study, the novella, like *The Adventures of Augie March*, presents multiple dialogic relationships between the protagonist and a number of other characters. For most of the narrative, confession takes place between the protagonist Clara Velde and her close friend Laura Wong. However, based on certain emotional considerations, Clara chooses not to confide in Laura any more and turns to Ithiel as her confidant. Apart from transitions from one character confidant to another, the novella is not included in this study because its confessional dialogues are more unidirectional rather than reciprocal.

Even if these novels are not included in this dialogic confessional study, it does not mean that they are not part of the overall progression in Bellow's oeuvre from earlier monologic style of confession towards a more polyphonic one in his later fiction. In fact, these novels have polyphonic qualities in their essence as well as structure, however, for reasons including word limit, I have selected to analyse the texts in which Bellow presents a more reciprocal, influential, and developing confessional connection between the protagonist and his character double.

Chapter 2

Narrative Confession: A Theory

2. 1. Introduction: Bellow-Dostoevsky-Bakhtin Connections

Developing a theory of narrative confession that informs the novels of Saul Bellow is the primary purpose of this chapter. The theory accounts for the argument that the discourse of truth-telling in Bellow's oeuvre develops in the form of a process during which the role of the confessor, at cultural, narrative, and inter-personal levels, advances from an authoritarian figure in the early short novels into a more pastoral power figure in the novels of his mature period and eventually into a more creative one in the later novels, while the discourse of truth-telling progresses from the earlier conservative style into polyphonic, subversive, and aesthetic forms accordingly. Although one confessional style at a time dominates Bellow's writing, various other styles of confession coexist in different proportions throughout. Depending on the existence or non-existence of an authoritarian and pastoral subject-object relationship between the confessant and the confessor, these confessional forms differ in their functions and effects. Whenever the voice of the Bellow protagonist is being subjected to the voice of his confessor, a rather subjective form of monophonic confession is produced. Conversely, when Bellow's confessants objectify the voice of their confessors, the discourse of confession becomes

subject relationship between the two people in conversation, mostly within the narrative voice, whereby more than one voice is heard. Polyphonic confession occurs in *Seize the Day* and *Herzog*. Finally, aesthetic confession is epitomized as a form of truth-telling in which Bellow's heroes establish a creative relationship between themselves and another, either in their reflections—as in *The Victim*, *Seize the Day*, and *Humboldt's Gift*—or in their writings: journal writing in *Dangling Man*, letter writing in *Herzog*, and biographical writing in *Ravelstein*. In order to formulate the theory of narrative confession that accounts for the stylistics as well as the development of the confessional discourse in Bellow's novels, I will employ the theories of dialogic confession developed by Mikhail Bakhtin. Bakhtin's dialogism is a pertinent and valuable theory through which one can read Bellow's novels, mainly because there is an essential connection between their writings, especially in the way they treat the discourse of confession. This undeniable affinity in their writings is possibly because both Bellow and Bakhtin were inspired by the fiction of Fyodor Dostoevsky (1821-1881).

As Bellow's biographer James Atlas notes, the novels of Dostoevsky provided the material not only for Bellow's teachings but also for the development of his social and literary models. In his classes (Atlas 304) and in team teaching with Allan Bloom in Hyde Park, Bellow taught Dostoevsky (Atlas 532). As Atlas notes,

The Bloom/Bellow partnership was already legendary in Hyde Park. The literature course they team-taught drew crowds. Standing together before a rapt audience in the Social Sciences Building auditorium, they worked their way thorough Proust and Celine, Flaubert and Dickens, Gide and Joyce, and

The Brothers Manischewitz (as they called *The Brothers Karamazov*). (Atlas 531-532)

In addition, Bellow developed the social model of his characters based on Dostoevsky heroes. He was “a great believer in the essential self” (Atlas 73), and from Dostoevsky he took the idea of “the spontaneous and robust human nature” (Atlas 73), the features which he developed in the innermost confessions of his most memorable heroes. The soul of the character is what is essential for Bellow and if he values the change in character it is always an inner change, a change of heart and soul as he argues in *More Die of Heartbreak* (251).

Likewise, it is inner personality which Bakhtin values most in Dostoevsky. He calls the realism that deals with the inner personality, realism “in a higher sense,” and confession is genuine only when it reveals the “man in man” (*Dostoevsky* 251-252). If there is an essential element that connects the writings of Dostoevsky, Bakhtin and Bellow, it is this particular approach towards inner identity and genuine confession. Bellow understands genuine confession as Dostoevsky had seen it. In his article “The French As Dostoevsky Saw Them” (1955), published in *It All Adds Up*, Bellow writes: “Let us come forward as we are” Dostoevsky is forever saying “in our native crudity. No disguises”.³⁴ For Bakhtin, as evidently for Bellow and Dostoevsky, truth is generated in communication. Bakhtin believes that the ideal truth is the one that is produced ‘between’ individuals, in dialogue and in dialogic interactions between them, as documented in an interview with Vadim Kozhinov, a student who visited Bakhtin in exile:

³⁴ Saul Bellow, “The French As Dostoevsky Saw Them.” (1955). *It All Adds Up: From the Dim Past to the Uncertain Future: A Non-Fiction Collection* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1994) 44. Hereafter cited internally as *French*.

What Bakhtin often used to call the ‘philosophy of dialogue’ lay at the basis of all his literary-critical works: all of life is a dialogue, a dialogue between person and person, person and nature, person and God [...] Even simply the very existence of a person, if you like, is also a ‘dialogue’, the exchange of substances between the person and the surrounding environment. And in this regard Bakhtin several times repeated the phrase that, as it were, objective idealism maintains that the kingdom of God is outside us, and Tolstoy, for example, insists that it is ‘within us’, but I think that the kingdom of God is between us, between me and you, between me and God, between me and nature: that’s where the kingdom of God is. (Kozhinov 114-15)³⁵

Dangling Man has undeniable affinities with Dostoevsky’s *Notes from Underground* (Atlas 97). Ellen Pifer³⁶ and Daniel Fuchs³⁷ note that Bellow’s employment of the double is an evident influence of Dostoevsky. The original title was “Notes of a Dangling Man” (Atlas 85). Apart from the title, as Atlas documents, “the dialogue that Joseph carries on with an inner voice called the Spirit of Alternatives—also known as “On the Other Hand” and “Tu As Raison Aussi”—is a variation on the self-interrogation that Dostoevsky’s *Underground Man* conducts in his wretched room” (Atlas 97). Perhaps more than anything else “it is Dostoevsky’s insight into and criticism of the modern zeal for ‘rationalistic solutions’ that has influenced Bellow’s own development as a writer” (Pifer 31). In addition, there is yet another source which has a pervasive effect on Bellow,

³⁵ See Ruth Coates, *Christianity in Bakhtin: God and the Exiled Author*, 8 Aug. 2005. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press) 8. <books.google.co.uk>. Path: Christianity in Bakhtin.

³⁶ Ellen Pifer, *Saul Bellow: Against the Grain* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991) 31.

³⁷ Daniel Fuchs, “Saul Bellow and the Example of Dostoevsky.” *Modern Critical Views: Saul Bellow*. Ed. and Intro. Harold Bloom (New York, New Haven, Philadelphia: Chelsea House Publishers, 1986) 40-41. Hereafter cited internally as *Example*.

that is, the ideological comedy found in *Notes from Underground* and *Crime and Punishment* (1866) (Example 214). Characteristic of Dostoevsky, as Fuchs points out, is “to scorn ‘advanced’ ideas, to characterize them as utopian schemes, masking the self-interest of the idea-monger” (Example 215).

In its plotting and characterization, Bellow’s *The Victim* has great affinities with Dostoevsky’s *The Double* (1846) and *The Eternal Husband* (1870) (Glenday 27). Pifer notes that Bellow employs Dostoevsky’s device for “heightening the sense of mystery: he deliberately blurs the boundary between his characters’ waking and dreaming state of consciousness” (47). Atlas remarks that “Bellow made no secret of the fact that he had been influenced by *The Eternal Husband* but denied that his borrowing of the plot was conscious—it was typical of him to both acknowledge and deny his sources” (Atlas 125 n). However, Atlas insists that in this case the borrowing is overt:

Alex Velchaninov, like Leventhal, is haunted by a double, Trusotsky, who tries to corrupt him. Both books feature the appearance of a dreamlike figure who comes to the door on a hot summer night in the city. And there are other striking congruences: Trusotsky, like Allbee, is a widower still in mourning for his wife; in both novels, a young child dies; and both culminate in a violent struggle between the hero and his oppressor, followed by a reconciliation. Only when Leventhal and Velchaninov come to recognize their affinities with their doubles and experience their sufferings firsthand are they finally liberated from the shadows of the obtrusive others. (Atlas 125, n)

Alfred Kazin likewise finds the book “amazing in its completely authentic and *personal* recreation of Dostoevsky” (Atlas 130).

The significance of the fiction of Dostoevsky for this study is that it links the novels of Bellow with the theories of Bakhtin on confession. Comparing the novels of Bellow with the theories of Bakhtin, this study argues that Bellow's novels signify a further development in the discourse of confession. The narratives of Bellow's fictions devote more space to the presentation of humour whereby the confessional discourse is endowed with new insights: the subversive and the aesthetic. In order to account for these new dimensions, I therefore refer to the theories of Foucault on confession, especially to his argument on transgressive and aesthetic acts.

In what follows, I will concentrate the discussion on the key confessional concepts and the major modes of confession. The confessional concepts that are examined are confession, voice, style, authority, humour, and border; and the confessional modes that chronologically appear in Bellow's key novels are conservative, polyphonic, carnivalesque, and aesthetic.

2. 2. Key Confessional Concepts

2. 2. 1. Confession

Discourse in general and confessional discourse in particular seems to have both surface and deep structures. As far as confessional discourse is concerned, one's desired truth is secured within the deep structure, whereas surface structure gives voice to the authorized truth. Whenever desired and authorized truth become one, confession becomes monophonic, which is the case with Saint Augustine of Hippo's (354-430) *Confessions* (c. 397). Augustine addresses his confessions to God, acknowledging his total dependence on and subordination to the divine power. He opens his *Confessions* with:

‘You are great, Lord, and highly to be praised (Ps.47:2): great is your power and your wisdom is immeasurable’ (Ps.146:5). Man, a little piece of your creation, desires to praise you, a human being ‘bearing his mortality with him’ (2 Cor. 4: 10), carrying with him the witness of his sins and the witness that you ‘resist the proud’ (1 Pet. 5: 5). (Augustine 3)

The *Confessions* sounds monophonic for all its unidirectional discourse and theme. The book was written about thirteen years after Augustine’s conversion to Christianity, and as Augustine knew that people still recall “how combative he had been against the Catholic Church before his conversion,” he also addressed his words to his fellow-Christians as well as his critics (Chadwick ix, xi-xii). However, despite its multiple audience, Augustine’s confessions seek one purpose, which is basically self-justification for his conversion to Christianity.

The confessional narrative seems to have developed historically from the earlier religious form as presented in the *Confessions* of Saint Augustine into the romantic style as in the *Confessions* of Jean–Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778) and subsequently into the novels of trial and justice as developed in the genre of detective fiction. Narrative confession or confessional self-accounting, as Bakhtin notes, first entered literature with the *Confessions* of Augustine, in which the first-person narrative voice is the penitent who directly acknowledges his sins in writing in the hope of being forgiven by God and with the purpose of glorifying his Divine presence. Bakhtin sees Augustine’s confessions as forms of “consolations” that are mainly “constructed in the form of a dialogue with

Philosophy the Consoler".³⁸ Augustine introduces "a new form for relating to one's self" which, in his words, can be described as 'Soliloquia', that is, the "solitary conversations with oneself" (*Forms* 145). Huck Gutman considers Augustine's *Confessions* as spiritual autobiography: "Augustine lays before his readers the chronicle of his spiritual waywardness and his eventual turn toward the church and the service of God" (Gutman 102). The subject matter of Augustine's confessions—identifying sin with sex—continues to influence Western Literature (Chadwick xviii).

In contrast to the confessions of Augustine, Rousseau's *Confessions* are more secular rather than religious (Gutman 103). Gutman explains that Rousseau's purpose is not to glorify God but first to "unburden himself of his shame" and secondly to "create a 'self' which can serve to define himself, to himself and to others, in the face of hostile social order" (Gutman 103). Gutman compares the confessions of Augustine with Rousseau's: "for Augustine, the self as exemplum is ancillary to discourse. For Rousseau, the self is the subject of the discourse" (Gutman 104). Gutman considers Rousseau's confessions as revolutionary because his age was the Age of Reason, and Rousseau was the one who rebelled "against the overvaluation of reason by asserting the claims of emotion" (Gutman 107). Rousseau wrote a Romantic version of the genre based on the distinction made between public and private confessions. Barbara F. Howard explains that the public form of confession presented in Rousseau's novel shows that "there is an irreconcilable rift between form and substance (17). Contrary to the attitude of submission to one unifying force and the dependence of the confessant upon the superior confessor that runs throughout Augustine's *Confessions*, Rousseau introduces the idea of

³⁸ Mikhail Bakhtin, "Forms of Time and Chronotope in the Novel." *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays* (1929). Trans. Caryl Emerson and M. Holquist. Ed. Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990) 144. Hereafter cited internally as *Forms*.

singularity and independence for the speaker in confession. He opens his confession with: “I have resolved on an enterprise which has no precedent, and which, once completed, will have no imitator” (Rousseau 17). Unlike Augustine, Rousseau addresses his public confessions not to God but to his reader:

Before I go further I must present my reader with an apology, or rather a justification, for the petty details I have just been entering into, and for those I shall enter into later, none of which may appear interesting in his eyes. Since I have undertaken to reveal myself absolutely to the public, nothing about me must remain hidden or obscure. I must remain incessantly beneath his gaze, so that he may follow me in all the extravagances of my heart and into every least corner of my life (65).

However, despite Rousseau’s insistence on his singularity of style, what his writing shares with Augustine’s confession is its monophonic mode of truth-telling. Foucault seems to hold similar views. Analyzing Rousseau’s *Dialogues*, Foucault notes that “these are anti-Confessions. And they come as if from the latter’s arrested monologue, from a surge of language that breaks forth from having encountered an obscure barrier” (*Aesthetics* 33). The source of Rousseau’s monophonic style may be found in his belief in the essential self. He writes: “My purpose is to display to my kind a portrait in every way true to nature, and the man I shall portray will be myself” (Rousseau 17). However, the striking difference is that whereas for Rousseau and Augustine truth exists anterior to discourse, for Bellow truth is generated during the process of confessional writings and meditations. Furthermore, the subject matter of confession in Bellow’s novels is not so much connected with sinful sexuality, as it is for Augustine, or minor crimes, as in

Rousseau's confessions; rather it is mainly about the sin of allowing oneself to be defined by external forces.

Comparing the confessions of Rousseau with the confessions of Dostoevsky's *Underground Man*, Howard maintains that the discourse of the *Underground Man* is ironically very similar to the Rousseauesque model of confession he attacks. The *Underground Man* criticizes Rousseau's *Confessions*, arguing that since the confessing voice in Rousseau's confessions addresses the public in the court, its essence does not follow the form of confession; whereas his own confessions produce a comparatively authentic truth. However, like Rousseau's confessing voice, the speech of the *Underground Man* is replete with "the temptation to conceal with rhetoric what he purports to reveal" (Howard 18). Both confessional novels present the relationship of author with reader as defendant to judge; however, whereas Rousseau addresses the audience in the court, the *Underground Man* addresses his public audience in writing (Howard 20). Compared to spontaneous, auricular, and meditative styles of confession, written confessions have the advantage of being more secure, reflective and developmental, giving the confessant the chance to review and modify the words. On the other hand, such confessions are fixed in time in the sense that they are signed, documented, and embodied in written form.

Bakhtin compares Rousseau's confessions with the confessions of Johann Wolfgang Von Goethe (1749-1832), which are based on "an evolving sequence".³⁹ As such, Goethe perceives "all existing contradictions as various stages of some unified

³⁹ Emerson and Holquist, "Notes". *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*. Mikhail Bakhtin. Trans. by Vern. McGee. Ed. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986). Note 15.p. 57. Hereafter cited internally as *Speech Notes*.

development; in every manifestation of the present, he strives to glimpse a trace of past, a peak of the present-day or a tendency of the future; and as a consequence, nothing for him is arranged along a single extensive plane" (*Speech Notes* 57, n 15).

After the Romantic Movement, confession became dominant in novels of trial and ordeal, as in the novels of Dostoevsky. In *Crime and Punishment*, for instance, Raskolnikov acknowledges having murdered the old woman, and in *Brothers Karamazov*, Ivan confesses his patricidal intentions. However, Dostoevsky introduces a new style for confessional writing. Bakhtin writes:

After Dostoevsky's confessions "by others," the old genre of confession became in essence impossible. Also no longer possible were the naively direct aspect of confession, its rhetorical element, its generally conventional element (with all the traditional devices and stylistic forms). Also no longer possible was a direct relationship to the self in confession (from self-love to self-denial). The role of the other person was revealed, in whose sole light could any word about oneself be constructed. (*Reworking* 288-289)

It is therefore not surprising that Bellow's confessional narrative does not entirely conform to the conventions of confession. In fact, as H. Porter Abbott suggests, even though Bellow adopts the European genre of diary fiction, he disobeys the rules that Sartre launched in *Nausea*: "whereas Sartre's hero bravely shoulders the burden of nothingness, Joseph in *Dangling Man* resists it right up to the end" (Abbott 165). Abbott explains that Joseph is

abandoning literary formality, the mandarin correctness and smooth polish of craft that are very much a part of stoic mode, and instead is adopting the

European tradition of intimate diary, a necessary informal genre, adaptable to the spontaneous expressions of the inner self. (Abbott 163)

Bellow has introduced a distinctive literary voice into American literature (Atlas 93). "After Hemingway," as Alan Cheuse notes, "no writer did more to enliven and transform the American literary sentence, stirring mind and feelings, ideas and action, the premeditated and the unconscious, in a spicy mix of high and low speech" (Cheuse par 2). Appropriating the European genre of diary fiction together with American stoicism, Bellow develops an idiosyncratic style of novelistic confession, the visionary confession. Bellow's distinctive style of confession differs from Rousseauesque expressionism in that unlike Rousseau, Bellow does not believe in the existence of the essential self, that the self is entirely given to us, and that the individual's only responsibility in confession is to articulate the pre-existent truth. Instead, Bellow seems to have developed in his novels the idea of the self in constant flux, flexibility, and progression. In writing *Dangling Man*, Bellow took possession of the genre of the journal rather than simply adopting it from Sartre. What Bellow disliked in Sartre was, as Abbott explains, a readiness

to tell people who they are, and on more than one occasion, he has not only told the Jews who they are but has gone on to tell them how they should therefore behave as Jews. Bellow's anxiety on this score is as acute as it is when critics attempt to classify him as a Jewish novelist. His repudiation of labels is similar to Geronimo's refusal to have his picture taken. The fixity of the classification, like that of the photograph, obscures the originality that is so essential to Bellow's own sense of self.⁴⁰

⁴⁰ H. Porter Abbott. "Saul Bellow and the Return to Character." *Diary Fiction: Writing as Action*. (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1984) 172. Hereafter cited internally as *Diary*.

Bellow's intellectualized "mid-Atlantic" (Abbott 165) version of confessional discourse is particularly known by its open-endedness, unfinalizability, and multi-voicedness. As Abbott explains, they are open-ended for "though it appears to conclude, to end with a certain finality, Bellow in fact takes no position in its final pages" (165). Although Bellow has dismissively referred to *Dangling Man* and *The Victim* as his MA and PhD respectively, the hurdles necessary to jump over before he could find his own literary voice (Abbott 159), his critics praise these novels as the novels by which Bellow "announced his presence in the American literary scene by importing the latest version of an ultra-sophisticated, introverted, intellectual European genre, the diary novel (Abbott 159). Michael Glenday, likewise, believes that although as a PhD Bellow's *The Victim* lacks originality because of its indebtedness to Dostoevsky's *The Double* and *The Eternal Husband*, the influence of Dostoevsky "does not diminish the striking dramatic achievement of this novel" (27). The novels of Bellow seem to share some stylistic features with the novels of Dostoevsky, more than the works of any other novelists, and as such it seems that Bakhtin's reading of Dostoevsky might shed light on the narrative qualities of Bellow's confessional techniques.

Bakhtin addresses the problems of confession as an artistic activity in his two early philosophical books: *Towards the Philosophy of the Act* (1919-1921) and *Art and Answerability* (1920-1923). In these texts, he argues that aesthetic activity produces a universal form of truth whereas confession generates the singular truth of a unique individual. Aesthetic activity isolates, closes, and finalises, Bakhtin argues: "Art produces certain isolation by the sole fact that it is art".⁴¹ Confession, on the other hand,

⁴¹ Mikhail Bakhtin, "Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity." *Art and Answerability: Early Philosophical Essays* (1920-1923). Ed. Michael Holquist and Vadim Liapunov. Translation and notes by

acknowledges open-endedness, uniqueness, event-ness and singularity of the act (the unique truth). In his introduction to *Towards the Philosophy of the Act*, Michael Holquist writes that Bakhtin praises “the naked immediacy of experience as it is felt from within the utmost particularity of a specific life, the molten lava of events as they happen” (x). This is the case with the act of confession before it is hardened and finalized as an aesthetic whole. The relationship between truth and aesthetic activity might seem a bit ambiguous at first, but their connection and also their place in the discourse of confession is gradually made clearer throughout this chapter. Bakhtin privileges the uniqueness of the act of confession over the unified act of aesthetics:

The further individual uniqueness moves away from theoretical unity, the more concrete and full it becomes: the uniqueness of actually occurring being-as-event, in immediate proximity to which the answerable act or deed is set. Answerable inclusion in the acknowledged once-occurrent uniqueness of Being-as-event is precisely what constitutes the truth of the situation. (*Act* 39)

The authentic truth of every single event is different from the theoretically defined, solidified, and universal truth. Therefore, the problem with the aesthetic activity is that because it confines the flow of events and objectifies the ongoing processes by simply giving structure to them, it is “powerless to take possession of that moment of being which is constituted by the transitiveness and open event-ness of Being” (*Act* 1). Whereas Bakhtin emphasises the never-ending flow of the “event,” Derrida conceives the concept

of “event” as “something you are not prepared to experience”⁴². As life itself, confession is therefore an ongoing and development “event” and Bellow reflects this quality in his major novels. Bellow presents narrative confession as an open event, never reducing the process into a single confessional moment or encounter in his protagonists’ life. In this confessional study, I have therefore selected for study the fictional texts of Bellow which give more opportunity for truth to develop over time through dialogic narrative technique.

Daniel Fuchs emphasizes the evolving nature of truth in Bellow’s novels, reasoning that the modernist aesthetic which holds that “the judgments of form preceded judgments of meaning” does not exist in Bellow’s fiction (“Modern Tradition” 69). Bellow’s novels establish an aesthetic relationship between confession and truth, meaning that the discourse of confession does not merely reproduce the truth authorized by social and cultural standards; rather, it generates new orders of reality. It is possible that the truth generated in such an aesthetic, private, and creative act of confession contradicts the truth adhered to by social, cultural, and public inter-personal powers. This is because the value of the soul of individuals for Bellow is above and beyond the value of the ideology of their culture. Bellow’s presentation of the aesthetic is, therefore, “postmodern par excellence” for all its preference of the soul to idea (“Modern Tradition” 67). Bellow goes against the grain of modernism because “he eschews the thesis novel, one which proceeds because of an idea; this he considers ‘French’ (Gide, Sartre, Camus). Bellow sees his characters in their personal reality, sees them as selves, or better, souls, whose thought moves with the inevitability of an emotion” (“Modern Tradition” 67). Bellow is

⁴² Jacques Derrida, “Composing ‘Circumfessions’”. *Augustine and Postmodernism*. Ed. John D. Caputo and Michael J. Scanlon (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2005) 19. Hereafter cited internally as *Circumfession*.

always critical of the modernist visionarists' view that "man is finished" ("Modern Tradition" 76). His novels relate confession to the aesthetic in a particular way: "where the artist-hero sought isolation, the Bellow protagonist longs for community and ironic distance gives way to the nearness of confession" ("Modern Tradition" 74). However, the argument of Fuchs in this article does not account for Bellow's *Humboldt's Gift* and *Ravelstein*, since it was written in 1974, before these novels were published. Bellow's perception of the aesthetic seems to be more in harmony with Foucault's understanding of the aesthetic, that is, the presentation of the concept of beauty in the Hellenistic era. Later in this chapter, I will discuss this perception of the aesthetic in detail when I examine aesthetic confession as the last mode of confession fully emerging in Bellow's *Ravelstein*.

A significant concept inherent in confession and aesthetic is judgment. Bakhtin, however, distinguishes confession from aesthetics in terms of the place and the function of judgment in the two. He believes that "the other's aesthetic approach and justification is capable of penetrating into my axiological relationship to myself and clouding its purity (cf. my reputation among other people, the opinion of other people, fear of shame before other people, the favour of other people, etc)" (*Author and Hero* 142). Craig Brandist notes that the category of judgment entered Bakhtin's philosophical arguments from the German Marburg School, whereby Bakhtin sees the legal person as being the only one capable of bearing rights and obligations (*Circle* 16). As an act of judgment, confession therefore turns into an ethical discourse and responsible act only when the confessant becomes his own innermost judge and creates a discourse of truth-telling in which confession is constituted as a result of

a probative description of the world of a once-occurrent life-as-deed, from within the performed deed and on the basis of its non-alibi in Being [...] in the sense of an individual and once-occurrent accounting to oneself for one's own actions. (*Act 53*)

Therefore, confession as “moral orientation within once-occurrent being” is a unique event and a responsible act—which differs from aesthetic discernment, that Bakhtin defines as an act or deed from inside with “no way out into life”. Such an act “does not penetrate into the content,” “does not turn into a confession, and if it does, it ceases to be an aesthetic thing” (*Act 14*). Bakhtin argues that the individual's unique place in life “is given, yet at the same time it exists only to the extent to which it is really actualized by me as uniqueness—it is always in the act, in the performed deed, i.e., is yet to be achieved” (*Act 41*). It is this uniqueness of confessional experience that turns it into a responsible act. What matters in confession is “not the content of an obligation that obliges me, but my signature below it – the fact that at one time I acknowledged or undersigned the given acknowledgment” (*Act 38*). Ethical concepts such as judgment, signature, and responsibility in confession are essential themes in the confessional novels of Bellow. They are viewed from multiple converging points: the viewpoints of the self, the culture, and inter-personal otherness, elements that eventually meet within the narrative voice.

Bakhtin further draws attention to the importance of the architectonics of confession, that is, the hero's “axiological position in the event” of confession: “the spatial, temporal and meaning-governed wholes” (*Author and Hero 138*). As a form of self-objectification, pure confession is an “accounting rendered to oneself for one's own life,” an account that “excludes the *other* with his special, *privileged* approach whereby a

“pure relationship of the *I* to itself” is realized (*Author and Hero* 141). Contrasting the two types of truth, Bakhtin comments that: “It is an unfortunate misunderstanding (a legacy of rationalism) to think that truth [*pravada*]⁴³ can only be the truth [*stina*] that is composed of universal moments; that the truth of a situation is precisely that which is repeatable and constant in it” (*Act* 37). He emphasizes that

The truth about a man in the mouths of others, not directed to him dialogically and therefore a secondhand truth, becomes a lie degrading and deadening him, if it touches upon his ‘holy of holies,’ that is ‘the man in man’.⁴⁴

We see the degrading effects of such monophonic judgments in Herzog and Humboldt when they are called mad and dictator without having given the chance to explain their conditions. Later on in this chapter, I will explain that it is this finalistic perception of the truth that forms the basis for monologic confessions.

The kind of confession that Bakhtin celebrates is “confession as an accounting rendered to oneself for one’s own life” (*Author and Hero* 141), a form of *self-objectification* that excludes the “*other* with his special, privileged approach” (*Author and Hero* 141). What Bakhtin praises as ideal is pure confession:

Confession as a self-accounting comprises only that which I myself can say about myself [...] all moments transgredient to self-consciousness are excluded. In relation to these transgredient moments, that is, to the possible axiological consciousness of the other, confessional self-accounting assumes a negative attitude and contends against them for the purity of self-

⁴³ “Bakhtin uses two words to denote truth: *pravada* (derived from ‘right’, ‘just’, ‘true-to’) and *stina* (derived from ‘is’)” (*Act* 37).

⁴⁴ Mikhail Bakhtin, “The Hero in Dostoevsky Art.” *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics*. (1929). Ed and trans. Caryl Emerson. Intro. Wayne, C. Booth (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984) 59. Hereafter cited internally as *Hero*.

consciousness—for the purity of one’s solitary relationship to oneself. (*Author and Hero* 141-2)

However, there is a Bakhtinian ideal “other” in confessional self-accounting whom Bakhtin praises as the one who cares about the confessant and helps the individual to come into consciousness. Of this ideal other Bakhtin writes: “the mere fact that I bring it up at all for discussion, that is, the very fact of becoming conscious of myself in being, testifies in itself that I am not alone in my self-accounting, that someone is interested in me, that someone wants me to be good” (*Author and Hero* 144). This form of communication exists between Chick and Ravelstein wherein the role of Chick in relation to Ravelstein is comparable to the role of the ideal other that cares about the speaker. Of course, the earlier forms of ideal other and their caring relationship towards the protagonist existed earlier in Bellow’s character doubles in *Dangling Man* and *The Victim* and also in the polyphonic narrative voice in *Seize the Day* and *Herzog*.

However, part of the challenge to arrive at reality is, as Bakhtin explains, due to the fact that this transcendent moment of otherness is not guaranteed: “for a guarantee would reduce it to the level of present-on-hand being (at best anesthetized being, as in metaphysics)” (*Author and Hero* 144). Having said that, Bakhtin argues: “One can gain consciousness of oneself neither *under a guarantee* nor in a void [...] but only in *faith*” (*Author and Hero* 144) whereby the “entirely new tones, the tones of faith and hope, irrupt into the penitent and penitentiary tones of confessional self-accounting” (*Author and Hero* 144-45). Thus, following Hermann Cohen, Bakhtin develops the conception of “aesthetic love” (*Author and Hero* 86-90) which is “the free and unmotivated (that is disinterested) affirmation of the value of another,” the kind of ‘loving’ relationship of

'author' to 'hero' (Hirschkop 60). Bellow gradually develops this kind of relationship between author and hero in his novels: in the relationship of the polyphonic narrative voice to the protagonist, in the meditative relationship between Charlie and Humboldt, and more noticeably in *Ravelstein* in the relationship between Chick and Ravelstein as author and hero.

The question that needs to be addressed here is how polyphony relates to concepts such as coherence, unity, and ethics. In contrast to most eccentric, judgmental, and monophonic communications in which fear controls the truth of the situation, in Bakhtin's ideal case of polyphony, God is conceived as an ideal receiver of private confession whose love facilitates the production of the authentic innermost truth.⁴⁵ Inclusiveness of values as well as balanced relationship between the two subjects in conversation are two essential qualities of polyphony which make discourse sound harmonious and coordinate. In addition, Bakhtin values the role of the ethical categories of "faith," "responsibility," and "judgments" in making fearless and authentic confessions. If authentic confession generates a more inclusive version of truth, then one can argue that Bellow's protagonists, including Herzog, Charlie in *Humboldt's Gift*, and Chick in *Ravelstein*, are more authentic whenever they start to believe in the other person, initiate and take responsibility for their actions, and make more disinterested judgments.

Bakhtin's version of confession diverges from Scheler's. Bakhtin's confession after having given a lecture on Scheler is documented in an official interrogation:

⁴⁵ There is not enough biographical evidence to confirm whether Bakhtin had lived a religious life, but his literary life proves that he had constantly meditated on religious themes in his writings (Coates 8), that a philosophy of religion underlies his ethics and aesthetics (Bagshaw), and that "he derived his concept of dialogue from religion and aesthetics" (Hirschkop 41). The most reliable proof in this respect is the special understanding of confession that underlies nearly all of Bakhtin's arguments on a wide range of subjects from philosophy of religion to ethics, aesthetics, and even stylistics. For instance, "trust in God", for Bakhtin "is an essential constitutive moment of pure self-consciousness and self-expression" (*Hero* 144).

The first lecture was on confession. Confession according to Scheler is the revelation of one's self before an other which makes social ('word') that which has striven to its asocial and extra verbal border ('sin') and was an isolated, un-lived out foreign body in the inner life of the individual. The second lecture concerned resurrection. In brief, life is not resurrected for its own sake, but for the sake of the value which is revealed in it by love. (Poole 110)⁴⁶

Therefore, God becomes the transcendent other in confession, the source of love and support rather than fear (as the external other is). In Bellow's novels, this source of love is embodied in the functions of the confessor-heroes as the protagonists' ideal other. In Bellow's model of paired-character confessional relationships, love and trust gradually eradicates fear and creates the narrative space for the emergence of inclusive truth. In this approach, as in Bakhtin's words, remorse becomes "a principle that organizes and gives form to inner life—a principle of seeing and fixing life axiologically" (*Author and Hero* 141), meaning that one learns to view life in the light of certain values and value judgments.

However, Bakhtin agrees with Scheler that repentance is a value theory: "Repentance is the mighty power of self-regeneration of the moral world, whose decay it is constantly working to avert" (*Eternal* 55 qtd. in Bagshaw).⁴⁷ As such, Scheler

refutes current theories of repentance, characterized as Fear-theory (fear of the divine punishment) and the Revenge- theory (self-punishment as an act of

⁴⁶ See Brian Poole, "From Phenomenology to Dialogue: Max Scheler's Phenomenological Tradition and Mikhail Bakhtin's Development from 'Towards a Philosophy of the Act' to His Study of Dostoevsky" *Bakhtin and Cultural Theory*. Eds. Ken Hirschkop and David Shepherd. Second ed. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001) 109-135. qtd. in Bagshaw.

⁴⁷ Max Scheler, *On the Eternal in Man*. Trans. Bernard Nobel (London: SCM Press Ltd. 1960).

revenge upon oneself), and puts forward a much more positive conception of repentance as the neutralization of guilt and reassertion of the possibility of moral regeneration. (Bagshaw 194)

Both Bakhtin and Scheler believe that repentance is a way towards faith in God. As Scheler states, “Even if there were nothing else in the world from which we might create the idea of God, Repentance alone could draw our attention to God’s existence” (*Eternal* 61, qtd. in Bagshaw 194). In Bellow’s novels, likewise, acts of repentance function to help the protagonist approach his ideal goodness through making personal confessions. Bakhtin declares:

pure, solitary self-accounting is impossible; the nearer a self accounting comes to this ultimate limit, the clearer becomes the other ultimate limit [...] the deeper the solitude with oneself [...] and consequently the deeper the repentance and the passing-beyond-oneself, the clearer and more essential is one’s referredness to God. (*Author and Hero* 144)

However, the process of achieving the state of ideal goodness for Bellow’s heroes does not stop with acts of repentance. There are times when protagonists realize that they need to take control of realities by making monophonic, negative confessions against authorial figures in order to modify and improve circumstances. In other words, they manage the truth’s deep and surface structures by making polyphonic as well as monophonic confessions.

2.2.2. Voice

Narrative confession can be practised in polyphonic as well as monophonic voice. Bakhtin introduces two different voices in the novel's narrative discourse: monophonic and polyphonic voices. He celebrates Dostoevsky as the creator of the polyphonic novel,⁴⁸ contrasting his novels with the monologic novels of Tolstoy. Arguing that polyphony functions like the aesthetics of democracy, Bakhtin explains that "Dostoevsky, like Goethe's Prometheus, creates not voiceless slaves (as does Zeus), but free people, capable of standing alongside their creator, capable of not agreeing with him and even of rebelling against him" (*Polyphonic* 6). Bakhtin defines polyphony as: "A plurality of independent and unmerged voices and consciousnesses, a genuine polyphony of fully valid voices is in fact the chief characteristic of Dostoevsky's novels" (*Polyphonic* 6). By contrast, an ordinary monologic novel, Bakhtin explains, "always and ultimately contains at heart only a single accent" (*Polyphonic* 25); therefore, he calls such novels homophonic (*Polyphonic* 8). Bakhtin argues that in the monologic novels of Tolstoy "the interaction of several unmerged consciousness was replaced by an interrelationship of ideas, thoughts, and attitudes gravitating toward a single consciousness" (*Polyphonic* 9). In contrast to authoritative monologic designs, polyphonic relations are liberal and internally persuasive; as Bakhtin argues, they impose no finalizing truth on the hero:

the 'truth' at which the hero must and indeed ultimately does arrive through clarifying the events to himself, can essentially be for Dostoevsky only *the truth of the hero's own consciousness*. It cannot be neutral toward his self-consciousness. In the mouth of another person, a word or a definition identical

⁴⁸ Mikhail Bakhtin, "Dostoevsky's Polyphonic Novel and Its Treatment in Critical Literature." *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*. 1929. Ed and trans. Caryl Emerson. Intro. Wayne, C. Booth (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984) 7. Hereafter cited internally as *Polyphonic*.

in content would take on another meaning and tone, and would no longer be the truth. Only in the form of a confessional self-utterance . . . could the final word about a person be given, a word truly adequate to him. (*Hero* 55-56)

Bakhtin contrasts “the internally persuasive truth” with “authoritarian truth”. Unlike the imposed authoritarian truth, “the internally persuasive truth” is “one’s own word” and is “decisively significant in the evolution of an individual consciousness” (*Discourse* 345). It is gradually and slowly wrought out of others’ words that have been acknowledged and assimilated, and the boundaries between the two are at first scarcely perceptible” (*Discourse* n. 31, p. 345). This internally persuasive word is hybrid: it is “half-ours and half-someone else’s” (345). It is creative, “awakens new and independent words,” “organizes masses of our words from within and does not remain in an isolated and static condition” (345). It enters into “an intense interaction, a *struggle* with other internally persuasive discourses. Our ideological development is just such an intense struggle within us for hegemony among various available verbal and ideological points of view, approaches, directions and values” (*Discourse* 346). Bellow’s novels present such power struggles mostly in the form of dialogic relationship among words and expressions. In this way, the novels’ overall semantic structure is left not finite but open to multiple interpretations. However, as Bakhtin notes, when one’s own discourse assimilates other’s discourse, another person’s discourse no longer performs “as information, directions, rules, models, and so forth—but strives rather to determine the very bases of our ideological interrelations with the world, the very basis of our behaviour; it performs here as *authoritative discourse*, and an *internally persuasive discourse*” (*Discourse* 342). The truth of the assimilative self therefore sounds

monophonic as it hardly makes distinctions between the voices of the self and another person.

2.2.3. Style

“Truth should have some style” (*Dean* 226).

Depending on the degrees of objectification, Bakhtin introduces three major styles of discourse, from the most monologic to the most polyphonic style. The most monologic discourse is the most objectified type of discourse presented as “direct, unmediated discourse directed exclusively towards its referential object, as an expression of the speaker’s ultimate semantic authority”.⁴⁹ In this kind of author-hero or self-other relationship, the hero is objectified by the author and has the minimum possible freedom in discourse. This is the least democratic artistic design. The author is the sole speaker and has the most silencing power over the hero. The amount of genuine confessional discourse here is minimal. Bellow’s novels are not written in monologic design, but they contain examples of monologic communication between the protagonist and their solid authority figures, for instance between Joseph in *Dangling Man* and the unfeeling social powers that he calls the hardboiled. The second type of style defined by Bakhtin is “objectified discourse”, which represents the discourse of the hero. It varies in degrees of objectification; therefore, the hero might possess individuality, distinct from that of the author (*Dostoevsky* 199). Confession as such might be able to release more glimpses of the personal truth of the hero. Examples of this form of communication are presented in the writings of the protagonists. In the third category, which represents the most

⁴⁹ Mikhail Bakhtin, “Discourse in Dostoevsky.” *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics* (1929). Ed and trans. Caryl Emerson. Introduction by Wayne, C. Booth (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984) 199. Hereafter cited internally *Dostoevsky*.

polyphonic type of discourse, Bakhtin incorporates “discourse with an orientation towards someone else’s discourse (double-voiced discourse)”. Double-voiced or polyphonic discourse, in Bakhtin’s words, “expresses simultaneously two different intentions: the direct intention of the character who is speaking, and the refracted intention of the author” (*Discourse* 324-5).

Within this third category, Bakhtin outlines a detailed description of three types of double-voiced discourse: “unidirectional,” “vari-directional,” and “the active type (reflected discourse of another)”. Bakhtin provides examples of each type of discourse. Of the unidirectional double-voiced discourse, he includes “narrator’s narration,” which is a good example of the reduction of objectification and a movement towards a fusion of voices. Bellow’s *The Victim* and *Humboldt’s Gift* are written in this form of narration. In these novels, the narrator’s third-person voice is distinct from the voice of the hero, yet the protagonist is closely focalized by the narrator. Of vari-directional, the mode that reduces the degree of objectification of the self by the other, Bakhtin, among others, refers to parody and parodistic narration. Discourse here becomes “internally dialogized and tends to disintegrate into two discourses (two voices of the first type)” (*Dostoevsky* 199). Examples of this form of narration are seen in *Seize the Day* and *Herzog*. In these novels, the protagonists’ voices are so intensely interwoven with the voice of the third person narrator that it is hard to make distinctions between the two. In fact, the narrative voice borders on Free Indirect Discourse—the narrative technique that combines the character’s thoughts with the voice of the narrator. The third type to which “the other discourse exerts influence from without” includes “hidden internal polemic,” “polemically colored autobiography and confession”, “any discourse with sideward

glance at someone else's word", "a rejoinder of dialogue," and "hidden dialogue" (Dostoevsky 199). The genre of autobiography, especially "polemically colored autobiography and confession," is the most liberal and polyphonic form and has a special place in Bakhtinian typology of discourse. Bellow's *Ravelstein* illustrates an example of this type of narration. The novel combines the genre of narrative confession with biography and autobiography. It is hard to tell where biography stops and where autobiography begins as they are so intertwined throughout the novel that one functions like the other and both are confessional in their effects. Chick, the author of Ravelstein's biography, writes with constant sideward glance at what Ravelstein would like him to write and what Chick desires to document about him. On other hand, as far as autobiography is concerned, the image Chick creates of himself in the novel is, to some extent, different from the image he is aware Ravelstein has about him. The polemic arises, because there is a gap between their understanding of oneself and of one another and genuine confession is made by Chick through humorous intonations, grotesque depictions of Ravelstein, and ironical statements about him. Discourse in this novel is highly polyphonic because in every word, gesture, and act of communication there is always a second or third level of truth and meaning aesthetically wrapped in its outward presentation.

The dynamics of monologic and polyphonic confession together with various discursive styles are mutually responsive to the relationships of cultural and interpersonal authority figures. In what follows, I will discuss the repressive as well as the productive functions of authorial structures in relation to the discourse of truth-telling.

2.2.4. Authority

There is an ambivalent relationship between power structures and the discourse of confession: one produces the other, resists the other, and transforms the other. The argument is both represented in Bellow's novels and is theorized in Foucault's ideas about truth and power relationships. The place of cultural and narrative authorities and their role in controlling and conditioning the production of forms of knowledge in Bellow's fiction is undeniable. However, it is in *The Adventures of Augie March* that he utterly blends language and power in the image of the grandmother: "she preferred to live with us, because for so many years she was used to direct a house, to command, to govern, to manage, scheme, devise, and intrigue in all her languages" (*Augie* 385).

The arbitrariness of the truth structured by social and cultural institutions was initially introduced by the German philosopher Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche (1844-1900). Nietzsche explains that forms of knowledge or truth appear in a culture not because they are innately "valuable or eternal, but because one group had managed to impose their will over others" (Danaher, Schirato and Webb 10). Geoff Danaher suggests that this statement by Nietzsche inspired Foucault's argument about the positive role of power. Foucault believes that

each society has its regime of truth, its 'general politics' of truth: that is, the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true; the mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish true and false statements, the means by which each is sanctioned; the techniques and procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth; the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true. (*Truth and Power* 131)

Foucault explains the problem of truth in capitalist culture and the role of the intellectual in directing the route towards the production of truth. It is “not a matter of emancipating truth from every system of power (which would be chimera, for truth is already power) but of detaching the power of truth from the forms of hegemony, social, economic and cultural, within which it operates at the present time” (*Truth and Power* 133).

In other words, by “truth” Foucault means ‘the ensemble of rules according to which the true and the false are separated and specific power effects attached to the true’” (*Truth and Power* 132). Foucault accordingly argues:

truth isn't outside power, or lacking in power: contrary to a myth whose history and functions would repay further study, truth isn't the reward of free spirits, the child of protracted solitude, nor the privilege of those who have succeeded in liberating themselves. Truth is a thing of this world; it is produced only by virtue of multiple form of constraint. And it induces regular effects of power. (*Truth and Power* 131)

Foucault suggests that truth and power are mutually connected. He reasons:

Perhaps too we should abandon a whole tradition that allows us to imagine that knowledge can exist only where the power relations are suspended and that knowledge can develop only outside its injunctions, its demands and its interests. Perhaps we should abandon the belief that power makes mad and that, by the same token, the renunciation of power is one of the conditions of knowledge. We should admit rather that power produces knowledge [...] that power and knowledge directly imply one another; that there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any

knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations. (*Discipline 27*)

In *Confession and Complicity in Narrative*, Dennis A. Foster expands Foucault's statement on the mutual interactions that exist between the discourse of truth and the relations of power in confession. He remarks that "a confessor commands a power over a listener because he controls the material the other is obliged to use to be the one who understands" (Foster 14). Foucault, therefore, argues that "power is exercised rather than possessed" (*Discipline 26*). This statement implies that there is always a chance for the oppressed to exercise their power over the oppressors, especially by claiming to possess a form of knowledge. Therefore, the discourse of confession is connected with concepts such as truth, knowledge, and power.

Confession as the discourse that generates truth and knowledge can accordingly create new orders of power. Bellow's protagonists fight back against their cultural authorities in their personal spheres by producing new forms of reality which are at times compatible with what authorities circulate as the one and only possible form of truth. In fact, the private writings of Bellow's heroes function like a modern form of authority which Foucault describes as micro-powers. Foucault compares the functions of modern power to the way Jeremy Bentham's Panopticon works:

In view of this, Bentham laid down the principle that power should be visible and unverifiable. Visible: the inmate will constantly have before his eyes the tall outline of the central tower from which he is spied upon. Unverifiable: the inmate must never know whether he is being looked at any one moment; but he must be sure that he may always be so. (*Discipline 201*)

In ways comparable to Foucauldian micro-powers, Bellow's heroes speak the truth to authorities while keeping their identities unverified in their medium of communication—in their unpublished journal, unsent letters, or meditations—as well as their seriocomic style and their sideward glances. Later in this chapter, I will discuss how Bellow's protagonists create polyphonic effects, using such sideward glances at someone else's discourse as their special technique of micro-power.

In addition, the operations of the micro-powers differ from those of dominations in that they “do not obey the law of all or nothing” (*Discipline 27*). In other words, the overthrow of these micro-powers does not result in “a new control of the apparatuses nor by a new functioning or a destruction of the institutions; on the other hand, none of its localized episodes may be inscribed in history except by the effects that it induces on the entire network in which it is caught up” (*Discipline 27*). Foucault notes:

the study of this micro-physics presupposes that the power exercised on the body is conceived not as a property, but as a strategy, that its effects of domination are attributed not to “appropriation”, but to dispositions, manoeuvres, tactics, techniques, functionings; that one should decipher in it a network of relations, constantly in tension, in activity, rather than a privilege that one might possess. (*Discipline 26*)

Confession in general and seriocomic confession in particular functions like a strategy for Bellow's protagonist to exercise their power and question totalitarian authorities. Humour, irony, and laughter; allusion to philosophical, political, and other social orders; as well as dialogic reproductions of previously mentioned ideas, images, and words are

among the techniques of micro-power that Bellow employs in his novels in order to expose the eccentricities of American public reality and power.

2.2.5. Humour

Seriocomic confession presents a more polytonal reality in Bellow's novels. The concept of humour is both semantically and structurally significant in the discourse of confession. It makes a distinction between the serious public truth and the comic private reality and at the same time integrates the two; it creates multiplicity in meaning and fashions new styles in the confessional writing. However, there is a possibility that the delicate border between the serious and the comic could disappear not only in the production of multiple styles and meanings but also in the creation of loopholes in discourse. It is for this reason that seriocomic speech is potentially a defensible speech. It is defensible because it avoids the fixity of meaning and one-sided judgments. For instance, if seriocomic speech is judged as having one single serious implication, it can refer to its comic and humorous dimension and thus it can easily escape difficult religious, social, and particularly political interpretations. Accordingly, polyphonic and seriocomic expressions are safe modes of truth-telling.

Sarah Blacher Cohen holds a similar view when she explains that "to maintain that existence is 'nauseous,' that life is a 'plague,' that we have no chance of winning the 'endgame' is, according to Bellow, to convey only partial truths. It is to fail to give a comprehensive account of reality" (3). If Bellow's novels depart from the traditions of modern literature, it is partly because they abhor "the 'hollow man' conception of character and the tone of 'elegy'" (Cohen 3). Humour is thus an inherent element in

Bellow's novels because it provides a more inclusive account of knowledge. Bellow makes use of comedy in his novels in order to "interrupt, resist, reinterpret, and transcend adversity" (Cohen 4). In terms of particular novels, Cohen argues that in *Dangling Man* comedy is used as "a shaky defense which ineffectually staves off distrust and melancholy;" in *The Adventures of Augie March*, comedy serves as "a tonic for the dispirited" and "as a miraculous alchemizer which transforms the common into precious;" in *Seize the Day*, comedy is a shield to protect Tommy Wilhelm "against his ubiquitous harassers" and as "a subtle cosmetic to cover up Wilhelm's blemishes and make him more endearing;" in *Henderson the Rain King* (1959), comedy is used "to defend and undercut his vaunted image of himself and to attack his brute opponent;" in *Herzog*, comedy acts "as a balance and a barricade which the morose hero introduces to counter and combat his own depressive tendencies;" and in *Mr. Sammler's Planet* (1970), "comedy appears as confectionery to accompany the bitter views of an angry old man" (4-5).

As such, humour creates multi-voicedness and inclusion in Bellow's novels. Bellow employs the comedy of character, situation, ideas, and language. Whereas the comedy of character is realized through the technique of affectation in order to expose "man's damaged nature" (Cohen 6-7), the comedy of situation is created through burlesque (14). However, the comedy of ideas or ideological comedy is introduced through the degree of articulateness of his characters and satire, and finally the comedy of language is portrayed in two ways: "the comic expressed" and "the comic created by language" (15-17). The creation of the comedy of language in Bellow's novels, Cohen concludes, is partly due to "the comic juxtaposition of many kinds of discourse" (113).

Particular words, expressions, sentence structures from different languages and of different levels of formality are put together in order to produce polyphony and at the same time the comic effect.

Bellow's stylistics of humour is particularly Yiddish in its multi-targeted discourse, the anti-authoritarian argument, the juxtaposition of various languages and styles, and the comic verbal retrieval. Humour is a stylistic feature that relates to authoritarian structures on the one hand, and to discursive styles on the other. Humour springs from a reaction to authoritarian structures and is directed at them. Leo. M. Abrami explains that Jewish humour is unique mainly because it pokes fun at the Jews themselves, criticizing their own shortcomings and weaknesses (Abrami). Bellow's irony targets nearly all of his Jewish protagonists. Furthermore, the impacts of humour in Bellow's novels are the destabilization of authority figures, the insertion of double-voicedness into the serious tone of confession, and the introduction of multiplicity of meaning in the novel. This particular kind of humour is Yiddish in that it questions the dominant ideology. In *The Victim*, humour is basically directed towards the convention of post-war anti-Semitism epitomized in the final reverse in the position of Asa-Allbee as Jew-Gentile, and therefore conventionally as victim-victimizer. Humour is produced by various stylistic devices in that novel. Of the stylistic devices generated by humour, Cohen refers to allusions, the Yiddish fusion of secular and sacred, and the coexistence of polished with fractured English (19-20). She agrees with Maurice Samuel that Bellow's humour is Yiddish in that it has the feature of "the humor of verbal retrieval" (20), explaining that this kind of humour is created not because what happens to people is funny but because what they say about it is funny (20).

Humour fashions style. Although Cohen discusses in detail the problem of the origins of humour in Bellow's novels and the various devices that he has employed in order to create it, she does not move on to make an in-depth analysis of the stylistic features which it generates. As far as the confessional voice in his novels is concerned, humour adds a new dimension and significance to the conventionally serious discourse of confession. It is partly through the seriocomic style of narration that the confessional discourse in Bellow's novels becomes polyphonic. For instance, for Joseph in *Dangling Man*, journal writing functions like a micro-power wherein he can make fun of authorities and disobey them in writing. He polyphonically presents his voice as in conflict with those who moralize "ideal constructions": "If you have difficulties, grapple with them silently, goes one of their commandments. To hell with that! I intend to talk about mine, and if I had as many mouths as Siva has arms and kept them going all the time, I still could not do myself justice" (*Dangling* 3). Bellow's novels create humour through techniques such as dialogic interaction as well as self-parody and grotesque presentation.

In order to illuminate this dialogic humour, I will provide some examples from *Seize the Day* and *Herzog* that show the role of the narrative voice in the creation of polyphonic truth. *Seize the Day* opens with the polyphonic narrative voice: "When it came to concealing his troubles, Tommy Wilhelm was not less capable than the next fellow. So at least he thought".⁵⁰ The impacts of irony, humour, and self-parody are reinforced when the same statement is reproduced later on in Tommy's introspection: "he was wrong to suppose that he was more capable than the next fellow when it came to concealing his troubles. They were clearly written out upon his face. He wasn't even

⁵⁰ Saul Bellow, *Seize the Day*, 1951. (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1957) 7. Hereafter cited internally as *Seize*.

aware of it" (*Seize* 18). These two statements address each other in a humorous way comparable to what Bakhtin describes as dialogic address. The dialogic presentation of the protagonist is also illustrated in Bellow's polyphonic novel *Herzog*. The novel opens with: "If I am out of my mind, it is all right with me, thought Moses Herzog".⁵¹ This statement is reproduced later on by Herzog: "But if I am out of my mind, it is all right with me" (315). The difference between the two productions is the seriocomic intonation added to the statement in its double-voiced presentation. In Bellow's novels, dialogic address functions at inter-textual level as well. For instance, in *Ravelstein*, we read: "Maybe an unexamined life is not worth living. But a man's examined life can make him wish he was dead" (*Ravelstein* 34). This sentence seems to be a dialogic address to a statement previously expressed in *Herzog*: "If the unexplained life is not worth living, the explained life is unbearable too" (*Herzog* 322). Similar connections can also be found between *Humboldt's Gift* and *Herzog*. Herzog signs a letter to Nietzsche as: "under the veil of Maya" (*Herzog* 320). In *Humboldt's Gift*, we read, "a person keenly aware of painted veils, of Maya" (*Humboldt* 3). And again, Charlie notes: "The lack of a *personal* connection with the external world. Earlier I noted that when I was riding through France in a train last spring I looked out of the window and thought that the veil of Maya was wearing thin" (*Humboldt* 202). Comparatively, in *The Dean's December*, the protagonist Albert Corde argues that "men and women were shadows, and shadows within shadows, to one another" (32). In what follows, I will discuss how the concept of humour is strongly linked with the concept of transgressing a limit.

⁵¹ Saul Bellow, *Herzog* (London: Penguin Books, 1964) 1. Hereafter cited internally as *Herzog*.

2.2.6. Borderline

The concept of the borderline is central to the discourse of confession because transgression of a border is the subject matter of confessional discourse in general and a quality of carnival confession in particular. At times, Bellow's protagonists engage with American culture in ways comparable to Bakhtin's conception of carnival and Foucault's notion of transgression. The concept of the border, especially the borders of a text, a culture, and a subject, is essential to transgressive, subversive, and carnivalesque modes of communication. In Bellow's novels, in whatever context it appears, confession is the acknowledgment of a line transgressed; however, carnivalesque confession is the transgressive way of acknowledging it. Bellow's fictions illustrate transgression in both the form and content of confession. He departs from the conventions of confession, that is, he presents the reverse hierarchical order in confessor-confessant relationship; he demonstrates the insertion of humour into the serious and monophonic discourse of confession; and finally, he destabilizes the pre-established laws of confession. In performing these rule-breaking confessional acts, there are borders transgressed and rules that are infringed. In order to elucidate the significance of borders in such subversive confessions, I refer to the theories of transgression proposed by Foucault and Bakhtin.

Foucault investigates certain limit-experiences and shows how humanity has transformed madness, death, and crime into fixed objects of knowledge that constitute subject matter for confession. He explains that by "knowing madness while constituting oneself as a rational subject; knowing illness while constituting oneself as a living subject [...]; or as an individual knowing oneself in a certain relationship with the law,"⁵² man

⁵² *Essential Works of Foucault: Power* (1994). Vol 3. Ed. James Faubion. Trans. Robert Hurly and Others. New York: The New York Press, 2000. 257. Hereafter cited internally as *Power*.

participates in the arbitrary process of knowledge formation and deprives himself of thinking otherwise. Criticizing the solidity of such perceptions, Foucault advocates constructive transgression from arbitrary norms, explaining that:

Transgression does not seek to oppose one thing to another, nor does it achieve its purpose through mockery or by upsetting the solidity of foundations [...] Transgression is neither violence in a divided world (in an ethical world) nor a victory over limits (in a dialectical or revolutionary world) [...] Transgression contains nothing negative, but affirms limited being – affirms the limitlessness into which it leaps as it opens this zone to existence for the first time.⁵³

It seems that this perception of transgression is very close to the understanding of critical thinking employed by Bellow's protagonists. In nearly all their transgressive thoughts and writings, Bellow's heroes create a space for themselves to communicate their helplessness and limitations, and at the same time offer a possibility to think differently.

Transgression can also be vital to the assertion of the truth of or by the powerless, or less powerful, in the presence of unbalanced power structures. Foucault explains that asymmetrical power structures create a discourse of the truth which

is not originally a thing, a product, or a possession, but an action situated in a bipolar field of sacred and profane, lawful and unlawful, religious and blasphemous. It was a gesture charged with risk long before it became a possession caught in a circuit of property values. (*Author* 124)

⁵³ Michel Foucault, "A Preface to Transgression." *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews by Michel Foucault*. Ed. and intro. Donald F. Bouchard. Trans. Donald F. Bouchard and Sherry Simon (Ithaca and New York: Cornell University Press, 1977) 35. Hereafter cited internally as "Transgression".

Transgressive argument is therefore a reaction to such a belief in truth as an exclusive possession. The subversive confessant therefore takes actions based on the brave presupposition that the discourse of truth does not totally belong to the superior power. Truth is treated by the speaker not as commodity but as a micro-power that can be exercised by every one.

As far as inter-subjective and cultural relationships are concerned, Bakhtin outlines circumstances that lead to the creation of subversive actions within the narrative. He explains that transgression of the limits usually takes place when the confessant is not interested in the value judgments s/he receives from the confessor. Joseph in *Dangling Man* and Herzog demonstrate their dissatisfaction and anger with their contemporary culture in their subversive and transgressive writings. As Bakhtin explains, in cases of monologic confessions in which the penitent refuses to accept a possible judgment, a change in his confessional tone will appear: tones of resentment, distrust, cynicism, irony, defiance and even playing a fool (*Author and Hero* 146). In such cases, as Bakhtin explains, an element of theomachy and anthropomachy enters the confessional self-accounting, that is, "the refusal to accept a possible judgment by God or by man" (*Author and Hero* 146). At this point, the usual conventions of confession—regret, remorse, repentance and the authority of the confessor— become inadequate for, or hostile to, the expression of the full range of feeling of the confessant. Privately or publicly, within the relationship with the existing confessor or with a new confessor (real or imagined), s/he transgresses the limits of those conventions to express that fuller range of feeling in what is still nonetheless a confession, but a confession for which the confessant has established new self-created possibilities for the confessant voice.

Whereas it is more likely that the speaker in traditional forms of monophonic confession demonstrate submissive acts towards cultural power structures, polyphonic and transgressive forms of discourse are more liable to generate transgressive and subversive actions at textual levels. As Ken Hirschkop argues, polyphonic discourse allows “the reversibility of the role of author and hero” (Hirschkop 66) whereas monologic confession presupposes the existence of an irreversible power relationship between the confessor and the confessant as self/other in confession. It is therefore possible for the confessional discourse to be subversive provided that it trespasses the traditional laws, limits, and borders of confession whether in intonation, essence and/or form. Subversive confession is identified by the appearance of a change in confessant’s intonation from absolutely remorseful into a more revolutionary one, making negative statement of confession, that is, the expression of guiltlessness, and also by subverting the structural hierarchy that traditionally exists between the confessor and the confessant.

The narrative spaces in the novels of Bellow provide the grounds for the emergence of subversive confessions in their structure and essence. In this sense, Bakhtin’s notion of carnival seems to exemplify Foucault’s concept of transgression. The carnival space allows for transgressing the borders. However, it never suggests a boundless libertarianism: it is a relative and controlled freedom. For Bakhtin, borders are important, because “[A]ll understanding is constrained by borders: freedom consists in knowing ... what those borders are, so that they might be substituted by, translated into different borders”.⁵⁴ This perception of the border explains how dialogism relates to

⁵⁴ Mikhail Bakhtin, *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*. Trans. by Vern W. McGee. Ed. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986) xix. Hereafter cited internally as *Speech*.

deconstruction. For Derrida “no border is guaranteed, inside or out”⁵⁵. In order to explain the significance of the concept of the border in understanding polyphonic auto/biography, I refer to the discussion put forward by Daphna Erdinast-Vulcan. She compares the Bakhtinian concept of polyphonic autobiography with the Derridean concept of heterobiography. As she explains “while ‘autobiography,’ as traditionally conceived, aspires to a territorial enclosure of the self, ‘heterobiography’ points to the inevitable a-topia of subjectivity, to a permeability of its borderlines” (304). She explains that “‘heterobiography’ revolves on the experience of liminality in more than one way. When a fictional text is scanned for autobiographical traces, the distinction between the ontological status of the historical subject who has authored the work and that of the fictional characters ‘within’ the work is usually honoured” (303). Bellow creates a literary culture for confession which is based on endless deforms and reforms, presenting the event confessed as well as the event of the confessing. As such, the absence of a clear distinction between the voice of author and character-narrator in Bellow’s novels is a major source of polyphony in his works.

In ways similar to Derrida, Bakhtin celebrates the destruction of the borderlines that separate author and hero, in the novels of Dostoevsky, as polyphony (Erdinast-Vulcan 306). Erdinast-Vulcan believes that “far from a comfortable accommodation of diversity,” Bakhtin’s discursive polyphony “stands for the eruption of otherness in the same, for permeability of cultural, textual, and psychic borderlines” (305). This eruption of otherness into the self or autobiography into biography explains the intricate technique of narrative confession in Bellow’s novels, especially in *Ravelstein*. The chronological

⁵⁵ Derrida, Jacques. “Living on Borders.” *Deconstruction and Criticism*. Ed. Harold Bloom (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979) 78. Hereafter cited internally as *Deconstruction*.

study of Bellow's novels reveals that there is an increase in the degree of flexibility of borders between the confessional self and other in his fiction. Depending on the degrees of fixity or flexibility of the borders, various forms of confessional discourse emerge in Bellow's novels. In what follows, I will discuss the chronological emergence of these four major types of confession in Bellow's writings.

2.3. Modes of Confession

2.3.1. Monophonic Confession

“Only oppression can keep us honest” (*Heartbreak* 100).

Monophonic mode of confession is conventionally practised in social contexts wherein the confessant performs acts of submission towards the confessor. This conservative mode of truth-telling is prevalent in Bellow's early short novels. However, whereas in traditional forms of confession, the confessor is a willing participant in his submission, Bellow's heroes rather conservatively yield to their cultural powers with dissatisfaction. To clarify the stylistic features of monophonic confession, I refer to Bakhtin's argument. In *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, Bakhtin develops his theory of dialogic confession while examining the novels of Dostoevsky. As noted by Hirschkop, the term “dialogism” was used by Valentin Voloshinov, a member of the Bakhtin Circle, as early as 1926 when he used dialogism as a stylistic phenomenon. Bakhtin, however, endowed the term dialogism with “redemptive intentions,” maintaining a balance between transcendence and actuality (Hirschkop 168).

Dialogism stands for “the ethical relationship between I and other rejigged as a form of language” (Hirschkop 168). Bakhtin's novel approach towards confession as a

ritual act also becomes evident in his tendency to internalize the role of the *other* in confession, the other as the one who is the confessor as well as the judge. This tendency was not very much in line with the kind of confession practised in the Russian Orthodox Church in Bakhtin's time. Bakhtin reasons that God is

the only possible stopping-point for an otherwise endless cycle of self-justification. The subject who 'would make immanent his own justification' (Lec., 235)⁵⁶ at once becomes unjust, for it is intrinsic to justification as such that it is justification to an *other*, and the only *other* ultimately good enough is the divine one. (Hirschkop 154)

Instead of a one-sided relationship between the self and the other in a confessor-confessant relationship, Bakhtin suggests a dialogical relationship between the two.

To explain more about dialogic relationships, I need to compare them to logical and dialectic relationships. Dialogic and dialectic relationships, as Bakhtin explains, are similar to logical relationships (*Dostoevsky* 184). However, dialectic relations are never argumentative. Bakhtin exemplifies this distinction in the following statements: "Life is good." And "Life is not good." Both statements are dialectic, because they make judgements without providing arguments:

Thus, both these judgments can, as thesis and antithesis, be united in a single utterance of a single subject, expressing his unified dialectic position on a given question. In such a case no dialogic relationships arise. But if these two judgments are separated into two different utterances by two different subjects, then dialogic relationships do arise. (*Dostoevsky* 183)

In the light of dialogic relationships as such, Bakhtin studies the novels of Dostoevsky.

⁵⁶ Lectures and Interventions by M. M. Bakhtin in 1924-1925.

Despite the existence of a flow of change in the course of Dostoevsky's works, in *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, Bakhtin argues that "all Dostoevsky's work is one single unified confession" (*Reworking* 288). He undertakes a chronological study of Dostoevsky's novels, arguing that in his early novels, *Poor Folk* and *The Double*, discourse is rather monologic (*Dostoevsky* 204-207) whereas in his next novel *Notes from Underground*, the confessional discourse of the underground man becomes more indirect and less monologic. Bakhtin describes the early novels of Dostoevsky as having the stylistic features of "the word with sideward glance". It is the word that shows "the acute awareness of the interlocutor" and "takes into account the other's possible reactions" (*Dostoevsky* 205). This anticipation of another person's words determines "not only the tone and style but also the internal semantic structure" (*Dostoevsky* 205) of the speaker's confessional self-utterances. This sideward glance "manifests itself above all in two traits characteristic of the style: a certain halting quality to the speech and its interruption by reservation" (*Dostoevsky* 205). Bakhtin traces a gradual movement away from this early reserved style towards a more courageous one in Dostoevsky's later novels. He defines this later style as "the hagiographic discourse" which he defines as "a word without a sideward glance, calmly adequate to itself and its referential object" (*Dostoevsky* 248). Although this voice might sound monologic, Bakhtin insists that even such monologic discourse in Dostoevsky is stylized:

a monologically firm and self-confident voice for the hero never really appears in his work, but a certain tendency toward it is clearly felt in several rare instances. When a hero, in keeping with Dostoevsky's plan, comes close

to the truth about himself, makes peace with the other and takes possession of his authentic voice, his style and tone begin to change. (*Dostoevsky* 248)

Bakhtin identifies two types of dialogic discourse: monologic, authoritarian discourse and polyphonic, egalitarian discourse. However, both monologic and polyphonic structures are: “The dialogic orientation of discourse is a phenomenon that is, of course, a property of any discourse” (*Discourse* 279). Therefore, dialogic addressivity is the quality of both monologic and polyphonic discourse whereby they both “enter another sphere of existence” (*Problems* 184). However, whereas monophonic discourse addresses someone else’s discourse in order to exclude it, polyphonic discourse addresses in order to include. Bakhtin describes monologic designs in the following way:

In a monologic design, the hero is closed, and his semantic boundaries strictly defined: he acts, experiences, thinks and is conscious within the limits of what he is, that is, within the limits of his image defined as reality; he cannot cease to be himself, that is, he cannot exceed the limits of his own character [...] Such an image is constructed in the objective authorial world [...] The construction of that authorial world with its points of view and finalising definitions presupposes a fixed authorial field of vision. The self-consciousness of the hero is inserted into this rigid framework, to which the hero has no access from within. (*Hero* 52)

Within the monologic design, as Bakhtin argues, “the author creates his heroes without ever abandoning his sanctified position as the single knower of the truth who is always capable of determining limits to the hero’s independence” (Tikhanov 70). The problem with monologic texts, according to Bakhtin, is that they “prevent literature from doing

justice to the multiplicity of human experience and to otherness” (Tikhanov 69), and they also “work towards diminishing the integrity of the knowledge we have about the world: by letting one voice prevail, they silence other points of view and in this way sacrifice the multifacedness of the truth” (Tikhanov 69). Therefore, Bakhtin asserts that monologic designs cannot be regarded as genuinely ethical.

Although Bellow’s novels are not monologic, they contain instances of monologic conversations. At the outset of *Dangling Man*, Joseph, the protagonist, presents an example of confessional relation, in the form of a monologic subject-object power relationship represented in the authoritarian speech acts of his cultural dominant, the “hardboiled”: “Do you have feelings? There are correct and incorrect ways of indicating them. Do you have an inner life? It is nobody’s business but your own. Do you have emotions? Strangle them”.⁵⁷ Characteristic of confessional style here is a unique, silencing, and judgmental force that addresses a group as its subjects, imposes a single answer on them, and is devoid of any human feelings towards them. Discourse here resembles Bakhtin’s definition of “the externally authoritative discourse” which is official, monologic, and carries with itself the ‘generally acknowledged truth’ (*Discourse* 344-345). It “demands that we acknowledge it, that we make it our own; it binds us, quite independent of any power it might have to persuade us internally; we encounter it with its authority already fused to it” (*Discourse* 342). It is “hard-edged”, “by its very nature incapable of being double-voiced and cannot enter into hybrid constructions” (*Discourse* 344). When this authoritative discourse becomes “completely deprived of its authority it becomes simply an object, a *relic*, a *thing*” (344). It enters the novel “as an alien body,

⁵⁷ Saul Bellow, *Dangling Man* (1944). *Saul Bellow: Novels 1944-1953: Dangling Man, The Victim, The Adventures of Augie March*. Notes by James Wood (New York: The Library of America, 2003) 3. Hereafter cited internally as *Dangling*.

there is no space around it to play in, no contradictory emotions—it is not surrounded by an agitated and cacophonous dialogic life, and the context around it dies, words dry up” (*Discourse* 344).

However, this monologic voice is integrated in *Dangling Man* with certain other voices and is thus polyphonically presented within the narrative voice. It combines the voice of the monologic authoritarian figure with the silenced voice of its addressee whose voice can be readily guessed as in a telephonic conversation. It is also combined with the voice of Joseph, the journal writer and with the authorial voice. Discourse here, as Foucault argues, illustrates the interconnection between truth and power in such a way that the authoritarian truth exercises its power on Joseph by circulating a form of knowledge which he should undoubtedly obey. This power figure tolerates no deviation from its rules; therefore, as Joseph writes, “to a degree, everybody obeys this code” (*Dangling* 3). In contrast to such monologic structures, polyphonic narrative designs are more democratic in the sense that the inward, ethical liberation of the hero must be realized, and this is possible provided that “the enslaved have first to combat the illusions and fears which are within them, in much the same way as the novel needs to work against the danger of relapsing into authoritarian monologic discourse” (Tikhanov 70).

2.3.2. Polyphonic Confession

Unlike the conservative mode of confession, which is rather serious, one-sided, and authorial, polyphonic confession is a more reciprocal, seriocomic, and harmonious mode of truth-telling. Polyphony is presented in Bellow’s fiction not only in the representation of the heroes but also in the presentation of their developing identity. In both instances,

polyphony is not realized in Bellow's novels unless accompanied by a great deal of humour. Unlike monologic presentations, in a polyphonic construction the heroes are never objectified or enslaved by the author; rather, they are "capable of standing alongside their creator, capable of not agreeing with him and even of rebelling against him" (*Polyphonic* 6). In Bakhtin's words:

It is impossible to master the inner man, to see and understand him by making him into an object of indifferent neutral analysis; it is also impossible to master him by merging with him, by empathizing with him. No one can approach him and reveal him—or more precisely, force him to reveal himself—only by addressing him dialogically. And to portray the inner man, as Dostoevsky understood it, was possible only by portraying his communion with another. Only in communion, in the interaction of one person with another, can the "man in man" be revealed, for others as well as for himself. (*Dostoevsky* 251-52)

The polyphonic presentation is made possible in Bellow's novels through the employment of double-voiced narrative voice particularly in *Seize the Day* and *Herzog*. Apart from the structural polyphony, polyphony is also illustrated in the content of the protagonist's confession. The content is polyphonic when Bellow's heroes reflect upon their action.

Polyphonic discourse is presented in Bellow's novels in confessional styles such as polemic, ironic, and explanatory confession. In *The Victim*, Asa polemically asks himself: "Hadn't he tried to be fair? Didn't he intend to help him? He considered that he

and Allbee were even, by any honest standard".⁵⁸ In *Seize the Day*, polyphony is created in the ironic structure of the novel. What creates the structural irony is the setting of the novel: it takes place on Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement.⁵⁹ However, Tommy forgets about the day altogether and is engaged with business which is conventionally forbidden on the day. An explanatory style of confession is presented in *Herzog*. After a long lecture saying that people should offer money and properties to eradicate poverty, Herzog ironically tries to explain why he is unable to offer his house to the Bhave movement in India. Herzog, however, gains a polyphonic identity whereby he becomes able to forgive his enemies:

Now what is it? Herzog urged himself to be clearer. What really is on my head? Probably this: shall I put those two on the stand under oath, torture them, hold a blowtorch to their feet? Why? They have a right to each other; they seem even to belong together. Why, let them alone. But what about justice?—Justice! Look who wants justice! (*Herzog* 220)

The polyphonic process of giving voice to the unheard, silenced, or monologically conditioned voices develops in Bellow's novels into a more interactive mode of conversation: the subversive and transgressive discourse.

⁵⁸ Saul Bellow, *The Victim* (1947) *Saul Bellow: Novels 1944-1953: Dangling Man, The Victim, The Adventures of Augie March*. Notes by James Wood (New York: The Library of America, 2003) 373. Hereafter cited internally as *Victim*.

⁵⁹ After the destruction of the second Temple in 70 CE, Jews wanted to continue to preserve the ritual of confession without the temple sacrifices, so they developed a more internalized form of confession: "The high priest no longer confesses for the people on Yom Kippur; now it is the duty of all Jews to confess their own sins" (Fry 208).

2.3.3. Carnavalesque Confession

Carnival and carnival transgression is a revolutionary confessional technique to expose the ugliness of unpleasant reality, express one's desired reality or change unwanted reality into pleasant one. It can appear in both form and content of confessional discourse. In contrast to layers that cover and polish reality, carnival provides grotesque "fits of vividness". Bellow writes: "In ordinary contact there was a common sense indifference or inertia in what you saw. But in a vividness fit you had the hillocky man, the obese breast, small hands, short neck, cannonball head—all of it" (*Dean* 151). Carnavalesque confession is a transgressive mode of polyphonic confession. In contrast to conservative style, carnival presents an independent, subversive style of truth-telling. The pivotal theme in subversive confession is transgression of a limit which can appear in the subject matter as well as the confessional design in Bellow's novels. Earlier examples of carnivalesque-transgressive confession are presented in the confessional content of the protagonists' private conversations, as in Joseph's journal and Herzog's letters. At this point, transgressive confession assimilates extremely monologic discourse. It is one-sided as it only includes one voice, the voice of the confessant-protagonist who impulsively silences the voice of the cultural authorities. Discourse here is evidently anti-authoritarian and norm-breaking, communicating the confessants' feelings of remorse and regret especially at having been for so long under the power of the dominant structure. Transgressive confession becomes more interactive in Bellow's later novels as transgression is also depicted more in the confessional design of the novel, the performative acts of the protagonist, and in the intonation as well as the content of the protagonist's discourse. Depending on whether transgressive mode of truth-telling

appears in the content or the form of the novel, various styles of transgressive confession emerge in Bellow's novels. In negative and parrhesiac confessions, the monologic styles of transgression, it is the content of discourse which is transgressive; whereas in subversive and carnivalesque mode of transgressive confession, the interactive styles, it is the confessional design which is more transgressive. Whereas negative confession is the expression of guiltlessness rather than sinfulness, parrhesiac confession is the articulation of an idea that contradicts the norm and the law.

For an example of a combined parrhesiac and negative mode of transgressive confession, I refer to Joseph's argument in *Dangling Man*, wherein he violates the authority of his contemporary literary culture by choosing to write his journal and has no feeling of shame or regret in breaking their rules: "to keep a journal nowadays is considered a kind of self-indulgence, a weakness, and in poor state" (*Dangling* 3). In a rather parrhesiac manner, he stands up to authority figures and exposes them in writing: "most serious matters are closed to the hard-boiled. They are unpracticed in introspection, and therefore badly equipped to deal with opponents whom they cannot shoot like big game or outdo in daring" (*Dangling* 3). Parrhesia is a form of transgressive style in which, as Foucault explains, the speaker "says everything he has in mind: he does not hide anything, but opens his heart and mind completely to other people through discourse".⁶⁰

It is very likely that whoever transgresses the border and the norm, even if an intellectual will be identified as mad, an issue that has ironically given rise to the creation

⁶⁰ Michel Foucault, *Fearless Speech*. Edited by Joseph Pearson (Los Angeles: Semiotext (e), 2001) 12. Hereafter cited internally as *Fearless*.

of “mad philosophers”.⁶¹ These mad philosophers are intellectuals who have the courage to take the risk and think differently. Foucault is very much concerned with the problem of the exclusion of certain voices as mad, abnormal, or unreasonable. In *Madness and Civilization*, Foucault argues that truth is a relative concept arbitrarily structured by the dominant culture. Therefore, there is always an element of risk involved in all transgressive forms of confession. Foucault writes:

How is it that the human subject took itself as the object of possible knowledge? Through what forms of rationality and historical conditions? And finally at what price? This is my question: at what price can subjects speak the truth about themselves as mad persons? At the price of constituting the mad person as absolutely other, paying not only the theoretical price but also an institutional and even an economic price, as determined by the organization of psychiatry.⁶²

The risk of such confessions is illustrated in Bellow’s novels, especially in *Herzog*. In a letter to Rozanov, one of his favourite Russian authors, Herzog writes: “Relief from the pursuit of absolutes made life pleasant. Only a small class of fanatical intellectuals, professionals, still chased after these absolutes” (*Herzog* 323). Herzog is isolated and judged as mad for saying that it is others who are mad. However, what Bellow’s novels show is that it is not only transgressive truth that involves risk. As his early novels,

⁶¹ Donald F. Bouchard, “Introduction.” *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews by Michel Foucault*. Ed. and intro. Donald F. Bouchard. Trans. Donald F. Bouchard and Sherry Simon (Ithaca and New York: Cornell University Press, 1977) 18. Hereafter cited internally as *Bouchard Introduction*.

⁶² Michel Foucault, “Critical Theory/Intellectual History.” An interview with Gerard Raulet. *Critique and Power: Recasting the Foucault/Habermas Debate*. Ed. and intro. Michael Kelly (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: The MIT Press, 1998) 120. Hereafter cited internally as *Critical*.

including *Dangling Man* and *Seize the Day* demonstrate, submissive truth has detrimental effects on Joseph's life and Tommy Wilhelm's business, respectively.

However, transgressive confession becomes more reciprocal when transgression appears in the confessional structure of the novel. Transgressive confession breaks the conventional norms of truth-telling in that it removes the fixity in the conception of the confessor as the only receiver of the confession and the confessant as the sole speaker and in possession of the truth. Transgressive confession therefore becomes a mutual act of conversation between two individuals without subordinating one to the other. This mode of communication is developed in Bellow's *Humboldt's Gift* in which transgressive confession appears both in the form as well as the subject matter of Charlie and Humboldt's confessions. There are key confessional concepts in the novel such as memory, mourning, and remembrance that help Charlie bridge the death threshold and reunite with his friend Humboldt even long after his death. The functions of such confessional acts are mutual in that Charlie eventually realizes that Humboldt has equally tried to reach him by the power of his art and depth of his love and friendship. As a result, Charlie cannot forgive himself unless he forgives Humboldt: the confessor and the confessant become one. This interactive confession is contrasted with an earlier monologic scene of transgressive confession downtown. At this social level of carnivalesque, Charlie is subordinated to Cantabile's orders; yet, he happens to identify values in disobedience and redefines his conception of borderline and transgression in connection with mutual communication.

The interactive aspect of confessional discourse is further intensified in Bellow's last novel *Ravelstein*. Here, Chick and Professor Abe Ravelstein mutually contribute in

the writings of Ravelstein's biography. In contrast to risky and polarized relationships, the novels' confessional design provides a more secure, relaxed, and harmonious style of truth-telling which I label aesthetic confession.

2.3.4. Aesthetic Confession

The discourse of confession is aesthetic when it is inclusive, harmonious and creative. The aesthetic mode of confession is predominantly presented in *Ravelstein* wherein Chick establishes an aesthetic relationship between himself and Ravelstein in writing. The novel is written in the form of hetero-biography: a biography which at times functions like autobiography. This form of confession is different from submissive, subversive, and normalising modes: Chick creates identities for himself and for Ravelstein through writing. Aesthetic confession is practiced in Bellow's earlier novels, particularly in the form of journal writing in *Dangling Man* and letter writing in *Herzog*. However, there is a shift in the consciousness from the self-consciousness in *Dangling Man* and *Herzog* into self and other-consciousness in *Humboldt's Gift* and *Ravelstein*.

The idea of creating an aesthetic relationship to one's inner self is explored by Foucault. From Baudelaire, Foucault took the idea of an art of the self which, as Jon Simons explains, is an understanding of the self based on "a mode of relationship that has to be established with oneself," involving "the asceticism of a dandy who makes of his body, his behaviour, his feelings and passions, his very existence, a work of art".⁶³ Modernity "compels him to face the task of producing himself" (*Enlightenment* 42). Characteristic of this relationship to oneself, as Baudelaire explains, is that it is first "a

⁶³ Michel Foucault. "What is Enlightenment?" *The Foucault Reader*. Ed. Paul Rainbow (London: Penguin Books, 1986) 41-42. Hereafter cited internally as *Enlightenment*.

discipline more despotic than any terrible religions” and, secondly, “this ‘ascetic elaboration of the self’ cannot occur in society or politics, but only in “a different place, which Baudelaire calls art” (*Enlightenment* 41-42).

Aesthetic confession accordingly entails an aesthetic relationship to oneself which, as Foucault argues, “has recourse neither to knowledge nor to universal rules”.⁶⁴ Foucault reasons that “from the idea that the self is not given to us, I think that there is only one practical consequence: we have to create ourselves as a work of art” (*Genealogy* 351). As Simons explains, in this aesthetic relationship “one relates to oneself as an object of art which one must create. One’s life becomes the material for aesthetic activity, the aim being to give it a certain beauty” (Simons 72). Aesthetic confession is thus a form of ethical self-formation.

In the second volume of *The History of Sexuality* entitled *The Use of Pleasure*, discussing the relationship between freedom and truth, Foucault argues that “the relation [of freedom] to truth constitutes an essential element of moderation”.⁶⁵ He reasons:

one could not practice moderation without a certain form of knowledge that was at least one of its [knowledge’s] essential conditions. One could not form oneself as an ethical subject in the use of pleasures without forming oneself at the same time as a subject of knowledge. (*History II* 86)

In Bellow’s novels, secret information has a special place in the creation of aesthetic confession. He refers to constructive secrets as arcana, explaining that “an arcanum is more than a mere secret; it’s what you have to know in order to be fertile in a creative

⁶⁴ Jon Simons, *Foucault & The Political* (London: Routledge, 1995) 72.

⁶⁵ Michel Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure: The History of Sexuality*. Vol. 2. (1984 as *L’Usage de Plaisirs*). Trans. Robert Hurley (London: Penguin Books, 1992) 86-89. Hereafter cited internally as *History II*.

pursuit, to make discoveries, to prepare for a communication of a spiritual mystery” (*Heartbreak* 27).

For Foucault, the ideal situation for the pronouncement of an authentic statement is when there is balance or moderation in freedom-power relationships. Likewise, Bellow argues: “you have to set up a principle of proportion” (*Heartbreak* 88). Moderation understood as “an aspect of domination over the self” is connected to categories such as justice, courage or prudence (*History II* 81). In Plato, as Foucault explains, the exercise of the *logos* in the practice of moderation appears in the form of “ontological recognition of the self by the self” (*History II* 87-88). Foucault explains that this particular relation of the self to truth never takes the form of a decipherment of the self by the self, or that of the hermeneutics of desire; rather, it is “a factor constituting the mode of being a moderate subject” (*History II* 89). It is not an obligation for the subject to speak truthfully; nor does it treat the soul as a domain of potential knowledge, but this

relation to the truth is a structural, instrumental, and ontological condition for establishing the individual as a moderate subject leading a life of moderation; it was not an epistemological condition enabling the individual to recognize himself in his singularity as a desiring subject and to purify himself of the desire that was thus brought to light. (*History II* 89)

Foucault further explains that this ontological relationship to truth opens onto an aesthetic of existence, by which he means:

a way of life whose moral values did not depend either on one’s conformity with a code of behavior, or on an effort of purification, but on certain formal principles in the use of pleasure, in the way one distributed them, in the limits

one observed, in the hierarchy one respected. Through the *logos*, through the reason and the relation to truth that governed it, such a life was committed to the maintenance and reproduction of an ontological order. (*History II* 89)

Therefore, aesthetic confession modifies the eccentricities of one-sided evaluations inherent in monologic and transgressive acts of confessions.

Moderation is a confession-related theme that makes its noticeable appearance very late in Bellow's fiction. From the earlier novels up to *Herzog*, Bellow presents protagonists who are extremely dissatisfied, restless, and even angry with their circumstances. *Herzog* turns loose his emotions in his excessive letter writings; Tommy Wilhelm in *Seize the Day* is so immersed in his failures and despair that he is far from having a balanced personality; Asa Leventhal, even though he could reconcile with Kirby Allbee in the final scene, remains for the most part of the novel a haunted soul, too confused to find his way in the crowd; finally, Joseph in *Dangling Man* is caught in an extraordinary dangling state not only in terms of his indecision about joining the war but also in his failed communications with his former comrade from the communist party, his brother and his family, his wife, Eva, and his job. However, it is with *Humboldt's Gift* that Bellow introduces the theme of moderation, especially in the form of systematic exercises in order to restore balance and order to Charlie Citrine's body and soul. Even though the idea of balancing exercises is treated with a great sense of humour, the concept of moderation is entangled with Humboldt's emotional episode and the confession he posthumously makes to Charlie in a letter. The truth produced in this letter is not only the source of moderation to Charlie's life but also to their mutually disturbed friendship. In *Ravelstein*, the bond between confession, truth, and moderation is made

even more secure. In writing about himself and Ravelstein, Chick creates a work of art out of their lives. Confession turns into an aesthetic act when Chick provides ethical truth and justice for Ravelstein and for himself, filling in gaps in information and providing the other side of the truth about him in his writings. Ravelstein equally contributes to Chick's writing in appointing Chick as his biographer, in providing the biographical model for his writing, and in supervising his sample notes, editing, and giving direction to his argument. Confession as such becomes a mutual act in which both the confessant and the confessor actively participate. The significance of interactive confession in Bellow's oeuvre is that as his confessional style becomes progressively more and more interactive, Bellow creates a tighter connection between the public and private realities of his protagonist.

In this chapter, I have examined concepts such as confession, voice, style, authority, humour, and border as the key concepts that are central to the understanding of the discourse of narrative confession. In Bellow's novels, the authorial, narrative, and cultural voice are presented as the voices that come from above and are capable of dominating and determining the style of the narrative confession. On the other hand, the voice of the protagonist functions like a micro-power that comes from below and acts through numerous stylistic devices such as humour, irony, and laughter. Whenever one or the other of these two interacting public and private voices dominates the narrative, the confessional discourse is far from being moderate. If the former group controls the argument, then the confessional mode of the protagonist, as seen in Bellow's early short novels, is very likely to be conservative, monophonic, and submissive. On the other hand, wherever the narrative voice creates a pastoral relationship with the angry protagonist,

the mode of confession, as in *Seize the Day* and *Herzog*, becomes more polyphonic. However, whenever the protagonist goes into excessive and reactionary confessions, attempting to subvert structural hierarchies, the confessional discourse is likely to be subversive, carnivalesque, and transgressive. Moderate and balanced confession takes place only in the presence of an ethical, just, and aesthetic relationship between two people. It is a symmetrical, harmonious, and beautiful mode of communication in which two people mutually pay justice to one another and create a work of art out of one's own and the other person's life.

The key confessional concepts and the various modes of confession that I introduced in this chapter exist in varying proportions throughout Bellow's oeuvre. Chapter Three examines acts of confession in Bellow's early novels, *Dangling Man*, *The Victim*, and *Seize the Day*, suggesting that even though they present submissive acts of confession in the outward performances of their protagonists, these novels contain the sources for the conversational confession and polyphony that progressively develop in Bellow's later novels.

Chapter 3

Acts of Conservative Confession in the Early Fiction of Saul Bellow

3.1. Introduction: Social Dominations and Conservative Confession

This chapter studies the early short novels of Bellow, *Dangling Man*, *The Victim*, and *Seize the Day*, exploring the mutual relationships between the dynamics of conservative confession and cultural exigencies in them. The central questions addressed here are: to what extent cultural powers manage to control the discourse of knowledge in these novels and in what ways Bellow's early protagonists respond to these conditioning forces by disconnecting their private reality from the public perception of the truth. What this chapter argues is that the truth that Bellow's heroes articulate in their inner polyphonic discourse, whether in their writing or in conversations with their doubles, is inconsistent with what they put forward in their submissive and outward performances. To account for the stylistics of discourse, I will refer to the theories of dialogic confession proposed by Bakhtin; and in order to outline the role of cultural dominants in shaping the protagonists' acts of confession, I will turn to Foucault's argument on the reciprocal relation that potentially exists between power and knowledge. The impact of the operations of power and knowledge in these novels is that, despite the fact that Bellow's heroes display a desire to establish successful communications with their external world, they eventually

end up being isolated, alienated, and silenced by their contemporary society, having been left with no option but to surrender to it. This is how and why *Dangling Man* apparently culminates with Joseph joining the war, *The Victim* with Asa Leventhal compromising with his Gentile character double Kirby Allbee, and *Seize the Day* with Tommy Wilhelm destroying his life by blindly obeying Dr. Tamkin's materialistic order.

To account for the final submissions of Bellow's heroes, we might consider Bellow's reflections on the troubles he faced at the time of writing his early novels: "I wasn't absolutely sure of my qualifications. What was there for me to write? Did I know English well enough to write it?"⁶⁶ He further declares: "I did not belong to a class that could bring me into a significant life. Therefore I had to seek a significant life in my own way. My way was to write" (Jefferson 125).

There are critics of Bellow who interpret the overall mode of Bellow's first novel in the light of the final submission of its hero. In "The Craters of the Spirit", Tony Tanner notes that "Joseph is the representative victim of the times" because he "finally capitulates, since his ideas have turned rancid in the contemporary atmosphere and his own freedom has become merely a morose accidie" (23). In "Tommy Wilhelm as Passive-Aggressive in *Seize the Day*", Darryl Hattenhauer argues that Tommy is presented as a passive-aggressive figurer who "refrains from asserting himself in situations because of the constant restraint he exerts on his emotions" (par. 1). On the other hand, in "Saul Bellow and the Concept of the Survivor", Earl Rovit aptly notes that even though Joseph, Asa Leventhal, and Tommy Wilhelm, are "victimized personalities,

⁶⁶ Saul Bellow, "The Jefferson Lecture." (1977). *It All Adds Up: From the Dim Past to the Uncertain Future: A Non-Fiction Collection* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1994) 125. Hereafter cited internally as *Jefferson*.

each of them in different ways manages to assert an ultimate sense of the self that resists merger or psychic surrender”.⁶⁷ He traces a development in Bellow’s fiction from “the figure of the victim to that of the survivor” (Newman 8). Rovit argues that “according to the degree to which they are able to preserve their moral integrity without succumbing wholly to the compulsions that would bend them, they are successful survivors rather than victims” (*Survivor* 91). Bellow’s heroes resist total submission to external forces by returning to inner ways of communication, that is, in their writings and meditations.

The significance of undertaking a confessional study in these early novels is that in their presentation of submissive, polyphonic, and transgressive acts of communication, they prefigure the confessional style that enlightens Bellow’s subsequent fiction. For instance, Charlie Citrine’s reluctant submissions to the orders of Cantabile in *Humbolt’s Gift* are comparable to the yielding attitudes of Asa Leventhal towards Kirby Allbee and also to the hesitant obedience of Tommy Wilhelm towards Dr. Tamkin. However, Bellow’s protagonists turn to a different space for genuine communication: the inner space of writing and dialogue with their double figures. The creation of polyphonic confessions in the written form of diary fiction presented in *Dangling Man* is developed in Bellow’s later novel *Herzog* into the polyphonic form of letters and afterwards into the auto/biographical form in his final novel, *Ravelstein*. The particular confessional relationships that exist between Bellow’s early protagonists and their doubles are significant because they anticipate the development of such relationships in his later fiction. The one-sided submissiveness of the hero towards his double is balanced by the caring attitude of the double towards the protagonist. This kind of relationship, which is

⁶⁷ Earl Rovit, “Saul Bellow and the Concept of Survivor.” *Saul Bellow and His Work*. Ed. Edmond Schraepen (Brussels: Centrum Voor Taal-En Literatuurwetenschap Vrije Universiteit, 1978) 93. Hereafter cited internally as *Survivor*.

initially presented between Joseph and The Spirit of Alternatives in *Dangling Man* and also between Asa Leventhal and Kirby Allbee in *The Victim*, later on diverges into two separate relationships in *Seize the Day*: in the polyphonic attitude of the narrative voice towards Tommy Wilhelm and in the submissiveness of Tommy towards Dr. Tamkin, who stands for a more realist version of the double figure. The combination of both confessional relationships in *Seize the Day* provides the ground for the emergence of humour into the serious discourse of confession.

Seize the Day stands as a turning point in Bellow's oeuvre. It is in this novel that for the first time he presents the polyphonic narrative voice as the two coupled voices in polyphonic communication and initiates a form of seriocomic and double-voiced confessional discourse. Later on, Bellow intensifies the technical roles of humour, irony, laughter, self-parody, grotesque and carnival in the novels of his mature period: *Herzog*, *Humboldt's Gift*, and *Ravelstein*. The early novels prefigure a gradual decrease in the submissive acts of confession and a progressive increase in polyphonic and transgressive forms of truth-telling in Bellow's subsequent fiction. The early hierarchical distance between the hero-confessor and his cultural dominants is significantly overturned in Bellow's later novel *Herzog*, in which the intellectual hero is of higher social status and is endowed with enough power to contradict the "Reality Instructors" of his time. After *Herzog*, the transgressive aspect of the polyphonic tone of confession is further intensified and the hierarchical distance between confessor and confessant is diminished and at times reversed, so that the novel transforms the genre of confession into a subversive form. In addition, there is a gradual development in Bellow's oeuvre away from seriousness and reservation in tone, and towards practices of confidence, liberation,

and humour. This progression towards the creation of more liberal and confident heroes finds parallels in Bellow's life. As he feels more at home with American language and culture, his novels grow less and less restrained. James Atlas, Bellow's biographer explains that

Bellow was never one to let experience marinate; his work tended to reflect his circumstances at the moment of composition. To read his books in consecutive order is to follow the contours of his biography. From the wartime Chicago gloom of *Dangling Man* to the postwar New York of *The Victim*, the suffocating fifties of *Seize the Day*, and the sexually liberated sixties chronicled in *Herzog*, Bellow's novels closely mime those decades in his life. (Atlas 386)

As he moves towards a more liberal style of writing, Bellow introduces new conceptions of sin and judgment in his novels. The evaluation of confession-related themes, such as judgments on and definitions of character, is significant for this study because they show the conception of sin and the feelings of guilt. Bellow's characters, like their author, show resistance to culturally imposed definitions, because they believe that to claim full knowledge of a character and to make a final judgment on him or her is unfair. In a number of instances Bellow has reacted against being defined as a "Jewish novelist" (Abbott 172). In like manner, Herzog argues against "Reality Instructors" because he believes that they are judgmental and "hard ruthless action taken against a man is the assertion by evildoers that he is fully knowable" (*Herzog* 299). Joseph, likewise, detests the "hard-boiled," because they are judgmental extremists for whom the world is "a wholly good or a wholly malevolent" (*Dangling* 18). This reaction calls to mind Bakhtin's definition of monologism and monologic relationships which attempt to

define and pass absolute and one-sided judgements on a character and reduce his/her personality to one knowable trait. It seems that, in their inward communications, Bellow's heroes desire to escape nearly all culturally imposed definitions and develop more flexible conceptions of guilt, shame, and responsibility.

Bakhtin contrasts the monologic, one-sided approach to personality to the approach in which both the speaker and the listener are actively responsive. Exploring the novels of Dostoevsky, Bakhtin developed his philosophy of dialogism and dialogic relationships. One reason that Bakhtin describes the confessional monologues of Karamazov, Raskolnikov, and the Underground man as dialogic is that their "words implicate the words and anticipated reactions of their listeners, so that listener, or reader, cannot escape scot-free from having listened to them" (Brooks 32). Whereas the monologic model of discourse represents univocal and monophonic confessional communication in its conventional form, the polyphonic model of speech allows for the presentation of more than one voice in interaction. As Mika Lähteenmäki explains, the dialogical philosophy of language communication is seen as

an interactive process in which both speaker and listener play an active role.

Understanding is not viewed as a process whereby a listener finds out a thought behind a speaker's words; rather it is regarded as a joint project in which meanings are mutually constructed. (Lähteenmäki 78)

In such reciprocal relationships, understanding and answering are interconnected: "understanding is not regarded as the successful decoding and reception of propositional information as in code models, but as the listener's active reaction to the speech act of the speaker" (Lähteenmäki 78). The speaker is also an answerer: "a speaker's utterance at

any given moment can be regarded as reactions to the previous utterance of *others*" (Lähteenmäki 78). Definition and judgment of character are therefore not dictated from an external and distanced authority, but are gradually formulated during the process of mutual communication.

The production of dialogic truth, however, does not emerge as a result of taking dialogism as a form of relativity, as Erik Dop argues (Dop 8). The risk involved in this approach towards dialogism is, as Todorov has warned, the impossibility of producing any form of meaning; because as far as relativity is concerned, discourse will contain "only the discourse of various interlocutors, a world in which all options are equally valid" (Dop 8). On the other hand, as Dop explains:

the concept of truth Bakhtin carefully wants to elaborate and present to us is that in the search for or endeavour to establish 'truths' we need to establish the intimate inter-relationship between the two natures of truth. By which he means that *dialogic* truth had a *twofold* nature, the nature of truth itself (the 'object' *in itself*), and the nature of thinking about truth (the subject's relation to the 'object' or the 'object' *for itself*). (Dop 10)

Bellow's novels illustrate the separation between public and private truth and advocate the structures of controlled liberalism as the necessary conditions to reconnect the two modes of reality. Dialogic confessional relationships presented in his novels are neither as borderless as relativism might suggest, nor as restricting as absolute authoritarian relationships would necessitate. In fact, Bellow's various and numerous confessional strategies function to prevent one-sided judgments of character and give voice to the other side of the truth. Journal writing, conversations with the double, and the

use of humour, are three major dialogic techniques that Bellow develops in his early novels and continues to use throughout his fiction. The role of character doubles in Bellow's fiction is crucial because they function to inform the protagonist of a different version of reality by creating conversations with them and diversifying the unity of their inner world. The doubles' sincere acknowledgment of the truth is indicated in the name of Joseph's double, called "On the other hand" and "Tu as raison aussi." Asa Leventhal's double character Kirby Allbee appears to be unpleasant at first, but it takes time for both Joseph and Asa to know their doubles and to admit the truth about themselves.

To account for the inconsistency between the heroes' inner thoughts and their outward actions, one can refer to Foucault's argument on truth and power and the Bakhtinian concept of monologic and polyphonic architecture. In the first volume of *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault makes a distinction between pluralistic relations of micro-powers and unitary authoritative relationships of domination (*History I* 92-98). Of the impacts of power on the human body, he states that authoritarian "power relations have an immediate hold upon it; they invest it, mark it, train it, torture it, force it to carry out tasks, to perform ceremonies, to emit signs" (*Discipline* 25). Authority figures dominate individuals by imposing an ideology on them as the only legitimate, believable, and acceptable truth. Foucault believes that "despite our potential for the production of meaning, what it is possible for us to think and do at a particular time is actually quite limited. This is because the rules that shape what we think and do are in large part the product of power relations in society" (Hughes-Warrington 96). To confront this domineering ideology, Foucault primarily suggests that power is not a commodity to be possessed by one authority figure but one that can be exercised by every one (*History I*

94). It may be possible for individuals to exercise power, but how? In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault proposes that truth and power are interrelated: “power and knowledge directly imply one another; that there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations” (*Discipline 27*). It then becomes possible for the individual to exercise positions of power by claiming to have a form of knowledge. Bellow’s characters exercise this form of power and knowledge in their writings, inner dialogues, and sense of humour. This positive view of power forms the basis of Foucault’s argument that:

Perhaps we should abandon the belief that power makes mad and that, by the same token, the renunciation of power is one of the conditions of knowledge. We should admit rather that power produces knowledge (and not simply by encouraging it because it serves power or by applying it because it is useful). (*Discipline 27*)

In contrast to the univocal relations of domination, the operations of the micro-physics of power are not localised but diffused (*Discipline 26-27*). When considered as micro-power, power is no longer a property, Foucault argues, but “a strategy” in which

one should decipher in it a network of relations, constantly in tension, in activity, rather than a privilege that one might possess; that one should take as its model a perpetual battle rather than a contract regulating a transaction or the conquest of a territory. (*Discipline 26*)

Accordingly, it can be suggested that Foucauldian conception of domination vs. power is comparable to Bakhtinian monologic vs. polyphonic relationship, in that

domineering and monologic relationships are distanced, monophonic, and authoritative whereas polyphonic relationships and micro-powers are egalitarian and pluralistic. In the presence of monologic relations of domination, Bellow's protagonists are likely to make monologic confessions, whereas in the presence of micro-powers a more polyphonic confessional response is produced. Both domineering and monologic relations are monophonic, external to the subject, and univocal. On the other hand, relations of power and polyphony are polytonal and can be "exercised from innumerable points, in the interplay of nonegalitarian and mobile relations" (*Discipline* 27; *History I* 94). Foucault outlines the features of power: relations of power are not in super-structural positions, that is, they do not exist exterior to other relationships such as economic, knowledge, or sexual relations; rather, they are immanent in them (*History I* 94-96). In addition, whenever these relationships interact, power is demonstrated. More importantly, "power comes from below; that is, there is no binary and all-encompassing opposition between rulers and ruled at the root of power relations" (*History I* 94). There is always a character in Bellow's novels who introduces the intellectual protagonists like Herzog, Charlie Citrine, Chick, and Albert Corde to the reality of their social subclass and helps them communicate in public. Mason Zaehner, Corde's nephew, represents such a voice from subculture and is described in the novel as: "The true voice of Chicago—the spirit of the age speaking from its lowest register; the very bottom" (*Dean* 42).

Power relations are "both intentional and nonsubjective," signifying that "there is no power that is exercised without a series of aims and objectives" (*History I* 94-95). And, "when there is power, there is resistance, and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power" (*History I* 95). The

existence of power relations “depends on a multiplicity of points of resistance: these play the role of adversary, target, support, or handle in power relations” (*History I* 95). Jon Simons suggests that although Foucault’s argument implies that there is no resistance when relationships of domination exist and although modern regimes constitute such relationships, it does not follow that resistance is impossible in modern humanist regimes because “power relations do not solidify into states of complete domination” (Simons 82-83).

In the light of these concepts of power, authority, and resistance, I will study the impacts of the Second World War, Jew-Gentile oppositions, and American materialism as three external and super-structural conditioning forces that control the discourse of Bellow’s heroes and elicit the publicly submissive and performative confessional responses from them. I will then study confessional speech acts in his fiction, exploring how the microphysics of power are at work at the level of personal language and style in order to respond to these domineering powers. I will study these three novels in terms of what they anticipate in Bellow’s future polyphonic confessional novels: the place of journal in *Dangling Man*, the double in *The Victim*, and humour in *Seize the Day*, arguing that these are the narrative strategies that Bellow develops in his novels in order to help his protagonists break the false conceptions of their thoroughly innocent selves and educate them to know, make known, accept, and take control of their public and private conditions.

3.2. Confession and Journal Writing in *Dangling Man*

“But I must know what I myself am” (*Dangling* 86).

Bellow's first novel, *Dangling Man*, illustrates the cultural impacts of Second World War⁶⁸ ideology of class distinction, rank, and Jew-Gentile opposition. Joseph's brother Amos, for instance, has no doubt that Joseph should improve his social and economic status by joining the war. Therefore, for Amos, private and public life are absolutely in communication. However, individuals like Joseph who cannot approve the war ideology and justifications dissociate from its values in private. Joseph oscillates between the extremely conditioned external world and his own free internal space. The novel shows that excessive freedom is as detrimental to the protagonist's dialogic confession as excessive control. “Joseph's America”, as Tony Tanner remarks, “has fallen under the shadow of Hitler's Europe” (18), the grotesque world which Joseph contrasts with the worlds of the past: “the giants of the last century had their Liverpools and Londons, their Lilles and Hamburgs to contend against, as we have our Chicagos and Detroits [...] The worlds we sought were never those we saw; the worlds we bargained for were never the worlds we got” (*Dangling* 15). The autocratic force of the war influences the physical actions as well as the ideology of some individuals. It functions, in Foucault's words, to impose the operations of “a group of institutions and mechanisms that ensure the subservience of the citizens”, “a mode of subjugation which, in contrast to violence, has the form of a rule”, “a general system of domination exerted by one group over another, a system whose effects, through successive derivations, pervade the entire social body” (*History I* 92). Joseph refers to ideological formation as “Ideal Construction”. He writes:

⁶⁸ The novel was published on 23 March 1944 “during the darkest days of the war. Hitler had just invaded Hungary; the gas chambers at Auschwitz were widely known; American fighter pilots were bombing Berlin” (Atlas 93).

“we are schooled in quietness” because “who can be the earnest huntsman of himself when he knows he is in turn a quarry?” (*Dangling* 86) Joseph complains and criticizes the war culture in writing:

we are called upon to accept the imposition of all kinds of wrongs, to wait in ranks under a hot sun, to run up a clattering beach, to be sentries, scouts or workingmen, to be those in the train when it is blown up, or those at the gates when they are locked, to be of no significance, to die. (*Dangling* 86)

Joseph extends his dissatisfaction towards all who rule mankind by imposing their ideology on them: he calls them the “hardboiled”. The “hardboiled” govern individuals according to the rules of their “ideal construction,” that is, their “obsessive devices”:

There have been innumerable varieties: for study, for wisdom, bravery, war, the benefits of cruelty, for art; the God-man of the ancient cultures, the Humanistic full man, the courtly lover, the knight, the ecclesiastic, the despot, the ascetic, the millionaire, the manager. I could name hundreds of these ideal constructions, each with its assertions and symbols, each finding—in conduct, in God, in art, in money—its particular answer and each proclaiming: ‘This is the only possible way to meet chaos’. (*Dangling* 101-102)

The impact of the silencing cultural dominants is initially foreseeable in marginal characters such as comrade Joe and Amos, Joseph’s brother, who are influenced by the communist party and war, respectively. Joe is a member of the communist party to which Joseph once belonged. When Joseph meets him in a café, Joe deliberately ignores him. Joseph comments: “simply because I am no longer a member of their party they have

instructed him and boos like him not to talk to me” (*Dangling* 21). Joseph links free speech with liberal thinking and contrasts them with obedience, isolation, and tyranny:

Forbid one man to talk to another, forbid him to communicate with someone else, and you’ve forbidden him to think, because as a great many writers will tell you, thought is a kind of communication. And his party doesn’t want him to think but to follow its discipline [...] when a man obeys an order like that he’s helping to abolish freedom and begin tyranny. (*Dangling* 21)

Joseph’s big brother, Amos, assimilates the war ideology. He is superior to Joseph in terms of age, wealth, high social position, and prosperous marriage. He is now assimilated to Dolly’s rich family, distinguishes himself from the class to which he had once belonged and accordingly sees the war as a chance for Joseph to get promoted. He ironically misreads Joseph’s impatience to join war as his impatience to become an “Officer Candidate,” but Joseph explains:

“I don’t think I want to try to make an officer of myself.”

“Well, I don’t see why not,” said Amos. “Why not?”

“As I see it, the whole war’s a misfortune. I don’t want to raise myself through it.” (*Dangling* 44)

Amos reasons: “many men carry their ambitions over from civilian life and don’t mind climbing upon the backs of the dead, so to speak. It is no disgrace to be a private, you know. Socrates was a plain foot soldier, a hoplite” (*Dangling* 44). Joseph contrasts an adventurous friend who died in the war with his materialistic brother, as he writes:

Jeff Forman dies; brother Amos lays up a store of shoes for the future. Amos is kind. Amos is no cannibal. He cannot bear to think that I should be

unsuccessful, lack money, refuse to be concerned about my future. Jeff, under the water, is beyond virtue, value, glamour, money, or future. I say these things unable to see or think straight, and what I feel is less injustice or inhumanity than bewilderment. (*Dangling* 59)

Joseph writes: “Great pressure is brought to bear to make us undervalue ourselves. On the other hand, civilization teaches that each of us is an inestimable prize. There are then, these two preparations: one for life and the other for death” (*Dangling* 86). Dangling between states of life and death, he compares himself to the murdered Barnardine in *Measure for Measure* “whose contempt for life equalled his contempt for death, so that he could not come out of his cell to be executed” (*Dangling* 10). Although Joseph almost unwillingly follows the orders of the war and eventually joins it, he seems to have remained untouched in his identity and ideology. Bellow describes Joseph’s twofold response:

He is a person greatly concerned with keeping intact and free from encumbrance a sense of his own being, its importance. Yet he is not abnormally cold, nor is he egotistic. He keeps a tight hold because, as he himself explains, he is keenly intent on knowing what is happening to him. He wants to miss nothing. (Atlas 88)

The distinctiveness of Joseph’s identity is that unlike his brother, Joseph does not let war ideology rule his life. Joseph feels isolated and powerless; he cannot communicate his thoughts to anybody. Therefore, he returns to his own private space—the journal wherein he can liberate himself from the imposed realities of the external world and express his thoughts and feelings with total freedom. His dual response to the external and internal

world is comparable to Kenneth's in *More Die of Heartbreak* who states: "I wouldn't have admitted that to a police examiner, or in a sworn deposition, but I confess it freely to anybody who has taken the trouble to read my narrative" (331).

Journal writing is Joseph's internal free space wherein he shows resistance to cultural demands and makes genuine confessions. Written in the form of a journal, *Dangling Man* is an account of the introspections of Joseph, who chronicles four of his most critical months from 15 December 1942 until 9 April before he is drafted into the army. The son of immigrant Jews, Joseph shares some of the troubles of his author.⁶⁹ As such, his autobiographical confessions border on heterobiography, communicating multi-layered truth: the authorial truth as well as the truth of character-narrator. Joseph is "reflective, guarded, a different young intellectual with a straight nose, black hair, and large soulful eyes" (Atlas 88). He is twenty-seven, tall, handsome, and young, graduated in history and married for five years (*Dangling* 16). He is depicted, at this point, when he fails most to establish communications with the external world. Although he has been living in Chicago for eighteen years, he is still regarded as a Canadian and therefore an outsider who cannot be drafted without bureaucratic investigations (*Dangling* 4). This feeling of alienation is intensified by the absence of communication at home with his wife.⁷⁰

⁶⁹ "Joseph's meditation on his Jewish ancestry, memories of his childhood in the slums of Montreal, references to his dead mother and to a disapproving father who wants him to get a job all resonates with Bellow's own life at the time" (Atlas 96).

⁷⁰ Bellow frequently depicts his domestic war at home with Anita, his first wife, in his early novels. In *Dangling Man*, Iva, Joseph's wife is "a quiet girl" with "a way about her that discourages talk," bears a distinct resemblance to Anita, Bellow's first wife (Atlas 96). In his later novel, *The Victim* he refers to an event when she got drunk at a party, and danced closely with a friend to annoy Bellow (Atlas 91-92). In *Seize the Day*, Bellow depicts Anita in "the portrait of Wilhelm's wife, Margaret, as a harridan who hectors him about child support" (Atlas 237) which was "inspired directly by Bellow's fights with Anita" (Atlas 237). Anita was not happy with the depiction: she "bitterly resented Bellow's fictional depictions of her. Once when she was complaining to the McCloskey about *Seize the Day*, Mitzi McCloskey asked, "How do you know it's you? Anita replied firmly, "I know" (Atlas 237).

The confessional movement in Joseph's journal begins with his transgression of literary norms and progresses towards polyphony, culminating with his submission to war. At the outset of his journal, Joseph acknowledges his transgression of literary fashion:

There was a time when people were in the habit of addressing themselves frequently and felt no shame at making the record of their inward transactions. But to keep a journal nowadays is considered a kind of self-indulgence, a weakness, and in poor state. For this is an era of hardboiled-dom. (*Dangling* 3)

Ellen Pifer believes that keeping a journal is for Joseph “an attempt to break free of the strictures of cultural authority” (Pifer 26). Joseph makes a clear distinction between the visionary world of his inner self and the external world of the hard-boiled. They are the major silencing cultural forces that believe in a “limited kind of candor, close-mouthed straightforwardness” (*Dangling* 3). They command: “If you have difficulties, grapple with them silently, goes one of their commandments” (*Dangling* 3). In describing the codes as “commandments,” Joseph shows how rigid they are and by disobeying them he intensifies his transgression, exclaiming: “To hell with that” (*Dangling* 3). The “hard-boiled” disregard inner life and feelings, believing that human feelings should be strangled or censored: there are “correct and incorrect ways of indicating” inner feelings. They are ignorant of “the truest candor”. Joseph, on the other hand, by writing a journal, proves to be willing to make a “record of his inward transactions” (*Dangling* 3). There are critics of Bellow who, like Atlas, believe that by “hard-boiled” Joseph obliquely refers to “Ernest Hemingway—the chief representative of the era of ‘hard-boiled-dom’”

thereby Joseph has meant to put the great man down (Atlas 96), reasoning that Bellow disapproved of Hemingway's "pose of manly stoicism" (Atlas 97).

The journal is therefore anti-authoritarian. Joseph disobeys the rules of war, ideology, God, literary idols, and authoritarian interpersonal relationships. The most transgressive form of confession is negative confession because it digresses from the basic rule of confession by expressing guiltlessness rather than sinfulness. At an interpersonal level, Joseph expresses no regret about having an affair with Kitty behind Iva's back (*Dangling* 72). At a supernatural level, Joseph makes negative confessions when he debunks the totalitarian power of God. He is desperately seeking a source for grace but he cannot accept the Divine God as that source. When the music he is listening to suggests God as the source of grace, he thinks:

The music named only one source, the universal one, God. But what a miserable surrender that would be, born out of disheartenment and chaos; and out of fear bodily and imperious, that like a disease asked for a remedy and did not care how it was supplied. The record came to an end; I began it again. No, not God, not any divinity. That was anterior, not of my own deriving. I was not so full of pride that I could not accept the existence of something greater than myself, something, perhaps, of which I was an idea, or merely a fraction of an idea. That was not it. But I did not want to catch at any contrivance in panic. In my eyes, that was a great crime. (*Dangling* 47)

In his liberating, visionary moment of communication, Joseph develops a higher perception of crime. He can acknowledge God's superiority, but he believes it is criminal to accept the authorized truth out of terror.

Joseph cannot bring to the surface these transgressive illuminations in public without modification, reforms, or pretence, because he is aware that making transgressive confession is not without risk: “I do not like to think what we are governed by. I do not like to think about it. It is not easy work, and it is not safe. Its kindest revelation is that our senses and our imaginations are somehow incompetent” (*Dangling* 59). Pretence is thus a confession-related speech act that Joseph consciously turns to in order to stay safe, even though he is aware that it “damages the sense of reality” (*Dangling* 6). He makes use of clothing imagery to visualize his pretence: “re-entering waking life after the regeneration (when it is that) of sleep, I go in the body from nakedness to clothing and in the mind from relative purity to pollution” (*Dangling* 7). The pretending face also appears in grotesque form: “we lie a great weight on our faces, straining toward the last breath which comes like the gritting of gravel under heavy tread” (*Dangling* 83). The grotesque image presents a face polluted, damaged, and deformed under the weight and pressure of layers upon layers of pretension. The face heavy with many layers of pressure upon it thus struggles and undergoes many frictions in order to articulate its fresh and pure truth. The homophonic word “lie” has thematic reference to resistance and to sincerity.

In addition to monologically transgressive confessions that attempt to demystify authoritarian figures, the journal includes various forms of polyphonic confession: polemic, ironic, and grotesque. These polyphonic forms function like micro-powers and create seriocomic intonation in discourse whereby Joseph arrives at a more comprehensive understanding of the world and of himself. He becomes able to accept and justify the ways of himself and those of others. He polemicizes:

Half-conscious, I call in a variety of testimony on my case and am confronted by the wrongs, errors, lies, disgraces, and fears of a lifetime. I am forced to pass judgment on myself and to ask questions I would far rather not ask: “What is this for? and “What am I for?” and “Am I made for this?” (*Dangling* 89)

Joseph makes polemic confessions in the employment of the stylistic feature that Bakhtin describes as “the word with a sideward glance” at the possible interlocutor. When he is unsure of the influence of his speech on his brother, he contemplates the problem:

What sort of impression had my words made on Amos? It was impossible to tell. What could he think? Perhaps he considered me more hopeless than ever. But what did *I* think? Was what I said half as true as it was impetuous? His neat vision of personal safety I disowned, but not a future of another kind. Still, how could I reason with him? He was a distance beyond reckoning from the craters of the spirit, so that they were no more than small pits on his horizon. (*Dangling* 45-46)

In his polemic confessions and self-interrogations, Joseph seems to be going through an in-depth self-analysis, introspection, and self-cultivation, looking for truth among layers of reality. Here, Joseph’s major confessional strategy to arrive at his inner truth is the technique that Bakhtin introduces as “the word with sideward glance” at someone else’s discourse. Joseph contemplates what Amos could think of him and how this consciousness of some one else’s value judgment might have influenced Joseph’s expression of reality.

Joseph's journal functions like a micro-power: a hidden free space for communicating his desired truth. For all its polyphonic features, the journal seems to have "an air of authenticity; it grapples with deep themes, breaks narrative rules in pursuit of its idiosyncratic vision, and captures the temper of an era" (Atlas 99). The micro-powers of dialogic relationships are at work at the level of language, functioning to disrupt authority figures. Dialogic responses are made when the same word is semantically reproduced in response to a previously mentioned word. For instance, "Great" is the word that is dialogically reproduced by Joseph when he wants to discredit the American eccentric passion to achieve greatness in everything. He exemplifies Abt as the one whose ambition is to be great and compares the modern challenge for greatness with past challenges:

Six hundred years ago, a man was what he was born to be. Satan and the Church, representing God, did battle over him. He, by reason of his choice, partially decided the outcome. But whether, after life, he went to hell or to heaven, his place among other men was given. It could not be contested. But, since, the stage has been reset and human beings only walk on it, and, under this revision, we have, instead, history to answer to. We were important enough then for our souls to be fought over. Now, each of us is responsible for his own salvation, which is in his *greatness*. And that, that *greatness*, is the rock our hearts are abraded on. *Great* minds, *great* beauties, *great* lovers and criminals surround us. From the *great* sadness and desperation of Werthers and Don Juans we went to the *great* ruling images of Napoleons; from these to murderers who had that right over victims because they were *greater* than the victims; to men

who felt privileged to approach others with a whip; to schoolboys and clerks who roared like revolutionary lions; to those pimps and subway creatures, debaters in midnight cafeteria who believed they could be *great* in treachery and catch the throats of those they felt were sound and well in the lassos of their morbidity; to dreams of *greatly* beautiful shadows embracing on a flawless screen. (*Dangling* 63, emphasis mine)

Every time, the word “great” is reproduced, it is charged with extra negative connotations whereby it becomes polyphonic, leaving a loophole in itself which functionally makes the statement defensible in intonation and significance. Such seriocomic and polyphonic confessions are made in the form of dialogic relationship and centrifugal micro-powers work at the level of language in order to contradict the domination of an absolute ideology. Polyphonic micro-powers as such function from below, from the depths of the character’s soul and from multiple locations.

Joseph employs humour, satire, and irony as the stylistic features in order to ridicule authority figures, that is, larger-than-life characters. He sees Abt as one of these figures: “Abt, more than anyone I have known, has lived continually in need of being consequential. Early in life he discovered that he was quicker, abler, than the rest of us, and that he could easily outstrip us in learning and in skills” (*Dangling* 61). He ironically describes Abt: “That winter he was Lenin, Mozart, and Locke all rolled into one. But there was unfortunately not enough time to be all three” (*Dangling* 62). His flaw was that he could not accept himself simply as a human: “He would never admit that he wanted to become another Locke, but there he was, wearing himself thin with the effort of emulation, increasingly angry at himself, and unable to admit that the scale of his

ambition was defeating him” (*Dangling* 62). He fails to acknowledge that he is less than perfect and admit his errors: “He is stubborn. Just as, in old days, it disgraced him to confess that he was not familiar with a book or a statement that came under his jurisdiction, he now cannot acknowledge that his plan has miscarried. But then it bothers him to be found guilty even of small errors” (*Dangling* 62). Abt’s language calls to mind Valentine Gersbach in *Herzog* who was “a regular Goethe” and “finished all your sentences” (*Herzog* 155).

From treating extremely controlling characters with humour, Joseph moves to treat extremely uncontrollable ones with grotesque elements. In several scenes, he creates a grotesque image of Vanaker (*Dangling* 9, 19, 40, 84), depicting him as exceedingly restless, dirty, and loud. However, in a reversal of subject positions, Joseph makes a grotesque show of himself: in blaming Vanaker for his loud coming and going to the toilet, Joseph became louder than Vanaker ever could be so that he put the life of some dying person in danger (*Dangling* 132). Another example of grotesque confession is when Joseph creates an exaggerated image of Aunt Diana. He dialogically relates the prevision scene of the man dying on the street, having fallen in front of Joseph, to that of his mother on her deathbed. What ironically relates the two is the scar Aunt Diana has left on his forehead:

My mother may still have been alive, though her eyes were shut, for when Aunt Diana threw herself upon her, her lips seemed to move crookedly in a last effort to speak or kiss. Aunt Diana screamed. I tried to pull her from the body, and she lashed at me, clawing with enraged fingers. In the next blurred moment, my mother was dead. I was looking at her, my hands pressed to my

face, hearing Aunt Diana cry, 'She wanted to say something! She wanted to talk to me!' (*Dangling* 83)

Images of Vanaker, Joseph, and Aunt Diana are grotesque, because they are fantastically serious and comic; they are satiric, and double-voiced in nature. Grotesque images are transgressive in that they deliberately depart from the normative conventions of behaviour. At times grotesque behaviour borders on madness.

Apart from seriocomic and grotesque modes of truth-telling, Joseph makes genuine confessions: "I am unwilling to admit that I do not know how to use my freedom and have to embrace the flunkydrom of a job because I have no resources—in a word, no character" (*Dangling* 5). In *Towards the Philosophy of the Act*, Bakhtin explores this modern problem:

Contemporary man feels sure of himself, feels well-off and clear-headed where he is himself essentially and fundamentally not present in the autonomous world of a domain of culture and its immanent law of creation. But he feels unsure of himself, feels destitute and deficient in understanding, where he has to do with himself, where he is the centre from which answerable acts or deeds issue, in actual and once-occurrent life. That is why we act confidently only when we do so not as ourselves, but as those possessed by the immanent necessity of the meaning of some domain of culture. (*Act* 20-21)

There are therefore times that Bakhtin sees value in acts of pretence. In the face of external authorities, the individual's show of certainty can empower his inner confidence. It seems that Joseph is looking for an internal assistance as such when he writes:

And was I to become this whole man alone, without aid? I was too weak for it, I did not command the will. Then in what quarter should I look for help, where was the power? Grace by what law, under what order, by whom required? Personal, human, or universal was it? (*Dangling* 47)

In a consummating moment, the whole world appears to Joseph in miniature. Joseph makes confessions at this moment of revelation:

I had not done well alone. I doubted whether anyone could. To be pushed upon oneself entirely put the very facts of simple existence in doubt. Perhaps the war could teach me, by violence, what I had been unable to learn during those months in the room. Perhaps I could sound creation through other means. Perhaps. (*Dangling* 139)

He seems to have developed certain “techniques of the self” in order to face the external realities. He gradually arrives at a more polyphonic understanding of his inner self. He recalls that at high school, the German parents of his friend Will had seen Mephistopheles, a devil in him:

I never saw them again. I avoided Will at school. And spent sleepless hours thinking of what Mrs. Harscha had said. She had seen through me—by some instinct, I thought then—and, where others saw nothing wrong, she had discovered evil. For a long time I believed there was a diabolic part to me. (*Dangling* 54)

On his failed relationship with Iva, Joseph polyphonically acknowledges his own faults in writing:

Iva and I had not been getting along well. I don't think the fault was entirely hers. I had dominated her for years; she was now capable of rebelling (as, for example, at the Servatius party) [...] Was it possible that she should not want to be guided, formed by me? (*Dangling* 69-70)

He ironically finds himself to be one of the hardboiled he condemned, forcing Iva to “read books of his choosing, teaching her to admire what he believes admirable” (*Dangling* 18). And: “if I were a little less obstinate, I would confess failure and say that I do not know what to do with my freedom” (*Dangling* 110). He acknowledges: “But now I am struck by the arrogance with which I set people apart into two groups: those with worth-while ideas and those without them” (*Dangling* 111).

Joseph begins to see the negative side of total freedom and the positive side of a rule-governed life. He learns from Robbie Stillman, his friend in the Army, that Army life “is not hard when you accustom yourself to discipline. You have to learn to submit” (*Dangling* 109). In the second dialogue with The Spirit, Joseph gradually comes to understand that he cannot live without an “ideal construction” (*Dangling* 102). He explains:

We are afraid to govern ourselves. Of course. It is so hard. We soon want to give up our freedom. It is not even real freedom, because it is not accompanied by comprehension. It is only a preliminary condition of freedom. But we hate it. And soon we run out, we choose a master, roll over on our backs and ask for the leash. (*Dangling* 122)

Later on, when Joseph eventually decides to join the war, he refers to this scene, saying that he had been testing himself in order to feel how painful it would be to surrender

when he had used the word 'leash' (134). Now he is sure that it had not been painful at all:

It was not painful in the least. Not even when I tested myself, whispering 'the leash,' reproachfully, did I feel pained or humiliated. I could have chosen a harsher symbol than that for my surrender. It would have not hurt me, for I could feel nothing but gratification and a desire to make my decision effective at once. (*Dangling* 134)

Having submitted to the army, Joseph feels greatly relieved: "But things were now out of my hands. The next move was the world's. I could not bring myself to regret it" (*Dangling* 139). On April 9, his last civilian day, he writes:

I am no longer to be held accountable for myself; I am grateful for that. I am in other hands, relieved of self-determination, freedom cancelled.

Hurray for regular hours!

And for the supervision of the spirit!

Long live regimentation! (*Dangling* 140)

In his last cry, Joseph is being ironic. Algis Valiunas states that "welcoming his submission to the hard rule of a mass life confronting mass death, Joseph celebrates with ironic zest: 'Long live regimentation!' At least his wearisome dangling days are over" (Valiunas par. 8). His is "the cry of a man for whom regimentation of any kind—whether in marriage, work or the writing of fiction—was anathema" (Atlas 93). The ending is seriocomic in essence. Joseph knows that he cannot stand authorities of whatever kind, yet he cannot manage without them either. He justifies his surrender, writing: "the highest 'ideal construction' is the one that unlocks the imprisoning self" (*Dangling* 112).

Joseph eventually sees the value of boundaries—or in what he metaphorically calls “constructions”—for the revelation of truth in both auricular as well as performative confessions. Enlightening communications with the double figure are further developed in Bellow’s next novel, *The Victim*, wherein Kirby Allbee informs Asa Leventhal of his truth.

3. 3. Confession and Conversation with the Double in *The Victim*

Bellow started working on his second novel, *The Victim*, in 1945 when he moved to New York. The novel is set in New York and concerns the problems of post-war oppositions between Jews and Gentiles. It was first published in November 1947 by Vanguard Press and sold 2,257 copies over three months: July-September (Wood 1002). Bellow describes it as “good, honest, solid work” (Atlas 125) and that it is a novel on which he “labored” on “and tried to make [...] letter-perfect” (Atlas 125). *The Victim* is significant for this study because it depicts a dynamic confessional relationship between the Jewish protagonist, Asa Leventhal, and his Gentile double, Kirby Allbee, depicting Allbee’s transgressions of the norms of anti-Semitism. The novel accordingly begins with the victim image of Asa, the Jew, being constantly bullied by the Gentile confessor-figure, Allbee. Allbee persuades Asa to put him up after he is evicted from a boarding-house, but he takes advantage of Asa’s kindness. One thing leads to another until in a penultimate climatic scene, Asa finds his door chained, and when he breaks into his home he discovers Allbee in his bed with a woman. Things mount towards a next climatic scene in which Allbee puts his head in the oven in Asa’s kitchen and turns on the gas (Atlas 125). Allbee rejects Asa in many ways: in his making fun of the Jewish attitude towards the

Gentile's drinking habit, in blaming Asa for having lost his job, in forcing him to tell the truth, and eventually in his parodistic attempt to commit suicide with gas in Asa's kitchen. Joan Acocella notes that the method Allbee chooses for suicide is a parody of the Auschwitz gas chambers (par 7).

On the other hand, Asa may compromise with Allbee because he sees Allbee as his double. The significance of the double for the narrative is possibly that it provides the grounds for the emergence of a private dialogue and inner confession. Confession takes place in the form of the dialogue of the self with the double. This style of inner communication is at the core of Bakhtin's dialogism. Bakhtin makes a distinction between "actual dialogue" between two people and "dialogical conversation of the self with himself". As Galin Tikhanov explains, this dialogical conversation is possible "only on the ground of a single consciousness":

instead of interpreting Bakhtin as inspired by a Buberian perspective of intimate I-thou relations, one has to admit that the sources of his excitements lie in a notion of dialogue which glorifies the capacity of the human consciousness not to emit signals to the outer world and other humans, but rather to internalize various alien voices (discourses) and to process them for the purpose of self-enrichment. (Tikhanov 199)

We have already seen the dialogic mode of conversation of the self with himself in the conversation between Joseph and the Spirit in *Dangling Man*. In *The Victim*, a similar intersubjective relationship exists between Asa and Allbee. However, the novel demonstrates how the protagonist's preconceptions initially hinder their mutual communication. As noted by Acocella, Asa is repelled by Allbee, but at the same time

identifies with him. He never asks Allbee to get lost, a refusal which might be regarded as part of the neurosis of his assimilation (Acocella par. 7). Allbee begins by telling a tedious story from some years earlier, reminding Asa that he had once victimized Allbee, a story which results in the reversal of their subject positions as victimizer and victimized. Allbee reminds Asa that once Asa was looking for a job and he asked Allbee for an introduction to his boss, the editor of Dill's magazine. During the interview,⁷¹ Leventhal had deliberately behaved insultingly, whereupon Allbee had been fired. At first, Asa confidently denies the story: "you're mistaken. I never did" (*Victim* 168). Then as the conversation goes on, he gradually begins to admit his fault: "But it couldn't have been my fault. I'm sure you're mistaken. Rudiger wouldn't blame you for the run-in we had. It was his fault too" (*Victim* 169). And after more clarification, Asa admits: "All I wanted was a job" and that "I didn't exactly keep my temper down. I admit that. Well if that's the reason I may be to blame in a way, indirectly" (*Victim* 169). Allbee then reminds him of what had possibly provoked Asa to do so: that Asa had done this to get back at him for Allbee's previous harsh attitude towards Asa and his other Jewish friend, Harkavy, in a party. He reminds Asa:

"you were sore at something I said about Jews. Does that come back to you?"

"No. Yes, it does. It does, too," he corrected himself, frowning. "I also remember that you were drunk."

"Wrong. I was liquored up but not drunk. Positively not. You Jews have funny ideas about drinking. Especially the one that all Gentiles are born drunkards."

⁷¹ Atlas suggests that the interview is a biographical reference to a failed job interview in which Bellow was humiliated at *Time*: "the interview wasn't a total loss. Like so many humiliations in Bellow's life, it showed up—turned on its head—in his fiction. In *The Victim*, published four years later, Asa Leventhal, a long suffering job seeker, sits through a disastrous interview with Rudiger" (Atlas 91).

You have a song about it. —‘Drunk he is, drink he must, because he is a Goy
... *Schicker.*’” (*Victim* 170)

In his review of *The Victim*, Malcolm Bradbury⁷² addresses the problem of the victimization of Allbee: Asa causes Allbee, his office colleague, to lose his job. Given the reversal of victimizer and victimized in Asa and Allbee’s positions, Acocella and Coetzee suggests that the book’s title is ambiguous because we can never decide “which man is the victim” (Acocella par 7; Coetzee par 13). Allbee functions like a brave diversifying force that shatters the imaginary, innocent, victimised image that Asa has created for himself. In his not-yet-overturned world, Asa keeps blaming Allbee for all the distractions and troubles Allbee has imposed on his life. However, in a reversal of power relations and subject positions, it turns out that it was Asa who first put Allbee in a victim position years ago. Their relationship is dynamic not only because it does not entail fixity in confessional relationship but also because there is “no authorial voice to tell us whose side to take, to say which of the two is the victim, which the persecutor” (Coetzee Part 2, par 3). Thus one can explain why Asa puts up with Allbee, considering his inner feeling of guilt and the desire to make up for his past flaws and then be forgiven by him.

Allbee is not the only intruder in Bellow’s fiction. Cantabile in *Humboldt’s Gift* invades Charlie Citrine’s undisturbed life. Both Allbee and Cantabile redirect the protagonists’ attention to social dimensions of reality, contributing to their concentration by distracting them from their over-focused, private self-consciousness. Their role can be more readily understood in the light of Derrida’s perception of “visitation” in contrast to “invitation”. Derrida argues that “for the truth to be ‘made’ as an event, then the truth

⁷² Malcolm Bradbury, “On Saul Bellow’s *The Victim*.” *New Statesman*. 128. 4464 (29 Nov 1999) 84. Hereafter cited internally as *Victim Bradbury*.

must fall on me—not be produced by me, but fall on me or visit me” (*Circumfession* 23).

He further explains:

When I invite some one, I remain the master of the house: ‘come, come to me, feel at home,’ and so on, ‘but you should respect my house, my language, my rules, the rules of my nation’ and so on. ‘you are welcome but under some conditions.’ But ‘visitation’ is something else: absolute hospitality implies that the unexpected visitor can come, may come and be received without conditions. It falls upon; it comes; it is an intrusion, an eruption—and that’s the condition of the event. (*Circumfession* 23)

It seems that, in case of Derridean “invitation,” the protagonist reproduces the already existing, authorized social reality, whereas in a more authentic event of truth-telling as in Allbee and Cantabile’s intrusions and “visitations” a more desired version of reality is brought to the surface.

In the presentation of the victim figure, the book is reserved in style: “In *The Victim*, published just two years after the war had ended, the Holocaust is mentioned only once” (Atlas 126): “Millions of us have been killed. What about that?” (*Victim* 261) Bellow explains: “I couldn’t tear myself from my American life”; yet the novel is packed with “a consciousness of that unprecedented crime” (Atlas 126). Bellow explains that it feels

as if by such afflictions the Jews had lost the respect of the rest of humankind and as if they might now be regarded as hopeless victims incapable of honourable self-defence, and arising from this probably the common

instinctive revulsion or loathing of the extremities of suffering, a sense of personal contamination and aversion. (Atlas 126)

As acknowledged by most Bellow critics including Tanner, Atlas, Glenday, Pifer, and Coetzee,⁷³ in terms of its plot and the presentation of the double, the novel bears undeniable resemblance to Dostoevsky's *The Double* and *Eternal Husband*. However, Bellow's distinguished confessional technique can be said to have implicitly reinforced the power positions of the Jews, rendering the Jew/Gentile binary opposition not as a fixed reflection of the victimized/victimizer relationship. Through a distinct confessional technique it becomes gradually clear that Asa has been capable of victimizing and that Allbee has played victim at least once.

The Foucauldian concept of power-knowledge relationship seems to have been working in the Asa-Allbee relationship for years. Asa has exercised his position of power by keeping the secret knowledge to himself for a long time; but now Allbee appears to him not only to remind him of his past sin but also to help him forgive himself. The key to redemption is that he needs to accept himself as a human.

The novel has two parallel plots which dialogically reproduce and amend Asa's misconceptions of confession, justice, judgment, blame, guilt, and responsibility. In the Asa/Allbee plot, Asa considers himself purely innocent and accordingly more than human, but in the plot which concerns his brother's family, his nephew, Mickey, and his illness, Asa sees himself as less than human because he is "indifferent", "impassive", and

⁷³ See Tony Tanner, *Saul Bellow*. (Edinburgh and London: Oliver and Boyd, 1965) 27; James Atlas, *Bellow: A Biography*. (New York: Modern Library, 2000) 125; Michael K Glenday, *Saul Bellow and the Decline of Humanity* (London: Macmillan Press Ltd, 1997) 27; Ellen Pifer, *Saul Bellow Against The Grain*. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991) 47; J. M. Coetzee. "Bellow's Gift." *The New York Review of Books*. 51.9. (27 May 2004). <<http://www.nybooks.com/articles/17110>>.

“unaccommodating” and accordingly cannot manage responsibilities properly (*Victim* 153). In addition, he feels that his Italian mother-in-law has a low opinion of him, because he is a Jew. Asa believes that she sees him as “a Jew, a man of wrong blood, of bad blood, [who] had given her daughter two children” (*Victim* 192). However, as the narrative voice informs us: “no one could have persuaded Leventhal that he was wrong” (*Victim* 192). Both plots concern the problem of confession and humanism, and they dialogically address Schlossberg’s key argument that “it’s bad to be less than human and it’s bad to be more than human” (*Victim* 250). By more than human, Schlossberg means the desire to be God-like, to be free from flaws and mistakes, and sins, whereas to be “less than human is the other side of it” (*Victim* 250). He concludes that “good acting is what is exactly human” (*Victim* 250). The significance of the Asa/Allbee plot in relation to the other plot is that as Asa learns to admit his mistakes, make confessions, and take responsibility for his actions, he improves in his inter-personal relationships with his relatives in that plot: he manages to identify himself as a human being. He learns that at times it is beneficial to treat with more flexibility and open-mindedness the socio-cultural boundaries that separate forever the Jews and the Gentiles as victims and victimizers.

The Victim introduces a transgressive mode of confessional relationship that continues to inform *Humboldt’s Gift* and *Ravelstein*. Allbee is initially presented in the authority position of the confessor whom Asa treats with anger and hostility. He questions Asa and retrieves the confession; yet, Allbee’s position of superiority proves to be more flexible, especially towards the end of the story when they develop some form of friendship and even love. Such a dynamic form of confessional relationship is originally seen in *Dangling Man* wherein the Joseph-Spirit relationship develops from a harsh

attitude in their first meeting towards a more understanding one in their second and final encounter. Both early double figures, that is, the Spirit and Allbee, polyphonically function to inform the protagonists, Joseph and Asa, of the other possible form of reality. The doubles represent an inner voice for the heroes, the voice which is more confident, knowledgeable, and playful than the heroes' hesitant outspoken voice. In their confessional dialogues we see the Spirit in the confessor's superior position and Joseph in the confessant's apologetic stand. For instance:

“And I'd like to apologize.”

“That's not necessary.”

“And explain.”

“I'm used to abuse. It's in the line of duty.”

But I want to say—I'm a chopped and shredded man.” (*Dangling* 120)

Unlike the Spirit, Allbee is characterized with more real-life traits; but his numerous and unexpected appearances and disappearances in Asa's life make him look like a shaky, ghost-like, and imaginary figure (Atlas 125).⁷⁴ Yet to Asa Allbee is a more knowledgeable figure who, Asa believes, knows the answer to his philosophical questions. In the concluding scene in the theatre, Asa asks Allbee: “‘Wait a minute, what's your idea of who runs things?’ But he heard Mary's voice at his back. Allbee ran in and sprang up the stairs” (*The Victim* 379). Allbee is as elusive as one's desired truth can be. If we find Allbee a more interesting character and if we tend to remember him more than Asa, it is also because of his norm-breaking courage and fearless confessional acts. This flexibility in the relationship between the confessor and confessant prefigures

⁷⁴ Atlas, accordingly, argues that the novel is written in a more Kafkaesque than Flaubertian standard in that the main characters are “allegorical” and “indistinct” (Atlas 125).

Bellow's final novels, in which subversion in subject positions is more intense and is combined with more caring relationships between the two people in confession so that a different, subversive-transgressive, mode of confession is produced. This transgressive quality is achieved through the use of humour and irony in the discourse of confession, a Bellowian confessional technique that is primarily introduced in *Seize the Day*.

3. 4. Confession and Humour in *Seize the Day*

From a comparatively reserved style in his two early novels, Bellow moves towards a more liberal one in *The Adventures of Augie March* (1953), the novel which won him the National Book Award. The narrative opens with Augie introducing himself and his style: "I am an American, Chicago born—Chicago, that sombre city—and go at things as I have taught myself, free style, and will make the record in my own way".⁷⁵ As noted by Algis Valiunas, unlike Joseph in *Dangling Man*, "Augie embraces the freedom to recoil from the life that others are living—as well as from their efforts to get him to join them—and to make himself what he wants to be" (Valiunas par 17). As David Gates explains, Bellow has a pattern of "following an exuberant book with a dark one": *Augie March* with *Seize the Day*, *Herzog* with *Mr. Sammler's Planet*, "whose hero reacts with revulsion against both the perceived social and sexual chaos of the 60s and the extremism and fanaticism of human nature" (Gates par. 4). Bellow returns to his former restrained technique in his fourth novel, *Seize the Day*. As Rovit explains: with his first two novels, Bellow was categorized as

⁷⁵ Saul Bellow, *The Adventures of Augie March*. *Saul Bellow: Novels 1944-1953: Dangling Man, The Victim, The Adventures of Augie March*. Notes by James Wood (New York: The Library of America, 2003) 383. Hereafter cited internally as *Augie*.

an academic, *Partisan-Review*-oriented, New Critical, Jewish novelist. However, the appearance of the free swinging picaresque *The Adventures of Augie March* (1954) startlingly shattered this restrictive definition [...] Undaunted, the critical cavalry laid chase, only to be ambushed by *Seize the Day* (1956). The wide open spaces of Augie's catch-as-catch-can world had been inverted into claustral, introspective labyrinths of Tommy Wilhelm's upper Broadway.⁷⁶

What Rovit then asks is whether Bellow's return to a reserved style in *Seize the Day* is a regressive or progressive move. Bellow himself explains that *Seize the Day* is a return to "a type of fiction he had written 'a great deal of at one time,' referring to the morally earnest works of his apprenticeship, *Dangling Man* and *the Victim*—'victim literature,' he calls it (Atlas 236). It can, however, be proposed that *Seize the Day* is an admixture and appropriation of both earlier victim and liberal styles. Bellow creates equilibrium between his extremely reserved victim literature and the excessively liberal style of *Augie*. *Seize the Day* employs humour, irony, grotesque, and self-parody controlled by free indirect narrative discourse, whereby Bellow effectively initiates the conventions of seriocomic confession. With the insertion of humour into the serious intonation of submissive confession and with the transposition of conversations with double figures in *Dangling Man* and *The Victim* into double-voiced narrative discourse in *Seize the Day*, Bellow productively removes the monologic seriousness of confession and flavours it with double-voiced, seriocomic intonation.

⁷⁶ Earl Rovit, "Introduction." *Saul Bellow: A Collection of Critical Essays*. Ed. Earl Rovit (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, 1975) 2. Hereafter cited internally as *Introduction*.

If there is a narrative technique that distinguishes Bellow's polyphonic style from Dostoevsky's it is the enormous use of humour in his confessional fiction. From Bakhtin's studies of the place of double-voicedness in Dostoevsky's novels, especially in the early ones, it is evident that Dostoevsky's characters use double-voiced discourse out of their fear of being judged by others and with the purpose of creating safe loopholes for themselves in order to evade telling the truth about themselves: that they truly care about other people's opinion of them (*Dostoevsky* 229-233). Bakhtin calls this confessional technique, "a word with sideward glance," arguing that not only the discourse but also the facial expression of Dostoevsky's Underground Man has its sideward glances: "every time I turned up at the office I painfully tried to behave as independently as possible so that I might not be suspected of being base, and to give my face as noble an expression as possible" (*Dostoevsky* 235). However, in a parodic exaggeration of his toothache, the Underground Man "deliberately makes his discourse about himself unattractive" only to show that he does not care about other people's opinion (*Dostoevsky* 236):

It seems I am troubling you, I am lacerating your hearts, I am keeping every one in the house awake. Well, stay awake then, you, too, feel every minute that I have a toothache. I am no longer the hero to you now that I tried to appear before, but simply a nasty person, a scoundrel. Well, let it be that way, then! I am very glad that you see through me. Is it nasty for you to hear my foul moans? Well, let it be nasty. Here, I will let you have an even nastier flourish in a minute. (*Dostoevsky* 231-232)

Likewise, Tommy Wilhelm desires to hide his flaws but he does this by making use of humour, irony, self-parody, and grotesque imagery rather than serious language. On

several occasions, he shows dissatisfaction with his gigantic troubles, the troubles that he fails to hide: “Ass! Idiot! Wild boar! Dumb mule! Slave! Lousy, wallowing hippopotamus! (*Seize* 61). In a comical self-parodistic image:

He began to be half amused at the shadow of his own marvelling, troubled desirous eyes, and his nostrils and his lips. Fair-haired hippopotamus! – that was how he looked to himself. He saw a big round face, a wide flourishing red mouth, stump teeth. And the hat, too; and the cigar too. (*Seize* 10)

And his face eventually turns into a face, making confessions in the seriocomic intonations:

With round grey eyes expanded and his large shapely lips closed in severity towards himself he forced open all that had been hidden. Dad I couldn't affect one way or another. Mama was the one who tried to stop me, and we carried on and yelled and pleaded. The more I lied the louder I raised my voice, and charged – like a hippopotamus. (*Seize* 19)

The grotesque depiction of Tommy's wide-open eyes, mouth, and body signifies his insincerity. For most of the novel, as indicated in the above extract, free indirect discourse is the major confessional narrative technique used to create polyphony in this novel. Free indirect discourse, as stated by H. Porter Abbott, is the “fluid adaptation of the narrator's voice in a kind of ventriloquism of different voices, all done completely without the usual signposts of punctuation and attribution”.⁷⁷

Bellow's use of double-voiced discourse reflects the dream of combating the dominant materialistic ideology. The force of materialism functions like the ruling order

⁷⁷ H. Porter Abbott, *The Cambridge Introduction to Narrative*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002) 70. Hereafter cited internally as *Narrative*.

that not only destroys Tommy's financial life but also damages his inter-personal relationships with his wife, his father, and his children. In *Seize the Day*, humour is inserted into the narrative discourse in order to free Tommy from the authority of Dr. Tamkin, a phoney character who represents the cruelty of the American culture in its extreme version. In what follows, I will examine the discourse of seriocomic confession against the materialist culture in *Seize the Day*, exploring the sources and the effects of humour in the novel. I argue that double-voicedness, dialogic interactions, and structural irony are the main sources for the creation of humour, the effects of which are to bring Tommy into a more comprehensive knowledge of himself and the world. The narrative voice is a blend of two voices: the voice of Tommy and the third-person narrator whose polyphonic attitude and function resembles those of the double-characters introduced in *Dangling Man* and *The Victim*.

The novel depicts the victim image of Tommy when he is a failure in business, jobless, and separated from his wife. It depicts Tommy as a loser: "sloppy, ineffectual, and inept, Wilhelm not only looks like a loser; he also seems more stupid than he is—emotion always overwhelming his attempts to think clearly" (Pifer 79). However, even when it parodies Tommy from a rather distant view, the narrative voice shows a caring attitude towards him. The position of the listener, the confessor, seems to have further approximated the voice and position of Tommy, the confessant. From yet a different standpoint, the narrative voice can be viewed as the voice of Tommy seeing his own caricature from a wider perspective. The caring attitudes of the narrative voice towards Tommy, its double-voicedness as well as its confessional style, are evident from the very first sentence:

When it came to concealing his troubles, Tommy Wilhelm was not less capable than the next fellow. So at least he thought, and there was a certain amount of evidence to back him up. He had once been an actor – no, not quite, an extra – and he knew what acting should be. Also, he was smoking a cigar, and when a man is smoking a cigar, wearing a hat, he has an advantage; it is harder to find out how he feels. (*Seize 7*)

Evidently, the essential contradiction between Tommy's appearance and reality, the intention and effect of his actions, as well as his high ambitions and frequent failures, are major sources of humour in the novel. His pretence is tragically more effective in revealing his inner flaws than in suggesting a powerful stature for him. The significance of the opening paragraph is also in that it creates humour through creating dialogic interactions. The reproduction of words such as "cigar" and "hat" (*Seize 7, 10*) are efficiently charged with extra intonation and value, qualities which make them sound polyphonic, making fun of Tommy's attempt to hide behind them. The place of acting and pretence are introduced as confession-related acts used in materialistic societies. The overall image presented in the novel is the grotesque image of post-war capitalism, in which knowledge and power work intensively together and materialistic power structures demand that not only money but also human souls are commodities to be traded.

In this capitalist culture, as Jean-Francoise Lyotard explains, knowledge becomes a commodity bought and sold on the market, and as such it conditions the basis of power relations in society: "knowledge in the form of informational commodity indispensable to productive power is already, and will continue to be, a major – perhaps the major – stake in the worldwide competition for power" (Lyotard 5). Persuaded by Dr. Tamkin, Tommy

gambles his left-over money on lard and loses all he has. Part of the cause of his fall is the persuasive art of Dr. Tamkin, of which Dr. Adler, Tommy's father, had already warned him but Tommy had just ignored him. Dr. Tamkin wins the game of business by retrieving knowledge from nearly everyone in the market, and by keeping it to himself in return, an act which remains obscure throughout the novel and is only glimpsed at the end. His ability to control his speech demonstrates a rule in the market that silence and not genuine articulation is the key to power. At this stage, Tommy is the victim of Tamkin's art of non-articulation. From yet a different standpoint, it can be suggested that the novel supports acts of pretence as a strategy for the individual to manage the public truth about himself and to survive certain public interactions.

Reality is both distorted and modified through narrative techniques of humour. Apart from dialogic interactions and double voicedness, humour and irony have yet another source: the structural irony inherent in the setting of the novel. The novel is set on the day of reckoning, Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement in the Jewish calendar. Sins defined and listed in the Talmud are communally acknowledged in the synagogue after a full day of fasting. However, for the protagonist, "the Gregorian time measurement is at the foreground, while the Jewish time lies buried in his subconsciousness" (Ranta par. 1). Tommy is presented at the high point of his business troubles on this official day of confession. The irony is created primarily because Tommy forgets about this day altogether and only remembers it at the end of the day and the close of business. The setting reinforces the ironical structure because no business is supposed to be carried out on the Day of Atonement. In a climatic business scene, Tommy fails to convince his father, Dr. Adler, to lend him some money. Having lost his last dollar, Tommy comes

back to the hotel and meets his father in the steam room. Here, Dr. Adler grotesquely rejects Wilhelm's request: "His mouth opened, wide dark, twisted, and he said to Wilhelm, 'You want to make yourself into my cross. But I am not going to pick up a cross. I'll see you dead, Wilky, by Christ, before I let you do that to me'" (*Seize* 117). His words prefigure the final funeral scene. This time Tommy sinks even more, but comes closer to the truth. He feels more shame, insult and humiliation and feels even more victimised than with Dr. Tamkin.

The novel thereby revisits the conception of guilt, truth, and pretending self. Atlas argues that if the novel is confessional, it is based on Tommy's sense of guilt "that comes from his rage at his rejecting father" (Atlas 238). And "to punish his father, he must punish himself. His misery serves as a silent accusation—a testimony to his victimization by his father" (Atlas 238). However, it can be suggested that Tommy is also angry with himself, for not knowing how to deal with materialistic society. A naïve, irresponsible, and dependent individual, Tommy fails to manage his public and private realities. As such, Bellow's novel redefines the concept of guilt in connection with truth-management. Tommy's revelation and perhaps purification happen in the steamy bath scene and his anger aggravates as he sees his reality. Wilhelm then has a confrontation with his wife and afterwards he runs into the street, into the midst of a funeral procession, the reality he eventually faces.

Grotesque imagery is presented when Tommy is gradually disfigured under the compelling pressures of his finances on the one hand and delivering confessions of love to his wife on the other. He talks to Margaret on the phone and she urges him to get some money, when he has just lost all he had:

He begged her, 'Margaret, go easy on me. You ought to. I'm at the end of my rope and feel that I'm suffocating. You don't want to be responsible for a person's destruction. You've got to let up. I feel I'm about to burst.' His face had expanded. He struck a blow upon the tin and wood and nails of the wall. 'You've got to let me breathe. If I should keel over, what then? And it's something I can never understand about you. How you can treat some one like this whom you lived with so long. Who gave you the best of himself. Who tried. Who loved you.' Merely to pronounce the word 'love' made him tremble. (*Seize*121)

The narrative voice shows Tommy's true love for his wife. In fact, he does not utter the word 'love' as an impulse. He had given it thought on at least two previous occasions. Revealingly, it occurred to him when he was moving downwards:

beneath Times square, when he had gone downtown [...] He was going through an underground corridor, a place he had always hated and hated ever now. On the walls between the advertisements were words in chalk. 'Sin No More', and 'Do Not Eat the Pig', he had particularly noticed. And in the dark tunnel, in the haste, heat, and darkness which disfigures and makes freaks and fragments of nose and eyes and teeth, all of a sudden, unsought, a general love for all these imperfect and lurid-looking people burst out in Wilhelm's breast. He loved them. One and all, he passionately loved them. They were his brothers and his sisters. He was imperfect and disfigured himself, but what difference does it make if he was united with them by this blaze of love? And

as he walked he began to say, 'Oh, my brothers – my brothers and my sisters,' blessing them all as well as himself. (*Seize* 91)

From this moment of revelation onwards, he develops an idea of a “larger body” that embraces all creatures and renders the concept of “outcast” as deniable (*Seize* 90). The images of “downtown” and “underground” not only positively serve to value these places but also render Wilhelm’s coming down from the twenty-third floor to the lobby in the first scene more as a falling down into truth and love than as a downfall into a total loss and failure. It is through such grotesque and fantastic images that truth is generated in the text.

Seize the Day stands as a turning point in Bellow’s oeuvre, for it contains the reservation and performative submission of Bellow’s earlier novels as well as the polyphony and performative transgressions of the later ones. It prefigures Bellow’s future polyphonic narrative technique and the seriocomic presentation of the discourse of confession. Free indirect narrative discourse in *Seize the Day* provides the grounds for the combination of various acts of confession: submissive, polyphonic, and transgressive on the one hand and serious and humorous intonations on the other. Performative submissions of Joseph to the Spirit in *Dangling Man* and submissions of Asa Leventhal to a comparatively more real-life creature, Kirby Allbee, in *The Victim* are reflected in *Seize the Day* in the submission of Tommy Wilhelm to the orders of Dr. Tamkin. On the other hand, the polyphonic attitudes of those early double figures towards the protagonist are transposed in *Seize the Day* into interactions between the two voices involved in the narrative confession: the voice of Tommy and the third-person narrative voice.

The significance of these three early novels lies not only in their anticipation of Bellow's future style of narrative confession but also in how they anticipate the theme of American excessiveness in creating discontinuity between public and private realities. In *Dangling Man*, Bellow illustrates that the private truth of Joseph cannot be discussed publicly because he is caught between two extremely dissociated worlds: the unfeeling and controlling world of the war and the eccentrically chaotic and formless world of personal freedom. What Joseph requires in order to be his genuine self in public is a more proportionate amount of regulation and autonomy. *The Victim* is, however, concerned with a different polaristic issue in relation to the production of reality: the problems of one-sided evaluation and inflexibility in character definitions. In his Foreword to *The Closing of the American Mind*, Bellow summarizes the teachings of the civilized world and the determining effects they have on the individual's reality: "Tell me where you come from and I will tell you what you are." (13). Bellow's statement explains the ways of the communities ordered by war, Anti-Semitism, and American materialism respectively presented in the three early novels. In addition, *Seize the Day* justifies confession-related themes such as truth-management and public pretence in connection with the individual's approach towards responsibility for one's guilt and mistakes. It shows that the absence of responsibility in Tommy Wilhelm damages his communications with the external world.

The condition that Bellow implies in these early novels and states more explicitly in the later works is a way to create balance, multi-voicedness, and moderation in human communities so that they might communicate more openly with themselves and with their society through a return to the discourse of confession and acts of forgiveness. True

friendship between the individual and society is suggestively the ideal condition to articulate private truth publicly. Bellow understands “true friendship” as Allan Bloom has found between Plato and Aristotle:

The real community of man, in the midst of all the self-contradictory simulacra of community, is the community of those who seek the truth, of the potential knowers [. . .] of all men to the extent they desire to know. But in fact, this includes only a few, the true friends, as Plato was to Aristotle at the very moment they were disagreeing about the nature of the good [. . .] They were absolutely one soul as they looked at the problem. This according to Plato, is the only real friendship, the only real common good. It is here that the contact people so desperately seek is to be formed. (*Closing* 11-12)

Bellow progressively approaches this ideal model of friendship in his later novels. From the earlier presentation of the imaginary, magical, and fictional versions of this ideal mode of friendship presented in *Dangling Man*, *The Victim*, and *Seize the Day*, correspondingly, Bellow moves towards the creation of a more realistic model of true friendship in his later works, particularly in *Humboldt's Gift* and *Ravelstein*. In *Herzog*, however, he contextualizes the confusing modern condition of truth within the context of intellectual war. Yet, the ideal model of friendship in *Herzog*, as in *Seize the Day*, is fictional: in the close relationship between the narrative voice and the protagonist.

Chapter 4

Acts of Polyphonic Confession in *Herzog*

4. 1. Introduction: Intellectual Struggles and Polyphonic Confession

Polyphonic confession is a narrative technique that gives voice to the marginalized and the silenced protagonist. The dominant irony in Bellow's novel is that Herzog, an intellectual and an academic, represents this neglected and mistreated voice. Herzog uses letter writings in order to express himself and to think the unthinkable in private. However, the novel offers a different space for him to communicate his thoughts at the public level: the fictional space wherein Herzog articulates his truth and shares his ideas with the intrusive narrative voice. It is at this level of communication that Herzog's confessions take a reciprocal form. Polyphonic interaction at this level enables Herzog to address publicly his dissatisfaction with American excessiveness in mythologizing the power of rationalism. The problem with rationalism, as with the war culture in *Dangling Man*, Anti-Semitism in *The Victim*, and materialism in *Seize the Day*, is that it resists mutual communication with the protagonist. These cultures as well as the individuals who blindly assimilate to them, refuse to listen to their critics. Polyphonic confession is a narrative technique that allows Herzog to include these unheard criticisms and to create a safe narrative space wherein public and private truth can integrate.

This chapter initially combines the narrative theory of polyphonic discourse introduced by Bakhtin with the social and cultural theory of knowledge and power relationships proposed by Foucault in order to examine the problems of public and private confession in *Herzog*. The novel contains numerous examples of both monophonic and polyphonic confessions; but the larger structure of the novel can be said to have effectively rescued the discourse of truth-telling from the absolutism of contemporary rationalism and constructed a polyphonic form of novelistic confession. *Herzog* dismantles the irreversibility of power relations, departs from the convention of total surrender of the confessant to the confessor, and introduces humour, irony, and laughter into the serious tone of confession. In fact, it creates a more inclusive version of the truth: the polyphonic truth. Written in nine unnumbered chapters, *Herzog* is an account of five critical days in the life of Moses Elkanah Herzog when he is informed by his friend Luke Asphalter that his former wife, Madeline, has betrayed him and is now living with his best friend, Valentine Gersbach. Herzog has been accused by Madeline of being dictatorial, selfish, and mad (*Herzog* 39-40). He suffers as he tries to explain to himself the motives for Madeline and Gersbach's actions: "If the unexplained life is not worth living, the explained life is unbearable, too" (*Herzog* 322). And about himself:

Resuming his self-examination, he admitted that he had been a bad husband—twice. Daisy, his first wife, he had treated miserably. Madeline, his second, had tried to do *him* in. To his son and his daughter he was a loving but bad father. To his parents he had been an ungrateful child. To his country, an indifferent citizen. To his brothers and his sister, affectionate but remote. With

his friends, an egoist. With love, lazy. With brightness, dull. With power, passive. With his own soul, evasive. (*Herzog* 4-5)

Herzog's confession here can be described as confession with "sideward glance," to borrow Bakhtinian terminology. In outlining his sins, it seems that Herzog seeks consolation and forgiveness from his audience.

He strives "to change it all into language" (*Herzog* 272) and "restore order by turning to his habit of thoughtfulness" (*Herzog* 265). He finds the conventions of public confession ineffectual:

Former vices now health measures. Everything changing. Public confession of each deep wound which at one time was borne as if nothing were amiss. A good subject: the history of composure in Calvinistic societies. When each man, feeling fearful damnation, had to behave as one of the elect. All such historic terrors—every agony of spirit—must at least be released. (*Herzog* 179)

Therefore, he turns to his personal way of making confessions in writing, whereby he carefully reviews and evaluates every incident that has happened to him. From personal crisis, he moves to historical and cultural issues in order to uncover the sources whereby the modern condition of the truth appears to him in gross forms: "And the world tells you to look for truth in grotesque combinations. It warns you also to stay away from consolation if you value your intellectual honor" (*Herzog* 272).

Such responses by Herzog are far different from the response of Bellow's heroes in the early novels *Dangling Man* and *The Victim*. As discussed in the previous chapter, these novels put Joseph and Asa Leventhal, respectively, in the conventional situation of

the confessant. Although Joseph in *Dangling Man* despises the culture of “the hard-boiled,” he eventually submits to its power and joins the Second World War. Similarly, Asa Leventhal surrenders to the force of the Anti-Semitism of post-war culture in *The Victim*. In an interview with Harper, Bellow distinguishes *Herzog* from his earlier novels in that *Herzog* “makes comic use of complaint.”⁷⁸ Bellow believes that this approach towards complaint is “more energetic, wiser, and manlier” (Harper 12). Bellow expresses dislike for his earlier novels: “I got very tired of the solemnity of complaint” (Harper 12) and admits:

I think that when I wrote those early books I was timid. I still felt the incredible effrontery of announcing myself to the world (in part I mean the WASP world) as a writer and an artist. I had to touch a great many bases, demonstrate my abilities, pay my respect to formal requirements. In short I was afraid to let myself go. (Harper 8-9)

By the time Bellow was writing *Herzog*, he was dealing with the WASP culture with less reservation. *Herzog* purges himself of any possible accusation of social climbing in the ironic description of his dilapidated house at remote Ludeyville, the house that he bought with the money he had inherited from his father:

Herzog's folly! Monument to his sincere and loving idiocy, to the unrecognized evils of his character, symbol of his Jewish struggle for a solid footing in White Anglo-Saxon Protestant America [...] I too have done my share of social climbing, he thought, with hauteur to spare, defying the Wasps. (Herzog 309)

⁷⁸ Saul Bellow Interview with Gordon Lloyd Harper. “Saul Bellow.” *Saul Bellow: A Collection of Critical Essays*. Ed. Earl Rovit. (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice Hall, Inc, 1975)12. Hereafter cited internally as Harper.

The “folly” is the house itself: a meaningless piece of architecture which commemorates nothing.

The movement away from those early novels towards *Herzog* is for Bellow an escape from submission, phobia, and dependence in confession towards autonomy, polyphony, and joy. The early novels position a common man as the hero, giving him less power to contradict authoritarian forces and therefore create a more monologic form of confession. However, this monologic position is replaced by a less hierarchical one in *Herzog*, a novel which positions the intellectual hero higher in social status, giving him enough power to oppose the “Reality Instructors” and speak his own truth to them.

Herzog, first published in September 1964, was immediately heralded as a masterpiece, the top of the best-seller list in October, and went on to win the National Book Award in 1965. Referring to the fact that Bellow worked hard in writing *Herzog*, James Atlas, describes the novel as “his most written book” (335). According to Wood’s Chronology, Bellow had been working steadily on *Herzog* since 1962 (Wood 1005). However, at some point he incorporated “Memoirs of a Bootlegger’s Son” that he had abandoned in 1954 (Woods 1003). Almost everything from the title to the name of characters has been redrafted numerous times, but what never changed was the opening sentence. The title went through many drafts, from “Hertzog” to “Some Bones to Pick” to “Alas and Hurray” (He also thought of calling it “The Fornicator”) (Atlas 335). However, as mentioned by Stanley Edgar Hyman, “Bellow has developed one aspect of himself—his guilt and desperation—into a character and a story” (Atlas 338). The main plot is based on Bellow’s biography. It is the story of the betrayal of his friend Jack Ludwig, with whom he was co-editing a journal, entitled *The Nobel Savage*. Bellow features Jack

as Valentine Gersbach (Atlas 335). In the original draft the names of Madeline and Gersbach appeared as Juliana and Grenzbach, characters who were based on real people in Bellow's life, and Bellow never made any effort "to disguise the models of his characters—and they weren't pleased" (Atlas 337). Jack was the only person to be happy with his likeness in *Herzog* (337-338). Bellow admitted that his work was based upon his life: "when a writer runs out of other people to write about there's no reason why he can't use himself" (Atlas 338), but when people asked him whether *Herzog* was autobiographical he became annoyed: "You try it sometime. You'll find out how hard it is" (Atlas 338). Yet, introducing a dialogue between fiction and autobiography, Bellow initiates a dialogue between autobiographical and fictive confessions. Therefore, as a work of heterobiography, the novel blends multiple realities: the authorial truth and the truth of Herzog, as well as the narrative truth.

The fact that Bellow's novel presents the monologues of Herzog has inspired some critics to disregard its polyphonic quality. Lillian Kremer, for instance, confines the semantic significance of *Herzog* to its Jewish quality (101-116). She argues that

as a Jew of post-Holocaust consciousness, Herzog rejects Nietzsche's view of history, his philosophy of self-mastery, his claim that God is dead; he repudiates Kierkegaard's advocacy and praise of suffering as essential to the religious experience [...] Embracing a philosophy older than German Romanticism and French Existentialism, Herzog posits Judaic veneration for life and ethical precepts as central to his insistence on human community. (Kremer 109)

In like manner, Frank Kermode regards the novel as a Jewish text where the Jewish type Herzog penetrates into his soul and “digs emotion” (Kermode 39). Mohammad. A. Quayum cogently argues that Herzog is caught between extreme rationalism and Romanticism; yet, he eventually takes side with the Romantic camp and contextualizes *Herzog* within Emerson-Whitman tradition only because Herzog “adopts a philosophy that is related to the transcendental philosophy of ‘double consciousness’” (Quayum 88). He explains that in a manner similar to Emerson and Whitman, Herzog “rejects the one-sided and extreme views of modern American culture, for one of coordination, balance and union” (Quayum 88).

As with rationalism and romanticism, Herzog’s position in relation to traditional and modern philosophy is liminal. Earl Rovit argues that Bellow stands midway between traditionalists and modernists. Rovit clarifies the ambivalent literary position of Bellow: To the traditionalists, Bellow seems to be “fashionably cynical, pessimistic, or irresponsible. From the opposite camp, he has been subject to harsher charges: naïveté, sentimentality, and, ultimately, compromising his ideals”.⁷⁹ The reason for this ambivalence, as Rovit explains, lies in the fact that Bellow:

has tried to resist a sentimental nostalgia for the unrecoverable values of that earlier age; he has insisted intently that the new is not necessarily good just because it is new [...] His is fundamentally a middle-of-the-road position, the tense stance of a rationalist who despairs of rational solutions to human frustration but who is constrained to accept no guide superior to rationality—crippled, incomplete, and irresolute as it may be. (*Introduction* 3)

⁷⁹ Earl Rovit. “Introduction.” *Saul Bellow: A Collection of Critical Essay*. Ed Earl Rovit (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc, 1975) 3. Hereafter cited internally as *Introduction*.

Unlike critics such as Tony Tanner, who considers Herzog's journey as unidirectional, moving inwardly towards alienation, solipsism, and isolation (*Prisoner* 96), there are critics such as Martin Corner (369), Sara Blacher Cohen (144), H. Porter Abbott (173), Gudrun Bjork Gudsteinsdotir, Faye Irene Kuzma, and Esmail Yazdanpour, who argue that the movement is towards union and communication. Keith Michael Opdhal distinctly regards Herzog's quest as both inward as well as outward, reasoning that: "If it is an affirmation of society, it is also an affirmation of 'the inspired condition,' or man's highest subjective experience" (*Inspired* 145). It is evident that the polyphonic approach values the multidirectional movements of the novel, in that all inward and outward actions coexist and participate in a dialogue throughout.

The fact that the novel is a form of confession is mentioned by Malcolm Bradbury: "though the method is third-person narration, the mode is confessional" (Bradbury 74). However, this study reads *Herzog* as a particular form of confession: polyphonic confession that contains a variety of voices and worldviews without any attempt to privilege one over others. Despite the fact that the novel presents the monologues of Herzog, it resists monophony. In fact, the polyphonic nature of the novel is implied in the studies of a number of Bellow's critics. In her PhD thesis (Alberta University Fall 1993) entitled "Novels of Ideas," Gudsteinsdottir argues that *Herzog* is an encyclopaedic novel in terms of both form and content (183). The encyclopaedic content of *Herzog* is also implied by Tony Tanner: "Herzog's [consciousness] is a representative modern mind, swamped with ideas, metaphysics and values, and surrounded by messy facts" (88). Kuzma suggests that "Bellow's novels are not simply univocal as has been assumed" (34). Likewise, Yazdanpour argues that *Herzog* is a polyphonic novel. However,

Yazdanpour rarely moves from theoretical discussions to a detailed application to the novel's language and style.

The language of the novel features postmodern conditions such as disintegration and uncertainty. In his essay, "*Herzog*, the Intellectual Milieu," Daniel Fuchs explains that *Herzog* "is more involved in the disintegrations of modernism than in the integrations of traditional theology" (157). The disintegration of language which might be considered as the sign of the disintegration of the modern man, as Michael Maciolwee notes, might as well be regarded as the sign of the polyphonic identity of *Herzog*. In his PhD thesis "The Language of Discontent: The Fiction of Saul Bellow's Mature Period" Michael Maciolwee argues that the disintegrated language of *Herzog* in one sense reflects the confusion of Saul Bellow in describing modern self and in another the disintegration of *Herzog* as a modern self (Maciolwee 20-22). His language reflects the post-war condition where the modern "separate-self" fails to compete against the millions [of people] (Maciolwee 26). Earl Rovit cites a key statement by Bellow that highlights what he calls "the thematic emblem of much of his work": "It is obvious that modern comedy has to do with the disintegrating outline of the worthy and human self" (*Introduction* 3). In this light, the disintegration of language can be taken not so much as a negative sign of a separate self as the positive token of the polyphonic self: the self who is struggling to shatter the monologic fixity of the external world.

Undertaking a detailed investigation into the novel's polyphonic discourse of confession, this chapter aims to fill a gap in the studies of *Herzog*. At the theoretical level, it initiates a dialogue between Bakhtin's philosophy of dialogism and Foucault's theory of the mutual relationship between truth and power. I will argue that in the

presence of monologic power structures—the church, the synagogue, the court of law, the police headquarters, and the academic world—the novel is more likely to produce confession-related speech acts that are monophonic in function, speech acts such as excessive articulations, pretence, lie and silence whereas on the other hand, I will examine how language, dialogism and intertextuality are at work within the larger structure of the narrative, to provide the polyphonic construction for the overall discourse of truth-telling. I will examine the underlying role of Yiddish language and humour in providing this new dimension to Herzog's speech. Interpreting dialogic relationships as relationships of power, I argue that *Herzog* dynamically generates a massive range of dialogic confessions varying from extremely monologic forms such as parrhesiac, transgressive, and submissive to particularly polyphonic types such as polemic, explanatory, loophole, ironic, grotesque, and negative confession. As the letter writing of Herzog has a key role in the novel, I will devote some space to inquiring into this particular form of confession. Herzog's letters, although monologic in nature, contribute to the emergence of polyphony by participating in the dialogue with the narrative voice. Finally, I will explore the place of silence as Herzog's final speech act, one which might arguably be considered as a particular form of confessional response in itself.

4.2. Confession and Power

Herzog depicts social institutions such as the church, the synagogue, the court of law, the police station, and the academic world as places in which monophonic modes of confession are practised. The priest, the rabbi, the magistrate, the police officer, and the Instructors claim to have absolute and total knowledge, enforcing confession by claiming

full authority to forgive, educate, pass judgments, condemn, and reform the individual. In his interview with Mathew Roudane,⁸⁰ Bellow asserts his awareness of and distaste for such unbalanced operations of power: “a variety of powers arrive whose aim is to alter, to educate, to condition us. If a man gives himself to total alterations I consider him to have lost his soul” (Pifer 113).

Likewise, Bakhtin disapproves of the monologic discourse of truth-telling which is univocal, centripetal, and monophonic, providing examples of this kind of discourse:

Aristotelian poetics, the poetics of Augustine, the poetics of the medieval church, of ‘the one language of truth,’ the Cartesian poetics of neoclassicism, the abstract grammatical universalism of Leibniz (the idea of a ‘universal grammar), Humboldt’s insistence on the concrete—all these, whatever their differences in nuance, give expression to the same centripetal force in sociolinguistic and ideological life; they serve one and the same project of centralizing and unifying the European languages. The victory of one reigning language (dialect) over the others, the supplanting of languages, their enslavement, the process of illuminating them with the True Word, the incorporation of barbarians and lower social strata into a unitary language of culture and truth [...] directed away from language plurality. (*Discourse* 271)

Bakhtin sees monologic subordination as a “degrading reification of a person’s soul, a discounting of its freedom and its unfinalizability, and of that particular indeterminacy and indefiniteness” (*Hero* 61). In addition, monophonic or monologic confessions at times take the form of an “authoritarian interrogation” which in Foucault’s words is

⁸⁰ Mathew Roudane, “An Interview with Saul Bellow.” *Contemporary Literature*. 25, 3 (fall 1984) 276.

a ritual of discourse in which the speaking subject is also the subject of statement; it is also a ritual that unfolds within power relations, for one does not confess without the presence (or virtual presence) of a partner who is not simply the interlocutor but the authority who requires the confession, prescribes, and appreciates it, and intervenes in order to judge, punish, forgive, console, and reconcile, a ritual in which the truth is corroborated by the obstacles and resistances it has had to surmount in order or to be formulated. (*History I* 61-62)

Herzog acknowledges that monologic confession often blends with pretence mostly out of the fear of being judged and condemned by an authority, the confessor. Herzog acknowledges his own pretence: "The human soul is an amphibian, and I have touched its sides" (*Herzog* 257-258). However, there are circumstances in which pretence exists for reasons other than fear, reasons such as winning the attention as well as the support of the confessor. An example of this kind of destructive pretence in Bellow's novel is evident in the short-lived conversion of Madeline to Christianity. In either case, pretence is a confession-related speech act that is seemingly induced in the presence of uneven power orders and results in the production of untrue statements. Herzog detests Madeline's temporary conversion to Catholicism, for the total loss of her soul. For her, the conversion was more a matter of prestige, the prestige of having been converted by the priest who converts celebrities (*Herzog* 53, 112) rather than an inner change of heart and soul.

Contrary to Madeline's outward conversion, Herzog values inner truth and inner change: "a change of heart" (*Herzog* 51, 165-166). He believes that his heart must be

cleansed of the poisonous hatred he feels for Madeline and Gersbach (Pifer 121). Herzog's emphasis on inner change calls to mind the features of "utter realism" that Bakhtin celebrates in Dostoevsky, the realism that he contrasts with the monologic realism of Tolstoy. "Utter realism" is the realism based not on cognition but on penetration: "To affirm some one else's 'I' not as an object but as another subject" (*Polyphonic* 10). It is "realism in higher sense" which has a special approach to "the man in man" (*Hero* 60-61).

Herzog disapproves of the monologic outlook of the Church: "The Church has universal understanding. This I consider a harmful, Prussian delusion. Readiness to answer all questions is the infallible sign of stupidity" (*Herzog* 155). Moreover, he criticises the ritual of Classic confession not only as an inhuman practice but as an anachronistic one:

It was enough to make a man pray to God to remove his great, bone-breaking burden of self-hood and self-development, give himself, a failure, back to the species for a primitive cure. But this was becoming the up-to-date and almost conventional way of looking at any single life. In this view the body itself, with its two arms and vertical length, was compared to the Cross, on which you knew the agony of consciousness and separate being. (*Herzog* 92-93)

In fact, not only the church but also the synagogue is conceived by Herzog as having monologic foundations. Excavating his childhood memories of the synagogue, the rabbi, and the education, Herzog remembers:

"You, Rozavitch, you slacker. What does it say here about Potiphar's wife, *V'tispesayu b'vigid . . .*"

“And she took hold of . . .”

“Of what? *Beged*.”

“*Beged*. A coat.”

“A garment, you little thief. *Mamzer!* I’m sorry for your father. Some heir he’s got! Some *Kaddish!* Ham and pork you’ll be eating, before his body is in the grave. And you, Herzog, with those behemoth eyes—*V’yaizov bigdo b’yodo*.”

“And he left it in her hands.”

“Left what?”

“*Bigdo*, the garment.”

“You watch your step, Herzog, Moses. Your mother thinks you’ll be a great *lamden*—a rabbi. But I know you, how lazy you are. Mothers’ hearts are broken by *mamzeirim* like you! Eh! Do I know you, Herzog? Through and through.” (*Herzog* 131)

The significance of the extract lies in the fact that it shows what hinders authentic communication here—the threatening domination of the rabbi which is reinforced not only by the contrast in age and rank but also by his authoritative attitude towards the kids, his diction, intonation, and more significantly his claim to unconditional knowledge. Herzog remembers having escaped from him and taking refuge in the toilet: “In an open stall, pants dropped to his feet, sat Nachman playing the harmonica. “It’s a Long, Long Way to Tipperary” (*Herzog* 132). It also portrays a seriocomic description of the rabbi, showing his grotesque extremism. Furthermore, the passage is more illuminating when considered in the light of its confessional and autobiographical values. Bellow once said:

“My mother wanted me to be a fiddler or, failing that, a rabbi. I had my choice between playing dinner music at the Palmer House or presiding over a synagogue” (*Closing* 13).

The court of law is ironically another place for evasion from telling the truth. It is in court that Herzog witnesses how lawyers search for loopholes in the law, employ pretence to win a case, and help their clients find ways to escape justice rather than encouraging them to make confessions and face punishment. Herzog sees materialistic reasons that support the corruption of justice and impulsively reacts with his grotesque nausea, the response which he repeats later at the police station. As distinct from Shapiro’s extreme version of nausea which happens as a result of his greed for food and as evidence to exaggerate his health to Madeline and impress her by covering up his stomach ulcer, Herzog’s nausea occurs when he cannot tolerate the eccentric pretence, cruelty, and injustice of his society. However, in court, Herzog also witnesses the courageous confessions of Aleck/Alice, the kid, who earns his/her living by various forms of pretence: shifting names, genders, and roles. He was the only person in the court to have the bravery to speak the truth to the magistrate: “your authority and my degeneracy are one and the same”, Aleck said (*Herzog* 229). To Herzog, Aleck was “purer, loftier than any square, did not lie” (*Herzog* 229). Later on, Herzog had to conceal the truth about his possession of a gun in the police station, the gun he had stolen from his father’s house with the intention of murdering Gersbach.

“Reality Instructors”, Herzog’s contemporary academic and intellectuals, are simply another authoritative, monophonic, and monologic force: “What they [the intellectuals] love is an imaginary human situation invented by their own genius and which they believe is the only true and the only human reality. How odd!” (*Herzog* 304).

As an academic, he is ironically one of those reality instructors who teaches in the university. He decides to stop being a university professor, reasoning that:

it became apparent to his students that they would never learn much about The Roots of Romanticism but they would see and hear odd things. One after another, the academic formalities dropped away. Professor Herzog had the unconscious frankness of a man deeply preoccupied. (*Herzog 2*)

In his understated humour, Herzog questions all these absolute power structures through the seriocomic intonation of the narrative voice, the voice which defends his sanity by rendering such formalities as relative.

A similar game of power and knowledge is initiated between Herzog, on the one hand, and monologic characters such as Madeline and Gersbach, on the other. Their relationships undergo an insidious change from love and friendship towards outrageous confessions of enmity and hatred, a change which is reflected in their heated conversations. For instance, when cheating on an unknowing Herzog, Madeline makes a scene, provoking Herzog's anger by accusing him of having engaged a spy on her:

"I should have thought," she said, "you'd have been far too clever to engage such an obvious type."

"Engage," said Herzog. "Whom have I engaged?"

"I mean that horrible man—that stinking, fat man in the sports coat."

Madeline, absolutely sure of herself, flashed him one of her terrible looks. "I defy you to deny this. And, it's simply beneath contempt."

[.....]

"But, Mady, this is simply a mistake."

“It is no mistake. I never dreamed you might be capable of this.”

“But I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

[.....]

“You sonofabitch! Don’t give me this soft treatment. I know all your fucking tricks.

[.....]

But why would I have you followed, Mady? I don’t understand. What could I find out?”

“Now that man dogged my steps around F-Field’s all afternoon.”

[.....]

“You point him out, Mady. I’ll go right up to him . . . Just show the man to me.” (55-56)

Madeline speaks with no intention to listen. She expects no reply in order not to give Herzog the chance to explain himself, question her innocence, or elicit any information. Her fake accusation and claim of knowledge are techniques by which she empowers her own position and weakens Herzog’s. What her language ironically reveals about her is her inferior opinion of Herzog, her own lies and tricks, and her future plan to spy on him.

Monologic relationships as such are combined with more effects of dramatic irony when Herzog confides in Valentine. Valentine’s technique of questioning, his impulsive judgments and indignation as well as Herzog’s spontaneous confessions of guilt are amusingly comparable to institutional scenes of confession in which authorities extract information:

“Have you been complaining again?”

“Maybe I have, a little. Eggshells, chop bones, tin cans under the table, under the sofa ...”

“There’s your mistake! Right there—she can’t bear this nagging, put-upon tone. If you expect me to help straighten this out, I’ve got to tell you. You and she—it’s no secret from anybody—are the two people I love most. So I must warn you, *chaver*, get off the lousy details [...]

“I know,” said Herzog, “she’s going through a long crisis—finding herself. And I know I have a bad tone, sometimes [...]

[.....]

“Why shouldn’t I level with you?” Moses was astonished by this vehemence, by Gersbach’s fierce, glowing look.

“You don’t. You’re damn evasive.”

Moses considered the charge under Gersbach’s intense red brown gaze. He had the eyes of a prophet, a *Shofat*, yes, a judge in Israel, a king (59).

Valentine makes false confessions of friendship in order to win Herzog’s trust and therefore illicit more information from him, accuse him of more mistakes, and charge him with even more feelings of guilt. Criticizing Gersbach’s monologic and cruel authority, Herzog writes: “Did Valentine Gersbach ever admit ignorance of any matter? He was a regular Goethe. He finished all your sentences, rephrased all your thoughts, explained everything” (*Herzog* 155). Herzog confesses: “he was again the inescapable Moses Elkanah Herzog. Oh, what a thing I am—what a *thing!*” (*Herzog* 206).

It seems as if Herzog is giving voice to Bakhtin’s evaluation of monologically objectifying relationship, that it is this

thinglike environment, which mechanically influences the personality to begin to speak, that is, to reveal in it the potential word and tone, to transform it into a semantic context for the thinking, speaking, and acting (as well as creating) personality. In essence any serious and probing self-examination/confession, autobiography, pure lyric, and so forth, does this. (*Speech* 164)

Valentine makes Herzog confess his mistakes, anger, and annoying complaints in relation to Madeline. However, his eyes reveal to Herzog what his words try to cover up. Herzog contends with monologic and one-sided definitions:

But hard ruthless action taken against a man is the assertion by evildoers that he is fully knowable. They put me down, ergo they claimed final knowledge of Herzog. They *knew* me! And I hold with Spinoza (I hope he won't mind) that to demand what is impossible for any human being, to exercise power where it can't be exercised, is tyranny. Excuse me therefore, sir and madam, but I reject your definitions of me [. . .] But I make no last judgment. That's for them, not me. I came to do harm, I admit. But the first blood shed was mine, and so I'm out of this now. Count me out. (*Herzog* 299)

In response to Madeline and Gersbach, Herzog declares his independence from them, stating: "I prefer to accept as a motive not the thing I fully understand but the thing I partly understand" (*Herzog* 194).

Foucauldian games of power and knowledge continue between Madeline, Gersbach, and Herzog when they spread rumours about Herzog, claiming that he is insane. But whom does this claim of knowledge serve? By keeping the truth of their betrayal from Herzog and claiming that he is out of his mind, they control and manipulate Herzog's

behaviour. Secrecy in one action leads to a claim of knowledge in another, and both are ironically verified by Herzog's lawyer, his doctor, and his aunt, who consciously or unconsciously function at the service of Herzog's enemies. Foucault writes: "It is a question of what *governs* statements, and the way in which they *govern* each other so as to constitute a set of propositions which are scientifically acceptable, and hence capable of being verified or falsified by scientific procedures" (*Truth* 112). What he suggests is the arbitrary nature of the truth and accordingly the reversibility of orders of power: "power is not something that is acquired, seized or shared, something that one holds onto or allows to slip away; power is exercised from innumerable points, in the interplay of the non-egalitarian and mobile relations" (*History I* 94).

However, although power cannot be possessed, knowledge can be seized, and it is through the possession of knowledge that Madeline and Gersbach bring power into their control and manipulate Herzog's thoughts, feelings, and actions. Madeline and Gersbach keep their secret relationship from Herzog so that he can help them move out of Ludeyville to Chicago, find a new job for Gersbach there, repair the house and pay for all their expenses. They manipulate him through secrecy. The knowledge of this secrecy and betrayal is the major source of his suffering, the influence of which is vividly seen in his disfigured face in many instances: "grief greatly damaged—it positively wounded—Herzog's handsome face. Anyone he had ever injured by his conceit might now feel revenged to see how ravaged he looked. The change was almost ludicrous" (*Herzog* 60). He feels degraded, insulted, and injured. Herzog restores his power by a similar technique of secrecy. He keeps his intention of murdering Gersbach to himself, a tactic that brings his existence into his full control, a reverse in power positions.

Truth and power work together until Herzog eventually gains polyphonic recognition and transforms in outlook. He becomes able to see the other side of the truth, the truth from the point of view of Madeline and Gersbach. This recognition enables him to forgive them and give them the right to love each other and live together. Yet, they remain unchanged in their hateful attitude towards Herzog. Their confessions of hate become evident when at the police station Herzog reads the look of Madeline: "I have just read a certain verdict in Madeline's eyes, 'For cowards, Not-being!'" (*Herzog* 304). At this critical point in the novel, he completely separates himself from Madeline. But in what way do truth and power cooperate so that the inner change in outlook emerges? The answer lies in Herzog's response in his transgressive letter writings.

In an interview with Alessandro Fontana and Pasquale Pasquino, published in *Power/Knowledge* as "Truth and Power", Foucault notes that "truth is to be understood as a system of ordered procedures for the production, regulation, distribution, circulation, and operation of statement."⁸¹ In Foucault's words, there is a mutual relationship between the discourse of truth-telling and the orders of domination, meaning that not only the extant relationships of power determine the kind of knowledge produced but also the production of a particular form of knowledge can influence the existing relationships of domination. It is in this second sense that he managed to interpret power as a positive force, the power that can subvert established truth and hierarchies. He states: "Power is everywhere; not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere" (*History I* 93). Gavin Kendall notes that Foucault argues for the omnipresence of power,

⁸¹ Michel Foucault, "Truth and Power." *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977*. Edited by Colin Gordon. Translated by Colin Gordon, Leo Marshall, John Mepham, Kate Soper (Great Britain: The Harvester Press, 1980) 133. Hereafter cited internally as *Truth*.

an argument which allows him to modify the Nietzschean argument of “the will to power”. Kendall explains that “unlike Nietzsche, whose re-evaluation of morals privileged the strong over the weak, for Foucault, there is a commitment to the downtrodden” (3). Accordingly, rather than submitting to the strong social and cultural powers, Herzog finds his true inner voice and power in his transgressive letter writings. For instance, in a letter to Professor Mermelstein, the eccentric anti-Semite, he writes:

You have a taste for metaphors. Your otherwise admirable work is marred by them. I'm sure you can come up with a grand metaphor for me. But don't forget to say that I will never expound suffering for anyone or call for Hell to make us serious and truthful. (Herzog 317)

In this way, Herzog creates a position of power for himself by establishing a strong and audacious writing voice.

4. 3. Confession and Transgression: Letter Writing

“I am telling myself the truth. As heaven is my witness” (*Herzog* 241). Herzog's letters have a significant place in shaping the confessional structure of the novel in that they give voice to Herzog's desired truth. Justifying his spontaneous act of writing, Herzog states: “And consciousness when it doesn't clearly understand what to live for, what to die for can only abuse and ridicule itself [...] as I do by writing impertinent letters” (*Herzog* 272-273). “Late in spring,” when informed of his wife's betrayal, he felt “overcome by the need to have it out, to justify, to put in perspective, to clarify, to make amends” (*Herzog* 2) and began writing endlessly and passionately to

“every one under the sun” (*Herzog* 1). In an interview, Bellow explains to Jo Brans what inspired him to employ this modified version of epistolary technique:

for many years I had fantasies in which I wrote letters to people. Then I thought, oh, what an odd thing. Wouldn't it be amusing if I wrote a book about a man who, going out of his mind, is writing letters to everybody. And then I discovered that hundreds of thousands of people were doing just that—always had been doing that. (*Common Needs* 57)

It seems that Herzog's letter writing is a compulsive act that stems from his anger; he feels a manipulating power inside himself to which he submits by his very act of writing: “*There is someone inside me. I am in his grip. When I speak of him I feel him in my head pounding for order. He will ruin me*” (*Herzog* 11). The compelling drive to communicate is explained by Bakhtin: “I cannot manage without another, I cannot become myself without another; I must find myself in another by finding another in myself (in mutual reflection and mutual acceptance)”. He reasons: “I am conscious of myself and become myself only while revealing myself for another, through another and with the help of another” (*Reworking* 287). Herzog's letters show not only his desire for confession and communication but his craving for survival: “Did I really believe that I would die when thinking stopped?” (*Herzog* 265)

This conception of memory and, by extension, confession as life is also reiterated in other Bellow's novels. In *Bellarosa Connection* (1989) for instance, we read: “Memory is life” (2) and in *Humboldt's Gift* (1975): “without memory existence was metaphysically injured, damaged” (*Humboldt's* 244). For Bakhtin, likewise: “To be means to communicate. Absolute death (non-being), is the state of being unheard,

unrecognized, unremembered" (*Reworking* 287). The fact that Herzog is a Jew and descends from a generation which has long been silenced, forgotten, and victimized during the great wars could possibly reinforce his extreme desire to be remembered, as well as his obsessive craving for communication. It is, therefore, not surprising that Herzog detests the authoritative powers. He writes: "*They want to teach you—to punish you with—the lessons of the Real*" (*Herzog* 125); they are the "diseased, tragic, or dismal and ludicrous fools who sometimes hoped to achieve some ideal by fiat, by their great desire for it. But usually by bullying mankind into believing them" (*Herzog* 67).

As documented by Daniel Fuchs, letters were absent from the original manuscript version of *Herzog* and were the most important device that appeared later in its revision.⁸² This new device helps Bellow to establish "the effect of intense subjectivity, a counter-point to the retrospective objectivity he tries to maintain" ("Herzog" 127). On the function of the letters, Glenday argues that the un-posted correspondence demonstrates an exercise of power between Herzog and national figures (96). Herzog exercises his power by creating the possibility of changing his last word. As such, the unsent letters function like "loopholes" which Bakhtin defines as

the retention for oneself of the possibility for altering the ultimate, final meaning of one's own words [...] judged by its meaning alone, the word with a loophole should be an ultimate word and does present itself as such, but in fact it is only the penultimate word and places after itself only a conditional, not a final period. (*Dostoevsky* 233)

⁸² Daniel Fuchs, "Herzog." *Saul Bellow: Vision and Revision* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1984) 129. Hereafter cited internally as "Herzog".

Loopholes as open as unsent letters valuably give Herzog the chance to alter his speech. For instance, in an earlier letter to Daisy, his ex-wife, he excuses himself for not being able to meet his son: “*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 [...] I think it would be best for Marco not to see me*” (Herzog 11). Nevertheless, in a later letter he takes the chance to change his mind and express his willingness to arrange a meeting. He writes to Marco: “*I’m looking forward to that, eagerly*” (Herzog 314). It seems as if Herzog evolves into a more responsible father figure and his writing becomes more confident, inclusive, and polyphonic. His progressive confession borders on Derrida’s perception of confessional discourse. Derrida explains:

when I ask, when I confess, I’m not reporting a fact. I can kill someone. I can hijack a plane and then report; it is not a confession. It becomes a confession only when I ask for forgiveness and, according to the tradition, when I promise to repent, that is, to improve, to love, to transform my hatred into love, to transform myself, and to do so out of love. (*Circumfession* 23)

By the same token, Herzog transforms his hatred to love when he improves his outlook and personality over time. Derrida prefers a confessional process as such that advances towards “making the truth” rather than “telling the truth” (*Circumfession* 23).

Apart from making the truth, Herzog wants the letters to function as an escape for himself and a trap for others. He tells his friend Luke Asphalter:

I go after reality with language. Perhaps I’d like to change it all into language, to force Madeline and Gersbach to have a *Conscience* [...] And I’ve filled the world with letters to prevent their escape. I want them in human form, and so I

conjure up a whole environment and catch them in the middle. I put my whole heart into these constructions. But they are constructions. (*Herzog* 272)

Herzog's letters have dual functions: they show the disintegration between public and private realities and they are the possible means to connect the two. In real life, Herzog cannot speak the truth publicly, perhaps because there exists a hostile intersubjective relationship between him, Madeline, and Valentine. However, his letters provide him with the chance to respond to the way Madeline and Valentine trapped him by their questions and accusations. His personal writing is the only free space where he can declare publicly his awareness of their truth and his demand for justice. However, the irony is that the letters are merely constructions—never posted.

In terms of style, Herzog's early notes feature his lack of confidence in repetitions, disintegrations, and discontent language: "*Death—die—live again—die again—live*" (*Herzog* 3) and at times omission of answers: "*And on the knees of your soul? Might as well be useful. Scrub the floor*" (*Herzog* 3). He depicts his bewilderment through confusion in language; yet it seems that he gains more confidence as he employs irony and laughter in his discourse:

Next, Answer, a fool according to his folly lest he be wise in his own credit.

Answer not a fool according to his folly, lest thou be like unto him.

Choose one. (Herzog 3)

The stylistic feature of discourse here resembles "hidden dialogicality" which, as Bakhtin explains, is a particular style of polyphony "in which the statements of the second speaker are omitted, but in a way that the general sense is not at all violated" (*Dostoevsky* 197). Employing hidden dialogicality, which is very similar to loophole in its function, as

well as irony, and humour, Herzog turns his private writing space into a more secure one so that he can speak up with more self-confidence the truth that might be offensive not only to Madeline and Valentine but also to his contemporary intellectuals.

In terms of the content of the confessional letters, Fuchs argues that it is not incidental that Herzog is a Jewish intellectual (*Intellectual* 166). As the upholder of humanism, Romanticism, and civilization, he cannot agree with Proudhon that “evil is all there is” (*Intellectual* 164) or with Himmelstein that “facts are nasty” (*Herzog* 86). Yet he is critical of Romanticism for its apocalyptic vision, a carry-over from Christianity (*Intellectual* 172). Unlike T. E. Hulme, he does not believe in original sin. He cannot accept the notion that “humanistic and religious views are mutually exclusive. If the good is to be found, with or without God’s help, it will be through human feelings and perceptions. Herzog speaks to God outside the synagogue, speaks out of feeling, out of personality” (*Intellectual* 164). Bellow mentions that for American writers, radicalism is “a question of honor” and that “they must be radicals for the sake of their dignity. They see it as their function, and a noble function, to say Nay, and to bite not only the hand that feeds them [...] but almost any other hand held out to them” (Harper 14). He continues to say that “a genuine radicalism, which truly challenges authority, we need desperately. But a radicalism of posture is easy and banal. Radical criticism requires knowledge, not posture, not slogans, not rant [...] True radicalism requires homework—thought” (Harper 14).

The monophonic voice of Herzog dominates his letters. Critics of Bellow have acknowledged the monophonic nature of the letters and have found that Herzog is looking for peace through his inner conversations. Ellen Pifer believes that they represent

a form of “private monologues,” presenting an “analytic voice with its rage for order and explanation” (114-115). Gilbert Porter also considers them as “philosophical monologues” as well as “an apology for his life and an attempt to regain his psychic balance through quixotic humour” (Porter 150). Yet, in all their transgressions, letters function like Bakhtinian carnival space wherein Herzog can momentarily come into contact with freedom. He liberates himself from the power and the value-judgments of people like Madeline and Gersbach. If letters indicate Herzog’s eccentric mad stage, it is because he uses them as a licence, a protective carnival mask behind which unlawful actions are temporarily permitted. Herzog questions the hegemony of rational arguments and brings uncertainties into the philosophy of romanticism, politics, religion, and science. He enters a game of power against “Reality Instructors” and philosophers, including, among others, Hegel, Heidegger, Nietzsche, and Kierkegaard, as well as politicians such as General Eisenhower, his lawyers Simkin and Sandor Himmelstein, his doctor Dr. Edvig, his former best friend, Valentine Gersbach, his ex-wife Madeline, God, and himself.

Bakhtin describes carnival as the “temporary liberation from the prevailing truth and from the established order; it marked the suspension of all hierarchical rank, privileges, norms, and prohibitions” (*Rabelais* 10). In a critical carnival scene, Herzog remarks: “I see the mobs breaking into the palaces and churches and sacking Versailles, wallowing in cream desserts or pouring wine over their dicks and dressing in purple velvet, snatching crowns and mitres and crosses . . .” (*Herzog* 215). Similar to the carnival feast, Herzog’s letters are “hostile to all that was immortalized and completed” (*Rabelais* 10). Towards the end of his letter writing, Herzog is left with the feeling of joy

comparable to the joy in the end of carnival feast. It is the joy that unites the individual to the community—the personal truth with public reality. In his final letter he writes:

Is it an idiot joy that makes this animal, the most peculiar animal of all, exclaim something? And he thinks this reaction a sign, a proof, of eternity? And he has it in his breast? But I have no arguments to make about it. "Thou movest me." But what do you want, Herzog? "But that's just it — not a solitary thing. I am pretty well satisfied to be, to be just as it is willed, and for as long as I may remain in occupancy. (Herzog 340)

In assaulting existential assumptions, notably Heidegger's reduction of ordinary life, as Fuchs argues, Herzog affirms the American faith in the ordinary ("Herzog" 145). In doing so, his letter writing turns into an act of modernity which, in the words of Jean-Francoise Lyotard, "in whatever age it appears, cannot exist without a shattering of belief and without discovery of the 'lack of reality' of reality, together with the invention of other realities" (77). Perhaps one reason that Herzog does not post the letters is because they are unrepresentable; however, by writing them he at least acknowledges "the fact that the unrepresentable exists" (Lyotard 78). The letters function like carnival free space for Herzog wherein he can freely express what he deeply desires, reverse the hierarchical social and cultural orders, and contradict their authorized truth. However, as Herzog's carnival free space serves his own intentions only and silences all other authorial voice, they can be regarded as monologic carnival.

In the final, long letters, the style of Herzog approaches the "hagiographic word," which as Bakhtin explains is "a word without a sideward glance calmly adequate to itself and its referential object" (*Dostoevsky* 248). This hagiographic word is similar to what

Foucault describes as “parrhesia”. Letters are Herzog’s ‘parrhesiac’⁸³ rejoinder to Reality Instructors. Foucault explains that parrhesia or ‘free speech’ first appeared in Greek literature, in Euripides (c. 484-407), and continued to exist in literature as a form of ancient Greek letter writing. Parrhesiastes is “some one who says everything he has in mind: he does not hide anything, but opens his heart and mind completely to other people thorough discourse” (*Fearless* 12). Discourse here is devoid of any element of persuasion and rhetoric that might veil the discourse (*Fearless* 12). Characteristic of the style is that the speaker tells the truth, has no doubt about his own possession of the truth, and has the courage to “say something dangerous—different from what the majority believe” (*Fearless* 14-15). For instance,

when a philosopher addresses himself to a sovereign, to a tyrant, and tells him that his tyranny is disturbing and unpleasant because tyranny is incompatible with justice, then the philosopher speaks the truth, believes he is speaking the truth, and, more than that, also takes a *risk* (since the tyranny may become angry, may punish him, may exile him, may kill him). (*Fearless* 16)

The description reminds one of Aleck/Alice, who spoke the truth to the magistrate in the court of law. In parrhesia “the danger always comes from the fact that the said truth is capable of hurting or angering the *interlocutor*” (*Fearless* 17). As such, the function of parrhesia is not simply the demonstration of the truth but criticism: “criticism of the interlocutor or of the speaker himself” (*Fearless* 17). Foucault further explains that parrhesia is

⁸³ Parrhesia or “fearless speech” is the subject of six lectures delivered by Foucault at the University of California at Berkeley in 1983.

a form of criticism, either towards another or towards oneself, but always in a situation where the speaker or confessor is in a position of inferiority with respect to the interlocutor. The parrhesiastes is always less powerful than the one with whom he speaks. The parrhesia comes from 'below,' as it were and is directed towards 'above'. (*Fearless* 18)

In a lengthy critical letter to Nietzsche, for instance, Herzog writes:

Dear Herr Nietzsche—My dear sir, May I ask a question from the floor? You speak of the power of Dionysian spirit to endure the sight of the Terrible, the questionable, to allow itself the luxury of Destruction, to witness decomposition, Hideousness, Evil. All this the Dionysian spirit can do because it has the same power of recovery as Nature itself. Some of these expressions, I must tell you, have a very Germanic ring [...] Perverted, your ideas are no better than those of the Christianity you condemn. (Herzog 318-319)

He further questions religion and its idea of suffering: “*With the religious, the love of suffering is a form of gratitude to experience or an opportunity to experience evil and change it into good*” (Herzog 317). The problem Herzog finds with this conception of religious suffering is that “*You have to have the power to employ pain, to repent, to be illuminated; you must have the opportunity and even the time*” (Herzog 317). Besides,

more commonly, suffering breaks people, crushes them, and is simply unilluminating. You see how gruesomely human beings are destroyed by pain, when they have the added torment of losing their humanity first, so that their death is a total defeat, and then you write about ‘modern forms of orphism’ and

about 'people who are not afraid of suffering' and throw in other such cocktail-party expressions. (Herzog 317)

His discourse is in fact characterized by what Foucault describes as “transgression”. However, this transgression, as Foucault explains, is different from violence or victory over borders; it only affirms the limited being (*Transgression* 36). The extreme reaction is perhaps a sign of Herzog’s dejected relationship to his inner self. As Bakhtin argues, “the hero’s attitude toward himself is inseparably bound up with his attitude toward another and with the attitude of another toward him” (*Dostoevsky* 207). When the hero comes into a caring attitude towards himself, he becomes capable of establishing a polyphonic attitude towards the external world. Herzog finds freedom, happiness, and peace in forgiveness and the aesthetic approach towards himself:

He was surprised to feel such contentment . . . contentment? Whom was he kidding, this was joy! For perhaps the first time he felt what it was to be free from Madeline. Joy! His servitude was ended, and his heart released from grisly heaviness and encrustation. (*Herzog* 313)

He acknowledges his happiness in a letter: “*And you, Gersbach, welcome to Madeline. Enjoy her—rejoice in her. You will never reach me through her, however. I know you sought me in her flesh. But I am no longer there*” (*Herzog* 318). Herzog’s feelings of joy and freedom originate in his newly achieved state of polyphonic comprehension. In what follows, I will discuss in detail the features as well as the significance of Herzog’s polyphonic confessions.

4.4. Confession and Polyphony: Narrative Voice

Herzog is structured as an extensive polyphonic confession articulated by the narrative voice into which numerous monologic confessional letters of Herzog and several monologic conversations are incorporated. The value of the overall polyphonic construction is that it presents confession, as Bakhtin explains, in the form of “an analysis of the interactions of many consciousnesses; not many people in the light of a single consciousness but precisely an analysis of many equally privileged and fully valid consciousnesses” (*Reworking* 287).⁸⁴ In Bellow’s novel, although Herzog monologically devalues the authority of rationalistic culture, he eventually arrives at a polyphonic comprehension and acknowledges its positive sides in modern life as well.

Bakhtin contrasts the monologic novels of Tolstoy with the polyphonic novels of Dostoevsky, arguing that although the novels of Tolstoy presents numerous voices, only one voice dominates all others, whereas in the novels of Dostoevsky no authorial voice utters the last word. Monologic discourse, in Bakhtin’s words,

at its extreme, denies the existence outside itself of another consciousness with equal rights and equal responsibilities [...] *another person* remains wholly and merely an *object* of consciousness, and not another consciousness. No response is expected from it that could change everything in the world of my consciousness. (*Reworking* 292-293)

In ways similar to Bakhtinian polyphony, Bellow dismisses going to monophonic extremes and encourages moderation, an argument which implies challenging monologism and endorsing polyphony. He warns his contemporaries against recent

⁸⁴ It is worth considering that Bakhtin developed the democratic theories of polyphonic discourse while he was living in exile under Stalin regime (Holquist xv).

American fiction, falling into either the extreme of the 'cleans', "the conservative and easily optimistic", or the 'dirties', "the eternal nay-sayers, rebels, iconoclasts" (Harper 13). Bellow's advice is: "Leave both extremes. They are useless, childish. No wonder the really powerful men in our society, whether politicians or scientists, hold writers and poets in contempt" (Harper 14).

These "powerful men" Bellow depicts in *Herzog* as "Reality Instructors". Herzog's open approach towards the teachers of reality resembles the open manner of the Russians whose work Bellow prefers to the narrow American Puritanism. Bellow reasons: "Their [the Russian's] conventions allow them to express freely their feelings about nature and human beings. We [Americans] have inherited a more restricted and imprisoning attitude towards the emotions" (Harper 8). By his harsh criticism against the instructors in his letters, Herzog temporarily joins the monologists; yet, his voice is being constantly and subtly questioned and criticized through the polyphonic functions of humour employed in the language of the novel, dialogic interactions among various voices, and the constructive effects of intertextual relationships.

The polyphonic language of the novel is characterized by its pervasive double-voiced and seriocomic intonation. At the heart of polyphonic discourse is the existence of double-voiced discourse which, in *Herzog*, is introduced into the narrative voice through the insertion of humour. Bakhtin explains:

Double-voiced discourse is always internally dialogized. Examples of this would be comic, ironic or parodic discourse, the refracting discourse of a narrator, refracting discourse in the language of a character and finally the discourse of a whole incorporated genre – all these discourses are double-

voiced and internally dialogized. A potential dialogue is embedded in them, one as yet unfolded, a concentrated dialogue of two voices, two world-views, two languages. (*Discourse* 324-5)

The double-voiced narrative voice and the seriocomic style of the Yiddish language and humour are primarily responsible for the creation of polyphony in *Herzog*. The narrative voice is a blend of two voices: the voice of Herzog as “I” and the voice of the third-person narrator. A good example of polyphonic interaction is evident when the narrative voice interrupts Herzog’s letter to his friend Luke Asphalter. All letters and notes are printed in italics and are made distinct from the normal typeface of the narrative voice:

Dear Luke— [...] I hope to hear your depression is over [...] As for me ... As for you, thought Herzog, you will not tell him how you feel now, all this overflow! It wouldn’t make him happier. Keep it to yourself if you feel exalted. Anyway, he may think you’ve simply gone off your nut.

But if I am out of my mind, it’s all right with me. (Herzog 315)

Here, the hybrid construction of the narrative voice depicts more than one voice in conversation. Sara Ganjaie likewise suggests that narrative voice in *Herzog* borders on what Roger Fowler defines as Free Indirect Discourse (45). It is through this narrative technique that

the writer is able to juxtapose two sets of values, to imply a critique of the character’s views, without the direct judgment which an external perspective would produce. (Fowler 174)

In what follows, I will analyse the dialogic interactions among diverse voices and languages within the heteroglossia of the novel.

4.4.1. Heteroglossia

It is the seriocomic style of Yiddish language and humour that enriches the polyphonic essence of the novel's heteroglossia. Yiddish carries the Jewish cultural heritage as well as its emotional values. "Yiddish" means "Jewish" in Yiddish language.⁸⁵ Yiddish sounds polyphonic. Although classified as Judeo-German, Yiddish contains "what philologists call Loez—which is Jewish correlates of Old French and Old Italian" (Rosten 449). It is hybrid for it is a blend of Hebrew, German, Italian, and French. As it has borrowed from several other languages, it is called "the Robin Hood of languages" (Rosten xvi) for "it steals from the linguistically rich to give to the fledging poor" (Rosten xvi). Apart from the coexistence of various European languages within Yiddish, the novel incorporates numerous instances of several European languages such as French, Italian, and German into the novel. Furthermore, as distinct from Hebrew, the sacred language of prayer and religious ceremonies, and the official language of Israel, Yiddish is a demotic language. It is said that Yiddish is "the vernacular of uneducated masses: the priests and intellectuals and noblemen (if educated) used Latin and Greek". It is perhaps "the only language on earth that has never been spoken by men in power" (Rosten xviii). Today, familiarity with Yiddish is associated with age: "The older the Jew, the more can he be expected to understand Yiddish" (Rosten 448).⁸⁶ Herzog remembers his father in his old age while "his Yiddish became more crabbed and quaint" (*Herzog* 248). Also when he

⁸⁵ Yiddish is older than modern German and modern English. It took root and expanded in the ghettos, flourished in Eastern Europe, and became the language of Ashkenazic Jews, the branch of the immigrant Jews distinct from Sephardic Jews who speak Ladino and settled in Spain (Rosten 446-447).

⁸⁶ Of the familiarity of Bellow with Yiddish, we know that in 1915, when Bellow's parents immigrated to Montreal from St Petersburg, Russia (Wood 999), they spoke to each other in Russian and Yiddish. Bellow spoke English and Yiddish at home; while "on the streets of Montreal they spoke French, and in public school they spoke English" (Atlas 14). Bellow wrote: "I didn't even know they [French, English, Russian, and Yiddish] were different languages" (Atlas 14).

acknowledges the disintegration in his earlier notes, he describes it “in the Yiddish of his long-dead mother” (*Herzog* 3) as “*Trepverter*—retorts that came too late, when you were already on your way down the stairs” (*Herzog* 3). Although speakers of Yiddish are now scarce, the diction and the style of the language continue to exist as a vibrant part of the English language. It is perhaps for this reason that Bellow provides no translation within the novel for Yiddish expressions, possibly confirming the integration of the two modes of personal and public discourse. He has contextualized Yiddish within the English text in such a way that the two languages are not simply juxtaposed but dialogically interconnected: they reproduce, acknowledge, and enhance one another.

These features of Yiddish language describe not only the marginality of Herzog’s immigrant generation in relation to the superior standing of American culture but also the informality as well as the familiarity with which they communicate among themselves in Yiddish. As such, Yiddish functions as their private language in the novel whereas they use English in more formal, official, and public communications. In Bellow’s novel, Yiddish has significance in the formation of various identities. Whereas Herzog speaks Yiddish with a bookish accent, Valentine speaks it very carelessly, perhaps in order to make fun of Herzog’s language, his possible prejudices, and his pride:

Valentine loved to use Yiddish expressions, to misuse them, rather. Herzog’s Yiddish background was genteel. He heard with instinctive snobbery Valentine’s butcher’s, teamster’s, commoner’s accent, and he put himself down for it—My God! Those ancient family prejudices, absurdities from a lost world. (*Herzog* 60)

Yiddish expressions function as centrifugal forces in *Herzog* more than any other of Bellow's novels. They bring into Bellow's novel the historical sense of Jewish experience as a peripheral, secondary, and foreign language and identity. Herzog notes: "all branches of the family had the caste madness of *yichus*. No life so barren and subordinate that it didn't have imaginary dignities, honors to come, freedom to advance" (141). Herzog remembers his father's disgrace: "I need my money. Who'll provide for me—you? I may bribe the Angel of Death a long time yet" (248). He wished he were dead: "I don't know when I'll be delivered" (249). And to show that his father's life already resembled death, Herzog explains that Father Herzog "used the old Yiddish term for a woman's confinement—*kimper*" (249). His moving description of his life as death is in sharp contrast to Humboldt's life in death in Bellow's later novel. Herzog reports: "The horror of this second birth, into the hands of death, made his eyes shine, and his lips silently pressed together" (249).

The interactions between Yiddish and English expression create double-voiced qualities in the novel. The tension-filled tendencies of language in the novel's heteroglossia show that diverse, competitive, and contradictory elements within the novel struggle for dominance. Within such heteroglot territory, language and novel are

Dynamically pulled between centre and periphery, between unitary and national forces and heteroglossia, at once describes the tensions that are holding together and pulling apart a language at any one time, and also the same forces which, in given social, economic, political, artistic and educational histories, are producing the multiple changes that constitute the history of a language. (Dentith 35)

To explore this dialogic quality of the novel, I have provided a table—appended to this thesis—which shows the English-Yiddish and English-Hebrew relationships as well as the seriocomic dialogic interaction between them.⁸⁷ As the table shows, the truth of the novel does not lie in the seriousness of English or Yiddish statements in isolation, but in the seriocomic, dialogic space that the narrative technique creates between the two.

According to the table, the novel's heteroglossia exposes the total assimilation of protagonists such as Aunt Zippora's to American culture as well as her eccentric disrespect for her own family and Jewish community. As given in the table, Aunt Zippora addresses Herzog's father: "Blame your own weak nature,' [. . .] '*Az du host a schwachen natur, wer is dir schuldig?* You can't stand alone. You leaned on Sarah's brother, and now you want to lean on me. Yaffe served in Kavkaz. *A finsternish!* (*Herzog* 144) However, Aunt Zippora's centripetal claim is counterbalanced by the humorous intonation communicated by the narrator's centrifugal voice. As Bakhtin explains:

All forms involving a narrator or a posited author signify to one degree or another by their presence the author's freedom from a unitary and single language, a freedom connected with the relativity of literary and language systems; such forms open up the possibility of never having to define oneself in language, the possibility of translating one's own intensions from one linguistic system to another, of using 'the language of truth' with 'the language of the everyday', of saying 'I am me' in some one else's language, and in my own language, 'I am other'. (*Discourse* 314-315)

⁸⁷ This table is produced with the assistance of the Liverpool Jewish Community Centre.

Therefore, the novel's heteroglossia creates conflict between different world views, including Aunt Zippora's critical views, Herzog's moving remembrance of his parent's disgrace, and a more distant and polyphonic viewpoint of the novel's narrative voice.

There is a particular style of Yiddish humour that runs throughout *Herzog*. As the language of humour, Yiddish is

Steeped in sentiment, it is sluiced with sarcasm. It loves the ruminative, because it rests on a rueful past; favours paradox, because it knows that only paradox can do justice to the injustices of life; adores irony, because the only way the Jews could retain their sanity was to view a dreadful world with sardonic, astringent eyes. In its innermost heart, Yiddish swings between *schmaltz*⁸⁸ and derision. (Rosten xvii)

Jewish humour is cerebral (Rosten xxiii). It shows self-awareness, self-analysis, and self-criticism (Rosten xxiii), as if "one way to block the bully's wrath is to know him better than himself" (Rosten xvii). Humour functions to redeem pain and suffering: "A Jewish aphorism goes 'when you're hungry, sing; when you're hurt, laugh'" (Rosten xxiii).⁸⁹ In *Herzog*, as noted by Irving Howe, Yiddish humour is the main source of the novel's seriocomic style. In "Odysseus, Flat on His Back", Howe writes:

Bellow's style draws heavily from the Yiddish, not so much in borrowed diction as in underlying intonation and rhythm [...] the jabbing interplay of ironies, the intimate vulgarities, the strange blend of sentimental and sardonic which characterizes Yiddish speech are lassoed into Bellow's English: so that

⁸⁸ Excessive sentimentality

⁸⁹ Bellow provides some examples: "if your mother called you an angel, it meant you were a devil", also "If she said that your hands were clean, it meant that your hands were filthy; if your nose was running, you were complimented on your well-wiped nose" (Atlas 14).

what we get is not a sick exploitation of folk memory but a vibrant linguistic and cultural transmutation. (48)

The confessional structure of the novel, as such, combines the serious with humorous intonations, the formal with the informal languages, as well as the private with public realities.

Moreover, Jewish humour is known to be anti-authoritarian. Yiddish humour often employs “the barbed joke about the strong, the rich, the heartless powers” (Rosten xxiv). Having lost his wife, job, and academic status to Gersbach, Herzog starts to fight the authority of Valentine in his seriocomic confessions. His confessional technique is first to exaggerate Gersbach’s power and hegemony by comparing him to a king and God and then demolish that superior image altogether:

Dealing with Valentine was like dealing with a king. He had a thick grip. He might have held a sceptre. He *was* a king, an emotional king, and the depth of his heart was his kingdom. He appropriated all the emotions about him, as if by divine or spiritual right. He could do more with them, and therefore he simply took them over. He was a big man, too big for anything but the truth. (Again, the truth) Herzog had a weakness for grandeur, and even bogus grandeur (was it ever entirely bogus?). (*Herzog* 61)

In the narrated plot, Gersbach wins the centripetal-centrifugal battle whereas in the plot of narration Herzog’s irony is more powerful.

In a similar seriocomic intonation, Yiddish humour is also used in the novel in order to shatter the authority of the magistrate in the court of law. The word “necessary” is used with great subtlety and humour in order to show the inhuman nature of the magistrate:

“Of course the magistrate had not spread his legs literally; he must have done all that was *necessary* within the power structure to get appointed” (*Herzog* 229, emphasis mine). Herzog creates dialogic interplays of this word. He extends the ironic intonation of the word “necessary” to apply to Chicago life and its “*necessary* quota of consequent lies” (*Herzog* 266, emphasis mine). In doing so, Herzog problematises a tragic American reality in his humorous intonation, asserting that pretence and lies are public anti-confessional speech acts that are essential for the individual in order to survive. In other words, Herzog is acknowledging the detrimentally widening gap and lack of communication between public and personal truths. He also uses the word “necessary” when he is ironically and polyphonically criticising his own monologic perceptions of realities and his private confessions in the train: “Herzog, now barely looking through the tinted, immovable sealed window felt his eager, flying spirit streaming out, speaking, piercing, making clear judgments, uttering final explanation, *necessary* words only” (*Herzog* 68, emphasis mine).

4.4.2. Seriocomic Discourse

Apart from Yiddish humour, double-voiced discourse is at work in the novel’s heteroglossia in order to create diverse seriocomic forms of polyphonic confession, including polemic, explanatory, loophole, ironic, grotesque, and negative confession. The principal form of polyphonic confession in *Herzog* is polemic confession, mainly produced as a result of the employment of the Bakhtinian stylistic feature known as: “the word with sideward glance”. For instance, Herzog meditates: “Should I say all this to

Ramona? Some women think that earnestness is wooing" (*Herzog* 314). "The word with sideward glance" creates argumentative double-voicedness in *Herzog*. For instance:

Now what is it? Herzog urged himself to be clearer. What really is on my mind? Probably this: shall I put those two on the stand under oath, torture them, hold as a blowtorch to their feet? Why? They have a right to each other; they seem even to belong together. Why, let them alone. But what about justice?—Justice! Look who wants justice! Most of mankind has lived and died without—totally without it. People by the billions and for ages sweated, gypped, enslaved, suffocated, bled to death, buried with no more justice than cattle. But Moses E. Herzog, at the top of his lungs, bellowing with pains and anger, has to have justice. It's his quid pro quo, in return for all he has suppressed, his right as an Innocent Party. (*Herzog* 220)

What is conspicuous here is the uncertainty in Herzog's intonation and the method of self-inquiring which is essential for the creation of polyphonic discourse and understanding of reality. In contrast to the confident tone and unquestionable language of monologic authorities such as Valentine Gersbach, Herzog arrives at a more comprehensive knowledge so that he can admit not only the Madeline-Valentine relationship but also the cultural injustice of reality instructors, and eventually his own innocence.

A form of polyphonic confession used earlier in the novel is explanatory confession. It appears in Herzog's speech when, having lectured the politicians that they should help eradicate poverty from India by offering their properties to the natives, Herzog makes an effort to explain and justify why he cannot offer his house to the Bhave movement. In a

letter to Dr. Bhave he advocates: “*Persuading the owners of large estates to give up some land to impoverished peasants, however*” (Herzog 48). The narrative voice comments:

what he had vaguely in mind was to offer his house and property in Ludeyville to the Bhave movement. But what could Bhave do with it? Send Hindus to the Berkshires? It wouldn't be fair to them. Anyway, there was a mortgage. A gift should be made in what they call “fee simple,” and for that I'd have to raise another eight thousand bucks, and the Internal Revenue wouldn't give me a deduction on it. (Herzog 48)

Here, Herzog confesses that his humanistic dreams are almost impossible to be realized in real-life situations. Later on, Herzog tries to excuse his explanations: “a curious result of the increase of historical consciousness is that people think explanation is a necessity of survival. They have to explain their condition” (Herzog 322). Implied here is the idea that explanation is a culturally conditioned form of avowal.

Foucault explains more about the arbitrary nature of the cultural factors involved in the production of the truth:

each society has its regime of truth, its ‘general politics’ of truth: that is, the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true; the mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish true and false statements, the means by which each is sanctioned; the techniques and procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth; the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true. (Truth 131)

Perhaps it is due to an awareness of such operations that the novel opens with Herzog's polyphonic and loophole assertion of madness: “If I am out of my mind, it's all right with

me, thought Moses Herzog" (*Herzog* 1). At the core of this statement is an argument in which the conditional assertion of Herzog acts more as a denial than as an avowal of madness. It is the "word with sideward glance" that is conscious of the possible judgments of other people and borders on what Bakhtin describes as "confession with a loophole".⁹⁰ Confessional self-definition with a loophole happens when:

the hero who repents and condemns himself actually wants only to provoke praise and acceptance by another. Condemning himself, he wants and demands that the other person dispute this self-definition, and he leaves himself a loophole in case the other person should suddenly in fact agree with him, with his self-condemnation, and not make use of his privilege as the other.
(*Dostoevsky* 233)

The narrative voice bears double intonations: the serious tone of Herzog the sufferer and the humorous tone of the joker which he acknowledges in himself: "*That suffering joker*" (*Herzog* 11). This seriocomic intonation running throughout the novel provides the grounds for the emergence of ironic confession. Herzog finds himself in an ironic confessional situation in the police station where he is held for the possession of a gun. He compares himself to his father thinking that a modern man like him is ironically more savage than the more primitives of the previous generation: "Ancient Herzogs with their psalms and their shawls and beards would never have touched a revolver. Violence was for the goy. But they were gone, vanished, archaic men" (*Herzog* 287). Earlier in Ludeville he had expressed his desire for a return to this primitive stage when he noticed

⁹⁰ "Confession with a loophole" is the way Bakhtin refers to Ippolit's confession in Dostoevsky's *The Idiot* (*Dostoevsky* 241).

the signs of the intrusion of the natives. They had left a used sanitary napkin in a plate on his desk where he had been working on his Romantic studies:

That was his reception by the natives. A momentary light of self-humor passed over his face [...] Suppose I accepted the challenge. I could be Moses, the old Jew-man of Ludeyville, with a white beard, cutting the grass under the washline with my antique reel-mower. Eating Woodchucks. (*Herzog* 49)

Disappointed with the modern condition of the truth, Herzog escapes momentarily into the basic and primitive life experience where he also witnesses its inhumane side.

As his suffering mounts towards a climax, Herzog can see true things only in grotesque forms (*Herzog* 269, 272). He satirizes the bankruptcy of his contemporary culture, that is, its extreme practices of animosity, dictatorship, and paranoia through grotesquely eccentric language:

How we all love extreme cases and apocalypses, fires, drownings, strangling, and the rest of it. The bigger our mild, basically ethical, safe middle classes grow the more radical excitement is in demand. Mild or moderate truthfulness or accuracy seems to have no pull at all. (Herzog 316)

Here, the grotesque appears as a seriocomic style of confession which combines elements of humour and satire. It is rooted in grotesque realism, which Bakhtin identifies with elements such as eccentricity, degradation (*Rabelais* 19), debasement (*Rabelais* 370), and ambivalence (*Rabelais* 24). Such elements permeate Herzog's language and self-image: his extreme anger, eccentric imagination, degraded self-image, deformed face-image and various animal imageries. Under the pressures of suffering, Herzog sees his face

deformed (2, 12, 20, 27, 41, 60), a condition which is an inherent element in the grotesque.

Deformity of his face is even further advanced by various animal imageries: when he is “lying with no more style than a Chimpanzee” (*Herzog* 11); when Ramona would lead him from one cocktail party to another like a “tame bear” (*Herzog* 23); when he regards himself as “Queer for recollections” like birds (*Herzog* 25); when he hibernates like an animal into hiding “getting away from all burdens, practical questions, away also from Ramona” (*Herzog* 27); and when he remembers in his childhood whining like a dog behind his sister Helen (*Herzog* 141). In addition, ambivalence, another element of the grotesque, further degenerates his self-image: “He was half elegant, half slovenly” (*Herzog* 159). As a result, in ways similar to Dostoevsky’s *Underground Man*, he hates his face, for in Bakhtin’s words:

in it he senses the power of another person over him, the power of that other’s evaluations and opinions. He himself looks on his face with another’s eye, with the eyes of the other. And this alien glance interruptedly merges with his own glance and creates in him a peculiar hatred towards his own face.
(*Dostoevsky* 235)

Herzog, likewise, avoids mirrors and when one reflects his face, he is shocked:

His face was before him in the blotchy mirror. It was bearded with lather. He saw his perplexed, furious eyes and he gave an audible cry. My God! Who is this creature? It considers itself human. But what is it? Not human of itself. But has the longing to be human. And like a troubling dream, a persistent

vapor. A desire. Where does it all come from? And what is it? And what can it be! Not immortal longing. No, entirely mortal, but human. (*Herzog* 220)

Herzog communicates his inner reality with elements of grotesque and caricature. In exaggerating the deformity of his bodily image, Herzog makes a seriocomic comment on his inner truth. It is polyphonic confession in that he combines the constructive inner sides such as his dreams, personal desires, and human side with the destructive outward animalistic appearance, the public in contrast to the private truth.

Bakhtin sees caricature as an essential category of the grotesque (*Rabelais* 306). As Stanley Edgar Hyman argues, Herzog is “a self-caricature, not a self-portrait” (Atlas 338). Apart from caricature self-depictions, Herzog makes uses of caricature in the portrayal of characters such as Madeline, Gersbach, Simkin, Shapiro, Himmelstein, and many Teachers of Reality. They are grotesquely portrayed so that against them, as Gudsteinsdottir argues, Herzog can be seen as saintly (Gudsteinsdottir 135). Perhaps, the most memorable grotesque, caricature description is the image of Madeline created by Herzog in the church: “Madeline genuflected in the aisle. Only it was more than genuflection. She sank, she cast herself down, she wanted to spread herself on the floor and press her heart to the boards—he recognized that” (*Herzog* 63). The Madeline we see “is not a fully realized personality but the grotesquely funny creature that emerges from Herzog’s angry recollections and perverse fantasies” (Cohen 160).

At a climatic confessional scene, Herzog makes a negative confession which is a polyphonic expression of guiltlessness, a digression from the conventions of classic confession. Herzog makes negative confessions when he views the act of murdering Madeline and Gersbach as murder with ‘clear conscience,’ reasoning that:

It's not everyone who gets the opportunity to kill with a clear conscience. They had opened the way to justifiable murder. They deserved to die. He had a right to kill them. They would even know why they were dying; no explanation necessary. When he stood before them they would have to submit. Gersbach would only hang his head, with tears for himself [...] Madeline would shriek and curse. (*Herzog* 254-255)

This expression of guiltlessness is well-protected, as Richard Poirier argues, by the enclosed narrative voice (Poirier 85). It is structurally enclosed and protective, because the novel begins where it ends so that the end informs the beginning in its final pause, its concluding silence and added humour. Later on in this chapter, I will discuss the significance of Herzog's final silence for the confessional discourse in more detail.

Negative confession continues to exist in philosophical and religious terms in the novel. In an allusion to Nietzsche, Herzog debunks his view on God: "God is no more. But Death is. That's their story. And we live in a hedonistic world in which happiness is set up on a mechanical model" (*Herzog* 271). He then appropriates this outlook into:

Not God is dead, that point was passed long ago. Perhaps it should be stated Death is God. This generation thinks—and this is thought of thoughts—that nothing faithful, vulnerable, fragile can be durable or have any true power. (*Herzog* 290)

Herzog argues: "If the old God exists, he must be a murderer. But the one true God is Death. This is how it is without cowardly illusions" (*Herzog* 290). He advances his argument by quoting from Proudhon:

“God is the evil.” But after we search in the entrails of world revolution for la foi nouvelle, what happened? The victory of death, not of rationality, not of rational faith. Our own murdering imagination turns out to be the great power, our human imagination which starts by accusing God of murder [...] It is easier not to exist altogether than to accuse God. Far more simple. Cleaner. But no more of that. (*Herzog* 290)

To account for the positive consequences of making such polyphonic confessions, it seems appropriate to quote Bakhtin: “To be means to be for another, and through the other, for oneself. A person has no internal sovereign territory, he is wholly and always on the boundary; looking inside himself, he looks *into the eyes of another or with the eyes of another*” (*Reworking* 287). Herzog experiences this mode of looking at his inner self when he momentarily exercises empathy, looking at himself from the point of view of another person:

Ah, poor fellow!—and Herzog momentarily joined the objective world in looking down on himself. He too could smile at Herzog and despise him. But there still remained the fact. *I* am Herzog. I have to be that man. There is no one else to do it. After smiling, he must return to his own Self and see the thing through. (*Herzog* 66-67)

Polyphonic confessions as such help Herzog develop features of a responsible identity, particularly a belief in no alibi in existence. It is only when he comes to terms with himself that he ironically feels he looks good:

And next came his specific self, an apparition in the square mirror. How did he look? Oh, terrific—you look exquisite, Moses! Smashing! The primitive

self-attachment of the human creature, the sweet instinct for the self, so deep, so old it may have a cellular origin. (*Herzog* 159)

When he reaches a realistic balance, Herzog finds the courage to look into the mirror: “His shaven face, muttering in the mirror—great shadows under the eyes. That’s okay, he thought; if the light’s not too bright, you’re still a grand-looking man” (*Herzog* 159). As a result of his polyphonic consciousness he becomes able to see beauty in his appearance as well as his inner reality. He departs from eccentric evaluations of himself and of others and creates a more comprehensive image of the public and private values, an understanding which is both ethical and aesthetic. This polyphonic understanding of the self and another is further intensified when combined with techniques of dialogic relationships and effects of intertextuality in the novel.

4.4.3. Dialogic Relationships

Dialogism, Bakhtin’s literary and philosophical theory, is founded on the idea that “discourse is by its very nature dialogic” (*Dostoevsky* 183). It explores the interactions among words as units of utterances: “the word dialogically contacting another word, a word about a word addressed to a word” (*Dostoevsky* 237). Bakhtin distinguishes dialogism from linguistics, mainly because linguistics is unable to account for such responsive dialogic interactions. Whereas linguistics statically studies sentence structures, diction, and the like, dialogic studies examine the active and dynamic communications among words, expressions, and sentences. Like dialectic relationships, dialogic relationships are logical relationships; however, they differ from dialectic relationships in that the two statements in dialectic relationships never argue with one another in any way

(Dostoevsky 183). For the thesis and antithesis to enter the dialogic plane, they “must be embodied, that is, they must enter another sphere of existence: they must become *discourse*, that is an utterance, and receive an *author*” (Dostoevsky 184). Bakhtin explains that

a dialogic approach is possible toward any signifying part of an utterance, even toward an individual word, if that word is perceived not as the impersonal word of language but as a sign of someone else’s semantic position, as the representative of another person’s utterance; that is if we hear in it someone else’s voice. Thus dialogic relations can permeate inside the utterance, even inside the individual word, as long as two voices collide within it dialogically. (Dostoevsky184)

Diverse and numerous styles, dialects, languages, genres, allusions and speech differentiations in *Herzog* are not simply put together but are brought into familiar zones of contact through their mutual address with effects of affirmation/disaffirmation, agreement/disagreement, contradiction, criticism, polemic, satire, humour, and irony.

Bakhtin employs the metaphor of clothes to visualize the functions of dialogic relationships, the intonation added to the words one receive from other people: “a new mode for wearing the clothing of the word, the clothing of language, a new mode for wearing one’s own body, one’s embodiment” (*Reworking* 291). Such relationships are presented, for instance, when Herzog hears that Zelda uses the German word for housewife: *housfra*; he understands that she has learned it from Madeline (*Herzog* 38, 39). So the reproduction of this word by Zelda shows close relationship between Madeline and Zelda as it reveals for Herzog that Madeline has complained and talked to

Zelda about him. It shows Madeline's trust and confidence in Zelda as well as their mutual support. Likewise, Sono's habit of questioning Herzog about his girls makes Herzog humorously remember her when the cop was interrogating him about the gun (283, 289). Dialogic relationships also amusingly compare Herzog's kitchen, where he tries to take control of his disordered mind by writing down his notes, to the police headquarters (*Herzog* 1, 290).

In what follows I will explore the dialogic relationship at the level of words in *Herzog* in order to show the interconnection between confession, hidden feelings, and secrets. The word "bury" and other words that semantically relate to it are used by Herzog and Madeline in order to show their cold relationship at Ludeyville. Herzog and Madeline each accuse the other of having forced him or her to live in the Berkshires. We hear Herzog complaining: "*digging* in at Ludeyville" (*Herzog* 6, emphasis mine) and Madeline blaming Herzog that she was "too sociable to be *buried* in the remote Berkshires" by him (*Herzog* 6, emphasis mine). Zelda takes sides with Madeline when she says to Herzog "You were a fool to *bury* yourself and her" (*Herzog* 39, emphasis mine). However, in a conversation with Zelda, Herzog acknowledges his plan by his silence: that he has primarily chosen the place to concentrate on his research. Another word is "charm", which Herzog uses with various intonations in order to show his personal evaluations of people. For instance, in the following example, he admires his father, criticizes Valentine and sympathizes with himself by using the same word, "charm":

But how charming we remain notwithstanding.

Papa, poor man, could charm birds from the trees, crocodiles from mud. Madeline, too, had great *charm*, [...] Valentine Gersbach, her lover, was a *charming* man, too, though in a heavier, brutal style [...] Herzog himself had no small amount of *charm*. (*Herzog* 5, emphasis mine)

Dialogic relationships are used in the novel in order to expose and criticise the effects of pretence as a confession-related act. Herzog adds negative intonation to the word “charm”, semantically relating it to the word “pretension” in order to fulminate against Madeline (*Herzog* 193) and also to the word “prepared” in order to describe her speech when she was asking for divorce (*Herzog* 9), and eventually to make fun of her “theatrical conversion” to Catholicism (*Herzog* 53, 112). However, in the potential crime scene when he is holding the gun and is ready to shoot Gersbach, what prevents Herzog from shooting is the realization of the fact that the act of murder, if it had happened, would have been an act of “theatre” (*Herzog* 258). In using such dialogic relationships among so many semantically related words, Herzog exposes and criticizes the disguises Madeline and Gersbach use in order to achieve higher social positions.

Herzog employs dialogic relationships in order to separate himself from authority figures such as Valentine Gersbach. He mentions the word “cry” and words related to it in order to distance himself from Gersbach. When his friend Luke informs him of Madeline’s betrayal, Herzog feels so disappointed that he wants to “cry” but he doesn’t (*Herzog* 45). He mentions two reasons for this: first that he does not want to behave like Gersbach who is “a frequent *weeper* of distinguished emotional power” (*Herzog* 45, emphasis mine). He even asserts: “at moments I dislike having a face, a nose, lips,

because he has them” (*Herzog* 45). Secondly, he contrasts Gersbach’s crocodile tears at the airport with his genuine *tears* in a playhouse when watching Pather Panchalli (*Herzog* 48). The functions of dialogic interactions, including covering and uncovering the truth, exaggerating and undermining the significance of a statement, and pretence are further intensified when considered within their intertextual operations.

4.4.4. Intertextuality

The novel explores the interactions between public and private confessions within an intertextual space which connects the discourse of confession to formal genres such as poetry and essay writing and to informal ones such as nursery rhymes. Initiating a dialogue between the genres of prose and poetry, *Herzog* renders his own philosophy in terms of June’s nursery rhyme:

I love little pussy, her coat is so warm

And if I don’t hurt her, she’ll do me no harm

I’ll sit by the fire and give her some food,

And pussy will love me because I am good (Herzog 118)

Later on, *Herzog* makes a confessional reply to June’s poem in a serious essay-like context wherein he reasons why he has not assimilated to the American ways of brutality:

I shouldn’t look down on old Sandor for being so tough. This is his personal, brutal version of the popular outlook, the American way of life. And what has my way been? I love little pussy, her coat is so warm, and if I don’t hurt her she’ll do me no harm, which represents the childish side of the creed, from

which men are wickedly awakened, and then become snarling realists.

(*Herzog* 291)

Here, Herzog criticises the problems of American excessive rationalism, its cruelty, and one-sided judgments. Making a dialogic reference to June's poem, Herzog suggests that what is absent from American culture is basic human feeling. Combining the high seriousness of his essayist language with the known language of June's poem, Herzog implies that what the society needs is a proportionate amount of emotion and rationalism, as well as seriousness and humour.

Confession through intertextual relationships disintegrates and multiplies the identity of the protagonist in the novel. In making connections between various speech differentiations, polyphonic narrative voice, and Herzog's letters, the novel makes Herzog's two separate social and private selves appear at once fragmentary and united. There are times when the two voices merge and conversely there are instances when they stand apart. Each voice seems to be providing the truth from a different point of view. In *Herzog*, this kind of intertextuality is created when the narrative voice interrupts Herzog's letter writing and argues with him. An example of this intrusive narrative voice occurs when Herzog is writing a letter to General Eisenhower: "*For knowledge of death makes us wish to extend our lives at the expense of others. And this is the root of the struggle for power. But that's all wrong!* thought Herzog, not without humor in his despair" (*Herzog* 162). It seems that because of the decrease in the degree of objectification between the two voices, both voices tend to merge or, in Bakhtin's words, "the distance between the two is lost" (*Dostoevsky* 198). In this way, the confession made

through this polyphonic narrative effect is infused with what Bakhtin refers to as double-voiced discourse. In “Discourse in the Novel”, he writes:

It serves two speakers at the same time and expresses simultaneously two different intentions: the direct intention of the character who is speaking, and the refracted intention of the author. In such discourse there are two voices, two meanings, and two expressions. And all the while these two voices are dialogically related, they – as it were – know about each other (just as two exchanges in a dialogue know of each other and are structured in this mutual knowledge of each other); it is as if they actually hold a conversation with each other. (*Discourse* 324)

Julia Kristeva reads dialogism as intertextuality, reasoning that: “The dialogic sees in every word a word about the word, addressed to the word; and it is only on this condition that it belongs to this polyphony – to this intertextual space – that the word is a ‘full’ word” (Kristeva 109). She translates Bakhtinian plurality as “intertextuality,” arguing that

the word/discourse is scattered in a thousand facets, in a multiplicity of contexts—in the context of the discourse in the intertextuality where the speaker becomes plural and becomes fragmentary, but also in the listener, ourselves: a ‘unity’ which Bakhtin calls ‘Man’, but which, he declares, resists definition, for ‘Man never coincides with himself.’ (Kristeva 109-110)

The conception of a unified and fragmentary self finds new connotations in the light of Bakhtin’s theory of dialogism. The protagonist’s private and unified self becomes plural in his social communications. However, this dissociated personality does not

hinder dialogic communication; rather, it adds more dimensions to the character and more layers into his private truth. Bakhtin explains that

dialogic relations are also possible toward one's own utterance as a whole, towards its separate parts and toward an individual part within it, if we somehow detach ourselves from them, speak with an inner reservation, if we observe a certain distance from them, as if limiting our own authorship or dividing it into two. (*Dostoevsky*184)

The polyphonic narrative voice in *Herzog* seems to be functioning in a similar way. At times, it seems that the narrative voice is the voice of Herzog himself, who steps back and revises his own writings. In a letter to the *Times* in which Herzog is criticizing modern philosophy and civilization, the narrative voice intervenes to advise him and help him see the positive sides of civilization. Although Herzog can admit the comfort brought to modern life by technology he cannot ignore and forgive its cruel aspect:

De Tocqueville considered the impulse towards well-being as one of the strongest impulses of a democratic society. He can't be blamed for understanding the destructive powers generated by this same impulse. You must be out of your mind to write to the Times like this! There are millions of bitter Voltairean types whose souls are filled with angry satire and who keep looking for the keenest, most poisonous word. You could send in a poem instead, you nitwit. Why should you be more right out of sheer distraction than they are out of organization? You ride in their trains, don't you? Distraction didn't build the railroad. Go on write a poem, and kill 'em with bitterness. They print little poems as fillers on the editorial page. But he

continued his letters, nevertheless. *Nietzsche, Whitehead, and John Dewey wrote on the question of Risk . . . Dewey tells us that mankind distrusts its own nature and tries to find stability beyond or above, in religion or philosophy. To him the past often means the erroneous.* But Moses checked himself. Come to the point. But what was the point? The point was that there were people who destroyed mankind who could destroy mankind and that they were foolish and arrogant, crazy, and must be begged not to do it. (*Herzog* 50-51)

The extract shows two voices in interaction: the transgressive voice of Herzog in his letter writing and the caring narrative voice who interrupts Herzog in order to advise him to be more careful when addressing a public audience. Herzog's argument outlines two different contexts for the confessional discourse: the social context of the media and the private context of letter writing, art, and poetry. In combining the language of newspaper with letter writing, and fiction, Herzog shows that truth needs to be modified and polished before it is published in the media and that the exposure of personal reality through the media involves risk whereas the same truth can be safely expressed in the language of poetry.

It seems that Herzog needs this plural identity in order to communicate successfully with himself and with others. Therefore, Herzog cannot agree with Romanticism and the Romantic view of the unique self. In his study, Herzog "was supposed to have ended with a new angle on the modern condition, showing how life could be lived by renewing universal connections, overturning the last of the Romantic errors about the uniqueness of the Self" (*Herzog* 39). However, he adheres to its philosophy of the heart because, after

all, as suggested by his name, he is a man of herz, or heart. Like his author,⁹¹ Herzog lives by Rousseau's attitude of "*je sens mon coeur et je connais les homes*" (*Herzog* 340). In this way, for Herzog, polyphonic experience becomes combined with ambivalence in philosophical outlook.

In *Saul Bellow and American Transcendentalism*, M. A. Quayum points out another source of ambivalence and conflict in Herzog, that he cannot choose between two opposing forces within contemporary American culture: the excessive materialism and rationalism of the "Reality Instructors," on the one hand, and the excessive emotionalism and sentimentalism of "Romantic enthusiasts" (85-89), on the other. Herzog gradually moves away from transgressive letters and develops features of inclusiveness, balance, and polyphony in speech. He eventually learns to live in moderation: "Allow me modesty now to claim that I am much better now at ambiguities" (*Herzog* 304). Keith Michael Opdhal notes that this very coming to terms with ambiguities is the source of salvation for Herzog (145). Herzog achieves this polyphonic state and inner peace and improves the management of his public and private truth by a turn to private letter writing. However, in contrast to his excessive articulation, he ends in silence. In what follows, I will argue that even his silence is polyphonic in its style, significance, and effects.

4.5. Confession and Silence

Herzog's endless letter writing ends in silence, a confessional response that suggests a reversal in the roles of the speaker and the hearer in confession. The pause, even if momentarily, gives Herzog the chance to review his actions, meditate on what has been

⁹¹ Jo Brans, "Common Needs, Common Preoccupation: An Interview with Saul Bellow." *Critical essays on Saul Bellow*. Ed. Stanley Trachtenberg (Boston, Massachusetts: G. K. Hall & Co., 1979) 57. Hereafter cited internally as *Common Needs*.

said, and receive views in peace. Furthermore, his silence shows his liberation from the grip of the power inside him, the inner wrath that demanded impulsive letter writing. Bellow explains:

I think of him as a man who, in the agony of suffering, finds himself to be his own most penetrating critic. And he re-examines his life, as it were, by re-enacting all the roles he took seriously. And when he has gone through all the enactments, he's back at the original point. (*Common Needs* 64)

This re-enactment, in Bellow's words, is "an attempt really to divest himself of all the personae" [the social selves] and "when he has dismissed these personae there comes a pause" (*Common Needs* 64). Bellow remarks: "I think that art has something to do with the achievement of stillness in the midst of chaos. A stillness which characterizes prayer, too, and the eye of the storm. I think that art has something to do with the arrest of attention in the midst of distraction" (Harper 14).

However, critics of Bellow have interpreted the final silence in many other ways. Glenday, for instance, reads the silence as "a rejection of that negotiation with reality which he had himself described as a humanist responsibility" (98). Keith Opdhal, on the other hand, interprets it as a form of return to community through inwardness:

he has discovered his interest in the external world by turning inward, has affirmed community by ceasing to write letters, has affirmed the inspired condition by examining society, and has found joy by returning to pain. He is a Moses, who cares deeply about religious faith and a Herzog, or prince, who is interested in society, duty, and power. But he is most of all a man who has accepted the identity that lies within this division. (*Inspired* 165)

It is worth wondering though, whether the tension and eventually the polyphony is between Moses as emblematic of the Law and Herzog as emblematic of the heart.

In one of his final letters, Herzog writes: “*I want to send you, and others, the most loving wish I have in my heart. This is the only way I have to reach out—out where it is incomprehensible. I can only pray toward it. So . . . Peace!*” (*Herzog* 326). Tony Tanner, perhaps accordingly, considers Herzog’s quest as a journey from disorder to order. He remarks that “the book moves from a corrosive restlessness to a point of temporary rest [...] the internal labour finally gives way to a glimpse of peace” (*Prisoner* 88). Sarah Cohen interprets the silence as suggesting the acceptance of “his limited condition” (175). She remarks that at the end “we find him in his Eden communing only with God and nature. His privacy as yet uninvaded and his newfound tranquillity as yet undisturbed, he awaits the arrival of another human being” (Cohen 175). Daniel Fuchs argues that “*Herzog* moves from an attitude of severe judgment, even revenge, to a tolerance, an acceptance based on the integration of cultural and personal attitudes” (“*Herzog*” 125), from “what starts out as a novel of revenge [...] becomes more and more a novel of redemption” (“*Herzog*” 130).

Herzog advances from the figures of mad, sick, irresponsible, and victimized personality into a more balanced individual who is in charge of and responsible for his inner as well as social self. He does this by purging himself of the feelings of hatred for himself and for others and invites love and understanding instead. He ceases to be a Reality Instructor by valuing the quotidian, approving that: “the strength of a man’s virtue or spiritual capacity [is] measured by his ordinary life” (*Herzog* 106). However, he chooses to end in silence possibly because he ironically sees himself turning into one of

the reality instructors he condemns by the very act of lecturing them in writing: “A *very special sort of lunatic expects to inculcate his principles*. Sandor Himmelstein, Valentine Gersbach, Madeline P. Herzog, Moses himself. *Reality Instructors*” (Herzog 125). As indicated by Ellen Pifer:

Herzog ultimately breaks the mental chain that binds him. After sifting thorough moulds of verbal persiflage, his mind comes to rest not in conclusions but in silence—a suspension of those critical operations that have tended to drawn out his “primordial” self. (112)

In this sense, his silence is suggestive of his freedom from his own inner authoritative voice.

However, silence, as Foucault explains, no matter whether it is practised as an imposed action or as a deliberate one, does not necessarily finalize anything about the individual:

Silence itself – the things one declines to say, or is forbidden to name, the discretion that is required between different speakers – is less the absolute limit of discourse, the other side from which it is separated by a strict boundary, than an element that functions alongside the things said, with them and in relation to them within overall strategies. There is no binary opposition to be made between what one says and what one does not say; we must try to determine the different ways of not saying such things, how those who can and those who cannot speak of them are distributed, which type of discourse is authorized, or which form of discretion is required in either case. There is not

one but many silences, and they are an integral part of the strategies that underlie and permeate discourses. (*History I* 27)

Herzog's silence is therefore a polyphonic silence. It marks a stage of confession in which free articulation is confined. His largely self-imposed state of silence is double-voiced in that it contains Herzog's consciousness that he still values articulation, and that he respects the value-judgment of others who might still believe that his writing is an abnormal way of communication and therefore a sign of madness. It also echoes Bellow's understanding of polyphonic truth: "[T]here were two varieties of truth, one symbolized by the Tree of Knowledge, the other by the Tree of Life, one the truth of striving and the other the truth of receptivity. Knowledge divorced from life equals sickness" (*Heartbreak* 57). Therefore, Herzog's silence shows his state of receptivity after such a long period of striving.

This chapter shows that the polyphonic mode of confession between the narrative voice and the voice of Herzog is a narrative technique employed in order to connect public and private realities of Herzog. The source of this confessional style lies in the imaginary and magical modes of reciprocal conversations between the paired characters in Bellow's earlier novels. *Herzog* stands as a turning point in Bellow's oeuvre, for one reason: that its interactive confessional style anticipates a more realistic version of the mutual confession in Bellow's future novels, *Humboldt's Gift* and *Ravelstein*. Secondly, *Herzog* contains some of the submissive features of Bellow's earlier novels while prefiguring the dominant subversive aspects of the later ones. After *Herzog*, Bellow continues to have an intellectual as the protagonist; yet there is a further change in technique. The transgressive aspect of this polyphonic style is further increased and the

distance between the confessor and the confessant is increasingly so diminished and at times reversed that these novels transform the very genre of confession into a more subversive form.

From *Herzog* to *Humboldt's Gift* there is a noticeable change in the orientation of discourse from self-conscious to other-conscious confession. Unlike *Herzog*, the confessant who is authoring himself and making confessions through writing, in *Humboldt's Gift* and *Ravelstein* the confessor is unconventionally the one who speaks for the other person, technically because the confessant is dead. This change in the orientation of confession from self-centred to self-and-other conscious discourse is the major narrative technique that leads to the creation of a more realistic version of confession in Bellow's later novels. The physical absence of the confessant in these novels does not diminish the reciprocal communication into a one-sided monologue. Instead, the artistic design in these novels give voice to character-confessors through techniques such as posthumous apology in *Humboldt's Gift* and participative biographical writing in *Ravelstein*. However, the employment of confessional techniques such as long meditation, mourning, and remembrance in both novels articulates the confessant's version of reality. The interactive confessional dialogue in these novels is initiated and maintained by both parties so that the confessor becomes the confessant. As a result, power positions are flexibly and reversibly exercised by both speakers and listeners.

Jeremy Tambling explains the precondition for the emergence of reciprocal confession. Referring to the definition provided by the O.E.D. for 'confessor,' Tambling states:

an actor acts, a receptor receives, but a confessor does not confess, but *hears* confession: is on the side of power and has appropriated a position and the right to use language which the confessant must accept. Nonetheless, some two-way flow of power seems possible. (68)

Such possibility is realized in Bellow's novels in the two major forms of polyphony: carnivalesque and aesthetic. *Herzog's* polyphonic narrative discourse brings together two otherwise monologic types of reality: the desired truth of Herzog's letters and the authorized truth of his culture. The connection between these two types of realities is more intensified in *Humboldt's Gift* wherein Bellow transposes the carnival quality of communication from the narrative domain into more realistic social interactions whereby the novel's confessional quality becomes more polyphonic. Whereas *Humboldt's Gift* presents the carnivalesque version of polyphony in its social, philosophical as well as artistic context, *Ravelstein* contextualizes such mutual and responsive confessional interactions within the artistic construction of biographical writing and political arguments. In the next chapter, I will analyse the carnivalesque confessional structure in *Humboldt's Gift*, arguing that art can provide the appropriate context for the creation of a dialogue between truth's deep and surface structures, that is, between personal and social realities.

Chapter 5

Acts of Carnavalesque Confession in *Humboldt's Gift*

5.1. Introduction: Border, Transgression, and Confession

The underlying theme in *Humboldt's Gift* is the problem of Humboldt's plagiarized identity. Humboldt accused his friend Charlie of having stolen certain features of his personality, incorporated them into his play, and made a fortune out of it. The eccentric, monologic Humboldt thus tragically deprives himself of Charlie's friendship and cannot forgive him throughout his life. The question that needs to be addressed here is whether Bellow advocates liminal and polyphonic identities in this novel and whether or not he allows his protagonist to transgress the borderlines that separate individuals' boundaries and create more permeable personalities. As this reading suggests, the novel's answer to this question is positive. Bellow criticizes not only Humboldt's monophonic truth and personality but also Charlie's extremely isolated, intellectual life. The novel's movement therefore shows a progression from monophonic towards polyphonic truth, a movement which is realized when both Humboldt and Charlie learn to break certain conventional boundaries, get involved with their society, and exchange their personal, desired truth with their culture's authorized reality by making carnivalesque confessions.

Distinguished from monologic confession which acclaims only the authorized truth, carnivalesque confession is a desired mode of truth telling in which the speaker steps over a boundary and breaks an established norm without feeling regretful or guilty. The presentation of transgressive subject matter, as we have seen in the journal writings of Joseph in *Dangling Man* and in the letters of Herzog, is a reactionary mode of communication with authorial figures and a personal technique to give voice to the unheard. Therefore, the end result of transgressive confession is the management of authorial figures. In *Humboldt's Gift*, Bellow employs transgressive techniques in order to connect public and private realities. He presents transgression not only in the content of the hero's personal confessions but also in the public space, as well as in the confessional design of the novel: in the philosophical version of transgressive communication in the Charlie-Humboldt friendship, in the social transgression and carnivalesque in the Charlie-Cantabile adventurous and subversive interactions, and in the theatrical and artistic mode of transgression in the Charlie-Renata episode in Spain. In this way, Bellow brings the private world of his protagonist into public display and into direct interaction with philosophical, social, and artistic spheres. As a consequence of bringing the private reality of the hero into public space, it seems that Charlie needs to have a "sideward glance" towards his implied public audience and is, therefore, comparable to the spontaneous Herzog, although Charlie is more cautious about the form and the content of what he articulates. For instance, compared to Herzog, who, in his personal letters, contemptuously and rather impulsively claims that "opposition is true friendship" (*Herzog* 125), Charlie Citrine in *Humboldt's Gift* seems to be more careful

about generalizing the statement, when explaining: "I may avoid opposition, but I know when it's true friendship" (*Humboldt* 63).

In order to account for the public and private presentation of transgressive confession in *Humboldt's Gift*, this chapter initially combines the social and cultural theory of transgression introduced by Michel Foucault with the literary theory of carnival proposed by Bakhtin. The concept of the border is central to both transgression and carnival, and Bellow's novel shows that border can have both confining and constructive values. The novel depicts Charlie Citrine and Von Humboldt Flesher, two contemporary American artists, in their external and internal conflicts with each other, their society, and other people in the novel. They communicate with each other and speak their truth only when they cross certain social, cultural, and philosophical borderlines in their discursive and performative confessional acts. As the novel shows, the troubles of Humboldt and Charlie are rooted not only in money matters in most cases created by the capitalist culture, but also in their own weaknesses. In their attempts to survive social distractions, Charlie and Humboldt concentrate on their friendship and art, and in doing so, the powerful truth of their soul, love, and art reaches out and transcends not only the confinements of society but also the limits of time, place, and death. Their meditative and discursive practices are subversive gestures in that they render normative binary oppositions such as high/low, imaginary/mechanical, emotive/intellectual, and open/covert interactions as mutually inclusive, illuminating, and resourceful.

In its presentation of transgressive truth, the novel challenges the authority of capitalist standards and questions the lack of communication between art and social culture. As Ben Siegel convincingly argues, Bellow is obviously dissatisfied with

America's "deflation of humanistic standards and values and its disdain for the creative artist, especially the writer."⁹² Nevertheless, Siegel suggests the artist for Bellow is also at fault for

if serious poets and fiction writers are viewed by many of their countrymen as mere entertainers and buffoons, they cannot blame solely the corporate or business—or, as he still puts it on occasion, the Philistines-mentality. Much of the problem, as he made clear in *Humboldt's Gift*, derives from the posturing and ambition of the poets and writers themselves. (*Satisfied* 203)

Bellow's novel suggests that reciprocal communication between art and society can construct a more comprehensive reality. The ambitions of the artists in Bellow's novel are functionally comparable to social and cultural limitations in that they both limit, and at the same time orient, the inventiveness of the artists. Therefore, borders and transgressions are essential elements in the constitution of social as well as artistic values.

Traditionally, it is likely that the social administration of rules and regulations will be resisted, attenuated, and even overturned by their artistic counterparts and vice versa. However, Bellow's novels show that border and transgression are mutually illuminative. As Foucault constructively argues:

the limit and transgression depend on each other for whatever density of being they possess: a limit could not exist if it were absolutely uncrossable and, reciprocally, transgression would be pointless if it merely crossed a limit composed of illusions and shadows. (*Transgression* 34)

⁹² Ben Siegel. "Still not Satisfied: Saul Bellow on Art and Artists in America." *Saul Bellow and the Struggle at the Center*. Ed. Eugene Hollahan (New York: AMS Press, 1996) 203. Hereafter cited internally as *Satisfied*.

Here, Foucault argues that we need appropriate proportions of border and freedom so that borders are translated as crossable whenever it is necessary for artistic creations. He suggest that concepts such as border, transgression, and creativity are interconnected and that their integration contributes to the emergence of liberty and freedom both in art and social life.

The interdependence of border and transgression is clearly illustrated in *Humboldt's Gift*. The novel shows that artists require borders in order to be creative. For Charlie, the playwright, in order to write his play *Von Trenck* he has to deal with Humboldt's distractions. Instead of supporting Charlie's first successful play, Humboldt creates financial problems and public scandals for him. He accuses Charlie of having stolen Kathleen, his money, and his personality. Conversely, in order to understand and redeem Humboldt, five years after his death, Charlie has to deal with Cantabile's intrusions and power games. Charlie has to cross the limits of rank, academic position, and wealth, in order to see the reality of Humboldt's life at the time of his *Von Trenck* scandal, Princeton fall, and his death. Therefore, Charlie is engaged with the rules of Cantabile's game: downtown degradations, media-related humiliations, public apology, and, perhaps more significantly, helping his PhD wife. Likewise, for Humboldt, the poet, in order to compose the posthumous movie script, it is necessary to live with his near-death poverty, the insult of American materialistic culture, and particularly, the negligence of his best friend, Charlie. Therefore, border and transgression relate to each other not so much as opposites but as two categories that help form "a spiral which no simple infraction can exhaust. Perhaps it is like a flash of lightning in the night which, from the beginning of time, gives a dense and black intensity to the night it denies, which lights up the night

from the inside, from top to bottom” (*Transgression* 35). As M. Keith Booker explains, “the boundlessness of the infinity highlights the artificiality of the various systems of boundaries that society constructs,” (104) and thus indicates the possibility of moving them. The flexible movements of social borders are possible through the discourse of confession. Foucault outlines the orientations of border, transgression, and truth:

Toward what is transgression unleashed in its movement of pure violence, if not that which imprisons it, toward the limit and those elements it contains? What bears the burnt of its aggression and to what void does it owe the unrestrained fullness of its being, if not that which it crosses in its violent act and which, as its destiny, it crosses out in the line it effaces? (*Transgression* 34-35)

Transgressive confession is therefore an act of violating social constraints and is directed towards regulative and administrative authorities.

As in transgression, concepts such as official borders, unofficial liberation, and transgressions are essential in the conception of carnivalesque and literary confession. Bakhtin explains that the source of carnival is to be found in a “syncretic pageantry of a ritualistic sort” (*Plot* 122). In his treatise *Rabelais and His world*, contrasting the official and social feasts of the Middle Ages with earlier popular feasts, Bakhtin explains that

unlike the earlier and purer feast, the official feast asserted all that was stable, unchanging, perennial: the existing hierarchy, the existing religious, political, and moral values, norms, and prohibitions. It was the triumph of the truth already established, the predominant truth that was put forward as eternal and indisputable. This is why the tone of the official feast was monolithically

serious and why the element of laughter was alien to it. The true nature of human festivity was betrayed and distorted. But this true festive character was indestructible; it had to be tolerated and even legalized outside the official sphere and had to be turned over to the popular sphere of the marketplace.

(Rabelais 9)

In contrast to the official, serious, cultural truth, the truth of carnival is familiar, seriocomic, and desirable. Contrasting the unofficial feast of carnival with the official ritual, Bakhtin argues that

as opposed to the official feast, one might say that carnival celebrated temporary liberation from the prevailing truth and from the established order; it marked the suspension of all hierarchical rank, privileges, norms, and prohibitions. Carnival was the true feast of time, the feast of becoming, change, and renewal. *(Rabelais 10)*

Apart from its informality and humorous nature, the intriguing quality of carnival reality lies in its liberating value. The most significant feature of carnival is that

the laws, prohibitions, and restrictions that determine the structure and order of ordinary, that is noncarnival, life are suspended during carnival: what is suspended first of all is hierarchical structure and all forms of terror, reverence, piety, and etiquette, connected with it—that is everything resulting from socio-historical inequality or any other form of inequality among people (including age). *(Plot 122-123)*

It is this temporary suspension of arbitrary normalcy that makes carnival confession more enjoyable. In *Mr. Sammler's Planet* Bellow, more directly than anywhere else in his

novels, makes such ideal, carnivalistic assertions: "He wanted, with God, to be free from the bandage of the ordinary and the finite. A soul released from the Nature, from impressions, and from everyday life. For this to happen, God himself must be waiting, surely" (117). Justifying transgression from rules, Sammler reasons: "Declare for normalcy, and you will be stormed by aberrancies. All postures are mocked by their opposites" (118). This social aspect of carnival is particularly illustrated in the Charlie-Cantabile relationship in Bellow's novel. In their numerous adventures, Cantabile fearlessly treats Charlie as equal, regardless of his superior academic, social, and economic class and speaks the truth to him.

Carnival truth is polyphonic, for it acknowledges both one-sided reality as well as its opposite. Carnival removes the conventional boundaries, bringing together "the sacred with the profane, the lofty with the low, the great with the insignificant, the wise with the stupid" (*Plot* 123). As such, it creates a free space for "the outspoken carnivalistic word" (*Plot* 123). "The primary carnivalistic act," as Bakhtin explains, "is the mock crowning and subsequent decrowning of the carnival king" (*Plot* 124). This reversal of subject positions is comparable to the ways Cantabile forces Charlie to humiliate himself downtown and apologize to him in public.

In both its social and literary context, carnival shows "life turned inside out," "the reverse side of the world" (*Plot* 122). As such, carnival exists on the threshold between life and art (*Rabelais* 7). We find in carnival

a characteristic logic, the peculiar logic of the 'inside out' (à l'envre), of the 'turnabout,' of a continual shifting from top to bottom, from front to rear, of numerous parodies and travesties, humiliations, profanations, comic

crownings, and uncrownings. A second life, a second world of folk culture is thus constructed; it is to a certain extent a parody of the extracarnival life, a 'world inside out'. (*Rabelais* 11)

Such carnivalistic features indicate that "the behavior, gesture, and discourse of a person are freed from the authority of all hierarchical positions (social, estate, rank, age, property)" (*Plot* 123). Evidently, from the point of view of noncarnival life, the truth of carnival appears to be eccentric. Eccentricity is an important carnival category that permits "the latent sides of human nature to reveal and express themselves" (*Plot* 123). The connection between social and literary carnival and its connection to the discourse of confession lies in its special approach towards crossing a line, liberation, and creativity. The truth produced in carnival circumstances is the creative and liberal truth and offers new approaches towards human life.

Humboldt's Gift illustrates exchanges of carnival and non-carnival points of view, revealing eccentric confessional moments that have social, artistic, and philosophical significance for this study. Whereas the social significance of carnival truth is presented in the adventurous Charlie-Cantabile interactions and numerous role plays in the city centre, the artistic presentation of carnival scenes and subversive reality is presented in Charlie's half-real, half-theatrical performance in Spain. The pension scene in Madrid provides a seriocomic, artistic, and carnivalistic view on Charlie's tragic situation. It creates comedy out of tragedy, laughter out of mourning. In this carnival scene, Charlie acts out what he desires had happened. He begins by making up a story in Madrid about his wallet having been stolen on a bus and settles in the pension La Roca. In ways comparable to carnival masking, Charlie disguises his clothes by dressing as a mourner

and his identity as a widower and a father. Inventing a tragic story of leukaemia for Renata followed by her dreadful death, Charlie explains: "I went out and bought myself mourner's handkerchiefs and some very fine black silk neckties and a little black suit for Rogelio" (425). Charlie's fake costume and shift in personality calls to mind that accessory to carnival ritual is the seriocomic tradition of disguise: "carnivalistic shifts of clothing and of positions and destinies in life" (*Plot* 125), which create "*new modes of interrelationship between individuals*": a world which is half-real, half play-acted (*Plot* 123). In acting out the details of Renata's mourning, (*Humboldt* 425) Charlie creates a new relationship with Renata, Roger, Humboldt, and himself. He relates to Renata as her unfortunate widower and to Roger as a caring father. The experience of seeing life from a carnival standpoint functions like a Foucauldian "technology of the self" for Charlie. In taking care of Roger, for instance, Charlie learns to understand how another person might feel and what they might desire. Subsequently, Charlie becomes able to understand the feelings of Renata and Humboldt. His show of mourning is seriocomic in that it is half true: "the boy *was* in a sense an orphan, and I was without exaggeration bereaved" (425). Also, his performance is comic because Renata is still alive and is honeymooning in Sicily. To Charlie, it is deeply tragic because she has left him for an undertaker. The ambivalent nature of Charlie's creative act of mourning Renata calls to mind Bakhtin's description of seriocomic nature of the social carnival images:

all the images of carnival are dualistic; they unite within themselves both poles of change and crisis: birth and death (the image of pregnant death), blessing and curse (benedictory carnival curses which call simultaneously for

death and rebirth), praise and abuse, youth and old age, top and bottom, face and backside, stupidity and wisdom (*Plot* 126).

The Madrid scene combines the images of death and rebirth in that it is the turning point in Charlie's life. He terminates his relationship with Renata and learns to consider other people with a more caring attitude. Bakhtin states that "everything has its parody, that is, its laughing aspect, for everything is reborn and renewed through death" (*Plot* 127). In addition, carnival combines images of death and renewal, "all-annihilation and all-renewal time" (*Plot* 124).

Such dualistic images in the novel culminate in the novel's final carnival scene wherein the images of Humboldt's burial are combined with the rejuvenating and promising sight of the spring flower. The philosophical essence of carnivalesque confession is skilfully depicted in this concluding scene in which advanced technology is employed in order to recover and exhume Humboldt's body to where it originally belongs. As Humboldt's body approaches its destination, Charlie undergoes a profound philosophical and emotional experience, one which he acknowledges as the end of all loopholes:

The coffins went down and then the yellow machine moved forward and the little crane, making a throaty whir, picked up a concrete slab and laid it atop the concrete case. So the coffin was enclosed and the soil did not come directly upon it. But then, how did one get out? One didn't, didn't, didn't! You stayed, you stayed! (487).

As Humboldt's body is transferred from one place to another, Chick moves between dual thresholds of security and insecurity, confinement and freedom. Chick's statement is a

philosophical confession of uncertainty and ambivalence in connection with the death experience in that his outward expression of safety is combined with his profound fear of entrapment. The scene has a dialogic reference to the episode about Harry, the magician who “defied all forms of confinement including the grave” (*Humboldt* 435). I will further examine this scene later in this chapter when I introduce threshold confession as a means to cross the boundaries of death. Here, however, the contrast intensifies the tragic nature of Humboldt’s entrapment in the reality of death with no real loophole to turn to for escape. It also suggests the figurative loophole of art by which Humboldt liberates himself from Charlie’s possible, one-sided evaluations. The concluding exhumation scene is immediately contrasted with a liberating and the promising sight of the spring flower which inserts hope into Charlie’s life and eases the climatic tension.

Carnival, Bakhtin explains, is “people’s second life, organized on the basis of laughter. It is a festive life” (*Rabelais* 8). Carnival also illustrates the deeply ambivalent nature of ritualistic laughter, “directed toward something higher: the sun (the highest god), other gods, the highest earthly authority were put to shame and ridiculed to force them to *renew themselves*. All forms of ritual laughter were linked with death and rebirth” (*Plot* 126-127). Accordingly, carnivalesque laughter “is directed towards something higher—towards a shift of authorities and truths, a shift of world orders” (*Plot* 127). Parody and ambivalence are therefore integral to carnival. In *Humboldt’s Gift* as in *Herzog*, laughter is directed towards the head-culture (*Humboldt* 31), in other words, Humboldt discounts the fact that “the only art the intellectuals can be interested in is an art which celebrates the primacy of idea. Artists must interest intellectuals, this new class. This is why the state of culture and the history of culture becomes the subject matter of

art" (*Humboldt* 32). For the intellectuals "the whole purpose of art is to suggest and inspire ideas and discourse" (*Humboldt* 32). In other words, the intellectual's business is "to reduce masterpieces to discourse" (*Humboldt* 32).

However, in *Humboldt's Gift* laughter is directed towards the artists as well. The novel shows, for instance, that Humboldt's failure is partly due to his own misconceptions, false judgments, and prejudices. The novel's mode of parodistic and carnival laughter is, therefore, targeting American artists and politicians alike; and, in doing so, Bellow's novel is giving voice to the unspeakable. The carnivalesque articulation of the truth is presented in the novel through Charlie's parodistic and temporary comprehension of reality and Humboldt's tragic fall into poverty, isolation, and madness. Charlie's adventure trip to downtown is comparable to Herzog's reference to Heidegger's "the fall into quotidian" (*Herzog* 49, 106). However, it is, in a sense, by going through the same experience as Humboldt that Charlie can understand and forgive himself and Humboldt. Carnival features are presented in Charlie's literary language.

Carnavalesque is the presentation of carnival values in the language of literature. ⁹³Carnival "is amenable to a certain transposition into a language of artistic images that has something in common with its concretely sensuous nature; that is, it can be transposed into the language of literature" (*Plot* 122). As Bakhtin argues, "a new type of communication always creates new forms of speech or a new meaning given to the old forms" (*Rabelais* 16). The new type of "carnival familiarity" was therefore "reflected in a series of speech patterns" (*Rabelais* 16). These patterns are: "abusive language, insulting

⁹³ For the discussion on carnival and language see Julia Kristeva, "The Ruin of a Poetics" *Russian Formalism: Twentieth Century Studies*. Ed. Stephan Bann and John E. Bowlt (Edinburgh: Scottish and Academic Press, 1973); and also Julia Kristeva, *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to literature and Art* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1980).

words or expressions, some of them quite lengthy and complex” (*Rabelais* 16). However, “these abuses are ambivalent: while humiliating and mortifying, they at the same time revived and renewed. It was precisely this ambivalent abuse which determined the genre of speech in carnival intercourse” (*Rabelais* 16). Abusive language signifies deviation and transgression from normative discourse. In Bellow’s novel, this mode of abusive truth telling is presented in the language of Cantabile when he speaks the truth to Charlie in a rather insulting and degrading way, disregarding his higher social and academic rank. Cantabile’s discounting of borderline characterises his liberal and transgressive speech.

As in transgressive and carnival performances, the conception of border is integral to the comprehension of the discourse of confession in general, and transgressive confession in particular. In conventional accounts, confession is the acknowledgement of an act of transgressing a limit, the feeling of guilt, remorse, and repentance. Conversely, in transgressive, subversive, and carnivalesque modes of confession, there is little likelihood for the pronouncement of penitence mode as such. Remorselessness is the predominant attitude in various styles of transgressive confession presented in *Humboldt’s Gift*, that is, in threshold, parrhesiac, and carnivalesque confession.

In “Characteristics of Genre and Plot Composition in Dostoevsky’s Works,” Bakhtin introduces the concept of threshold confession. In the trial in Plato’s *Apology* and in Socratic dialogue, Bakhtin identifies “the summing-up and confession of a man standing *on the threshold*”.⁹⁴ Bakhtin explains that “in both of these situations there is a tendency to create the *extraordinary* situation, one which would cleans the word of all of life’s automatism and object-ness, which would force a person to reveal the deepest

⁹⁴ Mikhail Bakhtin. “Characteristics of Genre and Plot Composition in Dostoevsky’s Works.” *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics*. (1929). ed and trans. Caryl Emerson. Intro. Wayne, C. Booth (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984) 111. Hereafter cited internally as *Plot*.

layers of his personality and thought” (*Plot* 111). Extraordinary situations which provoke a profound word, create “dialogues on threshold” which, as Bakhtin states, “became very widespread in Hellenistic and Roman literature, and ultimately, in the literature of the Renaissance and Reformation” (*Plot* 111). Bakhtin also identifies threshold dialogues in the threshold of the underworld, the nether world, and in the “dialogues of the dead” (*Plot* 116). He relates threshold confession and dialogue to the appearance of carnival in literature (*Plot* 122-132). Charlie’s final expressions about Humboldt’s burial, his statement about entrapment and security is comparable to a philosophical dialogue on threshold in the Bakhtinian sense which advocates the open truth as the end result of transgressive confession.

The artistic mode of threshold confession, however, is illustrated in the manuscript that Humboldt left for Charlie as his legacy—a literary form of threshold confession that connects life with death. It is, in fact, through making threshold confessions that Humboldt and Charlie, the novel’s two creative forces, can overcome various and numerous restraints of rationalistic head-culture, including materialism, politics, court of law, police, technology, and media, and can eventually reunite and communicate, even after Humboldt’s death. As Pifer argues, the dominant theme of the novel is “the power of love to survive the grave” (133). Humboldt and Charlie can invigorate their friendship because they can openly speak their truth. The open truth of the protagonist seems to be communicated in the novel in a different mode of transgressive confession: parrhesiac confession.

Parrhesia is another mode of transgressive confession, presented in the discourse of Humboldt and Charlie in their fearless criticism of materialist culture. Renata’s

illuminating letter to Charlie and Cantabile's conversation with Charlie downtown are parrhesiac in that they openly and directly inform Charlie of his weaknesses. Cantabile and Renata are parrhesiastes because they speak the truth to him when no one else has either the courage or the motivation to do so. Later in this chapter, I provide examples of Renata's parrhesiac confessions.

Apart from the threshold mode of transgressive confession that integrates the living with the dead, transgressive confession is presented in the novel at the social level between Cantabile and Charlie. Within this intersubjective space, transgressive acts of truth-telling take the form of carnival when, in his revenge plot, Cantabile takes Charlie to places where, divesting him of all his social and academic ranks, Cantabile, rather unintentionally, reveals to Charlie the reality of materialistic values and the depth of corruption in various social institutions. The carnivalesque confessions in the Charlie-Cantabile relationship help Charlie make internal confessions, deploring the limitations of American materialism and proclaiming the neglected condition of contemporary American artists. Charlie sublimates his contemplations in order to understand the tragic situation of Humboldt, when he was under arrest in a strait jacket at the police station, living in extreme poverty near his death, and misunderstood by his close friends.

In Bellow's novel, forms of transgressive confession function according to the triangular interactions between power, knowledge, and wealth. In the Humboldt-Charlie relationship, Humboldt's confession of faith endows him with a new position of power and earns Charlie a valuable legacy. On the other hand, the information Cantabile derives from Charlie about his collaboration with Humboldt in making a film script helps him identify a plagiarized version of their movie, an identification that earns them a large sum

of money. The novel also shows that social institutions such as courts, the police, and the media have become more and more powerful and prosperous by having increasing access to valuable sources of intelligence.

In addition, the novel ambivalently indicates a connection between art and affluence, on the one hand, and politics and entertainment, on the other, expressing a larger truth in this confessional exploration. Inherently, art has entertainment value and is thus capable of producing wealth; therefore, it can govern the public's attention. Charlie declares: "Maybe America didn't need art and inner miracles. It had so many outer ones. The USA was a big operation, very big. The more *it*, the less *we*" (*Humboldt* 6). The thematic connection to *Herzog* is further illuminating: "public life drives out private life. The more political our society becomes [...] the more individuality seems lost" (*Herzog* 162). In particular, Humboldt shows that America exploits its artists. In response to a student, asking Charlie about Humboldt, Charlie says: "young people, what do you aim to do with the facts about Humboldt, publish articles and further your career? This is pure capitalism" (*Humboldt* 9). Charlie is dissatisfied with the fact that "the country is proud of its dead poets. It takes terrific satisfaction in the poets' testimony that the USA is too tough, too big, too much, too rugged, that American reality is overwhelming" (*Humboldt* 118).

The novel criticises the manipulation of the artist by politics and differentiates political art from genuine art that expresses the artist's authentic values. In this sense, the novel contrasts political and artistic truth: Political truth is mandatory and veiled, whereas the innermost truth of the artist is creative. Discussing the possible link between the "painted veils," on the one hand, and the evident boredom in capitalist America, Charlie

indicates that affluence is the root of the contemporary melancholy (*Humboldt* 3). He is gravely preoccupied with the unspeakable question of boredom:

even with the astrophysicists, with professors of economics or palaeontology, it was impossible to discuss such things. There were beautiful and moving things in Chicago, but culture was not one of them. What we had was a cultureless city pervaded nevertheless by Mind. Mind without culture was the name of the game, wasn't it? (*Humboldt* 69)

Charlie criticises the absence of communication between art and culture, on the one hand, and politics, on the other. More specifically, the novel presents a contrast between the artist's inner and outer world. As Glenday argues, *Humboldt's Gift* demonstrates "inner life against outer, the here as against there, the world of flesh against that of spirit, public life swallowing private life" (128). Even if Charlie and Humboldt could eventually communicate and confess their truth through stepping over various limitations, it is evident that transgressive confession fails to bridge the communication gap at social levels between the artist and politics for instance.

The discrepancy between internal and external truth gives way to the presentation of various modes of public and private confessions in the novel. The novel's confessional discourse starts with Charlie mourning Humboldt and debunking American society for having abandoned its artist. At this stage, Charlie's confessions take the form of transgression and parrhesia, for they are directed towards and challenge social and cultural authorities. Charlie then genuinely and privately admits that he deliberately abandoned Humboldt when Humboldt was broke, ill, and on the verge of death. He feels deeply concerned, remorseful, and ashamed. He suffers as he tries to explain and justify

his own actions. In order to justify himself further, Charlie refers to Humboldt's betrayal with regard to their blood-brother pact.⁹⁵ He exposes Humboldt's gross actions: his eccentricities, his dangerous driving, inhumane bullying, false allegations, suspicions, wrong and hasty accusations, violence, madness, anger, troublesome sleeplessness, grotesque face, and misbehaviour. In so doing, Charlie makes both grotesque and parrhesiac confessions against Humboldt.

Charlie's one-sided and eccentric commentary on Humboldt is counterbalanced by a parallel and parodistic plot sequence in the novel. Charlie is distracted from his daily preoccupations by Cantabile who, as Pifer aptly argues, "serves as a catalyst for certain fundamental revelations on Citrine's part" (132). Cantabile has a double function in the plot: the director and distracter (Pifer 132), or, as in Bakhtinian terminology, he is at once the centripetal and the centrifugal force in the novel. Cantabile, perhaps unintentionally, directs Charlie's attention away from his immediate problems and reorients him towards more fundamental issues in his life. Advised by his friend George, Charlie had refused to pay Cantabile the money he lost him in the poker game. Charlie now admits that he had submitted to George, because he "couldn't challenge George's judgment" (*Humboldt* 40). Games, as Bakhtin explains, function like carnival free spaces wherein people from different social ranks are treated equally. In revenge for having stopped his check, Cantabile clubs Charlie's Mercedes-Benz into a wreck and forces him to perform a whole day of atonement. The relationship between Charlie and Cantabile, at this stage, involves performative as well as discursive modes of carnivalesque confession. In addition, Cantabile exposes Charlie's flaws and speaks the truth to him in numerous acts of

⁹⁵ Humboldt's transgression from their rule of friendship is comparable to Uncle Benn's breaking the law of total honesty with his niece Kenneth in *More Die of Heartbreak* (*Heartbreak* 116).

parrhesiac confession. As a result, Charlie ironically feels a kind of intimacy with Cantabile, who compellingly provokes him into seeing a different side of the truth. In yet another reversal of fortune plotted by Renata, Charlie undergoes Humboldt's experience in Spain: imprisonment, bankruptcy, divorce, and loneliness. Once more, it is Cantabile who helps Charlie get out of this situation, giving him the information about the plagiarized movie script. Charlie transforms in outlook as Cantabile, Renata, and Humboldt intrude and diversify his monotonous life. If Cantabile gives him insights about the nature of American culture by bringing him from high to low culture, Humboldt introduces Charlie to the new powers of human soul, love, and art; and Renata helps him move away from his self-centred position so that he can experience and understand the desires of another human being. Cantabile, Humboldt, and Renata, all help Charlie make transgressive confession at social, philosophical, and artistic-theatrical levels, respectively. These three modes of transgressive confession are employed in the novel in order to connect Charlie's public and private realities. However, whereas the connection is successfully made at interpersonal level between Charlie and Humboldt, and to some extent between Charlie and Renata, it fails to integrate Charlie with his society. The failure partly suggests the American society's resistance to communication with intellectuals and artists and partly indicates Charlie's initial unwillingness to communicate socially with subculture.

In what follows, I will discuss the place of dialogic relationships in the transgressive confessional discourse of the novel; the values of power-knowledge relationships within capitalist culture; and the significance of certain boundaries in the development of carnivalesque, parrhesiac, and threshold confessions. I will particularly

examine the significance of boundaries such as death, materialism, and social distraction in the formation of subjectivities in this novel.

5.2. Dialogic Relationships

A major confessional technique in *Humboldt's Gift* is the expression of truth and governance of power through the employment of dialogic interactions. The developing nature of the Charlie-Humboldt relationship is reflected in dialogic interactions among certain scenes, words, and expressions. In his constructive attempt to forgive himself and Humboldt, Charlie makes numerous dialogic references to two corresponding key scenes: one scene depicts Charlie's sin in abandoning Humboldt, and the other illustrates Humboldt's sin in drawing the blood-brother check—an act that obscured their friendship for long. The former reveals Charlie's extreme suffering due to the intense feeling of guilt, shame, and regret. Charlie explains: "I return again and again to that day because it was so dreadful" (*Humboldt* 112). Having received his legacy, Charlie is now sure that "Humboldt was never more sane and brave than at the end of his life" (*Humboldt* 112). Ironically, Charlie tries to provide explanations and justifications for his action and regain his position of respect and authority in such a grotesque way that he adds humour to his language:

Nevertheless I should have approached and spoken to him. I should have drawn nearer, not taken over behind the parked cars. But how could I? I had had my breakfast in the Edwardian Room of the Plaza, served by rip-off footmen. Then I had flown in a helicopter with Javits and Bobby Kennedy. I was skirring around New York like an ephemeral, my jacket lined with jolly

psychedelic green. I was dressed up like Sugar Ray Robinson. Only I didn't have a fighting spirit, and seeing my old and close friend was a dead man I beat it. (*Humboldt* 53-54)

The extract is an expression of Charlie's profound remorse and feeling of regret for what he has done to himself and to Humboldt by keeping his distance from Humboldt when he was supposed to help his friend. It is also an indirect and rather seriocomic confession of Charlie's, perhaps unconscious, belief in class distinction and also an indication of his extreme weakness in communicating with a supposedly subculture. The humorous intonation in this explanatory confession is in sharp contrast with the serious and angry intonation in Charlie's account of Humboldt's guilt:

He [Humboldt] invented a lover for Kathleen and then he tried to kill the man. He smashed up the Buick Roadmaster. He accused me [Charlie] of stealing his personality for the character of Von Trenck. He drew a check on my account for six thousand seven hundred and sixty-three dollars and fifty-eight cents and bought an Oldsmobile with it, among other things. (*Humboldt* 53)

It seems that Charlie, especially with his angry intonation, is desperately seeking to weaken Humboldt's status and ask for sympathy from his implied addressee. In order to do so, Charlie tries to remember what exactly Humboldt has done, so that he can undermine or even forget his own sin against his friend. Charlie can calm down only after he receives Humboldt's posthumous letter of explanation and apology for the check.

In addition to these dialogic scenes, there are a number of confession-related, dialogic relationships that exist in the production and reproduction of certain words and expressions that control authority. These dialogic references are either destructive or

constructive of Humboldt and Charlie's friendship. One of these words is "ingénu". The word is initially used by Humboldt in a negatively charged intonation in order to describe Charlie's dark and innocent eyes (*Humboldt* 18). Charlie knows that the word "ingénu" "was one of Humboldt's bad words," (18) for he believed that it is faulty to be too innocent. On another occasion, Humboldt implicitly disapproves of the fact that Charlie "didn't know *Evil*" (14, emphasis mine). Later on, Charlie mockingly reconsiders the good and evil aspect of the word in connection with America conceived as a didactic country where "people always offer their personal experiences as a helpful lesson to the rest, hoping to hearten them and to do them *good*" (65, emphasis mine). In his dialogic thinking, Charlie questions himself: "with everyone sold on the *good* how does all the *evil* get done? When Humboldt called me an *ingenu*, wasn't this what he was getting at?" (65, emphasis mine) Charlie eventually agrees with Humboldt and identifies his own weakness. He confirms: "a man like Cantabile took advantage of my inadequate theory of *evil*" (287, emphasis mine). Perhaps one reason that too much ingenuousness is destructive is that the state of absolute innocence is monophonic. In order for Charlie to become a more polyphonic and truthful individual, he needs to familiarize himself with and perhaps develop some features of the subculture. Charlie is not prepared to accept the reality that is thrust upon him because of Cantabile's intrusions. To apply Derridean terminology, Charlie confronts the reality of low culture as a reality of "visitation" and not "invitation".

Charlie, likewise, destroys monophony in Humboldt's life, exposing Humboldt's monologic eccentricities. He fights Humboldt back, using the same verbal and dialogic technique. In order to explain why Humboldt put through the blood-brother check,

Charlie, in a negatively charged intonation, calls Humboldt *litigious*: “The dough came between us immediately. He put through a check for thousands of dollars. I didn’t contest this. I didn’t want to go to the law. Humboldt would have been fiercely delighted with a trial. He was very *litigious*” (*Humboldt* 51, emphasis mine). Charlie compares his own ex-wife, Denise, with Humboldt, humiliating her as an imaginary Secretary of State to John F. Kennedy:

She’d have made him an excellent Secretary of State, if some way could be found to wake her before 11 a.m. For she’s quite marvellous. And a real beauty. And much more *litigious* than Humboldt Fleisher. He mainly threatened. But from the time of divorce I have been entangled in endless ruinous lawsuits. (*Humboldt* 57, emphasis mine)

In a different scene, where Charlie is reflecting on the obituary of Humboldt in the *Times*, he criticizes Humboldt’s picture for, he believes, it shows Humboldt as the kind of materialist that society would desire its artists to be. In describing Humboldt’s image, Charlie uses the word “litigious,” indicating initially the influence of social powers on Humboldt and then the powers of Humboldt over Charlie:

how successful bitter hard-faced and cannibalistic people exult. Such was the attitude reflected in the picture of Humboldt the *Times* chose to use. It was one of those mad-rotten-majesty pictures—spooky, humourless, glaring furiously with tight lips, mumpish or scrofulous cheeks, a scarred forehead, and a look of enraged, ravaged childishness. This was the Humboldt of conspiracies, putsches, accusations, tantrums, the Bellevue Hospital Humboldt, the Humboldt

of *litigious*. For Humboldt was *litigious*. The word was made for him. He threatened many times to sue me. (*Humboldt* 118, emphasis mine)

Charlie contrasts the real and personal image of Humboldt, the artist, with the image of Humboldt, the politician, in media and in the public. He criticizes the way that the media manipulates the reality of the individuals so that it serves their ends. Charlie's seriocomic and grotesque description of the picture is polyphonic, transgressive, and carnivalesque in that it is open to multiple interpretations, does not conform to any particular norm, and subverts Humboldt's established image as a celebrated artist.

In order to explain more about the features of the grotesque image, I refer to Bakhtin's explanation:

the grotesque image reflects a phenomenon in transformation, an as yet unfinished metamorphosis, of death and birth, growth and becoming. The relation to time is one determining trait of the grotesque image. The other indispensable trait is ambivalence. For in this image we find both poles of transformation, the old and the new one, the dying and the procreating, the beginning and the end of the metamorphosis. (*Rabelais* 24)

Humboldt's picture shows his transition and transformation from a dignified individual into a degraded image; a polyphonic individual with a distinct sense of humour turns into a monophonic, serious, and rigid person. As Mark Goldman explains, "Humboldt is a tragi-comic hero destroyed by America's indifference to its artists and by his own manic dream of success as a literary man turned politician-prompter" (4). Charlie's grotesque account of Humboldt's image is a double criticism: the criticism of Humboldt for allowing society to take advantage of him and also criticism of the materialistic society

for abusing its artist. In this sense, Charlie's description is a mode of confession for the expression of the truth about his friend and the society they inhabit; and it is transgressive, for in expressing this truth and criticism, Charlie is deviating from the norms of his culture, especially from the ways in which America treats its artists and politicians.

In order to justify his own misconduct towards Humboldt, Charlie describes their arguments through dialogic interactions. Charlie's narrative shows the progression of verbal attacks between him and Humboldt: Charlie monologically calls Humboldt a *tyrant* (*Humboldt* 23, emphasis mine). Charlie's accusation is a specific response to the oppressive night when Humboldt with a gang of "pals and rooters" picketed Charlie's success in his play *Von Trenck* at the Belasco Theatre. Charlie remembers that "in streaming characters, mercurochrome on cotton, Humboldt had written: The Author of this Play is a *Traitor*" (*Humboldt* 15, emphasis mine). In fact, Humboldt wanted Charlie to give him the money he had raised for him. However, Charlie is unwilling to release the money because the money was saved for Humboldt's psychiatric treatments, and, more importantly, he did not want Humboldt to suspect that Charlie believes he is insane. The scandal scene happens because a blackmailer has passed the information about the money to Humboldt. Charlie makes negative confessions: "I could grab this blackmailer by throat and strangle him. O, that would be delicious! And who could blame me! A gust of murderous feelings made me look modestly at the ground" (*Humboldt* 156-157). On the other hand, Charlie attacks Humboldt, exposing his worse trait, his bullying. He believes that "Humboldt was especially attached to the World Historical Individual, the interpreter of the Spirit, the mysterious leader who *imposed* on Mankind the task of understanding

him” (*Humboldt* 18, emphasis mine). It is illuminating to consider the dialogic reference here to the way that Herzog argues against reality instructors as “*bullying* all mankind into believing them” (*Herzog* 67, emphasis mine). When Humboldt could not go to sleep and he kept Charlie awake for most of the night in order to amuse himself, Charlie understood that Humboldt “had used the dramatic properties of the night to *bully* and harass people” (38, emphasis mine). In one of their earliest conversations, Charlie feels that “he [Humboldt] wants me to *suit* him perfectly, down to the ground. He’ll *bully* me” (*Humboldt* 14, emphasis mine).

Although dialogic relationships in these examples are mainly used in order to show the destruction of the Charlie-Humboldt friendship, there are instances in which dialogic relationships illustrate their concern for each other and express their confessions of friendship. For example, Humboldt leaves a movie scrip for Charlie as his legacy. The script consists of two parallel and dialogic scenes, one reproducing the other. The first scene involves a husband’s adultery and his adventurous trip to a tourist resort with a girl. On his return, he decides to write a book about his big adventure, but he realizes that he cannot publish it, fearing that his wife would become suspicious of his secret journey and his deception. He is then advised by a friend to repeat the trip with his wife and publish the book, to keep his marriage safe. Ironically, when the book is published, he loses both women. The script’s double-failure plot stands for Humboldt’s almost simultaneous loss of Kathleen and Charlie as a result of his eccentric actions. Therefore, the script can signify Humboldt’s profound regret for his past behaviour, his public confession, and hope for forgiveness. The irony here is that the betrayal script signifies Humboldt’s fidelity. John Clayton explains that the novel’s double plot of Humboldt’s tragedy and the

parodistic script reflects the connection between transcendence and distraction. The relationship between the two plots functions “to pull the lofty hero back to earth, to give weight to the comedy of distraction. The job of transcendent elements is to keep alive the yearning for and possibility of redemption of the suffering, humble fool” (Clayton 34).

However, there are instances of dialogic references that polyphonically create multiple, ambivalent, and liminal effects in the novel. For instance, the reproductions of words such as “sink” and “maya” show Charlie’s concern for as well as his criticism of Humboldt. As opposed to success, “sink” shows Humboldt’s economic and intellectual failure. Showing genuine sympathy for Humboldt, Charlie states, “Humboldt’s success lasted about ten years. In the late Forties he started to *sink*. In the early Fifties I myself became famous” (*Humboldt 2*, emphasis mine). Ambivalently, Charlie then tries to misdirect the reader’s attention from the truth. He makes false confessions, pretending that this reversal of fortune had turned Humboldt against him: “I even made a pile of money. Ah, money, the money! Humboldt held the money against me” (2). And he tries to defend himself, explaining:

and money wasn’t what I had in mind. Oh God, no, what I wanted was to do good. I was dying to do something good. And this feeling for good went back to my early and peculiar sense of existence—*sunk* in the glassy depths of life and groping, thrillingly and desperately, for sense, a person keenly aware of painted veils, of *Maya*. (*Humboldt 3*, emphasis mine)

Here, Charlie links acts of profit making with deception. He notes that Humboldt was aware of the discrepancy between covering up the truth and making a great deal of money (*Humboldt 3*). However, when Charlie is coming closer to the truth about himself,

he sees that “the veil of *Maya* was wearing thin” (202, emphasis mine). The word “*Maya*” makes more sense when considered in its dialogic reference, at an inter-textual level, to *Herzog*. *Herzog* ironically signs an assertive letter to Nietzsche as “under the veil of *Maya*” (*Herzog* 320, emphasis mine). Later on in the novel, *Herzog* acknowledges that he is aware of “the layers upon layers of reality—loathsome, arrogance, deceit, and then—God help us all!—truth, as well” (*Herzog* 109). Therefore, truth seems to be covered and uncovered in the novel depending on what or whose purpose it serves. In what follows, I will illustrate how in a materialistic society the disguise or revelation of truth is controlled by relationships of power on the one hand and by profit-making on the other.

5.3. Power, Knowledge, and Materialistic Impulses

Humboldt's Gift shows that power, knowledge and wealth work closely in Charlie's relationship with Cantabile, Renata, and Humboldt. Charlie puts forward his personal information at the poker game, an act which gives Cantabile the excuse and the authority to pay unexpected visits to Charlie and disturb his peaceful mind. Foucault's argument that knowledge and power are reciprocally integrated explains that the articulation of certain forms of knowledge is responsible for the reversal of power in Charlie and Cantabile's position. Charlie has to obey Cantabile's orders in public. When Cantabile asks Charlie to help his wife with her dissertation on Humboldt, Charlie regrets having mentioned Humboldt's name at the poker game: “I see, I was talking about him [Humboldt] at George's. Someone should have locked me in a closet that night” (*Humboldt* 105). Cantabile keeps coming back into Charlie's life, disturbing his monolithic personal life, rescuing him from alienation, and bringing him from his boring,

marginal state into a more adventurous and liminal social space: “It was Cantabile on the knocker, forcing his way into my sanctuary. I was annoyed with old Ronald Stiles. I paid Stiles to keep intruders and pets away while I was meditating” (168). Cantabile’s knowledge about Charlie’s private life overpowers him and Charlie blames himself for this: “Yes, I must have been eager to talk. I had given Cantabile plenty of information and he had made extensive inquiries besides, obviously intending to develop a relationship with me” (169). Renata likewise exercises her financial power over Charlie. Charlie regretfully admits: “The more fact I put into her, the more I needed her and the more I needed her the more her price increased” (*Humboldt* 356). Like Cantabile, Renata knows how to use personal secrets to trade power.

Humboldt is well-aware of the direct relationship between claims of knowledge, power, and success in gaining an academic position in the university and achieving his popular status as a poet in society. He asks Charlie to go to Ricketts and flatter Humboldt’s intellectual power so that he could make him a Princeton professor. Charlie sadly knows that Humboldt wanted to go “straight to the top” (*Humboldt* 136-137). Therefore, in a symbolic and transgressive move, “unauthorized he [Humboldt] entered Longstaff’s private elevator” (138). The elevator that leads to Humboldt’s academic and financial fall is comparable to the skyscraper that informs Charlie of the reality of high and low social ranks. However, in return for the circulation of false knowledge about him, Humboldt promises to help Charlie out by passing the unverified word around that Charlie’s play is going to be produced soon, so that on Broadway they look on Charlie as a successful playwright (*Humboldt* 126-127). Justifying this trade of knowledge for academic position, Humboldt further insists that success in poetry “depends on the

opinion you hold of yourself. Think well of yourself, and you win. Lose self-esteem, and you're finished. For this reason a persecution complex develops, because people who don't speak well of you are killing you" (*Humboldt* 120). Therefore, Humboldt dislikes his critics, reasoning that they drag you into a power struggle (120). On the other hand, it seems that Charlie imposes his will over Humboldt by producing false knowledge about him and misunderstanding him in private. In one scene Charlie is looking at Humboldt's obituary in the *Times*:

The *Times* was much stirred by Humboldt's death and gave him a double-column spread. The photograph was large. For after all Humboldt did what poets in crass America are supposed to do. He chased ruin and death even harder than he had chased women. He blew his talent and his health and reached home, the grave, in a dusty slide. He plowed himself under. (*Humboldt* 117-118)

Apart from inter-personal relationships, social institutions such as the media and the law courts benefit from the exchange of information. Cantabile informs Charlie that his friend Szathmar sells his confidential information to gossip columnists (*Humboldt* 169). Furthermore, Judge Urbanovich seems to be taking advantage of the information he has informally been given about Charlie's bank statement and "wants to teach Charlie some hard, practical lessons by draining him of money, energy and time"⁹⁶. However, despite the omnipresence of various public horizons, the novel asserts the possibilities of escaping, surviving, and even defeating the public restrictions imposed on an individual's discursive reality. Various modes of auricular and performative confessions—

⁹⁶ Ben Siegel, "Artists and Opportunities in Saul Bellow's *Humboldt's Gift*." *Contemporary Literature*. 19.2 (Spring 1978): 143-164. *JSTOR*. 17 July 2006. 151. Hereafter cited internally as *Artists*.

carnavalesque, parrhesiac, and threshold confessions—are presented in the novel in order to counterbalance social distractions, personal prejudices, and death.

5.4. Carnavalesque Confession: Subverting Distractions

As Charlie's unexpected visitor, Cantabile is the novel's major force of carnival subversion, transgression, and distraction. Cantabile even though unintentionally, intrudes into Charlie's house and introduces him to new spaces and unexpected intersubjective relationships in town. He forces Charlie to go more public. The introduction of a downtown sphere into Charlie's life brings a new style into his discourse. In order to account for the developing discourse of confession at this stage, I will refer to the theory of carnival proposed by Bakhtin in his *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* and *Rabelais and His World*. Bakhtin explains that the key carnival features are the inversion of power relationships, degradation, parody, grotesque, and eccentricity. At their social level, power relationships are constructively subverted in the novel by Cantabile's distractions. Bellow's novel illustrates the effective place of noise and distraction in the life of the artist. It is Cantabile who compels Charlie to reflect on Humboldt when he asks Charlie to help his wife with her doctoral thesis on Humboldt. Ironically, Cantabile, who is supposedly the agent of distraction, adds to Charlie's concentration.

The significance of the carnivalesque relationship between Charlie and his society represented by Cantabile is that elements of carnival such as subversion, degradation, and parody are the preconditions for making connection between the private life of Charlie, the artist, and his society. The Charlie-Cantabile relationship is, as Clayton argues, the

parody of the tragic story of the artist in America, in general, and Humboldt, in particular (34). In the Charlie-Cantabile drama, Charlie plays the clown whose quasi-homosexual feelings for Cantabile parody his love for Humboldt (Clayton 34). Cantabile connects Charlie to his society. He disrupts the appearance of peace and harmony in Charlie's monophonic and alienated, high-class life, disturbs his financial status, and introduces noise, speed, and adventure into his life. He dares to humiliate Charlie. It is in his adventure with Cantabile that Charlie discovers his own weaknesses of being aloof, passive, and judgmental.

Ironically, Charlie's economic subversion from high to low culture is prefigured by the headstand exercise. Following George Swiebel's prescription, Charlie stands on his head order to cure his arthritic neck pain and prostate gland (*Humboldt* 49). Charlie ridicules George's advice at first: "Though I threw up my palms and shrieked with laughter (looking like one of Goya's frog caricatures in the *Visión Burlesca*—the creature with the locks and bolts) I did as he advised" (*Humboldt* 49). Charlie tries the headstand position in order to recover his calmness. He notes:

as I stood on my head, I knew (*I would know!*) that there was a sort of theoretical impulse behind this grotesqueness too, one of the powerful theories of the modern world being that for self-realization it's necessary to embrace the deformity and absurdity of the inmost being (we know it's there!). Be healed by the humiliating truth the Unconscious contains. (*Humboldt* 48)

Charlie states that "to do this [exercise] one had to remove all personal opinions, all interfering judgments; one should be neither for nor against this desire" (*Humboldt* 416). However, Charlie cannot acquire this sense of objectivity.

Charles Chandler explains that Charlie “fails to practice Steinerian objectivity. Objectivity here means suppressing past experiences from present judgment; it is the state of being unclouded by personal prejudices” (Chandler 17). The practice of objectivity in one’s judgement is significant for the discourse of confession in general and for the production of carnival truth in particular. Charlie practises these exercises of objectivity in experimenting with new points of view:

Just as the soul and spirit left the body in sleep, they could also be withdrawn from it in full consciousness with the purpose of observing the inner life of man. The first result of this conscious withdrawal is that everything is reversed. Instead of seeing the external world as we normally do with senses and intellect, initiates can see the circumscribed self from without. Soul and spirit are poured out upon the world which normally we perceive from within—mountains clouds forests sea. This external world we no longer see, for we are it. The outer world is not the inner. Clairvoyant, you are in the space you formerly behold. From this new circumference you look back to the center, and at the center is your own self. (*Humboldt* 393-394)

From this fresh carnival viewpoint, Charlie is observing a subversive version of reality—of the external world and of himself—distinct from his normally subjective point of view. Bakhtin explains that “carnival is not a spectacle seen by the people; they live in it” (*Rabelais* 7). If the carnival space is the temporary ideal space, and if people are actually living in it, then it is a space from which they can review their real life. It is exactly from this new carnival standpoint that Charlie is looking back to the centre, that is, to his inner self. The value of the place of Cantabile in Charlie’s life is, as in Siegel’s words, in the

introduction of this new perspective to him. Cantabile “compels Charlie to move away from the ‘dead center’ and confront his true self” (*Artists* 151).

The subversion of Charlie’s point of view is accompanied by his enforced social subversion by Cantabile. Like most games, poker brings the high and the low together. Charlie states: “the guests knew that they had been invited as low company. Nowadays the categories are grasped by those who belong to them. It would have been obvious to them that I was some sort of mental fellow even if George hadn’t advertised me as such” (*Humboldt* 60). However, the game overturns their original ranks: “I was brought there by George to relish their real American qualities, their peculiarities. But they enriched the evening with their own irony and reversed the situation so that in the end my peculiarities were far more conspicuous” (*Humboldt* 61).

Bakhtin explains that “the main area for carnival acts was the square and the street adjoining it” (*Plot* 128). Cantabile forces Charlie to take a trip downtown, to the Russian bath, Playboy Club, Hancock Building, and the skyscraper, humiliating him into making public confessions. Comparable to a carnival free space, downtown turns into a fearless place for Cantabile to speak the truth.

Degradation and insult are also elements of carnivalesque that are figured in the way Cantabile treats Charlie. In the Russian Bath, Cantabile forces Charlie to accompany him into the toilet and observe him. Charlie states: “I then understood, his bowels were acting up, he had been caught short, he had to go to the toilet, and I was to go with him” (*Humboldt* 82). Charlie comments on this embarrassing effect:

Of course he wanted to humiliate me. Because I was a *chevalier* of the *Légion d’honneur*? Not that he was actually aware of this. But he was aware that I

was as they would say in Chicago a *Brain*, a man of culture or intellectual attainment. Was this why I had to listen to him rumbling and slopping and smell his stink? Perhaps fantasies of savagery and monstrosity, of beating my brains out, had loosened his bowels. (*Humboldt* 83)

Bakhtin points out that in “Rabelais’ work the material bodily principle, that is, images of the human body with its food, drink, defecation, and sexual life, plays a predominant role. Images of the body are offered, moreover, in an extremely exaggerated form” (*Rabelais* 18). He further explains:

To degrade an object does not imply merely hurling it into the void of non-existence, into absolute destruction, but to hurl it down to the reproductive lower stratum, the zone in which conception and a new birth take place. Grotesque realism knows no other lower level; it is the fruitful earth and the womb. It is always conceiving. (*Rabelais* 21)

Therefore, carnival truth is an ambivalent truth, combining death and rebirth of the individual. Ironically, Charlie arrives at a better understanding of the truth in that toilet. He thinks: “he [Cantabile] wanted to inflict a punishment on me but the result was only to make us more intimate” (*Humboldt* 83). Charlie feels how close observation, intimacy, and power are interrelated: “His [Cantabile’s] nose was particularly white and his large nostrils, correspondingly dark, reminded me of an oboe when they dilated. People so distinctly seen have power over me. But I don’t know which comes first, the attraction or the close observation” (62). Charlie reflects, “Why was it that I enjoyed no relations with anyone of my own mental level? I was attracted instead by these noisy bumptious types”

(*Humboldt* 173). Later, he declares: "I couldn't be myself with normal sensible people" (*Humboldt* 288).

The connection is mutual. Charlie feels that he is being observed by Cantabile: "I now found myself under Cantabile's gaze. He examined me. He also looked tender concerned threatening punitive and even lethal" (*Humboldt* 186). In ways comparable to Gersbach's monologic gaze in *Herzog*, Cantabile's gaze in this novel controls Charlie like the gaze of the panopticon in which, as Foucault argues, "inspection functions ceaselessly. The gaze is alert everywhere" (*Discipline* 195). Panopticon's major effect is "to induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power" (*Discipline* 201). It seems that although Charlie is being registered by Cantabile's gaze, he admits the positive effects of being controlled and directed by him: Cantabile "has tried to bring me out, to carry me into the world," (287) and that "Cantabile had invested much boldness and ingenuity in me and now he seemed to feel that we must never part. Also he wanted me to draw him upward, to lead him to higher things" (*Humboldt* 174). He asserts: "because of me he had gotten into Mike Schneiderman's column" (*Humboldt* 267). On the other hand, Cantabile becomes the source of knowledge and power for Charlie. From Cantabile, Charlie understands that Szathmar, George Swiebel, and even Judge Urbanovich need him. He reasons, "I must have been associated in Chicago with art and meaning, with certain upper values" (267).

Cantabile, nonetheless, is the only person who speaks the truth to Charlie, using a rather abusive, carnivalistic language: "Your pal George tells you to stop a check, so you stop it. Do you take the asshole's word for everything? Why didn't he catch Emil and me in the act?" (*Humboldt* 86). What Cantabile reveals to Charlie is the fact that he readily

allows people to manipulate and control him. He asks: “when are you going to do something *and know what you are doing?*” (86). Charlie privately admits: “Well, he may have been right” (86). Later on, Cantabile gets angry with Charlie about the way he deals with Denise and her lawyer: “Yuch, Charlie! This side of your life is disgusting. You refuse to be alert about your interests. You let people dump on you” (169).

Cantabile makes Charlie contemplate his ethical self. Charlie is dissatisfied with what he feels: “This made my heart particularly heavy, because I’m somewhat afraid of Denise. She still wields a certain power” (*Humboldt* 56). In an act of polemic confession, Charlie asks himself why he has taken George’s advice and earnestly admits: “Because he had raised his voice with such authority? Because he had cast himself as an expert on the underworld and I had let him do his stuff? Well, I hadn’t used my best mind” (*Humboldt* 79).

In order to explain the functions and the effects of the major carnival scenes in the novel, I turn to Bakhtin’s argument on carnival truth:

carnivalization with its pathos of change and renewal permitted Dostoevsky to penetrate into the deepest layers of man and human relationships. It proved remarkably productive as a means for capturing in art the developing relationships under capitalism, at a time when previous form of life, moral principles and beliefs were being turned into ‘rotten cords’ and the previously concealed, ambivalent and unfinalised nature of man and human *thought* was being nakedly exposed. (*Problems* 166-167)

Carnival truth does not reflect reality’s surface structure only. Its truthfulness and novelty lies in its in-depth excavation of reality’s deeper structures. In the novel’s carnival scene

downtown, Cantabile takes Charlie to the Playboy Club where he exposes Charlie's inner reality: "But you don't care about the things other people knock themselves out over. You have contempt. You're arrogant, Citrine. You despise us" (*Humboldt* 96). Here, Charlie is as fearless as he could be in a carnival space. The more Cantabile threatens Charlie, the less he is scared. In fact, Charlie starts mocking him. Charlie states: "he [Cantabile] spoke wildly. It was no time for argument. I was to respect and to fear him. It would be provoking if he didn't think I feared him. I didn't think he would shoot me but a beating was surely possible, perhaps even a broken leg" (96). Likewise, in the Hancock Building, Charlie contemplates: "if Socrates was right that only the man you meet in the street could teach you something about yourself, I must be in a bad way running off into the scenery instead of listening to my human companions" (*Humboldt* 97). He confesses: "Evidently I did not have a good stomach for human companions" (97). Cantabile eventually takes Charlie to their final destination: the top of the skyscraper under construction. Charlie is now ambivalently scared: "How could I describe my feelings? Fear, thrill, appreciation, glee—yes I appreciated his ingenuity. It seemed to me; however, that we were rising too high, too far" (*Humboldt* 101). There, Cantabile said to him: "I want to show you how much your dough means to me" (102). He started to make a child's paper glider of dollar bills and flew them into the sky. Charlie acknowledges: "But however scared and harassed, my sensation-loving soul also was gratified. I knew that it took too much to gratify me. The gratification-threshold of my soul had risen too high. I must bring it down again. It was excessive. I must, I knew, change everything" (*Humboldt* 102). Busby describes this scene as "a comic reversal of the underworld experience" (92). According to Bakhtin, "upward" and "downward" have an absolute and

strictly topographical meaning. “Downward” is earth, “upward” is heaven” (*Rabelais* 21). There are many significant references to images of high and low in this experience. However, it is on the threshold between up and down that Charlie makes his confessions. Charlie is aware of the fact that he is undergoing a drastic change in outlook: “but I no longer thought in the same way. I had decided to listen to the voice of my own mind speaking from within, from my own depths, and this voice said that there was my body, in nature, and that there was also me” (*Humboldt* 186). In bringing all the distractions into Charlie’s too focused, monophonic, intellectual life, Cantabile brings into Charlie’s attention a new subject for concentration, that is, his long lost friendship with Humboldt.

The novel draws a progressive parallel between the two plots: the Charlie-Cantabile plot and the Charlie-Humboldt plot. As Charlie moves forward towards polyphonic reality in his relationship with Cantabile, he develops in his understanding of Humboldt. Charlie and Humboldt’s friendship goes through many ups and downs. An unequal form of artist-disciple relationship once existed between Humboldt and Charlie. At the outset of his oral biography and meditations, Charlie reflects upon the time when he was a student at the University of Wisconsin and when Humboldt with his book of ballads published in the Thirties was an immediate hit. He had been a fan and disciple of Humboldt: “Humboldt revealed to me new ways of doing things. I was ecstatic. I envied his luck, his talent, and his fame, and I went east in May to have a look at him—perhaps to get next to him” (*Humboldt* 1-2). Charlie confesses: I always loved him” (*Humboldt* 2). This hierarchical relationship is tragically subverted towards the end of Humboldt’s life. Hiding away from Humboldt, Charlie reports: “he didn’t see me. He was gray stout sick dusty, he had bought a pretzel stick and was eating it. His lunch. Concealed by a

parked car, I watched. I didn't approach him, I felt it was impossible" (*Humboldt* 7). Charlie finds it impossible to meet Humboldt because that morning he "had been flying over New York in a procession of Coast Guard helicopters with Senators Javist and Robert Kennedy" (*Humboldt* 8). With his seriocomic intonation, Charlie makes explanatory confessions:

But I knew that I looked well. Besides, there was money in my pockets and I had been window-shopping on Madison Avenue. If any Cardin or Hermès necktie pleased me I could buy it without asking the price [...] So how could I talk to Humboldt? It was too much. While I was in the helicopter whopping over Manhattan, viewing New York as if I were passing in a glass-bottomed boat over a tropical reef, Humboldt was probably groping among his bottles for a drop of juice to mix with his morning gin. (*Humboldt* 8)

Their reversed positions are once more subverted at the end of the novel when Charlie receives Humboldt's letter. Humboldt's legacy endows him with a superior position. He is no longer the victim of social powers, but Charlie's hero and saviour. However, from a different standpoint, Humboldt's situation is ambivalent. Humboldt, who was once "just what everyone had been waiting for" (*Humboldt* 1), now turns into Charlie's emissary (*Humboldt* 107). Charlie reasons,

By and by it became apparent that he [Humboldt] had acted as my agent. I myself, a nicely composed person, had had Humboldt expressing himself widely on my behalf, satisfying some of my longings. This explained my liking for some individuals—Humboldt, or George Swiebel, or even some one like Cantabile. (*Humboldt* 107)

As Charlie gains more social and intellectual power, he starts to picture Humboldt as a grotesque figure, making fun of him. Grotesque is the fantastic mode of communication which is connected to the carnival space, on the one hand, and to the discourse of confession, on the other. The grotesque humiliation is realized through exaggeration. The most significant features of the bodily grotesque are its large size, extreme articulation, and eccentric actions. To Charlie, Humboldt's image is grotesque in body, speech, and behaviour. Eyes and mouth are significant members in the grotesque image of the body. Humboldt was big (*Humboldt* 23, 25) with "large lips" (20) "in flattery he had a marvellous touch" (12). Humboldt was huge: "He made the desk seem small. It was manufactured for lesser figures. His upper body rose above it. He looked like a three-hundred-pound pro linebacker beside a kiddie car" (*Humboldt* 125). In magnifying Humboldt's appearance, Charlie magnifies his inner flaws.

In many instances, Charlie remembers Humboldt's eccentric qualities as a lecturer (*Humboldt* 11), a monologist, and a conversationalist: "he was a wonderful talker, a hectic non-stop monologist, and improvisator, a champion detractor" (4). In fact, "the scale of his conversation was as big as he could make it" (18). "His monologue," Charlie states, "was an oratorio in which he sang and played all parts" (14). Charlie believed that "he [Humboldt] was a Mozart of conversation" (13). Charlie confesses:

Reasoning, formulating, debating, making discoveries Humboldt's voice rose, chocked, rose again, his mouth went wide, dark stains formed under his eyes. His eyes seemed blotted. Arms heavy, chest big, pants gathered with much belt to spare under his belly, the loose end of leather hanging down, he passed from statement to recitative, from recitative he soared into aria, and behind

him plays an orchestra of imitations, virtues, love of his art, veneration of its great men—but also of suspicion and skulduggery. Before your eyes the man recited and sang himself in and out of madness. (*Humboldt* 30)

Charlie's humorous and grotesque image of Humboldt's struggles to talk is a criticism of his peculiarly American, monophonic expressiveness.

Apart from Humboldt's figure and personality, Charlie ridicules his gross behaviour. Humboldt's eccentric habits are best shown in his driving. Charlie states that Humboldt "was a terrible driver, making left turns from the right side, spurting, then dragging, tailgating" (*Humboldt* 21). Charlie also declares that "close to the large form of Humboldt, this motoring giant, in the awful upholstered luxury of the front seat, I felt the ideas and the illusions that went with him" (21). The title of Humboldt's book, *Harlequin Ballads*, as Ben Siegel suggest, shows "the clownish aspects of Humboldt's character and fate" (*Artists* 147). Charlie remembers: "Humboldt behaved like an eccentric and a comic subject. But occasionally there was a break in his eccentricity when he stopped and thought" (6). He is an extremist in his treatment of girls and drinks (12). However, from his earlier certainty and fixity in judgment, Charlie gradually moves towards flexibility and polyphony in outlook, giving a mixed account of Humboldt: "He was fine as well as thick, heavy but also light, and his face was both pale and dark" (*Humboldt* 11). Charlie and Humboldt's confessional journey from monophony towards polyphony is through making outspoken, parrhesiac confessions, exposing the destructive role of American materialism.

5.5. Parrhesiac Confession: Exposing Boundaries

Parrhesiac confession has illuminating and moderating effects in *Humboldt's Gift*. The authority of rationalism and the borders as well as the monophony and boredom of American materialism are the social boundaries that are constantly and often parrhesiacally being challenged by Charlie and Humboldt. Like threshold confession, parrhesiac confession has constructive values. The text recounts a story about Antonion Artaud, the playwright, who once invited the most brilliant intellectuals in Paris to a lecture: "when they were assembled there was no lecture. Artaud came on stage and screamed at them like a wild beast" (*Humboldt* 31). Humboldt believes that "Artaud's scream is an intellectual thing. First, an attack on the nineteenth century 'religion of art,' which the religion of discourse wants to replace. . . ." (*Humboldt* 32).

The artist's exceptionally courageous and anti-authoritarian attitudes are comparable to Bakhtin's carnival and Foucault's parrhesia. The roots of the fearlessness of carnivalesque confession can be traced in the unofficial folk culture. As Bakhtin explains, "the images of Romantic grotesque usually express fear of the world and seek to inspire their reader with this fear. On the contrary, the images of folk culture are absolutely fearless and communicate this fearlessness to all" (*Rabelais* 39).

In like manner, Charlie parrhesiacally problematises the place of money, boredom, self-consciousness, and authoritarian power structures in his contemporary culture. He talks about the problems of American culture: "Genteel America was handicapped by meagreness of soul, thinness of temper, paucity of talent" (*Humboldt* 421). Criticising the undeniable place of money in America, Charlie questions himself: "what kind of American would I be if I were innocent about money?" (*Humboldt* 159).

Charlie amusingly confesses that he cannot agree with Chaucer's Pardoner that money is the root of all evil. He humorously sides with Horace Walpole, instead, who said that "it was natural for men to think about money. Why? Because money *is* freedom, that's why" (*Humboldt* 159). Criticising the authority of the rationalist culture, Charlie asserts: "America is a didactic country whose people always offer their personal experiences as a helpful lesson to the rest, hoping to hearten them and to do them good—an intensive sort of personal public-relations project" (*Humboldt* 65). It is ironic that the problem of boredom exists in a country with so many entertaining devices: "Never has any country given its people so many toys to play with or sent such highly gifted individuals to the remotest corners of idleness, as close as possible to the frontiers of pain" (*Humboldt* 249). Charlie subsequently realizes that the root of the problem of boredom is isolation. He asserts: "The educated speak of the disenchanting (a boring) world. But it is not the world, it is my own head that is disenchanting" (*Humboldt* 203). He reasons that "the self-conscious ego is the seat of boredom," (*Humboldt* 203) mainly because the single, independent, organized self, proud of its stability and absolute immunity remains unaffected by the troubles of the external world" (*Humboldt* 203). Conversely, Charlie claims: "But I did incorporate other people into myself" (*Humboldt* 288). In the battle between the public and private world, Charlie believes that "this increasing, swelling, domineering, painful self-consciousness is the only rival of the political and social powers that run my life (business, technological, bureaucratic powers, the state)" (203). It is this perception of the dialogic self, self-consciousness, and the desire to avoid joining one or the other extreme of art or social powers that provides the grounds for the emergence of dialogue between the artist and the society. Sociological determinism and

anti-totalitarian powers of art are equally destructive if they do not communicate with each other.

An important parrhesiac force in Charlie's life is Renata. Renata's parrhesiac letter to Charlie has a special place in the novel because it illuminates fundamental issues. The letter contains her confessions of love and the reasons she had left him for Flonzaley. She writes: "the role you got me into was the palooka role. I was your marvelous sex-clown" (*Humboldt* 429). Contrasting Charlie to Flonzaley, she states: "some of your ideas are spookier than his business" (431). Referring to Charlie's attempt to write his essay on "boredom," Renata responds: "But you don't spend years trying to dope your way out of the human condition. To me that's boring" (430). In reading these sentences, Charlie saw himself and other writers as "thinkers of genius throwing skeins of belief and purpose over the heads of the multitude. I saw them molesting the race with their fancies, programs, and world perspectives" (431). Charlie reflects: "they know best and abused mankind with projects" (431). It is after reading Renata's letter that Charlie becomes more cautious in his judgments.

As a result of the exchange of such monophonic, parrhesiac confessions, Charlie and Humboldt move towards moderation in their thoughts and actions. Instead of merely exposing the bullying nature of his culture, Charlie learns to admit his own faults: "we have gotten stuck six decades back and set the world a miserable example by allowing ourselves to be bullied" (*Humboldt* 471)—the theme that Bellow has initially introduced in the early novels and developed in *Herzog*. Charlie suggests that "between gunboat diplomacy at one extreme and submission to acts of piracy at the other, there ought to be some middle ground for a great power" (*Humboldt* 471). Although Humboldt believes

that “Monopoly capitalism has treated creative men like rats,” (*Humboldt* 135) and even though when Ricketts let him down, Humboldt argues that “a poet could not allow a bureaucrat to surpass him,” (*Humboldt* 143) he earnestly wanted “to be wise, philosophical, to find the common grounds of poetry and science, to prove that the imagination was just as potent as machinery, to free and to bless humankind” (*Humboldt* 119). In like manner, drawing upon the powers of the soul and spirit, Charlie links human perception with science. He explains that “in the arbitrary division between Subject and Object the world has been lost. The zero self sought diversion. It became an actor. This was the situation of the Consciousness Soul” (*Humboldt* 281). Modern rationality assumes that “I, a subject, see the phenomena, the world of objects. They, however, are not necessarily in themselves objects as modern rationality defines objects” (*Humboldt* 202). Charlie refers to the power of human spirit in general and Steiner’s theory in particular, in order to overcome the limitations of rationality. He thus explains that in spirit “a man can step out of himself and let things speak to him about themselves, to speak about what has meaning not for him alone but also for them. Thus the sun, the moon, the stars will speak to nonastronomers in spite of their ignorance of science” (*Humboldt* 202). Compared to Herzog, who reaches polyphonic comprehension after his monologic, transgressive, and parrhesiac letter writings, Charlie and Humboldt’s state of harmony and moderation proceed from their transgressive arguments. Charlie’s involvement with Cantabile in everyday social activities also helps him to arrive at a more moderate and comprehensive understanding of reality. The communication between Charlie and society helps redirect his attention from self to other consciousness, an act which helps him reunite with Humboldt.

5. 6. Threshold Confession: Crossing Death

The tragedy of Humboldt and Charlie's friendship is that when they feel able to forgive one another, they find out that it is too late to forgive and be forgiven. However, the beauty of the novel is that they as artists create new ways to overcome the death barrier and communicate with each other long after Humboldt's death. As he mourns and remembers Humboldt, Charlie deconstructs misconceptions and reconstructs new connections with his inner self, Humboldt, and the external world. *Humboldt's Gift* disparages the distancing authority of death and glorifies its reuniting significance. Throughout the novel, Charlie shows his obsession with the theme of death and the sites of mourning.⁹⁷ The authority of death is most evidently seen in Charlie's relationship with Humboldt, Renata, and Demmie Vonghel. However, death has an ambivalent place in the novel. The monophonic seriousness of death is redeemed by inserting humour into the language of mourning: grotesque imagery in mourning Humboldt, theatrical performances in mourning Renata, and artistic self-flattery in remembering Demmie. In remembering and mourning these people, Charlie tries to escape the separating, fatal force of death and start communicating with his dear friends.

⁹⁷ The act of mourning has a biographical significance in this novel. In writing the story of Humboldt, "Bellow had struggled to write about his dear friend, Issac Rosenfeld, under the name of Elias Zetland" (Atlas 428). However, "in the end, Bellow published only a fifteen-page fragment, "Zetland: By a Character Witness," explaining that "it was too harsh, too unremitting a catalog of failure" (Atlas 428). Herb McCloskey suggests that "He [Bellow] loved Issac too much to write that book" (Atlas 428-429). However, Atlas believes that "to write about a friend who had failed as a writer was to exploit Rosenfeld's memory, advancing the survivor's reputation at the expense of the victim" (429). In Bellow's novel, we see Humboldt accusing Charlie of copying his personality: "I don't say he actually plagiarized, but he did steal something from me—my personality. He built my personality into his hero" (*Humboldt* 4). It perhaps reflects Bellow's feelings of guilt in modelling his character on his late friends. Gradually, "Zetland/Rosenfeld faded from the manuscript, and Humboldt/Schwartz came to dominate" (Atlas 429). In fact, "he hadn't been as emotionally involved with Delmore Schwartz as with Rosenfeld; it was easier to write his story" (Atlas 429).

Expressing his desire to escape the chains of death, Charlie alludes to the story of the Jewish magician Harry Houdini:

[Harry] defied all forms of restraint and confinement, including the grave. He broke out of everything. They buried him and he escaped. They sank him in boxes and he escaped. They put him in a strait jacket and manacles and hung him upside-down by one ankle from the flagpole of the Flatiron Building in New York. Sarah Bernhardt came to watch this and sat in her limousine on Fifth Avenue looking on while he freed himself and climbed to safety.
(*Humboldt* 435)

Charlie has a “sideward glance” at and dialogic reference to Humboldt’s book when he declares: “A friend of mine, a poet, wrote a ballad about this [magician] called ‘Harlequin Harry’” (435). Humboldt wrote *Harlequin Ballads*, the only book he published and the work that brought him wealth as well as public and media attention. In associating Harry with Humboldt, Charlie implies that Humboldt could escape the boundary of death through his artistic works.

The novel emphasizes that although death separates the two friends, their art and mutual love can close the distance between them. Five years after Humboldt’s death, Cantabile and his PhD wife make Charlie contemplate Humboldt. Humboldt’s legacy—that is, his posthumous letter of love and apology, the movie script, and the sealed, self-addressed envelope—could cross not only the intangible boundaries of eternity and turn his otherwise absolute absence into shimmering presence but also could ease the tangible, economic pressures in Charlie’s life. It stands for Humboldt’s talent as well as his gift of forgiveness. The significance of the confessional letter is that it transgressively reverses

the power positions in Charlie and Humboldt's relationship. It endows Humboldt with a more honourable status and helps Charlie forgive him. Charlie, the confessant, turns into the confessor, a reversal in their subject positions, implying that such arbitrary hierarchical borders are flexible. In addition, the letter indicates the opportunity to trespass mortality and act upon others even from beyond the grave. The movie script sells very well and earns Charlie enough money to pay off the court's unfair divorce charges; repair his Mercedes-Benz wreck; publish his journal, *The Arch*; and pay for the astronomical expenses created by Renata and her mother. However, the forgiving confessional relationship between Charlie and Humboldt is not one-sided. Although Humboldt struggles to prepare the letter and the script during his most difficult days, Charlie spends time, money, and energy, redirecting his attention from Cantabile's distractions onto Humboldt. Humboldt's legacy communicates with Charlie as it stands on the death threshold, signifying that they needed this death-space in order to communicate with each other. Their reunion represents the communion of the dead and the living, time and space, praise and condemnation of death.

The ambivalent nature of Humboldt's death is embodied in the image of the spring flower at his tomb, the existence of which in the exhumation scene suggests both death and rebirth.⁹⁸ As Mark Busby suggests, "crocuses, often the earliest of spring flowers, usually symbolize the rebirth of nature, the coming of spring, and the regeneration of the spirit" (94). However, Charlie is aware, as Siegel explains, that Humboldt's "self-indulgence and lack of discipline rendered him a 'farcical' rather than a tragic martyr (*Artists* 155). Ruth Rosenberg believes that "in the light of narrative

⁹⁸ In *The Dean's December*, Bellow likewise combines image of death and regeneration by setting the death of Valeria, Cord's mother-in-law, on Christmas Eve.

association with traditional Jewish tales, the crocus is more likely to be simply a mute reminder that Citrine, like the classical Yiddish hero, has survived. He has endured his travails with ironic self-mockery and satiric thrusts at his persecutors, and now he plans to mediate” (Rosenberg 64). Humboldt’s life-in-death is in contrast to and compensates for his death-in-life, giving his whole life and death experience more balance and plurality.

Such thresholds in modes of existence and plurality of truth highlight the relationships between Charlie-Renata and Renata-Flonzaley. From Charlie’s point of view, Renata lives on the near-death end of the life-death spectrum when she chooses to marry Flonzaley, the undertaker, rather than him. However, what Renata affirms in marrying Flonzaley is that Charlie with his totalitarian ideology is much closer to the death than the undertaker. Renata ironically associates Charlie and his deadly, intellectual ideas, especially his theory of boredom, with death, even more closely than she believes her husband is dealing with it.

The end result of the production of carnival truth is the creation of aesthetic reality. In providing the freedom necessary for giving voice to the unnoticed, unheard, and unthinkable side of reality, carnival produces balance in the novel. It is for its creative, inclusive, and harmonious qualities that art has liberating values. Creative, visionary, and philosophical confession through mutual acts of remembrance is the recurrent theme in the novel. The tragic death of Demmie in the plane crash in South America ends Charlie’s dream of marrying her. In remembering Demmie’s trip with her father in order to convince him that she should marry Charlie, Charlie reconstruct the details as he desired them. In his amusing reflections, Charlie dreams a key scene in

which Demmie, in order to impress her father a bit further, was perhaps showing Charlie's Broadway scrapbook to him (*Humboldt* 167). In doing so, Charlie entertainingly introduces art as a compensation for reality. From this meditative style of truth-telling, I will further the discussion, in the next section, into Charlie and Humboldt's more aesthetic communication whereby mutual confession emerges as a result of the protagonists' creative and artistic activities.

5.7. Aesthetic Confession

“The soul was the artist of its own body” (*Humboldt* 442).

“A fellow really is the artist of himself” (*Henderson* 268).

If inherent elements of aesthetic are beauty and inclusion, then the somehow monophonic discourse of confession seems more aesthetic when it develops more features that contribute to its polyphonic value. For instance, rather than giving voice to the truth of the self or the other person, confessional discourse may articulate and include the truths of both the speaker and the listener in the form of a dialogue rather than a monologue. Bellow introduces this reciprocal style of confession in his idiosyncratic model of paired-characters dialogues. Although he has practised some forms of mutual confession in his earlier novels, including *Dangling Man*, *The Victim*, and *Seize the Day*, it is in *Henderson the Rain King* that Bellow, for the first time, articulates and portrays his principles of reciprocal confession between Henderson and King Dahfu. First, the hierarchical distance between Henderson and King Dahfu is removed by appointing Henderson-Sungu as the Rain King. Then, they enter the conversation not only as equals but also as friends for whom truth “will be worthless if not mutual” (*Henderson* 212). They accept this mutual

truthfulness as a pact (*Henderson* 212) that secures their confidence, requires their suspension of judgment, (232) and promises their enjoyment of the free exchange of secrets (212). However, even if they believe that they are “unified as friends” (232), the reader finds it rather implausible to suspend his disbelief, possibly because their quick friendship has not had the chance to develop over time. It is in *Humboldt’s Gift* that Bellow gives his protagonists Humboldt and Charlie a life-time of opportunity to develop, contemplate, remember, and acknowledge their friendship. The place of memory in Charlie’s meditative confessions is that it is a technique not only to include the voice of Humboldt but also to turn his absence into presence. As such, memory functions to create both beauty and inclusion in Charlie’s confessional discourse. Moreover, Charlie’s incessant acts of contemplation are suggestive of the time he has spent paying detailed attention to what has happened as well as what could have happened to his dear friend, and as such it shows his love for him and explains their final, mutual act of forgiveness. Aesthetic activities of the soul are presented in the novel in the form of remembering which, as Clayton also states, is “a form of love, an assertion of value” (33).

Aesthetic confession is the creative and harmonious style of truth-telling which unlike carnival truth needs more liminal than free spaces to emerge. Such threshold, creative horizons, in Bellow’s novels, are the state of madness-sanity for Humboldt and sleep-wakefulness for Charlie. For instance, during his final days when Humboldt’s appearance used to indicate his extreme poverty, exclusion, and madness he had been most original, productive, and energetic. Humboldt diagnoses his own condition as manic depressive, (*Humboldt* 5) and reasons that “if energy is Delight and if Exuberance is

Beauty, the Manic Depressive knows more about Delight and Beauty than anyone else. Who else has so much Energy and Exuberance?" (7). Madness is associated with originality, and Humboldt brings a "peculiar inventiveness" into common topics through his "manic energy" (18). It is interesting to note that for Foucault madness "is not a position of freedom, beyond the constraints of rational discourse, but illuminates the limit of Man" (Simon 71). Humboldt acknowledges and transgresses his philosophical limits. During his madness days, Humboldt has been remembering Charlie, writing the movie script for him. It is an instance of dramatic irony that Humboldt's legacy is believed by Charlie to be "a question addressed [only] to the public. The death question itself, which Walt Whitman saw as the question of questions" (*Humboldt* 65-66). Charlie was then unaware of Humboldt's valuable gift. Humboldt's gift stands not only on the threshold between his life and death but also between his madness and sanity. It proves that these arbitrary boundaries need to be treated with more flexibility. Additionally, Charlie's aesthetic confession takes place on the imagination threshold, standing between sleep and wakefulness. It is in this imaginary state that Charlie's most moving aesthetic confession takes place. He reconstructs the possible details of Humboldt's tragic death through his creative mode of mourning and remembrance (*Humboldt* 15-16).

Aesthetic confession is illustrated in Charlie's discourse in the form of filling gaps in his information, visualizing what he was unable to see, and performing theatrical shows. Waiting outside Stronson's office, Charlie aesthetically invents the seriocomic version of the Cantabile-Stronson affair: "Maybe Cantabile was now trying to get his hands on some of the money Stronson had stashed—in Costa Rica, perhaps. Or maybe if he was losing twenty thousand dollars (some of it possibly Cantabile family money) he

intended to make a big scene" (*Humboldt* 267). He also proposes: "maybe Cantabile was offering him deals—deals upon deals upon deals. Advice on how to come to terms with his furious Mafia customers" (267). The key word, the repetitions of which identify some aesthetic confessions in the novel is, "perhaps". The uncertainty that the word carries communicates the flexibility in Charlie's descriptions and judgments and suggests the possibility of changing his constructions. Charlie and Humboldt's reciprocal and aesthetic concentrations converge on their forgiveness and redeem their friendship.

Charlie and Humboldt's acts of forgiveness are both self and other conscious. Charlie realizes that "it is impossible for him to redeem his own distraught character without also redeeming Humboldt" (Quayum 168). It can be argued from Humboldt's point of view that a similar mutual movement towards redemption is inevitable. Drawing mainly upon the novel's mystic and religious implications, John W. Aldridge sees the distinctiveness of Bellow's *Humboldt's Gift* and argues that although the novel "cannot bring into single dramatic focus his [Bellow's] optimism about man and his pessimism about the conditions of life," it does manage to cope with them more effectively than in Bellow's previous works (52).

If Bellow in *Humboldt's Gift* presents the problems of capitalist America, its exploitations of and disregard toward the artist, it also illustrates the problems of the artist. Humboldt is a grotesque character, because he is eccentric in some of his traits and inflexible in some of his ideas and prejudices. The boundary that he particularly needs to cross over and deal with more flexibly is the plagiarism border. He overreacts when he understands that Charlie has dramatised the central character in his play based on Humboldt's personality. He accuses Charlie of stealing his personality, of plagiarism.

However, over the long period of contemplation, Humboldt learns that it is inevitable and yet valuable that during their extensive social communications, people aesthetically select, copy, and incorporate aspects of one another into their personalities. He realises that in his inventive copy modelling, Charlie has demonstrated his respect and attention for Humboldt. Charlie illustrates such aesthetic acts in the parallel plot sequences he creates. He duplicates his genuine concern for Humboldt's death with the seriocomic mourning for Renata. He draws a parallel between his humorous subversions by *Cantabile* and tragically subverting Humboldt in his own grotesque discursive practices. Finally, he somehow emulates Humboldt's tragic life—police arrest, poverty, madness, and desolation—by going through similar experiences. The creation of these parallel constructions demonstrates the practices of carnival on a textual level.

In this chapter, I have explored the carnivalesque mode of confession in Bellow's *Humboldt's Gift* in connection with the concept of borderland. The production of the desired, polyphonic truth of carnival is possible only in the presence of flexible rather than fixed borderlines. Therefore, Charlie and Humboldt's monologic realities are recovered only when they start to participate in social lives as multiple and liminal personalities. The novel criticizes Humboldt's dogmatic belief in identity plagiarism, suggesting that identities are not commodities to be possessed or traded but that they are inevitably semi-permeable, that is, in constant dialogue with the external world. However, whereas *Humboldt's Gift* criticizes the eccentric belief in monologism and the borderlines that separate the individual territories, *Ravelstein* criticizes eccentricities in communication. The problem with too much engagement with social realities is that it is as detrimental to social communications as absolute lack of communication. *Humboldt's*

Gift concentrates on the modification of the borders of plagiarism, while *Ravelstein* is more engaged with the “question of boredom” (*Humboldt* 69). Plagiarism is identified with its eccentric emphasis on the separation of certain borderlines, the borders that separate one character from another, one community from other communities, and one’s public from private reality. The problem with this extreme disconnection between various modes of life is the problem of boredom. At the other end of the extreme is the eccentric exchange of reality. Too much communication and total absence of border is what is criticised in Bellow’s *Ravelstein*. What Bellow argues is that we need the coordinate amount of both extremes. Border and freedom have to be treated with more care, flexibility, and moderation. Whereas Humboldt is grotesquely depicted as presenting the end extreme of advocating all rules, laws, and borderlines, Ravelstein is criticised for not respecting the basic rules of ethical communication, gossip, and truth-management.

Chapter 6

Acts of Aesthetic Confession in *Ravelstein*

6.1. Introduction: Aesthetic and Political Confession

The nature of the relationship between protagonists informs the confessional styles in the novels of Saul Bellow. In *Ravelstein*, the special form of researcher-researched relationship between Chick and Professor Abe Ravelstein fashions the aesthetic mode of confession between them. The novel presents Chick in the process of writing the biography of Ravelstein and understanding him as his researched other. Unlike Herzog, who treats the reality instructors in his letters as known and passive objects, Chick considers Ravelstein as a subject, actively engaged with him in the process of writing—especially through Ravelstein’s editorial and supervisory effects. Ravelstein’s active participation in the formation of his identity is comparable to Humboldt’s posthumous letter, which informs Charlie of his own personal truth. However, whereas the meditative model of communication in the Charlie-Humboldt relationship is characterised by competition, separation, distance, isolation, exile, and death, Chick and Ravelstein’s mutual and constant conversations and confessions take place not inside one or the other person but within their intersubjective space. The function of such mutual spaces is analogous to dialogism, the “between” of Bakhtin. As Harvey Grossinger notes, Chick

and Ravelstein are such close friends, because “they are each other’s best audience. They listen closely to one another and are not squeamish or ashamed when it comes to talking about their secrets and fears” (16). Therefore, whereas the initial model of subjectivity in the Charlie-Humboldt relationship is based on the monologic and the transgressive self, the Chick-Ravelstein mode of subjectivity is founded on the creative and the dialogic self—the self capable of creating a dialogue between his monologic and polyphonic identity.

Unlike the polyphonic model of communication examined in *Seize the Day* and *Herzog*, in which one voice presents two competing voices at the same time, the aesthetic model of communication in *Ravelstein* presents two voices, each listening to and addressing the other person with mutual care, understanding, and responsibility. As the element of competition is almost entirely absent from the aesthetic mode, its functions include and go beyond those of polyphonic discourse: aesthetic discourse attends to silenced and unheard voices in order to produce effects of inclusion as well as modification. In aesthetic communication, the two loving and caring voices are actively engaged in acknowledging the frailties they can see in the other person, paying attention to and doing justice to one another. Aesthetic confession is creative in that these mutually responsive voices are capable of creating values in one another. It is perhaps the most dialogic of various modes of truth-telling depicted in Bellow’s novels for it fuses monologic and polyphonic discourse. In doing so, the value of aesthetic discourse is that it initiates a dialogue between the public and the private modes of confession. Furthermore, aesthetic confession is endowed with the essence of beauty in the sense that it creates balance between extreme poles of public/private and monologic/polyphonic

truth. The model of intersubjectivity in aesthetic confession is comparable to Bakhtin's model of "active empathy"—*vzhivanie*.

In his early philosophical works, "Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity" and *Towards a Philosophy of the Act*, Bakhtin develops the concept of *vzhivanie* as an ideal model for the liberal communication process, the concept is a precursor to "dialogue"—the most celebrated and utilized Bakhtinian concept (Wyman 414). In describing *vzhivanie* (literally "living into" another self), Bakhtin accentuates "the creative, productive outcome of actively penetrating another consciousness (*pronitsanie*) without completely losing the value-producing 'surplus' yielded by the external perspective" (Wyman 414). In this communicative model, the two people never merge with one another: "both parties remain active, retaining their individual voices" (Wyman 414). Bakhtin values the other person's "surplus of vision," writing:

And what would I myself gain by the other's merging with me? If he did, he would see and know no more than what I see and know myself; he would merely repeat in himself that want of any issue out of itself which characterizes my own life. Let him rather remain outside of me, for in that position he can see what I myself do not see and do not know from my own place, and he can essentially enrich the event of my own life. (*Author and Hero* 87)⁹⁹

Bakhtin's argument makes a distinction between the assimilative and the creative self, particularly in connection with the interplays of truth and freedom. Dismissing his own inner values and yielding to the values of the other person, the assimilative self

⁹⁹ It is also interesting to consider that in *The Dean's December*, Bellow creates a relationship of "active sympathy" between Corde and his wife Minna in consoling her for the loss of her mother (258).

establishes a monologic relationship between himself and the other person, bounding himself to the other person's values and truth. This single-voiced relationship is unethical in that it eliminates the inner authenticity of the pretender self and ignores the values that the observer can see in that person. In art, in contrast to real-life situations, the creative self is capable of creating a dialogue between himself and the other person whereby each person acknowledges the inaccessible sides of the other person and subsequently initiates a conversation between their private and public truth. In doing so, the dialogic self gains access to a wider range of knowledge and is not restricted to the one-sided, monologic truth as seen mainly from his own singular standpoint. Aesthetic confession, in this sense, liberates the truth from the confinements of one unitary point of view and renders it as a unique version of reality.

It seems that for such liberating reasons, Ravelstein initially asks Chick to write his biography: "I want you to show me as you see me, without any softeners or sweeteners" (133). However, Chick exposes and at times has to modify the reality of Ravelstein. As such, his writing functions as an aesthetic form of confession in that, as Simon Dentith explains, "it is neither the 'natural' shape into which a life falls, nor an arbitrary imposition of shape upon that life by an author, but emerges from the complexities of the relationship between the two" (13). Aesthetically relating to Ravelstein, Chick neither adapts his writing to please Ravelstein nor does he distort facts in order to suit his own writings. On the other hand, he creates an aesthetic space in his writing wherein facts and impressions mutually serve and benefit from one another. Eventually, Ravelstein agrees with Chick that "it was important to note how people looked. Their ideas are not enough—their theoretical convictions and political truth"

(*Ravelstein* 136). Chick, therefore, brings together the two contrasting images of Ravelstein in his distinctive sketch: Ravelstein, the entertainer of the public and Ravelstein, the victim of cultural and political ethics. Chick's polyphonic presentation of Ravelstein is attended by the biographer's distinctively aesthetic and emotional values.

Chick's "surplus of vision" has emotive significance in the novel. In establishing an aesthetically dialogic relationship with Ravelstein, Chick not only begins to see the other side of Ravelstein's truth but also begins to understand Ravelstein, feel for him, and justify his excessive actions. Chick's process of emotional confessions can be further illuminated in the light of Bakhtin's argument on the significance of "active empathy" in human communication. Bakhtin believes that "the productive quality of active empathy is rooted in the presence of two non-coinciding [non-assimilative] consciousnesses in the process of dialogic exchange" (Wyman 417). The major revealing and creative force in the Chick-Ravelstein confessional relationships is their mutual friendship and love. It is their close friendship that motivates them not only to communicate but also to modify their eccentric behaviours and create moderation for each other. Ravelstein tries to add a public dimension to Chick's extremely private life, and Chick's intension is to introduce moments of pause, concentration, and privacy into Ravelstein's advancing national and international communications. In doing so, they interactively initiate a dialogue between the two poles: Ravelstein's extremely public and political side and Chick's excessively private life. It is the caring nature of their friendship that informs and structures the overall aesthetic architecture of the novel.

The novel's aesthetic construction is responsible for the presentation of its ethical values. Bakhtin's version of ethical, aesthetic confession is founded on the conception of

transgressing the limits of the narrative. In “Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity”, Bakhtin makes a distinction between the genre of confession and (auto) biography. In contrast to the discourse of confession, which is the representation of the uninterrupted flow of the truth, autobiographical discourse is restricted by the narrative’s aesthetic structure. Carolyn Ayers notes that Bakhtin sees (auto) biography as having mainly an *aesthetic* value, while confession has mainly an *ethical* value, that is, “it represents an act in an ongoing life” (Ayers 83). However, combining the genre of biography, autobiography, and confession, *Ravelstein* shows that such ethical and aesthetic distinctions are arbitrary and that confession can enjoy aesthetic merits in the same way that (auto) biography can have ethical essence. Bakhtin explains that “biographical value is capable of organizing [...] the experiencing of life itself and the story of one’s own life; it can be the form in which one sees and gains consciousness of one’s own life” (*Author and Hero* 152). Likewise, confessions, “although they are essentially ethical acts, may be approached aesthetically by the reader” (Ayers 83). In *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, Bakhtin classifies “autobiography, confessions, diaries, memoirs, and so forth” as autobiographical works (103-131). In combining various genres of truth-telling, Bellow’s novel brings together their values—the formative value of the genre of biography and the ethical value of the genre of confession. Chick creates a harmonious and beautiful form for the discourse of confession. In his writing, confession is not an authoritatively one-sided and serious monologue; rather, it is an interactive speech act taking place in the caring relationship between Chick and Ravelstein. It is ethical because it articulates a

more comprehensive version of reality, and it is aesthetic because it divests itself of eccentric and extremist evaluations.¹⁰⁰

The integration of ethical and aesthetic values in *Ravelstein* is due to the connection that the novel makes between two external points of views: the external point of view of Chick as the self in relation to Ravelstein as the other as well as Chick's external point of view in relation to himself. In doing so, Bellow's novel integrates two Bakhtinian concepts: "active empathy" and "transgression". If "active empathy" is oriented towards the other person and provides a broad point of view for the self in order to inform the other, "transgression" is oriented towards the self. Transgression provides "excess of seeing" and an advantage of feeling that one is the only person to possess a unique and irreplaceable place in the world: "for only I the—one—and—only I occupy, in a given set of circumstances, this particular place at this particular time" (*Author and Hero* 23). Accordingly, Bakhtin argues that from his unique place in existence the hero is the only person who has exclusive access not only to the external truth of the other person but also to his own inner truth: "in a human being there is always something that only he himself can reveal, in a free act of self-consciousness and discourse, something that does not submit to an externalizing secondhand definition" (*Hero* 58). The ethical value of this statement is that due to everyone's private secrets, "the human being cannot be fully explained" (*Dentith* 43). The end result of transgression for the self is personal autonomy.

¹⁰⁰ The novel has (auto) biographical values for Bellow and his friend Allan Bloom the author of *The Closing of the American Mind*. Like his character model Allan Bloom, Ravelstein is "an ideological power broker" (Atlas 594). In writing about Ravelstein, Chick writes about himself. In like manner, in writing about Chick and Ravelstein, Bellow, as documented by Atlas, writes about the relationship between himself and Allan Bloom (594). Therefore, in revealing facts about Ravelstein, Bellow is communicating the truth about Bloom's life and death.

An ethical act has emotive values in that in response to a suffering person we feel from within, while to render the same feeling as an aesthetic act we need to distance ourselves from the inner suffering, “a return to an outside perspective” and see it as an Other might see it (Ayers 84). In Bellow’s novel, Chick employs the same technique of active empathy in visualizing the suffering, emotional experience of Ravelstein in the intensive care unit. Chick depicts Ravelstein’s suffering from Chick’s own external point of view. However, the novel presents a second parallel scene of suffering in which, after Ravelstein’s death, Chick goes through a severe suffering and near-death experience in the hospital. Chick reports his own suffering from his own transgredient and internal standpoint. The comparison between the two scenes makes clear the fact that each perspective is incomplete in itself, and yet one can inform the other’s viewpoint. The inner reality of suffering is exposed only to the suffering person whereas its external manifestation is inaccessible to him. Bellow’s depiction shows that one’s internal point of view might be as valuable and valid to the comprehension of one’s reality as the outsider’s viewpoint.

Ravelstein can be regarded as an aesthetic-confession text which contains both ethical and emotive values in that Chick distances himself in writing and becomes his own as well as Ravelstein’s author, an action whereby the self returns to the authorial position of himself and that of the other person in relation to himself. The privilege of this outside position is that it gives the writer the chance to approach himself and the other person with more love, care, and attention—the feelings that require such an outside position for self-development (*Author and Hero* 49). The aesthetic and ethical value of Bellow’s novel is that it illustrates the discourse of confession and subjectivity in

the light of the arbitrary nature of certain personal, social and cultural limits. In exposing these boundaries, the aesthetics of the novel reveal not so much the oddities of Ravelstein's irregular erotic desires as they expose the limitations of his society's ethical standards. It is for this liberating effect that Chick's aesthetic confessions can be regarded as ethical auto-biography.

Bellow's version of biography is not an adventure-heroic type "in which the significance of the life of the hero/self is sought according to certain plots" (Ayers 85). Conversely, Bellow's biographical version is comparable to the biographical writing which Bakhtin calls "social-quotidian". In "social-quotidian," "the hero's main activity is confined to loving and observing, in other words, to playing the part of the Other" (Ayers 85). In fact, the social-quotidian mode of biographical writing is a type of realism which aims, as Bakhtin explains, to

fulfil oneself and one's life exhaustively within the context of contemporary life out of the past and the future. 'Life' is something one draws from the value-context of newspapers, periodicals, official records, popularized science, contemporary conversations, etc. (*Author and Hero* 162)

In the social-quotidian style of biography, the hero is often realized as a narrator (Ayer 85). In Bellow's novel, we notice that Chick, the narrator-biographer, rarely presents facts about Ravelstein's childhood or family background. On the other hand, he presents Ravelstein in all his various and numerous communications with the external world: politicians, literary groups, publications, students who are constantly communicating with him from all over the world, and celebrities such as Michael Jackson. As a result, one can have access to Ravelstein's true image not in isolation but in his extensive relationships

with other people. Therefore, unlike Charlie Citrine in *Humboldt's Gift*, who contemplates Humboldt by examining his life in isolation, Chick tries to understand Ravelstein in all his various and numerous relationships. However, Ravelstein has his own principles in relating to the public.

The relationship between individual and community is ethical and aesthetic provided that people observe moderation in their interactions. Bellow presents Ravelstein's style in managing his distance and involvement in his public relationships. Chick quotes Ravelstein, who believes in Schiller's statement: "Live with your century but do not be its *creature*" (82, emphasis mine). Chick notices the connections between Schiller's and an architect's advice: "Live in this city but don't *belong* to it" (82, emphasis mine). However, the irony, as the dialogical relationship between the two statements shows, can be the index of the sad argument that Ravelstein has been the real "creature" of the solid ethical values of his time, an argument which culminates in Chick's final comment on him: "You don't easily give up a *creature* like Ravelstein to death" (233, emphasis mine). In exaggerating Ravelstein's flaws, Chick is, in fact, exposing the excessive intolerance, inflexibility, and incommunicable features of Ravelstein's culture which in comparison seems much odder than any grotesque behaviour, sexual desire, and disease of Ravelstein's.

In aesthetically exposing and modifying the reality of Ravelstein, Chick makes a work of art of the older man's eccentric life. Chick inserts balance into Ravelstein's oddities so that they look uniquely impressive, attractive, and even beautiful. In *Madness and Civilization*, Foucault argues that "it is the world that becomes culpable [...] in relation to the work of art" (288). He explains that "the world is made aware of its guilt,"

meaning that “a work of art opens a void, a moment of silence, a question without an answer, provokes a breach without reconciliation where the world is forced to question itself” (*Madness* 288). Chick and Ravelstein have two distinct personal conceptions of the “odd” and the “beautiful”. Chick sees oddity in the fact that Ravelstein goes so public with people’s private lives, whereas Chick’s private life looks extremely odd from Ravelstein’s point of view (*Ravelstein* 12). Perhaps following a materialistic impulse, Ravelstein sees beauty in luxurious objects, while Chick seeks beauty in the external nature and in human soul. The proportionate blending of exterior with interior conception of beauty is representative of the integration of the aesthetically harmonious with the ethical and inclusive.

Chick’s conception of the beautiful is reminiscent of Foucault’s conception of “aesthetic judgment” and “the art of existence”. Foucault problematises the common judgment of beauty: “Why should the lamp or the house be an art object, but not our life?” (*Genealogy* 350) He subsequently argues that one can make a work of art out of one’s life. Proposing the concept of the aesthetics of existence, Foucault reasons that art cannot be exclusively related to objects; it can also be related to individuals and their lives (*Genealogy* 350). Foucault’s conception of the aesthetics of existence, that is, the creation of one’s life as a work of art, is Nietzschean in origin (Simons 21). He adopts Nietzsche’s “valorisation of creative action rather than Kant’s contemplation of what is beautiful or sublime” (Simons 21). In Bellow’s novel, through his biographical writings, Chick seems to be creating a work of art out of Ravelstein’s eccentric life. In his support of the valorisation of human actions, Foucault turns to Baudelaire’s argument that modern man “is not the man who goes off to discover himself, his secrets and his hidden

truth; he is the man who tries to invent himself" (*Enlightenment* 42). The modern artist, for Baudelaire, is, therefore, the one who "just when the whole world is falling asleep, he begins to work, and he transfigures the world" (*Enlightenment* 41). And this is exactly what Chick's artistic writing is doing in presenting Ravelstein's public and private contradictions. Whereas all of Ravelstein's people blindly idolize his public personality and philosophical ideas, Chick sees his inner weaknesses, pretensions, and grotesque behaviour as well. Therefore, Chick's writing creates a more comprehensive image of Ravelstein.

The artistic value of Chick's creative writing lies in the fact that he endows Ravelstein's grotesque features with liberating values. He distorts Ravelstein's image only to restore order, symmetry, and beauty into it. He brings together Ravelstein's public and private images without merging the two. Unlike most of Ravelstein's students and friends, Chick does not ignore, censor or silence Ravelstein's private weaknesses. Yet, he respects Ravelstein's reservations in choosing the model for his biography and in separating his private from public reality. Rather than blaming Ravelstein for his eccentricities or condemning him for what he is, Chick depicts him as he sees him in his writing, forgives him for his wrongdoings, and does him aesthetic justice. Furthermore, when other people are unable to see and acknowledge the confinements of their social structure, Chick problematises them in his writing, exaggerating their ordinary presence.

Foucault explains that "transfiguration does not entail an annulling of reality, but a difficult interplay between the truth of what is real and the exercise of freedom" (*Enlightenment* 41). For Foucault, as Jon Simons explains, "the relation to oneself as a work of art is a practice of freedom. But whereas Nietzsche practiced freedom primarily

in relation to himself, creating himself as literature, Foucault practised freedom personally and politically” (*Enlightenment* 21). Foucault argues that “for the attitude of modernity, the high value of the present is indissociable from a desperate eagerness to imagine it, to imagine it otherwise than it is, and to transform it not by destroying it but by grasping it in what it is” (*Enlightenment* 41). In his gross sketch of Ravelstein, Chick rescues him from the solidity of the image that his followers have made for him—from their idolized, mythologize, and monologic icon of Ravelstein. Chick’s aesthetic act becomes political in that his grotesque image of Ravelstein exposes the frailties of his society more than it addresses the ugliness of Ravelstein himself.

In order to create the art of existence, one needs to develop certain techniques of the self that help to eliminate eccentricities and develop multi-voicedness in one’s life. The concept of the techniques of the self,¹⁰¹ as Foucault explains, originates in the Greco-Roman mode of the “technology of the self,” which did not conform to any universal rule of subjectification.¹⁰² Aesthetic confession is the creative discourse in which the speakers perform voluntary actions whereby they “not only set themselves rules of conduct, but also seek to transform themselves, to change themselves in their singular being, and to make their life into an *oeuvre* that carries certain aesthetic values and meets certain stylistic criteria” (*History II* 10-11). In his biographical writing, Chick sets up new techniques for dealing with the reality of Ravelstein and improving his society’s norms of

¹⁰¹ Foucault notes that the aesthetics or “the art of existence” and “the technology of the self” “lost some of their importance and autonomy when they were assimilated into the exercise of priestly power in early Christianity, and later, into educative, medical, and psychological types of practices” (*History II* 11).

¹⁰² Foucault argues that “as self-formation became increasingly oriented towards knowledge, it also aligned itself more closely with universal rational rules. The personal choices of aesthetic gave way to the universal obligations of all rational things in late stoicism” (Simons 73).

conduct, an act which progressively leads to the artistic creation of Ravelstein's existence.

Aesthetic activity is an act of politics in that it functions as the strategy for taking care of oneself. Taking care of oneself seems to be working in close connection with taking care of one's public as well as private truths of which secrets seem to have an integral role in aesthetic confession. Simons explains that "arts of the self are non-mimetic, in that they do not imitate true notions of subjectivity. One thus escapes the tutelage of authorities who define one" (Simon 21). Foucault, accordingly, notes that to be modern "is not to accept oneself as one is in flux of the passing moments; it is to take oneself as object of a complex and difficult elaboration" (*Enlightenment* 41). Therefore, in his philosophical accounts, Foucault cannot agree with Jean-Paul Sartre's emphasis on authenticity. Foucault disapproves of the structuralist movement in general because its scientific approach to discovering man eventually developed "a new subjectivity through an operation that reduced the human subject to being an object of knowledge" (*Power* 276). In other words, its rationale "tried to put an end to, or to circumvent, a form of philosophy, of reflection and analysis, centered essentially on an assertion of the primacy of the subject" (*Power* 261). Therefore, Foucault relates Sartre's "theoretical insight to the practice of creativity—and not of authenticity" (*Genealogy* 351). He explains that "Sartre avoids the idea of the self as something which is given to us, but through the moral notion of authenticity, he turns back to the idea that we have to be ourselves—to be truly our true self" (*Genealogy* 351). It is at this point that one can initiate a dialogue between the Bakhtinian notion of "the surplus of the self in relation to the self" and Foucault's respect for personal, private, and incommunicable forms of knowledge. For

both Bakhtin and Foucault, the value of this technique of monologic privacy and silence lies in its creative significance, mainly because the incommunicable truth can create the dialogic tension which is essential for the creative activity. In Bellow's novel, although Chick and Ravelstein are close friends they do not go into extremes in sharing their secrets. They benefit from their hidden truth and creatively manage one another's reality. For instance, it is through techniques of secrecy, pretension, and deception that Ravelstein can convince Charlie to divorce Vela. Charlie likewise acts upon his hidden realities in managing the style of his biographical writing.

Foucault states that "we should not have to refer the creative activity of somebody to the kind of relation he has to himself, but should relate the kind of relation one has to oneself to a creative activity" (*Genealogy* 351). In Bellow's novel, Chick relates to himself and to Ravelstein as subjects for his creative writing. Combining the techniques of aesthetic and political truth telling, Chick benefits from the surplus of his own artistic vision as well as the surplus of Ravelstein's self in relation to himself, inventing political techniques for the representation, development, and transformation of their private as well as the public truth in his writing.

The aesthetic-political conception of the self requires the technical management of one's public and private truth. It creates a balance between the excessive political exposure of reality and its aesthetic modification in art. Foucault advocates the creative values of transgressive [political] art, arguing that it "takes us right up to the void, exposing what is absent" (Simons 71). However, he does not introduce radical transgression as the one and only preferred act of identity formation. In fact, "what is

relevant to Foucauldian aesthetics of the self is not any particular beautiful subject but the process of subjectification as an art” (Simons 76). However,

the freedom of arts of the self consists not in self-creation itself but in the experience of self-formation in the face of all the other forces that fashion us. It is an irony of self-fashioning that despite its resonance of autonomy, it includes being moulded by outside forces and attempting to fashion others. (Simons 76)

Therefore, in contrast to transgressive and monologic modes of truth-telling which exclude and silence the voice of the social and cultural authorities, the aesthetic style of confession includes them. In his aesthetic, auto-biographical writings, Chick respects and includes Ravelstein’s influence as an external force that had encouraged him into the act of writing and thus has, in one sense, fashioned his identity as an author. Also, in writing about Ravelstein, Chick values the productive powers of the confining social forces that have shaped Ravelstein’s life and personality and his conception of the truth and the beautiful. For instance, materialist culture has given shape to Ravelstein’s appreciation of the exterior beautiful. And in his seriocomic presentation of this reality, Chick combines elements of transgressive writing with features of aesthetic confession.

In presenting the grotesque image of Ravelstein, Chick establishes a mode of transgressive relationship with his society and an aesthetic relationship with Ravelstein, an aesthetic-transgressive act of confession which indicates the interrelationship between reality, authority, and ethics. This triadic relationship is also examined by Foucault. In his later works, Foucault turns into the perception of “the aesthetics of the self as a form of transgression” (Simons 71). Simons explains that transgressive, free literature “reaches

the limits of what can be said, without attaining the untrammelled freedom of saying it” (71). Foucault “endorses the formal or conceptual conditions of the Greek and Hellenistic relation of self to self; i.e. the loosening of the connections between the three axes of subjectification: power, truth and ethics” (Simons 72). Therefore, “the possibility of freedom lies in loosening the tight stranglehold of the triadic relation within which we are subjected” (Simons 72). Foucault criticizes the constraints of traditional conceptions of ethics which require obedience to universal codes, and proposes the concept of aesthetic-ethic, which allows for flexibility and inventiveness in modifying certain ethical rules. He argues that the problem with traditional ethics is that

for centuries we have been convinced that between our ethics, our personal ethics, our everyday life, and the great political and social and economic structures, there were analytical relations, and that we couldn't change anything, for instance, in our sex life or our family life, without ruining our economy, our democracy, and so on. I think we have to get rid of this idea of an analytical or necessary link between ethics and other social or economic or political structures. (Genealogy 350)

Bellow's novel shows the loosening of the link between the truth of social and cultural ethics, on the one hand, and personal preferences, particularly manifested in Ravelstein's personal erotic preferences, on the other. In acknowledging and respecting the boundaries of social truth within the social context and at the same time violating it within the realms of Chick-Ravelstein's private interpersonal space as well as in Chick's aesthetic writing, the novel creates a liberal sphere wherein the truth of Ravelstein is publicly addressed.

On the relationship between the production of transgressive truth and freedom, Foucault writes: “Baudelairean modernity is an exercise in which extreme attention to what is real is confronted with the practice of a liberty that simultaneously respects this reality and violates it” (*Enlightenment* 41). However, aesthetic confession is a responsible and ethical act in a particular modernist sense. Simons explains that “for Foucault, a primary feature of the ethos of modernity is the assumption of responsibility for producing oneself on the basis of mature awareness that one cannot discover oneself in scientific and moral truths about subjectivity” (21). As such, aesthetic confession is a mature, intellectual, and value-productive mode of truth-telling which is based on reciprocal respect and understanding and leads to the creation of new versions of reality.

This chapter combines the narrative theory of aesthetic confession introduced by Bakhtin with the social theory of aesthetic discourse proposed by Foucault in order to account for the discourse of aesthetic-political confession in *Ravelstein*. In this introductory discussion, I have illustrated how Bakhtinian concepts of emotive and ethical values in aesthetic confession are endowed with new dimensions when combined with Foucauldian notions of creative and liberal aesthetic acts. The two seemingly incompatible dimensions can illuminate one another provided that the borders of ethics are treated with more flexibility and if the concept of ethics can be viewed within a larger context that includes not only religious, social, and cultural principles but also accounts for liminal value-judgments. The discourse of confession can thereby be presented as having liberating and creative as well as emotive and ethical values. This ideal mode of presenting aesthetic confessional discourse is particularly possible in art and between two subjects who mutually communicate and care for one another. This chapter argues that

Ravelstein initiates a dialogue between aesthetic and political truth, rendering Ravelstein's political philosophy as aesthetic and Chick's writings as techniques of political management of the truth. The novel presents the political reality of Ravelstein within the aesthetic architectonics of Chick's writing, sketching Ravelstein's public and political truth as attended by Chick's aesthetic, personal, illuminating, and constructive value judgments. In order to understand the nature of the relationship between these public and private modes of truth-telling, it will be revealing to compare the essence of the political and the aesthetic both in isolation and in their mutual interplay. In what follows, I will examine Ravelstein's political reality, Chick's aesthetic truth, and the place of humour in the novel in presenting both realities.

6.2. Confession and Political Truth

The reality of Ravelstein's political confessions is rooted in the distinction he makes between thoughtful and passionate truth. Chick notes that in order to understand Ravelstein: "you had to distinguish between what people had been taught to do and what they deeply desired to do" (*Ravelstein* 42). It seems that taught and thoughtful truth is the public manifestation of reality, whereas passionate and desired truth is more a matter of personal and private concern. Ravelstein's evident act of public confession is demonstrated in the publication of his book—the book that changed his life into a prosperous one. Public acts of truth-telling are strongly connected in American culture with economic and therefore political outcomes. Ravelstein "who only last year had been a hundred thousand dollars in debt" (*Ravelstein* 3) is now staying at the Hotel Crillon where Michael Jackson and his entourage are staying (*Ravelstein* 2). Chick humorously

and rather suspiciously relates Ravelstein's wealth with the selling of his ideas: "his intellect had made a millionaire of him. It's no small matter to become rich and famous by saying exactly what you think—to say it in your own words without compromise" (*Ravelstein* 4). On the nature of the book, Chick writes: "the thing had been done quickly but in real earnest: no cheap concessions, no popularizing, no mental monkey business, no *apologetics*, no patrician airs. He had every right to look as he looked now, while the waiter set up our breakfast" (*Ravelstein* 4).

The book and the money it earned Ravelstein stand for the strong bond between the public declaration of the truth, on the one hand, and power and wealth on the other. The value of Ravelstein's book is that he published and sold his most transgressive ideas in the book, the ideas which debunk the insidious status of "liberal education" in the US in contrast to the advancing status of its "technical training". Chick notes:

the popular success of his book drove the academics mad. He exposed the failings of the system in which they were schooled, the shallowness of their historicism, their susceptibility to European nihilism. A summary of his argument was that while you could get an excellent technical training in the U.S., liberal education had shrunk to the vanishing point. (*Ravelstein* 47)

Criticising American materialist impulses, Chick asserts: "that Ravelstein's most serious ideas, put into his book, should have made him a millionaire certainly was funny. It took the genius of capitalism to make a valuable commodity out of thoughts, opinions, *teachings*" (*Ravelstein* 14). In his book, Ravelstein popularizes himself as an advocate of democracy, liberal education, and art. Ravelstein's book asserts that "no real education was possible in American universities except for aeronautical engineers, computerists,

and the like. The universities were excellent in biology and the physical sciences, but the liberal arts were a failure” (47). It is not only Ravelstein’s writing that functions as an act of politics; Chick’s writing is political in that he exercises his power over Ravelstein by revealing his innermost truth.

Chick criticises Ravelstein as being ironically the one who makes excessive use of modern technology—despite his assertive argument against them in his book—in order to be in touch with his students, have access to their private information, and control their lives. Chick explains: “Ravelstein was the man at the private command post of telephones with complex keyboards and flashing lights and state-of-the-art stereo playing Palestrina on the original instruments” (30). Chick humorously connects Ravelstein’s gross actions to his strong intellectual capacity: “but since Ravelstein had a large-scale mental life—and I say this without irony, his interests really were big—he needed to know everything there was to know about his friends and his students, just as a physician pursuing a diagnosis has to see you stripped naked” (115). When he was at home, Ravelstein “spent hours on the telephone with his disciples. After a fashion, he kept their secrets. At least he didn’t quote them by name” (*Ravelstein* 10). Ravelstein loved gossip (8). The possession of his students’ personal information puts Ravelstein in an authoritative position so that he can govern their intimate lives. Chick states: “it was wonderful to be so public about the private” (31). Chick criticizes Ravelstein:

Abe’s ‘people’ in Washington kept his telephone line so busy that I said he must be masterminding a shadow government. He accepted this, smiling as though the oddity were not his but mine. He said, “All these students I’ve trained in the last thirty years still turn to me, and in a way the telephone

makes possible an ongoing seminar in which the policy questions they deal with in day-to-day Washington are aligned with the Plato they studied two or three decades ago, or Locke, or Rousseau, or even Nietzsche. (*Ravelstein* 12)

As such, it seems that political discussions become a means for Ravelstein to take control of his students. In Foucauldian terms, political truth and relations of power are extremely interconnected.

Political confession, as presented in *Ravelstein*, is not so much a discourse about politics as it is the discourse of confession which employs certain techniques of domination. For instance, Bellow's novel shows the ways in which the truth about sex works within capitalist culture and produces wealth as well as positions of power. Ravelstein's relationship with his students, his public management of their private truth, as well as his gradual turn to religion towards the end of his life are among his major acts of political confession in the novel. Like his contemporary American politicians, Ravelstein employs various techniques of amusement in order to attract his student-disciples: from fashions in clothes, to music, philosophy, art and politics. He generously educates his students in Greek philosophy and politics and charges them in return by gaining access to their innermost personal desires. His trade of knowledge for power resembles the ways of his materialist culture. Ravelstein reasons: "I'm not a free commodity or public giveaway, *am I*" (44)! Ravelstein's older pupils now "held positions of importance on national newspapers" (10). Chick states: "most of them were trained as Ravelstein himself had been trained, under Professor Davarr" (*Ravelstein* 10).

The way Ravelstein achieves mastery over his students is very similar to the methods of the political philosophy he has taught them for years. Political philosophy is

preoccupied with “essentially prescriptive or normative questions, reflecting a concern with what *should*, *ought* or must be brought about, rather than what *is*” (Heywood 95). It deals with questions such as “who should rule?” (Heywood 95). Political philosophy cannot be objective in that it is concerned with “justifying certain political viewpoints at the expense of others and with upholding a particular understanding of a concept rather than alternative ones” (Heywood 95). Political philosophy constitutes

the ‘traditional’ approach to politics. It dates back to Ancient Greece and the work of the founding fathers of political analysis, Plato (427-347 BCE) and Aristotle (384-22 BCE). Their ideas resurfaced in the writings of medieval thinkers such as Augustine (354-430) and Aquinas (1224-74). In the early modern period, political philosophy was closely associated with the social contract theories of Hobbes (1588-1679), Locke (1632-1704) and Rousseau (1712-78). (Heywood 95)

We have already noticed that the teachings of Plato, Locke, and Rousseau have been the essence of Ravelstein’s teachings in his classrooms. He also uses the principles of enlightenment and rationality in order to control his students’ lives. As Chick notes: “he was going to direct them to a higher life, full of variety and diversity, governed by rationality—anything but the arid kind” (*Ravelstein* 26).

Ravelstein’s practices of power are comparable to the Foucauldian conception of power in its productive sense: power is capable of producing forms of knowledge. In his power relationships with his students, Ravelstein produces forms of erotic desires for them, simply by categorising them into sex groups. Chick explains:

bit by bit, Ravelstein also got them to confide in him. They told him their stories. They held nothing back. It was amazing how much Ravelstein learned about them. It was partly his passion for gossip that brought in the information he wanted. He not only trained them, he formed them, he distributed them into groups and subgroups and placed them in sexual categories, as he thought appropriate. Some were going to be husbands and fathers, some would be queer—the regular, the irregular, the deep, the entertaining, the gamblers, plungers; the born scholar, those with a gift for philosophy; lovers, plodders, bureaucrats, narcissists, chasers. (*Ravelstein* 25-26)

Among Ravelstein's students, Chick had been no exception. Ravelstein controls Chick's private life by convincing him to divorce Vela. Chick regrets and acknowledges the fact that in divorcing Vela he allowed himself to be oppressed by Ravelstein with fake allegations against Vela's fidelity and provoking her to accuse Chick and Ravelstein of having "a corrupt sex affair" (*Ravelstein* 113). It is amusing to know that Ravelstein has private information even about his doctor's sexual relationship with his wife. Ravelstein has been informed that Dr. Schley's wife and daughters are absolutely in control at home: "Like yourself Chick. You ought to know, you've plenty of experience in that line." I said, "One more case of the son of man having no place to lay his head." (77). By this expression, Chick is humorously alluding to his own homelessness when he divorced Vela. On this conversation, Chick comments: "All I could say was that the doctor had no friend, no Ravelstein, to set him straight" (*Ravelstein* 77). Ravelstein concludes: "the doctor is a tyrant in the clinic and the odd man at home" (77). Dr. Schley's most evident act of tyranny is perhaps his asking Ravelstein not to smoke cigarettes. He is odd at

home, according to Ravelstein, because his wife and daughters were activists, “busy with causes like feminism, environmentalism” (77).

The realm of sexuality, as Gayle Rubin argues, “has its own internal politics, inequities, and modes of oppression” (Spargo 6). In *Foucault and Queer Theory*, Tamsin Spargo argues that

as with other aspects of human behaviour, the concrete institutional forms of sexuality at any given time and place are products of human activity. They are imbued with conflicts of interest and political manoeuvring, both deliberate and incidental. In that sense, sex is always political. (6)

Queer tendencies are regarded as political acts for their digression from the ordinary. Ravelstein’s homosexual relationship with Nikki is accordingly a political act in that it deviates from the norms of his culture. As Spargo argues, “while there does seem to be a broader definition of acceptable sexual behaviour, many of the old prejudices remain” (5). Although Ravelstein speaks publicly about the problems of education in America, in his book he prefers to remain silent about the private truth of his sexuality.

Apart from sex, Chick notes that Ravelstein had devoted his life mainly to two political causes: religion and government (*Ravelstein* 178). Ravelstein considers Jerusalem and Athens as “the twin sources of civilization” (15). Throughout his life, Eros-related gossips and entertainments seem to be the key to Ravelstein’s success in attracting a large group of students. Eros, as Ravelstein notes, “is a compensation granted by Zeus—for possibly political reasons of his own. And the quest for your lost half is hopeless. The sexual embrace gives temporary self-forgetting but the painful knowledge of mutilation is permanent” (24). It is only towards the end of his life that the interest of

Ravelstein, the atheist (*Ravelstein* 45) shifts from Athens to Jerusalem, from Eros to religion. Chick writes:

I could see that he was following a trail of Jewish ideas or Jewish essence. It was unusual for him these days, in any conversation, to mention even Plato or Thucydides. He was full of Scripture now. He talked about religion and the difficult project of being man in the fullest sense, of becoming man and nothing but man. (*Ravelstein* 178)

Ravelstein returns to his Jewish origins and their historical connection to politics. Chick states: “the war made it clear that almost everybody agreed that the Jews had no right to live” (*Ravelstein* 178). Chick explains that “such a volume of hatred and denial of the right to live has never been heard or felt, and the will that willed their death was confirmed and justified by a vast collective agreement that the world must be improved by their disappearance and their extinction” (*Ravelstein* 179). Allan Chavkin explains that Chick as the narrator in Bellow’s novel,

is preoccupied with coming to terms with a world in which the great-souled man, such as Ravelstein, is confronted with his nemesis, nihilistic evil. In the twentieth century, nihilism is poignantly evident in virulent anti-Semitism, which culminates in the Holocaust and the murder of millions of people. (Chavkin 297)

Bellow’s novel therefore, as Chavkin argues, reflects the nihilism as well as the anti-Semitism of the time, especially in the presentation of Lloyd George’s repugnant anti-Semitic behaviour towards one of the French ministers, a Jew named Klotz (Chavkin 297). Chick’s ex-wife, Vela, her mother, and their family friend, Grielescu, are among

the Jew-haters (Chavkin 298-299). According to the teachings of Ravelstein's professor, Davarr, the Jews "were historically witnesses to the absence of redemption" (*Ravelstein* 179). *Ravelstein* is replete with Jewish themes such as victimization, extinction, and craving for salvation. Michael Davis explains that "Ravelstein reflects on Judaism because to be a Jew at the end of the twentieth century is to have no choice but to live without the illusions engaged with one's inclinations—to acknowledge the ugly" (28). Therefore, Ravelstein asks Chick to write his biography, possibly in the hope of being justified, aestheticized, and redeemed both in public and in private terms. Religion and sex have long provided the boring subject matter for confessional discourse so that individuals are strictly normalised and conform to the rules. In his deviation from the norms of sex, however, Ravelstein treats the traditional rules of sex with more flexibility and adventure. In exposing the eccentric political reality of Judaism and society's limitations in its treatment of sexual matters, Chick fashions a more comprehensive and therefore harmonious reality for Ravelstein. Unlike *Humboldt's Gift*, which criticizes Humboldt's excessive inwardness and his boring, monophonic life style, Bellow's final novel problematizes Ravelstein's excessive engagement with external realities. In questioning the rigidity of borders and in harmoniously presenting such questions, *Ravelstein* creates a balance between political and aesthetic truth.

6. 3. Confession and Aesthetic Truth

"The soul of another is a dark forest" (*Ravelstein* 88).

Chick's aesthetic confessional writing develops Ravelstein's secrets and inner contradictions into a work of art. In doing this, Chick combines Ravelstein's public and

private truth in his writings. Davis explains that “Ravelstein’s love of fine things is not really separable from his longing to fashion his soul into a fine thing” (Davis 27). The path that Chick follows in his writing is a combination of the style of Thomas Macaulay’s essay on Boswell’s *Johnson*, that he himself prefers, and the model of Keynes’¹⁰³ essays on his post-war experience that Ravelstein advises him to follow. Chick was made familiar with Macaulay in one of his boring high school classes with his then dull teacher, Mr. Morford. Chick reports to Ravelstein: “Johnson, despite his scrofula, his raggedness, his dropsy, had his friendships, wrote his books just as Morford met his classes, listened to us as we recited from memory the lines ‘how weary, stale, flat and unprofitable seem to me all the uses of this world’”(7). However, Chick explains:

reading it [Macaulay’s account of Johnson] put me into a purple fever. Macaulay exhilarated me with *his* version of the *Life*, with the “anfractuosity” of Johnson’s mind. I have since read many sober criticism of Macaulay’s Victorian excess. But I have never been cured—I never wanted to be cured of my weakness for Macaulay. (*Ravelstein* 6)

The artistic renovation of an unexciting reality into a beautiful one is the integral feature of Macaulay’s essay that was imperative to Chick’s writing. However, Ravelstein seems to be more amused by Keynes’ method, or better say, his private appeal—his political and adventurous sexual life.

Despite Keynes’ “serious errors” in exaggerating facts in his writings, Ravelstein was impressed by his “great many personal attractions” (*Ravelstein* 7). Keynes’ “serious

¹⁰³ J.M. Keynes was the powerful economist-statesman famous for *The Economic Consequences of the Peace*. He was a friend of the Bloomsbury group to whom he reported, “the reparations debate between the defeated Germans and the Allied leaders—Clemenceau, Lloyd George, and the Americans (*Ravelstein* 7).”

errors,” according to Ravelstein, were that he has “exaggerated the harshness of the Allies and played into the hands of the German generals and eventually the Nazis” (7). Among Keynes’ charms was that he was “educated at Eton and Cambridge, he was polished socially and culturally partly by the Bloomsbury group. The Great Politics of his day had developed and perfected him” (*Ravelstein* 7-8). In exactly the same way, Ravelstein’s taste for beauty and fine living, as well as his conception of truth, confession and justice, was formed by his capitalist culture. More important was the fact that “in his [Keynes’] personal life he considered himself a Uranian—a British euphemism for homosexual” (8). Ravelstein reminds Chick of the myth of Uranus: “Uranus had fathered Aphrodite but that she had had no mother. She was conceived by the sea foam” (*Ravelstein* 8). Chick believes that Ravelstein mentions these stories not because Chick was ignorant of them but because Ravelstein “judged that I needed at a given moment to have my thoughts directed toward them” (8). Ravelstein asks Chick to write about his naked truth—the truth emerging from confinement and concealment into the open space, a movement from secrecy to public affirmation. Chick remembers: “Ravelstein credited me with a kind of simpleminded seriousness about truth. He said: ‘You don’t lie to yourself, Chick. You may put off acknowledgment for a very long time but in the end you do own up. It’s not a common virtue”’ (*Ravelstein* 63). In reminding Chick of the myth of the Uranus, it seems that Ravelstein is asking him to bring his private truth into public’s attention and to stand emotionally on his side and support him. In addition, Keynes “was writing esoterically for his Bloomsbury intimates, not for the newspaper-reading mass” (*Ravelstein* 79). Keynes’ writing was therefore restricted to the demands and desires of the Bloomsbury group. By extension, Ravelstein is implying that Chick

needs to please Ravelstein in his writing, an implication which contradicts his original requirement that Chick needs to present his naked truth.

The Chick-Ravelstein confessional relationship is reciprocal. Ravelstein supervises Chick's writing. He initially asks Chick to write a sample, short description of Keynes. Chick reports: "Ravelstein was pleased with what I had done but not quite satisfied as yet. He thought I had a rhetorical problem. I said that too much emphasis on the literal facts narrowed the wider interest of the enterprise" (*Ravelstein* 6). However, despite Ravelstein's insistence on following Keynes' model, Chick seems to be also considering Macaulay's style in his depiction of Ravelstein. James Atlas further confirms that "*Ravelstein* is a biographical portrait in the manner of Macaulay's essay on Boswell's Johnson" (594). As Atlas notes, "what makes *Ravelstein* such a satisfying work of biographical portraiture is the balance it strikes between the particular characteristics that Johnson considered essential to life-writing and the representative traits that make Ravelstein a subject worthy of sustained attention" (595). Chick coordinates Ravelstein's factual information with his own personal impressions of him so that he can transform his dull reality into an attractive one. In choosing their biographical models, it seems that whereas Chick is more concerned about the style of writing, Ravelstein is more apprehensive of the content of the biography. Employing humour in his writing, Chick renders Ravelstein's contradictions and the dullness of his character intriguing. His combined biographical methodology in presenting the public and the private truth of Ravelstein is based on the special relationship that he establishes between himself and Ravelstein in his writing.

6.4. Aesthetic Relationships, Judgment, and Truth

The Chick-Ravelstein aesthetic distance is the key to Chick's biographical writings. In *Humboldt's Gift* the function of art is to bring two spatially and temporally distanced friends together, whereas in *Ravelstein*, art functions in order to create aesthetic distance between Chick and Ravelstein. In distancing himself from Ravelstein, Chick creates the interpersonal space necessary to avoid unfair eccentric responses such as total assimilation to, or complete rejection of, Ravelstein. Chick's primary step in evaluating Ravelstein is to acknowledge the complexity of their relationships: "A certain amount of documentation might be offered at this point to show what I was to Ravelstein and Ravelstein to me" (*Ravelstein* 94). Chick considers: "from my side, I was free to confess to Ravelstein what I couldn't tell anyone else, to describe my weaknesses, my corrupt shameful secrets, and the cover-ups that drain your strength" (*Ravelstein* 95). Despite their close friendship, Chick keeps his distance from Ravelstein in writing: "But the fact that we were laughing together did not mean that we were laughing for the same reason" (*Ravelstein* 14), and that "I was too old to become Ravelstein's disciple" (*Ravelstein* 15). Chick also keeps his distance from Ravelstein's admirers—from the White House that took him seriously, Mrs. Thatcher who was his weekend hostess, the President who never neglected him, and from the most popular literary movements of Bloomsbury and the British who informed Ravelstein's writings (*Ravelstein* 15, 11). Distancing himself from Ravelstein, Chick closely observes: "It wouldn't be too much to say that Ravelstein was genuinely important. By contrast, I was good enough, of my sort. But it was far from important sort" (*Ravelstein* 75-76). In observing the aesthetic distance, Chick benefits from a wider perspective within which to review Ravelstein's reality.

In order to elaborate further the nature of their intersubjective relationship, I need to refer to the Bakhtinian conception of “active empathy”. “Active empathy” is a particular mode of aesthetic relationship comparable to that which exists between the author and hero in the aesthetic activity, wherein the author completes the emotional experience as well as the gaps in the hero’s information. An aesthetic relationship, therefore, has both emotive and informative values. Instead of the passive assimilation of the author into the hero’s consciousness, Bakhtin explains that in aesthetic activity there exists “an active approach to another’s consciousness” (Wyman 415). Bakhtin introduces the values of this active approach by questioning: “In what way would it enrich the event [of being] if I merged with the other, and instead of two there would be only one?” (*Author and Hero* 87)

Bakhtin’s concept of ‘active empathy’ is “an alternative to the purely empathic, duplicating understanding, resulting from a passive merging with another’s psyche” (Wyman 415). There are duplicating characters in Bellow’s novels who passively assimilate to a political ideology, a cultural dominant, or a religious belief. We remember Comrade Joe in *Dangling Man*, who is so immersed in communist ideology that he is unable to greet a friend. Amos, Joseph’s brother in the same novel, is so intensely attached to the war ideology that he cannot think otherwise. In *Herzog*, Madeline so blindly follows the religious fashions of her time that she is ready to sacrifice her family life in order to follow that icon. In contrast to these extremely unfeeling and assimilative selves, there are Bellow’s heroes who actively feel for their friends, contemplate them, and responsively participate in their sufferings in order to understand their innermost realities. Charlie Citrine in *Humboldt’s Gift* and Chick in *Ravelstein* mourn and continue

to communicate with Ravelstein and Humboldt even long after their death. Chick writes: “many people want to be rid of the dead. I, on the contrary, have a way of hanging on to them” (*Ravelstein* 187).

Chick’s new authorial position endows him with what Bakhtin calls “the surplus of vision”. In Bakhtin’s view, the author, as the external observer, has the “surplus of vision;” therefore, he can see what the hero is unable to see about himself. In “Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity”, Bakhtin considers a compassionate observer’s reaction to another person’s suffering (Wyman 419). He writes: “the person suffering does not experience the fullness of his own outward expressedness in being,” reasoning that “he does not see the agonizing tensions of his own muscles, does not see the entire, plastically consummated posture of his own body” (*Author and Hero* 25). Bakhtin privileges the other’s position as being the only person who can aesthetically consummate the individual.

Even though Bakhtin respects the significance of one’s inner and private reality and explains that “in a human being there is always something that only he himself can reveal” (*Hero* 58). Alina Wyman argues that the “utilitarian approach to self-knowledge leads Bakhtin to a neglect and, at times, to a downright denial of the self’s ultimate interior” (Wyman 420). In introducing the concept of “the surplus of vision,” Wyman argues, Bakhtin has not fully considered the exclusive possession of the ‘ineffable’ knowledge by the self in relation to the self—the fact already acknowledged by Bakhtin’s master, Max Scheler. Therefore, in Wyman’s words, “Bakhtin’s analysis is especially flawed by the neglect of the concealed part of the other’s psyche, the region of absolute privacy” (Wyman 420). This “surplus of the self in relation to the self” has creative

values in that it “constitutes a surplus of sorts, although it lacks the visual, ‘plastic’ qualities characteristic of the other’s surplus (Wyman 420). Wyman argues that “the introduction of this additional concept into Bakhtin’s system, ‘the surplus of the self in relation to the self,’ guarantees a rightful place for the notion of interiority in the theory of active empathy” (422). Wyman explains that this part of the self is largely monological and “inevitably remains concealed from the dialogical partner” (422). It is the concealed truth that has potentially creative values for communication in Bellow’s novel.

Despite their claims that they [Chick and Ravelstein] have very little to hide (111, 160), Chick admits that they respect their own privacy. Chick confesses: “it was a standing premise between us that there was to be nothing hidden or too shameful to confess, and there was nothing I couldn’t tell Ravelstein” (171). Yet, Ravelstein knows that Chick was holding something back. He says to Chick: “You know, Chick, you sometimes say there’s nothing you can’t tell me. But you falsified the image of your ex-wife. You’ll say that it was done for the sake of marriage but what kind of morality is *that?*” (176) Moreover, there are things that Chick regrets having discussed with Ravelstein. For instance, Chick regrets having shared his preferred biographical model with him: “why did I invite him to see the Morford I remembered?” (7). It seems as if in describing Morford to Ravelstein, Chick has revealed, by mistake, an unspoken truth about Ravelstein. Chick learns to appreciate the values of silence and even admits his own: “but Ravelstein was unusually free from such [rank] preoccupations and grievances. And this is not the place for them. I may return to this subject later. I probably won’t” (*Ravelstein* 37).

The value of the monological, silenced truth is that, as Wyman argues, it paradoxically “creates the dialogical tension necessary for a productive interaction, for, by positing the ultimate limit of projection into another consciousness, it becomes the guarantor of the non-coincidence of selves, so crucial for Bakhtinian *vzhivanie*” (422, emphasis mine). Wyman concludes:

thus the surplus of the self both limits the extent of the dialogical interaction and ensures its productivity. This insight points to a larger thesis, often neglected by Bakhtinian scholars, namely, that monologue does play a positive, productive role in ensuring the well-being of dialogue as its value-bestowing other. (422)

In *Humboldt's Gift*, as in *Ravelstein*, the intersubjective relationships between Charlie-Humboldt and Chick-Ravelstein are not one-sided. Humboldt and Ravelstein act based on their own “surplus of the self in relation to the self”. In other words, they act according to their silences and their secrets. Throughout his life, Humboldt acts upon Charlie by keeping his confessions of love and apology to himself. Ravelstein, likewise, has his own incommunicable secrets, hypocrisies, and pretence. Chick notes: “But he himself had very important secrets to keep, information of a private, dangerous nature which only a few could be trusted with” (*Ravelstein* 59). Evidently this form of chosen silence is different from the imposed silences in authoritative contexts. In fact, this form of internal silence can never be eliminated by an external authority.

Acting upon their silences, both author and hero in Bellow's novel are mutually active in the process of aesthetic confession. While Ravelstein employs politics as his technique to act upon Chick, Chick makes use of his aesthetic writing as a political strategy to portray Ravelstein as he [Chick] sees him, not as Ravelstein would like to be

depicted. Ravelstein asks Chick to be sincere in his sketch of him: “I like to hear you when you’re drunk, Chick, talking and sketching freestyle” (136). In writing Ravelstein’s biography, Chick is “bound as an honest observer to make plain how Ravelstein operated” (83). Ravelstein’s truth, as Chick puts it, is that “if he cared about you it was in his perspective that he would sketch you” (83). The act of sketching a personality is associated with acts of framing and imposing limits on the individual’s character. However, as Chick shows his awareness of the consequences of an aesthetic sketch, he learns to avoid its limiting side-effects.

The novel shows a strong bond between contemplation, active empathy, and creating new ways to liberal confession. Even though Chick has good reasons to judge Ravelstein impulsively—just as Humboldt and Charlie do in *Humboldt’s Gift*—Chick considers a “piecemeal” [gradual and unsystematic] approach towards him (16, 37). In his innovative approach, Chick brings together the “relatively unstructured series of loosely related impressions” in his sketch of Ravelstein (Davis 27). Davis states that “Ravelstein is “a man of very specific pieces . . . fine things, friends, and wisdom” (Davis 27). The significance of Chick’s piecemeal approach is in his preference of the aesthetic rather than harsh and hasty evaluations. Chick sounds convincing when he explains that “of course my needs were different from Ravelstein’s. In my trade you have to make more allowances, taking all sorts of ambiguities into account—to avoid hard-edged judgments” (*Ravelstein* 43). Chick explains that “all this refraining may resemble naiveté. But it isn’t quite that. In art you become familiar with due process. You can’t simply write people off or send them to hell” (*Ravelstein* 43). Chick’s patience and his intellectual open-mindedness in evaluating Ravelstein are among the sources of his

inventiveness in confessing the truth. Chick's biographical writings can be regarded as creative confessions in that they propose new ways to liberate himself and Ravelstein from the established social and personal value judgments by learning how to manage their public and private truths.

6.5. Aesthetic Confession, Social Boundaries, and Freedom

Aesthetic confession, in Bellow's novel, works with flexible management of confessional boundaries and an innovative conception of liberal personalities. Chick's appropriate handling of Ravelstein's private reality is central to his success in liberating Ravelstein from the consolidated public opinion of him. Chick presents Ravelstein's irregular personal truth as an essential feature in creating polyphony in his eccentric life. He renders the oddities of Ravelstein's sexual life as his personal norm, despite his anticipation of the public controversy over it. Furthermore, Chick justifies Ravelstein's deceptive contradictions with regard to his sex life, especially his preference to be silent about it in public or to modify its reality. What Chick shows is that there are times when, depending on the nature of contextual intersubjective relationships, secrecy, pretence, and contradiction are appropriate confessional responses. If Ravelstein keeps Chick in the dark it is mostly because he anticipates that Chick might address his secrets publicly in his writing. On the other hand, from Chick's point of view, what slows down or blocks the flow of his writing is his limited or, at times, barred access to the inner truth of Ravelstein.

Techniques of censorship find significance on the level of Bellow's authorial position. As Ravelstein represents Bellow's friend Allan Bloom, the depiction of

Bloom's most silenced reality, his homosexual life, and his tragic death caused by AIDS, has been very controversial among Bellow critics. In dealing with the subject of Ravelstein's death, Chick's narrative technique, as Atlas describes, is his "Proust and Papuans" strategy (597). Atlas notes that "speaking by phone to a writer from *The New York Times*, he [Bellow] confirmed as fact a disclosure in the novel: Bloom had died of AIDS. 'You didn't hear that from me,' he had said a few years before, when asked to confirm the cause of Bloom's death" (Atlas 596). Atlas notes that in his finished book, Bellow has modified the reality of H.I.V in his novel: "Bellow has excised the words 'from H.I.V' from the phrase 'And not only his death from H.I.V but a good many other deaths as well.' The sentence 'Abe was taking the common drug prescribed for AIDS' had become 'Abe was taking the common drugs for his condition'" (Atlas 598).

There are critics of Bellow such as Norah Vincent who condemn Bloom for his hypocrisy in "being private about being gay and having AIDS;" they believe that Bellow has presented an ugly image of Bloom in his novel. On the other hand, there are critics such as Larry Kramer who argue that Bellow has insulted homosexuals by refusing to describe in detail the Nikki-Ravelstein intimate relationship, especially the significance of Nikki's caring role in the recovery of Ravelstein in his deathbed. Kramer compares Nikki's absence in this respect to Rosamund's full presence in supporting Chick in the hospital. Bellow's reservation in confessing the real cause of Bloom's death is understandable, particularly when one considers the role of the media. Bloom's death certificate attributed the immediate cause to "gastrointestinal bleed" and "duodenal ulcer," which are two complications of HIV (Atlas 597). Atlas explains that "AIDS is rarely given as the official cause of death" (597). In presenting AIDS as the real cause of

Ravelstein's death, Bellow is revealing the unreasonable fixities of his contemporary in defining restrictions and taboos more than the irregular behaviour of Ravelstein-Bloom. In fact, in disclosing the real cause of Ravelstein's death, Chick is giving voice to the unsayable and the silenced, rendering a taboo as a mentionable reality.

The ways in which Chick and Ravelstein manage their truth and the power relationships help them develop into more dialogic individuals. Chick sets himself free from confessional boundaries not so much by ignoring Ravelstein's and his own hidden truth as by acknowledging them and respecting their decision in keeping them private. Unlike the protagonists in Bellow's early novels, Chick and Ravelstein do not resist or avoid their personal and social boundaries, and unlike Charlie and Humboldt they do not intend to cross over them entirely. Alternatively, Chick and Ravelstein act upon the surplus of their secrets whereby they develop into personalities that include and respect both monologic and polyphonic identities. They are dialogic individuals, because they are capable of being both monologic and polyphonic whenever they want to. In polyphonic terms, Chick gives voice to Ravelstein's political side and Ravelstein empowers Chick's aesthetic activities. They remain monologic, however, in keeping their own private truths to themselves. Respecting the surplus of the self and the other in their communication, Chick and Ravelstein selectively inform one another of their inner reality and creatively imagine what the other person's private truth might be.

As dialogic personalities, Chick and Ravelstein successfully initiate a dialogue between their public-political truth and private-aesthetic reality: in his writings, Chick rescues Ravelstein from the borders of his publicly idolized self-image and Ravelstein sets Chick free from his exclusively private space—from his "pernicious habits"

(*Ravelstein* 9). Chick writes: “This morning he [Ravelstein] was again urging me to go more public, to get away from the private life, to take an interest in ‘public life, in politics,’ to use his own words. He wanted me to try my hand at biography, and I had agreed to do it” (*Ravelstein* 5). Chick explains:

he thought I was stuck in privacy and should be restored to community. ‘Too many years of inwardness!’ he used to say. I badly needed to be in touch with politics—not local or machine politics, nor even national politics, but politics as Aristotle or Plato understood the term, rooted in our nature. You can’t turn your back on your nature. (9)

What Ravelstein indicates is that Chick needs to develop techniques for himself so that he can communicate naturally with other ordinary human beings.

Chick’s aesthetic confessions for Ravelstein function according to the rules of Foucauldian power-and-knowledge relationships. Chick argues that if people “know your secrets they have increased power over you” (*Ravelstein* 115). And Chick knows most of Ravelstein’s secrets. Following Ravelstein’s technique in emancipating his students’ secrets, Chick publicises Ravelstein’s secrets in his biography. Chick has Ravelstein’s permission to reveal his truth: “you are much too soft on people, Chick, and it’s not entirely innocent, either” (*Ravelstein* 133). Chick justifies his sincerity, reasoning that: “my feeling was that you couldn’t be known thoroughly unless you found a way to communicate certain ‘incommunicables’—your private metaphysics” (*Ravelstein* 95).

In his aesthetic-political confessions, Chick presents a critical view of Ravelstein. His confessions sound political, mainly because he acknowledges Ravelstein’s inner oddities: Ravelstein’s manipulation of his students, his love of gossip, queer tendencies,

and tragic death followed by AIDS. In yet a different act of politics, Chick tries to emancipate himself from the orders of Ravelstein. Even if in the very act of writing Ravelstein's biography, Chick is following one of Ravelstein's primary orders: he disobeys him in choosing his own style. Chick's combined aesthetic and political mode of writing allows for the emergence of a narrative for truth-telling which is creative, liberating, and ethical wherein Chick liberates both himself and Ravelstein from arbitrary, social, and personal confinements.

In writing about Ravelstein, Chick confesses his own feelings of guilt, mainly for having allowed himself to be influenced by Ravelstein in divorcing Vela. The dialogic repetitions of the words "innocent" and "naïve" have negative effect in Chick's description of himself. He notes: "A man who knew me well said that I was more *innocent* than any adult had the right to be. As if I had chosen to be *naïve*. Besides, even extremely *naïve* people know their own interests" (*Ravelstein* 16, emphasis mine). At this point, in writing Ravelstein's biography, Chick seems to be revenging himself for his [Ravelstein's] one-sided evaluations on Vela. Chick understands that Ravelstein's numerous visits to Chick and Vela at Hampshire at the time were not so much meant to be an indication of his appreciating the natural beauty of the place, as he pretends to, as they were to convince Chick to divorce Vela—probably because she had refused to be an obedient student to Ravelstein. In support of his claim, Chick argues that Ravelstein was not an admirer of natural beauty or human soul at all. What he earnestly praised was the beauty of luxurious objects. Chick declares: "to be perfectly frank, I was tired of hearing about his unsatisfactory salary, his Byzantine borrowing habits, and the deals and arrangements he made putting his treasures in hock, his Jenson teapot or his Quimper

antique plates” (20). Not only in his writing but also in his speech, Chick speaks the truth to Ravelstein:

How long can you expect me to put up with this boring dispute, this boring teapot, and all your other boring luxury articles? Look Abe, if you’re living beyond your means, a struggling aristocrat victimized by his need for beautiful objects, why don’t you increase those means? (20)

Although he blames Ravelstein, Chick confesses his own sense of guilt and admits his responsibility, regret, and remorse, explaining:

You begin, in accordance with an unformulated agreement, to accept the terms, invariably falsified, on which others present themselves. You deaden your critical powers. You stifle your shrewdness. Before you knew it you are paying a humongous divorce settlement to a woman who had more than once declared that she was an *innocent* who had no understanding of money matters. (16, emphasis mine)

However, Chick’s view of Ravelstein is not purely critical and one-sided, mainly because the close relationship that exists between them enables Chick to understand Ravelstein and present him with care, respect, and dignity. Chick introduces Ravelstein as a popular artist, idolized, and praised not only by his numerous disciples but also by his materialist culture. Chick presents Ravelstein as a conversationalist (*Ravelstein* 21), the Jewish comedian who “thought better of you for stepping out of line” (23). He liked “minor crimes and misdemeanours” (23). In fact, Chick admires Ravelstein for his unconventional way of life. From Chick’s aesthetic standpoint, Ravelstein’s power has positive effects in providing shape and meaning to Chick’s life. Ravelstein’s positive

employment of his power position is further illuminated by consideration of the Foucauldian conception of constructive power relationships. Power can produce forms of knowledge and Ravelstein's practices of power produce not only form but also significance for his students' life. Furthermore, Chick asserts that the power of Ravelstein has been productive for his writing:

I was aware of the influence of Ravelstein when I made such a sketch. It may as well be admitted that he often figured in daily events. This was because of the power of his personality. It was also because his life had more inner structure than mine, and I had become dependent on his power of ordering experience—it may be that he also wanted to persist. (*Ravelstein* 187)

Ravelstein's persistence in exercising his power motivates Chick to reflect on his character. Chick makes polemic confessions for himself and for Ravelstein: "was it others who were forever putting me in that [cautionary] position, or was I at bottom exactly like that" (*Ravelstein* 68)? It is ironically Ravelstein's power that enables Chick to think otherwise. Therefore, Ravelstein is Chick's source of dependence as well as independence.

Chick practises his autonomy in marrying Rosamund against the will of Ravelstein. Chick asserts: "He [Ravelstein] didn't know it, but I had been, for once, ahead of him. I wasn't going to have Ravelstein vet Rosamund for me. I couldn't let him arrange my marriage as he did for his students" (*Ravelstein* 89). Chick explains that "if he lacked all feeling for you, he didn't give a damn what you did. But if you were one of his friends it was a bad idea, he thought, for you to take things into your own hands. It troubled him greatly to be kept in the dark on any matters by his friends—especially by

those he saw daily” (*Ravelstein* 89-90). In marrying Rosamund, Chick acts according to Ravelstein’s techniques of secrecy. He plays according to the Foucauldian rules of truth and power relationship whereby he proves his independence from Ravelstein. In addition, he creates a new relationship between himself and Ravelstein in which Ravelstein accepts his choice and continues to communicate with him as his close friend.

Chick and Ravelstein act upon one another according to the inaccessibility of their truth to the other person. The combination of Bakhtinian concepts of surplus of truth with Foucauldian truth-and-power relationships provides the ground for the emergence of what both Bakhtin and Foucault advocate as the creative mode of truth-telling. Chick and Ravelstein’s value-judgments are so intensely accompanied by their mutual love for one another that it allows not only for the manipulation and modification of their reality but also for their mutual respect and acceptance. Chick illustrates the triadic features of their relationships with his moving sense of humour and caring ironical intonation.

6.6. Confession and Humour

“Zarathustra: ‘Power stands on crooked legs’” (*Dean* 119). Ravelstein’s eccentricities are aesthetically presented, problematized, and treated with humour within the aesthetic architectonics of Chick’s writing. Davis argues that Bellow’s novel presents simultaneously the comic and the tragic side of Ravelstein. At times it seems that Chick is deconstructing the high position of Ravelstein: “but if you were in his company you had to go back to the *Symposium* repeatedly. To be human was to be severed, mutilated” (*Ravelstein* 24). On the other hand, there are instances in which humour is employed in order to justify Ravelstein’s grotesque actions. In this way, the

novel introduces humour as a political technique of governance through the employment of narrative devices such as dialogic relationships and grotesque presentations.

Chick employs metonymic dialogic relationships in presenting Ravelstein as one of the “mankind benefactors” that he debunks. Using the metonymic reference, *mankind’s benefactors* (1, emphasis mine), Chick compares Ravelstein to politicians such as Lincoln, the intellectuals such as those in the Bloomsbury group, and celebrities such as Michael Jackson who govern the public by entertaining them. The novel opens with: “Odd that *mankind’s benefactors* should be amusing people. In America at least this is often the case. Anyone who wants to govern the country has to entertain it” (*Ravelstein* 1, emphasis mine). Ravelstein believes that “writers are supposed to make you laugh and cry. That’s what *mankind* is looking for” (13, emphasis mine). In his piecemeal approach towards Ravelstein, Chick introduces erotic gossip, movie nights, pizza parties, as well as his distinct taste in fashion and music as Ravelstein’s personal techniques of entertainment.

The thematic dialogic reference of “model-copying” links Ravelstein to Michael Jackson, Lincoln, and the Scope’s monkey trial. Lincoln has been referred to, by his secretary, as an *ape* (1, emphasis mine); Ravelstein, Chick ironically claims, has used “no mental *monkey* business” (4, emphasis mine); and Michael Jackson is described as “this little glamour *monkey*” (4, emphasis mine). Chick’s writing gradually clarifies that his employment of the word “amusement” is so negatively charged that it connotes confession-related themes such as one-sided evaluations, guilt, injustice, cruelty, and sin.

Chick also employs thematic dialogic relationships in depicting the in-depth truth of Ravelstein’s partial feeling for Keynes, especially his relationship to the Bloomsbury

group. Ravelstein shows respect for Keynes in referring to his sexual preferences as “Uranian” (*Ravelstein* 8), the British euphemism for “homosexual”. On the other hand, he intends to express his contempt for the Bloomsbury group in his choice of word in describing them. Chick explains that “Ravelstein didn’t think well of the Bloomsbury intellectuals. He disliked their high camp, he disapproved of their *queer* antics and what he called ‘*faggot* behaviour’” (8, emphasis mine). However, he considers himself “not a *gay*” but “to use a term from the past, an *invert*” (160, emphasis mine). The word “invert” also signifies Ravelstein’s distinctiveness in life style in various other ways, including his unusual treatment of his students and also his distinguished ideas in his book.

Using similar thematic dialogic relationships, Chick depicts Ravelstein’s house as his place of injustice. Chick humorously and almost bitterly describes Ravelstein’s “large, handsome apartment”: “it wouldn’t be right to describe it as a *sanctuary*. Abe was in no sense a fugitive” (*Ravelstein* 46, emphasis mine). Later on, comparing his own place to Ravelstein’s monastic-luxurious apartment, Chick says that his [Chick’s] rooms weren’t splendid and that he was just looking for shelter after his divorce: “I was bombed out—evicted after twelve years of marriage from what had been my uptown home, and I was lucky to find *sanctuary* in one of the concrete pill-boxes down the way from Ravelstein” (63, emphasis mine). At this point, referring to “the wrought-iron Midwestern gothic gate and his uniformed doorman” (63), Chick associates Ravelstein’s house with iron gates. Later on, Chick reiterates the description of the “wrought-iron gates” (81) when he and Rosamund were waiting for Ravelstein’s ambulance to bring him home: “the courtyard was something like a decompressing chamber” (81). Chick notes: “You wanted some protection from the brute facts. To be fully aware of both

sanctuary and slum, you had to be a Ravelstein” (*Ravelstein* 81-82, emphasis mine). It seems that Ravelstein’s place personifies the contradictions in his character and the multidimensional nature of his identity. For Chick, Ravelstein, like his house, is both a place of refuge as well as threat. It is through presenting such delicate dialogic relationships that Chick uncovers the sad, earnest truth about Ravelstein and makes confessions for him.

Chick also employs humour as a confessional narrative device in presenting grotesque images of Ravelstein. As with Charlie in *Humboldt’s Gift*, Chick employs the grotesque for its double functions: to highlight, respectively, Humboldt and Ravelstein’s gross sincerity as well as their monstrous actions. However, Chick shows that Ravelstein is unforgettable for his great soul. Chick makes numerous reference to Ravelstein’s bald head, humorously emphasizing the fact that “somehow his singular, total, almost geological baldness implied that there was nothing hidden about him” (173). To Chick, “Ravelstein, with his bald powerful head, was at ease with large statements, big issues, and famous men, with decades, eras, centuries” (11). There are instances in which Chick employs grotesque elements in describing Ravelstein in order to highlight his weaknesses, especially his domineering attitude towards his students. Ravelstein was one of those large men—large, not stout—whose hands shake when there are small chores to perform. The cause was not weakness but a tremendous eager energy that shook him when it was discharged” (*Ravelstein* 3). Chick writes: “he was very tall. He was not particularly graceful [...] His legs were unusually long, not shapely” (*Ravelstein* 4). Like Chick in his description of Humboldt, Charlie presents Ravelstein as a larger-than-life character. Chick sees Ravelstein “as big as any of the [Michael Jackson’s] bodyguards—

even bigger but certainly not so strong” (28). Chick declares that Ravelstein “was a bigger man than me [Chick]. He was able to make a striking statement. Because of his larger size, he could wear clothes with more dramatic effect” (*Ravelstein* 30).

Chick contrasts himself with Ravelstein in terms of their eating habits: “I was a neater eater. Ravelstein when he was feeding and speaking made you feel that something biological was going on, that he was stoking his system and nourishing his ideas” (*Ravelstein* 5). He later describes Ravelstein’s unpleasant eating habits:

Faculty wives knew that when Ravelstein came to dinner they would face a big cleaning job afterwards—the spilling, splashing, crumbling, the nastiness of his napkin after he had used it; the pieces of cooked meat scattered under the table, the wine sprayed out when he laughed at a wisecrack; courses rejected after one bite and pawed to the floor. An experienced hostess would have spread newspapers under his chair. He wouldn’t have minded [...] Objecting to Abe’s table manners would be a confession of pettiness. (37-38)

What Chick here notes about Ravelstein’s eating habits ironically applies to his governance of information as well: “Abe *knew*— he knew what to bring to full consciousness and what to brush aside” (*Ravelstein* 38). On Ravelstein’s grotesque drinking habits, Chick comments: “Ravelstein’s big, unskilful hand gripped the little cup as he carried it to his mouth [...] Brown stains appeared on the lapel of his new coat. It was unpreventable—a fatality” (41). Chick writes: “the coffee spill was pure Ravelstein. He himself had just said so” (*Ravelstein* 41). Chick regrets: “But I did not treat it as a comic incident. I suggested in a somehow stifled manner that the stains might be removed” (*Ravelstein* 41). Chick defends himself: “you had to be something of a

specialist to follow the movements of his mind” (42). The grotesque description of Ravelstein’s eating and drinking habits finds a different significance when considered in the light of the novel’s biographical reference to Allan Bloom. As Bloom and his ideas are iconic representations of American culture of abundance, excessiveness, and waste, Bellow’s gross depiction of it can be taken as exposing American ways of life and a criticism of that culture.

However, Chick’s aesthetic approach towards the grotesque image of Ravelstein removes the eccentric nature of his behaviour and creates a more harmonious image of him. Throughout his life, Ravelstein appears as a voluminous self in excessively permeating people’s life, providing structure to their thought, feelings, and actions whereas his physical awkwardness is unformed. Chick declares his awareness of the massive influence of Ravelstein on his life: “His severity did me good. I didn’t have it in me at my time of life to change, but it was an excellent thing, I thought to have my faults and failings pointed out by someone who cared about me” (98). Here, Chick singles out the key principle of aesthetic confession. To provide an external point of view to see what a friend is unable to see for himself with the intention to reform was what Ravelstein has been doing for Chick throughout his life. Chick, however, immediately states that he was not one of those assimilative people who forget about their own value-judgments: “I had no intension, however, of removing by critical surgery, the metaphysical lenses I was born with” (98). It is from such mutual and active responses that their confessional relationship is constructed.

Ravelstein’s life and death prove to Chick that he himself cannot live without limits. Ravelstein’s death, therefore, leaves Chick with a huge void—the sudden removal

of nearly all limits that used to give order to his consciousness. Chick's feelings at this stage are reminiscent of the feelings of Joseph in Bellow's first novel *Dangling Man* when he is undergoing great suffering, mainly because he is left with nothing that can give structure to his life: job, marriage, or any ideology. Bellow returns to the same theme in his last novel. Like Joseph, Chick in this novel desires defining borderlines. After Ravelstein's death, Chick undergoes a near-death experience. He acknowledges: "it was obvious that I was out of order" (204). Rosamund takes Chick to a bay so that he can recover his peace. There, Chick notes: "I was grateful for the bay. It gave us an enclosure. I am thankful for boundaries. I am fond of having the lines drawn around me" (*Ravelstein* 185). The images of borderline and sea reveal to Chick the significance of the contradictory concepts such as freedom and limit in human life and remind him that he needs proportionate amounts of each in order to feel secure and make progress with life. Living without the confining boundaries of Ravelstein, Chick feels free and starts to use his creativity in imagining what Ravelstein would have expressed if he were there with him. These creative thoughts are also reflected in his dreams. Even though Chick could not stand Ravelstein's eccentric orders, he could not stand living without order either. He understands that with Ravelstein what he required was to be able to be flexible with the borders but not to lose them altogether—as the bay image signifies.

The act of writing Ravelstein's biography has a dual and ironic function for Chick. Like the bay, his writing stands as a barrier as well as a connection between Chick's life and death: it is a threat to Chick's life on its completion (*Ravelstein* 14) and a protection from his death as an unfinished responsibility (221-222). Therefore, it takes Chick about six years to start writing Ravelstein's biography. It is in his deathbed in the

hospital that Chick realizes that if it were not for the idea of writing, he would never have survived the fatal infection:

I wouldn't die because I had things to do. Ravelstein expected me to make good on my promise to write the memoir he had commissioned. To keep my word, I'd have to live. Of course there was an obvious corollary: once the memoir was written, I lost my protection, and I became as expendable as anybody else. (*Ravelstein* 221-222)

The responsibility of writing Ravelstein's biography endows Chick, in one sense, with an escape from death. During his semi-conscious state, Chick dreams of Ravelstein and his mission to complete the biography, a dream which he believes has brought him back to life. Michael Zuckert argues that the theme of commission is the dominant theme of the novel. Zuckert notes that the novel is not so much the biography of Ravelstein as it is the story of writing it—the ethical dilemmas that Chick has to confront and which he resolves in his writing. The novel is therefore the biography of Ravelstein as well as the autobiography of Chick.

The central theme of the novel is personal freedom. Bellow employs seriocomic intonation in the presentation of the discourse of confession, an act which allows for the practices of interactive, responsive, and responsible communication. Compared to the serious and monologic discourse of confession, seriocomic confession opens up a more secure space for mutual communication, inclusive of both the serious and the humorous side of reality. It also introduces a new narrative technique for the management of truth. The novel presents confession as a discourse, capable of rescuing the individual from the confinements of the inflexible cultural definitions of borders—providing the chance for

the hero not only openly to think the unthinkable but also to articulate the unspeakable. Humour is presented in the way Chick reservedly and rather ambiguously sometimes includes and sometimes excludes details concerning Ravelstein's transgression of social and cultural conceptions of morality.

Ravelstein presents Chick as the most dialogic of Bellow's heroes. Chick makes connections between his monologic and polyphonic truth as well as his personality in his aesthetic writing. It is through the employment of humour that Chick conflates the public and the private modes of confession. Moreover, the movement from *Humboldt's Gift* to *Ravelstein* signifies the departure from the private and meditational style of confession to the written and public mode of truth-telling. In contrast to Charlie's freely associative, straightforward, and transgressive language in describing Humboldt, Chick exposes and at the same time modifies the reality of Ravelstein, by making use of his delicate sense of humour. Furthermore, the bringing together of the public and the private truth makes it possible for the aesthetic relationship to link isolation, freedom, and grotesque creation in modern cultures. On this theme Ravelstein notes: "the challenge of modern freedom, or the combination of isolation and freedom which confronts you, is to make yourself up. The danger is that you may emerge from the process as a not-entirely-human creature" (*Ravelstein* 132). Chick concludes the novel and the biography by giving Ravelstein the final words: "You don't easily give up a creature like Ravelstein to death" (*Ravelstein* 233).

Conclusion

This thesis challenges the traditional conception that the only style for truth-telling is monophony. Through a comprehensive analysis of Bellow's fiction, this thesis has argued that a more ethical and aesthetic mode of confession can be practised in the form of dialogue rather than monologue. Dialogic confession narrows the widening gap between the public and the private modes of narrative confession in Bellow's novels. Whereas the early novels show a clear distinction between the public and the private discourse, Bellow's later novels show mutual communication between the two—bringing private truth into public display and/or acknowledging public realities in innermost confessions. The response of Bellow's heroes to the division between public and private life in *Dangling Man*, *The Victim*, and *Seize the Day* is a mixture of submission and resistance to the oppressive authority figures. This conservative response is developed into a more assertive one in *Herzog* and *Humboldt's Gift*, wherein the protagonists do not totally submit but aim to subvert the hegemony of the philosophical and social powers in transgressing their imposed boundaries. This eccentric and reactionary response is developed further in *Ravelstein* into a more balanced and creative rejoinder—a dialogue—between the internal and the external shaping powers. From passive receivers of truth and isolated monologic selves who desperately yield to the social powers in the early novels, Bellow's heroes develop into active, social, and more participant confessants as well as dialogic personalities who constructively communicate with their external reality.

In doing so, Bellow's later mature heroes show the value of private life for one's public life and vice versa.

In the early novels, the truth that Bellow's heroes expose in private, they modify in public. Their private expressions take place during acts of transgressive, carnivalesque, negative, and parrhesiac confessions. In these novels, the public modes of confession are mostly demonstrated in the form of conservative, polyphonic, and aesthetic style. Bellow's early fiction shows the asymmetry in power relationships and the inclination of the private truth to conform to public realities. In these novels, even though Bellow's heroes privately dismiss their cultural powers, they submit to them publicly. These novels show the excessive lack of communication between the public and private modes of truth-telling. The early Bellow hero communicates with himself in writing and meditations, but he never completely passes over the boundaries that separate the public from the private. Even though the polyphonic discourse presented in *Seize the Day* and *Herzog* allows for communication between the public and the private at the discursive and narrative level, in their performative social acts, Bellow's protagonists are confronted either with a dead end, like Tommy Wilhelm, or they return to perform a final act of silence like Herzog.

It is in *Humboldt's Gift* that for the first time the event of equation and mutual relationship between the self, the confessant, and the other, the confessor, takes place. Although throughout their lives Charlie and Humboldt's friendship was clouded by their misunderstanding and lack of communication, they manage to reunite after Humboldt's death through their mutual confessions of faith and friendship. It is in this novel that adventure is introduced into the life of the protagonist whereby his private information

goes public. If Charlie had not talked about his friendship with Humboldt, Cantabile would never have intruded upon his life and shattered its monotonous essence. In return, Charlie would never have had the chance to reunite with his friend Humboldt. The exchange of power and truth between the public and private modes of life is the root of the transformation of Charlie from a more monologic into a more dialogic individual. As such, in creating a new mode of communication with himself and his social powers, Charlie modifies the monologic status of his life and develops into a more dialogic personality, capable of combining monologic and polyphonic truth in various public and private spheres.

Bellow's last novel, *Ravelstein* illustrates further a development in the relationship between the self and the other as author and hero in the relationship between Chick and Ravelstein. The most interactive mode of communication occurs in this novel in the realm of art. Whereas in the early novels the self is either in society or in private, in *Ravelstein* the boundary between the two seems to have been blurred as the novel presents the publication of private secrets as a technique of self management. While *Ravelstein* openly publicises the private truth of his students in his gossip, Chick publicises Ravelstein's secrets in his biographical writing yet in the language of art. In so doing, the public realm of politics is combined with the personal realm of aesthetic writing. The significance of the art context for the creation of innovative confession lies in the flexibility it introduces in the management of borderlines that define the concepts of guilt and truth and also in the weakening of the ties that divide public and private realities. Art provides a secure context for the public communication of personal truth; it introduces new conceptions of the ethical and aesthetic truth. Despite the gradual closure

of the gap between the protagonists' public and private realities at textual and intersubjective levels, personal, and social truth remain distanced at social and cultural levels throughout Bellow's oeuvre.

It seems that Bellow's protagonists employ various styles of monologic and polyphonic communications in order to manage and take control of their realities. Whereas they make more use of monophonic confession in their relationship with external forces, Bellow's protagonists employ more polyphonic discourse in their private communications within intersubjective and art contexts. It can accordingly be concluded that the fact that they improve in their relationships within these two areas and remain untouched in their relationships with external social structures is due to their employment of monologic communications with external realities. As such, even if monophony can be regarded as an appropriate confessional response in certain circumstances, it can hardly change, develop, and improve the protagonists' social and cultural involvements.

Bellow's novels redefine the conception of guilt, morality, and freedom in confession. It seems that in his novels, Bellow does not so much picture sin as transgression from norms as he displays the concept of sin as the status of passively allowing oneself to be bullied. It is also sinful for his intellectual heroes, including Albert Corde in *The Dean's December* (42), Chick in *Ravelstien*, and Humboldt to detach themselves completely from their external world and take refuge in their inner world of art and philosophy. Like Chick and Humboldt, Corde "was strong-minded but at the same time withdrawn, seemed to have a minimum of common ground with the people about him, and seldom 'gave out' except on paper" (*Dean* 42). Rather than submitting to the definition of sin imposed by social authorities, Bellow's heroes expose the sins of their

contemporary social and cultural structures in relation to individuals. Instead of recognizing the confession-related concept of freedom as traditionally perceived, as freedom from shame and guilt, in exposing the limitations of their culture Bellow's heroes liberate themselves from those arbitrary conceptions and progressively initiate dialogic conversation with them. Bellow's early monologic heroes who, in one way or another, feel obliged to be submissive in their public relations but are transgressive, and as yet monologic, in their private communications gradually develop, in the later novels, into personalities who are capable of destabilizing the boundaries between the public and the private. Heroes in Bellow's mature novels are more capable of going public in private and private in public. This mode of communication demands courage on the part of the hero and tolerance and understanding on the part of the receiver of the confession, so that they can mutually interact. The development of Bellow's protagonists from common man in the early short novels into university professors, artists, and intellectuals in the later ones, explains the fact that Bellow's mature protagonists transform their confessional relationships by problematising the arbitrary distinction between the public and private discourse, especially in their textual and intersubjective relationships.

In this study, I have employed diachronic methodology in order to account for the development of the dialogic confessional discourse in Bellow's novels, the development from a more monologic discourse into a more dialogic one. As discourse in his novels almost always takes a sideward glance at social and cultural exigencies, I have also employed the social and cultural theories of truth and power relationships in order to account for the effects of external authorities in shaping the private conversations of the protagonist. The study shows that although Bellow's novels demonstrate a considerable

increase in the orientation of the confessional discourse from a more monophonic style into a more interactive one at both interpersonal and private levels, especially in Bellow's last novels, nevertheless American society seems to maintain its authoritarian distance from the individual protagonists. Therefore, Charlie and Chick, the respective protagonists in *Humboldt's Gift* and *Ravelstein*, are as complaining and dissatisfied with the degrading ways of their social and cultural structures as Joseph, Tommy Wilhelm, and Herzog are in the earlier novels. If the relationship between public and private realities becomes closer in Bellow's later novels, it is due more to the increase in the understanding of and flexibility in the ways that the protagonists respond to public realities rather than social and cultural reforms.

The major confessional themes explored in his novels are: remembrance and forgetfulness particularly in the early novels; one-sided forgiveness as a desired act of independence from controlling powers are especially explored in *Herzog*, mutual forgiveness in order to reunite in *Humboldt's Gift*, and mutual reconciliation in *Ravelstein*. However, the underlying theme of Bellow's oeuvre is that of sin as passivity in letting oneself be formed by external forces. In contrast, Bellow promotes active participation of the confessant-protagonist in constructing his personal and social values and taking responsibility for his actions. However, this perspective does not mean the total elimination of social power structures. It is the proportionate amounts of control and freedom that creates the suitable conditions for the protagonist to construct and develop his own realities.

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Appendix

Translation of Yiddish/Hebrew Expressions in *Herzog*

Yiddish/Hebrew Expression	Expression as Contextualized in <i>Herzog</i>	English Translation	Page Number
<i>A kalte kuzhnya, Moshe. Kein fire.</i> Father Herzog	But he has brought his iron to a cold forge . <i>A kalte kuzhnya, Moshe. Kein fire.</i> Divorce was impossible because he owed her too much money.	A cold fish – no spark	248
<i>Al tastir ponecho mimeni</i> Father Herzog	<i>Al tastir ponecho mimeni</i> I'm broke without a penny. Do not hide Thy countenance from us	Biblical saying: "Don't turn your face away from me"	136
<i>Amhoretz</i> Herzog	A huge ignorant man , an <i>amhoretz</i> who didn't know enough Hebrew to bless his bread.	Ignorant unlearned man	145
<i>Az du host a schwachen nature, wer is dir schuldig?</i> Aunt Zippora	"Blame your own weak nature ," said Zippora. " <i>Az du host a schwachen nature, wer is dir schuldig?</i> "	Saying: "If no weak nature, why so ashamed?"	144
<i>Begged</i> Rabbi	<i>Begeg</i> . A coat.	Coat or clothes	131
<i>Bigdo</i> Rabbi	<i>Bigdo</i> , the garment.	His coat or clothes	131
<i>Bruder</i> Valentine Gersbach	"One thing you can be sure bruder ," said Valentine.	Brother	60
<i>Chaver</i> Valentine Gersbach	So I must warn you, chaver , get off the lousy details ...	Friend	59
<i>Chazen</i> Sandor, the lawyer	You and me—we'll track down a good <i>chazen</i> [...] sandor began to sing ...	Cantor – religious singer	91
<i>Der heim</i> Father Herzog	"Who can imagine what a black year they're making back home ?" (It was always in <i>der heim</i> , Herzog reminded himself.)	Birthplace country	143
<i>Der kanader Adler.</i> Herzog	Yiddish newspaper (<i>Der kanader Adler</i>).	Adler, The Canadian	147
<i>Dreckische</i> Father Herzog	"Well, I think we'll leave your dreckische pants out here. Phew!"	Dirty trousers	136

Yiddish/Hebrew Expression	Expression as Contextualized in Herzog	English Translation	Page Number
<i>Edel-mensch</i> Aunt Zippora	"You travel in style, with ostrich feathers. You are an <i>edel-mensch</i> . Get your hands dirty? Not you."	Delicate genteel person	144
<i>Ein auswurf— augelassen</i> Polina, Daisy's mother	"What are you going to become?" said Polina, " <i>ein auswurf—augelassen?</i> " Outcast —dissolute? The old lady was Tolstoian, puritanical.	Outcast	167
Hebrew: <i>El malai rachamim.</i> Father Herzog	Or should I go to cemetery and wheeled mourners for a nickel? To say <i>El malai rachamim. I?</i> Let the earth open and swallow me up!	Biblical prayer: "God, full of compassion"	149
<i>Elend vie a shtein Mit die tzen finfer— alien</i> Ravitch	"Alien, alien, alien, alien <i>Elend vie a shtein Mit die tzen finfer—alien</i> " "Alone, alone, alone, alone Solitary as a stone With my ten fingers —alone"	Stony-faced He takes with 2 hands (10 fingers) & only gives back 1 hand (5 fingers)	135
<i>Ferimfter mensch</i> Valentine Gersbach	She wants you to admit her importance. You're a <i>ferimfter mensch</i> .	Twisted person	61
<i>Fifel</i> Valentine Gersbach	"Why when I lost my leg", said Valentine Gersbach. "Seven years old, in Saratoga utum, running after the balloon man; he blew his little <i>fifel</i> ".	Flute/Pipe Fife	61-62
Finsternish Aunt Zippora	A <i>Finsternish</i> ! It was too cold for dogs to howl.	Dark/black like night	144
<i>Gazlan</i> Aunt Zippora	"'If, God forbid, you had to shoot...' Cried Zippora. 'Could you even hit someone on head? Come! Think it over. Answer me, <i>gazlan</i> .'"	Thief/robber	145
<i>Goniff</i> Aunt Zippora	And you have to have a partner, a <i>goniff</i> .	Thief	144
<i>Gott meiner!</i> Aunt Zippora	I can still see you getting off the train from Halifax, all dressed up among the greener. <i>Gott meiner!</i> Ostrich feathers, taffeta skirts!	My God	142

Yiddish/Hebrew Expression	Expression as Contextualized in Herzog	English Translation	Page Number
<i>Gottseliger</i> Kaplitzky. Second Mrs Herzog	" <i>Gottseliger</i> Kaplitzky," she always called him.	The late Kaplitzky	247
<i>Greenhorns mit strauss federn!</i> Aunt Zippora	". . . Ostrich feathers, taffeta skirts! <i>Greenhorns mit strauss federn!</i> Now forget the feathers, the glows. Now—"	Foreigners with Fine feathers	142
<i>Hob es in dread.</i> Valentine Gersbach	Hell with that. <i>Hob es in dread.</i> I know Mady is a bitch.	I hope he dies	60
<i>Ich shtarb.</i> Father Herzog	Saying " <i>Ich shtarb!</i> " And then he died.	I'm dying	242
<i>Kaddish</i> Rabbi	I'm sorry for your father. Some heir he's got! Some <i>Kaddish!</i>	Memorial prayer for the dead (particularly parents)	131
<i>Kaplitzky-alehoshalom</i> Second Mrs Herzog	And every time . . . Kaplitzky- <i>alehoshalom</i> took care of everything.	departed/late	247
<i>Kimpet</i> Father Herzog	"I don't know when I will be delivered," Father Herzog whispered. He used the old Yiddish term for a woman's confinement— <i>kimpet</i> .	Lying-in Post-natal confinement – after giving birth	249
<i>Klug bist du</i> Aunt Zippora	"Now, isn't it time you used your head? You do have one— <i>Klug bist du ...</i> "	You are a clever one	146
<i>Kvetsch</i> Valentine Gersbach	But if she's got a disgusting father and a <i>kvetsch</i> of a mother.	Moaner wimp	61
<i>Lamden</i> Rabbi	Your mother thinks you'll be a great <i>lamden</i> — a <i>rabbi</i> .	Learned man	131
<i>Landtsleit</i> Mother Herzog	Mama was incredulous. " <i>Landtsleit?</i> Impossible. No Jew could do this to a Jew."	Fellow countrymen	148
<i>Leite</i> Aunt Zippora	They'll take what they want from you those <i>leite</i> .	People	146
<i>Lichtigen Gan-Eden</i> Uncle Yaffe	May he have a <i>lichtigen Gan-Eden</i> .	Light Heaven	143
<i>Lo mir trinken a glesele vi-ine</i> Ravitch	N/A	let's have a glass of wine	136

Yiddish/Hebrew Expression	Expression as Contextualized in Herzog	English Translation	Page Number
<i>Ma tovu ohaleha Yaakov</i> Moses and his brothers	“ <i>Ma tovu ohaleha Yaakov ...</i> ” “How Goodly are your Tents, O Israel.”	Biblical saying: “How Goodly are your Tents, oh Jacob”	140
<i>Machers</i> Nachman	They’ve put her away, the grim ones, the <i>machers</i> — our masters.	Important people	132
<i>Mamzeirim</i> The Rabbi	Mother’s hearts are broken by <i>mamzeirim</i> like you!	Bastards	131
<i>Mein zisse n’shamele.</i> Herzog	This is what your masochism means, <i>mein zisse n’shamele.</i>	My sweet soul	86
Hebrew: <i>Mi pnei chatoenu golino m’artzenu.</i> Sandor	Sandor began to sing, “ <i>Mi pnei chatoenu golino m’artzenu.</i> ” And for our sins we were exiled from our land.	Biblical saying: “Because of our sins we were expelled from our country”	91
<i>Ner tamid</i> Tante Taube Widow Kaplitzky Second Mrs Herzog	He found the switch and turned on the very dim bulb of the entry hall [...] reminded him of the <i>ner tamid</i> , the vigil light in the synagogue.	Everlasting light	245
<i>Rachatz</i> Herzog	He recalled the old Jewish ritual of nail water, and the word in Haggadah, <i>Rachatz!</i> “Thou shalt wash.”	Wash your hands. (Prayer before eating)	181
<i>Razboiniks</i> Aunt Zippora	I knew these hooligans and <i>razboiniks</i> .	Rowdies	145
<i>Schneller</i> Father Herzog	Can you walk ? It’s freezing. Now, get your crooked feet on the step— <i>schneller, schneller.</i>	Quicker, faster	136
<i>Shicker</i> Father Herzog	A Jewish drunkard . [...]“It is enough that I had to rent a room to a miserable <i>shicker</i> ”.	Drunkard	136
<i>Shiddach, tachliss</i> Herzog	Aunt Tamara wanted Ramona to have a husband . There must be a few Yiddish words left in the old girl’s memory— <i>Shiddach, tachliss.</i>	Agenda –match making	202
<i>Shofat</i> Herzog	He had the eyes of a prophet, a <i>shofat</i> , yes, a judge .	A Judge	59

Yiddish/Hebrew Expression	Expression as Contextualized in Herzog	English Translation	Page Number
<i>Shtick</i> Valentine Gersbach	My God! those ancient family prejudices , absurdities from a lost world. "Let's cut out all the <i>shticks</i> ", said Gersbach.	Rubbish, twists, slightly dishonest	60
<i>sieben glicken</i> Aunt Zippora	But you — you want <i>alle sieben glicken</i> . You travel in style, with ostrich feathers.	All 7 Lucky Stars	144
<i>Trepverter</i> Herzog quotes Mother Herzog	Nonsense syllables, exclamations, twisted proverbs, and quotations or, in the Yiddish of his long-dead mother, <i>Trepverter</i> — retorts that came too late.	Trick or trip word	3
<i>Valuta</i> Father Herzog	Cut open everything, looking for <i>vaulta</i> .	Money/cash	143
<i>V'tispesayu b'vigid</i> Rabbi	N/A	He "grabbed" him by his coat	131
<i>V'yaizov bigdo b'yodo</i> Rabbi	N/A	He left his clothes in his hand	131
<i>Yiches</i> Sandor	Who told you you were such a prince ? Your mother did her own wash; you took boarders; your old man was a two-bit moonshiner. I know you Herzog and your <i>Yiches</i> .	Family connections	86
<i>Yichus</i> Herzog	All branches of the family had the caste madness of <i>yichus</i> . No life so barren and subordinate that it didn't have imaginary dignities , honors to come, freedom to advance.	Honour of Ancestry	141
Hebrew: <i>Yiskor elohim es nishmas Imi</i> Nachman	<i>Yiskor elohim es nishmas Imi</i> ... The soul of my mother.	The soul of my mother (God will remember my mother's soul)	134