HENDERSON'S »I WANT« AND THE NATURALIST HERO

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The paper discusses Saul Bellow's *Henderson the Rain King* in the way of the presentation of Naturalist heroes of several Natutalistic novels. Furthermore it develops and enlarges his conception towards transcedence of the environmental and limitations imposed by one's own nature leading towards affirmation of his humanity and final maturation.

A large section of the paper has been devoted to demonstrate with somewhat limited references to Henderson, of the presence of some basic characteristics attributed to Naturalist hero in general. Parallels have been drawn to Zola's *Germinal*, and *Nana*, and some of Dreiser's novels to provide a heroine and a hero seeking transcendence. Finally the discussion leads towards Henderson's perception in leading his way out of the ideational dead end towards affirmation of his humanity and final maturation.

A. C. Henderson, the hero of Saul Bellow's *Henderson the Rain King,*[1] resembles the heroes of Naturalist novels in his cry, repeated periodically throughout the book, »I want«. It may aid our understanding of Henderson and, beyond that, Bellow's development as a novelist before he composed Herzog to examine what Henderson wants and the ways in which he wants it. This can best be done by comparing Henderson to the heroes of several Naturalist novels concerned with man's attempt to transcend his environment and, to a certain extent, his nature as well.

Henderson is conceived as a character who, to a point, may be explained in terms of ideas and attitudes he shares with the Naturalist hero. He is attempting, throughout most of the novel, to transcend or shed his human condition, to attain an estate a cut above the rest of humanity. His self conception is controlled by his fancied resemblance to an animal. The personal problem which occupies the central portion of the novel is worked out in terms of a conflict between two beasts: a pig and a lion. They battle for supremacy over his nature. Henderson is essentially a hollow character during most of the novel. He sees reality in terms of absolutes and pursues these absolutes by consulting various mentors. He hopes each successive mentor will provide him a capsule of wisdom which will enable him to transcend his nature and, as consequence, elude the necessity of living in a state of becoming. Finally, he is, until the denouement, a character too limited to accept a whole and healthy relationship with another being. To put this another way, he is unable to accept love.

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[1] Saul Bellow, *Henderson the Rain King,* Viking Press edition, New York, 1959. Sve daljnje reference su iz ove edicije.

Emil Zola, *Germinal,* New York: World Publishing Co., 1956.

Emil Zola, *Nana,* New York: World Publishing Co., 1956.

Theodore Dreiser, *The Financier,* Viking Press, New York, 1959.

Charles Wallcut, *American Literary Naturalism,* New York: New York University Press, N. Y. 1954.

These characteristics have not been generally regarded as traits of the Naturalist hero. Nevertheless, while they do not constitute an exhaustive description of him, they are among his definitive characteristics. A large section of this paper will be devoted to a demonstration, with only limited references to Henderson, of their presence in the Naturalist hero in general. We will then pass to a brief but documented examination of their presence in Henderson. Afterwards I hope to show how, both by leading Henderson to an ideational dead end and by causing him to perceive a way out in the affirmation of his humanity, Bellow matures his hero. Henderson's affirmation develops from an acceptance of change, relativity, becoming, and love.

To choose novelists who are unquestionably central to the Naturalist movement, Zola affords us Etienne Lentier (Germinal) and Nana: Dveiser's Carrie Meaber *(Sister Carrie)* and Frank Cowperwood *(The Financier)* provide, in the novels of an American Naturalist, a heroine and hero seeking transcendence. Since Naturalism purports to describe scientifically the process by which man's heredity and environment determine his character and fate, we should include Studs Lonigan and at least one character from *A World I Never Made,* the first volume of the Danny O' Neill tetralogy. Using these characters to focus our inquiry, we may proceed to an examination of the wants of some Naturalist heroes.

To begin with, »transcendence« seems perhaps a doubtful term to advance as representing one of the Naturalist themes. It is generally supposed that the Naturalists were almost exclusively concerned with showing the operation of a determinism which precluded any transcendence in man. It may be answered, however, that Naturalists were concerned with material transcendence in some of their novels. Zola's Nana rose a long way in society. Indeed, she fairly overtopped Paris after the horse race in the Bois de Boulogne, the zenith of her fortunes. All Paris was chanting »Nana«, the name of the winning horse (named after her by the infatuated owner of some racing stables), and »one no longer knew whether it was the animal or the woman who most filled men's hearts« (326). In Dreiser's *Financier,* the first novel of the Frank Cowperwood trilogy, Cowperwood makes a fortune, looses it, spends thirteen months in prison, and after emerging from prison, makes a second fortune by manipulating stocks during a panic similar to the the one in which he lost his first fortune. At the end of the novel we see him, wealthy and with the woman he almost loves, going to Chicago where, in *The Titan,* he will nearly succeed in cornering the grain market.

Material transcendence is, of course, a relatively superficial form of transcendence. While both Cowperwood and Nana transcend their environmental origins (Cowperwood began as a son of an unexceptional bank officer, Nana as the illegitimate child of obscure parents), neither of them alters his basic nature. Nana remains, to the end, epic in her bad taste, her banality, and her wasteful consumption of wealth an men. Cowperwood is almost wholly to be defined in terms of his financial ambitions. Although he unquestionably wants Aileen Butler as his mate, his feelings for her by no means constitute a »great love.« On the other hand, this term may be fitly applied as a description of her feelings for him. She loves and believes without question in him. Even when he must go to prison for fraud, she sees only a conspiracy (which is real enough) against »her« Frank. Dreiser presents this great love as, many ways, perhaps primarily, a burden on Frank rather than a blessing. Without it Aileen's father would not have been bent on enlisting the help of Mollenauer and Simpson to »get« Frank Cowperwood. Cowperwood himself remains primarily the financier throughout the novel and only secondly, through biology and the attraction to Aileen's »spirit« – spunk – the lover.

Dreiser shows him to us as a creature of overweening ambition and self-confidence. (Pride is the wrong term here: Cowperwood is too much bent on the concrete, material objects of his ambition, too unconscious of personal glory, for us to see him as a victim of *hubris.*) The fact that he does not attain a transcendance other than' material, is demonstrated centrally by his inability to learn from an experience with *moral* implications. However adept he is at profiting empirically from the the lessons of business, and here we recall that he got a long start toward making half a million dollars during the *second* financial panic described in *The Financier,* Cowperwood remains incapable of perceiving himself as overweening and, therefore, liable to precipitous descents in fortune. The connection is simply not plain to him. Rather than admit he had greatly overextended himself both in his business affairs and his affair with Aileen prior to the first panic, he prefers to blame pure chance, choosing as its instrument the Chicago Fire, for his fall. His transcendance at the end of the novel, then, neither alteration nor awareness of the self: it is merely material.

Henderson the Rain King, on the other hand, does not involve material transcendence at all. We are given a character who, at the outset, is supremely concerned about spiritual riches and not at all with material wealth. Henderson himself says so on the first page: »I might as well start with the money. I am rich. From my old man I inherited three million dollars after taxes, but I thought myself a bum and had my reasons, the main reason being that I behaved like a bum. But privately when things gor very bad I often looked into books to see whether I could find some helpful words, and one day I read, 'The forgiveness of sins is perpetual and righteousness first is not required.'« (3) When Henderson goes to Africa, the locale in which the bulk of the novel takes place, he tapes four one-thousand dollar bills inside his hat and forthwith devotes himself exclusively to a quest for spiritual absolutes. He wears his material transcendence lightly.

Henderson begins his quest with a great deal to overcome. Further, his handicap is similar to a factor which limits or shapes the heroes of many Naturalist novels and is, in fact, central to Naturalism. He feels he has associated too long with pigs: after World War II, on the strength of a friend's remark, Henderson very thoroughly converted his two hundred year old estate into a pig farm. His impulse seems to arise initially from mere perversity: »Goldstein . . . said, 'Why, me and my brother, if we live and be well, we're going to have a mink ranch in the Catskills.' So I said, or *my demon said for me,* 'I'm going to start breeding pigs.' And after these words were spoken I knew that if Goldstein had not been a Jew I might have said cattle and not pigs.« (20) Henderson afterwards comes to daubt the role of chance in his decision. The significance of the above passage lies in the words I have italicized, as is borne out by the subsequent course of the novel. Henderson periodically expresses a morbid fear that the pigs have affected a metamorphoses to the porcine in him or, worse, that he was *a priori* similar to the pigs and, therefore, predestined to his association with them. The pig, he fears, is his totem animal, his demon.

In reading *Nana* and *The Financier,* I found a similar use of members of the animal kingdom to explain by analogy the actions and, in *The Financier,* the world view of a main character. Nana is compared, it will be recalled, to a *»gilded fly.«* She was bread in the offal of society and disseminates the pestilence of her breeding grounds throughout society. She can do or think nothing which is uncorrupt: everything she touches is wasted in the sense that it is abandonedly spent up and, at the same time, wasted as if by pestilence. Only Nana's colleagues, namely Fontan and the prostitutes, remain consumed by her fever. Their immity comes from the fact that they too are flies, although their gilding does not take the eye as Nana's does.

Zola carries the analogy very far, makes it, in fact, almost a total explanation of his heroine. Cowperwood is explained as completely by the lesson he gains from a childhood experience. He watches a squid and a lobster which have been places in the same tank in a aquarium. Cowperwood as a child has been wondering »how this thing he had come into – this life – was organized.« He gets his answer from the struggle between the lobster and the squid, quick and equipped for concealment. From time to time the lobster snips off small portions of his prey's body and tail. The squid is finally caught and consumed. Dreiser clearly intends Cowperwood's reaction to serve as his definition throughout the balance of the novel:

> »He got him at last«, observed one bystander. »I was standing right here an hour ago, and up he leaped and grabbed him. The squid was too tired. He wasn't quick enough. He did back up, but that lobster he calculated on his doing that. He's been figuring on his movements for a long time now. He got him today.«

> Frank only stared. Too bad he had missed this. The least touch of sorrow for the squid came to him as he stared at it slain. Then he gazed at the victor.
>
> »That's the way it has to be, I guess,« he commented to himself. »That squid wasn't quick enough.« (4)

The main action of the novel, Cowperwood's attempt to monopolize and control the street railway in Philadelphia, is carried on by means of his relationship with George Stener, the financially infantile city treasurer. Their relationship essentially mirrors and defines Cowperwood's *Weltanschauung:* lobster and squid, the predator and his prey, the user and the used.

Examples of a controlling or defining image from the animal kingdom are rife in the Naturalist novel. Besides Norris' octopus, we have the army as a sort of corporate beast in Crane's *Red Badge of Courage.* Jack London's novels almost invariably cantain a character who embodies the half-human or superhuman presented in terms of his likeness to a particular animal. Early we have Nana as a gilded fly: quite late Steinbeck presents a whole people, the Okies, as a patient, victimized land-turtle.

The aspect of this bestiary of central images in the Naturalist tradition truly relevant to an examination of *Henderson the Rain King* goes beyond the mere fact that such images exist both in Bellow's novel and in the tradition as a whole. We must be concerned here with the *fatality* which these animal images represent. The substance of Henderson's dread is the fear that he will never be able to transcend the porcine nature he has either inherited by black sheep ancestors in an eminent family or had transferred to him by pigs he raised. An agonizing struggle develops within him when he tries to replace the pigs in his nature with another and more noble animal: Dahfu's lion. This conflict is reminiscent not so much of Dreiser's lobster and squid, which is, after all, no contest, but of the social warfare between the miners and the mine in Zola's *Germinal.*

The mine itself represents no abstraction to the miners. It is of an entirely different order from the mythic and inaccessible board of directors in Paris. If *Germinal* has a protagonist apart from the miners taken as one unit, that protagonist is Etienne Lentier. In so far as the miners posses eyes and a voice, he is their voice, and his first vision of the mine is ultimately the true one: »The Voreux was emerging from the gloom. Etienne . . looked round and could see each part of the pit: the shed tarred with siftings, the pit-frame, the vast chamber of the winding machine, the square tarret of the exhaustion pump. This pit piled up in the bottom of the hollow, with its squat brick buildings, raising its chimney like a threatening horn, seemed to him to have the evil air of a gluttonous beast crouching there to devour the earth.« (3) The image of the Voreux never changes during the course of the novel: the image functions as the defining characterization of the miner's antagonist.

It may be recalled that Henderson came to view the pigs as both fatally involved in his nature and as his natural enemy. When he thinks of the pigs, he almost invariably quotes Daniel's warning to Nebuchadnezzar: »They shall drive thee from among men, and thy dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field.« The Voreux in *Germinal* is shown to be a natural enemy not entirely unlike Henderson's pigs. It is the miner's fate, as the pigs seem to be Henderson's. Like Henderson, the miners attempt to overthrow the totemistic emblem of their subjection by substituting one animal for another. Henderson does his best to discover the leonine in himself: the miners must become a corporate beast without reason in order to subdue that other beast, the »squat« Voreux with its »threatening horn.«

As the miners gather for an assault upon the phisical buildings of the Voreux, Etienne Lentier, relatively a voice of reason, looses his control over them. After an intervening massacre of miners by soldiers, Souvarine the anarchist secretely and in a spirit of calculated ferocity deals the Voreux its death blow in the throat: he loosens the plates holdind back an underground flood. The flood comes, the beast figuratively bleeds to death, and the very buildings sink and are swallowed up.

Previously Zola has made much of the equivalence between the mine shaft swallowing miners and the throat of the predatory beast swallowing its prey. When we consider the entire body of the miners as the metaphorical beast in mortal combat with the Voreux, it seems fitting that Souvarine, the most ferocious, least humane or even human member of the group, should act as a fangor claw imbedded in the mine's throat. It seems equally appropriate that Etienne, the eyes and voice, hence the reason of the miner's beast, should himself nearly die as the result of Souvarine's slaughter of the mine. The miners recover their humanity when the Voreux falls in upon itself from internal hemorrhage. Their humanity is a sad one, however. It is their nature to serve as nourishment for coal mines and, now the Voreux is no longer in operation, they go to work in Jean-Bart.

In a somewhat parallel fashion, Henderson assumes his humanity after Dahfu dies and he can no longer continue his attempt to emulate the leonine in order to exorcise the porcine in himself. Henderson, however, does not submit to the pigs as the miners submit to the mine. The humanity he discovers is at once more complex and more profound than that to which the miners return. We must, however, defer, for a time our discussion of Henderson's conclusions.

The Naturalistic working out of themes and drawing of characters from analogies to various beasts requires some explanation. In the first chapter of his *American Literary Naturalism*, within the sections titled »The Emergence of Naturalism« and »The Devided Streem,« (7–13) Charles Wallcut affords us the ground for a reasonable interpretation. The Naturalists, he claims, take their philosophical cue not only from Darwin and Huxley, but also from the Transcendentalists. It is a Transcendentalist belief that man can approach self-knowledge and the comprehension of ultimate truths outside himself through the study of nature. In his *Origin of the Species*, Darwin provided two related truths which the Naturalists saw as analogous to the operation of human society: the perfectability of living species through their evolution from lower to higher, simpler to more complex forms, and the survival of the species fittest to adapt to its environment. I infer, then, that the characterization of the Naturalist hero by analogy to a member of the animal kingdom has as its ultimate roots such analogies in Darwin, Huxley, and Transcendentalists.

Wallcut further points out that optimism is implicit in the novels of the Naturalists. By deleneating the ways in which society's imperfections and injustices determine adversely the fate of the individual, they morally castigate society rather than Clyde Griffith, Maggie, Nana, or Studs Lonigan. Conversely, this reflects the optimistic faith that, if only we would reform society, such individuals would disappear. Society, the Naturalists imply, can be reformed: the millenium is attainable. Is not perfectibility reflected in the natural world by evolution?

Wallcut's thesis approaches the merely ingenious. I think, with regard to his corollary that the Naturalists are, by implication, optimists who believe the reformation of society would produce a corresponding reformation in individuals. The nature of the given in man is too strong. We have seen an example of men attempting to alter their species in *Germinal.* The miners are, for a time, a destructive beast, but from the influence of previous generations, they must in the end return to feed the mine with their flesh. Etienne can never entirely lose his fatal vulnerability to drink: he has inherited it. Nana is forever the gilded fly. We see finally that the Naturalists present man's hope for transcending the given as an impossibility. It is as impossible for man to transcend his nature as it is for one of the lower animals to change its species.

Nevertheless, the attempt is constantly being made in Naturalist novels. The naturalist hero almost invariably seeks to slough off the given, to apprehend some absolute which will enable him to live in a realm above that of ordinary men. Basically, in fact, the Naturalist hero seeks to live above all men, to approach a status of a god, although he does not see his quest in precisely these terms. This desire goes beyond mere lust for power as it exists, for example, in Cowperwood or Nana. It frequently involves a transcendance which is bestowed as grace from another being. This grace is obtainable through emulation of that other being, the mentor.

Some Naturalist heroes find their mentor early. Cowperwood digests the lesson of the lobster and the squid while still a child and believes forever after that he holds the key to transcendence: Be a lobster; the world is full of squids. Nana finds her mentor during a sojourn on her country estate. She sees a woman, renowned sveral decades previously as a courtesan, accepting the homage of villagers as a great lady. The image of this woman who has so consummately husbanded her resources to end her days in luxsury and universal respect remains with Nana throughout the novel. Although Nana is vastly less equipped than Cowperwood to utilize the posited key to transcendence, her vision and his are essentially of the same kind. They each fix upon a single image as the key to transcendence. Cowperwood lives his life by it; Nana wishes she could.

More frequently the Naturalist hero is unable for long to keep before him the image of a single mentor. Although he does not know for certain which area of life contains the key, or which order of being is likely to deliver it, he is certain that one need only turn the right corner in order to be confronted with and eternally blessed by it. Consequently, his search for the being who will give him the answer assumes the aspect of a lifelong quest. Further, its form, one way or another, will emerge as the single, essential piece of wisdom distilled from the whole of life into capsule. We know this from the characters who think they have found it. For Cowperwood it is »Be a lobster,« for Nana, »Husband your resources.« Al O'Flaherty *(A World I Never Made)* would formulate it as »Sell high-class shoes and cultivate high-class manners.« Willie Loman's maxim for salesman is, of course, »Be well liked.«

It goes without saying that these formulations are all from society and afford no real transcendence for those who adopt them. I have characterized Cowperwood as materially transcending his environment. This characterization needs now to be qualified. While Cowperwood goes far beyond his initial circumstances, he does not in reality transcend his environment. The lesson of the lobster and the squid is only a rahter *óutre* presentation by the natural world of the lesson society would have afforded, one way or another, a man with Cowperwood's predispositions. That his reaction is predisposed by what might be called a financier's anticedents is revealed by Dreiser's stressed contrast of reactions. The other bystanders think the squid's defeat is »too bad.« Cowperwood, even as a child, turn ed to look at the victor.

The essential distinction to be made between the Naturalist hero who is provided with and defined by a key and the Naturalist hero on a quest for one is that the letter expects from society what society cannot provide: an absolute not previously conceived by man. Sister Carrie's absolute, for example, has to do with an inconceivable beauty for which she has searched successively in Drouet, Hurstwood, and the stage. Etienne Lentier tries to glean from revolutionary tracts, the International, Rasseneur, Souvarine, and Pluchart the rudiments of a vision for world social reform. As might be expected, his vision is as cloudy and confused as it is lofty: it is, afterall, complicated by the fact that he has been associating with actual coal miners for some months:

> »He was meditating an enlarged programme; that middle class refinement, which had raised him above his class, had deepened his hatred of the middle class. He felt the need of glorifying these workers, whose odor was now unpleasant to him; he would show that they alone were great and stainless, the only nobilityand the only strength in which humanity could be dipped afresh. He already saw himself in parliament, triumphing with the people, if the people had not devoured him.« (468-470).

If we recall for a moment Crane's *Red Badge of Courage*, Henry Fleming seeks as many mentors on the battlefield as does Etienne in the coal fields. He seizes upon a host of absolute attitudes (courage, prudence, wisdom, folly, glory, disgrace) with which to label his actions and those of his comrades and superiors. He burns to apprehend some fixed value within the rapid, relativistic flux of battle. Crane shows admirably, one must conclude, the illusoriness of such absolutes.

The point which needs to be made concerning quests for a key to the absolute made by Naturalist heroes is that they are all doomed to failure. Three seems to be a basic immaturity in such quests. After they have run their course, we are almost invariably left with an open-ended novel. Etienne is going to Paris to work with Pluchart at the close of *Germinal*, but considering what he hopes to accomplish, there is little hope on the part of the reader that he will approach more nearly his vision of the one, the true social order. Tom Joad's conversion to Casey's mysticism at the end of *The Grapes of Wrath* seems to me equally unsatisfactory. The final incident, the nursing of the dying old man, is poetically impressive. It does not, however, resolve the novel; it is not sufficiently relevant to the preceding action to serve that function. Nana's mysterious voyage to the Middle East (or Southern Russia) seems equally contrived since, without it, Zola could not have had her die of smallpox and provide such an awesome spectacle of decay with which to conclude the novel.

Resolved endings to Naturalist novels seem generally as ineffective as unresolved endings. The basic inadequacy of these forcibly inserted closing symbols may be explained by the basic inadequacy of the Naturalist hero's conception of reality. The only way to satisfactorily conclude the quest of a Naturalist hero for the key to the universe is to let him find it, if these are the terms and the expectations which have been set up. Since this is impossible, the terms and the expectation should never have been established.

Due to these expectations, the Naturalist hero is, at bottom, hollow or narrow. If, like Cowperwood, he feels he has the the key and lives his life accordingly, he becomes constricted as a character. Large portions of *The Financier* contain as much characterization as one would expect to find in a narrative describing a child's »Monopoly« game. Insofar as the reader enjoys games, he identifies with Cowperwood, wants him to monopolize Philadelphia's street railways and win; insofar as the reader wants characters to appear as whole human beings, he is disappointed in Cowperwood. The hollow Naturalist hero is equally unsatisfactory. Since he is forver seeking mentors, he becomes little more than a many-faced mirror cast in the shape of a human being but hollow at the center. He is, finally, only capable of reflecting his mentors. Conversely, since the hero perceives in them only the messages which might lead to the appreciation of an absolute, the members of the supporting cast emerge as narrow, or, to use E. M. Forster's term, »flat« characters. They have their distinguishing mannerisms, attitudes, and ideas, but we do not see them in the round and we do not see them develop. The Naturalist hero is too busy shuffling through them, moving from one of them to another in his search for an extractable absolute.

Saul Bellow's *The Adventures of Augie March* contains an almost archetypal example of a hollow hero reflecting a narrow, mentor character. A third of the way through the novel Augie meets a girl at a resort in Michigan who personifies for him the enchanting aristocracy of wealth. She is fair blueeyed and mysterious, a figure, in fact, very similar to Daisy in *The Great Gatsby*. Augie himself closely resembles Gatsby in his romantic and forlorn attachment to that girl. Her dark sister, on the other hand, is drawn to Augie. all we see of the dark sister at the time is what Augie sees: a girl giving off, to a lesser extent than her fair sister, the magical aura of wealth who is somehow not worthy of Augie's primary attention.

When we encounter her again a hundred pages later, however, Augie is between stages in his quest for absolutes. He no longer feels that the gracious aristocracy bestowed by inherited wealth might afford him his key to life. The dark sister has correspondingly shed her share of Fitzgeraldian glamor. Now she exists for Augie completely independant of her sister. She leads him on a quest into Mexico to humt iguanas with a trained eagle. The absolute embodied in this form of a chase is by far the most difficult to fathom among the series of absolutes put forth during the novel for Augie to reject. Grandma Lausch, Einhorn, Mintouchian, and the mad sailor in the rowboat are all more comprehensible mentors than the dark sister and her eagle. The really interesting point to note, however, is that here, within a single character, we have two widely differing, mutually exclusive *personae:* the wealthy glamor girl according to Fitzgerald and, later, a tormented and neurotic quester after unfathomable absolutes. Further, her *personae* shift with Augie's. She and Augie reflect each other in both situations, and the reader's perception is in each case severely limited by a governing abstraction.

Henderson the Rain King, cannot be classed as a Naturalistic novel on the grounds of Bellow's selection of drab detail. Henderson's experiences in Africa are all of as exotic an order as Augie's Mexican expedition with a dark haired huntress. To begin with, Bellow creates out of whole cloth two African tribes, the Arnewi and the Wariri, and locates them somewhere in central Africa. He darkens the continent considerably in giving details about these tribes. The Arnewi love their cattle more than themselves. When Henderson arrives, the cattle are dying of thirst. They cannot drink the water in the cistern because there are swarms of frogs in it, and there is a taboo against cattle drinking from water which contains living creatures. The Wariri, on the other hand, leave the corpse of the rain king in Henderson's hut during his first night with them. The next day he participates in a rainmaking ceremony which involves, among other things, flagellation of the gods. Dahfu, the Wariri king, spends much of his time with a lion in the palace basement while he awaits the return of his father in the body of another lion.

All this exoticism, however, does not prevent the presence of some traits basic to Naturalism. Wallcut, it will be recalled, hypothesized that the Naturalists were optimists on the grounds that they believed an improved society would ameliorate the lot and, therefore, improve the character of its individual. In *Henderson the Rain King,* Bellow gives Henderson a better society to work with: the civilization of the Arnewi. Kindness, simplicity, hospitality, love and mutual esteem are its virtues. In the Naturalist conception, society assumes most of the functions of fate for the individual. Society shapes all the basic character traits of the individual. (This includes, finally, even those which he inherites, since inherited traits come from society one or two generations removed.) And Arnewi virtues, in effect, shape the behavior of the Arnewi. When Henderson, while attempting to exterminate the frogs, splits the cistern with explosives, the Arnewi do not threaten to destroy him, or even to prevent him from departing. Considering that they value their cattle many times more highly than they value themselves, and that Henderson's destruction of the water supply means almost certain death to the cattle, the forbearance of the Arnewi provides an indication of the governing influence of their virtues on their society. Social determinism, then, operates for good in a Utopian society much as it operates, in less virtuous societies, to perpetuate folly and vice.

Equally central to the Naturalist tradition is the deterministic influence exerted on the individual by his totem animal. I have mentioned Henderson's struggle to replace the porcine in himself with the leonine. This struggle, is parallel in some respects to the struggle of the miners in *Germinal* to overcome Voreux. The miners are compelled to become a corporate beast in thier attempt to purge that other beast, the mine. Henderson, similarly, must struggle to become a lion in order to expiate the pigs which are part of him.

Involved in this struggle to overcome the porcine is the struggle to overcome death in a particular shape which, in turn, involved considerably more than the potentially lethal character of Dahfu's lion. Dahfu seeks to identify with his lion, and beyond that to digest and apply the material contained in a host of scientific journals concerned with animal nature in man. He is in the toils of a »great idea.« At least Henderson recognizes this aim in a king:

> »He is an exceptional man. Sometimes these great men have to go beyond themselves. Like Cessar or Napoleon or Chaka the Zulu. In the king's case, the interest happens to be science. And though I'm noexpert I guess he's thinking of mankind as a whole, which is tired of itself and needs a shot in the arm from animal nature.« (251)

Henderson shares with the king the effort to overcome the divorcement of man from his animality.

On the other hand, Henderson's aims are more purely personal. He is concerned about a certain »cosmic coldness« and seeks to reconcile himself to a vision of malignant indifference in the universe which he has earlier experienced. It is significant to note that he encountered this vision immediately after he had violently cut himself off from love:

> »I dumped her foolish suitcase with the unwashed clothes in it on the platform. Still sobbing, I turned around in the station . . . and headed for the south of France. I drove to a place on the Vermilion Coast called Benyules. They keep a marine station there, and I had the strange experience in the aquarium. It was twilight. I looked in at an octopus, and the creature seemed also to look at me and press its soft head to the glass, flat the flesh becoming pale and granular-blanched, speckled. The eyes spoke to me coldly. But even more speaking, even more cold, was the soft head with its speckles, and the Brownian motion in those speckles, a cosmic coldness in which I felt I was dying. The tentacles throbbed and motioned through the glass, the bubbles sped upward, and I thought, »This is my last day. Death is giving me notice.« (19)

The extended quatation is justified, owing to its importance for the passage. To begin with, the image is not a little similar to the aquarium image in the *Financier*. The same piscatorial malignancy found openly in Dreiser's lobster is, to a degree, implicit in Bellow's octopus. one is active, the other passive, but they both exemplify dispassionate malignancy affoot in the universe. More important, the *function* of Bellow's octopus is similar to that of Dreiser's lobster: each determines, in large measure, the action of the hero in whose novel it appears. While the octopus does not *define* Henderson as the lobster defines Cowperwood, the thing it symbolizes motivates Henderson's actions as completely.

Basically, *Henderson the Rain King* is the chronicle of an individual's attempt to escape the prison of the self, establish contact with what is meaningful in other beings, human or otherwise, and thereby put his inner nature in tune with itself and things outside itself. The factor which lends urgency to Henderson's quest is the indifference of the cosmos and more specifically, an agent of the cosmos, Henderson's approaching death. (Henderson is fifty six when the present action of the novel takes place.)

Initially the octopus is the symbol for both cosmic coldness and, by implication, the dispassionately malign proximity of death. Subsequently these same meanings are transferred from the octopus to Dahfu's lion. Bellow specifically makes the transfer when Henderson is on the brink of encountering the lion for the first time. He comes to the bottom of the stairs leading to the basement of Dahfu's palace, and the door to the lion's chamber is open, when he makes the following observation:

> I came to the bottom, the last few steps being of earth and the bases of the walls themselves mixed with soil. Which recalled to me the speckled vision of twilight an Banyules-sur-mer in that aquarium, where I saw that creature, the octopus, pressing his head against the glass. (220)

Henderson feels hot in the lion's den where he had felt cold in the aquarium. This does not, however, alert the significant equivalence of octopus to lion. The vision of cosmic indifference in heat following the vision of it in cold is, rather, a small example of the rhythm which operates throughout the novel, but this is to anticipate.

To go beyond the operation of determinism through society and totem animals, Henderson's dependence on mentors seems to leave the novel open to the same objections which have been raised against the Naturalists in general: the dependence on mentors tends to produce a character who is hollow at the centre. Indeed, Henderson is a hollow character throughout most of the novel. The distinction between Bellow's treatment of the hollow Naturalist hero and the treatment usually afforded him by his creators is that Bellow makes Henderson acutely aware of and vocal about the void within him. Again and again Henderson gives us his cry, »I want! I want!« until his almost epic lack and need becomes his substance. Further, this accute consciousneds of the nature of his dissatisfactions lays the groundwork for an ultimate revision of his whole manner of seeing things.

To revert for a moment to a novel with a heroine who is similarly hollow, Dreiser, and not Carrie, expresses Carrie's insubstantial yearnings after beauty. Although she wants, like Henderson, a vague abstraction which she hopes will be provided by the people and occupations through which she shuffles (the card analogy in the one intended), we can hardly imagine her articulating, »I want from Hurstwood (or Drouet, or the stage) the key to the ultimate.« Henderson, on the other hand does precisely this: »But there was something about this man (Dahfu) that gave me the conviction that we could approach ultimates together.« (156) And again, when speaking of the waning of Willatale's influence upon him and the growth of Dahfu's: »May be my mind, beginning to change *sponsors*, so to speak, was stimulating the growth of a different man,« (272) (Italics mine) Here we have evidence that Henderson is aware both that he has mentors and that he wants absolutes from them.

We recognize, finally, that Henderson is basically immature throughout most of the novel in the same wys that most Naturalist heroes are immature. He feels that one only need find some angle in order to become a finished, transcendent being. He is constantly on the lookout for such a being and exultant when he thinks he has found him and may emulate him. Consider, for example, his rhapsody over the discovery of Dahfu:

> Being. Others were taken up with being. Being people have all the breaks. Becoming people are very unlucky, always in a tizzy. The Becoming people are always having to make examplanations or offer justifications to the Being people. While the being people provoke these explanations. (160).

Henderson goes on to classify Willatale and Dahfu as »Beers.« This classification, it emerges, is a central irony in the book. Dahfu is killed while hunting a lion he believes to be his father. After his death, it becomes apparent that he has been ruthlessly using Henderson in order to pursue his own absolutes or, rather, to perpetuate the search for them. Henderson has been trained to continue emulation of the leonine and is now obliged to be king of the Wariri. A condition of kingship in the Wariri nation is that the king will be strangled when he is no longer able to accomodate his thirty wives. (If we recall Henderson's age, the impossibility of his situation becomes apparent.) Henderson expects, in any case, to be murdered within three months as a result of court intrigues. We have, then the first half of the irony: while Henderson thought he was using Dahfu as a means of »reaching ultimates,« and that Dahfu befriended him »for himself alone,« Dahfu was also using him as a means.

The second half of the irony concerns Willatale. Recall for a moment that Henderson sees becoming people as unlucky. Dahfu makes the statement that the Arnewi are a very unlucky people. Willatale possesses all the Arnewi characteristics in the hightened degree termed »Bittaahness.« She is perhaps the most »becoming« and unlucky person he meets. Henderson, however, claims she is a »Be-er« on the strength of her formulation, »Grun-tu-Molani«, or, translated, »Man wants to live.« At the time Henderson interprets the phrase in the light of his own pursuit of absolutes. He feels it means that man wants to find his culmination in some superbly transcendent action. This action will, in turn place him forever in the position of a Be-er, a finished individual who will never again be forced to strive in a state of becoming. As has been mentioned, Henderson fails miserably in his attempt to exterminate the frogs. He succeeds in his second great attempt transcendent action: he lifts Mummah and becomes Rain King. His success, however, leads him directly to the dead and described in the preceding paragraph: as Rain King, he is next in line for the Wariri throne and its incumbent strangulation.

Both Willatale and Dahfu diagnose Henderson's ills. They perceive immediately the frenzy and suffering which depend upon his search for absolutes. Willatale, however, points out to Henderson that »the world is strange to child« (84) because she knows how basically child-like (and childish) is the search for a single idea with which to explain the universe. She then provides Henderson with the helpful if cryptic phrase, »Gruntu-Molani.« (85) Correctly interpreted, this phrase is a foreshadowing of the novel's ideational resolution. »Man wants to live« in the sense that he wants to be able to accept his place in a world of becoming and to come to terms with his own mingled nature. He must, it emerges from Bellow's conclusions, accept rhythm and change as the only absolutes; he must accept the fact that nothing is pure, unmingled, subject to only one interpretation; he must recognize the necessity for process in everything finally he must accept the necessity of beings to relate to one another as ends rather than to see in each other only means. We may rephrase this last idea, it seems appropriate, to mean man must give and accept love.

Bellow builds towards Henderson's realization of thsis throughout the novel. He narrates for us the agonized quest of a man who believes in none of them. His failure to concede the necessity for process, for example, drives him to make a grand, instantaneous explosion in the Arnewi cistern, thus destroying it. Rhythm on a large scale operates throughout the novel: Henderson's Odyssey takes him from the Temperate to the Torrid, to a Newfoundland landing strip in the Frigid Zone, even though Henderson frequently believes he is following a straight line to the absolute. When he rejects love, he moves to the octopus and towards death. His single-minded adulation of Dahfu as a means through which to attain absolutes boxes Henderson into an impasse.

Following Dahfu's death, Henderson escapes, first phisically then spiritually and psychologically. His first saving realization concerns rhythm:

> »Oh, you can't get away from rhythm, Romilayu,« I recall saying many times to him. »You just can't get away from it. The left hand shakes with the right hand, the inhale follows the exhale, the systole talks back to diastole, the hands play patty-cake, and the feet dance with each other. And the stars, and all of that. And the tides, and all that junk. You've got to live at peace with it, because if its going to worry you, you'll lose. You can't win against it. It keeps on and on and on. Hell, we'll never get away from rhythm, Rhomilayu.« (329)

This, for Henderson is a revelation of primary importance. Bellow has prepared for it, and he carries it to the conclusion of the novel. Henderson's rhythmic movement between the three zones of the earth is paralleled by a rhythmic movement between three psychic states. In the Temperate Zone, Henderson tries frantically to make himself a living denial of his father's values. He raises pigs. They dispoil his fayther's estate, antagonize his aristocratic neighbors, and drive away his first wife, the one he married to please his father. In the Torrid Zone he is all acceptance. He is predisposed to »buy« whatever absolute is posited to him. En route to Newfoundland, a stopping place in the Frigid Zone on the way home, Henderson moves away entirely from the absolute values he has first denied, then affirmed with equal frezny. He realizes instead three further ideas: the inevitability of process, the mingled nature of every being, and the necessity to accept love.

Bellow reveals all three of these ideas to Henderson by having him recall a forgotten association. At sixteen Henderson had worked in an amusement park. His job was to take high rides with Smolak it emerges exerted a considerable formative influences over Henderson: ». . . if Smolak and I were outcasts together, two humorists before the crowd, but brothers in our souls – I didn't come to the pigs as tabula rasa.« (330–339) Here we have the revelation of the process and the mingled nature of creatures. Henderson has always defined himself at a stroke by citing his fancied resemblance to pigs. The realizations of gains from love and a recapitulation of the mingled nature of creatures come together at the end of the passage:

> ». . . we hugged each other, the bear and I, with something greater than terror and felt in those gilded cars. I shut my eyes in his wretched, time-abused fur. He held in his arms and gave me comfort. And the great thing is that he didn't blame me. He had seen too much of life, and somewhere in his huge head he had worked it out that for creatures there is never anything that runs unmingled.« (339)

This passage also makes minigful the absolute with which Henderson began: »The forgiveness of sins is perpetual and righteousness first is not required.« Until this point, Henderson has accepted forgiveness to come from transcendent beings, Be-re. (The resemblance of Be-rs to deities is striking.) Now he discovers that forgiveness comes instead from one's fellow creatures. I think we may assume as a corollary that such grace and censure we receive come also from one's fellow creatures.

One final quotation is necessary to a discussion of the novel's resolution. It occurs at the very end of the sojourn in Africa, when Henderson is about to start home. Correspondingly, it marks the end of his search for absolutes and proves the basis for his subsequent life in a relative world of becoming: »I had a voice that said, I want! *I* want. I? It should have told me *she* wants, *he* wants, *they* want. And moreover, it's love that makes reality reality. The opposite makes the opposite.« (286) Without this realization, Henderson's subjective agony would have made it impossible for him to conceive the ideas he arrives at in recalling his association with Smolak. With the realization, Henderson's »Iwant« is at last placated. It does not recur during the balance of the novel.

Henderson is a successfully resolved novel with a Naturalist hero, as so many Naturalist novels are not, because Bellow has allowed his hero to mature. Henderson has outgrown his childish (and Naturalistic) need for mentors and absolutes. He is no longer as absolutely determined by values external to himself as he was, or as the Naturalist hero usually is. Neither is he seeking the angle to transcendence, the means with which to shed his humanity and attain some higher estate. Henderson prefers, insted, to affirm his humanity.

Sonja Valčić: HENDERSONOVO »JA ŽELIM« I NATURALISTIČKI JUNAK

Sažetak

Autor diskutira o liku Hendersona djela *Henderson, the Rain King*, Saula Bellowa, na način kojim se obično prezentiraju junaci naturalističkih romana. Međutim, ovdje se razvija i proširuje uobičajena predodžba naturalističkog junaka na način da se pokazuje izlaženje Bellowa iz okvira prezentacije tipične za lik junaka iz naturalističkog djela. Bellow dozvoljava svom liku da se razvije i sazrije.

Dio članka razmatra s relativno ograničenim referencama i neke osnovne značajke koje karakteriziraju tipične junake naturalističkog romana. Komparacije su povučene sa Zolinim *Žerminalom, Nanom,* Dreiserovim likovima iz *Financijera* i *Sister Carrie*.

Diskusija konačno vodi u pravcu pokazivanja Hendersona kao različitog od ostalih likova, jer on izlazi izvan okvira svog idealnog i apsolutnog poimanja svijeta i ljudi, a koji su tipični postulati naturalizma, te osviješćen ide prema afirmaciji humanizma i konačnom sazrijevanju.