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Research Paper

Mechanisms of Externalizing the Problem in Saul Bellow's Fiction: A Therapeutic Perspective

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Abstract
The present paper is a reading of Saul Bellow's *Dangling Man*, *The Victim*, and *Seize the Day* in terms of Michael White's and David Epston's notion of 'narrative therapy.' Narrative therapy is a poststructural viewpoint in psychiatry, and its ultimate goal is to reach a thick description of a person's lived experiences. Since people mainly narrate problem-saturated stories, narrative therapy aids them in deconstructing dominant narratives and reconstructing alternative ones to see events from multiple perspectives and find possible solutions to solve their problems. Saul Bellow's subtlety in his portrayal of the modern man's struggle against problems is present throughout all his novels. The existence of problems as dominators of the mind has become an integral part of his fiction. Bellow's prose implies a long-lasting tradition of story-telling to express events from distinguished perspectives. His characters, Joseph, Leventhal, and Wilhelm utilize therapeutic techniques like naming the problem, tracing its history, evaluating its effects, finding unique outcomes, and re-authoring to deconstruct totalizing stories. Bellow writes about men seemingly at the rope's end and their remaining hope to recover from past mistakes. Although some troubles are left unsolved during the deconstructing process, the protagonists arrange their problems based on their importance and externalize all of them.

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بیرونی سازی مشکل و سازوکارهای آن در رمان‌های سال بلو بر مبنای روایت درمانی

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چکیده

پژوهش حاضر، خوانش رمان‌های مرد معلق، قربانی و دم را دریاب سال بلو بر اساس روایت‌درمانی مایکل وایت و دیوید اپستون است. تیزبینی سال بلو در به تصویر کشیدن تلاش‌های مرد مدرن برای فائق آمدن بر مشکلاتش در تمام رمان‌هایش مشهود است. وجود مشکلات که توانایی سیطره یافتن بر ذهن را دارند بخش جدایی‌ناپذیری از نثر بلو شده است. قهرمان‌های بلو در تقلا هستند تا تجربیاتشان را روایت کنند و از راه‌های مختلفی اعم از نوشتن، یادآوری حوادث گذشته، نشخوارهای ذهنی روایت‌های تحلیل‌نشده و نامه بهره می‌برند. این شخصیت‌ها قربانیان داستان‌های غالبی هستند که بر پایهٔ اجتماع، فرهنگ و اقتصاد شکل گرفته‌اند. سختی‌ها و مشکلات گوناگون به آنها دیدگاهی پسامدرن پیشنهاد می‌دهد تا دریابند که نسخه‌ای مشخص، خاصه غالب، نباید مزیتی بر دیگر نسخ داشته باشد. یکی از دغدغه‌های این پژوهش، بررسی نقش دیگران و اجتماع در شکل‌گیری داستان‌های غالب است؛ زیرا داستان‌ها ساختمند هستند. اگرچه قهرمان‌های این سه رمان در پایان دادن به جداافتادگی‌شان از آشنایان و اجتماع، ناکام مانده‌اند ولی تلاش‌های زیادی نشان داده‌اند. در این سه رمان، سه نما از جامعهٔ آمریکایی ارائه شده است که شامل فضایی جنگ‌زده، روگردان از یهودیان، یا حسابرس برای افراد ناموفق می‌شود. فرهنگ غالب به عنوان عاملی مهارکننده که درک افراد از مشکلات را تحت تأثیر قرار می‌دهد در هر سه رمان، نقشی یکسان ایفا می‌کند. نتایج این پژوهش نشان می‌دهند که بلو دربارهٔ مردانی می‌نویسد که در مرز فروپاشی هستند و همچنان امید به بازیابی خودشان از اشتباهات گذشته‌شان دارند. روایت‌های جایگزین آنها را به سمت بازنویسی زندگی‌شان سوق می‌دهند.

واژه‌های کلیدی: *سال بلو؛ ادبیات یهودی آمریکایی؛ روایت درمانی؛ آلترناتیوها.*

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1. Introduction

Saul Bellow (1915–2005), a Canadian-born American novelist, was renowned for his portrayals of the modern intellectual—discontented with society yet unbroken by it. His work earned him the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1976 and the National Medal of Arts, the United States' highest honor for artists, in 1988 (Britannica, 2023). Bellow is the only writer to win the National Book Award for fiction three times, and also, he received Pulitzer Prize in fiction in 1976. Harold Bloom believes that "Saul Bellow is the strongest American novelist of his generation" (1986, p. 1). His popularity is astonishing, although his novels do not have the customary elements like extreme situations, suspense, heroes, and graphic sex and violence that one expects to find in best-selling fiction. As a matter of fact, his novels are intricate works that challenge readers' perception of the modern man and his state of mind in urban America. His graduation with honors in anthropology and sociology helped him to create characters with perplexing questions concerning their psychological, social, and cultural status. Bellow often referred to the works of psychologists, anthropologists, philosophers, poets, and other writers in his fiction. Bellow's primary concern in his fiction is modernism, the dominant literary tradition of the age. For him, modernism is oppressive in its depiction of the alienated individual locked in a futile and unending struggle against their surroundings.

The present paper aims to investigate Saul Bellow's *Dangling Man* (1942), *The Victim* (1947), and *Seize the Day* (1956) in the light of Michael White's and David Epston's notion of narrative therapy. As a form of psychotherapy, narrative therapy tries to help patients reach self-knowledge to increase their chances of solving their problems. By making a new narrative about themselves, a person can re-author his/her problems and seek the values and abilities that have been ignored because of the problem. Critics, like Bellow himself, believe that *Dangling Man* and *The Victim*, Bellow's earlier fiction, are very different from his other works. However, his focus on character development instead of plot is common in all of his works. Bellow's character-narrators always seek self-knowledge to find meaning in their inner philosophical

explorations. Some readers may find Bellow's fiction even hard to follow when most of his fiction happens in the mind of his intellectual protagonists.

As an attitude, not a technique, "externalization of the problem," based on narrative therapy, necessitates a particular change in the use of language. Character-narrators in the novels use some keywords to refer to the problem. By utilizing the shift in the use of language, "externalization of the problem" aids in transforming the keywords. In externalized conversations, often, an adjective becomes a noun. Using externalizing conversations, cultural and social practices like "mother-blaming, parent-blaming, women-blaming, heterosexual dominance, racism, and economic …that have assisted the problem to increase its influence in a person's life," may also be located away (Morgan, 2000, p. 21). Externalizing the problem disempowers the effects of labeling and aids persons in discarding fixed and controlling problems. As people begin to think of the problem as an independent entity, excluded from the person, arguing about who is to blame becomes less pertinent.

Different critics have underlined the psychoanalytical aspects of Bellow's three novels. R. Manikandaraja (2013) in the essay, "Psychological Confrontation in Saul Bellow's *Dangling Man*," shows an attempt to examine *Dangling Man* as a psychological confrontation, in which the mental procedure of a person and the environment he is living in determines factors of his fate. Justyna Kociatkiewicz (2011) in "Coping with the anti-Semitic Universe" attempts to explore universal analogies in three areas: the alternative, the oneiric, and the conspirational. She suggests that in *The Victim*, Bellow uses alternative realities so that his characters can experience a radical shift from the familiar universe. Victoria Aarons (2016) in "Faces in a Sea of Suffering" asserts that Bellow's *The Victim* might be seen as a warning of the compass and reach of moral accountability for both intentional and unintentional consequences of one's actions that are strategically crafted. Also, it might be a warning of the cost of indifference to the depth of human suffering.

In his "Caliban on Prospero," David Weiss (1962) tries to explore the relationship between Wilhelm and Dr. Adler. He concludes that the dead man in the coffin is representative of two substitutes- "the wish to destroy the hated father and the wish to be destroyed." He declares that Wilhelm has accepted Dr. Tamkin's existentialism and he no longer wishes for Dr. Adler's death. In another study, Bishnu P. Khanal (2008) portrays the existentialist sufferings that most of the characters in *Seize the Day* are dealing with. The critic declares that Bellow's aim in his fiction is humanism. And in the novel, the modern situation and its difficulties create an existentialist struggle for most of the characters in different ways. Morshedul Alam (2016) in "Human-Reluctant Modernity" investigates social circumstances represented in the novel to approach Wilhelm's characterization as an isolated modern man living in a capitalist society. Hong Wu (2013) in "*Seize the Day*: An Existentialist Look" tries to explore the novel in Sartre's terms of existentialism. Investigating *Seize the Day*, Kamol Karmakar (2020) in "Tommy Wilhelm's Psychological Rebirth" asserts that Wilhelm ended up with a psychological rebirth in the middle of a disorganized and confused life. Using a Jungian approach, he concludes that Wilhelm's distress led to his psychological rebirth.

2. Theoretical Background

Narrative therapy is a medical approach in psychiatry developed by Michael White and David Epston in the 1970s and the 1980s. Narrative therapy came out of multiple fields of studies like "cybernetics, interpretive anthology, and postmodernism" (Brown and Augusta-Scott, 2007, p. xi). As a poststructuralist approach, narrative therapy is highly influenced by the French philosopher, Michel Foucault. Stories are central to the techniques narrative therapists use. We talk about our relationships, interests, emotions, actions, successes, and failures in a sequence of events. We simultaneously tell stories about ourselves in our daily conversations and even our thoughts. Since we link events in a sequence and ascribe meaning to them, White (1995) asserts that our self-stories, or self-narratives, "determine the shape of our

lived experience" (pp. 13-14). Narrative therapists are interested in persons' self-stories and their interpretation of those stories.

Different interpretations of stories bring different perspectives. Morgan (2000) suggests that when we describe our abilities, we only select those stories that support the idea of us being able to do different things (p. 6). The selection also happens when we talk about our inabilities, fears and problems. This exclusion of all other stories creates a "*thin description,"* which reflects more accurately the idea that an initial *story* inevitably omits certain forgotten or unnoticed elements of the person's life (Payne 2006, p. 11; emphasis in the original). In a sense, a binary opposition of dominant narratives/alternative narratives emerges that creates a thin description of incidents. White (1989) believes that when people come to therapy, they select "problem-saturated" stories and form a map of their lives based on them (p. 39). Narrative therapy seeks to externalize the problem by deconstructing dominant stories and making alternative ones to reach a detailed description of persons' lives. As Madigan (2011) suggests, narrative therapy is not about ignoring the problem-saturated perspective. Instead, it respects all perspectives and tries to help people reach a thicker description of their lives (p. 106). The thicker the description becomes, the closer it is to the reality.

White and Epston (1990) introduce the externalization of the problem as a process that "enables persons to separate themselves from the dominant stories that have been shaping their lives and relationships" (p. 41). For this purpose, by using continuous externalizing conversations, narrative therapy paves the way to separate the identity and existence of problems from persons (Morgan 2000, p. 17). In order to separate the person's identity from the problem, narrative therapists encourage persons to choose a single word or even a concise phrase that fits the situation to call the problem. "Naming encourages focus and precision, enables the person to feel more in control of the problem, and gives a precise definition for externalization of the problem" (Payne 2006, p. 11). After the naming process, the person narrates multiple stories to trace the history of the problem and to evaluate its effects. Tracing the history of the problem can also put people at ease because they

can see that problems can become controllable when they change over time. Also, people describe the effects of the problem to become aware of the problem's limitations (Payne 2006, p. 41).

The following stages in order to externalize the problem are the deconstruction of the dominant narratives and the reconstruction of alternative ones. After joining the initial conversations, events are divided into two types: events in favor of the problem's effects and events standing against them. Unique outcomes include the latter kind of events, or as Morgan (2000) puts it: "A unique outcome can be anything that the problem would not like; anything that does not *fit* with the dominant story … [like] a plan, action, feeling, statement, quality, desire, dream, thought, belief, ability, or commitment" (p. 52, emphasis in the original). Unique outcomes are those leftover examples of events and feelings that are not chosen to strengthen dominant narratives. They are outcomes of the deconstruction process. White (2000) declares that memories can also play a crucial role in the externalization of the problem. In the final stage, alternative stories about the incidents make the description richer than before. The goal is not to forget about problems. Instead, the rich description helps the person to have multiple perspectives in order to reach possible solutions.

The roles of parents, siblings, friends, and, more importantly, spouses are crucial to White's and Epston's ideas. White (1997) introduces "Re-membering conversations" as conversations in which a person's significant figures can have a more active role in the "club of his life" (pp. 22-24). The person can connect the significant ones' memories and knowledge of events to events in an alternative story. A person re-authors his life by telling newer and more detailed stories about his life. Narrative therapy focuses on silenced and disqualified knowledge revolving around suppressed stories (White, 1997). Nevertheless, as Brown (2007) states, "resurrecting the suppressed voice is not the discovery of *the real self*, … and [the voice] should not be privileged as natural or as providing an authoritative foundation" (pp. 177-178, emphasis added).

Narrative therapists believe that there is not one true and definitive story that explains our one true and authoritative self.

So, privileging suppressed stories over dominant ones is as wrong as the opposite. Since experiences are interpretations of events in a storied frame, privileging each story over another is a mistake. "We cannot idolize, authorize, or privilege the subjugated voice" (Brown 2007, p. 187). The act of disqualifying the dominance of suppressed voice can be linked to studies on sex, gender, ethnicity, and race.

3. Bellowian Protagonists and Their Clubs of Life

The world of Bellow's novels conveys an ongoing quarrel between humans, mostly men, and their miscellaneous problems. Considering his style as a modernist writer, he mainly attempts to show different aspects of human mentality and understanding. None of Bellow's protagonists is immune to problems. The reader can recognize these characters as humans trapped in a loop of misfortunes. The possibility of seeing a battleground between a man and his aspects of life is high. However, the timeline of events and what different characters feel at distinctive moments are controversial. The distinction between narrators in each novel is a crucial factor to consider. *Dangling Man* is the only novel of the three that is narrated in first-person. Bellow chose a third-person narrative for the other two novels. The narrator of *The Victim* gives us selected information about characters, but we are aware of all the motivations and feelings Leventhal experiences. The omniscient narrator of *Seize the Day* breaks the limitations and goes beyond the protagonist's mindset. We can also be aware of what Dr. Adler, the protagonist's father, really feels about his son.

Apprehending the essential existence of men struggling with their problems makes us ask a primary question: what creates this urge to storytelling? What are the goals of this traditional storytelling? Is the process of retelling intentional or involuntary? In addition to analyzing this urge, it is also essential to study the club of life—the role of other people in what a person thinks of himself is undeniable. The familial and marital life can act as a foreground to these social practices. Joseph, Leventhal, and Wilhelm had their own unique conflicts with their wives. To a large extent, neither their partners, family, or friends could willingly assist them in solving their problems.

First and foremost, we must consider that externalization of the problem depends on a full survey of the club of life. The prospects of alienation in these novels are alike, but the role of each family member or friend is essential in a deeper layer. Joseph felt totally devastated by the social norms and what is considered the authentic way of living by these norms. He began to wonder what mistakes he had made to experience such a stagnant situation. At first, the journal seems like a relief from mundane life, but furthermore, the notes embrace the fact that to analyze Joseph's inner life, there is a primary need to examine his relationship with his wife, family, friends, and society. Leventhal and Wilhelm are the same. Among all their thoughts and motivations, they tried to understand social practices. Leventhal ironically dangled to reach an awareness of the notion of victimization. Moreover, Wilhelm is a victim who cries out for help, but almost everyone ignores his need for love and compassion.

Bellow's *Dangling Man* presents Joseph's reflections and memories arranged in chronological order over a specific period of time. The possibility of knowing everything about Joseph's life is limited to what he wrote. The feeling of being alienated and the notion of solitude suggest that he has many imprisoned thoughts. Holding these thoughts and ignoring them seems more futile than ever for him. He indicates that he was following the natural orders prescribed by the ones who thought there was only one authentic way of expressing emotions. Unlike Joseph, who voluntarily tried to go beyond naturalized rules, Asa Leventhal in *The Victim* did not permit himself to question institutionalized ways of thinking. The narrator of *The Victim* portrays Leventhal's most profound thoughts as bottomless. The reader can easily notice that Leventhal occasionally struggles to escape his memories and emotions. However, the more he tried to hide his feelings, sorrows, and motivations, the more he was trapped in the voices inside his head. Unlike Joseph, who set his objective to solve his problems, Tommy Wilhelm in *Seize the Day* is introduced as a master of hiding his problems. The narrator reveals Wilhelm's private thoughts and feelings. As a more flexible character, Wilhelm uses hope as a crucial element to confront his problems.

Among the wives of the three protagonists, Iva in *Dangling Man* stands out as perhaps the most fully realized character. Joseph always struggled to know what quality was lacking in their marital life that kept him from having an intimate relationship with his wife. Since Iva is represented as a supporter of Joseph, the reader, like Joseph himself, might think that their problems would be arbitrary and pardonable. Her disobedience of Joseph during the Servatius party indicates her ambitions to stop Joseph's domination. This new rebellious version of Iva reminds Joseph of the times he had dreamed of the perfect woman:

> Those dreams inspired by Burckhardt's great ladies of the Renaissance and the no less profound Augustan women were in my head, not hers. Eventually I learned that Iva could not live in my infatuations… Iva was formed at fifteen, when I met her, with likes and dislikes of her own… (p. 81).

The crucial problem Joseph faced was his far-fetched conception of an ideal woman. He was neglecting the impossibility of living like those women in modern times. Joseph missed the point that Iva's outburst was because of his not communicating and not paying sufficient attention to her. The couple's conflict is a result of their inability to communicate. Signs of this inability manifested themselves when Iva asked Joseph to cash a cheque. Joseph remembered past incidents when he could not do this simple task and walked off. In addition, Joseph was ashamed to announce that he was jobless. So, he rejected Iva's request. Calling him mulish, Iva found Joseph's principles and reasons absurd. She also suspected that maybe he had got into a fight there. Irritated by these accusations, Joseph claimed that Iva "always jump[s] to the worst conclusion [she] can think of" (p. 147). The quarrel indicates that the two have many untold stories about each other. In the end, the dangling man gave a clue that his problems with Iva remained unsolved. Although Joseph mentioned many marital problems he was experiencing, he wrote about unique outcomes too. For instance, the delightful sunset leads the reader to one of the few romantic moments between the two (p. 102).

Like Iva, Joseph's father is not invited to his club of life. Joseph criticizes his father's worldview. By talking about people who quit college to join the army, his father informs him that money is more

necessary than education. But his father is not the only member of his family trying to dominate such ideas in Joseph's mind. Due to what Joseph wrote in the journal, Amos's controlling role over Joseph's life is evident. While his father was just criticizing and encouraging Joseph, his brother, at least for a time, attempted to take complete control of his life. He even got disappointed when Joseph married Iva. Since he married a woman of a wealthy family, he tried to dictate his own ways to Joseph. Amos questions Joseph openly and harshly.

There is extreme antagonism between Joseph and his niece, Etta. Etta has a disrespectful attitude toward Joseph throughout the novel. Joseph tried to influence her by sending record albums and books. In one of the climaxes of the story, Joseph taught Etta a lesson by spanking her because she had called her uncle a beggar. Joseph's efforts to make a connection with her show that, at least for a short time, Joseph had hope for including her in his club. For Joseph, a perfect family would not try to give him a prescription for life. He was not interested in sharing his inner and spiritual transitions with any family member, nor was he affected by anyone. Perhaps the only case is his friend Abt (p.71).

Unfortunately for Leventhal, during the weeks in which *The Victim* takes place, Mary is away assisting her elderly mother with a move from Baltimore to their ancestral home in the South. Mary's impact on him can be traced by examining Leventhal's thoughts, memories, and ravings. What is known is that Leventhal was feeling devastated without her. In different sections, he mentioned that Mary's presence would undoubtedly soothe his nerves. Leventhal's harsh behavior and lack of flexibility indicate that his ideas were dominating and fixed. This domination was internalized and affected Leventhal's understanding of distinguished subjects. Max and Elena's relationship was another victim of Leventhal's dominant view of the couple's fixed roles. Mary plays a critical role in Leventhal's life. She persuaded Leventhal to see the other sides of events and examine other possible truths. The stiffness of Leventhal was because of internalized discourses he had never tried to examine. The moments in which Mary helped Leventhal conquer the dominant

voice in his head are arguably more than when he refused to turn to her to discuss the troubles. The sorrow reached deeper layers of his nerves when Leventhal felt lonely because his comfort zone was away.

There are only a few allusions to Leventhal's parents. Leventhal accepted that his mother was a mad woman. He took his father's words for granted, and to some extent, Leventhal has been dominated by his father. Leventhal was afraid to find the characteristics of his mother's face in anybody, including himself. In an attempt to make a connection, the relationship between Leventhal and Max is like the one Joseph and Amos had. In the two novels, both of the elders try to oppress their younger brothers. Perhaps the key difference is that Leventhal never confronted Max directly. Leventhal had taken an entirely ignorant attitude toward Max's status. He had always questioned Max's choices.

Max's elder son, Philip, is different from all other members of the family. Getting on a Metro, buying chocolate, and having a talkative nephew are the things that seemed pleasant to Leventhal (p. 86-87). Additionally, Leventhal did care about the kid and felt sorry for his absence as an uncle. In his wife's absence, Philip was a reliable person whose positive vibes were noticeable in Leventhal's life. Besides family members, Leventhal's circle of friends is not even comparable to Joseph's because Harkavy seems to be the only friend he has. Similar to Abt in the *Dangling Man*, Harkavy is portrayed as a friend who has a bad influence on the protagonist.

When Tommy Wilhelm in *Seize the Day* skimmed his own life, he concluded that ten wrong decisions had created "the history of his life," and marrying his wife was one of them (p. 27). Wilhelm and Margaret have two children. Although they were not together anymore, Margaret refused to divorce. This dangling situation is a total misery for Wilhelm. He could not afford the enormous amount of money Margaret asked for the children and herself. She put Wilhelm under so much pressure without trying to cover the expenses by working. Unlike Joseph, Wilhelm indicates that he tried to understand his wife despite Margaret, who never wanted to understand him. Margaret is portrayed as a maleficent who

constantly attempts to tease Wilhelm. Margaret had brought all the miseries and disasters for Wilhelm. And surprisingly, Wilhelm still hoped for better days. He does not forget good days with Margaret. Wilhelm even remembers when she nursed him and read John Keats' poem (p. 96-97). In a sense, Wilhelm is optimistic that one day, he will divorce and will propose to Olive, his lover. He would tell her to "stand by [him] a while" and not to allow Margaret to defeat him (p. 123).

While Joseph and Leventhal took a refusal method to communicate with their families and friends by will, Wilhelm felt obligated to do so. His father, Dr. Adler, is the only family member he has at the hotel. Still, like Joseph's and Leventhal's fathers, Dr. Adler is a controlling man who tries to dominate his son's state of mind. Catherine-Phillipa is Wilhelm's only sibling. Although Wilhelm is no longer communicating with her when Dr. Adler mentions her request for money, he tries to be just about her and the profession she loves. His father pointed to the hotel and the concept of the same roof after many years of separation between Wilhelm and himself. "Wilhelm was glad for an instant. At last they would talk over old times" (p, 32).

To some extent, Wilhelm blamed himself for the gap between him and the family. He felt he disappointed his parents when he left the college for a far-fetched career in Hollywood. "There were problems, and of these problems his father wanted no part" (p. 17). The doctor plays a cautionary role in Wilhelm's life. Like his marriage with Margaret, he only cautioned about a certain unsuccessful relationship. Unlike Joseph, a man refusing to talk to anyone, Wilhelm is a person who always wants to have better communication with his father, the only possible member of his club of life who does not care so much about his son. He just did not want his son and daughter to become a burden for him to carry.

4. The Externalization of the Problem in Bellow's Fiction

Bellow's protagonists feel the urge to tell self-stories. In the *Dangling Man*, Joseph starts to write about his life consciously and voluntarily. The portrait of him as a rebellious man against the hard-boiled era of hiding emotions and thoughts is important to the essence of the deconstruction of the dominant narratives. Unlike

him, Leventhal in *The Victim* resists examining his memories, but, in the end, involuntary memory conquers his thoughts. The narrator describes his inner thoughts. Based on them, a transition from a dogmatic character to a doubtful one becomes evident. In *Seize the Day*, Wilhelm is represented as a master of concealing troubles, but the distinguished day forces him to describe his feelings in the form of stories. Hope for alternatives plays an essential role in his attempt to narrate his lived experiences.

In the *Dangling Man*, Joseph was in many troubles when he began to write about them. As the title of the novel suggests, the crucial one was he was dangling between two types of life, civilian and army. The key concept of freedom evolves throughout the novel. At first, he found himself in mandatory leisure. The duration of seven months before writing the journal must not be neglected. Joseph gives the readers little information, and the only things he narrates about the timespan are the incidents regarding the wait for the induction. His exact feelings and thoughts during that time remain almost unknown. It is probably safe to say that Joseph's starting point for noticing problems in his life was around 15 December. And obviously, all the processes like naming the problem, tracing the history and effects of the problem, evaluating the impact of the problem, finding unique outcomes by telling alternative stories, and re-authoring happened by himself because he was writing the journal. Starting the third day of writing, Joseph admits that his situation is problematic:

> It is a narcotic dullness. There are times when I am not even aware that there is anything wrong with this existence. But, on the other hand, there are times when I rouse myself in bewilderment and vexation, and then I think of myself as a moral casualty of the war. I have changed. (p. 14)

The recognition that the problem has changed the person is essential. Joseph named his problem "narcotic dullness." He gives the reader a clue that the older Joseph is a conservative man with a conventional look (p.22). But the new Joseph seemed like a lost man who could not even think of turning to his wife and consulting her about his problems. Tracing the history of the problem is a must in the externalization process, and mentioning the flat several times makes the flat a point in which problems were almost absent.

Another instance of using the technique of tracing the problem's history is when Joseph tries to portray his long relationship with Abt. Joseph had found Abt's attitudes abusive and offensive. The problem, which he called narcotic dullness, can be related to this relationship.

As noted before, Joseph maintains that living with Abt had a bad influence on him. "We suffer from bottomless avidity. Our lives are so precious to us, we are so watchful of waste. Or perhaps a better name for it would be the Sense of Personal Destiny" (p. 72). Joseph names a problem rooted in the far past. Also, in narrative therapy, the person is free to change the name of the problem, and Joseph renames the problem in capitalized form. In his description of old Joseph, he maintained that Joseph was a man who knew his goals and had plans to reach them. Joseph traced this problem and admitted the bad effects of it. "The fear of lagging pursues and maddens us" (p. 73). This conclusion at the end of the note suggests that Joseph evaluated the effects of this long-lived problem, "the Sense of Personal Destiny."

Regarding Joseph's anger management issue, his notes after narrating his fight with Mr. Gessell are thought-provoking:

> This was "not like" me; it was an early symptom. The old Joseph was inclined to be even-tempered. Of course, I have known for a long time that we have inherited a mad fear of being slighted or scorned, an exacerbated "honor." It is not quite the duelist's madness of a hundred years ago… Only, in my opinion, our rages are deceptive; we are too ignorant and spiritually poor to know that we fall on the "enemy" from confused motives of love and loneliness. Perhaps, also, self-contempt. But for the most part, loneliness (p. 121).

Joseph made a connection between several problems he thought he was suffering from. Also, he referred to the old Joseph once again to indicate that the issue of ill temper was not present at that time. Instead, the starting point of its appearance was when they moved out of the flat. The new Joseph became lonely. In a single paragraph, Joseph traces the problem. The fight was *an early symptom* of this problem. He admits that the situation that made him behave like that is not a part of his identity. He questions the problem by calling it deceptive. He also names loneliness, an earlier problem, as a prerequisite entity for ill-temper. In a sense,

he starts to evaluate the effects of multiple problems to deconstruct the dominant and internalized narratives of the past. Also, Joseph's use of unique outcomes is noteworthy. He narrates the story with its highs and lows. For instance, he mentions that based on Gesell's Canadian origin and his own, they were smiling for some time and talking about their childhoods in Canada (p. 120). Joseph does not exclude the moments in which the problem was absent, or even it had less effect on him.

Spirit of the Alternatives is a major character in this novel. The name of the Spirit is eye-catching since Joseph put this name on it. The Spirit introduces himself as "But on the other hand, or Tu As Raison Aussi," which means you are right too (p. 111). This mainly refers to the essence of the Spirit, which is viewing stories and incidents from alternative perspectives. The Spirit can also be considered as a narrative therapist himself because he frequently asks Joseph questions. On the other hand, the Spirit can also be a part of Joseph's consciousness because he is not totally unaware of Joseph's mind. Although Joseph believes that "alternatives grow on imaginary trees," he seems thrilled to meet the Spirit of Alternatives (p. 69).

In *The Victim*, there are primary hints indicating that Leventhal's significant problems are based on the binary opposition between Jews/Gentiles. Tracking the critical incidents can be a helpful attitude to reach an understanding of Leventhal's ideas on Jewishness. Every story related to Allbee goes back to the party at Williston's house. Leventhal was a job-hunting young man who did everything to be employed, but due to his early failures, he was becoming a bad-tempered man. Before getting his current job at Burke-Beard and Company, Leventhal continued to dangle in the unemployment situation. The situation became underwhelming for him. He went to Allbee and asked for a favor, setting an interview.

The interview is the crucial event that shows the multiple stories of a single event. At least five versions of the story are narrated, and still, none of them sounded qualified as the truth of what really happened. All of the characters accept their own version of the incident without examining other possibilities. However, aside from the hot-blooded Rudiger’s perspective, no one else could

exert any significant influence. Allbee lost his job because of Rudiger's assumptions. When Leventhal asked Harkavy about the reasons behind Allbee's losing the job, his reflections on multi-storied experiences are thought-provoking. "Who knows? The truth is hard to get at. If your life depended on getting it, you'd probably hang" (p. 75). These misinterpretations of the truth are present all over the novel. There can be infinite alternatives for an incident. Given this particular nature of truth, it is plausible to view the novel's conflicts as stemming from the characters' failure to recognize or understand it.

Unlike Joseph, who tried to name his problems, Leventhal is a passive person in the process. However, the technique is not completely absent in the externalization process. One of the rare instances of this is when Leventhal doubts the truth about his mother's state of sanity. Throughout the novel, this side of the suspicious Leventhal is active. "Till he had better evidence, his fears were the fears of hypochondria. The word was helpful; it gave them an amusing aspect" (p. 49). Whether he did the process of naming or his wife is a concealed subject. But he found this naming very helpful because the naming separated the problem's identity from his own. Crucially, the naming process must be done by the person himself. Otherwise, it would become a noxious procedure in the externalizing process. As an instance, Harkavy discussed one of Wilhelm's problems instead of himself: "You want the whole world to like you… a little independence, boy; it's a weakness positively" (p. 76). The result of this is internalizing a problem that could not even exist. In an attempt to re-author, Leventhal acclaimed that in order to analyze his need for social acceptance, one must release all of his inner and deep feelings and embrace them (p. 70). So, the possibility of having an obsession with social acceptance fades.

The everlasting battle between accepting and rejecting Allbee's words is present for Leventhal all throughout the novel. It is directly related to the essence of being open to alternative sides of a story. Regarding Allbee's misfortunes, Leventhal blames him and nobody else. At times, Leventhal's oppression obstructed the externalizing process. In the ongoing battle between having

sympathy and oppressing the oppressor, the Gentile, Leventhal is irritated by the alteration of his feelings to the Allbee (p. 182). His suspicion surpasses common sense when he thinks that Allbee worked on his feelings intentionally (p. 184).

On the other hand, the role of sharing common concerns between the Jew and the Gentile is crucial to degrade Leventhal's suppressed voice. "Oh, there was a smashup somewhere, certainly a smashup and a tragic one, you could be sure of that. Something crushing, a real smash" (p. 63). Leventhal himself was dealing with such smashups. But he thinks that he ran away. So, when he considers other possibilities, becoming a blind essentialist seems to be the bigger problem for a Jew like him. And deposing this essentialist would be the solution for such an error. Essentialism is a state in which disadvantaged people believe that since they are underprivileged, they have the right to dominate those who silenced them. Allbee was not the only Gentile facing Leventhal's essentialism. In addition to Williston, Catholic Elena and his more orthodox mother were both cases for him to develop his oppressive ideas further.

Wilhelm's self-stories in *Seize the Day* are narrated over a single day, the reckoning day. Bellow portrayed Wilhelm with a more unique and distinguished style rather than the adolescent Joseph or the essentialist Leventhal. Wilhelm, in his mid-forties, has struggled hard to become a successful man, but he has failed to do so. Leventhal spoke about his past experiences as a man who escaped the trouble of becoming a man like Wilhelm. So, Bellow tries to portray the difficulties of a middle-aged man who could not escape the problems. In some ways, Wilhelm's situation is worse than the other two protagonists. The presence of Dr. Adler and Dr. Tamkin suggests that Bellow wrote the novel with an awareness of dogmatic and probably destructive methods of dominant psychology and therapy.

The notable matter regarding Wilhelm's father is his name, which reminds the reader of Alfred Adler, the founder of individual psychology. As a core member of the Vienna Circle, Adler believed that (A person's) memories are the reminders she carries about with her of her limitations and of the meanings of events"

(Adler 1931/1998, p. 58). The novel consists of memories to a large extent. One of the common qualities between Adler's ideas and White's notion of narrative therapy can be their belief in the inseparability of person and society. "All important life problems, including certain drive satisfactions, become social problems" (Ansbacher & Ansbacher 1956, p. 2). Adler rejected objective and natural psychoanalysis. But ironically, the portrait of Dr. Adler indicates a completely different image of him compared to Alfred Adler. Wilhelm's father did not even try to talk about his son's problems. Instead of using a subjective attitude toward him, he used an oppressive methodology. He wanted to convince Wilhelm that he was the one to blame for the poor condition he was experiencing.

The sense of forgiveness leads the person to use narrative therapy as a non-blaming outlook on incidents. To recognize a different entity separated from the self, the person must forgive herself. In spite of his long-lasting attitude of not accepting his mistakes before, Wilhelm changed his viewpoint of his mistakes and problems. Evidently, instead of blaming the self and doing nothing but escaping reality, Wilhelm uses narrative therapy techniques to externalize his problems. Admitting that changing his name was wrong, Wilhelm explores possible initial solutions. "But the mistake couldn't be undone now, so why must his father continually remind him how he had sinned?" (p. 29). "Past and dead" are the adjectives Wilhelm selects to describe his painful memories. The portrait of Wilhelm as a compassionate man who believes in forgiving the self makes him a promising character with a high chance of externalization. He prays, "For all the time I have wasted I am very sorry. Let me out of this clutch and into a different life. For I am all balled up. Have mercy" (p. 30). After all the mistakes he has made, he is still hopeful to find salvation.

Accusing his son of exaggerating his problems, Dr. Adler undervalued his mental health. His naturalistic view is to stick to the point. He is only curious about the result, ignoring all the processes behind every incident. Dr. Adler, an old man with a good position in society, was showing his appreciation for "the truth" blatantly. Relatedly, one can interpret details and principles

as alternative stories and dominant ones, respectively. Dr. Adler is the one who does not want his son to speak about his troubles by suggesting to him that he cut out details, including emotions and belongings (p. 52). In other words, he is a true supporter of the thin and to-the-point description who detested the process of thickening.

Various techniques of the externalization of the problem become more prominent when Wilhelm speaks with Tamkin, the fraudulent psychologist. Perhaps this is because of Tamkin's flexibility, the quality his father was missing during conversations. The conclusions Wilhelm has got to rethink about his relationship with Dr. Adler, Tamkin, and Margaret are noteworthy. Mentioning his love for his father, he began to muse, "It is my childish mind that thinks people are ready to give [pity] just because you need it" (p. 101). Wilhelm does not believe that he is a unique or privileged person, nor does he think that he deserves the mercy of his father. He hopes to see that affection he has tried to show to his own kids. But during the last encounter with Dr. Adler, Wilhelm's last drops of hope turned into emptiness. After all, Dr. Adler is his father, but because of the destructive effects this face-to-face relationship has had on Wilhelm's lived experiences, Wilhelm decides to leave the city in order to omit this influential factor.

Poems are tools for finding unique outcomes and thickening the thin description. They are noticeably present in the first chapter of the novel. Wilhelm admits that although he had never liked college, the only course he loved was literature. References to Shakespeare, Milton, and Keats show the efficient role of poems as a means to construct alternative narratives and to express the self. The relationship between the three poems is thought-provoking. The line from Shakespeare reminds him of how powerful love is, whether it is loving others or the self. Lines from Milton affected Wilhelm's mind from the beginning. In Milton's poem, there is a duality about death and mortality. And the main thing from Milton's poem that haunts Wilhelm is that maybe his death is the ultimate solution to all of his problems. That is why, at some points, he referred to death as a relief from his miseries. But seeing the body in the coffin makes him realize how wrong he used to be.

Still, Keats' poem is about sorrow. Sorrow can be regarded as Wilhelm's final choice for naming his problems. And Keats' poem reminds him that facing the problem is a must for him.

The poems' effects, considering all of them as unique outcomes, emerge at the end of the novel:

> [The heavy sea-like music] poured into him where he had hidden himself in the center of a crowd by the great and happy oblivion of tears. He heard it and sank deeper than sorrow, through torn sobs and cries toward the consummation of his heart's ultimate need (p. 125).

Wilhelm sinks deeper than the sorrow that has dominated his mindset. He goes beyond the surface of dominant narratives to find alternative ones. Wilhelm is still alive, and by considering hope, which was regarded as an aid against problems, he can be hopeful of changing everything just as he planned after the last crisis he faced. Tears are tears of joy, after all. His heart's ultimate need is to love himself, his father, and even other people, especially from his ethnicity. Deprived of his father's love, his wife's mercy, and his children's affections, Wilhelm shows his intention of sinking deeper than his problems and deconstructing dominant narratives of others, including Dr. Adler, Tamkin, and Margaret. Throughout the novel, involuntary memory acts as an unwilling tool for tracing the history of Wilhelm's problems. He has operated the processes of naming the problem and the unique outcome. Finally, the promising ending suggests that Wilhelm finally realized that the thin description of his lived experiences has deeper layers in which he can still find peace, love, and success.

5. Conclusion

In the *Dangling Man*, the protagonist names a couple of problems, traces their histories, and evaluates their effects. Although some problems are left unsolved or in a blur, he is able to externalize them in his journal. Communicating with the symbolic character, the Spirit of Alternatives, he shares some of his strangled thoughts and emotions for the first time. In *The Victim*, essentialism renders the protagonist too fanatical to consider alternative possibilities in the unfolding of events. At times, Bellow's words portray the path by which a victim of dominant narratives becomes a suppressor himself. Despite his tendency to recall memories, the protagonist uses some narrative therapeutic techniques to overcome his misleading sense of essentialism. In the end, he finally understands that his suppressed voice cannot be privileged, and he must be dethroned due to the re-authoring process. *Seize the Day* explores the possibility of revival from dominant narratives. The reckoning day marks the starting point for him to change his strategy from concealing problems to analyzing them with externalizing tools. The protagonist is all alone in his externalization process, but with an unconquerable spirit, his future seems brighter than that of the other protagonists. He chooses to dig deeper for meaning in his lived experiences. Instead of becoming a victim of the problems, he seeks a more detailed description of his life to re-author it.

Saul Bellow's fiction, at least the three novels analyzed in this study, portrays different characters from various backgrounds and social positions grappling with various problems. His depictions of the modern man and his problems make it possible to analyze the novels through a therapeutic lens. All three protagonists employ narrative techniques, and based on the results, these techniques are effective for them. They deconstruct the internalized narratives to re-author lived experiences of the past and the future. Bellow's understanding of how problems can shade all the unique outcomes is evident throughout the novels.

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