

## Matured but Childish: A Study of Saul Bellow's Dangling Man

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### Abstract

In Dangling Man Joseph's quest for ultimate meaning is necessarily preceded by self-knowledge. Bellow poses the alternative of human freedom and self-determination. It dramatizes the starkness of the choice between freedom and surrender and to add urgency to Joseph's quest. Joseph assumes that, given the leisure necessary for self-examination, some such definition is possible. He succeeds only in making himself and others miserable, he abandons the struggle and requests induction.

Joseph lives with the memory of his mother. His mother created him with positive approach. She took care of him in all his activities. As he remembers his mother, he has mentioned this very clearly in his personal diary. He states that his mother has provided him with true and positive self-image. He has been living with this positive attitude with the help of his mother. He believes that his mother is his god because she has created him cared for him in all possible ways. Joseph has lived his childhood in a Montreal slum. People around the slum face harsh realities. They have a hard life to live. But he has a protective life and escapes from the harsh realities of life as his home is acting as a protective shield for him. Joseph realizes that as a child he asked permission to polish the family shoes as he was staying at home during rainy days.

I did not clean shoes because I was praised for it, but because of the work and the sensations of the room, closed off from the wet and fog of the street, with its locked shutters and the faint green of the metal pipes along the copings of its houses. Nothing could have tempted me out of the house. (8)

Joseph has a secure life inside the home. His mother made a protective cover for him. He is very clear as a child that other people are suffering in that slum. He feels the issues faced by the people. Though his mother suffered she never allowed her child to suffer. Joseph fails to realize the reality of St. Dominick Street. Joseph states that "the only place where I was ever allowed to encounter reality" (57). He remembers the seclusion that he had in the apartment. Sitting in a secure place, he realizes the harsh reality outside his room.

Little since then has worked upon me with such force as, say, the sight of a driver trying to raise his fallen horse, of a funeral passing through the snow, or of a cripple who taunted his brother. And the pungency and staleness of its stores and cellars, the dogs, the boys, the French and immigrant women, the beggars with sores and deformities. (57)

Joseph's mother has the nature of protecting him in always possible ways. He remembers that when he was a child, his aunt took him to have curls cut. His mother did not like this that when he was back without curls she wept. She always accepted her son. When he commits mistakes she tries to make clear and defend him. She knows that his son is an innocent so she always gives freedom to him. Joseph enjoys complete freedom from his

mother. He always enjoys his mother's company and touch. He feels that he is secured in the hands of his mother.

Joseph feels safe in the hands of female gender. During childhood he was safe in the hands of his mother. During adulthood he feels safe in the hands of his wife Iva. Iva is quite a good girl. Joseph feels secured in her hands. Practically he enjoys the moral support and financial support from his wife. He stays at home as a leisure man when she works in the library. He stays at home all the day free, not going for a job. Joseph states that "She claims that it is no burden and that she wants me to enjoy this liberty, to read and to do all the delightful things I will be unable to do in the Army" (9).

Joseph loses the reality of life. He has started to live a depending life. His wife does not bother about his present life, she accepts her husband's wish to remain leisurely. She takes the responsibility of placing their household things and household activities. Iva asks him to help for the household activities but he rejects but she bears the shame. Even this situation is very clear in Joseph's brother's Christmas dinner. As a woman Iva sustains her husband because she has a real understanding.

Joseph with a harsh mind does not treat his wife as a normal human being. Iva knows that he does not have any kind of experience in his real life. Iva is often subject to the more unpleasant manifestations of his anxiety. Joseph relates, he and Iva no longer confide in each other. Joseph opines that: "the main bolt that held us together has given way, and so far I have had no incentive to replace it" (9). Even he is very clear in his action towards his wife. Even though he cannot control his reaction against his wife. It resultant with the acceptance of his wife and more over it shows the domineering nature of Joseph. He also says that his main bolt is not working. Iva treats Joseph as a child because she knows that he is not attached with the world of reality. This makes him have this kind of cruel action. He fails to adapt to the reality of life and it results in this unknown action within him.

Joseph believes that he is leading a life of reality moreover he believes that he is willfully accepting the reality of life. He thinks that he "worked everything out in accordance with a general plan" (15). He always thinks that he is ideally constructed and everything is touching his life. He is trying to unite with his wife Iva as she is behaving but he literally fails as he is constructed naturally "a great deal of trouble with his wife, urging her to read books of his choosing, teaching her to admire what he believes admirable" (20). The new notions within him make him aware of the new situation.

Joseph's childish nature within him never allows him to create a new notion in his life. He realizes the impossibility of creating a new world within him. He remembers the several incidents that took part in his life and his trial to come out of his childish nature. But people resist his nature. When he was a child, his mother accepted him and now his wife accepts his childish nature. His wife tolerates Joseph being drunk at the Servatius party. Later, he contemplates her resistance to his efforts to improve her:

Eventually I learned that Iva could not live in my infatuations. There are such things as clothes, appearances, furniture, light entertainment, mystery stories, the attractions of fashion magazines, the radio, the enjoyable evening. What could one say to them? Women thus I reasoned were not equipped by training to resist such things. You might force them to read Jacob Boehme for ten years without diminishing their appetite for them; you might teach them to admire Walden but never convert them to wearing old clothes. (65)

Joseph analyzes his self and find out his own mistake. He absorbs his self very clearly. He has tested his self-reliance and has found out the result for his analysis. Like his sustainable mother, Iva his wife, also provides his wish and she satisfies the need of her husband. Iva without the natural opposition of a subordinate, but she is silent, self-effacing as a mother does. Iva nurses him very well she comes from work to give lunch and fetches strawberries. She used to read for an hour for Joseph before going to sleep. He opines that “at her ample and most generous best” (79).

Later Joseph is being attracted with Kitty Daumier. Bellow portrays Kitty as a seductress woman. She is highly attractive and has threatening traits of total feminine sexuality. Joseph believes that Kitty pursues him in all ways. Kitty nevertheless accomplishes her objective with Joseph by appealing to his need for maternal attention. Joseph admires the talents of Kitty. His relationship with Kitty takes him into third world. The controversial relationship arises within the mind of Joseph and deviates them to have a sexual relationship at the boarding house during one rainy night. Joseph apologizes, though he is distracted by the sight of Kitty propped up in bed with a cold. Her response to his apology is to suggest that he takes off his shoes: “You poor thing, you must be drenched. Pull them off this minute and let me see your socks” (67). Kitty shows her acceptance for having sexual relationship. She gives him a towel and her gesture makes him have the sexual encounter. “I knew you’d see it my way sooner or later” (37). Again Joseph is manipulating woman because of his need to be mothered.

Joseph expresses his resentment of the real child. Joseph’s behavior demonstrates the effects of his mother encouraging him to remain a child. Bellow’s association of the maternal image with mortality, however, complicates the protagonist’s view of her and of women in general. As the transmitter of his mortal inheritance, the nurturing mother incorporates both the promise of life and the threat of death. The paradoxical image on Bellow’s Joseph is apparent in his ambiguous attitude towards women. Although they seek salvation in women, they deeply fear and even despise them. Bellow’s image of the exotic woman appears to be an attempt to synthesize the nurturing mother. Bellow himself declares that literature must be concerned with the living man and is convinced that the last word concerning him cannot be imagined. To his observation we can only amend the hope that the first word concerning women will, in his own work, begins to be formulated.

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