

Use of Metaphors and Symbols in Saul Bellows 'Mr. Sammlers Planet'

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Abstract—It is Saul Bellow's most anxious and apocalyptic novel. Published in spring 1970, winner of National Book Award 'Mr. Sammler's Planet' presents a world characterized by apparently irreconcilable antithesis. The story of a sad one eyed old man of seventy plus is told against the background of the imminent Moon landing. European born and bred, Arthur Sammler is a septuagenarian, grew up as a product of enlightenment. Mr Sammler has known about life and its complexities, about life and death and had presumably attained moral authority to utter opinions. Bellows' ideas are carefully grounded in Mr Sammler's Planet, through subtle handling of metaphors. Despite his age Sammler is a man in motion, moving among the clutter of thoughts, revolutionary motion, the unbalancing and the maddening of man not only accentuate the extremities of human experience but also integrate them.

Keywords— *Imminent, complexities, authority, metaphor, integrate.*

Saul Bellow's "Mr. Sammler's Planet" has had a remarkable and dispiriting reception. It is Bellow's most anxious and apocalyptic novel. Published in spring 1970, winner of National Book Award Mr. Sammler's Planet presents a world characterized by apparently irreconcilable antithesis. A catalogue of numerous disparities underlying Sammler's experiences and thoughts would be tediously lengthy because it would include countless variations on several fundamental polarities in the novel: "infinity and finitude, spirituality and materiality, order and chaos, inertia and motion, contemplation and action, end and beginning, death and life, civilization and barbarism, banality and sacrilege, society and self, wisdom and foolishness love and hate, objectivity and subjectivity."¹ The title of the novel itself suggests the life on earth, a timely theme and action takes place on day, night, and next day in 1969 in New York City. The story of a sad one eyed old man of seventy plus is told against the background of the imminent Moon landing. European born and bred, Arthur Sammler is a septuagenarian, grew up as a product of enlightenment. Returning to Poland to liquidate his father-

in-laws property, he and his wife get stuck in the mad storm of holocaust. Arthur managed to survive the debasement and rape of humanity. He was the only survivor of the large scale massacre, as he searched his way on the heap of corpse and returned to life. He was repatriated, along with his daughter Shula Slava, and his nephew Dr Elya Grunner. Mr Sammler wants to forget the misery, but the memory of the past breaks in as a burden of sorrow. His attitude towards life is not embittered. With his 'one good eye' he observes how others see him as a 'still point', a symbol of suffering and survival, with the other eye he is able to distinguish light and dark side of life.

Arthur Sammler is a polished Jew, a spoiled brat. He was a Nazi victim. Mr. Sammler is a reborn hero and whole of his life he struggled against the thought given to him "that reality was a terrible thing and the final truth about mankind is overwhelming and crushing." Mr Sammler has known about life and its complexities, about life and death and had presumably attained moral authority to utter opinions. Bellows' ideas are carefully grounded in Mr Sammler's Planet, through subtle handling of metaphors. The novel investigates the intellectual's preoccupation with reality and his use of language and certain literary devices used in that perception. Sammler is a reborn hero, three day quest symbolizes life, death, and rebirth. Sammler had encountered death, and this day and night of his soul brings out his belief in rebirth.

The protagonist is an intellectual engaged in both perception and formation of reality. Sammler's concern with sentences, names, and words reveals his attempt to formulate his ideology on the issues of life and death. Two metaphors dominate in the novel. One is of The Sea and the other is of the Planets and Satellites. Bellow implies that thinking in terms of metaphors may be inimical to the perception of reality. Sammler wakes up and is engrossed in the thoughts of 'ideas and explanation' and how they dominate modern intellectual life: "a drudgery, it occurred to Sammler, pumping and pumping to keep few acres of dry ground. The invading sea being the metaphor of multiplication of facts and sensation."² Sammler uses Sea as a metaphor for

preponderance of ideas. As water covers two thirds of the earth's surface, and sea according to Sammler is the metaphor for the preponderance of ideas, the earth is the earth of ideas, and human life is dominated by ideas. Sammler is caught up in this world of ideas. Furthermore Sammler with his conversation to Dr. Lal narrates his findings, "They say our protoplasm is like sea water, our blood has a Mediterranean base. But now we live in a social and human sea. Inventions and Ideas bathe our brains, which sometimes like sponges must receive whatever currents bring and digest mental protozoa." (Page 225) Sammler compares Wallace to anarchistic sons – those boys Bakunins Bakunins had loved fire so Wallace worked in water, a different medium." (Page 42-43.) Wallace had said he was hooked like a fish by the aneurysm and and jerked into the wrong part of the universe drowning in the air." (Page 244) Later running up and down the stairs ,carrying two buckets, while water is folding the house, Sammler thinks the words of Wallace, 'hooked like a fish', and 'drowning' and associate them with the metaphor of sea.

Sammler ponders, "How apt it was that Wallace should flood the attic, it was a metaphor for Eliya's condition." (Page 62). As the metaphor of the sea describes human life on earth, the title of the novel emblematic suggesting the consideration of life on the planet earth. Bellow has employed the metaphors of Planets and Satellites. Mr. Sammler occupies the position of the planet in centre and the other characters revolving around as satellites. "The metaphor of Planets and Satellites closely resemble the wheel, a metaphor used in Eastern philosophy and more recently in T. S. Eliot's "Murder in The Cathedral" and "Four Quaterets".³ Sammler in centre rotates on his own axis, other satellites rotate in orbit around earth, so do several characters in the novel in action. Certain incidents associated to several characters are explained in terms of satellites and planets as: Wallace is 'loomy', Dr. Govind Lal is a palnet buzzing oriental demon, (Page 237) Feffers very noisy very turbulent (Page 231) Eisen is a man himself very far out on another track, orbiting a different foreign centre." (293).

Most of the characters in the novel reveal confusions. The metaphor also applies to the ideas associated them to this confusion. As Sammler says, "It was the turn again and again of certain minor things which people insisted on enlarging, magnifying, moving into the centre." (Page 250) The metaphor of planets and satellites is suggested by the words 'turn' and 'centre'. Sammler thinks about people "like crew.....all went up and down, and roundabout, reinforce the metaphor of satellite, its nature is to rotate in orbit on an axis.

In the novel the earth not only is depicted as the 'womb' and 'tomb' of mankind, but also provide macrocosmic

analog to mankind's experience of conflict in life. Sammler possess an imaginary axis comprise of the emotional extremities, of attraction and reputation, around which the self-rotates experiencing the cyclic affirmation and despair equivalent to the planetary manifestation of day and night, Sammler about to sleep realizes circular motion, "all went up and down" (254) from time to time Sammler is attracted towards contemplation disinterestedness freedom from motion even death.

Despite his age Sammler is aman in motion, moving among the clutter of thoughts, revolutionary motion, the unbalancing and the maddening of man not only accentuate the extremities of of human experience but also integrate them as Sammler explains to Dr Lal "Once you begin talking, once the mind takes to this way of turning, it keeps turning and it dips to all events, and perhaps it makes matters slightly more tolerable, to let it turn." (215) The earth revolves round the Sun causing Day and Night, suggest the light and dark, good and evil aspect of life. Sammler's thoughts continue to turn like "Ferre's wheel of causation". This Ferre's wheel represents three stages of life: past life- ignorant Sammler in wordy sense, present life – undergoing consciousness of self, mind, and body, worldly attachments, future – optimistic preparing to be for rebirth. (Page 218) Sammler's mind is introspective, meditative. He attains stillness through Faith. The earth rotates on its axis, and the theoretical axis is accepted as the truth or the still point as there's no poof for it. Feffer is the furious whirling took him for a fixed point. In such hyperenergetic revolution you fell in love with ideas of stability." (119) The words 'whirlings' and 'revolutions' place Feffer on satellite's orbit round a planet with Sammler as a fixed point, incorporated in the artistic fabric, as a controlling metaphor. In Mr Sammler's Planet, Bellow reveals that life of an especially sensitive mind might as well be a particularly vital subject for imaginative depiction."⁴ In Bellow's fictional work 'Mr Sammler's Planet' marks a new direction: "we found that Mr Sammler's act as a figure of western thought that reaches back to the thirteenth century and makes its way to the present, through a series of ideological cycles we suggested that the purpose of his journey is to trace the historical ascendancy of science over religion and that Mr Sammler at the end is Bellows' advocate for the redresses in the balance which Bellow feels would make possible a less despairing vision of Man than the reign of Science has been able to afford."⁵

Metaphors in the novel are of thematic importance. They are not merely ornamental but are tightly woven in the framework, helps to grasp the significance of the various themes of Mr. Sammler's Planet

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