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The Moral and Spiritual Collapse of Modern Civilization:
A Study in Saul Bellow's *The Dean's December*

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الانحدار الخلقى والروحي للحضارة الحديثة : دراسة في رواية سول بلو "شتاء العميد"
كلمات مفتاحية: انحدار خلقي ، الحضارة الحديثة ، سول بلو ، شتاء العميد
بحث مقدم م قبل أم عباس هلال فرهود / كلية التربية الاساسية .

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خلاصة البحث الموسوم "الاتحاد الخُلقي والروحي للحضارة الحديثة: دراسة في رواية سول بلو(شتاء العميد) هذه الدراسة هي عبارة عن محاولة استكشاف طريقة الكاتب في التعبير عن فكرة الاتحاد في القيم والأخلاق وانتشار الجريمة في أوروبا الشرقية متمثلة بمدينة بخارست وأوروبا الغربية متمثلة بمدينة شيكاغو بين أعوام ١٩٧٠ - ١٩٨٠ . وتتكون هذه الدراسة من بحثين وخاتمة . يتناول البحث الأول كيفية عرض الرواية لاضطهاد الناس من قبل النظام الشيوعي وتحويلهم الى كائنات فاقدة الإرادة من خلال إتباع سياسة الظلم والجوع والخوف . ويتناول البحث الثاني رؤية الكاتب لأسباب التحلل الخُلقي وانتشار الجريمة والفساد في شيكاغو.

إما الخاتمة فتقدم أهم الاستنتاجات التي توصل إليها الباحث.

Abstract

Saul Bellow (1915-2005) is a Canadian –born American novelist. He won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1976. He wrote nine novels , some short stories, and a few critical essays . His work concentrates mainly on the significance of man's existence in a world of dying human principles and moral decay. He demonstrates his vision of a dying world in his last novel *The Dean's December* (1982) .

This study is an attempt to explore how Saul Bellow demonstrates the moral decline of the modern civilization in the East represented by Bucharest, and in the West represented by Chicago . The novel talks about the prevailing urban decay that characterizes the world during the 1970s and the early 1980s .

The study falls into two sections and a conclusion . Section One is devoted to depict how the totalitarian regime in Bucharest enslaves people through terror and hunger. Section Two traces the reasons behind the collapse of human values in Chicago . The conclusion summarizes the whole study and sums up its findings.

Section One

Bucharest : The Communist State of Fear and Hunger

The Dean's December starts its action in a chilly month of the year as its title indicates . Hence , the gloomy atmosphere of the novel has been established from the outset of the book . Albert Corde , the protagonist , is an American dean of a Chicago college of journalism . Corde and his wife Minna , a Romanian world-famous astronomer , are in a visit to Bucharest to see Valeria , Minna's mother , who is now in an intensive care unit in the Communist Hospital . With few exceptions , visits to the hospital are forbidden.

The Cordes have managed to visit Minn's mother twice . The first one is by official permission . The second visit is confronted by a lot of troubles . The hospital is run by a strong-headed Colonel in the secret police. Bellow describes him as “ a tough bureaucrat . The staff lived in terror of him”.* Minna suggests to her husband that if they talk sensibly with the Colonel , they may be allowed to visit her mother . However , this does not happen . The emotionally – dried Colonel does not yield to their plea. He remains as firm as a rock. He is “ a lean , hollow – templed , tight – wrapped , braided-whip , sort of man” (p.2). Bellow's descriptive compound adjectives show that there is no hope in finding human sympathy in the man . He treats the Cordes with disrespect . He pays no attention to their social ranks , nor does

* Saul Bellow , *The Dean's December* , (New York : Penguin Books , Ltd., 1982), p.1. Hereafter , further references will appear in my text , and will be identified by page number(s) .

he consider the critical condition of Valeria who is on her deathbed.

Dewey Spangler, Corde's American friend who happened to be in Bucharest as a journalist, says that in Bucharest the men in power are "real dogs" and that "power stood on crooked legs"(p.119). He goes on to say that Bucharest is "a hell of place seen from within" (ibid.,). The Cordes' request has been refused because the high authorities in Bucharest strictly forbid Valeria's visits as an act of severe punishment for the dying lady because of her disdain for the Communist policy in Bucharest.

Valeria, the old woman, is not a Party member now, hadn't been one since, as Minister of Health, she fell in disgrace.... She was denounced publicly by press and radio, expelled, threatened with prison, with death, too. Before he could come to trial, one of her colleagues who fell in the same shake-up has his head hacked off in his cell (p. 4).

The Communist regime is teaching the previous Minister of Health a very painful lesson because she has raised a finger in protest against the unforgiving nature of Stalinism. Moreover, they are punishing her for sending her intelligent daughter Minna to a more healthy area, the West. The savage action referred to in the previous quotation is taken against the 'Minster of Justice,'(p. 63), because of his disillusionment with the harsh and cold Communist administrative authorities. They cut his head even without trial. Dissenters are deprived of their human rights.

The Cordes have such a hard time to get the second permission to see the dying lady. In Bucharest they feel their physical, spiritual and ideological

isolation . The corrupt officials cause pain and suffering everywhere . The Colonel is the worst representative of the crooked authorities . He is unwilling “ to respond to humane appeal ,” (*ibid.*,) , and rules with an iron fist .

In *The Dean's December* Saul Bellow sees that in Bucharest people have no personal freedom . The glorious past days of Valeria have passed . Now, she is dehumanized in the full sense of the word . She is deprived of her own dignity in her last days . In Bucharest Corde, the American intellectual dean, has become

the image of the inappropriate American – all circumstances inappropriate , incapable of learning the lessons of the twentieth century ; spared , or scorned , by the forces of history or fate or whatever a European might want to call them . Corde was perfectly aware of this (p. 3) .

The American dean feels that Bucharest has turned him into an ‘image’ ; he has lost his self – esteem . The visit is a shocking experience for him . He encounters deep misery and disdain.

Malcolm Bradbury is quite right when he states that “in *The Dean's December* Bellow explores a new hero , a new man of feeling [who] knows his complexity.”¹ Corde’s democratic ideas about the West have been put into question in Bucharest . The despotic regime is antagonistic to the Western ideals of democracy and freedom .

Saul Bellow tells us that Albert Corde is a “hungry observer,” (p. 8) , and his presentation of the city’s crookedness requires special attention to realize the inner decay of the city . Although his exploration of the city is restricted by his fear of being arrested by the secret police , Corde’s communications with some close friends provides him with clear ideas on how life goes on there. During his stay in Bucharest , Corde shuts himself up in the cold , dimly – lit apartment of Valeria . There he meets the kind – hearted Tanti Gigi , Valeria’s sister . She tells him about the inner corruption of the totalitarian policy . In Bucharest there are “forced labor , mental hospitals for dissenters , censorship” (p. 63) . There are some torturing measures in hospitals : “Electric shocks , sulfadiazine injections ,” (ibid.,) , and other savage acts against political dissenters .

In his meeting with the American Ambassador in Bucharest , Albert Corde demonstrates how evil dominates the city : “A is bad , but B is worse , and C is worst still . When you reach N , unspeakable evil , A becomes trivial” (p. 64) . Corde’s words show that A’s badness is not made trivial by the fact that other things are worse . Corruption is a typical characteristic of the savage policy of the police state .

When he happened to be walking with his wife in the city , Corde noticed that there is an intentional shortage in the basic human needs . They are scared by the feeling that they have been watched . Minna “held Corde’s arm , and when the pedestrians approached , she gave it a tug which meant ‘shut up’ . So he was silent” (p. 107) . Moreover , the authorities make sure that “conversations with foreigners had to be reported ,”(p. 57) , to the

secret police. This is why the taxi drivers “here ,as elsewhere in Eastern Europe , reported to the secret police. For this reason they gave excellent service”(p. 106) . There is also strict control over speech and media . There are fears , “sick hopes , riddling evils , sadistic calculations” (ibid.,) .

In Bucharest there are extreme shortages of food, fuel , and energy . “Radiators turned cold after breakfast . The faucet went dry at 8 a.m. and did not run again until evening” (p.8) .The government offices are dimly – lit . Corde describes the Colonel’s room saying sarcastically : “There was the Colonel in his tall broom – closet office , ruling on this , ruling on that , under a twenty – watt light” (pp. 104-5) . The dim room is a reflection of the dark sadistic behaviour of the Colonel .

In *The Dean’s December* Saul Bellow sees no hope of regeneration in the Communist regime which turns Bucharest to “an archaic symbol of chaos”².

Aged women rose at four to stand in line for a few eggs , a small ration of sausages , three or four spotted pears . Corde had seen the shops and the produce , the gloomy queues – brown, gray , black , mud colors , and an atmosphere of compulsory exercise in the prison yard (pp. 51 – 2) .

The quoted passage shows that the necessary human needs are almost absent. People suffer from hunger . The Communist leadership is charged with the moral decay of the city.

The American dean protests silently against this reckless life . In a moment of silent contemplation , Corde’s thoughts are interrupted by a barking dog . “A dog barked ... then barked again . The barking of the dog , a protest

against the limits ,”(p. 10),is meant as an angry protest against hunger and oppression . Symbolically , the barking of the dog is meant to remind Corde that he is a stranger in Bucharest . The dog’s barking has “the function of the sheep – dog : that of guarding and guiding of the flocks”.³ Hence , people are dehumanized and treated like animals guarded by dogs.

However, there are ugly scenes in Bucharest and “the brick heaps exhaled decay” (p. 107) . There are even some unrecoverable human corpse under the great stony heaps of the earthquake. Hence , life in Bucharest has been deteriorated from within . It becomes “a miserable damn comfortless life , and scary as well as boring” (p. 119) . Like Valeria , Corde feels paralysed as he is unable to communicate his inner thoughts, “although there were many complex – things to be said”(p. 19). Commenting on the present crisis of his protagonist , Bellow says :

Corde is a humanist , perhaps , in the sense that he is obliged to find some explanation for his moral impulse which is challenged ... by a sort of nihilistic questioning of the modern world .⁴

Albert Corde sees that in the Eastern Europe life becomes unbearable ; it is not only chaotic , but nihilistic. The irredeemable spiritual bleakness of Bucharest drives him to think of how people endure living within a prison, which is called Bucharest .

However , a telephone call comes from the hospital to say that Minna’s mother has died . The moral decline of the despotic regime is depicted through the scene of Valeria’s funeral . Albert Corde pays bribes when they

have to be paid so as to ensure a dignified cremation for his mother-in-law. Through this episode , Bellow shows that Communist authorities dehumanize man even after death . People have no other choice than living like slaves without real sense of personal freedom . We sympathize with the sorrowful daughter over the death of her mother. We also sympathize with the citizens of Bucharest who struggle under the hardships of life in the police state .

The weaknesses of the Bucharest administrative institutions are presented through scenes , episodes , and characters . There is an utter disregard for the shocking fact that in the Capital of Romania , life has been deteriorated by the degraded ruling leaders . Amid the ruin of the modern civilization in the Eastern Europe , the Cordes find themselves obliged to return home in Chicago where some extremely painful problems are waiting for them .

Section Two

Chicago : The City of Crime , Corruption and Chaos

Saul Bellow tells the readers that Albert Corde has written a two – part article to the *Harper* before his departure to Bucharest . In this article Corde criticizes the inner life of Chicago . It represents “the contempt center of the U,S. A.,” (p. 42) , for Corde . The life of the underclass people is the main focus of Corde’s article . He reflects :

Those people do what they can in the space they’ve been confined to . Yes , they scrounge and they rob and they fuck , they drink and take drugs , they cut and shoot each other and die young . And what you , a man of routine , can’t give is that they have no structure. They don’t plan , and don’t ‘do’ ; they only hang out . That’s what disgusts you most (p. 47) .

In this quotation the pronoun ‘they’ is repeated ten times. This repetition reflects Corde’s disgust for the kind of life those people lead . There is a sense of bitterness in the speaker’s tone . Those people are driven to live a reckless life because hey have been neglected .

Saul Bellow demonstrates his angry protest against “the dehumanization of the blacks in big cities I’m speaking up for the black underclass and telling the whites they are not approaching the problem correctly.”⁵ The painful human conditions of Chicago require a close investigation since Chicago becomes a metaphor for all the essential characteristics of the modern American civilization .

The Dean's December exemplifies that the blacks in Chicago are doomed, and the whites show not only indifference, but a rejection to face the serious problems of the underclass. The American ideals of "liberty, equality, justice, democracy, abundance," (p. 123), have been violated because they are not "experienced" (ibid.). Bellow holds the whites responsible for the racial distinction in America. Racism is a complex problem. Politicians do not want to see what must be seen:

In the American moral crisis, the first requirement was to experience what was happening and to see what must be seen. The facts were covered from our perception....The increase of theories and discourse... the false representations of 'communication' led to horrible distortions of the public consciousness (ibid.).

Politicians, thinkers, scientists, and other public figures have to join one another to set right what has gone wrong in Chicago. Truths must be revealed. The media should enlighten the public by telling the Americans that millions of the blacks have been abandoned to poverty.

In *The Dean's December* Bellow attacks the "slums, guns, drugs, jails, politics, intrigues, disorders," (p. 77), that endanger the American moral ideals. Bellow's protagonist decides to "prevent the American idea from being pounded into dust altogether" (p. 123). Hence, the novelist attempts to call the American attention to the reasons behind the wretchedness of the underclass life. In his article *Corde* argues:

America no more knew what to do with this black underclass than

it knew what to do with its children . It was impossible for it to educate either , or to bind either to life . It was not itself securely attached to life just now . Sensing this , the children attached themselves to the black underclass achieving a kind of coalescence with the demand – mass (p. 201) .

The quoted passage states a serious problem . Corde sees that vice would creep to the white children and corrupt them. Therefore, moral decadence is inevitable in Chicago . To face the serious problem , Corde sees that a “moral revolution is required” and that the Americans need “to look into the abysses of chaotic thinking of anarchy”(p. 187). Within the heart of Chicago there are some moral ills. Chicago is approaching its moral decay. However, railing at Chicago does not necessarily reflect Bellow’s hatred for the city . He affirms his love: “Because I’ve loved the city, I’ve never been able to write lies about it”.⁶

As a matter of fact ,Corde’s article to the *Harper* depicts some dreadful episodes about the corruption in the city . The first episode is about Spofford Mitchell , a black man who kidnaps Sally Sathers, a white lady of three children. After raping her several times , he takes her to a remote place . He shoots her in the head , and covers her corpse with trash . This is not merely a savage crime ; it is a three – folded act of violence against humanity .

The second case mentioned in Corde’s report is about Gene Lewis , a back man of a horrible record of crimes . Lewis has been brought to be sentenced . His girlfriend manages to give him a pistol secretly inside a book . He disarms the guards , then shoots in the air . He almost manages to escape ; but his bad

luck leads him to his death when some detectives shoot him in the head ten times.

The third cruel case is about Rufus Ridpath , a black man, who is the ex – director of the County Jail in Chicago . The man refuses to involve in the city’s corruption . Because he tries to reform the conditions of the prisoners, the political authorities rejected him . He has been dismissed because of suspected corruption ⁷ . He loses both his job and his moral reputation.

It is noteworthy to add that Elfrida , Corde’s sister , knows that Ridpath is a good person . “He is the only one who even tried to improve the conditions and help the prisoners,”(p. 101), she tells her brother . Ridpath is politically regarded dangerous. Moreover, it is Ridpath who sends Corde to Toby Winthrop , the black man who establishes a rehabilitation centre in Chicago. He is an important character in the novel . He teaches the protagonist how to see the inner realities of Chicago . Winthrop has managed to regenerate himself . He changes his past and turns from a drug – addicted person to a “murderer – savior,”(p.193) , because he saves a lot of people from narcotics. He tells Corde that there are thousands of blacks who are “ marked out to be destroyed” (p. 192) . In his detoxification centre , Winthrop receives black and white people for medical treatment. Ridpath and Winthrop are the only blacks who stand as heroes in the novel .They exert a remarkable effect upon Corde’s consciousness.

Breaking the taboos in America is not to pass unquestionably . Talking about the inner life of the blacks in the media brings some serious troubles upon Bellow’s protagonist . “Liberals found him reactionary. Conservatives called him crazy” (p. 187) . He seems to be wading in muddy water. He sees that

the blacks live in poverty . They are forced to live a life of hopelessness and despair. This is why they are increasingly violent , self – destructive , and frustrated . Bellow calls for real measures of change to better the extremely painful conditions of life in Chicago .

It is worthwhile to add that Corde is neither on good terms with the press of Chicago nor with the college to which he is dean . The media make him an object of attack because of his enthusiastic involvement with a case of murder of a white graduate student of journalism . Rick Lester has been murdered by two blacks , Lucas Ebry and Riggie Hines , a prostitute . The dean offers a reward for the arrest of the murderers .⁸ The Provost , Alec Witt , gets angry with him . He accuses Corde of abusing the academic reputation of the college by supporting a case of interracial complications. Though he is “a man of masterly politeness ,” (p. 177) , the Provost sees that Corde is a fool and has to be led by nose for lacking practical experience.⁹ He incites some students against the dean . Mason , Corde’s nephew , leads them to declare that “the dean was racist and that he owed a public apology to Black , Puerto Rican and Mexican toilers for making them look like animals and savages”(p.163). The students’ declaration is meant as a metaphor to indicate that the dean is actually approaching his ‘December’ , his final days in the deanship .

However , neither Corde nor his fictional creator are racially prejudiced against the blacks . They are revealing the savage crimes of the blacks in an attempt to find some suitable solutions . Bellow affirms that the previous attempts to improve the life of the underclass were futile and fruitless. “All the previous approaches have been technical , financial , and bureaucratic , and no one has been able to take into account the sense of these lives.”¹⁰

The city of “skyscrapers monumental banking, corporate electronic computerized Chicago,” (p. 164), has turned into a life – negating branch of America in which Bellow’s hero “is challenged not only by the disorder of life but by the sort of nihilistic questioning in the modern world.”¹¹ He is angry with Chicago and his attacks against the city transcend the limits to an extent that provokes the political authorities . Bellow’s “high – principled idiot dean,”(p.180) , does not depict the problems cautiously , and he lacks moderation . In an intense interior monologue , he states his disillusionment:

The real vexation was that he had attacked –whom hadn’t he attacked : politicians , businessmen , the professions , and he had even loused up the Governor . Maybe suggestions had come ... by discreet channels , that this was one highly expendable dean (p. 179) .

Corde analyses his predicament . He has committed some serious mistakes . He blames himself for provoking his superiors . This is unforgivable and he has to pay the price for showing disrespect to high – ranked figures . Environmental pollution and its effect upon man is also exemplified in the novel . Cerde attacks the incompetent government officials because of their failure in controlling the rate of lead poison in the drinking water :

Government agencies assigned the task of measurement and control were incompetent They lacked the necessary instruments and correct procedures . The true magnitude of this deadly poisoning of water , vegetation and air was discovered by pure sciences of geo-

chronology , cosmology and nuclear geochemistry . A truly

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accurate method of detecting tiny amounts of lead led to the discovery that the cycle of lead in the earth had been strongly perturbed (p. 139) .

Some of the bloody crimes , Bellow believes , can be attributed to the dangerous pollution of lead . He affirms that “lead comes down to the nerves, to brain damage,”(p. 137) , through canned food and polluted water. Modern industry causes a lot of lead infection by the dispersal of the lead in the air , water, and soil . This is a problem too little understood as Corde argues. People are “ authoritatively assured,”(p. 138) , that lead levels are normal and tolerable . This is not true as Bellow demonstrates . “ Official standards are worse than incorrect ; they are dangerously false” (ibid.,). Hence , lead poison leads to a lot of mental disturbances in forms of “terrorism , barbarism , cultural instability , general restlessness , reduced acuity of reasoning powers” (p. 139) . These are some of the shocking negative effects of the modern civilization upon people’s health .

Hence , Corde’s “visionary project,”(p. 243) , is to save Chicago from decay. Saul Bellow seems to suggest that in the modern world “ the gold of the Western Civilization is turned into crushing toxic weight.”¹² Modern civilization carries the seeds of decay and death within its heart . Bellow drives the needle even further against the corruption in Chicago when he refers to some sexual abuse against children . He talks about some children who scream and their faces are tainted with “gobs of semen” (p. 130) . *The Dean’s December* associates sex with the sickness of the underclass. This

natural human instinct turns to beastly and “dirty sex” (ibid) . Corde is astonished and “ dismayed by the state of the moral corruption in Chicago’s

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social institutions”¹³ This is why we notice a sense of extreme bitterness in Corde’s depiction of the sexual crimes in Chicago . G. Neelakantan argues quite aptly saying : “The all – consuming drivers for sex in Bellow’s fictional America underscore the death of moral values in the contemporary world”¹⁴ . However , in Ch. 17 of *The Dean’s December* Bellow presents a comic scene of bitter irony.

In a very high building above the starved slums of Chicago , in a luxurious apartment , a group of high – ranked wealthy Americans are making a party to sing “Happy Birthday,”(p. 294) to which the Cordes are invited . To Corde’s astonishment , the party is to celebrate the birthday of a dog. The whole scene becomes for Corde the final sign of a the catastrophe awaiting this “all –but-derelict civilization”(ibid.,) . One of the National Guards sends a precious “five – star dog collar , the authentic insignia of a General of the Armies,” (ibid.,), to celebrate the occasion . It is a scene of bitter irony in which a hypocritical society demonstrates the absence of moral responsibilities in a decadent world . Bellow knows that he is shaking the dust off the rug when people are present .¹⁵ He provokes everybody .

Commenting on the serious message of *The Dean’s December* , Bellow affirms that the novel is “a book of protest ... but it is not a protest novel ... it is a novel of consciousness”¹⁶ . The novelist speaks for all mankind in a high lucid language to purify man’s sensibility so as people would gain power to reveal the truth for it is “power , not ideas , that moves the world”¹⁷ . We

detect a sense of despair in Corde's soul which rises to its extreme when he talks about the moral decadence and the spiritual "collapse of the civilization" (p. 277) .

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We do agree with Robert Tower's argument that in *The Dean's December* the "crucial oppositions of the novel are political , social , and philosophical rather than personal."¹⁸ Corde's opponents are irritated by the way in which he reveals their hypocrisy . He sees that life in Chicago fosters despair , alienation , and madness in the minds of sensitive people . Peter Hyland is true in his assertion that the novel is "an account of a mind obsessed by a vision of a decayed world"¹⁹ . Saul Bellow has dedicated his art to his fellows in an attempt to save the moral ideals of the American civilization from an imminent fall into a huge sewer of decay and death .

Notes

- ¹ Malcolm Bradbury , *Saul Bellow* , (London : Methuen , 1982) , p. 93.
- ² John R. Mary , *Toward a New Earth : Apocalypse in the American Novel* , (Norte Dame : Univ. of Norte Dame Press , 1992) , p.9.
- ³ J.E. Cirlot and Jack Sage , Trans. *A Dictionary of Symbols* , 2nd edition , (New York : Dover Publications , Inc., 2002) , p.84.
- ⁴ Cited in Melvin Bragg , “A Interview with Saul Bellow,” in *London Review Books* , 14. no.8 (May ,1982) , p.22.
- ⁵ Cited in Allan Chavkin and Nancy F. Chavkin , “Saul Bellow’s Visionary Project,” in *The Critical Response to Saul Bellow* , ed., Gerhard Bach , (Westport : Greenwood Press , 1995) , p.261.
- ⁶ Cited in Ben Siegel , “Still Not Satisfied : Saul Bellow on Art and Artists in America,” in Eugene Hollahan , *Crisis – Consciousness and the Novel* , (New York : Univ. of Delaware Press, 1992) , p. 217.
- ⁷ Cited in Chavkin and Chavkin , “Saul Bellow’s Visionary Project,” p.266.
- ⁸ See Michael G. Yetman , “Towards Language Irresistible : Saul Bellow and the Romance of Poetry ,” in *Saul Bellow in the 1980s* , ed., Gloria L. Cronin and L.H. Goldman ,(Michigan : Michigan State Univ. Press , 1989) , pp. 266 -7.
- ⁹ Robert F. Kiernan , *Saul Bellow* , (New York : A Frederick Ungan Book , 1989) , p. 176.
- ¹⁰ Michiko Kakutani , “ A Talk With Saul Bellow on his work and Himself,”

New York Times Book Review (13 ,^{Dec}. 1981), p.28.

¹¹ Judie Newman , “Bellow and Nihilism : *The Dean’s December* ,” in *Saul*

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Bellow : The Man and his Work , ed., Quayum and Sukhbir Singh ,
(Delhi : B.R. Publishing Corporation , 2000) , p.432.

¹² [Dreisnerbooks 2011 / 11 / blogspot.com/ deans – December – by Saul
Bellow. html](http://Dreisnerbooks2011/11/blogspot.com/deans-December-by-Saul-Bellow.html) . Retrieved : July 7 , 2013 .

¹³ R.Z. Shepherd , “Truth and Consciousness ,” in *A Dictionary of literary
Biography Documentary Series : An illustrated Chronicle*, Vol. 3. ed.,
Mary Bruccoli , (Michigan : Gale Research Com., 1983), p. 70.

¹⁴ G. Neelakantan , “Beast in Chicago : Saul Bellow’s Apocalypse In *The
Dean’s December* ,” [http:// journals . hil . unb . ca / index php/ IFR /
article / view / 7742 / 8799](http://journals.hil.unb.ca/index.php/IFR/article/view/7742/8799) . Retrieved : July 10 , 2013 .

¹⁵ *ibid.*,

¹⁶ Cited in Matthew C. Roundane , “Junkyards are as Miraculous as Orange
Groves,” in *Conversations with Saul Bellow : A Collection of Selected
Interviews* , ed., Sukhbir Singh , (New Delhi : Academic Foundation
1993) , p. 175 .

¹⁷ eNotes . com. *The Dean’ December* Saul Bellow : Themes and Meanings,”
[http:// www.enotes .com./ topics /dean’s December/ themes](http://www.enotes.com/topics/dean's%20December/themes). Retrieved:
July 7 , 2013 .

¹⁸ Robert Tower , “A Novel of Politics , Wit and Sorrow ,” [http : 1997/
nytimes. com. books /www. 05/25/ Reviews/ Bellow December html](http://1997/nytimes.com/books/www.05/25/Reviews/Bellow%20December.html).
Retrieved : Oct. 10 , 2013 .

¹⁹ Peter Hyland , *Modern Novelists : Saul Bellow* , (New York : St. Martin’s

Press ., 1992) , p. 88.

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Conclusion

To conclude , one would say that in *The Dean's December* Saul Bellow explores a fallen world dominated by hypocrisy . Man has to wage war against all sorts of corruption that threatens the sacredness of life . The novel raises some moral questions related to the ultimate role of the artist in preserving the moral values of life . The novel focuses on the disorienting nature of the modern civilization . The novelist protests against the inhumanity , decadence and corruption of the modern life in the last decade of the twentieth century . Bellow presents a warning that the modern world is moving towards anarchy and moral disintegration .

In the East , man's freedom is crushed by the tyrannical Communism which spreads hunger and fear . Mental and spiritual imprisonment , and the violation of human rights are typical characteristics of Bucharest. On the other side of the ocean , the situation in the West is no better than that in the East . The novelist digs deep in the sordid life of the underclass. The novel attacks the loss of values , racial distinction , and the dominance of violence in the ugly slums and streets of Chicago .

Although the economic systems in Bucharest and Chicago are essentially antagonistic to each other , the two cities are similar in that they reflect the moral and spiritual collapse of the modern civilization . The novel is an earnest call to save humanity from chaos and decay .

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