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The Power of Letter Writing in "Him with His Foot in His Mouth," by Saul Bellow

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Abstract: This article examines Saul Bellow's use of the epistolary form and apostrophe in his novella "Him with His Foot in His Mouth," focusing on how these tools reveal the psychological and relational complexities of Dr. Shawmut. Framed as an apology to Miss Rose, the letter transcends remorse, becoming Shawmut's means of controlling how his actions are remembered and interpreted. Through apostrophe, Bellow allows Shawmut to dominate the narrative, highlighting power imbalances in communication when one party remains silent. The epistolary form transforms Shawmut's apology into a performance of introspection and manipulation, revealing his oscillation between guilt and self-justification. This structure reflects Bellow's broader interest in memory, relationships, and the tension between private and public identities. Language, as depicted, becomes both a tool for confession and a mechanism for concealment. This study emphasizes the role of form in shaping Bellow's themes, complementing existing criticism on his exploration of identity and morality. By analyzing *Foot*'s narrative strategies, the article underscores Bellow's mastery of merging psychological depth with formal innovation, solidifying his place in modern literature as a writer attuned to the complexities of guilt, power, and self-perception in human relationships.

.**Key Words**: Saul Bellow, apostrophe, epistolary literature, theatricality, power dynamics, narrative control

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Introduction

Saul Bellow's novella "Him with His Foot in His Mouth," explores themes of self-awareness, memory, and human relationships through the intellectual protagonist, Dr. Shawmut. Published in 1984, the novella portrays Shawmut as a reflective academic grappling with his own failings and the moral intricacies of modern life (Bellow, 15).[1] He belongs to the same intellectual tradition, as Bellow's other scholarly protagonists, such as Moses Herzog in *Herzog*, Charlie Citrine in *Humboldt's Gift*, and Abe Ravelstein in *Ravelstein* (Cronin 43-45). Like these characters, Shawmut embodies the archetype of the "Bellow intellectual," striving to reconcile high ideals with the often harsh demands of daily life (Bloom 38).

Shawmut's introspection aligns with Herzog's existential despair and Citrine's reflections on fame and mortality, yet his focus remains uniquely personal—centered on a single past failing: a long-ago insult to Miss Rose. Bellow's use of the epistolary form situates "Him with His Foot in His Mouth," within a broader literary tradition in which letters serve as a means of self-exploration, confession, and power assertion. The act of letter writing functions as a tool for reconstructing personal narratives, a technique also present in *Herzog*, *Dangling Man*, and *Humboldt's Gift*.

[1] . For the sake of brevity, the title "Him with His Foot in His Mouth," will be referred to as *Foot* throughout this article.

Scholars such as Janet Gurkin Altman and Joe Bray have examined how letters create a one-sided narrative control, allowing the writer to dictate meaning while silencing the addressee. This strategy parallels Erving Goffman's theories on self-presentation, particularly his concept of dramaturgy, which suggests that individuals engage in impression management—strategically shaping their identity to align with social expectations and desired outcomes. In *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959), Goffman argues that self-presentation is a form of performance, where individuals consciously construct their image for their audience.

Goffman extends this idea in *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity* (1963), where he examines how individuals with stigmatized attributes craft narratives to control how they are perceived. A striking example is the "desperate" letter he cites at the beginning of the book, in which a woman lacking a nose writes to an advice column, shaping her identity through text to evoke a particular response from the reader (1963, 1-32). This illustrates how written communication serves as a means of impression management, reinforcing the notion that letter writers, like social actors, carefully construct their self-presentation.

Bellow's narrators, particularly Shawmut, employ letter writing not simply as an act of reflection but as a means to shape perception—both their own and that of their readers. Shawmut's extended apology letter allows him to examine his guilt, articulate his regrets, and subtly influence how his actions are received. Functioning as both a confession and a self-narrative (Cronin 97), the letter enables him to rationalize his behavior within a broader moral framework. This characteristic aligns him with other Bellow protagonists, such as Albert Corde in *The Dean's December* and Artur Sammler in *Mr. Sammler's Planet*, who similarly grapple with justice and moral dilemmas (Wilson 52).

However, Shawmut's journey is deeply personal. Unlike Herzog or Citrine, his letter is an attempt to reconcile with his own moral failings, highlighting Bellow's broader theme of seeking redemption amidst intellectual and emotional complexities. This focus on personal transgression, coupled with the introspective epistolary form, reflects Bellow's nuanced portrayal of academics as thinkers and flawed individuals striving for authenticity (Assadi 141, Bloom 102).

The letter begins with a striking introduction that immediately reveals the complex layers of Shawmut's apology and sets the tone for the entire novella:

Dear MISS ROSE: I almost began 'My Dear Child,' because in a sense what I did to you thirty-five years ago makes us the children of each other. I have from time to time remembered that I long ago made a bad joke at your expense and have felt uneasy about it, but it was spelled out to me recently that what I said to you was so wicked, so lousy, gross, insulting, unfeeling, and savage that you could never in a thousand years get over it. I wounded you for life, so I am given to understand, and I am the more greatly to blame because this attack was so gratuitous. We had met in passing only, we scarcely knew each other. Now, the person who charges me with this cruelty is not without prejudice toward me, he is out to get me, obviously." (Bellow 3)

In nearly addressing her as "My Dear Child," Shawmut signals a condescending tone, positioning himself as someone assuming superiority or deeper insight. This initial phrasing reflects Shawmut's inclination to ennoble himself through his words. By opting for "Miss Rose," he maintains a polite formality that outwardly respects social decorum while keeping a distance. However, "My Dear Child" suggests a paternal intimacy, implying he views himself as a guide or judge. Even as he retracts "My Dear Child," the consideration of this phrasing reveals Shawmut's instinct to control the terms of their relationship within his narrative.

The capitalization of "MISS ROSE" adds theatricality, making her name visually pronounced and evoking an invocation. Shawmut emerges as a deeply theatrical figure, designing his letter with dramatic flair and self-conscious grandeur. His rhetorical flourishes and exaggerated emotional declarations transform his apology into a performance, aiming to captivate and manipulate his silent audience. Shawmut dramatizes even fleeting interactions, such as declaring that they "make us the children of each other," recasting their relationship in terms that glorify his perspective. This theatricality is central to the novella, revealing

Shawmut's effort to dominate the narrative stage. It is no surprise that in 2014, New Perspectives Theatre Company staged the first adaptation of a Saul Bellow story, "Him with His Foot in His Mouth," emphasizing the inherently performative nature of Shawmut's character and the novella as a whole (Newman 159).

Shawmut's phrase "I wounded you for life" appears to accept full blame, but he quickly distances himself from the act's severity by adding, "so I am given to understand," implying he did not fully grasp the harm at the time and that this understanding was relayed by others. This distancing is reinforced when Shawmut remarks that the person accusing him of cruelty is "not without prejudice" and "out to get me, obviously." In this way, Shawmut acknowledges harm while questioning the legitimacy of the accusation. This duality of expressing remorse while doubting others' motives encapsulates the novella's central tension: Shawmut's apology is not pure contrition but a carefully constructed narrative in which he retains control.

Further reinforcing this dynamic, Shawmut writes: "Miss Rose—hence this letter of apology, the first I have ever written. You are the cause of my self-examination" (Bellow 27). This statement suggests Miss Rose's perceived injury prompted his reflection. While this might appear as guilt acknowledgment, Shawmut's phrasing shifts focus from Miss Rose's suffering to his journey of self-discovery. By framing the apology as a product of his introspection, Shawmut asserts dominance over the narrative, making his personal growth the story's centerpiece. This self-centeredness undermines his apology's sincerity, revealing it as more about reinforcing his narrative control than atoning for past wrongs.

The epistolary form in *Foot* grants Shawmut unchecked control over the narrative. The absence of Miss Rose's voice allows Shawmut to dominate the discourse, shaping the apology and interpreting past events to serve his interests. Miss Rose's silence is both literal and metaphorical, symbolizing her powerlessness against Shawmut's monologue. By addressing her directly, Shawmut creates the illusion of dialogue while ensuring his voice remains unchallenged.

Letters, as a literary form, have long been associated with intimacy, self-expression, and control. They enable characters to engage with silent or absent audiences, granting the writer power to shape perceptions while the addressee remains passive. As Janet Gurkin Altman observes, epistolary writing establishes a "tension between writer and reader," allowing the writer to dictate the narrative's flow and how they are perceived (Altman 4). This dynamic is evident in Bellow's novella, where Shawmut's letter becomes a tool for constructing a self-serving version of events. His use of apostrophe amplifies this control, enabling him to address Miss Rose directly while avoiding any challenge to his narrative. Through apostrophe, Shawmut creates a monologue projecting his thoughts and emotions onto a silent audience, maintaining the illusion of dialogue while preserving his authority over the story's interpretation.

Jonathan Culler highlights apostrophe's role in "calling attention to the absence of dialogue," creating a monologue where the speaker dominates (Culler 139). In *Foot*, Shawmut's frequent direct addresses to Miss Rose ("Miss Rose, I know I owe you an apology," (Bellow 2) reinforce his narrative command. Miss Rose, though addressed, becomes a passive figure whose silence underscores Shawmut's dominance. Without any reaction from her, Shawmut shapes the emotional and psychological tone of the letter, freely expressing regret, explaining his actions, and even questioning the accusations against him. This rhetorical strategy ensures that Shawmut's perspective remains the sole lens through which the story is told.

The epistolary form's history in literature reveals its power dynamics, allowing characters to manipulate narrative time and space. Joe Bray argues that letters in epistolary novels enable characters to control narrative flow and shape readers' perceptions (Bray 36). In *Foot*, Shawmut's letter exemplifies this function. By recounting events from thirty-five years prior through his perspective, Shawmut sculpts the narrative to mitigate his guilt, preventing Miss Rose from challenging his account. This structural choice further emphasizes Shawmut's authority over the discourse.

Although letter writing often serves as a means to control narrative time and space, this is not always the case. In Bellow's use of the epistolary form, however, it plays a crucial role in collapsing past and present. Shawmut's letter brings an event from thirty-five years ago into the immediate present, forcing both himself and Miss Rose (as a silent recipient) to relive it through his framing. Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of

chronotope applies here, as the letter merges temporal and spatial boundaries, allowing the past to be reinterpreted in the present. Not all letters in literature function this way. In Richardson's *Clarissa*, for instance, the letters serve as real-time documentation rather than retrospective reinterpretation. In contrast, Shawmut's letter operates as a retroactive reconstruction, shaping memory and perception rather than merely recording events. This distinction highlights Bellow's unique use of the epistolary form—not simply as a vehicle for communication but as a tool for reshaping time, memory, and narrative authority.

Shawmut's apology takes on the qualities of a theatrical soliloquy, positioning him as both speaker and protagonist while relegating Miss Rose, the letter's addressee, to the role of a silent spectator. This dynamic mirrors the nature of soliloquy in drama, where a character speaks to an audience that cannot intervene. His use of apostrophe heightens the theatricality of the letter, allowing him to dictate its emotional and psychological trajectory, shaping both his own character and Miss Rose's passive role within the narrative.

Apostrophe is more than just a stylistic device; it is an assertion of presence in the face of absence. When Shawmut directly addresses Miss Rose, he is not merely reaching out to a silent recipient—he is shaping the terms of their interaction, controlling the discourse, and ensuring that his voice dominates. This makes apostrophe a powerful rhetorical tool in epistolary writing, transforming the letter from a dialogue into a monologue in which the writer dictates meaning.

While any words in a literary text demand the reader's attention, apostrophe functions differently by creating the illusion of direct engagement. It pulls the reader into an intimate space where the writer's voice seems immediate and urgent, even as the recipient remains absent or silent. This is especially relevant in Bellow's work, where characters like Shawmut and Herzog use letters to negotiate their identity, assert dominance, and reframe their past. Apostrophe, then, is not merely a literary device—it is an act of control, shaping how both the recipient and the reader experience the letter.

The epistolary form inherently creates a power imbalance between the writer and the silent recipient. While letter writing in literature has served various purposes—romantic expression, historical documentation, and philosophical discourse—Bellow consistently employs it to explore themes of self-representation and dominance. Shawmut's letter exemplifies this by functioning as a carefully controlled performance, in which he oscillates between guilt and justification. This reflects a broader tendency in epistolary texts, where writers mediate their own actions and selectively frame past events to suit their narrative.

By contrast, some works, such as Goethe's *The Sorrows of Young Werther* and Fanny Burney's *Evelina*, employ letters as vehicles for emotional outpouring rather than self-defense. *Werther* captures the protagonist's unfiltered anguish and despair, while *Evelina* uses correspondence to navigate social anxieties and moral dilemmas, often revealing vulnerability rather than control. This contrast underscores that narrative control is not an inherent feature of the epistolary form but a strategy that Bellow deliberately employs. In *Foot*, letter writing becomes an instrument of both confession and authority, enabling Shawmut to dominate the discourse while shaping his own redemption.

Foot is not merely an apology but an exploration of narrative control and self-representation. Bellow's use of the epistolary form and apostrophe allows Shawmut to dominate the discourse, reshaping the past and controlling how he is perceived. The power imbalance between Shawmut and Miss Rose is reinforced through the letter's structure, where Shawmut's voice is unchallenged, and Miss Rose's silence amplifies his authority. The novella examines guilt, power, and communication, showing how letter writing can be both a tool for confession and a means of asserting authority. It reveals how remorse can be performed while maintaining control over a narrative, highlighting Bellow's mastery in constructing a narrative that blurs confession with performance, guilt with justification.

Context of the Epistolary Tradition in Literature and Bellow's Use of Form

The epistolary novel, rooted in letter exchanges between fictional characters, has long provided readers with intimate access to characters' private reflections, relationships, and personal conflicts. The form's versatility spans multiple themes and genres, as seen in some of its most notable examples. Samuel

Richardson's *Clarissa* (1748) captures tragic intensity, while Tobias Smollett's *Humphry Clinker* (1771) blends picaresque comedy with social commentary. Frances Burney's *Evelina* (1778) explores social class and decorum through the lens of a novel of manners, while Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *La Nouvelle Héloïse* (1761) uses letter writing as a platform for philosophical discourse on marriage and education. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's *The Sorrows of Young Werther* (1774) channels Romantic despair through its protagonist's anguished correspondence, while Pierre Choderlos de Laclos's *Les Liaisons dangereuses* (1782) employs letters to deliver sharp psychological insight, illustrating the form's capacity to explore complex emotional and moral conflicts.

As Thomas Beebee observes, letters in epistolary fiction extend beyond mere correspondence, serving as a "vehicle for inner revelation and self-explanation" (Beebee 4). In classical examples, letters offer an unmediated view into characters' minds, preserving their voice and perspective. Bellow follows this tradition in *Foot*, capturing Dr. Shawmut's thoughts, emotional turmoil, and self-justifications directly through his own words. His opening line—"I almost began 'My Dear Child,' because in a sense what I did to you thirty-five years ago makes us the children of each other" (Bellow 3)—immediately establishes his haughtiness while setting the stage for an unfiltered exploration of guilt, remorse, and control over the narrative.

Bellow's recurring use of letter writers—Shawmut, Herzog, and others—reflects his broader thematic concern with introspection, self-justification, and identity formation. The act of letter writing provides a unique blend of intimacy and distance, allowing characters to construct their own versions of reality without interruption. In *Herzog*, Moses Herzog's letters function as both philosophical inquiry and a means of personal reconciliation, a pattern echoed in Shawmut's self-examining yet manipulative apology. Through the letter form, these characters dominate the discourse, revealing their anxieties while maintaining control over their narratives. This interplay between confession and self-fashioning aligns with Bellow's broader exploration of memory, self-perception, and the intellectual's struggle with self-definition.

Through the personal address, Bellow adheres to the tradition's intimate tone and self-revelatory structure. More often than not, his letter provides moments of unfiltered introspection where he reveals his vulnerability and isolation. At one point, he confides to Miss Rose, "Indulge me for a moment, Miss Rose. I am covering the ground as quickly as I can. There's not a soul to talk to in Vancouver except ancient Mrs. Gracewell, and with her I have to ride in esoteric clouds" (Bellow 42). Here, Shawmut's tone is intimate and confessional, admitting to his sense of loneliness and lack of meaningful companionship. His reference to Mrs. Gracewell highlights his emotional isolation, as he is forced into conversations that feel distant and disconnected from his immediate concerns. In this moment, Shawmut's typical guardedness softens, and the reader glimpses his yearning for a genuine, relatable connection—one stripped of intellectual pretense. This rare admission of vulnerability adds depth to his character, showing that beneath his intellectual bravado lies a man troubled by solitude and estranged from meaningful human contact.

Epistolary novels traditionally empower the writer while silencing the recipient, creating an inherent power imbalance that gives voice to one perspective while leaving the addressee's response and viewpoint absent. As Janet Gurkin Altman notes, epistolary structure "naturally establishes an imbalance" that favors the writer's control over how the story and moral stance are conveyed (Altman 4). Bellow remains loyal to this aspect by restricting *Foot* to Shawmut's single, uninterrupted letter to Miss Rose, where he reflects on a past insult. Shawmut's address, "Dear Miss Rose…what I did to you thirty-five years ago makes us the children of each other," implies an unusual intimacy with someone he barely knew, drawing her into his view of events and positioning himself as both victim and confessor (Bellow 3). Through this exclusive perspective, Shawmut's letter embodies the epistolary form's capacity for one-sided self-revelation while showing how the narrator can manipulate how events are understood.

While Bellow's engagement with the epistolary form aligns with tradition, he also diverges by incorporating techniques that add complexity to Shawmut's monologue, notably apostrophe, theatricality, and a controlled narrative voice. Whereas traditional epistolary novels capture multiple perspectives, Bellow's

single-letter approach confines the narrative to Shawmut's own words, removing the recipient's perspective entirely and allowing Shawmut to subtly manipulate his apology. This divergence becomes clear as Shawmut veers between self-justification and regret, stating, "I am not the sort of man who goes around hurting people, you know" (Bellow 10). In placing the blame on his character's nature, Shawmut reshapes his past behavior, presenting it as an unintended lapse rather than a deliberate cruelty. This move goes beyond introspection, casting Shawmut's request for forgiveness as a self-narrative designed to validate his actions rather than engage in honest repentance.

Despite this divergence, Bellow's adaptation paradoxically brings him closer to the genre's central truth: that letters reveal more about the writer's inner world than about their recipient. Is this statement self-evident or a truism? At first glance, the idea that letters primarily reflect the writer's inner world may seem obvious, given that letters are written in the first-person and often contain personal reflections. However, this assumption warrants deeper scrutiny. Not all letters are confessional or introspective; they can be transactional, strategic, or outwardly focused on their recipient. The extent to which a letter exposes the writer's psyche depends on genre, intent, and rhetorical construction.

In Bellow's case, the epistolary form is not merely a medium of communication but a device for shaping identity. Shawmut's letter, for instance, does not simply confess wrongdoing—it carefully curates how his guilt is framed, oscillating between remorse and self-justification. This complicates the assumption that letters are inherently transparent windows into the writer's mind; instead, they are performances in which self-presentation is deliberately constructed. By challenging the notion that letters *naturally* prioritize the writer's inner world, we open space for examining how epistolary texts manipulate perspective, control narrative, and mediate power dynamics between writer and recipient.

Shawmut's attempts to shape his own narrative ultimately underscore the character's susceptibility and need for absolution. In his extended monologue, he admits, "The writing of this letter has been the occasion of important discoveries about myself, so I am even more greatly in your debt" (Bellow 57). Here, Bellow returns to the tradition's focus on inner revelation, as Shawmut's self-serving apology ultimately becomes a reflection of his own emotional journey rather than an attempt at true reconciliation with Miss Rose. By employing these narrative devices, Bellow extends the epistolary form, using Shawmut's words to depict not only his character's self-justification but also his deeper conflicts, staying paradoxically loyal to the genre's commitment to uncovering the complexities of human motivations and flaws.

The key question is how Shawmut's *guilt* and *confession* align with his sense of assertion.In Shawmut's case, guilt and confession are not opposing forces but rather deeply intertwined. His letter functions as both an admission of wrongdoing and a justification, revealing guilt while simultaneously controlling how that guilt is perceived. Though he acknowledges his offense, he quickly reframes it to mitigate his responsibility—questioning the legitimacy of Miss Rose's grievance or redirecting attention to his own misfortunes. This dynamic aligns with psychoanalytic theories of guilt, in which confession serves not only as an act of catharsis but also as a means of self-preservation. By asserting his perspective while admitting fault, Shawmut transforms his apology into a carefully managed act of self-explanation. His letter thus exemplifies the intricate relationship between guilt, self-justification, and narrative control—central themes in Bellow's work.

Bellow's engagement with epistolary writing intersects with larger themes in Jewish American literature, including exile, displacement, memory, and the struggle for self-definition. Jewish American writers often grapple with questions of belonging, assimilation, and historical consciousness, and letter writing becomes a powerful medium through which these concerns are explored.

For Shawmut, letter writing functions as a means of self-reconciliation, mirroring the broader Jewish literary tradition of using letters, diaries, and confessional narratives to process personal and collective history. The theme of wrestling with guilt—whether religious, moral, or existential—is also deeply embedded in Jewish American literature, making Shawmut's struggle with atonement and self-explanation a compelling case study within this tradition.

Additionally, Jewish American literature often plays with voice, interruption, and monologue, making the epistolary form particularly relevant. Bellow's use of letters aligns with a lineage of Jewish storytelling that foregrounds argumentation, rhetorical play, and the tension between spoken and unspoken words. Scholars and readers of Jewish American literature, therefore, should care about Bellow's use of epistolary narration because it provides insight into how Jewish identity, memory, and self-invention are negotiated through language.

In combining traditional elements of the epistolary form with his distinct narrative techniques, Bellow creates a work that is both a continuation and an expansion of the genre. Shawmut's letter thus serves as a stage where Bellow can explore the intersections of confession, manipulation, and self-preservation, remaining faithful to the epistolary tradition's purpose of revealing the paradoxes of personal truth.

Apostrophe as a Tool of Narrative Control within the Epistolary Tradition

One technique resulting from the employment of the epistolary novel is apostrophe, which is a literary device where a character directly addresses a subject that is absent or not capable of responding, such as an inanimate object, a deceased individual, or even an abstract concept. This device functions to focus the audience's attention on the subject being addressed, emphasizing its significance within the narrative. It often serves as a means for characters to express internal emotions or reflections in a way that would not be possible in a direct interaction. Apostrophe also conveys exclamatory tones, highlighting heightened emotions or pivotal moments in a character's inner life. This device appears when a speaker, such as in a play, breaks away from addressing the audience and directs their words to a third party who may be physically absent from the scene, effectively shifting the focus (Hays & Duvall 891; Ford 27).

This practice is particularly potent within epistolary literature, as it lets characters engage in intimate, one-sided dialogues that reveal their inner thoughts and emotions. In the context of the epistolary novel, apostrophe emphasizes the writer's control over narrative and interpretation, permitting a heightened degree of introspection and often, manipulation. Bellow's novella *Foot* exemplifies this by merging the epistolary form with apostrophic address, as Dr. Shawmut speaks directly to Miss Rose throughout his letter. His use of apostrophe serves as a mechanism of expression of regret and as a tool for self-defense, enabling him to reinterpret his actions and exert influence on how they are perceived. Dr. Shawmut's letter functions as both an apology and a performance, with an apostrophic appeal creating the illusion of a dialogue where none exists. By addressing Miss Rose directly—"Dear Miss Rose"—Shawmut bridges a passionate and spatial gap, conjuring her presence in his narrative and inviting her into his solitary reflections. This procedure grants him the opportunity to be in command of the narrative unopposed, giving him the freedom to reframe events and manage the interpretation of his actions. "Dear Miss Rose," he begins, "what I did to you thirty-five years ago makes us the children of each other" (Bellow 1). Here, Shawmut implies a shared experience and mutual responsibility, despite Miss Rose's absence. The apostrophic address becomes a subtle mechanism of control, recasting the offense as part of a shared history, which softens its impact and draws Miss Rose into Shawmut's subjective reinterpretation of the past.

Apostrophe in Bellow's novella also permits Shawmut to oscillate between expressions of regret and efforts to absolve himself of blame. Through rhetorical questions, he subtly shifts responsibility onto others, framing his insult as a product of circumstance and external influence. He wonders, "Who is it that accuses me of having wounded you? Eddie Walish, that's who…he has become the main planner of college humanities surveys in the State of Missouri" (Bellow 6). By invoking a third party's account, Shawmut indirectly questions the authenticity of Miss Rose's grievance, suggesting that her reaction may have been influenced by others' opinions rather than her own experience. This rhetorical strategy exemplifies how Bellow employs apostrophe within the epistolary form to expand Shawmut's control over the narrative, as Miss Rose's silence inherently validates his claims.

Through apostrophe, Shawmut is also able to insert self-reflective commentary into his apology, using his voice as a vehicle for personal justification and even humor. He describes himself as "a high-waisted and long-legged man, who is susceptible to paradoxical, ludicrous images of himself" (Bellow 7). This theatrical

self-portrayal serves to soften his character and deflect some of the seriousness of his offense, as he presents himself as eccentric and harmlessly amusing. The apostrophic discourse here enables Shawmut to frame his actions as humorous quirks rather than intentional malice. This self-characterization mirrors Bellow's broader narrative method of allowing his intellectual protagonists to explore the complexity of their flaws, using humor and self-awareness to temper their transgressions.

In another instance, Shawmut uses apostrophe to reflect on Miss Rose's potential memories of him: "I wonder whether you remember me at all, other than the person who wounded you—a tall man…and, in those days, dark on the whole" (Bellow 4). Here, he creates a moderated, almost endearing image of himself, transforming his offense into an unintended error in a charmingly imperfect personality. By directing this nostalgic, self-deprecating portrayal to Miss Rose, Shawmut influences how his movements are reminisced and apprehended, managing the impact of his words through the emotional distance of the apostrophic form.

Bellow's unique use of apostrophe within the epistolary framework thus transforms *Foot* into more than a simple letter of confession. It becomes a stage for Shawmut's personal performance, a carefully managed narrative where he not only examines his guilt but redesigns it. This manipulation of the epistolary form qualifies Shawmut to balance confession with self-preservation, constructing a monologue that masks vulnerability behind a polished exterior. By making Shawmut's voice dominate without intermission, Bellow achieves a layered exploration of self-presentation, where remorse is expressed but ultimately subsumed by the need to maintain control. Through Shawmut's apostrophic address, Bellow reveals how language can serve both as an instrument of connection and as a means to obscure or reinterpret past actions, highlighting the complex interplay of truth, self-perception, and narrative authority.

Temporal and Spatial Collapses through Epistolary Form and Apostrophic Address

In *Foot*, Bellow contrasts Dr. Shawmut's current isolation with his past achievements by using the epistolary form and apostrophic appeal to merge temporal and spatial divides, creating a theatrical immediacy that recalls the present-tense experiences of drama. Aristotle's principles of unity in *Poetics* emphasize cohesive, continuous action to generate immersion (Sections 6–8), an effect Bellow mirrors by drawing Miss Rose into Shawmut's here-and-now, despite the years that separate them. Shawmut's letter dissolves "then" and "now," collapsing past and present, so that what once occurred in the halls of academia now exists in Shawmut's isolated Canadian retreat. Reflecting on his academic decline, Shawmut writes: "It isn't easy to write with arthritic fingers… My lawyer… urged me to go to British Columbia, where… flowers grow in midwinter" (Bellow 9). His loss of professional identity and the remoteness of his new environment intensify the psychological divide between his former life and current isolation, highlighting the loss of his former influence and control.

Through the letter, Bellow uses apostrophic statement to invite Miss Rose directly into Shawmut's present-day, blurring time and creating what Mikhail Bakhtin describes as "time-space" immediacy in epistolary forms (Bakhtin 84). This technique, typical of what Bakhtin calls, "chronotope" in narrative, allows Shawmut to reconstitute past interactions with Miss Rose as if they are occurring in the present. This dynamic aids him to say, "Dear Miss Rose…what I did to you thirty-five years ago makes us the children of each other," drawing her into his narrative space to reformat their connection as a shared history rather than a one-sided insult (Bellow 3). Shawmut's present monologue thus becomes a stage for performing both self-representation and contrition, echoing Richard Schechner's idea of performance as a live, present-tense event where the narrative moment is relived with immediacy (Schechner 35–38).

Bellow's reliance on this theatrical immediacy reflects a convergence of narrative and performance theory. In the manner of the "here and now" in absurdist drama (Esslin 25–30), Shawmut's letter functions as a continuous, self-contained interaction in which he maintains power. Marvin Carlson's work on memory in theater underscores this effect: as Shawmut replays his memories for Miss Rose, he simultaneously controls how these memories are perceived, manipulating his audience's reception by recounting his own vulnerabilities and present hardships (Carlson 2–5). His rhetorical question, "Who is it that accuses me of having wounded you? Eddie Walish, that's who… He has become the main planner of college humanities

surveys in the State of Missouri" (Bellow 6), reframes the blame, suggesting Miss Rose's anger may be driven by others. Shawmut's use of apostrophe here allows him to embed Miss Rose into a narrative she cannot contest, effectively controlling her "response."

This interaction serves as a medium for Shawmut's reflections on guilt and redemption and emphasizes how Shawmut's confession, like a performance, is shaped for an "audience" that never disrupts or redirects him. Goffman (17–18) highlights this as a type of performance where social interactions become carefully managed presentations. Shawmut uses the letter to position himself sympathetically, writing, "The writing of this letter has been the occasion of important discoveries about myself, so I am even more greatly in your debt" (Bellow 57), reframing his apology as an exercise in self-revelation.

Through this blending of epistolary and theatrical forms, Bellow collapses the separation of past and present, reflecting Shawmut's longing for his former self while simultaneously shaping Miss Rose's memory of him. Bellow's approach enhances Shawmut's monologic control and creates a setting in which confession and performance coalesce, turning Shawmut's letter into a dramatic space where memory and present anguish intertwine.

Theatricality and Narrative Control through Apostrophe

In *Foot*, Bellow's use of apostrophe establishes a compelling dynamic, blending apology with a heightened sense of performance. Apostrophe, as Barbara Johnson describes, is "a form of ventriloquism through which the speaker throws voice, life, and human form into the addressee, turning its silence into mute responsiveness" (Johnson 221). This act of "ventriloquism" makes Shawmut a kind of actor, assigning himself and his addressee specific roles within his self-scripted narrative. Shawmut, as playwright, imbues Miss Rose with silent receptivity, modelling her as an audience member, while he steps into the role of the contrite yet complex protagonist. By positioning her in this receptive role, Shawmut creates a carefully crafted monologue where his voice remains unobstructed, and his reflections go uninterrupted, much like an actor governing the stage. This strategy, echoing classic theatrical forms such as Shakespearean soliloquy—think of Hamlet's introspective monologues—empowers Shawmut to reveal his thoughts and motives in a well-ordered space. By performing his remorse through apostrophe, he gains an audience while guiding the narrative, presenting himself as both vulnerable and humorous, manipulating Miss Rose's perspective and the reader's interpretation.

The shift of Shawmut's letter from a private apology to a theatrical soliloquy implies casting Miss Rose as a "non-person" in Erving Goffman's terms—someone present within a social interaction but marginalized and silenced (Goffman 241). Miss Rose's passive role is underscored by the letter format, which grants Shawmut uninterrupted control over the narrative. This rhetorical device lets him speak directly to her even though she remains voiceless, effectively silencing her potential responses. In *Herzog*, Bellow similarly explores this interpretive control, allowing the protagonist to exercise narrative power over correspondents and imagined dialogues. The epistolary form in Bellow's work creates "a rich and varied internal dialogue" that enables characters to assert dominance over silenced perspectives (Assadi 125–26). Unlike Herzog's correspondence, which involves public figures and friends, Shawmut's letter is a closed interaction, singularly focused on Miss Rose and constructed to bolster his self-presentation.

As Shawmut encircles Miss Rose's perspective within his own reflections, he exercises interpretive control over the events, shaping a narrative of flawed yet forgivable behavior. His response can be seen through two contrasting lenses. On one hand, Shawmut's humorous self-portrayal as "a camel on the village green… a high-waisted and long-legged man, susceptible to paradoxical, ludicrous images of himself" (Bellow 7) shifts the tone towards light comedy. This self-deprecating humor minimizes the gravity of his insult, redirecting sympathy to his eccentricities rather than the offense he caused. Such a response aligns with Frye's vision of comedy as a reformative force that fosters renewal and harmony (Frye 163).

On the other hand, Shawmut attacks Miss Rose for her treatment of him as an outsider, which aligns with Freud's theory of jokes as expressions of repressed aggression and societal tensions (Freud, 2002 134). Miss Rose, wielding social power suggested by the Greek classical setting, treats Shawmut as a "non-

person"—a term from Erving Goffman denoting someone excluded from the social stage—and as what Philip Wander calls the "third person" in discourse—those present in discussion yet denied voice (Wander 207). This dual framework of exclusion highlights Shawmut's alienation, exacerbated by his Jewish identity. His biting response, therefore, may be interpreted as a justified critique of a world that alienates him.

Adding another layer of dramatic irony, Miss Rose's possible racism takes on a tragic and theatrical dimension. Shawmut apologizes to Miss Rose for marginalizing her, only to discover that he himself has been the true target of marginalization. This reversal not only intensifies the theatricality of the narrative but also underscores the complexities of their interaction, amplifying the tension between their respective social positions and perspectives.

As Judie Newman highlights, Shawmut's dual comedic strategies—combining pointed critique with conciliatory humor—both challenge and reconcile societal tensions, offering a multifaceted response to his marginalization (Newman 15).

Ultimately, apostrophe affords Shawmut unrestricted control over the narrative landscape of his letter, positioning him as both protagonist and interpreter of his own story. In addressing Miss Rose directly while scripting her silence, Shawmut channels the reader's focus toward his portrayal as a flawed, repentant figure. This control enables him to deliver an apology that oscillates between genuine remorse and performative self-centeredness. The reader, much like Miss Rose, becomes a spectator in Shawmut's private theater, observing his attempt to reconcile regret with his need to manage the narrative of his actions. In *Foot*, Bellow's use of apostrophe not only intensifies Shawmut's narrative control but also emphasizes how the letter becomes a venue for both apology and performance, illustrating the inherent power dynamics within communication. Through apostrophe, Bellow creates a narrative that blurs the lines between confession and theater, inviting reflection on the complexities of remorse, self-image, and narrative authority in the presence of silence.

Voice, Silence, and Power Dynamics

Power dynamics in relationships refer to the underlying structures of influence, authority, and control that shape interactions in subtle yet impactful ways. In *Foot*, Bellow intricately explores these dynamics through the use of the epistolary form, giving Dr. Shawmut the chance to exercise full hold over the narrative, while Miss Rose, the hushed recipient of his letter, remains unable to contribute. In this context, power goes beyond authority and moves into the realms of dominance, influence, and the unique ability to sway events to one's advantage. The power Shawmut holds over the narrative resembles what psychologists John French and Bertram Raven identify as referent and expert power, where knowledge and a commanding presence of character assist one to influence outcomes without direct confrontation (French and Raven 262). Through his intellectualism and control over the letter's structure, Shawmut constructs a one-sided narrative in which he appears introspective and accountable, despite ultimately controlling the interpretation of his past actions.

Bellow's narrative choice to isolate Shawmut's voice in the letter draws upon the broader context of power dynamics that appear across his works, where interactions often reveal deeper layers of control, introspection, and confrontation. In *Seize the Day*, for example, Tamkin holds psychological sway over Tommy Wilhelm through manipulation and persuasion, an example of the "bad actor" archetype in Bellow's fiction. Critics like Eusebio Rodrigues and Jamal Assadi argue that Bellow's characters frequently encounter such figures, such as Madeleine in *Herzog* or Alf Steidler in *Dangling Man*, who exploit their vulnerabilities to maintain dominance (Rodrigues 53; Assadi 154). While Shawmut's approach is more restrained and less overtly aggressive, his one-sided control over Miss Rose's response and memory creates a master-narrative that keeps her in a fixed position, defining how she is perceived. Unlike other character pairings in Bellow's fiction, however, Shawmut and Miss Rose do not share a deeply personal or entangled history. Their relationship is marked by distance, built on a single, deeply painful encounter from years before, with no ongoing or mutual bond. Shawmut, an intellectual, and Miss Rose, a librarian, embody this distance both socially and personally, making their connection far weaker than other notable pairings in Bellow's works, such as the dynamic between Allbee and Leventhal in *The Victim*. In *The Victim*, the insult allegedly issued

by the protagonist is both claimed and contested; Leventhal cannot remember the slight yet accepts the accusation, engaging with Allbee in ongoing in-person confrontations that result in a complex exchange. Shawmut, in contrast, remembers the insult, confesses to it unprompted, and chooses to remind Miss Rose of it in a letter, yet with no opportunity for her to respond or confront him directly. This structural choice marks a divergence between *Foot* and *The Victim*, creating an entirely different power dynamic that allows Shawmut to rehash the past without challenge, thus transforming the apology into a form of narrative control. Jonathan Wilson describes such dynamics in Bellow's works as "theatrical self-presentation," a tactic characters use to elevate their self-image within the controlled confines of the story (Wilson 163).

Furthermore, Shawmut's extended letter reflects the distancing and demand-withdrawal behaviors often present in negative power dynamics, where one person dominates the interaction, silencing or sidelining the other. Studies in power dynamics reveal that interactions with a high imbalance in power often take on patterns where one participant withdraws, is overshadowed, or adopts a passive role. Coates and Wexler's research into negative dynamics identifies "demand-withdrawal" and "distancer-pursuer" patterns, which typically occur when one party holds complete narrative control (Coates and Wexler 145). In Shawmut's letter, Miss Rose's role is effectively minimized to that of an observer, as her silent, passive status allows Shawmut to assume a greater narrative authority, scheming events with no fear of contradiction. By drawing from French and Raven's concept of referent power, Shawmut's tone remains largely patronizing yet intellectually introspective, as though his apology is a carefully staged show rather than an act of accountability.

Bellow uses apostrophe to reinforce Shawmut's control, employing it as a rhetorical device that amplifies his voice while keeping Miss Rose firmly in the background. By addressing Miss Rose as though she were actively listening, Shawmut places himself in a position of authority over her, as she cannot respond or influence the conversation. In *The Pursuit of Signs*, Jonathan Culler describes apostrophe as "a means of creating presence from absence," which can evoke an unchallenged intimacy and dominance within the discourse (Culler 139). Shawmut's address to Miss Rose thus creates a narrative framework in which she is present in name only, as he projects his recollections and perceptions onto her, assuming her silence as a form of acquiescence or muted responsiveness. As a result, Miss Rose becomes a passive fixture in Shawmut's monologue, embodying what Goffman describes as a "non-person"—an individual acknowledged yet stripped of agency, incapable of influencing the interaction (Goffman 241). Shawmut's address further applies "civil inattention," in which he consciously overlooks any potential response from Miss Rose, effectively neutralizing her presence and rendering her a silent, unengaged observer, unable to disrupt his self-crafted narrative (Goffman 252).

The contrast with *The Victim* is further underscored by the dynamics of confrontation and accusation between Allbee and Leventhal, where both characters engage in a sustained dialogue over their grievances. In that novel, Leventhal's acceptance of Allbee's accusation regarding the past insult establishes a degree of parity, allowing for power reciprocity as each defends their perspective. By contrast, Shawmut's choice to write a one-sided letter devoid of any real interaction prevents such reciprocity, ensuring that his perspective remains unchallenged, reducing Miss Rose to a mute recipient rather than a participant. This method of storytelling highlights Shawmut's selective vulnerability, as his request for forgiveness is interwoven with attempts at self-defense, remodeling Miss Rose's memory of the event to suit his narrative goals. Barbara Johnson discusses this concept as a "ventriloquism," where the speaker animates a silent figure by projecting onto them a role that serves the speaker's purpose, a concept that perfectly encapsulates Shawmut's manipulation of Miss Rose's silence (Johnson 221).

This one-way dynamic also transforms Shawmut's apology into a stage for his self-justification rather than genuine contrition. As Wilson notes, Bellow's protagonists often employ a "theatrical self-presentation" where personal flaws are diminished through controlled narratives. Shawmut's apologetic letter exemplifies this approach, as he selectively portrays himself as both flawed and misunderstood, cultivating a sympathetic image through calculated disclosures. By recounting his self-perceived grievances, particularly within his own family, Shawmut draws attention to his hardships and repositions himself as a victim of circumstances. He describes his own struggles with his brother Philip, a wealthy sibling who

overshadowed him, remarking on his mother's preference for Philip even while Shawmut provided support in her old age. His portrayal of Philip as a man "devoted to money" and of Philip's wife, Peg, as "a short round blonde of butch self-sufficiency" (Bellow 28), positions him as the marginalized sibling, adding a layer of sympathy to his account.

In addition to family, Shawmut positions himself as a victim of ill fate, guided into financial instability and geographic isolation by misguided advice. He laments the counsel of a lawyer who advised him to relocate to British Columbia, describing it as "fatal advice" (Bellow 9). Here, Shawmut's relocation serves as a symbol of his isolation, alienating him from both his former social circles and any potential reconciliation with Miss Rose. By invoking these personal struggles, Shawmut transforms his apology into an appeal for compassion, subtly reframing his narrative to gain sympathy rather than extending true accountability. This tactic allows him to construct a narrative that distances him from his past actions and shifts focus from Miss Rose's grievance to his own hardships, creating a multifaceted portrayal of victimhood.

Shawmut's self-victimization reaches its zenith when he contemplates whether Miss Rose might take satisfaction in his suffering: "These disclosures, the record of my present state, may gratify you. Almost any elderly person, chosen at random, can provide such gratification to those he has offended" (Bellow 52). In this reflection, Shawmut conflates his apology with his hardships, turning his own misfortune into a counterbalance for the hurt he inflicted on Miss Rose. Rather than centering his regret on Miss Rose's pain, Shawmut redirects it toward his own perceived victimhood, obscuring the boundaries between confession and sympathy-seeking. This moment encapsulates the power imbalance in the letter, as Shawmut wields his voice to redirect focus, leaving Miss Rose's perspective unvoiced and her suffering sidelined.

In sum, the power dynamics in *Foot* emerge from Shawmut's unchallenged control over the letter, transforming it into a platform for both confession and self-representation. Shawmut's usage of the epistolary form, combined with apostrophe, emphasizes his command over Miss Rose's memory, controlling her responses and shaping her role as a passive recipient in his constructed narrative. Through this framework, Bellow not only researches Shawmut's complex psyche but also exposes the subtle manipulations that occur within human relationships, where voice and silence become tools of influence, framing, and sometimes, exploitation.

Shawmut's Self-Reflection and the Role of Letter Writing in Redemption

In *Foot*, Dr. Shawmut's extended letter serves as a mirror of self-reflection, allowing him a structured space to confront and rationalize his past actions while negotiating the present emotional weight they carry. Unlike verbal apologies, the epistolary form offers Shawmut the power to revisit, restyle, and essentially curate the memory of his insult to Miss Rose, creating a narrative that both seeks redemption and reinforces his narrative control. This process exposes Shawmut's dual impulses of expressing remorse and preserving his self-image.

Bellow's endorsement of the epistolary form transforms the letter from a straightforward admission of guilt into a platform for Shawmut's introspective journey. He traces Miss Rose's whereabouts as a way to satisfy a lingering unease that stems from his years-long guilt: "I traced you through Miss Da Sousa at Ribier College… Answering with gratitude, I asked what had become of you and was told that you were a retired librarian living in Orlando, Florida" (Bellow 5). This act of tracking down Miss Rose after decades signifies Shawmut's need for a tangible connection to reconcile the unsettled emotions tied to his past. Here, the letter serves as a device of confession, but Shawmut's phrasing exposes his simultaneous aim to reinterpret the past on his terms.

Within the epistolary form, Shawmut's self-reflection oscillates between expressions of regret and subtle attempts to distance himself from full accountability. He states, "I didn't mean it. I am not the sort of man who goes around hurting people, you know" (Bellow 10). This form of self-characterization allows him to partially admit fault while also mitigating it, suggesting his actions were out of character. In this carefully staged monologue, Shawmut navigates between guilt and a performative self-defense, designing his

narrative to maintain mastery over his image. This interplay highlights the dual nature of his introspection, where confession and self-preservation blur.

Shawmut's letter-writing also serves as an outlet for processing his own decline in status, with self-presentation as much a focus as atonement. Now living in relative obscurity in British Columbia, he juxtaposes Miss Rose's pain with his current suffering, remarking, "It isn't easy to write with arthritic fingers… My lawyer urged me to go to British Columbia, where, because of the Japanese current, flowers grow in midwinter" (Bellow 9). Through this depiction, Shawmut juxtaposes his own hardships against Miss Rose's pain, subtly implying a shared suffering that might counterbalance his prior misdeeds. This duality in his narrative shifts the letter's focus from a unilateral apology to an emotionally charged presentation of his own vulnerabilities. His strategic interweaving of personal hardship with apology serves both as an evocation of empathy and as a method to deflect full accountability for his offense.

The letter thus reveals Shawmut's inclination toward self-exoneration even as he seeks atonement, particularly when he revisits the original insult: "Oh. Dr. Shawmut, in the cap you look like an archaeologist. Before I can stop myself, I answer, 'And you look like something I just dug up'" (Bellow 8). In his retelling, Shawmut carefully frames the insult as an impulsive and humorous remark rather than a deliberate slight, minimizing its severity. This strategic framing allows him to maintain a degree of control over how his actions are remembered—both by Miss Rose and by the reader. The irony embedded in this recounting underscores the extent to which Shawmut's remorse is calibrated to protect his self-perception.

Yet, as we have already indicated, letter writing is not always apologetic; it takes on various forms across literary traditions. While Shawmut's letter is framed as an apology, it is also self-justifying and performative, making it less about atonement and more about narrative control. This contrasts with other uses of letters in literature, such as in *Les Liaisons Dangereuses*, where correspondence serves as an instrument of manipulation rather than remorse. Similarly, in Bellow's *Herzog*, the protagonist's letters function not as apologies but as philosophical reflections, internal debates, and expressions of intellectual frustration. While the epistolary form can serve as a vehicle for apology, it is not inherently defined by that purpose. In Shawmut's case, his letter only superficially fits the apologetic model while ultimately serving as a means of self-reinterpretation.

Shawmut's reflections on his relationship with Miss Rose further reveal that his letter has functioned more as a journey of self-realization than a path to reconciliation. He acknowledges: "The writing of this letter has been the occasion of important discoveries about myself, so I am even more greatly in your debt, for I see that you have returned me good for the evil I did you" (Bellow 57). This statement reshapes the letter from an act of remorse into a tool of self-discovery, reinforcing Shawmut's tendency to prioritize his personal growth over genuine atonement. The letter becomes less about repairing the harm done to Miss Rose and more about reaffirming his own self-image—transforming his offense into an impetus for self-improvement rather than a wrongdoing that requires redress.

In psychoanalytic terms, Shawmut's letter-writing process may be likened to Lacan's concept of the "mirror stage," wherein the individual creates an idealized self-image projected onto an external figure (Lacan 1949). Miss Rose, as the letter's silent addressee, functions as this symbolic "Other," reflecting Shawmut's idealized view of himself back to him. By directing his words to her, he can shape his apology in a way that preserves his dignity, even as it acknowledges past wrongdoing. This dynamic enables Shawmut to assert a degree of control over how he is perceived, allowing his need for self-preservation to coexist with his desire for redemption.

Altogether, Shawmut's letter functions as a double-edged tool: it provides a space for self-reflection and an expression of guilt while simultaneously allowing him to manipulate the terms of his apology. Bellow's sophisticated use of the epistolary form underscores this tension, illustrating how letter writing serves both as an instrument of atonement and a means of narrative control. Shawmut's apology remains inherently self-centered—a performance in which sincerity and self-interest intertwine, shaping his letter into a carefully orchestrated reflection of his complex inner struggle with guilt and redemption.

However, control in epistolary narratives is never absolute. While Shawmut seeks to dictate how his past actions are interpreted, his letter also reveals moments of vulnerability and unintended self-exposure. Similarly, in *Herzog*, Moses Herzog's letters shift between philosophical coherence and fragmented emotional distress, demonstrating how letter writing paradoxically highlights both control and its absence. In both cases, the act of writing becomes a means of imposing order on the past, yet it also exposes deep uncertainties. Shawmut's tendency to contradict himself—expressing remorse while simultaneously justifying his actions—exemplifies how epistolary texts can create an illusion of control while ultimately revealing internal disorder.

Conclusion

In Foot, Bellow masterfully employs the epistolary form and the device of apostrophe to allow his protagonist, Dr. Shawmut, to navigate both his inner turmoil and his external relationships. The letter, ostensibly an apology to Miss Rose, is less a straightforward expression of remorse and more a complex attempt to control how his actions are remembered and interpreted. By utilizing apostrophe, Bellow enables Shawmut to address Miss Rose directly, even though she remains absent and silent, thereby granting him full command of the narrative without opposition. This reinforces the power dynamics inherent in communication, particularly when one party holds all the narrative authority while the other remains voiceless.

Bellow's use of the epistolary format serves as a powerful tool that allows Shawmut to reconstruct past events and supervise their interpretation. Structuring the novella as a one-sided letter illustrates how communication becomes a performance—a way to rewrite history on one's own terms. Shawmut's alternating expressions of guilt, defensiveness, and self-exoneration reveal how the act of writing provides a space for both introspection and manipulation. This exploration of narrative control speaks to Bellow's broader concerns as a writer, particularly his interest in the complexities of human relationships, the role of memory, and the tension between private and public selves.

What this analysis highlights about Bellow's craft is his exceptional ability to blend psychological depth with formal innovation. Through apostrophe and the letter-writing form, he constructs a character who is both deeply flawed and intensely introspective, allowing readers to engage with the contradictions in Shawmut's apology. This combination of rhetorical devices and narrative techniques showcases Bellow's skill in using form to amplify his thematic concerns, particularly his examination of power, guilt, and self-perception.

Beyond its literary merits, Bellow's engagement with letter writing taps into broader questions of memory, self-representation, and narrative control—concepts that extend far beyond his body of work and remain central to literature, psychology, and human communication. Understanding how letters operate in Him with His Foot in His Mouth sheds light on the ways people use language to mediate guilt, assert power, and reinterpret the past—issues that resonate across disciplines. Moreover, Bellow's exploration of self-presentation through writing is especially relevant today, as digital communication—emails, texts, and social media—mirrors the epistolary tradition, allowing individuals to carefully craft, edit, and curate their identities, much like Shawmut does with his letter.

In combining traditional elements of the epistolary form with his distinct narrative techniques, Bellow both continues and expands the genre. His use of letters in Foot does more than capture a character's inner world; it exposes the act of writing as a performance, a negotiation between truth and self-fashioning. Shawmut's letter thus serves as a stage for Bellow to examine the interplay of confession, manipulation, and self-preservation, reinforcing the epistolary form's capacity to reveal the complexities of human motivation. Through Shawmut's words, Bellow reaffirms the epistolary tradition's purpose—not just as a means of revelation, but as a space where authors and characters alike wrestle with the paradoxes of personal truth.

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