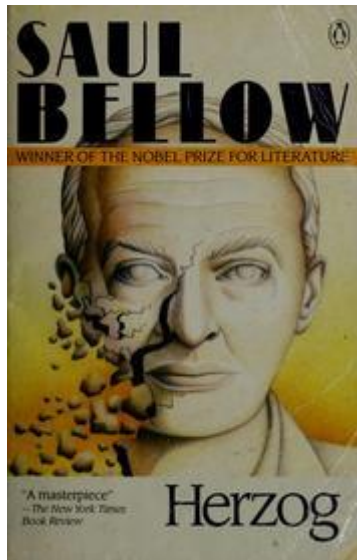


The Inner Journey of Man to Self-Discovery – A Study of Saul Bellow's *Herzog*

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Abstract

Due to its unique structure and characteristics, novel is considered as a genre where a variety of ideas find expressions. Works of fiction from various parts of the world show their peculiarities, along with their uniqueness in presenting the themes and the settings of the novels. One of the best features of American fiction is the way it has presented the sufferings of the people and their emergence into freedom by fighting against the social, emotional, racial and psychological barriers. Saul Bellow is one the advocates of the above ideal among American writers, who fought for the rights of the people to live. Bellow presents the many flaws that he has seen in modern civilization and its ability to foster madness, materialism and misleading knowledge. Bellow's fiction and its principal characters reflect his own yearning for divine existence. They always possess heroic potential and the ability to stand against the negative

forces of society. This research article aims at presenting the internal journey that the protagonists of Saul Bellow take in the novel *Herzog* in order to reach the desired destinations.

Key words: Features of American fiction, Saul Bellow, flaws of modern civilization, divine existence, self-discovery, *Herzog*

Introduction

Of all Bellow's novels, *Herzog* (1964) remained his most popular one and it was on the bestseller list of *New York Times* for more than a year. This novel, without a plot, is built around a cuckolded professor, Moses Herzog. Bellow is known for negating interviewers and always keeps his private life very private. However, this novel is considered as a semi-autobiographic novel. It is said that Bellow has given all of his early life to his fictional creation, Moses Herzog, the protagonist of the novel.

Peculiarity of *Herzog*

The peculiarity of this novel lies in the way that the novelist has presented the story of Herzog. The entire novel takes place in the mind of the protagonist, through his memories of the past and the letters that he writes to the newspapers, the public, friends, relatives and finally, to the dead. Many a time, these letters are unfinished and unsent. This aspect of the novel portrays the attempts of the protagonist to bring some order in the world around him. It also systematically presents the internal journey through which the novelist takes Herzog and the other characters of the novel towards the desired end. Herzog keeps talking and writing, thereby ironing out the contradictions that prevail in his philosophy, his life and in society.

Intertwining Psychology and Philosophy

Bellow has enriched this novel by intertwining psychology and philosophy effectively. Intriguingly, psychology serves as an object of satire in this novel. By presenting the psychological state of the characters and the society, Bellow presents universal philosophies to the world. The centrality of the novel lies in bringing out the philosophies by observing the psychological or internal journey of a man from conflict and oppression, to self-exploration, awareness and contentment. Rosette Lamont says, "There is little doubt that Herzog's truly

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extraordinary popularity is due not only to the profound intrinsic quality of the novel, but also to the long frustrated curiosity of the peeping toms of the literary world". (Rosette Lamont, 1965)

Haunted by the Memory of an Unfaithful Wife

This novel portrays a hero who is haunted by the memory of an unfaithful wife. In this novel, without any serious plot, the story weaves just around the memory of the protagonist and the letters written by him. The novelist makes use of writing letters as a brilliant device to present past information and also to reveal the nervousness faced by Herzog and also by the world. The novel presents odds and ends of time – present, past, future, historical, personal, prophetic, and so on. All these represent Herzog's striving to gain self-awareness. He always thinks that he is incapable. But Bellow rejects any literature that belittles the individual. He makes his characters travel through inner and physical journeys to experience the transcendent reality of life. Though Bellow's characters begin their journey with nothing and with a loss of individuality, the sense of nothingness and the loss of individuality of individual life are absurd according to Bellow. He claims that the ordinary life of the individual should not be condemned. He, in his fiction, tries to give colors to such characters by helping them find the meaning of their lives.

Repeated Occurrence of the Theme of Death

In this novel, the theme of death is presented repeatedly. It is referred to in many parts of the novel. But the novelist makes it clear that the historical events should not make us exhausted. God, death and the future are unpredictable. But the hope remains strong every time, rendering the humans optimistic. In this novel, the protagonist is uncertain about many phases of human life. In addition, death is, to the protagonist, presented as the ultimate ambiguity. But the novelist stresses the fact that life is about the loveliness that comes in the intervals between birth and death. He suggests living those beautiful intervals without fearing death. Herzog, in the course of time, understands this reality and accepts the existence of death, without ambiguity.

This travel takes him through various physical, philosophical and psychological realities. It shows Bellow's strong faith in human existence, his understanding of the paradoxes of modern man and his outstanding passion for cities. In human life, travel, either physical or psychological,

is inevitable. It makes them understand the reality and existence of the various phases of life. Herzog tries to establish his existence through various means. He travels across countries to achieve this. But the real fruit is achieved only through the inner journey, the psychological travel. Towards the end of the novel, Herzog discovers the necessity of society, but the discovery happens only through solitary meditation. The novelist puts forward the idea that before achieving the detachment which an individual longs for, he must give up the dream of love and the illusion of his innocence.

Shattered Inner Psyche

Herzog's inner psyche is fully shattered. He keeps himself very busy in order to relieve his mind from the heavy ethics. When the novel opens, he is on the edge of sanity. He finds himself desperate, lonely, a failure and also aimless and useless. He suffers extremely and painfully and looks for some consolation and moral support from his relatives and friends, which they fail to provide. Even Phoebe, whose husband has an affair with Herzog's wife, shows no sympathy for him. He is torn between true love and the human condition in the then world. For him, women are both the cause and the remedy for his sufferings. His wives give pain and his casual love gives him diseases. He even relies on sex for comfort and seeks stability in marriage. After his relationship with Ramona, he starts relating to women in a new way. He stops considering marriage as an easy solution to his problems and sex as the cure.

Transcendence at the End

Bellow takes Herzog through various situations and incidents, which pave way for Bellow's transcendence at the end of the novel. For example, at New York, when he was waiting for his lawyer, he witnesses a trial of a young couple. It dealt with the murder of a child of three years old. He understands the need for love in this loveless world. This brutal murder shakes him up and he started worrying about his daughter. In order to save her, he plans to kill his wife and her lover. In this shattered condition caused by the catastrophic domestic life, the hero goes in search of meaning. He finds anger and aggression as of no use and therefore, he searches and explores his own being. His attitude of carrying a loaded gun wrapped in currency represents a form of quietism, an intermediate state on the road to redemption.

Herzog's experiences and his knowledge enlighten his understanding of human condition. He also owes to Ramona his understanding of life. When Herzog understands that despite hatred, violence and sickness, the human community in the world is possible, he attains mental peace, radiates happiness and is ready to forget and forgive Madeleine, his wife. He abandons the idea of revenge and rediscovers his identity and his relationship with others. At the end of the novel, Herzog claims in a letter to his doctor that he is confident of dealing with ambiguities and his uncertainty of faith does not prevent him from achieving emancipation.

Structure of the Novel and Excellence in Narrating

Herzog is a novel that is constructed with great efforts and artistic consciousness, with an effective structure and eminent time scheme. Plot, character and themes of the novel are intertwined in an excellent manner in presenting the story of the heroic conflict between the hero and his inner life in search of order in the chaotic world. This novel is a representation of relentless and inspired examinations of the human condition in the present world. Man goes in search of peace and prosperity around the world. He seeks love from everyone but in the hot pursuit of love, he fails to provide the same love that others expect from him. However, he finds the result of his quest from and within him. Bellow, as a concluding mark, says: 'man should have, at least, sufficient power to overcome ignominy and to complete his own life'.

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