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## The Brotherhood and Love in The Novels of Saul Bellow Specially Self And Real Self In

### “Herzog”

#### Abstract

This paper reveals that *Herzog* is a totally unconventional novel. It is much difficult to read. Reader is always in a doubt whether the action is real or just in Herzog's mind. Herzog's abrupt letters make little sense initially and are only recognizable through their italic font. A common reader cannot understand the gist of *Herzog* in first reading because like Herzog's mind his letters are also written in topsy-turvy situation. Sometimes he uses quotations of other languages, which have even more irritating effect. And the most irritating fact is that whatever information is shared with the reader, it is through Herzog. There is always a doubt whether it is Herzog's extra sensitivity that causes him to manipulate the situation. The narrative is first person narrative and it never comes out of Herzog's point of view. Thus, the novel is not meant for studying in social perspective. Rather, it is a psychological novel which shows the impact of various pressures on Herzog's mind. It tries to suggest the various contradictions imbedded in

the structure of human society and that of an intellectual's mind in fight with his projected self and real self.

Introduction:

To be "human" is, throughout Bellow's fiction, terrifying. And so his heroes turn themselves into ideal images in order to protect themselves. At the same time they turn the world into one in which they can live safely. This double creation of a self and of a world is a constant theme in Bellow. (Clayton, 51)

Clayton further claims that Bellow's analysis is close to that of Sartre and Heidegger. Sartre's man, for example, runs from the terror of a world of pure existence; he runs from a world not in relation to human constructs but beyond categories; he runs into a safe ego, an *en-soi*, and refashions the world into his likeness. Bellow's characters do the same. They cannot face the terror of their own being or of their death.

From the existentialist point of view one can reach a better understanding of the novel. Initially Herzog supposed himself to be an innocent sufferer.

Gradually, he accepts the responsibility for being what he is. He acknowledges that all his miseries and pains were due to his own decisions. First, he had an extramarital affair with a Japanese girl, Sono; then he gives divorce to Daisy to lead a different life. After that he marries Madeline, though he knew that Madeline is a highly conceited, self-centered and unpredictable woman. He leaves a well-settled job in University and buries himself in a remote country house in Ludeville. Madeleine blames him for being a despotic and an insensitive person. Had he not left his first wife, his life would have been very normal like a University Professor. But he himself chose struggle in his life. And finally it is his decision not to murder Valentine and

Madeleine. That murder would have made Herzog a criminal. Herzog realized that he had no right to take anybody's life.

When he sees Valentine giving bath to his daughter, he realizes that Valentine too is a different individual. He has right to live. Moreover, Valentine treats June tenderly and not cruelly. Thus, he accepts Valentine's individuality. So, he rejects the idea of murdering Valentine and Madeleine.

In this way, Herzog accepts the intermediate position of human being between deities and demons. Madeline and Gersback are normal human beings and they commit mistakes like other human beings. Moreover, Herzog himself had done similar mistake earlier. While making love with Ramona, he reflects over George Hoberly (Ramona's lover) and comments, "But I think it's that while in New York I am the man inside, in Chicago the man in the street is me" (Bellow, *Herzog* 199). In this statement, Herzog compares himself with Valentine.

Practically, this shows his growth from a romantic to an intellectual sufferer. Now, he knows that he has been suffering because of his own actions. It was also his decision to accept Madeline's proposal to find a job for Valentine in Chicago.

Thus, his actions have caused him great pain. He can't avoid the responsibility of the result. Human beings exist; but what they are or what they may become depends entirely upon what they themselves choose to do. They must take the responsibility for their own development.

Further, suffering is inevitable because action itself is the cause of suffering. In society different people have different desires which clash with one another. Moreover, a single person has conflicting desires in his mind. All desires can't be fulfilled. The pain of incomplete desires is inescapable. The only way to be happy is to recognize one's real self and accept failure as an

inevitable outcome of our own doing. Thus Bellow can be rendered as a Jewish existentialist leaning towards optimism.

Herzog's image of selfhood:

Lacan suggests that a person doesn't want to accept his limitations and always craves to be perfect. As one is not perfect, one has his share of weakness. Again Lacan's concept of ego is really helpful in understanding Bellow's characters' psychology. Ego is inescapable for its roots lie in early childhood. Thus, Ego has been given a universal status in Lacan's study. Every child passes through the Mirror stage and faces the irrecoverable breach between reality and ideality. Herzog self image is that of ideality. When disserted by Madeleine, he tries to assume the role of an innocent sufferer. His egoistic self compels him to reject any responsibility for his divorce. His ideal image is hurt by Madeleine's blames. Madeleine blames him for being authoritative and torture some. This breaks Herzog's image of selfhood and brings Herzog on the point of mental breakdown. In the end, he comes out of his neurosis. He accepts that real Herzog is not ideal one. In this sense, the Ego can be overcome with acceptance of reality. But further only acceptance of reality may lead to a depressive state. If a person has lost a leg in an accident, mere realization of loss is not sufficient. For this Bellow provides a remedy which can be explained through the title of one of his novellas, *Seize the Day*—Bellow wants all his heroes to accept their reality and capture the present moment instead of wandering in depressive past or unknown future. In the last of the fiction, Herzog not only accepts his mistakes, but he also accepts the result wholeheartedly. He looks forward in his life and reflects over the plan of his future with Ramona.

In this way, Bellow is a supporter of the bright side of human nature. Though, Bellow does not ignore the failings of humanity, he does not want to count human failure as greater than the human hope of meaningful existence.

For him, faith in human capabilities is essential. He accepts that all human desires can't be fulfilled, but he is against surrendering before those unfulfilled desires. Life is not bound within some particular conditions. Until death one develops several cravings. One cannot stop living because of unsatisfied cravings. Life does not go according to our plans. It travels on a different path which cannot be understood while walking. But when a person crosses a particular milestone and looks behind, he understands the whole pattern of life.

Herzog finally writes letters and sends them, assuming responsibility for his own words. The most important letter of Herzog comes in the last section when he has regained his mental health to some extent. In this letter he attacks the prevalent notion that human life on earth is the result of Original Sin. Bellow opposes Freud's notion that all human actions are guided by the unconscious part of mind. Freud contends that all our suppressed desires, which are mostly sexual, are accumulated in the id, which forms major part of the unconscious mind. The id is the reservoir of all negative energy, and works according to pleasure principle. Freud argued that our unconscious desires are the cause of most of our psychic behavior. Here Bellow's opinion differs from that of Freud.

How can one assume the responsibility of such decision, which is taken due to some unconscious motives? If the unconscious part of mind plays crucial role in our decision making, we don't have the choice to decide because the unconscious is never known. In this case human being is helpless in the hands of some unknowledgeable suppressed desires. Freud's analysis turned human beings into puppets, which work according to the unconscious mind. The id is the

stock house of all our unfulfilled cravings which make it amoral and anti-social. If anti-social element of human mind unconsciously takes all decision, no dignity can be associated with human existence. That's why Bellow declines to accept this explanation of human existence. Herzog, who works at several moments as the mouthpiece of Bellow, frankly denies accepting the role played by the unconscious mind. According to him, it is not negative energy which is responsible for a person's decision. Every person wants to shape his life remarkably. Herzog, too, wants to dedicate his life thoroughly to his study on romanticism as well as lead an energetic life with Madeline. Unfortunately Madeline finds him repressive, insensitive and commanding; and she decides to divorce him. But as an intellectual, Herzog does not accept that all his decisions were the result of his suppressed desires or unconscious part of his mind. When his first marriage is broken, he is much clear in his mind that he doesn't want to lead a monotonous life of a college professor with a highly orderly wife.

*If a common primal crime is the origin of social order, as Freud, Róheim et cetera believe, the band of brothers attacking and murdering the primal father, eating his body, gaining their freedom by a murder and united by a blood wrong, then there is some reason why jail should have these dark, archaic tones. Ah, yes, the wild energy of the band of brothers, soldiers, rapists, etc. But all that is nothing but metaphor. I can't truly feel I can attribute my blundering to this thick unconscious cloud. This primitive blooddaze.*

*The dream of man's heart, however much we may distrust and resent it, is that life may complete itself in significant pattern. Some incomprehensible way. Before death. Not irrationally but incomprehensibly fulfilled. Spared by these clumsy police guardians, you get one last chance to know justice. Truth. (Bellow, Herzog 303)*

Herzog believes that there is an inherent inclination of mankind to believe that life is meaningful; it is not without purpose. It moves in curious ways, but for a definite purpose. We don't blunder randomly. It is not directionlessness that guides blunder as Freud would have made us believe. Primal crime, as a representative of all doing, is rooted in hopelessness. For Herzog, it is incorrect to say that wrong doings are always rooted in diminishing consciousness. Wrong doings occur because of an act of commission and not because of an act of omission (thoughtlessness). Every wrongdoing is part of a larger scheme of things according to Herzog. At least his own blunders do not subscribe to Freud's theory.

Life evolves in a pattern. It is not arbitrary. The pattern may not be discernable but there does exist a pattern. In absence of any pattern life becomes absurd. It loses meaning. Actions become inconsequential. There are no wrong doings. There are no blunders. What we currently refer to as crime, or wrong doing, reduces to an impulse of a freezing consciousness. Before life ends it works silently to complete its pattern. Life is sufficiently convoluted and random at the microscopic level. That is what makes it difficult to know that there has been any underlying design. But by the time it approaches its end, the pattern shows up as pieces of a jigsaw puzzle. To the extent man doubts or distrusts life as being meaningful, one is an absurdist. Herzog himself has nurtured this distrust for a sufficient part of his life. Just as the human craving to believe in purposiveness of human life is structured in its consciousness, similarly the tendency to distrust the same is also deep and in a sense built-in. At the level of individual event it is not easy to see the pattern of life. This perhaps is the reason for our perpetual distrust. The events in the unfolding of life are arbitrary only from the perspective of the participant. The standpoint from where all the events are visible in their totality, as it happens when life nears its end, life appears to be well-structured. Herzog underwent this transition of standpoint himself when he

looked back at the totality of his own life which otherwise has been an absurdist's nightmare. There has been a jump from meaningless spaghetti like events to a comprehensible stream of events. This is a life-changing phase transformation.

When one is immersed in the petty set of events, life remains spaghetti like that is incomprehensible. It is only when one disengages from the world in one's quietness, that one sees the truth, the pattern presented by life. Herzog himself got soaked in this world when he was undertaken by the police. When Herzog achieves tranquility after his bail, he got a breather to stare at the truth, life presented to him. Thus, the curious ways of life are not discernable from the rented viewpoint of a participant. It is only as an observer, from the bird's eye view point, that one sees the map of life. Herzog experienced this transformation himself firsthand.

Thus, Bellow's vision is optimistic as far as *Herzog* is concerned. Bellow does not leave Herzog disheartened. Until the end, one does not find any essential difference between Bellow's fiction and those of others. But it is essentially the last page of the novel which shows Bellow's peculiarity. The whole frustration lends Bellovian hero a better outlook towards life. His optimism doesn't need winning. Rather, the protagonist is a loser. But he is not depressive at last. He has faith in the healing capacity of life itself. From the beginning till the end, there is nothing desirable for Herzog, still in the last there is no poison in his heart. There is seldom any clue when and where this positivity enters his heart.

Herzog's mind is filled with conflicting arguments. Without any significant incident Herzog reaches at an optimistic standpoint. This shows the role of mind in human agony. In some of his last letters, Herzog writes down his main idea of suffering. He rebukes the person who praises suffering. He denounces the person who advocates suffering for its transforming power. According to such people, suffering makes a man more intelligent and appreciable

person. But Herzog brings light on the bitter aspect of suffering, “*more commonly suffering breaks people, crushes them, and is simply unilluminating. You see how gruesomely human beings are destroyed by pain, when they have the added torment of losing their humanity first, so that their death is a total defeat.*” (Bellow, *Herzog* 317). In the same way, he criticizes Kierkegaard. Herzog is doubtful of Kierkegaard’s formula of searching peace. Kierkegaard suggests sinking deep in despair. Herzog is critical of this self-contradictory argument which needs one to

face utter despair in order to come out of depression. It is not acceptable for Herzog that one must undergo the eternal punishment of Hell to identify reality and truth. He disregards such theories as being misleading. He also condemns the religious appreciation of suffering. In most of religious sermons, God’s grace is bestowed on a person who suffers. Without suffering the spiritual cycle cannot be completed. Suffering is necessary, in religious terms, for a man’s existence.

But Herzog doesn’t respect such explanations. According to Herzog suffering needs no theory or doctrine. He writes:

*Why not say rather that people of powerful imagination, given to dreaming deeply and to raising up marvelous and self-sufficient fictions, turn to suffering sometimes to cut into their bliss, as people pinch themselves to feel awake. I know that my suffering, if I may speak of it, has often been like that, a more extended form of life, a striving for true wakefulness and an antidote to illusion, and therefore I can take no moral credit for it.* (Bellow, *Herzog*, 317)

## Conclusion:

This paper concludes, suffering is necessary to come out of illusionary world. Though there should be no romantic notion attached to suffering, it should be accepted as an essential part of human life. Moreover, it is the Quixotic suffering incurred by mind. Mind itself dreams too high that it needs to realize reality which comes in the form of failure. Herzog is himself an intellectual. And one may assume that his own perception, too, is limited within his experience. For him suffering is due to mind. If mind is the creator of agony, it can refuse to suffer too. Herzog's mind does the same. At last, Herzog stops baffling himself with senseless arguments.

He separates himself from his egoist self. He sees Madeleine as his past and Ramona as his present. Now, there is no confusion in his mind regarding Madeleine and Valentine. As Bellow writes in the last section, "His servitude was ended, and his heart released from its grisly heaviness and encrustation. Her absence, no more than her absence itself, was simply sweetness and lightness of spirit" (Bellow, *Herzog* 313). Thus, the mind becomes a slave of its own imagination. First it creates a world of dreams and links its survival with these highly imaginative designs. Most of the time imagination is frustrated, and the mind suffers. The moment it detaches itself from self-created illusions, it starts living a fresh life.

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