

# Existentialism and Spirituality Divergence in Saul Bellow's Herzog

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## Abstract

Saul Bellow is recognized as one of the most celebrated writers of the twentieth century. With an impersonal vein, his writing searches the meaning of human existence in the mechanical world. He often explains the introspective individual sorting out a conflict between traditional and modern world values. In 1976, he was awarded the Nobel Prize “for the human understanding and subtle analysis of contemporary culture”. Jean – Paul Sartre is the exponent of French existentialism which has given Bellow inspiration for his novels. He has felt that such a time of purposefulness could only be momentary. Bellow has tried to provide a more permanent meaning to modern existence with the help of this philosophy.

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Though Saul Bellow has intended to give more importance to the male protagonists in his works, his portrayal brings up the others also without any difference based on gender. He seeks for his soul. By this he himself has changed his name Solomon to Saul, because he wanted to bear in mind always on his soul as in deeds, from callers, and at his atmosphere. He put the novels as the power of existence, and spirituality from early period of New England. When people of New England followed Indian culture and tradition through oral literature of the country. Traditional culture of India was imitated even among the Puritans, but after two World Wars, it is true that the concept has been changed by the development of science and technology in America.

A serious literature is made among the modern Jewish American through the works of Saul Bellow, who brought up the Jewish immigrants sensibility in his fiction. He explores that humanity may be celebrated with spirit. . Herzog Saul bellow's magnum opus is an epoch making novel in American literature. It is well known that Herzog is a matured novel against his experience of having written some works before. By reading bellow's Herzog whose first line is “If I am out of my mind, it's alright with me, thought Moses Herzog”.(1) One can make out that the protagonist is burdened by knowing numerous thoughts from the society including poverty as well. Therefore, he wants to forget all the struggles in his

life which are pangs in his life at every nook and corner. Though he was suffering, he was accomplished with a lady named Ramona who is with him as a friend. Lover, wife and philosopher to promote him from illusion, deception and allusion to become a happy man on this planet. He feels that entanglement relieved from him with the association of a great soul.

In the novel, Herzog, its protagonist's struggle is to find humanistic ways even in the ordinary environment. The human values have been on the basis of human consciousness. His awareness of suffering and losing made him to fulfill reality. He has been emphasizing on the human "soul" because it is not an elegant word in modern novels. Bellow is the writer of paradox and his obstacles make him to enter the world of peace at the beginning of the novel. When he feels nothing acquainted in his mind, everything is flown from his nothingness as volcanoes erupting. We reckon on the protagonist who is not only losing dignity on his work as a scholar but also in his life. Thus, the protagonist has been paradoxically thinking of his past ideas, and events. Herzog's problem reminds us of how much the spirit continues to matter. Eventually his battle recovers his sanity, exhausts himself as the novel's last line puts it, "he had no message for anyone, Nothing, Not a single word". (341)

By the time Herzog wants to be away from the knowledge of the world, he thinks about his mind, it should be in silence and without a single word. He does not want to be a gorgeous system. As he was divorced with two wives, one to whom has deceived him in order to be with his best friend, who too did the same to his friend. He feels that the world is full of enumerable chaos. A good person knows the bad, but the bad person does not know the good, because every bad person only becomes good who has realized life with awareness of the society. At all the difficult time for Moses, Ramona has provided him with a beautiful life.

Moses writes letters to friends, enemies, philosophers and political leaders, even dead people and to God for releasing his good opinion and anger on them. After having written letters, they are not sent to a single person. Eventually he got the solution for his obstacles through them. In the center of the novel, he was confused by the misinterpretation on his daughter, June. Abruptly he misunderstood his divorced wife and friend. Fortunately he comprehends immediately that his daughter has been treated by Gersbach in a good manner. Herzog reflects Bellow's need for distance from his material, which is usually autobiographical. The protagonist of the novel, seeks the overwhelming richness of experience to some kind of peace and clarity. His medication to lead him to a perception of spiritual truth. Now Herzog is a kind, thoughtful humanist. Herzog knows pretty well of his problems and also the necessary of functioning as a human being. The strength of a man's virtue or spiritual capacity is measured by his simplest life. He is under no prolonged illusion about his goodness. He recognizes that his sympathy is socially meaningless, and he mocks at it. According to Sanford Pinsker:

Herzog is the novel toward which Bellow had been pointing from the beginning and his protagonist's effort to free himself from the grip of mental collapse; one sees the larger crisis of contemporary culture: a pervasive sense of spiritual emptiness.(128)

Herzog begins and ends with a partially reborn hero. Moses Herzog, at peace with the world. According to John Jacob Clayton.

The novel tells of his divorce and confusion of his thinking, ratiocinating about Mady, his ex-wife, and Gersbach, the ex-friend who was secretly cuckolding him. He thinks about the various women in his life.... He examines the wreck of his life, to see if both can be saved.(186)

Thus, Herzog saves his sanity by turning the unpleasant experiences of his thinking, into pleasant perception. Interestingly enough, when we observe him as a human being responding to his emotional problems, he is quite inconsistent. His inability to control his emotions becomes the main source of his miseries.

Herzog laughs at his personal problems and prevalent ideology of apocalypse and alienation. In this way, he develops an independent consciousness, which is according to Bellow is:

The independence of this consciousness, which has the strength to be immune to the noise of history and the distractions of our immediate surroundings, is what the life's struggle is all about. The soul has to find and hold its ground against hostile forces, sometimes embodied in ideas which frequently deny its very existence, and which indeed often seem to be trying to annihilate it altogether.(17)

By bringing his painful experiences from a comic perspective and the pessimistic theories of modern philosophers to the optimistic, Herzog realizes that he is still useful to the society. And he derives confidence from the realization that he has been completely on his predicament. Now his surroundings, his people, and himself. He also has the conscience and the vitality and vision to try to turn everything into a human reality, which is another way of saying that Bellow has been able to make a man into conscience.

Thus, Herzog comes from the provinces, grows up in and out of a suffocating tradition, and becomes a pedlar of dreams. But he is a Ph.D., and that is just right for the Post-World War II hero. According to Forrest Read:

Bellow has perfected the novel by using the academic hero: that is, he does not put Herzog in the setting and situations which are characteristic of such novels, but in the center around which whirl centrifugally the campus, the business world, the city of the mind, the sensual and emotional life, the life, the family, personal values, and politics and history. Or since he achieves a beautifully persuasive and moving proportion among these attractions, we can say, with equal truth that they are rushing in upon Herzog centripetally and so give him his shape.(187)

Herzog has been built up painstakingly and harmoniously from detail, character, and situation. He is a “relating animal”. He does not like being with it, falling into the quotidian, but he cannot exist otherwise, for he draws his exuberance from his reactions to people, places, things, and ideas, and his reactions make him real. Herzog comes with all of his experiences and mould his future. He confirms that he has a future, even if it is only to endure. He is more sensitive to his environment, and has more capacity to feel and suffer. His troubles are uniquely his own, seem to represent the uncertainties of the modern world. He spares nothing for himself. The authour observes each nuance of Herzog’s judiciously:

He had bben a bad husband twice. Daisy, his first wife, he had treated miserably. Madeleine, his second had tried to do him in. to his son and his daughter he was a loving but bad father. To his parents he had been an ungreatful child. To his country, an indifferent citizen. To his brother and his sister, affectionate but remote. With his friends an egotist. With love, lazy. With brightness, dull. With power passive, with his own soul, evasive.(4-5)

Herzog is a womimizer whose many mistresses were mor than willing to his emotional and sexual need. Thus, each woman in his life represents a part of Herzog’s multifaceted personality. A woman must not only beatiful, but also kind hearted and perhaps most of all, a challenge. Herzog gradually comprehends his condition. He overcomes his mania; he accepts life with all its complexities after having undergone into the pangs of experience. His recovery is the result of “a personal response made with full awareness of the social, intellectual, moral, political, and regiois insides that conditions human existence in society,” says Chirantan Kulshrestha. Thus, he exhibits his latent potentially to overcome his crisis through a process of corrective self-comprehensions.

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