

Saul Bellow's Herzog: A Reconciliation

Dr. Vanshree Godbole

Assoc. Prof. of English Govt Girl's P. G. College, Kila Bhavn, Indore, M.P., India

Vanshri3@gmail.com

Abstract—*In Herzog the impulse conveyed is the sense of real sufferer hedged in by circumstances and neurotic attitude. Moses. E. Herzog calls himself 'a prisoner of perception.' The novel deals with the story of a man who is on the verge of disaster and depicts the incidents responsible for his present state in which he is desperate "to put in perspective, clarify, to make amends". Moses. E. Herzog a promising intellectual, a professor of cultural history, undergoes a mental crisis. Herzog is deserted, it is his sense of separation from his childhood, family world that is the root cause of his alienation. Herzog moves boldly to face the challenges of life, truth of everyday, and the final truth. In the posture of collapse detached Herzog watch the image of a "suffering Joker"*

Keywords— *perspective, intellectual, mental, crisis, Joker.*

Saul Bellow's Herzog may be regarded as "a chronicle of flight of characters, engaged in a cynical motion of aspiration and loss, in the protagonists Herzog's consciousness." In Herzog the impulse conveyed is the sense of real sufferer hedged in by circumstances and neurotic attitude. Moses. E. Herzog calls himself 'a prisoner of perception.' (2) The novel deals with the story of a man who is on the verge of disaster and depicts the incidents responsible for his present state in which he is desperate "to put in perspective, clarify, to make amends". The theme of Herzog is of reconciliation of the self with the society. The novel is Episodic in nature. The several experiences of Herzog's consciousness reinforce his instinctive capacity which helps him to turn towards self-evaluation. "This is not the novel of sufferer in the city but of a sufferer who contains city within him." 3

Moses. E. Herzog a promising intellectual, a professor of cultural history, undergoes a mental crisis. His second marriage ends up in divorce, first wife Daisy has the custody of his son Marco and second wife Madeleine has the custody of his daughter June, left all alone with no one to take care, his only human relation is with Ramona Donsell, his moral support. Because of twice shattered marital life, Herzog is forced to meditate on wreckage of his life and writes countless letters to his ex-wives, to leaders, to psychiatrist to his friends, philosophers,

theologians, to the secretary of the interior, to the President, to the living and dead. All these letters are the outcome of grievances and are never posted. He feels uprooted and unbalanced. His constant contemplation about his ownself helps him to understand self in terms of society. Search of causes of his suffering, his pain, exploring his ownself makes him cheerful, he thinks positive despite hatred, violence and weakness in human, life is possible.

The novel begins with Herzog lying on sofa and ends on the last page Herzog lying on recliner couch. Herzog broods over past experience and thinks on his present situation. Most of the images in the novel are the images recreated and relived in pain, trembling and human by a suffering mind, ultimately gives peace of mind to the protagonist. Herzog is deserted; it is his sense of separation from his childhood, family world that is the root cause of his alienation. With great difficulty he admits betrayal from his second wife Madeline, "he would tell again how he was swindled, conned, manipulated, his savings, taken, driven into debt, his trust betrayed by wife..." (p 156). Herzog is tortured again and again by the people surrounding him, being hypersensitive, he becomes neurotic, sick, his fragmented journey with painful memory are the references to his possible insanity. It is the extremity of Herzog's suffering that leads him to know his ownself. In the posture of collapse detached Herzog watch the image of a "suffering Joker"

The conflict in Herzog is between his intellect and his sensibilities provides the integrating principle in the novel, intensifying Herzog's anguish and leading him finally to his transcendental affirmation." 4 The present self sees the past self. Herzog looks both inward and outward, he broods over the past and compares his past experience, his ignorance to present position. These reflections of the self, the desire for transcendence, sometimes assume the form of imaginative reflection. His efforts are to make life worth living, "I am Herzog have to be that Man. There is no one else to do it." (p66-67) His idea of world and his surrounding is utopian, he sees the difference of ideal and real world and is disappointed but is compelled to achieve a balanced life. A hero's transformation from good to bad, from imperfect to perfect Herzog's views become optimistic with the

realization of truth, After being told about Madeleine's unfaithfulness he returns to Catkins. He sees himself, "he started at the dangling catkins, reddish and violet not to burst not to die – but stay alive was all he could hope for.....How I wish it were Moses prayed for this." (p 181). He is tired of his ideas and self-preoccupation denouncing what he calls "this giant insanity of self-examination, "According to Denis Donogue," Bellow's heroes seek values, equilibrium and salvation." Moral behavior, spiritual need, and religious inclination, aptly define a Bellow hero. The soul, Herzog feels "lives in more elements than I will ever know." The construction can account for everything in Man except the uncountable soul. Herzog has grasped the essentials. Simple and truthful Ramona helped Herzog to understand the complexities of truths of life. Herzog looks both inward and outward, "Awareness his work, extended consciousness was his line, his business vigilance....." (pp 278). "The state of being", at which Herzog finally arrives, involves rejuvenations of heart and soul, a return of the capacity to feel freely and intensely, the very core of life. In Lucas-Aphalter's apartment, a transformation begins, and he tried to force realities in verbal construction, He says:-

But Let's stick to what matters. I really believe that brotherhood is what makes a man human. If I owe God a human life this is where I fall down. 'Man liveth not by self alone but in his brother's face.

The real essential question is one, our employment by us, without this true employment you never dread death, you cultivate it. (p 272)

Herzog tries to move away from selfhood, towards brotherhood, towards community. After discarding selfhood, for the first time he buys a periscope for his daughter, symbolically so that when she grows up seeing world, "I mean to share with other beings as far as possible...." (p 322) The quest of finding his root with the community is revealed in one of his letters written to Indian Saint Vinoba Bhave and describes the Bhodan Movement. Herzog realizes that the elemental facts of life are the same in India as it was in the United States then, "It was raining also in New York as in rural India." (p 48). India is used as Metaphor, perhaps he is trying to set up an equation between himself and those nations, in terms of universal love for Mankind. As for Ramona's art of love, is not something ethereal, it is a matter of spiritual as well as physical conditioning. So becomes Herzog, for him love is a transcendence of one's body of death through our employment with other human being and their employment with other human being. In relation to Ramona, Herzog realizes that to appear tender and docile is essential element to establish real relations.

Herzog expresses his ingrained optimism by starting that his objective is "to live in an inspired condition, to know truth, to be free, to love another, to consummate existence, to abide with death.....the inspired condition is no visionary matter,.....but belong to mankind and all existence." (p67) Herzog moves boldly to face the challenges of life, truth of everyday, and the final truth. Herzog sees himself in the historical context, "overwhelmed by both the importance of his role as philosopher and by the burden of correcting the fallacies and misconception he encounters" (P169). To conclude in the words of Earl Rovit: "Herzog is a comic compendium of paradoxes, a rational student of irrationality, skeptical behavior, a calculating middle age, innocent self-affacing egotist, critical intellectual, Montreal born Russian Jewish American."⁵

REFERENCES

- [1] Lemco Garry. "Bellow's Herzog: A Flight of the Fear." Saul Bellow's Journal vol 3 1963 .p 38
- [2] Herzog New York Viking, 1964, (subsequent text quoted in parenthesis is from this edition)
- [3] Clayton John J. "Saul Bellow: In Defense of Man" Bloomington's Indiana University
- [4] Press, 1968, p 186
- [5] Ibid. P167
- [6] Rovit Earl, "Bellow in occupancy 'The American Scholar' 34 spring 1965 p 292.