

Recall as Narrative technique to show Insanity and Reliability in Bellow's Novel *Herzog*

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Abstract

Along with Hemingway and Faulkner, Saul Bellow is considered another most-famous novelist in the contemporary literary world of the U S A. His writing reflects the spiritual crisis of the intellectuals and conveys deep concerns about the human fate in the society. Herzog is no exception. There are hardly any plots in the novel. Most of the novel is devoted to the hero's imagination and memory. In addition to that, the novel represents Herzog's chaotic life within such a short period of time as several days. In the novel, Bellow successfully created the character whose complex spiritual world is faithfully and profoundly represented. The question remains how his complex mind and confusing life is made clear in details. The question has to be answered in terms of narrative art of the novel, which is the aim of this research paper. There are three parts in this paper (the narrator and the narrative perspective, the characterization and the narrative time). The first part is about the narrator and the narrative point of view. In Herzog, Bellow selected a hidden narrator. The reader can peep into the Herzog's inner world which is reflected as real as it can be. The second part is about the characterization. The third part is about the time in the fiction. In Herzog, the time line disappeared, but it is also achieved very good results by the unusual time mode.

Key words: Narrative art; narrator; narrative point of view; discourse mode

The achievement of Saul Bellow in writing *Herzog* lies in the narrative technique he used. If one goes to douse down the curiosity to define narrative, one can take the help of Gerald Prince, who says, “Narrative is the representation of at least two real or fictive events and situations in a time sequence”(*Dictionary of Narratology*, 34) so, the goals of narratology what one sees in the definition are clear: to discover, describe and explain the mechanics of narrative and the elements responsible for its form and functioning. This paper explores the actual functioning of narrative technique in *Herzog* by taking narratology in the centre which is very helpful in understanding the novel’s theme and character. First, in narrative time, Bellow compresses the lifetime of his protagonist into five days, which is arranged in chronological order and extended in psychological time. Bellow’s use of anachrony especially flashback within flashback increases the amount of information of psychological time, and reflects profound psychological levels and depth. Thus psychological time becomes the main temporal narrative structure that breaks the conventional way of chronological organization, enriches temporal concept of fictional narration and embodies the characteristics of consciousness itself that is free and not restrained by objective time. From the analysis of narrative order and duration, the reader may feel the strong sense of rhythm. Secondly, in narrative space, Bellow provides a vivid objective space from regional environment to social cultural context. In the meantime, tracing the psychological time, psychological space exposes to the reader a modernist world that is stereoscopic and three-dimensional, with a strong sense of space. It is through monologues especially Herzog’s unsent mental letters that such space is rich in profound thoughts, depicting modernist condition of existence and the protagonist’s inner feelings of outer world, reflecting

the crisis of bourgeois humanism. Thirdly, in narrative point of view, Bellow's use of strategic shifts in person and internal focalization embodies well the situation of the protagonist, and makes the readers learn more about Herzog's inner and outer world especially his confusion of reality. Finally, the employment of web narrative structure reflects modernist time and space. In a word, Herzog belongs to a modernist fiction with characteristics of temporal anachrony and temporal space as main body. Narrative analysis to Herzog has practical value, which contributes to thorough comprehension of its theme. At present, narratology has been more and more valued and gradually applied to analyze modernist fictions, thus becomes an important critical theory of contemporary literature.

Recall is a narrative device that includes flashback, memory, interior monologue, and of course stream-of-consciousness. Bellow has extensively used all these narrative devices to make his characters pour out their inners. In a novel which begin *in medias res*, it is very obvious that the writer would have to go back to tell the earlier story to the reader in flashback using narrative devices. In *Herzog*, Bellow has extensively used recall as a major narrative device. Percy Lubbock says, "the whole intricate question of method in the craft of fiction, I take to be governed by the point of view, the question of the relation on which the narrator stands to the story." (Lubbock, 25) The following snippet of the novel captures Bellow's narrative technique concisely:

He knew he would think better, clearer thoughts after bathing in the sea. His mother had believed in the good effects of bathing. But she had died so young. He could not allow himself to die yet. The children needed him. His duty was to live , and to look after the kids. This was why he was running from the city now,

overheated, eyes smarting. He was getting away all burdens, practical questions, away also from Romona. (*Herzog, 23*)

Although told in third person narration yet it tells the readers what is in Herzog's head. It is Joycean associative narrative without the conundrums thrown up by stream-of-consciousness technique. Partly this is because Herzog himself is an analyzer, always explaining himself to himself, as if he were a character in a novel being read by someone else. His Joycean counterpart, Leopold Bloom, is freer, less persistently self-conscious, less concerned about making himself understood. In this passage, he moves, as he typically does, from the present (the consciousness of heading toward a destination) to the future (the effect of bathing in the sea) to the past (his mother) to the present (why he can't die), always in the name of self-justification. And as usual, he begins writing (this time in his head, but sometimes on paper) one of his letters. This one is to Smithers, who seems to be an academic colleague on some committee, or perhaps his department head. Smither looks like Thomas E. Dewey, the failed presidential candidate who symbolizes political mediocrity, which provokes Herzog to a reflection on America itself.

On the train, Herzog wonders why he hadn't cried when Asphalter told him, and recalls that Gersbach was a frequent weeper of distinguished emotional power who had tears in his eyes when Herzog landed at O'Hare and hugged his little daughter. Hoyle's book has evidently inspired cosmic thoughts in Herzog:

Astronomers made it all sound as though the gases were shaken up inside a flask. Then after billions of years, the childlike but far from innocent creature, a straw hat on his head, and a heart in his breast, part pure, part

wicked, who would try to form his own shaky picture of this magnificent web. (*Herzog*, 57)

Then he begins a letter to the follower of Gandhi, Vinoba Bhave, in which he talks about the problem of poverty based on his recently seeing the Satyajit Ray movie *Pather Panchali*. He thinks of giving the house in the Berkshires to Bhave's movement, but can't imagine what they would do with it, and besides, he would have to pay off the mortgage before donating it.

Edvig also accused Herzog of having her followed by a private detective. She began this accusation with the slightly British diction he had learned to recognize as a sure sign of trouble. Edvig predicted that she would never lapse into a true psychosis, but would have such spells for the rest of her life.

There is a good deal of talk in *Herzog* about madness. Considering that we are locked inside Herzog's skull throughout the entirety of the novel, what gives us reason to believe that the narrator is not himself completely barking mad? There is certainly evidence to support this. When Herzog struggles to extrapolate sympathy from figures, such as Dr. Edvig and Sandor Himmelstein, who might understand both sides of the equation, he is confronted with implications of his own mental instability. He isolates himself from possible benefactors in his paranoia that they will turn or have already turned on him.

Further, Madeleine clearly seems to be enduring some troubles of her own; we as readers have no evidence that Herzog did not in fact provoke her. It is quite possible that he forced himself on her, thinking nothing of it. Herzog demonstrates throughout the prose a remarkable ability to repress memories. Consider the revelatory manner in which he recalls his mother's

death. This blindness, this affinity for ignorance, gives one cause to think that Herzog is not the most reliable of narrators. Hence it is reasonable to read Bellow's novel as much a document of insanity as a story of healing.

Harzog seems to be unstructured, in the first reading. The fact that Bellow produced the 340-page novel from some six thousand pages of manuscript should give us some indication of the thought that went into the book and renders it unlikely that, as Tony Tanner suggested back in 1965, the novel is “as mismanaged and patternless as its hero’s life.” (Tanner, Tony. *Saul Bellow: Vision and Revision*) For much of the novel Harzog is remembering himself in the act of remembering. We thus follow flashback within flashbacks.

As the novel starts, within a page and a half we have entered the first flashback and joined Harzog on the coach of his Seventeenth Street kitchenette in Manhattan. Here he enters into a long series of reminiscences on the breakup of his marriage and all his attendant follies. Throughout the novel Harzog’s activities are interspersed with memories, and some, like those that return Harzog to his early childhood, take the form of extended flashbacks.

When we are twenty-five pages from the end of the novel, the opening line of the text, “If I am out of my mind, it’s all right with me” (*Harzog*, 315), pops into Moses Harzog’s head, and we know that Bellow has signaled a return to our place of departure. From here on, everything happens in the “present” of the novel. This ‘present’ the week and a half that Harzog spends in the Berkshires—occupies only a small fraction of the text, that begins and end with Harzog at rest and at peace with himself.

Herzog remembers Madeleine's ostentatious manner when he went to church with her before they were married. In his letter to Edvig he writes:

Somehow I got into a religious competition. You and Madeleine and Valentine Gersbach all talking to me...so I tried it out. To see how it would feel to act with humility... As soon as I was gone, Madeleine, your saint, sent my picture to the cops.(*Herzog,67*)

The scandal with the revolver plays a major role in the narrative. Though our experience of this narrative is constantly framed by Moses' own thoughts, his own interiority, Bellow does, it should be noted, structure his *fabula* with conventional novelistic modalities; rhymes, echoes, and foreshadowings populate the story, suggesting an authorial presence beyond Herzog's own will.

The letters are tools of interiority; they provide a kind of running inner monologue; they are thoughts translated to paper. These concerns may seem exceedingly formalist, but it is worth considering the way in which Moses' narrative cannot continue, and cannot have an end.

What is telling about this moment in the novel is its immediacy, and the way in which Bellow abstracts an instance of narrative. Herzog is stripped of his own authorial voice and forced to contemplate a world over which he has little control. Is this a set-back in his road to recovery? It is perhaps instead a moment of enlightenment, in which the complexities of humanity assert themselves as, on some fundamental level, unfathomable, indescribable; they cannot be reduced to pithy letters of the kind in which Moses traffics.

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