

Interpretation of Female Images in Saul Bellow's Herzog

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Abstract: Saul Bellow is a famous contemporary American writer. His *Herzog* was published in 1964. The novel portrays a typical Jewish intellectual who lived in the 1960s in the United States. The main character, Herzog, on the one hand, is perplexed by the absurd reality; on the other hand, he has been constantly exploring the true meaning of life and pursuing the value of life. In order to be able to seize his own destiny, Herzog has demonstrated amazing perseverance. Through the elaboration of encounter of Herzog, the novel reveals the various problems existing in the real life of the United States. After the publication, it has been credited as bestseller of "noble taste".

1. The Fate of Characters in Herzog

The protagonist, Herzog, is a wealthy Jewish descendant. He is a professor of history. He has achieved great success in his career, but his life seems rather unsatisfactory. He made a quite casual choice in marriage. As a consequence, he has had two marriages and two children. But what he actually pursued is pure physical happiness, and he once fell in love with his female students. His second wife, Madeleine, a strong woman, came to the countryside with Herzog after their marriage, and shortly she began to miss the illuminating life in the city. As a young and beautiful lady, she believed that it was a total waste of time here. She returned to college to pursue her doctorate, and later fell in love with Valentine, Herzog's good friend, betraying Herzog and completely throwing Herzog's life into chaos which appeared a little crazy in the eyes of outsiders.

Herzog lived alone in the countryside and found himself in a state of disorder in his personal life and social life. He wrote down his views on life and society in letters and exchanged those ideas with his friends, relatives, enemies and even the late philosophers. He used letters to vent his discontent, but those letters had never been sent out, and he knew that even if they were sent out, nobody would like to read them, because in the eyes of others, he was a madman.

Nevertheless, after Herzog finished writing his letters, he felt extremely relaxed and peaceful in mind. He came to his former lover's house to pay her a visit, but then he left without saying goodbye. He came to his home of the childhood again and took away his father's gun. He hastened to his ex-wife Madelyn's residence, with such strong impulse to kill Valentin and Madelyn. But when he saw Valentine out of the window, patiently bathing the little daughter of Herzog and Madeleine, he instantly held back his crazy plan.

On the way home, Herzog had a car accident. When the police were handling the case, Herzog's gun was found and he was detained. Later Herzog's brother came to pay a fine for him. After Herzog regained his freedom, he came home to write again, but he found nothing can slip out of his mind.

2. Saul Bellow's View of Women

In modern literary works, there are several genres of female images in the works of male writers. The first is pure angels. They are beautiful, gentle, chaste and supple. The second is the devil. They are lustful, coquettish, selfish and challenging. The devil-type women can also be further divided into three categories. First, the beautiful women who have lost their virginity, passionate but irrational, are the incarnation of lechery; Second, the masculine women, they are as smart and bold as men, but cold-blooded; Third, those shrew women, they look ugly and fierce with a personality of being

strong and tough, who have a strong tendency to hold their husbands tightly in the palm of their hands. The portrayal of these images, to a large extent, carries the subjective consciousness of male writers. Some male writers often describe their partners in their lives as the blueprint of the heroines of the novel.

Among the modern American writers, Faulkner, Hemingway and Fitzgerald, their partners in life are characterized by of vanity, strong female consciousness and extravagance. Therefore, their heroines in their works are granted the similar features. They show the strong tendency of being vanity-loving, blindly advocate female chauvinism, and favor an opulent lifestyle. Later literary critics defined this mentality as "misogyny". Saul Bellow has been known as "the literary heirs of Faulkner, Hemingway and Fitzgerald", because Saul's novels are imbued with such a strong flavor of "misogyny" concept.

Madeleine, the heroine in the book Herzog, is portrayed by Saul Bellow according to the image of his second wife. Madeleine shows her appearance throughout the entire novel through Herzog's eyes. In his eyes, Madeleine is a woman with no single merit. She is an unscrupulous pornographer, living an extremely lavish life. And she even hit on Herzog's good friend Valentine and kicked Herzog away ruthlessly, even making it difficult for Herzog to meet his daughter; her marriage with Herzog merely evolved out of her greed to snatch his academic achievements away and become as successful as him. It can be said that Herzog's misfortunes all stems from this devil-like woman. Just because of her betrayal, Herzog's life was broken and he became neurotic and oversensitive. In the novel, malicious terms are frequently used to describe Madeleine by Saul Bellow, such as "the stinky lady, who only knows how to spend money", "parasites", "an estrous donkey", and "they eat green vegetables and drink red human blood."

The formation of Saul Bellow's "misogyny" view is closely related to the origin of his Jewish family. In traditional Jewish families, women serve their husbands and children. Cleaning the house, preparing three meals a day, grinding corn, baking bread, washing clothes, taking care of children, and knitting sweaters, all these trivialities constitute their entire life, which sets an ideal mode for a good wife. As a historian, Saul Bellow is very familiar with Jewish traditions, and his own mother is such a traditional woman. Therefore, any woman with the unique traits not confined to the traditional stereotype, such as self-reliance would become the target of criticism and denigration by Saul Bellow.

In real life, Saul Bellow has also suffered the setbacks from his own marriage because his traditional concept does not conform to that of the modern times. In his five marriages, four of his ex-wives divorced him as they were intolerant of his male chauvinism. Only in his later years did he admit that he made a fatal mistake in his marriage that his wives he must be completely obedient to him without any doubt and complaint. While meeting his harsh requirements, they must share something in common in taste with him and take good care of him in life.

Therefore, for the analysis of the female images in Saul Bellow's novels cannot follow his thoughts and feelings, but to put aside his prejudices.

3. Analysis of Female Images in Herzog

The main female image in Herzog is erected by Madeleine, Herzog's second wife who is a feminist. In the novel, Saul Bellow describes three types of women: modern women, traditional women and ideal women.

3.1 Modern Women in Herzog

In Herzog, Herzog is emotionally chaotic. In this case, he described his newly divorced wife with a strong sense of hatred. But when Herzog looked at Madeleine without any influence from his subjective feelings, Madeleine was still a respectable woman.

Madeleine was born into a family lack of warmth, and her father was an artist who only cared about himself and rarely communicated with her daughter. During Madelyn's girlhood, she was sexually harassed, which greatly affected her life, so she decided to step into marriage, she chose

Herzog, much older than herself, as a historian on the one hand, and as a paternal compensation on the other hand.

Originally, Madeleine was beautiful, lively, straightforward and honest, but when she married Herzog, she had no any financial resources and had to rely on Herzog for all her living expenses. However, Herzog said she was a parasite who only squandered money; Herzog himself held an unhealthy idea about marriage and cared only about sex in the marriage. For Madeleine, he always wanted to control her and make her obey him. In pursuit of sexual excitement, for weeks he forced Madelyn to make love on the bathroom floor, ignoring Madelyn's feelings. Madeleine forbore her displeasure and consented. But ironically, Herzog said his sexual desire had been strangled by Madeleine.

Such a life is not really what Madeleine expected. She was determined to make academic achievements and continue to obtain her PhD in Slavic. But Herzog never talked with her about something academic at home. Later, Herzog's friend, Shapiro, came, a knowledgeable scholar, for a visit and Madeleine had a good time talking to him. But Herzog believed Madeleine just showed off her charm, and regarded Madeleine's positive aspirations as ambition, attempting to overwhelm him academically, and eventually becoming an authority in her academic field and an indestructible woman. Herzog not only did not support Madeleine's academic pursuit, but he even demanded her to abandon her career to help him with book.

At this time, Valentin, Herzog's friend, slipped into Madelyn's life. Valentine used to be a radio announcer, relying on his own efforts to become a celebrity. He respected women, valued family bonds and granted countless tenderness to children, which formed a sharp contrast to Herzog who was selfish and stubborn. Finally Madelyn gave up Herzog and married Valentin.

From Herzog's perspective Madeleine is an immoral woman merely because her preference in life and choice in marriage, she should not have a love affair with her husband's friend, which fully demonstrated she was completely a "rutting donkey," a morally corrupted woman. Herzog had never examined his own shortcomings. He didn't care about housework, he didn't respect his wife, and he even felt annoyed by the crying of his children. And what merits Valentin abounds in is just what he is deficient in.

Despite Herzog's personal prejudices and paranoia, Madeleine, to readers, is actually a beautiful, passionate, pursuing, life-loving woman who is not satisfied with becoming a vassal of successful men, which is a model of self-improvement for modern women to follow.

3.2 Traditional Women in Herzog

In Herzog, Daisy, Herzog's first wife, is a traditional woman. After she married Herzog, she undertook all the housework, such as, cooking, laundry and household hygiene. All her life revolved around taking care of her husband and children. In this way Herzog can be fully concentrated on his own works. However, even wife of this kind did not satisfy Herzog. He felt too dull and had an affair with a Japanese woman named Shana. Shana is of strong oriental characteristics and charm, gentle, kind and obedient. She loved Herzog, but didn't need Herzog to make sacrifices for her, only hoping that Herzog could accompany her more. During the divorce between Herzog and Daisy, Shana gave Herzog limitless warmth, but when Shana suffered from lung disease, Herzog had no any appetite for a glimpse of her.

In Herzog's eyes, self-reliant women he distained and disgusted, but the gentle and gentle traditional women, he did not hold them dear and showed no interest in, which fully exposed his complex of misogyny together with male chauvinism.

3.3 Ideal Women in Herzog

In the novel, Herzog's ideal woman is Ramona, a divorced woman and student of Herzog in the evening school. Ramona, in her thirties, was well-educated with a master's degree, and also economically independent ability by running a flower shop. On one hand, she was gentle and kind, just like Daisy, knowing how to cook meal and take care of family well; on the other hand, she was smart and independent, more close Madeleine. She can be regarded as the ideal woman for Herzog, as

she was totally the combination of Daisy and Madeleine, embodying all the virtue and merit we can find both in traditional and modern women.

Ramona appeared in Herzog's life when he was completely frustrated. Two successive failed marriages made Herzog afraid of facing women and pursuing love any more. Therefore, he dared not face Ramona. Ramona, however, launched a fervent courtship of Herzog fiercely because she was deeply moved and agitated by Herzog's noble disapproval of the love between teachers and students. She was determined to restore Herzog's self-confidence with her love, thus his career could revive once again. Due to Romano's bold and genuine love, Herzog also regained his confidence and reinvigorated himself.

4. Conclusion

Herzog, portrays different images of women in the same era in a way pretty close to life, however, due to the author's paranoid view and prejudice toward women, the novel highlights the opinion that men are superior to women. Women are always being treated as vassals of men and merits or demerits of women are judged on the satisfaction of men's needs. As it is well known, women's self-reliance reflects social progress, but in the novel, self-reliant and independent women have become the main culprit to hurt men. Traditional women haven't received respect from men, and the ideal woman created by the author is perfect just because they can meet all the demands or criteria set by men. They must show their complete obedience to men and in the meantime achieve economically independence. Such a perfect woman is only the wishful thinking or pure illusion of the author, and may not exist in real life.

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