

Women In Contrast: From Constancy to Turmoil

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Abstract—Saul Bellow, a Jewish American novelist is one of the most renowned writers in America. He is regarded as one of the most profound and scathing authors of the post war generation. He won the Nobel Prize in 1976 for depicting the plight of Jews, struggling to assimilate in American culture while managing their Jewish identity. He won a Pulitzer, three national book awards and the national medal of arts too. Most of his works reflect his own first-hand experiences depicting his inner conflicts. Many writers have written from Samuel Richardson down to the present time dealing with the concept of human predicaments and their emotional setbacks. *Dangling Man*, *Herzog* and *Seize the Day* represent the emotional crisis of a modern man living in an American society where they need to assimilate themselves according to its set rules and norms. In other words, both protagonists fail to fulfill the American dream. These works depict and explore the theme of alienation and existentialism from the perspective of the protagonists. The female characters in these works serve as psychological counterpart expressing their inner turmoil. Most of these female characters are framed through the lens of the protagonists. The reader knows these female characters with the help of narratives and interior monologues set by the main characters. According to Joseph Eva, Kitty from *Dangling Man* is quite opposite. Ramona and Madeleine too serve as contrasting personalities as defined and analyzed by Herzog in *Herzog*. The paper will examine these female characters emphasizing on the interior monologues and the circumstances, the protagonists went through. All these women are portrayed on the basis of the mental state of these main characters showing anxiety, conflicts, alienation and suppressed desires. These women function as the figures that either gratifying or undermine their desires.

Index Terms—Contrast, dependent, comparison, past and present.

I. INTRODUCTION

Saul Bellow often portrays his female characters with a sharp contrast to one another. Saul Bellow rarely

showed his female characters directly with an independent representation. These characters are shaped by the interpretation and presumptions of male characters according to their subjective consciousness. The readers do not come across these female characters directly but male characters' version. Their identity largely depends upon the opinion male protagonists acquire for them. Joseph develops his relationship with Kitty Daulmer while serving in the Inter-American travel bureau, and had mapped out a Caribbean tour for his wife Kitty. Joseph gets mesmerized by the enchanting nature of Kitty as he finds her, "she is simple, warm, uncomplicated, and matter of fact" (Bellow, *Dangling Man* 79). Kitty never believed in marriage institution and said that "marriage as such did not exist. There were only people" (80).

Initially Joseph's intimacy with Kitty was constrained to discussions, conversations and routine chats. However soon this changed as Kitty caught in the rain comes into Joseph's room and warms herself in the bed with alcohol leading to a shift in their relationship. "She sipped her drink, her head raised between the cleft of the raised pillows" (82). They get into a physical intimacy for next two months. Joseph recognizes changed attitude in Kitty and he loses no time to bring the relationship to a close. He tells her that "a man must accept limits and cannot give in to the wild desire to be everything and everyone and everything to everyone" (83). For Bellow, unwanted 'sex' with a woman is synonymous with evil. He experiences sense of moral and ethical distress though he never exhibits a direct remorse.

This is noticed in the portrayal of Kitty Daumler too. "Her furniture was soiled, the wall-paper next to the mirror was smeared with lipstick, clothes were flung about, the bed was always unmade, and she was careless about herself." (Bellow, *Dangling Man* 81).

Joseph's sexual relationship with Kitty Daumler reveals his Jewish mind set. His calling off his extra-marital relationship with Kitty symbolizes his frustration of mind. Joseph describes the manner in which Iva nurses him when he is in bed with cold: —Iva came home after lunch to nurse me. She brought a box of Louisiana strawberries and, as a treat, rolled them in powdered sugar (98). Joseph and Iva have the row over the former's refusal to go to the bank to get money as Iva had given him a pay bill. This is one of the few instances when we get the woman's point of view: I'm quite sure you can stand it [go without meals]. You'd have to be as weak as Gandhi before you'd give in. You're mulish. . . You always have reasons, and with principles. Capital g, she said, tracing the letter on the air with her finger (147).

Iva is an intellectual, assertive, patient and emotionally grounded prioritizing her family. She is a modern woman since she passionately loves freedom as she despises male domination. In the Joseph-Iva relationship, therefore, it is shown that rebellion turns to adaptation which in turn ends in separation with the signing up of Joseph for the Army. Joseph is shocked to hear the truth from Mr. Almstadt: I don't pay much attention to it. All women are talkers. Maybe Kitty talks more than most, but you got to allow for that. Some people just turn out different than others. Everybody isn't alike (17). Joseph sums up "we fly at one another because of 'confused motives of love and loneliness'" (121).

Joseph is a dangling man as he never feels settled. He tries to fill the vacuum of his life but all efforts bring alienation and isolation in his life. Joseph 's married life with Iva is ruined because of his dominating attitude. His extra-marital relationship collapses because of his orthodox Jewish mentality. Joseph confronts the truth thus: —the more active the rest of the world becomes, the more slowly I move, and that my solitude increases in the same proportion as its racket and frenzy...I grow rooted to my chair (Bellow, Dangling 13).

Joseph is a typical Jew as he believes in male domination and justifies subjugation of woman. He recalls: "Iva and I had not been getting along well. I don't think the fault was entirely hers. I had dominated her for years; she was now capable of rebelling" (Bellow, Dangling Man 77). Iva expresses her resentment being neglected by Joseph since there is a

lack of communication between them. She accuses him in bitter terms: It's months and months since you took an interest in me. Lately, for all you care, I might just as well not be here. You pay no attention to what I say. If I didn't come home for a week, you wouldn't miss me (77). Iva is displeased at the aggressive behavior of Joseph who is an unreliable, angry and insensitive husband. On the contrary Joseph describes Iva as a nagging, over-emotional and dominating woman. Joseph emerges as a cold and oppressive, his married life is ruined since he developed his extra-marital relationship. Joseph believes that Iva is sexually inadequate and uninteresting. Iva represents stability and sacrifice whereas Kitty is a free spirit firmly believes in individuality.

Written in 1964 *Herzog* showcases a narrative of a middle-aged professor collapsed with failed marriages and relationships. Moses E. Herzog is described as a disillusioned, middle-aged man who has been abandoned by his wife Madeleine and alienated from his relatives and friends. Despite being a professor, he is unable to find basic clarity about his own existence. In *Herzog* the narrative is largely based on the letter writing most of which stay unsent. These letters work as a vital medium through which readers come across the circumstances they are grappling with. Herzog turns to letter writing when find him unable to express his thoughts and emotions in direct conversation as an alternative way of Communication. Moreover, these letters serve as a means of articulating his perceptions and judgmental vision of others. It is largely through them that the reader encounters and understands the characters in the novel. In this way the epistolary form not only reveals his inner turmoil and intellectual restlessness but also shapes the entire narrative perspective presenting the word through his subjective consciousness. These letters provide insight into how he perceives others roles and significance in his life. Female characters such as Daisy, Madeleine and Ramona have been largely shaped by his subjective interpretation.

Daisy is his first wife, whom he divorced after meeting and falling love with Madeleine. But he does remain emotionally close to Daisy and their son Marco. Soon he realizes the difference between Madeleine and Daisy and finds Daisy a way more caring and loving when Madeleine leaves Herzog for other man.

Resuming his self-examination, he admitted that he had been 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 (4)

He finds Daisy calm, conventional and sensible. On the contrary Madeleine was like Kitty, a young free spirit, untamed, uncontrollable and independent soul. She considered herself too Young, too intelligent too vital, too sociable to be buried in the remote Berkshires. (6)

Ramona has been described by Herzog as an independent and self-sufficient business woman in her thirties. She is highly attractive, and she was well educated; she had also been pursuing a master's degree in art history.

From many points of view, Ramona truly was a desirable wife. She was understanding. Educated. Well situated in New York. Money. And sexually, A natural Masterpiece (75).

She came into his life when Herzog was dealing with a disastrous marriage with Madeleine. Ramona doesn't control Herzog, but she offers him serenity and stability which were missing while in the relationship with Madeleine earlier. Ramona has served as an anchor who helped Herzog to regain his sense of self and given him a much-needed emotional support.

And after all, why was he here? He was here because Ramona also took him seriously. she thought she could restore order and sanity to his life, and if she did that it would be logical to marry her. Or, in her style, he would desire to be united with her. (195)

Esther Mackintosh in his paper *The Women Characters in The Novels of Saul Bellow* has classified the types of women in Bellow's works into four categories: The Defeated Women, The sensual Women, The destructive Women and The Good Women. He asserts that,

Ramona, for instance, probably comes to mind first as a sensual woman, and indeed she is. But in more important ways she bears resemblance to the group of Good Women (15).

He also reminisces about the days he spent with Daisy when he was free from stress, leading an independent life with Daisy.

For Herzog, Daisy was a devoted wife, and a responsible mother. He also praises Daisy to have with him an unconditional relationship. Herzog portrays

Daisy as an organized and prudent household woman. He also reminds how efficiently she would manage every situation orderly. In the novel Daisy has been described as a simple, stable, composed and sincere woman quite opposite to Madeleine. Herzog compares Daisy with Madeleine and assumes that Madeleine always acted childish and she would be unable to handle responsibilities like Daisy had done in the past. I know I can't abandon a tiny child to her. Mady is no Daisy, Daisy is a strict, Moody woman, but dependable. Marco has come true alright (78).

Herzog remembers how she cared for him, and how, when they were married to each other, he lived a serene and composed life. Herzog retains a vivid and affectionate image of Daisy in his memory. He does not need photographs to recall her; her features are deeply imprinted in his mind—her slanting green eyes, clear skin, and simple, natural appearance. His recollection of their first meeting in Chicago further emphasizes her modesty and simplicity: a young college student, dressed plainly, carrying her books, and exuding a natural charm and innocence.

As long as Moses was married to Daisy, he had led the perfectly ordinary life of an assistant Professor, respected and stable (5)

But later Herzog undergoes a subdued remorse, doesn't confess, but still it is vividly noticed how he compares Daisy to Madeleine, and then Daisy from past and present days.

Now Daisy had been a very different sort of person - cooler, more regular, a conventional Jewish woman. Her manner was shy but also rather stubborn (126)

II. CONCLUSION:

It is observed that in Bellow's novels female characters are largely described from the point of view of male protagonists. Almost all of his works present women through a subjective, male centered perspective. Moreover, these female characters are often compared with one another by the main male characters. In many cases a clear contrast is drawn between two women typically highlighting opposite traits, opinions, temperaments and their priorities. Both of the works show a subtle difference between female characters. Even in the *Seize the Day* Margaret and Olive too are contrasting figures, quite opposite to each other in many ways as explored by Tommy. Bellow's women evolve and changes from one novel

to another. It is observed that in the works of Saul bellow, female characters and their impact on the male protagonist show a gradual development in his narrative, reflecting a more refined way and a more tolerant and compassionate view of mankind.

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