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Method in Madness: Technique in Saul Bellow's *Herzog***Dr. Tanweer Jehan**Sr. Asstt. Prof.
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Herzog is one the most discussed narratives by the Jewish American writer Saul Bellow. In this novel the novelist has chosen epistolary form to allow Moses Herzog, the protagonist, to cure himself of his psychological problems affecting him to dangerous levels, that result in his fractured-self and failed relations. Herzog's willingness to cure himself and reinitiate a social life is consequential of incessant letter writing. This paper looks at old but effective technique used in this novel by Saul Bellow with great success.

Keywords: Technique, epistolary form, broken relations, dilemma, cathartic.

The term technique according to Mark Schorer means, nearly everything. It is the only means the writer has of discovering, exploring, developing his subject, of conveying its meaning, and finally of evaluating it.
Mark Schror also adds:

Technique can also be the arrangement of events to create plot or within plot, of suspense and climax; or as the means of revealing character motivation, relationship, and development.

(William J. Handy, Max Westbrook; Twentieth century criticism. New Delhi, Light and Life Publishers, 1976.p.71 & 72)

Technique is not mere craftsmanship. A writer has to consider the manner, the treatment and the purpose of his writing in particular. And this would mean that the demands of the narrative could vary and sometimes call for experimentations with devices and the manner of handling of the material. It can be a mingling of self conscious literary devices and colloquial spontaneity within the compression of the narrative.

Technique in its wider sense means the treatment given to a particular subject by a writer, which in turn determines its literary value. Every writer employs techniques in accordance with the need and demand of his subject and the relevance of it in the narrative.

Saul Bellow is one of the best known American novelists of twentieth century; widely known for his works like 'The Victim' and 'Herzog'. Bellow's protagonists are strong individuals trapped in the psychodynamics of their own existence. The world outside is as distraught as the world within and often the challenge is near crippling. To project this dilemma of the character Saul Bellow uses different techniques that are

both traditional and (with a slight twist, making them even richer) experimental - adding to the literary value of his works.

The socio-political crises of twentieth century triggered wars, devastation, depression, isolation and alienation of the modern man. In other words the deprivation and frustration in the private life extended to chaos in public life. Almost all discourse-writings spill over the urgency to address the pressing issues and to restore order to the disorderly state of human existence.

Herzog the novel with epistolary format was published in 1964 and earned international fame for Saul Bellow. It portrays the midlife crises of a Jewish man, named, Moses E Herzog. A college professor with a doctoral work that was sufficiently illuminating and an unfinished long gestating work on the Romantics is an individual who is failing in life. Herzog has left a stable marriage with his first wife Daisy because he found it dull and alienating but ends up in a marriage that left him isolated and self-alienated at the verge of disintegration. He is trying hard to emerge from his second divorce. Herzog has a son Marco by his first marriage and a daughter Junie by his second marriage but both the children are not with him. His career as a writer and as an academic has stalled. He is currently in a relationship with a vibrant woman, Ramona but finds himself running away from commitment. He is still to overcome the humiliating manner in which his second marriage ended. His second wife Madeleine convinced Moses to move her and their daughter Junie to Chicago and to arrange for their best friends, Valentine and Phoebe Gersback, to move as well. He was also made to secure a job for Valentine. The plans were all a ruse as Madeleine and Valentine were all this time cheating on Herzog- carrying on an affair behind his back. Then shortly after arriving in Chicago, Madeleine throws Herzog out, securing some sort of a restraining order against him. After that she even attempts to have Moses committed to an asylum.

The novel brings to surface alienation and displacement of the main character, Moses Herzog, who in a bid to analyze his past and determine his future, becomes obsessed with writing letters to 'everyone under the sun'; that at the end of the novel results in restoration of his faith in himself and in humanity.

Sigmund Freud observes in *Creative Writer's Day Dreaming*, that writing was a kind of therapy for those with neurotic tendencies. This holds the key to the technique of epistolary form used in this novel. Set in post war America, neurosis has been used as a mode of resolving the crisis in which the protagonist finds himself entrapped. Neurosis involves obsessive behavior, triggered by stress but not a radical loss of touch with reality. Here the protagonist like most of Saul Bellow's heroes, is no commoner and yet the failures are as excruciating for him as could be for any modern or post world war II man who so willingly casts off disappointing ideologies with an ability to live with many kinds of madness, an immense desire for certain durable human goods- truth, freedom or wisdom.

Herzog, who in the beginning of the novel says its okay if he is 'out of mind'-referred to by some as 'cracked ', points to his high stressed condition and Bellow subjects him to the old literary practice of epistolary mode. He is made to write letters that in itself seems a neurotic act but the fact is as the reader reads on we realize this is used as potent methodology. These letters written in cursive type set are addressed to Rousseau, Freud, Hegel, Kierkegaard, Heidegger, Vinoba Bhave, Tolstoy, Marx, Nietzsche,

Emerson, Spinoza, Friends, family members and scores of other people- both dead and alive. This act in itself brings out the importance of communicating with oneself in an honest manner as Herzog conducts his search for meaning entering into dialogue with people who have made an impact on his life or others-who have done much to shape the modern intellectual and aesthetic world. Most of these people he has never met and the letters are unsent- promoting the weird nature of the very act of writing letters. But what is important here is the one thing that is in common in these letters -Herzog expressing disappointment either his own failings or of others or their words or apologizing for the way he has disappointed others. Herzog uninhibitedly questions the philosophical ideas of the dead philosophers stretching and testing his own comprehension and intellectual capabilities helping him overcome his loneliness- the curse of modern man. In almost all the chapters these letters appear arguing, contradicting and even accusing thinkers and reality instructors; helping Herzog release excess emotions and unburden haunting thoughts. He even talks about the sexual abuse he was subject to years back as a child on a street in Chicago, something that he otherwise could not have been able to reveal.

Bellow achieves the difficult task of revealing the mind of his complex character also by using the flash back technique which helps transport with convenience, to the earlier point before the narrative started. Through this technique other critical details of Herzog's life come to light – including the life of Herzog's father who is a failure at every job he tried- all this is hitherto never spoken about. The release of such feelings of frustration becomes important for the Lazarus-act which is desirable outcome of all such confessions.

As the story progresses we find change taking place- where Herzog is described as 'person of irregular tendencies; he practiced the art of circling among random facts to swoop down on the essentials'. His letter writing was involuntary and more chaotic in the beginning and he writes these first letters to his dead mother, his friend and his first wife Daisy- that is his past. This allows him to analyze himself, his own behaviour as he writes to Ramona- his present female friend- 'why is it that I, a lecturer, can't bear to be lectured? I think your wisdom gets me because you have the complete wisdom. Perhaps to excess, I do not like to refuse correction. I have a lot to be corrected about.' This is an honest admission about himself. He is truthful because he wants to get to the truth of the wasteland of his being.

Herzog's neurosis interferes in his academics as now in the classroom while delivering lectures there are long awkward pauses while his students wait and stare at him. This is no less painful for him. But even in this stressed condition he does not fail to take cognizance and make a few observations about the social situation. Writing a letter to the commissioner Wilson about the parks not being properly policed- this is necessitated by the gangs of hoodlums there in the parks. Then he immediately writes a letter to himself, 'since when have you taken such an interest in social questions, in the external world? Until lately, you led a life of innocent sloth. But suddenly a Faustian spirit of discontent and universal reform descends on you'. He assesses his behaviour and unequivocally charges himself of selfishness and self confinement. As this technique of letter writing yields positive results, in one of the letters he clearly sees the reasons for his irrational behaviour of past 'In anger people become dictatorial, hard to

take'. Herzog agrees 'a letter gives one a chance to consider- think matters over, and reach a more balanced view'.

And in these letters if he happens to write anything that is untrue he stops and quickly adds 'untrue!' and moves on after some pause only to make himself comfortable enough for the truth howsoever shameful, to be told in its stark nakedness. He discusses the process of self aware-ness and the inward worlds of Americans and then writes to Spinoza about the pain caused by unconnected thoughts but says these random thoughts that assail him, may become his 'cure', and his 'salvation'. So he writes to Dr. Schrodinger- the theoretical Physicist '...In what is life? You say that in all nature only man hesitates to cause pain. As destruction is the master-method by which evolution produces new types, the reluctance to cause pain may express a human will to obstruct natural law. Christianity and its parent religion, a few short millennia with frightful reverses...'.

And as the reader reads on the unsent letter writing become fewer and he gradually regains control on himself. The source material for his letters is his own experience of crisis, his raw pain and wounded psyche and the stream of consciousness is no mere stylistic device here-it is the formative principle governing the narrative pattern of character. Style is rooted in content and content determines form and man is the focal point of content.

Herzog refuses to take his failures and his incapability to establish a relationship with others-refusing to stay confined to his condition and loneliness. He meticulously works to regain control over his life and establish a meaningful relation with the outside world including Ramona. His sojourn in long searching answers, meaning of freedom, faith and life Herzog even contemplates the orthodox Jewish religion in which he was instructed as a child. Therefore when his second wife Madeline decides to convert to Catholicism, Herzog again, is forced to re-examine his beliefs. 'I don't agree with Nietzsche that Jesus made the whole world sick, infected it with slave morality. But Nietzsche himself had a Christian view of history, seeing the present moment always as some crisis, some fall from classical greatness, some corruption or evil to be saved from, I call that Christian'. Although at another place he says that he is 'no Christian' but he acknowledges in an unsent letter which he writes 'on his knee with cheerful eagerness' that 'the dream of man's heart, however much we may distrust and resent it, is that life may complete itself in insignificant pattern, in some incomprehensive way, before death. Not irrationally but incomprehensibly fulfilled.

Throughout the novel Moses refers to philosophies of his own, of the ancient and the modern and the new scholars. Philosophy becomes a kind of religion for Moses and a process of methodical deconstruction in the hope of reconstruction to understand life and its challenges better through the matrix of dissecting his own mind. In the end, he finds that his personal philosophy is a mixture of philosophies and that satisfies him.

Death and the inevitability of it has preoccupied human mind ever since man thought of life. The impact of this thought disturbed and even colonizes his mind to mock his self-importance. Moses Herzog remembers thinking of the Holocaust when he went to Poland and thought of death that pervaded the place. He makes references to both T.S Eliot and the Holocaust; criticizes the leaders of his country for the war in Vietnam and condemns an aesthetic view of history that ignored death and murder.

Herzog cultivated his own views about life and death and mortality and immortality. The certainty of death was a way of insisting upon man's individuality through its many devices for obscuring the reality of death. Herzog promotes the loss of individual identity; a sense of the cycle of the individual life is lost in the onwards movement of mass. The question of death, he thinks 'offers us the interesting alternatives of disintegrating ourselves by our own wills is proof of our freedom' acknowledging that we owe a human life to this waking spell of existence, regardless of the void. He thinks man has no positive knowledge of that void. And the void becomes his personal concern and man has to confront it. He then identifies the void with death.

In chapter seven of the novel Lucas- Herzog's childhood friend and Zoologist at the university, who is still upset about the death of his monkey, tells Moses about the therapy he is having for his depression. He explains an exercise because according to him facing the death was the most important step. In this exercise pretending to be dead and imagining one self talking to people in one's life freely (another form of what Moses had been doing in his letter writing). Confronting them with absolute truth, Saul Bellow suggests that people play roles and act out the different parts of life, the different moments and eras, costuming themselves to fit the role of the moment.

The climatic section of the novel Moses Herzog analysis himself dispassionately. He realizes that he over reacted to the report of Junie's babysitter that Valentine was behaving cruelly to Junie. Moses even confronts the horror of his murderous thoughts, even briefly telling himself he deserves what is happening to him. He chides his emotions and admits that he is a 'sentimental s.o.b'. By the end of this section of the novel, Moses has begun to accept the fundamental ambiguities of the world, and to see it as a grand mixture of good and the evil, life and death, terrible and sublime. He mentions in his letter to Dr Edvig- the Chicago Psychiatrist who treated both Herzog and his second wife Madeleine, that he is 'better now at ambiguities'. The struggles that have plagued Moses throughout the novel become less painful because of his new found capability to accept juxtaposition; paradox, and uncertainty. He writes to God, perhaps finding a kind of faith, that God is the 'King of Death and Life-ruler, of the two opposite domains.

As the novel progresses the letters becomes fewer and fewer. This seems to mirror the healing of the protagonists mind and his attention turns from his own inner struggle to the world about and around him. Herzog has come to understand himself and now is ready to interact with the world, not just with himself. The reference to P.B Shelley's poem, Ozymandias marks the comprehension of Mose's that everyone, even the mighty, eventually fall and die and there is a kind of peace in this type of realization and acceptance that comes after long suffering. The option offered by his current situation becomes clear (not having to be a scholar, possibility of starting afresh with Ramona) and the clarification that is taking place on the content level is reflected stylistically in the movement from a predominantly epistolary mode towards a more linearly organized narrative. Herzog is at his old house at Ludevilla as a new changed man. The house like Moses's life has an ambiguous purpose. It is burdensome, isolated, and filled with memories in the form of objects- that visitors and inhabitants have left behind. The house is also surrounded by the beauty of nature. Herzog himself is burdensome, isolated and plagued by memories but the beauty of world surrounds him. He begins making plans to fix up the house, which, like his life needs repair but is still

structurally sound. In a symbolic gesture he opens the windows of the house and lets the sun in. His happiness will come with his ability to admit that 'the bitter cup, would come round again, by and by'. Now he can accept that moments of joy and beauty will inevitably alternate.

At the end of the novel reader finds Moses E Herzog preparing for dinner with Ramona-a dinner that differs in character from the one he shared with her in the beginning of the novel because now he is able to relate to women in a new way. He stops thinking of marriage as an easy solution to his problems and of sex as a cure for what ails him. As the narrator puts it 'the knowledge that he was done with these letters whatever had come over him during these last months, the spell really seemed to be passing, really going.'

Herzog lying down, stretched out on his 'Recamier couch' is symbolic of the new- found peace of conquering the disorder and chaos outside. His regaining mental health prepares him to write actual letters that he will send out into the world, instead of the unsent and unfinished letters of the past. The signs of transformation come to surface in his effort to define himself in positive terms. 'Myself is thus and so, and will continue thus and so. And why fight it? My balance comes from instability.'

Saul Bellow believes that modern man can find communion and beauty in the midst of bleakness and isolation of the modern world. Although Moses Herzog feels alienated and although the bulk of the novel is about his solitary thoughts in the end, Moses rejects alienation and solitude. He comes to embrace society and finds the importance of sharing his life with others. Bellow realized that the simple Utopian fantasies will not bail the modern man out of the chaotic puzzle of the mechanized world. But individuals had to find the delicate balance between self and the world around through whatever fragmentary and disconcerted experience it could be done. Herzog the protagonist in the novel believes both modern life and modernist literature have been working to under cut the glorification of self. Saul Bellow suggests that Man must meet his fate by rediscovering the self which involves the process of endless mental strife. His adventures in the novel are essentially related to mind- the mind that is constrained to confront the existing social setup- and the most important luxury that he indulges in; namely letter writing- apparently madness, is in fact, the most effective method he employs to understand the world around- cure himself of his ailment- that again is what modern man suffers from due to the curse of loneliness – disordered fractured life and a faithful reflection of the wasteland of existence.

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