

**A CRITICAL STUDY ON THE PROMOS OF SKILLFUL WOMEN IN SAUL  
BELLOW'S DANGLING MAN AND HERZOG IN THE PATRIARCHAL SOCIETY**

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**Abstract**

Saul Bellow throughout his fifty six years of writing, from *Dangling Man* (1944) to *Ravelstein* (2000) has portrayed a wide variety of wonderful, convincing and delineated women characters. This presentation, displays two skillfully woven women characters Iva and Madeleine Herzog from Saul Bellow's *Dangling Man* and *Herzog* who are highly nerdy, strong-willed, independent, dazzling, aspiring and candid. Iva and Madeleine could easily be differentiated from other Bellovian female characters as they are distinct in showcasing their individuality in the male dominated society through their will power and intellectual caliber. Bellow has created these two female characters evenhanded to their male counterparts.

**Keywords:** Assertive, Skillful, Dominating, Intellectual, Self-Reliant

Until the mid-fifties of the twentieth century, America was governed by the patriarchal tradition in the family. Women took care of the family while men were the bread-winners. The biological power of the men was more considered in the patriarchal society than the brilliancy of the women. In late 1960, women started to reject the manner in which they were treated and hands off to the feministic movement which shot into fame brought a great impact in the lives of both men and women. According to Victor J. Seidler, "freedom and equality were being given a different meaning as they now had to sustain the existence of women as independent human beings able to take control, of their lives, not live in relation to others." (Seidler 1991)

Women in the mid- nineteenth century were considered as an embodiment of piety, purity, docility and domesticity whereas the cult of mid twentieth century was youth, appearance, acquiescence and domesticity. American man in the patriarchal society is always assertive while an assertive female was considered a bitch. The feministic movement kindled the need for emancipation in the minds of women. In 1980's women started to frame their own ideology. She kept her own goals and started to act to achieve it.

Few critics believed that Saul Bellow, throughout his novels failed to create a convincing women. Leslie Fiedler remarks, "Indeed, the whole of Bellow's work is singularly lacking a real or vivid female character; where women are introduced, they appear as nympholeptic fantasies, peculiarly unconvincing." (Fielder 1967) Bellow's protagonists overshadow the women characters as they become the spokesman in all his novels. But, we have to look into the other side of the coin too with more care and clarity. Bellow throughout his 56 years of writing career has given a wonderful gallery of women characters. Most of his women characters are active, brilliant, outspoken, creative and alive. He has portrayed them as struggling, working, searching, growing and achieving to lead a meaningful lives for themselves. In the words of Aharoni, "There are modern 'new' women and traditional old-world women, brilliant women and shallow materialistic ones, ageing women who are trying to remain 'girls' and young women who try to appear older, sensitive and insensitive women, kind and cruel ones- in one phrase- a whole world peopled by not only men but also by women. Some are two-dimensional and some are three- dimensional, but they're for the most part convincing characters vibrating with life. (Aharoni 99)

Bellow's skillful characterization of women could be perceived through some of his powerful female characters like Madeleine Herzog, Iva and Clara Velde. In his first novel *Dangling Man*, Bellow has created young and energetic Iva, who dearly cherishes her independence. Bellow

clearly pens down the repercussions of what happens when a woman becomes the bread winner of a family through his characterization of Iva. In his first novel itself, Bellow breaks the Jewish familial identity where a female is considered to be worthy only to take care of the family and children. Iva works as a librarian, and is supportive to her husband Joseph while he waits for his call-up in the army. Iva suggests Joseph to concentrate and complete his book on Diderot and not to search for new employment. On hearing her suggestion, Joseph was enthusiastic and grateful to Iva till troubles enter into their familial bond. Joseph could not withstand the feeling that he was 'kept' by his wife and his confrontation with his in-laws who accuse him for living in their daughter's salary induces his disagreeable feelings. Iva's superficial interests such as, "clothes, appearances, furniture, light entertainment, mystery stories, the attraction of fashion magazines" (DM 65) creates a great rift between them. When Joseph tries to change her, she resents it and rebels. Iva after a tiresome day in the library with books and periodicals needs relaxation which she finds in lighter kind of reading and entertainment. His masculinity never allows him to understand Iva and reasons within himself when he has not succeeded in changing Iva's taste. He says women, "were not equipped by training to resist such things... you might teach them to admire Walden but never convert them to wearing old clothes." (DM 65)

Joseph's indifferent attitude estranged Iva from him and in the course of his introspective exploration, he understands the true meaning of 'freedom,' it becomes clear to Joseph, "A compact with one woman puts beyond reach what others might give us to enjoy." (DM 67) This new insight helps him to know himself as well as Iva better. Martin Buber remarks, "in order to be able to go out to the other you must have the starting place, you must have been, you must be, with yourself." (Buber 1958) Joseph's introspective search helps him to realise that Iva's freedom is as dear to her as his is to himself. Joseph concludes in his diary, "the desire for pure freedom" is the same, "the

differences in our personal histories, which hitherto meant so much to us... become of minor importance” (DM 102) He admits that he had dominated Iva while trying to reform her tastes for years.

This new insight about the concept of freedom made Joseph understand and respect Iva more. He comments in his diary, “It was not evident that Iva did not want to be towed. Those dreams inspired by Burckhardt’s great ladies of the Renaissance and the no less profound Augustan women were in my head, not hers. Eventually I learned that Iva could not live in my infatuations.” (DM 65) Joseph at last realizes that his aspirations for Iva, were just a response to his masculine centered values. Bellow brings his protagonist Joseph to a complete realization that Iva is not only his wife, but a person in her own right, with tastes of her own and a personality of her own, and he has to accept her the way she is.

In his masterpiece, Herzog Saul Bellow has depicted a wonderfully woven Madeleine Herzog. Like Iva, she is also described by the male protagonist. We get a vivid picture of Madeleine through Opdahl, “Although Bellow gives us only Herzog’s view of Madeleine... the thoroughness of his portrayal of Herzog is itself a check on Herzog’s view.” (Opdahl 1967) From a masculine point of view we could easily visualize the painful divorce story of Herzog and Madeleine, whom he still loves.

Madeleine, is portrayed as a brilliant, beautiful, ambitious, restless, aggressive and outspoken ex-wife of Herzog who is struggling to get rid of his passions for her. Herzog admits that she has, “great charm, and beauty of person also, and a brilliant mind.” (H 5) Moses Elkanah Herzog and Madeleine Pontritter come from a patriarchal set-up. L.H. Goldman comments, “(Sarah) represents the typical Jewish mother; she is self-sacrificing, doting, and devoted. She maintains the stability of the home and sees to it that everything runs smoothly... Even

Madeleine's mother (Tennie) was of the sacrifices all for the sake of her husband, who is an artist, even the love of her daughter and finally her own marriage." (Goldman 1983)

Madeleine's distorted family background develops a deep bitterness towards her parents. Tennie, her mother confesses, "Mady thinks I let her down. She doesn't understand... hates her father." (H 136). Herzog's instinctive goodness and Madeleine's premeditated cruelty extends to their parents. Jewish mother-figure dominated Herzog while patriarchal father-figure was despised by Madeleine. Herzog cherished the memories of his mother and extended the same expectations with all the women he encountered. Herzog was deeply ingrained in Jewish past while Madeleine, women of the late twentieth century designed and framed her own self.

Though Herzog and Madeleine got separated because of their striking indifferences. Herzog painfully struggles to get rid of his passions for her. He admits that Madeleine has, "great charm, and beauty of person also, and a brilliant mind." (H 5) His admiration for her not only rests on her intelligence, beauty or will power, but also "the perfection of her self-control. She never hesitated... it gave him a headache merely to look at her." (H 299-300) Not only Herzog, most of the characters evolved in the novel admired Madeleine. Geraldine Portnoy says, "She is so vivacious, intelligent, and such a charmer... It is extremely exciting to talk with her, she gives a sense of a significant encounter- with life- a beautiful, brilliant person with a fate of her own." (H 99-100) Lawyer Sander Himmelstein tells Herzog that Madeleine is, "a strong-minded bitch, terrifically attractive. Loves to make up her mind. Once decided, decided forever. What a will power. It's a type." (H 82)

Madeleine went for a wedlock with Herzog who was around 44 years while she was just in her twenties, hoping that he would be a good support for her intellectual pursuit and career. But Herzog had the expectation of a Jewish mother ideal in Madeleine- a woman who is always

hardworking, busy, cooking, cleaning, washing and taking care of the family. Herzog also expected her to forego her pursuit and help him in his career writing a book on the Romantics. She struggles a lot to make adjustments in her expectations for a career along with maintaining the wedlock. This conflict between their career pursuits became a great barrier in their personal life. Joanna Russ supports Madeleine, “As many modern intellectual women, Madeleine finds that her family does not give her sufficient scope, challenge or satisfaction, and she feels the deep need for further growth and for pursuing a career” (Russ 1972)

In Madeleine, we could find a modern woman struggling to live with a husband whom she does not love and whom she tries to avoid. She chases her pursuit to complete her studies in Russian Philosophy. Herzog continues to show his contempt for her studies and career. When his friend Shapiro enquires him about the title of Madeleine’s doctoral thesis, he admits that he vaguely knows about it. Shapiro, a well learned scholar in her field admits Madeleine’s expertise in her research area. The conversations between Shapiro and Madeline showcases her intellectual highness. Even Shapiro suggests Herzog to move to Chicago to help Madeleine in her studies. Infuriated by Shapiro’s suggestion, Herzog says, “Fill your big mouth with herring, Shapiro! ... and mind your own fucking business.” (H 74). Herzog acknowledges that she was a threat to him in the academic world, “I understood that Madeleine’s ambition was to take my place in the learned world. To overcome me. She was reaching her final elevation, as queen of the intellectuals, the castiron bluestocking. And your friend Herzog writhing under this sharp elegant heel... Madeleine, by the way, lured me out of the learned world, got in herself, slammed the door, and is still in there, gossiping about me.” (H 76-77)

Unlike Daisy, the first wife of Herzog or Sono his Japanese Mistress, Madeleine had a different perception about being a women. Her sharp repartees, witty dialogues and arguments

adds one more feather to her character as a strong-willed modern woman. When Herzog considers himself to be her generous benefactor and accuses her for utilizing him. She voices out not only for her own self but for all the women who were considered subservient to male. We could see this quality of hers even when she argues with Herzog in Berkshire when she broke out desperately, “So now we’re going to hear how you SAVED me. Let’s hear it again. What a frightened puppy I was. I wasn’t strong enough to to face life. But you gave me LOVE, from your big heart, and rescued me from the priests. Yes, cured me of menstrual cramps by servicing me so good. You SAVED me. You SACRIFICED your freedom. I took you away from Daisy and your son, and your Japanese screw. Your important time and money and attention.” (H 124)

Madeleine who cannot cope up with the dominating personality of Herzog breaks her nuptial lock after two years. With a sigh of relief she says, “the first time in her life she knew clearly what she was doing. Until now it was all confusion” (H 100) She finds her real love in Valentine whom she marries. Herzog who could not overcome his passions for Madeleine finally comes to shoot her and her lover Valentine in Chicago. But he sees the Yiddish Madeline who does all the household work happily along with her lover Valentine who is tenderly bathing Junie, the daughter of Herzog and Madeleine. On seeing their peaceful life, Herzog realizes that Madeleine did not love him, he succeeds in uprooting Madeleine from his life and thoughts.

Bellow’s Madeleine is a ‘new woman’ in the New World. A woman who recovered her strength combating the domineering male, the so called ‘generous benefactor’ to achieve her goal in her pursuit for career and real love. Madeleine stands as the outstanding portrayal of Bellow’s female characters.

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