

The Depiction of the Self in Saul Bellow's Selected Novels

Assist. Prof. HAMEED MANA DAIKH

University of Al-Qadisiyah, College of Education, Dept. of English

Hameed.mana@qu.edu.iq

Hmddaikh@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

The self has been an ever evolving and endlessly fascinating topic, inspiring literature, conversations and debates through the ages. The late Nobel Prize-winning American novelist Saul Bellow had an especially keen eye for the self, and his take on this interesting issue was universally recognized. Through his years of writing and teaching, he has given us an insightful and inspirational understanding of the ego and its relationship to the intricacies and truths of life. The author Saul Bellow wrote extensively about the joys, sufferings, and complexities of the self and its relationships with the world. His distinctive, colorful writing style and profound understanding of human nature have earned him widespread renown. Each of us has something to contribute, and it is up to us to decide how we will conduct our lives. The self is an unstoppable force that evolves and transforms with every new experience. Moreover, Bellow felt that the search of self-knowledge is the foundation of personal transformation. This illustrates Bellows' idea that in order to truly know ourselves and progress, we must strive for a deeper understanding of our cognitive processes and emotions. From reviewing his writings, it is clear that Saul Bellow had a profound grasp of the human mind and advocated self-reflection as a means of achieving personal growth and stability. His thoughts serve as a reminder of the power of self-examination and the complexity of the self in contemporary life.

Keywords: self, complexities, psyche, reflection, and transformation.

تصوير الذات في روايات مختارة لساول بيلو

أ.م. حميد مانع داikh

جامعة القادسية ، كلية التربية ، قسم اللغة الإنجليزية

Hameed.mana@qu.edu.iq

Hmddaikh@gmail.com

خلاصة

لقد كانت الذات موضوعاً متطوراً ورائعاً إلى ما لا نهاية، ألهمت الأدب والمحادثات والمناقشات على مر العصور. كان الروائي الأمريكي الراحل ساول بيلو الحائز على جائزة نوبل حريصاً بشكل خاص على الذات، وكان رأيه في هذه القضية المثيرة للاهتمام معروفاً على مستوى عالمي. خلال سنوات كتابته وتعليمه، منحنا فهمًا ثاقبًا وملهمًا للأنما وعلاقتها بتعقيدات وحقائق الحياة. كتب المؤلف ساول بيلو على نطاق واسع عن أفراح الذات ومعاناتها وتعقيداتها وعلاقتها بالعالم. أكسبه أسلوبه المميز والملون في الكتابة وفهمه العميق للطبيعة

البشرية شهرة واسعة النطاق. كل واحد منا لديه ما يساهم به، والأمر متروك لنا لنقرر كيف سنقود حياتنا. الذات هي قوة لا يمكن إيقافها تتطور وتتحوّل مع كل تجربة جديدة. علاوة على ذلك، شعر بيلو أن البحث عن المعرفة الذاتية هو أساس التحول الشخصي. وهذا ما يوضح فكرة بيلو أنه لكي نعرف أنفسنا حقًا وننقد، يجب أن نسعى جاهدين لفهم أعمق لعملياتنا المعرفية وعواطفنا. من خلال مراجعة كتاباته، من الواضح أن ساول بيلو كان لديه فهم عميق للعقل البشري ودعا إلى التفكير الذاتي كوسيلة لتحقيق النمو الشخصي والاستقرار. أفكاره بمثابة تذكير بقوة تحقيق الذات وتعقيد الذات في الحياة المعاصرة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الذات ، التعقيدات ، النفس ، الانعكاس ، التحول.

Saul Bellow was born on June 10, 1915 (some sources say July 10, 1915, though Bellow celebrated in June), in Lachine, Quebec to Russian-Jewish immigrants Abram Belo and Lescha (Liza) Gordin. Abram and Lescha emigrated from St. Petersburg to Canada with their three children - Zelda (Jane), Mosvscha (Moishe, Maurice), and Schmule (Samuel) in 1912, and changed their surname to Bellows. Following Solomon's (Sol) birth, the family moved to Montreal in 1918, and eventually settled in Chicago in 1924.

When Saul Bellow was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1976, it was the culmination of a thirty-five-year writing career. Yet it was only twelve years earlier, with the publication of *Herzog* in 1964 that Bellow began to receive widespread popular attention in his own country, and this novel confirmed his status as a major American novelist, the successor to Hemingway and Faulkner, both of whom had died in the three years prior to *Herzog's* publication. (Peter Hayland, 1992, p. 22)

The body of work of Saul Bellow provides a distinct perspective on the concept of the self. He used his characters to examine various facets of the psyche, ranging from solitude and despair to love and appreciation. Bellow is frequently credited with inventing the new comedic novel, a genre of fiction that combines humor and serious subjects in order to address problems about the self and society. This method aims, at its foundation, to comprehend how individuals make sense of the world and live in it:

That man is free whose condition is simple, truthful - real. To be free is to be released from historical limitation. On the other hand, GWF Hegel (1770-1831) understood the essence of human life to be derived from history. History, memory - that is what makes us human, that, and our knowledge of death: "by man came death." For knowledge of death makes us wish to extend our lives at the expense of others. And this is the root of the struggle for power. (Saul Bellow, *Herzog*, pp.188)

The above quote makes sense that Herzog, who is obsessed with recounting his own history and his own memories, is a believer in Hegel's philosophy. Hegel believed that history was created dynamically by the contradictory and conflicting interests of men, but, at the same time, he believed that this history illustrated a progression. He thought that even though the path was contradictory because of the human beings contradictory impulses, in the end, there is a self-realization. The human being recognizes his rationality and independence. In summary, this is precisely what happens to the novel's primary character. Moses is led by Bellow through a series of contradictory urges and thoughts, but he ultimately comes to terms with himself. He arrives at a revelation and comprehension of even death. Moses' acceptance of the ambiguities of his journey and of himself is the sole condition for the book's ambivalent energies to converge. (Priya, The Self and the Society in Saul Bellow's *Herzog*, pp.11-12)

Saul Bellow is an author who is renowned for his unique and insightful portrayal of the human experience. In his novels, he frequently explores the soul's depths, capturing the essence of the self in a beautiful and potent manner. Characters created by Saul Bellow are complex and varied, representing a spectrum of experiences and opinions. Using historical, cultural, and philosophical frameworks, he investigates the various elements of life. Saul Bellow's novels are renowned for their understanding of the human condition and the complexity of the ego. They examine topics like as identity, alienation, and the search for life's meaning. Through his characters, "A great deal of intelligence can be invested in ignorance when the need for illusion is deep," (Bellow, *To Jerusalem and Back*, 109) where he portrays a vivid sense of self and even delves deeper into our internal conflicts and how they manifest themselves in the external world. (Li and Xu, *Identity Construction: Narrative Tension in Saul Bellow's Herzog*, pp.40-45)

The novels of Saul Bellow convey a feeling of individual development and a quest for identity. Bellow analyzes the nature of the self and the interaction between the inner self and the outside world via the growth of his characters. In a number of his works, he argues that the self is not a fixed entity, but rather something that can be sculpted and formed by one's experiences. Moreover, Bellow offers his readers insight into how these experiences can lead to self-reflection and personal growth:

And this is what mere humanity always does. It's made up of these inventors or artists, millions and millions of them, each in his own way trying to recruit other people to play a supporting role and sustain him in his make believe. The great chiefs and leaders recruit the greatest number, and that's what their power is. There's one image that gets out in front to

lead the rest and can impose its claim to being genuine with more force than others, or one voice enlarged to thunder is heard above the others. Then a huge invention, which is the invention maybe of the world itself, and of nature, becomes the actual world —with cities, factories, public buildings, railroads, armies, dams, prisons, and movies—becomes the actuality. That’s the struggle of humanity, to recruit others to your version of what’s real. Then even the flowers and the moss on the stones become the moss and the flowers of a version. (Bellow, *Adventure of Augie March*, pp.438)

Saul Bellow's novels often feature protagonists that represent a part of the author himself. Frequently, Bellow's characters mirror his own battles with identification and his own desire for knowledge and comprehension of himself, his faith, and the greater world. In novels such as *The Adventures of Augie March* and *Herzog*, Bellow's protagonists are immersed in self-reflection and the search for solutions. Through these individuals, Bellow speaks on the value of self-awareness in a world that is continuously changing. This investigation of the self appears in numerous forms in Bellow's works. His protagonists struggle frequently to balance their innermost aspirations with the responsibilities of society and family. In a chaotic and unpredictable environment, they are perpetually in search of stability and meaning. Through his characters, Bellow expresses the idea that discovering one's actual self is both challenging and gratifying, and can ultimately lead to greater insight and a more meaningful living. (Hayland, *Modern Novelists*, pp.55)

As in his novel *the Adventure of Augie March*, Bellow sums up his view: “But I don’t have anything to go by except my own instincts and perceptions,” where he shows the way to portray his characters. Throughout the novel Augie is plagued by self-doubt and frequently questions his own identity. However, his attempts to understand himself and his environment are always influenced by his experiences and impressions of the world. Bellow frequently develops characters who are unable to identify their own identities because they are physically or emotionally in a perpetual state of change. In *The Adventures of Augie March*, Augie is constantly questioning his identity and attempting to understand who he is as a person. (Opdahl, *Strange Things, Savage Things: Saul Bellow's Hidden Theme*, pp. 6-9)

The path to comprehension is frequently arduous and fraught with errors, depicted in Bellow’s novels. In their pursuit of knowledge, his characters frequently make errors and endure setbacks, but they are ultimately rewarded with a deeper understanding of their place in the universe. The protagonists of Saul Bellow come to realize that life is not always simple or clear, but that the fight is

worthy and ultimately rewarding. In addition, this battle enables individuals to become more empathetic and tolerant of others, which leads to a deeper appreciation of themselves. Bellow's heroes are frequently on the verge of an epiphany, but are never quite able to attain the understanding they seek. This battle is emblematic of the human condition and exemplifies how challenging it is to genuinely know and grasp oneself. In many respects, Bellow's characters' quest for truth and understanding in a world that is continuously changing and evolving mirrors the author's own quest to comprehend himself and the world around him. Bellow gives an insightful image of the modern individual in search of identity through his characters. In Bellow's novel *Seize the Day* (1956), Wilhelm, the protagonist of the novel has faced a brutal sense of loss, where "someone had said, and Wilhelm agreed, with the saying, that in Los Angeles all the loose objects in the country were collected, as if America had been tilted and everything that wasn't tightly held down had slid into Southern California." (Bellow, *Seize the Day*, pp.12) These lines show endless sprawl of Los Angeles, its allure for misfits and runaways and strivers and psychotics, its lack of a center physically and morally. It is a place where someone like Wilhelm, with his undefined self, would naturally end up. (Glenday, *Saul Bellow and the Decline of Humanism*, pp.61)

Frequently, Bellow's characters face a moral conundrum that forces them to reconsider their views, ideals, and commitments. By allowing his characters to think, feel, and develop during the course of their trip, Bellow not only teaches readers how to acquire the answers they seek, but also how to apply that information to improve their lives. Through the hardships of his characters, the reader realizes that life is not always a straight path, but rather a journey filled with challenges and discoveries. By probing the depths of his characters' search for identification and self-reflection, Saul Bellow provides his readers with a glimpse of a life as complex and gratifying as their own. In *Humboldt's Gift*, Bellow's protagonist Charlie Citrine represents a complex mixture of the contradictory forces that make up the individual self, where, "the same things are done by us, over and over, with terrible predictability. One may be forgiven, in view of this, for wishing at least to associate with beauty." (Bellow, *Humboldt's Gift*, pp. 195) Through his experiences with Humboldt, Citrine discovers that life is a series of compromises and that the idea of one true path to success is a fallacy. Humboldt's refusal to accept the seemingly easy route is a lesson that Citrine takes to heart and eventually passes on to his own son, demonstrating that Bellow's characters are not static beings, but are capable of learning and growing. Moreover, Bellow's use of a character, who is constantly searching is an expression of his belief that one should never be complacent. (Halldorson, *The Hero in Contemporary American Fiction*, pp.45)

Citrine's journey of self-discovery is reflective of Bellow's philosophy of life: "I am what I am, I am what I have been, and I am what I will be." (Bellow, *the Humboldt's Gift*, pp.34) The path to true happiness lies in the pursuit of knowledge and understanding. Through Citrine's struggles, Knowledge and comprehension are the most valuable gifts one can give to oneself. The gift of knowledge and wisdom from Alexander von Humboldt serves as a reminder that life is a journey, and that it is necessary to never stop learning, growing, and evolving. Ultimately, Bellow's message is that life is a journey that is constantly changing and unpredictable, and that it is essential to welcome this uncertainty with curiosity and an open mind. The course of Citrine's life is a potent illustration of how to have a meaningful life. As he navigates his own problems, Citrine realizes that true success is not found in fame or money accomplishment, but rather in the deep relationships he establishes with others. In addition, Citrine's journey serves as a reminder that life is an ongoing process of learning and progress, and that the obstacles we confront are frequently the most gratifying experiences of our lives. Bellow's portrayal of life as a voyage of inquiry and self-discovery is a potent reminder that life is full of both challenges and opportunity. (Abbot, Saul Bellow and the Lost Cause of Character, pp.270)

The protagonists' selves in Saul Bellow's works are not content with their place in life; rather, they actively seek out opportunities to improve their situation, frequently in the face of enormous difficulty. This is demonstrated by Citrine's trip, which culminates in his triumphant return to Chicago and the achievement of his professional goals. Bellow's depiction of a life of struggle and development is bolstered by the contrast between characters such as Humboldt and Citrine, who both strive for achievement but adopt distinct tactics and strategies. By examining this duality, Bellow demonstrates that there is not one definite path to success, but rather a variety of routes that one can take. Saul Bellow's works are renowned for their exploration of the human soul and "his life was a search for the values that would give it meaning," (Bellow, *Homboldt's Gift*, pp. 55) and his novels are no exception. In particular, Bellow's selected works have often depicted characters' struggles to understand and reconcile their innermost thoughts and feelings. The soul, for Bellow, is a complex entity that must be both observed and comprehended on an individual level. Through meticulous characterization, Bellow offers a nuanced portrait of the human soul and its various conflicts. (Chapman, *The Image of Man as Portrayed by Saul Bellow*, pp.290)

In his selected works, Saul Bellow is famous for the depth of soul he imparts to his characters. In Bellow's works, he portrays the emotional and psychological complexity of his characters, enabling readers to better comprehend how the human soul operates. By digging into the lives of his characters, Bellow analyzes the

components of a happy and meaningful existence and illustrates how external circumstances affect the spirit. With his investigation of this concept, Bellow creates a relationship between reader and character by inviting the reader to notice and explore their own individual souls. Saul Bellow is renowned for his vivid and perceptive portrayals of the human soul. His works offer a unique perspective on the complexity of the human condition and its expression. (Luo, *Spiritual Journey of Protagonists in Saul Bellow's Fictions: Search- Escape-Regeneration*, pp.1316)

Saul Bellow's books have long been praised for their examination of the human self and soul. Bellow's novels exhibit a unique capacity to dive into the complexity of humanity, and the perception of the soul. His investigation of such issues as mortality, faith, and love is done with a nuanced perspective that resonates with readers of many backgrounds. Bellow's writings depict the intricacies of human existence in a manner that is both engaging and uplifting. Since time immemorial, Saul Bellow's works have been analyzed for their representations of the human soul. He is a good listener to man's self. He frequently concentrates on the inner lives of his characters, chronicling their struggles, development, and inner conflicts as they attempt to make sense of the world. The books of Saul Bellow examine the individual in relation to others and society. Bellow's protagonists struggle with,

The bad stuff keeps coming back, and it's the worst rhythm there is. The repetition of a man's bad self, that's the worst suffering that's ever been known. But you can't get away from regularity. But the king said I should change. I shouldn't be an agony type. Or a Lazarus type. The grass should be my cousins. (Bellow, *Henderson the Rain King*, pp. 195)

They are often outsiders who see the world in unique and illuminating ways. However, the characters are not always comfortable with this insight. The main characters often struggle with the concept of self-acceptance. They often question their place in the world and struggle to find a meaningful purpose or mission in life. Their struggles are symbolic of the universal search for meaning in a chaotic world. (Rovit, *Saul Bellow*, 16)

In *The Victim*, it is "easy to understand. Here I'm sitting here and my mind can go around the world. Is there any limit to what I can think? But another minute I can be dead, on this spot. There's a limit to me. But I have to be myself full." (Bellow, *the Victim*, pp.119) Ralph Amest is a failed writer who is drifting through life aimlessly. He has no career prospects and no meaningful relationships with family or friends. Ralph begins the novel thinking about a woman he saw earlier

that day while sitting in a café. He is so absorbed in his thoughts that he fails to notice when the woman sits down next to him and begins to speak. Alice introduces herself as his new neighbor and invites him to pay her a visit the following day. Ralph agrees to meet Alice and spends the night thinking about her and attempting to establish a romantic relationship with her. Ralph sees Alice the following day at her apartment complex, where they spend the day together. They share their hopes and aspirations for the future and ultimately fall profoundly in love. Ralph loses interest in Alice after several days of beautiful love, and the relationship begins to disintegrate. Ralph returns to his previous life at the conclusion of the novel without any new acquaintances or romantic interests. (Dipak, *The Search for Self* in Saul Bellow's Novel *the Victim*, pp. 1-25)

Bellow examines numerous facets of the self and the ways in which we perceive ourselves in society. Bellow's novels are typically thought-provoking and difficult, but instead of taking an introspective approach, he uses this ambiguity to reflect on broader societal themes;

The towers on the shore rose up in huge blocks, scorched smoky, grey, and bare white where the sun was direct upon them. The notion brushed Leventhal's mind that the heat over them and over the water was akin to the yellow revealed in the slit of the eye of a wild animal, say a lion, something inhuman that didn't care about anything human and yet was implanted in every human being too. (Bellow, *The Victim*, pp. 47)

The road towards self-discovery and unique identity is reflected throughout Bellow's works. His paintings examine the individual's lifelong search for identity and the numerous incarnations of the self. Eugene Henderson, the protagonist of Saul Bellow's novel *Henderson the Rain King*, travels across Africa in pursuit of his identity. Initially, Henderson is a standard businessman and veteran of the mid-20th century yearning for meaning. After encountering an African tribe, he learns more about his inner self than in his previous existence. Henderson progressively comes to embrace his inner self, resulting in a synthesis between his prior urban-modern personality and his self. (Kim, Saul Bellow and Imagination, pp. 106-110)

In each of these novels, Self-exploration is a vital part of self-discovery exploration. As Bellow explains, the self may be a complicated riddle, and identity is frequently determined through interactions with many cultures, beliefs, and people. Particularly through the novel's characters, each of whom experiences a temporary awakening, Bellow elucidates the numerous ways in which one can become aware of one's own nature. The protagonist's journey of self-discovery and

internal changes are the focal point of Bellow's whole body of work, allowing readers to examine the concept of personal identity. Through characters such as *Henderson, Augie March, and Herzog*, Bellow compels us to run circles around our own beliefs, to combine and discard elements of our identities while we build a true self, and to find enriching and meaningful friends, encounters, and experiences that extend our understanding of the human condition. (Schulweis, The concept of the self in Saul Bellow's Novels, pp. 5-11)

The books of Saul Bellow convey a distinct and extremely earthy perspective on the human experience, constructing narratives of difficult characters in complicated times that touch on many of life's intricacies. Bellow is able to write tales that examine the interior and external conditions of his characters, frequently expressing an especially intense inner conflict and including issues of identity and the self. In Bellow's selected novels, the self is repeatedly represented as a complex, ever-changing construct, fragmented as characters search for meaning in their lives.

In *Herzog*, the novel's protagonist, Moses E. Herzog, is a man deeply troubled by the state of his life and identity. Despite being a smart scholar and a successful lawyer, he is constantly uncertain of himself and his future, "rattling between two worlds" of split devotion. The reader is left to explore the stormy mosaic of life as he navigates his troubled relationship with his wife Madeline, his deteriorating ties with his erstwhile friends, and his own fluctuating ideas of himself. Bellow depicts Herzog's inner journey with meticulous contemplation, showing him as both vulnerable and resolute as he cobbles together an identity from his past thoughts and future dreams. (Godbole, Saul Bellow's *Herzog*: A Reconciliation, pp. 95-100)

In *Humboldt's Gift*, Bellow leans even more heavily on the construction of identity, with protagonist Charlie Citrine struggling with his own shifting perception of himself. Citrine continues to be troubled by a looming feeling of personal failure and a scary nihilism, despite his self-perception as a renowned author and respected member of Chicago's elite. In pursuit of a feeling of purpose and security, Charlie struggles consistently with personal inadequacy, his internal dialogue alternating between moments of terror, remorse, and self-assurance. With his exploration of the divided self, Bellow conveys the dynamic nature of identity and the difficulty of finding self-satisfaction. (Xiang, Psychological Analysis of *Humboldt's Gift* from the Perspective of Lacan's Theory, pp.89-93)

Finally, in *Seize The Day*, Bellow poignantly captures the existential search for purpose that many people experience in life. Despite his increasing financial distress, the novel's protagonist, Tommy Wilhelm, sets forth on a quest to balance his identity and come to terms with the events of his life. As the novel culminates, despite having failed to achieve his desired resolution, Wilhelm is seen showing a renewed appreciation of his self- worth, representative of a living soul striving to find solace in the ever-shifting nature of the self. (Richmond, he Maladroit, the Medico, and the Magician: Saul Bellow's *Seize the Day*, pp.15-20)

Eventually, Bellow's books create a wonderful depiction of the internal and external conflicts individuals experience in establishing a sense of identity and accepting the multidimensional character of the self. On the path to self-actualization, his characters acknowledge the fragmented and ever-changing nature of the self, experiencing both highs and lows. Thus, Bellow's chosen novels continue to be potent representations of the human experience.

Conclusion

Saul Bellow has a unique way of depicting the self in his selected novels. He shows us, the readers, how individuals interact with the world, and how they perceive themselves as a result. He creates characters that are incredibly complex, with deep desires and motivations that drive them forward. We can see how they struggle with their own identity, and how they often fail to conform to what society expects of them. Through Bellow's use of dialogue and descriptive narration, we get a clear picture of how the characters' inner battles shape their decisions and actions. Bellow also uses his characters to explore the complex relationships between individuals and their communities. He shows us how a person's sense of self can be impacted by their environment, and how they can find their acceptance within their own community, or be rejected by it. At the same time, Bellow emphasizes the importance of individualism. He shows us how one person's sense of self can be, as we delve into Saul Bellow's novels, we can easily observe his focused depiction of the self. He puts a magnifying glass on the inner workings of the human mind and its struggles. We can feel the tension and energy of the characters as they move from one event to the next, revealing their innermost thoughts and feelings. Bellow creates characters whose minds are pulled in a million directions, as they grapple with their own sense of identity. They question their purpose in life, their values, and the choices they have made. We see them struggling to reconcile the pieces of their personalities, to make sense of the chaos that is swirling within their minds. They are constantly in search of clarity, of understanding, of validation. These characters are deeply complex, and their inner journeys are often quite tumultuous. The way that Bellow depicts the self is quite unique. He captures the complexities

that make up each individual, the shades of grey that are often missing from other literary.

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