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A Case Study of *Herzog*

《赫索格》视域下的 索尔·贝娄犹太意识

◎ 彭 涛 著

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Foreword

Peng Tao, the author of this book, asked me to write a foreword and provided me with all the necessary materials for the work. I, with great pleasure and interest, accepted the task, for I like this topic, which is interesting and worth studying.

The Jewry is a very special race in such aspects as history, religion, customs, and life style and, with the Jewish-American writers (scientists and businessmen as well) as their representatives, the Jewish people is a very special ethnic group in the United States. The Jewish-American literature—a wonderful flower in the garden of world literature—contributes to American literature with vivid depictions of the cultural inheritance and development of the Jewish immigrants in America, as well as of their living environment in a multicultural context.

Jewish-American literature has made such great contributions to American literature that it has become a spectacular cross-cultural literary phenomenon. This book has good reasons for choosing Saul Bellow's *Herzog* as its topic of study. Saul Bellow won Nobel Prize for Literature in 1976, chiefly for *Herzog*.

Saul Bellow (1915–2005) is a distinguished Jewish-American novelist in the 20th century. Since the publication of *Dangling Man* in 1944, which is his first novel, he has caught extensive attention of both the reading public and critics.

Others of his important works include *The Adventures of Augie March*, *Henderson the Rain King*, *Herzog*, *Mr. Sammler's Planet*, *Seize the Day*, *Humboldt's Gift*, etc. With his "huge literary influence", Bellow has been widely regarded as one of the 20th century's greatest authors. So far, literary scholars have approached his works from such various perspectives as neo-critical, psychological, archetypal, structuralist, feminist, post-modern criticisms, etc.

In the words of the Swedish Nobel Committee, Bellow's writing exhibited "the mixture of rich picaresque novel and subtle analysis of our culture, of entertaining adventure, drastic and tragic episodes in quick succession interspersed with philosophic conversation, all developed by a commentator with a witty tongue and penetrating insight into the outer and inner complications that drive us to act, or prevent us from acting, and that can be called the dilemma of our age."

Saul Bellow was first introduced into China after the Reform and Opening Up. The year of 1985 saw the publication of the Chinese version of *Herzog*, translated by Song Zhaolin (1928–2011), a well-known translator, writer and English literature scholar in China.

Early Chinese critics concerned themselves mainly with offering introductions to Bellow's literary career as well as his modernistic style, in a somewhat generalized way. As time goes on, more specific studies and insightful articles turn up. It is with the help of Liu Hongyi's *Toward the Cultural Poetics—Studies in American Jewish Fiction* (2002), Zhou Nany's *Saul Bellow, the 20th-Century Literary Novelist* (2003), Liu Wensong's *Saul Bellow's Fiction: Power Relation and Female Representation* (2004), Wu Lingying's *Marginal Protagonists' Journey—a Study on Saul Bellow and Ralph Ellison* (2005), etc., that the Chinese reading public have access to a more comprehensive picture of Saul Bellow.

The recent years have witnessed the publication of Liu Xiyi's *On the Consciousness of Suffering and Jewish Ethical Orientation in Saul Bellow's Fiction* (2011), Zhang Jun's *A Study of the Mentors in Saul Bellow's Bildungsroman* (2013) and Qiao Guoqiang's *Saul Bellow: a Collection of Criticism* (2014), which have brought the Bellow criticism to a new peak.

Herzog is a representative of Saul Bellow's works. In *Herzog*, Saul Bellow transmutes his own life into the characterization of the protagonist, Moses Elkanah Herzog, a modern parody of the biblical Moses in Exodus of Hebrew Bible. Moses Herzog's indebtedness to the religious, ethical and philosophical estrangement and cultural traditions of Judaism, his experience of exile by force and re-entry by his own will prove Bellow to be essentially Jewish. With the depiction of the crack of Moses' individual history, Saul Bellow also depicts the American history. In other words, Bellow combines the Jewish theme with the open participation in the intellectual life of American, attempting to provide a specific Jewish dimension for the more general discussion of American problems. According to the observation of the author of this book, Bellow succeeds in making full use of his Jewish perspective, Jewish feeling, Jewish experience, his typical dialectical mode of thinking and excellent narrative techniques to expose the emotional and spiritual predicament and reaction strategies of the Jewish intellectuals in the modern world so as to show the universal reality of human existence. With a cosmopolitan vision, Saul Bellow transcends the particularism of the novel's Jewishness and gives expression to the intrinsic cosmopolitanism of his novel's central message—defending man's dignity, saving the human soul from the limitations of reality—Bellow's Jewish theme is a portmanteau and complex one. This is Peng Tao's basic thinking about the topic of this book.

Peng Tao has planned the book in five parts. Part I (Introduction), as a basis for the discussions that follow, gives a general introduction to Saul Bellow's literary career, his literary achievements as well as his thematic pursuit. Part II (Chapter 1) analyzes the formation of Bellow's Jewish consciousness, and differentiates "Jewishness" from "Jewish consciousness". Part III (Chapter 2), as the main body of the book and aiming at throwing light on Saul Bellow's Jewish consciousness, makes an in-depth study of the Jewishness of *Herzog*. Part IV (Chapter 3) is centered on Bellow's success in integrating *Herzog's* Jewishness with cosmopolitanism (universalism), with a purpose of revealing the cosmopolitan vision in Bellow's Jewish

consciousness. Part V, the Conclusion, brief as it is, sums the whole thing up with a statement that Bellow's works with strong Jewish color are humanism-oriented in their cosmopolitan themes.

Isaac Newton said, "If I have been able to see further, it was only because I stood on the shoulders of giants." Peng Tao, a teacher in Zhuhai College of Jilin University, basing on what literature she collected, worked this book out, which, I believe, should prove to be a very rewarding effort both for herself and for its intended readers. I hope Peng Tao will carry on her voyage on the vast ocean of Bellow studies.

Wu Jinghui

2016.2

February, 2016

前 言

著名的美籍犹太作家索尔·贝娄（1915—2005）是可与海明威和福克纳相媲美的小说家，他一生共发表了十一部长篇小说及其他几部短篇小说、散文集和剧本。1976年，贝娄因“对当代文化富于人性的理解和精妙的分析”获诺贝尔文学奖。1964年发表的小说《赫索格》是贝娄的代表作，这部小说真实地表现了犹太知识分子在现代社会中的苦闷与迷惘、追求与探索。

本书力图运用文化诗学理论对贝娄的代表作《赫索格》进行文化解读，旨在探讨贝娄的犹太意识。犹太意识强调犹太文化的传统意义和文化价值，就《赫索格》而言，该书通过描述生活在西方主流文化中的犹太知识分子的生存体验，将这种意识表现为边缘感、异化感、寻根性和寻本性。《赫索格》揭示了犹太知识分子的生存困境、精神困境和心路历程。作者在这部小说中选择犹太人作为自己叙事的视角，以文学的方式关注犹太人的生存状况和生命体验，展现犹太民族特有的文化品性和气质，这正是本书要探讨的中心问题。

贝娄的犹太意识以人文主义为核心，以现代性和世界性为依归。作为生活在20世纪的美国犹太移民中的一份子，贝娄倡导在犹太传统文化与美国主流文化之间建构一种多元的文化共生的局面。他不满传统文学在揭露社会和表现人性时过于悲观的态度，提倡作家要与社会通过“对话”实现“交流”，以此在文明的废墟上重塑高贵的人性，

树立人文主义的旗帜。《赫索格》的叙事聚焦于作家最为熟悉的犹太知识分子的精神危机，以探讨伦理和道德问题为手段，以犹太文化中的人类关怀为目标，昭示犹太人乃至现代人的普遍生活境遇与生存法则。由此可见，贝娄的犹太意识实际上是一种普遍人性意识，既关注犹太人的生命情怀，又能照见全人类的生存理念。这种超越狭隘种族偏见的犹太意识成就了《赫索格》一书的文化品格，也彰显了贝娄的人文主义关怀和世界性视野。

彭 涛

2016年3月

Preface

Nearly ten years ago, when I was a postgraduate in Central South University, I was determined to work out my M.A. thesis for my satisfaction. I went to the library of Hunan University. It was the first time that I saw Saul Bellow's works such as *Herzog*, *Dangling Man*, *Seize the Day*, etc. They lay quietly on the bookshelves and awaited people to enjoy them. The first book I took up and read was *Herzog*, which brought me much trouble at the very beginning. A lot of new words plus mixed plots made me greatly confused and frustrated. As time went on, with much effort I began to enter his world, analyzing his complicated diction and profound thoughts buried deep in his works. Over the past ten years, I have ever since engaged myself in studying his works. I feel grateful to Saul Bellow, for he guides me into the world of the Jews whose culture, history, religion, customs, values and great contribution to human history are a unique enchanting world and thus worthy of being studied.

In the Jewish history, we can see many celebrities such as Karl Marx (1818-1883), Albert Einstein (1879-1955), John Rockefeller (1839-1937), Vladimir Lenin (1870-1924), Christopher Columbus (1451-1506), Charlie Chaplin (1889-1977), Henry Alfred Kissinger (1923-), Alan Greenspan (1926-), Bill Gates (1955-), Warren Buffett (1930-), etc. It is no exaggeration to say that the Jewish people influence the world more than any other ethnic groups. I

can't help wondering what inspired them to make such great contributions to human history. With this doubt in mind, I, an English major, began to approach Saul Bellow, a Jewish man of letters, who builds a magnificent mansion of novels.

Saul Bellow (1915–2005), a Jewish-American novelist, is one of the greatest American novelists after Ernest Hemingway and William Faulkner. He left behind him a total of eleven novels, a great number of short stories, several novellas, plays and essays. The Nobel Prize for Literature came in 1976 to him for his “humanistic understanding and subtle analysis of the contemporary culture that are combined in his work.” *Herzog*, which was published by Bellow in 1964, is proclaimed to be his most important work for its realistic and vivid depiction of the vanity and sadness as well as its thorough investigation of American-Jewish intellectuals in the modern American society.

In this book, I intend to make a systematic cultural analysis on *Herzog* from the critical perspective of Cultural Poetics so as to figure out Bellow's Jewish consciousness. His Jewish consciousness emphasizes the Jewish culture's value and its traditional significance. By depicting in *Herzog* the personal experience of a Jewish intellectual situated in the dominating cultural context of the United States, Bellow reveals *Herzog's* Jewishness, a Jewish cultural quality, as marginality, alienation, homeland-quest and self-identification. He chooses Jewish intellectuals as his narrative focus, successfully highlighting the Jewish-Americans' embarrassing living conditions and life experience. This marks the starting-point of the book.

Bellow's Jewish consciousness is largely based on humanism, which is cosmopolitanism-oriented. As a member of Jewish-American immigrants, he zealously advocates constructing a multicultural coexistence between the Jewish culture and the American mainstream culture. By establishing an approximate cultural identification between the two cultures concerning man's meaningful existence, he successfully solves the two vital cultural strains. In the aspect of artistic creation, Bellow is not satisfied with those traditional writers who hold pessimistic attitudes toward human nature and social reality. He encourages

all writers to negotiate themselves with the society so as to achieve a mutual exchange and seek the “true impressions” instead of “direct relevance”^[1]. In so doing, he hopes to highlight our dignified human nature and put up a slogan of humanism above the civilizational “wasteland”^[2]. With this artistic thought in mind, he takes advantage of the anthropocentric concerns of the Jewish heritage and places the ethical and moral questions at the core of his works. Therefore, he is keen on depicting the emotional crisis and spiritual pilgrimage of the Jewish intellectuals he is most familiar with so as to expose the life predicaments and living principles not only for the Jews but also for all humanity. In all, Bellow’s Jewish consciousness is characteristic of universal human nature. Not only does it show his concern for the Jewish life and fate in particular, but also manifests the universal reality of human existence. In this view, his Jewish consciousness has transcended the singularity and provincialism of being Jewish only, thus integrating the Jewish traditional value into international cultural heritage. Such informs *Herzog* as a world-famous masterpiece of contemporary Jewish-American literature, and highlights Saul Bellow as a brilliant writer with humanistic concern and cosmopolitan vision.

Peng Tao

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- [1] “True impressions” and “direct relevance” appear in Saul Bellow’s Noble lecture. The original sentences are as follows: “Ingenuity, daring exploration, freshness of invention replaced the art of ‘direct relevance’; the essence of our real condition, the complexity, the confusion, the pain of it is shown to us in glimpses, in what Proust and Tolstoy thought of as ‘true impressions’”. At the end of Saul Bellow’s Noble lecture, he summarizes that “The value of literature lies in these intermittent ‘true impressions’”. Saul Bellow. “Nobel Lecture.” 1976. *Nobel Lectures in Literature (1968–1980)*. ed. Sture Allen. (Singapore: World Scientific Publishing, 1993) 131-142.
- [2] “Wasteland” is related to T. S. Eliot (1888–1965), a British poet. He published his poem *The Waste Land* in 1917. The poem not only presents a panorama of physical disorder and spiritual desolation in the modern Western world, but also reflects the prevalent mood of disillusionment and despair of a whole post-war generation.

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Introduction

Jewry is a very special ethnicity in the aspects of history and religion. Owing to religious and ethnic causes, the Jewish people have been exiled since the pre-historical time. As America had been relatively open to Jews, a lot of European Jewish people immigrated to this new land in the 20th century. It is no secret that they confronted multiculturalism with great ambivalence, trepidation and even hostility. The Jewish-American novelists who participated or have been participating in the multiculturalism vividly depict the cultural changes of the Jewish-American immigrants in their writings. Nowadays Jewish-American literature is becoming a typical cross-cultural literary issue.

Among all the Jewish-American writers, I am attached to Saul Bellow. He was born on June 10, 1915, and died on April 5, 2005. He is a distinguished Jewish-American novelist. His international status in the post-WWII American literature can be compared to that of Ernest Hemingway and William Faulkner. His humor and flexibility in dealing with the Jewish cultural heritage in his works have moved me deeply. Moreover, I feel fascinated by his subtle analysis of modern culture, of entertaining adventure, drastic and tragic episodes in quick succession, interspersed with philosophic conversation with readers and his penetrating insights into the dilemma of the modern age.

Since the publication of his first novel *Dangling Man* in 1944, Bellow has

caught extensive attention from the reading public as well as the critics. Literary scholars have approached his works from such various perspectives as neo-critical, psychological, archetypal, structuralist, feminist and post-modern criticisms.

The Bellow criticism has developed in three “generations.” The first of these, emerging in the later 1960s, identifies in Bellow the writer who breaks with modernist orthodoxy, the tradition dominating the 20th century American literary minds and the critical profession, and the Bellow critics such as Tony Tanner, Keith Opdahl and John J. Clayton investigate the author’s response to this tradition; the second generation, largely of the 1970s, broadens the critical spectrum to include investigations of individual issues such as the subject matter, theme, narrative mode and the psychic pattern of fiction. Sarah Blacher, Chirantan Kulshresta and Yuzaburo Shibuya are the typical critics of this generation. Despite new objectives and expanded thematic range, these perspectives do not principally challenge the first generation’s assessment of Bellow as an anti-modernist and an affirmative humanist; the third generation covers the period from the 1980s up to now. Canonical issues and diversification of critical theories found ample food in analyzing Bellow and his works. The notable critics such as Malcolm Bradbury, L. H. Goldman, Daniel Fuchs, Michael Glenday, Ellen Pifer, Peter Hyland, Gloria Cronin, Claude Levy and Jonathan Wilson largely adopt such critical approaches as structuralist, deconstructive, neo-critical, psychological, archetypal, feminist and post-modern criticisms to analyze his thematic patterns, characterization, styles, cultural backgrounds, humanistic consciousness, historical contexts, etc.

The research on Bellow’s Jewish consciousness mainly started from the 1980s. Regarding Bellow’s Jewish consciousness, there are two kinds of opinions. The first denies Bellow’s Jewish consciousness, as Malcolm Bradbury, in *Saul Bellow* (1982), when reassessing Bellow’s relationship to the European and American intellectual traditions, repositions Bellow as creating his own historical self to be independent of any of these inherited traditions. The second asserts Bellow’s Jewish identity, as L. H. Goldman, in *Saul Bellow’s Moral Vision: a Critical Study of the Jewish Experience* (1983), reveals Bellow’s debt to the Judaic tradition, arguing that this

debt is more profound and functionally important in Bellow's novels than Bellow could concede. In this book, *Herzog* is viewed as an in-depth exploration of Jewish culture in two aspects: 1) Bellow's protagonist in *Herzog* is a parody of the Moses of Exodus in the Hebrew Bible; 2) the intersection of English and Yiddish shows Bellow's indebtedness to Jewish tradition in the level of language. In 1989, Gloria L. Cronin and L. H. Goldman edited *Saul Bellow in the 1980s: a Collection of Critical Essays*, which includes an article "Saul Bellow and the Philosophy of Judaism" written by the latter editor. This article mainly exposes Bellow's consciousness to keep firm to philosophy of Judaism. In Goldman's opinion, Bellow's perspective is unmistakably Jewish, and he is a religious man. All the critics, as I know, seem to disagree with each other. Some of them deny Bellow's Jewish consciousness, while others definitely affirm his Jewish identity.

According to my understanding, Jewish consciousness is a kind of cultural consciousness. It usually emphasizes the Jewish culture's value and its traditional significance. Bellow, as a Jewish writer, proclaimed to be essentially Jewish, and he always demanded an approximate Jewish understanding of his fiction. Among all his novels, *Herzog* is the most Jewish. This novel could be regarded as a retrenchment in the direction of realism and high seriousness. It focuses on the Jewish protagonist, Moses Elkanah Herzog, the option available to him, his preferences and judgment, and his capabilities in dealing with his present predicament in the intellectual and social life. Since Bellow transmuted his Jewish life experience into his protagonist, expounded his observation of American Jews' cultural changes in the historical background of the 1960s in the USA, and expressed his deepest concern for the modern Jews, the novel which embodies profound Jewish cultural elements becomes a window for us to examine Bellow's Jewish consciousness.

In this book, I intend to survey Bellow's Jewish consciousness by applying cultural poetics in analyzing *Herzog*. The cultural poetics surfaced as an identifiable tendency in academic literary and cultural criticism in the 1980s. In 1982, Stephen Greenblatt, professor of English at the University of California at Berkeley, was asked by *Genre* to edit a selection of Renaissance essays. He