



解放潘多拉

贝娄四部小说中的女性形象
和两性关系研究

郑丽 著

Liberating Pandora: A Study of
the Female Images and Bisexual Relationship
in Saul Bellow's Four Novels

北京外国语大学 2007 年博士文库系列

外语教学与研究出版社

FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING AND RESEARCH

书馆

北京外国语大学 2007 年博士文库系列

外语教学与研究出版社
FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING AND RESEARCH PRESS
北京 BEIJING

江苏工业学院图书馆藏

贝娄四部小说中的女性形象
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图书在版编目(CIP)数据

解放潘多拉: 贝娄四部小说中的女性形象和两性关系研究 = Liberating Pandora: A Study of the Female Images and Bisexual Relationship in Saul Bellow's Four Novels: 英文 / 郑丽著. — 北京: 外语教学与研究出版社, 2009.4
(北京外国语大学 2007 年博士文库系列)
ISBN 978-7-5600-8565-4

I. 解… II. 郑… III. 贝娄, S. (1915~2005)—小说—文学研究—英文 IV. I712.074

中国版本图书馆 CIP 数据核字 (2009) 第 052868 号

出 版 人: 于春迟

责任编辑: 安阳阳

封面设计: 袁 璐

出版发行: 外语教学与研究出版社

社 址: 北京市西三环北路 19 号 (100089)

网 址: <http://www.fltrp.com>

印 刷: 北京外国语大学印刷厂

开 本: 850×1168 1/32

印 张: 8.5

版 次: 2009 年 4 月第 1 版 2009 年 4 月第 1 次印刷

书 号: ISBN 978-7-5600-8565-4

定 价: 25.90 元

* * *

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物料号: 185650001

Acknowledgments

This study has grown out of my Ph.D. dissertation, which was completed during my study at the English School of Beijing Foreign Studies University (BFSU) from 2003 to 2006. As the Nobel Prize winner of 1976 and a winner of several fiction awards, Saul Bellow (1915-2005) has been regarded as one of the most important American writers in the late 20th century. I'm very lucky to have been introduced to the works of this great writer by my tutor, Professor Guo Qiqing, whose profound knowledge and insightful views of this writer aroused my great interest in his works. My book is not the only one concerned with the study of Bellow's works, but it is one of the very few books which focus on the female images and bisexual relationship in his fiction, and the only one which uses myth to analyze this issue both at home and abroad. I sincerely hope my study will provide a new perspective to the gender study of Bellow's works, and enhance our appreciation of Bellow both as a great artist and as a man who has a thorough understanding of the subtle human nature.

As to the completion of this book, I sincerely dedicate my most heart-felt gratitude to my supervisor, Professor Guo Qiqing, for the irreplaceable role he plays in my academic improvement. He is always

a source of encouragement and insight in my study. In the process of my dissertation writing, he helped to clear my thoughts when I was distracted, and encouraged me when I was deadlocked. In a word, with his keen insights and overall academic guidance, he helped me greatly in my academic improvement. I wish to take this opportunity to express my special thanks for all the help, encouragement and support he has offered to me in my academic life. My gratitude to him is beyond words.

I would like to express my gratitude to Professor Jin Li of BFSU, Chair of my dissertation committee, for her enlightening lectures I have attended during these three years from which I have benefited a great deal. I would also like to thank all the other committee members: Professor Ma Hailiang of BFSU for his insightful suggestions which have become an inalienable part of this dissertation, and Professor Zhao Taihe of Beijing Normal University whose recommendation of certain important criticisms regarding Saul Bellow contributed a lot to the improvement of this dissertation. I also owe Professor Liu Shusen of Beijing University and Professor Liu Shisheng of Qinghua University a lot for the valuable suggestions they have made for my future research in this field.

Professor Liu Wensong of Xiamen University deserves my special thanks. His doctoral dissertation inspired me a lot in the construction of my dissertation. He also offered sincere suggestion on my research and copied some precious materials for me, which helped me greatly in my research.

From the bottom of my heart, I thank all the friends who have

given me a lot of help during the period of my dissertation writing. I wish to thank Professor Jack Rollwagen of Brockport University and his wife Louise Stein for their kindness in bringing the material I need for my research from the United States and for their constant encouragement. I also wish to thank Li Saihong for mailing the material I need from Denmark, Liu Kuilan and Yang Weidong for lending me some important resources concerning Saul Bellow, and Zhang Feng for his kindness and patience in helping me to solve the theoretical problems. Li Heqing deserves my special thanks, because he is always ready to offer a hand whenever I am in difficulty. He tackled my computer problems warm-heartedly, and helped me to get access to certain important resources for my dissertation. Without his assistance, the completion of this dissertation would have been much more difficult.

Finally, I would like to extend my gratitude to my parents who have encouraged me to pursue my goal. My husband, Cui Mingfeng, deserves my special recognition since he has urged me to explore my potentiality as fully as possible. But for his constant support and encouragement, the completion of this study would never have been possible.

As to the generous financial support, I'm very much obliged to BFSU for granting me this opportunity of publication, and Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press for publishing my book.

A Note on the Text

The following abbreviations of Bellow's fiction have been used in the text:

<i>DM</i>	<i>Dangling Man</i>
<i>V</i>	<i>The Victim</i>
<i>AM</i>	<i>The Adventures of Augie March</i>
<i>SD</i>	<i>Seize the Day</i>
<i>HRK</i>	<i>Henderson the Rain King</i>
<i>H</i>	<i>Herzog</i>
<i>MSP</i>	<i>Mr. Sammler's Planet</i>
<i>HG</i>	<i>Humboldt's Gift</i>
<i>DD</i>	<i>The Dean's December</i>
<i>MDH</i>	<i>More Die of Heartbreak</i>

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Introduction

Saul Bellow (1915-2005) is usually regarded as one of the most important American writers in the late 20th century^[1]. As a prolific writer, he has produced 13 novels and novellas (apart from some collections of short stories, essays, and plays) since the publication of his first novel *Dangling Man* in 1944. His literary creation qualifies him not only as a major American writer, but also as an international heavyweight. As the winner of several fiction awards: Pulitzer Prize for *Humboldt's Gift* (1975), and the National Book Award for *The Adventures of Augie March* (1953), *Herzog* (1964) and *Mr. Sammler's Planet* (1970), Bellow's career reached its climax in 1976 when he was awarded the Nobel Prize^[2] for his great achievements in literature, and "for the human understanding and subtle analysis of contemporary culture that are combined in his work" (Gottesman 1951). Bellow is called "Bellow the Humanist"^[3] and his works are in essence affirmatively humanistic. His alarm at the increasing spiritual devastation of the modern world, his uncompromising insistence to draw comfort from a broad and deep spiritual and intellectual culture, and his insightful analysis of human nature of the modern people all lead to the scholarly recognition of him as a humanist writer.

Despite the numerous awards and compliments Bellow has received since he commenced his literary career in the 1940s, some critics questioned the validity of the received criticism and Bellow's

artistic vision as a humanist. They argued that Bellow's humanism is incomplete as he excludes half of the human beings—the women in his works (*Saul Bellow at Seventy Fine* 93-112). Although it is natural that most critics focus primarily on the characters who receive most of the author's attention, it should not be forgotten that in Bellow's novels there are many other characters who make up the world with which the protagonist is so often in conflict, and who reveal much about the concerns of the author. These "other characters" are women who are so often neglected by most critics. In every novel, the protagonist has a significant, often intimate relationship with one or more women—a relationship that is crucial in illuminating or even altering his understanding of the meaning of life. Louana L. Peontek points out that although Bellow consistently affirms the dignity and the possibilities of "human" life, he consistently fails to recognize slightly more than half the spices. His concern for defining the dimensions of the "exactly human" is narrowed down by a misconception of the condition, and thus his otherwise attractive pronouncement sounds "hollow or desperate" (159).

Patricia Whalen Williams in her dissertation, "Saul Bellow's Fiction: A Critical Question", regards Bellow's failure with female characters as an artistic flaw (242). Comparing her interpretation of Bellow's philosophy with the way the protagonists relate to women, she finds the discrepancy and the critical shortcoming: "In the context of a philosophy that emphasizes the uniqueness of the individual, the value and dignity of man, and the liberating role of love, Bellow's failure to treat his women as people weakens the quality of his vision" (10).

The supposed universal assumption in Western civilization about human nature, as Toril Moi puts it, is:

Traditional humanism...is in effect part of patriarchal ideology. At its center is the seamlessly unified self—either individual or collective—which is commonly called “Man”....This integrated self is in fact a phallic self, constructed on the model of the self-contained phallus....In this humanist ideology the self is the sole author of history, and of the literary text. History or the text becomes the sole expression of this unique individual: all art becomes nothing but autobiography, a mere window on to the self and the world, with no reality of its own. (8)

L.H. Goldman assumes that Bellow, the chief literary anthropologist of Western cultural intellectual traditions, has not remained blind to more recent feminist revisionist critiques of Western humanism, such as Moi's. Goldman suggests that as a voracious and enlightened reader, Bellow has also been forced to engage these critiques of Western humanism. As a prolific writer, he has had to face much criticism and rejection from a literary critical profession increasingly shaped by feminist concerns. Furthermore, and greatly to his credit, he has anticipated some of these issues for more than 20 years when he began mapping not just the manifestations of a “universal” self, but the manifestations of a “particular” male self. Goldman further points out that “in fact, the psycho-cultural crises of masculine identity in our age have been one of his prevailing preoccupations. His male protagonists—American, Jewish, Eastern

European, Protestant—all enable Bellow to explore masculine coding across class, ethnic, national, and historical lines” (*Saul Bellow's Moral Vision* 99).

Thus, Bellow's considerable achievement is distinctively limited by his negative or distorted depiction of female characters in his works, which arouses critics' hot debates and makes Bellow a controversial writer. Just as his literary agent Harriet Wasserman observes in her memoir that “Saul Bellow's relationships, in his books and in his life—one and the same really, with women especially—are subject to much speculation and interest by the public” (xii). Then she mentions that some critics have characterized Bellow as a “womanizer”, a “misogynist”, or a “male Chauvinist” (ibid) for his biased view of women. Undeniably, Bellow is often criticized for his misogynistic depiction of the female characters, which is reflected either in his failure to produce female characters as fully and lively as the male ones or in his distorted depiction of them as strange, ridiculous, spiteful and destructive creatures. His pessimistic view of the bisexual relationship seems most obviously reflected in the constant battles between those miserable couples in his novels.

As regards the negative depiction of women, Bellow's critics often complain that Bellow fails to endow his female characters with anything like the force and power that he gives to his central figures—who are always male, first in the options of “fullness” or “roundness” the narrative point of view gives them, and second in the ideological role they play in the novel. We see only a limited picture of women as secondary characters, and this is why Bellow is criticized as a

misogynist: his misogyny manifests itself in the curtailed portraits of women that appear in his novels. In *Love and Death in the American Novel*, Leslie Fiedler observes that “the whole of Bellow’s works is singularly lacking a real or vivid female character; where women are introduced, they appear as nympholeptic fantasies, peculiarly unconvincing” (363). And John Clayton remarks in relation to *Herzog* that “women are creations of Herzog’s masochistic imagination, not ‘real’ at all” (221). The readers are never allowed a subjective view of the experiences of the women. “Women”, emphasizes Victoria Sullivan, “are characters in the movie that flashes through the protagonist’s head. Bellow does not attempt to penetrate their skulls; they have no monologues. The only self that they reveal is that which the protagonist perceives” (112). The readers never see Madeleine’s point of view, nor Ramona’s, nor Daisy’s, nor Margaret’s, nor Lily’s. Robert Towers comments on the typical depiction of the female characters in Bellow’s works and notes that they are always perceived through the male protagonist’s eyes (50-52). The readers mainly perceive the female characters through the minds of his male protagonists who often overshadow them; the female characters do not have the same depth of emotional, moral and intellectual power as the male protagonists. Women are very important to a man, but he often finds them strange, illogical, and disturbing. They represent one more pressure on his already overburdened psyche. The important emotional transactions are always between males (Braham 61). These critics complain that this is the evidence of Bellow’s inability to create a complex woman character; further, Fiedler suggests that

this is yet another symptom of American literature's preoccupation with an exclusively male world (107). Gloria L. Cronin argues that *Mr. Sammler's Planet* is Bellow's first really focused and searching psycho-social mapping of the phenomenon of misogyny and it is possible to read Mr. Sammler as Bellow's quintessential wounded misogynist. Arthur Sammler's remark about his sexy relative Angela reflects his prejudice against women: "Females [are] naturally more prone to grossness, [have] more smells, [need] more washing, clipping, binding, pruning, grooming, perfuming, and training" (*MSP* 36). Sammler thinks that women "all deploy similar stratagems: theatrics, seduction, insolence, or the culinary arts. Their ultimate purposes are self-gratification and castration or destruction of the male" ("Searching the Narrative Gap" 97-122). Cronin also claims that *More Die of Heartbreak* is constructed of rhetorical strategies which align it with a long Greco-Roman, medieval, and modern tradition of misogynous texts: its male center of perception, its objectification of women, its staging only of the scopophilic male gaze, its sympathetic exoneration of misogynous men, its framing of stereotypical binary gender patterns, and its characterization of women as shrewish and depraved ("Two Not-So-Farcical Misogynists" 71-87). In *The Flight from Women in the Fiction of Saul Bellow*, Joseph McCadden offers the first treatment of female characters in Bellow's novels. He analyzes why and how Bellow's male protagonists start their "flight from women" by pointing out that women arouse feelings of love and hate and females represent the Other in human experience to the male consciousness (6). But his work focuses more on men than on

women. When women are discussed by the critics, they are usually treated as the symbols or the subsidiary parts of the protagonist, rather than as the distinct, separate individuals. Robert R. Dutton, though he devotes a long and detailed discussion to Herzog's women, sees them as only the extensions of Herzog's personality, representative of various stages of his development. Thus, Daisy and all she stands for are a part of Herzog's mind, and Bellow depicts in this relationship the thesis that man can stand only so much reason and order. Sono, symbolic of Herzog's sensual nature, fails to content Herzog, the man. Madeleine's central purpose is to represent the object of man's pursuit and adoration of what is nebulously called "success". His final conclusion is that "on a deeper, universal level, these attachments and attractions are symbolic of elements to be found in all men" (132). Earl Rovit says that Bellow's gallery of female characters tends to be composed of almost identical stereotypes (30).

With regard to the bisexual relationship, Earl Rovit comments that one of Bellow's specialties is setting up confrontations that are ultimately dissatisfying to both men and women, and the very concept of a battle between the sexes is self-defeating, for in the war there are no winners, only greater or lesser losers. The protagonist is a man who finds it difficult to love. Marriage is his usual field of battle and bad marriages are the norm. His relations with the opposite sex are fraught with tension and pain (16). Woman is generally perceived, either consciously or unconsciously, as "the enemy" or at least as his opponent in a rather deadly sporting event by the male protagonist. In *Herzog*, the protagonist with the same name as the book title is

waiting for the coming of his ex-wife, Madeleine, in a police station of Chicago after the car accident when he took his daughter out at the weekend. As Madeleine comes to the police station to claim her daughter, Herzog sees her trying to score a few crucial points in the contest. Wilhelm in *Seize the Day* is slowly suffocating as a direct result of Margaret's (his wife) sadistic screw-tightening, as if she is removing oxygen from the environment by her very existence. Wilhelm says to his father:

“Well, Dad, she hates me. I feel that she's strangling me. I can't catch my breath. She just has fixed herself on me. She can do it at long distance. One of these days I'll be struck down by suffocation or apoplexy because of her. I just can't catch my breath.” (48)

Victoria Sullivan treats marriage as a battlefield, which results in not happiness but frustration and pain. In her essay, “The Battles of the Sexes in Three Bellow Novels”, she analyzes the nuptial relationships in Bellow's three novels: *Herzog*, *Seize the Day*, and *Henderson the Rain King*. By categorizing women in Bellow's works into two groups: the victims and the victimizers, Sullivan reveals Bellow's pessimistic view of the bisexual relationship, and his treatment of women as the source of man's suffering in the bisexual relations. William B. Coleman discusses man's attitude towards bisexual love and marriage, and associates love and marriage with tragedy (12-23); David L. Cowles argues that two particular aspects dominate with regard to gender: collision and inauthenticity (14-23).