

Spatial Narrative in Herzog

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Abstract: Saul Bellow holds an important position in the literary field of America. Among his notable literary works, it is Herzog that brought him reputation as a significant figure who has a huge literary influence in American literary history. Herzog is a typical spatial novel. This paper attempts to analyze the paper according to the theory of spatial narrative from three aspects: the topographical level of space, the chronotopic level of space, and the textual level of space. The construction of the text, the presentation of the theme and the interaction between Herzog and the spatial world can be shown through the analysis of spatial narrative in the novel.

1 Introduction

Saul Bellow was a great Canadian-American writer. Widely regarded as one of the 20th century's greatest authors, Bellow has had a "huge literary influence." In American history, Saul Bellow can be regarded as a writer who can be compared with Hemingway and Faulkner. He is the only novelist to receive three National book awards, for *The Adventures of Augie March*, *Herzog*, and *Mr Sammler's Planets*. In 1975, he won the Pulitzer Prize for his novel *Humboldt's Gift*. The Nobel Prize in literature was awarded to him in 1976 'for the human understanding and subtle analysis of contemporary culture that are combined in his work.' Among his notable literary works, it is *Herzog* that brought him reputation as a significant figure who has a huge literary influence in American literary history.

The reason that the novel could create such a great sensation is that the novel focus on the description of *Herzog's* inner world as well as the outer reality. The readers could feel the conflict between traditional consciousness and modern civilization, between intellectual awareness and common values, between American mainstream culture and Jewish culture. Because of the significance of the novel, many critics have done researches about the novel. However, most of them mainly studied the novel from the perspective of its theme, Jewish character, ethical dilemmas, feminist images, existential analysis, mental constructs and so on. The analysis from the perspective of spatial narrative is relatively rare. Nevertheless, to some extent, *Herzog* is a typical spatial novel, so it is necessary to study the novel from the aspect of spatial narrative. Gabriel Zoran showed us a good division of the spatial forms. According to Gabriel Zoran, there are three different levels of the structuring of space in the text: namely, the topographical level, the chronotopic level, and the textual level. The paper mainly discusses the spatial narrative in Herzog from these three aspects. Through detailed analysis of the text and the exploration of the physical world, society, culture in the text, it is obvious that the topographical level, the chronotopic level and the textual level of spacial forms play a very important role in the presentation of the themes and the construction of the text. By analyzing the spatial narrative forms of the novel, it will be found that this novel actually shows us the living condition, mental state and the social communication that the common people must face under the social background at that time.

2 The Topographical Level

Spatial form “in its simplest sense designates the techniques by which novelists subvert the chronological sequence inherent in narrative. (Boyd 2) And according to Gabriel Zoran in *Toward a Theory of Space in Narrative*, The topographical level refers to “space as a static entity” .(315)

The topographical level of space is space at its highest level of reconstruction, perceived as self-existent and independent of the temporal structure of the world and sequential arrangement of the text. The text can express topographical structure by means of direct descriptions, e.g., as in Balzac's well-known openings, but in fact every unit of the text, whether narrative, dialogic, or even essayistic, may contribute to the reconstruction of the topographical structure.

This structure may be conceived as a kind of map based on elements from the entire text, including all its components. True, a map such as this cannot be entirely exhaustive. Some of its areas are blank, and in the real world it may not be of much use in finding one's way. For the purpose of reading, however, it provides a sufficiently clear picture of the world. The map is based on a series of oppositions, some of which are general and typical, others of which are more specific. It encompasses the horizontal structure of the world, relationships such as inside and outside, far and near, center and periphery, city and village, etc. It may also include contours signifying the vertical organization of the world and representing the opposition up-down.

In *Herzog*, with the geographical trace of Herzog, an overall view of American is represented to the readers. Actually, in chapter one, Saul Bellow has told the reader the route map of Herzog:” He had carried his valise from New York to Vineyard, but returned from the Vineyard immediately; two days later he flew to Chicago, and from Chicago he went to a village in western Massachusetts. “(Bellow 1) To put it simply, his route map is New York-Vineyard-Chicago-western Massachusetts. These places are the reflection of the American topographic views as well as Herzog’s inner world. And the meanings of these places can change according to Herzog’s perception. In other words, just through the perception of the protagonist Herzog, can the concrete places become the so called spatial form in topographical level. So the space is not just the setting of the story, but an important element which is helpful in narrative. In topographical level of *Herzog*, two different kinds of spatial forms can be found: the city and the village. People’s inner heart and life style could be influenced by the place they live. Herzog is no exception.

The city appeared in *Herzog* is Chicago. And the protagonist is Herzog, who wanders between his ideal self and his despised self. He is a middle-aged and troubled college professor who writes letters to friends, scholars and the dead, but never sends them. He faced with both mental crisis and love crisis. To some extent, he is a marginalized people. He suffers loneliness. Misunderstanding drives him crazy. When he is on the verge of breakdown, he chooses to wander from the village to city, and at last back to the village again. Finally, he finds himself in the village and finds the meaning of existence. The experience of Herzog is just like the author Saul Bellow himself. Saul Bellow lived in New York City for a long time, but he returned to Chicago in 1962 as a professor at the Committee on Social Thought at the University of Chicago. Bellow found Chicago “vulgar but vital, and more representative of America than New York.” Bellow’s words show his dissatisfaction to the industrial city like Chicago.

In the novel , Bellow usually expresses his dissatisfaction by the tongue of the protagonist Herzog. So the readers could know the psychological state of Herzog. In his eye, the scene of the city is ”The Avenue was filled with concrete-mixing trucks, smells of wet sand and powdery gray cement. Crashing, stamping pile-driving below, and, higher, structural steel, interminably and hungrily going up into the cooler, more delicate blue. Orange beams hung from the cranes like

straws. But down in the street where he buses were spurting the poisonous exhaust of cheap fuels, and the cars were crammed together, it was stifling, grinding, the racket of machinery and the desperately purposeful crowds-horrible.”(Bellow 37) In this situation, it is not hard to find there are images like concrete, gray cement, steel, buses and crowd which could show the disorder of the city. It also shows the predicament and confusion of the modern man in big city. So the topographical level of the spacial form actually serves for the theme of the novel.

Besides, the view of Chicago is represented by the eye of Herzog, so it is inevitably subjective, with his reflection of the society, history, knowledge and the living condition of human being. On one hand, the combination of subjective expression and objective description strengthens the interaction between the city and the reader, the city and the characters in Herzog. On the other hand, the space of city, just as the other forms of space, is not just as a flat and dull setting, but added subjective color which makes the space flesh. And now, the space Herzog stayed has been symbolized. Saul Bellow represents the multiple culture of America through the eye of Herzog. By depicting the conflict and collision between Herzog and the space of city, Bellow portrays the state mind of those intellectuals represented by Herzog, who is both an intellectual and a Jewish. Bellow discloses the mental crisis under the flourishing of commodity economy. People were all at the state of spiritual wasteland.

In contrast, in the novel, there is another kind of spatial form in topographical level, that is the village. Compared with the city, the village in the novel is relatively monotonous. In some traditional novels, the village is usually appeared as the background that the characters live. And the relationship between the nature and the human beings is harmonious. In *Herzog*, the description of the image of village is usually appears at the description of the Martha's Vineyard and the village in western Massachusetts. The differences between the traditional novel and *Herzog* is that the village in *Herzog* has symbolic meaning and structure meaning. The relationship between the village and character is complex and changeable. The description of Berkshires is a typical example. At the beginning of the story, when Herzog first went to Berkshires, the scenery in Herzog's eye is: "Tall bearded grass and locust and maple seed-night, the stars were near like spiritual bodies. Fires, of course; gases-minerals, heat, atoms, but eloquent at five in the morning to a man lying in a hammock, wrapped in his overcoat. (Bellow1)"

Though the readers could feel the beauty of the countryside from the description, it is obvious in Herzog's eye, the scenery of the countryside is lifeless. He is absent-minded to the scenery around him. Because Herzog is in low spirit at that time, so the representation of the scenery is negative. However, at the end of the novel, when Herzog returned to Berkshires again, there is a scene that Herzog is waiting for Mrs. Tuttle in the seat by the arborvitae, Herzog has "his first leisurely look at the village. " In this situation, the scenery in Herzog's eye is lively and vigorous. And this was the first time that Herzog appreciated the village that he once lived. The narration is combined with the third person narrative point of view and the first person narrative point of view. Here the space in the physical world is widely connected with the world of Herzog's imagination world which indicates the protagonist's mental activity and his psychological values. And the images like red brick houses and the lawns all spread the vigor of the spirit. So from the contrast of the description of Berkshires, it is obvious that Herzog's perception is closely related to the space. The character is in the space, and the space has life by the appearing of the character. Just like the city, the village in the novel is the motive power of the narrative, but not just the setting.

3 The Chronotopic Level

According to Gabriel Zoran, the chronotopic level refers to “the structure imposed on space by events and movements, i.e., by spacetime”.⁽³¹⁵⁾ Before continuing, a clarification of the term *chronotopos* here is necessary. This Einsteinian term was introduced into literary criticism by Bakhtin, who uses it to signify the entire complex of space and time together, including physical objects, events, psychology, and history, etc. As Gabriel Zoran said, however, the term “has not been used to signify the totality of space and time, but rather to describe a specific aspect; i.e., not to signify all things that may be found in space or in time, but only what may be defined by an integration of spatial and temporal categories as movement and change. One may thus speak of the effect of the *chronotopos* on the structure of space. Within the overall *chronotopos* of the reconstructed world, one should distinguish between synchronic and diachronic relationships, which each have a different type of effect.” (318)

Herzog is a suffering joker searching in the modern thought-world. Awareness is his work, extended consciousness is his line, and loneliness is his state. He is an intellectual who is out of the line with the society. So Herzog is excluded in the chronotopic level of the space. He is not adopted by the mainstream culture and the society. Though he is a distinguished academic and the philosopher of the history of romantic ideas, he is not accepted by the society. In the relationship of family, he is a twice failed husband, and in his academic career, he usually disputes the available reality, trying to find a new angle on the modern condition. Because the social space can not accept him, so he writes letter to everyone he could remember, including his two ex-wives, his lover, his neighbors, some distinguished scholars, even the dead. So the communication between Herzog and the external world is not face to face, but with the letters and the imagination in his mind. So he can't live well in the the chronotopic level of space.

For example, Herzog intended to go the Vineyard Haven and asked his friend Libbie to find a house for him. However, when he came to Vineyard Haven, he knew that he has made a mistake. He thought Vineyard was not the place for him. Though the space is lovely and his friend is charming, he still thought Libbie and her husband could never touch his spirit. He is not familiar with the social space, and he feels that his feelings and heart and everything is strange in the space. This example shows the failure of his communication to other people and his integration to the society. The fact that Herzog refused to live in Vineyard Haven is his refusal to live in the chronotopic space.

Compared with Herzog, Madeleine Pontritter is representative of the American consumer culture. She cares about the material life and is eager to get wealthy which indicates that she is related to the modern society. Leaving Herzog to Chicago, Madeleine actually shows Chicago is her social space. And in contrast, Herzog cherish the village life. Living with Herzog challenges her living condition, so she decided to get divorce with Herzog.

At the same time, the identity of Herzog as a Jewish man must be taken care. Jewish stereotype usually exists. Jews are prejudiced by other nations. The Jewish diaspora have been stereotyped for over 2 000 years as scapegoats for a multitude of societal problems, such as: Jews always acting with unforgiving hostility towards the Christians, Jews religious rituals thought to have specifically undermine the church and state, and Jews habitual assassinations of Christians as their most extreme deeds. Even in English, there is a word called “ghetto” which was originally used in Venice to describe the part of the city to which Jews were restricted and segregated. So in the chronotopic space, Herzog, as a Jewish man, is segregated by the society. He spent his childhood in Napoleon Street where he could feel the ghetto culture. His mother wants him to become a rabbi, but he is not

so interested in the Bible, but the liberal thoughts. At the age of sixteen, he was already a thinker. He knows Darwin, Hacckel and Spencer well. He was angry to know from the book *The Decline of the West* that a Jew could not grasp the real meaning of Christian. This event shows that Herzog wants to get rid of his identity as a Jewish, he wants to leave the space of ghetto, but his social identity limits his action, it is hard for him to escape from this space. Herzog is ashamed to be the immigrant's son, and he tries his best to make the main stream culture accept him, but in vain because he could not escape from the destiny of being an outsider. His evasive soul has misled him so far from his Jewish heritage, however, he possesses his true soul in his unconsciousness. For example, the night he spent with Ramona gave him comfort and strength. He enjoyed the sweet relationship with Ramona, but the sexual comfort is only narcotics for him. When he is alone in the street, he is still the one with unresolved problem. His refusal of accepting Ramona from his deepest heart is actually the reflection of his refusal of getting involved in the social space, or we called the chronotopic space. Segregation by the society, Herzog's space is both exploited by his own mental thoughts and his Jewish identity. He is expelled from his chronotopic space.

4 The Textual Level

In *Toward a Theory of Space in Narrative*, Gabriel Zoran said "the textual level refers to the structure imposed on space by the fact that it is signified within the verbal text. "(315) This level encompasses the structure which is imposed on space by the fact that it is formed within the verbal text. It should be emphasized that the structure under discussion is not that of the text itself as a verbal medium, nor that of its linguistic materials, but rather an organization of the reconstructed world. This structure, however, although applied to the "world," is not derived from it. The objects structured belong to the reconstructed world, but the structure itself is imposed on them by the linguistic nature of the text.

These patterns of organization have to do mainly with three aspects of the verbal text: (1) the essential selectivity, or the incapacity of language to exhaust all the aspects of given objects; (2) the temporal continuum, or the fact that language transmits information only along a temporal line; (3) the point of view, and the perspective structure of the reconstructed world.

Of all Bellow's novels, Herzog has the most complicated and labyrinthine structure. The text is a flow, moving backwards and forwards in time, shifting through odd patterns and loose associations, allowing the prose to slip by sudden connection, turn of memory. Frenzied mental jumps. The book is multi-layered, mirroring the mixture of contemplation and frenzy which is the stuff of Herzog's own mind.

In the textual level of space, the novel combines the internal focalization and the external focalization. Internal focalization describes the sort of focalization which emphasizes the description of the thoughts and feelings of characters and analysis and interpretation of their actions. These aspects are typically conveyed from the point of view of one character who interprets all events through his or her perspective. External focalization, as opposed to internal focalization, has the narrator focus on visible, external aspects of events and characters in the narrative. The narrator, in this method, does not impart any information as to characters' thoughts or feelings, but merely relates physically ascertainable facts to the reader. Assuming a role outside of the characters' consciousnesses, this type of narrator or focalizer has access to the characters' utterances, but adds no interpretation or analysis. For example, in the following lines, there are two changes of the focalization,

"The lawn was on an elevation with a view of fields and woods. Formed like a large teardrop of green, it had a gray elm at its small point, and the bark of the huge tree, dying of dutch blight, was purplish gray. Scant leaves for such a vast growth. An oriole's nest, in the shape of a gray heart, hung from twigs. God's veil over things makes them all riddles. If they were not all so particular, detailed, and very rich I might have more rest from them. But I am a prisoner of perception, a

compulsory witness. They are too exciting. Meantime I dwell in yon house of dull boards. Herzog was worried about that elm. “

In this quote, there are two changes of the focus. And the change of the focus makes the reader care less about the time sequence of the plot, but the character's psychological exchange. The first person narrative point of view could express the inner world of Herzog subjectively and the third person narrative point of view could make the reader have a object attitude towards the description. The change of the narrator point of view not only make the narration more flexible, but also extends the story space and the discourse space which creates a special textual space. If there is only internal focalization, we could not follow the writer to pay attention to the real world outside the text. In contrast, if there is only external focalization, we could not have a better understanding of the inner world of Herzog.

The use of stream of consciousness also shape a special textual level of space. In literary criticism, stream of consciousness is a narrative mode or method that attempts to depict the multitudinous thoughts and feelings which pass through the mind. The term was coined by William James in 1890 in his *The Principles of Psychology*, and in 1918 the novelist May Sinclair first applied the term stream of consciousness, in a literary context, when discussing Dorothy Richardson's novels.

In *Herzog*, Saul Bellow combines the feeling, memory, association and reasoning of Herzog, and represents an inner world of Herzog without rules. In Herzog's inner world, there is his feeling about death, his self-criticism, his reflection about the reality of America and his view of the war. Herzog, for all his intellect and heart, for all his open madness, can not resolve the question of the modern condition, or come to clear philosophical conclusion. The multiplicity of reality, the irreconcilable energies of mind and sexuality, lead to the disorder of his mind. And the disorder of his mind can reflect the stream of consciousness. Just in the fragments of Herzog, we could see the shadow of the real world. Or we could say, every fragment could create a textual world.

5 Conclusion

In conclusion, By analyzing three different forms of space, the conflict between traditional consciousness and modern civilization, intellectual awareness and common values, American mainstream culture and Jewish culture is shown. In this novel, Saul Bellow depicts the problems of all human beings in modern society. When Bellow expresses the theme of the novel, the different spatial forms plays a very important role in the construction of the text, in the presentation and construction of the theme as well as in the interaction or tension between the character and the spatial world he lives in .

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