

Cavelstein: Aesthetic Confession in the Form of An Affetionate Memoir

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Abstract

Saul Bellow wrote his last novel Ravelstein with all his intelligence and energy at the age of seventy-five, Allan Bloom speaks of self-reflection from Saul Bellow in the memoir, here; self-reflection is not Saul Bellow's concern, but rather the pretension description. Ravelstein, a touching novel, is written with the full consciousness of Saul Bellow. In the beginning, Saul Bellow invokes Thomas Babington Macaulay's essay on Boswell's Johnson and Johnson's vivid portrayal of his theme, which Chick has read in 'a Purple Fever'. Ravelstein is largely concerned with the differences between Chick, the narrator, apparently Saul Bellow himself, slightly disguised, and his admired friend, who went to places Chick could not or did not want to follow him. The novel primarily presents Chick as Saul Bellow and Abe Ravelstein as Allan Bloom. Focusing on his horrific writings and activities in 'The Closing of the American Mind', which was a polemic against the decline in educational standards and the replacement of classical theory with relevant themes such as deconstructionism, feminism, and Black Studies. For Allan Bloom, this problem has spread beyond the academic realm into society, where people think that they have lost their souls and follow the ideology too eagerly. In his views, 'openness' undermines decisive thoughts and perpetuates the 'attitudes' that define culture. Relativism is the only virtue taught in American primary education, to promote tolerance for diversity.

Key Words

Ravelstein, self-reflection, memoir, self-reflection

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Introduction

Saul Bellow wrote his last novel *Ravelstein* with all his intelligence and energy at the age of seventy-five, published in 2000, for which he received widespread praise. Through the novel, he gives a touching tribute to Allan Bloom, his close friend and fellow faculty member in the Committee on Social Thought at the University of Chicago. Accepting Allan Bloom's last request to write a memoir, he wrote a novel in the form of an affectionate memoir in praise of Allan Bloom with his positive views on the existence of human dignity during his academic career. Allan Bloom speaks of self-reflection from Saul Bellow in the memoir, here; self-reflection is not Saul Bellow's concern, but rather the pretension description. *Ravelstein*, a touching novel, is written with the full consciousness of Saul Bellow. In the beginning, Saul Bellow invokes Thomas Babington Macaulay's essay on Boswell's Johnson and Johnson's vivid portrayal of his theme, which Chick has read in 'a Purple Fever'. Indeed, anyone reading this will find it hard to believe that Saul Bellow, with his energetic presence as a first-person narrator, is no longer alive. *Ravelstein* is largely concerned with the differences between Chick, the narrator, apparently Saul Bellow himself, slightly disguised, and his admired friend, who went to places Chick could not or did not want to follow him. The novel primarily presents Chick as Saul Bellow and Abe Ravelstein as Allan Bloom. Reflecting the complexity of his sensual and intellectual preoccupation in the face of impending death, the narrative takes the form of a memoir from Ravelstein's great soul to Chick's near-death experiences. He told about his friend who knew him so deeply whose loss can hardly be compensated, adding, "I could talk to him as I could talk to no one else, if you don't think that is a gap in my life now", saying it, his voice trailing off. Saul Bellow focuses on the depiction of their death after a poisonous dinner in St. Maarten. While expressing his views of unphysical existence, the author depicts death as the truth of life. Perceptively, he expressed his thoughts on Allan Bloom afflicted with AIDS, who died in Chicagoan 1992 at the age of 62. Perhaps, it is also the account of Saul Bellow's fatal illness in the late 1990s. In an interview, remembering Allan Bloom, Saul Bellow said, "Allan inhaled books and ideas the way the rest of us breathe air. People only want the factual truth. Well, the truth is that Allan was a very superior person, a great soul. When critics proclaim the death of the novel, I sometimes think they are saying that there are no significant people to write about, but Allan was certainly one."

Literature Review

A major theme of *Ravelstein* is the idea of love which keeps humans

connected with society. As Saul Bellow depicts Allan Bloom who was sybaritic and far from the model of sensible restraint, he did not praise the bourgeois virtue, “Just under the surfaces of his Preferences there were always ideas to be found. In this instance the idea was that uniform good conduct was a very bad sign” (p. 23) As Chick sets it in the narrative, “He had written a book – difficult but popular – a spirited, intelligent, warlike book, and it had sold.” [24] Mass scratches with growing ethnic groups in society and the point of view of American Lefties culture in the 1990s were not silent ones despite especially mass quietness. Alfred Kazin thinks about his life as well as of the chief figures of an individual Jew, both the scholars of literature and art who are his friends. In the name of an extensive and educated personality, as Chick presents Ravelstein, that is beyond ordinary life. Although Chick claims such as “I am not interested in presenting his ideal finds those ideas, the ideas of the classical political philosopher Bloom, very congenial, especially those stemming from Plato’s Symposium”. [53] there is nothing amazing. Saul Bellow shows Ravelstein with great hope, knowing hunger and understanding and therefore seething, bright, gifted expert of the Platonic paradox of sensual and rational fervour. Perceptibly, Chick certifies quickly their anxiety; however, the Platonic reference permits Saul Bellow to form the contact between wish and wit that describes the paddies, the teaching of self, knowing the truth of their wish and the basic theory of the Strauss and that Saul Bellow looks for Allan Bloom heroically protecting. In the name of an extensive and educated personality, as Chick presents Ravelstein, that is beyond ordinary life. Although Chick claims such as “I am not interested in presenting his ideal finds those ideas, the ideas of the classical political philosopher Bloom, very congenial, especially those stemming from Plato’s Symposium”. [53] there is nothing amazing. Saul Bellow shows Ravelstein with great hope, knowing hunger and understanding and therefore seething, bright, gifted expert of the Platonic paradox of sensual and rational fervour. Perceptibly, Chick certifies quickly their anxiety; however, the Platonic reference permits Saul Bellow to form the contact between wish and wit that describes the paddies, the teaching of self, knowing the truth of their wish and the basic theory of the Strauss and that Saul Bellow looks for Allan Bloom heroically protecting. In the name of an extensive and educated personality, as Chick presents Ravelstein, that is beyond ordinary life. Although Chick claims such as “I am not interested in presenting his ideally finds those ideas, the ideas of the classical political philosopher Bloom, very congenial, especially those stemming from Plato’s Symposium”. [53] there is no amazing Perceptibly, Chick certifies quickly their anxiety; however, the Platonic reference permits Saul Bellow to form the contact between wish and wit that describes the paddies, the teaching of self,

knowing the truth of their wish and the basic theory of the Strauss and that Saul Bellow looks for Allan Bloom heroically protecting. In the name of an extensive and educated personality, as Chick presents Ravelstein, that is beyond ordinary life. Although Chick claims such as “I am not interested in presenting his ideal finds those ideas, the ideas of the classical political philosopher Bloom, very congenial, especially those stemming from Plato’s Symposium”.^[53] really, there is nothing amazing. It is not amazing. Saul Bellow shows Ravelstein with great hope, knowing hunger and understanding and therefore seething, bright, gifted expert of the Platonic paradox of sensual and rational fervour. Perceptibly, Chick certifies quickly their anxiety; however, the Platonic reference permits Saul Bellow to form the contact between wish and wit that describes the paddies, the teaching of self, knowing the truth of their wish and the basic theory of the Strauss and that Saul Bellow looks for Allan Bloom heroically protecting.

I think it should be mentioned, but not more than a mention. The simplest man is, in fact, enigmatic and fundamentally mysterious. In what ways are all human beings esoteric and fundamentally mysterious? This is because of the gap between what we have been taught we should do and what we deeply desire to do. I think it is. I think most people are afraid to discover what they deeply desire to do. Of course, except in the case of major criminals like Jeffrey Epstein and Harvey Weinstein, most people stay on the safe side of law enforcement and control their urges. They are afraid of being caught, embarrassed, and punished, and they accept the decision of society. However, the sexual dimension of this unrestrained act driven by anti-social urges is only part of the picture. I think it is the hidden things about us that hide our standard behaviour. “In my trade you have to make more allowances, taking all sorts of ambiguities into account to avoid hard-edged judgments. All this refraining may resemble naïveté. But it isn’t quite that. In art, you become familiar with due process. You can’t simply write people off or send them to hell.” (p. 43) Even in art, one is not required or expected to explain oneself. In the name of an extensive and educated personality, as Chick presents Ravelstein, that is beyond ordinary life. Although Chick claims such as “I am not interested in presenting his ideal finds those ideas, the ideas of the classical political philosopher Bloom, very congenial, especially those stemming from Plato’s Symposium”.^[53] there is nothing amazing. Here is an example of Saul Bellow’s involvement with Allan Bloom. “On especially enjoyable days I suffer an early afternoon drop. Fine weather makes it all the worse. The gloss the sun puts on the surroundings, the triumph of life, so to speak, the flourishing of everything, makes me despair. I’ll never be able to keep up with all the massed hours of life-triumphant. The world and flesh in his prose are

both figured and transfigured.”⁴ As a humanistic author, he tackles two extremely sensitive themes, death and American Jews. Through his novel, portraying Ravelstein as a larger-than-life figure, Saul Bellow gives life a chance to flourish, and he becomes a voice for a time when Jewish writers were concerned about morality. However, Saul Bellow’s novel certainly plays out in an eclectic form. Saul Bellow says, “Mixtures of archaism and modernity were especially appealing to Ravelstein, who could not be contained in modernity and overflowed all the ages. Saul Bellow says, “Mixtures of archaism and modernity were especially appealing to Ravelstein, who could not be contained in modernity and overflowed all the ages. Oddly enough, he was just like that (p. 69). Sometimes he can acknowledge Rousseau, the genius and innovator whose ideas with his great mind dominated European society for more than a century. Expressing his feelings, he said, “Since he and I were close friends, it was up to me to do my thinking about Nikki’s place in his life. I believed that I was alert enough to understand. When I read his novels I thought he is a really important writer who presented himself as a writer, full of human qualities, immersed in love. “I’d fallen in love with a young woman and had married her” (p.130). After reading the novel, it’s hard to believe that Saul Bellow, with his energetic presence as a first-person narrator, is no longer alive. He says about Allan Bloom’s ideas, “He had initially been drawn to Jean Jacques by his strong belief in the love that knits persons and societies together. At times he might admit that Rousseau, the genius and innovator whose ideas his great mind had powerfully dominated European society for more than a century, was (almost necessarily) himself a nutcase”(p.159).So, he could be direct without offense. “Often the dying becomes extremely severe. We will still be here when they’re gone, and it’s not easy for them to forgive us” (pp. 158-159).Saul Bellow postponed the writing of his memoir on Allan Bloom for a few years. As an author, he expresses his views on death philosophically, and he says, “The rule for the dead is that they should be forgotten. It is how typical for Saul Bellow to speak about loving people who cannot forget them. I think this applies to Saul Bellow’s attitude to Allan Bloom, not absolute admiration, but awareness of his close friends’ shortcomings, quirks, and the difficulty of his personality, his brilliance and erudition, along with the opinionated demands he made of people. He tells his wife, “I’ll let you in on a kinky thought. We can’t bring ourselves to acknowledge them. Our souls are not strong enough to bear that. And yet one cannot give oneself a pass. A manlike Rakhmiel [the name Bellow gave to Edward Shills, another Chicago professor] would feel obligated to face up to the fact that this viciousness was universal. He believed that everybody had his share of it. You had to think of these hundreds of thousands of millions destroyed on ideological grounds.

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That is, with some pretext of rationality. A rationale had considerable value as a manifestation of order or firmness of purpose. But the maddest forms of nihilism are the strictest German military ones. (p. 168) He goes on to say, “There was a general willingness to live with the destruction of millions. It was like the mood of the century to accept it (p. 169).”

Every human dignity is valuable and requires a dignified life. Considering this, after the Second World War the international community recognized it as human right. After 1948, international human rights law is explicitly based on the assumption that people have equal basic rights to the same basic goods that are rooted in human dignity. Basically, the concept of human dignity holds that all people have a special worth that is integral to their humanity. They have nothing to-do with their class, race, religion, gender and other factors other than being human. Writing wittily on the stereotype of selfishness, Saul Bellow questions his own paradox. While he questioned traditional approaches to Jewish philosophy of faith, he did not introduce anything new.

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