



# Femme Fatale or New Woman? Revisiting the Women in Saul Bellow's *The Actual*

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## ABSTRACT

Saul Bellow is one of the greatest American novelists, but he is equally infamous for sketching women ruthlessly. Most of his earlier works are crowded by lethal women-mothers, and wives who drain all the positivity from the male protagonists. *The Actual* however, treats women differently, and evokes a spirit of harmony. There is a prison returnee wife who is given a second chance by her husband. The protagonist Harry Trellman meets his high school sweetheart Amy Wustrin after thirty years. The love rekindles and though Amy goes through a lot of hardship and morally questionable conditions, both decide to give a second chance to life. She is the New Woman who struggles for earning livelihood and is a free spirit, unlike any other divorced women in Bellow's popular fiction. This paper examines the use of femme fatale and New Woman tropes in *The Actual*, and tries to show how changes in the society as well as personal life, led Saul Bellow to bring change in his characterisation of women.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The trope of femme fatale (French for fatal women) started to get currency in the mainstream English literature through the gothic novels around mid-nineteenth century. After travelling Europe vehemently, femme fatale began to crowd American literature in between the world wars. Ghada Suleiman Sasa traces femme fatale in novels born out from American Naturalism in her book *The Femme Fatale in American Literature* (2008). The existence of femme fatale is

exhibited through different forms of her empowerment; she challenges the ideals of conventional femininity and essentially poses to be a potential threat to patriarchal structure. This literary trope was used heavily in the male-authored American literary works during twentieth century. 'New Woman', on the other hand, is a later extension of the femme fatale, as she also displays the rebellious spirit, but she is educated and highly fashionable. Saul Bellow, one of the most critically acclaimed American writers, demonstrates a number of female characters that fall into the category of femme

fatale. But his later works exhibit changes to the derogatory style, and they are closer to the concept of New woman. While much ink has been shed on his award winning novels, there is paucity of research on his later novellas. *The Actual* (1997) captures the story of a passionate lover and his indifferent beloved who get a chance to reunite after forty years; and the women here are portrayed with their roughest faces. Though the actions are few, and the events mostly circulate around the male protagonist Harry Trellman, portrayal of the female characters is an interesting extension of Bellow's typical style of presenting women. The purpose of the current study is to investigate which designation is more suitable to describe them- 'Femme fatale' or 'New Woman'. This study asks two questions. One is how femme fatale and New Woman figures emerged and developed in American literature. Another is how Saul Bellow presented them in his later works and why. Our research concludes that the author shows both femme fatale and New woman in the story, but contrary to popular ways of finishing, bestows different fates for them. Furthermore, characterisation of Femme Fatale or New Woman was reflected as a result of Bellow's own world view.

## 2. FEMME FATALE AND NEW WOMAN

The femme fatale, is defined as "an attractive and seductive woman, especially one who will ultimately cause distress to a man who becomes involved with her" (OED). Simkin (2014) include sexual attractiveness that is used to exercise power over men, while Allen (1984) adds eroticism and exoticism, as well as self-determinedness and independence, as characteristics of the femme fatale. In Western cultures, femininity is a stereotypical, desirable, 'socially constructed' characteristic of women. Being feminine implies, among other things, being passive, cooperative, expressive, warm and submissive (Strets and Burke 2-3). The classic femme fatale is the manifestation of all that goes against these given norms. While apparently such characters would highlight the softer qualities of a subservient woman and show the ultimate victory of goodness, critics argue that femme fatale- in a roundabout way – glorifies the strength of femininity.

Menon quotes many scholars—Virginia Allen and Bram Dijkstra, among others—who argue that the popularisation of the femme fatale was linked to the awakening of the feminist movements in France (4). Boozer also claims that the creation and expansion of the concept took place in a period in which women were starting to work outside the home, while men were fighting in wars (20). As men feared losing control and power, illustrations and journals spread the concept of the femme fatale, satirically reversing the power roles. These publications did mainly function to inform on current issues, but they also provided their audience with visual material about how to behave according to established gender rules (Menon 8).

Even if we know women have always been the object of the gaze of hegemonic sociocultural discourses, Boozer (20-22) and Menon (11) both agree that women were especially scrutinised and exposed in the 19th and 20th centuries. Hence, "femme fatale is not a subject of feminism but a symptom of male fears of feminism" (Doane 2).

The femme fatale archetype exists in the culture and folklore and myths of many cultures. Ancient mythical examples include Eve, Lilith Sphinx, Scylla, Aphrodite, Yael, Judith, Siren, Helen of Troy etc. Historical examples of classical times include Cleopatra and Messalina. Delilah, Ezebel and Salome are some of the biblical examples of femme fatale. Woman with power is rarely found in such fictions; if she possesses some power by accident, she is ascribed some negative qualities at the same time. Thus, powerful female characters in literature are labelled "insipid heroines ","sexy survivors "and "demonic destroyers "(Edwards 226-227). Although the origins of femme fatale are literary, modern reincarnations of this trope is mostly popularized in *film noir* which started around 1940's.

The New Woman was far from fiction. Socio-cultural forces, new science, new technology, new education and trends towards liberalization brought about the emergence of the new woman in reality and in fiction around the end of nineteenth century in England. In fact, it was the manifestation of the rebellious spirit that was long suppressed and an inevitable outcome of different feminist movements throughout Europe and America. The phrase "New Woman" was invented by the author Sarah Grand in her article "The New Aspect of the Woman Question" published in the North American Review in March 1894. Henry James developed the phrase 'New woman' (Stevens 27) when he used it to describe American emigrants living in Europe. Some critics consider Ibsen's Nora (the heroine of *A Doll's House*, 1879) as an early model of New Woman. Sally Ledger, in her study *The New Woman: Fiction and feminism at the fin de siècle*, theorizes the discursive formation of New Woman using Michel Foucault's argument in *History of Sexuality*. She argues that the appearance of a dominant discourse automatically invokes its other, and makes possible an articulation of hitherto suppressed voices (10). Hence, New Woman was the face of a 'reverse discourse', reactionary to the dominant hostile patriarchal discourse. The latter half of nineteenth century is marked by the growth of modern capitalism that encouraged autonomy in the pursuit of pleasure and consumption, and urban, industrial lifeways (Evans 1997). Unlike femme fatale, the new woman had visible manifestations in different magazines and movies. The movie *The Flapper* (1920) which gained immense popularity, exhibited the characteristics of the New woman through its title character Ginger. Charles Dana Gibson had created the iconographic 'Gibson Girl', the widely popular *Life* magazine featured flapper illustrations by John Held Jr. Ledger outlines some

features of New woman in her study: "She was, variously, a feminist activist, a social reformer, a popular novelist, a suffragette playwright, a woman poet; she was also a fictional construct, a discursive response to the activities of the late nineteenth century women's movement" (1). For women in 19th century America, this figure suggested freedom, transgression and deviance.

During the heyday of the Flappers, there were a number of female writers who fictionalized the New woman in their writings. Olive Schreiner, Annie Sophie Cory (Victoria Cross), Sarah Grand, Mona Caird, George Egerton, Ella D'Arcy and Ella Hepworth Dixon and Kate Chopin are some of the notable authors. But American literature was essentially discredited because of its inclination towards misogynist presentation of women. While unearthing the power designs that framed American literature, Judith Fetterley, in her seminal essay, "On the politics of literature", presents a number of observations. Along with discussing the challenges of a female reader, she elaborates the complicated presentation of female characters as well. She claims that, American literature neither leaves women alone nor allows them to participate; The theme of Americanism is commanded by men and their relationship to women, who have neither a voice nor any power but still inspire misogyny in men. Nina Baym in her collection of essays entitled *Feminism and American Literary History* (1992) claims that most of the male American authors have a common tendency to show women as agents of "permanent socialization and domestication", and consequently leading their male counterparts to suffer, or to deviate from their noble ambition in life(12). The heterosexual American youth is shown to be helplessly and emotionally attached to the women, and the events in the fictions lead the readers to believe that the sole purpose of these women is to play "the melodramatic role of temptress, antagonist, obstacle- a character whose mission in life seems to be to ensnare him and deflect him from life's important purposes of self-discovery and self-assertion"(ibid).

### 3. SAUL BELLOW'S WOMEN

Saul Bellow (1915-2005) had been a commanding figure in American literature after Second World War. Famous literary critic James Wood called him "the greatest writer of American prose of the 20th century". He was a cosmopolitan intellectual, Jewish immigrant, a university professor, a resident of Chicago and all these sources of his real-life experience had a considerable reflection in his literary creation. The Nobel Prize giving authority had issued a press release while nominating him for the prestigious award in 1976. It pointed out how Bellow matured through his writings stage by stage. In the latter phase, Bellow was trying out new approaches, and creating his hallmark. Hence, a mature Bellow would present his:

... own mixture of rich picaresque novel and subtle analysis of our (American) culture, of entertaining adventure, drastic and tragic episodes in quick succession interspersed with philosophic conversation with the reader - that too very entertaining - 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.

Though Bellow has created a number of female characters, his attitude towards women is paradoxical and a matter of controversy. Ram Prakash Pradhan, in his book *The Woman in the Novels of Saul Bellow* (2006) claims that the reason behind the author's negligence towards his female characters is related to his primary aim to write. His purpose is to fight out the dominant mood of later modernist despair. He wants to oppose the cultural ideas of western civilization such as Apocalyptic romanticism, cultural elitism, existentialism, alienation ethics, absurdism, nihilism and aloofness. With this end in view Bellow stands in need of having a powerful, masculine voice which might be effective and dominating in the removal of general despair which is born out of such unhealthy conditions of society. Bellow considers the female voice less powerful and strong than the male voice and that's why he gives his full support to portrayal of the male vision in the novels (Pradhan, 2006, p.53).

Feminists have vehemently criticized Saul Bellow as a misogynist and they put several charges against him. "Indeed the whole of Bellow's work is singularly lacking a real or vivid female character, where women are introduced, they appear as nympholeptic fantasies, peculiarly unconvincing" (as qtd. in Pradhan 52).

The women are seen and perceived through the eyes and minds of the men. The accurate reading of female mind is nearly absent in his novels and they are overshadowed by the male protagonists (Aharoni100). Though they play subsidiary role in the novels but they are responsible for creating problems for their children, their lovers and their husbands and also responsible for chaos and disorder in society. *A Theft* (1989), among all his novels, presents a woman as a central character. Bellow's short story "Leaving the Yellow House", published in 1958, narrates the tale of an aged lady named Hattie Waggoner and her maid servant India. His articulation of women has changed with time. In the earlier novels, namely, *Dangling Man*, *The Victim*, *Seize the Day*, *The Adventures of Augie March* and *Henderson the Rain King*, the stories mainly revolve around the male protagonists and women are shown as detrimental to marital harmony. Almost all the women in the earlier novels keep a low profile while the men are busy in their quest for the fulfilment of personal needs and growth-which connects Bellow to the American literary tradition that has been discussed earlier in this paper. Except for Iva, a library assistant in *Dangling Man*, and Stella, an

actress in *The Adventures of Augie March*, all the female characters in the earlier novels are homemakers.

By 1970, as historical records provide evidence, the women's movement had made its existence felt in America. Kate Millett's PhD dissertation *Sexual Politics* created a storm in the academia. It symbolized for many "the manipulation of women by men into acceptance of values that women would neither have chosen for themselves nor believed were beneficial for them". Bellow must have witnessed the rise of radical feminist movements, exhibited through formation of NOW (National Organization for Women), various show downs and protests demonstrated by women's Liberation movement around 1970's. As a result, the women of the 1980s formulated their own ideology. They were no longer "to arrange their world around a man's. Now she is to have goals for her life, and she is expected to admit them frankly and more than simply admit them, she is supposed to act to attain them. Bellow's later novels show fairly emancipated and empowered women, but they do retain the elements of dread that make them threatening and disturbing to the male counterparts. Madeleine in *Herzog* and Clara Velde in *A Theft* are highly intellectual and business-oriented in their outlook. Kathleen in *Humboldt's Gift* undergoes a transformation in her approach to life near the end of the story.

While defending Angela, Saul Bellow explains a plain take on femme fatale in *Mr. Sammler's Planet* (1970) through Wallace's voice:

Every myth has its female-power type, the femme fatale. She's a female-power type, the femme fatale. The enemy of the distinguished-male myth is the femme fatale. Between those thighs, a man's conception of himself is just assassinated. If he thinks he's so special she'll show him.

Nobody is so special. Angela represents the realism of the race, which is always pointing out that wisdom, beauty, glory, courage in men are just vanities and her business is to beat down the man's legend about himself .... (p. 99)

It can be argued that Bellow places women to strike a balance, to complete the inadequacies of men and to tone down their vain aggressiveness. Another very important factor that contributed in his understanding and characterization of women was his Jewish identity. Bellow's men embody a stark contrast to the Anglo Saxon masculinity which was previously characterized in Ernest Hemingway's 'tough guy' type. Bellow's heroes value restraint and grace, which are essentially Jewish in spirit. Lori Harrison-Kahan, in her study on Edith Wharton's *The House of Mirth* (1905), traces the construction of the identities of the Jew and the New Woman simultaneously around the turn-of -the-century.

"At this transitional moment in American history, national identity was, in fact, being

'queered' by the Jew's assimilation into white society and into whiteness itself, and by the New Woman's assumption of masculinity" (Harrison-Kahan, 1905, p.46).

"The Feminized Jewish Man" is a longstanding cultural stereotype in western tradition (Boyarin 87); and since "male self-fashioning has consequences for women", the stereotype for Jewish woman was essentially masculine, and in some cases 'monstrous'. *The Goldbergs* (a family series on radio and TV that continued from 1929 through the mid-1950s in the USA) can be worth mentioning because that became the most recognizable icon of Jewish matriarchy in America. "Excessive, demanding, and possessive, the stereotype of the Jewish Mother is a notorious construction borne out of anxious self-hatred, blamed for those perpetual feelings of outsideness that continue to afflict the American Jewish (male) psyche"(Cambridge Companion to Jewish American literature). The JAP (Jewish American Princess) was another stereotype that developed around the 1970's to ridicule the women in the lives of Jewish men other than the indomitable 'Mother'. (Byers 2009; Prell 1999). Rebecca Starkman, in her exhaustive research on JAP, primarily identifies JAP as "sexually frigid, assertive, self-centred, and excessively materialistic" as established by the critics who examined American literature and popular culture of the 70's and 80's. Her findings states that even though the coinage of the stereotype is religious, the stereotyping was used based on solely external features and attires. Moreover, Starkman recounts the argument of Baum et al (1976) that the most offensive aspect of the JAP's sexual standoffishness is her refusal to defer easily to male authority, "an unforgivable sin in the American pantheon of female virtues" (p.238) The consistent manifestation of Jewish women in the popular culture clearly reverberated the traits of femme fatale. Though Bellow disliked to be labelled a 'Jewish', the portrayal of women in his writings betray a collective unconscious of his race that he could not hide.

#### 4. THE WOMEN IN *THE ACTUAL*

The mother of the central character- Harry Trellman in *The Actual*, haunts his memory, and is- technically the first woman that appears in the story. Harry's parents were both alive, but the mother "had a disease of the joints that sent her from sanitarium to sanitarium, mainly abroad" (p. 10). His mother's relatives were rich, who paid for her travels and treatment and with that apparent excuse, she neglected her filial duties and developed no emotional bonding with her son at all. Harry dislikes her (p. 69) and "would never forgive her" for putting him "in an orphanage" (ibid) when he is very little and hence is "in an ambiguous category, an outsider, an orphan" (2). The very first impression of the woman is cold, insensitive and materialistic. Harry despises himself for having similarities with her, and blames his parents' conjugal tension and her disinterest

in keeping marital harmony that had artificially orphaned him: "The trouble was that it bored her to be the wife of a simple working stiff" (p. 69). Mrs. Wustrin is also drawn in same vein. Harry hated her, because she considered him "an undesirable friend for Jay, self-serving-the orphan on whom Jay spent his allowance." She did not rely on Jay regarding finance, as he was a careless spendthrift. "She was passive, thick-headed, devoted to Jay, her only child" (p. 46) but Jay was suffocating under her dominance, and regretted as he said: "You should be able to divorce mothers too." Both the mothers- Mrs. Trellman and Mrs. Wustrin replicate the monstrous Jewish Mother archetype.

'Dame Siggy' is the wife of the trillionaire Sigmund Adletsky-who appoints Harry to oversee his business, and she is graceful, observant and hospitable. She is in her nineties when Harry introduces her in the story, and it is obvious that she has been a sincere and loving wife of Mr. Adletsky. Her concern about materials is obvious in her interest in the apartment of the Heisingers. However, though she is Jewish, Florence Adletsky is the only woman with admirable qualities in this story.

Madge Heisinger is the wife of a toy manufacturer Bodo Heisinger, who appears in the story in a business deal with the Adletskys. Gloria L. Cronin, in her comprehensive study on female characters of Saul Bellow, *A Room of his Own: In search of the Feminine in Saul Bellow* considers her "to be the most destructive wife of all" (p. 69). She is the text book example of femme fatale archetype. She had actually hired a killer to dispose of her husband, Bodo, and had been jailed for three years. She is greedy, fashionable -she liked wearing "Escada suits and Nina Ricci dresses" and "acts very provocative". The most interesting thing about Madge is the way she is treated after coming back from jail. It is typical of traditional femme fatale to suffer, or after a chance of transformation, to assimilate with the community of subservient women. But Bodo accepts her, he remarries her; and he is desperate to prove his "love for his wife" by setting a good bargain with the Adletskys (32). Forgiving Madge was not unconditional, Bodo was gaining publicity and attention. "He presents himself publicly to declare that he's not afraid to marry her again, and he sets aside the old morality and the old expectations and old rules" (p. 44). Madge, on the other hand, was planning to start a business for her partner-in-crime Tommy Bales on 'divorce registry'- a service opposite to bridal registry- and that she shares with Amy Wustrin"(p. 66).It would on one side be excellent for the morale and on the other profitable for the suppliers of the survival kit"(ibid). This shows that Madge Heisinger remains the same materialistic schemer as she was before her imprisonment. And Bodo's welcoming her back is more out of showmanship than of true love. Though Madge fits in the femme fatale trope, Bodo's narcissist outlook mellows down her monstrosity.

Amy Wustrin, is the 'love object' of Harry Trellman since their high school days and the most important female character in *The Actual*. No matter how men disregard women in Bellow's fiction, their lives and action evolve around them- and in this case, Amy is the lady for whom Harry has "an actual affinity"(p. 113). In fact, the title derives from this very notion. The very first memory of young Amy, recounted by Harry, is about her physical appeal. "She wore tights and high heels, I saw her fully feminine thighs, the gloss and smoothness of sexual maturity on the cheeks and in the brown gaze..." (p. 19). They meet after thirty years, on a blizzard day at Chicago when Amy is supposed to exhume her ex-husband Jay Wustrin. Harry deliberately makes a parallel between Bodo Heisinger and Jay Wustrin, and asks whether their wives can be compared too: "Amy anticipated that there might be *some*". Amy, at present, is an interior decorator, and she has been twice divorced with two daughters from her first marriage. She was not an enchanting beauty, but had "an average sort of appearance". She had been in the inner core of the heart of Harry, but he failed to disclose it during their youth. Harry assumes that

"Amy was well aware that I turned to her continually and all my efforts to detach myself her had failed completely. She understood what first love can do. It strikes you at seventeen and, like infantile paralysis, though it works through the heart, not the spinal cord, it too can be crippling" (81).

Apparently, Amy, Harry and Jay were quite close to each other since their high school, and their emotional attachment had no sophistication in a real sense. Cronin (2001) makes a special category for Amy thus:

There are some women not entirely contained by the protagonist's erotic gaze, women who somehow escape into the texts to wander its margins with different spiritual powers and values attached to them, despite the brevity and ultimate inconsequentiality of their appearances and their ultimate abandonment or loss to the world of male homosociality. They are often, however, much less certainly and skillfully drawn. Amy Wustrin in *The Actual* and Rosamund in *Ravelstein* fit into this category. (p. 70)

Amy's traits make her close to the New Woman type. She had "high average IQ" (p. 106). She was independent in making decisions for herself. Amy decided to divorce her first husband when he went bankrupt. Her first husband Berner was fun-loving, gambler and rich. Though he was not a family person, she married her. After divorcing Berner, Amy got married to Jay Wustrin, who was a divorce lawyer and felt amused to cause others trouble. He was handsome, and chasing women was his habit. Amy gave him space, overlooking all his nasty qualities-

just because materialistic reasons. While all the divorces took heavy tolls of men in Bellow's fiction, Amy is the first woman who 'gains' nothing from the divorce. When Jay divorced her, she had no money to support herself or her daughters. Amy had to 'compromise' her way through the divorce process, by developing a relation with her lawyer. In course of time, Amy had become an interior designer, and also had been able to shed the 'ugly', 'adulterous' and 'nymphomaniac' image that Jay had publicized about her. She embodies in her character and her actions the 'free' woman who struggles to achieve her chance of growth and her goal of an independent career. She is very straight forward and dislikes philosophical quotes. Harry Trellman accompanies Amy in her perplexing task of relocating her ex-husband's dead body and in that climactic scene, Amy discloses a warm feeling towards Harry as the graves were being dug. But she remains cold towards the deceased, "I offered Amy my pocket handkerchief. She didn't dry her tears but covered her mouth with it" (p. 116). The very last lines of *The Actual* are part of the touching proposal of Harry towards Amy; "The past marriage between Amy and Jay is like the absurdly misplaced grave, and the previous betrayal and hurt is dug out of the memory gradually when they excavate the coffin" (Nan, 2014) and the novella ends sweetly where both Amy and Harry are about to set forth a new and 'harmonious gender relation' (ibid). Unlike typical fictional New Women, Amy gets a chance to restart.

Most of the discussion on Saul Bellow's women stems from how the men see or shape them; desire them and how they actually deal with them. Where can we situate Saul Bellow's *The Actual* in terms of his literary career and his presentation of women? This novella is not necessarily the best one of the writer, but it does capture the essence of his later phase of writing and how he visualised women around him. An interesting parallel can be drawn between Rabindranath Tagore-the first Nobel laureate in the Indian subcontinent, and Saul Bellow regarding their ways of sketching women. Young Tagore was skeptical about women's freedom, and his prose writings of that time are crowded with motherly housewives, or young maidens experiencing romantic encounters within the boundaries of home. As Tagore grew older, Indian women started to break down their traditional roles, got educated and raised their voice in different movements. In the later phase of his writings (specially short stories) we get rebellious characters like Mrinal in "Streer Patra", Kalyani in "Aparichita", and most importantly Sohini in "Laboratory" (www.tagoreweb.in). In a similar manner, while young Bellow had been wrathful and cynic about presenting women, the older Bellow is much forgiving about women and conflicts of life. By the 80's, American society had gradually evolved, more women were joining the workforce, living independently and the status of woman -married or single, had raised through legal and political movements. The social changes must not have been unnoticed by Bellow. Ellen Piefer, (1991) one of the

renowned critics of Bellow, gives a clear account of his later works : "At this late hour of twentieth century life and letters he is more committed than ever to uncovering "the radiance" of "common life" and to capturing the "silent speech" of the soul in a viable language of connection". (p.184) She emphasizes the sincerity of the later protagonists' search for self-awareness, i.e. Sammler, Corde etc. and argues that their search is complete when they achieve "the internal harmony" no matter how 'precarious' it is. *The Actual* reaffirms this fact as Harry and Amy bond with each other and more importantly, a balance in gender relations is achieved.

Moreover, Bellow is also known to have modelled characters upon real people from his acquaintance and Harry Trellman has a small touch of Bellow. The writer started a new conjugal life with his fifth wife in his 70's; and when she was asked about Bellow's marriages by his biographer Zachary Leader-her answer "He was looking for me"-resonates the spirit of Harry Trellman in a romantic way.(Klein, 2019) Amy's being married and divorced left Harry quite unaffected and nonjudgmental. Bellow was known to be cautious about modernising himself. The portrayal of women in *The Actual*, in this sense, can be considered Bellow's personal modernising project.

## 5. CONCLUSION

When 82 years old Bellow was writing *The Actual*, a genuine sense of mature acceptance had appeared. Here Jay Wustrin is as nasty a husband, as Madge Heisinger is as a wife. But Bodo gives Madge a second chance, and fate also paves a new way for Harry and Amy. Though little happens in terms of action, and Saul Bellow remains stingy in giving a full coverage to the women characters; enough events are reported that help us to conclude that the political and cultural changes that were going around Bellow-affected his portrayal of men and women in *The Actual*. Bellow was gradually transforming his preoccupations with femme fatale types that he had drawn earlier and gave a second chance to life and to New Women to embrace social reality. Revolution in socio political arena definitely helped Bellow to look at American women in a newer light, and a personal realisation and stability in life had also fostered the spirit of harmony and reconciliation in his fictional women. Though it is a novella of less repute, *The Actual* bears testimony to the liberating outlook of Saul Bellow towards women and showcases his maturity.

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