Chapter VIII

RAVELSTEIN
Saul Bellow’s latest novel, *Ravelstein* was published in the year 2000. It is his thirteenth novel. The work is a reminiscence of the novelist. Ravelstein, the protagonist becomes the spokesman of Saul Bellow. But it is Chick, Ravelstein’s friend, who as narrator unravels the mind of Ravelstein. Critics have pointed out that Bellow had drawn Ravelstein on the model of his fellow professor, Prof. Allan Bloom at Chicago University.¹ He is an intellectual, a professor and a millionaire. He has many students and friends, and he is also a good orator. He loves highly fashionable places and people and he reads many books which are related to humanity. As desired by Ravelstein before his death Chick narrates about their relationship between Ravelstein’s life and his affairs. The lamentation of the novelist at the brutal massacre and inhuman treatment of the Jews by the Nazis is a special feature of the novel because it depicts how deeply Bellow feels psychologically one with his Jewish brethren in going through their persecution at the hands of the Nazis. But like all Jews Ravelstein has a big hope that one day there will be justice and pure life for them when humanism will prevail and the question of their survival and their identity will be solved. Lastly, the novelist visualizes a place like Athens in this contemporary world which will restore their lost paradise. Bellow supports humanistic

¹ *Ravelstein*, USA, Compass Press, 2000. All further references to *Ravelstein* are to this edition of the work and the title will be abbreviated as *Rv*.

politics which alone will help in creating a justice world. He does not favour politics which breed corruption. He praises the politics of ancient philosophers such as Plato and Aristotle. He supports the Platonic conception of an ideal world where citizens enjoy equal rights and an individual's values and dignity are respected:

"Two many years of inwardness!" He used to say I badly needed to be in touch with politics – not local or machine politics, nor even national politics but politics as Aristotle or Plato understood the term, rooted in our nature.²

For Bellow the question of identity doesn't mean the identity of Jews only. The novelist presents the novel from a broad angle and he also underlines the contribution of the Blacks to American life and culture. In the past the Blacks were the slaves of the white people but after the Civil war they got their rights and their spirit of hard work enabled them to come up in this competitive world. In the present time without Blacks America cannot be the superpower that it has become. In every field the Black people are predominant in contemporary American society. For instance, in the field of music:

He used to say that basketball stood with jazy music as a significant black contribution to the higher life of the country – its specifically American character.³

Ravelstein is a Jew, it is through him, not his friend Chick, that Bellow presents his Jewish thought on existence. The protagonist is aware that death is inevitable that even though he is a millionaire and an intellectual, he cannot carry all his wealth or property with him into the other world when he dies. Like everyman when he dies he will go alone.

² Rv(11)
³ Rv(69)
This is the nature of this universe. He is of the view that one need not be greedy for all that a man needs at the time of death is a small piece of land for his burial. His thinking is realistic. The novelist stresses the sanctity of life rather than the superficial coloring of life. As he observes:

What will happen to all this when I am gone? There's nothing that I can take with me into the grave. These beautiful objects which I bought in Japan, in Europe, and New York, far and wide, with so many deliberations and discussions with experts and friends . . .

As in other novels of his, Saul Bellow, in this novel also discusses the conflicting relationship between husband and wife. Chick and Vela divorced because of their uncompromising attitude towards one another. Each of them was egotistical and demanded his or her identity and freedom of choice to be respected. Vela did not like the nature and lifestyle of her husband. She did not feel comfortable staying home all the time. While she went to the University Chick was busy enjoying himself in the company of other women. The issue of women's empowerment and demand for their rights and dignity and status created differences between them:

"It's a different content and you have a right to make preparations. You talk to me in a very superior way, as if you are putting me down as an ignorant woman. You should please remember that I stand as high in my field as you do in yours."

Though Ravelstein catches HIV infection because of his irregular sex habits and is hospitalized he has not lost his zest for life. His

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4 Rv(121)
5 Rv(128)
memory of his youthful days when he led an adventurous life is in tact. But physically his life is comparable to that of a wild turkey which can do nothing but be tamed like a domestic pet. Like a good humanist Ravelstein has a keen desire to live and to enjoy himself.

Of course he couldn’t beat his infection and he said, “I’m in no hurry to die” His social life flourished, In his best days he flew like a hawk, as he himself said, “But now I flutter like those wild turkeys on your place in New Hampshire.”

But he feels hurt by the Christian hatred of the Jews which is attributed to the ancient conspiracy which put Jesus on the cross. The person who conspired with the king was a Jew. This Christian belief supposedly marked the turning point in the life of the Jews. But Bellow rejects that theory by admitting that in reality it was absolutely wrong to think so and that it was a myth created by some sections of society.

The Jews had better understanding of their status with respect to myth, why should they have any truck with myth? It was myth that demonized them. The Jew myth is connected with conspiracy theory.

As a humanist Jew he upholds the preciousness of human life in this world. He believes that the Jews are optimistic in life and that the sense of optimism rather than the nihilistic thoughts always characterizes the minds of the Jews. Their optimistic outlook arises from their unwavering faith in their Judaical religion. Respect for human life and dignity and belief in life as such are important features of Judaism. The novelist further affirms that the world is made for us and we human

6 Rv(165)
7 Rv(156-157)
beings should enjoy it. There are hints at the Jewish moral philosophy which holds life in great esteem:

“Yes, American — style — without the abyss,” said Ravelstein. “But the Jews feel that the world was created for each and everyone of us, and when you destroy a human life you destroy an entire world — the world as it existed for that person.”

II

Ravelstein is a novel by Saul Bellow which is regarded as tribute paid to his friend Allan Bloom. Bloom had published his work on education The Closing of the American Mind (1987) which brought him great fame. He was a well-known teacher and philosopher with whom Saul Bellow has frequent exchange of ideas. Ravelstein is also portrayed after Bloom as a great intellectual who had a brilliant mind and brilliant ideas. He became extremely popular among his students who rose to great positions in life. He was widely loved and respected in spite of his personal weaknesses. He had great political ideas and a large chunk of the novel is devoted to his intense preoccupation with the Jewish question — the question of their past their settlement their religious beliefs and their interaction with the non-Jewish, Christian world. As a recent critic, David K. Nichols, while commenting upon the content of the novel observes:

The biggest mistake that reviewers make is their failure to appreciate both the political and intellectual weight of

\[ Rv(191) \]
Ravelstein. It is a book about ideas and it is also a very political book. There is no doubt that when Chick recounts that during the Civil War people complained about Abraham Lincoln’s funny stories and accused him of being frivolous he reminds us of Ravelstein critics and their failure to appreciate “that strict seriousness was far more dangerous than any joke . . . from the beginning Chick puts the reader on notice that frivolous stories may capture an important political teaching.9

The novel is then done by Saul Bellow who creates his character Click to become his substitute novelist who can in turn narrate the entertaining story of his (Bellow’s/Chick’s) friend Ravelstein. It is then the story of Ravelstein’s great ideas, his lifestyle and his tragic end due to HIV infection.

Chick’s story model follows the funny story models of Lincoln and the American writer H.L. Mencken. Though Chick’s narrative offers some fun and frivolity if carries with it the serious ideas of Ravelstein on his debunking of the popular current myths and give new explanations or ideas which will inform the souls of a new generation. Chick points out that one may not see any connection between a farm – politician who speaks in praise of the virtues of free silver but died while craving for Nebraska dinners like a great orator and the academic philosopher who dressed in Armani suits, studied classical texts and dined in the finest Paris restaurants.10 But as Chick points out, both the politician and the academic philosopher died as a result of their hungers and passions. They became objects of ridicule for preserving their lifestyles based on ideas which were outdated. Though the two instances emphasize the tragic fate of the two model figures who died sticking to

10 Rv(1-2)
their old, outdated ideas, Ravelstein at the end of his life turns to his own old-time religion. He considered the old religion as an alternative to both the modern and the ancient worlds of ideas. Chick’s portrait of Ravelstein begins on the significant note of his preference for old religion which touched the soul of man rather than his mind and was therefore to be taken seriously.

Ravelstein’s lifestyle is interesting and entertaining like that of the pop singer Michael Jackson. Both stayed in the same luxurious hotel in Paris. Ravelstein’s hotel suit was two floors above Michael Jackson’s which pointed to the higher pop status of Ravelstein. There was something common between the tastes of the two figures — both had a desire for living a lavish life, enjoying the grandeur of life and entertaining the audience around them, the audiences which had become their slavish admirers. Ravelstein’s style was marked by his Armanio suits Vuitton luggage, Cuban cigars, Dunhill products, solid-gold Mont Blanc pens or Baccarat or Lalique crystal glasses in which wine was served to him or to his guests. He was temperamentally seeking these luxuries and he had them even when he was not well provided to meet the expenses. He was surely a man of tremendous spirit and energy which could be seen by its effect on the surroundings when he used that energy. Ravelstein’s greatness of soul could not be seen but his exceptional taste for such exquisite things like the Mont Blan Pens etc. gave some reflections of his greatness or of the depth he had within him.

There is no doubt that Chick presents the details of Ravelstein’s life in such a high fashion as to make it unbelievable but he understood

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\[\text{Ry}(3)\]
Ravelstein's nature better than any other friend or disciple did. More than his nature it was his brilliant intellect which had made Ravelstein "a millionaire"\textsuperscript{12} which was "no such matter".\textsuperscript{13} Ravelstein was higher than the pop singer Jackson in that it was his brilliant intellect rather than "glamour monkey"\textsuperscript{14} business or the act of pondering to the people's temporary craving for entertainment that had made him popular. Besides, Ravelstein's greatness comes, as in the case of Kissinger and Nixon from his acceptance of Crillon's food. Ravelstein asks Chick to write about J.M. Keynes's account of the negotiations over German reparations in 1919; he asks him to be more political and to take an interest in public life. He talks about Macaulay's essay on Boswell's \textit{Life of Johnson}, and at the end of his life asks Chick to write a book on their friendship too. Although Chick had drawn a pen portrait of J.M. Keynes Ravelstein was not "quite satisfied"\textsuperscript{15} with it. Nor was he satisfied with his writing about "Crazy Morford" who was Chick's high school English teacher. Ravelstein was interested in Chick's account of Keynes's description of the peace conference because in the report he pointed out the anti-Semitic noise created Lloyd George against one of the German negotiators. As will be seen in section III of this chapter Bellow was himself as intensely concerned as Ravelstein is in the novel with the anti-Semitisms and his own Jewishness.\textsuperscript{16}

Ravelstein is fond of gossip. He gossips with his former students. But sometimes these gossips lead to serious seminars on the political and philosophic questions. Ravelstein himself favours the view that

\textsuperscript{12} Rv(4)  
\textsuperscript{13} ibid.  
\textsuperscript{14} ibid.  
\textsuperscript{15} Rv(6)  
\textsuperscript{16} David, K Nichols. \textit{op. cit.} p.3.
political and intellectual supports are necessary for the advancement and stability of a civilized society. But even more than that it is culture that sustains society. However, Ravelstein cannot precisely define what he means by human nature which “reduced human behaviour to economic calculation, nor was he attracted to the kind of person who held such views”. There is no specific mention of any political affiliations of Ravelstein by Chick. Chick would rather like to say that he was attracted to Ravelstein as a great soul. Chick repeatedly touches on the subject of Aristophanes’ account of love in Plato’s Symposium:

In the beginning men and women were round like the sun and the moon, they were both male and female and had two sets of sexual organs. In some cases both the organs were male. So went the myth. These were proud, self-sufficient beings. They defied the Olympian Gods who punished them by splitting them in half. This is the mutilation that mankind suffered. So that generation after generation we seek the missing half, longing to be whole again.”

As David Nichols comments on this “According to Chick, this erotic longing for wholeness is what drove Ravelstein. This longing animated the spirited young men and women who were attracted to Ravelstein, and it distinguished them from the bourgeois who were dominated by fears of violent death.” However, Chick is not himself sure to whom this myth could be ascribed or who truly was its author – whether Aristophanes or Socrates or Plato or Chick himself? Entertaining the readers with this kind of story is surely a pleasant playfulness and the strategy of Chick (or Bellow) the writer of the novel because it seems Chick (or Bellow) have definitely something serious to convey through

17 ibid.
18 Rv(29)
19 David, K Nichols. op. cit. p.4
this interesting anecdote. Chick seems to ask a serious question — Are we left in a world where “the sexual embrace given temporary self-forgetting but the painful knowledge of mutilation is permanent”?\textsuperscript{20} Or “does Ravelstein share Aristophanes’ view of eros?”\textsuperscript{21}. Chick states that whatever be Ravelstein’s position on the truth of Aristophanes’ myth “Nothing could move him more than a genuine instance of this quest”.\textsuperscript{22} As he also says earlier, that quest may be nothing more than a futile romantic illusion, an illusion itself based on a rather bleak view of human nature. “To be human was to be severed, mutilated. Man is incomplete, Zeus is a tyrant. Mount Olympus is a tyranny . . . and the quest for your lost half is hopeless”.\textsuperscript{23}

The novel also throws light on Revalstein’s past, his tyrannical father and some of his contradictions. One important thought that haunts Ravelstein’s mind is his concern with death. To overcome that thought he tells Chick to write about him and their friendship. Ravelstein knows that due to their deep friendship Chick will be haunted by Ravelstein’s premature death due to HIV infection and therefore the only way to liberate himself from that haunting obsession or the Damocles’ sword hanging over his head will be to record their relationship in a book.

Chick was close to Ravelstein but not close enough as one of his admitting disciples, for he was too young to be his student. As Chick points out, Ravelstein and Lincoln had one thing common between them: they upheld the extraordinary measure such as suspending a fundamental human right in a time of Cold War to preserve the Union,
when due process of law could not be followed. Ravelstein had also written a war-like act by writing a book defending the "greatness of humankind" against "bourgeois well-being". Ravelstein stood for pursuit of love, not self-preservation, and held it as the goal of life.

Chick has given some impression of Ravelstein’s scholars but has not shown him in his classroom. Nor has clearly explained the importance of his ideas which attracted generations of students to him. Chick however admits that Ravelstein made him more aware of the political dimensions of life and helped him recover his erotic longings. Chicks first wife Vela had both eros and politics, two themes of the novel, in her. But because of her strong belief in rationality and modern scientific method Chick could not continue his relationship with her. She believed in controlling the chaotic nature with modern scientific intellect. Chick began to suspect Vela’s vision of the world. He felt that he could not have a place in her world. He knew that she was beautiful both physically and internally in her soul. But Ravelstein’s persuades Chick that Vela’s quest to know the mysteries of the universe was a futile quest. He also tries to convince him that her attempt to make herself glamorous was also false because she did not truly possess erotic force. Chick finally leaves her and marries Rosamund, a scholar of Ravelstein with whom Chick remains contented for life. She becomes the key to understanding the relationship between Chick and Ravelstein and saves Chick who was nearly dying of fish poisoning in the caribbeans.

24 ibid.
Separating from Chick, Vela turns to a fellow scholar Radu Grielescus but Ravelstein warns Chick about Grielescus being a man of questionable past. Besides he was a Jew-hater who had written of the "Jew-syphilis" that infected the Balkans.\(^{25}\) Ravelstein loves none except his adopted Chinese son Nikke for whom he buys an expensive BMW as a token of his love. But his relationship with Nikke is a father-son relationship and not a shared intellectual relationship. Chick’s friendship with Ravelstein makes the former see the possibility of goodness in the world which was pervaded by evil which Ravelstein saw manifested in the hostility towards the Jews and "the atrocities to which it led."\(^{26}\) Ravelstein was a nihilist but towards the end he developed faith in religion and belief in love and friendship and dignity of the human soul.\(^{27}\)

III

Written at the most mature and advanced state of Bellows life, Revelstein throws light on the history of the Jewish experience of suffering and hurt psyche in a much greater measure than done ever before in order to throw light on their situation in the twentieth century. He points out that Hitler’s mind was obsessed with the ridiculous thought that the downfall of Germany had come about because of the Jews. All the anti-Semitic groups supported Hitler’s policy. After becoming Chancellor Hitler had a series of laws passed by which the Jews were deprived of their citizenship and other rights. Their synagogues in Germany were destroyed. Thousands of them were put in

\(^{25}\) ibid
\(^{26}\) ibid
\(^{27}\) David, K Nichols. *op. cit.* p.8
concentration camps. A major part of German Jewish wealth was confiscated and huge fines were imposed on them. Their children were debarred from admission to public schools. They were not allowed to conduct any business or profession or to own land or associate with non-Jews. Entering public parks, library or museums were also disallowed. They were ordered to live in ghettos. Anti-Semitism existed in all Christian and Muslim countries. With the great success of the German army in the early years of World War II the Nazis and their supporters had the Jewish population in Europe at their mercy. “From the Atlantic to the Volga, from Norway to Sicily, Jews were deprived of all human rights”. They were left like beggars when their property were confiscated. Subsequently they were deported to Poland under inhuman conditions. Hitler had some secret plan in sending them to Poland where they might be either settled or annihilated. Thus arose “the Jewish Question”, a human problem that always haunted Saul Bellow and figures in Ravelstein too. The painful presentation of the Jews is presented in great detail by Ravelstein:

“Of course that’s what this conversation is circling – what it means to the Jews that so many others, millions of others, willed their death. The rest of humankind expelled them. Hitler was on record as having said that once he was in power he would have gallows, in rows, put up at the Marienplatz in Munich and the Jews, to the last Jew, would be hung there. It was the Jews that were Hitler’s ticket to power. He didn’t have, nor did he use, any other programme. He became Chancellor by uniting Germany and much of the rest of Europe against the Jews.”

28 Encyclopaedia Britannica, Vol.6
29 ibid.
30 Rv(204-205)
The protagonist also admits that then may be natural disasters as the "Plague in Athens" such natural calamities are beyond human control. In such situations human beings cannot do anything except to take some precautions, but such man made disasters creating the masses of dead in the 20th century between 31 is brutal and inhuman.

Again, Saul Bellow seems to refer to the horrifying details of the persecution of Jews and others. They were packed in cattle cars and sent away into concentration camps and destroyed.32 The governments were not bothered whether these people lived or were suffocated to death in gas chambers or were drowned in the rivers. The brutal inhumanity was at its worst when the Jews were told that "they had lost the right to exist and were told as much by their executioners – There is no reason why you should not die".33 The Jews were slaughtered on a mass scale – in millions — on ideological grounds — "that is, with some pretext of rationality".34 This was the maddest form of nihilism which the German dictator, Hitler, carried out without shame or pity. The crazy military junta carried out the massacre. They did not have to pay for their inhuman crimes Ravelstein is at least clear about his view on these matters but what could he do except sadly recall the demoralizing and dreadful past. The entire world watched the mass execution of Jews and had no courage to protest the barbaric action. A poignant description of the world's stunned silence is presented thus:

31 Ry(205)
32 Ry(206)
33 ibid.
34 ibid.
“there was a general willingness to live with the destructions of millions. It was like the mood of the century to accept it . . . But I’m thinking of the great death populations of the Gulags and the Germans labour camps. Why does the century – I don’t know how else to put it – underwrite so much destruction? There is a lameness that comes over all of us when we consider these facts.”  

The painful history of the inhumanity to the Jews cannot be forgotten by humanity. In his last days Ravelstein is heavily obsessed with that history. He talks more and more about the Jewish massacre rather than about Athens or Jerusalem, which he no doubt, regarded as the two main sources of higher life. As he emphatically remarks:

“Why not talk about them? In the south they still talk about the war between the States much more than a century ago but in our own time millions were destroyed, most of them no different from you. From us, we must not turn our backs on them . . . .”  

Ravelstein lays bare the thinking of the leaders who ordered destruction of European Jews. As they formed the ruling class or the bourgeois they were told that if they were destroyed “a new great era would begin”.  

Ravelstein, as Chick explains, was apprehending that there were always chances of fresh instructions coming for more extermination of Jews from anti – Semitic forces working in the world:

“There’s no telling which corner it will come from next – the French Corner? No, no, not France. They had their glut of blood in the eighteenth century and they wouldn’t mind if it happened, but they wouldn’t be the ones to do it. But what about the Russians? The protocols of the Elders of Zion

\[35\text{ Ry}(207)\]
\[36\text{ Ry}(213)\]
\[37\text{ ibid.}\]
were a Russian forgery. And not long ago you were telling me about Kipling".38

Ravelstein points to the sarcastic remarks of the British Writer Kipling against the American Scientist, Jew, Einstein:

“This was early in the century. As said that the Jews” had already distorted social reality for their purposes. But not satisfied with that, Einstein was disfiguring physical reality with his relativity theory, and the Jews were trying to give a falsifying Jewish twist to the Physical universe.39

Ravelstein notes that there is a distinction between natural nihilists and intellectual nihilists and prefers the former to the latter. He prefers the former because they are frank and accepts them in that condition but the latter are manipulators and dangerous. Chick points to the inhuman nihilism of Ravelstein’s obsession with the writings of Celina, a writer who recommended, “that the Jews be exterminated like bacteria”.40 Although in his novel Celina observed some restraint because of the influence of art on him but in his propaganda he was a staunch propagandist for the destruction of Jews. Even though he is himself on his death-bed Ravelstein cannot overcome his psychic anguish. He laments the inhuman and brutal torture and massacres of the Jews by the Nazis. Obviously, his lamentation must awaken the Jews to know their rights and their history so that they may fight for their survival and their identity. It is also a clear manifestation of his obsession with the Jewish suffering and their right to justice:

38 Ry(214)  
39 Ry(214)  
40 Ry(215)
And one of these conclusions was that a Jew should take a deep interest in the history of the Jews – in their principles of justice, for instance.\textsuperscript{41}

However Bellow focuses on the painful past of the Jews. It is to be noted that he does not hide the inhuman things done by the Jews too. This itself shows the objective thinking and goodness of heart of the novelist. Ravelstein encourages one to read Celine’s work which points to the weaknesses of the Jews. Ravelstein believes that Celine’s anti-Semitic writings were largely responsible for turning the European countries against the Jews even though the Europeans did not support the ideas of the Nazis. However Celine’s writings were useful for making the Jewish people aware of their faults and misdeeds. They had to learn a lesson from his writings:

“But then, from left field, or do I mean right field, Ravelstein urges everyone to read Celine. Well, by all means. Celine was widely read before the war he published his Bagatelles pour un massacre. In this pamphlet Celine cried out against and denounced the Jews who had occupied and raped France . . . you can see how insane it was”\textsuperscript{42}

In Ravelstein again Bellow shows the Jewish way of life, the Jewish belief in Judaism. Judaism promotes belief in existence, life, values and dignity. Committing suicide is against their religion and it is a sign of cowardice. The Jews sacrifice their lives if they cannot fight the opponent. Before they die they kill their children too so that they may not be victimized like their parents.

\textsuperscript{41}Ry(220)

\textsuperscript{42}Ry(249-50)
“By whom is suicide forbidden?” “It’s against my religion. Jews don’t commit suicide unless they lost the siege as they did at Masada, or are about to be hacked to pieces, as in the Crusades. Then they put their children to death before they kill themselves.”

After recounting the history of the different occasions on which Jews had to undergo painful ordeal Bellow aspires to do something for his race before he dies of HIV infection. He believes that the prophecies of the religious philosopher A.N. Whitehead might show the Jews the way to be followed. That way a New Athens might be created. The society needs a new advanced educational center. In this way the novelist desires to create a world where intellectual people can exercise their minds for the betterment of the society. As prophesied by whitehead, Ravelstein believes that Chicago may be that center which will create and spread the new light all over the world:

It was also a fact that A.N. Whitehead had prophesied during a sojourn in Chicago that it was destined to lead the modern world. Intelligence was here for everybody’s free use, and so it was highly possible that this city might serve to be a new Athens.

The light of new Athens had obviously to be derived from the humanistic attitude to life. It has to be both ‘intuitive’ and ‘intellectual’ and it has to be directed toward the achievement of humanistic order in the family, in the society and in the world.

As Chick narrates, Ravelstein was deeply absorbed in discussing two subjects, religion and government, as these according to the French Philosopher Voltaire were the two poles of human life. Voltaire too was

43 Rv(265-66)
44 Rv(283)
a violent hater of Jews. Given a chance to add another subject for Ravelstein’s discussions he might have selected ‘Voltaire’ too. In his last days in particular, as Chick points out, “he (Ravelstein) was following a trail of Jewish ideas or essences. It was unusual for him these days, in any conversation, to mention even Plato or Thucydides. He was full of scripture now. He talked about religion and the difficult project of being a man in the fullest sense, of becoming man and nothing but man”.

A close friend of Ravelstein, Morris Herbst confirms about the subject of contemplation and discussion that Ravelstein was obsessed with. It was the subject of persecution of Jews all over the world and the failure of the civilized world to banish this evil of hostility toward the Jews. The subject of universal silence over the Jewish persecution was, according to Herbst, a problem of “top priority, because its connected with the great evil”. The evil kin the world seen through Jewish eyes, was not merely scriptural in essence but even political and it involved the whole of mankind. As Chick rightly interprets not only Ravelstein’s but possibly Saul Bellow’s mind too:

“I well understood what he meant. The war made it clear that almost everybody agreed that the Jews had no right to live.”

Obviously, as the novel develops this subject further, the Jews being “the chosen” people, according to Bible, had no choice of options. They have been treated not as “the chosen” but as an accursed lot. That is what the novel seems to emphasize:

45 Ry(218-219)
46 Ry(219)
47 ibid
Such a volume of hatred and denial of the right to live has never been heard or felt, and the will that willed their death was confirmed and justified by a vast collective agreement that the world would be improved by their disappearance and their extinction.48

According to this non-Jewish, hostile opinion the world over the Jewish race symbolized viciousness and this evil required to be wiped out of existence:

Rismus, which was Professor Davarr’s word for viciousness, hatred, determination to be rid of this intrusive population in furnaces or mass graves.49

One possible cause of this universal hatred of the Jewish race is hinted in the concluding observation of Herbst and Ravelstein on the subject. As Chick narrates,

The Jews, Ravelstein and Herbst thought, following the line laid down by their teacher Davarr, were historically witnesses to the absence of redemption.50

So the roots of the problem lay in the mythical conspiracy of the origin of the race in the pre-Christian times. And since it was not humanly possible for the Jews to disclaim their origin as Jews, the only possible way for them to redeem themselves is to know their history, “their principles of justice for instance”51 and learned their “religious legacy”.52 The principles of justice, if followed, would certainly instil humanism in the thinking and behaviour of man who would like to be identified as civilized human beings. Humanism with emphasis on the

48 Rx(219)
49 ibid
50 Rx(220)
51 ibid
52 ibid
principles of justice may then be not merely Ravelstein's but also the Bellovian way to overcome the hurt psyche of the Jewish race as well as mankind.

Thus it is not difficult to surmise how deeply Saul Bellow's psyche was affected and hurt. The intensity of the pain may be imagined from the details of the reminiscence of the brutal extermination of the Jews by Hitler and by other anti-Semitic countries. In Ravelstein as I argue, Bellow gives for the first time a free vent to that hurt psyche of his own as well as the rest of the Jews of the world. Never before in the earlier novels has Bellow allowed his pen to move without restraint in expressing himself in that traumatic experience which the entire Jewry had gone through in Europe. The elaborate reminiscence turns the novel into a memoir with political overtones. The central burden of the novelist clearly appears to be to recall and expose to world view the brutal inhumanity perpetrated by the German dictator against the Jewish race. His purpose is not only to recall the said human history but to suggest that the whole of the Jewish race has not only been maliciously maligned but that they have also the human right to exist and live according to their own lights with honour and dignity. In terms of humanistic concerns of Bellow, Ravelstein is a great leap forward in his work as a novelist in that he raises afresh the question of human right to life of a people or a race who had been denied such a right through the ages, who had been scattered over different continents and countries, and who need to be reunited, integrated and given the justice that all human beings deserve both as human beings and as members of a race.
It is important to note that Ravelstein masks the progression of Bellow's literary or naturalistic humanism into political humanism. The novel in effect, may be read as a work with a political purpose to rekindle the Jewish nationalist pride and prestige and express a desire for his spiritual reunion with the Jewish brotherhood. By recalling their past suffering he too suffers and becomes one with them. It is, therefore, in this novel that he achieves to a large extent the sublimation of his deep desire to expose the hurt psyche of the entire Jewish race and present afresh the case of the maligned Jewish race before the civilized world that they have been in Shakespeare's words "more sinned against than sinning" and that they deserve the justice of being treated humanely as equal members of the civilised humanity. It also appears that Chick is not only the narrator but the other, good part of the personality of Bellow, who shows how a good man should live, how he should not yield to the intellectual vices that Ravelstein has fallen a prey to. As a good man he also find an equally good intellectual wife, Rosamund, a former student of Ravelstein, who puts the interests of Chick before her own interests. In this novel Rasamund, the second wife of Chick, is a type of an ideal woman. Her character is unique as compared to some women characters in other novels of Bellow. Rasamund is a good woman, a good wife with good moral principles. Her humaneness is incomparable; she not only shows humane sympathy to her husband and other friends. She also shows humaneness to animals. She cannot bear to see the scene of the lunch spot where ribs, Chicken, lobster are treated
“with flames spurting straight up”\textsuperscript{53} or the “torture of the lobsters”.\textsuperscript{54} She extends care to the animals with her human impulses:

Back in New Hampshire when she saw salamanders in the road she picked them up and carried them to safety.\textsuperscript{55}

It is she who reminds Chick to fulfil the promise he had given to Ravelstein that the memoir of their friendship etc. would be written after his (Ravelstein) death. Hence the completion of Bellow’s thirteenth novel comes about with a clear focus on what were the central obsession of both Ravelstein out his creator Saul Bellow — the hostility towards the Jews and the need for a humanistic understanding of their predicament.

\textsuperscript{53} \textit{Rv}(226)
\textsuperscript{54} ibid
\textsuperscript{55} ibid