Chapter 1

Introduction

A Jew born and brought up in America, under the guidance, training and influence of typically Jewish parents, Saul Bellow is a perfect example of the marginal man. The “marginal man” is defined by Park, as “an individual who lives in two different worlds – and is a stranger in both (Levine & others, 1976).” (Rogers and Steinfatt 45) Park stated that the “marginal man is ‘a cultural hybrid, an individual on the margin of two cultures which never completely fused.’ Park thought that the marginal man represented a special way to understand social change: ‘It is the mind of the marginal man–where the changes and fusions of culture are going on–that we can best study the processes of civilization and of progress.’” (Rogers and Steinfatt 45)

Saul Bellow is one such person and that is precisely why he received the Nobel Prize in 1976 “for the human understanding and subtle analysis of contemporary culture that are combined in his work.” Reading through Bellow, we realize the aptness of James Atlas’ observation that he made the “process of becoming an American one of his major themes.” Each of his heroes struggles against his
Jewishness without ever succeeding in transforming himself into the typical American whom he so admires. This tussle between the Jew and the American inside him along with other minor influences give birth to a writing that is culturally alive, active and anxious.

Anxious or not, Saul Bellow is always conscious of culture and highlights cultural differences, be it between Jewish culture and American culture, black culture and white culture, village culture and city life, tribal lifestyle and modern living or African sand and Alaskan snow. In spite of this variety of character and settings, his Jewish American dilemma remains central to his personality and writing. Along with that gender, age, nationality and language among others are important factors working upon his psyche. An individual’s identity and psychology both are formed by his surroundings as well as the culture he inherits. But what exactly, is culture? In the words of Edward T Hall;

Culture is the total communication framework : words, actions, postures, gestures, tones of voice, facial expressions, the (handling of) time, space and materials, and the way he(/she) works, plays, makes love, and defends himself(/herself). All these things and more are complete communication systems
with meanings that can be read correctly only if one is familiar with the behaviour in its historical, social and cultural context. (Rogers and Steinfatt 1)

Saul Bellow’s writing is purely autobiographical and the story is his own story, so it is not difficult to conclude that his characters’ anxiety is his own too. Some of the incidents in his novels occur exactly as they were in Bellow’s real life, especially his relations with women. He once told Jane Howard in an interview, “My second wife used to say I was medieval pure and simple. I’ve always been among Foreigners, and never considered myself a native of anything” and in Herzog, Madeleine, his second wife tells him that he’d never get the surroundings he wanted. “Those are in the twelfth century somewhere,” adds Madeleine. *Dangling Man* was written when he himself was waiting to be drafted in the army, his various romances and divorces feature regularly in his works and his life-threatening illness at the age of eight appears in many of his books.

In *Humboldt’s Gift*, Charlie Citrine thinks back to the year he spent in a tuberculosis sanatorium when he was eight: “I became very thoughtful here and I think that my disease of the lungs passed over into an emotional disorder,” he says. “Owing
to the TB I connected breathing with joy, and owing to the
gloom of the ward I connected joy with light, and owing to my
irrationality I related light on the walls to light inside me.” But
there was a darker legacy as well, one that Bellow only touched
on in his fiction, so often a screen for painful memories rather
than a revelation of their meaning. (Atlas 16)

The vacuum created by this “long separation from his family remained
with him all his life,” convincing him forever that he was alone in the
world and would have to save himself. “To face, on his own, not only
separation from his family, from the comforts of his familiar Jewish
world, but the real prospect of death was a formative experience. It
made Bellow at once clear-eyed about the precariousness of the
human condition and imbued him with a longing to be parented.”
(Atlas 17)

The Bellows’ poverty and difficult days also form an important
part of his fiction. In an earlier version of *Herzog*, he wrote,
“everything in Canada had failed for Pa, the bakery, the sacks,
peddling, jobbing, buying produce in the country and selling it door to
door, the dry goods store was a failure; matchmaking, insurance
schemes, selling cemetery lots—all failed.” (Atlas 17) His bootlegger
father is a recurring figure in his novels; a failure, hated by his son, yet remembered with love after his departure from the world. Henderson, who ran away from his father at an early age, remembers him later;

I didn’t hope to perfect myself as an artist. My main purpose was to reach my father by playing on his violin. Down in the basement of the house, I worked very hard as I do at everything. I had felt I was pursuing my father’s spirit, whispering, “Oh, Father, Pa. Do you recognize the sounds? This is me, Gene, on your violin, trying to reach you.” For it so happens that I have never been able to convince myself the dead are utterly dead. I admire rational people and envy their clear heads, but what’s the use of kidding? I played in the basement to my father and my mother. (HRK 30)

Saul Bellow was born to Jewish parents who had only two years ago, migrated from Russia to Lachine, Canada, which was then, a “melting pot; Ukranians and Russians, Greeks and Italians, Hungarians and Poles were packed in side by side, drawn there by its thriving industries.” Out of these, only three hundred were Jews. The richness and diversity of the culture of Montreal is evident in the words of biographer Leon Edel;
In the streets of Montreal, on cold winter days, you could meet, in the 1920s, characters wrapped in great coats, their breath exhaled in vapor, walking out of the 19th century; in Westmount out of Dickens or Thackeray, in Montreal East out of Balzac. And in between, figures Biblical, or characters created by say Israel Zangwill—a glimpse of the Galician or Rumanian, the Lithuanian, or the Russian.” (Atlas 14)

So, Bellow was brought up in a cosmopolitan atmosphere, where he got ample opportunity to experience a rich and varied culture, which he imbibed and absorbed like a sponge. “It was out of this aggregate of languages and cultures that Bellow was to fashion his unique literary idiom,” wrote James Atlas, in his biography of Bellow. Yet, in spite of all these influences, “his prose reflects the animated cadences of his origins-what the critic Irving Howe describes as ‘the jabbing interchange of ironies, the intimate vulgarities, the blend of sardonic and sentimental’ characteristics of Yiddish.” (Atlas 14) Chicago was a new world, a shock at first, loud, crude, “animal-flavored,” that eventually turned into “a magical circus” at which the immigrants marveled, yet “the Bellows maintained their old ways.” Abram, Bellow’s father, was very particular about attending Shul on
Saturday, and did everything to ensure a traditional Jewish education for his sons. Bellow attended “Sunday school at the Jewish people’s institute,” studied the Talmud and was “bar mitzvahed at the Spaulding Avenue synagogue.” Due to his Jewish upbringing, Jewish culture and outlook dominate Bellow’s work; fiction as well as nonfiction, and justifiably so.

After all, an individual’s ethnicity is a fundamental factor in his life, a phenomenon inherent in human experience, responsible for shaping a large part of one’s personality and Bellow is no exception. Rather as a writer, he is prone to be more sensitive to everything that happens around him. As an American Jew, he shares the anxiety and the blessedness of both Jews and Americans as well as of the Jews settled in America. There has been an everlasting debate and the critics are still divided on whether to treat Saul Bellow as a Jewish writer or an American. Bellow calls himself an “out and out” Chicagoan, while his critics oppose him by asserting his Jewishness as a writer. The reality probably lies between the two extreme views as John J. Clayton observes, “Saul Bellow’s defense of man has been made in the cultural confluence of two main streams: the Jewish experience and the American experience.” (Clayton 30)
Almost all Bellow heroes are Jews based in the city of Chicago or New York. The city appears in all Bellow fiction, working as a theme and serving at the same time as a background for his stories centered on Jewish characters. Bellow has repeatedly shown us American city life through the eyes of Jewish protagonists like Herzog, Augie March, Mr. Sammler and others in various novels. As a writer, Bellow seems to have drawn the most diverse of opinions from all sides, having remained a riddle to his American critics as well as to the Jews. Arnold Jacob wolf states that “the Jewish intellectual establishment has never known quite what to do with Saul Bellow.”

Saul Bellow has been equivocal and somewhat mysterious. Beginning his career with brilliant translations from Yiddish literature, something in Bellow was Jewishly both authentic and troubling. Most of his Jews were unpleasant, but then, most of his other characters were unpleasant, too. His close friends were almost all Jewish intellectuals and he regularly skewered them in his many powerful books. (Wolf)

Born and brought up in a Jewish family, Bellow is a Jew at heart. He refuses to accept this fact, preferring his “American-ness to Jewish-ness,” as some of his critics suggest, yet almost all his heroes are Jews
and he writes about anti-Semitism, his major characters are mostly Jewish and his technique is influenced by his Jewish predecessors and contemporaries. Bellow’s Jewish birth and heritage are clearly reflected in his personality and work. He was deeply hurt by the discrimination that the Jews have faced through the ages and it is very clearly visible in his writing. Even though he claims to have woken up late to the Holocaust, Bellow has dealt with it in many of his novels, especially those written after 1959, because that is when he visited Auschwitz and felt the full weight of the holocaust. He attacked everything anti Jewish and his attack on Nazism was two-fold, criticizing everything German and his overall humanistic approach.

Bellow’s assault on Nazi philosophy and its progenitors, in his novels, is presented in a two-fold manner: First there is an attack on German culture per se, a generally critical, sometimes hostile, attitude towards most people and things that are Germanic in origin. This includes an expose of anti-Semitism and an attack on the expounders of German thought, as well as those ideas that gave rise to Nazism-Romanticism and Christianity. These are linked to the Holocaust by the protagonist’s thought patterns, his reveries, his dreams. Then,
Bellow’s overall humanistic presentation, with its emphasis on the sanctity of life and the brother-hood of peoples, is an implied attack on those who wanted to eradicate humanism from twentieth-century thought and practice. (Goldman)

Saul Bellow’s novels aim at establishing Jewish humanism and each of his works “progresses from the protagonist’s unhealthy preoccupation with the self to an involvement in a community, to the realization that life is with people,” observes Goldman. Bellow continuously fought against totalitarianism and fascism and in most of his novels “there is at least one minor character whose German traits are presented pejoratively.”

In *Dangling Man*, it is Joseph’s childhood friend, Will Harscha and his anti-Semitic parents; in *The Victim*, it is the Punts, Allbee’s unsympathetic landlord and landlady who evict him from his apartment during his fallen state; in *The Adventures of Augie March*, it is Einhorn, the cripple-his infirmity suggests his characterization, or the Fenchel sisters with their severe German upbringing, or the Russian tyrant, Grandma Lausch, who speaks a Germanized Yiddish (this affectation adds an air of ludicrousness to her characterization), or the person “who used
to be in Dachau” - we do not know whether as prisoner or guard - with whom Augie “did some business ... in dental supplies from Germany.” In *Seize the Day*, it is the inflexible and rigorous Dr. Adler; in *Herzog*, it is the cuckold and caricature of the all-time lover, Valentine Gersbach; in *Mr. Sammler’s Planet*, it is the “Weimar schmalz” of Margotte Arkin, or Hilda Gruner with her high-handed German mannerisms which were in conflict with her Ostiude husband’s demeanor; and in *Humboldt’s Gift*, it is Von Humboldt Fleisher-German in name only - with his fear of Nazi ghosts. Bellow’s main interest, however, is with the perpetuation of Nazi ideas and his works focus on those philosophers whose ideas contributed to the phenomenon of Nazism. (Goldman)

In spite of the fact that “anti-Semitism was an international malady,” Bellow specifically attacks the Germans and Germany because “it was in modern Germany that anti-Semitism reached its zenith by becoming official government policy and ultimately attained apocalyptic proportions. It was the perpetuation of this myth of the Jews, in a distortion of the original legend, rooted in Christian anti-Semitic diatribes, which Hitler so forcefully resurrected and manipulated in his
war against the Jews.” (Goldman) The Jews were hated and “excluded from German cultural life at the onset of the Nazi reign and this separation was made official in the Nuremberg Laws.” (Goldman)

Bellow recognized and relates in his works those ideas, German in origin, that are antithetical not only to the humanistic values of Judaism, but to the very nature of social and communal living. The forerunners of Nazi thought created the climate of acceptance for the atrocities perpetrated against humanity and consequently must share the guilt and blame for the demoralization and dehumanization of humanity. (Goldman)

Bellow always expressed his frustration over the way Jews were treated worldwide and never refrained from raising a voice for his community even though unconsciously. He did not realize how profoundly he was attached to his people and how deeply he shared the jews’ collective unconscious. As he remained oblivious of his own feelings for the Jewish clan for a major part of his life, he stayed unhappy with the label of a Jewish author too.

But then, he was not wrong in objecting to the restricting and confining nature of such tags either. Recent research also claims that
ethnicity is nothing but a social construct. “In 1978 anthropologist Ronald Cohen claimed that the identification of ‘ethnic groups’ in the usage of social scientists often reflected inaccurate labels more than indigenous realities:

‘...the named ethnic identities we accept, often unthinkingly, as basic givens in the literature are often arbitrarily, or even worse inaccurately, imposed.’” (Wikipedia)

These words seem apt and justified in Bellow’s case, who expressed his unhappiness and disappointment at the way critics treated him, classifying him and other writers who wrote for a much larger section of society, according to their ethnic origins. He verbalized his anguish in this regard to Alden Whitman in an interview for The New York Times:

In addition to exalting the ‘small-public writers,’ critics have performed a disservice by attempting to classify ‘great-public writers’ according to their ethnic origins … A few years ago it was fashionable to describe Roth, Malamud and me as the Hart, Schaffner and Marx of writing … The Protestant majority thought it had lost its grip, so the ghetto walls went up around us … Academics and critics gave writers
who were Jews or blacks a ghetto description of themselves,’ he continued, adding with asperity: ‘It was a matter of giving a dog a bad name in order to hang him.’

Bellow felt marginalized along with his Jewish contemporaries and did everything to prove that he had little sympathy for the Jews, that he was Americanized completely. Yet, at heart, he remained a Jew, who not just sympathized with his clan but was extremely pained by the inhuman treatment they had repeatedly received all over the world. But this doesn’t make him any less of an American. He, in fact, is one of the best authors America has ever produced. One of the most celebrated American authors, he has a unique writing style unaffected by popular and prevalent trends. Philip Roth, the man who suggested to James Atlas that he should write Bellow’s biography, believes that the backbone of 20th-century American literature has been provided by Saul Bellow along with William Faulkner and claims that combined together, they are the “Melville, Hawthorne, and Twain of the 20th century.”

Bellow, the most intellectual of American authors does not confirm to any of the existing schools of thought or writing and therefore remains a puzzle to his critics, who “have found it difficult to delineate the
complex sensibility at the core of his work,” asserts Chavkin. Some
claim that he is a modern writer while others place him with the early
nineteenth century English romantics and yet others call him a
“postmodernist par excellence,” but “he spoke his own mind, without
regard for political correctness or fashion, and was often involved, at
least at a literary distance, in fierce debates with feminists, black
writers, postmodernists.” (Gussow and Mcgrath) His passion for
writing is evident in the following statement:

There are many professions that one may follow without
enthusiasm, but though there may be as many unenthusiastic
novelists, proportionately, as there are unenthusiastic engineers
or dentists, they must consider themselves infidels and they feel
their unbelief and treason keenly. Vividness is what they must
desire most and so they must value human existence or be
unfaithful to their calling.

Though Bellow’s early works were dominated by the
“wasteland outlook” of the moderns, he “turns instinctively to the
traditions of comedy and romanticism because of his dislike of what
he considers to be the facile pessimism of modern literature, a
pessimism which has become, he suggests, a literary convention in
itself.” Chavkin further states that “unlike the modernists, he does not desire to challenge the human significance of things.” He presents a blend of emotion and intellect in his work and “in his most powerful work, Mr. Bellow was able to draw from many literary traditions—the European existentialists, the Russian moralists and brawny, red-blooded Americans like Melville and Dreiser—to create his own utterly distinctive fictional world,” notes Michiko Kakutani.

Dr. Gloria L. Cronin asserts that Saul Bellow is the only “post-WW II American writer” to have studied so thoroughly the effects of American cultural anxiety with the age of technology and rationalism, existentialism, and the legacy of high modernism.” Bellow rejects the negativity and hollowness of modern thinking.

Scorning absurdism, nihilism, alienation ethics, and belief in Deus Abscondus, refuting historicist pessimism, preaching against the void, and defending the embattled masculine self of Western metaphysics, Bellow has affirmed Judeo-Christian religious and social values more strongly perhaps than any other twentieth-century writer. From within this space he has tried to restore the integrity of feeling, the meaning of ordinary existence, and the primacy of social contract to a society in
which he perceives these things to be in eclipse. Likewise, few writers have explored so thoroughly and humorously the high comedy of heterosexual relations in our age, or the multiple, defeating ‘masculinities’ to which the American male is heir. That he has failed to deal adequately with ‘femininity’ and people of color is a commonplace of recent Bellow criticism and cannot be ignored. (Cronin)

Bellow’s originality is “manifest in that he eschews those sufficiently explored and exploited themes” of exile, wandering and alienation. “I am going against the stream. That’s not an attitude. Attitudes are foolishness. It’s just that there’s no use doing anything else is there? I blame myself for not having gone hard enough against it, and if I live I shall go harder,” (Cronin, Holy) says Bellow. While the moderns were busy moaning the loss of tranquility, Bellow came up with ideas to fight alienation and to bring out the “extraordinary in the ordinary.” Many of his critics attribute Bellow’s optimism to his “subconscious indebtedness to Jewish philosophers and possibly the influence of their writings on Christian thinkers with whom Bellow is familiar;” while Allan Chavkin observes an affinity between Bellow and the 19th century romantics in his essay, Bellow and the English
Romantics:

Like Wordsworth, he had faith in the power of the imagination to liberate the alienated individual shackled by customary perception, distractions of everyday life and the drudgery of the daily routine; thus imagination could expand consciousness and lead toward a spiritual rebirth.” (Cronin and Goldman 68)

But Bellow seems to have got over his romantic mood and rosy outlook soon, as “one sees his romanticism becoming increasingly darker during the course of his career, though he does not return to the pessimism of his first two novels.” (Cronin and Goldman 69)

Bellow had a tendency of puncturing theories and philosophies, even of the greatest of thinkers and philosophers and questioning everything under the sun. Bellow is never satisfied with ready-made answers and deals with questions of alienation, love and death in almost all his novels. Human relations take up a large space of his work. Family matters a lot to Bellow heroes, but they are egoists who want everything as per their wishes. That is why they suffer incessantly in their relationships. Bellow’s anxiety and concern regarding the human condition in today’s world is expressed in what
he told Gordon Lloyd Harper in an interview: “I wonder whether there will ever be enough tranquility under modern circumstances to allow our contemporary Wordsworth to recollect anything.”

Here, the journey metaphor comes into play. Henderson’s African adventure is taken up in search of this tranquility and Herzog and Sammler go on mental trips searching for their peace of mind. All of them return enriched and enlightened from their respective travels. Herzog’s mental letters acquaint him with himself and Henderson’s African safari brings him face to face with his own defects and flaws. Bellow protagonists try to “look inward and purge their consciousness” and “reminiscence becomes a modus operandi for his people, a means of self-inventory and sometimes a mea culpa.” (Kakutani. Poet)

There is a definite shift in Bellow’s later fiction, towards spiritual and transcendental pursuits. “Bellow, like Bloom, privileges an ideal community of men in the Platonic mode who meditate on ‘the permanent concerns of mankind.’” (Neelakantan) He has even been referred to as an apocalyptic writer by some of his critics, but Bellow’s apocalypse differs from that of his contemporaries “in rigor and in the mode employed in engaging the question of whether the human race
will eventually prevail.” (Neelakantan)

Bellow was initially optimistic as in Herzog, his protagonist said, “We must get it out of our heads that this is a doomed time, that we are waiting for the end, and the rest of it ... we love apocalypses too much, and crisis ethics and florid extremism with all its thrilling language.” (H 317) But eventually he turned from his anti-apocalyptic views to the apocalypse of The Dean’s December. G. Neelakantan notices, “The Dean’s December is an apocalyptic text that articulates the author’s neoconservative take on the urban decay and the racial conflicts that characterized America in the 1970s and early 1980s” and Frederick Glaysher believes that Bellow is the only American writer, along with Isaac Balshevis Singer, who addresses the problem of the modern soul. Humanity is so caught up with worldliness, that the spirit finds no expression with men. “At Mount Palomar Observatory, Corde views the heavens from the end of a telescope and finds the stars hazed by atmospheric disturbances. The starry skies appearing in a nebula suggest that the human race is far from attaining spiritual clarity.” (Neelakantan) Corde, like most Bellow protagonists, is at war with his surroundings and looking for inner peace.

While American society ails from its excesses, East European
society as depicted in Romania suffers from an impoverished sense of human dignity, owing to the regimentation of organized communism. In Corde’s view, the human race is being smothered by false consciousness. If the Ceausescu regime in Romania bans free speech, the liberal democracy in America endorses excessive empty discourse. In Corde’s view, Dewey Spangler, the media guru and “world-communicator” (DD 24), is a specialist in “the debris of false description” (DD 241). Bellow’s description of a world in the stranglehold of manufactured discourse has a parallel in Kaliyug, the apocalyptic age in Hindu mythology, where “all texts will be considered Sastras” [17] irrespective of their merit. The Dean’s December indicts the political systems of both East and West for bringing misery on the human community. (Neelakantan)

Bellow heroes are always anxious, unhappy and dissatisfied. But, there is another side to the coin. He does not make us miserable all the time. He is a realist, a visionary and a man of ideas, who makes us laugh and smile quite often. But there is a darker side to Bellow’s humour and that is why it has been categorized as black humour. Bellow could be simultaneously frolicsome and grave and this
apparent duality has divided his critics in their opinion of Bellow, some of whom consider him as a generally serious writer who is funny sometimes, while others saw him as a humorist who sometimes is deep and thoughtful. Critics who regard him as a comic writer hold varied opinions of him, their views ranging from “Bellow is a minor comic novelist” to “Bellow is surely one of the great modern metaphysical comedians.” Similarly, critics vary in their opinion of him regarding his ethnic and cultural loyalties. Almost all Bellow scholars agree that he is a champion of western humanism, but some trace his “humanistic outlook” to Greek, European or Christian sources, while others relate it to his Jewish upbringing.

“Appearing after Hitler’s attempted obliteration of humanism, Bellow’s works strive to reestablish the foundations of society by reaffirming the world’s need for morality, for the return to the humanism of Judaism,” says Goldman. Bellow believes that every individual knows right and wrong and considers himself as a medium for guiding and leading “this individual in the proper direction. Bellow’s works are polemical tracts that follow certain definitive axial lines of Jewish thought, especially in the presentation of God, man, and the universe.” (Cronin and Goldman 53) God is supreme and man
occupies a position below the angels. His characters do not “speculate about the nature of God” nor do they “attempt to prove his existence.” They simply accept the presence and the will of God and go on with their lives in spite of all kinds of difficulties that they face.

The Bellow protagonist views life as a gift from God and does everything to preserve it. “Bellow’s protagonists opt for life. Hounded by terrifying beasts, either of the soul or of the flesh, either Spirits of the Alternative, reality instructors, bitchy women, black thieves or WASP demons, they nevertheless overcome such traumas and move on with their lives.” (Cronin and Goldman 54) His heroes are immature, masochistic, sadistic and “anti-social,” characters difficult to create, “men who are convincingly good and interesting because of it.” Saul Bellow consistently grew as a writer and it has been observed by James Atlas that he’s probably the only one among living American novelists to show a “clear line of development” and “a steady increasing confluence of intellectual power with the more sheerly joyous aspects of narrative art.” Saul Bellow has grown and matured as an artist with every new book of his. Beginning with the “skeletal Dangling Man” in 1944, he went on to write maturer and more artistically stronger works like The Victim, The Adventures of Augie
March, Seize the day, Henderson the Rain King, Herzog, Mr. Sammler’s Planet and Ravelstein among others. Atlas sums it up beautifully, announcing that Bellow has progressed from being a “promising writer to an interesting writer to an exciting writer to a major writer” through these years. He went on to win the Nobel Prize in 1976 and continued writing until shortly before his death in the year 2005 at the age of eighty nine, to be remembered as the “last giant” of American Literature. Let us take a look at Saul Bellow’s major works:

Bellow’s first published work, a short story entitled Two Morning Monologues (1941) was “prophetically” entitled, as all his work is in the monologue form. Tony Tanner observes that “from his earliest stories to his latest novel, has presented us with a series of monologists whose most vital conversation is with themselves.”

Bellow’s rich immigrant linguistic heritage evidenced itself from his very first novella-sized fiction, Dangling Man (1944). The book garnered more than favorable reviews from the American critics like Chamberlain, Fearing, Irving, and Schorer, as well as British and European critics O’Brien, Le Sidaner, and Hale. (Cronin, Remembering)
Bellow’s first novel, *Dangling Man* was published in 1944. Written in diary format, it was deplored by critics for lacking a definite plot and being “too linear in its movement” on one hand and hailed for its style, language and originality on the other. *Dangling Man* is significant as a first novel because it sets the tone for all of Bellow’s upcoming work, by introducing to us, the themes, thoughts and ideas that were going to dominate the whole body of Saul Bellow’s fiction. Bonnie Lyons elaborates, “within its pages one finds the inherited intellectual and emotional starting point and the dialectical roots of all Bellow’s later work.” (Lyons)

His attitude towards sex and women also becomes evident and we can comprehend that “Bellow does not see in sexuality a significant way out of the self, or the healing, connecting aspects of marriage,” says Lyons. The novel also “adumbrates the nags, bitches, and sex-pots of his later work,” he further adds. Revolving around the life of an unemployed young man named Joseph, living in Chicago and waiting to be drafted, the diary brings to us, his philosophical and confessional reflections. He is “remarkable because he has the strength (and it is his only strength) to keep his eyes open and his mind awake to the quality of his experience.” In the interregnum of civilian and
army life, he feels frustrated and tries to alienate himself. The “early sections of *Dangling Man* establish an extreme polarity, a desperate choice between alienation and accommodation that is like choosing between death by drowning and death by hanging.” (Lyons)

As presented by Bellow, alienation is “anything but slyly comfortable superiority. There is increasing desperation in Joseph’s quest,” who experiences an “extraordinary spiritual longing” while listening to music, but rejects religious consolation because he believes that drowning reason in religious faith, would be “a great crime.” Moreover, there is no “suggestion of solidarity with the Jewish people, or hint of possible relevance of Jewish traditions,” (Lyons) in spite of the novel’s slightly Jewish atmosphere. Experts and critics vary in their opinion of the great author’s first “apprentice novel.” On one hand, we have Delmore Schwartz complaining:

Bellow brushes over a number of dramatic possibilities, particularly those inherent in Joseph’s marriage relation and his rejection of financial success. The narrative is perhaps too spare in its use of detail and background. And the use of the journal as a form blocks off the interesting shift of perspective that could be gained by presenting Joseph through the eyes of some person
Nathan L. Rothman on the other hand, is highly impressed with Bellow’s mastery of style and language. He expresses his admiration of Bellow in the following words:

Saul Bellow is a writer of great original powers. Quite apart from the pressing interest of the material he has chosen for his book (a first novel, incidentally), he writes with obvious style and mastery, with a sharp cutting to the quick of language, with a brilliance of thought. This is a successful piece of work everywhere you examine it, and ought to be the herald of a fine literary career.

Going by these opinions, we can assume that while the novel fails in the emotional department, it is a triumph where brilliance of thought is concerned; or in James Mellard’s words;

*Dangling Man*, a lyrical record of a man’s inward transactions, thus gives an objective form to a consciousness engagement with the varied craters of the spirit. In that objective, patterned, and finally aesthetic form, Joseph acts as his own therapist—as Dostoevski’s underground man and Sartre’s Roquentin (of *Nausea*) had done, and as Ellison’s invisible man and Bellow’s
own Herzog were to do later. As Keith Opdahl has shown, Joseph works his way through serious social problems; as Tony Tanner suggests, he works his way through traumatic psychological problems; and as Howard Harper and Joseph Baim argue, he works his way through an essentially religious and intellectual crisis in his felt tension between reason and faith, the rational and the irrational. But most of all, Joseph completes an aesthetic object that can absorb his conflicts and purge him of them. Ultimately, it is not Joseph’s decision to enlist that is final; it is his recognition that his formal pattern is completed. And as Herzog at last stops writing his letters, Joseph puts down his pen and closes his diary.

Saul Bellow’s second novel, *The Victim* was published in 1947 and is considered, along with *Dangling Man*, an apprentice work. Both novels’ paranoid, nightmarish atmosphere connects them to the modernist alienation formula novel. The author later distanced himself from both these early works of his, calling “*Dangling Man* his M.A. and *The Victim* his Ph.D.” Leventhal in *The Victim*, like Joseph of *Dangling Man*, faces a conflict between the “imaginative and the rational.” Death chases him like a shadow and Allbee becomes a real
threat in much the same way as Joseph’s dreams of death had become real. “What takes place entirely within Joseph’s private world, however, forms in *The Victim* a complex psychological relationship between two characters.” Richard Match described *The Victim* as a novel of “anti-Semitism as it hits the Jew, and Mr. Bellow is to get at the problem on a level less tangible than the ‘restricted’ sign at a summer resort.”

With a devious “logic” that would do credit to *Mein Kampf*, Allbee had built his case against Leventhal. There was the time, at a half-forgotten party, when he, Allbee, had made a slighting reference to the Jews. That was why Leventhal hated him. The rest was pure Jewish malice. Leventhal must have gone to Allbee’s boss -- there was an interview on record -- undermined Allbee’s position, cost him his job. As a result, Allbee’s wife had left him and, while traveling South, been killed in an automobile accident. One thing had led to another, and clearly Asa Leventhal, the Jew, was to blame for everything. Leventhal was outraged, then incredulous. Never very sure of himself, he began to crack, to half-believe in his own guilt. Mr. Bellow makes the steps in his disintegration suffocatingly real. (Match)
Leventhal is scared. “Why me?” he asks. “One wonders how many Jews have asked themselves the same question since 1933,” reflects Match. The Victim tells the story of a Jewish man, Asa Leventhal, living in New York City, dealing with unpleasant childhood memories, job related insecurities, fear of anti-Semitism and above all, a nagging old acquaintance, Kirby Allbee, who claims to have been destroyed by him. Allbee, in a way, is a realization of all of Asa’s nightmarish dreams, a personification of his fears. The Victim is a “melting pot” novel, “covering several different moral and emotional systems—Jewish, Anglo-Saxon, Italian-American. And the races are constantly set against each other; each has his own suspicion of persecution,” observes Bradbury. Everyone is insecure. “Leventhal feels that there is a ‘black list’ against Jews, Allbee that there is a Jewish set-up, the marriage of Asa’s brother is disturbed by its mixed strains. Nobody knows his place, for there is no class system; no promises are made in advance. All feel isolated and detached and alienated.” (Bradbury)

The book is set then in a densely realized society. The city is New York, the persons are largely low-grade professionals, the action takes place in offices, apartments, bars and cafes—places detached from much association, and permitting only tenuous
relationships. The city, its heat (“On some nights New York is as hot as Bangkok,” – the novel begins), the crowds and the general abrasiveness of urban existence dominate the book; and in this context life is a rough, competitive struggle not only with other persons but with impersonal forces – with the subway doors that close upon one as one gets out of the train, as we find Leventhal doing as the novel opens. Leventhal is the lonely man in the crowded city, the man for whom the presence of so many other people is a permanent threat, as it must seem to anyone in the highly competitive bourgeois world to which he belongs. (Bradbury)

The title is ironic as it refers to Allbee, the “self-styled victim,” an anti-semite, who confronts his Jewish victimizer and facing each other, the two are faced with their own selves as if each is the mirror-image of the other. Asa’s problem is his pride, which is the opposite of true dignity, while Allbee’s is his inability to accept responsibility for failure. Their “opposite problems define their characters and contain their solution. This is the crux of the book, the wit of it and the wisdom of it.” (Farrelly) Every man is responsible for others and “each man is everyman. All-Be: in touching Allbee, Asa touches all of
humanity; indeed he becomes all of humanity.” (Clayton 164-165) By the end of the novel, he learns to “conquer the anxieties that paranoia, anger, and self-isolation produce in him” and admits his “dependency on love and friendship, as well as his moral and social responsibility to others.” Wisdom, as almost always in Bellow, comes from the “Jewish past, or at least a non-American past.” Bellow “merges dream and Holocaust imagery to delineate the Nazi dementia which Jewry had recently suffered and survived. Allbee’s aborted attempt to gas himself and Leventhal is a powerful Bellovian parody of Germany’s sinister ‘Final Solution to the Jewish Question,’ the gas chambers and ovens of Treblinka, Chelmno, and Auschwitz.” (Kremer)

Bellow’s third published novel and his ticket to success, The Adventures of Augie March “established its creator on the national literary map.” This “great comic novel, full of Yiddishisms and jazz riffs, about an ebullient, uninhibited striver trying to break out of the Depression,” won the 1954 U.S. National Book Award for Fiction and got listed in the hundred best novels both by the Time magazine and the Modern Library Board. “While the earlier novels (or novellas) draw on the Bible, Camus, Sartre, Jewish Humanism, Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, and European modernist philosophy, as does Seize the Day
(1956), it is *The Adventures of Augie March* through which Bellow finds his own post-World War II American voice and picaresque sprawling style.” (Cronin, Remembering)

*The Adventures of Augie March* is not significant only because it brought recognition to its creator, but also because it “brought Jewish fiction to the center of the cultural stage,” which was “largely the result of a transformed Jewish hero,” animated by self-confidence and opposition. But Richard Pearce claims that it was Bellow’s “Americanization of the Jewish hero” that contributed most to the success of this book. “The urge to claim him as universal was an expression of our nascent imperialism, not to mention our need for new markets.”

He complainingly attributes the success of this book to the fact that it “perpetuated a role that was only available to white, acceptable-looking men.” Pearce observes that “Bellow’s richly populated world contains no blacks, hispanics, or orientals, let alone native Americans” and Augie “is a white male, who looks more like a Hollywood star than someone rooted in the Jewish ghetto of Chicago,” whose “rebellion never threatened the established norms of writing, thinking, or acting.”
Written in the picaresque style, it tells the story of a “Chicago-born” American, struggling to find success in an alienating world. He is an idealist dreamer who remains unfazed by the difficulties that come his way and unaffected by the instructions and advice of his friends and relatives, “the reality instructors.” What makes Augie unique as an adventurer is his “codelessness.” He is a “character made for the random shocks and aimless corners of experience,” but this “aimless ruck of experience” leads him toward philosophy. “That is, the aimless ruck had a shape, after all, and the shape is not that of Augie’s life but of Saul Bellow’s mind. Without that shape, and the shaping mind, we would have only the limited interest in the random incidents.” (Warren)

According to R. W. B. Lewis, *The Adventures of Augie March* belongs to the tradition of the earlier American Adamic myth and Augie fits in with the nineteenth century Adams because he is youthful, innocent, optimistic, and adventurous like them. “But rather than envisioning paradise as the fulfillment of the American dream Augie envisions paradise as an escape from modern American dilemmas,” claims Steven M. Gerson. Thus, we can call him “a modern American Adam whose personality has been shaped by
twentieth-century honors.” And just as Eve brought about the Biblical Adam’s fall, Thea Fenchel brings Augie down. Defeated and broke, he loses his original enthusiasm and innocence after they drift apart in Mexico and end their relationship. “Though Augie and Thea never get back together, his dreams of paradise continue” (Gerson) and in spite of all his traumatic experiences, the novel ends with Augie “grinning again.”

While Patrick Morrow thinks that Augie’s “good-natured grin” at the end of the novel indicates his acceptance of the world as it is and a beginning of accommodation, Ihab hassan points out that the novel offers “no proper ending.” “Augie remains, like Huck, uncommitted, suspended, as it were, between native innocence and hard-earned knowledge, poised for the next adventure which, though it may not actually repeat a former escapade, guarantees no final knowledge or repose,” Hassan adds. Augie “chooses to ignore reality and live in dreams; he fails to adapt to the world.” (Gerson)

In 1956 came Seize the Day. This Bellow novella was published along with three short stories and a one-act play in a collection entitled Seize the Day after the novella that outshone its companions in brilliance of execution and impact. Bellow is considered to have
attained full maturity as an artist with this work. The three short stories as also the novella and the one-act play had previously been published in periodicals and the reason why they were collected in one collection remains obscure as there is not much in common between the five. *Seize the Day* is way ahead of its companion pieces and none of the stories, nor the play match its brilliance.

*Seize the Day* depicts one day in the life of Tommy Wilhelm when he is completely shattered and “shorn of the conventional badges of identity. Jobless, separated from his wife, unable to marry his mistress, in conflict with his aged father, Tommy is about to founder in the heavy seas of his financial and emotional obligations.” (Baker) He is desperately trying to compensate for his financial “losses by gambling his last seven hundred dollars,” under the guidance of Dr. Tamkin, “a crazy, fraudulent psychologist.” Alongside, he is trying to understand his life till now and make sense of it. Finally at a stranger’s funeral, he breaks down and attains purgation, “moving from pity of self to perception of self.”

He realizes the importance of life itself, the value of simply being alive. “But the action of ‘Seize the Day,’ so badly stated, conveys nothing of the work’s concentrated power; it is all in the
telling. Bellow has at last gained control of his never-questioned force: in earlier work he seemed unable to resist the temptation to digress, but here Bellow has piled scene upon scene, image upon image, building a marvelous focused crescendo that leaves the reader nearly as shattered as Wilhelm” (Baker) and the novella’s abrupt ending leaves him as perplexed as ever.

This is a puzzling ending, for it leaves any reader habituated to the traditional dramatic rhythm of purpose-passion-perception, dangling. Where is the perception phase, the clarification? The novel gives a strong sense of preparation and struggle building up to the climax at the stranger’s funeral, but just when one expects the falling action to unravel and explain, the book ends. (Raper)

And this is not the first time a Bellow novel ended abruptly, critics have complained time and again that “his books don’t end, they just stop” and rightly so. Here Robert Baker comes to his defense claiming that this flaw in Bellow arises from his greater devotion to character than to plot. “With his avowal that ‘character is fate,’ sheer plot, the arrangement of events, has a diminished importance,” asserts Baker. Herbert Gold on the other hand advocates the theory of self
discovery and a “triumph of perception,” insisting that “there is a redeeming power in self-knowledge, and a redeeming pleasure. Purged of hopelessness, Wilhelm can go on to some sort of self-determination in the world.” (Gold)

Jerrald Ranta has observed a religious undertone and hidden Jewish references in the novella. According to Ranta, Bellow has used the “bi-calendric double-vision in telling Wilhelm’s story,” but in a “veiled manner” so that he could realistically present the Jewish-American experience without making it appear “a purely Jewish-American or a purely Jewish story. It is sufficient that there is a strong, possible, religious significance about the ‘day of reckoning’.” According to Ranta’s calculations in the article *Time in Bellow’s ‘Seize the Day,’* the day must be Sivan 6 and as per the Jewish calendar, time that has just come to an end in the story is, Sefirah. Ranta further emphasizes, “Ironically, Wilhelm’s life is informed by a religious code, perhaps absorbed from his mother, of which he is apparently largely unconscious - and now all is focused on a holy day that he is unable to ‘seize.’” The unconscious plays a major role in *Seize the Day.* In fact, according to Ranta, “Bellow is suggesting that the unconscious functions not only as a source and a repository, but also
as a kind of timing mechanism, a clock. Unconsciously, Wilhelm the actor acts out his own ironic version of Sefirah and Shavu’ot.”

Published in 1959, Bellow’s own favorite amongst his books, recommended for the 1960 Pulitzer Prize and ranked 21 on Modern Library’s hundred best novels, *Henderson the Rain King* remains his most popular work. The comical adventures of Henderson interspersed with serious philosophical discourse lend a uniqueness to the book that makes it extraordinarily popular among readers and critics alike. It is a Bildungsroman and a romantic novel packed with a whole range of symbols and metaphysical discussions. Interestingly, a week before the book’s publication, Bellow published an article in the New York Times, entitled “The Search for Symbols, a Writer Warns, Misses All the Fun and Fact of the Story,” warning the readers not to look too deep into a work of fiction, otherwise they’d fail to enjoy the book looking for symbols and hidden meanings in it and everyone wondered why he did it just before the publication of a symbol-packed book.

It is the story of Henderson, a Jewish man in his fifties, dissatisfied with life and looking for answers to his questions. His heart repeats incessantly, “I want, I want, I want,” yet knows not what
it wants. He has a wife, kids, a family, a rich background, but he is dissatisfied and wants something else. He goes on an African Safari to see if there he may encounter at last “the hour that burst the spirit’s sleep.” Romilayu, his guide, takes him to the Arnewi Village, where he meets “Willatale, the Woman of Bittahness, who recognizes in him ‘Grun-tu-Molani’ which she translates as ‘Man wants to live,’ only his spirit of destruction has followed him and when he tries to rid the village cistern of its plague of frogs he wrecks the whole cistern (that terrible image of water spilt and gone to waste in the desert).” (Desai) As a result, he has to leave the village without getting to learn anything from Willatale. His dreams shattered, he travels on and destiny takes him to the Wariri tribe, where he meets their king, Dahfu, who makes him Sungo, the Rain King, and takes him to a den “beneath the palace to meet Atti, his spirit-lion.”

King Dahfu has long philosophical discussions with Henderson and tells him once, “You are related to all. The very gnats are your cousins. The sky is your thoughts. The leaves are your insurance, and you need no other. There is no interruption all night to the speech of the stars.” (HRK 266) Henderson confesses to him; “King, I am a Becomer. Now I see your situation is different. You are a Beer. I’ve
got to stop Becoming. Jesus Christ, when am I going to Be? I have waited a hell of a long time.” (HRK 191) He hopes to learn a lot from King Dahfu, but loses him to death, finding himself in a trap that he escapes, carrying the lion cub supposedly embodying the dead king’s spirit.

King Dahfu is surrounded by enemies on all sides and therefore, he gets drawn towards Henderson, a simple stranger. He opens up to him, talking “intimate and low, of a variety of things” unknown to Henderson. Hurt by his surroundings, he says that he had a feeling that “there is a law of human nature in which force is concerned. Man is a creature who cannot stand still under blows. Now take the horse – he never needs a revenge. Nor the ox. But man is a creature of revenges. If he is punished he will contrive to get rid of the punishment. When he cannot get rid of punishment, his heart is apt to rot from it.” (HRK 213) He believes that everybody still feels the primeval blows, the first “supposed to be struck by Cain.” Since then, all want to “rid themselves and free themselves and cast the blow upon the others.” Henderson is astonished to hear that the king meant, “the soul will die if it can’t make somebody else suffer what it suffers.” He tries to convince Dahfu that “there are some guys who can return good for
“evil” and makes the Wariri king confess that he too thought that “the noble will have its turn in the world.” (215)

During his stay in Africa, Henderson notes that the tribals share a very different relationship with nature than him. He raised pigs and they raise cattle, but “unlike him, they do not raise their animals with an eye toward their domination, castration and consumption.” (Muhlestein) They love them and treat them as family. They are closer to nature and hence God. “Queen Willatale in particular appears to have a direct connection to the cosmos. When the queen presses Henderson’s hand between her breasts, he feels the calm pulsation of her heart ‘as regular as the rotation of the earth,’ as though he were ‘touching the secrets of life’.” (Muhlestein)

_Henderson the Rain King_ is another of his contemplative works and is only an extension of his favourite theme of “the perception of reality.” But with this novel, Bellow seems to stress that cultural differences are a mere illusion and man’s spiritual reality remains the same across cultures.

That an eminent member of the intellectual establishment, a college dean (_The Dean’s December_), arrives at a vision of
existence as ‘far out as the “daffy” African king’s (*Henderson the Rain King*) is itself telling. Bellow, having devised Dahfu’s colorful speech beneath the protective shade, and within the sheltering obscurity, of a mythical forest, has in subsequent novels brought his ‘primordial’ language to bear directly upon the iron realities of twentieth-century urban life. (Pifer 178)

According to Bellow, Eugene Henderson, of *Henderson the Rain King*, resembles him the most, out of all his characters.

Published in 1964, *Herzog* is believed to be Bellow’s most autobiographical novel. It relates Bellow’s own condition at being betrayed by his second wife Sondra, who left him for his own best friend Jack Ludwig. He trusted them both immensely and it was very difficult for him to take this double blow. This book was not only a rant, a pouring out, but also a way of healing as well as his revenge upon Sondra, Jack and those who took his enemies’ side instead of his. Bellow, in writing this novel, angered many including his lawyer and psychiatrist, whom he blames of betraying his trust because Madeleine made them fall in love with her. In fact, Jack Ludwig was the only man happy at becoming part of a Bellow novel, inspiring a character in it. Bellow had announced in advance that he would ‘fix’ Ludwig by
sticking him into his new novel. “By the time, I’m through with him, he’ll be laughed right out of the literature business,” he proclaimed. Atlas writes:

Ludwig had so many irons in the fire, Bellow joked, that he didn’t know which one to burn himself with. But the main object of satire was himself. “I thought in Herzog I was having a certain amount of fun at my own expense; or if not at my own expense, I was making fun of my own type. I was really taking Herzog at a moment of crisis and putting on and removing the masks he had used throughout his life: the scholar, the Jew, the husband, the father, the lover, the romantic avenger, the intellectual, all the rest of that.” Bellow had never been shy of plundering his experience for his books; in Herzog he had the audacity to put the most intimate details of his own life at the center of his art.

Later, Bellow confessed that he had done it in a rage and he was apologetic at insulting everyone. Sondra forgave him for this book just as Bellow had forgiven her affair with Ludwig, she said. Herzog was named one of the hundred best novels in the English Language since “the beginning of TIME” (1923-2005) and won the US National Book Award for Fiction and The Prix International. The novel is set in the
United States in 1964, and deals with the trauma of a wounded, cuckolded and tormented middle-aged man, Moses Elkanah Herzog, who is anguished at being divorced to his second wife, Madeleine, whom he refers to as Mady most of the time, evoking a sense of madness in her.

Daniel Fuchs writes in his essay on Herzog that like his other characters, Mady too is “rather clear in the novelist’s mind from the outset. Her name, a variation of ‘mad,’ is of a piece with the broad, comic nomination of the book, and more part of its essential gaiety than the stately ‘Juliana,’ which was Herzog’s divorced wife’s name in an earlier version of the book.” (143) Fuchs further says, “She undergoes, however, little heightening in revision. Some of her grosser qualities are purged.” (143) So that means Bellow was getting cured in the process of writing this novel, venting out his frustration, just like Herzog does in this novel, or as Joseph does in Dangling Man.

Consider this early description by Herzog: “Dr. Edvig said my violence bullied people but come to think of it he didn’t say what was the object of her smashing of china, clawing books, flinging a tureen of stew and a whole watermelon at my head” (B. 18. 11, 44). In the novel Mady’s hysteria falls this side of
Gargantua. Her demolition of the car (B. 18. 15) is also dropped. Though her toughness of language is developed rather than diminished in the revisions, an occasional excess of gaminess is corrected. When Herzog asks her whether she was mixed up with Val, she says, “with the one leg? With the stench he leaves behind him in the toilet. I could never have anything to do with a man whose shit smells like that” (B. 18. 18. 27of.). This is more effective in the novel, coming as it does from the outraged Herzog. Besides, her contempt for Herzog must stand out in bold relief. (Fuchs 143)

At forty seven, Herzog is fighting a torturous second divorce, separated from both his children, one from each marriage, and a floundering career. “Not that long disease my life, but that long convalescence, my life. The liberal-bourgeois revision, the illusion of improvement, the poison of hope.” (H 4) He is in a relationship with Ramona, one of his students, vibrant and extremely sensuous, his sole source of comfort, but he is avoiding her because she wants commitment and he is not ready for another marriage yet. His second marriage, to the difficult, controlling and scheming Madeleine, has recently crashed and he is yet to recover from the shock and
humiliation of the divorce and betrayal.

While she is still married to Herzog, the manipulative and demanding Madeleine convinces him to move her along with their daughter June to Chicago. She also makes him arrange for his best friend, Valentine Gersbach and his wife Phoebe, to shift there and secure a good job for Valentine. She is actually fooling her husband so that she gets more personal time with her secret lover, Valentine and the unsuspecting and clueless Herzog fulfils his wife’s every wish. He has no idea of what is going on behind his back and when his friend Lucas Asphalter tells him, Herzog feels shocked and suffocated. After some time, Madeleine secures a restraining order against Herzog, banning him from entering the area where she lives. Herzog, in his anger decides to kill Valentine and Madeleine, but when he reaches there, he sees Valentine very lovingly bathing his daughter Junie and his anger is subsided.

*Herzog* is largely an autobiographical novel, featuring his bootlegger father, second wife Sondra and his best friend Jack Ludwig among others. Herzog too is like Bellow himself, a Jew born and brought up in Canada, to immigrant parents coming from Russia. His first wife, a simple Jewish woman and their son, also appear in
Herzog’s memories as Daisy and Marco.

Herzog lives among ideas and takes a lot of pride in this fact. Later, Bellow confessed that he was attempting to prove that higher education had very little power to heal people or give them strength and sense to face life. “People don’t realize how much they are in the grip of ideas,” Bellow wrote. “We live among ideas much more than we live in nature.” Even though Herzog expresses brilliant ideas in his letters, he eventually comes to realize that his intellectual prowess was just another kind of bondage that he needed to release himself of. It is only after he gets in touch with the “primordial person” inside him, that he achieves “the experience of authentic being.”

The story is entirely narrated from Herzog’s point of view and we are trapped inside his head, “made captive in the world of Herzog ... the consciousness of the character forms the enclosing medium of the novel,” in Irving Howe’s phrase. The novel revolves around Herzog’s relations with family, friends, women, God, society and himself. He is healing as he is writing and with every passing day, his letters keep getting fewer and fewer, ultimately reaching a point where he feels no need to write any more letters. Now, he has started looking forward to a future with Ramona and is probably hoping for a settled
life. Talking of *Herzog*, Bellow once wrote:

Certain readers of *Herzog* complained the book was difficult. Much as they might have sympathized with the unhappy and comical history professor, they were occasionally put off by his long and erudite letters. Some felt that they were being asked to sit for a difficult exam in a survey course in intellectual history, and thought it mean of me to mingle sympathy and wit with obscurity and pedantry. But I was making fun of pedantry!… To finish with *Herzog*, I meant the novel to show how little strength “higher education” had to offer a troubled man. In the end he is aware that he has had no education in the conduct of life (at the university, who was there to teach him how to deal with his erotic needs, with women, with family matters?) and he returns, in game language, to square one - or as I put it to myself while writing the book, to some primal point of balance. Herzog’s confusion is barbarous. Well, what else can it be? But there is one point at which, assisted by his comic sense, he is able to hold fast. In the greatest confusion there is still an open channel to the soul. It may be difficult to find because by midlife it is overgrown, and some of the wildest thickets that
surround it grow out of what we describe as our education. But the channel is always there, and it is our business to keep it open, to have access to the deepest part of ourselves—to that part of us which is conscious of a higher consciousness, by means of which we make final judgments, and put everything together. (Bellow, Civilized)

Lauren Cardon has noticed that Herzog doesn’t directly speak of the Holocaust but “scattered allusions to the horrors of World War II surface in the narrative and the subtext” of his letters. “Through these images, Bellow establishes a parallel between Herzog’s experience of suffering and the condition of the modern world, still traumatized by the Holocaust,” asserts Cardon.

Herzog consistently visualizes his position within a larger context: as a family member among his immediate relations and ancestors, as an American citizen within his country, and as a Jew among the community of Jewish people. Andrea Mannis poignantly draws the connection between Herzog’s suffering and the suffering of the post-Holocaust world: “With his use of the words ‘survivor’ and ‘witness,’ Herzog uses what have become Holocaust terms to describe his own plight. He uses
these terms metaphorically to render a modernist despair that he believes mirrors his own.” Mannis argues that the language of Herzog’s letters illuminates society’s glorification of suffering, typified in the valorization of Christ and the crucifixion, and the nihilism of Nietzsche and his contemporaries. (Cardon)

Herzog condemns both nihilism and the glorification of suffering as he believes that the fundamentals of Nazism are provided by nihilism, and he blames Christianity for promoting suffering. “I don’t agree with Nietzsche that Jesus made the whole world sick, infected it with his slave morality,” says Moses. He claims that “Nietzsche himself had a Christian view of history, seeing the present moment always as some crisis, some fall from classical greatness, some corruption or evil to be saved from. I call that Christian.” Herzog reprobates “Christianity as much as nihilism for the modern condition because of its glorification of suffering and death. This illusion, Mannis argues, is dispelled by the Holocaust, which reveals the true horror of suffering and demonstrates a total lack of regard for any individual plight.” (Cardon) Herzog is hurt and disturbed by the total lack of sensitivity on the part of some humans who kill others for their petty selfish interests.
By asserting that those who died in the concentration camps “flow out in smoke from the extermination chimneys,” Herzog portrays the anonymity of suffering as it occurs in masses; it is so widespread that it is not noble but ordinary. The modern world, therefore, has learned the cost of becoming technologically and ideologically “advanced:” entire populations can be wiped out without a care for human value. (Cardon)

In fact, in his letter to Herr Nietzsche, he writes; “Humankind lives mainly upon perverted ideas. Perverted, your ideas are no better than those of the Christianity you condemn. Any philosopher who wants to keep his contact with mankind should pervert his own system in advance to see how it will really look a few decades after adoption.” (H 319) He claims that Madeleine too shares the views of Christianity and Nietzsche. “And Madeleine has it, all right. To some extent many of us do. Think we have to recover from some poison, need saving, ransoming. Madeleine needs a saviour, and for her I’m no saviour,” says a broken-hearted Herzog. He tells Nietzsche in his letter that he too agrees with him that “deep pain is ennobling, pain which burns slow, like green wood.” Herzog has suffered and learnt from his pain,
he has changed, modified into a better person than he has ever been. Throughout the novel, he is agitated and angry, writing letters in his mind and railing against almost everyone he knows. But this pouring out has a cathartic effect on him and he comes out purged of all evil and venomous thoughts. By the end of the novel, he has exhausted all his ill-feeling and frustration so that he has “no messages for anyone. Nothing. Not a single word.” (341)

In the year 1970, appeared *Mr. Sammler’s Planet*, Bellow’s first novel where he was consciously dealing with the Holocaust. Artur Sammler, a septuagenarian is immersed in the thoughts of a black pick-pocket as the novel opens. He is preparing coffee and reflecting;

In Poland, france, England, students, young gentlemen of his time, had been unacquainted with kitchens. Now he did things that cooks and maids had once done. He did them with a certain priestly stiffness. Acknowledgment of social descent. Historical ruin. Transformation of society. It was beyond personal humbling. He had gotten over those ideas during the war in Poland – utterly gotten over all that, especially the idiotic pain of losing class privileges. (MSP 4)
Even though he has his daughter Shula and niece Margotte, he prefers doing his routine work himself. It helps him feel young.

The routines he did himself. It was conceivably even part of his youthfulness — youthfulness sustained with certain tremors. Sammler knew these tremors. It was amusing — Sammler noted in old women wearing textured tights, in old sexual men, this quiver of vivacity with which they obeyed the sovereign youth-style. The powers are the powers — overlords, kings, gods. And of course no one knew when to quit. No one made sober decent terms with death. (MSP 5)

Being a thinking old man, he is tired of arguments and explanations. Everyone is busy explaining everything to others, still no one understands, no permanent solutions are worked out. “Intellectual man has become an explaining creature,” he says.

Fathers to children, wives to husbands, lecturers to listeners, experts to laymen, colleagues to colleagues, doctors to patients, man to his own soul, explained. The roots of this, the causes of the other, the source of events, the history, the structure, the reasons why. For the most part, in one ear out the other. The
soul wanted what it wanted. It had its own natural knowledge. It sat unhappily on superstructures of explanation, poor bird, not knowing which way to fly. (MSP 1)

Modern man does everything to satisfy the body, but the soul remains unsatiated. Coming closer to nature, is the solution Sammler suggests. Man will keep learning new things, inventing and discovering, he will keep growing, adding new versions of reality. “But the important consideration was that life should recover its plenitude, its normal contented turgidity ... To be nearer to nature was necessary in order to keep in balance the achievements of modern method.” (MSP 14) He blames the Germans for having been too methodical and systematic. “System demands mediocrity, not greatness,” he argues. “System is based on labor. Labor connected to art is banality. Hence the sensitivity of cultivated Germans to everything banal,” (14) Sammler goes on to say. He nurtures a natural hatred for Germany, the country that robbed a lot from him. But he loves Britain. Having spent “two decades in London as correspondent for Warsaw papers and journals,” Sammler is kind of an Anglophile. Sammler is a relic of the “lovely twenties and thirties when he lived in Great Russell Street, when he was acquainted with Maynard Keynes, Lytton Strachey, and H. G.
Wells, and loved British views.” (MSP 14)

His daughter, Shula Slawa had heard of her parents’ high connections as a young girl and uses the fact later, for her own advantage. When her father wants to leave because he finds his daughter too annoying to live with, she tells everyone that he is writing a memoir of H. G. Wells and that makes him unfit to live with. Her obsession with H. G. Wells does not end here. She steals a copy of a lecture from an Indian scientist and leaves it for her father with a note saying that it has affinities with the memoir. This fixation of hers amuses her cousin Angela Gruner, who asks Sammler if he really knew H. G. Wells, and he tells her that he found Wells’ company very pleasing and that “he was a sensible intelligent person, certainly on the right side of many questions.” (MSP 23) Sammler regards his daughter as an eccentric. “She seemed to know lots of rabbis in famous temples and synagogues” and “went to sermons and free lectures everywhere.”

Afterward she was the first to ask questions. She became well acquainted with the rabbi, the rabbi’s wife and family – involved in Dadaist discussions about faith, ritual, Zionism, Masada, the Arabs. But she had Christian periods as well.
Hidden in a Polish convent for four years, she had been called Slawa, and now there were times when she answered only to that name. Almost always at Easter she was a Catholic. (MSP 17)

The girl’s personality reflects a dichotomy and a little imbalance because of what she has suffered and the way her father tries to protect her from the thoughts and the reality of war. Gregory Bellow, Saul Bellow’s son wrote about Mr. Sammler:

Like my father, Mr. Sammler also fails to see certain things clearly. By the time we meet him, twenty years after the Holocaust, he suffers from several forms of blindness. First, despite barely surviving the Holocaust himself, he, like many Jews, kept both eyes closed to its evils. Second, Mr. Sammler suffers from physical blindness--a consequence of a Nazi rifle butt that put out one of his eyes. Finally, Mr. Sammler’s main form of blindness, one that he shares with my father, predates the Holocaust and is the self-imposed artifact of an overly optimistic political ideology.

He points out similarities between his father and Mr. Sammler;
“Let me turn to the specific intellectual and emotional overlaps that form junctions between my father and his main character, Artur Sammler. Both were led away from their identities as Jews,” taking pride in their American or English identities instead of Jewish ethnicity, only to be disillusioned later. “His Anglophilia begins as a source of pride, but as the novel progresses Mr. Sammler comes to view it with increasing disdain--finally concluding it to be a form of false vanity that blinded him to the danger posed by the Nazis . . . it was my father’s metaphor for his own youthful affinity with Marx and his Trotskyite idealism,” elaborates Gregory Bellow.

Just as Sammler is scared of a second Holocaust, Bellow too was, and Gregory says, “When I read Mr. Sammler’s account of his experiences as a war correspondent, I saw how the same phenomena the sights, the sounds, the smells of death and decay, and the fear of a potential second Holocaust--penetrated my father’s soul as no political argument or logical construct could ever do.” Saul Bellow kept on ignoring the real horrors of the holocaust till he himself went to Auschwitz, after which he confessed to his son that it really hurt him to think of what the Jews had suffered.

Similarly, Sammler evades the truth and avoids talking to his
daughter about it. He lives with her after her divorce for some time, but then he leaves. He lives with his wife’s neice and gets annoyed with her as well. “Margotte received payment from the West German government for her family’s property in Frankfurt,” though she had fled from Germany in 1937 before the war, whereas Sammler “had actually gone through it’ and lost his wife and his left eye. Worst of all, Margotte wants to discuss things with him like “Hannah Arendt’s phrase The Banality of evil.” He listens to her patiently for as long as he can stand, and then replies:

The idea of making the century’s great crime look dull is not banal. Politically, psychologically, the Germans had an idea of genius. The banality was only camouflage. What better way to get the curse out of murder than to make it look ordinary, boring, or trite. With horrible political insight they found a way to disguise the thing. Intellectuals do not understand. They get their notions about matters like this from literature. They expect a wicked hero like Richard III... Banality is the adopted disguise of a very powerful will to abolish conscience. Is such a project trivial? Only if human life is trivial. This woman professor’s enemy is modern civilization itself. She is only using the
Germans to attack the twentieth century – to denounce it in terms invented by Germans. (MSP 13-14)

Artur and shula were brought to the states in 1947 from a displaced-persons’ camp in salzurg by Arnold Gruner, his nephew, after he discovered their whereabouts from an article in the Yiddish papers. Elya’s daughter Angela, often visits Sammler and Sammler quite appreciates her as she “really was a beauty,” a “handsome, passionate, rich girl,” one of those “who were always an important social and human category.” He finds her very charming, even though he doesn’t approve of her short dresses. “She was big, but a beauty, a healthy young woman.” (MSP 248) Sammler found the girl very attractive and admired her a lot except for her sympathy for black criminals. He did not like the fact that she sent money to “defense funds for black murderers and rapists.”

Sammler himself, is tortured by the thoughts of a black pick pocket, about whom he informs the police, but in vain, as they tell him, “We haven’t got a man to put on the bus. There are lots of buses, Art, and not enough men. Lots of conventions, banquets, and so on we have to cover, Art. VIPs and Brass. There are lots of ladies shopping at Lord and Taylor, Bonwit’s and Saks’, leaving purses on chairs while
they go to feel the goods.” (MSP 9) Annoyed by his failure, Sammler fumes, “America!... Advertised throughout the universe as the most desirable, most exemplary of all nations.” (MSP 10) He feels like a fool for having rushed to inform the police of what he had seen on the bus.

The police were not greatly interested in the report. It had made Sammler feel like a fool to go immediately to a phone booth on Riverside Drive. Of course the phone was smashed. Most outdoor telephones were smashed, crippled. They were urinals, also. New York was getting worse than Naples or Salonika. It was like an Asian, an African town, from this standpoint. The opulent sections of the city were not immune. You opened a jeweled door into degradation, from hypercivilized Byzantine luxury straight into the state of nature, the barbarous world of color erupting from beneath. It might well be barbarous on either side of the jeweled door. (MSP 4)

Sammler is also dissatisfied with the young generation and gets impatient with them. “To judge by their reading ability, the young people had a meagre education ... Hairy, dirty, without style, levellers, ignorant.” (MSP 28) He is booed when he lectures at a seminar and a
young girl guides him, who “rushed up to express indignation and sympathy, saying it was a scandal to break up such a good lecture.” (MSP 34) Sammler is “not so much personally offended by the event as struck by the will to offend. What a passion to be real. But real was also brutal.” (MSP 34)

He makes his way to the bus and again finds the pickpocket, stealing from a man’s wallet. “It was at this moment that, in a quick turn of the head, he saw Mr. Sammler. Mr. Sammler seen seeing was still in rapid currents with his heart. Like an escaping creature racing away from him.” (MSP 37) Sammler gets off the bus, but is followed by the criminal. When he reaches home after being humiliated by the black pick pocket, he finds an annoying note and notebook containing “lectures on the moon by Doctor V. Govinda Lal,” left by his daughter for him. “They connect with the memoir,” her note says.

He is irritated by “his daughter’s single-minded, persistent, prosecuting, horrible-comical obsession,” but he opens the notebook, titled The Future of the Moon, and reads, “How long ... will this earth remain the only home of man?” And he reflects on the possibility: “To blow this great blue, white, green planet, or to be blown from it.” He starts looking at the prospects of a future for mankind on the moon.
too. Joshua Zajdman observes:

He is a social observer gravely concerned with the state of the world around him. His story is one of struggle. Mr. Sammler decides ‘to get a grip on New York, America’s financial capital and the pinnacle of the nation’s culture.’ It’s no accident that commerce and culture are so closely related. This is a great source of displeasure to Sammler. He is not pleased by the way ‘vulgarity and [the] brutal appetites of our culture’ are widening their reach. For the entirety of the novel, the cacophonous ‘sour trumpeting of decay’ can be heard, and Sammler is the red-cheeked Gabriel. He is a keen and observing mind housed in a nerve-damaged body, which is in turn housed in a brutal, unyielding but oddly compelling city ... Sammler suggests, ‘New York makes one think about the collapse of civilization, about Sodom and Gomorrah, the end of the world.’ This is the hardest realization for Sammler to swallow. This isn’t a syphilitic city, but a city bent on destruction. This is Sammler’s world. New York is Sammler’s Planet. If the end is near, perhaps it’s best to look with just one eye open.

Bellow’s first novel published after he received the Nobel Prize
in 1976, *The Dean’s December* is set in Chicago and Bucharest. Bellow originally intended to write a non-fiction work, encouraged by the success of *To Jerusalem and Back*, but after writing several pages of notes, he decided to write a novel. “I started to write a book about Chicago like my book on Israel, *To Jerusalem and Back*, but I found it much harder to do. I knew the Chicago that was, but not the Chicago that is. The Chicago of the 20’s and 30’s was pretty much wiped out,” Bellow told Herbert Mitgang in an interview. The protagonist of the novel, Albert Corde is dean of a Chicago college, who has received some violent and angry responses to his scathing articles on city corruption. He is also upset by a white student’s murder by two blacks and is attacked as being racist and a “civic minded fool” by his opponents for his involvement in the trial.

One of Corde’s respected colleagues at the college, Sam Michaels, had observed, “There’s less and less connection between blacks and whites. In the past, in spite of the silent war, there was a connection. Now the blacks don’t want it, don’t seem to care for white relationships.” In Mason you saw an attempted reversal, a connection to be made on black terms. What terms were those? Lucas Ebry’s terms? They didn’t exist.
Unreal! Young Mason’s idea of boldness put him in the servile position. Besides, Corde wrote, the effective black “image” had been captured by the black gangs, the Rangers and the El Ruskins, and the outlaw chieftains—black princes in their beautiful and elegant furs, boots, foreign cars. They controlled the drug trade. They ruled in the prisons. For young blacks, of all classes, even perhaps for young whites, they provided a powerful model. But Ridpath had nothing to do with images, image-making. (DD 149)

While investigating black crime, Corde meets Beech, who informs him about the role of lead in causing criminal tendencies.

Chronic lead insult now affects all mankind. Biological dysfunctions, especially observable in the most advanced populations, must be considered among the causes of wars and revolutions. Mental disturbances resulting from lead poison are reflected in terrorism, barbarism, crime, cultural degradation. Visible everywhere are the irritability, emotional instability, general restlessness, reduced acuity of the reasoning powers, the difficulty of focussing, et cetera, which the practiced clinician can readily identify.’ Sadly, the dangers of lead were very little
understood and needed to be taken care of. ‘Three industrial centuries had vastly increased the mining and smelting of lead, and the unavoidable dispersal of lead in air, water, soil, was a danger too little understood. (DD 138)

Bellow told Michiko Kakutani in an interview, “I think I’m speaking out quite frankly about the deterioration of life in American cities (in this book), and I wouldn’t be surprised if I drew some flack. But if you’ve told yourself all your life that you’re a friend of the truth, there comes a time when you must put up or shut up. They’re not going to be able to shrug this one off, though there are some very powerful shruggers around.” From all these troubling circumstances, he gets a temporary relief when he has to go to Bucharest to visit his dying mother-in-law, Valeria. There he compares the “corruption and inhumanity of communism” in Bucharest to the “rotting, doomed cityscapes of Chicago” and vents his fury at the “mayhem and carnage” of the modern world.

His mother-in-law’s political connections and rivalries from the past cause trouble for Corde and his wife, Minna as they are not allowed to meet her as often as they would. Minna is an astrophysicist, kept away from any kind of political influence by her mother, who had
suffered the tortures of a political life. “She sent her daughter directly into cosmic space. Nothing but particle physics, galaxies, equations. Minna had never read the *Communist Manifesto*, had never heard of Stalin’s Great Terror.” (DD 65) Corde was scared of his mother-in-law who he thought could read his “worst thoughts” and knew about his “instability, weakness, vices.”

Bellow created a unique fictional world “animated by an acutely moral imagination” and inhabited by “assorted cranks, conmen and fast-talking salesmen of reality” who hound and incite his heroes, whether poor Herzog or Eugene Henderson, “that absurd seeker of higher qualities,” or septuagenarian Mr. Sammler or dean Albert Corde. All his heroes are “caught in the middle of a spiritual crisis,” tortured by sights of worldliness and “frightened by the stubborn fact of death.” They are not too optimistic nor do they despair; they are deep thinkers who tend to ponder over “the bigscale insanities of the 20th century.” Michiko Kakutani notes that Bellow “sees the novelist as ‘an imaginative historian, who is able to get closer to contemporary facts than social scientists possibly can.’”

But while the madness of the modern world, manifested in everything from sexual profligacy to random violence, has
always reverberated in his characters’ lives - a phenomenon that became more pronounced in ‘Mr. Sammler’s Planet’ -specific public issues have remained largely in the background. With “The Dean’s December,” such matters as oppression in Eastern Europe, the plight of the American “underclass,” student militancy and the deterioration of life in American cities are more directly addressed... Mr. Bellow says he realized after writing “To Jerusalem and Back,” an account of his 1975 trip to Israel, that “it was as easy to write about great public matters as about private ones - all it required was more confidence and daring.” The winning of the Nobel Prize in 1976 no doubt provided some of that necessary confidence, and he made plans to write a nonfiction book about Chicago. After making hundreds of pages of notes, however, he decided to abandon that approach and write a novel. (Kakutani, A Talk)

There is a longing for connection in Corde, who shifted to Chicago some years back only so that he could find people to talk to, the right kind of people to talk to.

Even Corde’s name serves to convey his urgent quest for connection: the “cord” that binds him to all that he sees and the
heart—“cor” in Latin—that registers this connection. In the writings of Aquinas, Owen Barfield points out, “verbum cordis” signifies the “inner, unspoken word” within each person, which is directly related to the word (vox) that is actually “vocalized.” It is Corde’s own, unspoken sense of connection – the “verbum Cordes,” if you will – for which he (and his author behind him) seeks a viable language, or voice. (Pifer 166)

Ironically, the Corde who had gone to Chicago looking for company, now finds relief in the isolation of Bucharest.

Arriving in Bucharest in a state of exhaustion, Corde welcomes his sudden isolation; it gives him the chance to reflect on a recent storm of publicity at home, brought on by a couple of articles on Chicago that he wrote for Harper’s magazine. Charged with apocalyptic images of decay and disaster, his depiction of his native city has incited just about everyone who is anyone in Chicago, including the Provost of his college. The violence of the “black underclass,” Corde wrote, is actually condoned by a social and economic establishment that has failed “to approach” – seek real contact with – this population. White middle-class society hasn’t even conceived that reaching it may be a problem.
So there is nothing but death before it. The communication gap is filled by drugs, crime, sexual assault; they are the means by which a doomed population speeds the tortuously slow process of its own extinction. Adding to the public displeasure with Corde and to his own administrative headaches is a murder trial; two blacks have been accused of killing a white student at his college. The Dean’s December in Rumania is complicated, therefore, by transatlantic calls from the Provost and encounters with an old schoolfriend, Dewey Spangler – a celebrated newspaper columnist whose curiosity is provoked by the “visionary” tone of Corde’s *Harper’s* articles.

As Corde’s attention shifts between immediate events in Rumania and troubling developments at home, Bellow juxtaposes the worlds of Bucharest and Chicago, past and present, East and West. The comparisons drawn between these far-flung cities begin with the weather: “No more sun, that was gone, only linty clouds and a low cold horizon. . . . It was like the Chicago winter, which shrank your face and tightened your sphincters.” Even when Corde allows for the geographical, historical and political differences between the communist and capitalist cities, he is drawn to contemplate a deeper affinity: “If the cold reminded you of Chicago, the faces [in
Bucharest] were from the ancient world. But then in Chicago you had something like a vast international refugee camp, and faces from all over.” (Pifer 166-167)

*To Jerusalem and Back*, his first non-fiction work was published in 1976, the same year as he received the Nobel Prize. It is an account of his visit to Israel in the mid-1970s. While enjoying the landscape and culture of Israel, Bellow records the opinions, passions and dreams of Israelis of varying viewpoints including those of Yitzak Rabin, novelist Amos Oz, a magazine editor Kibutznik, Sholem Kahn, a faculty of the Hebrew University, Chaim Gouri, a poet and Journalist, Professor Werblowsky, Bellow’s barber and several others. The relations between the Arabs and Jews, America’s attitude towards Israel and the Israeli’s own take on everything has been recorded in this interesting narrative. Bellow wrote to Cynthia Ozick in a letter dated, June 15 1989:

The only non-fiction book I ever published, and it’s not likely to have a successor, was the Jerusalem one. I felt it had to be done, but then it was something I could do on my own terms without conferences, luncheons, speeches and appeals to the press to publicize my position. I can’t believe that either alternative
(Politics, No Politics) answers the one truly significant question. Because we are Jews we are scandalized, and being scandalized sets us apart – i.e. we have to be isolated by ‘everybody.’

*The Bellarosa Connection*, published in 1989, is along with *Mr. Sammler’s Planet*, Bellow’s most significant book related to the Holocaust. The Bellarosa Connection here, signifies on a surface level, Billy Roses Madison Square Garden benefit for the Jews of Europe, while at a deeper level, it considers the American Jewish response to European Jews’ experience during World War II. “As Bellow’s protagonist comes to grips with the past, his experience distances American Jewry’s position from that of its European counterparts. The book moves then to Israel in order to present the three major homelands of the World’s Jewry.” (Wikipedia)

It narrates the protagonist’s memories of interactions with the Fonsteins, especially Sorella Fonstein, Harry’s wife who goes to Billy Rose and blackmails him into meeting her husband whom he had rescued and saved from the Germans. The narrator’s father had great appreciation for the Fonsteins’ struggle and success, which he used as an example to make him realize how useless he was.
I could see why my father took to Fonstein. Fonstein had survived the greatest ordeal of Jewish history. He still as if the worst, even now, would not take him by surprise … I sized him up as a Central European Jewish type. He saw me probably, as an immature unstable Jewish American, humanly ignorant and loosely kind: in the history of civilization, something new in the way of human types, perhaps not so bad as it looked at first. (TBC 9-10)

Harry had struggled hard and his achievements were great in that regard.

To survive in Milan he had to learn Italian pretty damn quick. So as not to waste time, he tried to arrange to speak it even in his dreams. Later, in Cuba, he acquired Spanish too. He was gifted that way. In New Jersey he soon was fluent in English, though to humour me he spoke Yiddish now and then; it was the right language for his European experiences. (TBC 10)

As a result of this, he started getting interpreter jobs and once when Mussolini needed extra translators, he was sent for. “There was a reception for Hitler,” tells Fonstein.
“You mean you saw Hitler?”

“My little boy says it that way too: ‘My daddy saw Adolf Hitler.’ Hitler was at the far end of the grande salle.”

“Did he give a speech?”

“Thank God I wasn’t close by. Maybe he made a statement. He ate some pastry. He was in military uniform.”

“Yes, I’ve seen pictures of him on company manners, acting sweet.”

“One thing,” said Fonstein. “There was no color in his face.”

“He wasn’t killing anybody that day.”

“There was nobody he couldn’t kill if he liked, but this was a reception. I was happy he didn’t notice me.”

“I think I would have been grateful too,” I said. “You can even feel love for somebody who can kill you but doesn’t. Horrible love, but it is a kind of love.

“He would have gotten around to me. My trouble began with this reception. A police check was run, my papers were fishy,
and that’s why I was arrested.” (TBC 10-11)

Hitler was a terror so huge that if he did not kill people, they felt grateful to him and loved him for this favour. “In Fascist Rome, the child of her sister, her own flesh and blood, had seen Hitler at a reception. He was put in prison. There was no hope for him. Roman Jews were then being trucked to caves outside the city and shot. But he was saved by a New York celebrity.” (TBC 11) When Bellarosa refuses to meet or recognize Fonstein and behaves as if “Harry Fonstein never existed,” everyone wonders why. “Why, do you suppose? Afraid of the emotions? Too Jewish a moment for him? Drags him down from his standing as a full-fledged American?” (TBC 22) The protagonist tries to understand why his father is unhappy with him, especially his Americanization. The generation gap and difference of outlook between father and son is quite evident in the following lines:

I myself had wondered uncomfortably about the Americanization of the Jews. One could begin with physical differences. My father’s height was five feet six inches. To my father, this seemed foolishly wasteful somehow. Perhaps the reason was Biblical, for king Saul, who stood head and
shoulders above the others, was verrucht-demented and doomed. The prophet Samuel had warned Israel not to take a king, and Saul did not find favor in God’s eyes. Therefore a Jew should not be unnecessarily large but rather finely made, strong but compact. The main thing was to be deft and quick-witted. That was how my father was and how he would have preferred me to be. My length was superfluous, I had too much chest and shoulders, big hands, a wide mouth, a band of black moustache, too much voice, excessive hair; the shirts that covered my trunk had too many red and gray stripes, idiotically flashy. Fools ought to come in smaller sizes…

I didn’t agree, of course, with my father. We were bigger in my generation because we had better nutrition. We were, moreover, less restricted, we had wider liberties. (TBC 23)

In all, The Bellarosa Connection is a Jewish Holocaust narrative. Bellow’s last novel, Ravelstein was published in 2000 when Bellow was eighty-five years old. It is a “roman a clef” in memoir form. It tells the story of Ravelstein and Chick, two university professors, Ravelstein being the fictional name of the renowned Allan Bloom and Chick representing Bellow himself. The narrator is in Paris
with Abe Ravelstein, a renowned professor, and Nikki, his lover. Ravelstein is dying of AIDS and is a homosexual. Remembering Bloom in an interview, 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, great-souled. When critics proclaim the death of the novel, I sometimes think they are really saying that there are no significant people to write about. But ‘Allan was certainly one.’” (Wikipedia) *Ravelstein* is Bellow’s “most Jewish novel” according to Wilson.

There’s no confusion about the ethnic identity of Chick and Ravelstein: They brood fraternally on Jewish history, Jewish soul, the fate of Israel, the survival of the Jewish people despite Hitler’s efforts to wipe them off the map. Even more significant, Chick’s older brother is named Shimon, a notable alteration from *The Adventures of Augie March*, in which Augie’s brother is named Simon. (Atlas 598-99)

Many were angered by *Ravelstein* as Bellow’s disclosure of Allan Bloom’s secrets was termed as deceit and a breach of friendship on Bellow’s side. But Bellow claims that he had made a promise to Bloom that he would write this story. When Ravelstein asks Chick to
write a “Life of Ravelstein,” Chick says, “it was up to me to interpret his wishes and to decide just to what extent I was freed by his death to respect the essentials—or the slant given by my temperament and emotions to those essentials, my swirling version of them. I suppose he thought it wouldn’t really matter because he’d be gone, and his posthumous reputation couldn’t matter less.” (R 59-60)

Bloom had never spoken in favour of homosexuality in his life but Bloom and Ravelstein both believed that “sex—any sex—is a poor expression of Eros, but better than nothing at all.” Ravelstein once says;

Naturally there was a Greek word for it, and I can’t be expected to remember every Greek word I heard from him. Eros was a *daimon*, one’s genius or demon provided by Zeus as a compensation for the cruel breaking-up of the original androgynous human whole. I’m sure I’ve got that part of the Aristophanic sex-myth straight. With the help of Eros we go on, each of us, looking for his missing half. Ravelstein was in real earnest about this quest, driven by longing. Not everyone feels that longing, or acknowledges it if he does feel it. In literature Antony and Cleopatra had it, Romeo and Juliet had it. Closer to
our own time Anna Karenina and Emma Bovary had it,
Stendhal’s Madame de Rênal in her simplicity and innocence
had it. And of course others, untaught, untouched by open
recognition, have it in some obscure form. (R 82)

He was a neo-conservative and the “worst thing he could think
of to say about one of his academic antagonists was that he was ‘an
assiduous importer of the latest Paris fashions.’”

By this of course he meant an interest in Sartre or Althusser or
perhaps Foucault; it makes it all the funnier that when we first
meet ‘Ravelstein’ he is in Paris on a vulgar spree of
consumerism: Lanvin jackets, costly scarves, Lucullan
restaurants and hotel suites; if you’ve got it, baby, flaunt it.
Before too long there is a fast car with all the fixings being
ordered for ‘Nikki,’ the travelling companion, and we further
learn that Abe (Ravelstein’s seldom used first name) is en
rapport with at least some young blacks for his fashion sense
alone. By these signs, and a few others, Bellow makes it easy to
know what ‘Bloom’ never admitted in his paeans to the Greek
style: that for all his contempt for the counter-culture he was a
live-dangerously homosexual. (Hitchens)
Bloom was a disciple of Leo Strauss and the philosophical movement associated with Strauss “regards ‘sodomy’ as sterile and nihilistic, and as an unmanly betrayal of tribe and family.” Christopher Hitchens, in his review of Ravelstein, says that there was an attempt at anonymity in the first proof of the book, but “the chief point is allowed to survive its euphemisation: Allan Bloom died of AIDS, as was finally and reluctantly admitted by his admirers.”

Nor is this a detail. Bloom never mentioned the gay movement in his series of assaults on promiscuous Modernism. Throughout his posthumously published book, *Love and Friendship*, a rather superior effort to analyse Eros and agape from Alcibiades to Émile, he hoarded his own views on pederasty well on the other side of the closet door.’ He further says, ‘Thin though this novel may be, and perfunctory in keeping its commitment as the unwritten memoir that Bellow promised to Bloom in a moment of weakness, it does exemplify some of the stoicism of the neo-conservative mentality. (Hitchens)

Ravelstein is annoyed by the fact that American politics depends too much upon entertainment and intellect. The novel opens thus:
Odd that mankind’s benefactors should be amusing people. In America at least this is often the case. Anyone who wants to govern the country has to entertain it. During the Civil War people complained about Lincoln’s funny stories. Perhaps he sensed that strict seriousness was far more dangerous than any joke. But critics said that he was frivolous and his own Secretary of War referred to him as an ape. (R 1)

Ravelstein was very sensitive about these issues; “You know how television is: you can’t tell the wars from the NBA events-sports, superpower glamour, high-tech military operations.” (R 55) He keenly felt these things and “was here to give aid, to clarify and move, and to make certain if he could that the greatness of humankind would not entirely evaporate in bourgeois well-being, etcetera.” (R 53) Ravelstein had great respect for America and Jerusalem both. He showed special regard for the Pentagon and the bravery and loyalty of American soldiers. “He spoke with deep feeling about the American pilot shot down over North Vietnam who battered and bruised his own face, who deliberately broke his nose on the wall of his prison cell,” (R 56) when asked to denounce American imperialism. “President Bush had given the U. S. a military triumph,” (56) Ravelstein declared
and held the Black American servicemen in very high regard. He “felt himself deeply and vitally connected with Jordan, the artist. He used to say that basketball stood with jazz music as a significant black contribution to the higher life of the country – its specifically American character.” (R 56) He himself was seen by his students as the “intellectual counterpart of Jordan.”

Chick loved Ravelstein too much to let him go, but he knew he couldn’t do much about it. “You don’t easily give up a creature like Ravelstein to death,” (R 233) says Chick and thus ends the novel. Ravelstein is not shown dying, and Chick rather chooses to see this as a “pose, and to take literally Ravelstein’s expiring gags about a reunion beyond the grave,” which Hitchens along with many others sees as a “slight but significant breach of faith. Say what you will about the Straussians, they aren’t hypocrites or weaklings and they don’t burble about heavenly rewards to make up for when the mind has gone. Indeed, they have made rather a pointed study of the dignified hemlockian terminus. Bloom should have been allowed this last nobility.” (Hitchens) Followers of Leo Strauss were also unhappy with Bellow’s treatment of him as Ravelstein’s mentor, Professor Davarr. “Bellow treats Strauss as if he were like Anthony Powell’s
Sillery: no more than a don with a number of influential ex-pupils,” Hitchens complains.

Hitchens describes Ravelstein as a “hedonistic kvetch who manifests patience towards none.” Ravelstein was Bellow’s tribute to his late friend Allan Bloom, “author of the 1987 shocker, The Closing of the American Mind, in which Bloom argued that the American mind was closed because it had become so goddamned open – a nice deployment of paradox and a vivid attack on the relativism that has become so OK on campus these days,” says Hitchens. Bellow agrees with Bloom and his books forward this thought. Whatever the controversy, Bellow immortalized his dear friend and his relationship with him and not at all in a bad way, as his superior traits have been presented so beautifully that the faults and embarrassing facts about him become insignificant.

The Bellow hero in general, is an alienated individual, incompatible with the world around him. He is dissatisfied, insecure and unhappy, a lonely contemplative “in a society bristling with activity–an America dedicated to the glories of matter and motion.”

Bellow’s heroes are acutely conscious of their failure to warm
to this world of practical affairs and palpable profits. Still, they are defiantly protective of their right to ponder existence and plumb its mystery. Riddled with contrary emotions, Bellow’s protagonists, it is often observed, waver uneasily between alternate commitments – to action, fellowship and worldly self-assertion on the one hand and to stillness, contemplation and solitude on the other. (Pifer 1)

According to Pifer, this dichotomy arises from the Bellow hero’s tendency “to confuse reasoned analysis with metaphysical truth – and to uphold analytic methods as proof against the exigencies of spirit.” Pifer goes on to say, “In Bellow’s novels the densely woven background of historical and social fact, of physical event and psychological crisis, does not play back the old vision of ‘bourgeois realism’ or shelter in its cultural authority. Rather, this dense mimetic fabric constitutes the background against which a character discovers an entirely different order of fact: the ‘internal fact’ of revelation.” A psychic rift afflicts Bellow’s protagonists, who are all deeply divided in their perceptions, thoughts, attitudes and feelings. We can discern the operation of two different speeches in Bellow’s characters that he believes are “symptomatic of contemporary intellectual man and his
divided consciousness.”

‘Of course there are two different speeches’ operating in contemporary ‘head culture,’ Bellow candidly tells Robert Boyers. ‘There are the things you say, civilly, in polite society; and there are the things you say to yourself before you fall asleep. There are the people you bless and there are the prayers that you say to yourself which you wouldn’t say to anyone else.’

(Pifer 11)

The questions of real and ideal, true and false appeared early in his fiction. Joseph in his first novel, *Dangling Man* ponders over the “gap between the ideal construction and the real world, the truth?” Joseph’s feeling of strangeness, his sense of being a stranger to his surroundings, a feeling that he believes he shares with everyone, has been described by Bellow in the following words:

But for all that, Joseph suffers from a feeling of strangeness, of not quite belonging to the world, of lying under a cloud and looking up at it. Now, he says, all human beings share this to some extent. The child feels that his parents are pretenders; his real father is elsewhere and will some day come to claim him.
And for others the real world is not here at all and what is at hand is spurious and copied. Joseph’s feeling of strangeness sometimes takes the form almost of a conspiracy: not a conspiracy of evil, but one which contains the diversified splendors, the shifts, excitements, and also the common neutral matter of an existence. Living from day to day under the shadow of such a conspiracy is trying. If it makes for wonder, it makes even more for uneasiness, and one clings to the nearest passers-by, to brothers, parents, friends, and wives. (DM 30)

Joseph is not alone in this; all Bellow characters are strangers in their own world, unable to understand why they exist, what they want, what the world expects of them and how they can meet their soul’s demands and the world’s. They are alienated, psychotic, inquisitive characters, dissatisfied with what they have and unsure of what they want. Henderson is the most typical example of such a rift, whose heart keeps telling him, “I want. I want. I want,” and knows not what it wants. Out of agony and despair, he passes out often for apparently no reason at all. He in fact, finds this passing out relaxing and comforting to his ailing heart and mind.

Having been a stoic for so many years I am not skillful in
making my ailments sound convincing. Also, from much reading of medical literature I am aware how much mind, just mind itself, we needn’t speak of drink or anything like that, lies at the root of my complaints. It was perversity of character that was making me faint. Moreover my heart so often repeated, I want, that I felt entitled to a little reprieve, and I found it very restful to pass out once in a while. (HRK 164)

Psychically alternating between analysis and intuition, Sammler perceives reality in radically opposing terms. “Through analysis, moreover, he attempts psychologically to disengage himself from the world – and from the claims he intuitively knows it has upon him.” (Pifer 12) Sammler’s divided psyche and internal self-argument are clearly reflected in his “emotional relationships with others, in the things that happen to him and in the actions he takes.” (Pifer 11) His behavior and feelings towards everyone including his daughter are not unambiguous, and his coldness or even disgust at times with them can be attributed to his Holocaust experience. Mr. Sammler felt separated from the “rest of his species, if not in some fashion severed,” not because of his age but because he is absorbed with very different and remote ideas, “disproportionate on the side of the spiritual, Platonic,
Augustinian, thirteenth century.” (MSP 34)

In *Dangling Man*, Joseph wails, “It was a long time since a party, any party, had given me pleasure… You knew what to expect beforehand… You knew there was going to be mischief, distortion, and strain, and yet you went. And why? Because Minna had prepared a party; because your friends were going to be there. and they were coming because you were going to be there, and on no account must anyone be let down.” (DM 40) Everyone would come because the others should not be let down, though no one is entirely comfortable with the idea of this or any such get-together. Everyone is fulfilling worldly and societal obligations.

Herzog feels “someone inside” his head, a “little demon” and declares, “I am in his grip. When I speak of him I feel him in my head, pounding for order. He will ruin me.” (H 11) Bellow’s Dangling Man, Joseph once loses cool at finding out that Vanaker had stolen his socks, but before getting angry, he asks himself a question, “What can have inspired this theft of my worn socks?” (DM 126) and critics have tried to answer this question “by positing a symbolic relationship between the two men, whose alienation is mutual.”
Vanaker literally puts ‘himself in Joseph’s socks’ because, as M. Gilbert Porter says, he is Joseph’s ‘alter ego, a Conradian secret sharer.’ . . . Dostoevsky, whose influence on Bellow’s fiction is pervasive, created his Doppelganger effects to suggest the irrational configurations not only between disparate individuals but between opposing aspects of the self. Torn by contrary impulses of good and evil, love and hate, admiration and jealousy, power and fear, the soul is a force-field of conflicting desires unfathomable to plain reason or common sense. (Pifer 30-31)

A man can avoid everyone except himself, as Joseph says, “You can divorce your wife or abandon your child, but what can you do with yourself?” (DM 137) This feeling of being a stranger to the world, of not belonging, arises from various factors and several explanations have been presented by critics to understand this conflict in Bellow’s case.

Drawing on Western rationalist traditions, most commentators discern the conflict operating in Bellow’s novels as one between the self and the world, between the individual’s needs and society’s demands. Or, pressing a little further, they point to the
novelist’s occasionally ‘Platonic’ suggestion of a world of truth and value persisting beyond the ephemeral reality of appearances. Bellow’s own argument appears, more radically, to be with reason itself – or at least with the current hegemony of scientific rationalism that has driven religious modes of knowledge underground. Because the individual’s ‘internal beliefs’ have been virtually banished from the ‘polite society’ of received opinions’ and educated exchange, Bellow finds, as he tells Boyers, that ‘there’s really no language’ at the present moment in which to articulate the ‘secrets’ of the spirit. The volubility of ‘rationalistic talk’ has publicly drowned out, if not privately silenced, this ancient form of human utterance. (Pifer 12-13)

John J. Clayton on the other hand, makes a very important observation; “Saul Bellow’s defense of man has been made in the cultural confluence of two main streams: the Jewish experience and the American experience,” and this confluence has definitely played a major role in forming the author’s psyche and the psychic rift. Almost all Bellow heroes are Jews based in the city of Chicago or New York. The city appears in all Bellow fiction, working as a theme and serving
at the same time as a background for his stories centered on Jewish characters. Bellow has repeatedly shown us American city life through the eyes of Jewish protagonists like Herzog, Augie March, Mr. Sammler and others in various novels. As a writer, Bellow seems to have drawn the most diverse of opinions from all sides, having remained a riddle to his American critics as well as to the Jews. Arnold Jacob wolf states that “the Jewish intellectual establishment has never known quite what to do with Saul Bellow … Saul Bellow has been equivocal and somewhat mysterious.”

Apart from being torn between his Jewish heritage and American experience, the Bellow hero is tormented by another important issue, the gender issue. The complications and complexity of relations between men and women, transgender issues, homosexuality and sexual abuse form major themes in Bellow’s fiction. It is believed that language forms the psyche of an individual, and the races that do not let their language die, are more likely to succeed in immortalizing their culture and traditions, as compared to those who let their language die and get assimilated into another culture. The Jews have never fully assimilated into any other culture and have therefore preserved their Jewish identity.
**Methodology**

This piece of research is primarily a work of cultural studies but this involves an eclectic method including postcolonialism, psychoanalysis and ecocriticism.

Postcolonial criticism relates to literature and writers from colonized countries, as well as the marginalized, in general. Saul Bellow belongs to a community marginalized, mistrusted and ill-treated worldwide, for centuries together. Instead of dwelling in the past, he chose to let go and move forward, but it is not easy to cut oneself off from the past, especially when historical traumas of the nature and magnitude of the Holocaust are passed on from generation to generation, not just culturally, but also politically and economically. Bellow lived in America, a safe haven for the Jews and was considerably happy with his American existence. In fact, he wanted to be treated as an American writer, instead of being limited to the Jewish-American bracket. Still his critics did not hesitate in treating him more as a Jewish writer than American.

What is it that enables critics to acknowledge Bellow’s discomfort with this label and then proceed to classify him with
other Jewish-American writers in spite of his obvious reluctance to be so defined? Bellow is prominently featured in a recent collection called *Jewish-American Stories*. The editor justifies the inclusion of Bellow’s story, “The Old System,” on the grounds of its subject. It shows the familial tensions in two generations of Russian-Jewish immigrants. Although it richly details Orthodox rituals including a consultation with a learned rabbi, it is Jewish in deeper ways. Its underlying structure shares with all of Bellow’s fiction three narrative strategies derived from the Yiddish storytellers. These definitive structures are: a characteristic narrative perspective, a characteristic mode of ordering the events, and a characteristic mode of closure. That is, Bellow uses a Jewish point of view, a Jewish plot, and a Jewish ending. These authorial techniques are what mark him as a Jewish writer whatever his subject. (Rosenberg)

Even though Bellow took pride in being American and had great command over the English language but the soul of his style and language was Jewish. Most importantly, Saul Bellow is a Jewish-American, and depicted a variety of Jewish types in his novels, one of which is “the Jews who wanted what most Jews wanted—a place in
both the Jewish world and in the surrounding society—but who were not content to live between those two worlds.”

For them, the answer was to belong fully to both groups. They lived as Christians and as Jews. It was an unreasonable response to an unreasonable historical moment that proposed being a Jew in the synagogue and a citizen outside it... Under these conditions a new Jewish type emerged that found a new way to exist as Jew and German, Jew and Russian, Jew and non-Jew. The historian Harriet Murav describes the type as having the ‘personality structure of the impostor.’ … Tamkin and Gersbach are members of this Jewish historical club and share its characteristics and consequences. Like Kovner, Palgrave, Vambrery, and others. Bellow’s characters have impostor personalities that drive them to take on the coloring of their surroundings and this signals their difference and arouses suspicion. Normative Jews in *Seize the Day* and *Herzog* distrust Tamkin and Gersbach. When seen from a Jewish perspective, the ‘realistic hyperbole’ that surrounds Tamkin and Gersbach does not disturb the realism of the novels they inhabit. Instead, the historical view expands our appreciation for Bellow’s
alertness. He documented sightings of a Jewish type whose existence has only recently been verified by historians. More importantly, with Bellow as our field guide, we can see that the challenges of Jewish acculturation did not end in Europe. Tracing Tamkin and Gersbach’s lineage to historical Jews demonstrates that the impostor type and the dilemma of identity formation that breeds him also unsettled American Jewish communities. (Cohen, Recognizable)

He was a visionary and an intelligent and observant historian, who presented realistically and sometimes allegorically, a variety of characters, mostly Jews. Initially, Bellow had remained neutral towards the plight of his Jewish brethren. His son, Gregory Bellow once commented that his father had remained blind to the truth about the atrocities faced by the Jews for most part of his life, eventually coming to accept that it did hurt. He wrote:

The reawakening precipitated by the Six-Day War was to my father’s palpable identity as a Jew—something he tacitly disavowed for decades. The last lines of Mr. Sammler’s Planet refer to just the kind of knowing and moral guidance that the human heart provides. Herein lies the last and most speculative
parallel I will point out: that my father, through his narrator’s reawakening as well as his own, comes to not only a rational but, more importantly, an emotional certainty that he must return to and embrace his own Judaism.

After 1970 my father no longer publicly objected to being labeled a Jewish writer. In fact, he makes repeated public affirmations of his Judaism and supports Jewish causes—particularly writers from the Soviet Union. He and his fourth wife spent three months in Israel, and he wrote a non-fiction book about the Middle East after their sojourn. In his personal life, he increasingly reaffirmed his connection to Jewish culture and religious observation in his home and among the family.

But, he eventually came round to realizing and accepting that the Jews were “othered” even in America. He most openly and frankly talks about the discrimination faced by the Jews in his last novel, *Ravelstein*. His unhappiness with the treatment meted out to the Jews is evident in several incidents in *Ravelstein*, including the difficulties a Jew has to face while renting a house and how the Jews are insulted for being greedy usurers.
All postcolonial literatures, it might be said, seem to make this transition. They begin with an unquestioning acceptance of the authority of European models (especially in the novel) and with the ambition of writing works that will be masterpieces entirely in this tradition. This can be called the ‘Adopt’ phase of colonial literature, since the writer’s ambition is to adopt the form as it stands, the assumption being that it has universal validity. The second stage can be called the ‘Adapt’ phase, since it aims to adapt the European form to African subject matter, thus assuming partial rights of intervention in the genre. In the final phase there is, so to speak, a declaration of cultural independence whereby African writers remake the form to their own specification, without reference to European norms. This might be called the ‘Adept’ phase, since its characteristic is the assumption that the colonial writer is an independent ‘adept’ in the form, not a humble apprentice, as in the first phase, or a mere licensee, as in the second. This stress on ‘cross-cultural’ interactions is a fourth characteristic of postcolonialist criticism. (Barry 189)

Critics have noticed elements of Jewishness even in his early works,
beginning with *Dangling Man*, where he uses holocaust imagery and highlights a Jew’s insecurity and wish to hide his Jewishness from the world. Interestingly, this was the case with Bellow himself, who made every attempt to hide his Jewish identity under an American veil. But as psychoanalyst Jacque Lacan has said, “I am where I think not,” and as Freud pointed out that an individual is more likely to say what he does not want to speak, because it is the unconscious where one’s true selfhood lies. Even though Bellow vehemently opposed the concepts of psychoanalysis, his own writing qualifies for a psychoanalytic reading.

Psychoanalysis is a therapeutic method invented by Sigmund Freud, who believed that the unconscious plays a significant role in shaping an individual’s personality. “Freud suggested a three-part, rather than a two-part, model of the psyche, dividing it into the *ego*, the *super-ego*, and the *id*, these three ‘levels’ of the personality roughly corresponding to, respectively, the consciousness, the conscience, and the unconscious.” (Barry, 93) While the conscious part is deeply influenced by how we are expected to live, the unconscious stores our secrets. Incidents and events that we need to forget, unpleasant memories and painful past experiences that one doesn’t want to
acknowledge or accept as true, can’t simply be wished away. They form a major part of our psyche and indirectly influence our thoughts, views and actions. A community’s collective consciousness also forms part of this unconscious; in this case, Saul Bellow’s Jewish heritage.

Freud suggested that allowing an individual “to talk freely, in such a way that the repressed fears and conflicts which are causing the problems are brought into the conscious mind and openly faced, rather than remaining ‘buried’ in the unconscious,” (Barry, 92) cures him of mental ailments and disorders. Bellow protagonists are troubled individuals, melancholic and depressive, needing to be heard and listened to. They talk to themselves and vent out their frustration, purging their hearts of all that is pent up. This venting out has a cathartic effect on these characters, similar to Freud’s psychoanalytic therapy.

During the course of each novel, Bellow’s protagonist reveals a lot about himself and everyone he talks about. Bellow’s novels are generally written in the monologue form, reminding us of Browning’s dramatic monologues, in which the speaker unknowingly says about himself, what he means to hide. Bellow protagonists too tend to believe in a constructed version of the truth but end up disclosing the
reality, as it is, to themselves and to the world. In each of his novels, the Bellow hero, at the end, is relaxed and ready for the future, after finding the actual cause of his agony and addressing it.

In the process of telling these stories, Bellow himself reveals a lot, unawares. In the following pages, there is an attempt to find the hidden meanings in Bellow texts and to analyze the psychology behind what is being said. Bellow’s Jewish heritage, his American citizenship and his relationship with women are the three most important themes that drive the whole discussion. Almost all Bellow heroes overtly feel proud of being American, yet dislike a lot about America. On the other hand, they are reluctant to acknowledge their Jewish background, but are deeply affected by it. One more quality that they all share with each other as well as with Bellow, is their turbulent relationship with women. Many of Bellow protagonists like Bellow himself are serial-marriers. Marrying repeatedly and getting involved in multiple relationships, they never find real satisfaction. Freud would interpret this situation in terms of the “Oedipus Complex.” According to Freud, a man’s desire for his mother renders him unable to form a lasting bond with another woman and also makes him secretly wish to do away with his own father who is seen
as a barrier between himself and his mother. Almost all Bellow heroes are antagonistic to their fathers. Be it Herzog, Henderson or Wilhelm, they all stand at logger-heads with their fathers while longing for the mother. But at the same time, their conscience makes them feel guilty for this behavior and they try making up for it, like Henderson does in the “Violin scene.”

Henderson is a disturbed soul like most Bellow heroes and leaves for an African Safari in order to get rid of his pathetic life in the city. It has been observed that Bellow’s protagonists long for natural and peaceful surroundings, rejecting the hustle and bustle of city life. Herzog, similarly goes to his country house, which in spite of being dirty, comforts him by its sheer rawness and Albert Corde finds peace in Cyclamens. This phenomenon can be studied as a case of Eco-Criticism, defined by Cheryll Glotfelty as “the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment.” It “takes its literary bearings from three major nineteenth century American writers whose work celebrates nature, the life force, and the wilderness as manifested in America.” (Barry, 240) These three writers were, Emerson, Fuller and Thoreau, together known as the “transcendentalists.” For ecocritics, “nature exists, out there, beyond
ourselves” and is not socially or linguistically constructed. Saul Bellow, too uses nature as a healing force and a companion, in all its various forms; the wilderness, the scenic sublime, the countryside and the domestic picturesque. The Bellow protagonist, hurt by the culture around him, finds respite and comfort in the company of nature and natural objects. Henderson chooses the African wilderness, while Herzog looks at the stars and the rugged, old, snow covered tomato vines and other plantation in his lawn, which being unkempt and rough, matches with his state of mind and broken condition. Albert Corde, in *The Dean’s December*, finds comfort in the cyclamens, potted inside Valeria’s house. He dotes on the cyclamens and forgets his tensions for a while. Even though he favours nature and spirituality, Bellow is not a romantic writer nor does he agree with the modernists. Saul Bellow can be viewed as a cultural historian who “attempts to account historically for what has happened to the self in twentieth-century fiction.”

He notes that the first world war, with its unprecedented number of corpses; the Russian Revolution, with its hatred of bourgeois idealism; and the second world war, with its atomic blasts and reduction of millions of Jews to ‘heaps of bone and mounds of
rag and hair’ (‘Notes’ 22), have greatly contributed to the questioning of novelists about the viability of individual existence in the present age. The resulting image of mankind in American literature, according to Bellow, is that of a ‘colonist who has been sent to some remote place, some Alaska of the soul.’ (‘Notes’ 25)

For Below, the unitary, coping, sometimes noble Self earlier fiction has almost disappeared from modern literature. (Cronin, Antimodernist)

In order to reunite with his higher and true self, man needs to get back in touch with the natural world and Bellow’s heroes make a journey towards the same. Ironically, civilization and culture which were created to counter chaos and bring order to the world, have led to confusion and put man in an unhealthy frame of mind, to counter which he needs to take refuge in nature, which is exactly what Bellow protagonists do in order to bring back balance to their lives.