Chapter 2

Jewish Subconscious

Saul Bellow “entered mainstream American literary history in the 1940s and 1950s, the period now known as the ‘Jewish Decades’,” (Cronin, Remembering) and his first novel *Dangling Man* appeared in 1944, the year of Auschwitz and the Holocaust. However he claims to have realized the full impact of the horrors of the post WWII atrocities by the Nazis after his visit to Auschwitz in the year 1959. But it has been observed that his early writings too reflect the gloom and despair that the Jews went through during those years. It might have been his unconscious memory of earlier massacres and pogroms suffered by the Jews, embedded deep in the Jewish ‘collective consciousness,’ that inspired such imagery in his earlier novels. It has been observed that he was influenced by Yiddish art and literature as well as Jewish culture in general. Anti-Semitism and Orientalism along with Jewish values, language and sentiment form an important part of his work.

A Jew born in a Montreal slum, Saul Bellow is not “merely a Jew by birth – he comes from a strongly Jewish household.” His mother was a purely traditional Jewish woman, whose only dream for
Bellow was “to become a Talmudic scholar like everyone else in her family.” She would observe Jewish rituals minutely and light the “Shabbos candles on Friday night,” keep kosher, and bake a “loaf of challah once a week for each member of the family.” The male members wore “tsitsit, the fringed prayer shawls of the Orthodox.” The Bellows’ new world was no different from the old. It was, in fact, “a microcosm of the one they’d fled,” but their new surroundings managed to influence their lives and the New World “imposed its ways” on them.

Bellow has fond memories of his Jewish childhood. He remembers the “tallith katan” he used to wear at the age of six. In To Jerusalem and Back, he narrates an incident, where while travelling to Israel, he was reminded of his childhood days, “It is my childhood revisited. At the age of six, I myself wore a tallith katan, or scapular, under my shirt, only mine was a scrap of green calico print, whereas theirs are white linen. God instructed Moses to speak to the children of Israel and to ‘bid them that they make fringes in the borders of their garments.’ So they are still wearing them some four thousand years later,” (1) reflects Bellow, on his flight to Israel, looking at Hasidim, who are “flying to Israel to attend the circumcision of the firstborn son
of their spiritual leader, the Belzer Rabbi.” (1)

He definitely has a soft corner for his Jewish heritage, but being highly educated and intellectually sound himself, Bellow does not approve of blind faith and ignorance. He is shocked to hear that the young Hasid, sitting next to him, has never heard the name of Einstein and is totally ignorant of words like mathematics and physics. “This is too much for me.” Then he decides to give a second thought to the situation. “Silent, I give his case some thought. Busy-minded people, with their head-culture that touches all surfaces, have heard of Einstein. But do they know what they have heard? A majority do not. These Hasidim choose not to know.” (TJB 5)

The Hasid had earlier advised him to strictly eat Kosher food, and Bellow had chosen to “guiltily” eat his non-kosher sandwich. Coming from the same roots, they differ so much that “in me he sees what deformities the modern age can produce in the seed of Abraham. In him I see a piece of history, an antiquity,” (TJB 5) says Bellow. Bellow is definitely attached to his culture, but the primitiveness and lack of education of these Hasidim dishearten him. “It is rather as if Puritans in seventeenth-century dress and observing seventeenth-century customs were to be found still living in Boston or Plymouth,”
(TJB 5) complains Bellow.

He feels out of place in Jerusalem for several reasons and in innumerable ways and then he is reminded of the present day violence and power struggles. He thinks of the days when “culture was still culture. But in these days of armored attacks on Yom Kippur, of Vietnams, Watergates, Mansons, Amins, terrorist massacres at Olympic Games, what are illuminated manuscripts, what are masterpieces of wrought iron, what are holy places?” (TJB 7) He is enjoying the magic of the holy land of Jerusalem. “The air, the very air, is thought-nourishing in Jerusalem, the Sages themselves said so. I’m prepared to believe it. I know that it must have special properties. The delicacy of the light also affects me… This atmosphere makes the American commonplace “out of this world” true enough to give your soul a start,” (TJB 10) proclaims an excited Bellow.

He has imbibed Jewish culture thoroughly, though not its primitive features. “The Jews had Jehovah, but wouldn’t defend themselves on the Sabbath. And the Eskimos would perish of hunger with plenty of caribou around because it was forbidden to eat caribou in fish season, or fish in caribou season. Everything depends on the values – the values. And where’s reality?” (Atlas 51) He values
religious values, but more than that he values reality and practical morality. He was impressed with the “Eskimos’ willingness to obey a destructive prohibition out of allegiance to their god. It was a powerful lesson for an aspiring writer who considered himself the apprentice of a higher calling – the life of art – that seemed to have no place in philistine America. Bellow would rather starve than consign himself to a life toiling for the Carroll Coal Company.” (Atlas 51)

But at the same time, he opposes excessive traditionalism and enumerates advantages of the breaking of primitive order; “the lamentable weakening of the older, traditional branches of civilization might open fresh opportunities, force us to reassess the judgements of culture and that we might be compelled – a concealed benefit of decline – to be independent … quite simply, when the center does not hold and great structures fall down, one has an opportunity to see some of the truths that they obstructed.” (Bellow, Civilized 38) In Henderson the Rain King, Henderson tries to convince prince Itelo that it was okay to kill the frogs that were becoming a hindrance in watering their cattle, while the villagers were calling it a curse and not ready to do anything about their menace. He tells the prince; “Do you know why the Jews were defeated by the Romans? Because they
wouldn’t fight back on Saturday. And that’s how it is with your water situation. Should you preserve yourself, or the cows, or preserve the custom? ... Why should you be ruined by frogs?” (HRK 61-62)

Bellow is a realist, who uses contemporary culture as his subject matter and depicts contemporary America as he sees it, devouring and materialistic, and says, “I cannot exceed what I see … I am bound, in other words, as the historian is bound by the period he writes about, by the situation I live in” but at the same time he is an idealist who dreams of a perfectly beautiful world. “Ethical and moral questions are at the core of Bellow’s work.” (Kakutani, A Talk) who considers moral elevation of individuals and society at large to be the primary aim of an author.

Not necessarily involved with organized religion, Bellow heroes are religious and ethical individuals, concerned with dignity, humanity and community. They are “flawed individuals,” who are socially, psychologically and emotionally wrecked, and are now attempting, “through the course of a novel, to alleviate their condition.” This longing for the ideal is a Jewish trait. About the lofty idealism of the Jewish people, Maurice Samuels says that it is “because they had undertaken to be so much the better that they felt so much worse.”
Malin observes that Bellow’s heroes “walk between dream and fact, laughing at their precarious position. They are Jewish ironists.” The reason for Jewish fiction combining “realistic detail with parable and fantasy,” lies in “the ironic disparity between dream and fact and the tradition of moral seriousness” in Jewish culture.

Henderson’s African safari is a perfect example of such a mixture of dream and reality. Instead of drowning himself in sorrow, “Henderson flies high to escape his misery—so that even his failures seem funny, like a series of pratfalls skirting disaster,” observes Pifer. In spite of some critics considering him a mere caricature of the “archetypal seeker” and his journey a “parody of the modern quest,” there is a deeper seriousness in his journey through which he comes into “contact with the ‘fundamentals’ and ‘ultimates’ of reality.” From an inability to find meaning in existence, due to his “death-ridden” vision of reality, Henderson moves towards understanding the “nature of immortality.”

Death appears repeatedly as a theme and image in Bellow novels and the reasons are many, one of them being personal. Bellow encountered death for the first time at the tender age of eight and it was he himself who was dying. He was admitted to a hospital in
Montreal – dangerously ill, he had three operations and living in the depressing hospital environment, with children dying around him, he knew he might die too. Then a lady gave him a copy of the New Testament to read and he was overwhelmed by Jesus, his life and death, but he was a Jew and his family would never like the fact that he read Jesus and loved him.

“My people were orthodox Russian Jews. I had a religious upbringing. In those times four-year-old kids were already reading Hebrew, memorizing Genesis and Exodus.” (Marty) Traditional Judaism believes that death is not the ultimate end. It believes in an After-life. We see Henderson trying to feel his parents’ presence when they are gone. “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.” (HRK 30) But Judaism is not adamant in this belief and is concerned more about man’s present existence. “Bringing people into the here-and-now. The real universe. That’s the present moment. The past is no good to us. The future is full of anxiety. Only the present is real – the here-and-now. Seize the day,” says Bellow in Seize the Day. Man
ought to prefer life to death and hope to nihilism, is what the Jew’s message to the world is.

There is much variation within Jewish circles as to whether death ends all or life continues after the body has turned to dust. So, it is an open question which Bellow takes up for discussion and consideration novel after novel, trying probably to resolve the mystery. Herzog discusses the subject at length with his friend, Lucas Asphalter. God, death, and the future will always be unknown, says Herzog, but we can still be optimistic. The idea of death, pervades the novel, and “Moses eventually learns to accept its existence.” He remembers the death of his parents, faces death himself, and finally realises that “life is about the beauty that comes in intervals.” He chooses to enjoy those “moments of happiness, instead of fearing death.” Death has been compared to soil. Herzog’s mother demonstrates how God created Adam out of soil by “rubbing her finger into her palm until dirt rises up.” When she’s dying, Moses says that “she had begun to change into earth.” This reminds us of the phrase from Bible: “dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return.” This may sound dispiriting, but it is a reminder that “we are all part of a cycle, and we all, great and small, return to dust eventually.” As she
quietly dies and Moses watches in silence, he is reminded of his Biblical learning that God does not need our words. He understands and decodes our silence more clearly than our words. Words generally hide some truth behind them, which anyhow, God would know. Herzog listens to his mother’s silence and comprehends better than he understands his own words. According to Mark Cohen;

Because H exposes verbal communication as an often unreliable source of truth, Bellow provides a corrective litmus test for ascertaining the truth about the characters’ inner selves: body language. Within Bellow’s text, a character’s body displays clues to his or her real nature. In this way, expressiveness is doubled. The tongue tells lies as the eyes, nose, complexion, and muscles tell the truth. Furthermore, this significant expressiveness of physical bodies in H has another very Bellovian payoff: it invites close inspection of each person. Inevitably, the closer the inspection, the more compelling and informative this body language becomes.

Not just his mother, his friend Asphalter’s monkey too “mutely telegraphs notice of its own impending death to Herzog.” Cohen has observed that silent communication plays a very important role in
Bellow’s works.

Herzog’s mother delivers the news of her death without words. After “she had lost the power to speak,” she displays her discolored fingernails and nods “as if to say, 'That’s right, Moses, I am dying now’” (234). Herzog uncovers the ultimate model for this silent communication of death when he recalls his childhood religious lessons. For instance, Herzog remembers that God learns of Cain’s crime not because of any verbal confession but rather because, as God explains, “Thy brother’s blood cries out to me from the earth” (131). (Cohen)

Ravelstein describes death as a release from the troubles of existence; “If you dislike existence then death is your release. You can call this nihilism, if you like,” (156) he says. But Ravelstein opposes the idea of suicide, saying that “the Jews feel that the world was created for each and every one of us, and when you destroy a human life you destroy an entire world – the world as it existed for that person.” (156) When Allbee tries to kill himself in Leventhal’s kitchen, Asa saves the gentile trying to gas himself in a Jew’s house. The scene is reminiscent of the concentration camps and the mass killing of Jews by the Germans, just that the situation is reversed here;
a gentile is dying inside a Jew’s house who saves him, establishing the Jews’ high morality and strength of character.

Death continues to haunt Bellow characters till his last book. Ravelstein is seriously ill, waiting for his death and Chick is prepared for his own end. Sammler learns by the end of the novel through Gruner’s courage that death need not force men to abandon the “ordinary forms of common life” for terrified action or selfish disengagement. “Death was the sole visible future.” The “dark Romanticism” of Bellow characters includes primitivism, illogicality, mystery cults, sexuality, criminality, madness, and cultivation of freedom, spontaneity, innocence, and wholeness as the various ways of coping with the thought of finality.

The individual sacrifices religious or ethical criteria for aesthetic standards, thus making life a spectacle in which one acts or watches . . . Frustrated by his failed quest for transcendent singularity and ecstatic authenticity, the individual has a ‘peculiar longing for nonbeing’ and apocalypse. Bellow thus brings the circle of death to a full close: from fear of death to a longing for annihilation. (LeClair)
But at the same time, the realization of approaching death has a humbling effect upon men, as Chick says, “I had a good grasp of reality and of my defects. I permanently kept in mind the approach of Death, who might at any time loom up before you.” (R 105) Henderson’s suicide threat to Lily and his suicidal mood are reflected in an octopus, in whose movements, he imagines his own approaching end.

… I had a strange experience in the aquarium. It was twilight. I looked in at an octopus, and the creature seemed also to look at me and press its soft head to the glass, flat, the flesh becoming pale and granular – blanched, speckled. The eyes spoke to me coldly. But even more speaking, even more cold, was the soft head with its speckles, and the Brownian motion in those speckles, a cosmic coldness in which I felt I was dying. The tentacles throbbed and motioned through the glass, the bubbles sped upward, and I thought, “This is my last day. Death is giving me notice.” (HRK 19)

The death-question is of specific importance to the Jew, in whose psyche is embedded deep and engraved a permanent imprint of the Holocaust, the pogroms and the crusades. James Atlas writes in his biography of Bellow that “he had been struggling with the Holocaust
for more than two decades, yet had addressed it obliquely in his fiction, most notably in *The Victim*, where it hovered like a kind of spectral presence.” In Richard Match’s words, “*The Victim* is a novel of anti-Semitism as it hits the Jew.” Allbee tortures Leventhal, bringing his worst fears to the fore. “With a devious ‘logic’ that would do credit to *Mein Kampf*, Allbee had built his case against Leventhal . . . Asa Leventhal ‘felt that he had been singled out to be the object of some freakish, insane process, and . . . he was filled with dread.’ ‘Why me?’ he asked himself. One wonders how many Jews have asked themselves the same question since 1933.” (Match)

Herzog too broods over the Holocaust, “the black cloud of faces, souls” that flowed out from the extermination chimneys, but for him it was only one catastrophe among many – the threat of nuclear war, the totalitarian reign of Stalin – that distinguished the twentieth century by its horror.

While Moses Herzog rarely speaks directly of the Holocaust in Saul Bellow’s *Herzog*, scattered allusions to the horrors of World War II surface in the narrative and the subtext of Herzog’s 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 ... 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 … Mannis claims that both modern society’s worship of suffering and the adoption of nihilism as a worldview play into Herzog’s perception of the Holocaust. In Herzog’s letters to Nietzsche, he reveals his disdain for nihilism. Mannis attributes this attitude to Herzog’s belief that nihilism provides the fundamentals of Nazism: “Moses probes the heart of Nazi evil: the perversion of Nietzsche’s writings into a
doctrine, a blueprint for mass murder.” However, Mannis asserts that Herzog blames 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 … The letter addresses both Herzog’s personal suffering and that of the modern world. 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)

Bellow had the Holocaust and the other atrocities suffered by the Jews at the back of his mind, but it was not until Bellow had been to Poland and Israel and witnessed first hand, as a journalist, the Six-Day War, “that he felt prepared to take it on.” Mr. Sammler’s Planet is Sammler’s reflection on “that unspeakable event,” a narration of his
“ordeal at the hands of the Nazis.” Bellow had consciously avoided the subject of Holocaust for several years, till in Mr. Sammler’s Planet, twenty years after the Holocaust, he accepted that it did affect him and confessed to his son, Gregory Bellow; “Not a day goes by that I do not think of the horror of those last moments as the gas was released in the showers, the yelling, the screaming, the suffering.”

Gregory Bellow reminisces:

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 further adds:

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 … 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.

Gregory could sense his father’s discomfort and fear of another holocaust in Mr. Sammler’s Planet. “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,” he wrote. In fact, Bellow stopped reacting angrily to and disapproving of the title of “Jewish writer,” given him by critics, which annoyed him much till he observed the six-day war and saw Auschwitz with his own eyes.

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. Here, once again, my father and I parted company as my Jewish identity, though firm, is purely cultural. (Bellow and Berger)

Bellow was reluctant and would not talk to his son about it but one day, he expressed his feelings to him.
Knowing of our political differences, he gingerly broached the subject of the Holocaust, asking if I thought about it. I answered that I did from time to time and thought it one of the worst crimes against humanity in the course of history. He said, “Not a day goes by that I do not think of the horror of those last moments as the gas was released in the showers, the yelling, the screaming, the suffering …” A visceral way, it seems to me, to think about the final moments of the six million for a man as cerebral as my father. (Bellow and Berger)

It was his realization of the sufferings of his community that ultimately connected him to the Jewish race much more deeply than he had ever been or thought of being. As Carl Jung has said, “No one can flatter himself that he is immune to the spirit of his own epoch, or even that he possesses a full understanding of it. Irrespective of our conscious convictions, each one of us, without exception, being a particle of the general mass, is somewhere attached to, colored by, or even undermined by the spirit which goes through the mass. Freedom stretches only as far as the limits of our consciousness.” Gloria L Cronin writes:

Even though he insists much later that the full emotional weight
of the Holocaust did not land on him before his 1959 trip to Auschwitz (Manea 313), this is not entirely true. Even in *The Adventures of Augie March*, Augie deals with postwar American and European anti-Semitism, and Augie knows full well that he is driving over the war dead of Europe while breathing the lingering odor of the gas ovens. The novel concludes very much under the ash clouds of the Holocaust. (Cronin, Remembering)

Even though Bellow denied having taken account of the history of the Jews in his writings, his imagery is definitely influenced by the collective anxiety of the Jews and the images of massacre and death appear in his fiction right from his first novel, *Dangling Man*. In fact, Kremer has described *Dangling Man* and *The Victim* as “nascent Holocaust novels that trace the psychopathology of anti-Semitism and post-World War II Jewish paranoia.” The nightmarish dreams of Joseph are clearly reminiscent of the Holocaust and other violent attacks that the Jews have borne through the ages.

It was good to lie in bed, awake, not dreaming. Hemmed in all day, inactive, I lie down at night in enervation and, as a result, I sleep badly. I have never known dreamless sleep. In the past, my dreams annoyed me by their prolixity. I went on foolish
errands, and held even more foolish debates, and settled and arranged the most humdrum affairs. But now my dreams are more bare and ominous. Some of them are fearful. A few nights ago I found myself in a low chamber with rows of large cribs or wicker bassinets in which the dead of a massacre were lying. I am sure they were victims of a massacre, because my mission was to reclaim one for a particular family. My guide picked up a tag and said, “This one was found near…” I do not remember the name; it ended in Tanza. It must have been Constanza. It was either there or in Bucharest that those slain by the iron guard were slung from the hooks in a slaughterhouse. I have seen the pictures. I looked at the reclining face and murmured that I was not personally acquainted with the deceased. I had merely been asked as an outsider … I did not even know the family well. At which my guide turned, smiling, and I guessed that he meant – there was not enough light in the vault to make his meaning unambiguous, but I thought I understood – “It is well to put oneself in the clear in something like this.” This was his warning to me. He approved of my neutrality. As long as I took the part of the humane emissary, no harm would come to me. But it offended me to have an understanding with this man
and to receive a smile of complicity from his pointed face. Could I be such a hypocrite? “Do you think he can be found?” I said. “Would he be here?” I showed my distrust. We continued up the aisle; it was more like the path of a gray draught than anything so substantial as a floor. The bodies, as I have said, were lying in cribs, and looked remarkably infantile, their faces pinched and wounded. I do not remember much more. I can picture only the low-pitched, long room much like some of the rooms in the Industrial Museum in jackson park; the childlike bodies with pierced heads and limbs; my guide, brisk as a rat among his charges; an atmosphere of terror such as my father many years ago could conjure for me, describing Gehenna and the damned until I shrieked and begged him to stop; and the syllables *Tanza*. (DM 120 - 121)

The “ancient figure” of death appears in Joseph’s dreams repeatedly, chasing him and kissing him on the forehead finally.

Our first encounter was in a muddy back lane. By day it was a wagon thoroughfare, but at this evening hour only a goat wandered over the cold ruts that had become as hard as the steel rims that made them. Suddenly I heard another set of footsteps
added to mine, heavier and grittier, and my premonitions leaped into one fear even before I felt a touch on my back and turned. Then that swollen face that came rapidly toward mine until I felt its bristles and the cold pressure of its nose; the lips kissed me on the temple with a laugh and a groan. Blindly I ran, hearing again the gritting boots. The roused dogs behind the snaggle boards of the fences abandoned themselves to the wildest rage of barking. I ran, stumbling through drifts of ashes, into the street. (DM 121 - 122)

Bellow was unconsciously following the Holocaust initially, as the themes and imagery in his early novels testify. His first novel *Dangling Man* itself is replete with Holocaust imagery and Jewish hatred of self and fear of the other.

The Victim, written after the war, at a time when the embers of the Holocaust flames had barely been quenched, is a much more thorough analysis of this phenomenon, again with its overtones of Nazi Germany and its political and cultural progenitors. Asa Leventhal’s encounters with Kirby Allbee elicit the ghouls of anti-Semitism used so effectively by the Nazi propagandist machinery: the blood libel, the Protocols of the Elders of Zion,
the pound of flesh, etc.

Perhaps most interesting is Bellow’s covert reference to the exclusion laws of the Nazis or even the Nuremburg Laws of 1935. When Kirby Allbee at a party tells a Jewish girl who is singing Negro spirituals that it isn’t right for her to sing anything other than Jewish songs, he is voicing Nazi racial policy. The Jews were excluded from German cultural life at the onset of the Nazi reign and this separation was made official in the Nuremburg Laws. The dialectic of anti-Semitism is articulated by others as well, in a group of Harkavy’s friends in a cafeteria over lunch where the discussion progresses from the joviality of drama criticism to the deep-rooted seriousness of Jew-hatred. (Goldman, The Holocaust)

In fact, it is Leventhal’s insecurity as a Jew that makes it possible for Kirby to worm his way into his life.

Bellow’s later works, *Herzog, Mr. Sammler’s Planet*, and *Humboldt’s Gift*, penetrate deeper into the problems of Nazi ideology and German Romanticism. His sharpest attacks on two major progenitors of Nazi thought, Friedrich Nietzsche and
Martin Heidegger, is in *Herzog*, wherein the protagonist not only denounces both Christianity and Romanticism, but ultimately affirms his own Judaism and his relationship to the Mosaic code that forms the foundation of Western ethical and moral principles. (Goldman, The Holocaust)

Nietzsche’s writings, specifically *Thus Spake Zarathustra* and *The Will to Power*, even though modified and edited by the Nazis to suit their needs, had exerted a tremendous influence over the German intellectual community.

Writing during a time when the pseudo-science of racism was making its appearance, Nietzsche’s observations became attractive paraphernalia of the racist hoax. Nietzsche was not a racist and cautioned his adherents against partaking in the “mendacious race-swindle.” Nevertheless, his written remarks concerning the superior “Aryan conquering race,” the “black-haired vulgar man,” his urgings of castration for decadents, were exploited by racists and converted into full-blown racist theories. (Goldman, The Holocaust)

Not just Nietzsche, Herzog rejects all German existentialists,
including Martin Heidegger, to whom he writes for an explanation of the expression, “the fall of the quotidian.”

_Dear Doktor Professor Heidegger, I should like to know what you mean by the expression “the fall into the quotidian.” When did this fall occur? Where were we standing when it happened? (H 49)_

In one of his mental letters, Herzog probably thinking of Hitler and his associates, points at people who misuse power and become responsible for the destruction of mankind.

_Nietzsche, Whitehead, and John Dewey wrote on the question of Risk. . . . Dewey tells us that mankind distrusts its own nature and tries to find stability beyond or above, in religion or philosophy. To him the past often means the erroneous. But Moses checked himself. Come to the point. But what was the point? The point was that there were people who could destroy mankind and that they were foolish and arrogant, crazy and must be begged not to do it. Let the enemies of life step down. Let each man now examine his heart. Without a great change of heart, I would not trust myself in a position of authority. Do I love mankind? Enough to spare it, if I should be in a position to
A little later, he says, “Invariably the most dangerous people seek the power.” (51) And people like the Nazis when successful in attaining power, can bring the world to ruins. In spite of Bellow’s repeated denials, the influence of Jewish inheritance on his writing is too obvious to escape even a half alert reader, let alone lemon squeezing critics. His characters, themes, techniques, all are Jewish and Jewish values and philosophy are reflected everywhere in his work. The Holocaust and anti-Semitism are important themes that form part of his work, both fiction and non-fiction.

Anti-Semitism is an age old phenomenon beginning with the death of Christ, that featured in Shakespeare’s plays too and Shylock, his famous Jewish villain became a representative and an archetype of the greedy, heartless and inhuman Jew for centuries to come. But the term “anti-Semitism” was coined much later, in about 1879 to denote hostility toward the Jews. Holocaust scholar Helen Fein defines it as “a persisting latent structure of hostile beliefs towards Jews as a collective manifested in individuals as attitudes, and in culture as myth, ideology, folklore and imagery, and in actions – social or legal discrimination, political mobilization against the Jews, and collective
or state violence – which results in and/or is designed to distance, displace, or destroy Jews as Jews.” (Jewish Virtual Library)

The Jews have faced persecution and humiliation through the ages in innumerable ways at the hands of countless haters around the globe. Jews are despised on religious grounds as the killers of Christ, on economic grounds as wealth-obsessed usurers, and on ideological grounds as rebellious or revolutionary. Socially, they are discarded as inferior, pushy and vulgar, racially discriminated against as an inferior race and culturally regarded as a threat to the moral and structural fiber of civilization. Jews have been targeted individually as well as in groups in organized violent attacks by mobs, state police, or even military attacks on entire Jewish communities. Notable instances of persecution of Jews include “the pogroms which preceded the First crusade in 1096, the expulsion from England in 1290, the massacres of Spanish Jews in 1391, the persecutions of the Spanish inquisition, the expulsion from Spain in 1492, Cossack massacres in Ukraine, various pogroms in Russia, the Dreyfus affair, the Holocaust, official Soviet anti-Jewish policies and the Jewish exodus from Arab and Muslim countries.” (Wikipedia)

Jews have suffered in various ways in several parts of the world
for centuries, humiliated, murdered and persecuted. Even the Poles, who themselves were victims of the Holocaust, were responsible for killing Jews in their vicinity. The Polish people who had always considered themselves as innocent and helpless victims of the Holocaust, were shocked years later, to know that their own people had killed around 1600 Jews in the village of Jedwabne. “During Hitler’s occupation, the Polish nationalistic and anti-Semitic right didn’t collaborate with the Nazis,” as the right wing did everywhere else in Europe, but “actively participated in the anti-Hitler underground. Polish anti-Semites fought against Hitler, and some of them even rescued Jews, though this was punishable by death.” Yet, another side of the story as Adam Michnik describes it, is that “in the 1920’s and 30’s, anti-Semitism took hold. It became a fixture of radical right-wing nationalists and it could be detected in the utterances of the hierarchy of the Catholic Church.” Poland had always been relatively safe for the Jews, but under these circumstances, they “began to feel increasingly discriminated against and unsafe --and they were, with noisy anti-Semitic groups, segregated seating at universities and calls for pogroms” and finally, on July 10, 1941, almost the “entire Jewish population of the Polish village of Jedwabne, were murdered by their Polish neighbors.” In Mr.
When Mr. Sammler hid later in the mausoleum, it was not from the Germans but from the Poles. In Zamosht Forest the Polish partisans turned on the Jewish fighters. The war was ending, the Russians advancing, and the decision seems to have been taken to reconstruct a Jewless Poland. There was therefore a massacre. The Poles at dawn came shooting. As soon as it was light enough for murder. There was fog, smoke. The sun tried to rise. Men began to drop, and Sammler ran. There were two other survivors. One played dead. The other, like Sammler, found a break and rushed through. Hiding in the swamp, Sammler lay under a tree trunk, in the mud, under scum. At night he left the forest. He took a chance with Cieslakiewicz next day. (Was it only a day? Perhaps it was longer.) He spent those summer weeks in the cemetery. Then he appeared in Zamosht, in the town itself, wild, gaunt, decaying, the dead eye bulging – like a whelk. One of the doomed who lasted it all out. (MSP 114-115)

This hostility that has gone on for ages and is rightly referred to
as “the longest hatred” is supposedly justified by the German theory, that the Aryans are superior in physique and character to the Jews. The explanation for the phenomenon of anti-Semitism most widely accepted by social scientists, suggests that anti-Semitism is “nurtured in periods of social instability and crisis,” in places like the Germany of 1880s and in situations like those preceding World War II. Passions run high and “frustrations engendered during such periods are theoretically deflected onto scapegoats,” in this case, “an available, isolated minority, such as the Jews.” No doubt the Nazis took anti-Semitism to a genocidal extreme, yet it all started centuries ago, “with ideas and words: stereotypes, sinister cartoons, and the gradual spread of hate.” The Jews do not believe with the Christians that Jesus is the Son of God, and many Christians consider this refusal to accept Jesus’ divinity as arrogant. “For centuries the Church taught that Jews were responsible for Jesus’ death, not recognizing, as most historians do today, that Jesus was executed by the Roman government because officials viewed him as a political threat to their rule.” (Holocaust Encyclopedia) Bellow once cited Hyam Maccoby’s Revolution in Judea and noted that the book “argues that Jesus was anointed, a messiah, a Pharisee who tried to free the Jews from Roman tyranny. The Greek authors of the Gospels named the Jews the enemy race”
and love of “Jesus could not then be separated from hatred of the Jews.”

As outsiders, Jews had to face “violent stereotyping” and “violence against their persons and property.” Even natural catastrophes like the plague that killed millions of people in Europe in the 14th Century, the “Black Death,” were attributed to the Jews, “as divine retribution for their allegedly blasphemous and satanic practices.” Horrible stories were spread; stories that incited pogroms, one of which was the “blood libel,” a myth that Jews used the blood of Christian children for ritual purposes. The Jews’ refusal to convert to Christianity was considered as anti-Christ and an act of “disloyalty to European (read Christian) civilization” and when they converted, it was “perceived as insincere and as having materialistic motives.”

Bellow has great respect for Jesus and the New Testament, yet he cannot forget nor forgive the hatred he has received as a Jew. Responding to a Jewish writer, Stephen Mitchell’s 1993 Book The Gospel According to Jesus, Bellow expressed himself in the following words:

Jesus overwhelmed me. I was moved out of myself by Jesus, by
“suffer little children to come unto me,” by the lilies of the field. Jesus moved me beyond all bounds by his deeds and his words. His death was a horror to me. And I had to face the charges made in the Gospels against the Jews, my people … Jews were hated. My thought was … How could it be my fault? … But I was beyond myself, moved far out by Jesus (Mark and Matthew). I kept this to myself. No discussions with my father, my mother. It was not their Bible. For them there was no New Testament. Obviously Jesus was not discussible with them … I had never been in a position in which it was necessary to think for myself, without religious authorization, about God. Here at the Royal Victoria I was … free to think for myself. (Marty)

Bellow reacted sympathetically to Mitchell’s endeavor at translating the gospel, but did not agree with his view because he believes that one cannot take “this passionate love in the Gospels and let the hate ‘drop away.’ It’s too late for that, since the Jews have paid for this hate (daily) for 2 millennia.” Consequently, anti-Semitism frequently appears as a theme in his fiction. Ravelstein is forced to give up his apartment as well as his deposit, which he could not recover because he was a Jew and there was a “Gobineau in the
landlord’s family tree. Those Gobineaus were famous Jew haters. And I am no mere Jew but, even worse, an American one – all the more dangerous to civilization as they see it. Anyway, they will let a Jew live on their street, but he should pay for it,” (R 70) complains Ravelstein. Kirby’s rhetoric in The Victim is typically anti-Semitic. In this novel, Kirby Allbee, the gentile goes on accusing the good Jew Asa Leventhal, and by extension the whole Jewish race, of having made him lose his job, his wife and he even holds the Jew responsible for his drunkenness.

When Asa reminds him of his drunken state at the party, he retorts that he was “liquored up,” not “drunk” and that the Jews had “funny ideas about drinking.” The Jews, he says, believe that all “Gentiles are born drunkards” and sing “drunk he is, drink he must, because he is a Goy … Schicker.” Inspired on the other hand by his Jewish idealism, Asa regards himself responsible to an extent, for Allbee’s miserable condition. He admits to himself, his guilt and accepts that he had been in the wrong like everyone else. “Everybody committed errors and offences,” he says. But most importantly, he felt that “everything, everything without exception, took place as if within a single soul or person.” He was afraid that “tomorrow this would be
untenable” and he “won’t be able to hold onto it.” He feared that “something would prevent it.” He is definitely disturbed because of Allbee, yet he cannot hate him as he finds his own reflection in him. He clearly remembered having seen in Allbee’s eyes, something which “he could not doubt was the double of something in his own.” Bellow is here, trying to “understand the anti-Semite,” and reactions to the “anti-Semite, from a psychological and social point of view.”

He has consistently attacked Nazism and the ideas responsible for the phenomenon of Nazism. “Bellow, more than any contemporary writer, recognized that the basis of Nazi ideology is a misguided Romanticism.” (Goldman, The Holocaust) Innumerable Jews were killed in Germany and other parts of Europe during the first half of 20th century and it is a well-known fact that European intellectuals, especially “German scholarship provided the ideas and techniques which led to and justified this unparalleled slaughter.” (Goldman, The Holocaust) Darwin’s “survival of the fittest” and the French Gobineau’s concept of race along with others were major influences on Nazism. Even though Gobineau himself was a philosemitic, his ideology was used by the Nazis and Hitler as an excuse for eliminating the Jews who according to them would be polluting their
coming generations through marriage etc. In order to suit their needs, the Nazis even edited his theories extensively just as they did with Nietzsche.

“Hitler and the exponents of Nazi thought recognized that their war against the Jews was a war against twentieth-century humanism with the sole purpose of extirpating it at its roots: razing the humanism of Judaism and replacing it with the Nordic god of Darwinian-Nietzschean-Wagnerian-Chamberlainian epistemology,” says Goldman. Hitler believed in the Darwinian principle of Survival of the Fittest and “that the core of existence is based upon struggle.”

At a speech made February 5, 1928, he said: ‘Struggle is the father of all things. Only through struggle has man raised himself above the animal world. Even today it is not by the principles of humanity that man lives or is able to preserve himself above the animal world, but solely by means of the most brutal struggle.’ In Mein Kampf, Hitler says: ‘In the struggle for daily bread all those who are weak and sickly or less determined succumb …’ The Hitlerian society believed in a superior race created by the natural elimination of its weaker elements, a society of demi-gods, in essence severing the
universal bond that eternally binds all people.’ (Goldman, The Holocaust)

Hitler believed in Darwin’s principle of “survival of the fittest” and could never accept the Marxist principle of equality.

If it be denied that races differ from one another in their powers of cultural creativeness, then this same erroneous notion must necessarily influence our estimation of the value of the individual. The assumption that all races are alike leads to the assumption that nations and individuals are equal to one another. And international Marxism is nothing but the application – effected by the Jew, Karl Marx – of a general conception of life to a definite profession of political faith; but in reality that general concept had existed long before the time of Karl Marx… all this was done in the service of his race. (Hitler 297)

Following Darwin’s principles, the Hitlerian society believed in the creation of a superior race through the process of natural elimination, but instead of waiting for nature, they themselves went on a mission to eliminate the races they considered inferior and weak, or
in their hearts, superior and tough to compete with, who knows? “The year 1933 was one of the great dividing lines of history. Anti-Semitism of the most vicious kind had become the official policy of one of the most advanced nations in the world. Whatever other cultural changes they inflicted, the Nazis retained the traditional German respect for Shakespeare – ‘unser Shakespear’ (‘our Shakespeare’),” (Gross) by leaving no stone unturned in their efforts to eliminate the race that Shylock, the evil usurer in Shakespeare’s *The Merchant of Venice*, represented.

“The philosophy of Nazism was a clearly defined system of thought diametrically opposed to the philosophy of Judaism, the basis of the Judaeo-Christian ethos and Western humanism, and sought, with the eradication of the Jewish people, to eradicate humanism as a world view” (Goldman, *The Holocaust*) and Jewish Humanism is precisely what Bellow aims at establishing through his fiction. For several decades, there had been general agreement regarding “Bellow’s debt to and championing of Western humanism,” but ironically, critics dealt only with the “Greek, European and Christian sources of his humanistic outlook,” ignoring altogether the Jewish influence upon his writing, until L. H. Goldman corrected the existing
incomplete and partial view. Goldman suggests that “Bellow’s perspective is unmistakably Jewish,” that he “writes in the manner of an Old Testament prophet” and “literature for him is a way of coming closer to God.” Goldman further stresses that in Bellow’s later works there are many obvious expressions of conventional Judaism, thus making these works a form of “survivor literature.”

“Jewish culture hopes,” (34) says Clayton. Bellow hopes too, but not without despair. “He has within him the seeds of the despair which he attacks.” (49) In fact “the other side of Jewish hope for the individual faith in the common life is Jewish despair, Jewish guilt and self-hatred, Jewish masochism,” (50) remarks Clayton. “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,” writes Wolf. Bellow is an expert sufferer in a typically Jewish manner and so are his characters. Howe says, “The virtue of powerlessness, the power of helplessness, the company of the dispossessed, the sanctity of the insulted and injured – these finally, are the great themes of Yiddish literature.” Joseph in Dangling Man is waiting to be drafted in the armed forces, but his approach is more of sacrifice than attack.
Myself, I would rather die in the war than consume its benefits. When I am called I shall go and make no protest. And, of course, I hope to survive. But I would rather be a victim than a beneficiary … Alternatives, and particularly desirable alternatives, grow only on imaginary trees.

Yes, I shall shoot, I shall take lives; I shall be shot at, and my life may be taken. Certain blood will be given for half-certain reasons, as in all wars. Somehow I cannot regard it as a wrong against myself. (DM 84)

Sometimes the guilt and the agony in Bellow’s fiction are so strong, that Bellow’s world view appears to be entirely dark and devoid of hope. “Hearts hanging in the dark too long, and going bad, spoiling in suspension, and then having a seizure, an outburst.” (DD 186) Bellow admits that he is a “melancholic – a depressive temperament.” But he also says that he had stopped enjoying melancholy long ago.

Bellow himself has said, “Well, I am a melancholic – a depressive temperament. But I long ago stopped enjoying melancholy – I got heartily sick of my own character about
fifteen years ago. Sometimes I think these comic outbursts [in Augie March] are directed against my own depressive tendencies." I would argue that his affirmation of man is also directed against his own bitter nature. (Clayton 53)

Melancholy he might be, yet he cannot enter the darkness that he defines, nor can he share the nihilism that he examines. Clayton observes three major contradictions in Bellow’s fiction, first of which is his stand against cultural nihilism coupled ironically with his own depressive tendency. Secondly, Bellow rejects alienation on one hand and on the other his main characters are all “masochists and alienates” and thirdly, he values individuality and still rejects it novel after novel. All these contradictions arise from the fact that Bellow’s heroes realize that the only way to become worthy, is through unburdenening themselves of their “guilty selves” and becoming one with humanity as a whole.

His earliest writings definitely show a modern influence, but there are hints of reversal, which did not take long to make itself undeniably visible in Bellow’s later works. Joseph, the protagonist of Dangling Man “manfully denies that it is impossible to be ‘human’ in the present. For that matter, the present, he argues, is hardly so bad as
it has been made out to be.” (Abbot) Mr. Sammler, on the other hand, who is in his 70s, nurtures no illusions about life. His cousin’s desire for a “hot place … where she could see something green” evokes the image of a “billiard table in hell” instead of a cozy pastoral escape.

He rather “knowing from experience that the flight into nature too often ends not in simplicity but in primitivism,” feels that “man must live with dignity wherever he is” instead of expecting perfection. But eventually, he almost succumbs to the “possibilities of an escape from the complexities of the earth,” commenting that “colonies on the moon would reduce the fever and swelling here, and the passion for boundlessness and wholeness might find more material appeasement, and ‘humankind, drunk with terror’ might be then able to ‘calm itself’ and ‘sober up’ a bit.” This desire for perfect happiness and human compassion has always been an integral part of Bellow’s fiction, yet at the same time, desperation and hopelessness torment his protagonists.

Bellow, who has often ascribed a moral purpose to art “makes a conscious effort at world rehabilitation. Ethical and moral questions are at the core of his work.” Bellow’s mother was an extremely religious woman while his father avoided the subject, a dichotomy that presented an unresolved problem before him, to decipher. Ultimately,
he admits that it was his mother who had the greater influence upon him. According to him, prayer is above all, an act of gratitude for existence. In an interview with the Boston Globe he articulates, “I pray, but I don’t believe in petition prayers: My requirements are trivial. I don’t bug God.”

Moreover, he considers none as being out of the realm of religion. Even a proclaimed atheist is enjoying the freedom to be what he likes and “that’s an important religious principle,” on which the Christian idea of grace is based. Explaining Mr. Sammler’s declaration, “But very often, and almost daily, I have strong impressions of eternity” in Mr. Sammler’s Planet, Bellow told Antonio Monda:

There are moments when God shadows existence. And he persists in this manifestation. If you’re looking for revelatory fragments in what I’ve written I can help you: In another passage of the book I write that ‘the purest human beings, from the beginning of time, have understood that life is sacred’ and if I remember correctly I refer more than once to the will of God.

In Ravelstein, Chick says, “God appeared very early to me. His
hair was parted down the middle. I understood that we were related because he had made Adam in his own image, breathed life into him.”

(96) But in Herzog he writes:

“You think history is the history of loving hearts? You fool! Look at these millions of dead. Can you pity them, feel for them? You can nothing! There were too many. We burned them to ashes, we buried them with bulldozers. History is the history of cruelty, not love, as soft men think … If the old God exists he must be a murderer. But the one true God is Death. This is how it is – without cowardly illusions.” (H 290)

Elucidating the protagonist’s statement to Monda, Bellow pronounced, “I want to tell you I believe that a man’s life is also made of moments of desperation and rage. And it has to include a continuous reflection on this mystery: Herzog reflects on mankind’s constant abominations, but that never interrupts his own relations with God.” The continuous probing of spiritual themes is a characteristic of many of his books, without a propagandistic approach though.

Jewish culture and fiction is centered on a “moral concern for man—a moral seriousness which pervades even the comic writing.” In
Jewish culture art has never existed for its own sake, says Howe. It talks of beautiful deeds and actions rather than beautiful things. Even intelligence cannot be separated from morality in Judaism. “Appearing after Hitler’s attempted obliteration of humanism,” Bellow’s work too “strives to reestablish the foundations of society by reaffirming the world’s need for morality, for the return to the humanism of Judaism,” claims L. H. Goldman.

“In fact, Bellow’s religious concerns are the basis for his critique of certain aspects of modern humanism. These concerns are encompassed in his preoccupation with the transcendent, i.e., with the aspects of human experience and the qualities of the human personality that lie beyond the purview of positivistic science, psychology and rationalistic philosophy,” says Stephen L Tanner. Anything that makes man selfish is sinful. Money, to Bellow is as malevolent as war; an evil that has the “ability to survive identification and go on forever.” The Jewish faith believes in the power of community and a Jew is generally a moral being. Inspite of being a “prototypical alienate,” he is concerned for others as he is the “product of an ingrown community.” Bellow’s belief that “goodness is achieved not in a vacuum, but in the company of other men, attended by love”
is fundamental to his writing.

He learnt Hebrew and Yiddish along with French and English. “His Yiddish is fluent; he has translated a number of stories, including Singer’s *Gimpel the Fool*, and he has written an introduction to a collection of Jewish short stories.” (Clayton 30) The names of his major characters are Jewish and his love for the city of Chicago too has a Jewish connection.

For many of the characters, like Max Zetland, the city of Chicago is also the center of traditional Jewish culture. Bellow shares these opinions, for he constantly returns to Chicago in his stories. On one hand, it is ‘a city of confusion and vulgarity,’ but it is also the city where Bellow and many of his characters discover ‘the magic of reading, while frequenting the public libraries.’ (Brown)

Rejecting the themes of exile and alienation, “Bellow uses as his major theme the Biblical narrative most expressive of the Jewish ethic: Jacob wrestling with the angel in the dark of night.” (Kakutani, Poet) Leave alone theme and character, his technique too is influenced by his Jewish predecessors and contemporaries. “Life in Israel is far
from enviable, yet there is a clear purpose in it. People are fighting for the society they have created, and for life and honour,” (TJB 141) proclaims Bellow. He might not be happy with the label of a Jewish author, but he is proud of his Jewish heritage for sure and his Jewish background is reflected in his work.

*The Victim* deals largely with the Jewish sense of persecution and the Jewish yearning for brotherhood; the early scenes of *The Adventures of Augie March* portray the lives of the urban Jewish poor and lower middle class; the characters in *Seize the Day* are recognizable New York Jewish types; and in *Herzog* there is the portrayal of a Jewish childhood and an emphasis on Jewish family feeling. Then, too, as his work progresses, one finds a quasi-Yiddish style – shown in sentence construction and in a mixture of mundane and ideal – which becomes more and more pronounced. (Clayton 30)

Bellow’s Jewish birth and heritage are believed to have affected his personality as a whole as also his work. Let us take a look as to what this Jewish heritage is all about.

The Jews, a race at least 3000 years old are the oldest on earth
and have maintained their distinct cultural identity based originally on the idea of a covenant, or special relationship with God. Although all forms of Judaism have their roots in the Hebrew Bible, but contemporary Judaism is not simply the “religion of the Old Testament,” it is rather derived from the rabbinic movement of the first centuries of the Christian era in Palestine and Babylonia and is therefore called rabbinic Judaism. Rabbi, in Aramaic and Hebrew, means my teacher. “We are a people of teachers. For Millennia, Jews have taught and been taught. Without teaching Jewry was an impossibility,” (R 101) says Ravelstein.

The Jews have progressed immensely in all fields in almost all parts of the world and the reason behind their success lies in the ethically based rabbinic tradition, which is responsible for inculcating the Jewish mind with humanitarian values and great respect for parents, family and the whole of humanity. In the Torah, God ordered the Jews to multiply, so marriage is considered as sacred and celibacy condemned. Adultery, incest, and homosexuality are prohibited in the Torah and Prostitution not allowed. Monogamy is the ideal and chastity a virtue. Evils like stealing, flattery, falsehood, perjury, false swearing and oppression, are forbidden. Hatred and revenge are
unethical and reverence for old age is taught. Animals are to be treated with love and trees to be protected. Kindness, faith, pity and self-respect are taught and most importantly, the non-Israelite is to be treated as oneself and never forced to follow the Israelite faith.

But Jews themselves, in Europe and other parts of the world have endured punitive treatment, such as forced conversion, genocide, and discriminatory behaviour even in America. Yet regardless of all this discrimination, Jewish Americans have risen to high levels of accomplishment in all areas of social, economic, political, intellectual, and cultural endeavor. It has been observed that even though they have rapidly adapted to mainstream American society, Jewish Americans retain certain behavioral patterns that distinguish them from other groups.

Yiddish art, especially literature is believed to have affected Saul Bellow greatly. Present Yiddish literature focuses largely on “life in the ghetto, particularly its deprivations, narrowness, and insecurity.” Bellow too had sad memories of his ghetto childhood and he referred to himself as “the child of a despised people in the Montreal slums.” Yiddish literature reflects also the “warmth and personal feeling” of these simple people who are confined within a periphery, who do not
interact much with the outside world and are connected, mainly with “each other and with their God.” But gradually, Yiddish literature turned towards a “more universal orientation,” taking into account “life in the New World.” The Holocaust too finds a reference in many Yiddish literary works—“records of martyrdom and heroism and inquiries into the nature of evil.”

Saul Bellow’s fiction appears to be typically Jewish in nature because Bellow respects the Jewish tradition and shares the pride and concerns of the Jewish race and community. His ethnicity is believed to be reflected in all his works. Recent research however 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 to Bellow, 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 the following words:

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.’

The ghetto walls might have been erected in order to contain these great writers, who wrote for everyone, but Bellow cannot deny what he owes to his Jewish Ghetto upbringing. Growing up in a Yiddish-speaking household in the ghetto, he had a “childhood steeped in stories.” (Rosenberg) Later on he translated tales from Yiddish to English and then edited his own collection of Jewish stories. Through his lifelong acquaintance with them, he might well
have assimilated their typical narrative strategies, which he then put to sophisticated modern uses of his own.

He was certainly the legitimate heir of these stories, hearing them from boyhood on. He has said that, for the last generation of East European Jews, daily life without stories would have been inconceivable. “My father would say, whenever I asked him to explain any matter, ‘The thing is like this. There was a man who lived...’ ‘There was once a scholar ... There was a widow with one son. . . .’” (9) Bellow wrote in his introduction to the Great Jewish Short Stories.

Bellow inherited the art of appreciating and telling stories from his ancestors, and along with that he inherited their collective Jewish anxiety, their traumatic memories, values, principles and fears. The Jews have been hated and massacred since ages and been discriminated everywhere, and whenever such discrimination occurs and a group is marginalized, it is affected in various ways, but the most important effect of marginalization is psychological. It leads to stereotyping and damages the group’s self-esteem.

Sociologist Charles Horton Cooley suggested in his “looking glass” theory, that human beings use others as mirrors to evaluate themselves and the appraisals of others reflect back to them, their own
self-image and they learn who they are from what others think and say of them. “I am not what I think I am and I am not what you think I am; I am what I think you think I am.” It not only gives them a way of self-perception, but also reasons to feel proud or ashamed. Herzog is one character, who is ever busy imagining who hates him why and says what of him. He writes letters in his mind, replying to all and sundry, explaining what he thinks and narrating his side of the story to them. Joseph, in *Dangling Man*, believes himself to be evil, at the mere mention of the word Mephistopheles for him. When his German friend’s mother calls him Mephistopheles, he stops seeing them immediately, but starts brooding.

I never saw them again. I avoided Will at school. And I spent sleepless hours thinking of what Mrs. Harscha had said. She had seen through me-by some instinct, I thought then-and, where others saw nothing wrong, she, had discovered evil. For a long time I believed there was a diabolic part to me. Later, I gave that up. It was ‘poor devil,’ if any devil. Not me, specifically, just the general, poor, human devil. But meanwhile I had the confirmation of people like Mrs. Harscha for my suspicion that I was not like others but (and I now know that it is an old belief and at heart of what we call ‘Romantic’) that I concealed
something rotten. And perhaps it is world-wide, such a conviction, and arises because we know ourselves too well to accept the good but, rather, embrace the bad opinions others have of us. (77)

Why a certain group, racial or cultural, behaves in a certain way, is defined and decided, to a large extent, by the way its members are treated in society. Racial stereotypes, prejudices and discrimination are responsible for shaping an individual’s psyche and none can escape the influence or evade it completely. “While the specific content may vary, the general use of stereotypes remains part and parcel of human nature. As author Daniela Gioseffi writes,

It is clear, as psychology explains, that none of us can be perfectly free of social prejudices, those subtle stereotypical reactions to surnames or cultural backgrounds or skin tones or eye slant or nose width and breadth or sexual orientation that are jumbled in the haunted attic of our psyches, causing us to prejudge people before any evidence is in. (Waller 18)

Roger Cohen points out that anti-Semitism has taken such deep roots that everyone, including the Jews themselves, prefers to whisper when it comes to talking about Jews or Jewishness.
In his novel *Deception*, Philip Roth has the American protagonist say to his British mistress: “In England, whenever I am in a public place, a restaurant, a party, the theater, and someone happens to mention the word ‘Jew,’ I notice that the voice always drops just a little.”

She challenges him on this observation, prompting the American, a middle-aged writer, to say, yes, that's how ‘you all say ‘Jew.’ Jews included.’ (Cohen)

Saul Bellow has included anti-Semitism in almost all his novels and its psychological impact on the Jews. In *Dangling Man*, Joseph’s memory of the above mentioned incident from his childhood days, when he had gone to visit a German friend’s family depicts how deep the wounds are and how lastingly tormenting the results. Even though his father used to call Joseph handsome, his mother referred to him as Mephistopheles. “Joseph immediately understands the racist slur and is deeply shocked,” observes Philippe Codde. He never meets that friend again, but is himself profoundly hurt and shattered.

Significantly, this scene occurs just after the description of how his aunt Dina had decided that ‘it was high time my curls were
cut,’ after she had made him look less Jewish, in other words. The German mother, of course, referred to the age-old prejudice that equates Jews to the devil. This scene can directly be related to Sartre’s insight that for Gentiles (but even for Jews), the Jew can be whatever he wants to be (as handsome as he wants to be), but it will always be as a Jew... Perhaps this scene explains why Joseph later distances himself from his Jewishness in his dream: For Sartre, the inauthentic Jew often succumbs to self-hatred because he or she accepts the views that others have of him or her. (Codde 138)

Joseph immediately admits: “We know ourselves too well to accept the good but, rather, embrace the bad opinions others have of us.” (77) Cohen feels disappointed with this attitude and believes that the Jews after centuries of humiliation need to gather courage for “confronting the lingering, voice-lowering anti-Semitism.” He feels frustrated with the situation and expects the Jews to be more courageous in being themselves.

Jewish identity is an intricate subject and quest. In America, because I’ve criticized Israel and particularly its self-defeating expansion of settlements in the West Bank, I was, to self-styled
“real Jews,” not Jewish enough, or even -- join the club -- a self-hating Jew. In Britain I find myself exasperated by the muted, muffled way of being a Jew. Get some pride, an inner voice says, speak up! (Cohen)

Chick describes an anti-Semitic incident in *Ravelstein*:

Turned on M. Klotz with hatred, Keynes writes. “Do you know Klotz by sight? - a short, plump, heavy moustached Jew, but with an unsteady, roving eye, and his shoulders a little bent in an instinctive deprecation. Lloyd George had always hated and despised him. And now saw in a twinkling that he could kill him. Women and children were starving, he cried, and here was Mr. Klotz prating and prating of his ‘gooold.’ He leant forward and with a gesture of his hands indicated to everyone the image of a hideous Jew clutching a money bag. His eyes flashed and the words came out with contempt so violent that he seemed almost to be spitting at him. The anti-Semitism, not far below the surface in such an assemblage as that one, was up in the heart of everyone. Everyone looked at Klotz with a momentary contempt and hatred; the poor man bent over his seat, visibly cowering. (80)
Such discriminatory and insulting behavior from others has a deep psychological effect on the group or individual discriminated against. The Jews have been through such horror always and as a result their own idea of themselves is a bit confused and they sometimes hate themselves. Philip Roth in his *Operation Shylock* “externalizes and dramatizes the self-dividedness of the Jew. During Smilesburger’s lecture to Philip toward the end of the novel, he argues:

‘the divisiveness is not just between Jew and Jew -- it is within the individual Jew....inside every Jew there is a mob of Jews. The good Jew, the bad Jew. The new Jew, the old Jew. The lover of Jews, the hater of Jews. The friend of the goy, the enemy of the goy. The arrogant Jew, the wounded Jew. The pious Jew, the rascal Jew. The coarse Jew, the gentle Jew. The defiant Jew, the appeasing Jew. The Jewish Jew, the de-Jewed Jew.’

This depicts the ‘internal plurality of the Jew’ and different ways Jews may identify themselves or be identified by others. At root is the difficulty of defining precisely what ‘Jewishness’ is, compounding the problem of what ‘identity’ is
in general.” (Shostak)

This identity crisis forms a major theme in Saul Bellow, who denies and accepts by fits and turns, the impact of his Jewishness on his personality and writing. When his German friend’s mother calls Joseph Mephistopheles, his reaction is more of acceptance than anger, even though he decides never to see him again. It appears that the Jew has accepted the world view against him, consciously or unconsciously. Somewhere the Jew believes and agrees with his haters that he’s bad and evil, even though his own religion tells him that he’s one of God’s favourite children, “the chosen ones.” A 1937 sportswriter, Paul Gallico wrote about the group who dominated American basketball at that time in history:

‘Curiously, it (basketball) is a game that above all others seems to appeal to the temperament of Jews, and for the past years Jewish players on the college teams around New York have had the game all to themselves… Jews flock to basketball by the thousands… it appeals to the Hebrew with his oriental background… The game places a premium on an alert, scheming mind and flashy trickiness, artful dodging, and general smart-aleckness.’ (Waller 18)
This reminds us of Shylock, Shakespeare’s moneylender who “gradually went beyond the play” in order to “lead an independent life as image and metaphor.” In the history of prejudice, Shylock, “is the embodiment of the Jew,” a savage, disgusting and iniquitous fiend, “deformed by hatred and revenge.” (Gilman) Shylock is represented as a monster, within Shakespeare and outside and has become synonymous with “Jew” which in turn was nearly synonymous with “usurer,” in Elizabethan eyes. Since Shakespeare needed a userer, the association of Jews with usury, brought the Jew in and immortalized the association of greed with Jewishness.

“Invested with Shakespearean power and, in time, with Shakespearean prestige, Shylock the Jewish villain became part of world mythology. He may not have added anything to existing stereotypes, but as the most famous Jewish character in literature he helped to spread them and to keep them vigorously alive. He belongs, inescapably, to the history of anti-Semitism.” (Gross) Moreover, Shylock’s Jewish villainies being strictly traditional, he amplifies and reflects the Jews’ relation with Christ’s crucifixion. “He is a usurer; he is cunning and cruel; he pursues a vendetta against Christians -- or against their noblest available representative.” (Gross) Shakespeare’s
popularity immortalized Shylock, who in turn strengthened the
Christian bias against the Jews.

Behind his plot against the altruistic Antonio, who must face the
consequences of having signed a defaulted loan, lie fantasies of
ritual murder that ultimately go back to the Jews’ supposed role
in the Crucifixion.

As a villain, Shylock was supposed to be a hate figure. As the
villain in a comedy, whose designs were thwarted, he was,
paradoxically, someone to be taken seriously. (Gross)

He was in fact, taken very seriously by the Germans and “the ground
for the Holocaust was well prepared, and to that extent the play can
never seem quite the same again. It is still a masterpiece; but there is a
permanent chill in the air, even in the scenes where Portia presides,
even in the gardens of Belmont.” (Gross) The attitudes against Jews
definitely affected Bellow, who must have faced racism in America
and seen its face changing with time, from direct racism of the first
half of the twentieth century to its more obscure, aversive and
symbolic forms during the years after 1960. Minorities have been
humiliated in many ways all over the world, from being insulted to
avoided and ignored by the majority populations. Fearing non-acceptance, Bellow has always preferred to be called an American writer and in order to sound American or at least, to not sound too Jewish he changed his name from Solomon Bellow to Saul Bellow. “I didn’t deny anything, didn’t deny they were my family, didn’t turn my back on them, didn’t assume some fancy name like Courtney or Smithson. I didn’t hide anything,” explains Bellow. “As for his family, ‘they couldn’t have cared less,’ Bellow maintained.” (Atlas 52)

Bellow wanted to study English Literature, but being a Jew he was advised not to pursue the field, as no Jew can do justice to the spirit of English Literature. In search of career advice, Bellow called upon the chairman of the English department, William Frank Bryan, and Bryan told him that in spite of his good academic record, he would not suggest him to study English as he was not “born to it” and that no Jew could actually “grasp the tradition of English literature” nor could he “ever have the right feeling for it.” Bellow, then applied for a “fellowship in the Department of Sociology and Anthropology at the University of Wisconsin.” Fortunately, anthropology suited him and gave him “freedom from surrounding restrictions,” taught him that life is much broader and more panoramic than he realized and
prepared him for “criticizing society from its roots.” It taught him radicalism and as a Jew, provided him immunity from “Anglo-Saxon custom: being accepted or rejected by a society of Christian gentlemen.” And at the same time, anthropology, “the study of foreign cultures, provided expression for Bellow’s own sense of exclusion from American society—a condition that haunted him long after he had become an exemplary (and deeply assimilated) spokesman for the opportunities it offered. Like many Jewish intellectuals of his generation, Bellow never rid himself of the suspicion that he wasn’t quite part of America,” narrates James Atlas.

Saul Bellow’s subconscious affinity and indebtedness to his Jewish heritage is clearly evident in his writings, out of which some instances have been provided above in order to highlight the hidden Jewishness in his rhetoric.