Chapter V

Conclusion
Chapter 5

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The more you write the more you feel it to be inadequate. Such is the experience that awaits a student working on any theme related to Jewish literature. So much can be said and written, and, still, much can be left to the reader’s postulation. One can write 1000 pages and still not be satisfied with it, and one can just be “more vocal in silence.”

Jews have suffered every possible cruelty from various governments, neighbors, non-Jew communities—from shocking Holocaust to a casual raise of eyebrows—after declaring their identity! Still they stood firm, undaunting. Fighting for their history, for themselves! The most oppressed one of all the ethnic groups, and, yet the most successful one! They came to America with A History and created one for themselves. Today, in America, Jews are under every famous banner in all the fields: clothing, film-industry, banking so on and so forth. They had everything essential to be a successful ethnic group what they needed was America; not only acceptance but freedom! Though it was not a Promised Land it certainly was a land of promise. They had to face troubles but were different from Europe. What was so special about
Muriel Rukeyser identified strongly with the suffering Jews of Europe. Her intense emotion, found an objective correlative in the persecution of Jews. She was so right in expressing the true condition of Jews:

To be a Jew in the twentieth century
Is to be offered a gift.....
.......The gift is torment,....
torture, isolation......
For every human freedom, suffering to be free.
Daring to live for the impossible.¹

Jews sometimes enjoyed the periods of tolerance, prosperity; often they suffered oppression, poverty and violence. Throughout their history, in good times and bad, the Jews were considered to be different-religiously, ethnically, racially and hence politically- a distinction by the way, they did not always contest. When they came to America, however, they discovered- that America was different! “Without the opportunities, freedom, and openness found in this land, American Jewry would not have been able to realize its energies and talents and become what it is today.”² Those energies and talents are remarkably evident in the fields of literature and culture. Indeed, it would be hard to conceive of these
areas in the twentieth century without Jewish artists and writers. Of course Jewish creativity did not begin in America, nor has it ever been restricted to periods free from persecution and turmoil. The Jews did not need America in order to flourish creatively. But they did flourish differently there, and that story needs to be told.

The terms **ethnicity** and **ethnic group** are derived from the Greek word ἔθνος ethnos, normally translated as “nation.” The terms refer currently to people thought to have common ancestry who share a distinctive culture. Cohen, in his illuminating study of the use of custom in contemporary politics, conceives an “ethnic group” to be

….an informal interest group whose members

“are distinct from the members of other groups within the same society in that they share….“compulsory institutions” like kinship and religion, and can communicate among themselves really easily. [In] strife between such ethnic groups…people stress their identity and exclusiveness.³

Among the first to bring the term "ethnic group" into social studies was the German sociologist Max Weber, who defined it as:

Those human groups that entertain a subjective belief in their common descent because of similarities of physical type or of customs or both, or because of memories of colonization and migration; this belief must be important for
The peopling of America is one of the greatest dramas in all of human history. Over the years, a massive stream of humanity—45 million people—crossed every ocean and continent to reach the US. They came speaking every language and representing every nationality, race, and religion. Today there are more people of Irish ancestry in the US than in Ireland; more Jews than in Israel, more blacks than in most African countries. Each ethnic history is distinctive, and yet all were influenced by similar factors of age, location, time of arrival, and the skills and cultures they brought with them to American shores. The current economic position of American ethnic groups covers a wide range, and yet no group is unique. Each group has changed in America, and American society has changed in many ways. The most dramatic example is that today there are people sitting in congress and on the Supreme Court whose ancestors were brought here as slaves. Among the world’s leading scientific, political and economic figures today are Americans whose immigrant ancestors were once dismissed as “the beaten men of beaten races”.

Jews came to America from many countries. The ancient Jews were forced from their ancestral homeland in 70 AD, when the armies of
the Roman Empire conquered Palestine. Thus began the diaspora—the long centuries of their dispersion throughout Europe and eventually the world.

The Jews typically lived together and with the passing of the centuries and the rise of militant Christianity, they were forced to do so. In many parts of Europe, Jews were not safe outside the ghetto. The Jewish community was a separate, self-governing entity, with its own culture, courts and tax collection. One of the classic features of European Jewish culture was respect and reverence for learning. This was primarily religious learning, knowledge of the Talmud. For all their poverty, Jews seldom became servants. As the Jews rose economically, they also spread out residentially. Americanized Jews also found other parts of the US more accessible than their immigrant parents had. Among the Jewish movie moguls were Samuel Goldwyn and Louis B. Mayer, whose names were incorporated into the initials for MGM studios. David O. Selznick, the Warner Brothers, and William Fox were others. Despite a voluminous literature claiming that slums shape people’s values, the Jews had their own values and they took those values into and out of the slums.

When the whole world was outcrying the agony and pain suffered by Jews, hardly anyone was thinking about the excruciating pain of women. For Jewish women suffering was on many levels; they were not
only the victims as ‘Jews’ but also as ‘women’; they lost their families and also their self-pride and were left with a sense of loss and emptiness. A victim of nature and culture, a woman always ignores her own priorities and sacrifices for the whole family. Women constitute the essence of family but the unspeakable pain of Jewish women has ever remained marginalized. The study of women characters leads to the study of the whole family, the whole society. Women from different walks of Jewish life will give a better insight into the world of Jewish culture.

The Jewish Family, through the centuries, has been marked by filial reverence and family solidarity. Along with the great care and attention given the children, strong emphasis was laid upon the proper relation of children to parents: “Honor thy father and thy mother; that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee” (Exodus 20:12) Jews is a predominantly matrilineal society; a person is Jew if the mother is. Reverence for motherhood is a typically Jewish feature. The so-called overprotective Jewish mother came out of the eastern European background. Her desire to always have her children around her, within her sight, is all too understandable in view of the Jewish experience in Eastern Europe, where Jewish children who wandered off might never be seen again. The Jewish mother is recognized and appreciated for her role as homemaker, filling her home with warmth,
devotion and love. She is affectionately called the “Yiddishe Mamma”\(^8\) who, in poverty and amidst many tensions held the family together, gave the children emotional security, and inspired and prepared her sons to become doctors, lawyers, and teachers in order to have an easier and more secure life than their fathers. Modern Jewish mothers too deserve the praise due a devoted homemaker for her family. So the study of the female characters from a woman’s point of view is equally essential. That way it is not only realistic but authentic too. No one but a woman can have a better understanding of another woman’s plight. Hence the study is important for me too. I have studied and discussed selected female characters from the selected works of Malamud, Bellow and Singer.

Jews are the classic American success story- from rags to riches against all opposition.\(^9\) Moreover, like other groups that they have found in the US opportunities denied them in their homelands’, Jews have been proud and patriotic Americans. Rare as the success of the Jews has been, it is not absolutely unique. Episcopalians, for example, have had higher incomes than Jews. It is social and economic distance in a relatively short period of history that makes the story of Jewish Americans so remarkable.\(^10\)

One of the most traumatic events for later generations of American Jews occurred outside the US-the Nazis in Germany and the subsequent
Holocaust in which 6 million Jews were brutally killed. This catastrophe was totally horrifying in its methods and magnitude. The Diary of Anne Frank gives horrifying description of the Holocaust atmosphere. Of the six million Jews who died in the Holocaust, the most famous is Anne Frank, a Jewish teenager living in Amsterdam when the Nazis occupied Holland. For many people – non-Jews in particular- the Diary made the Holocaust real…the line in the diary for which she is most famous is: “In spite of everything, I still believe that people are really good at heart…”

A leading figure in Jewish community affairs relates that a Jew always eagerly asks, in any situation, “How many are Jews?” and when he gets an answer, he asks suspiciously. “How do you know?” Self-consciousness, curiosity, pride- all these are Jewish traits; caution, timidity, fear these are Jewish traits, too.

A satisfying pattern of Jewish middle-class life has not yet emerged. This failure in Jewish life reflects the general unease of American middle-class life as well as the specific Jewish dilemma of finding, in this amorphous society, a balance between separation and the loss of identity. This work aims at finding how this dilemma has found a perfect way out in the form of literature. Why this situation of being (or in some cases not being) Jewish becomes so very vital when it comes to express oneself? What is Jewishness then for these writers? Is it a race a
culture, a religion, or an obsession? “In recent years” as Leslie Fiedler puts it, “Jewishness has become an eminently marketable commodity.”

It is not surprising that Jewishness is as fielder tells us, a “passport into the heart of Gentile culture.” Thus we have a different situation: Jew and America cannot confront each other (often in the same person), without recognizing their differences and similarities, their complex, obscure, and mythic identities. The writers I have chosen to work upon face this particular situation. Their problems have the answers which they have to find through their characters. Question arises which is the most difficult one that they find to confront to- their Jewishness or their American passport.

The Thematic concern of Jewish American writers revolves around two major things:

- **Death of Memory and Memories of death**;
- **Promised Land became Land of Promise**;

These factors work in defining Jewish Identity. The whole Jewish identity revolves around *Past* and *History*. What is absent begins to speak through writing and results into ‘crises of identity’. The dilemma arising out of this situation is perfectly reflected in the works of three major writers; Bernard Malamud, Isaac Bashevis Singer, and Saul Bellow. These three writers, these survivors and children of survivors, bearers of a haunting
memory and an ancient promise, these dreamers and rebels who persist in trying to change the world and man through words- nostalgic, poetic or frenzied, depending on the circumstances- what do they have in common? The only answer is: they are all Jews!!

**Bernard Malamud**

“….Life is a tragedy full of joy” 16 - this is how Malamud explains life and we know that this is what his characters experience as they face the challenges in front of them. “If you have a sense of where the darkness is, you also know where the light is”17 - says Malamud in the same context, which may appear a pessimistic view but in reality a highly optimistic one. Redemption/salvation through suffering is the keynote to Malamud’s writing. "I was concerned with what Jews stood for," Bernard Malamud once said, "with their getting down to the bare bones of things. I was concerned with their ethicality - how Jews felt, they had to live in order to go on living."18 "The suffering of the Jews is a distinct thing for me," he once explained. "I for one believe that not enough has been made of the tragedy of the destruction of six million Jews. Somebody has to cry - even if it's a writer, 20 years later." 19 In an interview for the *Paris Review*, Malamud was asked about his frequent use of prison motif and he answered, “I use it as a metaphor for the dilemma of all men….A man has to construct, invent, his freedom. Imagination helps. ” 20 In *The
we are told in the beginning itself, “In a store you were entombed.”

“The store becomes not only a testing ground for Morris’s ability to retain his moral behavior, but also a training ground for Frank.”

Although instead of running away from prison like store, Frank stays. Frank realizes that imprisonment is necessary if he is to achieve his moral and spiritual possibilities, particularly if he is to attempt to emulate his hero St. Francis. The store is Frank’s monastery. “…. Each act of suffering Bober and the rest of mankind strips away Frank’s worldliness…”

In *The Natural* we again see Malamud telling: suffering as a possible means to moral growth. Possible because whether growth will take place depends on the attitude of the character. In Roy Hobbs case very little is learned. When Irene tells him the importance of suffering and that “suffering is what brings us toward happiness…” Roy answers, “… I am sick of all I have suffered.” When Malamud was asked about his attitude toward suffering in his work, he replied: “I’m against it but when it occurs why waste the experience?”

*The Fixer* concerns the fate of Yakov Bok, a poor Jew in Tsarist Russia who undergoes great suffering during two-and-a-half years in prison. Malamud focused on Bok’s thoughts, his experiences in his cell, and his personal development as a moral human being. Yakov thinks that
“being a Jew meant being vulnerable to history, including its worst errors.”

He spends long hours trying to answer that most unanswerable of questions: Why me? He is forced to consider the relationship of the individual to historical forces, one of the central issues in the novel. At one point during his imprisonment, Yakov, “cursed history, anti-Semitism, fate, and even occasionally, the Jews”

But we eventually see him moving from this position to a point of understanding history and fate becoming a sufferer for the Jews and for humankind rather than cursing them. For moral growth to happen, Yakov himself an orphan, must become a father in his heart and in actuality not merely say that he is one. Even to the extent of having an outgoing love for all of suffering humanity. In reading the Hebrew Bible, Yakov becomes aware that “suffering…awakens repentance…”

He extends this feeling of responsibility to all the Jews: “He will protect them to the extent that he can. This is his covenant with himself” Thus he gives his suffering meaning and his life a purpose. In accepting Raisel and her child, he also confirms his sense of oneness with his people, as her name is an anagram for Israel.”

In a story like “Angel Levine”, for example we see that the act of accepting responsibility should be mutual. Manischevitz, a tailor, is guilty merely of being man and Jew and also has trouble accepting God’s grace
in the end telling his wife, “Believe me, there are Jews everywhere.” Salzman, a marriage broker in “The Magic Barrel,” dreams of finding a perfect mate for his customer Finkle, a would-be-rabbi seeking a wife to improve his chances for a good congregation. By trusting in his love for another human being, Finkle has become ready to love God and man, and, therefore, will be worthy to be called rabbi at just the moment that Salzman stops thinking of him as a rabbi. Most shocking to mind and memory, however, is the title story from the collection, “Idiots First.” It is a mini drama of Malamud’s themes of compassion, charity, and sacrifice. When a loving father races to put his idiot son on the day’s last train to California, it slowly dawns on the father that the man trying to stop him is no bill collector or social worker, but the Angel of Death. The reader is in Grand Central Station and in the realm of the spirit at the same time. Malamud can make anyone human. When a Jewish bird helps junior with his homework, it is not surprising because the bird sounds exactly like a helpful “Jewbird.” He talks homely wisdom, and fears anti-Semitism from one of its most dangerous sources- Jews who have forgotten what Judaism means. Next morning, finding the bird dead, when it was asked, “Who did it to you, Mr. Schwartz,” Cohen’s wife answers, “anti-semeets!” And thus the first words of the bird at Cohen’s house come true; they were: “Gevalt, a pogrom!” “The Last Mohican” is again quite a haunting story. Fieldman an artist is followed by
Susskind, a beggar. Towards the end we realize that Susskind is actually every man’s conscience which follows him everywhere and questions his deeds.

Women, in Malamud’s fiction and stories appear with decreasing frequency and for shorter periods. This definitely is not because Malamud regards women as any less significant. In fact it is the other way round. “…to some extent, the variety of women that appear in Malamud’s canon is the male’s archetypal projection of feminine dualism- life-giver and death-dealer , Lady of the Lake and Morgan Le Fay, Eve and Lilith, Earth Mother and Death Goddess.” So, on the one hand, she is the means by which man is destroyed through his attachment to the world of objects (Memo Paris, Avis Fliss). On the other, she is the agent by which man is redeemed through love and suffering (Iris Lemon, Helen Bober). Malamud’s women function in a wider context. They have their own neurosis to contend with. They have the capacity to change their behavior and revise judgments. And, like the men, they are in the process of creating a self. In The Natural, Iris stands for maturity and understanding human capacity. Suffering, says Iris, educates. She explains:

“Experience makes good people better…..we have two lives, Roy, the life we learn with and the life we live with after that. Suffering is what brings us toward happiness”
And in Malamud’s fiction it is the men who are particularly entrapped by this unavoidable responsibility. For women, biology is still destiny. So Malamud’s vision of woman is basically a conservative one. Ida (The Assistant) is a typical nagging, frightened ageing woman who is eager for safety and security at any price. Helen Bober is however confused about her feminine identity. As Memo uses her body to assert her powers; so does Helen, by not offering one to others, especially to Frank. For Frank physical act is affirmation of love whereas for Helen it is almost a total and permanent commitment. The women of The Fixer and The Tenants, Raisl Bok and Irene Bell, present interesting variations of Malamudian woman. We see them actually for a relatively shorter period, although their presence is felt through the memories of their male counterparts. It is also remarkable that these women abandon their men when they no longer seem capable of fulfilling their responsibilities within the traditional zone. Raisl leaves Bok only after it is clear that she can not have a child by him, to become pregnant thus satisfying the basic feminine impulse. She returns only when an acknowledgement of paternity is necessary for the child and for Yakov’s growth. Irene also demanding family, children, life, departs. Raisl Bok is part of the same orthodoxy that has conditioned Ida Bober. Judaism has trained her for wifehood and motherhood and for very little else. So Raisl becomes a force which leads Yakov to accept his true identity. In this respect she is
like Isabella del Dongo/della Seta, “The Lady of the Lake”, false aristocrat and a true Jew, whose function is to force Henry Levin/Freeman to confront his rejected past. It is the response, denial or acceptance of these women which are the guiding force of male’s actions and decisions.

Self-discovery, that too through suffering is central to Malmud’s fiction. As discussed before Malamud’s most common motif is imprisonment- usually self- suffocation of the soul. What is significant about Malamud’s heroes is that they begin as ordinary men – often even less than ordinary men. Unlike the heroes of Greek or Shakespearean plays, they begin at the bottom. Suffering, commitment and responsibility are the hallmarks of Malamud’s heroes. They are men who start with nothing. But the broader and more fundamental obligation is to be fully a mensh. As Morris Bober says, “…to be a Jew all you need is a good heart.” Susskind follows us all, wherever we may go. Beware of the Last Mohican. To his question we must answer, “Yes I am a man. Yes I am a Jew. Yes, I am responsible.”

**Saul Bellow**

The winner of the 1976 Nobel Prize for Literature and the recipient of three National Book awards, Saul Bellow is a unique spokesman for humanitarian ideals in American literature in the twentieth century. His
writings epitomize the moral vision that is an integral part of the Jewish outlook. He believes in the divinity of the individual, that although a person may be psychologically and emotionally fragile, he/she is created in the image of God and is therefore majestic. Bellow’s writing is highly subjective and is based upon the tradition of a personal relationship between man and His Creator. (One of Herzog’s letters is directed to God. It is not and instance of blasphemy. It is an aspect of the Jewish tradition and clearly defines the Jewish attitude towards the Universe.). Bellow protagonist never attempts to involve himself in anything of the Jewish significance, nor does he attempt to do anything “Jewishly”. He remains Jewish by default. He is a Jewish protagonist, created by a Jewish author, who espouses a Jewish philosophy (unconscious though it may be). Dangling Man⁴⁷ Bellow’s first novel, is written in the personal voice of a protagonist whose principal domain is his own sensibility, and whose principal audience is himself. It concerns a war casualty who has not yet fought in the war, a man alienated from his surroundings and in the Limbo. Central to the novel was the theme of search for the value of individual freedom, the meaning of moral responsibility, and the demands of social contract. “Joseph’s present status as a “dangling man” is indicative of how the Jew is viewed in society.”⁴⁸ Joseph’s present predicament raises another issue: the question of the meaning of the
freedom. Joseph is “free”. He has all the time in the world to do whatever he wants. Yet he feels more imprisoned now.

*The Victim* 49 explores in an intense manner the ability of twentieth-century man to cope with victimization and paranoia. Asa Leventhal, a Jew who has been emotionally scarred in childhood by his mother’s madness and screaming fits, and who failed to form a relationship with his father, lost both parents, enters the post WW II American workplace minus both parents and carrying with him his personal fears and a keen sense of the prevailing anti-Semitism. In such readings, Asa Leventhal becomes the eternal Jew who must deal with a world not of his making. However, Bellow again poses the central moral question he asked in *Dangling Man*: To what extent am I my brother’s keeper? *(Genesis 4:9)* Though social responsibility is a pillar of Jewish thought, it is also an accepted norm of universal social behavior. Asa and Harkavy represent two types of Jews: one is victimized; the other is not. Asa epitomizes the self-conscious Jew, full of apprehensions and suspicions. He considers himself a different type of Jew from what his father was. Asa recognizes his responsibility to society to the point where he feels victimized. But it is only by means of his struggle with Kirby that he comes to a full valuation of himself. Albee appears as an angel, a monster, as a secret sharer, seeking to become one with Asa and thereby
destroy him. Asa ejects Kirby from his domicile, but Kirby returns for a final showdown. He attempts to commit suicide in Asa’s apartment and take his alter ego or antagonist with him. The struggle they enter into is the turning point of Asa’s life; he actually becomes a new person. Immediately following this confrontation, he telephones his wife to come home and shortly after that he gets a new job with a prestigious trade magazine.

_The Adventures of Augie March_,50 Bellow’s most exuberant and nostalgic book, is set in Depression era Chicago. Written as a contemporary bildungsroman, and picaresque adventure chronicle, it is the coming-of-age novel of the larky Augie March. Bellow’s Augie March suggests a approach to life which is unique and uniquely Jewish. Humor is an essential ingredient in the character of the Jew. It is not the humor of the belly-laugh, though that may be present at times. Jewish humor is a perspective on life. Bellow himself in suggesting that humor brings one closer to god, propounds a similar idea. Laughter and tears are essential elements in Bellow’s protagonists. “One of Augie’s extraordinary qualities is his prolixity. It is also one of his Jewish traits”.

51 Also, Jews are a “bookish” people. They place a high priority on education and learning. And Augie is both self-educated and verbose. His Jewish education amounted to that which he gathered from those with
whom he came in contact, and his oral tradition came from Grandma Lausch, Anna Coblin, and perhaps his mother. As for his English education, he was graduated from high school, spent a little time at college, but all said and done he was a self-educated man. He reads voraciously. Some of his language is too erudite. There are other characteristics of Augie which are generally accepted as Jewish but which may also be universal. One of these is Augie as a family man, his intense feeling of closeness and loyalty to his family and his sensitivity to the importance of the family. All of Bellow’s protagonists share this quality. In ascribing this trait to the Jewish protagonists he creates, Bellow follows biblical tradition. After all the history of the people of Israel is a history of one man, Jacob and his progeny. Bellow is also voicing the prevailing belief that the basis of Jewish survival is close family ties. Augie says in his own jargon: “I was sucker for it too, family love”

52 Augie’s quality of compassion extends to animals too. He disapproves the wild scheme of training an eagle to hunt iguanas. Perhaps Augie’s most Jewish quality is his commitment to society, his feeling of social responsibility. This is evident in Augie’s immense involvement with others, which is reflected in his compassionate and sensitive nature. He never withdraws from people.
All of Bellow’s novels deal with family conflicts, but *Seize the Day* is unique in that it is his only work which attempts to explore the relationship between father and son against a backdrop of a complex view of the dissolution of the Jewish–American family. Tommy is both a Jacob and Esau figure. He is a deceitful person and also the rebellious son who denounces his birthright for selfish reasons. He is born into an assimilated Jewish family in which education is of utmost importance. As an assimilated Jew, Tommy has equivocal Jewish values. The discord in the family is heightened by the fact that both father and son are at crucial stages of their lives: the father is an octogenarian, facing the end of his days, while the son is middle-aged, attempting to grasp the significance of his life. The parent-child relationship is fundamental in Judaism because it is recognized that the survival of Jewish life depends on this bond. Its importance is emphasized by the position of this bond at the center of the Decalogue. This tradition of honoring one’s parents remained a vital aspect of the Jewish child’s life, throughout the ages, down to the present time. Curiously we see in Bellow that minor characters usually have a full family whereas the family of the protagonist is broken. He is usually separated or divorced from his wife, and his mother is only a memory. If the mother is present, she is not like the revered figures of the matriarchs. She is not the configuration of the Jewish mother, fully devoted to her home, her husband, and her children.
She is not the strength to her family, a posture which has long been a major theme of both Jewish folklore and the Jewish consciousness. In Bellow’s works she is a shadowy figure (as in Augie March) or better still a non-entity (as in Dangling Man and The victim) or dead as in Seize the Day.

Herzog, is Bellow’s most Jewish novel. Externally, it concerns a man in the crisis of middle-age, on the verge of a mental breakdown, but from the aspect of the Jewish reader and Jewish writer, Bellow presents a study of assimilation. It presents the dissolution of a family which sparks the dissolution of personality. Inwardly the individual is is imprisoned in his own mind, in having to prove himself that life is worthwhile, that he still is human. Herzog’s Judaism is weak. He does not display an overt Jewish identity, but only one based on memories. His childhood experiences have created not a participating Jew, not a well-informed Jew, but a Jew who is a mensch This is Herzog’s problem. Yet this problem is linked with Jewish identity because it concerns the fate of the individual Jew. And this reflects and affects the fate of the Jewish people. Herzog thinks: “myself is thus and so, and will continue thus and so. And why fight it? My balance comes from instability. Not organization or courage, as with other people. ” Bellow’s choice of names for the protagonist is related to this novel, Moses Ekanah Herzog, is related to

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this consideration of Jewish identity. “Bellow’s use of the name Moses for his Jewish protagonist of Herzog clearly indicates that his concerns will be with the themes of slavery, freedom, and wandering.” 57 At the end of the novel Herzog quotes the biblical Moses when he says, “Here I am. Hineni!” 58

The Bellarosa Connection 59 is a much better crafted and more complex novella. Reveals, Bellow examining the net worth of his life as writer, and as an American Jew. The focus of the story is primarily on the unnamed narrator is overcome with the desire to find the couple and repent of his own American Jewish amnesia with regard to the consequences of the Holocaust. He knows he must deal with his own identity as a Jew, and the realization that he has lived more through memory than through actual relationships and moral commitments.

“Bellow is uncomfortable with women, who in his fiction, fall into three categories: mother, wife and lover. The wife and lover he depicts in terms of stereotypes: bitches, destructive sex goddesses, or sufferers.” 60

It would be wrong to ascribe these qualities to a Jewish mother figure; therefore, it is simpler for Bellow to omit this crucial aspect of the family entity. So although there is a strong family feeling on the part of Bellow’s protagonists, he renders the family as fractured social unit.
One notices that there are essentially three types of women in *Dangling Man* wife, mother, and lover. Within the traditional Jewish, the three are combined into one figure. In Bellow’s works, these roles are never incorporated into one entity entitled “woman”, but represent the categories by which his women are classified. None is developed to any degree, nor do the categories overlap.

“There are no matriarchs in this work, no Sarahs, Rebeccas, Rachels, or Leahs, nor are they to be found in Bellow’s subsequent writings. His women tend to be more like the Christological Eve archetype, evil figures leading men to their destruction. Etta shows signs of becoming such a woman.”

Iva, Joseph’s wife, is a shadowy figure, almost like the Hemingway female, mindless and devoted to her man. Yet her self-esteem increases in ratio to Joseph’s self-denigration. She is a good woman, sensitive to the needs of her husband while demanding little for herself. Invariably his women appear non-Jewish or neutral, simply because there is nothing to suggest otherwise. Neither names or actions, nor background tell us anything. Yet the three women, whom Augie at separate times thinks of marrying, are figures that traditionally appear in literature as destructive goddess figures. Lucy represents Lucifer; Thea is a generic term for goddess, and Stella is Ishtar the goddess of love of the ancient world, who is also the greatest impediment to Israel’s fidelity to the God of Israel and
is denounced vigorously by the prophets. We have archeological evidence that supports the demand of the sex Goddess for castration of her male devotees. Once she has deprived them of their masculinity they are subject to her domination. In Bellow’s narrative Thea wants to train an eagle, a symbol of her own high aspirations and desires to dominate, to attack the iguanas. Augie participates unwillingly but proves to be an ineffective partner in the chase. Once Augie suffers an injury to the end, a symbol of decapitation, in a way symbol of castration; his usefulness to Thea is at an end. At this point she goes on in pursuit of another lover and this time the image of the snakes is even more obvious. Bellow’s works omit a positive relationship between a Jewish male protagonist and a Jewish female. This negative attitude is not Jewish. The Jewish attitude may perceive of the women in a domestic capacity, but appreciatively not deprecatingly. We see the androgynous Grandma Lausch as Augie’s first influence. She plays a dual role. From her feminine visage, he gets a distorted view of religion, but as a cigarette smoking, chess-playing tyrant, she preaches values to him that he retains as an adult. Concerning the matter of love and respect she says, “Nobody asks you to love the whole world, only to be honest, ehrlich. Don’t have a loud mouth. The more you love people the more they’ll mix you up. A child loves, a person respects. Respect is better than love” 62 She explains to Augie that her main interest is to make a mensch out of him.
Bellow’s protagonists are concerned with freedom of choice, social responsibility, the life-style of a good man and the preservation of human individuality and uniqueness. The Bellow protagonist approaches life from the Jewish perspective, which is optimistic, which firmly believes that it is a sin to neglect the pleasures of life which are also God-created. Bellow’s heroes are Jewish by default. They espouse a Jewish philosophy but they are unaware of it. They are not men of action, rather men of reaction. Bellow in his works, voices the Jewish opinion that man, with all his imperfections, is basically good. The ideal is not the transcendence of human nature but the refining of its essence. That is why all Bellow’s protagonists search for an answer to the question: How should a good man live?

Isaac Bashevis Singer

Singer was one of the greatest storytellers of the twentieth century. His writing is a unique blend of religious morality and social awareness combined with an investigation of personal desires. Though his work often took the form of parables or tales based on a nineteenth century tradition, he was deeply concerned with the events of his time and the future of his people and their culture. These works caught the attention of a number of American writers including Saul Bellow and Irving Howe, who were greatly responsible for not only translating Singer’s work, but
championing it as well. Through his writings Singer explores the fact that the loss of faith and maternal feelings has destroyed the future of mankind.

Singer prefers and feels comfortable to write in Yiddish-

“a language of exile ....a language which possesses no words for weapons, ammunition, military exercises...one can find in Yiddish tongue and in the Yiddish spirit, expression of pious joy, lust for life, longing for the Messiah, patience and deep appreciation of human individuality.”

His love for his own race and his mother tongue is also a different aspect of his faith in motherhood. Throughout Singer’s writing, we get the glimpses of autobiographical references. References to his childhood memories, domestic figures, friends and relatives are scattered here and there. Singer himself admits, “All my books are about me. They are myself. The events in my stories are not always what did happen but always what might have happened.” Singer’s mother Bathsheba and Sister Hinde Esther seem to dominate almost all of his women characters. They serve as role models for many of his female protagonists. Paul Kresh, believes that Bathsheba,

“might almost have been the model for Singer’s Yentel, for she was something of a scholar. She was self-taught in both the Hebrew language and the reading of holy books, and is said to have known the entire Jewish Bible practically by heart.”
The shadow of Holocaust hovers over almost all of Singer’s novels. Hitler, Nazism, concentration camps; serve as a background to the plot, to which each character is related directly or indirectly. Singer’s Holocaust survivors can never forget. Eyewitness to the slaughter of their people, Tamara, Masha and Shifrah Puah are compulsive retellers of their stories. The three women survive as the sum of their Holocaust experiences. Shifrah Puah’s “whoever has tasted death has no more use of life”\(^66\) applies in varying degrees to Masha and Tamara as well. All three bear the guilt of their own survival and the stigmata of Nazi hatred. Each woman’s response to her experience of the Holocaust represents a version of Jewish survival. More typical of the reactions of Singer’s Holocaust survivors to the prospect of child bearing is Tamara’s “What for? So that the Gentiles will have someone to burn?”\(^67\) The novel most directly concerned with the Holocaust, *Enemies, A Love Story*,\(^68\) naturally contains some of Singer’s most bitter reflections on the human condition. For Herman, Masha and Tamara the Holocaust is evidence that God has broken His covenant with His chosen people. ‘Almighty Sadist,’ Herman calls God, “Jews must be slaughtered- that’s what God wants,”\(^69\) All the male and female protagonists of Singer’s novels show an intense tendency to cherish the memories of the past.
Women are predominantly seen as mothers in Singer’s writing. Absence of father and mothers playing role of fathers is a striking note in Singer’s fictions. In his novel, *The Magician of Lublin,* we see Yasha’s assistant Magda living with her mother; in *Enemies, A Love Story,* Masha is taking care of her mother (her father being the victim of Nazi camps); Shosha is being taken care by her mother Bashele. A way of having a pampering and nurturing mother through their daughters.” 71 As spinsterhood and barrenness was regarded something as a curse by religious Jews, so is the motherhood before marriage. In Jewish religion, woman is seen predominantly as mother, and womanness is directly related to motherhood. A man may pay visits to Rabbi’s court, but a woman functions primarily as wife and mother. A girl’s eagerness to marry is matched only by her eagerness to reproduce. If a man’s highest calling is to study Jewish text, woman’s is to bear Jewish children. All the Singer’s heroes have to listen to the perpetual cry of their wives, or lover, or mistresses: ‘I want a baby’. Shosha is no exception to the rule, she is desperately longing for a child. She tells Aaron, “I want to have a child with you…I want to be a mother…I want a child to say Kaddish for me when I die.” 72 When the women’s urge to become a mother is not fulfilled (either by their male partner or by fate), they take their heroes to be their sons and satisfy their need of motherhood. We are told in *Enemies* that for Yadwiga, her husband is her father and her son. She
takes good care of him, with great affection—only a mother could have. Similarly in *Magician of Lublin*, Yasha Mazur is taken good care by his affectionate wife and continues to take even when he becomes the penitent and locks himself in a cell.

But there is one thing similar to all Singer heroes: they don’t want to become fathers. Aaron, Yasha and Herman’s deliberate avoidance of fatherhood is obvious of the fact that they themselves want to reclaim their childhood. They like to be treated as a son by their lovers. They are afraid of the fact that children will share their love. They have different ways of running from reality. Yasha locks himself in a cell where he attains a position important than a rabbi; Herman simply disappears leaving all problems behind; Aaron involves himself in abstract discussions. The heroes escape adult responsibilities and show their liking for womb-like enclosures, in which they can both recover the mother and self-sufficiency, and hide from marital and reproductive duties. The importance of mother figure is emphasized again and again. She is viewed as the only hope for the betterment of the world which is brutally destroyed by the people like Hitler. And that explains why all Singer’s heroes, Aaron, Yasha, Herman are so full of compassion with woman. Throughout Singer’s novels women who possess the capacity to love and nurture acquired the status of God.
Woman, in any culture is always associated with love, care, nurture, preservation and protection of human values; whereas man is associated with war and destruction. In an ideal situation, man should have the capacity to love like woman and woman should have the protective nature like man. For the protection of humanity man must have feminine feelings. Singer regrets the fact that man has lost the woman within. Singer truly believes that the cruelty is the direct result of the loss of feminine feelings. Man has lost it out of an inferiority complex. Singer emphasizes the need of maternal affection for mankind to save the humanity from war and destruction.

Whether a Jew writer celebrates the triumphs or the torments of his people or whether he denigrates (criticize) them, whether he clings to his past or detaches himself from it, he will reflect his background in more than one way. Jew by conviction or Jew in spite of himself, the Jewish writer cannot be anything else. What is most ironic is that even his rejection of his Jewishness identifies him. He remains a Jew even if he writes against Jews. Like all great human experiences transfigured in literature, the gift of being Jewish in the twentieth century has been returned as a gift for all people, token passed on in the form of a permanent literary heritage.
Jewish woman lies at the very center of life: not only by being a good wife and caring mother but also as a great family-binder! In this world, where basic values are long forgotten, she stands firm and is providing a comfortable abode for her people as she does for the child in her womb. She is the center pillar of the Merry-go-round of Jewish familial bonds: they come and go and take rounds but she is standing still, holding the mother earth so that balance is achieved.

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References


15. Fiedler, op. cit., 171


17. Ibid.


19. Ibid.


22. Ibid. 26.


26. Ibid. 159.

27. Ibid. 159.


30. Ibid. 164-165
32. Ibid. 254.
33. Ibid. 228.
36. Ibid. 52.
40. Ibid. 102.


54. Cf. Rafael Patai’s discussion of the Jewish family in The Jewish Mind New York: Chas. Scribner’s


56. Ibid. 55.


61. Ibid. 8.


65. Ibid. 19


67. Ibid.111.


69. Ibid. 7.

