

THE ADVENTURES OF SAUL BELLOW

DIRECTOR'S NOTE (ASAF GALAY)

I was born in Chicago in 1978. Like Saul Bellow, I too can say, “I am an American, Chicago born.” For me, as for Bellow, that claim would be both the truth and a lie. My family came from Israel to the United States only for a short period of time, while my father completed a PhD at the University of Chicago. Growing up in Israel and moving back to the U.S. in my late thirties, I have always felt both fascinated and alienated by American culture—a contradiction that Bellow vividly explores in his work.

I realized I had to make a film about Bellow while working on my last project, *The Muses of Isaac Bashevis Singer*. That film told the story of how Singer used English language translation to transform his Yiddish writing into an American voice. As Singer’s first translator, Bellow was the bridge between the world of Jewish particularity and American, Anglophone universalism. I began to look for the ingredients in Bellow’s work that allowed him to become the missing link between these two worlds.

My affinity for the writer has deepened and developed over the years, stretching beyond questions of Jewish and American identity. I have come to admire the author’s bold insistence on humanism, how he cleaves to unfashionable notions like ‘culture’ and ‘personality.’ At the same time, I am troubled by Bellow’s racist and sexist imagery. I believe that these qualities make his work difficult to teach and study today. In my film, I am determined to let both of these sides of the author come to life. I seek a cinematic language that can bring out all the layers of his work for a new generation—the humorous, the spiritual, the profound, the American, the Jewish, the lowbrow, the highbrow, the just and the unjust.