Contemporary Literary Criticism

CLC 190

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Contemporary Literary Criticism

Criticism of the Works
of Today's Novelists, Poets, Playwrights,
Short Story Writers, Scriptwriters, and
Other Creative Writers

Tom Burns and Jeffrey W. Hunter
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Authors are selected for inclusion for a variety of reasons, among them the publication or dramatic production of a critically acclaimed new work, the reception of a major literary award, revival of interest in past writings, or the adaptation of a literary work to film or television.

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- Critical essays are prefaced by brief **Annotations** explicating each piece.

- Whenever possible, a recent **Author Interview** accompanies each entry.

- An annotated bibliography of **Further Reading** appears at the end of each entry and suggests resources for additional study. In some cases, significant essays for which the editors could not obtain reprint rights are included here. Boxed material following the further reading list provides references to other biographical and critical sources on the author in series published by Thomson Gale.

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Brossard, Nicole. "Poetic Politics." In *The Politics of Poetic Form: Poetry and Public Policy,* edited by Charles Bernstein, 73-82. New York: Roof Books, 1990. Reprinted in *Contemporary Literary Criticism.* Vol. 169, edited by Janet Witalec, 3-8. Detroit: Gale, 2003.

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Contents

The Adventures of Augie March

Saul Bellow

Canadian-born American novelist, short story writer, editor, critic, playwright, lecturer, and memoirist.

The following entry presents criticism on Bellow's novel *The Adventures of Augie March* (1953) through 2003. For further information on his life and complete works, see *CLC*, Volumes 1, 2, 3, 6, 8, 10, 13, 15, 25, 33, 34, 63, and 79.

INTRODUCTION

A marked departure from the author's earlier, more modernist novels, *The Adventures of Augie March* has become one of Bellow's most recognized and enduring works. Utilizing the structure of picaresque narratives, the novel chronicles the journeys of Augie March, a charismatic and entrepreneurial young man, coming of age during America's Depression and World War II eras. Bellow portrays Augie as a romantic hero, whose comic misadventures offer both nostalgic and biting commentary on restrictive social mores and the American immigrant experience. Narrated in an idiomatic Chicago-American accent, the novel emphasizes the metaphysical inertia of the protagonist as Augie passively experiences a range of emotional situations, including grief, loss, and betrayal. In 1999, when the Modern Library compiled their list of the 100 best novels of the twentieth century, *The Adventures of Augie March* was ranked as 81.

PLOT AND MAJOR CHARACTERS

The Adventures of Augie March revolves around the remarkable life of Augie March, a Jewish American born to a poor family in the slums of Chicago, Illinois, during the Prohibition era. Augie's father abandoned his family, leaving his wife to work long hours as a seamstress in order to raise her three sons—Georgie, Simon, and Augie. Due to his mother's absence, Augie's childhood is dominated by the controlling personality of Grandma Lausch, an elderly widow living with the March family. Augie's brother, Simon, is both ambitious and intelligent with a knack for business, while his other brother, Georgie, was born mentally challenged and is eventually placed in an institution. From an early age, Augie works a variety of odd jobs, at first partnering with Simon, who seems to succeed at anything he attempts. Augie later secures a position as an assistant to William Einhorn, a crippled and circumspect real-estate broker and businessman. After leaving Einhorn's employment, Augie begins working for the Renling family, who own a successful sporting-goods store. Mr. Renling sees a great deal of potential in Augie and offers to pay for his education and legally adopt him into the Renling family—an offer that Augie eventually refuses. During this period, Simon, now a wealthy and married businessman, suggests that Augie marry his sister-in-law, Lucy. Augie attempts to court the decidedly conventional Lucy but comes to feel stifled by their relationship and decides to head off on his own to find his fortune. With the advent of the Great Depression, Augie struggles to make a living, accepting a string of low-class and transient jobs, including selling bathroom paint, grooming dogs, stealing books, and smuggling immigrants across the Canadian border. Growing tired with his lifestyle, Augie agrees to travel to Mexico with a wealthy acquaintance, Thea Fenchel, who wants to train eagles to hunt giant lizards. Once in Mexico, the couple begins a passionate affair, but after their venture fails and Augie gets injured, Thea leaves him for another man. Augie soon meets Stella, a beautiful woman whom Augie saves from the wrath of her former lover. Stella and Augie return to the United States together and are quickly married. The attractive Stella becomes a motion picture star and travels to Europe to work on a film. Augie follows his wife, but his ship is torpedoed while crossing the Atlantic, and he finds himself stranded in a small lifeboat. After being rescued, Augie joins Stella in Paris, where their marriage dissolves due to Stella's flirtatious nature and Augie's general indifference. The novel concludes with Augie working as a middleman for a wily Parisian black marketer named Mintouchian, still trying to obtain the sense of personal independence he referenced in the novel's opening lines—"I am an American, Chicago born—Chicago, that somber city—and go at things as I have taught myself, free-style, and will make the record in my own way: first to knock, first admitted; sometimes an innocent knock, sometimes a not so innocent. But a man's character is his fate, says Heraclitus, and in the end there isn't any way to disguise the nature of the knocks by acoustical work on the door or gloving the knuckles."

MAJOR THEMES

Literary scholars have frequently interpreted *The Adventures of Augie March* as a parable for American optimism. The novel has also been characterized as a modern bildungsroman, chronicling Augie's progression from youthful optimist to defeated, experienced pessimist. Augie's coming of age is often viewed to parallel the development of the American consciousness from the opulent 1920s through the post-war era of the 1940s. Most commentators have noted Bellow's use of the picaresque format for the novel—labeling Augie as an archetypal picaro character—though some have argued that the recurring theme of moral awareness differentiates the novel from traditional picaresque texts. *Augie March* has also been examined within the tradition of Jewish American literature, with academics noting that the novel was one of the first major American novels with a Jewish protagonist. A taboo subject for many authors at the time, Bellow utilizes Augie's Judaism to comment on the American immigrant experience and the dangers of assimilation. Critics have discussed the strong metaphysical themes in *Augie March,* exploring Augie's quest of self-creation and yearning for a "worthwhile fate." Some have asserted that Augie's wanderlust and penchant for nonconformity are iconic characteristics in developing young male protagonists, which can be found in such similar works as Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* and J. D. Salinger's *Catcher in the Rye.* Additionally, *Augie March* has been viewed as a reinterpretation of the American Adamic myth, which Bellow has recontextualized using twentieth-century values and events.

CRITICAL RECEPTION

Reflecting a wide range of literary and cultural influences, *The Adventures of Augie March* helped to establish Bellow as a promising young American writer and was awarded the National Book Award in 1954. Several critics have considered the novel as a turning point in Bellow's literary career, tracing his stylistic development from his first two novels, *The Dangling Man* (1944) and *The Victim* (1947). *Augie March* has been characterized by critics as a distinctly "American" novel, embodying a literary style and thematic preoccupations that reflect the sensibilities of the American people during the first half of the twentieth century. Scholars have applauded the exuberance of Bellow's prose style in *Augie March,* particularly his idiomatic mix of literary English and American slang. Additionally, critics have commended the wealth of observational and character detail in the novel, noting Bellow's skill with rendering sharp and accurate of portrayals of people and places—most notably, the Chicago neighborhoods where Augie spent his childhood. However, some have argued that, despite the novel's attention to detail, Bellow's characters read as one-dimensional caricatures. Others have faulted the novel's lack of plot structure, with various reviewers debating whether this reflects Augie's questing, spiritual nature or Bellow's inability to construct a formal narrative. Due to the novel's emphasis on picaresque and bildungsroman elements, the novel has often been compared to the works of Salinger, Twain, and Ralph Ellison. In 2003 a variety of commentators offered critical reevaluations of *Augie March* on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of its initial publication. Leonard Kriegel has stated that *Augie March,* "[i]n its language as well as in the protagonist Bellow created, it remains one of the truly memorable achievements in American fiction."

PRINCIPAL WORKS

Dangling Man (novel) 1944
The Victim (novel) 1947
The Adventures of Augie March (novel) 1953
Seize the Day (novel) 1956
Henderson the Rain King (novel) 1959
Great Jewish Short Stories [editor and author of the introduction] (short stories) 1963
Recent American Fiction: A Lecture (lectures) 1963
Herzog (novel) 1964
The Last Analysis (play) 1964
**Under the Weather* (plays) 1966
Mosby's Memoirs and Other Stories (short stories) 1968
Mr. Sammler's Planet (novel) 1970
Humboldt's Gift (novel) 1975
To Jerusalem and Back: A Personal Account (memoir) 1976
The Dean's December (novel) 1981
Him with His Foot in His Mouth and Other Stories (short stories) 1984
More Die of Heartbreak (novel) 1987
The Bellarosa Connection (novella) 1989
A Theft (novella) 1989
Something to Remember Me By (novellas) 1991
It All Adds Up: From the Dim Past to the Uncertain Future (essays and criticism) 1994
The Actual (novel) 1997
Ravelstein (novel) 2000
Collected Stories (short stories) 2001

*Originally first performed in London in June 1966, *Under the Weather* is comprised of three one-act plays—*A Wen, Orange Soufflé,* and *Out from Under. Under the Weather* has also been published under the title *The Bellow Plays.*

CRITICISM

Charles J. Rolo (review date October 1953)

SOURCE: Rolo, Charles J. "A Rolling Stone." *Atlantic Monthly* 192, no. 4 (October 1953): 86-7.

[*In the following review, Rolo argues that* The Adventures of Augie March *presents the "archetypal" story of "the American as a rolling stone" but notes that the novel's protagonist lacks emotional depth.*]

Saul Bellow, who is now publishing his third novel, ***The Adventures of Augie March,*** has taken a fruitful hint from Cervantes's great parody of a classic Spanish type. His hero-narrator—in whom there is a "laughing creature" forever rising up—unfolds to us a slightly kidding but essentially serious version of an archetypal American saga: the saga of the American as a rolling stone, an irrepressible explorer who doesn't quite know who he is and is always trying "to become what I am"; who keeps seeking the fullest experience of life. The self-educated Augie tells his story in a freshly personal style which intermixes slang and literary English, and which has a quality rare in contemporary American fiction—a great variety of tone: grimness and exuberance, touches of clowning and touches of the fantastic; a current of comedy and intimations of the tragic.

Augie March comes of a poor Jewish family in Chicago. His father has vanished, and the ruling influence of his childhood is Grandma Lausch, who has known plushier days in Odessa. This picturesque old matriarch is one of a dozen or more sharply individual characterizations in Mr. Bellow's spacious novel, whose settings range from the slums to the abodes and playgrounds of the rich.

By the time he is a high-school junior and the Depression has set in, Augie has sampled half a dozen jobs; has once been fired for stealing; and has dabbled in more serious crime. A lucky break turns him into a salesman of expensive sporting goods on the millionaire circuit in Evanston. His wealthy employers take him into their home; polish him up generally; and acquaint him with the life of luxury. But when they want to adopt him and arrange his future, Augie moves on. And when his hardheaded, successful brother has found a rich wife for him and staked him to a job, Augie moves on again.

He moves from job to job, from girl to girl. He has a consuming and bizarre love affair with a glamorous millionairess who takes him to Mexico to help her train eagles, and who eventually leaves him down and out. When we see the last of him—though he is now married to a lovely and erratic siren—he is still the adventurer, chasing after big deals in Europe on behalf of an Armenian tycoon.

With its variousness, its vitality, its strong sense that life is worth living, Mr. Bellow's novel is a notable achievement, and it should be one of the year's outstanding successes. I cannot suppress a slight regret that a novelist with as large a talent as Mr. Bellow's has not tried to take us more deeply inside his hero. His story, at times, comes perilously close to being a catalogue of actions. It certainly tells us all *about* Augie March; but I do not even begin to know and understand him in the way the reader knows and understands, say, Stendhal's Julien Sorel.

T. E. Cassidy (review date 2 October 1953)

SOURCE: Cassidy, T. E. "From Chicago." *Commonweal* 58, no. 26 (2 October 1953): 636.

[*In the following review, Cassidy characterizes* The Adventures of Augie March *as a series of narrative vignettes and contends that "there is no real power here and no tremendous insight that Bellow certainly was striving to achieve."*]

Augie March lives quite a life [in ***The Adventures of Augie March***]. Up from the depths of poverty to the heights of success, back down, back up, and all in most peculiar fashion. Jobs, journeys, jolts—and women, women, women. Crime and college, labor unions and athletic clubs, Chicago and Mexico, slums and society, thievery and high honor: these form the panorama for Augie. And that's the book. It's a chronicle of an age and a case history of assorted human beings, most of whom are engaged, in one way or another, in using their fellow-men and helping or hurting their families and friends. A good many of these people are psychopathic; at best they have interesting eccentricities, and at worst they are criminals. And they are colorful, sometimes, and boring at other times. Augie himself never quite arrives anywhere and unless he is tormenting himself, he never is quite happy.

Saul Bellow has some fine things in this book. The characterization is complete to the point of exhaustion. The dialogue, when it's on-the-spot exchange, is sharp. When his people wander and meander in the realm of philosophy, garden variety or formal, they are windy and repetitious, and sound like cheap imitations of Proustians. The liberal-radical overtones of some sections are overdone and do not ring with authenticity. For Augie to break off his organizing activity for a quick but grand passion with one of the organizees, and then to flee to the arms of a wealthy nymphomaniac, is almost comic opera, twentieth century style.

But the best and the weirdest episode is the sojourn in Mexico with the latter lady. The two train an eagle to catch lizards, and the eagle is a flop. The society that surrounds them is full of nuts and cranks, and the eagle will catch anything and everything in the animal kingdom, except a mongoose. The Mexican stay is full of riot and rot, and at times is supremely funny.

The portraits of old families and their ties and splits are in great style. Indeed, several of them could be simply extracted and presented as very thorough national and racial profiles. These are the portraits that make the book, because as a novel there is no depth and no great theme. All the events are loosely tied, and people run in and out of the various stages of Augie's strange progress through life and the world. The one constant thread is the great but bumpy love between Augie and his money-worshipping brother, Simon. But there is no real power here and no tremendous insight that Bellow certainly was striving to achieve. I suppose the scene with Augie in a lifeboat with a maniac, off the Canary Islands, is as typical of the work as any. It's that kind of a book.

Robert Penn Warren (review date 2 November 1953)

SOURCE: Warren, Robert Penn. "The Man with No Commitments." *New Republic* 129, no. 14 (2 November 1953): 22-3.

[*In the following review, Warren traces Bellow's development as a writer and maintains that* The Adventures of Augie March *is a "rich, various, fascinating, and important book, and from now on any discussion of fiction in America in our time will have to take account of it."*]

The Adventures of Augie March is the third of Saul Bellow's novels, and by far the best one. It is, in my opinion a rich, various, fascinating, and important book, and from now on any discussion of fiction in America in our time will have to take account of it. To praise this novel should not, however, be to speak in derogation of the two earlier ones, ***The Dangling Man*** and ***The Victim.*** Both of these novels clearly indicated Saul Bellow's talent, his sense of character, structure, and style. Though ***The Dangling Man*** did lack narrative drive, it was constantly interesting in other departments, in flashes of characterization, in social and psychological comment. In ***The Victim,*** however, Bellow developed a high degree of narrative power and suspense in dealing with materials that in less skillful hands would have invited an analytic and static treatment. These were not merely books of promise. They represented—especially ***The Victim***—a solid achievement, a truly distinguished achievement, and should have been enough to win the author a public far larger than became his. They did win the attention of critics and of a hard core of discriminating readers, but they were not popular.

The Dangling Man and ***The Victim*** were finely wrought novels of what we may, for lack of a more accurate term, call the Flaubert-James tradition. Especially ***The Victim*** depended much on intensification of effect by tightness of structure, by limitations on time, by rigid economy in structure of scene, by placement and juxtaposition of scenes, by the unsaid and withheld, by a muting of action, by a scrupulous reserved style. The novel proved that the author had a masterful control of the method, not merely fictional good manners, the meticulous good breeding which we ordinarily damn by the praise "intelligent."

It would be interesting to know what led Saul Bellow to turn suddenly from a method in which he was expert and in which, certainly, he would have scored triumphs. It would be easy to say that it had been from the beginning a mistake for him to cultivate this method, to say that he was a victim of the critical self-consciousness of the novel in our time, to say that in his youthful innocence he had fallen among the thieves of promise, the theorizers. Or it would be easy to say that the method of the earlier books did not accommodate his real self, his deepest inspiration and that as soon as he liberated himself from the restriction of the method he discovered his own best talent.

These things would be easy to say but hard to prove. It would be equally easy to say that the long self-discipline in the more obviously rigorous method had made it possible for Bellow now to score a triumph in the apparent formlessness of the autobiographical-picaresque novel, and to remember, as a parallel, that almost all the really good writers of free verse had cultivated an ear by practice in formal metrics. I should, as a matter of fact, be inclined to say that ***The Adventures of Augie March*** may be the profit on the investment of ***The Dangling Man*** and ***The Victim,*** and to add that in a novel of the present type we can't live merely in the hand-to-mouth way of incidental interests in scene and character, that if such a novel is to be fully effective the sense of improvisation must be a dramatic illusion, the last sophistication of the writer, and that the improvisation is really a pseudo-improvisation, and that the random scene or casual character that imitates the accidental quality of life must really have a relevance, and that the discovery, usually belated, of this relevance is the characteristic excitement of the genre. That is, in this genre the relevance is deeper and more obscure, and there is, in the finest examples of the genre, a greater tension between the random life force of the materials and the shaping intuition of the writer.

It is the final distinction, I think, of ***The Adventures of Augie March*** that we do feel this tension, and that it is a meaningful fact. It is meaningful because it dramatizes the very central notion of the novel. The hero Augie March is a very special kind of adventurer, a kind of latter-day example of the Emersonian ideal Yankee who could do a little of this and a little of that, a Chicago pragmatist happily experimenting in all departments of life, work, pleasure, thought, a hero who is the very antithesis of one of the most famous heroes of our time, the Hemingway hero, in that his only code is codelessness and his relish for experience is instinctive and not programmatic. This character is, of course, the character made for the random shocks and aimless corners of experience, but he is not merely irresponsible. If he wants freedom from commitment, he also wants wisdom, and in the end utters a philosophy, the philosophy embodied by the French serving maid Jacqueline, big-legged and red-nosed and ugly, standing in a snowy field in Normandy, hugging still her irrepressibly romantic dream of going to Mexico.

But is this comic and heroic philosophy quite enough, even for Augie? Augie himself, I hazard, scarcely thinks so. He is still a seeker, a hoper, but a seeker and hoper aware of the comedy of seeking and hoping. He is, in fact, a comic inversion of the modern stoic, and the comedy lies in the tautology of his wisdom—our best hope is hope. For there is a deep and undercutting irony in the wisdom and hope, and a sadness even in Augie's high-heartedness, as we leave him standing with Jacqueline in the winter field on the road toward Dunkerque and Ostend. But to return to the proposition with which this discussion opened: if Augie plunges into the aimless ruck of experience, in the end we see that Saul Bellow has led him through experience toward philosophy. That is, the aimless ruck had a shape, after all, and the shape is not that of Augie's life but of Saul Bellow's mind. Without that shape, and the shaping mind, we would have only the limited interest in the random incidents.

The interest in the individual incidents is, however, great. In ***The Victim*** the interest in any one episode was primarily an interest in the overall pattern, but here most incidents, and incidental characters, appeal first because of their intrinsic qualities, and, as we have said, our awareness of their place in the overall pattern dawns late on us. In incident after incident, there is brilliant narrative pacing, expert atmospheric effect, a fine sense of structure of the individual scene. In other words, the lessons learned in writing the earlier books are here applied in another context.

As for characterization, we find the same local fascination. The mother, the grandmother, the feeble-minded brother, the brother drunk on success, the whole Einhorn family, Thea, the Greek girl—they are fully realized, they compel our faithful attention and, in the end, our sympathy. As a creator of character, Saul Bellow is in the great tradition of the English and American novel, he has the fine old relish of character for character's sake, and the sort of tolerance which Santayana commented on in Dickens by saying that it was the naturalistic understanding that is the nearest thing to Christian charity.

It is, in a way, a tribute, though a back-handed one, to point out the faults of Saul Bellow's novel, for the faults merely make the virtues more impressive. The novel is uneven. Toward the last third the inspiration seems to flag now and then. Several episodes are not carried off with the characteristic elan, and do not, for me at least, take their place in the thematic pattern. For instance, the Trotsky episode or the whole Stella affair, especially in the earlier stages. And a few of the characters are stereotypes, for example, Stella again. In fact, it is hard to see how she got into the book at all except by auctorial fiat, and I am completely baffled to know what the author thought he was doing with her, a sort of vagrant from some literary province lying north-northeast of the *Cosmopolitan Magazine*. Furthermore, several critics have already said that the character of Augie himself is somewhat shadowy. This, I think, is true, and I think I know the reason: it is hard to give substance to a character who has no commitments, and by definition Augie is the man with no commitments. This fact is a consequence of Bellow's basic conception, but wouldn't the very conception have been stronger if Augie had been given the capacity for deeper commitments, for more joy and sorrow? He might, at least, have tried the adventurer's experiment in those things? That is, the character tends now to be static, and the lesson that Augie has learned in the end is not much different from the intuition with which he started out. He has merely learned to phrase it. There is one important reservation which, however, I should make in my criticism of Augie. His very style is a powerful device of characterization. It does give us a temper, a texture of mind, a perspective of feeling, and it is, by and large, carried off with a grand air. Which leads me to the last observation that the chief release Saul Bellow has found in this book may be the release of a style, for he has found, when he is at his best, humor and eloquence to add to his former virtues.

W. M. Frohock (essay date winter 1968)

SOURCE: Frohock, W. M. "Saul Bellow and His Penitent Picaro." *Southwest Review* 53, no. 1 (winter 1968): 36-44.

[*In the following essay, Frohock challenges the traditional idea of* The Adventures of Augie March *as a picaresque novel, perceiving Augie March to be more of a penitent than a picaro lead character.*]

In one way, Saul Bellow's novels are very much alike: the stories focus on the special predicament of a single individual, the importance of the other characters is relatively small in comparison, and such glimpses as one gets from them of a surrounding society or of the world at large are relatively incidental. The hero's essential discomfort comes from the trouble he has in coping with life itself, the overwhelming job of just living: the central figure in ***Dangling Man*** (1944) is unhappily suspended while he waits for the draft to come and get him; ***The Victim*** (1947) has a man tortured by his personal guilts who sounds somewhat as if he had wandered in from a novel by Dostoevski; ***The Adventures of Augie March*** (1953) and ***Henderson the Rain King*** (1959) exploit heroes trapped in the quirks of their own personalities; Moses, in ***Herzog*** (1964), gets so entangled in who he is that he has to be rescued from the slough. All have trouble dealing with women who, on the whole, do not sound very hard to deal with, and each in his own special way has a talent for saying and doing the wrong thing.

Enough of us recognize ourselves, apparently, in these confessions to give Bellow a reputation for superior achievement. Over the last decade and a half it has become something of a critical cliché that he is the most accomplished of current American novelists. Doubtless he deserves the distinction, at least so long as we refuse to count among our compatriots such part-time residents as Vladimir Nabokov. Once Nabokov has been excluded, Bellow wins almost by default, at least in the field of novelists of his own generation, emergent shortly after World War II and arriving in commanding positions during the early fifties. The two most likely to challenge him in public esteem, J. D. Salinger and Ralph Ellison, have written much less than he and are even in danger of being forgotten.

Still, it is somewhat ironic that we should be telling Bellow that he is the best in the business at the present writing, and saying almost in the same breath that we like him best for books written fifteen or twenty years ago. And this we do almost invariably: ***Dangling Man*** and ***The Adventures of Augie March*** are the common favorites, with, it would seem, the preference, as between these two, falling quite regularly on the second.

There may be a perfectly simple historical reason why ***Herzog*** and ***Henderson*** should not please us as deeply as do the earlier books. The climate was different when the earlier ones appeared. We had just caught on that we had been living through The Age of Anxiety. From the Existentialists we had picked up the idea that *Angst* is a standard part of the human condition. We had become aware of books like *Fear and Trembling*, and had come to think of *Notes from Underground* as speaking especially to, and of, us. Kafka had convinced us that we had a broad streak of insect in us all. But twenty years have accustomed us to living with our neuroses, and today no one protests much when someone like Norman O. Brown defines, and even glorifies, the human as the one animal capable of being "sick." The change in atmosphere perhaps explains why the common reaction to ***Herzog*** and ***Henderson*** is one of amused indifference, when not of vague annoyance, at having to listen to so much talk about so little. These books may be a little out of date.

But such a reason should not be enough to explain the disposition of truly responsible criticism, since anyone pretending to critical responsibility should be able to see through himself well enough to make allowances for the pressure exerted by the mood of a given moment. If recent intellectual history is an adequate explanation of what has happened, critics as such should go out of business. If I am not ready to do so, it is because I think that there is another aspect of Bellow's present status with the literate public to be looked into.

Herzog and ***Henderson*** reflect Bellow's growing suspicion of literary form as such. Whereas ***Dangling Man*** is tightly organized on the revered model of the diary-novel, with the narrator telling his story installment by installment and not knowing what the outcome will be, and whereas ***Augie March*** adopts and adapts the equally established picaresque form, it would be hard to affirm that the novels Bellow has published more recently follow any recognizable model at all. The novelist himself has made it clear that the change was intentional.

Now Bellow is anything but a frivolous type. Between novels he has served on college faculties and frequented various think-tanks. His occasional pronouncements on literary subjects reveal acute awareness of the issues involved, and make it quite clear that if he cared to take the time he could be as successful a critic as he is a novelist. In him—and several others of his generation—we have what has been said from time to time not to flourish in America, a Man-of-Letters, and the exact opposite of the once popular stereotype who holds himself to be, as Faulkner once put it, "just a writer, not a literary gent." And in consequence one has to take seriously, and with respect, his reaction against our contemporary overconcern with technique and form.

Yet, unless I am mistaking mere coincidence for a matter of cause and effect, the record seems to show that his decision was wrong. In either case the facts are the same: ***Augie March*** is the latest of Bellow's novels to show a marked concern for form, and it is also the last in which a hero does not ultimately submerge under the incessant flow of his own gabbiness.

For the weakness of the kind of confession novel we so often get today is that the hero-narrator behaves as if he had mistaken his reader for either a psychiatrist or a