Chapter IV

THE ADVENTURES OF AUGIE MARCH
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The Adventures Of Augie March\(^1\) was published in the year 1953. Saul Bellow got the National Book Award for fiction for the first time for this novel. The novel is the reminiscence of Augie March from his childhood in Chicago before the depression, through the 1930s and 1940s, to his post-World War II life in Europe.\(^2\)

The Adventures of Augie March can be seen firstly as a story in which a picaro like protagonist, who is also the narrator, advances through a series of adventures and presents a general life experience. Secondly, the work is regarded as Bellow’s stricture on an existing relationship between literature and society which also makes it a fictional history of American literature. The narrative presents an account of the experiences of the protagonist and his reactions to those experiences. Thirdly, the presentation of the character and experiences of Bellow’s hero throw light on contemporary human condition.

Augie plays the role of the philosophic picaro. He has no commitments,\(^3\) and moves from place to place but he never gets deeply

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\(^1\) The Adventures of Augie March, New York, Penguin Books (Re), 1953. All further references to The Adventures of Augie March are to this edition of the work and the title will be abbreviated as AM


involved in any situation or event. Yet he continues his search for what he insists on in his “better fate”  

Even though Augie is introduced as an American, his identification as an American cannot be taken to mean that he believes totally in the ideals and values of the American culture.  

The novel is about the characterization of the protagonist by a long series of revolts against people trying to adopt him or manipulate him in a particular way. During his boyhood days, he is sometimes isolated and abused as a Jew by the Christian boys of the neighbourhood. Many of his well-intentioned relatives and friends make schemes and plans for him and try to mould his destiny. Grandma Lausch desires that he become a gentleman. Cousin Auma wants Augie to marry her daughter. William Einhorn wants to make Augie a disciple and induces him to approach any problem by asking himself, “what would Einhorn think?” Mrs. Renling desires him to be a perfect mensch. Simon wishes Augie to marry Lucy and get rich like himself. The numerous women with whom he falls in love get him to do what they want. He takes care of dogs for the social elite, becomes a union organizer, joins Merchant Marine. But eventually, he rejects them all. It is because their schemes threaten his individual freedom.  

After many encounters and bitter experiences of involvement with women, disappointment in love, a head injury, marriage with an inconstant women, choice of a profession of doubtful honour, Augie turns toward self-analysis.

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In this novel Saul Bellow presents once again some of these important events/themes from a humanistic point of view which will be discussed in detail in Section III.

II

Bellow’s achievement in Augie March becomes clear if one is aware of the circumstances in which it was composed. The publication generated a great literary excitement following the interview Bellow gave soon after it was published, and his recent strictures on the novel.

Bellow started writing Augie March, in 1948. He took up this work even though he had to give up another serious novel he had been working on. He was in Europe on a Guggenhein fellowship and wrote the novel in several places — Paris, Salzburg, Rome, in train and cafe, in hotels and eating places, in New York, Portland, Scattle. The last two paragraphs, according to Bellow, were “completed on a Viking Press typewriter. Not a single word of the book was composed in Chicago.” According to Lausa Z. Hobson, who wrote the literary gossip column “Trade Winds” for The Saturday Review of Literature, Bellow watched with dismay his book becoming lengthy. At one moment he was ready to have the first half published as Part-I, “But Vicking Press”, wrote Laura Hobson, “with whose financial connivance Bellow was operating

anyway, persuaded him to hold off publication until his giant was really completed."\(^8\)

The New York literary world eagerly awaited Bellow's new novel. Samples and excerpts, published in *Partisan Review*, *Sewanee Review*, *The New Yorker*, *Harper's Bazaar* and *Hudson Review*, had aroused the curiosity of the literary circles. Robert Penn Warren, Lionel Trilling, and Clifton Fadiman who had read parts of the manuscript gave indications of a promising work in the offing. When *Augie March* was published in the fall of 1953, it was received with enthusiasm and admiration. Some critics hastily rushed to regard it as a great work of art and gave it the status of a classic. Shortly after it won the National Book Award and was held to be "the most distinguished work of fiction published in 1953."\(^9\)

When Bellow looked back at *Augie March* after a decade he was not so much in admiration of his novel. He found Augie "so ingenuous – the ingénue." In a 1964 interview, Bellow said: "I am grateful to the book because it was so liberating to write it. But I do not consider it a success because I only just discovered a new possibility. I was incapable at the time of controlling it and it saw away with me. I feel that Augie was too effusive and uncritical."\(^{10}\)

*Augie March* is clearly not the fictional classic many considered it to be, but it is a novel that released Bellow's creative being and certainly trained him to write his best fiction. Writing *Augie March* was, for

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\(^8\) Hobson, Laura Z. "*Trade Winds*", *Saturday Review of Literature* 36 August 22, 1953, p.6.


\(^{10}\) Steers, Nina A. ""*Successor* to *Faulkner*?"" *Show* 4, Sept. 1964. p.38
Bellow, a freeing of his creative energies. It was what may be called his act of liberation from certain artistic inhibitions and repressions. It helped him understand his destiny as a fiction writer and the concerns that would occupy his imagination and his skill.

Bellow practiced the craft of fiction, and began using device from European tradition of Sartre, Dostoevski, Kafka, E.M. Forster. He used devices the older writers had used, and wrote neat, black parables about the diminishment of modern man, seen as dangler and as victim. In Augie March Bellow attempted to do whatever he could with his awareness of the European novelists. For nourishment he turned to the American tradition of the novel trying to use whatever suited him.

He did not find Hemingway's fiction to his satisfaction. He got more comfortable with the ampler, more hospitable and open-ended forms of American fiction used by Melville and Mark Twain. The title of the novel, which originally had been "Life among the Machiavellians", was changed to be in line with . . . . The adventures of Huckleberry Finn. The opening line, "I am an American, Chicago-born" is clearly reminiscent of the opening of Moby Dick confidently announcing the reappearance of another Ishmael who had been saved from the shipwreck to tell his tale. In the last paragraph, Augie sees himself as a sort of Columbus and, like Hucklebury, sails out to seek his own territory ahead. Bellow follows in the footsteps of Europeans in planning the adventures of Augie . . . joy and belief in human existence. Augie has also been given a liberal human temperament, large, open, large, open, large, open.

12 ibid.
free, eluding definitions, able to contain multitudes — the type defined by Whiteman. The novel is Augie’s song of the open road, a song of himself. Closely following Whiteman’s illustration in his “Song of Myself”, Augies claims for himself “being democratic in temperament, available to everybody and assuming about others what I assumed about myself.”

In writing Augie March Bellow attempts to explore and control the dark forces, the savage tensions, the tumults and bewilderments of the big city in which modern man finds and had to find himself. Various aspects of Chicago life are brilliantly introduced the novel. Augie is not only Chicago-born who has roamed its crowded, colourful sheets. He identifies himself with the city; the city is part of his being. And because he is deeply involved with Chicago, Bellow can catch its image as vividly as possible. “I grew up there and consider myself a Chicagoan, out and out.” The vigour, authority, excitement, and completeness of Augie’s Chicago springs in part from Bellow’s passionate involvement with and love for the city he grew up in.

The power of Augie’s Chicago derives also from Bellow’s was highly impressed by the practices and techniques of the Chicago naturalists Fassel, Dreiser, and Norris — who had also written about Chicago. This gives Bellow’s presentation of Chicago a greater effectiveness and charm. Yet Bellow was not fully satisfied with the power of Dreiser in his presentation of Chicago. In a review essay

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13 AM(155), c.f. Rodrigues Eusebio L. op. cit. p.75
Bellow has refused to admit the “lifting power” of Dreiser, his ability to convey forcefully the “facts of our American modern reality.”

“In an overview of Chicago from the roof of the hospital he becomes aware of the insignificance of man’s existence in this drab monotonous world around Chicago. In its repetition it exhausted your imagination of details and units, more units than the cells of the brain and bricks of Babel. The Ezekiel Caldron of wrath, stocked with bones. In time the caldron too would melt. A mysterious tremor, dust, vapour, emanation of stupendous effort travelled with the air, over me on top of the great establishment, so full as it was, and over the clinics, clinks, factories, flophouses, morgue, skid row. As before the work of Egypt and Assyria, as before a sea, you’re nothing here. Nothing.

“He is deeply affected by the vision of the world he gets. His is not the language of a mere spectator, but of the participant. Not only is the eye involved, all the senses are. The historical sense manifests itself in the reference to Troy, Egypt, Assyria. The biblical references – Babel, Ezekiel — suggest yet another dimension. The catalogue cluster, presenting the patients in the hospital, is a riot of facts, smell, abstraction, and surreal image — as if the technique of the catalogue used by Dreiser were combined with that used by Melville and Whitman. Above all, Chicago is not viewed as an object, but as an organism with an electric vitality of its own, a gigantic living crucible in

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16 AM(476), c.f. Rodrigues, Eusebio L. op. cit. p.76
which man can experience the terror of the contemporary human condition and the insignificance of the shrivelled self.”\(^\text{17}\)

By writing *Augie March*, Bellow is able to give free expression to his creative energy. In *Dangling Man* and *The Victim* Bellow’s Jewish sensibility lies dormant. It manifested itself briefly in the humanistic wisdom professed to Asa Leventhal by old Schlossberg, a Judeo-Christian belief in man and an acceptance of the human condition. In *Augie March* for the first time, Bellow has the courage to dilate upon his Jewish heritage to assert itself. This heritage, a vital ingredient of his creative sensibility, had been carefully nurtured in his childhood. He grew up in an orthodox Jewish household, brought up by a mother who wanted him to become a Talmudic scholar.

In *Augie March* Bellow has thrown away psychological pressures and has started writing consciously as a Jewish writer. He is proud and aware of his own past. He writes as the son of immigrant Russian Jews, trying to reclaim his lost individuality and self. Bellow’s Jewishness is now no longer a border jewel, but a valuable and inalienable core of his being. “It manifests itself in fundamentals, not in the use of minor detail, the references to old Granu, the Psalm reciter and death bed watcher, and to the razor slits in the vests of Enhorn and Dingbat after their father, the commissioner, dies. It refuses to idealize, and so to sentimentalise the oppressions and difficulties of Jewish life in the New

\(^{17}\) Rodrigues, Eusebio L. *op. cit.* p.77.
World: for sadness the Kaddish, for amusement the schnorrer, for admiration the breaded scholar.”\textsuperscript{18}

In his introduction to \textit{Great Jewish Short Stories} Bellow isolates two fundamental qualities of the Jewish imagination. One is the tendency to over humanize every thing, to invest all things in the universe with intense human meaning. The other is perhaps more essentially Jewish, the ability to respond to the human condition in a manner that lies on the edge between laughter and trembling. The Jewish imagination accepts the predicament in which all mankind (and Jews, especially) finds itself and yet it opposes to this terrible fact a comic sense of life. According to Bellow, the Jewish protagonist uses laughter as an antidote to achieve sanity and at times appears “to invite or encourage trembling with the secret aim of overcoming it by means of laughter.”\textsuperscript{19}

Bellow accuses Augie of over humanizing everything: “Oh, you screwball! You get human affection mixed up with everything, like a savage, keep your silly feelings to yourself”.\textsuperscript{20} But this is only to enable Augie acknowledge the way in which most people accept the terrible human condition. “External life being so mighty, the instruments so huge and terrible the performances so great, the thoughts so great and threatening, you produce a someone who can exist before it. You invent a man who can understand before the terrible appearances. This way he can’t get justice and he can’t give justice, but he can live. And this is

\textsuperscript{19} ibid. p.12.
\textsuperscript{20} AM(362) c.f. Rodrigues, Eusebio L. \textit{op. cit.} p.78
what mere humanity always does”. At the end of his adventures, Augie
does not learn how to act, but he does have a faint inkling of why
Jacqueline with her dream of Menico refuses to lead a disappointed life
and why he himself travels all through Europe. It is the animal reddens
in him, the Jewish comic sense of life that is mysterious and
inexplicable for he cannot understand its secret origins: “or is the laugh
at nature — including eternity — that it thinks it can win over us and the
power of hope? Nah! Nah! I think. It never will. But that probably is the
joke, on one or the other, and laughing is an enigma that includes
both”.

This abandance of humour that proceeds from a joyous
acceptance of the human condition. Augie is aware of the darkness in
which mankind exists; he knows about human disappointment and
deformation, and yet he bounces merrily along, choosing to laugh at
life’s inconsequentiality rather than to rage or weep at its wickedness.
His laughter and his hope and his joy issue from a sweeping comic
vision of life which embraces and reconciles the tragic sense and then
transcends it.

That is why Augie is comfortable with the world at large. He feels
a natural kinship with human beings. He participates in the human scene
as it opens out before him. Augie March is filled with a good number of
characters. The minor characters have comic, ethnic names: “Five
Properties,” Nails Nagel, Nosey Mutchnik, Dingbat Einhorn. The
millionaire Robey and Bateshaw, the biochemist, are grotesques, put
before us, in flesh and blood. Augie accepts human variety and makes

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21 AM(418) c.f. ibid.
22 AM(556-57) c.f. ibid.
bitter or harsh comments on human behaviour. It is as if he had the temperament of a creative writer and the ability to set down graphically every detail and nuance, every secret drive and desire, in an effort to get to the heart of the mystery.23

Augie is perhaps a frame. He does not have a genuine self because Bellow does not carve it out for him. Augie is a medium, a container for the ideas, problems, questions that troubled Bellow as artist at the time, but which he could not adequately dramatize. But Augie certainly reflects a sense of Jewishness, his love for Chicago, his desire to belong to America. He bestows on his protagonist his own faith in human existence and makes him wrestle with questions to which there are as yet no answers. Augie March is a Great Books book. His mind is full of learned allusions to historical and biblical sources which show that Bellow's mind is fully present in Augie. It is a mind which bears the imprint of the University of Chicago of the 1930s.

Above all, the language of the Memoir is not really that of Augie. Lacking a true self, Augie lacks a true language with which to talk about himself. He is the voice of the author. The language of Augie is that of a writer who is trying to discover, form, and possess a 'language' that will enable him to express what is lying deep within himself. In doing so he achieves a language that has both range and flexibility. Augie's voice is flexible enough which can tackle all simple and complex matters that he requires to deal with. Like Huckleberry Finn Augie speaks a vernacular, which has the tenor of the Chicago streets. Unlike Huck, he can also use the idiom of an educated mind. It is at once spontaneous as well as

23 Rodrigue, Eusebio L. op. cit. p.79
thoughtful. The two voices of Augie do not merge into one authentic voice. But when it comes to dealing with the humanistic views as his subject matter his language is free and clear of all complications and complexities.

Like the structure, the language of Augie is sometimes uneven and uncertain. But it holds out the possibility of development. Augie March, like Dangling Man, is another pioneering work for Bellow, in trying to evolve a flexible language which is a rich and powerful mixture of elements of the Yiddish, Chicago slang, literary allusion, etc. and yet distinctly American — a language that has the capacity to respond to and capture an American reality that is “new, promising, changing, dangerous, universal.”

The novel has some of the elements/events/themes which can be well appraised from a humanistic point of view as done in the following section.

III

As stated earlier in Section I and Section II Augie March is a novel by Saul Bellow which can be appreciated for its humanistic point of view. Its humanistic elements are present in its theme and even some important critical observations which show that the novelist himself is

engaged in portraying the situation of an American Jew living in the modern world.

The focus of the novel is on his protagonist after whom the novel gets its title. Understandably, this novel unlike the earlier novels Dangling Man and The Victim needs to be understood through the eyes of the protagonist.

In Augie March, Bellow presents a series of adventures or rather misadventures of Augie March. Augie plunges into various situations which bring out not only his humane qualities such as noble nature, loyalty to family, etc. but also show him materialistically as a poverty-stricken young man of twenty-two years. Due to his bad economic condition he becomes a book lifter to pursue his education. Some critics find him somewhat loose in morals, but they are hardly divided in their view that he is gentle and noble and possesses humanity which is indeed, a true virtue of a human being. He is tolerant and generous in showing sympathy to others when they need it. These qualities naturally endear him to all those who come in contact with him. All the young women he meets are easily charmed and fall in love with him. Thea Frenchel even chases him to give up his love affair with her sister Esther and compels him to respond to her own fascination for him. Later in the novel his fascination for and love of Thea is shattered because of the human help he extends to another woman in distress. Stella, whom he meets at a party desperately requests for his help to escape from her tyrannical husband. While he greatly sorrows over his break with Thea for helping Stella yet the breach seems to have come as a blessing in disguise. During their relationship and Thea’s adventure of capturing
iguanas and poisonous snakes Augie had become almost like a slave to her obeying all her wishes and commands even against his own will.

Augie falls in love with Lucy Magmus before Thea Frenchel both of whom are rich and belong to wealthy families but he never takes his relationship with them as affairs which would bring him a good deal of money too. That he is little attracted to money for money’s sake is something that even his brother Simon does not know much of. This is due to the essential human element in his personality which makes him indifferent to running irrationally after money.

But to say that he has no such vice as may render him into a man of weak personality would not be true. Several instances may easily be cited to show that he looks for money as a necessary means of fulfilling his purposes in life. He becomes a book lifter though his purpose is to use that money for paying his tuitions at the university. He indulges in this vice to make up the deficiency in his educational advancement. Again, when he is engaged in doing a business of a questionable kind in collaboration with Mintouchian he is obviously in search of means for making money. This involvement in a shady deal no doubt shows Augie in a bad light but as a critic, L.H. Goldman, has observed:

“...this flaw is what makes Augie human. To be human means to struggle with one’s imperfections, as did Jacob. Augie doesn’t struggle with his thievery, but his yearning for a fate good enough exhibits this tension between the ideal and the real.”

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Augie, then, is not a perfect human being that Bellow has created in this protagonist of his novel. On the contrary, the defect or the limitation of the protagonist is not only what makes him human but also what as the author himself emphasises is a human trait of this man. Bellow has himself admitted that he has presented protagonists who are real human beings, not ideal ones, in his novels. In reply to a question he observed:

I don’t think that I’ve represented any really good men; no one is thoroughly admirable in any of my novels. Realism has restrained me too much for that. I should like to represent good men, I like to know who and what they are and what their condition might be.\(^\text{26}\)

In what sense, then, does Bellow give the reader an impression of Augie March being a good man? It certainly does not imply that his goodness has a moral quality about it. Nor is it what Goldman calls the goodness of a religious devotee or the righteousness of a morally upright human being. Perhaps the point made here is that Augie is certainly not wicked at heart. On the contrary, he has a kindly attitude towards all his fellow beings. He has no inclination to cause any pain or suffering to anyone. Instead he tries to extend a helping hand to whether it is any of his family members or anyone intimately or even casually known to him. He does not react violently when he learns that his brother Simon had sold out their family house without his knowledge and their blind mother was kept with the neighbour Kriendle for the sole purpose of meeting his (Simon’s) marriage expenses.

Obviously, Augie has a reserved emotional attitude which is neither that of a religious devotee (\textit{hasid}) nor of a morally righteous

person (zadia). This is sheer, tolerant human nature which may be expected only in a man of benevolence and generosity.\(^{27}\) The presence of these humanistic elements in Augie’s temperament is evident. His meeting with Simon after he learns of the latter’s indiscreet action to sell his house to raise money for his marriage is a definite evidence of the kind of temperament and a cool reserve that Augie maintains throughout the novel. In terms of virtues he is just opposite to Simon who dispenses with the family house to raise money in order to marry a rich woman to become rich. But Augie does not worry about himself being poor or gaining social recognition or respectability like Simon does. He is quietly carried on with the various struggles that life demands. The end result of all these struggles is that he gets over all the complexities of life. He enjoys the different kinds of human relationships he creates in the course of these struggles. He comes out cheerful, a laughing animal — animal riddens\(^{28}\) — at the end of the novel. He puts up with the ups and downs of life without harbouring any grudge or prejudice in his mind. He takes everything in its stride. He indulges in the wrongful acts of thievery and black-marketeering not through any premeditated planning but just as the situations arises.

Rejecting the usual conception of the money-minded culture that Jews are wrongly supposed to possess, Bellow’s protagonist Augie March is first a human being and then anything else. He is surely not a money-crazy individual but a liberal, generous, good-natured man who is incidentally a Jew by birth. Yet Bellow imparts to him the most characteristic Jewish traits. One of these is his singular interest in


\(^{28}\) Dutton, Robert R. op. cit. p.61 and also see Goldman, L.H. op. cit. p. 34.
advancing his educational career. In order to complete his university education which he can ill afford he does not have any scruples in taking to stealing and selling books to meet his expenses. He is like any other Jew in that he takes serious interest in getting well educated. The Jews are well known for possessing sharp intellects and book-reading habits. Augie is honest, but the irony is that he does not have any economic support to sustain his desire for education. He is always in monetary troubles. Even while he attended school, he went for work too because he ad no other choice. His working hours were almost the same as compared with that of a regular working man. He did not like that his schooling should put any financial burden on his family. But he has a natural human desire to spare time for study. Augie shows concern for his real life. As a young man he wants to enjoy life. This is the nature of a human being. But he has difficulties. Bellow underlines the different strata of the society based on their economic disparities. The woman of the upper class looked down upon a woman of the lower class. It is a question of standard of living. Mrs. Renling is completely against Willa Steiner whom Augie admires for she had dissuaded him against developing any relations with the prostitute.

Over and above these matters the Jews show some skill at conversation. This makes them impressive talkers. Augie narrates his adventures; his narrative is impressive. The principal element of his narrative is his ability to use his language effectively. At times his language becomes literary too even though Augie does not possess literary imagination like Herzog or Charles Citrine do both of whom have a literary background. The former is a teacher of literature and the latter a writer.
Like other human beings the Jews too have a tendency to perceive reality in mythical terms, and to employ biblical myths and allusions in their conversation. Augie makes certain references to Bible which shows that he is fairly aware of the Jewish scriptural background. Pointing to this serious religious trait of his character evident from his statement –

[Anna Coblin] had the will of a martyr to carry a mangled head in Paradise till doomsday, in the suffering other’s hand led by Eve and Hannah.29

L.H. Goldman observes that “the reference to the ‘martyr’ carrying a ‘mangled head’ can belong either to Greek mythology or biblical literature and the reference to the story not in the Bible but in the Apocrypha and in Rabbinic literature”.30

That the Jewish consciousness of Augie is still more evident can be seen in his finding a resemblance between the eagle, Caligula, which Thea tries to train in Mexico, and “the ravens of Noah and Elijah, which may well have been eagles” as given in the description of ravens in Genesis 8:7 and also I Kings 17:26. The point to be noted here is that even though a direct equivalence between the eagles and the ravens is not established in the Bible, yet Augie does hint at such biblical allusions because of the essential Jewish consciousness he seems to have inherited from his family background. The novel contains many biblical allusions in the remarks made oft and on by Augie such as the reference to the Book of Jobit (one of the books of Apocrypha), the valley of

30 Goldman, L.H. op. cit. p. 40-41
Ezekiel (cf. Ezekiel, 37) and the adulterous wife of Hosea (cf. hosea 3:3)\textsuperscript{31}

A good number of sometimes lucid but often obscure allusions occur in Augie's biblical references. These allusions clearly suggest the Jewish cultural background employed by Bellow in the delineation of Augie March. As a result of this Biblical cultural inheritance Augie possesses optimistic liberal nature and believes in prophetic rebirth.

Yet despite all these biblical allusions Augie is not very well aware of the traditional Jewish lore. As L.H. Goldman has noted –

\begin{quote}
In Augie March, religion is a ... concept associated with the immature minds of women. The men have little to do with it\textsuperscript{32}
\end{quote}

Such observances as, for instance, the mourning for the dead, or not touching money on holy days, or wearing torn clothes, are mere superstitious practices. The belief in such practices has grown out of certain moods at certain times and has little to do with religion or even superstition. In the stories narrated within the novel there is an amorous tone. The stories are in a lighter vein. In the depiction of characters the Magnuses and the Fenchels too seem to have a Jewish background but that background is not much focussed upon. But while Stella's background is not elaborated yet like the other two women, she too is cast in a negative role. L.H. Goldman explores the symbolic significance of their names, thus: Lucy represents Lucifer\textsuperscript{33} Likewise, Thea

\textsuperscript{31} ibid. p. 42.
\textsuperscript{32} Ibid. p.44.
\textsuperscript{33} ibid. p.46.
symbolises the female goddess, the progenitor of eagle, iguanas and snakes. These are also the symbols of her own aspirations and the sexual power of the males whom she wants to render impotent and then dominate. Stella symbolizes the sex goddesses of ancient mythology who compete with one another and pursue the same objective of capturing the lovers of other goddesses.

Humanism must take into account the human tendency to use mythic symbolism since a large number of human beings believe in myths. In the employment of mythical symbolism Bellow no doubt exploits the ancient myths. The significance of using these myths lies in his attempt to reach out to the remote times to find a correlation between the present day lifestyle of man as a human being and the ancient life pattern of man when he was close to nature and so unaffected by the complexities of modern life. Seen in this perspective, Augie’s relationships with Lucy or Thea might have ended in a fiasco but his future with Stella is full of hope even though the promise of his fulfilment with her when she will return from California after doing her movie shooting is slightly spoiled by her suppressing her shady past. To predict a future of sterility for them may not be appropriate because in the given circumstances of the situation of both Stella and Augie the unfulfilled past of each is not touched upon. Unravelling the past may not only be a futile exercise but also a wrong step capable of destroying a possible and promised future happiness of a settled family life with children that Augie craves for.

While Bellow’s attitude towards representation of man is essentially humanistic he does not display the same attitude towards
woman. In this respect he also presents an attitude which is antithetical to the Jewish view in which woman is generally regarded as a sex-object and not an equal, intelligent partner of man in daily life. The woman's character is presented rather negatively her role is seen as either managing the household or procreating. The father is the custodian or source of values, not the mother. It is from Grandma Lausch that Augie gets his first humanistic instruction. He is taught to respect others and not merely get lost in multiple love affairs. He is also told to be honest, educated and a gentleman (mensch in Russian) of a high order. She advises him to know how to be a successful businessman who could handle all kinds of worldly affairs. Practicality was in any case to be preferred to sentimentality. He had his youngest brother Georgie sent to an outside school despite the financial strain on the family. Lausch was a strict disciplinarian in the family and Augie’s mother did not like to obey her dictates all the time.

The man crippled below the waist — Einhorn — is like Grandma who too lays stress on the building of character in a young man and believes that “character is fate”. Possessed of a strong will power Einhorn refuses to accept his helpless condition caused by his physical infirmity. Compared to Augie, his brother Simon is quite selfish and unmindful of others’ interests.

This is evident from the way he pockets all the money collected from selling his house and sends away his mother to the Kriendles, to live with them at their mercy. Pursuing his greedy ways he even attempts suicide several times. And yet because of his generous human nature Augie does not cease to love him or sympathize with him. In the
company of his schoolmates, Padilla and Bateshaw, Augie becomes conscious of the importance of getting well educated and having a university degree. He debates and rejects the views of Bateshaw on a possible solution to the problem of boredom faced by man. Bateshaw offers an artificial, mechanical solution to what is a human aspect of existence.

Mintouchian offers Augie guidance on how to live life and informs him of the essential maliciousness of man but Augie rejects his view of life. He believes in pure humanism, in being what he is or what he is fated to be and has no desire or will for any change in the fated pattern of his existence.

Another close associate of his is Clem Tambow who has his own perception of reality. Augie rejects Tambrow’s intention to exploit human weaknesses of others to his own advantage. He considers Tambrow’s view as unhealthy. It implies a desire to use his knowledge of psychology for that purpose and give wrong counsels to people in choosing their vocations. Likewise, Augie rejects the circular maze of psyche which Minotaur presents before man. He accepts the positive straightforward course of life that characterises or defines humanity and not any negative, roundabout path symbolised by the maze and upheld by the beast, Minotaur:

At an advanced stage of his understanding Augie realises that the true quality of humanity consists in not being tempted to deviate from one’s own perception of reality. In his view, the uniqueness of a human being consists in holding on to his perception of reality. He believes that it is not simply by existing as all living beings exist, but by existing on a
higher plane of reality, the human plane, that nobility, dignity, independence, etc. can be achieved. It is a vision of life which is realised after a great struggle like that of Jacob with the Angel as delineated in the Bible (Genesis 32:29). Jacob wins the struggle against the Angel and is named Israel, the progenitor of the (Jewish) race of people who are unique in possessing humanity.

Augie belongs to such a race and so resists evil influences which lure one to deviate from one’s chosen path of goodness. He believes in what he calls life’s “axial lines” which, as Goldman interprets, do not only indicate the ladder in Jacob’s dream but point to the significance of the ladder as symbolising a link between the earthly and the heavenly reality.\textsuperscript{34} The ladder suggests the connection between the earth and the haven toward which it points as in Frost’s poem “After Apple-Picking”. Understandably, a human being needs to be aware of both the realities simultaneously instead of getting wholly absorbed in either one.

Bellow emphasises the role of the family in \textit{Augie March}. Augie and the family are mentally disturbed when Georgie parts with them in order to be admitted to school. Augie tries to maintain close contact with the family members lest they should feel that the family is disintegrating. His deep affection and concern for the familial ties is evident in the way he expresses his anxiety about his mother and visits her in the home for the blind. His love of his brother Simon is manifest in spite of the latter’s wrongful actions. He visits Georgie at school as often as he can. Even at the conclusion of his adventures he looks forward to living a peaceful family life and bestowing his care and

\textsuperscript{34} Goldman, L.H. \textit{op. cit.} p.53.
affection on children. The soft human element in his personality in revealed when he is deeply upset to he learn that Simon would not be capable of begetting children.

Augie’s humanity, his gentle and compassionate nature, derive from his sensitivity and feeling for others and his attitude towards animals. He is generally compassionate but each time he shows compassion either to Mini Villars or Thea he has to pay the price. His relations with Lucy Magnus and Thea suffer a permanent break because of his benevolent nature. He is aware that he has landed in trouble because of helping a suffering woman. Augie’s attitude to animals is noteworthy. He feels unhappy at seeing the weak animals attacked by the strong ones. His humanity is evident as he sympathizes with the weak. Augie’s nature is known from his first job of looking after the dog club’s inmates. He feels no shame in confessing the truth when asked about this.

“Are you at the University?” I said,
“I got a scholarship in math and physics, what about you?”
“I wash dogs, can’t you tell I spend my time with dogs?”
“No, I don’t notice anything, but what are you doing?
“That is what I’m doing.”35

Thus, in this novel the focus has been on the elements of Bellow’s humanism. The protagonist of the novel, is widely appreciated for his humanistic nature. The quotations from the novel throw full light on his traits reflected in all the situations in which he in involved his goodness, benevolence, tolerance, nobility, sympathetic and helpful attitude towards the needy and the suffering, love affairs, his family loyalty and

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affection. My purpose has been to show that Augie March is a nice young man, good at heart, with no malice toward anyone and beloved of all the young ladies he falls in love with. He falls in bad company picks up bad habits, but overcomes all the difficult situations in which he gets involved. As he advances in years and matures into a thoughtful young man he is tired of all the adventures and running about and desires to settle down in a peaceful family life raising his small family and children and even establishing a foster-home for children. He looks forward to attaining peace and happiness in his family life. He has a plan or what we may call his vision of life.

Yet while narrating all his adventures Augie March cannot hide his childhood when his feelings were hurt. He recalls how a good number of times he has been marked out everywhere as a Jewish youth and subjected to ill-treatment. Clearly, Bellow tries to show, as I have argued, that in the mind of his Jewish protagonist there is a hurt psyche of having been ill-treated or singled out with some kind of prejudice. My point is that within the humanistic parameters of his novels Bellow tries to depict his protagonist who is not merely a Jew who suppresses his hurt feelings but also a human being with all kinds of virtues and vices that all real human beings possess. He tries to show, for instance, that his protagonist indeed looks for money but is not money-crazy or calculative in the way Jews have traditionally been understood to be. His presentation of his Jewish protagonist, is as human as Shylock in Shakespeare’s presentation of the Jew in The Merchant of Venice, who says:
I am a Jew, Hath not a Jew eyes? Hath not a Jew hands, organs, dimensions, senses, affections, passion? . . . if you prick us, do we not bleed? If you tickle us, do we not laugh? If you poison us, do we not die? And if you wrong us, shall we not revenge? If we are like you in the rest, we will resemble you in that.36

Bellow thus deals with the commonplace, Jewish world-view of man as a responsible human being who always questioning for living a good life, respects his as well as others’ dignity, upholds freedom of choice, sanctifies life and sees it as a gift of God to man, and considers life as a perpetual struggle for survival and attainment of beatitude that is dear to God, and upholds reason and self.

In his next novel Herzog, Bellow seems to be engaged in expanding the human and intellectual vistas of his protagonist.

36 Shakespeare, William. The Merchant of Venice, Act-III, Scene I