

The Adventures of Augie March Study Guide

The Adventures of Augie March by Saul Bellow

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Plot Summary

The Adventures of Augie March by Saul Bellow is the fictitious memoirs of a Chicagoan raised in poverty, rising to be the protégé of wealthy people, participating in petty crime, nearly marrying an heiress, working as a union organizer, following a woman to Mexico on a harebrained scheme, and narrowly surviving World War II in the Merchant Marine. His life passes looking for greener pastures and seeking his true self.

Born and raised in somber Chicago on relief, Augie March is an "easy touch for friendships" but not cut out for academics. His first break comes when he is hired by the crippled tycoon William Einhorn only to lose the position in the Depression. He next becomes the protégé of the controlling Mrs. Renling, through whom he meets and falls in love with beautiful Esther Fenchel, who rejects him, and becomes the object of her sister Thea's affections. When Mrs. Renling proposes to adopt him, Augie flees the easy life.

Augie's life changes when brother Simon sells the family house. Augie takes a job so disgusting that he takes up the lucrative shoplifting of textbooks. He moves into a house for transients, where he deals with a love triangle between Mimi Villars, Hooker Frazer, and Clem Tambow. As he marries into the Magnus family, Simon pushes Augie to do likewise and hires him for his company. Both situations end when Augie is caught taking Mimi to an abortionist and no one believes that he is not the father.

Augie briefly organizes workers for the CIO and is involved with Sophie Geratis, but Thea Fenchel reappears and takes him off to Mexico. Family and friends warn him against surrendering his liberty too quickly, but he is smitten. They are soon on one another's nerves as the eagle-training fails, she rejects his marriage proposal, and Augie helps Stella Chesney escape a bad situation. Augie fails to get them back together and, penniless and feeling useless, returns to Chicago where an eccentric millionaire hires him as research assistant, allowing him to read widely for pay.

Determined to align himself with "the axial lines of life," Augie plans to settle down on a farm and raise institutionalized children, but World War II intervenes. While training the Merchant Marine, Augie reunites with Stella, marries, ships out, and survives being torpedoed. After the war, Augie and Stella live in Paris, where he is an agent for a shady New York lawyer. In his spare time, Augie writes his memoirs.



Chapters 1-3

Chapters 1-3 Summary

In Chapter 1 Augie March depicts his life at age 9: abandoned by an unknown father and living under the rule of a tyrannical boarder, Mrs. Lausch, whom they call Grandma. He loves his beaten down, simple-minded, worn-out Mama but learns little from her, is less school-oriented and gregarious than big brother Simon, and cares for his "idiot" younger brother, Georgie. They are poor Jews in a Polish Catholic neighborhood that only rarely makes them suffer for their heritage. Augie enjoys being sent by Grandma to dicker with the Charities and clinic about free services.

In Chapter 2, Augie at 12 gets a summer job distributing theater handbills, and the next summer moves in with relatives, the Coblins, to help with the newspaper route. It is a slovenly household but they are generous with him. Emotional Cousin Anna intends Augie and daughter Freidl to marry soon. Augie appreciates his own home when he comes home on half-days off, and is proud to turn over his earnings. Grandma is involved as matchmaker for Anna Coblin's rich brother, Five Properties, who wants to marry a beautiful American girl. Anna gives Augie religious training that muddles the stories.

In Chapter 3, Grandma wages psychological warfare to turn Augie and Simon into successful gentlemen. Simon excels in academics while Augie finds excuses for skipping classes with his friend Jimmy Klein. Simon graduates lands a good job with Federal News Company. He arranges a job for Augie, whose humiliating failure drives a wedge between them. Earning good money makes Simon cocky but he as yet has no plans for overthrowing Grandma's hated regime. She does not approve of the Kleins. Jimmy's Uncle Tambow uses political connections to get the boys jobs, usually supervised by Sylvester, who has lost his theater and dreams of traveling the world as an engineer, while making little progress towards a degree.

Chapters 1-3 Analysis

Chapter 1 introduces Augie March's childhood world, including the immediate family, friends, and enemies. The Marches are poor, non-practicing Jews living in a Polish Catholic neighborhood with its colorful displays of religious art and anti-Semitic youth gangs. Augie claims that his big brother Simon is the studious one, but in the first chapter he alludes to Heraclitus, Machiavelli, Tom Brown's Schooldays, George III and Cornwallis, and Timur. The novel has to pass the halfway point before it becomes clear that Augie is a voracious reader. Until then, the highbrow references are puzzling - and abundant. The family dynamic is established: Grandma Lausch, a Russian Jew, officially a boarder, rules the roost and sets the tone. Mama and the mentally-challenged youngest sibling are victims of life's cruelty. Augie enjoys challenges and makes friends easily. Bellow paints ever character, place, object, and event in minute detail and



frequently refers back to them by key details. An example is the "household trinity" of the see/hear/speak-no-evil monkeys. The red of their nostrils will be mentioned when the old house is sold.

Chapter 2 deals primarily with Augie's cousins, the Coblins, who take him in one summer as he helps with Hyman Coblin's newspaper route. With Anna Coblin's brother Five Properties also living in the house and a stuttering, not particularly attractive daughter whom Anna intends to marry to Augie by the time she is 14-15, it is a lively narrative. Grandma is revealed to be a marriage broker and involved in illegal business ventures. A reference to burial detail during World War I and a parade on Armistice Day 1921 finally set the time of the novel.

Augie continues dropping literary and historical allusions. Anna Karenina and Manon Lescaut inspire Grandma to cinch up her old corset before heading to the park, ostensibly to read but actually to hunt for a husband. A sad anecdote shows how that can end badly. He refers in passing to Ophelia's brook, thereby evoking the tragedy in Shakespeare's Hamlet. Talking about how his hosts trust him with money lying around, Augie shrinks from putting himself on a level with Cato the Elder and Abraham Lincoln, adding just enough detail to make his point. At one point he has borrowed Simon's copy of The Iliad and includes a wonderful summary of Briseis being dragged tent-to-tent and Achilles growing obstinate—while he is himself eavesdropping on a conversation. The reader must have a fair education him- or herself to catch all of the tidbits that Augie drops effortlessly into his memoir or be prepared either to look them up or accept a reduced reading experience. At the end of the chapter, Anna, the only character thus far to adhere to religion, is shown providing Augie religious education. She garbles events of the Hebrew scriptures and oddly does not shy away from sexual scenes. She also considers her audience; at thirteen, Augie does not need to know more about Shechem's rape of Dinah than that it is torture. This is a rather enlightened attitude for the early 1920s.

Chapter 3 shows the March boys entering the work force. Augie declares that Grandma's keeping them engage in "various jobs" provides the "Rosetta stone" to his life's story. Rosetta stone refers to the stone table discovered in Egypt in the 18th century that enables scholars to penetrate the mystery of hieroglyphics. Augie will continually drift from job to job, always looking for something worthy of him, and will struggle trying to understand why.

The chapter introduces Jimmy Klein and his Uncle Tambow, who become important figures later in the novel. Sylvester fails as a theater owner, does poorly working on his engineering degree, but wants to travel the world. He admires Lenin and especially Trotsky, with whom Augie is later involved in Mexico City.

There are vivid allusions applied in this chapter: to Georges-Jacques Danton, the French revolutionary leader who loses his head to the guillotine, to Napoleon as an example of "universal eligibility to be noble." Simon is graceful like the Chevalier Bayard, a French military hero and "Cincinnatus at the plow," a Roman hero who becomes dictator and then relinquishes the office, like George Washington, nemesis of



Britain's King George III, mentioned earlier. Simon drops the names of celebrities that he sees on the train platform, which inspires Grandma to call Julius Rosenwald, whom she considers her social equal a "German Yehuda" for concentrating his philanthropy on blacks rather than Jews. This racism within the race is striking in context. Grandma is said to have "Pinkerton sources" of information on people, referring to the famous Chicago-based detective agency that becomes the United States' first "Secret Service."



Chapters 4-6

Chapters 4-6 Summary

In Chapter 4 Augie and Jimmy get caught swindling money from Deever's Department Store during Christmas time but are not prosecuted. Augie falls in unrequited love with Hilda Novinson and meets his first gangsters while working for Bluegren Florist. Grandma demands that Georgie, having reached puberty, be institutionalized, and out-argues Mama and Augie. The household dynamic shifts without him. The boys grow ruder and the house seems threadbare. Winnie dies of old age.

In Chapter 5 Augie describes working in his junior year as rich, crippled William Einhorn's "secretary, deputy, agent, companion." His duties are varied, some demeaning, but he rejects Simon's mockery about being just a butler. The Einhorn family also includes William's aged but spry father, "The Commissioner," who still runs the real estate and investment business, William's wife Tillie, his half-brother, Shep, known as "Dingbat," a boxer, and his only son, Arthur, a student at the University of Illinois. William's insistence that Augie can never become an heir, as Grandma hopes, is annoying. While obsessed with death, William prides himself on not surrendering to his fate and keeps Augie busy attending to his diverse interests. Augie wisely steers clear of William's flirtatious mistress.

In Chapter 6 Augie helps Dingbat manage a hapless boxer, which wins Dingbat none of the respect he craves from his father and half-brother. While they are out of town at a losing bout, the Einhorns' living room burns, a probable arson to suit Tillie's redecoration plans. Augie salvages a useful set of Harvard Classics. Grandma declines rapidly and grows troublesome. When Simon then arranges with her ingrate sons to put her in the Nelson Home for the Aged and Inform, it falls on Augie to drive her there. The Commissioner dies with dignity, and family and friends gather for the funeral. Augie helps William prepare an obituary and begin sorting documents to file or destroy. Ignoring his father's ways of dealing with cronies, William alienates many.

Chapters 4-6 Analysis

Chapter 4 opens with Augie telling the reader that he talks more about influences than about himself because throughout his life he has a poor "sense of consequences." Grandma is increasing household discipline and he is chafing. He wonders what she knows about his latest caper with Jimmy. The sights and sounds of the Christmas season are elicited—nothing is said of Hanukkah—as Augie and Jimmy are hired to play Santa's helpers in a department store. Santa is played by a tough old Swede who seems anything but the type. The elves skim money, the store demands back more than they steal, and they are punished by their families. Jimmy's severe beating is recalled many times later. Grandma and Simon alternate between giving Augie the silent treatment and coarsely criticizing him for all he does, including fall hopelessly in love



with someone who does not know he is alive. He rejects friends' offer to get him a prostitute. They argue that Hilda is not even pretty and he can do better; Augie spends a lifetime looking for a better lover.

Bellow makes a smooth transition from Augie's woes to the crisis that befalls the family through having him work for a florist. Gangsters, who will play a significant role later in the novel, are being killed off at a rapid rate in Chicago and Augie delivers flower arrangements to the whiskey-reeking wakes. In the neighborhood many people are experiencing bad times. There is an omen in the air. Grandma strikes, demanding that George be institutionalized rather than become a menace to young girls in the neighborhood. Simon silently supports this view, while Mama and Augie seek to keep him home. Augie recognizes that it is the practical thing to do but hates the manner in which it is done. George is terrified. Sending him away begins the process of destroying Grandma's sovereignty and vesting it in Simon. It is a slow process. The poodle Winnie's death seems to put a seal on the old system that has ended.

The chapter's allusions are a bit more esoteric: Elysian Fields, the Prophet Elisha's bear, the hapless Jew who dares steady the Ark of the Covenant and is struck down, Switzer and Praetorian Guards, and Fouché and Talleyrand.

Chapter 5 opens with a paean to William Einhorn, likening him to Julius Caesar, Machiavelli, and Ulysses. Later Augie observes that William sees himself in precisely such heroic terms. Much of the chapter examines William's psychological and physical adaptation to having no use of his arms and legs and only limited use of his weak hands. He is determined to do whatever he can for himself, and orders custom devices to facilitate independence. For those most part, however, he is dependent on Augie for all functions. Simon mocks Augie for being a butler, but Augie sees worth in the diverse services he provides. William's emphasis on Augie not hoping to become his heir eventually leads to Augie leaving his service. Although Grandma hopes that he and Simon will achieve such a lift to success, Augie maintains that he had not thought about it until William makes such a point of it. Even after the amicable break, Augie has frequent contacts with members of the family, so the detail with which they are initially painted is vital. Bellow is scrupulous about epitomizing their most important features when he reintroduces them to the story.

Later chapters will develop the theme of William's robust sexuality, using Augie to facilitate trysts, and procuring Augie's first sexual experiences. Friends worry that Augie has not yet found a girlfriend or considered marriage. William's efforts to be a useful citizen are cataloged in great detail, giving a feel for the intellectual climate on the eve of the Great Crash of 1929. William's understandable obsession with death brings in attitudes towards euthanasia, expensive medical care, and programs of positive thinking.

Allusions are particularly rich. Augie sees caring for William in terms of the "Sun King," Louis XIV in Versailles. He talks of William's "Parsee sense" in facing adversity and his scorning of custom à la Pope Alexander VI. He lists many cripples throughout history who have overcome: Hephaestus the inventor, lame Oedipus, tongue-tied Moses, and



epileptic Julius Caesar and the Prophet Muhammad, dog-ugly Socrates, and chief among them. He notes the cruelty of God in allowing Sarah to persecute the son of Hagar. Augie cannot go along with the extreme optimism of the Rev. Lyman Beecher, but goes along with William trying Teddy Roosevelt's program described in *It Can Be Done* and the Coué Theory. In comparing the great cities of the world with Chicago he cites many great cultural achievements and ends with putting Al Capon beside Cicero. He deplores Aristotle ridden by nasty whores, Pythagoras being killed over a diagram, Seneca having to slit his wrists, and countless martyred teachers and saints. The chapter ends with a long discourse on Death personified.

Chapter 6 opens with Augie agonizing over what he wants from life. Simon and many of his contemporaries have already decided and Augie knows what William needs from him, but is adrift about when he wants for himself. It is a crisis of maturity. He and Dingbat manage a hapless boxer in a bittersweet interlude. Bellow captures the atmosphere inside Trafton's Gym and the ring at the Lions' Club in Muskegon, MI, the horror of seasickness, and the rusting, smoking industrial zones and tenements of Gary, Hammond, Flint. He shows Augie, again destitute, riding the rails later in the novel. Dingbat emerges as a rounder, more likable character.

The meat of the chapter shows the rapid, monumental changes that affect the Einhorn and March homes. William's lover departs and refuses pleas to visit, leaving him irate. To accommodate his wife's redecorating whims, William burns the living room down and has to strong-arm the insurance company to pay up. Disposition of the damaged furnishings shows William's stinginess and craftiness. Augie claims a fire-damaged set of the Harvard Classics, which become the cornerstone of his on-going self-education. This begins to explain the breadth of knowledge that he incorporates in his writing.

The Commissioner then dies with unexpected dignity. Bellow brilliantly captures the awkwardness of a non-practicing Jewish family going through the forms of a religious funeral, including praying the orphan's Kaddish in the synagogue. The writing is delicious. William's early faux pas in managing the business are shown along with his determination to succeed. Recall that the Great Crash is drawing near. Augie remains his right-hand man.

The obituary that William prepares for the newspapers grandly ties the departed into the history of Chicago, including the legend of Mrs. O'Leary's cow, and to construction rivaling Pharaoh's and Peter the Great's. The Commissioner's decency contrasts with these rulers' cruelty. The Commissioner's death is worthy of Plato, who advises seekers of truth to study Death. William's writing drips with the bombast that Augie's lacks.

The March household also changes radically as Simon arranges to pack Grandma off to a nursing home, making Augie driver her there. She maintains her dignity in the process, sold out by sons who will not let their comfortable lifestyle be burdened by the old woman. Her steamer chests bear stickers from her life in Odessa and travels to the New World. Grandma has not been an attractive character, but her downfall is nevertheless moving. The home is depressing and the ancient residents more so. In a truly obscure reference, Augie says that it would take the genius of Origen, an early



Christian theologian whose massive writings are considered heretical and burned, to describe it. Among the chapter's other allusions are Aphrodite's temple at Eryx, the Bible's Garden of Eden, the Prophet Samuel's putting on the ephod in front of Eli to begin serving in the Temple, and Robinson Crusoe, "alone with nature."

Mama, meanwhile is shown to be nearing complete blindness and George, having adjusted well and learned crafts, must be moved to an adult facility. These problems must be dealt with soon.



Chapters 7-9

Chapters 7-9 Summary

In Chapter 7 the Crash ruins William, reducing his empire to the poolroom, where he begins rebuilding. He lets Augie go as an economy measure, but hires him back—for less money—after Augie takes part in a robbery planned by Joe Gorman in the poolroom. He lectures him hypocritically and convinces him not to be determined by his environment. The Depression is hard on all of Augie's friends. William's evicting tenants unable to pay rent gets him picketed by Communists and attempts to get around zoning laws costs him his last big property. Still, he refrains from violence. His savings lost in the bank run and his work hours sharply cut back, Simon begins learning how to dress and behave for success. To celebrate Augie's graduation, William takes him to a whorehouse for his first sexual experience.

In Chapter 8 Augie and Simon both enroll in city college, since jobs are hard to find. Both get part-time jobs in a shoe store, with Simon having the choicer upstairs position, but Augie is soon brought up as well. Simon hires a maid to help Mama, who is nearly blind, but seduces the middle-aged woman and fires her, finding an unattractive replacement who cannot cook. Augie moves to Evanston to work in an upscale sporting goods store, where the husband's owner, Mrs. Renling takes on the project of making him perfect. They turn him into a "clotheshound." When Augie begins dating a waitress, Mrs. Renling takes him away to a resort at Benton Harbor/St. Joseph, where he promptly falls in love with a beautiful heiress, Esther Fenchel. Thinking that he is attracted to her sister Thea, Mrs. Rendling warns that Thea is no good. When Augie tries to make a date, Esther turns him down coldly, causing him to pass out. Later, Thea approaches him to declare her love for him. She explains Esther's behavior by saying rumors are that he is Mrs. Rendling's gigolo. At any rate, if he knew Esther he could not love her. When the family leaves, Thea leaves a note promising to see Augie again. Simon and his girlfriend, Cissy Flexner, make a day visit to St. Joseph, but the brothers do not reconnect as Augie had hoped. Simon plans on marrying soon. Augie does not care for demanding Cissy.

In Chapter 9 Augie parts company with the Rendlings when she pushes to adopt him. Augie has family and pride. He moves in with a college acquaintance but finds that the job that comes with it is in outdoor sales peddling an unattractive niche product. Ruber's house is near Grandma, so Augie visits her a last time before she dies. Desperate, Augie runs into Joe Gorman, who looks prosperous, and agrees to help drive immigrants in from Canada. The risk is slight and the job pays \$50. Gorman neglects to mention that his car is stolen and the plates not changed, so they lose it at a gas station in Lackawanna, NY. They split up, both heading for Buffalo, NY, where Augie sees Gorman in custody. Augie hurries across the state line to join hobos catching freight cars. It takes eight days to reach Chicago, with one day lost in police custody in Detroit, where Augie finds himself by mistake.



Chapters 7-9 Analysis

Chapter 7 brings the Crash. Bellow constructs a long opening paragraph to apply the legend of wealthy King Croesus who takes in the Greek Solon as a refugee from the Persian King Cyrus, who captures Croesus, whom he spares the being burnt alive. Before applying elements of the tale to William and the bank failures, he adds color detail and secondary analogies that rather clouds the core message, which remains a tour de force. Augie than summarizes the shrinking of William's empire to just the poolroom.

The effects of the Depression on all is described. Some of the rich commit suicide "by skyscraper leaps," a sharp turn of phrase, but William doggedly fights as long as he can and, from a reduced position, begins rebuilding. His belligerency toward tenants unable to pay rent gets him picketed by Communists, including Sylvester, whose role begins enlarging. Dingbat wants to use violence but is restrained by William, in whose financial prowess he still believes. How the various minor characters earlier introduced cope with the Depression allows a wide perspective on the crisis. Augie likens William to John Quincy Adams, defeated for re-election and deigning to return to Washington as a simple congressman.

Although he has dabbled in petty crime, Augie's participation in a robbery is rather unexpected. He dislikes the way it makes him feel—the modus operandi is described in rich detail—and bows out of future involvements, even before William learns of it and delivers a long lecture explaining the diverse ways in which criminals harm themselves. Considering his own machinations, it is hypocritical, but sincere. One gets a good picture of criminal justice from the monologue. It opens Augie's eyes to the need not to be determined by his environment. No one has ever told him the bold truth about himself before and he appreciates it. William hires him to run errands. Augie recalls one, in which he is middle-man in swindling a gangster. It shows how deviously William works, sitting safely in his office. Augie will be tempted back into crime once more by Joe Gorman.

William's sexual needs come back into focus and to get a piggy-back ride upstairs to a whorehouse, he treats Augie to his first encounters, as a graduation gift. He makes up a flimsy cover story about taking in a show that can hardly have fooled his wife. The whorehouse is like a speak-easy, requiring a referral from a trusted customer. The madame is leery about admitting a cripple borne on a teenager's back. The logistics of satisfying William's needs are described; he is careful to have Augie hold his wallet. Augie describes the kind treatment the older whore assigned to him offers, while realizing post-coitally that it is simply a transaction for her. Thus introduced to pleasure, Augie begins having relationships that never manage to endure. They parallel his inability to find a job that truly satisfies.

Chapter 8 again brings significant change to Augie's life. He and Simon both enroll in city college, which the opening paragraphs describe at length as a beautiful mixture of all elements of Chicago society and America at large. He sketches the student body in



largely stereotypical manner and summarizes everything about the world with which a person must catch up, while observing that the object of the brothers' study is practical; it is not a seminary teaching casuistry and preparing for participation in an unreal European world. European culture soon becomes a significant consideration.

Both brothers get part-time jobs in a shoe store, Simon in the high-price upstairs salons, where he radiates the poise he has been learning. Augie is in the bargain basement at a lower salary. He soon works his way upstairs, however. He then moves to the rich suburbs of Evanston, IL, and is hired by a sporting good store. He is proud finally to be out-earning Simon. The manager, Mr. Renling, is reticent to hire a Jew because of local prejudice, but takes a change. Augie likens his examination to the slave block. He and his wife turn Augie into a "clotheshorse" and Mrs. Renling aims to perfect him; she seems to make a hobby of reforming salesmen. Part of this is regulating his love life. To get him away from an undesirable waitress, Mrs. Renling insists that he escort her to a resort, where he instantly falls in lust with a beautiful heiress, Esther Fenchel. Fearing that he has fallen for her sister, Thea, Mrs. Renling take it upon himself to warn him away. She is dangerous. Augie embarrasses himself asking Esther out and later hears from Thea why she refuses him: rumors have it that Augie is Mrs. Renling's gigolo. The gulf between European and American views on such relationships comes out as Thea insists that to her it is no big thing while Augie is aghast and desperate to explain the situation. The reason for Thea's lack of concern comes out: she is in love with Augie and Esther is no good. Departing the resort, Thea promises to see Augie again. She is as good as her word and Thea becomes a central character later in the novel. Also on the romantic front, Simon shows up with the girl he intends soon to marry. It seems ill-omened to Augie and the reader. Simon's track record is not good. Earlier in the chapter he makes wild love with a maid he has hired to help Mama and has to fire her, least she take advantage of the situation.

Mrs. Renling's time at the resort is spent in mineral soaks and meals, which she refuses to take alone. Augie endures an enormous amount of gossip about fellow guests. One story particularly bothers him. The wealthy Dutch Zeeland family is present. Word has it that they have gotten their daughter off scott-free after she kills a child. This reminds Mrs. Renling of lurid news accounts of Ruth Snyder being electrocuted. Photographers capture the procedure, threatening Snyder's due feminine modesty. Augie is shocked that that could be the primary consideration in the taking of a human life.

In Chapter 9, Audie's life shifts again, and he wastes no time prefacing the matter as he usually. Mrs. Renling pushes hard to adopt him. This is Grandma's dream and Audie's subliminal dream while with William, but now he is insulted. Pointedly, he does not want to be a Moses plucked out of the reeds by Pharaoh's daughter. He has a family. He is not an orphan. Mrs. Renling gets nasty, saying that he prefers shit to quality of life. Audie consults William, who is preoccupied with a new lover, a fellow cripple, so Augie acts on his own: finding somewhere to live and work. Augie trying to sell rubberized paint for bathroom walls is entertaining, but one can sense his frustration and growing panic. He is desperate when he runs into Gorman again and agrees to what sounds like a safe and even noble cause. Gorman is not forthcoming about his car and they find themselves being searched for. Gorman gets arrested, eliciting misplaced guilt in Audie,



who receives no money from Simon and has to ride the rails to Chicago. Bellow devotes pages to describing hobo life in the early-1930s. Augie makes short-lived friends among them. In Detroit, Bellow pulls out the slapstick, having the police interrogate without an interpreter a group of irate deaf mutes. The solution is to let them cool off over night. The police try to link Audi and his companions to a car parts theft ring. The police ask about their hometowns and get suspicious of towns too small to be on a map. The questioning is inane. Only Wolfy is held on suspicion because someone recognizes him from a prior offense. Audi must be hearing William's lecture running through his head after all of this.



Chapters 10-12

Chapters 10-12 Summary

In Chapter 10 Augie comes home from his terrible trip to find a Polish family living in his house and Mama living in the Kreindls' basement. No one knows why, but Simon has sold the house and furniture. Augie heads to William's, running first into Hyman Coblentz and Five Properties, who laugh at things that Augie does not know. Five Properties invites him to his wedding, without saying his bride's name. At William's, Augie learns that: 1) Simon has borrowed money to pay off gambling debts to the mob, on top of money that William gives him to wire to Buffalo; 2) as punishment for selling Mama's house out from under her, Kreindl has broken Simon's engagement to Cissy Flexner in favor of Five Properties; and 3) Simon has spent a night in jail for breaking up the Flexner house but is not being prosecuted. William savagely advises Augie not to let Simon off without making restitution. He promises to help Mama. Augie cannot find Simon but discusses the matter with Kreindl, who believes that Simon is too young and dumb to get married.

Augie heads to the Charity to talk with Lubin about getting Mama into a Home for the blind. It is arranged, but the family's co-payment is \$15 a month. Augie pawns his fancy clothes to raise funds. William arranges for Augie to get a job in Guillaume's dog-sitting business. It is hard, stinking work. As Simon continues to avoid his brother, Augie thinks about changing his own life. A poor but brilliant mathematics student, Manny Padilla, tells him that he supplements his meager scholarships by stealing textbooks to sell to students. He prides himself on his technique, which he shares with Augie. The risk of being caught is minimal. Augie tries it and succeeds, and shares the business. Manny tells him to do only what comes easily. Simon comes to visit, confessing that he has dealt foolishly with the mob, reaches the bottom in jail, where he contemplates suicide, but now is ready for the good life, which he will attain by marrying an heiress, Charlotte Magnus. Taking marriage seriously is for suckers. Augie disagrees with such cynicism. The Magnuses want to meet Augie at the big engagement party, so he sends money to get Augie's good clothes out of pawn. Simon believes that Charlotte already loves him.

In Chapter 11 Augie moves into student housing, answering phone calls and distributing mail for the Owenses in lieu of rent. He, fiery Mimi Villars, and Kayo Obermark in separate rooms live in the attic, with Mimi visiting both to borrow things, store overflow clothing, and chat. Augie has to deal with a love triangle: Mimi and her current lover, Hooker Frazer, and Augie's ugly old friend Clem Tambow. Sylvester returns as a Communist operative and seeks from Mimi help getting her sister to return to their marriage. Early in their friendship, Mimi teaches Augie that "everyone sees to it his fate is shared."

Simon takes Augie to meet the in-laws, who believe that the wedding is still to come. For convenience, Simon and Charlotte marry quietly out-of-state and pretend not to live together. Augie stays silent during his first introduction to the wealthy and large-statured



Magnuses and sees in Simon's personality Grandma Lausch's profound influence. The nieces and cousins size Augie up as marriage material, but he is in no hurry. Simon showcases Augie's intelligence in order to improve his own image. He buys Augie a new wardrobe and other luxuries, but gives him little cash, to keep him dependent. Learning the coal business in the warm off-season brings Simon to the brink of suicide, but business-minded Charlotte assures him that it will turn around. She wants him to succeed financially. Distraught, Simon begs Augie to work for him, to have someone he can trust, and Augie cannot refuse. Simon's need to dominate appears when they visit Mama. While she is content in her life, Simon suspects that she is being exploited and makes a great pest of himself with the directors. No one can quiet him.

In Chapter 12 Simon and Charlotte have their grand wedding, during which Lucy Magnus flirts openly with Augie. Simon pushes his grand scheme for them to marry and employ their joint assets to building careers. Augie and Lucy begin dating and become virtually engaged. At work, Simon is relieved that sales pick up with the return of cold weather but becomes an ever more demanding boss, giving Augie assignments in which he is sure to fail in order to prove his own competence in overcoming obstacles. His cruelty and bent for calling in political favors grow. He sends Augie to the morgue to identify an employee's corpse, leaving Augie shaken as he drives to pick up Lucy for a date. He damages Simon's car and his weakness makes Lucy look at him differently. Simon is angry that Augie is not more upset about the accident.

Mimi tells Augie that she is pregnant and determined to have an abortion. They argue about the gift of life when more often than not it leads only to suffering and decline, before Augie agrees to raise the \$50 that she needs. Caught shoplifting, Augie is relieved that the store detective is Jimmy Klein, who recovers the merchandise but lets Augie flee. They meet for coffee, catch up on one another's family's lives, and Jimmy provides the needed money. Reluctantly Augie takes Mimi to Dr. Stracciatella for a labor-inducing injection. Mimi suffers greatly but does not expel the fetus. She goes to a hospital feigning symptoms of a tubal pregnancy, is operated on, but congratulated that all is in order: she will bear a fine baby. Depressed, she returns to Stracciatella. As Augie helps her downstairs, they run into Kelly Weintraub, a Magnus relative, who promptly spreads rumors with the clear spin that Augie is responsible for her pregnancy. Simon accepts this and cares only that it not affect his position in the family.

Augie, Kayo, and Manny take Mimi to the hospital, being rejected by the first because she has had an illegal procedure performed, but accepted at a second, where Manny has a friend. He waits while she is treated and Augie races to the Magnuses, where a solid family from makes clear that his relationship with Lucy has ended forever. Augie returns to the hospital to learn that Mimi is doing well. As they talk briefly, she says that it is depressing to be in the maternity ward with crying and suckling babies. Asked to leave, Augie finds that Simon's car has a flat tire. He abandons it to walk to the Coblins' house and spend the night. In the morning, Cousin Anna while making breakfast shows him a picture of the now-beautiful Friedl and reminds him of their almost-engagement. Augie stares at the wintry sky.



Chapters 10-12 Analysis

Chapter 10 brings with Augie contemplating the problems likely to face in on coming home. Still, entering one's native waters is satisfying. He mentions Dagon, the ancient Phoenician sea god. He discovers that everything has fallen apart. He admits objectively that he and Simon are not suited to keeping up the house and caring for Mama, but resents the way Simon has acted. Later in the chapter, Augie calls Simon's plan to marry for money "cold-blooded," but his actions in Augie's absence are more so. Simon has vanished and no one knows his motivations. Augie searches for information.

He again consults William who, as it turns out, holds all the keys. He explains Simon's multiple woes, which stem from his being a "greenhorn" dealing with mobsters and the resentment mistreating Mama creates in Kreindl the matchmaker. Simon's fiancée is marrying Five Properties instead. Augie has just been invited to that wedding, not knowing the bride's identity.

All of this occurs quite specifically on Passover. Augie gets invited to a Seder but is preoccupied. As he walks through Chicago on a spring night, the atmosphere suggests to him how Egypt must have felt as the Angel of Death went out in search of Egyptian first-born sons. Electricity is knocked out at Einhorn's, continuing the atmosphere, although the family does not celebrate the High Holy Day. This is not unexpected, after the funeral scenes, but there is an odd note: they do keep Yom Kippur—the Day of Atonement when a year's worth of sins are forgiven and a new slate begun. William tells Augie about all that has transpired by candlelight. Augie has much to resent Simon for and William urges him to demand retribution. He implies that Augie is weak.

Unable to find his brother, Augie takes control, finding Mama a good home and getting a terrible job dealing with rich people's pampered dogs. He goes into detail about how the French proprietor charges, too readily resorts to tranquilizers, and, parenthetically has a sexy girl friend. Augie has a bad case of spring fever and no outlet. He gets some relief by partying with Manny Padilla and two lively girls for a weekend. Manny's true important is in giving Augie a philosophy to live by: do whatever comes easy naturally. He will many times remind himself this through the rest of the novel. He also learns from Manny now to shoplift textbooks to sell to students. Having just seen an example of what William had lectured him about, Augie should have been more careful, but for a while he succeeds and is able to leave the filthy dog business. Augie's involvement with handling animals will be revisited shortly. It is noted that Manny keeps dealing in technical titles, which matches his subject expertise, and assigns the humanities to Augie. Clients are students at the theological seminary. The irony is left muted.

Simon eventually seeks Augie out and after an awkward start, admits his foolishness and reveals his plans to marry an heiress, older, heavy, and not particularly pretty. Augie calls this cold-blooded, and the brothers debate the institution of marriage. Simon charges that Augie loses opportunities while waiting for something ideal. This theme develops going forward. Augie cannot be so cynical. The in-laws want to meet a March and Augie is the only one presentable. Simon finds the money to get Augie's good



clothes out of pawn. Simon begins reclaiming his position as older brother, lost while Augie is Mrs. Renling's protégé. The present chapter carries out the Moses theme introduced in that relationship: the babe saved from the reeds. Simon needs to dominate, like Pharaoh and Augie will need his help for some time, but the sibling rivalry will continue to simmer. Simon's marriage will be one of convenience, in accordance with the philosophy he explains to Augie.

Chapter 11 opens with an obscure evocation of places in England, Sicily, Bogotá linked somehow to human foolishness. The final entry leads back to Chicago's Wabash Ave., where a bridge has just been erected in Augie's time. It segues abruptly into a description of Augie's new residence on the South Side and his continuing to sell stolen textbooks to students and establishing himself in a new housing situation that brings him in contact with key new characters and brings back several acquaintances from years ago. Augie answers phone calls and distributes mail in a transient housing situation that allows him covertly to see and hear many things. He, Mimi Villars, and Kayo Obermark live in separate rooms in the attic, with Mimi visiting both to borrow things, store overflow clothing, and chat. This trio is at first platonic and will weather many crises before they break up. Mimi's insistence that if she ever gets "knocked up," she alone will take care of the problem. Pregnancy to her is a great curse, although she preaches and practices the maxim, "everyone sees to it his fate is shared." One of the trio's crisis will be a pregnancy that nearly kills Mimi.

Augie also deals with a love triangle: Mimi and her current lover, Hooker Frazer, and Augie's ugly old friend Clem Tambow. Clem has no chance. Hooker is not as central a character as the others, but becomes a point of reference for Augie at intervals going forward. Hapless Sylvester returns as a Communist operative and seeks from Mimi help getting her sister to return to their marriage. He takes on a new importance. His and Hooker Frazer's expulsion from the Communist Party for "deviation" and adherence to Trotskyism suggest the profound internal struggles within Bolshevism. These are further developed later in the novel, when Augie without intending to nearly penetrates Trotsky's inner circle in Mexico City.

Chapter 11 also introduces the Magnuses, another wealthy family into whose affairs Augie is sucked when Simon marries Charlotte. He attends a family gathering that allows him to evaluate them as a whole and as individuals. Simon is determined to draw Augie into the circle, building up his intelligence and potential before them. It is entirely self-serving. Augie stays silent, reserving his observations for the reader. He sees Grandma Lausch's profound influence in forming Simon's increasingly bipolar (manic/depressive) personality. The nieces and cousins size Augie up as marriage material, but he is in no hurry. Since it fits Simon's plans, entering the clan becomes a bone of contention. Simon buys Augie a new wardrobe and other luxuries, but gives him little cash, to keep him dependent. This is a relationship that Augie has often needed but always despised, vis-a-vis both Simon and William. It will happen again.

Learning the coal business during the predictably slow warm months brings impatient Simon to the brink of suicide. Business-minded Charlotte assures him that it will turn around and wants him to succeed financially to free herself from the family's financial



domination. The "greenness" that gets Simon into trouble with gangsters earlier plagues him again as he rushes to start his new life. Distraught, Simon begs Augie to work for him, to have someone he can trust, and Augie cannot refuse. Strong Simon weeping in the bathroom is repeatedly recalled afterward. Simon's need to dominate and utter self-absorption appears when they visit Mama. While she is content in her life, Simon suspects that she is being exploited and makes a great pest of himself with the directors. He forbids Mama to assemble FDR campaign buttons; the director, tongue-in-cheek tells Augie that he hopes FDR is good enough for Simon personally.

Allusions play a larger role than they have for a few chapters. Clem Tambow is seen in terms of Plutarch's radiance and as Phoebus' boy. Kept waiting, Clem declares that he is no King Canute. Simon's terrible situation evokes the "Valley of Ezekiel slain," Alexander in the "harmful Cydnus," Commodus before the Senate, Caracalla, and Balaam, impatiently beating the ass that refuses to carry him to his death.

Chapter 12 begins with a meditation on luxury and power, contrasting the Old World style at the Schönbrunn and in the "Bourbon establishment in Madrid," which Augie has seen—a first indication that he eventually lives or travels in Europe—and the modern forms that consists primarily of massive equipment requiring battalions of support people to maintain. People who will not go along with and/or enjoy available luxuries are disturbing. Augie suggests that he is coming to a crisis point, contrasting choosing and being chosen. He mentions the ancient Horatius, the kamikazes (whose self-sacrifice is not called up until the very end of World War II, and in between Martin Luther's "Ich kann nicht anders—so help me God!" - a quotation he uses frequently. Augie claims to be a person not easily influenced, which is precisely what Simon wants him to be. He finishes setting up the action by a reference to a "Phedra cry" (Racine) and Napoleon fleeing wintry Russia through the midst of the frozen dead.

This is a bit over the top but not wide of the mark, for the time turns to winter, Simon's spirits rise along with his profits, and he and Charlotte have their fashionable wedding. Simon is a caricature of the nouveau riche before the ceremony, talking with his brother, who is an usher. Simon sprawls on the bed and struts like a rooster admiring himself in the mirrors. Charlotte has done all of the planning. Simon is ready to cash in and urges Augie to do likewise: if he marries Lucy Magnus, who is richer even than Charlotte. Although he does not share the outlook, he does not argue the point and, in fact, begins dating Lucy. Simon leaps among the opportunities: having Augie as a top-flight lawyer, working together to leverage their combined assets, or becoming ambassadors. Augie notes that this is no longer the exalted office of former years but an actual job. He delicately describes how he and Lucy engage in sexual play short of intercourse; he accepts that when a woman says know it means no, long before the women's movement demands that it be so and for the sake of his own self-respect. Bellow revels in describing the wedding and reception spoiled only the Cousin Five Properties taking silly offense at where he is seated and stalking out. Augie is strong enough not to get caught in the middle.

Simon's increasing domination at work and at play is depicted from many angles, showing a palpable increase in the level of sibling rivalry. He can see things only from



the perspective of his own benefit. This is shown sharply when Augie and his friends help Mimi terminate her accidental pregnancy. She and Augie debate getting rid of what Mimi calls a "little scallop." She holds that Augie, lucky to be a male, has no right to get indignant about this. They debate the value of life that originates in an accident; Mimi demands to see concrete examples of struggling people benefiting in any way from aging and death and being glad to go through it. Augie cannot picture oblivion, which is the fate of the fetus if Mimi goes through with it, but knows that he cannot win the argument on such a personal basis.

Abortion before World War II (and for a long while afterwards) is illegal and medical professionals who are caught practicing it are prosecuted. Finding an abortionist comes by word of mouth, and because the competition is limited their prices are high. Augie reluctantly takes Mimi to a Dr. Stracciatella, whose portrayal could not be more repulsive. He provides little information beyond his non-negotiable price and says, in essence, take it or leave it. Mimi takes the experimental injection, cursing Stracciatella, and goes home to suffer contractions that do not expel the fetus. She and Augie debate the ethics and feasibility of convincing doctors at a clinic that she is suffering a tubal pregnancy, which can be legally terminated, and she undergoes surgery that finds all is normal. Mimi is galled that the nurses congratulate her on her upcoming motherhood. Her only choice is to return to Stracciatella and Augie returns to shoplifting to raise the \$100 fee. He is, of course, caught in the act, but the "house dick" is Jimmy Klein, a childhood thief, who not only lets him go but raises the money in conjunction with his sister, Eleanor, who has returned from a disillusioning trip to Mexico. This points to Augie's future travels in Mexico and allows "catching up" on several minor characters.

Money in hand, Augie and Mimi go to Stracciatella and the deed is done. Coming down stairs, they have the bad fortune to run into a Magnus relative who happens also to be the doctor's cousin. He spreads the word, ending Augie's relationship with Lucy. Sure that Augie has impregnated Mimi, Simon makes clear that he is protecting himself within the family circle. Augie, neighbor Kayo, whom Mimi dislikes and avoids, and Manny, take her, fevered from blood loss and infection, to the hospital. They are rejected at the first because she protects the name the doctor who has treated her, but get into a second where Manny has connections. The novel makes clear that everything important requires connections. Augie abandons Simon's car, its flat tire symbolizing their broken relationship, and visits the Coblins, where he is reminded of Friedl, who in adolescence had been his intended wife.



Chapters 13-15

Chapters 13-15 Summary

Chapter 13 sees Augie's life spinning until Mimi suggests he work as a union organizer for the CIO during a time of wildcat strikes and competition with the AFL. Mr. Grammick teaches Augie by example to work 16-hour days, 10-12 days straight, and soon has him traveling around the city, often at night, when it is safer for the workers. Augie's manner is "slipshod and preppy," and many expect him to be tougher.

Augie visits William, who asks him to get his son a job. Married and divorced, Arthur and son have moved back home. Augie is briefly involved sexually with union activist Sophie Geratis, until Thea Fenchel shows up, needing to see him. Hoping for another chance at Esther, Augie lets Sophie slip away. Before he can phone Thea, Grammick summons him to South Chicago for a rally and Augie is then sent to the Northumberland Hotel to deal with a "hot dual-unions" situation. Sophie is leading a strike meeting and has been calling for him. She stands him up to speak, but the workers do not want to hear about peacefully filling out forms.

An AFL leader knocks Augie from his perch, bloodying his face. His goons would have beaten Augie more as a lesson, had the women not surrounded and defended him. Showing him the back way out, Sophie asks if they are finished and accepts the situation: there is another girl. On the street, Augie fears being shot as he disappears into the crowd, catches a street car, jumps off before the Loop, and hides out in a theater before taking a taxi to Thea's, his day's destination.

Chapter 14 finds Augie passionately kissing and fondling Thea on the elevator ride to her apartment and making wild love barely inside the door. His days of labor organizing are over; he has no calling. He moves into her all-white apartment, wondering at the unpacked suitcases that surround the bed. Thea explains that she is bound for Mexico to divorce her wealthy, older husband, Smitty. In the meantime, she is lavishly spending his money, including buying a new wardrobe for Augie whom she assumes is going along. He does not protest.

Augie learns about Thea's obstinate ways and jealousy, and analyzes and condemns his need to have everyone love him. He knows that she is out of his range but ignores what people have always told him: go slowly, be cautious. Thea teaches Augie to shoot and ride while still in Chicago and advises him not to think about the eagle that they will buy in Texarkana and train to capture giant iguanas. None of Augie's friends wish him the bon voyage for which he hopes, causing him to wonder about what he is getting into. Visiting a Chicago zoo, he sees what a formidable creature an American eagle is and grows more afraid. Smitty's lawyer writes, however, and they pack the station wagon and head for Texarkana.



In Chapter 15 Thea and Augie keep each other off-balance and begin annoying one another. They pick up not a hatchling owl but a nearly-mature one, stuff his cage into the station wagon and cross into Mexico. They stop regularly for training "Caligula" first to the hood and then to soaring aloft on a tether and attacking bait. The first part takes days of sleepless work, enduring his crushing claws through a thick glove. Augie has to do most of it. Crowds gather everywhere to see the eagle. They reach Mexico City on the tenth day and check into a good hotel while Thea meets with Smitty's lawyer. She seems to dawdle.

Chapters 13-15 Analysis

Chapter 13 begins with Augie contemplating how he is at age 22 tossed into the spinning world. Later in life he will learn about the "circle of love," of which death is merely a part, but confesses he lacks that perspective earlier. Bellow gives a feel for the Roosevelt Administration's "Fair Deal," as Augie accepts jobs in the Work Projects Administration (WPA) and is glad he has not been detailed to other tasks. Bellow also depicts the violence that splits the labor movement in the 1930s. Augie is hired by Mr. Grammick of the CIO (Congress of Industrial Organizations) during a time of illegal wildcat strikes. The AFL (American Federation of Labor) at the time concentrates of the rights of workers in major industries but is not willing to surrender the so-called "craft unions" to the breakaway CIO, to which underpaid doormen, porters, checkroom attendants, waitresses, and chambermaids turn. Congress has outlawed "wildcat strikes"—emotional, unannounced walk-outs, while recognizing workers' rights to strike for better pay and benefits.

Bellow focuses on Augie and his short-term lover, Sophie Geratis to capture the fear that management instills, the exploding passions of repressed workers who refuse to settle for more rhetoric, and the use of hired thugs to settle disputes and make examples. The hoodlums' role has been already seen in passing and, on the run from one, Augie says tongue-in-cheek that flying bullets are not unknown on Chicago's streets. He likens the ardor of workers—particularly women—to join the CIO to gold-seekers in the Klondike. It is an intriguing image, because these people have no dreams of massive, sudden wealth, but want merely to earn a livable wage. It is a rich commentary on life in the 1930s.

Love interests proliferate. Mimi falls for hapless Arthur Einhorn and Augie with Sophie, only to have Thea Fenchel show up out of the blue. Still pining for her sister Esther, Augie lets Sophie, who is just having fun during the last six weeks before her wedding, bow out gracefully. William is still a lecher, making a pass at Mimi when they are introduced. Mildred is now essentially a second wife, caring for William's grandson, and Tillie stays out of sight. Through Mimi, William's atrocious treatment of his son is shown. William cares mostly that Augie is not having sex with Mimi. Like Simon, he cannot conceive of a platonic relationship between men and women in close proximity. As the chapter ends, with Augie at the end of a terrible day finally reaching Thea's doorstep, it is clear that the protagonist will become involved in a new romance—and have to get out of town quickly to save his life.



Passing allusions in the chapter include Jesus Christ, St. Paul disfavoring lust, Xerxes' and Constantine's armies, Guy Fawkes, Prince Metternich, Villon, Rimbaud, Stonewall Jackson, Tecumseh, and the Egyptian overseer killed by Moses.

Chapter 14 develops the relationship between Augie and Thea, with whom he falls in love, forgetting Esther except as she resembles Thea. She is the first woman he has known who has no sexual boundaries and plays no games. As they romp in the elevator and just inside her front door, and Bellow's language grows less chaste without growing sufficiently explicit to offend the tastes of the 1950s.

Thea adds her analysis of Augie's personality to those of Mimi, Simon, William, and Manny: he is too needy for indiscriminate love, too eager to please people who cannot be pleased. Only lovers care for one another properly. Augie recalls—and ignores—all of the advice he has gotten about plunging into things too quickly, with eyes closed. He sees Thea's faults but loves her passionately and accepts that she is more experienced than he. Once again he becomes a kept man, being lavishly outfitted, this time not in fine suits and formal wear but as an adventurer. She warns that the money ends when the divorce is final. Knowing that Augie is firmly hooked, Thea can tell him everything.

Augie, writing with the benefit of hindsight neither covers up his blunders nor gives away too much. Still, it is evident to the reader that disaster lies ahead, much of it centered around the American eagle that they will buy and train to hunt iguanas. Thea's airy explanations of how this will make money show that she is no stickler for details. Note that Manny, a Mexican, is wary of them going and gives Augie a cousin's address in Mexico City. None of his friends shows any enthusiasm. Augie visits a Chicago zoo to see what kind of creature he is getting involved with. It has killer eyes and beak and leg feathers that make it look like a Janissary. Augie repeats this characterization often, intending it to conjure images of ferocious fighters. Already defunct for a century, the elite Turkish corps had performed no useful military function for a long time, instead looking out for their own self-interests. This turns out to be precisely the behavior seen in upcoming chapters of *Caligula*, named by Augie in honor of the depraved and erratic Roman emperor. The chapter is otherwise lacking in allusions.

Happy to have avoided the Decoration Day Massacre by being with Thea rather than Grammick, Augie uses the name that becomes fixed as Memorial Day only after World War II. Because Augie is abandoning the cause of organized labor for which he feels no true calling—although Thea's curt treatment of servants riles him, given what he has learned in the field—this event is seen only in passing. Because the novel is sparse in clues to its setting in time, this detail is helpful. Augie begins his relationship with Thea and new adventures on 30 May 1937.

In Chapter 15, Augie talks about his ability to recall tiny details and to see without prior experience, but he cannot understand the mystery of "human heat." He writes, however, in broader terms of his and Thea's troubles as they drive towards Mexico. As always, he is "casual and unattached," finding it hard to change his ways, while she is non-committal and mysterious about specific plans. They discuss jealousy, making Augie wonder about historical figures who have been unable to get along with others yet



talked a great deal about human relations: Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Karl Marx in particular. Deep desires run beneath what is apparent. Augie lists some key annoyances for which he finds no reason. Bellow writes poetically and more explicitly about their lovemaking. Augie wonders why human beings "submit to the gyms of previous history while mere creatures look with their original eyes."

Much of the chapter describes the ardor of training an almost-adult eagle rather than the hatchling that Augie had expected. Augie recalls the Russian writer Mikhail Lermontov's poem, "The Eagle," and other images of this majestic bird through history and across cultures, before reminding himself that it is a "robber and carrion feeder." He describes in detail how predatory birds are "manned," noting that eagles have not been much manned since the Middle Ages. Many pages are devoted to technique and the suffering the trainer—usual Augie because of the bird's weight—endures. He names it Caligula after the infamous Roman emperor because he wrongly hears the Mexicans exclaiming "El águila." Thea's Spanish amuses the natives, but she is able to charm the males.

When they reach the Valley of Mexico, Augie discusses the pre-Conquest culture in which eagles are part of the pantheon. Aldebaran is a enormous star so bright that many cultures worship it as a god, including the Mexicans. Bellow indulges in pages of colorful description of local culture, in both village and Mexico City. The cleanliness of establishments is always a point worth mentioning along with price as the time nears that they will have to be frugal, without Smitty's fortune. Thea's posing Augie and Caligula in front of the cathedral brings the police. She charms their way out of the confrontation and decides it is time to go to Acatla to look up a ghost writer to develop the notes she is taking. Note that the divorce is left hanging.



Chapters 16-19

Chapters 16-19 Summary

In Chapter 16 Augie and Thea reach her family's villa, "Casa "Descuitada" (Carefree House) in the mountain village of Acatla in Central Mexico. The villa overlooks the zócalo (cathedral square). A large colony of foreigners lives in the expensive Carlos Quinto Hotel and drinks at Hilario's bar. Thea is well known from previous visits and Augie is looked upon with suspicion.

In Acatla they begin Caligula's final training, aided by the houseboy, Jacinto. Augie would rather sell the eagle or set him free and find a way of earning money, but Thea is adamant. He blames Caligula's demanding nature for a drop in intimacy with Thea. Thea still calls Augie her lover, but never husband as Lucy had, and seems to share Mimi's opposition to marriage, but without being polemical. Tensions continue to build as Augie shows squeamishness about feeding Caligula live lizards, and worsen when the eagle proves cowardly against larger, aggressive iguanas.

The couple visits Hilario's, where patrons include two New York writers, Wiley Moulton and Iggy, whose talents as ghost-writer Thea had depended upon but is unable to secure, and a handsome young Mexican playboy, Talavera, whose gaze disquiets Augie. From Talavera's father they rent an ancient warhorse, Bizcocho, to carry them into the mountains.

On their first outing, Thea is a savage ground commander, dissatisfied with Jacinto's lazy efforts at flushing out prey. When an iguana bolts, Caligula pounces, but quickly retreats when it fights back. Thea declares the performance humiliating, throws rocks at the eagle, and is ready to murder him. Turning to photography and collecting venomous snakes, she ignores Caligula and leaves Augie to tend him alone.

Thea sends Augie out into the the rain-swept zócalo on an errand, but he is hailed by Moulton and invited to a drinking party above Hilario's. There, Moulton nicknames him Bolingbroke (or Boling), chides him about Caligula's failure, which is the talk of the town, and introduces Mr. Oliver, the alcoholic editor of Wilmot's Weekly, a political magazine that Iggy suggests could publish a story about Caligula. Oliver has a model, Stella, as his companion. They invite him to join them for drinks that the hotel any time.

Augie is thoroughly depressed about how his life is going. It gets worse when Thea returns with her first deadly pit vipers, the beginning of a collection that eventually fills the patio. Augie convinces her to give Caligula a second chance as a hunter. When Thea downhill gives the signal to launch Caligula into flight, Old Bizcocho picks up too much speed on and throws Augie, kicking him in the head and knocking him out.

In Chapter 17 Thea nurses Audi after surgery until he is fairly well recovered and then returns to snake collecting. Caligula departs to a zoo, with Augie's goodbye and Thea's



bitter good riddance. She asks repeatedly that Augie accompany her in her collecting, but he uses the excuse that he is not yet up to it and asks that she take along male companions. He meanwhile joins the "international set," drinking heavily and winning money at cards. As neither is interested in the other's pursuits, they drift apart, to the point that when Thea's divorce becomes final, she turns down Augie's marriage proposal.

Sitting in the cathedral square one day, Augie observes a line of European cars drive up and deploy bodyguards for someone important. He guesses, correctly, that it can only be the exile from Soviet Russia, Leon Trotsky, upon whose life Stalin has taken out a contract. Among the bodyguards is Sylvester from Chicago, who tells Augie that Hooker Frazer serves as one of Trotsky's personal secretaries. Augie would like to meet Trotsky, but is told that this is difficult to arrange.

As the Christmas season of fiestas arrives, Oliver and Stella are evicted from the hotel for cohabiting without being married and after a frustrating wait for a villa to be vacated move in and plan a party to show the hotel who matters. U.S. Federal agents are said to be circling, waiting to arrest Oliver for tax evasion. One day Oliver punches Louis Fu in the face and, as the police respond, Augie spirits Stella away. She says that she must speak with him in confidence soon. Thea announces that she wants to move to Chilpanzingo, where collectible animals are plentiful, and chides Augie for his heavy drinking. He is willing to go along, because he wants to be with her more than anyone in the world.

Chapter 18 opens at Oliver's housewarming party. Thea to leave almost immediately, but Augie hands her to dance with Mouton, whom she despises, Augie needs to talk with Stella in private. Stella tells him the real story about U.S. authorities wanting Oliver to turn states-evidence against the Italian who actually runs the magazine that he edits. It is a mouthpiece for the Fascist government in Rome. Oliver is planning to escape to the jungles via Alapulco. Stella, therefore wants to go in the opposite direction, to Mexico City. She has money in New York that she will have wired to her. Augie can take her only to Cuernavaca.

As they are about to depart, Thea confronts them, "angry, ironic, and sad." Frantically, she proposes that Stella join them at Chilpanzingo. Putting in a dig about how Augie responds to flattery, Thea watches drive away. Augie takes a wrong turn in a construction zone and gets them stuck on a narrow, empty, dark road. It is too dangerous to walk for help. Lying on a patch of grass, Augie and Stella make love. She gives herself to him as a prize and does things to him that show she has studied what men enjoy. Afterwards, Augie thinks about what will happen with Thea, if anything permanent is possible with Stella. In the morning, workmen get the station wagon back on the road. In Cuernavaca Augie hires a car to the capital. Stella gives him her agent's address in Mexico City, thanks him for being a true friend, and advises that he not let Thea be too hard on him. He wishes her better luck.

When Augie gets home, Thea is packed for Chilpanzingo. She declares flatly that they are finished. Their relationship has been a mistake—her mistake. She rejects his story



about the breakdown. He points out that she has had many more affairs than, making her regret having shared secrets with him, since obviously he keeps score. Augie is about to tell the truth when Thea stops him and tells him to go after Stella. There are no tears in Thea's cold.

Thea renews her charges that Augie is too obliging and reveals that Oliver has been arrested, so Stella is in no danger. Oliver had forced Stella to do nothing against her will, because she is a whore. Trying to return the hurt Augie lashes out at being told all the time what to do and putting up with all of her "queer" ways. He tries to mitigate his words, feeling sorry for her pain. Stella admits to being jealous and disappointed, recalling how she had been crazy to take him away from Sophie simply because she was lonely at the time. She had thought that Augie is different, but he is like everyone else. She had predicted that he would be drawn away by another woman.

When Augie tries to comfort Thea, she steps back, dries her tears, and heads out with all of her baggage. Augie weeps, collecting his own things and runs after her too late. In a rage, he smashes up the villa, including—without thinking—the snakes' cages. He goes to Hilario's where, talking with Iggy about Iggy's woes, he bursts into tears. In Chapter 19 Augie struggles to make sense of his altered life. Iggy takes him in but champions Thea's side, saying that Augie needs such a crushing.

Augie most painfully examines himself as "love's servant." Why are others better off than he? How can he be a monster and yet suffer? Why do others have power without caring? Why is he powerless, caught up in lying and cheating? Why is there nothing but degenerate humanity? How can he reinvent himself to have the power to stand before eternal life? Great people recruit followers and gain power, inventing an image and building modern society. Augie figures that he is an ideal recruit but has done nothing. He cannot stay true to his feelings and now Thea has torn a great hole in him.

Augie hopes that Thea is cooling off, but doubts it. Recalling Kayo's remarks about intense bitterness being an essential part of life, Augie curses cowardice and slavery. He longs for simplicity and wonders what he has suppressed within his heart. Such feelings of terror are as old as humankind and only the brave like Jacob become "fathers of whole people." Augie looks for someone to deliver him, knowing there are many cowards like himself. He believes he must go to Chilpanzingo, admit his weakness, and ask Thea to bear with him. Feeling better by having made the decision, he gets cleaned up and catches a decrepit bus. Moulton warns him that Talavera is with Thea. They had been a couple before Smitty and resumed during her hunting trips while Augie is laid up. Needling makes Augie threaten to kill them in front of an Indian. Iggy offers to clean him up before putting him on the bus and warning him not to tangle with Talavera. Augie is tormented during the trip, thinking about Talavera receiving the intimacies he cherishes, about wanting to marry about possessions,

Chilpanzingo is hot. Augie thinks to arm himself but sees the station wagon first, gets Thea's room number, and goes up and asks to get back together again. Thea thinks not and declines to discuss Talavera. She wishes Augie were dead. She is going to Yucatán to study birds and refuses to let him follow.



Chapters 16-19 Analysis

Chapter 16 opens with a quote from Shakespeare's Antony and Cleopatra on lamenting ones "most persisted deeds." The scene shifts to Acatla in Central Mexico. Bellow spends many pages describing the rugged country surrounding it and lays out the town's geography. Reacting to the intense heat of summer, Augie approves of the Italian dictator Benito Mussolini's crackpot idea of blasting pieces out of the Alps and Appennines to cool the peninsula with German air. In passing, Augie recalls the Mussolini's fate and that of his mistress, strung upside down, bullet-ridden and no longer grimacing. From this he segues into a photograph of Thea's father seated insolently in a rickshaw in China, surrounded by "gowping" Cantonese. He wonders why this European is chosen not to feel the famine that kills millions.

Caligula's training reaches the final stages. When Augie shrinks from feeding him live lizards and watching their blood spurt, Thea mocks his sentimentality, claiming that if lizards were not quick enough to escape on their own they would soon be extinct and if Augie were dead they would crawl into his mouth to hunt for beetles. The world is savage. When Augie suggests that Caligula would eat him, Thea says that he might. She would bury him, because he is her lover. Reflecting, Augie compares her to Lucy and Mimi. Recall that Augie and Mimi have also debated right-to-life and quality-of-life issues and come to a stand-off. Augie feels caught in an "inescapably bad" situation from which there is no way out. Thea wants him to stop hoping for remedies rather than accept reality. When they tether a larger lizard to a stake, Caligula attacks like Attila the Hun's horsemen, but leaps away when the lizard bits back and retreats. The bird has never experienced this kind of pain. Augie understands and is inwardly delighted but Thea loses control. When Jacinto kills it, Caligula refuses to accept it as food. Her patience spent, Thea turns to other interests.

The scene shifts to Hilario's bar and introduces a colony of affluent foreigners who have made it an alternative to Biarritz and San Remo, European resorts that have grown too politically involved. As relations with Thea further decline, Augie becomes a regular in the nearly non-stop drinking party above Hilario's bar. This extends over several chapters. He becomes particularly close to two New York writers, Wiley Moulton and Iggy (who has dropped his surname). Neither is willing or able to ghostwrite for Thea, which had been her stated intention in coming to town. A Mexican playboy, Talavera, and Augie take an instant dislike to one another for no evident reason.

In Chapter 19 Augie engages in a long and agonizing analysis of himself and the human condition and finds both wanting. It is dense reading and he is too upset to come to any useful conclusions. Recalling Kayo's remarks a year earlier, about intense bitterness being an essential part of life, Augie curses cowardice and slavery, his own and others. He knows that it is cowardly to need a deliverer rather than do for oneself, and has only Thea to turn to. He must humble himself, go to Chilpanzingo, admit his own weaknesses, and ask her to bear with him as he tries to improve. Given the things that she has said about him in the past, he cannot hope this will succeed, but he feels better for having made the decision.



A complication is introduced: Talavera is with Thea, an ex-lover usurped when Smitty marries her, and now back with her since Augie's accident and refusal to join her in her snake-collecting expeditions. Augie denies that this could be and is needled about her not saving herself for him, a variant of Thea's proclaiming Stella a whore. The bus ride to Chilpanzingo, a touch of local color deftly handled, brings more emotional torment to Augie as he contemplates the intimacies that he and Thea have shared, details often mentioned in the story as their relationship was growing, and having to picture Talavera enjoying them. Talavera is not there when Augie confronts Thea and asks to be taken back. Had he been, Augie might have tried to kill her. A light scene just before the meeting shows him trying to buy a knife or steal one from a restaurant and getting nowhere. Thea is finished with Augie and wishes he were dead. She will not give him the satisfaction of talking about Talavera and will not take him on her next adventure.

Talavera's father rents Thea and Augie an old horse, Bizcocho, a wounded veteran of guerrilla battles during the Zapatista rebellion, over two decades earlier. Bellow uses the horse's past in several places to describe the atrocities associated with the Mexican civil war of 1910. Bizcocho is said to be fit only to be gored in the bull ring. Bizcocho does not, however, shrink from the eagle as had burros and other horses. There is more technical description of how human, eagle, and horse must coordinate in order to launch the bird; it resembles an aircraft carrier heading into the wind.

Augie then shares his esteem for Caligula's opponent. He is amazed at the huge lizards that have the tops like Elizabethan costumes and the sleek bodies of fish. Their movement is "monstrously beautiful," and in leaps from great heights they do not splatter like quicksilver (mercury), but race away unharmed. The hunt goes as rehearsed many times but ends in failure when Caligula breaks away from the iguana and cowers. Thea wants to have nothing more to do with him and turns to photography, which Augie finds exceptionally dull. His reading, an anthology that includes Campanella, More, Machiavelli, St. Simon, Comte, Marx, and Engels, is of no interest to her.

Sent on an errand, Augie is in a mood as foul as the weather. He is summoned to a party at Hilario's where the music makes him sad and the patrons poke fun at him about Caligula's humiliation. A new society couple, Owen and Stella, are introduced, to be involved in the plot only later. Back home, Augie meets the cook, frantic about pit vipers being caged on the patio. Talking her out of quitting, Augie is diplomatic with Thea and talks her into giving Caligula a second chance. Another hunt scene is set up, but this time Bizcocho slips and throws Augie, knocking him unconscious. Thea runs to him, calling him darling, so the chapter ends leaving one wondering what changes will occur as the page turns.

In Chapter 17 Augie and Thea drift further apart and the seeds for their breakup and Augie's new relationship and eventually marriage are planted. Thea is glad to get rid of Caligula, but Augie, who had often hated the bird, is wistful. Augie dodges her frequent requests to accompany her in her collecting and urges her take along male companions for protection. This will, of course, result in sexual affairs. Parallel with this, Augie rescues Stella from an ugly scene when Oliver strikes someone and the police respond.



She tells Augie that she needs to speak confidentially with him soon. The party that Oliver throws to celebrate their occupying a villa—and to flaunt their controversial relationship at the hotel that evicts them—will provide the opportunity. Societal regulation of sexual mores has rarely been mentioned in the novel. In Chicago all of the males either have extramarital affairs or assume that it is natural. In Chicago and in Mexico, brothels do a thriving business. When Thea's divorce becomes final she turns down Augie's marriage proposal, confirming his suspicion that she shares Mimi's views on the institution.

Augie meets Sylvester as he serves in Leon Trotsky's bodyguard. Bellow paints a visit picture of a line of European cars drawing up before the cathedral and bodyguards swarming to insure that it is safe for their protectee to visit the cathedral—a singularly odd thing for an atheist Bolshevik to do. Trotsky leaves Soviet Russia after losing the battle to succeed Lenin and lives under the threat of assassination. Gaining access to Trotsky is understandably difficult. Although he has never shown interest in leftist politics, Augie wants to meet him, but Sylvester offers little help. He mentions that Mimi's ex-lover, Hooker Frazer, is one of Trotsky's personal secretaries. Going forward, Frazer will attempt to broker a deal to bring Augie into the inner circle.

Oliver is on the verge of being arrested by U.S. Federal agents for tax evasion. It seems odd, therefore, that one day Oliver draws the police by punching Louis Fu in the face. Augie spirits Stella away and she makes her plea to speak soon. The plot then shifts again, unexpectedly, when Thea announces that she wants to move to Chilpanzingo, where collectible animals are plentiful, and chides Augie for his heavy drinking. He is willing to go along, because he wants to be with her more than anyone in the world. This is so emphatic and typically emotional that the end of the relationship is clearly approaching.

In Chapter 18 Augie and Thea split up. The immediate cause is Augie's driving Stella to Cuernavaca in order for her to escape sharing Oliver's fate in fleeing the U.S. Government. Her version of why he is being sought differs from popular rumors, giving him a nobler image as a material witness against an Italian Fascist political front. Augie feels sorry for him seeking refuge in a death-filled jungle. Thea confronts them as they are about to drive off, begs them to come with her to Chilpanzingo and refusing to go along as chaperon. While they argue, Augie energetically cranks the engine when the weak battery cannot turn it over. This detail, often repeated as punctuation in the growing argument, makes the reader certain that the car will break down on the road.

It does, in the dark, forcing Augie and Stella to spend the night together. Augie observes that Stella has obviously learned what pleases men and offers herself as a prize. Bellow is far franker describing sex than previously. Lying with Stella afterward, Augie thinks of a Texas girl who snuggles with him on a crowded ship years afterward, who in turn reminds him of Stella. It is an odd but poignant interlude as Augie finds himself caught emotionally between two women, as earlier with Sophie.

Sophie comes up in Thea's attack on Augie when he reaches the villa. Stella had advised him not to let Thea give him a hard time and he is determined not to. She



opens sarcastically with surprise that he has returned, which later turns to a wish that he had not. Her mind is made up: they are finished. Having earlier put the onus for their problems on Augie, she now accepts that she has made a fundamental mistake in seeing him as different from other men. She reminds him that in Chicago she had predicted that he would stray. She runs through the catalog of his faults, which includes gullibility. Stella is a whore, not an innocent victim, and has taken him in. He should chase after her now.

The fight, a classic he-said, she-said, is drawn out over many pages, growing to a crescendo through charge and counter-charge. Augie remains soft-hearted to the end but is fed up with being ordered around. Each finds the other's activities "queer" in the sense of odd. For most of it there are no tears. When finally Thea's flow, Augie tries to comfort her but is rejected. Thea storms out with all of her baggage. Augie wrecks the villa, thinking only after the fact about the snakes whose cages he smashes are deadly. They slither harmlessly away. Augie weeps at home, wondering what he will do as he packs his belongings, and weeps again at the bar, where his friends tell him of Oliver's arrest and commiserate mildly at his losing Thea. They believe he has done right in helping Stella.

Stella has given Augie her agent's address in Mexico City and promised to repay him for his loan of a meager amount of money. That they will meet again seems obvious, but how and when do not. The emotional and dramatic chapter has no room for the allusions that Augie normally strews. Chapter 19, which continues his adventure in Acatla, opens with a reference to the ancient Christian theologian Tertullian rejoicing at the sight of the damned. Audie feels himself among them.



Chapters 20-22

Chapters 20-22 Summary

In Chapter 20 Augie returns to Acatla, which he finds now finds painful. He palls around for a while with a Cossack from Paris, who tells him odd stories about an uncle in Paris who goes to church dressed as a woman to scare people. When the Cossack becomes a pimp for the foco rojo, Augie drops him. When Augie gives up on hearing from Thea or Stella, he heads for Mexico City. Dead broke, because Stella fails to repay the loan, he gives in and phones Sylvester who, through Frazer, arranges him to live with a friendly, emotional Yugoslav journalist, Paslavitch, in exchange for English lessons. They have fine times drinking together and talking about French history and culture, which Paslavitch adores.

Frazer floats the idea of having Augie pose as Trotsky's traveling companion, incognito, to throw off the Soviet secret police who are seeking to assassinate the "Old Man." Augie argues that Trotsky's distinctive face is vital to his mission, considers the plan loony, but has the free time to devote to it. When Trotsky vetoes the plan. Augie flies home to Chicago with \$200 from kindly Paslavitch.

In Chapter 21 Augie returns home and catches up with family and friends. George is his first stop. He has matured into a "large hulk insecure in his steps," who has learned to make shoes, and accepts his fate with dignity. Still, Augie does not want him to spend the rest of his life under control. Augie next visits Mama in a luxurious room that reflects Simon's fussy taste. She proclaims him skinny, wants to know what he will do next, and urges him to contact Simon. Learning that Augie is back, Simon, "heftier" and carefully manicured and attired—and in a constant rush—fetches Augie in his Cadillac, judges his Mexican adventures, brags about the "gold touch" and luck that have nearly made him a millionaire, despite the Depression. Simon tells Augie to stop stalling and do something with his life. Simon strips Augie, dresses him luxuriously, and hands him \$50. At Simon's office, Augie listens to him dicker internationally, at his club cringes watching him treat the staff rudely and butt into a poker game with people who clearly hate him and whom he considers lice. When they pick up Charlotte, she is stiffly polite.

Augie next visits William, who complains about Mimi ruining Arthur, the sole heir to the Commissioner's remaining fortune. Next Augie sees Manny, who tells him not to blame himself too much and advises him to return to the university. Clem Tambow, who has matured greatly and is near finishing his own degree, advises the same. Augie resents his old friend's haw-hawing at his misfortunes, but agrees that he needs to specialize. Clem pushes him to study Freudian psychology or travel the Nile and establish himself as an Egyptologist. Clem lectures on concrete ambition, to become a Man of stature. With such a strong superego, Augie needs to accept reality. Mimi laughs at Augie, that saying guys like him make life simple for women like Thea and lectures him on curing his attitudes, seeing things as they are, including the bad with the good. Most people just want to be left alone.



Arthur then introduces Augie to a millionaire, Robey, who needs a research assistant for a book he is writing about "human happiness from the standpoint of the rich," Fraser's former student, with crazy relatives, a bad marital record, and terrible stutter, hires Augie for \$20 plus a free room, which gives him altogether too much access to Augie for the latter's taste. Robey heaps readings on Augie and conducts businesslike, twice-weekly conferences whenever he is not too vexed or distracted. By autumn, however, Robey loses his grip, continues giving assignments and paying, but does no work himself. Augie tries to quit but comes back. Having taken care of George, Augie is used to dealing with dependency and confusion.

In Chapter 22 Augie teaches alongside Kayo Obermark, who pressures him to marry, but Augie wants to simplify his life. Kayo teaches him about the Navajo and Sanskrit concept of "moha," the opposition of the finite, which can be combated only by infinite love. They have a falling out when Augie sells his clunker car to Kayo's brother-in-law without revealing that it has bent rods. Augie gets back with Sophie, who wants to divorce and marry him, but Augie is not ready.

Clem Tambow suggests that he and Augie partner to provide vocational-guidance counseling. It is legal, easy, and lucrative. Augie has come to believe that he must align with the "axial lines" of the universe that, by marrying the right kind of woman, retiring to a farm, and raising deprived children. Clem is dubious. Augie is reconsidering Sophie when World War II breaks out and he is consumed with zeal to defeat the evil world power.

Augie cannot enlist without hernia surgery and, while he recovers, is drawn into Simon's open affair with a voluptuous woman, Renée. Renée knows that she will never gain exclusive claim on Simon or his fortune, but receives equal treatment with Charlotte. Charlotte long pretends to know nothing but eventually demands a breakup, threatens divorce, and provokes a scene. Renée is sent to California but returns pregnant. Simon's indifference drives her to swallow pills, but she survives and Simon faces having a bastard child.

Chapters 20-22 Analysis

Chapter 20 puts a close to Augie's Mexican adventure. He pals around for a while in depressing Acatla with a Cossack emigré, who tells a bizarre story of an uncle who dresses as a woman to go to church in Moscow and scare people. The police question his "powers." Bellow refrains from likening him to Rasputin, but the comparison is inevitable. The Cossack's character (no name is given) captures in a few sentences the state of the White Russian emigration, stretching from Paris, France, to Harbin, China.

This vignette in a sense prepares the reader for Augie's mission to help protect Trotsky from the GPU, which is seeking to assassinate him. The GPU is one of the many acronyms used over the years by the dreaded Soviet secret police. The most familiar variants are Cheka and NKVD, and much later the KGB. Bellow errs in calling it GPU in the period covered. The danger is real, for Trotsky is eventually axed to death. Frazer



suggests that they disguise the "Old Man," cutting off his signature beard, and having him be accompanied by a "very American" married couple. Augie calls the plan "loony," pointing out that Trotsky's appearance is integral to his message, but is willing to go along. Trotsky vetoes the plan and Augie returns to Chicago. In his final days in Mexico, Augie is taken in by a Yugoslav journalist with Trotskyite leanings, who plays Chopin and talks intelligently and enthusiastically about French culture. Augie will later in the novel live in France and Italy. Having in recent chapters railed against human nature, Augie touchingly declares that his benefactor is one of the world's few decent guys.

In Chapter 21, Augie comes home to Chicago and visits family and friends. The reader is brought up to date on everyone's matured appearances and varied fortunes. All agree that it is time for Augie to pick a direction for his life and get on with it, but each comes at the subject from his or her own perspective. Augie still bristles at being mocked for mistakes he now owns up to, but knows better than to argue with the likes of Mimi. He tries to draw out Clem Tambow, nearing the end of his studies in psychology, on the need to specialize in something. So far Augie has specialized only in bird-training and that was a failure. Augie recalls Manny's dictum: only do what comes easily.

Simon reasserts his economic power but less stridently, much in the flamboyant style of Mrs. Renling. Many pages are devoted to demonstrating Simon's bravado and self-importance, as Augie tags along for a busy day. Tensions with his wife and the rest of her family emerge subtly. Simon has no interest in improving Mama or George's lives, which he has generously ordered to fit his own taste. Despite his behavior, Augie loves his big brother. Simon's dig at Charlotte about Augie being better off a bum than married to Lucy portends the disintegration of that marriage in the coming chapters, as Simon denies himself fewer and fewer pleasures.

Finally, Augie becomes the research assistant to a new character even more eccentric than William. Augie's experience dealing with William and George help him cope with the difficult situation. Robey is a millionaire who aspires to write a grand history of all ages and cultures but needs assistance. This presents Augie an opportunity to read systematically and analyze material for pay, and goes a long way towards explaining his erudition throughout the novel. The rich man, a former student of the Marxist Fraser, tries to hire Augie on the cheap, but Augie holds out for a living wage, pointing out he could do as well on public assistance as the original offer. Robey's rambling lectures form a clump of allusions unprecedented in the novel. Augie fumes over the man's frugality and tries to pin him down to a specific job description, perhaps because of the lectures he has earlier received from his various friends. The Robey section grows more colorful as the poor man loses control of his mind.

Chapter 22 brings the novel into the era of World War II, where Augie shows surprising zeal in opposing the world slavery that the Axis Powers represent. Getting free of them would require a "new Moses." At the same time, Augie is thinking seriously about simplifying his life. Again, friends listen to him and try to help him understand. Kayo introduces the Buddhist concept of "moha" (delusion), saying that it is a Navajo word also used in Sanskrit, and colorfully likens it to "the Bronx cheer of the conditioning forces," to which infinite love is the only antidote.



Clem then tries to get Augie into a lucrative joint business, but Augie wants to talk about the "axial lines of life," that he has claimed to have known exist since youth but has ignored. When one is aligned with them, one can live a perfect life without needing to be one of the elite. It is a concept older than the Ganges or Euphrates. Working for Robey has convinced Augie that continuing his formal education would be pointless: he will never use what he has learned. He cites King Arthur's Round Table and the Gospels as part of the "Niagara Falls torrent" of knowledge. Storing it up for nothing is senseless. Augie's view is to form a rural school for institutionalized children, even though there is no guarantee that they will turn into "Michelangelos and Tolstois" (artists) rather than "John Dillingers or Basil Bangharts or Tommy O'Connors" (notorious gangsters). Augie is more often the recipient of a diatribe than the deliverer, which points to considerable dedication. His friends see it more as stubbornness but wish him well.

Augie is back in a sexual relationship with Sophie, who is still jealous of Thea, and begs Augie to marry her. He is not ready—although after his discussion of the farm he is said, inconsistently to be thinking of her as his spouse—when World War II breaks out. Augie needs an operation before he can enlist, and his recovery time keeps him in Chicago a bit longer, to get unhappily involved in Simon's on-the-side romance with Renée. He describes her physical attractions heartily and at length, which is odd for him, but sides with Charlotte. Simon's primary defense is that he does not practice the double-standard; Charlotte is free to have a lover, but neither March brother believes her capable. Renée makes sure that she gets equal value from Simon. The blow-up when Charlotte quits ignoring the obvious is dramatic, including slapping and swallowing pills more as a call for attention than an attempt at death. Simon, who has always been suicidal, is delivered a blow finding Renée and more so by realizing that she will bear him an illegitimate child. He comments to Augie that this sounds like how they had been conceived.



Chapters 23-26

Chapters 23-26 Summary

In Chapter 23 Augie learns that Stella lives in New York while he is studying at the Merchant Marine Academy on Speepshead Bay. He looks her up while on liberty, watching for hints how she will react to a kiss. Stella welcomes it. They reflect on Mexico and Stella offers a few details about her background, including that she has a father in Jamaica who sends her money and is a follower of the mystic Gurdijeff. Augie is convinced that Stella is completely honest, although she denies that anyone is. They make love until he is due back for another week's training and worrying if she truly loves him. Stella is waiting for him on Saturday. Augie proposes immediately, rather than waiting six months as Clem had urged. They plan to marry as soon as he graduates

Chapter 24 introduces Harold Mintouchian, a rich Manhattan lawyer, friend of Stella's wealthy friend, Ages. A week before the wedding, Mintouchian takes Augie to a Turkish bath for a frank talk about marriage, infidelity, and death. Life is an infinity of secrets within secrets. When Augie agonizes about not being good enough or able to change, Mintouchian says that must take chances, for it is better to die than to live as a stranger. He confides that Agnes years ago fraudulently collects insurance money on a large diamond ring, ostensibly stolen. Augie accompanies Mintouchian to visit his invalid wife, who tells Augie that her husband is great but all too human. She knows everything that he does.

Chapter 25 shows Augie and Stella's wedding and reception, catered by Mintouchian and attended by Sylvester and Frazer. The latter keeps the conversation high-brow and convinces Augie that there is much that is better forgotten. After a two-day honeymoon, Augie ships out aboard the Sam MacManus, where his duties are light, giving him time to read and write a chronicle to Stella and act as the unofficial "ship's confidant." He recalls their stories in detail as a testimony to their lives, lost to a German torpedo on the 15th day out, near the Canary Islands. MacManus sinks swiftly, leaving Augie and a carpenter's mate, Basteshaw, thrown together in a life raft.

Basteshaw's vocabulary betrays a higher education, which does not fit with his job aboard ship. He tells of having created protoplasm in the laboratory but having his experiments turned down by six universities. He is working on giving it reproductive and regenerative powers while aboard the MacManus. When Augie worries that they may evolve in the wild, with unpredictable consequences, Basteshaw grows silent for days until, believing that he sees signs of land, he rejoices that they will be interred in Axis territory for the rest of the war and invites Augie to assist him in his vital experiments. When Augie tries to signal a passing ship, Basteshaw knocks him out and binds him firmly. Augie escapes but, lacking a weapon, cannot get revenge. Instead, he feels sorrow and pity. They are rescued by a British ship and dropped in Naples. In the hospital, Augie taunts Basteshaw with how they could have died because of stubbornly insisting that he knew their course. They are far off. The two never speak again.



Chapter 26 opens after the war with Augie and Stella living in Paris, he traveling as an agent of Mintouchian and she making international films in Paris. Augie gives way to Stella's desires because he loves her the more and appreciates, having survived the sea, whatever fate is his. Her interest in his farm/school idea fades quickly and he lets it go. Once in Florence on business, Augie wants to see Ghiberti's sculptures at the Baptistry, but cannot endure the self-appointed and ill-informed guide whom he cannot shake.

Augie has written this memoirs because, as a traveling man, he has time on his hands, and dislikes the idea of the siesta. He begins in Rome, in the Café Valadier in the Borghese Gardens atop the Pincio, not because what he has to say is so significant, but because human beings have the right to express themselves and ought to do so at the appropriate time. He makes the most of his time in Paris, where they live in a luxury section but a terrible "joint." Augie frequently takes breakfast out and one day runs into Frazer. Stella lies more than the average person, as Augie learns from Alain du Niveau. She has not father in Jamaica, never cared for Oliver, and remained ever intent on suing Oliver's predecessor, the wealthy, elderly Cumberland, whom she put into debt. Mintouchian reveals that Stella performs on the stage to show Cumberland that she can do it, after failing in Hollywood. Once Augie gets her to begin telling her story, he cannot shut her up.

Simon and Charlotte visit Paris and seem pleased that Augie is finally in business. Charlotte tells Augie the story of Renée's paternity suits against four partners, including Simon, which is eventually dismissed. She marries one of them and disappears. Augie wants not to hear this stuff. Having to drive on business to Belgium at Christmas time, Augie goes out of his way to deliver his grotesque maid, Jacqueline, to her home in Normandy. His car breaks down a few kilometers short of her uncle's far, and they sing as they cross the frozen fields, to keep their stomachs from freezing, as the legends say. When Jacqueline talks of wanting to visit Mexico, Augie laughs at the mental picture, as he finishes his trip alone.

Chapters 23-26 Analysis

Chapter 23 shows Augie training for the Merchant Marine Academy on Speepshead Bay, NY. It contains rich detail about voyages aboard decrepit old ships. It seems not a rigid discipline. Bellow takes the opportunity to catch up on many minor characters through the device of letters, sharing what they do during World War II. Several of Augie's friends think he is crazy to risk his life when he has a perfectly legal excuse for staying home. He is so excited about his farm idea that it is hard to keep his promise to serve.

Most of the chapter is devoted to Augie and Stella getting back together and quickly deciding to marry when he graduates. While on duty, he agonizes about whether she truly wants him. She tells details about her life that make little difference to Augie but prove important later. He believes that she is completely honest, although she denies



that this is possible. Impetuous as always, Augie proposes immediately, rather than waiting six months as Clem had urged.

Most of Chapter 24 is devoted to Augie's meeting, a week before his wedding, with Harold Mintouchian in a Turkish bath, listens to the rich Armenian lawyer's allegorical talk about existence. There is much rich detail about the life of the affluent in Manhattan, and more help with Augie figuring out who he is. The lawyer probably breaks professional ethics by narrating case histories to Augie about three cases of adultery, drawing conclusions that offend Augie, and then retreating to say that this is not his intention. He is telling how the world is. He knows his own reputation and assumes that Augie believes him to be less than honest. Augie on the whole appreciates these honest "life counsels," but is offended by the idea that Stella could move on if he were to die at sea. This sets a theme for the chapters that follow and prepares the reader not to be surprised when Augie finds himself in mortal danger. Mintouchian believes that life is an infinity of secrets within secrets and that one must take chances in life.

Chapter 25 begins with Augie's wedding and shipping out upon the Sam MacManus. Augie is found to be a good listener and is soon giving for free advice the the could have been selling with Clem. Augie describes a long, diverse series of crewmen's stories, so many that one wonders why, and then Augie explains that it is a memorial to the lives they lose at sea. The chaos and danger of the sinking, which so contradicts the monotony of the days preceding, is told in chilling detail.

The scene shifts to a life raft amidst burning, oily water, where Augie helps an exhausted shipmate aboard, expecting help in return. When he is ignored, the tone of their time together is set. Augie describes how it feels to be involved in a fight for survival against nature and a fellow human. As survival stories go, this one is underplayed for drama. It turns more into a psychological contest with heavy philosophical overtones. The man is at first taciturn. Only when he rigs a makeshift sail and introduces himself as a fellow Chicagoan do they begin to communicate. It turns out that William Einshorn had known Hymie Basteshaw's late father and Augie experiences an uncomfortable moment after letting slip William's nickname for Aaron. The son takes no offense and indeed piles on stories to show his hatred of his father. Augie is uncomfortable at such unnatural hatred.

The discomfort grows as Basteshaw talks of his discoveries in biology that the academic community has foolishly rejected. He has been working on perfecting the protoplasm that he has created in the laboratory, by giving it reproductive and regenerative powers. These advanced samples have gone down with the MacManus. Augie initiates an argument about the ethics of letting something evolve in the wild, with unpredictable consequences. Basteshaw discounts this and grows silent.

Basteshaw takes pride in all of his scientific and technical learning, believes that he knows precisely where the current and winds are taking them from the point of the sinking, and looks forward to doing his research in an Axis POW camp rather than returning to the U.S. and more voyages. When Augie sets out smudge pots to attract Allied shipping, Basteshaw sees a danger to his plans and subdues Augie. When



rescued shortly afterwards and hospitalized, Augie boasts about Basteshaw being wrong.

Chapter 26 concludes the novel. It is set primarily in Paris after the war. It shows Augie for love's sake giving up his dream of a farm and school and making a successful career, at long last, as Mintouchian's agent for slippery trading deals. Augie describes Paris and Rome and, finding himself with time on his hands, begins writing his memoirs. He writes not because he believes that he has anything extraordinary to say, what he has to say, but because he believes that human beings have the inherent right to express themselves and ought to do so at the appropriate time.



Characters

Augie March

The narrator and principal character in this novel, Augie is born and raised in somber Chicago in a fatherless, non-practicing Jewish family on relief. He describes himself as a "black mass of hair and cleft chin" that contrast with his handsome older brother Simon. By age nine he is adept at lying to the Charities and unaffected by Grandma's "kitchen religion" or the Poles' flamboyant Catholicism. He does not "fatigue" himself over being born into "occult" work...but is an "easy touch for friendships." Early on he takes menial jobs and Grandma predicts that this will be his fate unless he buckles down. He is not cut out for academics but and lacks Simon's luck in the workplace. In high school Augie and Jimmy Klein are caught running a Christmastime swindle. Augie is repeatedly drawn when financially desperate to dabble in petty crime. The object of his first puppy love ignores him, but Augie goes on to experience several profound love affairs, one of which leads to marriage. Care for his mentally challenged brother George and Mama, who is going blind, often falls on Augie.

Augie's first break comes when he is hired as the crippled tycoon William Einhorn's "secretary, deputy, agent, companion." It teaches him to attack all projects with vigor. Recovering from a fire in the Einhorn's home a set of Harvard Classics sets Augie on a life-long love of reading. The Depression ends Augie's position, crime once again beckons, and he experiences his first whorehouse as a graduation present. Augie next becomes the protégé of wealthy, demanding Mrs. Renling, who to keep him from a woman beneath his worth, takes him to the Benton Harbor resort, where Augie falls in lust with Esther Fenchel, who rejects him, and becomes the object of her sister Thea's affections. Much later Augie and Thea meet and have Augie's first torrid affair. When Mrs. Renling proposes adopting him, Augie flees the easy life. Simon unilaterally sells the house, leaving Augie on his own. He meets fiery Mimi Villars, his platonic friend, Hooker Frazer, and old friend Clem Tambow.

Simon becomes engaged to Charlotte Magnus and pushes Augie also to marry into the wealthy family Simon also hires him for his coal yard to have someone he can trust, but proves a merciless employer. Their relations suffer as Augie and Lucy Magnus' dating ends when Augie helps Mimi get an abortion. No one will believe that he is not the father. Augie returns to reading, works briefly for the WPA, and is involved sexually with activist Sophie Geratis. He throws Sophie over when Thea Fenchel reappears and takes him off to Mexico. Family and friends warn him against being a "chump and old fool" and giving up his liberty too quickly, but he is smitten. Soon they get on one another's nerves and their interests diverge. They break up when he helps Stella Chesney escape a bad situation, and Thea refuses to believe they have not had sex (they have). After a passing involvement with revolutionary Leon Trotsky's security detail, Augie returns to Chicago.



Feeling useless and wondering why everyone seems better than he, Augie seeks to reach simplicity in his heart. An eccentric millionaire hires him as research assistant, which allows Augie to read widely for pay, but is otherwise unpleasant. Determined to align himself with "the axial lines of life," Augie decides to marry, settle down on a farm, take in Mama and George, and open a home school for institutionalized children. Before he can, however, World War II breaks out and, carried away with zeal to save the world from enslavement, Augie joins the Merchant Marine. During training in New York, Augie reunites with Stella, they marry just before he ships out, his ship is torpedoed, and he survives in a lifeboat with a crazy would-be biologist who wants him to work with experiments in creating protoplasm. After the war, Augie and Stella remain in Europe, primarily Paris, where she works with a film company and he as an agent for a New York lawyer.

Simon March

Augie's elder brother, Simon, is Germanic-looking blond, with large cheekbones, and wide gray eyes. A scar across his brow adds character, and for the same reason never has a chipped front tooth fixed. School absorbs Simon more than Augie and he excels. Accepting menial jobs like Augie, Simon always ends up better off and, as he rises, helps Augie rise—and is disgusted when he fails. Simon takes the lead in having Grandma Lausch, the boarder who rules the household, and his mentally-challenged brother George put into appropriate homes, but leaves the dirty work of putting them in to Augie. The Crash of 1929 wipes out the family finances, which Simon manages. He develops rich tastes and learns good manners. Simon hires a middle-aged mulatto woman, Molly Simms, to keep house, but seduces her on New Year's Eve and fires her, replacing her with an unattractive and untalented woman.

Simon gets engaged to colossally-built but slow-minded, crude, and demanding Cissy Flexner at the same time that he stupidly grows indebted to the Mob. When he sells the family home to pay up, Cassy is given to a cousin, and Simon is arrested for breaking up the Flexners' place. In jail he is suicidal, a problem that persists for years. Simon next marries an older heiress, Charlotte Magnus, and works hard to fill the prince's position in the Magnus family, becoming "boisterous, capricious, haughty, critical, arbitrary, mimicking, and deviling" - traits absorbed from Grandma Lausch. Simon wants Augie to marry into the family and consolidate assets and hires him to work in his coal yard, in order to have someone near that he can trust. The business goes badly, as could be predicted, during the warm months and Simon despairs. He is a tyrant with workers, customers, and even the staff of Mama's home for the blind, for which he pays and demands special rights. When word spreads that Augie has helped his friend Mimi get an abortion, Simon assume that Augie has gotten her pregnant and worries only about his own relations with the Magnuses. They are estranged while Augie goes on his Mexican adventure.

Learning that Augie is back, Simon, "heftier" and carefully manicured and attired—and in a constant rush—again helps Augie get on his feet, while bragging about his own "gold touch" and luck. He is nearly a millionaire, despite the Depression. Simon tells



Augie to stop stalling and do something with his life. Following Simon around for a day lets Augie see him as a wheeler-dealer businessman, rude club member, and dismissive husband. As World War II breaks out, Simon begins flaunting an affair with a "blonde doll," Renée, while allowing Charlotte equal freedom. Charlotte ignores rumors for a long time but finally forces the point. Renée is paid to go away but returns, claiming to be pregnant. Charlotte stands by Simon and the problem goes away. After the war, Simon and Charlotte visit Paris. He is proud that Augie is finally in business and prospering, and considers Augie's wife Stella a "real dish" and likely to keep Augie on his toes.

Grandma Lausch

An elderly, widowed Russian Jew who lives with the Marches, "Grandma" is not a blood relative, but an immigrant from Odessa who takes over rule of the household from weak-willed and sickly Mama. She is a neighborhood Machiavelli, always scheming to obtain benefits from the Charities. She is jesuitical, full of guile and malice, and impossible to satisfy. She reads Anna Karenina and Eugene Onegin once a year, loves novels, but hates religious books. She practices the Jewish "kitchen religion" and works as a matchmaker for a fee.

Grandma is determined to turn Augie and older brother Simon into gentlemen, despite their cultural disadvantages, and is rueful that her bored, ungrateful sons, Stiva and Alexander, have not taken full enough advantage of all she has given them. They refuse to speak Russian with her. Grandma tries regularly to shame Augie into nobility, hinting at her past connections with the courts of Europe. Sometimes it works, but it also makes him resistant. When Augie is fired from the Federal News Company, Grandma savagely reminds him of how he will feel when she dies, but then quickly returns to condemning Mama for her failings.

Tension in the family rises when mentally-challenged Georgie reaches puberty and Grandma demands that he be institutionalized. She has an answer for every argument. When Grandma begins to weaken and grow troublesome, Simon demands that the Lausch boys deal with her and she is put in the Nelson Home for the Aged and Infirm. Grandma deludes herself that it is a deluxe, intellectual estate, and leaves the March home as a grande-dame moving to a better situation. She is stony silent during the trip and stoical about the reality she enters. She thanks him for his troubles, gives him a quarter, and refuses to weep until he is out of sight. He keeps his promise to visit only once, when Grandma is near the end, gaping like a cat. She seems to enjoy the visit, but her weakness throws Augie. Grandma dies of pneumonia that winter and Augie cannot imagine such strength, albeit detestable, vanishing underground. In his ongoing dealings with Simon, Augie sees that much of Grandma's personality has rubbed off.



The Einhorns

Four generations of the Einhorn family are depicted in the novel: 1) the "Old Commissioner," founder of the dynasty; 2) William and Tillie, the crippled heir and his wife, plus William's half-brother Shep, better known as "Dingbat"; and 3) Arthur, William and Tillie's only son Arthur, a student at the University of Illinois; and 4) an unnamed grandson from Arthur's failed marriage, whom William and his mistress, Mildred. William, who hires Augie March in his junior year in high school to assist him, is of primary importance in the story

The Commissioner builds a real estate and investments empire largely by word of mouth agreements. He is a shrew old man, perhaps brilliant, four-times married, and wears a distinctive with his Buffalo Bill style Vandyke beard. William is born to his first wife. A subsequent wife (uncertain which) bears Shep, known as "Dingbat," a boxer who lacks a killer's intention. Dingbat is at one point in charge of Einhorn's Billiards until he is replaced by a professional manager; then he becomes his father's chauffeur. Dingbat considers William a wizard at making money, as does William's wife Tillie, who is heavy, attractive, and languorous, with pharaoh-bobbed hair. She likes things to be organized and ready. She keeps late hours and is not a good housekeeper. She obeys William as if she worships him, running his errands, and finding his relationship with his father enigmatic.

When the Commissioner dies with great dignity, William arranges to take over the business. Although the family observes only Yom Kippur annually, the funereal rituals of Judaism are observed; the house is put in mourning and the family attends synagogue services, however awkwardly. William keeps Augie with him to prepare a flowery obituary and begins sorting documents to destroy or file. The Commissioner's private debtors are likely to default, reducing the estate's value. Shortly after the Commissioner's death, the Great Crash wipes out the fortune he has amassed, partly thanks to his "golden trust system" and partly thanks to William's inexperience and mismanagement.

William is the first "superior man" whom Augie March knows, on a par with Caesar, Machiavelli, and Ulysses, William hires Augie during his junior year in high school, shortly before the Great Crash of 1929. Augie stays with him after William loses his fortune and becomes essential to him. William has lost the use of his arms and legs, although his hands function weakly. He prefers to be jocular, but usually awakens peevish until he is helped to wash, shave, and dress. He is generally stoical, enduring what he must. He is highly systematic and has Augie keep his files and desk in order. He is organizer, poet, and philosopher to his father's conqueror.

William once holds hope that his paralysis could be conquered, but now sometimes talks of euthanasia. He is obsessed with death, particularly of being mugged at his desk, but he fights to beat death, which already has such a hold on him. Death is perhaps his only god He usually enjoys good health, however, and takes pride in being a useful citizen. William needs to demonstrate strength in weakness. He has Augie write



away for free samples, reports, and pamphlets in order to keep in touch with everything. William publishes and distributes a mimeographed paper called "The Shut-In" for those with disabilities. He is proud, even while the Commissioner is still at the helm, not to have given in to disease and faded away, for which no one would blame him in his condition. He has sexual affairs with many women, but lacks his father's smoothness. His sole goal is seduction, although he jokes about his handicap not interfering with his sexual performance. He treats Augie to a visit to a whorehouse for his high school graduation.

William's treatment of tenants unable to pay rent brings him in conflict with Communists, particularly Sylvester. Dingbat organizes a "flying squad" from the poolroom to serve as security and favors violence, but William restrains him for the time being and insists that he must give the orders. William comes in conflict with the zoning board over industrial rentals in a residential block and loses his last big property. He moves into the poolroom and manages it back to profitability. To economize, he lets Augie go, but brings him back part time and for less money when he learns of Augie's part in a robbery, arranged in his poolroom. The lecture, which succeeds in making Augie think, is ironic, given William's many swindles. William in turn is swindled when he gives Simon the money that Augie has requested and lends a bit more; Augie never sees a penny of it. William gets angry at people like Augie who do not get angry, but promises to arrange something for Mama when she loses her home and eyesight.

A fellow cripple, Mildred Stark, becomes William's private secretary, confidante, and loving handmaiden. When Augie visits while working as a union organizer, William explains why "closed shops" are not a solution. Augie sees Tillie as acting coldly and staying away from the new family group that is developing, as Arthur and his little boy come home after Arthur's quick marriage and divorce. Mildred, in effect William's second wife, happily cares for his grandson.

Arthur begins seeing Augie's platonic friend Mimi. William and Tillie are not keen on the girl and she dislikes William even more, since their first meeting, when he makes a pass at her. She resents how William nags Arthur. Arthur is in treatment for syphilis, but after the cure he will leave his father's house, not taking the child. When Augie moves in with Thea Fenchel, Arthur takes over his room, where he works hard on translations, rather than becoming a union organizer. He asks to take care of the Harvard Classics.

Returning from his Mexican adventure, Augie visits William, who is "white and peaky" after prostate surgery, but still a "fine presence." Tillie and grandson are on vacation and Mildred is firmly in charge. The house stinks and is aging. William complains about how Mimi is ruining Arthur. Mimi is even crueler on the subject of William: a self-absorbed "impresario." Arthur alone will inherit the Commissioner's remaining fortune.

Dingbat plays a minor role as the family tough guy. He comes to the fore only once when, for a few months, Augie hangs out with him. Dingbat needs desperately to justify himself before his half-brother and father. He believes that he has found in Nails Nagel a heavyweight fighter to manage to a championship, but Nails proves a failure despite merciless training. Dingbat lectures a boys' club about the essentials of training,



including avoiding masturbation and hanky-panky with girls. Augie goes along to a bout in Muskegon, MI, where seasickness leaves Nales too weak to fight. During World War II, Dingbat serves in New Guinea, driving a jeep, and is ill.

Hymie Basteshaw

A crewman who with Augie March shares a lifeboat after the sinking of the freighter Sam MacManus in World War II, Basteshaw is a skilled carpenter's mate. Augie helps the exhausted man into the boat, expecting to be helped in turn, but Basteshaw refuses, infuriating Augie. They drift for a day before Basteshaw rigs a makeshift sail and initiates a conversation. They are both from Chicago. Basteshaw talks with contempt about his late father, amazing Augie, while his vocabulary makes it seem odd that he is in the Merchant Marine. He tells of having made a radical finding in psycho-biology but having his experiments turned down by six universities. He is now working to give his created protoplasm reproductive and regenerative powers. His experiments having gone down with the MacManus, Augie worries that they will succeed in the wild, with unpredictable consequences. Basteshaw discounts this and grows silent until he sees signs of land. When Augie tries to signal a ship, Basteshaw overpowers him, wishing to work in a POW camp rather than return to sea. They are rescued next day by a British ship, far from where Basteshaw predicts, and are dropped in Naples. In the hospital, Augie taunts Basteshaw with how they could have died because of his stubbornness and they never speak again.

Betzhevski

A red-haired barber occupying one of the Einhorns' flats, Betzhevski gives mandolin concerts on the sidewalks before the Great Crash of 1929. His eviction for failure to pay rent inspires Communist party picketing. Dingbat Einhorn wants to smash up the tiny basement shop to which Betzhevski moves. Mrs. Betzhevski stands in the street and curses Einhorn as a "stinking Jew cripple." Clem Tambow continues coming to Betzhevski because he is the only barber who "understands" his beard.

Steve the Sailor Bulba

A high school bully and neighborhood vandal, Bulba steals Augie March's science notebook and turns an assignment in as his own. Augie is caught using Jimmy Klein's paper. Augie and Jimmy take to skipping school for adventures downtown. Augie next meets Bulba as an accomplice in the robbery of a leather goods shop on Lincoln Ave., masterminded by the thief Joe Gorman. Bulba goes on to become a "slugger for a union."



The Coblins

Relatives of the March family, the Coblins take in Augie for the summer when he is thirteen, to help with their newspaper route. The family consists of 1) Anna, Rebecca March's over-emotional cousin, 2) her husband Hyman, 3) her brother "Five Properties" (given name never mentioned), and 4) her daughter Freidl. Son Howard is never seen, having run away to the Marine Corps. His mother grieves for him. Among the Coblins, Five Properties plays the largest role in the novel.

Anna has "huge" reddish hair, moles and bumps all over, particularly on her neck, an asthmatic voice, coppery eyes, a burning morose face, and no conception that others might have worse lives than she. Her Corsican temper leads her to cry in bed, cursing all of her diabolical enemies. She is a slovenly housekeeper but delivers the men folk's meals on time. She is "terribly religious" with her own concepts about doctrines. She observes all of the holy days, but when giving Augie religious instruction, garbles all the stories. She is fiercely protective of her daughter, Freidl takes elocution lessons to get rid of her stuttering. Anna insists that Augie and Freidl will marry, the sooner the better. She considers it sacrilegious for Augie to try Howard's saxophone.

Hyman is a sturdy, bald, big-featured man with a tic that some take as meekness, but he is dangerous in a fight. He stays away from the house whenever possible on business. After his 4 a.m. newspaper route, during which he sometimes badgers Augie about being slow, he dresses nattily to go downtown, takes lunch in expensive restaurants, and after meetings with the circulation manager, takes in a burlesque show or visits prostitutes. He plays the stock market as business and poker in moderation. Hyman is unconcerned when Augie walks into the bathroom and discovers him masturbating in the bathtub.

Five Properties, enormous, long-armed, and hump-backed, with "an Eskimo smile of primitive simplicity," drives an electric dairy truck. He takes thirteen-year-old Augie March on his route, along which he delights in greeting customers with appropriate ethnic greetings and jokes. Being on field burial detail in Poland during World War I toughens him. In America he becomes rich and swaggering, constantly bragging, "Five prote'ties. Plente money." Five Properties is anxious to marry, preferably a "bouncing, black-haired, large-lipped, party-going peach." Reacting to Simon March's selling the family house out from under his blind mother convinces Mr. Kreindl to break the engagement he has made between Simon and Cissy Flexner and give her to Five Properties, who invites Augie to his wedding at the Lion's Club Hall without revealing the bride's identity. Five Properties and Cissy are invited to Charlotte and Simon's wedding, marking the reconciliation of the cousins, but Five Properties takes offense at where they are sat for the reception and stalks out, leaving Augie to voice his protest

The Fenchels

The Fenchels are a rich family that Augie March meets while on vacation with his mentor, Mrs. Renling, at Benton Harbor/St. Joseph, MI. Having lustful fantasies about



beautiful Esther, Augie approaches her properly through her fat, black-eyed, millionaire uncle. Augie then finds Esther on the beach, is aroused, and that evening tries to talk to her. Esther rebuffs him so rudely that he faints dead away. Mrs. Renling informs him later that Thea has been watching him all night and declares that she has "hot pants" and is trouble. Thea informs Augie that Esther has rejected him because rumor has it he is Mrs. Renling's gigolo. Thea insists that this is common among Europeans and does not bother her - because she is in love with Augie. He would not love Esther if he knew her. The Fenchels check out, Thea leaves him a note, reaffirming her love and promising to see him again.

Long afterwards, Thea hires a detective to find Augie's address and derails her affair with Sophie Geratis. At their first meeting, Thea and Augie barely make it inside her door before making passionate love. Thea is still legally married but is en route from Long Island, NY, to Mexico to divorce her rich, older husband, Smitty. She assumes that Augie will accompany her and he does not think of refusing. She gleefully outfits and supports him. Augie overlooks Thea's quirks, admiring her decisiveness and firm convictions. She is prepared to test her ideas to the extreme.

Thea can be crude and with people and assumes that she knows everything about Augie. She is jealous of Sophie and charges that Augie needs everyone to love him but cannot stand up under flattery. With wider experience than Augie, Thea is suspicious of everyone and suffers periodic doubt. His honesty and desire to please everyone annoys her. Thea's wisdom is bitter and she seems to foresee that Augie will someday do her wrong. She warns against this. Thea gradually reveals her history of marital indiscretions, but is honest about having no money once the divorce comes through.

Thea's plan is to make money in Mexico, not only catching lizards but also making documentaries and publishing articles in National Geographic (using a ghost writer). She promises that the eagle will be no problem once trained. In fact, Caligula, the eagle, is "manned" with great effort, most of which Augie must bear. When Caligula proves a failure as a hunter, Thea washes her hands of him and turns to collecting poisonous snakes. Augie is injured during Caligula's last hunt and while he is recovering, Thea gets secretly back together with her previous lover, Talavera. Augie learns of this only after their formal break-up, occasioned by Thea's jealousy over Augie helping another woman in trouble, Stella Chesney. Thea goes next to Yucatán to study migratory birds, refusing to take Augie along. During World War II, Thea marries a captain in the Pacific.

Lollie Fewter

A woman who comes in to do the Einhorn's' laundry and clean, Lollie often has sex with crippled William Einhorn. She is an overgrown girl in a thin blouse and straw sandals, smirking about the situation. She flirts with Augie until he gets excited, but as an Einhorn employee, he declines. While Willia's father, the Commissioner, is dying, Lollie quits and moves downtown. William misses her and often begs her to visit. It is learned later that she is shot by a teamster-lover involved in black marketing. William believes that with her "Frankie-and-Johnny mentality," Lollie's destiny is a violent death.



Hooker Frazer

Frazer plays a recurring cameo role throughout the second half of the novel. He is introduced as Mimi Villars' lover and, thus, Clem Tambow's rival. Frazer is a graduate assistant in political science at Northwestern University and one of Augie March's shoplifted book customers. He is a "young Calhoun," tall, handsome, and intelligent, living on Burton Ct. in "learned bachelorhood." He comes from a "high mountain slum" and has no use for Old World culture. He speaks with a Tennessee accent about Communism and Trotskyism. He has studied at the Lenin Institute but is expelled over the "German question."

Augie next sees Frazer in Acatla, Mexico, serving as one of Leon Trotsky's personal secretaries. When they meet in Mexico City, Augie sees why Mimi had called Frazer "The Preacher;" he looks like that or a Confederate officer. He assigns Augie to teach English to a Yugoslav sympathizer, Paslavitch in exchange for living at his villa. Frazer tells Augie about a plan to thwart Stalin's efforts to assassinate the "Old Man" (Trotsky) by disguising him and having an American-looking comrade travel with him. Trotsky vetoes the idea. Frazer's final appearance is during World War II, working in Intelligence, and just back from Asia in time to attend Augie and Stella's New York wedding. Frazer talks about the situation, his now-mature face showing the strains of world politics. Augie admires his ability still to talk about any subject.

Sophie Geratis

A small, shapely Greek woman, working as a chambermaid in a Chicago luxury hotel when she meets Augie March, Sophie is spokesperson for workers ready to strike for higher wages. Augie falls for her at first sight. They kiss, trembling. He learns that she lives with her sister and the two are engaged to a pair of brothers, to be married in six weeks. Augie is talking in bed with Sophie when Thea Fenchel visits out of the blue. Sophie dresses quickly and leaves them alone. After Augie returns from his Mexican adventure, Sophie wants to divorce her inattentive husband and marry him. They spend a lot of time at Owens' where, as a former chambermaid, she criticizes his stinginess and sloppiness. She is still very pretty and tender, but Augie is not prepared to marry. She still resents being left for Thea. Augie is beginning to think about marrying Sophie when World War II breaks out. She helps him through a long, painful recovery from hernia surgery. When Augie joins the Merchant Marine, Sophie reconciles with her husband and joins him at Camp Blanding, saying farewell in a series of letters.

Joe Gorman

A professional thief who hangs out at Einhorn's poolroom, bright, handsome, slim, and clever Gorman recruits Augie March for the robbery of a leather goods shop on Lincoln Ave. Sailor Bulba is the other accomplice. As his father owns a tire shop, there is no reason for Gorman to be a thief, but he has quite a record and has been in St. Charles twice. After the successful heist, Gorman takes Augie's bowing out of future jobs in



stride. Years later, when he needs a break, Augie runs into Joe Gorman again, looking prosperous. Gorman is smuggling immigrants in from Canada and needs help driving. There is minimal risk for \$50. They drive fast to Lackawanna, where the state troopers spot the stolen Buick. They separate, planning to meet in Buffalo. Hidden, Augie a squad car brings in a bloody-faced, dazed Gorman.

Mr. Grammick

A rough-and-tumble but soft-spoken union organizer, Grammick hires Augie March to deal with wildcat strikes for the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO), which is in fierce competition with the American Federation of Labor (AFL). Grammick is slovenly but mild and delicate, clever, and tenacious. Workers are signing up in droves, demanding justice. Grammick starts Augie in the union hall, handling the phones and hearing grievances in person. By example Grammick teaches Augie to put in 16-hour days, 10-12 days in a row and then decompress for two days at his mother's flat. He is also studying law. Grammick is clubbed in the head during the Decoration Day Massacre outside of Republic Steel. He understands when Augie quits.

Guillaume

The owner of a dog-coiffure business, Guillaume is a French expatriate who works as a wrestler's shill in carnivals while studying for this occupation. He is the proud Maître de Chiens, selling his services at \$20 per animal. Business is brisk. The club is located on the Gold Coast near the Humane Society on Grand Ave. Guillaume takes in Augie March on William's recommendation and puts him to work. Guillaume gives injections routinely to control the chaos resulting in Augie carrying home "some pretty wan dogs." He charges extra for pedigreed dogs arriving in heat. He teaches his small staff well. Guillaume's middle-aged girl friend is "a great work of ripple-assed luxury with an immense mozzarella bust."

Jacinto

The houseboy in Thea Fenchel's villa in Acatla, Mexico, Jacinto becomes Thea and Augie March's eager assistant in training the eagle Caligula. His mother is the cook. When they go iguana hunting in the mountains, Jacinto beats the brush to flush out the speedy, vicious creatures. After Caligula's humiliating defeat in a fight with an iguana, Thea's interest turns to collecting venomous snakes and Jacinto leads a pack of village boys as her assistants. Augie is angry at Jacinto for spreading the story about Caligula.

Jacqueline

Augie and Stella March's maid while living in Paris, Jacqueline had been a waitress in Vichy France. She rides with Augie to her home in Normandy. She is "grotesque" in face and form, has a busy manner but sweet temper. She also works in a movie theater,



which makes her a font of gossip, and an "unkillable pride in her sensuality and adventurous spirit, and if she has these outrageous colors and parrot bit, what about it?" Augie goes out of his way to deliver her home, enjoying the company and conversation. A few kilometers from her uncle's farm, Augie's Citroën dies and they walk across the frozen fields, singing, because Jacqueline insists that this keeps the stomach from freezing. She dreams of visiting Mexico, which gives Augie a laugh long after he has driven on his way alone.

The Jepsens

A denizen of Hilario's bar in Acatla, Mexico, Jepsen is the second husband of writer Iggy's ex-wife, Eunice. His father is an African explorer; he is an alcoholic. Iggy lives in the same villa to protect his daughter from Jepsen. When Jepsen is deported to the U.S. for vagrancy, Eunice takes Iggy back.

Happy Kellerman

Simon March's experienced yard manager and weight-master, Happy teaches Augie the ropes. He is small, humorous, and paunched, a "carnival type" and "whorehouse visitor." He carries a business card identifying himself as representative of March's Coal and Coke. It pictures a rooster chasing a hen with the caption, "I mean business." Happy keeps the books with elegant penmanship. Simon's savagery over his pranks nearly makes Happy quit, but Augie irons things out. Simon sends them out to drum up business. Happy drives carefully, fearing to run over a "Bohunk" kid and be torn to pieces.

The Kinsmans

The rich owners of several funeral parlors, the Kinsmans are superstitiously avoided by many people, including Anna Coblín, who blames the son, Joe Kinsman, for luring Howard Coblín to lie about their age, enlist in the Marine Corps, and go to Nicaragua to fight Sandino and the rebels. Mrs. Kinsman is big, fresh, and leery-looking. The Kinsmans bury "Commissioner" Einhorn,

The Kleins

The Kleins are neighbors to the Marches while Augie is growing up. Laid-back Mrs. Klein is heavy-set, limps with one leg shorter than the other, and her obviously dyed hair makes her look Indian. She watches Augie's mentally impaired little brother Georgie afternoons along with grandchildren by her five sons and three daughters. Several have had marriages fail and have moved back. The family constantly borrows, lends, and buys on installments. They trace their ancestry back to a 13th-century Spanish family named Avila and have a cousin in Mexico City.



Jimmy Klein is Augie Augie's friend and co-worker in Woolworth's basement. He is sociable, spirited, dark-faced, narrow-eyed, witty-looking, inclined to honesty but no stickler on conscience. Grandma Lausch does not approve of him. Jimmy and Augie are regularly sent on errands, during which they take time to attend shows in the Loop. Jimmy's older brother Tommy works for a "bucket-shop" stockbroker on Lake St. and gives the boys money-making leads. Their fat, unmarried sister Eleanor has a "gypsy style" and calls Augie "lover," "little brother," and "heart-breaker." She has given up on finding a husband. When not too sick from rheumatism and "female disorders," she works at a soap factory; when sick she sits home, indulging herself.

The Kleins admire Grandma Laush for managing the Marches, but she calls them ugly names. She rightly intuits that Jimmy is a petty thief before Jimmy and Augie run a Christmastime swindle at Deever's Department Store. Ironically, he becomes a security guard at Carson's and stops Augie leaving the store with a valuable book that he has shoplifted. Jimmy lets him escape—without the book—and they meet in a cafeteria to catch up. Jimmy's father has been widowed and married an Old World sweetheart with four children. Eleanor has returned from Mexico where she had gotten sick while working in a sweatshop; the promise of marriage had been a lie. Other siblings and their spouses and kids fill the house. Jimmy marries because he gets the woman pregnant. When Augie explains why he needs money, Jimmy promises to help.

The Kreindls

The Kreindls are the March's next-door neighbors. Mr. Kreindl is a "powerful stub-handed man with a large belly" who plays klabyasch with Grandma Lausch and retains the "drill-sergeant's bark" of an Austro-Hungarian conscript. He looks "altogether Napoleonic." He carries coal upstairs for Mama when she is unwell. Mrs. Kreindl is quiet and modest with neighbors but quarrelsome with him and their dentist son, Kotzie, who lives nearby and works part-time at the drugstore. Kotzie alerts Lausch to the services of the free clinic and fills the Marches' prescriptions for free. Nevertheless, Grandma reviles family members with nasty ethnic slurs

Grandma also works with Mr. Klein in arranging a marriage for his niece with "Five Properties" Coblin, who politely declines. Kreindl is a regular at Coblins' on Sundays, mixing business with pleasure. During the Depression, Kotzie supports his whole family and gets the suddenly unemployed Augie a job as an apprentice soda jerk. When Simon March sells the family home and its furniture to a Polish family to pay off his gambling debts, the Kreindls take Mama in downstairs and Kreindl changes the arrangement for Cissy Flexner's wedding: giving her to Five Properties rather than Simon March. Explaining this, he cannot stop raving about Cissy's proud "tsitskies." She even gives him an erection at his age.



Mr. Lubin

The Marches' caseworker at the Charity, Lubin with his bald head, gold frame glasses, dingy suit, and derby, tries to look patient and comfortable as Grandma Lausch works him over about the Marches' financial need, but is determined for reasons of policy to remain master of the situation. He wishes to be delivered from such clients. After demanding that Georgie be institutionalized, Grandma calls in Lubin, who has always favored this. Mama has no choice but to sign the commitment papers. After Simon then sells Mama's house and furniture, Augie returns to Lubin to get her into a home for the blind. Lubin believes firmly that humans rise from caves rather than fall from Paradise.

The Magnuses

A wealthy family, whose fortune comes from the coal business, the Manuses, who live in a huge flat on the West Side of Chicago, become Simon March's in-laws and ticket to success when he marries Charlotte. While she is the central thread in the family's involvement in the novel, her parents, uncles, and cousins are also woven in. Augie for a while is on track to join the clan.

Charlotte is attractive but a bit heavy and older than Simon, who is blunt about marrying for money, and Charlotte approaches the subject with humor. Simon moves in and begins enjoying luxury after a secret out-of-state marriage, pending a lavish engagement and wedding. He begins learning the business in one of their five coal yards and is promised one of his own to manage once he is ready. An excellent businesswoman, Charlotte assures Simon that business will pick up in the cold season, and is not put off by his cursing and mockery. Her support and counsel unites them much more than sex. While indulging in feminine vanities, she knows that they are unreal. Her purpose is to make a success of Simon, who acknowledges her ability and goodness.

Everything in the Magnuses' home is over-sized and ungainly, like the occupants themselves. The grandmother is dissolving in size, wears pious black and a wig, and is capable of "metaphysical judgment." She wonders who Augie is, perhaps smelling a thief. Mr. Magnus teaches Augie to play pinochle, because any decently-raised person ought to know how; otherwise he is easygoing and indulgent. Peevish, overweight Uncle Charlie owns the coal yards. Uncle Artie owns a big mattress factory. Uncle Robby is a commission merchant whose office Charlotte manages. Augie senses that they all consider him a "schmuck," but Simon defends him as quick-learning. The nieces and female cousins all size Augie up as marriage material, particularly the openly sensual and attractive Lucy. Augie is in no hurry to marry. Another cousin, Kelly Weintraub, causes trouble for the Marches by recalling their youths.

Charlotte and Simon's wedding is a gala hotel affair, throwing Augie and Lucy together in the bridal party. Simon wants them to marry, for Lucy is even wealthier than Charlotte. Simon describes Lucy as "a juicy piece" and willing. Combining their assets could open great possibilities in business and diplomacy. Lucy flirts with Augie throughout the



ceremony. They date and neck within Lucy's clear boundaries; she begins to call him "husband" but cannot be talked into eloping as Charlotte had. On the night that he helps his platonic friend Mimi get an abortion, Augie is supposed to be at a party with Lucy. When he finally arrives, late, he finds the "big machine" of Uncle Charlie, Lucy, her parents, and always-hostile brother Sam, waiting. They decree that the break-up is instant and forever.

When Augie returns from his Mexican adventures, he finds Charlotte "vigorous rather than friendly" in conversation, dressed and made up in the height of fashion. She is still observant, nagging, and tough. She is annoyed that Augie shows no anxiety over being penniless while wearing Simon's suits. When Augie wants to talk about George's fate, she advises him to worry more about turning into a bum himself. Simon notes sharply that that would be better than being stuck with Lucy and family. Charlotte for a long time ignores rumors that Simon is seeing and supporting a voluptuous blonde, Renée, but finally demands that the affair end, threatens divorce, and at a meeting with Simon's lawyer, slaps and curses Renée. Only after World War II, when Charlotte and Simon visit Augie and wife Stella in Paris does Charlotte talk about the Renée affair, which had made all of the Chicago newspapers. Their marriage survives.

George March

Augie's younger brother, Georgie is born an idiot and throughout his life drags one foot, and sings to himself. He is bristle-headed. As a child he plays with chickens afternoons in the Kleins' yard. Georgie's look and smile when people discuss him shows some comprehension, as when Grandma Lausch insists that, having reached puberty, he is too big for home care and must be put into an institution and learn a trade. Georgie stops eating and moans, irritating Grandma, who opens a tirade about risks of having him loose. Augie spends all of his time with Georgie during the last month.

In the Home, George grows large and learns broom-making before having to be transferred to an adult facility downstate near Pinckneyville. Eldest brother Simon's wife Charlotte wants to move George into private care, but nothing comes of it. On his way home from his Mexican adventure, Augie visits George, who has matured into a "large hulk insecure in his steps," with darkened skin under the eyes. Augie is proud of how he accepts his fate with dignity. He works as a manual shoemaker; he cannot run machines. George greets Augie cheerfully, as he always had, not knowing how he ought to resent the 3-4 years of neglect. They walk around the grounds, Augie without permission takes George to a store to buy cookies, which George saves for later and looks anxious being outside. He responds instantly to the dinner bell. Not wanting George to spend the rest of his life under control, Augie resolves, after visiting Mama, to arrange something with Simon. He also plans to take both to the Utopian farm/school about which he dreams before World War II intervenes.



Rebecca March

Augie March's simple-minded mother, Rebecca (always called "Mama") teaches by object lessons. She is "big, gentle, dilapidated," with large feet on which she wears unlaced men's shoes, a long, fresh-colored face with green eyes, and work-hardened red hands. Her circle-shaped glasses magnify her round eyes, which weaken for two-thirds of the novel before failing altogether.

Mama works in a coat factory before marrying a truck driver for Hall Brothers laundry. She bears three children and is then abandoned. No one ever speaks about her husband, of whom no picture remains, forcing Augie as a child to fantasize about him. Augie likes to think of him in uniform. The man sends only occasional support money. Given these circumstances, Mama gladly surrenders control of the house to Grandma Lausch, her boarder, and works as a drudge. Grandma (no blood relation) regularly ribs Mama about her failed marriage. As Simon and Augie begin working, their chores fall on Mama's shoulders and she grows haggard. When Georgie reaches puberty, Mama and Augie resist putting him in an institution, but Grandma has an answer for every argument. Mama does not bother to hide her grief.

As Grandma weakens and becomes troublesome, George arranges for her to be put into a Home but does little to obtain good help for Mama with housework and cooking. Then, while Augie is away briefly, Simon sells the house and furniture to pay off gambling debts. The Kreindls take Mama in downstairs until Augie arranges for her to enter a Home for the blind. When Simon marries wealthy Charlotte Magnus, they pay Mama's fees and send gifts. Mama enjoys the company in the Home and never complains, but Simon is always gruff when visiting, assuming that Mama is being mistreated. He is particularly outraged finding her assembling Roosevelt campaign buttons at 10¢ per hundred. She insists that she enjoys having something to keep her busy, but Simon sees only exploitation. She has to endure living by the noisy kitchen because Simon insists on her having a private room. At Simon's wedding, Mama obediently wears dark glasses but is afraid to relinquish her white cane as Simon demands. Her exhibition of will is surprising. Mama takes news of Augie's going to Mexico with Thea Fenchel indifferently, asking only that he not let her make him unhappy. She talks about riding in Simon's new Cadillac. As World War II breaks out, Mama is weakening. Fortunately while walking with Augie, she does not see Simon with his flashy new mistress.

Stella Chesney March

Augie March's wife, Stella first meets him in Acatla, Mexico, while she is the consort of an alcoholic magazine publisher, Oliver. They are staying at the expensive Carlos Quinto Hotel next to Thea Fenchel's villa. Stella and Oliver then move into a Japanese man's villa when the hotel objects to them cohabiting while unmarried. Rumor has it that Oliver is being sought for embezzlement, tax evasion, or as a material witness in a federal prosecution. When an angry Oliver punches Louis Fu in the face and the police



respond, Augie spirits Stella away and she asks to speak with him in confidence soon. When they slip away from their housewarming party, Stella asks Augie to drive her to Mexico City to avoid accompanying Oliver to South America. She claims to have money in a New York City bank and offers to pay him when funds are wired to Mexico. Although she does not know Augie well, she believes that both of them are the type who do not fit others into their schemes. This melts Augie's heart.

Although he cannot drive her all the way to the capital, he agrees to get her to Cuernavaca, far enough from Acatla to be safe. As they are about to leave, Thea confronts them, "angry, ironic, and sad." Augie takes a wrong turn on a dark, empty road, gets stuck, and the engine dies. It is unsafe to walk for help, so they huddle against the cold and, inevitably, make love. He observes that Stella offers herself as a prize and does things to him that show that she has studied what men like. Afterwards, Augie thinks about what will happen with Thea, if anything permanent is possible with Stella. In the morning, they reach town and hire a driver for Stella. She gives Augie an address, thanks him for being a real friend, and advises him not to let Thea be too hard on him. He wishes her better luck and long waits for a letter that does not come.

Years later, while studying at the Merchant Marine Academy, Augie learns that Stella is in New York. He visits her while on liberty, watching for hints how she will react to a kiss. She welcomes it. She talks about a father in Jamaica who sends her money and how Oliver had promised to take her to Hollywood and fame. For a while she had actually loved him. Augie is convinced that Stella is completely honest, although she denies that anyone is. They make love until he is due back on duty and another week's voyaging. She is waiting for him on Saturday. Augie proposes, not waiting six months as Clem had urged, and she reveals that she is a follower of Gurdijeff. Augie and Stella marry the day after his graduation, days before he ships out on his first trans-Atlantic voyage. She then makes a week-long USO tour of the Aleutian Islands, which worries Augie.

After the war, while Augie works as an agent for crooked lawyer Harold Mintouchian, Stella works in Paris as an actress in international movies. Her famous role is in *Les Orphelines*, about displaced persons. It turns out that she enjoys lying and the high life of Paris, whereas Augie longs for his farm and school program. Stella keeps him in the "bondage of strangeness." She reveals that she has no father in Jamaica, had never been to college, and had never loved Oliver. Augie learns earlier from a third party about Cumberland, Stella's lover before Oliver and Mintouchian suggests that she is giving the story a false perspective. The old man is not her oppressor. Stella is aggressive about wanting to go to court over debts, while he wants to settle. This all comes out when Augie forbids a lawsuit. Stella cries about being threatened and makes him comfort her, and sends him to sea a second time with a book about bees. The movie career is to prove her self-worth to Cumberland.

Harold Mintouchian and Agnes Kuttner

Friends of Stella Chesney at the time that Augie March comes back into her life in New York, Agnes lives opulently in a 5th Ave. Manhattan apartment filled with antiques, and



Mintouchian is her lawyer and friend. A huge Armenian, Mintouchian is a frequent house guest but also has an apartment with an invalid wife for whom he cares. The foursome go out to "scarlet-and-gold-door places" when Augie is on leave from Merchant Marine training. Mintouchian is open-handed with his money, a "good-time Charlie." Augie learns that Mintouchian is not strictly honest, but not a rogue. He has global business interests and is well-read, and persistently offers Augie "life counsels." Aristocratic Agnes bosses Mintouchian around. A week before Augie's wedding, Mintouchian takes him to a Turkish bath for a frank talk and caters their wedding luncheon. After World War II, Mintouchian uses Augie as a trading agent in Europe.

Wiley Moulton and Iggy Blaikie/Gurevitch

Moulton and Iggy are New York writers living in the foreign colony in Acatla, Mexico, when Augie March and Thea Fenchel arrive. Thea wants to hire a ghost writer for articles about her iguana-hunting eagle to sell to National Geographic. Moulton is big-bellied and long-haired with fingers oddly bent back at the last joint. He is a chain-smoker and talks of boredom as strength. He had specialized in "weird stories," but now is writing exclusively for Nicolaides. He suggests his friend Iggy, who specializes in "blood-curdlers" and can write nothing else.

Iggy's real surname is Gurevitch, but he changes it to Blaikie before becoming simply Iggy. He has a misleading "pool-room" look: lean, flushed face, frog-wide mouth, half-shaven, voice half incoherent. He is divorced from Eunice, who has married Jepson, but she forces him to watch their child while they go out. Iggy lives in the same villa to protect his daughter, "an overpetted dark little kid," from Jepson and because he still loves Eunice, who handles checks from New York and gives him an allowance to keep him from blowing money on the *foco rojo* (whorehouse) or playing cards.

After Caligula's humiliating performance hunting iguanas, Augie accepts Moulton's invitation to a perpetual drinking party on the second floor of Hilario's bar. Augie regularly out-bluffs Moulton at poker. When the madame at the *foco rojo* returns Iggy's forgotten jacket, Eunice throws him out on the street and Moulton refuses to take him in. Iggy is back in the villa by the time Augie and Thea break up, and he lets Augie live in a "stone cell at the top of the house," feeling like one of the damned. Iggy keeps him company, encouraging him to talk and then cutting him off, mixing pity with revenge. Learning that Augie intends to take a bus to Chilpanzingo and beg Thea to take him back, the two writers reveal that she has resumed her pre-Smitty romance with Talavera. Augie tries to attack them but a policeman is watching... When Jepson is deported to the U.S. for vagrancy, Eunice takes Iggy back.

Nails Nagel

The heavyweight boxer whom Dingbat believes that he can manage to a championship in order to win his father and half-brother's respect, Nails is strong and absorbs



punishment well, but lacks the heart to rise to the top. Dingbat makes him train rigorously.

Hilda Novinson

A tall, small-faced, pallid, shy but "hasty-spoken" young woman, Hilda is Augie March's first puppy love in high school. Augie follows her through the corridors, joins the Bonheur Club to be near her once a week, and follows her home on the street car to the West Side, but Hilda is oblivious. Her father is a tailor and they live behind his shop. Clem Tambow points out that she is not pretty and has "lousy teeth," but Augie persists. While love-struck he earns little money.

Kayo Obermark

Occupying the middle room between Augie March and Mimi Villars in the attic of the Owensens' house, Kayo at 22 is ponderous, large-faced, impatient, irritable, gloomy, and rough. He dislikes going to classes, preferring self-education. He is too lazy to clean his room or go to the bathroom, so the room reeks of urine stored in jars. Still, he is brilliant. Geology is his greatest interest but he is not disappointed in humanity—he simply does not care about it.

Mimi visits both Kayo and Augie to borrow things, store overflow clothing, or talk, but prefers Augie. When Augie brings her home suffering contractions from an induced abortion, Kayo talks bitterly about Christ bringing God down to human level. Imperfection is inevitable. One cannot live on a movie screen. One must not fear believing in something. Augie is always impressed with Kayo's speech even when he does not understand or agree. Kayo cares for Mimi while Augie works and helps take her to a hospital. Kayo tells Augie that everyone must go through intense bitterness in his or her chosen thing. This requires courage. Recalling this a year later in Mexico, Augie feel even worse about breaking up with Thea.

After Augie's return from Mexico, he teaches school with Kayo, who is now fat, sloppy, and as an emperor, married with a son, and urges that Augie do likewise. Augie complains to him about needing to simplify his life and of having his pride repeatedly injured. When Augie has told of his views on nature and human artifacts, Kayo informs him that Navajo and Sanskrit sources refer to this as "moha," the opposition of the finite, the "Bronx cheer of the conditioning forces." Infinite love is the only answer. Kayo invites Augie home to meet his wife, who is unfriendly, and his brother-in-law, who buys Augie's Oldsmobile for a moderate price, without Augie disclosing that the rods are bent. They then play poker to let him win back his money, and Augie cleans them both out. When the car does not run properly, Kayo snubs Augie at school for many days.



Oliver

One of the denizens of Hilario's bar in Acatla, Mexico, Oliver lives with beautiful actress Stella Chesney, Augie March's future wife, in the Carlos Quinto Hotel. Oliver publishes Wilmot's Weekly, a New York-based political magazine, and is an alcoholic. Evicted for bad morals from the hotel, they rent a village and he throws a housewarming party to flaunt the relationship. Meanwhile, rumors have it that U.S. agents are preparing to arrest him for tax evasion. During the party, Stella explains that the magazine is a front for the Fascist Italian government, run by Maltifano, who has been arrested, and the U.S. probably wants Oliver to turn states-evidence. Stella paints Oliver as an old-fashioned journalist who does not distinguish between governments. Because Oliver is heading for Acapulco, Stella heads for Mexico City to avoid fleeing to South America with him. Augie feels sorry for the fate he probably faces in the wild jungles. Oliver is arrested on the fateful day that Augie drives Stella to safety and loses Thea.

The Owenses

After reconnecting with his brother Simon, Augie March moves into transient housing on the South Side, continuing his book sales, and answering telephone calls and distributing mail for a beefy old Welshman, Mr. Owens in lieu of paying rent. They and Owen's spinster sister/housekeeper eavesdrop. Augie and tenants Mimi Villars and Kayo Obermark occupy the attic together and she frequently visits their rooms to borrow things, store overflow clothing, or talk.

Manny Padilla

A student at Crane College, Manny is a Mexican who excels at cracking mathematical equations. He is so poor that he works on scraps of paper, wears a filthy whitish suit and Salvation Army rummage shoes. He is on scholarship in math and physics but augments this by shoplifting expensive textbooks and selling them to students. He advises Augie March to set aside his outmoded Harvard Classics, earns a degree so that no one will be able to push him around, and specialize in something. When Augie pleads poverty, Manny recruits him for his shoplifting operation, assigning him to the humanities. Manny assures him he has no larceny at heart. It is not his fate, just what he does to get by now. He takes pride in his technique and has studied all sorts of stealing. Manny also shares with Augie his philosophy that "Either this stuff comes easy or it doesn't come at all."

Manny leaves shoplifting when he begins working in the biophysics lab, calculating the speed of nerve impulses. Augie consults him as a medical expert when his platonic friend Mimi suffers heavy bleeding and high fever after an abortion. Manny hurries over with drugs, warns of the seriousness of infection, arranges with a friend her admission to hospital, stays with her while Augie meets other obligations, and even donates blood. When Augie tells him about an upcoming trip to Mexico with Thea Fechnel, Manny gives him a cousin's address in Mexico City. Returning from his Mexican adventure, Augie



looks up Manny and admits that Manny had been right about following Thea, but Manny tells him not to blame himself too much. He again advises Augie to return to the university.

Paslavitch

A friendly Yugoslav journalist who sympathizes with the thought of Leon Trotsky, Paslavitch takes in a penniless Augie March at his villa near Mexico City in exchange for English lessons. Paslavitch is worried, meek, stubborn, and emotional, frequently to the point of tears. He plays Chopin on the piano and tells stories from French history and culture, which he greatly admires. They drink heavily together. Fraser floats the idea of Augie becoming part of Trotsky's incognito to throw off the Soviet secret police, but when Trotsky vetoes the idea, Augie decides to go home to Chicago. Paslavitch declares repeatedly in French how he will miss Augie and gives him \$200 traveling money. Augie declares him to be one of the world's few decent guys.

Renée

A voluptuous woman who leaves her husband the same night as she meets Simon March in a Detroit night club, Renée becomes his mistress in Chicago, spending most of every day with or near him. They claim to love one another and to want her to be friends with Augie, who is defensive about Simon's wife Charlotte. Initially Renée treats Augie with suspicion and eventually has nothing to say to him. Simon explains that it has nothing to do with Charlotte, who also has complete freedom, and that Renée knows that she can never have exclusive claim to Simon. Renée keeps tabs on whatever Charlotte has and demands the same.

When Charlotte stops pretending that Renée does not exist and provokes a scene, Renée agrees to go to California, if adequately paid off. When she returns, claiming that she is pregnant, Simon is indifferent, provoking a half-hearted attempt at suicide using sleeping pills. After World War II, Charlotte tells Augie in Paris the end of Renée's tale. Renée had documented everywhere she and Simon had gone and what they had done, had taunted Charlotte about being unable to have children, and begged her to set Simon free to have a family. When Renée sues for patromony, Charlotte warns Simon of the summons and sends him out of town. Renée also sues three other men and in the end there proved to be no baby. She eventually marries one of the three and disappears.

The Renlings

The gloomy but patient manager of an upscale sporting goods store in Evanston, IL, Renling takes a chance on hiring a Jew after giving Augie March the kind of once-over that slaves used to get on the auction block. Renling looks like a head waiter or chief of bellhops. With his wife, Renling "glamorizes" Augie to fit the "high-pressure" sales environment of the saddle shop, turning him into a "clotheshorse." Mrs. Renling



encourages Augie to take riding lessons, but Mr. Renling will not allow enough for him to become accomplished, arguing that he sells guns without ever having shot an animal. She wants to teach him refinement as she has earlier salesmen and make him perfect.

Mrs. Renling is 55, light-haired starting to gray, freckled, hard-eyed, with the accent of her native Luxembourg. She is equally proud of her Old World nobility and her American republicanism. She dislikes aristocrats. She teaches Augie the arcana of cooking and is in general an unstoppable force. Mrs. Renling makes Augie break up with a stewardess, Willa Steiner, whom he briefly dates, warning him about thieving tramps. She then demands that Augie drive her to the mineral baths at Benton Harbor, ostensibly to treat her rheumatism, but in fact to get him away from Willa. Mrs. Renling refuses to eat alone and requires Augie to be present in her room for breakfast, while she gossips about fellow guests. Listening is a chore for Augie. She warns Augie away from the dangerous heiress Thea Fenchel, but Augie is in love with her sister Esther, who rejects him. When Mrs. Renling proposes to adopt him to secure an heir, Augie needs out. She mocks him for preferring common things.

Robey

A South Side Chicago millionaire determined to write the definitive scholarly book on "human happiness from the standpoint of the rich," Robey hires Augie March as a research assistant on recommendation from Arthur Einhorn, who has already turned the position down. Robey has studied under the Marxist Hooker Fraser. Robey is tall, bent, and scraggly bearded, stammers badly, and has large, inflamed, and reticent eyes that express hard luck. He has been married and divorced four or five times. His mother had believed herself Queen of Rockford, IL, and lived with all the trappings. His sister Caroline, who lives with him, believes herself a Spaniard.

Reluctantly, Augie visits Robey's lake-front mansion, is put off by the shabby meal and self-centered conversation. Augie wants a job description but hears that the program will cover many ideas that Augie must document. It will allow Augie to read widely while being paid. Robey offers \$15 a week and is talked up to \$20 plus a free room, which gives him altogether too much access to Augie for the latter's taste. The book will survey all eras and cultures, as ideas come to Robey. Robey heaps readings on Augie and demands businesslike, twice-weekly conferences to question him and examine his notebooks. At times, Robey is vexed or distracted and once goes to war on cockroaches during a session. By autumn Robey loses his grip, continues giving assignments and paying, but does no work himself. Augie finally gets fed up and charges that Robey only wants someone to take his nervousness. Robey apologizes and wins him back. Having taken care of George, Augie is used to dealing with dependency and confusion. During World War II, Robey moves to Washington, D.C.



Clarence Ruber

An acquaintance of Augie March's from Crane College, Ruber takes Augie into his house on Blackstone Ave. when he can stand to live with the Renlings any longer. He is quiet, dirty-speaking, smooth-faced, fat-bottomed, and well-dressed. He has recently opened a decorating store that services hotels. A wealthy widow is backing him. He has lined up a revolutionary product to prevent water rot in bathrooms. Augie leaves Ruber at his first opportunity.

Mildred Stark

A heavy, crippled, childless woman in her thirties with black hair, strong brows, and a somewhat "struggle-weakened head," Mildred falls in love with William Einhorn as many have before. She writes him in verse to volunteer to work gratis in his office. Quickly she becomes his full-time secretary, confidant, and handmaiden. Tillie Einhorn accepts Mildred, making allowances for William's special needs as a cripple. Mildred takes over raising William and Tillie's grandson.

Willa Steiner

A waitress from Symington, whom Augie March briefly dates, Willa "makes no bones" about why they are together. She has a lover at home whom she expects to marry. Augie's mentor, Mrs. Renling calls Willa a prostitute and declares that her nose makes her look Indian. She is after Augie's money. Mrs. Renling will not hear a defense of Willa, and takes him away on a vacation, where he meets the rich woman who soon takes him on his Mexican adventure. Returning, Augie searches for Willa but cannot find her.

Dr. Stracciatella

An abortionist with no bedside manner, Stracciatella wants \$15 up-front for an injection that can cause contractions sufficient to "expel" Mimi Villars' "trouble," but warns that \$100 worth of dilation and curettage might be needed afterward. He also performs that, gives no discounts, and does not haggle. He refers to the D&C as what "actresses in Hollywood describe in the paper as appendicitis." Mimi is not amused and wants explanations that he will not provide. His attitude is: take it or leave it. His office, stinking of cigars and the hairy, sedentary doctor himself, is above a music store, so the strains of amplified guitars penetrate the floor. When not engaged with a patient, he reads Spinoza and Hegel. Mimi takes the injection and leaves cursing the "dirty, bloody gypper." When she fails to get a legal abortion at a hospital, Mimi returns for the procedure. Afterwards, as Augie nearly carries her down the stairs, they encounter Kelly Weintraub, a Magnus cousin, also cousin to Stracciatella.



Sylvester

The son of the palsied theater owner nicknamed "the Baker," Sylvester runs Sylvester's Star Theatre while looking to go back to the Armour Institute and complete his engineering degree. Meeting twelve-year-old Augie March for the first time, Sylvester acts tough, warning against dumping handbills rather than distributing them all. This puts ideas in Augie's mind. Money and family anxiety keep Sylvester in a constant sweat, and when he loses the theater, he moves back with his father, who is going through a nasty annulment. The son discovers that he is not cut out for classroom study and often supervises Clem Tambow's sales operations on Milwaukee Ave. He thinks young, like the younger Augie and Jimmy Klein, and shares with them his dreams of traveling the globe as an engineer. He sympathizes with Lenin and Trotsky.

By the time the stock market crashes in 1929, Sylvester is a busy member of the Communist Party and takes part in picketing the Einhorn properties. Sylvester tries to recruit Simon March, but Simon comes to meetings simply to kill time. Sylvester washes out at Armour Tech and moves to New York, working underground as a draftsman, growing sallow and Turkish-looking. He is expelled from the Communist Party and joins the Trotskyites, considering himself still a Bolshevik. He returns to Chicago ostensibly to visit his father but actually to contact Hooker Frazer. He also visits his former sister-in-law, Mimi Villars, to get her help in winning Annie back. She refuses, because Sylvester "leaks misery."

Sylvester studies Marxism diligently, determined to prove his worthiness to serve as a commissar. Long afterwards, when Augie and Thea are living in Acatla, Mexico, Augie recognizes Sylvester as part of Leon Trotsky's security guard and ostensibly a technician. They talk briefly, Sylvester telling Augie that it is hard to arrange an audience with Trotsky but adds that Hooker Frazer is one of his personal secretaries. Sylvester is in New York when Augie and Stella marry, and attends the reception, speaking seriously for a change, recalling the old days at the theater. He is off politics by then.

Talavera

A young Mexican who handles for his father the taxi and horse rental trade in Acatla, Mexico, and hangs around the local bar, Talavera makes Augie March uncomfortable at first meeting. He has a tanned face, freestyle hair, is movie star-handsome, and is both soft and haughty. He is said to have trained as a mining engineer but prefers to be a sportsman, living on his father's money. From Talavera Senior, Augie and Thea Fenchel rent Old Bizococho, an ancient warhorse, to carry the eagle Caligula into the mountains for a calamitous iguana hunt. Talavera Junior turns out to have been Thea's lover before she marries Smitty and returns to the role while Augie lies recovering from a head injury. When Thea takes off for Chilpanzingo, Talavera follows. It is unclear whether he accompanies her further to Yucatán.



The Tambows

Jimmy Klein's uncle, Tambow (no given name mentioned) is a big-wheel in Chicago's Republican ward politics. He frequently hires Jimmy and Augie March to run errands and attend his notions stand on Milwaukee Ave. while he plays poker. His own sons refuse to work for him. He is divorced and lives in a single room. He indulges his sons in competition with their step-father. Tambow has a huge nose and loose, green/gray skin. He wheezes from excessive weight and cigar smoking.

Clem Tambow looks like his father, while brother Donald is handsome, taking after their mother. Clem reads about lords and affects a British swagger. He has a booming "haw-haw" laugh. He wants to be an actor but gets booed off the stage in amateur hours. He struts but suffers melancholy and is jealous of Augie's good looks. During the Depression, Clem does his best to avoid class in his senior year. His mother chides him about becoming a "superior bum." Clem answers that he would sooner swallow cyanide than perform stoop labor. Instead, he masturbates in bed. His dim, unemployed step-father is also unemployed and spends his time reading the Jewish Courier.

When Clem receives an inheritance, he registers in the university in the psychology department, and visits Augie. Clem laments both his own physical ugliness, which limits his sex life, and not appreciating his father enough. Psychology books are helping him clarify his ideas. He attends ridiculous classes rarely and plays poker a lot. His outlook is already middle-aged. He challenges Augie about always waiting for something, reading books, rather than acting and making money.

Later Clem pursues Augie's platonic friend, Mimi Villars, who lives in his building, but he stands no chance, because she already has a man, Hooker Frazer. As Augie and Mimi become good friends, Tambow suspects sexual intimacy. When he returns from his Mexican adventure, Augie visits Clem, who has matured and is near finishing his degree. Like Manny Padilla, he advises Augie to return to the university. Augie resents Clem's haw-hawing at his misfortunes, but agrees that he needs to specialize. Clem pushes him to study psychology, which has opened his eyes, or to travel together up the Nile and establish himself as an Egyptologist after ten years. Clem lectures on concrete ambition, to become a Man of stature. Recalling an incident in elementary school, when boys who draw imagined flowers rather than real are punished, Clem lectures about Augie's strong superego and need to accept.

Clem proposes that after he finishes his degree they go into legitimate business together as vocational-guidance counselors, he giving aptitude tests and Augie conducting interviews. It is simple and lucrative. Augie responds by telling him about a revelation of "the axial lines of life." He has always since childhood felt that they exist but has resisted them. Through aligning with them, anyone can achieve "truth, love, peace, bounty, usefulness, harmony." One need not be great to live with true joy. Clem calls Augie persistent and obstinate. Working for Robey has shown Augie that there is too much information in the world for him to benefit by formal education. It would be better to dig ditches. He does not want to be exemplary, but marry, settle down on a



farm, take in Mama and George, and open a home school for institutionalized children. Clem finds this fantastic but warns that it sounds like a reaction to his father's abandoning the family: Augie wants to be a king. He wishes Augie luck but has doubts.

Mimi Villars

A non-student living in the Owenses' house where Augie March answers phone calls and distributes mail in lieu of rent, Mimi becomes Augie's close, platonic friend—although no one will believe that they are not having sex. She is very fair and ruddy with a "tough beauty" marked by pencil-thin eyebrows, curly hair, a large mouth that can say almost anything without thought, violent laughter, thin hips, large breasts, and muscular legs. Mimi waits tables in a student hash-house on Ellis Ave. She is originally from Los Angeles, CA, the daughter of a silent film actor. She comes to Chicago to study but is expelled for sexual impropriety.

When first introduced in the novel, Mimi's lover is Hooker Frazer, a graduate assistant in political science and one of Augie's book customers. Augie's ugly boyhood friend, Clem Tambow also has a crush on her. She is proud of having been arrested for shoplifting and convincing the court psychiatrist that she is a kleptomaniac. She is remorseful about having subdued a mugger, shot him in the groin with his own gun, and testified to get him imprisoned; she sends him packages and letters. She claims to have rescued Frazer from a "House of Pain" (referring to H.G. Wells' *The Island of Dr. Moreau*) from his first wife, although the divorce is not finalized. Mimi regularly reviles Frazer over the phone, making no attempt at privacy. She then waits for his next call. Mimi tells Augie that women are no good; they only want a husband and care nothing about politics. When Augie does not rise to her challenges she attacks him as a "bonehead" and declares pregnancy to be life's worst swindle. Augie is too indulgent of women. Mimi's greatest lesson to Augie is that "everyone sees to it his fate is shared."

When Frazer gets her pregnant and heads to Louisiana to lecture, Mimi turns to Augie, denying any interest in marriage and tells of a doctor who brings on miscarriages by injection. She has tried home remedies. They argue about the value of lives begun by accident and consisting of little but suffering. Mimi sees value in the "little scallop" never seeing light, but existing in oblivion. Women in particular are doomed to decline. Augie takes her to Dr. Stracciatella, who repulses her, but she accepts the \$15 injection. Augie then takes her home and puts her to bed, where she experiences terrible contractions but they accomplish nothing. She hears Augie and fellow roommate Kayo talking and resents being the subject. Because Augie has responsibilities, Kayo must look in on Mimi next day.

Looking for legal means of ending the pregnancy, she visits a clinic to convince them that her life would be in danger delivering full-term. They suspect a tubal pregnancy and want to explore. The operation finds a normal pregnancy, which they are not at liberty to terminate. Mimi is upset by maternity nurses' congratulations and determined to return to Stracciatella. She has \$50; Augie goes out to raise the remainder. Augie takes her for the procedure, which leaves Mimi weak. On the way out they run into Kelly Weintraub, a



Magnus cousin, and Mimi tries to explain that Augie is just a kind friend. At home, Mimi bleeds profusely and spikes a fever. Kayo cares for her while Augie works—she being too weak to protest—and that night Augie, Kayo, and Manny Padilla decides that the risk of infection is high and take her to the hospital. Manny waits while Augie goes to his party, and donates blood. Augie returns, broken off with Lucy, questions the doctor, and visits Mimi in the maternity ward at 1 AM. She is depressed being among crying and suckling babies.

Mimi goes back to work, repays Augie, and begins an affair with Arthur Einhorn. Arthur's quadriplegic father, William, makes a pass at Mimi when Arthur on her first visit to their home and there is never any love lost between them. Mimi tells Augie that he is terrible to his son, nagging and belittling him. Mimi resents Arthur's ex-wife abandoning her child there. She is also bitter about Frazer going back to his wife and skipping out on loans.

When Augie declares that he is in love with Thea Fenchel and intends to follow her to Mexico, Mimi merely laughs. He looks her up after returning from that disastrous trip and is again involved in Mimi's feud with William, who accuses her of ruining his son. Mimi is still bitter. She and Arthur take turns working while the other is sick with flu, but she wants him to finish writing his book. Augie tells Mimi everything and admits all those who told him not to go with Thea had been right. Mimi laughs at him, saying guys like him make life simple for women like Thea. He does not try to correct her, because she has made up her mind. She lectures him as had Clem Tambow about curing his attitudes, seeing things as they are, including the bad with the good. Most people just want to be left alone. Mimi is not in favor of Arthur's recommendation that Augie become the research assistant to Robey, but he accepts. She then disappears from the story before the advent of World War II.

Kelly Weinstraub

A neighborhood bully from Augie March's youth, Weinstraub is related to the wealthy Magnuses. Augie stands up to him in defense of brother Georgie in the old days and later sees him watching him intently at Magnus family gatherings. Weinstraub catches Augie helping Mimi Villars down the stairs after an abortion performed by Weinstraub's cousin, Dr. Stracciatella. Augie knows that he will use this to ruin him with fiancée Lucy Magnus.



Objects/Places

Benton Harbor / St. Joseph, MI

Benton Harbor is a luxury resort featuring mineral baths for treating rheumatism. It is first mentioned when Augie March's big brother Simon gets a summer job there, which turns him into a materialist. Augie himself passes through years once, hitchhiking home to Chicago from Muskegon with Dingbat Einhorn and Nails Nagel, but the resort comes into focus when he accompanies his rich mentor, Mrs. Renling, as part of her ploy to break off his relationship with waitress Willa Steiner. They stay in the luxurious Merritt Hotel, build on the shore of Lake Michigan, in imitation of the opulent Saratoga Springs establishments. Besides bathing, Augie wanders through the surrounding orchards tended by pious, apocalyptic-minded House of David Israelites. At the resort he meets beautiful sisters Esther and Thea Fenchel, is rejected by the former and sought by the second. When the Fenchels check out, Thea promises to find Augie again, and years later makes good, which leads to a trip to Mexico.

Bizcocho

An ancient horse that Augie March and Thea Fenchel rent from Talavera's father in Acatla, Mexico, to hunt giant iguanas, Bizcocho is a wounded veteran of guerrilla battles during the Zapatista rebellion, over two decades earlier, and is fit only to be gored in the bull ring. Bizcocho does not, however, shrink from the eagle as had burros and other horses, and he masters the intricate coordination needed to launch the eagle properly into flight. On the second attempt, Bizcocho picks up too much speed and throws Augie, knocking him unconscious. Suffering a broken leg, Bizcocho is shot. Bizcocho provides Saul Bellow's excuse for describing some of the atrocities of the Mexican civil war of 1910.

Caligula

The American eagle that Augie March and Thea Fenchel purchase from George H. Somebody-or-other, in Texarcana, planning to train it to capture giant iguanas in Mexico, Caligula is more than an armful. He has a pressed-down head, killing eyes, and legs that look like they are clothed in Janissary pants of feathers. He is already quite large when they claim him and lodge him in the back of Thea's station wagon. He has not come into the white head feathers of maturity. Augie hates Caligula at first, resenting how he interferes with intimacy with Thea, who is instantly absorbed with him. Raw meat is the key to taming him to accept a hood. His talons crush and tear even through thick gloves. He is too heavy for Thea to carry for long, so Augie's arm suffers most.

Near Laredo they being letting him fly, tethered. Everywhere they go, excited children and adults scream, "El águila," Spanish for eagle; Augie hears "Caligula," and the name sticks. In motels Caligula's usual perch is the toilet tank. He is glorious once he learns to



soar, but does not take to the lure well. It is difficult for mules or horses to accept him, hooded, as a passenger. By the time they reach Thea's villa at Acatla, Augie is in dread of Caligula and wants to sell or free him or find him dead. Caligula stands in the way of love. Once he is trained to their voices, they graduate from attacking lures to live but tethered lizards, Caligula proves a failure. The prey bites him and he seems shocked and retreats. Thea is furious that he will not kill or eat. From Talavera Senior, they rent Old Bizococho, an ancient warhorse, after burros and other horses shy away from the eagle. After a few days practice, they are ready to hunt the fast and savage iguanas. Caligula attacks and engages in a fight, but then retreats. Thea is furious at the cowardice, throws rocks at him, and threatens to kill him as he flies off. Augie hopes that he would strike out to Canada or Brazil, while Thea wishes him in hell. They find him at the villa, frightening everyone. For a week, Augie is Caligula's sole custodian.

When given a second chance to prove himself, Caligula fails miserably and Augie is seriously injured when thrown from a horse. Disgusted, Thea sells Caligula and takes up collecting poisonous snakes, an undertaking that leads to her and Augie's break-up and his return to Chicago.

Chicago, IL

The lion's share of the novel is set in Chicago, which Augie March describes as a rough place without illusions. Scenes are set primarily on the South and East sides, and a number of places receive special attention. The March family is on relief even before the Depression, and the operation of the "Charities," a collective term for social agencies, is depicted. Grandma instructs young Augie in how to talk to officials to obtain what the family needs, a task that he enjoys. They also obtain services at the Free Dispensary on Harrison St., particularly eyeglasses for Mama. Grandma prefers not to go there for dentistry.

Augie gets his first job, while still in high school at Sylvester's Star Theatre, already a failing enterprise, whose shutdown shows Chicago's economic decline. It becomes a wallpaper and paint business. Augie gets his first taste of organized crime while working at the Bluegren Florist, delivering huge floral displays to funeral homes when gangsters meet their bloody ends. Later, when helping organize workers for the CIO, Augie remarks that it is not unheard of for bullets to fly on the streets of Chicago. Working as Christmas elves at Deever's Department Store, Augie and run a scheme to defraud the company of 25¢ per gift bag, assuming there will be no audit. At the end of the season, they are charged with theft of \$70 (more than they actually take). When next Augie is tempted to crime, he remembers this frightful experience—but does it anyway.

Federal News Company provides Simon March's first break in the business world, selling concessions at the railroad stations in Chicago and candy and papers on the trains. Advanced to the busy La Salle Street Station, where celebrities are often seen, Simon gets Audie a job, but in an out-of-the-way stand, where Audie fails to meet quotas and is fired. The Depression causes staff cut-backs.



The economic misery in Chicago of this period fills many pages. It is most clearly shown in the demise of the Einhorn family's fortunes. Built largely on the basis of word-of-mouth agreements and shady deals, the enterprise is reduced from vast real estate holdings, including the Einhorn home, whose opulence is often described, to a single poolroom, frequented by "hoodlums." William Einhorn's callous evictions of tenants unable to pay rent attracts Communist protesters, while his inept attempts at bribing zoning officials hastens his empire's demise. There Augie is recruited for a theft that leaves him even more sour on crime, but he returns to it once more and barely avoids arrest. Augie's brother Simon comes close to becoming a millionaire despite the times and his in-law's home and his own high-rise apartment, overlooking the city, are described in detail. The novel gives the reader a broad and detailed picture of Chicago in the 1920s and 1930s.

It also depicts two unnamed institutions of social welfare. First, is a home for mentally deficient adolescents to which George March is committed lest he become a community risk. It is located an hour's trip away on the far West Side. It has wired windows, dog-proof cyclone fence, an asphalt yard, and "great gloom. Inmates watch as Mama and Augie settle George in the dormitory. Terrified, George breaks into his moan. Mama grows too blind to visit him alone, so Augie takes her. There George learns broom-making before he outgrows the facility and is transferred to an adult facility downstate. The second is a home for the blind to which Mama is committed. It is depicted as quite comfortable and specially laid out for the needs of the blind. A third institution, the Nelson Home for the Aged and Infirm, provides Grandma's final home. She deludes herself that it is a deluxe, intellectual estate, and is stoical about the stark reality she enters.

Evanston, IL

Augie March's home while selling luxury shoe lines in the millionaire suburbs of Highland Park, Kenilworth, and Winnetka, Evanston is located on the North Shore. Jews are unpopular there, but Augie is given a change by Mr. Renling, manager of the sporting good store. In Evanston, Augie lives in a student loft. Mr. and Mrs. Renling see to his wardrobe, turning him into a "clotheshorse." He takes riding lessons, but not enough to become accomplished.

France

After World War II, Augie and Stella March settle in Paris, where she works in the movie industry. Augie is frequently in Italy as an agent of the New York lawyer Mintouchian. Alain du Niveau, a friend of Mintouchian, helps them find their way in society and fills them in on gossip. He is a descendant of the Duc de Saint-Simon. The Marches' apartment is in the expensive area near the Champs Elysées. To visiting brother Simon it is a pigpen, but Augie insists that neither is home much. Du Niveau takes them all to an exhibition at the Petit Palais.



Merchant Marine

At the outbreak of World War II, turned down by the Army and Navy, Augie March joins the Merchant Marine. He undergoes training at Sheepshead Bay, NY, with training cruises in Chesapeake Bay aboard an old scow from Pres. McKinley's era. Voyages remind Augie of paintings by Hieronymus Bosch. Food is good and plentiful, and time is spent in drilling and horseplay. Augie attends Purser's and Pharmacist's Mate's School. During this time he meets and marries Stella at City Hall in Manhattan.

Two days later, Augie ships out of Boston aboard the sooty, rattling, middle-aged freighter Sam MacManus. Augie's duties as druggist and bookkeeper are light, giving him time to read and write a chronicle to Stella that he intends to post from Dakar. Word gets out that Augie is a good listener and he becomes the unofficial "ship's confidant." He recalls their stories in detail as a testimony to their lives, lost to a German torpedo on the 15th day out, near the Canary Islands. MacManus sinks swiftly, leaving Augie and a carpenter's mate, Basteshaw, alone in one lifeboat, but they see at least one crowded one moving away across the still-flaming waters. Trying to lower a boat stuck on its davit, Augie is thrown into the water and realizes that he must swim far enough away to avoid being sucked down when the ship plummets.

Mexico

In the second half of the novel, Augie March, his lover Thea Fenchel, and an American eagle named Caligula, travel in Mexico. Until reaching Mexico City, they stop only for supplies and to train the eagle to fly and hunt. He causes a sensation everywhere they go, sometimes wonder, sometimes terror. Augie describes Mexican towns as never-sleeping and mounting religious processions on Sundays. The sky grows more brilliant blue as they enter the Valley of Mexico, where before the Spaniards the Indians had worshiped Aldebaran with human sacrifices and eagles figured in the pantheon. Death remains a normal part of Mexican life; the living and the dead are both "dumped upon."

Augie and Thea reach Mexico City on the tenth day and stay a few days in the cheap but remarkably clean La Regina Hotel. Thea does not care for the city but must meet her husband Smitty's lawyer to complete their divorce. When the police outside the Cathedral declare that the eagle is dangerous and demand to see Augie's papers, Thea decides it is time to move on to her house in Acatla.

Acatla is located in the mountains, which have been heavily mined for silver, in the midst of sheer cliffs. Beyond the semi-tropical band of vegetation surrounding the village are parched lands where iguanas and poisonous snakes abound. The square affront the cathedral is zócalo. A bit uphill from there is Thea's villa, "Casa Descuitada"—Carefree House. The cook and houseboy, mother and son, stand respectfully. Jacinto follows the Americans, thrilled, and becomes their assistant. The house is large and handsome with two patios, suitable for Caligula's training. Near the villa is a luxury hotel, the Carlos Quinto, which attracts an international crowd, and Hilario's bar, where everyone knows Thea and her family from frequent visits. Acatla's foreign colony comes from a dozen



countries. After the eagle's act of cowardice in attacking an iguana estranges Augie and Thea, he joins a perpetual drinking-and-poker party on the second floor of Hilario's (sometimes adjourned to Louis Fu's filthy Chinese restaurant or the front of the foco rojo). Augie and Thea drift apart as they concentrate on their own interests and dislike the other's. When her divorce becomes final, Thea refuses to marry Augie. The Christmas season provides a series of fiestas.

One day a column of European automobiles shows up in the square and private security forces—thugs—emerge. Augie deduces the chief must be Leon Trotsky, on whose life Stalin has put out a contract. Hope of meeting Trotsky are slim. After a brawl in town Thea announces that she wants to move to Chilpanzingo and chides him for his heavy drinking. He is willing to go, because he wants to be with her more than anyone in the world. Needing to get away from Oliver, Stella asks Augie to drive her to Mexico City, but he can take her only to Cuernavaca, far enough from Acatla to be safe. They take a wrong turn on a narrow, empty road in a construction zone, get stuck, and make love in the grass. Workers extricate the car in the morning and they reach town, where Stella catches a ride to the capital. Its shops, opening for business are described as typically Mexican. Rejected by Thea, Augie returns to Mexico City, where he lives briefly with a Yugoslav journalist at his villa.

Muskegon, MI

The venue for a boxing match involving Dingbat's fighter, Nails Nagel, Muskegon is most economically reached by water. During the trip on the City of Saugatuck, Nails gets seasick and arrives too weak to fight. Still Dingbat and Augie March, his assistant manager, feed and train Nails at the YMCA, and hope for the best at the Lion's Club against Prince Jaworski. Nails falls so quickly that fans claim he has taken a dive. Flat broke, they have to hitchhike miserably back to Chicago.

Winnie

Grandma Lausch's senile, overfed, "loud-breathing and wind-breaking" poodle, Winnie rules the March household. She dies in May after George March is committed to the Home. Augie buries her in a shoe box in the yard.



Themes

Education

The Adventures of Augie March purports to be a memoir spanning some twenty-five years. Education runs through it as a constant theme and for the early part of the novel presents the reader a quandary: how is Augie, who repeatedly claims to be unfit for academics, salt his text with such impressive chains of allusions to history, literature, philosophy, and religion? While a schoolboy, Augie is constantly reminded by Grandma Lausch that unless he buckles down and studies like his big brother Simon, he will be condemn himself to a life of common labor. Augie is too easily distracted by life in the neighborhood and only fitfully rises to his academic potential. Grandma prides herself on being an intellectual, rereading Anna Karenina and Eugene Onegin annually and bragging of having sent her grown sons to gymnasium. Her tyranny, however, vitiates any example she might set.

Simon by contrast graduates high school as class valedictorian, but like Augie he enrolls in community college only because the Depression has made jobs scarce. He seeks only to prepare himself for civil service jobs. While working part-time, Augie obtains a full set of the Harvard Classics, a rich anthology which he regularly reads. Many of his allusions are drawn from titles in this set. When a student whom he admires tells him that these are passé, Augie broadens his range, often by holding back choice titles that he has shoplifted for other students. Several times benefactors stress obtaining a degree and specializing in some field in order to escape a life of drudgery, and even provide tuition money, but Augie's classroom time is always limited. He has friends who prefer self-education, including Clem Tambow, who as a boy avoids classes and is warned by his own mother that he is destined to become a bum. He later applies himself and earns a master's degree in psychology, a field that he assures Augie offers great insights.

Augie's final benefactor, a millionaire determined to write the definitive scholarly book on "human happiness from the standpoint of the rich," gives him, as a paid research assistant, the opportunity to read systematically and deeply in all areas of the humanities. This appears, very late in the novel, to solve the mystery of Augie's erudition.

Crime

Set in Chicago in the era of the classic gangster, The Adventures of Augie March repeatedly subjects the narrator to the temptation of petty crime and in his formative years he works for a tycoon whose business practice are shady. He first encounters the Mob while delivering lavish floral arrangements to funeral homes for the funerals of "hoodlums" gunned down in the streets. Later, when pursued by an AFL tough while



organizing for the CIO—an altogether legal but risky endeavor—Augie contemplates that gunfire on the crowded streets of Chicago is not a rarity.

As a schoolboy, Augie joins his friend, Jimmy Klein, who is constantly in trouble, in defrauding a department store of tiny amounts of money per transaction while working as Santa's helpers one Christmas. They assume the operation is too vast to be audited, but are wrong. The store does not press charges, but recovers from the boys more than they steal. The experience sours Augie for a while to crime. Later, however, unemployed and hanging around a pool hall, Augie is enticed by Joe Gorman, a professional thief who has twice done prison time, to serve as lookout for the robbery of a leather goods shop. The heist is successful but traumatic, and Gorman takes Augie's bowing out of future jobs in stride. Crime is not for everyone. Years later, however, when Augie needs a break, he runs into Joe Gorman again, looking prosperous and smuggling immigrants into the U.S. from Canada. He needs help driving. There is minimal risk in exchange for \$50. They drive fast to Lackawanna, where the state troopers spot the Buick, which Gorman has failed to tell Augie is stolen. They separate, planning to meet in Buffalo. Hidden, Augie a squad car brings in a bloody-faced, dazed Gorman. Again, Augie is cured of crime. Augie's benefactor, William Einhorn, whose business dealings are decidedly shady, hypocritically lectures Augie on the wages of sin.

Augie's longest involvement in crime—and his closest call—come when he apprentices in shoplifting expensive textbooks to sell to university students. Manny Padilla assures him he has no larceny at heart and stealing is not his fate, just what he does to get by for now. Manny takes pride in his technique and has studied all sorts of stealing. Augie has a long string of successes, which ends when he is obtaining money to get a friend an abortion, which is strictly illegal at that time. He is fortunate that the "house dick" who catches him is his old partner in crime during the Christmas caper. Jimmy confiscates the textbooks but tells his employer that the unknown thief has escaped. For the rest of the novel, Augie never again has the need to steal.

Sex

Sex runs throughout *The Adventures of Augie March*. As a youth, Augie sees and hears about men and boys masturbating as a natural act but says nothing about whether he indulges. His first bout of puppy love is an utter failure. His mentally-challenged brother George is put in an institution to guard the little girls of the neighborhood as soon as he reaches puberty, on the assumption that he will not be able to resist temptation. Augie's first sexual experience comes in a whorehouse, as a high school graduation gift from his employer, William Einhorn, who, although a quadriplegic, has a powerful sex drive and needs to be carried from the car upstairs and carefully arranged in bed. Augie enjoys the experience but reminds himself that it is just a transaction for the whore. When Augie gets to Mexico he finds whorehouses plentiful but refrains. His first real girlfriend makes no bones about sex being her prime interest in the relationship, but Augie's pushy employer/benefactor finds the little tramp beneath his dignity and whisks him away to a resort, where he promptly falls in lust with beautiful Esther Fenchel.



Watching Esther oil herself on the beach brings Augie an embarrassing erection. When Augie gets up the nerve to talk to Esther before dinner in the hotel, he is rejected so categorically that he faints dead away. Her equally-beautiful sister Thea later explains that Esther believes the rumors that he is 55-year-old Mrs. Renling's gigolo. As Augie gasps protests, Thea declares that this is quite common in Europe and does not diminish her own love for Augie. When the Fenchels check out, Thea promises to find Augie again, and years later makes good, which leads to a torrid affair—the most explicitly described in the novel—and trip to Mexico, which ends when each rightly believes that the other is being unfaithful.

No one will believe that Augie's relationship with his neighbor, Mimi Villars, is entirely platonic. A beautiful would-be actress, Mimi is expelled from college for sexual impropriety and at the time she and Augie meet is having an affair with an affair with a Marxist graduate student who claims to be getting divorced from his horrible wife. When Augie helps Mimi through a terrible abortion, he is caught by his almost-fiancée's cousin. Again, no one believes that he is not the father, and the engagement ends.

The affair with Lucy Magnus takes place within the context of her cousin Charlotte's marriage to Augie's brother Simon. Having endured an arranged marriage falling through, entirely by his own fault, Simon explicitly marries for money and opportunity and wants Augie to do likewise, in order to consolidate their resources. Lucy is even wealthier than Charlotte. Lucy flirts openly with Augie throughout the ceremony, they date, and Augie for his own honor's sake accepts Lucy's clear boundaries while necking. Simon goes on to have an open affair with a woman he meets in a night club. When Charlotte finally confronts him, Simon pays Renée to disappear to California. She returns, however, claiming to be pregnant, and eventually sues Simon and three other men for paternity. The claim cannot be proven and Simon and Charlotte remain married, albeit not happily.

Augie is in the midst of a hot affair with a sexy labor organizer bored while waiting for her wedding day when Thea returns. Hoping through Thea to get to her sister Esther, Augie breaks off with Sophie Geratis. Augie's first encounter with Thea begins in her elevator and barely makes it inside the apartment door before they are making wild love on the white carpet. They spend days together in bed. Thea clearly has studied what men most enjoy. Against his friends' warnings, Augie follows Thea to Mexico, where she intends to finalize her divorce from her older, wealthy husband, who catches her having sex with a sailor. She later admits to multiple indiscretions and returns to her husband's Mexican predecessor, the smarmy Talavera, dumping Augie.

Thea's immediate reason for dumping Augie is her belief that he has had sex with Stella Chesney, another member of the international set in Mexico. Stella and her lover Oliver throw a party in their new villa to flaunt their relationship in the face of the hotel that evicts them for cohabiting while unmarried. Augie helps her escape from Oliver, but his car breaks down on a deserted mountain road at night, and they give in to the inevitable on a patch of grass, Stella giving herself to Augie as a treasure. Years later, they meet in New York while he is training for the Merchant Marine and marry when he graduates and ships out to the war. Before they marry, Stella's friend, speaks obliquely about the



transience of relationships and women's need to move on. The still idealistic Augie takes offense. After the war, Augie and Stella cool down but remain married. Finding time on his hands, Augie writes his candid memoirs, in which sex is handled more and more explicitly as he gets used to the theme. Written in a single block of time, Augie's early timidity cannot be explained by by inexperience. Rather, he seems simply to grow accustomed to dealing with it as a subject.

Style

Point of View

The Adventures of Augie March is presented as the fictitious narrator's memoir. Author Saul Bellow virtually removes himself from the story in favor of giving his chief character complete autonomy. This mitigates against the examination of anyone's inner mental processes except Augie's—and anyone's whom he might, rightly or wrongly, surmise. Augie is consciously telling his life's story to people whom he believes to be interested in the details of his tale and not antithetic to his foibles and many failings. He prides himself on honesty and integrity (after adolescence, when it is always problematic) but never conceals his mistakes.

The process of becoming aware of who he is and why he exists is assisted for Augie by input from a plethora of characters, both major and minor. These occur at all stages of his life, in ordinary times and those of crisis. People seem to have no trouble sharing their criticisms of him with him and he is not shy about sharing these with readers, sometimes quite confusedly. There is plenty of direct and indirect dialog, thoroughly intermixed. When third persons speak, each is given his or her own authentic, recognizable voice. Augie sometimes argues with his interlocutors but more often absorbs it and thinks his replies or retorts. Thus, they serve no purpose in moving Augie forward, but clarify his various predicaments.

Augie moves among both practical and philosophical types. For much of the early part of the novel, it is mildly irritating that someone who admits to doing poorly in school has such elevated ideas conveyed by strings of allusions to history, culture, and religion. How he educates himself is eventually revealed, at which point Augie laments that he can already do nothing practical with all that he has learned and the world's flow of knowledge is a Niagara Falls. He ends the novel by comparing himself to Columbus sent home in chains. Assumed failure does not disprove real truth

Setting

Much of The Adventures of Augie March by Saul Bellow takes place in Chicago, from the immediate post-World War I period through the Great Depression, to the outbreak of World War II. It is a tough, somber city, through whose streets the reader follows Augie and his family in hard economic times, amongst ethnic ghettos, and its share of contact with organized crime. The spread of unionism provides an impetus for Augie to leave town. Local color and flavor are developed to the maximum in this first section.

Augie makes several forays outside Chicago proper. The first takes him to Western New York to help smuggle illegal aliens into the country when the plan fails, Augie rides the rails as a hobo and hitchhikes home. A second trip, to Evanston, IL, the wealthy northern suburbs of Chicago, puts Augie in society and nearly gets him adopted. He



flees back to menial odd jobs in the city, culminating in a position as a labor agitator. His health endangered by thugs, Augie heads south to Mexico.

In Mexico, Mexico City is several times depicted in passing, but the village of Acatla is Augie's home for many months. There is a large foreign colony there, with whom Augie becomes friendly, while Thea collects poisonous animals. They split up when a third party, Stella, accepts Augie's help in escaping a bad situation. After a spell in Chicago, where he catches up on information from all of his friends, Augie joins the Merchant Marine. During training on Long Island, NY, Augie renews his relationship with Stella. Their brief courtship takes place in Manhattan.

Augie's ship is torpedoed out from under him 15 days out of Boston, and survivors are deposited in a hospital in Naples. The gray waters of the mid-Atlantic in an unnamed life boat are described at length. After the war, Augie and Stella live and work in Europe, primarily Paris. In the final, anticlimactic section of the novel, the drive to the Belgium is described in passing.

Language and Meaning

The Adventures of Augie March is told entirely by the narrator and chief character, Augie March. He begins as a pre-teen living in a tough Chicago neighborhood after World War I. The Great Depression lies years ahead, but the March family is already on relief. They live in ethnic enclaves, so the idioms of the cultures, mannerisms, and thought patterns are reflected. Russian-Jewish is particularly strong, as the non-related Grandma in Augie's household is an intellectual from Odessa, who sprinkles Russian and Yiddish words into conversations.

From the start, Augie's memoir is filled with rich vocabulary and literary, historical, and religious allusions that are hard to reconcile with his own admission that he is a poor student, easily distracted from studies. It seems a defect until Augie rather late begins revealing how he educates himself. The first step is reading the Harvard Classics, a five-foot shelf of great works from all epochs. A college friend then mocks him for reading passé material and helps him read a wider variety by becoming involved in shoplifting for profit. Other friends suggest materials to this voracious reader. His education is topped off by being a research assistant on a book project covering all eras of history and culture. He says that he has read too much ever to use and adding more is superfluous. By this point, one sees why Augie has such a powerful and rich vocabulary.

Author Saul Bellow sneaks in, as it were, by virtue of the careful construction of descriptive narrative. Augie never claims to have taken the advanced writing courses that would be needed to achieve these—barring his being a literary genius. At some point that would have had to come out, if it were true. Augie struggles with who he is and where he is going throughout the novel, listening to the opinions of others, wise and foolish, sometimes resisting, but more often incorporating their insights into his own vision.



The chapters set in Mexico capture the Hispanic spirit, while making sparing use of Spanish words and phrases. Almost always Augie explains what these mean if he intends to use them frequently for local color. It "feels" more like Bellow describing opulent buildings, twisted mountains, and flaming oil-covered waves than the Augie who grows before the reader's eyes. All told, this is a minor point in an extremely rich reading experience.

Structure

The *Adventures of Augie March* by Saul Bellow consists of twenty-six numbered but untitled chapters. There are no formal structures above the chapter level and relatively few cases in which separate scenes within chapters are set aside by extra leading. The story progresses in chronological order with few flashbacks except when introducing new characters. There is a discernible flavor to each historical era that Augie passes through: post-World War I, Great Depression, World War II, and immediate post-World War II period. The lion's share of the novel takes place before Pearl Harbor.

The novel begins with Augie March as a pre-teen, describing life in his non-observing Jewish family that lacks a father but has a dominant grandmother figure, in the form of a renter. Although unrelated by blood, Grandma rules the roost until Augie and his brother Simon reach early adulthood. Their mother is extremely timid and their youngest brother is mentally deficient. The early chapters show the family's circle of relatives and friends, including characters both transitory and recurring through the end of the novel. Augie and Simon have an intense sibling rivalry. Grandma sees that both finish school but also from a young age bring in money from after-school and summer jobs.

By the end of high school, Augie has a responsible, well-paying job caring for a handicapped tycoon. The novel takes on a new flavor with the advent of the Great Depression. All of the characters fall on bad times, even William Einhorn, who lets Augie go to economize. Augie bounces back to become an assistant to another rich couple, to the point that it is assumed that he is her gigolo. When they want to adopt him legally, Augie flees. Simon, who is beginning to prosper, helps Augie out, but always with strings attached.

Augie's life—and the novel—grows complex. Finally, he runs off to Mexico with a woman who is getting a divorce there and whose get-rich scheme is to train an eagle to capture iguanas. They drift apart after Augie suffers an injury and separate when he helps another woman escape a bad situation. After getting involved with Leon Trotsky's security detail, Augie returns to Chicago, renews old friendships, and gets a lot of advice. He is determined to marry, have children, and run a boarding school/farm for institutionalized children, when World War II breaks out. Augie joins the Merchant Marine, marries, and has his first ship torpedoed out from under him. After the war, Augie and wife Stella remain in Europe, finally earning a good living and he still wondering if he is doing right.



Quotes

"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." Chapter 1, pg. 3.

"While the old lady, following her own idea of what that fate would be, continued to find various jobs for me.

"Saying 'various jobs,' I give out the Rosetta stone, so to speak, to my entire life.

"These earliest jobs, though, that she chose for us, they weren't generally of the callousing kind. If hard, they were temporary and supposed to lead to something better. She didn't intend us to be common laborers. No, we were to wear suits, not overalls, and she was going to set us on the way to becoming gentlemen, despite our being born to have no natural hope of it." Chapter 3, pg. 28.

"Presently we all knew what was up; the old woman was ready to deliver her stroke. She waited for an evening when we were all at supper. I came in from delivering death-flowers; Simon was off from the station. The old woman hit out in her abrupt way and declared it was time we did something about Georgie, who was growing up." Chapter 4, pg. 50.

"The Crash was Einhorn's Cyrus and the bank failures his pyre, the poolroom his exile from Lydia and the hoodlums Cambyses, whose menace he managed, somehow, to get around.

"The Commissioner died before the general bust, and wasn't very long in his grave when the suicides by skyscraper leaps began to take place on La Salle Street and downtown New York. Einhorn was among the first to be wiped out, partly because of the golden trust system of the Commissioner and partly because of his own mismanagement." Chapter 7, pg. 106.

"I said, 'Miss Fenchel, I wonder if you would like to go with me some evening to the House of David.' Astonished, she looked up from the music. 'They have dancing every night.'

"I saw nothing but failure, from the first word out, and felt smitten, pounded from all sides.

" 'With you? I should say not. I certainly won't.'

"The blood came down out of my head, neck, shoulders, and I fainted dead away." Chapter 8, pg. 142.

"They're all married or are born of marriages, so how can you pretend to me that it makes a difference that Bob loves Mary who marries Jerry? That's for the movies. Don't you see people pondering how to marry for love and getting the blood gypped out of them? Because while they're looking for the best there is—and I figure that's what's



wrong with you—everything else gets lost. It's sad, it's a pity, but it's that way." Chapter 10, pgs. 198-199.

"He knew.

" 'Why, Mr. March, what a hell of a surprise this is! You been to see my cousin?'

" 'Who's your cousin?'

" 'The doctor is.'

" 'That makes sense.'

" 'That you're his cousin.'" Chapter 12, pg. 270.

"I hustled down the hot black fire-escape frames and swung from the ladder, jumped, and when I made a choice of streets to run to I had no luck. One of the goons was there; he came for me, and I took off toward Broadway. I flinched from the shots he might have taken, that not being unknown in Chicago, that people should be knocked off in the street. But there was no noise of any gun, and I reckoned that his object was to work me over, finish the beating, break bones perhaps, and lay me up." Chapter 13, pgs. 307-308.

"An iguana fled down the rocks. Caligula saw him and made his pitch. Feathered and armored he looked in his black colors, and such menace falling swift from heaven. Down the iguana made his pure leap too, crashed, ran, doubled at Caligula's stoop, slithered from the snatch of the talons, rolled, fought over his belly from the shallow that haunted him so fast, flew again." Chapter 16, pg. 354.

"This I had been expecting, though I don't think I ever intended to do anything about it. Now, when it came, it did something to me. I shivered, as if my fate had brushed me. Admitted that I always tried to elicit what I hoped for; how did people, however, seldom fail to supply it so mysteriously?" Chapter 18, pg. 383.

"My strange teacher, for he certainly was teaching, said further, 'Erratic is nothing. Only system taps the will of the universe.'

" 'I want to obey those laws,' I said. 'I'm not trying to get out from under. I never did.'" Chapter 24, pg. 483.

"Why, I am a sort of Columbus of those near-at-hand and believe you can come to them in this immediate terra incognita that spreads out in every gaze. I may well be a flop at this line of endeavor. Columbus too thought he was a flop, probably, when they sent him back in chains. Which didn't prove there was no America." Chapter 26, pg. 536.



Topics for Discussion

What functions does the elderly poodle Winnie play in the novel?

What functions do Thea's snakes play in the novel?

What do Augie's various forays into petty crime contribute to his memoirs? Pick one and analyze its particular significance.

How is organized crime—the Mob—depicted in this novel? Does Augie March subscribe to the romantic cast it is often given in popular culture?

Discuss Simon March's role as a Horatio Alger figure. How does he symbolize the advantages and pitfalls of wealth?

Discuss William Einhorn's heroic struggle with profound disabilities. How does his sexual appetite affect and inform that image?

Augie March has a penchant for attracting benefactors. Select the one that helps him most, discussing how and why, and contrast the one that you believe most retards his development.

Like Job in the Bible, Augie March has many "friends" willing to point out his defects and offer advice. Select the one that you believe helps him most, discussing how and why, and contrast the one that you believe most retards his development.