

INTERVIEWS: JM

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Mr. Saul Bellow

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Bellow, S.

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Bellow is, to JM's mind, one of the most promising of the present group of younger American novelists. His second book, The Victim, was first drawn to JM's attention by R. B. Blackmur as conspicuously exceptional among current American novels. Very briefly, it deals with the theme of unjustified victimization: the protagonist is literally haunted by a worthless fellow who imagines that the protagonist has had a part in his losing his job. The treatment of this theme takes Bellow into phases of American sensibility with which few novelists of his generation have been interested to deal.

In September, 1950, Bellow returned from a year in Europe, made possible by his having a Guggenheim fellowship. (Incidentally, he is one of the relatively few distinctly younger writers recently to have had a Guggenheim.) To support himself, he is now teaching at New York University, at the same time that he is trying to work on two further novels.

One that is now well on its way to completion likewise deals with a theme unusual for the American novel: the protagonist is strongly attracted by Machiavellian figures, and this attraction leads him from one to another in an ascending scale of social influence. The resulting novel will be long, and Bellow's publishers, the Viking Press, are flirting with the idea of issuing it in two successive volumes.

What Bellow said of this novel led JM to talk with him pretty frankly about the perplexities of the Humanities officers in considering aid for creative writing. Bellow's comments certainly showed him to be appreciative of these perplexities and indicated that he, as a novelist, was very much concerned with the novelist's responsibility in the choice of material he would treat.

When Bellow finally came to his point and asked JM if there were any possibility of his having assistance from the Foundation, JM in turn asked if Bellow would be interested to write for the officers a statement of his view of this responsibility as exemplified by his own published and unpublished work. Bellow replied that he would not only be glad to do so but that he felt he ought to work this out for the sake of his own work. He agreed to try to send in a piece on this subject within the next two weeks so that it could be considered and discussed by EFD and JM before JM's departure.

JM

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