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The Life of Saul Bellow: To Fame and Fortune, 1915-1964

By Zachary Leader



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The Life of Saul Bellow: To Fame and Fortune, 1915-1964 By Zachary Leader

For much of his adult life, Saul Bellow was the most acclaimed novelist in America, the winner of, among other awards, the Nobel Prize in Literature, three National Book Awards, and the Pulitzer Prize. *The Life of Saul Bellow*, by the literary scholar and biographer Zachary Leader, marks the centenary of Bellow's birth as well as the tenth anniversary of his death. It draws on unprecedented access to Bellow's papers, including much previously restricted material, as well as interviews with more than 150 of the novelist's relatives, close friends, colleagues, and lovers, a number of whom have never spoken to researchers before. Through detailed exploration of Bellow's writings, and the private history that informed them, Leader chronicles a singular life in letters, offering original and nuanced accounts not only of the novelist's development and rise to eminence, but of his many identities—as writer, polemicist, husband, father, Chicagoan, Jew, American.

The biography will be published in two volumes. The first volume, *To Fame and Fortune: 1915–1964*, traces Bellow's Russian roots; his birth and early childhood in Quebec; his years in Chicago; his travels in Mexico, Europe, and Israel; the first three of his five marriages; and the novels from *Dangling Man* and *The Adventures of Augie March* to the best-selling *Herzog*. New light is shed on Bellow's fellow writers, including Ralph Ellison, John Berryman, Lionel Trilling, and Philip Roth, and on his turbulent and influential life away from the desk, which was as full of incident as his fiction. Bellow emerges as a compelling character, and Leader's powerful accounts of his writings, published and unpublished, forward the case for his being, as the critic James Wood puts it, “the greatest of American prose stylists in the twentieth century.”



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Editorial Review

Review

"Since Saul Bellow--along with William Faulkner--constitutes the sturdy backbone of 20th century American literature, a biography as lavishly detailed and craftily organized as Mr. Leader's is a necessary addition to the library of major biographies of our strongest writers. Despite Bellow's every effort to find order and serenity in which to do his work, his life, as it is meticulously presented here, was no less wild and original than his novels, a turbulence of crises that might have killed him had they not been magically transfigured by a prose style as rich and roiling as Melville's into one of the liveliest, brainiest collections of vivid American fiction that is ours to treasure."

—Philip Roth

"A dazzling piece of work—a tremendous achievement—it draws the reader in wonderfully well, with its almost manic attention to biographical detail, and its inspired interweaving of Bellow's autobiography with his fiction. It's shrewd and scholarly throughout; but also lavish, entertaining and frequently mischievous. Young Bellow himself comes steadily surging through, getting bigger and bigger: clever, ambitious, philandering, mordant, magnificent, dominating and always furiously typing, typing, typing. In a word, this Volume One has all the makings of an American epic. I enjoyed it immensely."

—Richard Holmes

"Zachary Leader has written a multi-layered book about a colossal American literary life. His research is prodigious, his curiosity about Saul Bellow's epic career limitless, and he reinvents biography as a four-dimensional narrative of time, space, perspective, and genre. Leader sets forth Bellow's life history through his interviews and letters as well as those of his huge extended family, his wives, mistresses, children, friends, enemies, neighbors, colleagues, critics, rivals, teachers, students, agents, editors, and publishers, and through analyses of Bellow's books and stories about them, and their books and stories about him. On a grand scale, as enthralling as it is masterful, *The Life of Saul Bellow* is one of the great biographies of our time."

—Elaine Showalter

"Richly detailed, Zachary Leader's admiring but clear-eyed chronicle of Saul Bellow's youth, talent, and his struggle for recognition is nuanced, impassioned, and capacious; from him we meet Bellow as if for the first time, as friend, lover, father, husband, American, and Jew-- and of course as the writer who energetically resisted despair and cynicism with his profound commitment to literature and to life. An essential book--more than a biography, it's the story of American letters in the twentieth century."

—Brenda Wineapple

"Zachary Leader has read everything, interviewed everyone, and woven it all together into a biography of Saul Bellow on a grand scale. Staggering in its research, rich with insight into the relationships between his family origins, the lives he pursued, the people he knew, and the books he wrote, this account lays bare the alchemy of Bellow's imagination and the sources of his literary achievement in profuse and arresting detail."

— Morris Dickstein

"This will stand as the definitive account of the making of Saul Bellow, an absorbing story of how a determined young writer emerged as one of the twentieth-century's most celebrated novelists."

—James Shapiro

“It is, however, certain that I will not be alone in the expectation that *The Life of Saul Bellow* will prove definitive. Leader is respectful but unintimidated, balanced but never anodyne, and his literary criticism, like his prose, is unfailingly stylish and acute. The book is very learned,”

—Martin Amis, *Vanity Fair*

“Zachary Leader, the latest Bellow biographer, has found plenty... Leader is statesmanlike, fair-minded...He is particularly felicitous in his descriptions of Bellow’s parents and their struggles”

—Judith Shulevitz, *The Atlantic*

“Unsurpassable. It is a valuable resource, and the prose is clear and poised.”

—*New York Review of Books*

“Leader gratifyingly shows how Bellow transformed his personal limitations into liberating art.”

—*New York Magazine*

“Will surely become the standard biography of Bellow for years to come.”

—*Washington Post*

“The most purely delicious literary biography that I’ve come across. Leader’s calm, gradual, but serenely excited prose vibrates with the joy of his thought coalescing with his subject.”

—*The New Yorker*

“Leader does full justice to both life and oeuvre in this chronicle of Bellow’s struggle. . . . Leader’s biography has the vital virtue of ringing true. . . . Leader’s life of Saul Bellow is not merely head and shoulders above its predecessors, but given the depth of his research and judgment and its broad scope, it is hard to imagine it being bettered anytime soon.”

—*San Francisco Chronicle*

“A fascinating analysis.”

—BBC

“A revelation.”

—*Barnes & Noble Review*

“Uncommonly good. . . . [Leader] has not only made himself familiar with all of Bellow’s facts. He has also made the vigilant reader welcome to them.”

—*Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel*

“Leader’s research here...is astonishing. It is a banquet, a profoundly serious and scholarly examination of an important American writer.”

—*Cleveland Plain Dealer*

“Leader’s *Life of Saul Bellow* is likely to remain the definitive biography. . . . Leader has our gratitude.”

—*Commentary*

“Authorized and judicious. . . . Excellent. . . . Leader has clearly done new and prodigious work.”

—*Jewish Review of Books*

“Will now stand as the definitive Bellow biography.”

—*Kirkus* (Starred)

“An impressive achievement, this biography gives noble due to one of the 20th century’s most significant writers.”

—*Publishers Weekly* (PW Pick)

About the Author

ZACHARY LEADER is professor of English literature at the University of Roehampton in London. An American citizen, he has lived in Britain for more than forty years. In addition to teaching at Roehampton, he has held visiting professorships at Caltech and the University of Chicago. He was educated at Northwestern University; Trinity College, Cambridge; and Harvard University, and is the author of *Reading Blake’s Songs*, *Writer’s Block*, *Revision and Romantic Authorship*, and *The Life of Kingsley Amis*, a finalist for the 2008 Pulitzer Prize in Biography. He has edited *Romantic Period Writings, 1798–1832: An Anthology* (with Ian Haywood); *The Letters of Kingsley Amis*; *On Modern British Fiction*; *Percy Bysshe Shelley: The Major Works* (with Michael O’Neill); and *The Movement Reconsidered: Essays on Larkin, Amis, Gunn, Davie, and Their Contemporaries*. He is a fellow of the Royal Society of Literature.

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6

Anita/Dangling

The girl’s name was Anita Goshkin and Bellow met her in Hyde Park in the summer of 1936, before the start of his senior year at Northwestern. By the spring of 1937 they were engaged. Anita had been at the University of Chicago only a year, having transferred from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, as a junior (shortly after the death of her father, which suggests the move may have been motivated by family or financial considerations). The “grimy” sociology books she carried at their first meeting were for a summer course at the university. She was six months older than Bellow, born on December 12, 1914, and like him lived on the North Side, in Ravenswood, a modest suburb of small courtyard apartment buildings. Bellow told his son Greg that he’d had his eye on Anita for some time, before gathering the courage to speak to her. Her cousin and childhood playmate, Beebee Schenk (later de Regniers), was a friend of Bellow’s, and may have told him to look out for her.¹ On their first date, they went swimming in Lake Michigan off the Point, a Hyde Park landmark. In *Herzog*, Bellow fictionalizes the moment they met. Moses sees Daisy, who will become his first wife, under the El at 51st Street. Pretty and fresh in appearance, with large “slant green” eyes, she wears a simple seersucker dress and small white shoes. Her “golden but lustreless” hair is held in place by a barrette and her legs are bare. Moses sees the square-cut neck of her dress as expressive of character: “stability, symmetry, order, containment were Daisy’s strength.” Her “laundered purity” also strikes him, as does her coolness and regular features, those of “a conventional Jewish woman.” As Moses stands behind her on the El platform, a “fragrance of summer apples” rises from her bare neck and shoulders (pp. 542–43).²

This fragrance is also expressive, for Daisy is a country girl of sorts, raised near Zanesville, Ohio. Anita came from a similar background, in Lafayette, Indiana, not exactly the country, but not Chicago either. Her parents, like Bellow’s, were Russian immigrants. Her father, Morris, arrived from the Crimea after the pogroms of 1905, settling in Lafayette for the same reason the Bellows settled first in Lachine then in

Chicago: because he had relatives there. He worked as a milkman, then opened an ice cream parlor. What Greg Bellow remembers hearing of his maternal grandfather is that he was “quiet, kind and gentle.” It was Sonia, Morris’s wife, a forceful, opinionated, modern woman, a suffragette in Russia, who ruled the roost, encouraging her daughters to be independent and insisting that they go to college.³

Like Bellow, Anita was the only member of her family to be born in the New World. A late arrival, she was much doted on. She had two brothers, Jack (also known as J.J.) and Max, seventeen and ten years older, and two sisters, Catherine and Ida, sixteen and fourteen years older. The sisters became librarians, earned higher degrees in library science, traveled in Europe, were lovers of high culture, and never married. When they retired, they moved to New York, living together in an apartment close to Lincoln Center, to be near the ballet. Of the brothers, Jack, the eldest, had an affair in college with a non-Jewish girl. When she got pregnant, he married her. According to Greg, Anita’s mother was so scandalized by these events, “that, basically, she forced Jack to divorce . . . and move back in.” Jack’s son, Jack Jr., was raised out of state by his mother and on rare visits to Lafayette “was kept on the back porch, incommunicado.” When the Goshkins moved to Chicago and the son visited, his father “checked into a hotel.” Anita’s other brother, Max, a machinist, also lived at home, well into his forties.

Anita was political at college. When Greg was a student at Chicago, “with great pride” she pointed out to him the spot in the lobby of the Social Sciences building where she had once sold a hundred copies of Soapbox in an hour. She attended political meetings and regularly spoke at them. She went to Gary, Indiana, to organize steelworkers, was arrested, and spent a night in jail, along with Bellow’s friend Oscar Tarcov. Her interest in politics was practical; she had little patience for theoretical or doctrinal dispute. The two-year MA program she entered in March 1937 in Chicago’s School of Social Service Administration involved fieldwork at the Michael Reese Hospital, one of the oldest and largest teaching hospitals in Chicago. There Anita met Bruno Bettelheim, who later remarked to Greg on his mother’s beauty. Anita finished the first year of the course but not the second, which required that she write a dissertation. She could not write, or thought she could not write, a conclusion she’d been led to as an undergraduate. “My father told me he wrote most of her term papers,” Greg recalls. After abandoning her MA in 1939 she got a job at the Chicago Relief Administration giving out welfare checks. By this date she and Bellow had been married over a year.

Users Review

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Now a day people that Living in the era wherever everything reachable by connect to the internet and the resources within it can be true or not need people to be aware of each info they get. How a lot more to be smart in obtaining any information nowadays? Of course the reply is reading a book. Looking at a book can help individuals out of this uncertainty Information particularly this The Life of Saul Bellow: To Fame and Fortune, 1915-1964 book since this book offers you rich details and knowledge. Of course the details in this book hundred per cent guarantees there is no doubt in it you probably know this.

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Nowadays reading books become more and more than want or need but also turn into a life style. This reading behavior give you lot of advantages. The huge benefits you got of course the knowledge the particular information inside the book that will improve your knowledge and information. The knowledge

you get based on what kind of guide you read, if you want send more knowledge just go with schooling books but if you want really feel happy read one along with theme for entertaining like comic or novel. Often the The Life of Saul Bellow: To Fame and Fortune, 1915-1964 is kind of book which is giving the reader unpredictable experience.

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The book untitled The Life of Saul Bellow: To Fame and Fortune, 1915-1964 contain a lot of information on that. The writer explains the girl idea with easy approach. The language is very clear and understandable all the people, so do not worry, you can easy to read the idea. The book was compiled by famous author. The author gives you in the new era of literary works. You can easily read this book because you can continue reading your smart phone, or model, so you can read the book in anywhere and anytime. In a situation you wish to purchase the e-book, you can wide open their official web-site in addition to order it. Have a nice learn.

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