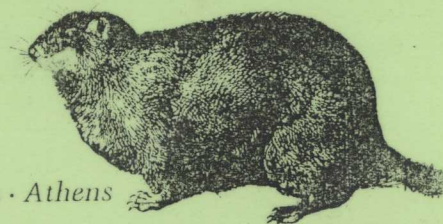

Saul Bellow

Drumlin Woodchuck

By Mark Harris

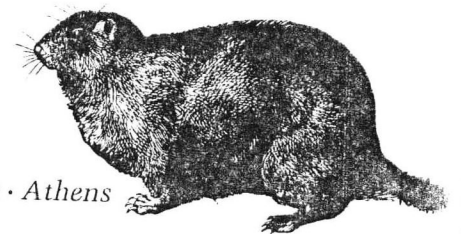


The University of Georgia Press • Athens

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Athens, Georgia 30602

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Designed by Richard Hendel
Set in 10 on 13 point Trump Medieval type
Printed in the United States of America

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

Harris, Mark, 1922—
Saul Bellow drumlin woodchuck.

1. Bellow, Saul. 2. Novelists, American—20th
century—Biography. I. Title.

PS3503.E4488Z675 813'.52 [B] 80-14390
ISBN 0-8203-0529-4

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For Richard G. Stern

PUBLISHER'S NOTE

Mr. Saul Bellow, in granting us permission to quote from certain of his letters or other correspondence, has made it clear that he does not in any way endorse this book, nor has he in any way cooperated with the author in its formulation or in its writing. He has concluded, however, that to withhold permission would be to interfere with the conception or plan of this work. For that reason he has granted the use of every passage for which his permission was sought. Grateful acknowledgment is also given to Pamela McCorduck, Ruth Miller, and Richard Stern for permitting the author to reprint correspondence and other writing.

Readers may wish to know which editions of Mr. Bellow's books I have quoted from. I worked from books in the house, familiar to my hand and eye. My choices are not otherwise rational. *Herzog*, *Humboldt's Gift*, and *The Last Analysis* are Viking editions. *Henderson the Rain King*, *Seize the Day*, and *Mr. Sammler's Planet* are soft-cover Fawcett Crest Books. *Dangling Man* is a Signet Book.

M.H.

If I can with confidence say
That still for another day,
Or even another year,
I will be there for you, my dear,

It will be because, though small
As measured against the All,
I have been so instinctively thorough
About my crevice and burrow.

Robert Frost, "A Drumlin Woodchuck"

OTHER BOOKS BY MARK HARRIS

It Looked Like For Ever

Short Work of It

Best Father Ever Invented

The Design of Fiction

(with Hester Harris and Josephine Harris)

Killing Everybody

The Goy

Twentyone Twice

Mark the Glove Boy

Friedman & Son

Wake Up, Stupid

A Ticket for a Seamstitch

Something About a Soldier

Bang the Drum Slowly

The Southpaw

City of Discontent

Trumpet to the World

One thing has a shelving bank,
Another a rotting plank,
To give it cozier skies
And make up for its lack of size.

My own strategic retreat
Is where two rocks almost meet,
And still more secure and snug,
A two-door burrow I dug.

With those in mind at my back
I can sit forth exposed to attack
As one who shrewdly pretends
That he and the world are friends.

All we who prefer to live
Have a little whistle we give,
And flash, at the least alarm
We dive down under the farm.

We allow some time for guile
And don't come out for a while
Either to eat or drink.
We take occasion to think.

And if after the hunt goes past
And the double-barreled blast
(Like war and pestilence
And the loss of common sense),

Young people, what do you aim to do with the facts about Humboldt, publish articles and further your careers? This is pure capitalism.

Humboldt's Gift

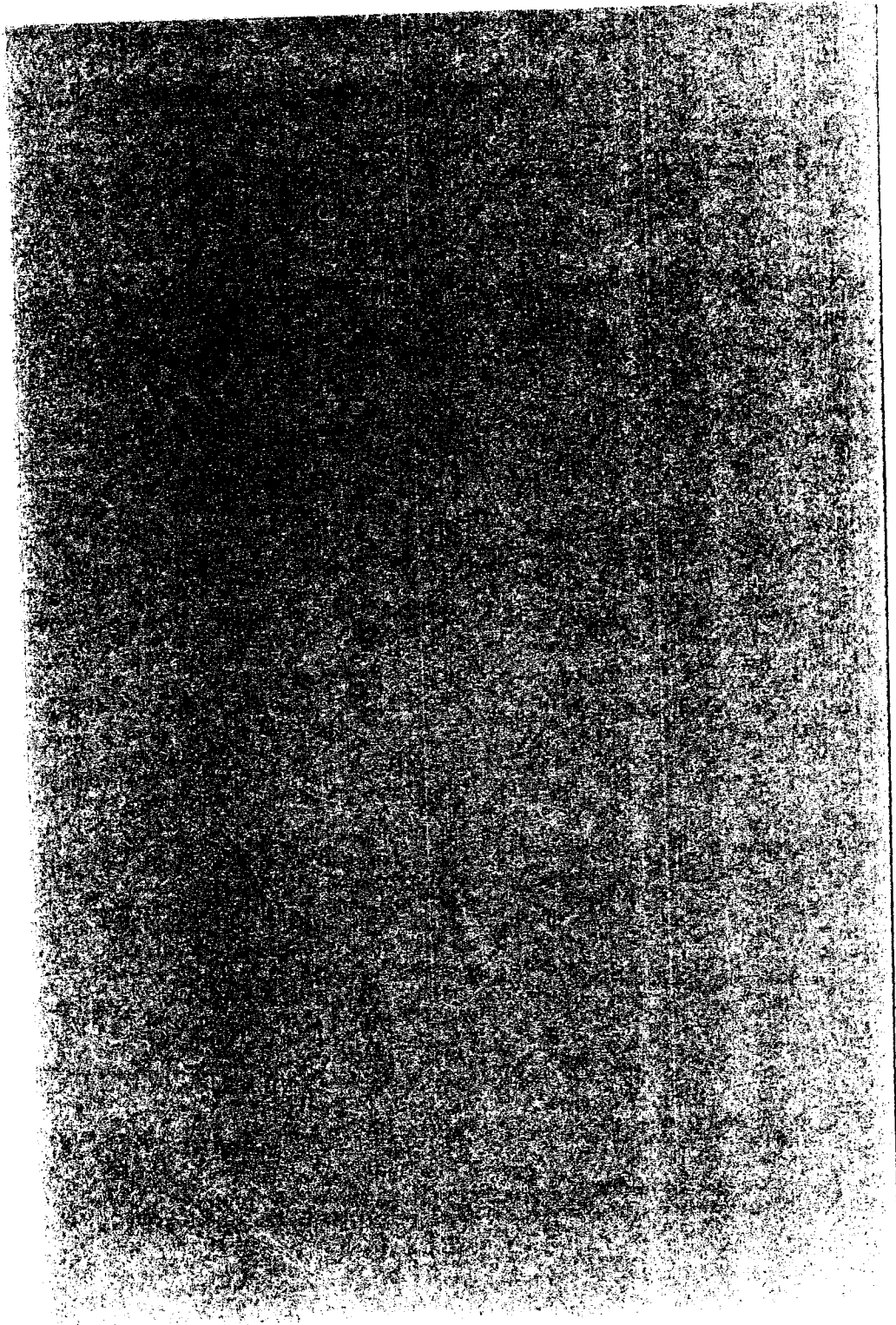
So he lived for many years, with small regular intervals of recuperation, in visible glory, honored by the world, yet in spite of that troubled in spirit, and all the more troubled because no one would take his trouble seriously. What comfort could he possibly need? What more could he possibly wish for? And if some good-natured person, feeling sorry for him, tried to console him by pointing out that his melancholy was probably caused by fasting, it could happen, especially when he had been fasting for some time, that he reacted with an outburst of fury and to the general alarm began to shake the bars of his cage like a wild animal.

Kafka, A Hunger Artist

Some old Elizabethan play or poem contains the lines:

" . . . Who reads me, when I am ashes,
Is my son in wishes . . . "

Henry Adams, preface to
Mont-Saint-Michel and Chartres



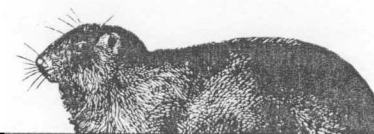
Saul Bellow

Drumlin Woodchuck

Saul Bellow

Drumlin Woodchuck

Chapter One



I AM IMPATIENT to get forward with this book, and yet I know the value of taking just a little time at the outset to clarify the rules.

The rules: in this book I will quote actual letters. If in any passage I were to alter any expression the reader—you—will be fully advised by signs and signals in common use among scholars and other literate men and women these hundred years or more. I am no “new journalist.” Only one kind of journalism exists: good journalism. This is a book of nonfiction, a pure category opposed to pure fiction. No such thing exists under the name nonfiction novel. A thing is not true false. No thing exists by the name prose-poetry.

At all points in this book when I attribute with the usual signs and signals direct speech to any person, the words you will read will therefore be, as far as I am able to make them, the exact words exactly spoken by the person to whom they are attributed. I carry paper and pens with me at all times. I write a diary every night. I keep a journal sometimes. I save all correspondence I receive and copy all correspondence I send. I freely consult the memories of other persons. “Almost certainly, Nachman ran away from the power of his old friend’s memory. Herzog persecuted everyone with it. It was a terrible engine. . . . I, with *my* memory—all the dead and the mad are in my custody, and I am the nemesis of the would-be forgotten. I bind others to my feelings, and oppress them.”

And oppress myself, too. In this book, as always, I come off worst. It is a device not always appreciated by people who feel that I have hurt them, threatened them, and never acknowledged by critics of

my writing, who use against me the facts they would never possess but for me. I am my own instrument or symbol of social criticism.

In this book I will never speak of "sources close" to anyone, nor offer unattributed remarks. I will never hide behind "we" nor shield myself with the passive voice. I will not employ this book or its principal subject in causes not his: I do not volunteer other people's sons for foreign wars. In *Humboldt's Gift* Citrine complains to Thaxter: "You've set yourself up as a Citrine expert and interpret me all over the place—how I function, how little I understand women, all the weaknesses of my character. I don't take that too hard. I'd be glad, though, if you didn't interpret me quite so much. And the words you put into my mouth—that X is a moron, or Y is an imbecile. I have no prejudice against X or Y. The one who's out to get 'em is you."

I exert myself to be responsible, though most of my strenuous virtues will never be apparent to anyone but a fellow-writer as sincere as I. I will never tamper with time: everything happens on the day I say it happened, and in the order of reality; if otherwise, I shall clearly indicate the departure. All citations are true, recorded in academic style. I will never say I thought something *then* if I did not think it until afterward: I almost *never* think a thing in the moment—I am too busy writing it down.

Of course, a book compresses reality, condenses time, and abbreviates encounters, except when it inflates, enlarges, or extends those elements. Long or short, whichever way it goes it is a lie. I grant that. But in the everyday sense I do not lie, I tell only the truth as far as I am able.

OFF AT LAST! I have been trying for more than a decade to get off the starting block with my biography of Bellow, and now at last I'm on my way, with many thanks to Professor Richard G. Stern of the University of Chicago, writer, friend. Stern is a bolsterer. From the beginning his enthusiasm has favored possibility. His confidence in me gave me a reality of which I had not been aware. He is far better acquainted than I with the central figure. They have been close friends since the 1950s, colleagues, neighbors. Stern knew that I must go on, even when I was most doubtful.

In my making of this book Saul Bellow, on the other hand, has been of no assistance. How wise he was! How shrewdly he read my

character, how thoroughly he tested me! I had been untrustworthy, not so much for reasons of bad character but because I did not know what he wanted me to be—what things he admired in the world—and the reason I did not know what he wanted me to be was that I did not know what he was.

I attributed his mistrust of me to deficiencies of his character. I assumed he was eccentric, temperamental, and unreasonable, as artists are said to be. I was yet to learn, by my study of Bellow, that an artist could remain alive only by resisting every effort to make him into a monument. "Humboldt! My goofy sister named him after a statue in Central Park."

Because he mistrusted me I learned to seek in myself those aspects of myself he mistrusted, not merely to deny them but to see if they were really there, and when I found them I was able to deal with them, and to become better. Frost had done the same for me—held me off, forced me to focus my thought upon him, forced me to ask myself why he resisted me. I had gone in the very beginning directly from Frost to Bellow, Vermont to Tivoli, as we shall see.

Bellow saw from experience the dangers to which I was susceptible, the traps into which he had seen others fall who had come toward him to share something of him they wanted—an aura, a wisdom glowing—whose real intention might have been to use him for their own gain or fame, place or position. He was yet to speak of people with their thumbprints on his windpipe. He had come to be mistrustful of individuals, seeing their opportunism as unfortunate but real, and he became, to save himself, not angry with them but only difficult, recalcitrant, reluctant, a foot-dragger, a woodchuck whose mind was a memory-bank of holes to run into, so that every encounter with Bellow was bound to be attended by the merest impossible obstacles of time, place, logistics, a connection missed, a wallet lost, persons detained, telephones unanswered, evasion, escape, everything clouded by the simpler forms of misunderstanding.

It was his way of freeing his mind and remaining flesh. No biographical monument for him. He was still "groping," he insisted. Not yet "*fini*." Writers, he once wrote, "are often transformed into Major Literary Figures and for the rest of their lives do little more than give solemn interviews to prestigious journals or serve on White House committees or fly to the Bermudas to participate in international panel discussions on the crisis in the arts. Often the

writer is absorbed by the literary figure. In such cases it is the social struggle that has been most important, not the art."¹

Why art? Isn't the "social struggle" more important? On this subject Bellow has quoted someone else: "The remedy is the poem itself. Art is the community's medicine for the worst disease of mind, the corruption of consciousness."²

IN TIME I saw how real those things were which Bellow valued. This required some years, some travel, some postage, some exasperation, and a great deal of repeated reading in the work of Bellow; and when I was done I knew that I had improved myself by providing myself with a model of a man who had resisted many temptations. I grew up to a belief in his character. He ceased to be eccentric. "Success" did not spoil him but only strengthened him. At a peak of "success," after *Herzog* (after which all his books were reissued as if "by the celebrated author of *Herzog*"—so said the publishers' advertising), he saw with the clearest eye, and so wrote on the most public wall, "We have at present a large literary community and something we can call, *faute de mieux*, a literary culture, in my opinion a very bad one."³ He could never be bribed to change his mind. One might have thought that the very man acknowledged (not by himself) as a leader of the literary culture would therefore have been an American booster. But not our difficult Bellow, truthful at all cost, going forward with his work in spite of fads and fashions, never stepping from his path to suit the trade. He was one who learned from history.

This is a book about a man whose talent expresses hope. In a cynical world we are skeptical. A great deal of literary work sneers at the world, destroys life, kills. Bellow yearns for the salvation of the world, risking himself to balance cynicism with his hope. A thousand times painful therefore to hear him accused of cynicism. He is accused of having made a great deal of money. Therefore he wrote for money?

People who say such things are almost always people writing for

1. *The Arts and the Public*, ed. James E. Miller, Jr., and Paul D. Herring (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967), p. 17.

2. "Culture Now: Some Animadversions, Some Laughs," *Modern Occasions*, Winter 1971, p. 178.

3. "Cloister Culture," *The Best of "Speaking of Books,"* ed. Francis Brown (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1969), p. 5.

money only. They cannot imagine another kind of writer any more than they can imagine another kind of world. Here is an example of the cynicism I am talking about: I was flying for the Peace Corps from New York to Senegal shortly after the publication of *Herzog*. In those days I could not sleep on airplanes. It was the middle of the night. Beside me a black Pentecost missionary minister named Miss Johnson, blissfully sleeping, dreaming of the Kingdom of Heaven. Hunched under my little high-intensity light I read the PanAm copy of *The New Yorker* for January 9, 1965, containing a short bitter essay by one Thomas Meehan, called "Claus [A Leftover Candy Cane for Mr. Saul Bellow]." Some of its best phrases were stolen from *Herzog*, and yet the essay was an attack upon that book, or certainly upon its author, for being "woebegone, intellectual . . . long-winded . . . melancholy," and finally "uninteresting." These are subjective judgments that may describe nothing more than Mr. Meehan, who ought to understand that accusations of motive are very likely projections of one's own. Meehan's conclusion infuriated me. "With this thought in mind," Meehan ended his essay, "he [Herzog] fell into a long winter's sleep, as visions of sugarplums, paperback rights, a six-figure sale to Joseph E. Levine, and the New York Times best-seller list danced in his head." Whose head?

Had I not been in an airplane over the Atlantic I would have telephoned Mr. Meehan and abused him. Bellow, in pain, created literature; for the moment *Herzog*. Meehan, denying his own pain, attacks the maker of the book.

HERE IS ANOTHER experience of bitterness. At the University of Minnesota, where I was a graduate student from 1951 to 1954, I had a friend who claimed an acquaintance with Bellow. Bellow had been a young teacher there in the late 1940s (again in the 50s), and I heard something about him from teachers and students who had seen him coming and going. I eagerly listened. I was myself becoming a writer and I cared to know how writers lived and walked and talked. It seemed to me a good omen that Bellow had had an office in the very building where mine was—Temporary North of Mines, "a temporary wooden structure to the north of the School of Mines. From the window we saw a gully, a parking lot, and many disheartening cars."⁴

4. "John Berryman," foreword by Bellow to John Berryman's *Recovery* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1973), p. ix.

My friend was theoretically filled with good will for all sorts and kinds and races and colors of men women and children, a student of literature and of the politics of history, a deep reader, overcome by a reverence for books and for almost anything else printed on a printing press. This is not to say he agreed with everything he read. He fought back. To living journals he wrote letters, and those letters in turn he himself printed, sending them to me for years afterward in lieu of personal messages, making me party to his disputes with *The New Leader* and the *Minneapolis Tribune*.

Quotations from journalistic editorials began to replace speech in his mouth. It was a humble affliction, a modesty about his own views, not a bad thing, and he might have led a serene and fulfilling life with his wonderful family, working by day, reading by night, had his humility not turned to bitterness.

And so he became a man who could detect in every event only the element of impurity, however small, and dwell upon it, and elevate the fractional impurity to the level of the whole. A work of fiction he could see only as the writer's deception for bad purposes—"You hide behind your characters with your filthy ideas," he said. His meanness increased. In the short space of twenty years, from the time I knew him to the moment of my most recent word of him, he became an adherent of the most conservative Establishmentarianism compounded by evangelism, renouncing the socialist ideals of his youth. Of course he discovered that old run-of-the-mill anti-Semitism. Bellow drew the type in *Mr. Sammler's Planet*—Cieslakiewicz, caretaker of the cemetery, who saved Sammler from capture and death. But then, strangely, "after some years, the letters began to contain anti-Semitic sentiments. Nothing very vicious. Only a touch of the old stuff."

I date my friend's decline from 1953, the year *The Adventures of Augie March* burst upon us. The "success" of *Augie* drove him wild. One day he flew into a rage which at first appeared to me to be unconnected to the words he spoke: "I sat beside him in the barber shop." Meaning what? Go on. He did not go on. It was the end. So wholly had his passion subdued him that his logic failed him: having said nothing, he thought he had said everything.

What he meant was this: *I once sat beside Bellow in the barber shop close enough to see that he was only human like you and me.* After all, Bellow had been printed. Two books by then, and now *Augie*. My friend thought God should identify a printed man, es-

pecially if the man was destined to arrive on the best-seller list. He should be obvious. He should not require a haircut. Maybe only a trim. Although Bellow never claimed any humanity for himself above ordinary membership, my friend claimed it for him, and condemned him for failing to fulfill such expectations, and branched out from Bellow to anyone else who might have been more or less "successful," and at the same time took up God, too, although God had already filled him with confusion by neglecting to stamp the secular seal on those children Published or otherwise Chosen. In the end my friend condemned the whole world wherever it survived, and wished death upon everyone at last in his friendly way.

ON THE OTHER HAND—on the brighter side, one might say—I am thinking of a dark and beautiful professor beside whom I sat at a dinner party in San Francisco on the night of March 10, 1967, who told me that she had recently seen Bellow, who was then (she said) occupying a house in southern California. Said she, "The whole cast of *Herzog* was there." I had by that time become warmly attached to my idea for a biography of Bellow, and I therefore took her information into my possession, more or less correcting its hyperbole: reducing the "whole cast" to Bellow and her, I concluded that they had spent some time together in southern California. Afterward, however, when I mentioned her to Bellow, he said he did not know her.

Later that year a moment occurred which was a companion to the first. I encountered the dark and beautiful professor at the Palmer House in Chicago, at a meeting of the Modern Language Association. She said, "I've just come from having a drink with Saul Bellow." But when I encountered Bellow that evening he said no, he had not had a drink with her, they had talked on the telephone. "Maybe," said he, "she was having a drink at her end and I was having one at mine."

Writers walk around in other people's fantasies, nightmares, psychiatric sessions. Sometimes they are really there, and sometimes they are not. The professor from San Francisco State University imagined herself drinking with Bellow in a house in southern California. Or else she was there, and so was he, and they did drink.

OF ANOTHER LADY'S STORY I am more certain. I met her first in 1953. She was an important person to me, since it was through her

that I established my own first living connection with Bellow. She was Catherine Lindsay, and she told me that she was Lily in *Henderson the Rain King*. True, she was one of "these big beauties," as Henderson calls her—"I hadn't seen her in more than a year, not since I put her on that train for Paris, but we were immediately on the old terms of familiarity just as before. Her large, pure face was the same as ever. It would never be steady but it was beautiful. Only she had dyed her hair. It was now orange, which was not necessary, and it was parted from the middle of her forehead like the two panels of a curtain. It's the curse of these big beauties sometimes that they are short on taste. Also she had done something with mascara to her eyes so that they were no longer of equal length. What are you supposed to do if such a person is 'the same as ever'? And what are you supposed to think when this tall woman, nearly six feet, in a kind of green plush suit like the stuff they used to have in Pullman cars and high heels, sways, and in one look she throws away all the principles of behavior observed on 57th Street—as if throwing off the plush suit and hat and blouse and stockings and girdle to the winds and crying, 'Gene! My life is misery without you?'"

Once, with the poet John Berryman, Bellow writes, "as we were discussing Rilke I interrupted to ask whether he had, the other night, somewhere in the Village, pushed a lady down a flight of stairs.

"'Whom?'

"'Beautiful Catherine, the big girl I introduced you to.'

"'Did I do that? I wonder why?'

"'Because she wouldn't let you into the apartment.'

"He took a polite interest in this information. 'That I was in the City at all is news to me.'"⁵

In 1959 beautiful Catherine sought employment in our department at San Francisco State, and Bellow had written for her a letter of reference so affecting me that I instantly sat down and wrote one to *him*: "I have been thinking of you all day because my boss showed me this morning the letter you wrote on behalf of Catherine Lindsay. Letters like that are impossible to write, but you did it. I think Catherine will be hired." I continued, taking this occasion to unload some of my troubles. "I have been reading galleys of a novel I

5. Ibid., p. x.

thought was funny when I sent it to Knopf, but in galleys there is nothing to make me laugh. . . . Now I must go on and find something new to write about, but I feel heavy, and I wonder where the new experience is to come from. I seem to have overtaken myself, having written myself up-to-date, so that instead of some larger thing looming for me there seems to be only something smaller and narrower ahead. I can go on doing the same old thing, but this is what writers mostly do, and I don't want to be the kind of writer there has mostly been."

From Minneapolis, Bellow replied in the most encouraging terms: "I'm glad you wrote me a letter. It's silly not to know each other, isn't it? We've crossed the same ground any number of times and besides I have a sympathetic impression of you. I know very well—all too well—what you mean when you say you've overtaken yourself. You can't, really, except within a given system which makes repetition inevitable. But then it's not so much yourself you're repeating as it is a way, a system, a procedure, a method which originated with certain old gentlemen in France, England, Russia. So let's say you've overtaken Turgenieff (for example). I don't know your work well enough to say this. Let's assume I'm speaking of myself. Without an influx of new life the situation becomes depressing in the extreme, as it was in the end for Turgenieff himself. Once more a woman who loves, in the same old way; once more a lazy nobleman. The benefits of a literary education soon come to an end. Is this what you're talking about? Or is it only what I am making of it? . . .

"You'll like Catherine Lindsay. I hope she gets the job."

I had been made joyful by his letter. For several months we briskly corresponded. I hoped that I would meet him. In July I wrote to him in praise of *Henderson the Rain King*, which appeared that year. Ever afterward, when I enjoyed reading a new work of his I wrote to tell him so. Thus I wrote him after every work, for all his work delighted me, struck me right. I speak for myself only. I make no scientific critical claim for his objective worth. Perhaps I admired his growing each time stronger, surpassing himself, or perhaps it was only the pleasure I felt in his versatility: even when a story or novel slowed, lost force, slid into doldrums, its language and images carried it until a fresh wind rose. He seemed to me always funny, moving, even when I was unable to follow his philosophical gyrations, or

didn't care, or felt like telling him, as Renata told Citrine, "You'll wind up with bare feet in the Loop carrying one of those where-will-you-spend-eternity signs." I admired his craftsmanship and knew the labor of it. "The fitting together of the parts gave me the pleasure of a good intricacy."⁶ Bellow was story-teller and world-saver, and I admired that ambition. Life, peace, and civilization he favored, guns and untimely death he opposed. Historian, humorist, Jewish, American. A political radical, seeing the world whole, true anti-fascist, he made me want to write better, he enlarged and extended my imagination, my vocabulary, my consciousness, and my idea of the English sentence.

He replied to my letter, inviting me to submit work to his new magazine, *The Noble Savage*. I sent him a story of mine I had been unable to publish elsewhere, and he published it, paying me two hundred and fifty dollars. He was associated with several magazines, but none survived. Charlie Citrine had high hopes for *The Ark*, but it cost him money beyond his means, and Renata challenged his motives: "Who needs this Ark of yours, Charlie, and who are these animals you're gonna save? You're not really such an idealist—you're full of hostility, dying to attack a lot of people in your very own magazine and insult everyone right and left."

In September—still 1959—he wrote me again from Minneapolis, commenting on that novel of mine which had disappointed me in galley proofs. His insight into my book was helpful to me also as light upon myself: the book was a "switch," he wrote, "on the engaging and seemingly open and gay character who however has qualities not to be openly shown, so that the openness is the greatest feint of all."

Beautiful Catherine Lindsay got the job, and Bellow for some reason fled the country. Often he left when a book appeared, lying low until the tide of reviews had ceased. "In very great haste," he wrote to me November 12, 1959, "because I'm leaving for Europe and that's not the worst of it. . . ." ("So you're going to Europe," says big-brother Julius to Charlie Citrine. "Any special reason? Are you on a job? Or just running, as usual? You never go alone, always with some bim. What kind of cunt is taking you this time?") I don't know whom he went with, if anyone, or why. Some years afterward he told me that he had that year received a grant from the Ford Foundation,

6. *Humboldt's Gift*.

and that his (then) wife had obtained for him a State Department grant to tour the world speaking: while he was on tour around the world she stayed home and spent his Ford grant. From Rome early in 1960 he sent me a postcard commiserating with me on the death of my father: "When my father died I was for a long time *sunk*. I hope you're a wiser sufferer. Our business is survival, with pain unavoidable. By now I'm far better." And soon afterward: "I'd never have come here if home hadn't blown up under me. Now I'm well enough to think again. I'm all right. . . . Give regards to C. Lindsay. How is she? From darkest Yugoslavia."

For more than a year, no word. Finally I actually met him.

IN VERMONT, for *Life* magazine, and ultimately for my own writer's education, I spent August 17 and 18, 1961, making notes as fast as I could type them while Robert Frost talked, and August 19 driving a rented car from Vermont to Tivoli, New York, Frost to Bellow.

At a nice little bookstore in Vermont I had purchased a slim book called *The Writer's Dilemma*, containing Bellow's essay "The Sealed Treasure," telling of a drive he had taken through Illinois "to gather material for an article." I read his essay at a coffee-stop. By the "sealed treasure" Bellow meant "the intelligence or cultivation" of women of small towns, whose "private vice" was reading great books from the local public libraries. Their connection to the great world of spacious feeling beyond Shawneetown was the local library. "I went to the libraries and was not surprised to learn that good books were very much in demand, and that there were people in central Illinois who read Plato, Tocqueville, Proust and Robert Frost. . . . The writer's art appears to be a compensation for the hopelessness or meanness of existence. *He* by some method has retained the feelings and the ideal conceptions of which no sign remains in ordinary existence." Here he cited Vachel Lindsay, "preaching the Gospel of Beauty and calling on the people to build the New Jerusalem." I had written a book about Lindsay nine years earlier, which Bellow had admired. Then, too, his balanced politics, poised between hope and despair: "Yes, there are good reasons for revulsion and fear. But revulsion and fear impair judgement. Anxiety destroys scale and suffering makes us lose perspective. One would have to be optimistic to the point of imbecility to raise the standard of pure Affirmation and cry, 'Yea, Yea,' shrilly against the

deep background of 'Nays.' But the sympathetic heart is sometimes broken, sometimes not. It is reckless to say 'broken'; it is nonsense to say 'whole and unimpaired.' On either side we have the black and white of paranoia."

And so I drove up to the lawn at the house at Tivoli in the Hudson Valley. I made photographs of Bellow and his son Adam on the same roll of film with which I'd shot Frost, and I slept in a clean bed on a hot night beneath a sheet only, and in another room of that vast and marvelous house Bellow, and somewhere Adam, and in yet another room a gentleman friend of Bellow's who worked for the government, and somewhere in some room or other (I never knew where) slept or lay a woman of extraordinary beauty. My not knowing where she was made me restless. To this day I do not know where she was, or who—I made no notes on Tivoli: my head was filled not with Bellow but with Frost.

Bellow cooked dinner for me, and for some reason we ate alone (I suppose because I had arrived late), and afterward he read to me from a work in progress which became the novel *Herzog*. I have never been able to find or remember the sections he read (perhaps they never reached print), although I do remember that he wore a hat while he read—charming eccentricity, I thought, until, seven years later, my age then his, my eyes undergoing changes, I concluded that his hat might have been a shade against the light. (Herzog "put on his fedora, as if he hoped to derive some authority from it.")

Of course I chattered on about Frost. Late that year, after my article appeared, Bellow wrote to me about it. "Very much liked your Sandburg-Frost article. How neatly you let Sandburg portray himself. One or two strokes of the dollar sign and the thing was done. Frost is a different kettle of woodchuck altogether. Woodchuck I say because he has more exits to his burrow than any man can count."

I remember best of all—better even than the woman who was the guest of the house—standing at a window with Bellow and feeling fearful of the silence, the solitude of his surroundings, and remarking, "I'd be nervous. Do you own a gun?"

"No," he beautifully replied, "why should somebody die because I'm nervous?"

In Bellow, only crazy people carry guns, shooting a cat in the attic, shooting through the telephone directory on a music stand. Hender-

7. *The Writer's Dilemma* (London: Oxford University Press, 1961).

son, recovering from craziness, gives up hunting—"it seemed a strange way to relate to nature." "But I couldn't see what good it would do me to fire a gun," says Charlie Citrine. "As if I could shoot my way out of my perplexities—the chief perplexity being my character!" Through all Bellow's work violence is pointless, mad, associated with futility and brainlessness.

From Tivoli, on Sunday, I left for New York City. Later in the week Bellow came down. I dined on Wednesday with Bellow and my friend Herbert Blau at a restaurant called Oscar's on Third Avenue, passing from there with Bellow to a lady's apartment. I hoped it would be the lady I had pondered in the night at Tivoli, but it was not, though it was another as fine; and met there Bellow's first son, Gregory, in his teens. So I saw Bellow Saturday, Sunday, and Wednesday, but not again for four and a half years.

I had gone to Bellow at Tivoli in purity, without motive. It did not occur to me that someday I might want to write his biography or anybody else's. I was essentially a novelist—now and then a journalist. Four years later, however, it occurred to me to write an article about him for *Life*—the Frost had turned out so well—but when I wrote to him he replied: "Thank you for your offer, it's a very good one. But the fact of the matter is that I've had about all the public attention I can safely absorb. Anyone who held a geiger counter on me now would hear a terrible rattling. I liked your Frost and Sandburg piece . . . but somehow I think I would be ill-advised to spread myself all over *Life* even under your auspices. What I want to do now is to lie low and gather a little shadow. . . . Please remember me to Wright Morris. I didn't much care for his last book. Regrettably I told him what I thought of it and I appear to have blown up a valuable friendship. Odd, but I don't number so many friends among writers now. There was a time when we loved one another. No one gives me the time of day anymore except yourself, and John Cheever and I forget who else. The rest have vanished."

I SAW HIM NEXT at his apartment in Chicago on South Shore Drive, and his wife, Susan, who was neither the woman of Tivoli nor the woman of Manhattan but someone other, whose olive beauty made me restless. Her trousers snugly fit her hips; and Daniel, who was Bellow's third son, even as Susan was his third wife; and our mutual friend Richard Stern.

Once again I was on journalistic assignment, this time for *Sports*