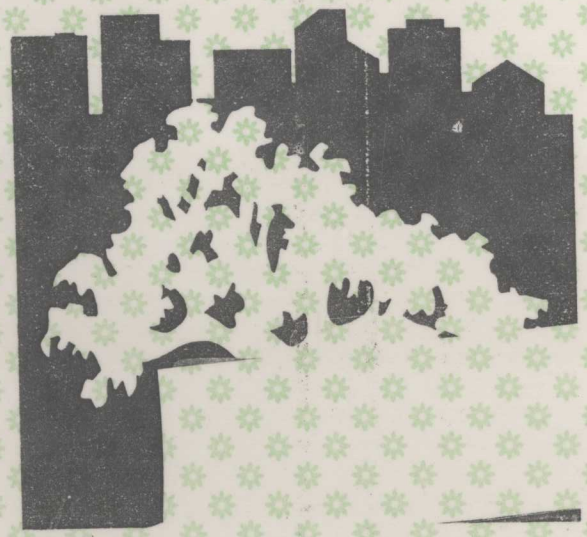
SAUL BELLOW IN THE 1980s



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Gloria L. Cronin and L.H. Goldman

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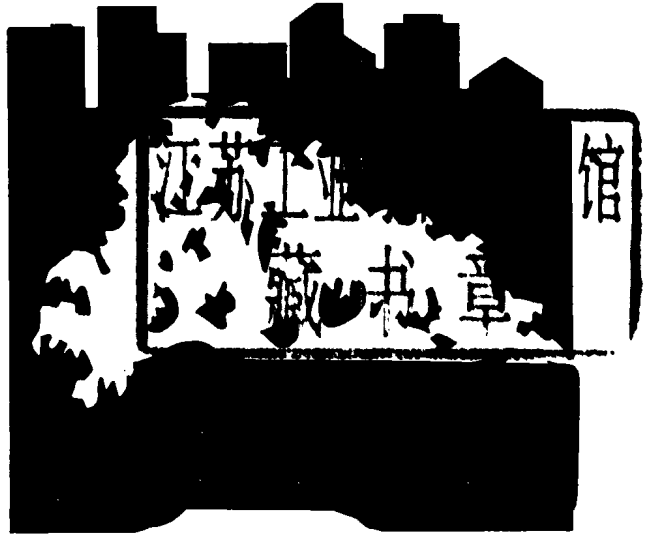

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Introduction

Saul Bellow's stature in postwar American letters can only be compared to that of Hemingway or Faulkner earlier in this century. A Nobel Laureate and winner of numerous prestigious fiction awards, Bellow has commanded serious attention from a large range of reviewers and critics at home and abroad for the last forty years.

The first major wave of scholarly interest in Bellow occurred approximately between 1966–74 approximately, producing major books by Brigitte Scheer-Schäzler (1965), Keith Opdahl (1967), Pierre Dommerges (1967), Irving Malin (1967, 1969), Robert Detweiler (1968), John J. Clayton (1968), David D. Galloway (1970), Nathan Scott (1973), Sarah Blacher Cohen (1974), M. Gilbert Porter (1974), and Earl Rovit (1974, 1975). Though each study is focused differently, all share in common a celebration of Saul Bellow as humanist and contemporary neo-transcendentalist. These writers performed the extremely valuable function of placing Bellow in the contemporary scene and broadly distinguishing the nature of his thematic concerns, stylistic techniques, and peculiarly affirmative *menschlichkeit* values. Most of these studies represent sophisticated and useful approaches to the Bellow text, and many hint at an array of sources and structures which would have to be unraveled by later critics.

Not surprisingly then, critics like Peter Bischoff (1975), Robert Kegan (1976), Tony Tanner (1978), Yuzaburo Shibuya (1978), Chirantan Kulshrestha (1978), Edmund Schraepen (1978), and Stanley Trachtenberg (1979), developed many of the avenues of inquiry hinted at in these works, yet though they all amplified the earlier works they only slightly modified the "orthodox" vision of Bellow as humanist and contemporary "yea-sayer."

With the advent of the 1980's, a third wave of critical interest produced a spate of new books on Bellow which opened many new avenues of

approach. Joseph McCadden (1980), an American graduate student, reproduced his dissertation to provide the first book-length study of Bellow's treatment of women; Mark Harris (1980), a noted American biographer, published the results of his abortive attempt to produce a Bellow biography; Malcolm Bradbury (1982), a British scholar, located Bellow within the historiography of modernism; Frenchman Claude Levy (1983) wrote a structuralist analysis of Bellow's narrative strategies; while L. H. Goldman (1983), an Orthodox American Jew, produced a thorough treatment of Bellow's philosophical debt to Judaism; Jan Bakker, the Dutch critic, produced an exhaustive comparative study of Hemingway and Bellow; Jeanne Braham (1984), American scholar, traced the nineteenth-century American influences on Bellow; Judie Newman (1984), a British scholar, documented his responses to twentieth-century history and historiography; while Dan Fuchs (1984), another American scholar, produced the first full-length textual study of the novels, being one of the few scholars with access to Bellow's manuscripts; and most recently Jonathan Wilson (1985), also an American scholar, expressed his frustration with the orthodox image of Bellow the humanist, by trying to construe Bellow as a thorough-going nihilist.

What we notice in these books is that they all move beyond Bellow's humanism to the particulars that go into making Bellow the kind of author he is. It is this interest in specific areas of concentration, as well as the courage to be distinctive, that make this second wave so much more interesting.

This present volume of essays, coming as it does at the end of the 1980's, rounds out the picture of the new topics of investigation undertaken by critics during this decade of renewed critical interest in Bellow. The topics are even more distinctive, more provocative, and more exciting. We have arranged this book in two sections, (1) General Essays and (2) Specialized Essays providing a novel by novel analysis. This should aid students and researchers who wish to gain a general overview, as well as those hoping for enlightenment with a specific work. What follows will be a series of descriptions of the articles, designed both to place each author's essay in the context of Bellow criticism and to illuminate its particular contribution. Comments appear in the order in which the articles appear in the Table of Contents.

General Essays

Previous critics like John J. Clayton, Brigitte Scheer-Schäzler, Gilbert Porter, Keith Opdahl, and Tony Tanner have all resisted the idea that

a sense of history is central to Bellow's novels. In their critical view it is the sense of the transcendent that is imminent, with literal detail merely being employed in its service. British critics Malcom Bradbury and Judie Newman differ sharply with this largely American critical tradition. In "Bellow's Sixth Sense of History," Newman provides a novel-by-novel treatment which describes the two polar entities posited by the Bellow novel as "chaos" and "chronos." Each of the novels, and even the very first of the short stories, echo the "tension[s] between the timeless and the timebound." This essay, therefore, seeks to establish a historical interpretation of the fiction showing how the historical content of Bellow's work, far from being ancillary, does enter the novels functionally, organizing their structure, and informing their thematic concerns. Newman's major contribution to Bellow criticism is the assertion that Bellow's novels systematically explore different approaches to history, and different retreats from it—"history as nightmare, as tragedy, as farce, as black comedy; the retreat into myth or into the heightened presence of the crisis mentality." The novels also explore the dangers of "pop" or instant history, and those dangers of history governed by stereotypical moral responses.

Fuchs' essay "Bellow and Freud" bears a parallel relationship to Newman's work since he, too, is discussing the subject of Modernism in the Bellow novel, albeit from a philosophical and historiographical perspective. Fuchs' article is the first of several mappings of Bellow's critique of modernism. This subject has been dealt with only tangentially by earlier critics. Though not an exhaustive treatment of Bellow and Modernism, this article provides the definitive treatment of Bellow's relationship to Freudian thought, which system, Fuchs argues persuasively, represents "a prime instance of modernism" against which Bellow has mounted a life-long sustained critique. Fuchs' study illustrates Bellow's ongoing quarrel with a host of Freudian constructs. He draws convincing evidence from biography, the essays and the fiction, as well as his personal acquaintance with Bellow, to document Bellow's systematic "deconstruction" of Freudian modes of thought.

Also definitive is Goldman's informed treatment of the undergirding influence of the philosophy of Judaism in the Bellow canon. There has been undisputed agreement for several decades concerning Bellow's debt to and championing of Western humanism, but, ironically, the efforts of previous critics have documented only the Greek, European, and Christian sources of his humanistic outlook. Goldman corrects this partial view by providing the missing, and perhaps prior, source in a specifically Jewish cultural and religious tradition. She also suggests that

for Bellow writing is a way of coming closer to God, that in his later works there are many overt expressions of covenant Judaism, thus making these works a form of survivor literature.

Tracing yet another source of Bellow's thinking, Allan Chavkin documents Bellow's debt to the English romantics, characterizing Bellow as a prodigious reader and the foremost intellectual among twentieth-century writers. Chavkin first acknowledges the multitude of modern philosophical sources Bellow has drawn upon, and then traces his allegiance to the older tradition of early nineteenth-century English romanticism. Critical formulations written before the mid-seventies concentrated on Bellow's preoccupation with transcendence, affirmations of human potential, humanism, belief in intuition and the realm of enlightenment which lies beyond the rational intellect. Major early critics like Clayton, Opdahl, Tanner, Scheer-Schäzler, Porter, and others, while being perfectly aware of Bellow's connection with the English romantics, mainly described its general translation into the value structure of the fiction, and left it for someone like Chavkin to make the connection explicit. In this study Chavkin asserts that though Bellow so thoroughly assimilates and makes his own whatever sources he uses, his romantic sensibility is largely the result of deliberate borrowing from early nineteenth-century English Romantics.

Related in treatment to Chavkin's essay is Weiting's identification of Bellow's use of the pastoral mode in the novels. While previously critics have focused quite exhaustively on Bellow's metaphorical and literal uses of a Jewish-urban milieu—usually that of New York or Chicago—Weiting points out that in each of the novels "one finds also a corresponding pastoral element, an excursion, either physical or mental, to an environment that is free from the clutter and chaos of the protagonist's urban environment. Whereas their flights to nature have attracted attention in individual novels, they have been virtually ignored as a pervasive pattern that informs a cohesive motif in Bellow's fiction."

The application of feminist theory and methods to the Bellow canon surprisingly begins as late as 1979 and 1980 with the appearance of dissertations and articles by such people as Louana L. Peontek, Nantana Buranaron, Esther Marie Mackintosh, Joseph McCadden, Sherry Levy Reiner, and Judith Scheffler. Of these only McCadden's study, photoreproduced from his dissertation, appears in book form. With the appearance of the new gender study, Aharoni departs [from the generation of 1980's early feminist critics] who almost exclusively pursued the "images of women" approach, and nearly all of whom failed to distinguish between Bellow's misogyny and that of his protagonists. In the 1960's critics like Leslie Fiedler and John J. Clayton had both lamented

that Bellow's work was singularly lacking in real or vivid female characters. Irving Malin had also chastised both Bellow and his critics: "I am troubled by the absence of any lengthy discussion of Bellow's women. Critics assert they are stylized and unreal. But these adjectives are not enough to explain the complexity of recurring stereotyped roles .... It is time for someone to write an entire essay on all the women."

Aharoni seems to have taken seriously Malin's injunction—particularly with regard to his hint of the complexity of the women characters in the novel. She undertakes to reexamine and recover the range of female characters from a less ideologically radical perspective and discovers: "Bellow's artistic technique imposes some limitations on his portrayal of women characters, as we perceive them through the minds of his male protagonists who often overshadow them; and that because narrators are men generally going through various existential crises, the female characters in comparison often do not have the same depth of emotional, moral, and intellectual complexity as the heroes or anti-heroes. Furthermore, we sometimes get the impression that Bellow is more interested in illuminating certain societal attitudes to women rather than in fully delineating their characters. However, having said that, the fact remains that Bellow through his 45 years of writing ... has given us a vast and rich gallery of convincing and vivid women of all kinds."

Aharoni accumulates evidence for this thesis by limiting her analysis to a few representative female characters who appear at different periods of his writing, and who reveal not only Bellow's treatment of the characterization of women, but the growth and development in his depiction of the female situation as it appears in Bellow's works.

While Aharoni deals with Bellow's attempts to depict women characters in the novels, Abbott deals more broadly with Bellow's commitment to "character," male and female, in the context of the twentieth-century critical debate concerning the questionable viability of the "novel of characters" (Alain Robbe-Grillet). Whereas Abbott argues that for Bellow "character" is very much a live issue, not a strategy to be dropped, he agrees with Bellow that the passing of the apogee of the individual has removed easy assumptions about the power and centrality of the "individual" in our age and, subsequently, in the novel. "Character has become a subject for discussion among humanists," he asserts. "One can no longer take the existence of character for granted." Abbott's most important point is that Bellow's novelistic philosophy of character takes a backwards turn after the very modern treatment of the problematics of character in his first novel.

An entirely new thematic topic of interest in Bellow criticism appeared in the 1980's with the advent of Ben Siegel's intensive treatment of

Bellow's attitudes about and relationship to modern academe. Siegel observes that like many other American novelists and poets, Bellow blames it for much of what is wrong with this nation's culture, especially its literary culture. Siegel begins with the assertion that almost no other subject stirs Bellow with as much rancor and resentment as the subject of the modern university. His article is an exhaustive analysis of Bellow's numerous fictional and other recorded statements about the state of the modern university, the American education system, the state of modern culture, and the state of the arts. It takes on particular relevance with the publication of Bellow's "Introduction" to Bloom's *The Closing of the American Mind* in 1987.

Specialized Essays

The essays on individual works presented herein deal mostly with issues that are in some way unique: either they consider areas that have been neglected heretofore, or they deal with a particular subject in an innovative fashion.

Bellow's early novels, specifically *Dangling Man* and *The Victim,* have received very little critical attention in the first twenty five years after their appearance. It is only in the 1970's and 1980's that scholars have begun to take these works seriously and have viewed them as an integral part of the Bellow canon rather than dismissing them as a "Master's" or "Ph.D. thesis" (as Bellow would have it). These later critics search for early influences on Bellow in order to discern the shape his philosophical world view was taking. While previous scholars have recognized the Conradian influence on Bellow's early works—an influence Bellow himself acknowledges in his Nobel Prize speech—Jo Brans' contribution in "The Dialectic of Hero and Anti-Hero in *Rameau's Nephew* and *Dangling Man,*" is in locating a much earlier source—that of the eighteenth century French writer Diderot. Brans claims that Diderot's work had great impact on Bellow's initial novel, the device of the dialectic of hero and anti-hero suggesting alternate modes of thought processes and behavior created by Diderot and recreated by Bellow in *Dangling Man,* but with the refinement of a single character. For both Diderot and Bellow both aspects are necessary. They are both visible in the world and appear in the individual psyche as well. The individual, ultimately, has to choose his way of life.

Critics have recognized that the concern for what it is to be human is the central preoccupation of Bellow's novels. Michael Bellamy's contribution to this discussion in "Bellow's More-Or-Less Human Bestiaries: *Augie March* and *Henderson the Rain King,*" is in pointing out that the

animal kingdom in these two works function as a locus for man's humanity. He is more than a beast yet a member of the animal kingdom "in terms of the way he interacts with his fellow creatures." When man seeks to transcend his nature, the animals he comes in contact with remind him of his own "creaturehood" and his place in the scheme of things. For Bellamy, the inordinate use of animals in these two novels indicates Bellow's belief in "man's immanence within nature."

Henderson the Rain King has always been a favorite of students and scholars alike. It is humorous; it is different (with its obnoxious-yet-ultimately-endearing Gentile protagonist); and it lends itself to a variety of literary, theological, and metaphysical interpretations. Recent criticism, as already stated, concerns itself with Bellow's anti-Modernist stance. Gloria L. Cronin, in a vigorously written article entitled, *"Henderson the Rain King:* a Parodic Exposé of the Modern Novel," traces Bellow's critical posture to ideas formulated in his essays and then indicates how these ideas work in *Henderson the Rain King.* Through the use of parody, Bellow exposes the "absurdities of absurdism, the banalities of historicist thinking, and the ignominy of post-modern sewer searching." Bellow's burlesque, however, is functional: "to restore moderation and good sense to the twentieth-century novel which . . . has lost its ability to assess truthfully the possibilities of life."

Although there are not many black characters in Bellow's works, the few that there are have received little meaningful attention by Bellow critics. An excellent early essay is Mariann Russell's "White Man's Black Man: Three Views." She deals with the black figure in *Mr. Sammler's Planet,* but since her approach is a comparative study of three American authors, she doesn't go into the depth that is really needed. Her essay is significant, nevertheless, and makes an important statement: the black man is not seen as an individual but is used by the three authors, Bellow included, in the Conradian sense, as an aspect of the protagonist. He becomes "a convenient metaphor for the disturbing elements in white society and is, in the last analysis, not an image of black culture, but a mirror image of the prevailing white culture." Russell's essay also points to the need for further examination of this subject.

Mr. Sammler's Planet is Bellow's only novel that deals directly with the Holocaust, and critics have recognized that its major concern is human survival in light of this most horrendous crime. Susan Glickman, in "The World as Will and Idea: A Comparative Study of *An American Dream* and *Mr. Sammler's Planet,*" examines this problem but focuses on survival in America since that is the locus of Artur Sammler's present residence. She perceives a similarity in thematic and narrative strategies to Norman Mailer's novel and suggests that Bellow, who has a penchant for

parodying and flaying contemporary novelists, "deliberately raided Mailer's novel (*Mr. Sammler's Planet* came out in 1970, *An American Dream* in 1965) in order to make his critique of his rival's viewpoint more witty and more comprehensive." Glickman notes that both authors take radical stances on the "issues of man's place in nature and society, the character of the religious quest, the function of evil, and the roles of will and intellect."

Most critics are not too fond of Artur Sammler, viewing him as a static character devoid of psychological conflict. Ellen Pifer, in her essay, "'Two Different Speeches': Mystery and Knowledge in *Mr. Sammler's Planet*," argues against this reading of Sammler. She claims that it is his Holocaust experience that marks the way he observes phenomena. And Sammler's psyche, not just his mind, is divided on most issues. The "unfolding of his internal self-argument, is profoundly psychological in the root sense of the term." She views Sammler as embodying the "epitome of the 'passionate, conflicted, modern self.'" Bellow uses the device of Sammler's physical infirmity—his "two different-looking eyes"—to communicate this fractured psyche: the "blind side" denotes an uncommunicative or inward process while the operative right eye, representing the intellect, is alert to the phenomena it registers.

The Dean's December, is similar to *Mr. Sammler's Planet* in that it, too, is a "novel of ideas," and also has not fared well with early critics. In fact, its detractors use the same disparaging phrases in their negative critique of the work: it is tedious and its characters lack vitality. Matthew Roudané, however, in his article "A *Cri de Coeur:* The Inner Reality of Saul Bellow's *The Dean's December*," finds that a careful examination of this late novel will reveal a "successful fusion . . . of ideas and image." Roudané claims that *The Dean's December* indeed "embodies an engaging tale, one as complex and multivalent as any Bellow fiction to date." Bellow's technique, as in *Mr. Sammler's Planet*, is to filter the world through the consciousness of the protagonist, Albert Corde, and it is Corde's meditative perceptions which shape the novel. Michael Yetman, on the other hand, uses this work to relate the importance of Bellow's prose in providing the key to an understanding of Bellow's fiction. "Words reflect and at the same time interpret, humanize, even 'save' through imagination the stuff of literal experience." Yetman claims that Bellow, an "old-fashioned, conservative thinker," believes that words "properly used . . . capture and preserve the truth or reality of human experience, including its moral dimension." And in *The Dean's December*, Bellow thematizes poetic language thereby demonstrating how many of the wrongs of society can be attributed to "our having foresworn the poetic and individual for the conceptual, mass media-induced trendy thinking of the day."

While Bellow's religious proclivity has been noted by many critics, few critics have taken the trouble to delineate just how this interest is manifest in his works. Whereas L. H. Goldman traces specific Jewish roots, Stephen L. Tanner, in "The Religious Vision of *More Die of Heartbreak,*" uses Bellow's latest book to show how Bellow's religious concerns qualify and define the humanism in his novels. They are encompassed in his preoccupation with the transcendent, that is, with the aspects of human experience and the qualities of the human personality that lie beyond the purview of positivistic science, psychology, and the rationalistic philosophy. He suggests that a statement from the foreword to Allan Bloom's *The Closing of the American Mind,* published the same year, echoes the major theme of *More Die of Heartbreak.* Bellow states therein: "The soul has to find and hold its ground against hostile forces, sometimes embodied in ideas which frequently deny its very existence and which indeed often seem to be trying to annul it altogether." Tanner claims that this is a "religious preoccupation, if a broad definition of religion is allowed." He maintains that in this novel Bellow brings to us a sense of religion by "intimation rather than assertion . . . , by preaching, by a comic mixture of the profound and preposterous rather than a sober polemic."

Gerhard Bach's article, "The Dean Who Came in From the Cold," studies both elements: language and ideas. Bach believes that in *The Dean's December* Bellow presents "a view of the American 1980s which forcefully addresses (masked) 'realities' and (unmasked) 'appearances,' and which brings into focus the artist's struggle to find a language appropriate for describing their origins, their enactments, and their underlying mechanisms." And although *The Dean's December* does provide conclusive insights into America's problems, more importantly, however, is its concentration on those processes—"mental, sensual, and spiritual"—necessary in procuring such insights. Bach further states that "the novel establishes two prerogatives for the protagonist to contend with: in the mental-spiritual realm the refinement of thought into crystal-clear images, and in the pragmatic realm the search for a common language with which to express" them. Consequently, Bellow assigns Albert Corde, protagonist of *The Dean's December*, the soul-searching task of "recover[ing] the world that is buried under the debris of false description or non-experience."

As this collection of essays emerges at the end of the 1980s, it is possible to discern both gaps and future trends in Bellow criticism. Clearly, post-structuralist criticism will have a major impact on the shape of things to come in the 1990s.

Saul Bellow's Sixth Sense:
The Sense of History

Judie Newman

For Nietzsche, the historical sense in our time forms a sixth sense, pervading the philosophy, history, and culture of the modern era.[1] For most critics, however, the notion of a "sixth sense" operating in the novels of Saul Bellow more readily suggests a sense of transcendent realities, Platonic homeworlds, Steineresque meditations, and intimations of immortality. Overwhelmingly, critical orthodoxy sees Bellow as a writer more concerned with the universal than with the contingent and the particular.[2]

At the International Symposium on Saul Bellow the question of the historical content of Bellow's work was raised. Malcolm Bradbury argued that Bellow's novels encounter the chaos and contingency of the historical world remaining within the historical and experiential continuum, rather than express an urge to transcendence. Bradbury's voice rang out alone on this side of the argument as other critics weighed in on the side of transcendence. John Clayton argued that *Humboldt's Gift* concerned "Transcendence and the Flight from Death"; Gilbert Porter discussed Bellow's "Transcendental Vision"; Keith Opdahl, while describing Bellow's style as "realistic" nonetheless argued that he used radiant "literal detail to portray a transcendental reality"; and Brigitte Scheer-Schäzler affirmed that "Bellow in trying to discover the universal in the particular echoes the Transcendental epistemological quest."

In his comment in the proceedings of the Symposium,[3] Tony Tanner credited Bellow with a sense of history, but argued that this was merely ancillary to his fiction. Tanner begins by arguing against the "Transcendent" interpretation. "To be sure," he said, "by adroit and legitimate quotation one can find 'transcendental-type' statements in Bellow's work, but then whom has he not read, whom does he not quote?"

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"It is my own sense," he continued, "that in Bellow's writing the pained, hyperactive, omnivorous, all-remembering habit of perceiving the given world is more powerful and more convincing than the yearning . . . to assert the existence of some Transcendental reality." Tanner, however, also objects to the "historical" interpretation. For Tanner, Bellow's novels fail to incorporate an analytic sense of the dynamics of history. Transcendent glimpses are offered as a reprieve saving the protagonists from trying to comprehend history. The protagonists become, in Tanner's analysis, either "victims," suffering history passively, or "survivors," evading history, but in no sense do they comprehend it. Though Tanner sees Bellow as aware of the problems of history, he argues that such problems "do not functionally enter his fiction."

It is the function of the present article to argue for a "historical" interpretation of Bellow's writing, and to establish that the historical content of his work does enter the novels functionally, organizing their structure, rather than, in Tanner's view, in quotation marks.

Bellow's work presents an increasingly overt tension between the timeless and the timebound, with a consequent modification of his form, from the spatially ordered forms of *Dangling Man* and *The Victim* to "loose and baggy monsters" which express the contingency of the historical process. Bellow's concern with history begins as early as his second published story, "The Mexican General,"[4] an account of the death of a great man (Trotsky) as it impinges on the mean and limited awareness of a petty Mexican police chief. It comes to the fore in *The Adventures of Augie March,* entailing, as Bellow recognized, a new, freer style. Without going into detail, it seems interesting to dwell briefly on its status as a literary manifesto, setting out the problems of history and the manner in which these problems govern the form of the novels. *The Adventures of Augie March* centers on Ortega y Gasset's dictum that "Man has not a nature but a history," testing this statement in the sphere of historical existence (Chicago), in the natural world (Mexico), and finally in the European world of art. The novel falls into three distinct blocks. The Chicago section has a detailed historic time scheme relating Augie's adventures to the events of the Depression. The Mexican adventures initially move out of time into a realm of plumed serpents and nature deities, where Augie reads Utopian writers and historians. And the final parts of the novel steadily introduce the question of Art as timebound or timefree, through a succession of paintings referred to, and a thinner, more formal narrative texture.

Is Augie a validation of Ortega's view or a parodic enactment of it? Ortega's concept of "historical reason" implies that we have no resource but to "tell a story," to re-experience. Man is not an Adamic figure but a member of a society with a past. This "pastness" of society is established

in the early pages of *The Adventures* where each character is delineated as representative of certain historical periods. For Ortega all truth is relative and historical, every idea is inscribed in a situation. Ortega shares with Heraclitus the "pure happening" of all existences: the ego is only activity, pure happening. Man constructs himself whether he will or no, in various "versions" of himself so that, in Ortega's terms, we are all "novelists of ourselves." Ortega makes these assumptions, however, on a metaphysical, nonethical ground. Bellow shifts onto the moral. He accepts the primacy of historical existence but refuses any acceptance of either a deterministic or a relativist view of history, the view in which man is either victimized by history or "survives" at the cost of exploiting others.

The major assertion of Bellow's message comes toward the end of the novel when Augie observes the doors of the Baptistery in Florence, doors which tell the entire history of mankind. At this point Bellow links the question of history versus nature to the problem of form in the novel. These doors are not selected at random by Bellow. In *Notes on the Novel*[5] Ortega introduces the doors as an analogy to the importance of formal, timefree esthetics in art. Contrasting an "art of figures" to an "art of adventures," Ortega argues that "in our time the novel of high style must turn from the latter to the former" (74), a movement which is entirely negated in the picaresque "adventures" of Augie March. Ortega argues that "the material never saves a work of art, the gold it is made of does not hallow a statue. A work of art lives on its form not on its material" (75). This view is also negated when the argument is put in the mouth of the sinister Basteshaw who discourses on the goldsmith whose statues were melted down. Ortega sees culture as a mere "lifeboat" offered to shipwrecked man. Basteshaw's biological culture is used to attack this non-ethical view of the creative act. For Ortega, the historical, material quality of art must be reduced to a minimum, so that the artist's aim is to work within a tiny circumscribed sphere. It is this necessity which according to him complicates the writing of historical novels involving the clash of two horizons, the imaginary and the historically correct—precisely the clash in *The Adventures.* Ortega concludes:

> Let all novelists look at the doors of the Florentine Baptistery, wrought by Lorenzo Ghiberti. In a series of small squares they show the whole creation. . . . The sculptor was concerned with nothing but to model all these forms one after another. We still seem to feel the trembling delight with which the hand set down the arched brow of the ram Abraham espied in the thicket and the plump form of the apple. . . . Similarly a novelist must be inspired above all by a wonderful enthusiasm to tell a tale and to invent. . . . In simpler words a novelist,

> while he writes his novel, must care more about his imaginary world than about any other possible world. (95)

Augie, we remember, is writing his own story for us. His concern with his own inner world is seen here as indefensible. When an old lady appears to "explain" the doors to him and to recount her own woeful history, Augie brushes her off.

> "This is happening to me," she says.
> "There always is a me it happens to," says Augie. (597)[6]

This is ambiguous. On the one hand all historical narrative rests on one postulate—that of the eternal identity of human nature—so that there always is a "me" it happens to. On the other hand it is Augie's "me," the pure happening of his ego, which is the one which concerns him. Ortega's philosophy of history implies an implicit moral relativism. Augie, while asserting that his story will be the "truth," that he'll be telling it like it was without selection or suppression of detail (such is the opening statement of the novel), is first seen by us busily lying to the Charity officers, suppressing the existence of a lodger, constructing not a true history but a plausible tale. The novel introduces a succession of tales and versions which become more and more overtly constructions free of truth. Paslavitch tells the tale of his uncle, Clem describes the children smelling flowers, Basteshaw tells of his aunt's sleeping sickness, Mintouchian treats Augie to a series of cautionary tales on the general theme of marriage, and the entire ship's company of the *Sam McManus* pour out anecdotes, troubles, personal histories, and even poems to the receptive Augie.

Where Ortega argues that men must construct "versions," that history is narration, Bellow questions the morality of the process. History is deterministic, powerful, only in so far as the individual collaborates with it. We remember that Augie visits the doors to kill time before meeting a black marketeer, collaborating in war profiteering, and, most sinisterly, buying dental supplies from a person who used to be in Dachau. For Bellow, then, man cannot escape history, yet need not be entirely conditioned by it. Augie's opening statement that "a man's character is his fate" is ambiguous. The essential nature of the individual does not govern his destiny. Yet the individual need not necessarily become the victim of the self-conscious creation of the self-as-character, of history as narration. History is neither the objective record of "facts" nor entirely interpretive. The artist need not be swamped by the historical material—nor isolated in the formal ivory tower of art. In "How I Wrote Augie March's Story" Bellow said, "We are called upon to preserve our humanity in circumstances of rapid change and movement. I do not see what else we can do but refuse to be condemned with a time and place."[7]

Bellow's later works continue this examination of historical existence. *Seize the Day* signals a return to the formal poetic novel as its title suggests, and to a present unthreatened by the extension of past or future. Tommy Wilhelm attempts to live for and in the present, to begin again, only to discover that this is the creed of financial America. His "day" becomes a day of atonement subsuming his entire history, and reasserting its importance. Henderson attempts to move out of time into a world of prehistory only to be forced back into the timebound. Herzog, the history scholar, examines his own past and that of Western man and attempts to relate the personal to the public. He attempts to take on his entire historical situation, and his inherited house at Ludeyville represents the chaos which is the result of taking on such a massive task. Herzog's nostalgia for his family's past corresponds to a negative Calvinist view of history—decline from a golden age. His belief in progress, his orientation to the future, corresponds to a positive, Romantic creed (see Mosher; hence the title of his first book—*Romanticism and Christianity*). The two creeds are questioned by an accident which disrupts his historical schemes, and they coalesce in his relation to his daughter, June, the future and the month in which the novel ends. In a reverse development, Mr. Sammler is caught between a nightmare past (the concentration camp) and a Utopian future (the Apollo moonshot), and is consciously established, by reference to Wells, as a time traveler. He is forced out of both horror and Utopia into the recognition that existence in living relation to time is one of the conditions of his being. Finally in *Humboldt's Gift* Bellow explores an encyclopedic assortment of different approaches to history. In order to demonstrate that history does enter the fiction functionally and not merely in quotation marks this argument concentrates on two novels—*Henderson the Rain King*, the most fantastic, and least overtly concerned with history, and *Humboldt's Gift*, the most obviously historical.

At the beginning of *Henderson the Rain King* the narrator emphasizes the problem of dealing with time. Henderson is seen grappling with the problems of organizing his memories, unable to cope with their simultaneity in the present. "A disorderly rush begins—my parents, my wives, my girls, my children, my farm, my animals, my habits, my money, my music lessons, my drunkenness, my prejudices, my brutality. . . . And they pile into me from all sides. It turns into chaos" (7). The alternative to chaos is, of course, chronos. Yet Henderson strenuously continues to undermine any easy acceptance of the structures within which he is forced to construct his tale. Wandering from one event to another, uncertain where to begin his story, he places a distance between himself and events, expressive of

his alienated stance and of its roots in his uncertain relation to time. He says things like, "To go by the ages of the kids we were married for about 20 years" and, "Frances and I were divorced. This happened after V.E. day. Or was it so soon? No, it must have been in 1948" (8).

Henderson is alienated because he is living in an eternal present in which the past does not exist and everyone is always a stranger. This alienation, in part a personal psychological disturbance, is also that of a culture alienated from its origins, living in the expectation of immediate salvation in a new world. The first four chapters of the novel form an extended meditation on the question of an inherited past. Henderson fears mortality and therefore refuses to acknowledge time passing, or, within a family context, to acknowledge the parental generation—the past or his children—the future. By ignoring the claims of passion he attempts to avoid any connection with the generations and thus with time. His passionate encounters with Lily are always checked by images of death.

This psychological theme is linked to a larger cultural context. Henderson's flight from passion and death involves him in the desecration of religious and cultural inheritances. At Monte Cassino, scene of the destruction by U.S. troops of a monument of the European past, Henderson decides to breed pigs in the ancestral home, allowing them to root up statues from Florence and Salzburg. His choice of pigs is motivated by a desire to outrage his friend Goldstein's religious taboos.

Henderson rejects the European past, and that of his WASP ancestors, refusing to take his place in their portrait gallery. He typifies the American belief in the ability to wipe out the past and begin again in a new world where salvation from inherited guilt is a product of salvation from inherited tradition and history.

Such a belief is impossible, however, in psychological terms. Bellow implies a deep rooted schizophrenia here in American society. Although the African experiences operate in the realm of timeless fantasy or dream, Bellow begins by carefully embedding them in a psychological and social reality. The African experiences work as an exaggeration and refraction of elements already alluded to in the prologue. The tenant's cat and Miss Lennox's cat become avenging lions. The misery inflicted on Ricey conjures up a weeping African maiden. Literary allusions to ritual and romance become two full blown episodes. Minor "guilts" are punished by massive retributions in the "dream" experiences which distort scale and proportion in terms of absolute degrees of guilt and innocence. Aware of his own violence and amorality, Henderson is transported to a land where these are the norm. He rejects Ricey's child to find himself surrounded by Africans who hold him in their power. He desecrates his ancestors and the inheritance of the past only to become part of a society

where reverence for ancestors and observance of taboo almost prove fatal to him. The past avenges itself in no uncertain terms.

Henderson's journey into Africa is presented as a journey into prehistory. Africa is described as if it had only just emerged from the solar "big bang." The Arnewi, as their name suggests, are presented in terms of radiant newness, light, and harmony, in a golden age of esthetic beauty. They "would have satisfied the standards of Michelangelo himself" (55) we are told. They have no oppositions in their language and appear to possess in the person of Willatale a wisdom outside time. The timeless quality of their life has its counterpart, however, in their paralyzed inertia and the stagnant water of their cistern. It is significant that frogs, with their associations with the primal slime, should be their taboo animal. They are described in terms that suggest the life in time, and the regeneration inherent in it. They are "at all stages of development, with full tails like giant sperm" (58). In typical American fashion Henderson pins his faith on the annihilation of custom and taboo, and a new beginning. Though Henderson gets his technological timing right—the fuse works, the bomb explodes—it is his attitude to time which explains his overall failure. Wedded to an ideal of secular progress, Henderson proclaims that "this is the day and this is the hour," keen to deliver on his Messianic promise of salvation. The explosion ends in disaster, however, with the final image that of the Arnewi culture at war with nature, as the cows drink: "the cows, of course, obeying nature and the natives begging them and weeping" (103)—an image akin to the Freudian repressions of Henderson's America. In Arnewiland two attempts to escape from history are defeated—the esthetic timeless and the technological progressive. The problem of cultural change cannot be resolved either by ignoring it or by its elevation to a supreme value. Nature and culture remain locked in conflict with Henderson as the battleground.

Where the Arnewi experiences involve cultural attitudes toward change, those in Waririland move into the individual psyche. Waririland is established as a timebound fallen world. Romilayu falls at Henderson's approach to it and arises older and greyer. The associations are with darkness, evil, and crime. Wariri kings inherit only by the murder of the father, and live in terror of being denounced for lack of virility by their women. Henderson's own fears are magnified here. The Wariri religion of cyclic recurrence depends upon the belief that man is fallen, doomed to a pointless repetition of passion and violence. Dahfu describes it in terms of a primal crime, "In the beginning of time there was a hand raised which struck" (200). Dahfu, however, involves Henderson in Reichian psychotherapy.[8] If Freudian psychotherapy may be seen as a psychological version of inherited sin, Reichian therapy is the psychological equivalent of

the American transcendental belief in the possibility of instinctual innocence, of harmony between nature and culture. As opposed to the Freudian view of the necessity of cultural repression to protect against the amoral urgings of the instincts, Reich suggests that a total freedom from repression would result in an idyllic harmonious society. In the words of Philip Rieff, "Reich never bothered to argue against the probability that sex suppression functioned to hold societies together against the pressure of nature. It was a dogma to him that nature and culture could not be in tension. . . . He never confronts the horrible possibility which obsesses all of modern art that the reality behind the appearance may be even more unpleasant than the appearance."

To some extent Reichian therapy works for Henderson. In learning to express his rage and face his fears he learns to stop "avoiding" and to dance in time with Atti, Dahfu's tame lioness, who forces the present moment upon him. He has to learn to move in time despite his fear that "as I was in motion I was fair game" (246). The various dances of the tribe and the skull-throwing ceremony establish a new dynamic of esthetics, moving beyond the stasis of the Arnewi to a musical form in which time is a necessary element. The surroundings of the final lion hunt in the hopo are described in terms which reveal a delighted sensitivity to temporal processes as if change had been speeded up so that it were visible, as if the rhythm of life were audible. Rhythm pervades the episode from the swaying of the hammock to the music of cicadas. Yet though this recognition of change is hopeful to Henderson, his individual regeneration is placed in a cultural context which is less optimistic. The appearance of a real savage lion leads Henderson to recognize the possibility precisely outlined by Rieff—that animal nature is more terrifying than we think, that Melville may be closer to the truth than Emerson. Henderson's terror of Atti pales once he sees a real lion and learns what his role as Sungo is. Though Dahfu supposedly teaches a Reichian ethic in which a new beginning is possible, free from taint or repression, he hands on, in fact, a social role which can be seen only as a curse. On coming around in the tomb, Henderson's first thought is of time: "Maybe time was invented so that misery might have an end. So that it shouldn't last forever?" (293). For man, change and morality are consolations. Back in Baventai, Henderson is able to reconcile himself to the cyclic recurrence of nature: "You can't get away from rhythm. . . . The left hand shakes with the right hand, the inhale follows the exhale. . . . And the seasons. And the stars. . . . You've got to live in peace with it" (307).

The ending of the novel integrates the two ways of approaching time and culture—the Old World cyclic view and the American prophetic and progressive view, each represented emblematically by the lion cub and the

orphan child. Henderson admits that he had "lost count of time," tells the stewardess that he now sees something of value in the past, and faces up to the reason for his estrangement from his father—the latter's grief over the dead brother. Personal and cultural problems are resolved together. In the final dance around the plane Henderson celebrates not the frozen moment but the cyclic dance of human life. The novel moves from an initial refutation of time to a loving acceptance of it and willingness to exist within it. Even in this, the most fantastic and least naturalistic of Bellow's novels, then, the hero's attitude to his individual and social history governs the action. The supposedly "mythic" or "romance" setting is merely a pretext to an exploration of the bases of the historical sense.

This critical relation with myth forms the starting point of *Humboldt's Gift*.[10] To comprehend Bellow's view of history in this novel we need to refer back to the committed criticism of the forties and in particular to Philip Rahv. Writing in 1953, in his essay *The Myth and the Powerhouse,* Rahv argued that the concern with myth in modernist writing resulted from fear of engagement with history. History terrifies because

> modern life is above all a historical life producing changes with vertiginous speed, changes difficult to understand and even more difficult to control. And to some people it appears as though the past were being ground to pieces in the powerhouse of change, senselessly used up as so much raw material in the fabrication of an uncertain future. One way intellectuals have found of coping with their fear is to deny historical time and induce in themselves through esthetics and ideological means a sensation of mythic time . . . confounding past, present and future in an undifferentiated unity, as against historical time which is unrepeatable.[11]

Identifying the mythicism of Pound and Eliot with a retreat from the hazards of freedom, Rahv argues that art achieves independence only as it frees itself from myth. The mind needs to recognize its own creations as creations. It is my contention that Bellow is occupied with this freeing of the mind by confronting its own creations. Rahv characterizes the retreat into myth as follows: "To [the myth makers] as to Stephen Dedalus in *Ulysses* history is a nightmare from which they are trying to awaken. But to awake from history into myth is like escaping from a nightmare into a state of permanent insomnia" (208). *Humboldt's Gift* practically opens with Humboldt's quip that "History was a nightmare during which he was trying to get a good night's rest" (4). Insomniac Humboldt is contrasted with Citrine, a sleeper through the events of history, in flight from involvement. In a recent essay Bellow discussed the modern faith in progress by

technological innovation and lamented the cultural amnesia which is its byproduct. "The new era will produce men who are no longer attached to the past by any habit of mind. For them history will be nothing but strange incomprehensible tales."[12] Citrine's brother, Julius, for example, suffers from an amnesia extending even to his personal past. As the novel progresses, the initial presentation of the forties and fifties as richly textured historical periods yields to a series of strange incomprehensible tales—the film scenarios, the Thaxter kidnapping, the Cantabile plot. Parody becomes the dominant mode of the novel as Bellow explores ossified "fictions" both historical and literary to free the past as experience. Bellow is concerned with two alternative problems: the danger of avoiding history and the danger of embracing it too fondly.

Humboldt's character is marked by a relentless desire for status in history, a desire Bellow has described, in the same essay, as follows: "Intellectuals try hard to be what Hegel called World Historical Individuals. They may denounce the nightmare past but they have also an immortal craving to be in the line of succession and prove themselves historically necessary" (11).

Humboldt, discoursing on Julien Sorel, Napoleon, and Balzac's *jeune ambitieux* in a car in New Jersey is "especially attached to the World Historical Individual." The Napoleonic myth of intelligence in action controlling events in the thick of battle is satirized here as the two great men pass through an industrial battlefield and rural ghetto. Humboldt as a poet inclines toward a belief in his Orphic role. As a World Historical Individual, however, he fails to remain an instrument of any larger purpose but sets out to wage his own war. In his need to escape from being a victim of history he becomes an aggressor. The cost to Humboldt's poetry is demonstrated through a second series of parallels to Tolstoy. Bellow's novel restates what Isaiah Berlin has described as the central opposition in Tolstoy's work, between the hedgehog and the fox, the opposition between the craving for one absolute idea and the multiplicity of individual events which constitutes life. Humboldt lives in the realm of large abstractions. His conversation is peppered with references to historical events in a way which levels all it touches. No distinctions are made between the Age of Gold and the Gilded Age, the gold death mask of Agamemnon and the golden scandals of yesteryear. Historical events are just so much raw material from which literary capital can be made. The decline of Humboldt's poetic gift is demonstrated in "the recurrent jingle" rhythms associated with him. He is "poet, thinker, problem drinker, pill-taker, man of genius, manic depressive" (25), a tinker-tailor rhythm in which social and historical roles, a succession of categories, eliminate poetry. Citrine notes that Humboldt was "pondering what to do between *then* and *now*, between birth and death, to satisfy certain great questions" (6). In Humboldt's poetic grammar,

however, then *has* become now. The idea that he can make history implies a self-conscious casting of himself in a historical character and a consequent transformation of the present moment into a historical moment. The present then becomes an abstract idea, and the individual life is foreshortened, almost erased.

The novel is structured in two ways: first, the horizontal time scheme along which Citrine moves forward into the present and the Cantabile plot, backward into the past and memories of Humboldt, and secondly, a vertical structuring in which the pretensions of "high" and "low" cultures are exposed. Humboldt, in a long monologue in New Jersey, reveals an overpolarization in his view of history. His monologue deals with the reverse of the World Historical Individual, what D. H. Fischer has called "the furtive fallacy."[13] Humboldt dwells on such topics as the secret sex lives of great men, the secret police, the perversions of the military. Either history is made by great men with great motives or it is created out of secret conspiracies, wicked plots, dire psychological needs. Nothing, however, is the result of chance. It all forms part of a pattern. If the "high" plot exposes the pretensions of man as maker of history, to heroic status, the Cantabile plot reveals identical pretensions in low life. The poker game takes place amidst discussion of the territorial imperative and sheds new light on the attraction exercised by abstract categories, suggesting that the attraction of closed philosophical systems is only a refinement of a basic biological drive.

When Citrine needs advice in dealing with Cantabile, he goes to the Russian Bath, deliberately set up as a mythic environment, with antique denizens, eating epic meals and reclining on hot planks as if in Hades. Two senses of the term "underworld" are juxtaposed here: the mythic and the criminal. With a shock Citrine realizes that the Bath may be owned by the Mafia. Bellow suggests here that the attempt to idolize the elemental nature of man, to enthrone the biological imperatives or natural forces as mythic beings is as dangerous as trying to isolate man from them as hero or saint. The "vertical" structuring of the novel therefore works against easy moral dichotomizing in the reading of history.

The horizontal dimension poses a similar question. At the end of a long meditation on Humboldt, Citrine complains of his action in cashing a blank check immediately upon the death of Demmie Vonghel. Citrine complains that "he reads the papers, he knows she's gone" (168). The meditation follows the events of the Cantabile plot in terms of narrative time, but of course precedes them in terms of the supposed historical order of events. When Citrine accuses Humboldt, we, as readers, remember a preceding scene where Cantabile accused Citrine of knowing from the papers about the death of Bill's brother. In both cases the individual is

unaware of the public version of events he is living through. The reader's judgment of Citrine depends upon the presentation of the time scheme. Citrine used his involvement in public affairs, his historical role, to justify abandoning down-and-out Humboldt, but the imaginative narrative counters and reverses this justification by positioning Citrine's betrayal first before we learn of Humboldt's cashing the check. The timing of Humboldt's action is morally culpable in terms of the public record of events, but this is not the only temporal perspective. The personal relation to the past becomes as important as the cultural overview. The construction of the novel up to this point may be said to respect A. N. Whitehead's dictum that history may be read in two directions, forward and backward, but that the thinking man must do both.

From this point on, the novel becomes increasingly comic. Events are summed up in oblique fashion by the Caldofreddo filmscript, which Humboldt envisages as "vaudeville and farce but with elements of *Oedipus at Colonus* in it" (182). The novel deliberately tests Hegel's view of the historical process, as described by Marx: "Hegel remarks somewhere that all acts and personages of great importance in world history occur as it were twice. He forgot to add, the first time as tragedy, the second as farce."[14] The double reading of history is then extended in terms of style. The form of the novel avoids the danger of offering the reader simplistic moral judgments on events because similar events occur within very different stylistic modes. In a second deflation of myth Myron Swiebel meets Gaylord Koffritz in the Russian Bath, but the scene is comic as Gaylord launches into a sales pitch for tombs—tombs ranging in style from Etruscan to art nouveau, fitting monuments to those like Myron who live their lives according to a ready-made style. Citrine's first encounter with Renata is seen as a reenactment of established roles of good and evil—but again comically. Citrine refers to the "middle class endeavour . . . to preserve a certain darling innocence—the innocence of Clarissa defending herself against the lewdness of Lovelace" (209).

In the seduction scene, Citrine is cast by his own guilt in the role of Lovelace, with Renata, drugged by martini, an insensible Clarissa. The scene culminates in the reappearance at this of all moments of Citrine's childhood sweetheart—alone at a bar, and taken by Charlie for a hooker. Were he really a Lovelace, of course, this confrontation with the sweetheart now sunk in shameful depths would not be so unlikely! Charlie turns the tables, however, accusing Naomi of ruining him: "I lost my character altogether because I couldn't spend my life with you" (213).

In the court scenes the same stereotyping of roles of good and evil is explored. Although supposedly deployed in his support, Charlie's lawyers will not hear criticism of the opposition because of a code of professional

ethics. Since Charlie is also paying both sets of lawyers, the supposed legal battle is merely an empty ritual. Although Charlie is fighting mad he restrains the impulse to burst out in impassioned speech, like Shylock telling off the Christians. The intuitive sense of right and wrong, meaningful appeals on behalf of the human bond, are out of place in a court where everyone is entitled to his pound of flesh. Charlie keeps quiet out of "Respect for the real thing" (232), real suffering and persecution. His own "bleeding" at the hands of Cannibal Pinsker is after all only a metaphor, and by now Charlie is alert to the dangers of allowing a metaphor to govern reality. Strong manly silence is, however, also immediately attacked, first in a tragic mythic sense in the account of the death of Tigler, the hard-boiled Western cowboy, and secondly in comic terms in the variant hard-boiled role, when Charlie is cast by Cantabile in the role of silent hit-man in Stronson's office. When he is arrested, the fact that Charlie is an internationally known historian cuts no ice with the Chicago cops. He is saved by his sweetheart's daughter, Maggie, who is quite unimpressed by his books—"I understand they're history books and history has never been my bag" (290). What motivates her is the memory of her mother's love for Charlie. Charlie is rescued, then, not by rational historical analysis, but by the real force of remembered emotion.

Charlie's attempts to buck out of history, to flee into the transcendent, are also treated ironically. He argues that he has to abandon his children in order to do them any real good. He must first seek a transcendent truth. The tables are turned by Renata, however, whose quest for what Charlie always calls "the riddle of your birth" parodies Charlie's own more ethereal quest. If Charlie can abandon his children for the supposed good of his soul (actually to engage in sexual shenanigans with Renata), so Renata can abandon Roger, supposedly to go in quest of Biferno (actually to engage in similar activities with Flonzaley). Although Charlie does finally propose to Renata, the Senora's comment says it all: "I congratulate you on finally making sense. . . . She didn't say, mind you that I had done this in time" (419). Charlie cannot renegotiate the terms of his existence from scratch, making sense of them with an abstract solution. He has to remain within the contingent.

Given this immersion in history, then, is life therefore reduced to a mere cycle of pointless repetitions? This is the question faced by Charlie when he meets the missionary Vonghels, a second group (the first having been eaten by cannibals) and all exactly alike. Wearily Citrine comments that "the whole thing is disintegrating and reintegrating all the time, and you have to guess whether it's always the same cast of characters or a lot of different characters" (301). The repetitive and parallel structures within the novel pose the same problem. Does the individual merely repeat past