A RHETORIC OF DIGRESSION

The Discursive Critique of Ratiocentrism
in the Major Novels of Middle Bellow 1953–1975

by

Mark Dennis Crimmins

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Mark Dennis Crimmins
Department of English
University of Toronto

ABSTRACT

One of the most striking formal attributes of Saul Bellow's fiction is its digressivity, and the tendency of Bellovian narrative to wander and return is particularly pronounced in the long fiction of the author's middle period (1953-1975). From The Adventures of Augie March (1953) to Humboldt's Gift (1975), by way of Henderson the Rain King (1959), Herzog (1964), and Mr. Sammler's Planet (1970), Bellow's novelistic fiction manifests an incremental shift of emphasis from plot to theme and from action to reflection. Both the articulation of theme and the representation of reflection--increasingly the former by means of the latter--are accommodated by the creative variety of digressive means Bellow employs to effect suspensions of the narrative of event. At least four major patterns of digression can be discerned in middle Bellow: dialogic, narratorial, epistolary, and meditative. By means of dialogues that are monologic in Augie and univocal in Sammler, narration that is eccentric and discursive in Henderson, epistolary techniques that
are peculiar to Herzog, and detailed representations of meditative withdrawals that are unique to Humboldt, Bellow voices his fundamental protest against the modern world: secularism and science, by subordinating other human faculties to reason, have given humankind an impoverished conception of itself and its abilities. Refusing to be bound by secular dogmas or the scientific world view, Bellow employs a rhetoric of digression to provide a space within his fiction where his counterposition emerges in a counternarrative of affirmation, the principal tenets of which are the existence of the soul, the primacy of the imagination, and the necessity of suprarational epistemology.
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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Positional Play: "The Spirit of Alternatives"

"Intricate metamorphoses suggest intelligent intent."

--Kenneth Trachtenberg in More Die of Heartbreak

"And listen here, I am not digressing at all."

--Ijah Brodsky in "Cousins"

"Man is the lord of counterpositions."

--Hans Castorp in The Magic Mountain

Introduction

With the publication of The Actual in 1997, the total shape of Saul Bellow's fictional oeuvre received significant additional resolution. Given his publishing record over the last decade or so, this most recent volume (easily the slightest and probably the weakest of his five exercises in the art of the novella) has the air of valedictory fiction. In fact, with its funereal emphasis and its cemeterial conclusion, The Actual approaches the haunting status of testamentary art. In the twelve years since the publication of his last full-length novel, More Die of Heartbreak (1987), the author has published five books. First, he broke precedent by publishing two paperback originals, A Theft (1989) and The Bellarosa Connection (1989). Subsequently, in
Something to Remember Me By (1991), these two novellas were bound together with the eponymous short story and a brief foreword. This collection and the second volume of Bellow’s nonfiction work, It All Adds Up (1994), add an element of conscious memorial and deliberate summation to the latest phase of Bellow’s career.

In a broader sense, the scaling down of the Bellovian fictional enterprise began after the publication of Humboldt’s Gift in 1975 and the Nobel prize which followed it in 1976. Martin Amis incurred a measure of scorn from German editor and critic Gerhard Bach (Seventy-Five 8) for having the prescience, in 1984, to christen the period inaugurated by The Dean’s December (1982) "late Bellow" (8), but the subsequent work of the author validates this judgment. Amis’s characterization of Bellow’s final phase as one of "last things, leave-taking, and final lucidities" (8) is somewhat oblique, but he detects the fundamental shift which occurred in Bellow’s work after Humboldt.

In view of the large body of excellent scholarship devoted to Bellow’s entire development as a novelist, this dissertation, the first full-length study of the period it seeks in part to define, confines its examination to the novels of Bellow’s middle period, which is defined here as the era beginning with The Adventures of Augie March (1953) and ending with Humboldt’s Gift (1975). On the merits of these two novels and the three published in the period which
separates them, *Henderson the Rain King* (1959), *Herzog* (1964), and *Mr. Sammler's Planet* (1970), Bellow's literary reputation most solidly rests. In his introduction to the *Modern Critical Interpretations* volumes on Bellow, Harold Bloom, for example, safely identifies "Bellow's principal works" as *Augie, Herzog, and Humboldt* (Bellow 1). By excluding Bellow's other novels and novellas—along with his short stories—from my examination, I do not intend to imply that these other works are of any less significant literary value. Indeed, *Seize the Day* (1956), though a work of narrower scope than the novels considered in this study, is still widely regarded as the author's masterpiece, vying with *Herzog* for this honour. Bellow's short fiction, too, is of considerable merit and has recently received the long-overdue and extensive attention it deserves in Marianne Friedrich's study, *Character and Narration in the Short Fiction of Saul Bellow* (1995).

My own approach to *Augie, Henderson, Herzog, Sammler,* and *Humboldt* is an attempt, through formal analysis, to elucidate the evolution of Bellow's digressive style and to highlight the relation between the author's digressivity and his ongoing project of sounding objections to rational orthodoxies and secular dogmas. As I do this, I employ a number of terms which require definition at the outset. The most important of these is *digression* itself. The most common meaning of this term today is, according to *The
Oxford English Dictionary, "to deviate from the subject in discourse or writing" (4: 657-658). In this dissertation, I take the subject of the five novels under consideration to be the plot, the sequence of events forming the main story. Because Bellow's style is extremely digressive, I limit my investigation to the principal digressions or systems of digression in the novels, passages which hold the progress of the plot in notable or repeated suspension.

This study is concerned with four major categories of digression: dialogic, narratorial, epistolary, and meditative. By dialogic digression, I mean a temporary departure, during dialogue, from the dual verbal exchange which facilitates character portrayal and interplay to a monologic exposition of theme in extended speech. This is the focus of my analysis in the second and fifth chapters of this study. I employ the term narratorial digression to refer to the way in which a first-person narrator may, in telling a tale, depart from a simple, chronological recitation of a sequence of events. Bellow's use of this type of digression is the primary focus of my third chapter. Epistolary digression is the term I use to describe the system of plot suspensions represented by Moses Herzog's correspondence, a selection of which I examine in chapter four. In chapter six, I use the term meditative digression to refer to the imaginative mental withdrawals which form an integral part of Charlie Citrine's narrative. I use the term
digressivity to describe a general state or quality of
digression. Bellowian digressivity, for example, is the
general digressive quality peculiar to Bellow, which
contrasts considerably, say, with Homeric digressivity.

The rhetoric of digression from which this dissertation
takes its title is another general term, which I use to
define the sum of digressive narrative strategies Bellow
employs, particularly as they facilitate the author's
project of articulating his objections to rational,
scientific, and secular orthodoxies. One of the primary
purposes of this study is to demonstrate that Bellow's
digressive techniques are the product of careful design and
share a purpose in accommodating a fictional portrayal of
Bellow's fundamental quarrel with modernity: his staunch
objection to the dominance of exclusive rationality.
Bellow's rhetoric of digression is the stock of digressive
devices he employs, to varying degrees and with a range of
effects, to articulate explicitly or dramatize implicitly
his quarrel with the rationalist orthodoxies in which he
detects a threat to the spiritual powers of humankind, a
menace to intuitive ways of knowing, and the possibility of
a profoundly limited future for imaginative art.

Along with these terms relating to digressivity, I
employ some terms which function as adjuncts to those listed
above. I use the term ventriloquism to describe the
appearance of the protagonist's verbal characteristics in
the vocal representation of secondary characters. I use the term *counternarrative* to refer to the digressive sections of Bellow's middle novels in their function as platforms from which the author launches his opposition to the secular orthodoxies which permeate the contemporary world as it is represented in the novels. I denote the position against which Bellow defines himself with the word *ratiocentrism*, a term I have coined to circumscribe the general attitudes and views to which Bellow is counterposed, most of which have in common an enshrinement of the faculty of reason. Most fundamentally, Bellow is opposed to the religion of reason, to the idea that reason is the highest human faculty, that it is the engine of human progress, and that, as some of its Enlightenment proponents maintained, it has rendered obsolete the *religiocentric* view of humankind, which I define here as the idea that humans, possessed of a soul, carry within themselves a spark of the divine and along with it the ability to achieve a transcendental perspective. In this study, I attempt to demonstrate that the opposition between religiocentrism and ratiocentrism is of fundamental importance to Bellow's work, where the religiocentric view, as I define it here, receives such sustained support that it is difficult to extricate it from the Bellovian affirmation itself.

It will also be necessary here to explain briefly the logic of exclusion by which I delineate Bellow's middle
period. In his first two novels, *Dangling Man* (1944) and *The Victim* (1947), while he sets forth many of the themes and articulates the major premises of his mature fiction, Bellow seems yet to be struggling to find his own fictional voice. But this is not to say that these early novels have a great deal in common. Indeed, the contrast between the two works is an excellent illustration of what Daniel Fuchs, in his formidable manuscript study, calls "the antiphonal development of Bellow's fiction" (100). The journal of Joseph, the protagonist and—by dint of his status as diarist—narrator of *Dangling Man*, is the enabling device of the novel’s loose, peripatetic structure and the modus operandi by which its introverted keeper conveys the minute particularities of his psychic life as he awaits induction into the military in wartime Chicago.

Joseph, the brooding protagonist, dwells in a state of mental detachment from his environment, and his painful isolation rewards him with almost clairvoyant powers of observation. Frank in its emotional candour, the language in which he writes shows signs of restlessness but falls short of wild experimentation, and the syntax with which he expresses himself is marked by a restraint that is perhaps symptomatic of his claustral mental and social condition. This claustral quality is also evident in *The Victim*, but as much in the style of the novel as in the condition of its protagonist. Related by a third-person, omniscient narrator,
the tale of Asa Leventhal and his antisemitic doppelganger Kirby Allbee, with whom he becomes unintentionally yet intensely psychologically entwined, is told in taut, measured sentences. Although it is perhaps less meticulously shaped than *Seize the Day*, Bellow's second novel is often acclaimed as the author's strictest exercise in novelistic form.

In separating these two early novels from the body of work which has a new beginning of sorts in *Augie*, I have been moved by chiefly formal considerations. Taken together, Bellow's first two novels represent a significant contribution to the American literary tradition, as is indicated by the pronounced, if limited, critical acclaim they received on publication. While *Dangling Man* and *The Victim* are works in which the author has not yet definitively discovered the distinct and original fictional voice which marks his later work, they are nevertheless essential to an understanding of Bellow's novelistic evolution and seem undeserving of the degree of critical neglect to which they have been subjected. It is, however, at Bellow's point of breakage with these two early works that I intend to begin my examination of his mature style and the digressivity which is one of its vital components. Bellovian digressivity becomes particularly pronounced in the work of his middle period and receives its fullest expression and most dramatic application in the five long
narratives which succeed Bellow's short, earlier novels. The spectacular annunciation of Bellow's distinct and original fictional voice in *Augie* (of which the opening lines are a resonant expression), with its wide, free-ranging scope, also occasions the first extended employment of Bellow's novelistic digressivity.

But before laying aside the issue of the two early novels, I will examine several passages from them which presage the emergence of Bellow's rhetoric of digression. The first example is the most striking formal departure from the diary form in *Dangling Man*. Two of Joseph's diary entries are entirely distinct from all the others in his account, those for 3 February (111-17) and 16 March (136-140). In these two passages, which bear little relation to the rest of the narrative, the morbid protagonist records his Socratic dialogues with an entity he refers to as "the Spirit of Alternatives" (111, 136). The transitional introductions to these discussions are brief and abrupt: "An Hour with the Spirit of Alternatives:" (111) and "Another Talk with the Spirit of Alternatives" (136). This kind of sharp transition is a common feature of Bellovian narrative. Later examples are the "And now the present" (*Humboldt* 47) with which Citrine shifts the focus of his narrative several decades forward, and the "Coming from a direction altogether different" (*The Actual* 17) with which Harry Trellman introduces Amy Wustrin to the account in which she has as
yet played no part. In his criticisms of The Dean's December, Daniel Fuchs laments the fact that in Bellow's ninth novel the "transitions are mechanical" (305). Such transitions, however, have characterized Bellow's work from the beginning, as the above passages suggest.

The transcripts of Joseph's presumably imaginary conversations are seldom interrupted, a feature distinguishing them from the other dialogues in the novel. Moreover, the mysterious representative of alterativity receives no introductory definition or explanation. The capitalization of the Spirit's title and of the nouns "Hour" and "Talk" (by means of which the preposition "with" links the elided and implied subject--the protagonist--with his interlocutor) appears to be an attempt on Joseph's part to give these dialogues heightened typological significance. The name Joseph assigns to his interlocutor is itself suggestive, and the capitalization which raises this "Spirit" to the status of a proper noun recalls classical Greek personifications of abstractions. Bellow's use of the word "Spirit" also hints at his emphasis on the animistic, incorporeal element in human beings and perhaps of the soul whose mythologization he resists and with which the word spirit is often cognate.

Functioning as a transcendental messenger of sorts, this Spirit, in having a specific designation ("of Alternatives"), becomes a hierophant of metaphysical option,
who appears to the protagonist and consoles him as he suffocates in the stifling mundanity of an all-too-concrete Chicago. Just as Joseph is the prototype of subsequent Bellovian protagonists, so the Spirit of Alternatives is the archetype of Bellovian alternativity. The inclusion of two imaginary dialogues in a text otherwise comprised of diary entries documenting the protagonist's relation to the real is the most dramatic alterity on the novel's representational horizon. Furthermore, there is a link between the noncompliance with realism of these discussions and the logic of fictional form connecting all other parts of the novel. Both in form and content, the dialogues break out of realist conventions, and a recognizable historical debate can be discerned in the exchanges: the clash between religion and science on the issues of faith and reason.

It is the province of the Spirit of Alternatives to "suggest" opposition to ratiocentrism. An avatar of scepticism, Joseph's immaterial interlocutor adopts a posture of nonassertion in his reluctance to be bound by terminological constraints suggestive of rationality or its discursive method, and the first of these Socratic exchanges becomes animated when Joseph mentions rationality:

"I try to be reasonable."

"I know you do."

"Is that wrong?"

"To Understand?"
"You want me to trust Unreason?"
"I want nothing. I suggest..."
"Feelings?"
"You have them, Joseph."
"Instincts?"
"And instincts."
"I know the argument. I see what you're after."
"What?"
"That human might is too small to pit against the unsolvables. Our nature, Mind's nature, is weak, and only the heart can be relied on." (112)

A similar emphasis is apparent later in the discussion, when Joseph—perhaps ironically—says he will try to live a good life by means of "a plan, a programme, perhaps an obsession" (115). In these terms the Spirit discerns an allusion to "ideal construction" (115). The mention of this "German phrase" (116) provokes Joseph to his longest outburst in the dialogue, the speech in which he attacks such constructions. As is often the case in Bellow, the character dismissing systems of abstraction claims a high degree of familiarity with them before describing their limitations:

I could name hundreds of these ideal constructions, each with its assertions and symbols, each finding—in conduct, in God, in art, in money—its particular answer and each proclaiming: "This is the only possible
way to meet chaos." (116)

Having declared his knowledge of such systems, Joseph protests: "But what of the gap between the ideal construction and the real world, the truth" (116). In saying this, Joseph enunciates one of the central themes of Bellovian fiction: the inadequacy of systems of explanation. Joseph is not happy with the Spirit's response and soon becomes angry with his interlocutor's "equivocal answers" (117). The conversation concludes when the Spirit infuriates Joseph by telling him, "You're forgetting to be reasonable" (117).

The debate between Joseph and his mildly disturbing muse produces a space in the novel within which one of the author's perennial themes is addressed. The issue of fundamental importance raised by Joseph's extraterrestrial interlocutor is that of whether or not the mind--associated in the second dialogue with soul (139)--has the ability, outside of intellectual structures, to posit suprarational, yet nevertheless valid, solutions to "unsolvables." Joseph doubts the powers of his own unaided reason: "I am somewhat afraid of the vanity of thinking that I can make my own way toward clarity" (138). In this passage, Joseph alludes to another important Bellovian theme: humankind has access to ways of knowing aside from reason, which enable those who recognize and avail themselves of them to gain access to metaphysical truths.
In Joseph's two discussion with the Spirit of Alternatives, Bellow introduces these themes by dialogic means, and how they are introduced has much in common with how he implants thematic discussions in his novels throughout his middle period. In *The Victim* Bellow does this less fantastically than in its predecessor, utilizing characters who have the same ontological status as the protagonist, but the result, while more fictionally credible, is no less transparent. In the tenth chapter of the novel, my second example of early Bellovian digressivity, the drama critic Schlossberg delivers an important speech on human nature, which John J. Clayton identifies as "perhaps the central speech of Bellow's fiction" (144). The substance of the speech is contained in the most frequently cited passage from this novel in the critical literature:

> So here is the whole thing, then. Good acting is what is exactly human. And if you say that I am a tough critic, you mean I have a high opinion of what is human. This is my whole idea. More than human, can you have any use for life? Less than human, you don't either. (112-113)

The ambivalence which informs Schlossberg's speech is similar to that which prevents the Spirit of Alternatives from adopting any dogmatic position.

Moreover, just as the Spirit of Alternatives makes a
jarring entrance into *Dangling Man*, so does Schlossberg in *The Victim*. For this reason, Eusebio Rodrigues identifies the tenth chapter of *The Victim* as a structural flaw, calling Schlossberg "a choric mouthpiece deliberately introduced to express the positive values about the human that Bellow could not dramatize" (*Quest* 55). Taking exception to the transparency of Bellow's motive in introducing the character, Rodrigues identifies a pervasive element of Bellovian fiction: its unapologetic employment of dialogue to state philosophical or ethical positions, particularly those resembling the views the author expresses in his nonfiction work. Suspending the narrative of event to facilitate extended speech, Bellow employs dialogic digressivity in particular to deploy theme for theme's sake. This manipulation of dialogic situation comprises one element of the "positional play" by means of which Bellow incorporates ideas into his fiction.

The similarity between these passages from Bellow's first two novels resides more in their form than in their content. On both occasions, there is an abrupt departure from the story into a general discussion about ideas and values. While this is perhaps the most widely criticized element of Bellow's work, it is, of course, criticized from a particular position: that of the aesthete. It is clear both from Bellow's fiction and nonfiction that he rejects the limitation of his artistic project to a merely mimetic
or purely aesthetic function. In fact, many of Bellow's critics, in calling into question his aesthetic judgment--for example the hostility to Sammler's ponderous dialogue with Lal--seem to overlook the fact that such dialogues are less aesthetic fumbles of the author than they are direct expressions of his philosophy of literature itself.

This philosophy, while it evolves and changes, has at least four basic premises. First, Bellow is tirelessly opposed to the notion that the depiction of emotion (rather than its representation in action) is of spurious value to literature. So important is this principle that it forms the introductory argument to Dangling Man. On the first page of the novel, Bellow announces his disagreement with the "hardboiled-dom" of the current literary "code" (7), of which he gives a characterization: "Do you have feelings? There are correct and incorrect ways of expressing them. Do you have an inner life? It is nobody's business but your own. Do you have emotions? Strangle them" (7). After conceding that it "does admit of a limited kind of candour" (7), Joseph immediately proceeds to the drawbacks of this code: "But on the truest candour, it has an inhibitory effect. Most serious matters are closed to the hard-boiled. They are unpractised in introspection" (7).

Joseph's first diary entry links the prohibition of emotion to the suppression of inward mental states, the detailed representation of which is another important
element of Bellow's philosophy of literature. Bellow's conveyance of mental states is one of the pillars of his fiction and one of its distinguishing features, and the long fiction of the middle period reveals an incremental emphasis on the fictional representation of the mental lives of its protagonists. Augie is the least introverted and the most social of the five. Henderson's narrative communicates more of his "inner life" than does Augie's. Moses Herzog's mental life dominates the novel which bears his name, and the most prominent formal feature of the narrative--the letters--directly facilitates the representation of Herzog's states of mind. A great deal of Mr. Sammler's Planet is comprised of Sammler's thoughts, either represented directly by the narrator or by Sammler in speech. And the space devoted to Charlie Citrine's mental withdrawals is one of the dominant features of Humboldt, Bellow's second-longest novel.

The third element of Bellow's philosophy of fiction which requires emphasis here is absent from Joseph's credo but is nevertheless one of the main distinguishing characteristics of the author's work: the importance of ideas and the legitimacy of their place in fiction. This is manifest in Bellow's breadth of reference and allusion, his pervasive tendency towards citation, and above all in the tendency of his characters and narrators to discuss specific ideas at length. A great many topics receive discussion in Bellow's fiction, but the idea which receives the most
sustained opposition in Bellow's middle fiction is, in one way or another, the notion of the primacy of reason. Throughout his fiction, but especially in the five novels considered here, Bellow is relentless in his opposition to ratiocentrism, which he depicts as a threat to his own highest values: the recognition of the soul, the exercise of suprarational ways of knowing, and the enshrinement of the creative and perspectival powers of the imagination. In terms of philosophical position, Bellow's fiction can most accurately be defined in terms of his opposition to ratiocentrism, although it should be emphasized that rationality is not so much opposed as subordinated to the "higher" faculties of imagination, intuitive knowing, or spiritual seeing. Bellow's position is less antirationalistic than suprarationalistic; his objection to rationality is in "the spirit of alternatives," in that he constantly reiterates the legitimacy of positions outside generally accepted contemporary secular views. As Ellen Pifer argues in Saul Bellow Against the Grain (1990), Bellow is constantly "going against the grain of contemporary culture and its secular pieties" (2). Nevertheless, Bellow's fiction never argues that science, rationality, or secularism should be abolished. His objection is less to rationality itself than to the tendency of its proponents to make it the central agency of human knowing. In opposing ratiocentrism, Bellow questions the legitimacy of reason's
place at the top of secular epistemological hierarchies.

This brings me to the final element of Bellow's philosophy of fiction: his emphasis on spiritual values. Bellow's fiction insists on the soul and demonstrates a belief in the existence of God. These twin tendencies towards essentialism and transcendentalism find their most common expression in the areas of Bellow's fiction to which his rhetoric of digression leads. Augie's "axial lines" are perhaps Bellow's most striking metaphor for the location of an essential centre which gives humanity a permanent anchorage and by which people can measure their proximity to "other true people" (456). Henderson's "voice within" serves a similar function, as does Herzog's restless correspondence, culminating in his realization that he has always desired to do God's "unknowable will" (326). For Artur Sammler, it is the persistent Bellovian bete noir of explanation which the soul, with "its own knowledge" (3), resists. This spiritual element in Bellow's fiction culminates with Charlie Citrine's quest for "higher worlds" in Humboldt's Gift, where his meditations provide him with access to transcendent truths and spiritual principles.

The constriction of syntax which characterizes the prose of The Dean's December is a clear movement away from the narrative extravagances which often characterize the work of Bellow's middle period. The dramatic formal change which occurs between Humboldt's Gift and The Dean's December
is the obverse of that which takes place between *The Victim* and *Augie*. The later transition, however, is more peripety than reversal: *The Dean’s December* is less a return to tight formalism than a contraction of scope, less a suppression of exuberant emotion than a lack of it. Moreover, there is more than a little resemblance, as is often the case in Bellow, between the protagonist of *The Dean’s December* and his creator. Albert Corde has done some writing himself and has suffered from adverse public response to several journalistic pieces he has published in *Harper’s* magazine. Significantly, the aging dean laments the rhetorical excesses of his earlier work and voices his commitment to renounce them in favour of a more event-based narrative:

> He thought he had interrupted his accounts...far too often with his unwanted and misplaced high-mindedness. On rereading, he himself passed quickly over the generalizing, philosophizing passages. They were irritating. He wouldn’t, as a reader, have bothered to figure them out. Straight narrative was a relief and a consolation. (176)

Corde seems to stand in a similar relation to the excessive generality of his journalism as the later Bellow does to the digressivity of his own earlier work. In an interview with Sybil Steinberg of *Publisher’s Weekly* in 1989, Bellow talks about his sense of detachment from his earlier, more intrusive prose style:
I think I've now done all the thinking that I'm going to do. All my life long I have been seriously pondering certain problems and I'll probably continue to do that, but I'm now in a position to use this pondering as a background for the story, and not intrude it so much into the narrative. (Cronin and Siegel 239)

There is a hint here of Bellow's sense of departure from the "generalizing, philosophizing passages" which form much of the digressive content of his middle fiction. Summing up his career in the preface to It All Adds Up, Bellow expresses regret for his earlier emphasis on the peripatetic: "I was obsessed or distracted by the subject of distraction" (xi). This preoccupation with distraction finds expression in Bellow's digressivity and is accommodated fictionally by his rhetoric of digression, although Bellovian digressivity cannot be reduced to any single function.

The literary digression itself comes in a wide variety of forms and serves an equally wide variety of functions. Its most logical function is its use as a device to vary the action, pace, or subject matter of the plot, a fact reflected in the etymology of *digression*, which, according to *The Oxford English Dictionary*, derives from the Latin compound *di-gradi*, a stepping away or departure from a road or path (4: 657-658). In the novel, the literary digression may be playful, as in Fielding, didactic, as in Richardson, or consciously defiant of narrative convention, as in
Sterne. Bellow's digressivity could, at various junctures, accurately be described with the adjectives suited to his eighteenth-century predecessors. In moving from story (a sequence of events) to idea (thematic discussion), Bellow suspends the narrative of event of which the plot is primarily comprised. In this respect, his digressions often function as transgressions (a word which originally shared the same meaning with digrêssions) of the storytelling code which has its basic imperative in the relation of action and the representation of material phenomena.

But for the purposes of this dissertation, consideration of the term digression as simply denoting a "departure from the main subject" will be sufficient. I take as the main subject the idea that a narrative is the relation of a sequence of events, a story of things that happen. Bellow's fiction clearly recognizes this as a fundamental imperative of fictional narrative. It is the departure from this task which leads to Bellow's digressive terrain, as opposed to the digressivity of the narrative of events itself. Bellow's digressivity from the narration of event falls into several major classes. One of his principal methods is the dialogic digression, in which the speakers deliberate at length on ideas and themes before the narrative of event resumes. There is a marked difference between the dialogic digression as I define it here and dialogue in general. For the purposes of this study, I
consider a dialogue digressive when it meanders into ideas, as opposed to dialogue the subject of which is confined to the fictional situation of the interlocutors. I focus on dialogic digression in my chapters on Augie and Sammler. Henderson’s narratorial digressions are amongst the most creative and intriguing in Bellow’s work, and his character is indirectly revealed in his meandering method of telling a tale, particularly during the opening sections of his narrative. Only once is epistolary digressivity employed extensively in Bellow’s fiction—in the correspondence of Moses Herzog. Finally, Bellow employs meditative digressivity extensively in Citrine’s narrative, *Humboldt’s Gift*.

Most writers digress in some fashion and to some extent, if in no other way by the utilization of parenthetical statements. One of the objects of this study is to show by detailed analysis of the major works of a specific author that digressivity itself—the general quality of a given system of digressions—far from being a peripheral element of a writer’s style, can be a major stylistic aspect, and in a few cases (Bellow’s amongst them) can amount to a central feature of a writer’s fiction. The pliability of digressive devices finds a terminal expression of sorts in the later work of Joyce. The ability of digressivity to accommodate psychological portrayal can be detected in Faulkner’s mastery of perspectival shift,
although in Faulkner's more radical works it is more difficult to establish a resting narrative viewpoint from which the subsidiary viewpoints depart. Digressivity's adaptability to parenthetical subordination is evident in the work of Virginia Woolf, who employs it perhaps most brilliantly in *To the Lighthouse*.

The self-referential and playfully ironic contemporary employment of digressivity is one of the notable formal features of what has been termed the Postmodern Novel. An excellent example of the Postmodern approach to digressivity occurs in John Barth's *Sabbatical* (1982). Early in the novel, Fenwick and Susan, the two principal characters, discuss how and when, for the reader's benefit, they will incorporate into their story an account of John Arthur Paisley, a character they have mentioned on several occasions:

In Sue's opinion it would be a breach of verisimilitude for either of us to review that case to the other as we sail along, when both of us know the details painfully well. That particular narrative lapse is called Forced Exposition; Susan's name for it, in the classroom, is Corning the Goose. For as the hapless goose must feel, when to enlarge its liver for pate de foie gras the French commercial goose farmer rams a hose down its gullet and blows its belly full of corn, so must the reader feel when fictional characters say things to
each other that between them should go without saying, just to get the author's exposition done. There'll be none of that, Susan says, in our story. (85)

This passage offers an interesting contrast to many of those analyzed in this study. Barth's comic-epic simile distinguishes Sabbatical's orientation towards dialogic exposition from that in Augie and Sammler.

Fenwick's statement, however, reveals Barth's own preoccupation with a form of narrative exposition no less artificial than that which it lambasts: the exposition of the novel's status as an artifact. This particular aesthetic tendency is largely absent from Bellow's fiction. In the region to which the departures from his ostensible narrative teleology lead, Bellow establishes the forum (however varied the guises it adopts) within which he can deploy and develop the issues which transcend the realities depicted in the fiction of which they are part. In the sometimes unclear and often esoteric territory to which his departures from the metanarrative of realism tend, Bellow deploys his arguments for the soul, for transcendence, for the existence and importance of "higher" truth and the special means of knowing required to apprehend it. Bellow's critique of the contingent reality of the world as he finds it, his stubborn insistence on the primacy of value, and his interest in human nature are often brought to the fore in his fiction by the agency of digressivity. This includes his attacks on
modernity and the pride of place rationality enjoys within it. With its abidingly thematic interest in ideas, Bellow's work tends to focus on individual concepts rather than broad movements of thought. If Bellow defines himself against one dominant idea, however, it is the ratiocentric notion that reason is the human faculty which is best suited to the discovery of truth and the best engine of human progress.

Due to the vastness of the critical literature on Bellow, only a cursory survey is possible in this introduction, and perhaps the best place to start is with two of the most prominently published and relatively recent statements on the subject. Gloria Cronin and L. H. Goldman, along with Gerhard Bach, in the introductions to their respective collections of critical essays on Bellow, reduce the history of Bellow criticism to three stages (Cronin and Goldman 1-2; Bach, Critical Response 7-9). The wording of Bach's survey demonstrates a clear indebtedness to Cronin and Hall, perhaps a concession to the fact that Cronin (along with Blaine Hall) published by far the most complete bibliography of the secondary literature on Bellow to date, Saul Bellow: An Annotated Bibliography, Second Edition (1987). In their overview, Cronin and Goldman claim that "the first major wave of scholarly interest in Bellow occurred approximately between 1966-74 approximately [sic]" (1). The sketchy list which follows--listing several of the works with incorrect publication dates--neglects to include
some of the most significant studies (such as Tony Tanner's *Saul Bellow* (1965) and Earl Rovit's *Saul Bellow* (1967)) and includes studies such as Robert Detweiler's *Saul Bellow: A Critical Essay* (listed as a "major study" and with incorrect publication date), which receives—perhaps justly—little citation elsewhere in the critical literature. Other inaccuracies include the listing of Scheer-Schazler's monograph with a publication date seven years off the mark and David Galloway's study, four years late. Bach lists Tanner, Opdahl, and Clayton as representative of the "first generation" (7) of Bellow critics, but his characterization of Bellow Criticism between 1965 and 1974 as a secondary literature which "identifies in Bellow the writer who breaks with Modernist orthodoxy" (*Critical Response* 7) is a somewhat unrepresentative reduction of that which it describes.

The premise of the "first wave" or "generation" is something of an oversimplification, for while the publication of the first book-length study of Bellow in any language (and perhaps the best book of its length on Bellow), Tony Tanner's *Saul Bellow*, does mark a beginning point of sorts, Cronin, Goldman, and Bach fail to point their readers towards the twenty years of criticism which precede Tanner's study. This criticism comprises reviews of the author's first six novels and, later, critical articles in periodicals and scholarly journals by a plethora of
The fine work on Bellow in single-author studies of groups of novelists, such as Chester Eisinger's *Fiction of the Forties* (1962), represents a transitional stage between scholarly articles and complete books about the author. Only if such reviews, scholarly articles, and chapters are not considered criticism can they be excluded from an overview of the secondary literature, and I suggest that it is this substantial body of work which actually comprises the "first wave" of Bellow scholarship.

Similar problems plague Cronin, Goldman, and Bach's idea of the second stage of Bellow criticism. Cronin and Goldman describe this group of critics as one which "only slightly modified the "orthodox" vision of Bellow as humanist and contemporary "yea-sayer"" (1). Covering the period from 1975 to 1979, the list of seven critics is a strange one, including untranslated work by German and Japanese scholars, two editors of essay compilations, a later (but not revised) edition of Tanner's book, and minor studies by Chirantan Kulshrestha and Robert Kegan, which have registered little or no effect in the secondary literature. The "second generation" is located by Bach in the seventies and "broadens the critical spectrum to include investigations of individual issues arising from Bellow's humanist disposition, such as specific narrative devices and
recurring thematic patterns" (Critical Response 8). However, "specific narrative devices and recurring thematic patterns" are not, strictly speaking, "individual issues." Moreover, these elements do not accurately describe Bellow criticism in the seventies, which often keeps a general emphasis on the author’s entire work and his fundamental stance.

The "third wave," which for Cronin and Goldman begins with "the advent of the 1980s" and "opened up many new avenues of approach" (1-2), is singled out for special praise. After a mingled list of eight critics, Cronin and Goldman give their assessment of the new wave: "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" (2). Moreover, these critics (Goldman among them) are singled out for their personal merits: the specificity of their concentration is bolstered by their having had "the courage to be distinctive," which makes them "so much more interesting" (2). The personal bias of Cronin and Goldman becomes glaring in their assessment of the place in Bellow criticism occupied by the essays (including one each from the editors) they have compiled, which "are more distinctive, more exciting, and more provocative" (2). Goldman and Cronin describe Goldman’s article as "definitive" (3) and Cronin’s as "vigorously written" (7).

Bach’s list, which judiciously omits books by Joseph McCadden, Mark Harris, and Jeanne Braham, otherwise follows
Cronin and Goldman's selection of important critics from the eighties. Bach passes over major studies by Robert Kiernan and Michael Glenday but lists Peter Hyland's monograph, which makes no reference to specific pages in its citations from Bellow. In summarizing the three generations of Bellow critics, Bach makes several odd claims about previous criticism in distinguishing it from his selection:

With few exceptions, most of the summary readings of Bellow presuppose the existence of a common denominator by which to gauge his art. As singular perspectives, they represent individual approaches connecting Bellow's oeuvre as a unit to the (implied or expressed) unity of the critic's theoretical orbit. In contrast, this collection, in bringing together a multiplicity of voices over a historical distance of almost half a century, makes no attempt to present either Bellow's development or that of the critical responses as coherently connected. (9)

During my research for this dissertation, I have found useful and informative critical work written on Bellow from early in his career until the present, but while much recent work on Bellow is of a high standard, I have not found that it eclipses earlier work on the author quite to the extent that Cronin, Goldman, and Bach suggest.

In my research, I first focused on the single-author studies of Bellow and then continued with an examination of
the bound volumes of essays. After this, I scrutinized the special issues on Bellow in the periodical literature. Finally, I read as widely as I could in the mass of material that remained, focusing on essays which pertained to the works under consideration here or which had a thematic bearing on the argument of this study. Since this is the only full-length study focusing on middle Bellow or his digressivity, many of these readings, while they furnished good background material, did not necessarily have a direct effect on my analysis of Bellow. Some works, however, have been invaluable. Chief among these is Daniel Fuchs' Saul Bellow: Vision and Revision (1984), surely the most prodigious scholarly work written on the author in English. That Fuchs's intelligent and scholarly work has not become a model for subsequent generations of Bellow scholars is to be regretted. Returning to general considerations of the author as he is manifest in the entirety of his texts and of his critics as they are manifest in theirs, this study is a response to the proliferation of criticism which seems to take as its object either a single issue or—a fine example is Stephen Bloom's essay in Saul Bellow at Seventy-Five—the gratuitous indulgence of the critic's own fantasy and creative efforts.

In my second chapter, I attempt to show that in Augie the verbal tendencies of the characters as they are represented in dialogue change dramatically as the novel
progresses. I also attempt to show how the formal nature of the dialogues, which become much longer and accommodate the more oratorical tendencies of the interlocutors, not only changes but also becomes the principal locus of Bellow's attack on excessive rationality. In chapter three, I examine the erratic narratorial digressivity of Eugene Henderson, a protagonist who, although he lacks the verbal exuberance of the early Augie, is a more flamboyant narrator—with regard to narrative conventions—of the tale he relates. The extravagance of the ways in which he breaks narrative conventions is especially noticeable in his introduction to the story and in his major digressions during its narration. Although, like Augie and Sammler, Henderson is a novel in which dialogic digressivity significantly impedes the action, the points of jarring breakage with the narrative conventions Henderson establishes for himself offer a different kind of glimpse into the workings of Bellovian digressivity. In chapter four, I examine the brilliant parodic reinvention of epistolary form that makes Moses Herzog one of Clarissa Harlowe's most colourful contemporary counterparts. Focusing on Herzog's letters to intellectuals, I demonstrate how Bellow employs the digressive device of the letters to enable his celebrated protagonist to voice the author's univocal protest against rationalist orthodoxies.

In chapter five, I examine the collusion of the novel's
unnamed, third-person narrator with the protagonist, Artur Sammler, and attempt to show that the ventriloquization of secondary characters exacerbates the heavily univocal tone of the novel. Examining the similarities in the speech patterns of Sammler and his relatives, I argue that most of the voices in the novel are disguised versions of Sammler's. In my analysis of Sammler's conversations, I focus on the specific idea content of his speeches in an attempt to lay bare the systematic incorporation of counter-ratiocentric argument into the novel. Consequently, I argue that Bellow's rhetoric of digression, which progresses steadily from Augie to Herzog, begins to show signs of strain by Sammler, before it reaches its terminal point in the radical form of alterativity represented by the psychological withdrawals of Charlie Citrine, which are the focus of my sixth chapter. Here, I analyze the meditative withdrawals of Charlie Citrine, attempting to show that by making his protagonist an avid practitioner of meditation, Bellow allows for an architectonic disagreement with the ruling premises of a secular society. In this chapter I examine the significance of Humboldt as the culminating point of Bellow's digressive trajectory.

In chapter seven, I advance my final arguments and conclusions about Bellow's rhetoric of digression, its place in his fiction, and its relation to his critique of contemporary society. I also attempt to address the place of
Bellow's work with relation to several literary movements and traditions, including his relation to the American literary tradition. In the Works Consulted section, I have included a selection of the sources I read on Bellow that pertain to my research in this study. All references to Bellow's novels follow the pagination in the Penguin editions. In my own text I have followed Canadian spelling conventions, and in citations from the author and the critical literature I have followed American and British spelling conventions as they are used by the writers. With spellings which are alternate according to Canadian convention, I have followed my own preference. In citations from the author I have honoured all of his own orthographical idiosyncrasies.
CHAPTER TWO

Dialogic Digressivity: The Tale of Talk

In The Adventures of Augie March

"When important thought doesn't have to be soliloquy, I know how valuable an occasion that is. Because to whom can you speak your full mind as to yourself?"

--Augie March

"Sadly enough, the number of intelligent people whose most vital conversation is with themselves is growing."

--Saul Bellow, "Gide as Writer and Autobiographer"

"Those blank empty buildings, without the stream of life pouring through them, were like empty jails. It struck young Rosicky that this was the problem with big cities; they built you in from the earth itself, cemented you from any contact with the ground. You lived in an unnatural world, like the fish in an aquarium."

--Willa Cather, "Neighbour Rosicky"

Introduction

The Adventures of Augie March (1953) was at once recognized as a major stylistic departure for Bellow and a major arrival for postwar American literature. Robert Penn Warren, in one of the book's initial reviews, claims that "from now on any discussion of fiction in America in our
time will have to take account of it" (49). Warren also addresses the issue of the book as an exercise in style: "It would be interesting to know what led Saul Bellow to turn suddenly from a method in which he was expert and in which, certainly, he would have scored triumphs" (49). Arthur Mizener sees this new development in style as a decline: "Since nothing of this sort goes on in Bellow's earlier novels, it must be deliberate here; the novel would be better without it" (48). Tony Tanner echoes Mizener and Warren in identifying Augie's renunciation of Flaubert, linking Bellow's new style to a fresh emphasis on voice: "From the start we know that this is a Whitmanesque voice which has renounced all attempts at any cautious Flaubertian accuracy of description" (55).

Peter Hyland credits the novel with "a new literary style, so distinctive that it has been called 'Bellovian,' in the wonderful talking machine of Augie's voice that contains also the limitless polyphony of the world he inhabits" (Bellow 40). Thirty-seven years after the novel's publication, in the second of his autobiographical interviews with Bostonia, Bellow himself addresses the issue of voice in his third novel:

In Augie March I wanted to invent a new sort of American sentence. Something like a fusion of colloquialism and elegance....Street language combined with a high style. I don't today take rhetorical
effects so seriously, but at the time I was driven by a passion to invent. (Cronin and Siegel 282)

The language of the novel supports Bellow's claim that its style attempts to democratize the hieratic literary language he refers to as "Mandarin English" (Cronin and Siegel 282). Nor is this all Bellow's third novel signalled for American literature: Richard Pearce argues that the novel singlehandedly "brought Jewish fiction to the center of the cultural stage" ("Looking Back 63").

But in spite of the wide praise accorded to Augie, some of Bellow's most distinguished critics find the novel wanting. Daniel Fuchs criticizes the enthusiasm of the novel's prose and the tendency of its dialogue to devolve into monologue: "The bursts of triumphant vision remain just that; the memorable argumentative dialogues have a quality of monologues juxtaposed" (77). John J. Clayton identifies the problem with dialogue as one that is pervasive in Bellow's work, claiming the author is "a monologuist who longs to become a dialoguist" (141). This may be why Norman Podhoretz argues, in his review in Commentary, that Bellow "hasn't yet worked his way out of the non-dramatic solipsism of his earlier books" (17). Leslie Fiedler's melodramatic assessment of Augie's ending overstates the case but nevertheless identifies some of the problems in the last third of the novel: "shriller and shriller, wilder and wilder, it finally whirls apart in a frenzy of fake euphoria
and exclamatory prose" (Malin, *Critics* 7).

This chapter focuses on the connection between these criticisms of the novel and Bellow's newly expansive indulgence in dialogic digression, an expansion partly accommodated by the length of his longest novel. Although there is a picaresque element in the peripatetic action of *Augie*, it is in this novel that the rhetorical tendencies of the characters begin to define a peculiarly Bellôvian picaresque in which, through the agency of "Bellow's peripatetic comedian of ideas" (Cohen, *Laughter* 79), ideas themselves function as the picaro. Ideas come to special prominence late in the novel, both in the lengthy thematic articulations of the protagonist and in the increasingly oratorical and ventriloquized speeches of his interlocutors. Ventriloquism first appears resonantly in Einhorn's speeches and becomes more pervasive as the book progresses, although this feature is counterbalanced somewhat by Bellow's tendency not to ventriloquize his female characters. Grandma Lausch, Mrs. Renling, and Thea Fenchel speak with their own distinct voices, although the blandness of Thea's language contrasts sharply with the colourful and idiomatic speech of the older women, reflecting the assimilation of the novel's successive generations of characters from idiomatic to standardized speech.

But while *Augie*'s representation of Thea's speech is only mildly ventriloquistic, the short speeches of
Paslavitch, Clem Tambow, Robey, and Kayo Obermark all bear the distinguishing marks of the narrator's own speech patterns and thematic emphases. This becomes more prominent in the speeches of Mintouchian and Basteshaw, whose lengthy discourses manifest many similarities to Augie's own prolix expressions. As Tony Tanner notes, "Bellow is clearly using some of these speakers to display and explore some of his own ideas" (Bellow 46). By the end of the novel, Augie's trenchant reminiscences, his memorable evocations of character through reported speech, and the youthful exuberance of his rhapsodic prose have been tempered considerably, and, as Eusebio Rodrigues notes, "the incidents, adventures, encounters" of the novel's later pages are "neither remarkable in themselves nor coherent" (Quest 72). Perhaps because of Bellow's oft-noted weakness in dialogue, his utilization of dialogic digressivity as a vehicle of thematic exposition is his least successful employment of a rhetoric of digression, largely because of the transparency of its didactic function.

In this chapter I examine the development of dialogue in the novel, arguing that the part of the book most often dismissed by critics is that in which Bellow employs a rhetoric of dialogic digression to give extensive expression to his opposition to the ratiocentrist orthodoxies of secularism and science. To do this, I examine the speeches of a spectrum of characters, demonstrating how the novel's
dialogue progresses from the local and particular speeches of early characters such as Grandma Lausch, William Einhorn, and Mrs. Renling, through the partially ventriloquized transitional speeches of Paslavitch, Clem Tambow, Robey, and Kayo Obermark, towards a somewhat univocal dialogic conclusion in the oratory of Augie himself, Mintouchian, and Basteshaw.

In fact, the movement of Augie towards rhetorical climax is analogous to that in Sammler. Augie, however, has a much more solid fictional base than the later novel: the detailed evocation, in its early pages, of an era, a place, and its inhabitants is the most sustained and total representation of the concrete and particular in Bellow's fiction and one of the mimetic high points of his art. Nevertheless, Bellow's project of asserting a counter-rationalist position rises to unmistakeable prominence as the novel draws to its conclusion, and the story of lives lived and experiences underwent becomes, with its protracted discussions of ideas, largely a tale of talk. The problem of the rhetorical conclusion has plagued Bellow somewhat and seems to throw into question Harold Bloom's claim that "few novelists have ever surpassed Bellow at openings and closings" (Bloom, Bellow 2).

Augie signals the arrival of major secondary speakers in Bellow's work, and there is a clear progression in the novel from description to dialogue and from short to much
longer speeches. Moreover, the elongation of the novel’s speeches is accompanied by the slackening vigour of its prose generally. The last few hundred pages of Augie reveal a noticeable retreat from the poetic resonance and syntactic ebullience which characterize the narrative’s earlier pages. The second half of the novel forsakes many of the memorable features of Bellow’s most unfettered style: the comic-epic catalogues and extended similes, the sesquipedalian chains of compound adjectives (the author’s most Dionysian adjectival excesses), the armies of memorable minor characters, the intensely sympathetic portrayals of privation and suffering, and the rich and colourful evocations of dialect in the speeches of Grandma Lausch, Dingbat, Einhorn, Kreindl, Mimi Villars, and others.

A sporadic feature in the novel’s first hundred pages, Augie’s transcripts of conversations seldom last longer than a page. There is a slight shift in the second hundred pages, with the principal conversations being the few pages of discussion between Augie and Einhorn on the subject of determinism in the seventh chapter, Augie’s uninterrupted account of the police officers’ talk in Detroit, Einhorn’s discussion with Augie about the bad family news on Augie’s return from Detroit, Augie’s chat with Padilla about college, and finally, the brotherly discussion of marriage between Augie and Simon at the end of the tenth chapter, the five-page report of which is by far the most considerable
instance of dialogue in the novel to that point. The chapter containing this dialogue is also the approximate point at which Augie's narratorial commentary begins to assume a more prominent role, going beyond its introductory and summary functions to more intrusive commentary within the chapters. The girth of Augie's conversational transcripts remains approximately even over the third and fourth hundred pages of the text, before broadening considerably in the novel's last hundred pages.

But the dialogues between characters do not merely lengthen as the novel proceeds—they also change in form and nature. The movement of extended speech in the novel is also a transition from local to general, and the speech of Augie's interlocutors shifts dramatically from the idiomtic and local expressions of the early ghetto figures to the generality and abstraction of the later speakers. Functioning partly as a corollary to Augie's progression from ghetto immigrant to assimilated citizen, this movement away from concrete and particular expression in specific dialect towards abstract and universal articulations largely in standard idiom signifies a critical change in the novel's field of represented speech.

**Early Speakers**

The first major speech in the novel is Grandma Lausch's discourse on the virtue of committing Georgie to a mental institution, a speech which changes the course of the March
family's fate. Speaking with an accent and an identifiable set of verbal characteristics, Grandma Lausch typifies the success of the novel's early vocal characterizations. Her speech is an excellent dramatic vehicle, for it both conveys her character and renders directly to the reader the force and persuasiveness with which she speaks. The battery of rhetorical questions with which she showers Simon reveals the strength of her emphasis and her tendency to intimidate: "What? Did you inherit a fortune? Can you have servants, gouvernantkes, tutors, such as Lausch laid down his life to give our sons?" (52). Her similes are peculiarly her own, and the one she uses to insult Augie is typically earthy: "his thoughts are about as steady as the way a drunkard pees" (52). This is of a piece with her earlier claim that Augie, who brings her the wrong book from the library, hasn't "got the brains of a cat" (11). When she mentions ideas, she does so to dismiss impractical ones as a class: "But you must know who you are, what you are, and not get unreal ideas" (52). There is a hint here of one of Bellow's fundamental themes: the inability of mere ideas to accommodate a full picture of reality. But her philosophy, "an idiosyncratic compound of Horatio Alger idealism and streetwise opportunism" (Kiernan, Bellow 41), is distinct from Augie's own, and her speeches render her idiosyncracies and individuality directly.

Although Grandma Lausch's speech conveniently iterates
one of Augie's main themes, Einhorn, the novel's next notable speaker, has more of a tendency to sound like the narrator, and like Augie he exhibits a marked propensity to citation. However, Einhorn's character still emerges powerfully—if unevenly—in his speeches. His quick movement from abstract to concrete contrasts with Augie's verbal patterns: "There's opinion, and then there's nature. Somebody has to get outside of law and opinion and speak for nature. It's even a public duty, so customs won't have us all by the windpipe" (67). While the voice here is clearly not Augie's, Einhorn's sentiments about custom clearly accord with Augie's sense that conformity is to be resisted. Augie's new benefactor shares Grandma Lausch's tendency to use Yiddish words, as when he paraphrases Hamlet: "What a piece of work is a man, and the firmament frotted with gold—but the whole gescheft bores him" (75). Here the Yiddish word for business, connoting earthy matters, refutes the artificial phrasing of Shakespeare's Elizabethan English, and the result is a good example of a distinctly Bellovian sentence: the lyrical poetry with which it begins receives a blunt rejection in the plain vernacular with which it ends, and the Yiddish gescheft brings to earth the idealized abstraction of the gilded heavens. Einhorn's paraphrase nevertheless amounts to a demotic translation of Hamlet's own sentiments: "and yet to me, what is this quintessence of dust?" (II: ii, 308).
Einhorn's use of classical allusion seems more suspicious than his quotations from Shakespeare (an edition of whom he keeps on his desk), although his irrepressible character always eclipses his bookishness:
nobody would blame me for rotting in the back room under a blanket or for crabbing and blabbing my bitter heart out, with fresh and healthy people going around me, so as not to look. A kid like you, for instance, strong as a bronco and rosy as an apple. An Alcibiades, beloved-of-man, by Jesus. (75)
The final sentence, in particular, the expletive comically juxtaposed with Einhorn's hyperbolic appraisal of Augie, seems to capture the high ideals of Einhorn, along with his struggle to believe in them. The two metaphors which precede the reference to Alcibiades are not necessarily convincing as figures of speech which would come naturally to Einhorn, but they do represent the store of colloquialisms on which he draws.
Einhorn's idiom is again in evidence as he tells Augie how he overcame suicidal impulses when he became an invalid:
Nobody'll ever know all the things I tried before I decided it was no go. I couldn't take it and I took it. And I can't take it, yet I do take it. But how! You can get along twenty-nine days with your trouble, but there's always that thirtieth day when goddammit you can't, when you feel like the stinking fly in the first
cold snap, when you look about and think you're the old Man of the Sea on Sinbad's neck, and why should anybody carry an envious piece of human junk? (78)

Einhorn's wavering resolutions at the beginning of this passage are a Bellovian version of the existential paradox of the narrator's farewell in Beckett's The Unnameable: "I can't go on, I'll go on" (414). Both Einhorn's bitterness and his fortitude emerge in the language he employs, and it is clear that he manages to preserve his dignity, in spite of his inability to care for himself, when, in the comparison he uses to suggest his burdensomeness to others, he casts himself in the role of a deity.

Einhorn's Protean quality can be discerned in his kaleidoscopic range of interests, business and cultural, private and social. His description of Chicago is more human than Augie's, and his whirling syntax conveys the energy of his spoken expression:

This city is one place where a person who goes out for a peaceful walk is liable to come home with a shiner or bloody nose, and he's almost as likely to get it from a cop's nightstick as from a couple of squareheads who haven't got the few dimes to chase pussy on the high rides in Riverview and so hang around the alley and plot to jump someone. (82)

With an equal amount of cynicism directed at the forces of order and disorder in the city, Einhorn manifests his
worldliness and—in his hypothetical criminal situation—hints at his own sexual misery. At the same time, his slang suggests his connection to the urban reality he describes.

During this speech—by far Einhorn’s longest—Augie (as narrator) interjects briefly to note that Einhorn “began to increase his range” of speaking (82), and at this point his voice begins to resemble Augie’s. In the phrasing of his more bookish comments, Einhorn begins to sound like the narrator. His affection for historical figures, conveyed in single anecdotes, is also one of Augie’s idiosyncrasies:

I’ve seen a picture of Aristotle mounted and ridden like a horse by some nasty whore. There was Pythagoras, who got killed over a diagram; there was Seneca who had to cut his wrists; there were the teachers and saints who became martyrs. (83)

Immersed as he is in the manipulation of the immediate, Einhorn is slightly out of character in his effusiveness about history. His lament for Seneca, Pythagoras, and the saints seems inconsistent with his pragmatic focus on his “many enterprises” (60), just as his offense at the slight to Aristotle resembles the narrator’s own interest in “the traits we honour in these fabulous names” (60). As the early character who generalizes the most, Einhorn prefigures the novel’s later orators. One of the principal differences between him and them is the high slang content of his speech and his tendency not to hold forth at length on a single
theme. Above all, though his more general speeches seem to be ventriloquized by the narrator, Einhorn's distinct and vivid character often emerges when he speaks. This partly represents the tribute Augie pays to the character of an early benefactor he clearly remembers with respect: "William Einhorn was the first superior man I knew" (60).

Einhorn's successor as Augie's benefactor, Mrs. Renling, is endowed more completely with autonomous verbal characteristics, reflecting a pattern also evident in Bellow's other novels, particularly in *Sammler*: female characters tend to escape ventriloquization. Freed from the burden of discoursing about ideas, they have an advantage over their male counterparts: when they speak, their characters are often vividly distinct from the protagonist's. The first time Mrs. Renling speaks to Augie at length, she does so at a high rate of character transmission per word, relating an anecdote about a European baroness:

She taught me how to make veal kidneys with cognac. One of the rare dishes of the world. There's a restaurant now in New York that makes them. People have to make reservations, even now, in Depression time. She sold the recipe to a caterer for five hundred dollars. I would never do that. I go and cook it for my friends, but I would consider it beneath me to sell an old family secret. (131)
The pace of Mrs. Renling's chatter is conveyed in brisk, staccato sentences, the progression of which is the only respect in which she resembles the narrator: her swift movement outward from the particularity of her cooking lesson with the baroness to her reflections on the world-historical significance of the dish recalls Augie's own generalizing tendency. Mrs. Renling's shortest sentence, "I would never do that," reveals one of her prominent qualities, her tendency to think herself better than others. Her use of the conditional suggests she has a high degree of self knowledge, and her unqualified assertion seems to amount to more than belief. In this statement about what kind of person she is, Augie's benefactor betrays a self-justificatory impulse. Her story purports to explain her dislike for aristocrats, but both in emphasizing the exclusiveness of the dish and in dismissing the spurious values of the baroness, Mrs. Renling spends more time talking about herself in comparison with the morally frail baroness than she does talking about her ostensible subject. Her contempt for the European upper classes is perhaps suggestive of her sense of her own aristocracy, and her hypocrisy is underscored by the vaguely aristocratic speech contour of her final statement as a dignified--rather than merely aristocratic--human being.

The baroness anecdote is not the only speech in which Mrs. Renling's character is revealed. Her diatribes against
Augie's waitress girlfriend Willa Steiner (134-5) and the Zeelands (137) display her sense of superiority, chiefly in how she censures those she observes. Mrs. Renling's reduction of Willa Steiner to the status of prostitute establishes her own superiority as a human type:

I have freckles too, but mine are different, and anyhow, it's only as an older person that I am talking to you. Besides, the girl is a little prostitute, and not an honest prostitute, because an honest prostitute, all she wants is your money. And if you have to do this, if you come and tell me you have to--and don't be ashamed of that--I'll give you money to go somewhere on Sheridan Road near Wilson, where such places are. (134)

The extremity of Mrs. Renling's dismissal can be detected in her refusal to award Willa status even as a worthy member of the proscribed class to which she relegates her. The intensity of her opinionation is underscored by her proffering to pay Augie if he needs to visit an "honest" prostitute. But her prejudices render her character distinct and are somewhat mitigated by the fact that her reaction to Willa reflects her interest in Augie's welfare, as she suggests by reminding Augie that she speaks "only as an older person."

Nevertheless, Mrs. Renling's adjudication of guilt in others is also evident in her assessment of the Zeelands. After listing the successes of the father of the family, she
quickly dismisses the women, employing an idiomatic simile reminiscent of those used by Grandma Lausch: "And still his wife is stupid as her own feet, and she drinks, and the daughter is a drunkard too" (137). Her opinionated views express a perspective which contrasts sharply with Augie's own assessment of the people they both know. Her sense of superiority, however, is ultimately what pushes Augie away from her. Her mistake is to think that, by adopting Augie, she will give him a better fate than that which he can find himself: "it wasn't a fate good enough for me" (151). Mr. Renling recognizes Augie's arrogance: "Offer him Gold and he says, no, he chooses shit" (153). In evading the adoptive efforts of the Renlings, Augie demonstrates his own sense of superiority regarding the "imposers upon" (524) who would shape him, and his own severity can be discerned in his rejection of the character Ellen Pifer describes as "one of the more benign Machiavellis with whom he comes into contact" (60).

One of the ironies of Augie is that the character of his most significant female "imposer," Thea Fenchel, is conveyed only sparingly in speech. Augie delivers far more substantial transcripts of his conversations with itinerant male characters than he does with Thea. The paucity of her represented speech may reflect Augie's awareness of her faults at the time of writing. "I was never before so taken up with a single human being" (316), claims the infatuated
Augie, but it is soon after this that he admits to finding fault with her: "Then how I'd criticize her if I weren't her lover would come to me" (317). "Usually her wisdom was against me," (319) he complains shortly afterwards. Ironically, in the speech which spurs Augie to write this, Thea describes one of Augie's many flattering faults, "being so obliging" (318). Reinforcing Augie's sense of his victimization by others, Thea also conveniently reiterates one of his prominent themes: "They will make you suffer from what they are" (318). Thea seems to share the cynicism with which Augie construes any attempt to help him as a covert threat to his autonomy.

The lengthy account of his time with Thea--the Mexico section of the novel--is invested with premature bitterness. After devoting three pages to their romantic journey from Chicago to Texas, Augie pens an epitaph of sorts for the relationship: "And so this gilded and dallying part of the excursion ended in Texarkana" (331). Thea's longest speech is her farewell to Augie, after the failure of their relationship, in which she admits that she thinks she is crazy and describes her disappointment with Augie in succinct sentences that seem to be spoken in pain:

I was so happy to find you. I thought you knew all about what you could do and you were so lucky and so special....I didn't want you to come back. I'm sorry you're here now. You're not special. You're like
everybody else. You get tired easily. I don’t want to see you any more. (396)

Thea speaks in her own bitterly frank, unadorned voice, and while her speech conveys her personality less vividly than the diatribes of Mimi Villars convey hers, it manages to convey her sorrow without sentimentality and her bitterness without hyperbole.

Along with Grandma Laus, William Einhorn, and Mrs. Renling, Thea typifies the represented speech of the novel’s early speakers. The uniqueness of Grandma Lausch’s character is conveyed memorably and distinctly by her idiomatic speech, and the poignancy of her decline and admission to a home for the aged is tragically conveyed by the terrible silence with which she leaves the March home forever.

Perhaps Bellow’s first great secondary character, William Einhorn is richly portrayed when he speaks. Of all the novel’s speakers, he embodies most perfectly Bellow’s stated purpose of fusing "street language" with a "high style," although the latter is subordinated to the former when his references to culture are made in his own colourful idiom, which is rich in slang and profanity. In his generalizing tendency, Einhorn sometimes sounds like Augie, but the dominant overall effect of his speeches is to render his character distinct. Mrs. Renling’s style of speaking represents a generational shift from her predecessors, but her voice succeeds in transmitting her character, if less by
its idiom than its opinionation and emphasis. Thea's voice, less memorable and distinct than those of the earlier speakers, tends to convey her emotions rather than her character, and her poverty of dialogic representation signals the novel's shift away from character conveyance as the primary function of dialogue.

**Intermediate Speakers**

In the novel's chorus of speakers, Paslavitch, Clem Tambow, Robey, and Kayo Obermark have a distinctly different role than Augie's earlier interlocutors. While they retain some of the individual speech traits granted to the novel's earlier minor characters, their voices convey less individual character and share a distinct similarity with Augie's own, both in what they say and how they say it. All of these speakers are male, and all of them are given to thematic discussions of particular ideas. This is accompanied by the pronounced similarity between their interests and the narrator's and the resemblance between their employment of metaphor and historical anecdote and Augie's own.

The first of these, Paslavitch, is a minor character who makes his appearance as Augie is waylaid in Mexico City on his way back to Chicago. Frazer introduces Augie to the Yugoslavian expatriate, who lives in a villa in Coyoacan. Augie's description of him hints at the role he will play: "He appeared to have grave weights on his mind and to be
preoccupied with superior things" (414). In the first exchange Augie records between them, it becomes clear that they will trade ideas. Paslavitch sets the terms of their conversational exchange: "Teach me about General Ulysses S. Grant. I will teach you. I will tell you about Fontanelle's ham omelette. We will exchange" (415). When Paslavitch immediately relates the anecdote of Fontanelle's ham omelette, it is clear that he represents a new type of character in the novel—the character whose principal function in the story is to engage Augie in verbal exchanges the purpose of which is to trade anecdotes, to articulate theories, or to discuss ideas for their own sake. Paslavitch represents the beginning of the stage in the novel during which Augie's relations with the other characters become predominantly verbal and assume the form of ideational exchange. Moreover, Paslavitch's brief acquaintance with Augie wins him seemingly unearned praise from the hard-to-please narrator, suggesting Augie's approval of thematic discussion: "He was a very decent guy. You don't meet many such" (418).

On Augie's return to Chicago, he visits the members of his family briefly, before he contacts his friends, and it is at this point that Augie's conversations begin to become the narrative's prime feature, adventures which are "more philosophically reflective than the earlier episodes" (Porter, Whence the Power? 89). Augie's discussion with Clem
Tambow in the twenty-first chapter, as the two old friends have dinner in a Chinese restaurant, is a signal of what is to come. Relating his dream of the three pianos (434), Augie gives his longest speech in the novel thus far. Conveniently, Tambow directs Augie to address the issue which has preoccupied him as the narrator since his citation of Heraclitus on the first page: "How's your campaign after a worth-while fate, Augie?" (432).

Moreover, Clem has acquired a character trait he did not have before Augie left for Mexico: he is given to bouts of outrageous flattery. In the restaurant, he tells Augie, "When I think of you I have to think in terms of something exceptional. On the level of achievement" (433). Tambow reinforces Augie's sense of his own rarity: "You are a distinguished personality. You are a man of feeling. Among us poor drips at the human masquerade you come like an angel" (434). Clem's exalted view of Augie is framed in terms that are reminiscent of Augie's reflection, after an earlier conversation with Tambow, that personal greatness is not what he seeks: "I could not shine the star of great individuality that, by absorbed stoking, became a sun of the world over a throng to whom it glitters--whom it doesn't necessarily warm but only showers down a Plutarch radiance" (204). Moreover, Tambow's reference to "the human masquerade" reflects Augie's view that the human race, for the most part, devotes its energies to pretence and seeming:
"This is what mere humanity always does. Its made up of these inventors or artists, millions and millions of them, each in his own way trying to recruit other people to play a supporting role and sustain him in his make-believe" (402).

Augie responds to Tambow’s flattery with a few modest remonstrations, after which Tambow delivers a short speech which bears strong marks of Augie’s language and sensibility:

We aren’t in the same universe of discourse. This is not yet what St. Thomas calls my level of first intention. I didn’t say I thought you were an angel; only us common-clay, step-by-step, unfortunate ordinary personnel see you arrive as for a ball, smiling and beaming. You have ambitions, but you’re ambitious in general. You’re not concrete enough. You have to be concrete. Now Napoleon was. Goethe was. You take this Professor Sayce who actually had this Nile deal. He knew everything along the banks for a thousand miles. Specific! Names and addresses. Dates. The whole mystery of life is in the specific data. (434)

Tambow’s speech shows notable signs of ventriloquization. Speaking of Simon earlier, Augie himself employs Tambow’s phrase from Aquinas: "It appeared that he could no longer take out the first intention of his heart without touching the inflamed place of self distinction" (235). It is a feature of Augie’s speech to refer to the sainthood of
certain writers, as when he speaks ironically of "the world-wide livery service of the horsemen of St. John" (100). Tambow also shares Augie's interest in Napoleon. Augie claims that Simon "intended to carry me along with him, when it was time, the way Napoleon did his brothers" (53); he compares his hard times with Napoleon's misfortunes during the retreat from Moscow (251); and he describes Kreindl as "altogether Napoleonic" (5). Even Tambow's suggestion that a role as an Egyptologist would be fitting for a man of Augie's talents accords with Augie's own view of himself as an Egyptologist of the self, which is evident in his reference to his employment history as a sort of "Rosetta Stone" (28).

In addition to his tendency to resemble Augie in sensibility and reference, Tambow shares some of the protagonist's distinct verbal features. He displays Augie's tendency earlier in the novel to modify nouns with compound adjectives. His "common-clay, step-by-step" people recall the "West-moving, factor-shoved parents" (125) of Augie's classmates at the city college and the "off-with-their-heads stony-facedness" (103) he attributes to Mrs. Karas. Tambow's use of the word now in the phrase, "Now Napoleon was" is also one of Augie's mannerisms: "Now there's a dark Westminster of a time when a multitude of objects cannot be clear" (201). Augie also uses this word when he pauses to situate the reader: "Now I've mentioned that Thea carried
among other pictures one of her father" (345).

Augie continues his colloquies with Tambow after an intermission during which he converses briefly with Mimi Villars and makes the acquaintance of another interlocutor whose principal emphasis is ideational: the eccentric millionaire Robey. Like Paslavitch, Robey has no other function in the narrative other than to engage Augie in conversation. His acquaintance with the protagonist does not, like that of Tambow or Obermark, originate in Augie’s Chicago childhood. Augie describes Robey’s first speech: “He mightn’t be very bright, Robey humbly started, but what could he do? He couldn’t escape ideas. None of us could escape ideas, and everybody was up against the same thing, namely that there were hundreds of things to think about and know” (440). Robey’s sense of living under an avalanche of ideas is reminiscent of Augie’s sense of futility in the face of a multitude of facts, which he expresses shortly after enrolling at the city college with Simon: “Considering how much world there was to catch up with—Asurbanipal, Euclid, Alaric, Metternich, Madison, Blackhawk—if you didn’t devote your whole life to it, how were you ever going to do it?” (125). Moreover, Robey shares some of Augie’s intellectual prejudices, including the disdain for science which informs his portrayal of Basteshaw. In his projected scholarly work, the eccentric millionaire will be sidestepping the tradition of scientific rationalism:
"modern science, stand-still. Not even interested" (441). Augie similarly sidesteps science during his student days: "I didn't carry the germ of a Clerk Maxwell or Max Planck in me" (193).

Much of what Robey says is summarized by Augie, who explains that Robey spoke much more than he reports: "Robey poured it on me; he let it come down" (442). Augie is sensitive to Robey's shifts of rhetorical register, which Augie identifies with inauthenticity and associates with occasions of formal delivery, and his shift to the general recalls Einhorn's similar tendency: "Robey didn't sound like himself now, not, that is, as earnest as before, but bookish. He scratched his foot and went on like a lecturer" (442). Robey's stutter does not conceal the fact that he shares Augie's belief in the insufficiency of secularism: "Did you work up that Italian Renaissance stuff for me about the p-princes and the h-humanists? How they suffered without God!" (444).

But nowhere is Augie's ventriloquization of Robey more in evidence than in his insistence on the relevance of historical anecdote to daily situations. Robey answers a stripper's insult about his beard with a reference to Elizabethan times: "In the old days of Elizabeth the barbers had lutes and guitars in the shop so the gentlemen waiting could sing and play. It was because the beards and the lovelocks took so long to fix" (445). Robey's tendency to
compare his own situation with historical events resembles one of Augie's most pronounced traits, one that is manifest, for example, when Augie is annoyed by Mexican music in Acatla: "So things shouldn't cram on his mind but be orderly, Bacon had music played in the next room when he thought out the New Atlantis. But down in the zocalo all day the machines played "Salud Dinero" or "Jalisco" (367). After Robey's role as purveyor of ideas and historical anecdotes has been played, "the addled philosopher" (Kegan 90) promptly disappears from the novel, and almost immediately, Augie engages his next interlocutor, Kayo Obermark.

Picking up where Robey left off, Obermark relates a historical anecdote to Augie almost as soon as they become reacquainted, using it as he admonishes Augie to have children: "There was an old philosopher caught by his disciple behind the Stoa with a woman, and he said 'Mock not! I plant a man'" (448-449). Like Tambow, Obermark is conspicuous in his validation of Augie's character: "You're no worse than anybody else, don't you know that?" (450). Obermark also uses metaphor as Augie uses it, as an illustration of theme. When he speaks of "the Bronx cheer of the conditioning forces" (450), he manifests Augie's tendency to personify the idea of determinism as an oppressive mass of human particulars: "All the influences were lined up waiting for me" (43).
Paslavitch, Tambow, Robey, and Obermark, while they are not the only interlocutors who demonstrate these traits, nevertheless offer a representative sample of the novel's intermediate speakers and illustrate the noticeable shift from character portrayal early in the novel to ideational exchange as the narrative moves towards its conclusion. Paslavitch and Robey, in particular, illustrate the tendency later in the narrative for Augie's interlocutors to have no role beyond that of ideational exchange. Tambow and Obermark reappear after playing earlier roles in Augie's story, but their involvement with him late in the novel is almost exclusively verbal, and their role as interlocutors, when they are not speaking of ideas, is the one Cohen imputes to Mintouchian, that of the "Socratic questioner" (Laughter 80) of the protagonist.

**Final Speakers**

In the first half of the twenty-second chapter, Augie reaches its rhetorical climax, and strikingly, it is the protagonist, whose representations of himself speaking have been minimal thus far in his account, who dramatically bursts into extended speech in his talks with Obermark and Tambow. Augie gives the reason for this in his introductory commentary. Without specifying exactly how he "went along with the changes of the times" (447), Augie undergoes a significant internal change: "like a big and busy enterprise that tries to cover all it can, I also brooded in my higher
mind over my course of life" (447). Although the adventurous protagonist has been "smeared, or knocked, kissed by the rocky face of clasping experience" (447), he has, "in the consummation and final form" (448) of his life, achieved peace and serenity: "I was happy. I felt at home" (448).

This state of calm realization results from Augie's having arrived at certain conclusions, as Eusebio Rodrigues notes, not "in logical fashion but in his own intuitive way" (Quest 71). These conclusions receive expression in Augie's impassioned statements of belief and principle to Obermark and Tambow, which contrast dramatically with his earlier speeches in the novel. In fact, Augie's longest speech in the first half of the narrative is the five-line statement he delivers to Mimi Villars on the subject of obliviousness, which also contains a pertinent statement of belief: "if you ask me whether obliviousness would have been better for me, then I'd be a liar if I answered 'yes' or even 'maybe,' because the facts are against it" (254).

An excellent example of how, as Delmore Schwartz argues, "Augie is a highbrow of sorts, but he does not talk like one" ("Adventure" 9), Augie's twenty-five-line discourse to Obermark deals with the protagonist's fundamental philosophy of life, beginning with his affirmation of the Thoreauvian imperative: "I really should simplify my existence" (450). Early in the speech, Augie identifies the influence others have attempted to exercise
over him as a force antagonistic to his attempts to simplify his existence: "my pride has always been hurt by my not being able to give an account of myself and always being manipulated" (450). His first clear statement of belief identifies the relation between his narrative itself and his search for reality: "Reality comes from giving an account of yourself" (450). For Augie, civilization itself is a great obstruction to the simplification necessary to give such an account: "you can't lie down so innocent on objects made by man" (450). This represents a significant change of emphasis from Augie's focus throughout the narrative on the human "destiny moulders" and "Machiavellis" (524), who, from Grandma Lausch to Basteshaw, have convinced him that "the struggle of humanity" is "to recruit others to your version of what's real" (402).

To Obermark, Augie extends this suspicion from humanity to its inanimate products: "In the world of nature you can trust, but in the world of artifacts you must beware" (450). This sentence, according to Scheer-Schazler, "aptly sums up the view that is expressed in all of Bellow's works" (Bellow 47). The rationale for Augie's suspicion of "the world of artifacts" is that civilization is an oppressive burden on humankind because of the effort it requires to be comprehended: "There you must know, and you can't keep so many things on your mind and be happy" (450). Narrowing the world of artifacts to the technological products of modern
science, Augie, in his peroration, lambasts the vanity of modernity itself, beginning with an allusion to the powerful irony of Shelley's "Ozymandias:"

'Look on my works ye mighty and despair!' Well, never mind about Ozymandias being now just trunkless legs; in his day the humble had to live in his shadow, and so do we live under shadow, with acts of faith in functioning of inventions, 'as up in the stratosphere, down in the subway, crossing bridges, going through tunnels, rising and falling in elevators, where our safety is given in keeping. Things done by man which overshadow us. And this is true also of meat on the table, heat in the pipes, print on the paper, sounds in the air, so that all matters are alike, of the same weight, of the same rank, the caldron of God's wrath on page one and Wieboldt's sale on page two. It is all external and the same. Well, then, what makes your existence necessary, as it should be? These technical achievements which try to make you exist in their way? (450)

For Augie, technology, demanding a constant faith in human artifacts, keeps humankind in a state of darkness, and "things done by man" eclipse the power of nature. As Ellen Pifer points out, Augie's lot is "to suffer the degenerate reality of the shared human condition" (77). Civilization so completely "overshadows" the human that it levels the vital
distinction between the merely human and that which transcends it, between "Wieboldt's sale" and "God's wrath." The problem is not just the uniformity of "the world of artifacts" but also the externality of its focus. Augie's concluding point seems to be that the unique and individual life is direly threatened by the monolithic idol of modern technology, which tyrannizes and dehumanizes its subjects by imposing its own mechanistic mode of existence on them.

In a sense, Augie turns the tables on technology, responding to its mechanistic demands with his negative humanization of "technical achievements" and refusing to impute any objective neutrality to human artifacts as they relate to humankind. Augie has made a great leap of the imagination in his identification of the determining forces residing implicitly in the products of technology, and by adding technology itself to his list of "destiny moulders" (524), he has discovered the threatening animus behind the inanimate "world of artifacts." By brooding over his life, Augie has come to a broad understanding that it is not just Mrs. Renling who has an "all-interfering face" and that there are more massive forces at work upon him "to infuse and instill" (135) inside him something other than "a fate good enough" (151). Obermark encapsulates Augie's fundamental position in four words: "opposition to the finite" (450).

Having delineated to Obermark the general nature of
what opposes him, Augie proceeds, in his speech to Tambow, to identify--in abstract terms--the manner in which he contrives to escape what he earlier calls "those great currents where I can't be myself" (416). As he realizes during his "terrible investigation" (401) of himself at Iggy Blake's house in Acatla, "External life being so mighty, the instruments so huge and terrible, the performances so great, the thoughts so great and threatening, you produce a someone who can exist before it" (401-402). "I have a feeling," he says to Tambow, "about the axial lines of life, with respect to which you must be straight or else your existence is mere clownery, hiding tragedy" (454). Significantly, Augie's sense of the "axial lines" precedes his education in worldly knowledge: "I must have had a feeling since I was a kid about these axial lines which make me want to have my existence on them, and so I have said 'no' like a stubborn fellow to all my persuaders" (454). Ihab Hassan notes that Augie's wish to bring himself into line with his axial lines is an "instinctive desire" (305), emphasizing the unlearned nature of his sense of spiritual location. Michael Glenday takes a harsher view of Augie's declaration, calling it "a piece of pseudo mysticism" and at that "a mysticism for loafers" (67). To Tambow, Augie describes his immediate experience of the axial lines:

I was lying here on the couch before and they suddenly went quivering right straight through me. Truth, love,
peace, bounty, usefulness, harmony! And all noise and
grates, distortion, distraction, chatter, effort,
superfluity, passed off like something unreal. (454)

Nor is Augie's experience one that is merely his own personal prerogative: "And I believe that any man at any time can come back to these axial lines" (454). Although Augie's zealous affirmation of the axial lines shows him to be "committed to an abstraction" (Opdahl, Novels 82), this at least partially counteracts Robert Penn Warren's judgment that he is a "man with no commitments" ("The Man" 13). Augie describes his feeling of the axial lines, not just as an alternative to secular knowledge, but as one which antedates civilization itself, being "the oldest knowledge, older than the Euphrates, older than the Ganges" (454). Even for the contemporary human, this knowledge can serve as an elixir of regeneration: "man himself, finite and taped as he is, can still come where the axial lines are. He will be brought into focus. He will live with true joy" (455). David Galloway's suggestion that "Augie has paraphrased, in this vision of 'axial lines,' the absurd formula embodied in the figure of Sisyphus" (Absurd 101) seems to ignore the unequivocally affirmative value Augie assigns to his axial lines. Augie contradistinguishes the knowledge of the axial lines from the "Niagara Falls torrent" of secular knowledge, which threatens not to give his "feelings enough of a chance" and to make him "become like an encyclopedia" (455).
"Too much history and culture...too many details" threaten to imprison Augie within walls of information, reducing his life to "a terrible, hideous dream about existing" (455). This speech seems to represent a position quite different from what Norman Podhoretz calls Augie's "belief in the American abstractions" (18).

Containing his most essential views, Augie's "lengthy declaration" (454) to Tambow is a distillation of his many reflections, the most extended, passionate, and personal expression of belief he makes in the novel. In asserting that Augie's attitude is one of "ironic affirmation" and "comic transcendence" ("Adventure" 9), Delmore Schwartz seems to overlook the passionate sincerity of Augie's remarks to Tambow. In spite of his opportunity to have Augie make such a declaration at any point in his extensive commentary on the narrative, Bellow reserves this crucial statement for inclusion in dialogue. Augie's lengthy speeches to Obermark and Tambow illustrate the shift, late in the novel, of dialogic function. Unlike his earlier speeches, Augie's lengthy summations are broad articulations of the novel's central themes, and they clearly accommodate Bellow's ongoing project of voicing his opposition to ratiocentrism and stating its major premises, much as Charlie Citrine, also in dialogue, states twenty-two years later in Humboldt's Gift "that there's something in human beings beyond the body and brain and that we have ways of
knowing that go beyond the organism and its senses" (227-228).

After his flights of volubility and perhaps to substantiate his strange claim that in the wake of the attack on Pearl Harbour, "overnight I had no personal notions at all" (457), Augie's role as a speaker declines and gives way to his two most voluble interlocutors: Mintouchian and Basteshaw, the twin orators whose performances figure prominently in the novel's last sixty pages. Both characters are introduced suddenly and without prior reference, both begin to speak almost as soon as they are introduced, and both speak far more extensively than any other secondary characters in the novel. In a scene somewhat discontinuous with the rest of the novel, Mintouchian is introduced to the narrative in the twenty-fourth chapter, itself perhaps the most autonomous in the novel. Augie's use of the present tense, along with his description of himself in Rome envisioning Mintouchian, is one of the jarring transitions Bellow uses often in his fiction:

I see before me next a fellow named Mintouchian, who is an Armenian, of course. We are sitting together in a Turkish bath having a conversation, except that Mintouchian is doing most of the talking, explaining various facts of existence to me, by allegory mostly. The time is a week before Stella and I were married and I shipped out. (477)
That Augie is presenting a procession of speakers is clear from his use of the word next. He highlights the general nature of Mintouchian’s remarks when he identifies their subject as "existence."

After assuring the reader that "this Mintouchian was a monument of a person" (477), Augie proceeds to the specific situation he wants to relate and gives his narratorial pretext for its inclusion in the tale: "The reason why I was with him in the bath this particular afternoon was that Stella had gone shopping with Agnes for the wedding" (478). Augie’s attempt to integrate this discursive episode with the larger narrative has a weak premise in the shopping visit of Augie’s wife Stella, herself a character whose place in the novel Robert Penn Warren attributes to "auctorial fiat" ("The Man" 13). Augie’s inclusion of this situational rationale seems to be a tacit admission that the episode warrants explanation. In attempting to characterize Mintouchian specifically, Augie seems to be describing himself: "It was one of his curiosities to figure out historical happenings like the building of the Berlin-Baghdad Railway or the Battle of Tannenberg, and he furthermore knew a lot about the lives of the Martyrs" (478). The two specific examples Augie gives of historical events, preceded as they are by the word like, are approximate characterizations of interests analogous to the narrator’s, and Mintouchian’s interest in the Martyrs
mirrors Augie's own interest in figures from religious history.

As Mintouchian holds forth, he demonstrates many of Augie's own verbal traits. Like Augie, Mintouchian not only speaks to himself but does so using his last name, which he includes parenthetically: his "to live is to be, Mintouchian, my dear man" (480) resembles Augie's "Why, March, let the prophetic soul..." (468). The Armenian also shares a distinct similarity to Augie in some of his general beliefs. In particular, Mintouchian shares Augie's counter-ratiocentric bias, along with his emphasis on a more timeless knowledge: "Ancient wisdom is right. Now science comes lately and finds it out" (480). These elements of similarity are accompanied by Mintouchian's employment of a metaphoric structure reminiscent of Augie's. His reference to life as "this Mongolia, or clear-light desert minus trees" (480) recalls Augie's description of "whole Mississippis of bootleg whisky and beer" (39), and his "middle-of-Asia darkness as flat in humanity as the original is in space" (273) resembles Augie's "tremendous Canada of light" (170). His historical anecdote is delivered without apology and seems rather ponderous for a chat in a Turkish bath, and the sentence containing it makes a familiar--at this stage of the novel--expansion into generalization: "But when Mr. Cecil Rhodes of the British Empire weeps many tears because he can't do business with the blazing stars, this is
not decadence but inner consciousness speaking over all the highest works of man" (480).

Furthermore, Mintouchian sounds more like a writer than a lawyer, as is evident in his poetic speech: "The human mind has bounded the exploding oceans of universal space; the head has swallowed up the Empyrean" (481). Just as Augie relates a string of anecdotes about "those persons who persistently arise before me with life counsels and illumination" (478), Mintouchian insists on giving "a few examples" from his law practice of "what goes on in other parts of the soul" (481). In relating his anecdotes, Mintouchian addresses Augie by last name, the same way Augie addresses himself: "Not only did he keep it, March,..." (483). Mintouchian also shares Augie's tendency to see things in terms of fate: "you show how you love your fate" (483).

Towards the end of the conversation, Mintouchian declares that he has a "dominant idea," which he expresses without hesitation: "I stand in awe of the genius of the race. But a large part of this genius is devoted to lying and seeming what you are not" (484). Both in his possession of a dominant idea and in the idea itself, Mintouchian shares Augie's hierarchical order of beliefs and recognizes the same tautological imperative: "To be what you are" (519). Like the poetic Augie, the New York lawyer with "global business interests" (478) is given to exclamatory
laments: "How rare is simple thought and pureheartedness!" (485). When Mintouchian says, "You must take your chance on what you are" (485), he is repeating Augie's central idea, and his gnomic closing statement reinforces the book's theme in memorable fashion: "It is better to die what you are than to live a stranger forever" (485).

Mintouchian delivers the moral of Augie's tale, and the fact that he does so with almost scriptural force further underscores the fact that his place in the narrative is to bolster theme and articulate idea. Recalling his closing statement about Paslavitch, Augie's reflections on Mintouchian show that he is more involved in constructing autonomous dialogic episodes than in developing character at this point in his tale: "Sometimes on short acquaintance you can get very closely knitted to someone. And Mintouchian and I now were" (486). This somewhat contrived conclusion further underscores the forced nature of this episode's inclusion in the narrative. In a postscript of sorts, Augie adds that Mintouchian "acted the part of a good friend" (488). This statement is expressive of Augie's abidingly cynical view of the good will of others. In relegating Mintouchian to the status of an actor, Augie dismisses the integrity of his interlocutor, reducing Mintouchian to an expression of the Armenian's own dominant disgust, his disdain for "disguises, vaudeville, multiple personalities, (484)."
But Mintouchian is represented with relative beneficence, compared to Augie's final notable interlocutor, Hymie Basteshaw. Augie resorts to simile in his most creative description of the "fanatical positivist" (Pifer 58) with whom fate casts him into a lifeboat: "I watched him climb around like an alpinist of the mountains of his own brain, sturdy, and with his calm goggles and his blue glances of certitude" (504). As an example of rationality gone wild, Basteshaw is somewhat ineffective, since his status as a madman undermines his ability to dramatize the shortcomings of rationality as such. Nevertheless, the mad scientist is portrayed with Bellow's considerable gift for memorable caricature. An Icarus of the intellect, Basteshaw represents the mind in its dangerous tendency to become the victim of its own ambition when it ignores the counsels of intuition and submits entirely to the artifice of the exclusively rational enterprise.

However, the effectiveness of Basteshaw's portrayal as Augie's opposite is significantly undercut by the noticeable similarity between his speech patterns and peripheral interests and those of the narrator, whom he addresses—as Mintouchian had—parenthetically and by surname: "Listen to me, March, that old Rip Van Winkle conked out on purpose" (501). Strangely for a fanatical rationalist, Basteshaw quotes a champion of faith: "Pascal says people get in trouble because they can't stay in their rooms" (501). Like
Augie, Basteshaw tends to mention famous works of art. "I was once bugs on the history of art" (501), Basteshaw explains, but describing Henri Rousseau’s The Sleeping Gypsy as "that famous painting of the gypsy Arab traveler sleeping with his mandolin and the lion gazing on him" (501), he forgets the painting’s artist and title and describes its content, just as Augie, earlier in the novel, refers to Pieter Breughel’s The Misanthrope as "an old, singular, beautiful Netherlands picture" (190), describing the painting’s content but neglecting to mention its artist or title. Basteshaw also shares Augie’s penchant—one dispersed liberally among the protagonist’s interlocutors—for historical reference. As they battle for their lives on the lifeboat, Basteshaw relates to Augie Ghiberti’s tale about "a German goldsmith of the Duke of Anjou" (501). Furthermore, Basteshaw shares Augie’s taste for Shelley, whom he quotes (502), as Augie had to Kayo Obermark.

Moreover, Basteshaw’s life, as he describes it, has been like Augie’s in several significant respects. "I went through a large number of interests and nothing suited me" (503), he says to the perennially dissatisfied protagonist. It is not long before Basteshaw has moved, via anecdotes about his family history and more general historical remarks, to a discussion of principles, and he expresses views which are clearly the narrator’s: "Ah, well, what can you do, impose your ideas on life! Everybody wants to be the
most desirable kind of man" (503). Basteshaw clearly shares Augie's preoccupation with ideas as such and his tendency to universalize his own aspirations. The mad scientist also assumes the existence of a thinking and feeling entity aside from the mind: "The soul cries out against this namelessness" (503), he hyperbolizes while describing his anonymity in the crowded municipal swimming pool of his youth.

Basteshaw also shares Augie's predilection for speaking about "the reality situation" (503). He dichotomizes the human condition in Augie's terms and in Augie's words, describing humanity as "a billion souls boiling with anger at a doom of insignificance," who require salvation in the "assurance of a fate worth living for" (503). He shares Augie's penchant for classical allusion, describing his ambition to be the world's leading authority on boredom as "Titanic! Promethean!" (504). Augie himself thinks about the subject of boredom during his book-stealing phase (194). In his reference to Prometheus, a figure often employed to suggest the danger of aspiring to exclusively divine prerogative, Basteshaw seems unaware that he alludes to the futility of his own endeavors, and when he describes boredom as "the shriek of unused capacities, the doom of serving no great end or design, or contributing to no master force" (504), he seems unaware of the ugly implications of his terms.
Basteshaw's further elaborations on boredom manifest another feature of Augie's verbal style—a tendency to elide the subject and verb from consecutive sentences describing the same thing: "The obedience that is not willingly given because nobody knows how to request it. The harmony that is not accomplished" (504). Like Basteshaw, Augie tends to employ this feature for lyrical emphasis: "What Christ meant when he called his mother 'Woman.' That after all she was like any woman. That in any true life you must go and be exposed outside the small circle that encompasses two or three heads in the same history of love" (285). After describing his scheme to regenerate life in the laboratory, Basteshaw adds to Augie's Egyptian allusions with his assurances: "Think of the opportunity you've fallen into. To understand the birth of life and be in on the profoundest secrets. Wiser than the Sphinx. You'll gaze on the riddle of the universe with comprehension!" (508). Identifying himself with Moses (509), Basteshaw shares Augie's tendency to revere Biblical figures.

In addition to many specific features linking his speech with Augie's, Basteshaw's general pronouncements also tend to resemble Augie's own, reinforcing the novel's themes. Much as Mintouchian's closing statement was a reiteration of Augie's beliefs, Basteshaw's final statement to Augie clearly reflects Augie's sentiments about the peril of the individual in contemporary times: "The power of an
individual to act through his intellect on the reason of mankind is smaller now than ever" (513). "Basteshaw too speaks many of Bellow's ideas" (Novels 93), Keith Opdahl observes, recognizing that the familiar sound of the mad scientist's speeches extends beyond the protagonist to his creator. Augie's final assessment of Basteshaw is somewhat predictable: "I realized how much he was barren of, or trying to be barren of in order to become the man of his ideas" (512). With this conclusion, Augie seems to verify Walter Bigler's view that "Bellow seems to be introducing Basteshaw" in an effort to "consolidate the protagonist's stance and Weltanschauung" (Figures 67). Augie bolsters his case against ratiocentrism by presenting a distorted form of rationalism in Basteshaw, but while the caricature of the mad scientist is not without comical effect, the Basteshaw episode is so fantastic that with it, Augie's adventures, memorably real in the early part of the novel, seem to have become purely fabulistic by the novel's end.

Augie's own long speeches and the orations of Mintouchian and Basteshaw illustrate the drastically changed nature of the novel's later dialogues. The speeches of Augie's two final major interlocutors are permeated with his own sensibility and his own verbal features. The sudden appearance and disappearance of Mintouchian and Basteshaw from the narrative is a striking contrast to the more sustained relationships Augie has with his earlier
interlocutors. The speeches of these late speakers convey little in the way of distinct character, and they have a transparent role in articulating the novel's themes. These weaknesses in the dialogic portrayals of Augie's late interlocutors, the fact that they speak far more than the novel's earlier characters, and their almost exclusive function as speakers, signal the subsumption of the adventure narrative by the tale of talk. At the same time, they form an excellent example of how Bellow, in his middle fiction, occasionally subordinates his fictional enterprise to his metafictional project of voicing alternatives to ratiocentrism, revealing in the process his rhetoric of dialogic digressivity.

Conclusion

Augie's description of his adventures is a record of his progress from situations in which his interactions with others consist of various courses of common action to social exchanges in which extended speech becomes the norm. The tale of talk in Augie is the record of a dialogic evolution from concrete and particular to abstract and universal, from the rich local coloration of ghetto speech directed towards the fictional situation of which it is part to a more generalized ideational discourse articulated by characters whose voices are less individually distinct and whose function seems less and less to contribute to the overall fictional narrative. At the same time, however, the
development of dialogue in the novel is also a corollary of the protagonist's own progress as he moves away from the ghetto and is gradually assimilated into the wider community. The increasing prominence of discussions about secular ideas and concepts partly represents the generational changes between the early immigrants and their children, but this development may also be a reflection of the fact that, as Keith Opdahl argues, in the last chapters "the protagonist catches up with the narrator" (Novels 73). Nevertheless, the dialogue increasingly facilitates the author's incorporation of ideas into the fabric of the novel, expressing the aspect of his philosophy of fiction which asserts the legitimate place of ideas in fiction. The pattern of ideas itself manifests a particular emphasis on Bellow's fundamental opposition to ratiocentric systems of ideas.

Thus, the tale of talk in Augie is partly the tale of how the narrative of event is increasingly usurped by extended dialogic suspensions which have a thematically expository function. Bellow's increasing reliance on dialogue towards the end of Augie shows the author resorting to a mode of narration which is not his greatest strength, a fact, as the introduction to this chapter shows, which is reflected in the critical response to the novel. In moving steadily from accounts of what happens to transcripts of what is said, Augie foreshadows in the
evolution of his emphasis the course of Bellow's novelistic development over the next twenty-two years, prefiguring Henderson's long conversations with Dahfu, Sammler's epic conversation with Lal, and the topical conversations of Charlie Citrine.

The form of Augie's dialogues changes considerably as the narrative progresses. The dialogues become much longer, and the speeches of the interlocutors become more extensive. This dialogic elongation increasingly constitutes them as dialogic digressions from the narrative of event, and in fact, these discussions themselves become the locus of event. The dialogues also function less effectively as dialogues when the statements of the interlocutors become, as Daniel Fuchs points out, "monologues juxtaposed" (Vision 77). The increasingly oratorical speeches are less and less integrated with the whole, in contrast to the early dialogues, which are exchanges between characters who have a significant fictional role in the narrative.

These changes in the form of the dialogues are accompanied by marked changes in their content. Early in the novel, dialogue is a repository of dialect and often reflects an animated personal engagement between the interlocutors. The later extended dialogues become the repository of what Daniel Fuchs calls Bellow's "greater susceptibility to quasi-philosophical gloominess" (77). The speeches in the later dialogues also tend to be expressive
of different facets of the speakers' characters: the early speeches contain the opinions of the speakers, the middle and later ones their ideas. Generally speaking, the early male speakers and almost all of the females are more expressive of emotion than of intellect, a process which is inverted somewhat as the novel proceeds.

Augie's ventriloquization of his interlocutors also reflects a significant change. The speech patterns of Augie's female interlocutors and many of the novel's earlier male speakers resemble Augie's own far less than those of the late, predominantly male speakers. The rise to prominence of male speakers who discuss ideas with the protagonist is accompanied by a growing resemblance between their speech and Augie's own. Coupled with the incremental univocalization of the dialogues, the conversations about abstractions, often devolving into expatiations on theme, represent a dialogic digressivity in which the sensibility of the author becomes increasingly evident. Augie's own voice, according to Peter Hyland, "often sounds as though it might be Bellow's own" (Bellow 34), a view Norman Podhoretz seems to share when he argues that Augie "doesn't represent a point of view independent of Mr. Bellow's" (15). This becomes evident later in the novel, as the incidents become more arbitrary and the lessons they contain more explicit.

As Tony Tanner notes, "Sometimes the wisdom seems to be superadded to the adventures rather than an outcome of them"
As the novel proceeds, the function of the dialogues becomes increasingly expository with regard to theme. Early in the novel, dialogue is used to great effect for the conveyance of character, and there is a high level of individual distinction in the voices of the speakers, which facilitates the transmission of individual character, its opinionation and prejudices, along with the unique and endearing traits of the speakers. In the middle section of the novel, the function of dialogue shifts to one in which the interlocutors seem principally to accommodate the protagonist's interest in ideas. This exacerbates the novel's movement away from dialogue as character conveyance, particularly given the evasive nature of Augie's own character, which is often, as Irving Malin points out, "simply a persona" (Fiction 165). The noticeable ventriloquization of the novel's late speakers renders them less distinct from each other, less distinct from the protagonist, and less convincing as entirely separate fictional entities. This is aggravated by the fact that the fictional premises on which the inclusion of the later dialogues rest become more and more contrived, finally approaching the fantastic. A rhetoric of dialogic digressivity is discernable in the clear element of suasion which emerges as the author's extranovelistic purpose of voicing his objections to contemporary ratiocentric
orthodoxies becomes more and more evident. Chester Eisinger notes the central relevance of this to the novel: for Augie, "the life of reason must be investigated, but no finalities, no ultimate satisfactions or motives, are to be found there" (355).

The emergence of extended dialogic digressivity in Augie is a development of great moment for the fiction of Bellow's middle period, and this form of digressivity, more than any other, becomes a pervasive feature of Bellow's mature fiction. Henderson's conversations with Dahfu are of central importance in Bellow's next novel. Herzog alone, in the novels considered in this study, is largely free from this feature, in part because its epistolary digressivity largely satisfies Bellow's requirements for the incorporation of ideas into the novel. In Sammler, dialogic digressivity assumes the center of the fictional stage. And in Humboldt, the device, in conjunction with Citrine's meditative digressivity, continues to be used pervasively, resulting in a novel saturated with the articulation of theme. For this reason, I have chosen to examine Bellow's use of dialogic digressivity only in Augie and Sammler, focusing on different forms of digressivity which play a prominent role in the other works under consideration here: narratorial digressivity in Henderson, epistolary digressivity in Herzog, and meditative digressivity in Humboldt.
CHAPTER THREE
Narratorial Digressivity: Henderson's Restless Seeking

"From time to time I've lost my head, but I've always made a comeback, and by God, it hasn't been easy, either."

--Eugene Henderson in Henderson the Rain King

"A man's road back to himself is a return from his own spiritual exile, for that is what a personal history amounts to--exile."

--Harry Trellman in The Actual

"It is the function of consciousness not only to recognize and assimilate the external world through the gateway of the senses, but to translate into visible reality the world within us."

--Carl Jung, The Structure and Dynamics of the Psyche

Introduction

With Henderson the Rain King Bellow's development as a novelist takes one of its most enigmatic turns. Describing the novel as a "philosophical romance" (98), Daniel Fuchs contrasts Henderson's "fiction of lyricism" with Augie's "fiction of facticity" (100). Malcolm Bradbury sides with Fuchs in seeing the novel as a romance, but claims it is one which mixes "spacious picaresque construction and
metaphorical concentration" and searches for grandeur "in a mythic intensity and a symbolistic method" (56). For John J. Clayton, the novel is not about Africa at all but is "a romance-satire on the American quixotic self" (166). Tony Tanner concludes his chapter on Henderson less surely: "The book remains, I think, somewhat enigmatic, its overall intention unclear, its perspective shifting, its level of seriousness always in question" (85). Sarah Blacher-Cohen assumes no realism in her description of the novel as a "whimsical fantasy" (116). Eusebio Rodrigues, on the other hand, praises the genuine human realities of Henderson's "tempestuous, rollicking, and glorious safari into the fundamentals of human life" (108). Making his focus political, Michael Glenday concludes that Henderson's central conflict is his inability to reconcile himself to the evils of American capitalism (86). But it is Robert Kiernan who offers a possible resolution to the conflicting interpretations of the "most relentlessly symbolic" (77) of Bellow's novels, positing the novel's resistance to reduction as its fictional premise: "The inconsistency and inconclusiveness that are often thought a failing of Henderson the Rain King are Bellow's narrative postulate, and it is his particular achievement to have turned the postulate into novelistic terra firma" (93).

The "inconsistency and inconclusiveness" which Kiernan argues are central to Henderson form an important part of my
analysis of the digressivity in Bellow's fifth novel. In the novel's most prominent digressive sections, Bellow illustrates the erratic course which consciousness often follows in its search for truth and understanding, both self-understanding and the apprehension of general truths. Henderson's peripatetic narrative is the tale of the protagonist's quest for a truth which transcends orthodoxies. As 'Ihab Hassan claims of Henderson, "his search, first and foremost, is for reality" (317). The Bellovian protagonist is often preoccupied with this particular search for a general truth, but Henderson goes about it in a unique way, and this search often becomes explicit in the digressive sections of the narrative. Henderson's disorderly digressivity is a discourse on counter-ratiocentric method.

Augie contrasts himself with those who had found their directions in life by saying "I was circling yet" (84). Henderson's successor, Moses Herzog, makes the circularity of his search for truth explicit when he says he "practiced the art of circling among random facts to swoop down on the essentials" (Herzog 10). But Henderson's circularity, as his vertiginous initial digressions demonstrate, is manifest in the manner he tells his tale. A millionaire financially far-removed from the odd-job-working Augie and the at-the-end-of-his-rope Tommy Wilhelm, Eugene Henderson is enjoying a lifetime retirement from the exigencies of urban reality and
is up against a different problem entirely: how to discover in outer experience a resolution to the chaotic intensity of his inner life. In fleeing the penury of his American reality, Henderson, like Charlie Citrine, seeks a richer world. To gain access to this higher reality, Henderson engages his imagination, listening to his inner voice, making himself susceptible to truth which "comes in blows," and demonstrating his preference for methods of enquiry which transcend mere rational limits.

In his retrospective account of his crises and their resolution, the erratic and unreliable Henderson attempts both to come to terms with the causes of his crisis and to articulate the manner in which he escapes the confines of his earlier perceptions of reality. In doing so, he seems at times to confuse his search for emotional stability with his quest for metaphysical truth. The narrative which documents this forms a unique expression in Bellow's novelistic oeuvre, for there is uncertainty in the nature of the reality it portrays. This is one of the primary ways in which Henderson creates a fictional environment suited to a novelistic enquiry into the nature of the real. Henderson's digressivity mirrors his instability and suggests the difficulties involved in the search for personal and general truth. His explicit preoccupation with reality further emphasizes the foundational nature of his quest, one which seems far more ambitious (and potentially frustrating) than
Augie’s search for a worthwhile fate.

Bellow gives Henderson the surreal arena of an imaginary Africa to exercise his facility of searching for truth. Henderson’s Africa is a counter-reality to Henderson’s America, a magical place where he can escape the suffocating massiveness of the reality of a modern civilization which is a concrete expression of the dominance of rationality and the hegemony of scientific method. The intuitive Dahfu joins the unstable protagonist in articulating an alternative to the impoverished reality within which human beings enclose themselves when they cut themselves off from nonrational forms of perception and knowing. Symptomatic of his mental and emotional state at the time he records his story, Henderson’s digressivity is partly an exercise in the art of representing madness in speech. But the madness Henderson acknowledges in himself is not insanity itself but the salutary madness of refusing to acknowledge the sole legitimacy of ratiocentric thought. Walter Bigler’s clinical observation in *Figures of Madness in Saul Bellow’s Longer Fiction* (1998) that Henderson suffers from "the impairment of rational modes of orientation" (81) seems to overlook the element of conscious complicity in Henderson’s counter-rational narratorial method, for Henderson’s relation to "rational modes of orientation" is less one of impairment than suspicion.

In this chapter I examine several of the principal
detours Henderson makes from the account of his experiences in Africa, in order to demonstrate that the digressivity of Bellow’s fifth novel portrays the counter-rational premise on which Bellow’s argument for alternative ways of knowing rests. The protagonist, as Jeanne Braham argues, may be "a burlesque of the Hemingway hero" (77), but he can be also be characterized as an embodiment of the counter-rational principle as Bellow conceives it. A soulful man who listens to his heart and refuses to deny his spiritual nature, Henderson demonstrates that a human being is something far more complicated than a mere rational animal. In fact, it is by means of Henderson’s digressivity that Bellow demonstrates the manner in which the essentially human can be found in ways of knowing that are mysterious, erratic, and, in rational terms, inexplicable.

To illustrate this, I examine the series of digressions with which Henderson prefaces his account, attempting to show that the twists and turns the protagonist takes in his attempts to answer his opening question are themselves an unorthodox answer to his query. I argue that this section of the narrative establishes, in its burlesque of reason, one of the novel’s fundamental themes: that the search for truth, encapsulated by the search for a particular answer to a specific question, is a mysterious and sometimes chaotic process which perhaps finds its best solution in an approximate and suggestive answer, rather than a logical and
linear process of thinking which results in a dogmatic insistence on a particular conclusion. Next, I focus on Henderson’s most striking departure from the dominant present of the narrative, the digression of the teeth, examining the relevance of its content and its placement in the narrative. Emphasizing Henderson’s commentary on the digression, I attempt to show that Henderson’s suspension of the narrative of African event is more than mere psychological portrayal and actually amounts to a subtly disguised articulation of Bellow’s premise about alternative ways of knowing.

The Initial Digressions

The initial digressions in Henderson have, more than any other section of the novel, won high critical regard. Richard Chase places the rest of the novel on a lower plane than the "wonderful first forty pages or so" ("Adventures" 26). Daniel Fuchs shares this judgment. "Henderson succeeds nowhere more than in the first forty pages," he claims, noting that their "explosion of spontaneity was carefully prepared" (104). Daniel Hughes, writing in 1960, claims that "the first four chapters of the novel are among the most striking in contemporary fiction for the manner in which the realistic life of a huge and suffering comic hero is presented" ("Reality" 88). For Earl Rovit, the initial digressions are "among the most humorous pages that Bellow has written" ("Bellow" 39). In his introduction to Great
Jewish Short Stories, Bellow argues that "Jewish humour is mysterious and eludes our efforts—even in my opinion the efforts of Sigmund Freud—to analyze it" (12). Whether or not Henderson can be subscribed under the rubric "Jewish humour," it is certain that the complex humour of the introductory section of the novel presents a considerable barrier to analysis.

The opening four chapters of Henderson are the most digressive section of narrative in Bellow up to this point. Henderson begins with a question: "What made me take this trip to Africa?" (3). His most succinct answer to this question follows immediately: "There is no quick explanation" (3). Henderson gives a brief account of himself and his family history, before outlining in more detail his relationship with his second wife Lily. At the beginning of the third chapter of the narrative, Henderson returns to his initial question: "And now a few words about my reasons for going to Africa" (20). But once again, Henderson veers away from his question, plunging into an account of his pig farming days before calling himself back to his stated purpose. In his third return to the topic, Henderson makes a dramatic sequence of failed attempts to answer his question, preceded by a realization: "But I see I haven't got any closer to giving my reasons for going to Africa, and I'd better begin somewhere else" (21).

In quick succession, Henderson discards as explanations
his parentage and his ancestry. After these attempts, he addresses the issue of explanation again: "Still an explanation is necessary, for living proof of something of the highest importance has been presented to me so I am obliged to communicate it" (22). Henderson refers to one of the principal hindrances of his explanatory impulse: "And not the least of the difficulties is that it happened as in a dream" (22). Henderson then says he went to Africa with Charlie Albert, but once again he explores his personal history before he mentions Charlie Albert again, almost twenty pages later. After describing his "inner voice" (24-31), Henderson frames another question: "Is it any wonder I had to go to Africa?" (32). He follows this question with an account of the "day of tears and madness" (32) during which his vociferous anger at the breakfast table becomes a verbal assassination of Miss Lenox, who suffers a fatal heart attack in the kitchen as she makes breakfast. After this, Henderson resumes his discussion of Charlie Albert, and the African narrative begins.

Henderson's initial digressions serve one of the prime functions of narratorial digressivity: the indirect representation of the narrator's character by the way in which he tells his tale. When Henderson says "there is no quick explanation" (3) of why he went to Africa, he alludes partly to "the unbearable complications" (18) of his heart. But he also speaks as "an avoider" who, as Dahfu intuits,
has "accomplished momentous avoidances" (260) in his life. His circumlocutionary attempts to answer his initial question are symptomatic of the fact that he is "a restless seeker" (199), who sees the imperative "to be cool-mouthed" as the "slavery of the times" (175) and whose purpose in attempting to answer his own rhetorical question is the same as that with which he surveys Dahfu’s palace: "to see essentials, only essentials, nothing but essentials" (161).

His decision to get involved in the Wariri rain ceremony is "naturally against reason" (178), just as his narrative is the expression of an "exceptional amalgam of vehement forces" (271), a man who is "highly mediumistic and attuned" (210) and who, by his own admission, is "the inspirational and not the systematic type" (244), in addition to being "one of the most spell-prone people who ever lived" (210).

But while the initial digressions function effectively as a means to demonstrate Henderson’s cognitive complexity, they also serve as an indirect assertion that the examination of human motives is ultimately the examination of complex and paradoxical phenomena which are often inexplicable. As a personality, Henderson himself suffers from an ailment which he says "defies classification" (164), a fact which renders him unamenable to categorial description, even, as Dahfu suggests to him during their first conversation, in a physical sense: "I am not sure I have ever encountered your category" (155). More anomalous
than his physical attributes, his inner workings are a mystery, even to himself. When Romilayu asks him why he lifted Mumma in the rain ceremony, Henderson replies: "I don't know why it is I have such extreme intensity. The whole thing is so peculiar the explanation will have to be peculiar too. Figuring will get me nowhere. It's only illumination that I have to wait for" (204).

Henderson's stress on illumination also suggests a reason for his initial digressions: he values the facts of his own life less than the higher truth he can communicate. "I don't even deserve to be chronicled on toilet paper" (211), he tells Dahfu in the palace. After a number of unsuccessful attempts to explain his reasons for going to Africa, Henderson gives instead the rationale behind his narrative impulse: "Still, an explanation is necessary, for living proof of something of the highest importance has been presented to me so I am obliged to communicate it" (22). One of the initial digressions is Henderson's comical account of his establishment of a "pig kingdom" (20) on his farm, but as he reveals later in the narrative, he "didn't come to the pigs as a tabula rasa"; rather, "something deep was already inscribed" (339) on him. The transcendence of his porcine nature by a more noble essence is the result of Henderson's encounter with the leonine Dahfu, even if this transformation comes late in life, as Henderson indicates in his last speech to the dying king: "The spirit's sleep burst
too late for me. I waited too long, and I ruined myself with pigs" (312). As Henderson tells Romilayu in their ravine cell, "the universe itself being put into us, it calls out for scope. The eternal is bonded onto us. It calls out for its share" (318).

Henderson's emphasis on essential truths has a bearing on the narrative swerves which characterize the opening of his account. "If I am to make sense to you people and explain why I went to Africa I must face up to the facts" (3), he states at the beginning of the narrative. But Henderson reels before the weight of personal facts. "The facts begin to crowd me," he says, noting that "a disorderly rush begins" (3) when they do. Henderson's initial digressions are a linguistic portrayal of his disorderly rush, and the sequence of events he narrates suggests a movement towards the revelation of important truths, answering in the affirmative the question he poses when, during wood chopping, a chunk of wood flies up and hits him in the nose: "Does truth come in blows?" (23). Just as the meandering introduction acts as a kaleidoscopic revelation of what made Henderson go to Africa, Henderson seeks truth in "the real past, no history or junk like that" (46), where "the throat of the lion," its voice "like a blow at the back" of Henderson's head, blasts him away from "unreality, Unreality, unreality," his erstwhile "scheme for a troubled but eternal life" (307). The restless digressivity of
Henderson's opening, with its shifting focus, is a confirmation of Dahfu's assessment that "man is a creature who cannot stand still under blows" (213).

In his opening, Henderson avails himself of Herzog's methodological premise, practicing "the art of circling among random facts to swoop down on the essentials" (Herzog 10). This method contrasts with that of Henderson's "schizophrenic" (4) first wife Frances; one of whose "mental crises" is manifest when, "on one of her kicks of philosophy or something," her method of "working things out" (9) includes a "correspondence with some intellectual or other over in Europe" (8-9). Henderson does not absolve himself from madness, although his own admission of insanity is equivocal: "I, too, am considered crazy, and with good reason--moody, rough, tyrannical, and probably mad" (4). During the digressive introduction which serves as his own discourse on method, Henderson tempers his own admission of madness with an implication of his age: "Of course, in an age of madness, to expect to be untouched by madness is a form of madness. But the pursuit of sanity can be a form of madness too" (25).

Delivered after Henderson has given an account of the "voice that spoke" (24) in his heart, the timing of his caveat on madness is significant, for, unlike the intellectual craziness of Frances, the madness which Henderson recognizes in himself is the salutary madness
which will bring him to his senses. The swerves and swings of Henderson's overture to his African narrative illustrate Henderson's digressive method of finding truth and reflect a conflict he experiences and which threatens to frustrate his enquiries: "I had to find the simplest, most essential points, and all my thinking happens to be complicated" (80). Counterbalancing the chaotic complications of his conscious thought processes, Henderson's inner voice is a gyroscopic indicator by means of which he establishes his essential location. Expanding his experience by traversing the gigantic African continent, Henderson is thus assured of much more than a geography lesson: "I'm still not convinced that I didn't penetrate beyond geography. Not that I care too much about geography; it's one of those bossy ideas according to which, if you locate a place, there's nothing more to be said about it" (55). Henderson's inner voice, as he tells Romilayu, "wanted reality" and through much of his life has been starved: "How much unreality could it stand?" (318). The reality he seeks and finds in Africa is not the objective reality of its physical phenomena but the essential truth which lies behind physical appearances.

Henderson is also concerned with the general relevance of his trip to Africa, which functions partly as an indication that "every guy has his own Africa" (275). Locating his safari in the more universal purview of mental experience, Henderson states not only that "travel is mental
travel" but that "the world is a mind" (167). Such a view allows Henderson to supersede spatial restraints, just as his inner voice allows him to break out of temporal restrictions. Ultimately, this liberation from imprisonment in the spatiotemporal becomes a freedom from the tyranny of death. The regulatory feature of the inner voice is evident in the metronomic function it serves as Henderson seeks to communicate with his dead father, playing the Sevcik exercises on his violin and "keeping time with the voice within" (31). The "mediumistic" (210) attunement of the protagonist is suggestive of the visionary powers without which he can not hope to apprehend the higher realities he seeks. "Only visions ever got to be so hyperactual" (307), Henderson tells himself when he first glimpses the lion that will kill Dahfu. In fact, Henderson seeks truth precisely because of its ability to redeem death from irrelevance: "Time for a word of truth. Time for something notable to be heard. Otherwise, accelerating like a stone, you fall from life to death" (297).

Consequently, Henderson's digressive account of why he went to Africa becomes more than once a recitation of his confrontation with death. The long digression concerning his relationship with Lily (5-19) has a resonant conclusion in the "strange experience" (19) of Henderson's epiphany as he looks at an octopus in Banyules-sur-Mer:

The eyes spoke to me coldly. But even more speaking,
even more cold, was the soft head with its speckles, and the Brownian motion in those speckles, a cosmic coldness in which I felt I was dying. The tentacles throbbed and motioned through the glass, the bubbles sped upward, and I thought, "This is my last day. Death is giving me notice." (19)

This passage is an excellent example of how Bellow employs a rhetoric of narratorial digression to steer his narrative indirectly towards a terrain where epiphanic insight can appear to be the byproduct of a narrative impulse whose ostensible telos is the expository narration of a sequence of events.

The octopus incident is nicely framed by Henderson's stated intention of explaining the relevance of his suicide threat to Lily. After describing Lily covering her face and running from him when he threatens to kill himself with a gun during an argument, Henderson proceeds to explain her reaction: "I'll tell you why" (7). He begins the second chapter of his account with a summary explanation: "Because her father had committed suicide in the same way, with a pistol" (8). But after this sentence, he shifts to a detailed account of his romance with Lily in France. After a catastrophic argument, the lovers part ways, and it is when he is alone and depressed after the rupture that Henderson encounters the octopus at Banyules-sur-Mer. Immediately after his description of the intimation of death he receives
as a result of seeing the octopus, Henderson returns to the point of departure with which the chapter had begun: "So much for my suicide threat to Lily" (19). The ambiguity of this remark is characteristic of Henderson's references to his narratorial rationale during his initial digressions: the remark can be seen as an acknowledgment that the incidents described in the second chapter function as an explanation, Henderson-style, of his suicide threat, but it can also be taken as a satirical acknowledgment that the suicide threat has merely been another narrative premise which Henderson, as narrator, has exercised his prerogative to ignore or deliberately to turn to a purpose different from his stated one.

The latter possibility is suggested by what Henderson does next in his account. He begins the third chapter of the narrative with a statement which indicates that his attempts to begin with an explanation of why he went to Africa are deliberately satirical: "And now a few words about my reasons for going to Africa" (20). Both a comical recognition that he has wanded considerably from his stated intention at the beginning of the narrative and a suggestion that he does not necessarily regard his wandering as a serious flaw in his account, this statement of Henderson's captures the equivocal nature of his initial narrative telos. But also, Henderson's narrative peripeties reflect his view of life. For the narrative as Henderson
tells it, as for life as he sees it, "there is nothing that ever runs unmingled" (339). Explaining his tears to Dahfu when he first encounters Atti in the subterranean cave of the palace, Henderson says, "It's the richness of the mixture. That's what's getting me. The richness of the mixture" (226). Likewise, the erratic progression of the narrative's opening is a reflection of the "richness of the mixture" of Henderson's narrative impulses, his fidelity to the facts which "pile into" him "from all sides" (3), his attempts to describe the "large and real" emotions he persistently requires (22), and his determination to overcome the fact that he has been "ignorant and untutored in higher things" (168) by communicating "something of the highest importance" (22).

Although Henderson's opening reflects the complex interplay of the various things he is trying to communicate and directly dramatizes the confusion to which he becomes prey in his attempts, the initial digressions also function in the narrative as a contrast to the clarity and resolution with which the novel concludes. While his consideration of the facts of his existence "turns into chaos" (3), Henderson nevertheless finds confirmation in Africa of his conviction that "chaos doesn't run the whole show" (175). Henderson's turbulent opening is an appropriate vehicle for the dramatization of his unorthodox method of seeking and finding truth in the chaos of his experience. The
serendipity of his discovery in his father's library is a
good illustration of this. "When things got very bad I often
looked into books to see whether I could find some helpful
words" (3), he says, but the example he gives of a text
which gave him consolation illustrates the disorganized
nature of his textual searches:

One day I read, 'The forgiveness of sins is perpetual
and righteousness first is not required.' This
impressed me so deeply that I went around saying it to
myself. But then I forgot which book it was. It was one
of thousands left by my father, who had also written a
number of them. And I searched through dozens of
volumes but all that turned up was money, for my father
had used currency for bookmarks--whatever he happened
to have in his pockets--fives, tens, or twenties. (3)

Henderson's experience with the passage about
forgiveness typifies the manner in which, in the initial
digressions and throughout the narrative, he finds truth or
comes to understand reality by accident. During the last of
the initial digressions, Henderson recounts his anger when
Lily suggests he is unaccepting of reality: "'What?' I said.
'I know more about reality than you'll every know. I am on
damned good terms with reality and don't you forget it'"
(36). Later, as he recounts his conversations with Dahfu,
Henderson reflects on this conversation with Lily: "I was
telling the truth to Lily after a fashion. I knew it better,
all right, but I knew it because it was mine—filled, flowing, and floating with my own resemblances; as hers was with her resemblances" (167). Henderson's moments of illumination are thus distinctly personal experiences in which he suddenly understands something about his relationship to reality. His revelations, however, come not from himself but from a transcendent source, as when, outside his hut among the Arnewi, he senses in "the light of daybreak against the white clay of the wall" a whole greater than the parts of his perceptions, "some powerful magnificence not human" (100) which resembles "the fringe of the Nirvana" (102).

Henderson enjoys such revelatory encounters, and part of his enjoyment is the surprise and incredulity with which he recognizes that his understanding has been quickened: "Oh, what a revelation! Truth spoke to me. To me, Henderson!" (167). His digressive manner of searching for answers to questions, both mundane and metaphysical, along with the illumination he receives as a result, make him a model of the Bellovian searcher whose enquiries may be less linear than a logician's but whose desire for truth is equally rigorous. Dahfu seems to remind the protagonist of something he already knows when, as Henderson notes, "he had warned me that the truth might come in forms for which I was unprepared" (236). In this respect, Henderson is a particularly good example of the Bellovian seeker, both in
his narrative questioning and his experiential questing, and it is perhaps for this reason that, when asked by Nina Steers which of his characters he most resembled, Bellow replied, "Henderson--the absurd seeker of higher qualities" (Cronin and Siegel 34).

The Digression of the Teeth

Henderson's initial meanderings are the most notably digressive section of the novel, and, while the narrative continues to be digressive, for the most part the African events are narrated in chronological order. The most glaring digression from the African present in the narrative is Henderson's account of the history of his dental work. Ambushed and taken prisoner by the Wariri, Henderson and Romilayu sit in a courtyard awaiting their fate. But at this crucial juncture, Henderson makes a temporary and dramatic shift in the focus of his account. "And now one of those things occurred which life has not been willing to spare me" (120), he recalls. The event he describes is simple in itself: "As I was sitting waiting here on this exotic night, I bit into a hard biscuit and I broke one of my bridges" (120). Earlier, Henderson hints that his teeth will play a role in his narrative, including them at the end of the long list of "facts" about him which are relevant: "my prejudices, my brutality, my teeth, my face, my soul" (3).

Henderson displays the broken dental work to Romilayu, and then intervenes as narrator: "After this I was compelled
to recall the history of my dental work" (121). Henderson devotes almost ten pages of his account to these memories concerning his dental work, going into such detail that the digression becomes a rhapsody of ironic reminiscence. The digression has three distinct divisions: the dental work performed by Mme. Montecuccoli in France, Dr. Spohr's dental repair work in New York, and the incident in which Henderson impulsively kisses Klara Spohr, the dentist's cousin and the wife of Lily's portrait painter. This sequence itself is complicated by digressions within the digression of the teeth: the interruption of the Montecuccoli episode with a brief mention of the Henderson children's governess, Berthe, and Henderson's account of his thoughts about his family as he sits in Spohr's waiting room. The digressions within Henderson's digression are well-suited to the presentation of mental disturbance, the arbitrary flights of a mind in psychological crisis.

All of these details form an interruption of Henderson's African narrative so striking that, like the initial digressions, it shifts the focus of the narrative from Henderson as eccentric protagonist to Henderson as erratic narrator. The digression of the teeth entertains with the gratuitous individuality of its incorporation, but it also solicits an interpretation of the narrative impulse with which it complies and an assessment of the author's narrative strategy. As Daniel Fuchs points out, the novel's
manuscripts reveal that the location of the teeth digression was altered during composition:

It first appears in the Arnewi sequence, just before the rain ceremony. By transferring this minor disaster to the tense scene in which Henderson and Romilayu, having been ambushed, are made to wait for an audience with Dahfu, the comedy of middle age is intensified. Another advantage is that Bellow, having packed the first forty pages with incident, can break up a particularly flat stretch of narrative with flashback, or intensify present time with past time. Out trot Mme. Montecuoccoli, Berthe, the feckless Edward and his Maria Felucca, the Spohrs, and Lily, and Henderson's psychological turmoil eclipses the adventure-story line. (107)

Fuchs highlights the author's restlessness with regard to the placement of the teeth digression and focuses on the strategic reasoning behind its shifts of location at different manuscript stages. In his final statement, Fuchs notes the fundamental result of the digression of the teeth, the shift to the interior of the protagonist's experience, a movement which is often coterminous with the Bellovian digression. Fuchs interprets the digression principally in terms of its relevance to the author's narrative strategy, identifying a triple intensification of effect: comedic, operatic, and mimetic. Certainly, the incident with the
teeth intensifies "the comedy of middle age"—in fact, the incident provides some comic relief from the dark prospects Henderson seems to face among the people Romilayu describes as "chillen dahkness" (115). The operatic effect of the digression in breaking up the "flat stretch" of narrative Fuchs describes comes from the inclusion within the recitative of African event Henderson's spiralling psychological aria. But perhaps the most intriguing of Fuchs's observations is his assessment of the mimetic effect of the digression, the intensification of "present time with past time." Throughout Bellow's work, this is one of the chief functions of analeptic digressivity. The "psychological turmoil" to which Fuchs refers is a major representational concern of Bellow's narrative art generally.

But these are not the only considerations which can be directed towards the digression of the teeth, which also reveals a great deal about Henderson as narrator. That he thinks what he thinks when he breaks his teeth is understandable enough, but the intensity of his inclination to include such psychological details in his account is a direct result of the fundamental complexity of his character as a narrator. Like the initial digressions, the digression of the teeth reveals some of Henderson's fundamental narrative postulates. His narrative is less an attempt to portray himself psychologically than an admission on his
part that psychological portrayal is rendered futile by human complexity. Thus, Dahfu's disposition to psychoanalyze is, for Henderson, a worthy object of suspicion: "To tell the truth, I didn't have full confidence in the king's science" (273).

Henderson himself diagnoses Dahfu's tragic weakness as his susceptibility to ideas:

it is possible that he lost his head and was carried away by his ideas. This was because he was no mere dreamer but one of those dreamer-doers, a guy with a program. And when I say that he lost his head, what I mean is not that his judgment abandoned him but that his enthusiasms and visions swept him far out" (235).

Henderson notes that Dahfu's "brilliance was not a secure gift" but one which "rested on doubtful underpinnings" (269). Nevertheless, Dahfu's brilliance at least allows him to realize that Henderson can not be classified by psychological type. "No rubric will fully hold you," he says to the "man of many qualities" (300). Part of the reason for this is that Henderson is caught between his frail humanity and his search for higher truth. He is "a bungled lump of humanity" (269), but he is also illustrative of Dahfu's principle that "the noble self-conception is everything" (268).

The digression of the teeth simultaneously portrays Henderson's "noble self-conception" and his status as a
"bungled lump of humanity." This can be seen partly in the relevance with which Henderson, as narrator, invests the seemingly mundane details of the teeth digression. "All this information is essential," (122) he claims after reciting the tale of his French dental work, referring perhaps to the fact that his transmission of these psychological details portrays his essential condition as he sits in the Wariri courtyard holding his broken teeth. At the same time, Henderson’s claim that his digression is essential challenges the reader’s preconceptions of what is relevant to his account. The digression of the teeth thus becomes a statement of Henderson’s narratorial values, one of which is that he places the relation of mnemonic reaction to experience alongside the relation of experience itself, just as he places the emotional impact of external events above the events themselves.

But there is another respect in which the teeth digression is essential: like the initial digressions, it affords Henderson an opportunity to outline principles which are vital to him and thus to an understanding of him. As with the opening digressions, the dental digression also illustrates Henderson’s serendipitous path to truth. He attributes his impulse to remember to a force outside of himself: "I was compelled to remember" (126). While he may have to force himself "to stick to the subject" (122) as he recounts his memories, Henderson nevertheless hierarchizes
his memories: "But most of all what I recalled with those broken teeth in my hand on this evening in the African mountains was how I had disgraced myself with the painter's wife and dentist's cousin, Mrs. K. Spohr" (126). Henderson detects frailty in himself at the originary moment of his dental work, just as he does when it crumbles in the Wariri courtyard: "Yes, I returned the kisses. With the bridgework, new then, in my mouth. It was certainly a peculiar moment" (128).

Henderson's digression of the teeth thus becomes an account of the illumination of one "peculiar moment" by another. Before returning to the African narrative, he guesses at the symbolic significance of the kissing incident: "maybe I have kissed life too hard and weakened the whole structure" (129). This is an excellent example of the manner in which Henderson finds meaning in his experience, perceiving general truths in particular events. As such, it also reflects Bellow's own view of literature as an imaginative representation of events by means of which truths about reality itself can be apprehended. The digression of the teeth demonstrates Bellow's concern, not merely with the facts themselves, but also with the meaning which can be derived from them. It is by this means that Bellow sets about the task of finding universal relevance in particular experience. At the beginning of his novelistic career, in Dangling Man, Joseph articulates this idea: "We
are all drawn towards the same craters of the spirit, to know what we are and what we are for, to know our purpose, to seek grace. And if the quest is the same, the differences in our personal histories, which hitherto meant so much to us, become of minor importance" (128).

Conclusion

With the initial digressions and the digression of the teeth, Henderson makes his narrative as impulsive and individualistic as he is, but at the same time his narrative method, particularly in its digressivity, illustrates his idea of experience as a "disorderly rush" towards the truth which comes in blows. His chaotic attempts to give his "reasons for going to Africa" (21), in their gratuitous avoidance of systematic analysis, are an implicit rejection of ratiocentric method itself. Moreover, the narratorial eccentricities of his digressions, a fitting analogue of his own peculiar personality and its unorthodox attempts to discover meaning in experience, are also suggestive of his own conviction that truth can be found in disorder as much as it can in an arbitrary imposition of order. Just as "there is no superfluity in the way flies take off" (192), Henderson's own seemingly random narrative tendencies all accommodate his own attempts to communicate essential truths.

By making Henderson's digressive tendencies seem a completely natural and believable way for his narrator to
record the tale of which he is the protagonist, Bellow demonstrates, with brilliant creativity, the manifold and simultaneous purposes to which he can bend his own authorial penchant for digressivity. His use of digressivity to facilitate a complex psychological portrayal of his protagonist serves well Bellow's determination to make the representation of the inner human qualities a central element of his fiction. At the same time, Henderson's digressivity allows for a typically Bellovian portrayal of character that is rich in the possibilities it offers for a fictional portrayal so deep in ambiguity that it refutes, ultimately, any dogmatic analytical interpretive reduction of the protagonist or his digressive tendencies. Henderson's peripatetic attempts to communicate "higher things" (168) through his narration are as appropriate for a man who describes himself as a "reckless seeker" (199) as they are for a man described by his creator as an "absurd seeker" (Cronin and Siegel 34).

Bellow's bold and striking employment of narratorial digressivity in his fifth novel is of great moment to the development of his fiction after 1959. In a manner quite dissimilar from Augie's narratorial method, Henderson digresses in a fashion and to an extent which suggests that Bellow, by the end of the fifties, was beginning to realize the diverse potentialities of his digressive style. With Henderson, Bellow demonstrates that he has become conscious
of the comic, psychological, and artistic potential, particularly of narratorial digressivity, and of his ability to use it to employ an unorthodox and peculiar narrative method to interrogate the ratiocentric prejudices, both of a formalist aesthetic and of a secularized view of humankind. With *Henderson*, Bellow delivers a novel destabilized by narratorial digressivity and one which, with the critique of ratiocentrism implicit in its narrative method, reveals the author's ability to speak in more than one register when he employs a rhetoric of digression.
CHAPTER FOUR

Epistolary Digressivity: Herzog and the Limits of Letters

"Still, if you think that historical forces are sending everybody straight to hell you can either go resignedly with the procession or hold out; and hold out not from pride or other personal motives but for admiration and love for human abilities and powers to which, without exaggeration, the words 'miracle' and 'sublimity' can be applied."

--Kenneth Trachtenberg in More Die of Heartbreak

"A man like me has shown the arbitrary withdrawal of proud subjectivity from the collective and historical progress of humankind."

--Moses Herzog

"Unfortunately nothing is so difficult to represent by literary means as a man thinking."

--Robert Musil, The Man Without Qualities

Introduction

With Herzog, Bellow achieves unprecedented acclaim as a novelist, and the novel's success rests largely on its inventive customization of epistolary form in the often mental and always unsent letters of its protagonist. The relevance of Herzog's correspondence can be inferred from
the prominent role it plays in the critical praise accorded to Bellow's sixth novel. The novel's "most brilliant innovation," Daniel Fuchs argues, "is the renovation of the epistolary technique, allowing as it does a blending of discursiveness and intimacy, the argumentative and the personal, kulturkampf and the cri de coeur" (16). Nor is this the only praise Fuchs reserves for Herzog's letters. Elsewhere, he compliments the author with having used the letters to demonstrate the integration of mental and emotional truth: "Bellow excels at dramatizing this integration, and the epistolary form enables him to do so with unexampled brilliance. It is, in point of polemic, not only the solution to a book, but to much of a lifetime of literary effort" (108). Writing a year after the novel's publication, Tony Tanner also sees the fundamental relevance of Herzog's correspondence to Bellow's overall project: "These letters and notes are symptoms of a plight and desire which are basic in Bellow's work," he explains, although he sees in the letters evidence of a phenomenon which will become even more pronounced in the author's two subsequent novels: "All those prolific letters simply serve to emphasize Herzog's silence, his basic isolation and apartness and indrawnness" (95-96). Earl Rovit highlights the dual function of the letters, finding that Bellow "employs the device of the fragmentary 'mental' letters as a masterly bridge between solipsism and communication" (24).
Philip Rahv comments on the individuality of Bellow's epistolary effort: "There is nothing in any novel I have read quite like these letters Herzog writes. In no sense formal in tone, they represent at once a fictional device and a prodigiously productive aggression of the mind" (14).

Jonathan Wilson is less enthusiastic than Rahv, commenting on the potential of the letters to turn "the dross of a tawdry and troubled personal life into a platform for the discussion of everything" (132). Wilson's assessment of the transparency of Herzog's epistolary artifice identifies its strategic function of providing a space within which the protagonist's potential for uninterrupted speech has been vastly increased. David Galloway sees in Bellow's epistolary arrival reason for praise and caution. "Herzog's compulsive letter writing offers a brilliantly versatile conceit for the absurd predicament," he notes, but he also warns that the increasing tendency in Bellow's fiction for a single theme to be asserted and reasserted in different novelistic forms might "force the novelist to yield to the rhetorician— a danger already apparent in the concluding pages of Henderson the Rain King and Herzog" (63). Galloway's comment indicates that, for some critics, the incremental emphasis on speech during this period in Bellow's career is a development which threatens to devalue his entire fictional project. Nevertheless, as the metaphors critics employ to describe the letters suggest, their
versatility as a device, like Henderson's narratorial swerves, enhances their resistance to classification.

Bellow's exercise in epistolary digressivity in Herzog marks the arrival of his mature digressive style. In Augie the digressivity asserts itself most notably in the incremental prolixity of Augie and his interlocutors and in the ideational emphasis which accompanies their loquacity. In Henderson, digressivity "brilliantly conveys the eccentric character and counter-ratiocentric sensibility of the protagonist by the unconventional way he tells his tale. In Herzog, too, the dominant digressive device is a versatile agent of subjective portrayal, but it is also a vehicle by means of which the author voices his protest against the ratiocentrism of intellectual orthodoxies. There is wide critical agreement that Augie's dialogic digressivity detracts from the novel. In contrast, Henderson's narratorial digressivity, particularly its dramatic and comically counter-ratiocentric manifestation at the beginning of the novel, is generally regarded as one of the novel's greatest strengths. Compared to Herzog's pervasive digressivity, however, Henderson's is concentrated and localized. Like Augie's dialogic exchanges, Herzog's letters facilitate an explicit expression of the author's alternatives to contemporary orthodox ideas.

The novelty and versatility of Bellow's customized epistolary technique make it one of his greatest creative
(and comic) achievements. Bellovian digressivity comes into its own in Herzog, the epistolary device becoming its most celebrated formal attribute and making the representation of the protagonist’s expressive impulse one of the novel’s central concerns. Herzog’s letters to Monsignor Hilton and Edvig are full of suspicion and accusation; his letters to Ramona and Sono are heavy with affection; his letters to Dr. Bhave and Martin Luther King are expressions of respect and reverence; and his letters to Heidegger, Spinoza, and Nietzsche, to varying degrees, are more contemplative expressions. For Herzog himself, the letters are a psychotherapeutic cure far more effective than his treatment by the meddling, Ibsenesque Edvig. The kaleidoscopic picture of Herzog’s mind which emerges from the correspondence captures his turmoil and is a stirring--yet nevertheless comical--rendition of a mental crisis in progress.

But this emphasis on the activity of the protagonist’s consciousness dramatically infringes on the narrative of external event, the relevance of which, though it is related to the internal activity finding expression in the epistolary events, is clearly subordinated to the manifold activities of Herzog’s inner world. In Bellow’s sixth novel, the pervasive vocal expression of theme highlights the vehicular nature of the story. The prime symptom of the protagonist’s crisis, the letters chart his psychological trajectory, and the story is over when he has reached a
point of psychological resolution: "At this time he had no messages for anyone. Nothing. Not a single word" (341). The narrative proper is the account of how Herzog arrived at and worked through the epistolary stage of his mental crisis. Thus, Tony Tanner describes the novel in terms of mental rather than physical movement: "The book moves from a corrosive restlessness to a point of temporary rest, and the most important meaning is in that actual movement" (88). Herzog's story is, as much as anything else, the story of how his consciousness works, and as Daniel Fuchs points out, the "plot in the broadest sense involves the uncomplication of that consciousness" (122).

The epistolary posture Herzog adopts repeatedly throughout the novel makes his chorus of interlocutors potentially infinite at the same time that it provides the author with a reasonable fictional premise for the univocality with which his protagonist establishes his dialogue with the world. So effective is this illusion that it sidesteps the fictional shortcomings of Bellow's next novel at the same time that it indulges essentially the same authorial impulse. Moreover, the epistolary device, by making a large section of Herzog's chorus of interlocutors merely imaginary, removes the imperative for the author to create the illusion of their existence as figures distinct from Socratic interrogators or ventriloquized projections of the protagonist himself. This has a beneficial effect on the
actual dialogues Herzog has with his "reality instructors" and results in memorable dialogues which are largely unhampered by dialogic digressivity into idea. Effectively, the epistolary device accommodates the essayistic tendencies of the author, allowing dialogue to serve a more exclusively fictional function in the novel.

A conduit for the kind of discussion Bellow reserves elsewhere during his middle period for dialogue, the letters are the principal locus of digressivity in *Herzog*. As the central device of the novel's rhetoric of digression, the letters systematically shift the narrative from story to Bellow's favoured vehicle as a novelist of ideas, reported speech. But because the letters are a device Bellow employs widely and for a variety of effects, in this chapter I focus on Herzog's missives to intellectuals, to show how the epistolary device is employed to accommodate Bellow's ongoing project of voicing a protest against contemporary orthodoxies, particularly the intellectual orthodoxies of ratiocentrism. To do this, I examine in detail Herzog's letters to Smithers, Shapiro, Mossbach, Schrodinger, Pulver, and Mermelstein, focusing on Herzog's general discontent with contemporary education and ideas. In a brief preface intended to show the contrast between Herzog's family correspondence and his intellectual letters, I examine his letters to his mother, brother, son, and cousin.
Letters to Family Members

Approximately one third of Herzog’s letters are addressed to people with whom he is personally involved. The rest of his letters are directed, by turns, towards the political entity of which he is a citizen, the educational establishment of which he has been a part, a religious hierarchy (including its ultimate manifestation in God) he views with some ambiguity, and the philosophical tradition, with its variegated legacies, in which, to a limited and personal extent, he places himself. Herzog’s personal letters counterbalance his more public correspondence. Describing the epistolary evolution of the novel during its manuscript stages, Daniel Fuchs places the personal letters first: “The very earliest versions, then, show no letter material; next come the letters of primarily personal grievance (e.g., Edvig) and, finally, the idea-letters” (129). From this it seems that Bellow, while he may discover a didactic purpose as he writes, does not necessarily begin with one or with a clear sense of what it is.

The letters Herzog writes to members of his family form an important subgroup of his personal letters and include missives to his mother, his brother Alexander, his cousin Asher in Israel, his son Marco, his two ex-wives, and the letters he writes to Tennie and Zelda, to whom he is related by his previous marriage to Madeleine. The first letter Herzog addresses is the short note he pens to his mother
early in the novel: "Dear Mama, As to why I haven't visited your grave in so long..." (11). This brief statement about his failure to discharge familial obligation is characteristic of the notes Herzog pens to close family members, in that it speaks to the immediate concern of the relation, in this case, Herzog's guilt that he has, in his crisis, forgotten to show his respects to "his own obscure dead" (1). The brevity of this letter is indicative of the difficulty Herzog experiences--at least in his crisis--in communicating with those who are closely related to him and portrays an abiding preoccupation of the Bellovian protagonist: a deep sense of obligation to the dead. At the same time, the simplicity of the maternal letter and the fact that it is broken off after one line and never resumed indicate that if Herzog is to use the letters to write his way out of crisis it will have to be in a broader manner than penning exclusively familial notes.

Slightly longer than the note to his mother, Herzog's letter to his brother Alexander (whom he calls Shura), in which he asks for money and a legal recommendation, manifests Herzog's dependence both on family members and the more impersonal workings of the social structure. Unlike the maternal letter, the fraternal one confines itself largely to practical matters. It does, however, contain a reference to Herzog's crisis, a brotherly admission: "In the process of pulling myself together" (78). Herzog's sensitivity is
evident in the way he evades this issue in his paternal letter to his son Marco: "I've come up to the old homestead to look things over and relax a bit" (314). However, the miniature historical digression this letter contains has a notably morbid emphasis. A child could not be expected to detect the possibly personal relevance for Herzog himself of his summary of Scott's tragic mission to the Antarctic:

"There was a man in Scott’s party who went out and lost himself to give the others a chance to survive. He was ailing, footsore, couldn't keep up any longer" (314). After mentioning other gruesome details of the expedition, the letter returns to the practical matter of when Marco can expect to see his father next: "Expect me on the 16th, bright and early" (315).

Herzog's sensitivity to the importance of the paternal relation is also evident in the letter to his cousin Asher in Beersheba. Although it is less detailed than the letter to Marco, it nevertheless illustrates the protagonist's sense of familial obligation and his awareness of the relevance of the paternal role: "I mentioned an old photograph of your father in his Czarist uniform. I have asked my sister Helen to look for it" (49). The narrator explains the reason for this letter, briefly describing Herzog's visit with Asher in Israel: "He went with Moses to visit the Dead sea. It was sultry. They sat down in the mouth of a salt mine to cool off. Asher said, 'Don't you
have a picture of my father?'" (49). Sandwiched between the letters Herzog writes to Dr. Bhave and the President of the United States, the short note to Asher--like his letter to Shura--is one of the twenty-seven epistles Herzog pens while he is on the train to Vineyard Haven. As such, it demonstrates the complex interplay of personal and public concerns in Herzog's mental life and the rapidity with which his thoughts move, "shooting out all over the place" (13) during his "whirling ecstasy" (68) on the train, the agents of whose locomotion are themselves circular: "the wheels of the cars stormed underneath" (47).

By means of the personal correspondence, Bellow gives subtle and indirect articulation to Herzog's character, locating him at the nexus of private and public concerns. As a means of character portrayal, the personal letters are extremely effective, and they are not compromised by the intrusion of the author's didactic, expository, or essayistic tendencies. As temporary suspensions of the enclosing third-person narrative voice, they are formal digressions of a sort, providing an innovative modulation from narration to a vocality directly expressive of the protagonist's first-person perspective, complicated by his hypothetical adoption of a second-person stance. For the most part, the personal correspondence is confined to the fictional objectives of conveying character with epistolary portrayal and locating the protagonist in a network of human
connections.

**Letters to Intellectuals**

In contrast to the personal correspondence, Herzog's letters to intellectuals, portraying the protagonist in the throes of intellectual engagement, serve an entirely different fictional purpose. Demonstrating the protagonist's concern with the social and ethical ramifications of ideas as such, these letters also reflect many of the author's public concerns. The first of these, Herzog's letter to his colleague Smithers, protests the cool reception of Herzog's suggestion of "a series on marriage" (27) for a new lecture course:

*The people who come to evening classes are ostensibly after higher culture. Their great need, their hunger, is for good sense, clarity, truth--even an atom of it. People are dying--it is no metaphor--for lack of something real to carry home when the day is done.*

(28)

Herzog's perception of the deficiencies in the education system is further suggested in his letter to Aunt Zelda, where he describes the effect of his acceptance by her husband, who has had underworld connections: "It meant my muddled intellectual life, as a poor soldier of culture, hadn't ruined my human sympathies" (35). Emphasizing the threat of "intellectual life" to the "human sympathies," Herzog is giving expression to what he calls, in a
reflective note to himself on the train, his "Faustian spirit of discontent and universal reform" (68).

In part, Herzog takes issue with higher education as an intellectual profession with a ratiocentric emphasis, one he passionately derides in his letter to Shapiro:

But we mustn't forget how quickly the visions of genius become the canned goods of the intellectuals. The canned sauerkraut of Spengler's "Prussian Socialism," the commonplaces of the Wasteland outlook, the cheap mental stimulants of Alienation, the cant and rant of pipsqueaks about Inauthenticity and Forlornness. (75)

These comments and those to Smithers echo the sentiments of the nonfiction Bellow about contemporary education. "We seem to have come to a time," the author writes in 1967, "when the main problem for culture is to make it personally applicable" ("Skepticism" 21). In his 1975 article in Opera News, Bellow's own "Faustian discontent" with higher education in America is clearly in evidence. Accusing the education system of "disabling, confusing, and alienating students," Bellow claims that "in colleges and universities, no passion for novels and poems is instilled. What people learn is how to conduct a cultured conversation for a few minutes without betraying ignorance or stupidity" (It All Adds Up 76). "The universities have failed painfully," Bellow claims, by unleashing the "negative force" of "educated philistinism" (75). He widens this criticism to
take in "the modern world" itself: "This is how the modern world meets the deepest of human needs--by fraud, demagogy, opportunism, and profiteering" (78). Herzog’s letter to Smithers seems to reflect Bellow’s cynicism regarding the insufficiency with which human needs in contemporary society are being met: "In our world it seems that as soon as a clear need appears, it is met falsely" (It All Adds Up 77).

Bellow’s concerns with intellectualism also find expression in Herzog’s letter to the man he refers to late in the novel as "that fat nutty brute, Egbert Shapiro" (315). Herzog’s longest letter is, according to Fuchs, "a ray of light in the modernist gloom" (Vision 130). The epistle to Shapiro, who "knew the literature of every field" and "read all the publications" (71), is abandoned after its hundred and twenty-six lines because "it raised too many painful thoughts" (78), reminding Herzog of how, "a prisoner of perception, a compulsory witness" (72), he had had to endure the "learned badinage" (76) of a conversation between his ex-wife and Shapiro. Articulating what Fuchs calls "the argument in Bellow’s arsenal" (Vision 130), Herzog asks Shapiro, "Has the filthy moment come when moral feeling dies, conscience disintegrates, and respect for liberty, law, public decency, all the rest, collapses in cowardice, decadence, blood?" (74). He is outraged by Shapiro’s idea of "a merely aesthetic critique of modern history" (75). Herzog passes on to what history might have taught humankind:
United by the horrible wars, instructed in our brutal stupidity by brutal revolutions (heirs of Marx and Hegel and trained in the cunning of reason), perhaps we, modern humankind (can it be!), have done the nearly impossible, namely learned something. (75)

Herzog’s bias against rationality is manifest in his reference to "the cunning of reason," training in which he implicates in the inability he posits for humankind to learn the vital lessons of history. This emphasis continues as Herzog laments "the results of rationally organized labour," "the evils of standardization" and "the standardized pedantry" born of "cultural drill" (75). In his chapter on the history of Romanticism, Herzog informs Shapiro, he had intended to highlight the relation between aestheticism and immorality: "In the sphere of culture the newly risen educated classes caused confusion between aesthetic and moral judgments" (76). "The emergent plebeian masses," having lost sight of "the old-fashioned moral characteristics," laid a foundation whereby "it was easy for the Wastelanders to be assimilated to totalitarianism" (76). Herzog's "long study of the ancien regime" convinced him that "circumstances of bourgeois privacy in the modern age deprived individuals of scope for grand passions" (76).

From these general ideas, Herzog moves to the specific circumstances of Shapiro’s visit, now two years past. He contrasts his preoccupations on that occasion with those
evident in the eager interlocution he witnesses between his wife and Shapiro: "While you and Madeleine were tossing your heads, coquetting, bragging, showing off your clean sharp teeth--the learned badinage--I was trying to take stock of my position" (76). Herzog does this with relation to his wife: "Madeleine's ambition was to take my place in the learned world" (76). Attacking both his wife and the profession she seeks to enter, Herzog disdains Madeleine's desire to enter "the trades in which the main instrument is your opinion of yourself and the raw material is your reputation or standing" (77).

"One of the most important letters in the novel" (Fuchs, Vision 129), the letter to Shapiro is an extended expression of Herzog's belief that ratiocentric secularism, particularly as it is manifest in the "learned world," pits "the cunning of reason" against the "moral characteristics" and the "grand passions," threatening to eradicate "moral feeling." These themes are also evident in Romanticism and Christianity, the book Herzog writes after completing his doctoral studies. Its chapter on "Romantics and Enthusiasts" deals with "the Enthusiastic reaction against the scientific mode of suspending belief, intolerable to the expressive needs of certain temperaments" (127). Later, in his letter to Rozanov, Herzog sounds a perennial Bellovian theme with his description of the emergence of impoverished and ratiocentric realism: "In the seventeenth century the
passionate search for absolute truth stopped so that mankind might transform the world. Something practical was done with thought. The mental became also the real" (323). One result of this is that Herzog now lives in an "age of spiritual exhaustion" (234) when "strange, minimal ideas of truth, honor" result in a "Realism" which elevates negative human attributes, putting "nastiness in the transcendent position" (229). Watching Jimmy Hoffa "chewing up" a group of "poor professors" on television, Herzog wishes he had a chance to talk to the union leader: "I would have said to Hoffa, 'What makes you think realism must be brutal?'" (218).

Herzog takes up similar themes in his letter to Dr. Mossbach, which takes as its subject human nature itself, particularly as it has been differently interpreted by Rousseau and Hobbes. Herzog sympathizes with Rousseau's religion of the heart. "I see what a villain Rousseau was and how degenerate," he claims, "But I do not see what we can answer when he says 'Je sens mon couer et je connais les hommes'" (129). In his final reflections, expressed to himself as he walks in his garden at Ludeyville, Herzog quotes the same words from Rousseau, along with a response of sorts: "I couldn't say that, for sure" (340). But Herzog has broken out of his entrapment within intellectual deliberations, and after brief consideration of Rousseau's meaning he lays the issue to rest by expressing his exhaustion of interest in mental polemic: "But I have no
arguments to make about it" (340). Like his protagonist, Bellow shares Herzog's affection for this particular citation from Rousseau. "There's a good deal to it," the author says after quoting it in his 1977 interview with Jo Brans (Cronin and Siegel 143).

Herzog's citation of Rousseau's claim, along with his suggestion that this statement is not easy to refute, sheds light on his philosophical orientation. In his continuation of the letter, Herzog sides against those who have attempted to define human nature: "Man has a nature, but what is it? Those who have confidently described it, Hobbes, Freud, etcetera, by telling us what we are 'intrinsically,' are not our greatest benefactors. This is true also for Rousseau" (129). Herzog does not expand on his thesis about Hobbes and Freud, but the gist of his disagreement seems to be that a purely rational examination of human nature is not necessarily beneficial. Herzog's bias, in spite of his suspicion of Rousseau, is towards an intuitive apprehension of human nature, over the science-influenced ratiocentric approach.

Herzog's general position with regard to the rise of science is summed up in the conclusion to his letter to Mossbach: "Modern science, least bothered with the definition of human nature, knowing only the activity of investigation, achieves its profoundest results through anonymity, recognizing only the brilliant functioning
of intellect" (129). Criticising it for giving humankind no truth "to live by" (129), Herzog aligns science with the deficiencies of secular education he had mentioned in his letter to Smithers. The letter to Mossbach advocates the suspension of the exclusively rational quest for human understanding: "Perhaps a moratorium on definitions of human nature is now best" (129). Herzog's reservation is less about the inquiry into human nature than its ratiocentric form and its explicatory method, which Herzog, like Sammler, rejects. Herzog's letter to Rozanov contains a protest which anticipates Sammler's claim that the soul rests "unhappily on superstructures of explanation" (Sammler 3-4): "A curious result of the increase in historical consciousness is that people think explanation is a necessity of survival. They have to explain their condition. And if the unexplained life is not worth living, the explained life is unbearable too" (322). Herzog's mistrust of explanation is linked to his belief that the intellect alone is incapable of ascertaining truth: "But can thought wake you from the dream of existence? Not if it becomes a second realm of confusion, another more complicated dream, the dream of intellect, the delusion of total explanations" (166).

Composed mentally as Herzog rides the subway to Ramona's, the letter to Schrodinger also stresses the limitations of the scientific enquiry into human nature. Taking issue with Schrodinger's idea of the body as an
entropic organization, Herzog first paraphrases, then protests: "Being an unstable organization of matter, the body threatens to rush away from us. It leaves. It is real. It! Not we! Not I!" (178). Appalled by Schrödinger's clinical objectification of the human organism as an impersonal biological system with innate predatory instincts, Herzog assures Schrödinger that "nevertheless there are moral realities...as surely as there are molecular and atomic ones" (178). These concerns about science also surface in Herzog's letter to the New York Times. After mentioning various forms of chemical pollution, he adds, "I am as deeply concerned with the social and ethical reasoning as I am with those other forms of poisoning" (49). In Chicago, after leaving the phone booth from which he calls Lucas Asphalter, Herzog broods on the same theme: "We have ground to hope that a Life is something more than a cloud of particles, mere facticity" (266). Late in the novel, just before he writes a letter to God, Herzog expresses the serenity that comes from his sense of liberation from materialist concerns, noting to himself that he is "deaf to the multiplicity of facts" and "within the hollowness of God" (325).

Herzog's letter to Pulver, "the editor of Atlantic Civilization" (163), also focuses on the damaging aspects of modern science, particularly the role of technology. Describing "this stage of human development" (163) as "the
plebeian stage of evolutionary self-awareness" (163-64), Herzog claims that "in this new reign of multitudes, self-awareness tends to reveal us to ourselves as monsters" (164). Lacking "adequate space or scope," the individual "is provoked to take revenge upon himself, a revenge of derision, contempt, denial of transcendence" (164). But Herzog does not blame the masses for the "paths of horror" (164) they may have chosen: The replacement of "'spiritual'" values by a new respect for the "grotesque" is "related to the fact that so much of 'value' has been absorbed by technology itself" (164). Herzog facetiously notes the manner in which technology, by helping the poor, complies with the ethical imperatives of Christ: "Don't we obey Jesus in shipping machinery to Peru or Sumatra? Good is easily done by machines of production or transportation" (164). The problem is that "new techniques," Herzog observes, "represent not only rationality but benevolence" (164). But if technology can represent good, it can also represent evil: "Just as machinery has embodied ideas of good, so the technology of destruction has also acquired a metaphysical character. The practical questions have thus become the ultimate questions as well" (165).

Contrasting the external effects of technological developments with "the private and inward existence" (165) of the masses, Herzog asserts the right of humankind "to live in an inspired condition, to know truth, to be free, to
love another, to consummate existence, to abide with death
in clarity of consciousness" (165). Drawing on his resources
as "a learned specialist in intellectual history" (106),
Herzog praises Romanticism for the values it championed:

Romanticism guarded the 'inspired condition,' preserved
the poetic, philosophical, and religious teachings, the
teachings and records of transcendence and the most
generous ideas of mankind, during the greatest and most
rapid of transformations, the most accelerated phase of
the modern scientific and technical transformation.
(165)

The lesson Herzog derives from this is that belief and
values can coexist with rationality in an age of reason. To
dramatize his point about the insufficiency of exclusive
rationality, Bellow suspends Herzog's letter while the
narrator relates the intrusion of a single sensory
impression into the consciousness of the protagonist as he
is summing up. As Herzog proclaims, "Reason exists!
Reason..." (165), the narrator relates that "he then heard
the soft dense rumbling of falling masonry, the splintering
of wood and grass" (165), and then Herzog continues: "And
belief based on reason. Without which the disorder of the
world will never be controlled by mere organization" (165).
The "sounds of slum clearance in the next block" (166),
given the emphasis of the letter they interrupt, carry great
comic and symbolic significance for the man who reads Queens
as "a thick document of brick" (41) and himself sees the writing on the wall for a civilization defined by its raticentricity. With this brief yet resounding intrusion from the outside world, protagonist, narrator, and author function in concert to create a comic, subtle, and memorable dramatization of theme.

Herzog’s moral protest against raticentricism is also in evidence in his epistle to Mermelstein: “We’ve reached an age in the history of mankind when we can ask about certain persons, ‘What is this Thing?’ No more of that for me—no, no! I am simply a human being, more or less” (317). In spite of Herzog’s implication, however, that he accepted such objectifications of the human at some point in the past, the rest of the novel shows no evidence of such a previous orientation. Rather, as Herzog’s references to his earlier published work suggest, he has never accepted a raticentric definition of humanity. But the principle theme of Herzog’s letter to Mermelstein is more particular: the negative human consequences of raticentric views of suffering and death.

To get to this theme, Herzog contests Mermelstein’s "frivolous" (316) analysis of Kierkegaard in his otherwise "splendid book" (315):

I venture to say Kierkegaard meant that truth has lost its force with us and horrible pain and evil must teach it to us again, the eternal punishments of Hell will have to regain their reality before mankind turns
serious once more. I do not see this. Let us set aside the fact that such convictions in the mouths of safe, comfortable people playing at crisis, alienation, apocalypse and desperation, make me sick. We must get it out of our heads that this is a doomed time, that we are waiting for the end, and the rest of it, mere junk from fashionable magazines. Things are grim enough without these shivery games. (316-17)

Herzog's intense distaste for the "convictions" of those who see civilization in crisis and possibly on the verge of collapse is manifest in the visceral reaction he has to them. His abhorrence of apocalyptic notions is partly due to their extremism, as he has made clear earlier in the letter: "How we love extreme cases and apocalypses, drownings, fires, stranglings, and the rest of it. The bigger our mild, basically ethical, safe middle classes grow the more radical excitement is in demand" (316). With his claim that the crisis mentality merely titillates the middle classes, Herzog questions the sincerity of the middle-class fear of doom. As he notes in his statement about Kierkegaard, the middle classes are simply "playing at crisis" (316). But Herzog recognizes the unpopularity of his antidote to this hypocritical extremism: "Mild or moderate truthfulness or accuracy seems to have no pull at all. Just what we need now!" (316). The intensity of Herzog's disagreement with the inclinations of his contemporaries
makes him repetitive in his insistence: "We love apocalypses too much, and crisis ethics and florid extremism with its thrilling language" (317).

Herzog includes the secular notion of the finality of death in his catalogue of contemporary extremisms, reminding Mermelstein that the burden of human suffering is vastly increased when "death is a total defeat" (317). Herzog largely credits Existentialism with the dissemination of this doctrine. "Face death. That’s Heidegger" (270), he says to Lucas Asphalter in Chicago. Deriding this idea as "the old memento mori, the monk’s skull on the table," Herzog asks Asphalter, "And what good is that?" (271). He draws on his background as an intellectual historian to elaborate: "It all goes back to those German existentialists who tell you how good dread is for you, how it saves you from distraction and gives you your freedom and makes you authentic. God is no more. But death is. That’s their story" (271). The conversation with Asphalter contains Herzog’s longest speech in the novel, in which he continues to address the problem of death: "Modern philosophers would like to recover the old-fashioned dread of death. The new attitude which makes life a trifle not worth anyone’s anguish threatens the heart of civilization" (272).

To Mermelstein, Herzog counters this by outlining a more religiocentric view of death:

The religious...believe the spiritual cycle can and
will be completed in a man's existence and he will somehow make use of his suffering, if only in the last moments of his life, when the mercy of God will reward him with a vision of the truth, and he will die transfigured. (317)

Somewhat reminiscent of Tolstoy's depiction of death in The Death of Ivan Ilyich, Herzog's summary of the religious view also recalls Augie's statements, at the end of his speech on the axial lines, about the man who, "finite and taped as he is, can still come where the axial lines are" and "live with true joy" in his cognizance that there is meaning in his suffering: "Death will not be terrible to him if life is not. The embrace of other true people will take away his dread of fast change and short life" (455). Herzog stresses the importance to humankind of his own views on suffering: "But, to get to the main point, the advocacy and praise of suffering take us in the wrong direction and those of us who remain loyal to civilization must not go for it" (317).

Herzog occasionally ironizes his deep sense of responsibility to civilization, as he makes clear when giving the rationale behind his annoyance with Madeleine, who "injured a great project" (125) by mistreating him: "The progress of civilization--indeed, the survival of civilization--depended on the successes of Moses E. Herzog" (125).

But Herzog seems quite serious in his indignation
towards Mermelstein for employing "cocktail-party expressions" (317) to discuss issues with great human relevance. Herzog offers an alternative perspective of his own: "Why not say rather that people of powerful imagination, given to dreaming deeply and to raising up marvelous and self-sufficient fictions, turn to suffering sometimes to cut into their bliss, as people pinch themselves to feel awake" (317). Herzog seems to see himself as one of these "people of powerful imagination," as is evident from his next statement: "I know that my suffering, if I may speak of it, has often been like that, a more extended form of life, a striving for true wakefulness, and an antidote for illusion" (317). Herzog recognizes that his determination to find meaning in suffering and death is the expression of a fundamental human craving. As he realizes in his Chicago jail cell, "The dream of man's heart, however much we may distrust and resent it, is that life may complete itself in significant pattern" (303). In his capacity as "the nemesis of the would-be-forgotten" (134), Herzog describes the human ability to endure "any amount of torment" for a higher purpose, calling the exercise of this ability "the unwritten history of man" and praising man's "ability to do without gratification for himself provided there is something great, something into which his being, and all beings, can go" (289).

Herzog's letters to intellectuals contain a wealth of
passionate polemic on a great variety of subjects, and they express his opinions on a wealth of issues. But it is nevertheless possible to discern a single, underlying theme in their protest against ratiocentric orthodoxies. This protest is directed, not just against specific secular ideas, philosophies, and disciplines, but also against particular thinkers and the secular establishment itself, especially the education system and the professors who are its specialists. Although Herzog does not take issue with the term itself, the clear implication of his letters to intellectuals is that "higher education," in the truest sense, is neither. His position clearly corresponding with Bellow's own views regarding these ideas, individuals, and institutions, Herzog's correspondence with intellectuals provides an excellent example of how Bellow, utilizing the epistolary digressivity of the novel as "a platform for the discussion of everything" (Wilson 132), makes brilliant use of what is perhaps his most inventive single literary device to voice his protest against the orthodoxies of his age. In doing so, Bellow demonstrates both his skill as an artisan and the manner in which his philosophy of fiction is carefully articulated with a rhetoric of digression.

Conclusion

Herzog represents a change in Bellow's novelistic development almost as dramatic as that represented by Augie, but while the earlier book signals the emergence of the
author's distinctive style and voice, Bellow's sixth novel shows a marked contrast in form and content from his novels of the fifties. The novel after which Bellow was hailed as "the successor to Faulkner" (Cronin and Siegel 28) contains at least one striking formal resemblance to the work of the novelist whose death in 1962 made him Bellow's predecessor: the pervasive use of intermittent and extensive passages in italics to represent interior monologue. Completely absent from Augie, this feature manifests itself tellingly towards the end of Henderson in the interplay between the protagonist's letter to his wife and the reflections it inspires (Henderson 280-286). Henderson's thoughts, interspersed with the letter, anticipate the epistolary expressiveness of his memorable successor in the distinguished line of Bellovian protagonists:

"Lily, I probably haven't said this lately but I have a true feeling for you, baby, which sometimes wrings my heart. You can call it love. Although personally I think that word is full of bluff." Especially for somebody like me, called from nonexistence into existence: what for? What have I got to do with husbands' love or wives' love? I am too peculiar for that kind of stuff. (Henderson 284)

But what was a minor feature of Henderson becomes a dominant attribute of Herzog. Composed of more than eighty letters and filling almost forty pages of text, Herzog's
correspondence, while it occupies just a little over ten percent of the narrative, permeates the novel, sometimes densely and sometimes thinly, forming the most extensive and easily visible system of digressions in Bellow thus far. Suspending the narrative of present event and often generating a narrative of retrospective event, the letters always represent a departure from story into speech, giving the protagonist—and behind him the author—multiple opportunities for his reflections to be voiced as assertions. The fabulous artifice of Herzog's unsent letters is one of Bellow's greatest fictional inventions, and one of the great strengths of the letters is the plausibility with which they function in the narrative. Both "a symptom of disintegration" (3) and a "homeopathic, epistolary cure" (Fuchs, Vision 133), Herzog's letters are a believable outlet for a "suffering joker" (11), "both visionary and muddy" (34), who has "a taste for the philosophy of history" (6) and is "deadly in polemics" (129), whose "eccentricities had him in their power" (11), whose "balance comes from instability" (330), whose mind is "too full of his grand projects to think anything clearly" (109), and whose "angry spirit" (27) and "inexhaustible energy" (165) are manifest in his "quarrelsome and baiting of great men" (319).

Serving as an outlet for the author's tendency to teach, the letters have a significant indirect effect on the dialogue in the novel, for although didactic or essayistic
passages occasionally occur in Herzog's--usually remembered--conversations, the dialogue of Herzog is more often utilized to portray the character of the interlocutors, and it does so to great effect. The novel's epistolary digressivity, working well as a completely independent device for the representation of speech, saves the novel's dialogue from dialogic digressivity into idea, resulting in some of Bellow's most colourful, comic, and evocative dialogic episodes. Speaking with voices that could not be mistaken for Herzog's, the characters of Valentine Gersbach, Sandor Himmelstein, Simkin, Herzog's parents, the Chicago police, and--perhaps above all--Madeleine, greatly enhance the novel's fictional world with their memorable vocal portrayals. Receiving the flat dialogic portrayal that is often the lot of the women most favoured by the Bellovian protagonist, Ramona can not compete with Madeleine, whose impatience with and contempt for Herzog's foibles are expressed with a vehemence and wit that makes her speeches vie with Himmelstein's rages and reality instruction as the most uproariously entertaining passages in the novel. The dialogues with Lucas Asphalter are the heaviest with ideational content, and Asphalter's character, though distinct, suffers as a result.

Ideas certainly played an important role in Bellow's previous work, but in Herzog they are central to the novel, and the epistolary digressions from the narrative of
external event contain their most concentrated and extended expressions. The relation of the narrative of event to the digressions away from it follows a clear line of development from *Augie* to *Herzog*. In *Augie*, as I argue in my first chapter, the adventure story is increasingly replaced by a tale of talk. In *Henderson*, the peculiar manner of the story's telling rivals the relevance of the tale itself. In *Herzog*, the narrative of event shrinks dramatically from the broad emphasis on tale in Bellow's novels of the fifties. The action itself is reduced to five days, and during these days, the thoughts of the protagonist form the most significant pattern of action. This represents a profound change in the emphasis of Bellow's fiction generally, one which prompts Nathan A. Scott to group him with Dostoevski, Kafka, Faulkner and Sartre in the line of novelists "whose principal area of inquiry is the phenomenology of selfhood" (105). This emphasis is expressive of Bellow's philosophy of fiction, with its focus on the thoughts and feelings of the protagonist and its emphasis on the relevance of ideas to fiction. Bellow's innovative and masterful use of the epistolary device goes far beyond the deployment of ideational material, but the letters nevertheless are the principle vehicle for the conveyance of Bellow's own assault on the "modernistic outlook that, along with the divorce, is the other major cause of Herzog's gloom" (Fuchs, *Vision* 128).
CHAPTER FIVE

Dialogic Digressivity: The Lesser Art of Univocal Dialogue

"Everybody knows there is no fineness or accuracy of suppression."

--Augie in The Adventures of Augie March

"His monologue was an oratorio in which he sang and played all the parts."

--Charlie Citrine in Humboldt's Gift

"Keep thyself detached from all mankind; keep thyself devoid of all incoming images; emancipate thyself from everything which entails addition, attachment or encumbrance, and address thy mind at all times to a saving contemplation wherein thou bearest God fixed within thy heart as the object from which its eyes do never waver."

--Meister Eckhart, "Detachment," Tractates

Introduction

In Mr. Sammler's Planet, Bellow's rhetoric of digression achieves a new prominence, and the book's pronounced tendency towards represented speech has a weakening effect on the story, a fact that has been noted by critics. Referring to the novel as "a brilliantly austere set of opinions," Alfred Kazin notes Bellow's "remarkable
ability to find narrative forms for the urgency of his own undisguised thinking" (3). Charles Samuels, identifying the novel's religious undertone, describes it as "a sermon designed for the already converted" (30). Jonathan Wilson observes Bellow’s transparency of purpose, viewing Sammler as "little more than a mouthpiece for his creator" and noting the novel's political aspect: "Sammler’s pontifications lend the novel its reactionary air" (144). John Clayton suggests that the rift between the story and the speech it generates is too wide: "The metaphysical speculations do not derive from the realities of life in the novel...but are imposed as a substitute for and refuge from such life" (308). And Sarah Cohen, though generally favourable to the novel, nevertheless argues that its "verbal torrents have been precipitated by insufficient warning and provocation and have gone on interminably so as to impede the novel's narrative flow" (222).

What Bellow told Jane Howard of Life Magazine was his "first thoroughly nonapologetic venture into ideas" (Cronin and Siegel 80) is a tale which moves from telling to talking and from talking to teaching. This story about a seventy-something holocaust survivor who moves towards a confrontation with death in the life-obsessed hedonism of late sixties New York is also an account of how the introverted protagonist overcomes his reticence and is able to voice his views. In his speech at the dinner table in New
Rochelle, Artur Sammler finally speaks with passion and at length, though his long monologue is prefigured in some earlier passages. These formal expressions of Sammler’s opinions, more than any other element in the book, accommodate Bellow’s ongoing project of offering a challenge to contemporary orthodoxies in America at the same time that he delivers his scathing critique of the cult of rationality and its contemporary legacy, modernity.

Sammler’s mental meanderings form a significant part of the narrative, and since his speeches are a distillation of his musings, for the purposes of this chapter I will concentrate on his thoughts as he articulates them to others. In doing so, I will endeavour to show that Bellow utilizes his protagonist’s loquacity as a conduit for most of the statements in the novel directed (like many of Herzog’s epistles) towards the time and place in which the book was written, rather than the fictional world it contains. In addition, I will attempt to demonstrate that Bellow’s extensive use of ventriloquism fails to provide Sammler with any kind of convincing opposition, resulting in a concentration of the novel’s dominant voice, rather than that conflict between voices which is necessary if ideas are to become the object of fictional examination, as opposed the subject of authorial restatement. The secondary characters in the novel, when they share identifiable similarities of language and viewpoint with the protagonist,
become reflections or extensions of Sammler and in so doing lose their autonomous character traits.

This lack of distinction between Sammler and the secondary characters contributes considerably to the novel's overall univocality, and this is further exacerbated by the narrator's closeness to Sammler. As Claude Levy notes, Bellow's third-person narratives seem plagued by an obfuscation of the distinction between the roles of the narrator and the principal personage:

This relation in Bellow's novels is always ambiguous, indeed problematic, to the extent that the narrator and the protagonist are almost without exception merged: it is clear in the first person novels, but it is also true for the third person novels (like Seize the Day and The Victim), in which the "he" hides an "I" and the "dislocated" is also the "locator." (13)

In Sammler there is no substantial difference between the views and language of the narrator and those of the protagonist, and throughout the book it is difficult to determine at what point the narrator's viewpoint stops and Sammler's begins.

This distinction is clearest when the narrator reports Sammler's speech as opposed to his thoughts, which permeate the narrative. Sammler's brooding is most protracted in the mornings and evenings: the account of the first day in the story includes two extended episodes of reflection, his
thoughts in his room in the morning and his reflections after he peruses Lal’s manuscript in the evening. He concludes the second day with a similar episode before he goes to sleep in New Rochelle. But while these reflections occasionally veer into the thematic, they tend to be composed of Sammler’s memories of concrete events, incidents from his past, rather than ventures into the world of ideas as such. Sammler’s thoughts on the first morning, for example, centre around the other characters in the novel; later in the evening, after a visit from his sex-obsessed friend Walter Bruch, Sammler thinks about the sexual revolution; at the end of the day in New Rochelle, he thinks about his wartime experiences. In these flashbacks Bellow employs analeptic digressions to give his protagonist—and the novel itself—a history, and he favours this technique for representing time in narrative, and, with modifications and variations, uses it widely in his fiction. It is used to great effect in Sammler, a strength not often noted by the book’s defenders.

In addition to the lengthy episodes of brooding, there are numerous shorter passages scattered throughout the novel in which Sammler’s thoughts and impressions are conveyed. These glimpses of Sammler’s thoughts as he goes about his tasks add up to a considerable total by the novel’s conclusion. In fact, the thought-permeated narrative, like the others under consideration in this study, is
fundamentally a representation of the protagonist's mind. Cushman does not overstate the case when he claims that "the substance of the narrative is Sammler's consciousness" (147). But while the narrative closely represents Sammler's consciousness, his conversations tend to be where his views (as opposed to his impressions, memories, or interpretations of character) are given clear, unequivocal, and often thematic expression. To illustrate this, I examine three of Sammler's conversations, the talk with Margotte which he recollects on the morning of the first day, the epic discussion with Lal just after midnight on the second day, and the conversation with Angela Gruner just before the novel ends on the third day.

The Conversation with Margotte

In the account of Sammler's first day, the mass and variety of his thoughts on various subjects is counterbalanced by a few occasions on which he speaks at length on a single theme. The first of these occurs in the morning, as he sits in his room reminiscing. His thoughts wander from the pickpocket he has been watching on the Riverside bus to several conversations he has had about the criminal, the first with the police, the second with his niece Margotte. The transcript of the conversation with the police is standard Bellovian fare for the portrayal of big city police: the officer listens glumly to Sammler's report and admits that nothing will be done about the criminal. But
the second conversation, that with Margotte, takes a theoretical turn, ostensibly at the instigation of Sammler's well-intentioned niece, who "was sweet, but on the theoretical side very tedious" (15).

To illustrate Sammler's frustration with Margotte's "full German pedantry" (14), the narrator relates, "He had learned his lesson one week when she had wanted to analyze Hannah Arendt's phrase The Banality of Evil" (15). This passage contradicts Daniel Fuchs' statement that Arendt is "never named" (Vision 19) in the novel. Margotte's summary of Arendt, which Amos Oz kindly calls a "popular, simplified version" (21), is a crude caricature: "A mass society does not produce great criminals. It's because of the division of labour all over society which broke up the whole idea of general responsibility. Piecework did it" (16). Margotte is eager to hear Sammler's point of view: "And what is your opinion, dear Uncle Sammler?" (18). Invariably a petition of this sort provides the impetus for Sammler to speak his mind. This is perhaps evidence of an effort on Bellow's part to downplay the opinionation of his protagonist by suggesting that he is not inclined to pass judgement but is rather a pensive man who is asked to do so.

Sammler is reluctant to engage, but "he was old-fashioned. The courtesy of some reply was necessary" (18). His putative reluctance has the air of a posture and manifests the collusion between narrator and protagonist.
The novel is replete with Sammler’s opinions, which he never seems quite as reluctant to express as the narrator suggests. The attack on Arendt is Sammler’s longest speech in the novel thus far and an excellent example of how he complies with the admonition of the English clergymen Sydney Smith, "Short views, for God’s sake, short views" (114). The author’s closeness to Sammler is reflected in his use of the same quotation in the Foreword to Something to Remember Me By (v).

Sammler’s argument against Arendt is conveyed in one paragraph. First he attacks the Germans, seeing cunning where Arendt sees banality. "The banality was only a camouflage," he says, adding that it was not with innocence but "with horrible political insight they found a way to disguise" their exact knowledge of what they were doing (18). Next Sammler attacks the intellectuals who invent theories such as Arendt’s: "Intellectuals do not understand. They get their notions about matters like this from literature" (18). Like his creator, Sammler is given to attacking intellectuals as a class. He gives his strongest argument against Arendt in one sentence: "Banality is the adopted disguise of a very powerful will to abolish conscience" (18). Finally Sammler attacks Arendt herself: "This woman professor’s enemy is modern civilization itself. She is only using the Germans to attack the twentieth century—to denounce it in terms invented by Germans" (18-
19). Sammler's dismissive attitude towards Arendt, a female intellectual (a "woman professor") is of a piece with his generally dismissive attitude to women and intellectuals alike. In spite of his antipathy to system, Sammler nevertheless seems to be systematic in his prejudice against classes of individuals whom he categorizes in order to dismiss.

Immediately following this diatribe is a passage which conveys some of Sammler's thoughts. Here Sammler, presumably thinking in the present as he sits in his room, extends his suspicions beyond the Nazi regime to Germans in general, the giants of the "modern Method," which needs to be counteracted by humankind's becoming "nearer to nature" (19). The modern Method, which Sammler never exactly defines, is presumably a general adherence to rationality and system, which Sammler equates with the inhuman, the machine. Sammler sees the Germans as the great proponents of this mechanical approach, a people who have created "the aesthetic machine, the philosophic machine, the mythomanic machine, the culture machine. Machines in the sense of being systematic" (19). Here Sammler expands his argument against what he takes to be Arendt's partial exoneration of the Germans: "System demands mediocrity, not greatness. System is based on labor. Labor connected to art is banality. Hence the sensitivity of cultivated Germans to everything banal. It exposed the rule, the might of Method, and their
submission to Method" (19). This passage is important because it shows that Sammler's antagonism towards system is the result of reasoning which is not strictly logical. He begins with an absolute statement, "System demands mediocrity." Next he indulges in reduction as he examines the forces which produce system, confining himself to one, labour. Then he follows with another absolute statement: "Labour connected to art is banality." Finally, Sammler's hence precedes the articulation of a conclusion which does not follow from its premises. Sammler broadens the blame for the holocaust beyond the Germans, seeing its machine-like success at least in part as a symptom of modernity. Sammler seems to make a mistake similar to that he imputes to Arendt by implying that system itself was partly responsible for the holocaust.

Sammler's statement on Arendt and the thoughts it inspires are the clearest example of Bellow's employment of a rhetoric of digression in the early part of the book. The passage establishes what will be a dominant theme, Sammler's attack on modernity. In order to launch this particular salvo, the author introduces an intellectual protagonist who recalls as he makes his morning coffee a roughly paraphrased version of the position with which he differs. Sammler attacks "the banality of evil" partly because it fails to put any blame for the holocaust on modernity's erosion of spiritual values. This conversational flashback is a device
by means of which the author sounds one of his dominant themes: the negative legacy of modernity. Sammler's comments on Arendt also furnish an instance of Bellow's essayism, his incorporation into his novels of short, well-formulated, often polemical passages of prose which examine, attack, or negate particular ideas and philosophies. Moreover, Sammler's reluctance to speak seems to be part of Bellow's strategy for making the book's primary inclination seem to be incidental to the story, inasmuch as it suggests that the protagonist has no real intention of taking issue with his time. This is also in evidence as Sammler protests near the end of his long speech in New Rochelle: "And I have not stated my arguments, for I argue nothing. I have stated my thoughts. They were asked for, and I wanted to express them" (236). Here Sammler seems to guard himself from appearing to be one who advances formal arguments, because such activity amounts to intellectualization, a process he associates with the dangers of ratiocentrism. Sammler makes no attempt to explain his distinction between views and arguments; although his preference for the former term is marked. Elsewhere (for example when he quibbles with Lal about the word explanation (212)), Sammler shows a similar tendency to bicker about terminology, yet another manner in which he seems to share the habits of the intellectuals from whom he prefers to distinguish himself.
The Conversation with Lal

The climax towards which *Mr. Sammler's Planet* moves is also intellectual in nature. From his early introduction as the victim of Shula's theft, Govinda Lal, the Indian scientist who has written a book about space travel, becomes the person with whom Sammler moves towards an intellectual summation of sorts, one which is—to paraphrase Herzog's paraphrase—a fine, good-sense synthesis. Lal remains in the background as Sammler flits back and forth between hospital visits to his dying nephew Elya Gruner, but before Sammler will stand at Elya's deathbed, he must make amends for Shula's theft of Lal's intellectual property. Towards the end of the second day, the two men are finally brought together and have the longest conversation in the novel. Nowhere else in the narrative do the characters express themselves so completely and at such length. Spanning approximately thirty pages of text, the conversation affects the nature of the entire narrative. Malcolm Bradbury identifies this colloquy as a discursive event which, by its very prominence, transforms the novel:

Between them, Sammler and Lal turn *Mr. Sammler's Planet* into a neo-expository text, a work of extraordinary detachments and tonalities, of cosmic questions and anxieties: the closest thing, one might say, that Bellow has come to science fiction, not only by virtue of his subject but also by its persistent utterance of
social and historical ideas (80).

The novels's discursive conventions, however, while they may not be alien to a science fiction novel, are somewhat at home in a novel set in the intellectual centre of contemporary New York. Scheer-Schazler also notes Bellow's attempt (both in Herzog and Mr. Sammler's Planet) to "turn the novel into a medium of inquiry," an effort which "leads to the near exclusion of action and real dialogue in favour of reflection" (127).

Scheer-Schazler's suggestion that the novel eschews "real" dialogue is perhaps too severe an indictment, but the central dialogue of the novel does have its flaws. It is, more accurately speaking, a dual monologue, a stereophonic soliloquy in which the two participants take turns in stating essentially the same themes: the bleakness of the planet's current constitution, the inhospitality of godless modernity, and the potential of the soul for the transcendence of both. The principal statements of both interlocutors are made with little or no interruption. The conversation between the men breaks down into two clearly identifiable parts. In the first section, pleasantries are exchanged as Margotte introduces the two men, and the pair settle down to what begins as a casual before-supper discussion. Sammler recommends a drink for his manuscript-deprived guest and attempts to put Lal's mind at rest. They are in the dying Elya Gruner's living room: "The living room
was what they called 'sunken.' You had to descend. A well, a pool, a tank of carpet. It was furnished or decorated with professional completeness, densely arranged" (203). The baptismal aspect of the room is suggestive of ritual and relevance, and Sammler's descent into the tank of carpet functions as a sort of preparatory rite incident to his subsequent flights of tongue.

'As ked about his name,' Artur Sammler quickly proceeds to a discussion of Schopenhauer. Mentioning that he was named after the philosopher by his mother, who gave him *The World as Will and Idea* for his sixteenth birthday, Sammler speaks with respectful eloquence of the thinker whose name he bears:

I studied the system and I still remember it. I learned that only Ideas are not overpowered by the Will--the cosmic force, the Will, which drives all things. A blinding power. The inner creative fury of the world. What we see are only its manifestations (209).

That Sammler expounds Schopenhauer's doctrine of will when he is asked about his name is an indication of the direction the conversation will take, and when he pursues his appositional emphasis by informing Lal that "the organs of sex are the seat of the will" (209), the genteel biophysicist quickly changes the subject, while Sammler momentarily remembers the seat of the pickpocket's will--the penis he had displayed in cryptic threat.
Perhaps to move the subject in the direction of the manuscript he has come to retrieve, Lal asks, "And you were__ a friend of the famous H. G. Wells--that much is true isn't it?" (210). The lengthy discussion of Wells which ensues accounts for most of Sammler's part in the first half of the conversation. Sammler describes his association with the English writer in London and summarizes his major themes: "Scientific humanism; faith in an emancipated future, in active benevolence, in reason, in civilisation" (210). Sammler's description of Wells is highly complimentary, although the adjectives he chooses to describe him don't necessarily distinguish him from millions of other people: "So nice. So serious. So English, Mr. Wells" (211). When Sammler says, "I was flattered to be chosen to listen to his monologues" (211), he is perhaps implying that Lal is equally fortunate to have the privilege of hearing the monologues of an associate of Wells. During the conversation which follows, Lal, like the prewar Sammler, is similarly cast as a grateful recipient of an older man's wisdom. It could not be said of Sammler, as Citrine says of Humboldt, that he "was simply the Mozart of conversation" (Humboldt 13). Great conversationalists in Bellow tend to be those who hold forth voluminously on a variety of subjects, rather than those who adapt themselves to the cues of their interlocutors. Sammler does not want to talk about Wells, however.
After a brief discussion of Wells's writing, Sammler moves to change the subject: "But now I have exhausted my interest in Wells. Yours too, I hope, Dr. Lal" (214).

Sammler's rather speedy exhaustion of interest in the man about whom he is writing a book can be interpreted in various ways. Perhaps the aspiring Wells scholar can no longer sustain an interest in his subject, or perhaps Wells is simply not pressing on his mind, given the burst blood vessel pressuring the brain and endangering the life of Elya Gruner. The latter possibility is suggested by Sammler's subsequent reference to Gruner. When Sammler praises the dying man for supporting him, Lal asks, "He simply let you be a kind of philosopher?" (215). Sammler replies, "If that is what I am. I am familiar with many explanations of things. To tell the truth, I am tired of most of them" (215). Sammler's antagonism towards explanation is pronounced, and the reason for this is given early in the book: "The soul wanted what it wanted. It had its own natural knowledge. It sat unhappily on superstructures of explanation, poor bird, not knowing which way to fly" (3-4).

When Lal suggests that Sammler may not want to talk, given his nephew's nearness to death, Sammler disagrees:

Once you begin talking, once the mind takes to this way of turning, it keeps turning, and it dips through all events. And perhaps it makes matters slightly more tolerable to let it turn. Though I can't see why they
should be tolerable. It is really a frightful moment. But what can one do? The thoughts continue turning.

(215)

Nowhere else in the novel does Sammler speak so frankly and explicitly about how his mind works. Though there is a hint of obsessiveness in his thinking, Sammler nevertheless achieves catharsis through talk. Since his mind keeps thinking "independently" of his will, he simply makes the best of it and makes his thoughts constructive. This implies that Sammler has a hand in his introversion, that it is--like the mysticism of Charlie Citrine--an active resistance to the world in which he lives, rather than a quality of his character. Sammler embodies the doctrine of the man after whom he is named: his will directs the whirling thought-world inside his skull, and arguably he has had no other option, "the earth being an earth of ideas" (4). But Sammler is no introvert today. Lal has already praised his conversational prowess, calling him a "first-rate condenser" (214), but now it is the Indian's turn to speak. Lal does this by appending Sammler's characterization of thought as a ceaseless "turning" with a simile of his own in which thinking is "like a Ferris wheel" (215).

From this point in the conversation until Margotte interrupts its participants with an invitation to dine, Lal's long speeches predominate. Not unlike Dahfu's speeches in Henderson, Lal's discourses sound strikingly similar to
those of his interlocutor (and of the book's narrator). From the time the Indian biophysicist begins to speak, there are pronounced discrepancies in his voice. The Indian's syntax is a somewhat inconsistent approximation of what it purports to be, a Punjabi's English. When Lal talks about humankind's inclination to space travel, he bears a transparent resemblance both to Sammler and the nonfiction Bellow:

The invitation to the voyage, the Baudelaire desire to get out--get out of human circumstances--or the longing to be a drunken boat, or a soul whose craving is to crack open a closed universe is still real, only the impulse does not have to be assigned to tiresomeness and vanity of life, and it does not necessarily have to be a death-voyage (219).

It is difficult to reconcile this syntax with that of the man who often resorts to telegraphic statements such as, "I do hope you like my jokes. I enjoy your wit. If not mutual, that would be too bad" (216). Noting the human propensity to "live without order," Lal interrupts himself with slang: "Are we crazy, or what?" (216). When he describes the relevance of space travel, he claims that "the soul most certainly feels the grandeur of this achievement" (217). He later laments that the soul cannot make the trip to the moon: "The longing soul cannot by direct impulse go because it has the boundless need, or the mind for it, or the suffering power" (219). Lal's preoccupation with the soul
resembles his host's and betrays an emphasis not necessarily characteristic of a man of science.

Liberally sprinkled with French (he speaks of the "fruitful gaspillage" (217) of Americans and of the grasshopper and the ant as "the cigale and the fourmi" (216)), Lal's speech seems from the start to be authorial intrusion thinly disguised, and in his final comment before dinner, he sounds less like a distinct character than Sammler's doppelganger: "To see the sidereal archipelagoes is one thing, but to plunge into them, into a dayless, nightless, universe, why that, you see, makes sea-depth petty, the leviathan no more than a polliwog" (222). Bellow fails to convey the difference in character between the two men by failing to utilize the distinguishing power of contrasting speech to differentiate the interlocutors.

Lal is relieved of his active role in the conversation when its participants move to the dining table. As the conversation resumes, Lal is holding forth briefly on the general waste of human brain power and concludes, with words reminiscent of Hamlet's (and Einhorn's), by declaring his conception of man: "Therefore, at the lowest, a rat in a temple. At best a clumsy thing, with dawning awareness of the finesse of internal organization employed in crudities" (225). Lal's sentiments about man are clearly a reflection of Sammler's views. Here Lal voices one of Bellow's quarrels with the technological age: the average human has no idea
how technology actually works. Sammler responds to this with a qualification which expresses his disappointment with humankind: "I am not sure that there are many people so fine that they can feel this light weight of being so much more than they can grasp" (225). It is on this theme that La1 asks Sammler to expand, and Shula and Margotte join him to form a chorus of encouragement. The narrator intervenes to describe the effect this has on the protagonist: "A strange thing happened. He felt that he was about to speak his full mind. Aloud! This was the most striking part of it. Not the usual self-communing of an aged and peculiar person. He was about to say what he thought, and viva voce" (226). This introduction attempts to dramatize Sammler's sudden willingness to speak, but since Sammler has not heretofore shown a great deal of reluctance to express his views, this statement of the narrator seems to be a ruse, a component of Bellow's narrative strategy which attempts to create a sense of the drama of the occasion. Once again, Sammler's tendency to talk is more pronounced than the narrator suggests.

Sammler begins by confessing his disdain for the cult of rationality and its epistemological pretensions: "I am extremely skeptical of explanations, rationalistic practices. I dislike the modern religion of empty categories, and people who make the motions of knowledge" (226). Having said this, Sammler distances himself from a form of address employed by rationalists and (perhaps
remembering the debacle of his Columbia address) expresses his dislike of lectures, so Lal helpfully suggests that he view his speech in more entertaining terms, "as a recital rather than a lecture" (226). Sammler is amenable to this, and, taking the idea of the recital as his point of departure, launches into the most extended speech in the novel. His oration, which suffers only token interruption from his company and the narrator, is the discursive climax of the narrative, and, notwithstanding his status as a condenser, he needs over three thousand five hundred words to state his views. "Luckily my views are short," he says as he prepares to speak, but Sammler's response to Lal's request is a recital indeed, and like the musical events of which it is a parody, it has a clear theme.

Sammler's chief point is familiar enough to Bellow's readers: modern civilization has failed to take into account the spiritual powers of the soul and to enshrine the exercise of these powers as the principal purpose of existence. Sammler argues that the development of spiritual power is humanity's raison d'être: "The spirit knows that its growth is the real aim of existence" (236). With customary Bellovian insistence, this spiritual quest becomes its own imperative: spiritual development is the purpose of life, and we know this because the spirit tells us. The issues of what the spirit is and how it knows what it knows are avoided. Sammler states that "all is not flatly
knowable" (236) and that he daily receives "strong impressions of eternity" (237). He brings his peroration back to its point of departure (Lal’s question about space travel and human potential) by addressing his interlocutor: "So then, Dr. Lal, if the moon were advantageous for us metaphysically, I would be completely for it" (237).

Sammler’s reservations about space travel are rooted in his sense of the primacy of the soul, and he furnishes no proof that humankind receives a metaphysical advantage by staying on earth. Finally, Sammler sees the impending leap into space less as a logical or biological development of human history than a sort of mystical inevitability: "I suppose we must jump off, because it is our human fate to do so" (237). Here Sammler’s reasoning is circular. To say humankind must leap into space because it is humankind’s fate to do so is to reduce the burden of the imperative to an imponderable. Sammler’s response implies that there is a transcendental force which has established an unalterable and inevitable course for human history, and in speaking of fate he threatens to imprison his "poor bird" of the soul in a deterministic cage.

In his long soliloquy at the Gruner’s dining table, Sammler breaks free of his introversion and temporarily escapes his mental isolation. When he finishes, he, like Augie before him, has made the record in his own way. In fact, the dinner table oration appears to be the telos
towards which the entire narrative moves. Presumably, the
function of the oration is to allow Sammler to overcome his
introversion and to rescue him from his "meditative island
on the island of Manhattan" (75), but when he does escape
the self-immolation of his obsessive thoughts, it is only to
break into a long monologue which merely externalizes his
internal flow of thought. As the climax to the story it is
ineffective, for by the time Sammler speaks, what he thinks
has been conveyed in great detail by the narrator's reports
of his thoughts and in earlier conversations between Sammler
and family members.

The fact that the central episode in the novel turns
out to be a conversation which itself is a barely disguised
indulgence in protracted exterior monologue accounts for the
general dramatic weakness of Mr. Sammler's Planet. Few
critics agree with Irvin Stock's assessment that,
"improbable though it may seem, the twenty-nine pages of
philosophic dialogue which follow [Lal's] meeting with
Sammler are a moving and exciting fictional climax" (45).
Keith Cushman, in his textual study of the novel, betrays
his impatience with the exchange: "the weighty dialogue
between Sammler and Lal is rather mercifully interrupted by
the water flooding out from the burst pipes" (153). And
Eusebio Rodrigues assumes, probably correctly, that Bellow's
comments about the book's "nonapologetic venture into ideas"
refer specifically to this conversation (214).
The great conversation between Lail and Sammler highlights one of the central problems with Bellow's rhetoric of dialogic digression: it becomes a digression into rhetoric, often the recognizable rhetoric of the author himself. To the extent that the characters in Bellow's novels assume the recognizable rhetorical attributes of their creator, they fail to function as imaginary personae who lead an autonomous existence in the work of which they are a part. By his seventh novel, Bellow's trajectory with regard to the relation between the narrative of event and the departures from it is becoming clear: it is a steady movement from story into speech, a continuation of the tendency of dialogic digressivity in Augie to turn the tale into talk. The sermon-like quality of Sammler's speech is in keeping with what appears to be its purpose. The speech is the vehicle by means of which the author calls his age to account and reminds humankind of its spiritual nature and mission. The journey to the lunar boundary, if it is not accompanied by an undefined effort of an undefined spirit to scale unspecified heights, is meaningless, at least inasmuch as it produces no "metaphysical advantage." Sammler's priorities are with transcending the animal rather than the terrestrial, but his reluctance to grant technology its concrete achievements amounts to a grudge against the successes of modernity, just as his failure to see that his own self-incarceration is not necessarily a general
condition prevents him from realizing that the human race has made progress in anything other than penury of spirit. But Bellow's key failure is that he does not provide his views of the age with a coherent critique; if Sammler fails it is less because of rhetoric than because of rhetorical imbalance.

After Sammler's speech, the action rushes towards its conclusion and there is no other discursive interlude of major significance. (The two longer speeches Sammler makes in his conversation with Angela Gruner on the third and final day of the story are much shorter than the "recital," and tend to speak—like the rest of the conversations in the novel—to the immediate subject at hand.) The Belovian speech reaches a new peak in Sammler's torrent of talk, but the story of a bitter man who broods upon and is finally able to voice his disillusion is hardly a story that gives credence to hopes for a spiritual regeneration of humankind. Moreover, Sammler fails to spell out the terms of the spiritual contract he suggests at the same time that he bases his argument for it on the religious notion of the soul.

The Conversation with Angela Gruner

Sammler's inauspicious conversation with Angela Gruner towards the end of the novel also bears the marks of Bellow's rhetoric of digression. In her microskirt, "a narrow band across the thighs" and her low-necked satin
blouse (295), she is a female character who seems to confirm Leslie Fiedler's assertion that Bellow's "women tend to be nympholeptic projections, fantasies based on girls one never had" (Rovit, Critics 8). Sammler tries to convince Angela to change her clothes out of respect for her dying father, but his attempt fails and the conversation degenerates as Angela takes offense at Sammler's moral tone. As the conversation moves towards its conclusion, Angela is becoming impatient with the aging uncle and says, "I don't like the opinion I think you have of me" (304). Sammler's response to this statement, given the sensitivity of the situation, appears pompous and artificial. Instead of addressing his interlocutor's concerns, he simply avoids the confrontation he has precipitated.

Sammler's break from the subject at hand is abrupt. He denies the relevance of his niece's opinion of his opinion by saying, "Why should that matter on a day like this?" (304). From here Sammler quickly turns to a broader subject: "New York makes one think about the collapse of civilization, about Sodom and Gomorrah, the end of the world" (304). In case he has overstated the case, Sammler reminds his offended niece that "in one day, Caesar massacred the Tencteri, four hundred twenty thousand souls. Even Rome was appalled" (304). Having made this historical allusion, Sammler waxes philosophical: "Anybody may feel the truth," he tells Angela as she sits, "breasts shown,
diffusing woman-odors, 'big eyes practically merged" (305). Finally, Sammler's response to his niece's anger becomes an affirmation of hope for the science-doomed race: "There is still such a thing as a man--or there was. There are still human qualities. Our weak species fought its fear, our crazy species fought its criminality. We are an animal of genius" (305). Sammler's sudden praise of humankind seems out of place in its context and appears to be yet another pretext for Bellow to sound his thesis that humankind, in enshrining the genie of intellect, has forsaken the tutelary deity of the soul. But Sammler's speech also demonstrates his inadequacy, a fact which seems to be supported by Angela's understandably curt response: "O.K., Uncle" (305). Behind the protagonist's inadequacy, however, lies the same purpose which animates Sammler's soliloquy: the author makes transparent use of his protagonist to proselytize his readers with the worldview he espouses in his nonfiction.

Sammler's speech to Angela adopts an unapologetically authoritative tone to describe the general conditions of humankind, and the fact that it is so poorly matched with the fictional situation in which it transpires draws attention to the author's rationale for its inclusion. Sammler's allusion to the Tencteri seems to be a gratuitous self-indulgence; his assurance that the truth can be felt by anyone is a statement not necessarily connected with those before and after it; and his affirmation that "there are
still human qualities" falls on the ears of a woman who surely assumes what Sammler concludes. The suddenly triumphant tone of the final few sentences is neither a logical conclusion to the statements which precede them nor a fitting remark to address to a woman whose father is dying in the next room. A purpose other than the resolution of the plot seems to be at work here, and the spectre of barely disguised authorial intrusion begins to haunt the narrative as it draws to a conclusion.

The frailty of Sammler’s situation is even more in evidence with Angela than in the pickpocket episode. Sammler’s dilemma with the pickpocket is that his actions seem to fail to do any good; with Angela, he is equally unable to bring about change--his good intentions flounder and, as they did with the pickpocket, return to him in the form of anger. All of the other conversations on the third day are shorter and more pertinent to the action than to ideas. Interestingly, Sammler fares less well in these kinds of conversations, which tend to be fraught with misunderstanding. When talking about ideas, Sammler can hold his own, but in the thickets of the purely social he falters and finally fails. In terms of Sammler’s downward movement towards the distinctly Bellovian epiphanic moment with which the novel concludes, the conversation with Angela Gruner is of crucial importance because in it some of Sammler’s best qualities count against him and all his intellectuality and
moral goodness do not suffice for the task before him. Sammler's mourning is all the more astute as it takes place in an atmosphere heavy with personal failure.

Not since Tommy Wilhelm has Bellow created a protagonist for whom so much goes so wrong so quickly, and Bellow is often at his best when delineating those slow, painful and progressive failures the affliction of which ultimately finds a higher purpose in the generation of epiphanic insight. But Sammler's shortcomings also provide a convenient device by means of which the narrative can flee from the conundrums of human particulars and engage itself in universal considerations. As the collusive narrator implies during Sammler's conversation with Bruch, the protagonist's penchant for universalization occasionally appears to give him an instrumental interest--with regard to the production of abstraction--in the human particulars who are his interlocutors: "It was easier with a man like Bruch to transfer to broad reflections, to make comparisons, to think of history and themes of general interest" (61).

**Ventriloquism in Sammler**

At various points during the narrative, Bellow counterbalances the weight of ideas he assigns to his protagonist by having secondary characters express views which, though they sometimes differ from Sammler's, are often strikingly similar both in form and content. In particular, the liberal characters tend to express
examples of this should suffice to demonstrate adequately that Bellow throws his authorial voice into the mouths of minor characters and that when he does this he generally fails to disguise his efforts. The most notable example of ventriloquism in the book is Lal’s half of the long conversation in New Rochelle, but other occasions, though less blatant, nevertheless enjoy a kind of kinship with this one.

In Sammler’s conversation with Wallace Gruner in the hospital anteroom at the end of the book’s second chapter, the young entrepreneur stops speaking about hidden money to say, "There are higher aims in life. I don’t think those are shit" (102). Sammler’s vague transcendentalism can be detected (along with his vocabulary) in his nephew’s speech. Moreover, Wallace Gruner’s preoccupations, as they are portrayed, seem inconsistent with his transcendental suggestions. Gruner’s "higher aims" seem to be related to Sammler’s "exalted ideas" (181). Like the other young people satirized in the novel, Wallace is an Odysseus of the immediate, a card-carrying member of the Now generation, yet his speculative, quasi-philosophical conversational inquiries are similar to Sammler’s. For example, when the young man talks about mathematics, he exhibits Sammler’s tendency to formulate human questions in scientific terms: "What is the human integer like?" (102). This bears a
distinct similarity to the way in which Sammler contemplates the geometry of death: "Drop a perpendicular from the moon. Let it intersect a grave" (105). Like the older man, Wallace Gruner tends to retreat from his own inquiry, posing rhetorical questions akin to Sammler's speculative queries. Followed as it is by Sammler's question ("What is one?") , Gruner's question about the human integer is simply a reflection of Sammler's inquiry into the nature of individuality, which forms the basis of his monologue in New Rochelle, and the fact that both men pose unanswerable questions finds a justification in Sammler's thesis that "all is not flatly knowable" (236).

In his conversation with Sammler in the back of Elya's Rolls Royce, the younger Gruner betrays another suspicious tendency. He seems to share Sammler's prejudices, voicing dismissals as authoritatively as the older man: "I don't think homosexuality is simply a different way of being human. I actually think it's a disease" (186). It seems unlikely that a young man involved in the student movement in the late sixties, an heir to the sexual revolution, would say to his avuncular companion, "I believe this boom in faggots was caused by modern warfare. One result of 1914, that slaughter in the trenches" (186). These sentiments are strange for someone who is "nearly a homosexual" (88), and they are expressed in a style which seems unnatural for a speaker who is a child of the sixties. The appositional
"1914, that slaughter" is not a construction favoured by youthful speakers, but it does seem natural for Sammler, when, for example, he thinks about his injured eye: "the damaged tissues--that nerve-spaghetti" (5). Furthermore, Sammler's "kinky cat" (88) of a nephew seems unrealistically to share his uncle's bias against modernity. Gruner also shares his uncle's propensity to speak with confidence about the entire human race. He does this as he speaks of his sister: "Angela represents the realism of the race, which is always pointing out that wisdom, beauty, glory, courage in men are just vanities, and her business is to beat down the man's legend about himself" (187). There seems to be an implication here that Gruner's "race" refers to the female half of the species, another locus of Sammler's prejudice. The young man's sexual disgust is also a Sammlerian trait, as is his theory about sex as an assassination of self, particularly the murder of the male self by the female: "Between those thighs, a man's conception of himself is just assassinated" (187). Gruner's opinion with regard to liberated female sexuality shares much with Sammler's distaste for the sexual habits of his female relatives. Sitting in his daughter's old room at New Rochelle, Sammler remembers "when she was a young girl. Or an apprentice whore" (194).

Finally, the young Gruner sounds a little too much like his uncle as he imparts wisdom: "Everybody needs his
memories. They keep the wolf of insignificance from the door" (190). These hardly sound like the words of a youth hurrying across the city to find his father's secret abortion fees so he can use them to implement a get-rich pyramid scheme. Sounding one of Bellow's most persistent themes, the primacy of memory, Gruner employs the metaphorical language favoured by Sammler. The "wolf of insignificance" which Gruner fights with memory could well be combatted with Sammler's "energy bank... of noble purposes" (174) or tranquilized with what he calls "the drug of historical recollection" (148).

Not just Sammler's style and manner but also his peculiar form of analysis seems to run in the Gruner family. When Elya Gruner speaks from his sick bed, he reveals a dark cynicism (not unlike William Einhorn's) with regard to such things as the youth movement: "Youth is big business. Schoolchildren spend fantastic amounts. If enough kids get radical, that's a new market, then it's a big operation" (80). Here the dying uncle, in spite of his difference of experience from Sammler, reduces the radical movement of the sixties to a business venture. Elya's cynicism is one with Sammler's: "If your theme was social justice and your ideas were radical, you were rewarded by wealth" (212). Elya also shares Sammler's generalized anxieties with regard to his age: "Very little is holding still," he assures his visitor with a Yeatsian foreboding that echoes Sammler's similarly
generalized crisis claims. Gruner's sense of the chaos of the age dovetails neatly with Sammler's bleak view of his time as one in which "dark romanticism now took hold" and "the suicidal impulses of civilization were pushing strongly" (33).

Sammler's other nephew, Lionel Feffer, also seems related to his uncle in speech and opinion. Feffer speaks in the telegraphic concatenations which are one of the distinguishing features of Sammler's syntax. He tells the older man what he respects about him by listing as Sammler lists: "Your life, your experiences, your character, your views--plus your soul" (109). Feffer gives one of Sammler's most important concepts (the soul) special prominence in the list by placing it last and separating it from Sammler's other virtues. During the same conversation in Stuyvesant Park, Sammler suggests that, as Lal is a scientist, he must have made a photocopy of his manuscript about the moon. The radical youngster responds with a bookishness of reference and a syntax strikingly similar to his uncle's: "Well, I don't know. There was Carlyle. There was T. E. Lawrence. Brilliant people, weren't they? And they both lost the only copy of a masterpiece" (113). Feffer's literary references are more easily reconcilable with the interests of his uncle, and both belong to an era for which Sammler is sometimes nostalgic. A little later, Feffer reminds his uncle of a previous conversation between them: "We were
standing in front of the Bretton Hall Hotel, that miserable bunch of decay" (114). Like Wallace Gruner, Feffer employs an appositional phrase to express disappointment. But the decay of society is the uncle’s theme, not the nephew’s, and the words seem misplaced in Feffer’s mouth. Moreover, there is a bitterness in Feffer’s "miserable bunch of decay" which seems out of keeping with his character as given earlier: "a bustling; affectionate; urgent; eruptive, enterprising character" (38) who Sammler likes for his "degree of life" and "the passion-sounds he made" (110).

There is a considerable amount of ventriloquism in Sammler, but one of its notable features is that the protagonist’s voice, when it is thrown, almost always finds a location in a male mouth. Elya, Feffer, Wallace Gruner, and Lal all share Sammler’s voice to some degree, and all of them seem too close to the novel’s dominant voice, just as that voice—Sammler’s—is practically indistinguishable from the narrator’s, making the novel heavily univocal. Unlike Herzog, Sammler has no reality instructors to check his perspective or to suggest that it may be a function of flaws in his thinking. The female characters in the novel seem not to have been found worthy of ventriloquization. Margotte Arkin, in her attempt to discuss the banality of evil, sounds quite unlike her more articulate uncle. Like Angela Gruner and Sammler’s daughter Shula, she tends to be a silent presence in the novel, at least where general views
are concerned.

When the women in the novel speak, they usually address the present or express views which seem like projections of the protagonist's distaste for women. Angela Gruner conveniently validates Sammler's disapproval when she tells him what every woman wants: "A Jew brain, a black cock, a Nordic beauty" (66). The last item in this series seems out of kilter with the two which precede it and gives the niece's statement a slightly contrived air. The choice of *beauty*, where *body* or *physique* would have seemed more appropriate, calls attention to itself. Moreover, the use of *beauty* with the indefinite article as the object of the verb *to want* is jarring in an instance of everyday speech. There is a similar unnaturalness in Margotte's attempt to discuss Arendt, which contains some of the least mellifluous sentences in the novel. Margotte's language seems to try too hard to be disconnected, just as Sammler's shows too much urgency to connect. Both syntactically and emotionally, the younger male characters seem a little too contrived for their age, and the younger female characters speak with an incoherence that gives the reader pause, especially in view of their poor status with Sammler. The women do not hold forth on the state of society, the country, or the race. Bellow, while he makes some attempt to ventriloquize the dominant voice of the novel, makes little or no attempt to endow the female characters in the book with voices of their
own, much less those with which they could confront Sammler. Angela Gruner holds her own with Sammler in the book’s final long conversation, but she does so less by overturning the principles with which he assails her than by holding fast to her own. Overall, the ventriloquization in the book does not become extensive, especially when compared to that in Augie, but where it is employed it is with a heavy hand, which results in a concentration rather than a dispersion of the novel’s dominant voice.

Conclusion

The transparency of Bellow’s reason for employing a rhetoric of digression increases in inverse proportion to its efficacy. The wealth of speech and paucity of story in Mr. Sammler’s Planet indicate that by his seventh novel, the author is taking less pains to disguise his ventriloquism and making fewer attempts to have the fiction show rather than tell the reader his message. Daniel Fuchs places Sammler in a polemical class of its own, claiming that of all Bellow’s novels "this one gives the most centrality to dramatized argument" (221). Like all of Bellow’s pensive heroes and antiheroes, Sammler betrays a marked tendency to reduce and generalize. When he is merely observing, this becomes an excellent portrayal of his mind at work. Sammler constantly sees the universal in the particular, as when he sees the dew in Elya’s garden as "the galactic sperm of worlds" (17). But he also demonstrates the danger of an
obsessive search for law, a tendency to be blind to the possibilities for nuance in particulars. Bellow's rhetoric of digression, apparent in the dialogues between Augie and his heavily ventriloquized interlocutors, Henderson's meandering departures from his putative subject, and Herzog's letters to intellectuals, acquires in his seventh novel a more transparent form.

Sammler's 'place in' the trajectory of Bellowian digressivity is unique, in that it represents Bellow's first attempt at consciously writing a novel in which ideas form the primary focus. Perhaps its greatest strength is the felicity of the style in which its ideas are expressed, particularly the "beautifully fastidious and discriminatory use of language" (Bayley 28) employed to convey Sammler's thoughts. But there is a change in the nature of Bellowian digression in his seventh novel, one which shows a distinct movement away from Bellow's devotion to the development of character towards an emphasis on ideational content. Bellow's oeuvre could be described as one which subscribes to the primacy of fictional form in its first two novelistic expressions, then focusses more fully on the development of character in its next three novelistic formulations (ending with Henderson), then takes another turn as it concentrates (in Herzog, Sammler and Humboldt) on the development of the mind of the characters, with a concomitant tendency towards discursive elaboration of their thoughts and ideas,
particularly in thematic interludes. In *Sammler*, Bellow fails to heed the warning with which he concludes his preface to Dostoevsky's *Winter Notes to Summer Impressions*: "The degree to which you challenge your own beliefs and expose them to destruction is a test of your worth as a novelist" (*It All Adds Up* 46).

The result of failing to follow this advice seems to be a more dogmatic form of novelististic expression than that in which—as with Dostoevsky—interrogation, rather than mere articulation, is the lot of ideas. This raises the issue of didacticism, a quality for which *Sammler* has been widely criticized. Here again, Bellow seems not to have taken his own advice. In a speech to students at the University of Michigan in 1965, he offers his own theory of the validity of didactic art. After describing the novelist's task as fundamentally didactic, Bellow asserts that didacticism, to be effective, must provide itself at least with the appearance of its own critique. The challenge, according to Bellow, is for the novelist to subordinate didacticism to craft:

In a way it doesn't matter what sort of line the novelist is pushing, what he is affirming. If he has nothing to offer but his didactic purpose, he is a bad writer. His ideas have ruined him.... Among modern novelists the bravest have taken the risk of teaching and have not been afraid of using the terms of
religion, science, philosophy, and politics. Only they have been prepared to admit the strongest possible arguments against their own positions. ("Where Do We Go" 220)

By failing to give adequate opposition to Sammler's views, Bellow seems to forget his own warning and forfeit his status—at least in this novel—as one of "the bravest" novelists. The weakness of Sammler's voice of protest is partly attributable to its transparency of disguise. That is, since Bellow's protest against sixties liberalism in particular and modernity in general appears in a novel, his heavy reliance on a form of argumentation usually reserved for nonfiction seems to be a betrayal of his own idea of the compact between author and audience. The negative criticism of Sammler with which this chapter begins seems to find a common focus in this generic betrayal.

While dialogue is often successful in Bellow's fiction, his employment of dialogue to veer into extended thematic speech often renders his fiction homiletic. When employed as a means to digress from narration into speech or from fiction to history, Bellow's fictional conversations are less effective than his more direct representations of his protagonists' consciousness. The last section of Augie, the central section of Henderson, and the final section of Humboldt all attest to this. The fact that Herzog has an outlet in his letters for his tendency to preach is perhaps
one reason for the novel's success: such conversations as Herzog has (especially those with his reality instructors) are more confined to the fictional situation, and they are some of the most colourful and engaging dialogues in Bellow. This is because the interlocutors speak within the fictional situation, rather than of general ideas or universal principles which clearly have moment beyond the fictional construction within which they exist.

When this has not been the case, Bellow has produced some of his most spectacular failures, but whereas these failures in his other novels have been tempered by his gifts for memorable portraiture and comic caricature, vividly detailed concrete particulars, and a peculiarly inventive talent for the creation of narrative voice, *Sammler* makes his biggest weakness—the weakness that scuttled *The Last Analysis* on Broadway—the climax, rather than the denouement of his novel. It is one of the ironies of Bellow's novelistic career that the novel in which his prose style seems to reach new heights of precision and poetic resonance is also the novel in which his storytelling abilities suffer a major setback, although David Galloway's assessment that the novel was evidence of "the bankruptcy of Bellow's novelistic imagination" (17) seems to have been premature. In saying that *Sammler* is "not so much written as aimed" (Fuchs 209), Bellow's most meticulous commentator identifies the novel's principal weakness: its barrage of polemic
transforms it, like Eisen's crude sculptures, from a work of art into a weapon.

But in spite of its bitter criticisms of contemporary society or perhaps because of them, Sammler ends on a note of passionate affirmation. Echoing the manner in which Herzog's intellectual and emotional crisis results in an epistle to God, Sammler's final reflection in the novel assumes the form of prayer. At the bedside of his dear deceased nephew, Sammler gives resonant expression to Bellow's fundamental theme: that the human condition is redeemed from meaninglessness and the human psyche is saved from the damnation of despair, not by art and not by intellect, but by a conviction born of inner knowing. Sammler praises Gruner for meeting "the terms of his contract" (313), without specifying the nature of the terms or the contract, an omission Sammler justifies with the claim that they are "the terms which, in his inmost heart, each man knows" (313). This knowledge of the heart is itself the central premise of Bellow's protest against ratiocentrism, although strictly speaking it is not a premise at all but an absolute proposition, one that cannot be accessed or acceded to, except by an appeal to a transcendent principle. As such, Sammler's final mantra of affirmation, appropriately directed to the personification of transcendence, God, speaks for Sammler, Bellow, and all humankind in the untrammelled conviction with which it
articulates, in capsule form, the idea that transcendent knowledge is innate. Both *sine qua non* and *né plusultrà*, this spark of spiritual knowledge is, for the author, both the essence and the highest attribute of humanity, and its recognition is an enlightenment which supersedes Enlightenment. In the last sentence of the novel, the fundamental Bellovian credo, in its most contracted form and its most memorable expression, spurns belief and receives quintuple emphasis: "For that is the truth of it--that we all know, God, that we know, that we know, we know, we know" (313).
CHAPTER SIX

Meditative Digressivity: Four Doctrines of 
Religiocentric Reflection

"At present we were essentially alone, first in the sense 
that the recognition of angels was forbidden us by the 
prevailing worldview, and secondly in our shadowy 
realization of the existence of others, and consequently of 
our own existence. In the solitude this enforced upon us, we 
were aware, each of us, of a small glacier in the breast."

--Kenneth Trachtenberg in More Die of Heartbreak

"The seams open, the bonds dissolve, and the untenability of 
existence releases you back again to the original self. Then 
you are free to look for real being under the debris of 
modern ideas, and in a magical trance, if you like, or with 
a lucidity altogether different from the lucidity of 
approved types of knowledge."

--Ijah Brodsky in "Cousins"

"A representation, which is collectively mistaken for an 
ultimate--ought not to be called a representation. It is an 
idol. Thus the phenomena themselves are idols, when they are 
imagined as enjoying that independence of human perception 
which can in fact only pertain to the unrepresented."

--Owen Barfield, Saving the Appearances
Introduction

_Humboldt's Gift_ is the culmination of Bellow's digressive style and his experimental narrative technique. Second only to Augie in length, Bellow's eighth novel has received a mixed critical response, prompting Ben Siegel, in 1978, to write of "reviewers and critics differing more sharply in their interpretations and evaluations of _Humboldt's Gift_ than of any previous Bellow novel" ("Artists" 172). Many critics hint at signs of decline. Charlie Citrine, the protagonist, "only a pale image of his predecessors" (Kiernan 193), wends his way through a novel in which "the plot is itself distraction" (Clayton 309), engaging in Steineresque meditations of which Fuchs says, "we have seen nothing so questionable in Bellow since his espousal of Reich" (Vision 251). The issue of distraction is also addressed by Edmond Schraepen: "The trouble is that, while withdrawing from the distracting world may be the right thing for Citrine's soul, it certainly does not do any good to the novel" (209). Roger Shattuck claims that in _Humboldt_ "solitude is becoming very real and leans toward self-absorption" (194) and that the author's ability to fictionalize is perhaps on the wane: "in the characters of Augie March, Henderson, Herzog, and Sammler, all in some degree projections of himself, he employed devices to create an adequate distance from himself. In _Humboldt's Gift_ Bellow gets in his own way" (202). The charge that the novel is
compromised by the extent of its similarity to the author's life is repeated by Jonathan Wilson, who views Citrine as "an avatar of his creator," the product of a writer whose autobiographical fiction has become autoanthropophagous: "Bellow seems finally to have consumed himself" (171).

Balancing these views is criticism which praises the novel. John W. Aldridge informs the readers of The Saturday Review that Humboldt "is richer in texture and implication than anything" since Augie and that "it may well be the most distinguished novel he has so far produced" ("Saul Bellow at 60" 49). Eusebio Rodrigues is even more emphatic about the novel's virtues, which he describes in metaphoric terms:

*Humboldt's Gift, Bellow's Mount Everest, towers above those twin peaks, Herzog and Henderson the Rain King.*

From that magnificent height, *Mr. Sammler's Planet* appears to be a crevasse filled with darkly luminous clouds. Down below rests that tiny, almost perfect plateau, *Seize the Day*, while immediately beneath it stretch the sprawling ridges of *The Adventures of Augie March*. In the far depths, glimpsed at through the swirling mists, lie those foothills, *The Victim* and *Dangling Man*. (225).

In a more analytical evaluation, Ellen Pifer finds that Citrine, by "rejecting the determinist vision of a world reified by scientific materialism, attests to the ability of the individual to have a meaningful connection to reality"
(Against the Grain 151). Raymond Bradbury stresses the relation between the novel's form and its content with his claim that Humboldt is "the novel as conditional form" (91). For Bradbury, the book is "about the problems of the creative self in a new world of mind, a world not of history but of versions of history, not of psyche but of versions of psyche" (89). Whatever Humboldt's Gift is, it is clearly much more than the story of a dead poet whose legacy saves an old friend from financial difficulties.

Citrine's retrospective, first-person narrative begins with a prelude describing his friendship with the poet Von Humboldt Fleischer in New York's Greenwich Village in the late thirties and then shifts abruptly to the novel's dominant present in early-seventies Chicago. Comprising over half of the novel, the Chicago section of the narrative is an intensely detailed treatment of two days during which Citrine, at the instigation of a gangster, Rinaldo Cantabile, falls "into the Moronic inferno" (35) of Chicago. In a brief coda to this section, Citrine takes his daughters Mary and Lish to see Rip Van Winkle and visits his childhood sweetheart Naomi Lutz. After this, the action shifts to New York City, where Citrine, in the company of his glamorous girlfriend Renata, goes to a cocktail party, visits Coney Island to obtain his legacy, and has conversations at the Plaza Hotel with Renata, his friend Pierre Thaxter, and Humboldt's widow Kathleen Tigler. From New York, Citrine
suddenly flies to Texas to visit his brother Julius, who is going to have open heart surgery. After the successful operation, Citrine flies to Madrid, where he learns of Renata’s betrayal with and marriage to Flonzaley, an undertaker. In Madrid he visits museums and strategizes his future, only leaving the Spanish capital to visit Paris, where he watches the film that has been made from an old script of his and Humboldt’s and talks to lawyers about suing the film makers. In the last chapter of the novel, Citrine returns to New York, where, with his old friend Menasha and Humboldt’s uncle Waldemar, he arranges the reburial of Humboldt and the poet’s mother in the Valhalla cemetery.

Citrine’s tale ends Bellow’s sixteen-year hiatus from the first-person novel, and John J. Clayton contrasts the narrator with his predecessors: “Compared to the two earlier first person novels, Augie March and Henderson the Rain King, Charlie’s way of telling a story is incredibly complicated, flitting from digression to digression, memory to meditation to current event” (265). The narrative complexity of Humboldt is one of its most striking features, although, like that in the other novels under consideration in this study, its action in the dominant present has a clearly chronological development. Citrine’s suspensions of this narrative of event are facilitated by a combination of Bellow’s digressive devices.
Dialogic digressivity is pervasively used, and, as in Augie, becomes particularly pronounced in the last third of the novel. Although Citrine's analeptic digressions are not as jarring or disruptive as Henderson's, they are far more frequent. Citrine writes no letters, but epistles from Humboldt, George Swiebel, and Pierre Thaxter, recalling Geraldine Portnoy's long letter to Herzog, provide the narrative with a subdued element of epistolary digressivity, each of the characters directing an epistolary monologue at the protagonist. Both Humboldt and Citrine manifest, though in more modest proportions, Sammler's lecturing tendencies, and their similarity of expression and emphasis, coupled with many ventriloquized dialogues, give Citrine's conversations with others a univocality more extensive than that in Sammler.

But there is also a new form of digressivity in Bellow's tenth novel, and it is the one in which his rhetoric of digression can be most clearly detected. Vying with Herzog as the most architectonic of Bellow's representations of interior states, Humboldt employs the protagonist's meditations and reflections to enunciate Bellow's most radical critique of ratiocentrism. Augie's disagreement with the ratiocentric doctrines of determinism, Henderson's burlesque of rationality, Herzog's dramatization of the insufficiency of intellectualism, and Sammler's discourses on the evils of modernity are all combined in
Charlie Citrine’s rejection of the most fundamental tenet of ratiocentrist thought: the secular conception of reality itself. With Citrine’s imaginative refusal to bow to reason, Bellow takes the scepticism of his spirit of alternatives to its counterrational conclusion by making the metaphysical assertion that the material world is merely an illusion veiling an alternate reality: the world of spirit.

In this chapter, I focus on the meditative digressivity of Humboldt, arguing that Bellow’s new device, like those which preceded it, facilitates his metafictional purpose of voicing his objection to ratiocentric orthodoxies. To do this, I examine Citrine’s meditative exercises, correlating them with his more spontaneous reflections. Citrine’s meditations are a ritualized form of purely imaginative action, rites by which he attempts to understand his earthly experience and to achieve a transcendental perspective that will enable him to gaze behind the illusory appearances of the material world. By apprehending the infinite and the eternity of his connection to it, Citrine attempts to liberate himself from meaninglessness and the tyranny of a death that is final. Communing with his soul and exercising its powers of suprarational apprehension, Citrine becomes a representation of the Bellovian essential self at the same time that he illustrates the operations of the ways of knowing which Bellow offers as epistemological alternatives to rationality. Moreover, Citrine’s meditations highlight
the redemptive power of the imagination, a faculty the primacy of which receives unequivocal affirmation in the novel. Making a sustained resistance to the idolization of reason as the arbiter of truth and to the hegemony of ratiocentric theories, Citrine rejects the "collective abstractions" which constitute their conception of reality and their embodiment in technological progress.

The Soul

Citrine's account of his morning meditations provides him with an occasion to express his belief in the soul, its existence before life and its continuance after death. The fourteenth unnumbered chapter of the novel concludes with Citrine remembering Humboldt's attempt to murder his wife Kathleen. But at the beginning of the fifteenth chapter, Citrine suspends his meditative reconstruction of tragic events past to state some of his primary beliefs. Similar to Augie's "lengthy declaration" to Clem Tambow about the axial lines (Augie 454) and Sammler's "recital" of his views to Shula, Margotte, and Lal (Sammler 226), Citrine's statement also differs from its dialogic counterparts in being made directly to the reader:

At this moment I must say, almost in the form of deposition, without argument, that I do not believe my birth began my first existence. Nor Humboldt's. Nor anyone's. On esthetic grounds, if on no others, I cannot accept the view of death taken by most of us,
and taken by me during most of my life--on esthetic grounds therefore I am obliged to deny that so extraordinary a thing as a human soul can be wiped out forever. No, the dead are about us, shut out by our metaphysical denial of them. As we lie nightly in our hemispheres asleep by the billions, our dead approach us. (141)

Citrine's testimony of belief is of central importance to the novel. Resembling a statement made under oath, his narratorial confession is neither undercut by irony nor offset by comedy. Moreover, Citrine's belief that birth is not the beginning and death is not the end of life is articulated throughout the novel. He first attributes this belief to Humboldt: "one of Humboldt's themes was the perennial human feeling that there was an original world, a home-world, which was lost" (24). But Citrine himself also believes humanity is in a postlapsarian state: "Poor humankind, we're all hurled down into the object world now" (353). Citrine's view of himself is affected by his beliefs, tinging even his mundane activities with transcendence. Looking in the mirror while shaving, he sees more than just his face: "I saw angelic precipitates condensing into hypocrisy, especially around my mouth" (66). Citrine's belief in a preexistence is also manifest in what he says about his brother: "Biological evolution and Western history could never create a person like Ulick in sixty-five lousy
years. He had brought his deeper qualities here with him" (383). Furthermore, Citrine's reading confirms his beliefs: "Plato in the Myth of Er confirmed my sense that this was not my first time around. We had all been here before and would presently be here again" (89). Likewise, Citrine's beliefs direct his readings: "I was drawn also to philosophical idealists because I was perfectly sure that this could not be it" (89).

Citrine's beliefs also affect his interpretation of coincidences, as when he runs into a childhood friend from Chicago during his visit to New York: "Learning to think of this existence of mine as merely the present existence, one in a series, I was not really surprised to meet Menasha Klinger. He and I obviously held permanent membership in some larger, more extended human outfit" (332). Speaking from beyond the grave in the testamentary letter Citrine reads in "the ricketing speed of the howling weeping subway" (338), Humboldt, with "end-of-the-line lucidity" (339), finishes his epistolary oration with a resounding confirmation of the protagonist's essential belief: "Last of all--remember: we are not natural beings but supernatural beings" (347). "Skirring around New York like an ephemerid" (53-4), Citrine is in tune with his transience as an organism, but he discerns a higher role for "the physical being when the Spirit looks at it" and sees the eyes as "two radiant suns" and the musculature as a "precipitate of
Spirit" carrying within it "the signature of the cosmos" (394).

Citrine’s belief in life after death also has great relevance to the narrative. In his morning meditations, he demonstrates his "loyalty to the deceased" (107) by thinking mostly about Humboldt, "a precious friend hid in death’s dateless night" (110). He admires "the princes of science, astrophysicists; pure mathematicians," but he notes their limitations: "nothing had been done about the main question. The main question, as Walt Whitman had pointed out, was the death question" (332). Citrine has never believed in the finality of death, and he rejects the notion that such a belief is rational: "I never believed that oblivion was the case and by five and a half decades of distortion and absurdity I have challenged and disputed the alleged rationality of the oblivion view" (357). As Citrine’s "deposition" makes clear, his disagreement with "the oblivion view" is less a rational than an "esthetic" objection.

Various passages in the novel suggest the nature of the "esthetic grounds" of Citrine’s rejection of the finality of death. "Feeling unusually high" as he walks along the Coney Island boardwalk, Citrine realizes that this "glorious condition" results from his renewed understanding about death: "I was inclined to think as I vigorously walked behind Renata that I owed it to a change in my attitude
toward death. I had begun to entertain other alternatives. This in itself was enough to make me soar" (328). Citrine's epiphany on the boardwalk reveals that his denial of "the oblivion view" is partly an interested rejection. His belief in immortality satisfies an emotional imperative, since he feels that if this world is all there is, life is not worth living:

If this is literally all what life is, then Renata's little rhyme about Chicago is right on the head: 'Without O'Hare it's sheer despair.' And all O'Hare can do is change the scene for you and take you from dismal to dismal, from boredom to boredom. (332)

Citrine's belief in the soul also satisfies his need to find meaning in the whole of his experience: "At the center of the beholder there must be space for the whole, and this nothing-space is not an empty nothing but a nothing reserved for everything" (313).

Citrine's belief in immortality brings him numerous benefits. Taking the sting out of his "fantasies of solitary death" (44), his assurance of immortality frees him from the despair of imagining his own bodily decline. Citrine does this with some frequency, perhaps most memorably when he is in bed embracing "a busty Renata," whose "love-pious eyes" gaze on a man morbidly envisioning himself in old age:

But in some phantom Atlantic City boardwalk of the mind I saw another Citrine, this one on the border of
senility, his back hooked, and feeble. Oh very, very feeble, pushed in a wheelchair past the little salt ripples, ripples which, like myself, were puny. (9)

Moreover, his beliefs about death quell the pangs of guilt he feels as a result of his behaviour towards those now departed. When he sees Humboldt for the last time, he sees "a dying man eating a pretzel stick at the curb, the dirt of the grave already sprinkled on his face," but Citrine hides and runs away, saying to himself, "Oh, kid, good-by. I'll see you in the next world" (112). His beliefs also reconcile him to the heartbreak of losing loved ones. As his brother nears heart surgery and approaches "the fatal coastline" of death, Citrine, sitting beside him in the car, thinks of what he would like to say: "I wanted to say, as he sat looking sick behind the wheel, that this brilliant, this dazing shattering delicious painful thing (I was referring to life) when it concluded, concluded only what we knew" (391). Remembering their childhood and their long-dead parents, Citrine frames a mental appeal to Julius, in which he stresses the significance of the lives of their parents: "there are good esthetic reasons why this should not be wiped from the record eternally. No one would put so much heart into things doomed to be forgotten and wasted" (392).

Other Ways of Knowing

Citrine's beliefs about the immortality of the soul are similar to those in some religious systems of thought.
Outside the courthouse a few hours after his morning meditations, he denies his ex-wife's charge that he is a mystic, emphasizing the religiocentric nature of his belief system:

I'm not a mystic. Anyway, I don't know why mystic should be such a bad word. It doesn't mean much more than the word religion, which some people still speak of with respect. What does religion say? It says that there's something in human beings beyond the body and brain and that we have ways of knowing that go beyond the organism and its senses. I've always believed that.

(228)

But while they may be in agreement with religion, Citrine's beliefs are not reiterations of religious dogma but principles which originate with himself, as he makes clear in his commentary towards the end of the transcript of the conversation he has with Cantabile immediately after his morning meditations:

I had decided to listen to the voice of my own mind speaking from within, from my own depths, and this voice said that there was my body, in nature, and that there was also me. I was related to nature through my body, but all of me was not contained in it. (186)

As these passages indicate, the "esthetic grounds" for the beliefs Citrine outlines in his "deposition" are not the only grounds on which he bases them. His morning meditations
are an attempt to apply the "ways of knowing that go beyond the organism and its senses" (228) and to hear the voice of his "mind speaking from within" (186). Citrine's special ways of knowing are intuition, intimation, inspiration, and illumination. He receives "sudden illuminations" (220) in the wake of his meditative exercises, and his declaration of love to Naomi Lutz at the bar of the Palmer House is "the truth, involuntary spontaneous truth" (213). He will not concede "the finality of death" because to do so would be to deny his "intimations" (263) of immortality. He interrupts the transcript of a conversation with Cantabile to attempt a description of his special way of knowing: "I speak as a person who had lately received or experienced light. I don't mean 'The Light.' I mean a kind of light-in-the-being, a thing difficult to be precise about" (177). He describes this "light" as something he knew as a child but from which he later became estranged: "In the first decade of life I knew this light and even knew how to breathe it in. But this early talent or gift or inspiration" was "given up for the sake of maturity or realism" (177-78). Citrine's reflection anticipates Ijah Brodsky's definition of genius in "What Kind of Day Did You Have?": "Genius must be the recovery of the powers of childhood by an act of the creative will" (Him With His Foot 118).

Citrine earlier identifies his "gift of inspiration" as his most important endowment: "This finding before seeking
was my special gift. If I had any gift" (73). Recalling Einstein's prediction that light would be bent by the sun's gravitational field, Citrine finds a confirmation of his view: "So Einstein, sitting thinking of things, had foretold. And observations made by Arthur Eddington proved it. Finding before seeking" (97). He remembers this key phrase before he begins his morning meditations: "I remembered again that wonderful piece of advice given by a French thinker: Trouve avant de chercher" (110). Bellow begins his Nobel Prize lecture with a reference to this gift, quoting Joseph Conrad, who appealed "to that part of our being which is a gift, not an acquisition" (It All Adds Up 89). And as he concludes the same address, Bellow emphasizes the importance of this gift in the present age:

At such a time it is essential to lighten ourselves, to dump encumbrances, including the incumbrances of education and all organized platitudes, to make judgments of our own, to perform acts of our own. Conrad was right to appeal to that part of our being which is a gift. We must look for that gift under the wreckage of many systems. (It All Adds Up 96)

The gift of inspiration and other extrasensory means of knowing do not give Citrine illusions about reality; rather, they allow him to discern how "realism" itself is an illusion. During his meditations, Citrine remembers Humboldt, by now a "hero of wretchedness" (155), calling him
repeatedly from the Bellevue jail where he has been incarcerated. Humboldt angrily reminds Citrine of the contrast between art and the desperate reality of his life: "All right, Charlie, this isn't literature. This is life" (156). Receiving the calls at the Belasco Theater, where his play Von Trenck is soon to be performed, Citrine interprets Humboldt's statement as an accusation that "in the theater I was in the world of illusion" (156). But Citrine locates his illusions elsewhere: "I suffered from an illusion, perhaps a marvelous illusion, or perhaps only a lazy one, that by a kind of inspired levitation I could rise and dart straight to the truth" (158).

Citrine's meditative exercises are themselves an attempt to apprehend truth by inspired levitation. A result of his determination to make "lost time yield illumination" and to "strengthen the powers of consciousness", the meditations represent Citrine's efforts to see as the soul sees, to acquire "the perspective of an immortal spirit" (109). In his preface to the meditations, Citrine reflects that riches are not required to "purge the inner film from the eye and rise into higher consciousness" (110). Shortly after his deposition, he describes his "exercise in contemplation or Spirit-recollection" (142) as an attempt "to penetrate into the depths of the soul and to recognize the connection between the self and the divine powers" (143). He also explains part of the theory behind his
meditative exercise: "Such meditation supposedly strengthened the will. Then, gradually strengthened by such exercises, the will might become an organ of perception" (111). Citrine trains his will in order to perceive the illusory nature of the sensible world and to see the transcendent reality of which the material sphere is only a veil. But like the light he knew as a child, Citrine’s gift of discernment is also rooted in his "early and peculiar sense of existence" (3). At the beginning of the narrative he describes himself as "a person keenly aware of painted veils, of Maya, of domes of many-coloured glass staining the white radiance of eternity" (3).

Citrine thus describes his meditations as an attempt "to look behind the appearances" (167). Earlier in the narrative, in a more forcefully stated passage, Citrine reveals the iconoclastic nature of this effort: "I rejected the plastered idols of the Appearances. These idols I had been trained, along with everybody else, to see, and I was tired of their tyranny" (16). Citrine recognizes "the power of collective abstractions" (16), but he denies their ability to satisfy the deepest human needs: "We crave more than ever the radiant vividness of boundless love, and more and more the barren idols thwart this" (16-17). As he indicates later in the narrative, business is one of the spirit-thwarting idols: "Business, with the peculiar autonomy of business, went its own way. Like it or not, we
thought its thoughts, spoke its language....Business, sure of its own transcendent powers, got us all to interpret life through its practices" (475). The idols represent an impoverished conception of the world, "a world of categories devoid of spirit" (17). Later in the novel, Citrine states with vatic assurance that rejecting the idolatrous categories is a prime historical imperative: "If there is one historical assignment for us it is to break with false categories" (404). With his meditations, Citrine makes his own attempt to transcend the categories into which the appearances of the sense-world have been divided. Man-made and ratiocentric, "categories devoid of spirit" are a large part of the "human nonsense which keeps us from the large truth" (147). But knowledge of the soul and higher ways of knowing are not by themselves enough: to burst from its imprisonment in the empty categories of reason and breach the gap between human truth and divine truth, consciousness must call for intercession from its highest faculty: the imagination.

**Imagination**

Citrine's morning meditations begin with Citrine receiving an epiphanic insight regarding "the saviour-faculty of the imagination" (112). This epiphany is inspired by the action with which Citrine initiates his meditative session: his reading of the "phantom strokes" on the "wrinkled postcard" (111) on which Humboldt, in the form of
a short poem, had sent Citrine his last message. Almost a decade before, Citrine had only detected madness in the poem, but reading Humboldt's imaginative expression at the beginning of his morning meditations, he discerns its message: "Now I saw this as a communication, not as a poem. The imagination must not pine away--that was Humboldt's message. It must assert again that art manifests the inner powers of nature" (112). After recalling the obituary, Citrine pays his own tribute to Humboldt, praising him for wanting to prove that "the imagination was just as potent as machinery" (119). "But a poet can't perform a hysterectomy or send a vehicle out of the solar system," Citrine laments in retrospect, and thus Humboldt's talents were condemned to be neglected in "business and technological America" (118).

Citrine reads a message for himself in Humboldt's decline: "His talent had gone bad. And now I had to think what to do about talent in this day, in this age. How to prevent the leprosy of souls. Somehow it appeared to be up to me" (136). Later in the narrative, Citrine suggests that the imagination is a vital component of the soul, speaking of his "eagerness to go far, far beyond fellow intellectuals of my generation who had lost the imaginative soul" (332). Describing his emotions during recollection, Citrine interrupts the account of his conversation with Humboldt at Princeton: "I felt sorry for us, for both, for all of us, such odd organisms under the sun. Large minds abutting too
close on swelling souls" (125). In The Ark, the journal he plans to publish with Pierre Thaxter, Citrine hopes to publish his "imaginative reflections on a world transformed by Mind" (74). This project is appropriate, given Citrine's residence in Chicago, which he calls "a cultureless city pervaded nevertheless by Mind" (69). It is this pervasion of mind which Citrine hopes to transcend by imagination: "The job, once and for all, was to burst from the fatal self-sufficiency of consciousness and put my remaining strength into the Imaginative Soul" (417).

As an emissary of imagination, Citrine is determined both to save himself and participate in the salvation of mind-shackled humanity:

I had business on behalf of the entire human race—a responsibility not only to fulfil my own human destiny but to carry on for certain failed friends like Von Humboldt Fleisher who had never been able to struggle through into higher wakefulness. My very fingertips rehearsed how they would work the keys of the trumpet, when I got ready to blow it at last. The peals of that brass would be heard beyond the earth, out in space itself. When that Messiah, that saviour faculty the imagination was roused, finally we could look again with open eyes upon the whole shining earth. (396)

Citrine's expansive reflections as he stands on the peninsula in Texas contain his most cosmic claims for the
redemptive power of the imagination, but his morning meditations demonstrate the power of the "saviour faculty" to redeem him from the personal pain of his earthly recollections. In spite of the fact that "one's heart hurt from this sort of thing" (147), especially when "meditation began to get really tough" (130), Citrine makes his "meditation as detailed as possible, no fact too small to be remembered" (133). Exercising the saviour-faculty of the imagination in his meditations, Citrine is involved in a spiritual and sacred exercise. Resisting the "nagging rush of distractions," he is resolute in his meditative mission: "I fought off the impulse to rise as if it were a wicked temptation" (131). When his meditations come to an end, he further suggests their sacred relevance: "It was Cantabile on the knocker, forcing his way into my sanctuary" (168). The intense relevance Citrine assigns to his ritual of remembrance can also be inferred from his comparative devaluation of purely bodily activities: "if I left myself five minutes for a container of plain yoghurt and five minutes to shave I could continue for two hours to think about Humboldt" (143).

In performing these exercises, Citrine dedicates himself to the imaginative reconstruction of painful events past, and the vividness of his imagination is evident in the eidetic nature of his recollections. When he remembers himself seeing Humboldt for the last time, he sees himself
as though from the outside: "I saw myself taking cover behind the parked cars on Forty-sixth Street" (112). Citrine has a predilection for this kind of visual meditation:

Of all the meditative methods recommended in the literature I liked this new one best. Often I sat at the end of the day remembering everything that had happened, in minute detail, all that had been seen and done and said. I was able to go backward through the day, viewing myself from the back or side, physically no different from anyone else....If this was what transcendence took, it was a cinch, I could do it forever, back to the beginning of time. (117)

This ability enables Citrine to "bring back to mind the obituary page of the Times" (117), to "remember verbatim what the Times said" (118) and to recall in detail the picture of Humboldt's face which appeared there, "spooky, humourless, glaring furiously with tight lips, mumpish or scrofulous cheeks, a scarred forehead, and a look of enraged, ravaged, childishness" (118). Nor does Citrine need a memory of a photograph to summon up an image of Humboldt's face: "I could see how Humboldt had looked when he coached me on the way to handle Ricketts" (133).

Citrine's remarkable ability to reproduce images at will not only makes him an imaginative man--it contributes significantly to his status as a visionary. Indeed, he consciously pursues such status, as the efforts he makes to
envision plants make clear: "I obtained a large botany book by a woman named Esau and sank myself into morphology, into protoplasts and ergastic substances, so that my exercises might have real content. I didn't want to be one of your idle hit-or-miss visionaries" (131). His pursuit of a prophetic function is also evident as he broods in Madrid over Renata's betrayal with Flonzaley the undertaker: "Oh, that stupid Renata, didn't she know the difference between a corpse-man and a would-be seer?" (442). But Citrine's ability to see the future is also a burden. During his morning meditation, he recalls his last friendly conversation with Humboldt, remembering an insight that was sadly prophetic: "I was appalled by what I foresaw" (149).

When Humboldt speaks from the dead in the letter Citrine reads on the New York subway, he laments the fact that he lost sight of his own visionary power: "How many souls hoped for the strength and sweetness of visionary words to purge consciousness of its stale dirt, to learn from a poet what had happened to the three-fourths of life that are obviously missing" (340). Humboldt also speaks from the dead during Citrine's morning meditations, as the protagonist recalls a conversation between the two men several decades earlier. When Citrine resists Humboldt's diatribes against the prejudices of the Princeton community, the poet enjoins the younger man to see as he sees, and he does so with words that apply more resonantly to the
meditative man who recalls them than they did to Citrine when he first heard them: "Call on your imagination, Charlie" (126).

Nowhere else in the novel does Citrine demonstrate his enshrinement of imagination more fully than in the morning meditations. In contrast to his ritual humiliation by Rinaldo Cantabile during the action of the previous day, Citrine's meditative ritual illustrates the value he places on imaginative action, his preference for which results in him being misunderstood by "people completely at home in the fallen world" (222): "Cantabile may have believed that he was abusing a passive man. Not at all. I was a man who was active elsewhere" (89). Allowing Citrine to leap beyond "the lower grade of modern rationality and calculation" (221), his imagination becomes an agent of transcendental perception, reducing Cantabile to the status of "a demon, an agent of distraction" (180). Memory assumes an important imaginative role in Citrine's meditative exercises, reflecting his belief that "without memory existence was metaphysically injured, damaged" (244). The value of memory in Bellow is given its most precise formulation by the unnamed narrator of The Bellarosa Connection, the founder of the "Mnemosyne Institute": "Memory is life" (Bellarosa 5).

**Intellectual Orthodoxies**

By his contemplative exercises, Citrine sets about redeeming the world with his imagination, "ransoming the
commonplace, all this junk and wretchedness, by the superior power of the soul" (72). The meditative digressivity of Humboldt provides Bellow with a means to depict the value he places on the soul, transrational ways of knowing, and the imaginative faculty. But at the same time, the author's rhetoric of meditative digression facilitates his ongoing critique of ratiocentric orthodoxies. The subject of Citrine's morning meditations, Humboldt, exemplifies the shortcomings of the ratiocentric aestheticism of modern art. In addition to this, Bellow uses his meditative protagonist to lambast American ratiocentrism generally, attacking modern intellectualism, and noting the daunting hegemony of science and technology.

Humboldt, the friend about whom Citrine obsessively meditates and reflects, is a tragic figure who, "faithful to failed ideas, lost his poetry and missed the boat" (250). Citrine attributes Humboldt's failure partly to his love of ideas as such: "I felt the ideas and illusions that went with him. He was always accompanied by a swarm, a huge volume of notions" (21). Humboldt ultimately sacrificed art to idea: "He believed in victorious analysis, he preferred 'ideas' to poetry, he was prepared to give up the universe itself for the subworld of higher cultural values" (269). "All his desires were contradictory," Citrine laments after recalling Humboldt's obituary, "he wanted to be magically
and cosmically expressive and articulate, able to say anything; he wanted also to be wise, philosophical, to find the common ground of poetry and science" (119).

To Citrine, Humboldt forsook his genuine role as an artist and pursued instead its image: "instead of being a poet he was merely the figure of a poet. He was enacting 'The Agony of the American Artist' (156). In retrospect, Citrine sees Humboldt's mistake: "He threw himself into weakness and became a hero of wretchedness. He consented to the monopoly of power and interest held by money, politics, law, rationality, technology because he couldn't find the next thing, the new thing, the necessary thing for poets to do" (155). Aware that he criticizes Humboldt harshly, Citrine includes in his narrative Renata's criticism of his criticism:

But he went insane. You can't lay all the blame on him. I never knew the guy, but sometimes I think you're too hard when you attack him....You feel that he lived out the poet's awful life in just the way the middle class expected and approved. But nobody makes the grade with you. (251)

Although Citrine sees Humboldt succumbing to "failed ideas," he blames the ideas more than Humboldt, and, in seeing Humboldt as "a big spirit who was destroyed" (106), he places the blame on the intellectual movements which resulted in the forces which destroyed him.
The "collective abstractions" which destroy Humboldt are partly the notions of modern art itself. Early in the novel, Humboldt holds forth on the new direction art must take: "The only art that intellectuals can be interested in is an art which celebrates the primacy of ideas. Artists must interest intellectuals, this new class" (32).

Humboldt's imperatives contrast with Citrine's own, which he states in the preface to his meditations: "I was always thinking of statements that must be made and truths of which the world must be reminded" (108). As he meditates, Citrine remembers Humboldt criticizing him for being "one of the types that only cares about inner inspiration" (122). Citrine distances himself from Humboldt's contemporary concerns: "I was too haughty to bother with Marxism, Freudianism, Modernism, the avant-garde, or any of these things that Humboldt, as a culture-Jew, took so much stock in" (158). During his meditations, Citrine reflects on the disastrous effect intellectuals also have on Humboldt: "Dragged into a power struggle" with "critics and intellectuals," the poet's "art dwindled while his frenzy increased" (120).

Meditating about Humboldt's final descent into madness, Citrine describes the symptoms: "He didn't want to be a poet now. Symbolism, his school, was used up. No, at this time he was a performing artist who was being real. Back to direct experience. Into the wide world. No more art-substitute for
real life" (161). Less than two hours after his meditations, Citrine alights in front of the county building in Chicago and reflects on the state of modern art and ideas two decades after Humboldt's fall:

And there was the handsome russet and glass skyscraper, and there was the insignificant Picasso sculpture with its struts and its sheet metal, no wings, no victory, only a token, a reminder, only the idea of a work of art. Very similar, I thought, to the other ideas or reminders by which we lived--no more apples but the idea, the pomologist's reconstruction of what an apple once was, no more ice cream but the idea, the recollection of something delicious made of substitutes, of starch, glucose, and other chemicals, no more sex but the idea or reminiscence of that, and so with love, belief, thought, and so on. (218)

In a reflection filtered by the unnamed narrator of his tale, Ijah Brodsky more succinctly addresses the relevance of Picasso: "In Picasso you had the flavour of nihilism that went with increased abstraction" (Him With His Foot 137).

In a passage that acts "as a Foreword" to the longest paragraph in the novel (which recalls Sammler's discourse in New Rochelle in representing Humboldt's conversational "recital"), Citrine offers his own "succinct historical statement" about the decline of modernity:
There came a time (early Modern) when, apparently, life lost the ability to arrange itself. It had to be arranged. Intellectuals took this as their job. From, say, Machiavelli's time to our own, this arranging has been the one great gorgeous tantalizing misleading disastrous project. (29)

Brooding in the taxi on the way to the Russian Baths, Citrine contemplates his own great counter-project to the "disastrous project" of modern intellectuals, an enterprise he hopes his daughter will continue after he dies: "As for the project or purpose I want her to carry on, it is a very personal overview of the Intellectual Comedy of the modern mind" (73). This recalls Bellow's claim, in the "author's note" with which he prefaces The Last Analysis, that the play's "real subject is the mind's comical struggle for survival in an environment of Ideas" (vii).

This comical struggle often takes place on an academic stage. In his meditative reconstruction of Humboldt's decline and fall, Citrine complies with the poet's request that he approach Professor Ricketts to help secure a position at Princeton. "I think he needs an intellectual community" (133), Citrine recalls himself saying, but he does not share Humboldt's belief. Citrine sees Princeton as "a sanctuary, a zoo, a spa" (133), and he speculates on Humboldt's motives: if you could avoid the "routine job-world you were an intellectual or an artist" (134). After
telephoning George Swiebel, a man who "denounces eggheads" but "loves culture" (59), the meditative protagonist reflects: "Humboldt, boyish, loved the life of the mind and I shared his enthusiasm. But the intellectuals one meets are something else again. I didn’t behave well with the mental beau monde of Chicago" (59). Remembering his ex-wife's charge that he despises "these people" (59), Citrine explains his prejudice against "these bastards": "This accusation was true. I hoped to lay them all low. In fact it was one of my cherished dreams and dearest hopes. They were against the True, the Good, the Beautiful. They denied the light" (60).

As this passage suggests, Citrine resists intellectualism in part because he sees it as incompatible with the transcendent perspective which is the object of his meditations and a central element in his theory of imaginative art. Richard Durnwald was "the only man with whom I exchanged ideas" (60), says Citrine. Durnwald is "a great scholar, one of the most learned people on earth," but "he was a rationalist" and Citrine "couldn’t talk to him about the powers of a spirit separated from a body. He wouldn’t hear of it" (109). When he thinks of Humboldt during his meditations, Citrine reflects that the poet "got a Rationalistic, Naturalistic education at CCNY" and that this "was not easily reconciled with the Orphic" (119). Grounded in rationality, Humboldt’s secular education, for
Citrine, is related to the hegemony of science, a hegemony which does not bode well for a creative artist: "could a poem pick you up in Chicago and land you in New York two hours later? Or could it compute a space shot? It had no such powers" (155). Citrine gives his own view of secular education in his conversation with Denise at the county building: "I've been to college so I know the educated answers. Test me on the scientific world-view and I'd score high. But it's just head stuff" (228). Citrine's meditative mentor, Rudolf Steiner, "a Scientist of the Invisible" (260), is the kind of thinker to whom Citrine turns; feeling that "the ideas of the last three centuries are used up" (250). Citrine feels that these ideas are a dire threat to humankind's spiritual powers and thus necessitate the formulation of a redemptive imperative: "Mankind must recover its imaginative powers, recover living thought and real being, no longer accept these insults to the soul, and do it soon. Or else!" (250).

But the ideas alone are not the only threat Citrine perceives; their concrete expression in technology is equally insidious. "Man had overcome the emptiness of this land," Citrine thinks as he looks from the window of the Playboy Club; "But the emptiness had given him a few good licks in return" (93). When his mind is in one of its "Chicago States," Citrine reflects, "I infinitely lack something" and "the sentient part of the soul wants to
express itself" (66). Citrine sees the great achievements of technology to be in danger of replacing the imaginative and creative achievements of humankind: "Maybe America didn't need art and inner miracles. It had so many outer ones. The USA was a big operation, very big. The more it, the less we" (6). In fact, the tragic lives of poets who commit suicide, are "peculiarly appreciated by business and technological America," to whom their deaths prove "the weakness of the spiritual powers" (118). As he tells Renata on the plane to New York, one "must have the power to cancel the world's distraction, activity, noise, and become fit to hear the essence of things" (312). Embattled by the overwhelming force of the material world, Citrine speaks of "furnishing my retreat, my sanctuary, my Fort Dearborn deep in Indian (Materialistic) territory" (291). Citrine recognizes that he is facing overwhelming odds. As he watches the bulldozer in the cemetery bury Humboldt in the novel's last scene, Citrine reflects: "Thus, the condensation of collective intelligences and combined ingenuities, its cables silently spinning, dealt with the individual poet" (487).

Resisting the intellectual orthodoxies of modern art and secular education, combatting the hegemony of science and technology, Citrine fights to maintain contact with his soul, to exercise "ways of knowing" that transcend rationality, and to assert the powers of imagination. His meditations about Humboldt strengthen his determination not
to make the mistake of his tragic predecessor: "to join together the Art Sacrament and the Industrial USA as equal powers" (119). In doing so, Citrine represents Bellow’s own resistances and determinations: "At the center, humankind struggles with collective powers for its freedom, the individual struggles with dehumanization for the possession of his soul" (It All Adds Up 96). Employing the meditative device to great effect, Bellow provides his protagonist with an inner space where he can fashion, in calmness and solitude, a perspective from which he can look "behind the appearances" of the modern world which engulfs him and make the attempt which the author, concluding his Nobel address, claims is the first obligation of art: "Art attempts to find in the universe, in matter as well as in the facts of life, what is fundamental, enduring, essential" (It All Adds Up 97).

**Conclusion**

In *Humboldt’s Gift*, Bellow articulates many of his enduring concerns, stressing his belief in the soul, his emphasis on ways of knowing which transcend rationality, and, with its location in the former and its activation by the latter, the redemptive power of the imagination. In doing so, he recognizes the kinship between the artistic and the religious enterprises, a kinship which, although it is implied in the earlier works of the middle period, receives unequivocal emphasis in his eighth novel. The novel makes
clear Bellow's position: that ratiocentrism is as big a threat to art as it is to religion. Citrine's yearning for a higher world can be taken as a rejection of the world, but only of the "world of categories devoid of spirit" (17). With Citrine's mysticism, Bellow's spirit of alternatives moves beyond "analytical Skepticism" (13) and discovers a transcendental alternative to the "merely phenomenal" (291) appearances of the material world. Refusing to ignore his "metaphysical hunches" (228), Citrine reasserts the powers of "the sovereign consciousness," which "trained itself to avoid the phenomena and to be immune to their effects" (267).

Suspicious of what "everyone sees under a common directive," Citrine asserts his right to see for himself: "The rule of this view is that I, a subject, see the phenomena, the world of objects. They, however, are not necessarily in themselves objects as modern rationality defines them" (202). For Citrine, the fault is not in the distinctions but in the sensibility which makes them: "In the arbitrary division between Subject and Object the world had been lost" (281). Citrine thinks about one of his most important "metaphysical hunches" as he sits with Renata in the Oak Room of the Plaza Hotel:

I had the strange hunch that nature itself was not out there, an object world eternally separated from subjects, but that everything external corresponded
vividly with something internal, that the two realms were identical and interchangeable, and that nature was my own unconscious being. (356)

Further, Citrine recognizes that this view is an "option seldom chosen" (357). But its necessity as an option Citrine must exercise is reinforced by its alternative: "If there is nothing but nonbeing and oblivion waiting for us, the prevailing beliefs have not misled us, and that's that" (357).

Citrine's resistance to ratiocentric orthodoxies is of a piece with Augie's rejection of determinism, Henderson's refusal of arbitrary dualism, Herzog's recognition of the insufficiency of intellectualism, and Sammler's dark assessment of the legacies of ratiocentric modernity. Moreover, Citrine continues the broader critiques of his predecessors. Like Augie, he sees modernity itself as a threat to intuitive ways of knowing, and he shares Henderson's determination to "to burst the spirit's sleep" (Henderson 77). He traces the contemporary world-view through a negative intellectual genealogy which spans the last few centuries, just as Herzog does. And like Sammler, he receives consolation in the contemporary world, not from philosophy but from mysticism. With these predecessors, Citrine shares a deep skepticism of the contemporary world and its ratiocentric constitution.

Perhaps the most fundamental expression of this
skepticism is the conviction held by Citrine's predecessors that the agreed picture of reality itself is suspect. Augie sees a difference between the real and "what people call reality" (Augie 378). More definite than Augie, Henderson states: "What we call reality is nothing but pedantry" (Henderson 167). Herzog, "too well aware of the layers upon layers of reality" (109) to accept the views of any particular "Reality Instructor" (30), notes a historical moment when "the mental became also the real" (323) and recognizes the modern conundrum: "by yourself you can't determine which reality is real" (287). With Artur Sammler, however, a distinct shift in emphasis occurs. Less inclined than Augie, Henderson, and Herzog to discuss reality itself, Sammler usually modifies the term. In his most important speech, the aged holocaust survivor speaks of contemporary conditions which place "impossible demands upon complex realities" (229) and of spiritual growth as the "real aim of existence" (236), but his concern is less with reality than with truth.

Citrine's objection to the dominant premises of a society that "trains you in distractions" and "colonizes consciousness as fast as consciousness advances" allows him to find "the true poise, that of contemplation, or imagination" (306). From this vantage point, which he achieves by meditation, Citrine can receive broad insights into the nature of things: "Sunk into the pillow of the
green sofa it was all clear to me. Ah, what this existence was! What being human was!" (125). Like Augie, Citrine is a "Columbus of those near-at-hand" (Augie 536), and like Herzog he is "the Nemesis of the would-be-forgotten" (Herzog 134), but he refuses to let "the moronic inferno" (35) make him "a connoisseur of the near-nothing" (24), even if his stubbornness makes him "the Saint Sebastian of the critical" (256).
CHAPTER SEVEN

Conclusion: A Rhetoric of Digression

"There's a way through the cracks. This city, this country, is full of them and it's up to people like me to find a way through them."

--Saul Bellow, "Two Morning Monologues"

"Only art penetrates what pride, passion, intelligence, and habit erect on all sides--the seeming realities of this world. There is another reality, the genuine one, which we lose sight of. This other reality is always sending us hints, which, without art, we can't receive."

--Saul Bellow, Nobel Lecture

"To write is thus both to disclose the world and to offer it as a task to the generosity of the reader. It is to have recourse to the consciousness of others in order to make oneself be recognized as essential to the totality of being; it is to wish to live this essentiality by means of interposed persons; but, on the other hand, as the real world is revealed only by action, as one can feel oneself in it only by exceeding it in order to change it, the novelist's universe would lack thickness if it were not discovered in a movement to transcend it."

Sartre, What is Literature?
General Conclusions

The forms of Bellovian digressivity are as manifold as their functions and as varied as their contents. For this reason, in this study I have focussed on four major categories of Bellovian digression in order to examine the specific roles they play in the principal novels of the author's middle period. Although Bellow's dialogic, narratorial, epistolary, and meditative digressivities represent distinct narrative modes, they have a unifying principle in accommodating the author's fundamental quarrel with the contemporary world: his critique of ratiocentrism.

The lengthy colloquies and extended speeches of Augie March and the verbal recital of Artur Sammler monologize dialogic situations, facilitating the univocal articulation of authorial values. The meanderings of Eugene Henderson are a linguistic enactment of the author's belief in the value of individuality, an implicit objection to narrative conventions which subordinate the uniqueness and peculiarity of fictional voice to aesthetic orthodoxy. The epistolary swerves of Moses Herzog are both a celebration of the expressive impulse and a denigration of ratiocentrism as trenchant as it is eccentric. And the meditative withdrawals of Charlie Citrine enshrine the imagination, linking it with the soul and connecting it to a contemplative tradition animated by suprarational ways of knowing.

Together, these digressive modalities form a
counternarrative of discursivity by means of which the spirit of Bellovian alternatives voices objections to contemporary secular orthodoxies. In addition to their strictly fabulous function of conveying the rich mental and emotional lives of imaginary characters who inhabit fictional worlds, Bellow's digressions also reveal the metafictional artifice with which he transcends the aesthetic constraints he refuses to acknowledge as the legitimate boundaries of art. This, along with the other extrafictional objectives which can be discerned from an analysis of the author's digressivity, forms the basis on which the variously patterned uniformities of his digressive style can be seen in their totality as a rhetoric of digression. More concerned with objection than suasion and less inclined to dogmatism than scepticism, Bellow's rhetoric of digression is comprised of the battery of digressive devices he employs, sometimes transparently, often subtly, and always creatively, to invest his imaginative fictions with the capacity to interrogate the ratiocentric prejudices of the modern age.

Moreover, digressivity turns key elements of Bellow's philosophy of fiction into artistic praxis. Augie and Sammler express their deepest feelings in dialogue; Henderson's narratorial meanderings are an objective correlative of his disorderly rush; Herzog's emotions find their most extensive expression in his epistolary outbreaks;
and, although they are supposed to make him calm, Citrine's meditations produce lyrical and impassioned outcries with which he fulfills his office as the expressive delegate of others. Suspending the orderly relation of external event, the Bellovian digression swerves into the fluid internal states of the protagonists, locating the essentially human in the human interior. But in addition to providing a fictional space for a vivid representation of the protagonists' mental and emotional lives, Bellow's digressive terrain facilitates the extensive incorporation of ideas into his fiction. While the cerebral content of his fiction is pervasive and far from confined to the narrative space opened up by digressivity, Bellow's detours into the explicitly ideational are most detailed and extensive in his dialogic, epistolary, and meditative digressions. Augie, Henderson, and Citrine all employ narratorial digressivity to articulate ideas, but Henderson, more than his counterparts, succeeds in dramatizing Bellow's counter-ratiocentric themes implicitly, particularly in the celebrated initial digressions of the novel.

But ideas, while they occupy a prominent place in Bellow's fiction, are always subordinate to values. "The central thrust of Bellow's work," argues Daniel Fuchs, "is to deny nihilism, immoralism, and the aesthetic view" (Vision 9). Writing with such ethical urgency that Alfred Kazin regards him as "the sternest of Jewish moralists"
("Earthly City" 485), Bellow asserts the didactic imperative of art. To paraphrase Citrine's ironic fusion of images (Humboldt 51), Bellow's fiction crosses the tigers of moral indignation with the horses of artistic instruction to produce a hybrid opposed to the nightmare of apocalyptic modernism. "In his writings he views himself as an Abraham figure," L. H. Goldman argues in Saul Bellow's Moral Vision (1983), adding that Bellow feels "it incumbent upon himself to smash the idols of contemporary literature and to dispel its negative influence" (xiv). Goldman interprets the author's iconoclasm narrowly, however, maintaining that it "takes the form of a war with Ernest Hemingway" (xiv). But while Bellow certainly has his disagreements with Hemingway, his rejection of idolatry often takes the less militant form of a refusal to genuflect: "Bellow will not bow to the religion of art" (Fuchs, Vision 21).

Nor is art the only religion to which Bellow will not bow--he refuses to place his faith in science or accept the gospel of reason, remaining dubious of progress as it is measured by technological miracles. In fact, he does more than this, going, as Ellen Pifer argues throughout her major study, "against the grain of contemporary culture and its secular pieties" (Against the Grain 2). In this study I have attempted to circumscribe the aesthetic, scientific, and cultural secular orthodoxies against which Bellow counterpoises himself with the term ratiocentrism, which
emphasizes what they have in common: a central emphasis on reason. My research for this study, in particular my examination of the five long novels of Bellow’s middle period, leads me to conclude differently from Pifer, who finds that “each of Bellow’s protagonists is divided against himself” in having a “polarized consciousness” that is “torn between the alternate claims of reason and faith” (Against the Grain 1).

As I have attempted to show in each chapter of this study, an examination of Bellowian digressivity reveals an authorial bias that is consistently against the exclusive claims of reason and what Bellow calls, in his affectionate memorial of Isaac Rosenfeld, “heartless abstractions” (It All Adds Up 264). Augie March is consistent in his suspicion that the ideas of others threaten him with entrapment, and the dialogic digressivity of the latter part of his narrative makes clear that his convictions place him surely, if not squarely, on the axial lines of which he has been aware since childhood. His entire narrative demonstrates his concurrence with the assertion of Heraclitus that a man’s character is his fate. Rejecting the rationalistic doctrine of determinism as an idea, he evades the reality-recruiting schemes of Grandma Lausch, William Einhorn, Mrs. Renling, and Thea Fenchel, seeing behind their intentions and companionship impulses no less Machiavellian for being unconscious. Paslavitch, Tambow, Obermark, and Robey, either
as convenient Socratic elicitors of Augie's ideas or as ventriloquized interlocutors echoing his sensibility, confirm the protagonist in his convictions. Mintouchian, lamenting the paucity of essential selfhood, and Basteshaw, personifying the madness of rationality, further reinforce Augie's belief that reason alone is not worthy of faith.

Similarly, Eugene Henderson, true to his inner voice and searching for truth which comes in blows, is never in danger of seduction by the claimants of reason. In fact, in the figure of Dahfu he encounters a Basteshaw of sorts, a tribal king versed in medical science and conversant with secular debates, who, while he enjoys the affection and admiration of the protagonist, nevertheless manifests a tragic susceptibility to the follies of reason. The initial digressions, a burlesque of rational explanation, certainly reveal a man of contradictory impulses and erratic intentions. But while Henderson may be divided against himself, his consciousness is not polarized by the claims of reason and faith, as his convictions about reality show. Believing, at various stages, that reality is himself, that it is mere pedantry, and that it is constituted by love, he seems never to have been in danger of subscribing to a ratiocentric view of reality.

Nor is the scholar of chaotic arguments who circles among random facts in his quest to discover essentials with an amusing stratagem in danger of becoming a slave to
ratiocination. Moses Herzog, with the whirling ecstasy he
gives epistolary form, is the Nemesis of the would-be-
ratiocentric. His epistles to intellectuals reveal a man who
is irritated, not beguiled, by the claims of reason, just as
his letters to God bespeak no doubts about the claims of
faith. Like Henderson, Herzog is a man riven with conflict,
but the angels with which he wrestles are the perennial
antagonists of the Bellovian protagonist: "his conscience,
his alter ego, his fantasies" (Goldman, Moral Vision xiv).
It is not himself but the world which Herzog would rescue
from reason. His determination is to be as God wills, not as
reason dictates. The sign which accompanies his assertion
that reason exists is the sound of slum clearance in the
next block, just as Elias Zetland’s formulation of the
antinomy between positivism and religion is followed by
factory whistles and the basso profundo of a radio booming
through the floor its announcement of the Anschluss (Him
177).

Gobbled up by the juggernaut of the Wehrmacht and spat
naked into an Einsatzgruppen grave, Artur Sammler is no
stranger and no friend to the rationality and calculation of
mythomanic machines. Discouraged by the reasonable madness
sweeping the Western world, unimpressed with the cosmic
aspirations of the technological will, he closes his
Schopenhauer and opens his Eckhart. A half-blind seer, he
views with his one good eye a house of reason that is swept
and garnished and suspects that its last state might be worse than its first. Shunning argument, all too familiar with the logic of destruction, he prescribes a Balm of Gilead for the contemporary soul caged in by explanation: the obviation of rational superstructures. When he whispers his prayer at the side of Elya Gruner’s deathbed, he does so not with equivocation but with resonant conviction, closing a novel which does not question but presupposes the existence of God. Moreover, the special knowledge of which his last words bear quintuple witness is the knowledge of the heart, not the kind of knowing on which "the modern religion of empty categories" is built (226). Consigned to a "written off category" by "the giants of the modern Method" (19), Sammler himself is understandably suspicious of categorical imperatives.

The Bellovian protagonist's problem with categories, as Charlie Citrine notes, is that they are "devoid of spirit" (Humboldt 17). In rejecting "the plastered idols of the Appearances" (Humboldt 16), Citrine, like the protagonists before him, aims his hammer at "rational orthodoxy," the awe of which he suspects cost Humboldt his life (Humboldt 363). Humboldt, "with all of his conforming abstractions" (413), responds to the allure of the "collective abstractions" (16) and is buried by "the condensation of collective intelligences and combined ingenuities" (487). But Citrine himself, while he may "know the educated answers" (228) and
have "read the textbooks" (310), does not stand in his room at the Pension La Roca reciting them to the dead, an honour he reserves for the works of Rudolf Steiner, "a very rational kind of mystic" (362). He gives his "metaphysical hunches" clear priority over "the scientific world-view," which is "just head-stuff" (228). After summarizing the religious view, Citrine makes his position clear: "I've always believed that" (228).

Citrine's preoccupation with a higher world is only one element of what Martin Amis calls "the strong vein of (heterodox) transcendentalism" in Bellow's work (Moronic Inferno 9). As I argue in my introduction, Joseph's Spirit of Alternatives, as a hierophant of metaphysical option, is an early manifestation of Bellow's inclusion of transcendental perspectives in his work. Dispersed throughout his oeuvre, Bellow's transcendentalism is not linked exclusively to his digressivity; however, the digressive terrain of his fiction, often a departure from the narrative of material fact, strongly favours the articulation of transcendental perspectives. Dialogic digressivity, for instance, provides Augie with the forum for his expressions of suspicion with regard to the world of artifacts and with an occasion for his declaration of the doctrine of the axial lines. Likewise, Henderson's initial digressions include his insight into the revelatory operations of truth and the description of his inner voice.
Herzog's epistolary digressions are the principal locus of his lament for the spiritual emptiness of secularism and also contain his direct addresses to God. Artur Sammler's recital emphasizes the necessity for and contemporary corruption of spiritual striving. And Charlie Citrine's meditations are his attempt to bring the soul into contact with higher worlds and spiritual beings.

Representing Bellow's unwillingness to condemn his characters to a world of events above which they can not rise, these transcendental interludes have a significant bearing on the narrative of event itself. For the protagonists, digressivity is a salvation from plot; for the author it is a formal representation of the possibilities for human liberation from entrapment in a mechanistic universe. The plot of Augie becomes increasingly dialogic as its episodes become less plausibly chronological and more fantastic in nature, and the extended speeches, as the novel progresses, acquire the character of metanarrative perspectives. The African narrative of Henderson is fantastic in its entirety, representing the Bellovian novel at its most parabolic and perhaps reflecting Henderson's view that "every guy has his own Africa" (275). Reversing the trend in Augie, digressivity in Henderson is a perspectival shift from the fantastic to the real. In Herzog, the epistolary suspensions of the narrative of event necessitate a significant shrinkage in the scope of the
plot, reducing its prime focus to five days. Sammler’s narrator, relating a tale which spans two and a half days, gives pride of place to Sammler’s broodings and speeches in which he articulates them. And Charlie Citrine, devoting over a third of his narrative to the account of his second day in Chicago, gives architectonic expression, not to the outward events of that day but to his meditative digressivity from them.

But what middle Bellovian narrative loses in depiction of event it gains in wealth of phenomenological portrayal, although this is incrementally rather than evenly the case. Augie’s inner life, although it is suggested in the narratorial digressivity of his commentary throughout the narrative, finds its most resonant expression in his lengthy dialogic declarations of belief. The ambiguous nature of Henderson’s tale makes it a fascinatingly equivocal and bafflingly indeterminate psychological portrait of its teller. Nevertheless, the novel’s digressivity serves brilliantly as an index of the protagonist’s erratic and peculiar mental constitution, also functioning as a burlesque of the ratiocentric explanatory urge. Herzog’s epistolary digressivity accommodates the kaleidoscopic portrayal of the protagonist’s psyche in the process of crisis, depicting the inner civil war between his expressive and intellectual impulses and resulting in a phenomenological portrayal that is cinematic in its
movement. The broodings and verbal recitals of Artur Sammler, while they may not effectively conceal the author's didactic purpose, are nevertheless effective in their portrayal of a protagonist who is "a meditative island" (Sammler 75). Similarly, the complex facets of Citrine's character are greatly in evidence as he weaves the tale of his experiences with the counternarrative of his meditations.

Along with character, the exposition of theme is greatly facilitated by digressivity in middle Bellow. Augie, whose position throughout the narrative has been interpreted as the "limitless disponibility" (Fiedler 7) of a "man with no commitments" (Warren, "The Man" 13), nevertheless makes a sustained, if often implicit, objection to relativistic contingency, a theme receiving explicit expression in his unequivocal edict of counterposition: the essential necessity of metaphysical location given analogue form in the axial lines. Similarly, Eugene Henderson's counter-ratiocentric quest for truth receives implicit dramatization in the narratorial digressive postponement of the novel's opening and the striking suspension effected by the dental interlude are both comical in themselves and suggestive of a relation between the tragic nature of the real and the romantic
possibilities of the surreal. The thematics of Herzog's disagreements with the world are a central preoccupation of his epistolary digressions, just as the protagonist's recital is the most extended and concentrated exposition of theme in *Sammler* and Citrine's meditative interludes enable extensive articulations of theme in *Humboldt*.

Bolstering the major digressions in their role with relation to theme, Bellow's wealth of reference also plays a pervasive and significant role in his middle fiction and indeed in his entire oeuvre, amounting to one of its most notable and idiosyncratic formal features. Calling on a vast range of sources, the author's predilection for citation gives his work a scholarly breadth which combines a passion for secular learning with an intense search for moral principle. Placing enormous demands upon the reader, the cosmopolitan reference of Bellovian fiction speaks loudly of the author's sense of his own responsibility as a writer. But it does much more than this. Locating his fiction in the broad purview of history, Bellow's reference to a plenitude of sources, ancient, medieval, and modern is a formidable tribute to his interdisciplinary aspiration.

But the attempt of Bellovian fiction to grasp the world is accompanied by an equally potent urge to disavow it. Bellow's work is nothing if not a fiction of protest, and the digressivity of the middle fiction reflects the author's belief that "a Faustian artist is unwilling to surrender to
the mass of particulars" (Howe 359). When Augie indulges his longing for passionate speech, it is to express mistrust, if not of "the world of nature," of the "world of artifacts"—"things done by man which overshadow us" (Augie 450).

Henderson protests the inability of the external world to satiate the cravings of his inner voice and its "terrible repetition within" (Henderson 14). "Spluttering fire in the wilderness of this world" (Herzog 307), Herzog reacts to the "imaginary human situation"(304) invented by intellectuals in an "age of spiritual exhaustion" (234), finding refuge in "the arbitrary withdrawal of proud subjectivity from the collective and historical progress of humankind" (307).

Artur Sammler's cultivated disinterest in the world borders on outright rejection as he contemplates modern life, "considering the earth itself," in its contemporary condition, "as something to cast oneself from--to be divested of" (Sammler 51). And Charlie Citrine, refusing to accept imprisonment in "the merely phenomenal" (Humboldt 291), contrives a meditative escape worthy of Harry Houdini, with whom he has "some affinities" (Humboldt 65).

But Bellow's fiction of protest is also a fiction of affirmation, an element which is also linked to his digressivity. Augie's axial lines promise humankind "true joy" and an assurance that "death will not be terrible" (Augie 455), and they play a role in allowing him to discern, even in "a dark Westminster of a time" (201), the
"animal ridens" in himself, "the laughing creature, forever rising up" (536). At the outset of his initial digressions, Henderson encapsulates the affirmative value of his experiences in Africa: "the world which I thought so mighty an oppressor has removed its wrath from me" (Henderson 3). Herzog's final epistolary expression affirms a human holiness that defies explication: "Something produces intensity, a holy feeling, as oranges produce orange, as grass green, as birds heat" (Herzog 340). In his longest speech, Sammler assures his listeners that "the spirit knows that its growth is the real aim of existence" and reminds them that "inability to explain is no ground for disbelief" (Sammler 236). The "strong impressions of eternity" Sammler receives "almost daily" (Sammler 237) are coupled with the resounding conviction with which the novel concludes. With his meditations, Citrine affirms the soul and its ability to exercise ways of knowing that transcend rationality. His contemplative exercises also celebrate the emancipatory potential of the imagination, to which he adduces the Copernican power of envisioning a multiplicity of worlds.

However, Citrine's insistence on higher worlds also highlights the equivocal nature of the Bellovian affirmation, for it is accompanied by a concomitant devaluation of this world. Throughout his work, Bellow manifests a distinct distaste for the world as it is, and his fiction does not often stress the possibilities for
affirmation that remain for those of his readers who do not share his convictions in the soul or in transcendental truths. In fact, Bellow's view of material reality and the human condition in the contemporary Western world is more dark than neutral. As Jonathan Wilson points out, Bellow's fiction "projects a vision of the world as an essentially hostile place populated, for the most part, by hypocrites, egotists, grotesque swindlers, absolutists, and hardhearted 'realists'" (On Bellow's Planet 18). Similarly, Michael Glenday observes that Bellow "does not place much faith in the regenerative promises of a communal ethic" (Decline 2). Bellow's work does not seem to confirm Eusebio Rodrigues's perception of "the basic premise on which all his fiction rests--that it is marvelous to be alive" (Quest 15).

Consideration of Bellow's overall fictional vision leads to questions concerning the author's orientation with regard to the novelistic tradition itself. Here, Bellow's affinities are varied. At times, as with the Dickensian starkness of the first part of Augie, Bellow writes in a mode reminiscent of the realist tradition of the late nineteenth century. The spiritual element with which he provides for the transcendence of an often claustrophobic reality links his work with that of Dostoevsky, "the Russian master whose example is most instructive to him" (Fuchs, Vision 29). "I was doing nothing very original by writing another realistic novel about a common man and calling it The
Victim" (Cronin and Siegel 67), Bellow says in his Paris Review interview, adding that "realism has always both accepted and rejected the circumstances of ordinary life" (69). In rejecting the confinement of his later protagonists by ordinary circumstances, Bellow locates his heroes in a realism from which he provides them with a means of escape. Digressivity is one way Bellow does this, the digressive terrain of his novels often being a space outside the metanarrative of realism, which acts as a backdrop rather than an enclosure.

To a lesser extent, Bellow’s fiction also shares some affinities with work in the naturalist tradition, although his own philosophy of literature is opposed to a view of literature which makes its characters the pawns of determining forces. Bellow always offers his characters some form of redemption from victimization by circumstance; however, he is often at his most poignant in his dramatization of the protagonist’s fall to grace through a sequence of painful divestments, misadventures, or misfortunes. Perhaps most memorably, Tommy Wilhelm finally moves towards "the consummation of his heart’s ultimate need" with "torn sobs and cries" that are "deeper than sorrow" (Seize the Day 118). Augie witnesses the incarceration of Georgie, his mother, and Grandma Lausch in institutions. He sees William Einhorn’s struggle with disability and the conquest of his financial hopes by the
depression. He views his brother's disillusionment in love and his flight into a loveless marriage. He assists Mimi Villars in her near-death struggle to maintain her own independence and sees the terrible suffering of mothers in the hospital. The "free spinning of the world" (Augie 285) replaces his own "gilded and dallying" (331) adventures in love with disappointment and disillusion, finally throwing him into a marriage that is a betrayal. Only after seeing "the strange outcomes of the history of toil" (303) and learning, not just that "there is a darkness" but that "it is for everyone" (175) can the "Columbus of those near-at-hand" (536) see, through the rain that is "an emblem of the shared condition of all" (201), the resilience of "the laughing creature, forever rising up" (536).

Likewise, Eugene Henderson, a giant for whom "violent suffering is labour" (Henderson 4), a commando who weeps "from all the unbearable complications" in his heart (18), does not find easily that love can dispel the agonies of "reality's dark dream" (48). Nor is Moses Herzog a stranger to suffering. He witnesses the dark comedy of betrayal by his friend, divorce from his wife, and estrangement from his children before a world pregnant with misunderstanding confines him in the jail cell where, using his knee as a table, he writes "with cheerful eagerness" about "the dream of every man's heart" (Herzog 303). Like Herzog, Artur Sammler inhabits a world the stark realities of which do not
seem in danger of doing "justice to Condorcet" (Herzog 312): the Holocaust did not sully the vision of the Enlightenment's most irrepressible optimist. The losses and disappointments of Artur Sammler, along with his frailties, give added resonance to his conviction that, in "all the confusion and degraded clowning of this life," there are nevertheless terms of a contract "which, in his inmost heart, each man knows" (Sammler 313). And, haunted by the spectre of a friend destroyed by the machinations of abstraction, Charlie Citrine responds to the "collective intelligences and combined ingenuities" (Humboldt 487) of a world dominated by science and secularism by producing the deus ex machina of its meditative transcendence.

In providing his protagonists with a measure of relief from the dark prospects of a naturalistic landscape, Bellow has, as Daniel Fuchs points out, reacted "vividly, though antithetically, to the assumptions of the modern tradition" (Vision 27). Bellow's fictional art reveals that, like his modernist predecessors, he is a writer situated squarely in his time, but the philosophical predisposition of his work, in contrast, reflects his refusal to adopt positions that are of his time. In spite of his enmity towards aestheticism, his fictional craftsmanship never betrays a conviction that art has no aesthetic obligation. His mastery of narrative form and his uncanny command of fictional voice, his gift for portraiture, both comic and tragic, and
his talent for memorable caricature, his relentless verbal ingenuity and his untiring artisanship of English sentences which often sound with great poetic resonance all attest to the fact that he is, first and foremost, although neither merely nor exclusively, an artist. Although overall he is counterpostmodern in the outlook and prosecution of his art, Bellow’s depiction of the human comedy is at its most postmodern in the punctuated relief he offers from it with the positional play of his digressivity.

But Bellow’s digressivity traces its descent from an ancestry that is not limited to the tradition of Western literary digression which stretches back at least as far as the imaginative digressivity with which Homer depicts the macrocosm of the ancient world in the engraved microcosm of Achilles’ immortal shield (*Iliad* 454) and the dialogic digressivity with which he has Odysseus, "the man of many resources" (*Odyssey* 139) relate, after dinner in the palace of Alcinous, the tale of his wanderings to that point (*Odyssey* 139–201). In terms of narrative method, particularly the narratological peculiarities which contribute greatly to one of his strengths as a writer, his mastery of first-person voice, Bellow seems deeply indebted to the Yiddish tradition. Especially with his narratorial portrayals of Eugene Henderson and Charlie Citrine, Bellow assimilates some of the conventions for unwitting irony and indirect self-revelation that link the first-person
narrators of Sholem Aleichem, Isaac Babel, Isaac Bashevis Singer and others. Before he created many of his own narrators, Bellow transformed into English one of the Yiddish tradition's most widely celebrated narratorial personae, Singer's Gimpel the Fool, whose ironized absurdity, like that of his Bellovian counterparts, is also a conduit for illumination: "No doubt the world is entirely an imaginary world, but it is only once removed from the true world" (Great Jewish Short Stories 247).

In more ways than one, Bellow's fiction draws heavily on two great traditions which are seminal in the development of Western civilization: the Hebraic and the Hellenic. Indeed, his fiction is enlivened by an interanimation of these traditions and explores the conundrums and paradoxes of their coexistence and the chaos of their procreative force as it is manifest in the geopolitical entity of the United States. Occupying a central place in modern American literature, Bellow's fiction is a striking portrait of American life in the second half of the twentieth century, at the same time that it is a sustained plea for the transcendence of materialism in the engine room of capitalism. Easy to admire, susceptible to attack, but difficult to dismiss, his oeuvre is a certainly enigmatic and arguably anachronistic contribution to the tradition of the American novel, and it has something in common with two of that tradition's masterpieces. In its picaresque
liveliness and its comic ingenuity, his work has some of the delightful digressivity that animates *Huckleberry Finn*, and in the abiding seriousness of its moral concern and the psychological intensity with which it prosecutes its metaphysical ambitions, it also has something in common with one of American Literature's masterpieces of digressivity: *Moby Dick*. With sentiments which affiliate it with the transcendentalism of Emerson, Thoreau, and Whitman, Bellow's fiction is nevertheless stubborn in its insistence that the transcendental can be glimpsed from "the Moronic inferno" (*Humboldt* 35) of the contemporary American urban nightmare. It is one of the powerful ironies of a pervasively ironic fiction that its creator, depicting characters oppressed by the totalitarianism of fact and challenged by the sophistries of theory, veils his own message of truth and finality with a rhetoric of digression.
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