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### The Incomplete Dialectic of *Humboldt's Gift*

The theme of all Bellow's work is the possibility of resistance to the forces of victimization. In *Humboldt's Gift* the source of that possibility is called the soul—Charlie Citrine, the narrator, believes “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” (pp. 227-28; and see p. 286).<sup>1</sup> But what this apparently transcendental psychology and epistemology amount to, pragmatically, we see in Charlie's figures of speech for Humboldt's last-minute reprieve: “it may have been as hard for him [to break out of his case of hardened madness] as it might be for someone—myself, for instance—to go from this world to the spirit world. . . . he made a Houdini escape” (pp. 372-73). Since Charlie decides that no one, not even Houdini, escapes from the grave (pp. 436, 487) and that “life on this earth [is] actually everything else as well, provided that we [learn] how to apprehend it” (p. 350), those figures of speech mean that Humboldt's miraculous return to sanity—entering the story like a resurrection, seven years after his death—identifies the immortal soul as man's capacity for spiritual rebirth or self-determination: boxed in by pre-fabricated biology, chained by conditioning and circumstance, all but buried, still the spirit breaks out, like Houdini—“Where did Walt Whitman come from, and where did he get what he had? It was W. Whitman, an irrepressible individual, that had it and that did it” (p. 370). This irrepressibility establishes the “connection between the self and the divine powers,” so that the reprieved Humboldt can claim we are “supernatural beings” (pp. 143, 347), but these “divine powers” are the “inner powers of nature,” which “art manifests” (p. 112): imagination, for Charlie Citrine, is “that Messiah, that savior faculty” (p. 396)—a metaphor amplified and clarified in *Henderson the Rain King* when Dahfu envisions the whole human race as having a natural ability to break out of its straitjacket of genes—successful mutations are not the product of chance: Dahfu teaches Henderson, “Imagina-

tion is a force of nature. . . . What Homo sapiens imagines, he may slowly convert himself to" (p. 271).

In school, of course, we are taught that Lamarck was wrong. Our "ruling premises," as Charlie calls them (p. 479), tell us that we don't break out, not even as individuals—in *Dangling Man* an "untimely butterfly" seems "somehow alien to the whole condition of the century" (p. 172-73). Accordingly, the unreconstructed Humboldt, "overawed by rational orthodoxy" (p. 363), put his faith in the "*Merck Manual*. . . bound in black like the Bible" (p. 21), bowing to a century that teaches man he is a machine. But, says Charlie, those "ruling premises" of "mental" people, who have been "trained to resist what everyone is born knowing" (p. 91), are (by way of a pun) nothing more than a "mental coffin" (p. 433), for "It is not the world, it is my own head that is disenchanted" (p. 203): the mechanical universe is a depressive cognitive distortion, a Hotel Ritz Coffin (the ex-husband of Charlie's mistress, Renata, is a mausoleum salesman named Koffritz)—in *The Dean's December* Andrew Corde says, "The view we hold of the material world may put us into a case as heavy as lead, a sarcophagus" (p. 227). Thus Humboldt destroyed himself like Joe Christmas in Faulkner's *Light in August*, who, instead of seeing that he *was* whatever *he* chose to be, assumed he was black—and therefore doomed—because the myth of his time and place supported these ravings of his insane grandfather. As early as *Dangling Man*, in the conjunction of hypnosis and the auto-hypnosis of Christian Science (pp. 45-55), Bellow asserted this power of mind over body: what we believe we are decides what we are—man, says Charlie Citrine, is not programmed like the beaver (pp. 236, 268). Therefore Schlossberg in *The Victim* advises, "Choose dignity. Nobody knows enough to turn it down" (p. 134): in *Henderson the Rain King*, when clouds come to the cloudless sky, so that Dahfu says, "Do you see, Mr. Henderson, the gods know us" (p. 202), these gods are the metamorphic "inner powers of nature" by which we ourselves bring the rain to our Newtonian Waste Land; and in *The Dean's December* a black heroin addict and hit-man abruptly and magically transforms himself into a savior (pp. 188-93). For Charlie Citrine, it is such resurrection that shows "what a human being is" (p. 89).<sup>2</sup> The "irrepressible individual," outfoxing the century's "ruling premises," bursts out of nowhere like the universe itself, represented by the miraculous powers of the sun—Charlie says, "The sun like a bristling fox jumped beneath the horizon" (p. 101); Henderson, "the sun was like the coat of a fox" (p. 79); and Mr. Sammler, "Just then the sun ran up from the sea like a red fox" (p. 249).<sup>3</sup>

All the same, Bellow recognizes that his salvationist art cannot simply wish away the strength of those "heavily fortified positions" built on our "Rationalistic, Naturalistic" premises (pp. 91, 119). Twenty years ago he observed that in "The Grand Inquisitor" episode of *The Brothers Karamazov* Dostoevsky had in advance "all but devastated his own position. This, I think, is the greatest achievement possible in a novel of ideas. It becomes art when the views most opposite to the author's own are allowed to exist in full strength. Without this a novel of ideas is mere self-indulgence, and didacticism is simply axe-grinding."<sup>4</sup> Yet the extent to which Bellow has lived up to this dialectical ideal, and the means he has used, have not been explored.<sup>5</sup> *Humboldt's Gift* offers an especially interesting opportunity for that exploration. For example, the beliefs that "warmed the environment for" Charlie Citrine (p. 257) can seem delusions of benevolence paralleling Humboldt's delusions of persecution: Humboldt, who has no grounds for mistrusting docile Kathleen, builds fantasies of betrayal; Charlie, who has good grounds for mistrusting Renata (or Pierre Thaxter) builds romantic fantasies—for Renata (whose name may be taken as an anagram for "nature"), remains Renata despite the enchantment in Charlie's head, twice she marries death; so Herzog can insert as a bookmark in a volume of Blake a psychiatrist's "list of the traits of paranoia" (pp. 77, 80.)<sup>6</sup> More important, while *Humboldt's Gift* keeps proclaiming our "connection [with] the divine [inner] powers," it also keeps reminding us of our connection with the infernal outer powers, such as we find in our sexuality—lust hounds us from adolescence to old age (pp. 298, 139, 98)—and especially in our mortality: we wrinkle, sag, and thicken (pp. 297, 321, 366) until we are pushed in wheelchairs (pp. 9, 337), our memory fails (p. 81), and we "put two socks on one foot and pee into the bathtub" (pp. 298, 417-18); and no quasi-divine spirit breaks out of this biological box—only medical technology can do the trick. Thus, the moment Charlie Citrine feels the spirit world hovering near, he runs into Dr. Klosterman, the ophthalmologist who recommended surgery on Charlie's eye-bags (pp. 295, 193); and when Charlie tries to "experience the sun . . . as a being, an entity with a life and meanings of its own" (a cosmic Houdini-fox), we are brought back to earth in the next line, which tells us that, "thanks to pencillin," little Roger Koffritz has recovered from the flu (p. 420). Charlie's brother, Ulick, in late middle-age is still the glutton he was in boyhood (pp. 385-86)—but Demmie Vonghel, Charlie's dead girl friend, who weighed "two hundred and eighty pounds at the age of fourteen," was made slender by "hormone injections and pills" (p. 152). A broken nose ruined Menashe Klinger's chances in opera (p. 330)—but Ulick's breathing "through the mouth"

ended when "we could afford the nosejob" (p. 386). Behind Renata's brilliant laugh—she is "a perfect Wenatchee, raised under scientific conditions" (p. 314)—lies the "fortune [her mother spent] on orthodontia" (p. 192); and Charlie can see this mother's mind as a sewing machine ("nature, the seamstress," says Herzog [p. 25]) because veins from Ulick's leg are sewn into his heart, which the doctors shut "off like a small motor and [lay] . . . aside" (p. 399) while "by miraculous medical technology" (p. 421) "they circulate the blood by machine. . . . Poor humankind, we're all hurled down into the object world now" (p. 353)—"A heart can be fixed like a shoe," says Ulick (p. 400). So the steward in the Mercedes body shop wears a "long white smock, like a dentist" and "charges like a brain surgeon" (pp. 47, 71) because the same technology works indifferently on teeth, cars, and brains as on shoes, hearts, and apples. If the Mercedes windshield can have "suffered a kind of crystalline internal hemorrhage" (p. 36), then, by reciprocity, "car-crazy" Humboldt must find at the end that his mental "gears are stripped," his "lining is shot" (pp. 4, 340.)<sup>7</sup>

But does all this witty jeering give us quite the Dostoevskyan dissonance the dialectic of *Humboldt's Gift* calls for? Mortality laughs at literal immortality; where is Bellow's ridicule of the metaphorical immortality that is his actual theme? Medical technology demonstrates that the *body* has been "hurled down into the object world"; from the engineering of teeth, nose, and heart, Bellow allows no inference about mind-technology, the engineering of the soul. The negation Bellow's theme calls for is the gross biological basis and limits of so-called "self-determination" (the limits of the credit mankind can give itself for the evolution Dahfu credits to man's imagination)—in other words, the evidence that there are only programmed outer powers in the brain (varying with the individual), no undetermined, magical "inner" ones (the caterpillar, after all, even if its metamorphosis is unseasonal, can do nothing but become a butterfly): Augie March's brother George, an imbecile, "was good at heeling and soling" but not "equal to making shoes by hand" (pp. 450, 419); and the lives of the self-destructive poets Humboldt represents—Poe, Hart Crane, Jarrell, Berryman (p. 118)—and the life of Delmore Schwartz, on whom Humboldt is based—strongly suggest that these men were no more able to "choose dignity" (i.e., save themselves) than Georgie March was able to make a shoe. Such an apparently escape-proof naturalistic box—the "leprosy of soul" in Humboldt that repels Charlie Citrine at first ("It's no use going back to St. Julien or hugging lepers" [pp. 136, 116]),<sup>8</sup>—Bellow has evaded by making Humboldt's "leprosy" a reversible, comparatively shallow and conscious, cognitive depression, much as if Faulkner had sent Joe Christmas to Norman

Vincent Peale;<sup>9</sup> and as a result, Bellow shows us Humboldt's box and chains from the outside only, as when a showman presenting an escape artist is afraid to let us examine the arrangements too closely—Bellow himself evidently could not escape an uneasy awareness that his weakening of Delmore Schwartz's "case" or "coffin" betrays the Spartan complacency of the claim that consciousness is responsible for the health of the inherited constitution, rather than the other way round ("I'm not sick—why should you be?"). This flaw in the art of *Humboldt's Gift*, and the author's awareness of it, can be shown in two complementary ways.

The first necessitates some preliminary appreciation of the extent to which Humboldt is Delmore Schwartz, down to any number of details, like the scar on his forehead (pp. 11-12), his playing baseball with his childlike uncle in a long apartment-house hall (p. 333), his cats (pp. 21, 25, 33, 368), his fear of accepting an invitation to teach in West Berlin (pp. 33, 52), his dropping in on Bellow at Tivoli just before the Bellevue episode (pp. 148-50), the glimpse Bellow had of Schwartz on West 46th Street in May 1966, etc., etc.<sup>10</sup> If Ralph Ellison, who as a young man planned to write symphonies, "offered to light [Schwartz's wife's] cigarette" at a party in Princeton, why should Bellow, if he was writing fiction, need to keep Ellison in the incident, hardly disguised as "a Negro composer" (p. 145)?<sup>11</sup> Was the implied comparison of Schwartz and Iago the "homosexual paranoiac" too good to pass up<sup>12</sup>—like so many other things Bellow remembered? James Laughlin, who was Schwartz's publisher and friend for twenty years, says of Bellow's account of Humboldt, "It is *very* accurate. . . . it's very, very true";<sup>13</sup> and because the novel shows *Humboldt* punching his wife, William Barrett, who was Schwartz's best friend for almost twenty years, withdraws his own earlier statement that *Schwartz* was never physically violent—even though the violence does not appear in James Atlas's account of either occasion in question (pp. 314, 330)!<sup>14</sup> No wonder there was a rumor in the late 60s that Bellow was writing a biography of Schwartz<sup>15</sup>—he did, in fact, begin with a memoir.<sup>16</sup> Once one recognizes the extent to which Humboldt is Schwartz, how is one to explain Bellow's deviation from those facts of Schwartz's medical history that, if dramatically developed, would have completed the book's dialectic?

At the very beginning of *Humboldt's Gift* we hear that "Insomnia made [Humboldt] more learned. In the small hours he read thick books" (p. 4); and Humboldt says, after publishing his first book at twenty-two, "I have vertigo from success, Charlie. My ideas won't let me sleep. I go to bed without a drink and the room is whirling" (p. 12)

—in other words, the insomnia is manic (p. 340) and comic. Although the opening pages flit back and forth over all of Humboldt's life, they make no other reference to his insomnia—it is not singled out as decisive, here or later. What Charlie at once emphasizes, instead, is Humboldt's drinking: "First he gave me black coffee, and then poured gin in the same cup" (p. 2; also pp. 8, 12, 14). And that Bellow had nothing at all about Humboldt's insomnia in the first published version of the opening (*Playboy*, Jan. 1974, p. 88), where the subject is mentioned only parenthetically when Humboldt is awake at 3 a.m. the night of his death (p. 112), further exposes Bellow's decision to evade what we may take as three facts about Schwartz's inability to sleep. First: its importance. William Barrett leaves us no doubt that without chronic insomnia, Schwartz would not have combined barbiturates, alcohol, and amphetamines and would not have suffered the paranoia and violence of amphetamine psychosis.<sup>17</sup> In "The Hartford Innocents," the novella Schwartz placed last in the last book he published, sleep is called "that fountainhead of life"; and in a still later work, posthumously published, an all-night disc jockey celebrates "the magic and magnetism of sleep's divinity."<sup>18</sup> Second: Schwartz's age at the onset of insomnia. Atlas, wary of Schwartz's "tireless [self-] mythologizing imagination" (p. 3), ignores the insomnia of the hero of Schwartz's autobiographical *Genesis* (New York: New Directions, 1943), which opens with Hershey Green at sixteen waking as soon as he falls asleep—"sleepless boy" he is called (p. 93); we even hear that until Hershey was almost three he slept by day and cried by night, so that the family had to move out of one apartment after another (pp. 76, 89). That at least such a *memory* was autobiographical would seem to be confirmed by its reappearance in a later story.<sup>19</sup> Why should Schwartz have had such a memory? We know the autobiographical underpinning of the story that when Hershey Green was seven he would lie awake at night and his mother took him to a doctor to find out why (pp. 183-84)—and may not Schwartz's remembered "wish not to sleep" when he was four (Atlas, p. 177) suggest a pathological origin for what the boy took to be a wish, since the not-sleeping turned out to have an unalterable will of its own? Nothing of this appears in *Humboldt's Gift*. Third: the origin of Schwartz's drinking. According to Barrett, Schwartz at twenty-one—more than three years before the publication of his first book—had "brutal" insomnia (so "vertigo from success" had nothing to do with it) and "fought it bare-handed and toe-to-toe. . . . When he later took to sleeping tablets and liquor it wasn't for kicks, but out of grim need" (*The Truants*, p. 217).<sup>20</sup> "Jews don't drink," Schwartz used to say when he was young (Atlas, p. 199; Simpson, p. 35), and he was no exception—until 1942, when he was

twenty-eight; and even then, the alcohol, as Barrett indicates, was as much a medication as the prescribed barbiturates Schwartz had begun taking in his early twenties. Since these "reliefs" (along with amphetamines) ruined Schwartz, his insomnia would seem to have been a symptom of mental chains beyond the power of "Houdini escape" and thus the perfect naturalistic challenge to Charlie Citrine's claims for the human spirit. Yet, close as Bellow hewed to the facts of Schwartz's life and character (not even the man's appreciation of Edith Wharton could be omitted [pp. 23, 371]), the central mystery of that life, the early insomnia, was rejected for the unchallenging stereotype of the bohemian alcoholic. The glimpse Bellow gives us of the young Humboldt is a tendentious extrapolation from the later Schwartz, whom Bellow knew, rather than the "magical" Schwartz of the first part of Barrett's memoir, whom Bellow did not know and did not choose to imagine.<sup>21</sup>

The suppression strikes one as all the more unwarranted when investigation reveals that the pathology apparently underlying Schwartz's insomnia answers perfectly to the purpose of the organic dialectic of *Humboldt's Gift*. Charlie Citrine tells us (characteristically) that "[Humboldt] was a manic depressive (his own diagnosis)" (p. 5)—"I don't make diagnoses," says Charlie when asked, "You think Mr. Fleisher is off his nut?" (p. 156); and not a line in Atlas's biography attempts to offer medical authority for Schwartz's "own diagnosis."<sup>22</sup> But this pall of doubt inspired by Bellow is a red herring, for professional diagnosis would not impress him any more than it impresses Charlie (p. 310; also, *Mr. Sammler's Planet*, p. 111). In any case, though Atlas cautiously and modishly steers clear of the clinical literature, he nevertheless identifies and documents Schwartz's "manic-depressive roller coaster" (pp. 183, 370)—Schwartz's moods had "vacillated wildly between elation and extreme depression for as long as he could remember" (pp. 155-56; and see pp. 39, 181, 184, 241, 301). In addition (aside from the episodes of drug-induced paranoia), all accounts, including Bellow's, confirm Schwartz's paranoid personality, which is common in both mania and depression.<sup>23</sup> And two of Schwartz's early works that cannot be attributed to "self-mythologizing" are transparent attempts to rationalize the disorder Schwartz only later came to believe he had: in both the story "The Statues" and the play *Dr. Bergen's Belief*—where the doctor founds a cult based on the revelation that the sky is "god's blue eye"—suicide is the price paid for the fleeting manic reenchantment of the world.<sup>24</sup> By 1950, in *Vaudeville for a Princess* (New Directions), Schwartz could write, with unquestionable self-reference: "No one knows what the real causes of the manic-depressive disorder are, whether physical or mental or

both. . . . You can have this gift or that disease, and no one understands why, no one is responsible, and no one can really alter matters, and yet no one can stop thinking that someone is to blame" (p. 19). This is why Schwartz could say, in a late poem, "I am a book I neither wrote nor read."<sup>25</sup> His feeling that he (like Oedipus) was in the hands of a foreign power need not be regarded as a rationalization of what Charlie Citrine sees as a spiritual weakness in Humboldt. Ten years after Schwartz's death we could read:

. . . in a number of families [some forms of manic and depressive illness occur] in association with such traits as color blindness and a specific blood group known to reside in the X chromosome . . . . When [this association] does occur, it follows a pattern so consistent that it cannot be explained on a non-genetic basis. One is forced to reach the conclusion that . . . in a substantial number of manic-depressive illnesses, genetic factors play a crucial causative role.<sup>26</sup>

Another kind of support for this hypothesis is inferred from the mode of action of the drugs with which severe mental disorders are now treated: the "genetic factors" evidently express themselves as malfunctions in the chemical transmission of impulses across the synaptic gaps between neurons in the brain.<sup>27</sup> Among these drugs is lithium carbonate, whose value as the one known means of unlocking the manic depressive box has been demonstrated dramatically in the U.S. in the past ten years.<sup>28</sup> By 1974 Dr. Nathan S. Kline, the best-known practitioner in the field, could claim to have "cleared up in about two months" the manic depression of a patient who had been in psychoanalysis fifteen years.<sup>29</sup> Of such cases, the most publicized has been Josh Logan's;<sup>30</sup> but by 1973, before Bellow had published any part of *Humboldt's Gift*, "more than 30,000 manic-depressive patients [were] being treated with lithium."<sup>31</sup> Now, if this treatment had been known while Schwartz was a young man, and had been made available to him (with proper safeguards) before he met Bellow, would there have been a *Humboldt's Gift*? Here is a negation that might well have "devastated" Bellow's thesis: that a salt might have done for Schartz what the Houdini spirit could not do—that technology at work among the outer powers of nature can be as decisive for man's brain as for his teeth, heart, and automobiles—is the dialectical opposition Bellow refused to confront, thereby thwarting the organic development of his theme.

Recoiling as though we had discovered the human race to be less human when we found that an iodine deficiency in the mother-to-be can cause cretinism in the child, Bellow ridicules the challenge: a hundred years ago, exclusive St. Petersburg doctors sampled Ivan Ilych's urine (instead of seeing that the man's problem was an existential disease of the spirit), and now NIMH biochemists working on



manic depression trap “neurotransmitter metabolites” in the spinal fluid—what a banal idea of man (the canned naturalism of Claude Bernard that Tolstoy, like Dostoevsky, was already laughing at when the one book he decided to show Ilych reading is a new novel of Zola’s)!<sup>32</sup> Wasn’t Josh Logan, born five years before Schwartz, able to nourish his talent and to survive as a person until the advent of lithium? and what about Lincoln, Schwartz’s favorite manic depressive (*Genesis*, pp. 170-73)? “A man’s character is his fate,” asserts Augie March, and Bellow agrees: for Delmore Schwartz to claim he was suffering from an uncontrollable hereditary disorder that absolved him of responsibility for his fate was to demand from his friends a blank check—a metaphor that *Humboldt’s Gift* makes literal. For Charlie Citrine, Humboldt’s madness was an “act” (pp. 158, 239), a “neurotic superdrama” (p. 149). But does this shifting of the blame dispose of the opposition? One traditional analyst concludes an exhaustive scholarly review of psychoanalytic theories of depression (which, in some genetic studies, seems a less severe form of manic depression), “It seems to me that the significant focus of new work on depression will continue to shift in a neurophysiological and psychopharmacological direction”—and he goes so far as to say:

Especially after I have seen . . . the astonishing effectiveness of lithium carbonate on the modification not only of mood swings but of lifelong personality structures, I wonder more about the effect of neurophysiology on character. I refer, for example, to the sudden, dramatic transformation of an acting-out, promiscuous, unfeeling, “hysterical” personality into a stable, disciplined individual with a capacity for warmth and for lasting relationships following dramatically upon the administration of lithium carbonate, with relapses occurring in the early stages when the patient, unconvinced . . . , would discontinue her medication, only to change once more when she began to take her lithium regularly.<sup>33</sup>

Thus the Newtonian Grand Inquisitor authorized by Humboldt’s “Bible”—speaking with the “Naturalistic, Rationalistic” voice Bellow “borrowed” for Humboldt from Delmore Schwartz<sup>34</sup>—makes deeper inroads into Charlie Citrine’s Fort Dearborn (p. 291). In other words, when we recognize that in Schwartz the neurophysiological insomnia of manic depression was aggravated by neurosis and failures of intelligence and character, we only uncover new sources of strength in the case Humboldt might have made for the outer powers. Whether this “Case”—“the beautiful version of one’s sad life,” mocks Charlie—is “bad art” (p. 303), warranting Bellow’s dismissal of how Humboldt “saw it” (p. 6), the reader may decide by considering how Schwartz “saw it”: without any attempt at posthumous psychoanalysis, we can hardly help appreciating the nature and potential victimizing force of

neurosis—another kind of “case” that only drugs may be able to unlock—when we consider how Schwartz’s insomnia led him to compare himself to both Oedipus and Kafka’s Joseph K. in *The Trial*. “Why can’t you sleep?” a landlady asked one summer when Schwartz, at 21 or 22, was trying to find a quiet rooming house; and Barrett comments, “Delmore would have given thousands then and in the years after to answer that question” (*The Truants*, p. 216).<sup>35</sup> Now, not to know why he couldn’t sleep meant, for Schwartz, that he was under the control of forces he had no consciousness of: in other words, he did not know who he was. He felt like Joseph K. (Atlas, p. 94), i.e., as though he were being punished for a crime he had no awareness of having committed. How are we to explain that the ancient Greek mind arrived at exactly these terms in conceiving the legend of Oedipus—who did not know who he was, who had no awareness of having committed the crimes he was accused of, and who had lived under the control of forces he had no consciousness of? In Schwartz’s *Genesis* we find the explanation: “Like Oedipus, / No one can go away from genesis, / From parents, early crime, and character.”

... no man  
Escapes the Past, nothing is lost,  
—There in the ultimate pit, rising and falling,  
Lie all the deities which make our lives — (p. 120)

We appreciate the Freudian interpretation a good bit better when we realize that no paranoiac could conceive a more fantastic, far-flung plot against himself than the one the Oedipus legend assigns to the gods—the implicit paranoia helps us see that the Oedipus legend, as much as *The Trial*, is a paradigm of neurosis: the Greek gods, like Kafka’s court, are a projection of the neurotic feeling of being driven by an alien force; the alien force is unconscious guilt—such guilt, on entering consciousness, takes the shape of an external attacker; the inevitable working-out of the gods’ decree is a primordial metaphor for the inescapable power of the unconscious mind;<sup>36</sup> only this paranoid metaphor explains why the dual crime that most haunts both the primitive and the neurotic mind should be the one assigned to Oedipus. (And it is this metaphor that explains why Kafka can be interpreted with equal cogency either theologically or psychoanalytically.) Similarly projecting, young Schwartz searched for a quiet rooming house, as though other people were keeping him up; he would later expose his unconscious guilt by resorting to “reliefs” that only aggravated the punishment—he was really punishing himself, without knowing what for.<sup>37</sup> In this way, neurosis became decisive in Schwartz’s fate, since he turned his physiological insomnia into a confession of

guilt. We see the same self-punishment when Joseph K. accepts the court's summons instead of ignoring it with a curse ("Let them go — themselves").<sup>38</sup> Because the unconscious mind's control feels like an external force, young Schwartz could conceive of himself as Oedipus: in the autobiographical "In Dreams Begin Responsibilities" (1937) he implies that he, like Oedipus, was doomed by his parents before he was born—his fate was irreversible;<sup>39</sup> in the one-act play *Shenandoah* (1941), another autobiographical fantasy, the infant's uncle predicts that "the boy will be handicapped" by his *name* "as if he had a clubfoot" (p. 18), i.e., the swollen foot that gave Oedipus his name. And we can see the same identification with Oedipus when Schwartz at twenty-seven or twenty-eight claimed to feel like a "vessel of wrath," a person whose fate (according to St. Paul) is, although predetermined, somehow also freely chosen (*The Truants*, pp. 238-39)—for Oedipus too *felt* free all the while he was under the complete control of the gods; and here is the climactic point of the legend. Because of the gods' utter control, we cannot blame Oedipus for the anger which drove him to kill the man who was sent to the crossroads at that moment for him to kill and who turned out to be Oedipus's father, any more than we can give Oedipus credit for the intelligence that solved the riddle planted in front of Thebes for him alone to solve: in part, at least, Oedipus blinds himself out of furious shame that he has lived blindly, thinking for so many years that *he* was master of his fate when, in fact, fate was leading him by the nose. What we are being told by the Greek genius behind the legend is that those who are under the control of unconscious forces lack responsibility for both their character and their intelligence: the sane are no more responsible than the mad when—like Oedipus—they do not know who they are and consequently *do not know what they are doing*.

To this, Bellow roars, What! ". . . no man / Escapes the Past"? Then where did Walt Whitman come from? This "case" of Schwartz's drives Bellow to parody—a parody that began in *The Last Analysis* (1964), where Bummidge's televised vision of his birth and conception mimics all three of the works in which Schwartz, like Sophocles' Oedipus, tries to find out who he is: in "In Dreams Begin Responsibilities," the narrator turning twenty-one dreams of his parents' courtship as a movie; the young man Shenandoah Fish imagines himself as a Greek chorus at his circumcision in infancy; and in *Genesis* Hershey Green obsessively searches for himself in the lives of his parents and grandparents, discovering such things as that he was conceived when a French bond "entered [his mother's] womb" (p. 65).<sup>40</sup> Similarly, Schwartz's *Shenandoah* stands directly behind Charlie Citrine's "trying [like Oedipus] to solve the riddle of man" by looking through a

window into the room where he was born—only to find a fat old woman in panties and be caught peeping by her husband (p. 90); Cantabile emphasizes to Charlie, “When are you going to do something and *know what you’re doing?*” (p. 86); Charlie comically laments, “. . . if, before I was born, you had submitted the tale of my own life to me and invited me to live with it, wouldn’t I have turned you down flat?” (p. 371); and Renata too asserts her “right to an identity problem” and is out “to solve the riddle of her birth” (pp. 378, 403). But in *Humboldt’s Gift* the ridicule goes on to make a new point. The parallel between Oedipus at Colonus and Caldofredo is explicit (pp. 182, 465), and this self-exiled explorer is played by an actor whose resemblance to Humboldt is “uncanny” (pp. 462, 474)—and in Fenchel we learn why Caldofredo’s crime is cannibalism rather than incest and parricide: “The manic depressive constitution [probably] consists in a relative predominance of oral eroticism”; “the unconscious ideas of depressed persons, and frequently their conscious thoughts also, are filled with fantasies of persons or parts of persons they may have eaten.”<sup>41</sup> As Bellow’s Herzog reminds us, in Freudian anthropology the “primal crime” was followed by the sons’ “eating [their father’s] body” (p. 303)—but the motive for the murder was the wish to return to the infant’s feast on the *mother’s* body; so the adult who compulsively repeats his first despair—that oral-dependent response to weaning (following the first long period of mania)—would like to, but cannot, murder his father and go back to eating his mother. That Bellow had in mind this “eating” of the mother, we see when four-year-old Roger Koffritz, missing his mother, fills his mouth with a chocolate bar: “He desired his Mama . . . feverish. . . beating all over with pulses—nothing but a craving defenseless greedy heart” (pp. 422-23). That is, Humboldt, unlike Henderson the Rain King, could not move his Mummah out of the way; and when his wife disappears, Humboldt projects his own unconscious incest onto her father (p. 144). Nothing but Bellow’s ridicule of manic depression as an oral fixation can explain the rest of the book’s pattern of ludicrous, dream-like displacements of the Oedipus legend and complex: Naomi Lutz’s son blasphemously demanding the word for “mother-fucker” in Swahili (pp. 448-49) and howling for milk in African villages (“It was easier to kick the heroin habit than the milk”), the villages nesting among “giant anthills like nipples all over the landscape” (p. 447); Ulick—who smells “Dirty work at the crossroads” (p. 384, echoing p. 178)—“suck[ing]” on “breast-sized persimmons” (p. 397) and insatiably stuffing his mouth with chicken breasts (p. 398), the chocolate sauce on those breasts tying him to little Roger Koffritz, whose mother goes to see *Deep Throat*; and Charlie himself, who likes to sleep with his hands

on Renata's breasts (p. 297) and, his head lying on the "bib and bosom" of his 747 seat (pp. 312, 404), "curl[s] his forefinger over the top of the glass," like an infant feeding.

Instead of Humboldt's "horror, ideas of Fate" (p. 54), we see how Charlie Citrine "saw it": Humboldt had "rushed into the territory of excess to stake himself a claim" (p. 155); "he was having a grand time being mad in New York" "enacting 'The Agony of the American Artist'" "to "make [himself] interesting" (pp. 53, 156, 312)—now "merely the figure of a poet," "an actor" staging a "melodrama" (pp. 156, 281, 152) that wasn't even his own: "he couldn't find the next thing, the necessary thing for poets to do. Instead he did a former thing. He got himself a pistol, like Verlaine, and chased Magnasco" (p. 155); Humboldt's "Agony" was "faked suffering" (p. 174)—his picket sign, "carried . . . as though it were a cross," was written in mercurochrome, not blood (p. 15). And this view of Humboldt determines the book's structure, for the overriding picture of the fraudulence of contemporary life is what unifies the book's two plots and separate decades. For example, the lure of synthetic image-making—which prompts Charlie Citrine to compare Colonel McCormick, owner of the *Chicago Tribune*, to Circe (p. 86)—dictates Cantabile's maneuver to break into a Chicago gossip column, paralleling Humboldt's jealousy of Charlie's appearance in Leonard Lyons (p. 163); the swings of Humboldt's manic depression as an "act" that makes demands on his friends are mimicked when Cantabile forces Charlie to attend him in a toilet stall (the dumps) and later manically drags him along the top girders of a skyscraper under construction—an "act" hard "to follow" (p. 177);<sup>42</sup> etc. And this multiply mirrored vision of Humboldt's madness as inauthentic, *Humboldt's Gift*, a defense of the imagination, implicitly offers as one of those "true impressions"<sup>43</sup> that justify the claim of art to see "what is" more clearly and deeply than "the modern intelligence" can.<sup>44</sup> "Reality didn't exist 'out there,'" thinks Corde in *The Dean's December*. "It began to be real only when the soul found its underlying truth. In generalities there was no coherence—none" (p. 266). A good novel, accordingly, "deal[s] with real or approximately real, human beings, not the zombies of a pamphleteer" ("A World," p. 5)—art, says Bellow, forced Tolstoy "to be fair to Karenin":<sup>45</sup> "Truth, said Tolstoi at the conclusion of *Sebastopol*, was the hero of his novel."<sup>46</sup>

But if Bellow's vision of Humboldt is the truth, why the tendentious distortions and omissions? Why do we not see Humboldt as a graduate student unable to sleep, moving from one rooming house to another, looking "ghastly, his face almost yellow-green with fatigue" (*The Truants*, p. 216)—hardly an antic attempt to "make himself interest-

ing"? Nor are we given Schwartz's hallucination that the Rockefellers were beaming voices and mind-destroying rays at him from the Empire State Building<sup>47</sup>—a piece of pathology that would have blunted the comic axe Bellow was grinding. Mind-technology, representing the inescapable outer powers of nature, is missing from *Humboldt's Gift* because the watering-down of Delmore Schwartz's fate—and the consequent inorganic, Lysenko-ish double plot—could not have survived the challenge of the naturalistic tragedy in Schwartz's actual "leprosy"; Humboldt then could not have been resurrected from the Waste Land's "mental coffin," and the "Testament" forgiving the narrator (and author)<sup>48</sup> would have been exposed as a wish-fulfilling fantasy. The disingenuousness of this "Testament"—the authorial self-endorsement substituted for the self-subversion of "The Grand Inquisitor"—confirms our sense that we have been left with "axe-grinding," with deception in both the argument and the art. And, as is always the case with such evasion, Bellow's willful structure collapses—under the weight of the ghost that haunts the book, for so much of Humboldt is Schwartz that Bellow loses control of the character: the realities of Schwartz's life manifest in the caricature (the photographed features under the cartoon moustache) break loose from Bellow's Procrustean zeal and repossess what has been lopped off. Bellow's warning about the "coast of Bohemia"<sup>49</sup> does not protect the will that usurps the role of imagination: the maligned and dismissed generalizing intelligence is justified in asking how Bellow's "true impression" of Schwartz as the antic Humboldt can account for the common ground of Schwartz's fate and the fates of two other twentieth-century American literary men, Ring Lardner and Elliot Cohen, founder of *Commentary*. Was prim Lardner (in whose crippling insomnia and alcoholism Schwartz saw his own), was Lardner—while crusading against *double-entendre* in popular songs that children could hear on the family radio, and while telling a son, "No one, ever, wrote anything so well after even one drink as he would have done without it"<sup>50</sup>—also copying Verlaine, enacting "The Agony of the American Artist"? When Elliot Cohen, after ten years' success at *Commentary*, fell into a deep depression which was unrelieved by treatment at the Payne-Whitney clinic (where, like Schwartz, Cohen suffered "periods of delusion") and finally killed himself in 1959—was he too taking literally the middle-class notion of the self-destructive poet (p. 251)?<sup>51</sup> Furthermore—since Bellow's caricature of Humboldt is meant to confirm our responsibility for our fate—do we find Lionel Trilling, who considered Cohen a genius as an editor and teacher ("the only great teacher I have ever had"), surrendering belief in imagination and spirit when he finds Cohen's fate teaching us our limitations:

Perhaps he was licensed to give so much feeling to what in life is gratuitous—to what is finely free—because he had so much natural awareness of what in life binds us, whether for good or for bad.

. . . No one who knew Elliot as a friend through his mature life could be unaware that the pain of existence was darker for him than it is for most of us. I know of no response we can make to his pain other than that of our silent humility before it, and before the mystery of this great pain being bound up with so much delight in human life and with so much power . . . .<sup>52</sup>

Very different is the tone Bellow's art dictates for Charlie Citrine's farewell: "Poor Humboldt! What a mistake! Well, perhaps he could have another go at it. When? Oh, in a few hundred years his spirit might return" (p. 443). Which version—Trilling's or Bellow's—gives more resonant support to Moses Herzog's claim that "human life is far subtler than any of its models" (p. 271)? Bellow can make Charlie apologize—"I thought about Humboldt with more seriousness and sorrow than may be apparent in this account" (p. 10)—and have him reflect once, "I doubt that Humboldt had had a single good day in all his life" (p. 240); but such afterthoughts, or interpolations, do not change the book's structure or complete its dialectic.

In defense of his omission of Humboldt's "case," Bellow can be imagined as implicitly claiming that the banalities of determinist mythology could safely be left to any reader under its spell; but the claim would be untenable—a thousand Chernyshevskys could never have written "The Grand Inquisitor." And the fact is that Bellow, instead of making the imagined claim, has built into *Humboldt's Gift* an apology for his evasion of the determining forces in Delmore Schwartz's life: Charlie Citrine is blamed for the parallel evasion. After all, the picture of Humboldt is "how I saw it." And Charlie speaks of himself as having felt—one night in 1953—"entitled to my eight hours of oblivion and determined to have them" (p. 145); twenty years later at fifty-five, he still speaks of his nightly period of sleep as "eight intervening clock hours" (p. 441). That is, Charlie is a normal sleeper, complacently unable to imagine Humboldt's insomnia. The point is reinforced when Charlie, practicing one of the exercises in an anthroposophic training manual, finds himself unable to "enter into" his daughter Mary's desire for a ten-speed bike: "To do this one had to remove all personal opinions, all interfering judgments. . . . But I couldn't do this. . . . If I couldn't know this kid's desire could I know any human being?" (p. 426). Such egocentric blinders shelter Charlie even when a missing piece of the picture falls within his line of vision: from Demmie's exophthalmic eyes, for example, he surmises that "it must have been thyroxine they put her on" (p. 152). Knowing such

things, why does he bow out of all discussion of Humboldt's drugs (p. 28)? If Charlie knows "the symptoms of an overdose of caffeine" (p. 66), couldn't he have informed himself—and us—about amphetamine psychosis? Similarly, Charlie mentions Humboldt's "nutty old mother" (p. 51; also, pp. 5, 10), he knows the "hereditary attainder rule" in horseracing (p. 229), he can hear in his ex-wife's voice the voice of her grandfather (p. 41) and see his old girl friend Naomi Lutz in the "gums and teeth" of her daughter Maggie (p. 290), and we learn Ulick's opinion that Charlie's memory was inherited from their father's father (p. 244); but never do we hear of the genetics and biochemistry of manic depression, although Charlie must have heard of this from Humboldt. Twice Renata reminds Charlie that Humboldt "died nuts" (pp. 251, 310)—but Charlie grandly dismisses "the textbooks. I know what clinical psychologists say about manic depressives. But they didn't know Humboldt. . . . What does clinical psychology know about art and truth?" (p. 310). For all such self-imposed blinders and grandiosity in the narrator, distorting the characterization of Humboldt, how is the author to blame?

The answer is that Charlie's view of Humboldt's madness as an "act" is Mr. Sammler's view of the "theater" of the 60s—everyone imitatively dramatizing his "interest" instead of fulfilling "the terms of his contract" with God (pp. 146-48, 313): Bellow has been reported as saying that "character [is] the single most important element in determining a writer's worth,"<sup>53</sup> and he has endorsed Charlie Citrine's interpretation of Humboldt's failure—"Humboldt is in some way following the pattern of the doomed poet . . . that banal pattern . . . . It was not self-definition."<sup>54</sup> Further—despite the teasing of Charlie's quest for spirit, as in the suggestion of "paranoia in reverse"<sup>55</sup>—Bellow shares Charlie's grandiosity: in 1972, while writing *Humboldt's Gift*, Bellow attacked André Malraux for seeming to say "that what a clinical psychologist learns about the human heart is far deeper and more curious than anything the greatest novelists can reveal";<sup>56</sup> Bellow reverses Malraux—"The accounts of human existence given by the modern intelligence are very shallow by comparison with those the imagination is capable of giving" ("A World," p. 9). As for biological psychiatry, in *The Adventures of Augie March* Bellow invented a mad "psycho-biophysicist," Basteshaw, a "Renaissance cardinal" type (pp. 503-04)—like Dostoevsky's Inquisitor—who in the twentieth century expects to make his flock happy not by an iron theocracy but by a synthesis of protoplasm that will unlock the secret of depression. Allegorically, Basteshaw is fatally off course (p. 512)—and it is not Charlie Citrine who is stage-managing the allegory. Moreover, isn't the shadow of Delmore Schwartz visible behind Basteshaw? When



Augie tells the madman, "No one will be a poet or saint because you fool with him" (p. 509), one can easily imagine that Bellow said something like this to Schwartz at Princeton in 1952 ("Dexedrine won't bring back your poetry"). And the past thirty years haven't changed Bellow's mind: in 1972 he drew our attention to Theodore Roszak's ridicule of the Brave New World that would reduce " 'the tragedies of our existence' " to " 'chemical imbalance within our neural circuitry' " ("Machines and Storybooks," p. 49); and in *The Dean's December*, although the new Basteshaw, Professor Beech, is made an eminent geophysicist, there can be no mistaking the caricature (counterpointing, belatedly, the anthroposophist Dr. Scheldt in *Humboldt's Gift*) when Beech attributes the fall of the Roman Empire to "the use of lead to prevent the souring of wine. Lead was the true source of the madness of the Caesars" (p. 225)—"human wickedness," mocks Dean Corde, "is absolutely a public health problem, and nothing but. No tragic density, no thickening of the substance of the soul, only chemistry and physiology. . . . Pb is the Stalin of the elements, the boss" (p. 227), i.e., as much as the various forms of Soviet brutality, science under democracy is part of the Grand Inquisitor's "worldwide process of consolidation" reducing man to an object (p. 105).

Finally, we cannot hold Charlie Citrine responsible for two inconsistent omissions dictated by Bellow's evasion of mind-technology. Since Humboldt is the most complex character in the book (Charlie is more a mouthpiece than a character) and the narrator wants to explain the poet's fall, isn't our acquaintance with Humboldt's early life strangely meager? Philip Rahv found, after twenty-five years, that he remembered vividly Delmore Schwartz's talk "about his parents, his brother, and his early experiences."<sup>57</sup> And isn't Charlie's omission of such talks surprisingly uncharacteristic of a professional biographer? True, Charlie is an ex-biographer: why bring up anybody's early life when Whitman came out of nowhere? But Charlie continues to have a fondness for "ontogeny and phylogeny" (pp. 65, 72). It is the author himself who wishes to avoid the question of why Schwartz had insomnia in childhood and youth, long before "vertigo from success." Also inconsistent is the omission of any attempt to display "the Mozart of conversation" (p. 13): not once does Charlie give us—directly reported, unparodied—a sustained example of Humboldt's conversation "in the days of his youth" when the poet was "covered in rainbows" (p. 341); yet Charlie has a great memory (pp. 117, 134), which he, unlike Ulick, attributes to love (pp. 330, 348), and he claims to have loved Humboldt (pp. 2, 10, 163, 311, etc.). Love would have given us Humboldt's arias; but Bellow had to exclude them, for any such attempt to give Humboldt stature would have made the author's caricature and the omis-

sion of Humboldt's own account of his fate so much the less acceptable.

As a scapegoat, then, the narrator is an ineffective mechanical device, exposing the author's attempt at a trick-escape from the dialectic his Dostoevskyan model imposed. And that Bellow felt the need of providing himself with such an escape-mechanism establishes his awareness of the deficiency in the characterization of Humboldt—a deficiency that may be attributed to the buoyancy of Bellow's temperament: there can be no "Grand Inquisitor" without the freighted ambivalence that could let D. H. Lawrence think the Inquisitor speaks for Dostoevsky.

## NOTES

1. Page references to Bellow's books are to the first U.S. editions, all published in New York: the first two, by Vanguard—*Dangling Man* (1944) and *The Victim* (1947); the latest, *The Dean's December*, by Harper & Row (1982); the others, by Viking—*The Adventures of Augie March* (1953), *Seize the Day* (1956), *Henderson the Rain King* (1959), *Herzog* (1964), and *Mr. Sammler's Planet* (1970).
2. That there need be nothing supernatural in this transcendentalism can be seen in the thoroughgoing naturalism of the case for Lamarck in Arthur Koestler's *Janus: A Summing Up* (New York: Vintage, 1979), Part Three, and in the secularism of Morris Berman's *The Reenchantment of the World* (Ithaca, N.Y., and London: Cornell Univ. Press, 1981).
3. Rosette C. Lamont, in "Bellow Observed: A Serial Portrait," *Mosaic*, 8 (Fall 1974), remarks that Bellow's profile "is that of a witty, half-domesticated fox" (p. 248).
4. "Where Do We Go From Here: The Future of Fiction (1961), in A. L. Bader, ed., *To the Young Writers, Hopwood Lectures, Second Series*, (Ann Arbor: Univ. of Michigan Press, 1965), p. 145.
5. See, for example, H. Porter Abbott, "Saul Bellow and the 'Lost Cause' of Character," *Novel*, 13 (Spring 1980), 271-72.
6. At the time Bellow was finishing *Herzog*, he quoted Seymour Glass from Salinger's "Raise High the Roof Beam, Carpenters": "Oh, God, if I'm anything by a clinical name, I'm a kind of paranoiac in reverse. I suspect people of plotting to make me happy" ("Literature," in Robert Hutchins and Mortimer Adler, eds., *The Great Ideas Today 1963* [Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1963], p. 150). For the famous passage in Blake that Bellow refers to in the *Playboy* draft of the opening of *Humboldt's Gift*—"Did you, beholding the sun, see a pale blot in the sky, or did you see a heavenly host and hear it singing "Holy, holy, holy?" (Jan. 1974, p. 250)—the book substitutes a parody, a chorus of skeletons: "The course of nature itself was behind [Flonzaley, the rich undertaker Renata runs off with]. . . . All [the] dead, like the glorious court of Jerusalem, chanting, 'Live forever, Solomon Flonzaley!' " (p. 417).
7. The ur-Humboldt was named George Driver in passages omitted from *Herzog* and Jonas Amilcar and Hamilcar in the earliest version of *Humboldt's Gift* (Marianne Nault, "Humboldt the First," *American Notes and Queries*, 15 [Feb. 1977], 88-89, and *Saul Bellow: His Works and His Critics* [New York: Garland, 1977], Nos. 359, 360, 428, 662, 671-81, 804).
8. The self-creating spiritual power that unifies Flaubert's *Three Tales* is the unspoken reason Charlie refers to all three—the others are on pp. 76, 214.
9. See Aaron T. Beck et al., *Cognitive Therapy of Depression* (New York: The Guilford Press, 1979), and David D. Burns, *Feeling Good: The New Mood Therapy* (New York: New American Library, 1981).
10. See James Atlas, *Delmore Schwartz: The Life of an American Poet* (New York: Farrar Straus Girous, 1977), pp. 62-63 (the scar), 227, 270 (cats), 314 (the rejected invitation to teach at Salzburg in 1953), 330 (visit to Tivoli). Bellow's last glimpse of Schwartz was

- reported by Richard Stern, in "Bellow's Gift," *New York Times Magazine*, 21 Nov. 1976, p. 46. Playing baseball in the hall with his uncle is in Schwartz's manuscript "The Story of a Heart" (Beinecke Library, Yale University), in the entries for 1923-24.
11. Atlas, p. 314, and Eileen Simpson, *Poets in Their Youth* (New York: Random House, 1982), p. 219.
  12. See Gordon Ross Smith, "Iago the Paranoic," *American Imago*, 16 (Summer 1959), 155-67. Robert Towers notes reprovingly that Atlas "fails to make the familiar psychoanalytic connection between paranoia and the repression of homosexual impulse in certain personality types" ("The Delmore File," *New York Review of Books*, 23 March 1978, p. 16).
  13. Interview by Robert Dana, *American Poetry Review*, Nov./Dec. 1981, p. 26.
  14. In his memoir "Delmore" (*Commentary*, Sept. 1974), Barrett wrote: "He had not struck her [this is about 1946], only raved madly; Delmore never went in for physical, only emotional violence" (p. 49). Now, in *The Truants: Adventures Among the Intellectuals* (Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1982), Barrett adds: "Saul Bellow, in his novel about Delmore, represents the hero as beating his wife [in 1953]. Since Bellow is generally scrupulous about the important facts, I have no doubt he is accurate here, and that in his later and crazier state Delmore lapsed into this kind of violence too" (p. 228; see also p. 231). Mrs. Simpson, who witnessed the incident at the Princeton party, Christmas 1952, reports only the threat of violence (p. 219); her book appeared shortly after Barrett's.
  15. "Tony Tanner writes about the American novelist, Saul Bellow," *The Listener*, 23 Jan. 1969, p. 113.
  16. Jack Ludwig, reviewing Atlas, *Partisan Review*, 46 (1979), 640.
  17. And see Atlas, p. 304; Solomon H. Snyder, *Madness and the Brain* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1974), ch. 10.
  18. *Successful Love and Other Stories* (New York: Corinth Books, 1961), p. 237; *Last and Lost Poems*, ed. Robert Phillips (New York: Vanguard, 1978), p. 86.
  19. "The Child Is the Meaning of This Life," in *The World Is a Wedding* (1948), p. 184.
  20. Another witness to this need is John Berryman, in "At Chinese Checkers" (1939), which shows only depression, not manic insomnia: Schwartz "sprawls upon his bed/Useless, the eloquent mouth relaxed and dumb,/ Trouble and mist in the apathetic head" (*The Dispossessed* [New York: William Sloane, 1948], p. 40).
  21. The book's unchronological narrative-by-association opening camouflages Charlie's strange omission of any record of his friendship with Humboldt between May 1938 and September 1952. The *Playboy* draft tells us that "after the War" Humboldt would refer to Churchill's manic depression (p. 88); in the novel this dating is omitted (pp. 6-7), since it would clash with the haze over Charlie's chronology. Bellow had to work to make a scene out of Charlie's meeting with the young Humboldt in May 1938: the scene (not the fact) is not in *Playboy*. In addition, in 1938 Charlie visits Humboldt on Bedford Street (pp. 2, 11, 22), but from Atlas we learn that Schwartz did not live there before 1945; and Atlas offers no evidence that the two writers met before that year, when Schwartz was thirty-one. In the manuscripts of *Herzog*, again it is the Schwartz of 1952-53 that we find (see n. 7). The great difference Barrett noted in Schwartz after the War is confirmed by Harry Levin, who knew Schwartz well in 1940-41, but writes about Humboldt: "Except for the physical likeness and the sudden obituary, and possibly some twists of conversation, I cannot say I really knew that wayward hero" (*Memories of the Moderns* [New York: New Directions, 1980], p. 157).
  22. For Atlas's wariness, see my review, "The Lesson of the Sphinx," *Midstream*, 26 (June/July 1980), 51-54. Less under Bellow's spell now, Atlas recently referred to Schwartz straightforwardly as a "manic depressive"—in his review of Mrs. Simpson's book, *New York Times Book Review*, 2 May 1982, p. 29. Now it is William Barrett, again, in whom Bellow has inspired caution: in "The Truants' *Partisan Review* in the 40's" (*Commentary*, June 1974), Barrett testifies to Schwartz's "regular manic-depressive cycle" in the late 1940s (p. 48); in his book *The Truants* he has dropped this line (p. 28) and has toned down a similar reference, where he now speaks of Schwartz's "trying to figure out his own case" (p. 38; compare "The Truants," p. 49).
  23. William W. Meissner, *The Paranoid Process* (New York and London: Aronson, 1978), pp. 24-27, 125-29, 531-33; William F. Fry, Jr., "Paranoid Episodes in Manic Depressive Psychoses," *American Journal of Psychiatry*, 135 (Aug. 1978), 974-6.
  24. First published in *Partisan Review*, 4 (May 1938), "The Statues" was reprinted in *The World Is a Wedding. Dr. Gergen's Belief* is in *In Dreams Begin Responsibilities* (New Directions, 1938).
  25. *Summer Knowledge* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1959), p. 200.
  26. Seymour S. Kety, "It's Not All in Your Head," *Saturday Review*, 12 Feb. 1976, p. 32. Formerly director of research at the National Institute of Mental Health, Kety is currently a

- professor of psychiatry at Harvard and editor-in-chief of the *Journal of Psychiatric Research*. For continuing controversy over the location of the presumed gene or genes whose action creates a susceptibility to some types of manic depression, see the letters by Elliot S. Gershon and J. Mendlewicz in *Archives of General Psychiatry*, 37 (Oct. 1980), 1200, and 38 (June 1981), 719-20. Kathleen D. Bucher *et al.*, in "The Transmission of Manic Depressive Illness," *Journal of Psychiatric Research*, 16:1 (1981), 53-78, argue that the data in three separate family studies (covering 156 cases of manic depression) support the purely environmental hypothesis just as poorly as they do the single-gene Mendelian hypothesis—but conclude: "It may well be that there is some kind of genetic transmission in these families, but it is too complex to be explained by the models examined here" (p. 77). Similarly, Kety now writes that the brain's "behavioral output remains largely inexplicable in molecular terms. One need not invoke the transcendentalism of free will to account for the hiatus; sheer complexity offers a sufficient explanation" ("Neuroscience, Psychiatry and Society," *Michigan Quarterly Review*, 20 [Fall 1981], 361). That the genetic issue has not been resolved is no reason, of course, for Bellow to ignore his opposition: the Grand Inquisitor's analysis of the central contradiction in human nature is not a biological discovery universally accepted. The fact remains that "Studies of monozygotic twins reared apart and of biologic and adoptive relatives of affected adoptees have demonstrated the importance of genetic factors in affective illness [depression as well as manic depression] by showing a higher incidence of the trait in biologic relatives irrespective of home environment" (Miron Baron *et al.*, "Multiple-Threshold Transmission of Affective Disorders," *Archives of General Psychiatry*, 38 [Jan. 1981], 79). For at least fifty years, such studies have persuaded psychiatrists that "hereditary predisposition is the most important predisposing aetiological factor" in manic depression (*Henderson and Gillespie's Textbook of Psychiatry*, rev. Ivor R. C. Batchelor, 10th ed. [London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1969], p. 211).
27. See Solomon H. Snyder, "Drugs and the Brain and Society," in *The Tanner Lectures on Human Values*, vol. 3 (Salt Lake City and Cambridge: Univ. of Utah Press and Cambridge Univ. Press, 1982), pp. 240-51, and Seymour S. Kety, "Neurochemical and Genetic Bases of Psychopathology," *Behavior Genetics*, 12 (1982), 93-100.
  28. First prescribed for manic depression (in modern times) in 1949, in Australia, lithium carbonate was illegal in the U. S. from 1949 to 1970 because ignorance of its side effects had killed some patients being treated for other illnesses.
  29. *From Sad to Glad: Kline on Depression* (New York: Putnam's, 1974), p. 13.
  30. See the last chapter of *Movie Stars, Real People, and Me* (New York: Delacorte, 1978) and *Josh: My Up and Down, In and Out Life* (1976), which describes Logan's manic-depressive breakdowns and hospitalizations. For a manic episode of Robert Lowell's, and his later treatment with lithium, see Mrs. Simpson, pp. 189-94. Percy Knauth, a *Time-Life* journalist, writes in his *A Season in Hell* (New York: Harper & Row, 1975) that antidepressants and lithium rescued him from an unaccountable, otherwise incurable, suicidal depression.
  31. Ronald R. Fieve, "New Developments in Manic-Depressive Illness," in Silvano Arieti and Gerard Chrzanowski, eds., *New Dimensions in Psychiatry: A World View* (New York and London: Wiley, 1975), p. 6. Moreover, Fieve writes in *Moodswing: The Third Revolution in Psychiatry* (New York: Morrow, 1975), "The evidence is that overall creative output becomes more consistent with lithium and it does not interfere with the quality of work" (p. 69); a pseudonymous Hollywood writer reports of his treatment, "I feel like a child growing up all over again. In a way which I sought through [counterculture] drugs but could not achieve, the world is fresh and new each morning" (Jay Spencer, "Living on Lithium," *Harper's* June 1975, "Wraparound," p. 9); and see also Mogens Schou, "Artistic Productivity and Lithium Prophylaxis in Manic-Depressive Illness," *British Journal of Psychiatry*, 135 (Aug. 1979), 97-103.
  32. "Biological link to mental illness in question," *Chemical and Engineering News*, 5 Jan. 1976, pp. 16-18. Ironically, in the new volume of *Tanner Lectures*—as though the committee choosing the speakers were making up for the incomplete dialectic of *Humboldt's Gift*—the lecture following Bellow's is Solomon H. Snyder's on neurotransmitters and mental illness.
  33. Myer Mendelson, *Psychoanalytic Concepts of Depression*, 2nd ed. (Flushing, N.Y.: Spectrum, 1974), pp. 317, 311. Freud at the end of his life conceded, in advance, biochemical discoveries that would facilitate the therapeutic work of analysis: asking why analysis would succeed with one patient and fail with another, the latter seeming to lack freedom to change, Freud concluded, "Here once more God is on the side of the big battalions," i.e., biology (*An Outline of Psychoanalysis* [New York: Norton, 1949], pp. 78-79).
  34. Schwartz writes, "The correctness of [post-Freudian revisionism] cannot be determined by argument . . . but only by clinical practice. This suggests that many of us may have been born

- too soon to know what the whole truth is" ("The Sick City and the Family Romance," *Nation*, 12 Jan. p. 48). In "clinical practice," Schwartz would have included drugs: by 1952 he had made his analyst his pharmacist (Mrs. Simpson, p. 218).
35. Even twenty "years after," Schwartz, reviewing Donald Elder's biography of Ring Lardner, could write that the question "why so successful and gifted a human being suffered so much and so helplessly [from insomnia and alcoholism] was "perhaps unanswerable" (*Selected Essays*, ed. Donald A. Dike and David H. Zucker [Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1970], p. 228). That Schwartz was thinking of himself in this review is indicated by his failure to mention Lardner's fatal TB.
  36. A. N. Whitehead, under whom Schwartz did graduate work at Harvard in 1935-36, writes in *Science and the Modern World* (New York: Macmillan, 1931): "Fate in Greek Tragedy becomes the order of nature in modern thought"; "The laws of physics are the decrees of fate" (pp. 15, 16).
  37. In a journal entry for 1958 Schwartz noted: "I said . . . I had gotten married the second time the way that, when a murder is committed, crackpots turn up at the police station to confess the crime" (Lila Lee Valenti, ed., "A Poet's Notebooks," *New York Quarterly*, Spring 1972, p. 117; cited in Atlas, p. 278). Though no crime was in evidence, the ultimate penalty, death by stabbing, seemed to Schwartz as appropriate for him as for Joseph K. (*Last and Lost Poems*, p. 6).
  38. Refusal to accept the summons can be seen in Evelyn Waugh. He too combined alcohol with barbiturates (and other medications) until the mixture produced a prolonged period of paranoid auditory hallucinations; but, despite the roots of his chronic insomnia, the firmness of his identity, or of his defenses, permitted Waugh, like a very ancient Greek, to continue to dissociate himself (after recovery) from the unconscious conflicts he had projected: in his novel about the experience, *The Ordeal of Gilbert Pinfold*, the voices of Waugh's private furies seem a parody of his public detractors (see p. 155, Penguin edition).
  39. For a persuasive uncovering of the latent oedipal content of the dream in "In Dreams Begin Responsibilities," see Robert J. Klass, "An Ancient and Famous Capital: Delmore Schwartz's Dream," *Psychoanalytic Review*, 65 (1978), 475-90.
  40. That Schwartz recognized the parody is intimated by Humboldt's claim that Charlie had stolen from him the personality of the hero in Charlie's Broadway hit, *Von Trenck* (pp. 3-4, 148, 340), which Bellow locates in the Belasco, where *The Last Analysis* was performed.
  41. Otto Fenichel, *The Psychoanalytic Theory of Neurosis* (New York: Norton, 1945), pp. 403, 390. See also Karl Abraham, "A Short Study of the Development of the Libido: Viewed in the Light of Mental Disorders" in *Selected Papers of Karl Abraham* (London: Hogarth Press, 1968), pp. 418-501.
  42. The catwalk scene, which ends with Cantabile sailing Charlie's \$50 bills into the twilight "like finches, like swallows" (p. 102), is thereby doubly bound to Humboldt, whose manic visit to the 60th floor sanctuary of Wilmoore Longstaff ends with their discussing "Dante's bird imagery" (pp. 136-39).
  43. "The Nobel Lecture," *American Scholar*, 46 (Summer 1977), 324.
  44. "A World Too Much With Us," *Critical Inquiry*, 2 (Sept. 1975), 5, 9.
  45. Stern, "Bellow's Gift" (see n. 10), p. 52.
  46. Bellow's Foreword to Dostoevsky's *Winter Notes on Summer Impressions* (New York, 1955; rpt. McGraw-Hill, n.d.), p. 27.
  47. Barrett, *The Truants*, p. 233, and Dwight Macdonald, "Delmore Schwartz, 1913-1966," in Schwartz, *Selected Essays*, p. xviii.
  48. *Humboldt's Gift*, writes Atlas, "can be read in part as a justification of [Bellow's] role" in the Bellevue episode; "there is a certain bitterness in Bellow's portrait of Von Humboldt Fleisher" (pp. 332, 334). In the *Playboy* draft—where Bellow is closer to his raw material—Charlie Citrine, when he unexpectedly glimpses Humboldt after an estrangement of twelve years, is still "bitter, very bitter" (p. 88), though the man is obviously dying (the book omits the quoted words), and Charlie says of Humboldt's cronies picketing *Von Trenck*, "I knew some of those miserable bastards" (p. 88), which the book tones down to "malicious pals cheered" (p. 163). Ostensibly, the bitterness was due to Schwartz's effective slanders: even after twenty years, Jack Ludwig faults Atlas for not finding out whether Schwartz was right in suspecting that Bellow had signed the papers admitting him to Bellevue for observation (*PR*, 46 [1979], 639-40). Ludwig says that then, in 1957 (not 1953—the novel collapses four years for dramatic convenience), Bellow was Schwartz's "closest friend" (p. 638), but he seems not to have visited Schwartz in Bellevue, offering only absentee benevolence, having evidently withdrawn from his old friend, partly in disapproval, partly out of fear—the *Caldofreddo* scenario in *Humboldt's Gift* suggest that the fellow-writer overloaded with his own baggage who had rushed in to rescue the poet who had "hurled" [himself] down into the

object world" would only have sunk himself ridiculously in the attempt. A wry awareness of the self-exculpation may explain why Doris Scheldt has Delmore Schwartz's initials: when Charlie Citrine, flushing and sweating in December as memories of Humboldt arouse shame and guilt (pp. 111-12), wipes his face with a pillow embroidered by Doris Scheldt, is that comforting gift from D— Sch— a parody of Humboldt's "Testament" forgiving Charlie?

49. "We are a nation devoted to facts, and we don't like to waste time with books that give the wrong dope about shipwrecks on the coast of Bohemia. . . . [But i]magination may do with experience or with nonexperience precisely what it likes" ("Distractions of a Fiction Writer," *New World Writing 12* [New York: New American Library, 1957], p. 235).
50. Donald Elder, *Ring Lardner* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1956), pp. 355-59; Ring Lardner, Jr., *The Lardners* (New York: Harper & Row, 1976), p. 165.
51. Norman Podhoretz, *Making It* (New York: Random House, 1967), pp. 197-98, 210.
52. "On the Death of a Friend," *Commentary*, Feb. 1960, pp. 93-94.
53. William Kennedy, "If Saul Bellow Doesn't Have a True Word to Say, He Keeps His Mouth Shut," *Esquire*, Feb. 1982, p. 49.
54. "Off the Couch by Christmas," an interview, *The Listener*, 20 Nov. 1975, p. 675; and see the interview in *Salmagundi*, #30 (Summer 1975), p. 20.
55. The teasing begins in Charlie's oxymoronic name: the "Ch" stands for hogbutcher Chicago, which scoffs at "sensitive plants" (p. 229), while the Anglicized "Tsitrine" (p. 65), from the Yiddish *tsitter*, "tremble," and his mother's "trembly Russian songs" (p. 73) identify him as the "Hallelujah and Glory type" subject to "enthusiastic dizziness" (p. 65) and "quaking" (p. 412).
56. "Machines and Storybooks: Literature in the Age of Technology" (1972), *Harper's*, Aug. 1974, p. 50.
57. "Delmore Schwartz: The Paradox of Precocity," *New York Review of Books*, 20 May 1971, p. 20.