

## The Self And Beyond: A Reading of *The Fixer*, *The Centaur*, And *Henderson* *The Rain King*

Susana Bornéo Funck (UFSC)\_\_\_\_\_

Toward the end of the three novels I'm going to discuss, the protagonists make the following statements. Eugene Henderson, in Bellow's *Henderson the Rain King*, says: "Whatever gains I ever made were always due to love and nothing else." In Updike's *The Centaur*, George Caldwell realizes that "Only goodness lives. But it does live." And Yakov Bok in Malamud's *The Fixer* recognizes that "There's no such a thing as an unpolitical man."

Isolated though they may be from the contexts in which they appear, these statements summarize appropriately enough the lessons learned by the three protagonists after periods of intense doubts and suffering.

If, as I intend to show, Bok, Henderson, and Caldwell represent the plight of modern man in his attempt to come to terms with himself and to establish meaningful ties with the universe, and if, as I firmly believe, their statements on love, goodness, and responsible involvement with others convey the vision of the novelists who have told their stories, then we must acknowledge in Malamud, Updike and Bellow a radical departure from the post-war novel of despair and escape. Even at the risk of being called Pollyanna, as I have by a former professor of mine.

For me, these novelists take an important step beyond the

negative and pessimistic view of human nature of other mid-century novels. They illustrate, at least in the novels discussed here, a movement toward unity and fulfillment rather than toward disintegration and frustration. In so doing they reinforce the antirationalistic trend which colors much of the thinking of the late 1950's in other realms of experience as well.

Three studies are especially relevant to an understanding of my position in this paper: *Irrational Man* (1958), William Barrett's brilliant analysis of existentialism; *Life Against Death* (1959), Norman O. Brown's highly speculative psychoanalytical interpretation of history; and *I and Thou* (1958), Martin Buber's popular and quasi-poetic bible of neo-hasidism.

Existentialism, psychoanalysis, and Buber's orthodox mysticism, by emphasizing the passionate and instinctive in human nature, seek to reintegrate the conflicting tendencies which have rendered modern man alienated and fragmented. Modern civilization, writes Barrett, with its increasing emphasis on abstraction, has brought about "a divorce of mind from life."<sup>1</sup> Existentialism, in reaction, "attempts to grasp the image of the whole man, even where this involves bringing to consciousness all that is dark and questionable in his existence."<sup>2</sup> Likewise, in interpreting and applying the ideas of Freud to history, Norman O. Brown advocates a positive consciousness based on the resurrection of the body or the elimination of repression. Man must move, he states, from an Apollonian negation of matter, from the spiritual world of the dream, from life "kept at a distance and seen through a veil," to the fullness of a Dionysian or instinctual reality, or as he puts it, to "life complete and immediate."<sup>3</sup> This acceptance of the body and consequent elimination of the mind-body dualism underlies much of Buber's religious theories as well. Like Zen-Buddhism, Hasidism stresses a "positive relationship with the concrete." "The learning and developing man," Buber writes, "is directed to things, to sensible being, to activity in the world."<sup>4</sup>

In the American literary scene, this movement toward unity and wholeness of being has been recognized in different ways. Tony Tanner sees it as a working out of the desirable relationship between self and society, a mediation between fixidity on the one hand and fluidity on the other.<sup>5</sup> For Marcus Klein, the

contemporary strategy for the novel is accommodation, which he defines as a "simultaneous engagement and disengagement."<sup>6</sup> Robert Kegan emphasizes the concept of "affirmation,"<sup>7</sup> while for Richard Rupp the move is toward celebration.<sup>8</sup> Whichever the collocation, the stress is on an affirmative, non-escapist assent to reality. Our object in this paper is to examine how such an attitude is conveyed in **The Fixer**, **The Centaur**, and **Henderson the Rain King**.

Published in 1959, **Henderson the Rain King**<sup>9</sup> narrates the adventures of a big, blundering, larger-than-life Hudson River aristocrat who, dissatisfied with the utter meaninglessness of things, decides to take a trip to Africa, the dark continent of primeval forces and unconscious desires. There he meets the cow-worshippers Arnewi and the lion-tamers Wariri, two antagonistic tribes whose leaders, Queen Willatale and King Dahfu, become his mentors in a fantastic quest for reality and truth.

**The Centaur** (1963)<sup>10</sup> tells the story of George Caldwell, a high-school science teacher in Olinger, Pennsylvania, who is contemplating resignation. The novel fuses the realistic events of George Caldwell's life with the mythical story of Chiron, the noblest of centaurs, who gave up his immortality to atone for the crime of Prometheus. Thus, roughly, Olinger High School becomes Olympus, with Zimmermann the principal as the lecherous Zeus, and each of the several characters of the novel loosely associated with a mythological figure. Peter, George's son, is Prometheus, and the fire stolen from the gods and bestowed on men is his extreme sensibility and his ability as an artist, a talent which will be thwarted in its development if George quits teaching and therefore supporting his son.

**The Fixer**,<sup>11</sup> published in 1966; deals with the plight of Yakov Bok, who leaves a small Russian shtetl for Kiev, repudiating his very identity as a Jew in search of more universal and meaningful values. Accused of the murder of a Christian boy, Bok, imprisoned and abused, is forced to acknowledge concrete aspects of existence through physical suffering and political involvement. In its outline, the plot relies on the Mendel Beilis judicial case in 19th-century Russia.

In spite of employing different techniques — allegory and comic exaggeration, the superposition of mythology to plot, and the fictionalizing of an historical fact — the three novels follow a similar pattern in terms of the protagonists' development. Though very different from each other as to social origin, occupation, and temperament, George Caldwell, Eugene Henderson, and Yakov Bok share a very significant trait — a deep lack of harmony with the world around them. They experience, in varying degrees and in different ways, a sense of isolation from history, community and environment — an isolation which characterizes the alienated or absurd hero of modern fiction.

Fatherless, they lack above all a sense of continuity with the past. When Yakov Bok rides past his parents graves on his way out of the shtetl, he does not have the heart for a visit and remarks that "the past was a wound in the head." Bok's only connection with the older generation is his father-in-law Shmuel — an affectionate, charitable and pious Jew, whom Bok antagonizes, however, as the father of his unfaithful wife Raisl. In rejecting old Shmuel and life in the shtetl, Bok rejects tradition, an action which becomes even more explicit when he renounces his Jewishness.

Eugene Henderson has a heavy burden of tradition to uphold, but cuts himself from it by behaving like a bum. As he leafs through his father's books in search of the "helpful words" he once had come across about the forgiveness of sins, all that Henderson finds are the bills his father had used as bookmarks. His link with the past may thus be reduced to money and, as he mentions later, land stolen from the Indians.

Like that of Yakov Bok, George Caldwell's relationship with the preceding generation can be effected only imperfectly through his father-in-law Pop Kramer, who in the mythical dimension stands for Chronos — the old monarch of the Golden Age dethroned by Zeus. Like old Shmuel in *The Fixer*, Pop Kramer is full of popular wisdom and represents acceptance of the designs of God, whereas Bok and Caldwell believe in a man-oriented rational universe.

Their connections with the present are also weak. For one

thing, they are not especially fond of life close to nature, which for George is a reminder of death. All that nature means to him is "garbage and confusion and the smell of skunk." Significantly, because of the assumed association of the feminine with the natural world which Malamud, Bellow and Updike subscribe to, the three protagonists are not particularly attached to their wives (nor to women in general, for that matter). Yakov Bok repudiates Raisl — who incidentally manages a small dairy business — when she fails to bear him a child. Caldwell's wife Cassie, the mythological Ceres with her "strange innocent scent of earth and cereal," fails to provide her husband with a meaningful physical relationship. For Henderson, who gave in to Lily's advances only after three years of romantic persecution on her part, the best moments of their life together were "during her pregnancy, when it was far advanced."

They are not close to the younger generation either. Bok is childless. Henderson has been so prolific that the children, like his millions of dollars, have become meaningless to him. In *The Centaur* there is no real understanding between George and Peter. Actually, George's major concern is with his own performance as a father: he is obsessed with the idea that he may be a failure in providing for Peter.

All in all the Fixer, the Centaur, and the Rain King — as their impersonal designations emphasize — remain isolated from the family as a social unit; they have no strong personal links with past, present, or future.

Furthermore, they have no organized religion to anchor them in the universe or eternity. Their worlds are limited to the here and now, to the physical realm and to this life on earth. Ironically, however, all three find themselves constantly limited or trapped by the environment. The world is hostile and threatening. Things go wrong all the time. "Things never fail to fail," thinks Caldwell. And technology or mechanical knowledge, instead of a blessing, turns out to be a burden. Bok, a fixer by profession, in spite of all the tools he carries with him, proves unable to fix a broken wheel and is prevented from using a wagon on his way to Kiev. Caldwell, for all his defense of progress and his love of modern gadgets, cannot keep his old

Buick running. But by far the best example of the inefficacy and burdens of technology is the incident in which Henderson blows up an entire cistern when trying to kill the frogs that infested it.

In spite of the obvious differences among them and of the fact that they exist in carefully defined social and cultural contexts, the three protagonists go beyond their specific situations and, in their detachment and bewilderment, become representative of modern man. Extremely dissatisfied with the lives they lead, godless, faced with a technology they cannot control, unable to cope with the pragmatic problems of ordinary living, unloving and unloved, fearing a death that may render their existence even more meaningless, they set out on urgent and vital quests.

For Henderson the journey is his fantastic trip to Africa, which as I read it, is a psychological allegory, an encounter with the most obscure parts of his self — the subconscious mind.

For Caldwell the wandering takes the form of a three-day Odyssey during which, because he is unable to get home out on the farm, all the problems of his everyday existence (the pain in his abdomen and his conflict with Zimmermann) appear magnified through the mythical dimension attributed to them.

For Bok the journey consists not only of his leaving the village for Kiev in search of freedom, but also of the growth of consciousness which ironically accompanies his progressive loss of freedom as the Jewish scapegoat for the murder of a young Russian boy.

Although all three protagonists ultimately search for the same answer — what it means to be human — they apprehend the object of their quest differently. Yakov Bok looks for freedom, freedom of choice. "What choices has a man who doesn't know what his choices are?" (p.32) "What I want to know is what's going on in the world" (p.16). Knowledge, he thinks, is bound to give him more choices and consequently make him freer. Henderson, who apparently has all the freedom in the world, has reality as the object of his search. His purpose is "to see essentials, only essentials, nothing but essentials, and to guard against hallucinations. Things are not what they seem, anyway." (p.137)

He wants to acquire "the wisdom of life" (p.233). George Caldwell searches for truth. In fact, as his son so very rightly remarks, "My father brought to conversations a cavernous capacity for caring that dismayed strangers. They found themselves involved, willynilly, in a futile but urgent search for the truth" (p.66).

Whether truth, reality, or freedom, the three men desperately need to find an answer, something that will heal them and connect them to the world. They all have, furthermore, the innocence and strong predisposition to learn which are characteristic of a child. "You're not a teacher," Dr. Appleton/Apollo tells Caldwell, "You're a learner" (p.102). And, as he leaves the shtetl, anonymous in the snow, Bok admits that he feels "strange to himself" (p.46). In **Henderson**, Queen Willatale soothes Eugene Henderson with the words, "World is strange to a child" (p.73). Caldwell, Bok, and Henderson appear to be seeing the world and looking at themselves for the first time. It is therefore as children of life that they embark on an education.

Now, to simplify a complex question, people have always had to choose between two basic roads to knowledge. They've had to apprehend reality either with their intellect or with their senses, and the dichotomy between reason and feeling, as that between soul and body, spirit and matter, has pervaded most of the literary tradition at least in the Western World.

Another way of approaching such dichotomies, and perhaps a better perspective for our analysis here is William Barrett's elaboration of the distinction between Hellenism and Hebraism, originally voiced by Matthew Arnold. In **Irrational Man** Barrett recognizes an opposition between the man of reason (or Hellenic ideal) and the man of faith (or Hebraic man). The intellectual man, he says, remains detached from existence; the moral man seeks involvement and commitment. The man of reason strives towards knowing, whereas the man of faith concerns himself with doing. And I quote further:

The man of faith is the concrete man in his wholeness. Hebraism does not raise its eyes to the universal and abstract; its vision is always of the concrete, particular, individual man. The Greeks, on the other hand, were the first thinkers in

history; they discovered the universal, the abstract and timeless essences, forms, and Ideas.<sup>12</sup>

These two distinct ways of apprehending reality are fundamental for an understanding of the novels under discussion. In a world which is clearly a product of the Enlightenment, with its reliance on rationality and abstractness, the man of faith or concrete man is only very reluctantly beginning to re-emerge. As embodiments of mid-twentieth-century man, Henderson, Bok, and Caldwell may rightly be expected to take the road of reason, to seek in the world of ideas a way of transcending matter and thus escaping the painfulness of earthbound existence.

Bok's first attempt to attain his goal — freedom — is clearly rationalistic. He substitutes an interest in Spinoza for the lost faith in the Jewish God. "If there was a God," he concludes, "after reading Spinoza he had closed up his shop and become an idea" (p.55). History "fatigues" and "sickens" him. At the same time, he loses interest in his tools; the man of action becomes contemplative. "It's as though a man flies over his own head on the wings of reason, or some such thing. You join the universe and forget your worries" (p.67). But chance tricks him. When he is accused of a crime he has not committed, Bok realizes that the world does not necessarily make sense. "One dark night a thick black web had fallen on him because he was standing under it.... There was no 'reason' for the accusation, there was only their plot against a Jew, any Jew; he was the accidental choice for the sacrifice.... Being born a Jew meant being vulnerable to history" (pp.127-28). He feels "entrapped, abandoned, helpless." At this point he merely understands that he cannot understand.

The existential spider that gratuitously ensnarls Bok also affects George Caldwell. His wound, like that of the mythical Chiron himself, is merely a consequence of his being vulnerable to evil and suffering. But instead of simply acknowledging this less-than-perfect nature of the world, Caldwell tries to soar above it by rationally striving to understand and give order to the chaos around him. He cannot yet see that Venus (Vera Hummel) has already given him the answer he seeks when she says: "The



mortals have the joy of struggle, the satisfaction of compassion, the triumph of courage; but the gods are perfect — Perfect only in our permanence," she adds. Chiron feels a "weight of weariness; he would always be less than they" (pp.26-27).

This very perfection of permanence, this realm beyond earth-bound existence, is what Henderson strives to reach by playing his violin. Like Bok's wings of reason, Henderson's music is a means of transcending death and the "queer diseases" that being human entails. When among the Arnewi, the first tribe he visits in Africa, Henderson is carried away by the Apollonian light that emanates from them and by Willatale's serene domination of the irrational forces of nature. Under the spell of such illumination or enlightenment, he feels encouraged to great undertakings. But, as critic Bruce Borrus rightly remarks, "he attempts to prove his value to them by solving their water problem in a characteristically intellectual way — he uses his mind to dominate nature."<sup>13</sup> And he fails, for he has misinterpreted several signs as indications of omnipotence and power. For one thing, unlike the Arnewi, he does not possess the wisdom that comes with experience. He has not learned to accept fate.

Thus, striving to be pure idea, emphasizing the rational and contemplative aspects of their natures, Bok, Henderson, and Caldwell cannot find the answer they search for. Though they learn important lessons from their intellectual mentors — Spinoza, Queen Willatale, and Doc Appleton/Apollo — their real problems continue unsolved: Bok remains in prison and very much confused as to the nature of the world; Henderson blows up the cistern and continues as dissatisfied with himself as he was before; Caldwell cannot get home and find the peace he so desperately longs for. Before our protagonists can find unity and harmony, they must pay closer attention to the evils that threaten to destroy them; they must take heed of the darker and less angelic sides of human nature.

In the chapter entitled "The Place of the Furies," William Barrett points out that

the attempt to see the whole or integral man, in place of the rational or epistemological fragment of him, involves our taking a look at some unpleasant

things.... The whole man is not whole without such unpleasant things as death, anxiety, guilt, fear and trembling, and despair.<sup>14</sup>

In a very apt comparison, Barrett traces parallels between these generally feared aspects of life and the Furies — the old goddesses of night and earth, who opposed Apollo in Aeschylus' *Oresteia*. Unacknowledged, these aspects of existence threaten to destroy those who deny them; given their proper due as integral parts of nature, they may help achieve the balance and unity man so desperately pursues.

Bok quite frequently remarks that "death is the least of [his] worries." Not until he comes face to face with Bibikov's dead body in the next cell does he realize the utter terror of dying. With this discovery comes the painful realization that Bibikov himself — who had come to represent goodness and love — had fallen prey to fear, despair, and suffering. Fearing torture and pain, Bok flagellates himself and, as he crawls across the yard on his hands and knees, in spite of the admiration he arouses in the other prisoners, he reaches the utmost degradation: instead of soaring above all suffering on "the wings of reason," he must walk on his fours like a dog. The further suffering he undergoes — the pain of being operated on without anesthetic, the humiliation of the daily searches — leads him to question his early beliefs. Instead of philosophy, he tries to recall the biology he had studied and all the history he knew. He discovers a "curious human odor" in the religious objects he had ignored so far, and he finds in the New Testament the God in history, the word made flesh, instead of the abstract and all-diffused God of Spinoza. In the soiled pages of the Old Testament, he sees for the first time "the joyous and frenzied Hebrews." As he takes a closer look at his condition as a human being, he progressively comes to embrace Bibikov's belief — "that each man suffers for other men, that everything relates underneath." And he thinks, "Suffering I can gladly live without, I hate the taste of it, but if I must suffer let it be for something. Let it be for Shmuel" (p.222). Yakov Bok has stepped into history.

Having come face to face with sin, suffering, and death, Yakov Bot had finally learned to cope with the irrational forces

around him. And he not only learns to accept his gratuitous entanglement in the web of history, but also freely assumes responsibility for those who, like him, are part of suffering humanity. His cry "I will live" and his decision to dedicate his suffering to others become the profession of faith that will guide him toward his ultimate victory — a free trial. With that in mind, he refuses to sign a confession and to accept pardon.

What Bok learns from the degradation of imprisonment and torture, Henderson absorbs from his stay among the Wariri — the second tribe he visits while in Africa.

Unlike the Arnewi, the Wariri are fierce and belligerent. Even the landscape reflects this difference: instead of the soft contours of the Arnewi territory, Henderson and his guide Romilayu encounter peaks and spines, and domelike white rocks. Instead of the light iridescence of the Arnewi, the Wariri irradiate a reddish and dark glow. Whereas the Arnewi appear angelic, the Wariri resemble the devil. Red is, besides, the symbolic color of both violence and of pleasure, the basic irrational forces the tribe represents.

When they arrive, Henderson and Romilayu are ambushed by a dark leathery-looking herdsman, wearing a leather apron — a striking contrast to the cattle-worshipping Arnewi. Right afterwards, as night falls, Henderson breaks some of his dental work and the broken molars remind him of death. "My body was trembling when I spat out those molars and I thought: Maybe you've lived too long, Henderson" (p.110). As if that weren't enough, he and the guide had to share quarters with the body of a dead man, a body which they spend half the night trying to get rid of, but which is every time thrust back upon them.

King Dahfu receives them in a luxurious green sofa, surrounded by voluptuous women. The hot feminine odor Henderson perceives among them is quite erotic, diametrically opposed to the asexual power emanating from Willatale.

The land of the Wariri appears thus animated by the instincts of love (eros) and death (thanatos). The very conditions under which the king must reign indicate a strong reliance on these physical aspects: when no longer fit for love-making and lion

hunting, Dahfu must die.

A fundamental aspect of Henderson's education among the Wariri is his acquaintance with Dahfu's lioness, Atti. From observing the connections that bind man and beast Henderson understands the meaning of love as a natural force and learns to conquer fear. As critic Donald Markos recognizes,

At the root of Henderson's self-avoidance and restless striving has been his fear of his animal nature, because to acknowledge this nature, this biological element, is to accept limitations on will and desire, to acknowledge one's capacity for death and savagery.<sup>15</sup>

Because lions are unavoidable and rely on experience above all else, Henderson has much to learn from them. Urged by Dahfu, he assumes the posture of a lion and roars. "The tendency of your conscious," says Dahfu, "is to isolate self. Be the beast! You will recover humanity later" (p.225). Like Yakov Bok on all fours, Henderson reverts back to the level of almost complete animality: pure existence. Thus he purges himself, lion-fashion, of all the accumulated pathos of his existence "from birth to Africa," as he puts it. In a letter to Lily he announces his decision to give up the violin and enter medical school. "I guess I will never reach my object through it." His object, as he elaborates to himself, is "to raise my spirit from the earth, to leave the body of this death... I wanted to raise myself into another world" (p.239). His mind begins to "change sponsors." Like Bok, he becomes earth-bound and committed.

Another similarity is their affirmation of life in the presence of death. When he jumps in to help Dahfu and thus faces real death embodied in the lion, Henderson does so in full consciousness of the consequences of his act. He has ceased to be an avoider. But like the fixer, he opts not to die, but to live for Dahfu, as his escaping with the lion cub shows. In so doing, he refuses to become exactly like Dahfu, that is, completely natural.

He has learned from his experience among the Arnewi that man is not god; he now discovers that man is not pure animal either. He must now return to civilization, go back home to America and to Lily.

In *The Centaur* George Caldwell's fear that he may be dying and his failure to drive home in the blizzard continues to throw him more and more deeply into frustration and despair. After a conversation with Hester, Doc Appleton's daughter who represents the mythical Artemis, an earth goddess associated with the birth and growth of all living things, George begins to question knowledge: "A thought he had run his mind through in the last minute had pleased him. But what? He picks his way back through the brown pebbles of his brain to locate this jewel. There. Bliss. Ignorance is bliss" (p.149).

Though on the level of everyday existence most of Caldwell's fears prove groundless, his anxiety as to whether to continue teaching or not does not subside. He opts for the figurative "suicide" of teaching and in so doing enacts the sacrificial dying of the volvox, that early element in the kingdom of life that invented death. As Caldwell tells his science students:

the volvox, a rolling sphere of flagellating algae... by pioneering this new idea of cooperation, rolled life into the kingdom of certain — as opposed to accidental — death... for, while each cell is potentially immortal, by volunteering for a specialized function in an organized society of cells, it enters a compromised environment. The strain eventually wears it out and kills it. It dies sacrificially for the good of the whole (p.37).

Like the volvox, Caldwell enters a compromised environment, that same "being in history" or dying for something that Yakov Bok finally accepts. As he walks through the snow toward the car that will take him back to school, Caldwell becomes painfully aware of the chaos of existence and of the death-bestowing nothingness of winter. But, as he perceives the small budding twigs in the snow, his mind, like Henderson's, begins to "change sponsor," or as we are told in *The Centaur*, "slowly the chemistry of his thought altered" (p.220). He begins to accept "the joy of struggle, the satisfaction of compassion, the triumph of courage" (p.27) that Venus/Vera Hummel had pointed out earlier as the real objectives of human existence.

Thus, having come to terms with the darker side of life — the presence of evil, suffering, sacrifice, and death — Bok,

Henderson and Caldwell can become not only self-accepting, but also socially valuable. They can understand both love and death as natural forces.

The affirmative vision Malamud, Updike and Bellow impart at the close of their novels must be understood as a direct result of this newly-found balance between instinctual response and rationality. By reaching such a balance, Bok, Caldwell and Henderson integrate opposing tendencies within the self. But the journey does not end here: it reaches beyond the self, to integration with others.

More accepting as they are of human frailty, they move from the condition of children to that of mature adults, or fathers. The metaphor of paternity is used by the three novelists to illustrate the world of relation which eradicates the feeling of alienation or displacement originally experienced by their protagonists.

Yakov Bok accepts his wife Raisl by stating that he is the legal father of Chaim — which incidentally means life in Yiddish. He finally understands what a beggar had told him in the beginning of his search, that "charity saves from death" (p.17). His imaginary killing of the Tsar, as he awaits his trial, represents not only his assuming responsibility for the whole Jewish race, but also a rejection of his old self — weak, self-willed, and uncharitable — and, above all, his commitment to a life of action rather than contemplation. Affirming the new belief that "Where there's no fight for it there's no freedom" (p.271), he advances among the people to his free trial, to accept whatever the verdict and to act out his destiny.

George Caldwell likewise discovers that "in giving his life to others he entered a total freedom" (p.220). So that his son Peter, like Chaim, may have a future, he acquiesces in his less-than-perfect condition as a human being — a centaur, caught between the divine and the brute. "He thought of his wife's joy in the land, and Pop Kramer's joy in the newspaper, and his son's joy in the future and was glad, grateful, that he was able to sustain these for yet a space more" (p.220).

This same movement beyond self applies to Bellow's Henderson as well. As he realizes at the end of his stay in Africa, "it's

love that makes reality reality. The opposite makes the opposite" (p.241). On the plane back home, as the other passengers indifferently read or sleep, Henderson rejoices in his new awareness of the world. He awakens to a Newfoundland where relationships replace objects and ideas, as his acting like a father towards an orphan boy illustrates. His "leaping, leaping, pounding, and tingling over the pure white lining of the gray Arctic silence" (p.286) reiterates Bellow's vision of affirmation, an affirmation of life in the presence of death.

In going to Africa in his search for ultimates, the Yankee millionaire Eugene Henderson very much resembles the Russian Yakov Bok, who leaves the village in order to experience life more fully and finds himself entangled in the particularities of his own historical being. And Bok, in refusing both suicide and dishonor, accepts the same stoical responsibility which leads George Caldwell to face the unrewarding world of teaching. And Caldwell, in thinking of his son, his wife, his father-in-law, echoes Henderson's realization that the voice that used to tell him "I want, I want" should have said, "he wants, she wants, they want" (p.241). They all learn, in short, that only a full acceptance of one's condition with all the limitations that it entails can allow man to move from an exaggerated concern with self toward responsible ties with others and thus affirm his position within the universe.

Through their protagonists, Malamud, Updike and Bellow approach the ideal of William Barrett's integral or Hebraic man whose "emphasis is on commitment, that passionate involvement of man with his own mortal being (at once flesh and spirit), with his offspring, family, tribe, and God"<sup>16</sup>. In Martin Buber's terminology, they are able to take their characters beyond an I-it, or superficial interaction with the world, into the I-Thou realm of relation (or as Kirkegaard terms it from an aesthetic to a moral level of existence). And they illustrate a return to that positive faith in the goodness of man which is so much a part of the American character, but which had been buried under the weight of alienation and despair in the literature immediately following the Second World War.

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup>William Barrett, **Irrational Man: A Study in Existential Philosophy** (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1958), p.9.
- <sup>2</sup>Barrett, p.22.
- <sup>3</sup>Norman O. Brown, **Life Against Death: The Psychoanalytical Meaning of History** (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan Univ. Press, 1959), p.307. For further elaboration of this idea, see also, pp.174-76.
- <sup>4</sup>Martin Buber, **The Origin and Meaning of Hasidism**, ed. & trans. Maurice Friedman (New York: Horizon Press, 1960), p.238.
- <sup>5</sup>Tony Tanner, **City of Words: American Fiction 1950-1970** (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), p.19.
- <sup>6</sup>Marcus Klein, **After Alienation: American Novels in Mid-Century**, (New York: World Publishing Co., 1967), p.30.
- <sup>7</sup>Robert Kegan, **The Sweeter Welcome: Voices for a Vision of Affirmation: Bellow, Malamud and Martin Buber** (Needham Heights, Mass.: Humanitas Press, 1976), p.16.
- <sup>8</sup>Richard H. Rupp, **Celebration in Postwar American Fiction 1945-1967**, (Coral Gables: Univ. of Miami Press, 1970), p.18.
- <sup>9</sup>Saul Bellow, **Henderson the Rain King** (New York: Avon Books, 1959), p.10. All further references will be to this edition.
- <sup>10</sup>John Updike, **The Centaur** (Greenwich, Conn.: Fawcett Publications, 1963), p.144. All further references will be to this edition.
- <sup>11</sup>Bernard Malamud, **The Fixer** (New York: Dell Publishing, 1966), p.11. All further references will be to this edition.
- <sup>12</sup>Barrett, p.77.
- <sup>13</sup>Bruce J. Borrus, "Bellow's Critique of the Intellect," **Modern Fiction Studies** 25 (1979), p.34.
- <sup>14</sup>Barrett, p.276.
- <sup>15</sup>Donald W. Markos, "Life Against Death in **Henderson the Rain King**," **Modern Fiction Studies** 17 (1971), p.198.
- <sup>16</sup>Barrett, pp.77-78.

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