

THE PROBLEM OF GRACE IN JOHN UPDIKE'S

RABBIT, RUN AND THE CENTAUR

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of Graduate Studies

University of Manitoba

---

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

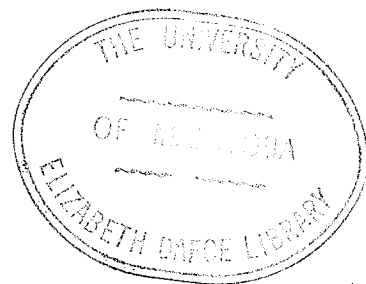
---

by

David Arnason

---

September, 1969



AN ABSTRACT OF  
THE PROBLEM OF GRACE IN JOHN UPDIKE'S  
RABBIT, RUN AND THE CENTAUR

The purpose of this thesis is to demonstrate that the major concerns in John Updike's writing are religious concerns, and that the novels Rabbit, Run and The Centaur are complementary novels, each dealing with a different aspect of man's search for grace. The thesis also seeks to demonstrate that Updike's religious thinking, in particular, his idea of grace, has been profoundly affected by the writings of the theologian Karl Barth.

Chapter I deals with Updike's early religious concerns, particularly, the problem of grace, and examines in detail the short story "Pigeon Feathers," and his first novel The Poorhouse Fair.

Chapter II examines Harry Angstrom's search for grace in Rabbit, Run, and seeks to demonstrate his failure to achieve grace.

Chapter III examines The Centaur in detail and tries to show that George Caldwell attains a state of grace through his self-sacrifice.

Chapter IV provides some conclusions and attempts to demonstrate how the concerns examined in this thesis are part of Updike's metaphysical and artistic vision, and to show how these concerns are the basis for much of his other work.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

|                                                      |    |
|------------------------------------------------------|----|
| ABSTRACT . . . . .                                   | 11 |
| CHAPTER                                              |    |
| I     Early Religious Concerns. . . . .              | 1  |
| II <u>Rabbit Run</u> : The Failure of Grace. . . . . | 15 |
| III <u>The Centaur</u> : Grace in Motion . . . . .   | 60 |
| IV    Conclusion. . . . .                            | 85 |
| BIBLIOGRAPHY . . . . .                               | 93 |

## CHAPTER I

### EARLY RELIGIOUS CONCERNS

John Updike writes out of a Christian ethos. He is concerned with examining the major themes of human existence: love, death, and the search for a meaning in life; and in his works, these themes always operate in terms of a Christian metaphysics. More specifically, he is concerned with the American Protestant middle class. In an interview in Life magazine, Updike stated, "My subject is the American Protestant small town middle class. It is in the middles that extremes clash, where ambiguity restlessly rules. Something quite intricate and fierce occurs in homes, and it seems to me without<sup>1</sup> doubt worthwhile to examine what it is." Updike reiterated this concern in an interview in Time magazine where he reported that he was<sup>2</sup> "kind of elegiacally concerned with the Protestant middle class."

Updike was raised as a Lutheran, but has since joined the Congregationalist church. He reports that he grew up in a family<sup>3</sup> where it was the practice to "examine everything for God's fingerprints." Many of his short stories are frankly autobiographical attempts to grasp what is universal in his private experience.

---

<sup>1</sup>  
Jane Howard, "Can a Nice Novelist Finish First?" Life (November 4, 1966), p. 75.

<sup>2</sup>  
"View from the Catacombs," Time, XCI (April 26, 1968), p. 67.

<sup>3</sup>  
Jane Howard, "Nice Novelist," p. 76.

Updike's early short stories, and his first novel, The Poorhouse Fair, represent his first attempts to come to grips with the spiritual problems that he feels are at the core of man's existence. His early Lutheranism affected him profoundly, and this is obvious in all of his work. It was not until he was writing Rabbit, Run, however, that Updike found his spiritual mentor in Karl Barth. Barth confirmed Updike in much of what he felt about the human situation. In particular, Barth clarified for Updike an idea of grace. Grace is God's freely bestowed gift of salvation and eternal life. It is not something which can be earned through works, but is the result of a real and vital faith. On the one hand, man faces sin and eternal death. Through grace, man dies metaphorically, with Jesus Christ, and is reborn into a state where sin and eternal death are no longer possibilities. Barth says that when grace is achieved:

The totality of our human will and intelligence, future as well as past, has been superseded by the pre-eminent, ineffable, and invisible power of our eternal future existence. This is grace. 4

Grace then is the solution to sin and death which man must seek, but which paradoxically he cannot find through his own efforts, because grace belongs entirely to God, and He, in His infinite mercy, dispenses it in ways man cannot understand. It is an attempt to find grace, the only possible solution to death, which is Updike's primary theme.

One of Updike's earliest examinations of the problem of grace

---

4

Karl Barth, The Epistle to the Romans, trans. by Edwyn C. Hoskyns (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1933), p. 19.

occurs in his simple and beautiful short story "Pigeon Feathers." The hero of the story, a young boy named David, is undergoing his first religious crisis. His awareness of the very real possibility of death resolves itself into an instinctual search for grace. The young David of "Pigeon Feathers" has spent the first fourteen years of his life in the simple acceptance of a Christian upbringing. Everything in his life has been solid and secure and he has not even considered the possibility of disbelief. The story begins with the family's movement from the town to the farm. The concomitant sense of dislocation prepares David for the crisis that results from his casual reading of H. G. Wells' Outline of History. Wells' casual, historical account of Christ appalls David. His initial reaction is powerful:

This was the initial impact---that at a definite spot in time and space a brain black with the denial of Christ's divinity had been suffered to exist; that the universe had not spit out this ball of tar but allowed it to continue in its blasphemy, to grow old, win honors, wear a hat, write books that, if true, collapsed everything into a jumble of horror. 5

At this point, the yawning gap, the abyss of doubt opens before David, and he attempts desperately to close it and return to the surety of older days. He first examines the objective facts he has. Churches exist. His attempt to find a foundation for Christ on the base of the churches whose basis is Christ is confounded by his lack of historical knowledge. He calls on the known efficacy of prayer, but in light of the cool assurance of Wells, becomes aware that all could be chance.

The external circumstances of his world fail to reassure him. Death stands before him, a palpable vision. "Without warning, David was visited by an exact vision of death: a long hole in the ground, no wider than your body, down which you are drawn while the white faces above recede."<sup>6</sup> This is Updike's private vision, and in many of his stories death appears in the image of a hole. The hole, of course, is the grave, but it is also something more, a kind of emptiness that continually threatens.

The failure of the external circumstances of his world to provide a foundation for faith leads David to his next attempt: an appeal to established orthodoxy. He begins by attempting to force the Lutheran minister who teaches his catechetical class to give him some solid proof; the statements he makes in church each Sunday, David feels, will be enough. The signs are not auspicious. The minister, Reverend Dobson, who David hopes will show him the way, is constantly lost when travelling around his own parish. He teaches the lesson by having his class fill in the blanks on a test paper. "I am the \_\_\_\_\_<sup>7</sup> the \_\_\_\_\_, and the \_\_\_\_\_, saith the Lord." He does not seem the man to help David fill in the enormous blank of his private doubt, and indeed, he is not. To David's question about the existence of the soul between the time of death and the day of Judgment, he replies,

---

<sup>6</sup>

Ibid., p. 88.

<sup>7</sup>

Ibid., p. 94.

"David, you might think of Heaven this way: as the way the goodness  
<sup>8</sup>  
 Abraham Lincoln did lives after him." This answer is worse than no  
 answer at all, since it confirms the nothingness of death, and so David  
 rejects it.

David turns to the Bible, but his mother discovers him reading  
 it, and so he turns to her, as the other form of established orthodoxy.  
 She affirms her belief in God as the creator of all things, but when  
 David confronts her with the childish paradox of who created God, she  
<sup>9</sup>  
 replies in radiant happiness, "Why Man, Man." A God created by man  
 is not going to save David from death, however, and he rejects her  
 answer, trying to point out to her that if she is correct, then  
<sup>10</sup>  
 everything is an "ocean of horror."

<sup>11</sup>  
 He soon realizes that he is alone "in that deep hole," and that  
 no one can help him. The outward paraphernalia of organized religion  
 makes him aware that somewhere, someone had once realized that sub-  
 mission to death was untenable, and this helps him cling to the shreds  
 of hope.

His solution to his problem comes when he is asked by his mother  
 to kill some of the pigeons that infest the barn. David finds the

---

<sup>8</sup>  
Ibid., p. 95.

<sup>9</sup>  
Ibid., p. 97.

<sup>10</sup>  
Ibid., p. 98.

<sup>11</sup>  
Ibid., p. 99.

experience exhilarating. He kills six and when he examines them before he buries them, he is convinced of God's existence by the infinitely complicated patterns of shape and colour of their feathers. He becomes "...robed in this certainty: that the God who had lavished such craft upon these worthless birds would not destroy this whole<sup>12</sup> Creation by refusing to let David live forever." He has evolved for himself the classical argument from design, and, temporarily, it is enough. He fails to see the irony in the fact that he has found his solution in the senseless killing of God's creatures. The pigeon, of course, is a dove, and the traditional symbol of the Holy Spirit, and so David's victory is illusory. He has gained for himself an illusion of grace. The same theme, death, and its alternative, grace, was later to become the ground for the novels, Rabbit, Run and The Centaur.

The alternative to the religious pattern of doubt, fear and grace is a seductive offer of material plenty in the here and now, offered by humanism. Humanism denies the possibility of grace, and is, in the modern world, the chief enemy of God. The Poorhouse Fair, Updike's first novel, pits a godless humanism against irrational faith, and the failure of humanism to offer anything of real value is clearly demonstrated.

The action of the novel takes place in the near future at a poorhouse on its one day of celebration, the day of its fair. This

---

<sup>12</sup>

Ibid., p. 105.

particular setting allows for the bringing together of two Americas; the existing humanistic America of the visitors and the old, finished America of the inmates. The difference is heightened by the main characters. Conner, the prefect, lives in the future, constantly prefiguring the era to come, and Hook, the oldest inmate, lives in the world of his childhood and so reflects not his own America, but his parents'. In this way, two generations are added to the already great stretch of years that separate the two Americas of the novel.

It is in the continual opposition of these two Americas that the themes of the novel manifest themselves. In almost all respects, the old America comes out better. The craftsmanship of the old is superior to the shoddy workmanship of the new. The meaningful politics of the old are superior to the vacuous emptiness of the new. The strong bonds of family of the old are superior to the empty relationships of the new, to which the cast of old in the poorhouse stand as eloquent testimony. Above all, though, the religious, spiritual strength of the old stands superior to the empty, inhuman humanism of the new, and it is this contrast that is the chief focus of the novel.

On the one hand, Conner represents both the hope and the futility of the future. He is no paradox, as has been suggested by various critics, but is, indeed, a sympathetic character. Stephen Conner is a modern St. Stephen, facing both metaphorically and, in fact, the stones of those who misunderstand or don't share his vision. His vision is that of man living healthy and unafraid beneath blank skies, "integrated" as

the accepted phrase had it, "with his fulfilled possibilities."<sup>13</sup> When the poorhouse inmates ask him for his idea of Heaven, he pictures it on earth:

There will be no disease. There will be no oppression, political or economic, because the administration of power will be in the hands of those who have no hunger for power, but who are, rather, dedicated to the cause of all humanity. There will be ample leisure for recreation.... Leisure, and no further waste of natural resources. Cities will be planned and clean. Power will be drawn from the atom and food from the sea. The land will recover its topsoil. The lifespan of the human being will be increased to that of the animals, that is, ten times the period of growth to maturity.... There will be no poor.... Money too will have vanished....<sup>14</sup>

The music the band plays helps Conner to visualize the future:

He envisioned grown men and women, lightly clad, playing on the brilliant sand of a sea shore, children's games... brown breast leaning one against another, among scarves of everlasting cloth, beneath the sun.<sup>15</sup>

What Conner visualizes is a tableau, not a mode of living. It is a vague and nearly mystical vision of mankind become Olympian gods, of the kind that science fiction writers love, but it bears little relationship to the men of passion, flesh, and blood who inhabit Conner's poorhouse.

Conner shuts his eyes to the depressing humanity of his charges. When the cat, an injured and decrepit analogue to the old people of the

---

<sup>13</sup>

John Updike, The Poorhouse Fair (Greenwich, Connecticut: Fawcett Publications, Incorporated, 1959), p. 47.

<sup>14</sup>

Ibid., p. 75.

<sup>15</sup>

Ibid., p. 87.

poorhouse, is shot, the sound "pleased the rebel in Conner, the idealist, anxious to make space for the crystalline erections that in his heart he felt certain would arise, once his old people were gone."<sup>16</sup> Implicitly, he denies the humanity evidenced by age and impending death, and refuses to acknowledge that replacements for his old people are inexorably preparing themselves to take over by the simple expedient of staying alive. When he reads over his letter from "a towns person," he wonders<sup>17</sup> "when would they all die and let the human day dawn."

Conner's humanism is empty and that is clearly demonstrated in the imagery and the action of the story. The fantasies of the future that he constructs are "crystalline erections,"<sup>18</sup> clear, but empty. He<sup>19</sup> imagines the anonymous hierarchy above him as "black blank heads" behind which hangs, "the white walls of the universe."<sup>20</sup> He sees man<sup>21</sup> living under "blank skies." He denies the emotional and spiritual manifestations that could fill in the blanks. In his cupola, both the space above and the space below make him uncomfortable. In fact, Conner's belief in "blankness" is such that the threat of rain on the day of the fair seems to him a comment on his own work. "The weather

---

<sup>16</sup>

Ibid., p. 46.

<sup>17</sup>

Ibid., p. 56.

<sup>18</sup>

Ibid., p. 46.

<sup>19</sup>

Ibid., p. 13.

<sup>20</sup>

Ibid.

<sup>21</sup>

Ibid., p. 47.

of this one day would be, he felt, a judgment on his work; these people, having yielded all authority, looked beyond themselves for everything--sufficient food, adequate shelter, and fair weather on their one day of profit and celebration. He would be blamed, and strangely felt prepared to accept the blame for foul skies.<sup>22</sup> It is part of Conner's makeup that he should, in some way, feel god-like, in spite of the fact that he "thought of no one as God" and resented the god-like pose of his predecessor Mendelsohn.

The opposite of Conner is Hook, the man of thought. An ex-school teacher, he is devoutly and fundamentally Christian. The forms of Christianity that he expresses, like that of the Lutheran minister Kruppenbach in Rabbit, Run and the minister in Of The Farm, is basically the theological stance of Kari Barth. Speaking to a visitor at the fair, Hook says, "Make no mistake. There is little store of virtue left."<sup>23</sup> This phrase, "make no mistake," with the absolute conviction implied, is an echo of Barth, who uses it many times. In Rabbit, Run, Kruppenbach tells Eccles, "Make no mistake. There is nothing but Christ for us."<sup>24</sup> Updike himself begins his poem "Seven Stanzas at Easter" with the phrase "Make no mistake, if He rose at all, it was as His body,"<sup>25</sup>

---

<sup>22</sup>

Ibid., p. 30.

<sup>23</sup>

Ibid., p. 111.

<sup>24</sup>

John Updike, Rabbit, Run (Greenwich, Connecticut: Fawcett Publications, Incorporated, 1959), p. 143.

<sup>25</sup>

John Updike, "Seven Stanzas at Easter," Verse: The Carpentered Hen and Telephone Poles (Greenwich, Connecticut: Fawcett Publications, Incorporated, 1963), p. 164.

and goes on in it to make a perfectly Barthian analysis of the resurrection of Christ.

Hook, in his argument with Conner about religion, makes what is for Updike a key religious distinction. He tells Conner, "There is no goodness, without belief. There is nothing but busyness." He makes, in his own vernacular, the theological distinction between faith and works. Goodness, it is implied, is inseparable from God's grace. The best intentions and the best attempts to do good are hollow and empty when they operate outside the sphere of grace.

Karl Barth makes the explicit statement: "No work, be it most delicately spiritual, or be it even a work of self negation, is worthy of serious attention." The reference is to Romans 3:27. "Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? Of works? Nay: but by the law of faith. Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of law." This also appears to be a justification of antinomianism, and is important to the understanding of Updike's later work; in particular, Rabbit, Run. Conner's whole vision and his work falls into what is, from a Christian theological point of view, "works without faith." Conner is concerned about the improvement of man in general and goes about his task with admirable self-sacrifice and humility. This humility is, however, deceptive, "but this is the triumph of Pharisaism appearing in a new and far more terrible form;

---

26

Updike, The Poorhouse Fair, p. 81.

27

Karl Barth, The Epistle to the Romans, p. 191.

for it is the Pharisaism of humility taking the place of the Pharisaism  
of self-righteousness.<sup>28</sup> As such, it is the "wisdom of death"<sup>29</sup> rather  
than the wisdom of life, and ultimately it is destructive.

It is important to reiterate at this point that in Updike's  
metaphysics the pure and fundamental God described in Barth's theology  
is very real. He is an operative force, constituting and taking part  
in the universe of the novel. The God that sends cloudy weather to the  
fair is the same God that permits Rabbit Angstrom's daughter to drown,  
and that reaches out His hand and destroys the Congregational church  
of Tarbox. In each case, God makes a judgment. In The Poorhouse Fair,  
the clouds and rain are a direct denial of Comer's "blank skies."

This very real God has established what Barth calls a covenant  
with man. God permits man an independent reality, and offers him the  
possibility of grace. On his side, man fulfills his part of the  
covenant through faith and through responsibility. When man forfeits  
his responsibility and his faith, he also forfeits his humanity and his  
possibility of attaining grace.

Hook's notion of virtue as "an austerity of the hunt, a manliness  
from which comes all life, so that it can be written that the woman  
takes her life from the man,"<sup>30</sup> is not merely an incidental position  
that Hook provides. The minister in Of The Farm, in a sermon which he  
expressly points out is based on the writing of Karl Barth, examines the

---

28

Ibid., p. 109.

29

Ibid.

30

Updike, The Poorhouse Fair, p. 111.

story of Genesis, and in particular the creation of woman from the rib of man. He sees woman as, metaphorically, taking her life from man, since she exists as man's "helpmeet."

Barth points out:

...she is the part of him which was lost and is found again-- taken out of him. It is proper for her to be beside him. This is her humanity, and in this place and the consequent form it is no less than that of man but surpasses it in a definite and decisive respect, although she surrenders and forfeits it if she tries to exchange it for that of man. 31

This is why Hook states that, "Women are the heroes of dead lands." 32 He sees that in the America of the novel, man has ceased to fulfill his proper role, and so woman, forced to usurp man's place by his default, forfeits her humanity.

Hook's fundamental interpretation of virtue is balanced by Updike's objective assessment of the American visitors to the fair.

Heart had gone out of these people: health was the principal thing about the faces of the Americans that came crowding through the broken wall to the poorhouse fair. They were just people, members of the race of white animals that had cast its herd over the land of six continents. Highly neural, brachycephalic, uniquely able to oppose their thumbs to the four other digits. They bred within elegant settlements, and both burned and interred their dead. 33

The reduction of the people to nothing more than healthy animals

---

31

Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol. III, part I, ed., Rev. C. W. Bromley and Rev. T. F. Torrance, trans. by J. W. Edwards, Rev. O. Bussey and Rev. Harold Knight (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1958), p. 301.

32

Updike, *The Poorhouse Fair*, p. 111.

33

*Ibid.*, p. 109.

is accompanied by a debasement of the American ideal as well: "everywhere was sufferance, good sense, wealth, irreligion and peace. The nation became one of pleasure seekers; the people continued to live as cells of a body do in the coffin for the conception 'America' had died in their skulls." <sup>34</sup> Updike's vision of the future is a bleak one. He foresees an America where the body politic is dead though the individual cells survive. The old virtues he foresees as disappearing and being replaced with good health and a spiritual emptiness. Man, he suggests, will lose his purpose in life, and woman will replace him as the controlling one. This unnatural state of affairs will serve only to debase both men and women. Society becomes humanistic and graceless. Its individual members find themselves much less likely to be in harmony with God.

## CHAPTER II

### RABBIT, RUN: THE FAILURE OF GRACE

John Updike underwent a serious religious crisis in 1960 while he was in the midst of writing Rabbit, Run. He reports that his sense of time passing affected him so strongly that he felt "a sense of horror that beneath this skin of bright and exquisitely sculpted phenomena, death waits."<sup>1</sup> Such "bright and exquisitely sculpted phenomena," as the pigeon feathers that satisfied David in the earlier story "Pigeon Feathers" served as no solace for him. He turned to the reading of theology and a deeper examination of Christian belief in order to try to find something solid. In retrospect, Updike says of this period of his life:

I've touched a kind of bottom when I've felt that existence itself was an affront to be forgiven. I've felt in myself and in those around me a failure of nerve--a sense of doubt as to the worth of any action. At such times one has nothing but the ancient assertions of Christianity to give one the will to act, even if the act is only the bringing in of the milk bottles off the front porch.<sup>2</sup>

It was the "ancient assertions of Christianity," particularly as perceived by the theologian Karl Barth that sustained Updike during this difficult period. Updike states "...Barth's theology, at one point

---

<sup>1</sup>

"View from the Catacombs," Time, XCI (April 26, 1968), p. 67.

<sup>2</sup>

Jane Howard, "Can a Nice Novelist Finish First?" Life (November 4, 1966), p. 78.

in my life, seemed alone to be supporting it (my life)."<sup>3</sup>

It is not surprising then, that Updike's work is particularly concerned with the matter of grace, and that his novel should work out in terms of Karl Barth's theology. Updike's private concerns about the nature of grace and the acceptance of death find their artistic expression in Rabbit, Run, and The Centaur, the novel which immediately followed. Rabbit, Run examines the problem of man's existence; The Centaur provides a partial answer to it.

In order to gain a clear understanding of the particular kind of Christian ethos out of which Rabbit, Run operates, it is necessary to understand something of the theology of Karl Barth. Barth was a neo-orthodox theologian. He represents the extreme conservative movement in twentieth century Christian theology, the opposite pole to Paul Tillich's liberal, humanistic metaphysic. It is Barth's view that the only thing that reason can prove about God is that it is absurd not to believe in Him. Beyond that, God is "wholly other," a deity that man can know nothing about. Barth even goes so far as to examine St. Anselm's ontological argument and conclude that it is not intended to prove the existence of God.

Throughout Barth's theology, he constantly reiterates his idea that man must say "no" to any anthropocentric myth, any idea of God that depends on man, and say "yes" to the God of revelation. In fact,

---

3

John Updike, "Forward," Assorted Prose (Greenwich, Connecticut: Fawcett Publications, Incorporated, 1962), p. 21.

he states quite clearly, that the only way we can know anything about God is through revelation, and hence, through the Bible. This cannot be done individually however. Barth, like Buber, believes in the importance of the individual's encounter with God, but, unlike Buber, his theology is evangelical, and demands a community of worship. Man gets to God through the church and not by himself.

His concept of grace, as Updike pointed out in a review of one of his books, is nearly antinomian. That is, if one has faith in Christ, he is free from the obligation to obey the moral law as set forth in the Old Testament. This freedom is, however, as Updike demonstrates in Rabbit, Run, a double-edged sword. Freedom is freedom for God, not freedom from God. A nature that is noble will act morally, because it will be operating according to God's will. If that nature is not completely noble, however, even with faith, it is doomed to an absolute and bewildering freedom. Barth says, "Sin as an alternative is not anticipated or included in the freedom given to man by God.... Sinful man is not free, he is a captive, a slave."<sup>4</sup> The freedom to sin makes man "...a creature of chaos, a monster begotten by his own pride, his own laziness, his own lies."<sup>5</sup> That is to say, freedom from the moral law may not be seen as freedom to indulge in sin. Barth's discussion of sin in his The Epistle to the Romans

---

<sup>4</sup>  
Karl Barth, The Humanity of God (Richmond, Virginia: John Knox Press, 1960), p. 77.

<sup>5</sup>  
Ibid., p. 76.

clearly reveals this:

Sin is related to grace as possibility to impossibility. Grace to which sin is a contemporary possibility is not grace. He that has received grace neither knows nor wills sin. He is not a sinner. Between the two is set the dissolution of the old and the emergence of the new man. 6

and again, "to be in grace means that we are no longer treated by God  
7  
as sinners."

To believe, however, that grace and sin can exist side by side, that Rabbit, for instance, is justified in his sin because his search for meaning or God is valid and important, is to fall into error. "Grace is not then a human possibility for men by the side of which  
8  
there is room for such other possibilities as, for example, sin."

The other error is to assume that grace and sin are human possibilities, one as real as the other, that there exists a causal relationship between the two. There would then be a clear invitation to continue in sin that grace may abound. By this reasoning, "...sin, which in God's sight withers as soon as it appears and vanishes in extrusion and destruction, becomes a positive factor, a means, an instrument, a springboard by the use of which another

---

6

Karl Barth, The Epistle to the Romans, p. 191.

7

Ibid.

8

Ibid., p. 200.

human possibility may be achieved." <sup>9</sup> Any human action, no matter how sinful, becomes by this reasoning, invested with sacred and transcendental authority and sanction.

Barth points out the speciousness of this "human reasoning" with attempts to confine the antinomies (sin and grace) of an eternal God, within the limits of human experience. This pseudo-dialectic translates the divine concepts into human psycho-physical sensations, and fails to see that they are not human experiences, but rather spheres of being which are mutually exclusive.

It is Barth's kind of negative freedom that Harry "Rabbit" Angstrom gains when he gives up his responsibility. David Calloway, in The Absurd Hero as Saint, makes exactly the same error as Rabbit does, by assuming that Rabbit's faith frees him from the need to act morally and in community with others, and he applauds Rabbit's selfish and individual quest. He calls Rabbit a saint, but misses the point that seeking sainthood is not identical with being a saint, and that it is indeed, a sin, (as Graham Greene demonstrates in The Heart of the Matter). He, again with Rabbit, makes one other classic error in terms of Christian metaphysics; that is, he sees grace as an object and not as a state of being, and assumes that it is something that can be found rather than something that is received.

Rabbit is no saint. He is a sinner, aware of his sin, but seeking some kind of answer to it. Calloway can make him a saint by

---

<sup>9</sup>  
Ibid., p. 189.

suggesting that it is man who is moral and society that is immoral. To do this, though, is to deny the strict orthodoxy of the Barthian view, to which Updike repeatedly and publicly subscribes.

The hero, Rabbit himself, is not a particularly intelligent or mature character. This does not in any way invalidate his moral crisis, however. As Kierkegaard pointed out, faith, because it is irrational or beyond reason, has no need for intellectual substantiation, and so anyone from a simple child to a wise and sophisticated genius is eligible for spiritual crisis. God does not differentiate between men. Karl Barth says:

On the basis of the eternal will of God, we have to think of every human being, even the oddest, most villainous or miserable, as one to whom Jesus Christ is Brother and God is Father, and we have to deal with him on this assumption. 10

Updike's main characters are not heroes. That is, they are not heroic characters. Updike says:

The idea of a hero is aristocratic. As aristocracies have faded, so have heroes. You cared about Oedipus and Hamlet because they were noble and you were a groundling. Now either nobody is a hero or everyone is. I vote for everyone. 11

Rabbit, as his nickname suggests, is a sensual character. He feels more than he thinks. He is not an articulate hero whose introspection demonstrates his changes and his growth. Instead, he

---

10

Barth, Humanity of God, p. 53.

11

Jane Howard, "Can a Nice Novelist Finish First?" p. 75.

feels and intuit. He responds to stimuli and he seeks stimulus. He makes no abstractions. Throughout the novel, his attempt to find some kind of solution to his crisis is centered on sensual experiences, running, playing games, gardening or making love.

Updike introduces Rabbit, Run with a quotation from Pascal:

"The motions of grace, the hardness of the heart; external  
<sup>12</sup>  
 circumstances." This is not a comment on the action of the novel, but rather a definition of the elements of the novel. Grace is what Rabbit frantically seeks, though he cannot trace its motions. The hardness of the heart is the awareness of sin that Rabbit feels. External circumstances represent the society in which Rabbit lives, and, in fact, all the action outside of Rabbit.

Rabbit, Run is primarily a religious story. It deals with the traditional religious quest, the attempt to find meaning in life. Rabbit gives the clearest explanation in his discussion with the minister Eccles. He says:

Well, I don't know all this about theology, but I'll tell you. I do feel, I guess, that somewhere behind all this--he gestures outward at the scenery; they are passing the housing development this side of the golf course, half wood, half brick, one-and-a-half stories in little, flat bulldozed yards with tricycles and spindly three-year-old trees, the un-grandest landscape in the world--there's something that wants me to find it. <sup>13</sup>

The "something that wants me to find it" appears to be grace.

---

<sup>12</sup>

John Updike, Rabbit, Run (Greenwich, Connecticut: Fawcett Publications, Incorporated, 1959), p. 5.

<sup>13</sup>

Ibid., p. 107.

As naive and simplistic as Rabbit's theology is, the effect upon him of his quest is quite as powerful as it would be if he were a theologian.

The short story "Ace in the Hole" from The Same Door treats the problem of Rabbit, Run in capsule form. Ace Anderson, having lost his job, largely due to juvenile intransigence, drag races with a kid in a '52 Pontiac, arguing with him "good naturedly across the little gap of years that separated them."<sup>14</sup> This "little gap of years,"

however, is enough to have brought him to a kind of angst that causes him irresponsibly to quit his job. The youth in the other car begins him thinking about his past as a high school basketball hero, and, caught up in fantasy, he leaves his car at his mother's and runs home, because "his old coach, Bob Behn, used to say never to ride where you could walk."<sup>15</sup>

At home he opens a beer, worries about baldness and catches a glimmer of past glory in a sports page reference to his old basketball scoring record. When his wife comes home the combination of euphoria and panic that has developed over regaining his independence by quitting a boring job, proving his virility by beating a kid in a drag race, and regaining some of his past fame by seeing his name in the newspaper, reaches its climax. He turns on the radio and dances with his wife, and suddenly "he seemed to be great again, and all the other kids were around them, in a ring, clapping

---

14

John Updike, "Ace in the Hole," The Same Door (Greenwich, Connecticut: Fawcett Publications, Incorporated, 1959), p. 20.

15

Ibid., p. 21.

16  
time."

Updike has referred to dancing as the only socially acceptable  
17  
form of sexual intercourse, and Ace's dance with his wife is clearly  
another attempt to prove his virility and thereby deny that he is  
aging, and that death is approaching. Updike constantly reiterates  
the theme that man denies death by taking part in the life creating  
process of sex. In this short story, Ace, who is literally "in the  
hole," is able momentarily to escape his fear. Updike does not,  
however, accept this escape as a valid answer to the problem of death,  
and a part of Rabbit, Run is intended specifically to demonstrate the  
illusory nature of this answer.

Harry "Rabbit" Angstrom, as his name suggests (Angstrom--stream  
of anxiety), is, like Ace Anderson, at a period of anxiety. Like Ace,  
he is an ex-basketball hero, growing old with no apparent purpose to  
his life. Ace recaptures his past through the paper. Rabbit  
recaptures his by playing on a sandlot with some boys. Each returns  
to a wife who fails to understand what is happening. Ace's story  
ends, symbolically, in the dance; Rabbit's just begins.

A number of mutually contradictory forces war within Rabbit.  
The primary one is a kind of anima-eros, a life force, of the kind that

---

16

Ibid., p. 27.

17

Alice Hamilton and Kenneth Hamilton, John Updike: A Critical  
Essay, Contemporary Writers in Christian Perspective, ed., Roderick  
Jellema (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1966), p. 33.

Piet Haenema (Haenema-anima) of Couples shares. This force, shared by all men, but highly developed in Rabbit, is manifested in his sensuality, his sexuality and his creative urge. On the one hand, it leads him into evermore desperate sexual encounters; on the other, it provides the contentment that he finds in his gardening.

He loves folding the hood ridge of crumbs of soil over the seeds. Sealed, they cease to be his. The simplicity. Getting rid of something by giving it. God himself folded into the tiny adamant structure. 18

Here, there is peace. It contrasts sharply to the violence and desperate urgency with which he spreads his own seed.

Mrs. Smith is most acutely aware of Rabbit's peculiar power. She sums it up: "That's what you have, Harry: life. It's a strange gift and I don't know how we're supposed to use it but I know it's the only gift we get and it's a good one." 19

Her assessment of the life force as a good gift is fair enough in general terms, but in Rabbit is a much more ambiguous thing. Complicating and amplifying this life force is Rabbit's awareness of its opposite, death. Rabbit is not a thinker and he does not articulate his fear of death. Instead, it appears in the way that he sees the world. He feels himself "safe inside his own skin" 20 and

---

18

Updike, Rabbit, Run, p. 115.

19

Ibid., p. 187.

20

Ibid., p. 105.

21

Ruth recognizes that "he just lived in his skin." At the same time, he sees that the world that surrounds him is in dissolution. Our first vision of Janice is Rabbit's, "her hair has thinned, so he keeps thinking of her skull under it." <sup>22</sup> The thing that frightens him about Janice is the fact that she is visibly growing older, approaching death.

Since her hair has begun to thin back from her shiny forehead, he keeps getting the feeling of her being brittle, and immovable, of her only going one way, toward deeper wrinkles and skimpier hair. <sup>23</sup>

This vision of dissolution reaches its high point after the first night with Ruth. Rabbit dreams about Janice, and the process of aging that he sees most clearly in her is distilled to an essence.

...and to his horror her face begins to slide, the skin to slip slowly from the bone, just more melting stuff underneath: He cups his hands with the idea of catching it and patting it back; as it drips in loops into his palms. The air turns white with what is his own scream. <sup>24</sup>

The third major force in Rabbit is his awareness of an unseen world. His faith in God is deep and instinctive, though it is not something that he can articulate. Throughout the novel, Rabbit catches glimpses of this unseen world, and most of his actions involve him in transactions with it.

---

<sup>21</sup>

Ibid., p. 125.

<sup>22</sup>

Ibid., pp. 10-11.

<sup>23</sup>

Ibid., p. 13.

<sup>24</sup>

Ibid., p. 76.

These, then, are the warring elements: a primal life force which manifests itself as a selfish ego and a powerful sexual drive, a fear of impending death, and an instinctive belief in God. They are the basic elements of spiritual crisis. Life wars with death, and the only foreseeable resolution is their reconciliation in terms of God's grace.

When the novel begins, the stage is set for Rabbit's spiritual crisis. Rabbit had been a high school basketball hero, but now demonstrates MagiPeel fruit and vegetable peelers in department stores. He is married and has a son. His life appears to have settled down to a dull and ordinary routine.

On his way home from work one day in March, Rabbit stops to play basketball on a back lot with some young boys. His problem is sounded immediately. "He stands there thinking, the kids keep coming, they keep crowding you up."<sup>25</sup> As he plays with the kids, he recaptures some of the excitement of his youth during a time when the game gave his life some kind of focus and meaning. "That old stretched-leather feeling makes his whole body go taut, gives his arms wings. It feels like he's reaching down through years to touch this tautness."<sup>26</sup>

This momentary recapturing of his youth touches off a series of events. Rabbit becomes aware of the new stirrings of life that the spring brings. "The month is March. Tone makes the air light. Things

---

<sup>25</sup>

Ibid., p. 7.

<sup>26</sup>

Ibid., p. 8.

start anew; Rabbit tastes through sour aftersmoke the fresh chance in  
the air...." <sup>27</sup> He throws away his cigarettes and runs home, caught up  
in the spirit of renewal. There, he is confronted by a small messy  
apartment and a wife who is drunk, aging, and unattractive.

At this moment, Rabbit becomes aware that he is trapped, and  
that there is no way out. His awareness that he is caught is  
symbolized in the net-like images that recur throughout the novel.  
Rabbit feels that "the continual crisscrossing mess--clings to his back  
like a tightening net," <sup>28</sup> and he "senses that he is in a trap." <sup>29</sup>

On this impetus, Rabbit sets out on his odyssey. He gets into  
his car and determines to drive south to the Gulf of Mexico. He  
cannot escape, however, since what he is fleeing is not a place but his  
own humanity. On his way "the growing complexity of lights threatens  
him. He is being drawn into Philadelphia." <sup>30</sup> He escapes, but "He  
doesn't drive five miles before this road begins to feel like a part  
of the same trap." <sup>31</sup> No matter where he goes, "The further he drives  
the more he feels some great confused system, Baltimore now instead

---

27

Ibid., p. 9.

28

Ibid., p. 16.

29

Ibid., p. 17.

30

Ibid., p. 25.

31

Ibid.,

of Philadelphia, reaching for him." <sup>32</sup> The land refuses to change its scenery. Everywhere looks like Mt. Judge. "At the upper edge of his headlight beams the naked tree twigs make the same net. Indeed, the

net seems thicker now." <sup>33</sup> Rabbit decides to return and checks the road map. "The names melt away and he sees the map as a whole, a net, all those red lines and blue lines and stars, a net he is somewhere caught in." <sup>34</sup> He returns to Mt. Judge and sleeps in his car, where

"He feels the faded night he left behind in this place as a net of telephone calls and hasty trips, trails of tears and strings of words, white worried threads, shuttled through the night and now faded but still existent, an invisible net overlaying the steep streets and in whose center he lies secure in his locked windowed hutch." <sup>35</sup>

The journey is circular. Rabbit is back where he started, and he is still trapped. All he has gained on his trip is an enigmatic comment from a rural gas station attendant--cum-philosopher, "The only way to get somewhere, you know, is to figure out where you're going before you go there." <sup>36</sup> Rabbit feels that "...it missed the

whole point and yet there is always the chance that little as it is, it is everything." <sup>37</sup> The philosophy can offer very little to Rabbit,

---

<sup>32</sup>

Ibid., p. 30.

<sup>33</sup>

Ibid., p. 32.

<sup>34</sup>

Ibid., p. 34.

<sup>35</sup>

Ibid., p. 37.

<sup>36</sup>

Ibid., p. 27.

<sup>37</sup>

Ibid., p. 34.

however. He does not know where he is going, and if he were able to make the decision about where to go, then he would not have his problem.

In an interview, Updike pointed out that Rabbit, Run says "yes...to our inner urgent whispers, but--the social fabric collapses murderously."<sup>38</sup> The "yes" quality of Rabbit's response to his situation is revealed when he returns from his trip and begins to feel guilty. "But now these reflexes, shallowly scratched, are spent, and deeper instincts flood forward, telling him he is right."<sup>39</sup> Rabbit affirms his individual ego in opposition to everything else. It is this affirmation of the self, that has led some critics into seeing Rabbit as a kind of latter day saint. They justify Rabbit's selfishness as the necessary prerequisite for a spiritual life, and discount the damage he does on the grounds that the people he affects are so insensitive that they deserve no more. All the means are justified by the end.

This is, of course, a kind of lay version of absolute antinomianism. The search for "meaning in life," (the non-religious equivalent of the search for grace), sets the individual above the need for ethical action and responsibility (the non-religious equivalent of the moral law). The novel, however, does not justify this view. Rabbit steps outside

---

38

Charles Thomas Samuels, "The Art of Fiction: John Updike," Paris Review, XLV (Winter, 1968), p. 100.

39

Updike, Rabbit, Run, p. 45.

the moral law, but nothing in the novel suggests that his action is valid, or worthy of approval.

Rabbit is religious. Updike makes this clear from the start. Rabbit and Janice watch Jimmy the Housekateer on television as he provides a platitudinous little sermon about our God-given talents and the need to know ourselves. Rabbit and Janice's reactions reveal their naive religious faith. "Janice and Rabbit become unnaturally still; both are Christians. God's name makes them feel guilty."<sup>40</sup> Rabbit later tells Ruth that he believes in God and reaffirms the statement in a discussion with Eccles the same day. He is aware of an unseen world, of which church going is only one of the manifestations. "Their clothes, they put on their best clothes: he clings to the thought giddily; it seems a visual proof of the unseen world."<sup>41</sup>

When he looks over Brewer from the mountain, he has a clear vision of the religious situation. "His day has been bothered by God: Ruth mocking, Eccles blinking--why did they teach you such things if no one believed them? It seems plain, standing here, that if there is this floor there is a ceiling, that the true space in which we live is upward space."<sup>42</sup>

One of the ways in which Rabbit attempts to reconcile his affirmation of his ego, (the individual projection of the anima-eros

---

<sup>40</sup>

Ibid., p. 12.

<sup>41</sup>

Ibid., p. 77.

<sup>42</sup>

Ibid., p. 96.

that moves men) with his spiritual yearnings is through sex. In an interview in Time magazine, Updike commented on Couples. "There's a lot of dry talk around about love and sex being somehow the new ground of our morality," he said recently, "I thought I should show the ground and ask, is it entirely to be wished for?"<sup>43</sup> He shows the ground in Rabbit, Run as well. Rabbit, unable to find spirituality in his everyday life, attempts to find it in sex.

Rabbit's first night with Ruth becomes a kind of quasi-religious ritual. To begin with, "With this Ruth, Rabbit enters the street."<sup>44</sup> The particular "this," by analogy, ties her to the Biblical Ruth. We imagine the Biblical Ruth as a solitary gleaner, collecting the seeds that no one else wants. This Ruth, a prostitute, gathers another kind of seed, but she is as isolated as the first and the seed she gathers nobody else wants.

Updike makes it clear, that though Rabbit delights in the sensuality of the act, the experience that he wants is not physical but spiritual. Rabbit frightens Ruth with the intensity of his first embrace. It is not physical longing, however, that motivates this violence. Instead, "it is her heart he wants to grind into his own,<sup>45</sup> to comfort her completely." He refuses to allow her to wear a diaphragm, because he wants nothing that is not natural involved in his

---

<sup>43</sup>

"View from the Catacombs," p. 62.

<sup>44</sup>

Updike, Rabbit, Run, p. 63.

<sup>45</sup>

Ibid., p. 65.

ceremony. He insists that she be naked, and even removes her ring. Finally, he wets a cloth and washes the makeup from her face, in this way symbolically purifying her. Though Ruth attempts to reduce the affair to the mechanical, Rabbit resists, "crying out against her smothering throat that it is not her crotch he wants, not the machine; but her, her."<sup>46</sup>

The ritual takes place against the background of a church window across the way. "Lights behind its rose window are left burning, and this circle of red and purple and gold seems in the city night a hole punched in reality to show the abstract brilliance burning underneath."<sup>47</sup> In the short story "Wife Wooing," from Pigeon Feathers, the hero thinks of the psychologist's theory of stained glass windows. "They say rose windows in cathedrals are vaginal symbols."<sup>48</sup> Against this symbol which contains the sexual and the religious,<sup>49</sup> "He makes love to her as he would to his wife."

The experience, however, is not a success. Rabbit has pulled the blind to shut the church out of the room. Afterwards, he feels depressed and his dream symbolizes his guilty response. The white capillaries in the ice is another reminder of the net that binds him.

---

<sup>46</sup>

Ibid., p. 68.

<sup>47</sup>

Ibid., p. 69.

<sup>48</sup>

John Updike, "Wife Wooing," Pigeon Feathers (Greenwich, Connecticut: Fawcett Publications, Incorporated, 1962), p. 80.

<sup>49</sup>

Updike, Rabbit, Run, p. 71.

The girl whose flesh melts and dissolves demonstrates that the flesh will not do. The subconscious mind is clearly aware of the horror and the sin; the conscious mind responds with a childlike prayer. "Help me Christ. Forgive me. Take me down the way. Bless Ruth, Janice, Nelson, my mother and father, Mr. and Mrs. Springer, and the unborn baby. Forgive Totharo and all the others. Amen."<sup>50</sup>

Rabbit finds no salvation in this sensuality, and his attempts become progressively more selfish and debased. The affair with Ruth ends, when, just before he returns to Janice, he insists she commit fellatio. The sensuality here is purely selfish. Rabbit tells Ruth,

51

"I need to see you on your knees." From this, he moves to

52

masturbation, the solitary sex experience, and to the final embarrassing attempt that destroys the reconciliation with Janice when, shortly after she returns from the hospital, he insists that she suffer through a perversion of intercourse that is at this point little more than another kind of excretory function for Rabbit.

Rabbit attempts to trace the motions of grace, and thereby to find the something that wants him to find it, but because of the hardness of his heart, the awareness of sin which he refuses to expiate or even admit, all his paths are blind alleys. Having stepped

---

50

Ibid., p. 77.

51

Ibid., p. 157.

52

Ibid., p. 193.

free from the net of circumstances and human relationships that everywhere threatens to surround him, he feels nearer to the discovery of grace. When he escapes the "little hooks and snares"<sup>53</sup> of his first encounter with Eccles he is exultant. "Harry grins at this cop, and walks along the pavement with his stomach singing. Funny, the world just can't touch you."<sup>54</sup> Later, he makes this a philosophical position when he tells Ruth, "If you have the guts to be yourself...<sup>55</sup> other people'll pay your price."

This freedom of Rabbit's is an illusion, however. Rabbit has become Barth's unfree man, "a creature of chaos, a monster begotten by his own pride."<sup>56</sup> The absolute freedom that Rabbit felt when he started on his trip became a circular path that led him back to his starting point. His sexual experimentation was debasing and self-defeating. The other freely chosen attempts to find meaning were equally abortive. In the moral universe of Rabbit, Run, controlled as it appears to be by a Barthian "wholly other" God, freedom comes only out of God and the relationships that he has decreed. Freedom from this God means slavery to the passions and whims, the inner whisperings that affirm the ego and destroy the social fabric. The

---

<sup>53</sup>

Ibid., p. 193.

<sup>54</sup>

Ibid., p. 89.

<sup>55</sup>

Ibid., p. 92.

<sup>56</sup>

Barth, Humanity of God, p. 76.

net that captures him becomes not the external circumstances that surround him, but the human passions that impel him on his fruitless and circular run.

After Rabbit returns from his fruitless ride, he turns to the aspects of the external circumstances that have so far given him the greatest direction. These are his old school teacher and his mother. Rabbit thinks "Next to mother Tothero had the most force." <sup>57</sup> They were the shaping elements of his youth and so he again turns to them.

Tothero (a pun on taught-hero) has given Rabbit the credo by which he lives. "You can't run enough." <sup>58</sup> Rabbit discovers, though, that the answers his old coach can give are mere platitudes. They were adequate for the young Rabbit, when a basketball hoop could serve as the ultimate end, and aging and death were misty concepts for an undefined future, but they will not do for the older Rabbit in spiritual crisis. Statements like: "you can't make good out of bad," <sup>59</sup> and talk of "the sacredness of achievement" <sup>60</sup> and "the greater game of life" <sup>61</sup> are inadequate in their meaninglessness. As well, Tothero's

---

57

Updike, Rabbit, Run, p. 18.

58

Ibid., p. 54.

59

Ibid., p. 52.

60

Ibid., p. 53.

61

Ibid., p. 54.

own perverted sensuality disgusts Rabbit.

Rabbit's mother can offer no more. Harry loves his mother, a strong, dominant woman, and "it worries him at times that she [Janice] does not seem to love her mother."<sup>62</sup> When he goes to her she defends him, but she is a mother defending her son from predatory females, attempting to reduce his freedom once more, and Rabbit rejects her. She lessens Rabbit's son in his own eyes by pointing out that he has small hands. He is aware that she wants to pull down all of Rabbit's structures and make him a child again.

It's as if she wants to pull down everything, even if it falls on her. And he admires this, her willingness to have him hate her, so long as he gets her message. But he rejects her message, he feels it probing at his heart and rejects it.<sup>63</sup>

Just as Rabbit's sensuality and his human relationships failed him, so do the social institutions fail. His marriage can offer nothing to sustain him in his crisis, because his wife, Janice, is as selfish as he is, and as unable to communicate with him as he is with her. His job, selling MagiPeel peelers, operating as a sort of circus barker, can offer even less. His religion, the one thing that should sustain him, can do no more than these.

Eccles (a play of words on "ecclesiastical") is Rabbit's wife's pastor. He sees helping Rabbit as a part of his role and attempts to offer a sort of theological strength. Unfortunately, his own theology is so watered down that he can't offer very much. At any rate, there is

---

<sup>62</sup>

Ibid., p. 182.

<sup>63</sup>

Ibid., p. 191.

a mutual attraction, and what conscious thinking Rabbit does is in response to Eccles' attempts to return him to responsibility.

Eccles finds Rabbit attractive for much the same reason that Ruth does and that Mrs. Smith does. Ruth tells Rabbit she likes him "cause you haven't given up. 'cause in your stupid way you're still fighting."<sup>64</sup> Mrs. Smith recognizes Rabbit's attractiveness as "the gift of life."<sup>65</sup> Rabbit himself is aware of this effect he has on others and reveals it in a conversation with Ruth when she wonders why people like him. "I'm a mystic," he says. "I give people faith."<sup>66</sup> Eccles has told him this, and cryptic though the statement may be, it does contain the truth. It is Rabbit's anima, his driving force and his refusal to submit to circumstances that makes him appeal to others. His awareness of something beyond that wants him to find it, or, in other words, his desperate search for grace, communicates itself as a spiritual force, and, in Eccles' words, "gives people faith."

Rabbit is aware, at least in part, that finding an answer to his quest would destroy this force. During his first encounter with Eccles, he says, "If you're telling me I'm not mature, that's one thing I don't cry over since as far as I can make out, it's the same

---

<sup>64</sup>

Ibid., p. 79.

<sup>65</sup>

Ibid., p. 137.

<sup>66</sup>

Ibid., p. 121.

67  
 thing as being dead."

Speaking of a similar kind of destruction of force in Couples, Updike comments that after God has destroyed the church and Piet Hanema (Hanema-anima) is free from God and his religious concerns, he dies metaphorically. "He becomes merely a name in the last paragraph: he becomes a satisfied person, and in a sense dies. In other words, a person who has what he wants, a satisfied person, a content person, ceases to be a person. Unfallen Adam is an ape." 68 The paradox of grace is that it demands a metaphoric death. A certain amount of the sovereignty and independence of the individual ego must be given up. This is the kind of surrender that Caldwell makes in The Centaur. It should not be confused with the kind of resignation to sin that occurs in Couples when God destroys the church. At any rate, Rabbit is caught in a kind of tension between the two, and cannot surrender to either.

Eccles attempts, without much success, to help Rabbit. He is the third in a line of Christian ministers. His grandfather was a free thinking ultra-liberal. His father was a rigid dogmatist. Eccles attempts to find some midpoint for his own views, and is aware that he is not as popular as either. He inclines more to the liberality of his grandfather, but feels continually threatened by the thought that his father was right, and that he himself is somehow in error.

---

67

Ibid., p. 90.

68

Samuels, "Interview," p. 101.

His problem is compounded by a Freud-quoting wife who considers his religion neurotic.

Eccles explains his theology to Rabbit. He sees Hell "as  
 69 separation from God," and explains that our earthly separation from  
 70 Him is "inner darkness." When Rabbit tells Eccles of the thing that  
 was somehow missing in his marriage and in his life, Eccles taunts  
 him: "What is it? What is it? Is it hard or soft? Harry, is it  
 71 blue? Is it red? Does it have polka dots?" Rabbit sees through  
 Eccles, though, and becomes aware of Eccles' own basic insecurity.

It hits Rabbit depressingly that he really wants to be  
 told. Underneath all this I-know-more-about-it-than-you-  
 heresies-of-the-early-Church business he really wants to be  
 told about it, wants to be told that it is there, that he's  
 not lying to all those people every Sunday. 72

Eccles sees his role in life as a kind of intermediary on  
 earth, leading people towards grace. His confidence is, however,  
 shaken when he speaks to Rabbit's own minister, Kruppenbach.

A staunch right-wing churchman, Kruppenbach dismisses Rabbit  
 as a schussel, a good-for-nothing, and sums up the problem, "What do  
 you think now it looks like to God, one childish husband leaving one  
 73 childish wife?" He encourages Eccles to become an exemplar of

---

69

Updike, Rabbit, Run, p. 106.

70

Ibid., p. 107.

71

Ibid., p. 112.

72

Ibid.

73

Ibid., p. 143.

faith, and to burn his parishioners with the heat of his belief. He dismisses Eccles' good works as easily as Hook dismisses Commers' in The Poorhouse Fair. Without the strength of faith, all works are, in Hook's words, mere "busyness" and the Devil's work. Eccles feels the force of his father in those words and is severely shaken by them. In a kind of ironic gesture, he goes to the drugstore and balances Kruppenbach's flaming belief with a cool marble counter and an ice cream cone.

His awareness of the influence of his father is revealed earlier when he speaks to Mrs. Springer:

With his white collar he forges God's name on every word he speaks. He steals belief from the children he is supposed to be teaching. He murders faith in the minds of anyone who really listens to his babble. He commits fraud with every schooled cadence of the service, mouthing Our Father when his heart knows the real father he is trying to please, has been trying to please all his life. 74

Eccles' belief is not stronger than Rabbit's, and so he is susceptible to Kruppenbach's powerful authority.

In spite of Eccles' weakness, he does move Rabbit to a greater articulation of his spiritual state than Rabbit is accustomed to declaring. Left to himself, Rabbit feels and responds on a basic, primal level. At their first meeting Rabbit declares his selfishness and his insularity. "All I know is what's inside me. That's all I have." 75 This is the point that Eccles seizes on during their next meeting at the golf course. In response to Eccles' questioning, Rabbit articulates his reasons more clearly. He is searching for the

---

74

Ibid., pp. 129-30.

75

Ibid., p. 91.

76

"something that wants me to find it." Eccles responds by accusing Rabbit of solipsism. He tells Rabbit that Jesus said, "That saints  
 77 shouldn't marry," and a little later exclaims, "We're trying to serve  
 78 God, not be God."

At the same time, Rabbit, who tends to feel rather than think, works out his game in terms of his sexual relationships. The irons represent Janice, hard, cold, and rigid. (Kenneth Hamilton  
 79 suggests Janice = January, ice, hence frigidity). The woods represent Ruth, the natural and the warm. The hole as a symbol combines ideas of sex with ideas of home, and thus fits into a complex symbolic pattern.

The hole as a symbol recurs throughout Rabbit, Run and, indeed, throughout Updike's writing. In "Ace in the Hole," it is primarily sexual. In "Pigeon Feathers," it is death. "...a long hole in the ground, no wider than your body, down which you are drawn while the  
 80 faces above you recede." In Rabbit, Run, it gains other ramifications. Again it is sexual, as in the image of the basketball hoop. "There was you and then the hole, the high perfect hole with its pretty skirt  
 81 of net." Here it is tied in with the image of the net, representative

---

76

Ibid., p. 107.

77

Ibid.

78

Ibid., p. 112.

79

Hamilton and Hamilton, "John Updike," p. 36.

80

Updike, "Pigeon Feathers," p. 80.

81

Updike, Rabbit, Run, p. 35.

of relationships and responsibilities and suggests that sexuality is tied to responsibility. (A basketball player less sexually obsessed than Rabbit will think of the hoop and not the hole.)

At another level, the hole becomes a link with the past and in some mystical way with the primal sources of life. This is expressed in the image of the ruined cellar which appears at three separate places in the novel.<sup>82</sup> In each case, Rabbit's reaction is fear, "a

clangorous horror, as if this ruined evidence of a human intrusion into a world of blind life tolls bells that ring to the edges of the universe."<sup>83</sup> Somehow, it makes Rabbit aware of his feeble humanity.

"...he obscurely feels lit by a great spark, the spark whereby the blind tumble of matter recognized itself, a spark struck in the collision of two opposed realms, an encounter a terrible God willed."<sup>84</sup> Again, it is death, as the hole in the churchyard, the grave in which Rabbit's daughter is buried.

Finally, the hole is a connection between the world of reality and the unseen world of which Rabbit is aware. The church window seems "...to make a hole where he looked through into underlying brightness."<sup>85</sup> In the same fashion, it is the keyhole that will

---

82

These references may be found on pages 19, 64, and 247.

83

Ibid., p. 247.

84

Ibid.

85

Ibid., p. 254.

unlock the door to grace for Rabbit. Throughout the novel Rabbit is scratching at keyholes, and this scratching ties into the symbolism of the hole.<sup>86</sup> Rabbit is constantly seeking the key that will unlock the door to grace.

At any rate, the golf game serves as a kind of metaphor for human existence, "...as if they are together engaged in an impossible, startling, bottomless quest set by a benevolent but absurd lord, a quest whose humiliations stung them almost to tears, but one that is renewed at each tee."<sup>87</sup>

When Janice goes to the hospital to have her baby, Rabbit is drawn back into the net of responsibility and his awareness of his relationship to God assumes greater import as he becomes personally involved in the actual movements of life and death. At the same time, it becomes much more urgent that he resolve this relationship against the whispered demands of ego and libido.

Rabbit's initial response is an intense and physical awareness of sin.

He is certain that as a consequence of his sin Janice or the baby will die. His sin a conglomerate of flight, cruelty, obscenity and conceit; a black clot embodied in the entrails of the birth. Though his bowels twist with the will to dismiss this clot, to retract, to turn back and undo, he does not turn to the priest beside him, but instead reads the same sentence about delicious fried trout again and again.<sup>88</sup>

---

86

Images of scratching may be found on pages 10, 11, 45, 65, 158, 197, 202, 208, 211, 230, and 243.

87

Ibid., p. 141.

88

Ibid., p. 164.

Even when sin affects Rabbit as powerfully as this, his response is to ignore it.

The sin will not permit him to ignore it, however, and as Rabbit waits, it becomes more intense and forces him to draw conclusions. In his fantasy, his sin becomes a phylogenic factor, affecting his offspring. "The idea grows that it will be a monster, a monster of his making. The thrust whereby it was conceived becomes confused in his mind with the perverted entry a few hours ago he made into Ruth."<sup>89</sup> From the retrospect of this point of desperate pressure, "His life seems a sequence of grotesque poses assumed to no purpose, a magic dance empty of belief."<sup>90</sup> This thought is balanced by another simultaneous awareness.<sup>91</sup> "There is no God. Janice can die."

This is the only point in the entire novel at which Rabbit considers the possibility that God may not exist. At no point before or after this is doubt a part of Rabbit's problem. He is always aware of the unseen world as real, and needs not faith, but grace. This is the nadir of Rabbit's despair, but it does not become a turning point from which he moves to grace. Instead, he drives the thought from his mind with nostalgic reminiscence of his first sexual episodes, and achieves a kind of joy.

The possibility of Janice's death, which is what has brought

---

<sup>89</sup>

Ibid., p. 165.

<sup>90</sup>

Ibid.

<sup>91</sup>

Ibid.

Rabbit to this point becomes less real when Mrs. Springer accuses Rabbit of desiring it. Her articulation of Rabbit's fear, creates in him a sense of community, and he drops part of his burden. "The dreadful thought of Janice's death; hearing it voiced aloud had halved its weight."<sup>92</sup>

Enough is left though to keep Rabbit aware of the "gap of guilt"<sup>93</sup> between himself and the rest of humanity, and to make him willing to try to exert some control over himself. He tells Mrs. Eccles, "Last night driving home I got this feeling of a straight road ahead of me; before that it was like I was in the bushes and it didn't matter which way I went."<sup>94</sup> This willingness to try, combined with Rabbit's momentary awareness, when Mrs. Springer accused him of desiring Janice's death, that sin is shared, would seem to be a good start on the way to grace.

The days between Rabbit's return and Janice's coming home from the hospital, Rabbit shares with his son, and it is at this point that he becomes aware of one of the possibilities of attaining grace. He becomes aware first of the fact that his quest is mistaken. "He feels the truth: the thing that had left his life had left irrevocably; no search would recover it. No flight would reach it. It was here,

---

<sup>92</sup>

Ibid., p. 167.

<sup>93</sup>

Ibid., p. 168.

<sup>94</sup>

Ibid., p. 175.

beneath the town, in these smells and these voices, forever behind  
<sup>95</sup> him." "This is the preliminary acceptance necessary in order to  
 be able to accept the idea of death. It leads him to the next step:  
 the best thing he can do is submit to the system and give Nelson the  
<sup>96</sup> chance to pass, as he did, unthinkingly through it."

This, of course, leads to a paradox. The acceptance of  
 sacrifice for the sake of the child involves a metaphoric death.  
 Rabbit has already equated maturity with death, and denied that it  
 was a valid alternative. Rabbit is a Christian, though, and a Christian  
 must accept death if he is going to be able to accept the most  
 fundamental aspect of Christianity: the idea of rebirth.

The idea that an indissoluble relationship exists between  
 parents and children is one of Updike's most important themes. He  
 sees the fulfilling of man's God-given duty through this relationship  
 as one of the means of achieving grace. The theme is given its  
 fullest treatment in The Centaur.

Once Updike has established this surrender as a possible  
 alternative for Rabbit, he examines the nature of Rabbit's belief.  
 Rabbit's faith is primal and instinctive. "His feeling that there is  
 an unseen world is instinctive, and more of his actions than anyone  
<sup>97</sup> suspects constitute transactions with it." Rabbit is constantly on

---

<sup>95</sup>

Ibid., p. 188.

<sup>96</sup>

Ibid.

<sup>97</sup>

Ibid., p. 195.

the lookout for objective proofs of its existence. The first night he is with Ruth, "The thought of these people having the bold idea of leaving their homes to come here and pray pleases and reassures Rabbit...."<sup>98</sup> He dresses carefully before he goes to church himself because, superstitiously, he feels that this makes his belief somehow more valid.

He hates all the people on the street in dirty everyday clothes, advertising their belief that the world arches over a pit, that death is final, that the thread of his feelings leads nowhere. Correspondingly he loves the ones dressed for church; the pressed business suits of portly men give substance and respectability to his furtive sensations of the invisible. ...They release him from fear.<sup>99</sup>

He is not above mocking them, however. The morning after his first night with Ruth, he attempts to lure her back to bed because, "The idea of making it while the churches are full excites him."<sup>100</sup>

It is only when Rabbit attends Eccles' church and listens to his sermon that the real nature of Rabbit's belief becomes clear.

Harry has no taste for the dark, tangled, visceral aspect of Christianity, the going through quality of it, the passage into death and suffering that redeems and inverts these things, like an umbrella blowing inside out. He lacks the mindful will to walk the straight line of a paradox. His eyes turn toward the light; however, it glances into his retina.<sup>101</sup>

---

<sup>98</sup>

Ibid., p. 77.

<sup>99</sup>

Ibid., p. 196.

<sup>100</sup>

Ibid., p. 78.

<sup>101</sup>

Ibid., p. 197.

Rabbit has not the "mindful will" that it requires to accept and live with a paradox, and for that reason, redemption is beyond him. He cannot accept death, even metaphorically, because he cannot live with a paradox, and so the sacrifice of his own ego to his son is beyond him. His eyes turn always to the light, and throughout the novel light functions as a symbol of grace, a kind of "underlying brightness,"<sup>102</sup> or "abstract brilliance burning underneath,"<sup>103</sup> the unseen world, in fact, that Rabbit so often glimpses. He wants to reach the light, but he will not face the dark to reach it; that is to say, he denies responsibility and suffering as ways toward grace.

Rabbit demonstrates this when he leaves Janice for the second time. In response to her resentment of his perverse sexual demands shortly after the baby's birth, Rabbit asserts the primacy of his own ego. She asks him to consider how she feels, and he responds, "I can. I can, but I don't want to, it's not the thing, the thing is how I<sup>104</sup> feel, and I feel like getting out."

As a result of Rabbit's second disappearance, Janice becomes drunk, and, in what is one of the most powerfully horrible scenes in any fiction, she drowns the baby in the bathtub while trying to wash it. This perverse and ironic baptism brings Rabbit back and puts him squarely in the presence of death.

---

102

Ibid., p. 254.

103

Ibid., p. 69.

104

Ibid., p. 207.

Rabbit, on his return, is sick with grief and the sense of his own responsibility. It remains within him, physical, as a "...heavy knot of apprehension" or a "hard loop in himself." He learns something too, of the nature of God, when he drains the water from the tub in which the baby drowned:

He watches the line of water slide slowly and evenly down the wall of the tub, and then with a crazed vortical cry the last of it is sucked down. He thinks how easy it was, yet in all this strength God did nothing. Just that little rubber stopper to lift. 107

When Rabbit considered Janice's death, he saw it in terms of God's existence. If there were no God then Janice could die. He knows now that his God is at least not actively beneficent, stepping in to work miracles for Rabbit.

Rabbit is visited shortly after by Tothero, who comes preaching a humanistic creed. He tells Rabbit that right and wrong are man made, that they do not drop from the sky, and that misery is the result of their disobedience. Rabbit feels sullied by his association with Tothero and chilled by his revelation. "He wants to believe in the sky as the source of all things."

In response to Tothero, Rabbit turns desperately to Eccles, wanting confirmation that "the thing out there" really exists, but

105

Ibid., p. 230.

106

Ibid., p. 224.

107

Ibid., p. 230.

108

Ibid., p. 233.

Eccles cannot help him. He refuses to see grace as an object to be sought. He explains to Rabbit that guilt is shared in community, and that one must work towards forgiveness, must earn and not seize grace. He says, "Harry, it's not for me to forgive you. You've done nothing to me to forgive. I'm equal with you in guilt. We must work for forgiveness; we must earn the right to see the thing beyond every-

109  
thing." Eccles makes a valid distinction between Rabbit's illusion and the traditional Christian road to grace, then follows this distinction with the fatuous conclusion that "...this tragedy, terrible  
110  
as it is, has at last united you and Janice in a sacred way."

Rabbit responds in his usual, animal-like way. He tries to believe, though his belief "seems to bear no relation to the colors and sounds  
111  
of the big sorrowing house." Rabbit feels, but he does not think much. Ideas tend to slip away from him.

As the novel approaches its climactic end, Rabbit's nervous intensity builds. His concern with understanding death reveals itself in his dream:

He is all alone on a large sporting field, or vacant lot littered with small pebbles. In the sky two perfect disks, identical in size but the one a dense white and the other slightly transparent, move toward each other slowly; the pale one is directly above the dense one. At the moment they touch he feels frightened and a voice like over a loudspeaker at a

---

109

Ibid., p. 234.

110

Ibid., p. 234.

111

Ibid.

track meet announces, 'The cowslip swallows up the elder.'<sup>112</sup> The downward gliding of the top one continues steadily until the other, though the stronger, is totally eclipsed, and just one circle is before his eyes, pale and pure. He understands: 'The cowslip' is the moon, and 'the elder' the sun, and what he has witnessed is the explanation of death: lovely life eclipsed by lovely death. With great excitement he realizes he must go forth from this field and found a new religion. 112

The dream underlines the expectancy that Rabbit feels. Grace is God's forgiveness. The understanding of death is, in other words, the acceptance of grace. The dream is a false resolution, however, and Rabbit awakes to find that nothing has changed, that he must still carry the knot of responsibility and fear in him.

Rabbit can never carry responsibility for long, and after a passing flash of love for Janice, makes her cry, so that he can be insulated from real contact with her or her parents through the agency of hatred. "Immersed in hate he doesn't have to do anything; he can be paralyzed, and the rigidity of hatred makes a kind of shelter for him."<sup>113</sup> At the same time, he realizes, like Lady Macbeth, that he is sullied by the whole experience and is intensely aware that he is dirty and ugly. He washes himself with intense care, hoping somehow to clean and purify himself.

At the funeral, Rabbit's mother serves as a catalyst, freeing him from hatred and from responsibility. Rabbit, nervous and excited, listens to Eccles' words, and though, for Eccles, they are merely a

---

<sup>112</sup>

Ibid., pp. 234-35.

<sup>113</sup>

Ibid., p. 238.

formula that convention demands he recite; Rabbit is aware of the possibility in them. He experiences an intense sense of community with the world at large.

He feels them all, the heads as still around him as the tombstones, he feels them all one, all one with the grass, with the hothouse flowers, all, the undertaker's men, the unseen caretaker who has halted his mower, all gathered into one here to give his unbaptized baby force to leap to Heaven. 114

He feels certain that his child has ascended to Heaven, and this relieves him from responsibility. Eccles recites "casting every  
115  
care on Thee." Rabbit has done that, and so feels free.

The sense of freedom is followed by a moment of intense spiritual awareness. "It is as if he has been crawling in a cave and now at last beyond the dark recession of crowding rocks he has seen a patch of light; he turns and Janice's face, dumb with grief, blocks  
116  
the light." Rabbit wants to offer forgiveness, to let the others join him in the truth. He wants to state the simple factual truth, the fact that Janice killed the baby, not him, but that he forgives her. The response that he expects is not there. All he gets back is dumb grief and shocked horror at his cruelty. Their response destroys his vision. "His face burns; forgiveness had been big in his heart and now it's hate. He hates her dumb face. She doesn't see.

114

Ibid., p. 243.

115

Ibid., p. 244.

116

Ibid.

She had a chance to join him in truth, just the simplest factual  
 117 truth, and turned away in horror." Rabbit responds in his usual way.  
 He runs, leaving the stunned mourners to watch him disappear.

This passage has been variously used by critics to justify  
 Rabbit, to make the sum of his actions somehow right. Dean Doner points  
 out that:

Brutal as Rabbit's remarks are, the real impact and the  
 real significance of the scene at the graveside comes when  
 we realize that, of all those gathered there, only Rabbit  
 believes in God. There is not one good word to be said for  
 him, yet he alone perceives the unseen. 118

From this, he concludes that because the others do not believe in God,  
 they must share their guilt and grief in a community from which Rabbit  
 may be excluded. Similarly, David Galloway justifies Rabbit by  
 seeing him as a new kind of saint who is justified in his cruelty  
 because he experiences God intensely, while the others are merely  
 ordinary Christians. To do so he inverts Pascal's pensee. The  
 discovery of grace "...demands a hardness of heart and a definite  
 119 obliviousness to external circumstances."

Neither of these views is tenable. They deny not only the

---

117

Ibid.

118

Dean Doner, "Rabbit Angstom's Unseen World," New World  
Writing, XIX (1961), p. 72.

119

David Galloway, "The Absurd Man as Saint: The Novels of  
 John Updike," Modern Fiction Studies, XI (September 24, 1964),  
 p. 34.

movement of the novel, but also Updike's own stated religious stand-  
 point. He has stated, "theologically, I favor Karl Barth,"<sup>120</sup> and no  
 reading of Barth could ever justify the denial of community or the  
 validity of sin. Updike's God is like Barth's God, real, terrible,  
 and powerful. Updike states, "I've never really understood theologies  
 which would absolve God of earthquakes and typhoons, of children  
 starving. A god who is not God the Creator is not very real to me."<sup>121</sup>  
 In a poem, "Seven Stanzas at Easter," Updike clearly indicated the kind  
 of God he accepts:

Make no mistake: If he rose at all  
 it was as His body;  
 if the cells dissolution did not reverse, the molecules  
 reknit, the amino acids rekindle,  
 the Church will fall. 122

This God, whose miracles are real is the God of the Bible. He is  
 functional in all of Updike's work, and no amount of justification of  
 Rabbit's sin in terms of the absurd will free Rabbit from His Wrath.

It is Rabbit's anima-eros, the spirit of life within him, and the  
 generalized love of which he is capable, that makes him attractive.  
 It does not, however, justify him. Rabbit's experience at the grave-  
 side is not a real acceptance of grace. It is as illusory as the

---

120

Samuels, The Art of Fiction: John Updike, p. 97.

121

Ibid., p. 101.

122

John Updike, "Seven Stanzas at Easter," Verse: The  
 Carpentered Men and Telephone Poles (Greenwich, Connecticut: Fawcett  
 Publications, Incorporated, 1963), p. 164.

dream. Like the shelter he receives when the others hate him, it is a way of insulating himself and freeing himself from responsibility. At the graveside, like everywhere else, Rabbit demands that others pay his price. He is not aware that, as Barth says, "...there is no  
123  
private Christianity," that grace, though an individual relationship with God must be achieved through community with others. Rabbit's religious experience becomes another affirmation of his private ego.

When Rabbit leaves the grave, he runs to Ruth, still confident that all will be well, that he will find the way. He finds that she is pregnant and is contemplating an abortion. She calls him Mr. Death, and tells him, "Boy, you really have the touch of death, don't  
124  
you?" In theological terms, she is perfectly correct. Rabbit does have the touch of death. Unrepentant and unsaved, he is, in spite of his anima-eros, a slave to death, and not merely metaphoric death, but real and eternal death. Karl Barth, speaking of sin and iniquity, says:

Why are they forbidden? Because their end is death; because they issue from the 'vitality of mortality'; because they spread death and are dedicated to it; because they cannot exist in the devouring fire of the life which is perceived through death. [*Italics mine*] 125

In this respect, Ruth's appellation "Mr. Death" is perfectly correct.

Rabbit leaves in confusion, still not comprehending because

---

123

Barth, Humanity of God, p. 64.

124

Updike, Rabbit, Run, p. 251.

125

Barth, Epistle to the Romans, p. 227.

"it is too complicated and, compared to the vision of a sandwich,  
 126 unreal." He cannot choose between, "the right way and the good way,  
 127 the way to the delicatessen." The trivial mixes with the vitally  
 important, but discrimination is beyond Rabbit. "Guilt and  
 responsibility slide together like two substantial shadows in his  
 128 chest." Like the sun and the moon in his dream, things begin to  
 merge, to blot each other out. His daughter he has sent to Heaven.  
 His son remains, a burden he is aware of and cannot escape.

As Rabbit leaves, he passes the church he has seen from Ruth's  
 window.

Afraid, really afraid, he remembers what once consoled him  
 by seeming to make a hole where he looked through into under-  
 lying brightness, and lifts his eyes to the church window. It  
 is, because of church poverty or the late summer nights or just  
 carelessness, unlit, a dark circle in a stone facade. 129

The light, the symbol of grace, has gone out. David Galloway suggests  
 that the dark window is a symbol of Rabbit's turning his back on the  
 church, but this is not tenable. It is not Rabbit who has rejected the  
 light, but the light which has rejected Rabbit. Rabbit is no saint on  
 the first step of a new odyssey, but a traditional Christian sinner  
 who has cut himself off from God's grace.

---

126

Updike, Rabbit, Run, p. 253.

127

Ibid., p. 254.

128

Ibid., p. 253.

129

Ibid., p. 254.

Rabbit experiences a final resolution, similar to his faulty spiritual vision at the grave. He feels that, "goodness lies inside, there is nothing outside, those things he was trying to balance have no weight."<sup>130</sup> This is a last and desperate affirmation of his ego.

Immediately afterwards, "He feels his inside as very real suddenly, a pure blank space in the middle of a dense net."<sup>131</sup> The fact that

he himself doesn't know where he is going makes him feel "infinitely small and impossible to capture."<sup>132</sup> This reminds him of playing

basketball, and passing the ball off, to make the men guarding him look foolish, "because in effect there was nobody there."<sup>133</sup>

In this is Rabbit's real philosophy. He aims at blankness, at nothingness. Like Conner of The Poorhouse Fair, who hoped for blank skies, Rabbit aims at an encompassing personal blankness, that will permit him to escape the net of personal and communal responsibility. He is an expert at passing the ball. Others "just can't touch" him, because in effect, there is nobody there. In his refusal to accept proffered grace at the cost of metaphoric death in terms of the suppressed ego, Rabbit becomes nobody.

The novel ends with Rabbit running again, once more on his trip to nowhere:

---

<sup>130</sup>

Ibid.

<sup>131</sup>

Ibid.

<sup>132</sup>

Ibid.

<sup>133</sup>

Ibid., p. 295.

His hands lift of their own and he feels the wind on his ears even before, his heels hitting heavily on the pavement at first but with an effortless gathering out of a kind of sweet panic growing lighter and quicker and quieter, he runs. Ah runs. Runs. 134

The paradoxical joy of the ending has led to some critical assertions that Rabbit has suddenly gained a real and valid insight into the nature of things. Galloway asserts that "responding to these inner voices which warn him that escape from the pretensions and inconsistencies of the world is the only course by which he can maintain his integrity, Rabbit, like Huck Finn, lights out for the wilderness: escape becomes fulfillment and irresponsibility becomes responsibility." 135 This view is a kind of wilfull antinomianism. Rabbit's release is as much a release from God as it is from responsibility. 136 According to Karl Barth, "freedom is joy," but it is freedom for God, the freedom of grace, that is real joy and freedom from God that is the perverse joy of slavery. Rabbit has the second kind of freedom. The light in the church window is out, and the "movements of grace" have had no effect.

Mrs. Springer asks Eccles the key question: "Well, if the world is going to be full of Harry Angstroms how much longer do you think they'll need your church?" 137 Updike provides a clear answer.

---

134

Ibid.

135

Galloway, "Absurd Man," p. 40.

136

Barth, Humanity of God, p. 78.

137

Updike, Rabbit, Run, p. 129.

God will destroy the churches. In Couples, Piet Hanema's church burns, as a result of his sin. "The Congregational Church was burning. God's own lightning had struck it."<sup>138</sup> Updike, in an interview confirmed his intention. "...yes, it certainly is God who throws the lightning bolt."<sup>139</sup> John Thomson, in a review of Couples comments, "But who could have supposed that what we took to be the celebration of freedom would turn out to be the celebration of death."<sup>140</sup> That comment can serve adequately for Rabbit, Run. John Updike's Rabbit, Run has a message, but it is not a message about the absurd, or about sainthood. It is the age-old Christian message: Grace is in motion, God is in Heaven; he who rejects grace is lost.

---

<sup>138</sup>

John Updike, Couples (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1968), p. 241.

<sup>139</sup>

Samuels, "The Art of Fiction: John Updike," p. 101.

<sup>140</sup>

John Thompson, "Updike's Couples," Commentary (May, 1968), p. 73.

### CHAPTER III

#### THE CENTAUR: GRACE IN MOTION

The Centaur was originally conceived as a companion piece to Rabbit, Run, and it is, in fact, an extension of the same concerns. Rabbit, Run was concerned with the failure of grace that resulted from the hero's refusal to accept metaphoric death, in terms of the denial of the individual ego. The Centaur demonstrates how the motions of grace may become effective when a man is willing to accept the dwindling of his private ego and accept, as a sacrifice, his own metaphoric death.

The Centaur is prefaced by a quotation from Karl Barth:

"Heaven is the creation inconceivable to man, earth the creation conceivable to him. He himself is the creature on the boundary between<sup>1</sup> heaven and earth." The novel operates in terms of this quotation. Its hero, George Caldwell, is a science teacher who has, nevertheless, an abiding and vital faith in God. He is seen metaphorically as a centaur, part horse, part man, and near-god. Significantly, though the novel is structured in terms of Greek mythology, the central image is Christian. Caldwell is the man on the boundary between earth and heaven. Updike said of his choice of the centaur, "I was moved, first, by the Chiron variant of the Hercules myth--one of the few classic instances of self-sacrifice, and the name oddly close to

---

<sup>1</sup>

John Updike, The Centaur (Greenwich, Connecticut: Fawcett Publications, Incorporated, 1963), p. 3.

<sup>2</sup>  
 Christ." More than the name is close to Christ. The idea of self-sacrifice for the good of the whole is central to the Christian myth. That is the main precept of Christ's sacrificial death. In the same way, the individual attains grace through a similar ritual--self-sacrifice. Barth says, "Dying with Christ is the vast negation beyond which by grace we stand."<sup>3</sup>

The novel is extremely complex in structure, but the structure must be understood if the novel is to have meaning. First, there is the obvious overlay of Greek mythology. This device has been much commented on by reviewers and critics, most of whom claim either too much or too little for it. Bryant N. Wyatt, for instance, sees Updike's use of mythology as a glorious failure:

Thus we are to see the element of time, embodying the golden past expanded into timelessness; the Caldwell family, merging with the avatars of classical antiquity, magnified to titanic dimensions; and the quest for identity, amplified by the character of Prometheus, made archetypal. But Updike cannot quite temper his modern day plot to fit the forged mythical pattern, so structure once again fails.<sup>4</sup>

D. J. Kuright is even less kind. He quickly dismisses the entire attempt, stating "...The Centaur was a fairly obvious case of

---

<sup>2</sup>  
 Charles Thomas Samuels, "The Art Of Fiction: John Updike," Paris Review, XLV (Winter, 1968), p. 103.

<sup>3</sup>  
 Karl Barth, The Epistle to the Romans, trans. by Edwyn C. Hoskyns (Oxford University Press, 1933), p. 201.

<sup>4</sup>  
 Bryant N. Wyatt, "John Updike: The Psychological Novel in Search of Structure," Twentieth Century Literature, 13, (1967), pp. 89-96.

mythology dragged in by the ears to bolster up a thinnish story-  
line."<sup>5</sup>

What these and a good many others fail to perceive is that the device is essentially roccoco. It is not intended as a purely organic fusion of the real and the archetypal of the kind that Joyce uses in Ulysses. Instead, it operates usually as a kind of irony, creating humour and ironic comment on the concerns of the characters. Updike himself has clearly stated its purpose:

The mythology operated in a number of ways: a correlative of the enlarging effect of Peter's nostalgia, a dramatization of Caldwell's sense of exclusion and mysteriousness around him, a counterpart of ideality to the drab real level, an excuse for a number of jokes, a serious expression of my sensation that the people we meet are guises, do conceal something mythic, perhaps prototypes or longings in our minds. 6

Tied closely to the use of mythology is the fact that The Centaur is essentially a comic novel. Though in each case there is the suggestion of an archetypal connection between the character and his mythological referent, more often than not, the connection is humorous. At the beginning of the novel, when Chiron meets Aphrodite (that is, George Caldwell meets Vera Hummel), the tone is set for the rest of the novel. She reduces the status of the gods immediately. Zeus (Zimmerman) is "a lecherous muddler,"<sup>7</sup> his wife

---

<sup>5</sup> D. J. Enright, "The Inadequate American: John Updike's Fiction," in D. J. Enright, Conspirators and Poets. (London: Chatto and Windus, 1966), p. 135.

<sup>6</sup> Samuels, "The Art of Fiction," p. 103.

<sup>7</sup> Updike, The Centaur, p. 25.

Hera is a frustrated virago "beating her servants because Zeus had not  
<sup>8</sup> spent a night in her bed for a year," Poseidon is "a senile old  
<sup>9</sup> deckhand," Apollo is "an unctuous prig,"<sup>10</sup> Artemis may be seen  
<sup>11</sup> "tittering around the woods with a pack of Vassar freshmen," and  
 even her virginity is suspect. Throughout the novel the ironies,  
 jokes and double-entendres continue. Toothless old Pop Kramar, of  
 course, becomes Kronos, or Father Time. Dionysius appears as a  
 lecherous old homosexual hitchhiker; Hephaestus, the lame smith of  
 the gods becomes Kummel, the garage keeper, and his dimly lit garage  
 is highlighted by acetylene torches, and, appropriately enough,  
 infested with goggled mechanic-cyclops. Minor Kretz (King Minos of  
 Crete) runs a labyrinthine cafe, in which may be found Johnny Badman,  
 a pinball-playing, mechanically-minded Daedalus. The building which  
 houses the cafe also contains the post office, run by Mrs. Passify  
 (Pasiphae, the daughter of the moon and the wife of King Minos).  
 There is, in fact, a path worn between the two buildings, as if Minor  
 Kretz and Mrs. Passify were secretly married. Peter's (Prometheus)  
 girlfriend Penny is, of course, Pandora, and it requires little  
 imagination to guess the significance of Pandora's Box. Old Doc  
 Appleton (Apollo) is proud of his learning, but his wife Corrina

---

<sup>8</sup>
Ibid.<sup>9</sup>Ibid.<sup>10</sup>Ibid.<sup>11</sup>Ibid.

(Coronis) has left him under strange circumstances, and his son Skippy (Asclepius), a bright ex-student of Chiron-Caldwell, is a doctor in St. Louis. His virginal twin sister, Hester (Artemis) teaches in the high school. He shares Prometheus-Peter's curse of Psoriasis, as does Peter's mother Cassie (Chariclo/Ceres) who moved them to the country. (As Ceres, the mother of grain, she wants to be near the land.)

Through the mythic land of Olinger (Olympus) moves the centaur (George Caldwell). Updike, in his spoofing mythological index omits Chiron and Prometheus since they are ubiquitous; that is to say, all fathers and sons. Caldwell himself is a comic hero. He exudes a kind of restless energy, and seems inhabited by an almost demonic force that keeps him constantly in motion. He is always in a hurry, always one step ahead, rushing from one minor cataclysm to another, eagerly questioning everyone he sees in his "baffled quest"<sup>12</sup> for truth. In this respect, he is Updike's prototype of the father. In the short story "Pigeon Feathers," the father, also a school teacher, shares this restless energy, and even uses the same expressions; in particular, the phrase, "This reminds me of death."<sup>13</sup> In another short story, "Home," the same father appears, still a school teacher,

---

<sup>12</sup>

Ibid., p. 118.

<sup>13</sup>

John Updike, "Pigeon Feathers," Pigeon Feathers (Greenwich, Connecticut: Fawcett Publications, Incorporated, 1962), p. 91. See also, Updike, The Centaur, p. 118.

14

still on a "baffled quest," and still filled with restless energy. The Centaur is the clearest treatment, however, and the character is extended to greater proportions.

Combined with the powerful energy of his desperate search, Caldwell has a capacity for love that is enormous. Though he feels that the students he teaches are destroying him, he is nevertheless desperately interested in communicating with them. He continually disgusts his son by his lack of discrimination. Hoboes, bums and misfits are all absorbed by his encompassing capacity for love.

At the same time, he shelters himself behind a kind of ironic defense that is truly comic. He overstates everything and qualifies nothing. He makes absurdly positive statements such as, "I never made a decision in my life that wasn't one hundred percent selfish,"<sup>15</sup> and he grossly over-praises such people as the fascist cafe proprietor, Minor Kretz, when he tells him, "There isn't a man in town he thinks more of than Minor Kretz. You're a father to that boy, and don't think his mother and I don't appreciate it."<sup>16</sup> Yet, when he actually does make contact with someone, he resorts to an equally overstated self deprecation that bewilders the people he speaks to and makes any meaningful conversation with him almost impossible. He

---

14

Updike, Pigeon Feathers, p. 118.

15

Updike, The Centaur, p. 217.

16

Ibid., p. 155.

tells the hitchhiker, "My wad is shot. Time to trade in on a new old  
<sup>17</sup>  
 man; I'm a walking junk heap." There is, of course, a kind of  
 desperate panic behind these isolationist tactics, but their initial  
 result is comedy.

That is not to say that Updike's chief aim is to be funny. A  
 great deal of the humour is a result of the myth making power of  
 Peter's retrospective vision, his nostalgia, or, as Alley calls it,  
<sup>18</sup>  
 his "transcendental imagination." Peter, now grown up and an artist  
 with a Negro mistress, is the narrator of the story. The home he  
 remembers is filled with joy. He tells his sleeping mistress:

...I miss only, and then only a little in the late afternoons,  
 the sudden white laughter that like heat lightning bursts in an  
 atmosphere where souls are trying to serve the impossible. My  
 father for all of his mourning, moved in the atmosphere of such  
 laughter. <sup>19</sup>

At another point, he tells her:

...and yet, love, do not think that our life together, for all  
 its mutual frustration was not good. It was good. We moved,  
 somehow, on a firm stage, resonant with metaphor. ...Yes.  
 We lived in God's sight. <sup>20</sup>

The humour of the novel is not the humour of black comedy. It  
 arises not out of the grotesque posturing of insignificant men facing  
 an absurd and meaningless universe, but out of joy, operating in God's

---

<sup>17</sup>

Ibid., p. 71.

<sup>18</sup>

Alvin D. Alley, "The Centaur: Transcendental Imagination and  
 Metaphoric Death," English Journal, 56, (October, 1967), p. 982.

<sup>19</sup>

Updike, The Centaur, p. 201.

<sup>20</sup>

Ibid., p. 57.

sight, where souls attempt to serve the impossible. Caldwell, in jest,<sup>21</sup> claims "The Lord loves a cheerful corpse," but this is only his own debasement of a credo that his father has given him and that he believes:

All joy belongs to the Lord. Wherever in the filth and confusion and misery, a soul felt joy, there the Lord came and claimed it as His own; into barrooms and brothels and classrooms and alleyways slippery with spittle, no matter how dark and scabbed and remote, in China or Africa or Brazil, wherever a movement of joy was felt, there the Lord stole and added to His enduring domain. All the rest, all that was not joy, fell away, precipitated, dross that had never been.<sup>22</sup>

It is in this respect that the comic mode becomes the natural and necessary vehicle for an examination of a man's search for grace, when that search is as honest and selfless as is George Caldwell's search. The humour of the roccoco mythical decoration and of the earnest fumbings of the hero, as well as of the narcissistic and selfish urgencies of the son, are a part of the joy that belongs to the Lord.

There is, in fact, a strong religious tradition in the Caldwell family. George Caldwell is the first of six generations not to enter the ministry. Peter, at one point, speaks of "Priest, teacher, artist:<sup>23</sup> the classic degeneration." He is, of course, thinking of Kierkegaard's triad, the three mutually exclusive spheres of being: the spiritual

---

<sup>21</sup>

Ibid., p. 174.

<sup>22</sup>

Ibid., p. 220.

<sup>23</sup>

Ibid., p. 201.

life, the ethical life, and the aesthetic life. Caldwell's father, whose deathbed loss of faith haunts Caldwell throughout the novel is the exponent of the spiritual life, as is, to some degree, Pop Kramer. Caldwell himself, as a teacher is representative of the ethical life, and his son Peter, the artist, provides an example of the aesthetic life. In Kierkegaard's metaphysics, these are each, as I pointed out, mutually exclusive. A man can only serve one master, be it God, mankind or art. There is the possibility, of course, of switching allegiances and a man could possibly, at different times, serve all three. Salvation, however, comes ultimately only through the spiritual life.

Updike clearly does not accept Kierkegaard's divisions rigidly. The key problem in the novel seems to be an attempt to discover how these spheres can be meaningfully combined. In Caldwell, Updike combines the spiritual and ethical, and concludes that a meaningful combination may produce something akin to grace; that is to say, though The Poorhouse Fair demonstrated the emptiness of works alone, The Centaur demonstrates how a combination of faith and works may be enough. For Peter, the aesthetic man, there is no answer. At the end of the novel, he finds himself "...straining to say what even I am<sup>24</sup> beginning to suspect is the unsayable thing, and I grow frightened."

The novel begins with George Caldwell being shot in the heel by an arrow, a parody of the arrow that Hercules shot into the heel of the

Centaur, Chiron, at the wedding feast of the Lapithae, and which provided him with such pain that he asked Zeus to allow him to die as atonement for Prometheus. In The Centaur, the arrow becomes a symbol for George Caldwell's sudden grasping of the very real possibility of death. He has, of course, been aware of death before, but at this point it gains a reality that it has not had before, and creates in him a desperate urgency. Caldwell is a religious man, and this sudden awareness of death affects him powerfully, providing "...a painful, confused sense of having displeased, through ways he could not follow, the God who never rested from watching him."<sup>25</sup>

Caldwell has the arrow removed at Hummel's (Hephaestus) garage, and returns to the school where he meets Hummel's wife Vera (Aphrodite) who, as representative of love, makes him even more aware of death. He enters his classroom and finds the principal, Zimmerman (Zeus) there to judge his lesson. In a brilliantly surrealistic scene, he delivers his sermon on creation.

When the concept of death enters Caldwell's mind, all order leaves his life, and, in a parallel fashion, all order leaves his class. Zimmerman becomes a lecherous Zeus, takes the form of a bull, and begins to seduce the Osborne girl (Io, the heifer). A student, Diabendorf, becomes Pan, and fornicates with the Davis girl while the smell of his satyr's musk fills the room. The noise in the room mounts to a pandemonium as Caldwell teaches with a mounting furious

energy.

Caldwell's lesson is a modern Genesis, filled with unimaginable, monstrous numbers and violent forces of heat, contraction and explosion, as the world is created. He compresses all creation into the space of three days, and this adds to the sense of violent activity in the room. He explains how death entered the world:

There is no reason intrinsic in the plasmic substance why life should ever end. Amoebas never die; and those male sperm cells which enjoy success become the cornerstone of new life that continues beyond the father. But the volvox, a rolling sphere of flagellating algae organized into somatic and reproductive cells, neither plant nor animal--under a microscope it looks just like a Christmas ball--by pioneering this new idea of cooperation, rolled life into the kingdom of certain--as opposed to accidental death. For--hold tight kids, just seven more minutes of torture--while each cell is potentially immortal, by volunteering for a specialized function within 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.<sup>26</sup>

The image of the volvox becomes the central image of the novel. The notion of sacrifice, which first brought death into the world, becomes, in a slightly different way, the method whereby death is defeated. It is through sacrifice that grace, and hence eternal life, is achieved.

Zimmerman's report on the lesson is powerfully discouraging, and contains the statement "The humanistic values implicit in the physical sciences were not elicited."<sup>27</sup> This is particularly ironic,

---

<sup>26</sup>

Ibid., p. 37.

<sup>27</sup>

Ibid., p. 86.

since Caldwell's lesson, in spite of his pain, his fear of death, and of Zimmerman, and the confusion of his class, ends in a resounding affirmation of man:

He opened his mouth, his very blood loathed the story he had told. 'One minute ago, flint chipping, fire kindling, death foreseeing, a tragic animal appeared---' The buzzer rasped; halls rumbled throughout the vast building; faintness swooped at Caldwell but he held himself upright, having vowed to finish. '---called Man.' 28

This affirmation of man is particularly characteristic of Caldwell. In everything he does, he affirms human value. His concern for his students and for all those he meets, even the hoboes and drunks, demonstrates this.

In contrast to the violence of this class, Updike provides a parallel class in which Chiron teaches essentially the same lesson. Here, the atmosphere is gentle and quiet. Instead of the closed room and the stink of the stable, there is "...free space---touched by the arching search of fresh shoots and threaded by the quick drip drop of birdsong released as if from a laden ceiling rich in elements." 29 Chiron thinks of herbs and healing. His students greet him with a hymn. The air is fresh and sweet: "Chiron inhaled; air like honey expanded the spaces of his chest; his students completed the Centaur." 30 Students and teacher become one. Chiron begins his story of creation,

---

28

Ibid., p. 40.

29

Ibid., p. 74.

30

Ibid., p. 78.

and it contrasts strongly with Caldwell's:

And love set the universe in motion. All things that exist are her children--sun, moon, stars, the earth with its mountains and rivers, its trees, herbs and living creatures. Now Eros was double sexed and golden winged and, having four heads, sometimes roared like a bull or a lion, sometimes hissed like a serpent or bleated like a ram, beneath her rule the world was as harmonious as a beehive. Men lived without cares or labor, eating only acorns, wild fruit, and honey that dripped from the trees, drinking the milk of sheep and goats, never growing old, dancing and laughing much. Death to them was no more terrible than sleep. 31

Here, instead of violence, rupture, and ferocious energy, there is union and peace. Love, rather than blind energy is the motive force. Man is not a tragic, death-foreseeing animal, but a whole, healthy and fulfilled being.

The contrast is in perfect keeping with the quotation from Barth. The first lesson is the lesson of the earth, the second is the lesson of the gods. Caldwell-Chiron is on the boundary. He exists somewhere between the two. That is to say, he has intimations of immortality.

Caldwell's awareness of the imminence of death expresses itself as a physical reaction, a pain in the stomach which he mistakes for cancer. He tells his wife, "I can feel it in me like a poison snake wrapped around my bowels,"<sup>32</sup> and then tells Pop Kramer, "I'm carrying death in my bowels."<sup>33</sup> At the same time, he reiterates a firm

---

31

Ibid.

32

Ibid., p. 41.

33

Ibid., p. 46.

belief in God. "I was a minister's son. I was brought up to believe, and I still believe it, that God made man as the last thing in His Creation,"<sup>34</sup> It is necessary at this point for him to reconcile his faith in God and man with his own approaching death.

His own acceptance of the necessity of death is complicated by the fact that his father, a minister, had suffered a death bed loss of faith. He tells Peter:

I remember, when my old man knew he was dying, he opened his eyes on the bed and looked up at Mom and Alma and me and said, 'Do you think I'll be eternally forgotten?' I often think about that. Eternally forgotten. That was a terrible thing for a minister to say. It scared the living daylights out of me.<sup>35</sup>

The events of the following few days complicate and amplify this fear. Caldwell, at his wife's urging, goes to see the doctor to have x-rays taken. The doctor tells him that he suspects mucinous colitis, but Caldwell will not be reassured. A casual encounter with a drunk on the street points this out. The drunk asks him, "Are you ready to die?"<sup>36</sup> The question is only an attempt at badinage on the part of the drunk, but Caldwell takes it in desperate seriousness. It makes him "jerk still like a halted movie."<sup>37</sup> He concludes that he is not ready, and shakes the drunk's hand, telling him "You've clarified my

---

<sup>34</sup>

Ibid., p. 52.

<sup>35</sup>

Ibid., p. 73.

<sup>36</sup>

Ibid., p. 121.

<sup>37</sup>

Ibid.

38  
thinking."

Peter's awareness of the possibility of his father's death operates as a parallel. His father's preoccupation begins to affect him as he becomes aware of how it affects him personally:

My father provided; he gathered things to himself and let them fall upon the world; my clothes, my food, my luxurious hopes had fallen to me from him, and for the first time his death seemed, even at its immense stellar remove of impossibility, a grave and dreadful threat. 39

He is reassured somewhat by a conversation that his father has with a janitor. He feels, in his naivety, that "nothing as absolute and awesome as death could enter a world where grown men could exchange  
40  
such banalities."

Peter's awareness, however, begins to work itself out symbolically. He dreams that he hears a voice calling out of a Mason jar,  
41  
"I want to die. I want to die." The voice, of course, is the voice of his father, and the dream reveals not so much the fear his father feels, as it does the key aspect of his obsession.

The symbolic awareness increases in a surrealist scene in which Peter doubles as Prometheus. Chained to the rock he is visited by various manifestations. First, Mr. Phillips arrives, telling him,

---

38  
Ibid., p. 122.

39  
Ibid., p. 73.

40  
Ibid., p. 88.

41  
Ibid., p. 128.

42

"Thanatos, the death demon carries off the dead." The town appears, as a sort of Greek chorus, and informs him that his father is forgotten. Finally, his father appears and writes an equation on a blackboard.

43



He explains that this is the recipe for both life and death:

He encircled the E and said, Energy. That's Life. That little extra E is life. We take in sugars and oxygen and burn it, like you burn old newspapers in the trash barrel, and give off carbon dioxide and water and energy. When this process stops---he Xed through the equation---this stops---he double Xed out the E---and you become what they call dead. You become a worthless log of old chemicals. 44

Here again is death, this time seen in its scientific form---death as chemistry. Peter watches in agony, and asks whether the equation can be reversed. His father agrees that it can be, and this provides hope. Even in terms of the scientific formula, there is hope for a reversal of death, for a kind of rebirth.

It is their mutual apprehension of the possibility of Caldwell's death that forges the strongest link between father and son. Peter begins to see all his hopes tied to his father's life. Caldwell, on the other hand, comes to recognize a responsibility inherent in his position as father. He tells Hester Appleton, "I can't afford to die." 45 When he leaves her the two irreconcilable

42

Ibid., p. 134.

43

Ibid., p. 142.

44

Ibid.

45

Ibid., p. 146.

needs in him clash; the need for rest, and the need to continue living so that he can provide for his son.

Caldwell heads for the stairs groggy with woes. Peter. His education is a riddle to which however it's posed, the answer is money, of which there is not enough.... Now his son's face, dappled, feminine in the lips and eyelashes, narrow like a hatchet, anxious and sneering, gnaws at Caldwell's heart like a piece of unfinished business. 46

At the same time as his awareness of responsibility increases, his fear of death becomes increasingly powerful. It begins to affect his every thought. On the fifth day, it reaches a critical intensity:

Since, five days ago, Caldwell grasped the possibility that he might die, took it into himself as you might swallow a butterfly. A curiously variable gravity has entered the fabric of things, that now makes all surfaces leadenly thick with heedless permanence and the next instant makes them dance with inconsequence, giddy as scarves. 47.

The physical power of this fear gains a new intensity that stuns him:

The shadow of the wing tightens so that his intestines wince: a spider lives there. Brrrough. In the shuffle of his thoughts his own death keeps coming to the top. His face burns. His legs go watery, his heart and head become enormous with fear. Death that white width for him? His face is drenched with wrath; a blindness seizes his body; he silently begs a face to appear in the air. 48

Involved, as well, in Caldwell's fear of death is the suspicion

---

46

Ibid., pp. 148-49.

47

Ibid., p. 149.

48

Ibid., p. 150.

that he has not yet lived. His questioning of the hitchhiker about the places that he has been suggests something of his desire to see the world, and, perhaps, find the thing that he is seeking; the "nugget of information" that he needs. He resents the land that ties him down. In this he is like many other of Updike's males, such as the father in "Pigeon Feathers," "Home," and Of The Farm. The traditional ties between man and the earth are abrogated, and these men find themselves restless and unattached. Peter points out that:

Haste and improvidence had always marked our domestic details. The reason, it came to me, was that our family's central member, my father, had never rid himself of the idea that he might soon be moving on. This fear, or hope, dominated our home. 49

This "moving on" may be read either in terms of Caldwell's death, or in terms of an actual physical change of place. In the second case, it becomes a kind of desire to escape similar to that which propelled Rabbit Angstrom. It is part of the inner whisperings of the ego that are irreconcilable with the demands of ethical responsibility. Even in the depths of despair, his fantasy runs toward a real, physical escape. He imagines himself running "on and on, on a southeast course cutting diagonally across highways and rivers frozen solid as highways until at last he drops, his head in death extended toward Baltimore."<sup>50</sup> This kind of physical escape, however, is not a real possibility for Caldwell. He rejects it the

---

49

Ibid., p. 203.

50

Ibid., p. 152.

same way as he rejects the possibility of a sabbatical. He refuses it active consideration.

What gives Caldwell the strength to reject escape and to bear up to the fear and despair that he feels in his religion. His faith is reiterated throughout the novel. Updike contrasts the vital faith that informs and motivates Caldwell with the cold, dead, institution-alized faith of the minister, Reverend March, whom Caldwell confronts in a deadly earnest but highly comic argument during a basketball game.

Caldwell is a Presbyterian turned Lutheran, and "...surprisingly in one so tolerant, sincerely distrusts the Reformed, whom he associates with Zimmerman and Calvin, whom he associates with everything murky and oppressive and arbitrary in the universal kingdom."<sup>51</sup> This bias is not, however, so surprising. The god of the Reformed Church, that is to say, Karl Barth's god, is too terrible and powerful, too arbitrary for Caldwell's humanistic taste. Calvin's notion of grace, at least in the way Caldwell understands it as descending on a faithful few regardless of worth, makes a mockery of the kindness and self-sacrifice which are Caldwell's main attributes.

Caldwell's faith is dynamic, and almost everything he does is, in some way connected with it. The Reverend March (Mars, Ares) has a different kind of faith. It has been hardened in the crucible of war:

---

51

Ibid., p. 174.

Though his faith is intact and as infrangible as metal, it is also like metal dead. Though he can go and pick it up and test its weight whenever he wishes, it has no arms with which to reach and restrain him. He mocks it. 52

Caldwell, on the other hand, is not capable of mocking his faith.

Peter demonstrates this when, in an argument with Minor Kretz, he makes fun of those with faith. Immediately, he perceives in his assertion<sup>53</sup> "an abysmal betrayal of his father."

When the two faiths collide at the basketball game, it is March who is annoyed by the burlesque absurdity of the shouted discussion of theology and who cuts it off. Caldwell, "heavy and giddy with his own death,"<sup>54</sup> seems to feel that if faith matters at all, it matters as much at basketball games as in church. Absurdity does not bother him. He has already searched for his answer in discussions with a homosexual hitchhiker and a homosexual drunk. He has no difficulty in confronting a lecherous minister at a basketball game.

The discussion with March does not offer any consolation, but Caldwell is given a different kind of answer at the same basketball game. Parallel with his fear of death is his fear of losing his job. He has been given a bad report, and he has discovered the principal, Zimmerman, engaged in an amorous affair with a female schoolboard member. He expects to be fired just as he expects to die. Zimmerman

---

52

Ibid., p. 178.

53

Ibid., p. 154.

54

Ibid., p. 189.

confronts him at the basketball game and cruelly begins what appears to be the prelude to Caldwell's dismissal. Just as Caldwell is about to collapse with apprehension and fear, Zimmerman, in what seems an astonishingly generous stroke, tells Caldwell, "You've received no favors...you're a good teacher."<sup>55</sup> Zimmerman-Zeus has dispensed grace, and this dispensation of grace in the earthly sphere is a parallel of and a prelude to the ultimate dispensation of grace in the spiritual sphere.

The final movement of the novel is preceded by a tremendous snowstorm, which for the third day in a row, prevents father and son from returning home. The snowstorm cleans and purifies the countryside and seems a symbol of death, an actual, physical representation of the conceptual "white width"<sup>56</sup> which is Caldwell's vision of death. It acts as a kind of catharsis, cleaning out Caldwell's fear and despair, and he emerges from it filled with joy, and in full acceptance of death. Before he and Peter return home, he goes back to the school where he sets all his affairs in order, so that "the new teacher can step right in and take over, poor devil. Biff, Bang, move over, huddy, next stop, the dump."<sup>57</sup>

Father and son return home the day following the storm to learn

---

<sup>55</sup>

Ibid., p. 187.

<sup>56</sup>

Ibid., p. 150.

<sup>57</sup>

Ibid., p. 207.

that Caldwell has once again been spared. His wife tells him that the doctor phoned and that the x-rays are clear. What he suffers from is mucinous colitis. Caldwell gives thanks where he feels it is due;

58

"God takes care of you if you let Him."

The final chapter is an elaborately complex integration of the real and the mythical, the ethical and the spiritual; that is to say, earth and heaven. It deals with the dispensation of grace, and reunites the antinomies into the wholeness that is part of grace. The real and the mythical blend as Caldwell and Chiron become indistinguishable; the ethical and spiritual blend as Caldwell accepts the necessity of both works and faith; heaven and earth blend as Caldwell, "the

59

creature on the boundary," is granted grace.

The chapter opens with the line, "Alone he walked through the white width." The "white width" is the field of snow, but it is also the field of death. Caldwell-Chiron becomes aware of the joy that belongs to the Lord and determines to sustain that joy through self-sacrifice:

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. The x-rays were clear. A white width of days stretched ahead. The time left him possessed a skyey breadth in which he swam like a true grandchild of Oceanus... 61

58

Ibid., p. 217.

59

Ibid., p. 3.

60

Ibid., p. 218.

61

Ibid., p. 220.

In these terms, self-sacrifice becomes a positive thing and, "he discovered that in giving his life to others he entered a total freedom."<sup>62</sup> His ritual self-sacrifice, like the self-sacrifice of Christ, gains him the freedom of grace. Heaven and earth are reunited in him. "...in the upright of his body, Sky and Gaia mated again."<sup>63</sup> He can now make a positive affirmation of value in the universe.<sup>64</sup> "Only goodness lives, but it does live."

There is a cost involved in this, however, and the cost is a certain denial of the ego, and a giving up of possibilities. Caldwell wonders, "...how could his father's seed, exploding into an infinitude of possibilities, have been funneled into this, this paralyzed patch of thankless alien land, these few cryptic faces, these certain four walls of Room 204."<sup>65</sup> When he reaches the car, he understands. "This was a chariot Zimmerman had sent for him."<sup>66</sup> For Chiron, this is the chariot that will carry him to death. For Caldwell it is the car that will carry him to school and the life that God has chosen for him. He understands what the price is and he is willing to accept it. The novel ends with the sentence, "Chiron accepted death."<sup>67</sup> Caldwell too

---

<sup>62</sup>

Ibid.

<sup>63</sup>

Ibid.

<sup>64</sup>

Ibid.

<sup>65</sup>

Ibid., p. 221.

<sup>66</sup>

Ibid.

<sup>67</sup>

Ibid., p. 222.

accepts death, but it is a metaphoric death that he accepts, a death for the inner whisperings of his own ego.

Rabbit Angstrom had achieved a similar understanding when he realized that, "the best he can do is submit to the system and give Nelson the chance to pass, as he did, unthinkingly, through it."

Rabbit, however, rejected this possibility, and his story ended with him running, the light of grace behind the church window blinded to him. George Caldwell ends his story fulfilled. The epilogue describes Chiron being placed in a position of honour, in the constellation Sagittarius, by Zeus; and, by extending the parallel, with Caldwell being provided with grace by God.

It is the last chapter which has led to the most misunderstanding of the novel and its intention. A great number of critics have somehow concluded that Caldwell actually did die. Norman Podhoretz says of Caldwell, "...there is nothing in this character as Updike has created him that makes his suicide dramatically plausible."

68  
John Updike, Rabbit, Run (Greenwich, Connecticut: Fawcett Publications, Incorporated, 1959), p. 188.

69 Norman Podhoretz, "A Dissent on Updike," in Norman Podhoretz, Doings and Undings. (New York: Farrar, Straus, 1964), p. 256.

Wystt. "Psychological Novel," p. 93.

71 Jack Di Bellis, "The Group and John Updike," Sewanee Review,  
72 (Summer, 1964), p. 536.

72  
Enright, Conspirators and Poets, p. 136.

Podhoretz, that Caldwell had committed suicide. Norris W. Yates concluded, not suicide, but "a heart condition...aggravated by worry and overwork,"<sup>73</sup> was what carried him off. Naturally enough, they regarded this as a weakness in the story. It is a tribute to Updike's skill that, in spite of such a misreading, all but Podhoretz felt that the novel was, nevertheless, a success.

Caldwell does not die in the novel, but he is dead by the time of the telling of the story. Peter, as narrator, is grown up, an unsuccessful but reasonably happy artist. He wonders, assessing his life "Was it for this that my father gave up his life?"<sup>74</sup> The answer, of course, is yes, in spite of Peter's failure to say the unsayable thing. Peter sees himself and his mistress as making, yin and yang, one whole person. It is a vision of wholeness that Caldwell has left his son, and the story that the son tells of his father is an adequate tribute to the value of his legacy.

---

<sup>73</sup>

Norris W. Yates, "The Doubt and Faith of John Updike," College English, 26 (March, 1965), p. 473.

<sup>74</sup>

Updike, The Centaur, p. 201.

## CHAPTER IV

### CONCLUSION

In all of Updike's literary work, his chief concerns are religious. It is man's relationship to God that is Updike's primary theme. All aspects of life are examined in relation to this single, fundamental issue. Though Updike is now a Congregationalist, he was raised as a Lutheran and, he says in "The Dogwood Tree: A Boyhood," the change has been pragmatic rather than spiritual. He is still influenced by the dark Nordic teachings of his youth. The God he believes in is absolute. Updike feels that if God is to be believed in, then He must be accepted as the all powerful worker of miracles. He states: "That God, at a remote place and time, took upon himself the form of a Syrian carpenter and walked the earth wilfully healing and abusing and affirming and grieving, appeared to me quite in the character of the author of grass."<sup>1</sup>

If God is accepted, then as corollary, the Bible has meaning. Updike feels that it provides the most valid clue to the mysteries of life, and feels within himself "an obdurate insistence that at the core of the core there is a right angled clash to which, of all verbal combinations we can invent, the Apostle's Creed offers the most adequate correspondence and response."<sup>2</sup> This particularly Lutheran

---

<sup>1</sup> John Updike, "The Dogwood Tree: A Boyhood," Assorted Prose (Greenwich, Connecticut: Fawcett Publications, Incorporated, 1965), p. 143.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

aspect of Updike's thought is the great unifying force in all of his writing.

There is, in all of Updike's work, a coherence and unity that is the result of his comprehensive metaphysical and artistic vision. The themes that are treated in his earliest stories recur in his later works as he expands and clarifies this vision. Ultimately, all themes become a part of the all-encompassing relationship between God and man. The artistic method whereby Updike expresses his metaphysical vision is the method of nostalgia. Nostalgia, the recreation of the past in the light of the present is, for Updike, a means of examining the world and not merely a state of mind. The minister in Of The Farm makes perhaps the clearest definition of Updike's artistic position. In a sermon based on Karl Barth's examination of Genesis in his Church Dogmatics, the minister comments that Adam named the creatures, and in so doing, gave them an essence. From this he concludes, "Is not language an act of husbandry, a fencing in of fields?...language aerates the barren density of brute matter with the penetrations of the mind, of the spirit." Memory synthesizes experience, and gives it meaning. The artist's translation of memory into language is a "fencing in of fields;" that is to say, it defines and limits our experience, giving it a kind of independent and objective existence.

In a short sketch entitled, "My Grandmother's Thimble," the

---

3

John Updike, Of The Farm (Greenwich, Connecticut: Fawcett Publications, Incorporated, 1965), p. 111.

narrator says, "Now around that cold spark, isolated in memory, the air of that house crystallizes."<sup>4</sup> Here again, nostalgia becomes a method of recreating and defining experience.

Peter Caldwell, the narrator of The Centaur is the clearest embodiment of Updike's authorial voice. The story of his father's sacrifice is defined and given meaning through the myth-making power of Peter's nostalgic vision. Joey Robinson in Of The Farm carries the nostalgic vision one step further and actually returns physically to the place of his childhood in an odyssey that is an attempt to recreate the pattern of his growing up, and so to define and give meaning to it.

Nostalgia is more than a method for Updike. It becomes, in all of his work, an awareness of the strengths of the past, and in particular, of the American past. Hook, in The Poorhouse Fair, relives his father's past and points to a virtue that has disappeared. Piet Hanema, in Couples, is a carpenter, aware of a craftsmanship that gave strength and meaning to life, and which is no longer in evidence. In many of the Olinger stories, the father plays the part of Uncle Sam in a July fourth parade, and by so doing, expresses a faith in the American heritage. Ultimately, this nostalgia yearns for a time, now past, when faith had strength and meaning.

Updike is not, however, chiefly concerned with bemoaning the

---

4

John Updike, "The Blessed Man of Boston, My Grandmother's Thimble, and Fanning Island," Pigeon Feathers (Greenwich, Connecticut: Fawcett Publications, Incorporated, 1962), p. 162.

passing of virtue. He is concerned with the ordinary man's attempt to find meaning in a world that no longer seems to offer him very much that is solid.

The awareness of death is one of Updike's main themes. Always, awareness of death is coupled with doubt, and the product of the two is a kind of spiritual angst. Its first treatment in "Pigeon Feathers," examined the first clumsy fumbblings with faith of a young boy. It was given major treatment in the two complementary novels, Rabbit, Run and The Centaur. The motive force in each novel is the hero's awareness of death. This awareness, in turn, drives each of the heroes into a mounting, frenzied activity, which in each case develops into a spiritual crisis as the focus of the activity becomes an attempt to establish a relationship with God; that is, the awareness of death becomes a quest for grace, the only possible solution to death. Rabbit, Run becomes a tragic demonstration of failure; The Centaur becomes a joyous celebration of success.

At the same time, inextricably woven into the quest for grace is Updike's other main theme: the covenant established in Genesis. This covenant is the set of relationships and responsibilities that man accepts in return for God's permitting him to exist in an independent reality and offering him salvation. The witness to this covenant is Christ. Karl Barth expresses the concept thus:

The insight that man owes his existence and form, together with all the reality distinct from God, to God's creation, is achieved only in the reception and answer of the divine self

witness, that is, only in faith in Jesus Christ, i.e., in the knowledge of the unity of Creator and creature actualized in Him, and in the life in the present mediated by Him, under the right and in the experience of the goodness of the Creator towards his creatures. <sup>5</sup>

Barth, in his Church Dogmatics examines particularly two aspects of the covenant: man's freedom, and his relationship with other creatures. These two themes become major themes of John Updike, too. The idea that freedom is meaningful only in terms of God, that freedom is for, not from, is a major aspect of Rabbit, Run. Rabbit in attempting to achieve a freedom without responsibility becomes a slave to the anarchy of his own passions. George Caldwell of The Centaur finds his freedom in responsibility and so enters the real and total freedom of grace: "...he discovered that in giving his life to others he entered a total freedom."<sup>6</sup> In Updike's later novels, the idea of freedom is also important. Piet Hanema of Couples gains a different kind of freedom from either Rabbit Angstrom or George Caldwell. God destroys the church of which Piet is a member, leaving him to the freedom of a kind of animal self-satisfaction, but destroying any hope for a real and meaningful freedom.

The other aspect of the covenant, responsibility, is also

---

<sup>5</sup>

Karl Barth, Church Dogmatics, vol. III, part I, ed., Rev. C. W. Brouley and Rev. T. F. Torrance, trans. by J. W. Edwards, Rev. O. Bussey and Rev. Harold Knight (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1958), p. 3.

<sup>6</sup>

John Updike, The Centaur (Greenwich, Connecticut: Fawcett Publications, Incorporated, 1963), p. 220.

present in all of Updike's works. The primary responsibility, because the first, is man's responsibility to woman. The minister in Of The Farm analyzes Barth's lengthy comment on the relationship and concludes:

In designating her with his own generic name, Adam commits an act of faith. 'This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh.' In so declaring, he acknowledges within himself a responsibility to be kind. He ties himself ethically to the earth. <sup>7</sup>

The two poles of the relationship are examined in Rabbit, Run and The Centaur. Rabbit abrogates his ethical ties, denying his responsibility to be kind. He takes two women, and accepts no responsibility for either. George Caldwell, in spite of his fantasies about the phys-ed teacher, acknowledges his responsibility to his wife, and the lesson he learns is "A hero is a king sacrificed to Hera,"<sup>8</sup> Hera is the patroness of marriage, and Caldwell's sacrifice raises him to heroic proportions.

In the later novels, Of The Farm and Couples, Updike extends and deepens this concern. Joey Robinson in Of The Farm is divorced, and seeks to justify his sexuality. The entire society of Couples operates in terms of a semi-mystical sexuality that is surrogate for religion, and the spiritual destruction caused by the rise and collapse of this society demonstrates its futility.

The other aspect of the concept of responsible relationship,

---

7

Updike, Of The Farm, p. 113.

8

Updike, The Centaur, p. 221.

parenthood, operates in much the same way. Rabbit Angstrom denies his responsibility for his son, though it remains, "a hardness he must carry with him."<sup>9</sup> Caldwell, the man of grace, sacrifices himself for his son. Joey Robinson, having deserted his children through his divorce, is haunted by them in dreams. The children of Couglas become a silent, ghostly chorus, denying by their very existence the validity of their parents' selfish sexuality.

As a counterpoise to his concern for the individual and his private spiritual existence, Updike details the failure of society to serve a real and meaningful purpose. Established religion, he sees as watered down, having become a kind of self-doubting social service. The minister, Dobson, in "Pigeon Feathers" and Eccles in Rabbit, Run are prime examples of this failure. Each is concerned with works, but the works are ineffectual because each lacks real faith. Those ministers who have escaped this dilution seem to be as ineffectual as their counterparts. Reverend Kruppenbach in Rabbit, Run denies the value of works and, in his fanatical faith, becomes merely irrelevant. Reverend March in The Centaur has a dead, infrangible faith that helps no one. No minister seems to be able to combine faith and works meaningfully.

At the same time, Updike indicts the customary alternative to faith, humanism, and Conner of The Poorhouse Fair bears the brunt of his

---

9

John Updike, Rabbit, Run (Greenwich, Connecticut: Fawcett Publications, Incorporated, 1959), p. 234.

criticism. Godless humanism becomes inhuman precisely because it is Godless. In its concern for man's physical well being, it ignores each man's spiritual yearnings and leaves him isolated and unfulfilled. It offers a material richness whose corollary is spiritual barrenness. Conner's broad love of humanity is balanced by his distaste for the individual members in his care. Humanism, for Updike, is a sterile alternative to vital faith.

Updike's religious concerns, to some extent, set him apart from his contemporaries. He is as aware as they are of nihilism, of despair, and of the seeming absurdities of existence. Unlike them, however, he sees the situation not as the inevitable consequence of the way things are, but rather as a failure of modern man and modern society to realize the possibilities of real grace in action under a real God. The possibilities are there, he asserts. Man needs only to grasp them.

## SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

### I. Primary Sources

- Updike, John. Assorted Prose. Greenwich, Connecticut: Fawcett Publications, Incorporated, 1962.
- .....° The Centaur. Greenwich, Connecticut: Fawcett Publications, Incorporated, 1963.
- .....° Couples. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1968.
- .....° Midpoint and Other Poems. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1969.
- .....° The Music School. Greenwich, Connecticut: Fawcett Publications, Incorporated, 1966.
- .....° Of The Farm. Greenwich, Connecticut: Fawcett Publications, Incorporated, 1965.
- .....° Olinger Stories. Greenwich, Connecticut: Fawcett Publications, Incorporated, 1963.
- .....° Pigeon Feathers and Other Stories. Greenwich, Connecticut: Fawcett Publications, Incorporated, 1962.
- .....° The Poorhouse Fair. Greenwich, Connecticut: Fawcett Publications, Incorporated, 1959.
- .....° Rabbit, Run. Greenwich, Connecticut: Fawcett Publications, Incorporated, 1960.
- .....° The Same Door. Greenwich Connecticut: Fawcett Publications, Incorporated, 1959.
- .....° Verses: The Carpentered Hen and Telephone Poles. Greenwich, Connecticut: Fawcett Publications, Incorporated, 1968.

### II. Secondary Sources

#### A. Specific Works on John Updike

##### (1) Periodical Articles

- Alley, Alvin D. "The Centaur: Transcendental Imagination and Metaphoric Death." English Journal, 56 (October, 1967), 982-985.
- Balliett, Whitney. "The American Expression." New Yorker, 36 (November 5, 1960), 222-224.
- Brenner, Gerry. "Rabbit, Run: John Updike's Criticism of the 'Return to Nature'." Twentieth Century Literature, 13 (April, 1966), 3-14.
- Brodin, Pierre. "John Updike." Liberte, 5 (May-June, 1963), 259-265.
- Burgess, Anthony. "Language, Myth, and Mr. Updike." Commonweal, 83 (February 11, 1966), 557-559.
- Davenport, Guy. "Magic Realism in Prose." National Review, 13 (August 28, 1962), 153-154.
- De Bellis, Jack. "The Group and John Updike." Sewanee Review, 72 (Summer, 1964), 531-536.
- Doner, Dean. "Rabbit Angstrom's Unseen World." New World Writing, 19 (1961), 58-75.
- Duncan, Graham, H. "The Thing Itself in Rabbit, Run." English Record, 13 (April 4, 1963), 36-37.
- Haright, D. J. "Updike's Ups and Downs." Holiday, 38 (November, 1965), 162.
- Galloway, David. "The Absurd Man as Saint: The Novels of John Updike." Modern Fiction Studies, 11 (September 24, 1964), 111-127.
- Geismar, Maxwell. "The American Short Story Today." Studies on the Left, 4 (Spring, 1964), 21-27.
- Hainsworth, J. D. "John Updike." Hibbert Journal, 65 (1967), 115-116.
- Hamilton, Kenneth. "John Updike: Chronicles of the Time of the Death of God." Christian Century, 84 (June 7, 1967), 745-748.
- Hatheway, Baxter. "Reviewers as Sleepwalkers." Epoch, 14 (Winter, 1965), 188-192.
- Howard, J. "Can a Nice Novelist Finish First?" Life, 61 (November 4, 1966), 74-74A.
- Hyman, Stanley Edgar. "The Artist as a Young Man." The New Leader, 45 (March 19, 1962), 22-23.

- Kauffman, Stanley. "Onward with Updike." New Republic, 153 (September 24, 1966), 15-17.
- Klauser, A. P. "Still Wilderness." Christian Century, 78 (February 22, 1961), 245-246.
- La Courue, G. "The Innocence of John Updike." Commonweal, 77 (May 10, 1963), 512-514.
- "Le Coeur Secret de l'Amerique." Realites, 266 (March, 1968), 99-103.
- Let Vet, Andre. "Le Petit Monde de John Updike." Langues Modernes, 63 (January-February, 1969), 66-77.
- Let Vet, Andre. "Updike, ou, le Mythe d'Antee." Langues Modernes, 59 (November-December, 1965), 50-55.
- Mailer, Norman. "Norman Mailer vs. Mine Writers." Esquire, 50 (July, 1963), 63-69, 105.
- Matson, Elizabeth. "A Chinese Paradox But Not Much of One: John Updike in His Poetry." Minnesota Review, 7 (January-February, 1967), 157-167.
- Muradian, Thaddius. "The World of John Updike." English Journal, 50 (October, 1965), 577-584.
- Murphy, Richard W. "In Print: John Updike." Horizon, IV (March, 1962), 84.
- Novak, Michael. "Updike's Quest for Liturgy." Commonweal, 78 (May 10, 1963), 192-195.
- Rupp, Richard H. "John Updike: Style in Search of a Center." Sewanee Review, 75 (Autumn, 1967), 693-709.
- Samuels, Charles, T. "The Art of Fiction: John Updike." Paris Review, 43 (Winter, 1968), 84-117.
- Serebnick, Judith. "New Creative Writers." Library Journal, 84 (February 1, 1959), 499.
- Standley, Fred, T. "Rabbit, Run, An Image of Life." Midwest Quarterly, 8 (1967), 371-386.
- Stern, Richard. "The Myth in Action." Spectator, 7057 (September 27, 1963), 389.

- Stubbs, John C. "The Search for Perfection in Rabbit, Run." Critique, 10 (Spring, 1968), 94-101.
- Sullivan, Walter. "Updike, Spark, and Others." Sewanee Review, 74 (Summer, 1966), 709-716.
- Tate, Sister Judith H. "John Updike: Of Rabbits and Centaurs." Critic, 22 (February-March, 1964), 44-51.
- Thompson, John. "Other People's Affairs." Partisan Review, 28 (January-February, 1961), 117-124.
- Thompson, John. "Updike's Couples." Commentary (May, 1968), 70-74.
- Ward, J. A. "John Updike's Fiction." Critique, 5 (Spring-Summer, 1962), 27-40.
- Wyatt, Bryan N. "John Updike: The Psychological Novel in Search of Structure." Twentieth Century Literature, 13 (Summer, 1967), 89-96.
- Yates, Morris W. "The Doubt and Faith of John Updike." College English, 26 (March, 1965), 469-474.

#### (11) Books

- Detweiler, Robert. Four Spiritual Crises in Mid-Century American Fiction. Gainesville: The University of Florida Press, 1964.
- Enright, D. J. Conspirators and Poets. London: Chatto and Windus, 1966.
- Galloway, David. The Absurd Hero in American Fiction: Updike, Styron, Bellow, and Salinger. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1960.
- Hamilton, Alice & Hamilton, Kenneth. John Updike: A Critical Essay. Contemporary Writers in Christian Perspective. Edited by Roderick Jellens. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1966.
- Harper, Howard N. Desperate Faith. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1967.
- Hicks, Granville. "Generations of the Fifties: Malamud, Gold, and Updike." The Creative Present. Edited by Nona Salakian and Charles Simmons. Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1963.
- Misonar, Arthur. The Sense of Life in the Modern Novel. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1964.

O'Connor, W. Van. "John Updike and William Styron: The Burden of Talent." Contemporary American Novelists. Edited by H. T. Moore. Carbondale: The Southern Illinois University Press, 1964.

Podhoratz, Norman A. Doings and Undoings. New York: Farrar, Straus, 1964.

#### B. General Works

Barth, Karl. Church Dogmatics. Volume III, part I. Edited by Reverend G. W. Bromley and Reverend T. F. Torrance. Translated by J. W. Edwards, Reverend O. Bussey and Reverend Harold Knight. Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1958.

\_\_\_\_\_. Church Dogmatics. Volume III, part 4. Edited by Reverend G. W. Bromley and Reverend T. F. Torrance. Translated by A. T. Mackay, Reverend T.H.L. Parker, Reverend Harold Knight, Reverend Henry A. Kennedy, and Reverend John Marks. Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1961.

\_\_\_\_\_. The Epistle to the Romans. Translated by Edwin C. Hoskyns. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1933.

\_\_\_\_\_. The Humanity of God. Richmond, Virginia: John Knox Press, 1960.

Buber, Martin. Eclipse of God. New York: Harper and Row, 1952.

Kierkegaard, Soren Aabye. Fear and Trembling: The Sickness Unto Death. Translated by Walter Lowrie. Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1954.

\_\_\_\_\_. Stages on Life's Way. Translated by Walter Lowrie. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1940.

Tillich, Paul. Dynamics of Faith. New York: Harper and Row, 1957.