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The Cultural Consciousness of John Updike: Rhetorical Spaces as Representations of Americana through the "Rabbit" Series

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By

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Abstract

This thesis is a scholarly examination of John Updike's first two novels of the Rabbit saga: *Rabbit, Run* and *Rabbit Redux*. The discussion is centered on the cultural artifacts and geographic spaces that populate the novels and how they are a reflection of popular cultural and contemporary sociological, economic, and political climates. These items are also closely considered with respect to their rhetorical significance and how Updike makes use of rhetorical spaces to influence his readers. What may seem like ordinary places are, through Updike's writing, imbued with rhetorical significance that sheds light on his contemporary culture and that of his readers. Updike's writing over the span of two decades readers provides readers an opportunity to experience culture of two important but seemingly antipodal decades: the 1950s and 60s. Furthermore, by choosing characters that reflect "Middle America" for the first novel and by then integrating characters from the fringes of society in the second novel, Updike shows that he is keenly aware of his changing society.

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Introduction: Cultural Materialism and the Critical Response to Updike

Raymond Williams proposed that culture is ordinary. Ordinary in the sense that culture not only influences society, but society also creates culture. This relationship is ongoing and fluid, with changes occurring on all temporal levels—from days to decades. John Updike's Rabbit saga provides an intimate cultural experience spanning several decades. Through the eyes of an "ordinary" character, contemporary material culture manifests in the most ordinary ways: through people, places, and objects. As culture is experienced it is also created; portions of this inventive process are revealed through the actions of Harry Angstrom and the people and places that surround him. Spanning twenty years in the life of a middle-class white man in Middle America, the Rabbit series offers a unique and thorough perspective on popular culture and the places where culture is experienced. Furthermore, the novels span highly politicized and influential decades of the twentieth century: the 1950s in *Rabbit, Run* and the 60s in *Rabbit Redux*. To encounter a variety of cultural artifacts and experience contemporary values and norms through the life of Harry Angstrom sheds light on how culture is created, transformed, and interacted with, and provides an intimate look at the places where these occur and the rhetorical significance of such places.

In this thesis I will consider each decade and the corresponding novel in chronological order: *Rabbit, Run* was written and takes place at the end the 1950s, and *Rabbit Redux* is set in the late 60s. The discussion will also examine the interaction of these novels with one another and how changes in culture and key

geographic spaces (towns, buildings, homes, etc.) occur over time. Likewise, critical response to these novels changes over time. I investigate how a number of critics respond to each novel (and each other) to add valuable content to the larger discussion. The overriding theme of this investigation is to look at cultural artifacts and specific places and what each lends to the broader discussion. Sections will take a closer look at Harry's hometown and the surrounding areas, restaurants and churches, and places that contrast with one another: the city versus the country. By investigating the seemingly quotidian, culture reveals itself in interesting ways. Likewise, by examining cultural geography as a daily interaction as well as one that spans decades, a holistic view of material culture can be realized.

Some critics have briefly addressed the importance of place, but few have offered a sustained discussion. Updike's popularity and prodigious career have motivated many members of the academic community to comment on his work—the Rabbit saga is no exception. However, the rhetorical and cultural significance of cultural spaces has not been adequately addressed and merits additional discussion. Since Updike's first two Rabbit novels take place over two decades, were written ten years apart, and feature the same characters, there is much to gain from an in-depth study of how each of these decades are perceived, portrayed, imagined, and experienced. Likewise, it is worth investigating how Updike's characters respond to and shape culture, and more specifically how cultural objects and places play a role in shaping these characters. The purpose, then, of this thesis is to present and add to the scholarly discussion surrounding

the rhetorical and cultural significance of the ordinary spaces that populate Updike's Rabbit saga, while also exploring the social and political climates of each corresponding decade.

One of the greatest attributes of the Rabbit saga is its intimate representation of contemporary culture. Details of the period's political climate, both traditional and changing values and norms of a society in flux, and the spaces in which all of these are contained are vividly captured by an author who was immersed and engaged in his culture. Harold Bloom writes; "Updike is certainly a representative novelist: of his time, his place, his society" (1). Samuel Beckoff agrees, adding "Updike's development as a novelist has been traced from a chronicler of middle class domestic fierceness and its highly insignificant minicrises to an extremely competent 'social secretary' (Henry James's phrase) of the broader contemporary scene" (120). Updike proves to be an efficient, consistent, and hardworking "social secretary" that sheds light on some of the defining decades of the twentieth century. The places and events in the Rabbit saga are skillfully chronicled through intelligently crafted narration. Likewise, the interaction of characters with one another and the rhetorical spaces they inhabit in the novels maintain a personalized tone that readers—those who lived *in* and those who can only read *about*—these decades can relate to.

Tony Tanner adds to this conversation by stating, "John Updike seems on first reading to stand quite apart from his contemporary fellow writers. His work reveals no visible need for continually renewed formal experimentation and he seems serenely immune from the paradoxes of the fiction-maker" (37). Tanner

explains that Updike uses New England suburbia for his subject matter at a time when most American novelists were paying little attention to the middle class, regarding life in the suburbs as a "desert of unreality" (37). However, Tanner claims "Updike has maintained, and demonstrated, that middle-class existence is more complex than American literature usually allows," noting that "Suburbia is the 'compromised environment' in which his characters live and to which, like the majority of the American population, they have committed their lives" (37). Tanner submits that Updike's avowed subject is how people live with and within that compromise, and how they die of it. He goes on to say "where many contemporary American novelists tend to see the social environment as a generalized panorama of threatening impositions and falsifying shapes, Updike accepts it as the given world for his characters, the one and only locale in which they will learn what they learn and lose what they lose" (37). What works especially well for Updike and these novels is that the suburban lifestyle indicative of his and his character's existence extends far beyond Pennsylvania—the characters and places in the Rabbit novels are ubiquitous. Across America the middle-class "majority" deal with trials and tribulations like those of the Angstroms in spaces that are very similar to the suburbs of Reading, Pennsylvania. The "compromised environment" Tanner coined is one shared by many of Updike's readers, and the author does a notable job of accurately conveying the realities of middle-class life.

But not all the critics agree. John Aldridge asserts: "Mr. Updike has none of the attributes we conventionally associate with major literary talent. He does

not have an interesting mind. He does not possess remarkable narrative gifts or a distinguished style. He does not create dynamic or colorful or deeply meaningful characters" (9). He goes on to say that Updike does not confront the reader with dramatic situations that "bear the mark of an original or unique manner of seeing and responding to experience," and that he "does not challenge the imagination or stimulate, shock, or educate it" (9). According to Aldridge, one of the problems Updike poses for the critic is that he engages the imagination "so little that one has real difficulty remembering his work long enough to think clearly about it" (9). Aldridge attributes these faults to a quality Norman Mailer once remarked of Updike: "He tends to become confused when the action lapses, and so he cultivates his private vice: he writes. And the conviction grows on one that he writes a great deal too much of the time, and is too frequently ridden by the necessity to distract the reader's attention from the lapse by planting in his path yet another exquisitely described tree, shack, or billboard" (Aldridge 10). However, what Aldridge fails to see is that those "exquisitely described trees, shacks, or billboards" hold significant rhetorical value and often add to the richness of the text. These places and objects that Aldridge feels Updike allows himself to flourish on are important to the novel in that they are reflections of the time and spaces the characters occupy, and they are cultural artifacts that many readers can relate to. Examining excerpts of the novel will show that when Updike describes these artifacts in such "exquisite" detail it is for good reason.

Aldridge's criticism of Updike does not stop there, however. He goes on to claim: "*Rabbit, Run*, although brilliant in many of its superficial effects, was a

botched attempt to explore certain important disorders of the modern will and spirit. It raised vital questions of freedom and responsibility that it answered vapidly" (11). Aldridge has taken notice of Updike's "social secretary" qualities but adds:

> At just the point where it should have crystallized into meaning, it collapsed into a shambles of platitudes and stereotypes of alternative—rebellion versus conformity, the loving, passionate prostitute versus the dull, drunken, respectable wife—which nicely dramatized Mr. Updike's failure to come to fresh imaginative grips with his materials. *Rabbit, Run* might have been a deeply subversive book. Instead, it merely recapitulated subversive elements that had ceased with time and repeated literary usage to be subversive. It was spiced with a stale, High-Camp brand of Angst and a sexuality that had become merely a form of writing done with a different instrument, and, perhaps appropriately, the most viable possibility it appeared to hold out was that Rabbit probably ought to try very hard to make his peace with society, family, and God. (Aldridge 11)

What Aldridge considers a "botched attempt" to explore modern society in fact turns out to be a successful discourse on contemporary culture. Granted, many of Updike's criticisms are not outwardly apparent. Updike's conversation with readers regarding "disorders of modern will and spirit" are sometimes esoteric and are conveyed through much more poetic means than critics such as Aldridge are accustomed to reading or can appreciate. Again, the language of the

novel puts special emphasis on people and places by stressing their rhetorical roles in ways that demand a closer reading, and perhaps re-reading. Updike's poetic flourishes are what draw attention to these items, not detract from them. While Aldridge's criticism may lack a majority consensus, Mary Allen's criticism of Updike warrants consideration.

Allen, while less hostile than Aldridge, nonetheless takes aim at Updike's treatment of women in the Rabbit novels. Perhaps resulting from the ideology of the 1950s more so than Updike's own sentiments (a statement which is also arguable), he portrays women much differently than he does men; Allen adds:

> John Updike the writer is an honorable man. His heroes return to their wives in the mellow atmosphere of appreciation and affection. His people do not kill or maim or intentionally cause pain. After a few rebellious starts they adjust and become at last like so many of us—comfortable. And for the woman who would be anything more than a vegetable-wife, this writer is the cunning enemy who would affectionately lull all womankind away from anything that has to do with life of the mind or self-respect or the joy of doing to a more appropriate and "natural" imbecility.
>
> Perhaps Updike's horror of the powerful, manipulative mother turns him with an extra fondness to the docile woman who can be dominated (and slept with). Most of his women characters belong to one of these two opposing types, each deadly in its way. Some readers see in

> Updike's women instead a wife-whore division, but the wife and whore often resemble each other, wives acting the part of whores and whores who are considered as possible wives. (69)

Much of what Allen claims is reasonable. Updike does portray Rabbit's wife Janice in less than the highest regard. Yet for all the condescension directed at Janice throughout the first novel, Updike may redeem himself when showing consideration for Janice's emotions prior to the tragedy at the end of the novel; the reader can feel her pain and desperation while Harry is only motivated by selfishness. Likewise, Updike provides a lengthy internal monologue for Ruth, the quasi-prostitute Rabbit has a relationship with during the separation from his wife. While the attention directed at the women of the novel pales in comparison to Harry and other male characters, the consideration Updike gives the women at the very least engenders a sense of cultural awareness regarding women. In fact, this could be a reflection of Updike questioning the time he is living and writing in with respect to women; for the duration of the 1950s women have taken a subordinate role to men and Updike seems to be well aware of this. Upon closer examination, the text reveals that Ruth has a certain power over Rabbit, and in the second novel Janice is the one who is liberated and pursues her own wants and needs. These are examples of Updike's growing consciousness of woman and their changing role in the late 1950s and indicative of him questioning their relegation to passive roles. Additionally, as the text will show, Rabbit's sister Mim turns out to be the one character that asserts her role even more so as a

woman and takes control of her own destiny—in stark contrast to her brother Harry.

Richard Rupp also comments on how Updike's style is an impediment. Like Cheever, Rupp claims Updike is concerned with ceremonial style. He submits, "Though neither writer can project a sustained festive action, each man tries to make style carry the burden of a ceremonial attitude toward life" (15). This criticism is reminiscent of Aldridge's, though not so vituperative. Rupp goes on by stating "Updike's ceremony is different from Cheever's, however, in some important ways: first, Cheever's ceremonial style is founded on social and religious certitudes, whereas Updike's style is not. Second, Cheever's ceremonies are generally social and lighthearted, whereas Updike's are solitary and solemn" (15). The differences Rupp claims are arguable. Removing Cheever's work from the statement and concentrating on the comments regarding Updike raises some questions. The novels show that Rabbit's "ceremonies" are much more than merely private, and that social and religious certitudes influence the novel in pervasive and conspicuous ways. Samuel Beckoff's extensive criticism of the first two Rabbit novels explores these concepts in greater detail. In addition to challenging Rupp's comments, Beckoff's commentary addresses the culture of the 1950s and 60s and the rhetorical significance of the spaces within the novels.

What makes Beckoff's criticism even more poignant to these topics is that he wrote his criticism soon after Updike published each of the first two Rabbit novels. Considering that Updike would publish a novel and Beckoff would

comment soon after allows readers a temporal frame with which to analyze each text. In other words, readers catch a glimpse of contemporary culture, first through Updike's characters and situations, and then through Beckoff's in-depth criticism. Adding to this, the notion that Beckoff wrote on *Rabbit, Run* and then again on *Rabbit Redux* ten years later offers readers a chance to discern how both author and critic have changed over the passing decade, along with how the scenic structures and characters have changed with society and its culture. Beckoff's commentary adds immeasurable material to the discussion of places and their rhetorical significance as well as insights into the contemporary culture of both author and his fictional, yet representative characters.

During the writing of *Rabbit, Run,* Updike's contemporary culture was in a period of flux. One changing aspect of this society was how the entertainment industry was asserting its influence over popular culture. Beckoff suggests the structure of the novel is not rigid like some of the other novels appearing during this time. Rather he sees fluidity in *Rabbit, Run* that suggests motion—as in "motion picture." Beckoff quotes from several interviews where Updike said, "'I originally wrote *Rabbit, Run* in the present tense, in a sort of cinematic way,' Updike told Jane Howard. 'I thought of it as Rabbit Run: A Movie'" (15). In another interview, Updike explained that "'The opening bit of the boys playing basketball was visualized to be taking place under the titles and credits. The effect to be achieved was that of something happening to you at that very moment in which you are sitting there, reading the novel (or watching the film)'" (15). It is interesting to hear Updike explain this in his own words and even more so when

this cinematic element is further developed in the novels. Even if the novels fail to read like a movie, the cinematic factor Beckoff and Updike speak of is not lost; movies play a very significant role in the novels in other ways. Movie titles scattered throughout the series come up time and again, with the titles themselves contributing a major role, especially in *Rabbit Redux*. Not only are these films decisive examples of contemporary culture, the titles also serve rhetorical roles and the *geographic locations* where these films are shown play an important part. The inclusion of movies and movie theatres are only a sampling of Updike's success at portraying Americana of this time period.

Movie theatres are but one example of the various locations or "scenes" that populate the Rabbit novels. These scenes are significant for a number of reasons: they are cultural artifacts indicative of the time; they frame action that is important to the novel's plot and development; and perhaps most importantly, scenes are imbued with rhetorical significance that reinforce and develop major themes in the novels. As such, when considering the role of scene, it is important to define it within a rhetorical context. Scene can be defined in many ways; a dictionary seems the logical place to start: scene is "the place where an incident occurs or occurred; a view or landscape as seen by a spectator; an incident or situation of a particular kind . . ." (Compact Oxford English Dictionary of Current English 920-21). But when considering scene in a rhetorical sense, Thomas Biesecker explains, "scene may be a historical space, a political space, or a sacred space; a site of preservation, interpretation, or commemoration—it is the provisionally settled scene of our collective invention" (1). Biesecker's definition

offers some interesting points to consider. For instance, collective invention can mean a society's epistemological way of seeing things: their cultural frame. The scenes that make up these frames are not necessarily limited to physical or geographical locales, but quite often these physical and geographical spaces play a major role in society. Additionally, sometimes these new scenes are used to challenge collective invention—Beisecker alludes to such locales in his definition. This is often the case in the Rabbit novels.

Gerard Hauser's definition of scene creates a larger lens from which to begin. Hauser's definition and interpretation of scene as a rhetorical device adds: "Scenes encourage and thwart audience responses through the ways in which they induce rhetorical responses" (280). Hauser also asserts that scenic structures can be arguments, and offers, "We know from experience that a setting can have meaning or symbolic value. Further, we can respond to a scene in terms of its symbolic value" (279). This is a fundamental way in which Updike uses scene; his scenes are often both symbolic and rhetorically significant. Another of Hauser's points which is especially important is "the way in which we argue with scenic elements is through the location of scene" (281). *Location* of scene is something that is of great importance in the Rabbit novels as many of the scenes are pervasive and are continually revisited as the novels progress through the decades.

Coombe and Herman allude to this when they claim that "Rhetoric is a social and material practice of the pragmatics of power and the use of scene in rhetoric can be both social and material" (560). It may be easier to look at this

notion from the material perspective. It is not difficult to exert power through the physical manifestation of power; consider how settings are used to manipulate audiences. Likewise, contemplate how physical centers of power are scenically represented: imposing buildings, homes of the wealthy, places of worship—these are all present in the Rabbit novels. Many of these buildings are for their respective occupants and observers the material way in which power is expressed. They function as parts of the greater rhetorical scene and influence audiences through their non-verbal rhetoric. Updike uses buildings and other spaces in much the same way and these scenic structures, while having rhetorical significance, are also excellent artifacts of contemporary culture.

Hauser explains that the scene (physical location) of a rhetorical exchange is sometimes used to persuade audiences to respond a certain way. In order for scene to work, there must be a desired rhetorical response from an audience. The way in which the desired response is induced often deals with the physical scene of exchange. If Updike wants his audience to act or react in a certain way, then he can use objects in a scene, or more specifically *location* of the scene as part of the rhetorical structure. As such, scene can be used to alienate and exclude certain segments of the population and this often happens in the novels. In many cases, where scene is rhetorically significant Updike chooses to create a dichotomy between two distinct places; Susan Friedman calls this “spatial poetics” and calls for critics to take a closer look at what it has to offer literary scholarship.

Friedman expands on her concept of spatial poetics in an essay devoted solely to this topic. The essay begins with a discussion in which Friedman

examines the concepts of space and time and then offers some opposing theoretical views, quoting Foucault, Bakhtin and others. Friedman frames her argument by sharing one of Foucault's observations: "The great obsession of the nineteenth century was, as we know, history. . . . The present epoch will perhaps be above all the epoch of space" (192). Friedman also paraphrases an argument Edward Soja made that calls for a compensatory emphasis on spatiality to counteract the emphasis on temporal modes of thought. Citing the success of Soja's call for such emphasis, Friedman asserts, "there's been a sea change in cultural theory, a veritable flood of spatial discourses proliferating across the disciplines in the 1990s, as an effect (I believe) of the intensified form of globalization in the late twentieth century" (192). Although theory has begun to afford space more importance, Friedman stresses that narrative theory still largely privileges narrative time over narrative space.

In spite of Bakhtin's insistence in the 1920s and 1930s on *topos* as a constituent of narrative along with *chronos*, prominent narrative theorists including Ricoer, Genette, and Brooks mute or even delete considerations of space in their analysis of narrative (Friedman 192). Friedman adds: "Space in narrative poetics is often present as the 'description' that interrupts the flow of temporality or as the 'setting' that functions as static background for the plot" (192). In her article, Friedman explores some alternative views on time and space, and then tests what she terms a "revisionist emphasis on space in narrative poetics" with a reading of Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*. Before applying her theory on Roy's novel, Friedman supplements her argument by

stating, “Space restored to its full partnership with time as a generative force for narrative allows for reading strategies focused on the dialogic interplay of space and time as mediating co-constituents of human thought and experience” (195). The principles Friedman applies to Roy’s novel can be applied to the Rabbit series, and when this is done space and time are shown to occupy a major role in Updike’s novels as his spaces are visited and constantly revisited at different times, creating the “dialogic interplay” Friedman describes.

Friedman concludes her article by explaining how Roy tells her story through buildings, through spatial entities that “heterotropically draw within their walls the geopolitical and domestic structures that have taken shape through time” (205). When applying these ideas to *Rabbit, Run* and the other Rabbit novels the same conclusion Friedman reaches for Roy also works for Updike. She discovers the narrative’s structural reliance on buildings to move the narrative forward (which is also very important to Updike) and how this gives a compensatory emphasis to space over time as constitutive of narrative discourse; an emphasis she insists needs to be acknowledged. She ends by noting, “*The God of Small Things* narrativizes story as a spatial practice, one that doesn’t erase time, but rather constitutes space as the container of history and the generator of story” (205). Space that contains time is what defines spatial poetics and is a concept which populates and enriches the Rabbit saga. The question that needs to be asked is whether Updike consciously wrote these novels with an emphasis on space, or if the spatial poetics that were created were simply the result of his creative writing background and style. I conclude that the use of space is intentional as the

action and plot in the Rabbit novels are driven by these places. As the story unfolds these places take on personalities—personalities that change, just as with their human counterparts.

As with Roy, scene plays a critical role in all of the Rabbit novels. Updike told Charles Samuels during a Paris Review interview: "When I write, I aim in my mind not toward New York but toward a vague spot a little to the east of Kansas" (Beckoff 60). Rabbit, the Angstroms, and the Springers are all part of Middle America, the "silent majority" and in that respect may be said to be "normal" or "average." Though Beckoff adds that the spiritual, religious, or theological escape from their entrapment offered by Updike is not always convincing, he reiterates Updike's words: "But this is how we are" (60). And this sentiment from Updike is apparent in much of his work. "This is how we are" is a theme readers can relate to in Updike's oeuvre; his characters are not unlike us and similar characters and situations populate many of his stories. In fact, a Harry Angstrom-type character appeared before the writing of *Rabbit, Run*.

Updike prepares for the Rabbit books with two earlier texts. The poem, "Ex-Basketball Player," in *The Carpentered Hen*, along with the short story "Ace in the Hole" which appeared in *The Same Door* have a number of similarities to *Rabbit, Run*. Like Harry Angstrom ("Rabbit"), in "Ace in the Hole" Fred "Ace" Anderson is the former star of the high school basketball team at Olinger High School. As with Rabbit, Fred is caught in a dead end job, has an unlovable wife and a daughter who cannot become a future basketball player (as is the case with Nelson, Rabbit's son). Fred reminisces on his former glory but differs from

Rabbit in that he is satisfied with his life and even comes to have a meaningful relationship with his own wife. The marked difference between the two characters is one of capitulation; Fred comes to terms with his situation and even embraces it, while Harry Angstrom lives in his past and can only think of escaping his present. This could have something to do with society in the 1950s. "Ex-Basketball Player" and "Ace in the Hole" were written earlier in the decade when many embraced the conservative and comforting values and norms of a society still recovering from World War II. As the decade progressed it appears members of society became disenchanted with what was expected of them; this is obvious with Rabbit but also becomes apparent through the women of the story, yet much less obvious as Rabbit's perspective (and later Eccles') dominate.

Harry's 1959 marks the close of a decade characterized by rigid family structures and well defined gender roles. *Rabbit, Run* is a morality tale written about a period before Women's Liberation in which many social critics were beginning to document an increasing disbelief in marriage as the foundation of everything. Soon after the writing of *Rabbit, Run* Updike would question "marriage as a sacrament" even more vigorously in *Couples*. There is little doubt that Rabbit was trying to escape from the "unfathomable insatiable domesticity" of the Eisenhower 50s (Beckoff 43). Harry was tired of the status quo and yearned for something more, even if selfish and immature in his course of actions—Updike may have felt the same, for the novel was ahead of its time and shocked many readers and critics. Even so, the shocking portions are of less importance to the scope of this thesis. Place and culture play the primary roles and there are

numerous opportunities to explore the rhetorical significance of these throughout the novels. *Rabbit, Run*, which introduces and develops many of the most important rhetorical spaces through Updike's use of something similar to Friedman's concept of "spatial poetics" is where the story begins. Because Samuel Beckoff's criticism extends to both *Rabbit, Run* and *Rabbit Redux*, is thorough and sustained, and because he takes note of some of the most important rhetorical spaces, his criticism drives much of the discussion. The comments from other critics, however, will be used to further enhance the broader discussion of place and will also help to define and explore the contemporary culture which surrounds each novel.

Chapter 1: *Rabbit, Run*

An Examination of the First Novel in Chronologic Form

Rabbit, Run opens in an alley where Harry "Rabbit" Angstrom attempts to join in a pick-up game of basketball with some youths from his neighborhood. The neighborhood is in the town of Mt. Judge (Mt. Penn in Updike's world), a suburb of Brewer (Reading). This was where Updike spent his formative years and is the scene of much of his writing (Beckoff 2). Beckoff quotes Updike's response to why he chose this setting: "'My subject is the American Protestant small-town middle class' he says. 'I like middles. It is in middles that extremes clash, where ambiguity restlessly rules'" (3). Mt. Judge is Harry's birthplace and home town and is located on the east side of the mountain. As *Rabbit, Run* progresses and he becomes involved with Ruth, Harry's physical and moral descent is down the west face of the mountain into the city of Brewer where Ruth lives: Mt. Judge thus becomes "Mt. Judgment" (Beckoff 23). Although Updike does not introduce this dichotomy between the two opposing sides of the mountain, he does provide readers information necessary to create scenic structure. Yet scene is not the only thing Updike imparts early in the novel; immediately basketball is introduced as an important part of Harry's life as well as a framing element and metaphorical concept for the series. Basketball plays a significant role in the first novel, and basketball jargon and flashbacks to Harry's glory days consistently arise in all of the Rabbit novels. Beckoff invokes a fitting quote from another critic: "'A peculiarity of American sexual mores,' says Gore Vidal, "is that those men who like to think of themselves as exclusively and

triumphantly heterosexual are convinced that the most masculine of all activities is not tending to the sexual needs of women but watching other men play games'" (11). Harry proves to be one of these game players even though he is also presented to readers as a "great servicer of women." Here is but one of the many conflicts that corrupts Harry's judgment. Vidal's idea sheds light on the cultural significance of sports but misses on accurately identifying Harry's troubles with women.

The novel opens in Spring and Rabbit decides to quit smoking. After briefly playing basketball with the neighborhood boys, Rabbit runs past the deserted ice plant, a place which will come up again and again in both novels. Most importantly the ice plant is an overbearing presence reminding Harry, and the thousands of other residents who can see it that even in 1959 industry was beginning to stagnate and fade. As Rabbit runs to the end of the block nearing his home readers are formally introduced to his hometown: "Wilbur Street in the town of Mt. Judge, suburb of the city of Brewer, fifth largest city in Pennsylvania"; not very impressive and Rabbit knows it (6).

The narrator describes the more elegant brick homes as Harry runs uphill towards his own. After guiding the reader past the nicer homes the houses like the one Rabbit lives in come into view: "each double house rises above its neighbor contains two wan windows, wide-spaced like the eyes of an animal, and is covered with composition shingling varying in color from bruise to dung. The fronts are scabby clapboards, once white" (6-7). The description of his

neighborhood engenders a feeling of disdain as images of illness and unappealing bodily functions are invoked. His apartment is on the top floor of a three-flat, is generally unkempt, and is shared with his toddler son and wife Janice. Janice spends much of her time watching television and drinking cocktails in what may be considered one of the first instances in which Updike experiments with the women's perspective of the Fifties. She is tired and bored like so many others who have lived in this decade. In fact, a few pages later dialogue reveals even more: Harry tells Janice: "You're supposed to look tired. You're a modern housewife," to which Janice replies, "And meanwhile you're off in the alley playing like a twelve-year-old?" (12). Janice may have a point; Harry shows us that he has the emotional tools of a twelve year old. With this early passage it is clear that Updike is cognizant of women's places in modern society. Throughout the novel he experiments with this by including extended passages where women's perspectives are revealed through detailed interior monologue, but it is not until the end of the novel that Updike's use of this is most effective.

This is also the first time readers are introduced to some cultural artifacts that characterize 1959. Janice is sitting on the chair "watching a group of children called Mousketeers perform a musical number" after which "the commercial shows seven segments of a Tootsie Roll coming out of the wrapper and turning into seven letters of 'Tootsie.' They, too, sing and dance" (9). Harry's reaction reveals much: "Son of a bitch: cute. He's seen it fifty times and this time it turns his stomach" (9). His reaction tells readers that Harry may be tiring of the consumerism mentality that has steadily grown through the decade and how

commercials have come to dominate the new media of television. When the commercial break is over and the show returns a big Mousketeer named Jimmy offers Rabbit a cryptic message: "Know Thyself" (9). Jimmy tells the young couple staring at the television that God has given each one of them a special talent which makes them both feel guilty; the wise Mouseketeer continues:

> "God wants some of us to become scientists, some of us to become artists, some of us to become firemen and doctors and trapeze artists. And He gives to each of us the special talents to become these things, *provided we work to develop them*. We must *work*, boys and girls. So: Know Thyself. Learn to understand your talents, and then work to develop them. That's the way to be happy." (9-10)

This passage does two things. First it introduces religion which will be a consistent and powerful theme that runs through the novels. Second, it states, through a surrogate, what Rabbit is thinking. He yearns for something more but his talent as a basketball player can do little for him now that he is 26. He needs to find something else, something fulfilling and something that will bring back the feeling he so loved back in his glory days on the basketball court. The cryptic message the Mousketeer delivers also speaks to the general feeling of boredom and disinterest many are feeling as the decade rolls to a close. Updike's use of a figure from pop culture, viewed on a television no less, illustrates how society is changing and looking to new venues for stimulation and encouragement. Instead of opening a book and looking to figures from a traditionally more highly

regarded medium, modern people are too busy and left with little choice but to turn on the television. Once it is on they are assaulted with commercials telling them to do one thing while brief moments of clarity like the one the Mouseketeer offers tell them to do another and are lost in the fray.

Also important to this discussion is how Janice is portrayed early in the novel. Mary Allen offers some critical commentary: "The *wife*, who may be as distasteful as Janice is at the beginning of *Rabbit, Run*, where marriage is a system of constraints, is not, however, essentially a distasteful concept to Updike's men. A wife is the comfort they seek" (78). Though Rabbit runs away he eventually returns, seeking the comfort Janice provides and ultimately becomes dependent on the financial comfort the Springer business offers. Allen adds of Updike's men—in this case Harry Angstrom—that "Their truest entrapment is never more to their wives than to themselves, and even a possessive wife can be a liberating force. Pastoral lyricism is thus by no means limited to praise of the unattainable lady" (Allen 78). Harry proves to be his own worst enemy, and like the dichotomy Updike creates between city and country Harry too is caught up in a tug of war between his childish, selfish side and the one that eventually succumbs to his moral and culturally prescribed obligations.

Janice first met Harry Angstrom when they both held entry level jobs in Kroll's department store; work which they and the other employees hated. Allen explains how years later Rabbit's work situation has not improved much and he demonstrates MagiPeel Peelers in five-and-dime stores, a trifling occupation for a man and so close to the trivia of housework. Allen adds, "We are made very

aware that he must have talents for something better. Even tending Mrs. Smith's garden is an improvement. But what about Janice? Our author never allows us to *expect* her to do anything important or interesting" (82). And for the course of the novel she never does. Aside from the tragedy at the end of the novel Janice takes a subordinate role to Harry and the action that surrounds him. Updike paints her in a stereotypical, misogynistic role indicative of the 50s as critics have expounded, yet she is also given moments of intense attention and readers come to understand and even empathize with her—this is Updike's way of subtly yet intentionally drawing attention to the portrayal of women in his contemporary time and challenges the pigeon hole critics like Allen tend to place him in. This is even truer at the end of the novel, just before the accidental drowning of the baby when Rabbit has just left her in a childlike fit. For a number of pages Janice's perspective is revealed through intense and anguished interior monologue. Her situation in these pages is analogous to the plight of many contemporary women and it takes decisive effort on Updike's part to convey these ideas through the extended interior monologues.

With many of the cultural and social elements of the novel established, it is easier to focus on the development of some of the more pervasive spatial environments and their rhetorical roles. A number of places reoccur throughout the novel and carry with them important meanings that subtly change as action in the novel occurs. In addition to individual physical and geographic spaces, Updike often draws attention to conflicting relationships between particular places which become prominent as soon as Rabbit runs from Janice the first time.

After the brief moment he and Janice share watching the Mousketeer on television, his wife sends him to pick up their infant son Nelson at his parents' house. As Rabbit leaves his own depressing home it is further scrutinized: "The kitchen is a narrow room off the living-room, a tight aisle between machines that were modern five years ago" (14). Rabbit leaves and as he walks along he rounds the next corner "where the water from the ice plant used to come down, sob into a drain, and reappear on the other side of the street" (16). Harry reminisces about the ice plant and how it used to create a boundary but no longer does. Again, the ice plant dominates the early scenic structure of the novel as its rhetorical significance is established. The ice plant "used" to emit the water but no longer does like so many other industrial buildings that now molder and rust. Harry's surroundings are in a state of decay and this extends beyond the tangible to the culture of the 50s. By using these physical and/or geographic places, Updike creates a metaphorical relationship with the culture of the period; the dominant values and norms of the 50s are dying and through the course of the novel readers are subtly convinced that it is a good thing they are.

Rabbit continues on his journey and turns down another street where the narrator goes into great detail regarding Harry's environment:

> He turns down Kegerise Street, a narrow gravel alley curving past the blank back side of a small box factory where mostly middle-aged women work, the cement-block face of a wholesale beer outlet, and a truly old stone farmhouse, now boarded up, one of the oldest buildings in town . . .

> This building, which once commanded half the acreage the town is now built on, still retains, behind a shattered and vandalized fence, its yard, a junk heap of brown stalks and eroded timber. (16)

The building that "once commanded half the acreage" now sits vacant and neglected, much like the domineering ice factory. Urban blight dominates as the scene is set, yet these building still stand. The next place Harry reaches is the Sunshine Athletic Club and it is not much of an improvement. Despite its name, the "tall thin brick building like a city tenement misplaced in this disordered alley of backsides and leftovers" is a sad place Rabbit associates with "a depressing kind of sin, sin with bad breath" (17). More importantly, the Sunshine Athletic Club is home to one of Harry's mentors and former basketball coach Marty Tothero. But Harry walks on, "past a body shop and an unused chicken house," and his progress is always down, "for the town of Mt. Judge is built on the east side of the mountain Mt. Judge, whose west face overlooks the city of Brewer" (17). As Harry takes this revealing stroll Updike offers an important item: this scene is set a day before the vernal equinox, or the first day of spring. Throughout the three novels the solar year, which marks the coming and going of the four seasons, often coincides with notable events. The author is in tune with the passing of seasons and uses these important dates to add significance to the events that fall on these days. This notion is reinforced again near the end of the novel on the summer solstice. Likewise, during this stroll through town Updike continuously juxtaposes nature against the urban environment, casting even more light on how urban blight has taken over the town while at the same time

emphasizing the grandeur of nature and its ability to reclaim what man has built and later abandoned.

This walk ultimately brings Rabbit to his parents' home where he had lived the first twenty years of his life. The home is a two-flat set on a corner, with Harry's parents occupying an inside unit that received little light. While these homes are really quite close to one another, there remains a deep divide or separation between them. The Angstrom's old neighbors, the Zims (who they seldom talked to) had to leave their home when the husband found a new job—it appears he was laid off from his previous one in keeping with the urban and economic decay theme. The new neighbors refuse to cut the very narrow swath of grass that separates the two units. In fact, only one pass with the lawn mower was all it took to cut each neighbor's portion, but the new "Methodist" neighbors neglected their half. Harry's mother refused to let either Harry or his father cut it for them, and the tiny piece of lawn became a knee-high, overgrown and wild oasis in the otherwise maintained neighborhood. How quickly nature reclaims what is hers, and how interesting that 18 inches of turf can create such a wall. In these novels the scene is often limited to very small geographic area; homes, individual rooms, etc., yet these spaces and the people who occupy them are quite often disconnected from one another—this division will be a theme that continues throughout the series.

As Harry stares into the kitchen window of his parents' home he sees them feeding his son Nelson at the kitchen table. The narrator's description of the

kitchen of his childhood home brings back a flood of memories and Harry sees himself in Nelson's place. More importantly, the reader finds that the descriptions of his mother's kitchen compared to the description of his own kitchen earlier are quite different. "Harry's boy is being fed, this home is happier than his, he glides a pace backward over the cement and rewalks the silent strip of grass" (22). Something prevents Rabbit from interrupting this much happier event, and he does not enter the home to retrieve his son.

Harry proceeds to walks to his car without Nelson and begins to drive away. As he drives away from his parents' home he looks at the front of the house which reminds him of "an abandoned ice-cream stand" (23). Rabbit goes through a series of thoughts; from Janice cooking a bland dinner to him shooting a basketball; "but he feels he is on a cliff, there is an abyss he will fall into when the ball leaves his hands" (24). He tries to re-picture his mother and sister feeding Nelson, but that happy vision eludes him. Finally, a familiar site is imagined: "the water from the ice plant running into the gutter, yellowish, the way it curled on stones and ran in diagonal wrinkles, waving the fragile threads of slime attached to its edges" (24). This lucid recollection of the ice plant carries with it a more important meaning: the ice plant serves as a divider, a boundary, and Harry's actions are becoming a manifestation of boundaries and divisions. His attempt to run south effectively separates him from his family, and in some ways, himself.

Rabbit is now running. He tends to know what "feels right," with his intuition often guiding him. But when he is driving south in the early portion of

Rabbit, Run he seems to be driving in circles. On his trip south he is told by the old farmer that he needs to decide where he wants to go and then go. As Harry continues on his journey he contemplates the pleasures waiting for him. Eventually finding himself on a dark, foreboding road which turns out to be a lovers' lane where young couples, not much younger than he are parked and necking in their cars. The place Harry finds himself in is ironic.

Harry's continues to flee Brewer, drawing closer to Philadelphia, the "dirtiest city in the world, they live on poisoned water, you can taste the chemicals" (25). Harry wants to go south and fantasizes about orange groves, smoking rivers, and barefoot women, "But he is going east, the worst direction, into unhealthy, soot, and stink, a smothering hole where you can't move without killing somebody" (25). He needs to head south because as he continues east the road "begins to feel like a part of the same trap" (26). Traps are another important theme in *Rabbit, Run* and most of these traps turn out to be physical places. Harry stops to fuel the car and asks the gas station attendant how far away he is from Brewer. Although Rabbit has driven forty miles, the attendant advises him that he in only fourteen miles away from his home, "But it was far enough, this was another world. It smells differently, smells older, of nooks and pockets in the ground that nobody's poked into yet" (27). The man at the gas station asks Harry where he's headed, and "for the first time, Harry realizes he is a criminal." Harry hears the gasoline rise in the neck of the gas tank as the attendant squeezes every drop carefully in the car, quite a difference from the city garage man who let the last drops "insolently" slosh over the lip (27). This subtle comparison shows the

drastic differences between the country and the city. In this passage the narrator offers another example: “The rich earth seems to cast its darkness upward into the air. The farm country is somber at night. He is grateful when the lights of Lancaster merge with his dim beams” (29). Later in the novel, however, when Harry returns to Brewer he will find a special comfort in the country. As Harry prepares to leave the gas station and continue on his elopement the attendant delivers a cryptic message: “The only way to get somewhere, you know, is to figure out where you’re going before you go there.” To this Rabbit replies, “I don’t think so” (29).

Harry soon stops at a diner and reflects on how much better the hamburgers are there than in Brewer. He proceeds to drive through a series of small towns as readers are told the names of the songs Rabbit hears: “No Other Arms, No Other Lips,” “Stagger Lee,” a commercial for Rayco Clear Plastic Seat Covers, “If I Didn’t Care” by Connie Francis, a commercial for Radio-Controlled Garage Door Openers, “I Ran All the Way Home Just to Say I’m Sorry,” “That Old Feeling” by Mel Torme and the list goes on, alternating from song title to commercial with occasional news items also included. The series of song titles not only provide a detailed glimpse into popular culture of the time, but also serve a symbolic and rhetorical purpose. Updike chose titles such as “I Ran All the Way Home Just to Say I’m Sorry,” “That Old Feeling,” and “Turn Me Loose” to convey Rabbit’s conflicted mood. Rabbit is in search of “that old feeling” but cannot find it, and should be running home to tell Janice that he is sorry. Instead, Rabbit has turned himself loose to find an idealized place that does not exist.

Likewise, the radio commercials offer a peek into the growing commercialism of the 1950s and the news items show that the world is increasingly becoming less stable. Interestingly, the news explains that spring is "scheduled to arrive tomorrow," once again showing how the seasons are an important theme for Updike that he uses to denote major transitions in the lives of the main characters.

As Rabbit continues on his journey he reaches Route 1, "which with its hot-dog stands and Calso signs and roadside taverns aping log cabins is unexpectedly discouraging. The farther he drives the more he feels some great confused system . . . reaching for him" (31). Harry feels more and more like an outsider, but not just because he is outside of Brewer, his home element. Harry had thought he had read, "that from shore to shore all America was the same. He wonders, 'Is it just these people I'm outside, or is it all America?'" As the 1950s come to a close this sentiment is felt by many others, and Rabbit will be meeting and interacting with more than a few of them throughout the first and second novels. While most characters Harry interacts with in the first novel are by and large living the status quo, the individuals who populate the second novel come from very different walks of life with very different views which influence Rabbit to see things in new ways.

Harry drives on after eating at the diner and is startled by two hand holding lovers. He soon finds himself on a deserted road and becomes quite scared. Ironically, this road is actually a lover's lane, and Harry is once more startled to find that what scares him is the same that compels him: a dark and

frightening road turns out to be one where young couples go to be intimate. This same quest for intimacy is one Rabbit is perpetually on. At this he finally decides to turn around and head back to Brewer; his journey having been short and futile. The contrast between the mysterious country and the dull city is expressed once again as Harry comes into Brewer from the south: “seeing in the smoky shadow before dawn as a gradual multiplication of houses among the trees beside the road and then a treeless waste of industry, shoe factories and bottling plants and company parking lots and knitting mills converted to electronics parts and elephantine gas tanks lifting above trash-filled swampland” (39). Harry makes his way to the Sunshine Athletic Club, parks in front and tries to go to sleep in an effort to catch Tothero, his high school basketball coach first thing in the morning. Before succumbing to sleep Rabbit reflects on his failed escape, “he thinks again of his goal, lying down at dawn in sand by the Gulf of Mexico, and it seems in a way that the gritty seat of his car is that sand, and the rustling of the waking town the rustling of the sea” (40). If Rabbit cannot reach the sea at least he can imagine it. Harry and Marty Tothero eventually rendezvous, and the old basketball coach convinces Harry to join him in meeting two other women, but like Rabbit, Tothero is also married. Harry is expectant at this chance to meet a new woman and the two meet the girls in front of a Chinese restaurant; a space that symbolizes the foreign relationship and departure from the values and norms of the 1950s that Rabbit is about to embark on. In fact the restaurant was just recently reopened as a Chinese restaurant as pink paintings of Paris are still on the wall (56). The group finishes dinner and Harry and his date, Ruth, decide to go

back to her apartment on Summer Street. Harry has awoken on the first day of spring and as the day draws to a close he is presented with a foreshadowing of what his summer is about to entail; a woman who lives on Summer Street. Updike is again using the seasons as rhetorical element within the novel. Ruth's status as a prostitute is somewhat ambiguous and is never discussed between the two explicitly. However, Rabbit knows what she is and finds himself quickly attached to her. The location where this all takes place is equally important.

The new couple ultimately reaches her apartment, one floor above a doctor's office and, ironically, directly across the street from "a big limestone church" that "hangs like a gray curtain under the streetlamp" (75). The entrance to Ruth's apartment building is under a façade of stained glass and across the street stands the gray limestone church; both Beckoff claims, are ironic heralds of the great "spiritual experience they are about to share upstairs" (44). To Ruth the church affords a "dismal view"; however the same view for Rabbit is reassuring the next morning: "Its childish brightness seems the one kind of comfort left to him" (90). Rabbit's religiosity is not absent and he finds himself drawn to the qualities of the church despite the sins he has committed and the mortal one he is about to commit:

> He goes to the window and bends to see what she means. There is only the church across the way, gray, grave, confident. 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. He feels gratitude to the builders of this ornament, and lowers the shade on it guiltily. (80)

How ironic that Rabbit holds the church in such high regard yet his forthcoming actions with Ruth are antithetical to what this very "ornament" stands for. This seems to be a common theme with Rabbit; he holds religion in such high regard but chooses to follows its teachings pragmatically. In other words, he appreciates the rules and traditions of organized religion but acts as if he is not subject to them; religion is more of a spectacle he finds comfort in viewing from the outside. This could be a reflection of Updike's sentiments, shared with his readers who have lived through the strict moral codes of the 1950s. It is ironic that Harry barely struggles with or even acknowledges his hypocrisy, while at the same time a close reading betrays an author's sense of waning religious influence.

After Rabbit consummates his new "marriage" to Ruth he falls asleep and has an intense dream. In this dream Rabbit sees his parents and some others sitting around their kitchen table. He watches an unknown woman open an ice box and once again visions of the pervasive ice plant emerge (88). The following morning the church bells rouse Rabbit from his sleep and he watches the "crisply dressed" people go into the church. Rabbit reflects:

> The thought of these people having the bold idea of leaving their homes to come here and pray pleases and reassures Rabbit, and moves him to close his own eyes and bow his head with a movement so tiny Ruth won't notice. *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 Tothero and all the others. Amen." (90)

Not long after Rabbit's prayer the church bells ring and people leave the church "carrying wands of green absentmindedly at their sides" (95). Rabbit had considered going to church that morning because it is Palm Sunday but Ruth doubted his sincerity. As they watch people leave the church carrying palms (symbolic for redemption) the two are not among them.

Harry returns home and gathers some of his clothes to bring back to Ruth's. As he walks from his apartment (where he has left his key irrevocably in the lock) Harry is stopped by the Reverend Eccles. When Harry senses someone is behind him he considers ducking into the abandoned ice plant—the pervasive building which has perhaps become a symbol for Harry's new duality: it becomes a rhetorical space that symbolically divides Harry from his wife. Harry submits to Eccles' plea to join him and as they ride off together they are circling Mt. Judge —not climbing or descending it (106). Later, they are on Weiser Street, "heading toward the great sunflower, dead in day" (108). After returning Harry persuades Ruth to walk with him up to the top of Mt. Judge (remember Mt. Judgment) (Beckoff 35). Speaking to the changing times "long ago" when hiking "was customary entertainment," the couple decides to climb the steps up to the top of Mt. Judge. They walk away from Ruth's apartment uphill, toward Mt. Judge and Rabbit looks up to see the aptly named Pinnacle Hotel. From this vantage point Rabbit has a different perspective of the city which "stretches from dollhouse

rows at the base of the park through a broad blurred belly of flowerpot red patched with tar roofs and twinkling cars and ends as a rose tint in the mist that hangs above the distant river" (113-14). Harry's new perspective is a bit perplexing; do the omniscient narrator's words reflect a new Harry Angstrom, or is he momentarily in the midst of a high brought on by this new lover? It seems that since Rabbit is at the Pinnacle of the mountain he is briefly free from judgment, but as he descends the mountain into the realm of Brewer he soon comes under the scrutiny of many, including Ruth.

Rabbit continues his rather domestic affair with Ruth and the two spend much time together. In less than a week they have seen four movies: *Gigi*; *Bell, Book and Candle*; *The Inn of the Sixth Happiness*; and *The Shaggy Dog*. The movie titles seem an odd mix and serve as a reflection of the conflicted inner feelings Ruth and Rabbit share. DeBellis claims that in *Rabbit, Run* two of these movies counterpoint the seriousness of the action. *The Shaggy Dog* reduces Harry's romantic quest for "first-ratedness" while *Bell, Book and Candle* affirms the magical power of love. DeBellis explains, "Harry poises uncomfortably on both the need for self-identity and the need for love. By alluding to the Hollywood fantasy versions of happiness, Rabbit's predicament is shown to be all the more poignant, partly because such fantasies have fed his notions of 'first-ratedness'" (85). DeBellis goes on to describe in detail how these two movies serve as powerful metaphors for the relationship between Rabbit and the two opposing women. It is no coincidence that Updike chose to use artifacts of popular culture to add emphasis to Harry's quandary. Consider too that these

films were contemporaneous to the writing of the novel, its setting, and to the audiences reading it; the connections would be hard to miss for audiences reading the novel shortly after publication.

The Shaggy Dog, DeBellis asserts, underlines the opposition of dog/rabbit images in *Rabbit, Run*:

> Rabbit Angstrom (a "rabbit") has married Janice Springer (a "dog") and the contrast reverberates throughout the novel. This discontent turns comic in *The Shaggy Dog*, a film Rabbit and his mistress Ruth enjoy during their six-week affair. Though Rabbit does not reflect upon this contrast, the reader becomes aware of a parallel between Harry's situation with his estranged wife and the film's antagonist Mr. Wilson Daniels who fears and hates dogs and imagines shooting an invading shaggy dog who becomes the hero. Meanwhile, Rabbit's in-laws try to transform his son into a Springer. (85)

The Shaggy Dog parodies Rabbit's hero's quest, and his spiritual groping for the "it" he discusses with Eccles that could make him first-rate again. The movie depicts a dog that saves a missile site, rescues a girl from drowning and a baby from a fire. DeBellis relates this last fact to Rabbit's life: "But Harry cannot rescue his drowning baby in *Rabbit, Run*—the image haunts him throughout the sequel—nor in *Rabbit Redux* can he save Jill from burning nor direct the moon rocket Apollo 11 away from the moon, the 'big nothing.' Only Disney makes modern heroes" (85). It would be difficult for contemporary audiences to not see the parallels between the movie and Harry's situation. Updike chose an ideal

venue for creating the connection; one that the majority of "Middle-America" could relate to. But the rhetorical connection between Hollywood and Harry's quandary is further enhanced when Updike includes one of the other movies Harry and Ruth watch.

The other film supplying counterpoint, *Bell, Book and Candle*, injects a gothic element into *Rabbit, Run*. DeBellis explains that when Jimmy Stewart is bewitched by the New York witch Kim Novak, he renounces his fiancée for her, as Ruth bewitches Harry into giving up his family. Unlike Stewart's character, Rabbit breaks the hold of all the witches and escapes. Other parallels emerge. When the dark pasts of Novak and Ruth are discovered, their lovers flee. DeBellis adds, "As Novak pursues Stewart to her undoing, so Ruth's love of Rabbit weakens the prostitute's protective defenses. Only when Novak's dark past is discovered does Stewart lose interest. Though we may applaud their return to customary human behavior, both women are more unhappy in their rejection of the unconventional path they had chosen" (85-86). It is interesting that Updike uses this second film as a counter to the first for another reason: the attention is focused on the women. *Bell, Book and Candle* pays attention to the woman's perspective. In doing so Updike offers readers more than a glimpse into the psyche of Ruth and as an extension many women faced with an oppressive social structure. While it may only seem fleeting, Updike is paying attention to women with the choice of including this film among the four.

DeBellis adds that Updike uses these films in *Rabbit, Run* to comment on specific aspects of the action. In *Rabbit Redux*, however, Updike traces how the

two appearances of Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey* act as enclosures for the quest theme, with key images which reflect upon the inner worlds of Harry and Janice. DeBellis posits in the second novel, "The film brackets Janice's infidelity and Harry's exposure to ideas which challenge his comfortable passivity. The arrival of the film and the lunar landing complement each other, creating maximum interest in space flight as a fact and as imaginative stimulation, but they mean very different things to Rabbit and Janice" (86). Updike uses film again in the second novel as a rhetorical device and a framing element. Even ten years later for the sequel Updike is using artifacts from contemporary culture to develop the plot. Since these movies are popular examples of contemporary culture their significance is hard to avoid—Middle America has become consumed with popular culture, especially in its cinematic form.

Harry and Ruth do more than watch movies together: they are now living together and their burgeoning relationship does not go unnoticed. Reverend Eccles is summoned to try and mend Rabbit's fractured marriage to Janice and in one such effort Eccles schedules an afternoon of golf with Rabbit. As they approach the course a discussion on religion ensues. The shift in this scene is from contemporary culture to the rhetoric of scene and it is an important moment in each man's development, especially with regard to their search for existential meaning. Eccles opens up to Rabbit and in turn Harry feels compelled to reciprocate. Rabbit admits:

> "'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 holding tricycles and spindly three-year-old trees, the un-grandest landscape in the world—'there's something that wants me to find it.'" (127)

This passage is significant for a number of reasons. First, Harry ironically points out to a landscape that is half-urban and half-country yet exhibits none of the better qualities of either. Harry uses this un-grand landscape to make a point that seems almost ludicrous considering the scene. Updike's use of this location as the two make their way to the golf course—another half-urban, half-country space—makes a mockery of his protagonist. Harry cannot be taken seriously as he uses this landscape as a reference because there is nothing behind "all this"—urban blight is replaced with urban sprawl and the latter, as seen in *Rabbit Redux*, is just as depressing as the former. Clearly, Rabbit is confused and lost in his surroundings.

These rhetorical spaces frame the action and psychological state of the protagonist which is further exaggerated by Updike's exaggerated use of hyphens. The hyphens engender a sense of fractured, half-whole entities and Rabbit is one of them. He likes to think there is something more out there but only a few weeks earlier he drove South in hopes of finding it—only to return dejected and still utterly lost. This time spent with Eccles also sheds light on Rabbit's spiritual life and how it manifests in his everyday existence. The topic is also explored in critical circles and several perspectives lend interesting ideas to the discussion.

Marshall Boswell is one critic who claims that God's existence is as obvious to Rabbit as his nonexistence is to Ruth. Boswell invokes the same passage quoted above as Rabbit and Eccles are on their way to play golf "that most bourgeois of all activities" (61). He adds "Amid the 'un-glamorous' world of Mt. Judge, amid his middle-class pursuits and worldly activities, Rabbit clings to his faith that behind the visible world lies an unseen world that not only redeems all but also includes him" (Boswell 61). Boswell's comments point to the notion that Rabbit is lost both mentally and spiritually, and that he is searching for some sort of redemption. However, the redemption he seeks eludes him partly because he keeps looking in the wrong places. What happens on the affectation-of-nature golf course sheds light on Harry's real emotional and psychological state.

Chapter 2: The Major Rhetorical Spaces in *Rabbit, Run*

The physical scene of the golf game Harry and Eccles play during the estranged period from Janice also plays a significant rhetorical role with relation to Harry's wife. While on the course Janice is one of the threatening irons in his golf bag: "light and thin, yet somehow treacherous in his hands" (110). When he misses the shot and is jolted to his shoulders he believes that it was Janice who struck him. Mary Allen replies by asserting that for Rabbit to prove he is a winner he needs women like Janice and Ruth. She adds, "Only their incapacity can confirm his superiority" (85). Allen reiterates the same passage from the novel and comments: "To explain his mediocre golf game he replaces thoughts of his own inadequacy with the concept of women's stupidity: 'In his head he talks to the clubs as if they're women. The irons, light and thin yet somehow treacherous in his hands, are Janice. *Come on, you dope, be calm.… Oh, dumb, really dumb*"' (85). Like Janice, Ruth is also "dumb," which is just the quality to appeal to Rabbit (Allen 85). Allen's ideas are further developed by Derek Wright who is also able to tie together some of the prominent themes that pervade the novel.

Three important entities come triumphantly together at the climax of the first game of golf: sex, sport and religion. As mentioned, at the start of the game Rabbit is vengefully thinking of his golf clubs as his women, confusing his sexual and sporting ineptitudes and blaming his own inadequacy on female stupidity. Wright explains: "He then tells Eccles that he has left his wife because 'there was this thing that wasn't there,' and after some heated exchanges as regards to what

'this thing' is, Rabbit finally tees off and, just as his ball hangs and then vanishes in space, he turns to Eccles and cries 'That's *it*!'" (31). Wright claims that this "it" or "thing" that Harry is convinced wants him to find it is, in his understanding, at once sexual, sporting and spiritual (Wright 31).

The golf course is also a significant rhetorical space because so many of the novel's themes meet and interact in a place that is neither pastoral nor indicative of the city. Wright's recognition of this intersection of the major themes of God, sex, and sport, suggests that the golf course is an important place. The nice tee shot after so many bad ones is Rabbit's symbolic rite of passage to a new level of understanding. Yet to use golf (and basketball in many other cases) as a tool to gain a higher understanding betrays Harry's immaturity. From the very beginning of the novel, Harry turns to sports to find authentication in his life and thinks he has done so again with this arbitrary tee shot. The golf course serves as a place where Rabbit thinks he finds redemption but, like the flight of a golf ball, this redemption is only fleeting.

Though Rabbit and Eccles speak about God while driving to the course and while playing golf, the conversation is underscored by Eccles' own struggle with his religious position and serves to refocus some of the attention from Rabbit's marriage to Eccles'. Eccles' own wife seems starved of attention and flirts with Rabbit on more than one occasion. Wright's entities of sex, sport, and religion also apply to the young reverend. The golf course is more than just a rhetorical space for the novel's main character, but is one for anyone who occupies the space. This point is further developed in *Rabbit is Rich,* where

Rabbit has become a member of a prestigious country club along with his circle of friends. That golf course also becomes a pivotal rhetorical space which both frames and creates much of the action in the third novel.

The golf course's geographical and physical space is perhaps the most important component of its rhetorical significance. Larry Taylor has a particular point of view worth exploring. He submits that the satire of the novel should be emphasized as fully as the pathos and suggests that this satire is perhaps most clear in the treatment of the "return to nature" motif in the novel (6). In the opening of his essay, Taylor suggested that a work is anti-pastoral "when it challenges, refutes, and exposes the concept of an elemental, simple life in a state of nature is a part of the American Dream and agrarian myth" (7). He claims much of Rabbit Angstrom's failure can be attributed to his passionate pursuit of this ideal; an ideal which involves being in harmony with nature, rather than knowing one's relationship to nature (Taylor 7). The golf course is far from an example of "a simple life" or "return to nature," but the physical components of the golf course scene do point to a nature motif. Returning to Rabbit's "deep" exchange with Eccles while on their way to the course, ironically, "all this" is meant to be idyllic nature. Taylor suggests the effect is satiric anticlimax. It is later, in the groves of the golf course, that Rabbit explains to Eccles that he is searching for 'this thing" (Taylor, 11). Here is where the dichotomy Updike creates between the city and the country is most pronounced.

That "thing" Rabbit is searching for, whether it is Taylor's idyllic nature or something more on the spiritual plane, must remain elusive. This is because the

golf course is neither truly nature, nor truly something of the city. With the golf course Updike's creates a dichotomy which defines a scene and offers no resolution for Rabbit's quandary. If it is a return to nature Rabbit is searching for, this scene can only provide him with half of the solution. While the golf course resembles nature, it is only a man-made affectation of nature that must be molded and maintained by even more men. Yet the golf course is not truly a piece of the city either. After only a few months of neglect the course has the potential to return to its natural state. However, only with the *complete absence of man* can the golf course revert to its truly natural state. Updike shows the potentiality of this rhetorical space but asserts it dichotomous existence. Because the space is a jumble of both man-made and natural parts, it can hold no resolution for Rabbit's search for existential meaning. The "it" Rabbit is searching for cannot be found on the golf course because of the course's own conflicted existence. Rabbit comes closer to finding meaning on the pastoral Smith estate, but the scenic structure of it too thwarts Harry's search.

While still estranged from his wife, Harry takes a job for an elderly widow working as a landscaper on her sprawling estate. The descriptions of the Smith setting are in stark contrast to those of the city and suburbs. Spring is breaking forth in Harry's new surrounding and life stirs from its winter slumber. After a day of working on the grounds, while on the bus ride back to Brewer Harry reflects on his new job and the surroundings he works in: "Funny for these two months he never has to cut his fingernails. He lops, lifts, digs. . . . The simplicity" (136). Harry enjoys working on the Smith estate and even indulges in walking and

conversing with the elderly owner. He walks with her and likens her to the swaying tops of the spruces that surround them; “He associates these trees with forbidden estates; it gives him pleasure to be within their protection” (139). The setting is pastoral and even Edenic, and with these descriptions the rhetorical value of this scene comes into focus.

Larry Taylor describes this scene while explaining that Rabbit has taken a job gardening in “old Mrs. Harry Smith’s fancy rhododendron patch, the lavish garden on the wealthy estate” (12). He claims the garden is a version of Eden, even to a direct comparison by an old woman who had once told Mrs. Smith that “heaven must be like this.” But interestingly, Mrs. Smith is a realist who prefers alfalfa to expensive flowers. She would have rather plowed under all the flowers and planted cash crops than turn the field into a prized garden full of ornamentals. Her dead husband, not she, Taylor adds, had been the idealizing pastoralist. Rabbit becomes a type of surrogate for her lost husband, also named Harry. Not surprisingly Rabbit feels the old woman is in love with him, or rather wants her to be in love with him. Taylor adds: “And here we have curiously grotesque scenes in which the ex-basketball-hero and the ancient dowager stroll through the Edenic lanes arm-in-arm, at peace. Perhaps the strangest Adam and Eve in nature” (Taylor 12).

Readers may think that the Smith garden was always a pristine natural area if it was not for Mrs. Smith saying that she would have rather grown alfalfa there. Although the garden exudes a strong pastoral note, Smith’s words alter its rhetorical value by asserting that this space, like the golf course, is neither truly

city nor country. Had it been a strictly pastoral setting the garden may have offered Harry answers to the questions he was asking on the golf course with Eccles. Updike has again created a rhetorical space that is caught in the city/country dichotomy—a dichotomy that thwarts the search for answers.

Later, when Harry returns to visit Mrs. Smith with Nelson she delivers a cryptic message not unlike the Mouseketeer at the beginning of the novel. Mrs. Smith hands Nelson a piece of candy and says, "You try one of these. They're old but good like a lot of old things in this world" (223). Later she tells Harry, "All winter I was fighting the grave and then in April I looked out the window and here was this tall young man burning my old stalks and I knew life hadn't left me. 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" (224). Perhaps the message is not so cryptic: life is a gift and it's a good one. These words of wisdom are delivered in what can only be considered the most pastoral and natural space Rabbit ever occupies for an extended period of time. Even more interesting and significant is that the message is delivered by a wise old woman. Mrs. Smith's message is perhaps the best advice uttered in the novel—in any of the Rabbit novels—and it was uttered by a woman; an indication that Updike does not subordinate *every* woman in the novels to his dominant male characters. Mrs. Smith is a brief but important character and it is no coincidence that her words of wisdom where delivered while in the rhetorically significant boundaries of her estate.

The notion that Updike is paying attention to the feelings of his female characters is further developed soon after the Smith scene when Harry and Ruth spend the holiday together. On Memorial Day, Ruth and Harry go to the public swimming pool in west Brewer. They enjoy the time together and Harry lovingly reflects on Ruth as they lay in the sun. For several pages Harry's internal monologue shows how he idealizes Ruth to an almost pathological degree. But then in fitting Rabbit Angstrom style, he suddenly takes a 180 degree turn when he sees that she is paying more attention to the sun than to him. He notices this and "gets up on an elbow and looks across her dead body to the lighter figures of two sixteen-year-olds standing sipping orange crush" (144). The narration then changes to Ruth's interior monologue, supplying readers with an extended example of Ruth's perspective. Assigning several pages to Ruth's struggle with understanding Rabbit (and really all men), shows that Updike is concerned with women's perspectives in this socially rigid time. Though Ruth is not indicative of the majority of women during this or any time, her internal monologue touches on several points that resonate with the lives of contemporary women. Ruth ruminates on the men she has slept with, beginning back in high school with Tommy Harrison and moving onto the older men she now sees for money. Overall, Ruth paints Harry and the other men in a negative light, effectively stereotyping them and affirming the general perception of men of the 1950s: domineering, egotistical, and superior. Ruth's criticism is an extension of Updike's criticism and with Ruth's interior monologue he hones in on one subject of particular importance during this era: women and work. Harry convinces Ruth

to go out and get a proper job after he moves in with her which is antithetical to the 1950s. In fact, the roles have shifted and Ruth is the primary breadwinner. In a novel where nearly every other woman is a homemaker, the fact that Ruth is working (in two very different industries) is significant. Updike pays special attention to the women and their changing roles when it comes to the workplace.

In response to this, Stacey Olster responds to Mary Allen's criticism of Updike's portrayal of women in the novels, especially their careers or lack thereof. But as Stacey Olster suggests, asking the question, as Allen does, "What about work for women?" is the wrong one. Olster cites data from the US Department of Commerce in answering Allen's criticism:

> It is the wrong question to ask a novel set in a period of time in which 34,374,000 out of a non-institutional population of 117,881,000 defined their role as "keeping house," in which 38,053,000 (or 62.8 percent) of a total of 60,569,000 women did not belong to the labor force, and in which day care for those, like Janice, with small children but few financial resources was not an available option, as indicated by the fact that of 12,205,000 married women in the labor force only 1,118,000 (or 18.3 percent) had children under the age of six. (48)

Olster alludes to Updike's awareness of contemporary women when she reasons that for Updike "to portray women adjusting instead of protesting does not imply endorsement of their options. As the despair he attributes to the drunken Janice indicates, it certainly does not provide evidence that women are, or should be, content with their condition" (49). The time for protesting would soon come, but

for the contemporary setting just acknowledging women's struggles with their place in the workforce was critical and even encouraging. Ruth's interior monologue, while not entirely focused on work, was precipitated by a discussion of her work and brings needed attention to several aspects of women's conditions as the 50s draw to a close. Updike is not suggesting complacency for women; rather he has created a scenario for female readers to examine and question their role in a changing society.

Soon after the holiday, Eccles makes a call to the Angstrom home to meet with Rabbit's parents, shifting the discussion back to the rhetorical significance of scene while still addressing an episode of recent cultural significance. The conversation takes place in the kitchen, a space whose rhetorical importance was established early in the novel. The elder Angstrom comes home after Eccles and Harry's mother begin speaking, and the narration specifies where the three congregate: "at the porcelain kitchen table. Four settings, year after year, have worn black burs through the enamel" (162). A discernible confrontation between what is old (the house, the Angstroms) and what is new (the need for only two settings) takes place. The discussion continues and another place, Texas, comes up. Mrs. Angstrom tells Eccles that the Army, more specifically Harry's stint in Texas, is what changed Rabbit, saying "When he came back from Texas he was a different boy" (162). Harry's father explains that Rabbit changed once he came back from the army though he never even saw combat in Korea. In fact, Harry never left Texas while he was enlisted. Rabbit none the less had a rendezvous with a prostitute that has made him, as his father explains, much more interested

in “chasing ass” than getting his fingernails dirty in the print shop (163). This could also explain Rabbit’s affinity for Ruth. The details of Harry’s brief tenure in Texas elude readers through all three novels, but glimpses do occur and carry with them meaning; at least for Harry. Beckoff comments: “It must have been the Army experience that turned Harry from a career of chasing honest dollars (the Protestant Ethic) to the chasing of women. Neither parent can explain why their ‘domestic animal’ went amuck” (51). Yet from these flashbacks the reader is provided with some insight into his relationship with women, if not his feelings on war. But in *Rabbit Redux* all this changes; the Vietnam War takes a central role in the novel as one of the main characters is also one of its many casualties. Perhaps it was not appropriate to talk about the Korean War during the 1950s because it is seldom mentioned in the novels, and the politics of the war are never even hinted at. However in the 1960s the politics of war dominate much of *Rabbit Redux* and many differing opinions of the war are expressed throughout. The reticence of the 50s is replaced by the expressiveness of the 60s—important reflections of what defined each decade.

A new introduction to the rhetorical spaces discussion comes near the end of the novel. A pronounced dichotomy is created within Club Castanet and is personified at each side by a man and woman, and fittingly by Harry and his sister: “Club Castanet was named during the war when the South American craze was on and occupies a triangular building where Warren Avenue crosses Running Horse Street at an acute angle. It’s in the south side of Brewer, the Italian-Negro-

Polish side, and Rabbit distrusts it" (172). The significance of this space is further addressed in its detailed description:

> With its glass-brick windows grinning back from the ridge of its face it looks like a fortress of death; the interior is furnished in the glossy low-lit style of an up-to-date funeral parlor, potted green plants here and there, music piping soothingly, and the same smell of strip rugs and fluorescent tubes and Venetian-blind slats and, the most inner secretive smell, of alcohol. You drink it and then you're embalmed in it. (172)

Ruth and Rabbit sit and converse in the bar for some time when Rabbit notices that his sister Mim has entered with a young man. Miriam and her escort walk past Rabbit and pause to look for a booth. The narration that follows provides the rhetorical importance: "The place is shaped like a wedge and widens out from the entrance. The bar is in the center, and on either side there is an aisle of booths. The young couple heads for the opposite aisle" (181). The significance lies in the geographical space; more importantly the separation and opposite sides the brother and sister sit on. It could be a foreshadowing of the separate paths each sibling takes, or an indication of how the values and norms of their contemporary society diverge and evolve. For Rabbit, the mentality of the 50s follows him into the next decade, while Mim becomes the epitome of the 1960s: she is colorful, liberated, and in charge of her own life. It is no coincidence that Mim is a sister instead of a brother. Mim is Updike's example of a woman who can think for herself, be assertive, and not have to remain in a traditional gender

role. Mim is what Ruth and perhaps even Janice could have become if it were not for Harry's poisonous influence.

The first novel ramps up to its tragic climax when Harry receives a call from Eccles while he is staying at Ruth's apartment. Eccles informs him that Janice is about to have the baby and so Rabbit concedes: "I guess I ought to go to her" (190). Rabbit runs to her and his journey across town is narrated in great detail over several pages. Many of these details are minutiae, but the places are given significant meaning by the way in which they are described and experienced by Rabbit as he runs across town. Most importantly, as he reaches the hospital parking lot a powerful new symbol and space is introduced which will follow Rabbit into the next novel:

> The St. Joseph's parking lot is a striped asphalt square whose sides are lined with such city trees; and above their tops, in this hard open space, he sees the moon, and for a second stops and communes with its mournful face, stops stark on his small scrabbled shadow on the asphalt to look up toward the heavenly stone that mirrors with metallic brightness the stone that has risen inside his hot skin. *Make it be all right*, he prays to it, and goes in the rear entrance. (194)

The moon, as it casts a shadow on Rabbit, becomes something that is at the same time both unreachable and a source of comfort. Whether it is a symbol for God or the "it" Rabbit seeks, the moon metaphor will follow Harry into the sequel where it is an even more pervasive spatial and rhetorical element. The moon is also a rhetorical space; it is somewhere so far away and seemingly unreachable but a

place that influences everyone's daily lives. In the next decade the "space race" will ensue and the United States will send a manned mission to the moon by the decade's close. However, the "launching" of Harry predates the launching of the space race, as the next passage shows, and it will take more than the span of the 1960s for Harry to ever reach his destination. As he awaits the delivery of his daughter, Harry reminisces on his former glory days—a passage which gives readers some insight into why Rabbit is so utterly lost:

> Sometimes the shouting glare of the gym would darken behind his sweat-burned eyes into a shadowed anticipation of the careful touchings that would come under the padded gray car roof and once there the bright triumph of the past game flashed across her quiet skin streaked with the shadows of rain on the windshield. So that the two kinds of triumph were united in his mind. She married when he was in the Army; a P.S. in a letter from his mother shoved him out from shore. That day he was launched. (198)

Launched on a journey of misogyny that Harry seems to regret in this passage, but in fitting style he quickly flips back to the carefree (careless) Harry. In the very next sentence this is evident: "But he feels joy now; cramped from sitting on the eroded chrome-armed chair sick with cigarettes he feels joy in remembering his girl; the water of his heart has been poured into a thin vase of joy" (199). These emotional extremes occur within the confines of the hospital waiting room. The hospital itself is a place of rhetorical significance for obvious reasons, but when

Janice returns home with the new baby, the apartment her and Harry share again takes on rhetorical importance.

Rabbit and the family return home from the hospital with the new baby who "fills the apartment as a little casket of incense fills a chapel" (233). An ominous foreshadowing of what is soon to unfold in their home opens the passage. Eccles later comes calling and tells the couple that he would love to see them in church. Janice feels too warn out but Harry obliges: "He dresses in his new grey suit and steps out at quarter of eleven into broad blue Sunday morning a day before the summer solstice. He always enjoyed those people parading into church across from Ruth's place and now he is one of them" (235). The church again comes into focus as a rhetorical space, not because Harry is finally an attendant, but because within days their newborn daughter will need a funeral.

When Rabbit returns home he wants badly to make love to Janice and goads her into having a drink. She questions him as to why he is forcing the issue when in the past he always gave her a hard time about drinking. Updike again foreshadows the baby's death as Rabbit and his family finish a late dinner: "amid the stacked dishes on the sink, under the worn and humid furniture, and in the coffin-like hollow of the plaited crib, the shadows begin to strengthen, the grip of the one with which Becky has been struggling all afternoon relaxes, and suddenly she is quiet, leaving behind a solemn guilty peace" (246). Finally, Janice relents and has a drink that her husband makes for her: half whiskey and half water. His aim is to get his wife drunk so that she will give in to his sexual advances, but she is too tired and too sore from giving birth. An argument ensues and Rabbit, in a

jealous and selfish fit, gets up from bed, dresses and states that he is "going out" (249). Readers cannot help but feel for Janice and empathize with her, while simultaneously feel contempt for the selfish and obscene advances Harry makes on her. This part of the novel paints Harry in perhaps the worst light of any of the novels and it is not without purpose.

As *Rabbit, Run* comes to a close so do the 1950s. Updike is offering a final perspective on the decade through the actions of Harry in this scene. The 1950s have been a morally oppressive decade where women have been subjugated while men are allowed to live a double standard. Updike is bringing this to readers' attention through the despicable actions Harry displays, and then further drives the topic home by offering Janice's perspective over a number of pages. Janice's perspective and interior monologue is analogous to many women of this time and offers them a final pronounced voice as the novel draws to a close. Despite the fact that she is sipping a cocktail (one Harry has forced upon her), readers cannot help but feel for her. Updike again displays his awareness of women in a time when male protagonists' tend to eclipse any female perspective.

Rabbit has left Janice at the apartment with the two children and she struggles to keep things in order—especially her mental faculties given the way Rabbit has treated her and subsequently run away *again*. Janice's mother calls at what would seem to be the best moment to intervene, and she promises to come over and give Janice a hand: "I'll have a bite to eat and be over in twenty minutes" (262). Tragically, twenty minutes proves to be too long and Janice accidentally drowns the baby in the bathtub instead of going to bed as her mother

suggested. The scene then immediately shifts to the Eccles household where Rev. Eccles has just learned of the baby's death. Lucy, Eccles' wife, castigates him for loving the careless Rabbit when she exclaims: "Why must you spend your life chasing after that worthless heel? . . . You love him. That's sickening. Oh I think that's sickening, Jack. Why don't you try loving me, or your children?" (266). Updike is not only criticizing the actions of the main character, but has also used the denouement of the novel to criticize the other main character who also happens to be a man. Lucy's feelings toward her husband are not unlike Janice's and are perhaps shared by many other women readers. Again, Updike has given these women a voice to criticize the status quo and the values and norms of their contemporary culture. It is also no small coincidence that these two perspectives are provided to readers within just a few pages of one another as the novel comes to its close. It appears Updike is reinforcing his take on women by making their perspective the dominant one as the novel ends.

It is not until after Eccles and his wife have their heated exchange that Rabbit is made aware of what has happened. He calls Eccles from a payphone in a drugstore in Brewer because he is concerned no one has answered the phone at his apartment. Rabbit steps outside the drugstore; "It's a hot day, the first of summer" (270). The changing seasons come into play again and here, the beginning of summer marks a significant change in Harry's life. He boards a bus leaving Brewer en route to Mt. Judge. Harry gets off the bus too soon and must walk the rest of the way to the Springer's house. But Rabbit does not walk, he runs in order to "keep his body occupied" (272). His path crosses everything dismal and

depressing Mt. Judge has to offer before he finally reaches the Springer house (the same one which, ironically, is to become his home in the third novel). While at the Springer house Eccles, Tothero, and others try to console and lecture Harry on what all this means, with the most significant reaction coming from Eccles who claims that this event has brought the couple closer than ever possible before. For the time being this could not be farther from the truth, but in subsequent novels the two do eventually become much closer. Whether this reconciliation is attributable to the death of their daughter, the changing culture of the 60s and then 70s, or a final capitulation on both their parts are all plausible reasons. However, for the time being Rabbit is even more lost than before he took his brief run south. Some of this comes through to readers as they return to the forlorn apartment to retrieve some clothes. The changing seasons and the death of the baby coincide with the rhetoric of the scene:

> They walk with their child through streets they walked as children. The gutter along Potter Avenue where the slime-rimmed ice-plant water used to run is dry. The houses, many of them no longer lived in by the people whose faces he all knew, are like the houses in a town you see from the train, their brick faces blank in posing the riddle, Why does anyone live here? Why was he set down here, why is this town, a dull suburb of a third-rate city, for him the center and index of a universe that contains immense prairies, mountains, deserts, forests, cities, seas? (284)

Their town has changed dramatically in the last decade. Like the baby and the ice plant it is dead and everyone Harry once knew is gone; whether dead or having

moved off to follow a job. In this brief passage Updike also evokes the city-country dichotomy when Harry questions why he has been tossed in such a dull suburb of a third-rate city when there are so many better places—all of them uncorrupted nature.

This spatial dichotomy is evoked again in the last scene when the funeral procession reaches the cemetery on a hill:

> They pass between two granite pillars linked by an arch of wrought iron. The cemetery is beautiful at four o'clock. Its nurtured green nap slopes down somewhat parallel to the rays of the sun. Tombstones cast long slate shadows. Up a crunching blue gravel lane the procession moves in second gear, its destination a meek green canopy smelling of earth and ferns. The cars stop; they get out. Beyond them at a distance stands a crescent sweep of black woods; the cemetery is high on the hill, between the town and the forest. Below their feet chimneys smoke. (294)

Despite its purpose, the cemetery is beautiful and nurtured and compared to the rays of the sun. This passage is also replete with descriptions using colors. Updike also casts opposing objects in these descriptions: one manmade and one natural. The granite pillars versus the wrought iron arch, green slopes punctuated with tombstones, and the crescent sweep of the city on the high side of the cemetery and the smoking chimneys on the lower. Updike sets up a powerful rhetorical scene with these details. Also of interest is the use of "crescent" to describe the forest. The word is evocative of the moon which has been introduced already in

Rabbit, Run as a significant metaphor, and then further developed as a powerful framing device in *Rabbit Redux*.

What causes Rabbit to run this time is his utter lack of tact and compassion for his wife. While standing around their daughter's grave Rabbit turns to Janice's face, "dumb with grief" and utters, "'Don't look at *me* . . . I didn't kill her'" (295). After his heartless comment "A suffocating sense of injustice blinds him. He turns and he runs" (296). It is to this crescent shaped forest that Rabbit runs "uphill exultantly" (296). Like the moon which shares the crescent shape through its stages, the forest, or rather the *answers* that natural spaces are supposed to hold for Harry are elusive—the moon is an unattainable space and the "it" Harry seeks in natural places is equally beyond reach. After a brief discussion with Ruth reveals that she is pregnant, Rabbit becomes even more confused and takes to running once again. The novel begins and now ends with Rabbit running; at the start of the novel he runs to his family but now runs away from it. The reader is left with the question of where Rabbit might be running to, but the text has established the notion that it does not matter where Rabbit runs to because the answers he seek will always elude him. The rhetorical spaces Updike uses throughout the novel always thwart Harry's quest for his "it." Though the natural spaces like the Smith estate or the crescent shaped swath of forest get him closer to that "it," he must always return to the dull suburbs of the city where modern life eclipses any chance at clarity. Just as his aborted effort south was a failure his final quest for answers in *Rabbit, Run* is also a failure; after all, when

Harry exits the forest he finds himself in the Pinnacle Hotel parking lot—another manmade blemish in what was once an unspoiled wilderness.

Richard Locke offers some commentary to help close the discussion on Updike's first book in the Rabbit saga:

> What distinguishes *Rabbit, Run* from all of Updike's other work (until the appearance of its sequel) is its dynamic balance between description and narrative energy: as Rabbit escapes from one enclosing situation to another, the pace never flags and yet the physical and psychological details have never been more sharply in focus. The minutiae of the Eisenhower age—the paradigmatic Mickey Mouse TV show, the religious revival, the all-American glamor of high-school heroes, the cramped apartments of small town sweethearts who married too young, the hallowed authority of athletic coaches and parents—all are perfectly there. (76-77)

Also perfectly there are the rhetorical spaces Updike creates to draw attention to the important points of the novel. The quest for answers is caught up in a dichotomy that places the country and the city on opposite sides. Updike also imbues the novel with references to popular culture which help to reinforce the rhetorical significance of many of these spaces while providing readers with a familiar frame with which to experience the text. Perhaps most importantly, Updike experiments with the female perspective in several passages adding a new and culturally necessary viewpoint to how the values and norms of a repressive society affect women. While the argument that many of Updike's characters are

misogynistic is valid, the fact that the author has included female perspectives shows that he is becoming more aware of women's status in his contemporary culture. This notion and that of female independence is further developed in the second novel—a novel which requires this discussion to focus much more on the contemporary culture Updike is writing in than about the rhetorical spaces that have already been established.

Chapter 3: Contemporary Culture over Space in the Second Novel, *Rabbit Redux*

In the 50s, Rabbit was running every which way, searching for spiritual answers. In the 60s he has returned to his wife, taken on a steady job and a mortgage on a suburban home, buttressed himself with super-patriotic bigotry and an antipathy towards sex, and settled down to enjoy all the cheap illusions he had fought against earlier (Beckoff 69). Along with Beckoff's, Richard Locke's comments helped summarize the discussion on *Rabbit, Run* and aid in opening the examination of *Rabbit Redux*:

> The essential theme of *Rabbit, Run* is civilization and its discontents: the opposing claims of self and society, the sacrifices of energy and individuality that the claims of the libidinous presocial self against the smothering complacencies of small town white America. Now in *Rabbit Redux* (that is, Rabbit "returns") he pulls against the 1960s and defends his hero's new commitment to civilization, his longing for social and personal continuity in an age where both are hard to come by. (Locke 77)

For these reasons, the shift will be from discussing the rhetorical significance of places to a more focused look at the culture of the 1960s and how it manifests in the novel. More importantly, by studying critical commentary alongside the text, significance of Updike's inclusion of under-represented and fringe elements of society is revealed. In *Rabbit Redux*, Updike makes a concerted effort to create a dialogue between the political extremes when it comes to the

decade's most controversial topics; most notably the Vietnam War and black/white relations. By including members from both sides—under the same roof no less—Updike creates a rhetorical space (within the novel and also in Harry's suburban home) where these various factions can interact and reveal elements of contemporary culture.

Samuel Beckoff comments extensively on the sequel suggesting that ten years later in *Rabbit Redux*, Updike offers a cogent solution to the 1950s. Beckoff claims in the second novel Updike offers an updated solution to the normal, average, "silent majority." Social, cultural, political, and spiritual reform are visible in the recognition and acceptance of, and perhaps even integration of certain minority elements (60). To achieve this, the sequel is populated with new characters such as Jill, Skeeter, and Charlie who belong on the fringes of society to varying degrees. Beckoff adds, "Updike moves from the Silent Generation of the Fifties in a virtual quantum leap to the excitement and ferment of the Sixties" (60). The 60s "saw apocalyptic criticism assimilated in the middle class culture." "Those were years," he adds, "in which critics emphasized the 'exhaustion, desuetude, and terminality' that were symptoms of the deathlike stasis of the Eisenhower Fifties" (100). The events of the new decade show how middle class culture reacted, and many of these are captured within the action and dialogue of *Rabbit Redux*.

Since that fateful day in June, 1959, when Rabbit ran away at the end of the first novel, presumably forever, some very significant events occurred, up to

the landing of the first American on the moon in 1969. A number of other significant events have occurred during this very different decade which include: the escalation and intensification of the Vietnam War; the Civil Rights Movement; the emergence of the Blacks as a militant force in society; the demonstrations and riots in Watts, Detroit, and other cities; the peace protests; the takeover of Columbia University and the other campuses; the Democratic National Convention of 1968; the Free Speech Movement at Berkeley in 1964; the surfacing of an extensive, palpable drug culture; and many others (Beckoff 60). It is immediately evident to readers who have lived through the 1960s that these social and political events are going to be difficult to ignore in a novel whose predecessor keenly captured what life in Middle America is like. Many of these events have shaped and defined a new contemporary culture which is virtually antipodal to that of the 1950s. The decade culminates in the first man touching foot on the moon—a seemingly impossible task in the decade before. Yet even before this high point is achieved, other problems in society are shaping the culture; most notably the Vietnam War and civil rights, including those of women.

In *Rabbit Redux*, for the first time in his career, Updike deals in a large way with public subjects: violence, the Vietnam War, black revolution, drug addiction, Middle American anger and frustration, hippie life-styles, and the manned trip to the moon. Locke asserts that with great narrative facility Updike has integrated these volatile elements within a realistic novel of suburban life in 1969. He warns in outline the book may seem populated with clichés, but on the

page they are redeemed by Updike's accurate evocation of people's voices and feelings as well as his description of physical details, adding "Updike has always written about the inner surface of banal experiences; in *Rabbit Redux* he shows highly familiar subjects in all their human particularity" (Locke 78). Many of these human particularities are brought out by the culture of the time, with the culture being well defined by the tumultuous and intense socio-political climate.

Of these socio-political events the trip to the moon is the controlling metaphor in *Rabbit Redux*. The moon and related lunar terms punctuate the novel in key spots. The new house that Harry and Janice have occupied for three years is in Vista Crescent, a subdivision with tiny, newly planted trees that are in stark contrast to the crescent shaped forest Rabbit runs to at the close of *Rabbit, Run*. Beckoff suggests the moon metaphor comes to a climax with Rabbit and Janice coming together once again "with the cold, objective precision of a LEM docking with its command module following a mission," adding that the epigraph of the first section of the novel is an exchange between two Russian cosmonauts while performing a docking maneuver in space (64). He adds that later, "'O.K.?' is the very last word of the book, an approximation of space-astronaut talk, and is also, perhaps, our earthbound, now middle-aged author asking, 'What did you expect? I do consider marriage a sacrament . . . and sacraments do bring us to a state of grace'" (64). This shows that Updike is able to combine a number of important, but seemingly unrelated ideas within a single rhetorical space: the moon. With the moon he has combined two separate quests (Harry's and Janice's), the dead baby, marriage, and the unattainable, among others. As mentioned earlier, Updike's

development as a novelist has been traced from a chronicler of middle class domestic fierceness to an extremely competent "social secretary" of the broader contemporary scene. Updike succeeds in addressing the contemporary with the moon metaphor and calls special attention to a topic that was under his scrutiny in both decades: marriage.

Rabbit, Run was probably the definitive marriage novel of the "tranquilized Fifties" (Beckoff 120). As such, this period marked the beginning of the decline in the belief that marriage was the foundation of everything good in society. The impression persists that divorce was becoming not only more popular but easier to obtain. So was spouse-swapping and the swingers (a reality for Harry in *Rabbit is Rich*), and a more tolerant attitude toward birth control and even abortion. Still, Updike was able to say in that novel that "marriage is a sacrament" and was to be preserved at all costs, even at the expense of a serious personal hell for one or both of the partners. A similar statement in *Rabbit Redux* would have probably provoked outright disagreement or derision (Beckoff 120-21). But with the 60s the decline in the sanctity of marriage was noticeably accelerated, and Updike captures this with the failed marriage between Harry and Janice.

Updike explains to Beckoff in an interview, "Moreover, I did give Rabbit another chance to achieve grace through Jill and Skeeter, through secular agencies, if you wish, and he muffed the chance" (64). Essentially, the moon metaphor served as an unattainable place in the first novel, but in the second man has reached the moon and so too has Rabbit achieved a level of reconciliation and

communion with Janice, yet still fails to achieve the state of grace the author suggests. Because Rabbit can never step foot on the moon himself, his quest for the "it" will never be finished; however, through the actions of another American touching the moon, Harry is vicariously able to take a step closer to understanding some existential meaning. Updike also injects popular culture in the sequel to add emphasis to the moon metaphor, and, in a greater sense, Harry's quest for answers.

The movie *2001* is one such example of popular culture which fits nicely alongside the moon theme and plays a prominent role for providing a frame for much of Harry's internal dialogue in *Rabbit Redux*. As Beckoff posits, Harry Angstrom started on his own personal "space odyssey" as the second novel opens while he is watching the Apollo rocket being launched on television, and simultaneously learns that Janice is cheating on him with Charlie Stavros, an employee at her father's car dealership (Beckoff 65). Jack De Bellis, who revealed the significance of films in the first novel, describes the rhetorical importance of *2001*. De Bellis first ties the use of film into the broader subject of how contemporary culture is captured in the sequel:

> John Updike's dozens of references to films and allusions to screen actors and actresses reveal not just a passing knowledge of an important aspect of American popular culture but offer verisimilitude and nostalgia, while providing a clever disclosure of character and support for theme. So adept is Updike at using every element of film that even titles on marquees

> foreshadow and counterpoint his themes. Individual films reveal ironic relations to his images, plots and characters, most suggestively in the use of Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey* in *Rabbit Redux*, where parallels focus attention of the growth of Rabbit's wife, Janice Springer, and the significance of the black messiah, Skeeter. (83)

Updike used films in *Rabbit, Run* to comment on specific aspects of the action, but in *Rabbit Redux* he traces how the two appearances of Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey* act as enclosures to ideas which challenge Rabbit's comfortable passivity. The arrival of the film and the lunar landing complement each other, creating maximum interest in space flight as a fact and as imaginative stimulation, but they mean very different things to Rabbit and Janice (De Bellis 86). Harry's 'space odyssey' begins at the beginning of the novel when he discovers Janice is cheating on him with Stavros as the lunar module is launched from Earth, while Janice's odyssey had its somber start ten years prior.

Janice's journey had begun tragically with the image of her drowned baby in *Rabbit, Run.* Coincidentally, as the family will soon witness, the space voyage in *2001* ends with images of the "Star-Child," as A. C. Clarke named it. De Bellis asserts that in the decade between *Rabbit, Run* and *Rabbit Redux* the baby has loomed large between Janice and Harry. At dinner with Stavros before seeing the film, Harry is so casually cruel as to remind his son, "Your mother's the girl that's good at death." Janice's rejoinder fits the blame: "Tell him who refused to have another child" (48). The Star-Child at the end of the film symbolically shows her

that the baby is not dead, and the huge image seems to absolve her, in contrast to the accusing baby who seemed to divine that Janice would mishandle her, "this big moon face looking cross at me," which occurred ten years before in the first novel (De Bellis 87). The importance of using this film is clear and what also emerges from the transaction between Harry and Janice before the show reveals that Janice is beginning to assert herself; an example of how Updike injects Women's Liberation into the novel. With this evolution of Janice's personality into a stronger, more independent woman, Updike reveals that he too is aware of the changing times and the changing role of women.

Beckoff comments on this but lacks sensitivity when doing so. He claims, "This is the new Janice who is able to use the new permissive language without any inhibitions and apparently ready to sexualize anything and everything she sees or hears" (92). He continues by adding that even Janice's appearance has changed; "little makeup and a face strengthened by a kind of gypsy severity have given her plainness close to beauty" (92-93). In a rather abrupt way, Beckoff sums up Janice's existence in the first novel: "The next phase in her predictable career is that of the bored, sloppy housewife, addicted to TV and Old Fashioneds, pregnant again, and waiting for life to give her the signal to live again" (119). That signal, Beckoff claims, sadly comes from the accidental death of her baby, the subsequent desertion by her husband, and finally through the interaction with Charlie in the second novel which proves to liberate her (119). "It is a rather maudlin version of Women's Lib" Beckoff states, "but it is consistent with the new times" (119). It seems Beckoff, writing in 1974, is ignorant of the Woman's

Liberation movement and what it stands for. Women's Liberation is gaining momentum during the time in which the novel is set, and characters including Mim and Jill are examples of women who are searching for their own meaning. Commenting as he did in 1974 would probably have disastrous consequences for Beckoff today. No less, women critics such as Mary Allen would certainly have a much different view of his misogynistic remarks—another reason why it is revealing and important to examine critics who were commenting just after these novels were published. Looking at their criticism provides another viewpoint through which readers and scholars in the present can examine the novel and the society that surrounded it.

A major part of said society was shaped by man's first trip to the moon. The moon metaphor continues in Part II of the novel and is introduced with another moon-related epigraph. In this one Neil Armstrong, after having stepped foot on the moon looks around and says, referring to the lunar landscape, "it's different but it's very pretty out here" (101). Likewise, Harry finds himself in an equally strange environment but one he also begins to see beauty in: his expanding universe now includes Jill and Skeeter. Seemingly alien characters from different cultures, the two outcasts quickly grow on Harry and he eventually takes them in to live with him and Nelson in their cookie-cutter home in the suburbs. With these "alien" creatures living with Harry a new rhetorical space emerges. But the location (a typical house in the suburbs) is not as important as what happens *inside* the space. Again, the way the novel treats contemporary culture and the socio-political climate of the 60s is more important to the

discussion than the geographic or physical places in the second novel, since many are the same and carry with them established meaning (but which is still vitally important). Inside these spaces, Updike's characters face, and in cases challenge this new culture head-on.

Once again, in *Rabbit Redux* Updike skillfully uses symbols, images, metaphors and motifs that enriched *Rabbit, Run*. However, in *Rabbit Redux* he employs a new rhetorical device which is so fitting with his contemporary culture: Updike now adds the wide range of tones and rhythms that are found in Black speech. Beckoff adds, "He has successfully captured the 'melody' of Black speech, perhaps no other contemporary white writer has. The added increment from this later skill is the remarkable believability of Buchanan, Babe, and Skeeter. They are 'visible' and Black" (70). Skeeter becomes the dominant figure in the novel from the African American population, and gives a voice to this otherwise under-represented group. Furthermore, it is Skeeter who has the biggest impact on Harry as he tries to overcome his staunch conservative, pro-war stance that has crippled Harry's relationships with many of those around him. Skeeter, the Vietnam Veteran and fugitive, delivers a message through his "seminars" which are much more powerful and certainly more current than those Eccles delivered to Rabbit ten years prior.

It is ironic that Harry, who shared such a violent distaste for blacks with his father and Nelson, provides black Vietnam veteran Skeeter with a refuge from the police. Even more interesting, Skeeter soon takes over the responsibility for

reeducating both Harry and Nelson by conducting several seminars on slavery, Vietnam, Black Revolution, and the New Gospel according to Skeeter. There is no doubt that Harry is permanently influenced by the "Blackwashing" of his brain; he helps Skeeter get away when the authorities come looking for him after jumping bail. Through Skeeter the reader is able to learn a great deal about the Black Revolution of the 60s, an integral part of *Rabbit Redux*. The presence of Skeeter is also an index of the extent to which Updike has tried to familiarize himself with one of the most important cultural phenomena to occur during the ten years between *Rabbit, Run* and *Rabbit Redux*. This element alone could serve to show how far Updike has traveled as a novelist in ten years (Beckoff 126). More importantly, it shows the author is culturally aware and is not afraid to tackle the more controversial affairs of the decade.

The seminars or lectures Skeeter holds in Part III of *Rabbit Redux* are significant for a number of reasons. First, they reflect the cultural awareness of the African American population. Secondly, they represent a new and ever growing social awareness of the author, an answer to those critics who have accused him of concentrating on the trivial. Thirdly, they change the whole tempo and tone of the novel; the action has been frozen as the novel becomes a tract for the times, rather than a story or a piece of fiction. Skeeter's first lecture is on the Civil War, the second is on slavery, and the third is on Vietnam and is more elaborately staged than the first two. Keeping with cinematic overtones that pepper all the novels, Skeeter even looks up at the ceiling as if it were a movie screen while speaking (Beckoff 66). Interestingly, the narrator and not Skeeter is

the one who narrates this lecture. Beckoff surmises that Updike can probably "preach" to the white population more easily than Skeeter can (66). This says quite a bit about Updike: he is trying to give the marginalized members of his society a voice but must do so through a surrogate because of incomplete acceptance of Skeeter and those like him.

But before Skeeter's arrival, Rabbit felt just like the majority of his community when it came to blacks. When Harry's father blamed the blacks for the many thefts in the area and elsewhere Harry did not argue. Nor did Harry reply when his father assured him that the black population is "the lowest of the low" (149). Harry has come a long way in the hundred pages since he complained that the bus "stinks of Negroes" (40). He is now harboring a black fugitive in his very own conservative home. He also knows about the Black Revolution that is taking place all around him; in fact, he has even become a part of it. He becomes Skeeter's receptive audience thus giving this marginalized member of society a voice. During the time Skeeter stays with Harry, the latter is aware of the black riots happening in York and elsewhere from newspaper and television reports. As Beckoff notes, "He would like to stay with the white backlash, which is more his cup of tea, but Skeeter (and Jill and Nelson) have been working on him, especially through those 'seminars' that Skeeter has been conducting . . . By his very presence, and more systematically, through the 'seminars,' Skeeter proceeds to introduce Harry to the Black cultural dowry" (78). Part of this cultural dowry includes references to texts that must be all but foreign to Harry. Since literary criticism is also grounded in contemporary culture, Beckoff's comments on

Rabbit Redux indicate changing times as well. He claims that the texts that Skeeter uses to try and convert Harry to a "White Negro" are interesting in that they can be found in the bibliography for any Black Studies course in the country. That was in 1969; titles that include *The Selected Writings of W. E. B. DuBois* and *The Life and Times of Frederick Douglass* are no longer relegated to so-called Black Studies courses but instead are now (2012) commonplace in many survey courses in American Literature. Even so, all this intensive teaching by Skeeter has an unmistakable effect on Harry and also reveals that Skeeter is far from a Black Power advocate (Beckoff 79). In other words, Skeeter may actually be part of that appealing "middle" Updike alluded to earlier. Skeeter, though not assimilated into Harry's concept of Middle America, is closer to it than either character thinks. Updike is thereby including a segment of society into this middle that is traditionally overlooked and often viewed as subordinate to white America.

Skeeter's concept of black-white equality is Vietnam, "the only place in Uncle Sam's world where black-white doesn't matter" (228). According to Skeeter, white boys in Vietnam were willing to die for him and the Army treated blacks as well as whites because a "black body can stop a bullet as well as any other, they put us right up there, and don't think we're not grateful, we are indeed, we hustle to stop those bullets, we're so happy to die alongside Whitey" (228-9). By including a provocative, contemporary cultural event as a platform for Skeeter to discuss further supports Updike's effort to extend a voice to underrepresented strata of the population. The Vietnam War is a place with rhetorical and cultural significance for this reason; as Skeeter decries, it is the only place where black

and white do not matter. By Skeeter doing so, he also lives up to his "Black Messiah" claim. But interestingly, this notion of a Black messiah extends beyond the pages and into the psycho-social realm of the reader. In the late 60s there are few Black voices heard with respect to the war, yet Skeeter's is loud and clear. What he is saying about the war, or any other subject, is not as important as the fact that he is speaking with such authority, even if what he is saying is relayed through a narrator. Skeeter's influence is unmistakable, yet very intentional as Updike purposefully used this character to reach across traditional racial and socio-economic lines.

Black speech may be a new rhetorical device for the second novel, but an old motif that continues in *Rabbit Redux* is that of basketball. Though it has been twenty years since Rabbit's glory days on the high school basketball team, the influence of the sport persists and will continue to do so even in the next novel, *Rabbit is Rich*, where Harry is middle aged and overweight—the antithesis of what he was back in high school. In keeping with basketball's influence throughout the novels, Harry explains the American policy in Vietnam to Skeeter in basketball terms, the one language in which he considers himself to be a complete master. Beckoff adds, "But in the end, the ultimate irony is that running in life, like 'travelling' in basketball, became an offense in the game of life, as well as in the game he had excelled in" (77-78). But Rabbit is not running anymore, in fact it can be argued that he is finally beginning to face his culture head on and is intentionally gaining awareness of the tumultuous society he is experiencing. However for Harry, explaining things in basketball terms is the best

way for him to convey his meaning, especially when dealing with his contemporary culture; after all he still lacks sufficient social skills.

This new cultural shift in the waning years of the 1960s brings with it a new dichotomy. In *Rabbit, Run*, the dichotomy between the city and the country was pronounced and rhetorically significant. This remains true in *Rabbit Redux,* but a new dichotomy is created between two other subjects. In his criticism Beckoff discusses the religious influences found in the novel right alongside the sexuality of the novel, and when considering this suggests that it may seem irrelevant to consider sexuality in such close proximity with the religious and the spiritual, "but it is that very dualism that is at the heart of this book" (81). Beckoff relays Updike's comments from an interview with the *Paris Review*: "In the microcosm of the individual consciousness . . . sexual events are huge but not all-eclipsing; let's try to give them their size" (81). Beckoff goes on to point out what is now obvious: since 1959 language has been liberated, especially in relation to the body parts, body functions, and sex. Harry even crosses the black/white line that has existed so long when he has libidinous thoughts about a black bride and muses on black sexuality in very explicit terms. Even Janice has changed with the times and is not afraid to use the more lurid four-letter words without self-conscious feelings. Nor does she think language should be inhibited in front of Nelson. Beckoff even claims that Updike puts some of the choicest phrases of what used to be called (and what is now common place) "gutter language" or "locker-room language" into Skeeter's description of God and Jesus Christ (81). With this new "liberated" language Updike is staying consistent with the times

and certainly appealing to the middles of society. With the inclusion of characters like Skeeter who speak in this way Updike is also appealing to the middles, especially those who are traditionally underrepresented in literature. In keeping with this trend Updike also introduces a female character who breaks away from a male-dominated relationship and society to find her own way, only to ultimately fall under the destructive influence of Skeeter.

Jill Pendelton is an upper middle class hippie who has run away from home after the death of her father, taken up with a group of adventurous blacks after an unfortunate relationship with her boyfriend Freddie, a seeker of God and ecstasy through drugs, and is now serving as both lover and daughter to Harry (Beckoff 120). Jill's influence on Harry is a major catalyst in the novel and in Rabbit's life. She reintroduces him to sex after his long hiatus. She also introduces him to exotic foods, new literature, new ideas, and the new politics. In her presence he finds it much easier to use so-called off-color language, and this language becomes in turn a major characteristic of the newer Updike. Whereas in the past Harry's use of four-letter words was an indication of the paucity of his vocabulary, now he can throw them around with complete abandon, even in the presence of Janice and Nelson (Beckoff 123). Again, the shift in language use is important but the inclusion of Jill as a major influence on Harry is more so. Jill is flawed, but still a member of a societal class that is beginning to assert itself and ready to shrug off the male dominated society that characterized the 50s. Jill serves as lover and daughter to Harry, but more importantly helps to reeducate Harry and move him from his staunch, single-mindedness that has crippled him

for so long. Jill is an example of many such women during this period who have shirked the clutches of male domination and struck out on their own to find meaning.

Mim, Harry's sister, is another example of Updike inclusion of female voices in a period where they have begun to assert themselves. In *Rabbit Redux* Mim is only briefly included but she is a strong figure; much stronger than Harry. She has gone West to find her own destiny, has taken control of her life and seems to be happy, and it is obvious that Harry envies her. Updike's inclusion of Mim and Jill and the way they are portrayed suggest that he is aware of the cultural changes going on around him with relation to the role of women and is continuing to experiment with adding their perspectives to his novels. The same is true of Janice who plays a much greater and more independent role in the sequel. While neither Jill nor Janice can escape the grasps of controlling men, women are portrayed much differently in the sequel though Updike's cultural consciousness of their plight may seem subtle to many readers.

Beckoff, writing in 1974, touches on some of the other differences between the two novels:

> *Rabbit Redux*, like so many other sequels, suffers from a split identity. It is, first of all (or should be) a novel independent of any other novel, and should be evaluated on its own merits. On the other hand, it cannot reject its "blood ties" to the earlier novel to which it presumably owes its existence. In that respect, it must be judged as to how faithful it has been

> to its antecedent, and how well it has brought the reader to an understanding and appreciation of the interconnection of the two; the "parent novel" and the "scion novel." (109)

Beckoff relays Updike's comment that the author wrote the second novel after rereading the first. But the decade since the writing of the first novel has brought about numerous and far reaching changes in Rabbit's society (and also Updike's). How the author injects his own perception of these decades is evident throughout the page of both novels; through character's interior monologue, an omniscient narrator, and in less obvious ways by incorporating complex but powerful scenic structures that frame the novel. Updike comments: "A reader picking up the second, having read the first years ago was to be amused and surprised that Harry, last seen running, had just circled the block and become the most sedentary of citizens" (Beckoff 109). Rabbit ran, but he did not get far. He has become the typical middle class, Middle American worker stuck in a comfortable suburban home who enjoys the same routine day in and day out. Rabbit does not do the running in *Rabbit Redux*, in the sequel it's Janice's turn.

Beckoff relays Weber's sentiment that Harry is effectively the weakest link in the second novel. Weber explains that Updike "has done a remarkable job of reconstructing the many revolutionary (and evolutionary) events that served to transform a quiescent, moribund America of the Fifties to the turbulent, fermenting, questioning America of the Sixties" (110). Throughout these important years Rabbit has slept and in *Rabbit Redux* he is hardly awake. It takes

the changing times and the meeting of Jill and Skeeter to rouse him from his decade long slumber. However Weber misses the giant steps forward Harry has taken. He has accepted two "alien" people into his home and has opened his mind to what both had to say and ultimately taught him. Rabbit has evolved into a much more socially aware person who in many ways actually fits into his contemporary society.

So why did Updike make the moral quantum leap in *Rabbit Redux*? One possible explanation may be found in the changes in the moral climate brought about by the termination of Eisenhower's presidency, and Kennedy's three years, along with the other changes that influenced culture in the decade. Then there was also the Vietnam War, America's "descent into Hell," still going on within the time frame of *Rabbit Redux*, and only recently terminated. Add to this the effects or symptoms the civil rights movement, the peace demonstrations on and off college campuses, the Black Revolution and the burning of cities, the Women's Liberation campaign, the liberation of language through the Free Speech Movement in Berkeley, more widespread sexuality, the drug culture, and general alienation. Updike chose to include many of these items to update the sequel (Beckoff 121).

Richard Locke's criticism of *Rabbit Redux* speaks to this as well:

> To be sure, the author of *Rabbit Redux* does finally come face to face in his career with larger, more public themes: the Black Revolution, Vietnam, drug addiction, the dropout generation, violence, middle-

> American morality as a façade for the self-serving and self-righteous endorsement of corruption in domestic affairs and subversion of liberal movements abroad-the whole pre-Watergate syndrome-and space exploration. Writing in 1971 Locke adds, "He has integrated these volatile elements within a realistic novel of suburban life in 1969." (Beckoff 111)

In *Rabbit, Run*, the hero confronted an essentially static social situation and dove into his inner spaces to avoid it when running away did not work. In *Rabbit Redux* he confronts an unnervingly dynamic social situation that plunges him into outer space—beyond his family, his class, his race and his normal earthbound feelings and behavior. The inclusion of the movie *2001* adds unmistakable emphasis. Locke asserts, "*Rabbit, Run* was a major book about the fifties; *Rabbit Redux* is a major book about the sixties—the period when the struggles of the private self became political events and political events broke in on private lives" (Locke 78). Together these novels offer an intimate glimpse into these two decades and how the culture of the times affected characters from Middle-America—a notion that appealed to many readers and helped raise awareness for Updike's work. This is owed, in larger part, to Updike's awareness of his contemporary culture and his literary efforts to include it in his novels. Updike was not afraid to veer away from safe subjects or look at these same quotidian subjects in a new, culturally-connected light. By including members from the fringes of society he succeeded in growing the "middle" from its traditionally white male orientation to include women and African Americans. Part of Updike's success in doing so rests on his use of powerful rhetorical scenic

structures which permeate the novels, and persist through them even as the decades passed and society changed.

Conclusion

John Updike's *Rabbit Run* saga provides an intimate cultural experience spanning several decades. Through the eyes of an "ordinary" character, contemporary material culture manifests in the most ordinary ways: through people, places, and objects. Both geographic and physical places proved to be rhetorically important, as well as elements from contemporary culture such as Hollywood movies and television shows. As this culture is experienced it is also created; portions of this inventive process are revealed through the actions of Harry Angstrom and the people and places that surround him. Spanning twenty years in the life of a middle-class white man in Middle America, the *Rabbit* series offers a unique perspective on popular culture and those places where culture is experienced. Furthermore, the novels span highly politicized and influential decades of the twentieth century: the 50s and 60s. To encounter a variety of cultural artifacts and experience contemporary values and norms through the life of Harry Angstrom sheds light on how culture is created, transformed, and interacted with, and provides an intimate look at the places where these occur and the rhetorical significance of those places. Additionally and more importantly, this analysis proved that Updike was keenly aware of his contemporary culture and used literary means to explore it and comment on it. The society that surrounded both he and his characters comes alive in the Rabbit novels. The Rabbit saga is as much cultural commentary as it is literary fiction; the scenic structures Updike creates and cultural artifacts he includes shed light on these fascinating decades of the twentieth century.

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