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A Torn Man in a Torn Society: John Updike's Rabbit

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ABSTRACT

A Torn Man in a Torn Society:
John Updike's Rabbit

Che Xiangqian

This thesis traces a close connection between John Updike's Rabbit series (Rabbit, Run, Rabbit Redux, and Rabbit Is Rich) and American history from the 1950s to the 1970s. The trilogy of novels reveals American modern society as a problematic one in which people live with annoyance, perplexity and even despair. The evidence shows that Updike's attitude toward American reality is critical; he does not hesitate to oppose social conventions that result in meaningless and secular lives. He is an American patriot, yet an iconoclast. The thesis concludes that the Rabbit novels firmly establish Updike as a social historian. Even while his fiction testifies to a love of country, his vision of modern American society is profoundly unsettling.

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(I) INTRODUCTION

After the Second World War, as America entered a new era, its literature acted as a mirror reflecting all aspects of the changed society. It developed into a new shape, using "modernist or standard literary devices to conduct its own experiments with human subjects"(Josephine Hendin, "Experimental Fiction," Harvard Guide to Contemporary American Writing, 241).

It is in such concrete historic circumstances that John Updike stands as a prominent writer and creates his works, trying to "sound some major themes--love, death, freedom, the burden of redemption in the contemporary world"(Hassan 1973, 60). Obviously, his writing is closely related to the soil in which it has been cultivated. The purpose of this thesis is to trace the interaction between Updike's works and American reality. Particular emphasis is placed on the "Rabbit" trilogy of novels.

At the end of the war and in the 50s, America began to enjoy the dividends of victory, emerging as the strongest power in the world and leader of the western countries. At the same time, however, it had to deal with a number of problems. Internationally, the anti-communist ideology of the U.S.A. dragged it into a complete confrontation with Russia. For the same reason, America missed a chance to reconcile with Red China, and entered into direct rivalry with it during the Chinese Civil War

and the Korean War:

Domestically, McCarthyism produced a tyrannical political atmosphere. Intolerance and anti-communist hysteria came into fashion. Political dissent was regarded as irresponsible and ignorant. The fear of communism and the belief that American society could solve its problems without major conflict were accepted as ideological truisms by most politicians and the social elite. But this unanimity produced something quite contrary to what was expected. The consensus of public opinion was only apparent; on deeper levels a new radicalism was brewing, which would be disruptive to American politics later in the 60s and 70s.

Although American capitalism developed with a promise that poverty might soon be found only as a word in the dictionary, the flow of urban immigration was reducing that hope. Millions of Americans immigrated to the city where they encountered new problems. They lost their status; they had to do tedious work; they lived in the poor house. To make matters worse, they were also insulted because they were immigrants. They had to deal with city officials, employers, labour unions and alien neighbours in a new orientation without any help. While they expected economic progress, they experienced instead a sense of loss and a threat to their identities. Their society seemed to value goods and material wealth over the health and welfare of human beings.

America was turning into a mass society with its mass production system. The production system manifested itself "in

the form of exploitation, in the form of authority, in the role of possessiveness"(Fromm 103). People produced goods, sold goods and enjoyed goods. All their actions served the processes of material production and consumption. It seemed that people lived for nothing else but to produce and consume goods. As a result, people were divided into different groups and ranks according to their possession of wealth. In the society, possessiveness became a priority.

In the 60s, America faced more challenges. The Cuban missile crisis, the Vietnam War and black unrest proved that America had not solved either its international or domestic conflicts. To some extent, it had actually exacerbated them. It was denounced as imperialist abroad and racist at home. The assassinations of President John F. Kennedy and the black leader Martin Luther King heightened the evidence of sickness in American political life. Nuclear power, computers, moon landings and scientific development changed people's views of the world further. People sensed American power as well as its social cancers. In the 1960s, Americans, unlike those of the 50s who generally kept quiet, erupted in many civil rights movements. The Berkeley Free Speech Movement, SDS (Student for a Democratic Society), the Weathermen, SNCC (Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee), CORE (the Congress Of Racial Equality), the Black Panthers, Women's Lib, the Gay Liberation Front, Chicano and Red Power, and others all emerged as parts of the younger generation's rebellion. The new

feminism struggled for equality in jobs, education and other social institutions and even challenged traditional language usage (successfully converting "chairman," for example, into "chairperson"). Feminists regarded society as masculine-dominated and oppressive to women. The feminist perception accelerated changes in people's view of the world and of human relationships.

At the same time, blacks were pursuing a revolutionary nationalism to maintain self-determination and to struggle for social and academic recognition.

A profound cultural transformation was taking place. People changed their code of dress as well as their manner of speech. For whole segments of the population, jeans became de rigueur, and new forms of vocabulary entered the language. Music, as a symbol of the spirit of the time, was close to the people's feelings. Enlarging the heritage of rock'n roll, the Beatles and the Rolling Stones expressed the exhilaration, fear and boredom of life. Social protests appeared everywhere. The counterculture of the Hippies, Yippies, Freaks, and Crazies boomed. The young generation adopted different ways to wage battle against society. The interest in psychedelics and the occult expanded, and the ecological movement spread. The interest of the ecologists was to struggle against nuclear weapons and pollution, and to guard the integrity of the world's physical environment.

During the sixties, America experienced one of the most

active and chaotic decades in its history. Some social movements declared total opposition to the established society. Indignation and resistance became widespread. The "Great Society" promised by Lyndon Johnson actually turned into a society of strife and conflict.

In the 70s, America not only encountered social and political challenges, but also economic challenges. America's political power had been damaged by its failure in the Vietnam War. In order to avoid further decline, Nixon's Administration pursued a skillful policy of detente with the Soviet Union and the east European bloc. To balance international antagonisms, Nixon also offered friendship to Mao and Chou En-lai, and their hand-shakings established a new relationship between America and China. However, Nixon was not so skillful in handling the complex questions of the economy. The Middle East War of 1973 resulted in an oil embargo, and the energy shortage caused serious economic problems in America. The very foundation of the American economy was shaken.

As for world trade; in 1971, for the first time since 1893, America experienced a deficit(Carroll 127). Furthermore, the persistence of inflation deeply troubled the country. In 1973, food costs began to climb quickly, and the price of meat skyrocketed beyond the means of many. Since the energy shortage eliminated jobs, the unemployment rate rose. Taken together, the oil crisis, inflation and increasing unemployment shocked the

nation. And the economic crisis inevitably aggravated the spiritual crisis. With the economy stumbling, pessimism and disillusionment developed. Americans could not stop worrying about how they could preserve their status and economic pre-eminence, for it seemed the glory of their country was steadily diminishing.

Thus, the mood of America as a whole shifted rapidly from confidence to uncertainty, then to anxiety, and at last to despair. The spiritual decline manifested itself in extraordinary ways, as Peter N. Carroll illustrates:

> The undying belief that Americans could exercise hegemony over nature reached its ultimate absurdity in a popular fad of the era —the gift of a "pet rock" —an object so tangible yet so puny as to provide ironic proof of the impotence of human possessivness. (Carroll 135)

And as Edwin Scott Gaustad points out:

> 1.Artisanship gave way to mass bargaining, entrepreneurship to cartel and conglomerate, social service to the bureaucratic buck-pass, creativity to joyless technology, personal identity to Orwellian data banks.
>
> 2. "Sex" and "soul" no longer suggested unification and commonality, but barrier and exploitation, separation and misunderstanding. The human race

was falling apart, its dissolution being scandalously palpable in pluralistic America.

3. People feared to follow, to believe, to be vulnerable once more.

4. "Law and order" was a slogan turned into travesty, enticing a nation to lose its soul while trying so desperately to save it.

5. With the unhealty state of the nation so starkly revealed, people all inquire into the condition of society: its institutions, its aims, its resources, its chances for recovery. ("Religious dimensions in American Life", Qualities of Life, 86-87)

In short, Americans were facing new problems and were being forced to explore new perspectives and options. Historically, they had embraced a spirit of frontier exploration; during the decades after the Second World War, they did the same. They were eager to explore human nature and life. American intellectuals, in particular, dissatisfied with the political life of the country, assumed "a political cast, and often a radical rhetoric," they tended "to think of literature and the arts in political terms" (Dickstein 57). A new political consciousness thus entered American letters. In content and form American writing underwent a change. In the domain of the novel, inquiry into the nature and value of human existence became the chief concern. The literary works placed greater emphasis on man's inner world and his unhappy

environment rather than on general frontier explorations, mysterious regional legends or independent family sagas, let alone the optimistic melody of individuality as the transcendental writer had done.

Since the end of World War II, the American novel has developed into a strong philosophical expression of conflicts omnipresent in reality. As Ihab Hassan comments:

> Moving in time, the postwar novel also recognizes the enormous diversity of American culture viewed at any given moment as a spatial artifact. Between the appearances of that culture— cliches of mass media or technocratic bureaucracy— and its inner motives, between the normative images of the first and the opposing images of the last, a huge discrepancy obtains. The opposing Self pursues beyond disaffiliation a new concept of love or of freedom. The pursuit of love brings men to the threshold of mystical experience and the search for freedom brings them to the frontiers of nihilism, thus, saintliness and crime violently merge in quest of a new consciousness. (1973, 24-25)

Issues new to the American consciousness began to dominate the works of Saul Bellow, Norman Mailer, Ralph Ellison, James Baldwin, Bernard Malamud, John Updike and other writers. Marcus Klein identifies these issues as:

> the new nihilism, poetic naturalism, radical innocence, a new concern for final matters, the rule of personality, the disappearence of manners, the death of dissidence.... (14)

The key aspect in the work of these writers is their exploration of man in a conflicting environment, with a recoiling "from the Promethean extremes of modernism and naturalism to take refuge in craft, psychology, and moral allegory"(Dickstein 37). While expressing dissatisfaction and disappointment at reality, these works show alienation caused by the conflicts between man and society, man and nature, man and his peers, and man and himself..

Economic development and high industrialization have substantially influenced postwar American literature. With society making more and more demands upon individual talent to produce profit, competition among Americans inevitably increased. Since better social position and better life were typical American's major goals, the depression caused by failure gave birth to social problems. These problems found expression in literature.

Social injustice, political suppression and economic decline impacted upon a large portion of the American people. The existence of nuclear power, unemployment, inflation and the diminution of human value in the materialized society made people sense daily threats. The consciousness of actual danger generated

a psyche of uncertainness, fear and confusion. Many writers accordingly raised questions about the ultimate meaning of human life. In their writings, the human self became the frontier.

Postwar American literature presents man as a victim tortured by his own perplexty as well as by his environment. Human fragility becomes more and more visible. With these new characteristics, the novel often presents a labyrinth-like world, where the protagonist, immersed in a mood of crisis and living a life like a riddle, sees no way out, and senses that his existence is taking place in a "jagged, roguish, or grotesque" reality. (Hassan 20). Fiedler describes this sensation with a powerful metaphor:

> Our literature as a whole at times seems a chamber of horrors disguised as an amusement park "fun house", where we pay to play at terror and are confronted in the innermost chamber with a series of inter-reflecting mirrors which present us with a thousand versions of our own face. (Fiedler 27)

Literature has its roots in life. New social conditions continuously forge innovations in literature. The form of the novel in particular undergoes transformations. Its structure becomes complicated. Devices such as monologue and stream-of-consciousness become more important than the plot itself. The sentences in the story stand as suggestive rather than expressive. In most cases, the protagonist seems obscured

and the mood of the story is downbeat. Irony is a reinforcement for the expression of the author's intention.

The new social situation not only urges writers to explore its essence but also supplies them with possibilities of new ways to do so. The development of science impels people to see the world from new vantages. Because psychoanalysis contains elements of a philosophy of art and of existence, it has been used as a powerful tool to analyze human nature in literary writing. As a result, modern American writers adopt psychological presentations to build up their protagonists. In this respect, Freudianism plays a great role. As Frederick J. Hoffman points out, psychoanalysis suggests a weapon for fighting the sources of repression(Hoffman 241). The characters that modern American writers create are often to be understood in Freudian terms: unconsciousness, repression, and libido. Trilling observes that Freud's polar extremes of practical reality and neurotic illusion find wide adoption in American literature(Trilling 42). Besides, in the form of alienation, with "a kind of hell within him from which rise everlastingly the impulses which threaten his civilization"(Trilling 54), the individual is depicted as an isolated and paradoxical entity. Social Darwinism and Lester Frank Ward's theory, which delineate the relationship between emotion and action, and make the clear definition of emotion as "wants, desires, anger, hate, jealousy, love and somewhat inconsistenly, lofty and refined sentiments"(Curit 249), expand

the range which writers can explore. These psychoanalytical ideas of human essence undoubtedly become the important threads with which writers weave the fabric of their characters.

Reality supplies writers with concrete models. Though in literary history the social novel has for a long time focused on ordinary people, not kings or knights, as the backbone of human community, the central concern of the recent novel has changed. American realistic writing in the 19th century, as C. Hugh Holman observes, stresses:

> the Puritan passion for righteousness; a pragmatic view of value; an egalitarian democratic sociopolitical ideal; a distrust of tradition, ritual, and ceremony; and a desire to achieve objectivity and to act with disinterest. (Holman 7)

On the other hand, postwar literature stresses individual misfortune and a vicious environment. Hassan wrote:

> the contemporary world presents a continued affront to man, and that his response must therefore be the response of the rebel or victim, living under the shadow of death. (Hassan 1961, 5)

Thus, he pointed out: "The contemporary American novel does not only aver our presence: it explores and enlarges the modalities of our <u>being</u>"(1961, 3). In other words, "being" is actually an accommodation between victimization and rebellion. For that reason, as Susan Sontag says: "modern literature is the history of

alienated writing or personal utterance"(introduction, Writing Degree Zero by Roland Barthes). In this way, reader and protagonist could be greatly identified with each other. For readers, to read is to see what they are really like themselves. It is not a temporal entertainment but a highly psychological desire.

Postwar American literature develops in a fashion parallel to other cultural forms, such as plays and movies. Because new technological methods have been widely adopted in the theatre and cinema, and because different cultural forms have inevitably influenced each other, the novel begins to share some aspects of play and film.

The novel is no longer written in a linear development acccording to the plot but appears as a simultaneous presentation of multiple perspectives, which consist of different aspects of the author's concerns. The common case is that montage is adopted in novel writing so that time and space move back and forth flexibly. What the reader experiences when he is reading is a complex combination of the past and present, and the inner and outer worlds of the character, who is "personified by the converging figures of the initiate and the victim"(Hassan 1961, 33).

Generally speaking, the novel becomes suggestive rather than didactic and it gives the reader more controversy than assertion. The author's intention sometimes seems allusive and even

deceptive, that is, it is presented ironically. In the form of paradox, what is revealed in the novel is the truth that humans live in a state of suffering, though they continuously struggle for improvement, happiness and even perfection. Because of this, modern literary works need our scrutiny.

With these factors mentioned above, American literature since the mid-century is distinguished by its obvious emphasis on criticism of reality. The American writer "has his hands full in trying to understand, and then describe, and then make credible much of the American reality"[Philip Roth, "Writing American Fiction," (1961)]. Writing has become a mirror to reflect the nakedness of the human essence, in all its misery.

Among the noteworthy modern writers who share the characteristics mentioned above, John Updike holds a distingushed position. As Hassan argues in Contemporary American Literature 1945-1972, Updike "shares the ironic temper, the lexical agility, of both Barth and Nabokov," and he writes "in a crisp, probing idiom, precise yet astonishing in imagery, sterile in an oddly poetic way"(60); Updike's themes are about "subtle middleclass characters who seldom suffer the extreme passions of their day," and about "love, death, freedom, the burden of redemption in the contemporary world-- in the forms of some mythic resonance"(60). The important thing in Updike's works, Hassan thinks, is "a fear of chaos and waste, a sense of the self's own emptiness"(60). In her article commenting on postwar experimental

fiction as "a search for ways to deal with the violence, brevity and rigidity of life"(Daniel Hoffman ed., Harvard Guide to Contemporary American Writing, 240). Josephine Hendin ranks Updike with writers such as Thomas Pynchon, John Barth and Flannery O'Connor, by asserting that his "spectrum of talents and abilities is full"(244). John Updike is one of those writers who devote their works to probing American culture.

Updike was born in a small town called Shillington, Pennsylvania, in 1932. He graduated summa cum laude from Harvard in 1954, and won a fellowship to spend one year in Oxford. In his twenties, he launched his literary career with the publication of a short story in New Yorker.

He is a prolific writer. Up to now, he has published more than ten novels and hundreds of short stories, poems and critical essays. His novels have raised fervent debate among both critics and ordinary readers, because of the nature of the characters he creates and the themes he presents. His first novel was The Poorhouse Fair (1959). That book and the its immediate successor, Rabbit, Run (1960), created a breakthrough in his literary career. Subsequently, his third novel The Centaur (1962) won the National Book Award for fiction in 1964. Up to then, critics had devoted their reviews mostly to praising the young and powerful writer for his vision of the world, pleased by his ability to discern significance in the lives of ordinary people.

The period from the middle 1960s to the middle 1970s was

notable for Updike's output of remarkable novels such as Of the Farm (1965), Couples (1968), Bech: A Book (1970), Rabbit Redux (1971), A Month of Sundays (1975) and Marry Me: A Romance (1976). During this period, his work attracted considerable critical attention. The first scholarly books and essays on Updike were published. Among them: the Hamiltons' The Elements of John Updike which analyses Updike's works in terms of their Christian quasi-allegorist theory; Robert Detweiler's John Updike, which is about Updike's canon; Edward Vargo's Rainstorms and Fire, which is also based on Christianity; and Joyce Markle's Fighters and Lovers, the most intelligent analysis of Updike's early works. As for the many other essays on Updike, a number of critics took different approaches via Christianity, psychology and technique in terms of parable, symbol, theme, structure and so on.

Since the middle 70s, while Updike has continued to display his literary skill and creative versatility with his production of more than 10 volumes of novels, poetry, short stories and prose, including The Coup (1978) and Rabbit Is Rich (1981), critics have deepened their exploration. They discuss the religious implications, ethical questions and sexual relationships in his works. As before, there is controversy about him in the field of literary criticism. The noteworthy scholarly books of this period are William R. Macnaughton's Critical Essays on John Updike (1982), and David Thorburn and Howard Eiland's John Updike:

A Collection of Critical Essays (1979). The collections contain essays by representative critics on Updike such as Alice and Kenneth Hamilton, Robert Detweiler, Suzanne Henning Uphaus, George W. Hunt and George Steiner. It is also worth pointing out that more and more academic dissertations have been devoted to Updike's works since the middle 70s.

Among the abundant criticism, the Hamiltons' view of Updike's work is an important one. Emphasizing their Christian quasi-allegorist theory, they believe that Updike's major intention is to allude to the human choice between a desolating idolatry on the one hand, and on the other, faith in the true God who brings the gift of peace. They assert that "John Updike is one of the most elegant and most serious authors of our age"(7), because he views the world "in the perspective of Christian faith"(22). They make great efforts to trace Updike's craft in presenting "a progressive delineation of how death triumphs over life wherever earth is not understood in the light of heaven"(244) and they believe that Updike has given an unambiguous answer to the riddle of life in Christian terms. However, the Hamiltons admit that Updike is not a priest or a moralist; they do think that Updike consistently writes Biblical parables to ask people to view themselves as children of God. This later assertion is debatable. In my opinion, Updike straightforwardly provides a description of the human place in reality, he is not urging people to submit to God's guidance. The world in his writing is a world

that has been deserted by God, leaving no hope for redemption.

Robert Detweiler's John Updike (1972) sets off in another direction. Detweiler calls Updike's fiction a "secular baroque," which means an "elaborate, texture-conscious, structurally balanced, highly controlled, mythically resonant ficton"(preface). He explains that Updike "has impressed his readers with the intensity and complexity of modern individual and collective neuroses through the brilliance and rightness of his narrative art"(167). Detweiler is so impressed by Updike's artistry, that he goes on to say:

> the texture of [Updike's] fiction— of the individual image and phrase —is spectacular; and his shaping of structure is so smooth and unobtrusive that his mastery often goes unperceived. He is an expert in assigning and developing narrative point of view, in fashioning dialogue with a minium of stage direction, and in utilizing stream-of-consciousness passages to convey the temper of crucial times and places. He has been successful in discovering effective substitutes for traditional formular fiction. As a stylist, then, he is anything but out of date. Indeed, he pushes constantly beyond the old techniques he has mastered in order to mold new experience with new methods. (167-68)

However, Detweiler stops at his assertion that "above all, Updike

manipulates myths toward self-destruction to make the reader realize that the old institutions they reflect are disintegrating"(168).

Joyce Markle in her Fighters and Lovers takes up the task of scrutinizing Updike's major thematic lines:

> the flight from death; the need for what I called "Lovers" (characters who can give a feeling of stature and specialness to others); evidence, such as handicraft, of man's impact on his world; the sources of man's sense of importance; man's abilities and responsibilities in relating to the members of his society; and so forth.(2)

Markle does not include much discussion about specific historic institutions, which are important because literature can only be a historic literature. As Trilling points out:

> the literary work is ineluctably an historical fact, and, what is more important, that its historicity is a fact in our aesthetic experience. Literature, we may say, must in some sense always be an historical study, for literature is an historical art. (175)

Clearly, without interaction between the historic background and an author's sensibility, there could not be any theme, nor thematic lines. The theme of a work is an artistic incarnation of an author's intention and it can only be derived from the author's

experience in an actual environment. To some extent, the author's theme is a product of his experience, an experience inseparable from a specific historic background. In other words, the analysis of a literary work's thematic lines requires an analysis of related history, because "we read any work within a kaleidoscope of historical elements"(Trilling 175) and because "we are creatures of time, we are creatures of the historical sense"(Trilling 176). The "we" mentioned here by Trilling includes both the author and reader. A writer writes his work under a historic influence and we read the work under it too.

As for the latest criticism on John Updike, Donald J. Greiner's books The Other John Updike (1981) and John Updike's Novels (1984) must be mentioned. Greiner seeks to construct a global comment on Updike's works, reviewing Updike's poems, short stories, proses and plays in the first book and the novels in the second one. In the second book, the critic claims that what he wants to do "is not to wage a thesis on the canon but to offer an informed and careful reading of the novels in order to isolate and discuss the qualities that make Updike a great writer"(ix). The qualities that Greiner stresses are "the theology of Karl Barth and the nation of belief versus busyness" and the "relationships between adultery and fiction, transgression and art"(xiv). Though, Greiner claims that his primary concern is "what [Updike] does"(xv), he limits himself to an examination of Updike's philosophy of art.

Obviously, Greiner does not go far enough. An author can have various qualities. However, the most important one is a quality of intention, an intention based on the author's approach to his environment. Using an illuminating metaphor, Trilling says: "He [poet/author] may be used as the barometer, but let us not forget that he is also part of the weather"(Trilling 181). In this sense, when he writes, Updike not only refers his art as disclosure but also theoretical formation. His theoretical idea must spring from the social soil of his time.

Articles on Updike abound in magazines and journals of literary criticism, and most praise his talent as an artist. They generally relate Updike's work to human existence without reference to any specific historic background. And as for American reality, some say that Updike is obsessed with a "surface he is unable to penetrate." Among negative comments, John W. Aldridge's words are pungent. In his essay "The Private Vice of John Updike," Aldridge includes this indictment:

> 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. He does not confront the reader with dramatic situations that bear the mark of an original or unique manner of seeing and responding to

> experience. He does not challenge the imagination or stimulate, shock, or educate it. In fact, one of the problems he 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. (1966, 164-65)

Aldridge inevitably concludes that "Mr. John Updike has nothing to say"(170). His iconoclastic assertions naturally caused a heated argument, and most readers and critics took exception to his position. The controversy, however, raises an interesting point. Few critics have explored Updike's work from a sociological perspective: few critics care to confess the unpleasant truth drawn by Updike about current American life, a life which is becoming more and more secular.

Updike is an author who resides within modern American society, and who inevitably accepts information from the outer world. Roland Barthes has said:

> Writing, free in its beginning, is finally the bond which links the writer to a History which is itself in chains: society stamps upon him the unmistakable signs of art so as to draw him along the more inescapably in its own process of alienation. (Barthes 40)

Updike sees writing as a way to impress his views on the outer world. His works undoubtedly have a strong relation to history and society. Further, since writers always "owe their

existence to one identical process, namely the writer's consideration of the social use which he has chosen for his form, and his commitment to this choice"(Barthes 15), and since "writing is essentially the morality of form and the choice of that social area within which the writer elects to situate the Nature of his language"(Barthes 15), Updike's works require an interpretation which can comprehend the allegory he intends. Placing his protagonist in a specific social environment, John Updike greatly reflects American reality of the modern epoch. His best accomplishment, according to Hassan, is that "he sees more than the pretension of society; he sees its spiritual vacuity"(Hassan 63).

His first novel The Poorhouse Fair not only presents literal meaning, but also an illuminating connotation: people come to the poorhouse because they have lost their most valuable possession—their belief. They live as "the people continued to live as cells of a body do in the coffin, for the conception 'America', had died in their skulls"(159). The image of "America" fades and recedes and increasingly disappoints in Updike's novels.

In The Centaur, Updike elegantly uses the reference from ancient Greek mythology to portray a modern man and expose a modern life. The present is compared with the past, and fatal aspects of modern life such as fear, longing and death are explored.

Couples, far from being a falsification of American life, or

a piece of junk full of cheap pornography (as some people say), actually reflects an American aspect of banality. With the game of sex as his topic, Updike digs into the hearts of people who are trapped in unhappiness. In an ironic presentation of sexual failure, he reveals the truth that modern man needs transcendental love; otherwise, the fate of modern man is to live with sadness and hopelessness.

In Updike's writing, the issue of death assumes central importance. As A. Charles Reich says: "America is dealing death, not only to people in other lands, but to its own people" (Reich 3). In The Centaur, Caldwell fears death from cancer; in Of the Farm, Joey's mother dies from angina and emphysema; in Couples, dead souls haunt many people; in Rabbit, Run, Harry's daughter is drowned, and Janice is threatened by death as she gives birth; in Rabbit Redux, Jill is burned to death; in Rabbit Is Rich, news arrives of the death of Skeeter.

The presence of death in Updike's novels implies a destruction of human significance as well as physical destruction. Updike perceives death as dehumanization happening in reality in an age of atrocity. The personal awareness of death is a testimony of human suffering, and individual extinction symbolizes the end of a great dream and acknowledges the complex presures of reality.

Updike is one of those writers who are "haunted by the contradictions in man's natural existence, [and] have little

interest in prophecy or utopia"(Langer 32). Furthermore, such writers

> seek first to disclose the naked visage of death in its most modern guise, and then to create what human balance they can against its ravages in time, without illusions about man's power to live long in what Kierkegaard might have called the transcendental dimension. (Langer 32-33)

From this viewpoint, death is a denial of self, a murder committed by society.

Updike talks about God quite often. However, the God in his work is often a symbol of the will of society—an institution exercising complusary force. Using this symbol, he denounces the conventional ideological consensus which limits human thoughts. What he says of Kierkegaard could also be said of himself, for Kierkegaard

> mounted a savage attack upon organized Christianity, exhorting true Christians to abstain from the sin of church worship. (Picked Up, 110)

Updike's God topic is a disclosure of ideological conflict in America in his time. He uses God as a mask to criticize the limiting force in society.

In all his novels, his characters are not pure artistic creations but true reflections of people in reality, who are trapped in the sharp contradiction between inner desires and outer

restrictions. They live like fish, pitifully swimming in a course decided by the stream. Even though they try to jump, dive and float, they cannot possibly escape the restricting course. Ultimately they arrive at their common destination— death. This kind of recognition of human existence is Updike's preoccupation. He sees no happiness in modern society, but an image of a tomb.

With his presentation of ordinary Americans, Updike reveals what has gone wrong in American society; the reality is nowhere near congruent with the dream. He often describes traps which prevent people from ootaining real happiness and value. The elder people's poorhouse, Eccles's church, and the couples' sexual games are such traps. However, he does not describe his characters as vicious but as captive people who could, given the chance, live more meaningful lives. Updike's books are sober; they deal in sympathy. Their bleak view of reality serves as a critique of modern America, a society devoted to gain, a society lacking ultimate values and a sense of the trancendent.

Updike himself is acutely sensitive to history. The historic periods in his works not only function as temporal settings. For instance, almost all the important events which happened from the 50s to the 70s recur in the Rabbit series. Without history, there could be no fiction: such is a basic Updikean position. He confesses in an interview that his novels are almost all about history, and says that it is not true that American history is normally absent from his work, as someone has accused(Picked Up,

501). All of his novels are precisely placed in time, during particular American presidencies. However, history for Updike is not a matter of "a list of declared wars and changes of government"(Picked Up, 501). History is the story of social conflicts and of man finding his place in reality. Updike's novels are American history rendered into art. They accurately dramatize the American dilemma, which is contained within the incessant disappointment of American reality in relation to the American dream. Updike's writing, in the terminology of Fredric Jameson, is "political unconscious." Jameson explains:

> history is not a text, not a narrative, master or otherwise, but that, as an absent cause, it is inaccessible to us except in textual form, and that our approach to it and to the Real itself necessarily passes through its prior textualization, its narrativization in the political unconscious. (35)

Updike is not a mere chronicler of events, but a critical historian, who consistently makes judgements on his time. Barthes has said:

> Writing [...] is always rooted in something beyond language, it develops like a seed, not a line, it manifests an essence and holds the threat of a secret, it is an anti-communication, it is intimidating. [...] an axiological writing, [...] is given at one as description and as judgment. (20)

Updike himself says:

> [that] some message is intended, wrapped in the story like a piece of crystal carefully mailed in carboard and excelsior, is not doubted. (Picked Up, 30)

Clearly, Updike's purpose is to communicate meaning within his stories. His writing is a unity of the signs in the zones of infra- or ultra-language(Barthes 20) and could be called "a plunge into reality"(O'Connor 78).

Updike's realistic style derives from his belief that a writer should write about his people and their lives, and that only through presenting actual life can writing assume vitality. He says:

> We must write where we stand; wherever we do stand, there is life; and an imitation of the life we know, however narrow, is our only ground. (Picked Up, 32)

He clearly sees his duty and says:

> Anyone dignified with the name of "writer" should strive, surely, to discover or invent the verbal texture that most closely corresponds to the tone of life as it arrives on his nerves. (Picked Up, 16)

And so Updike writes of ordinary people, sharing their sadness and explorations.

Updike thinks it is not a writer's duty to function as a reformer:

> the general betterment of mankind, and even the

> improvement of social conditions within my own violently imperfect nation, were not my basic motivation as a writer. (Picked Up, 30)

Instead, the writer's obligation, in the realist tradition, is to reveal reality as clearly and fully as possible:

> ...as a writer, for me to attempt to extend my artistic scope into all the areas of my human concern, to substitute nobility of purpose for accuracy of execution, would certainly be to forfeit whatever social usefulness I do have. (Picked Up, 32)

In his mind, what he should do is to present "social protest, and a hope of reform"(Picked Up, 32). He says:

> Is not the writer's role, indeed, to speak for humanity, as conscience and prophet and servant of the billions not able to speak for themselves? (Picked Up, 31)

As a matter of fact, Updike's work functions as an effective agent of the moral imagination, which accords with Trilling's idea about writing:

> its greatness and its practical usefulness lay in its unremitting work of involving the reader himself in the moral life, inviting him to put his own motives under examination, suggesting that reality is not as his conventional education has led him to see it. It taught us, as no other genre ever did, the extent of human variety and the value of this variety. (209)

According to Updike's own words, he wants to devote himself to writing in such a way that "...the world, so balky and resistant and humiliating, can in the act of mimesis be rectified, adjusted, chastened, purified"(Picked Up, 35). He believes that in writing "fantasies defeated in reality can be fully indulged; tendencies deflected by the cramp of circumstance can be followed to an end"(Picked Up, 35). In effect, Updike is saying that he wants to have a moral debate with the reader.

To some extent, Updike's work is a history of rebellion. He expresses his philosophy without any hesitation:

> Like Harry, I try to remain open. Revolt, rebellion, violence, disgust are themselves there for a reason, they too are organically evolved out of a distinct reality, and must be considered respectfully. (Picked Up, 509)

Updike, seemingly, likes "anarchy" too, because it is an opposition to ideological consensus which would deny any individual option. With such an intention, Updike justifies ultimate freedom for humans:

> I try to love both the redneck and the flower child, the anarchist bomb-thrower. People are basically very anarchistic. Harry's search for infinite freedom— that's anarchy too. He loves destruction, who doesn't? (Picked Up, 509-10)

To expose this problematic reality is not his ultimate goal,

Updike's final aim is to be militant and destructive in opposing reality. He writes:

> we should proceed in the humble faith that, by taking pains, word by word, to be accurate, we put ourselves on the way toward making something useful and beautiful and, in a word, good. (Picked Up, 17)

Accordingly, it is not surprising to find a similarity between him and Norman Mailer. Updike writes in the same way as Mailer thinks:

> What I find most interesting in writing at this point is always making a new attack on the nature of reality. Reality has some subtle desire to protect itself, and if we keep going in the same direction, reality is able to handle us, just in the same way organisms become resistant to various pesticides and herbicides and start thriving among them. Reality will do that if you keep taking the same approach to it. You've got to sneak up on it from the other side. (Ruas, 36)

In Updikean gallery of characters, various models of the fighter appear. Hog is a literary type and Skeeter is a proponent of action. Updike himself is a social protestant; his philosophy is based on the justification of individual right and individual goodness. He thinks man should take control of life and see himself as a person in his own right, and that man should live by

his own inner power. Moreover, he thinks that man should not reason within limiting principles imposed by some outside force or institution, but make his own choice, and act on his own authority. In a word, Updike emphasizes man's spirit. His definition of the "spirit" transcends religion; he sees spirit as a weapon with which individuals can oppose social injustice.

As has been pointed out, Updike is an artistic historian. He uses fictional form to record American history, focusing on the metamorphosis of the American image. Updike knows that a writer is a conduit "who so positions himself that the world at his back flows through to the readers on the other side of the page"(Picked-Up, 38). With the Rabbit trilogy he paints a sweeping canvas of American reality over the last few decades, in terms such as Terry Eagleton's:

> Literature, we are told, is vitally engaged with the living situations of men and women: it is concrete rather than abstract, displays life in all its rich variousness, and rejects barren conceptual enquiry for the feel and taste of what it is to be alive. (196)

The Rabbit novels are the most important of Updike's books, because the protagonist is a typical modern American, and because the series covers three decades of the modern epoch. Since the novels function as a vivid reflection of mid-20th century America, and since they are quintessential Updike, they act as profound keys to an understanding of the author's method and world-view.

In undertaking a study of the trilogy, these words of Barthes are instructive:

> what modernity allows us to read in the plurality of modes of writing, is the blind alley which is its own History. (61)

(II) ON RABBIT, RUN

In 1960, John Updike published Rabbit, Run as his second novel following The Poorhouse Fair. The novel attracted both critics and ordinary readers, and induced a fervent reaction. Once again, opinions are varied widely. Some critics accused Updike of having nothing to say; others saw in Rabbit, Run both thematic and artistic achievments. And then there were critics who disclaimed any judgements in favor of exhaustive scrutiny of the novel's plot, structure, and even protagonists' names.

Only to say: Rabbit, Run has continuously been valued in different ways since it came out. However, most critics like to read the novel as an isolated literary work, and dig into it painstakingly. In this way, the protagonist is only regarded as a separated individual who shares no identity with his peers in American reality; the novel is valued as an imaginative product, and not as a true reflection of American life. This kind of discussion ignores the decisive effect of society on the author and neglects the author's intention to put forward certain beliefs. As a result, the novel is devalued. When we read a novel, we should relate it to the original soil in which it is cultivated, and, as Fredric Jameson suggests, see that the author, with a political unconscious, presents his cultural artifacts as socially symbolic acts. Furthermore, we should apply Lionel

Trilling's idea that literature deals with man in society(Trilling 265) and that "literature is the human activity that takes the fullest and most precise account of variousness, possibility, and difficulty"(Trilling preface). As for Rabbit, Run, our priority in reading should be a process "within a kaleidoscope of historical elements"(Trilling 175) to trace the relationship between what is in the novel and what happened in American society in the 1950s, the decade that provides the historic setting for the novel. And more important, we must remember that "in the novel no less than in the poem, the voice of the author is the decisive factor"(Trilling 238). By doing so, we can see that in the complex panorama of many-sided life, the major protagonist Harry Angstrom is a modern man hopelessly struggling in the problematic American reality, and that the author holds a critical view of American reality.

The decade of the 1950s was a special time for Americans. Their country grew stronger and stronger politically and economically, and they believed they would continue living in this unchanging new era, which had generally been considered as a Golden Age.

Early in the second half of the 40s, after the Second World War, America emerged as the strongest power in the world and had accepted the responsibility of becoming the leader of the West. At that time, American military power, with solid support from its economy, stood at the summit of the world, as Winston

Churchill described. Domestically, the war had unleashed an economic leap forward. National income, national wealth and industrial production doubled every few years. No other country could compare with America. Its industrial might was awesome:

> In 1947, with postwar recovery under way everywhere, the United States produced about one-half of the world's manufactures: 57 per cent of its steel, 43 per cent of its electricity, 62 per cent of its oil. It owned three quarters of the world's automobiles and was improving on that show by manufacturing well over 80 per cent of the new cars built in the world that year. The American lead was greatest in precisely those industries which contributed to the power to wage modern war: aviation, chemical engineering, electronics. [....] After four years of war boom, American industry, and only American industry, had money to spend on new plant, new processes, higher productivity for the individual worker, large-scale (and therefore in theory more economical) production facilities, and research and development. (Hodgson 19-20)

With these immense achievements, America became a synonym for magic in the eyes of the world; it gave the impression of having achieved a perfect society, or at least a perfectly happy society. Godfrey Hodgson comments on this kind of belief in his

America in Our Time:

> the promise of American capitalism seemed to be that it could produce abundance on such a scale that social problems would be drowned under a flood of resources. Social conflict would become anachronism. (18)

When the 50s began, and America enjoyed uninterrupted economic progress, most Americans benefited from the new prosperity. After the tribulations of the Second World War, they welcomed economic development and embraced materialism. Cars, TV sets, automatic washing machines—people had to have them. Consumerism became a way of life.

> Tens of millions looked on as a birthright a standard of economic well-being that had been the privilege of a few only short years before. Persons of a pessimistic temperament stopped worrying about how to achieve prosperity, and began to deplore its supposed consequences: obesity, conformity, materialism and neurosis. (Hodgson 48).

Naturally, the fifties were celebrated as the happiest, most stable and most rational period the western world had known since 1914(Dickstein 26). Politically, the United States experienced a period of consensus concerning the general principles of Americanism; economically, its free-enterprise system gave promise of creating seemingly perpetual abundance. Many people believed

that harmony in American society would prevail.

Hadley Cantril, a professor at Princeton, conducted a survey of thousands of individuals in ten countries in 1960. The foreign view was that Americans were the most confident people in the world. Hodgson agreed with Cantril's findings and concluded that:

> At the end of the 1950s, ... few of them[Americans] doubted the essential goodness and strength of American society. (Hodgson 68)

Unfortunately, the overflowing jubilation and optimism basically depended on the economic development of the time and on the ignorance of the problems which actually existed in the society.

As a matter of fact, beneath the outward sheen of success, profound problems were developing. Firstly, people became greedier than ever. Materialism had been justified by the whole society and had almost killed all other moral standards. There was more competition among people and, inevitably, while competition created a paradise for some people, it opened a gate to hell for others. Secondly, while people were placing stress on their social and economic position and were indulging themselves in material enjoyment, they were in want of another dimension of human value: spiritual self-recognition. Victory in the Second World War did not guarantee establishment of spiritual richness for people. Rapid development in industry did not completely wipe out the shadows of inflation and unemployment. Large-scale immigration created new problems. Urbanization and

industrialization, while producing material abundance, also generated social upheaval and crime. Racial discrimination still existed. Optimism was incompetent to solve annoying daily problems such as fear, anxiety and the consciousness of alienation. Ideologically, Americans were in a time of transition, expectation, and confusion. Generally, the generation at the time, spoiled by materialism, was actually, in the words of Norman Podhoretz, "a non-generation". Dickstein, in his Gate of Eden, quotes Podhoretz's sharp commentary on the generation:

> a collection of people who, for all their apparent command of themselves, for all the dispatch with which they have taken their places in society, for all their sophistication, for all the "maturity", know nothing, stand for nothing, believe nothing. (62)

In short, in spite of its tremendous economic success, American capitalism had not created a society with spiritual values—and had not eliminated serious social conflicts.

While many voices praised the progress of American society, and lauded the abolition of social classes and the dismantling of race discrimination, and while the opinion was general that there was nothing to worry about except how to enjoy life ever more, some writers such as Norman Mailer and John Updike, contradicted the conventional wisdom—they expressed hostility to the dominant

spirit of the age. They insisted that material abundance was only one side of the coin. The other side was the fact that people needed something else, namely, spiritual richness and fertility.

According to Mailer and Updike, human achievement must be based on a readjustment of the relationship between individuality and reality. Human beings must struggle for spiritual survival as well as material success; they must engage themselves, as individuals, in an exploration of belief, value and action separate from material enjoyment. The urgent task, as Mailer and Updike saw it, was to revive a genuine American tradition.

In warning people that the materialized society was not good enough, these writers placed stress on the themes of self-realization and self-evaluation in order to revive transcendental power within. While maintaining a perspective of alienation, they devoted their works to the relationship between personality and community. As Trilling points out, "the novel is a perpetual quest for reality, the field of its research being always the social world, the material of its analysis being always manners as the indication of the direction of man's soul"(Trilling 199).

With the intention of delivering the message that modern man had not yet escaped his fundamental dilemma, Updike created a story about a torn man, who looked for self location in the new historic period of the 1950s. It is a story of the times. Rabbit's uncertainty, to some extent, is a common aspect of the

generation, and the problematic environment around him epitomizes the society. The original intention to write such a story is revealed by Updike's own words:

> My fiction about daily doings of ordinary people has more history in it than history books, just as there is more breathing history in archaeology than a list of declared wars and changes of government. (Picked-Up, 501)

It goes without saying that Updike wants to write a novel in much the same way as an archaeologist wants to illuminate an historic period. Updike is not satisfied with simple facts and a mechanical chronicle but is determined to expose the social essence and human essence, in the same way that an archaeologist would trace social history through a small piece of antiquity. He creates Rabbit as a representative of the men living in the specific historic period and society, and examined him under his sociological microscope.

The story is simple. Harry Angstrom, generally called Rabbit, finds his youth past, his wife dumb, and his family like a trap, and runs away. During his flight he finds no satisfaction, whether in the church, in nature, or from his sexual partner. In the whole plot which consists of running episodes, though there are no breath-taking events at all, the author gives us a profound philosophical discourse.

In his running and being torn in his uncertainty, Rabbit

undertakes his endless discovery of hopelessness. He is a hero of contradiction. In his activities, he oscillates between opposite poles: self-centered and God centered; a wasteland of the psyche and natural prosperity; the past and the present; the outer and inner worlds; rationality and irrationality; free will and determination; receiver and giver; and running and staying. In a word, he hesitates to make a choice and says "yes" and "no" at the same time. He is a typical modern man built of helplessness and hopelessness, though he lives in an environment of material abundance. When he has an impulse to run, external circumstances prevent him from running. He acts, but seems always to be jostling with implacable fate. His running becomes a progress akin to crucifixion, but does not achieve redemption—achieves nothing. When Rabbit arrives at his final destination, he is nothing more than a victim.

As a member of the middle class in America, Rabbit does not need to worry about his [illegible]ances. He has family, house and car, which should have suppli[illegible]him with a cosy nest. However, these conditions do not give him spiritual satisfaction. He encounters his family with a feeling of annoyance and regards his house as a trap. This feeling impels him to get into his car to run.

Running away has been an important topic in American literature. It has been used as a meaningful mode to reveal alienation from reality. Early in 1894, Mark Twain wrote a great novel The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, a novel about running

away. In order to gain personal freedom, Finn and Jim, the major characters of the story, escape on a raft. In the course of the narrative, the sins of slavery are exposed and criticized, and the natural and healthy instincts of men are praised. The book becomes a moral protest against the sinister society in which men are hard, sordid, ungentle, dishonest, oppresive, aggresive and money-loving. In Twain's writing, running away in the interest of freedom is justified as a virtue.

In 1955, another American writer, Jack Kerouac published On the Road. It is a story of flight too. Being excited with the great possibility of riding in America, Sal, a young writer, experiences life on the road, westward. He is supposed to go to his "super" destinations— the West Coast, the Rocky Mountains and the Pacific Ocean. With the end of the 40s as a background, the author gives us a picture of young people in a frenetic search for complete freedom. Engaging in all-night bouts, wild parties, jazz joints, picking up girls, making love, they drive across America as part of the Beat Generation. Ironically, their running becomes a reaction to the great American dream. Instead of participating in building an abundant society, they withdraw from it and courageously attempt to create new spaces and new lives, as Sal says, to "hear a new call and see a new horizon"(11). In effect, by running, they cut themselves off from the postwar American dream.

Under the new historic conditions as discussed above, Updike

draws his story of flight. His protagonist is socially conditioned. Rabbit's running takes place in the highly materialized society. His motive for running is not for economic gain nor for personal freedom, but for spiritual freedom—for release of the self from a restricting environment. Updike has pointed out that there must be some kinds of anxiety and tension in modern life which will impel humans into an exile. He says: "...all of our institutions—of marriage, the family, your driver's license—everything is kind of precarious, and maintained at a cost of tension"(Picked-Up, 509). Updike's revelation exposes a basic fact of social tension. His central point is: anxiety and tension in modern life are inevitable. The anxiety and tension in the family are symptomatic of those in society. The priority of materials has changed human moral standards and life habits. Humanity is dissolving in materialization, and energetic individuality is wiped out by the qestionable unification of society. Such are the fundamental recognitions of Updike's story.

The problem is revealed by the contradiction between Rabbit and his wife. In Rabbit's eyes, his wife Janice is dumb now. She watches TV all day long and cares nothing about their home and son. The incompetent wife appears disgusting to him:

> ...she stopped being pretty. With the tiny addition of two short wrinkles at the corners, her mouth has become greedy; and her hair has thinned....

(Run, 7)

Deliberately, Updike locates the ageing figure in front of television set, to dramatize his contention that people lose their vitality to material manipulation. As one of the pervasive agents of modern technology, television has played a great role in influencing Americans' lifestyle, thoughts, and personalities. After 1952, "the box" became available to every home. By 1956, two out of every three American families had at least one TV, and by 1960 the figure was up to 87 percent (Jezer 130). Television has changed people; they sit in front of it for as long as they can find time. The constant commercials do not drive them away. Thus, while being entertained, they are also manipulated. Consequently, their tastes are shaped by television and their way of life geared to the acquisition and enjoyment of material goods.

The most unfortunate effect of the "boob tube" is that communication between humans is replaced by communication between human and TV. According to the latest survey in 1986, most Americans believe they get more pleasure from television than from their family, marriage, food or sex. As soon as TV begins to dominate people, society changes:

> Never had so many men (and women) been so dependent on material goods for their identities. And never before has community been so synthetically derived, divorced from both collective historical tradtion and personal experience.... (Jezer 133)

Janice Angstrom is one of those who lose control and become the victims of TV. The television has made her dumb and apathetic; it has captured her and transformed her into a person without feeling. She is a withered figure, a victim of modern technology, through whom Updike exposes the phenomenon of identity-loss in the modern world.

The apathetic wife is not the only negative factor impelling Rabbit to run away. His sense of his house as a cage is another reason. In the house everything is in disorder:

> The clutter behind him in the room—the Old-fashioned glass with its corrupt dregs, the choked ashtray balanced on the easy-chair arm, the rumpled rug, the floppy stacks of slippery newspapers, the kid's toys here and there broken and stuck and jammed, a leg off a doll and a piece of bent carboard that went with some breakfast-box cutout, the rolls of fuzz under the radiators, the continual crisscrossing mess—clings to his back like a tightening net.(14)

The mess consists of various objects from furniture to toys, all items produced by the commercial society. The messy situation makes Rabbit feel afraid that he has been trapped and will lose his own personality.

Undoubtedly, Rabbit's wife and house are closely linked with modern material civilization, but that does not produce a spiritual richness. In this respect, there is no arguing that

Updike's view of the world is critical. With the descriptions of the captive personality and the mess in the house, he presents Rabbit's family, the basic unit of society, as one full of problems caused by materialism. By doing so, he points to the large situation of society, and implies that people are in danger of losing their humanity.

According to Updike's idea, though the progress of science and industry increases social assets, it decreases human value at the same time. While society worships money, cars and television, human values such as personality and individual independence are completely ignored. As a result, man no longer lives as the centre of the Universe, but as a new kind of slave to materials. Therefore, man finds himself incompatible with his environment which consists of powerful material objects and experiences a feeling of loss:

> He does not feel himself as a creator and centre, but as the servant of a Golem, which his hands have built. The more powerful and gigantic the forces are which he unleashes, the more powerless he feels himself as a human being. He confronts himself with his own forces embodied in things he has created, alienated from himself. He is owned by his own creation, and has lost ownership of himself. (Fromm 125)

It is this exact situation that Rabbit faces. He fears the loss of his personality; he does not want to suffer the same fate as

his wife. And so, impelled by this fear, he runs.

The episode in which Rabbit takes flight is also symbolic of the fragmentation of the American family. In modern industrial and commercial society, Americans have become extremely mobile; the family has lost its cohesion. Beginning with the 50s, the family no longer acted as a shelter from poverty and the outer world. The individual became part of the mass society; fragmentation of the family accelerated. Man, as William H. Whyte, Jr asserts, immerses himself in the group at "the conference table, the workshop, the seminar, the skull session, the after-hours discussion and the project team" (Whyte 46). Though, during the 50s, divorce was still a serious matter and not very common, friction within the family was a growing phenomenon. The tension between Rabbit and Janice indicates the tendency toward breakdown in American families as communication becomes more and more difficult among family members.

It is interesting to note that Rabbit runs away in a car. This is not without irony. America is famous for its love of the automobile. A product of modern technology, the car is regarded as a symbol of American power, a proud indicator of a high level of industry, and a sure reward of people's lives. In this connection, it can be no coincidence that the new industrial revolution is summed up in the word "automation". The car is the means of transportation to the American dream.

In Rabbit, Run, however, the car is Rabbit's means of escape

from the effect of modern American society. The irony here is powerful: the object of consumer society and its most valued possession become the means of flight from that society and become a source of potential freedom from the supposed American dream.

Comparing Rabbit's running in a car with Huck and Jim's running on a raft, we see that the development of technology does not diminish the human striving for freedom. Furthermore, the fact that Rabbit's car cannot take him to his ideal kingdom is a symbolic criticism of the materialism which has greatly influenced people's lifestyle: a materialism that brings them neither happiness, nor a way out of their dilemma.

Since Rabbit's running is a complex process concerning spiritual movement rather than simple physical movement, he often oscillates between the past and the present. He especially sentimentalizes the past when he was a strong man. For him, the past means youth, beauty and guts; the present is ageing, annoyance and fatigue. When he encounters the bleakness of the present, his mind jumps back to the past, which seems harmonious, ideal and Edenic. He remembers his youth as well as his wife's. He remembers the days when his wife was an attractive girl. He recalls athletic adventures (such as climbing poles), which are no longer possible.

Rabbit's affection for the past indicates his nostalgia. For him, the clear difference between the past and present is related to how much energy he once had, compared to the amount of energy

he now has. In the past, though, without material abundance, people had the spirit of the frontier (Rabbit "climbing the poles"); at present, people are ageing with inertia, depending too much on material things—sitting in front of the television and doing nothing. Here, Updike weaves a sensitive and lyric meditation on the human sense of an ideal past, which is based on the Biblical Golden-Age and Edenic entity: a world that has no relationship with materialism.

Much worse, besides the captivating power of <u>things</u>, Rabbit lives in a community in which a man-made God is worshipped. He is torn between self-centered will and so-called God's will. It seems to him that God has no interests in human will but exercises his power to trap man. So, when Rabbit's car enters a twisting road, he prays, but "the prayer's answer is blinding." Updike is satirizing God's indifference.

Presenting the situation in which Rabbit encounters God's indifference, it seems that Updike bravely conducts a serious debate on religion. As a matter of fact, Updike imports a new conception of God in the story. To trace this point, we need to review some facts of the time. Since the Second World War, because of its military and industrial success, America enjoyed an image of greatness and infallibility. Notwithstanding its many social problems, the country, as a whole, knew a tremendous self-confidence. It tried to maintain an ideological consensus while developing the capitalist production-consumption system, in

which material is the centre and money is a measure. For most people during the 50's, it seemed that America was a giant that would never falter. The famous report Prospect for America issued at the end of the 50s, quoted by Hodgson, expressed the certainty that:

> America has a notable record of responding to challenges and making the most of opportunities. With our growing population, our extraordinary record of rising productivity, the inherent dynamism in our free enterprise economy, there is every reason to face the future with all confidence. (Hodgson, 70)

In other words, the chief interest of America, the implicit ideology of America, and the actual religion of America are related to the production and consumption of goods. Updike wittily describes this belief as one that seems confident but gray(Run, 79) and associates it with "childish brightness"(Run, 86). It is pure Americanism, as Alan Trachtenberg observes:

> For about twenty years after the conclusion of the war, it was common for Americans to read in their newspapers and journals, and hear and see in the mass media, nothing but praise for the "American Way," for the "American Century," typified by an ever-rising Gross National Product, an expanding highway program, and mushrooming suburban shopping malls. It was common to hear America described as a consumer's paradise,

> a showcase of democratic free enterprise, in which the ubiquitous credit card had wrought a more lasting revolution against class distinctions than any "foreign" ideology could offer. "Freedom" reigned as the rhetorical centerpiece of public discourse. And deviations from the national consensus, either in political views or personal styles, risked the chilling charge of "alien," "subversive," "unAmerican." ("Intellectual Background," in Harvard Guide to contemporary American Writing, ed. by Daniel Hoffman, 5-6)

However, people found that this society, dubbed the "Organization Society" by William H. Whyte, is still a place "in which there is a conflict between the individual as he is and wishes to be, and the role he is called upon to play"(Whyte 142). In Rabbit's case, there is only one way to settle the conflict: to run away.

If we remember that Updike uses a metaphor of God to illustrate the compulsive social will, then we will recognize the meaning of Rabbit's act as a rebellion against the artificiality of his society.

To highlight the God-metaphor, Updike creates an important character, Eccles, the priest, who acts like Rabbit's spiritual savior, but stays within the range of banal reality. With the belief that God rules reality, Eccles painstakingly persuades

Rabbit to kneel down before his maker.

Eccles insists that man should follow God, and should grow up as He indicates, to be a big tree from a little tree(106) and to live free of "inner darkness". He thinks that man's duty is to serve God, that is, to do things ordered by God, and that it is betraying God's will to seek self advancement. Eccles's theory of a God-centered world is analogous, for Updike, to the Americanism-centered society; in both, there is a compulsory authority. At that time, "the free-enterprise system was seen as Americanism; social criticism, class solidarity and radical politics were rejected as 'un-American'"(Hodgson 88). Eccles's theory echoes the theory of civil religion, which Norman Vincent Peale and Billy Graham promote. They insist on faith and take "In God We Trust" as the nation's official motto. What they favor is "an uncritical tendency to give religious sanction and support to 'the American way of life'"(J. W. Carroll 6).

However, Rabbit's attendance in church represents a denunciation of the false God. In Rabbit's eyes, Eccles appears distorted during his sermon. Up behind the altar rail, Eccles, absentminded and grouchy, remote and insubstantial and stiff, looks like "a Japanese doll in his vestments." Rabbit feels that there is something disagreeable about the whole Episcopal service, and he really feels uncomfortable:

> In this service he blunders absurdly, balked by what seem wilful dislocations of worship. He feels too much

> is made of collecting the money. He scarcely listens to the sermon at all.(236)

To the great extent, Rabbit's sense of church as a place of money-collecting alludes to the whole society which admires money too much to leave a space for human spiritual richness. Under such circumstances, God's glory disappears. Rabbit, ironically, is attracted by the priest's wife's, "radiation"(237), which implies a kind of transcendental love coming from human beings on eart rather from Eccles's sermon related to God untouchable.

Rabbit does not accept Eccles's idea and thinks that "there must be something existing there" besides so-called God's will, and that man should know himself as well as others, and even find his own religion. Rabbit's perspective on God is very Updikean. In one of his interviews, Updike says:

> I guess the noun "God" appears in two totally different senses, the God in the first instance being the one worshipped within this nice white church, the more or less watered-down Puritan God; and then God in the second sense means ultimate power. I've never really understood theologies which would absolve God of earthquakes and typhoons, of children starving. A god who is not God the Creator is not very real to me, so that, yes, it certainly is God who throws the lightning bolt and this God is above the nice god, above the god we can worship

> and empathize with. I guess I'm saying there's a fierce God above the kind God and he's the one Piet believes in. (Picked-Up, 504)

As a Christian writer, Updike does not blaspheme Christianity in his religious discourse, but mocks man-made worship. In his view, God is not the one who promotes inertia and obedience but the one who has energy. The real God exists outside and above everyday life, outside and above the form that men on earth have grafted onto Him. Updike's idea is close to the Neo-Orthodoxy of Paul Tillich and Reinhold and H. Richard Niebuhr, who propose a situationalist ethic based on an existential, tragic sense of life rather than obedience to a moral code, or the legalism of giving evidence of faith in good works. (Trachtenberg, "Intellectual Background," Harvard Guide to Contemporary American Writing, ed. by Daniel Hoffman, 47)

The comparison between Rabbit and Eccles also shows a social change of the time, described as a movement from "inner direction" to "other direction" in David Riesman's terms. Americans, as a whole, have become less assertive and more conciliatory, attuned to group conformity, accomodating the social ideals and demands of others. As an exception, Rabbit wants to keep an inner-directed character, which is individualistic and greatly demanding on oneself in defiance of convention.

To do so, Rabbit acts as a spiritual searcher and as a representative of those who betray reality and long for a new

kingdom. Though he meets endless failure and is mentally tortured, he keeps running. In this respect, Updike reflects social facts. In the 50s, the new radicalism began to emerge. Ignoring the ideological consensus and taking modern American society as a target, periodicals such as Dissent and Universities and Left Review, with a desire for social change, severely attacked advertising, the debaucheries of capitalist culture(Bell 313). Their ideas contradicted American social reality. When America undertook its revolutions in transport and communication to bring men into close contact on the basis of commercial interests, the new radicalism sensed anxieties and tried to find a new faith. It sought individual distinction in a world of lonely crowds and opposed the idea of a society that valued itself through "economic calculabilities"(Bell 22).

It is interesting that Updike gives a long description of Mrs. Smith's garden where the flowers bloom. Writing about the garden to give more meaning to the text is not his invention. In literary history, many writers have taken garden imagery as the incorporation of human dreams and desires, and such imagery often embodies an idealized alternative to social reality. Updike uses Mrs. Smith's garden in a slightly different way. His description of it renders an incarnation of Rabbit's social environment:

> The flowerbed, bordered with bricks buried diagonally, are pierced by dull red spikes that will be peonies, and the earth itself, scumbled, stone-flecked, horny,

raggedly patched with damp and dry, looks like the oldest and smells like the newest thing under Heaven. (135)

The Smiths' garden is a metaphor of America, which seems thriving but cannot give Rabbit a spiritual rebirth. At last, Rabbit leaves it with regrets. Rabbit's disappointment with nature is a disappointment with the land on which he stands. Though Rabbit has declared several times that he is a patriot, he cannot get along with the society, even though material goods are as abundant as the blooming flowers in the garden. He is more impressed by the ragged stone of the garden.

Updike knows what he wants to say and also knows how to say it. His style becomes an instrument of his meaning. Mythic pattern is adopted in the form of the hero's quest; theme is revealed by the protagonist's monologue as well as by his physical action. Self-consciousness and realization are often emphasized. Rhetorical devices are not only used for literary effect but also for thematic focus.

The quest has been a stereotype of literary form adopted by a number of writers since Greek myth. From Odysseus to Huckleberry Finn, the heroes usually undertake a quest to explore the outer world. Their journeys are full of fights between good and evil and between truth and falsehood. Their experiences highlight mysterious aspects of the world. Unlike them, Updike emphasizes an inner reaction, which goes on intensively in his protagonist's

mind. Unlike heroes created by other writers in quest story, who go on their way after conquering enemies or overcoming obstacles, Updike's Rabbit encounters mental problems and spiritual annoyances which are caused by reality. Rabbit's quest, motivated by awareness of something wrong at home, something wrong in Church, and something wrong in his relationship with others, takes the form both of an internal hunt and a critical re-evaluation of his society. His quest accords with Harold Bloom's assertion in "The Internalization of Quest Romance":

> The internalization of quest-romance made of the poet-hero not a seeker after nature but after his own mature powers, and so the Romantic poet turned away, not from society to nature, but from nature to what was more integral than nature, within himself. (Bloom 26)

In other words, Rabbit's quest is a spiritual striving in a social environment that is alien to such striving. He is "on the road" but is far off the main road of American reality.

At the dramatic beginning, Updike gives a very strong hint about the essential aspect of Rabbit's quest. There are three paragraphs describing what happens when Rabbit comes home after playing basketball with a few neighourhood kids. The interesting thing is that the first sentences of the paragraphs communicate an unmistakable message:

> "Running."
>
> "He [Rabbit] pauses in the sunless vestibule, panting."

"The door is locked." (6-7)

The message tells us that Rabbit's quest is going "in the sunless vestibule". He feels tired and the door is closed; there is no way out or in. The vision seen by him is a picture of broken objects. The description of "two wan windows, wide-spaced like the eyes of an animal" and the sentence "His downstairs neighbor's door across the hall is shut like a hurt face" render awesome imagery. At the time when he fits the little key into the lock, "his hand trembles, pulsing with unusual exertion, and metal scratches"(7). Vividly and clearly, Updike depicts Rabbit as a desperate man in a broken world, whose running is in vain. The picture can be associated with T. S. Eliot's wasteland in which:

> A heap of broken images, where the sun beats
> And the dead tree gives a shelter, the cricket
> no relief,
> And the dry stone no sound of water.
> (The Waste Land, line 22-24)

The land Rabbit stands on is a wasteland where there is no meaningful living, but only a place in which man is trapped as hopelessly as a caged animal. Updike's viewpoint is very close to existentialism.(1)

In the 1950s, despite tremendous economic development, serious problems and potential dangers existed, as has been discussed. Wars, depressions, national and world calamities, and materialism became threats to both physical existence and

spiritual wellbeing. Man lived with the inescapable predicament of isolation, loneliness and vulnerability in a society declared by C. Wright Mills as a great salesroom, an enormous file, an incorporated brain, and a new universe of management and manipulation. More and more people sensed that:

> life presses us so hard, time is so short, the suffering of the world is so huge, simple, unendurable— anything that complicates our moral fervor in dealing with reality so we immediately see it and wish to drive headlong upon it must be regarded with some impatience. (Trilling 208)

It is clear that Updike holds the same view; he constructs his story to show that his protagonist is disappointed with his environment and involved in endless anxiety. Rabbit tries again and again to make choices(his running, his visit to church, his sojourn in the Smiths' garden, and his intimacy with Ruth)—but the culmination of his flight coincides with his daughter's funeral. Such is the terminus of his spiritual search in the America of his time. Rabbit is perplexed. On the one hand, he realizes that "he must go forth from this field and found a new religion"(282); on the other hand, he is not clear about these questions:

> 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? [...] why am I me? (282-83)

The protagonist's perplexity does not erase Updike's justification of individual subjectivity. Presenting Rabbit's agony, Updike does not regard the man-made God as savior of the torn man but as the opposition to the man's initial goodness; he claims the importance of the identity of "self" in the materialized and manipulating society. Updike presents a valuable idea which could be explained by M. H. Abrams' words: "spirit may recognize itself, make itself objective to itself, find itself, become for itself, and unite itself with itself"(Abrams 234).

While Rabbit adopts rebellion against the conventional God, and denies the possibility of harmony between himself and reality, the central theme of the novel is shown: the social influence on man is the knot which "regathers in his chest"(Run, 282), as Updike himself always sees that pain, plague and destruction are everywhere(Picked Up, 87-88).

The individual quest during the 1950s therefore seems an unsuccessful one. At last, with the regret that "the goal is an infinite one which lies forever beyond the reach of man, whose possibilities are limited by the conditions of a finite world"(Abrams 194), Rabbit comes full circle. His quest falls in Abrams's model: " ... the journey in search of an unknown or inexpressible something which gradually leads the wanderer back toward his point of origin"(Abrams 193). The very nature of

modern American life stifles any attempt to rebel. The failure of Rabbit's quest leads to his predictable "Redux."

(III) ON RABBIT REDUX

Ten years after he wrote Rabbit, Run, Updike published the sequel Rabbit Redux.

The book continues Rabbit's story against a background of the 60s, which was a period full of social changes and chaos in America. Though Updike writes about the same protagonist, he transfers the focus from the psychological and ideological quest of an individual in Rabbit, Run to the focus on the political issues witnessed in Rabbit Redux. In so doing, Updike depicts the social background more substantially and distinctly than in Rabbit, Run, acting as a historian and social commentator. He presents what happened in the United States in the 60s and concludes that, despite its achievements at the time, American society was full of conflicts which had exhausted the country as well as its people.

In the 60s, America succeeded in landing on the moon and in making the economy bloom. The increase alone of the U.S. GNP in the first four years of the 60s was greater than the entire GNP of Germany in one year, 1964, —122 billion dollars to 100 billion. About 90,000 Americans were millionaires, with a growth of 5000 each year. The value of New York Stock Exchange investments had grown from 46 billion dollars to 411 billion since the Second World War, held by some twenty million Americans, so that some

people said a "people's capitalism" had occurred in the United States(Manchester 1003). Attracted by a better life and technological innovation, the great internal migration occured and made the population of urban and suburban communities reach 75 per cent of the whole country's in 1963. There were 17,000 automobile graveyards and 56.4 million TV sets. Radio and other communication systems were so efficient that nobody could avoid influence from the media. Beneficial legislation was also passed, such as bills to fight cancer, heart disease, strokes, air pollution, and water pollution. But America faced severe challenges on several fronts. Confronting international communism, it was involved in the Vietnam War, which drained its energy as well as its morale. At home, racial discrimination caused dangerous tension between the white and black. Black riots and student tumult broke out from time to time, demonstrating general contempt for authority. Disappointed at non-violent reform, militant radicalism emerged. Hostility developed nation-wide and violence continued to appall the whole country. In the fields of culture and morality, a wide-open and "anything goes" movement was under way. In the wave of a search for personal freedom, teenagers ran away to find their own lives and Hippie and Yippie communities came up. The feminist movement bloomed and it influenced housewives to resist the old morality based on sexual difference. A sexual revolution appeared and changed people's lifestyle. In pursuit of temporary pleasure,

drugs were widely used by youth. Industrial development produced heavy pollution as the twin of economic growth. Democratic life was threatened as President Kennedy and the black leader, Martin Luther King were assassinated. During the decade, no matter whether America was in the sense of change or chaos, conformity disappeared. The important characteristics of the epoch are vividly presented in Updike's Rabbit Redux.

Rabbit, now 36, ten years older than he was in Rabbit, Run, becomes a witness of this chaotic decade. His life is related to the most important social events: the black uprising, the counterculture movement, the Vietnam War, and the moon landing.

The serious problems Rabbit encounters in society are hostility and violence. Reality is a messy one, as he had been told by Mr. Spring, his father-in-law: "Things go bad. Food goes bad, people go bad, maybe a whole country goes bad"(Redux, 80). These words were supported by hostility coupled with bloodshed, with "the colored riots in York, snipers wounding innocent firemen, simple men on the street" (Redux. 57).

The unpleasant images are not Updike's artificial creations but a true record of the society. The assassination, riot and militant confrontation happened there and then.

The race issue had emerged as one of the predominant themes of the 60s. In the South, Blacks still suffered from legal and constitutional inequalities. Living not as Americans but as aliens and pariahs, Blacks were regarded as "different," that is,

"not as good as the white." Under segregation, they had to attend different schools, use different public rest rooms, and sit in the backs of buses, or stand so that white people could sit down. An invisible wall existed between the two worlds—the white one and the colored one. An informal segregation army, the Ku Klu Klan protected this wall with violence. Segregation became one of the major reasons for millions of black people to move to the North to look for their freedom.

When they entered Northern cities, Blacks became producers as well as consumers and could not be ignored:

> The black man was no longer for those white people who had the power to contribute to the American self-image merely a dim, reproachful silhouette, glimpsed in the cottonfields through the heat haze out the window of a train speeding down to Miami or New Orleans. For the industrialist, he was becoming an employee; for the adman, he was an increasingly significant consumer; for the federal bureaucrat, he might be the parent of a child at the bureaucrat's children's school. For the New York TV producer, he might be a neighbor on the subway or at the lunch counter.(Hodgson 61)

It is obvious that the blacks had become an inseparable part of the society, linking their interests with the country's. The Great Society must include prosperity for the black. Otherwise,

it would mean nothing, as Hodgson explains: "The American ideals of equality, abundance, and constitutional democracy must be extended to black people, or they could be guaranteed to no one"(Hodgson 62).

However, though there had been some laws and acts to eliminate racial discrimination, like Enforcement of the Reconstruction Acts (1867) and Voting Rights Law (1965), in reality there was another story. Even in the North, though racism did not exist in the form of legal prohibition, and in theory no one denied their equal rights, Blacks could not enjoy equality in social life as a fact. The common feeling among the white community was such a psychological one as Rabbit felt that he did not like to take the bus because there were too many black people there. Blacks were still seen as the untouchables. They were obligated to fight for their country as soldiers abroad, but returned as pariahs. Black unemployment rate was double the rate for whites. The jobs they did were mostly unskilled and threatened by the spread of automation. Between 1960 and 1966, in the cities with populations of one million or more, the percentage of non-white families living in "poverty areas" remained constant at 34 percent(Allen 23). In this situation, the black's status in America was like that of a pure colonial, with the slight difference that his position was maintained in the "home" country. In order to recover his status as a human, to integrate himself more closely into white society and share equality not only as a

theoretical right, but also as a fact and a reality, the black began to take action.

The earliest and most significant struggle was the 381-days bus boycott in Montgomery in 1956, led by Dr. Martin Luther King. It not only showed that blacks had the capacity to win their equality, but also demonstrated an important aspect of their struggle: non-violence.

The idea of non-violence was based on the recognition that racial conflict could be settled as long as blacks were integrated into the American political and economic mainstreams and assimilated into American culture. It seemed a long run solution. Nevertheless, the black's requirements for equality were challenged by the violence perpetrated by racists. For example, in Mississippi the murder of civil rights workers was still a frequent occurence. From 1965 to 1967, more than forty blacks and whites were lynched or murdered and more than fifty black churches were burned or bombed.

Under these circumstances, black militants opposed the non-violent solution, and thought that American democracy was only a sham which put on a false face while acting to cover murder, brutality and exploitation. They had no hope for the socioeconomic system of American capitalism. A black claimed:

> We have marched, we have cried, we have prayed, we have voted, we have petitioned, we have been good little boys and girls. We have gone out to Vietnam as

> doves and come back as hawks. We have done every possible thing to make white man recognize us human beings. And he refuses. (R. L. Allen 3)

According to the militants, non-violent integration was a failure since they could hardly climb up from the bottom of the economic ladder supplied by the social structure. Militants like the SNCC and the Black Panthers viewed black people as an internal colony of the United States and thought they had right to wage a violent struggle. Stokely Carmichael, a representative of radicals, declared at a meeting of Latin American revolutionaries in Cuba in 1967 that:

> Our enemy is white Western imperialist society. Our struggle is to overthrow this system which feeds itself and expands itself through the economic and cultural exploitation of nonwhite, non-western people—the THIRD WORLD. (R. L. Allen 6)

When the promoters of non-violence like Martin Luther King pursued their legal actions and wanted to win over the white liberals' support, the angry young blacks took their own road of militant radicalism. The hectic background and radical spirit of the young black are clearly shown in Rabbit Redux.

Skeeter, a black and a sixties radical, who reflects the profile of Malcolm X, holds a hostile attitude towards society and regards himself as a revolutionary. He stresses violent revenge on the unjust society and maintains extremism in dealing with

social problem, that is, he wants to break and destroy the system completely. He declares: "The system is rotten... The laws are written to protect a tiny elite"(Redux, 207). He wants to deny all existing elements of human society, including law, order, social authority, worship of God, displine and human morality. Jill, another character in the story, describes Skeeter's philosophy in a few lines of her poem, "Beatitudes of Skeeter":

> Power is bullshit.
>
> Love is bullshit.
>
> Common sense is bullshit.
>
> Confusion is God's very face.
>
> Nothing is interesting save eternal sameness.
>
> There is no salvation, 'cepting through Me.
>
> (264)

The capitalized "Me"—instead of Him—is an indication of Skeeter's anarchical intention; rather than a hope of success. He feels that he should be a completely free man and not have to control himself. His radical intentions are expressed in the slogan: "Do anything for self reason"(212). As a matter of fact, he is a nihilist rather than a revolutionary, and his characteristics are defined by Ronald Berman:

> Its aims are not limited, and its strategy is not to discipline feeling but to express it with as much moral damage as possible. It has an intense hostility to whatever public action is programmatic. Its great

> symbolic actions are the manifesto and the riot.
>
> (Berman 97)

Malcolm X, Skeeter's original model, the ideological father of the black power movement, had put forth his kernel of black nationalism in terms of self-determination. He said that black people should control the economy, politics, and social institutions of their own communities, and that, since their aims could not be achieved in the American capitalist system, another alternative was needed:

> There are 22 million African-Americans who are ready to fight for independence right here.... I don't mean any nonviolent fight, or turn-the-other-cheek fight. Those days are gone. Those days are over.
>
> (Malcolm X 49)

He claimed that there was legitimacy in violent struggle. This declaration not only indicated the contradiction between the white and black, but also the differentiation among blacks.

As history showed, there was a heated argument among blacks on whether black power needed love, and whether they should seek domination rather than equality. Martin Luther King wrote in his Where Do We Go from Here: Chaos or Community?

> ...power without love is reckless and abusive and
>
> ...love without power is sentimental and anemic. Power at its best is love implementing the demands of justice. Justice at its best is love correcting everything that

stands against love. (37)

His ideas were not accepted by the radicals, who had lost faith in the method and philosophy of nonviolence. They insisted that violence was a psychologically healthy and tactically sound method for the oppressed and, in short, the only thing that would bring about liberation. Malcolm X declared:

> Revolution is never based on begging somebody for an integrated cup of coffee. Revolutions are never fought by turning the other check. Revolutions are never based upon love-your-enemy and pray-for-those-who-spitefully-use-you. And revolutions are never waged singing "We Shall Overcome." Revolutions are based upon bloodshed. Revolutions are never compromising. Revolutions are never based upon negotiations. Revolutions are never based upon any kind of tokenism whatsoever... Revolutions overturn systems. And there is no system on this earth which has proven itself more corrupt, more criminal, than this system that in 1964 still colonizes 22 million African Americans, still enslaves 22 million Afro-Americans. (Malcolm X 50)

The militant black movement emerged because of social discrimination, but its violent struggle did not eliminate that discrimination. The struggle of hate-against-hate exacerbated psychological tensions and stirred up all of society. From 1964

to 1966, 101 major riots broke out with the result that 130 people were killed and 3623 injured, the total damage costing 715 million dollars.

Violence and hostility were endemic in the pursuit of black power. What should black power really mean? Robert Alan Kalich explained in The Negro Manifesto:

> It is a world, a dream, an unknown island that the black man will move to and soon inhabit. It is a movement, a cause, a reason for life. Black power is pride, dignity and manhood. It is the means and the end, the sum total of assertion. It is respect and leadership. It is recognition and mutual concern. It is a dialogue, not monologue, with you and me and with every other responsible citizen. Black power is integrated housing and great Negro wealth. (64)

However, radicals—like Skeeter in Rabbit, Run—related black power to violence and riots. The tit-for-tat rebellion brought meaningless death. Riots killed and violated the blacks themselves. Annihilation and violence resulted in radical nihilism. The unsuccessful struggle waged by radicals was tragic, because it lacked understanding and confidence of love among human beings.

As Rabbit sees, hostility and violence exist in society everywhere. When he goes to watch a baseball game, he finds that he is not enjoying a game of strength and nobility but a game of

madness. What he sees is distasteful, and the stadium is just a reality that "is too big for the child"(84):

> The crowd is sparse, thinning out from a cluster behind the infield to fistfuls of boys sprawling on the green seats sloped up from the outfield. Sparse, loud, hard: only the drunks, the bookies, the cripples, the senile, and the delinquents come out to the ball park on a Saturday afternoon. Their catcalls are coarse and unkind. "Ram it down his throat, Speedy!" "Kill that black bastard!" (83)

This is not watching a game, but observing life. There freedom is in doubt, madness prevails, and darkness exists. The uncontrolled madness happening in his country gives Rabbit a very sad portrait of reality. What he thinks earlier becomes an ironic critique:

> America is beyond power, it acts as in a dream, as a face of God. Wherever America is, there is freedom, and wherever America is not, madness rules with chains, darkness strangles millions. (47)

Updike's presentation reflects the historic situation and his own regret at the ruthlessness in the society. In his eyes, what has been gained in the 60s is in question.

Besides hostility, violence and militant rebellion, there was a wide scale counterculture movement. It meant all things to all people and embraced everything from new clothing and appearances to politics and ideology—including drug use, unconventional

sexual values and underground media. It was a culture, as Theodore Roszak points out,

> so radically disaffiliated from the mainstream assumptions of our society that it scarcely looks to many as a culture at all, but takes on the alarming appearance of a barbarian intrusion. (42)

In American history, what was regarded as civilization were work, progress, economic growth, saving, investment, self-denial, self-improvement, respect for law and order, the responsibility for others and the sanctity of the family. These values encouraged Americans to be hopeful about the future and pragmatic about present. But these moral standards changed in the 60s.

In this decade, the rediscovery of poverty in a highly advanced society, the increasing violence in society, the assassination of President Kennedy, and the Vietnam War unleashed a sense of frustration and disillusionment. Furthermore, the lack of satisfaction in work and family life, and the general absence of love and care in social relations, gave many Americans a sense of loss. As Jill proclaimed, in this sinister life there was not love but ego. Ego had drowned the whole world, and because of this, humanity was in decline and fighting was everywhere. Under these conditions, some people, especially, young people, looked for new solutions, which developed into a radical divergence from mainstream values and assumptions of American tradition. At this point, when they struggled for freedom as a fact, they looked for

"free" love as an expression—an anarchical, alternative lifestyle. Opposing American tradition, they created a counterculture with the belief that "the meaning of life is here and now, in this experience, in my head now"(Hodgson 313). The present-oriented ideology came in fashion. This ideology denied everything but "self." It was also an ideology of open rebellion and protest. With it people did whatever they liked to do and whatever was prohibited before. For them, nothing seemed to be scared. Individual satisfaction was far more important than the American flag and the voice of God. In this way, a new wave of bohemianism appeared, and spread in all fields of American social life in terms of freedom and love.

Updike mainly presents the aspects through the figure of Jill, a run-away girl. With a belief in unlimited action and the immediacy of salvation, Jill adopts her own lifestyle. She takes drugs, conducts sexual games and expresses ideas of maintaining universal love. Her relationship with Rabbit and Skeeter—in Rabbit's house—is based on a model of a "free community," in which there are no limitations, no heritage and no future. Her idea is one of the 60s: "Make it if you can; if you can't, die gracefully." What she is seeking is a culture aware of Self and its superiority.

Jill's drug use also reflects a historical fact. According to a survey in Northern California school districts in 1968, the percentage of drug users was very high. Almost 50%, of students

had had experience in drug taking. In the whole country, at the time, while 80 million Americans were alcohol-users, and 75 to 80 million Americans smoked cigarettes, millions of Americans were also involved in using marijuana, LSD, heroin and other drugs. Disillusioned by the Vietnam war and urban crises, people turned to chemistry as a saviour and took drugs for the purpose of escaping from reality, believing that their minds could be freed from depression in drug use. An LSD user said: "When you can sit down on a public curbstone, drop a pill in your mouth, ... you can hear the universal symphony, with God singing solo and the Holy Ghost on drums"(Manchester 1124). This kind of fantasy is an altered perception which is "typically accompanied by feelings of ego loss, godlike cosmic insight into the unity of all life, and the unmasking of society as a transparent system of games," as Shachtman quotes Gardner(125).

More social aspects can be seen from Jill's character. She is a problem teenager who runs away from home and looks for her own freedom. She becomes a streetwalker and a drug addict. Her suffering makes her feel discarded by society. She says: "I am no man's daughter, no man's wife"(172). She is a miserable wanderer. She gets consolation from drugs and feels she is herself under their influence. Her story is not isolated. The two biggest hippie parties can give a rough estimate of how many run-away teenagers there were in America.

On March 26, 1967, ten thousand boys and girls assembled in

New York Central Park's Sheep Meadow to honor love. On the same day, fifteen thousand youths in San Francisco cheered Dr. Leary's Pied Piper spiel: "Turn on the the scene; turn in to what's happening; and drop out—of high school, college, grade school ... follow me, the hard way"(Manchester 1114-15). It was immediately apparent that what they dropped out of was not only school but the whole Western intellectual traditional bourgeois-Protestant version of humanism. In their words, they came together with the intention to change the world, to 'turn it away from rampant materialism, greed, destruction of the environment, nuclear weapons and war, and from all human evils.

Jill tells the story of her unhappy past in a sentimental ballad to Rabbit. Using music to show their unhappiness and longing was a favourite pastime of American youth in the 60s. Wide spread popular music played an important role in this respect. Being conspicous and outrageous, rock music became a way to define identity of young people, which was based on the social consciousness of being abused by their fellow men and surroundings. The gigantic rock festival at Woodstock in 1969, which attracted 400,000 youths, was a symbol of generational unity against the dark side of society, insisting that their new type of culture was based on love rather than exploitation, on peace rather than violence, and on freedom rather than restraints.

Updike expresses the sex topic through Jill and Rabbit's experience, the meaning of which is beyond plot. The author's

intention can be traced from the historical background. Sex was a field where youth explored its freedom at the time. From 1964, open sex became commonplace in America and sex became the symbol of this generation's liberation. Having sexual and sensual pleasures unbound by legal commitment, became the model of freedom. Youth regarded it as a way to be natural and express unlimited love. People began to accept sexual revolution as an option, an exploration of possibilities to escape from the undesirable climates of society. In Updike's novel, it is shown as a new kingdom in which individual identity seems to be regained, and a defense against sick reality seems to be maintained.

In the 60s, though bohemianism waged a struggle against American traditional morality and decorum in lifestyle, the most vehement attack was launched against social authority, called "the technocracy" by Roszak. This point of view is evident in Skeeter and Jill's declaration and we cannot miss the connection between Updike's fiction and American history. For instance, the establishment of the Free Speech Movement(FSM) in Berkeley was a formal challenge to authority. The FSM, at the very beginning, was aware that American society was a mass society in which no deviations from the norm were tolerated, and they declared that they first as human beings, and second as students, must take their stand on every vital issue of discrimination, segregation, poverty, and unemployment. They opposed the loss of individual

identity and "diploma-ism." In a word, they did not want to be simple and mindless technicians, but independent humans. Their slogan was: "I am a human being. Do not fold, bend, spindle or mutilate"(Kendrick 194). They expressed hatred at manipulative society. With the same ideas, Rabbit and Skeeter attack society heavily, calling it "a world of hurt"(259).

As a matter of fact, according to Updike, all counterculture actions are intertwined with a licence of rebellion. With Skeeter's radicalism and Jill's bohemianism, the community of Jill, Skeeter and Rabbit is one that exercises the right of liberty and sustains nihilism. However, at the same time, they perceive a serious problem, as Rabbit says: "We all got here on a bad boat"(234). In Rabbit's view, bad luck and danger co-exist with humans, and no matter how they have tried, life is rotten. The sweet dream has turned into poison. This kind of lament and disillusionment was popular in the 60s. America seemed to be a "bad boat", with everything going wrong. The American armed forces level in Vietnam had risen to 600,000 troops but was rewarded by the deaths of 23,000. Student violence erupted in more than 20 universities, including Berkeley, Harvard and Columbia. There were other problems which threatened people's daily life, as Manchester enumerated:

> One morning you found a notice in your milk box. No more milk; the company had stopped deliveries.
>
> You had to go to the store. The postal system was a

disgrace. Everybody had his horror story about the mails. Waitresses brought you somebody else's order. Cab drivers couldn't find your destination. Your evening paper wasn't delivered. The druggist filled the wrong prescription. The new washer-dryer was a lemon. Deliverymen double-parked and wouldn't move. By the end of the Johnson years it was a national joke. People displayed little signs

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(Manchester 1135)

Rabbit's personal experience reveals an important social problem of the era, a geographic and spiritual "homelessness." At first, he separates from his wife, Janice, who lives with Stavros temporarily and feels unsteady. Though Rabbit remains in his house, he loses his family centre of gravity and goes around at random. Then, the house, which bonds Rabbit, Jill and Skeeter together, is burned.

Rabbit's new house should be a shelter for homeless people, but it fails in this capacity. The questions raised by the author are who causes the problem of homelessness and what should be done

to resolve the problem. Updike exposes the fact that the public is apathetic to the problem of homelessness. His ironic depiction severely reproaches convention, with the witty symbol of fire. In Greek mythology, fire is Hephaestus's weapon to protect children. In this story, Jill, a teenager, is burned to death. Social convention acts as a destroyer that extinguishes all protests and rebellions. In this way, Updike uses the symbol of fire to denounce convention as a killer of humanity.

In Rabbit Redux, to some extent, "home" becomes an image which symbolizes a refugee camp and a grave for the victim of traditional morality. A "home" represents the difficult location in the dangerous environment for Rabbit and his peers. Rabbit's own home is a broken one in which ther is no unity, and the community of Rabbit, Jill and Skeeter is an experimental home which is vehemently rejected and finally destroyed by convention. In any mode of home, humans cannot find a real ideal shelter. The human becomes a detached particle, which turns into a cancer cell since it cannot becomes a healthy one in the social body. As a result, the image of home appears not as a happy and desirable shelter but an equivalence of a "tomb," in which people desperately take counterculture actions as rebellions, which are doomed to fail.

Another major event Rabbit witnesses is the Vietnam War, a symbol of the deeper ills of American society. Like most Americans, he is trapped in the dilemma of whether to approve it

or oppose it at the very beginning.

It was during Lyndon Johnson's administration that the Vietnam War escalated. According to Johnson's advisers, the aim in entering the Vietnam War directly was to protect America's reputation. They thought that if America lost Vietnam, it would lose other nations' confidence in the United States as the world leader. This opinion is reflected in Rabbit's thought: "You have to fight a war now and then to show you're willing, and it doesn't much matter where it is"(47-8). It seemed that the war was a necessary demonstration of American ability to have its will in the world in the name of Great Power.

The biggest mistake made by Americans like Rabbit was their trust in "the men in uniform." As a result,

> the civilians were trying harder to show the military that they understood the military point of view than the military were trying to show the civilians that they understood theirs. (Hodgson 242)

The civilians' innocence made themselves think that "let its military power be used as it has always been used in war, to defeat the enemy as swiftly as possible"(Hodgson 243). At the time, the civilians' model, as Hodgson points out,

> was not war but the imposition of the will of the United States on people who might frustrate and humiliate the United States in the sense that a victim can humiliate a torturer by refusing to obey

> his will but could in no circumstances hurt the United States. (Hodgson 243)

It seemed that, for Americans, whether to approve the war was a criteron of whether they were patriotic or not.

As a matter of fact, their patriotism was wasted in the battle for an illusory greatness. America lost a great deal of money and personnel, and damaged its international reputation as well. Worst, the war changed the thinking of the majority, further fragmented American ideological consensus, and brought America a sever blow to its sense of justice and confidence.

At the time America tried to contain communism in Indochina, it was not so interested in abolishing poverty and achieving equality at home. As a result, it was under fire from the twin crises in Southeast Asia and in its own black ghettoes. The military draft and the crisis of racial issues had indeed led millions of Americans to re-examine the moral basis of American power(Hodgson 276). It is not surprising that later there were more and more people who cried out in opposition to the war. Blacks, especially, combined the anti-war struggle with the struggle for equality in their all-round battle against the established forces of social authority. In this respect, the Vietnam War was the pinnacle of a decade of tumultuous upheavals. Seeing this undesirable situation, Americans began to wonder about their patriotism, which was based on an idea that, as Rabbit says: "I just can't stand to hear the U. S. knocked."

American problems dishearten Rabbit, and even the country's successes can not save him from disillusionment. The moon landing, which, instead of inspiring him, sets off darkness in his heart.

In the early 60s, the Soviet Union had shown America its superiority in space exploration. They were first in orbit, the first to hit the moon and then to photograph it. Their satellite flew around Venus and sent back information of the planet. In the manned space flight, Russians were displaying their confidence. They had already put dogs into orbit and their first vehicle to put a man up was under design. For Americans, what Russians had achieved represented more than problems of national security and scientific knowledge. It was a matter of losing face in terms of astropolitics. A few years later, America finally got its space exploration under way and successfully landed on the moon. It could be a positive opportunity to display American confidence and capacity, as Armstrong, the astronaut, said when he landed on the moom: "That's one small step for a man, one giant leap for mankind." However, in Rabbit's eyes, the moon landing does not achieve such kind of effect. After viewing the enthusiastic landing on TV, he feels that he is still left on earth—in the messy reality.

With the image of "moon," Rabbit encounters a new perplexity. When he watches TV, seeing the astronauts landing on the moon, he suddenly feels that he is left on the earth and he gets a dark

picture of a "clumsy silhouette." It seems to him that there are some thoughts of trouble in his skull. However, he is not sure what it is. So, he abruptly admits: "As a human being I'm about C minus," and "I know it's happened, but I don't feel anything yet"(100). The trouble Rabbit is uncertain of is the "long empty box in the blackness of Penn Villas"(99). While the astronauts successfully landed on the moon, nobody could reach the blackness in Americans' hearts. In this respect, Updike's epigraph is significant. The epigraph is a few lines of conversation between the Russian astronauts. It indicates the background of a space age in which there are adventures, technological prowess and competition. To vie with the Soviet seems important for the United States's interest in being a leader of the West. However, what happens at home seems more crucial. Updike's whole story justifies Joseph Heller's assertion in his Catch 22 that the true enemy is on our own side. It means that danger, imprisonment and death result from American society itself, not from external forces. Rabbit's witness of the moon landing does not result in a jubilation but a gloom.

In Rabbit Redux, vivid metaphors and suggestive symbols are everywhere. For Rabbit, the dark and empty environment is dominant. The sky is colorless; the parking lot appears empty; the buildings are torn down and darkness presses there. This is not only a natural scene but also an implication of social situation. America is symbolized as an old city. The most

obvious objects are only "the row houses," which stand there "with speckled bastard sidings and the hopeful small porches"(3). The city, attempting to revive its dying downtown, has torn away blocks of buildings to create parking lots, which does not renew the streets but leaves "a desolate openness, weedy and rubbled." At the time, even "the sky is cloudless yet colorless, hovering blanched humidity." It is not a pleasant and comfortable place in which to live, because "Pennsylvania summers, [are] good for nothing but to make green things grow." It is clear that the green things are only weeds.

Reality is also like a bar—for example, the Phoenix. The illuminating description of the bar by Updike evokes two impressions of the country. The outside of the bar is "a girl nude but for cowboy boots in neo"(4). On the inside are dim walls, with "cactuses painted on"(4). Cowboy boots, which symbolize a romantic and endless quest to conquer, standing as well for American guts and courage in history, serve merely as phosphorescent decoration for the bar. The effect of their fluorescent appearance only sets off the inner dimness. In essence, the Phoenix is a metaphor for America in the 60s—a country, though with a slick, powerful surface, is deteriorating from within.

Updike's implications are also shown in his descriptions of people living there. Living in the old small town, "man don't even tan; filmed by sweat, they turn yellow." The words "tan,"

"sweat" and "yellow" are associated with the thematic meaning, and imply that people don't live a happy life and are suffering here. They have less hope, since the wisps of hope are difficult to perceive and the end of people's exploration can be nothing but a "cruel breadth of the light," as Rabbit sees. These presentations reflect Americans inner worlds: dissatisfaction, weariness, incapacity and even lethargy to "let a certain type of things to go unsaid"(5).

When the country resembles a decaying small town, the individual's position in society is seen as pitiful. Rabbit loses his wife, job and house, one after another. The worst thing is that he always feels isolated. Rabbit is associated with isolated objects such as "a TV aerial, an aluminum clothes tree, a basketball hoop on a far garage." These objects have conveyable meanings to set off Rabbit's identity. The TV aerial accepts signals from outside without the least choice of refusal; the basketball hoop is a relic of his youth, but now he hardly touches it; the garage is a home of the discarded. They are all negative symbols of Rabbit's present life which embraces isolation and loneliness. Finally, he has to confess that "a weight crushes him"(26).

Rabbit's feeling of isolation in society makes him retreat into himself. He does this by burying himself in the workshop. In his relationship with the machine, Rabbit experiences his joy of self respect. In the big room of Verity Press, there is no

"shadow." With this presentation, Updike reveals the essence of modern Americans who are disoriented, perplexed, as well as distracted. They have found that they can only be identified with the charisma of individuals and have lost faith in traditional institutions; they have come to realize that "participation in any facet of modern society was meaningless"(Shachtman 145).

The disorientation and perplexity of Americans are also shown in Rabbit's last retreat. Rabbit is standing at the crossroads after the house is burned down; Jill has died and Skeeter has left. Idealism and radicalism vanish. Rabbit cannot return to pure innocence like that of his son and has no desire to go on the road with Skeeter. He hesitates and comes back "home" again, and eventually reconciles with Janice. They take a vacation and stay at a motel. The story seems to conclude with a happy ending. However, the underlying theme that the author stresses finally comes to the surface. This needs our further discussion.

Updike suggests that when we read a novel we should "go easy on plot summary, and do not give away the ending"(Picked Up, xvii). He means that the ending of a story is important. There is no doubt that we should pay more attention to the ending of Rabbit Redux. The motel at which Rabbit stays in with his wife is named Safe Heaven Motel. The ironic name indicates the end of Rabbit's another unsuccessful attempt. The only thing he can do now is to sleep. The last words of the story—"He. She. Sleep. O. K.?"—are implicated. "He"—Rabbit, a little man comes back;

"She"--Janice, a housewife who has embarked on her own failed journey for liberation, also comes back. They have no more will and strength to struggle and rebel, and have to settle. For people like Rabbit and Janice, it seems that the only way out and to find a happy ending are to sleep quietly—to settle in reality docilely—without the least complaint or rebellion. In this sense, "O. K.?" can be a question asked by Rabbit and his wife with a resentment to convention. However, I also like to see the second meaning—"O. K.?" can be a question asked by the author to urge readers to think if it is a real happy ending of Americans after they give up their rebellious attempts.

As discussed, Updike adopts a sociological approach in writing, and his fiction places stresse on the philosophical perspective toward human life and conditions. In the first place, Updike justifies the feeling of dissatisfaction towards society. In the second place, he doubts the posciblity of a way out. Still more, he regards violent struggle and counterculture only as reasonable ways to protest but not as ways to save both people and society. On the whole, he draws a pessimistic conclusion about his protagonists against an equally pessimistic interpretation of the events that occured, and of forces that went at work in America in the 1960s. He finds human experience to be fragmented, irritating, apparently unredeemable because of being in a bad boat. Updike's intention is not to reveal an apocalyptic terminus but to diagnose the human situation he observes.

(IV) ON RABBIT IS RICH

In 1981, Updike published Rabbit Is Rich, the third book in the series.

As the title suggests, Rabbit is a rich man now and has a solid economic base. His richness is constituted by financial assets and is built in the shadow of a national economic recession, and the accumulation of his assets corresponds to a simultaneous spiritual erosion and decline. Presenting Rabbit's changed life in the 70s, Updike exposes basic characteristics of American society of the time—decline and doom.

In the 70s, America suffered severe defeats in the military and economic fields, and its glory faded further. The social deterioration was obvious.

America's involvement in the Vietnam War had exhausted the country not only by the fighting itself but also by the internal disputes about it all over the country. In 1973, the war ended with a result that 46,000 U.S. soldiers died; 300,000 were wounded; and expenditures totaled nearly 110 billion dollars. Moreover, Americans came back home with a spiritual malaise. As James Reston wrote, the war had resulted in:

> a decline in respect not only for the civil authority of government but also for the moral authority of the schools, the universities, the press, the church,

> and even the family. Something has happened to American life —Something not yet understood or agreed upon, something that is different, important, and probably enduring. (Manchester 1296)

After being involved in a long war, Americans became disheartened. Even Richard Nixon, the President of the United States, confessed that:

> the time has passed when America will make every other nation's conflicts our own, or presume to tell the people of other nations how to manage their own affairs. (Manchester 1298)

To pour fuel onto the fire of the American dilemma, in the Middle East, most Arab countries imposed an oil embargo against major Western countries, which they regarded as supporters of Israel, and this action provoked a severe worldwide oil crisis that badly hurt the American economy. The oil shortages distressed the large oil companies and some large oil consumers. There were layoffs in oil-related industries. Because of the increase in fuel prices, the prices of food, air travel and heating increased. Long lines at the service stations and "Oil Sold" signs were omnipresent. The U.S GNP for the first quarter of 1974 showed a severe decline of 7% over the previous year. Americans had a cold winter. The economy, which was the foundation of American strength, was shaking.

There was also something wrong in American political life.

The burglary and bugging of the Democratic national headquarters, the events of Watergate and its subsequent cover-ups mishandled by the Nixon Administration, became the most serious political scandals in American history, and damaged the image of American democracy. With feelings of shock, fear and anger people began to doubt the reliability of social authority. It seemed that the country had become lawless in a struggle for the rule of law. There appeared a "widening gap between national political ideals and social aspirations on the one hand and political and social realities on the other." (Schrag 17)

The hostage crisis in Iran in 1979 was another nightmare for Americans. The event itself and the failed rescue attempt designed by President Carter's Administration exposed the fragility of American power. The question—"What's wrong?"—haunted Americans more than ever. One thing was clear: America was no longer capable of dealing with its own problems, let alone solving the affairs of others. America became a trapped giant, who desperately fought for survival, but had nowhere to go. An allegorical story, told by Philip Slater in his Pursuit of Loneliness, reveals the situation faced by the American giant: America created its new problems by eliminating the old problems—it was a vicious circle. Pointing out the same aspect, Peter Schrag wrote:

> There seemed, moreover, to be a new (or, at least, newly visible) demonic streak in the nation's soul, a

> vein of madness, that might be explained but never understood. The best and most hopeful among us were being killed with an apparent inevitability that could easily be regarded as an expression of some buried impulse in the national will. ...there was something in us that seemed no longer able to tolerate the demands of grandeur and spirit. (Schrag 12)

The defeat in the international conflict had hurt Americans' confidence. Turning from an aggresive and bullish attitude, they wanted to pay more attention to their own affairs. In readjusting their perspective of the world, not only President Nixon but also all people of the country recalled Kennedy's most memorable lines then: "Let each of us ask, not just what will government do for us, but what I can do for myself." Having been failed by their country so often, Americans expressed their own understanding of Kennedy's words. They adopted a passive transformation and turned inward to seek "comfort in insularity and renewal in isolation" (Manchester 1297). Activities and goals like home ownership, possession of consumer durables, vacation and travel, health and play, and investment and saving dominated their lives. It is this aspect that Updike exposes in the novel, using Rabbit as a vehicle.

The "aging" was an undeniable phenomenon of the nation then. After a series of frustrations, exhausted in spirit, people wanted to become quiet, letting times pass by with the sour memories, and

silently turned into the greed for assets.

With close reference to the historic background, Updike explores a major theme: Energy exhaustion—the nation running out of gas and Rabbit running out of spiritual energy. Furthermore, with the symbolic proposition that American mobility is paralysed, and with the subtle presentation of individual lethargy, Updike reveals that the giant's falling co-exists with man's banality.

To justify his assertion that reality is a bad boat or a wrecked car, Updike loses no time to let Rabbit witness a messy world at the very beginning of the novel:

> The fucking world is running out of gas. ... the people out there are geting frantic, they know the great American ride is ending. .... People are getting wild, their dollars are going rotten, they shell out like there's no tomorrow. (Rabbit Is Rich 3)

This is a picture of a mess which is triggered by the deepening crises, both of energy and spirit. It reminds us of a hard time and conveys a sense of moral and spiritual loss.

Because of the energy crisis, the winter of 1973 loomed as a grim season. The speed limit had been reduced from 60 m.p.h to 50 m.p.h. The price of gas jumped up 2c per gal overnight. Office heating was set at 68 degrees. Schools were closed for a month. Shortages of oil-related products ranged from phonograph records to penicillin. Leisure activities, from boating trips to night football games, were often cancelled. Gasoline-short service

stations were temporarily shut down. The bedroom became a chilly place to have bad dreams. In the saddest way, an eight-year-old Miami boy told what he had to do in order to save energy: "I walk to school every day. I don't watch much television. And I try not to take a bath." Traveling would turn into a nightmare because of gasless Sundays. The wholesale price index in November of 1973 rose at an annual rate of 21.6%, led by a 19.3% jump in fuel prices. Limousines and heavy sedans were taken away from every federal official, except President Nixon and Vice President Ford. Big layoffs in auto, electronics, rubber and aluminum industries were undergone. A chill had invaded the temples of commerce. All outdoor advertising and store-window lights blinked off earlier, and office-building and parking-lot lights went dark before midnight. Many companies reduced lights, lowered temperatures, ensured that doors and windows stayed shut, and left unused space unheated.

Meanwhile, everyone was talking about the worst economic crisis to face the nation since the Depression. Magazines were instructing people how to save energy, how to "keep auto tires properly inflated to reduce friction," and how to "resist the lure of high horsepower." Americans were urged to buy smaller rather big electrical appliances. Some even went so far to advise people to replace color TV sets with black and white ones. In promoting a leaner standard of living, Time gave away "A Crib Sheet for Conscientious Savers," which included a recommendation for using

twinkle lights on Christmas trees.

In order to deal with the energy crisis, Nixon had changed his chief energy advisers three times in one year. The Administration was preparing some methods to control oil consumption, such as issuing coupons to drivers, and a tax-plus-rationing system to disencourage oil consumption. People were crying out that it was a time for a new frugality.

Though the energy crisis did not last very long and did not result in a complete collapse of the American economic system, it was a nightmare. Its negative effects were predominantly psychological rather than financial. When Americans began to doubt the reliability of their economic power, they also began to doubt the American dream on which their hopes were built, and felt frustrated.

Updike is sensitive to this phenomenon and reveals it through his protagonist's testimony. Rabbit confesses: "If you can't get your foot on even the bottom rung of a society geared like this, people are going to lose faith in the system"(25). In a bleak time, people live selfishly. They adopt the slogan: "I'll get mine, and screw you"(8). Charlie's story supports this view:

> ...some station owner and his wife somewhere in the middle of the state were pumping gas for a line and one of the cars slips its clutch and crushes the wife against the car next in line, broke her hip I think I read, and while the husband was holding her and begging

> for help the people in the cars instead of giving him any help took over the pumps and gave themselves free gas... (7)

The story, based on fact, shows that America not only suffers a decline of economic power, and also a decline of people's moral values.

As the country is on its tight-rope, as so seen in the novel, Rabbit himself is uncontrollably sliding in physical energy and spiritual energy, obviously aging with his country. He even finds it hard to turn his head:

> ...at his age turning his head is not so easy and indeed some days he wakes with pains all through the neck and shoulders from no more cause than his dead weight on the bed all night.(19).

Worse than that, Rabbit has no more intention nor will to run from inert life and only likes to sit down without any motion. No matter what you call it, "being puritanical or practical"(41), Rabbit is used to living without the least rebellion now.

Ten years older than he is in Redux, Rabbit's physical fattening, with "six three and around two ten by now," and "a forty-two waist"(6), shows that he is "a big bland good guy"(6). Work as senior sales representative is comfortable. He can spend lots of time playing golf, swimming, talking with women and thinking of money. "Let 'em by" has become his motto and his life has been settled.

Undoubtedly, Rabbit becomes a person without aspiration, who is buried in the business routine:

> ... showing up at the showroom day after day, riding herd on the paperwork and the payroll, swinging in his clean suit in and out of Service and Parts where the men work filmed with oil and look up white-eyed from the built-in engines as in a kind of underworld while he makes contact with the public, the community, the star and spearpoint of all these two dozen employees and hundred thousand square feet of working space, which seem a wide shadow behind him as he stands there up front. (4)

The "shadow" is a symbol of Rabbit's spiritual life, his inner world. Though he becomes a rich partner of Spring Motors and sometimes feels "as though he owns it all"(4), life tastes to him like a "bitter lemon"(46). He feels that the only advantage of his relationship with his wife is that he gets her inheritance. He is being challenged by Nelson's disobedience. His own aging is perceptible. On the one hand, he has turned into someone who lives "in grey flannel suits," has tasted the fast progress in business life and has sensed "no great cause, no titanic struggle between good and evil, nothing but a scramble for the buck"(Wilson 1976, 11). On the other hand, he is tortured by an inner struggle, in which he "dodges among more blanks than there used to

be"(Rich 13). The alleged happiness and wealth make him more paradoxical than ever before. When he indulges himself in his material life, he senses life as a misery without alternation and feels that "life is a big TV, full of ghosts"(161), and "time seeps up through the blades of grass like a colorless poison"(178). The recognition of ghosts in life is a feeling of being threatened. It is a kind of fear, a fear of aging in the routine of dull life, which Lasch regards as characteristics of modern Americans:

> Men and women begin to fear growing old before they even arrive at middle age. The so-called midlife crisis presents itself as a realization that old age looms just around the corner. Americans experience the fortieth birthday as the beginning of the end. Even the prime of life thus comes to be overshowed by the fear of what lies ahead. (Lasch 1978, 210)

In this sense, Rabbit feels that nothing can be done to overcome his inner misery but to be lethargic, realizing his life in such a way:

> Life. Too much of it, and not enough. The fear that it will end some days, and the fear that tomorrow will be the same as yesterday.(Rich 354)

Sensing that youth has gone with its energy, aspiration and heroic past, and that now he is standing by the brink of loss, Rabbit is tasting the bitterness of modern life. He is trapped in

a life without an ultmate meaning. In his heart, the pessimistic mood prevails.

The pessimistic view of life leads Rabbit to a perception of permanent nothingness. He senses that his existence is somehow threatened, and that "the great shining shoulder of the ocean could shrug and immerse and erase all traces of men"(389). For him, more or less, the world is an empty hole, in which nothing is magnificent and freedom is "a radiant wind," formless and elusive. For him, there is no vitality in life but meaningless passage of time, a routine, which leads to the ultimate destination— death.

While he is getting richer and richer, Rabbit thinks of death more and more. Day by day, he thinks of "the dead he has known, the groaningly many"(47), and laments that our lives fade behind us before we die"(47). He is conscious of the end of his own life all the time. He senses that death is at hand since "the earth is hollow, the dead roam through caverns beneath its thin green skin"(177). He feels so incapable and unsafe in the universe. He finds that death of the beetle is an omen of his own:

> He spots a Japanese beetle on a beam plant leaf
> and with a snap of his fingernail— big fingernails,
> with conspicuous cuticle moons — snaps the irridescent
> creature off. Die. (48)

Rabbit's realization accords with Hodgson's assertion that the great events happening in the recent decades have torn the

American consensus to shreds and there appears a permanent change in the way Americans see the future of their society, so that

> in individual lives, there comes a stage when a person has to recognize that death is indeed an undeniable fact, and that not everything is possible. (Hodgson 498)

It is because Rabbit has no more confidence in America's future that he inevitably feels the approach of death. As a result, he becomes the kind of person whom he used to hate—to be "smug and satisfied" and "gutless"(317). Rabbit has changed into a person, who, as Lasch says, hungers

> not for personal salvation, let alone for the restoration of an earlier golden age, but for the feeling, the momentary illusion, of personal well-being, health, and psychic security. (Lasch 1978, 7)

Obviously, in Updike's terminology, death is a spiritual death, a confession of the inadequacy of modern life. As for this argument, Lasch's words provide useful footnotes to Updike's view: "...the fear of death takes on new intensity in a society that has deprived itself of religion and shows little interest in posterity"(Lasch 1978, 209).

When Updike delineates Rabbit's spiritual death, his veiwpoint conforms to other American critics'. A. Charles Reich has also provided a good analysis of spiritual death. "America is dealing death, not only to people in other lands, but to its own

people." Reich begins his The Greening of America with the assertion and continues to reveal a discouraging picture of America:

> an individual is systematically stripped of his imagination, his creativity, his heritage, his dreams, and his personal uniqueness, in order to style him into a productive unit for a mass, technological society. (Reich 10)

This assertion has been justified by Updike's revelation in the novel. American confidence has fallen to a low ebb with the sure memory of the defeat in the Vietnam War, the chaotic situation in the cities and disheartening economic stagnation at the time. People feel hopeless and sense a crisis of confidence themselves. The crisis of confidence is more harmful for Americans than an energy crisis or economic crisis. Since they have no capacity nor will any more, as Lasch sees, Americans begin to live in a way of life with a worship of:

> the culture of competitive individualism, which in its decadence has carried the logic of individualism to the extreme of a war of all against all, the pursuit of happiness to the dead end of a narcissistic preoccupation with the self. (Lasch 1978, xv)

It is the aspect of "the pursuit of happiness to the dead end of a narcissistic preoccupation with the self" that Rabbit's character is composed. Rabbit, after making his unsuccessful

attempts to look for his own religion, degrades into a philistine. He no longer seeks for spiritual value, and his major wish now is to be rich while letting everything pass by naturally. He is holding a new pattern of life that is delineated by Lasch as psychic self-improvement:

> getting in touch with their feelings, eating health foods, taking lessons in ballet or belly-dancing, immersing themselves in the wisdom of the East, jogging, learning how to "relate", overcoming the "fear of pleasure". (Lasch 1978, 4)

Now, what Rabbit wants to do is not to stand with the people like Jill and Skeeter, but to make his life for the moment in terms of secularization and materialization. Earning and spending money come to be his major activities. Skill in business is regarded by him as an essential quality. The shining gold coin becomes his cult. He lives as:

> a person without absolute or transcendental values; he cannot make a personal judgment; he must accept the premises of society (Reich 74)

Subtly, Updike writes a great deal about Rabbit's activities in pursuit of gold and implies it in two senses: the decreased American power and Rabbit's increased secularization.

American dollars were once supposed to be the most powerful money in the world. At the end of The Second World War, because of American wealth, American dollars were honored with gold as the

reserves behind the money of almost every major nation in the world. At the same time, America pledged its capacity of redeeming all available dollars with an ounce of gold for every $35. World trade was conducted with such a commitment.

To some extent, American dollars were an indication and guarantee of American power. America was strong because its dollars were strong enough to buy anything in the world. The American dream was glorious because its dollars shone. American dollars, with the most famous former presidents' images on them, were rarely refused on the earth.

However, because of expenditures in the Korean War and the Vietnam War, and the revival of European commerce, American gold reserves fell rapidly. The American dollar, lacking its gold support, fell in value too. As a result of devaluation of the dollar, the gold price was boosted to $38 an ounce in 1971 and $42 an ounce in 1973. Eventually, gold jumped to $180 an ounce in 1974 and by December 1979, the price had soared to the $500 level. In early 1980 gold reached an unbelievable price of $1,000 an ounce (Bridwell 229).

The influence of devaluation of the dollar was not limited to the economic field. It shook the world's confidence in the American power. Even Americans took a detour to save themselves and wanted gold more than the notes. In rescuing himself economically, every one took any efforts to hold precious metals instead. At the same time, the government was trying to save

itself by stealing. For example, the silver content of American coins was reduced from 90% to 40% and then eliminated entirely(Bridwell 17).

For the same reason, Rabbit is clearly aware that when inflation runs about twelve percent, it is suicide to sit in a savings account drawing a mere six per cent interest. "As the dollar sinks, gold goes up." He is willing to find the way to save himself too. Furthermore, because of being plagued by anxiety and discontents caused by daily life, Rabbit wants to bury himself into the material value of gold coins and momentary leisure to gain an asylum.

After Rabbit quits his spiritual exploration and begins to indulge in the pursuit of gold, he also changes his morality. The following paragraph shows how greedy he is now:

> Their color is redder than gold in his mind had been. "Gold," he whispers, holding up close to her[Janice's] face, paired in his palm, two coins, showing the two sides, the profile of some old Boer on one and a kind of antlope on the other. "Each of these is worth about three hundred sixty dollars," he tells her. "Don't tell your mother or Nelson or anybody." (215-16)

For him, there is nothing more important and valuable than gold. He finds satisfaction in the red Krugerrand. He even regards gold as more important than human relations. He does not

allow anybody to share his fortune, no matter who they are, his mother or son. His obvious creed is that gold is primary. A so-called solid citizen, holding the golden Krugerrand, Rabbit does not feel close to others any more. His individualism is total, and is expressed in selfish greed.

Rabbit's transition from a spiritual explorer to a pursuer of wealth is an indication of degradation, in Updike's view. The quality and value Rabbit is chasing have no spiritual property but physical and material dimensions. For example, he runs for the sake of health, makes plans to buy a house for possession, and has love affairs with other women only to test and prove his sexual capacity. He merely wants to keep himself a healthy man in the physical sense.

The more carnal, the more cynical. As for the hopeless background, Rabbit agrees with the pessimistic realization that the world is no longer a safe place(76), and sees the world in mixed colors and elements: a boycott of the 1980 Moscow Olympics, an invasion of Afghanistan, building of nuclear plane, spread of drugs, invention of artificial protein interferon, frenzied pursuit of gold(436). There are scientific breakthroughs, political conflicts, both in international and domestic domains. Nevertheless, politics never goes with people's interests. Scientific developments always come in with a negative aspect to threaten human life. No matter whether it is a possible destruction of nuclear power or a possible replacement of an

artificial protein, individuality is insignificant, and the human being seems fragile. Under such circumstances, like most people, Rabbit is puzzled, uncertain, and feels that "it is cold, a day that might bring snow, a day that feels hollow"(437).

The feeling was wide-spread in the 70s when people felt that the volcano—all the forces that could lead to their demise—could erupt at any time. American reality was in such a situation as Peter Schrag delineates: "When the language of consensus fails, cohesion and political success are forged by more devious means"(Schrag 18).

In Rabbit Is Rich, the lethargic society as well as the carnal man are the objects in the lenses of Updike's sociological binoculars. Updike does not praise the rapid development in economy but calls attention to the severe oil crisis; he does not glorify the accumulated assets in the society but exposes the emptiness in the soul.

In Updike's presentation, Rabbit lives a robot's life in which:

> man is deprived of his own being, and he becomes instead a mere role, occupation, or function. The self within him is killed, and he walks through the remainder of his days mindless and lifeless, ... (Reich 129)

The portrait of Rabbit at his prime is a picture of the middle-classes of the 70s who were getting richer and richer, at the same time they became more and more perplexed and mindless.

Rabbit's character is the model character of the times. His individuality is moulded by the social background. As Charles Horton Cooley says: "it is not something existing separately in the individual, but a group-nature or primary phase of society, a relatively simple and general condition of the social mind" (Curti 241).

What should be pointed out is that Rabbit's experience shows an important aspect of modern American reality: the priority of money. Money, as happens to Rabbit, can dominate all aspects of people's lives when they pursue false spiritual satisfaction. As for this point, Reich observes that in America "man's most basic activity was dominated by the most impersonal of masters —money" (Reich 30).

Opposing the popular idea of the time, Updike expresses his own doubts about wealth and money, and raises the questions: What can money really do? Can it buy an individual's happiness? Can the American giant succeed in his great causes—fulfilling the so-called American dream—with its dollars? His answer is negative. He does not want to see the world last long, in which there are so many people who never know what hit them and their lives are over before they wake up. Updike intends to wake people up.

As Updike implies, money is not a guarantee for happiness, and unhappiness is not only due to the material poverty. Besides material poverty there is also spiritual poverty on the earth.

The society that is eager to avoid material poverty but ignores the spiritual poverty must take its own blame.

Updike's idea is not a new one. In the history of social thought in America, Romanticism and Puritanism have maintained a very strong emphasis on a spiritual richness. However, Updike puts the question at its most urgent. According to his view, materialism and money worship may cause a shortage of spirit. Taking Rabbit as an example, life is still a "bitter lemon," even though he holds gold coins. It is clear that without spiritual richness, humans, as Reich describes them,

> knowing the possibilities of a rich and varied banquet, are forced to live in deprivation, hollowness, and despair. (Reich 189)

In the novel, Updike portrays Rabbit as a business man, and emphasizes the three points, that is, a state of exhaustion, a process of pursuing doubtful gold, and awareness of death, both physically and spiritually. This kind of arrangement reminds us of Sinclair Lewis's Babbitt.

In the 1920s, Lewis published his novel and presented a story of a little businessman who loses his identity in the desire to conform:

> He does not rule; he "joins" to be safe. He boots and boasts with his fellows, sings and cheers and prays with the throng, derides all differences, denounces all dissent— and all to climb with the

> crowd. With the supremacy of public relations, he abolishes human relations. And finally, therefore, he abolishes his own humanity. [Mark Schorer, afterword, Babbitt, by Sinclair Lewis (New York: A Signet classic) 324]

We can see that there is a similarity between Babbitt and Rabbit, which Updike hints at by the suggestive name. Updike's story about Rabbit's richness recalls Lewis's vision of the small businessmen, their empty lives and meaningless activities. Babbitt lacks appreciation of truth, beauty, excellence, joy, passion and wisdom, Rabbit is in want of them too. With some sentences from Babbitt as one of the epigraphs, Updike's writing renews Lewis's to a great extent, by showing that modern American society is still creating a person with utter emptiness in the soul.

As in the earlier novels, Updike skillfully uses rhetorical devices to support the novel's theme. The climatic images are efficiently used for this purpose. For example, it keeps raining in Rabbit Is Rich, compared with the "grey color" in Rabbit, Run and "sunlessness" in Rabbit Redux.

The rain draws Rabbit into a mysterious emptiness. When he lies awake and listens to the rain, he is "not willing to let it go"(126). The constent rain drops, the tangible nature phenomena seem to be the message from his obscure vision of God:

> Murmurously beyond their windows, yet so close they

> might be in the cloud of it, the beech accepts, leaf upon leaf, shelves and stairs of continous dripping, the rain. (125)

The dull dropping imitates the dull life, which cannot nourish the wasteland in Rabbit's heart. He is lost, feeling that "there is something I don't know"(125). The rain drops bring nothing valuble except a dull sound that is "the last proof left to him that God exists"(125). When drops turn into shadow waters on the muddy ground after penetrating empty air, they symbolize human existence. It is from the hollow sound of rain that Rabbit hears the hollowness of his own life once more.

The observation of natural rain is also a process of perceiving the danger which the outer world force exerts on humans:

> Ever since earlier childhood, his consciousness dawning by the radiators in the old half-house on Jackson Road, it has been exciting for Harry to stand near a window during a rain, his face inches from the glass and dry, where a few inches away it would be wet. (269)

The author's eloquence does not stop here. Rabbit wonders whether rain will wet all people equally, asking a meaningful question whether "it's going to rain on the Pope"(269). Being a little man, he has doubts about being equally treated in reality and feels threatened all the time.

While Updike lets Rabbit fumble in and out of gold coins and silver, he does not forget to cast a shadow of the "tomb" upon him. The little stone house which Rabbit buys has an unpleasant history and appearance:

> The house was built in that depressed but scrupulous decade when Harry was born. Suave gray limestone had been hauled from the quarries in the far north of Diamond County and dressed and fitted by men who took the time to do it right. At a later date, after the war, some owner broke through the wall facing away from the curb and built an addition of clapboards and white-blotched brick. Paint is peeling from the clapboards beneath the Anderson window of what is now Janice's kitchen. (451-52)

The house is a building in decay. It symbolizes Rabbit's personal life which is "ageing." Moreover, it is the place now for Rabbit to spend what is left of his life, and to "begin to learn about history"(453). As a matter of fact, the history he views is a process of rolling himself "into a satin-lined coffin"(375).

In the novel, as a whole, the golden coins do not nourish human spirit. As Rabbit realizes finally, the whole world is nothingness, and in seeking for assets, "everyone was a clown in costume"(390). That life is meaningless is Rabbit's nihilist

perspective. He regards every step in life as a "nail in his coffin"(467), which reveals that materialism stands together with nihilism.

With his sober view Updike shows the defector of the time. After the tumultuous decade of the sixties, Americans, wondering what was really wrong, showed no more interest in reform. Both individuals and society turned to conservative silence. Economic development became the first task of the country and to be rich was the most popular motivation of the people. Enthusiastic aspiration for spiritual richness died; the experimental solutions of the 60s receded; the energy which used to explore social progress was poured into mad pursuit of illusory fortune, which could be symbolized with a gold Krugerrand. But, as a result, people felt lost rather than happy.

Updike has woven his personal feelings into the novel. He is disappointed at what happened there and then, and realizes that America needs a renewal. In his nostalgia for the American tradition of spiritual exploration and in his hatred of inertia in reality, Updike is trying to wake people up from their dreams. Because of this, it is not surprising that Updike portrays America as a place described by Schrag as:

> a place too large and complex to comprehend,
> a place too much loved and too much hated, a place
> that people re-spelled, for the purpose of abuse...
> (Schrag 14)

(V) CONCLUSION

As presented above, we can see that the Rabbit series, a modern man's saga, is a crystallization of Updike's philosophical perspectives about American reality. It is a chronicle of small-town American life that exposes a manipulating environment and the incapacity of modern man. The fiction reveals and epitomizes an essential defect of a whole society, and the conclusion Updike reaches is startling: a spiritual malaise exists in the nation, being fed by and in turn exacerbating a host of mundane American problems.

The Rabbit series is not an isolated entity in Updike's writings. On the contrary, it interweaves thematically with the other novels he has written. It can be said that the series acts as a thread to link all the other novels into a closely-related presentation of the author's critique of modern American society. Topics treated in the Rabbit trilogy—death, man-worship, free will, exhaustion, flight—are explored as well as in Updike's other novels. In the trilogy, Updike adopts a technique of synecdoche, that is, he employs Rabbit as a representative figure to stand for a large process of spiritual decline and confusion, which, in his view, is the major defect of the time. In other words, the Rabbit series serves as a synthetic presentation while the other novels act as analytic expositions; they reveal the

American modern epoch in terms of its people's unhappiness, hopeless exploration and inevitable despair.

In Updike's latest works, we do not see him retreating in the least from his basic ideas on modern America. He maintains a position similar to Bech's: "He writes as if he hates it"(Back, 173). When Updike feels uneasy with reality, his uneasiness finds outlet in his works.

Updike's recent works, Bech Is Back and The Witches of Eastwick, continue to probe the depths of people's souls, only with more cynicism than before, ironically interweaving romance with spiritual turmoil.

Henry Bech, a writer in Bech Is Back, seems to be partially a self-portrait of the author; he displays a cynical awareness of modern life. Bech perceives his life as "a matter of burrows"(Back, 8), and as a matter of mechanical routine, in which he has to "wake, eat, swim, sun, sign, eat, sun, sign, drink, eat, dance, sleep"(18). Instead of being happy, he finds that "the space around him, the very air, felt tense, like held breath"(70). What he is doing is "as if ironically, to live, to cast shuddering shadows toward the center of his life, where that thing called his reputation cowered"(Back, 3). With doubt about conventional man-worship, Bech asks the same question that Rabbit asks: "Who is this God? If he's so good, why does he permit all the pain in the world?"(70) Bech's intention to inquire into human pain is also the author's.

In The Witches of Eastwick, Updike, with his brilliant irony and parody, creates three women with bizarre powers: Alexandra Spofford, a sculptress, can create thunderstorms; Jane Smart, a cellist, can fly; Sukie Rougemont, the local gossip columnist, can turn milk into cream. Updike does not portray them in a humorous light, but relates them to American reality. He is revealing an impression: aberrant humanity is produced by an inhumane environment. As Alexandra senses, there is an endless turmoil in her soul— "pulsing, bleeding, adapting to the cold, to the ultraviolet rays, to the bloating, weakening sun" (Witches, 14-15), which will turn into a thunderstorm.

Updike presents unhappy, perplexed and lethargic people against the backdrop of a specific and concrete historical period. He is probing an American society in which God's mercy is out of reach, social will and force are irresistable, individual will limited, humanity devoured by materialism. It is a society in which people make different choices; some choose violence, and others choose passivity, lethargy, or resignation. In any case, for all, death hovers.

When Updike exposes social defects in terms of the spiritual malaise of the nation, he is sending out a warning. By so doing, he writes out of and continues the tradition of the American jeremiad, which Sacvan Bercovitch delineates as

> a ritual designed to join social criticism to spiritual renewal, public to private identity, the shifting

> signs of the times' to certain traditional metaphors, themes and symbols. (Bercovitch, xi)

Presenting his work as a jeremiad, Updike joins those writers whose exhortations and warnings form a lasting legacy of Puritan tradition, a tradition that insists on spiritual values and fights against all forms of slavery, whether it be enslavement by man or enslavement through materialism.

Updike is disappointed at the current situation in reality, but he does not give up; he continues to perform his duty as a social historian. In order to expose the cancers affecting society, and to heal them, he writes. In criticising the "Americanism" which emphasizes materialism, and discourages spiritual exploration, Updike actually upholds the real American values, which are related to the ideas of independence, freedom and wealth—a wealth that enriches the spirit rather than diminishes it. He does as Bercovitch says of the authors of the jeremiad: "... the Puritan's cries of declension and doom were part of a strategy designed to revitalize the errand"(Bercovitch xiv). To a great extent, the errand for Updike is to assail undesirable reality.

Fully aware of his duty, Updike says that what he is interested in is "a fervent relation with the world." He claims: "At all times, an old world is collapsing and a new world arising; we have better eyes for the collapse than the rise, for the old one is the world we know"(Hugging, xix). It is for this reason

that Updike wields his sociological surgical instrument in fictional operations that reveal defects of reality.

Undoubtedly, Updike's work does not stand as mere entertainment, but as incisive portraiture that exerts a moral call to action. What Updike seeks is nothing less than a transformation resulting in spiritual richness. Though it is hard to say that his jeremiad writing is the best way to reform reality, it is far better than a dose of soporific. Waking up from somnolence to face the undesirable is painful, but it is the only way to lead a real life. Moreover, it is well known that no good prescription can be given before a correct diagnosis is made. The value of Updike's fiction can be seen in this context. He has not proposed a panacea capable of killing all social cancers, but has made a diagnosis of society. He has found certain social cancers developing in his nation. His diagnosis is the first necessary step toward healing.

Note(s):

(1) Existentialism has been defined as "a type of philosophizing which endeavors to analyse the basic structures of human existence and to call individuals to an awareness of their existence in its essential freedom"(Molina 2). Existentialism has rapidly spread since the 19th century.

More than one hundred years ago, the Danish philosopher Soren Kierkegaard put forth his theory about human existence. According

to his thought, the essence of man was subjectivity, and the essence of subjectivity was freedom and the responsibility that attached to freedom. To see freedom not guaranteed caused human anxiety. Kierkegaard also wrote that only individual existence that could prove the truth, whether in terms of God or Christianity. He maintained that having energy was important for human to go for his freedom. He assumed that human existence should precede essence and that all meaning in the world depended on human action.

After the Second World War, the French writer Jean-Paul Sartre delineated his analysis of the relation between human reality and action. He made a detailed analysis of cause, motive and end, and wrote that "motive is analogous to a cause in that it too is correlated with the basic project toward a specified end" (Molina 97). Most importantly, Satre justified human freedom and maintained that man was meant to be free.

Needless to say, it is essential for existentialism to "codify the irrational aspect of man's nature, to objectify non-being or nothingness and see it as a universal source of fear to distrust concepts and to emphasize experiential concreteness"(Holman 1972, 213). The departure point of existentialism is the immediate sense of awareness that man has of his situation and the ultimate result is that man turns inward and finds himself fragmented and virtually destroyed by the exigencies of life. The essential aspect of Existentialism is the idea of

conflict between the impulsive man himself and his restricting environment. Frederick R. Karl and Leo Hamalian point out in their The Existential Imagination that the conflicts can be depicted as:

> the alienation of man from an absurd world and his estrangement from normal society, his recognition of the world as meaningless or negative, his consequent burden of soul-scarring anxieties, bringing with it his need to distinguish between his authentic and nonauthentic self, his obsessive desire to confront his imminent death on one hand and his consuming passion to live on the other....(9)

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