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The protagonists of John Updike

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THE PROTAGONISTS OF JOHN UPDIKE

BY

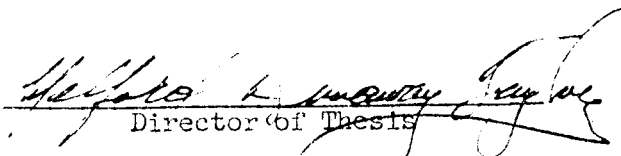
CHARLES MONROE COCK

A THESIS
SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE FACULTY
OF THE UNIVERSITY OF RICHMOND
IN CANDIDACY
FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF ARTS IN ENGLISH

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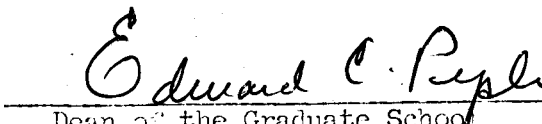

Dean of the Graduate School

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
PREFACE	1
KEY TO ABBREVIATIONS.	iii
I. CATEGORIES	1
A. INITIATES	8
B. SEEKERS.	14
C. TEACHERS	43
II. THE BLUNDERING PROTAGONISTS	72
III. THE PROTAGONIST AS MODERN MAN.	105
BIBLIOGRAPHY	130
VITA.	134

PREFACE

One of the most difficult tasks confronting a graduate student is selecting a topic for a thesis. For those of us in the English graduate program, there are many subjects to choose, but numerous subjects have been overworked. For myself, I wanted a chance to show some originality in a thesis. I went to Dr. W.D. Taylor about a year ago and told him that I wanted to choose an author that was American and preferably still living. He suggested that I look into the works of John Updike.

I had read a few of Updike's works prior to this and had been impressed with his capability to capture the same things that I saw in life. On further examination I discovered that Updike is three years older than I and that both of us had lived in close proximity in Pennsylvania. This brought me further enjoyment from his works and I was transposed back to the happy days of childhood again.

Maybe it's because both of us are in the over thirty crowd that I agree with what he has to say. Some people have told me that they think Updike is pointless and has nothing to say. But as will be seen in this paper Updike has a message for everyone, especially those of today's world. He is the best of the modern writers in America today.

My purpose in this paper is to show that the protagonists of Updike can be categorized into groups and that these protagonists are as real for me as they are for Updike. It is because of these

protagonists that the works of Updike will live for many years to come.

Key to Abbreviations of Updike's Books

<u>BAB</u>	<u>Bech: A Book</u>
<u>C</u>	<u>Couples</u>
<u>OTF</u>	<u>Of The Farm</u>
<u>PF</u>	<u>Pigeon Feathers and Other Stories</u>
<u>RR</u>	<u>Rabbit, Run</u>
<u>SD</u>	<u>The Same Door</u>
<u>TC</u>	<u>The Centaur</u>
<u>TPF</u>	<u>The Poorhouse Fair</u>

The Protagonists of John Updike

Chapter I

Categories

In studying the protagonists of Updike's novels and short stories, one finds some differences and many similarities in their spiritual make-up and personalities. The purpose of this thesis is to show that these can be broken down into three groups: (1) Initiates, (2) Seekers, and (3) Teachers. This grouping is entirely my own and has not been used in any primary or secondary source that I have used. The basic similarity of the three groups is that all seem to be on a search for some kind of belief. This is usually, but not always a search for a spiritual faith in the Christian sense. As we shall see in The Centaur, George Caldwell is searching for a peace with death. Henry Bech in Bech: A Book, is searching for the inspiration to write a great book so that he will not be eternally forgotten.

Many of the early protagonists, especially in the short stories, are autobiographical for adolescence is Updike's favorite time of life to be treated in an autobiographical way. As John Gilman tells us, "Updike is his own chief character, or rather his sensibility is its own chief object, spreading itself among a half-dozen voices and physiognomies..."¹ This is not to say that the autobiographical trend stops

1. Richard Gilman, "Fiction: John Updike," The Confusion of Realms (New York, 1969), p. 62.

with the adolescent protagonists. We can see many examples of autobiographical material in almost all of the stories and novels. However, because he treats ordinary people doing everyday things and also avoids issuing injunctions or underlining his ideas, Updike is simultaneously palpable and elusive.

The initiates are the younger group of protagonists. The main characteristics of this group are youth, innocence, and dependence upon the mother-nest. Among these are David Kern ("Pigeon Feathers"), Allen Dow ("Flight"), Peter Caldwell (The Centaur), William Young ("Museums and Women"). There are other initiates, but these four protagonists are representative of the group. Peter Caldwell is listed under both the initiates and the seekers, but will not be discussed until later with his father in the teacher's section.

When we first meet David Kern, he is fourteen years old. Like his fellow Updike adolescents, he is trying to break away from the mother-nest. It is a loss of innocence. The controlling factor in the initiates' lives has been their mother. There is a stronger than normal son to mother relationship. Just as Linda Hoyer Updike was the dominating figure in the Updike household, so the mothers of the initiates are the dominating figures in their lives. Their lives have been extremely sheltered and they have not broken away from the mother-nest. But they are trying to "fly" even though they do not always succeed in the story. If they are successful in the future, they will join the seekers in their search. If they are unsuccessful, as William Young is, they will remain in the initiates.

In the second group, Updike shows a continual search by the protagonists for something of spiritual value. The seekers are Harry "Rabbit" Angstrom (Rabbit, Run), Peter Caldwell (The Centaur), Joey Robinson (Of The Farm), and Piet Hanema (Couples). But even in these there is a referral back to the first natural unit in their search: the family. In describing the loneliness of the seekers, Updike makes a clear distinction between the inevitable separateness of each individual who must "do his own thing" and the complexities of modern life. The seekers are the children of Man, and in their early childhood experiences within the family, they have their chance to discover interdependence on the basis of trust within this small circle. A loving home lays the foundation for that sense of place, allowing the individual to relate himself to friends, to neighbors, to fellow citizens, and to the universe itself. In other words, the seekers are like the initiates in some ways, but they have broken the bonds of the mother-nest and have lost their innocence. But this would not have been possible without the foundation of the family and home enjoyed by the initiates.

It is in the seekers that we see "there are times when Updike's women are more sophisticated than their menfolk, but their strength lies in their intuitive grasp of reality and in their keeping near to nature."² Joey Robinson's mother is a good example of this type of strong womanhood who kept near nature. She has stayed on the farm while Joey has tried in the outside world to escape the nest as represented by the farm and his mother.

As in Of The Farm, the dominating figure in the Updike family was

2. Alice and Kenneth Hamilton, "John Updike," Contemporary Writers in Christian Perspective (Grand Rapids, 1967), p. 26.

the mother. John Updike was born in Shillington, Pennsylvania on March 18, 1932. He was the only child of Wesley R. Updike and Linda Hoyer Updike. Just like George Caldwell in The Centaur, Wesley Updike was forced by the depression to seek employment in Shillington, Pennsylvania as a schoolteacher. The family lived for a while in Shillington, but later as in the case of Cassie Caldwell, the family moved to the country to the birthplace of the mother. The more sophisticated woman of Updike has returned to nature. Wesley bitterly disliked farming and had to travel some distance to school each day, just as George Caldwell did. It was Linda Updike who decided that John Updike should go to Harvard because more poets were alumni of this institution than any other college or university. She had dreams of John becoming a poet, even though John was more attracted to art at the time. Updike went to England to study art after graduation from Harvard as we see in the short story, "A Dying Cat." Updike returned to the United States and moved to a small town in New England, Ipswich, Massachusetts, much like Piet Hanema in Couples lived in Tarbox. Updike took a trip for the State Department behind the Iron Curtain in 1964 after he had written three books just like Henry Bech in Bech: A Book. Updike was elected to the Academy of Arts and Sciences just as Bech was. Even though the precise details of Updike's life are vague and sketchy, it can be clearly shown that his protagonists are moulded in his likeness.

In the quest of the seekers, the pattern of complementary differences that marks the family (masculinity and femininity, maturity and the dependence, sexual passion and social affection) relates the seeker to

the total pattern of the universe. It is suggested by Updike in his writings that the idea of progress is boring. This progress suggests that we are free to scrap the past and build according to our fancy. It must be pointed out here that once we break with the past, we have destroyed the texture of nature's balanced pattern. There is nowhere for the protagonist to go except into blankness. There are skies without stars or birds, while on the earth the generations become confused and man is reduced to a blurred image, immobilized and fearfully alone. When faced with the blankness and lack of values of the modern world, the seeker can do three things that Mr. Galloway has described for his absurd hero:

(1) He can seek an escape through sensualism; (2) he can attempt to find reconciliation with his fellows through some form of humanism; or (3) he can break from all conventional ethics and systems and actively pursue new ones. It is the last category to which the absurd hero must be limited; and since his search is a search for values his struggle is primarily religious. Any consideration of a religious system without God (or with only an irrelevant God) involves paradoxical inversions of values. Rabbit (Harry Angstrom, Rabbit, Run) does demand confirmation of a voice which calls to man and asks him to make life meaningful. Heroes like Rabbit reject formal Christianity because it is not religious enough. What they seek is not the consoling reinforcement of dogma or ritual but some transcendent inner vision of truth that will make life meaningful. Despite its secular origins there is something holy in such austere dedication to truth. Rabbit remains true to a standard of good by which he attempts to live, and the intensity of his loyalty to this standard can only be described as "religious." Everything in this world is in flux, but his intention is, in the presumed absence of God, to impose order and value on that flux.³

3. David G. Galloway, The Absurd Hero in American Fiction (Austin, 1970), p. 37.

Although Mr. Galloway has written this about Rabbit, it applies to all the seekers.

Sex and religion play an important part in the lives of the protagonists as they do in everyday life. As sex demands that we engage at one level with the ultimates of love and death, so religion poses the question of how these ultimates are to be understood at every moment of our existence. Updike's protagonists (The initiate has the nervousness about sex while the seekers seek refuge in it) have a nervousness about sex, a guilty preoccupation with the perverse, that leads to an unintentionally ludicrous scene in Rabbit, Run, and in The Centaur leads to some absurd meditations by Peter on the esthetic beauty of postures on obscene playing cards.

In the third group, the teachers, we have George Caldwell (The Centaur), Henry Bech (Bech: A Book), and John F. Hook (The Poorhouse Fair). Caldwell is not just a teacher in the classroom, but teaches his son what love really means. Bech assumes the role of teacher throughout the book as will be seen in later discussion. Hook is the pinnacle of the teachers. Caldwell and Bech both have "hang-ups," while Hook's only responsibility is to teach. Updike sees the universe in existentialist terms. It has no essence; it simply exists; it is all strange. In his first novel, The Poorhouse Fair, the belief in God is shown to be a spiritual necessity stronger than the humanitarian illusions of the welfare state. But in The Centaur, God becomes increasingly vestigial, a ceremonial idol to be invoked against the void. Although the novel's protagonist George Caldwell clings to a belief in

this vestigial God, his son does not, and both are aware of the permanent estrangement of heaven and earth, with man trapped between them. The meaning given to heaven and earth is entirely formed by man, and the feeling that this meaning is transitory gives Updike's work its most moving quality. The protagonists of Updike are caught between this heaven and earth and they feel a tragic sense of loss at the erosion of human meaning by time and cosmic indifference.

A. The Initiates

As has been said before, no matter what Updike calls his protagonist, the character is essentially John Updike. David Kern is the most characteristic of this group. When we first meet David he is a boy of fourteen in the story "Pigeon Feathers." It is interesting to note at this point that the name David was given to Updike's first son. Also David Copperfield is the best known of autobiographical novels. It is most fitting for Updike to use the name of David in this most personal of all the Olinger stories. (Olinger is the name that Updike gives to his real birthplace, Shillington.) Let us delve further into the name, David Kern. "The biblical King David is described as a man whose heart was wholly true to his God, the name David (the Hebrew means beloved) is a suitable one for a story describing a crisis in faith issuing in a renewed belief in the everlasting love of God. Kern literally means in German, 'kernel' (and therefore metaphorically 'heart of the matter'). And in suggesting kernel, the name also echoes St. Paul's words about resurrection and death, about what is sown in the earth not coming to life unless it dies (I Cor. 15: 36-38). St. Paul says that a 'bare kernel' is put in the ground and then God gives it a new body."⁴

Like the other protagonists, David Kern, as we see in this story and shall see in later stories, claims the existence of a Divine Be-

4. Alice and Kenneth Hamilton, The Elements of John Updike (Grand Rapids, 1970), p. 93.

ing, but his faith and the faith of the other protagonists of Updike is intermittent, subjective, and often capricious and the object of their belief is, in any event, rarely equatable with traditional Western concepts of divinity. As a group, Christians in Updike emerge as "a minority flock furtively gathered within the hostile enormity of a dying, sobbing empire."⁵

Reading in H. G. Well's *The Outline of History* throws David into doubts about the divinity of Christ.

He (Jesus) had been an obscure political agitator, a king of a hobo, in a minor colony of the Roman Empire. By an accident impossible to reconstruct, he (the small h^{horri-}fied David) survived his own crucifixion and presumably died a few weeks later. A religion was founded on the freakish incident. The credulous imagination of the times retrospectively assigned miracles and supernatural pretensions to Jesus; a myth grew, and then a church... It was as if a stone that for weeks and even years had been gathering weight in the web of David's nerves snapped them and plunged through the page and a hundred layers of paper underneath. These fantastic falsehoods - plainly untrue; churches stood everywhere, the entire nation was founded "under God" - did not at first frighten him: it was the fact that they had not been permitted to exist in an actual human brain. (PF, pp. 85 86)

David also has doubts about prayer. He is able to think of several instances when he thinks prayers have been answered. One instance was when he had prayed that two war effort posters he had sent away for would arrive the following day. They didn't, but they did arrive several days later. David receives a rebuke from the mail box

5. Galloway, p. 38.

slot just as if it had come from God's mouth, "I answer your prayers in My way, in My time." (PF, p. 86).

David continues in his search for a true faith by asking the Lutheran minister Rev. Dobson, "About the Resurrection of the body - are we conscious between the time when we die and the Day of Judgment?" (PF, p. 94) The minister in his "snowball" way of handling questions is angered that David will not accept his answer,

"No, I suppose not,"...

"Well, where is our soul, then, in this gap?" (David asks)

...

"David, you might think of Heaven this way; as the way the goodness Abraham Lincoln did lives after him."

"But is Lincoln conscious of it living on?"...

"Is he conscious now? I would have to say no; but I don't think it matters." (PF, pp. 94,95)

During this exchange Rev. Dobson becomes angry, which is only a "cover-up" for an unsatisfactory answer to the question. He expects David's faith to be strong enough to overlook some flaws in his theology. Even David's mother is of no help. She gives him a copy of Plato's Parable of the Cave to read as an explanation to the reason why Rev. Dobson cannot answer his question. Updike seems to be pointing out that the establishment of the church and even motherhood are dictatorial. They expect David to accept the Bible and Christianity without a reason other than faith. David's faith is restored when his mother tells him to go to the barn and shoot the pigeons that his grandmother is afraid will defecate over the furniture they have brought from Olinger with them, but will never use. David doesn't

want to kill the pigeons but does so because he doesn't want to argue with his mother. David's father has already pointed out to him, "You can't argue with a femme. Your mother's a real femme. That's why I married her, and now I'm suffering for it." (PF, p. 87) After killing several pigeons and studying the dead birds he is struck by the order and the beauty of their feathers. "...he was robed in this certainty: that the God who had lavished such craft upon these worthless birds would not destroy His whole Creation by refusing to let David live forever." (PF, p. 105) With these words, the story ends. But in symbolically slaying the doves of faith, David has returned an answer to his doubts that is less final than ominous.

In another story, "Flight" in Pigeon Feathers we see a clever image of the conflict in Updike's initiates between love for the mother and love for others. In fact most of the protagonists of Updike are the result of a mother's fierce ambition; just as John Updike's going to Harvard was a result of Linda Updike's ambition for her son. We will see that often the love of another woman is a betrayal of filial loyalty.

This is particularly true in "Flight." This time the protagonist is Allen Dow, but as I have said before, it makes very little difference for these protagonists are mostly John Updike. Now Allen is seventeen years old. Allen has fallen in love with an Olinger girl, Molly Bingaman. Lillian, his mother, calls her stupid. (This word will also appear as a mother's reference to a wife in Of The Farm.) Allen is dismayed by his mother's fury and by the general

disapproval he finds around him of his chosen love. He torments Molly and makes her cry, and at last breaks with her when he finds she comes to him too easily.

The mother's ambitions for her son can also be seen in the title, "Flight."

"There we all are, and there we'll all be forever." She (Mrs. Dow) hesitated before the word, "forever," and hesitated again before adding, "Except you, Allen. You're going to fly." (PF, p. 41)

Allen's grandfather lies upstairs on his death bed, alternately coughing and singing hymns. In his search for a way to leave the nest that his mother has made for him, Allen is shown two ways. One is through the body of another woman, although sexual intercourse does not occur. Molly offers him the chance to end his search of an escape from the other's nest. Or he can end his search in an ascension [just as Jacob's ladder ascends to heaven] to the upper levels and join his grandfather in death. Allen refuses both alternatives and says, "All right. You'll win this one, Mother; but it'll be the last one you'll win." (PF, p. 56)

William Young is an older initiate, but yet one who still belongs in this category. He is married, but is quite attached to his mother. When he married his wife, she seemed to him to be the radiance that his mother had led him to look for in museums. Yet this marriage is not the way of breaking from the nest of his mother. The marble woman of the museum leads him to believe that the ideal must be found in another woman. He finds a mistress, who at the time of discovery seems to be

his marble woman come to life. Showing the immaturity of his fellow initiates, William Young, is unable to realize that the Eros-ideal is never realized in time and space.

B. The Seekers

We get some idea of the first seeker's character when we analyze his last name, Angstom. Angstom is of course a chic word in existential circles, while Strom can hint at Rabbit's incessant running.⁶ Literally, Angst Strom means stream of fear. "Angst," says Kierkegaard, "is the lot of all men since Adam; and its only cure is faith."⁷ Otherwise it issues in despair, the course of which Kierkegaard outlines in "The Sickness Unto Death." The question which is raised by the fear of cancer is precisely whether George Caldwell has the sickness unto death. In "Pigeon Feathers" young David Kern has his first awakening to the sickness unto death, among the spiders' webs in the outhouse; his fear of spiders for once seems trivial. There is a suggestion that spiders for Updike do symbolize death. George Caldwell, speaks of his consciousness of death-bringing sickness as "a clot of poison" (TC, p. 41), "a poison snake" (TC, p. 41), and finally as "a spider in my big intestine" (TC, p. 42). He feels the spider to be more than physically caused, and to have emanated out of his students' hatred of him.

Rabbit, Run is a record of a spiritual crisis that begins when Rabbit first leaves his wife, climaxes at the death of his baby daughter and continues as the book comes to a close. Updike's use of the present tense underscores the immediacy of the crisis. Rabbit's tragedy is not only that he has no inner resources, but that none of the

6. Robert Detweiler, Four Spiritual Crises in Mid-Century American Fiction (Gainesville, 1963), p. 16.

7. Hamilton, Elements, p. 166.

natural and social institutions of his environment are able to help him. Rabbit, himself, can be looked upon from many different points of view. From my first reading of the novel I felt that he was an immature "bum." On second thought, I saw him as a basketball hero who cannot adjust to the rigors of a normal adult life. After much thinking on the subject I have come to sympathize with Rabbit, because he could have ended his search if his relatives, friends, and community had offered some positive action rather than the constant advice that he received. Robert Detweiler says, "that Rabbit is the epitome of the 'nice guy' who with a reasonable amount of support from his community could live a respectable and productive life. Yet, it is precisely the failure of the community and the institutions that comprise it which causes Rabbit's own existence to be a failure. Neither marriage, parenthood, vocation, school nor church can provide him with a good reason for living or with a reason for taking up the responsibilities that each of them offers."⁸ Rabbit finds a prostitute (Ruth Leonard) who is a better housewife than his wife Janice. Janice is the type of wife who spends her day drinking hard liquor and watching television. Though we are only told of one program that she watches, Mouseketeers, one strongly suspects that she seeks regression through the soap operas that help her to avoid reality. In the first chapter, we see that she doesn't even keep their son, for Rabbit is to stop by his mother's house and

8. Ibid.

take him home. Of his three jobs during the novel, the only one that he seems to find somewhat gratifying is as a yardman for Mrs. Smith. Of course this is Updike's call for the return to nature, which is not the subject of this thesis.

For those of us who have gone rabbit hunting, we know if a good dog chases the rabbit from his hiding place, the rabbit will eventually come back to his starting point. The same is true of Rabbit Angstrom. In the beginning of the book as he walks home from his work as a "barker" for MagiPeeler products, he stops to play basketball with some young boys. These boys are teenagers and Rabbit is now twenty-six. He is supposed to stop by his parents' home and get his son to take home. Instead he walks to his car and intends on driving south as far as the Gulf of Mexico. By doing this, "Rabbit, whose name suggests both anxiety and running, must escape from other traps as well: from the smothering expectations of his parents and his sister, from the demands of Janice's family (whose name, Springer, suggests trapping), from the shallow pietism of the Episcopal minister Jack Eccles (whom he has not met at this point of the story and will not meet until he has left Janice and is living with Ruth) and the seductiveness of Eccles' wife Lucy, (whom he does not meet until he stays at Eccles' home later and slaps her nicely formed bottom), from the dishonesty and insignificance of his jobs selling kitchen gadgets and used cars."⁹ These traps are manifestations of a larger

9. Howard M. Harper, Jr., Desperate Faith (Chapel Hill, 1967), p. 167.

and ultimately inescapable one: the prison of an entirely secular way of life, with its promises of salvation through social and economic success. Rabbit, in his search for a faith, really rises above the others intellectually. It may appear that he does not, but he is searching for something better than his parents, his in-laws, his wife, his coach, the religious institutions, or his community can give. The goal of Rabbit's quest, this sense of perfection found through the feeling and intuition of the heart, is represented in the novel by the image of the circle.¹⁰ Like a rabbit, Rabbit is unable to get much further than a lover's lane in West Virginia when he becomes confused and lost and returns toward his home, stopping by the Sunshine Athletic Association to see his old basketball coach, Tothero. Tothero is now a broken-down man who has been dismissed from his job as coach because of scandal. He has said earlier that "next to his mother Tothero had had the most force." (RR, p. 18) Tearing down the name of Tothero we can see that it actually reads To The Hero. Rabbit had been his star, "Point-getter" a few years before. Rabbit seeks advice, for Tothero, like so many other phonies of the world, is full of advice. Galloway says that "because Tothero represents a kind of spiritual force, Rabbit for a while thinks of him as the Dalai Lama, the object of his quest, but while Tothero has helped to inspire Rabbit with the sense of spiritual achievement, his realization of that im-

10. John C. Stubbs, "The Search for Perfection in Rabbit, Run," Critique (Volume 10, 1967) p. 96.

pulse must come on a larger ground than that which is defined by a single individual."¹¹ During the circle to West Virginia and back it should be remembered that the announcement is made twice on the car's radio asking where the Dalai Lama is. By this Updike gives us a small preview that Rabbit's search is a spritual one. Tothero emphasizes that what he has inspired in his boys is "the will to achieve." (RR, p. 54) He adds, "I've always liked that better than the will to win, for there can be achievement even in defeat. Make them feel the, yes, I think the word is good, the sacredness of achievement, in the form of giving our best." (RR, p. 54) It is part of Updike's essential irony that this message comes from a pathetic neurotic.

Throughout the novel there is a denial of responsibility and male authority. Later we will see where Rabbit's father lies to his mother about cutting a strip of grass. Rabbit goes to Tothero and expects guidance from him. He doesn't get it. The Sunshine Association where Tothero is now living "is a euphemism for the old men's bar and card-playing den: just one of Updike's versions of degenerated present-day athletes."¹² Instead, Rabbit gets sententious platitudes, ["Do only what the heart commands" (RR, p. 47)] and pompous oratory, ["It makes me happy, happy and humble, to have as I do this very tenuous associa-

11. Galloway, p. 36.

12. Gary Brenner, "Rabbit, Run: John Updike's Criticism of the 'Return to Nature'," Twentieth Century Literature (Volume 12, April 1966), p. 4.

tion" (RR, p. 47)]. Tothero gets him a date with a prostitute whom anyone can get as long as he has the money; he views Tothero being slapped by a tart; and he gets left with the bill for dinner. All these incidents indicate the shift in responsibility. Later in the novel when Tothero comes to console Rabbit about the accidental drowning of Rabbit's daughter, Tothero tells him that he had warned him earlier to go back to Janice. Tothero accepts only the responsibility for second-guessers.

The proof that Rabbit's search is a spiritual one can be seen when he talks to Tothero and Tothero offers him an alternative, a world in which God never existed: "Right and wrong are't dropped from the sky. We. We make them." (RR, p. 232) "Tothero's revelation chilled" (RR, p. 233) Rabbit, because "He wants to believe in the sky as the source of all things." The revelation has the flavor of a deathbed confession: Tothero had suffered two strokes; he is now a "smirking gnome, brainlessly stroking the curve of his cane," (RR, p. 233) completely dependent upon the care of his wife, who seems to enjoy her martyrdom. As a coach Tothero had preached the gospel of self-reliance, and his final "revelation" to Rabbit is undercut by Rabbit's awareness of Tothero's paralysis, an awareness which may include a subconscious realization of the paralysis of the doctrine itself as an adequate approach to life.¹³ Jointly, these alternatives

13. Harper, DF, p. 171.

define the limiting boundaries of the modern wasteland, the trap in which man must run, but from there, there is no exit. Rabbit cannot commit himself fully to any of the alternatives; he cannot break out of the trap of existence into the certainty of essence.¹⁴ If we echo Sartre's words, Harry is condemned to life. "That's what you have, Harry: life," old Mrs. Smith had told him. "It's a strange gift and I don't know how we're supposed to use it but I know it's the only gift we get and it's a good one." (RR, p. 187)

"Rabbit is presented as a genuine seeker after religious truth, and certainly his plight is genuine enough. Sport has failed him; sex fails him; but religion offers hope. Rabbit is the only major character who believes in God. Even Rabbit's sinning has touches of inverse piety."¹⁵ Paradoxically, one Sunday morning with Ruth he prays silently and teases her into a discussion about the existence of God while seducing her. "The idea of making it while the churches are full excites him." (RR, p. 78) However, faith too will fail him. He is left with a feeling that he is near death, that death is nothingness, and that even in life he is dead. This feeling is conveyed by direct statements: "You're Mr. Death himself," (RR, p. 251) Ruth tells him, by means of suggesting deep empty holes. In "Pigeon Feathers" David Kern too feels death as a "deep hole," but his dark night of the soul passed, temporarily. As Rabbit is about to start his last run, "He

14. Ibid.

15. Norris W. Yates, "The Doubt and Faith of John Updike," College English (Volume 26, Oct 1964 - May 1965), p. 472.

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

(RR, p. 254)

While the heart is the source of Rabbit's feelings, the circle represents the state of perfection of his feelings; the circle represents the state of perfection his feelings direct him toward.¹⁶

Perhaps the clearest use of the circle or the deep hole as the image of perfection appears in Rabbit's memories of feeling he has had playing basketball, the game in which he was "first rate."

'I once played a game real well. I really did. And after you're first rate at something, no matter what, it kind of takes the kick out of being second-rate. And this thing Janice and I had was really second-rate.' (RR, p.90)

In these memories the circle is the basket rim. The rim is, by itself, an image of perfection, but Updike metaphorically imbues it with feminine and sexual connotations and therefore also associates it with the feelings of sexual perfection Rabbit experiences with Janice and Ruth.¹⁷

Rabbit has peculiar saintly qualities. Early in the book when his wife Janice hears that he has given up smoking, she says, "What

16. Stubbs, p. 97.

17. Ibid.

are you doing, becoming a saint?" (RR, p. 12)

Whenever Rabbit is disillusioned by the world in which he finds himself, he runs. The gesture is impulsive, an animal instinct, but it is fundamental to his spiritual nature. As he runs Rabbit becomes a social outcast, rejecting his family and the responsibilities which life seem to place on him. These rejections are part of his saintliness. He has sampled conventional ethics and found them wanting. He longs for total absorption into the present moment, for an opportunity to express his compassion for the human race. This expression of compassion - the desire to embrace the very soul of man - is a concomitant of sainthood. ¹⁸

This peculiar saintliness demands that he not be celibate; therefore it is impossible to compare him to Christ. He is more of an anti-Christ, but not a fallen angel. It is through sexual intercourse that he is able to see Ruth's heart. This same idea of salvation through sex is revealed by Updike in a short story, "Lifeguard." (PF) The lifeguard emphasizes that:

"To desire a woman is to desire to save her. Anyone who has endured intercourse that was neither predatory nor hurried knows how through it we descend, with a partner, into the grotesque and delicate shadows that until then have remained locked in the most guarded recess of our soul: into this harbor we bring her." ("Lifeguard", PF p. 149)

Rabbit cannot be called a Christian saint because Christianity is one of the environments which fail him and which he must reject. He has no taste for what Updike later calls "the dark, tangled visceral aspect of Christianity, the going through quality of it, the passage

¹⁸. Galloway, p. 32.

into death and suffering that redeems and inverts these things, like an umbrella blowing inside out."¹⁹ Rabbit is attracted to the church as long as it fulfills his needs. When it fails him, the stained-glass church window which had once "consoled him by seeming to make a hole where he looked through into underlying brightness" becomes "a dark circle in a stone facade." (RR, p. 254) There is little doubt that Updike wants us to look upon Rabbit as a saint and to see his experiences as spiritual. Regardless, Rabbit is a saint who exists outside the Christian tradition. This exclusion is based, first of all, upon his own inability to conceive of a God in the traditional Christian sense, and secondly on the fact that Rabbit's "saintly" quest is a wholly solipsistic one:²⁰

In his search for spiritual faith he is misguided by the symbol of the institutionalized modern church in the person of Rev. Jack Eccles. There can be little doubt that the name Eccles is short for Ecclesia or church. Eccles is the third of an ecclesiastical series. His grandfather was a near-Unitarian and his father rigidly High Church; both were equally successful and popular. His predecessor in his present parish was another admired cleric. So he lives under a churchly shadow, haunted by the thought that he follows his calling to please an earthly father more than a heavenly father, and conscious

19. Ibid., p. 35.

20. Ibid.

that he is being judged constantly to be inadequate for his position.²¹ His insecurity increases daily as a result of his wife Lucy who never loses a chance to tell him that she thinks Christianity is a neurotic religion that childishly causes him to retreat from reality. Eccles is the minister of the church that the Springers, Rabbit's in-laws, attend. The Springers call in Eccles because Mrs. Springer is worried about the scandal involved when Rabbit leaves Janice. Mrs. Springer tells Eccles that Rabbit "has no reason to come back if we don't give him one," (RR, p. 131) and the Springers do, in fact, give Rabbit a job as a used-car salesman in an effort to keep him with Janice. Their hatred for their son-in-law is carefully masked by social propriety.

Eccles telephones Rabbit at Ruth's apartment and they agree to a golfing date. Once again the hole or the circle come into play as the cup which is the object of golf is seen as a symbol of this search for faith or perfection. As they stand in the parking lot Rabbit sees Eccles standing behind a car, so that his head seems on a platter. Eccles symbolizes John the Baptist calling Rabbit to repentance. He chides Rabbit for returning to his home to collect clean shirts, while trampling upon other decencies. He tries to show Rabbit how forgiveness may be found. On the golf course, the greens which resemble pagan groves, Rabbit names the "irons" Janice and the "woods" Ruth. Ruth and Janice therefore symbolize the natural,

21. Hamilton, Contemporary Writers, p. 35.

sympathetic material that he has sinned against. The hole he aims for becomes his home, with his grandfather upstairs in the sky above. And Eccles, his guide, "his grubby shirt like a white flag of forgiveness" (RR, p. 111), is showing him the way home. This same type of situation is used by Updike in another short story, "Intercession." (SD) There, a guilt-ridden protagonist, Paul [no last name], plays golf with an imaginative boy and is angered because the boy will not play by the rules and refuses to count wasted shots. Rabbit too is angered by Eccles making him try over again when he fails. What Rabbit objects to is the assumption that his strokes are past counting. Eccles knows that Grace comes only when we cease to try to live by the Law; forgiveness follows the realization that our sins are too many for us to atone for ourselves.²²

Eccles is aware of the spiritual dimensions of Rabbit's problems. Rabbit tells him that he is looking for "the thing behind everything, for something that wants me to find it." (RR, p. 107) But Eccles, like Conner (The Poorhouse Fair), is too enlightened to take the long leap of irrational faith. He tells Rabbit, "I don't think that thing exists in the way you think it does." (RR, p. 106) Although he senses the reality of what Rabbit is looking for; to do so would be to admit the failure of his own tenuous faith.²³ God for Eccles is theoretical, and he believes in a theoretical hell of separation from God. Therefore, he must deny Rabbit's assertion that we are all in hell, even though he

22. Ibid.

23. Harper, DF, p. 169.

knows that Rabbit is right. To justify his own compromises, and really his failure to help Rabbit in search, Eccles says: "Of course, all vagrants think they're on a quest. At least at first." (RR, p. 107)

There is an implication that Rabbit may outgrow his childish need for the real experience of God. Eccles says that salvation can be found through good works: "We must work for forgiveness; we must earn the right to see that thing behind everything." (RR, p. 234)

Eccles decides to get help from Rabbit's minister Mr. Kruppenbach of the Lutheran church. Eccles finds Kruppenbach as he is mowing the grass. Dressed in his undershirt as though in vestments, Kruppenbach gives Eccles the stripped-down essentials of the faith that alone can make his ministry effective. Kruppenbach expresses with authority the argument against Eccles' position which Rabbit has also voiced but can not get Eccles to admit. Kruppenbach tells Eccles that if God had wanted to end misery, the millenium would already be here. The duty of ministers toward their parishioners is to "burn them with the force of our belief... There is nothing but Christ for us. All the rest, all this decency and busyness, is nothing. It is Devil's work." (RR, p. 143)

Eccles is furious at Kruppenbach, yet he is extremely afraid that he may be right. Updike seems to be telling us that the two ministers objectify two religious alternative: one which Rabbit admires but cannot reach, the other which envelopes him in its do-goodism but which he cannot respect.²⁴

24. Ibid.

Rabbit returns to Janice just before the birth of their daughter. Several days later he leaves again because Janice refuses him sexual satisfaction. This causes Janice to return to her drinking which is the reason that the baby drowns in the bathtub. Rabbit can only see God as being very ineffectual, for all He had to do was to pull out a very small rubber stopper. Rabbit has not completed his search. However, as a critic, Hamilton has pointed out, "In Christian tradition, consciousness of guilt is the first step in the direction of grace. Among pagans who have no consciousness of guilt, says Kierkegaard, dread (angst) is not fully experienced."²⁵ Only Rabbit and Piet Hanema (Couples) among all protagonists are never able to find repentance. Repentance is accomplished through the love of God and Man, but Rabbit is unable to find this. The book ends with man's hard heart still rejecting grace. There is little forgiveness amongst nominal Christians, while in the official ecclesia forgiveness is no longer proclaimed with conviction. As Rabbit runs, the round church window, that should be bright, is a dark circle. Rabbit has completed the circle several times but has failed to find a faith, but still he runs. "Ah: runs. Runs." (RR, p. 255)

In Of The Farm (1965) we see a protagonist that parallels David

25. Hamilton, Elements, p. 145.

Kern and Allen Dow in some ways, but differs in others. The book is not an Olinger story, because it is not a story of the past as had been the case of all the novels prior to this with the exception of the first. The protagonist is Joey Robinson, whose memories parallel those of Allen Dow, David Kern, and Peter Caldwell. Mrs. Robinson, Joey's mother, seems to be an older Lillian Dow, Elsie Kern and Cassie Caldwell.

Like Allen Dow, Joey had been only partly liberated from his mother's influence. Like all of Updike's sensitive protagonists, "Joey longs for a kind of ongoing immortality, in which no moment is ever wholly lost. For him, maturation means decay more than growth."²⁶ Joey becomes jealous of Richard standing next to Peggy, even though Peggy is now his second wife and Richard is her eleven year old son. Joey wants to possess in her both a wife and a mother, going to her in Richard's "size."

The search for Joey in this book is a search for a freedom from the past, the farm, his mother, and his mother's ambitions. Joey's first wife Joan had been an Olinger girl more or less approved by his mother. This has tied Joey to the confines of his mother's nest. One instance of the hold that Mrs. Robinson had over Joey and his first wife can be seen in the following passage.

26. Charles T. Samuels, John Updike (Minneapolis, 1969), p. 24.

Above the sofa... there had hung for twelve years a formal portrait of Joan, a companion to a photograph of me taken at the same time... My mother had made the appointment without consulting us, and we had both resented it. I had thought such sentimentality uncharacteristic of my mother. I still saw her with the eyes of her child, as someone whose presence was renewed each day. (OTF, p. 18)

His marriage with Joan soured and he married Peggy. During the last year of his first marriage, Peggy, who was his mistress prior to their marriage, offered to break off their love affair because she saw that her possessiveness was destroying them. It is during this three day visit to Joey's mother that he begins to see their differences as assets rather than liabilities to their marriage. By permitting Peggy to be herself they can achieve a relationship of greater dimensions than if she is imprisoned within his expectations. And by granting her this freedom, he himself becomes a larger person.

But before he can grant her this freedom, he must free himself.

As he begins to free himself from his own misconceptions - e.g., the notion that his mother had 'poisoned' his first marriage - he is better able, as Sartre puts it, to 'want only the freedom of others.' In beginning to grant this freedom, Joey begins to approach the ideal relationship which D. H. Lawrence has called 'polarity.' Peggy, the least intellect of the characters in the book, is the first to realize the need for polarity.²⁷

For a time, Joey tries to assume this "polarity" through the most basic fact of manhood. Conceiving Peggy as a field, he sows the seed of his possession; but in so doing, he takes his wife on his mother's terms.

²⁷. Harper, DF, p. 184.

Making of Peggy an ersatz farm, he turns to her for sex, not love, and thus confirms his mother's denigration. Peggy realizes this and tells him, "You never should have left your mother's womb," to which Joey wittily replies, "It was wonderful in there. Perfect room temperature."

(OTF, p. 106) Even the symbolic gesture of going to buy Tampax shows the hold that Mrs. Robinson had over Joey in his first marriage. Then she could provide such items for Joan, but now that she is too old to old to have these around the house, she does not control the second marriage.

Each of the three adult characters need to be freed: Joey from his mother's conception of what he should become; from his wife's jealousy of his past, and from his own burden of guilt and doubt; Peggy from her mother-in-law's disapproval and from Joey's jealousy of her past and his idealization of her present role; and Mrs. Robinson from Joey's mistaken assumptions about her devaluation and destruction of his father (whom he idolized) and about Joey's first marriage, and from her own feeling that she and the farm are a burden to Joey.²⁸ Instead of the artist his mother had wanted him to be, Joey is a thirty-five year old advertising consultant employed in Manhattan. "My specialty is advertising dollar distribution, which is to say, broadly, corporate image presentation." (OTF, p. 82) Mrs. Robinson neglected her husband

28. Ibid.

to devote herself to Joey, for Joey was the objectification of her own self image.²⁹ As in "Flight" Joey cannot be free until he accepts the truth about both his women; for only then will he acknowledge the change that has taken place in himself. His mother is no longer the swift young woman of whom he had felt himself deprived. Peggy may be inferior to Mrs. Robinson but she is Joey's choice now and deserves his loyalty. Time has taken away the past; Joey is a man. Now he must accept a man's responsibilities. He does this in two ways. First, Joey tells Richard a fairy tale that will recall a similar device used by the father in "Should Wizard Hit Mommy?" (PF) But in this story the teller is drawn back to his mother's self-referring vision of his character, whereas Joey uses the fairy tale to express his freedom, his ability to break out of the past. Second, he goes to church with his mother while Peggy and Richard stay on the farm for lack of "good-enough" clothes. The minister takes his sermon from Genesis 2:18.

And the Lord God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him. Notice, first that Adam's need was a 'help meet.' In Hebrew the word is *ezer*, meaning, without connotations of sex, 'aid,' 'help' such as an apprentice might render a master, or one laborer another. We were... not put here... to love one another, but to work together. (OTF, p. 110)

The minister goes on for three verses and says:

So Woman, if I have not misunderstood these verses, was put on earth to help Man to his work, which is God's work.

29. Samuels, p. 24.

She is less than Man, and is superior to him. ... Adam commits an act of Faith: 'This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh.' In so declaring, he acknowledges within himself a responsibility to be kind. He ties himself ethically to the earth. Without conscious confession of God, there can be no righteousness. But kindness needs no belief. It is implicit in the nature of Creation, in the very curves and amplitude of God's fashioning. Let us pray. (OTF, p. 113)

"In Of The Farm, love itself seems a religious obligation, because Christianity has been polluted by institutionalism or diluted by a social gospel. Love can seem the deepest expression of spiritual thirst. In virtually all of his autobiographical stories, the hero experiences similar difficulty through sex. Faced with woman's irrevocable otherness, he beats against the barrier between them or he pursues his ideal complement by attempting to love many women. No mortal, however, can provide the constancy and total acceptance that might hush the clock's tick. Lacking the support of faith, Updike's modern heroes can neither accept man's contingency nor find permanence through the world."³⁰ If Joey is to be free, he must free himself from the myths that he "cuts" in his mother's mind and Peggy's. Peggy has told him that it is cowardly to expect either his mother or his wife to give him self-direction. In earlier years he denied his mother's wish that he become a poet, but he lives in the grip of poetic nostalgia. Marrying Peggy was another bid for freedom, but this too is incomplete. His fear of Peggy's past, where she slept with her first husband and many other men after their

30. Ibid., p. 27.

divorce, bothers him. Therefore, desiring a perfect corroboration of his own identity he comes home for the weekend visit.

Whereas everyone in Brewer battles Rabbit, everyone in Tarbox apes Piet Hanema in Couples (1968). He also differs from Piet in that the latter starts with something (Angela, his wife, a symbol for a heaven on earth), while Rabbit started in his search with little or nothing. This is a hell on earth as Janice his wife was nothing more than January Ice.

Piet Hanema, the main protagonist, is a Michigan-born son of Dutch speaking parents whose livelihood was raising greenhouse plants. Couples shows what is happening now to the American anima (Hanema) when the ties binding man to the soil and to family traditions have almost universally broken.³¹ The social groupings in the twentieth century have become entirely a matter of personal choice. Piet is still a believer in rules and codes. He is a carpenter, a carpenter in love with the rules of his craft. He is the only man in Couples who earns his living by his hands. Thus, he is the only creative artist in the group. We find that Piet is at home in the old Congregational Church, the fourth church to be built on the original site of Tarbox's first meeting house. At the beginning of the book, Piet is the one protestant among the couples who continues to worship, for the memory of Calvinistic God of the Dutch Reformed Church in which he was reared has

31. Hamilton, Elements, p. 220.

not been extinguished. Thus the American anima is not wholly cut off from its roots. Insofar as Couples is the story of Piet, it is the story of the temptation and fall of an individual soul - and of the soul of a nation - though turning away to strange gods.³² Piet already has Angela, his angel. In his search he is tempted by a fallen angel, a Thorne. The physical adultery recorded in the story refers, at a deeper level, to the spiritual adultery of apostasy against which the Old Testament prophets raised their voices. Just as Georgene is wholly of the natural world, so Angela is not of it. "Touch Angela, she vanished. Touch Georgene, she was there." (C, p. 54) Piet's angel brings him messages from heaven. She warns him often of the sickness inherent in their way of life. Even after the exposure of his affair with Foxy, Piet begs: "Don't make me leave you. You're what guards my soul. I'll be damned eternally." (C, p. 425) But Angela cannot help him, because he like Rabbit refuses to take the path of repentance. A moment later he is ready to strike her. Even angels are powerless to deal with the soul that is hardened through self-will. After the divorce, Angela returns to her father. She has no place in a fallen world. In such conditions Angela has been compared to Matthew Arnold's beautiful and ineffectual angel, beating in the void her luminous wings in vain. Angela flails her arms and head in a paroxysm of futile grief on the way home after the confrontation with the Hanemas and Whitmans.

32. Ibid.

We first meet Foxy Whitman at a party given by the Guerins, a sterile couple. It is interesting to point out here that the Guerins are typical of the Tarbox culture where "the men had stopped having careers and the women had stopped having babies. Liquor and love were left." (C, p. 17) It is not an accident that this retreat from work and childbearing represents a denial of God's words to the first couple after the Fall.³³ When Piet first went with Georgene and raised the question of contraception, she asked him whether Angela did not use Enovid and laughingly said, "Welcome to the post-pill paradise." (C, p. 58) Nevertheless, the appeal of Georgene for Piet lies in her belief in life without guilt. To Georgene both Apollo and Venus are equally divine, to be served in turn or together as the opportunity presents itself. In returning to Foxy we find that she is an Episcopalian and that like Piet she attends church. Like Piet, her church-going is a bond with the past.

"Bearing unmistakable sign of Updike's approval, Piet Hanema is an antique-loving craftsman, who adores the physical universe and assuages his fear of death in the act of love. But given his orphaned status and oral-genital fixation, he often seems an unconsciously facetious version of Updike's symbolic desire to get back to the womb."³⁴ What could serve to show more of a searching for a mother's love than when Piet suckles Foxy's breast laden with the milk for her new-born? Piet risks his marriage and his neck in order to have this symbol of mother love. As I have

33. Ibid., p. 226.

34. Samuels, p. 35.

stated before, Updike's protagonists have a strong desire to have this mother love and Piet is no exception. And who could have a more ambitious mother than Foxy?

Piet first notices her properly, not at the party, but on her leaving the Episcopal Church on Palm Sunday dressed like a bride in white. She appears as a fox dressed in sheep's clothing. Piet is searching for God and "has sown seeds among the thorns", Georgene Thorne, wife of Freddy. Foxy Whitman's maiden name, Elizabeth Fox, is from Bethesda, Maryland. Perhaps Updike had in mind Jerusalem's Bethesda, which is near the Sheep Gate, a natural enough place to find a fox wearing white clothing. Bethesda is the pool where the angel comes to trouble the waters. Piet, called in to repair the waterfront home the Whitmans have bought, sees Foxy in her lemon-colored smock and "saw she was going to be trouble." (C, p. 198)

It was the home the Whitmans had bought that Angela had coveted when the Hanemas had first come to Tarbox.

To substantiate further the claim for Angela being not of this world, her choice of houses should be looked at more closely. When we first meet Piet in the book, he and Angela are undressing in the bedroom of their eighteenth Century farmhouse home. They have been married for nine years. Piet's chest shows "its cruciform blazon of amber hair." (C, p. 11) So we know that Piet is both passionate and marked with the sign of a Christian. Angela undresses behind the closet door, which her husband kicks open, disclosing her where "like Eve on a portal she crouched in shame." (C, p. 14)

Her shame, as they both stand naked facing each other, shows that the time

is after the Fall. The portal of Paradise has been closed behind them. Piet feels "with Angela, a superior power seeking through her to employ him." (C, p. 8)

The identification of Angela's father with the measurement of time makes him a "superior power" - he is even called omnipotent - and explains Angela's fondness for the stars. His wife's presence reminds Piet continually of the fact that the earth is set under the government of heaven.

Just as Piet sees Angela as his good angel, Piet sees Freddy as his evil one. Although the novel does not state the obvious, Piet must know St. Paul's words, "a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me" (II Cor 12:7).³⁵

Over the whole group hovers the satanic, death-worshipping Freddy Thorne. He is a dentist by trade, but in fact he is a faithless St. Augustine indulging his 'hyena appetite for dirty truths' in his role as Updike's designated 'priest' to the tribe. 'He thinks we're a magic circle of heads to keep the night out,' says Angela, 'He thinks we've made a church of one another.' The news of John Kennedy's assassination touches them all - but very much in their own way. Freddy hears it over the radio in his dental office. 'You hear that?' says Freddy. 'Some crazy Texan. You may spit.' A few minutes later, Kennedy is dead, and Freddy thinks of cancelling his party that night. 'But I've bought the booze,' he says.³⁶

Freddy tells the couples: "We're all here to humanize each other... . We're a subversive cell. Like in the catacombs. Only they were trying to break out of hedonism. We're trying to break back into it. It's not

35. Hamilton, Elements, p. 229.

36. "Views from the Catacombs" Time (Volume 91, April 26, 1968), p. 67.

easy." (C, p.158) The couples have fallen into a simple religious or cultic alignment; another of those biological phenomena that interest Updike. Freddy becomes the priest of this religion as well as the buffoon. Freddy had started to become a psychiatrist, but because of lack of ability he was forced to accept dentistry as second best.

Some of the rituals that Freddy organizes for his religious group are touch football, sacrificial party games, and ceremonial bibulations. Freddy uses Piet as a scapegoat because Piet constitutes a running threat to everyone, by virtue of his honesty, total heterosexuality and sense of death, all dangerous anti-social extremes.³⁷ Freddy is the one who speaks for the community; and this seems to be because he believes that life is ultimately foul and malignant, and must be guarded against. The point of having a church at all is to keep out the dark.

Like Rabbit Angstom, Piet quickly tires of feeling guilty. "Nothing will happen," (C, p. 424) he tells Angela once they are home from the confrontation with the Whitmans. Angela replies: "Something should happen, Piet." (C, p. 424) Angela's persistence in seeing that something does happen brings him back to his basic beliefs; he believed that there was, behind the screen of couples and houses and days, a Calvinist God Who lifts us up and casts us down in utter freedom, without recourse to our prayers or consultation with our wills. Angela had become the messenger of this God. Piet has searched for God and has found Him if only he would ask for some type of forgiveness. Only through Grace can he experience a

³⁷ Wilfred Sheed, "Play in Tarbox," NY Times Book Review (April 7, 1968), p. 30.

a satisfaction in his search for God.

Piet continues his search when Foxy tells him that adultery is silly and so much trouble. Piet replies that it is a way of seeking knowledge. She asks him, "What do we know now, Piet?" (C, p. 359) He throws back at her, "We know God is not mocked." (C, p. 360) Piet recognizes his God, but he cannot realize how to come to terms with Him, how to seek repentance. Piet tells Foxy that her god is sex, yet it is more accurately the self-will which, in seeking only its own, is the contrary of Christian Agape. (I Cor. 13:5)³⁸ Piet has found that Foxy's slow response in love-making is really a form of greed. Piet realizes that she thinks herself to be perfect, and yet her underwear is not always clean. She doesn't understand the message, "Wash me." She consents to the abortion because she knows that refusing it would mean losing Piet. Foxy says, "To be mastered by your body I would tame you with my mind." (C, p. 471)

Piet thinks he has broken with Foxy, so in his search he turns to Bea Guerin as his mistress. Piet realizes that Bea's attraction for him lies in her barrenness. As Beatrice is Dante's guide as he ascends from Hell through Purgatory to Heaven, and points him to life, so Bea reconciles Piet to the descent into death.³⁹ Piet finds that he enjoys striking her as he makes love to her. She tells him others always seem to want to do that and she

38. Hamilton, Elements, p. 235.

39. Ibid., p. 239.

had hoped that he would be different. But instead of leading him to Paradise, Bea leads Piet down into a Nether Hell within the circles dominated by the "sins of the Lion," that is by violence.⁴⁰ Piet's sign in the sky is the Lion.

At the end of an evening with Bea, he drives away; he sees "beyond the backstop screen his church bulking great, broad, and featureless from the rear, a stately hollow blur." (C, p. 257) How can hope be accepted as a Grace beyond willing when for Catholics Grace is a formula learned by rote and when for Protestants the community mediating Grace is a hollow blur rapidly receding from sight? The problem as Piet senses it is that "the world hates the light." (C, p. 25) Freddy, in seeking to make the couples into a church with himself as priest, can only pay nihilistically with the trappings of Christianity in order to contrive his new religion. Freddy carves ham and says: "Take, eat. This is his body, given for thee." (C, p. 334)

For Piet alone, the chase into neighborly beds comes close to the course of tragedy. Unlike the other adulterers, he is bounded not only by lust, curiosity, and boredom, but by a terrible sense of time fleeing. He is haunted by the past, by a "shepherd paralyzed in webs of lead" in his boyhood Dutch Reformed Church, by his father's rough hands tending the fragile flowers in his greenhouse, most of all by his parents' death in an automobile accident.⁴¹ Death for Piet is not some day in the

40. Ibid.

41. "Views from the Catacombs," p. 68.

distant future; it is time itself, and "life is what Updike has referred to as a series of little losses leading toward the dry well."⁴² Piet fights death by trying to turn time around, to recapture the past, to make manifest the heaven of nostalgia. On the night that Piet and Freddy exchange wives, Angela tells Freddy: "Piet spends all his energy defying death and you spend all yours accepting it." (C, p. 388) Defying death is Piet's self-imposed task because, like his daughter Nancy, he has never been able to reconcile himself to this intruder into life.

Short and agile, he displays the orange of passion in his flaming hair and in an apricot windbreaker which he constantly wears during working hours. But Tarbox has surrounded him with death. The fact that he will never have a son is connected now in his night reverie with having to carry out the greedy plans of Gallagher's plan for making money by building on Indian Hill homes for those who will play with life rather than walk through it like men. Tarbox once had a hosiery mill. Now it has been turned into a factory manufacturing plastic toys. Piet's creative powers, whether as a father or as a carpenter, are redundant in this artificial society.

As Piet drives away from making love to Foxy (unknown to both of them she has conceived) he feels happy, "Exhilarated once again at having not been caught." (C, p. 351) But the all-seeing eye of the weathercock on the church peeks through a leafless tree. There is a

42. Ibid.

link here with St. Peter and the cock who announced the disciple's denial of his Master. Piet is a Peter who does not repent of his denial, a rock unfit for founding a lasting church upon. Piet's search has ended in despair and frustration as Rabbit's had. Rabbit runs; Piet and Foxy move away to Lexington.

C. The Teachers

Where Of The Farm deals with man's horizontal freedom, (man's freedom on the earthly level) The Centaur deals with his vertical freedom. Alice and Kenneth Hamilton have said, "Man's first duty is to his Father in Heaven, and his second to his neighbor on earth. And man learns love for his neighbor through his basic experience of one who is like himself and yet unlike, namely, through woman."⁴³ The protagonists in this novel are a father and son team, George and Peter Caldwell.

The novel has to do with the multiple planes of being that converge in each moment of experience. One focus is provided by the title character, Chiron, the centaur, who is also George Caldwell, a teacher at Olinger High. George Caldwell is deeply disturbed by everyday problems of money, parental responsibility, time, and death. Though somewhat ridiculous in his ingenuousness and impropriety, he has the philosopher's questioning mind. He will confront strangers with questions about the meaning of life and death, much to the embarrassment of his son Peter.

The Centaur is a loving tribute to Updike's father, an endearing old-style eccentric in whom Updike sees "the Protestant kind of goodness going down with all the guns firing - antic, frantic, comic, but goodness nonetheless."⁴⁴ It is also interesting to note that the fathers in "Pigeon Feathers," Of The Farm, and in all of the David Kern stories were named

43. Hamilton, Elements, p. 184.

44. "Views from the Catacombs," Time (Volume 91, April 26, 1968), p. 74.

George. Cassie Caldwell, the mother, we have met in "Flight," "Pigeon Feathers," and Of The Farm. She also appears briefly in Updike's newest work, Bech: A Book.

'She's (Cassie) in a funny mood,' he (George) said. 'Your mother's a real femme, Peter. If I'd been any kind of man I would have put her on the burlesque stage when she was young.' (TC, pp. 57,58)

A similar quote was made by the father George about his wife in "Pigeon Feathers."

The novel is presented in the legend of Chiron, the Greek centaur who gave up his immortality to expiate Prometheus' sin of stealing the holy fire from the gods. Each character in the literal story has a mythological counterpart. (As I have already identified George Caldwell as Chiron, I will identify each character of the novel as they appear in this paper with the mythological name in parenthesis.) The story is told in alternate chapters first by an omniscient narrator and by Peter (Prometheus). When Peter is telling the story he is fourteen years older than he was at the time of the story. He has become a second-rate abstract artist and is telling the story to his Negro mistress.

George Caldwell's search is not for a spiritual faith so much as it is for coming to terms with death or a despair of possessing faith.

'I was a minister's son. I was brought up to believe, and I still believe it, that God made Man as the best thing in His Creation. If that's the case, who are this time and tide that are so almighty superior to us?' (TC, p. 52)

George Caldwell's father, though he was fifth in a line of Presbyterian ministers, died shorn of hope in eternity because of his lifetime quest for knowledge. So the question that torments Caldwell is whether the pursuit of truth leads inevitably to the destruction of belief in a God of goodness and to the triumph of a desolation of heart beside which brute ignorance must seem a blessed state.⁴⁵ So death and forgetfulness, it seems, have the final word. In life, love seems only a disguise for lust.

The degeneration that Peter sees in his family, i.e. preacher (grandfather), teacher (father), and artist (himself) is not a degeneration as he thinks. The preacher preaches a kind of faith. Doubtless, we tend to think of this faith to be Christian. This is not necessarily so. All men have a kind of faith. The teacher teaches a skill or knowledge that will add to the students' knowledge. This knowledge may be of a scientific kind as George Caldwell teaches, or it may be of a more logical way of thinking. However, Updike's teachers are teaching a kind of faith. In order for the teachers to be able to teach this faith, they first must have faith themselves. The creative artist attempts to teach a faith that is built around his works. But he too, must have this faith before he can teach it to others. In other words, regardless of how much it is disliked, the main mission in life of a preacher, teacher, or artist is one of teaching a kind of faith. This cannot be avoided if one is to be called one of the three.

⁴⁵. Hamilton, Elements, p. 170.

George Caldwell's science lesson begins with a description of the beginning of the universe, the genesis of earth, the coming of life, and the introduction of certain death - as opposed to random extinction - by the introduction of co-operative life with the volvox that dies sacrificially for the good of the whole.⁴⁶ The scene in Caldwell's classroom is symbolic of the human condition itself: man, aspiring to reason and harmony and peace, is constantly tormented by insanity and chaos and conflict. As a teacher, Caldwell is essentially a transmitter of wisdom from one generation to the next. Thus Chiron, having carried in his own body the infection of poison, could instruct those who were themselves to be poisoned. And, having accepted death over self-will, he could convey to others the lesson that they must learn in order to find life.

Yates has observed:

Updike implies that if one has not entirely lost faith - if one is not the fool who inwardly rejects God - works may be important after all in giving one's life meaning on earth, whether they are practically effective or not. He does not attempt to answer the question of whether salvation can be attained by works, but he does hint that the suffering of the man who tries his best to do good despite some doubts about eternity may be a re-actment of Christ's sacrificial atonement. Works alone do not save one, but works and faith may indeed be combined meaningfully, and when they are, a man's suffering may well be a song of Grace.⁴⁷

Yates goes further by pointing out that "Updike has to be perpetually making the leap of faith. He maintains the man's intuitive thirst for

⁴⁶. Ibid., p. 161.

⁴⁷. Norris W. Yates, "The Doubt and Faith of John Updike," College English (Volume 26, October 1964 - May 1965), p. 473.

immortality demands a belief in God, but that man's reason tells him there cannot be a God; out of this clash between reason and feeling come man's largest and noblest efforts, including genuine faith, which needs no validation other than itself. Hook had this kind of faith; so does Caldwell. On the other hand Rabbit is the fullest expression of Updike's skepticism. Doubt born of anxiety finally overwhelms faith in Rabbit and that the spark is not completely extinguished is grounds only for pathos, not for spiritual hope."⁴⁸ For the first time Peter realizes the fact that his father must die. The terror he feels is inspired by the knowledge that he may lose his father: "for the first time his death seemed, even at its immense stellar remove of impossibility, a grave and dreadful threat." (TC, p. 73)

George's fear of death is complicated by his sense of Peter's helplessness: "Now his son's face, dappled, feminine in the lips and eyelashes, narrow like a hatchet, anxious and sneering, gnaws at Caldwell's heart like a piece of unfinished business." (TC, p. 73) Peter must learn to become a man, learn how to survive and then to create in a world shaken by the struggles of the Titans, a world seemingly forsaken by the powers of Heaven.

Caldwell is ridiculed for being naive, for allowing people to take advantage of him. Yet, he sees through superficial appearance into the

⁴⁸. Ibid., p. 474.

heart of chaos. "Ignorance is bliss," he tells Phillips. "That's the lesson I've gotten out of life." (C, p. 169) This revelation brings the values of his teaching career and his whole life into question: If the heart of life is truly chaotic and meaningless, then he has indeed been naive and foolish in devoting himself to the service of others. Caldwell's revelation comes in the afternoon; in the evening he seeks out Rev. March at the high school basketball game. He is in anguish over the fate of his soul, but March regards his anxious questions as a "preposterous interruption." Caldwell cannot believe that God could condemn anyone without just cause, and thus cannot agree with the Calvinistic concept of the elect and the nonelect. March replies that the doctrine of predestination is counter-balanced by the doctrine of God's infinite mercy.

The philosopher's mind and the artist's eye struggle to master the transcendence of earthly existence. The alternating angles of vision, George's and Peter's, offer two means of transcending time and space - reason and art. As a science teacher George instructs his classes in the formation of the universe; as Chiron he instructs the centaurs in the myths of creation. The history of life is staggering and sacred, whether told by an evolutionary scientist or an Olympian centaur; and the juxtaposed accounts, far from conflicting, lend support to each other. Man, the microcosm, reflects the cleavage in all being the macrocosm. The centaur is the main symbol of human duality, but there are other images of spirit confined by time and space; the driver in a non-functioning car, the teacher in a school, the brain in a skull.⁴⁹

And so it is that Caldwell in his humility believes that he is unsuccess-

⁴⁹. J. A. Ward, "John Updike: The Centaur," Critique (Volume VI, 1963), pp. 111, 112, 113.

ful. He is unable to grasp that he is actually doing something worthwhile. He finds that in giving his life to others he has entered a total freedom. The gift that he gives to all of his students and especially to his son Peter, makes Chiron's gift of immortality to Prometheus appear shabby. Chiron gave up his immortality because it had become a burden to him. Caldwell gives his life, which is anything but a burden, to others because he loves them. Chiron's gift had been to Prometheus alone; Caldwell's gift is not to Peter alone, but to everyone he meets, with no thought of merit of the recipient or the cost to himself.

The goal of Caldwell's life has been "to bring men out of the darkness"; the tragedy of his life is that he does not realize that it is as a man who loves and not as a teacher that he is best equipped to fulfill this challenge.⁵⁰ In a world apparently devoid of meaning - even when he imagines himself dying of cancer, his money runs out, his car breaks down, and he and Peter become snowbound - he never ceases to believe that there is meaning. Throughout his search, it is this meaning or his unrealized love for mankind that gives him a reason to go on living. But for Caldwell, existence itself is a wound that he is determined to tolerate, and his time is measured chiefly in waves of pain. The novel is not foreshortened because Caldwell's experience is not: his

⁵⁰. Galloway, p. 43.

day to day life is spun out in a continuum of anxieties and belittling defeats. In his lecture on the origins of life and the dimensions of the universe he strings out zeroes across the blackboard--years, light years, eons. "Do these figures mean anything to you?" he asks. "They don't to me either. They remind me of death." (TC, p.34) At fifth Caldwell has achieved all that he is going to achieve. Now he can only fight to keep his wife, his son, and his father-in-law healthy and alive. Unlike Rabbit Angstrom, he has not run because he is anchored by his sense of responsibility--somehow both noble and quixotic--and by his anguished, self-deprecating love for his son. Because of his conditioned economic fear he cannot escape his life's absurd commitment, and yet because of his latently romantic temperament he cannot fully compromise with his situation and make a bearable existence of it; as Peter says, there was always in their household a sense that they would someday be moving on. Caldwell is tortured too, by the thought that he is incompetent as a father, incapable of becoming the kind of symbol that Peter needs.

In the final paragraph of Chapter IX, Caldwell "cast his eyes upward to the dome of the blue and perceived that it was indeed a great step. Yes, in seriousness, a very great step, for which all the walking in his life had not prepared him. Not an easy step nor an easy journey, it would take an eternity to get there, an eternity as the anvil ever fell... . His will, a perfect diamond under the pressure of absolute fear, uttered the final

word. Now... Chiron accepted death." (TC, pp. 221,222) The falling anvil symbolizes the estrangement of heaven and earth. Chiron had felt earlier, "Perhaps - the thought deepened his sickness - an anvil could fall forever from sky and never strike Earth" in both; space and time.⁵¹ It is this estrangement which creates the fear within ourselves. Yet, in Updike's view, a symbolic heaven is attainable even though it may take us an eternity to get there. And paradoxically the ticket to get there is our acceptance of death. We must accept the fact that, like Caldwell, we are mortal. In that acceptance the animal part of us dies and we as Chiron are set among the stars. It is this climactic epiphany, rather than the physical death of Caldwell, which the final pages of the novel reveal. The acceptance, in absolute fear, of the fact of death, is the first requirement for the existential acceptance of life.⁵² So Caldwell's search is ended and he has found what has been plaguing him. George had freed Peter.

Caldwell's lifetime has been sacrificed to his son; perhaps Updike means for his death to be - accidentally - a sacrifice as well. Perhaps we are meant to see here that, in spite of his motivations, in dying Caldwell dramatizes for Peter the hollowness and the mockery of an altruistic existence - the life that is idealized as noble and good but is in reality tedious, humiliating, and grotesquely absurd. Peter is freed of this vaguely tyrannic authority and begins his own rebellious existence in Greenwich Village - a second-rate abstract-

⁵¹. Harper, DF, pp. 180.

⁵². Ibid.

impressionist painter living with a Negro mistress. And yet Peter himself wonders, Was it for this that my father gave up his life? ⁵³

And so George's search is finished. He has found what he is searching for, just as Bech will do. Peter as an initiate, is just starting his search. He has been set free by his centaur father. Peter has been oppressed by the "nothing" of woman. Yet it was in the "hope" that lay in the "nothing" that he was to discover human love and the meaning of divine grace, through the knowledge of self-sacrifice that will surrender all for "nothing." Nature's law is that some will die so that others will live. The "hope" or "love" that he finds in the "nothingness" that lies between his girl Penny's (Pandora's) legs is what finally makes him aware that love will cure his affliction. He shows Penny his psoriasis and she accepts him as he is and loves him as though he was not "hobbled" by this Promethian type of affliction. This is what finally makes him aware of what his father has been trying to do for him all the time. He is now a seeker; the only seeker who has benefited from his teacher. The teacher must first have faith before he can teach faith.

In some respects George Caldwell is merely an older and slightly more conventional Harry Angstrom; both men had once excelled as athletes and both are enmeshed in a narrowly circumscribed world which repeatedly di-

53. Vereen Bell, "A Study in Frustration," Shenandoah (Volume 14, 1963), p. 72.

verges from the principles they value. While Rabbit defends his values by running, George maintains his intensions in the face of a hostile reality by retreating into a mythological kingdom in which Olinger becomes Olympus. George's experiences are almost wholly psychological, but like Rabbit's they constitute a significant rebellion against the meaninglessness of life. Like Rabbit, George represents both life and death, but the paradox is more successfully realized in Caldwell's case by an almost Whitmasesque vision of the significance of death.⁵⁴ Like Chiron and the volvox, Hook (The Poorhouse Fair), Rabbit and Caldwell all suggest Christlike figures, although in the intensity of his love Caldwell comes closer than any of Updike's other characters to something like a traditional concept of Christ. George is like Tom Sawyer, but George's saintliness is stripped of the romantic sentimentality for which Twain began to dislike Tom. It is more traditional than Rabbit's since it seeks social rather than asocial forms of expression. While George's dedication to a ceaseless, exhausting struggle for value in a world from which value seems to have abnegated is "absurd," he lacks the awareness of absurdity which Camus asserts to be a crucial ingredient of the absurd experience.⁵⁵ Dramatically such awareness is provided by Peter Caldwell, who is often painfully aware of the disparity between his father's inten-

⁵⁴. Galloway, p. 45.

⁵⁵. Ibid.

tions and the reality which he encounters.

On the dustjacket of The Centaur we are told that the novel was originally planned to be a "contrasting companion" to Rabbit, Run (1960). George Caldwell, the devoted husband and father certainly makes a very evident contrast with Harry Angstrom, the rabbit that breeds and runs. The most far-reaching difference between them - apart from differences in age, occupation, and temperament - is that Rabbit lives in his skin and does not care what he gives other people, while George Caldwell is a man who walks with "generous strides."⁵⁶ The teacher's intense concern for others and his disregard for self-interest is, indeed, a constant source of dismay to those who know him - and to his own family in particular - since it leads him into conduct seemingly quixotic and even irresponsible. All the same, whatever the embarrassments his selflessness provokes, he proves to be the antithesis of the man (boy?) in Rabbit, Run who is seen as Mr. Death himself.

In turning to Henry Bech (Bech: A Book), we see that Beck is kin to George Caldwell, a middle-age artist (as I have already pointed out in the classic degeneration that minister, teacher, and artist all have the same mission in life, only in different aspects) who has burned himself out on his first book, Travel Light. Bech, a Jew, had no belief in Christ, but is still searching for a faith in something that will promise him an eternal light.

⁵⁶. Hamilton, Elements, p. 158.

Bech is the symbol of the assumed role of middle-age teacher. This can be seen in the first chapter, "Rich in Russia:" ("To be brief I saw you, in the back row, glancing at your wristwatch, and don't think that glance will sweeten your term grade, for it was." (BAB, p. 19)) Bech has been sent on a tour of the Iron Curtain Countries by the State Department. One gets the impression during the first three chapters that he is in a college classroom taking notes on a lecture by a world traveler.

Bech in his life has not found time for God. While in Rumania,

The Lutheran cathedral was surprising; Gothic lines and scale had been wedded to clear glass and an austerity of decoration, noble and mournful, that left one, Bech felt, much too alone with God. He felt the Reformation here as a desolating wind four hundred years ago. (BAB, p. 33)

Is this Jewish teacher afraid of another Jewish teacher who preceded him by almost two thousand years?

In chapter three, "The Bulgarian Poetess" a brief description of Bech is given:

He was, himself, a writer, this fortyish young man Henry Bech, with his thinning curly hair and melancholy Jewish nose, the author of one good book and three others, the good one having come first. His reputation had grown while his powers declined. As he felt himself sin, in his fiction, deeper and deeper into eclectic sexuality and bravura narcissism, as his search for plain truth carried him further and further into treacherous realms of fantasy and, lately, of silence, he was more and more thickly hounded by homage, by flat-footed exegetes. Rather automatically, but with some faint hope of shaking himself loose from the burden of himself, he con-

sented, and found himself floating, with a passport so stapled with visas it fluttered when pulled from his pocket, down into the dim airports of Communist cities. (BAB, pp. 49,50)

Bech takes this trip in search of something that will allow him to write as well as in his first book. He assumes the disguise of a teacher when in reality he is searching himself for knowledge that perhaps he will find behind the Iron Curtain. He is so wrapped up in his search that he forgets to sleep with his first guide, "Kate."

The first fear of death that Bech experiences is when in Sofia, Bulgaria, from fear of reprisal for being American after the American legation is attacked, he reads a collection of Hawthorne's short stories:

The image of Roger Malvin lying alone, dying, in the forest - 'Death would come like the slow approach of a corpse, stealing gradually towards him through the forest, and showing its ghastly and motionless features from behind a neared and yet a nearer tree' - frightened him. Bech fell asleep early and suffered from swollen, homesick dreams. It has been the first day of Hanukkah. (BAB, p. 51)

It is interesting to note that Hanukkah, known as the festival of rededication, will find Bech searching for the ideal love in the Bulgarian Poetess, who resembles the ideal that Melville, his favorite author uses Lucy in Pierre, in that she is blonde, and dressed in white. Without actually coming to physical sexual intercourse, they talk about "orgasm." As Updike point out, "Despite the decay of his career, Bech had retained an absolute faith in his instincts; he never doubted that

somewhere an ideal course was open to him and that his intuitions were pre-dealt clues to his destiny." (BAB, p. 59) The Bulgarian Poetess is the symbol for this idealism. She has beauty. She has brains. She is artistic. Like most of Updike's protagonists, Bech is the product of a home where the mother was the dominating person while the father was weak. And when he does find this ideal, it is the day before he is to depart for the United States, the motherland. We see that Bech thinks of the Bulgarian Poetess as an ideal.

In all his loves, there was an urge to rescue - to rescue the girls from the slavery of their exertions, the statue from the cold grip of its own marble, the embassy wife from her boring and unctuous husband, the chanteuse from her nightly humiliation (she could not sing), the Mongolian from her stolid race. But the Bulgarian poetess presented herself to him as needing nothing, as being complete, poised, satisfied, achieved. (BAB, pp. 60, 61)

She is like the work that he would like to write. She is the unattainable love, the unattainable art work that is escaping him. As he himself says, "I kind of overlooked getting married." He regrets that this poetess is an ocean apart from him.

They (Bech and his guide) stood beside a small church with whitewashed walls. From the outside it looked like a hovel, a shelter for pigs or chickens. For five centuries the Turks had ruled Bulgaria, and the Christian churches, however richly adorned within, had humble exteriors. (BAB, p. 61)

Could this be an almost conversion for a Jew? Had he noticed that the human body was just like the Christian church? That no matter how rich the insides were, the exterior was always displayed in a humble manner?

Would Bech be converted so that he might be able to possess this ideal that has appeared in Bulgaria?

Those in the narthex depicted a Hell where the devils wielded scimitars. Passing through the tiny nave, Bech peeked through the iconostasis into the screened area that, in the symbolism of Orthodox architecture, represented the next, the hidden world-Paradise. He glimpsed a row of books, an easy chair, a pair of ancient oval spectacles. (BAB, p. 61)

North of Bulgaria is Rumania where Bech admits he was afraid for four days. He has passed through the tiny air slot to Bulgaria and there has found paradise - the Bulgarian Poetess. But in the room with the representation of Paradise he sees things that are common to this earth - a row of books, an easy chair, and a pair of glasses. As he sees it, this paradise is only a symbol and not part of reality. The ideal symbolized by the poetess for his love and his work is not to be found in the Iron Curtain countries or the Christian church.

In Travel Light he had sought to show people skimming the surface of things with their lives, taking pints from things the way that objects in a still life color one another, and how later he had attempted to place beneath the melody of plot a counter-melody of imagery, interlocking images which had risen to the top and drowned his story, and how in The Chosen he had sought to make of this confusion the theme itself, an epic theme, by showing a population of characters whose actions were all determined, at the deepest level, by nostalgia, by a desire to get back, to dive, each, into the springs of their private imagery. (BAB, p. 67)

Like Joey Robinson, who compares his wife to a field, Bech says, "We fall in love, I tried to say in the book, with women who remind us of our first landscape." (BAB, p. 68) Then immediately following this he has

intercourse with the poetess by talking about orgasm. Bech says that " - the orgasm... [is] perfect memory. The mystery is, what are we remembering?" (BAB, p. 68) She adds that never else do we "concentrate our attention." (BAB, p. 68) She reaches a mental climax when:

She shook her head and tapped the stem of her glass with a fingernail, so that Bech had an inaudible sense of ringing, and she bent as if to study the liquor, so that her entire body borrowed a rosiness from the brandy and burned itself into Bech's memory - the silver gloss of her nail, the sheen of her hair, the symmetry of her arms relaxed on the white tablecloth, everything except the expression on her face. (BAB, p. 69)

The stem of a drinking glass is definitely a phallic symbol. Bech hears a ringing or a noise caused during a climax of his own. Her body moves closer as if in a climax and a rosiness that gives the symbolism of the loss of innocence. During the climax he remembers her nails that touched him, the hair that he ran his hands through, and the white arms on the white tablecloth (bedsheet). Because of the closeness of proximity of their bodies he is unable to observe her face.

Bech realizes that the ideal cannot be his as he writes on the inside of a stolen copy of The Chosen:

Dear Vera Glavanakova-

It is a matter of earnest regret for me that you and I must live on opposite sides of the world. (BAB, p. 70)

Just like so many ideals, she has no name until such time that she is no longer an ideal. In her, Bech thinks that he had ended his search for

the love and artistic inspiration (faith) he needed, but realized that it is not to be so.

For one spring term Bech, who belonged to the last writing generation that thought teaching a corruption, had been persuaded to oversee - it amounted to little more than that - the remarkably uninhabited conversations of fifteen undergraduates and to read their distressingly untidy manuscripts. (BAB, p. 73)

In his search, Bech is almost run off the road by a former student of his, Wendell Morrison. Seeking new insights into artistic values, he is able through the guise of helping his mistress, Norma Lachett, to smoke "pot." This searching ends in frustration when he vomits the whole experience down the toilet. His insight was short lived. Throughout the "pot" smoking session, Wendell is embarrassed to assume the role of the instructor, but actually he assumes the role of teaching the master. Bech never moves from his chair until he gets sick. Again we see the phallic symbol of a stem. This time it is a pipe stem. Just like the mistress (whore) she is, Norma reaches for the pipe and says, greedily, "Give it to me." (BAB, p. 89) It allows Bech to see that there is no answer, either sexually or artistically in Norma. Norma will not mother him, nor will he marry her. Once again we see that Bech is the teacher when Wendell says about the pipe, "Give it back to our teacher. We need his wisdom. We need the fruit of his suffering." (BAB, p. 90)

Bech is bothered by the same mother complex that many of Updike's protagonists have. He has changed mistresses from Norma to her sister

Beatrice. Beatrice, unlike Norma, is divorced and a mother. Bech finds her much softer physically than Norma. The real reason that Bech has changed mistresses is that in his search Bech overlooks marriage and this is what Norma has in mind. But the love for Bea is no different than the love a mother gives to a child:

Little Donald (one of Bea's children) would sleepwalk, sobbing, into the bed where Bech lay with his pale, gentle, plump beloved. The first time the child, in blind search of his mother, had touched Bech's hairy body, he had screamed, and in turn Bech had screamed. Bech on his side never quite adjusted to the smooth transition between Bea's love-making and her mothering. Her tone of voice, the curve of her gestures, seemed the same. He, Bech, forty-four and internationally famous, and this towheaded male toddler depended parallel from the same broad body, the same silken breasts and belly, the same drowsy croons and intuitive caresses. It robbed sex of grandeur if, with Bech's spunk still dribbling from her vagina and her startled yips of pleasure still ringing in his dreams, Bea could rouse and turn and almost identically minister to a tot's fit of nightfright. (BAB, p. 100)

In fact Bech reacted just as a child would do if his mother paid too much attention to another child. Donald, then, became competition for Bech.

She nestled the boy to sleep against her naked breasts and Bech would find himself curled against her cool backside, puzzled by priorities and discomfited by the untoward development of jealousy's adamant erection. (BAB, p. 100)

Bea also after while wanted him to say the words, "Marry me."

But marriage would have only stymied him. In his search he needed a woman for the moment and not for life. Marriage to such a woman as Bea would have suffocated him. Her husband would have to be a commuter, eight to five man. In an attempt to get away from her, Bech

accepts a speaking engagement at a girl's college in Virginia. As he is driven to the campus, he thinks of death: "if the convertible flipped, his head would be scraped from his shoulders; he foresaw the fireman hosing his remains from the highway." (BAB, p. 107)

Bech's biggest problem is that, like Caldwell's father, he is going to die and be eternally forgotten. The idea of death is constantly upon him through the chapter, "Bech Panics."

Along with the sun's reddening rays and the fecal stench a devastating sadness swept in. He knew that he was going to die. That his best work was behind him. That he had no business here, and was frighteningly far from home. (BAB, p. 108)

His real attention was turned inward toward the swelling of his dread, his unprecedented recognition of horror. The presences at his feet - those seriously sparkling eyes, those earnestly flushed cheeks, those demurely displayed calves and knees - appalled him with the abyss of their innocence. He felt dizzy, stunned. The essence of matter, he saw, is dread. Death hung behind everything a real skelton about to leap through a door in these false walls of books. He saw himself, in this nest of delicate limbs, limbs still ripening toward the wicked seductiveness Nature intended, a genuine male intellectual Jew, with hairy armpits, and capped molars, a man from the savage North, the North that had once fucked the South so hard it was still trembling... His death gnawed inside him like a foul parasite while he talked to these charming daughters of fertile Virginia. (BAB, p. 110,111)

Bech goes on to see that these young women, so fertile for conceiving children, would accomplish their purpose in life while he, who had no children, would not accomplish his. Of course his purpose was of a higher artistic kind. He had made a small contribution to American

literature and is comforted by the thought. "He had spilled his seed upon the ground. Yet we are all seed spilled upon the ground." (BAB, p. 112)

And if he were to die without finding this faith that he searches for, he says:

The widest fame and most enduring excellence shrank to nothing in this perspective. As Bech ate, mechanically offering votive bits of dead lamb to the terror enthroned within him, he saw that the void should have been left unvexed, should have been spared this trouble of matter, of life, and, worst, of consciousness. (BAB, p. 116)

Bech reverts to his fathers' religious practice. He offers bits of lamb as his forefathers sacrificed lambs and goats to God upon the altar. Bech does not know it yet, but the fear within him is a fear of God. He sees that his life should not have been. It has been of no value.

He meets a Jewish professor, Ruth Eisenbraun, and sees her as part mother and part clinician. He thinks that he should have more to do with Jewish women. He tells her as if she were his mother or psychiatrist:

I can't describe it. Angst. I'm afraid of dying. Everything is so implacable. Maybe it's all these earth-smells so suddenly. (BAB, p. 123)

Bech must come to terms with himself before he can attempt to come to some kind of terms with God.

Who was he? A Jew, a modern man, a writer, a bachelor, a loner, a loss. A conartist in the days of academic modernism undergoing a Victorian shudder. (BAB, p.125)

After he sees himself for what he is, Bech attempts to pray to God.

He threw himself with a grunt of decision onto the damp earth, and begged Someone, Something, for mercy. He had created God. And now the silence of the created universe acquired for Bech a miraculous quality of willed reserve, of divine tact that would let him abjectly pray on a patch of mud and make no answer but the familiar ones of rustle, of whisper, of invisible growth like a net sinking slowly deeper into the sea of the sky... . Eventually the author arose and tried to brush the dirt from his knees and elbows. (BAB, p. 125)

Ryth Eisenbraun offers to sleep with him. He declines. She assumes from his works that he will welcome the opportunity but like many critics of art, she does not really know what the artist means. But the main reason he turns her down is that he has turned to religion in his search for just that moment and then regrets his refusal of a "piece" when he lies in his bed. When he returns to New York, Bea sees that there is not enough left for her; we hear no more of her in the book.

Then he goes to England, arriving "with the daffodils, he knew that he must fall in love. It was not his body that demanded it, but his art." (BAB, p.133) Women for Bech are a temporary inspiration. This is six years later

and Bech is now approaching fifty.

It was his charm and delusion to see women as deities - idols whose jewel was set not in the center of their foreheads but between their legs, with another between their lips, and pairs more sprinkled up and down, from ankles to eyes, the length of their adorable, alien forms. But perhaps, Bech thought, one more woman, one more leap would bring him safe into that high calm pool of immortality where Proust and Hawthorne and Catullus float, glassy-eyed and belly up. One more wasting love would release his genius from the bondage of his sagging flesh. (BAB, p. 135)

Mistakenly thinking that the physical sensation caused by the touch of soft flesh can be the answer to his search he plans a new novel. The title is to be Think Big. He will make his newest "flesh" the heroine. In exchange for her body, what could be more fair than to make her world famous in his newest artistic endeavor? What Bech does not see is that the road to great creative artistry is not through the passions. If it were, Hollywood would be a Mecca of creativity.

Merissa has no ideas about the exchange. To her it is nothing more than a "shack job." Bech tells her that she will be the heroine of Think Big and she says of men whom she has slept with: "They're so grateful. Men are. They're so grateful is you just make them a cup of tea in the morning." (BAB, p. 162) She is not disillusioned by this physical thing.

The last time he makes love to her, he has an erection that is caused by his art, showing that to him art is his life. Art can do more for him

than his mere physical body.

It was no use; he could not rise, he could not love her, could not perpetuate a romance or roman without seeing through it to the sour parting and the mixed reviews. He began, in lieu of performance, to explain this.

She interrupted: 'Well, Henry, you must learn to replace ardor with art.'

...'Art is ardor,' he told her.

'Do you think I'm necessarily impotent? As an artist?'

'Unnecessarily.'

'You'll see,' she said, pressing her head back into the pillow and smiling in assured satisfaction, as his giant prick worked back and forth. The tail wagging the dog. (BAB, p. 164)

Just as Updike's mother had been the dominating person in his family, so in Bech's family the mother was the one who served as the pillar of strength:

She consulted when Henry entered the first grade, when he came back from the second with a bloody nose, when he skipped the third, when he was given a 65 in Penmanship in the fifth, and when he skipped the sixth. (BAB, p. 170)

Bech, rather short for his age, yet with a big nose and big feet that promised future growth, was recognized from the first by his classmates as an only son, a mother's some more than a father's, pampered and bright though not a prodigy. (BAB, p. 171)

Even at the initiate age Bech was exposed to the mothering process that not only a mother would give her son:

Whenever she had him skipped a grade, he became all the more the baby of the class. By the age of thirteen, he was going to school with girls that were women. (BAB, p. 172)

Bech admits himself that there is nothing he would not do in his search for a faith that will help him to be eternally remembered.

He hesitated to decline any invitation, whether it was to travel to Communist Europe or to smoke marijuana. His working day was brief, his living day was long, and there always lurked the hope that around the corner of some impromptu acquiescence he would encounter, in a flurry of apologies and excitedly mis-aimed kisses, his long-lost mistress, Inspiration. (BAB, p. 180)

Bech is finally elected to The American Academy of Arts (?) and Sciences and therefore his name will not be eternally forgotten. He has tried everything to get this remembrance: women, God, and art; but only his art has done this for him. It is ironical that the girl who shows Bech where to go at the award has on a button, "God Freaks Out." To show the influence that his mother had upon him, he believes during the ceremony that he sees her in the audience. Like Caldwell, Bech brings his search to an end. While Bech has posed as a teacher, he didn't seem to realize that he was a seeker. Bech has made it to the Heaven of writers; how much further can he go?

Although it may appear that I am approaching the house from the rear door, I want to try to show that I see the peak of Updike's protagonists in his first book, The Poorhouse Fair (1959). The normal hero - the young advertising man or the high school lout has been replaced by a group of ancient indigents unified in their hostility toward the scientific-minded director of their poorhouse.⁵⁷ The main

⁵⁷. J. A. Ward, "John Updike's Fiction," Critique (Volume V), p. 30.

protagonist in this case turns out to be a ninety-four year old former teacher, John F. Hook. Hook no longer seeks a faith for he has found his and ended his search. His job now is to continue to teach the younger people and help them along the way in their search. Conner, the prefect of the poorhouse, is the one that Hook is trying to educate. Conner is the symbol of the institutionalized society that takes away any individuality that human beings may have. Seeking to deprive men of suffering, secularism threatens to deprive them of all emotion.⁵⁸

Two conflicting views of destiny are presented in the book. The view of Conner is the traditional socialist view: man is master of his own destiny and creator of the only values, and he should try to achieve a peaceful society with an equitable distribution of wealth and high standard of physical well being and material comfort. The view of Hook is the older and more conservative Christian view: man and his values were created by God, who balances the books at the end of each man's life and dispenses reward and punishment with meticulous accuracy, and man must behave in life in order to profit in the final judgment after death.⁵⁹

Updike clearly prefers the older view. Hook does not presume to analyze and there are some philosophical problems, such as free will, that he offers no solutions. Hook tries to teach Conner that God in his wisdom which passes human understanding, created man - and that man must try

⁵⁸. Samuels, p. 33.

⁵⁹. Howard M. Harper, Jr., "John Updike: The Intrinsic Problem of Human of Human Existence," Concepts of Human Destiny in Five American Novelists: Bellow, Salinger, Mailer, Baldwin, Updike (Penn State, 1964), p. 268.

to live in a manner worthy of God's concern for him. The key to goodness is faith. This is what Hook is trying to tell Conner, the symbol of secularization. Hook's faith offers what Conner's humanism does not: a bridge over the great void which threatens all men.

In The Centaur Caldwell-Chiron takes the way of imitating Christ in self-forgetful humility, claiming nothing for himself and yet accusing himself of selfishness. Thus Conner is like Caldwell in the way that the Anti-Christ is like Christ. The same traits are there, but turned to self-glorification instead of to self-denial. Conner almost dreams of being a savior. In fact some critics have described him as St. Stephen when the inmates are stoning him near the tumbled down wall. The critics claim that this punishment is for proclaiming his new savior, the secularization of American life. Even so, instead of a new religion or a savior, Conner actually becomes a tyrant and destroyer. He places name tags on the chairs that are to be used during the fair. This only takes away from the old people the feeling of liberty and makes them sit where he wants them to sit. In effect, it is like putting them in cells. Hook feels nothing but compassion for Conner. He recognizes Conner as a fellow intellectual, and sees him as a bright boy, easily hurt and in much need of guidance.

In the heat of an argument with Hook, Conner contends, "We've sifted the body in a dozen different direction looking for a soul. Instead we've found what? A dog's house, an ape's glands, a few quarts of

sea water, a rat's nervous system, and a mine that is actually a set of electrical circuits." (TPF, p. 80) Updike may have chosen the name of Conner to suggest the secular con men who deprive us of spiritual depth and meaning at the same time that they enhance our physical comfort. Despite his intelligence, his organizational ability, and his compassion for his guests, Conner cannot minister to their real needs. He cannot even understand them; ironically, he is conning himself rather than his old people.

Concerning the question of how man might live in a godless world, Updike makes clear that Conner's sort of reform is indeed mere "business" as shown by the prefect's religious skepticism and by the sadistic zest with which he orders the shooting of a crippled cat and goes about re-ordering the lives of his charges.⁶⁰ Without goodness, which requires belief, there is only the dismal world revealed by science, a world in which the highest organisms are "members of the race of white animals that had cast its herd over the land of six continents. Highly neural, brachycephalic, uniquely able to oppose their thumbs to the four other digits, they bred within elegant settlements, and both burned and interred their dead." (TPF, p.109) Hook, tells Conner that "there is no goodness without belief." (TPF, p. 81) Man is not the measure of all things.

The dislike that Conner shows for Hook is born of mediocrity's de-

60. Yates, p. 471.

sire to destroy excellence. Conner has no use for patterns; he strives to impose simple, rigid plans upon the unpredictable variety of nature. Conner is particularly annoyed when Hook's weather forecast is more accurate than the weather bureau's. Hook, the teacher whose work it has been to pass the living wisdom of civilization from one generation to another, does not think of Man in the abstract. He sees each face he meets in the present in terms of the students he recalls, by name from his past. Instead of blank skies, his vision is linked to the years when he lived beside the Delaware and watched the changing colors of that historic water. Hook is the perfect foil to Conner in that he respects reality. Instead of trying to impose arid theory upon the universe, he patiently reads the face of nature and of man. As the man of the past, the teacher of Updike's protagonists, Hook has learned that the pattern of life takes time to decipher.

CHAPTER II

The Blundering Protagonists

Richard Leban has said that "Contemporary writers are pessimistic as to man, but optimistic as to men. Their fiction is the testament of that desperate faith."⁶¹ This pessimism is reflected in many of the antagonists, such as Conner in The Poorhouse Fair, whereas the optimism is reflected in the protagonists such as Peter Caldwell. One way that Updike shows this optimism is in his sense of the erosion of time. This erosion of time is prominent in The Centaur and The Poorhouse Fair and continues to haunt a number of the other novels and short stories. This time closes the door to the past in which we must seek the meaning of our present condition. Literature is a means for recording this meaning before it is irrevocably lost. It is through this loss of the past and the attempt to regain what has been lost that Updike's protagonists stumble through life, create a hell on this earth, but try to create a heaven that they cannot reach. Updike sees their existence as that which simultaneously hides and reveals the truth about itself, since truth ultimately lies beyond the bounds of space and time and yet must be grasped by creatures who are temporarily and spatially limited.⁶² Even in his earliest stories Updike refuses to make his characters merely chic.

61. Richard D. Leban, "Fiction: The 1930's to the Present," American Literary Scholarship, An Annual (Durham, 1969), p. 191.

62. Hamilton, Elements, p. 22.

More often than not, they are young innocents trying to thread their way through a vaguely hostile urban environment. One example of this can be seen in "Toward Evening" (SD). This story tells of a young married man, Rafe, returning home with a mobile for his daughter. Half-dreaming, he is aroused by the sight of a beautiful red-head at the back of the bus, then by a Caucasian Negress. The bus, the two women, and Rafe's dreams are juxtaposed against his apartment, wife, and baby girl. At the end of the story, Rafe has finished his favorite meal, which, like the clumsy mobile for the baby, is vaguely disappointing. Rafe and his wife are balanced against each other in a wordless struggle to find the right way. Outside, their life is dominated by a huge Spry sign, white and red, blinking from the Jersey shore. Updike explains how the sign got there. It is a good account of urban scramble which Rafe is unable to explain to Alice. Thus Rafe and his inability to explain to his wife have bungled through another chapter of their lives. Updike ends the story without any comment.

For Updike's characters, human society is unreal unless converted by the mind; and in the novels the conflicts arise from the clash of fantasies. The fantasies flow from the universal assumption that nothing has meaning unless it affects the private ego. Thus, whatever is sane to a person can only be interpreted as an act of love or persecution, whereas, in fact such actions are indifferent, the thoughtless gestures of people equally self-centered.⁶³ The initiates are less clumsy when

63. J. A. Ward, "John Updike's Fiction," Critique (Volume V), p. 29.

going through life than the seekers; however, the teachers (with the exception of Hook) are not much better than the seekers.

Updike's fiction has moved from a rather facile social criticism toward a more fully existential point of view.

In a recent but regrettable brief statement on English novel and then identified what he considered to be its major shortcoming: '...no literature is as non-existential as the English. That is, the Englishman does not really seem to be aware of any intrinsic problem in human existence. It can all be patched up and muddled through.' Updike's recent heroes muddle through too, but not without awareness of this intrinsic problem. The universe in which they live is ever estranged. And man is a stranger too, wandering between them but able to possess neither. He is a victim; his cries cannot reach heaven, and have made earth a noisy hell.⁶⁴

To illustrate this further let us take a look at a few examples. The Poorhouse Fair exhibits the bungling social creed that thinks to build a heaven on earth while at the same time it considers the universe a meaningless absurdity. Rabbit, Run traces the disintegration of a consciousness in which inner feeling tries to assert its self-sufficiency. The Centaur celebrates a victory of faith achieved in the sacrificial life where heaven and earth are 'married' - and also explains how hard it is to follow such a life. Of The Farm shows the consequences for an individual of choosing the horizontal dimension of existence and ignoring the vertical, a choice resulting in the displacement of right order in the horizontal. Finally, Couples displays the catastrophic

⁶⁴. Harper, DF, p. 189.

social effect when disorder is regarded as the norm because the human has usurped the place of the divine.⁶⁵

"Men of Genius," Goethe believed, "experience puberty again and again; other people are young only once."⁶⁶ Updike seems to be able to return to this world of initiation again and again in his writings. He is able to rediscover the rarities of feeling and painful alertness. Updike portrays man's longing to see the light of knowledge and the child's astonishment of awakening to new experience. But with these experiences and the dawning of the light, these initiates sometimes stumble on the way to these new experiences. Updike's sketches of childhood portray consistently the beleaguered innocent who suffers collision with a bittersweet reality. The riddle and pain of adolescence provides a background for his moist poignant writing.

Precise recollection, then especially of family love, is vital to the initiate; it is the actual experience in which the saving truth is incarnate, and it worries the initiate to lose the least fragment of it, as he seems to feel he is gradually losing his understanding of the past. Allen Dow in "Flight" remembers with minute psychological realism his high-school love affair with a very similar girl and builds up around their story a world of remembered details of his grandmother and grandfather, his mother's shocking jealousy of the girl, the high-

65. Hamilton, Elements, p. 244.

66. Guerin La Course, "The Innocence of John Updike," Commonweal (Volume LXXVII, Feb 8, 1963), p. 512.

school debates and dances of his courting. It is a loving and meticulous re-creation of the past and Updike's mind probes it with the delicacy of a surgeon, seeking what makes it in memory so prenatally alive and meaningful. As is true of the initiates, Allen Dow's blundering can be explained because of immaturity. He makes both his mother and Molly cry, because he feels it is necessary to do so. He bungles his chance to lose his innocence and thus cut some of the ties with his mother. "We never made love in the final, coital sense. My reason was a mixture of idealism and superstition; I felt that if I took her virginity she would be mine forever. I depended overmuch on a technicality; she gave herself to me anyway, and I had her anyway, and have her still, the longer I travel in a direction I could not have taken with her, the more clearly she seems the one person who loved me without advantage." (PF, pp. 53,54)

Allen comes down the stairs at nine thirty to go out to see Molly against his mother's wishes. This is a chance to escape the mother-nest, but all he does is to make Molly cry.

Even in a later story, "The Persistence of Desire," Allen Dow is the protagonist, except that now his name is Clyde Behm. Clyde meets an old girl friend, Janet, in the ophthalmologist's office. He clumsily attempts to make up for some wrong doing that he has committed against her when they were dating. Both of them are married now and are parents. By this show of immaturity where he risks reputation by flirting publicly with her, he remains an initiate. Like Jay Gatsby in F. Scott Fitzgerald's novel,

Clyde covets not the girl, but some idea of himself that went into loving her.

In another short story, "You'll Never Know, Dear, How Much I Love You," we see the innocence of youth clumsily tripped by the greed of man. Ben - he has no last name - is the protagonist. He is all innocence. He is able to beg fifty cents from his parents to attend a carnival. He feels that he is being held back by the poverty, slowness, and sadness of his parents. His needs are clear to him; to be exalted; to find sweetness; to find light. In order to get these he must first learn how to distinguish the true from the false. His only guide is an instinctive feeling for what he wants. He is fascinated by the spinning roulette wheel. He never changes his fidelity to number, 7, or to the promise by the barker that everyone is a winner. In his innocence he is tripped by the "moonfaced god" and quickly all of his money is gone. When the barker sees him turn away, he is afraid he will have trouble with the law and so pushes some nickels into Ben's hand. When Ben counts the money, the barker has kept ten cents. Once again the painful experience of reality punctures the balloon of innocence.

Ben is the youngest of Updike's fictional heroes, but all the rest of the initiates, seekers and some of the teachers encounter his problem, or at least some aspect of it, and try to cope with it according to the insights they happen to possess. Sometimes they are wiser than Ben, but often they are less wise, for Updike does not imagine that added

years or wider experience necessarily bring extra wisdom. The seekers are even more likely to bungle than the initiates. The initiates can be excused because of innocence. One Updike story links with others, because Updike presents at all times a consistent universe where men reap what they sow and are rewarded by the god at whose shrine they serve, according to the nature of that god.⁶⁷

"Pigeon Feathers" is a study of the pressure exerted against religious faith by our secular society. If these pressures coincide with an inner emptiness in the believer, faith collapses, at least for the moment. Yet faithless existence is a fearful state. As David Kern discovers, it cannot be permanently accepted. David's loss of this faith [as explained in Chapter I] causes him to stumble temporarily, for loss of faith is lack of nerve and acceptance to a servile state in which we abdicate from our humanity. To live as a human being is to cherish and practice natural piety. And in the end, this natural piety [which really conquers the bungling] can be sustained only by the belief that the joyous patterns of creation are the will of a Creator whose providential care enfolds both the external and the internal world.⁶⁸

A younger William Young than the one that appears in "Museums and Women" appears in "A Sense of Shelter." Though but a senior in high school, he tells Mary Landis that he loves her. They have known each

67. Hamilton, Elements, p. 24.

68. Hamilton, Contemporary Writers, pp. 28, 29.

other since they were both toddlers. William blunders when he is asked by Mary, "What do you know about me?" (PF, p. 73) He still has a small chance for her love, but because of his innocence he bungles the chance to win her love.

This awful seriousness of hers; he dissolves it. 'That you're not a virgin.' But instead of making her laugh this made her face so dead and turned it away. Like beginning to kiss her, it was a mistake; in part, he felt grateful for his mistakes. They were like loyal friends who are nevertheless embarrassing. 'What do you know about me?' he asked, setting himself up for a finishing insult but dreading it. He hated the stiff feel of his smile between his cheeks; glimpsed, as if the snow were a mirror, how hateful he looked. (PF, p. 74)

He had a small chance to keep Mary from keeping her date with an older man. Because of his bungling Mary would rather wait in the snow for the older man than in the warm schoolhouse with William. Innocence is no bedfellow for failure, for it ends in fear rather than understanding. Innocence means unacquaintedness, unfamiliarity, separation from a depth of life which ensnares, souls, and instructs. The converse of innocence is harmfulness - the sting of existence consciously known and embraced.⁶⁹

If ever a protagonist has bungled his way through life, it is Rabbit Angstrom. But how much of this bungling can be laid at the feet of the church, community, family, and friends? Rabbit's pri-

69. LaCourse, p. 513.

mary error is his failure to recognize reality as such. He seeks perfection in an unreal way, and as he does he ruins the lives of his wife and mistress. Before marriage, Rabbit makes love to Janice in a room borrowed from a friend, a room with silver medallions on the wallpaper. Janice's shy love and the dreamlike quality Rabbit finds in the room with the silver ovals provide him with an exalted arena above the ordinary world. But when possessing Janice through marriage, he finds her to be full of human weaknesses. Rabbit's blundering leads him to believe that Janice will be as she always was in the room with silver medallions. Disregarding his vows of marriage he turns to Ruth in his search for perfection. When he undresses her on their first night together, he thinks of her as "a perfect statue, unadorned woman, beauty's home image." (RR, p.70) His clumsy act of scrubbing her makeup off is in keeping with the ritualistic and worshipful aspects he wants in the affair. Rabbit's statement that the night is their wedding night is indicative of his desire for ritual, and at the same time it is somewhat ironic, for as was the case with Janice the realistic considerations which must come after the honeymoon bring doom to the kind of ideal he envisions in Ruth. Rabbit is twenty-six years old and innocence is not one of his virtues.

The circular window of a church that Rabbit sees from Ruth's apartment coincides with the image of the silver medallions on the room where he and Janice met. Both images help to show the feeling of perfection

that Rabbit seeks through the two women. However, his efforts lead to no perfection. They make Janice an accidental murderess and Ruth an unmarried mother-to-be.

Updike's seekers dress their wounds of infatuation or nascent manhood with their instinct to objectify their pain, sealing it off with the sweet drug of cynicism.⁷⁰ On the strength of the instinctive conviction that earth can be truly known only in relation to heaven, Rabbit is called by Eccles a mystic who can give other people faith. The result is that Rabbit begins to pride himself on being a spiritual person, superior to others - to Eccles, for instance - who for all his theological training must come to him to have his doubts removed. But it is to Ruth that he confides his most prized piece of acquired wisdom: "If you have the guts to be yourself, other people pay your price." (RR, p.125) Rabbit at least had the idea he was acting wrong "but with him he's got the idea he's Jesus Christ out to save the world by doing whatever comes into his head." (RR, p.125) Ruth says this in an obvious reference that Rabbit is only stumbling again in his quest.

Rabbit even shows desire for Eccles' wife. Rabbit goes to Eccles' house and sees "a little porch imitating a Greek temple" and a cold silver room containing "one of those clocks with a pendulum of four gold

70. Ibid., pp. 512, 513.

balls that are supposed to run practically forever." (RR, p. 98)

This certainly gives the impression of a pagan world, with its love of lucidity and its aspiration toward eternity. It is not surprising that the owner should take him out among the pagan groves of the golf course referred to in Chapter One. Eccles' wife, Lucy, answers the door dressed in orange pants (orange for Updike symbolizes passion as is seen in the orange lipstick, bikini, and the nipples of the breasts on Carol Constantine in Couples). Rabbit thinks that she is "a fine-grained Ruth". (RR, p. 99) Yet he again makes a mistake by slapping "a cupping hit, rebuke and fond pat both, well-placed on the pocket," afterwards making a face, "a burlesque of penitence." (RR, p. 100)

Rabbit blunders at the very beginning of the book when he leaves his domestic kingdom. He has forsaken the responsibilities of being a father, son, and husband. He has forgotten his spiritual duties. The news is repeated: "Where is the Dalai Lama?" (RR, p. 30) Even when he is reminded by this radio broadcast to go home, he does not. Instead of returning home he goes to the greatest failure of the novel, Tothero. Seeking guidance, Tothero only leads him to failure. Tothero introduces him to Ruth, one more step away from his spiritual duties. The Christian church in the form of Eccles follows him like a traffic cop in a patrol car, after he has made a surreptitious visit home to fetch some clean clothes. The green groves he had wanted to reach have taken the form of Eccles' green car into which he climbs. The car is

suitably olive green. It promises peace, a peace that the world cannot give, if Rabbit will change into the penitent white garments.

Eccles is part of Rabbit's hell on earth, Rabbit is reaching for heaven, but is stuck here on this earth, which has become a hell for him. Kruppenbach tells Eccles that by immersing himself in worldliness and seeking humane improvement, man cannot enrich his life. For this, Eccles must give himself to God. Eccles cannot for he is a minister in the service of an earthly father. But if Eccles is incapable of giving himself to God, he could at least take the route of substitute belief, as Rabbit does. This may fail, and it will surely offend the bunglers of the Christian faith, the Pharisees, but it can at least escape the deadness of dishonesty. Eccles is a stumbling block that has been placed in Rabbit's quest. He causes Rabbit to flounder for Eccles is a pharisee himself.

Rabbit is a man of feeling and intuition, not a man of intellectual, abstract expression. He often has difficulty talking about his anxiety and search. When Eccles asks him about his reasons for deserting his wife Janice, Rabbit doesn't like being second-rate. Then when Eccles asks him about his belief in God and the goal of his search, Rabbit answers, "I do feel, I guess, that somewhere behind all this... there's something that wants me to find it." (RR, p.107) He wants to escape the second-rate and to discover the "something" that he intuitively knows must be behind the world, but he is at a loss to define the "something," until with Eccles on the golf course Rabbit hits a perfect shot.

"That's it!" he cries. The physical sense of perfection he gets from hitting the golf shot exactly right is his imitation - however secular - of something more meaningful than the second-rate, mortal world he inhabits.⁷¹ In his attempt to escape this second-rate life, he stumbles many times because he is misguided by the people around him.

It might be helpful here to mention a short story from which Rabbit, Run was developed. It is called, "Ace in the Hole," (Pigeon Feathers and other stories). This story presents a small town version of the urban conflict. The setting is Olinger. Ace Anderson is more boy than man. A former high-school basketball star, Ace has just been fired from his job parking cars. He stops at his mother's to pick up his daughter and ponders how to explain the firing to his wife. Ordinarily his flip indifference carries him through most crises, but not this one. This time he has gone too far. He uses the radio as a symbol of the sign of urban conflict. Seizing his wife, he dances away from his problems, stilling her protests in the rhythm of the dance. Ace's escape is an uneasy compromise between athletic pride and responsibility to his wife and daughter. For the moment Ace has no idea of what to do. Needing contact with others but unable to make it, he plays the radio and TV incessantly. He is in league with the Spry sign. In this story of conflict between the mechanized pre-

71. John C. Stubbs, "The Search for Perfection in Rabbit, Run," Critique (Volume 10, 1967), p. 96.

sent and the family, compromise is fatal. The hell on earth Ace created by his bungling. He does this by himself. Ace needs no help, but Rabbit is helped by the bunglers themselves.

Throughout the book, respectable people deplore what they believe to be the misconduct of Rabbit. He is called a deserter and whoremaster, but what is their respectability? Perhaps, "He who is without sin should cast the first stone." During his first escape, in which he drives half the night only to find he has followed a circle. Rabbit stops to get gas and is lectured on maturity by a man with whiskey on his breath. Equally suspect are the maxims of his wife's family. Through Mrs. Springer takes the tone of outraged virtue she cares less for Janice's welfare than for the scandal. Tothoro doesn't like marital obligation, though he has been twisted into perversity by his own. When Rabbit repents, his father-in-law rewards him with a steady job selling used cars with set-back speedometers. Every Sunday people dress for church, but their most influential preacher is the Mickey Mouse master of ceremonies whom Janice watches religiously on television. Though society conspires to rout the Rabbit in Angstrom, it wishes merely to drive him into the mould that it has created in its minds.

After clapping his hand on the bottom of Mrs. Eccles, Rabbit is later shocked when, at the very height of his repentance, she returns his pass. These people are responsible for Rabbit's bungling for their hypocrisy merely explains why Rabbit cannot accept his world.

The hell on earth for Rabbit is created by these people and there is no chance for him to attain a heaven without conforming to their overworked beliefs. Rabbit seeks a higher level than the church, community, or family can offer.

Rabbit often inadvertently does harm, causes pain; he bumps and blunders through his life in a pitiful way because he has almost no sophisticated capacity for constructing intellectual explanations of himself and his experience.⁷² But in his haphazard manner Rabbit is fighting for life. To run is the author's urgent, ironic advice to his hero, a demanding cry from within his heart. The world as Rabbit knows it is hurt by him because it is filled with nothing but oppressions and hurts, and this is the condition which dictates his peculiar kind of isolation. The mistakes in his quest for meaning dictate his absolute aloneness in a society which knows nothing of meaning. The book emphasizes that man is victimized by life itself, and it remains for him to seek salvation alone even when that means a rejection for human solidarity.⁷³ Ruth's admiration for him, despite his mistakes can be seen when she says, "You haven't given up. You're still trying."

(RR, p. 79)

Another seeker, Joey Robinson, might be described as an older

72. Arthur Mizner, The Sense of Life (Cambridge, 1964), p. 254.

73. Galloway, p. 36.

Rabbit Angstrom who conformed to what was expected of him by his family and community. He conformed at a young age, but has run from the ties that bind him to his birthplace to New York. Joey married his first wife because his mother and the community approved. Yet the marriage ended in divorce because he failed to live up to his spiritual duties, yet he has wrongly allowed the farm, his job, his mother, and his second wife to keep him from being his own man.

In a discussion with Mrs. Robinson, Peggy hears about "this unexpected cruel streak." (OTF, p. 100) As a child he would torment his toys, "trying to make them confess. His father thought it was the effect of war propaganda." (OTF, p. 101) Then there was the way he treated his pet, a puppy called Mitzi. He would tease her until she ran and hid in a drainpipe near the chicken shed. One day, having grown larger, she was unable to turn around in the pipe and became stuck. Joey was scared, but finally the dog had the sense to back out. All the same, although he was so relieved that Mitzi saved herself, whenever he felt a bit mean he would take her down there and show her the hole and pretend to put her in the pipe again. "I thought that was ungentlemanly," says Mrs. Robinson. (OTF, p. 101) The adult Joey still exhibits his capacity for cruelty, especially in verbal bullying by which he tries to wring a confession from his victim, usually Peggy. This feeble attempt at trying to express his freedom is only another way in which Joey blunders.

Joey misdirects his emotions when he is jealous of Peggy's son,

Richard. He stumbles in his love making, for Peggy has become his tool for sex and not a wife. He has muffed his artistic talent and is now a man interested only in the material things of life. Because of this blundering he creates a hell on earth for himself until the final section of the novel when he is able to see the working relationship that should exist in marriage.

The problem that Updike raises is whether belief in heaven can persist at all once man has consciously acted in defiance of the right order in creation. Joey has bungled and never made the decision to cut himself off from his childhood Christianity. Once again, it is Joey's unconscious mind that shows his spiritual condition. His reflection about the flowers of the field, recently cut down by the mower and growing again, refers on the surface to his scale of values as an advertising man.⁷⁴ Joey has been unable to establish priorities in his life. "I'm thirty-five and I've been through hell and I don't see why that old lady has to have such a hold over me. It's ridiculous. It's degrading." (OTF, p. 38) Joey, while spending his days in the service of advertising dollar distribution, had sold cheaply the most valuable assets in life: his poetic gifts, his capacity for work, his responsibility to wife and children.⁷⁵ But most damaging of all, he has stumbled into accepting the value of everything in terms of possessing something "big." Understanding that Joey cannot see both Peggy and

74. Hamiltons, Elements, p. 198.

75. Ibid., p. 197.

the farm at once, and certain that he will part with the land to keep the expensive property he has married, Mrs. Robinson pleads with him, "Joey, when you sell my farm, don't sell it cheap." (OTF, p.127) Joey replies, "Your farm? I've always thought of it as our farm." (OTF, p.127) Joey has achieved a peace of sorts between the farm, his mother, and Peggy.

Piet Hanema is a seeker that visits more boudoirs than any other of Updike's protagonists. In his quest for God, he seeks refuge in the body of a woman. He creates the traditional Updike hell on earth for himself by ignoring the heaven that is at home, Angela. Piet has heaven at his fingertips. He bungles by being unable to discover it.

Tarbox is a symbol for a fallen world - a world that has plunged into the depths of moral despair. Piet trips from heaven when he has sexual intercourse with Georgene Thorne. He goes from heaven to hell in one step; from the bed of Angela to the sunporch of Georgene. Sitting in church he recalls his fear of Freddy Thorne "with his hyena appetite for dirty truths," thinking how through his adultery with Freddy's wife he has "placed himself in bondage to him." (C, p. 26) And yet, in a sense, Freddy is not of the world. His interests are entirely spiritual. His work simply confirms him in his belief that the whole of nature is polluted and decaying and that earthly existence is one desperate and futile effort to postpone death.⁷⁶ His preoccupation with the idea of sex springs from a conviction that sexuality is the sole distinguishing

76. Ibid., p. 229.

mark of humanity and the only refuge from despair. Physically the distinguishing marks of animality are lacking in him. He loses his hair early, and he appears to have no teeth. Because of his spirituality, he is deeply attracted to Angela. She talks to him in preference to any of the others. Angela's pleasure in Freddy's company infuriates and puzzles Piet. Piet, the carnal man's prototype, despises the dentist for his lack of animal spirits, while he fears him because as he tells Angela, "he threatens my primitive faith." (C, p.319)

Piet is called in to advise about repairs to the Whitman house. He stumbles this time from the thorn to the fox. Renard, the fox of Aesop's Fables, was a wily and crafty animal. So is Foxy Whitman. From Angela, Foxy is able to take Piet and the house that Angela had originally wanted. Foxy is pregnant when she first meets Piet. She tells him that her ambition in life was to be pregnant. Her husband, Ken, is set up as a foil to Piet. Ken is soulless, sexless, and scientific. Piet is the opposite of these.

Piet falters once more by becoming jealous of Foxy's undisguised admiration for Ben Saltz. Foxy has had a Jewish lover before her marriage to Ken. Ben is a true Jew. On the night of John Kennedy's assassination the couples have a black-tie party at the Thornes' house. Piet misses Foxy and Ben, and imagines that they may be outside making love.

Piet makes still another error by forsaking the fox for Beatrice, Bea Guerin, as she attempts to guide him to paradise. But Bea is barren.

She is no guide, just a tool to be used when the animal instinct must be satisfied. Piet goes back to the fox. On their first meeting after the birth of her child, he seduces her and she conceives. In their panic, they turn to Freddy Thorne for help. He is able to help them find an abortionist. There follows a rather absurd turn of plot that seems straight out of the old-time melodrama. All but twirling his mustache, Freddy agrees to help them in exchange for a night in bed with Angela. Angela is the one woman in the couples who has never entered the communal bed. Without question, Angela consents. One night in a ski lodge after the Thornes and Hanemas have had too much to drink, Angela suddenly says, "Well, is this the night?" (C, p.382) Georgene, helpless, furious, goes to her room. Angela bussess Piet fondly and prepares to go upstairs with Freddy. In his bungling way Piet asks, "Freddy, should you get your toothbrush or anything?" (C, p.383) In sleep, angel and fallen angel "parallel floated toward dawn, their faces slacker than children." (C, p.390) The picture of Freddy and Angela sleeping peacefully together remind us that though spiritual good and evil cannot mix (Freddy cannot perform sexually with Angela), yet they can co-exist.⁷⁷ It is in the ambiguous realm where flesh and spirit mingle that the two forces are locked in conflict.

The life of the couples in Tarbox, and the progressive deterioration of their ideals of "truth and fun," witness to the truth that no coupling of man and woman can bring happiness or restore humanity to paradise,

77. Ibid., p. 230.

since the essential relationship one must find is that of flesh to spirit within each individual.⁷⁸ Men and woman can be partners in this quest, either to help or to hinder.

When burying his daughter's dead hamster, Piet is struck by the fact of its being a male. The hamster was let out of the cage by one of his daughters and was killed by a cat. So Piet himself is not content to stay within the "cage" of marriage, but must go falteringly about like the hamster and be struck down by a hunting animal strong in tooth and claw. Freddy has already remarked to Foxy that she has strong teeth. He does not say nice or good teeth. The death of the hamster is only one kind of death in Tarbox for death pervades there.

Piet tells Foxy, "God doesn't love us any more. He loves Russia, He loves Uganada. We're fat and full of pimples and always whining for more candy. We've fallen from grace." (C, p.212) This is death for a man who has tasted death. Yet he continues to create a hell on earth and bungle as he drinks Foxy's lemonade and finds it not sweet enough for his taste. Almost immediately, she invites him to kiss her; so she becomes his lemon. Sex and candy have become assimilated to each other in Tarbox. After Foxy's abortion, as Freddy drives her away, Piet looks downward and sees, "a condom and candy wrapper... paired in the exposed gutter." (C, p.397) The old station wagon that Piet uses for his work, and which he leaves parked outside the Whitman place, carries "Wash me"

78. Ibid.

drawn into the dirt on its tailgate. Piet carried with him the memory of the stain of sin and the need for forgiveness. His bungling has created a hell for him that cannot be made into a heaven. "But even as he pleaded he knew it was no use, and took satisfaction in this knowledge, for he was loyal to the God Who mercifully excuses us from pleading. Who nails His joists down firm and rocs the universe with order." (C, p.418)

It is interesting to note the streets of Tarbox. Hope Street and Charity Street meet at right angles. Divinity Street (faced by the churches) meet at right angles to Charity Street. So faith, the third of the theological virtues, was central at first. Freddy Thorne has his office on Divinity Street. Hanema and Callagher have established theirs on Hope Street. When Piet hears on the telephone the news of Foxy's being pregnant by him he looks across Charity Street. Tarbox "seemed a sacred space, where one could build and run and choose, from which he was estranged." (C, p.212) Of the four cardinal virtues, Prudence and Temperance survive as streets. But Justice and Fortitude are absent. Piet feels the lack. He feels it when in looking up details of colonial carpentry in order to furnish a local restaurant in antique style, he is "demoralized." (C, p.282) He feels it as he senses his faith ebb away from him. The phrases, "Thou shalt not covet" and "whoever lusteth in his heart" merge with a dream of a big new plane, a luxurious jet, plunging to earth while its passengers sit quietly indifferent. "He has patronized his faith and lost it. God will not be

used. Death stretched endless under him." (C, p.271) Piet has bungled his heavenly bliss on earth and others sit quietly by as he plunges himself into the fire of hell on earth. But it is not only Piet that has bungled; it is the entire community of Tarbox. They all have bungled their spiritual duties to spouse, to each other, and to God. At the end of the book, the Congregational church is destroyed by fire as the book of Revelation has prophesied that the earth will be destroyed for the second time. Of the church fire all that is left is the old tin weathercock, as when the second destruction of the earth only God will remain to look over the ruins. "The wages of sin are death."

In order for the teachers of Updike's protagonists to be able to teach, they must have made many mistakes in their lives also. As has been stated before, Updike picks everyday people for his protagonists, and this must make them fellow sufferers with the initiates and the seekers. But the quality that the teachers have is the ability to guide others around their own blundering. If the teachers are successful, the initiates and seekers will be able to make a better life here on earth and will be successful in their grasp for heaven. Rabbit's teachers were all false teachers. Joey would not accept his teachers. Piet lived in a demoralized society whose entire time was devoted to fun and games.

Peter Caldwell is more fortunate than the others for he has a teacher who is willing to teach him the truth. What George Caldwell

teaches Peter is love. This love is the same type of love that God gives his children. God is a reality for George, but not for Peter. "When man can no longer look up, he looks in and out and becomes dependent upon himself and others. He sees the destructive consequence of selfishness and of a morality imposed from without. At this point, the moment of love is possible, a moment that is often the resolution of an Updike novel."⁷⁹

George does not bungle as much as he thinks he does. He is a middle-aged man who has expended all of his energy and believes that all that is left for him is death. "I was a minister's son. I was brought up to believe, and I still believe it, that God made Man as the last best thing in His Creation. If that's the case, who are this time and tide that are so almighty superior to us?" (TC, p. 52) In "Pigeon Feathers" David Kern comments that he has so often heard his father say, "This reminds me of death" (PF, p. 91) that he has never stopped to consider what it meant. In "Pigeon Feathers" and The Centaur the father constantly refers to his own death as "getting the garbage out of the way." (TC, p. 42) George was "rarely a formally humorous man." (TC, p. 39) Speaking about life as garbage is seriously meant, if casually uttered. There is in him a deep piety that never forgets the Christian God (as Chiron never forgets Zeus); yet his searching honesty, directed by his scientific training, will not allow him to rest

79. Richard D. Leban, "Fiction: The 1930's to the Present," American Literary Scholarship, An Annual/1967 (Durham, 1969), p. 203.

in an untroubled faith such as his father-in-law, Pop Kramer, possesses - and far less in the quasi-Greek belief in the "soul" of nature that his wife entertains.⁸⁰ The experience of the first two days described in the novel impress on him how all life is decaying and how death presses in from the extremities of existence of the center. Failure, fear, death, and sex seem to take one decaying mass. A drunk accosts them, hugging Peter and accusing George of being "an old lech" lifting boys off the street. The drunk then jeers, "Are you ready to die?" (TC, p. 121) Escaping to a hotel, Caldwell explains to the clerk that they need shelter but have no money. After taking the strangers in, the Samaritan clerk dies during the night.

George's bungling is done so his pupils will benefit from it. He cannot keep the necessary discipline in his classroom. All the same he does teach and the impact of his teaching returns in the form of ex-students lauding him. "As the science instructor at Olinger High, Caldwell thinks himself a failure, though he is such a success that, years after they have studied with him, people still recall his crucial effect on their lives. Pretending to hate his students, Caldwell in effect gives them his life - suffering ingratitude, administrative interference, and his wife's dissatisfaction with a teacher's salary - so as to minister to the mind and heart of youth."⁸¹ Although George insists

⁸⁰. Hamiltons, Elements, p. 167.

⁸¹. Samuels, pp. 15,16.

that he is useless as a father, also, it is he who protects Peter's body and nurtures his soul. It is the job of the teacher to keep his students from blundering in life. George does not recognize the fact that he has given Peter this greatest of all lessons.

The hell that George creates is within the confines of his mind only. George is constantly on a mental trip from the earth to the stars. Updike helps to see this via the mythological story of Chiron, an interpretation of the relationship between Peter and George on another level, a transcendent one. On this level the fact of death is seen not merely as a personal problem for the individual, but as a cosmic question demanding an answer as to how biological existence meshes with the life and death of the spirit.⁸² And Man's consciousness of death as an evil is probed in connection with human responsibility before God, where the willing sacrifice of one's life for others may prove to be the way of bringing life out of death. "Rabbit, Run describes the consequences of choosing to live in the aesthetic sphere. The Centaur goes on to examine life lived in the moral-religious sphere, which for Kierkegaard is reached only by those willing to exercise freedom of choice and accept the discipline of suffering, sacrifice, and death."⁸³

As his father despairs of existence, Peter rejoices in his, drifting through the innocence of first love. He does not know it, but the

82. Hamiltons, Elements, p. 159.

83. Ibid.

kind of love that he feels for Penny and later for Vera, will one day free him from his father; however, in his confusion, his love for his father and his love for Penny have somehow become the same.⁸⁴ Ultimately, after contending with a series of maddening frustration -- including a broken drive-shaft, a snow-storm, and tire-chains that will not go on -- Peter and his father spend two nights and three days together in Olinger. When they finally return home neither knows much more about the other than he had before, but each is somehow more sharply conscious of what the other means.

In the final chapter George is overwhelmed by a vision of the void: "the monstrous tumble of aborted forms and raging giants that composed the sequence of creation: a ferment sucked from the lipless yawn of Chaos, the grisly All-father....His wise mind gaped helplessly ajar under this onruns of horror and he prayed now for only the blessing of ignorance, of forgetting." (TC, p.219) The snowy landscape suggests the emptiness of life in the absence of transcendent values. Yet spring exists even in the dead of winter; the small buds are there on the leafless branches. George remembers his childhood, when walking with his father through the streets of Passaic, he had heard from a saloon "a poisonous laughter that seemed to distill all the cruelty and blasphemy in the world, and he wondered how such a noise could have a place under the sky of his father's God." (TC, p.220) His father, feeling the boy's fear and concern, had

84. Vereen Bell, "A Study in Frustration," Shenandoah (Volume 14, Summer 1963), p. 71.

smiled down at him and said, "All joy belongs to the Lord." (TC, p. 220)

This is the beginning of the final revelation to George, of the nature of immortality: "Only goodness lives, but it does live." (TC, p. 220)

It is this revelation which makes it possible for man to accept the fact that he must die. Immortality is not an indefinitely prolonged physical existence; this, as in the case of Chiron, would be endless torment. Immortality is the inheritance, enrichment, and bequest of moral and spiritual values.⁸⁵ Peter, like so many students, fails to grasp entirely what his father has done for him. His father has helped him from stumbling in the initiate stage and when he narrates the novel he is at the seeker level. Peter has stuck to the values of creative art, but he is only a second-rate abstract expressionist. He is living in a small apartment with a Negro mistress in Greenwich Village. Like the seekers, he is trying to find a refuge in sex. He wants to make peace with a present so much less brilliant than he had anticipated, But the teacher cannot be held responsible for what the student does with what he has been taught. The teacher presents the material and the student must be able to take the initiative. Just as George is sure that Zimmerman is moving to destroy him, the principal says, "You're a good teacher." (TC, p. 187)

Henry Bech is much like George Caldwell in that both are middle-

85. Howard Harper, Jr., DF, p. 178.

aged and seem to have exhausted all of their energy in their work.

Bech, like George, feels that his work has been futile. Unlike George, Bech does not have a captive audience like a classroom or a son. Bech does go to a college in Virginia to teach and lecture for two days, but this can hardly be called a captive audience since all of the students are there by choice. For Bech his classroom is the world. Like his fellow Updike protagonists, he is searching for something, the inspiration for the one great book that will make his name immortal. This may seem a paradox to the reader for the teacher to be searching while they are actually to instruct the seekers. Bech is a teacher in search of something that he may give his students that will justify his job as a teacher of the world.

In his search for this inspiration, Bech flourishes through the Iron Curtain countries, several mistresses, and even marijuana. Updike says of Bech that "his own writing had sought to reach out from the ghetto of his heart toward the wider expanses across the Hudson; the artistic triumph of American Jewry lay..." (BAB, p. 5) During his search Bech creates a hell within his mind. "There is no value but you hold within yourself," (BAB, p. 18) Bech tells one of his pupils, the Russian guide Kate. Further proof that Bech has created this hell can be seen in this passage: "At any rate, it seemed to Bech, as he skidded into sleep, that his artistic gifts had been squandered in the attempt to recapture that moment of stinging precision." (JAB, p. 38)

As a creative artist and a teacher, Bech has a message for his class, but has been unable to get it across.

Like George Caldwell, Bech is afraid of death. George is afraid of death in a despair of possessing faith, while Bech is afraid that his death will come before the great artistic work. Bech's work has steadily declined both in quality and in sales. With obvious reference to his creator, Bech feels himself in danger of "eclectic sexuality and bravura narcissism." (BAB, p. v) Like Updike in *Couples*, "his search for plain truth" carries him "further and further into treacherous realms of fantasy." (BAB, p. 50) As Updike's essential teacher, Bech equates the needs of soul and heart. "He had loved, briefly or long, with or without consummation, perhaps a dozen women; yet all of them, he now saw, shared the trait of approximation, of narrowly missing an undisclosed prototype." (BAB, p. 135) Although he has written an essay concerning "the orgasm as perfect memory" he finds love a mystery; the mystery of being "what are we remembering?" (BAB, p. 68) Ironically it is remembering what we never had. "Actuality is a running impoverishment of possibility" (BAB, p. 69): therefore, the only truly desirable inspiration is the one we don't get. Meeting a gentle, intelligent poetess in Bulgaria, Bech experiences perfect love. Putting this novel beside the short story "The Persistence of Desire," one has Updike's basic notion about love: "either it enshrines a lost past or projects an unattainable future; in the present, it withers. So does faith."⁸⁶

86. Samuels, p. 31.

Bech does not realize that throughout his search for inspiration he has been teaching the world. He has made many false moves, but great teachers teach not only from the book, but from experience. As the seekers of Updike cannot reach heaven, the teacher can. As Caldwell is able to gain a peace with death, so Bech is able to reach the heaven of writers when he is elected to the Academy of Arts and Sciences. Bech's teaching has not been in vain.

Of all the protagonists of Updike, John F. Hook is the one that does not stumble. He probably has blundered earlier in his life, but now he has come to the time of life that his only job is to teach those that are still fumbling. The main recipient of his teachings is the thin-skinned and ignorant director of the county poorhouse, Conner. Conner is a disciple of the rationalistic order, and thus the main representative of institutionalized programming. In Conner all the fantasy-possessed young men of the short stories are combined and given a public form, an official respectability.⁸⁷ A major irony of the novel is that the primly scientific Conner cannot help regarding himself as a primitive deity, seeking chumminess with the members. When the poor pelt him with stones, he sees himself as a betrayed Christ. "As member of a group, MAN is twisted, incomplete, and at odds with himself. Only those without social identity have personal identity. Psychologically those outside the poorhouse would be better off within it."⁸⁸ Conner, like the

87. Ward, "John Updike's Fiction," p. 31.

88. Ibid.

townspeople, seeks in vain external comforts, - sex, money, and power.

Unfortunately, Conner has been born too late for the kind of life he should have preferred: "he envied the first rationalists their martyrdom and the first reformers their dragons of reaction and selfishness." (TPF, p. 47) The nature of Conner's administrative post would suggest impartial conduct. Indeed, he feels that impartiality is a "crucial virtue." He frequently fails to practice this. He encourages an informer in the midst of the old people, allowing the man benefits not available to the others, and he has clear partiality for inmates who were once wealthy or well-educated. Despite Hook's education, Conner is angered by his defense of the concept of heaven and the administrator quickly yields to the desire "to pin his antagonist against the rocks that underplay his own philosophy." (TPF, p. 48)

Conner is the only two dimensional figure created by Updike in this world of three-dimensional characters. Updike seems to regard Conner with distaste, in fact with such distaste that he makes him merely an object-lesson instead of a human being. Conner is drawn without one creditable feature or amiable eccentricity. He walks the way to hell with good intentions. He is a humanist without knowledge of humanity except as a sentimental ideal. He is a believer in the advancement of the bureaucratic hierarchy. He cannot conceive that the way things are is more important than the way he sees them, or that there is more to heaven and earth than his philosophy allows. His ig-

norance of nature and of man is compounded in his utter lack of self-knowledge. Self-convinced of his good-will toward the old folk in his charge and the injustice of their hostility toward him, he looks down from his office window and says, "Damn these people." (TPF, p.18)

Conner regards Hook as a trouble-maker and blames him for the stoning incident. Actually Hook is a wise old man, despite his love of windy oratory, and speaks of Conner with kindness and generosity to the other inmates. At the end of the book, Hook compassionately desires to save Conner from spiritual orphanhood by placing in his hands some accommodation to the limits of mortality and the agonizing fact of death. The wisdom of the past has become incommunicable, and the link between generations has been permanently sundered. Like all students Conner has the choice of accepting or not accepting the teachings of the teacher. Conner bungles when he does not accept what Hook is attempting to tell him, "There is no goodness without belief. There is nothing but busyness." (TPF, p. 81)

Updike sees his protagonists as blundering through this life in a quest. It is through this blundering that the protagonist reinforces his faith or has the courage to continue the search. The initiates learn from experience and become seekers. The seekers learn from blundering that the hell that has been created here on earth will only improve if they continue in their quests. Along the way of life the seekers will be guided by the teachers. It is only through faith that the seekers will become teachers.

CHAPTER III

The Protagonist as Modern Man

Modern man is rather an ambiguous concept, but there are certain characteristics which are commonly applied to twentieth century men. Updike dwells at length on a few of these characteristics. Most prominent among these are (1) fear of death and religion, (2) alienation from man, (3) sexuality and religion, and (4) boredom with what he and his fellow modern man have created.

The protagonists of Updike suffer from the sickness of modern living: rising, meal, riding to work, four hours of work, meal, four hours of work, riding from work, meal, television, and sleep. Within modern society, the man who is blessed with this sickness feels that he is separated by these things and people that surround him. The malaise of alienation is one which Updike seems to attribute to the inability of twentieth century man to recognize the universe of things surrounding him.⁸⁹ The more modern man tries to know himself in isolation from his environment, the greater becomes his capacity for self-deception and the wider becomes the guilt that separates him from his fellow man, and leaves him in frightening loneliness. This loneliness often leads to alienation from society in modern man's mind. Modern man, like Updike's protagonists is alone in a crowd. A more common form of acceptance (of this loneliness) is the resignation to permanent

89. Hamiltons, Elements, p. 62.

alienation from public values, as in Baldwin's *David*, Mailer's *Hipsters*, Updike's *Rabbit*, and all of Salinger's protagonists.⁹⁰ Some of Updike's protagonists have made a separate peace, but it is an uneasy truce arrived at in full awareness of its costs and consequences. They have little faith in social action.

Updike's skill is employed in presenting us with a picture of modern lives set in a complex yet orderly universe where to be human is to be creatively involved with mysteries. In his estimate of the well-spent life, he allows little weight to mere cleverness or strength of will. Rather the varieties of intelligence and stupidity, on the one hand, and the boldness and the timidity on the other, occupy his attention a good deal as he makes his writer's report upon humanity. Ultimately, however, not knowledge and power but wisdom and faith are for him the harvest of the years. Faith is the positive relationship engendering stability and tranquility: faith between persons, between man and all creation, between man and His Creator. And the preservation of faith through suffering and temptation brings the achievement of wisdom, a vision of reality bringing with it the reward of enduring joy. Often in his writings the omnipresence of un-faith in adult world is countered only by a cherished memory of childhood convictions affirming life and love. Because a sense of place is the chief tactical advantage we can

90. Harper, *DF*, p. 193

Updike's sharp awareness of modern American is everywhere in his works. Upon returning from a year in Europe one of his heroes finds American cars, "bunched like grapes and as blatantly colored as birds of paradise... were outrageous, but made sense," ("Home", PF, p. 109) and as he drives through the American countryside, "the dear stucco hot-dog stands, the beloved white frame houses, the fervently stocked and intimately cool drugstores unfurled behind car windows smeared with sullen implications of guilt, disappointment, apology, and lost time." ("Home", PF, p. 112) There has been a fighting within Updike between the aesthetic delight of his cultivated humanistic self in complex forms and ingenious verbal patterns and his commitment to the everyday, homely American life that is filled with inexpressible transcendent significance for him.⁹² Once neighborly intimacy in the small community is left behind, ceremony becomes a forgotten language. There needs to be a recognition of continued humanity. Even a cat should not be left by a human being to die disregarded, or human birth has not significance, as Updike points out in "Packed Dirt, Churchgoing, A Dying Cat, A Traded Car."

There are no figures of real evil in Updike's fiction, only a few misguided Connors and Zimmermans. But it is just possible that Updike is right, that evil is accidental and inherent in the scheme of things, and may even arise from a misguided righteousness. Updike shows that

92. Mizener, p. 252.

man achieves goodness by wanting the freedom of others, and by unselfish love. Morality, insofar as it is imposed from outside, is meaningless.

Beginning with Rabbit, Run and the stories in the second half of Pigeon Feathers and Other Stories, Updike began to deal with contemporary problems in a much more compelling way. As has been explained earlier, he drew the settings and characters of his earlier works from his own experience. The difference is felt in the depth of his search for its ultimate meaning. A consideration of his fiction will show his deepening concern with modern man.

The Poorhouse Fair is an anti-utopian novel set in New Jersey about the time of George Orwell's 1984. But Updike's society of 1984 is closer to Aldous Huxley's Brave New World than to Orwell's totalitarian nightmare. The home is a microcosm of society as a whole. Only after their exile to the poorhouse do these Americans recognize the void from which their formerly busy lives had shielded them. Conner, the manager, is a liberal idealist, "a man dedicated to a dynamic vision: that of man living healthy and unafraid beneath blank skies, 'integrated,' as the accepted had it, 'with his fulfilled possibilities'." (TPF, p. 47) Despite Conner's idealism and dedication, he makes one blundering mistake after another with his elderly guests. He is out of touch with their real needs and interests. His failure is symbolic of the failure of the welfare state as established by modern man. The old people care more about spiritual things than social security. Their attention is focused upon

the ultimate fact of life which looms larger now than any other and which fills them with anxiety.

The fundamental anxiety for modern man is not that he will exist or cease to exist, but whether he is loved. Only in being loved will he find external corroboration of the supremely high value each ego secretly assigns itself. The theme of the novel is one concerned with religion entirely outside the context of love. Though set in the future, it is only an exaggerated version of the present.⁹³ If the modern secularism, symbolized by Conner, continues, this is what modern society will become. This society is more concerned with material things rather than spiritual values. Updike may have chosen the name, Conner, to be symbolic of the secular con men who are depriving modern man of spiritual depth and meaning at the same time they are enhancing their physical comfort. Despite his intelligence, organizational ability, and genuine dedication to these old people, Conner fails because he does not know their real needs. Because the lives of the aged residents are no longer filled with the routine details of their former occupations, families, neighborhoods, churches and other interests, their attention is focused upon the ultimate fact of life which looms larger now than any other, and which fills them with anxiety. Conner's socialism gives no reason for death. He is proud of being a rational, practical man,

93. Samuels, p. 31.

and he cannot consider seriously a concept so irrational and impractical as that of the existence of a soul. In the heat of an argument with Hook, Conner contends that "We've sifted the body in a dozen directions, looking for a soul. Instead we've found what? A dog's bones, and ape's glands, a few quarts of sea water, a rat's nervous system, and a mind that is actually a set of electrical circuits." (TPF, p. 80)

As secularism seeks to deprive men of suffering, it also threatens to deprive them of all emotion. Even when Conner achieves a strange sort of martyrdom, he lacks the belief that would lend it dignity. Some critics have compared him to St. Stephen during the stoning and others as an anti-Christ, but regardless his apostleship is sterile.

For all of modern man's hatred of imperfection, he is nostalgic about the past. This is the cause of the annual poorhouse fair, where "a keen subversive need" is demonstrated "for objects that showed the trace of a hand, whether in an irregular seam, the crescent cuts of a chisel, or dents of a forge hammer." (TPF, p. 28) But while purchasing these artifacts, modern society cheats the artisans. Hook formulates the result of modern malaise when he says that having lost religion, the human family will ultimately decline: "As the Indian once served the elusive deer he hunted, man once served invisible goals, grew hard in such service and pursuit, and lent their society and indispensable temper. Impotent to provide this tempering salt, men would sink lower than women as indeed they had. Women are the heroes of dead lands." (TPF, p. 111)

"If they do this when the wood is green, what will happen when the

wood is dry?" (Luke 23:31) Modern society has taken the sap from the lives of these old people because they have sent them to the home and have forgotten about them. Modern society has turned from Christ, who recognized man's deepest needs as being spiritual. Modern society thinks only in terms of tangible and rational things. As the symbol of modern secularism, Conner believes that heaven will be built here on earth by man, and that there is no immortality of the soul. For him the creation is meaningless, escape as man puts meaning into it. He ridicules Hook's notions of the inheritance of sin and virtue, and of the efficacy of human suffering. But Hook, like the great teacher he still is, denies that man is the measure of all things. "There is no goodness without belief." (TPF, p. 81) There must be faith in man's life. However, irrational and unscientific that faith may be, it offers what modern society's humanism does not; "a bridge over the great existential void."⁹⁴

George Caldwell is a personification of modern man - worried about cancer, grocery bills, decaying teeth, parental responsibility, and the power of authority as represented by Zimmerman. But the asset that sets George apart from some of the other Updike protagonists is love. George maintains the ability to keep on going and loving in a world where no pleasant rewards encourage his struggles. Although he is finally mesmerized by the thought of death, he continues to radiate a quality of life

94. Harper, DF, p. 165.

and energy which affects even those who scorn him as an incompetent nuisance. The old enemies of rationalism and orthodoxy again emerge as the protagonist's major opponents.

Mythological references in The Centaur illustrates the narrowness and mediocrity of the modern environment and suggest the overriding, universal significance of the human struggle.⁹⁵ The mythology is a view of Updike's belief in the human condition that man is neither god nor beast, but is something of both. Chiron's heaven is not the Christian one. It is the home of irrational and capricious gods who have made him their victim. Yet he aspires to an order beyond the chaos of Olympus. The gods have faith in him for they have entrusted him to teach their children. The story of creation that Chiron tells in which "Love set the universe in motion," is quite poetic, but like George's lecture on evolution, there is an unhappy ending. The Titans are overthrown by the irrational violence of the gods, just as Caldwell's rational explanation of man is drowned in the rising time of irrationality in his classroom.

The scene in the classroom is symbolic of the human condition itself; man, aspiring to reason and harmony and peace is constantly tormented by insanity and chaos and conflict.⁹⁶ Modern man is, as Updike's epigraph from Karl Barth says, "the creature on the boundary between heaven

95. Galloway, p. 46.

96. Harper, DF, p. 176.

and earth." There is much made throughout the book of the conflict between heaven and earth. As has already been mentioned in the previous paragraph is Chiron's mythical story of evolution. Uranus, the personification of the heavens and father of the Titans, was dethroned and emasculated by his son Kronos, a Titan, who in turn was dethroned by Zeus. Chiron sees the whiteness of the earth, covered by the snow, as symbolic of the infertility of Gaia (Earth the consort of Uranus) caused by the emasculation of Uranus; the irrevocable estrangement of Heaven and Earth has left a curse upon all their children, "Sky, emasculate, had flung himself far off raging in pain and left his progeny to parch upon a white waste that stretched its arms from sunrise to sunset." (TC, p. 219) This hopeless estrangement of heaven and earth, of the ideal and the actual, is the bitter truth from which George is trying to protect Peter. George senses in Peter, as Chiron had in his daughter Ocyrhoe, the suffering inherent in the confrontation of an intelligent and sensitive nature with an irrational and callous world. Like Caldwell, modern man wants to shield his children from bitter realities also. Yet, George's concern not only reaches his son, it embraces all of humanity.

George is ready to give his gift to everyone he meets, with no thought of the merit of the recipient or the cost to himself. As with modern man, so with Caldwell, there is a little bit of Christ. In choosing to give rather than to take, to follow his spiritual rather than his animal instincts, to transcend his environment rather than to conform to it, modern man becomes the architect of his own destiny. A man's destiny,

that is the moral and spiritual quality of his life, is first of all a matter of influence. The second factor in determining destiny is the nature of the mind and spirit which receive these influences. If modern man is willing, teachers like George will be successful. Like Caldwell, Bech is frustrated by what he feels to be the ineffectiveness of his work. Bech feels to this point in his life that what he has done does not matter. He is tired and worn-out, but the search must go on.

As Caldwell is, modern man and Bech are frightened by death. Hawthorne brings this thought closer to Bech in the image of Roger Malvin dying alone in the forest. When Bech goes to the girls college in Virginia, he throws "himself like seed upon the leafy sweet earth of Virginia, within a grove of oaks on the edge of the campus, and mutely begging Someone, Something, for mercy." (BAB, p. 99) This fear of death before "his time" is the same fear that modern man has. Bech is afraid that he will leave his work undone while modern man is afraid that he will leave wife and children before properly providing for them. Bech, like modern man, seems to plead with God whenever there appears to be a crisis.

Bech recognizes nature's law that somethings must die in order for others to live when he talks about love-making to the college girls:

'For example, lovemaking,' Bech said, and to his horror beheld her blush surging up again, and beheld beyond her blush an entire seething universe of brainless breeding, of moist interpenetration, of slippery clinging copulation, of courtship dances and come-on signals, of which her hapless blush, known to her, was one. He

doubted that he could stand here another minute without fainting. Their massed fertility was overwhelming; their bodies were being broadened and readied to generate from their own cells a new body to be pushed from the old, and in time to push bodies from itself, and so on into eternity, an ocean of doubling and redoubling cells within which his own conscious moment was soon to wink out. He had no child. He had spilled his seed upon the ground. Yet we are all seed spilled upon the ground. (BAB, p. 112)

Bech's child is his work. He believes that all he has written before has gone for nothing and that he will die and be eternally forgotten. For Bech to be eternally forgotten is a death here on earth. He had hit his literary stride in his first book, Travel Light. Even the title has a transient connotation. As Bech travels in his quest, he seeks an identity through his works. Like modern man, Bech is afraid that he will be lost in the "shuffle."

The alienation that Bech feels is caused by himself. He never establishes meaningful relations with anyone. He doesn't want or need a wife. He needs a woman for only the physical relief. His work is the main factor in his life. He knows that his work is slipping away from him and he is unable to do anything about it.

Like modern man, Bech wants immortality, Bech is able to achieve this by being elected to the Academy of Arts and Sciences and has achieved an immortality while here on earth.

The fear of death is also present in the initiates. We see this particularly in David Kern in "Pigeon Feathers." Like of many of today's

young people, David is afraid of the unknown, the uncertain - death. While sitting in the outhouse, David is "visited by an exact vision of death," (PF, p. 88) a vision ending thus: "And the earth tumbles on, and the sun expires, and unaltering darkness reigns where once there were stars." (PF, p. 89) After David experiences his vision of death, he reflects that this kind of extinction is not just another threat, another pain, "it was qualitatively different." (PF, p. 90) There are four other philosophical stories in Pigeon Feathers and Other Stories concerned with death. David has doubts about the existence of the soul and the certainty of eternal life. In "The Astronomer" the scientist Bela has seen in the nothingness of the New Mexico desert a vision of his own mortality and a prophecy of his extinction. In "Lifeguard" the divinity student often has felt "death rushing toward me like an express train," (PF, p.148) and he sees theology as a frightened attempt to bridge the abyss of man's knowledge of his mortality. In "The Blessed Man of Boston, My Grandmother's Thimble, and Fanning Island" the death of the narrator's grandmother has made him conscious of the perishability of the richest part of human experience and the story is an attempt to invest her with immortality. And in "Packed Dirt, Churchgoing, A Dying Cat, A Traded Car" David Kern, like Peter Caldwell is terror stricken at the realization that his father may die.

We find one of Updike's more powerful stories about the passage from childhood to adolescence in "The Dogwood Tree." The story con-

cerns the three problems of the modern American initiate: sex, religion, and art. As the initiate tries to find direction in life and consciously strive towards those values that seem to him to be important, the first experience of grappling with the three imponderables always remain determinative. Even when the initiate revolts against his past and aims to set his sights in a new direction, what he was, still moulds what he is. This is not to deny the reality of the importance of the choices that he makes along the way, but he is usually quite misled by the explanations he gives himself at the time of decision. Updike notes "that the stability of his own childhood was purchased at the price of catastrophe in the world at large - the Depression and the Second World War. Updike's universe may look enclosed and parochial, too slight and too safe to contain the tragedy and terror that occupy the headlines of our disordered days. But he holds to a faith that does not despair of finding the basis of his experience of finding a place where human values may be nourished and mature, he maintains that extremes, incoherent in themselves, meet in a middle point; and that man may still rest, if he will, upon the eternal simplicities that our earth sustains."⁹⁷ Does this differ from anything that all of us have experienced at one time during youth?

It is in Of The Farm that "we meet the nostalgia of an overurbanized American for his country roots, and the sense that a highly un-

97. Hamilton, Contemporary Writers, pp. 8,9.

dustrialized monster feeding on stereotypes must, sooner rather than later, open its claws to crush this rural pocket of tranquility and sane values."⁹⁸ There is a sense of the break-up of families and the need to adjust to new loyalties and yet he must remain faithful to the old. Joey has forgotten the passage in the Bible that says that man should leave his parents and cling to his wife. He did not do this with the first wife for his mother's influence was still strong during the first marriage. The second wife is strong and will fight the mother. Joey, as modern man has done time and time again, has not placed love in the correct "file." It is not until the end of the book that Joey is able to correctly categorize the different loves that he has and place them in the correct order.

The alienation of Joey Robinson is not so much from society as Rabbit Angstrom's, but from the farm and his family. Joey is a member of the dog-eat-dog community of modern man. Like many rural young people, Joey has migrated to New York in search of more money and evidently has found it. His mother calls his job a "prostitute's job." Unlike Peter Caldwell, Joey has succumbed to money. In The Centaur, as Peter lies in the bedroom of the hotel at which he and his father are staying in Alton, his father comes upstairs and explains that he has met a man willing to offer a creative young person like

98. Anthony Burgess, "Language, Myth and Mr. Updike," Commonweal (Volume 83, Feb 11, 1966), p. 558.

Peter a job in advertising that leads to a salary of twenty thousand dollars a year. Peter shows no interest, and his father says with a chuckle, "the hell with him, huh? I guess that's the attitude to take." (TC, p.128) The career so quickly turned down by Peter has been accepted by Joey. Peter has accepted his gift of art whereas Joey has refused his.

The problem of sexuality has been a subject for much concern for modern man. Updike treats sex in a spiritual way.

"To close the window I left the bed. The small thump of the sash seemed to trigger the night; lightning flashed behind Schoelkopf's hill and thunder, like a violent guest grown too much at home, clapped. I got back into bed facing Peggy. Her warmth altered my flesh. She put her oval hand upon me." (OTF, p.107) There is a need to relate the impersonal world of nature to the personal world in the bedroom. This produces a purely fanciful kind of anthropomorphism. This is an attempt to mitigate with the language of mass-communication-sex. Updike uses sexuality in this novel in order to probe the possibility for our living daily in a state of natural piety and for our pressing through to a vision of heavenly grace. His sexuality now is no longer that of the awakening initiate meeting his first disillusioning shock. It is a sexuality in religious terms and he asks modern man if they have found a God to whom they can pray, and rise forgiven?

Sexuality in Updike reaches a high point in Couples. Again it is

a sexuality in religious terms. After the couples have dispersed, Updike seems to be saying, "After Christianity, what?" For the most part Couples seems to disapprove of what it displays by realizing Updike's prediction in The Poorhouse Fair of an America in which "the population soared... and the economy swelled, and iron became increasingly dilute, and houses more niggardly built, and everywhere was sufferance, good sense, wealth, irreligion, and peace. The nation became one of pleasure-seekers; the people continued to live as cells of a body do in the coffin, for the conception 'America' and died in their skulls." (TPF, p. 110)

This describes Tarbox and suburbia in modern America today. Like the modern man of suburbia, the couples lack real purpose and spend their lives in copulation; ignoring morality and even ignoring the outside world. Not even death has much power over their hearts. On the night of President Kennedy's assassination, they give a party because the booze was already bought. Tarbox society is shown to be the conscious articulation of American value, and thus a microcosm of the whole of Western civilization.⁹⁹ Updike sees only one answer to this problem and he points this out in a complex structure of biblical parallelism. The internal action is the announcement of an apocalyptic Day of the Lord, one which comes as darkness and not as light, bringing judgment upon individuals and upon nations. This is introduced by the words,

99. Hamilton, Elements, p. 216.

"Then the supernatural declared itself." (C, p. 364)

Piet, like Lot, has been raised in the knowledge of the God of Abram. Like Lot, he has a wife and two daughters. Like Lot, he has left the tents of Abram and gone to live among the heathen in the cities of the Plain. Piet is not only Hanema/anima/Life, he is Lot, the man with two virgin daughters, who flees Sodom, and leaves his wife behind. Tarbox may qualify as a modern Sodom, if Freddy is to be trusted when he tells Angela that Piet alone among their circle of couples is properly heterosexual. But Updike makes another identification. Once when Angela asks, her eyes flashing, whether Piet wishes her to practice fellatio, he replies; "No, no, no. Good heavens, no. That's sodomy." But this practice he follows constantly with Foxy, and it is particularly emphasized in the last days he spends with her in Tarbox before she leaves to get her divorce. And just as the Cities of the Plain are destroyed by fire from heaven, so Tarbox's Congregational Church is burned at the end of the novel. "God's own lightning has struck it." Then as Piet sees the church burn after the lightning has struck it, he "watched his wife walk away, turn once, white, to look, and walk on, leading their virgin girls."¹⁰⁰

This is an interesting observation by the Hamiltons for is not modern man like Lot? Modern man is often alienated from where he belongs as Lot belonged with Abram, or close to God. Modern man is seduced by the temptations of Sodom just as Lot was. Piet succumbed to the temptations, but like modern man and Lot he knew that there was a God who will not be mocked.

Every community, even the most enlightened, needs these two...

¹⁰⁰. Ibid., pp. 236,237.

Thorne, the fearer of life and organizer of amnesiac activities; Hanema, the coward and the embracer of life (the Greek word means both); also, Hanema the builder whose new structures change the community, and challenge its commitment to death; Hanema the adulterer, who threatens dead marriages and builds rickety affairs over them; Hanema the free lance acrobat who makes up his own play without regard to the priest.¹⁰¹ When Freddy does not accept Piet, life leaves the community and the dead hand of organized religion remains. When the organizer drives out the prophet, even the organization suffers and so the couples are replaced by others.

Marriage for modern man has been a main topic for discussion for a number of years. Is the contract necessary or not? Updike in this novel comments upon the contemporary effort of man to live the virtuous life, asking whether the relationship of marriage can be understood by those who have ceased to know themselves as sons of Adam. Marriage is stated in the book to have a double foundation - admiration and trust. In the religious sphere this is the reason why man turns to worship God. On earth, this is the condition making possible kindness and selflessness in and out of marriage.

Connections are even hinted between Kennedy and Piet Hanema - two men who offer life and surprise to these dead cells of American

101. Sheed, p. 31.

life, these play-churches and are rejected.¹⁰² In years to come the town of Tarbox will disappear, but the waves will still be pounding against the shore. But really all that matters for Updike and modern man is whether or not God exists and whether His intentions are friendly for mankind. In Couples Updike has written a painful natural history of Man, and it would have been in his interests to make it big with personal tragedy. But this goes against Updike's religion. So instead, it trails off on a note of irony, like Tender Is The Night. Existence is tragedy enough for a Calvinist temperament like his own and nothing that happens to anyone in particular can add very much to that.¹⁰³

From sexuality as a means in searching we go to running and sexuality in Rabbit, Run. "Rabbit Angstrom is fighting instinctively what Niebuhr has been fighting since the 1930's," says Robert Detweiler. "He has been speaking against a false moralism and a belief in human progress that conceals the actual sinful nature of man and society. Our whole difficulty in American Protestantism is in having so long regarded Christianity as synonymous with the simple command to love God and our fellow men, that we have forgotten that the Christian religion is really a great deal more than this."¹⁰⁴ Updike is concerned with

102. Ibid., p. 32.

103. Ibid., p. 33.

104. Detweiler, pp. 17,18.

the damaging effects of false love relationships which exist in Rabbit's community as well as our modern society. The townspeople loved Rabbit as a high school sports star, but seem no longer to care about him. Rabbit has a much more religious relationship with his mistress than with his wife. Tothoro's concern for Rabbit is for the benefit that Rabbit can do for him. Eccles' love for God is questionable.

What makes Rabbit run is what has frustrated modern man. Rabbit, Run is a catalogue of modern misfortunes. Those who can identify with Rabbit as a human character find in him a convenient release from the demands of human dignity.¹⁰⁵ Mr. Rupp has lived in Utopia if he finds Rabbit only a means to rid oneself of human dignity. Rabbit is trapped as modern man is in a demanding society. He rebels against this wasteland into which he is born.

What alienates Harry from the world around him is his intention, and the disproportion of that intention to the reality which he encounters is responsible for his absurd stance.¹⁰⁶ In consistently opposing the reality which he encounters, Rabbit becomes a seeker of the highly spiritual devotion, against the world. Because of this he becomes a very special kind of saint. Like many modern men, Rabbit is a seeker, and because of the nature of his search, he is set apart from the world

105. Richard H. Rupp, "John Updike: Style in Search of a Center," Sewanee Review (Volume 75, 1967), p. 702.

106. Galloway, p. 39.

in which he lives. He is rejected by both his own family and his wife and her family because of his dedication to "something that wants me to find it." (RR, p. 107) Rabbit strives for the same perfection and skill in life that he had known on the basketball court. As a special saint Rabbit must free himself from both the rationalism of the Springers and the spiritual subjectivism of Eccles. Like modern man, Harry is alienated, but he never gives up. He continues to try. For a saint like Harry, it is the struggle, not the success of the struggle, that counts.

Like modern man, Rabbit is concerned with whether or not people like him. In fact Rabbit's relations to everyone are established in terms of whether or not they like him: his parents, sister, Tothero, mistress, and Eccles who do; his in-laws, Tothero's girl, and Kruppenbach who do not. He never achieves deep communication with anyone. The reason for this may be that no one tries with Rabbit other than to say, "See, I told you so."

The novel is a grotesque allegory of American life, with its myth of happiness and success, its dangerous innocence and crippling antagonism between value and fact.¹⁰⁷ But even more significant, it is the story of the spirit thirsting for room to discover and be itself, ducking, dodging, staying out of reach of everything that will pin it down and impale it on fixed, immutable laws that are not of its own making

107. Richard Gilman, "A Distinguished Image of Precarious Life," Commonweal (Volume 73,) October 28, 1960), p. 129.

and do not consider its integrity. This is a rebellion against the nature of existence, but it is the rebellion in which all of modern men are involved with greater or lesser consciousness. "Harry has no taste for the dark, tangled, visceral aspect of Christianity, the going through quality of it, the passage into death and suffering that redeems and inverts these things, like an umbrella blowing inside out. He lacks the mindful will to walk the straight line of a paradox. His eyes turn toward the light however it glances into his retina." (RR, p.197)

The angst or anxiety that has conceived Rabbit's running brings forth both pride and sensuality. Man falls into pride, when he seeks to raise his contingent existence to unconditioned significance; he falls into sensuality, when he seeks to escape from his unlimited possibilities of freedom, from the perils and responsibilities of self-determination.¹⁰⁸ The opposition between life as it is lived and conventional and theoretical postulates is here dramatized in the form of the unconscious and mind reacting against all forms of social order. Rabbit is solely a creature of instinct. His motives, his values, and his decisions follow immediately from his direct apprehensions. To see for Rabbit is to know. Just like a rabbit he instinctively reacts to

108. Detweiler, p. 20.

sense impressions with either disgust or rapture. People, objects, and memories all fuse indiscriminately in Rabbit's mind, and his evaluation of such sensations is essentially aesthetic. His aesthetic sense always acts as his moral sense; it guides his will. No thinking occurs, and none is described. There is merely a flood of images, then action; Rabbit begins to run. Rabbit's only other means of explaining himself is to match his present life against his days of glory as a basketball star.

As death is one of the facts of life for modern man, so Rabbit is perplexed by a dream of death that he has. The dream of death leads him into searching questions about life, questions which are not abstract and philosophical, but urgent and personal. "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, coastlines, cities, seas? This childish mystery - the mystery of 'any place' preclude to the ultimate, 'Why am I me?' - starts panic in his heart. ~~Coolness~~ spreads through his body and he feels detached, as at last he is, what he's always dreaded, walking on air." (RR, p.254) Like all seekers, and modern man must be considered a seeker, Rabbit seeks absolute answers to these questions. "He wants every why to be traceable to the will of God. Furthermore, the will of God must be discernable by men, and every action must be explicable as part of God's coherent plan."¹⁰⁹ Ruth's answer that there is no God and no plan, and

109. Howard M. Harper, Jr., "John Updike: The Intrinsic Problem of Human Existence," Concept of Human Destiny in Five American Novelists: Bellow, Salinger, Mailer, Baldwin, Updike (Dissertation, Penn State, 1964), p. 274.

and that life is meaningless is too terrible for Rabbit to contemplate.

The real indictment of the American Protestant society which Updike treats is its failure to give Rabbit a saving answer.¹¹⁰ There is little doubt that Rabbit's problem is a religious one and it is evident that Updike considers it such by the quotation from Pascal preceding the novel, "the motions of Grace, the hardness of the heart; external circumstances." In this sentence we have the individual sin ("the hardness of the heart") and social evil ("external circumstances"). There is the other aspect of Niebuhr's analysis in "the motions of Grace" throughout the book, but Rabbit cannot find grace because the term itself has become so used and because the context of Rabbit's Protestantism will not admit the seriousness of sin from which grace can result.

At the end of the book, Rabbit feels himself once more as "infinitely small and easy to capture." But ironically, it is this smallness which enables him to avoid the traps intended for him. By passing off he had made the men guarding him look foolish, and by remaining "pure blank" he has avoided the nets of the various theories which would imprison him by defining, in too limited terms who and what he is. In his smallness is his vastness. The penalty is that his hands are empty; he is a nobody. This painful paradox is what makes him run. And isn't the life of modern man the same painful paradox?

110. Detweiler, p. 22.

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VITA

I was born on November 2, 1935 in Hagerstown, Maryland. My father was a minister with the First Churches of God of North America; therefore, we moved quite often and after attending seven schools in Western Pennsylvania and Maryland I was graduated from Westminster High School in Westminster, Maryland in 1953. After a year of working, I attended Western Maryland College and graduated from there in 1958 with an A.B. degree in English-Education. I taught ninth grade English for one year; afterwards I entered the United States Army and have been a member of the army since July 13, 1959. My rank is presently Major and I will be leaving for my second tour in Viet Nam in April, 1971.