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Updike's Human Comedy:
Comic Morality in The Centaur and the Rabbit Tetralogy

by

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in partial fulfillment of the
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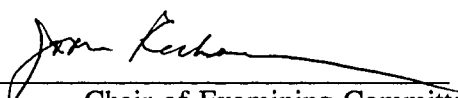
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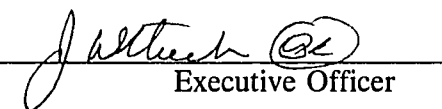
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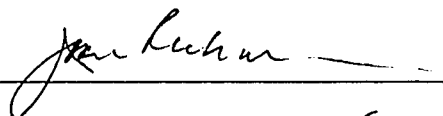
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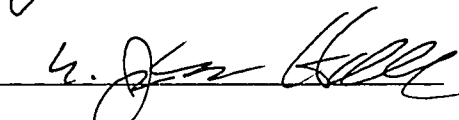
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For my mother,

Anne Keener

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Introduction: **Updike's Comic Morality: "To Maureen, comedy is one of the...chief aids (along with love and procreation) in our maturation."**

"It seems to me that critics get increasingly querulous and impatient for madder music and stronger wine, when what we need is a greater respect for reality. Too many people are studying maps and not enough are visiting places."

John Updike, quoted by Jane Howard, "Can a Nice Novelist Finish First?" (82)

The comedy in John Updike's most important fiction--The Centaur, Rabbit, Run, Rabbit Redux, Rabbit Is Rich, and Rabbit At Rest--defines man's world and his morality. To date, Updike critics have failed to recognize both the extent and importance of the comedy. In this introduction I shall begin with a brief survey of the chief criticism and indicate the inadequate framing of this--what I see to be--essential and informing element. I shall follow this with a taxonomy of the comedy in The Centaur and the Rabbit series and explain my focus on these novels as Updike's richest works. I shall then review comic theory in order to demonstrate the ways in which Updike's comedy conforms to the recognized types and concerns of traditional comedy. Afterwards, in the body of my dissertation, I shall devote a chapter to each novel in order to show that an awareness of the importance of the comedy in these works results in a better understanding of them and helps resolve a number of problems.

Overwhelmingly, critics have seen Updike primarily as a writer of high seriousness and have concentrated on exploring, for example, theological and philosophical aspects of his work. Alice and Kenneth Hamilton, in The Elements of

John Updike(1970), the first book-length critical study, view Updike as a "teller of parables"(248). Updike's major theme is:

...how to reconcile the ambiguities of flesh with the vision of the spirit. Man either finds his true freedom in knowing himself to be the creature of his Creator called to the upright life, or else he destroys himself by serving idols of his own creation. (243)

William R. MacNaughton, in his "Introduction" to Critical Essays on John Updike, depicts "the learned, humorless study by the Hamiltons" as "both illuminating and irritating. Consciously setting out to prove that Updike has 'something to say,' they emphasize their Christian quasi-allegorist theory until one sometimes forgets that Updike is a maker of fiction"(13).

The next published study on Updike, Rachael C. Burchard's John Updike: Yea Sayings(1971), traces his career up to Couples. Also attempting to prove that Updike "has something to say," Burchard concludes her study:

The thing man needs in order to accept both the negative and positive truths is a concept of God which allows for all life's discrepancies, ambiguities, and changes. The search for such a concept, the search for a religion in our time, is the philosophic goal of the artist, Updike. There is much, much yet to learn and much yet to write, but for the moment, the assertion that God exists is the most important of John Updike's "yea sayings." (159)

She does note comedy in Updike:

There is comedy here and there as a result of fiasco in the serious events of life; there is, of course, a blending of the humorous with the pathetic, the funny with the sad, all relating the comedy of living. There are hilarious moments and, especially in Couples, scenes which border on burlesque, but the undercurrent of meaning is anything but comic. The bulk of Updike's work is earnest portrayal of people whose business is the serious business of life. (6)

Larry Taylor's Pastoral and Anti-Pastoral Patterns in John Updike's

Fiction(1971) argues that Updike's central theme is the depiction of "the pastoral and anti-pastoral in our time." Taylor observes that early in his career Updike presents pastoralism positively, but gradually he becomes more ironic in his treatment of pastoral assumptions. Taylor sees The Centaur as a pastoral elegy "corresponding roughly to Lycidas"(89):

John Updike's finest work--the novel which would have established him as a major writer, had he written nothing else--rests directly in the mainstream of this pastoral-epic pattern; furthermore, The Centaur powerfully illuminates the pattern itself. (87)

Next, Taylor describes Rabbit, Run as "a type of fable with satiric overtones."

Robert Detweiler's concise study, John Updike, focuses on Updike's technique and its relationship to his themes:

If Updike can be classified at all in terms of literary tradition, one might say that he writes a "secular baroque." It is elaborate, texture-conscious, structurally balanced, highly controlled, mythically resonant fiction, yet a kind that does not celebrate such a rich and ordered world but instead ironically marks its passing. (7)

For Detweiler, "...the sum total of his fiction is to impress his readers directly with the conviction that, although things are not good, men can still work meaningfully to make them so. In Updike's world, suffering and death are present; but original sin as their cause and redemption as the cure are not important" (80). Instead, Updike's "...answer is work. Work involves suffering and therein another facet of creativeness is exposed: man is the one who works and suffers for the sake of meaning"(94).

According to Detweiler, in The Centaur Peter Caldwell recognizes from his father's sacrifice the importance of work and "takes on the responsibility of faith in the future, faith in his art (hitherto "second-rate") as the vocation-risk that will form his meaning

and that will redeem his creatureliness"(97). Detweiler sees no such resolve in the Rabbit of Rabbit, Run: "Irresponsible, undependable, and gutless, he is the quintessence of the non-hero. The tragedy--or the farce--of the novel is that he never learns"(50-51). Despite Detweiler's reference to farce, he believes that "...Updike had limited his use of humor to his poetry and Assorted Prose...and he had reserved for his fiction a certain wit often more cynical than comic"(1).

As my study will show, Detweiler is mistaken in assuming, as others do, that Updike is contrasting an inferior present with a rich past and in his notion that in The Centaur it is respect for work that Peter Caldwell must accept in order to mature. Rather, an understanding of the centrality of comedy in Updike undercuts nostalgia by positing the cyclical nature of life and the primacy of the present; as for Peter Caldwell, he is industrious but lacks his father's insightful comic sense. Also, Detweiler's evaluation of Rabbit Angstrom is too harsh. Rabbit, uneducated and provincial, is finding his way in a problematic world. He too is a hard worker: his father recalls how diligently Rabbit had practiced to become a star basketball player. In Rabbit, Run, Rabbit strives to become a better salesman and works hard in Mrs. Smith's garden. Maturity comes with experience; gradually, over the course of the series, he does mature. Comedy is not moralistic but rather sympathetic: it exposes the foibles and shortcomings of a character like Rabbit to reveal his humanity rather than to condemn him.

Joyce Markle, in Fighters and Lovers(1973), describes "Updike's major thematic lines" as:

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

Like Burchard, Markle recognizes the existence of comedy in The Centaur, Rabbit, Run, Rabbit Redux, The Poorhouse Fair, Of The Farm, and Couples but argues against its importance:

Although there are many somewhat comic scenes in the other novels and many truly comic moments...it is clear that, in their basic view of the human world, the other six novels are serious whereas Bech is unquestionably comic. (168)

While Markle asserts that comedy by its nature is unworthy of critical attention, she continually acknowledges the presence of comedy in Updike's serious fiction:

The reason for this also explains why this study has been so far forced to neglect the comic aspects of Updike's writing: criticism in itself is essentially serious--it awards to its object the very dignity and importance which comedy subtly denies. (168)

As a critical principle, a point of view that denies ab initio the importance of comedy in fiction seems questionable. My study will directly challenge such a sweeping generalization. In concluding her analysis, Markle allows that, "Seen through the rose-colored glasses of comedy, Updike's other novels appear filled with whimsical and humorous scenes"(182) and she alludes to the comic "outrageousness" in the novels. Markle continues:

In addition to being humorous, there is another sense in which Updike's novels could be considered somewhat comic: they frequently rely heavily on the customs and manners of a particular social milieu. (185)

Apparently contradicting her earlier dismissal of the comedy's importance, Markle finally admits that:

The comic and the serious often seem to coexist dialectically in Updike's work; the major characters often struggle against insignificance, against perhaps the acceptance of a comic rather than a serious world. (169)

The seriousness of this dialectic opposition seemingly escapes her. Instead, Markle insists on the mutual exclusivity between the serious vision and the comic:

Given the often amusing situations and the attention to manners, then, how does Updike succeed in creating, ultimately, the serious vision and not the comic in these novels? Partly...it is by placing his characters in a causal realm where they want to and can perform effective actions and where they are not invulnerable to harm from each other or from some outside agency. The threats to each of the central characters are made visible and serious. But more than that, Updike...has relied on perhaps the oldest and most categorical differentiation between the comic and the serious: the fact of death--the absence of which marks the comic and the presence of which calls forth the serious. (186)

Overall, then, while Markle does detect a great deal of comedy in Updike's fiction, she ultimately dismisses it. She fails to consider that the comedy need not be antithetical to Updike's seriousness and that, indeed, it seems essential to expressing his vision.

Edward Vargo, in Rainstorms and Fire(1973), sees Updike's novels as demonstrating the need for ritual in contemporary life and the realization of the "sacral" universe. Vargo says of The Centaur:

I shall demonstrate how the ordinary elements of human life on this conceivable earth are brought within the sacral sphere, how elements of the inconceivable heaven affect the life of man on earth, and how rituals grow out of this sacral atmosphere to enrich the lives of George Caldwell and his son Peter. (91)

Nevertheless, Vargo admits that "...the effect of The Centaur is to leave us unconvinced of this other world." The "material clutter overwhelms the transcendent"(102). For Vargo, this effect is caused by "a failure of vision":

For Karl Barth, the relationship between heaven and earth is a sign of the covenant between God and Man. In The Centaur, the sign value of the world is implicit but God is still a vague, bloodless Being.

(102)

Tony Tanner, in a 1971 article "A Compromised Environment" included in John Updike (edited by Harold Bloom), expresses a similar feeling. After praising Updike's matchless rendering of the "suburban world"--his "density of specification"--Tanner notes: "Paradoxically the effect of most of his work is to leave us feeling that there is only one world, and that the wall of detail with which he confronts us looms all too authentically large"(43). Thus, from different perspectives, Vargo and Tanner come to the same conclusion: in Updike the emphasis is on the everyday world. Had these critics recognized the centrality of comedy in Updike's world, they would not have found this emphasis "paradoxical." Comedy's subject matter is the ordinary and everyday. Henry James, in his chapter on Balzac in French Poets and Novelists, observes, "Never was a great genius more essentially local"(73). James declares:

...this palpable world of houses and clothes, of seven per cents and multiform human faces, pressed upon his imagination with an unprecedented urgency. It certainly is real enough to most of us, but to Balzac it was ideally real--charmingly, absorbingly, absolutely real.

(90)

As with Balzac, Updike's human comedy focuses on the quotidian. Richard Duprey, in his essay "Whatever Happened to Comedy?" collected in Robert W. Corrigan's Comedy: Meaning and Form, notes, "Great comedy is the result of keen observation

of the world"(244).

George Hunt, in John Updike and the Three Great Secret Things: Sex, Religion, and Art(1980), asserts, "...that these three secret things also characterize the predominant subject matter, thematic concerns, and central questions found throughout his adult fiction"(2). Hunt emphasizes Updike's interest in Karl Barth and Kierkegaard:

My efforts, especially in considering his earlier novels, are intended to demonstrate that this attitude is more than a merely spontaneous one, but is in fact a most sophisticated religio-artistic vision, informed and often shaped by a very complex and subtle theology. My rather lengthy expositions of the theologies proper to Kierkegaard and Karl Barth are, I believe, an indispensable aid for understanding the spiritual depth and range of Updike's fiction. (3)

Like other critics, such as Detweiler, Hunt briefly notes Updike's humor: "Several of Updike's novels are funny indeed, and humorous incidents are found even in his most sober fiction"(6). Hunt, however, does not pursue this observation further except for noting the depiction of the Kierkegaardian "humorist" in the short story "The Astronomer." Curiously, Hunt does not mention this influence within The Centaur.

Suzanne Henning Uphaus, in John Updike(1980), observes, "The common theme behind Updike's writing is the profound religious searching that grows from this despair, a quest in which doubt fights desperately with faith"(5). Uphaus views The Centaur as a depiction of "...the tension between the metaphoric and the factual vision, the heroic and the mundane"(170). Like Vargo, Uphaus reluctantly admits the dominance of the factual and mundane:

In this discussion of The Centaur, I will demonstrate how the use of classical mythology in conjunction (or perhaps disjunction) with realistic

detail, reflects the ostensible meaning of the novel: the thematic loss of Christianity parallels the loss of artistic faith.

(164)

Finally, for Uphaus, the heroic vision succumbs to the mundane, creating the mock-heroic. Uphaus' interpretation is inadequate, however. As my study will show, the heroic is undermined, for example, in the burlesque of the Greek gods. Instead, The Centaur celebrates the ordinary and the everyday. Furthermore, an acceptance of everyday reality is fundamental for both artistic achievement and Christian belief.

Donald J. Greiner, in John Updike's Novels (1984), states: "My primary goal, then, is not to urge a thesis on the canon but to offer an informed and careful reading of the novels in order to isolate and discuss the qualities that make Updike a great writer"(IX). In his detailed analysis of The Centaur and the first three Rabbit novels, however, Greiner ignores Updike's comedy. The most recent critical book on Updike is Judie Newman's John Updike (1988). Rather than approaching the novels in terms of religious and philosophical issues, Newman calls attention to their responsiveness to social and historical developments in modern America:

... although religious issues are relevant to any discussion of Updike, it is important to keep them in perspective. John Updike is emphatically not an esoteric writer, nor a rigidly programmed apologist, and it is perfectly possible to understand and appreciate his novels without abstruse theological knowledge.

(2)

For Newman, Updike's focus is on this world: the social ethic in The Poorhouse Fair and Couples; the world of work in the first three Rabbit books; the aesthetic in, among others, The Centaur; and "the politics of the imagination" in The Coup and The Witches of Eastwick. In her study, Newman does not explore Updike's humor,

although she does note a number of comic scenes. In The Fiction of Philip Roth and John Updike(1985), George J. Searles compares the work of the two writers and finds a number of similarities. Searles, however, finds little comedy in Updike:

While Roth is completely at ease with--and remarkably skilled at--broad, burlesque farce and roisterous slapstick, Updike's humor runs more to witty repartee and intellectualized parody, the type of humor that characterizes his light verse. But low comedy is not his forte.

(159)

Searles ignores the recurrent burlesque and farce in The Centaur, such as in the bizarre first chapter when the naked Venus teases the aroused Chiron and lampoons the gods or when, during Caldwell's lecture, the class riots and, outlandishly, the principal fondles a student.

There are only three studies of Updike's comedy in The Centaur and/or the Rabbit series. Hazel Guyol, in a brief article in English Journal, "The Lord Loves A Cheerful Corpse," focuses on the humorous aspects of the characterization of George Caldwell in The Centaur: "...it is probable that Updike's greatest achievement in The Centaur is the creation of a living, breathing comic character"(836). Guyol, however, does not explore the significance of this comic characterization for the novel. In her essay, "Updike's American Comedies," Joyce Carol Oates makes a number of intriguing generalizations about Updike's comedy. Defending Updike as a writer of substance, Oates states, "...it is far more difficult to do what Updike does. Like Caldwell/ Chiron, he accepts the comic ironies and inadequacies of ordinary life"(68). She notes:

And he has taken on as well that remarkably detached, rather elegant ego-less ability to glance without judgement on all sides of a

melodramatic event, a basic clownishness, that seems to go largely unnoticed in his writing, but which gives it its energy, its high worth. Caldwell is funny, very funny, not with Bech's overwrought and neurotic wit, but with a fundamentally amiable acceptance of misery. He reduces theological arguments to their basic emotional core, and correctly, presents it all as a cosmic joke. (67)

Ralph C. Wood, in a 1988 study--The Comedy of Redemption:

Christian Faith and Comic Vision in Four American Novelists--includes Updike along with Flannery O'Connor, Walker Percy, and Peter DeVries as "a parabler of comic redemption"(283)--although Updike is "the hardest case to make." Wood, a professor of theology, is concerned with proving how Christian faith is comic:

The central contention of this study is that Jesus' death and resurrection render human existence comic in both its roots and its ramifications. Christian faith is comic, I will argue, in the profoundest sense of the word. It is about eschatological laughter and joy and hope. The grim sobriety of the old aeon has been replaced with the gracious hilarity of God. (1,2)

Of the Updike novels, Wood treats only the first three Rabbit novels in depth.

Although he makes some pertinent points regarding Updike's comedy, overall Wood's perspective is theological rather than literary.

Updike's comedy may be classified as farce, burlesque, and irony. In his essay "Comedy and the Comic Spirit" (Comedy: Meaning and Form,3), Robert W. Corrigan quotes Samuel Johnson's observation that, "Comedy has been particularly impropitious to definers." Nevertheless, The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics' definitions offer a starting point for classifying Updike's comedy. The Princeton Encyclopedia describes farce as that which "...exploits the surprise of sudden appearance or disclosure, the mechanism suggested by many physical actions,

repetition, gross exaggeration of character, and so on...it may pursue its laughter into a world of fantasy, where the unpredictable, even the impossible is commonplace"(271). Updike's farce helps create his fictional world of absurdity, uncertainty, and confusion. In The Centaur, farce is evident in the carnivalization in the first chapter: Caldwell's bizarre behavior, the principal Zimmerman's clowning, and the riotous behavior of the students, which is described surrealistically. In Rabbit Is Rich, Rabbit's son, in a rage, smashes the cars in his father's automobile lot "comically fast." Spying on his ex-lover, Rabbit is forced to make an undignified retreat from an aggressive collie.

The Princeton Encyclopedia defines burlesque as "...incongruous imitation and deflationary treatment of serious themes for satiric purposes"(88). Updike's burlesque, however, ought not be confused with satire. His comedy is not distancing as satire is; rather it is sympathetic to humanity, undercutting pretension and vanity to establish man's proper place in the world. Updike has vigorously maintained that he does not write satire in his novels: "You cannot be satirical at the expense of fictional characters because they're your creatures. You must only love them"("One Big Interview," Picked-Up Pieces, 519). V.C. Clinton-Baddeley, in The Burlesque Tradition in the English Theatre After 1660, observes: "Caricature and burlesque exhibit all distortions and exaggerations whatever but under this discipline--that they purpose that way to get closer to essential truth(5). Venus' burlesque of the gods (Zeus becomes "a lecherous muddler") and Caldwell's disdain for the local "aristocrats" ("Make Nero look tame") reveal the truth beneath the pretense.

Caldwell, however, burlesques himself as well by means of his mismatched clothes and comic behavior: his son Peter points out, "He was always bringing junk like this home as if burlesquing his role of provider"(48). Caldwell caricatures the incompetent dentist as "Dr. Yankem," but as his former teacher he accepts the blame for the man's deficiencies. Similarly, in Rabbit Is Rich, Rabbit burlesques Brewer's business and political leaders: "How can you respect the world when you see it's being run by a bunch of kids turned old?"(275) Defending America in Rabbit Redux, he recognizes, "If it was better I'd have to be better"(171).

The Princeton Encyclopedia defines irony as a device by which a writer expresses a meaning contradictory to the stated or ostensible one. Both verbal and dramatic irony are evident in Updike's fiction. In The Centaur, Zimmerman/Zeus warns his mistress: "You overestimate my omnipotence"(163). In Rabbit Is Rich, Rabbit lusts for the enticing Cindy Murkett; but when he and his wife vacation with friends in the Caribbean and the couples agree to exchange partners for a night, Rabbit is rudely surprised to find himself paired with the plain Thelma Harrison. Updike's paradoxes, understatement, hyperbole, punning, and jokes expose both the uncertainty of life and the foolishness inherent in humanity. Again, however, Updike's intentions are not satirical. After accepting his initial disappointment with Thelma Harrison, Rabbit learns a great deal about himself and his friends from the experience. For Updike's fiction, Northrop Frye's contrast between irony and satire in The Anatomy of Criticism applies:

The chief distinction between irony and satire is that satire is militant irony: its norms are relatively clear, and it assumes standards against

which the grotesque and absurd are measured...whenever a reader is not sure what the author's attitude is or what his own is supposed to be, we have irony with relatively little satire. (233)

Moreover, Auden's distinction in the essay "Don Juan" is pertinent: "Satire would arouse in readers the desire to act so that the contradictions disappear; comedy would persuade them to accept the contradictions with good humor as facts of life against which it is useless to rebel"(388).

Why then would a writer as artful as Updike include so much comedy if it has little significance? Critics have failed not only to answer this question but even to pose it. In fact, Updike's comedy reveals the absurd and contradictory nature of life and the limitations of existence. Updike has stated that in all of his books the essential question is "What is a good man?" or "What is goodness?" ("One Big Interview,"502) My thesis is that the comedy in Updike, and especially in The Centaur and the Rabbit series, far from being peripheral or mere comic relief, expresses the morality of his fictional world. His comedy illustrates and elucidates how human beings can come to a mature apprehension of themselves and others. George McFadden, in Discovering the Comic(1982), cites Charles Mauron's Psychocritique du genre comique:

To Mauron, comedy is one of the defenses against anxiety, one of the most important in the whole sphere of play and the arts; and these, he believes, constitute the chief aids (along with love and procreation) in our maturation. (153)

Reflecting the link that exists among comedy and love and procreation, Rabbit defines the purpose of life as "Have a few laughs....Have a few babies"(Rabbit Redux,194).

In Updike's fiction, characters are mature when they recognize the comic nature of the human condition and yet accept their own place in it. They do not distance themselves from humanity's follies by retreating or escaping into egotism, fantasy, or pedantry. Updike's characters are most fully human when exhibiting a conscious willingness to cross back and forth over the boundaries between rationality and irrationality, conventionality and outrageousness. George Caldwell, in The Centaur, is Updike's paragon, but the shrewd Charlie Stavros, in Rabbit Is Rich, expresses this perspective succinctly: "Being crazy's what keeps us alive" (Rabbit Is Rich 90). Also, an understanding of the function of comedy in expressing Updike's morality will help answer two related critical questions: Does Updike have anything of substance to say or is he, as Harold Bloom charges, a minor novelist with a major style? And why, as critics as different as Tanner and Vargo have wondered, does the everyday world dominate his fiction to the exclusion of the transcendent?

Perceiving the extent of Updike's use of comic elements and understanding them in the context of their connection to questions about goodness help explain one of the most conspicuous features of Updike's work, his almost constant preoccupation with religion. In a mid and late-twentieth century world view, a comic attitude seems perhaps the most appropriate stance. Wylie Sypher states in "The Meaning of Comedy," "The modern hero lives amid irreconcilables which, as Dostoevsky suggests, can be encompassed only by religious faith--or comedy"(196). Updike's comedy, therefore, does not belittle man but rather, in a manner faithful to the comic vision, establishes his true place in the world without delusions or pretense.

From my research in the criticism and theory of comedy, I have drawn upon a number of sources. Especially useful in describing comedy's general nature and concerns have been William F. Lynch's Christ and Apollo, Edward L. Galligan's The Comic Vision in Literature, Joseph Meeker's The Comedy of Survival, George McFadden's Discovering the Comic, William G. McCollum's The Divine Average, Northrop Frye's The Anatomy of Criticism, Robert Bernard Martin's "Notes Toward A Comic Fiction," James Feibleman's In Praise of Comedy, Morton Gurewitch's Comedy: The Irrational View, and Comedy, edited by Wylie Sypher, containing Bergson's "Laughter," Meredith's "An Essay on Comedy," and Sypher's "The Meanings of Comedy." In each Updike novel, I have found subtle depictions of Frye's idyllic "green world" as well as of the pharmakos figure mentioned by a number of critics including Frye, McFadden, and Sypher. Robert W. Corrigan's anthology, Comedy: Meaning and Form, contains a wealth of pertinent criticism: Corrigan's own essays "Comedy and the Comic Spirit" and "Aristophanic Comedy: The Conscience of a Conservative"; Santayana's "The Comic Mask and Carnival"; Susanne K. Langer's "The Comic Rhythm"; Nathan A. Scott's "The Bias of Comedy and the Narrow Escape Into Faith"; Martin Grotjahn's "Beyond Laughter"; Richard Duprey's "Whatever Happened to Comedy"; Eric Bentley's "Farce"; C.L. Barber's "The Saturnalian Pattern in Shakespeare's Comedy"; and L.J. Potts' "The Subject Matter of Comedy." I have drawn upon Edith Kern's The Absolute Comic, with its explication of Bakhtin, for an understanding of carnivalization. In F. M. Cornford's The Origin of Attic Comedy, Freud's Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious,

and Kierkegaard's Concluding Unscientific Postscript, I have discovered valuable information regarding the importance of comedy in Updike. In particular, Kierkegaard's morphology of the spheres of human existence, mentioned by the Updike critics Hunt, Newman and the Hamiltons, has helped frame my study.

In comedy, life appears absurd, uncertain, contradictory, and frustrating: "We have, in short, been forced to admit that the absurd is more than ever inherent in human existence: that is, the irrational, the inexplicable, the surprising, the nonsensical--in other words, the comic"(Sypher,195). Kierkegaard, in Concluding Unscientific Postscript, declares: "The matter is quite simple. The comical is present in every stage of life (only that the relative positions are different), for wherever there is life, there is contradiction, and wherever there is contradiction, the comical is present"(459). Nevertheless, the comic hero accepts the human condition. The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics describes the central values of comedy as "the ability to adjust, common sense, and humility, or a clear-eyed sense of one's relationship to others"(145). Robert Bernard Martin, in his essay "Notes Toward a Comic Fiction," describes comedy as "...that genuine quality embracing sympathy, tolerance, acceptance, even celebration of the human condition, imperfect as it is"(78). Meeker's The Comedy of Survival depicts man's challenge in a comic world: "Comedy illustrates that survival depends upon man's ability to change himself rather than his environment, and upon his ability to accept limitations rather than to curse fate for limiting him"(39). Similarly, McFadden, in Discovering the Comic, finds

that comedy "...encourages us to face commonplace reality and live with it"(166).

Meeker, discussing Dante's The Divine Comedy, avows that the poet is presenting "...an image of human adaptation to the world and acceptance of the given conditions without escape, rebellion, or egotistic insistence upon human centrality"(187).

Refusing to isolate himself, the comic hero recognizes his role in time and society. Comedy's realm is the everyday, the present, the actual: "Lynch argues that the comic mode is the most finite, most concrete, least magical, least univocal of the modes of the literary imagination..."(Galligan,24); according to Lynch, "The one offense, therefore, which comedy cannot endure is that a man should forget he is a man, or should substitute a phony faith for faith in the power of the vulgar and limited finite"(105). In comedy, as Galligan puts it, "time and change" are seen "...as cyclical and unthreatening. Progressions--of seasons and generations--matter in comedy; progress does not"(213). Northrop Frye, in The Anatomy of Criticism, declares, "That the theme of the comic is the integration into society which usually takes the form of incorporating a central character into it"(43). By contrast, tragedy isolates its heroes(54). Frye adds, "...and one feels that the social judgement against the absurd is closer to the comic norm than the moral judgement against the wicked"(163). Meredith and Bergson also emphasize the social aspect of comedy. In "An Essay On Comedy," Meredith notes, "The comic poet is in the narrow field or enclosed square of the society he depicts"(46). Bergson writes:

To understand laughter, we must put it back into its natural environment, which is society, and above all must we determine the utility of its function, which is a social one. Such, let us say at once, will be the leading idea of all our investigations. Laughter must answer

to certain requirements of life in common. It must have a social
signification. (65)

In The Divine Average, William McCollam indicates the importance of society as the setting for comedy:

In contrast to tragedy, comedy directs itself toward those levels of mind and feeling concerned not with perilous moral choices made in isolation from others but with the steps or leaps taken, the adjustments made, the routines rehearsed, and the chance encounters in an endless variety of social settings from family to committee room to carnival. (VII)

Meeting his familial and societal responsibilities requires that the comic hero sacrifice himself. McFadden alludes to Coleridge's insight that within the comic character there tends to be "...an absence of effective self-interest." For McFadden, this negation of self-interest "...presents a vision of the hollowness of mere selfishness, of calculating motives, and of their disproportion to 'the godlike within us...'"(35). By accepting his obligations, the comic hero matures. Kierkegaard, in Concluding Unscientific Postscript, claims, "The comical is always the mark of maturity"(250). In "Aristophanic Comedy," Corrigan quotes S.N. Behrman: "The ability to laugh at his own pretensions and shortcomings is the true mark of the civilized nation, as it is of the civilized man"(361).

Skeptical of orthodoxy and authority, the comic hero learns from experience that is often bewildering and humiliating. Galligan observes that comedy "... rejects the neat, mechanical, perfectly balanced orders generated by logic and embraces the organic, irregular orders generated by what Lynch calls the analogical mind"(31). The univocal--whether expressed by pretension, habit, or pedantry--is ridiculed: "...unincremental repetition, the literary imitation of ritual bondage, is funny"(The

Anatomy of Criticism,168). Sypher notes the ubiquity of doubleness throughout comedy: "... comedy is built upon double occasions, double premises, double values"(213).

Doubleness characterizes the comic hero as well. He is both average and engaging, passive and adventurous. As McFadden puts it, "We are creatures of the middle state in life"(20). According to Frye, the comic hero tends to be "...ordinary in his virtues, but socially attractive"(44); taking life as it comes, he proceeds uninhibited by decorum or conventionality: "Prudence then becomes irrelevant because man's essential existence is not led in a prudential world"(Martin,81). Gurewitch elaborates, "Humor seeks, not to expunge folly, but to condone and even bless it, for humor views folly as endearing, humanizing, indispensable"(9). In "The Comic Rhythm," Susanne Langer underscores the comic hero's vitality: "This human life-feeling is the essence of comedy. It is at once religious and ribald, knowing and defiant, social and freakishly individual" (123). The comic hero develops double vision: "...the comic perception comes only when we take a double view---that is, a human view--of ourselves, a perspective by incongruity" (Sypher,255). Through it all he remains resilient, playful, and open-minded. His experience reflects the survival of the species: "...the truest and the most accurate form of comedy and laughter: this song of indestructibility, the song of the indestructibility of the people"(Lynch,107).

Essentially, comedy reveals truth. A number of theorists mention a device called the comic discussion. McFadden describes its function: "The essence of the discussion is that it tests and sorts things out but changes nothing radically; it shows

up situations and characters for what they are"(35). In general, comedy, by challenging conventionality and the status quo, reveals a deeper more human reality:

On the surface, comedy, with its antipathy to the order of things, seems anarchic....But it is not at all anarchic: it is only a defender of another and more human order(more muddy, more actual, more free). Metaphysically, it is a defender of being against the pure concept of category. (Lynch,114)

The alazons or impostors of traditional comedy are liars, though as Frye points out, "...it is more frequently a lack of self-knowledge than simple hypocrisy that characterizes them"(172). Sypher observes, "In the course of the comic debate (between the alazon and the eiron) the supposed wisdom of the alazon is reduced to absurdity, and the alazon himself becomes a clown" (228). By disclosing truth, comedy reaches Martin's congruity beneath the incongruity(86) and Lynch's "power of rock-bottom being"(108). The happy ending of comedy reflects this faith and hope: "The function of comedy is to sustain hope" (Galligan,28). Still present in modern comedy are its ritual origins "... that we celebrate in reverence for the vital generative forces that enable us to survive and be happy" (McFadden,159). According to Galligan, "...comedy plunges in to discover that when we wholly submit to it the finite itself generates the insight we need"(26). For the Christian Updike, the transcendent exists within the quotidian. Lynch emphasizes, "...the centrality of the finite concrete as the only healthy and effective path to whatever has always traditionally been regarded as the goal of the human imagination or, for that matter, of the total human personality. It does not matter whether we call that the infinite or peace or insight or maturity"(99-100). In maturing, the comic hero advances from the

isolation of Kierkegaard's aesthetic sphere to the ethical where one lives for others.

Analyzing Updike's comic morality, I shall focus first on The Centaur. Many critics regard this novel, winner of the National Book Award for 1964, as Updike's outstanding work. This novel, with its merging of the mythic and the realistic, its disjunctive narration, and its surrealism, is Updike's most puzzling; at the same time, it is also his most profound with its emphasis on tradition and learning, its focus on art and religion, and its breadth of vision encompassing evolution and the pagan and Christian worlds. Updike himself has described this most autobiographical novel as his "gayest and truest book" ("One Big Interview," 500). Given its extraordinary scope and variety, I believe that The Centaur provides the underpinning for the other novels, and that, as I have suggested, its comedy expresses its profundity. Next, I will analyze how comedy expresses the morality in Rabbit, Run, Rabbit Redux, Rabbit Is Rich, and Rabbit At Rest. Updike's devoting four full-length novels to chronicling the life of Rabbit Angstrom indicates the centrality of this series in his work. Nor does Rabbit's ordinariness diminish the series' importance. Updike has stated: "Today either everyone is a hero or no one is. I vote for everyone" ("One Big Interview," 518). The books depict the America of, respectively, the conformist 1950's, the turbulent 1960's, the complacent 1970's, and the problematic 1980's and thus provide a social history of these decades following the post-war 1940's of The Centaur. The realism of the Rabbit novels also complements the experimentalism of The Centaur. With the publication of Rabbit At Rest, the series is complete. In an article "Why Rabbit Had To Go" (The New York Times Book Review, August 5,

1990, p. 1), Updike states, "Rabbit At Rest will be the fourth and last of my so-called Rabbit books." This final novel of the series will allow me the opportunity to explore how Updike's comic vision presents the end of his hero's life--the average person's experience with aging and death. Overall, through an analysis of Updike's comedy, my study will reveal a dimension of this writer's fiction that is essential to understanding his work. In doing so, I hope that my work will contribute to a greater awareness of the significance of comedy as a dominant and informing twentieth century genre.

Chapter One: The Dichotomy Between the Comic Paragon and the Meticulous Man in The Centaur: "The mortals have the joy of struggle, the satisfaction of compassion, the triumph of courage; but the gods are perfect."

"And the man that has anything bountifully laughable about him, be sure there is more in that man than you perhaps think for." Moby Dick

The *Centaur* chronicles three days in the lives of George Caldwell, a public school science teacher, and his fifteen-year-old son Peter in 1947 Pennsylvania. Updike, in the manner of Joyce limning 1904 Dublin in *Ulysses*, details the experiences of father and son in their rural home, the Olinger high school, and a variety of other locales, including the luncheonette after-school hangout, Doc Appleton's office, and a seedy Alton hotel. At the same time, the novel transcends realism. All of the characters have mythic correspondences: Caldwell is Chiron, "noblest of all the centaurs"; the proud Peter, with his "fiery" red shirt, Prometheus; a raving drunk clad in motley, Dionysos; the lecherous, domineering principal Zimmerman, Zeus; Diefendorf, an unruly student and member of the swimming team, at different times appears as a centaur, a merman, and even Hercules; and so forth. Throughout, *The Centaur* alternates realistic passages with surrealistic ones that likely represent Peter's dreams ("In that way we have in dreams, where we are both author and character, God and Adam..."159) The disjunctive narration also contributes to the novel's complexity. Peter narrates four of the nine chapters, with the others told in the omniscient third person. Moreover, the use of the synchronic blurs the distinction between the past, present, and future. Partly because of the incongruous

effect of merging the mythic, realistic, and surrealistic as well as because of the antics of Caldwell, the undercutting of authority figures, and the bizarreness of characters and situations, the novel's mood is zany. Yet the plights of father and son remain serious. Plagued by poverty, numerous physical ailments, disruptive students, the overbearing "gods" of the town, worries that he will lose his job and be unable to support his family, and the fear that he has cancer, Caldwell is a modern-day Job; for his part, the adult Peter despairs over his unfulfilled life.

In Chapter One, an apparent nightmare of Peter's dramatizes Caldwell's trying existence. As the teacher lectures in front of the class, a student wounds him with an arrow. Overwhelmed by pain, the centaur flees the boisterous classroom, taking refuge at Al Hummel's nearby garage. Upon returning to his classroom, he finds to his dismay that one of the local gods, the principal Zimmerman/Zeus, has chosen this day for an unannounced "visitation." While Caldwell struggles to finish his lesson, rowdy students disrupt the class with scuffles and antics. Chapter Two, as a counterpoint to the first chapter's depiction of Caldwell at work, portrays his home life. Inside the Caldwells' dilapidated farmhouse, both the love and the tensions within the family are apparent. Peter overhears his parents discussing Caldwell's concerns about his health and job; the family's poverty and hardships frustrate Cassie (Ceres), planted in the isolation of the countryside; Caldwell teases his sententious father-in-law, Pop Kramer (Cronus); Peter rues his psoriasis, daydreams of a glorious future as a successful artist, and competes with his father for his mother's attention. Still, as the adult Peter avers, all in all their life "was good." On the way to school,

however, after a loathsome hitchhiker (Hermes) steals the elder Caldwell's new gloves, Peter senses his father's death as "...a grave and dreadful threat"(73).

Abruptly, the idyllic Chapter Three provides a contrast with the raucous first chapter by presenting Chiron teaching the respectful "princely children of Olympus" the Greek mythic version of the creation: "And Love set the universe in motion"(78).

Chapter Four relates Caldwell's after-school travails: counseling dull students, suffering the torment of Zimmerman's ambivalent official observation report, visiting the patronizing Doc Appleton for a physical examination, and coaching the inept swimming team in a losing meet at the YMCA. Peter, after spending the afternoon at Minor's (Minos) luncheonette ("It was a maze, Minor's place") with his girlfriend Penny and the "tall criminals" who frequent this teenage lair, and the early evening escaping at a downtown movie, meets his father for the journey home. The breakdown of their aged car, however, thwarts their plans. Aimlessly wandering the frigid streets of the nearby city of Alton, they chance upon a bizarre destitute drunk (Dionysos). From this encounter, Caldwell recognizes the urgency of immediately locating shelter for Peter and leads him to a downtown hotel. Without explanation, Chapter Five consists entirely of an honorific newspaper obituary for Caldwell. Chapter Six depicts Peter, Prometheus-like on his rock, tortured by a hallucinatory collage of threatening images, including the exposure of his humiliating psoriasis and a future when his father is forgotten by the local community. In Chapter Seven, Caldwell, remaining after school to grade exams and to investigate the mystery of missing basketball tickets entrusted to him, surprises the officious school board

member, Mrs. Herzog (Hera), leaving Zimmerman's office after a tryst with the principal. Scorned by the haughty woman, the dejected teacher fears that this unlucky encounter will result in his dismissal from the faculty. That night, however, at the high school game, after Peter discloses to Zimmerman his father's apprehensions, the principal astounds Caldwell by assuring him that his job is safe. Afterwards, Caldwell questions the arrogant Reverend March (Mars) about faith, but the clergyman, more interested in the charms of Vera Hummel, rebuffs him. Later, on the Caldwells' way home, fate changes their plans again. This time their Buick becomes stuck in a blizzard when they are unable to fasten snow chains to the tires. The chapter ends with their trudging to the shelter of the Hummels' house with Caldwell shielding his son from the storm.

In Chapter Eight, Peter awakens in the cozy Hummel home to find school closed and his father already out gathering information about the snowstorm. After Hummel attaches the chains to their car, father and son arrive home to a hero's welcome and the joyful news that Caldwell's x-rays are negative. A relieved Peter, weakened by the three-day ordeal, gratefully retires to his bed with a fever. The next morning, from his bedroom window, he watches his restless father make his way through the snow toward their car. The final chapter depicts Chiron/Caldwell readying himself for a merciful death that will end his suffering. Gradually, however, he recognizes that a "change" is not in store for him: "There would be none"(221). Instead, his fate is to continue living in order to sustain his family. In an epilogue, Zeus rewards the centaur by setting him among the stars as the constellation

Sagittarius.

The Centaur portrays a good man in a comic world. With his clowning and joking, George Caldwell acknowledges life's absurdity and uncertainty; at the same time, he accepts his place within the human comedy as family man, teacher, and dutiful member of the community. Unlike his dreamy son Peter, who lives in a glorified past and a vaguely grandiose future, Caldwell inhabits the problematic present. Although beset by doubts, he personifies the humble Christian who lives his faith daily. In the morphology of Kierkegaard, Caldwell represents the "humorist" poised on the final boundary between the "ethical" and "religious" spheres of existence. Karl Barth's epigraph reflects Caldwell's position:

Heaven is the creation inconceivable to man, earth the creation conceivable to him. He himself is the creature on the boundary between heaven and earth.

George Hunt (although he does not apply Kierkegaard's morphology to The Centaur) characterizes the "humorist":

Each of these spheres has a boundary-line which can be crossed only by a "leap," i.e. a decision to renounce the former sphere and embrace the next; it is the "leap of faith," the decision to entrust one's life to God in faith, that bridges the boundary between the ethical and the religious. The "humorist," then, is one who stands before this final boundary but does not cross it. He is sympathetic with the follies of the human comedy (Aesthetic) and aware of the limits of moral effort (Ethical) and, though he is attracted to religious commitment (Religious), he seeks a way out of it. He is called a humorist because in his situation he is very cognizant of the contradictions of life, the basis of all humor; as a result he retreats to the shared laughter and acknowledged foibles of common humanity rather than confront the highly individual demands that faith requires.

(25)

In this context, Caldwell's unconventional behavior becomes fathomable. His humor stems from his awareness "of the contradictions of life"; his tolerance for outrageous characters like the drunk and even repugnant figures like the thieving hobo reflects his sympathy "with the follies of the human comedy"; his humility and self-deprecation result from his recognition "of the limits of moral effort." While the adult Peter remains ensnared within the first sphere, "the aesthetic," where the individual limits himself to personal satisfaction, Caldwell has attained the next level of existence, the ethical, where the individual lives for the benefit of others. Within the quotidian, the resilient and resourceful comic hero learns the value of self-sacrifice: "he discovered that in giving his life to others he entered a total freedom"(220). In the novel Caldwell never attains the religious sphere of existence (although the Epilogue hints that he does afterwards); instead, as the humorist, he "...retreats to the shared laughter and acknowledged foibles of common humanity...." Throughout, The Centaur associates humor and laughter with the acceptance of one's "common humanity." Caldwell recalls his first meeting with Zimmerman fondly because of their "shared laughter":

He had liked Zimmerman and had felt liked in return. They had shared a joke about Pop Kramer. He cannot remember the joke but smiles to remember that one was made, fifteen years ago. (151)

With Heaven "inconceivable," the comic hero Caldwell discovers meaning in the mundane: "Only goodness lives. But it does live"(220). His experience reflects the insight of the critics Lynch and Galligan that "...the comic mode...descends dramatically through the varieties of the concrete to reach a rock-bottom

reality and there discovers that life is good"(Galligan,24).

Nevertheless, although Caldwell dominates this novel as well as his son's imagination, finally The Centaur is Peter's book. He is the unfinished character trying to make sense of his unhappy life. An allusion to the Cumaen Sibyl (during one of Peter's dreams, in a jar he hears an ominous voice, "...saying with microscopic distinctness, 'I want to die. I want to die'"128) links Peter to The Waste Land. In T.S. Eliot, Northrop Frye notes:

Another story about the Cumaen Sibyl hanging in a jar between heaven and earth and waiting only to die, a most vivid image of the "nightmare life in death," which is Eliot's theme, is told by Petronius, and forms the motto of the poem. (66)

The Sibyl's position "between heaven and earth" suggests that the Barth epigraph, locating man "on the boundary between heaven and earth," applies to Peter as well as his father. The Centaur depicts Peter's "nightmare life in death." Despite this reference to The Waste Land, however, critics have not noted Peter's identification with Tiresias. Mythologically, Peter is both male and female (Prometheus and Ocyrhoe) and in both the realistic and mythic worlds possesses the gift of prophecy. Frye continues, "The Waste Land, we are told in the notes, is a reverie of Tiresias... whose hermaphroditic shadow-mind contains all the men and women who appear in it"(67).

In a similar way, Peter is the sensibility of The Centaur. Edward P. Vargo notes in Rainstorms and Fire, "The entire novel is a fusion of the dreams and reveries and actual narration of Peter"(85). Like the inhabitants of The Waste Land, Peter, trapped within his own egotism ("...that atrocious ego Peter Caldwell,"152), despairs

and contrasts his life with an idealized earlier time. Actually, however, Peter's memories reveal that the past was problematic also. The comic world prevails no less in 1947 Olinger than in 1961 New York City. Even the teenage Peter's feelings toward his beloved father are ambivalent. Expressing the oedipal rivalry between the generations, the young man competes with the older for love and attention. Essentially, the difference between Peter's unfulfilled adult life and George Caldwell's meaningful one is the son's failure to assimilate his father's morality. Years later, Peter seeks to comprehend the elder Caldwell's double vision: "My father for all his mourning moved in the atmosphere of such laughter. He would have puzzled you. He puzzled me"(201). Like his namesake, St. Peter, he requires an exemplar of faith. From his father's everyday heroism, Peter, like the inhabitants of The Waste Land, ultimately discovers the hope that exists within the quotidian.

The human comedy of The Centaur resembles Dante's Divine Comedy not only in its range of style that includes the colloquial and humorous as well as the loftiness of the idyllic Chapter Three, but also in its depiction of a journey that starts in misery and ends with happiness. Peter's mental odyssey, which begins in despair, concludes with the possibility of rebirth. His future after the novel's conclusion, however, remains uncertain. It remains to be seen whether Peter will ever mature or, in Kierkegaard's terms, negotiate the boundary between the aesthetic and ethical spheres of existence. Such an open-ended conclusion fits the nature of comedy. Distinguishing between tragedy and comedy, Susanne Langer describes the former as "...a fulfillment, and its form therefore closed, final..."; on the other hand, "Comedy

is essentially contingent, episodic..."(126). Continually, The Centaur alludes to the problematic modern world: Caldwell's wry comment on the environmental havoc inflicted by war ("Then to win World War II, we gouged all those battleships and tanks and Jeeps and Coke machines out of it..."36); Peter's nightmare of Hitler as a "...white-haired crazy man with a protruding tongue..."(40) alive in Argentina; the cliched cold-war rhetoric of Minor Kretz ("The Russkies'll be in France and Italy before the year's over...."153); and the juvenile delinquent Johnny Dedman's rapture over the atom bomb ("I love that mushroom-shaped cloud,"154). The novel's setting, post World War II during the after-Christmas letdown when school resumes in January, contributes to the sense that, as Caldwell soberly remarks, "It's no Golden Age, that's for sure"(19). According to the younger Caldwell, Kretz' "...black Republican stupidity...embodies everything in the world that is killing Peter's father"(154). The teenager Dedman (Daedalus), with his police record and his talent for "...all the meaningless deeds of coordination, jitterbugging and playing pinball..."(96), personifies the rebellious adolescent sub-culture of the period. The mechanic Hummel's plight during the transition between war and peace reflects the individual's economic precariousness. With "everything mass-produced" and "Mobilgas moving in and now the rumor was Texaco too," the squeezed independent small businessman finds himself an anachronism. Intellectually and spiritually as well, the individual experiences alienation. Serious for once, Caldwell admits his desperation: "Everything. The works. I can't make it add up..."(188) When the science teacher washes the blackboard, his "long rhythmic swipes shaped like

sideways 8's" suggest the Einsteinian universe(87). James Feibleman observes, "The pursuit of comedy always flourishes during periods of excessive unrest and change, troubling times..."(30). Characteristically, however, Caldwell jokes about these troubling times: "When do you think the Russians will reach Olinger? They're probably getting on the trolley up at Ely now"(158).

Nevertheless, The Centaur, contrary to the critical consensus, does not neatly contrast a glorious past with a grim present. Caldwell's reductive lecture on evolution describes man's origin as less than heroic:

"There are over two billion people in the world right now," he said, "and it all began around a million years ago when some dumb ape swung down out of a tree and looked around and wondered what he was doing here." (32)

Synchronically, the past repeats itself in the present: "Diefendorf...began to scratch his scalp and armpit and make monkey chatter." Lynch points out, "Comedy is perpetually reminding the uprooted great man that in some important sense he was once, and still is, a bit of a monkey"(104). In effect, modern man is no less confused than his simian ancestors. The mythic correspondences also emphasize that the world remains essentially the same. Venus philosophizes, "We all flow from Chaos"(28). Caldwell's identification with Chiron is pertinent: the centaur, not fully a god, must negotiate his way among the capricious Olympians just as Caldwell does among the small-town gods of Olinger. In "One Big Interview," Updike writes, "It is part of Chiron's plight that he is living in a town full of gods, and he's not quite a god himself, hence this failure of communication all the time"(499). Venus' lampooning of the gods brings them down to earth:

"Your gods, listen to them--a prating bluestocking, a filthy crone smelling of corn, a thieving tramp, a drunken queer, a despicable, sad, grimy, grizzled, crippled, cuckolded tinker--" (26)

Caldwell's harsh fate parallels Chiron's. Updike includes a passage from Josephine Preston Peabody's Old Greek Folk Stories Told Anew: "...in the general confusion, Chiron, blameless as he was, had been wounded by a poisonous arrow." As with Chiron (also a teacher) at the wedding feast, Caldwell suffers his injury in an unlikely setting. Moreover, it is Peter who perceives the mythic within the mundane; Caldwell lives in the present, the everyday, and the finite--the domain of comedy. James Feibleman writes, "Tragedy deals with the past, and by inference with the future, with a timelessness. But comedy's concern is with the present"(28). Updike has explained the use of the mythology as, among other things, a representation of "prototypes" in life as well as a source of humor("One Big Interview,"500). Mythic or mundane, the "gods" of the novel are characterized as pretentious, pedantic, and vain. The Centaur continually equates the past with the present. When Johnny Dedman, whining about his lack of opportunities, cites his "police record," Caldwell rejoins, "So did Bing Crosby. So did St. Paul"(156). At about the time of The Centaur's publication, Updike in a review of James Thurber's Credos and Curios criticized the author as "...one more indignant senior citizen penning complaints about the universal decay of virtue"(Assorted Prose,240).

At once, The Centaur plunges the reader into the confusion, absurdity, frustration, and absurdity of its world. Without explanation, an arrow pierces the teacher's ankle and the students revert to beasts, "leering and baying at the

teacher"(9). "The confusion became unbearable" amid the carnivalesque "festal noise." On Caldwell's flight down the corridor, he overhears "... children's voices chanting French, singing anthems, discussing problems of Social Science." In his panic, the words blur:

"Avez-vous une maison jolie? Oui, j'ai une maison tres jolie for amber waves of grain, for purple mountain majesties above the fruited plain throughout our history boys and girls (this was the voice of Pholos), the federal government has grown in prestige, power, and authority..."(9-10)

Apparently now four-footed, he defecates like a beast in front of the school trophy case; at the garage, the mechanic Hummel (Hephaestus), as if repairing a machine, uses a blowtorch to remove the projectile from Caldwell's ankle. Characters change back and forth from mythic and realistic identities. Taking a shortcut through the basement on his return to class, suddenly Caldwell turns into Chiron recalling an embarrassing chance encounter with a naked Venus (the gym teacher Vera Hummel) emerging from the swimming pool. Saucily, the goddess entices him: "'Horse,' she breathed, 'ride me. I'm a mare. Plough me.'" When the transfixed centaur hesitates, "Venus vanished into the underwood"(26).

Back in the classroom, chaos reigns. "Slyly pussyfooting" and with a "pantomime of whispers," Zimmerman, a carnivalesque trickster figure, incites the class to riot. Outrageously, the principal fondles "the milky" Iris Osgood (Io). Disruptive students release live extinct trilobites, which wear "partially unrolled condoms, like rubber party hats"(38); a student metamorphoses into a parrot and nonchalantly chews one of the insects; acne leaps from a face and blisters the wall

paint; scuffles ensue; the din rises. When a dull student erroneously names "Venus" as the only star in the solar system, the class puns "Venus, venereal, V.D. Someone clapped"(32). Ironically, as Caldwell lectures on evolution, the students regress to primitivism. Eventually, Caldwell loses patience and beats Diefendorf with the bloody arrow shaft, the alliteration of "bastard beast's bare back" evoking the regression to an earlier period. In the midst of the uproar, the immense numbers that Caldwell writes on the board, such as "1,998,000,000,000,000,000, 000,000,000," have a dizzying effect. Afterwards, the alternation of realistic chapters with unexplained passages like the idyllic chapter depicting Chiron teaching, the premature obituary, and the nightmare-like Chapter Six, keeps the reader off balance. The Centaur's episodic structure creates a mercurial mood that suggests anything is possible.

The Centaur presents life as perplexing. Caldwell identifies the first evidence of life as "Corycium enigmaticum...As the name suggests, this primitive form of life remains enigmatic..."(36) Mysteries abound. Peter feels frustrated by his inability to determine the identity of the girl who had boldly inscribed "FIDO" in one of his textbooks; even more exasperating, the "mystery" of the "faint pallor at the bottom of the fly" of one of his pairs of trousers embarrasses him when the dry cleaners returns these pants "with an insulting printed slip about No Responsibility For Ineradicable Spots"(46). A number of "mysteries" puzzle Caldwell. One, the missing basketball game tickets, is only partially solved when Zimmerman reveals that he has donated a block of them to Reverend March's youth group: the remainder of the 140 tickets

remain unaccounted for. In a school lavatory, Caldwell is "puzzled" by the transforming of a scribbled "FUCK" on the wall that has been altered into "BOOK": fearful that Peter has done this, "The mystery depresses him"(185). After his medical examination, Caldwell informs Peter of the rumor that Zimmerman had fathered Doc Appleton's son Skippy. When Peter inquires about Mrs. Appleton, Caldwell replies portentously, "Nobody knows where she went. She's either alive or dead." In turn, Peter finds his father's "...phrases...rich with mystery"(105).

Most mysterious are the ubiquitous "seeds" that possess a significance never made explicit. The janitor, Heller, shows Caldwell seeds found in his cleaning:

"What kid would be carrying seeds?" my father asked.
 "Maybe from an orange?" Heller suggested.
 "One goddam more mystery," My father said, and he seemed to shy,
 and we went out into the weather. (89)

Their unobtrusive presence among the janitor's sweepings indicates the cyclic nature of life. These humble seeds recall the mythic pomegranate seeds of Persephone, Ceres' daughter and Hades'(Heller) reluctant wife, that symbolize the cycle of death (causing the centaur's mortal equine nature to "shy" in fear) and resurrection. Near the end of the novel, as the dejected Caldwell agonizes over his life, he ponders the fundamental human mystery of one's own particular fate:

...how could his father's seed, exploding into an infinitude of possibilities, have been funnelled into this, this paralyzed patch of thankless alien land, these few cryptic faces, those certain four walls of Room 204?
 (221)

At the same time, he remembers his responsibility for his own child, "his one seedling," who, "Poor kid, needed everything"(219). His mood brightens, however,

when he acknowledges the paradox of life evolving from death:

Yet even in the dead of winter the sere twigs prepare their small dull
buds. In the pit of the year a king was born. Not a leaf falls but leaves
an amber root, a dainty hoof, a fleck of baggage to be unpacked in
future time. (219)

Scattered about the comic landscape, these mysterious seeds, like the buried seeds of The Waste Land, imply the promise of rebirth.

Nevertheless, daily life remains unsettling. Caldwell laments, "Things never fail to fail"(149). On successive nights the family car strands Caldwell and Peter. Their chaotic household, exemplified by its two clocks keeping different time, dismays Peter: "I wondered why some people could solve at least the mechanical problems of living while others, my people, seemed destined for lifetimes of malfunctioning cars and underheated toiletless homes"(203). Their poverty gnaws at him. When he irritably demands of his father, "Why don't we have any money?" Caldwell confesses, "I've been asking myself that for fifty years"(125). During a blizzard, when Peter strains to attach chains to the mired car's tires, "a tiny gap" defeats him:

He prays; and is appalled to discover that, even when a microscopic concession would involve no apparent sacrifice of principle, matter is obdurate. The catch does not close. He squeals in agony, "No!" (195)

These chains are as limiting as those of Prometheus. A fountain in the Alton Museum dismays the young Peter for within it an "eternally expectant" statue of a woman thirsts for water that falls an "enduring inch" from her mouth. Peter insists that when the museum is deserted at night the figure would somehow "...reach the spray"(200). Peter's inability to bear life's frustrations reveals his callowness: instead, he

daydreams about a life as a rich, glamorous New York painter ("...my skin as smooth as milk as I painted, to the tune of great wealth and fame, pictures heavenly and cool, like those of Vermeer"63). Caldwell indulges in no such illusions: "I don't know why the damned car doesn't move. Same reason the swimming team doesn't win, I suppose"(115).

Caldwell has learned to accept absurdities such as Zimmerman's assigning him, a non-swimmer, to coach the swimming team as well as, despite his best efforts, discouragements like the team's lengthy losing streak. Sadly, "Cruelness is clever where goodness is imbecile"(105). At the same time, Caldwell is aware as well that, when least expected, the sublime--tantalizingly --may suddenly appear. During another losing meet, one of the Olinger divers inexplicably executes an almost perfect dive that produces startled cheers from both teams. On his next attempt, however, with the crowd expecting a repeat performance, the boy tenses and flops entering the water: "And when Danny surfaced this time, my father, and only my father, clapped"(110). Glimmers of hope only depress Peter. Reading two articles in Reader's Digest, "Miracle Cure for Cancer?" and "Ten Proofs That There Is a God," he is "disappointed, more than disappointed, overwhelmed--for the pang of hope roused fears that had been lulled"(206). At this point, Peter lacks the comic vision to accept life on its own terms and to perceive the true hope that it offers. The scientist Caldwell, however, recognizes that fact is often stranger than fiction: "Leptothrix...a microscopic fleck of life...fantastic as it seems, existed in such numbers that it laid down all the deposits of iron ore which man presently mines"(36). Caldwell, though

he characteristically rants ("I wouldn't mind plugging ahead at something I wasn't any good at...if I knew what the hell the point of it all was. I ask, and nobody'll tell me"102), nevertheless continues "plugging ahead" anyway. Synchronically, his experience in the classroom reenacts early man's precarious survival. Amid the chaos, he somehow musters the strength to "swim on" and conclude his lecture:

"One minute ago, flint-chipping, fire-kindling, death-foreseeing, a tragic animal appeared--" The buzzer rasped; halls rumbled throughout the vast building; faintness swooped at Caldwell but he held himself upright, having vowed to finish."--called Man." (40)

Earlier, Caldwell's chalk had "chipped"(33); during the class "...the kids were catching fire"(34) (the image alluding to Prometheus/Peter as well); as a centaur, his bottom half is animal; and throughout he remains acutely conscious of death. Just barely, he keeps himself "upright" in a way that resembles early man's achievement in standing erect. The chapter's triumphant final words, "called Man," evoke his surname: "Caldwell."

In such a world, nothing may be taken for granted. Ironically, as the prescient Peter foresees, the rambunctious student Diefendorf eventually becomes a teacher like Caldwell. When Peter encounters him on an Alton side street fourteen years later, Diefendorf wears "...a saggy brown suit from whose breast pocket the pencils and pens thrust as from my father's pocket in the old forgotten days"(81). The succession of gods depicted--Cronus, Zeus, Dionysos, Christ--suggests the inherent flux of life. Even within the idyllic Chapter Three life does not remain static. Chiron's daughter Ocyrhoe "...claimed to foresee a day when Zeus would be taken by men as a poor toy they had themselves invented, and be terribly taunted, be banished from Olympus,

sent scrambling down the shingle, and branded a criminal"(77). Moreover, Chiron perceives an ominous sign when a black eagle appears "(But on his left)." Yet, while death hovers over Caldwell throughout the novel, the only actual death is a reference to a former student who, as a flight instructor, is killed in a training accident (the theorist McFadden notes that "...there cannot be much real peril or toilsome adventure in great comedy"41). Caldwell underscores the paradox: "Isn't that funny? To go all through war without a scratch and then get nailed in peacetime"(167). This young man, returned safely from war, in his prime, and fondly recalled as "A bright and respectful and athletic and handsome student ...," dies unexpectedly while the weary Caldwell, desirous of death, lives on. Kierkegaard's Concluding Unscientific Postscript contains a passage describing an illustrative incident whose similarity to an incident in The Centaur is uncannily revealing. Kierkegaard is describing the "subjective existing thinker" who with his "double reflection is as sensitive to the comic as to the pathetic"(81). He then cites an incident from Lucian in which Charon recounts a story of a man invited to dinner who accepts "definitely." Thereupon, the guest is killed by a falling tile. "And Charon comments, 'Is not that something to laugh yourself to death over?'"(80) Unnoticed by critics, The Centaur includes a corresponding scene. When the Caldwells are forced to stay in a hotel in town, the night clerk, Charlie, identified with Charon, allows them to pay in the morning, "I guess we'll all still be here"(124). During the night, Charlie dies: "It's a funny thing ...Charlie died last night"(128). For Lucian, Kierkegaard, and Updike, life's uncertainty is comic.

While the Promethean Peter represents the tragic rebel straining against human limitations, his father personifies the comic hero who accepts his humanity. Caldwell appears ordinary, flawed, and foolish; at the same time, he is attractive, resilient, resourceful, playful, open to experience, and gifted with double vision. The Centaur identifies the fifty-year-old Caldwell with the middleness of comedy: by nature, he is half man, half beast and both human and divine; the Barth epigraph situates man on "...the boundary between heaven and earth"; mythologically, "...it was rumored that Zeus thought centaurs a dangerous middle ground..."(26); Zimmerman describes Caldwell as "a teacher in the middle of his career"(186); Caldwell loves the cities "...of the great Middle Atlantic civilization"(112); at novel's end, Caldwell estimates his chances of freeing his Buick (symbolizing his own survival, for throughout he is identified with his car as, for example, in Peter's insight that "Now it occurred to me he had had an 'attack' and the inexplicable behavior of the car was in fact an illusionistic reflection of some breakage in himself"(115) from a snowbank as "fifty-fifty"(220). Within Kierkegaard's morphology, Caldwell inhabits the ethical state midway between the aesthetic and the religious.

This underpaid, overworked, and unappreciated school teacher is everyman. A scientist, Caldwell understands the individual's humble place in the universe. The current geological era, the Cenozoic, "...began seventy million years ago"(84). Caldwell's self-deprecating humor reveals his humility: "One nice thing about having a simple mind, you can only think of one pain a time"(106); "He could read at terrific speed, and claimed never to learn or remember a thing"(49). To Peter's shame, his

father looks ridiculous:

He had on his overcoat, a tattered checkered castoff with mismatching buttons, which he had rescued from a church sale, though it was too small and barely reached his knees. On his head he wore a hideous blue knitted cap that he had plucked out of a trash barrel at school. Pulled down over his ears, it made him look like an over grown dimwit in a comic strip.

(53)

Also, Peter recalls a long-awaited trip to New York City, where they had planned to visit the Metropolitan Museum of Art, but "My father's blundering blocked it...The strangers my father stopped on the street resisted entanglement in his earnest, circular questioning"(68). When the vile hitchhiker names short order cook as his "profession" (Hermes had roasted cattle stolen from Apollo and the cook was one of the lowest stock alazon figures), Caldwell fulsomely praises him: "You cook! That's a wonderful accomplishment..."(66). Insensitively, Caldwell blurts out to a coarse stranger the secret of Peter's embarrassing psoriasis: "He ought to get out of this part of the country and get down where there's some sun. He has a terrible skin problem"(71). His wife hints at a lack of passion in her marriage: "If there's anything I hate...it's a man who hates sex"(56). Nor is Caldwell above self-pity: when the family learns that he does not have cancer, Cassie dryly notes, "Now he'll have to think up some new way of getting sympathy"(215).

Despite shortcomings, however, Caldwell personifies Frye's "...socially attractive"(44) comic figure. Two female colleagues, Vera Hummel and Hester Appleton, are drawn to him. Even his rambunctious students celebrate Caldwell's charisma. In the terminology of the comic theorist McFadden, Caldwell's antics in the classroom achieve "anecdotal permanence": "...when what is funny may be

grasped with enough directness to be recalled or retold"(11). At Minor's luncheonette, the teenagers congregated there relate "sweetly cruel memories" of the science teacher:

"He used to lie down in the aisle and holler, 'Come on, walk all over me, you will anyway'..."
 "...about six of us filled our pockets up with horsechestnuts..."
 "...seven minutes to the hour everybody stood up and stared as if his fly was open..."
 "Christ, I'll never forget..."
 "...this girl in the back of the class said she couldn't see the decimal point...he went to the window and scooped some snow off the sill and made a ball...hard as hell at the fucking blackboard..."
 "'Now can you see it?' he said."
 "Christ, what a character."
 "You got a great father there, Peter." (95)

By their mythologizing of a popular teacher (the horsechestnuts an allusion to the centaur's equine nature), the students reveal their affection and respect for him. Subconsciously, their irreverent expletives associate the self-sacrificing Caldwell with Christ. Peter notes, "These ordeals usually ended with some such unctuous benediction."

As the students' banter indicates, Caldwell has learned how to cope with adversity. Both in his mythic and realistic guises, the teacher is a survivor. The tumultuous classroom scene in Chapter One illustrates Caldwell's resiliency. In pain, he returns to the classroom; undercut by the mischievous Zimmerman ("Please behave, boys and girls, as if I were not present"³¹) and tormented by the students, he nevertheless manages to complete his lecture. Experience is his guide to survival. When the cut-up Diefendorf responds curtly, "Caldwell disarmed his impudence by agreeing. He had been teaching long enough to keep a step or two ahead of the

bastards occasionally"(34). Although not a disciplinarian, the resourceful Caldwell knows how to gain the attention of restive students. Comparing the primeval earth to a golf ball "...woke them up a little..."(35). Playfully, he entertains them. Describing "These first cells who got tired of sitting around forever in a blue-green scum..." as "...the first altruists," the beleaguered teacher announces:

"If I had a hat on, I'd take it off to 'em."
He pantomimed doffing his cap and the class screamed. (37)

Caldwell expends himself for the sake of his family. Facetiously, he warns Diefendorf, "It's either you or me, Diefendorf...I'll strangle you with my bare hands if I have to. I'm up here fighting for my life. I have a wife and a kid and an old man to feed"(79). Similarly, his survival requires that he negotiate his way among his superiors. Dealing with the Greek gods or the Olinger aristocrats, he has learned the art of diplomacy: "Politic, he had long ago made it his policy to ask of the gods only what he believed they could not help giving"(219). In his compromising rendezvous with Venus at the pool, the centaur recognizes his danger: "His position was difficult; he knew that the indulgent Zeus would never harm his young aunt. But he might in annoyance toss his bolt at her innocent auditor, whose Olympian position was precarious and ambiguous"(26). When the cruel goddess gratuitously insults him, he responds ambiguously: "...a deferential rebuke if she chose to accept it; otherwise a harmless medical truth. His long survival had not been attained without a courtier's tact"(23-24). In Olinger, too, Caldwell is subject to the power of intellectual and moral inferiors. The school board member Mrs. Herzog urges Zimmerman to fire the teacher, but the pragmatic principal defends Caldwell: "He stays in the room with

them, which is the most important thing"(163). His colleague Phillips (and fellow centaur Pholos), although regarding himself as Caldwell's "guide," acknowledges his friend's playful resourcefulness: "At the same time he cannot rid himself of an obscure expectation that Caldwell out of his more chaotic and mischievous resources would produce a marvel, or at least say the strange thing that had to be said"(167). When the blizzard at the end of the novel effectively shuts everything down, Caldwell lets Peter sleep while he makes his way around Alton to gather the latest news. Peter cannot help admiring his father:

I marvelled at all this information and imagined him gathering it, wading through snowbanks, halting snowplows to question the drivers, running up and down raggedly heaped mounds in his too-small overcoat like an overgrown urchin. (208)

Impishly, "the overgrown urchin" Caldwell delights in this game: "He clenched and unclenched his hands happily as he gazed into this vision of confusion"(208).

Caldwell draws his strength from the quotidian. He prefers the company of the cafeteria workers and the janitor to that of the town's authorities: "A modest man, Caldwell was most comfortable in the underreaches of the high school. It was warmest there; the steam pipes sang; the talk made sense"(21). In the spirit of comic inclusiveness, he accepts everyone: dull students, bores like Doc Appleton (when the physician commences an oft-told anecdote, Caldwell, to Peter's dismay, encourages him: "I was furious with my father for being so obsequious, for laying us both open this way to a long and often-chewed story,"102), the mean-spirited Minor Kretz ("He's just fascinated by that kind of man, isn't he?"160), and even society's outcasts like the thieving hitchhiker and the mad Dionysius. Essentially passive, he takes life

as it comes. After he learns that he does not have cancer, Caldwell proclaims his faith: "I've always been lucky. God takes care of you if you let Him"(217). At the same time Caldwell remains alert to life's subtle revelations. His interaction with the bizarre Dionysos illustrates Caldwell's openness to experience and willingness to cross boundaries in the pursuit of truth.

This scene is carnivalesque. The drunk is one of the trickster figures who as Edith Kern describes "...are the instigators of carnivalesque activities, whether Lords of Misrule, jesters, clowns, devils or saintly prophets"(117). Each of these guises fits him: in preposterously accusing the noble Caldwell of soliciting Peter as a prostitute, he is a Lord of Misrule ("Shall we call the cops, kid? Let's kill this old nance, huh?"121); in his slap-stick buffoonery, he plays the jester and clown ("He waved his finger back and forth in front of his nose and peered at us roguishly through this wind-shield wiper action"120); his hypocritical willingness to abet pederasty ("I'll even tell you a hotel where they don't ask any questions"122), as well as his "sulphurous" breath, indicates his devilishness (Kern associates hypocrisy with tricksters,206); and the revelation the drunk provides Caldwell reveals that finally he is a prophet. With his chameleonic nature, the drunk recalls that "Originally, Trickster was the name given to a clownish figure of mercurial unpredictability and changeability ..." (Kern, 117). His mythic correspondence is apt as well. On first sight, Peter confuses him with the hobo Hermes: "For an instant I thought he was the hitchhiker, but this man was smaller and further gone in degeneracy"(120). Kern notes that "...the trickster seems to be a direct descendent of Hermes the thief"(206).

Instead, the drunk is identified with Dionysos. Kern quotes Huizinga:

Attic comedy grew out of the licentious komos at the feast of Dionysius...and even then in the days of Aristophanes, it bears numerous traces of its Dionysian past...The phallic costumes of the players, the disguising of the chorus in animal masks are traits of remote antiquity. (33-34)

The drunk's "...hair was wild like the mane of a muddy lion(120)" (Dionysos had once disguised himself as a lion); eventually, it becomes apparent that this wretched creature knows about pederasty because he himself is a prostitute ("When he gets a new pretty boy he'll throw you out on the street like an old Trojan,"120).

Furthermore, "God of wine and all reproductive forces in nature, Dionysos was also revered as the god of creative imagination and of theater in particular"(Kern, 16-17).

Pathetically, the drunk begs Caldwell for "One little bitty dollar bill so I can get myself a drink and stop freezing to death"(122). To hold their attention, the drunk stages a theatrical performance on the deserted street: "...his empty arms waved and bobbled around him as he pirouetted"; he "...exercised an elaborate, pleased control over his intonation, like an actor marveling at his own performance"(120). The drunk ("His face under the blue streetlight seemed splashed with purple...."120) is like all tricksters who "...belong to the realm of fantasy and imagination and are far from being mimetic"(Kern, 207).

His identification with the cycle of death and rebirth is indicated by his association with the ubiquitous "seeds" ("... his teeth were set in his grin like a row of small seeds,"120) and Caldwell's joke about a hotel named the Osiris (the Egyptian god whose death and resurrection symbolize the self-renewing vitality and fertility of

nature): "The bedbugs got to be as big as the prostitutes so the customers couldn't tell them apart. I guess the Osiris was before your time"(122). Finally, the drunk's union of hardship and revelry depicts the two sides of the god: "For all his raggedness on this bitter night there was much that was merry about him." Kern observes: "In his ambivalence, the trickster seems to be of the very essence of the absolute comic and of farce, personifying in his own person the genre's proximity to laughter and tears"(205). This figure, according to Kern, is "...almost always, in some form, a scapegoat"(206). Like Dionysos, the youthful drunk knows pain as well as pleasure. Alternating between mania and depression, tricksters like the drunk reflect the cyclic nature of life.

Predictably, the drunk's antics repel the Apollonian Peter; Caldwell, however, perceives method amid the madness. Unlike Peter, who wishes to distance himself from such wretches, Caldwell recognizes his shared humanity with this pathetic figure. The drunk's coarse language ("Doesn't the old bastard feed you?"121) does not deter Caldwell. Within the carnivalesque, "Speech and gesture were those of the market place: frank and free and disallowing any and all distance between those who came into contact with one another"(Kern,9). In the spirit of the absolute comic, the drunk's outrageous behavior "...emanates from...a conception of man's place in the universe quite different from that of so-called realism"(Kern,7). In "One Big Interview," Updike explains "In a way the natural events in my book are meant to be a kind of mask for the myth"(499). Thus, the drunk represents a deeper reality:

Originating in that mythical stage of the human race and its subconscious, the trickster figure provides us, indeed, with insights that

reach beyond life as we daily live it. By turning the world playfully upside down, by putting down the mighty from their seats and--though only in jest--exalting them of low degree, the trickster makes apparent the frailty of human existence and the proximity of laughter and tears. Quintessence of the absolute comic, he transports us into worlds where imagination and make-believe triumph. Because he makes scapegoats of pompous authoritarians, he is himself sacrificed for daring to be both Satan and savior. But though it is mixed with sadness, the laughter he elicits is liberating in its ambivalence: while it makes us realize that we are both spokes in the great wheel of existence, it makes us cherish the moment of infinity allotted to us. (Kern, 208)

The drunk's carnivalization presents "...a vision of man sub specie aeternitatis-quite in contrast to bourgeois notions of the individual's importance and his obligations to standards of propriety"(Kern,8). When father and son attempt to brush past him, the drunk almost takes a pratfall:

"Knock me down when I want to save your soul. Are you ready to die?" This made my father jerk still like a halted movie. The drunk, seeing his triumph, repeated, "Are you ready to die?"

Momentarily, the drunk prevails. Although his breath, "both sulphurous and sweet" reflecting his dual nature, repels Peter, the unexpected question arrests Caldwell:

"I thought I was ready to die," my father said, "but now I wonder if anybody ever is. I wonder now if a ninety-nine-year-old Chinaman with tuberculosis, gonorrhea, syphilis, and toothache is ready to die....No, Peter," my father said, "this gentleman is talking sense. Are you ready to die?" he asked the drunk. What do you think the answer is?" (121)

Like Elijah in Moby Dick warning Ishmael and Queequeg, the question "Are you ready to die?" resounds ominously. Bizarrely, the messenger of death takes the form of this tattered raving drunk. Nevertheless, Caldwell recognizes the necessity of preparing for death. As usual, Caldwell, with the analogy of the "ninety-nine-year-old Chinaman" expresses himself jestingly, although the inclusion of a "toothache"--

one of his own ailments--makes clear the identification with his own plight. Soberly, Caldwell recognizes how ordinary concerns pale in the light of mortality. Kern notes, "Carnival was the true feast of time, the feast of becoming, change and renewal....It laughed at rigidity and at the individual's exaggerated notion of his own importance, considering him but a link in the great chain of death"(11). The drunk's vulnerability reflects man's place in eternity:

He inflated his chest as if to shout, but the street dwindled northward toward infinity without upholding another visible soul--just the painted brick fronts with the little railed porches characteristic of Alton, the stone stoops now and then bearing an ornamented cement flower-pot, the leafless curbside trees alternating and in the end mixing with the telephone poles. Parked cars lined this street but few passed down it because it met a dead end at the Essick's factory wall two blocks away.
(121-122)

With his "pigeon dignity," set against the stark background of the "dead end" that "dwindled northward toward infinity without upholding another visible soul," the drunk looms an existential figure. Like him, all human beings ultimately arrive at dead ends. The spirit of carnivalization, however, encourages human beings to overcome their fears of death. The drunk's association with Hell is fitting:

...hell was an essential part of the setting for carnival, and being able to laugh about it, removed, during carnival, all fear of it. His creative fantasy made man the victor over his fears just as the Imaginary Invalid, in the carnival scene, was to be victorious over the death whose threat perpetually dogged him.
(Kern,10)

At last, Caldwell gives the beggar his last thirty-five cents and thanks him: "'You've clarified my thinking,' he told the drunk." The wretched state of the drunk (Peter is shocked to discover that "...he was virtually a boy like me...."122) reinforces Caldwell's sense of his son's vulnerability. Now he knows his destination:

"Where are we going?" I asked.
 "To a hotel," my father said. "That man brought me to my senses.
 We gotta get you into where it's warm. You're my pride and joy, kid;
 we gotta guard the silver. You need sleep." (123)

This scene depicts a comic discussion which, as McFadden explains, "...tests and sorts things out but changes nothing radically; it shows up characters and situations for what they are"(35). In Frye's terms, the drunk, with his "pigeon dignity," enacts the role of the foolish smug alazon while Caldwell is the plain-speaking eiron. Over the course of the discussion sense emerges from nonsense. The older generation, before it passes away, must provide for its successor.

In an uncertain world, the Kierkegaardian "humorist" continually evolves. According to Kierkegaard, "An existing individual is constantly in process of becoming; the actual existing subjective thinker constantly reproduces this existential situation in his thoughts, and translates all his thinking into process." In doing so, "The incessant becoming generates the uncertainty of the earthly life, where everything is uncertain"(79). Caldwell's routine keeps him busy as he attempts to meet his myriad obligations. Continually, he feels the pressure of time. Kern, distinguishing the comic from the tragic, cites Girard that "...in the comic mode, the sovereignty of the individual is minimized to an extent that makes us aware of a hidden clockwork which controls him"(20). After the arrow is removed, the centaur hastens back to his classroom: "A clock in his head was ticking on; the school called to him urgently" (18). During the class, he races the clock ("Caldwell looked at the clock. Five minutes left, and the main part of the story all before him,"37). At

home, he hurries Peter to get ready for school: "I got to be there at eight. Zimmerman'll have my neck"(43). After Peter falls asleep at the hotel in Alton, his father, instead of resting, leaves the room to call Cassie, contact Hummel about the broken-down car, and even chat with a travelling salesman in the lobby because he thinks that the man might be helpful for Peter's career. Even within the idyllic Chapter Three, "Chiron hurried, a little late..."(74). Like Benjamin Franklin and Gatsby, Caldwell, driven to accomplish as much as he can in a limited period, organizes his time carefully:

Nevertheless, among disintegrating surfaces he tries to hold his steadfast course.

Hummel	
Call Cassie	
Go to the dentist	} This is his program.
Be here for game by 6:15	
Get in the car and take Peter home	

(149)

This ceaseless restlessness exasperates his wife and son. Peter reflects "...that our family's central member, my father, had never rid himself of the idea that he might soon be moving on"(203). Caldwell's sense that time is running out emboldens him. Peter observes that reaching the age of fifty has made his father willing to cross boundaries: "Breaking the barrier had unbridled his tongue, as if, being in mathematical fact dead, nothing he said mattered. His ghostly freedom at times did frighten me."(46) With maturity, the comic hero recognizes the truth of Martin's contention that prudence is irrelevant in the non-prudential comic world(81).

Rather than becoming rigid and smug with age, Caldwell retains a youthful

open-mindedness and flexibility. Kierkegaard proclaims that the subjective thinker "...is therefore never a teacher but a learner; and since he is always just as negative as he is positive, he is always striving"(78). Recalling Mr. Deasy's advice to Stephen Daedalus in *Ulysses*, Doc Appleton (Apollo), diagnosing Caldwell, informs him, "You're not a teacher You're a learner"(101-102). Charon, on his way to teach Achilles, Jason, and the others, halts to distinguish various herbs: "His student's eyes--for what is a teacher but a student grown old?--retrieved, from their seclusion in the undergrowth, basil, hellebore, feverwort, spurge..."(74). During his theological discussion with Reverend March at the basketball game, Caldwell implores, "I'm trying to learn"(189). In Peter's eyes, his middle-aged father, despite the ravages of his harsh life, appears youthful. When the car fails, "I was about to touch him... when he looked up with a smile of sorts on his bumpy and battered urchin's face"(115).

The comic hero's double vision allows him to continue functioning in the face of life's absurdity. Galligan explains that "...comedy consistently calls for double vision, for the ability to see this and that at the same time and to see both accurately"(34). Emphasizing the need for double vision, in the first chapter Caldwell notices a sign in Hummel's garage promoting the safeguarding of one's eyesight. The placard contains a graphic of two eyes and the boldfaced warning, "YOU WON'T BE GIVEN ANOTHER PAIR"(14). Later in that chapter, as the teacher shields his eyes from the Bbs that unruly students fling at his face, the image of Hummel's sign, with the two eyes and the warning, reappears in his mind. Moreover, aside from the

mythic correspondences, dualities abound in the novel: approaching the mechanic, "Caldwell experienced a mocking sensation of walking toward a mirror, for Hummel also limped"(12); Doc Appleton and his sister Hester are twins; in Peter's eyes, his father and Diefendorf make a "sickening duet"(79); Peter at first mistakes the drunk for the hobo; because of his psoriasis, Peter takes care to dress in order that "...my disguise as a normal human being was good"; Caldwell announces, "So when you say 'Pennsylvanian,' you can mean either a dumb Dutchman or a stretch of Paleozoic time"(38). According to Frye, "...ambivalence is apparently the main reason for the curious feature of doubled characters which runs all through the history of comedy"(181). To the ambivalent Peter, Caldwell "...seemed both tender and brutal, wise and unseeing"(53).

Settings in the novel convey life's dualism. At the farmhouse, "The downstairs was two long rooms...connected by two doorways side by side"(48); two clocks keep divergent time; and to get "...out the doors. There were two..." that to Peter appear a "double curtain"(49). According to Sypher, "...comedy is built upon double occasions, double premises, double values"(213). In town, Minor's Luncheonette "...shared a brick building with the Olinger Post Office":

There were two plate-glass windows side by side: behind one of them fat Mrs. Passify, the postmistress, surrounded by Wanted posters and lists of postal regulations, doled out stamps and money-orders; behind the other, wreathed in adolescent smoke and laughter, Minor Kretz, also fat, scooped ice cream and concocted lemon Pepsis. The two establishments were symmetrically set up. Minor's butterscotch-marble counter mirrored, through the dividing wall, Mrs. Passify's barred windows and linoleum weighing-counter...The pinball machine and the cancellation machine were twins of noise...the symmetry, carried right through to the worn spots of the two floors and the heating pipes

running along the opposing walls, was so perfect that as a child I had imagined Mrs. Passify and Minor Kretz were secretly married. At night, and on Sunday mornings, when their windows were dark, the mirroring membrane between them dissolved and, filling the unified brick shell with one fat shopworn sigh, they meshed. (89-90)

Peter's "mythy" imagination posits a relationship between Kretz and Mrs. Passify (King Minos' wife Pasiphae) because he cannot yet reconcile life's duality.

The experienced Caldwell, however, employs his double vision daily. Peter notes his father's dual nature: "My father for all his talk was at heart a man of silence"(112). Caldwell's contradictoriness reflects his perspective. When the manager of a garage cannot spare a mechanic to fix the car, the teacher nevertheless thanks the man profusely:--"Don't apologize, mister. You've told me what you think is the truth and that's the greatest favor one man can do for another." Once out of earshot, however, Caldwell changes his tune:

But outside the garage, again walking in the night, he said to me, "that poor devil didn't know what he was talking about, Peter. I've been a bluffer all my life so I can spot another. He was what they call talking through your hat. I wonder how he got to be manager of an important place like that; I bet he doesn't know himself. He acted just the way I feel half the time." (119)

In public, Caldwell treats the manager with deference; in private, he recognizes the man as a "bluffer." At the same time, Caldwell includes himself as another flawed human being bluffing his way. The phrase "half the time" indicates the doubleness of his perspective; the verb "acted" reflects his playfulness. Similarly, he at first praises the travelling salesman he meets in the hotel lobby ("...an awfully nice gentleman...and clears twenty thousand a year with a two-month vacation"), but soon

afterwards denigrates him: "A man like that would walk over your dead body to grab a nickel. That's the kind of bastard I've done business with all my life; they're too smart for me"(128). Yet, he still faults himself: "they're too smart for me." When his inept dentist, clumsily pulling a sore tooth, blithely surmises, "This must have been giving you a great deal of pain," the suffering Caldwell deadpans, "Only when I noticed it"(165). Again, however, the teacher takes responsibility for "Dr. Yankem's" callousness because the dentist had once been a student of his: "Caldwell recognizes the pain branching in his head as a consequence of some failing in his own teaching, a failure somewhere to inculcate in this struggling soul consideration and patience; and accepts it as such"(164). According to Galligan, "The comic vision forces those who are faithful to it to acknowledge that they are themselves part of what they laugh at"(XII). Making light of his pain, Caldwell parodies, "Another day, another molar. (He should be writing Valentines)"(165).

Caldwell's double vision is especially apparent in his professional life. He refers to Olinger High as "the hate factory" and announces his departure for school by declaring, "The monsters are ready to learn"(217). According to him, "I love lies. I tell 'em all day. I'm paid to tell 'em"(42). Caldwell insists, "Kill or be killed, that's my motto. Those bastards don't give me any quarter and I don't give them any." When Cassie reproaches him for such "...a poor attitude for a teacher to have," he rejoins, "It's the only attitude, Cassie. Any other attitude is suicide."(216) His actions, however, belie his words. Despite the students' misbehavior and the stifling bureaucracy (Zimmerman's report faults Caldwell because "The humanistic values

implicit in the physical sciences were not elicited,"86), Caldwell remains a dedicated teacher. His lecture on evolution is erudite and inspired; he participates enthusiastically in extracurricular activities; and after school he willingly spends his free time tutoring the same students who bedevil him in the classroom. Coaching the grade-conscious but dull witted Judy Lengel for an earth science exam, Caldwell tries to present the subject humorously: "It may interest you for your own information that the brontops looked a lot like William Howard Taft, who was President when I was your age"(85). When she fails to grasp the material, he reductively consoles her, "Just do the best you can....After Wednesday you can forget all about it and in no time you'll be married with six kids." Meanwhile, Peter realizes, to his "indignation," that before she leaves, "... my father had hinted away to her the entire quiz"(85). Peter resents his father's concern for these students while they are "...sucking the strength from him." Overall, Caldwell's contention that teaching is "suicide" is perceptive: nevertheless, he continues sacrificing himself for his students. His perspective allows him to perceive the worth of education in spite of its shortcomings. Resigned, he gently burlesques Zimmerman's critique: "Maybe deep down in the atom there's a little man sitting in a rocking chair reading the evening paper"(87). Caldwell, "From his professional heart," perceives education as "...a jungle, an unholy mess"(151); at the same time, he gets to school early to be ready for class: "I left a whole mess of papers to correct"(43).

Even Zimmerman's report concedes "...that some of his illustrations relating subject matter to his students' everyday lives were effective"(86). The obituary,

written by one of his "ex-students," extols "...the quality of his teaching":

A thorough mastery of his subjects, an inexhaustible sympathy for the scholastic underdog, a unique ability to make unexpected connections and to mix in an always fresh and eye-opening way the stuff of lessons with the stuff of life, an effortless humor, a by no means negligible gift for dramatization, a restless and doubting temperament that urged him forward ceaselessly toward self-improvement in the pedagogic craft--

(133)

His comic virtues--humor, sympathy, resourcefulness, and intellectual restlessness--combine to make him an extraordinary teacher. The compassionate Caldwell recognizes that knowledge can be painful:

"Coming out of my room today I had a kind of revelation; it's taken me fifteen years of teaching to see it...Ignorance is bliss. That's the lesson I've gotten out of life."

(168-9)

The maxim, paraphrased by Caldwell elsewhere, comes from Gray's "Ode on a Distant Prospect of Eton College." Aptly, this poem depicts an adult's sympathy with adolescents "...--where ignorance is bliss,/ tis folly to be wise." Like the speaker in this poem, Caldwell grasps this paradox at a school. After "fifteen years of teaching" the student Caldwell has learned a "lesson...out of life." Later, when Cassie offers, "It must be terrible to know so much," he admits, "It's hell"(216). In a topsy-turvy world where ignorance is associated with heaven ("bliss") and knowledge with hell, this wise teacher shows compassion for his youthful students.

Nor does Caldwell confine his performances to the classroom. When Hummel helps Caldwell dig out his car, "...the two men enacted a pantomime with a wallet ..."(210); after school, "At the front entrance, Mr. Caldwell and Mr. Phillips meet on the steps and enact...an Alphonse and Gaston routine..."(166). This element,

curiously overlooked by critics, is especially present in Chapter Two. As Peter awakes, he overhears his parents' conversation: "He had a way of not speaking to her, but performing in front of her, as if there were an invisible audience at her side"(42). Afterwards, Caldwell teases Pop Kramer until his exasperated wife exclaims, "You can stop the performance any time"(46). Caldwell's theatricality reveals his sense of life as play. Galligan observes that the image of play in comedy evokes "...the possibility of treating even the most ordinary and serious of activities as though it were like play, free of worldly purpose, simply the utterly absorbing occasion for fun"(5). Caldwell even jokes about his greatest responsibility. Inside the house are numerous combs that Caldwell "...had scavenged from the high school Lost and Found department. He was always bringing junk like this home, as if he were burlesquing his role of provider"(48). According to V.C. Clinton-Baddeley in The Burlesque Tradition in the English Theatre after 1660, "Burlesque serves truth, not with the bitterness of its tongue, but with the irreverence and deliberate impropriety of its laughter"(2). In truth, on his meager salary Caldwell barely supports his family. Hence, his supplying the household with an abundance of "junk" underscores his difficulty in providing the basic necessities in "his role" as the family breadwinner.

Caldwell's playfulness is infectious. At times even Cassie cannot resist taking a part in the "familiar opacities of clownish quarreling"(41). Repeatedly, the self-deprecating Caldwell calls attention to his wife's theatricality: "If I'd been any kind of man I would have put her on the burlesque stage when she was young"(58). Later, Peter, speaking to his mother on the telephone, notes "...that theatrical talent for

holding the stage that perhaps is the germ of sense in his father's fantasy about putting her in vaudeville ..."(161) Pop Kramer performs a "trick" of tucking an entire piece of bread into his mouth. Staging this routine, "He moved with a pronounced and elaborate air of being inconspicuous that made us all watch him"(56). At home, even the self-conscious Peter playacts. Descending to the first floor, he imagines himself "Tripping in grace notes like Fred Astaire..."(48). Brushing his teeth outside (the house lacks indoor plumbing), Peter performs for his dog:

All the time, Lady watched my performance with a wild delight that swelled and twitched her body, and when I spat, she barked in applause, each bark a puff of frost. I replaced the brush and bowed, and had the satisfaction of hearing the applause continue as I retired behind the double curtain, the storm door, and the main door. (50-51)

Inspired by Caldwell, Peter imitates his dramatics:

I was like my father in performing for an unseen audience, but his was far off and needed to be shouted at, whereas mine was just over the footlights. Boy, clutching stomach comically crosses stage left. (53)

The members of the Caldwell family nourish and sustain one another with playfulness and humor. As an adult, looking back, Peter explains to his mistress that the godliness and joy of their lives was linked with imagination and theatricality:

And yet, love, do not think that our life together, for all its natural frustrations, was not good. It was good. We moved, somehow, on a firm stage, resonant with metaphor...Yes. We lived in God's sight. (57)

Galligan, citing Lynch, elaborates on the significance of playfulness:

But Lynch's whole approach to comedy makes it easy for him to put playfulness, or funniness, at the center of the subject. An acceptance of limitations with a concomitant rejection of "magical" solutions and "angelic" powers points toward a delight in games (with all their arbitrary rules about fair and foul balls) and in unabashed pretense.

Absorption in the concrete and trust in the generative finite lead directly to full, innocent acceptance of the present moment, which is the essence of play. Hostility toward the univocal and celebration of the analogical mind and imagination compel one to respect witty, playful ways of thinking. Above all, an argument that the course of comedy is a descent below all the categories to rock-bottom reality, "which is profoundly and funnily unbreakable" is an argument that comedy is a call to play, an imitation to dance. (37)

At the end of the novel, when Peter and his father finally reach their farmhouse after their odyssey, the image of the "fire dancing" in the hearth reinforces the sense of the Caldwells' home life as warm, vibrant, and good. According to Corrigan, "Comedy always ends in fusion and with a sense of social union" ("Aristophanic Comedy: The Conscience of a Conservative," 354).

The sense that life is fundamentally playful is evident in the antics of ordinary people like the pinball wizard Johnny Dedman ("He played the machines as if he invented them," 96) and the janitor Heller who makes sweeping the corridor a performance: "Here comes Heller down the annex hall! Twiddle, piddle; piddle, pat!! How the man does love his own broad broom!!!" (165). In humble Olinger, nature and the cityscape create a theatrical effect:

The streetlights strung along the pike made a forestage of brightness where the snowfall, compressed and expanded, by the faintest of winds, like an actor postures-- (179)

This image of streetlights and snowfall combining to form a theater evokes the notion in As You Like It that "All the world's a stage." Caldwell's playfulness reflects his sense of the human condition expressed in Shakespearean comedy: "And all the men and women merely players." As he tells his colleague Phillips, "Phil, I don't know any other way to act. I'll have to act childish until they put the half-dollars over my

eyes"(167).

In comedy, characters are most fully human when they recognize their inherent foolishness and hence refuse to take themselves too seriously. The clown Touchstone's paradoxical distinction in As You Like It applies: "The fool doth think he is wise, but the wise man knows himself to be a fool." Caldwell's double vision contrasts with the rigidity and vanity of single-vision characters such as Doc Appleton, Mrs. Herzog, and Reverend March. These humorless figures, with their pomposity and self-centeredness, are the true fools in the novel. Galligan emphasizes that "...Comedy is hostile to the univocal mind. It ...embraces the organic irregular generated by what Lynch calls the analogical mind"(31). Unlike the gregarious Caldwell, these pompous characters remain aloof from common humanity. In "Laughter," Bergson observes, "Any individual is comic who automatically goes his own way without troubling himself about getting into touch with the rest of his fellow beings"(147). Doc Appleton as "the learned doctor" and March, a war hero ("The war made him,"175) and mythologically Mars the god of war, as "the swaggering soldier," resemble stock alazon figures whom Cornford characterizes as "...touched with some form of pretentiousness, swagger, conceit, which makes them ridiculous and incurs the irony of the hero-buffoon"(134). Venus describes Appleton/Apollo as an "unctuous prig"(25); Caldwell resists visiting the physician's office: "All he does, Pop, when I go to him, is brag about himself"(54); he and his twin, Hester Appleton ("She spoke of the gods with a certain authority, Miss Appleton did...."140), are known for their "ill-humor"(146). Excluding himself, Appleton declares, "People are

foolish"(104). Reflecting his single vision, Appleton exemplifies "...that strange way monologuists have of ending a conversation as if their time had been wasted"(104).

In his obliviousness, Appleton resembles the aged Pop Kramer, another creature of habit:

My grandfather lifted his hands in his squeezed space and in a voice muffled by bread pronounced, "Blessings on thee." He never failed to say it, just as, in the early evening, when he climbed "the wooden hill," he would call down to us, "Pleasant dreams." (56)

Pop Kramer's rigidity inspires Caldwell to sport with the old man: "He was an ideal foil for my father because as a very old man he imagined that, if listened to, he could provide all answers and soothe all uncertainties"(54). Comedy, however, subverts certainty. Caldwell's inverting of venerable maxims ("Yeah but Pop...did you ever stop to think, does any man wait for time and tide..."52) illustrates the interplay between Bergson's mechanical and organic:

The rigid, the ready-made, the mechanical, in contrast with the supple, the everchanging and the living, absentmindedness in contrast with attention, in a word automatism in contrast with free activity, such are the defects that laughter singles out and would fain correct. (145)

Galligan quotes Arthur Koestler's notion of creativity as "...an act of liberation--the defeat of habit by originality"(96).

Nevertheless, Pop Kramer and Doc Appleton, a conscientious general practitioner, remain benign figures. Less sympathetic are the cold Reverend March and the haughty schoolboard member Mrs. Herzog. Disdainfully, both distance themselves from the human comedy. Mim Herzog, with "Her air of interrupted dignity, ridiculous in one not yet out of her thirties..."(151-152), remains blind to her

own foolishness. When Caldwell surprises her emerging from a tryst with Zimmerman, "...her eyes widen behind her cockeyed butterscotch hornrims." The adjective "cockeyed" indicates that her perspective is askew. Lacking double vision, she fails to appreciate farce. After the embarrassed Caldwell blurts a joke to make light of this awkward encounter, the unamused woman's face "...freezes the harder at this greeting." In a novel that celebrates humor (Vera claims, "In laughter her girlhood, her virginity is reborn,"178), Mrs. Herzog is defined by her humorlessness: "She is customarily slow to see her own humor"(163). Unwilling to accept her own guilt, she vindictively scapegoats Caldwell and urges her paramour to fire the unlucky teacher. Zimmerman's oxymoronic response, however, reveals that the principal, unlike Mrs. Herzog, has some sense of his limitations: "You overestimate my omnipotence"(163). This cynicism suggests that the principal at least appears aware of his outrageous behavior. When Mrs. Herzog asks whether they should feel "guilty," Zimmerman replies slyly, "Absolutely. Afterwards"(163); when he admits his responsibility for the missing tickets, he "crookedly winks" (187). This mischievous wink indicates Zimmerman's playfulness. The principal is capable of acknowledging Caldwell's goodness: "You've received no favors....You're a good teacher"(187).

Reverend March, however, lacks any sense of his place in life. He postures heroically: "Life is a hell but a glorious hell"(176). Like another clergyman in Updike's fiction, the sardonic Roger Lambert (modeled on Hawthorne's Roger Chillingsworth) in Roger's Version, March represents the critic Lynch's anti-comic

"meticulous man" who wishes to distance himself from an imperfect world(108):

"This minister is a tall and handsome man with a bony brown face and a crisp black mustache fastidiously shaped"(175). In order to curry favor with the alluring Vera Hummel, March paints himself as the innocent victim of deluded parishioners:

Her wet lips are framed to release laughter even before his jokes, indignant questions, are out. "Why does anything like this happen to me?" he sternly asks, slightly pop-eyed. "Why do all the ladies of my parish bake cupcakes once a month and sell them to each other? Why does the town drunk keep calling me on the telephone? Why do these people keep showing up in fancy hats on Sunday morning to hear me prattle about an old book?" (178)

March's self-serving satire excludes himself from life's absurdity; the ludicrous reference to his sight ("pop-eyed"), however, reveals that, like Mim Herzog, his perspective is distorted.

The interaction between March and Caldwell illustrates the distinction between the meticulous man's single vision and the comic hero's double vision. When, during a varsity basketball game, the despairing Caldwell urgently seeks the minister's counsel, March is appalled by "this preposterous interruption" of his flirtation with Vera. Irked, March attempts to flee "...this tall tousled maniac." When Caldwell persists, the clergyman responds with rhetoric:

"That's ridiculous...Orthodox Calvinism--and I count myself more orthodox than not--is fully as Christocentric as the Lutheran doctrines. Perhaps more so, since we exclude the saints and any substantive Eucharistic transformation." (188-189)

Soon, March loses patience and dismisses the teacher: "'This is burlesque!' he shouts. 'A basketball game is no place to discuss such matters.'" Caldwell's burlesque, however, exposes March. After perfunctorily offering to lend "...some

excellent books," March terminates the interview: "He firmly restores his attention to Vera, presenting to Caldwell a profile as handsome and final as if stamped onto an imperial coin." As in all comic discussions, the truth emerges. The behavior of alazon-like March ("Make Nero look tame, small town aristocrats," Caldwell thinks..."189) reveals that "Though his faith is intact and infrangible as metal, it is also like metal dead. He mocks it"(178). With all his doubts, Caldwell's faith is vital; in contrast, the smug clergyman's is lifeless. March's association with imperial Rome (the comparison with Nero, the allusion to his battlefield exploits "in the hills above Rome," and "a profile as handsome and final as if stamped onto an imperial coin,"189) fits. His cynicism evokes the Roman soldiers' derision at the crucifixion. Paradoxically, it is the minister March who lacks faith: "He mocks it."

Ultimately, the central dramatization of the dichotomy between the comic hero and the non-comic "meticulous" figure exists in the relationship between Caldwell and Peter. According to Frye in The Anatomy of Criticism, fiction contains a "comic" tendency to integrate the hero with his society and a "tragic" that isolates him(54). As a child and as an adult, the son envies his father's vitality and gaiety. Langer identifies vitality with comedy: "The pure sense of life is the underlying feeling of comedy..."(120). Galligan describes "...that spirit of gaiety which permeates all comedy..." that is life-affirming(37). What the older Peter misses most from his childhood is his family's "...white laughter that like heat lightning bursts in an atmosphere where souls are trying to serve the impossible"(201). The single-vision son, however, lacks his father's faith. His behavior illustrates Lynch's condemnation

of those who attempt to "...substitute a phony faith for faith in the power of the vulgar and limited finite"(105).

Repeatedly, Peter reveals his distaste for "the vulgar and limited finite." His propensity for dreaming is telling. Freud observes that dreams and jokes are related; the former, however, are private and the latter social. Peter dreams and his father jokes. In Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious, Freud observes: "A dream is a completely asocial mental product; it has nothing to communicate to anyone else. A joke, on the other hand, is the most social of all the mental functions that aim at a yield of pleasure"(179). Symbolically, the teenage Peter's psoriasis (a condition he shares with the pedantic Doc Appleton) is "...allergic, in fact, to life itself"(44). At the same time that his family's poverty shames him, he feels superior to "his fellow members" of the 4-H Club: "The dull innocence of some and the viciously detailed knowingness of others struck me as equally savage and remote from my highly civilized aspirations"(60). His snobbishness is apparent in the scene with the hobo:

...I vividly resented that he should even speak of me to this man, that he should dip the shadow of my personality into this reservoir of slime. That my existence at one extremity should be tangent to Vermeer and at the other to the hitchhiker seemed an unendurable strain. (67)

As an adult, Peter behaves like one of the local "gods." Encountering the school teacher Diefendorf, now overweight and balding, Peter is disdainful: "He asked me, dared in all seriousness to ask me, an authentic second-rate abstract expressionist living in an East Twenty-third Street loft with a Negro mistress, me, if I was ever going to teach"(81).

Despite his bravado, however, Peter remains troubled. He thinks of his father

and clergyman-grandfather and reflects, "Priest, teacher, artist: the classic degeneration"(201). In bed with his mistress, "...at the hour in the afternoon when my father and I would be heading home in the car...", he assesses his art and his life:

I glance around at the nest we have made, at the floorboards polished by our bare feet, at the continents of stain on the ceiling like an old and all-wrong explorer's map, at the earnestly bloated canvases I conscientiously cover with great streaks straining to say what I am beginning to suspect is the unsayable thing, and I grow frightened. I consider the life we have made together, with its days spent without relation to the days the sun keeps and its baroque arabesques of increasingly attenuated emotion and its furnishings like a smattering of worn-out Braques and its rather wistful half-Freudian half-Oriental sex-mysticism, and I wonder, Was it for this that my father gave up his life?

(201)

Peter's uneasiness stems from his sense of having removed himself from the quotidian ("...life we have made together, with its days spent without relation to the days the sun keeps..."). Unlike his father, whose life is ruled by time, Peter yearns to escape the limitations of the finite. Lynch stresses the importance of accepting one's place in time:

Human time, when lived according to its basic flow, is a highly subtle, complicated, and sophisticated intellectual process. Yet many an intellectual, devoted to the pure intelligence, rejects this process as though it were a sickness. We have learned from modern psychology how deep is the temptation of the human being to escape into his mind, so to speak, and to think out his reality in that safe spot, untouched by the processes of living through experience. The withdrawal from the flow of time is such an escape from experience; the attempt to reject or to ignore any part of the temporal movement, to hold on too tightly to any part of it, produces not freedom, and not inviolability but a kind of slavery.

(52)

The cerebral Peter's art reveals his wish to stop "the flow of time." As a child, Peter had been attracted to art by what he perceives as its power to suspend flux:

It was this firmness, I think, this potential fixing of a few passing seconds, that attracted me, at the age of five, to art. For it is about that age, isn't it, that it sinks in upon us that things do, if not die, certainly change, wiggle, slide, retreat, and, like the dabs of sunlight on the bricks under a grape arbor on a breezy June day, shuffle out of all identity? (51)

According to Lynch, however, such a viewpoint is anti-comic:

For it is simply not true to say that the function of all art is to immobilize time, to freeze into permanence some instant of peace or illumination so that we may have it forever and thus share in that quality of eternity that does not move but simply is. (57)

Near the conclusion of the novel, the adolescent Peter vows "... that I must go to Nature disarmed of perspective and stretch myself like a large transparent canvas upon her in the hope that, my submission being perfect, the imprint of a beautiful and useful truth would be taken"(218). In "Laughter," Bergson summarizes:

So we were probably right in saying that comedy lies midway between art and life. It is not disinterested as genuine art is. By organizing laughter comedy accepts social life as a natural environment--and in this respect it turns its back upon art which is a breaking away from society and a return to pure nature. (170-171)

In contrast, Caldwell passionately rejects Cassie's suggestion that he retire from teaching and work their farm: "I hate Nature. It reminds me of death. All Nature means to me is garbage and confusion and the stink of skunk--brroo!"(216)

Ultimately, Peter becomes "an authentic second-rate abstract expressionist." In Just Looking: Essays on Art (1989), Updike observes, "Abstract Expressionism has the effect of glamorizing the painter, of making him, rather than the sitter or the landscape or the Virgin, the star"(115). According to Newman, "Peter uses art as an escape route from the ugly realities of the present, into the timeless"(83). The novel's

use of the synchronic reflects Peter's predilection for what Lynch terms anti-comic

"simultaneity":

A principal mode of attack on the movement of time and the finiteness of human reality can be described under the heading of "simultaneity." The term covers the impulse to pack the past and the future, indeed the whole of scattered being, into the present moment--thus to possess all things in a single instant and to demolish the narrow gates of both space and time. (48)

Worse, Peter's personal life is equally unfulfilling. His egotism isolates him.

Peter's girlfriend Penny charges, "You're just so wrapped up in your own skin you have no idea what other people feel"(139). Like Reverend March ("Their value is not present to themselves, but is given to them by men...."177), Peter uses women for ego gratification. As a teenager, Peter relishes Penny's willingness "to sacrifice" for him: "This was a fresh patch of paint in my life"(44). Significantly, Peter's black mistress remains unnamed and without individuality. He speaks at her, not with her; his recollections are for his own benefit, not hers. Asleep throughout, she functions as an objective correlative for Peter's unconvincing bohemianism. He loves her "mouth whose corners compress morally," her "burnt skin ceaselessly forgiving mine," and "the centuries of being humbled held in the lilac patina of your palms"; making love with her, he feels "radically confirmed." The references to "morally," "forgiving," "humbled," and "confirmed" suggest that Peter is using his black lover to fabricate a morality for himself. Inevitably, he fails:

I want to be a Negro for you. I want to have a wised-up shoe-polish face taut as a drum at the cheekbones and wear great opaque anonymous-making sunglasses at three a.m. in a dim lavender cellar and forget everything but the crooning behind my ribs. But I cannot quite make that scene. A final membrane restrains me. I am my father's

son.

The self-conscious slang ("make that scene") betrays Peter's inauthenticity. In desperation, Peter looks not to the fabled glory of Greek mythology but to the comic reality of 1947 smalltown Pennsylvania: "I am my father's son." His memory of the three days depicted in the novel provides him with a sense of fulfillment comparable to his childhood fantasy of the statue's thirst: "In that sense, then--in the sense that the coming of night enwrapped the luminous ribbon of downfalling water and staunched its flow--my story is coming to its close"(200).

Caldwell's humble life serves as a model for Peter. Potts writes, "He [the comic writer] is trying to present a social point of view: to measure human conduct against a norm rather than an ideal"(198). Caldwell endures the pain of the social world in order to provide for his family: "My father provided; he gathered things to himself and let them fall upon the world; my clothes, my food, my luxurious hopes had fallen to me from him ..."(73) Caldwell's self-sacrifice ("Was it for this that my father gave up his life?") is illustrated by Updike's subtle depiction, unnoticed by critics, of the ritualistic humiliation of the comic scapegoat. In "The Saturnalian Pattern in Shakespeare's Comedy," C.L. Barber observes, "The pattern of all clowning involves, moment by moment, the same movement from participation to rejection that appears at large in scapegoat ritual"(376). Barber continues, "The artist gives the ritual pattern aesthetic actuality by discovering expressions of it in the fragmentary and incomplete gestures of daily life." The scapegoat is the pharmakos, the word a cognate of pharmacist, the profession of Chiron and the unrealized

ambition of Caldwell. In a dream, Peter imagines his father:

Face ashen, his father, clad in only a cardboard grocery box beneath which his naked legs showed spindly and yellowish, staggered down the steps of the town hall while a crowd of Olingerites cursed and laughed and threw pulpy dark objects that struck the box with a deadened thump.

(159)

McFadden, citing Cornford, states:

... the characters of comedy became the successors of the pharmakoi, victims of humiliation, punishment, and ridicule but happy in the assurance that they were helping to give continued fertility to the tribe.

(158)

Caldwell fits this description. Upon learning that his painful life will continue, he nevertheless rejoices: "He thought of his wife's joy in the land and Pop Kramer's joy in the newspaper and his son's joy in the future and was glad, grateful, that he was able to sustain these for yet a space more"(220). Frye, in The Anatomy of

Criticism, elaborates on the pharmakos' dual nature:

The pharmakos is neither innocent nor guilty. He is innocent in the sense that what happens to him is far greater than anything he has done provokes, like the mountaineer whose shout brings down an avalanche. He is guilty in the sense that he is a member of a guilty society, or living in a world where such injustices are an inescapable part of existence. These two facts do not come together; they remain ironically apart. The pharmakos, in short, is in the situation of Job.

(41)

In his nightmare,

... Peter understood that inside the town hall there had been a trial. His father had been found guilty, stripped of everything he owned, flogged, and sent forth into the world lower than the hoboes...He tried to explain aloud to the angry townspeople how innocent his father was, how overworked, worried, conscientious, and anxious; but the legs of the crowd shoved and smothered him and he could not make his voice heard. He woke with nothing explained.

(159)

Within this context the perplexing last chapter may be seen as a dream of Peter's dramatizing the sacrifice of the pharmakos. In Comedy, Wylie Sypher describes the ancient ritualistic "purging or catharsis" of "the scapegoat" who "...was often the divine man or animal":

Behind tragedy and comedy is a prehistoric death-and-resurrection ceremonial, the rite of killing the old year (the aged king) and bringing in a new season (the resurrection or initiation of the adolescent king).

(216)

The "aged king" Caldwell, representing the older generation, dies for Peter, the "adolescent king." Caldwell dies not literally but in the sense of sacrificing himself for his son. Kern notes, "But the punishment of the guilty son is usually death and the result tragedy, whereas the punishment of the guilty father is degradation and laughter--hence comedy"(25). Daily, Caldwell suffers his pharmakos "punishment" in the form of the "degradation" he endures amid the students' derisive laughter and the local gods' haughtiness. Rather than escaping to what Hester Appleton calls the "luxury" of death, Caldwell resigns himself to continue living: "Atropos had opened her shears, thought twice, smiled, and permitted the thread to continue spinning"(221). Reflecting comedy's double perspective, fate "thought twice" and "smiled." For years Caldwell has sublimated his own desires for the sake of his family. During the scene with the hobo, Caldwell had briefly revealed a Rabbit Angstrom-like desire to "Bum around from place to place" (66) that he has never acted upon.

Sypher elaborates, "The rites may take the form of an initiation or testing of the strength of the hero or his fertility, perhaps in the form of a 'questioning' or

catechism, after which there comes to him a 'discovery' or 'recognition'-- an anagnorisis or new knowledge"(217). Caldwell learns that he will continue to be tested by having "...again to maneuver among Zimmerman and Mrs. Herzog and all that overbearing unfathomable Olinger gang..." As the centaur agonizes, he has a revelation: "... he discovered that in giving his life to others he entered a total freedom." Afterwards, follow four questions and answers, including "Name me the five rivers of the dead" and concluding with "What is a hero? A hero is a king sacrificed to Hera." According to Sypher, linked to this ceremony "...lies the myth of the primal union between the earth-mother and the heaven-father." In The Centaur, "Mt. Ide and Mt. Dikte from opposite blue distances rushed toward him like clapping waves and in the upright of his body Sky and Gaia mated again"(220).

Sypher continues:

Comedy, however, kept in the foreground the erotic action, together with the disorderly rejoicing at the rebirth or resurrection of the god-hero who survives his agon. (217)

Peter enjoys no such transcendence. Just as The Waste Land's apparent fragmentation represents the confusion of its inhabitants, The Centaur's disjunctive narration conveys Peter's ambivalence. The first person narration indicates a desire to integrate himself into the quotidian, while the use of the omniscient third person reflects his proclivity for distancing himself from it. Applying his own terms, Peter cannot decide whether to be Adam or God. Like the inhabitants of The Waste Land, who must learn to give, sympathize, and control in order to live, Peter must transcend his own egotism in order to live a meaningful life. The union of sky and earth

represents the fulfillment missing from Peter's life. At the end of the novel, the "cliff edge" that Caldwell/Chiron approaches symbolizes the boundary line that separates Kierkegaard's spheres of existence. Before making the leap of faith, he "...uttered the final word, Now." For Peter to make a similar leap, he too must learn to live in the present. A quotation in Greek from Apollodoros' The Library follows:

But the hurt proving incurable, Chiron retired to the cave and there he wished to die but he could not for he was immortal. However, Prometheus offered himself to Zeus to be immortal in his stead and so Chiron died.

The novel concludes "Chiron accepted death"(222). This "death" of the pharmakos symbolizes the sacrifice on behalf of the younger generation that the older generation accepts as its responsibility.

The scapegoat's "guilt" reflects the imperfect nature of man, symbolized in Christianity by original sin. One of Caldwell's colorful images conveys this recognition. Worried about his father's health, Peter has resolved to protect him from manipulative students and overbearing townspeople. Instead, Caldwell suggests that Peter "kill time" with his friends. Peter feels guilty because in fact he is drawn to the teen-age society of the local luncheonette, described as "criminal," where his girl friend awaits him. Caldwell insists, "Take your time...You got lots of time to kill. At your age I had so much time to kill that my hands are still bloody"(91). In Self-Consciousness, discussing his ambivalent attitude toward the Vietnam war, Updike uses the same imagery when criticizing anti-war protestors: "...pretending that our great nation hadn't had bloody hands from the start, that every generation didn't have its war, that bloody hands didn't go with having hands at all. A plea, in short, for the

doctrine of Original Sin and its obscure consolations"(136). This expression, "killing time," by alluding to the overthrow of Cronus (Caldwell's father-in-law Pop Kramer and mythically Chiron's father), suggests the inevitable overthrow of the old by the young, the comic insistence on the natural succession of generations. This theme manifests itself in the teenage Peter's oedipal feelings. As is traditional with comedy, The Centaur reverses oedipal roles with the father playful and the son grave ("They had been too poor to afford a baby carriage; the kid had learned to steer, too early?"15). Peter takes himself too seriously and lacks the playfulness of the mature comic hero. At home Peter competes with Caldwell for his mother's attention and sulks when she rebuffs him:

"I can't," I told her. "I'm too upset. My stomach hurts." I wanted revenge for her snub of my flirting overture: It dismayed me that my father, that silly sad man whom I thought our romance had long since excluded, had this morning stolen the chief place in her mind. (52)

Staying at the Hummels' house, Peter, after fantasizing that the glamorous Vera is his "wife," resents his father's intrusion:

The snow on his coat and pants and shoes, testimony of adventure, made me jealous. Mrs. Hummel's attention had shifted all to him; she was laughing without his even saying anything. (207)

Upon reaching home, Peter admits, "I tried to get back into the little intricate world my mother and I had made, where my father was a strange joke..."(215) Cassie's barb, "I think it's so sad...that they don't allow men to marry their mothers"(47), is aimed at her husband but applies to her son as well.

Throughout the novel, the continual references to Caldwell's death--especially the obituary composed by an unidentified former student (Peter had been in his

father's class)--suggest Peter's subconscious rivalry with his father. Although he dearly loves his father, at the same time the "ambitious" Peter feels overshadowed by Caldwell's charismatic presence and wishes him out of the way. The human comedy, however, requires that each generation await its time. Aware of the age gap separating them, Vera Hummel keeps Peter at bay; when Caldwell returns from his "adventure," she lavishes all her "attention" on him. Even more frustrating to Peter is his father's blithe unawareness of their rivalry:

The man with two talents didn't get sore at the man with five. Look at me and Peter. I have no talents, he has ten; but I'm not mad at him. I like him. He's my son. (84)

Effortlessly, Caldwell upstages his son: "...she was laughing without his even saying anything." Although Peter, as Vera allows, has "possibilities"(204), he overestimates his ability to compete with his father now. Caldwell, on the other hand, accepts his role in time. Rather than competing with his son, he sacrifices himself to protect him: "... using his body as a shield against the wind for his son, pulls down upon Peter's freezing head the knitted woolen cap he has taken from his own head"(198). Like Chiron atoning for Prometheus, Caldwell suffers for Peter. The gift of the ridiculed cap, a symbol of Caldwell's foolishness, represents the succession of the generations.

The frequent references to "humiliation" in the novel underscore the reality that social intercourse is necessarily painful for the individual. In "One Big Interview," Updike avers that "The general social contract--living with other people, driving cars on highways--all this is difficult, it's painful. It's a kind of agony

really..."(509). Juxtaposing "agony" with "really" fits: reality can be painful.

Caldwell's reaction to the students' derision illustrates the agony of the individual in society: "The laughter of the class...seemed to crowd against him, to crush the privacy that he so much desired, a privacy in which he could be alone with his pain ..." (9). Yet it is by meeting his obligations that the individual attains maturity. Frye asserts that the central theme of comedy is the integration of a main character into society (The Anatomy of Criticism, 43). This theme is evident in Caldwell's farcical account of the origin of life during his classroom lecture:

"...the volvox, of these early citizens in the kingdom of life, interests us because he invented death. There is no reason intrinsic in the plasmic substance why life should ever end. Amoebas never die; and those male sperm cells which enjoy success become the cornerstone of new life that continues beyond the father. But the volvox, a rolling sphere of flagellating algae organized into somatic and reproductive cells, neither plant nor animal--under a microscope it looks like a Christmas ball--by pioneering this new idea of cooperation, rolled life into the kingdom of certain--as opposed to accidental--death. For--hold tight kids, just seven more minutes of torture--while each cell is potentially immortal, by volunteering for a specialized function within an organized society of cells, it enters a compromised environment. The strain eventually wears it out and kills it. It dies sacrificially for the good of the whole."

(37)

Caldwell identifies the volvox as one of the "early citizens" who enter into a social contract with "an organized society." By "volunteering" to do so, the volvox subjects itself to "a compromised environment." The volvox's altruism reflects the survival instinct. Langer points out, "It takes life to produce further life. Every organism, therefore, is historically linked with other organisms"(122). Eons later Caldwell repeats this sacrifice on a daily basis ("...just seven more minutes of torture"). Contrary to the view of the critic Markle, the presence of death is not incompatible

with comedy; rather, it is an inescapable part of the human comedy. Critics have failed to notice the similarity between Langer's remarks in "The Comic Rhythm" and Caldwell's lecture. She explains: "...death, which is an accident in amoeboid existence, becomes the lot of every individual--no accident, but a phase of the life pattern itself"(122). Nevertheless, as Updike insists, Caldwell does not literally die at the end of the novel:

By the way, I must repeat that I didn't mean Caldwell to die in The Centaur; he dies in the sense of living, of going back to work, of being a shelter for his son.

("One Big Interview,"498)

Peter acknowledges, "... my father's teaching was what sheltered us and let us live"(87). Like the humble but heroic volvox, Caldwell sacrifices his own life for others. His compromised environment is the society of Olinger that, with its overbearing "aristocrats" and demanding students, over the years wears him out. In the epigraph, Chiron dies for Prometheus: "He died like any wearied man..." When Peter recognizes with horror, "I'm killing my father"(193), he is expressing not only his sub-conscious oedipal feelings, but also the fact that the older generation inevitably makes way for the younger.

Yet, as Galligan notes, comedy sustains hope(28). At the conclusion of the dream-like Chapter Six, Peter informs his father that he has gained hope "From you"(144). When Caldwell is dubious, Peter musters the courage to imagine a Kierkegaardian "leap of faith":

I closed my eyes; between the voiceless "I" inside my head and the trembling plane of darkness also there, there was a gap, of indeterminate distance but certainly not more than an inch. With a little lie I leaped it.

"Yes," I said.

Unlike Peter's fruitless attempts to overcome the tiny gap that prevents him from attaching the chains to the tires or his fantasy that the museum statue at night would be able to reach the water that falls an inch from her lips, hope can be achieved with the "little lie" of faith. Its inclusion within a dream, however, reveals that Peter's waking life yet lacks faith. Freud explains:

In the case of adults it seems to be a generally binding condition that the wish which creates the dream shall be one that is alien to conscious thinking--a repressed wish--or will possibly at least have reinforcements that are unknown to consciousness.

(161)

The surrealistic quality of this chapter conveys Peter's despair. Freud elaborates:

Nonsense, absurdity, which appears so often in dreams and has brought them into so much undeserved contempt, never arises by chance through the ideational elements being jumbled together, but can always be shown to have been admitted by the dream-work intentionally and to be designed to represent embittered criticism and contemptuous contradiction in the dream thoughts.

(175)

Hope, however, does have a basis in reality. In The Anatomy of Criticism, Northrop Frye describes comedy's inclusion of "the green world...as visualizing the world of desire, not as an escape from 'reality,' but as the genuine form of the world that human life tries to imitate"(181). Peter at first locates the green world in the statue of the "naked green lady" with "her verdigrant hair" thirsting for "pearlish green" water that continuously eludes her, and later he finds it briefly in Penny's green eyes. Ultimately, however, in The Centaur, the green world manifests itself in the cyclic nature of life. When Caldwell represents death in the form of an equation on the blackboard, Peter demurs, "But can't the process ever be reversed?" His

father responds:

"Thanks for asking that, Peter. Yes. Read the equation backwards and you have photosynthesis, the life of green plants. They take in moisture and the carbon monoxide we breathe out and the energy of the sunlight, and they produce sugar and oxygen, and then we eat the plants and get the sugar back and that's the way the world goes round." (142-143)

Caldwell's "Yes" counters his son's nay-saying. The fundamental process of photosynthesis, "the life of green plants," drives "the way the world goes round."

Galligan identifies the cyclical nature of time and change as one of the "... five major recurring images in comic literature"(30). He adds, "Comedy's propensity for seeing time as cyclical and repetitive rather than as linear and progressive is well known and often discussed"(34). For Frye, "The green world charges the comedies with the symbolism of the victory of summer over winter ..." (183); it also reflects "...the triumph of life and love over the waste land"(182). Recurrently, The Centaur links life's cyclical nature with rebirth: the seeds identified with Persephone; Caldwell's description of the school calendar as "'The long haul'...the stretch between Christmas and Easter"(41); and the seasonal nature of Peter's psoriasis,

God, to make me a man, had blessed me with a rhythmic curse that breathed in and out with His seasons. The summer sun melted my scabs; by September my chest and arms were clear but for a very faint dappling, invisibly pale seeds which the long dry shadow of the fall and winter would bring into blossom. The curse reached its climax of flower in the spring; but then the strengthening sun promised cure. (45)

Peter's own body contains the promise of a rebirth.

Lynch identifies "the limited concrete" as "the path to insight and salvation"(104). A key passage in the novel reflects this insight. In the final chapter the despairing Caldwell recalls walking with his minister father "down a dangerous

street in Passaic":

From within the double doors of a saloon there welled 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. In those days he customarily kept silent about what troubled him, but his worry must have made itself felt, for he remembered his father turning and listening in his backward collar to the laughter from the saloon and then smiling down to his son, "All joy belongs to the Lord." It was half a joke but the boy took it to heart. All joy belongs to the Lord. Wherever in the filth and confusion and misery, a soul felt joy, there the Lord came and claimed it as his own; into barrooms and brothels and classrooms and alleys slippery with spittle, no matter how dark and scabbed and remote, in China or Africa or Brazil, wherever a moment of joy was felt, there the Lord stole and added to His enduring domain. And all the rest, all that was not joy, fell away, precipitated, dross that had never been. He thought of his wife's joy in the land and Pop Kramer's joy in the newspaper and his son's joy in the future and was glad, grateful that he was able to sustain these for yet a space more. The X-rays were clear. A white width of days stretched ahead. The time left him possessed a skyey breadth in which he swam like a grandchild of Oceanus; he discovered that in giving his life to others he entered a total freedom. Mt. Ide and Mt. Dikte from opposite blue distances rushed toward him like clapping waves and in the upright of his body Sky and Gaia mated again. Only goodness lives. But it does live. (220)

In "The Bias of Comedy and the Narrow Escape into Faith," Nathan A. Scott, Jr.

suggests the nature of the relationship between comedy and Christianity:

Which means that the Christian imagination is enabled to rejoice in the quiddities and hecceities of existence in a way that accords very closely with the path that is taken by the comic vision.

And though this world of ours has been injured by man's sin, it is, despite his distinctness from God, essentially good, because it proceeds from Him and exists by His design. (108)

The "double doors" of the raucous saloon indicate Caldwell's father's double vision.

Unlike Reverend March, this clergyman and parent does not distance himself from the quotidian; instead, he rejoices in life's "quiddities and hecceities." That this insight is

expressed as "half a joke" reflects his comic perspective. Amid the problematic human comedy, the "poisonous laughter that seemed to distill all the cruelty and blasphemy in the world," he discerns the truth that "All joy belongs to the Lord." This passage echoes the 100th Psalm: "For the Lord is good and his love is everlasting,/ His constancy endures to all generations."

The Centaur locates faith within the quotidian. Aptly, this revelation occurs not in a church but outside a rough working man's bar; moreover, Updike does not quote the 100th Psalm but paraphrases its imagery and rhythm in the vernacular.

Scott describes the "Christian imagination":

And it believes that in the Incarnation God Himself has affirmed the world, has affirmed the realm of finitude, the realm of nature and of history. So the religion which finds its main fulcrum in the Incarnational event is a faith which does not take us out of this world; it takes us, rather, deeper and deeper into it. (110)

Although Caldwell identifies himself as a Christian ("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,"⁵²), the establishment Christianity of churches and clergymen fails to address spiritual needs. Caldwell's clergyman father loses his faith on his deathbed; the teacher is plagued by doubts ("What I could never ram through my thick skull was why the ones that don't have it were created in the first place,"¹⁸⁹) that March dismisses; Peter never attends church or finds consolation in religion. Symbolically, when Caldwell gazes at the heavens, "The clear blue of the towering sky seemed forceful yet enigmatic," recalling "this dividing and indifferent blue" of Wallace Stevens' "Sunday Morning." Edward Vargo asserts, "Yet the effect of The Centaur is

to leave us unconvinced of this other world...God is still a vague, bloodless being"(102). Caldwell, however, has not attained the Kierkegaardian religious sphere marked by a personal relationship with God; instead, he remains in the earthly ethical sphere. Divinity can be understood only in terms of this world. When the aesthete Hester Appleton describes God as "Very fine, very elegant, very slender, very exquisite," Caldwell responds reductively, "That's right. He certainly is. He's a wonderful old gentleman. I don't know where the hell we'd be without Him"(147).

Thereupon, he recites a poem from his youth, "'Song of the Passaic' By John Alleyne MacNab":

"The great Jehovah wisely planned
All things of Earth, divinely grand;
And, in His way, all nature tends
To laws divine, to serve His ends.

The rivers run, and none shall know
How long their waters yet shall flow;
We read the record of the past,
While time withholds the future cast."(148)

When Hester comments that "It's not a very happy poem...", Caldwell says, "It is for me, isn't that funny?" The comic perspective finds a joyful faith in the natural world's reflection of the divine. Unlike Peter's abstract paintings which take him away from the world, this uncelebrated poem leads Caldwell deeper into life. In comedy, this is the goal of art. Peter's true canvas is the The Centaur itself. During a snowstorm,

Olinger under the vast violet dome of the stormstruck night sky
becomes yet one more Bethlehem. Behind a glowing window the infant
God squalls. Out of zero all has come to birth. The panes, tinted by
the straw of the crib within, hush its cries. (179)

Recurrently, the birth of a new generation redeems the world. Yet, faith is challenging: "The world goes on unhearing." History continually reenacts the crucifixion. This is evident even at the simplest level of life. The lowly volvox is identified with Christ: it "looks just like a Christmas ball"; the description "flagellating" evokes Jesus' agony; like Christ, "It died sacrificially for the good of the whole." Similarly, Caldwell sacrifices himself. The students' behavior during Caldwell's lecture represents society's response to Christ: "Mute faces marvelled and mocked"(33). With "marvel" sharing the same etymology as "smile," this dual reaction reflects Frye's contention that the comic "emotions" are "sympathy and ridicule"(43). Undeterred, Caldwell holds "himself upright," with the adverb evoking the imagery of the cross. His resolve to continue living and working is heroic. As a father, he does not want to die at an early age as his own father did: "...I didn't want to doublecross my own kid like that"(169).

The quotidian contains the hope of resurrection as well. During his lecture, Caldwell shrinks the history of the universe into "our scale of three days," beginning with darkness and concluding with the emergence of man. When the Caldwells' ancient car stalls in the morning, "The resurrection felt impossible." Nevertheless, Caldwell succeeds in starting the engine:

We listened so intently that a common picture seemed crystallized between our heads, of the dutiful brown rod straining forward in its mysterious brown cavern, skidding past the zenith of its revolution, and retreating, rejected. There was not even a ghost of a spark. I closed my eyes to make a quick prayer and heard my father say, "Jesus kid, we're in trouble." He got out and frantically scraped at the windshield frost with his fingernails until he had cleared a patch for the driver's vision. I got out on my side and, heaving together on opposite doorframes, we

pushed. Once. Twice. An immense third time.
 With a faint rending noise the tires came loose from the frozen earth of
 the barn ramp. (58)

The allusions to "mysterious brown cavern," "ghost," "prayer," "Jesus," and "heaving together" evoke the resurrection. Many "revolutions" of the earth later, another miracle occurs within the "common picture." Upon his return home, Peter reflects: "As I resettled myself in bed I relaxed into the comfortable foreknowledge of the familiar cycle of a cold: the loosening cough, the clogging nose, the subsiding fever, the sure three days in bed"(217). Just as the car starts on the third try and Peter will recover after three days in bed, Caldwell learns over the three-day period of the novel that he does not have cancer. When father and son reach home, Caldwell apologizes to Peter: "I gave you a rough three days"(217); but it is this period that furnishes Peter with the hope of renewal. In T.S. Eliot, Frye notes that "Dante's journey through hell begins on Good Friday evening....Thus his journey fits inside the three-day rhythm of the redemption..."(65). Through a number of allusions, The Centaur associates Peter's mental journey with a Dantean descent into the underworld: Mr. Rhodes, the service station manager, is mythologically Rhadamanthus, one of the judges of the dead; in the obituary, Caldwell's nickname is "Sticks" (Styx); the traditional Olinger High School cheer is "Hell"(171); the hotel desk clerk is identified with Charon; characters as diverse as March and Caldwell find life "hell." Peter's identification with the Cumaen Sibyl also is pertinent. Frye adds, "Apart from Easter, the idea of a descent into hell came to Dante from the sixth book of the Aeneid, where Aeneas enters the lower world with the aid of a 'golden bough' and

the Cumaen Sibyl"(66). Moreover, the myriad references to death in the novel reflect the need for the old Peter to die in order that the new may be born: "Easter represents the end of a long period of religious symbolism in which a 'dying god,' a spirit representing the fertility of nature, was thought to die and rise again, usually in a three-day festival"(65). Seeds must be buried to bring forth life. Frye's depiction of The Waste Land applies to Peter's predicament:

This world is physically above ground but spiritually subterranean, a world of shadows, corpses, and buried seeds. The inhabitants live the "buried life"... of seeds in winter: they await the spring rains resentfully, for real life would be their death. Human beings, who live like seeds, egocentrically, cannot form a community but only an aggregate where "Each man fixed his eyes before his feet," imprisoned in a spiritual solitude... (64)

To integrate himself into the human community Peter must touch earth.

Meeker emphasizes that comedy focuses on man's ability to adapt himself to his environment and accept his limitations(39). Scott asserts:

For what comedy never gives up insisting upon is that we are not angels and that we belong, therefore, not to any unhistorical heaven of pure essences, but to the moving, restless, dynamic world of time and space. (103)

Within The Centaur the transcendent manifests itself in the quotidian. In "The Varieties of Religious Experience," William James quotes Leuba:

Does God really exist? How does he exist? What is he? are so many indecent questions. Not God, but life, more life, a larger, richer, more satisfying life, is in the last analysis, the end of religion. The love of life, at any and every level of development, is the religious impulse. (455)

Despite his travails, Caldwell loves life. He concedes, "Some have it and some don't. But everybody has something, even if it's just being alive"(84); Peter remembers his

parents' voices as "full of life"(40). The pagan Chiron preaches, "And Love set the Universe in motion. All things that exist are her children--sun, moon, stars, the earth with its mountains and rivers, its trees, herbs, and living creatures"(78). The Christian Caldwell expresses his faith in his love of ordinary life: "Think about the earth. Don't you love her?"(84); sympathizing with the hapless Diefendorf, he confesses, "It takes a rat to love a rat"(87). Years later, Diefendorf returns Caldwell's affection: "A great man, your Dad. Did you know that?"(81) For Peter to assimilate his father's faith, he too must learn to love life. Robert Bernard Martin writes,

The theory of incongruity goes far toward explaining comedy but stops short of the best sort in which the incongruous is finally seen to be congruent to a larger pattern than was originally perceived. (86)

With the incongruous comic world as its backdrop, The Centaur depicts Peter's gradual perception of his place in this "larger pattern." Peter will enjoy what James terms the "larger, richer, more satisfying life" that is "the end of religion" when he begins to live his father's comic morality. Not as a god who is perfect, but as a human being experiencing "...the joy of struggle, the satisfaction of compassion, the triumph of courage," Peter may yet attain the maturity of Kierkegaard's ethical sphere.

Chapter Two: The American Everyman's Incipient Recognition of his Place in the Generations in Rabbit, Run: "Today either everyone is a hero or no one is. I vote for everyone."

"...he runs. Ah: runs. Runs."

Rabbit, Run covers three months in the troubled and confused life of Harold "Rabbit" (a childhood nickname) Angstrom. In 1959 Rabbit, 26 years old, lives with his pregnant wife Janice and three year old son, Nelson, in Mt. Judge, near the city of Brewer, Pennsylvania. Once a high school basketball star, Rabbit now is employed demonstrating a kitchen gadget in department stores. Within the first few pages of the novel, Rabbit makes clear his dissatisfaction with his home life. Janice, who "Just yesterday... stopped being pretty"(13) drinks during the day. Their home is a "mess" and the clutter of toys and uncollected dirty glasses dismay the "order-loving" Rabbit. Viewing his home life as "a tightening net"(19), he "...senses he is in a trap"(20). One afternoon after work, instead of picking up Nelson at his parents' home where Janice had left the child while shopping, Rabbit impulsively flees this "muddle" and drives south toward Florida. He expresses his goal, the imagery evoking the sensuality associated with Florida in the Wallace Stevens' poem, "O Florida, Venereal Soil," romantically: "He wants to go south, down, down the map into orange groves and smoking rivers and barefoot women" (29).

Driving at night on unfamiliar roads, Rabbit loses his way and ends up on a country lane in West Virginia. His confusion evokes Alice in Wonderland's bewilderment after her descent into the rabbit hole. Despite the miles, Rabbit still

feels trapped: "Indeed the net seems thicker now"(37). In a 1968 Paris Review interview, Updike remarks that "...only lately do I see that Brewer, the city of brick painted the color of flowerpots, is the flowerpot that Mr. McGregor slips over Peter Rabbit" (Winter, "The Art of Fiction,"104). The plight of the frustrated Rabbit recalls Peter Rabbit's ensnarement in the gooseberry net. In Just Looking(1989), Updike recalls as a child being greatly affected by the "pathos" of the accompanying drawing in Beatrice Potter's Peter Rabbit, showing Peter "upside down"(36, Updike's emphasis). Like his namesake, Rabbit Angstrom panics: "the scrabbling shadows spider backward through the web of wilderness into a black core where he fears his probe of light will stir some beast or ghost...His ears itch"(38). Trying to find his way, Rabbit studies "...the map whole, a net, all those red lines and blue lines and stars, a net he is somewhere caught in"(39). Finally, like Peter Rabbit, he extricates himself. Chagrined, he rips up the map and "...turns instinctually north"(40).

The next morning, Rabbit, unwilling to return home, seeks out his former high school coach, Marty Tothero, for assistance. In Rabbit's life, "Next to his mother Tothero had had the most force"(21). Now, however, Rabbit finds him down on his luck, dismissed from the high school and, estranged from his wife, living in the shabby Sunshine Athletic Club. Tothero can do little for Rabbit except arrange a blind date for him with Ruth Leonard, a prostitute. After spending the night together, Rabbit moves in with Ruth. While transporting his clothes to her apartment, Rabbit encounters his in-laws' Episcopalian pastor, Jack Eccles, who hopes to persuade him to return home. In order to maintain contact with Rabbit, Eccles, a social-activist

minister, arranges a golf date. On the day of the match, Rabbit meets Eccles' saucy wife, Lucy, and flirts with her. During their golf game, Eccles berates Rabbit for his fecklessness: "The truth is...you're monstrously selfish. You're a coward. You don't care about right or wrong; you worship nothing except your own worst instincts"(125-126).

In the novel's second half, Rabbit begins a temporary gardening job at the estate of Mrs. Smith, an elderly widow. This work--natural, physical, and honest--renews Rabbit. Meanwhile, Ruth, unsure of Rabbit's love for her, does not divulge to him that she is pregnant with his child. One evening at a Brewer nightclub, Rabbit and Ruth meet Ronnie Harrison, Rabbit's ex-high school teammate and nemesis. During the evening, it becomes apparent that Ruth has had sexual relations with Harrison. Afterwards, as retribution, the jealous Rabbit pressures the reluctant Ruth into humiliating sex. Later that night, he receives a phone call from Eccles informing him that Janice has given birth. Leaving Ruth desolate, Rabbit rushes to the hospital, where he and Janice reconcile. With no thought of Ruth, Rabbit moves back home. One Sunday morning, excited by an encounter after church with Lucy Eccles, Rabbit returns home "jazzed." That night, however, when the exhausted Janice resists his advances, Rabbit storms out of the apartment. When he fails to return by the following day, the despairing Janice gets drunk and accidentally drowns the baby in the bathtub. During the mourning period, Rabbit is repentant, but at the grave he loses his composure and to the horror of those assembled blames Janice alone for their loss. Rabbit then races away, finally arriving at Ruth's apartment. There he is

overjoyed to learn of her pregnancy and begs her not to have an abortion. The resentful Ruth demands that if he wants her and the baby he must divorce Janice and marry her. Rabbit vaguely promises "to work it out," but soon departs: "...he runs. Ah: runs. Runs"(284).

Rabbit, Run depicts a young man's incipient comprehension of his role in time and society. Rabbit Angstrom embodies the comic hero: ordinary but attractive, passive, resilient, playful and, above all else, vital. Quintessentially, he is a developing character. In Kierkegaard's morphology, this selfish Rabbit inhabits the aesthetic sphere of existence where individuals limit themselves to personal satisfaction. Over the course of the novel, however, Rabbit's experiences gradually force him to begin to take stock of his life and examine his egotistical delusions. In doing so, he begins the lifelong journey that leads through trial and error to the attainment at last of Kierkegaard's more advanced ethical sphere where the individual lives for others. Along the way, Rabbit grounds his faith in the quotidian: by the end of the series, he will grasp Eccles' insight that "God rules reality"(140). In Rabbit, Run, however, the young adult Rabbit resembles the vain Peter Caldwell rather than the mature George Caldwell. Both young men prefer a nostalgized past and a fantasized future to the problematic present. Tellingly, Rabbit, like Peter, is too self-absorbed to appreciate the comedy around him: "He is the Dalai Lama"(52). Yet, though the humor is muted, Rabbit, Run does contain irony, farce, and burlesque. Eccles chides the smug Rabbit, "It's the strange thing about you mystics, how often

your little ecstasies wear skirts"(121). Encountering Lucy Eccles in the rectory, Rabbit outrageously "...slaps! her sassy ass. Not hard; a cupping hit, rebuke and fond pat both, well-placed on the pocket...her rigidly cold stare is so incongruous with the lazy condescending warmth he feels toward her, that he pushes his upper lip over his lower in a burlesque expression of penitence"(112-113). After the ex-coach Tothero self-servingly sermonizes, "A boy who has his heart enlarged by an inspiring coach...can never become, in the deepest sense, a failure in the greater game of life," Rabbit answers Ruth's inquiry about his occupation, "I uh, it's kind of hard to describe. I demonstrate something called the Magi-Peei Kitchen Peeler"(62).

Mauron's linking of comedy with maturity is as pertinent for the Rabbit series as for The Centaur (McFadden,153). Rabbit's inability to accept his place in the human comedy ensures that he must continue to run, that is, gain experience in order to mature. The title of this first Rabbit novel indicates the link between running and experience: it alludes to a line in Wallace Stevens' poem "The Comedian As The Letter 'C'": "Let the rabbit run, the cock declaim."¹ Joan Richardson observes in Wallace Stevens: The Early Years that in this poem "Not God but experience itself would be celebrated" (521). Updike's inclusion of a comma in his title, thus substituting the imperative mood, indicates the indispensability of experience in maturation.

In John Updike, Robert Detweiler emphasizes Updike's achievement in making such an ordinary character compelling:

¹Joan Richardson has suggested the source of Rabbit, Run's title.

Updike gives himself practically nothing to create from: not a colorful setting but just a common, conventional, slightly squalid Pennsylvanian suburban town; not even an anti-hero but just a non-hero with still less potential for tragedy than Arthur Miller's salesman. (46)

Rabbit's surname suggests his lack of tragic dimension. Angstrom means a unit of wavelength of light equal to one ten-billionth of a meter, the ratio reflective of an individual's standing in a crowded world. Rabbit's humble status, recalling Stephen Daedalus' location of his position within the Christian hierarchy in Portrait of the Artist As a Young Man, is indicated by his address: "...Wilbur Street in the town of Mt. Judge, suburb of the city of Brewer, fifth largest city in Pennsylvania"(10). Rabbit lives in a tacky apartment development, earns a modest living (Ruth refers to his jobs as "a joke,"281), and by his own admission has a lackluster marriage. His world is a lower-middle class "muddle"(101) of broken toys and dirty dishes. Not a reader, he gains his information about the larger world from television and radio. With only a high school education, Rabbit's lack of sophistication is evident. During a conversation with Lucy Eccles, it is apparent that he knows nothing about Freud. Except for his army service spent isolated on a post in rural Texas, Rabbit has never been away from home. Updike's intention is neither satirical nor condescending; rather it is to delineate the provincial background that circumscribes the ordinary person. Within this context, Rabbit's foolishness becomes more excusable.

Rabbit feels his ordinariness all the more because for a brief period in his life, as a high school basketball star, he had known what it was like to stand out from the crowd. Fans cheered his exploits as he set scholastic scoring records (although even this achievement is undercut because he played in a less competitive "B" league).

Later in the series, he recalls that his Mt. Judge team had been no match for the stronger Brewer High School squad: the teams once scrimmaged "for laughs. Theirs." And within four years after his graduation, all his records had been broken. Nevertheless, for a time he was a star in something that mattered. Fondly, Rabbit remembers a fan for whom "...he had been a hero of sorts"(40). When Rabbit attempts to explain to Eccles his "second-rate" marriage, he contrasts it with "playing first-rate basketball"(101). Rabbit, Run at once emphasizes Rabbit's fall from glory. In the opening scene, Rabbit joins a street basketball game with some youngsters. Despite flashes of skill, he fails to impress most of the boys: "They've not forgotten him; worse, they never heard of him"(11). The depiction of Rabbit as a minor celebrity quickly forgotten emphasizes the fickleness of life.

Nevertheless, other characters, including Ruth, Eccles, Mrs. Smith, and Lucy Eccles, find themselves attracted to Rabbit. Tothero vouches for Rabbit's resiliency: "...I know you well enough to know you always land on your feet, Harry"(45). Ruth acknowledges Rabbit's perseverance with a backhanded compliment: "'Cause you haven't given up. 'Cause in your stupid way you're still fighting"(89). Rabbit's interest in basketball and golf reveals his playfulness. Eccles' account of golfing with Rabbit serves to capture the comic experience:

... only Harry gives the game a desperate gaiety, as if they are together engaged in an impossible, startling, bottomless quest set by a benevolent but absurd lord, a quest whose humiliations sting them almost to tears but one that is renewed at each tee, in a fresh flood of green. (157)

On a "bottomless quest" essentially "absurd," the comic hero seeks to be "renewed"

in the "green" world of play. According to Galligan, play is central to comedy:

"Absorption in the concrete and trust in the generative finite lead directly to full, innocent acceptance of the present moment, which is the essence of play"(37).

Within the series, the primacy of the present is indicated, formally, by the use of the present tense; thematically, by the undercutting of nostalgia; and, imagistically, by the vivid rendering of the concrete and quotidian. When Rabbit experiences a moment of transcendence it occurs during a round of golf. He makes a perfect shot when he for a moment forgets his ego and embraces immediate experience: "That's it"(126).

Galligan asserts that playfulness provides hope "...that we will, somehow, land right side up"(5). In addition, the comic hero "...loves to speculate about the world, to play with metaphors, and to toy with analogies"(Galligan,89). This penchant is only glimpsed in Rabbit, Run; however, when Eccles parks on the wrong side of the street Rabbit muses, "Funny how ministers ignore small laws"(86).

Langer views the comic figure as "the personified elan vital"(133). Mrs. Smith gushes: "You kept me alive, Harry...That's what you have, Harry: life. It's a strange gift and I don't know how we're supposed to use it but I know it's the only gift we get and it's a good one"(207). Discussing their wayward son with the senior Angstroms, Eccles sheepishly confesses, "When I'm with him--it's rather unfortunate really--I feel so cheerful I quite forget what the point of my seeing him is"(153).

Langer elaborates on the comic hero's vitality:

Comedy is an art form that arises naturally whenever people are gathered to celebrate life, in spring festivals, triumphs, birthdays, weddings, or initiations. For it expresses the elementary strains and resolutions of animate nature, the animal drives that persist even in

human nature, the delight man takes in his special mental gifts that make him lord of creation; it is an image of human vitality holding its own in the world amid the surprises of unplanned coincidence. What justifies the term "Comedy" is...that the Comus was a fertility rite, and the god it celebrated a fertility god, a symbol of perpetual rebirth, eternal life.

(124)

Rabbit's nickname fits. James Feibleman observes, "The use of comparisons between animals and humans, often to the detriment of the latter, has been a characteristic of comedy from earliest times to the present"(23). Essentially, the comparison reveals "the animal drives that persist in human nature" even if human dignity might prefer to deny them. The novel notes that Rabbit's facial features "partially explain the nickname"(9). Left unstated is the rabbit's association with sex and fertility. The identification is reinforced by the nickname's allusion to the line from the Stevens poem that pairs the rabbit with the cock, a clear sexual symbol. Langer adds:

For there is no denying that the Fool is a red-blooded fellow; he is, in fact, close to the animal world; in French tradition he wears a cockscomb on his cap, and Punchinello's nose is probably the residue of a beak. He is all motion, whim, and impulse--the libido itself.

(135)

According to Frye, "The presiding genius of comedy is Eros..." (*Anatomy*,181).

Aptly, it is in the first novel of the series, when Rabbit is in his 20's and is most sexually active, that the book most frequently refers to him as "Rabbit"; as he ages in the sequels, he is increasingly known as Harry and the nickname eventually becomes a vague memory.

Critics have condemned Rabbit for his lust, but they fail to recognize that comedy is not moralistic and that Rabbit's "animal drives" are natural and vital, as evidenced by his attraction to pregnant women and his desire to father children.

According to Langer, the comic figure, "...is neither a good man nor a bad one, but is generally amoral--now triumphant, now worsted and rueful, but in his ruefulness and dismay he is funny, because his energy is really unimpaired and each failure prepares the situation for a new fantastic mood"(133). The comic figure's ups and downs reflect the cyclic nature of life; his rolling with the punches illustrates his resiliency and determination to survive. His vitality overrides his faults. Rabbit is flawed, but this is the human condition. Meeker avers, "Comedy is concerned with muddling through, not with progress or perfection"(26). What Rabbit must learn is to accept the "muddle" that is life. The death of the infant Rebecca dramatizes not only life's precariousness but also the devastating effect on the family. Since the novel does not portray the baby as an individual, the focus remains on the survivors. As with George Caldwell, accepting life on its terms is the greatest challenge that confronts human beings. The comic hero's energy provides him with the strength--and inspires others, like Mrs. Smith--to endure life.

A developing character, Rabbit struggles to find his way. The novel underscores Rabbit's confusion by continually depicting him misinterpreting statements and events. In one such instance, the venerable Mrs. Smith, after meeting the three-year-old Nelson, warns Rabbit: "You have a proud son; take care." The narration hints at Rabbit's failure to comprehend her meaning: "She must mean he should be proud of his son and take care of him"(207). His error is excusable because the widow's warning is cryptic; nevertheless, in light of his earlier dismissal of the oedipal syndrome as explained by Lucy Eccles ("I hadn't noticed,"111) and his

subsequent bitter conflicts with Nelson, depicted in the following novels, it is revealing. The presumption of Rabbit's explanation ("must mean") betrays his callowness, for comedy undercuts certitude and exposes the superficiality of pat assumptions. Maturity comes with time and experience. From social relationships that are frequently humiliating Rabbit over the course of the series learns what it means to be a human being. According to Kenneth Burke, "The comic frame of acceptance but carries to completion the translative act. It considers human life as a project in 'completion' where the poet works with the material of social relationships"(173). In Discovering the Comic, McFadden notes that "...comedy in general, encourages us to face commonplace reality and to live with it. This ability has much to do with our being able to transform it; survival is a more practical program than revival"(166). The novel's brief opening scenes that on the surface appear insignificant serve to define how reality bewilders and frustrates the inexperienced Rabbit. Fittingly, these minor scenes in themselves illustrate how comedy locates meaning within the mundane.

The novel opens with boys playing a pick-up basketball game. This scene establishes the boundary between childhood--Rabbit's past--and Rabbit's adult world--his present. It quickly becomes apparent that Rabbit has difficulty accepting his place in time. The unorganized street game with a backboard attached to a telephone pole belongs to the domain of boyhood. Rabbit immediately feels the pressure of the new generation: "He stands there thinking, The kids keep coming, they keep crowding you up"(9). Once a legend in this world, he now is an outsider: "...in a business suit,

stops and watches, though he's twenty-six and six three"(9). The "real boys" are wary of him--"It seems funny to them"(9)--and suspect the worst (they sense Rabbit's sexuality). They perceive an adversarial relationship between this "adult" and themselves, but, despite his size, they know that the generational odds are in their favor ("there are six of them and one of him"9). The youths resent his presence ("They're doing this for themselves, not as a show for some adult..."9). During the game, save for one "natural" who identifies with Rabbit (and who with his "knitted cap...giving his head a cretinous look"(11) recalls George Caldwell, the comic paragon of The Centaur), they attack him ("As the game goes on he can feel them at his legs, getting hot and mad, trying to trip him ...,"10). Uneasy, Rabbit waxes nostalgic for his own youth ("...in his time Rabbit was famous,"9).

This episode adumbrates the inevitable generational conflict that will constitute the main theme of the series. The emergence of the new signals the demise of the old. Rabbit, at twenty-six, is not old, but he is compared to these boys: after "...a kid he accidentally knocks down gets up with a blurred face and walks away, Rabbit quits readily. 'O.K.,' he says. 'The old man's going'"(11). His sense of being supplanted by the younger generation, especially his son Nelson, will contribute to his subsequent panic and flight. The boys' antagonism parallels the opening of The Centaur with its depiction of unruly adolescents tormenting the middle-aged Caldwell. This scene underscores as well the importance of living in the present. Instead of recognizing that everyday adult life with its cares and responsibilities cannot match the glory of his basketball youth (he is, after all, a tall skilled veteran athlete

competing against boys), Rabbit exacerbates his current dissatisfaction by contrasting his problematic life today with his romanticized yesterday. Yet, the scene also suggests the value of crossing boundaries even at the price of rejection and humiliation. Essentially passive, Rabbit "...likes things to happen of themselves"(281). The parochial Rabbit has until now been timid and, by risking his adult dignity in play, "He feels liberated from long gloom"(11). In an essay "Dingley Dell & The Fleet," W.H. Auden cites Nietzsche: "To become mature is to recover that sense of seriousness which one had as a child at play"(407).

Passing "stalks of dead flowers," Rabbit longs for a fresh start. It is spring and "Things start anew"(11). Winded from his exercise, he vows to quit smoking and on the run tosses away his cigarettes. Two images reflect comedy's traditional emphasis on the promise of rebirth: first, Rabbit notices a toy clown left in his yard all winter; then he explains his lateness to Janice by telling her that he had been "...clowning around. I played ball with some kids down the alley"(17). Once home, however, he confronts the usual disorder:

The clutter behind him in the room--the Old-fashioned glass with its corrupt dregs, the choked ashtray balanced on the easy-chair arm, the rumpled rug, the floppy stacks of slippery newspapers, the kid's toys here and there broken and stuck and jammed, a leg off a doll and a piece of bent cardboard that went with some breakfast-box cutout, the rolls of fuzz under the radiators, the continual crisscrossing mess--clings to his back like a tightening net. (19)

This instance of what Tony Tanner terms Updike's powerful gift for expressing ordinary life's "density of specification"(43), overwhelms the easily daunted Rabbit. Like Lynch's non-comic meticulous man, Rabbit reacts by distancing himself from

this "mess": "It seems to him he's the only person around here who cares about neatness"(19). Disgusted, Rabbit fails to note the images of doubleness symbolic of comedy contained within this ordinary housing development: "...each double house...contains two wan windows...and each has two doors"(12). The pregnant and weary Janice is exasperated by her husband's perfectionism: "You don't drink, now you don't smoke. What are you doing, becoming a saint?"(14) When she asks him to pick up a pack of cigarettes for her, Rabbit "...senses he is in a trap. It seems certain"(20). Unable to accept the muddle of ordinary life, Rabbit not for the last time runs.

As Rabbit trudges to his parents' home to retrieve Nelson, the familiar locale evokes powerful memories. Telephone poles--associated with youth in the basketball opening--remind Rabbit of his climbing them as a boy and "Listening to the wires as if you could hear what people were saying, what all that secret adult world was about. The insulators giant blue eggs in a windy nest"(20). The reference to insulators applies to his memories as well. Overwhelmed by his problems, Rabbit retreats to the safety of an idealized past. He remembers as a child hiking up Mt. Judge and from its pinnacle viewing the city of Brewer below: "... unlike the color of any other city in the world yet to the children of the county is the only color of cities, the color all cities are"(22). This striking image evokes the certitude of childhood, when reality, whether good or bad, at least makes sense. In his memory, the past looms secure in contrast to the problematic nature of the adult present. In Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious, Freud explains:

For the euphoria which we endeavor to reach by these means [jokes, humor] is nothing other than the mood of a period in life in which we were accustomed to deal with our psychical work in general with a small expenditure of energy--the mood of our childhood, when we were ignorant of the comic, when we were incapable of jokes and when we had no need of humor to make us feel happy in our life. (236)

Lacking a sustaining comic perspective, Rabbit founders. Significantly, both childhood memories locate Rabbit, climbing a telephone pole or a mountain, as removed from the life below him. In the following scene, however, Updike subtly will undercut his hero's nostalgia. The past, though valuable for understanding the present, cannot replace it.

Approaching his parents' home "stealthily" (as if already feeling guilty), Rabbit recalls a long-ago episode from his youth. At one point new neighbors, "strict Methodists," had moved in next door and, when mowing their half of the strip of grass between the two houses, had failed to continue their predecessors' practice of doing the Angstroms' side as well. This change so infuriated Mrs. Angstrom that in retaliation she obstinately forbade Rabbit or his father to mow their portion. With no communication between the neighbors, a stalemate ensued. Before long, the Angstroms' side became so overgrown that a town official arrived to threaten them with a summons. This impasse embarrassed the teenage Rabbit, but he never questioned his mother's stance although there was no reason for her to expect the new neighbors to mow the Angstroms' grass. In this absurdly overblown comic dispute, the rigid mother (as well as the Methodists) displayed the univocal vision that is antithetical to comedy. Finally, Rabbit's father pragmatically resolved the problem. One afternoon, while his wife was away, he enlisted Rabbit's help and cut the grass.

Anti-climactically, their side now "...looked as trim as the Methodist's half, though browner"(24). On his mother's return Rabbit felt "guilty" and feared a quarrel between his parents, but his father deftly avoided any unpleasantness by coolly claiming that the Methodists had capitulated: "His father shocked him by simply lying and doubled the shock by winking as he did it"(25). Together, this wink (like the principal Zimmerman's in The Centaur) and the verb "doubled" suggest a capacity for double vision, an indication of the father's ability to perceive both sides of an issue and mediate between them. In the spirit of compromise, the father recognized that survival outweighs principles. Meeker notes a crucial distinction between tragedy and comedy: "Tragedy demands that choices be made among alternatives; comedy assumes that all choice is likely to be in error and that survival depends upon finding accommodations that will permit all parties to endure"(33). Unfortunately, years later the son lacks the good sense that his father had exhibited on this occasion. Rabbit's vivid recollection reveals that this event has remained with him; at the same time Rabbit, still resentful of the Methodists, continues to sympathize with his univocal-vision mother. This shortsightedness will distort Rabbit's current perspective.

Rabbit, instead of entering the house, conceals himself and peers, undetected, through the kitchen window at the tableau of his parents, sister Mim, and, in his former place, his son Nelson seated eating dinner: "He sees himself sitting in a high chair, and a quick strange jealousy comes and passes. It is his son" (25). The image crystallizes Rabbit's oedipal fear of Nelson's usurping his own place. Again distancing himself--on the outside looking in--Rabbit misreads what is before him:

"Rabbit, with the intervening glass and the rustle of blood in his head, can't hear what they say"(25). Envyng the warm domestic scene with his father laughing, his mother spooning the beans, and his sister grinning as she feeds Nelson, Rabbit concludes ruefully that "...this home is happier than his"(26). Despite memories of the bitterness with the Methodists and his parents' recurrent ugly quarrels, he romanticizes this scene at the expense of his own family life. Updike hints at Rabbit's misinterpretation. When Nelson drops his spoon, "The kid cries, 'Peel! Peel!': this Rabbit can hear, and understand. It means 'spill'"(26). Given the flatness of the description of Rabbit's assumption, the reader remains skeptical of his conclusion; it seems much more likely that the boy's cry is a reference to Rabbit's "MagiPeel Peeler," and thus a call to his absent father. Elsewhere, Eccles assures Rabbit that he "is needed" at home(251). Nelson's grandparents cannot replace his father: Rabbit's place is with his family. In Rabbit's current state, however, he feels unable to cope with his domestic problems. Like Peter Caldwell, Rabbit, as indicated by his expectation of seeing his boyish self seated in his old place, is guilty of what Lynch terms "simultaneity" (48), the anti-comic blurring of the past and the present. Given his nostalgia and his frustration with the present, he overreacts. Panicking, "His acts take on decisive haste"(26).

Rabbit can only learn through experience and his flight south begins his education. In the long run, however, he will change his life not by fleeing his obligations but by learning to accept them. As he starts out, he stops at a garage and the attendant gives Rabbit disconcerting advice, "The only way to get somewhere,

you know, is to figure out where you're going before you go there"(32). The enigmatic nature of this counsel is indicated by the ambiguous description of the speaker: he looks like "a scholar," but, as with Tothero the image is undercut when Rabbit smells whiskey on his breath. This garageman, with his "two shirts" symbolizing his double vision, recalls the scholarly-looking janitor Heller in The Centaur who discovered in his sweepings the seeds that symbolize rebirth. Although disregarded, the garageman's advice haunts Rabbit: "Funny how the man sticks in his throat"(39). Ruefully, Rabbit admits that, "...it missed the whole point and yet there is always the chance that, little as it is, it says everything"(39). Thirty years later, the seasoned Rabbit finally grasps the wisdom of the man's words. Now, however, the advice is merely nagging because in comedy one learns more from experience than from authorities.

Crossing boundaries is essential for broadening one's perspective. On this odyssey Rabbit first senses his isolation. As a stranger in a roadside diner, "He wonders, Is it just these people I'm outside, or is it all America?"(36) He begins to acknowledge his flawed character: "For the first time, Harry realizes he is a criminal"(30). Later, moving his clothes from his apartment to Ruth's, he feels "...ridiculous...like one of those weird thieves..." (95); after the baby's death, Rabbit is dismayed that he is not held legally responsible for what happened: "It disgusts him to feel the net of law slither from him. They just won't do it for you, they just won't take you off the hook"(264). His wish that society relieve him of the pain of confronting his guilt parallels Caldwell's yearning for death to relieve his misery.

Both learn better. Debating the minister Eccles, Rabbit identifies maturity with death: "If you're telling me I'm not mature, that's one thing I don't cry over since as far as I can make out it's the same thing as being dead"(102). Instead, as the series unfolds, Rabbit will gradually come to recognize that maturity comes with accepting his role in life. Responding to Rabbit's petulance, Eccles defines maturity with reductive succinctness, "...[God] wants a little tree to become a big tree"(102).

In Rabbit, Run Reverend Eccles comes closest to matching The Centaur's George Caldwell as a comic hero. Through example more than precept, Eccles serves as a model for Rabbit in a way that parallels the relationship between father and son in The Centaur. Eccles, a younger man and a secondary character, does not equal Caldwell in stature. Yet, he resembles the centaur in a number of important ways (symbolizing the link between them is the Buick each drives): his humility ("I'm immature myself,"102); his clowning such as his foolishly alienating an elderly member of his congregation by referring to him as "Happy Beans"(193); his flawed human nature, evident, as with George Caldwell, in an imperfect marriage("You couldn't bear to love anyone who might return it"245); his wrestling with faith; and most of all his acceptance of his role in society despite frustration and humiliation. Both men's occupations--public school teacher and parish minister--serve the community. Significantly, a fleeting image subtly depicts Eccles, like Caldwell, as a comic scapegoat sacrificing himself for others. Eccles remembers being "humiliated"(141) by his inability to assemble a swing-slide-and-sandbox set for his daughters. The set had arrived in "a long cardboard box" and this detail links it to

Peter's nightmare of his father naked in "a grocery cardboard box" being ostracized by the townspeople. Although the recollection itself is minor, it illustrates that Eccles suffers for the sake of his children just as Caldwell endures his harsh life for his family.

Eccles is, as the Lutheran minister Kruppenbach charges, lacking in spirituality, and he is also, as his wife points out, ineffectual; nevertheless, despite his failures and admitted shortcomings, like Caldwell, he continually strives, amid frustrations, to help others. "Making awkward calls is agony for Eccles"(140), but he makes them nonetheless. In his efforts to reunite Rabbit and Janice, he visits, in turn, her parents, Rabbit's parents, and, seeking consolation himself, the senior minister Kruppenbach. These scenes, following in swift succession, depict the humiliation, comic in its repetition and unexpectedness, that a good man endures fulfilling his obligations in society. In the comic universe, no good deed goes unpunished. First, he suffers the barbs of Mrs. Springer ("Well if the world is going to be full of Harry Angstroms how much longer do you think they'll need your church?"144); next, the bitterness of Rabbit's parents; and, finally, a scathing denunciation of his efforts by the farmer-clergyman Kruppenbach: "Make no mistake. There is nothing but Christ for us. All the rest, all this decency and business, is nothing. It is Devil's work"(159). Although Eccles had anticipated that the first two visits might be uncomfortable for him, he is unprepared for the condemnation from a fellow clergyman. The shattering effect of Kruppenbach's tirade indicates the gap in comic maturity between Eccles and George Caldwell: the latter, older and more experienced,

possesses a deeper understanding that such humiliation is part of his Job-like existence.

Nevertheless, Eccles remains a Kierkegaardian "humorist." With his moral commitment and sense of duty, Eccles belongs to the "ethical" sphere of existence, the stage of development midway between the self-absorbed "aesthetic" and the transcendent religious sphere in Kierkegaard's morphology. According to George Hunt, the humorist sympathizes with "...the demands of the human comedy (Aesthetic)..."; remains "...aware of the limits of moral effort (Ethical)"; and "...though he is attracted to religious commitment (Religious), he seeks a way out of it." This figure "...is called a humorist because in his situation he is very cognizant of the contradictions of life, the basis of all humor; as a result he retreats to the shared laughter and acknowledged foibles of common humanity rather than confront the highly individual demands that faith requires"(75). Eccles is sympathetic to the plight of those like Rabbit, confined to the aesthetic sphere. Moreover, Kruppenbach is correct about Eccles' lack of spirituality: "I say you don't know what your role is or you'd be home locked in prayer. There is your role: to make yourself an exemplar of faith"(143). Eccles is aware that his own unresolved oedipal conflict had caused him to enter the ministry:

He commits fraud with every schooled cadence of the service,
 mouthing Our Father when his heart knows the real father he is trying
 to please, has been trying to please all his life, the God who smokes
 cigars.

(144)

These self-recriminations are appropriate for a Christian comic hero. Unlike other clergymen in Updike's fiction, such as the overbearing Reverend March in The

Centaur, Eccles accepts his own flawed human nature. Auden in "The Globe," collected in The Dyer's Hand, writes:

Comedy, on the other hand, is not only possible within a Christian society, but capable of a much greater breadth and depth than classical comedy. But Christian comedy is based upon the belief that all men are sinners; no one, therefore, whatever his ranks or talents, can claim immunity from the comic exposure, and indeed, the more virtuous, in the Greek sense, a man is, the more he realizes that he deserves to be exposed. Greater in depth because while classical comedy believes that rascals should get the drubbing they deserve, Christian comedy believes that we are forbidden to judge others and that it is our duty to forgive each other.

(177)

Even Rabbit notices the minister's doubts: "Underneath all this I-know-more-about-it-than-you-heresies-of-the-early-Church business he really wants to be told about it, wants to be told that it is there, that he's not lying to all these people every Sunday"(125). Eccles' faith is more evident in his ministry in society--shepherding his youth group softball team, visiting his parishioners, counseling Rabbit on the golf course--than it is in church. His sermon "...is an unpleasant and strained performance, contorted, somehow; he drives his car with an easier piety"(219). The distinction is apt. Like Caldwell, Eccles' faith is grounded in everyday life. Kruppenbach speaks with authority if not charity, but he (Kruppenbach means "horse's ass" in German) fails to appreciate the comic nature of Eccles' faith. As a humorist, Eccles exists on the "boundary between the ethical and the religious...but does not cross it." Contrary to Kruppenbach's view, Eccles' "role" within the ethical sphere does involve him with "all this decency and busyness." As Caldwell does for his son Peter, Eccles serves as an "exemplar of faith" for sinners like Rabbit.

His faith is characteristically comic in its hope that everything will work out

somehow despite considerable evidence to the contrary: he believes and perseveres despite his doubts. When he accepts the blame his wife assigns him for the death of the Angstrom infant, he thinks, "These words are a shadow of his idea that if faith is true, then nothing that is true is in conflict with faith"(246). God exists within the details. He finds his faith in what Lynch calls "...the power of rock-bottom being"(108). Scott describes this faith:

The Christian imagination does not shrink, in other words, from the tangibility, from the gross concreteness, of our life in time, and it is not afraid to face the limited, conditioned nature of human existence. It is, indeed, affirmative--radically affirmative--in its attitude toward nature and time and history. It does not spend its time looking about for an elevator that will whisk it up out of the world into eternity, for it is committed to the world, and it wants the world to come to itself, not to run away from itself. (110)

Eccles admonishes the deluded Rabbit, "Christianity isn't looking for a rainbow. If it were what you think it is we'd pass out opium at services. We're here to serve God, not be God"(125). In Updike's fiction, faith is neither fixed nor detached from the everyday world. By its very nature, it is precarious and it is validated only through an acceptance of the quotidian.

Distancing oneself from reality erodes faith, for the transcendent reveals itself through the mundane. Eccles defines "Hell as Jesus described it. As separation from God"(119). The epigraph Updike chooses for Rabbit, Run is Pascal's Pensee 507: "The motions of grace, the hardness of the heart; external circumstances." In a book review "Ungreat Lives," collected in Odd Jobs, Updike writes,

for Mr. Dubus, amid the self-seeking egos of secular America, the church still functions as a standard of measure, a repository of mysteries that can give scale and structure to our social lives. The

family and those intimate connections that make families are felt by this author as sharing the importance of our souls, and our homely, awkward movements of familial adjustment and forgiveness as being natural extensions of what Pascal called 'the motions of Grace.'

(652)

When Rabbit despairs over his daughter's death, Eccles counsels, "Be a good husband. A good father...We must work for forgiveness; we must earn the right to see that thing behind everything"(259). The Christian comic hero's self-sacrifice for the sake of his family extends the motions of grace. By contrast, "self-seeking" egotism hardens the heart against grace. At the novel's conclusion, Rabbit recognizes that his desertion of his son means "here is a hardness he must carry with him"(282-283). After Lucy hints at doubts concerning orthodox Christianity, Eccles replies, "I said as long as your heart remained open for Grace"(114). Kierkegaard's morphology requires that the individual advance from the self-centered aesthetic sphere to the charitable ethical before approaching the sublime religious sphere.

Although Pascal's epigraph is cryptic, his placement of two elements on the same side of the semi colon suggests their equality; however, dividing them with a comma indicates a division between them as well. Placing "external circumstances" on the other side of the equation suggests that this element affects both of the other two equally. The ups and downs of the comic world may strengthen or weaken faith. When the Christian accepts his responsibilities in time and society, he comes closer to God; if his egotism isolates him from others, he suffers the alienation from God that is Hell. Eccles' own experience is illustrative. After Kruppenbach berates him, Eccles recognizes, as a humorist, "the contradictions of life": in this case, the

paradox of Kruppenbach's "insanity" and the fact that nevertheless "he is right." In Hunt's words, Eccles "retreats to the shared laughter and acknowledged foibles of common humanity rather than confront the highly individual demands that faith requires." Chagrined, Eccles seeks relief for his pain in society, significantly, at "the drugstore in the center of town":

The poodle-cut girl behind the counter is in his Youth Group and two parishioners buying medicine or contraceptives or Kleenex hail him gaily. It is here that in truth they come to find the antidotes to their lives. He feels at home; Eccles feels most at home in public places. He...drinks two Coca-Cola glasses of miraculous clear water... (160)

After enduring humiliation, the humorist locates the "miraculous" within the two (expressing Eccles' double vision) glasses of humble "clear water." Moreover, the clergyman's association with a pharmacy reinforces his identification with the pharmakos figure, like George Caldwell, who scapegoats himself for the benefit of society. Eccles' surname is doubly significant: etymologically, it means "assembly of citizens, church," reflecting this activist minister's commitment to Kierkegaard's ethical sphere that requires participation in society; it also is the name of the street that Leopold Bloom lives on in Ulysses, thereby associating the clergyman with Joyce's own bumbling scapegoat and comic hero.

Eccles may never attain the religious sphere (he does not appear in the rest of the series), but the humorist serves as an appropriate model for someone like Rabbit trapped within the "net" of the aesthetic sphere. Despite his doubts, Eccles through his social ministry displays his faith. When the task of informing Rabbit of the death of his child falls to Eccles, the minister reflects: "One of the uses society seems to

have for him is to break tragic news and the cave of his mouth goes dry as he braces for the familiar duty. No man, having put his hand to the plough ...(247). The passage from Luke (9:62), that concludes, "...and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God," illustrates that though faith is subject to doubt, a Christian perseveres nonetheless. Aptly for comedy, the image of plowing locates faith in the quotidian. Likewise, it is fitting that Eccles describes his function in terms of "uses society seems to have for him " and "duty" because they indicate his acceptance of his role in society no matter how distasteful. With his double vision, Eccles perceives the problematic nature of society without shrinking from it. Eccles' pronoun indicates his empathy, "Harry. A terrible thing has happened to us"(248). Discussing Hell, Eccles had informed Rabbit, "'What we live in you might call'--he looks at Harry and laughs--'inner darkness'"(120). Eccles' ability to laugh despite his keen awareness of the human plight proclaims his faith. At novel's end, Rabbit associates Eccles with laughter--"He imagines her telling Eccles about how he slapped her fanny and thinks he hears Eccles laughing and himself smiles. He'll remember Eccles as laughing"(276)--a defining image for the Kierkegaardian humorist.

From the outset, Rabbit too confronts a world marked by unpredictability, frustration, uncertainty, absurdity, and apparent arbitrariness. Attempting to reach nirvana, he repeatedly gets lost, becomes unnerved (an Amish buggy unaccountably disappears in the rearview mirror,³²), feels menaced by strangers and the countryside that "grows wilder" until he realizes that, paradoxically, the "road of horror is a lovers'lane"(38), and at last ignominiously returns to Brewer. During the hours of

driving, Rabbit listens to the radio and what he hears--a hodge-podge of popular music, advertisements, and news--depicts the jumble of American culture that circumscribes him. Popular songs ("I Ran All the Way Home Just to Say I'm Sorry"), baseball scores and golf tournament results ("somebody tied with somebody in the St. Petersburg Open"), commercials ("New Formula Barbasol Presto-Lather, the daily cleansing action tends to prevent skin blemishes and emulsifies something"), mix with news of world events ("Tibetans battle Chinese Communists in Lhasa, the whereabouts of the Dalai Lama, spiritual ruler of this remote and backward land, are unknown,"33-34). The media's trivialization of life recurs: later, Rabbit and Janice watch a television program where contestants relate personal "tragedies," but "...by the time the M.C. gets done delivering commercials and kidding them about their grandchildren and their girlish hairdos there isn't much room for tragedy left"(201). On Rabbit's flight south the effect of the radio is bewildering--as indicated by his increasing inability to make sense of what he hears--and, given his isolation within his car in the darkness of night in unfamiliar territory, alienating as well (hearing "comforting songs from the Forties" the lonely Rabbit "pictures married couples driving home to babysitters after a meal out and a movie"36). Throughout, The Centaur focuses on domestic life: Rabbit's family, his parents, Janice's parents, the Eccles, and even Rabbit's relationship with Ruth ("They have become domestic"86). Rabbit, however, repeatedly romanticizes other families and neglects his own (both of them). His life will only become meaningful when he accepts his familial responsibilities. Unmistakably, Rabbit's radio conveys the problematic nature of the

modern world. One image, "Saxes doing the same figure 8 over and over again"(36), recalls a similar description in The Centaur of the teacher Caldwell washing the blackboard "With long rhythmic swipes shaped like sideways 8's..."(87). Here the symbol of infinity suggests the Einsteinian universe of the twentieth century. The repeated references to the missing Dalai Lama indicate life's mysteriousness (his unknown "whereabouts"), its uncertainty (no one is safe), and especially the precariousness of the spiritual. Eventually, Rabbit switches off the radio: "...its music no longer seems a river he is riding down but instead speaks with the voice of the cities and brushes his head with slippery hands"(37). Unlike Huck Finn's raft ride down the Mississippi, Rabbit's flight permits no respite from civilization. Finally, Rabbit prefers silence--for dreaming not reflection--to the unsettling and ubiquitous voice of society. Frustrated, he turns inward and backward. Gerry Brenner observes, "His reminiscing becomes an egotistic indulgence, thinking often of past or wished-for love affairs, an escape from the real world"(100).

On Rabbit's return to Brewer, he meets the unexpected. His old coach Marty Tothero, once revered as a mentor by Rabbit, is "stranger than Rabbit had expected...He looks like a big tired dwarf"(44). The members at the drab, shabby, and inaptly named Sunshine Athletic Club regard him as "a fool"(53). When Rabbit blames Janice's drinking as a major cause of his departure, Tothero paradoxically suggests that he should have drunk with her. Thereupon, Tothero forgets all about Janice and arranges a date for Rabbit. Far from offering the reassurance that Rabbit seeks, Tothero behaves bizarrely:

"Janice! Let's not talk about little mutts like Janice Springer, Harry boy. This is the night. This is no time for pity. The real women are dropping down out of the trees." With his hands he imitates things falling out of trees. "Plip, plip, plippity."

(55)

In his carnivalesque ravings Tothero (dead hero) echoes the bizarre Dionysos in The Centaur; and Rabbit's response recalls the dismissive attitude shown by Peter Caldwell rather than the sympathetic one of Caldwell senior: "...discounting the man as a maniac"(55). Even the local Chinese restaurant where Rabbit and Tothero take their dates presents incongruities: an American girl in a kimono sits beyond the counter, scenes of Paris adorn the walls, and the Chinese waiter lapses into hipster argot: "--and then this other cat says, 'But man, mine was helium!'"(71) Throughout, Rabbit's experience, such as his inability to determine whether Lucy Eccles is flirting with him or not ("The woman winks. Quick as light: maybe he imagined it",196), is confusing and unsettling.

Nothing in the novel, however, reflects life's uncertainty, frustration, and arbitrariness more than the accidental drowning of the Angstrom infant. When the Angstroms, with the family intact, seem to have surmounted their problems, disaster strikes. The description of the drowning dramatizes its suddenness and the fumbling frustration of the mother as the infant slips out of her soapy hands. One moment little Rebecca is perfectly healthy and the next, lifeless. The lack of divine intervention undermines faith; but it is essential for maturity as well as for a stronger faith that man accept that there is no traditionally concerned God to intercede in his behalf. Rabbit must rebuild his faith from the trials and tribulations of everyday life.

Early on, he recognizes, "There is this quality, in things, of the right way seeming wrong at first. To test our faith"(37). At one point, Tothero declares that "Right and wrong aren't dropped from the sky. We. We make them" and the immature Rabbit is "...chilled ... He wants to believe in the sky as the source of all things"(257-258).

The passage describing Janice's recognition that her frantic prayers for her child's life will go unanswered echos others in the novel as well as elsewhere in Updike's fiction:

Though her wild heart bathes the universe in red, no spark kindles in the space between her arms; for all of her pouring prayers she doesn't feel the faintest tremor of an answer in the darkness against her. (243-244)

After the death of his daughter, Rabbit suffers similar despair. Returning to the apartment, he stares at the water remaining in the bathtub and effortlessly reaches down to pull the plug: "He thinks how easy it was, yet in all his strength God did nothing. Just that little rubber stopper to lift"(255). This incident shatters Rabbit's untested faith. His frustration recalls Peter Caldwell's in The Centaur when "a tiny gap" defeats his attempts to attach tire chains during a blizzard: "He prays; and is appalled to discover that, even when a microscopic concession would involve no apparent sacrifice of principle, matter is obdurate. The catch does not close. He squeals in agony, 'No!'"(195) These three passages also echo Ruth Leonard's self-pity when Rabbit abruptly leaves their bed:

It's like when she was fourteen and the whole world trees sun and stars would have swung into place if she could lose twenty pounds just twenty pounds what difference would it make to God Who guided every flower in the fields into shape? (179)

Like Rabbit, Ruth's disillusionment is understandable, but revealing. She recognizes

that her teenage wishfulness was "superstitious": after all, losing weight is her own challenge. Now she must come to terms with this harsher disappointment. Ruth's stream-of-consciousness lumping of "the whole world trees sun and stars" recalls the sentence that introduces the pastoral interlude of Rabbit's job with Mrs. Smith: "Sun and moon, sun and moon, time goes." Working outdoors with his hands and, without realizing it, revitalizing the lonely Mrs. Smith, Rabbit renews himself by his involvement with the natural process of birth, growth, and death. This experience awakens in him a sense of how life should be lived. Discussing the importance of such pastoral interludes within novels primarily set in urban locales, Leo Marx concludes:

... the hero explores the possibility of a simpler, more harmonious way of life. At some point, invariably, there is an idyllic interlude when the beauty of the visible world inspires him with a sense of relatedness to the invisible order of the universe. During this episode, which can only be described as a moment of religious exaltation, he enjoys an unusual feeling of peace and harmony, free of anxiety, guilt, and conflict. (253)

Caring for Mrs. Smith's prize rhododendrons ("...dozens of great rectangular clumps like loaves of porous green bread...The bushes were evergreen,"128), Rabbit visits Frye's refreshing comic "green world": "Because of the social interest of comedy, the idyllic...preserves the theme of escape from society to the extent of idealizing a simplified life in the country..."(43). Within Mrs. Smith's idyllic garden, "Invisible rivulets running brokenly make the low land of the estate sing"(127). Elsewhere, it is significant that the color green is repeatedly associated with the altruistic Eccles, including his "olive Buick"(97), the "greasy green" of the rectory lawn, Lucy's "green eyes"(110), the living room's "heavy green"

furniture(117), and "the green alleys" of the golf course(123); moreover, it is the minister who finds Rabbit this gardening job where the flowers "...seemed to belong to a different climate, to a different land"(128). Rabbit at first recognizes the change in his working life, from selling a kitchen gadget in department stores, in a small way that is puzzling: "Funny, for these two months he never has to cut his fingernails."

Unconsciously, he obtains a sense of "the invisible order of the universe":

He loves folding the hoed ridges of crumbs over the seeds. Sealed, they cease to be his. The simplicity. Getting rid of something by giving it to itself. God Himself folded into the tiny adamant structure. Self-destined to a succession of explosions, the great slow gathering out of water and air and silicon: this is felt without words in the turn of the round hoe-handle in his palms.

In this humble work, after at first complaining about the "poor" pay, he discovers the peace and harmony he had imagined finding in his romantic dreams of Florida. He perceives the "simplicity" of the natural order that expresses God's subtle presence. The reference to the "seeds" that are buried to be resurrected recalls the seeds in The Centaur that symbolized the hope of rebirth. This "is felt without words," that is, in a very elemental sense. The later Rabbit books reveal that Ruth too will eventually rebound from despair. She will marry a loving husband and have a family with him. Moving to his farm, she also will experience the green world. After Rabbit's desertion, Ruth's resiliency affirms her faith in life.

Faith, as Eccles insists, must be earned within the everyday finite. In Rabbit's experience, establishment religion fails to inspire belief: on Palm Sunday, "Out on the street people leave church carrying wands of green absent-mindedly at their side"(90). Orthodoxy is undermined in other ways as well, including the minister Eccles'

doubts, the missing Dalai Lama, and the darkened church at the end of the novel.

Without the consolation of traditional faith, Rabbit struggles to comprehend the contradictory and unfathomable events of life such as when Tothero, earlier the victim of life-threatening strokes, attends Rebecca's wake: "...Tothero, leaning on a cane and his face half-paralyzed; but talking, walking, alive. And the baby dead"(257). Pascal's "external circumstances" make clear that Rabbit's world is one without a traditionally concerned God, an indeterminate universe.

In such a world, human beings struggle to make sense of their lives. During the mourning period for the infant as the numb Angstrom family paces the local streets, Rabbit ponders:

The houses, many of them no longer lived in by the people whose faces he all knew, are like the houses in a town you see from the train, their brick faces blank in posing the riddle, Why does anyone live here, why is this town, a dull suburb of a third-rate city, for him the center and index of a universe that contains immense prairies, mountains, deserts, forests, cities, seas? This childish mystery--the mystery of "any place," prelude to the ultimate, "Why am I me?"--ignites panic in his heart. (260-261)

Like George Caldwell, Rabbit's pain leads him to question his fate. The terms "riddle" and "mystery" fit, for comedy presents life as inherently perplexing; moreover, it is fitting that a familiar, everyday and ordinary scene of neighborhood houses inspires Rabbit's inquiries, for in comedy it is the realm of the quotidian that contains the meaning of life. In contrast, Rabbit had earlier arrogantly insisted that "it," the meaning of life, transcended an ugly housing development that he and Eccles drive by. Now, Rabbit's musings suggest a heightening of consciousness, for comedy celebrates open minds and ridicules closed ones. Finally, it is characteristic of

comedy that misfortune, rather than success, heightens awareness: mistakes and failures are inevitable for fallible human beings and resiliency a requisite virtue. The comic hero continually rebounds from life's vicissitudes, with fresh starts following every disappointment.

The circulative structure of Rabbit, Run symbolizes Rabbit's pattern of progression and regression. Repeatedly, he departs and returns. Rabbit flees south only to return north; he leaves home and sets up house with Ruth; then he deserts Ruth and returns home; he quits his salesman job to work in Mrs. Smith's garden and then leaves her employ for a job selling cars; at novel's end he runs out on Janice again and attempts to return to Ruth; over the course of the novel he moves back and forth between the urban (Brewer, his apartment, Ruth's apartment) and the rural (the country road in West Virginia, Mrs. Smith's garden, the golf course, the woods beside the cemetery, and finally the road out of town leading "over a brook into a dirt road, he doesn't know,"283). Overall, the pattern is cyclic: Rabbit flees, returns, flees, and, as the title of the next book in the series, Rabbit Redux, reveals, returns once more. This back-and-forth movement mirrors Rabbit's alternately evading and accepting his responsibilities. Galligan notes, "Progressions--of seasons and generations--matter in comedy; progress does not"(34). Typically the comic hero evolves by embracing experience, accepting the changes time brings, and learning from his mistakes. Change in the comic hero is gradual, reflecting the cyclical nature of life and time. Rabbit, Run depicts its protagonist's maturing by fits and starts.

In The Comic Spirit of Wallace Stevens, Daniel Fuchs, discussing the poem

from which Rabbit, Run derives its title, "The Comedian As the Letter 'C'," asserts, "The central incongruity and source of comedy in the poem is precisely the juxtaposition of the everyday and our, alas, archaic, abortive attempt to rise above it"(33). In his distaste for actuality, Rabbit represents Lynch's anti-comic "meticulous man"(108). His fastidiousness is evident. He likes Chinese food because it contains no "...disgusting proof of slain animals"(62). His father comments spitefully that after Rabbit's army service, "He didn't want to get dirty"(152). The earthy Ronnie Harrison recalls that as the star scorer on the high school basketball team, Rabbit had left the work of defense to others: "You were too much of a queen to dirty your hands"(164). According to Harrison, Tothero had informed him, "Harry is not a team player"(165). Against Ruth's wishes, Rabbit insists on washing the make-up off her face before they make love(80). Despite his lustiness, "There's that in women repels him...Tubes into tubes, wash away men's dirt, insulting, really"(84). The juxtaposition of "insulting" and "really" reflects his uncomfortableness with reality. Even Rabbit's religion is marked by squeamishness: "Harry has no taste for the dark, tangled, visceral aspect of Christianity, the going through quality of it"(219).

Rabbit masks his uneasiness with arrogance. Early on, sure that he is above the law--represented by a passing policeman--Rabbit gloats: "Funny, the world just can't touch you"(103). Comedy, however, delights in deflating such hubris. The debates between Rabbit and Eccles take the form of comic discussions between Frye's boastful and foolish alazon and the realistic eiron in the course of which the truth emerges. When Rabbit, thinking that "...this is what ministers need, to cut everyone

down to the same miserable size," flippantly refers to Jesus as "foolish," Eccles retorts, pointedly referring to Rabbit's anti-comic meticulousness, "He did say...that saints shouldn't marry"(120). Ruth accuses Rabbit of being "smug," and asks him, "Don't you ever think you're going to have to pay a price?"(136), but Rabbit responds in a "cocksure voice" with "an idle remote smugness" that makes her cry: "When I ran from Janice I made an interesting discovery...If you have the guts to be yourself...other people'll pay your price"(140). The shallowness of this bravado is apparent from its source. Rabbit is parroting what he had earlier heard the Mousketeer Jimmy preach on a children's television show: "Know Thyself, a wise old Greek once said. Know Thyself. Now what does this mean, boys and girls? It means, be what you are. Don't try to be Sally, or Johnny or Fred next door; be yourself"(14). Lynch observes that, "...the action of 'paying the price' is central to all creation, and to all real knowledge"(54-55). Human beings pay for their mistakes and delusions. Rabbit's attempts to distance himself from the muddle of everyday life will indirectly lead to the sadness of his daughter's death. In an eerie premonition of the infant's death, Rabbit early in the novel recalls that "One time Janice, who is especially clumsy when pregnant or drunk..." had almost pulled over the television set, but "Luckily he got to it while it was still rocking in the metal cradle..."(13). Later, however, because of his irresponsibility, he will not be present to rescue Rebecca from his wife's drunken clumsiness.

At the same time, he learns from this sobering experience. After the drowning, Rabbit reflects upon why he had stayed away from his home on the day of

the accident: "What held him back all day was the feeling that somewhere there was something better for him than listening to babies cry and cheating people in a used-car lot and it's this feeling he tries to kill..."(250). The reference to killing is appropriate. Dimly, he senses that maturity entails the older generation sacrificing their own lives for the welfare of the next. In this way, the immature self dies. Gradually, Rabbit comes to recognize the primacy of parenthood: "Or maybe just being a father makes everyone forgive you, because after all it's the only sure thing we're here for"(187); Janice too "...seems to accept herself with casual gratitude as a machine, a white pliant machine for fucking, hatching, feeding"(216). Later, when Rabbit takes Nelson to a playground, the familiar sounds and smells of childhood activities that evoke memories of his own boyhood produce a revelation:

He feels the truth: the only thing that has left his life has left
irrevocably; no search would recover it. No flight would reach it. It
was here, beneath the town, in these smells and these voices, forever
behind him. The fullness ends when we give Nature her ransom, when
we make children for her. Then she is through with us, and we
become, first inside, and then outside, junk. Flower stalks. (208)

Rabbit's youth is gone and no flight, whether to Florida or to a nostalgic paradise lost, can recapture it. The final image directly connects this insight to the repeated images of decaying flower stalks, especially his experience in Mrs. Smith's garden where, as part of his duties, he cut and burned the "crumbled stalks." Rabbit too belongs to the natural process of life. At one point Rabbit alludes to a local event called "Fosnacht Day." The origin and specific details of this holiday are vague in his mind for it is a vestige of an earlier time, a folk custom, and is dying out. Rabbit does, however, remember that when he was a child his grandfather would purposely

delay coming downstairs in order that his grandson would not be the Fosnacht:

"What was the penalty for being a Fosnacht?"
 "I forget. It was just something you didn't want to be. Wait. I remember, one year, I was the last downstairs and my parents or somebody teased me and I didn't like it and I guess I cried, I don't know. Anyway that's why the old man stayed up."(118-119)

The term "Fosnacht" is never defined in the novel, but its scapegoat connotations are suggested by the translation of two German words, "Fastnacht" meaning Shrove Tuesday and "Fasernackt" meaning "stark naked." As the Hamiltons point out, the golf match with Eccles where Rabbit suffers the humiliation of his embarrassing play and the minister's sarcasm occurs on Shrove Tuesday(147). Edith Kern, in The Absolute Comic, alludes to the "...German Fastnachtspiele that combines scapegoat rites with celebrations of nature's changing seasons in such a way that the fool as a central figure is frequently killed and later resurrected"(11). Linking the European middle ages with modern America, the preservation of this ritual reflects the comic notion that the essential concerns of humanity do not change. Like the scapegoat associations with George Caldwell and Jack Eccles, the grandfather's behavior represents the older generation's self-sacrifice on behalf of the younger. On the golf course, the chastened Rabbit looks to the sky as he had as a child sought upstairs for his grandfather's protection; now, however, his grandfather is dead and it is Rabbit's turn to assume the adult's protective role.

Eventually, an episode occurs that shows Rabbit fulfilling this role. Fittingly, the event is both minor and farcical. After reconciling with Janice, he has accepted his father-in-law's offer to work in his used car lot and thus must quit his gardening

job with Mrs. Smith. In effect, Rabbit compromises his anti-comic meticulousness by accepting the obligation of supporting his family. On Rabbit's farewell visit with Mrs. Smith, Nelson, who has accompanied his father, bites into a piece of chocolate candy that she has offered him. The taste, however, is too rich for him and Rabbit allows the boy to spit out the "...bits of chocolate shell and stringy warm syrup and the broken cherry" into his hand(207). Significantly, Rabbit accepts "this mess" of his son's in contrast to his earlier fleeing the muddle of his home life. As a result, he is left with a hand "full of melting mashed candy" as Mrs. Smith, unaware of this occurrence, embraces him. The intent is not to undercut the real emotion in the scene but to indicate Rabbit's willingness, at least in a small way, to sacrifice himself for his son.

Overall, however, Rabbit remains far from ready for the demands of the ethical sphere. Near the end of the novel, the confused Rabbit, once again on the run, allays his guilt:

Two thoughts comfort him, let a little light through the dense pack of impossible alternatives. Ruth has parents and, and she will let his baby live; two thoughts that are perhaps the same thought, the vertical order of parenthood, a kind of thin tube upright in time in which our solitude is somewhat diluted. (282)

Rabbit's "two thoughts" that provide some consolation indicate his inchoate double vision. Through acceptance of their duties in society, especially parenthood, human beings create order within the surrounding chaos and in a sense transcend the limitations of the finite. The relationship between the generations has two sides: there is conflict but also hope. Accepting one's place in time and society, as the fasnacht

scapegoat ritual suggests, entails pain and humiliation, but is also liberating. Yet, maturing remains an ongoing challenge. Listening to Eccles' prayers for the repose of Rebecca's soul, Rabbit can only think of "...the limitless volume of loss....Never hear her cry again, never see her marbled skin again, never cup her faint weight in his arms again....Never, the word never stops..."(269). At the cemetery when his daughter's tiny casket is lowered into the ground, he panics and flees again. Understandably, he has difficulty accepting the infant's death and his responsibility for it. Hardening his heart, he rejects the motions of grace.

The tension in Rabbit between his sense of responsibility and his selfishness reflects the human condition. In "One Big Interview," Updike asserts, "I feel that to be a person is to be in a situation of tension, is to be in a dialectical situation"(501). Dualities within the novel underscore the doubleness natural to comedy: the hero's two identities, "Rabbit" and Harry; Janice and Ruth ("He makes love to her as he would to his wife,"81); the conflict between the past and the present; the similarities between Rabbit and Eccles; and even, as indicated by the closeness of the two names, Harry and Harrison, a correspondence between the two ex-teammates (Ronnie Harrison embodies Rabbit's repressed earthiness). At the end of the book, Rabbit tries to determine his course:

On this small fulcrum he tries to balance the rest, weighing opposites against each other: Janice and Ruth, Eccles and his mother, the right way and the good way, the way to the delicatessen--gaudy with stacked fruit lit by a naked bulb--and the other way, down Summer Street to where the city ends. (283)

When he looks toward the church, its window is dark: "There is light, though, in the

streetlights"(283). For the comic hero, understanding his role in life will come from everyday experience, not supernatural revelation. According to Galligan, "...comedy plunges in to discover that when we wholly submit to it the finite itself generates the insight we need"(26). In the words of the Stevens' poem, "Let the rabbit run." Galligan, citing as an example the ending of Huckleberry Finn with Huck fleeing civilization, notes that "...comedies end in a symbolic gesture rather than a summary assertion"(X). The novel concludes as it began: with Rabbit, intimidated by reality, running from it. Discussing The Divine Comedy, Meeker notes, "Dante explained the title of his poem by referring to the classic definition of comic form as the passage from pain to pleasure"(182). At the conclusion of Rabbit, Run, happiness eludes Rabbit. In "Aristophanic Comedy...", Corrigan observes, "...the reconciliation at the end of comedy always involves the preserving of the social contract....Comedy always ends in fusion and with a sense of social concern"(354). At this juncture, Updike's everyman remains trapped within the aesthetic sphere, running in circles. This immature Rabbit still has a long way to go before he rests.

Chapter Three: "The Comic Hero's Renewal in Rabbit Redux: "Be crazy to keep free."

"Because I love my country and can't stand to have it knocked."

"'If you loved it you'd want it better,' Jill says."

"'If it was better I'd have to be better,' he says seriously, and they all laugh, he last."

Rabbit Redux resumes the story of Harry Rabbit Angstrom in 1969, ten years after Rabbit, Run. Indeed, all four novels of the series are set in the last year of the 1950's, 1960's, 1970's, and 1980's respectively as if summing up each of these decades. During the interim Rabbit has returned home to his wife Janice and their son Nelson, now thirteen years old; after the death of the infant Rebecca, the couple have not had any other children. The Angstroms live in the same vicinity but now own a house in a new development not unlike the one Rabbit had scorned in the earlier novel: "...the view from any window is as into a fragmented mirror, of houses like this, telephone wires and television aerials showing where the glass cracked"(15). Rabbit toils as a printer at the same plant in Brewer where his father works. At 36, Rabbit is in a rut, with a stale marriage and a deadend job; moreover, he feels increasingly alienated by the social and political turmoil of the 1960's.

This time Janice leaves Rabbit, for an affair with the car salesman Charlie Stavros. At loose ends, the demoralized Rabbit visits the black side of town, where he encounters Jill, a runaway 18-year-old white hippie from an affluent background. Although wary initially, he soon welcomes Jill into his house and bed. During her stay, Jill functions both as a wife and as a daughter for Rabbit as well as a sister and as a lover for Nelson. Next, a black revolutionary, drug dealer, and fugitive called

Skeeter also moves in. In effect, the 1960's come home to Rabbit: the counter culture, political and social radicalism, the sexual revolution, illicit drugs, and especially black protest and power. Through lectures and communal readings, Skeeter educates Rabbit about American racism and imperialism; meanwhile, he gains control over Jill by supplying her with heroin. Although at times the household forms a community, eventually, with Jill's despair and increasing drug use and Skeeter's messianic delusions, the situation deteriorates. Nevertheless, despite the tension in the household and threats from bigoted neighbors, Rabbit tolerates the presence of his visitors. One night, however, while Rabbit and Nelson are away, the house is firebombed. Although Skeeter escapes, Jill dies in the fire.

Homeless, Rabbit returns with Nelson to the house of his ill mother and aging father. Shortly afterwards, Rabbit suffers another blow when he loses his job. In the meantime, the arrival of Rabbit's worldly sister Mim from Las Vegas enlivens the depressed household. During her visit, Mim counsels Rabbit and also helps end Janice's affair with Stavros. At the conclusion of the novel, Janice and Rabbit begin a reconciliation by spending an afternoon at a motel. The book ends with a hopeful if uncertain peace between them: "He. She. Sleeps. O.K?"

The comic nature of life, as well as the humor that reflects it, is far more conspicuous in Rabbit Redux than in Rabbit, Run. As the 1960's did to the 1950's, Rabbit Redux overturns the world of Rabbit, Run. Janice emerges as a comic heroine whose renewal will parallel her husband's. For his part, the footloose Rabbit

of Rabbit, Run has become the dispirited Harry (harried) of the sequel. The first novel introduced a confused young man attempting to escape the "trap" of his responsibilities by pursuing romantic illusions; the opening of Rabbit Redux presents a deadened figure who has submerged his individuality and retreated into conformity and drudgery. The death of his daughter has left Rabbit devoid of hope and faith. As a result, Rabbit has drastically altered his strategy of evasion. No longer on the run, he now hides in obscurity.

At the same time, the comic world expands and intensifies. The first novel in the series provided only glimpses of the uncertainty and absurdity in society at large, subtle cracks in the superstructure; in contrast, Rabbit Redux abundantly foregrounds the social and political upheavals of the 1960's. While Rabbit, Run focused its attention on the relatively narrow context of Rabbit's home town, the sequel broadens its canvas to include the diverse and problematic worlds of Black America, the counter culture, the elderly, a developing suburbia, the desert playland Las Vegas, and even outer space. The stable 1950's has yielded to the turbulent 1960's and Rabbit is engulfed by the tempest. Moreover, the power of the McLuhanesque media, obtrusive and ubiquitous, overwhelms the average man like Rabbit, exacerbating his confusion and despair.

While Rabbit, Run, set in the insular 1950's, centered on the individual within the nuclear family, the sequel focuses on the individual's place within the extended family, the community, the nation, the world, and even, given the moon expedition, the universe. As husband, father, and citizen, Rabbit will gradually begin to

understand his place and his family's in a fluid society whose private and public domains overlap. The continual domestic realignments--Janice's moving-in with Charlie Stavros, the arrival of Jill and Skeeter, Rabbit's night at Peggy Fosnacht's apartment, his eventual return to his parents', Mim's visit from Las Vegas, and Rabbit and Janice's reconciliation at a motel--illustrate the interconnectedness and mobility within society that cut across class, racial, ethnic, ideological, social and generational divisions. Exposure to the bohemian Jill, the black community, the revolutionary Skeeter, the worldly-wise Stavros, the sophisticated Mim, and his deteriorating parents broadens Rabbit's perspective and contributes to his renewal. This inclusiveness is appropriate since, as Frye notes in The Anatomy of Criticism, comedy's main theme is the integration of the individual into society(43). Moreover, the doubleness associated with comedy is evident in the novel's focus on the integration into society of both female and male heroes. Janice, no less than her husband, seeks to find her way in a rapidly changing world.

Within Rabbit Redux, humor is far more prominent than in Rabbit, Run. When Rabbit's father exults, "Uncle Sam is on the moon!" his wife shrugs, "That's just. The place for him"(93). This wry indictment of the government for slighting its earthly affairs in favor of euphoric space exploration underscores the comic notion that mankind's "place" is here on earth: that Uncle Sam is more at home on the moon points up the dire state of society. Overall, however, farce predominates in Rabbit Redux. In this teeming novel, anything goes, from Jill's shocking the neighbors by casually sunbathing topless to Rabbit's clumsy love-making with the

"wall-eyed" Peggy Fosnacht to Skeeter's revisionist history: "The Southern assholes got together with the Northern assholes and said, Let's us do a deal. What's all this about democracy, let's have here a dollarcrazy" (232). With its zaniness, Rabbit Redux is closer in spirit to The Centaur than to Rabbit, Run. In Rabbit Redux, changes in society turn the larger world inside out; Janice's departure and the arrival of Jill, Skeeter, and Mim turn Rabbit's private world upside down. Now he experiences fully the topsy-turvy nature of life merely adumbrated in Rabbit, Run.

By upsetting the normal state of affairs, farce bares mankind's essential condition. Edith Kern observes that Baudelaire found the absolute comic or farce "...highly creative from an artistic point of view"(3). According to Kern, "The seemingly lighthearted and heedless laughter of farce..." creates "a vision of man sub specie aeternitatis" that undercuts "...bourgeois notions of the individual's importance and his obligations to standards of propriety"(8). Temporarily escaping the confines of their stagnant existence, Rabbit and Janice renew themselves. Kern quotes Bakhtin: "The influence of the carnival spirit was irresistible: it made a man renounce his official state...and perceive the world in its laughing aspect"(9). By renouncing, in one way or another, their "official state," Janice and Rabbit arrive at a better understanding of the world's "laughing aspect" and their place within it.

Present in Rabbit Redux are "trickster figures" who "...are the instigators of carnivalesque activities, whether Lords of Misrule, jesters, clowns, devils, or saintly prophets..."(Kern 117). Tricksters have a dark side, but their mischief ultimately is redemptive. For Janice, her lover and mentor, Charlie Stavros, plays this role; for

Rabbit, these figures include Jill, Skeeter, and Mim. In the judgement of Rabbit's father, Stavros is a shady character ("This son of a bitch looks slick"177), but in Janice's eyes, he "...is remaking her from the bottom up...the whole base of her feels made new, mud made radiant"(382). Stavros' surname suggests the Greek word for cross (stauros), thus connoting Christ's sacrifice and redemption. When Janice fears that her affair with him has destroyed her "world," Stavros coolly restores her faith, "You can get it back"(383). Similarly, Rabbit at times brands Jill a whore, drug abuser, and spoiled "bitch," but her mysticism intrigues him and "Her cooking has renewed his taste for life"(171). Skeeter's identification with the carnivalesque is explicit: Slavery, one of his assigned readings "...seems a small carnival under Skeeter's slim hand"(242). He is portrayed as a devil ("So he is evil,"208), but also as a streetwise prophet ("By many false prophets...you shall know my coming, right?"224), clown("He entertained us,"327), and Lord of Misrule (after the fire, the destroyed house appears to Rabbit "a hellish fun house,"329). For Skeeter, "Chaos is God's body. Order is the Devil's chains"(275). The novel clearly identifies Mim as well with the carnivalesque: the references to her "clownish" clothing (352) and "clown costume"(358); her name, which suggests mime; her dazzling mannerisms, which make even smoking a cigarette a performance ("Pop is enchanted by the routine, struck dumb,"353); the comic "act" in which she impersonates a Disneyland Abraham Lincoln and a mechanical guide conducting a tour of George Washington's house; her dubious career in the adult playground of Las Vegas as a performer ("...only I take on the audience one at a time,"360); her

flamboyant life style ("I used to be a den mother for a pack of Hell's Angels,"363); and, most of all, her revitalizing the household by overturning it. By challenging conventionality (what Skeeter calls "bull shit" common sense), these tricksters serve to remind Rabbit and Janice of their existence sub specie aeternitatis.

The 1960's proves fertile ground for farce. In the world of carnival, "All habitual norms of decency and etiquette were abandoned"; moreover, "Speech and gesture" were coarse and candid(Kern,9). The language of Rabbit Redux, mingling topical references, ribaldry, street lingo, technical jargon, and the inflated argot of the media, celebrates vitality, variety, and democracy as well as zaniness. Bakhtin, citing Rabelais, observes that farce often makes vulgar reference to "the human body with its food, drink, defecation, and sexual life"(Kern,18). These allusions are "not obscene" but have a "positive, assertive character" because they celebrate life. With a vulgarity that nonetheless conveys his appreciation of women's vitality and resiliency, Rabbit expresses how Janice's discontent reflects the frustrating biological disparities between men and women: "Women, fire in their crotch, won't burn out, begin by fighting off pricks, end by going wild hunting for one that still works"(104). According to Bakhtin, the laughter of the absolute comic is "...ambivalent--gay and triumphant, but also mocking and deriding, asserting and denying, burying and reviving"(Kern,8). The old and outworn yields to the new and vital: "To degrade is to bury, to sow, and to kill simultaneously, in order to bring forth something more and better"(Kern quoting Bakhtin,10). When Rabbit Redux begins, Rabbit is psychologically in a state of rigor mortis. Farce is "hostile to all

that was...completed" and "... laughed at rigidity"(Kern quoting Bakhtin,11).

Rabbit's renewal begins when he opens himself to new experiences that, though painful, prove liberating. According to Tanner, "...the carnival (or funhouse or circus) can serve to stand for some of those instincts in life which resist patterning"(42). This experience reminds the individual of his common humanity:

To Bakhtin, carnival laughter "is, first of all, a festive laughter. Therefore it is not an individual reaction to some isolated 'comic' event. Carnival laughter is the laughter of all the people." (Kern,8)

Rabbit's interactions with the likes of Skeeter and Jill--like George Caldwell's in The Centaur with the drunk and hobo--serve to reconnect him to "the people." Frye notes that "The tendency of comedy is to include as many people as possible in its final society"(Anatomy,165).

At the opening of Rabbit Redux, Rabbit has distanced himself from God as well; unlike Rabbit, Run, clergyman, churchgoing, and theological discussions are absent. After Rebecca's death, the disillusioned Rabbit's faith has waned: "No belief in an afterlife, no hope for it, too much more of the same thing..."(104) Yet, as the novel unfolds, there are indications of God's subtle presence within the quotidian. Skeeter muses upon Vietnam, "It is where God is pushing through"(261). At the black bar that Rabbit reluctantly visits, the pianist Babe hymns,

...in a voice that is no woman's voice at all and no man's, is merely human, the words of Ecclesiastes. A time to be born, a time to die. A time to gather up stones, a time to cast stones away. Yes. The Lord's last word. There is no other word, not really. (125)

The last sentence locates the transcendent within reality: the Lord's word sung in a nightclub. Babe's powerful rendition "...frightens Rabbit with its enormous black

maw of truth yet makes him overjoyed that he is here." Her voice transcends all categories, even gender, and reaches an elemental level that is "merely human." This is the voice of comedy that, in Galligan's words, descends "...below all the categories to rock-bottom reality"(37). It expresses the fundamental comic truth that human beings must accept their place in time. The religious significance is reinforced by the references to the Lord, Jesus (later, Skeeter whose name the police chief spells "double Easter"(329), is called "black Jesus"(380), composes his "Beatitudes"(264), and his naked chest reminds Rabbit of Christ on the cross,279), Pontius Pilate, sin, angels, theology, immortality, and the identification of the prostitute Babe with Mary Magdalene: "Hate is not clean. A boy like you with hate in his heart, he needs to wash"(129). This scene recalls the pivotal passage in The Centaur when George Caldwell's clergyman father, with the language evoking the 100th psalm, affirms that the raucous laughter from a squalid gin mill reveals that "All joy belongs to the Lord." In both scenes God emerges from within the sordid and even menacing commonplace. Later, Jill, whom Rabbit meets in this bar, instructs him, in Blakean terms, that "God is in the tiger as well as the lamb"(162).

Elsewhere in Rabbit Redux, Rabbit's mother, the person who in "all this rolling-on world"(166) understands him best, inquires whether he prays, and his reply, "Mostly on buses"(197) denotes God's place within everyday life. Rabbit's response is not flippant; he does indeed pray on buses, the prosaic setting where black teenagers and "fat Dutch housewives" confront one another. Just as Reverend Eccles in Rabbit, Run "...drives his car with an easier piety"(219) than he preaches,

Rabbit here finds buses more conducive than church for prayer. Furthermore, the discrediting of the increasingly egomaniacal Skeeter indicates that finally God is found within ordinary reality rather than the surreal. Rabbit recognizes Skeeter as a prophet, but finally rejects him as a savior: "‘I shall return,’ Skeeter promises, ‘only in glory.’" Reflecting comedy’s ultimate predilection for normalcy, Rabbit pleads, "When you do, leave me out of it"(336).

From his exposure to Jill and Skeeter, Rabbit unconsciously absorbs the message of Christianity: "We must be nice to her, we must be nice to the poor, the weak, the black. Love is here to stay"(153, Updike’s emphasis). Bakhtin quotes a 1444 letter from the Paris School of Theology that defends the absolute comic: "This is why we permit folly on certain days so that we may later return with greater zeal to the service of God"(Kern,14). Rabbit’s tolerance of his visitors despite their unconventional, even criminal behavior and the threats of his single-vision neighbors stems from his gradual perception of the common humanity he shares with them. Increasingly, he recognizes that in order to transcend his own life of quiet desperation he must learn to love others. This attitude is essentially Christian for it implies that loving God means loving one’s fellow human beings, especially outcasts. The critic Lynch warns that comedy cannot tolerate that human beings forget their humanity or replace "faith in the power of the vulgar and limited finite" with something else(105).

Through his unsettling experiences, Rabbit rediscovers a sense of his place within humanity. Earlier, he had noted the lack of any sense of community in his

suburb: "Their neighbors in Penn Villas are strangers, transients...people whose lives to them are passing cars and the shouts of unseen children"(61). The inhabitants "...do not connect"(76). This environment is as cold and soulless as the moon. The arrival of Jill and Skeeter brings tension, violence, madness, and even death, but also vitality, truth, freedom, and gaiety. A community evolves, a new family to replace Rabbit's splintered one:

Their laughter makes a second wave to reassure him they are not laughing at him, they are laughing in relief at the gift of truth, they are rejoicing in brotherhood, at having shared this moment, giggling and cackling; the house is an egg cracking because they are all hatching together. (213)

Just as an egg cracks in order to produce life, this rebirth will not be without friction. In this scene Rabbit, uneasy about Skeeter's intrusion, has come to blows with the black fugitive. The arrival of young Nelson with his pal Billy Fosnacht, however, interrupts the scuffle. Skeeter seizes the opportunity to defuse the ugly mood by mocking the teenage Billy, with his acne and orthodontia, as "grotesque." As a result the tension is broken and replaced with laughter, joy, and a sense of brotherhood.

This scene illustrates Frye's insight that the prevailing emotions of comedy are sympathy and ridicule (Anatomy,43). The two are linked because together they convey the double vision of comedy. Uncoincidentally, the grotesque Billy's last name "Fosnacht" is the name of the scapegoat ritual, "Fosnacht Day," that Rabbit had obliquely alluded to in Rabbit, Run. After the first novel in the series, this occasion is never mentioned again; apparently it has died out over the years.

Instead, just as comedy reenacts the ancient rituals celebrating fertility and rebirth(Sypher,215), the Fosnacht scapegoating in the sequel now reappears within everyday life. Like Rabbit, Run and The Centaur, Rabbit Redux also depicts the sacrifice of an innocent: the death by fire of the teenage Jill, whose association with drugs reinforces her identification with Frye's pharmakos, parallels the drowning of the baby Rebecca and the living death of George Caldwell.

Comedy does not fix blame; rather, it suggests that all human beings are like the pharmakos both guilty as well as innocent(Frye, Anatomy,41). Eventually, Rabbit accepts his own complicity in Jill's death. Reconciling with Janice at novel's end, Rabbit resignedly acknowledges the blame he and his wife share: "Her trip drowns babies; his burns girls. They were made for each other"(395). Rabbit's frankness in admitting his flawed human nature contrasts with the stance of Jill's haughty mother when she finally descends from her Connecticut suburb to claim her dead daughter's possessions. With her single vision she resembles the self-important "gods" who make Caldwell's life miserable in The Centaur. Although Mrs. Aldridge must bear a good deal of the ultimate responsibility for her disaffected child's fate, she instead blames Rabbit entirely: "You are a beast." Rabbit, wiser from his experiences, recognizes the woman's anti-comic distancing herself from the quotidian:

She wanted to stay out of harm's way. She wanted to have some fun and not be blamed. At the end she wanted not to have any apologizing to do to any heavenly committee. Right now she wanted to tame the ravenous miracle of her daughter being cast out and destroyed. (347)

Jill's mother is one of the critic Lynch's "meticulous" figures who are finally anti-

life. The use of religious imagery, "heavenly committee," "miracle," and "cast out and destroyed," indicates the link between this world and the next. Good and evil manifest themselves in everyday experience. Christianity recognizes man's inherently flawed nature, what comedy terms foolishness, as the result of original sin. Acknowledging man's failures, Christianity offers the opportunity for rebirth. The Christian stumbles repeatedly but accepts his shortcomings as an integral part of his humanity; the worst sin is despair which, as a form of pride, denies forgiveness and renewal. In comedy, characters do not wear their faith on their sleeves; they live it. Faith is strengthened by accepting one's place within the human comedy. Rabbit justifies exposing Nelson to the antics of Jill and Skeeter: "And life is life, God invented it, not him"(231). In such a fashion, Updike seamlessly weaves God and faith into the quotidian.

In Rabbit Redux, even Rabbit cannot ignore the problematic nature of life. Early on, he declines his father's invitation for an after-work drink by explaining that he had better return to his house: "In case it's burned down. In case a madman has moved in. These things happen all the time in the papers"(18). Later on, with the arrival of Skeeter, Rabbit's fears become fact. After the accidental drowning of his daughter in Rabbit, Run, Rabbit has become fully aware of the precariousness of life: "The world is quicksand"(37). In Rabbit Redux, Rabbit will lose his wife (temporarily), his home, his livelihood, and, with Jill's death, in a sense, another daughter. Moreover, with illness and senility, his parents start to fade from him; worse, the estrangement between Rabbit and Nelson, which will become increasingly

bitter, begins. In the aftermath of the fire that kills Jill, Rabbit tries to articulate the human condition: "But it is all life, sex, fire, breathing, all combination with oxygen, we shimmer at all moments on the verge of conflagration, as the madhouse windows tell us"(346).

In Rabbit Redux, however, it is not only the peripheral madhouse windows that reveal the instability of society; the media accomplishes this merely by reporting the news of the day: "These things happen all the time in the papers." In the 1950's Rabbit, Run, news of the larger world is in the background, just brief bulletins interrupting the music on Rabbit's car radio during his drive south; throughout, the novel focuses on the turmoil in Rabbit's private life. By contrast, in Rabbit Redux reports of war, riots, demonstrations, scandals, crime, space explorations, and changing mores and life styles overflow in the print and electronic media. Indeed, the power of the media threatens to overwhelm reality. When moviemakers choose Brewer as a location for a film about "MIDDLE AMERICA," Rabbit comes upon the scene and feels "...dim, dim and guilty, to see how the spotlights carve from the sunlight a yet brighter day, a lurid pastel island of heightened reality around which the rest of us...are penumbral ghosts, suppliants ignored"(184).

Moreover, the speed and sensationalism with which the media report the news serve to accelerate the pace of events and to emphasize the helplessness of the individual in the face of such flux. Watching the space launch on television in a bar, Rabbit and the other patrons are made aware of their obsolescence: "They have not been lifted, they are left here"(7). The inhuman jargon transmitted from space

reinforces these feelings of alienation:

"Nine zero four thirty-four forty-seven."
 "Roger, copy, Tranquility. That gravity align
 looked good. We see you recycling."
 "Well, no. I was trying to get time sixteen sixty-five out and
 somehow it proceeded on the six-twenty-two before I could do a BRP
 thirty-two enter. I want to log a time here and then I'd like to know
 whether you want me to proceed on torquing angles or to go back and
 re-enter again before torquing. Over." (96)

Public events, especially the space expeditions, hover over the lives of the characters.

Unlike the philosophical and literary epigraphs included in The Centaur and the other Rabbit novels, each of the four sections of Redux begins with an epigraph quoting dialogue of transmissions from either American or Soviet missions in space.

Throughout the novel, television, radio, and newspapers--Rabbit works as a linotyper and sees reports transposed into type before his eyes--blare the news. Characters discuss, argue, and analyze current events. Mostly, Rabbit finds this news dismaying, frustrating, alienating, and confusing. The news media's comparison of the moon expedition with Columbus' discovery of America baffles Rabbit:

They keep mentioning Columbus but as far as Rabbit can see it's the exact opposite: Columbus flew blind and hit something, these guys see exactly where they're aiming at and it's a big fat nothing. (29)

In the 1960's no one escapes the turmoil: "Next day, Friday, the papers and television are full of the colored riots in York, snipers wounding innocent firemen, simple men on the street, what is the world coming to?"(57) As one of those "simple men on the street," Rabbit finds himself defending the Vietnam war and a beleaguered America against liberals like Charlie Stavros and radicals like Skeeter; later in the novel, Rabbit confronts the racial bigotry of his Penn Park neighbors.

Unrest in the black community is evident not only in the type he sets for newspaper articles about Black Power but in the "pushy" youths he encounters on buses. Eventually, technological advances make his printing job obsolete. The arrival of Jill and Skeeter heightens Rabbit's consciousness of class struggle, racism, and the gap between conventional society and the counter culture. Even sports, once Rabbit's refuge, have changed. Attending a baseball game, Rabbit finds, "...something has gone wrong. The ball game is boring." The ballplayers "...seem specialists like any other, not men playing a game because all men are boys time is trying to outsmart"(83-84). Worse, blacks now dominate basketball, "his sport," with their flashy style, and, on the TV screen, the few remaining white players appear out of place. The blurring of the private and public sectors is evident in Updike's use of the Ulysses-like technique, in which Rabbit imagines his life as bizarre headlines: "LINOTYPER'S WIFE LAYS LOCAL SALESMAN. Greek takes Strong Anti-Viet Stand"(74). Gradually, images from the media dominate Rabbit's thoughts. After Janice's departure, Rabbit expresses his loneliness by comparing his home to a spacecraft: "But the spacecraft is empty: a long empty box in the blackness of Penn Villas, slowly spinning in the void, its border beds half-weeded"(99). Elsewhere, Rabbit refers to Janice's affair with Stavros as a "...fucking coalition government"(181). Social and political unrest exacerbates Rabbit's confusion:

"Things go bad. Food goes bad, people go bad, maybe a whole country goes bad. The blacks now have more than ever, but it feels like less, maybe. We were all brought up to want things and maybe the world isn't big enough to take all that wanting. I don't know. I don't know anything."

(80)

Even progress is undercut. At this point in his life, Rabbit views scientific advances reductively, "...but then being smart hasn't amounted to so much, the atom bomb and the one-piece aluminum beer can"(13).

Moreover, the revisionism of Stavros and Skeeter subverts Rabbit's patriotism by exposing him to the darker side of American history and current realpolitik. Appropriately for comedy, this demythologizing, along with Rabbit's memories of childhood ("And Rabbit remembers, it's a myth they never fought,"367), serves to demonstrate the comic truism that in both the public and private spheres the past resembles the problematic present. Even nostalgia provides no haven. At one point as Rabbit watches a TV show, a skit about the Lone Ranger evokes warm memories of his childhood:

... those generous summer days, just enough dark to fit sleep into, a war being fought across oceans just so he could spin out his days in such happiness, in such quiet growing. Eating Wheaties.

(22)

Rabbit's memory glosses over the horrors of World War II, but the comedy sketch, at first "pretty funny," returns him to reality. In this campy version of the heroic western, the foolish Lone Ranger has a disgruntled wife who, behind her husband's back, carries on an affair with his Indian sidekick Tonto. Rabbit "...laughs, but underneath the laugh this final gag falls flat, maybe because everybody still thinks of Tonto as incorruptible, as above it all, like Jesus and Armstrong"(24). Aside from the skit's uncomfortable parallel with the Angstroms' own domestic problems, Rabbit finds himself confused over what he had once taken for granted, America's moral preeminence: "Where has 'the side of right' gone?"(24)

When Stavros condemns America for the imperialism that began with the usurpation of the Indians, Rabbit explodes self-righteously: "'Oh those fucking poor Indians,' Harry says. 'What were we supposed to do, let 'em have the whole continent for a campfire site?' Sorry, Tonto"(49). The unspoken apology at the end of his outburst reveals Rabbit's ambivalence, an attitude, according to Frye, typical of comedy(Anatomy,181). With his private and public worlds askew, Rabbit finds it difficult to relinquish his traditional beliefs; yet, he recognizes the unfairness of his jingoism. Just as Rabbit, Run had undercut Rabbit's religious orthodoxy, the sequel causes him to reexamine his unquestioning nationalism.

Rabbit, the average American ("He's a normal product," Stavros sneers,47), is ripe for change in his life. With his basketball glory long forgotten, Rabbit at the opening of Rabbit Redux is a ghost of his former self. When Jill asks him, "You don't think much of yourself, do you?" Rabbit admits, "Once the basketball stopped, I suppose not"(200). Ten years, the lingering sadness of the baby's death, his stale marriage, the drudgery of his job, and the characterless development Rabbit lives in have sapped his spirit. Only a vestige of his charisma remains:

The son is five inches taller and fatter; his prime is soft, somehow pale and sour. The small nose and slightly lifted upper lip that once made the nickname Rabbit fit now seem, along with the thick waist and cautious stoop bred into him by a decade of the linotyper's trade, clues to weakness,a weakness verging on anonymity. Though his height, his bulk, and a remnant alertness in the way he moves his head continue to distinguish him on the street, years have passed since anyone has called him Rabbit.

(4)

His vitality has faded along with his nickname. Unlike Rabbit, Run, here Rabbit feels almost comfortable in his trap. The blunt Mim, with an outsider's

objectivity, points this out. When the self-pitying Rabbit whines that he has sacrificed his life by working "...day after day for ten years," his sister is unsympathetic: "Mim tosses this off. 'You felt like it. It was the easiest thing to do'"(370). In effect, Rabbit has used his occupation as a means of numbing himself emotionally. Early on, Rabbit, observing his father and son, muses: "That's the trouble with caring about anybody, you begin to feel overprotective. Then you begin to feel crowded"(19). The word "crowded" is significant, for throughout the series it expresses the anti-comic fear of being usurped in time and society (On the first page of Rabbit, Run, "The kids keep coming, they keep crowding you up,"9). At this point, the demoralized Rabbit finds it easier to deal with work than with people. The critic Newman has noted that, while each of Updike's novels deals with a particular sphere of life, the Rabbit books focus on work(80). In fact, within the series, Rabbit Redux most concerns itself with this part of life. Each of the four chapters begins either with Rabbit at work or leaving work. All four epigraphs quote men at work in space. The novel continually depicts aspects of work: the intricacy of Rabbit's typesetting; the camaraderie of the workers at the print shop; the details of Mim's life as a call girl in Las Vegas; the neighbor Peggy Fossnacht's difficulty as an older woman in finding a job; the baseball players who approach their game as a job; the fatigue of mission control during the long hours of the space launch; the horror of slavery as depicted in The Life and Times of Frederick Douglass; the routine of housework; the role of unions; the exploitation of workers like Rabbit's father; the nature of capitalism as explained by Skeeter; and the workplace as a setting for

socialization (Janice's affair with Stavros begins upon her return to work at her father's lot; a co-worker invites Rabbit to join him at a club on the black side of town).

At the same time, Rabbit Redux shows that work can be misused. Freud defines a healthy life as one that balances loving and working. In the paperback edition of Redux, Updike provides a dictionary definition of "redux" that gives its primary meaning as a return to health. Distancing oneself from others, as Rabbit has done, is not healthy. After the death of the infant, Rabbit has neglected his wife: "You've taken Janice for granted ever since--the time"(6). Like the inhabitants of The Waste Land, Janice and Rabbit "...had become locked rooms to each other"(54). The once lusty Rabbit has become, as both Janice and Mim note, priggish. His squeamishness, discernable in Rabbit, Run, has become pronounced: Rabbit "...lifts his head fastidiously" when his father swears(7); elsewhere, Janice reflects that her husband, "...he's too fastidious, hates sex, really"(57). Now, it is Janice's sexual appetite that intimidates Rabbit: "...he had fled her cunt as a tiger's mouth"(27). His preference for technology over human contact is apparent when, as he absent-mindedly touches Janice in bed, "He thinks of feathering the linotype keys, of work tomorrow, and is already there"(27).

Paradoxically, while Rabbit withdraws into himself, Janice becomes adventurous. Dismayed by her "provincial"(39) and "clinging"(34) husband, she illustrates the cyclic nature of life by reenacting Rabbit's flight in Rabbit, Run. The "dumb mutt" of the earlier novel blossoms in this affair. Crossing the boundary of

adultery renews her: "One of the nice things about having a lover, it makes you think about everything anew. The rest of your life becomes a kind of movie, flat and even rather funny"(53). With vulgar reductiveness, Janice acknowledges her averageness: "I'm just a cunt, Harry. There are billions of us now"(33). She expresses this observation not resignedly, but objectively; the significance lies in her new boldness. Encountering Janice, Mim is struck by the change in her. Aptly, she describes Janice's evolvment in comic terms: "Janice can be quite funny about herself, which is a new thing"(375). Charlie Stavros "...has given her not only her body but her voice"(53). His vitality reinvigorates Janice. A cryptic exchange between Janice and Rabbit makes clear her appreciation of Stavros' zest for life:

"Charlie loves life.

"We all do."

"Not really." (73)

The adverb accentuates Stavros' Caldwell-like acceptance of reality, a mark of the comic hero. As Janice matures, she too learns to value life. When Rabbit drives erratically, Janice warns him, "If you want to kill yourself, go ahead, but don't kill me; I'm just getting to like being alive"(400). By the end of the novel, Janice sheds her identification with death and becomes life-giving. During their final tryst, Janice "must make a miracle" in order to save Charlie's life when he suffers a heart attack. Her efforts sound like an exorcism: "...hears herself praying, Go, Go to the devil thrashing this her man. 'Go,!' she utters aloud"(387). The religious imagery reflects Janice's new-found faith. By saving Charlie she also exorcises the stigma that has haunted her since the drowning of her infant daughter. Now, "The mark upon her as

a giver of death has been erased"(387). This emergency parallels the description of the drowning infant in Rabbit, Run, except that this time Janice's efforts are successful. The scene depicts the trial-and-error experience of the average person rising to the occasion. Foolishly, Janice at first bumbles and brings the choking Stavros cold pills instead of his heart medicine. For a moment she panics and the description evokes the soapy infant slipping from her wet grasp: "...very stupidly lets the faucet water run to get cold, wetting her palm in turning it off, so the pills there blur and soften and stain the creased skin they are cupped in"(386). Undeterred, Janice persists in her efforts and ultimately saves Charlie through force of will. Updike observes in Self-Consciousness that the crucial difference between tragedy and comedy is that comedy offers second chances(241). Ten years after the drowning of Rebecca, Janice makes the most of a second opportunity. Charlie's nickname for her, "Tiger," along with Rabbit's association of her sexuality with a tiger, links Janice to Jill's insight that God exists in the tiger as well as the lamb. In Blakean terms, the tiger alludes to experience that, while often harsh and painful, is also enlightening. Janice's bitter experiences in Rabbit, Run have toughened her. Her boldness in defying conventionality in the sequel has provided her with the chance to save another's life and thereby redeem her own. After rescuing Charlie, Janice recognizes that their affair has run its course. Prudently, comedy does not push its luck:

Next time she might not be able to keep him up. Miracles are granted but we must not lean on them. This love that has blown through her has been a miracle, the one thing worthy of it remaining is to leave. Spirits are insatiable but bodies get enough. She has had enough, he

has had enough; more might be too much. She might begin to kill. He calls her tiger. (388)

The reference to "miracles" reflects Janice's comic faith that discerns the transcendent within the quotidian. Strong enough now to end the affair with Stavros, Janice next initiates the reconciliation with Rabbit. For everything there is a time. Earlier, in Molly Bloom-like stream of consciousness, Janice had reflected upon her life, the average woman's eight Shakespearian stages of birth, infancy, adolescence, marriage, motherhood, prime, old age, and death:

How silly. How silly it all is. We're born and they try to feed us and we get breasts and menstruate and go boy-crazy and finally one or two come forward to touch us and we can't wait to get married and have some babies and then stop having them and go man-crazy this time without even knowing it until you're in too deep the flesh grows more serious as we age and then eventually that phase must be over and we ride around in cars in flowered hats for a while to Tucson or seeing the leaves turn in New Hampshire and visit our grandchildren and then get into bed like poor Mrs. Angstrom...and then we die and it wouldn't have mattered if we hadn't bothered to be born at all. (55)

Eventually, however, her experiences foster in her an appreciation of "silly" ordinary life. Yet even here, Janice perceives that larger events are mostly peripheral in the individual's life: "And all the time there are wars and riots and history happening but it's not as important as the newspapers say unless you get caught in it"(55). Comedy pays attention to public events only insofar as ordinary people "get caught" in them. The verb "caught" is telling. Not only does its use recall Rabbit's ensnarement in Rabbit, Run and his predicament in the sequel, but also its voice signifies the traditional passivity of the comic hero.

Passivity, however, ought not be confused with lifelessness. For most of

Rabbit Redux, Rabbit has resigned himself to failure and a circumscribed existence.

Only his characteristic expressiveness belies his despair:

Thirty-six years old and he knows less than when he started. With the difference that now he knows how little he'll always know. He'll never know how to talk Chinese or how screwing an African princess feels. (22)

He used to daydream about going South, Florida or Alabama, to see the cotton fields and the alligators, but that was a boy's dream and that died with the baby. He once saw Texas and that has to be enough. (69)

As a human being I'm about C minus. As a husband I'm about zilch. When Verity folds I'll fold with it and have to go on welfare. Some life. Thanks, Mom. (97)

There is that scent in the air, of going back to school, of beginning again, and reconfirming the order that exists. He wants to feel good, he always used to feel good at every turning of the year, every vacation or end of vacation, every new sheet on the calendar: but his adult life has proved to have no seasons, only changes of weather, and the older he gets, the less weather interests him. How can the planet keep turning and turning and not get so bored it explodes? (193)

Self-defeatingly, Rabbit has closed his eyes to life's possibilities. His experiences in Rabbit, Run have made him timid: "I once took that inner light trip and all I did was bruise my surroundings. Revolution, or whatever, is just a way of saying a mess is fun"(172). When his mother implores him to "Pray for your own rebirth" and once more "Run"(197-198), Rabbit associates these imperatives with death:

He feels she is asking him to kill Janice, to kill Nelson. Freedom means murder. Rebirth means death. A lump, he silently resists, and she looks aside with the corner of her mouth worse bent. She is still trying to call him forth from her womb, can't she see he is an old man? An old lump whose only use is to stay in place to keep the lumps on top of him from tumbling. (198)

Rabbit's fears are valid, for rebirths are accomplished only with pain and loss. The past must die to make way for the present. True to comedy's penchant for divining revelations within the prosaic, Rabbit recognizes this fact while eating a casserole of chicken pieces: "No avoiding it: life does want death. To be alive is to kill"(311). Nevertheless, tumultuous change is preferable to stagnation. Acutely, Janice notes Rabbit's deterioration: "You were a beautiful brainless guy and I've had to watch that guy die day by day"(74). To become healthy, Rabbit must once again "run," or, in other words, risk new experiences.

Doing so, he discovers truth. Over the course of the novel, Rabbit finds himself engaged in comic discussions that, as the comic theorist McFadden points out, reveal "...situations and characters for what they are"(35). Such a discussion in Rabbit, Run matched the wry Reverend Eccles as the realistic eiron with the smug Rabbit as the deluded alazon in order to expose the latter's inflated sense of self. Newman observes that the first two novels of the series to a large extent are structured as a series of dialogues(81); hence, comic discussions fit neatly. Early on in Rabbit Redux, the reactionary Rabbit engages the liberal Charlie Stavros in an ostensible debate over Vietnam and foreign policy. The subtext of the discussion, however, expresses the rivalry between Rabbit and Charlie for Janice's affections. Rabbit has begun to suspect his wife of having an affair with her coworker and his suspicions mount when Stavros enters the same downtown restaurant where the Angstrom family is dining. Significantly, the restaurant is Greek, outside Rabbit's usual boundaries; in contrast, Stavros, by descent Greek, feels at home. When

Rabbit, guessing randomly, orders "the paidakia," Charlie snaps authoritatively, "I don't think so. It's marinated lamb, you need to order it the day before, for at least six"(42). For Rabbit, this ethnic restaurant with its incomprehensible menu, strange cuisine, and immigrant customers illustrates the threatening changes overwhelming his nostalgized America. When a large Greek family enters ("They cackle their language, they giggle, they coo, they swell with joy of arrival"), Rabbit "feels naked in his own threadbare little family"(40).

The families here represent larger social entities: Rabbit's family is the traditional white Protestant majority that now feels threatened by such newcomers. Foolishly, Rabbit positions himself as the defender of the "traditional" America against Charlie, labeled a "spic" because of his Mediterranean heritage. Here the public and private again merge, for "outsiders" like Charlie now threaten Rabbit's family as well as his country. During the debate, Rabbit resumes the role of the foolish alazon with the commonsensical Stavros as the realistic eiron. Although Rabbit had done his best to avoid the Korean War and was relieved to serve his army duty in Texas, here he embodies one of the stock alazon figures, the swaggering soldier, as he defends American military intervention around the globe: "Bully for you. You're what made America great. A real gunslinger"(47). Stavros' use of the term "bully" is accurate, for the alazons are bullies forcing their point of view in the face of reason. By ignoring reality, Rabbit's arguments defend the indefensible just as his family outing barely hides the marital rift between Rabbit and Janice and her affair with Stavros. Uncomfortably, Rabbit cannot help noticing how close his wife

and Stavros sit together. In comedy, where change is natural and cyclic, any stance that denies change is certain to prove shortsighted. Neatly, Charlie turns the tables on his adversary when Rabbit, "a defiant bastion," defends 19th century manifest destiny:

"They were in the way,"
 "Fair enough," Stavros says. "Now you're in their
 way." He adds, "Paleface"(49).

In Rabbit's siege mentality, Janice too looms a threat: "her face owns a gypsy mentality," with the "dignity ... of female guerrilla fighters"(43). Sensing her alliance with Stavros, Rabbit sees Janice as an enemy: "Massacre this squaw"(50).

Paradoxically, it is from exposure to outsiders like the counterculture Jill and the black revolutionary Skeeter that ultimately Rabbit evolves. At this point, however, Rabbit repeatedly betrays his ignorance: labeling the American-born Stavros a foreigner; airing his racial and ethnic prejudices; boasting of his provincialism; and displaying his simplistic notions of history and current events ("If we don't send somebody in the other side sure as hell will, the Greeks can't seem to manage the show by themselves"). His tirade proclaims his foolishness: "I don't think about politics...That's one of my Goddam precious American rights, not to think about politics" (44). Frye notes that..."the social judgement against the absurd is closer to the comic norm than the moral judgement against the wicked"(Anatomy,168). Rabbit even has the temerity to allude to the drowning and blame Janice: "Your mother's the girl that's good at death"(48). Nevertheless, Updike mitigates Rabbit's cruelty by showing him as aware that he has gone too far.

After his accusation infuriates Janice, "Even he knows how cruel this is; he is grateful to her for not collapsing, for blazing up instead." Moreover, Rabbit's foolishness, given his background, is understandable: "His tongue is reckless; but he is defending something infinitely tender, the star lit with his birth"(47).

Rabbit's blustering, however, cannot halt the truth from suddenly and inevitably emerging. After the heated discussion, both sides attempt to smooth things over with Rabbit apologizing for his behavior and Charlie picking up the bill: "...everyone now anxious to please"(51). Then, abruptly, Charlie destroys Rabbit's "keen family happiness" by unwittingly exposing Janice in an incriminating lie that reveals their affair. Despite all attempts at a cover-up, the discussion ends with the affair between Janice and Stavros out in the open. Comedy's ultimate allegiance is to the truth. Stavros has displaced Rabbit and the latter, in topsy-turvy fashion, is now the cuckold and outsider. Another such debate finds Jill and Rabbit arguing politics. After Rabbit, cynically, advocates fear as the most powerful motivation, Jill counters, "Let's try love for a change"(170). Rabbit, squeezing her slender wrist tightly, again personifies the bullying alazon:

"Then you better find yourself another universe. The moon
is cold, baby. Cold and ugly. If you don't want it, the
Commies do. They're not so fucking proud." (170)

This scene ends by exposing the insecurity beneath Rabbit's ugly threats. When the distraught Nelson interrupts to ask his father why he is so contentious, Rabbit's answer is self-incriminating:

"Because I love my country and can't stand to have it knocked."
"If you loved it you'd want it better," Jill says.

"If it was better I'd have to be better," he says seriously, and they all laugh, he last. (171)

The joke is on Rabbit, but finally he too joins in the mirth. His laughing at himself exemplifies Galligan's notion that the comic vision requires human beings to acknowledge their own foolishness(XII). Typically, the comic discussion that begins seriously ends in laughter not only because of the shock caused when truth finally emerges but also because of Rabbit's acknowledgement of the group's common humanity: "Thus, through lame laughter--she still rubs her wrists, the hand he hit her with begins to hurt--they seek to reconstitute their family."

Near the end of the third section, another discussion hints at a change in Rabbit. During this scene two racist neighbors, Showalter and Brumbach, attempt to intimidate Rabbit into removing Skeeter from his home. There is a ludicrous quality to the men as they confront Rabbit: "Showalter has a way of bending, as if dance music is playing far away and he wants to cut in between Rabbit and Eddie"(286). These two characters, comic and menacing simultaneously, recall the murderers in Hemingway's "The Killers." Brumbach's handshake chills Rabbit: "I twist bodies to my will. I am life. I am death"(287-288). As the conversation proceeds, "Rabbit sees the structure: one man is the negotiations, the other is the muscle"(289). This division of responsibilities reflects each man's incompleteness: "An age of specialization and collusion"(289). Showalter, the spokesman, has "a hard little hook nose," and is "in the hardware end" of computers; significantly, Brumbach, "the muscle," is a scarred Vietnam veteran who personifies the swaggering soldier this time: "He stands the way guys in the Army used to, all buttoned in, shoulders tucked

back, an itch for a fight between their shoulder blades"(286). Nevertheless, Rabbit cannot help liking the man, in part because he respects Brumbach's war service "where he himself should have been fighting had he not been too old, too old and fat and cowardly"(290), but also because his own broadened experience has increased his tolerance for divergent points of view. As a result, "Rabbit tries to play the game." He attempts, jokingly, to reach a compromise: "I'll keep my kid from looking in your windows, and you keep yours from looking in mine." His visitors, however, reject this offer, warning Rabbit to "fucking barricade the whole place"(289). At the end of the confrontation, Brumbach at last shows his ruined face:

The cocky little man keeps his arms stiff at his sides. Instead he turns his head, so the ruined jaw shows. The scar is not just a red L, Rabbit sees, it is an ampersand, complicated by white lines, where skin was sown and overlapped to repair a hole that would always be, that would always repel eyes. (290-291)

Brumbach too has suffered. The human comedy includes him and Showalter as well. Although misguided, they are not presented unsympathetically. Brumbach has the final word, and he speaks sincerely and without self-pity:

"I earned this face," he says. "I got it over there so I could have a decent life here. I'm not asking for sympathy, a lot of my buddies made out worse. I'm just letting you know, after what I seen and done, no wiseass is crowding me in my own neighborhood." (291)

Although the neighbors' methods are reprehensible, their fears have validity. Skeeter, after all, is a heroin dealer and felon. For most of this episode the two visitors, with their bullying and closed minds, embody the blustering alazon while Rabbit, as he parries their threats, assumes the part of the reasonable eiron. Comedy, however, mischievously resists neat categorizing. Finally, Brumbach's

heartfelt expression of his sentiments makes it apparent that Rabbit has taken his visitors' concerns too lightly. Rabbit still has more to learn about the human condition. At the same time, the episode serves to teach Rabbit that his barren development does constitute a community. Rabbit recognizes this truth when, in the midst of the negotiations, out of the corner of his eye he is surprised to observe a mail truck appear "Out of nowhere" and a postman collect "...a torrent, hundreds it seems, of letters"(290) from the mailbox that Rabbit is leaning against. Earlier, Rabbit had reflected that, unlike his old neighborhood of Mount Judge where "...people were always mailing Valentines"(289), in this development the mailbox is unused. Instead, these letters indicate that a community exists where he had thought there was none. The humble quotidian, represented by ordinary mail, presents the underlying congruity beneath the incongruity that, according to Martin, "the best sort" of comedies disclose(86). Countering the neighbors' anti-comic divisiveness, the presence of community is reassuring.

Ultimately, it is through experience--both painful and pleasant--that human beings mature. Rabbit's return to health begins when he accepts his black coworker Buchanan's invitation to meet him for a drink in Jimbo's Friendly Lounge on the other side of town. Desperation prompts him: "Something in what Buchanan said. He was lying down to die, had been lying down for years"(103). Grudgingly, he respects Janice's decision to leave: "At least she had the drive to get out"(104). For Rabbit, crossing the bridge to the downtown area is venturing into terra incognita: "Beyond the lake of light, unfriendly darkness"(113). Like Peter Caldwell, the

spiritually dying Rabbit will make a metaphorical descent to the underworld in order to be renewed. In this unlikely locale, a black bar, Rabbit will start to better comprehend the comic nature of life. He will begin to transcend the provincialism that is stifling him ("I don't think this fella's ever gotten above Twelfth Street, have you Harry?"127). Crossing boundaries leads to unexpected experiences like experimenting with marijuana and forming in effect a commune with Jill and Skeeter. Moreover, Rabbit starts to view blacks as people. Before entering the bar black was a "political word"; here Rabbit meets individuals: Skeeter is antagonistic; Buchanan, avuncular; Babe, mysterious. Furthermore, he begins to see how the particular experiences of African-Americans, with the police for example, have shaped them. Later, with Skeeter's lectures and communal readings of texts like Frederick Douglass' autobiography, Rabbit's education will continue. Rabbit learns that blacks too in the 1960's yearn for a new life.

During the evening, Buchanan, another down-to-earth authority, explains to Rabbit their common plight: "What I am is a man trying to get from Point A to Point B, from the cradle to the grave hurting the fewest people I can. Just like Harry here..."(131) Later in the novel, as Rabbit, Jill, Nelson, and Skeeter watch the TV program "Laugh In," two characters, one white and the other black, dressed as old men, confront one another through a "crazy mirror," suggesting their shared humanity(247). To the insular Rabbit, blacks had appeared foreign, bizarre, and threatening. Recognizing them as fellow human beings who share similar hopes, joys, and sorrows allows Rabbit to better understand the elemental human condition.

Also, Rabbit's visit to Jimbo's reminds him of what is lacking in his own life. Like Charlie Stavros, Buchanan equates vitality with sex: "So that is the problem...Man has to have tail"(132). Fear of Jill's presence attracting the police motivates Buchanan to persuade Rabbit to take her to his home; yet, the black man diagnoses Rabbit's malaise correctly. Rabbit desperately needs reinvigoration.

This ghetto locale paradoxically provides a pastoral interlude where, as Leo Marx observes, "...the hero explores the possibility of a simpler, more harmonious way of life"(253). As the apprehensive Rabbit enters the murky maze-like bar, he is at first unnerved by the presence of so many blacks. His anxiety is eased, however, when he notices "the idyllic green felt" of a pool table. Play, an essential element of comedy, according to Galligan(36), "...reassures Rabbit. Where any game is being played a hedge exists against fury"(115). Soon, another form of play occurs when the pianist Babe performs for Rabbit:

What does Babe play? All the good old ones. All show tunes. "Up a Lazy River," "You're the Top," "Thou Swell," "Summertime," you know. There are hundreds, thousands. Men from Indiana wrote them in Manhattan. They flow into each other without edges, flowing under black bridges of chords thumped six, seven times, as if Babe is helping the piano to remember a word it won't say. Or spanking the silence. Or saying, Here I am, find me, find me. Her hands, all brown bone, hang on the keyboard hushed like gloves on a table; she gazes up through blue dust to get herself into focus, she lets her hands fall into another tune: "My Funny Valentine," "Smoke Gets in Your Eyes," "I Can't Get Started," starting to hum along with herself now, lyrics born in some distant smoke, decades when Americans moved within the American dream, laughing at it, starving on it, but living it, humming it, the national anthem everywhere. Wise guys and hicks, straw boaters and bib overalls, fast bucks, broken hearts, penthouses in the sky, shacks by the railroad tracks, ups and downs, rich and poor, trolley cars, and the latest news by radio. Rabbit had come in on the end of it, as the world shrank like an apple going bad and America

was no longer the wisest hick town within a boat ride of Europe and Broadway forgot the tune, but here it all still was, in the music Babe played, the little stairways she climbed and came tap-dancing down, twinkling in black, and there is no other music, not really...As Babe plays she takes on swaying and leaning backwards; at her arms' ends the standards go root back into ragtime. Rabbit sees circus tents and fireworks and farmers' wagons and an empty sandy river running so slow the sole motion is catfish sleeping beneath the golden skin. (123-124)

Just before crossing the bridge to this side of town, Rabbit, with time on his hands, had wandered the streets of Brewer. This heart of the city had seemed stagnant: "...these harmless neighborhoods that have gone to seed." The mood is lethargic and lifeless:

... fat men in undershirts loiter, old ladies move between patches of gossip with the rural waddle of egg-gatherers, dogs sleep curled beside the cooling curb, and children with hockey sticks and tape-handled bats diffidently chip at whiffle balls and wads of leather, whittling themselves into the next generation of athletes and astronauts. (113)

This passage recalls Mark Twain's description in Life on the Mississippi of the sleepy riverside town before the arrival of the steamboat; in contrast, Babe's music evokes the animated mood of Twain's town when it awakens. The images of "circus tents and fireworks and farmers' wagons and an empty sandy river" suggest the excitement and vitality produced by an event like the appearance of a glamorous steamboat. What Rabbit remembers from baseball games of his youth ("There was a beauty...a game whose very taste, of spit and dust and grass and sweat and leather and sun, was America,"83) is present in the music. Babe's songs relocate something Rabbit and America have lost: the jaunty comic spirit of accepting life as it comes, riding with the punches, and yet hoping and striving for something better. Somewhere, the "American dream" has been misplaced, just as Rabbit's hopes have

been dashed. Earlier in the novel, Rabbit, the American everyman, had sensed this loss of heart and spirit not just in himself but in the whole country. In his debate with Stavros, Rabbit graphically rues society's decadence:

"The trouble isn't this war, it's this country. We wouldn't fight in Korea now. Christ, we wouldn't fight Hitler now. This country is so zonked out on its own acid, sunk so deep in its own fat and babble and filth, it would take H-bombs on every city from Detroit to Atlanta to wake us up and even then we'd probably think we'd just been kissed." (48)

America is as depressed as Rabbit. Musing about blacks earlier, Rabbit had conceded, "...at least they remember how to laugh"(12). Here the pool table and the evocativeness of Babe's music furnish Rabbit with a glimpse of Frye's idyllic "green world." Slyly, Updike reinforces this incongruous linking by later matter of factly listing in a police report the pianist Babe's last name as Greene. The distance Rabbit and America have travelled in the ten years since Rabbit, Run is illustrated in the contrasting settings of the green world: the first Rabbit novel located it in Mrs. Smith's garden; now, it exists in the inner city among Blacks invisible in Rabbit, Run. Seeds, the symbol of rebirth in The Centaur and the Rabbit series, in Rabbit, Run appear in the course of Rabbit's gardening in Mrs. Smith's yard; in the sequel, seeds are repeatedly associated with blacks: Skeeter declares, "We black men...are the future's organic seeds"(275). Jill, the substitute daughter he meets at Jimbo's, is also associated with the green world. After Jill's death, her spirit visits the sleeping Rabbit and he longingly envisions her alive and happy with Skeeter. As he wakes, she retreats from him leaving only the memory of "...her daughterly blind grass-green looking to him for more than shelter..."(381). In the final novel of the series,

the dying Rabbit finds himself drawn to a shabby older black section far afield from the fashionable side of Miami. Despite its decay, this area appears a green world to him because in its vitality amid the poverty it reminds him of his boyhood neighborhood.

In Jimbo's Friendly Lounge, the mood created by the music and the camaraderie, along with the drinks and marijuana, engulfs Rabbit in happiness: "...he brims with joy, to be here with these black others, he wants to shout love..."(125) Abruptly, however, this euphoria evaporates. After Babe finishes her mesmerizing arrangement of standards, Skeeter pimps her to Rabbit. When Rabbit demurs, "She's too good," Skeeter rejoins, "Good, man; she got to live, right?" Comedy visits the "idyllic green," but its permanent home remains the problematic present. Rabbit's experience in the bar is not entirely upbeat; he must endure the insults of Skeeter and the jibes of Buchanan. Nor will his new life be bliss: to be reborn is painful as well as exhilarating. The "American dream" evoked in Babe's songs took the bad with the good, conceding that life inevitably is filled with ups and downs and that people cannot insulate themselves from reality. Rabbit's decision to take risks and embrace experience reflects the black perspective that is comic in its penchant for taking life as it comes: "Funny man, Buchanan. No plan, exactly, just feeling his way, begin by wanting to sell him Babe, maybe that's the way to live"(146). When Rabbit and Jill leave together, Babe plays "There's a Small Hotel," the title adumbrating the motel that will be the site of Rabbit's reconciliation with Janice. The final line of the passage, an italicized "With a wishing well," plaintively underscores the need for

hope.

From Jill, Rabbit learns about a world as foreign to him as the Black community: the counter culture with its mysticism, anti-materialism, casual drug use, free sex, vegetarianism, and pacifism. The epigraph to the second section of the novel, entitled "Jill," quoting Neil Armstrong's awed feelings after reaching the moon, presages the effect this young woman shall have on Rabbit: "It's different but it's very pretty out here." A free spirit, Jill teaches the "cynical" Rabbit that "...our egos make us deaf. Our egos make us blind." She informs Rabbit and Nelson that

"The point is ecstasy...Energy. Anything that is good is in ecstasy. The world is what God made and it doesn't stink of money, it's never tired, too much or too little, it's always exactly full....Everywhere is play..." (159)

Although these sentiments celebrate playfulness, Jill ultimately despairs and becomes a heroin addict; nevertheless, her presence has a profound effect on Rabbit. Jill helps him understand the class system and his place within it. She explains Janice's behavior to the confused Rabbit: "She wants to be alive while she is alive" (273). Finally, her presence enflames the oedipal rivalry between Rabbit and his son. At first Jill functions as Rabbit's wife and as Nelson's missing sister, but before long she and the boy are lovers. Observing their closeness, Rabbit begins to feel "Jealousy, perhaps...his son in spite of his smallness bony and dominating and alert..."(153). When Jill perishes in the fire, the grief-stricken Nelson berates his father: "You fucking asshole, you've let her die. I'll kill you. I'll kill you"(320). Just as the infant Rebecca's death drives Rabbit and Janice apart, Jill's death prompts the long cold war between father and son.

With Skeeter's arrival, Rabbit's education intensifies: "You just don't know, Chuck. You don't even know that now is all the time there is"(263). Skeeter's words express the comic perspective that emphasizes the primacy of the present. With a sense of urgency, Skeeter fills Rabbit's empty book shelves with paperbacks:

The Selected Writings of W.E.B. Du Bois, The Wretched of the Earth, Soul on Ice, The Life and Times of Frederick Douglass, others, history, Marx, economics, stuff that makes Rabbit feel sick, as when he thinks about what surgeons do, or all the plumbing and gas lines there are under the street. (226)

As a symptom of his anti-life fastidiousness, Rabbit has no taste for intellectualism, radical or otherwise: he likens it to plumbing and surgery as unpleasant explorations of the grim reality beneath the facade. Rabbit prefers to skim the surface without delving into the unromantic depths of politics and history. Astonished by Rabbit's naive views on history and politics ("He's not ready...He is immature,"246), Skeeter and Jill schedule seminars and readings to reeducate him.

From a revisionist point of view, Skeeter analyzes Western history, slavery, racism, Vietnam, capitalism, socialism, Black Power, and Christianity. During his rambling lectures, Skeeter cajoles Rabbit and Nelson into reading from his texts and playacting the part of blacks while he takes the role of the white man. Reading the account in Frederick Douglass' autobiography of the author's humiliating experience as a slave moves Rabbit. He cannot but compare Douglass' plight and rebirth to his own life:

"A man without force," Rabbit intently reads, "is without the essential dignity of a humanity. Human nature is so constituted, that it cannot honor a helpless man, though it can pity him, and even this it cannot do long if signs of power do not arise." (282)

The comic hero is passive, not supine. He celebrates freedom, vitality, energy, resiliency, resourcefulness and a sense of his worth as a human being. Douglass renews himself by standing up to the cruel and dehumanizing overseer Covey; in effect, this brave man crosses the boundary from being a slave to a person:

"It was a resurrection from the dark and pestiferous tomb of slavery, to the heaven of comparative freedom. I was no longer a servile coward, trembling under the frown of a brother worm of the dust, but my long-cowed spirit was roused to an attitude of independence. I had reached a point at which I was not afraid to die." (282-283)

Rabbit's travails do not equal Douglass' heroism. Yet, by empathizing with "a brother worm of the dust," Rabbit draws strength for his own resurrection.

Finally, however, Rabbit can learn only so much from his visitors. By challenging the status quo, the carnivalesque liberates human beings from stagnation and complacency; but in turn its excesses must be corrected by the restoration of normalcy. Since meeting Skeeter and Jill, Rabbit has broadened his perspective and deepened his understanding of life. Although they have not radicalized him, he has tempered his conservatism and increased his tolerance for divergent points of view. No longer does Rabbit assent to his father's racism and support for the war ("Pop, all they're saying is they want the killing to stop," 349); now he questions his neighbors' xenophobia.

For everything there is a time: now, it is time for stability. Comedy's place is the middle ground of compromise, not the extremes of either the right or the left; ultimately, it functions on a human level that transcends ideology. From a comic perspective, there is not that much difference between Ho Chi Minh and Everett

Dirksen lying in state: "Dignitaries look alike"(236); and Nixon, "He's just a typical flatfooted Chamber of Commerce type who lucked his way into the hot seat and is so dumb he thinks it's good luck"(225). The references to "typical" and "type" suggest Nixon's ordinariness despite his high office. Rabbit's encounters with his visitors have allowed him to see them as human beings rather than as stereotypes and the education he has received from them has enriched his own life. For a time they have formed a viable community, but now it is time to reconstitute his true family. When the frightened Nelson, during one of Skeeter's outbursts, points at his father and screams, "'I want to grow up like him'--his father, Harry, the room's big man--'average and ordinary'"(262), it is a plea for domestic law and order. After the firebombing of the house, Nelson, taken by police cruiser to his grandparents' home, "...seems relieved to be at last in the arms of order, of laws and limits"(326).

Characteristically, Rabbit submits to fate's dictates. Events run their course, and this part of his life concludes with another death and another move. Recalling his reaction to his daughter's drowning in Rabbit, Run, this fresh disaster reminds him of his guilt: "So again in his life the net of law has slipped from him. He knows he is a criminal, yet is never caught"(329). Paradoxically, however, the purging fire also is liberating: "His house slips from him. He is free"(332). A kindly old watchman, another wise common man, informs Rabbit that the mortgage insurance will pay for most of the damage. More encouragingly, the "geezer," by twice addressing him as "young fella," reminds Rabbit that he remains youthful enough for a fresh start. Later, as he "hallucinates," Rabbit locates his position in time:

The freshening sky above Mt. Judge is Becky, the child that died, and the sullen sky to the west, the color of a storm sky but flawed by stars, is Nelson, the child that lives. And he, he is the man in the middle.

(330)

Rabbit recognizes that he belongs in the middle, the comic present between the past of Becky and the future of Nelson. One learns from the past and plans for the future but lives in the present. When he enters the wreckage of the house in order to salvage anything valuable, he rejects "the one resaleable item here," the television set, and instead chooses a "dumb bench" that Janice "always loved"(332), as if unconsciously planning on reuniting with her (the epithet "dumb" reinforcing the link between the bench and his "dumb mutt" wife,269). One last loose end remains. When Rabbit gets into his car, he finds Skeeter hiding in the back seat. In the spirit of Frederick Douglass, Rabbit helps the fugitive get away by driving him out into the countryside and providing him with money ("Underground railroad,"396).

The novel's final chapter dramatizes the sunset of one stage in Rabbit's life and the dawning of another. Rabbit has lost his wife, house, the surrogate daughter/lover Jill, and any closeness with his son. In response, he buries himself in the routine of his job: "Rabbit is at his machine. His fingers feather, the matrices rattle on high, the molten lead comfortably steams at his side"(339). The consolation that this familiar work affords him is apparent not only in the language and imagery-- "Fingers feather," "on high," "comfortably steams at his side"--but also because he is matter-of-factly engaged in typesetting the news story reporting his home's firebombing and Jill's death. The antiseptic tone of the report (reminiscent of the obituary for Caldwell in The Centaur) mirrors Rabbit's detachment. In another

instance of news-media distortion, the superficial account describes, "...the handsome Penn Villas house of Mr. and Mrs. Harold Angstrom" where "A guest in the home, Miss Jill Pendleton, 18, of Stonington, Connecticut, perished of smoke inhalation and burns"(339). Here, as elsewhere in the novel, technology is depicted as anti-life. Earlier, in the warmth of the Greek family restaurant, the earthy Charlie Stavros had dismissed the motion picture "2001" as "all toys" because of its celebration of technology at the expense of humanity: "For me, it just wasn't sexy. I just don't find technology that sexy"(42). Recurrently, the space program is portrayed as inhuman. At this late date, however, Rabbit still clings to his machine as a means of protecting himself from life. When the supervisor Pajasek interrupts his work, Rabbit, thinking that there is a phone call from Janice, snaps, "Tell her I'm dead." Instead, Pajasek tells Rabbit that he is fired. Pajasek's explanation underscores life's uncertainty: "Nothing stands still...the bottom's dropping out"(340-341). Even the selection of the survivors appears whimsical. Just as the elderly Tothero outlives the infant Rebecca in Rabbit, Run and Rabbit's bedridden mother revives while the teenage Jill dies, Rabbit, not his retirement-age father, loses his job.

This news appears the final nail in his coffin: "Die I guess would be the convenient thing"(342). The pragmatic supervisor dismisses such talk and, like the watchman, attempts to bolster Rabbit by emphasizing his youth ("young buck") and urging him to make a fresh start. Callously, Pajasek advises:

"Leave the mess behind you. Forget that slob you married...Kid, schmid. You can't live your life that way. You got to reason outwards from Number One. To you, you're Number One, not the kid." (342)

Unlike the conclusion of Rabbit, Run, however, now Rabbit owns up to his responsibilities. Minimizing Janice's blame for the "mess" and admitting his own, he acknowledges: "I can't go anywhere, I got this kid"(342). Jill's death has made Rabbit more aware of his parental responsibilities. Meeting with Jill's mother at the local police station, Rabbit recognizes the woman's culpability for Jill's demise. The police chief seconds Rabbit's verdict: "Rich bitch, if she'd given the girl half a reason to stay home she'd be alive today." With "A coach's paternal punch on the arm ...," the chief cautions, "Keep your nose clean, Angstrom, and take care of your own"(348). The allusion to a "coach's paternal punch" returns Rabbit to his high school basketball days when his mentor was the fatherly coach Marty Tothero. The veteran police chief, whose own sense of duty is exemplified by his voluntarily responding to a fire out of his district "... on behalf of my esteemed colleague the sheriff of Furnace Township who rolled over and went back to sleep"(328), appears a sager counselor than the self-serving Pajasek. Nevertheless, Pajasek's image of the firing--like the destroyed house--as a "sacrifice"(348) is apt, for Rabbit's new life will arise only from the embers of the old.

Updike dramatizes his hero's rebirth by returning him, with nowhere else to go, to his boyhood home. Unlike Rabbit, Run, this time Rabbit's flight takes him, Nelson in tow, back to a familiar setting rather than on a solitary journey into the unknown. Typically both of comedy and Updike's fiction, the ordinary and mundane sustain the individual: "It has been his salvation, to be home again." The memories the house evokes, another instance of what Tanner calls Updike's powerful "density

of specification"(43), replenish the empty Rabbit:

The same musty teddy-bear smells from the carpet, the same embrace of hot air when you open the cellar door, the same narrow stairs heading up off the living room with the same loose baluster that lost its dowel and has to be renailed again and again, drying out in the ebb of time; the same white-topped kitchen table with the four sets of worn spots where they used to eat. (350)

In his boyhood home, Rabbit enjoys a second adolescence: "An appetite for boyish foods has returned"(350). In Penn Villas he had risen at dawn, but here he relaxes: "...he sleeps late, so he has to be waked for work"; later, Rabbit finds himself "faithfully masturbating"(377). He wistfully recalls his childish sense of life as playful discovery: "He was in love with the idea of travelling, with running, with geography, with Parcheesi and Safari and all board games where you roll the dice and move"(377). Even his father's customary rantings "...make him feel protected, at home"(349). Reflecting Frye's contention that "...unincremental repetition...is funny"(Anatomy,168), Mr. Angstrom's knee jerk reactionaryism "...amuses Harry." In return, Rabbit's presence brightens his parents' lives as well. Reductively, his ailing mother allows: "Harry's being home, she claims, is worth a hundred doses of L-dopa"(350). Only Nelson, devastated by Jill's death, which he blames on his father, remains "defiant of assimilation." In the words of the epigraph from Pascal in Rabbit, Run, "external circumstances" have caused a "hardness of heart" against "the motions of grace" represented by the reuniting of the family. This ominous turn of events, with the son now behaving as the father had in the previous novel, reflects the cyclic nature of the generations.

The restoration of Rabbit's boyhood family becomes complete when his sister

Mim arrives from Las Vegas for a visit. The homely tableau that Rabbit in Rabbit, Run had felt excluded from is now intact. Once the worldly-wise Mim breezes into town in a flashy "borrowed" Toronado, Rabbit's education accelerates. The energetic Mim at once sets about "...taking care of them all" (362). She pulls the family together: "She tightens the hug, and linked like that they walk to the foot of the stairs, to go up and console their parents"(361). Energizing them with her "act," Mim draws them out of the gloomy house to dinner and a film:

Though Mom's head waggles and she has some trouble cutting the crust of her apple pie, she manages pretty well and looks happy: how come he and Pop never thought of getting her out of the house? (369)

At the movies they choose Funny Girl, depicting the life of Fanny Brice, the feisty comedienne who, like Mim, survived among "gangsters." This excursion is successful, if bizarre. Mom falls asleep, Pop wanders about the theatre and talks so loudly he is shushed, and on the way out "a trio of hoods give Mim such an eye Rabbit gives them back the finger." Nevertheless, Mom enjoys herself and Pop feels brash enough to insist that the true gangsters are the powerful industrialists: "The Mellons and the DuPonts, those are the cookies we should put in jail"(371).

Ultimately, Mim focuses her attention on her foundering brother. With her mother, Mim recognizes her limitations:

"What're you trying to prove? I thought you came East to help Mom."
"To help her help you. How can I help her, I'm no doctor." (368)

Mim paves the way for the Angstroms' reconciliation by diverting Stavros' attention to herself as well as by initiating negotiations with Janice. Next, she soothes Rabbit by calmly assuring him that he and Janice will not divorce: "Don't get uptight. It

won't come to that"(375). In topsy-turvy fashion, the elder sibling, once the star of the family, now learns from the younger sister who earlier had lived in his shadow. She is "Miss Fix-It" to his "Mister Muddle"(369). While Rabbit has played it safe, Mim has taken risks and crossed boundaries. He acknowledges Mim's savvy: "Mim knows things, Rabbit realizes proudly. Wherever you go in some directions, Mim has been there"(356). In contrast to his own bumbling, "Rabbit is jealous. Mim has learned these years out of school, what he has not: how to manage people"(364). Like Stavros with Janice, Mim tutors Rabbit. She analyzes Janice's behavior: Stavros is the "...first person in thirty years to give her some serious attention as a person"(366). For both mentors, sexuality and knowledge are linked. Even between brother and sister, sexual tension is present. Mim radiates sensuality and flaunts her sexuality, teasing Rabbit and threatening to undress in front of him. Rabbit even confesses that if given a choice he could more readily accept an affair from Janice than from Mim.

Like Stavros (Mim and Charlie recognize each other as kindred spirits immediately: "He saw right through me,"367), Mim approves of taking chances: "That fits. Be crazy to keep free"(358). Urging her naive brother "...to tend your own garden," she instructs him about life's "survival rules":

"Everybody else has a life they try to fence in with some rules. You just do what you feel like and then when it blows up or runs down you sit there and pout."

(370)

In The Absolute Comic, Kern, citing Gregory Bateson, depicts life as "...a game

whose purpose is to discover the rules, which rules are always changing and always undiscoverable"(1). Human beings must continually adapt themselves to changing circumstances; game plans are necessary but need to be flexible. Even the freewheeling Mim plays by rules. Pragmatically, she allays her brother's fear that she will fall in love with Stavros: "Don't fret. Years ago, I made it a rule never to be with a guy more than three times"(369). After failing as an entertainer, Mim has come to terms with her niche within the glitter of Las Vegas: "I'm no showboat like Rabbit Angstrom, but in my quiet way I swing"(361). Now her brother needs to adjust to changes in his life. According to Mim, Rabbit will have to accept a new Janice: "That's how you have to take her"(357). Kenneth Burke avers, ...[the comic frame] might provide important clues for the composition of one's life, which demands accommodation to the structure of others' lives"(173-174).

In her zest, willingness to take risks and cross boundaries, resiliency, earthiness, playfulness, colorfulness, and savvy, Mim personifies the comic heroine. Unlike Rabbit, she embraces life ("Of course, I was never squeamish like you,"376); is comfortable with sexuality ("It's what we do. It's what people do,"376); understands humanity ("People want to be nice, haven't you noticed? They don't like being shits, that much; but you have to find some way out of it for them,"376); and sympathizes with the contemporary political and social unrest ("You don't think there might be just a lot of little guys trying to get a little more space than the system they're under lets them have?"357). At the same time, the realistic Mim refuses to take herself too seriously. One day, while she and Rabbit shoot baskets in the yard,

she continues to counsel him. By now, the awed Rabbit hangs on every word. Eventually, Mim announces, portentously, "One other thing you should know." As "He braces for the worst, the hit that will leave nothing there," Mim deadpans, "It's raining"(376). Reductively, at this point the befuddled Rabbit requires his sister to tell him to come in from the rain. Mim's savoir faire, along with Janice's maturing and, in the course of the series, the portrayal of Ruth Leonard, Thelma Harrison, and Nelson's wife, Pru, as well as both Rabbit's mother and mother-in-law as survivors, indicates that, while Updike's main characters are male, strong female figures do exist in his fiction.

Like Mim, Rabbit's mother helps Rabbit rebound. For his edification, she notes the perseverance and hope that empower Mim: "She tries to be. Cheerful" (373). Later, Mrs Angstrom buoys her son by reciting a simple ditty from a children's TV program: "Inch by inch/ "Life is a cinch. Yard by yard, life is hard." Succinctly, these lines express a survival strategy: divide and cope. Accordingly, Rabbit "laughs appreciatively." He then plaintively wonders where he "...went wrong: Mom. No house, no wife, no job. My kid hates me. My sister says I'm ridiculous." In reply, Mom explains succinctly, "You're. Growing up"(373). Burke observes, the "...[comic frame] considers human life as a project in 'composition...'"(173). Slowly, Rabbit is maturing. His conversation with his mother leads to a revelation. Gazing out the window at the familiar street, he muses:

He looks out of her windows. There was a time--the year after leaving, five years after--when this homely street, with its old-fashioned high crown, its sidewalk blocks tugged up and down by maple roots, its retaining walls of sandstone and railings of painted

iron and two-family brickfront houses whose siding imitates gray rocks, excited Rabbit with the magic of his own existence. These mundane surfaces had given witness to his life; this chalice had held his blood; here the universe had centered, each downtwirling maple seed of more account than galaxies. No more. Jackson Road seemed an ordinary street anywhere. Millions of such American streets hold millions of lives, and let them sift through, and neither notice nor mourn, and fall into decay, and do not even mourn their own passing but instead grimace at the wrecking ball with the same gaunt facades that have outweathered all their winters. However steadily Mom communes with these maples, the branches' misty snake-shapes as inflexibly fixed in these two windows as the leading of stained glass, they will not hold back her fate by the space of a breath; nor, if they are cut down tomorrow to widen Jackson Road at last, will her staring, that planted them within herself, halt their vanishing. And the wash of new light will extinguish even the memory of them. Time is our element, not a mistaken invader. How stupid, it has taken him thirty-six years to begin to believe that. (373-374)

This passage parallels the scene in Rabbit, Run when Rabbit had viewed his familiar neighborhood anew after the death of his daughter. That locale, awing Rabbit with its "mystery," had inspired questions about his identity; here, he finds answers. At the opening of Rabbit Redux, Rabbit, in despair, admitted: "Thirty six years old, and he knows less than when he had started ..." (22) Now, only months later, Rabbit's experiences have changed him. The "mundane surfaces" of Jackson Road bear witness to the finiteness of life. Human beings exist in time: "Time is our element, not a mistaken invader." Any attempt to evade this reality is futile.

Nevertheless, Rabbit remains self-centered. The language and imagery-- "magic of his own existence," "given witness to his life," "this chalice had held his blood," "here the universe had centered," "communes," "stained glass"--recall the ending of the Dubliners story "Araby" where Joyce uses religious language and imagery to depict his young hero's disenchantment with reality. In that story a boy

from a sheltered parochial background overreacts when a visit to a tawdry carnival dashes his naive assumptions. The adult Rabbit experiences a similar disillusionment when he revisits his boyhood. Rabbit will attain the Kierkegaardian ethical stage of development only when he transcends his egotism. For Rabbit to approach a Caldwell-like acceptance of life will take twenty more years of experience and two more books. In Antigone, Sophocles concluded, "Wisdom we learn at last when we are old." The ending of the above passage carefully indicates the inchoateness of Rabbit's comprehension: "begin to believe." Even beginning to believe, however, denotes a heightening of consciousness. When Mim earlier quizzes him about what he has "learned" from "going back to school" with Skeeter's books, Rabbit responds, "I learned...the country isn't perfect." This admission, from Rabbit, indicates a considerable increase in sophistication for earlier, in his argument with Stavros, he had steadfastly defended America as perfect: "America is beyond power, it acts as in a dream, as a face of God"(47). With Mim, however, he immediately qualifies his statement: "Even as he says this, he realizes he doesn't believe it, any more than he believes at heart that he will die"(358).

Yet, Rabbit has grown. At the end of the novel, as he gingerly reconciles with Janice, he explains that he is "too rational" to believe in Skeeter's apocalyptic viewpoint; instead, he surmises, "Confusion is just a local view of things working out in general"(405). Overall, the Angstroms' diverse and bizarre experiences have provided them with a better sense of the nature of life: its absurdity, unpredictability, and limitations but also its wonderfulness because it blesses energy, courage,

perseverance, and resiliency. Their experiences, though undergone separately (they never meet in the middle two chapters), have created a basis for a stronger union between them. Fittingly, Rabbit Redux concludes with Rabbit and Janice reconciling. The critic Ralph Wood notes,

Tragedy ends in separation and death, comedy in union and new beginnings. The classic comic ending is marriage, and this is the redemptive state to which Rabbit and Janice are finally restored. (222)

Symbolizing the rebirth both are undergoing, the couple in effect reenact their high school courtship. Arranging to meet, ostensibly to discuss their divorce, they appear nervous teenagers. Significantly, Rabbit and Janice are each now living with their parents. For the occasion, Rabbit chooses to wear his old athletic jacket with the Mount Judge High School colors and lettering discovered in his parents' attic. When Janice comments on the jacket, Rabbit explains sheepishly that "A lot of my clothes got burned up." The burning of his adult clothing represents the old Rabbit's death, and the resurrection of this jacket, the symbol of his greatest glory, his rebirth. At the same time, Janice's appearance also calls attention to her renewal: "Yet she too is wearing something too young for her, with a hairdo reverting to adolescence, parted way over like those South American flames of the forties. Chachacha"(393). The allusions to "South American flames" and "Chachacha" suggest Janice's new Mim-like boldness and sensuality, born out of her adventurousness. For both Rabbit and Janice, this playacting indicates hopefulness, resiliency, and a sense of the cyclic nature of life. It also puts the past into perspective: wearing his athletic jacket, Rabbit recognizes that, "...it was an ice-

cream world that he made his mark in"(393).

The resolute Janice, once disdained by Rabbit as inept, organizes their rapprochement. By presenting him with the keys to the family car that she had taken with her when moving in with Stavros, she symbolically restores her husband to his former position as head of the family. Now, however, power will be shared: while Rabbit drives, Janice navigates. Their meandering progress through Brewer recalls their original courtship when the teenage couple searched for trysting places. Rabbit, noting the change in his wife, salutes her superior survival skills: "Feminine logic: smother and outlast what won't be wished away"(404). Insightfully, Janice recognizes that opportunities exist within crises. She informs Rabbit that their empty lot is worth a considerable sum of money because "...this is becoming such a fashionable area." When he objects, "I thought Brewer was dying," Janice responds, "Only in the middle"(396). Just as Brewer dies in order to be reborn, the Angstroms' unhappy marriage ends in order that a more satisfactory union may emerge. Although the nervous Rabbit is ready to flee at any moment, Janice's newfound strength (verified by both Stavros and Mim: "Charlie told me Janice is fantastic. A real wild woman"370) sustains them.

In flashes, Rabbit recognizes that his old ways are dead, no longer viable.

Riding, they pass Summer Street, the direction of Rabbit's flight in Rabbit, Run:

At the end of Summer Street he thinks there will be a brook, and then a dirt road and open pastures; but instead the city street broadens into a highway lined with hamburger diners, and drive-in sub shops, and a miniature golf course with big plastic dinosaurs, and food-stamp stores and motels and gas stations that are changing their names, Humble to Getty, Atlantic to Arco. He has been here before. (398)

Unlike Huck Finn or even his younger self, the older Rabbit finds no open territory for escape in middle-aged America. With his flight blocked, Janice steers her timid husband to the redundantly named "Safe Haven Motel" instead. Comedy promotes accommodation and compromise. At the motel, Janice's judgment is vindicated when the couple, to Rabbit's surprise ("I guess I've led a kind of sheltered life"), have no difficulty, despite a lack of luggage, registering for a room. The desk clerk, a friendly codger like his counterpart in The Centaur, notes Rabbit's youth and remonstrates with him for thinking that he will never travel to distant places like Santa Fe: "Don't say that, young buck like you"(402). The old man's use of the term "young buck" (echoing Pajasek and the watchman) and his description of the couple as resembling "haah school" students on a "honeymoon" encourage the possibility of a fresh start. Registering, Rabbit "must lie" in listing as his address his burnt-out house. Doing so reveals his burgeoning faith in the quotidian because in Updike's fiction "lies" are necessary to breach the gap between hope and reality. As in The Centaur, they represent a leap of faith. In this instance, despite the fact that the house no longer exists, "The junk mail and bills have been getting to him from that address." Impressed, Rabbit reflects that the postal service is "wonderful" and "Supernatural, that it works"(400). Just as the mail pickup during the confrontation with his neighbors had revealed the community existing within the seemingly cold development, here the unexpected arrival of bills and junk mail, an example of the quintessentially mundane, illustrates the comic faith that miracles are part of ordinary life. These thoughts confirm Rabbit's skepticism about the

limitations of radicalism: "Young punk revolutionaries, let them try to get the mail through, through rain and sleet and dark of night"(400-401). Sub-consciously, Rabbit's awe over the wonderfulness of ordinary life encourages him to pursue a reconciliation with Janice, despite their problems, rather than to flee to some fantasy.

Inside the motel room, however, Rabbit remains wary. Janice, undeterred, continues to encourage their reconciliation. When Rabbit acknowledges his flaws ("I'm a mess") and guilt ("I feel so guilty"), she, in her new-found wisdom, cautions him not to overreact: "Relax. Not everything is your fault"(406). Gradually, Rabbit "feels them drift along sideways deeper into being married"(405). Symbolically, they achieve Frye's "new society" of comedy often represented by "weddings"(Anatomy, 163). Eventually, Janice pronounces "this--reunion" as "fair." Comedy is prudent. The novel ends with them curled up together asleep. However tentatively, they have reconciled: for the first time since their breakup husband and wife are together. The final sentence of the novel's epigraph, the transmission of the cosmonaut Colonel Shatalov as he prepares to dock his spacecraft, expresses the Angstroms' experience: "It took me quite a while to find you, but now I've got you." Rabbit falls asleep against her stomach, "...his babies from her belly..."(407), suggesting that the strongest link between them is their shared parenthood. The punctuation of "He. She. Sleeps" symbolizes the gap that lingers between them, one that will take time to close. The final utterance "O.K.?", its slanginess reflecting the fondness of both this novel and comedy in general for the vernacular, conveys measured optimism as well as, with its question mark, a hard-earned respect for the uncertainty of existence.

For now, however, Rabbit and Janice have regained a healthy, that is to say comic, sense of themselves.

**Chapter Four: The Role of Comedy in Dispelling
Illusion in Rabbit Is Rich: "...whatever
reality is, it's not that."**

"Sunshine, the old clown, rims the room"

Rabbit, Run and Rabbit Redux

"Life is sweet. That's what they say."

In Rabbit Is Rich, set in the 1979 America of oil shortages and hostages, the 46-year-old Rabbit has become prosperous. Now a co-owner with his wife Janice and her mother, Bessie, of Springer Motors, his late father-in-law's Toyota dealership, he makes a comfortable living; moreover, he enjoys his status as "...the star and spearpoint of all these two dozen employees and hundred thousand square feet of working space..."(4) As a measure of his success, Rabbit belongs to the Flying Eagle, a nouveau riche country club. Here the Angstroms socialize primarily with the Murketts, the successful contractor Webb and his much younger wife, Cindy, and the Harrisons, Rabbit's long ---time adversary Ronnie and his wife, Thelma. Although Rabbit loathes Ronnie and finds Thelma unappealing, he tolerates their company because of his regard for Webb and his lust for Cindy. Despite fears of aging and worries about holding on to his money, Rabbit avers, "Still, life is sweet"(6). When he reads the obituaries and thinks about how the dead "were multiplying," including his parents and his old coach Tothero during the interim since Rabbit Redux, "For the first time since childhood, Rabbit, is happy, simply, to be alive"(10). Toward the

deceased like Fred Springer, Rabbit feels grateful: "The great thing about the dead: they make space"(5).

Two unsettling occurrences, however, disturb Rabbit's serenity. First, he suspects that a young woman shopping for a car at his lot is his grown daughter, the baby born out of his affair with Ruth in Rabbit, Run. Hopeful that he has a daughter after all, Rabbit sets about to learn whether this teenager is his child. His sleuthing leads to the discovery of the location of the widowed Ruth's farm, but Rabbit lacks the courage to question Ruth. Instead, he contents himself with spying on the farm from the cover of the adjoining woods. Next, and more ominously, his son Nelson returns home, announcing his plans to quit college and work in the family business. His son's behavior puzzles Rabbit until the arrival of Nelson's pregnant girl friend, Pru. Despite Rabbit's reservations about the union between Nelson and Pru, eventually the young couple marry with Rabbit paying for the wedding. Now the Angstroms, senior and junior, live with Janice's mother in her crowded house.

Although Rabbit resists employing his son at Springer Motors, Janice and Ma Springer overrule him, and Nelson replaces Charlie Stavros at the lot. The tension between father and son increases when Nelson, on his own initiative, invests the firm's money in exotic stock such as convertibles, sports cars, and even a snowmobile. Meanwhile, Rabbit grows richer by investing first in gold and then silver. Even more thrilling, the country club set plans a vacation in the Caribbean, where Rabbit feels certain that he will at last bed Cindy. Before leaving, however, Rabbit and Janice, using the profits from their investments in precious metals,

purchase their own home.

In the Caribbean, the couples, exulting in the freedom from routine, agree to swap mates for the last two nights of their stay. Rabbit, however, is disappointed when he ends up with the plain Thelma instead of the lustrous Cindy. Nevertheless, the night proves a revelation, for Thelma and Rabbit achieve a true intimacy. The next morning, Janice greets Rabbit with the dismaying news that, because Nelson is missing, they must return to Brewer immediately. There will be no night of ecstasy with Cindy after all. At the airport, Ma Springer relates glad tidings: Pru has given birth to a daughter. Once home, Rabbit pays a last visit to Ruth's farm, where he finally confronts Ruth about the identity of her daughter's father. Although the resentful Ruth steadfastly maintains that the girl is not his, he remains unconvinced. Later, Nelson surfaces back at Kent State to complete his education while Pru and the baby remain at Ma Springer's. At the end of the novel, Rabbit and Janice move into their new house. The next afternoon, Ma Springer, Pru, and the baby arrive for a visit. Rabbit Is Rich concludes with Rabbit holding his granddaughter: "Fortune's hostage, heart's desire, a granddaughter. His. Another nail in his coffin. His"(467).

Rabbit Is Rich presents a world beset by fear, uncertainty, and frustration. America in 1979 is a helpless giant, held hostage economically by its dependence on foreign oil and politically by the seizure of its embassy in Tehran. Nelson sums up the nation's ineptitude: "We can't do anything anymore"(378). The opening of the novel, with Rabbit and his associate Charlie Stavros trading anecdotes about people's

incongruous behavior in the throes of the energy crisis, immediately conveys the hysteria of the times. The frustration is evident as motorists, vying for the limited supplies of gas, run amok:

And come in they do, the people out there are getting frantic, they know the great American ride is ending. Gas lines at ninety-nine point nine cents a gallon and ninety per cent of the stations to be closed for the weekend. The governor of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania calling for a five-dollar minimum sales to stop the panicky topping up. And truckers who can't get diesel shooting at their own trucks, there was an incident right in Diamond County, along the Pottsville Peak. People are going wild, their dollars are going rotten, they shell out like there's no tomorrow. (3)

Despite his own prosperity, Rabbit cannot ignore society's disintegration: "On the news there is rioting in Levittown over gasoline, people are throwing beer bottles full of gasoline; they explode, they look like old films of Vietnam or Budapest but it is Levittown right down the road, north of Philadelphia"(49). Just as Rabbit Redux brought the turmoil of the 1960's home to Rabbit, this novel brings the angst of the 1970's to his home town. Disconcertingly, Rabbit observes that the oil shortage has developed, "A new industry, gas pump shrouds"(20). Moreover, spiritual leaders find themselves under siege in a materialistic age. Even the Pope comes under fire. John Paul II's doctrinaire stand on birth control during his visit to the United States ignites heated discussion among Rabbit's set: "'He's running scared,' Rabbit offers. 'Like everybody else'"(293). Just as the exile of the Dalai Lama had reflected Rabbit's own flight in Rabbit, Run, the Pope's defense of tradition in the face of social change parallels Rabbit's attempt to maintain his position against Nelson's encroachment. More than ever, life remains inexplicable. The Dalai Lama's fate

suggests this: "Not only is the Pope coming but the Dalai Lama they bounced out of Tibet twenty years ago is going around the U.S.A. talking to divinity schools and appearing on TV talk shows"(231). The resilient Dalai Lama, after fleeing Southeast Asia for his life, years later emerges on the American lecture circuit and television. His resurfacing emphasizes the similarity between Rabbit's fate and his own. In Rabbit, Run, Rabbit had listened on the radio news to reports of the Dalai Lama's exile and later on, in his hubris, had even compared himself to the religious leader. Now, after twenty years of ups and downs, the international figure and the average man are both survivors who, for the moment at least, have landed on their feet.

Rabbit Is Rich, as its title suggests, focuses on the economic aspect of life. With affluence, however, comes insecurity: both Rabbit and America fear the loss of their accumulated wealth. The volatility of money not only exacerbates feelings of insecurity, but also contributes to the sense that life is capricious. With inflation, the appreciation of Rabbit's investments in precious metals mocks how his father had once slaved for a pittance: "Poor Pop, he didn't live to see money get unreal"(402). For Rabbit now, money symbolizes the mystery of life: "He loves money, though he doesn't understand how it flows to him, or how it oozes away"(139). Eventually, the relationship between wealth and poverty expresses life's inherent contradictoriness: "...and through the murk he glimpses the truth that to be rich is to be robbed, to be rich is to be poor"(375). The predominance of money undermines institutions such as higher education and the professions. According to Nelson, "College is a rip-off, the professors are teaching you stuff because they're getting paid to do it, not because it

does you any good"(208); Rabbit thinks of dentistry as a "Hellish way to make a living. Maybe there's no entirely good way"(203).

Throughout the novel, the middle-aged Rabbit voices his confusion and frustration. By now, he acknowledges the surrounding turmoil: "In middle age you are carrying the world in a sense and yet it seems more out of control than ever..."(189). Reflecting the generational conflict at the novel's heart, Rabbit blames the current turmoil on his son's emerging generation:

Khomeini and Carter both trapped by a pack of kids who need a shave and don't know shit, they talk about old men sending young men off to war, if you could get the idiotic kids out of the world it might settle down to being a sensible place. (354-355)

These sentiments project Rabbit's own uneasiness over Nelson. Increasingly, Rabbit's tone echoes that of the weary George Caldwell in The Centaur. At 46, Rabbit complains, "...if a meaning of life was to show up you'd think it would have by now"(231). Like Caldwell, the older Rabbit questions truisms: "They say you should encourage it, reading, but they never say why"(116). And, more and more, he finds women perplexing. He cannot decide whether Janice thinks he should or should not have girl friends:

"I don't have any girlfriends," he protests. It sounds pitiful. Is Janice saying he should have? Women, once sex gets out in the open, they become monsters. You're a creep if you fuck them and a creep if you don't. (42)

At this point in his life, Rabbit shares Caldwell's skepticism: "According to Skeeter the world was never a pleasant place"(176).

By turns wondrous and horrific, life eventually overwhelms the individual.

Rabbit, struck by nature's magic as he hides himself behind a tree when spying on Ruth's farm, feels awed by the subtle presence of the miraculous in the quotidian: "The miracle of it: how things grow, always remembering to be themselves"(113). At the same time, Rabbit finds existence increasingly problematic: "Life. Too much of it, and not enough. The fear that it will end some day, and the fear that tomorrow will be the same as yesterday"(354). When Rabbit learns that Peggy Fosnacht, his ex-lover from Rabbit Redux, undergoes a mastectomy, he laments: "'My God,' Breast he had sucked. Poor old Peggy. Flicked away by God's fingernail with its big moon. Life is too big for us in the end"(460). Yet, as elsewhere in the series, a reflex pessimism is no more adequate than optimism in predicting the future. After the initial panic, the energy crisis abates: "Once that first weekend of riots and rumors is over, the summer isn't so bad"(108).

Like the other novels also, the plot contains mysteries: one, the reason for Nelson's unexpected return home, becomes clear; another, whether Rabbit is Annabelle Byers' father, is never clarified; finally, the identity of the individual who sends Rabbit a newspaper clipping describing the black revolutionary Skeeter's death is only hinted at (the "...neat block ballpoint printing such as an accountant or schoolteacher might use...",³⁰ suggests that it is Thelma). Moreover, the newspaper story reporting his murder fails to establish Skeeter's identity. In death, he remains an enigma. Driving through the black part of Brewer, where Rabbit had encountered Skeeter and Jill in Rabbit Redux, "...you can see spray-painted SKEETER LIVES, but they don't say where"(435).

In a small way, Rabbit's unsuccessful attempt to tell a joke at the country club epitomizes the frustrating and uncertain nature of the world. Sure that his circle will enjoy the pun "A mercy killing, or murder most foul" heard as the punch line of an anecdote reported on his car radio, Rabbit looks forward to relating it. Instead, the joke falls flat because his friends either do not listen, interrupt, or miss the point. Nevertheless, this joke gains what the critic McFadden terms "anecdotal permanence"(11) with allusions to it recurring. Months later, the Harrisons triumphantly produce a newspaper clipping from an Ann Landers column detailing the incident that served as the basis for Rabbit's joke. This item, however, is a straightforward factual account minus the pun; when Rabbit protests that he had been making a joke, the Harrisons, pedantically, focus on the discrepancies between the two versions:

"The point is, Harry," Thelma says, "it's so different. You said he was from Baltimore and this says he was from Washington. You said the ball hit the goose accidentally and the doctor put him out of his misery." (291,2)

To Rabbit's embarrassment, the Harrisons' literalism again obscures the humor. Nevertheless, Webb Murkett surprises Rabbit by praising the joke: "'You didn't show it at the time,' Harry says, pleased however." Near the end of the novel, as Rabbit and Janice settle into their new home, they receive in an envelope without a return address another clipping, this one from "Golf Magazine" Annual "Roundup," describing how a doctor had been fined for killing a goose on a golf course. This version has an ironic twist for it states that the golfing doctor had "cooked his own goose." For the Angstroms, however, the clipping has disturbing implications. They

recognize that it is Thelma who has sent it and that, as Janice observes, "She'll never let us alone. Never"(455). Rabbit's harmless joke has evolved into something serious, a reminder of Thelma's affection for Rabbit that threatens the Angstroms' marriage: "Janice was vehement. 'I'm furious with her, doing such a flirtatious thing, so soon after.'" Within the comic world, the line between the frivolous and the serious blurs. At the end of the novel, Rabbit ends one of his catalogues of the dead, that includes his parents, his daughter, Skeeter, and various celebrities, with "the goose"(462). Overall, the different versions of the incident, from the disc jockey's gag to the earnest account in an advice column to the arch report in a golfing magazine, reflect the vagaries of existence. Galligan, citing Arthur Koestler, concedes that "...yet the effect of most jokes is to affirm apparently irrational orders"(11).

The central theme of comedy, the individual's ongoing acceptance of his place in time and society, informs Rabbit Is Rich. In "Why Rabbit Had to Go," in The New York Times Book Review (August 5, 1990), Updike stated that he originally conceived Rabbit as a "dodgy" character, in contrast to the responsible, plodding Caldwell of The Centaur, in order to compare two ways of life: the feckless rabbit and the noble centaur(1). As in the first two novels of the series, this Rabbit again attempts to dodge his responsibilities. Inflated by his recent prosperity, he indulges in various forms of wishful thinking as a means of insulating himself from reality. For the first time since his high school basketball stardom, Rabbit has achieved a modicum of success, and, after so much failure, he resists any changes that threaten

his position. The greatest menace to Rabbit's happiness is his grown son, Nelson, who represents the oncoming young generation: "Because Nelson has swallowed up the boy that was and substituted one more pushy man in the world, hairy wrists, big prick. Not enough room in the world"(226). The conflict between Rabbit and Nelson creates the main tension in the novel; with the publication of Rabbit At Rest, the central importance of the relationship between father and son throughout the series becomes more apparent, linking even more closely the Rabbit novels with The Centaur. This rivalry dramatizes the oedipal conflict between the old and the new generations that must end with the former yielding to the latter. The comic world is dynamic, not static. Over the course of the novel, Rabbit will grudgingly accept the inevitable: that Nelson's generation will begin to supplant his own. At the same time, however, Rabbit will obtain a better sense of the possibilities available within his own life. True to the oxymoronic nature of the comic hero, at once passive and adventurous, Rabbit learns anew that accepting one's role in life does not mean a circumscribed existence. The shrewd Stavros observes, "You got freedom you don't even use"(272). Eventually, Rabbit convinces Janice that they should leave her mother's and buy their own home; afterwards, he participates in the unprecedented Caribbean adventure that results in his night with Thelma. For most of this novel, spirituality, like other resources, is in short supply. With Thelma, however, Rabbit experiences transcendence. Opening himself to experience is liberating for Rabbit. As he exclaims after finally deciding to buy a house: "For years nothing happens, then everything happens"(392). Near the novel's conclusion, a wiser Rabbit reveals his

faith when he counsels his mother-in-law: "Let go; you got to let some things go for other people to worry about. The Bible tells you that, it says it on every page. Let go; the Lord knows best"(385).

With age, Rabbit's sense of irony sharpens. Thinking about his Rotarian luncheons amuses him:

The thing about those Rotarians, if you knew them as kids, you can't stop seeing the kid in them, dressed up in fat and baldness and money like a cardboard tuxedo in a play for high-school assembly. How can you respect the world when you see it's being run by a bunch of kids turned old? That's the joke Rabbit always enjoys at Rotary.

(275)

Like Caldwell's inspired classroom performances, this running joke too achieves the status of "anecdotal permanence." Increasingly, Rabbit perceives life as play. Later, socializing at Nelson's wedding reception, Rabbit senses himself playing at adult life: "He sounds to himself, saying this, like an impersonator; life, just as we thought, is playing grownup" (250). Rabbit even has some fun at the expense of his creator: "D'you ever get the feeling everything these days is sequels?...Like people are running out of ideas"(403).

Nevertheless, the joke is on Rabbit when he forgets that he too is part of the human comedy. George Meredith describes how the "Comic Spirit" reprimands human beings for their own good:

...whenever it sees them self-deceived or hoodwinked, given to run riot in idolatries, drifting into vanities, congregating into absurdities, planning short-sightedly, plotting dementedly;...whenever they offend sound reason, fair justice; are false in humility or mined with conceit, individually or in the bulk; the Spirit overhead will look humanely malign....

(48)

Farce brings Rabbit back to earth. Before the carnivalesque Caribbean interlude, Rabbit imagines a blissful sojourn with the dreamy Cindy as "his certain destination"(393). Reality, however, undercuts fantasy. When the Caribbean vacationers disembark from the airplane, Rabbit's first encounter with the aromatic tropical air transfixes him, "...but Ronnie Harrison ruins the moment by exclaiming distinctly, behind his ear, 'Oh boy. That's better than a blow job'"(394). Worse, all the women, even Cindy, laugh. The effect is to shatter, momentarily at least, Rabbit's reverie. Later, when the long-awaited moment arrives for exchanging partners, the calypso band pointedly segues into "Where are the Clowns?" Afterwards, Thelma defends her husband's bawdiness by citing his overriding gentler side:

Being old as she was, with some experience of men, and with a certain gift for letting go, she was amused by the things he thought of. For their honeymoon breakfast he jerked off into the scrambled eggs and they ate his fried jism with the rest. If you go along with everything on that side of Ronnie, he's wonderfully loyal and docile you could say.

(420)

Against his better judgement, the skeptical Rabbit promises to overlook Ronnie's vulgarity and outrageousness. The next day at breakfast, however, Ronnie unconsciously reminds Rabbit of his essential self when he orders "scrambled eggs": "Loose. you understand. Not too well done"(424).

Despite his affluence, Rabbit remains the comic everyman: bumbling, as, for example, his undignified retreat with Ruth's collie at his heels or his capsizing of the sailboat in the Caribbean; nonetheless, attractive, as indicated by Thelma's unrequited affection for him ("I adore you. Adore you,216"); vital ("You're so glad to be

alive,"418); resilient, as evident by his rebounding from the disasters of Rabbit Redux; playful, ("... life, just as we thought, is playing grownup"); capable of risk-taking, as is clear from his adventures in the Caribbean; increasingly aware of the value of survival ("Now the dead are so many he feels for the living around him the camaraderie of survivors,"139); and, as the novel unfolds, inclined to compromise rather than resist the tide of events. Furthermore, Rabbit's age, no longer young but not yet old, symbolizes his averageness. Acutely conscious of being 46 (Thelma reprimands him: "Your age. Always talking about your age,"415), Rabbit has reached middle age. Chronologically, poised between the past of his youth and the future of his old age, he inhabits a middle ground commensurate with comedy's predisposition for the midpoint between extremes. Like Dante, as well as George Caldwell, this comic hero finds himself, "Midway along the journey of our life." With his new-found prosperity, however, Rabbit has become "smug and satisfied"(317). A reductive paraphrase of Browning's "God's in his heaven--/ All's right with the world!" indicates Rabbit's complacency: "He is in his bed, his molars are in their crowns"(86). At the same time, his wealth makes him uneasy: "I pretty much like what I have. The trouble with that is, then you get afraid somebody will take it from you"(72). This lethal combination conspires to make him fearful of change. In particular, the passage of time threatens Rabbit for it reminds him of his own mortality. Regressing from Rabbit Redux, he again views time as an enemy rather than as his element. Even the change of the seasons, that once had reinvigorated Rabbit, ultimately depresses him, "...but then again reminding him he's suffered

another promotion, taken another step up the stairs that has darkness at the head"(171). He dreads aging: "He avoids mirrors, when he used to love them"(6). Above all else, Nelson's emergence as a young adult represents the ravenous nature of time. For much of this novel, Rabbit resists Janice's sound advice: "Nelson's not your enemy. He's your boy and needs you..."(125).

In Rabbit Is Rich, Rabbit manifests his fear of temporality by an anti-comic meticulousness. As in the earlier novels, he is uncomfortable eating food such as roast lamb: "Harry doesn't like to be reminded that these are living things, with eyes and hearts, that we eat; he likes salted nuts, hamburger, Chinese food, mince pie"(104). Even his beloved golf reveals his "Misapplied tenderness": "One of the weaknesses of Rabbit's game is he cannot make himself take a divot ..." (178). Except for fantasizing about Cindy, Rabbit's interest in sex has dwindled. Early in the novel, a farcical scene occurs when an inebriated Janice, intent on sex, interrupts Rabbit as he avidly reads Consumer Reports in bed:

Naked, Janice bumps against the doorframe from their bathroom back into their bedroom. Naked, she lurches on to the bed where he is trying to read the July issue of Consumer Reports and thrusts her tongue into his mouth. He tastes Gallo, baloney, and toothpaste while his mind is still trying to sort out the virtues and failings of the great range of can openers put to the test over five close pages of print. (50)

In her coarseness, lustiness, and clumsiness, Janice embodies the earthy comic figure antithetical to the fastidious Rabbit. As elsewhere in the novel, his shrinking from sexuality is linked to his fear of death. Later in the novel, when he thinks that for the rest of his life his only sexual partner will be Janice, "...his heart just sinks. He'll never fuck anybody again in his lifetime except poor Janice Springer, he sees this

possibility ahead of him straight and grim as the known road"(347).

The novel's two epigraphs convey Rabbit's smugness and uneasiness. The first connects Rabbit to Sinclair Lewis' Babbitt, another businessman and member of the bourgeoisie:

"At night he lights up a good cigar, and climbs into the little old 'bus, and maybe cusses the carburetor, and shoots out home. He mows the lawn, or sneaks in some practice putting, and then he's ready for dinner."
-- George Babbitt, of the Ideal Citizen

Rabbit shares with Babbitt more than just an interest in golf and cars. During the period between Rabbit Redux and this novel, Rabbit, as Ruth observes, has become one of the fat cats he had once disdained, "A regular Brewer sharpie. A dealer. The kind of person you used to hate. Remember?"(443) When he thinks of his parents' economic struggles during his childhood, "Rabbit basks above that old remembered world, rich, at rest"(69). Learning of the black revolutionary Skeeter's death, Rabbit feels relieved that this agitator can no longer threaten society. And Nelson accuses his father, "All you think about is money and things"(119).

Befitting the cyclic nature of comedy, Rabbit has regained his status as a big fish in a small pond. Not since his high school basketball stardom, before the series began, has he enjoyed such respect within the community. The relationship between the sports glory of his teen-age years and his current self-satisfaction is underscored by the "...framed old clippings and team portraits, including two all-county tens, from his days as a basketball hero twenty years--no more than twenty years ago" that adorn his office walls(4). The nightmarish headlines in Rabbit Redux blaring his misfortunes and humiliations have been replaced by actual ones saluting past heroics:

"Angstrom hits for 42. 'Rabbit' Leads Mt. Judge Into Semi-Finals." This memorabilia, "Resurrected from his dead parents' attic...had been Fred Springer's idea, along with that phrase about an agency's reputation being the shadow of the man up front"(4). Now once again Rabbit is "the man up front." The rebirth undergone in Rabbit Redux has led to his present prosperity; Rabbit is "...serene in his middle years"(8). He relishes his comeback: "He likes being part of all that; he likes the nod he gets from the community that had overlooked him like dirt since high school"(6).

Nevertheless, a disconcerting hint of temporality is present: "Even under glass, the clippings keep yellowing..."(4). In the earlier novels Rabbit struggled with failure; in this book, the comic hero contends with the problematic nature of success. The other epigraph, from Wallace Stevens' "A Rabbit as King of the Ghosts," hints at Rabbit's insecurity:

The difficulty to think at the end of the day
When the shapeless shadow covers the sun
And nothing is left except light on your fur--

In contrast to the shadow of the old newspaper clippings that celebrate Rabbit's past, this shadow is as ominous as the omen of the eagle is for Chiron in The Centaur. The phrases "end of the day" and "nothing left" convey Rabbit's sense of time running out. At the beginning of the novel ("king of the lot,"5) and at the end ("Harry was king of the castle,"456) images depict Rabbit as a king. For most of the novel, however, it is an uneasy head that wears the crown. Fearful of relinquishing his place in the sun, Rabbit desperately wishes to maintain the status quo: "Take over, young America. Eat me up. But one thing at a time, Jesus. There's tons of

time"(122). Galligan notes that one of the "five recurring images in comic literature... is its image of time and change as cyclical and unthreatening" (30,34).

Lynch elaborates:

The withdrawal from the flow of time is such an escape from experience; the attempt to reject or to ignore any part of the temporal movement, to hold on too tightly to any part of it, produces not freedom, and not inviolability but a kind of slavery.

(52)

Like Peter Caldwell in The Centaur, Rabbit wishes to stop time. Ultimately, however, each protagonist will learn that not only is such a desire impossible, but that, paradoxically, freedom is achieved by accepting one's place in time. As a pair, the epigraphs of Rabbit Is Rich reflect Frye's two comic emotions: ridicule and sympathy. On one hand, Rabbit's Babbitt-like complacency is foolish and deserving of comeuppance; on the other, his concern for his own finitude is natural and understandable.

The opening of the novel reveals Rabbit's hopes of staying outside the hurly-burly of the quotidian:

Running out of gas, Rabbit Angstrom thinks as he stands behind the summer-dusty windows of the Springer Motors display room watching the traffic go by on Route 111, traffic somehow thin and scared compared to what it used to be. The fucking world is running out of gas. But they won't catch him, not yet, because there isn't a piece of junk on the road gets better mileage than his Toyotas, with lower service costs.

(3)

America is suffering the frustrations and fears of the energy crisis and its attendant effects; but Rabbit, significantly separated from the street scene by a window, feels insulated by his lucrative association with the foreign-made energy-efficient Toyotas.

Recalling Rabbit Redux, Rabbit hopes to utilize his business--as Peter Caldwell tries to use his art in The Centaur--to distance himself from the demands of life. Rabbit's gazing through a window here recalls a similar passage early in Rabbit, Run when, as a young father, he peered enviously through his parents' kitchen window at the homely tableau of his mother, father, sister, and son eating dinner. Then, Rabbit, feeling incapable of providing in his own home the romanticized familial bliss he imagines before him, fled in despair; here, the scene before him is one of confusion and panic, and he is glad to remain removed from it. Nevertheless, as in Rabbit, Run and Rabbit Redux, events will force him to reaffirm his place within the comic world. Eventually, Rabbit will discover that his affluence will not protect him from life's vicissitudes. In the qualification "not yet" already there is an indication of a dim suspicion that he cannot indefinitely remain detached from the encroaching world. Rabbit's reluctance to accept reality is dramatized in the novel's three main plot lines: his wish that Annabelle Byer is his lost daughter, his infatuation with the youthful Cindy, and most of all his rivalry with Nelson. Each of these manifests Rabbit's preference for wishful thinking as a substitute for accepting reality. Circumstances, however, gradually force Rabbit to give up his fantasies, thus illustrating Frye's notion of the "... importance of the theme of creating and dispelling illusion in comedy" (Anatomy, 170).

His longing for a daughter reflects the recently affluent Rabbit's Gatsby-like desire to recreate the past. In part, he vaguely hopes to replace his two dead daughters, the drowned baby Rebecca and the burnt surrogate daughter Jill.

Moreover, he hopes to assuage his guilt for abandoning Ruth in Rabbit, Run by funding the girl's education: "It's not for you, it would be for her. I can't give a lot. I mean, I'm not that rich. But if a couple thousand would make a difference --"(447). Rabbit's obsession with the girl also reflects nostalgia for his youthful love affair with Ruth:

He does not know if he loved her or not, but with her he had known love, had experienced that cloudy inflation of self which makes us infants again and tips each moment with a plain excited purpose. (112)

Rabbit has not found such love since. When Annabelle enters his showroom, she reminds the blunt Rabbit of Ruth: "A little touch of the hooker about her"(14); enviously, he disdains her boyfriend. Finally, Rabbit's desire for a daughter reflects his rivalry with Nelson. When Ruth asks Rabbit why he has no interest in claiming either of her two sons as his child, he snaps: "'I have one boy. He's enough'--the phrase just comes-- 'bad news'"(444). He finds an imaginary child easier to deal with than a real one; moreover, a daughter, unlike a son, does not threaten his position at work or at home. His refusal to confront Ruth confirms that his yearning for a daughter amounts to wishful thinking: "It's true, he could have looked her up, he even knew she lived around Galilee. But he hadn't. He hadn't wanted to face her, the complicated and accusing reality of her"(112). Galligan distinguishes between wishful thinking and wishfulness: "Comedy is the mode for realistic, wishing but not wishful, imaginations"(34). Early on, Janice exposes her husband's fantasizing:

"You always want what you don't have instead of what you do. Getting all cute and smiley in the face thinking about this girl that doesn't exist while your real son, that you had with your wife, is waiting at home right now and you saying you wished he'd stay in Colorado." (72)

Rabbit's crush on Cindy Murkett also reflects wishful thinking. For Rabbit, fantasizing about younger women is a way of escaping his role in time. Ogling the comely Cindy, Rabbit focuses on her youthfulness (Babbitt also has an ideal "fairy girl"). Although she is almost thirty, Rabbit views her as a teenager ("...still smelling of high school") and even an infant (the lower part of her bathing suit is a "black diaper," 57). He envies Webb Murkett, old enough to be Cindy's father. At the country club pool when parents hand towels to their "clean children," Rabbit notices Cindy's towel dangling from her empty chair as she swims: "To be Cindy's towel and to be sat upon by her: the thought dries Harry's mouth" (68). When Cindy shocks Rabbit by disclosing her fear of sterility, he remonstrates, "But you're a baby" (294).

Despite his sexual attraction to Cindy, Rabbit cannot ignore entirely the age gap between them. On the plane to the Caribbean, "Cindy seems, in this confusion, amiable but remote, a younger sister..." (393). At the wedding of Nelson and Pru, meeting the bride's mother reminds Rabbit that he belongs with women of his own generation:

Rabbit realizes with a shock that she is his proper date: old as she seems this woman is about his age and instead of naked in dreamland with stacked chicks like Cindy Murkett and Grace Stuhl's grandson's girlfriend he should be in mental bed with the likes of Mrs. Lubell. (250)

The references to "dreamland" and "mental bed" suggest an awareness of the fanciful nature of his desires. Significantly, this recognition occurs at Nelson's marriage, a ceremony Rabbit had opposed because it signifies his son's coming of age. Before

the wedding, both young women Nelson brings home, his classmate Melanie and his fiancée, Pru, pique Rabbit's interest. Melanie, who returns with Nelson from Kent State to watch over him for her friend Pru, keeps Rabbit at a distance; nevertheless, he envies the middle-aged Stavros' intimacy with her. Although the cagey Stavros sensibly recognizes that his affair with Melanie will be short-lived, his audacity in vacationing with a young woman thirty years his junior, as well as the account of Melanie's father dropping out of a successful law career to live "out there on the West Coast fucking Indian maidens"(272), impresses Rabbit. When he recognizes that Prudence is pregnant, Rabbit "...is touched by her, turned on: he wants to be giving her this baby"(184). This reaction unites the three elements of Rabbit's wishful thinking: his attraction to younger women, his desire for another child, and his oedipal rivalry with Nelson.

Ultimately, the shallowness of Rabbit's infatuation with Cindy becomes apparent. For all his lustiness, Rabbit remains essentially prudish; echoing Janice's characterization of her husband in Rabbit Redux, Thelma remarks, "You're such a sweet prude, Harry"(412). When Rabbit discovers hidden photos of the Murketts having sex, the pornographic images of Cindy shock as well as excite him:

... he tries to tear his mind loose from that image of her open mouth laughing at the sight of herself being fucked, who would have thought sweet Cindy could be so dirty? It takes some doing to realize that other boys are like you are, that dirty, and then to realize that girls can go right along with it takes more than one lifetime to assimilate. (308)

Later, the fastidious Rabbit will be "appalled...by this coarse crowd he's in" that includes Cindy (408). Meanwhile, women Rabbit's age, even if still attractive, fail to

interest him. Although Janice has maintained her figure, Rabbit requires the titillation of lucre to become sexually stimulated: "Nothing like the thought of fucking money"(188). Two farcical scenes, equally incongruous and outrageous, depict his perverseness. After purchasing thirty Krugerrands, Rabbit becomes excited during foreplay with Janice amid the coins:

She is still examining the coin, stroking its subtle relief, when he wants her attention to turn to him. He hasn't had a hard-on just blossom in his pants since he can't remember when. (217)

Later, after exchanging the gold for silver, Rabbit and Janice transport the coins to a bank for storage. Within the vault, as they fill a safe deposit pouch with the coins, Rabbit becomes aroused: "He takes one of the silver dollars and slips it down the neck of her linen blouse into her bra"(373).

Rabbit estimates even the idealized Cindy in terms of monetary value. When the idea of swapping spouses is broached to Webb, "The old fox knows he has the treasure to barter"(407). For Rabbit, Cindy's youth and beauty are her currency, and, just as the value of gold and silver fluctuates with time, so will she. Gazing at the intimate photographs, Rabbit notes subtle signs of her aging: "She's getting there. She will get fatter. She will turn ugly"(307). The day after his night with Thelma, Rabbit reevaluates Cindy in her bathing suit, "She is getting fatter, day by day. Better hurry, he tells himself"(423). In the final novel of the series, Rabbit's intuition becomes fact. By 40, Cindy has lost her figure and beauty; discarded by Webb for a still younger wife, she ends up bitter and alone. On the flight home, Janice confides to her husband, "Webb says she's not that wonderful"(427).

Finally, the chief manifestation of Rabbit's wishful thinking is his refusal to accept Nelson as an adult. Early on, Rabbit recalls that his uneasiness with his son began when Nelson reached puberty:

From about that time on he began to feel crowded, living with the kid. As long as Nelson was socked into baseball statistics or that guitar or even the rock records that threaded their sound through all the fibers of the house, his occupation of the room down the hall was no more uncomfortable than the persistence of Rabbit's own childhood in an annex of his brain; but when the stuff with hormones and girls and cars and beers began, Harry wanted out of fatherhood. (212)

As in the other novels, the thought of the succeeding generation makes Rabbit feel "crowded" and threatened. He admires Webb for distancing himself from his own grown children ("When those kids turned twenty-one, boy or girl, I told each one of them, 'It's been nice knowing you, but you're on your own now,'" 176); thereupon, he has begun a new family with Cindy, but the two young children never disturb the Murketts' parties or even appear in the novel. For Rabbit, "Two glimpses mark the limits of his comfort in this matter of men descending from men." He remembers at age thirteen seeing his father dressing and being dismayed by the sight of "the mute and helpless flesh"; in contrast, as a father himself, he recalls accidentally surprising the fourteen year old Nelson as the boy emerged from a shower: "...he had pubic hair and, though his body was still slim and pint-sized, a man-sized prick, heavy and oval, unlike Rabbit's circumcised and perhaps because of this looking brutal, and big. Big"(212).

Unlike the paragon George Caldwell who sacrifices himself for his son, Rabbit views Nelson as an adversary: "It's great to have an enemy. Sharpens your

senses"(125). Despite the wise counsel of Stavros ("Don't give up on the kid. He's all you got,"27) and Janice, Rabbit girds himself for Nelson's challenge. He begins jogging in preparation for "The big bout"(142). Associating "big" with Nelson underscores the life and death nature of this struggle in Rabbit's mind:

"It's now or never," he tells her, the blood of fantasy rushing through his brain. "There's people out to get me. I can lie down now. Or fight."
 "Who's out to get you?"
 "You should know. You hatched him." (142)

With "the blood of fantasy rushing through his brain," Rabbit dehumanizes his son ("You hatched him"). Rabbit's overreaction is evident in his vow "To press against. Your own limitations.'" Training for a showdown with Nelson, Rabbit feels immortal: "He loves the earth, he will never die"(142). This bravado is closer to tragedy than comedy. As Scott notes, tragic figures like Oedipus and Lear "...soon exhaust themselves in the effort to gain release from the restrictions that are a consequence of their finitude"(90). By contrast, comedy respects limitations. Without the burden of an oedipal syndrome, the down-to-earth Janice has no difficulty accepting Nelson's maturing: "Typical of the way things have gone, that the kid's growing up should seem a threat and tragedy to him and to her an excuse to steal a T-shirt"(138). According to McFadden, comedy suggests that accepting everyday reality is the best way for human beings to survive and endure(166). The sensible Janice grasps this notion while her proud husband does not.

In Rabbit's overheated imagination, the son's ascension signals his own immediate demise. Symbolically, Nelson's desertion of his own family does dash

Rabbit's last opportunity for bliss with Cindy. On the plane ride home a gloomy Rabbit senses that he has reached his apex and from now on can only fall: "He has risen as far as he can, the possibility of such women is falling from him, falling with so many other possibilities as he descends"(428). Martin Grotjahn, in "Beyond Laughter," included in Corrigan's Comedy: Meaning and Form, elaborates on the nature of the oedipal syndrome in comedy:

The psychodynamics of the comedy can be understood as a kind of reversed Oedipal situation in which the son does not rebel against the father but the son's typical attitudes of childhood longing are projected upon the father. The son plays the role of victorious father with sexual freedom and achievement, while the father is cast in the role of the frustrated onlooker. The reversed Oedipus situation is repeated in every man's life when the younger generation grows up and slowly infiltrates and replaces the older generation in work and life. The clown is the comic figure representing the impotent and ridiculed father.

(273)

In Rabbit Is Rich, Nelson enjoys sexual relations with both Melanie and Pru in the house where, after Fred Springer's death, Rabbit had ruled; now Rabbit, attracted to both young women and desirous of impregnating Pru, becomes the frustrated onlooker. In their generational struggle, the son appears to gain the upper hand. At Nelson's wedding, significantly, the father feels the "itch...to play the disruptive clown"(244). Moreover, unlike Rabbit, who never had the opportunity to attend college or travel, Nelson goes away to study at Kent State University and he hang-glides in Colorado. In contrast to the provincial father, the son, who thinks nothing of hitchhiking across the United States, majors in geography. Worst of all, Rabbit must now accept Nelson's invasion of the family business. Just as Fred Springer had prepared the way for his son-in-law, who, as Ma Springer points out, was at that time

no more promising than Nelson is here, it is time that Rabbit "make room" for his son. Rabbit's sense that everything is running out--energy, time, money--stems from his narcissistic fear of his own mortality. Spitefully, Rabbit welcomes the world's end: "It gives him pleasure, makes Rabbit feel rich, to contemplate the world's wasting, to know that the earth is mortal too"(12). Comedy, however, undermines such selfishness; instead, it celebrates a generous live-and-let-live attitude. Rabbit himself admits, "The world keeps ending but new people too dumb to know it keep showing up as if the fun's just starting"(88). Over the course of the novel, Rabbit will gradually learn that there is enough energy, time, and space for both his generation and the next, for him and Nelson. Once again it falls to the wise Mim, fittingly at Nelson's wedding, to enlighten her brother: "You must let go, Harry. The boy's life is his, you live your own"(241). Rabbit's resistance to Nelson's return to Brewer stems partly from a hope that the son not repeat the father's mistakes: "'I just don't like seeing you caught,' he blurts out to Nelson. 'You're too much like me'"(208).

Nevertheless, Rabbit's stance is self serving for it denies Nelson his individuality in favor of Rabbit's wishes. Nelson's marriage symbolizes his coming of age: "You say I'm caught but I don't feel caught, I feel like I'm becoming a man"(208). Frye observes, "The appearance of the new society is frequently symbolized by some kind of party or festive ritual"(*Anatomy*,163). This changing of the guard is natural and vital. Langer notes comedy's association with celebrations like weddings(124). The wedding proves a joyous event, and despite the expense,

even Rabbit becomes philosophical amid the gathering of family and friends: "What the hell, we're all going down the chute together"(249). Pru's pregnant condition emphasizes the marriage's celebration of life: "The secret knowledge shared by all that she is pregnant enriches her beauty"(242,43). According to Langer, comedy celebrates Comus, a fertility god who is "...a symbol of perpetual rebirth, eternal life"(124). Hence, the marriage of Nelson and Pru marks a stage in the succession of generations.

True to comedy's promise, Rabbit's acceptance of Nelson's individuality helps lead to his own liberation. At the crowded reception in Ma Springer's gloomy Victorian home, which has always reminded Rabbit of a fairytale "witch's house"(38), it occurs to him:

It's always slightly dark in the living room, no matter how many lights are on or what the time of day, the trees and the porch cut down the sun. He'd like a house some day with lots of light, splashing in across smart square surfaces. Why bury yourself alive? (253)

The comic authority Stavros prods him, "How come you and Jan keep living in that shabby old barn with her mother?"(272) To live a rich life, human beings must take chances and cross boundaries. Elsewhere, Stavros succinctly articulates Updike's comic creed: "Being crazy is what keeps us alive"(90). In Rabbit Is Rich, "crazy" becomes an honorific term. Nelson reminds his father how in order to sell used cars in "...the good old days" Charlie and "...old man Springer used to do all these crazy things, they'd give away stuffed animals and crates of oranges..."(165) When Nelson purchases large American cars and a British Triumph for resale, Rabbit denigrates these vehicles as "crazy cars"; eventually, however, Nelson's business instincts prove

correct and these "crazy cars" sell at a profit. During the quarrel between father and son over this investment, after Nelson, in a fit of pique that expresses his hostility, crashes these cars "comically fast," Rabbit charges that this behavior "...borders on crazy"(172). Springer Motors symbolizes Rabbit's power, and continually throughout the novel Nelson attacks his father by wrecking cars from the dealership.

Unexpectedly, however, Rabbit's reaction to his son's spree at "the lot" reveals his subconscious sympathy with Nelson's aggression. Rather than outraging Rabbit, Nelson's attack brings forth "These strange awkward blobs of joy bobbing in Harry's chest"(170). This incident too achieves "anecdotal permanence": "... it has become a story he tells on himself"(170). Vaguely, Rabbit recognizes that his intransigence is as inhibiting for himself as for his son. Later, after evading Ruth's collie while spying on her farm, Rabbit reflects, "He hasn't felt so close to breaking out of his rut since Nelson smashed those convertibles" (282). To emerge from his doldrums, Rabbit must change. When Rabbit finally approaches Ruth's door, he momentarily panics ("This is crazy. Run!"437) before overcoming his fears and confronting reality.

New experiences prove liberating. En route to his daring Caribbean holiday, Rabbit describes the Brewer airport in carnivalesque terms:

Ever since the airport he has been amazed by other people: the carpeted corridors seem thronged with freaks, people in crazy sizes and clothes, girls with dead-white complexions and giant eyeglasses and hair frizzed out to fill a bushel basket, black men swaggering along in long fur coats and hip-hugging velvet suits, a tall pale boy in a turban and a down vest, a dwarf in a tam-o'-shanter, a woman so obese she couldn't sit in the molded plastic chairs of the waiting areas and had to stand propping herself on a three-legged aluminum cane. Life outside

Brewer was gaudy, wild. Everyone was a clown in costume. Rabbit and his five companions were in costume too....(389-390)

These images and references suggest that Rabbit is embarking on an adventure that will ultimately, in Kern's words, provide him with a "...vision of man sub specie aeternitatis"(8). Like Skeeter's eye-opening lectures in Rabbit Redux, this scene furnishes Rabbit with "...the revelation that outside Brewer there is a planet without ruts worn in it." Rabbit feels "Free: the dead and the living alike have been left five miles below in the haze that has annulled the earth like breath on a mirror"(390). Unlike Rabbit Redux where, amid the euphoria of the expedition to the moon Rabbit was one of those "left behind" in earth-bound deadening routine, here he embarks on an exhilarating visit to another planet. Out of his "rut," Rabbit, true to the spirit of the carnivalesque, gives himself to the moment and plunges into a new lifestyle: playing, partying, spending freely, gambling recklessly, and even, despite being "a land animal," sailing a Sunfish that, "Once you get going you don't feel how fast you're moving, the water having no landmarks"(403). That Rabbit is not entirely successful in these endeavors does not diminish their value. Although Webb shoots the best golf, Rabbit loses \$300 at the casino, and the sailboat overturns, Rabbit renews himself. Crossing boundaries is risky and fraught with danger--Rabbit "...feels shaky and humiliated"(398) after losing at blackjack and the sailing "episode is inglorious"(405)--but such new experiences are essential for growth. In life there is no gain without pain; like George Caldwell, Rabbit learns anew that humiliation and embarrassment are part of the human condition.

Moreover, venturing outside his safe niche allows Rabbit to discern the

difference between fantasy and possibility. All of these new experiences are prologue to his overriding goal: sleeping with Cindy. True to the spirit of comedy, the outcome shall be quite different from the anticipation (Rabbit observes in another context, "As with many joys it does not come exactly as envisioned"213). In mischievously thwarting Rabbit's unrealistic aims, fate instead provides him with a far more valuable experience. Allowing themselves the comic freedom to act "crazy" helps keep human beings vital, more receptive to the possibilities life offers, and, ironically, better in touch with reality ("If life offers you something, take it,"222). As Martin notes, in a non-prudential world, caution becomes irrelevant(81).

Crowded by Nelson in Ma Springer's house, Rabbit finally recognizes that, as the realistic Pru urges, "...it's natural ...in a couple that age to want your own space"(358). Granting his son space, Rabbit creates more room for himself. This greater independence is mental as well as physical: "He thinks in this room he might begin to read books, instead of just magazines and newspapers, and begin to learn about history, say"(453). His new home "...hints to him of many reforms and consolidations now possible in his life, like new shoots on a tree cropped back"(453). The simile is apt for in the two preceding novels in the series, plant stalks had been used as symbols of rebirth. Symbolically, Rabbit and Janice choose New Year's Day as the date to tell her mother about their new house and new life. As in the other Rabbit novels, his recognition of his place in time and society, true to the scheme of comedy, is ongoing rather than final. This process requires a lifetime of experience and will be dramatized over the full series; nevertheless, in the course of Rabbit Is

Rich, Rabbit matures. Tragedy focuses on endings; comedy, on beginnings. Rabbit's acceptance of the next generation's emergence indirectly leads to another fresh start for himself. No one is ever too old for renewal. Even the elderly Ma Springer, distraught by Rabbit and Janice's desertion, rebounds from despair. On their return from the Caribbean, the Angstroms find "...her at the terminus of the last great effort of her life. Henceforth, she is in their hands." This verdict, however, turns out to be premature. On the next page, the old woman, in order to replace the vanished Nelson, "...wasn't so totally thrown by events that she didn't have the wit to call up Charlie Stavros and have him come back to the lot"(429,430).

Rabbit's rebirth entails more than a new house. In Rabbit Is Rich, as in its predecessors in the series, God is an elusive presence. Early in the book, Rabbit fleetingly muses, "Rain, the last proof left to him that God exists"(125). At long last successful, Rabbit thinks about God as little as possible. Doing so makes him uncomfortable because he associates God with death:

When Harry was little God used to spread in the dark above his bed like that and then when the bed became strange and the girl in the next aisle grew armpit hair He entered in the blood and muscle as an odd command and now He had withdrawn, giving Harry the respect due from one well-off gentleman to another, but for a calling card left in the pit of his stomach, a bit of lead true as a plumb bob pulling Harry down toward all these leaden dead in the hollow earth below. (231)

Elsewhere, Rabbit muses, "He doesn't want to think about the invisible anyway, every time in his life he's made a move toward it somebody has gotten killed"(162). At the same time, God's remoteness is unsettling. Discussing their concern over Nelson, Janice assures Rabbit that as parents they have done their best. She concludes

by noting, "'We're not God.'" In reply, Rabbit concurs, "'Nobody is'...scaring himself"(312). The concept of a Godless universe is antithetical to Christian comedy, for although comedy presents the world as absurd and arbitrary, this is only the facade. Beneath the chaos, there is an order to life, what Galligan calls "...a rock-bottom reality..." where "...life is good..."(24). Lynch declares, "Let us not talk of incongruity as the secret clue to comedy, but of congruity, of the tie between earth and Christ, with all the logic omitted"(115). Joyce Carol Oates charges, "When the comic vision is weak in Updike's writing, a terrible nihilism beckons..."(67). Nevertheless, in Rabbit Is Rich, as in the other Rabbit novels and The Centaur, the comic vision eventually predominates; before the novel ends, Rabbit will eventually rediscover his faith within the quotidian.

For much of the novel, however, Rabbit and God are estranged: "Sometimes he prays a few words at night but a stony truce seems to prevail between himself and God"(140). Rabbit's inability to pray is linked with his diminishing sexual powers. In bed at night, he finds it difficult either to pray or maintain an erection. For the meticulous Rabbit, both God and sexuality are discomfiting reminders of reality. During the arrangement of a church wedding for Nelson and Pru, Rabbit envies the homosexual minister, Archie Campbell:

Before reaching into the breast pocket of the seersucker coat, Campbell taps out the bowl of his pipe with a finicky calm that conveys to Rabbit the advantages of being queer: the world is just a gag to this guy. He walks on water; the mud of women, of making babies, never dirties his shoes. You got to take off your hat to him: nothing touches him. That's real religion. (202).

Rabbit's wishful thinking extends to religion as well. He longs for a faith that will

insulate him from life, where he can walk on water and never soil his shoes. Significantly, he wishes to distance himself from the quotidian that is represented by earthly dirt. Earlier in this scene, upset by Nelson's atheism, Rabbit at first responds portentously, "Hell, what I think about religion is--" before concluding, with everyone's eyes on him, weakly, "--is without a little of it, you'll sink"(198). In return, "The boy sneers, 'Well don't sink, Dad, whatever you do.'" As the meticulous figure intent on distancing himself from life, Rabbit hopes to compartmentalize God. In the fearful Rabbit's view, a "little" of religion is necessary to safeguard human beings from harm, from "sinking" into unpleasant reality.

In contrast, Reverend Campbell instructs Nelson and Pru: "Marriage is not merely a rite; it is a sacrament, an invitation from God to participate in the divine. And the invitation is not for one moment only. Every day you share is meant to be sacramental"(201). These words define the role of the divine within the daily quotidian; fittingly for the unpredictable nature of comedy, they come from, in Rabbit's judgment, an unlikely source. Rabbit disdains the clergyman as "prissy" and, likening him to Mad Magazine's Alfred E. Newman, foolish. Yet, it is this "fag" who articulates God's involvement in everyday life, including procreation:

"I was born in January," Archie Campbell says, rising. He grins to show his seedy teeth. "In my case, after much prayer. My parents were ancient. It's a wonder I'm here at all." (202)

The reference to his "seedy" teeth, repeated during the wedding scene, connects Campbell with the image of seeds that in Updike's fiction represents life and rebirth. In The Centaur, seeds are associated with the humble janitor, Heller, whose sweeping

of the corridors renews the school daily; in Rabbit, Run, Rabbit marvels at the seeds in Mrs. Smith's garden that produce life; in Rabbit Redux, seeds are identified with Skeeter, who plays a crucial role in reviving Rabbit. Here, Campbell recounts that his birth was accomplished by prayer and describes it as a "wonder." In comedy the miraculous occurs in the context of everyday life.

This truth is brought home to Rabbit during the night he spends with Thelma Harrison in her Caribbean hotel room. As in Rabbit Redux, Rabbit begins the process of renewal when he dares to cross his usual boundaries. On the airplane to the Caribbean, "Joy makes his heart pound. God, having shrunk in Harry's middle years to the size of a raisin lost under the car seat, is suddenly great again, everywhere like a radiant wind"(390). On the island Rabbit and his friends cross another kind of boundary when they arrange to swap spouses for the evening. In a scene that parallels George Caldwell's religious experience outside a rough New Jersey saloon in The Centaur and Rabbit's own within the menacing black bar in Rabbit Redux, intimacy with Thelma provides Rabbit with a revelation:

That void, inside her. He can't take his mind from what he's discovered, that nothingness seen by his single eye. In the shadows, while humid blue moonlight and the rustle of palms seep through the louvers by the bed, he trusts himself to her as if speaking in prayer, talks to her about himself as he has talked to none other: about Nelson and the grudge he bears the kid and the grudge the boy bears him, and about his daughter, he thinks he has, grown and ignorant of him. He dares confide to Thelma, because she has let him fuck her up the ass in proof of love, his sense of miracle at being himself, himself instead of someone else, and his old inkling, now fading in the energy crunch, that there was something that wanted him to find it, that he was here on earth on a kind of assignment. (419)

Only comedy would permit a character the audacity to rediscover his faith by means

of anal sex. Although God is not explicitly mentioned, the wording "speaking in prayer," "sense of miracle," and "confide," a cognate of faith, suggest the spiritual nature of this experience ; moreover, the expression, "here on earth on a kind of assignment," suggests that earthly life is temporary and ancillary to a transcendent existence. Finally, Thelma's comment after the above passage, "'It makes you'--the word is hard for her to find--'radiant'"(419), employs the same adjective that Rabbit had used on the airplane to describe God's reappearance as "a radiant wind"(390). The importance of this word, with its connotations of the heavens, is emphasized by Thelma's deliberate search for the precise term.

Rabbit's sex with Thelma reaffirms his faith in life: "Since fucking Thelma up the ass he's felt freer, more in love with the world again"(430). Earlier in the novel, in a moment of despair, Rabbit had thought, "From a certain angle the most terrifying thing in the world is your own life, the fact that it's yours and no one else's"(182). At the same time he had complained, "The problem is, even if there is a Heaven how can there be one we can stand forever?" This question, framed in the comic vernacular, echoes the stately lines from Stevens' poem, "Sunday Morning":

Is there no change of death in paradise?
Does ripe fruit never fall? Or do the boughs
Hang always heavy in that perfect sky,
Unchanging,

This poem explores the religious yearnings that exist even within a non-believer and hedonist. Rabbit, while lacking the sophistication of the persona in "Sunday Morning," resembles her in his estrangement from God and his position within the self-centered confines of Kierkegaard's aesthetic sphere. The frustrated Rabbit feels

trapped within his routine but receives no comfort in contemplating a sterile afterlife.

Stevens' stanza concludes:

Death is the mother of beauty, mystical,
Within whose burning bosom we devise
Our earthly mothers waiting, sleeplessly.

In "Sunday Morning," without death and change all sensuous experience cloys. Until this point in the novel, Rabbit fears death. Girding himself for unappetizing sex with Thelma, he imagines his own death: "...as he will be before the undertakers undress him for the last time"(413). When Rabbit first penetrates Thelma's anus, he finds, "...there is no sensation: a void, a pure black box, a casket of perfect nothingness"(417). Rather than horrifying Rabbit, these images impress upon him that death and change are integral to life. The sex with Thelma renews him, not primarily because of its sensuousness (which is downplayed), but because it reconnects Rabbit to reality. Later, the memory of this experience empowers Rabbit to approach Ruth's farmhouse and confront her about his "daughter": "...he takes that step, drawing heart from that loving void Thelma had confided to him"(437). In contrast to his earlier adolescent fantasies, Thelma represents mature love, reminding him that he should be interested in women his own age ("You should want to fuck me, I'm your generation, Harry. I can see you. To those girls you're just an empty heap of years and money,"420); moreover, Thelma is identified with death (she has lupus) or more aptly an acceptance of death as a part of life ("I'm dying, you know that, don't you?"(415) When Thelma and Rabbit finally fall asleep it is "...as if not a few stolen hours but an entire married life of sanctioned intimacy stretches unto death

before them"(422). In the interim between this novel and the final novel of the series, Thelma becomes Rabbit's mistress; in Rabbit At Rest, her identification with death is reinforced when she dies and Rabbit attends her funeral, the only funeral, aside from the infant Rebecca's in Rabbit, Run, depicted in the series.

The telling phrase, however, is "sanctioned intimacy," suggesting the sacramental nature of their relationship. This phrase harkens back to the minister Campbell's description of marriage, "Every day you share is meant to be sacramental." The intimacy that Rabbit and Thelma experience during their evening together is holy and in effect marriage-like. Reflecting the doubleness of comedy, Thelma functions as a second wife for him in this novel as Ruth did in Rabbit, Run and Jill in Rabbit Redux. Yet, Rabbit's sense that the middle-aged Thelma better suits him than does his dream girl, Cindy, represents an acknowledgement of his place in time. He recognizes that death is the mother of beauty, bestowing value on the individual life. Lynch insists that "The finite intelligence--my term for the intelligence that is devoted to the finite and the concrete--does accept as a basic premise of its own functioning the idea of death"(51). This evening replenishes Rabbit spiritually. Later, he follows Thelma's advice and summons the courage to ask Ruth about the parentage of Annabelle. When Ruth denies that he is the father, Rabbit exhibits the strength to take her word at face value: "Let go. God has never wanted him to have a daughter" (450). Afterwards, he offers, "Maybe God is in the universe the way salt is in the ocean, giving it a taste"(462). This remark reflects God's subtle but ubiquitous presence within everyday life. Earlier in the novel,

Rabbit had recalled his experiences at Sunday School where the minister Kruppenbach "...pounded in the lesson that life has no terrors for those with faith but for those without faith there can be no salvation and no peace. No peace"(71). Elsewhere he recalls his feelings as a basketball player "...when you're down ten points and less than five minutes left on the clock and you've just taken one too many elbows in the ribs, and all the muscles go loose suddenly and something begins lifting you and you know nothing is impossible, with faith"(165). In Rabbit Is Rich, until this episode with Thelma, Rabbit had misplaced the feeling that "something" is "lifting you" and that "nothing is impossible, with faith."

Significantly, both spiritual experiences, aside from occurring in secular settings, take place within the framework of play during a holiday from routine (Thelma is "playful" making love,415). Galligan describes the importance of play in comedy: "Comedy treats play as a way of knowing and as a way of doing--which is why it is so liable to strike respectable people as irresponsible, or even subversive...(37) Aptly, Thelma during the evening, characterizes herself, "I'm crazy, Harry. I got to get you out of my system"(416). Like Stavros, Thelma wisely recognizes that unconventional behavior keeps human beings vital. In the carnivalesque spirit, freeing oneself from inhibitions is reinvigorating. In her combination of innocence and experience (symbolized by the demure schoolteacher exterior that masks her passionate nature and sexual expertise), her Job-like fate as a sufferer of a debilitating disease, and especially her willingness to sacrifice herself ("The one thing I'm absolutely not supposed to do is go out in the sun. I was crazy to

come down here,"415-416), Thelma represents the pharmakos. Describing her unrequited love for Rabbit, she refers to him as "My little hairshirt"(421). As in the other novels, Updike reinforces the identification of a character with this figure by subtly alluding to the word's root meaning. In the Harrisons' bathroom Rabbit discovers a wealth of pharmaceuticals:

Plain as she is, Thelma carries a hefty medicine kit, and beauty aids, plus a sun block called Eclipse, and Solarcaine. Vaseline, too, for some reason. Tampax, in a bigger box than Janice ever buys. And a lot of painkiller, aspirin in several shapes and Darvon and more pills in little prescription bottles than he would have expected. (412)

Before long, Rabbit learns why Thelma carries vaseline with her. Analyzing the role of the pharmakos, Frye declares, "But the element of play is the barrier that separates art from savagery, and playing at human sacrifice seems to be an important theme of ironic comedy"(*Anatomy*,46). By jeopardizing her health through exposure to the sun, Thelma on this holiday is "playing at human sacrifice." Through sexual play with Thelma, as he had achieved by playing basketball, Rabbit gains a greater respect for the sacredness of life. According to Lynch, "The Christian generally believes that time is a passageway into the infinite, and that the latter goal cannot be achieved by any other means"(53). Rabbit can only find his way by running, that is, experiencing life fully. By exposure to the carnivalesque, Rabbit better comprehends the human being's place in eternity.

As in the other novels, Rabbit's renewal will not be accomplished without a visit to the "green world," which exists "...not as an escape from 'reality,' but as the genuine form of the world that human life tries to imitate"(Frye, *Anatomy*,183).

Teasingly, Updike locates it in a number of settings. These include Ma Springer's Poconos cottage where Rabbit, refreshed by nature, "...feels love for each phenomenon and not for the first time in his life seeks to bring himself into harmony with the intertwining simplicities that uphold him ..." (138); the Flying Eagle Tee and Racquet Club, with "its fairways and terraced tennis courts" (61) and chlorinated pool, where the staff wear green uniforms and Rabbit in his green bathing trunks enjoys his privileged status and daydreams about Cindy; and Ruth's farm with the repeated references to the house's "green door" (157). Yet finally none of these green worlds sustains Rabbit. Nelson intrudes upon his father's cozy domestic arrangement; not only do circumstances thwart Rabbit's pursuit of Cindy, but eventually he has misgivings about the country club clique; and as indicated by the various descriptions of Ruth's farmhouse green door as needing "its green paint refreshed" (112), "scabby" (157), and its "paint a poisonous green" (438), Rabbit has no future there either. After at last confronting Ruth, he departs knowing that he will never return: "Both know, what people should never know, that they will not meet again" (450).

Ultimately, the pregnant Pru represents the green world. Repeatedly, Pru is associated with the color green: Rabbit notices her "eyes, a flourishing green" and their "uncanny green clarity" (183); she regularly drinks creme de menthe ("a little bright green gleam of it appears by Pru's elbow at surprising times," 192); in Nelson's jaundiced view, she wears "horrible green platform shoes" (336); her crotch is "like the center of a flagrant green flower" (338). With child, Prudence represents fertility and vitality. Frye notes, "In the rituals and myths the earth that produces the rebirth

is generally a female figure ..."(183) In Rabbit Redux, this young woman embodies the earth mother, recalling the line in Stevens' "Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction," "...my green, my fluent mundo." On his initial meeting with Pru, Rabbit quickly senses that she is pregnant. With this revelation, the world changes. The walls of the Springer house "...change meaning, containing this seed between them"(184); even the old room's furnishings revive: "...all these souvenirs of the dead bristle with new point, with fresh mission, if as Harry imagines this intruder's secret is a child to come"(184). "This seed," the image recurrent in Updike's fiction, promises a viable rebirth. Frye comments, "The green world charges the comedies with the symbolism of the victory of summer over winter..."(183). Through Nelson's union with Pru, Rabbit finally gains a female descendent. The very end of the novel finds Rabbit holding, for the first time, his granddaughter: "Fortune's hostage, heart's desire, a granddaughter. His. Another nail in his coffin. His"(467). The wording conveys Rabbit's range of emotions: a sense of the continuity between generations, his awareness that all along he had desired a female descendent, and an acceptance of his own mortality. Like Fred Springer, some day Rabbit, in turn, will "make space."

Rabbit Is Rich ends with Rabbit renewed. Expressing a deeper faith grounded in reality, he reaffirms: "Life is sweet. That's what they say"(463). With Nelson back at Kent State, "The kid was no threat to him for now. Harry was king of the castle"(456). Accepting his role has resulted in an enlarged kingdom, his own home and a granddaughter, as well as a richer appreciation of life. Now Rabbit understands the comic wisdom of living in the present: "No point in keeping secrets, we'll all be

dead soon enough, already we're survivors, the kids are everywhere, making the music, giving the news"(462). This novel's depiction of the gradual succession of the generations reflects Frye's description of the fundamental dynamic of comedy:

Thus the movement from *pistis* to *gnosis*, from a society controlled by habit, ritual bondage, arbitrary law and the older characters to a society controlled by youth and pragmatic freedom is fundamentally, as the Greek words suggest, a movement from illusion to reality. Illusion is whatever is fixed and definable, and reality is best understood as its negative: whatever reality is, it's not that. (169,170)

Rabbit's wishful thinking has been exposed: "...whatever reality is, it's not that." As Galligan avers, the maturity of comedy allows for wishfulness but not wishful thinking. Recognizing that it is the human condition to be foolish, Rabbit no longer admires the smug, univocal Webb: "Harry suddenly hates people who seem to know; they would keep us blind to the fact that there is nothing to know"(425). Just as Rabbit had felt trapped in a "net" in Rabbit, Run, in this novel the aptly named Webb Murkett (web, murky), with his glamorous wife, showy house, and authoritative manner, at first captivates the impressionable Rabbit. According to Kerry Ahearn, Webb is a "devilish character" ("Webb's shadow...with horns") who "...embodies self-containment and unquestioned power in marriage and family"(77). As the leader of the Caribbean excursion, Webb becomes the "trickster figure" who instigates the group's carnivalesque activities (He establishes in a lengthy "sermon" the ground rules for exchanging spouses,407). By the novel's end, however, Rabbit's disenchantment with Webb suggests a rejection of smugness and univocalness in favor of humility and double vision: "The comic is par excellence the great enemy of the univocal mind"(Lynch,113).

As Rabbit watches the Superbowl, the halftime performers, "...kids...born, can you believe it, around 1960 at the earliest" sing "Energy is people...People are energy"(465). According to Lynch, "...the truest and the most accurate form of comedy and laughter..." is "...this song of indestructibility, the song of the indestructibility of the people"(107). Such sentiments celebrate the faith in what Lynch calls the "generative finite"(27). Galligan elaborates: "Perhaps the plainest illustration of his concept of the generative finite is the aging process. The best way to understand, or at least to dissipate the confusion of one age, is to proceed into the ages that follow"(26). No longer threatened by the younger generation, in his everyday behavior Rabbit acknowledges his place in time. Even if "Our tears are always young"(451), human beings age; as Charlie Stavros observes in another context, "There comes a time"(271). Rabbit accepts the necessity of preserving his history, the fading clippings of his high school basketball exploits ("Might as well blow them up big, it's a business expense"), as well as his health: "At his age you wear a hat"(434). At the same time, he is more keenly aware of the possibilities contained within the quotidian: "Nelson having stolen his Corona, Harry has allocated to himself a grape-blue Celica Supra, the ultimate Toyota ..."(434) The cars' names are significant: if Nelson has reached for his father's crown, Rabbit in turn has achieved transcendence: "The Corona for all its dependable qualities was a stodgy little bug, whereas this blue buzzard has charisma"(434). Rabbit's experience in this novel recalls George Caldwell's in The Centaur. Like Caldwell, Rabbit, by accepting his role in the generations, discovers freedom. Ralph C. Wood notes, "He finds

himself strangely upheld rather than oppressed by mortal limits and responsibilities" (283). Wood, however, perhaps overstates Rabbit's transformation when he concludes, "...Angstrom learns to save his own life only as he loses it in duty and service to his family and friends"(283): in fact, Rabbit has not yet reached George Caldwell's level of self-sacrifice; his attainment of Kierkegaard's ethical level must await the very end of the final novel of the series, Rabbit at Rest. Rabbit's run will go the distance.

Nevertheless, by fits and starts, Rabbit continues to mature. At the conclusion of Rabbit Is Rich, Rabbit, holding his granddaughter, understands that he is indeed rich. Gradually, Rabbit has surrendered his illusions for reality. In doing so, he has found joy in the sense that Scott describes:

The motions of comedy do...finally lead to joy, but it is a joy that we win only after we have consented once again to journey through this familiar, actual world of earth which is our home and, in doing so, have had our faith in its stability and permanence restored. The joy of comedy is a great joy, but it is a joy which can sometimes come only after a humiliation...

(108)

Rabbit's experiences in this book have taught him anew that "...[comedy's] whole function is to be a perpetual and funny, if disconcerting, reminder that it is the limited concrete which is the path to insight and salvation"(Lynch,104). According to William James (quoting Leuba), "...a larger, richer, more satisfying life, is, in the final analysis, the end of religion. The love of life...is the religious impulse"(455). Rabbit's love of life, the quality that attracts Thelma to him ("You're so glad to be alive,"418), finally proves his greatest asset in Rabbit Is Rich. In comedy, appreciating the value of everyday life amounts to true wealth.

**Chapter Five: The Comic Hero Accepts His Mortality in Rabbit At Rest:
"There comes a time."**

"...what to make of a diminished thing." Robert Frost, "The Oven Bird"

"A time to be born, a time to die." Rabbit Redux

Rabbit At Rest, the fourth and final novel in the series, begins just before New Year's 1989 with the semi-retired Rabbit and Janice residing half the year in their Florida condominium while Nelson manages Springer Motors in Brewer. Now 55, Rabbit has become acutely conscious of death, with news of disasters like the Lockerbie bombing exacerbating his sense of foreboding. At the airport awaiting the arrival of Nelson and his family for a post-Christmas visit, Rabbit envisions "...what's floating in unseen about to land, is not his son Nelson and daughter-in-law Pru and their two children but something more ominous and intimately his: his own death, shaped vaguely like an airplane" (3). Strained relations between father and son add to Rabbit's uneasiness. During his stay, Nelson behaves erratically, becoming easily irritable and disappearing for hours. Adding to the mystery, Rabbit is perplexed that the recent used car sales figures from the dealership are much lower than normal. Although Rabbit is kept in the dark, Pru confides to Janice that Nelson is using cocaine. Meanwhile, the dutiful grandfather takes eight- year-old Judy and four-year-old Roy on day trips. On one such excursion, Rabbit and Judy go sailing. Far from shore the boat capsizes and Rabbit, in his efforts to rescue his granddaughter, suffers a heart attack. Afterwards, as Rabbit convalesces from a coronary bypass, his doctor outlines a strict diet and exercise program for him.

The second chapter returns to Pennsylvania. On his farewell visit to the dying Thelma Harrison, his long-time mistress, Rabbit learns about his son's drug addiction. Late one night Pru frantically rouses Rabbit and Janice from bed because Nelson, in his frenzy for drugs, has assaulted her. Next, Rabbit discovers that his son, to pay for his cocaine habit and medicine for his AIDS-stricken friend and coworker Lyle, has been stealing from the Toyota agency. Caught, Nelson reluctantly agrees to enter rehabilitation. During the same period, Rabbit undergoes an angioplasty in the Brewer Hospital, where, coincidentally, he encounters a young woman working as a nurse who he suspects is his daughter. On his release from the hospital, Rabbit returns to his son's home. That evening, after the children are asleep, Rabbit finds himself alone in the house with the distraught Pru. When she visits his bedside to talk over her problems, solace becomes intimacy: they make love.

In the last chapter, with Nelson undergoing rehabilitation, Rabbit resumes managing Springer Motors. Returning to work proves a tonic for him as well as for the beleaguered dealership. Rabbit even revisits his former glory when, dressed as Uncle Sam, he leads the local Fourth of July parade. Soon, however, a series of events changes his life forever. Suddenly, Thelma dies; next, despite Rabbit's success in reviving the family business, an executive from Toyota arrives to announce his company's decision to disenfranchise Springer Motors; finally, Rabbit learns that Pru has revealed their liaison to an outraged Janice and Nelson. Rather than confronting his resentful family, Rabbit, once more, flees south. Alone in Florida, he finds himself left to his own devices. Although he does not keep to his diet, he does

exercise by exploring Deleon neighborhoods off the beaten track. On one of these forays, he shoots baskets in a playground with a group of local youths; the next day, he challenges an athletic teenager to a competitive one-on-one basketball game. On the final play as Rabbit launches the winning shot, he collapses with a violent heart attack. When Janice and Nelson reach Rabbit's bedside, they find him dying. As Nelson beseeches his father not to die, Rabbit tries to reassure him: "...all I can tell you is, it isn't so bad." The novel ends with a one word sentence, "Enough."

The comic hero's experience coming to terms with his life culminates in Rabbit At Rest. As the average man dealing with illness and aging, Rabbit recognizes that he too is mortal: now it is his turn to "make room" for the next generation. A number of occurrences, including his estrangement from Janice, the end of his affair with Thelma, the loss of the Toyota franchise that leaves him without a "space to fill," his failing health, and the distancing of old friends, diminish Rabbit's appetite for life; but the determining factor in his acceptance of death is his concern for the welfare of his son's family. By now, Rabbit intuitively feels that his presence inhibits Nelson's maturation. Despite being the parent of two children himself, Nelson remains feckless: he still blames his father for his own mistakes and misfortunes and slights his obligations. Worried about the future of Judy and Roy, Rabbit senses that the only way to resolve the oedipal rivalry with Nelson is to remove himself. In effect, by sacrificing his own life for the benefit of others, Rabbit approaches Caldwell-like maturity. Late in the game, Rabbit transcends the Kierkegaardian aesthetic sphere of

existence and just barely attains the ethical. Caldwell's sacrifice had taken the form of enduring his onerous life of pain and poverty when he yearns for the relief of death; in contrast, Rabbit gives up his life when still relatively young and materially comfortable. Over the years, Rabbit, as indicated by his increasingly acute double vision that expresses itself in Caldwell-like wryness, has come to acknowledge the comic nature of life; now he accepts that this world will continue spinning without him.

The ending of Rabbit At Rest underscores the cyclical nature of comedy: the last section of this novel recalls the conclusion of The Centaur and parallels the opening of the Rabbit series. When Rabbit drives to Florida in the final section of this novel, he completes the journey he began prematurely thirty years before in the first chapter of Rabbit, Run. Roaming the backwater old neighborhood of Deleon, aptly named after the seeker of the fountain of youth, Rabbit rediscovers his own boyhood. Typical of the unpredictable nature of comedy, his life has played out in a very different way from what he earlier had imagined. Instead of finding freedom through self-indulgence, as expressed by Rabbit, Run's romantic imagery of "smoking rivers and barefoot women," Rabbit ultimately liberates himself through self-sacrifice. Through the prism of his experiences, Rabbit glimpses the congruity that exists beneath the surface chaos. Before dying, Rabbit subtly affirms his faith : finally, the transcendent manifests itself in the quotidian.

In Rabbit At Rest, the comic world rolls on, unrelentingly frustrating, absurd,

confusing, mysterious, and, more than ever, uncertain. Events in both his private life and in the world at large exasperate Rabbit. Early on in the novel, an incident crystallizes his sense of frustration. After becoming separated from the rest of the family at the airport, Rabbit and his granddaughter have difficulty locating their car in the vast airport parking lot. Finally, they find it, "But nobody is here and the car is locked and Harry threw away the keys"(25). When Judy sobs in panic, Rabbit sympathizes, "He too wouldn't mind having a cry..."(23). The images depicting the scene that confronts Rabbit, "...a lake of shimmering cars..." and "...a brutal river of them..."(20), presage the subsequent ordeal in the "dark water" when the sailboat overturns. In both instances, the presence of others, either entering and exiting the lot or sailing and waterskiing near the capsized sailboat oblivious to Rabbit's plight, heightens his frustration. At home, life is unsettling as well. Rabbit's grown son "frightens him"(24). His relationships with women remain problematic: "Women don't forget, especially what you wish they would"(194). Rabbit laments that he and his wife "...must live...in a world of mostly mixed signals"(90); he resents Janice's returning from her women's group with fresh accusations of male chauvinism: "Oh Harry, you men have been so awful. Not only were we considered chattel, but all those patriarchal religions tried to make us feel guilty about menstruating. They said we were unclean"(79). Worse, his soulmate Pru sends him mixed signals: "Women, no telling which side they want to dance on"(445). At times even his beloved grandchildren show Rabbit scant respect: Roy intones, "Grampa looks ridiculous"(53).

A comfortable retirement fails to insulate Rabbit from life's frustrations:

Some people have it made; not for them a condo where they steal your
view of the Gulf from the balcony. No matter how hard you climb,
there are always the rich above you, who got there without effort.
Lucky stiffs, holding you down, making you discontent so you buy
more of the crap advertised on television. (484-485)

As a way of dealing with his irritations, Rabbit consoles himself with food.

Reflecting comedy's focus on ordinary life, the instinctive behavior of eating serves to illustrate the frustrating nature of existence. Throughout, Rabbit At Rest focuses on food and eating to a far greater extent than do the earlier novels. In Rabbit, Run, Ruth mentions that the young adult Rabbit is a "bland eater"(90) and in the other novels in the series he displays no more than an ordinary interest in food. Here, however, eating--especially overeating--becomes a recurring motif. In late middle age, the grossly overweight Rabbit's poor eating habits endanger his health.

Right away, the novel condemns the sedentary Rabbit's rich diet: one of its epigraphs warns, "Food to the indolent is poison, not sustenance." Exemplifying this quotation (from The Life and Times of Frederick Douglass) which first appeared in Rabbit Redux, Rabbit avoids exercise while continually binging on lethal junk food. In the airport waiting area, Rabbit cannot resist buying "something to nibble"; after purchasing a peanut-brittle bar, he appeases his guilty conscience by deciding to eat only half of it and save the rest for his grandchildren: "But the first half is so good he eats the second and even dumps the sweet crumbs out of the wrapper into his palm and with his tongue licks them all up like an anteater"(7). Beginning by "nibbling" like a rabbit in a garden, he concludes by voraciously devouring the crumbs like a

scavenger. His not saving any candy for his grandchildren underscores his piggishness. The mature comic figure sacrifices himself for the benefit of succeeding generations, but Rabbit's selfishness reveals that at this point his own desires still take priority. Shortly afterwards, as he escorts Judy through the airport, Rabbit stops to buy her a candy bar and then, against his better judgment, treats himself to another "peanut brittle after all. It is not so much the swallowing and ingesting he loves as the gritty-edgy feeling of the first corner in his mouth, the first right-angled fragment, slowly dissolving" (17,18). Despite the edicts of his doctors ("Ma'am, teach this stubborn bastard to eat," 172) and the good example of his nutrition-conscious daughter-in-law as well as the irony of Charlie Stavros ("It's your funeral," 242), Rabbit continually violates the diet his doctors have prescribed by sneaking cookies, guzzling beer, and ravenously consuming salts and fried foods. Now, food is more alluring than sex. He rhapsodizes about macadamia nuts: "He gets a slippery forkful into his mouth and finds among the oily lettuce and alfalfa sprouts a whole macadamia nut, and delicately splits it with his teeth, so his tongue feels the texture of the fissure, miraculously smooth, like a young woman's body ..." (240-241). Nevertheless, no matter how much he eats, his appetite remains unsated. At this point, Rabbit can appreciate the lament of a former mentor: "What did his old basketball coach, Marty Tothero, tell him toward the end of his life, about how when you get old you eat and eat and it's never the right food?" (6) Adding to his frustration is the paradox that worrying about his health makes him hungry: "Harry finds that every time he thinks of his death it makes him want to eat--that's why he

hasn't lost more weight"(218). Rabbit never reconciles his yen for junk food "poison": "If God didn't want us to eat salt and fat, why did He make them taste so good?"(177) Reductively, Rabbit's plaint poses the timeless question of why God permits temptation.

The state of society is as unsound as Rabbit's diet: "Everything falling apart, airplanes, bridges, eight years under Reagan of nobody minding the store, making money out of nothing, running up debt..."(9). The rebellious Rabbit of the earlier novels flaunted society's mores; now, "He resents the fact that the world is so full of debt and nobody has to pay--not Mexico or Brazil, not the sleazy S and L banks, not Nelson. Rabbit never had much use for old-fashioned ethics but their dissolution eats at his bones"(400). This sentence, linking international, national, and familial instances of fiscal irresponsibility, bundles Rabbit's public and personal frustrations. By the 1980's the extent of society's disintegration is evident in the irony that by now Rabbit feels morally superior to the larger community. Elvira Ollenbach, one of the new salespeople at the lot, notes, "The world is full of cheaters"(383). Aptly, Updike describes Rabbit's dissatisfaction with the phrase "eats at his bones": the use of this verb metaphorically connects Rabbit's frustration with his chief means of consolation. Moreover, the Florida lifestyle only exacerbates his sense of the world's absurdity. Reflecting on the aimlessness of modern existence, Rabbit muses, "Most of American life is spent driving somewhere and then driving back wondering why the hell you went"(29). The landscape, "Among the repeating franchises selling gasoline and groceries and liquor and drugs all mixed together in that peculiar lawless way they

have down here ..." (29) contributes to Rabbit's feelings of anomie:

Between these paths there's somehow nothing, a lot of identical palm trees and cactus and thirsty lawn and empty sunshine, hotels you're not staying at and beaches you're not admitted to and inland areas where there's never any reason to go. (88)

Man's attempts to dominate nature seem futile: "The skin men have imposed on bleak nature is so thin it develops holes ..." (85).

More and more the modern world perplexes the aging Rabbit. Ironically, he finds the headline of a newspaper article, "Circus Redux," puzzling: "He hates that word, you see it everywhere, and he doesn't know how to pronounce it. Like arbitrageur and perestroika" (50). Reading a current history of the American Revolution, he comes across an impenetrable sentence that puts him to sleep:

"Unlimited convoy would become another test of ego as a casus belli" (87). Rabbit's difficulty in keeping pace with the modern world indicates a growing fear of being left behind: "He is still trying to keep up with America, as it changes styles and costumes and vocabulary as it dances ahead ever young, ever younger" (280). The older Rabbit gets, the more the world awes him. Watching a nature documentary on television, Rabbit is awed: "Life, it's incredible, it's wearing the world out" (456). Florida's dazzling natural marvels reinforce this sense of wonder. As Rabbit and Janice take the grandchildren on a tour of the Thomas Alva Edison Winter Home, Rabbit reflects upon the guide's rhapsodic description of the exotic trees on the grounds: "Why did God bother, Harry wonders, to do all these tricks, off by Himself in the Amazon jungle?" Whereupon the tour guide's practiced spiel supplies the answer: "They are chocolate brown on one side and white on the other and because of

their unusual shapes and lasting qualities are in great demand for dried floral arrangements. You can purchase these leaves in our gift shop." Rabbit's double vision allows him to accept this explanation with equanimity: "So He did it so people would have something to buy in gift shops"(94). Afterwards, at Jungle Gardens, the colorful and bizarre flamingos remind Rabbit of the diversity in life that makes relationships among individuals problematic:

... flocks of flamingos, colored that unreal orange-pink color, sleep while standing up, like big feathery lollipops, each body a ball, the idle leg and the neck and head somehow knitted in, balanced on one pencil-thin leg and wide leathern foot. Others, almost as marvelous, are awake and stirring, tenderly treading. "Look how they drink," Harry tells his grandchildren, lowering his voice as if in the presence of something sacred. "Upside down. Their bills are scoops that work upside down." And they stand marveling, the four human beings, as if the space between farflung planets had been abolished, so different do these living things loom for themselves. The earth is many planets, that intersect only at moments. Even among themselves, slices of difference interpose, speaking the same language though they do, and lacking feathers, and all drinking right side up. (103)

Given such variety in life, confusion and miscommunication become inevitable.

Like the other novels in the series, Rabbit at Rest contains mysteries: Nelson's odd behavior ("There is a glitch, a secret," 41); the sales figures that do not add up; whether or not after the sailboat capsized Judy was in fact in danger or feigned helplessness as a joke; Pru's producing a condom from her bathrobe on the night when she and Rabbit spontaneously make love; Rabbit's despair, "But how can you believe how much void there is"(413); on the news, "Where is the missing tritium?" (441). As usual, some of the mysteries are solved while others are not: the discovery of Nelson's cocaine addiction explains his jitters and sudden disappearances as well as

the loss of sales revenues; on the other hand, although Judy's behavior during the accident is addressed on a number of occasions subsequently, the truth never emerges. One mystery, whether Rabbit has a living daughter, extends from the previous Rabbit Is Rich: "And Rabbit suspects himself of having an illegitimate daughter, three years younger than Nelson, by a woman named Ruth, who wouldn't admit it the last time Harry saw her"(27). By now, however, Rabbit has learned to accept the problematic nature of life; although there exist opportunities to reinvestigate this matter with Ruth, Rabbit does not pursue them. Reflecting his weariness, he decides that he will wait until the next world to meet Ruth again, "Under the pear trees in paradise"(293).

Foremost, Rabbit, more than ever, is acutely conscious of the precariousness of life. Sailboats capsize; planes crash; Hurricane Hugo threatens Florida; Nelson's accountant, Lyle, dies of AIDS; the energetic Commissioner of Baseball and former president of Yale University, Bartlett Giamatti, "Only fifty-one" (447), after lunch in his summer home, suffers a fatal heart attack; on the drive south, Rabbit reflects upon road-kill that was once someone's "pussycat": "Just think, he lay down for lunch and that was it"(449). Unthinkably, "Now Springer Motors is kaput, finito. Down the tubes...Nothing is sacred"(464). Images of "sinking" recur: the boat, Nelson's house, Springer Motors (Rabbit imagines a Rabbit Redux-like newspaper headline, Joint Scam Sinks Family Concern,"258), and Rabbit himself. Even within the confines of his snug Pennsylvania residence, Rabbit feels vulnerable. When drug dealers telephone his home seeking payment for Nelson's debts, the menacing voices undermine any sense of security: "But the caller has hung up, leaving Harry with the

sensation that the walls of his solid little limestone house are as thin as diet crackers, that the wall-to-wall carpet under his feet is soaked with water, that a pipe has burst and there is no plumber to call"(230). This scene recalls Rabbit's misgivings in Rabbit Redux before terrorists firebombed his house. Both times, his feelings prove prophetic. In Rabbit At Rest, Nelson's cocaine addiction will induce Janice to try to sell their home to repay his debts. After a lifetime, Rabbit perceives the flimsiness of man's institutions. Near the end of the novel and his life he ponders:

He knows when the bottom fell out. When they closed down Kroll's, Kroll's that had stood in the center of Brewer all these years, bigger than a church, older than the courthouse, right at the head of Weiser Square there, with every Christmas those otherworldly displays of circling trains and nodding dolls and twinkling stars in the corner windows as if God Himself put them there to light up this darkest time of the year...When he worked there back in Shipping you saw the turnover, the hiring and firing, the discontinued lines, the abrupt changes of fashion, the panicky gambling of all this merchandising, but still he believed in the place as a whole, its power, its good faith. So when the system just upped one summer and decided to close Kroll's down, just because shoppers had stopped coming in because the downtown had become frightening to white people, Rabbit realized the world was not solid and benign, it was a shabby set of temporary arrangements rigged up for the time being, all for the sake of money. You just passed through, and they milked you for what you were worth, mostly when you were young and gullible. If Kroll's could go, the courthouse could go, the banks could go. When the money stopped, they could close down God Himself. (461)

Aptly for comedy, the symbol of society's precariousness becomes a downtown department store. Rabbit's experience with Kroll's reflects his involvement: in his childish imagination, the store with its magical Christmas displays represented the harmonious workings of God and man ("As a little kid he couldn't tell what God did from what people did; it all came from above somehow") that created a

stable meaningful universe; as a young man employed there, he recognized the store as a human enterprise subject to economic forces, but nevertheless retained an overall trust "in the place as a whole, its power, its good faith"; ultimately, as a mature adult, when "the system" abruptly closes Kroll's, he perceives the essential instability and uncertainty of human institutions ("If Kroll's could go, the courthouse could go, the banks could go"). Man's creations--and man himself--are by nature finite. Even the God that human beings create to sell man-made products, symbolized by the "otherworldly" window displays so glittering to a child's eyes that they appear divinely inspired, is vulnerable: "When the money stopped, they could close down God Himself." Rabbit now knows better than to place his "faith" in the permanence of man's creations. With time, the old order changes: Soviet communism collapses; the defeated Japan outstrips the victorious U.S.A.; after Rabbit's heart attack, "A new order has dawned"(155). Helpfully, Mr. Shimada, the Toyota executive who announces his company's decision to disassociate itself from Springer Motors, confides, "Things change...is world's sad secret"(393). Though Rabbit pleads, "...with a tired joke, 'I'm too old for flux'"(398), he has little choice but to keep rolling with the punches.

The uncertainty of life appears most evident in the threat of sudden death. Now, death abounds: "There has been a lot of death in the newspapers lately"(8). In particular, the horror of the Lockerbie bombing, which sent the helpless passengers falling to their deaths, mesmerizes Rabbit:

Imagine sitting there in your seat being lulled by the hum of the big Rolls-Royce engines and the stewardesses bringing the clinking drinks

caddy and the feeling of having caught the plane nothing to do now but relax and then with a roar and giant ripping noise and scattered screams this whole cozy world dropping away and nothing under you but black space and your chest squeezed by the terrible unbreathable cold... (8)

The vividness of his stream of consciousness reveals Rabbit's identification with the Lockerbie victims. The comfortable images of the "Rolls-Royce engines" and "the clinking drinks caddy" reflect Rabbit's own affluence and leisure financed by the profits from Springer Motors. Yet, given the paradoxical nature of the world, one is most vulnerable to life's vicissitudes when there is "nothing to do now but relax." Again, his fears prove prophetic. The fatal heart attack occurs when Rabbit experiences once more his basketball glory during a moment of triumphant play. The description of this sudden strickeness recalls his rendering of the Lockerbie disaster: "Up he goes, way up toward the torn clouds. His torso is ripped by a terrific pain, elbow to elbow. He bursts from within"(506). Rabbit too will plummet abruptly and helplessly to his death. From the beginning of the novel, however, the fear of death hovers over him: "In Florida, he thinks, even friendship has a thin provisional quality, since people might at any minute buy another condominium and move to it, or else up and die"(73). Rabbit warily acknowledges man's vulnerability: "In Florida the people are so cautious, as if on two beers they might fall down and break a hip. The whole state is brittle"(70).

Such a world allows no restful retirement. Accepting one's continually changing role in the human comedy proves an ongoing challenge. Even at his advanced age, Rabbit must continually evolve. At this point Rabbit ruefully admits that he can no longer count on an older generation to shield him from life's slings and

arrows. Now he is on his own: "When he was a kid and had growing pains he would be worried and the grownups around him laughed them off on his behalf; now he is unmistakably a grownup and must do his own laughing off"(7). The wording indicates the individual's changing role over time. The phrase "growing pains" refers to his gradual maturing, a process that inevitably entails suffering; the image "laughing off" aptly describes the comic perspective that accepts these "pains." "Grownups," having reached maturity, bear their responsibilities "on behalf of" the younger generation.

Over the course of this final novel in the series, Rabbit more and more resembles George Caldwell, the paragon of The Centaur. Two images, reflecting Galligan's contention that comedy expresses itself through images that "...tend...to be aesthetically coherent rather than logically sound"(29), suggest this resemblance. First, Rabbit achieves Caldwellesque legendary status by his mistakenly eating bird food when escorting his grandchildren to Florida's Jungle Gardens:

...they begin the long day that for years to come will be known in fond family legend as The Day Grandpa Ate the Parrot Food, though it wasn't exactly for parrots, and he didn't eat much of it. (92)

Just as Caldwell's antics in the classroom ("Christ, I'll never forget...", "95) acquire McFadden's "anecdotal permanence"(11), so too does Rabbit's celebrated blunder. A second parallel occurs when Rabbit dresses up as Uncle Sam for a Fourth of July parade, "...and though he has become more corpulent than our national hero should be has the right fair skin and pale blue eyes and a good soldierly bearing"(362). In The Centaur, Peter has a disconcerting dream in which the local town fails to

remember his father although "he was Uncle Sam and led the parade..."(136). Both Rabbit's impersonation and Peter's dream reflect the comic hero's position in the generations. As Rabbit marches, he notices that there has been "...a bubbling up of generation on generation since the town brought him forth"(369); nevertheless, "They remember him," and cheer him, calling "his old nickname" affectionately. Rabbit has consented to participate in the parade "for Judy's sake"; he experiences "an exalted sacrificial feeling"; on route, "He feels giddy, ridiculous, enormous." Here too he achieves mythic status: "He is a legend, a walking cloud"(370). In contrast, Peter's dream depicts his father as forgotten among the generations, "There have been thousands, there will be thousands...First, the People. Then the Welsh, the Quakers, the Germans from the Tulpehocken Valley..."(136). Peter too sees his father sacrificed, but there is a considerable difference between this gloomy projection of his father as a pariah and Rabbit's ultimately triumphant transformation into "...this walking flag, this incorrigible taxer and frisky international mischief maker"(368). The contrasting images of Uncle Sam distinguish Rabbit's willingness to appear ridiculous for the sake of his granddaughter from Peter's despair. Rabbit's sacrifice is in the spirit of the elder Caldwell's buffoonish classroom behavior that wins him anecdotal permanence in the hearts of generations of appreciative students. By now, Rabbit possesses double vision. His irony ("The old familiar riddle: how do you telephone the phone company without a telephone?"466) reveals his awareness of the world's absurdity; at the same time, the novel's burlesque and farce indicate his acceptance of his own foolishness as a part of this world.

Like the smalltown schoolteacher of the earlier book, now Rabbit embodies the middle-aged everyman: "It's a typical American heart, for his age and economic status et cetera"(166). Both Caldwell and Rabbit worry about the welfare of their family. Expressing their bewilderment, they sound alike: Caldwell complains, "...if I knew what the hell the point of it all was. I ask and nobody'll tell me"(102); Rabbit confesses, "Well I don't know what the hell's going on"(83). Each has a grown son who lacks his father's redeeming virtues which include humility, durability, resourcefulness, openness to experience, an aptitude for double vision, a concern for others that transcends self-interest, playfulness, attractiveness, and the fusion of passivity with venturesomeness.

After Rabbit foolishly mistakes the parrot pellets for "peanuts or pistachio nuts," Janice charitably rationalizes, "It was a natural mistake"; whereupon, Rabbit admits, "That's the kind I make...Natural ones"(105). Comedy insists that foolishness is intrinsically human. When Judy exclaims, "Grandpa, that's the dumbest thing I ever saw anybody do!" Rabbit, though he feels "...his life is a silly thing...", still manages a smile(105). Protectively, the older generation keeps up a brave front by "laughing off" disconcerting reminders of human fallibility. Rabbit humbly recognizes man's inherent limitations: "Nobody's perfect. We're only human. Look at Jim Bakker. Look at Bart Giamatti"(454). Coupling such diverse figures (recalling Caldwell's linking of Bing Crosby with St. Paul by virtue of their having in common "a police record,"156), the convicted television evangelist and the scholar, reflects the inclusiveness of comedy. The infamous and the renowned, as

well as the average man like Rabbit and George Caldwell, share the same humanity: "We're all just human, bodies with brains at one end and the rest just plumbing"(410). Moreover, the novel's graphic descriptions of illness and surgery emphasize human frailty. In the long run, the comic figure is a survivor in what Rabbit considers, "...a small world, and a long life in a way"(483). Caldwell, wounded but game, struggles against the odds; for his part, the stricken Rabbit compares himself to the pond in his yard: "The cement pond is cracked but still holds water. Like himself" (191). A veteran of the cold war, he takes satisfaction that his country outlasted the Soviet Union: "Still we held out. We held off the oafs for forty years"(443). Like Caldwell, Rabbit displays resourcefulness in small ways. While marching as Uncle Sam, he has the presence of mind to reattach with scotch tape his sweat-loosened goatee. "The spectators who see him improvise this repair cheer"(369). For both, their ability to survive stems from their resiliency. Though weary and fearful of having cancer, Caldwell continues working in order to sustain his family; after his heart attack, Rabbit musters the strength not only to replace the rehabilitating Nelson at work but also to restore temporarily at least Springer Motors to solvency. Visiting Edison's home in Florida, Rabbit finds most impressive the inventor's perseverance in developing the storage battery: "How many--nine thousand experiments?"(98)

Caldwell's openness is best exemplified by his eagerness to converse with bizarre figures like the sleazy hitchhiker and the drunk. Less dramatically, the provincial Rabbit evolves by assimilating diverse experiences. Semi-retired to Florida, he

interacts with Jews for the first time and they intrigue him with their equanimity:

"Tell me how you've got on top of sex and death so they don't bother you"(71).

Golfing with these retired Jewish businessmen, Rabbit perceives a gap between them and him. One of them tactfully notes a difference between Jews and gentiles: "You guys think the world will melt if you whistle"; Rabbit, however, "...knows that 'guys' is polite for 'goys'"(59). As in Rabbit Redux, where Rabbit learns from the black experience, here by negotiating the boundary that divides Jews and gentiles he deepens his own understanding of life: "He is still getting used to the Jews down here, learning from them, trying to assimilate the philosophy that gives them such a grip on the world"(6). For Rabbit, "The Jewish couples down there had this at-rest quality, matched like pairs of old shoes, the men accepting their life as the only they were going to get, and pleased enough"(430). Bernie Drechsel, after "making money and children," now accepts retirement as just another stage of life: "...and now he's at the other end of life's rainbow, and this is what you do: Bernie endures retirement fun in the way he's endured his entire life, sucking that same acrid wet-cigar taste out of it"(66). Like the blacks encountered in Jimbo's Friendly Lounge, Jews live in the comic present: "Rabbit is impressed by this ability Jews seem to have, to sing and to dance, to give themselves to the moment"(61). From their long history of suffering, Jews understand the human condition: "He in turn treasures their perspective; it seems more manly than his, sadder and wiser and less shaky"(57).

Later on, playing golf back in Pennsylvania with Ronnie Harrison, Rabbit cannot help contrasting his gentile partner's indifference to the explorations of

Voyager II with the likely reaction of the Florida Jews:

"Clouds on Neptune," Rabbit says, "and volcanos on Triton. What do you think it means?" One of his Jewish partners down in Florida might have come up with some angle on the facts, but up here in Dutch country Ronnie gives him a dull suspicious look. "Why should it mean anything?" (411)

In this novel, Jews possess the comic double vision that allows them to endure a flawed world. Near the end, the isolated Rabbit briefly entertains the notion of a flirtation with Mrs. Zbritski, a widow in her 60's and a survivor of the holocaust: "Didn't he read somewhere that even in the Nazi death camps there were romances?"(488) Like the blacks in Rabbit Redux, Jews have not forgotten how to laugh. Listening to Rabbit's uneasiness about Nelson's behavior, Joe Gold says:

"Here's a Jewish joke for you. Abe meets Izzy after a long time no see. He asks, 'How many children do you have?' Izzy says, 'None.' Abe says, 'None! So what do you do for aggravation?' (72-73)

This acceptance of "aggravation" as intrinsic to life, especially within the parent-child relationship, achieves anecdotal permanence as "a Jewish joke." Individually, these golfing pals are flawed ("a touch too authoritative,"142) but, overall, Rabbit learns from their venerable perspective.

This double vision is reflected as well in the dual identities of Caldwell/Chiron and Harry/Rabbit as well as in the identification of each with other characters. When the wounded Caldwell approaches the garage mechanic Hummel/Hephaestus "Caldwell experienced a mocking sensation of walking toward a mirror for Hummel also limped"(12). Rabbit thinks of his daughter-in-law Pru, nee Theresa: "Theresa, Pru--she is like him even in having two names, an inner and an outer"(118);

elsewhere, "It had felt like he was seeing himself reflected, mirrored in a rangy young long-haired left-handed woman"(432). Grudgingly, Rabbit recognizes his earthy side in Ronnie Harrison: "Funny, all his life Harrison has been shadowing Harry with a fleshly mockery, a reminder of everything sweaty and effortful Rabbit hoped squeamishly to glide over and avoid"(305). The comic quality of this duality is indicated by the epithet "Funny" and that, as with Caldwell and Hummel, there is a "mockery" in the resemblance. This viewpoint expresses itself in playfulness. At fifty, Caldwell remains a mischievous urchin in the eyes of his son. Rabbit exhibits a similar spirit in his unspoken response to the heart specialist's urging that he undergo a coronary bypass operation:

"If I were in your shoes, it's what I'd have done--without any hesitation. You're just toying with your life otherwise."

Yeah, Rabbit thinks when the doctor is gone from the room, but you're not in my shoes. And what's life for but to toy with? (286)

With the perspective of age, Rabbit perceives the playacting nature of life: "in Florida, the retirees play dress-up every day, as if they've become their own paper dolls"(245); in DeLeon Community General Hospital, "His little white-walled room seems in his entrancement to be a stage set, crowded with unpredictable exits and entrances"(166). As in The Centaur, all the world's a stage to the perceptive onlooker. This point of view enables the comic hero to laugh at danger. After the ordeal of the capsized sailboat in the Gulf, the seriously ill Rabbit still "tries to smile comfortingly" at his granddaughter. Minimizing his condition, he concludes, "It must have been the birdfood that I ate"(142). Later, Pru verifies Rabbit's courage and

concern for others in the face of his own suffering: "...--he seemed happy, relieved somehow even with the terrible pain and struggling for breath. He kept trying to make jokes and get us to laugh"(162). The references to "smile," "jokes," and "laugh" indicate Rabbit's recognition that it is his place to "laugh off" the fears of the younger generations represented by Judy and Pru. In the raging sea, Rabbit's priority had been Judy's safety ("She has a child's sense of immortality and he is its guardian,"134); once on land he devotes himself to cheering up his concerned family.

His vitality makes the comic hero attractive. The uptight Peter Caldwell envies his father's popularity in the high school and female teachers like Vera Hummel and Hester Appleton are drawn to the senior Caldwell ("She thinks he's wonderful,"138). Rabbit's charisma is evident in the Brewer crowd's outpouring of affection during the parade: "And it still loves him, as it did when he would score forty-two points for them in a single game"(370); earlier, Pru confesses her longstanding affection: "You were one of the things I liked about Nelson. Maybe I thought Nelson would grow into somebody like you"(345). Finally, both protagonists combine an essential passivity with a penchant for bizarre behavior. Parodying the inevitable progression of the generations, Caldwell does not hesitate to stretch out on the classroom floor and invite the students to walk over him because "...you will anyway..."(95).

Rabbit is no less capable of outrageousness. The most striking instance is the lovemaking episode with his daughter-in-law. Rabbit's explanation afterwards, "It was just a crazy moment that didn't hurt anybody"(433), employs the same epithet

"crazy," that recurs in Rabbit Is Rich as an honorific term for bizarre but ultimately justifiable behavior. In that novel Stavros had explained, "Being crazy's what keeps us alive..."(90); here, Rabbit and Pru are "...weary and half crazy with their fates"(361). Pru confirms Rabbit's foolhardiness: "I know you...A crazy man"(345). On this night of passion, the demoralized Pru feels abandoned by her crack-obsessed husband ("I love coke...And it loves me,"154) and Rabbit feels similarly deserted by his suddenly ambitious spouse. Noting that "Eros" dominates comedy, Frye maintains: "...Eros has to adapt himself to the moral facts of society: Oedipus and incest themes indicate that erotic attachments have in their undisplaced or mythical origin a much greater versatility"(Anatomy,181). This union merges both the oedipal and, in a sense, the incestuous, but suggests that human needs override society's taboos. The storm raging outside ("Rain whips at the screen") during the scene serves as an objective correlative for the powerful and spontaneous passion that overwhelms them: "...As if in overflow of the natural heedlessness..."(346). Rabbit later insists, at the time "...it seemed sort of natural"(342). There is an innocence to this episode, "...a piece of paradise blundered on, incredible." The verb "blundered" connects this scene with Rabbit's "historic blunder" in eating the parrot food: his behavior here too is natural and unpremeditated, if also foolish. "Paradise" suggests not only joy but also a quality of moral uprightness however unlikely ("incredible"). Associating the lovers with childhood, "His gesture has the presexual quality of one child sharing with another an interesting discovery..."(345), along with the allusion to paradise, evokes Edenic images. Moreover, Updike atypically refrains from detailing

the sexual act; the chapter closes with Pru and Rabbit ready to make love. Finally, Rabbit's reductive version afterwards, "She was hard-up and I was at death's door. It was her way of playing nurse"(434), conveys the flavor of this episode far more accurately than does Janice's rigid moralizing and Nelson's self-pity. According to Frye, self-righteousness is antithetical to comedy(167); Potts observes that comedy is not moralistic:

But for the moralist to condemn any comedy because of its subject matter is an error in judgment. Its business is to satisfy a healthy human desire: the desire to understand the behavior of men and women towards one another in social life, and to judge them according to their own pretensions and standards. (207)

In their playfulness ("playing nurse," "he...content to toy") and readiness to cross boundaries, Rabbit and Pru evoke the comic spirit. As with the night of intimacy with Thelma in Rabbit Is Rich, this unconventional experience proves salutary. The disclosure of this experience leads directly to Rabbit's "revelation" of what course he should follow. Even Pru ultimately gets what she wants. Nelson returns from rehabilitation a more dutiful, if sanctimonious, father and husband; the revitalization of their marriage is signaled by the news that they will try to have a third child; finally, Pru establishes some distance from the aggressive Janice with her scheme of uniting all three generations under the same roof. The word "prudence" implies not only caution but the capacity for judging in advance the possible results of one's actions. These two meanings provide a link between the comic figure's essential passivity and occasional venturesomeness. At times, circumstances warrant radical measures, since, as Martin insists, "...man's essential existence is not led in a

prudential world"(81). Pru, a survivor in her own right, knows what she's doing. With her world crumbling, she cannot afford the luxury of playing it safe; with little left to lose, out of desperation she risks violating conventionality. Driven by her "slum hunger," she succeeds in saving her family. At novel's end, Rabbit, during their final conversation, unsentimentally characterizes her as a typically settled Pennsylvania matron like her mother-in-law: "She sounded Dutch, the cozy settled way she said that. She's assimilating. One more middle-aged Brewer broad"(495). Pru too finds her niche.

Despite this episode, Rabbit remains fundamentally passive. Undeniably, Pru initiates events (evident in her seductiveness, "Does Janice say you can't fuck?"(434) as well as her foresight in carrying a condom in her bathrobe: "It was her show,"354). Moreover, for most of the novel Rabbit tends to be reactive. Against his wishes, Janice insists that he spend his first night out of the hospital at Nelson's; he returns to Springer Motors only when Janice overrules his protests that he is too sick to work; his family's outrage motivates his flight to Florida; on the trip, he reminisces wistfully about his military service, "...as a lyric tan, a translucent shimmer of aligned faceless men, the curious peace of having no decisions to make, of being told entirely what to do"(442). As a soldier, "He did his bit"(362). Elsewhere, he recalls that when the President of the United States, beset by "one of the oil crunches" as well as an impending Watergate scandal, had asked that Americans save fuel, "Harry as a loyal American did go and turn his thermostat down"(308). Reductively, he meets his societal obligations.

An apparently minor passage illustrates comedy's merging of passivity with venturesomeness. The last section of the novel opens with a comic discussion, the device according to McFadden that "...tests and sorts things out, but changes nothing radically; it shows up situations and characters for what they are"(35). During a lull at work, Rabbit chats with Benny Leone, one of the salespeople who works under him. Here, Rabbit personifies the bullying alazon figure as he insists on turning the conversation to one of his favorite topics, sports: "...even though the guy keeps saying he's no sports nut. Maybe he enjoys bullying him with it, boring him"(351). Rabbit's imposing title of Chief Sales Representative associates him with what Cornfeld calls the "professional types"(122) who hold a superior position in society over their listeners. Rabbit begins by lavishly praising Mike Schmidt, the veteran Philadelphia Phillies baseball star, for abruptly electing to retire in mid-season despite forfeiting a large portion of his salary:

"All he had to do," he explains to Benny, "to earn another half million was stay on the roster until August fifteenth...He knew what he had to do and couldn't do it, and he faced the fact and you got to give him credit. In this day and age, he put honor over money." (351)

Before Benny can respond, the other salesperson, a young woman named Elvira Ollenbach, in "her deep voice," interrupts:

"Eight errors...An error each in the last two games against the Giants," Elvira inexorably recites. "And hitting .203, just two hits his last forty-one at bats."

This dry recounting of indisputably damning statistics neatly undercuts Rabbit's romanticized version of Schmidt's retirement. Meeker notes, "The comic point of view is that man's high moral ideals and glorified heroic poses are themselves largely

based upon fantasy..."(26). Rabbit persists, but "weakly":

"But still, it took a lot of style. Just a week ago, did you see, there was this interview in some Philadelphia paper where he said how great he felt and he was only in a slump like any overeager kid? Then he was man enough to change his mind. When all he had to do was hang around to collect a million and a half total. I like the way he went out," Rabbit says, "quick, and on his own nickel." (352)

By downplaying the reality of the athlete's diminishing skills, Rabbit continues to assign Schmidt too much credit. Again, Elvira, matter of factly, "not looking up from her paperwork," sets the record straight: "They would have cut him by August, the way he was going. He spared himself the humiliation." With her candor, Elvira represents the plain speaking eiron figure, who, in Frye's view, "...takes on an attitude of flexible pragmatism"(226) in response to the alazon's posturing.

Moreover, during this exchange, Rabbit's male chauvinism affects the dynamics of the alazon/eiron interaction. Although aware of Elvira's rabid interest in sports ("Her father was a sports addict, she has explained, and to communicate with him she followed all this stuff and now can't break the habit,"352) as well as Benny's lack of interest in the subject, Rabbit nevertheless directs his remarks at the man instead of the woman. When she speaks up, Rabbit grumbles about the presence of women in the work force: "It's getting as bad as Russia; next thing we'll have women coalminers"(352). Undoubtedly, these sentiments project Rabbit's distaste for Janice's careerism; in addition, however, they also expose his ignorance regarding developments in society such as the increasing emergence of women into the workplace (earlier, he had questioned Nelson's having hired "a skirt,"221). Both Rabbit's bias and his minimizing of Schmidt's eroding skills as the motivation for

retiring stem from an alazon-like reluctance to acknowledge reality. In April at the opening of the baseball season, Charlie Stavros had tempered Rabbit's enthusiasm for Schmidt's fast start, "This is still spring...Wait till the pitchers' arms warm up. Schmidt'll wilt. He's old, not compared to you and me but in the game he's in he's old..."(232). Time proves Stavros, as usual, correct; and his counterpart Elvira confirms his perspicacity. Afterwards, she admonishes Rabbit, "Don't live in a dream world, Harry. We still need you down here"(358).

Eventually, the discussion reveals more about Rabbit's state of mind than about Schmidt's. Rabbit too feels the pressure of time on his own diminished powers. Earlier, in the hospital after his first heart attack, he had struck a heroic pose:

...determined to be debonair--Bogey at the airport in Casablanca, Flynn at Little Big Horn, George Sanders in the collapsing temple to Dagon, Victor Mature having pushed apart the pillars. (172)

Rabbit's self-aggrandizement is clear in his selection of glamorous movie stars in romantic roles as the models of his own heroism. At the same time, his identifying with images of actors playing parts and with the ballplayer Schmidt fits comedy's sense of life as play. Galligan observes that play in comedy functions both "...as a way of knowing and as a way of doing"(37). Ultimately, Rabbit's playfulness complements Elvira's pragmatism. According to Galligan, "An acceptance of limitations with a concomitant rejection of "magical" solutions and "angelic" powers point towards a delight in games (with all their arbitrary rules about fair and foul balls) and in unabashed pretense"(37).

Rabbit expresses his sense of time running out for him in playful images of

movie stars resolutely enduring grim fates and of an aging baseball hero choosing "honor over money." Now, Rabbit too must come to terms with the limitations of existence. He confronts not only his own mortality but the troubled state of his family as well. According to Meeker, comedy demonstrates that man's survival requires that he accommodate himself to his environment and accept his limitations(39). Gradually, Rabbit perceives that the survival of his grandchildren, the succeeding generation, depends upon his decision to place their interests before his own. Rabbit's acceptance of the need to transcend his self-interest does possess a heroic quality; and it is not surprising that the common man like Rabbit finds his images of heroism in the popular culture of Hollywood films and sports. Moreover, the comic hero's acceptance of his own finitude does not take on a morbid tone for he bases it on a belief in the naturalness of the succession of generations. Hence, Rabbit selects playfully heroic images to express his hope and faith. Galligan explains:

The image is that source of that spirit of gaiety which permeates all comedy and which is the one thing that all of us are sure to carry away from any comedy we respond to; and it is grounded in the conviction that the unknown will turn out to be at least as good as the known, that we will, somehow, land right side up. (5)

Bogey and Flynn and the others live on in celluloid, forever young and dashing; late in the novel, Rabbit, watching television, even discovers Mike Schmidt judging a beauty contest and muses, "So there is life after death of a sort. Schmidt judges"(487-488). Playfully, Rabbit reveals his faith that like Schmidt somehow he too "will land right side up." Unlike another famous aging ballplayer, Pete Rose, Mike Schmidt knows when to quit. Rabbit salutes his decisiveness: "Schmidt did what Rose is too

dumb to: quit, when you've had it. Take your medicine, don't prolong the agony with all these lawyers"(356). Within life's limitations, the comic hero retains the freedom to act decisively, "quick, and on his own nickel," when the time comes.

At the beginning of the tetralogy, when Rabbit on his confused flight south sought directions, an old farmer had cryptically informed him, "The only way to get somewhere, you know, is to figure out where you're going before you go there"(32). At the time, Rabbit found this advice perplexing; soon, defeated, he retreated north. In the final section of Rabbit At Rest, Rabbit flees to Florida once more. On his way, he unsuccessfully attempts to revisit the site where he had encountered the rustic sage three decades ago:

Rabbit wants to see once more in Morgantown, a hardware store with two pumps outside, where a thickset farmer in two shirts and hairy nostrils had advised him to know where he was going before he went there. Well, now, he did. He had learned the road and figured out the destination. (438)

The duality associated with this speaker (the "two pumps," "two shirts," and "nostrils") identifies him as a comic authority possessing double vision. Now, the weathered Rabbit appreciates this counsel. Through a lifetime of trial and error, the comic hero gradually finds his way. His dual nature, balancing passivity with venturesomeness, allows him both to absorb the lessons of life and, when the situation calls for it, to act boldly. When an indignant Janice confronts her husband with her knowledge of his sleeping with Pru, Rabbit knows what to do: "A life knows few revelations: these must be followed when they come. Rabbit sees clearly what to do. His acts take on a decisive haste"(435). Rejecting Janice's summons to present

himself for a "family therapy session," Rabbit departs for Florida instead. Now, he finally knows his destination.

External circumstances motivate Rabbit. First, Janice develops a new life for herself that increasingly excludes her husband. Her evolvment from a dependent housewife in Rabbit, Run culminates with her achieving autonomy in Rabbit At Rest. The opening cites "...the businesswoman efficiency she has taken on in middle age"(5). Early on, Rabbit senses an estrangement from his wife: "Rabbit would like to share with her the sudden chill he had felt...but a shell she has repels him...He is alone with his premonition"(5,6). In Florida, the once mousy Janice now affects the flamboyance of her new Jewish friends: "'Mmmm-wah!' Janice says to cap her hello kiss; she has learned to make such noises here, among the overexpressive Jewish women"(13). While her husband struggles to understand the Jewish ethos, Janice readily assimilates it. Moreover, now it is clear that it is Janice, not Rabbit, who controls the family wealth. When Bessie Springer died, "Everything went to Janice, as if he was an unmentionable incident in the Springer dynasty"(5). She owns Springer Motors and the "...gloomy house on Joseph Street...worth three hundred thousand now...not to mention the cottage in the Poconos...and the lot land alone, four acres along Route 111 south of the river, might bring close to a million...." Now, "Janice is rich"(5). While Rabbit ages and weakens, Janice blossoms: "...she looks girlish"(283); "Her legs are still firm and trim at fifty-two...and compare favorably with those of the other women"(148). In her prime, "...she has that broad-beamed look women of the country wear when they come into their own"(303). Her

physical and financial well-being has bolstered her self-esteem; now her spirit is strong as well. When disaster threatens, Janice matter of factly exhibits her comic faith:

"Daddy always said, 'If I don't have two nickels to rub together, I'll rub two pennies.' He had faith he could always make enough, and he did, and I guess I inherited his philosophy." (249)

Tellingly, she quotes her dead father rather than her live husband. Unlike the downcast Rabbit, she remains undaunted by the loss of the Toyota franchise:

"'Harry,' she says. 'You are taking it hard. Don't. Daddy used to say, 'For every up there's a down, and for every down there's an up'"(395).

Janice's closeness to her father reflects the dynamics of the Electra complex: her emergence in this novel results from finally escaping the shadow of her domineering mother. Fittingly, Janice's maturing is revealed in small ways. On her own she erects a bird feeder in the yard: "Putting up bird feeders was the sort of thing her mother used to do but would never have occurred to Janice when they were younger and old Bessie was still alive"(190). Later, embarking on a career as a real estate broker, Janice reflects upon her relationship with her parents: "...but of course if they were alive she wouldn't be doing this, she wouldn't have the mental space. They were wonderful parents but had never trusted her to manage by herself..."(312) Her experience corroborates Rabbit's growing suspicion that Nelson will never reach maturity until he escapes the shadow of his father. The absence of her parents liberates Janice. When Rabbit questions why she works so diligently in her studies, Janice replies, "I'm trying to prove something to myself"(336). Like Rabbit's

seminars with Skeeter in Rabbit Redux, her returning to school, significantly to an old elementary school where the evening courses are held, symbolizes her rebirth. By novel's end, Janice succeeds her mother. After learning of Rabbit's sleeping with Pru, her "dead" voice on the telephone, "...sounded comically like her mother..."(435). Galligan avers that "Progressions--of seasons and generations--matter in comedy"(34). By now, Janice has taken her mother's place. Her emergence stems from everyday experience: "The years with their heartbreak and working off and on over at the lot have taught her some things"(311). From trial and error, Janice evolves.

Unlike her husband, late middle age is kind to Janice. As her canny father had noted, the world's ups and downs balance out. Rabbit's heart attack is a watershed event; for Janice, "a new order has dawned." Now it is her turn to take center stage. Reflecting her increased consciousness, Janice notes the reversal of roles between Rabbit and herself:

It feels wrong: in their marriage in the past Harry's vitality always towered over hers--his impulsive needs, his sense of being generally cherished, his casual ability to hurt her, his unspoken threat to leave at any moment. (321)

Rabbit too notices this change:

He faintly feels with Janice now like one of the dead they used to say came back and watched over the survivors, living with them invisibly like the mice in the walls. She often doesn't seem to hear him, or take him quite seriously. (188)

In effect, she sees her fading husband, in a veiled allusion to the Wallace Stevens poem "A Rabbit as King of the Ghosts" that serves as an epigraph to Rabbit Is Rich,

as having become a king of the ghosts; aptly he refers to Janice as one of the "survivors," a synonym for the tenacious comic hero. This identification is also revealed by her place in the middle of her class, "... not the oldest person in the class and not the dumbest either"(311).

Janice makes the most of her time in the sun. She enters school, on her own finds a job outside the family business, continues her tennis and social life while Rabbit quits golf and rarely visits the country club, and, most important, is the one who takes charge of the family's fortunes. Nelson's accountant thwarts Rabbit's attempts to investigate the firm's books because he knows, as Janice boasts, "...I'm the only one who counts" (225). Similarly, Nelson refuses to deal with his cocaine addiction until Janice threatens to take legal action against him. He scoffs at his father, but Janice commands his attention: "'Even at eighty-two, you'll still be my son,' she tells him"(147). Although she feels remorse for her firmness with her wayward son,

She takes a weary pride in her stoniness; her head is numb but clear,
with the product of her own womb pleading and wriggling beneath her.
This numbness she feels must be the power her woman's group in
Florida talks about, the power men have always had. (315)

Symbolizing her new-found authority, she repeatedly wears a suit that "...made her look like a little policeman"(311). With her independence, Janice begins adapting to a life alone even before Rabbit is gone. While he convalesces in Brewer Hospital, she relishes her freedom: "Maybe being a widow won't be so very bad is the thought she keeps trying not to think"(309). Also, she notices that in talking about her husband, "There is this subtle past tense that keeps creeping into her remarks about

him"(363). Expressing its comic focus on today rather than yesterday, the Rabbit series has employed the present tense throughout; now Janice consigns its hero to the past. Philosophically, she allows, "Well, sometimes in life you have to give up things that you love"(396). No longer does she rely on Rabbit for information about the world: "He hears in the things she says, more and more, other voices, opinions, and a wisdom gathered away from him"(395). He feels that these new influences in her life "...seem an invasion as devious as that televised catheter nudging forward into his shadowy webbed heart"(336).

As he had feared all along, Rabbit's most formidable rival turns out to be his son. Janice's bond with Nelson excludes Rabbit: "Their complicity is complete now"(153). As the novel proceeds, she manifests a greater allegiance to her son than to her husband. Her willingness to sell Rabbit's beloved Penn Park house to bail out Nelson illustrates that her ultimate loyalty is to her son. When she learns of Rabbit's night with Pru, she cannot "forgive" him and refuses to communicate with him afterwards. Rabbit recognizes that he is no longer dealing with the old Janice: "With her new business sense Janice won't give away anything cheap"(434). When she hears of his second heart attack, at first she reflexively wants to pray for his recovery, but,

...she encounters a black dead wall. From what Dr. Olman said he would never be alive the way he was and as Dr. Morris said, sometimes it's time. He had come to bloom early and by the time she got to know him at Kroll's he was already drifting downhill, though things did look up when the money from the lot began to be theirs. With him gone, she can sell the Penn Park house. Dear God, dear God, she prays, Do what You think best.

(510)

Reflecting her faith, Janice puts her trust in God, but clearly she feels freer with her husband, like her parents, out of the way. In the uncertain comic world, Janice outlasts her tall husband: as he declines, she ascends.

Meanwhile, others close to Rabbit fade from his life. On Rabbit's return to Florida, he visits Thelma, his mistress of ten years during the interval between Rabbit Is Rich and this novel: "She didn't sound happy to hear from him, but not distressed either: resigned, merely"(192). Thelma, fatally ill herself, "...seems smaller, and her hair grayer." The scene has a morbid air. The dark, "motionless stuffed" living room depresses Rabbit: "This room is so finished, he feels in it he should be dead. It smells of all the insurance policies Ron sold to buy its furnishings"(196). Even Thelma's refreshments seem anti-life. Coffee and tea are "no-nos" so Rabbit settles for a soft drink, but the Diet Coke is "tasteless": "First they take the cocaine out, then the caffeine, and now the sugar"(197). The quintessential American drink is now as diminished as Rabbit. In discussing their illnesses, Thelma reveals that her health is rapidly deteriorating: "I'm losing it, Harry." Her sexual recklessness now frightens Rabbit, "...because it suggests a willing slide into death." She senses his reluctance to make love: "On her own she sees he isn't up to it"(203). In turn, Rabbit intuitively feels that their relationship has changed: "He feels that Thelma is looking at him in a new way--clinically, with a detached appraising look...She is moving him out." When he, clinging, embraces her, "Thelma goes dead, somehow, in his arms"(207). As he leaves, Thelma announces that their affair is over. When Rabbit protests, "Without you, I don't have a life," she is adamant: "Maybe Nature is trying

to tell us something. We're too old to keep being foolish." In light of Stavros' credo in Rabbit Is Rich, "Being crazy is what keeps us alive," Thelma's remark implies a death wish. This scene parallels Rabbit's final encounter with Ruth in the previous novel when the two former lovers recognized that they would never again meet. Quietly, Updike provides a link between these two episodes by means of the image of "yellow school buses" outside Thelma's house. Ruth's yard also contained parked yellow school buses once driven by her dead husband. The buses on Thelma's street with their cargos of "shrilly yelling children" symbolize the succession of generations: as the aging lovers' lives draw to a close, a new generation emerges as the children "release" from the school buses.

Comedy, however, resists conclusions. Rabbit encounters Thelma once more. As he convalesces in the hospital, Thelma and her husband Ronnie visit him. With her own condition worsening, Thelma, recalling the singing of Babe in Rabbit Redux, echoes the lines of Ecclesiastes:

"Harry, you know the part of the Bible they used to read us in assembly, before the Bible got outlawed, about a time for everything? A time to gather up stones, a time to cast them away? I'm beginning to think there's a time to give up." (306)

Nevertheless, Thelma retains her wry perspective. When Ronnie in protest whines that "You have three boys who want to see you grow old," she "smiles slyly at Harry," and "asks mischievously," "Why would they want to see that, Ron?... They're grown men. I've done all I can do for them." Having fulfilled her generational responsibilities, Thelma knows that she is no longer needed. For Rabbit, recognizing that Ronnie "...loves this woman too," the scene reflects the duality of comedy: "It

occurs to Harry that two men for a woman and vice versa is about right, just as we need two kinds of days, workdays and holidays, and day and night"(306). Soon, "Thelma was suddenly dead"(371). At her funeral, the generic eulogy fails to convey her individuality: "The description describes no one, it is like a dress with no one in it"(373).

Rabbit's sister, Mim, prominent in the two previous novels, appears only briefly here in a phone conversation with her brother. Although only fifty, the flippant Mim dismays Rabbit with her own sense of aging: "That's cow pasture. That's hang-it-up time, if you're a woman. You don't get the stares anymore, it's like you've gone invisible."(287) A Las Vegas businesswoman, she declines Rabbit's invitation to return home for a visit by equating Brewer with death: "Harry, the last time I came to Pennsylvania I nearly died from the humidity." When Rabbit, seeking the reassurance of nostalgia, whimsically inquires about the lyrics of a childhood song ("What's the line that comes after 'Makes your eyes light up, your tummy say "howdy"?'"), Mim abruptly cuts him short: "I have no fucking idea." Before long, because a celebrated customer has entered her shop, she terminates the conversation: "But Mim has hung up. She has a life to get on with"(289). At Thelma's funeral, Rabbit meets Cindy Murkett, his erstwhile "dream girl" in Rabbit Is Rich. Observing her now, with her looks gone, Rabbit muses, "He had wanted Cindy and wound up with Thelma. Now both are beyond desiring"(375). While in Brewer Hospital, Rabbit learns that his nurse is Annabelle Byers, Ruth's daughter who he suspects is his as well. From Annabelle, Rabbit learns that Ruth is rejuvenated, living and

working in Brewer and has "...lost a lot of weight and dresses real snappy"(278).

Nevertheless, he resists Annabelle's invitation to meet her: "He is suddenly tired, too tired for Ruth. Even if the girl is his daughter, it's an old story going on and on like a radio nobody's listening to"(278). At this point Rabbit has no patience for melodrama.

On his return to Brewer, Rabbit, needing advice, seeks out Charlie Stavros, now retired from Springer Motors. Charlie, echoing the Florida Jews, warns Rabbit to "...avoid aggravation"(236) and sensibly advises: "One day at a time, and don't look down"(238). Rabbit feels, however, that "It's not quite like the old days, when they had all day to kill, over in the showroom"(240). Later, when Rabbit hopes that Charlie might return to work at the lot, Janice informs him that it is out of the question: "He likes his freedom"(283). Rabbit finds that his interest in playing golf at the country club has waned also: "Well, it's no fun with the old gang gone. The kids out there at the Flying Eagle don't want an old man in the foursome"(396). He does, however, invite Ronnie Harrison, who had resigned from the Flying Eagle because of the expense, to play golf at the club. The first two occasions are successful, but on the third the smoldering animosity between them surfaces when Ronnie questions Rabbit about his affair with Thelma. When Rabbit attempts to arrange another match, Ronnie declines: "You know the Flying Eagle rules--you can't keep having the same guest. Anyway, Labor Day's coming. I better start getting back on the ball, or Schuykill'll think I'm the one who died"(414).

Inevitably, Pru as well distances herself from Rabbit. After their night

together, Rabbit and Pru "...are severely polite with each other" and "It was now as if it had never been"(361). As for the ill Rabbit, "He hasn't the strength any more, the excess vitality for an affair--its danger, its demand performances, the secret added like a filigree to your normal life, your gnawing preoccupation with it and with the constant threat of its being discovered and ended."(402) In contrast, the youthful Pru still has a life to lead: "She is stuck back there, she is saying, with the living"(446). Necessarily, Pru chooses Nelson over Rabbit. During Rabbit's last conversation with his family, Nelson reveals that he and Pru have decided to have a third child: "Not only for Judy and Roy, but for ourselves. We love each other, Dad"(482). This news produces mixed feelings in Rabbit, but the overriding emotion is "relief":

Maybe this is supposed to make him feel jealous, and there is a pang just under the right ventricle. But Rabbit's basic emotion is relief, at being excused from having to keep any candle burning at Pru's shrine. Good luck to her, her and her slum hunger. "Great," he tells the boy.

(482)

Pru belongs with the "boy" Nelson. By the novel's conclusion, Rabbit feels totally estranged from family and friends. When Pru inquires his whereabouts, Rabbit answers elusively, "Far away, where everybody wants me"(444).

Additionally, Rabbit is left without an occupation to sustain him. The elderly but still vital Dr. Morris informs Rabbit: "You need more than that. A man needs an occupation. He needs something to do. The best thing for a body is a healthy interest in life"(476). On his drive south alone, Rabbit, mulling over his life, recognizes that most of all it is work that has fulfilled him:

What he enjoyed most, it turns out in retrospect, and he didn't know it at the time, was standing around in the showroom, behind the dusty big

window with the banners, bouncing on the balls of his feet to keep up
 his leg muscles, waiting for a customer, shooting the bull with
 Charlie or whoever, earning his paycheck, filling his slot in the big
 picture, doing his bit, getting a little recognition. That's all we want
 from each other, recognition. Your assigned place in the ratrace. (451)

True to comedy, Rabbit locates happiness within the quotidian: playing one's role on
 society's stage, or in Rabbit's terms, "filling his slot in the big picture." Reductively,
 an occupation becomes "Your assigned place in the ratrace." The canny Florida Jews
 understand the relationship between happiness and work. Bernie Dreschel notes,
 "There are two routes to happiness...Work for it, day after day, like you and I did, or
 take a chemical shortcut." When Rabbit rejoins, "'And then when you've gone the
 distance, where's the happiness?' the other man admits 'Behind you'"(58). Now,
 Rabbit's happiness is behind him.

The workplace dramatizes the succession of the generations. Nelson condemns
 his father as an anachronism: "That was then, Dad, this is now. You were still in
 the industrial era. You were a blue-collar slave. People don't make money an hour
 at a time any more; you just get yourself in the right position and it comes"(39).
 Finally, there is no role for Rabbit in Nelson's business schemes. Selling aqua
 motorcycles called Waverunners at the lot strikes Rabbit--echoing his granddaughter's
 assessment of his eating the bird food--as the "dumbest thing I ever heard." In
 response, Nelson counters this skepticism with a pointed, "People can adjust, if
 you're under a certain age"(416). The child is young enough to change her mind; but
 her grandfather, set in his ways, is not. Rabbit's obsolescence is made clear in the
 scene depicting the visit of the Toyota executive, Mr. Shimada, in order to announce

his company's decision to sever its ties with Springer Motors. The passage emphasizes the contrast between the "impeccable" Shimada, exquisitely dressed and with an "amazingly thin ox blood-red briefcase," and Rabbit. Just before Shimada's arrival, Rabbit had decided to clean up the litter in the lot. When the limousine pulls in, the overweight Rabbit, "Puffing, his heart thudding," his suit "pulling at the buttons," rushes to greet his visitor and shakes hands "with a hand unwashed of street grit, dried sugar, and still-sticky pizza topping"(385). In Lynch's terms, Rabbit represents the down-to-earth comic man and Shimada the "meticulous" anti-comic figure. Rabbit also senses this: on the tour of the facility, he refrains from introducing the visitor to the Assistant Parts Manager "for fear of besmirching Mr. Shimada with a touch of grease"(387). The fastidious Shimada is single-minded: he lectures Rabbit with "a prepared speech." During this presentation, in which "Mr Shimada does not expect to be even slightly interrupted," he condemns the United States for its lack of discipline, its preference for freedom over order. For Shimada, his only imperfection his English, the dominating image of America's lack of order is the ubiquity of "dog shit":

Everywhere, dog shit, dogs must have important freedom to shit everywhere. Dog freedom more important than clean grass and cement pavement. In U.S., Toyota's company hope to make irrelands of order in ocean of freedom. (392)

From "...a single sheet of stiff creamy paper, sparsely decorated with typed figures"(390), Shimada announces Springer Motors' death sentence: "Too much dog shit. Pay by end of August, no prosecution of criminal activities. But no more Toyota franchise at Springer Motors"(392). His data sheet, "single" suggesting his univocal

vision and "stiff" indicating his inflexibility, serves as an objective correlative for Shimada's humorless perspective. Exiting, Shimada callously makes "a little Japanese joke," advising Rabbit to purchase a luxury "...Rexus at dealer price" while still eligible for the discount. In return, Rabbit "gives the manicured hand a gritty squeeze," emphasizing again the contrast between the meticulous non-comic and the earthy comic figure, and makes an ironic rejoinder of his own: "Don't think I can afford even a Corolla now"(394). Rabbit's evolvment from the meticulous figure reflects his maturing. His comic vision enables him to accept the demise of Springer with "...a reflex of good will really..."(394). Nevertheless, this comic discussion, as usual, ends by revealing the true state of affairs. Soon, "... all joking falls away and he abruptly feels fragile and ill with loss"(394). The other, younger employees find other positions, but for Rabbit this day ends his working life. Later, at home talking on the phone to Nelson at the lot, Rabbit rues his obsolescence:

Hanging up, Harry pictures the showroom, the late-afternoon light on the display windows, tall to the sky now with all the banners down, and the fun going on, amazingly, without him. (419)

For the comic hero, working, that is playing his role in society, is "fun"; without this happiness, there is, as Rabbit's doctor observes, less and less reason to live.

Finally, the retired Rabbit's failing health diminishes his zest for life. Even before the heart attacks, Rabbit connects his weakening eyesight with his ennui:

His own vision feels fogged no matter which glasses he puts on...And the lenses are always dusty and the things he looks at all seem tired; he's seen them too many times before. A kind of drought has settled over the world, a bleaching such as overtakes old prints, even the ones kept in a drawer. (55-56)

Aptly, given the state of Rabbit's health, the novel opens in Florida with its "...sunstruck clinics--dental, chiropractic, arthritic, cardiac, legal, legal-medical--that line the boulevards of this state dedicated to the old"(4). After his heart attack, Rabbit's life must change drastically: a strict diet, regular exercise, medicine, and, inevitably, more surgery. For Rabbit, once an athlete, the diminishing of his physical powers is especially dispiriting. Since the first operation, Rabbit is not the same:

Ever since they invaded his arteries with dyes and balloons, he has aches and pains in remote and random joints, as if his blood is no longer purely his own. Once you break the cap on a ginger-ale bottle, there is never again as much fizz. (289-290)

Watching his operation on a monitor, Rabbit feels that the doctors are invading a place where "...God or whoever never meant human hands to touch"(269). Dr. Breit attempts to demystify the specter of cardiac disease:

"All a heart attack is some heart muscle dying. A little can die without your noticing. It happens to all of us, just as everybody over a certain age has some emphysema. It's called the aging process and there's no escaping it. Not in this life." (284)

Aging and illness are part of the human condition and Dr. Breit's sentiments express the pragmatism of comedy. As Caldwell describes in his lecture about evolution in The Centaur, human beings naturally deteriorate with age. Rabbit learns, "Life is a hill that gets steeper the more you climb"(282). When Dr. Morris chastises him for failing to keep to his regimen and recommends "another catheterization," Rabbit labels such surgery "insulting": "In fact when you think about it, his whole life from here on in is apt to be insulting. Pacemakers, crutches, wheelchairs. Impotence"(475). Intellectually, Rabbit accepts his doctors' reductive analysis of the

human condition ("We're all plumbing, the doctors say,"489); yet he makes clear his distaste for the infirmities of aging: "He does hope he never reaches the point where he has to think at the time about shitting. Ma Springer, toward the end, got to talking about her bowel movements like they were family heirlooms, each one precious"(489). During the climactic basketball game in Florida, the panting Rabbit refuses his opponent's gracious offer to stop play. Scornfully, he berates himself: "No big deal you're too out of shape for this. No big deal you aren't good even for a little one-on-one"(505).

As his present and future dim, Rabbit retreats into the past. In a poetic passage, he recalls playing as a child:

Then as now, waking from twilight dreams, he discovered himself
nearer a shining presence than he thought, near enough for it to cast a
golden shadow ahead of his steps across the yard; then it was his
future, now it is his past. (191)

Reflecting this novel's elegiac air, the epigraphs contain allusions to all three of the previous books in the series. Rabbit even misses the cold war: "It gave you a reason to get out of bed in the morning." As Rabbit reminisces, his maturation is evident. When he thinks of that long-ago feud between "...that long dead Methodist neighbor of theirs on Jackson Road" and his mother, "he smiles"(183). Now he possesses the double vision to put this overblown incident in perspective.

Significantly, late in life Rabbit begins reading history: "It has always vaguely interested him, that sinister mulch of facts our little lives grow out of before joining the mulch themselves"(44). The aging Rabbit identifies with history now, "...things he remembers personally, VE day or the Sunday Truman declared war on North

Korea, are history now, which most of the people in the world know only about from books"(183). When Rabbit plays basketball with the youths in Florida, one of them prophetically "...taunts him, 'you're history'"(491); before the final game, when his opponent, Tiger, deduces that Rabbit "played once," Rabbit dates himself, "Long time ago"(503). Over the course of the book, Rabbit plows through a lengthy history of the American Revolution. For the weary Rabbit, the task of reading The First Salute matches the struggle depicted: "It is a long march"; yet he vows to finish the book "... if it kills him." The narrative parallels Rabbit's current experience. For most of the novel, his illness casts a pall; similarly, the American Revolution until almost the end appears doomed ("It will never work,"489). Nevertheless, both books arrive at happy endings: the colonialists win their freedom and Rabbit, through self-sacrifice like Caldwell, liberates himself by attaining Kierkegaard's ethical sphere.

Approaching death, Rabbit tires of life. His interest in sports, as either participant or spectator, wanes. He virtually gives up his beloved golf: "I realized I'd never get any better at it, at this point"(350). As for spectator sports, "You can't live through these athletes, they don't know you exist"(233). For the comic hero, a diminished playfulness is an ominous sign: "...his own capacity to be interested isn't what it should be"(288). Increasingly, the past overwhelms the fragile present: "... he feels a stifling uselessness in things, a kind of atomic decay whereby the precious glowing present turns, with each tick of the clock, into the leaden slag of history"(420). His mind wanders and he finds himself "in a fog"(178). Later, hearing of problems at work, he feels relieved, "Thank God, Harry no longer has to

care"(499); more and more, everyday events are "Not his problem. Fewer and fewer things are"(340). Working in his garden, he feels himself drawn to the earth:

In his mood of isolation and lassitude he is drawing closer and closer to the earth, the familiar mother with his infancy still in her skirts, in the shadows beneath the bushes. (395)

In Rabbit, Run, his gardening for Mrs. Smith had acquainted him with the cyclic natural process that includes all life; now, older and weary, he himself is ready to return to the womb.

Essentially, however, the plight of his grandchildren motivates Rabbit. Early on, he notices Judy's unhappiness (Updike's italics): "At her age, this girl should be happier than she is, Harry thinks"(49). In Pennsylvania, when summoned by Pru in the middle of the night because of Nelson's abusive behavior, Rabbit reflects, "Nobody has brought this child a present for some time. Her childhood is wearing out before she is done with it"(263). Afterwards, Janice, enlisting her husband's support for Nelson's rehabilitation, nudges Rabbit, "Weren't those children dear? Harry, you don't want them to live in one of those sad one-parent households"(269). Upon Nelson's return from the clinic, Rabbit remains dubious when Janice insists on "putting this loser back in charge"; nevertheless, looking at the hopeful Judy, he confesses, "But how can he wish anything for this child but the father she needs?"(408) Recommending a bypass operation, Dr. Breit urges Rabbit, "You owe it not only to yourself but to your wife and son. And those cunning little grandchildren I've heard about"(285). In turn, Rabbit demonstrates a willingness to sacrifice himself for his family: in small ways like taking Judy and Roy on outings

and accepting "the humiliation" of dressing up as Uncle Sam "for Judy's sake"; and in larger ways, such as risking his life to save Judy in the Gulf and returning to the lot, despite his illness, to substitute for the rehabilitating Nelson. Eventually, Rabbit senses that to ensure the future of his grandchildren, he must step aside in favor of Nelson.

This sacrifice entails accepting his finiteness. From the outset of the book, Rabbit feels the next generation crowding him. On the way to the airport, another car, driven by a "...black chick in a gray felt stewardess's cap"(4) tailgates Rabbit; returning, Nelson sits "...right behind Harry, so he can feel the kid's breath on the back of his neck"(25). Two telling images recur: taking up "space" and a "parade." The portly Rabbit feels that his stomach weighs as much "...as a starving Ethiopian child" (91). Later, catching his reflection in a mirror, Rabbit "...is startled by how big he is, by how much space he is taking up on the planet"(380). At the lot, he reminisces: "When he first came to the lot as Chief Sales Rep, after Fred Springer had died, he was afraid he couldn't fill the space. But now as an older man, with his head so full of memories, he fills it without even trying"(356). Nevertheless, for anyone, "filling the space" is temporary. With Janice firmly in control of the family business, she informs Rabbit that his presence at the lot will inhibit Nelson: "Let's give Nelson the space"(408). On the drive south, providing a symmetry with the novel's opening scene on the highway, Rabbit reflects upon his "...jostling for his space in the world as if he still deserves it"(442). The word "jostling" also appears in the image of a parade representing the progression of generations: "Rabbit feels as if

the human race is a vast colorful jostling bristling parade in which he is limping and falling behind"(115). Earlier, recognizing his place at the head of his family, Rabbit preens, "How full he feels...A float of a man, in a parade of dependents"(84). Later, he recalls his childhood "...house on Jackson Road, where Mom and Pop set up their friction, their heat, their comedy, their parade of days"(281). Finally, as Rabbit marches in the Fourth of July parade, he perceives that "The whole town he knew has been swallowed up, by the decades, but another has taken its place, younger, more naked, less fearful, better"(370).

Gradually, Rabbit accepts his place in life's passing parade. Staring at his son's cowlick that resembles his own, Rabbit reflects, "Maybe the only immortality we get, a little genetic quirk going on and on like a computerized number in your monthly banking statement"(19). Later, he muses, "...it's a depressing thought...that the whole point of his earthly existence has been to produce Judy and Roy, and so on until the sun burns out"(48). Rabbit cannot help contrasting the vitality of Nelson and Pru with Janice's and his own:

Brawling, Fucking. There is something hot and disastrous about Nelson and Pru that scares the rest of them. Young couples give off this heat; they're still at the heart of the world's business, making babies. Old couples like him and Janice give off the musty smell of dead flower stalks, rotting in the vase. (101)

Ruefully, Rabbit recognizes that his aging generation must yield to the more vital succeeding one that is "still at the heart of the world's business, making babies." As the image of the "dead flower stalks," one that has recurred throughout the series, indicates, this process is natural. When Rabbit prunes the forsythia in his garden,

"...you take out the oldest stem from the base, making the bush younger and thinner....It doesn't do to be tenderhearted; the harder you cut back now, the more crammed with glad yellow blossoms the stubby branches become in the spring"(421). Just as the previous generation had "made room" for Rabbit's, now it is his generation's turn to sacrifice itself: "Your life derives, and has to give"(451). At this stage, Rabbit recognizes that "There's more to being a human being than getting your own way." McFadden observes that in comedy "...this humorous negation of self-interest presents a vision of the hollowness of mere selfishness, of calculating motives, and of their disproportion to 'the godlike within us'..."(47).

Rabbit's self-sacrifice marks his passage from Kierkegaard's aesthetic sphere of existence to the succeeding ethical one. His own individual life reflects the progression of the generations. Like George Caldwell, Rabbit finally crosses this boundary, that as Hunt notes, separates "the pursuit of personal satisfaction" from "moral commitment and a sense of personal duty"(25). Moreover, Rabbit's emergence into the ethical sphere also reflects his willingness to at last take control of his destiny. Judy Newman asserts:

Aesthetic experience is not just hedonism, however. Rather, its essence is that life is divorced from moral will and completely determined by external events. To live aesthetically is to live without choosing in an immediate continuity of nature and feeling, before any moral distinctions are attempted. The aesthetic life therefore leaves the meaning of life at the mercy of fate or future. The succeeding sphere, the ethical, involves not so much a "good life" as a life governed by the principle of voluntary decisions. The distinguishing criterion between the aesthetic and the ethical is the "baptism of will." What is important here is not the reality of the thing chosen so much as the act of choice itself.

(80)

There comes a time for decisive action: "When you get children growing under you, you try to rise to the occasion"(139). The habitually passive Rabbit rises to this occasion: "A life knows few revelations: these must be followed when they come. Rabbit sees clearly what to do. His acts take on a decisive haste"(435). The word "revelations" here, with its religious connotations, links Rabbit's experience to Newman's description of the ethical sphere's "baptism of will." Through his decisiveness, Rabbit emerges as a new person. He senses this transformation immediately. Straightening up the house before leaving on his final journey, Rabbit reflects that now he is "...on the far side of a decisive gulf. The he who fell asleep was somebody else, a pathetic somebody"(436).

In this novel, Rabbit discovers Frye's idyllic "green world" in the recurring image of his granddaughter's "green eyes, greener than Pru's"(139). In Rabbit Is Rich, he located the green world in the pregnant Pru, especially in her eyes, "...those staring mud-flecked greenish eyes that Judy's clearer paler eyes were distilled from ..." (172) Now, symbolizing the succession of generations, the promise of the green world has passed to Judy:

The child's face wears a glaze of perfection--perfect straight teeth, perfectly spaced lashes, narrow gleams in her green eyes and along the strands of her hair. Nature is trying to come up with another winner.

(408)

In a dream, Rabbit envisions "...Roy, Roy all grown up, and as tall as he"(500).

More and more, Rabbit feels responsible for his grandchildren's future.

From the opening of Rabbit at Rest, the oedipal conflict raging between Nelson and Rabbit threatens the welfare of the Angstroms. At the airport, an

argument exposes old wounds:

"We stuck right together," Rabbit says calmly. "And don't dent my fucking car. You've damaged enough cars in your life."
 "Yeah, and you've damaged enough lives in yours. Now you're kidnapping my goddamn daughter!" (25)

The harsh language defines the state of war between them. Nelson continues to blame his father for the deaths of his infant sister and Jill. Janice complains, "I'm tired of you and Nelson fighting your old wars through me"(249). Elsewhere, she explains to Rabbit his effect on his son: "You are to him. Psychologically dominating. You're certainly a lot taller. And were a wonderful athlete"(189). Etymologically, Nelson's name means son of a champion, and this legacy weighs on him. She elaborates, "Men have this territorial thing. You think of the lot as yours. He thinks of it as his"(227). Symbolically, at the lot Nelson has removed from the office walls the aged photos of his father as a high school basketball star. Later, siding with her son, Janice refuses to replace Nelson at Springer Motors: "He's running the lot and it would be too unmaning to take it from him"(266). Wryly, Rabbit acknowledges, "The kid and I have something going between us. Not sure love is what you'd call it"(172).

In comedy, the oedipal rivalry tends to reverse the usual roles of father and son. One of the shrewd Jews notes, "The way you talk about him...he could be the father and you the son"(71). Nelson accuses his father, "...--and you're so damned adolescent"(257). Even Rabbit recognizes the reversal of roles: "You always seemed pretty mature to me. Maybe too, early on. I didn't set such a good example of maturity"(179). In this way the father-son relationship resembles that of the

Caldwells in The Centaur. Like Peter, Nelson takes himself too seriously. When Janice tells Nelson that he "...was a tense child...You took everything very seriously," he replies, "How else're you supposed to take it? Like a big joke, like Dad does, as if the fucking world is nothing but a love letter to yours truly?"(147) Rabbit, like George Caldwell, expresses his comic perspective in jokes. As with Peter and his art, Nelson attempts to distance himself from the quotidian first with cocaine and afterwards with his new-found faith in therapy. After rehabilitation, the preachy Nelson speaks in a "steady-voiced sermon"(404); he possesses "ministerial gravity and automated calm"(417). At the same time, he still blames his parents and his wife for his problems rather than himself. Earlier, Pru rails against his "immature dependence" on his parents: "By continuing to accept the blame he's willing to assign you, you and Janice continue to infantilize him. After thirty, shouldn't we all be responsible for our own lives?"(125)

Meanwhile, Rabbit continues to feel the attraction toward Pru that he had felt when first meeting her: "Having a wife and children soon palled for him, but he never fails to be excited by having, in the flesh, a daughter-in-law"(14). For him, Pru's cooking is a "personal message" and her voice is "personally aimed....She would take care of me, Harry thinks"(112). He feels envious that Nelson is the beneficiary of Pru's nutritional expertise. Before the sailboat adventure, Rabbit is flattered that the beach supervisor assumes Pru is his wife; "Tall and fair-skinned like he is, she might well be his"(118). Her voice is "...aimed flat at him as a man"(175). He experiences "...a pang of jealousy" when, after escorting the grandchildren to

Edison's home, Jungle Gardens, and the movies while Nelson and Pru rested at the condo, Judy and Roy ignore their grandfather and lavish their attention on their father: "The surly kid spends the whole day balling this big redhead and then is treated like a hero by these two brats Harry went and knocked himself out for"(108). In light of the oedipal role reversal, it is telling that the younger generation represented by Nelson is regarded as a "hero," while Rabbit, the older generation, is portrayed as foolish during the retelling of "the incredible story of how Grandpa ate the grungy birdfood"(108). The reversal of roles manifests itself also in Rabbit's sleeping with Nelson's wife. Even after Pru has terminated their relationship, Rabbit consoles himself with his discovery of a warmth in her tone: "That level woman-to-man voice, as if he had his arms around her, her voice relaxing into their basic relation, cock to cunt, doing Nelson in"(445).

Nevertheless, in comedy the new inevitably gains the upper hand over the old. Although he feels "squeezed" when he learns that Nelson and Pru have decided to try to have another baby, Rabbit himself accepts the inevitable: "You're not a man until you've gotten on top of your father"(480). Rabbit acknowledges his own oedipal triumph: "In his own case, it was easier, the system had beaten Pop so far down already"(480). When the wise Stavros explains that the world's overcrowding necessarily will cause disaster, "There's a crush on, and it's not going to get better," Rabbit immediately thinks of his relationship with Nelson:

Rabbit's heart dips, thinking that from Nelson's point of view he himself is a big part of the crowding. That time he screamed outside the burning house at 26 Vista Crescent, I'll kill you. He didn't mean it. A spark, a crack in metal. A tiny flaw. When you die you do the

world a favor.

(233)

The image of "crowding," recalling the opening of Rabbit, Run ("The kids keep coming, they keep crowding you up,"9), indicates the theme of the natural advance of the succeeding generation that informs the entire series as well as The Centaur ("Come on, walk all over me, you will anyway..."95). After Rabbit's first heart attack, at the hospital Roy playfully pulls the oxygen tube from his grandfather's nose. When Nelson lashes out at the child, Rabbit intercedes, "Don't hit the kid ...He just wanted to do me a favor"(179). Earlier, Rabbit had articulated his feelings toward Nelson: "I love him...but maybe it's a him that's long gone. A little tiny kid, looking right up to you while you're letting him down--you never forget it"(172). Rabbit acknowledges his failures as a father: When a drug dealer, attempting to collect Nelson's debts, flatters Rabbit as "a very excellent father," Rabbit demurs, "Not so hot, actually"(229); when Nelson enters rehabilitation, Rabbit recognizes that "His fatherhood hasn't been good enough. They're calling in the professionals"(300). With the comic spirit that grants second chances, the aging Rabbit sees one last opportunity to avoid "letting him down."

The very end of the novel, culminating with an exchange between father and son rather than husband and wife, underscores the centrality of the oedipal relationship in the series. At the deathbed, with Rabbit unable to speak, the petulant Nelson is "unhappy" and "complains" about his father's silence. Meanwhile, Rabbit thinks, "He feels sorry about what he did to the kid but he's doing him a favor now, though Nelson doesn't seem to know it"(511). The word "favor," repeated here,

expresses Rabbit's sense that his dying represents the older generation's stepping aside in favor of the younger. Dying, Rabbit's concern is for his son rather than himself: "He wants to put the kid out of his misery. Nelson, he wants to say, you have a sister." Transcending his own plight, Rabbit seeks to console his son with the news that, after all, in Annabelle Byer Nelson has a sister. When the uncomprehending Nelson wails, "Don't die, Dad, don't!" Rabbit recognizes that "...the boy depends on him." The Caldwell-like references to a 33-year-old as a "kid" and a "boy" suggest Nelson's lack of maturity (like the 31-year-old Peter in The Centaur); moreover, just as the elder Caldwell had sacrificed himself for his son and family, Rabbit intuits that Nelson also "depends on him" to sacrifice himself. Rabbit, sensing that he "...shouldn't leave the question hanging like that," assures his son, "Well, Nelson... all I can tell you is, it isn't so bad." Death is part of life; the qualifying phrase "isn't so bad" reflects Rabbit's double vision. In "Aristophanic Comedy," collected in Comedy: Meaning and Form, Corrigan quotes Christopher Fry:

...that there is an angle of experience where the dark is distilled into light: either here or hereafter in or out of time: where our tragic fate finds itself with perfect pitch, and goes straight to the key which creation was composed in. And comedy senses and reaches out to this experience. (15,16)

This is "all" Rabbit can impart to his son, but it is finally "enough." With his father out of the way, Nelson now has "space" to grow. The adjective suggests the measure of Rabbit's heroism. Earlier, "His fatherhood had not been good enough"(300); now, it is. The prudent comic hero manages to accomplish just enough. If there should be another novel in the Rabbit series, it is fitting that it depict Nelson in 1999 as a Peter

Caldwell-like figure attempting to comprehend his father's comic heroism. Such a work, by connecting even more closely The Centaur with the Rabbit books, would emphasize the cyclic nature of comedy as well as provide Updike an opportunity to conclude his social history of the United States in the twentieth century.

The structure of this novel and of the series reflects the cyclic nature of life. Rabbit At Rest's movement from Florida to Pennsylvania and back to Florida reverses Rabbit, Run's pattern from Pennsylvania to Florida and back to Pennsylvania. The end of each chapter of Rabbit At Rest finds Rabbit in bed: first, ill with his heart attack in the hospital; next, showing his resiliency by making love with Pru; finally, dying. Rabbit's retirement to Florida suggests the circular nature of the individual's life. In this "state dedicated to the old" senior citizens revert to infancy: "... the whole state babies you"(4). Typically, the American everyman dies in Florida. Back in Pennsylvania, a Brewer restaurant evolves:

Johnny Frye's Chophouse was the original name for this restaurant on Weiser Square, which became the Cafe' Barcelona in the Seventies and then the Crepe House later in the decade and now has changed hands again and calls itself Salad Binge... (230)

The quotidian confirms life's cyclic nature. Rabbit learns that the salad contains "heartier ingredients" like beefsteak: "So underneath everything, Rabbit thinks, it's still Johnny Frye's Chophouse"(234). His experience over the years undercuts Rabbit's earlier tendency to romanticize the past at the expense of the present. Hearing of Annabelle's trials living in the city, Rabbit admits, "Brewer's a rugged town...Always was (293). As he reads history, the brutality of the Revolutionary War appalls Rabbit: "He has always thought of the Revolution as a kind of

gentleman's war, without any of that grim stuff"(499). Now he sees the resemblance between that celebrated war of independence and the recent unheroic Vietnam conflict. The educated Rabbit views George Washington as a comic hero, a desperate survivor with the odds against him: "But he hangs in there, patching, begging, scrambling, his only assets the fatheadedness of the British commanders, all gouty nobleman wishing they were home in their castles, and the fact that, just like in Vietnam, the natives weren't basically friendly"(484). Popular culture also undercuts nostalgia: watching an old Abbott and Costello movie, Rabbit thinks, "People yelled and snapped at one another like animals then"(498). Listening to pop music on the radio, just as he had in Rabbit, Run, Rabbit now notices that "...the songs of his life were as moronic as the rock the brainless kids now feed on....They lead us down the garden path, the music manufacturers, then turn around and lead the next generation down with a slightly different flavor of glop"(460-1).

The first words of the second chapter, "Sun and moon, rise and fall," salute the natural rhythm of life and recall the opening of Rabbit, Run's second chapter: "Sun and moon, sun and moon, time goes." As Rabbit ages, he rediscovers his past within the present. On his return to Pennsylvania, "...he gravitates to Mt. Judge, the town where he was born and raised"; no longer running, Rabbit walks and this familiar cityscape, just as it did in the other novels in the series, produces a revelation:

Every other house in this homely borough holds the ghost of someone he once knew who is gone. Empty to him as seashells in a collector's cabinet, these plain domiciles with their brick-pillared porches and dim front parlors don't change much; even the slummier row houses such as

he and Janice lived in on Wilbur Avenue when they first married are
just the same in shape ... (182)

Rabbit recognizes that within time's changes a continuity exists. Driving through Brewer, Rabbit notes that "...life goes on as lively as ever, though in a darker shade"(185); marching in the Fourth of July parade, he thinks, "This crowd seems a strung-out recycled version of the crowd that used to jam the old auditorium-gym..."(368) The crowd's cheers celebrate Rabbit's reemergence as a local hero almost forty years since his high school glory. In the final days of his life Rabbit in effect revisits his youth. With time on his hands, "He discovers...old neighborhoods" in the black area of DeLeon. He finds himself drawn to this area because it reminds him of his past:

It reminds Harry...of the town of his childhood, Mt. Judge, in the days of the Depression and distant war, when people still sat on their front porches, and there were vacant lots and odd-shaped cornfields, and men back from work in the factories would water their lawns in the evenings, and people not long off the farm kept chickens in back-yard pens, and peddled the eggs for odd pennies. (477-8)

According to Galligan, comedy presents time and change as "...cyclical and unthreatening"(34). Rabbit's lifelong journey brings him full circle: he returns to his starting point. The opening scene of Rabbit, Run depicted the 26-year-old Rabbit pushing his way into a pickup basketball street game with some local kids; near the end of Rabbit at Rest the 56-year-old Rabbit does the same thing on a playground in DeLeon. The next day the ex-high school basketball star ends his life by playing one-on-one with an eighteen-year-old. In the first chapter, at the DeLeon hospital a mural depicted an Indian shooting an arrow at an explorer ("This Indian scowls with evil

intent. The explorer will be killed,"157) Here, Rabbit's opponent's "lips hint at Indian blood," his expression is "snarling," and he moves "knifingly." By the game's end, the stranger Rabbit, a Ponce Deleon-like explorer searching for his youth in this poor Florida neighborhood ("Deleon is in some way familiar,"486), suffers a "knifelike pain"(505). The strenuous competition against this native (aptly called "Tiger" recalling the stricken Charlie's nickname for Janice in Rabbit Redux) will kill Rabbit. The emerging young generation literally destroys the old. Nevertheless, before suffering his fatal heart attack, Rabbit experiences once more basketball stardom. Aptly, the comic hero's last activity is play. Now the other players are Florida blacks rather than Pennsylvania whites, but the game remains the same. Rabbit's running has brought him home.

Earlier, Charlie Stavros helps Rabbit perceive the underlying congruity in life. When Rabbit inquires, "Does it seem to you ...there's a lot of disasters lately? That Pan Am plane blowing up, and then those soccer fans in England the other day getting crushed, and now this gun exploding on the battleship for no apparent reason....," Stavros sets him straight:

"Apparent's the key word," Charlie says. "Everything has some little tiny reason, even when we can't see it. A little spark somewhere, a little crack in the metal. Also, champ, look at the odds. How many people in the world now, five billion? With the world jammed up like it is the wonder is more of us aren't trampled every day or blown up or whatever." (233)

Everything happens for a reason. With overpopulation, the chances of "accidents" only increase. Life appears uncertain and unpredictable only because of the limitations of man's knowledge. Understandably, human beings may despair: "Harry,

Roy's breath moist on his neck and the child's head heavy as a stone on his shoulder, looks up at the teeming sky and thinks, There is no mercy"(85). Holding the grandson who represents his responsibility for the future generation, Rabbit feels overwhelmed; as he looks to the heavens for solace, the sky resembles Wallace Stevens' "dividing and indifferent blue." Life continually tests one's faith. Rabbit cannot help linking the news of disasters like the Lockerbie bombing to the saddest event of his own life, the accidental drowning of his daughter:

God hadn't pulled the plug. It would have been so easy for Him, Who set the stars in place. To have it unhappen. Or to delete from the universe whatever it was that exploded Pan Am 747 over Scotland. (10)

In such a world, the leap of faith requires "lies." As in The Centaur where George Caldwell "loves lies," Rabbit concludes, "We are each of us like our little blue planet, hung in black space, upheld by nothing but our mutual reassurances, our loving lies"(264). By accepting the challenge of the quotidian, individuals manifest their faith. Janice informs her husband, "...you have to have faith. You've taught me that." When the startled Rabbit inquires, "Faith in what?" she replies, "In us. In life." Faith is inspiring. Like Peter Caldwell, who "lies" to his father that all will be well, Janice assures her worried husband, "'We'll be fine,' she lies"(409).

Ultimately, Rabbit's faith becomes rooted in everyday experience. According to Scott, "...faith...does not take out of this world: it takes us, rather, deeper and deeper into it"(110). As the series proceeds, Updike portrays institutional religion as less and less important in Rabbit's life. Rabbit, Run depicted churchgoing and earnest discussions of faith and the clergymen Eccles and Kruppenbach were

prominent. In the last novel, the sole clergyman is the minister of the "no-brand-name" church who presides at Thelma's funeral service. His eulogy sounds perfunctory and "wrapping up" the proceedings, he "rolls on to rote assurances ..."(373-4). Otherwise, the only clergymen mentioned are television and radio evangelists whose preaching causes Rabbit to switch stations in search of the consolation of nostalgic music. In derision, Rabbit compares the rehabilitated Nelson, with his single-vision belief in his therapeutic program, to these evangelists: "'Tell Nelson to loosen up. Just because he got over crack he doesn't have to turn into Billy Graham.' Or Jim Bakker"(446). Yet as he ages, Rabbit, without the benefit of churches and clergy, naturally feels closer to God:

He'll be there. Funny, about Harry and religion. When God didn't have a friend in the world, back there in the Sixties, he couldn't let go of Him, and now when the preachers are all praying through bullhorns he can't get it up for Him. He is like a friend you've had so long you've forgotten what you liked about Him. You'd think after that heart scare, but in a way the closer you get the less you think about it, like you're in His hand already. Like you're out on the court instead of on the bench swallowing down butterflies and trying to remember the plays. (450)

Significantly, Rabbit uses the word "Funny" to describe his faith; moreover, he chooses images from the quotidian--of friendship, sexuality, and playfulness--to express his religious feelings. The comic hero lives his faith rather than, like Nelson, pontificating or, like Jim Bakker, proclaiming it over the air for profit. Rabbit is uneasy when Thelma patronizes him: "Believe in God, darling. It helps"; uncomfortably, "He squirms, inside, 'I don't not believe'"(206). "Sermons," whether from Nelson, the smug Webb Murkett in Rabbit Is Rich, or even the earnest minister

Eccles in Rabbit, Run, are less effective than experience in revealing the transcendent in the quotidian. For Rabbit, "...the sound of the rain in that great beech had been the most religious experience of his life. That, and hitting a pure golf shot"(250). He speaks of a golf shot in religious terms: "the hope of perfection," "grace you could call it," and "pure"(56). Similarly, the dying Thelma finds that "... her affair with Rabbit has enriched her transactions with God"(195). Given the nature of faith, the comic hero continually wrestles with doubt: "Hard to believe God is always listening, never gets bored"(440). Reductively, Rabbit articulates his uncertainty about an afterlife in terms that echo the doubts in Stevens' "Sunday Morning" ("Is there no change of death in paradise?/ Does ripe fruit never fall?"): "But without money around, what would they talk about?"(298) Throughout, he muses about the origin of life. Staring at his heart in the monitor during surgery, Rabbit, like Caldwell's students confronted with the mystery of evolution, "marvels and mocks": "How could the flame of him ever have ignited out of such wet straw?"(270) Later, as Rabbit convalesces in the darkened bedroom of Ma Springer's old house, the light from the streetlight creates shapes out of the raindrops on the windowpanes that resemble "...the origins of life in one of those educational television shows he watches: molecules collecting and collecting at random and then twitched into life by lightning"(340). Gazing at his dead mother-in-law's sewing machine, which seems to await her return, Rabbit reflects, "About as likely as that to happen as life just rising up out of molecules"(341). Finally, however, near the end of his life, Rabbit declares his faith: "Those crazy molecules. All by themselves. Never"(437). The wonder of

these humble molecules, like the primitive life that Caldwell's lecture celebrates, proves God's existence. This expression of faith, delivered as an offhand remark, employs the honorific epithet "crazy." Within a Christian comedy, human beings, most fully human when "crazy," are God's creation and depend upon Him. When the distraught Pru reveals her fear that she and her endangered children are "trash," Rabbit quickly attempts to console her, but to himself admits, "We're all trash, really. Without God to lift us up and make us angels we're all trash"(344). Human beings, fallible and foolish, require faith in God to transcend their earthly limitations.

As one ages and confronts his mortality, he more acutely recognizes the presence of the transcendent in everyday life. On Rabbit's return to Brewer after his first heart attack, he finds himself driving down the familiar streets of his past:

A block or two toward the mountain from Ruth's old street--Summer Street it was, though they lived there in spring, summer spelled their end--Rabbit is suddenly driving in a white tunnel, trees on both sides of the street in white blossoms, the trees young and oval in shape, and blending one into the other like clouds, the sky's high blue above tingeing the topmost blossoms as it does the daytime moon. And up top where there is most light the leaves are beginning to unfold, shiny and small and heartshaped, as he knows because he is moved enough to pull the Celica to the curb and park and get out and pull off a single leaf to study, as if it will be a clue to all this glory. Along the sidewalk in this radiant long grove shadowy people push baby carriages and stand conversing by their steps as if oblivious of the beauty suspended above them, enclosing them, already shedding a confetti of petals: they are in Heaven. (187-8)

Already he is in paradise, under the pear trees. Later, when Rabbit, overwhelmed by this experience, asks his wife why he had "never seen them before," she matter of factly replies, "You've seen, it's just you see differently now." Significantly, younger couples "pushing baby carriages," like Nelson and Pru, still in "the business

of making babies," remain "oblivious" to this beauty; they are too busy with the "world's business" of "making babies." It is the elderly Rabbit whom the scene transfixes. As with the rain in the trees, Rabbit perceives the transcendent within nature: "this glory," "radiant," "They are in Heaven." He "is moved enough to... pull off a single leaf to study." The scene recalls Updike's short story "Pigeon Feathers," in which a precocious young boy finds the evidence of God's existence in the feathers of humble pigeons: "...no two alike, designs executed, it seemed, in a controlled rapture, with a joy that hung level in the air above and behind him"(105). Similarly, the "clue" of one leaf provides Rabbit with a proof from design of the universe's divine origin. This experience echoes the scene at Jungle Gardens when the sight of the colorful flamingos caused Rabbit to feel "...as if in the presence of something sacred"(103).

In accepting his place in time, Rabbit gradually comes to understand that death is a stage in life. For much of the novel, the fear of death haunts him. After his first heart attack, Rabbit sees with horror that

... death is not a domesticated pet of life but a beast that swallowed baby Amber and baby Becky and all those Syracuse students and returning soldiers and will swallow him, it is truly there under him, vast as a planet at night, gigantic and totally his. His death. (176)

Painfully, Rabbit, recalling his Sunday School education, attempts to comprehend the termination of his individual consciousness: "A God-made one-of-a-kind with an immortal soul breathed in. A vehicle of grace. A battlefield of good and evil. An apprentice angel"(237). With difficulty, he struggles to reconcile this image of himself with the reductive description of human beings as "...disposable meat"(18).

Nevertheless, as he ages, he gradually accepts human finitude. Observing a crippled woman in a wheelchair, Rabbit reflects, "Nobody knows when to quit"(97). The sports arena provides evidence of the irresistible march of time: "And the weekend before last, a young black girl beat Chrissie Evert in the last U.S. Open match she'll ever play. She packed it in too. There comes a time"(488). Now Rabbit fully understands the divine "word" from Ecclesiastes, sung by Babe in Rabbit Redux: "A time to be born, a time to die." On his drive south, Rabbit, as he listens to the evocative songs of his youth on the radio, recognizes that his earlier life is irrevocably over: "Though the stars recycle themselves and remake all the heavy atoms creation needs, Harry will never be that person again ..."(437). Rabbit notes the equanimity with which people accept the end of their lives:

A certain dignity in the doomed one, his or her moment come round at last; a finality that isolates the ensemble like a spotlighted creche. You would think people would take it worse than they do. They don't scream, they don't accuse God. We curl into ourselves, he supposes. We become numb animals. Earthworms on the hook. (422)

The weary Rabbit too ultimately accepts his death. Through his experience, he recognizes that in fact death is our certain destination. The "it" that for Rabbit had always stood for the transcendent is in fact mortality. In the throes of his first heart attack, Rabbit reflects, "Once Rabbit told someone, a prying clergyman, somewhere behind all this there's something that wants me to find it. Whatever it is, it has found him, and is working him over"(136). This recognition, rather than terrifying Rabbit, comforts him: "Yet he feels good, down deep. There is a satisfaction in his skyey enemy's having found him. The sense of doom hovering

over him these past days has condensed into reality, as clouds condense into needed rain"(139). This last clause conveys the naturalness of death. Now he understands existentially what he had surmised in Rabbit Redux: "Time is our element, not a mistaken invader"(374). In the wisdom of "Sunday Morning," "Death is the mother of beauty." As his doctors charge, Rabbit, by refusing to diet and exercise properly, poisons himself(474). Unheroically, his fondness for forbidden junk food causes Rabbit's death. After the fatal heart attack, Dr. Morris explains to Janice, "Sometimes it's time....It can be a matter of attitude. He seemed to have become a wee bit morbid"(509). Like Caldwell/Chiron readying his black Buick, Rabbit prepares himself. As the centaur's destination is an honored place in Zeus' heavens, that of Rabbit, descended from Swedish Angstroms, is Valhalla Village, his Florida condo named after the home of Norse warriors slain in battle. Packing for the trip to Florida, he takes both a light and dark colored suit: "In case there's a wedding or a funeral"(435). Comedy typically concludes with a ceremony, often a wedding; at the same time, comedy also portrays the necessary death of the old to make room for the young. In either case, Rabbit is ready for closure.

Like Caldwell, Rabbit, his constant use of nitroglycerin identifying him with Frye's pharmakos, now embodies the figure of the scapegoat who, in McFadden's description, is cast out and humiliated, associated with regeneration, and marked by his sexuality(158). As Caldwell "prepares his lessons," naming the rivers of the dead and defining a hero, so does Rabbit. Rendezvousing with death, Rabbit crosses the American version of the Styx and the others:

How many rivers there are! After the Potomac, the Accotink, the
 Pohink, the Occoquan, the Rappahannock, the Pamunkey, the Ni, the
 Po, the Matta, the South Anna. (443)

Thinking of Pru, Rabbit recognizes that a boundary now divides him from her: "She is stuck back there...with the living"(446). On his deathbed, Rabbit tries to convey to Nelson that "...he's doing him a favor now." Like Caldwell, Rabbit enters a cave to die, although he notices that "The red cave he thought had only a front entrance and exit turns out to have a back door as well"(511). As with Mike Schmidt, apparently there is an after-life.

Rabbit, by accepting his fate, experiences Caldwell-like transcendence: for the centaur, "...in the upright of his body Sky and Gaia mated again"; for Rabbit, "...the nature of his exertion is to mix him with earth and sky"(504). Dying, he embraces "his skyey enemy," symbolizing his attainment of completeness. Lying unconscious on the ground, Rabbit represents the fallen comic hero: "Adhesive dust of fine clay," the image suggesting the human fate of dust to dust, creates "...a shadow, like half of a clown's mask ..."; this sight impels Tiger, evoking the half-equine nature of Caldwell/Chiron, to exclaim in dismay, "Pure horseshit"(506). Martin Grotjahn, discussing the reversed oedipal syndrome, notes the significance of the clown figure in comedy: "The clown is the comic figure representing the impotent and ridiculed father. He also represents the sadness of things and finally comes to stand for death in the person of the truly great tragic clown. This is the point where tragedy and comedy finally meet and symbolize human life"(273). In the opening pages of Rabbit, Run, Rabbit had noticed a lost toy, a plastic clown, consigned to the dirt of

his yard. Thirty years and four books later, the stricken Rabbit himself embodies the clown left for dead on the deserted playground. As this clown, the everyman Rabbit represents all fallible and foolish human beings who inhabit for a time the playground of life before experiencing the transcendence of death. In "Comedy and the Comic Spirit," Corrigan quotes Santayana: "Everything in Nature is lyrical in its ideal essence, tragic in its fate, and comic in its existence"(10). Each individual's human comedy, which contains both the everyday quotidian and the idyllic green world, ends with death. Nevertheless, Rabbit, like George Caldwell, has not lived in vain. Through his acceptance of his place in the generations, he too has "...discovered that in giving his life to others he entered a total freedom"(220).

The opening novel of the series, Rabbit, Run, had begun with an epigraph from Pascal: "The motions of Grace, the hardness of the heart; external circumstances." Over the course of the tetralogy, the motions of grace--manifested in his concern for his family--and the external circumstances of comedy have softened Rabbit's hard heart. Updike leaves his dying hero in the existential human position, poised between this world and the next, as described in the quotation from Karl Barth that serves as the epigraph for The Centaur: "He himself is the creature on the boundary between heaven and earth." At long last, Rabbit is at rest.

Conclusion: What Updike's Comedy "Has to Say": "Only goodness lives. But it does live."

"Accept the place the divine providence has found for you, the society of your contemporaries, the connection of events. Great men have always done so, and confided themselves childlike to the genius of their age, betraying their perception that the absolutely trustworthy was seated at their heart, working through their hands, predominating in all their being. And we are now men, and must accept in the highest mind the same transcendent destiny; and not minors and invalids in a protected corner, not cowards fleeing before a revolution, but guides, redeemers and benefactors, obeying the Almighty effort and advancing on Chaos and the Dark." Emerson, "Self-Reliance"

"Confusion is just a local view of things working out in general." Rabbit Redux

In his comedy, Updike heeds Emerson's exhortation to the American democrat. Both men recognize the contradictory nature of life; at the same time, they write from a religious perspective that seeks to make sense of human existence. By accepting their place in society ("the society of your contemporaries"), human beings conform to the wishes of "divine providence." From the everyday experience of "working through their hands," they discover the transcendent "predominating in all their being." Refusing to distance themselves from the turmoil of life ("not minors and invalids in a protected corner, not cowards fleeing before a revolution"), they fulfill their roles as "guides, redeemers, and benefactors." In particular, the use of the word "redeemers" implies that average men and women reenact a Christ-like sacrifice when they live for others. With faith ("confided") that is "childlike," they perceive an order that connects all life and overcomes the "Chaos and the Dark."

For each writer, the divine manifests itself within a cyclic quotidian.

Essentially, the twentieth century America of Updike's novels does not differ from the one portrayed in Emerson's nineteenth century essay. True to the comic point of view, Emerson declares in "Self-Reliance": "Society never advances....It undergoes continual changes; it is barbarous, it is civilized, it is christianized, it is rich, it is scientific: but this change is not amelioration." Instead, it is always the individual who must change, develop, and mature. Emerson emphasizes, "This one fact the world hates; that the soul becomes." Evolving, Updike's everyday heroes struggle through trial and error to find their way. For Updike, the good man today lives a comic morality. Human beings mature, or gain Kierkegaard's ethical sphere, by fulfilling their societal and generational responsibilities. Just as a joke establishes a relationship between apparently disparate elements, the best comedies--like Updike's--discover beneath the surface absurdity a congruity where life becomes meaningful. In Rabbit Redux, Rabbit expresses this revelation in the vernacular of comedy: "Confusion is just a local view of things working out in general"(405). By understanding his true place in time and the world, the comic hero recognizes what McFadden calls, "...the hollowness of selfishness, of calculating motives, and of their disproportion to 'the godlike within us'"(35). According to Kenneth Burke, "In sum, the comic frame should enable people to be observers of themselves, while acting. Its ultimate would not be passiveness, but maximum consciousness. One would 'transcend' himself by noting his own foibles"(167). George Caldwell understands what Peter Caldwell struggles to assimilate and what Rabbit learns almost too late: through self-sacrifice, individuals attain what Emerson terms man's

"transcendent destiny." The conclusion of The Centaur defines goodness in terms of Caldwell's sacrificing himself for his family and students: "...he discovered that in giving his life to others he entered a total freedom." In doing so, he affirms, "Only goodness lives. But it does live"(220). Appropriately, Updike links life and goodness. In comedy, human beings live fully when they lead good lives.

This study began with the critical question: Does Updike's comedy have anything to say? Generalizing about comedy, Galligan observes:

Comedy is often funny, but it is never merely funny: it is about something. Comedy concerns those life and death matters that all of us must cope with through most of our lives--sex and dying, aggression and injustice, love and vanity, rationality and sense. (XI)

Updike's human comedy includes all of these "life and death matters." Following his own admonition quoted in my introduction's epigraph, Updike achieves this by "visiting places" rather than "studying maps." Guided by his "respect for reality," Updike writes fiction that illuminates the human condition.

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