THE FICTION OF JOHN UPDIKE : HIS VISION OF HUMANITY

Thesis submitted to the University of Calicut
for the award of the degree of
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By

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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the thesis entitled "The Fiction of John Updike : His Vision of Humanity" submitted to the University of Calicut for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, is a record of bona fide research carried out by Joycemol Mathew under my supervision. No part of the thesis has been presented earlier for the award of any degree.

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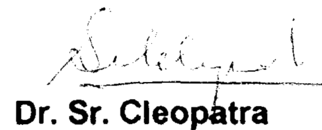

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DECLARATION

I, Joycemol Mathew, hereby declare that this thesis is a bona fide record of the research done by me and that it has not previously formed the basis for the award of any degree, diploma, associateship, fellowship, or other similar title or recognition.

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"Our humanity were a poor thing but for
the divinity that stirs within us"

Bacon.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

John Updike and His Fiction

John Updike is among the most prolific of contemporary American writers, who has to his credit, seventeen novels, eleven collections of short stories, eighteen volumes of verse, six anthologies of non-fictional prose including an autobiographical work, two plays, children's books, book reviews and articles. In the world of fiction Updike's voice is as recognizable as that of Saul Bellow. By the versatility of his multifaceted literary genius as novelist, short story writer, poet, essayist, art-critic and dramatist his place among his contemporaries is unparalleled. He has taken his vocation as writer with all solemnity and expresses himself with rare sensibility, sensitivity and humanity. He has occupied his place in the front ranks of fictionists ever since the publication in 1959, of his maiden novel The Poorhouse Fair. His recent novels of the nineties--Rabbit at Rest (1990), Memories of Ford Administration (1992), Brazil (1994) and In the Beauty of the Lilies (1996)--show his powers still on the ascendancy. Indeed his readers detect promise of master works yet to proceed from this great genius which is a rare combination of ideas and technique, intellect and imagination.

None the less, it was a polarized response that greeted each work of his from the first novel onwards. While critics like Paul Doyle praised Updike's dazzling prose style and brilliant ideas, others like Richard Gilman persistently

blamed him for his narrow outlook and limited range. In 1964, Norman Podhoretz had described Updike as "a writer who has very little to say" (257). Howard Harper affirmed in 1967 that Updike's work, "has a depth, an integrity, and an ultimate concern" (190). John W. Aldridge is a leading spokesman for the group of critics who insist that Updike is a mere verbal artificer who has nothing to communicate. Aldridge pointed out in 1972 that Updike is addicted to, "obliqueness and stylistic preciosity" (201). Robert Detweiler in 1972 applauded him for attempting, "to extend the capacities of fiction through many devices at a time when others are pronouncing the death of the novel," and affirmed that his, "accomplishment is in dramatizing eternal human problems in terms of arresting contemporary techniques" (167). Joyce B. Markle in 1973 affirmed that Updike's works, "establish with clarity and unqualified definition the dynamics of his vision of man" (2). In 1986, when Roger's version was published, critical opinion varied in response to it. While critics like Aldridge reacted vehemently against it, others like David Lehman applauded it for the variety of subjects it dealt with. George Hunt interprets Updike with the aid of Jungean psychology while Jeff H. Campbell takes an interdisciplinary approach finding in Updike's fiction a search for a myth to replace Christianity. Judie Newman's method is also interdisciplinary; she stated in 1988 that, "Updike's works may be considered as broadly separable into realistic social novels or flights into fantasy and aesthetic allegory" (114).

With the publication of the fourth volume of the Rabbit Tetralogy Rabbit at Rest, in 1990 which brought him Pulitzer Prize in 1991, praises became louder and attacks milder. Critics noted that the protagonist's pointed

comments on and instinctive reactions to such issues as the AIDS epidemic, the terrorist attack on Pan Am Flight 103 over Lockerbie and America's trade war with Japan made Rabbit at Rest an inclusive and insightful satire of American society during the 1980s. Many have also suggested that Harry's moral and physical decay symbolizes the spiritual lethargy of contemporary America. Joyce Carol Oates compared him with Flaubert and observed: "the being that most illuminates the Rabbit quartet is not finally Harry Angstrom himself but the world through which he moves in his slow downward slide, meticulously recorded by one of our most gifted American realists" (Contemporary Literary Criticism 253). Jonathan Raban asserts that Rabbit at Rest, like Bellow's Herzog is one of the very few modern novels that one can set beside the work of Dickens, Thackeray, George Eliot and James Joyce. In 1992, Professor Antony Fernandez in his thesis, "The American Family Through Four Decades," attempted a sociological interpretation of Updike's Rabbit Tetralogy. He insists that, "Updike whose fiction has been a bit elusive and ambiguous has boldly come out in his Rabbit Tetralogy as an indefatigable champion of domestic values" (8-9). He proceeds to state that Updike has presented the protagonist, Harry, as one who was "done in" by his addiction "to junk food and mindless adultery" and basketball (9). Far from it; Updike has bestowed on Harry heroic dimensions, for the novel identifies him with the myth of America. He is the historian who has been turned into an object of history. He is the living, breathing symbol of America while Uncle Sam whose role he assumes on the Fourth-of-July parade at Mt. Judge remains an abstraction. He had prided himself in being a "star" at basketball and even to the last, he plays the game in superb form and his is a life of fulfilment. He is the man who had

been tested and purified by the fire and had undergone a spiritual renewal. Harry "Rabbit" Angstrom as his nick name "Rabbit" suggests is, "the frisky international mischief maker," that America represents. Updike himself argues in favour of Harry in a recent interview granted to Professor Sukhbir Singh:

> Harry is just as I am. On the one hand, he has many good instincts. . . On the other hand, he can't really resist the invitation to live. Pru offers herself to him when she's in a desperate mood . . . and he's just come out of the hospital. In a way it's their way of saying yes to life. . . . It's breaking of the social order. But always in the Rabbit novels, there is a tension between doing what feels right and feels vital and staying within the social bounds. This is the basic human conflict that I tried to dramatize in all these books. ("The Novel According to John Updike." 37)

Wherever occurs a conflict between individual instinct and social norms, Updike's sympathies are always seen to remain with the individual. He is a true Emersonian in this respect.

Despite recurring adverse criticisms attempting to limit his genius to mere technical virtuosity, Updike has continued to pursue his own artistic vision, producing a steady stream of works which have earned for him honours such as the National Book Critics Award and the prestigious Pulitzer Prize. His works are extensively read and reviewed and widely translated into other languages. His more recent works, Brazil (1994) and In the Beauty of the Lilies (1996) appear as answers to his critics who have blamed him for limiting his canvas to small town American middle class. With every new

novel, he is seen to be cutting fresh ground proving himself to be a man of ideas as well as an adept practitioner of modern and post-modern techniques.

The work of the writers of Updike's generation is bound to reflect some of the aspects of the artificial culture into which they were born--rootlessness technological mobility and standardiaztion. The modern novel that recognized disintegration and disillusionment had faded out of the scene by the end of the Second World War. But the sense of insecurity and terror became accentuated further though the strategies of survival assumed a more sophisticated and complex form. Ihab Hassan gives a vivid picture of this post-modern predicament that forms the background for the literary efforts of the writers of Updike's generation, in Contemporary American Literature, 1945-1972. He remarks:

> Survival appears indeed both the secret and paramount obsession of contemporary man. . . . Memories of holocausts from Auschwitz to Hiroshima, a succession of wars from Korea to Vietnam, the earth exploding in numbers, ravages to natural environment, renewed awareness of poverty in America, the discriminations of race and sex, political protests of every kind--all these perpetuate a mood of crisis that no writer can entirely ignore. Science can capture the moon or alter the genes of mankind, but none knows how the ultimate moral and historical decisions can be made. . . . A massive invasion of human privacy takes place as the media of control and of communication exchange their functions as computers at once ease and complicate the patterns of social existence. Increasingly the public realm seems ruled

> by a variety of fantasies, instantaneous, comical, dreadful. For the individual, violence, nihilism . . . offer no genuine alternatives to the surrealism of mass society and the superstate. This experience shared abroad, deepens the affinities between American and European literature, between nations witnessing the strange paradox of a world extensively homogenized yet intensely fragmented. (2-3)

Apart from his anxiety about survival, the writer of this period was also concerned about his identity. The literary artist found it difficult to give an authentic voice to the unreality that he found around him. To cope with the existing situation the contemporary novelist turns "experimental" and "self-conscious" at times, and creates "metafiction" and "surfiction" that examine the very role and character of the novel. Sometimes he indulges in forging myths out of the fantasy which characterizes the post-modern habit of mind. However, unlike the modernists of the 1920s who mourned over the decline of Western civilization, Updike's post-war generation of writers tried to come to terms with their predicament accepting dislocation as part of life. Naturally the themes centred around the fragmentariness, meaninglessness and combativeness arising out of the fear of survival. Fiction of this period was also concerned about the mechanism and conduct of the individual's mind and life, with functioning and behaviour, with an attempt to adapt to the changing circumstances of life. Updike's fictional world reflects the influences of his times; yet he stands apart, maintaining his individual distinction as a writer who is in possession of a humane and humanistic vision of life and the predicament of the human being in it.

Several salient points regarding his work emerge from Updike's biography, for he is a writer who has drawn from autobiography, material for his fiction, to a large extent. He was born on March 18, 1932 in Reading, Pennsylvania as the only son of Wesley Russell and Linda Grace Hoyer. During the Depression the family shifted to the farm of his maternal grandparents, near Shillington, Pennsylvania. His boyhood spent in the agricultural environment of Shillington has provided him with a mythic setting for the major part of his fictional work, for his fictional Olinger is the actual town of Shillington. His parents were Lutherans in faith and democrats in politics. His parents had felt the stress of the Depression; his father who worked as a cable splicer lost the job and had to accept the more strenuous and less lucrative work of the school teacher. The Centaur his third novel is an exact translation of these circumstances into fiction. Even grandfather Hoyer had to find work during these hard times of the Depression. He joined a road-repairing crowd. Updike's mother was literary in her turn of mind. She was an aspiring writer.

He went to Harvard on a scholarship and studied English, graduating in 1954. In 1953 while yet a student, he had married a class-mate, Mary Entwistle Pennington. After graduation he joined the Ruskin School of Drawing and Fine arts at Oxford on a Knox fellowship and spent one year studying graphic arts. His daughter Elizabeth was born during this period. Upon his return to America in 1955, he joined the staff of the New Yorker as a reporter for "The Talk of the Town" column. He also contributed to the magazine, parodies, humorous essays and light verse. Later these New Yorker poems have been

collected in The Carpentered Hen and Other Tame Creatures (1958) and Telephone Poles and Other Poems (1963). The year 1957 brought changes in Updike's life; his son David was born; he resigned from New Yorker in order to devote himself to serious writing and moved with family to Ipswich, Massachusetts. While living in Ipswich, so as to keep regular working hours Updike occupied an office in the centre of the town. Work was sacred for him, as he explains in his autobiographical work Self-Consciousness. This autobiography reveals another reason for Updike's shifting to suburban seclusion in Ipswich. He had been suffering from psoriasis, a hereditary skin decease that could be alleviated only by exposure to the sunlight, of which Ipswich abounded. After his sunless year in England, this skin condition was aggravated. Even his marriage to Mary Penninghton at the age of twenty-one was partly out of a sense of gratitude to the girl who was willing to forgive him his miserable skin. These circumstances get detailed treatment in The Centaur in the portrayal of the romance between young Peter Caldwell and Penny. Ipswich had a beach where one could sunbathe in perfect privacy. From Spring to Autumn he resided in Ipswich and in Winter, he would migrate to the Caribbean for more sunlight. This went on for years, until recently; when the discovery of a new treatment had temporarily released Updike of this urgent need of exposure to sunlight. In 1959 his son Michael was born and in 1962 he had a second daughter, Miranda and by this time he had become a popular writer

In 1964 on a cultural exchange programme he had visited Russia and Eastern Europe which had inspired the writing of Bech: A Book (1970) and

Bech is Back (1982). He made a tour of Africa in 1973 which resulted in the writing of The Coup (1978), a novel about an African dictator. The same year he left Ipswich and in 1974 he left his first wife Mary. The divorce materialized later; and in 1977 he married Martha Bernhard a psychiatric-social worker. Troubles had started in his married life early in the sixties, of which he had written indirectly in Of the Farm (1965)and more directly in Marry Me (1976) and later in Memories of Ford Administration (1992). Updike at present lives the comfortable life of an affluent man in a big mansion in Beverly Farms, outside Cambridge and close to the Massachusetts Bay.

Updike in his autobiographical Self-Consciousness (1989) has acknowledged the influences of Karl Barth and Soren Kierkegaard on his mind. His works show the influences of Edmund Husserl, Heidegger and Jean Paul Sartre also. In religion, Updike favours Karl Barth's theology and believes with him that God is Wholly Other, unreachable and unknowable, a belief he has put into the minds of many characters he has created. Barth's position on the moral and ethical questions of life is stated clearly in his theological work, The Word of God and the Word of Man. He has stated in this book: "Man cannot begin to answer the ethical questions in actual life. He can only recognize that he is wholly incapable of commanding an answer" (166). In the interview granted to Charles T. Samuels Updike has spoken at length on Karl Barth's theology:

> His theology has two faces--the No and the Yes. The No which first resounded in 1919 when the original edition of Barth's impassioned commentary on Romans was published, is addressed to all that is

> naturalistic, humanistic, de-mytholigized and merely ethical in the Christianity that German Protestantism had inherited from the nineteenth century. The liberal churches, as Barth saw them, were dedicated to the god to whom in our pride and despair we have erected the tower of Babel; to the great personal and the impersonal, mystical, philosophical or naïve Background and Patron Saint of our human righeousness . . . . This god is really an unrighteous god, and it is high time for us to declare ourselves thorough-going doubters, skeptics, scoffers and atheists in regard to him." The real God, the God men do not invent is, totaliter aliter--Wholly Other. We cannot reach Him; only He can reach us. This He has done as the Christ of Biblical revelation, and the Yes of Barth's theology is the re-affirmation . . . of the traditional Christian message." (Samuels 97)

For Updike, religious questions are those arising from the relationship between man and God, While moral questions are those which concern man's intercourse with his fellowmen. The problems of human morality are subordinate to that of faith.

In the radio talk, "Self Comments on His work and the Role of the Novelist Today," Updike has said that the central theme of each of his novels is "meant to be a moral dilemma" and his books are intended as "moral debates with the readers." Traditionally novelists who dealt with moral issues have tried to view human problems from a moral perspective which indicates both their causes and possible solutions. Updike believes that these problems are insoluble basically. He rejects the notion that literature should inculcate moral

precepts. His theme is a moral dilemma and he constantly concentrates on the complex implications of his characters, moral decisions, so that the issues are always clear and the consequences of each decision fully developed. While his characters choose from among the given options, the author remains neutral; he does not indicate any preferences. He leaves the decision to the individual and is sympathetic even when the character chooses against the norms of morality. Updike is more humanistic in this respect; he upholds the individual in the true spirit of an American.

Yet Updike has portrayed the human conscience as suffering pangs of guilt for transgressing the laws of established morality. For instance his novel Roger's Version in which all the major characters are shown to be suffering from pangs of guilt. He has also hinted at another morality which is a sort of response to an inner voice; most of his characters follow this subjective morality. Harry Angstrom of the Rabbit novels and Piet Hanema of Couples are examples. He has also created a few characters in the earlier novels, representing the established conventional morality, especially in the novels of his romantic naturalistic phase; that is, the work of his early youth produced in that decade that extends up to 1965. Hook of The Poorhouse Fair, George Caldwell of The Centaur, Harry's parents in the Rabbit novels and Mrs. Robinson in Of the Farm exemplify this type of character. But these character types fade out as one approaches the second phase characterized by realistic and existentialistic modes of representation. The old world is shown as fading out giving way to the new. George Caldwell dies so that his son Peter may be free to pursue his ambition of becoming an artist. Joey's mother Mrs. Robinson is

also on the point of death and she too releases her son Joey from his sense of obligation to the old world represented by his mother's farm. Rabbit's parents also are on the verge of death in Rabbit Redux. This phase begins with Of the Farm which is the transitional novel, followed by Couples, Rabbit Redux and ends with A Month of Sundays (1975) which marks again, transition to a third phase in Updike's artistic evolution.

The protagonists of the third phase of his career are marked by a humanistic existentialistic vision. They also represent, like the protagonists of the second phase, the subjective morality to an extent. Some of them care less for their consciences, and play a game of chess with life moulding other people's lives to serve their convenience. Roger in Roger's Version, the protagonists of the short stories in the collection Trust Me, Sarah Worth and Arhat in S. are all examples of this type of character that tends to victimize others and who also are turned into victims. Yet Updike's treatment is humanistic and they are given opportunities for spiritual growth and renewal. Being led by instinct, or subjective morality they also are seen to be engaged in a search for some kind of salvation or meaning. Sometimes they seek meaning through sexuality, some times through endurance and also through orderliness and integrity in a small job well done.

Among his works of fiction Bech: A Book (1970) and Bech is Back (1982) are two books that defy classification. Updike himself has given the subtitle "A Book" to the first collection of Bech stories, which is significant, for the structure of the short story that he has made use of, in the execution of these two works makes it impossible to view them as novels.

However these books mark a different phase in the development of Updike's view of life. Here, from an existentialist world he has moved on to the realm of the comic and the absurd. The other works related to this comic phase of Updike's vision are A Month of Sundays, The Witches of Eastwick and S.

Henry Bech is portrayed as a distracted Jewish writer who, during a protracted bout with the writer's block gets into greater entanglements with distraction by accepting invitations to lecture at colleges and to represent American culture abroad. In the second volume he is found to sink deeper: being wed and put in bed with toddlers from his wife's early marriage, and having to put up with the cold war fought by his wife's sister Norma, whom he had jilted by marryng her younger sister. He is completely undone, the remaining wits take leave of him. Bech is in shambles; he is rendered impotent in more ways than one. When it was required of him to autograph copies of his own earlier books, he could not even write his name.

Just as characters like Sarah Worth in S. and the three witches, Alexandra, Jane and Sukie in The Witches of Eastwick had provided him with an opportunity to air his views on feminism and American Protestantism, Henry Bech too presents Updike with a vehicle for talking about the current literary scene from a safe distance. In the guise of Bech Updike ventures to reveal and comment on the racket that literary scene has been reduced to.

The nineties have witnessed Updike developing into a tragic philosophic phase of vision even while making a return journey towards his old modes of narration. Rabbit at Rest published in 1990 is indeed a coming back to the realistic documentary novel he had experimented in Rabbit, Run of the earlier

phase. Memories of Ford Administration (1992) makes use of post-modern techniques he had earlier used in A Month of Sundays, The Coup and Roger's Version, yet it reminds one of the reminiscent tone of his earlier romantic phase. Brazil (1994) is a definite return to the world of romance. For as in Marry me (1976), it retells, through the modern love story of Isabel and Trisato, set against the idyllic background of the wilderness of the unexplored regions of Brazil, the ancient love myth of Tristram and Iseult. With In the Beauty of the Lilies (1996) Updike's vision returns to the grand conception of mega fiction as in the Rabbit novels. But here in one single volume he tracks the fortunes and fall of an American family through four generations and eight decades. He has hit the heights of mature philosophic wisdom in the novels of this period, particularly in Rabbit at Rest, Brazil and In the Beauty of the Lilies.

The distinctive characteristic that makes Updike's fiction stay apart from the loud and aggressive voices around him in the world of fiction, is the "humane dimension," the presence of a compassionate vision of men and matters which proceeds from an instinctive understanding of the two worlds, the Old and the New: a rare insight Updike had gained through co-habitation with grandparents and which had improved his 'backward and forward visions' as he had explained at length in the short story "The Happiest I've Been." In this exquisite story, through the character of John Nordholm he relates how he "knew about the bedside commodes and midnight coughing fits that awaited most men" and had "gained a humane dimension" that had made him gentle and humorous with peers, but diffident with girls and how girls had felt it as an

insult and turned unresponsive. According to Updike, "A girl who has received out of nowhere a gift worth all Asia's gold wants more than just humanity to bestow it on" (The Same Door 223). This vision of humanity has become Updike's greatest attribute as a writer. His vision of humanity renders the most negative situation affirmative by a sympathetic study of even the most unlovable character. Some of his characters are made to undergo a total transformation, a spiritual renewal. Harry Angstorm after the traumatic experiences culminating in the burning down of his house in Rabbit Redux, Piet and Foxy in Couples, Roger, Dale, Esther and Verna in Roger's Version and Sarah Worth in S. testify to this spiritual re-orientation.

Thus, out of contradictory forces that has drained the vitality out of other writers or led them to wrangle with each other, Updike has fashioned a body of writing, that is rich, mysterious and so full of life that it could be a substitute for nature itself.

The present investigation aims at an interpretation of Updike's fiction foregrounding his work against socio-cultural milieu so as to illumine the author's meaning and intention. This study focusses on the way Updike visualizes his subjects and characters, thus bringing to light his compassionate and sensible vision of "humanity"--the "humane dimension"--that accompanies his fiction all the way, from the short stories of the earlier phases to the megafiction In the Beauty of the Lilies, which is the latest among his novels.

The method applied here is interdisciplinary: sociology, psychology, phenomenology, history and other disciplines have been made use of. The introduction places the author in the relevant perspective. The Second Chapter

gives an overview of Updike's short fiction. An attempt is made here to highlight his compassionate and humane vision of men and matters. The Third Chapter adopts a sociological approach to his first novel, The Poorhouse Fair which is set against the background of the conformist fifties. The Fourth Chapter analyzes the Rabbit tetralogy in which the protagonist, Harry Angstrom, gets identified with the myth of America. From his role of historian turned into history, he is seen to attempt a new synthesis of the diverse elements of race, colour and region, so that America would yet achieve a tradition, historical significance, mythic character and a spiritual renewal. The Fifth Chapter concentrates on three novels that redefine and reconstruct Hawthorne's The Scarlet Letter and are together grouped as the "The Scarlet Letter Trilogy. The novels thus grouped are A Month of Sundays, Roger's Version and S. The Sixth Chapter analyzes nine novels--The Centaur, Of the Farm, Couples, Marry Me, The Coup, The Witches of Eastwick, Memories of Ford Administration, Brazil and In the Beauty of the Lilies--bringing this study upto date. The concluding chapter summarizes the findings and evaluates Updike's vision of humanity and his unique place in the ranks of the fictionists of the twentieth century. Direct quotations from the novels, short stories and other works of Updike are included, as they serve as rules laid down for review purposes by Updike himself. For example, in Picked-Up Pieces (1975) Updike makes his statement on the practical value of fiction to its readers: "Fiction is also a mode of spying, we read it as we look in windows or listen to gossip, to learn what other people do" (518).

The grace of a compassionate vision proceeding from a sympathetic understanding of humanity, the depth of ideas, the variety of subjects, the narrative confidence and the perfection of technique displayed in his novels to date make Updike's readers sigh with a sweet anticipation for more of his instructive "gossip" and wish for him laurels, more and more, including the highest-the Nobel Prize.

“The still, sad music of humanity”
Wordsworth.

CHAPTER TWO

Tales of Innocence and Experience: Updike's Short Fiction

In an interview granted to Charles T. Samuels, John Updike had affirmed the great satisfaction and delight he had felt while reflecting over his short stories. He had stated, "they are dear to me and if I had to give anybody one book of me it would be the Vintage Olinger Stories" (Luscher 167). In his short stories he shares with his audience what is most precious to his creative imagination, that is, the cherished memories of his own lived life. In them, he had concentrated on topics and locale of which he had an intimate knowledge, those which are closest to his home and heart. Hence, in these stories he has restricted his canvas to the depiction of the daily lives of the middle class people of small towns; the best of his stories are set in the fictional town of Olinger and most often deal with adolescent protagonists.

This chapter attempts to illumine the vision of humanity that unfolds through the short fiction of Updike, based on eight collections of shortstories--The Same Door (1959), Pigeon Feathers and Other Stories (1962); Olinger Stories: A Selection (1964); The Music School (1966), Museums and Women and Other Stories (1972), Problems and Other Stories (1979), Two Far To Go (1979) published in England as Your Lover Just Called (1980), and Trust Me (1987).

If, in his short fiction, Updike has concentrated on the comparatively insignificant lives of middle class people living in suburban places, it is because he has taken it upon himself, as a "self-appointed mission" to be their spokesman. As

he had affirmed, he wanted to "stand up and cry, 'No, this is life, to be taken seriously as any other kind'. . . " (Luscher 184). In his vision of life all kinds of people could be equally interesting; the middle class life is as good a subject as any other. So he declares: "My subject is the American Protestant small-town middle class. I like middles. It is in the middles that extremes clash, where ambiguity restlessly rules" (Contemporary Authors 953).

A great respect, Updike has for reality, its secrecy and its music. So he depicts the problems, the pain and the sacrifices that the middle class life demands of man, woman and child. He draws abundantly from the real experiences of his own childhood, adolescence and manhood. According to him, the creative imagination is wholly parasitic upon the real world:

> Creative excitement, and a sense of useful work, have invariably and only come to me when I felt I was transferring, with a lively accuracy, some piece of experienced reality to the printed page. . . . The will toward concreteness, the fervour to do justice to the real, compels style and form into being . . . (Luscher 184-85).

The textuality of his work and the reality of his portraits proceed from the authenticity of the material he manipulates.

"Friends from Philadelphia," Updike's first published short story introduces the character John Nordholm as a teenager. His mother employs him to get a bottle of wine to entertain their guests from Philadelphia. To accomplish his mission, he needs the help of his father's friend, Mr. Lutz. John has to wait in Lutz's house for him, enduring the mocking remarks of Thelma, Lutz's adolescent daughter, which

makes him painfully aware of his parents' financial inferiority. Mr. Lutz arrives, he even allows John to drive his new car to the liquor store, buys an expensive bottle of wine costing much more than the two dollars John gives him, and gives a dollar's change back to him. Yet, there are some hints given in the course of the story that make one doubt the real motive behind this apparent generosity; that is, in the form of some remarks made by Lutz. According to him, intelligence is not always rewarded by material prosperity; for instance, he points out his own prosperity in contrast to the more educated Nordholm's reduced circumstances; and his remark to his daughter as he admires John's quick mastery of the new car, "He's a smart boy. He'll never own a car" (The same door 9), throws more light into his character. So the gift of the wine he makes becomes an ironic gift, and John shrinks into beihg an emissary handing out this ironic message along with the expensive wine, to his parents.

John Nordholm again appears in the story, "The Happiest I've Been." But he has changed. Having developed a personality of his own, he is much removed from the immature adolescent of the previous story. Aged twenty, "a college sophomore home on vacation" he stands at the threshold of the adult world of responsibilities. He is mature enough to observe the changes in himself and his friends. In the course of a New Year party at Olinger hosted by a young man and his bride, John meets the young man's jilted girl friend Margaret, who gets drunk and sick in between her frenzied dancing. John's companion Neill sets about looking for fresh pastures while John drifts from room to room passively observing the scene. As the night wears on, he takes upon himself the mission of seeing Margaret and her friend to their apartment. While Neill and Margaret's friend

grope behind the sofa, John instead of taking advantage of his protégé, listens to her as she confides in him her wounded feelings. Later he becomes her headrest as she falls asleep on his shoulder. Although he is eager to return to Chicago, to his studies and his girlfriend, he experiences great happiness by this lingering behind. Towards the end of the story he is found speeding along the highway, away from Olinger, leaving behind his childhood, and adolescence, bound for his destination. Neill, his companion has fallen asleep on his shoulder trusting him with the wheel of his car. Thus that night turns out to be, he says, "the happiest I've ever been," in knowing that "twice since midnight a person had trusted me enough to fall asleep beside me" (The Same Door 242).

There is a passage in this same story which gives a rare insight into the attitudes of the adolescents of his time. Updike describes the relaxed friendship that existed between Neill and Nordholm:

> But it seemed to me the most important thing . . . was that he and I lived with grandparents. This improved our backward and forward visions; we knew about the bedside commodes and midnight coughing fits, that awaited most men. . . . We had gained a humane dimension that made us gentle and humorous among peers but diffident at dances and hesitant in cars. Girls hate boys' doubts; they amount to insults. Gentlemen is for married women to appreciate. . . . A girl, who has received out of nowhere a gift worth all Asia's gold wants more than just humanity to bestow it on. (The Same Door 223)

No doubt his short stories illumine scintillating moments. Updike's sensibilities are paramount when he is less constrained by the need for elaboration. For

instance, note the verbal economy applied in evoking background as the short story "Pigeon Feathers" opens: "When we moved to Firetown, things were upset, displaced, re-arranged" (Pigeon Feathers 116). The shifting, mobility, displacement and re-arrangement of things form perpetual features of the post-modern predicament, of which Updike himself had direct experience. During his childhood Updike's family had moved from Shillington to Plowville to reclaim the farm that belonged to his grandparents. Shifting to a different milieu marks an abrupt change in everything from the rearrangement of furniture to the re-ordering of one's life and habits. Fifteen-year-old David, the protagonist of "Pigeon Feathers" is not only upset by this displacement but also struck with terror by his reading of H.G.Wells's The Outline of History. In this book, Jesus Christ, described as "an obscure political agitator" was denied his divine personality. His faith in God is shaken and he is assailed by terror, at the picture of nothingness that gapes at man after death, if he is denied his immortality, his existence with God in heaven. This fear of sure extinction sends David in search of some solid foundation on which to set up a "fortress against death." Neither Reverend Dobson whose "job" it was to give answers to such metaphysical questions, nor his mother could give him the right answer. What he requires is a re-affirmation of his faith. Rev. Dobson with his incompetent and evasive approach, and the mother with her attempt at enticing him away from his search, with the prospect of a sensuous enjoyment of life with nature, alienate the boy into an isolated realm, where he struggles all alone with fear and doubts. He is angry with his mother for having assumed that heaven had faded out of his mind years ago. "She had imagined that he had already entered in the secrecy of silence the conspiracy he now knew to be all around him" (136). Engrossed in his domestic chores Mr. Kern

seems to be a "distant ally." Their trips together into Olinger provide him with a temporary release from his anxieties.

At last David reaches his answer gropingly. Towards the close of the story as he gets the affirmation he was seeking, as he stands gazing at the intricate beauty of the dead pigeons he had killed: "God who had lavished such craft upon these worthless birds could not destroy His whole creation by refusing to let David live for ever" (150).

Here, there can be a "possible irony in the whole performance" as Robert Detweiler suggests (1972 ed. 65). This affirmation of faith could be a strategy to cope with his fear of death, and not a genuine religious commitment. The faith he grasps is provisional, the struggle in his mind is only temporarily settled.

Updike has an unquestionable insight into the conflicts in the life of men whose choices are made not of their volition, as also of the complexities in their sexual attitudes. It seems he associates maleness with sexuality and connects the decline of society with the decline of masculinity. He has a naturalistic concept of man; the near-savage strength of the male, he celebrates. For instance this passage from "Pigeon Feathers":

> . . . when some Saturdays they did stay home, it was to do something destructive—tear down an old hen-house, or set huge brush fires. . . . Whenever his father worked, it was with rapt violence; when he chopped kindling, fragments of the old hen-house boards flew like shrapnel and the ax-hand was always within a quarter of an inch flying

> off the handle. He was exhilarating to watch, sweating and swearing and sucking bits of saliva back into his lips. (141)

Updike revels in the portrayal of men. His men refuse to be "second rate" no matter what it is they are engaged in: religiosity, sexuality, manual labour, football or basketball. They are men who have had a vision of something better and greater: Harold of "Trust Me", Richard Maple, David Kern, John Nordholm, Allan Dow, Harry Angstrom, Piet Hanema and a host of other men stand evidence to these powerful males of this creation. Yet his women are more real, having a firm grip on reality. It is his women characters who discover the "soul" of the soil, revelling at the miraculous beauties of nature. A fine example is the character of David's mother in "Pigeon Feathers." An efficient woman and a perfect manager of home and farm, she is a prototype of many other mothers in his later novels. Updike's women characters manage not only home and farm, but also their men. On the contrary, his men, torn by doubts and fears, entertain vain dreams about life and have to be initiated into adult responsibilities the hard way. For instance, to escape his fear of death and extinction, David Kern has to undergo the experience of being the agent of death and destruction. He has to be inducted into the adult world through a ceremony of violence and it is his mother who urges him to it. In the Maples stories Joan Maple extols the strong female, notably in the story "Separating" that poignantly portrays the moment when after twenty years of married life, Joan and Richard Maple had to explain to their four children why they decided to separate. Richard has originally consented to Joan's plan to tackle each child separately. But his tears betray him during the welcome-home-dinner given to his daughter, Judith, on her return from England. Joan is forced to reveal the

truth to all at once. But she is sober and cool as she does it, although it is Richard who needs the divorce in order to marry another woman he loves. The reactions are multifarious. The girls react with cool rationality, but the backlashes of the sons are diverse. John, the youngest, shouts and expresses his shock and rebellion by eating cigarette and napkin. The eldest son Dickie who is told the last takes it manfully to begin with, but finally, as his father bids him good night, Dickie breaks down and kisses Richard passionately like a woman on the lips and asks the painful yet crucial question, "Why?" The story reaches its conclusion as Richard fails to answer his son's query: "Why. It was a whistle of wind in a crack, a knife thrust, a window thrown open on emptiness. The white face was gone, the darkness, was featureless. Richard had forgotten why" (Too Far To Go 211).

It is with astonishing power and tenderness that Updike traces the story of the Maples; their's is a marriage that begins with love and ends irretrievably with love. The concluding part of the collection, "Here Comes the Maples," is a story which is all reminiscence, the only action being the divorce. As Richard Maple, now a middle-aged man chews the honeyed cuds of youthful memories, the wedding twenty years hence, looms large in his mind. He remembers how in his haze and wonderment of the historic moment, he had forgotten to seal the vows with a kiss: "Joan had glanced over at him, smiling expectant, he had smiled back not remembering. The moment passed, and they hurried down the aisle" (Your Lover Just Called 134).

Now, after twenty long years of fidelities and infidelities they decide to part ways—a decision agreed upon by both in all love and consideration on either side.

At the scene of the closing ceremony as they stand side by side before the judge to sign out of their marriage:

> The judge smiled and wished them both good luck. The lawyers sagged with relief, and a torrent of merry legal chit chat . . . excluded the Maples. Obsolete at their own ceremony, Joan and Richard stepped back from the bench in unison and stood side by side, Uncertain of how to turn, until Richard at last remembered what to do; he kissed her. (Your Lover Just Called 141)

One is reminded at this stage of Updike's personal parable: his marriage, separation and divorce that made this story of the Maples all the more poignant and heart-rending. He had admitted in the Paris Review Interview that there is "no avoiding one's own experiences" and that the autobiography becomes almost a "submerged thread connecting certain of the fictions." So his own home town Shillington becomes the fictional Olinger, the scene for the best of his stories; the old high school crowd of his boyhood and adolescence fills the pages of his fiction under different names just as he himself shifts from role to role--adolescent David Kern, young John Nordholm or the middle aged Richard Maple. This self-expression is an essential part of creativity according to him.

Updike's earlier stories of the sixties, as the author himself owns, have to do with an "image of flight or escape or loss." Flight may lead to freedom, but in the process certain cherished items are irretrievably lost. In certain characters this fight is in retrospect, in an insatiable desire to retrieve something from that remote romantic realm of early youth or adolescence. In their search for a faded radiance they reconstruct the past trying to relive it, painful though it be. The world of art

seems to provide Updikean characters with one of the means of redemption--a valuable something, constructed to the accompaniment of the music of reminiscence, something immutable and enduring, retrieved from the flux, as a stay against the sense of loss.

In the second phase which starts with the closing years of the sixties, the Updikean hero is found as passing through a problematic and critical period in his life. Innocence passes into experience. Marital problems arise. Man is torn between his emotional drives and his sense of duty to family and children. He should either suffer the pangs of guilt or the nagging pain of self sacrifice. As Updike points out in an interview: "The father, whatever his name, is sacrificing freedom of motion, and the mother is sacrificing . . . sexual richness, I guess. They are all stuck . . ." (Luscher 166).

With the advent of the seventies the confusing transitional phase wears off and the characters tread on surer grounds, being confident to step outside legitimate boundaries. Freud had opened the path to new freedoms of behaviour, uninhibited pleasures and sexual hedonism, the intellectual basis of which were only dimly understood. Extramarital relations become the order of the day than the exception. As the Maples stories point the way, one man and four women appear to be the right proportion in this post-Freudian world. A man has a wife, a mistress, a "redherring" and a "fish;" that is two women in current application, one with reference to the past and one to the future yet to be hooked. Marital problems arise only when a mistress aspires for a lasting relationship.

The Updikean hero has reached a fourth stage in his development during the eighties. He is past his childhood and adolescence, marriage and divorce and is

found still advancing through uneasy territories beyond. As they get older they become increasingly conscious of ageing, illness and death. They have passed through the territory of mid-life crisis, and established new relationships after failed first marriages. These new relationships which seem to be only repetition of the same old ceremonies of trust and betrayal of trust, fill in the pages of his later collection of stories--Trust Me. Men yearn for the lost realms--the peace, comfort and security of their earlier existence. The children of previous marriages, whose affection the parents yearn for, make the domestic tragedy more poignant. With men who would be trustworthy, yet fails, and men who betray trust knowingly the Updikean scenario has become subtle and complex.

Updike has come a long way from his adolescent protagonist of "Piegeon Feathers" in his portrayal of the middle-aged Ed Marston of "The Other Woman," the concluding story of Trust Me. Ed Marston is an engineer whose specialization is stress analysis of tall steel-frame buildings. He considers himself a connoisseur of stress. One sleepless night while his wife Carol lay snoring beside him, he chances upon a home-made valentine from Jason Reynolds, an acquaintance of the family, in Carol's stop-bureau drawer. Ed makes up his mind to untangle himself from his marital co-habitation of 22 years, for Jason's message bespoke a handsome blending of friendliness, passion and manly adoration. He was delighted to realise that his wife was loved by someone, so bored he had been "lying beside her night after night, rising to urinate once, twice, depending on his insomnia, which expanded in spirals like a rage, he had become convinced that there must be a better life than this" (Trust Me 131). But he had never dared expect that some

other man might covet her and now the thought made him feel so happy that he fell asleep over it.

He gave the affair some time to ripen, watching over it, even protecting it from the eyes of Jason's wife Patricia. Her ignorance was a pre-requisite for the fulfilment of his self-serving scheme of comfortably extricating himself from his wife at the same time being assured of a supporter for the family. So Pat remains in her "protected bubble." Meanwhile Ed confronts Carol with his information and leaves her. During the transitional phase before the divorce, Ed sees to it that the two families merge and have parties and games in common. Even the children of the two families become aware of the affair but "the other woman" somehow remains on the periphery of the knowledge that the others share. Finally when the secret explodes on her, it is such a shock that she instantly leaves, finding it impossible to forgive even her own children who have kept her in the dark, making her a fool in the eyes of society. So Carol had to help Jason to run his household mothering the hostile Reynolds children in addition to her own. Eventually Jason moves in with Carol. Pat's vindictive behaviour, especially towards her own children loses for her the society's sympathy and the legal bias which had been initially on her side. It becomes easy for Jason to get a divorce and the custody of the children. Jason and Carol get happily married, Ed resumes his bachelor ways and the only one who suffers in the process is Pat. The story ends with a chance meeting between Ed and Pat sometime afterwards when she greets him with a lingering kiss on the lips. The gesture disturbs him for it is difficult to analyse the meaning and he asks himself, whether it means forgiveness, or a way of reliving her happy past, or an acknowledgement of an exultant trembling moment in the

tennis court when he had held her in his hands. Ed chooses the last, as the least stressful reading, so that he could live his life free from pangs of guilt, for having manipulated her life to serve his convenience. Ed is seen to be almost as unpardonable a sinner against trust as Chillingworth of Hawthorne's The Scarlet Letter.

Updike's world view has undergone a drastic transformation as innocence gives way for experience. It is an existentialist view of a chaotic viscuous world where suffering seems to be inevitable. Life offers only mixed blessings. Man is offered a variety of options. Whichever way he chooses, he suffers invariably, the consequences of his action and those of others. Man's urge for freedom leads him only to illusions; the happiness he pursues somehow eludes him. Ed Marston desires to free himself from the constraints of married existence, yet he is not left altogether free. He has to disentangle himself from his guilt-consciousness, which is possible only by his willingness to lose, his hard-won freedom again.

In his analysis of life and humanity Updike is evidently indebted to the French intellectual, Jean Paul Sartre, whose original conception of a novel in four volumes entitled Paths of Freedom must have inspired Updike's conception of the Rabbit Tetralogy with a similar theme. Though Sartre's Tetralogy was never completed, the first three volumes, The Age of Reason (1947) The Reprieve (1947) and Troubled Sleep (1950) had become popular by the time Updike commenced upon his career. Among Sartre's philosophic works, more than the pessimistic Being and Nothingness it is Existentialism and Humanism introducing the humanistic moral theory that seems to have influenced Updike's humanist version of existentialism. It is a view which lays strong emphasis on human freedom

though freedom itself is a heavy burden because it brings with it responsibility, guilt, remorse and punishment. Further, one's pursuit of freedom results in another's entrapment. But it is to be cherished because it is the unique source of human nobility that renders him god-like. Updike seems to share along with Sartre, some of his notions of humanist existentialism: such views as that the pursuit of one's freedom requires of him to promote the freedom of others and that a man has responsibilities to all for the values affirmed by his way of life. But Updike stops travelling alongside Sartre when he takes off with the theories of dialectical materialism, for Updike is convinced that the problems of the Western society are not rooted in economic scarcity, but in the short-sightedness of an affluent society.

From Sartre, he moves on to the ideas of the German philosophers--Martin Heidegger, a major influence on Sartre and twentieth century existentialism, and Edmund Husserl, the founder of phenomenology. Heidegger believed that the investigation of human being in his basic situation, aims and needs was the starting point of one's search for "the meaning of being." He also taught that the human existence as seen in this basic existentialist way is seen to be grounded in care and dread--a notion Updike shared with him, and the earlier expounder of existentialism, the religious philosopher Kierkegaard. Updike has applied this philosophy to his work, most notably in novels like Rabbit, Run, Rabbit Redux and Marry Me. But Updike does not share in the atheistic implication of Heidegger's essays on existentialism. For instance, he does not believe that the human endeavours are brought to nothingness in death. Updike would refer to his strong

faith in God and the promise of a hereafter as a stay against this existentialist horror of total extinction.

It is in his approach to the data and the method of applying it to the form at hand that Updike owes to Edmund Husserl. Husserl's phenomenological method is a new philosophic approach to describe and define the genuine essence of conscious data. Husserl being a mathematician turned philosopher, had applied this method primarily to more formal meanings of logic and mathematics. Phenomenology emphasizes the intentionality of the consciousness, that is, the necessary relation of every conscious act to a meaningful object. Reduced to its meaning as such, the world to be explained in philosophy is not the existing world supposed by the natural attitude, but an infinite multitude of meaningful data, unified by the universal structures by which these data belong to the world. Phenomenology has to describe the basic meanings and structures by "intentional analysis" of them, that is, an analysis of their meaning as such. Updike has resorted to this method in the best of his short stories and novels, more remarkably in short stories like "Trust Me" and "The Other Woman."

The short story, "Trust Me," appears as a montage comprising four juxtaposed segments, snapshots of skirmishes with trust at different stages in one man's life. The first incident is from the protagonist's childhood. His father coaxes little Harold to jump into the pool failing to catch him. The child sinks, water fills his lungs while gasping for air. His father finally rescues him. As they reach safety, what shakes the child's trust even more, is his mother's indignant slapping of his father. It echoes in his memory and breeds a distrust of the mother's "swift sure-handed anger." The second scene takes place in his youth.

Here the situation is inverted for it is Harold who betrays trust inadvertently. Harold's wife who has an acute fear of flying is inspired by Harold into trusting the flight. Yet a near accident occurs after take off from Rome which shakes even Harold's easy acceptance of being air-borne while his wife suffers worse. The third incident occurs during a ski-trip with his girl friend, Priscilla, after the break-up of his first marriage. Here Harold assumes his father's role of his childhood urging the young girl to attempt a more advanced trail. She refuses and this lack of trust falls on him as a transformed version of his mother's slap. The concluding incident takes place after his divorce, while as an errant parent, Harold sadly pursues his children's affections. Here Harold again becomes a victim, this time of his grown-up son's casual indifference. Dining with his son Harold eats a hashish brownie that his son assures him is harmless; Harold fumbles through the usual trip back home in giddiness caused by the hashish brownie. Emerging from the subway, "he was in air again . . . something in his throat burned" (Trust Me 11). He reaches the safety of his room by the sheer force of habit and phones his girl friend expecting sympathy. Listening to his tale of woe, Priscilla rebukes him and the sound of her hanging up the phone evokes the memory of his mother's slap: "His father had become his son and his mother was his girl friend. This much remained true, it had not been his fault, and in surviving he was somehow blamed" (Trust Me 12).

The basic issue here is the human need for interpersonal trust, its unreliability and its betrayals. Man wishes to be trust-worthy, yet betrays trust unwittingly. Man seeks to be trusted, but is refused outright. Man changes role from victim to victimizer. The world appears so unreliable a place where one is

bound to face betrayals. The only solution seems to be to take the lapses in others as part of human limitation. The "humane dimension" would become a valuable asset in judging the lapses in yourself as well as in the rest of humanity.

Updike describes the basic meanings in the story by intentional analysis, keeping the essential relation of act with its meaning or intention. From the Maples story, Richard's younger son's cigarette-eating and his elder son's passionate kiss, from John Nordholm's story Mr.Lutz's expensive gift of wine, from "The Other Woman" Jason Reynolds' valentine and Pat's kiss, and from "Trust Me" Harold's mother's slap and Priscilla's hanging up the phone, are all instances of the conscious data which Updike uses to describe and define his world. It seems that Updike stands alongside Mark Twain and his Huckleberry Finn, that immortal symbol of the American innocence turned to experience, in commenting over a world of "pitiful rascals," that human beings can be awfully unkind to one another.

To conclude, Updike is a writer endowed with a rare insight into the problematic human condition in a chaotic viscuous world. He has bestowed heroism on the day-to-day lives of ordinary men and women irrespective of age or class. The textuality of his work proceeds from the authenticity of the material he manipulates. He revels in the portrayal of characters. His men refuse to be "second rate," his women are realistic. His heroes fall into four categories--the young man trying to recapture his lost childhood and adolescence; the married man bored with his married existence facing mid-life crisis, the middle-aged man who has overcome his diffidence and indulges in extra marital relationships, and finally the hero, past middle age, who has established new relationships after a failed first

marriage and divorce and who is still uneasy and angst-infected. These different aspects of humanity Updike has presented with verisimilitude progressing from romanticism through realism and existentialism, to humanist existentialism. Contradicting elements are brought to harmony by his bestowal of an aspect of his own experience, a chunk of his own life to each character he has breathed life into. His protagonists are both victims and victimizers of whose failings he is sympathetically aware of. They are desirous of trust at the same time betrayers of trust--the two aspects co-exist as two sides of the same coin. Aided by an unerring insight into human nature, Updike accounts their lapses and failures attributing them to the human limitation. Thus his vision of humanity permeates through each of his short stories.

"Where there is no vision, the people perish"
The Bible.

CHAPTER THREE

A Bond and a Testament: The Poorhouse Fair

The Poorhouse Fair published in 1959 is Updike's first attempt at treating society on a wider canvas. It inaugurates his experimentation with the form of the novel. Hitherto his reputation had rested on a handful of short stories published in the New Yorker. "My sense of myself was of a sort of a sprinter," he confessed in an interview, years afterwards. Writing a novel was a trial of his resources as is evident in the brevity of this opening address. Written at a highly volatile and impressionable age, The Poorhouse Fair has to be treated as a product of its milieu--the American Fifties.

The idea that America was turning into a slavishly conformist state was shared by literary men, social thinkers, economists, psychologists, sociologists and visionaries. Mc.Carthyism in politics had imposed a spirit of conformity in the intellectual community. Many had noted it but few dared to react against it. The dissenting voices were noted with suspicion; involved in it was the delicate question of their loyalty to the American Government. Irwing Howe had referred to the times as "this age of conformity" in his article of the same title. David Riesman, the sociologist in his memorable work The Lonely Crowd (1953) makes a dispassionate and precise statement of the situation. His book, significantly subtitled, A Study of the Changing American Character, declares that America is becoming a nation of conformists who are "other -directed" while their ancestors were "inner-directed." William H White's work The

Organization Man (1957) finds the average American with his strong sentiments for the "rugged individual" of the national past, now willing to lay down his individuality and self interests to big business corporations. Paul Goodman goes a step further in his indictment of society in his work Growing up Absurd (1960). He points out as a serious reason for the spread of juvenile delinquency in the US, the shoddy goals of American society which makes the American adolescent decline membership in it.

Yet it was Reisman's The Lonely Crowd that established a critical terminology for the analysis of "mass society." The subject being "the changing American character" he proceeded on the assumption that change in character follows changes in social structure and economic patterns. The aptness in the use of terms was an important feature of Reisman's work. His analysis of the society hinged on three key terms, "tradition directed," "inner-directed" and "other directed," each of which describe a historically conditioned "social character." "Tradition-directed" behaviour is characteristic of capitalistic, agricultural and nomadic societies. "Inner-directed" people belong to the early capitalistic era, when production and mobility ruled social life. They are self-governing people equipped with an inner "psychological gyroscope" capable of coping with a world of vast choices. This has been the American character type through the major part of its history. But now as society has shifted the primary emphasis from production to consumption and from work to leisure, the "other-directed" character has replaced the self-directed character. Riesman expresses deep anxiety over this shift for, other-direction has become a powerful cultural force producing anxious, uncertain

conformists looking up to mass media and mass political parties for direction. What Riesman would recommend as an alternative is the "autonomous" individual--one who can manage the temptations of a society of consumption and leisure, and "diffuse anxiety" without losing his bearings. In unequivocal terms Riesman denounces the pointless conformity that has gone beyond all limits: "Is it conceivable that these economically privileged Americans will some day wake up to the fact that they overconform? Wake up to discovery that a host of behavioral rituals are the result, not of an inescapable social imperative, but of an image of society. . ." (Reisman 16).

The Poorhouse Fair is the story of a "lonely crowd" fighting other-direction. It gives the picture of a scientifically structured, highly-mechanized and sterile society of a future welfare state. The projection of fictional time into future does not in any way interfere with its artistic purpose--the criticism aimed at the slavishly conformist state to which America has fallen. It is the picture of a society that has prescribed for itself the wrong remedies.

In The Affluent Society (1958) published around the same period, the economist John Kenneth Galbraith had commented on the unwholesome nature of post war American society, with its private affluence and public squalor. He had pointed out with prophetic insight the danger involved in misreading social implications. He remarks:

> Western man has escaped for the moment the poverty which was for so long his all embracing fate. The unearthly light of a handful of nuclear explosions would signal his return to utter deprivation if,

> indeed he survived at all. . . . Illusion is a comprehensive ill. The rich man who deludes himself into behaving like a mendicant may conserve his fortune although he will not be very happy. The affluent country which conducts its affairs in accordance with rules of another and poorer age also foregoes opportunities. And in misunderstanding itself it will, in any time of difficulty, implacably prescribe for itself the wrong remedies. This . . . is to a disturbing degree, our present tendency. (Galbraith 16)

The society Updike portrays in The Poorhouse Fair is a highly organised and well-ordered "affluent society" of which even the poor houses are perfectly managed aiming at the health, hygiene and longevity of the inmates, resorting to updated health-care. Yet, in their attempts to reinforce the body, the spirit is altogether forgotten; which in due course leads to disintegration and chaos.

The setting of the novel is a poorhouse for the aged in a future welfare state--the Diamond County Poorhouse which is getting ready to receive visitors for its annual Fair. The old people's home becomes a convenient sociological terrain for the interaction of the opposites--the old and the young, America's past and present, the "inner-directed" and the "other-directed".

The events of the story take place from morning to evening of a day--the day set apart for the Poorhouse Fair. This is the day the people from the nearby town are expected to visit the House so that the old people could display and sell the fruits of their labour through the year: hand-made quilts, hand-carved toys and other artistic or useful things.

The first part of the story is the preparation for the Fair. The old inmates set up booths, fix coloured lights and arrange their wares in the lawn in spite of the clouded skies threatening heavy rain. The antipathy of the inmates for their new administrator Mr. Conner is touched upon in the opening scene itself. The name tags Conner has placed on their chairs provide them with an occasion to give vent to their rebellious spirit. The subhuman way they feel they are managed by the administrator could be made out in Gregg's explosive reaction: "Is he putting tags on us so we can be trucked off to the slaughter house?" (5). Later in the morning the soft drink for the fair arrives, and the truck driver, goaded on by Gregg and his friends, backs the truck right into the poorhouse wall demolishing a part of it. The old men disperse as the rain begins to pour at that moment.

The second movement in the story begins with the fireside discussion among the old men after lunch, as out-door activities are hindered by the rain. Ninety-year-old Hook who has nineteenth century political reminiscences alive in his mind to share with the comparatively younger old men like Lucas and Gregg, gets the undivided attention of the whole company. Conner, the prefect enters uninvited into their discussion which gradually develops into a debate between Conner and Hook on religio-political issues. Conner acknowledges neither God nor heaven. What he would have instead is a perfect state of existence on this earth in a scientifically structured community. The inmates are shaken in their faith and the discussion becomes embarrassing for them. They are thankful when it is interrupted by the arrival of the band from the town

inspite of the rain. The musicians play indoors for the inmates. Later, as the rain ceases, they go ahead with plans to hold the Fair.

The third movement begins when Conner orders the clearing of the heap of earth and stones caused by the demolished wall. With his urge for orderliness, he wants the repair done before the Fair begins. While the old men are carrying the stones, Conner handles the wheel-barrow but Gregg who was slightly drunk, prompted by his inherent passion, triggers off a rebellion. He purposely aims a stone at the prefect which hits him on the leg. Then another stone strikes him in the back. Conner, alarmed, backs out. But the old people, men and women alike, as though caught by some mass hysteria join in the action letting out their dormant animosity. Conner reaches the safety of his room, humiliated though not hurt. In Conner's mind Hook is the instigator of the attack, though in fact Hook was not in the vicinity when the pelting took place.

The last part of the story is the Fair. The young visitors from the town mingle with the old inmates. The younger generation for whom "the concept of America had died in their skulls," have come to the Fair, "to be freshened in the recollection of an older America, the America of Dan Patch and of Senator Beveridge exhorting the Anglo-Saxons to march across the Pacific . . ." (110). The visitors have no vision of the past. They converse on the present; try to construct new sagas; create instant history in the absence of visions of the past. An instance of this is given in the vulgar story they religiously recount about a pregnant girl and her night escapades.

The arrival of the night brings conclusion to the Fair and the story. The visitors having dispersed the principal characters are back with their usual occupations. Conner has recovered from the shock and is back at his desk, while old Hook wakes up in the middle of his sleep feeling some urgency to talk to Conner for whom he feels sympathy.

The characters of The Poorhouse Fair fall well under the two contrasted sociological types--the "inner-directed" and the "other-directed." The inner-directed type, comprising men of older America, men of faith and vision, are represented in the novel mainly by Hook and Mendelssohn and to a lesser degree, the other old inmates, though sometimes some of them fall to the temptations of the culture of consumption and leisure. Hook, indeed, is the "autonomous" individual, for he is free of anxieties and also he does not lose his bearings in the midst of temptations.

On the other extreme is Conner representing America of the future. For him heaven means a scientifically-structured, well-ordered, healthy and homogeneous community on this earth itself. He is a conformist and would be "other-directed" having in view the welfare of the community. He demands the same conformity from people under his charge. Buddy, his assistant, Dr. Angelo of the West Wing, and the insensitive young visitors to the Fair also belong to this category. So the conflict in the story between the young administrator and the old inmates is the conflict between America's individualistic past and the conformist present, the older and the younger generation, the inner-directed and the other-directed men.

Conner represents the scientifically conditioned and passively rational new type of American character, willing to make adjustments in his behaviour looking up the "radar screen." He represents the evolving new type whose organ of gregariousness is overdeveloped while the rugged individualistic traits have dwindled out of sight. This type of conformists have appeared occasionally in American history before. More than a century ago this same trait of character had been bemoaned and denounced by Emerson and Thoreau. The difference in the 1950s might be, in the fact that, here conformity has become the norm while it had been an exception in the earlier century.

No doubt, Conner abounds in good intentions. He attaches name tags on the chairs in order to give the old men a sense of ownership, as he explains to Lucas: "[It] strengthens . . . rather than weakens a communal fabric to have running through it strands of private ownership" (16). He wants to help them "to hold up their heads; to retain to the end the dignity that properly belongs to every member big or little, of humanity" (16). His earnestness appears real, but the next moment reprimanding Lucas for scratching a sore ear with a match, he reveals himself to be a man devoid of vision. He might have been speaking of an animal he had befriended, as he directs Lucas to the West Wing: "Well, could you go to the west wing, now, please. And throw the matchstick into the waste basket. This waste basket. Good god, you'll give yourself Otomycoses" (17).

He gives exact directions which he expects strictly to be followed in every detail. Later, he shows the same sympathetic concern for the crippled cat which he delivers out of pain by putting to death. His conception of heaven

also is typical. It is a secular homogeneous heaven for all: ". . . no disease . . . No oppression, political or economic. . . . Leisure for recreation . . . Cities will be planned and clean . . . The life span of the human being will be increased. Man will grow like a tree in the open" (75).

Towards the end of the novel, the narrator's voice ironically parodies this view recasting this hi-tech heaven into a veritable hell. As technology tampers with nature, and its resources are tapped beyond sensible limits, and as death fails to take over, man goes on living for ever as though laid alive in a coffin. Life loses its meaning, desirability and preciousness. The narrator describes the social situation, thus:

> There was to be no war. We were to be allowed to decay of ourselves. And the population soared like diffident India's and the economy swelled and iron became increasingly dilute . . . and everywhere was sufferance, good sense, wealth, irreligion and peace. The nation became one of pleasure-seekers; the people continued to live as cells of a body do in the coffin (110).

Conner's view of the universe is science-oriented: a biological view where a man's life is terminated conclusively when the body ceases to be. There is no soul, no heaven, no God. Hence survival and longevity become prime concerns for him. The individual human being set against the vastness of the infinite space appears insignificant in his view, and he can neither understand nor appreciate individualistic urges in other men.

In contrast to this communal homogeneous heaven, stands the highly individualistic concepts of the old people. They enjoy a wide variety of differentiated visions about heaven. Amy Mortis who had always felt inferior to her mother in looks, imagines that in heaven "I'd be a beauty and my mother not." For another person, "Heaven will be . . . a mist of all the joy sensations have given us" and yet another view is that in heaven "we'll all be about the same age" (69-74). Hook has absolute faith, but is not bothered to draw a clear picture of heaven. Still he reassures them, "Heaven will be something of what each wants it to be." Privately he feels that people of the present have everything they need and are not capable of thinking of a better place awaiting them after death. However, according to Conner's earth-bound view, these visions are nothing but "the tremblings" of their minds, "shy hallucinations" and "cartoons projected on a waterfall."

Their firm faith in the bliss after death makes the old people look forward to death, yearning for it. Amy Mortis recalls the death of Mendelssohn, their late prefect with nostalgic feelings: "In his coffin, I remember saying to Mrs. Haines, he looks like he's come to the end of a prayer, his nostrils still full of its breath. My heart told me to stoop and kiss his hand, but the line was pushing" (22). They remember him with love and gratitude; in spite of his busy schedule, he would have a kind word for everyone, he would inspire them, "he'd have us all singing and shouting prayers and telling us how we all must die" (56).

Mendelssohn had the humane vision and he knew how in the old people's House they all lived close to death: ". . . here they lived with death at

their sides, the third participant in every conversation, the other guest at every meal" (57). But Conner, his successor tries to postpone death with updated health care aiming at longevity of the old people, which for him would be a mark of professional success. He tries to destroy their faith and hope for immortality intruding into their friendly discourse. He even corners old Hook in religio-political debate, another cause for displeasure of the inmates, for the old man is looked upto with reverence by them all.

It is also interesting to note that Conner does not care to identify himself with humanity through meaningful relationships. He is no lover of nature nor of woman; nothing binds him with the past, not even memories. He has no friend among the old men; the only one he relies on is his loyal assistant Buddy whom he uses as a tool. Conner is spoken of as:

> Young for the importance of his position, devout in the service of humanity, Conner was unprepossessing . . . The ignorant came to him and reaped more ignorance; he had no gift of conversation. The theater of his deeds was filled with people he would never meet--the administrators, the report-readers and beyond these black blank heads hung the white walls of the universe; the listless permissive mother for whom Conner felt not a shred of awe, though orthodox in the way of popular humanist orators, he claimed he did. Yet there were a few--friends he supposed. Buddy was one. (12-13)

In contrast, we have the old inmates with their attachments, to nature, to the past and to each other. Ninety-year-old Hook, even at the moment exercises, power over the opposite sex. The speaker comments on the relationship

between old Amy Mortis and Hook: "There vibrated between them something of the attraction he had of old exercised on members of the opposite sex" (23).

Yet one has to concede to Conner's positive points. He holds his head high till the very end, even after his failure as an administrator is spelled out, to his very face by the old inmates through their defiant action. He is still faithful and believes in himself and his mission: ". . . he prized a useful over a pleasant life. Wherever I can serve, he told himself" (108). Within he carried the conviction that he was the hope of the world: "He wanted things clean, the world needed renewal" (46).

He overrules Buddy's suggestion of punishing at least the leader of the mutiny, on the grounds that he himself was their leader--a Christ-like stance, though he is not a believer. He stays in his post to the last, despite feelings of humiliation, working late into the night: "Above them in the cupola Conner worked unseen checking Buddy's typed reports" (127).

But Updike would have his omniscient speaker dwell longer on his "inner-directed" men--those men of passion, action and vision. He comments on Lucas, Gregg and Hook: "THE MAN of flesh, the man of passion, the man of thought. Lucas slept . . . submitted in oblivion to a harmony of forms. Gregg hopped and chirruped in the lawn, dazzling himself with the illumination and talking aloud in his self-delight though tomorrow he would be as cross as ever" (127).

Lucas and Gregg are unconcerned about consequences; Hook, the man of thought cannot sleep. He wakes up with a start. His heart goes out to

Conner in sympathy for he is sure the young man had been grievously stricken. His encounter with Conner troubled him, after which he could sense a sort of intimacy between them which he must reward with help. He reflects:

> A small word would perhaps set things right. As a teacher, Hook's flaw had been over-conscientiousness. There was nowhere he would not meddle. He stood motionless, half in moonlight, groping after the fitful shadow of the advice he must impart to Conner, as a kind of bond between them and a testament to endure his dying in the world. What was it? (127)

It is on this search, for the advice which has yet to take shape and for which the "autonomous individual" has to apply to his "inner gyroscope" that the narrator winds up his story. Hook, the ninety-year-old history teacher who has seen about two decades of the nineteenth century and has perused the history of the world to the present, is to be the link dovetailing the two worlds--the Old and the New. Summoning to aid, the historical consciousness, certainly, he could correlate objectively the "older America, the America of Dan Patch and of Senator Beveridge," with America of the younger generation for whom "the conception of America had died in their skulls." He could "diffuse anxiety" and put things in the right perspective. The modern scientifically-structured, technology-loaded, leisure-seeking and consumerist society should of necessity seek guidance from the tumbling old world of God centred, work-oriented and rugged individuals of action and vision.

Through his work, Updike leaves to his contemporaries a rich legacy, "a testament to endure his dying in this world." The Poorhouse Fair is indeed a

testament of his having lived in proximity of the two worlds--the Old and the New. Updike had the rare experience of having lived in a home shared by his grandparents. In his short story "The Happiest I've Been" he makes mention of the deeper understanding and "humane dimension" one gains out of co-habitation with the older generation which,

> . . . improved both our backward and forward vistas; we knew about the bedside commodes and mid-night coughing fits that awaited most men, and we had a sense of childhoods before 1900, when the farmer ruled the land and America faced west. We had gained a humane dimension . . ." (The Same Door 223)

This debt that he owes to the old world, he attempts to repay by gratefully creating a true-to-life character with individualistic traits, sound sense and rare vision of humanity out of a very old man. Updike himself has revealed that he was trying to make an "oblique monument" to his grandfather in the character of Hook. Since his intimate knowledge of the old world has improved both his "backward and forward vistas" his creative urge must crave for not just monuments to the past, but also bequests to posterity; and this he feels as his mission as a writer. Standing on this vantage ground between two worlds, his creative energies directed with a double thrust backward and forward, he tries to reconcile the one with the other, "diffusing anxiety" by application to the "humane vision."

In The Poorhouse Fair, apart from giving his initial definition of the people, Updike also maps out for himself his role and mission. The character of Hook may be a tender tribute to the memory of his grandfather; yet at some

point in the course of the novel, Updike had stepped into this role. At the end of the novel while Hook is searching for the "fitful shadow of advice he must impart" to Conner, one recognizes the author and his search. For Updike, The Poorhouse Fair inaugurates his search for identify. For the reader it is somewhat more, it uncovers the first landmark in the search, for he recognizes the novel as a "bond" between the two contrasted worlds--the past and the present and a "testament" to the fact that the author has partaken the existence of both.

Time has caught up with this fictional projection into future and brought to light the subtle and delicate nuances of fiction and reality. Yet this novel, more than any another futuristic work of its time, has served its purpose, in sounding a prophetic warning against the dangerous trends in society, which, carried to the extreme might eventually produce a sterile, mechanized and dehumanized society. Though The Poorhouse Fair is Updike's early experimental novel, it deserves to be considered along with Aldous Huxley's Brave New World and George Orwell's 1984.

Thus, the Poorhouse Fair is clearly a product of its socio-cultural environment. Also, the conflict in the story between the young administrator and the old inmates of the poorhouse is symptomatic of the greater conflict between America's individualistic past and the conformist present, between the culture of labour and production and that of consumption and leisure and between inner-directed and other-directed men. The solution to the problem is to be found in "autonomous individuals" who could waive aside temptations and cope with a world of vast choices. A proper historical perspective, humane

vision, insight into human nature, and compassionate understanding of the spiritual needs are the qualifying marks of the "autonomous individual" who by establishing meaningful relationships would seek out solutions to problems. The Poorhouse Fair is found to be a "bond" that its author offers to posterity; his willingness to mediate between the two worlds, interpreting the one to the other--as a "testament" of his having lived in the proximity of both.

In The Poorhouse Fair, apart from giving his initial definition of the people, Updike inaugurates his search for identity defining his role and mission as a writer. Updike also insists that the humane vision, comprising a compassionate understanding of the spiritual needs of the human beings and an insight into the essential human nature is the qualifying mark of the "autonomous individual" who becomes a redeeming factor in the problematic contemporary world. Thus Updike has introduced his vision of humanity in The Poorhouse Fair.

"We are such stuff
As dreams are made on, and our little life
Is rounded with a sleep"
Shakespeare.

CHAPTER FOUR

Past and Present: The Myth of America and the Rabbit Tetralogy

> The population shifts to the "vacuum states," and the well publicized physical theory of entropia, the tendency of the universe toward eventual homogeneity. . . . This end was inevitable, no new cause for heterogeneity being, without supernaturalism, conceivable. (The Poorhouse Fair 65)

Conner, the administrator of the poorhouse in Updike's The Poorhouse Fair dreams about a homogeneous society, restructured on the basis of new scientific theories. He sees no reason for a society to remain heterogeneous while the universe itself moves toward eventual homogeneity.

But the constant anxiety of the writers of the 1960s who discussed entropy was its homogenizing effect on the universe, by which all things dwindled to nothing, all things became alike. In this waste-making process all things eventually dissolve into a blank formless junkheap, a perfect homogeneity of nothingness.

The fifties had seen the birth of a new scientific-technological field--Cybernetics or information theory. This theory conceives of the machine as a surrogate brain, only vastly more efficient, rapid and comprehensive. One of the expounders of this field, Norbert Wiener in his notable work The Human Use of Human Beings (1950) locates the theoretical origins of cybernetics in the phenomenon of entropy. Entropy, as described in Newton's Second Law of

thermodynamics, is the tendency of any closed system to lose energy, to run down. Hence the picture of a fixed stable world is no longer tenable: "The world as it actually is, is replaced in some sense or other by the world as it happens to be observed" (Qtd. in Hoffman 43). With quantum physics, chance and contingency have entered the world picture, and information theory is a response to this development. For in the midst of an entropic universe, man represents an "enclave" of opposite tendency, a tendency that arises from the fact that man receives and acts on information, gathered through his senses. In man, therefore is an "organization to increase" which creates a wholesome disequilibrium between man and his environment. Machines can "resemble human beings in representing pockets of decreasing entropy," and cybernetics--the movement and control of information through a system by machines--thus serves as an anti-entropic force.

Wiener himself did not feel complacent about the reliability of cybernetics. He recognizes the threat of Frankenstein involved in permitting machines to make decisions, and insists that control should rest with the human agent: "For the man who is not aware of this, to throw the problem of his responsibility to the machine, whether it can learn or not, is to cast his responsibility to the winds, and to find it coming back seated on the whirlwind" (Ibid.). Wiener concludes, with a call for an intelligent "faith in science" bringing about a compromise between the advances of science and the traditional ethical views of religion.

If this "life-initiating automata" is the response of physical science to counter entropy, John Updike visualizes it differently. In a society abounding

in "automata imitiating men" he foregrounds nature's own natural, Harry "Rabbit" Angstrom on the run as an anti-entropic force. He observes what becomes of this outsider-individualist in his fight against the homogenizing attempts of the technology-infected mass society and faithfully records the proceedings in a tetralogy that covers three crucial decades of American social life--Rabbit, Run (1960), Rabbit Redux (1971), Rabbit Is Rich (1981) and Rabbit at Rest (1990).

Rabbit, Run introduces the theme of assertion of individuality against social entrapment through the story of young Harry Angstrom, a former basketball star of Mount Judge High, who among his peers is better known by his nick name, "Rabbit." He is cast in the model of Biff Loman of Arthur Miller's Death of a Salesman. The initial victories at high school had led him to entertain high hopes about life; but having made wrong choices, he is made to lead a drifting, dodging life pursuing illusions of easy freedom. He is sickened by his degrading job of selling Magi Peel peelers, by his drab apartment which clutters with waste everywhere and by his "dumb mutt" of a wife, Janice, whom he had to marry for having got pregnant. Being pregnant again, she now ignores him and the two-year-old baby, Nelson, and spends all evening drinking and viewing soap operas. When the novel opens, Harry, twenty six years of age, is seen playing football with some teenagers in the alley on his way back home. As he arrives home late, he is so overcome with disgust at the "second-rate" thing his life has been reduced to, that he deserts his wife; he runs without leaving any explanation whatsoever.

He spends the whole night driving his car heading southwards dreaming about a romantically free life. He gets as far as West Virginia drifting from one route to the other and somehow returns early morning to Mt. Judge taking a different route through eastern Pennsylvania, not to Janice, but to the apartment of Tothero, his old high-school coach. For, "Next to his mother Tothero had had the most force" (Rabbit, Run 16). Tothero makes him rest the whole day and in the evening takes him on a double date. Harry is introduced to Ruth Leonard who happens to be a former school-mate. She has become an occasional call-girl for want of better occupation. He takes to her instantly, sexually and emotionally and moves into her apartment. Harry treats his affair with Ruth as a serious romance and endows it with the sanctity as of a marriage. He would have carried on with her, had it not been for the efforts of the meddlesome Rev. Eccles, the Episcopalian minister who considered it his religious duty to take Harry back to Janice and his marital responsibilities. Eccles meets Harry frequently, plays golf with him, and becomes his friend and companion.

The second movement in the story begins after a lapse of two months. Rabbit still lives with Ruth. Janice has moved back to her parents' home with baby Nelson and is waiting for labour. Ruth is happy with her steady relationship with Rabbit and is settling back into an honest life. One night, in a restaurant, Ruth and Harry meet Ronnie Harrison and his girlfriend. From Ronnie, his team-mate at school, Harry comes to learn about Ruth's former sex life. Harry is enraged to such an extent that, returning home he humiliates Ruth sexually and spoils the rapport between them. The same night he learns that Janice is in labour and rushes with feelings of guilt, to the hospital with a

resolution to redeem their marriage. Janice gives birth to a baby girl. He goes back to the apartment and takes care of Nelson while Janice recovers. When Janice returns from hospital they live happily for about a week. But then on a Sunday, he meets Lucy Eccles the minister's provocative wife towards whom Rabbit has a sexual affinity. He is aroused and returning to Janice tries awkwardly to make love to her. She stalls his advances being in convalescence after child birth. Frustrated, he leaves her and stays away all night. Janice in despair unfairly assuming he had gone back to Ruth, drinks all night and the next day, tipplingly bathing her baby daughter, Becky, in the tub, drowns the baby inadvertently.

In the concluding part, Rabbit having learned about the death of his daughter returns to Janice who has been taken back home by her parents. The two families, the Angstroms and the Springers, prepare for the funeral on Tuesday afternoon. Rabbit feels the accusing eyes on him during the funeral and has a sudden inspiration to declare his innocence. He turns to the mourners in the cemetery and tells that he did not kill the baby and Janice was the one who did it, and in the same breath he tries to console her. Seeing the horror in the faces around him, he runs again, with Eccles following, though Eccles fails in the chase. In the evening Rabbit manages to go to Ruth's apartment only to learn about another entrapment, for, Ruth is pregnant with his child. Ruth demands legalizing the relationship if he wanted his baby to live. Rabbit could not bring himself to consider a divorce and Ruth instantly rejects him. The novel ends on the continued flight of the protagonist. Rabbit runs aimlessly into the night.

Rabbit Redux catches up with the story of Harry Angstrom ten years later. The time of action of this second novel is from July to October 1969. Rabbit is thirty six. He has undergone a complete transformation and had come to accept the social set up and is reunited with Janice. Janice has improved, she now holds a responsible position in her father's concern, the Springer Motors. Nelson is thirteen, and an only child.

The novel opens on Harry's meeting his father after work from whom he learns about Janice's wayward conduct. She has an affair with Charlie Stavros, a middle-aged bachelor salesman of Greek descent who is her co-worker at her father's automobile sales lot. Harry is not emotionally involved with Janice anymore, and sex with her has been reduced to sheer boredom, and a reminder of baby Becky's death. Consequently he is irritated at her two-timing deceitfulness and explodes on her with his information. Janice leaves Harry and home to live with Stavros, her lover. Harry and Nelson now left to themselves in their home at Pen Villas, visit Pop and Mom Angstrom at their home in the neighbouring Mount Judge to celebrate Mom's birthday. Mom, now sixty-five is dying a slow death of Parkinson's Disease. Together, they watch the historic moon-landing of July 1969 on the television, with which the first part of the novel "Pop/Mom/Moon" closes.

In the next section entitled "Jill" Rabbit is introduced to a juvenile delinquent from a rich home, the eighteen-year-old Jill. The meeting takes place at Jimbo's Lounge, a black bar where Rabbit is escorted by his Negro co-worker, Buchanan. Harry is persuaded by the Blacks to take the girl home as a substitute for his runaway wife. Jill fills in the role of absent wife in Harry's

home. More than that, she assumes the part of an older sister to Nelson who gets attached to her. Gradually she becomes all-in-all to the thirteen-year-old boy, a friend, philosopher and guide, leading him through the most troublesome times of his life, filling in the parts of sister, and absent mother who has deserted him when he most needed her. Janice and Charlie meet Harry, Janice makes enquiries about Jill, being concerned on Nelson's behalf. It is her anxiety over Nelson's association with the "hippie" girl, that occasions their meeting. Alone with Harry, Charlie asks him to take Janice back. Harry's mother as she hears about the new development is against a reconciliation.

Part III with the title "Skeeter" introduces Skeeter, a black militant into the story. He makes a visit to Jill whom he had known earlier and decides to make Harry's home his new hide out, for he is wanted by the police on a drug-dealing charge. He calls himself the Saviour, "Black Jesus." He imposes imself on Harry who, being in a kind of moral stupor, lacks powers of resistance. Skeeter commands the household, makes love to Jill, dopes Jill and Harry in the presence of Nelson, and tries to educate Harry in Black history and politics. They hold discussions on American history, society and the Vietnam war from the anti-establishment point of view. The white neighbourhood goes on the red alert, warns Harry against his cohabitation with the dangerous Black, and blames him for sullyig a decent white block. They ask him to throw out the intruders or else be prepared to suffer the consequences. On a Saturday night while he and Nelson are invited for dinner by the divorcee, Peggy Fosnacht, Harry receives an urgent call from Skeeter to come home. Harry returns to see his home being firebombed, consumed by flames with the doped Jill within. Harry couldn't save her life in spite of the frantic pleas of Nelson. Harry

drives Skeeter out of town early next morning, away from the searching police. In the concluding section "Mim" Harry and Nelson move in with his parents at Mount Judge. Harry lost his linotyper's job, for, the offset printing machines had substituted men. Mim, Harry's younger sister on a visit to her home discovers the deplorable domestic situation and with her characteristic toughness gained from experience at the West Coast as a call girl, tries to set the wrongs right. She torpedoes the love triangle that menaces Rabbit's home front by offering herself as the fourth one. She starts paying furtive visits to Charlie which eventually estranges Janice from him. She encourages Rabbit for a reunion with Janice at the same time. Finally after a heart stroke which took Stavros to the verge of death, Janice decides to sacrifice her love, fearing he might die otherwise.

In the final scene of the novel, Harry and Janice reconcile. Harry returns to the security of his married existence. With the death of Jill on his conscience to balance with the death of baby Becky on Janice's account, Harry figures the scores as pathetically even on both sides. The "Black Jesus" Skeeter had admonished him not to feel guilty; the question of guilt and responsibility being hard to settle, for "we got to go back hundreds of years." According to Skeeter's precepts, an individual's responsibility is primarily to his own self: "Everybody stuck inside his own skin, might as well make himself at home there, right?," as Skeeter puts it, and for him, the matter is settled. But Rabbit cannot waive aside his guilty feelings as easily. In the concluding scene when Rabbit and Janice are together, in the room in Safe Haven Motel, Rabbit confesses his guilt:

"I feel guilty."

"About what?" Janice asks.

"About everything." "Relax," she coaxes. "Not everything is your fault." "I can't accept that."

Thus, the last line Rabbit speaks in the novel indicates his desire for assuaging of his guilt.

Rabbit Is Rich the third novel of the series takes place after another decade. The time is June 1979, a critical period in world economy with its energy crisis and the hike in oil prices; "the fucking world is running out of gas," as the opening sentence of the novel expresses it. Though America's power abroad is on the decline economically and politically, in the course of the decade, Harry has become powerful materially. He co-owns a half interest with his wife Janice, on the Springer Motors, one of the two Toyota agencies in the Brewer area. Janice's mother owns the other half, old man Fred Springer having died five years back. Harry's parents are dead too. As the opening chapter puts it, "Ten years ago when Rabbit got laid off as a linotyper and reconciled with Janice, her father took him on as a salesman and when the time was ripe five years later had the kindness to die." Harry lives in his mother-in-law's place now, his Penn Villas home having burned down ten years ago.

Skeeter who had parted ways with Harry after the firebombing of his home, spitting in Harry's palms in gratitude as he pocketed the last few dollars left with the unemployed Harry, is heard of again by way of a newspaper clipping of April 1979 sent to Harry by someone anonymous who must have

known of his association with Skeeter. The newsclipping informs Harry of Skeeter's death of a shoot-out with police officials in a Philadelphia hospital. He had assumed another name, Hubert Johnson, and was leader of the Messiah Now Freedom Family located in Columbia Avenue with a number of Blacks and Whites as followers. The authorities had described him as "crazy" and neighbours had complained against the violent and abrasive behaviour of the group and their singing overnight. Harry feels more safe, with Skeeter dead than alive, though with his premature death "a certain light was withdrawn from the world, a daring, a promise that all would be overturned" (Rabbit Is Rich 31-32). But somehow Rabbit feels relieved at his death for "he was a mad man and his demands inordinate and endless, and with him dead Rabbit feels safer" (32).

The by-gone decade has brought about drastic changes in Harry's way of life and habits. He has become an avid reader of Consumer Reports and is crammed with inside commercial information. He has become a professional sales promoter and with his newly acquired Toyota franchise feels complacent and confident about himself.

The opening scene itself provides an example of his sales talk, as Rabbit addresses Young Jamie and his girl friend Annabelle, who he believes is his daughter, though legally of Ruth's marriage with a man from Galilee. They had come to consult him about cars. Harry says:

> I think it's helluva world we're coming to, where a young couple like yourselves can't afford to buy a car or own a house. If you can't get your foot on even the bottom rung of a society geared like this,

> people are going to lose faith in the system. The Sixties were a lark in the park compared to what we're going to see, if things don't straighten out. (23-24)

Since his social success, he has become sociable; being a man of consequence in his town, "he likes the nod he gets from the community that overlooked him like dirt ever since high school" (3).

He has membership in a country club, the Flying Eagle, where he plays golf; he has the right kind of friends and social contacts typified by the Murketts and the Harrisons. He has hoarded a considerable sum of money which he turns first into gold Krugerrands and later converts into silver following Webb Murkett's investment advice. He attends a constant round of parties and even takes a Caribbean vacation, fulfilling the dream of most affluent Americans. Although he is rich because of Janice's inheritance, having money has made him feel "satisfied all over." His sexual interest has begun "to wobble and by now there is real crisis of confidence" (49).

Though Harry is full of information about the socio-economic set up, he lacks insight into the more intimate issues relating to his own domestic situation. For instance, he is the last to learn about Nelson's problem; that he has impregnated Pru and needs a job to get married. So also during the Caribbean vacation, the wife-swapping which was planned ahead by the others--Ronnie and Thelma Harrison, Cindy and Webb Murkett and Janice--turns a surprise on him.

Since sex with Jancie has dwindled to a "blurred burrowing of two old bodies, one drowsy and one drunk," to arouse himself Rabbit has to think of

Ruth or Mary Ann, his girl friend at school or of Cindy the young sexy wife of his friend Webb Murkett. His unfulfilled desire for Cindy grows on him as an obsession. Nelson's rebellion is another problem Harry has to tackle. His relations with his own son grows so unpleasant that he indulges in a fantasy about a daughter--Ruth's daughter, Annabelle, whom he considers as his own. To prove his fantasy he confronts Ruth with the question, offering financial support. Ruth is horrified at the suggestion and denies him the paternity of her daughter: "When I think of you thinking she's your daughter, it's like rubbing her all over with shit." It remains her secret which his money could not buy.

Nelson's antagonism for his father had its beginning on the night their Penn Villas home got burnt down and his frantic appeals to save the sleeping Jill was turned down by everyone including Harry. Nelson could not wipe out the past as dexterously as Harry apparently has been able to do. He resents his father's complacency and backlashes in all possible ways. He drops out of college, smashes Harry's cars and loads him with repair bills and spends relentlessly his father's resources. Where Harry is miserly, Nelson is wasteful and tells him, "money is shit" (169), echoing Jill's attitude to money and her rich parents. He poses a threat to Harry that Harry is shaken out of his moral stupor. As he remarks to Janice: "I like having Nelson in the house. . . . It's great to have an enemy. Sharpens your senses" (125). Yet Harry is sympathetic when Nelson confronts the same dilemma that he did; whether to marry or not the woman he has impregnated. Harry is even willing to provide the funds for flight, for he does not want to see his son being caught in the same trap. "I just don't like seeing you caught," he declares, "You're too much me" (208). But Nelson goes through with his marriage. History repeats

again, Nelson eventually runs deserting his new wife even before the birth of their child, and Harry has to rush back home cutting short his Caribbean vacation. Nelson goes back to college landing his father again in more expenses.

At the end of the novel Harry is seen watching the Super Bowl on his new Japanese TV in his newly bought house at Penn Park surrounded by the women of his family--mother-in-law, wife, daughter-in-law and in his lap, a granddaughter. When the Super Bowl dancers celebrate patriotism, upholding the energy of the American people, with the hostage crisis in Iran in the background, Harry's final reflection is equivocal: "Fortune's hostage, heart's desire, a granddaughter. His. Another nail in his coffin. His." These closing lines of the third novel point to the awakening of death consciousness in Harry, brought to the surface by the birth of a grand child--a new phase in his evolution.

Rabbit at Rest opens on the same note and evokes thoughts of ageing and death:

> Standing amid the tan, excited post--Christmas crowd at the south west Florida Regional Airport, Rabbit Angstrom has a funny sudden feeling that what he has come to meet, 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 aeroplane. (1)

Nine years have elapsed and the last novel of the series opens after Christmas of 1988. Janice's mother had died seven years ago, leaving her the lot,

Springer Motors and its assets making Janice a rich woman who owns over a million. Nelson has been managing Springer Motors taking away from Harry his position as "the man up front." Apart from the granddaughter, Judy, born in 1980, he has a toddler of a grandson, Roy. Harry and Janice spend half the year in their newly acquired condominium in Florida so that Nelson can have free run of the lot. Harry is fifty-five and has deteriorated physically; he is overweight, "two hundred and thirty pounds the kindest scales say." He eats junk food and drinks beer, both against the good advices of his doctor. In the course of the novel, he has two heart attacks, the second of which turns fatal.

In his semi-retired state, he has no use for Consumer Reports and economic information. He has taken up reading history instead. His historical consciousness makes him ponder on the personal, regional and national pasts. The novel has a three part structure. The first section "FL" is expository in nature and revolves around the visit of Nelson and family to Harry's Florida home during the Christmas season of 1988. Nelson behaves erratically and Pru's conduct too borders on the abnormal, as though she holds the key to a mystery. The parents are kept worried, for they do not have an inkling as to where to begin unravelling the puzzle.

Harry takes the children out on a picnic to the beach along with Pru. While 'sunfishing' with Judy out at Deleon Bay, Harry suffers his first cardiac attack. Left alone with Nelson at home Janice discovers Nelson's problem; that he has been involved with the drug mafia. Being addicted to cocaine and crack he is currently running into heavy debts, his family and business suffering

the consequences. The section closes with Harry in hospital greeting Nelson and family on the wake of the New Year 1989, as they prepare to leave.

The second section "PA" takes place in Pennsylvania. Harry is back at home in Penn Park, Brewer. He has to undergo angioplasty to remedy his ailing heart and is hospitalized. Nelson's addiction is aggravated; he, with the help of his new recruits at the lot, Slim and Lyle, has robbed cash through misappropriation and manipulation of accounts, from his own mother's firm and consequently even the Toyota franchise is at stake. Charlie Stavros, Janice's ex-lover and Harry's best friend ever, though retired now, helps to check the accounts and assess the debts. The old accountant Mildred too joins him in the task and they together convince Janice of the gravity of the situation. Janice confronts her son with the facts, and sulkingly Nelson agrees to go to a rehab centre. Janice attends night classes and gets trained to become a real-estate broker.

While in hospital, Harry discovers that Annabelle, now one of the nurses attending on him is his daughter by Ruth. He comes to this conclusion being convinced by certain family resemblances he notices in her. The ways she adopts with him too speaks of blood relation; though they fail to communicate with each other as kin.

After the angioplasty Janice sees to it that they return to Ma Springer's old home to live with Pru and children in Nelson's absence. Further, Janice could avail the help of her daughter-in-law in taking care of the convalescing Harry, while she is away on business. The section closes with a sexual encounter between Pru and Harry which happens to be the only notable sexual

episode in the novel. Harry had altogether lost interest in sex with Janice and after his first heart attack, had cut off relations with Thelma Harrison with whom he had carried on an affair ever since the Caribbean wife-swapping episode, where his lot fell with Thelma.

The third section is titled "MI" short for Miocardial Infarction, the massive attack and failure of the heart toward which Harry is drifting as a definite closure to his fifty-six years long episodic life. "The something-that-wants-me-to-find-it" Harry was groping towards all his life is at close range now, just around the corner. On the Fourth-of-July parade at Mt. Judge, Harry marches as Uncle Sam, the symbol of America; the approving eyes and applauding arms of the whole town once again turned in his favour.

The final section brings in unpleasant revelations too. Thelma Harrison had died and before her death confessed to her husband Ronnie Harrison about her ten years affair with Harry causing the rupture of a life-long friendship. Nelson had returned from the rehab centre totally reformed, as good as a saint, that Pru was bound to make a confession of her one night's fling with Harry so as to make an honest woman of herself. This pronounces doom on Harry's life, he has to flee again. He goes to his Florida condo to live an isolated life cut off from kith and kin. Janice had pronounced his sin unforgivable and he had no idea how Nelson would react. Strangely enough, Nelson sees it only as a serious aberration in his father which needs remedying through analysis. Befitting his emerging new identity as a

social worker, he is willing to forgive his sick father and penitent wife. He would pay more attention to his married life, for they still love each other, he informs his father over the phone. But he expects Harry to settle things with Janice, for Janice had arranged to sell their Penn Park home to pay off the debts on other properties caused by Nelson's smoking crack.

But Janice refuses to communicate with him. Harry manages his life alone in Florida. He eats "low-cal" frozen meals and raw vegetables, takes lonely walks, watches children's games and takes part in games on occasions. Sometimes when he is offered company by elderly women, he gets so upset that he has to take two Nitrostats to quell his heart. Once his lonely walk takes him near a basketball court situated in the black section of Florida. The coloured boys permit him to play a game with them. The next day too he is drawn to the same spot where he plays with a lonely black boy a superb game keeping up with the form of his youthful games. Simultaneously he suffers a massive attack of the heart. The novel closes with Rabbit in hospital attended by the remorseful wife and son as he passes contentedly through the last lap of his racing life. Janice is in tears, so too is Nelson. Nelson childishly demands that Harry talk to him. Harry tries to tell him his cherished secret; that Nelson has a sister. Nelson hears only "sister" and tells Harry that Mim is already on her way to Florida to see him. Nelson clings on to him begging him not to die. Harry assures him the experience of death is not so bad. The story closes on Rabbit's

wish to communicate more to Nelson: "Rabbit thinks he should may be say more, the kid looks wildly expectant, but enough. May be, enough."

The first novel of the series, Rabbit, Run has little to do outside of Brewer, Pennsylvania and is set in a typically middle-class milieu of the fifties. Updike has admitted that the novel "was a product of 1950s" though not "really in a conscious way about the 1950s" ("Why Rabbit Had to Go" 18).

The fifties in America was a time of conformity and national somnolence. Robert Lowell had called it "the tranquilized Fifties" (Lowell 85). It was also a time that saw the beginnings of revolt against that conformity. Updike's Rabbit is an outsider-individualist who experiments with new ways of dealing with his social situation. He is a modernist hero shaped by a new humanistic existentialistic ethos. He is concerned with functioning and behaviour, being a product of the ego psychology of the 40s and 50s. Experimenting with complex sexual attitudes, he is engaged in searching after a different adaptation and angle of vision which might alter his conditions of life. Rabbit's revolt is an individualist's solitary war against the gregarious vast majority.

During the Fifties and Sixties sociologists like David Riesman and C. Wright Mills had endeavoured to reach historical explanations of contemporary social phenomena. Like Riesman, Mills too had observed a catastrophic shift in American character from the nineteenth century individualist and ingenious farmer-artisan to the twentieth century "Little Man," the "hired employee." In his notable work White Collar, Mills expressed his concern over the decline of the old middle classes of independent entrepreneurs, manufacturers and tradesman and the subsequent rise of new social configuration of professional

technical and managerial people who now occupied the middle of society. As hired employee the new middle classes display but little of the hard individualism and initiative found in the middle class men of the earlier century. This new "Little Man" is like a "cheerful robot" with "no firm roots, no sure loyalties to sustain his life and give it a center" (Qtd. in Hoffman 16). He had no set of beliefs to give meaning to life, and was powerless, helpless, amorphous and without direction or aim. These miserable traits of the "Little Man" got imprinted upon American society as a whole. Mills' picture of the "Little Man" agrees with Riesman's portrayal in The Lonely Crowd, of society as consisting of "other-directed men."

The finest novelist of this period to deal with this unhappy social situation and to bring to bear a humane dimension on the depiction of men conflicted by the mechanical robot-like existence, institutionalized society has prescribed for them, is John Updike of the Rabbit stories. In Rabbit, Run Harry's father is a hard working "Little Man" as he himself acknowledges on occasions. He is passive before his wife, who is the controlling influence. Harry and Mim, their two offsprings, are different in kind and they want their lives as different from that of their parents. Mim is a liberated female who prefers to manage men on a hard-cash basis than be managed by them for security's sake. For Harry, the formative influence next to his mother's was that of Tothero, his basketball coach, who had taught him to "run all the time" in the court and win scores as the "star player" unmindful of how the rest of the team work together to form the necessary set up conducive to his scoring. So he turns an individualist and conceives of life in terms of the game he was taught to play

and wants to be a star even outside the court. He finds the life that society has apportioned him, as husband and father with economic responsibilities attached, as constraints on his personal freedom. He sees flight as inevitable if he has to keep up with his instinctive urge for freedom. He evades the "socializing" attempts and "strikes out for the territory ahead of others" like Mark Twain's Huck Finn had done; for the society he inhabits, comprises "Little Men" who believe in mutual responsibility, shared joys, sorrows, problems, and guilts and he would have none of these.

The opening scene of the novel points to the fact that Rabbit's home situation is unbearable: "It seems to him he's the only person around here who cares about neatness. The clutter behind him in the room . . . the rolls of fuzz under the radiator, the continual criss-crossing mess clings to his back like a tightening net" (Rabbit, Run 16).

This appears to be a trap tightening around Harry the Rabbit. Janice, his wife, it is obvious, has little house keeping virtues. Being an alcoholic she spends all afternoon drinking and viewing television. She is neither pretty nor intelligent: " a small woman with a tight dark skin . . . just yesterday, it seems to him, she stopped being pretty. With the tiny addition of two short wrinkles at the corners, her mouth had become greedy, and her hair has thinned, so he keeps thinking of her skull under it" (10).

His dull wife, degrading job, his unattractive neighbourhood are all factors that contribute to his boredom. Life in these circumstances provides little chance for Harry who wishes to be "first-rate." As he explains later to Eccles: "I once played a game real well . . . . And after you're first rate at

something, no matter what, it kind of takes the kick out of being second rate. And that little thing Janice and I had going, boy, it was really second rate" (90).

Rabbit had played the game all through life and for him, basket ball becomes a life embracing symbol. The first book begins with twenty-six-year-old Harry playing basketball in the alley with teenagers. In the fourth book Rabbit gets his fatal stroke of the heart at age fifty-six, while playing a game with a black boy in the slums of the city of Deleon in Florida. On both occasions he astonishes his playmates by the superb shots he is still capable of, and exacts their admiration, and it is felt as "some pep" that helps him through the gloom that his life has grown to be since: "Flat and soft the ball lifts. That his touch still lives in his hands elates him. He feels liberated from long gloom. But his body is weighty and his breath grows short. It annoys him that he gets winded" (Rabbit, Run 7).

For, Rabbit, basketball is associated with images of sex. He describes the basket as "the high perfect hole with its pretty skirt of net" (35), and the rim becomes a "crotch." The net makes "a lady-like whisper" (7). Net could be used as a trap for rabbits and sex likewise had impeded Harry's freedom, getting him into deeper responsibilities. The scores that a game of basketball brought to him excited him, so too the offsprings that is the end-product of sex. He covets the children, though he would rather not be bound by official responsibility. He wants Ruth's child to live. He is so elated at the birth of his baby daughter, that he even feels guilty at having deserted her insufferable mother. His memories of the "first-rate" sexual encounters are also connected with his first-rate basketball. Characteristically, the moments he felt like a winner are bound

›gether by an invisible thread of mental associations. The moment he awaits is baby's arrival on a hospital chair brings a re-enactment in his mind of his oyhood romance. He remembers how after an exciting game which he had von, he would find Mary Ann sitting on the front steps under the school motto ınd how they would walk to his father's car, which could give them private ;pace for the enactment of their adolescent passion:

> Her body a branched tree of warm nests yet always this touch of timidity. As if she wasn't sure, but he was much bigger, a winner. He came to her as a winner and that was the feeling he missed since. She was the best of them because she was the one he brought the most to, so tired . . . So the two kinds of triumph were united in his mind. (166)

Mary Ann got married when he was in the army; yet the memory holds joy for him: "But he feels joy now; cramped from sitting on the eroded chrome armed chair sick with cigarettes he feels joy in remembering his girl; the water of his heart has been poured into a thin vase of joy . . ." (166).

As in basketball, in life, Rabbit feels the need to run clear of those who crowd and tangle him. After deserting Janice he gives the chase to Eccles, the emissary from Janice's parents. When he sees Eccles's green car, "he thinks of throwing the clothes away and really running" (85). And he runs as Joseph of the Old Testament ran from his seductress. He runs again at the end of Rabbit, Run, away from Janice, from the crowd at the funeral, from Eccles, and from Ruth's demands. Running with the will to achieve, according to Tothero, was the key to success in basketball. "I had nothing to teach you," he tells Rabbit,

"I just let you run" (52). In the game of basketball, for running there was a definite goal, the basket. In life, Harry failed to locate the basket around which his running should revolve. He had a vague idea of "something-that-wants-me to find it," the ultimate meaning life should be geared to. Being the individualist star player, he believes that this ultimate truth is to be reached by his sole quest, steering clear of the crowds that impede him from the goal point; which meant ridding himself of family, friends, job and responsibilities. Religion (Rev. Eccles) and sex (Ruth) he makes trials of as possible ways that might lead him to self-realization. But soon he is thrown back on his own, for as means to his end, both religion and sex fail him. From his interaction with religion through Eccles, Rabbit has come to acquire a new faith in his own instincts, that what he "felt" as good must be good:

> That was the thing about him, he just lived in his skin and didn't give a thought to the consequences of anything . . . and off he'll go, him and his good clean piece and his cute little god and his cute little minister playing golf every Tuesday. For the damnedest thing about that minister was that, before Rabbit at least had the idea he was acting wrong but now he's got the idea he's Jesus Christ out to save the world by doing whatever comes into his head. (120-21)

Apparently Harry has to guide his religious friend from lack of faith to faith. But his association with good-natured Ruth sharpens his perception. He realizes, "In all the green world nothing feels as good as a woman's good nature." Through her he advances in self-knowledge. Rabbit quizzes her about her love for him:

"Why else do you like me ?"

She looks at him. "Shall I tell you?"

"Tell me."

" 'cause you haven't given up. In your stupid way you're still fighting" (76).

If from Eccles he gains affirmation of his instinctive goodness, Ruth inspires him to persist in his militancy. Like religion, sex refuses to supply ultimate satisfaction, for, "As they deepen together, through all their thrusts they remain separate flesh . . . everywhere they meet a wall. The body lacks voice to sing its own song" (72). Further his pursuit of sex indirectly causes the death of his baby. Though there is a hint of another baby from Ruth, Rabbit is not in a position to ensure its survival; for Ruth refuses to let it ripen in her womb unless Rabbit formally takes up its paternity by marrying her. But Rabbit concludes otherwise: "Ruth has parents and will let his baby live." He conveniently shifts responsibility to Ruth's parents, in the same way as he expected Janice's rich father to support her. He makes other people "pay his price," as he had once told Ruth, "if you have the guts to be yourself, other people 'll pay your price" (125).

But "Harry's search for infinite freedom" meets with its "inevitable bafflement" as Updike himself admits (Picked-Up Pieces 510). As in the beginning of the novel, Harry the Rabbit is left with no other option but to run into the darkness of the night: "His hands lift of their own and he feels the wind on his ears even before, his heels hitting heavily on the pavement at first but

with an effortless gathering out of a kind of sweet panic growing higher and quicker and quieter, he runs. Ah:runs. Runs" (284).

Rabbit ends up as a tragic and trapped figure as his desire to evade social constraints in pursuit of infinite freedom, fails. In his denial of established religious and social value systems, and insistence on the existential urges of the individual, Harry Angstrom appears to be the inheritor of the existentialist tradition. The tetralogical conception of this story of the individual in pursuit of "infinite freedom," in itself makes it fall directly in line with Jean Paul Sartre's Paths of Freedom, a novel in four volumes, intended to give a synoptic picture of different people's paths of freedom. The first volume The Age of Reason (1947), a novel in its own rights, narrates the experiences of a man named Mathieu, who in the course of a few days, is led from one set of illusions about freedom to another. The second volume The Reprieve (1947) is based on the documentary US novel. It covers by a montage of different characters' reactions, the inner story of the week of the Munich crisis of September 1938. In the third volume Iron in the Soul, Sartre returns to his "non-hero" Mathieu who is transformed under the stress of the battle into a military hero and follows his adventures up to the fall of France in 1940. The fourth volume was left unfinished though the completed two chapters he had published in 1949 in a periodical under the title "Strange Friendship." It gives a pessimistic view of the Nazi-Soviet friendship. Mathieu and Rabbit have much in common as non-heroes engaged in the quest of freedom. The protagonist's rejection of conventional values, his isolation, the ever-present "wall" that he encounters in

relationships, the constant interplay of contradictions and undercuttings are all characteristics that place the Rabbit story in the Existentialist tradition.

If in the Rabbit, Run Updike had traced an individual's skirmishes with society in his pursuit of limitless freedom, in the second novel, Rabbit Redux this contemporary non-hero has been reduced to insignificance. The novel points to an awareness of the major shift in the cultural scenario. According to Updike, the "1960s were much more self-conscious, much more conscious of themselves as a decade" than were the 50s. ("Why Rabbit Had to Go" 18). He had admitted that his decision to write a sequel to Rabbit, Run with the sixties as background, meant confronting "all the oppressive, distressing, overstimulating developments of the most dissentious American decade since the Civil War" (Hugging the Shore 858). These "overstimulating developments" included the Vietnam War, Black militancy, Women's Liberation Movement, cybernation, media culture, and space flights culminating in Apollo moon shot among other developments in the national scene.

With the technological advances, between 1950-1980, in America the gross national product trebled and income per head doubled. While wealth and output increased, the pattern of economic activity changed rapidly. The leading sectors in industry were those dominated by new technologies and by defence need. The U.S. led the way in electronics which was necessitated by military needs including the "star wars"--the missile race and the successful moon-landing programme

The age of mass consumption was accompanied by a more equal distribution of income and a greater concern for the under-privileged, even

though in 1969, some 20 million Americans were described as living below poverty line. President Truman had launched his Fair Deal campaign in 1949, but not a great deal of legislation actually got through. The Eisenhower administration was a sterile interlude, and though President John F. Kennedy had the benefit of a rapidly expanding economy, had little success with his request to "get the country moving" on the road to reform. President Johnson's shrewd relationship with Congress produced better results-- above all, Medicare, Civil Rights and Education act of 1965. Wealth and success had created a belief in the universal validity of the American way of life. But, with Johnson's unexpected decision not to run for re-election in 1968, however the conflicts and divisions building up in the American society since 1945 came to a head. With Nixon at the helm, the protests of Blacks and other minorities against discrimination became violent. The militancy of students, disillusionment over Vietnam War combined with concern over the threat to the quality of life posed by the headlong pace of economic growth; all played a part in precipitating the Sixties as "the most dissentious American decade since the Civil War."

Surrounded by confusion and chaos, in Rabbit Redux Harry is reduced into passivity; the victimizer turned victim. The focus shifts to the predicament of marginalized minorities: women, represented by Janice and Jill; adolescents represented by Jill and Nelson, and the Blacks represented by Skeeter.

In the first novel, Rabbit had esteemed himself as superior and "first rate." Abounding in vitality, he had been racing against the homogenizing effects of entropia. He was a winner and "second rate" people like Janice,

Eccles, Ruth and Mrs. Smith swarmed about him for sustenance and revitalization. Society had taken great pains to entice this individual into its fold. In the second novel, the society seems to have had a decisive victory in its homogenizing attempts. Rabbit turns into the victim as other people override him in their pursuits of freedom. The system has entrapped the individual. As he no longer poses a threat, society loses interest in him. A few years of mechanical existence of a linotyper earning his keep chained to a desk has drained Rabbit of his individualistic traits and rendered him into the semblance of a robot, a veritable "Little Man." All work and no play has made him so dull that even the "dumb mutt" Janice his own woman prefers another man and deserts him. She knows his return to the "second-rate" marriage means he has bought into the values of the society he once had fled. As she puts it, "May be he came back to me, Nelson and me, for the old-fashioned reasons, and wants to live an old-fashioned life; but nobody does that anymore, and he feels it. He put his life into rules he feels melting away now" (Rabbit Redux 54). Even she notices the shift in social norms which Rabbit in his new passivity fails to. From the status of an outsider, he has been converted into a staunch defender of the system. Having been drained of vitality he needs something to hold on to, to sustain himself. He looks upto the myth of America, America the winner, the source of freedom and sanity, which is "beyond power" and which "acts as the face of God." He mystifies and apotheosizes it: "Wherever America is, there is freedom; and wherever America is not, madness rules with chains, darkness strangles millions. Beneath her patient bombers paradise is possible" (49). He is hawkish on the issue of Vietnam. As he argues with Charlie Stavros, he explains his stance; that the US is trying to make Vietnam, the "little yellow

people happy," and "make a happy rich country full of highways and gas stations" (48).

Skeeter, the angry young black militant is another force he looks up to as a generator of power, a source of regeneration for power-drained victims of society like himself. In the first novel, Rabbit was the only character with a sense of belief strong enough to vitalize others. In the second novel Rabbit has become one of the burnt-out butts, a spent force, one among masses. The role of vitalizer is assumed, in Rabbit Redux by Skeeter, the indignant Black whose hostility lends importance and identity to the characteristics of American society. Listening to Skeeter's foul-mouthed bitter reflections on race-relations in America's history, Rabbit comes to realise "There seems to be not only a history but a theology behind his anger" (122). As Skeeter recounts black humiliations and sufferings, he is so emotionally involved that he screams and cries on occasions. As he gives his black version of American history Skeeter requires the white man's concurrence, which Harry freely gives: "I believe all of it." But Skeeter is enraged that he becomes oblivious of time, space and person and turns offensive: "Do you believe, do you believe I'm so mad just telling this if I had a knife right now I'd poke it in your throat and watch that milk white blood come out and would love it, oh, would I love it" (207). Saying this Skeeter breaks into uncontrollable sobs. History turns theology here, a myth for the new American to lean back on and seek guidance from, as Harry understands it. Harry reaches the same answer that Hook, the old history teacher, in The Poorhouse Fair, has pointed to: the reliability of history to guide the vitality-drained, technology-loaded, media-addicted and leisure-seeking

younger generation out of its moral stupor. Through hatred Skeeter has done for Harry what Hook had intended to do for Conner through love. Skeeter calls himself Jesus, the "Black Jesus." This is true in terms of the novel. He is the only one in the novel with a vision; who comprehends the past and present, and the suffering of the humiliated black race which comprises their contribution to the making of the myth of America.

In Harry's little community consisting of himself, Jill and Skeeter, Skeeter is the only one with vitality while Harry and Jill representative of the White, are sterile, drained of power, mechanized. "We are what has been left out of the industrial revolution," Skeeter says about the Blacks "We are the nature you put down in yourselves" (208). Skeeter characteristically never talks about technological advances or spaceflight. What he is concerned about is human action as witnessed at Vietnam. He describes the war as horrible, fascinating and even holy. It is America in essence, it is "where god is pushing through." Technology has put down nature and consequently the white race given to mechanization has lost in terms of primitive virtues; in the same way as the old America found behind the poorhouse walls in the earlier novel, The Poorhouse Fair has surrendered to the artificial world of technology.

Jill in her state of double marginalization as woman and adolescent represents an exaggerated state of loss; "rejecting instruction and inventing her own way of moving through the world, she has lost any vivid idea of what to be looking for" (119). She is the juvenile delinquent from Connecticut, from a family that owns sailing boats and yachts, she has fallen on evil ways by doing

"some sick things" and is brought back to health by the black group at Jimbo's Lounge; Rabbit's co-worker, Buchanan introduces her to the cuckolded Rabbit.

The story she tells Rabbit is horrifying. Her father died of a stroke the previous year. About her mother she says, "She really is good with men, she thinks they're the be-all and end-all. I know she was playing around even before Daddy died." In brief, Jill too would have ended up as her mother, a "rich bitch" had she not run away from home. Instead she turns an urchin slut, sleeping with men old enough to be her father, like Rabbit, and "spooks," like Skeeter. She had run away from her "bitch" of a mother and drug addict of a lover. Yet she fraternizes Nelson filling in that vacuum left in his home and heart by his mother's wayward conduct. She rarely goes out, her tastes are tame and quiet; sewing, reading or playing Monopoly with Nelson. Her choice of books too are peculiar; Yoga, psychiatry and Zen; and her topics of discussion: God, beauty and meaning. She considers money as "stinking." She tells Nelson, "The world is what God made and it doesn't stink of money . . ." (143). Still, Jill and Nelson "hustles" enough money and buys a guitar. Rabbit gets furious for her having turned his son to a beggar. The rich kid playing with life makes him sick. He lectures her: "You're all sucked out and you're just eighteen. . . . You've had it handed to you, sweet baby, that's why it's so dead. . . . You don't have a fucking clue what makes people run. Fear. That's what makes us poor bastards run. You don't know what fear is, do you poor baby? That's why you're so dead" (152). Yet Rabbit admires Jill for her youth, upper-class background and high-flown ideas; and sex with her is not a complete failure as it was with Janice; though it lacks in intensity in comparison with his

times with Ruth, it gives him the thrill of stepping out of boundaries. The same thrill he experiences in forming a marginal community of outsiders along with Skeeter and Jill; sharing meals, dope, sex and ideas. Like Jill and Skeeter, Rabbit too is in a state of marginalization: being deserted by wife and deprived of a job. This inter-racial, inter-generational community has only a precarious temporary existence; for it is destructive in effect particularly to the weaker sections, as seen in the case of Jill; and of Nelson who suffers in the long run. Skeeter does Jill serious wrong, by hooking her on drugs and physically abusing her; and the two men heedless of the pleas of Nelson work together towards her destruction. One feels sad to think of the eventual fate of this "no man's daughter, no man's wife" as she is carried away by the fireforce as a shapeless package covered in rubber sheets from the burned down Penn Villas house, with only adolescent Nelson to mourn her and to make a relic of her half-burned guitar.

With Jill turned to ashes and Janice bidding shamefaced good bye to her liberated status Updike has pronounced doom on the possibilities of the Women's Liberation Movement.

Yet Rabbit's stance in this second novel of the series seems ambivalent. He defends the system as he tells Skeeter: "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. Well, it is fun, for a while as long as somebody else has laid in the supplies" (154).

So he has laid in the supplies this once and passively enjoys the fun as Skeeter activates the revolution. But he moves out of his passive defence of the

status quo by refusing to throw Skeeter out in compliance with the white neighbourhood's sense of propriety. It is the outsider in him that surfaces, as his reliance on his own instinct makes him do the right by going against society: "I did what felt right," as he puts it. In essence he still retains his militant spirit disastrous though the consequences be: his house is firebombed, Jill burns to death and Skeeter has to flee again and his small community of marginalized minorities is disbanded. With feelings of guilt for being responsible for Jill's death weighing down on his conscience he returns to his marriage, being now aware of the disasters that the world outside marriage can bring with it.

Rabbit Is Rich opens in the new era in international power relations as the cold war between the superpowers gives way to more relaxed relations, with the emergence of Japan as a new constellation among industrial powers.

After America's withdrawal from Vietnam in 1973 protests within the country became more muted--except for the powerful and largely successful compaign against nuclear power.

The new Republican President Richard Nixon promised in 1969 to reduce and finally (1973) to withdraw US ground troops from Vietnam. When in 1971, he followed up this reversal, by overtures in Communist China and later visited Peking and Moscow, the relaxation of tension seemed to mark the beginning of a new era in international relations, and a similar change occurred in Europe with the conclusion of a Four-Power Agreement in Berlin in 1971 and détente between East and West Germany. But the underlying tensions and suspicions remained unresolved. In spite of the SALT negotiations of 1972 and later, both the USSR and the US continued to build up new strategic weapon systems. Yet

down to 1979 the atmosphere of détente or "thaw" created in 1971 was outwardly maintained.

Rabbit Is Rich begins in 1979, as the two decades of bipolarity of the world between USSR and US, the two superpowers on the Eastern and Western flanks, give way to a new phase in international power relations. The recovery of Europe with the formation of the European Economic Community in 1957, the emancipation of Asia and Africa, the bursting in of the oil-rich Middle East into world economy with the formation of Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries and the emergence of Japan as a new industrial power are among the developments that made "the 1970s seem . . . amorphous" in Updike's description ("Why Rabbit Had to Go" 18). The novel opens with Harry's heightened historical awareness: "The fucking world is running out of gas" (Rabbit Is Rich 7).

In the middle of the gas shortage of 1979, Harry had managed to thrive; he had managed to keep on top of the wave of the industrial revolution. He had acquired new skills, talents and capabilities. The opening part of the novel foregrounds information as Harry's capital asset. As the creature of nature that his nickname makes of him, from disasters he has emerged falling back on all fours licking and healing his wounds. He is doing very well as the manager of his mother-in-law's Toyota franchise. When Harry tries to sell the economy model, the Corolla, he quotes Consumer Reports approvingly and urges in favour of rapid turnover. "Who in this day and age keeps a car longer than four years?" (18). While exhibiting the luxury model, Celica, Harry reverses his

earlier opinion and points out its investment value: "That old Kleenex mentality of trade it in every two years is gone with the wind" (19).

Also there is an obvious shift in Updike 's attitude to the electronic media as he proceeds from one novel to the other in the tetralogy. In 1969, reflecting on "The Future of the Novel" in what he described as "an age of Mc Luhanism," Updike expressed the view that the new electronic age threatened to "dull our sensibilities and eclipse our humanistic heritage" (Picked-Up Pieces 18) Marshall Mc Luhan in his works, The Gutenberg Galaxy (1962), Understanding Media (1964), The Medium is the Message (1967) and War and Peace in the Global Village (1968) had put forward his theories on the role of the media. For Mc Luhan "the medium is the message;" that is, the manner in which the medium disseminates information is more important than any particular message. The medium extends one or more of our senses, the telephone extends the sense of hearing, the camera that of sight. Mc Luhan develops his theories by analysing how technology has affected human behaviour and culture through centuries. He argues that since the invention of printing by Gutenberg in the fifteenth century, Western culture has been slavishly dominated by the eye, consequently impoverishing the other senses. Oral communication involving all the senses, hand-crafted texts and manuscripts give way to the uniform nature of the printed page. The reading of print is done individually and the printed book brings in a social and political system destroying communal order of the tribal world and promotes competitive individualism, under bureaucratic control, homogenizing culture in the process. The rise of the new electronic media, radio, film, telephone, television and the

computer reverses this process connecting cities and countries and creates a "global village." According to Mc Luhan the new audio visual media involves different senses simultaneously and for the individual if offers a wholesome aesthetic experience, reconciling the elite and the pop cultures. All social groups including the minorities interpenetrate and the visually oriented West could have a participatory effect in the rich auditory and tribal cultures of the East.

Rabbit's attitude to the media undergoes a remarkable change as he proceeds from youth to middle age and old age. In Rabbit Run Updike casts an eye of disapproval on the electronic media; it is partly Janice's addiction to the visual media that precipitates the domestic tragedy. It appears to have made her too dull and dumb and good for nothing. Her home deteriorates into a junk heap while she spends whole afternoons viewing soap operas followed by the Mickey Mouse club. But Harry is not altogether repelled by the movies while in congenial company. For instance, with Ruth he finds it entertaining enough: "They have gone bowling once and have seen four movies. . . . He saw so many snippets from 'The Shaggy Dog' that he was curious to see the whole thing" (Rabbit, Run 94).

In the second novel Rabbit Redux, Rabbit is fascinated with the printed page. His interest in typography is understandable, for he is a linotyper enslaved by the machine. While Harry is trapped in the world of typography, Janice's friendship with Charlie Stavros opens up new vistas. Janice has grown more humanistic and prefers lingering in the Greek restaurant with Charlie while

Harry and Nelson are impatient to see 2001: A Space Odyssey, a film which celebrates technological evolution.

On Mom's birthday which coincided with the Apollo moon-landing, the Angstroms watch the event on television. The scene amplifies the dehumanizing effects of the new technology and pronounces Mc Luhan's picture of the media-connected global village unrealistic. Far from the idea of a global village, Brewer reminds one of a deserted ghost town, with everyone locked indoors watching the moon shot on the television. In the background, the computerized jargon of the spacemen conveys more than anything else the picture of the sad state into which human communication has deteriorated: "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" (97).

The whole thing sounds meaningless to Harry; the technological terms render the voice incomprehensible. Harry even misses the vital phrases "one small step for a man, one giant leap for mankind" hearing only "something about steps." The medium, in fact, obscures the message.

As Jill takes up Janice's role at home, Nelson and Harry rarely watch television, for Jill leaves the room when they turn the set on. Jill's humanistic approach has a positive effect on Harry's home. Her healthy cooking restores him physically, her responsiveness rekindles his deadened emotions and sex with her is not evocative of death as it was with Janice. She banishes the mechanical television and introduces guitar music and discussion in its place. Her vision of man is as anti-entropic; man according to her is "a mechanism for turning things into spirit and spirit into things" (139). For her, man's perfect

creations are not what he does for the general, but personal, bearing the stamp of the feelings of its architect. With her personal touch Harry is restored to health; he is led back from the mechanical robot-like existence to the abundance of a life of the senses.

In Rabbit Is Rich, the women of Harry's household--Ma Springer, Janice and Pru--are media addicts. They revel in television soap operas. At several points in the novel an ironic counterpoint is established between the screen image and Angstrom family. For instance, Harry's antagonistic discussion of the past with Nelson is interrupted by sentimental comments from Janice or her mother engrossed in the films. The Waltons or All in the Family. The repeated screen image of American happy families projected by the media is undercut by the reality of conflicts in the Angstrom family. Harry dislikes the TV serials, Nelson too is irritated by the pregnant Pru's fascination for afternoon soaps. What interests the men, is the re-enactment of the horrors of their life in the past. Nelson is fascinated by horror films, and repeatedly describes his past as a horror story. He was attracted to Pru initially by the "horror stories of her own growing up" (291). In the closing part of the novel Harry watches the Super Bowl on television but obviously his interest is in the half-time show with the American propaganda. Soon his attention is diverted humanistically. He turns away from the television to his grand daughter, turning away from fantasy he comes to terms with reality.

Harry, as he appears in the last novel, Rabbit at Rest has undergone a tremendous change in his attitude to the media. Though not such an expert at "channel-surfing" as his granddaughter Judy, his initial contempt for television

has given way for awe and admiration. It functions for him as a conduit of information from the outside world. It serves as a data lifeline providing him with facts in aid of his business practice. It acts also as a veritable lifeline while Harry is admitted in hospital for angioplasty: "Its wires come out of the wall behind him, just like Oxygen" (294).

Harry mentions The Lone Ranger and Walt Disney nostalgically on many occasions. Updike himself has admitted that Mickey Mouse had been his "first artistic love and inspiration" and that his first ambition was to be an animator for the cartoon's creator, Walt Disney. Updike recalls the ubiquity of the Disney enterprise:

> . . . in that pre-television Thirties world, the world of the movies and the world of the popular press were so entwined, and the specific world of Walt Disney so promiscuously generated animated cartoons and cartoon strips and children's books and children's toys, that it all seemed one art. (Self consciousness 242)

The 1930s had witnessed the emergence of many "Superbeings"--The Lone Ranger, Superman, Batman, Green Arrow, Flash Gordon--all of whom appealed to the average American desperately trying to pull out of the Depression. Robert Field in The Art of Walt Disney (1942) points out: "No one will ever know to what extent The Three Little Pigs may be held responsible for pulling us out of the Depression" (Field 60). However, for Harry, as for Updike the greatest contribution to popular culture of the times was Disney's: "That Disney, he really packed a punch" (Rabbit at Rest 140), he muses listening to Judy's songs while sunfishing at sea. Listening to the songs from those children's classics,

The Wizard of Oz, Snowwhite and Pinocchio. Judy and Harry glide safely onto the shore though, in the meanwhile Harry is wriggling with pain of a heart attack.

As Harry flees from home after Pru's disgraceful disclosure, he listens to the radio in the same way as he did during his flight three decades earlier. The songs of his youth have now become old songs. Listening he realizes "that the songs of his life were as moronic as the rock the brainless kids now feed on, or the Sixties and Seventies stuff that Nelson gobbled up." And he recognizes the profit motive behind composing such music, "use and throwaway" culture aiming at gross material gain: "It is all disposable, cooked up to turn a quick profit. 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" (460-61). Yet his faith in Walt Disney remains unshaken. He thinks the Disney World and its master showman will remain inviolate and their amusement parks will "hold out their cups for the tourist overflow" (462). The Lone Ranger and Carol Burnett no longer rides the air having given way for the new hero Deion Sanders, new music replaces the old, yet Disney shall never lose in value.

Harry and Janice had taken their codes for conduct from the movies and movie stars like George Sanders and Liz Taylor. The sensibilities of the younger generation seem different as a result of the television substituting the movies. Janice mourns the appearance of Nelson dressed in a purple paisley robe and realizes the contrast in the aspirations of the new generation:

> Robes, smoking jackets, top hats and white ties, flowing white gowns if you were Ginger Rogers, upto your chin in ostrich feathers or was it white fox? Young people now don't have that to live upto, to strive toward, the rock stars just wear dirty blue jeans. . . . When she was a girl nobody had money but people had dreams. (Rabbit at Rest 143)

At this stage, Updike seems to approve of Mc Luhan's positive approach to the audio visual media, for Harry's viewing of the television has its positive impact. It extends his visual imagination. He gradually develops a kind of detachment and could even imagine the details of plane explosions. He is shocked at his ability to imagine Nelson's plane in flames, with "just a cold thrill at being a witness." During the angioplasty, watching, what is happening to him on an actual monitor, his television induced detachment enables him to deviate his thoughts and render it into terms of media frames. Harry could combat "a wave of nausea" with "a test pilot's detachment" and could keep the whole experience "as remote from his body as the records of his sins that the angels are keeping" (275).

Nostalgia and historical consciousness are the prime conditions of Rabbit at Rest, the last novel of the tetralogy. Harry is past middle age and cannot help observing and nostalgically commenting on the changes that passage of time has brought about in American social life. His nostalgia is for a period of time when individual heroism was possible in the service of the nation; though the litany of loss also includes commonplace enjoyments of his childhood days like chiclets, penny candy, gum drops, and sour-balls: "Whatever happened to the

old-fashioned plain hamburger? Gone wherever the chiclets went" (100). He favours junk food, buys peanut bars that recalls the fresh hot nuts he bought as a child in Brewer. He tries to reclaim the past by getting transported through imagination, by evocative songs, to the times when "life was not only bigger, but more solemn." He sadly realizes "all this effort to be happy, to be brave, to be loved all this wasted effort" yields just "the saddest loss time brings, the lessening of excitement about anything" (114). Now that his social world has dissolved, since he lives half the year in Florida, he rarely sees any of his friends. He nostalgically yearns for "those boozy late afternoons at his old club back in Diamond country, the Flying Eagle, before . . . Thelma Harrison got too sick with lupus ever to show up and Cindy Murkett got fat and Webb divorced her so you never saw anybody anymore" (70).

His attempt to reconstruct a social circle in Florida is a difficult and time consuming process. He plays golf regularly, but he feels that his neighbours in Florida mostly older in age, are "cautious as if on two beers they might fall down and break a hip." Harry feels this caution arises more out of racial difference than of ageing. His golf partners are Jewish and with them he is never quite sure where the boundaries are. To them, he is not Harry, but Angstrom, an outsider, "a pet gentile," "a big uncircumcised hunk of the American dream." But he respects their historical vision, he "treasures their perspectives, it seems more manly than his, sadder and wiser and less shaky. Their long history has put all that suffering in its pocket and strides on" (57-58).

Harry's reverence of history and staunch faith in its reliability as a sure guide amidst chaos had its beginning in the second novel, Rabbit Redux; where

he is found to stand in awe of Skeeter representative of a minority group, the Blacks. His association with Jews, another race endowed with a long-standing history of suffering and humiliation, flight and torture, rekindles his historical consciousness. Now in retired life he reads history, ponders over history. His historical consciousness acts at three levels: the personal, the regional and the national. This role of the historian befits his isolated stance, for it gives him the necessary detachment to comment on contemporary realities. Dilvo I. Ristoff in his book, Updike's America: The Presence of Contemporary American History in John Updike's Rabbit Trilogy (1988) speaks of Harry thus: "And he is the man in the middle, pressed between life and death past and future, an object of the cosmos, an object of history" (Ristoff 28). As an "object of history," he is "an object of the cosmos" poised between past and future. More than that Updike's and Harry's prime concern is with America, past, present and future. The role Updike had taken upon himself through the characterization of Hook, the old history teacher in The Poorhouse Fair, was to interpret the lessons of the past, to the present and future generations of America. The Rabbit tetralogy opens up new vistas for him through the chracterization of Harry Rabbit Angstrom. His role as historian is enhanced by his willingness to stand between the past and the future. He has successfully incorporated the sufferings of the minorities of America in his interpretation of American history, a step taken in the right direction which might result in "one giant leap for mankind." Rabbit's is a call for a return to the image of the melting pot that America stood for before the onset of the turbulences that the past few decades brought with it that forced the mosaics to fly out of the pattern.

"Pressed between life and death" as Harry is, as the story moves on to the closing days of Harry's life, he becomes increasingly aware of his role as an object of history. While in hospital for the angioplasty Harry has a view of the nearby brick mansions through the window and he ponders over the different brick-laying patterns:

> . . . he tries to view his life as a brick of sorts, set in place with a slap in 1933 and hardening ever since, just one life in rows and walls and blocks of lives. There is a satisfaction in such an overview, a faint far-off communal thrill, but hard to sustain over against his original and continuing impression that Brewer and all the world beyond are just frills on himself . . . himself the heart of the universe. (293-94)

Even a close encounter with death fails to remove the individualistic slant out of his thoughts. One is reminded, at this juncture, of "Self Reliance," the Emersonian dictum: "history is an impertinence and an injury if it be anything more than a cheerful apologue or parable of my being and becoming" (Complete Works II 66). Harry's is a variant of the Emersonian expression of the cheerful individualism, according to which the individual forms the centre, while all else, class, community, institutions, governments, years, events, etc. are pushed to the peripheries.

His sense of himself as an object of history inspires him to read history. Throughout the novel, he is seen to read history. As the novel begins: ". . . in his semi-retirement he has taken to reading history. It has always vaguely interested him, that sinister mulch of facts our little lives grow out of before joining the mulch themselves, the fragile brown rotting layer of previous

deaths" (44). Towards the end of the novel, when the doctor asks him, if he has any hobbies, Harry replies: "I read a lot of history. I'm a kind of buff." His reading and consciousness of history make him even more aware of his marginalization. Harry's view of the easing of tensions of the Cold War becomes relevant here. He asks, "Without the Cold War what's the point of being an American?" This is exactly in line with his view of his son's hostility towards him, that having an enemy "sharpens your senses." Still Updike's own explanation on Rabbit's feelings, is illuminating:

> His sense of being useless, of being pushed to one side by his wife and son, has this political dimension, then. Like me, he has lived his adult life in the context of the Cold War. He was in the Army, ready to go to Korea; hawkish on Vietnam, proud of the moonshot and in some sense always justified at the back of his mind, by a concept of freedom of America that took sharpness from contrast with Communism. If that contrast is gone, then that's another reason to put him regretfully to rest in 1990. ("Why Rabbit Had to Go" 19)

The way to co-operative co-existence among the major powers had been opened, way back in early sixties with Kennedy's negotiations with Khrushchev and in the seventies with Nixon's negotiations with China and the Soviet Union. By the late 1980s even President Ronald Reagan--who without prior Congressional consent ordered an invasion of Grenada and an American Military presence in Lebanon--had begun to understand the sinificance of that course. He, in the closing years of his administration had recognized that co-operation, not confrontation fitted the needs of the US in a world where power had become

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diffused. On the opposite pole, Gorbachev signalled agreement for obvious humanistic reasons, that, in Nicaragua, Cuba, Bulgaria, Poland, Ethiopia and Southeast Asia, large-scale human misery, starvation and death could be averted and survival of life on earth could be ensured. Later the statesmen of the 1990s, Soviet and American, Gorbachev and George Bush began wisely to diffuse rivalries and the Cold War became part of past history.

Rabbit had always justified America in all its passing phases of victories and defeats, he had fought its wars, felt proud of its achievements always cherishing the myth of America. America of the anti-Soviet phase. He should become part of the past, now that phase of America is part of the past. Towards the closing part of the novel, while fifty-six year-old Rabbit is engaged in a game of basketball with coloured boys at Deleon, Florida, the boys taunt him saying, "You're history" (491); obviously they see the super-annuated man as part of the past, irrelevant to the present and comtemptuously to be dismissed. But it is not so, for history has its place and value, the novel insists. The scene of Harry's marching in the Fourth-of-July parade at Mt. Judge as Uncle Sam illuminates this aspect:

> They wave ironically calling "Yaaaay" at the idea of Uncle Sam, this walking flag, this incorrigible taxer, and frisky international mischief-maker; . . . the crowd as it thickens calls out more and more his name, "Harry" or "Rabbit" - "Hey, Rabbit! Hey, hot shot!" They remember him. He hadn't heard his old nick-name so often in many years, nobody in Florida uses it, and his grandchildren would be puzzled to hear it. (365)

Time has turned full round, and in the cyclical revolutions of history, his original title to fame, is flung back at him. He is now the "star" of the moment, cheered by masses, not as basket ball star but in his new title as Uncle Sam. He becomes America, its symbol, its history.

The clue to the unravelling of the symbolic signification underlying the character of Rabbit and the nature of his pursuit is left here. The perceptive reader identifies the character and his pursuit. Rabbit Angstrom represents America in flesh and blood, in all its sensibilities, pursuits, strength, weakness, deeds and mischiefs, where as Uncle Sam is an abstraction; America, the star-player, "the frisky international mischief-maker" engaged in its quest for identity, a tradition and its place as an object of history; at the same time re-creating history all the time around it. At the end of the parade, Rabbit's personal and mythic identities fuse, the actor becomes the character, the reader becomes the text, Harry becomes the myth of America: "Harry's eyes burn and the impression giddily--as if he has been lifted upto survey all human history--grows upon him, making his heart thump worse and worse, that all in all this is the happiest fucking country the world has ever seen" (371).

This is the moment of self-realization: a historical perspective is acquired agonizingly by way of angst-infected, uncertain pursuits; conflicts, compromises, struggles, sacrifices, scrapes and narrow escapes, feats and failures. America that is forever moving westward, the frontiers giving way; from Nature's jungle to man-made concrete jungles and now back again to the elements, with the seas and skies as limit. So, as the novel closes, Rabbit has made his last halting place at Deleon Bay in Florida, gazing out to the sea. He

is back in his elements; retains to the last his basket ball title; for the fatal stroke occurs while he is playing in the company of an adolescent Black who marvels at Harry's prowess.

Harry had been endowed with a superb aesthetic sense. He flees from home in the first novel, leaving behind all that is ugly, drab, dull and mediocre which includes wife, home, job and the neighbourhood. He responds to the call of beauty, wants to enjoy a life given to the senses in the lap of nature. He wanted to go south, "into the orange groves and smoking rivers and barefoot women" (Rabbit, Run 22). He wanted to drive all night through dawn and morning and noon and park at night on a beach and "fall asleep by the gulf of Mexico" (22).

Later during his picnic life with Ruth, he takes up a gardening job in Mrs. Smith's vast rhododendron garden of eight acres on 40 dollars a week. The job, though not highly paid gives him heart's contentment. He feels the divine presence in that wilderness of brilliance: "Sun and moon, sun and moon, time goes. In Mrs. Smith's acres, crocuses break the crust. Daffodils and narcissi unpack their trumpets. . . . He loves folding the hoed ridge of crumbs of soil over the seeds. God himself folded into the tiny adamant structure (114-15).

Even after three decades more of eventful life and a brush with death in the form of an attack on the heart, in Rabbit at Rest he displays the same visionary delight in the spectacle of an avenue lined with pear trees in blossom. Before getting hospitalized for angioplasty, as he drives around his native Brewer "refreshing his memory and hurting himself with the pieces of his old self that cling to almost every corner" (150), he comes upon a vision of spring:

> 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 . . . 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 their glory. (155)

Rabbit had impulsively responded to the call of beauty accepting with all his heart, what nature apparently had offered to him out of its bounty. He does not hesitate, to "pull off a single leaf" to study its intricate beauty; it is the same responsiveness to the call of beauty that moves Rabbit to a sexual encounter with Pru, his daughter-in-law:

> Pru says, "shit" jumps from the bed, slams shut the window, pulls down the shade, tears open her bathrobe and sheds it, and reaching down, pulls her nightie up over her head. Her tall pale wide-hipped nakedness in the dimmed room is lovely much as those pear trees in blossom along that block in Brewer last month were lovely, all his it had seemed, a piece of paradise blundered upon, incredible. (286-87)

For Harry, this moment is "a piece of paradise blundered upon, incredible." Pru later feels remorseful at the transgressive nature of the relationship. Harry does not feel remorse or shame. He does not even take it as a "mischief" from his authorial point of view; though from the critical perspective, it is possible to consider it as such, for Harry has his mythical identity as America, the "frisky international mischief-maker." From a post-colonial view point Rabbit's behaviour could even be described as the "power play" of the neo-colonialist imperialism.

Janice describes the whole affair as "perverted" and "monstrous" and "truly unforgivable." Their views on the matter clash, and to avoid unpleasantness, Harry resorts to his instinctive response, he runs. He goes South. What he had wished for and could not achieve thirty years ago is accomplished. He might not "fall asleep by the gulf of Mexico," but he could fall asleep by Deleon Bay, in Florida living in his condominium. His dreams come true, he sleeps beside the beach in the South; just as the boy's dream to visit the Lighthouse gets fulfilled years later in Virginia Woolf's <u>To the Lighthouse</u>.

And to the end Harry retains his status of the outsider. In the closing scene of <u>Rabbit at Rest</u>, as he journeys towards death with the sense of fulfilment of having played superbly all through life, he does not care to struggle, for he conceives of death as yet another experience and accepts it wholeheartedly. He could view it with detachment and comment on it. He tells his son "it isn't so bad." So he has scored the last of his points before he becomes part of the past.

In brief, the protagonist's denial of conventional values, his isolation, his racing against homogenizing attempts and insistence on the existential urges, put Rabbit's story in the Existentialist tradition and points towards the futility of man's libidinous pursuits. It is also humanistic in its appeal and vision though naturalistic in design. The second novel of the series clearly pronounces an indictment on the dehumanizing effects of the advances in technology and points towards humanistic approach as a remedy for the sterile, robot-like state to which the average "Little Man" has deteriorated. It also upholds the rights of

the minorities especially of the Blacks and the adolescents, though towards the Women's Liberation Movement not sympathetic. Updike apparently, disapproves of co-habitation in marginalized intergenerational communities, for its effect is described as destructive to weaker sections, as is seen in the cases of Jill and Nelson. In Nelson it has far-reaching dire consequences as witnessed in his rebellion and drug-addiction.

Updike's outlook on the electronic media undergoes a transition. His initial disapproval gives way to appreciation when he reaches the last novel. As for Pop culture, he stands in awe of the artistic and lasting contributions of Walt Disney that had entertained and enlightened all generations beginning with the thirties, though he looks askance on the low-taste music which is evidently tuned on to make quick profit.

In the Rabbit Series, Updike returns to his earlier concern, the relevance of the past to the present and the reliability of the historical perspective. He visualizes Rabbit as an object of history and points to the need of reconstructing history from a different point of view, incorporating the sufferings of the minority communities, for it forms a vital part of America's past and endows it with meaning and character enhancing its cultural heritage. The last novel of the series, closes with Rabbit's identification with the myth of America; the "frisky" racing Rabbit becomes America's symbol. The novel also insists that history is not to be dismissed contemptuously, for, it has its place and value for contemporary man, who in his turn becomes part of history; present merging with the past as time marches on relentlessly.

Above all it is Updike's splendid vision of humanity that shows all through the tetralogy which makes his work essentially different from the works of his contemporaries. His compassionate touch is extended also to those individuals who take exception to, and stand outside of, social morality enforced by the Establishment. Thus in the first novel of the tetralogy, Rabbit, Run, though the characterization of Harry Angstrom is executed in existentialistic lines, he has drawn him as essentially humane and humanistic in his approach, to children and the distressed, in particular. Updike's concern for the suffering minorities, his humanistic approach to life and his extolling of the historical perspective as a solution to human problems are all factors that come out brilliantly through all the novels of the tetralogy making it another instance of Updike's vision of humanity.

"The web of our life is of a mingled yarn,
Good and ill together"
Shakespeare.

CHAPTER FIVE

Reconstructing the Myth: The Scarlet Letter Trilogy

In an interview through the mail granted to James. A. Schiff in January, 1989 John Updike had expressed his deep admiration for his great predecessor Nathanial Hawthorne for having "struck the American note . . . in a most unexpected place and way" and described him as the only "major American novelist until James to write persuasively of male female relations" (Schiff 131). He enters into a dialogue with this predecessor and reconstructs The Scarlet Letter in three diverse pieces of fiction which is grouped together as The Scarlet Letter Trilogy. According to Updike, The Scarlet Letter is not merely a piece of fiction but also a myth and it was an updating of that myth and a redefining of the triangle that he attempted in his Scarlet Letter Trilogy--A Month of Sundays (1975), Roger's Version (1986) and S. (1988).

Apart from the fact of the common source, there are other factors that persuade the perceptive reader to view these novels as a cluster different from Updike's other novels. These novels mark a departure from his usual realistic or naturalistic modes of story-telling. They use first person narrators and each of these narrators is aware of his or her role as the narrator of a fiction to be read by others. So, in these novels, Updike is found to be experimenting with the "self-conscious" narrative technique commonly associated with the post-modernists, Vladimir Nabokov, John Barth, John Hawkes, Thomas Pynchon and others.

Years ago in 1970, in an interview granted to Frank Gado, Updike had discussed the relationship between naturalistic descriptions of sexual activity and the requirements of an author's style, pointing out D.H. Lawrence, James Joyce and Vladimir Nabokov as three artists who led the way in showing the actualities beneath the elegance of language. The balance between depictions of sex and the nuances of style is a primary factor with Updike, as is exemplified in his A Month of Sundays. In this novel, Marshfield, the protagonist, plays the role of a first person narrator writing a journal in which he is the main character; and the journal is the novel. Marshfield, the implied author is a witty, eccentric sexually conflicted and spiritually tormented clergyman from Massachusetts who has been ordered by his bishop to an Arizona desert resort for the clergy-gone-astray. His condition is being officially diagnosed as one of "distraction." But in the clergyman's own terms, he suffers from "nothing less virulent than the human condition, and so would preach it" (A Month of Sundays 7). The reliability of the facts as he narrates them is as questionable as the facts as related by Saul Bellow's maniacal Herzog of his novel of the same title or Nabokov's aberrated neurotic Humbert Humbert of Lolita. Marshfield, being extremely conscious of his dual positions as wayward adulterer and punning author struggles to reconcile the demand for style with his two roles, which Updike himself admits, "is to be in a situation of tension; is to be in a dialectical situation," where perfect adjustment would deny meaningful identity (Picked-Up-Pieces 504). The tension between body and soul in his life mirrors the conflict between language and communication in his art. In both cases sex becomes a central problem. For instance, the

juxtaposing of religion and sex as seen in the closing prayer in A Month of Sundays while making love with Ms. Prynne:

> There was a moment, when I entered you, and was big, and you were already wet, when you could not have seen yourself, when your eyes were all for another, looking up into mine, with an expression without a name, of entry and alarm, and of salutation. I pray my own face, a stranger to me, saluted in turn. (190)

Robert Detweiler makes a point when he points out that this conclusion is a recapitulation of Updike's suggestion that language is inadequate to define the sexual and religious forces that come together silently at the end. Marshfield gains the affirmation he sought in his belief that the body itself is holy, professing this belief is the way to salvation and hence the concluding prayer is for the communion of body and soul, matter and spirit.

Updike has stated, that the conflict between matter and spirit is central to all Hawthorne's work and that The Scarlet Letter offers a statement of Hawthorne's creed. In an essay on "Hawthorne's Creed" in his prose collection, Hugging the Shore (1983), Updike had referred to A Month of Sundays as "Dimmesdale's Version" of The Scarlet Letter. In 1986 Updike published Roger's Version, another first person narrative in which a fifty-two-year-old professor of Divinity, specializing in church history named Roger Lambert, whose young wife's name happens to be Esther, manipulates and victimizes a young, pious computer science undergraduate named Dale Kohler. In 1988, Updike came out with the third novel on the same source, S. from a woman's point of view. It is obviously Hester's version, in which an indignant

North Shore housewife rebels against the narrow outlook and patriarchal set up of American Protestantism in which she recognizes a hangover of the Puritan heritage. She flees her philandering husband and constraining circumstances of domesticity that denies her continual spiritual growth and takes refuge in an Arizona desert commune, the Arhat Ashram. Updike in his reconstruction of The Scarlet Letter, has elaborated, updated and satirized on the views of the Hawthorne text, the central issue being the split between matter and spirit, body and soul, sex and religion. Updike had said, "Hawthorne's instinctive tenet [is] that matter and spirit are inevitably at war" and that at Dimmesdale's dramatic death upon the Scaffold, the soul is victorious over the transgressions of the body. In his trilogy, Updike seeks to transform this Puritan myth into a contemporary reality-based modern yarn affirming the corporeal impulse and thus reconciling body and soul, matter and spirit.

Updike's trilogy builds upon two concepts outlined by D.H. Lawrence in his Studies in Classic American Literature (1977) namely Hawthorne's duplicity and the American quest for renewal. Lawrence declares that the primary impulse in Hawthorne was toward subversion and deception and that Hawthorne had known disagreeable things in his inner soul which he had carefully sent out in disguise. In recasting Hester, Dimmesdale and Chillingworth, Updike had only built a superstructure on the basis provided by Lawrencian concepts. He redefines Hawthorne's characters thereby urging the reader to re-examine their nature, particularly in regard to what has been repressed or disguised. Lawrence refers to Hester as a "gentle devil" who desires to revenge herself upon the male species.

Lawrence's second concept Updike has made use of is the idea of "shedding skins" in order to bring about a total renewal. Lawrence argues that the Pilgrim Fathers' desire for the founding of America arose not out of their urge for freedom but out of a desire to get away from everything they have been. Their objective was to shake off the old European skin and to grow a new American one. A number of Updikean characters are seen as "shedding off their skins." For example, Sarah Worth in S. and Rabbit in Rabbit Is Rich. They undergo a total renewal during their transition from America of the seventies to that of the eighties. Sarah refers to "shedding skins" literally as well as metaphorically on many occasions. She openly talks about her disaffection for Europe and Europeans just as she attributes the reason for the founding of America to the Puritans' distrust of Europe. Sarah and Rabbit have the same spirit of quest that once lured Hawthorne's Puritan characters of the seventeenth century to cross the Atlantic in search of a New World.

James Joyce's publication of the archetypal, mythological novel Ulysses had ushered in the vogue of the mythic method in fiction. Since then, a number of writers have retold earlier myths. Bernard Malamud, John Barth, Derek Walcott, and Updike himself who had made use of the method successfully in an earlier novel The Centaur. But in his Scarlet Letter trilogy Updike manages a unique effect. In all three novels he dexterously keeps up a persistent relationship with the prefigurative myth and his mythological novel, at the same time bringing about distortions and reversals in character and situations which serve to reduce the mythic distance and to ground the novel firmly in his own time and space. He utilizes skilfully both fragmentation and condensation, as

techniques in order to deflate the mythic dimensions of The Scarlet Letter and destroy the distancing effect of the earlier myth producing a picture of contemporary reality reminiscent of the work of Nabokov and John Barth, where parody itself becomes, as M.M.Bakhtin puts it in The Dialogic Imagination (1981), "the most accurate rendering of reality" (Bakhtin 89). In all three stories that he tells, the prefigurative story of The Scarlet Letter remains the common source; yet they remain three altogether different stories having only few points of intersection. He follows the same method here, that was first applied to one of his short stories, "Four Sides of One Story," which is a contemporary retelling of the story of Tristram and Iseult. In the short story as well as in the trilogy, Updike has deconstructed an earlier tale, to show how a story contains within it as components the multiple voices of different characters. According to Bakhtin's concept of dialogics, the author's vision unfolds as a polyphony of the distinct voices in conflict with one another. Updike has broken down The Scarlet Letter into its component voices providing each of Hawthorne's quiet characters with an opportunity to speak directly to the reader, his own version of the story.

These novels reveal a post-modern Updike; one who experiments with alternative modes such as the diary, and the epistolary novel creating texts that are self-reflexive and inter-textual. He has also made these texts documentary in nature integrating into them a wealth of difficult information from a variety of disciplines such as computer science, particle physics, evolution theory, crisis theology, cosmology, church history, Christian heresies, Hinduism and Buddhism.

In A Month of Sundays the diary setting allows Updike free range to parade his stylistic gifts and a chance to offer a comic resume from the point of view of a conflicted conservative, of contemporary issues like sexual revolution, women's liberation, liberal theology, the New Left, Watergate morality etc. It is the most metafictional and self conscious of Updike's novels and it centres upon a writer in the process of writing as signified by the first epigraph taken from Psalm 45: "My tongue is the pen of a ready writer." Leaving aside its religious and sexual connotations, it serves as an obvious clue left to the reader, for an easy identification of Marshfield with Hawthorne's Dimmesdale, based on Hawthorne's allusion to the "Tongue of Flame" which is Dimmesdale's attribute; as a gifted speaker he is seen speaking and preaching to his flock from pulpits and balconies and scaffolds. Updike's Marshfield wields a powerful pen, in place of Dimmesdale's "tongue of flame," which also is a charism of the spirit of God. The "distracted" clergyman-writer Thomas Marshfield conceives of himself as an adulterous preacher in exile for a month to a desert motel where he reflects upon erotic exploits with a number of women of the parish. A sustained analogy between writing and sexuality is maintained thoroughout, calling attention to the capacity of language, as of sex, to mediate between body and spirit. He recounts how he met his wife Jane at the Divinity School where her father Mr. Chillingwroth was a Professor of Ethics and how his courtship progressed, in parallel to the texts of her father's lectures, "as if it were in running footnote" to them (46). As his course comes to an end, he promptly proposes, "I introduced the word marriage." With Jane who is an unbeliever, but a strictly "ethical" person of "good works" neither his spirit nor body are satisfied. Soon his attention drifts

to Alicia, his organist who is a divorcee given to a life of carnal pleasures. Sermons get reduced to marginal interruptions to Alicia's increasingly prolonged musical performances. Alica eventually makes her claim over Tom, in a confrontation with Jane, his wife. But Jane's cool reaction assertive of the wife's rights discomfits the mistress and the scene ends on an expression of vulgarity from Alica as she says, "I think it is his duty to shit or get off the pot" (94). This repulses both Tom and Jane and the couple get reunited in scorn for Alicia's abusive language. Jane's "good works" extend to being "good in bed" which intimidates her spouse.

There are a host of discontented church women that seek comfort at the hands of their counsellor. Tom's attention gets diverted again. He falls to the charms of Frankie Harlow, a professing Christian whose all round perfection and unshakable faith renders the minister altogether impotent. Unable to reconcile body and spirit Marshfield finds himself desexualized by his religion. Goaded by the vengeful Alicia who had been fired from her position as organist, Frankie's husband who is one of the church administrators, charges him with adultery. The Bishop interferes and sends him away to the desert motel established for the purpose of healing errant ministers.

The regimen imposed for his recovery includes banishment of the Bible, diary writing in the morning, golf in the afternoon and poker at night before going to bed. He is asked to record what interests him most, which in his case is sex and religion.

Setting pen to paper he realizes "Communication is often the real problem" (136), not only in sexual relation between couples but also between

writer and reader. In a multitude of typographic errors, Marshfield's unconscious surfaces through the control of language. "Flash" becomes "flesh" (10), his "upraised" phallus becomes "unpraised" (34). Alicia's organ turns into a "gorgan" (112) and "kisses" become "misses" (84). A funeral "sermon" gets transformed into "semen" (142) and "important" becomes "impotent" (202). Marshfield allows language to slip and slide in an improvisatory free-flowing style and he gains in imaginative freedom and self-discovery. The power of the unconscious is emphasized at every point. It is demonstrated by the instance of his father who in his senility dwells on past sexual exploits. He alternatingly confuses his son with his brother, a companion soldier, a T.V. presenter and his wife's lover. Significantly Marshfield could only communicate with his father by entering into his private fantasy (172).

He also pens four sermons for Sundays, that stands testimony to his gradual accommodation to a less dualistic faith. In the first, on the Biblical instance on the woman taken in adultery, Christ is depicted as writing idly and thus defeating the woman's accusers. This disputable apologetics for adultery is accompanied by a hint at the power of writing. The second sermon is an attack on the ethical grounds of Christ's miracles. He argues in this sermon that since diseases continue, Christ's purpose in healing was not to accomplish good works but to demonstrate the existence of God. A third sermon, that conceives of the world as a desert place and human beings as the apple of His eyes kept on the palm of His hands, signals a new acceptance of the physical world. The fourth sermon addresses his fellow priests in the motel and

admonishes them on the claims of the body, concluding "our bodies are us" (209). The last two sermons signal Marshfield's return to the borders of normalcy and deservedly the last sermon elicits a comment from his supervisor "yes--at last a sermon that could be preached" (212).

Throughout the novel, Updike continually signals to his readers that this is definitely not realistic story-telling in diary form. He resorts to various devices such as requests for the reader's imaginative co-operation, invitation to conjure up further detail, consulting the reader on switching over to other tenses, eccentric foot-noting and at times warnings about the unreliable nature of the account. The progress of Marshfield's entries in the diary exhibits his deepening awareness of himself as writer and of the questionable nature of the whole process: "Or perhaps these words were never spoken, I made them up, to relieve and rebuke the silence of this officiously chaste room" (33). The complex nature of the truth as he expresses it is obvious in some of the utterances. For instance his assertion of the primacy of fantasy in writing: "Worse, I must create; I must from my lousy fantasies pick the nits of truth. What is truth? My fantasies are what concern you" (91). Even the title of the novel raise doubts, with its reference to the proverbial month of Sundays which can never be.

Marshfield depends, for his identity as a writer on the existence of another person--the reader. Marshfield agonizingly ponders whether his "Ideal Reader" exists. Only with the co-operation of the reader does his writing become a process of communication. He assigns the role of his "Ideal Reader" to Ms. Prynne, the manageress of the motel and sets out to win her, using his

writing as a means of seduction. Once he is convinced of his Ideal Reader's existence through her comment over his final sermon, he implores her to help him to overcome the dualism of matter and spirit, body and soul; that is, for a union of the writer and reader in the creative process: "You are yet the end, the intelligens entis, of my being, in so far as I exist on paper. Give me a body" (220).

Yet the final impression is one of ambiguity, as expressed in the second epigraph of the novel taken from Paul Tillich: "This principle of soul, universally and individually, is the principle of ambiguity." True to his epigraph, the novel ends on a note of ambiguity about the fiction's ultimate source and meaning: "Did I dream this? . . . . The day after tomorrow, my month may seem a metaphor . . ." (226).

All through the novel there is a studied awareness of the writer addressing various traditions: theological and literary, with references to Eckhart, Pascal and Karl Barth; Joycean touches and Nabokovian pastiches in explanatory footnotes, like, "I swear, Alicia's name is real, not contrived to fit Wonder-land," calling attention to a contrived fable. The inter-textual appearances of characters like Ms. Prynne and Chillingworth confirm the connection. Ms. Prynne in the course of the novel assumes various roles. She is the big-built, middle-aged, efficient matron who runs the motel who later assumes the role of the Ideal Reader; like her namesake in the prefigurative myth, she alone can listen to a tale about sacerdotal infidelity and dramatize forgiveness. In her authoritative position, as a person wielding power over fallen priests like Marshfield, Updike has brought about a reversal; that is, he

has turned Dimmesdale's Puritan dilemma upside down. This also leads to the effect of condensation, that is, Marshfield's character condenses in itself the roles of both Dimmesdale and Hester Prynne of the prefigurative myth. He is both the adulterous priest and also a "poor WASP stung by the new work-ethic of sufficient sex, sex as the exterior sign of interior grace" (218); that is, he is also the man whose fall was caused by women.

Marshfield's problem is a crisis in religious faith consequent to the conflict between matter and spirit, the demands of the body and religious duty. The clergyman who by vocation is, "pledged to goodness and fidelity," is confused about both faith and goodness. The rationalist Chillingworth's 'ethical' question, "Is the pleasant the good or not quite?" becomes his query; whether to equate the "good" with the 'pleasant' or not. Marshfield, despite his extensive dialogue with Christian theological thought, cannot solve this dilemma regarding faith on a conceptual theological level. It can be resolved only on the more existential and psychological level through the agency of Ms.Prynne; for, his religious crisis is related to his sexual problem and both together precipitate the temporarily deranged mental state which is officially diagnosed as "distraction." But in his own opinion: "In my diagnosis I suffer from nothing less virulent than the human condition . . . . I should in honest modesty add that my own case is scarcely feverish, and pustular only if we cross examine the bed linen. Masturbation !" (7).

Since he is suffering from this fallen human condition, he is reluctant to divulge his identity in detail. Apart from his name and religion and country, he would not reveal any more and appeals for anonymity.

In Ms. Prynne he finds a compassionate heart, for he had witnessed her kindness in the treatment of a hostile Indian during a picnic to the desert. He turns to her in supplication appealing for her mercy on his pathetic condition. He describes himself as "a poor WASP stung by the new work-ethic of sufficient sex, sex as the exterior sign of interior grace, at the last sanctuary for violence, conquest and rapture, in a world as docilely crammed as an elevator ascending after lunch time" (182).

He is reminded at this point of his once-a-week routine sex with his wife and rules it out from the realms of sexual experience; "My situation with my mate Jane with its obstinate look of symmetry and loving kindness, belongs to the province of works purely and works without faith are constipation" (182). He sets aside thoughts of Jane and switches over to memories of his association with Frankie Harlow, the most perfect woman he has ever met. He concludes that his impotence with Frankie "seems now as a product of over management, a wish on my part of match the perfection that sat on her as lightly as a cape of feathers" (182). Frankie fades out of his mind and now his thoughts hover around the figure of Ms. Prynne which he describes in imaginary detail and he invokes on her: "in my insomnia now, between masturbating spurts of fantasizing about you, Ms. Prynne . . ." (182). This revelation of the truth about his condition is the key for unravelling the textual ambiguity. Marshfield's problem is physical more than moral or spiritual; he feels desexualized. Consequent to his desexualization, he is suffering from insomnia resulting in masturbating spurts, fantasizing over the figures of the innumerable women whom he had come across and whose sexual problems he

has learned during counselling sessions. The disclosures that he had come upon in that age of "female discontent" were stunning. The upcoming surge of feminism had turned his world upside down. Marshfield summarizes the catastrophic shift:

> In sum the world men had made no longer fit them. The chafing for some came in the crotch, for others in the head. Some explained that they loved their husbands . . . . Many had the opposite complaint; indeed a curious image of the race of husbands accumulated, as toothless, spineless, monosyllabically vocal, sticky in texture and tiny in size, deaf and blind--the race of axe-wielding, percentage calculating giants who managed the nation became infant monkeys upon entering their front doors. Even the physically violent ones--the strikers the night-gown rippers--were described as ultimately docile and so foolable, so obtruse in relation to the essential, as to be figures of manipulation and pity. (113)

Through these sessions with women he came to know about their sexual potence: "Many women had had lovers; what remained in their minds was not the male lover's prowess or impact but their own, female, magnificently enclosed suffering" (113). And they gave him proof against the suggestion of frigidity pointing out incidents of sexual arousal on stimuli other than that of male contact. For instance, an infant sucking at the breast, the moment of an aeroplane take off, the vibration of the dishwasher as they leaned against the sink, etc. Even the movies projected the image of women as different; some of them featuring ladies as experiencing Lesbian sex.

This inside information into the power of sex and women made him realize his own sexual deprivation. The blunt disclosures shocked him and dealt stunning blows on his sexual being and rendered him impotent. He gets panicky when his own woman all of a sudden becomes "good in bed;" he fears he too is an object of pity in some other man's eyes, having developed an invisible cuckold's horn. Women, taking lessons from the younger generation ascribed new meanings to 'head' and 'heart' and the baffled counsellor became their sounding board: "When these details emerged . . . . Wives who wanted head from their husbands and didn't get it, wives who got it and hated it, wives who didn't mind getting it if they didn't have to give it" (114). These voluntary recitals were prompted by the "traditional sexual ambiguity of the priest" and women flocked around him at all times. He had his answers based on the traditional views of the church; that the marriage is a sacrament and not a contract of convenience and that "a spouse like the land we are born in and the parents we are born unto is given . . . that we and our bodies are one. . . . That women's rights cannot be established as a symmetrical copy of men's, nor as an inversion of male wrongs. That communication is often the real problem" (115).

The problem for the counsellor had only begun. He feels obliged; for the women had brought him "out of the wilderness" where he "did not know that our acts, everyone are homage; only the furniture varies. Churches are spires and domes; we minister now here, now there" (116). This realization that religion and sex need not remain on opposite poles was the beginning of the conflict in the priest's personal life. He was vexed by that ancient ethical

problem raised by his father-in-law Professor Chillingworth, can "good" be equated with the "pleasant." He was so conflicted between the good and the pleasant; his profession and his nature, religion and sex that he consulted all available sources: theologians and thinkers; Karl Barth, Paul Tillich and Kant among them. The question got transformed into a plea for male liberation; for a release from a marriage of spiritual, emotional and sexual incompatibility:

> When is it right for a man to leave his wife? When the sum of his denied life overtops the calculated loss of the children, the grandparents if surviving . . . when is a war good to fight? When Pearl Harbour is attacked. . . . What interests us is not the good but the godly. Not living well but living forever. (161)

But he wanted to live well here and now and he wanted his freedom to choose. There were moments when he had been startled by a glimpse of the male beauty of his sixteen-year-old son Martin. He was also fascinated by the charm of his flirtatious church organist who had had many lovers. He envies Alicia for her freedom and power:

> To be a woman among men is to be surrounded by sexual pressure; the lightest touch invites, the smallest submission releases. The pressing of a key, the pulling of a stop; and what eager tunes, what a hungry wind of power! She was making music with us that only she could hear. She was organist, church and congregation. How superb to be woman! (162)

Man's urge for identification with the female, according to Carl Jung, is an encounter with his anima image; that is, an encounter with the unconscious feminine aspect of one's own personality. For Jung, the anima acts as a positive mediator between the conscious Ego and the Self. The Self-mandala usually expresses itself as some kind of circular four-fold structure. Characteristically the desert resort where Marshfield goes for therapy to get cured of his distracted mental state manifesting in insomnia and masturbation, "has the shape of an O, or more exactly an omega" (8). When he enters the portals of the motel with a circular structure, he enters the realms of the psyche and what follows is the recording of the proceedings as he journeys through the region of the Unconscious, which is exactly the therapy prescribed for him: "my keepers have set before me a sheaf of blank sheets--a month's worth, in their estimation. Sullying them is to be my sole therapy" (7).

The anima image according to Jung, manifests four aspects; Eve, Helen of Troy, the Virgin Mary and Sophia which are stages in the development of heterosexual Eros. George H. Hunt in a chapter on A Month of Sundays in his book, John Upkide and Three Great Secret Things: Sex, Religion and Art (1980) has made a significant point when he located the four women in Marshfield's life corresponding to the four aspects of the anima image:

> Marshfield's diary records in the Jungian order his erotic encounters with the four significant women in his life: Jane, his wife; Alicia, the church organist; Frankie Harlow, the devout believer; finally, the elusive Ms. Prynne. Each corresponds with one of the four stages of the Jungean anima." (Hunt 189)

As Carl Jung describes the four aspects of the anima image:

> . . . Eve, Helen of Troy, the Virgin Mary and Sophia. . . . The first stage--HAWWAA, Eve, earth--is purely biological: woman is equated only with mother and represents something to be fertilized. The second stage is still dominated by the sexual Eros but on an aesthetic and romantic level where woman has already acquired some value as an individual. The third stage raises Eros to the heights of religious devotion and thus spiritualizes him: Eros replaced by spiritual motherhood. Finally, the fourth stage illustrates something which unexpectedly goes beyond the almost unsurpassable third stage: Sapientia (or Sophia). . . . This stage represents the spiritualization of Helen and consequently of Eros as such. (Qtd. in Hunt 189)

According to Jung, the male's psychic maturation takes place only after a series of encounters with his anima image and the positive function of confronting one's anima in all its aspects occurs only when a man fixes the feeling, moods, expectations and fantasies sent by his anima in some specific art-like form, such as writing, painting or sculpture. Throughout the process, however, the anima form in its various stages must be continually re-evaluated ethically, intellectually and emotionally before a psychic unity emerges.

For Marshfield, diary-writing is prescribed for therapy with positive result--writing becomes a mode of healing. His self-conscious attempt at writing requires a definite writer-text-reader concept. As a conjurer with words, the writer consults his mirror:

> 'Who are you, gentle reader?
>
> Who am I?
>
> I go to the mirror.' (10)

And he arrives at the answers: the writer is Dimmesdale, the text The Scarlet Letter and the reader Ms. Prynne. So Ms. Prynne is Dimmesdale's target whom he has to seduce eventually. The initial declaration of the writer assumes more meaning in the context of the purpose of seduction: "Though the yielding is mine, the temptation belongs to others" (7). The writer begins his campaign of seducing the Ideal Reader, which manifests in pleas, requests, invocations, extended fantasies blooming into seductive descriptions of sequences of sex-episodes, open threats and appeals for mercy on his distracted emasculated state. All these combine and fill in the pages of his book. He pleads his case as "a common fall . . . into the abysmal perplexity of the American female. I feel, however, not merely fallen, but possessed and such is demonology that the case needs for cure, another woman; and the only woman here, in this frontier, is Ms, you" (168). Not just in demonology but in Christian theology too, the fall of man (Adam) through woman (Eve) is rectified through the ministration of another woman (Mary). Marshfield's fall was through women and rightly he demands remedy at the hands of a woman. And he implores her for that "rite" which would remove his curse of sterility so that he would be fit once again to inhabit the realms of normalcy. He needs her compassionate touch to restore him to masculinity. To facilitate his return to the territories of reality from the territories of the Unconscious he implores for her mediation: "Have you been preparing me . . . for a return to this world and not a translation to a

better? Is this the end of therapy a reshouldering of the ambiguity. . . . One rite, one grail stands between me and renewed reality. You, Ms. Prynne." (178)

The laborious journey through the labyrinthine ways of the Unconscious thus turns out as a solitary soul's quest for the Holy Grail with its mythological associations. The writing process turns into the fertility rite which requires for its consummation the union of the writer and the Ideal Reader. The modern fisher king Marshfield invokes America's mythic heroine Ms. Prynne to restore him to manhood, lost in the cause of quelling "the gale of female discontent." At one stroke Updike has reversed the role of Prynne and exalted her to the heights of Jung's fourth anima figure, Sapientia, who is also associated with God's wisdom referred to in the Book of Proverbs and with the goddess of fertility invoked through fertility rites. In the desert, the wasteland or the howling wilderness of America, Marshfield, the writer, or the emasculated king is engaged in a quest for the grail that will restore his masculinity, redeem his land of aridity and fulfil his role as writer.

So it would appear, Marshfield's multiple seductions remain only verbal; pure fiction, a "demoniac obsession" on the writer. Marshfield, his text and the Reader remain as real, all the rest belong to the realm of imagination and fantasy. Updike has redefined the triangle, that is, the writer relates the text and the text relates to the reader in a new triangular formation. The writer has succeeded in seducing his Ideal Reader by making believe in the consciously constructed world of make-belief. The reader gets carried away by the writer's subjectivity which impinges on the reader's consciousness that the reader tends

to believe in Marshfield's disgraceful womanizing pursuits as the reality. As George Poulet in an essay on "Phenomenology of Reading" points out, ". . . a second self takes over, a self which thinks and feels for me. . . . This I who thinks in me, when I read the book, is the I of the one who writes the book." (Critical Theory since Plato 1215). This remark is true in the reading of A Month of Sundays. It seems, the writer by his reference to the "Ideal Reader" refers to the one who does a phenomenological reading of the text; for he expects the reader to be completely taken in and lost in the subjectivity of the writer to deem fiction as reality, in the larger context of Updike's metafiction.

Apart from the post-modern techniques exploited for the first time there are other unique features that mark A Month of Sundays as a departure from the Updike norm. It casts for the first time a minister as the central character. Further, it is unprecedented in his career to cast a priest as the writer of his fiction speaking his views for him. Also, the inter-textuality is functional, it serves to point up the contrast that America of the twentieth century poses to America of the previous centuries in attitudes and outlook. One clear instance is the attitude towards sex. The priest, instead of concealing his adulterous turn of mind, indulges in giving outlet to it by describing in minute detail, his sexual fantasies. The character of the American female too has undergone complete transformation. Hester Prynne who would keep her love's secret to death stands in ironic contrast to the lovers and wives who would shamelessly divulge the private weaknesses and deformities of their spouses in order to proclaim their sexual potence. The reversal in the role of Ms. Prynne also points to the shift in the role of woman, brought about by the passage of time, to superior

roles as wielders of power and authority. Above all, it is Updike's vision of humanity that surfaces, in the probing that he undertakes into the problematic predicament of this latter day Dimmesdale and in coming up with a solution that creates comedy out of Hawthorne's tragedy. His humane vision prevails in restoring Marshfield to the realms of normalcy through the ministration of a woman.

Roger's Version published in 1986, spans a period of nine months, from October 1984 to June 1985. Roger's Version, the title in itself is an open declaration of the novel's relation with the prefigrative myth, The Scarlet Letter. Professor Roger Lambert, the protaganist of the novel shares a name and role with Roger Chillingworth as the cuckolded husband. His wife, Esther, younger to her husband by fourteen years resembles Hester Prynne as the adulterous young wife. There is also another claimant to Hester's role: the nineteen year-old Verna Ekelof. She is Roger's niece and the unwed mother of an illegitimate mulatto toddler, Paula. Paula stands in the place of Hester's Pearl. Arthur Dimmesdale's post is filled by Dale Kohler the young computer science undergraduate who in Roger's fantasies becomes Esther's lover. Roger Lambert resembles Tom Marshfield and Dimmesdale in the fact that he too is a fallen minister. He is also the self-conscious narrator of the story. But unlike Marshfield, he has definitely strayed and had an extramarital affair fourteen years ago. He had left his ministry and the parish, had divorced his first wife and had married "the other woman." All this is part of his past history, for when Roger's Version opens, Roger had already established himself to the quietly affluent life of a Professor of Divinity in a University in another part of

America. He has specialized in church history more particularly in heresies. It is a nonproblematic eventless existence that verges on boredom. Into this setting, enters Dale Kohler, a twenty-eight-year old undergraduate of computer science. He is a believer, intent on proving the existence of God by the aid of science, applying to his computer. Dale seeks Roger's help for securing a grant from the Divinity School for his project. He had approached Roger, because of his acquaintance with Verna, the daughter of Edna, Roger's half-sister from Cleveland. Verna had been disowned by her parents for her fall from the ranks of decent society as the mother of a half black illegitimate baby. She had been living in a housing project in her uncle's city though Roger never knew about it until Dale told him. Roger is appalled by the whole idea of Dale's project finding it, "aesthetically and ethically repulsive. Aesthetically because it describes a God who lets Himself be intellectually trapped, and ethically because it eliminates faith from religion, it takes away our freedom to believe or doubt" (24). He also feels an antipathy for the younger man. "He was, I saw as he came to the door, the type of young man I like least, tall, much taller than I, and pale with an indoors passion" (1-2). In Hawthorne's novel, Chillingworth's hatred of Dimmesdale results from the discovery that he has seduced Hester. In Updike's novel the hatred exists well before his meeting with Esther. So it would appear, in getting involved with Esther, Dale follows a pattern already mapped out by his adversary. He becomes Roger's chosen victim. Roger agrees to let Dale use his name on the grant application admitting that, 'it would be a relief . . . to underwrite something . . . other than black or feminist studies. Or these pathetic papers on street religion' (25).

Roger assesses his mixed feelings for Dale as physical repugnance combined with a loathing of his theories and "a grateful iinkling that he was injecting a new element into . . . life" (95). Unlike Dale who relies on science to prove the existence of God, Roger leans heavily on his favourite theologian Karl Barth who sees God as entirely "Other;" he hunts around for the exact quotation from Barth to validate his stance and finds it: "The god who stood at the end of some human way would not be God" (42). Naturally the Barthian in Roger could only view Dale's attempt as equivalent to heresy.

As his scholastic pursuits have their claim on his time, at age fifty-two, Roger's sex life has started wearing off; he reads pornography instead. His relationship with Esther which began as a passionate extramarital affair is cooling off after fourteen years of married existence. Roger could sense boredom wafting from Esther "like the scent of stale sweat." Without their twelve-year old son Richie, they would have nothing to talk about, he realizes. Esther's interest is aroused when Roger acquaints her of Dale's project and of Verna's presence in the city. Esther suggests that Roger invite Verna and her friend Dale for tea. Roger visits Verna and Paula in the housing project and invites them for Thanksgiving dinner. He invites Dale as well. During dinner Roger notices Esther's vivacity and obvious interest in conversing with Dale. Esther even arranges for Richie, tuition in Mathematics and Dale agrees to come on Tuesdays and Thursdays. Roger assumes the role of Verna's tutor during his next visit to her apartment so as to enable her to take a high school equivalency test.

Within the next two months, Roger is almost certain of the sexual involvement between Esther and Dale. With his extreme sensibility he could follow Dale's consciousness. Every move of Dale is observed analytically by his victimizer which enables him to see into the inside details of their emotional and sexual involvement and indulge in pornographic fantasies about their sexual excesses. His sadistic interest in his wife's sinful passion recalls in exactness Roger Chillingworth of the earlier myth. Chillingworth tells Hester Prynne during his visit to her in jail: "Between thee and me, the scale hangs fairly balanced" (The Scarlet Letter 53), and extracts her promise never to reveal his identity to anyone, especially to Pearl's progenitor. This is the strategy that enables him to prolong his sadistic play on Dimmesdale's conscience after prying into his secret. Roger Lambert's pleasure at seeing the guilt-stricken nervousness of Dale Kohler during their consequent encounters has the same sadistic slant. Esther warns Dale that Roger might be manipulating him but he does not pay attention to it. To see Dale discomfited, Roger deliberately makes references to sex and Esther while they argue, about the mind-body split in theological terms. But before they part, Dale acquaints Roger of Verna's latest misery, for she is pregnant again, and of her need for someone to direct her. Roger goes to her help and arranges an abortion. Esther helps her by putting the baby in a day-care centre so that Verna gets more time during the day for her studies. In January, Roger attends the grants committee meeting of the Divinity School and sways the committee, ironically by speaking against Dale's project from his Barthian point of view, to approve of the grant for the project. Roger describes how, in April, Dale spends a whole night in the computer room desperately trying to get some evidence in support of his

thesis. Feeding facts and figures to the computer, he discovers a ghostly, "dead" hand on the screen at one point. But when he gives the command repeat, the hand has vanished and its shape got reduced to a single green scale at the lower right of the computer screen, appearing like an artist's signature. Dale is disappointed, but Roger imagines Dale as consoling himself, "zero is information also" (251). The same night, Verna's desperate call for help over the phone interrupts Roger's reading in his room. Verna, in desperation at Paula's pranks, had struck the child and broken her leg. Roger takes them to the hospital where Paula's leg is set right. But she is kept there for the night; the case has to be seen to by a social worker so that the question of child abuse could be cleared up the next day. As Roger takes Verna back to the apartment, Verna invites him inside and ultimately into her bed. Roger succumbs to his incest, in spite of his fears about V.D. and AIDS. In Roger's "refracted mind" this really experienced incest is "less distinct" than Esther's "many pictured infidelities with Dale" (280). This real scene of adultery is described in one paragraph while Roger's fantasizing over the couplings of Esther and Dale receive pages and pages of graphic description; a pointer to the fact how the authorial point of view plays a major role in making or marring the gravity of incidents and events.

In the fast moving concluding chapter, Roger describes the events from the second week of May through the second week of June 1985: Esther takes active interest in helping Verna to cope with her predicament; she helps to smooth things over with the child welfare people promising to care for Paula while Verna seeks counselling. Dale comes to the annual cocktail party given

by the Lamberts knowing about Esther's waning interest in him and also that he is not going to succeed in his project.

Roger introduces Dale to an authority in natural science, his neighbour Kriegman. Young Dale's half-hearted arguments are systematically destroyed by the hard-core scientist, Kriegman. The next day Roger has a luncheon date with Verna. He gives her money to go back home to Ohio to her parents. He promises her to arrange matters with his half-sister to make the home-coming easier for Verna. Also little Paula is to remain with him and Esther until the domestic scene clears up. Verna tells Roger that Dale too, is going back to his home in Akron, having lost his moorings. The story closes on a Sunday in mid-June as Roger is seen as looking after Paula and Richie while Esther is getting ready to go to church; an unusual gesture on her part, for she is no believer. Roger asks Esther, "why would you do a ridiculous thing like that?" Esther in her "gorgeous rounded woman's voice" replies smilingly. "To annoy you" (328).

Roger's first person narrative is different from Marshfield's. Abounding in sensibility, Roger sees into the life and activities of other people by getting inside of their consciousness and describes them with verisimilitude. He assumes omniscience, but he is careful, when reporting actions or thoughts not his own to remind the reader that these are his views or intuitions regarding others though he presents them as factual. Updike is experimenting with the self-conscious fiction here too, for Roger is aware that someone is reading his version. But Roger is unlike Marshfield who was aware of a fictional artifice of an implied author's attempts at communion with an implied reader. As a

scholar gifted with an insight into human nature and as a man who reads pornography side by side with theology Roger intuits unerringly that Esther's sexual boredom and Dale's youth can combine in producing excellent matter for pornographic fiction. He has confessed in a footnote that at his age "the best sex is head sex--sex kept safe in the head" (190). So the reader would expect a revelation at the end that Dale and Esther were innocent, that Roger's version is his private fantasy. Instead, Verna's disclosure about Dale's affair with an older married woman in Roger's neighbourhood, gives solid basis for Roger's fantasy.

Another way to approach Roger's fantasies is by recognizing the references to The Scarlet Letter. Just as Marshfield's story was a retelling of the earlier myth from the adulterous minister's point of view, Roger's Version is the same story told by the cuckolded husband. Dale Kohler has replaced Dimmesdale, Esther has replaced Hester and Roger Lambert has replaced Roger Chillingworth of the original myth. Updike himself has admitted to his interest in the Hawthorne text and has stated that the allusions to The Scarlet Letter in A Month of Sundays, Roger's Version and S. are meant to be more than playful; they mean to show how things have changed since 1640, or 1850. One could easily recognize in Marshfield's story an inversion of Dimmesdale's where the male becomes the victim. Roger Lambert's story also shows how things have changed; the adulterous couple is not exposed to shame; even the cuckolded husband remains passive about their sin. Dale do get tormented by inner guilt as Dimmesdale did, that he looks "terrible." During the cocktail party while everyone else looks colourful, fresh and vibrant Dale appears "in

his grey suit and violent necktie, pasty and gaunt" (313). And Roger assumes, "the inner worm is gnawing high in his stomach" (315). He is frustrated at his project's impending failure as also from the mixed feelings of guilt and hopelessness consequent to an unnatural affair. But Dale, unlike Dimmesdale does not think of redeeming himself by open confession of his guilt. Roger Lambert also, is essentially different from Roger Chillingworth; Lambert does not pursue his revenge to the extremes, he does not aim at the destruction of his adversary's body and soul. But he shares in one of his namesake's abilities, that is, he could get inside the sensibility of Dale Kohler, in the same way Chillingworth was able to see into Dimmesdale's inmost soul and know his secrets. Roger Lambert identifies with Dale's consciousness since their first meeting itself: "In one of those small undesired miracles that infest life," Roger says, "my disembodied mind empathetically followed Dale Kohler down the hall" (28). As he walks to Verna's apartment too, Roger feels like Dale, imagining Dale's feelings, following the route Dale must have taken in his visits to Verna's place: "I was taking this walk in the steps of another" Roger says, "I felt his spirit invading mine" (56). Sitting in Verna's apartment, Roger has "a sense of being Dale Kohler" (70). Such moments of empathetic identification enables Roger to visualize and present Esther's couplings with Dale. He could even describe Dale's room and its furnishing; so also he could give minute details of the Cube, the giant computer building into which Roger has never even once entered. Chillingworth's uncanny ability to see into the heart and soul of his rival, Roger Lambert has inherited.

Apart from Verna's disclosure and the precedent in the original myth, there are other textual evidences which Updike leaves as pointers to the fact of the adultery of Esther and Dale. For instance, Esther stops acting bored and nervous and becomes "languid and saucy" on Tuesdays and Thursdays, the days Dale comes to teach Richie (230). Esther trims her dangerously long fingernails to the length she had them when she and Roger were in love. Dale gets his hair cut according to the way Esther would like it. On top of everything else, during his confrontations with Roger, Dale starts showing signs of guilt. Finally Roger bases his strategy of undermining Dale's personality on a certainty of Dale's guilt and the strategy is seen to work, which s a positive proof for his assumptions.

In his sadistic playing upon Dale's guilt, Roger Lambert resembles Chillingworth. Roger denies Dale an opportunity to talk about his guilt. When he meets Dale in his office, as Dale begins to talk about his personal life, Roger stops him because he does not want to hear about his wife's adultery though Dale might cleverly conceal her identity. Roger reflects: "if he [Dale] were allowed to confess and weep, the wound would start to drain and stop festering" (188). Instead Roger consoles Dale quoting from Tertullian: "Don't be afraid of the Earth. The flesh. You know what Tertullian said? He said, 'There's nothing to blush for in Nature; Nature should be revered' . . ." (188). Roger makes no secret of his goal to the reader; he makes clear of his intentions: "I did intend to crush him, and this determination felt delicious and solid and grisly, like an especially circumstantial paragraph in Tertullian" (191). Tertullian is an early Christian writer whose positive views on sex had

impressed Roger. Roger consciously guides the theological conversation through bodily metaphors: "I wanted to keep him close to the carnal, to images recalling him to his sin" (171). Roger deliberately brings in intimate reference to Esther and their shared life as man and wife, so as to hurt Dale:

> I knew the reference to our shared bathroom would wound him; our casual, sanctioned nudity, our damp towels and washcloths promiscuously interchanged . . . would torment him with the realization that there were many rooms below the attic--where he and she enacted their charade of hopeless love--rooms of reality, of shared possessions . . . of memories . . . of shelter I could give her and he could not." (184)

In short Roger works on Dale Kohler's psyche in a way similar to Chillingworth's working on Dimmesdale's conscience.

Yet Roger arranges for Dale his Divinity School's grant for his project. The way Roger achieves it gives the reader an insight into his clever management of men and matters. Apparently Roger argues against Dale, quoting Karl Barth that, "the god at the end of a human path would not be God." Roger knows Dale feels betrayed: "After this Judas kiss, Dale for the first time gazed my way. . . . His blue eyes were dazed, clouded. He didn't understand the favour I had done him" (235-236).

This "Judas kiss" would turn into a favour because Roger knows that two members of the committee are supporters of Tillich and Bultmann, old foes of Barth; and a third one is a Jewish woman who would sense the "anti-Semitic

feeling present in Barth's professed philo-Semiticism." Roger says, "I had swung the committee against me: that is toward Dale" (236). Dale is awarded a grant, but as foretold by Esther his experiments lead him inevitably to frustration. Working overnight with computer during the whole Spring vacation, he gets as end product, a curious resemblance of dots and lines in a formation like that of a hand on the computer screen. Dale is frustrated in his attempt to find a living God whom he expected to encounter at the end of his search. During the cocktail party Roger gets the dejected Dale to discuss his theories with Kriegman, the atheistic scientist, knowing Dale had already failed to find the living God. At this point, one gets a clear insight into Roger's real intention behind his securing the coveted grant for Dale: he knew that Dale would fail, weakened as he was by guilt over the affair and it was part of the psychic game he was playing with his victim. Verna confirms Dale's total collapse during her luncheon with Roger, that Dale "is having some kind of break down." She reports, "he says he can't sleep now, because he always used to pray and that would put him to sleep" and "at times at work in front of the screen this actual wave of nausea comes over him and he thinks he has to throw up" (340). Roger quizzes her about Dale's tendency "to throw up":

"And does he?"

"Well, not that he told me."

"Well, then. There you have it; He'll live.

There's and there's faith, and what we think we believe is really a very minor part of what we do believe" (350).

Updike in the voice of Roger leaves clear implication that Dale is better off after the death of his simplistic, essentially materialistic God, better off without his cocksureness, because the ground is prepared, all passions spent, for an image of the spiritual God to arise within his mind. Dale's vision of the "dead" hand on the computer screen does not mean God is dead in his mind, for, in Christian belief death is followed by resurrection which ensures regeneration of faith in Dale's mind too. Any way, his initiation into adult life has taken place already. After his futile search, he has left his student life in the University for good while there is still time to strike out for the territories of adult life. By his departure for home, he reverses the fate of Dimmesdale.

What Updike offers here, by means of the reversals in characters, situations and fates seems to be a new perspective regarding values, attitudes and outlooks, ushered in by a major shift in paradigms with the turn of the Century. As the individual gets acclimatized to the culture of technological mobility he learns to accept dislocation as part of life. Survival being the paramount obsession, he becomes highly adaptable to changes in patterns of life. Roger Lambert, unlike his namesake of an earlier time accepts his wife's boredom as a fact and adapts to it. He even adjusts himself to his temporary displacement, from his wife's affections and attentions. He is sure of his objectives and confident in his own powers and he redeems his marriage by his carefully calculated and perceptive moves in the sexual game of chess. He reminds the reader of the protagonist, Ed Marston of Updike's short story "The Other Woman" in his strategic deployment of circumstances, though towards a different effect, altogether; for Ed Marston's maneuvering is to disemburden

himself of his wife while Roger manipulates "the other man" to regain his wife. Dale also is essentially different from his counterpart of the earlier century, Dimmesdale. He recognizes ultimately that Esther was just a passing phase in his transition to adulthood and thereby he too reverses Dimmesdale's fate. He like Verna returns to his original sphere, to "structure" and normalcy. Esther, too unlike her counterpart Hester ends the affair still comfortably married. Her going to church for the first time in years, may parallel Verna's desire for normalcy and structure.

Roger in Roger's Version had been an adulterous man of religion in the past; that phase being over when the novel begins, Roger passes into another role, that of the cuckholded husband. The victimizer has turned victim, as in the case of Harry Angstrom in Rabbit Redux. Hawthorne had made Chillingworth a man of science; in Updike's novel a graduate student of computer engineering named Dale becomes the adulterer and he is assigned the role of inner conflict. By combining these role reversals, Updike also flips the plot from tragedy to comedy, adding also a fourth character to solve the love triangle. When two men compete for one woman, as in The Scarlet Letter, since she can chose one, or the other or neither, the outcome should be tragic. And hence to make The Scarlet Letter into the comedy that is Roger's Version, Updike introduces Verna, the fourth main adult character. She becomes Roger's consolation as she compensates for the temporary loss of Esther's love. How deep she has seen into the affair between Esther and Dale remains a matter of conjecture. Either Dale must have confided in her or she has had the perception to have guessed at the reason for Roger's obvious

restlessness. She openly tells him on that night of Paula's mishap when she offers herself the third time since they met, "It might make you feel less crumy." She also admits of her personal need for company, to feel less miserable about her child's temporary absence and the cause of it. But from Verna one gets a close up view on Roger's misery, which in no other way one is likely to get, since Roger is the first person narrator who never indulges in self-pitying. She brings one close to his misery as she observes: "Look at your frowny face sometimes . . . those eyebrows. The way you look at your own hands all the time." (297) And after their coupling, as she is about to leave, what she says is more revealing than it would seem at the moment, for it appears an oblique reference to his cuckolded state. "You're quite a horny old fart, it turns out." (302) It seems, from her marginalized lonely status, she could recognize and pity another one in a similar state. And she is the one who assures him, to his relief, of the certain departure of Dale to Ohio, his home place.

Verna fills in another role for Dale; in her fallen state she is some one, whom he takes as his mission to "save," when he has lost his vocation of saving the world from the possibility of intellectual atheism. Further she functions as his sounding board, she listens to his tales of woe and desperation with understanding and sympathy so rare to find in one so young as she is.

In the portrayal of the character of Roger, Updike has brought about a distortion from the prefigurative myth by resorting to condensation along with reversal. Roger condenses in his character aspects of the role of Dimmesdale too. While retaining in the main, the role of Chillinworth. In the case of

Esther and Verna, he has resorted to the technique of fragmentation, that is, he has split the Hester Prynne role between two women; the one to tangle and the other to resolve the love-knot. Esther has some of Hester's qualities, she bears the resemblance in her name and she is the young wife married to a middle-aged man, caught up in an affair outside matrimony. But Verna is the one who has inherited from Hester Prynne her illegitimate daughter Pearl. Verna's daughter Paula is a similar "elf-child" and her name is a variant of the name Pearl. Paula becomes Verna's scarlet letter, for her obvious mullatto's mixed complexion marks her out as a product of White-Black coupling which brands Verna in the white world as a slut to be abhored and in the black world as a target for passes and sexual exploitation. Like the letter "A" in the case of Hester Prynne, Paula represents Verna's shame as also the cause for her rebellious pride. As another reversal of the earlier myth, Updike makes Verna leave her scarlet letter behind; in keeping with his comic vision, she too is restored to the world of normalcy. Verna leaves Paula behind under the temporary guardianship of Esther and Roger, to make easier her reunion with her parents in Cleveland. And Paula, the scarlet letter is willingly taken up by Esther, the other woman who too has strayed from the path of morality, probably as a way to atone for her past sins. Roger, too has his grievous sin to atone for; he voluntarily accepts the sweet burden of the custodianship of the naughty little girl who in her turn fills in the place of playmate for lonely Richie in Roger's spacious home.

Updike offers here a compassionate vision on the world and its affairs as an option, a counterforce against self interest, passions, prejudices, spites and

segregations all of which combine in creating a world saturated with tragic possibilities. Verna and Paula are "the least of these," fallen on evil days, segregated and discarded by the world and landed in the bottomless pit of despair and degradation characteristic of their marginalized state. Yet they have become instrumental in disentangling Roger's home of the complex problems that threatened its well-being. Verna introduces Dale to Roger's home, together they provide Esther and Roger with action and adventure to counteract the boredom proceeding from their eventless, easy going and affluent existence. Roger's compassion on Verna's state and his readiness to outstep the social barriers in accepting the fallen girl into his elite circle, galvanizes a whole series of reactions which in the long run lead to wholesome results for all those who are involved. By making his Roger more human and humane and by endowing him with a sensibility going all the way with his intelligent perception, Updike has made the impossible possible; turned Chillingworth's domestic tragedy into Roger's domestic bliss. He points to compassion, sensibility, kindness and sympathetic understanding, as necessary ingredients to essential human nature if it is to bring about wholesome, balanced solutions to emotional and spiritual problems. Even without reference to a punishing or intervening deity or religion, human beings could bring about wholesome changes around them and make life more tolerable in this existentialist world by adding and extra amount of understanding and insight to their essential humanity. Paula's adoption into Roger's home, though it should prove to be temporary, serves to conquer the racial prejudice that permeates through Roger's narration of the novel and it becomes another bright aspect that contributes to the happy ending of Roger's Version. Updike's vision of

humanity is seen to prevail bringing about positive changes in attitudes, thus transforming the very outlook on life.

With the publication of S. in 1988, Updike's Scarlet Letter trilogy was completed, and with the trilogy Updike has become America's prominent practitioner of inter-textuality. S-the most comic volume of the trilogy borrows heavily from, and converses with, not only The Scarlet Letter but also Hawthorne's The Blithedale Romance and no doubt, the portrayal in S. of Arhat Ashram and Arhat are based on the actual Rajneeshpuram at Oregon and the notorious Yogi Rajneesh, details of which were suggested by reports of the same in newspapers, Oregon Magazine and Cities on a Hill by Francis FitzGerald, as Updike states in his Author's Note to the book.

The Blithedale Romance is considered to be Hawthorn's statement upon his seven month's residence at Brook Farm in 1841; an experiment at communal life. S. borrows in largely a thematic sense, from The Blithedale Romance. The Utopian community depicted in Hawthorne's novel has ideal intentions, of building and participating in a new world. But it could not survive, in the face of harsh realities which included financial problems.

Bent upon creating a perfect world, the sannyasins of Updike's Ashram Arhat in S. like the pilgrims of Blithedale, actually create a society that repeats the features of the outside world they resist. Apparently against materialism the Ashram has its own shopping malls which sell gadgets, T-shirts and tapes. It also employs rhetorical strategies to rob its patrons of their money so that the Arhat may drive about in limousines and wear diamond rings. For all their talk about love and common good, both Blithedale and Ashram Arhat decline into

unwholesome states of competition, selfishness and mutual distrust. Both novels point to the inevitable hypocrisy and self-deception found in Utopian communities. He also points to the play of passion staged under the guise of high ideals and ideas. They also reveal the private aims behind the mask of communal reform. Updike reveals how behind the facade of spirituality, the Arhat is quenching his craze for power, money and sex.

The Arhat Ashram where Sarah Worth of S. takes refuge is a replica of Rajneeshpuram in terms of its outlook and activities, precepts and practice. Buddhism, Hinduism, Zen, encounter group therapy, tantric sex and Yoga mix together in the philosophy and practices of this fictional Ashram which appears like a transplantation of Rajneesh's Oregon Ashram into Arizona desert, for the resemblances are clear even to its specific details; the sannyasins wear a uniform in sunset shades of colours; women control the commune; the guru or master lives a luxurious life and the commune collapses because of deception, poisoning, electronic bugging and fraud on the part of top leaders.

However the most crucial text that Updike makes use of for his novel, is The Scarlet Letter. Indeed Sarah Worth is the latter day Hester Prynne: her mother's maiden name is Prynne, her daughter is named Pearl; her husband's name is, though not exactly Chilllingworth, Charles Worth, and he is a physician. Her seducer, the spiritually-oriented Arhat Mindadali of the Arhat Ashram is really Art Steinmetz of Watertown, Massachusetts, a twentieth century variant for Arthur Dimmesdale. Further, two quotations from The Scarlet Letter describing Hester's lady-like majesty, her voluptuous beauty, the

"marble coldness of her impression" and her defiance of world's law, serve as epigraphs, to Updike's novel.

Updike's intention is obviously to recreate Hawthorne's myth in a comic mode. For this he places its archetypal female victim in a modern setting where adultery is no longer viewed as a serious offence causing ignominy or agony on its perpetrator. S. apparently celebrates the freedom of women. But a number of feminist commentators have expressed their views against Updike's treatment of its female narrator, for Sarah, in many ways looks like a caricature than a realistic portrait. Yet, Sarah, more than any of the other Hester figures in Updike's trilogy physically duplicates Hawthorne's Hester who is described in the prefigurative myth as having "dark and abundant hair, so glossy that it threw off the sunshine with a gleam," and as, "being beautiful from regularity of feature and richness of complexion." This description of feminine beauty has so fascinated Updike, that he makes it serve as an epigraph in his novel. Like Hester Prynne Sarah too had been confined and betrayed by the narrow outlook of American Protestantism which still keeps its puritan heritage. She too is in search of an alternate life style so that she may assume "freedom of speculation." Hester Prynne of the earlier novel is described as wandering in "desert places" and "regions where other women dared not tread." Updike makes Sarah go to an Ashram in Arizona desert.

Charles Worth, Sarah's husband who assumes Chillingworth's role represents patriarchal repression. He manipulates women; he had broken faith with his wife by carrying on affairs with his nurses. Sarah, at forty-two, after "years of respectable bondage and socially sanctioned frivolity" as she tells him

in one of her letters, has skipped out on him. She attempts to turn her misery and depression into social and spiritual rebellion. The Arhat Mindadali whose real name is Art, plays the part of Arthur Dimmesdale thus filling out the triangle. The Arhat, like Arthur Dimmesdale attracts females by his physical and spiritual presence. Pearl Worth resembles Peral Prynne. She too is strong willed like Hester's Pearl, who resists the controlling hand of her mother. Like Hester's daughter, she too goes outside of America, to Europe where she marries into nobility.

Somewhat like A Month of Sundays which was composed of diary entries, S. consists of Sarah's letters. The story unfolds in an epistolary manner. Sarah from her distant haven in the Arizona desert, communicates the details of her spiritual pursuit through letters and tapes, to Charles her husband, Midge her friend, Pearl her daughter, her mother, her brother, her hairdresser, her psychiatrist, her dentist and others. The tone of these missives is comically erratic. The letters reveal both her depths and deficits. Through these epistles, she tries to clarify her stance and advocates the cause and motive-force behind her seemingly impetuous adventure.

In the prefigurative story of Hawthorne, Hester stands markedly silent as a counterpart to the vocal powers of Dimmesdale, who is depicted as ever speaking or preaching. Updike reverses this condition in his Hester's version of the myth, S. providing her with a voice in which she tells her story. So he makes Sarah pen angry and bitter letters to her relatives and acquaintances speaking openly of her many infidelities, her many strayings from the straight path of traditional morality, her adulterous relationship with various men and

women. She gloats on her powerful position as the manager of finances of the Ashram and narrates how she had pilfered funds from ashram accounts and had added to her own personal accounts in foreign banks. Before leaving the ashram for good, she has resorted to electronic bugging to get at the fraudulous secrets of her master Arhat and deposits this valuable piece of taped evidence, safely in a bank locker as a measure of caution in case he dares to charge her with robbery and deception. It is obvious, from the tone that she adopts, her quest is more after revenge than freedom. Her revenge is directed against the species of males and the set up that has betrayed and kept her in confinement. In her pursuit of revenge, she becomes nasty, self-centred, cunning and defiant.

In his retelling of Hawthorne's story, Updike de-romanticizes Hester challenging feminist and romantic readings that confer on her the aura of a saint like Joan of Arc. Updike has asserted, "I see Hester, in the context of her time, as tough and defiant and practical as she could be" (Schiff 99). In presenting a cool-headed practical Hester in Sarah Worth, Updike follows D.H. Lawrence who views Hester as a "gentle devil" desiring to revenge herself upon the male species for their abusiveness and oppression (Lawrence 89). Though many readers might view Hester as "lovely Hester" Updike begs to differ and takes "another view" of Hester as Hawthorne, according to Updike's understanding, intends it. Updike's epigraphs extracted from Hawthorne's novel underlines this different reading on which he builds Sarah's character; for instance this passage from the The Scarlet Letter from which Updike's second epigraph is chosen:

> Standing alone in the world--alone, as to any dependence on society, and with little Pearl to be guided and protected--alone, and hopeless of retrieving her position, even had she not scorned to consider it desirable. She cast away the fragments of a broken chain. The world's law was no law for her mind . . . . She assumed a freedom of speculation, then common enough on the other side of the Atlantic, but which our fore-fathers, had they known of it, would have held to be a deadlier crime than that stigmatized by the scarlet letter. In her lonesome cottage, by the sea-shore, thoughts visited her, such as dared to enter no other dwelling in New England; shadowy guests, that would have been as perilous as demons to their entertainer, could they have been seen so much as knocking at her door. (164)

Hawthorne only outlines the kind of thoughts a person in Hester's condition might have entertained; he does not enter into the details of the "freedom of speculation" she had assumed. Yet he leaves solid basis by way of suggestion, on which an intelligent reader could construct his own superstructure. By giving a voice to the repressed Hester, Updike has only built on the basis provided by Hawthorne's text.

The novel S. begins with Sarah's renouncing of the Puritan heritage, remnants of which still lingers on as is obvious in the narrow outlook and the patriarchal repression characteristic of Protestantism in twentieth century America. She leaves her sophisticated middle class set up for a new spiritual experience; as a pilgrim she ventures out into the wilderness seeking spiritual

renewal. She discards her old name and habitat so as to be reborn to a new spiritual identity. As she writes in her letter to her husband Charles:

> I will change my name, I will change my being. The woman you "knew" and "possessed" is no more. I am destroying her. I am sinking into the great and beautiful blankness which it is our European/Christian/Western avoidance maneuver to clutter and mask with material things and personal "achievements." Ego is the enemy, Love is the goal. I shed you as I would shed a skin. (11)

She turns her back on Western culture which has imprisoned her and on Charles whom she addresses as her "prison warder." She turns Eastward to a new mythos adhering to which she might renovate her spirit. She becomes "Kundalini," which stands for "the female energy in things" (80). She acquires a new vocabulary, thinks in a new language free from the orthodoxy of the dominant patriarchal culture. In turning to the East too, she is following Hester who "had in her a rich, voluptuous, oriental characteristic" (The Scarlet Letter 83).

Herself a victim of patriarchal oppression, she assumes the role of feminist spokeswoman in her family, as she warns her mother and daughter against submitting to male domination. Sarah follows Hester here too, for in the earlier novel Hester too had "comforted and counselled [women] as one who had herself gone through a mighty trouble" (263).

Sarah tries to lure her daughter Pearl away from her lover Jan, the son of a Dutch Count, whom she had met at Yale. She fears that her daughter might

repeat her mistake, sacrificing her life and studies for a man. She admonishes Pearl to concentrate on her course in the University for she fears, "Jan won't let you grow--that you'll allow him to put a permanent cramp in the ongoing splendid adventure of your womanhood just as your father with the connivance of my parents did to me twenty-two years ago " (171).

Sarah who blames her mother for having connived to detach her from her "unsuitable attachment" to her Jewish boy friend at Radcliffe, Myron Stern, is doing the same thing to her daughter. Her mother who now lives in a condominium in Florida has herself fallen to the charms of an old admiral. Now it is Sarah's turn to protect her from an unworthy alliance. Sarah expresses her shock at her mother's involvement with the "alleged admiral." To Sarah, "he sounds like a typical male exploiter, hunting for a cook and a nurse to see him into the grave." She implores her mother not to be "conned" and then concludes: "I guess it's not in the nature of women to learn. Seduced and ruined by an octogenarian swindler--is that what you want your epitaph to be?" (179). No doubt she is utilising her mother and daughter in aid of her revenge motive and sharpening them as weapons in her war of the sexes.

Midge Hibbens, Sarah's best friend who later betrays her by conspiring with Charles and finally by marrying him, is another echo from the prefigurative myth. She in her character and name bears the likeness of Mistress Hibbins, the witch who tempts Hester toward the devil. Sarah communicates with her through missives dictated to the tape recorder and it is she who becomes the recipient of her most intimate stories of the Ashram. The tape is made furtively; Sarah conceals the recorder in her bra in order to get at

the secrets of the Arhat and it records actions and sounds as they occur. It records even the scene of the coupling of Arhat and Sarah during the course of which the master deigns to reveal details of his real identity to Sarah which provides her with a weapon of blackmail.

The Arhat is the most engaging character in the novel, for he is the latest in the line of fraudulous religious men resembling the real life spiritual con-men of the 1980s from Jim Bakker to Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh. Arhat preaches the primacy of sex over ego and everything else and Updike derives a great deal of fun in turning to ridicule his fraudulence and obvious self-serving hedonism. The irony of what Sarah had described as "our beautiful experiment in non-competitive living" turning out into a ferocious battle among power-crazy, jealous women for the prime place in the Arhat's bed, and Arhat himself turning out a fraud; being not an Indian guru, but just an American Jew from Watertown, Massachusetts with the name Art Steinmetz, produces its desired effect. The satire is aimed at his countrymen's credulity and affinity for anything that goes by the term spirituality and bears the brand name of "Eastern".

Viewed from the point of its social satire, S. has attained heights, yet out of the three novels of the trilogy, it makes less of an impact as a novel for it does not offer a consistently convincing portrait of a woman's character. It is possible to deem his attempt of a woman's version as a venturing too far out into unfamiliar territories; for understandably he lacks insight into the pattern of behaviour of the female; particularly in her dealings with her own daughter. Richard Gilman has made a point as he comments in his book review, in The

New Republic, ". . .one freedom Updike hasn't won in writing S. is from his fixed sense of women, his inevitable creation of them as projections of male sensibility " ("The Witches of Updike" 41).

Though a woman might attempt to mould her daughter as one of the "free women--women standing upright and having ideas" (223); she may not deny her the right to love and to become a mother herself. Also a woman in her right senses may not make a much loved and cared for daughter, an instrument for venting her rage and distrust of men.

But the possibility is not to be counted out, that Sarah's character is being drawn in these extravagant lines deliberately with the intention of attracting his adverse critics. For the effect of comedy, he has resorted to literary in-jokes; for instance, many of his reviewers--Richard Gilman, Norman Podhoretz and John Aldridge--appear as characters in S. 'Dr. Podhoretz 'is Sarah's dentist, 'Mr. Gilman' is the name of her husband's sharkish lawyer and 'Mr Aldridge' is the name of a county administrator; all these namesakes are some of the unfortunate recipients of her scorching missives.

In Sarah's romance with the Arhat, though some of the details of The Scarlet Letter are adhered to, in certain other aspects the situation is reversed. Dimmesdale is spiritual, Arhat feigns spirituality; Dimmesdale captures women's admiration by his personal charisma especially the "tongue of flame"; Arhat enslaves women by his enigmatic personality and play of tantric sex. During their sexual encounter, Sarah wears on her chest, not the scarlet letter "A" but a concealed tape recorder which electronically captures and publicizes an act which Hawthorne only dares to hint at. By recording and

publicizing the same act that caused such ignominy and agony in the prefigurative myth, Updike has invalidated its damaging moral consequences. When he enwraps it in his comic vision, it occasions only laughter: the picture of a woman smuggling a tape recorder into the sanctum sanctorum of the bed chamber of her spiritual master and getting away safe with the recorded evidence of his carnal passion and fraudulous history belongs to the realms of pure comedy. It also points to the fact how sex has come to be viewed in more recent years. The intended use of the tape for the purpose of blackmail, shows how the every same act has become far from a disgrace, a powerful weapon in the hands of an unscrupulous woman, that could be turned into her advantage as and when she desires it. Sarah escapes with this potent weapon and deposits it in a banklocker for she is aware of its value. So, in a powerful reversal Updike has turned the scarlet letter into a valuable possession.

The mode of disintegration of the idealistic commune occasions revelations. Though the agencies like INS and FBI pose continual threat of deportation to its European inhabitants, the more serious threat for the commune, just as in the case of their seventeenth century Puritan counterparts, comes from within their own ranks. Inner strife, arising out of craze for power, money and sex, and their unwillingness to compromise, prove to be the undoing of this Arizona desert commune. Sarah has no sympathy for the Europeans who do not possess a sense of reality. She warns her daughter Pearl against them, as she writes to her on the eve of her impending marriage to a European:

> The Europeans here at the ashram, most of them have been deported or gone into hiding, were a fascinating study in how intelligent and

> attractive people could go through all the correct notions and yet all the time be missing the point. They kept trying to make a formal church or a military organisation out of it all; the delicacy of our American reality keeps escaping them, the way our whole lovely nation is founded on the edge of a dream. (222)

Earlier she had counselled Pearl against her Dutch alliance. She had warned her that Europeans are everything Americans left Europe to get away from and that Europe bears "the leaden weight of age-old sacrosanct male supremacy" (171). Still Sarah is fascinated with Europe, the old world still holds its attraction for her. Europe is depised, at the same moment yearned for; which constitutes the mysterious ambivalence in the attitude of every American towards Europe and Sarah is no exception. She speaks of this strange fascination, in her letter addressed to Myron Stern, from Samana City on the Caribbean where she stays waiting for a reunion with him, at the close of the novel:

> It was not just you I was infatuated with, it was your family tucked with all those others in this hilly wooden three-decker part of Boston, I had never been to before . . . so full of wall paper patterns and kinds of plush and fat friendly knobby furniture and embroidered doilies and doodads still savoring of Europe. Europe as a place of actual living life and not just a vague distant source of authenticity and privilege. (263)

But it is to the old Europe which had been left behind by the Pilgrims in the seventeenth century that she pays this tribute; not the Europe and Europeans of the present of which she is brutally critical.

Like the pilgrims, Sarah also has attempted to begin a new life. She had tried to separate from the trappings of the past and to evade the role fixed on her by the dominant culture. She had shifted from role to role during her residence in the ashram. With her female lover Alinga she played the role of the male, with Arhat she was goddess Shakti making love to god Siva. She had assumed multiple roles in her letters too, as her signatures vary from Sarah P.Worth through Sara and S to Kundalini and back to Sara again. In her last letter written to the Arhat she arrives at the conclusion that he is not a fraud, but has only undergone self-transformation, which she herself wants to model on. Yet the truth remains that Sarah has been cheated by both the worlds: the old and the new. Disappointed, she returns, at the end of the novel to the origins of America, the Caribbean, where she reposes before returning to her old lover. Her inner self remains the same even after her quest.

It is also true that her spiritual quest has enabled her to act on her own initiative and on her own intuition, following the way of Emerson and Whitman in her own variant of Transcendentalism. She too feels a spiritual presence in the universe: "There is something in everything, its isness, that is unutterably grand and consoling" (42). She turns to the East like Emerson, for a mythos; the American Protestantism can no longer nourish her spirit. But inspite of herself she falls into the American trap of materialism. Sarah who started off with ideas of renouncing the past and its bondage, plunges even more deeply

into the world of money, and acquisition of money becomes a prime passion with her, and she grabs from all possible sources. It appears, like the letter "A" of the earlier myth which symbolized "Adultery" initially and which acquired a whole range of different meanings as Hester transforms herself from adulteress to angel with the passage of time, 'S' which stands as abbreviation for the Scarlet Letter and Sarah and later for Sex, as the novel closes acquires the different meaning, of money--dollar, $. Updike in his own way points to the greater danger, in the way of modern America's spiritual renewal, posed by money and materialism in the place of the moral laxity which had threatened the Puritan America of the seventeenth century. Updike's vision of humanity, one feels, guarantees Sarah's safe return to structure and the original quest for spiritual renewal, after a brief repose.

In short, Updike through his inter-textual echoings attempts to maintain and confirm a connection with the past by offering homage to an earlier writer and text. Updike had earlier expressed his reverence for the great writers of the past by writing a series of essays on his predecessors, Emerson, Hawthorne, Howells, Melville and Whitman. In conversing with Hawthorne through his trilogy, he carves out an emotional stance for himself and endeavours to inherit some degree of his great predecessor's genius. But he also parodies and de-romanticizes Hawthorne's text challenging its central moral stance. He rejects the idea of the split between body and soul from his post-Freudian point of view. Updike's attitude towards Hawthorne is seen to be a combination of devotion and aggression. He pays homage to him, at the same time challenges and satirizes his moral stance.

In Hawthorne's unreal romantic world marked by primitive forests inhabited by witches and blackmen, and divine messages written across the sky, much of the details of real life remain unsaid. Though passions occasionally burst forth, the force of Eros is quickly repressed and held in check. Hawthorne expresses his disapproval of passion and immorality through the tragic fate he delivers as punishment to those who strayed from the path of morality. Updike exercises his humane vision and allows Hawthorne's characters the opportunity they are denied in the earlier novel to act freely and talk their versions. Updike's characters are less concerned with the proprieties of behaviour, being more concerned with their inner faith. Sexuality is no crime according to their sense of social conduct. Marshfield, Roger Lambert and Sarah Worth offer testimony to this revised version of social behaviour. Updike who lives in a less repressive age in American history has a unique ability to understand the flesh in all its complexities and consequently, is eager to examine the baser instincts of human behaviour.

Updike's objective in this trilogy is to reconcile matter and spirit and thereby to do away with the traditional body-soul division, which had been the central problem in Hawthorne's text. Updike's Roger Lambert argues in favour of the flesh quoting Tertullian. According to Roger there is no reason to be ashamed of the body and its desires, for body and spirit are partners; the pleasures of the soul are those of the body also. Tom Marshfield also asserts: "We and our bodies are one," Updike's characters are able to bridge the gap between body and spirit through vicarious experiences and voyeurism

sometimes, for Roger becomes sexually powerful after his vicarious experience of sex through Dale Kohler's consciousness.

With the Scarlet Letter trilogy Updike has started on a new phase in his career; he departs from his more traditional and straight forward narratives. During this phase Updike has become more interested in alternative modes of narration: satire, parody, pastiche, mythical types, inter-textuality, self-conscious narration and metafiction. He has turned away from his usual third person narrator and attempts new modes of story-telling: the diary and the epistolary mode. His narrators have become more self-conscious about their role and that of the writer. These novels point to a more post-modern Updike reminiscent of Nabokov and Barth.

Through these novels, Updike gets an opportunity to give free reign to his interest in religion. Marshfield, Lambert and Sarah are individuals concerned with spiritual issues and through them he attempts to demonstrate how American Protestantism has decayed with the passage of time and how America stands in need of an alternative mythos to bring about a spiritual renewal. In their eagerness to find another faith, he shows how Americans are often misled by fake prophets and fraudulous religious con-men whose influence turn negative, pushing them deeper into the mire of materialism.

Finally, though these novels of the trilogy do not render Updike at his best, they have aligned him with the American literary past and reveal archetypal patterns in American culture. They also illustrate the significant changes--a shift in paradigms--brought about by the passage of time on central issues discussed--sexuality, science and religion and reveal archetypal patterns

in American culture. Updike also points out how a more humanistic approach to existential problems, paves the way for redefining the traingle, bringing into being happier solutions. It offers one of the foremost examples of contemporary inter-textuality and points to the fact that Updike's work deserves to be considered in relation to the work of Hawthorne, America's first great novelist.

Updike's work endows a humane dimension in the treatment of the problem and the characters of the prefigurative myth. The humanistic view that he adopts in depicting characters and their affairs is what makes Updike's work essentially different from the work of the earlier novelist. This vision of humanity is most obvious in his treatment of, "the least of these," the marginalized, which includes children, adolescents, the coloured classes and others who are in distress being considered as castaways by the established conventional society. This humane dimension is most emphatically brought to display in all the three novels of The Scarlet Letter Trilogy. Thus Updike's vision of humanity prevails turning Hawthorne's grim tragedy into a thought-provoking comedy.

"Life like a dome of many coloured glass,
Stains the white radiance of Eternity"

Shelley

CHAPTER SIX

God's Plenty: The Updikean Panorama

The Centaur, Of the Farm, Couples, Marry Me, The Coup, The Witches of Eastwick, Memories of Ford Administration, Brazil, and In the Beauty of the Lilies

The radiance, richness, mystery and abundance at display in the fictional world created by Updike, with pictures being unrolled in succession as the scenes and the setting shift from the fifties to the nineties, endow it with a wonder and glory; as of Nature's own panoramic splendour. The kaleidoscopic patterns that emerge as his infallible authorial vision assimilates subjects as dissimilar as religion, art, sex, politics, witchcraft, history, science and after life, compel one to gaze spell-bound marvelling at the variety, colour and brilliance of the spectrum.

What makes each of Updike's works of fiction different from those of his contemporaries is the humane dimension that is brought to bear on the burden of his subject and the humane view he takes on his characters and their affairs. If his subjects vary from religion to sex his protagonists range from teenagers to octogenarians. His vision of humanity embraces all classes, colours and nationalities. The Updikean panorama is indeed mysterious and as enticing as nature itself. The referential and evocative prose that enwraps the subjects in a web of allusion and nuance befitting the scene and the minds of his characters is common to all of his works of

fiction. He also resorts to the use of the post-modern techniques in his later novels. This chapter attempts a study of a nine diverse pieces of fiction by Updike: novel, romance and megafiction; so as to bring out the author's meaning, intention and attitude to the subject, and the characters portrayed; thus to illumine his vision of humanity. The works examined are: The Centaur (1963); Of the Farm (1965); Couples (1968); Marry Me: A Romance (1976); The Coup (1978); The Witches of Eastwick (1984); Memories of Ford Administration: A Novel (1992); Brazil (1994) and In the Beauty of the Lilies (1996).

The Centaur (1963)

The Centaur, a novel that draws heavily on autobiography tells the story of a fifteen-year-old boy and his father, a school-teacher, using the mythic method, bringing in the parallel of the Greek myth of Chiron the Centaur and Prometheus his son and disciple.

The novel opens with the attempt of George Caldwell, teacher at Olinger High School to quell an unruly batch of students who create disturbance during his class on evolutionary human history. Caldwell is wounded in the ankle by a missile thrown by one of his students, which is parallel to the mythic instance of Chiron being wounded by a poisoned arrow shot by another centaur the venom of which he carries in his blood throughout life. Caldwell goes to the garage of his friend Hummel who has his mythic parallel in Hephaestus, the blacksmith of gods and gets the missile removed. As he returns feeling like the wounded Chiron, he surprises Venus bathing in the pool. Warned by the thunder of Zeus he

removes himself from her amorous attentions. Stripped of the metaphor, Caldwell had come upon Vera Hummel, the physical education teacher, emerging from the school locker room after a shower and is distracted from talking to her by the intervention of the principal, Mr.Zimmermann. he returns to class and strikes the unruly pupil Deifendorf with the arrow while Zimmermann appears on the scene, watching Caldwell's actions.

From the Second Chapter, one understands that the story is actually reminiscence of Peter Caldwell, the son of George Caldwell. Peter now a young man of thirty, narrates from memory the experiences of a few days of early 1947, that led to the death of his father, fourteen years ago. Peter is a second-rate expressionist painter who lives in Manhattan with a Negro mistress to whom he recounts his past history; how his father and himself used to rush to school and back again in an old family Buick which sometimes would fail on the way to start making them reach late at school and home.

Chapter Three returns to Chiron and his students at school and in Chapter Four Peter resumes narration. On a Monday evening the father and son attend a swimming meet in the nearby town of Alton, but they have to stay overnight in a cheap Alton hotel, for the car does not start. Leaving the car for repair, they walk to school in Olinger the next morning.

Abruptly Chapter Five presents George Caldwell's obituary as written by one of Caldwell's students in a local newspaper. Chapter Six presents in a surrealistic dream sequence, Peter as Prometheus mourning over his father's death; but then he meets his father in the dream and pleads with

him to go on living. Chapter Seven reverts to a third person narration of the activities of father and son in the school which includes Peter's love-episode with Penny. That night on the way back home, the Buick is caught in snow. Chapter Eight resumes Peter's narration of how they spent the night at the Hummels' home. Due to snow, the school is closed and later in the afternoon when the Buick is ready the Caldwells drive back home. The Buick is caught again in snow at the dirt road that leads to their farm and they walk to the house. George tells his wife that X-rays show that he is free of the feared cancer. Peter is feverish the next day and stays in bed, while his father leaves the house. In Chapter Nine, Caldwell now as Chiron walks out and finds the chariot of Zeus awaiting him in the form of the black Buick. He yields to death.

This sort of straight mythological narrative is unique among Updike's novels though reconstructing of myths he has attempted in some of his other novels. In the mythic context value judgements are rendered easier. One would easily locate the hero in George Caldwell for he represents the noble teacher of Gods, Chiron. The lecherous and power-crazy Zimmermann is easily identified with the henpecked, lecherous Zeus. Hummel the craftsman of the garage-forge becomes Hephaestus and Vera Hummel his wife is Venus, who is described as, "a woman of overarching fame: legends concerning her love-life circulated like dirty coins in the student underworld" (249).

In the Prometheus myth, Chiron, the Centaur redeems the crime of Prometheus by sacrificing his own immortality. Prometheus is set free and

the eagle pecking at his heart departs. Similarly in accepting death George Caldwell sets his son free. Peter is free to pursue his ambition to become an artist. It is a love that effaces the self that one discovers in the father-figure. Indeed it raises the mortal to immortal heights and no wonder he is raised to the level of a "star" in the mind of his son Peter who narrates his miraculous history:

> Wherever in the filth and confusion and misery, a soul felt joy, there the Lord came and claimed it as his own. . . . 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 . . . he discovered that in giving his life to others he entered total freedom. (296)

For Caldwell death becomes an assurance of eternal life and absolute freedom, for he is a man of faith. In his science class, Caldwell lectures on the creation of the Universe and of plant and animal life; he brings in the analogy of the volvox which is a scientific concept that supports belief in immortality. The image of the volvox becomes the most central thematic image for it telescopes within it the idea of the sacrifice of the centaur. So the image of the volvox signify individuals giving up immortality and freedom to create a community :

> . . . the volvox . . . 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 spermcells which enjoy success become the cornerstone of new life that continues beyond

> the father. But the volvox . . . by pioneering this new idea of co-operation, rolled life into the kingdom of certain--as opposed to accidental--death . . . while each cell is potentially immortal, by volunteering for a specialised function, within an organised 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. (42)

Caldwell incorporates into the analogy a philosophic concept, that those who sacrifice themselves for others earn eternal life. By connecting the volvox image to individual human lives that choose to die so that life may continue, he is arguing a case for acceptance of death. The certainty of death warrants certainty of everlasting life. So, the emphasis on death in Caldwell and Updike becomes emphasis on life, eternal life for all God's creatures.

Updike's novel, is also the story of Peter the artist, his acceptance of nature, his body and his developing awareness that his understanding of his art is deficient. Peter's transformation from an artist into the narrator of the story indicates Updike's development into a writer in spite of his fascination with graphic arts. Like his grandfather is being paid a tribute in the character of the old history teacher Hook in the The Poorhouse Fair, in The Centaur, Updike is paying a tribute to his father who was a school teacher and who lived with his wife's parents in a farm house away from school in similar circumstances. Updike's use of autobiography, the mythic mode of presentation and the theme of the evolution of a young life passing from

theology through science to art reminds one of the evolution of the artist in the protagonist of James Joyce's A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man.

The Centaur appears to be part of Updike's on-gong search for a philosophy and a code of living to accommodate the needs and hopes of the contemporary man. His vision is humanistic, exalting the human being above the trivia that his station in life represents. Through the instance of the transition of Peter Caldwell from theology through science to art Updike seems to suggest that as theology and science tend to lose their autonomy and inner structure, art which is always in a flux of formation could be relied on as an alternative faith. In George Caldwell he has drawn a contrast to Harry Angstrom of Rabbit, Run. Harry evades responsibility in his questing after truth while Caldwell tries to cope with life driving himself mercilessly in dedicated service to his profession, the community and his family till he drops dead. Service becomes his way of searching for his place in the cosmic design. In Updike's humane vision George Caldwell the humble school teacher is as much a "star" as Harry Angstrom who laboured to keep up his basketball title. Caldwell's search does not go wasted; for Caldwell becomes the star after his death, as his son visualizes him in the final surrealistic chapter of the novel. The Centaur declares God's existence and visualizes hope in the perpetual cycles of life and death. Updike's vision of life in this novel holds hope for humanity, for death is not the end but an assurance of eternal life and though man is only a part of God's vast design he is significant and George Caldwell's life bears testimony to this fact.

Of the Farm (1965)

Of the Farm is a small masterpiece which according to Updike is "about moral readjustment" and "the consequences of a divorce" (Contemporary Literary Criticism 427). In it Updike's protagonist, a thirty-five year-old Manhattan advertising consultant visits his widowed mother's farmhouse with his new wife and stepson over the weekend but soon finds himself torn between two equally demanding forces, mother and wife.

Just as The Centaur featured the father, Of the Farm focuses on the mother. Here Updike's vision of humanity projects the benevolent and sacrificial inner quality of the old world and its benign forgiveness and compassion turned in the direction of the errant and existentialistic younger generation. The mother's character appears repeatedly in Updike's earlier fiction; David's mother in the short story "Pigeon Feathers" is her younger version. In Of the Farm the mother is in her old age while her son Joey is middle-aged. Mrs. Robinson, Joey's mother shares with the mothers of David and Peter Caldwell her sense of the farm as a person: "The land has a soul" (Pegeon Feathers 87). By the time she appears in Of the Farm she has acquired maturity and visualizes the farm as a person: "The farm . . . is just like a person, except that it never dies, it just gets very tired" (24).

The character of Joey's mother and the relationship between the son and the mother are revealed to have a great bearing on Joey's behaviour and in this novel Updike seems to be probing into the psychological needs which determine how one responds to the external directives of human behaviour like values, ideals and beliefs. Like Hook, Rabbit and Caldwell Mrs.

Robinson is a believer. She goes to church and is against working on Sundays. She senses the presence of the divine in her surroundings: "I see and touch God all the time" (55). Her relationship with Peggy, Joey's second wife is hostile, she sees her as a threat: "She'll have me dead within a year" (103), she says. But she pays her more respect as an individual than does Joey himself whose love of Peggy is purely physical. The same kind of respect she pays to Joey's eleven-year-old stepson Richard. She treats him like an adult giving him coffee and encouraging him to run the tractor, which Peggy resents. Joey comments on his mother: "My mother has a dangerous way of treating children as equals" (22).

Though Joey teases her for her belief in a mythic universe, it is to an experience of his family as myth that he has come to her. He is seeking a renewed sense of his identity in his new life with a new wife. He wants to re-establish his own sense of self and he knows she is capable of providing identity, significance and stature to his personality by her memories of his childhood and youth, of which she would spin yarns endowing him with mythic stature.

Mrs. Robinson's relationship to the things around her is one of love. She knows each plant, each flower by its proper name. Joey says: "My mother's method when she moved was to embrace the field. . . . I imitated war, she love" (47). But Joey has some of his mother's love for the farm, for he has learned to see it in her way. Further, it is the treasury of the myths of his past life, a place which gives him his identity and stature. Pictures of the younger Joey are every where; in his room everything is

preserved in the same way as in his boyhood: "Things lasted forever here" (31) Joey says. The lamps, the books, the knives, forks and every small item in the house is marked in his memory, reminding him of his past existence with his parents and grandparents. He could recapture the past and be little Joey once again. Both Joey and his mother are possessive of the farm. At the opening part of the novel, he tells his stepson with the pride of possession: "It's probably the biggest piece of open land left this close to Alton."

A similar possessiveness is seen in his attitude to Peggy. While talking to his mother Joey observes his wife sleeping in the chair. He reflects : "She overflowed the chair, and I felt proud before my mother, as if, while she were talking of the farm, I was silently displaying to her my own demesne seized from the world" (30). But soon a tug-of-war between the two equal and opposite forces ensues. Joey is hyper sensitive and dominated by his mother, which results in complications in his relations with his marriage partners. The novel's epigraph extracted from Sartre describing the existential nature of freedom becomes meaningful in view of the predicaments of Joey, Peggy and Mrs. Robinson. One individual's freedom is another's entrapment.

When Mrs. Robinson fantasizes about turning her farm into a "people sanctuary" (71), with the help of Richard the precocious son of Peggy, Peggy who is as possessive of her son as Mrs. Robinson is of Joey, retorts that the idea reminds her of a concentration camp. The whole point of Joey's visit is being defeated. The women are alternately hostile and

overfriendly, one vying with the other for his undivided loyalty. Joey has also to tackle ghosts from his past: memories haunt him; of his deceased father, his first wife and his three children now living in Canada with Joan his first wife. Suppressed guilt and remorse re-awaken in him. The novel moves to a climax when on Sunday, returning from church, Joey's mother who was over-excited by the visit of her son and family, suffers a mild heart attack. She is put to bed, the doctor attends to her and she regains consciousness. Joey decides to leave for New York the same evening with his family in spite of the mother's ailing condition. A special feature introduced in this novel is the analogy of land and woman. The parental farm looms large in Joey's mind as a possession he can show off and be proud of. He feels the same pride in his woman Peggy. Peggy though city-bred, was born in Nebraska the farming country. Her appearance invites analogy to the land. Joey describes her in terms of the terrain; she is his farm: "My wife is wide, wide-hipped and long-waisted, and surveyed from above, gives an impression of terrain, of a wealth whose ownership imposes upon my own body a sweet strain of extension" (39). Peggy is aware of the way she stands being compared with the land. She comments on his love of the farm: "You like it in the same way you like me. It's something big you can show off" (91).

But at the end of the novel, after his mother's heart attack, Joey finds the farm as a deserted place suddenly deprived of life. He realizes that it was his mother's presence and attention that gave it vitality. With her being confined to bed, it is nolonger the "lush and fabled haven" (142). Instead, it has become a wild and dangerous place "a vacuum pulling into itself

madmen and rapists" (142), and Peggy is discovered crouching in the bushes, terror-stricken seeing a carload of boisterous drunkards passing by. So his mother's fantasy of the farm as people sanctuary is exploded. Peggy's confidence in her body is also shaken. So the characters gradually move from illusion to a perception of the truth. Joey accepts the truth that the stupid earthy Peggy is the answer to his needs. His mother also realizes it, her asking for Peggy's photograph is a mark of her acceptance of Peggy. She asks Joey to sell the farm finally releasing her son, from the burden of the past and setting him free.

Of the Farm appears as a novel that marks a transition in Updike's career. It is related to the earlier novels that romanticize the glories of the old world. The novel has its relation to the lives of the existentialistic younger generation in sympathetically recognizing them for what they are. Yet the focus is on the old world represented by Mrs. Robinson, and it bears a thematic resemblance to The Centaur. In the way George Caldwell dies sacrificially for his son's sake, Mrs.Robinson too releases her son from the burden of the farm by her impending death. The book also visualizes change: changes in the life of individuals, families and society, which inevitably brings about changes in the direction of the literary artist who chronicles their story. In an artistic sense, Mrs. Robinson and her farm are Updike's symbols of an old world that is giving way to the new. Updike's vision of humanity deftly touches on this shift in the cultural scene and telescopes it into an exquisite tale of an affectionate mother and sensitive son.

The Couples (1968)

With Couples the transition which had started with Of the Farm has reached its culmination. The old world and the values that it stood for has given way to the new. From Couples on, sexual explicitness becomes a marked feature of Updike's novels. Updike also shifts the locale; the romantic Olinger setting gives away to the setting of Tarbox, a suburb of Boston. Couples offers a minute probing into the sexual game of chess played by ten couples of varying professional background. The novel also marks Updike's increasingly explicit fascination with religion; the intertwining of sex and religion that becomes a marked feature of the later Updikean novel, dates from here. Sexuality is also almost sacramentalized; it becomes a lovely ritual in which one pays homage to the body in word and deed.

As in The Poorhouse Fair Updike presents a collective protagonist in Couples. Updike's vision of humanity is again directed towards the society's malaise. In the late fifties, many neo-Freudian thinkers had proposed different kinds of prescriptions for the problems of American Society based on notions of freedom and repression. Herbert Marcuse in his Eros and Civilization (1955) argues that a new polymorphous sexuality should replace the repressions on which American Society was founded. William H. Whyte in his book The Organization Man (1957) offers a preview of the direction of the social ethic signalled by the decline of the Protestant ethic. According to Whyte, twentieth century America is characterized by the emergence of the "organization man", the individual

who belongs to the organization, whether a worker within a large corporation, or a doctor in a corporate clinic or a member of a church hierarchy. In his view, while officially holding on to individualism, thrift and work which are the major principles of the Protestant culture, Americans are in reality moving towards gregariousness, a tendency to be organized collectively. According to the evolving new social ethic man in isolation is meaningless; he becomes worthwhile only as he collaborates with others. By application of scientific techniques to human relations, a science of man is expected to be evolved, as in personality measurement, behaviourism, group dynamics and social engineering. Obstacles to social concensus may thus be eliminated, the needs of society and the needs of the individual being one and the same. It is the Utopian goal of achievable social harmony and it looks forward to demonstrating that the hedonistic approach to life is a moral one.

Whyte proceeds to analyse the basic mechanics of suburban social life, examining the different groups of couples which tended to have parties together. Friendships were based on the geographical layout of the suburb resulting in the formation of certain sets. Whyte even had specified the size of these groups, which according to him, rarely exceeded twelve couples; because the size of the living room of suburban homes prevented larger gatherings. Whyte does not mention adultery as a feature of his package suburb; in all other respects Updike's Tarbox community exemplified the traits outlined by Whyte.

Updike's Tarbox is a small town in Plymouth County, Massachusetts, twenty-two miles south-east of Boston. Apart from the Guerines and Thornes, all others have settled down in the town during late fifties or early sixties; the Applebys and Smiths during the mid-fifties, the Ongs and Saltzes in 1957, the Hanemas and Gallaghers in 1958, the Constantines in 1960 and the Whitmans at the time when the story begins, that is in 1963. Some of them are the second generation of immigrants from other countries, while others are from different parts of America. Piet Hanema is of Dutch descent and John Ong is Korean. Foxy, wife of Ken Whitman is from the South while Jane, wife of Frank Appleby is from Buffalo. Bernadette, wife of the Korean nuclear physicist John Ong, is Japanese-Portuguese. Apart from Piet and Matt who are self-employed partners of their own building construction firm and Freddy Thorne who is a dentist and Roger Guerine who is independently wealthy enough not to work, all other men of the set are connected by their occupations with Government or large corporations. Both John Ong who is a research physicist and Ben Saltz who miniaturises components for the space programme are employed by the Government. Eddie Constantine is a pilot in government aeronautics, Ken Whitman works as a biochemist in a University. Frank Appleby is a banker while Harold Smith is in securities as a broker. They are on the average in their late thirties and most of the women have had their childbirths and when the novel opens have stopped being fertile, living in "the paradise of pills." Bea Guerine is barren, without issue. Foxy Whitman who is under thirty is the youngest among the wives and she is in the family way when the story begins.

Piet Hanema who comes closest to being an individual protagonist, is thirty-five-years old and has an affair with Georgene Thorne. The wife of his partner Matt Gallagher, Terry, has an affair with her pottery instructor. Later as the story proceeds to conclusion Bea Guerine too becomes Piet's mistress. Frank and Janet Appleby and Harold and Marcia Smith swap spouses so often that they have come to be known among the set as "Applesmiths." There is another foursome who indulge in unholy relations, the "Saltines": the Jewish pair Ben and Irene Saltz and Carol and Eddie Constantine form another set within the set and their inter-relations include apart from simple adultery, homosexuality too. The Korean nuclear physicist John Ong and his American wife Bernadette somehow remain on the peripheries of this promiscuous group of couples.

Into this group which had claimed nine couples for members in 1963, enter the attractive young couple from Cambridge, Ken Whitman, a research biochemist and his pregnant wife Foxy. The Whitmans gradually make the tenth couple of the set. They take part in parties and games and the Whitmans hire Piet Hanema to renovate the house they have bought close to Tarbox Bay, a house Piet's wife Angela fancied buying at first. Angela, after the birth of her two daughters is averse to sexual relations though Piet is very much in love with her. Angela, a superb beauty, is the cynosure of the group but she disdains sexual overtures.

Piet has to visit Foxy's home as he sets his workmen to do the repair. The initial fascination Piet and Foxy had for each other which had become stronger by their meeting in the church, now develops into a passionate love

affair. He visits her almost everyday while Ken is away, being engrossed in his research. He attends to her and sleeps with her during the months of her pregnancy. He gradually drops relations with Georgene. He continues with Foxy even after her baby's birth. Foxy becomes pregnant by Piet and though Freddy Thorne offers to help Foxy, he sets a high price for it and that is a night with Piet's wife Angela; for he had come to know about Georgene's liaison with Piet. Although Angela does not realize that she is paying the price for her husband's infidelity, she agrees to sleep with Freddy. Freddy had always been good to Angela though he had been contemptuous of the others in the group; and she knows that her husband is in a tight spot. Freddy and Angela spend a night together at a ski resort; Freddy does not spoil the purity of Angela but he tells her about the bargain, making her understand clearly the kind of husband she is harnessed with. The terms of the bargain being fulfilled, Freddy takes Foxy and Piet to a Boston abortionist. The abortion is successful; Piet and Foxy agree to stop meeting. Georgene who is also taken into confidence, helps Foxy with her baby and the domestic chores while Foxy recovers. But Georgene who still desired Piet, finds Piet's car near Foxy's home. Stricken by jealousy she tells Ken Whitman of the affair and the abortion; Ken and Foxy decide to separate and Foxy goes to the Virgin Islands to make the legal proceedings easier. Angela throws Piet out of the house and eventually divorces him. Piet has to live the life of an outcast in a rented room. His erstwhile friends disown him. Marginalized, Piet decides to leave the place and sells his share in the construction firm to his partner. Knowing that Angela would not take him back, he goes to Foxy and eventually their marriage

takes place. He takes the job of a construction inspector of military barracks. The newly-wed couple move to Lexington, "Where gradually among other people like themselves, they have been accepted as another couple" (458).

Piet's marriage to Foxy is a happy ending to the story as Updike visualizes it. The two of them have many things in common and they are the only believers, the only practising Christians in the group and naturally an affinity exists between them and they break out of the corrupt environment around them. Yet somehow it remains uncertain whether Piet and Foxy would be able to find real happiness. Updike's own comment on Piet shows the difference between a contented existence and life in the proximity of uncertainties and adventures:

> He becomes merely a name in the last paragraph, he becomes a satisfied person and in a sense dies. In other words, a person who has what he wants, a satisfied person, a content person, ceases to be a person. Unfallen Adam is an ape. . . . I feel that to be a person is to be in a situation of tension, is to be in a dialectical situation. A truly adjusted person is not a person at all. (Picked-Up Pieces 504)

In Updike's vision of life, contentment is the mark of loss, stripped of the possibility for tragedy, Piet's life is emptied of moral significance. Piet's story unlike Updike's other novels concludes in a typical fairy story ending, a situation from where no further movement is possible; the journey of the protagonist being brought to a state of inertia. Unlike Hook who still

searches for the message, or Rabbit who goes on fighting or Joey who has still to fight against his mother's death, for Piet the struggle is ended. It is the end of a protagonist and as Updike puts it, a truly adjusted person ceases to be a person. Piet being the only practising Christian among the men of the story, his becoming a nonentity might suggest the death of Christianity. The burning down of the church towards the end of the novel signifies the weakened and rotten inner state of the Protestant religion. It has failed in essentials and one feels that the church should have collapsed of itself earlier. People are no longer convinced of the presence of God. Piet and Foxy becoming just "another couple" also breathes of their having lost their speciality and having fallen into the ways of other couples for whom God is non-existent and has taken to hedonism in the place of Christianity.

Freddy states to Angela earlier in the story that the couples have made a church of each other. Later he explains to her that it is their fate to be "suspended in . . . one of those dark ages that visits mankind between millennia, between the death and rebirth of gods, when there is nothing to steer by but sex and stoicism and the stars" (372). The majority is lost in the mires of pragmatism and carnality, the minority of believers turn away from a church that is rotten inside and find consolation in each other. Priestly figures like Freddy and pure women like Angela get marginalized being pitted against the brute force of the "organisation man," and the evolving new social ethic in which hedonism passes for morality. It is a grim view on human predicament that Updike seems to offer at the end of Couples.

Marry Me: A Romance (1976)

In Marry me the plot hinges upon the problem of choice; two adulterers, Jerry Conant and Sally Mathias, involved in an extramarital affair are caught in the ambiguous dilemma of wanting to marry but not wishing to hurt their respective families. The theme of conjugal infidelity in Updike's novels like Couples and Marry Me is being viewed by a number of critics in the context of De Rougemont's elaboration of the myth of Tristram and Iseult in his books Love in the Western World and Love Declared discussed and reviewed by Updike during the sixties. The ethical and religious questions raised by marital infidelity in his works call for reference either to Kierkegaard or Karl Barth, the two notable religious thinkers who have influenced him, as his essays in Picked-Up Pieces and the autobiographical work Self-Consciousness testify.

Unable to decide whether to remain with his wife Ruth or to abandon her for his lover Sally, wife of Richard Mathias, Jerry Conant vacillates, his ethical capacity to reach a decision being well-nigh non-existent. In the Kierkegaardian context this indecision may be read as the "dread" or "anxiety" produced in the face of uncertain "possibilities" (Concept of Dread 262-64). According to De Rougemont's theories this indecision is what animates desire: to choose means to have, and to have is to put an end to desire. Anyhow, Jerry avoids action because of his belief in Christian values, he fears suffering as the consequence of his action; but even otherwise he causes suffering. As Sally reflects: "Jerry believed in choices, in mistakes, in damnation, in the avoidance of suffering. She and Richard

believed simply that things happened" (43). The Mathiases believe in happiness for the present, being hedonistically greedy for life. Significantly during their trysts, Jerry constantly dwells on the shortness of their time together while Sally entreats him to have faith in the beauty of the present.

During their contrived stay in Washington Jerry understands the wider implications of their situation. He draws from Sally the admission that he is torturing her with his indecision. He draws two conclusions: that realization would cancel the ideal dimensions of the desired object and that possessing Sally by marriage would destroy their love. As he puts it:

> Any way, in addition to your evident charms, you are unhappy. You need me and I can't give myself to you. You're like a set of golden stairs I can never finish climbing. I look down, and the earth is a little blue mist. I look up, and there's this radiance I can never reach. It gives you your incredible beauty, and if I marry you I'll destroy it. (46)

One could without effort, detect in this episode of love, an updated version of the ancient courtly romance between Tristram, the earthy lover, and the unattainable lady Iseult.

Anyhow, Jerry decides to tell his wife Ruth about the affair. Ruth, the daughter of a Unitarian minister acknowledges that she has, in part, caused Jerry's adultery by her coldness and owns to herself that "as a negative wills a print, she had willed Sally" (157), and that the problem of the affair "must be discharged by some last act of her will" (158). What Jerry does not know is that Ruth has recently had an affair with the partially

blind Richard Mathias, Sally's husband. Ruth has ended the relationship sensibly keeping her marriage intact. She now admonishes Jerry to stay, because to marry Sally would be to convert their ideal love into drab reality. But she expects in her heart for Jerry and Sally to act sensibly as she and Richard had done. She gets Jerry to promise not to see Sally again until the end of Summer. Sally goes to Florida in August, hoping Jerry would follow. But he stays with Ruth because of the children. Sally returns home and tells Richard of the affair and Richard insists on divorce. He helps Ruth to find a lawyer so that she could start proceedings herself. But now Jerry can not make up his mind to marry Sally, as foreseen by Richard. So the divorces do not proceed, though Jerry still indulges in fantasies about running away with Sally to Wyoming. What he actually does is to take a six month's leave of absence, so that the Conants could fly to Nice to paint, a common interest which initially had brought them together before their marriage. But they return earlier, in February, due to change in climate. In March, Jerry flies to the Virgin Islands alone, still fantasizing about his reunion with Sally at some place, some point in time when he might to go up to Sally and say, "Marry Me": "The existence of this place satisfied him that there was a dimension in which he did go, as was right, at that party, or the next, and stand, timid and exultant, above the downcast eyes of her gracious, sorrowing face, and say to Sally, Marry Me" (252). So the novel ends with its italicized title directing the reader back to its beginning, suggestive of Jerry's illusion of love as never-ending. He will for ever be "timid" but "exultant" for love, she will forever remain "sorrowing" but expectant, like

the figures of the lovers engraved on Keats' "Grecian Urn" who need never know love's sad satiety.

In giving his novel the subtitle "A Romance" Updike has already hinted at the nature of his work and suggested the perspective from which to approach it. Sally appears as the unattainable but ever adored lady-love of the Western romantic tradition Iseult, and Jerry, her courtly lover Tristram; or she could be deemed as the princess possessed and detained by the one-eyed monster and he, the knight who has vowed to rescue her as in the medieval romances. So it would appear, that the "place" that Jerry refers to is the world of pure romance and fiction and the "dimension" is the psychic dimension where a man is free to indulge in fantasies about his unattainable lady. Updike has conjured up a solution for the love triangle; he applies the "humane dimension" and untangles the love-knot. Jerry's need is more psychological than physical and it craves for psychic solution. He has to make this journey through the realms of the psyche as many times as is required for him to attain maturity. Updike's vision of humanity is evident in the portrayal of these errant human beings, Jerry, Sally, Ruth and Richard. His compassionate vision enwraps them as he averts the domestic tragedy and finds a sensible solution to the love triangle summoning to aid, the past relationship of Richard and Ruth whose folly is found to exert a positive impact, having rendered them more humane and worldly-wise.

The Coup (1978)

A novel inspired by Updike's lecture tour of Africa in 1973, The Coup marks a radical departure in his subject matter. As in A month of

Sundays the protagonist is writing his memoirs. The narrator of the memoirs is the black dictator of Kush which is conceived as an emerging African nation. His memories combine with imagination in recreating his own story and that of his country. The book ridicules the idea of revolution as the vehicle for change. It also condemns the attempts by superpowers to make the third world countries serve their economic interests.

The Coup marks a departure from Updike's usual mode of writing in more ways than one. He uses a different kind of narrator who is absolutely a strange figure to the persistent readers of Updike's fiction. The narrator is Colonel Felix Hakim Ellellou, the black President-dictator of the imaginary African nation of Kush. The Coup also takes Updike's readers away from the recurring interest in the American suburbia, into the heart of modern Africa to reflect on the ineffectuality of revolutions, the ridiculousness of power politics and the idiocy of nationalism.

The narrative distance assumed by the narrator from the very beginning of the novel makes one suspect that the narrator Ellellou is no longer the ruling head of Kush. He describes the form of Government in his country as "a constitutional monarchy with the constitution suspended and the monarch deposed" (7). For the perceptive reader, it raises a doubt whether it was he himself who had been removed from power. There is another clue in Ellellou's statement: "I am copying these facts from an old Stateman's Year Book freely, here where I sit in sight of the sea, so some of them may be obsolete" (6) At this point, though he does not tell us the fact that Ellellou is in exile on the Riviera in France, he implies that he is now

distanced from the time, place and subject matter of his tale. The subject of his tale is the decline and fall of his government of Kush which was formerly known as Noire, a French Colony. Kush is a poverty-stricken African country, "a land of delicate delectable emptiness" (4), which Ellellou had attempted to change into a nation governed by Islamic morality and Marxist ideology.

Ellellou's personal evolution through politics to the hierarchy of power is interesting. He is the offspring of a Salu woman born in 1933 as the result of her being raped by a Nubian raider. At seventeen he joined the French Foreign Legion and served in the ill-fated French campaign in Indo-China. From there he was sent to Algeria. Feeling reluctant to fight against fellow Africans he had quit military service and joined a four year course in liberal arts studies at Mc Carthy College at Wisconsin. When De Gaulle granted freedom to Noire, the former king of the Wanjiji tribe, King Edumu IV was restored as constitutional monarch of the country which was renamed as Kush.

Ellellou attaches himself to King Edumu as his trusted lieutenant and it is the king who suggests that Hakim should have the addition of the name Ellellou which means freedom. A revolution in 1968 led by the military forces overthrows the king and he is kept as prisoner while many of his officials are executed. Ellellou, Chairman of the Supreme Counseil Revolutionaire et Militaire pour I'Emergence (SCRME) and the head of all important departments, pronounces himself President.

Ellellou was married in his boyhood to a Salu woman of the name Kadongolimi who was older to him by four years. He brought home from America a second wife, the white woman Candace Cunningham. Being a Moslem, he is entitled to four wives and he fills in his quota by marrying two more. His third wife Sittina, daughter of a Tutsi Chief, is a graduate. Sheba the fourth one is a beautiful young girl, he finds wandering in the streets of his capital city Istiqlal, stoned, on cola nuts and listening to rock music on a transistor radio.

Being an Islamic fundamentalist, he tortures his citizens for minor digressions. His Revolutionary Council, SCRME makes its decisions based on, "the pure and final socialism envisioned by Marx," and, "the theocratic populism of Islam's periodic reform movements" (7). Ellellou describes in his memories the events which led to the coup that displaces him in 1974, just as the coup led by him had displaced King Edumu in 1968.

Ellellou's idealistic goals for the welfare of his country are impeded by the reality of a severe drought. The novel recounts Ellellou's many travels, in disguise though accompanied at a distance by the Presidential Mercedes, to discover the reason for the curse of the drought and to have close encounters with his people.

Though Ellellou's love of Marxist ideology leads him to hate the United States, the US ignoring ideological differences sends tons and tons of food in boxes. Early in his travels, Ellellou orders to destroy the heap of boxes by inciting the crowd to set fire to it. The American Officer who was

in charge of its transportation, while trying to prevent the fire, gets burned along with the pile of boxes.

The burning of American aid does not put an end to the drought or the problems of Kush. Ellellou had brought to Istiqlal after his first sojourn to the border disguised as a beggar, an illiterate and shabby looking but imaginative Sara woman named Kutunda as his mistress, who now becomes his adviser on matters of state. Upon her advice, Ellellou decides to execute the old King Edumu whom he considers a "Blot upon Our Flag" (67), and whose crimes have resulted in "Widespread Shortages, Dislocations and Sufferings" [sic.]. Ellellou himself beheads his benefactor the King, using the ceremonial scimitar. The ceremony is interrupted by the sudden appearance of a troop of muffled Tuareg, who swiftly ride into the square and snatch off the severed head of the King and ride away. Ellellou suspects a CIA conspiracy, but he cannot come to a conclusion for he had smelled vodka in the breath of the men in disguise.

Still the rains do not come and even in the capital, there is scarcity. Moreover, there arrives, a cable from America asking for information on the missing State Department official who was sent to deliver the food. Ellellou asks Michaelis Ezana, his Minister of Interior to ignore the missive. But Ezana brings more disastrous tidings; of a rumour that the severed head of King Edumu is speaking prophecies from a cave in the inhospitale mountains of Balak. Ellellou suspects American technology behind it and knows that he must undertake another journey. But meanwhile he comes to know about Ezana's deception and Kutunda's complicity in it, for they

had been communicating with the US Officials in Washington. Ellellou orders Ezana's imprisonment and after appointing a former police spy as interim Minister, he sets out to the Balak with his fourth wife Sheba.

The trip is long and dangerous which takes three months. Ellellou and Sheba are near death when they reach the cave. Ellellou finds that the trick is played by the Russians and not the Americans. The electronic device made out of the King's head has already made the place a spot of tourist interest with parking lots, slide shows and refreshment stands. Busloads of foreigners are brought in by travel agencies in Zanj, the neighboring country governed on capitalist principles. Edumu's head speaks prophecies against Ellellou. It blames the drought on Ellellou's defection from the path of People's Revolution and goes on to say that Ellellou while pretending to hate capitalism has brought "an entire American boom town" (213) into existence. The head says, both Ellellou and the town must be destroyed. Ellellou though in the disguise of desert wanderer snatches the head loose from its wiring and destroys the device. This was exactly what the Russian colonel in charge of the show had expected; the whole trick was played with the intention of bringing Ellellou to the realization of Ezana's pro-American activities and its effects.

Ellellou had lost his young wife in the flurry at the entrance to the cave. He could not redeem her. However, he decides to visit the new city the "American boom town" and he discovers the existence of a new, broad and easy highway down the eastern flank of the mountains and he is soon driven to the new city in the State Mercedes. The city, located on a

geological formation called Ippi Rift where great quantities of oil and water are tapped from beneath the sandstone had the marks of Westernization about it--lawn sprinklers, used car lots, drug stores, a McDonald's and an oil refinery. It is named Ellellou after him, but no one recognizes the great man who has given his name to the city. Ellellou tries to get the citizens to set fire to the oil refinery but with little effect, the crowd tramples over him while rushing to get the free beer offered by the Americans. He fails to convince the crowd that he is the great man who has lent his name to the oil city. His wallet has been stolen, his body guard and the Presidential Mercedes too have vanished.

In effect Ellellou has ceased to exist. At this moment something miraculous happens, "a little cloud covers the sun" (256). Soon it starts pouring and the rain continues for months. Ellellou realizes at last that he "was the curse upon the land" (261). He saves enough money to return to Istiqlal doing odd jobs for five months in the city bearing his name. He returns disguised as a begger to find Ezana as ruling in an "emeritus" position in his place. Ezana had adopted another name, Dorfu, which means both solidarity and consolidation. Kutunda has been elevated to the position of Minister of Interior and Protector of Female Rights. Americans are welcomed warmly and the widow of the man immolated along with the American food boxes, has fallen in love with Dorfu and she is being converted to Islam. Ellellou convinces Dorfu that the country of Kush would benefit more from a mysteriously disappeared hero than from another dead ruler. So he is granted a comfortable pension on the promise of his silence. Of his four wives only Sittina remains to console him in his

exile, Kadomgolimi having died during his absence, Sheba being lost in the cave and Candace getting divorced to return to America. The concluding part of the novel evades finality, for at the end of the novel the solidity of Ellellou's memoirs is erased, by a statement that could be read equivocally: "He is writing his memoirs. No, I should put it more precisely, Colonel Ellellou is rumoured to be working on his memoirs" (299). As in A Month of Sundays the narrator points to the unreliable nature of Ellellou's imaginative account. Ellellou is the writer and self-conscious narrator constructing his imaginary world in the narrative mode of memoirs.

The Coup belongs to the post-modern phase of Updike's career as fictionist. This phase had its beginning in A Month of Sundays in 1975, carried on most remarkably through The Coup and Roger's Version. Another special feature of the novel is its topical concern over the third world with ironic glimpses of the meddlesome super powers. Also the alternative narrative mode of the memoirs is used in the larger context of the metafiction.

It could be argued against Updike that in his depiction of Africa, he puts forward the familiar white man's concept of the inadequacies of other cultures. Edward Said suggests that at the heart of colonial discourse is the concept of culture as power possessed by the colonizer. In his work Orientalism (1978) Said shows how the depictions of the orient as eternal, uniform and incapable of defining itself were bound in the colonial project of occupation and control. In The Coup though Ellellou has repudiated

Western culture he has nothing positive to offer to substitute it and the result is chaos. It would appear, at a cursory reading, that Updike is putting forward the familiar Western concept that the Third World natives are incapable of governing themselves and that the fictional Kush with its natural disasters and inept leaders becomes a paradigm of an essentianlized and homogenized Third World awaiting interpretation and representation by the West. But Updike explains that he was attempting a creative work on parallel lines with The Waste Land; on "the idea of a bad leader, the bad king, being bad for the land." Further, the book, being written just after the Watergate scandal and Nixon's resignation, "was a kind of allegory about the Nixon years" ("The Novel According to John Updike" 37), and this explanation adequately gives answer to the critics who express reservations on the novel from the point of view of "orientalism."

Updike had, in A Month of Sundays settled Marshfied to a quest in an Arizona desert resort; in The Coup he has changed the locale to an African desert and befittingly shifted the narrator's role, to Ellellou an African leader. If he had portrayed Ellellou as ridiculous in his essentialism, he had directed his satire against the superpowers too. However, unquestionable is the fact that Updike has made his portrait of Ellellou convincing; he belongs to the category of individualistic characters like Hook, Harry Angstorm and Caldwell, he too is engaged in a quest for spiritual renewal. Like Marshfield, through the act of writing, Ellellou is attempting to discover himself, so as to recover his dream of Kush. As one recognizes Ellellou's pursuit , consequently, Ellellou gets identified with the rest of mankind. He becomes the prototype for man. He represents man

trying to rediscover and renovate his own self, engaged in a quest for the renewal of the spirit. Man in his spiritual quest transcends polarities, race distinctions and continental barriers; and this appears to be Updike's vision of humanity as revealed in his portrayal of the Third World and its leader. His humanity transcends barriers of colour, race, ideology, religion and rank and embraces life in all its varying shades and modes. Roles change, the leader turns a begger, the desert-wandering harlot becomes the Minister protecting Women's Rights. Updike's humane vision encompasses them all, and assigns to them their proper places in the scheme of things. Thus The Coup offers evidence for Updike's vision of humanity.

The Witches of Eastwick (1984)

The Witches of Eastwick centres on three divorced women who acquire the powers of the witches casting evil spells and pursuing unhappy married men in their suburban community until they come up with their counterpart in a Satanic male who fascinate them, collaborates with them and at last defeats them in competition. Greg Johnson sums up the diverse critical interpretations of this work: "An allergy, a fable, a romance, a meditation on the nature of evil--The Witches of Eastwick is all of these while remaining a high spirited sexual comedy and a caricaturist's view of women's liberation" (Contemporary Literary Criticism 434).

This novel which departs from baroque realism, transposes, mythology, as in The Centaur into American suburban life. The small settlement of the fictional Eastwick in Rhode Island becomes the space inhabitated by the witches because, as the book itself points out, Rhode

Island was the place of exile for Anne Hutchinson, who was banished from the Massachusetts Bay Colony by the Puritan forefathers for female insubordination, a quality the witches of Eastwick--Alexandra Spofford, Jane Smart and Sukie Rougemont--have in surplus. Alexandra and Jane are in their late thirties while Sukie is six years younger. All three are divorcees, and with the images of their former husbands shrunk and dried and stored away in their minds and cellars they are free to be themselves. Updike's witches are three bored gossipy women who live alone, support themselves and raise their children single-handedly. They are all artists; Alexandra sculpts female figures she calls "bubbies," Jane is a musician while Sukie is a writer working for a local magazine. The three witches get together once a week for a friendly coven and in the beginning they seem quite ordinary women of the privileged, cultured middle class. But as one looks closely into their activities one comes to know of their acquired powers--the power to see into the minds of others, to alter the lives of others and to translate their darkest thoughts and wishes into reality.

Updike's interest in witches appears to have had its beginning in 1978 when he had the opportunity to review a re-issue of Sylvia Townsend Warner's novel Lolly Willoes (1962) which tells the story of an English lady who disdained married life for the pursuit of witchcraft. This work was applauded by Updike who found in the witch a positive image of the liberated woman. Updike had stated, "let us respectfully construe the word 'witch' as a free woman" (Huggong the Shore 306).

Jeffrey B. Russell in A History of Witchcraft (1980) reports the existence of about 10 thousand self-styled witches in America and also of a few journals devoted to the cult. Erica Jong in her Witches (1981) sees historical witch hunting as a means to the political repression of women and most of the feminists are of this view. Some others appear as attracted by its female orientation, that is, the pre-eminence of the goddess in modern covens has made witchcraft attractive to some of the feminists who view it as a goddess-centred religion. Naomi Goldenberg in her work Changing of the Gods: Feminism and the End of Traditional Religions (1979) places neo-paganist witchcraft in the context of reaction to patriarchal Christianity and to the marginal place assigned to women within it.

Updike's The Witches of Eastwick set in the 1960s foretells the darker turn the sexual and feminist revolutions might take. The witches consorting with the devil individually and in group, their communal sexual orgies in the perfumed hot tub and all the rest of it, point to Updike's version of witchcraft as closely related to carnality and mortality. Their activities range from unstringing pearl necklaces, making ladies trip and fall, killing squirrels and puppies, to causing Cancer and killing women who stand in the way of their pleasure.

The novel opens, in a September of the Vietnam era, that is, in the late sixties. In the small settlement of Eastwick, the three divorcees, Alexandra; Jane and Sukie discover the power of their feminity and they form a coven of witches. In the beginning the witches amuse themselves with spiteful gossip, playing mischievous tricks and seducing unhappily

married men which Eastwick supplied in plenty. Into their bored lives enter the devil, in the form of a dark mysterious stranger of the name Darryl Van Horne, a fabled millionaire-scientist who also collects pop-art. As he moves into Eastwick buying the old Lennox Mansion, setting up a laboratory and turning the whole mansion into a technological wonderland, each of the witches pursues him and each receives his favours. He becomes the bone of contention and it would have been the end of the witches' sisterhood, had it not been for the much younger Jennifer Gabriel who, in her innocence had also been attracted to the mysterious man of science. When Darryl chooses to marry Jennifer, the witches' jealousy breaks all bounds. The witches make a puppet, name it Jennifer, bind it with spells, stick it full of pins and set their wills against their rival desiring her death. Strangely enough, it works and the girl dies of Cancer. Darryl Van Horne invited to preach in the church during Jennifer's illness, makes his Satanic claim that he himself could have been a better creator pointing towards the problem of suffering due to diseases in the God-made world.

After the death of his wife, Van Horne does not stay to choose one of the witches in the place of his deceased wife, instead he disappears with her orphaned younger brother. It is a shocking revelation that Van Horne had actually married Jennifer having his eyes on her share of money got through the sale of her parents' home and that his mind with its homosexual turn was actually set on her brother Christopher.

The witches stagger under the weight of the blow dealt on their pride and find their powers slipping away. They feel helpless, for there is no way

to ascertain whether it had been their powers that willed the death of Jennifer or the diabolical powers of the devil himself. They become more practical, and use the remnants of their powers to entice men who might marry them. Jane marries into real Bostonian aristocracy and settles down in Boston. Sukie marries a word processor salesman and settles down to a comfortable life. Alexandra gets an art instructor from Taos as husband and goes away to Taos with him. The witches return to structure and normalcy as is the case of many errant characters of Updike's creation.

Updike's vision in this novel, as in Couples is directed towards the malaise of society; deterioration of marriages, breaking up of families, the sad predicament of children and the destruction of innocence, all of which go unheeded by the organized society in its hedonistic pursuit of instant pleasure. The witches become emblematic of the type of hedonism presented in Couples. The part played by technology is also insisted upon. The myth of the machine is exploded in all its horror through the characterization of the demoniac Darryl Van Horne who poses as a technologist. The novel probes into American culture's attempts to find a replacement for an abandoned Christianity. Alternative myths emerge, but they fail as sources of ultimate meaning.

Though the witches have returned to normal life, what remains as an abiding picture is that of the demoniac Van Horne and the hell consisting of NewYork's underworld into which he has disappeared taking young Christopher Gabriel as new recruit. Updike's vision of humanity illumines this existing social situation clamouring for remedy and redemption.

<u>Memories of Ford Administration: A Novel</u> (1992)

In Memories of Ford Administration, a college professor of the name Alfred Clayton narrates the memorable events in his life during the two years and five months during which Gerald Ford was in office as the President of the US, that is, from 1974 to 1977. The narrator is a disillusioned history teacher at Wayward Junior College, a women's college in Southern New Hampshire. A product of the sexual revolution of the sixties, Alfred is an ageing academic with a capacity for imaginative reconstruction of the past. Being the decade before the setting in of the threat of AIDS, he remembers it as a time of terrifying permissiveness, when the sexual freedom enjoyed by the adolescents in the sixties had filtered down to the middle-aged. Married professors of the Wayward Junior College could freely make love to students, students' mothers or other professors' wives. Alfred himself had been promiscuous and he narrates the story of his entanglement with the wife of another professor. Alfred is apparently preparing his memories and impressions, on request by the historical association to prepare a historical work about that period. Alfred remembers only two things and that happens to be concerning his personal life the tangle of an extramarital affair and the never completed book on the life of President James Buchanan.

The novel alternates between these two loosely related subjects. James Buchanan was the last President before the Civil War and he tried to fend it off with compromise and legal measures; but he restrained himself from using the military power for preserving the Union. He was America's only virgin President. He never married, and he had lived a life of rectitude after a frustrated love affair, according to Clayton's reading of history. Buchanan's fiancee for some mysterious reason had broken the engagement and had died of an overdose of

laudanum. In the end Clayton abandons the book because of the ambiguous and unsettled nature of available facts, which as he understands them are actually secondary versions of the real facts. Real facts remain buried with the times. Clayton's passionate extramarital relationship was also, in due course of time abandoned due to other intricate involvements and the delay in the legal proceedings for divorce. But the memory of it still lingers as he tries to recapture the impressions of the Gerald Ford era.

What is most striking about the novel is its correspondence to Updike's own life. Like Alfred Clayton, Updike also had known the excitement and the tensions of an extramarital affair. After twelve years of marriage to a Harvard classmate, in 1965, he had an affair which he thought would lead to divorce. It did not; but he left his wife Mary in 1974. He got a divorce and married Martha Bernhard, a psychiatric social worker in 1977. Alfred Clayton, like Updike is an only child of a doting mother and and he also suffers from a recurrent disabling affliction which in Clayton's case is asthma while in Updike's life the affliction is psoriasis. Again like Clayton, Updike too had a persistent interest in the life of President James Buchanan which had led to his writing a play Buchanan Dying.

Though The Memories of Ford Administration is not to be ranked along with Updike's Rabbit at Rest or Roger's Version where Updike is seen at his best, it has made its impact. What Updike seems to pursue here is the indeterminacy of memory. The facts available to the historian need not be the actual facts, but secondary versions which remain in the minds of different members of society, shifting in meaning and emphasis according to the mental make up of each. Clayton, the historian encounters the same problem while working on his memories as in recreating the history of James Buchaman.

Updike appears to point towards the unreliability of what is generally held as historical truth. In depicting the promiscuous professor's obsessive interest in the virgin President's life, Updike's vision of humanity touches upon the unique quality of the human heart that yearns for an image of the ideal, though impossible it is to translate into one's own life.

Brazil (1994)

Brazil, obviously is an updated version of the Western romantic myth of Tristram and Iseult; a return to romance. Updike shifts the locale again; the action of the novel takes place in Brazil. The novel opens on the Copacabana, "the most democratic, crowded, and dangerous of Rio de Janeiro's beaches" (3). It is a place where race, class or colour does not pose barriers; it becomes an ideal setting for the opening of a romance between man and woman situated in opposite poles in social circumstances. So, it is here that Tristao, the black Brazilian native born of a whore, meets Isabel, daughter of an anstocratic white Brazilian official in the diplomatic service. One glance at the girl in the swimsuit playing on the surf, and Tristao recognizes Isabel as his mate for life, though the differences in their stations are obvious; "This dolly, I think she was made for me" (4), he tells his brother.

Nineteen-year-old Tristao who led a tramp's life like the other boys of the beach, tended to criminal ways when occasion demanded it. Tristao had come by the valuable possession of a ring with the letter DAR inscribed in it during his criminal career. He offers the ring to Isabel which she accepts and in return she invites him to her uncle's home. Inside her room, she tells him that she is eighteen and offers herself to him. Her uncle tries to dissuade her from her unworthy

attachment and as she is adamant, decides to send her back to her father. But Isabel elopes with Tristao to Sao Paulo. In the hope of meeting Tristao's brother Chiquinho who works in a factory in Sao Paulo, they live in a hotel there for some days. Their attempts to locate Chiquinho fail and the money Isabel had with her is reduced down to the last few dimes. It is at this point near desperation that all of a sudden Chiquinho comes to the hotel where they live. He promises to take care of them and invites them to his house. It was too late when they recognized the trap, for as they reach Chiquinho's house the policemen are already there waiting to take Isabel back to her father. Tristao's attempts to recover his wife fail and the lovers are separated. Isabel fears danger for her husband and decides to obey her father. She is taken to her father's home in Brasilia where she is kept under constant surveillance. Salamao, her father had been a widower for many years. He admonishes his daughter to adapt to changing circumstances as he himself has done after the death of his beloved wife. It would be easy and convenient for her to forget the illiterate and uncultured black boy who had only been a passing phase in her life, according to her father. He advises her to go back to her studies in the University. He also warns her that if she tries to run away again, the boy Tristao, "may painlessly disappear," and not even his mother would complain about his disappearance.

Isabel spends two years in the University of Brasilia while Tristao gets work in the car factory in Sao Paulo where Chiquinho is employed. He lives in Chiquinho's house, but is closely guarded by the 'Big Boys', the policemen. After two years in the factory Tristao feels he has enough savings to go searching after his wife. One night, he breaks out of Chiquinho's home and reaches Brasilia. He meets Isabel late in the evening in an ice-cream parlour in the company of her

friends. As he goes up and speaks to her, Isabel bids farewell to her friends and follows him. They walk away from the city, to the open air, under the night sky. Thus begins the second phase of a life in love in the lap of nature, wandering away from civilization. They explore the possibilities of life in the wilderness, their only aim being to live together without giving Isabel's father another chance to separate them. Isabel assures Tristao: "Brazil is endless, with endless opportunities" (113).

As they reach the city of Goiania they happen to hear about the gold mines. With the money that they put together, Tristao buys a claim and they set out for the mining village. From the co-operative commissary, they acquire the tools; a pickaxe, shovel, sledge hammer and sacks. They set out to work patiently waiting for the gold nugget that might make them rich.

In their second year at Serra do Boraco, the mining village, Isabel conceives and gives birth to a boy whom they call Azor. Her daughter was born fourteen months after Azor's birth, who is named Cordelia, the name of Isabel's dead mother. As the mining does not bring enough for the family's increasing needs Isabel starts selling precious clothes and other valuables in her possession. Later, she takes a part-time job with a manicurists' co-operative; manicuring in the mining circumstances being a euphemism for prostitution. To care for her children during the day while she went to work, they employ an old Tupi woman named Kupehaki who gradually becomes a part of the household.

During their fourth year at the mine, Tristao turns lucky and strikes a real gold nugget. Tristao hopes to buy a small farm with the money and live comfortably. But as the nugget is unearthed, there ensues a dispute over its ownership which attracts the newspapers. The publicity brings the Big Boys back

on their track. Leaving the nugget in the safe custody of the co-operative, they take to the road again, this time with their two children and the Tupi woman for company.

One night, as they hitch their tent by the side of a river they are subjected to an Indian raid. The Indians kill Kupehaki and ride away with the children, Azor and Cordelia. Their attempts to follow the Indians, fail. Later they come to understand that the Indian women, being averse to pregnancy and childbirth in their vagrant life, steal children to bring up as their own. Tristao and Isabel, tortured in mind and body cling to each other for sustenance. Adrift in the wilderness without their children to console them or Kupehaki to direct them in procuring means of sustenance, they starve. Still, for love's sake they keep alive sustained by the perfection of their passion. At a point when death seemed near, they are rescued by a wandering tribe of Portuguese origin, New Christians as they call themselves. Their leader Antonio welcomes Isabel and Tristao into their band, for Isabel's worth as a young woman and Tristao's value as a slave. When Isabel protests insisting that the blackman is not a slave but her husband Antonio consoles her and makes her his own third wife.

With in a year Isabel conceives from the old man Antonio and gives birth to a boy whom she names Salamao after her father. Salamao is unresponsive by birth and he barely has strength in him to suckle. Keeping the unresponsive baby in her lap, Isabel would weep for her mate, Tristao who being turned into a slave is given heavy tasks, of cutting trees and making canoes. Antonio's second wife, an Indian of the name Ianopamoko had become greatly attached to Isabel and out of love for Isabel, she tells her about an Indian wizard who could work miracles and offers to take Isabel to the 'mesa' so as to bring life to the limp body of Salamao. Antonio

permits the two women to undertake the hazardous journey leaving Salamao in the care of the other women. But as they meet the wizard what Isabel asks for, is the freedom of Tristao. To liberate Tristao, he is to be transformed into a white man, for black men are slaves according to the Portuguese. The wizard prepares her for a sacrifice on her part so as to achieve her desire. As the orgy proceeds to its completion Isabel gradually loses her white complexion. She turns as black as a Negro woman. The wizard tells her at parting , that at home the miracle would await her. When they reach home, they find that the miracle had already taken place, Tristao has become a white man. The phenomenon had been viewed as an ill-omen by the Portuguese and they have left the place. Tristao recognizes his Isabel in the black woman by her voice and the lovers are re-united. They resume their sojourn, their roles now reversed, Isabel as the black woman and Tristao, the white man. She suffers, in her mind and body all the insults and exploitations that the Blacks suffer in a white dominated world. She also realizes that Tristao as the white man has lost his virility. On the road, she is impregnated by a black Moslem who had employed her for a day.

Isabel, after eight years of wandering life returns to Brasilia with her white husband. Her father has become a Minister in Brasilia. As he hears her voice over the phone, he is delighted to have his only daughter back. He welcomes her white husband as his son-in-law. Even when Tristao points out the change in Isabel's complexion to the notice of her father, the affectionate father could see the change in her only as a tan caused by exposure to the sun, which he hails as a mark of health. He also solicits his son-in-law to love his daughter all the more for it. Isabel's father, as Minister of the Interior, is responsible for the affairs of the Indians and other wandering tribes. Isabel implores her father to be merciful in

policies to the wandering tribes. She has come to the realization that she is the mother of all tribes now, having two of her children among the Indians and one child among the New Christians.

Isabel's father is successful in finding proper employment for his son-in-law; he is installed in an executive's position and they settle down to an aristocratic style of life. In the place of her three lost children, she has acquired three more; one from the religious black Ethiopian she had met in her sojourn and her twins from a business associate of Tristao's who was part white and part moorish. After these indiscretions by which she gained three children, she lived an honest life with her life's love, Tristao. Yet Tristram and Iseult, the perfect lovers of the myth, are not destined to consummate their happiness. Eventually tragedy, inevitable in the path of perfect love, overtakes them.

It happens, as they visit her uncle Donaciano in Rio de Janerio; and on the same beach Copacabana, the place of their first meeting. Taking a lonely walk at night on the same beach where as a black boy he had robbed white tourists, Tristao becomes the target of the knives of the black boys. The trick is turned on him this time. The black boys slashed at the white man, "as a lesson to all such white men who think they still own the world" (255). In a powerful double reversal, Updike brings out the irony of life; the black man being punished by the black boys, for parading in the borrowed garments of the white complexion. Tristao dies tasting the salt and water of the sea which has nurtured him and which has seen him through the different phases of his life. Isabel finds him lying dead face down clutching on to the beach, a picture of fidelity.

Updike has transformed the romance of Tristram and Iseult into the tragedy of modern man, the tragedy of the civilized savage, for whom possibility of return to a life in nature, is very little. Having cut off his roots from the soil of his birth, Tristao himself has rendered his return impossible. He has burned his boats, in his ambition to climb higher in the social ladder. He has lost virility and his primal strength in the bargain and consequently fails to defend himself in a moment of trial and he dies the hapless death of a helpless whiteman.

Brazil also concentrates on the theme of white man's rediscovery of nature, a life away from the bondages of civilization. It is revealed through Isabel's return to nature and rediscovery of life in the of lap nature in the model set by Thoreau's Walden. It is also the story of the human being pitched against overwhelming odds; where only the valiant and the resourceful could survive. The novel puts forward the view that wealth and well-being are two entirely different aspects. Human life in the midst of riches does not ensure well-being. Happiness resides in action and motion, in change from one state to another, in the pursuit of something that gives meaning to life.

More than anything else, what is most striking about the novel is the character of Isabel, who becomes the symbol of America and its ethnicity. She is wedded to the Black, becomes mother of Indians, Blacks, Whites, Moorish tribes, Portuguese New Christians and Moslems. In the portrait of Isabel, Updike appears to be making a tribute to his older daughter who has chosen to marry a black man. In his autobiographical work Self-Consciousness he devotes an entire chapter writing a letter addressing his two grandsons, Anoff and Kwame, sons of his older daughter. He instructs them about their rich mixed heritage: Russian, French, English, German, Dutch and African. As he writes in the letter to his grandsons:

> Your two parents are about as black and white as people can be, and that helps make them a beautiful couple. But they are beautiful too, for sharing similar temperaments and similar backgrounds, coming as both do from the international race of teachers and artists. Your black grandfather is an internationally known ceramicist, and your white grandmother paints pictures that hang on your walls. Your black grandmother, like your father and my father and my mother's father . . . is a teacher; we are all, that is, people who are at home with pencils and paper, with the tools of education and art. (Self-Consciousness 165)

Updike's vision of humanity that embraces and synthesizes different backgrounds, temperaments, continents, cultures, nations and races is as evident in Brazil as it is in the letter that he writes to his grandsons. His portrayal of Tristao as nobler, more loyal, enduring and compassionate than his white characters, in itself is evidence for Updike's grand, gracious and humane vision of life and human nature.

In the Beauty of the Lilies (1996)

In the Beauty of the Lilies is grand in conception; it is megafiction. It documents the story of an American family through eight decades and four generations. Updike's vision has struck heights that equal the widely acclaimed Rabbit novels for, the novel insists that death is not the end; there is the promise of regeneration.

The novel has four sections, each section narrating the story of a generation. The story begins in the Spring of 1910. The protagonist Clarence Arthur Wilmot, a Presbyterian minister feels his faith as slipping away. His books of theology fail to convince him of the existence of God. He finds it impossible to minister to the

spiritual needs of his parishioners having lost his faith in God. He fails in the pulpit too. Two years of trial being over, still failing to regain his sense of God, he resigns from the ministry.

With his savings, Clarence buys a small house in one of the crowded streets of Paterson, the same town. His attempts to find a job as teacher turns ineffectual, for schools have no use for a turncoat who had left his post due to lack of faith. He accepts a low-paid job in a silk factory.

His older son Jared who is nineteen has already gone through two years at college. He settles down to a job in the Wall street arranged by one of his friends. Esther who is seventeen has been trained for a secretarial position which helps her now to find employment. Teddy, the youngest who is a child of ten becomes the main concern of the parents.

As the strike organized by the Industrial Workers of the World affects the Paterson Silk Mills, the mills get locked out with the staff laid off. Clarence also loses his job. He becomes a door-to-door salesman for The Popular Encyclopedia, with little profit, for no one has the money to spare on books. In the Summer, when the heat gets unbearable he takes refuge inside movie theatres which were in plenty in Paterson. The sight of his poor family, his wife Stella looking aged in her early forties, Jared and Esther going about with the secretive cockiness of children thrust too early upon their own resources and Teddy at ten growing a shell of reserve along with a stoic acceptance of suffering, was so painful to his warm nature that he preferred to spend more time in the movie theatres. There he could forget his fall, his failure and his disgrace and he became quite addicted to the movies.

The second section 'Teddy' concentrates on the younger son of Clarence. Through Teddy's eyes, the final days of Clarence are viewed. The narrator tells how Clarence caught tuberculosis that disabled him utterly from getting out of home. Teddy, still in school takes the paper route to help his mother with house-keeping money; his mother chips in by doing stitching jobs. During July 1918 Jared has his arm crippled by shrapnel in the battle and he comes back home with one arm hanging limp from the shoulder. Jared gives Teddy useful tips about the adult world and warns him against becoming a mama's boy once their father 'pulls out.' Teddy is attached to his father; talks to him and reads the newspaper to keep him engaged. In September 1919 his father "slipped away" in the night, "without a sound so they found his body like a beautiful perishable statue in the morning" (125).

Esther had been working in secretarial capacity for a silk dyeing company. She had her father's physique, being tall and thin. Stella wished to release Esther from the responsibilities of the family so that she could think of getting married. Jared had already married and settled down in New York. He had been working in the stock market. As she gets an invitation from Clarence's childless sister, Esther, who lived in a big house in Basingstoke alone her husband having run away with another woman, Stella decides to accept it and go there with Teddy. She intends for him to have a fresh start in Basingstoke with his aunt's help. Teddy now seventeen, is reluctant to leave Paterson. At his mother's insistence, he agrees to go provided Esther too goes with them. Esther agrees, for she knows Teddy's need for her guidance; young Teddy had never come to terms with the fact of the death of his father. Teddy had pitied Clarence and had felt a grudge against God who in His might could have given Clarence a sign of His existence.

At Basingstoke, he resists his mother's attempt to send him to college insisting that his father's tragedy resulted from his knowing too much. He would rather find some job to ease his mother's burden. Esther had found a place with the local law firm. Teddy gets work in a bottle cap factory. He attends a course in Practical Business simultaneously. Later he is employed as assistant in a drug store where he meets the crippled but angelic Emily Sifford. Her father owns a greenhouse where they grow flowers.

Emily and Teddy meet often and becomes attached to each other. Esther had got involved with the proprietor of the law firm and expects to marry him when he gets divorce from his first wife. The family tries to separate Teddy from Emily, by sending Teddy to New York with Jared. But New York does not suit Teddy. Soon he returns to Basingstoke and marries Emily. Esther also gets married to her lover and settles down in Basingstoke. The Siffords buy a new house for their daughter and son-in law. Teddy secures the position of a mail-man with the postal department. Aunt Esther dies and the house is sold by her husband, which lands Stella in the home of Teddy. Emily welcomes her warmly into their life. The third section 'Essie/Alma' narrates the story of Teddy's daughter Essie and her development into the Hollywood actress Alma De Mott. She, from her childhood had been attracted to the movies like her grandfather was; winning second place in a beauty contest, introduces her to the field of modelling from where through untiring effort and devotion to her profession she reaches the heights of a Hollywood movie star.

The fourth section 'Clark/Esau/Slick' tells the story of Clark the son of Essie born of her marriage to a movie script writer. She had divorced him soon after the birth of Clark. In the pursuit of her profession, she had ignored her son's

needs. Spiritual development was denied to him, as he was sidelined by everyone including his mother. Though Alma believed in God, she had failed to impart her faith to her son. Happiness of a family life, he knew only when he visited his grandparents at Basingstoke. From them he gathers information about his mother's childhood. Clark finds it impossible to stick to any one thing, he flits from one thing to another in his attempt to cull out a space for himself, to cut a heroic figure. He gets fed up with the film world. His grandfather's brother Jared who had a ski resort on a mountain, gives him a job in his resort. There he meets a girl called Hannah. She introduces him to a religious commune under the leadership of a man called Jesse Smith who professed to be the Saviour.

Clark who had been questing after a spiritual renewal, falls to the charm of the communal life. He becomes Jesse's disciple who renames him as a Esau. Esau becomes an important person in the community. Soon trouble breaks out as a few of the disciples of Jesse go beyond the legal limits in their interaction with the outside world. It results in a shoot out which ends in the burning down of their Temple. Jesse in his fanaticism has planned a mass suicide as a spectacular way to salvation, which meant shooting down of women and children and suicide on the part of the men of the commune. As the scheme is about to be put into effect, Clark who is also known for his clever and polished ways as "Slick" to the inhabitants turns 'slick' in reality. In a moment of revelation he realizes his mission and role. He assumes command and takes the revolver from the assassin's hand and shoots the leader, Jesse. He orders the women and children to rush out of the burning Temple. But Clark being the last to get out of the smoke-filled passage, fails to get out of the temple which gets consumed by the fire. Clark dies as a hero though he could not be a hero while he lived. He had found his faith at last; in being faithful

to his brethren in the Temple, and in sacrificing his own life to save theirs he has found his place among the valiant and the faithful. Clark finds the answer to the problem posed by Clarence. If Clarence died of an apparent impoverishment of faith Clark dies in the abundance of faith vindicating belief in God.

Clarence's life and its mission gets completion and justification through the short but meaningful life of Clark. Clarence's quest meets with its desired end after two generations and seventy years; for Clarence had more faith in him than he was conscious of, his atheism being an extreme manifestation of his ardent, faithful nature.

In making Clark win the battle lost by his great grand father Clarence, Updike's vision of humanity surfaces. His humane vision imparts heroism on the piteous figure of Clark, the marginalized wreck of a young life. The novel pronounces Updike's belief in a God-centred Universe--a re-affirmation of the traditional faith, in the real God whom men can not reach, but who reveals himself to man as He wills. God chooses to reveal Himself not to the learned minister who tried to reach Him, but to the mediocre and miserable man of the world--the least of these--who really needed Him. Thus In the Beauty of the Lilies Updike unfolds his vision of humanity that enwraps even the lilies of the field with a visionary gleam.

“I am a man, I count nothing human
indifferent to me”

Terence.

CHAPTER SEVEN

CONCLUSION

John Updike's Fiction and His Vision of Humanity

The work of John Updike spans the latter half of the twentieth century. Though his fictional output forms only a part of his multifaceted contribution to the world of letters, a classification and evaluation of it in its entirety poses difficulties: for, being a man of ideas as well as technique he touches upon a wide range of subjects from religion through art, metaphysics, politics, history and science, to sex, and experiments with a variety of techniques, modern and post-modern. He has his identity with the early experimental fictionists, as also with the novelists of manners and the post-modernists of the present. His fiction has absorbed, assimilated and commented upon almost every movement in thought that has influenced his times. Some of his novels are documentary in nature, incorporating into it contemporary history, giving voice to the views of different minority groups. He has been mindful of conformists as well as counter-cultures and minority cultures: different groups of liberation fronts; war-resisters, women libbers, Hippies, Yippies, freaks and religious con-men.

Though Updike does not intend to put forward any theory of man and society, his investigation into social life takes the form of multiple quests--for identity, authenticity and survival--which are in line with the major concerns of contemporary intellectuals and literary men. Further more, his protagonists are seen to be engaged in the quest for renewal of the spirit, a concern of the

seventeenth century America of the Pilgrims, which Updike seems to have inherited through constant intellectual dialogues with his great predecessors like Hawthorne, Melville, Emerson and Whitman.

Updike's work has a great depth and meaning though he is also a stylist indulging at times in verbal artifices and technical virtuosity. Though he is an experimenter, he is not an experimentalist in the mode of John Barth or John Hawkes in that he has not committed heart and soul to innovative techniques; he has only successfully used them as effective substitutes for traditional formula fiction. He is seen to be forever cutting fresh ground, pushing beyond techniques which grow old by use to go in search of new methods in order to convey new experiences. He is also in possession of a genial vision of life, that makes him soar above the subjects he treats, elevating small instances of what appears to be silliness, into telling truths about modern lives.

What makes each of Updike's works of fiction different from those of his contemporaries, is the humane dimension that is brought to bear on the burden of his subject, be it religion, sex or art, as also the humane view he adopts in dealing with his characters and their affairs. "Humanity" according to Updike, means the fact of belonging to mankind as well as the fact or quality of being humane: kindness, mercy, sympathy etc. It is not in any way related to the rationalist movement "humanism" which holds that man can lead an ethical life and have self fulfilment without recourse to a supernatural force and which banishes the concept of a God-centred universe. Contrary to it Updike has absolute faith in a God-centred universe. With the Swiss theologian Karl Barth, he believes in the real God who is not invented by men and who is

'Wholly Other.' For Updike, the problems of human morality are subordinate to that of faith.

Updike's vision of humanity is most obvious in the treatment of "the least of these"--the minorities and the marginalized sections which include children, the coloured classes and others who are considered as castaways by the established conventional society. For instance, the neglected children of the hedonistic couples in Couples and The Witches of Eastwick; Verna in Roger's Version; Ruth in Rabbit, Run; Jill, Nelson and Skeeter in Rabbit Redux. His compassionate touch is extended even to those individuals who take exception to the external social morality enforced by the establishment, being guided by a personal morality dictated by the inner voice, their instincts. When a conflict occurs between the individual instinct and the social morality Updike rises to the occasion and casts away his neutrality in order to uphold the individual. Harry Angstrom of the Rabbit quartet, Piet and Foxy of Couples attest to this fact.

The novelist softly touches upon and transforms subjects which range from religion to sex and protagonists from teenagers to octogenarians and offers certain new patterns of reality, metaphors, myths, and fantasies, so that society may have an awareness of its malaise and adopt corrective measures. Ofcourse, he does not intend to offer any theory, being primarily a novelist and not a psychologist or sociologist.

Updike has made explicit his views on the function of the novel and the role of the novelist in his discourse "The Future of the Novel" included in The Picked-Up Pieces. In it Updike establishes love as an essential ingredient of

the novel, citing for support, Dr. Johnson's definition of the novel--"a small tale, generally of love"--given in his Dictionary. Updike argues:

> Throughout however, and right down to the classics of modernism, love is a pervasive, perhaps obsessive thread. The French say, "Without adultery, there is no novel," and while this may be true of their novels than yours, it is indeed difficult to imagine a novel, even one by Lord Snow, without its—as the phrase goes--"romantic interest." (Picked- Up Pieces 21)

He concedes that there are other areas of concern in life apart from love, but it is difficult to make them interesting in a novel. Freud has given sex the right to be free and Updike observes how the writers of the day has used it in their works. The works of novelists like Henry Miller, according to Updike are not novels, "they are acts of intercourse strung alternately with segments of personal harangue. They are closer to the Arabian Nights than to Tolstoy: they are not novels but tales" (21). He detects in the recent trend, a dangerous tendency for the subversive burden to shift from sex to violence. He observes that the threat of society and the problem for censorship lies not with the description of sexual acts, but with fantasies of violence and torture. He pronounces his anxiety over the unhappy direction fiction has taken. He points out: "cruel events do occur in reality . . . but the obligation of the artist, when dealing with them, as with sex, is to be, not inexplicit, but accurately alive to their complicated human context" (22). According to him being explicit, and placing the events in the right perspective giving the full circumstantial and human background would take away the fear and anxiety regarding such events.

At this point Updike's persistent readers are reminded of the dexterity with which he has depicted the transgressive sexual relationships between Verna and Roger in Roger's Version and Pru and Harry Angstrom in Rabbit at Rest. He concludes his essay on the future of the novel expressing the hope that the novel would be a light and nimble messenger: "Let me admit to the hopeful fancy that some book such as I have imagined--a short novel, approaching the compact, riddling condition of an object--may serve as the vehicle of a philosophic revolution. That a new Rousseau or new Marx or a new Kierkegaard may choose to speak to us through the Novel" (23). So, carrying out his precept into practice, in Marry Me he has presented in the Kierkegaardian mode, the problem of indecision arising out of the dread and anxiety of the unknown. The Rabbit Tetralogy makes an individualistic and impulsive approach to the existentialist dilemma of freedom and entrapment. The Scarlet Letter Trilogy seeks a solution to the traditional problem of the body-soul division, the dichotomy of matter and spirit. Through the character of Tom Marshfield of A Month of Sundays Updike asserts: "We and our bodies are one," thus doing away with the split and bringing about a thoroughly humanistic and humane solution which enhances his vision of humanity.

Updike's more recent novel Brazil (1994), emphatically conveys his messages--the need for the mingling of races and cultures, an idea which had been hinted at in 1959, in his first novel The Poorhouse Fair. Brazil, the story of a white girl who marries a Black, puts in very palatable and effective terms what he has stated in "A Letter to My Grandsons"--a real letter he writes to his mulatto grandsons, Anoff and Kwame, sons of his older daughter who married

a Black: "we are all of mixed blood, and produce mixed results. . . . We are social creatures, but unlike ants and bees, not just that; there is something intrinsically and individually vital which must be defended against the claims even of virtue" (Self -Consciousness 211). Indeed a very humanistic sentiment which might be a panacea for the afflictions of a world torn by racial strife; and which becomes another proof for his vision of humanity.

His vision of humanity is seen as paramount in The Scarlet Letter trilogy and the short stories. An analysis of the short stories reveals that the protagonists of these stories represent four main stages of transition keeping step with the turn of the decades. A study of the novels also shows a similar division as possible. His fiction of the first decade extending from mid-fifties to mid-sixties depicting adolescent and youthful protagonists belong to the romantic phase in the author's career. To this phase belongs The Poorhouse Fair, The Centaur and a major portion of the short stories. A realistic existentialist phase is inaugurated in 1965, in Of the Farm which signals the passing away of an old world giving way to the new. With Couples (1968) the change has become marked. The protagonists of the stories of this second stage are married men nearing middle age, beset with problems in their married life. Yet, they are seen to survive the mid-life crisis by either stepping outside the constraints of matrimony or by indulging in extramarital affairs. The third stage which begins in mid-seventies is a humanistic existentialist phase. It portrays protagonists more advanced in years. After their failed first marriages and divorce, they have settled down with new partners. Yet inspite of being increasingly conscious of ageing, illness and death; they yearn for something

better even as they advance in self-knowledge. In this evolution from romanticism to humanist existentialism, the influences of Soren Kierkegaard, Heidegger and Sartre could be detected. While Kierkegaard, Sartre and Heidegger presented him with a conceptual basis, the method of approach--phenomenology--is provided by Edmund Husserl.

Updike rejects the notion that literature should inculcate moral precepts. His theme in every novel has to do with a moral dilemma. But he leaves the decision to the individual, and is sympathetic even when the character chooses against social morality. Being humanistic he favours the individual. The humanistic existentialist phase reaches its highest point of perfection in the novels of the eighties particularly in Roger's Version (1986) in which all major characters are seen to be undergoing a spiritual renewal and a growth from existentialist ways to a more humanistic approach to life. There is a brief intervening comic absurdist phase which is represented by Bech: A Book, Bech is Back, A Month of Sundays, The Witches of Eastwick and S.

With the nineties, Updike's vision has acquired the added dimension of the tragic. In this tragic philosophic phase he depicts tragic heroes like Harry Angstrom of Rabbit at Rest, Tristao of Brazil, and Clark of In the Beauty of the Lilies; and as each novel comes to an end, the life of the protagonist also dims out ushering in death into the world of Updikean heroes, though the instruments vary: heart attack in the case of Harry, an assassin's knife in the case of Tristao, wilful confrontation with death for Clark. Memories of Ford Administration is the only novel of this period which does not belong to this category expressing a philosophic vision of human tragedy. Harry Angstrom is

raised to the stature of a tragic hero in the closing part of the novel. He achieves honour and glory through his heroic encounter with death which he considers as yet another adventure. In Brazil, Tristao is seen to return to his native place as a man of achievement, having won his love and his life's ambition. The very perfection of his love, requires a way to immortalize it which is provided by death. In the Beauty of the Lilies also creates a tragedy out of the ordinary circumstances of life. In it Updike elevates young Clark, the neglected offspring of a movie star to heroic dimensions at his sacrificial death to save the lives of numerous others.

In Couples and The Witches of Eastwick Updike's vision is directed critically towards the malaise of society: the deterioration of marriages, breaking up of families, the sad predicament of children and the destruction of innocence, all of which go unheeded by the "organized" society in its hedonistic pursuit of instant pleasure. These novels probe American culture's attempts to find a replacement for an abandoned Christianity. Alternative myths emerge but they fail as sources of ultimate meaning. The majority is lost in the mires of pragmatism and carnality, the minority of believers like Piet and Foxy in Couples turn away from a church that is rotten inside and find consolation in each other. Though the witches, Alexandra, Jane and Sukie in The Witches of Eastwick have returned to normal life, the demoniac Darryl Van Horne is still at large practising his devilish charms in some other place, an awareness which borders on the grim. Updike's vision of humanity is slightly different in quality in Couples and The Witches of Eastwick. It appears in his willingness to point out the social malaise that clamours for remedying.

Thus the vision of humanity permeates through each of his novels beginning with The Poorhouse Fair. The total effect of his fiction is to impress his readers with the conviction that although the prospects appear grim in the world that they inhabit, men can hope to change them through their efforts. Though the world is pictured as a desert place in many of his novels, he has also insisted on the existence of God and affirmed the Biblical concept of the human being as the "apple of His eyes," being kept in His palm. Yet he has repeatedly demonstrated through almost every novel, how American Protestantism has decayed and how America stands in need of an alternative mythos to bring about spiritual renewal. He has also shown how Americans in their eagerness to find another faith are often misled by fake prophets and fraudulous religious freaks whose influence turn negative, pushing them back to materialistic ways. He offers a humane vision of the world and mankind as a solution to existentialistic problems. He points to compassion, sensibility, kindness and sympathetic understanding as essential ingredients to human nature, which for him would mean "humanity."

The variety of ways in which Updike expresses himself, the textuality and authenticity of his fiction and his perfect mastery over the subjects, combined with the felicity of his method ensure for Updike a prime place among contemporary writers of fiction. He is also the direct descendant of the great American writers: Hawthorne, Howells, Melville, Emerson, Whitman and Thoreau. A marvellous combination of intellect and imagination, ideas and technique, Updike might become for the twenty-first century, the representative novelist of the twentieth century.

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