Run Baby Run
CHAPTER III

RUN BABY RUN

*Rabbit Redux*

*Credo quia absurdum*

I believe it because it is absurd

-Tertullian

The second novel of the tetralogy, *Rabbit Redux* is aligned with the major events of the sixties of the last century coinciding with America’s conquest of Moon and the intense racial and political turmoil that ravaged the domestic scene. The novel’s action which spans a brief period of four months between July and October 1969 is captured as a quartet, each named after an individual except for the first which has a seemingly incongruous addendum. The first chapter is named Pop, Mom, and Moon, and the other three after Jill, a flower child of the sixties, Skeeter, a black Vietnam war veteran and Mim, Rabbit’s sister and his only sibling, in the same order. The oddity of inclusion of the lunar sphere in the caption of the first quartet gets resolved by a skillfully contrived symbolic unity achieved by prefixing each of the four sections with epigraphs taken from the conversations of the astronauts of Apollo 11 and the Russian Cosmonauts.

According to George Hunt, “If *Rabbit, Run* was Updike’s quintessential novel of the 1950’s, *Rabbit Redux* is search for the 1960’s.” (165). In the first novel, Rabbit was overcome by angst which propels him to seek new frontiers whereas *Rabbit Redux*
finds him in a state of stupor induced by external circumstances. The intervening decade between *Rabbit, Run* and *Rabbit Redux* had witnessed intense metamorphosis of social, political and religious ideas and convictions which confront the perplexed protagonist. The Vietnam War of the 1960’s which challenged the leadership of America in ideological sphere unleashing social and political forces that shook the serenity of the 1950’s forms the matrix of the external circumstances which engages the protagonist.

The story line of the novel is linear unlike *Rabbit, Run* whose movement is set in a zigzag pattern. One finds here the protagonist whose personal life with his wife is at nadir. Janice has an affair with Charlie, a co-worker, but with the passion of the youth being over, the knowledge of the illicit tryst does not elicit any violent domestic convolutions. On the contrary, Rabbit treats the matter with disdain. When he confronts Janice, she promises to end the affair, but surprisingly Rabbit suggests that she can go on seeing her lover which really shocks and hurts Janice. She deserts her son and her husband to be with her lover. In her absence Rabbit gets involved with the members of the counter culture, particularly Jill, a White Hippie from an affluent background and Skeeter, a Black militant and a drug pusher. Both of them come to stay in Rabbit’s house and Jill plays a sort of surrogate mother to Nelson.

Rabbit and Nelson are given daily discourses by these two odd persons on the popular anti-establishment views. In tune with hippie ideals, Jill offers sex both to Rabbit, and Skeeter and indulges in drugs. In that communal living, Rabbit’s house becomes a refuge centre representing the permissiveness of the sixties. The dream
world abruptly ends when the house is set on fire; the novel is ambivalent as to whether it was caused by the White neighbours who were angered by the racial mix and experimentation with drugs or by Skeeter himself. The fire causes the death of Jill who happens to be in the house in a state of drug induced stupor. Soon after this, Rabbit loses his job as a lino-type operator, thanks to the replacement of modern machinery. Mim, Rabbit’s sister who comes to see her dying mother intervenes in the affair between Janice and her co-worker. Piqued by her lover’s infidelity, Janice returns to Rabbit and the novel ends in a positive note with the couple being together in domestic harmony.

What saves Rabbit Redux from being a mere topical novel is Updike’s serious engagement with fundamental theo-philosophical issues. Hunt declares, “Rabbit Redux is so obviously a thesis novel” (169). Embedded in the political and social crisis that shook America, are deep philosophical and theological concerns which buoy up the content of the novel. Hunt’s caustic remarks that “philosophic mots more appropriate to the professor than to blue collar types are sprinkled about, trivial incidents elicit Schopenhauer – like reflections, an air of Weltschmerz pokes through and deflates almost every vivid experience” (170), stress the esoteric aspect of the discourse.

The trenchant criticism notwithstanding, Updike engages in a scholarly discussion of religion, race, sex, love and death to record his vision and views which are closely expounded through a series of discourses between the principal actors, interspersed by various events. The primary question that is posed in this second novel is, “What makes people run?” (Redux 170). This existential query assumes enormous
significance in *Rabbit Redux* as all the major female characters, Janice, Mim, his sister, and Jill the new found friend, show a remarkable affinity to run away from their homes.

Janice’s flight is initiated by her extra-marital tryst with Charlie while Jill is propelled to leave her parents due to ideological fracture with the puritan and capitalistic belief. Mim’s foray to Florida is to taste the fruits of freedom, thanks to the raise of feminist movements. Even Skeeter, the only major male character other than the protagonist is a fugitive from law. While Rabbit was prone to running in *Rabbit, Run* in *Rabbit Redux*, it is Janice who runs away not only from Rabbit but also from her son, social mores and conventions. Her running marks the hiatus with the conventional womanhood represented by Mary Angstrom. Juxtaposed with the latter’s impending death, it signals the passing away of the conventional womanhood and the inauguration of a militant and self-centred feminism. In brief, the cosmos of Rabbit is in constant motion in which he is stationary like the sun relative to others.

The existential problem of running thematically welds the first two novels of the tetrology. If the first novel is concerned more with the inward realization of the self of the protagonist when confronted by the external circumstances, the same thematic concern is developed in this second novel also but with a difference. The past issues centering on his failure to balance familial responsibility and egoistic pursuits is confronted by the protagonist instead of being buried in escapist tendencies. As Campbell notes, “The issues … in 1959 are still present, but the deliberate expansion of the external circumstances to national international and even cosmic
levels suggests that the solipsistic escapism he pursued ten years earlier, whatever tenuous elements of heroism it possessed then, is impossible now” (180). Confronted by reality, Rabbit’s focus is transformed and trained at events, issues, and the people around him. And this altered attention foregrounds a fundamental theological issue: “where do you go from here?” (Redux 234). Both the questions why do people run and where does one go get coalesced contributing to intricate debate on theo-philosophical issues.

The question “where do you go from here?” is raised by Rabbit in a debate with the fugitive African American, Skeeter. Analyzing the racial problem, Skeeter spews venom on the White Americans for their exploitation of the blacks. But Rabbit, faulting him for self pity, makes a seminal observation that “We all got here on a bad boat” (Redux 234). Updike universalizes the problem of existence and poses the question whether erasure of racial, gender, and economic differences manifested in Rabbit’s recognition of being together in the same boat though bad, is an achievable ideal. The personal voyage of the participants in this debate is controlled by complicated impersonal forces which do not seem at the first sight to impact their life, but become increasing evident in comprehending the underlying tensions exhibited through external circumstances.

Updike’s engagement of theo-philosophical issues is in tandem with the American intellectual tradition which can be likened to a double helix composed of philosophical and theological strands conjoined by other lesser concerns. Hunt, while explaining the contours of the intellectual arena, refers to Lewis’s study on the
diametrically opposed interpretation of the fall of Adam in American tradition. According to this thesis, there are two parties, a party of Hope and another party of Memory. The party of Hope represented by Emerson, Thoreau, and Whitman believed in “a sinless Adam, a radically new personality, emancipated from history and ancestry, an archetypal man whose moral stance was prior the experience and whose radical newness meant radical innocence” (Hunt 148). The opposite view was held by the party of Memory which felt that “‘Adam fallen’ was a sinner badly in need of redemption, whose condition was obviously manifest in the light of contemporary corruption” (Hunt 148). This ancient cleavage continued to be manifested in the America of sixties.

The party of Hope had for its membership flower children, feminist, clergyman and all those who were desirous of emancipation from old sexual mores, traditional family and ecclesiastical structures. The party of Memory was “composed of members who were strict Calvinists” and subscribed to “Calvinism’s fundamental suspicions about race” (Hunt 149). *Rabbit Redux* captures this break with an astonishing verisimilitude. While all the quartets of the novel address this issue, the second and the third tropes titled after Jill, and Skeeter undertake detailed analysis in the form of lengthy discourses.

Jill resembles a Greek chorus primarily articulating the beliefs of the party of Innocence. On the other side of the dialectic, Rabbit’s parents Earl Armstrong and Mary Angstrom representing the party of Memory are arraigned. Skeeter represents the third dimension, offering violent and emotional counterpoint. Rabbit appears to occupy a synthesizing point in the discourse and comes out as a rather confused
individual unable to make much of the events, as he undergoes a cycle of hope, discouragement and inertia. The articulations of the party of Memory are minimal and are summed up well in the resignation of Earl Armstrong: “Harry, God in His way hasn’t been all bad to your mother and me” (Redux 11). Updike clearly signals the declined fortunes of this party whose only legacy is nostalgic recollections of the past and centralizes the discussions around the party of Hope which resonates with rich philosophical and theological overtones. The seriousness and the far-sightedness of the engagement are well stressed by Boswell:

Unfashionable at the time of its publication by virtue of its up-to-the-minute timeliness, *Rabbit Redux* must now be regarded as one of the most important documents we have of that over documented time, a brilliant and focused portrait unmarred by sentimentalism or short-sightedness. Updike looked out the window and called it as he saw it, and history has largely borne him out. (80)

What Updike then saw out of the window was a social protest unmatched in intensity to create a Camelot, reflecting the aspirations of the party of Hope. Jill, their representative from a rich upper middle-class White American family is wedded to social and racial equality and is a typical Hippie and flower child of 1960’s. A run-away from home and drug addict, she is the proponent of anti-establishment view. While puritan ethics elevated work as a virtue, she dismisses it as an expression of the exploitative facet of capitalism which reduces human beings to animalistic state. She reasons out that “What have the pig laws ever done for you except screw you into a greasy job and
turn you into such a gutless creep you can’t even keep your idiotic wife?” (Redux 169).

On the other side of the dialectic, Rabbit subscribes to old ethics which equates honesty and work as the inscriber of goal for life.

Accordingly, Rabbit considers rich kids as already dead for they are ignorant of the meaning of life. He retorts to Jill’s taunts with conviction: “You’ve tried everything and you’re not scared of nothing and you wonder it’s all so dead. You’ve had it handed to you, sweet baby, that’s why it’s so dead” (Redux 170). This identification of work with life and its absence with death inhering in conventional belief comes in for a sharp critique. Jill finds only material compulsion in such ideology. She chides Rabbit for his lack of certainty in life in other planets which again rests on a queer Puritan logic of work: “It’s your Puritan fear of waste that makes you want that… You think the other planets must be used for something, must be farmed” (Redux 161).

Jill’s critique of protestant work ethics foregrounds the fundamental discourse on the theocratic belief that is seared by the liberal values.

On the awareness of God, Hunt’s finding is that “Unlike the Rabbit of Rabbit, Run, Rabbit in Rabbit Redux is no longer religious save in the loosest and most nostalgic sense” (177). Though the protagonist’s personal faith might have seen erosion, the novel witnesses a major debate on the ontological issues of God, evil, guilt, and the meaning of creation. Boswell’s insightful observation that in this novel Updike engages “complex and hair splitting theological issues” (104), is proved right as even the socio-political issues like racism, capitalism are dissected from a theological perspective.
If Rabbit was intrigued by the muteness of the transcendental in *Rabbit, Run*, it is Jill who displays a keen sensitivity to this issue in *Rabbit Redux*. Unlike Ruth of *Rabbit, Run* whose foil she is, Jill is a religious person for according to Boswell, “Jill has chosen to suppress her ego, her subjectivity, in the cause of enlightened selflessness” (98). While Ruth treated her body as a commodity for sale setting out a price of fifteen dollars, Jill volunteers to offer herself to an astonished Rabbit even in their first encounter without any consideration. Their social standings differ: Ruth is from working class, while Jill is from a rich family. More than these peripheral differences, it is their relative position in the Kierkegaardian universe that sets them wide apart.

In *Rabbit, Run* Ruth occupies the lowest rung in comparison with other inhabitants of the aesthetic sphere. She lacks faith, either in God or in higher human values which disqualifies her both for the ethical and the religious sphere. Her lack of faith is so acute that it has a debilitating effect on Rabbit who comes to dread her as an angel of death.

Though Jill’s selflessness may not fall within the ambit of conventional morality, its effect is nonetheless the same. The fact that she embraced hippie culture is more a reflection of the convictions of the party of Hope who believed in the natural goodness and purity of pre-fallen Adam than an indictment of the decaying conventional mores of the sixties. In an elemental sense, it would be difficult to assign Jill to the Kierkegaardian religious sphere as her indulgence in sex and drugs would indeed mark her out as an aesthetic person. But in her case sex is not a conduit for satiation of physical craving nor does it portend any spiritual dimension. As Boswell observes, “Indeed, sex for Jill is neither a spiritual union of the flesh nor a natural bodily function
bereft of mystery. It is an act of surrender – to the world’s ugliness, to another person. Its purpose is not self-vindication but renunciation” (100). Not only in the matter of sex but also in the mundane act of eating, she displays the same repudiation of pleasure which covers her with an aura of saintliness. Explaining the reason why she hates eating, she confesses, “It’s so ugly. Don’t you think, it’s one of the ugliest things we do?” (Redux 140). Though Rabbit dismisses it as a queer philosophy, she alone possesses in Boswell’s view, “a coherent religious vision” (101), and it is to Jill’s theology that one should turn to mine the theological stratum of the novel.

Jill’s vision is controlled by her faith in the transcendent. Her religious orientation is manifested in her declaration that “the world is what God made” (Redux 159). If there is evil in the world, the author is man and not God. According to Bailey, “in Rabbit Redux, the omnipresence of commodities and pop culture contributes to the novel’s pervasive aura of oppressively banal, soulless materialism” (91). Jill’s indictment is against this soulless materialism. Imbued by the anti-capitalistic views of the sixties, she faults man for making the world stink of money. In her opinion, the world is “never tired, too much or too little, it’s always exactly full” (Redux 159). It is a fullness that man in his myopic pursuit fails to understand.

Disturbing that fullness paves way for competitive spirit, upsetting the equilibrium that God had assigned as a part of creation. This belief of the party of Hope is expressed in Jill’s assertion that the original artist had left his imprint of his goodness in his creation. Even the presence of evil fails to obstruct Jill’s view of the
goodness of creation. What is good exists in ecstasy, and that creation is nothing but a manifestation of God’s ecstasy. Therefore, the fullness even if it carries a defect within, possesses a positive facet. With this resolute faith she declares that “The second after an earthquake, the stones are calm. Everywhere is play, even in thunder or an avalanche” (Redux 159). The depth of her conviction is seen in her prognosis of what eclipses God’s ecstasy displayed in his wondrous creations. Our inability to hear or view it is, “Because our egos make us deaf, our egos make us blind” (Redux 159). Updike does not employ ego in Freudian sense but with a Biblical tilt, articulated in the admonition of Jesus about fault finding.

Jill says, “Whenever we think about ourselves, it’s like putting a piece of dirt in our eyes.” (Redux 159) Agreeing with Jesus, she declares that what He meant was “Without our egos the universe would be absolutely clean” (Redux 159). In this hedonic world, everything will be according to God’s command and even the inanimate and animate would be “doing their thing unself-consciously” and “the only conscious would be God’s” (Redux 159). Jill’s exposition that “the matter is the mirror of spirit” (Redux 159), establishes a tenuous relationship between matter and spirit.

This raises the question if matter is the mirror of the spirit, why is not the spirit reflected in the mirror? In the celebrated platonic illustration, man is chained within a cave consequent to which he can see only the reflection of the reality and never the truth of reality. But in Updiken world, there is not even a reflection but only a confabulation of dark spots which blinds out the Maker. Jill argues:
Matter is the mirror of spirit. But it’s three-dimensional, like an enormous room, a ball room. And inside it are these tiny other mirrors tilted this way and that and throwing the light back the wrong way. Because to the big face looking in, these little mirrors are just dark spots, where He can’t see Himself. (Redux 159)

An analysis of the above passage shows that there is no fundamental difference between matter and spirit. Since matter is nothing but reflected spirit having no inherent attribute of its own, anyone should discern the spirit in matter. However the passage is silent about the origin of ‘tiny other mirrors’. The text shows the word ‘other’ italicized which indicates that Updike enlarges on the theme by positing that the one large mirror of spirit is intruded by broken others which are nothing but the other aspect of creation. Read with Barthian concept of creation not willed by God, the broken mirrors are the signifiers of the broken relation of man with God occasioned by Adam’s disobedience. It is this broken relationship that occults the reflection of spirit in the matter.

How could this gulf be bridged? Updike proposes two solutions, one through Rabbit and the other through Jill. Rabbit desires God to take the initiative to break the wall that divides man and God. “Why doesn’t He just do away with the spots then? I take it the spots are us” (Redux 160). What Rabbit proposes is essentially a Barthian doctrine requiring God to do the act of reaching out to man. However, it does not indicate that Rabbit has Barthian conviction in Christology because soon he offers another solution, “Maybe we’ll do the erasing ourselves” (Redux 160). Rabbit persists
with his lack of Barthian vision as he fails to comprehend that the act of erasure
cannot be done by man but that it requires a redemptive act. Though Jill counters
Rabbit’s solution, her explanation is puerile as she is equally ignorant of the Barthian
doctrine which holds that the only tangential connection Man can have with God is
through Christ. Her explanation that God has not noticed the human beings yet,
since the cosmos is so large and man’s portion is so small, is not convincing.
According to the novelist, her face is “blank as a mirror in this instant” (Redux 160),
which betrays the indefensibility of her stand.

If Jill’s face is blank as a mirror, it is an attestation of the failure to reflect the
spirit. The blankness she experiences runs counter to her thesis that matter should
mirror the spirit. Her cause for this apparent contradiction is attributed to ego which is
the root for our inability to locate God’s presence in his creations. Updike posits that
the very presence of God negates evil and it is for man to seek God’s presence in the
evil. Boswell comments, “If *Rabbit, Run* affirms the ‘something’ aspect of God, then
*Rabbit Redux* affirms that aspect’s opposite” (111). In Barthian world, evil is the
shadow side of creation not willed by God which curtails the relationship between
man and God. Jill’s call is to disengage with the evil side of the creation.

While Jill takes a synoptic view of the problem of existence in consonance
with the belief of the party of Hope, the contrary view is articulated by Rabbit and
Sketeer. The fundamental existential question that is addressed in the first part of the
novel is human relationship. Updike takes a dialectical view on this issue. Rabbit avers:
“That’s life. Dog eat dog” (Redux 77). In employing the imagery of eating, a hint is
thrown that man exists on a material level only. This discourse occurs when Nelson admits that he doesn’t like sports because it is competitive. Rabbit’s philosophical response is that there cannot be life sans competition. In his Edenic innocence, Nelson thinks that there is enough for everybody to share. But Rabbit draws his attention to the fact that ideals are different from reality. Giving a practical lesson, he asks Nelson, “Why don’t you start then by sharing this lawn-mowing? You push it for a while” (Redux 77). The boy immediately demands his weekly allowance and when Rabbit hands him a dollar and two quarters, Nelson protests that by the standards of federal minimum wage he should “get a dollar twenty-five an hour for work” (Redux 77). Turning the table on Nelson, he explains that this exploitive situation is what ‘Dog eat dog’ means.

On the contrary, Jill’s construct of existence is idyllic in accord with the tenets of the party of Hope which abominates American Dream. She elevates all human exertion to a spiritual dimension and measures the outcome in terms of beauty. Referring to a row of houses, she analyzes why they are so ugly and concludes that it is because monetary consideration alone mattered for the builders. On the other hand, Cathedrals built long ago are lovely to behold as money was not a consideration. Rather they were built out of a sense of devotion and love which propelled even “nobles and ladies in velvet and ermine to drag stones up the ramps” (Redux 158). She envisages a loftier pedestal for man, endowing him with divinely attributes of a creative artist.
Jill’s views are an echo of Ruskin’s tirade against the factory system and the material progress it represented, which ultimately satisfied only the wants of the body. Ruskin, according to John Marsh believed that “the laborer is not a machine, but that he has a soul and that soul has a right to see and enjoy the clear sky, works of art, health, sanity, beauty” (530). Jill subscribes to this enlightened notion of work for she avers that work must bear the unique imprint of individuality. Even a small mark reflects the mood and the mind of the creative artist like finger prints and handwriting disclosing his personality: “Whatever he feels when he makes the mark – if he’s tired or bored or happy or proud – will be there. The same color, but we’ll feel it” (Redux 158). In short, she desires to salvage the individual from being reduced to a non entity in a materialistic world.

Jill’s nostalgic harking back to the pre-fallen state of Adamic innocence is vehemently critiqued by Skeeter. Representing the subaltern party of American politics, he articulates his views primarily through a personal theology which is an amalgam of his skewed understanding of Christian theology and politics. But Skeeter’s critique of the contemporary ills straddles between idealism and realism, leaving the underlying dialectics unresolved. A good example of this is his query, “What is lib-er-alism? Bringin’ joy to the world, right? Puttin’ enough sugar on dog-eat-dog so it tastes good all over, right?” (Redux 263), which is a curt dismissal of the genuine efforts of liberals to mitigate insalubrious dimensions of life within the frame work of a competitive world.
Boswell considers that Updike’s engagement of racism is tied to the “novel’s larger thematization of ontological guilt” (127). It can be understood only in the context of the theology that propels the incidents. Boswell makes a pertinent observation on the complex blending of theology and politics: “Because the specific circumstances of the scene are impossible to separate from the theological and political themes the scene brings to an unnerving, ambiguous close, any assessment of Harry’s guilt necessarily entails these self-same theopolitical issues” (127). Since these twin problems are inexorably intertwined with the religious ethos of the nation originating from its inception, Skeeter is impelled to formulate a discourse on these implosive ingredients of American politics.

The 1960’s saw the division of the domestic scene as an arena for the contending ideological forces of liberalism and conservatism each with its fringe extremities in religion, politics, and racial relationships. The counterculture of the 1960’s affirmed in particular the rights of African Americans and Women. Marxism masquerading as an ally of the hitherto marginalized forces came to occupy the central’s place in the intellectual field. As Susan Jeffords notes, “the loss of Vietnam War, the civil rights movement, and feminism” (73), were the chief challenges offered to the white male authority of this decade. Rabbit meets this challenge passively and as Sally Robbinson observes the novel takes “great pains to place Rabbit in a disempowered position and as many critics of the novel have argued, Updike represents him primarily as passive” (273). This disempowerment is seen in Rabbit’s feeble dismissal of Skeeter’s polemics by shrouding it in images of filth. For Rabbit, Skeeter’s tirade against
religion, and politics have a stench which reminds him of the pungent smell he sniffed after putting his finger into his belly button. Skeeter’s arguments “opens a pit of scummed stench impossible to see to the bottom of” (Redux 208), which puts off the protagonist.

The same imaginary of filth and darkness is employed by Skeeter when he parodies the resurrection of Christ in terms of dialectical tension between the Blacks and the Whites. Skeeter besmirches the Whites with evil and stench and contrastingly the Blacks with cleanliness and hope. He derides that, “Your God’s a pansy ... He was a faggot crook, right? They bribed the Romans to get his carcass out of the tomb ‘cause it smelled so bad, right?” (Redux 210). Therefore he declares that he’s the real Jesus and that too “the Black Jesus” (Redux 210). But unlike Jesus he cannot give the assurance of resurrection, but only death. In an emphatic assertion of his personal theology, he declares “I am strong, I twist bodies to my wil. I am life, I am death” (Redux 249). His blasphemous inversion of the vital canons of Christianity is in sharp opposition to the views of the party of Hope which did not negate faith in the traditional religion.

Skeeter’s bizarre conclusion is “Love is bullshit. Common sense is bullshit. Confusion is God’s very face.” (Redux 264). Therefore, he comes with the central message that “Chaos is God’s body” (Redux 274). Gordon Slethaug comments: “If society has set him adrift in the first place, then he owes no alligence to that society, and stands outside space and time, simultaneously free and slave” (240). In this complex mixture of race, religion, and politics that propelled the America of 60s, Updike implies that Barthian concept of an important attribute of God is
compromised. While Barth opined in *The Humanity of God* that God “wants cosmos, not chaos. He wants peace, not disorder” (46), one finds Sketeer’s theological cosmos ruled by confusion which is a precursor to disorder.

If that is the queer theological articulation of Skeeter, his political and religious views are no less revolutionary. Updike foregrounds the dialectical interplay of love and fear and sets up a discourse as to what constitutes freedom. Jill, Rabbit and Skeeter propel the debate from the differential standpoints of Kierkegaardian religious, ethical and aesthetic persons. Jill observes: “You accept these things as sacred not out of love or faith but fear; your thought is frozen because the first moment when your instincts failed, you raced to the conclusion that everything is nothing, that zero is the real answer” (Redux 228). Between instinct and reflection, she deduces that cynicism is a result of American competitive spirit and that it is erroneous to sustain faith in that philosophy.

Skeeter, referring to the Vietnam imbroglio, thinks America is God showing the dog face and assumes the role of Anti-Christ. There is a descend of darkness and so he is the “Christ of the new Dark Age” (Redux 276). Everything is skewed and Skeeter is resolved to fight. Updike juxtaposes the dialectical tension between love and force ingeniously by making Rabbit read *The Life and Times of Frederick Douglass* which is Skeeter’s Bible. “‘A man without force,’” Rabbit intently reads, “‘is without essential dignity of humanity. Human nature is so constituted, that it cannot honor a helpless man, though it can pity him, and even this it cannot do long if signs of power do not arise’” (Redux 282). It is by exercise of power and not faith that Sketeer’s
resurrection is to be accomplished and inevitably this curious resurrection is not of life but of racial struggle. “‘It was a resurrection from the dark and pestiferous tomb of slavery, to the heaven of comparative freedom’” (Redux 282). Judy Newman in her article “Guru Industries” notes that “[w]here Jill essentially looked back to an older set of values, Skeeter’s historical theology turns the clock forward, towards apocalypse rather than Golden Age” (230). Skeeter’s ideology is a vehement repudiation of the beliefs of the party of Hope as well as the party of Memory. No wonder Updike’s delineation of Skeeter has evoked extreme evaluations from critics and Hunt’s confession that “I must admit that I find Rabbit Redux Updike’s weakest novel” (167), sums up the unease in handling the sensitive issue of race.

Set in the midst of these discourses of contemporary issues is Updike’s skillful examination of the Existential problem of “What makes people run?” (Redux 170) which is achieved by foregrounding the dialectical tension between the fundamental emotions of fear and love. As a Dasien, Rabbit is conscious that the reality of living cannot be divorced from external circumstances, and according to his understanding the impelling factor that animates life is fear. He declares: “Fear. That’s what makes us poor bastards run” (Redux 170). Jill being a votary of the party of Hope counters Rabbit’s pessimism suggesting, “Let’s try love for a change” (Redux 170). She argues that the antidote to fear is love and that it is an alternative worth trying because in her opinion “People’ve run on fear long enough” (Redux 170). But a skeptical Rabbit expresses his solipsistic conviction that it can be found only in another universe.
Jill fails to note that contrary to the idyllic world envisaged by the party of Hope, 1960’s gave birth to its pernicious dialectical counterpart graphically described by the psychologist, Rollo May. The liberated scene of that period while increasing the range of power and freedom of the individual brought about “the banalization of sex and love” (120). Observing the radical change in the gender roles, May raises a query striking at the very root of family as an entity:

We are hurtling into, not a bisexual or a multi sexual; but an a-sexual society: the boys grow long hair and the girls wear pants ... Romance will disappear; in fact, it has almost disappeared now.... Given the guaranteed Annual Income and The Pill, will woman choose to marry? Why should they? (62)

May’s fears are proved right by the personal ideology of Mim, Rabbit’s sister. A sex-worker by choice, she justifies her profession. Her skewed logic is that,” Men need to be drained. Like boils….You asked me my specialty and that’s it, I milk people. I let them spill their insides on me. It can be dirty work but usually it’s clean” (Redux 360). This unashamed crude admission epitomizes the degradation of human values and marks Mim as the lowest occupant of the Kirkegaardian aesthetical sphere. Yen Chu looks upon Mim as “a dehumanized woman” (40). For Mary Allen the only purpose of her existence, “is to be used by men with failed careers and broken marriages, who, like her, are merely waste products of society” (93). Rollo May further elaborates his apprehension about the indifference to find a solution to the problems generated by obliteration of traditional values: “What disturbs me is the real possibility of the
disappearance of our humane, life-giving qualities with the speed of developments in the life sciences, and the fact that no one seems to be discussing the alternative possibilities for good and evil in these developments” (63). Updike suggests love as a redeeming feature in this disturbing scenario.

Updike’s alternative solution of love to the disappearance of humane values articulated through Jill can be comprehended fully only by unlocking the special sense in which she employs the word ‘love’. By love she intends not just the instinctive part of Eros but the creative aspect as well which echoes Plato’s belief that Eros constituted man’s creative spirit. “Eros is the drive which impels man not only toward union with another person in sexual or other forms of love, but incites in man the yearning for knowledge and drives him passionately to seek union with the truth” (May 78). In other words, love in the form of Eros endows creativity which propels man to immortality and simultaneously to biological procreation.

In identifying Eros only with procreation, humanity has missed the significance of the meaning that the Greeks had assigned to love. From the Freudian point of view, love is nothing but Libido which is a physical passion of finite quantity that gets depleted when diverted to a person other than oneself. May terms this as a hydraulic model of sex destroying the critical values at stake. He makes a pointed observation on the exhilarating role of love: “When I fall in love, I feel more valuable and I treat myself with more care” (83). This positive dimension of love is advocated through Skeeter.

Subscribing to this view that a person in love feels enhanced self-esteem, Skeeter too identifies love with the creative aspect of life. He notes it as an antidote to
hate which substantiates Jill’s opinion that love is an antidote to fear. Where there is hate, there is fear for these are self generated evil things. Hate precedes fear and when fear grows full blown brings forth hate. Skeeter’s homely, “I am full of love, which is a dynamic force. Hate is a paralyzing force. Hate freezes. Love strikes and liberates” (Redux 274), delineates accurately the interplay of hate and fear and the importance of love as a positive force to resolve the dialectical tension.

In contrast, Rabbit reflects Freud’s view of identifying love with libido. The unfortunate consequence of the banalization of love as nothing more than libido is identification of love with death. Rollo May notes: “There is another side to the relationship between death and love. The obsession with sex serves to cover up contemporary man’s fear of death” (105). He notes that modern man represses death employing the same ways the Victorians repressed sex. Death is obscene and unmentionable and should not be talked about. Morticians dress death in beautiful coffins in the same way Victorian women dressed.

Rabbit displays the same association of sex with death: “It had all seemed like a pit to him then, her womb and the grave, sex and death” (Redux 27). The identification of sex with death is further expressed in his rumination: “Sex ages us. Priests are boyish, spinsters stay black-haired until after fifty. We others, the demon rots us out” (Redux 71). Even in his encounter with Jill, Rabbit remains essentially unchanged by sexual activity and still views sex as a grim business. Towards the end of the novel, he tells Janice, “But all this fucking, everybody fucking, I don’t know, it just makes me sad. It’s what makes everything so hard to run ... There must be something else”
The unspecified something else is the ethical and religious dimension which Rabbit as an aesthete fails to focus despite all the running he does. If he wants to experience that something else, he must take a leap of faith which being an individuating act can be performed by him alone. As Flynn observes, “this ‘leap’ is not the natural, much less, the necessary, evolution of the earlier stage, as a Hegelian reading would suggest” (31). The running within the aesthetic sphere becomes hard but surprisingly God does reach out to him, this time through the text of God which in Bartian theology, apart from Jesus, is the source of revelation.

The revelation for the first time in the novel occurs when Rabbit experiences ethical and religious epiphany in a Black Bar where Babe, an African American woman sings. Updike skillfully utilizes the occasion to underscore the difference in Heideggerian and Biblical notions of time. For Heidegger, time is a delimiting factor of a Dasein’s existence whereas in the opinion of the Old Testament Preacher it is a continuum:

Into the mike that is there no bigger than a lollipop, she begins to sing, sings in a voice that is no women’s voice at all and no man’s, is merely human, the words of Ecclesiastes. A time to be born, a time to die, a time to gather up stones, a time to cast stones away. Yes. The Lord’s last word. There is no other word, not really. (Redux 125)

Though the exact nature of the last word is not elaborated upon, it is not difficult to discern Updike’s credo in the assertion of basic unity of God’s creation, of the fundamental goodness of man, and the pointer to the artificiality of racial and
gender differences. This fact is underscored by the obliteration of gender difference in the voice which becomes merely human and by the fact that the dialectics of birth and death conceals within both dread and joy. Babe is the herald to announce this fact:

Her singing opens up, gross enormous, frightens Rabbit with its enormous Black maw of truth yet makes him overjoyed that he is here; he brims with joy, to be here with these Black others, he wants to shout love through the darkness of Babe’s noise to the sullen brother in goatee and glasses. (Redux 125)

Despite his earlier posturing that love can be found only in the other universe, Rabbit experiences the transcendental joy when colour prejudice and gender barrier between man and woman break down. No doubt the knowledge of the truth, that love is the ultimate unifier of humanity frightens him. Jay Prosser observes, “It is clear that Blacks stand for some consciousness in the American nation” (79). Updike’s choice of the Black Bar is deliberate for it enables him to articulate the hidden consciousness of the nation.

Updike implies that love does have a positive function and is a powerful agent of change. Hinting at the temporality of societal mores, Updike postulates that love in unison with time can alter dialectical tension and generate changes that are not without positive aspect. There can be a time where there is no man-woman and white-black differences. Rabbit experiences this truth in an epiphany caused by love. The obliteration of racial and sexual difference ushers in freedom which concomitantly frightens as
well as gives him a sense of exhilaration. Tragically, Rabbit fails to leap out of his aesthetic state and his life sans love is doomed to a state of fear and perpetual death.

Death overhangs the entire novel and its effects are palpably felt. One of the close thematic affinities between *Rabbit, Run* and *Rabbit Redux* is the pre-occupation with death. In *Rabbit Redux* one comes across the violent death of Jill, the near death of Charlie, Janice’s lover, and the imminent death of Mary Armstrong, and the actual death of Chappadick. While Rabbit’s daughter meets with a watery grave due to negligence, the death of Jill is caused by wanton mischief and aggression. But the effects are same in so far as Rabbit is concerned. If Ruth christened him Mr. Death in *Rabbit, Run*, Nelson now accuses him of being a killer. Actually the estrangement between Nelson and Rabbit which assumes Freudian overtones in the third novel of the tetrology has its origin in the tragic episode of Jill’s fiery death.

Rabbit’s constant dread of death is so intense that he refuses to allow Nelson the luxury of owning a bike. His fear is that he will get killed for his other child was killed in an accident. “The world is quicksand” (Redux 32). In quicksand, he has to be cautious not to take a false step and get himself entrapped. The death of the daughter has affected him so much that it colours his attitude towards life. Perplexingly in his imagination death and God are interlinked and in *Rabbit Redux* even his false gods of sex and sports fail him. Greiner observes: “All but impotent since Janice accidentally drowns their baby in *Rabbit, Run*, he unconsciously equates sex with death.” He further adds, “Yet even a sports arena, always a hollowed sanctum in Rabbits mythology carries the curse of emptiness” (73). If Rabbit ran away from death in *Rabbit, Run*,
he appears to be lurking under its shadow in *Rabbit Redux*, completely immobilized. Even “contentment makes Harry motionless” (Redux 172). While his impulse earlier was to keep running, in *Rabbit Redux*, he lapses into a state of inertia, in contrast to the people around him. Janice has deserted him, Jill has run away from her parents, Skeeter is suspected to be running from law. Oddly enough, Rabbit is rendered motionless.

It is ironic to note that when Rabbit pours out his problems to his mother, she advises him to run away and even admonishes him for coming back. Her advice though odd is not without a purpose. She wants her son to turn a new leaf instead of ruminating over what had happened in the past. Her counsel echoing the teachings of Jesus to get on with the pursuit of one’s goal in life is pragmatic: “Let the dead bury the dead. Don’t say no to life, Hassy, Bitterness never helps” (Redux 197). Mrs. Angstrong’s advice possesses dual dimension. In her hatred for her daughter-in-law Janice, she doesn’t care what would happen to Rabbit’s family. “She forgets what time creates, she still sees the world with its original four corners her and Pop and him and Mim sitting at the kitchen table” (Redux 197). Judie Newman observes in her book *John Updike*: “Mom is interested only in her son, the generation of the past” (53). When Mrs. Armstrong suggests Rabbit to “Pray for rebirth, Pray for your own rebirth” (Redux 198), Rabbit interprets it to mean that she is advising him to kill Janice and Nelson.

The freedom so obtained would be pyrrhic for it originates in murder and the consequential new life will have its genesis in death. Thus freedom paradoxically
requires annihilation of the other and rebirth extracts its price of death, squaring perfectly with Rabbit’s pessimistic view that it is ‘Dog-eat-dog life’. Greiner comments: “Even his mother dying herself and dreaming of death, urges him to say ‘yes’ to life, to formalize his break with Janice …, but he knows now, as he does not know in Rabbit, Run, that ‘Freedom means murder. Rebirth means death’ ” (228). Observing the affinity between death and freedom, Newman comments that the American society “offers only two alternatives, murderous freedom or passive, drugged well-being” (53) and Rabbit pays the price for freedom in the form of Jill’s death as Janice had paid it with Becky’s death earlier. She elaborates: “Each flight into freedom has had murderous consequences, for Rebacca in Janice’s case, for Jill in Harry’s” (61).

The discourse on freedom with its originating roots in political and racial matrix culminates in highlighting the profound dialectics of life and death and assumes an individualistic meaning.

This duality of life and death takes personal overtones in Skeeter’s sermon where he likens himself to Christ. By juxtaposing life and resurrection, Jesus did not obliterate the reality of death but offers hope that death is not the final reality but that would be overcome by resurrection. In contrast Skeeter finds that “there isn’t any net … to grab it all in” (Redux 258) and Boswell concurs in with his pessimism observing that “death is formless, without direction or intent” (124). Being cast in the mould of an anti-Messiah, Skeeter has no positive message to offer.

Rabbit too is engulfed by the same lack of faith, confronted by existential monotony. The novelist records: “Without going much of anywhere in his life he has
somehow seen everything too often” (Redux 104). He witnesses the same trees, the same house and the same weather. Sucked out of joy and even from the angst that propelled him to make the flights in Rabbit, Run, he becomes stationary; only the cosmos around him seem to revolve and the only excitement that comes from running is provided by the moon-flight. Updike’s observation, “No belief in an afterlife, no hope for it, too much more of the same thing, already it seems he’s lived twice” (Redux 104), pithily sums up the protagonist’s paralyzed state in this decade.

In extreme pessimism, Rabbit identifies God with death. Before visiting his ailing mother, he goes around his house and notices that weeds had invaded the bulbs, plants, and shrubs planted by Janice. He recalls the initial enthusiasm with which Janice did the gardening and how it got ruined at the onset of summer when weeds entirely took over. Rabbit sees in this natural cycle a reflection of the duality of life and death. He intervenes to clear the weeds “until he begins to see himself as a weed and his hand with its ugly big moons on the fingernails as God’s hand choosing and killing” (Redux 88). In this identification of God with death, Rabbit reaches the nadir of his belief that there is something good, though it is not directly perceived by him.

The scepter of death extends its sway over all the characters, whose intimate recollections are associated with death. Death of her daughter continues to haunt Janice and in a state of hallucination she imagines that Rabbit is a ghost and that she is dead and interned in a coffin like her dead child. She recalls, “The way she held [Baby Becky] sopping wet against her chest already dead, she could feel it, and screamed a great red scream as if to make a hole to let life back in” (Redux 57).
The immediate cause for Janice’s running obviously has its origin in her fear that inertia would lead to death. She is perplexed by the mystery of her temporal self-identity and the final dissolution of self in death. Therefore she must find out where she is going: “I’m trying to look honestly into myself, to see who I am, and where I should be going” ( Redux 104). This quest for the purpose of life is born out of the realization that mere existence at physical level annihilates life itself. This existential problem has to be solved only in finding out ‘Who I am’. The answer according to Janice lies in sensual experiences. But it is not to be, for in Freudian concept sensuality is linked to death.

The overpowering presence of death ignites the questions on the purpose of life, and the ultimate impression left is that the characters fail to fully appreciate the significance of faith. Mrs. Angstrom’s confession that after sixty years of life she is not sure as to the achievements she has made is a typical pointer to purposeless living. She likens life to a drain that is cleaned and all that shows up is hair and sludge mixed up with a rubber comb somebody had dropped years ago. Rabbit echoes this spiritually wasted state when he queries the efficacy of individual efforts: “A good job at what? We don’t know even what we’re trying to do, is the humor of it” ( Redux 194). In this aimless existence, death is a welcome arbitrator. It doesn’t strike hard as it comes with its own mitigating elements. This is the truth that Rabbit’s father Earl Angstrom believes. He notes that at times the tragedy creates a numbness, which ironically salvages people from experiencing its cruel reality. “Things come in bunches, that’s the mysterious truth. We get numb and the Lord lets us have it, that’s how His mercy
works” (Redux 349). If God’s intervention were to occur, it could be only through his grace and faith is a pre-requisite to have cognizance of it.

At this juncture, Updike raises the crucial issue whether faith in God is just an idea or a reality. In a sharp analysis Updike presents the thesis aspect of the problem through Rabbit who admits, “Ideas used to grab me too. It’s not that you get better ideas, the old ones just get tired” (Redux 162). The streak of pessimism continues as he finds material things lacking concreteness. He muses that, “After a while you see that even Dollars and Cents are just an idea”, and the cynicism reaches such a lowest point that he declares that if “somebody came up to me and said, ‘I’m God, I’d say, ‘show me your badge’ ” (Redux 162). This solipsistic opinion of Rabbit constitutes the ‘nay’ aspect of the dialectical vision about God and can be attributed to his extreme estrangement from social relationships.

The ‘yea’ aspect is provided by Jill who addresses the cardinal problem of how to account for the ills that plague humanity. The extreme loss of religious faith manifested in Rabbit’s denial of God’s existence is born out of pragmatism that God doesn’t intervene in human affairs. In the enthusiastic description of the thrill he had in driving Porsche through the mountain, Nelson observes that the place is quite deserted except for the hawks that are waiting for carcasses of cows and things. This innocuous observation ignites a debate on the evil aspect of creation. Holding the apology for evil, Rabbit remarks that “Hawks got to live too” (Redux 162) emphasizing the inherent antithesis of life and death.
Jill’s answer foregrounds the Blakean mystery of evil. She avers that “God is in the tiger as well as in the lamb” (Redux 162). If the loving side of God is reflected in the lamb, the otherness of God is reflected in the tiger. The issue of evil in Blakean world, according to Foster Damon articulated in his article “Three Sounds of Experience” is “how to reconcile the Forgiveness of Sins (the Lamb) with the Punishment of Sins (the Tyger)” (29). He observes that Blake did not consider evil abstractly for his conception of God was personal. Therefore, Blake reasoned that evil must be God’s wrath and accepted the basic goodness of God’s creation. The aphorism, ‘The Tygers of wrath are wiser than the Horses of instruction’ in his Proverbs of Hell underlines his belief in the goodness in God’s wrath. Though this conception of evil articulated in Jill’s retort is at divergence with Barthian view of evil as an unwilled aspect of creation, it challenges Boswell’s avowed stand to impute responsibility to God for the evils of the world.

It is not the wrath of God that extinguishes Jill’s life, but man’s rage emanating from convoluted notions of superiority. The intensity of the loss is amplified as in her death one finds extermination of innocence. Becky’s death in Rabbit, Run was one such instance for she was incapable of differentiating good and evil. Despite her awareness of good and evil, Jill is as innocent as Becky. Her visions and aspirations moulded on religious scale are put to test by a fiery ordeal and like Christ, only by dying she proves that her commitment was sincere and true. Though Jill’s death appears to have been a colossal waste, on deep reflection, it does have a positive effect on Rabbit by opening his eyes to the meaning of faith, though belatedly.
Later recalling her death, he muses in *Rabbit is Rich*: “Water, flanges, the tongues of God; a man is helpless” (Rich 104). Over awed by the power of God, he feels puny and realizes his limitation.

How could then a helpless man trounced by fear, confront the reality of living? According to Martin Israel, “no one can come to an authentic knowledge of love except through fear” (63). If Jill offers love as the antidote to fear, Sketeer being a victimized other, trusts in black power. But he fails to note that this solution is flawed for man’s quest for security in power ironically brings in the opposite effect of the dialectics. Rollo May observes this contradiction: “Our curious predicament is that the same processes which make modern man so powerful – the magnificent development of atomic and other kinds of technical energy – are the very processes which render us powerless” (187). It is against this background that moon landing which is a metaphor for America’s technological might and which is the most visible external circumstance that Rabbit is exposed to should be critiqued.

The centrality of the moon and the space flight to the novel conceded by Updike is captured by Joyce Markle: “The novel is itself a moon shot: Janice’s affair launches her husband, as he and his father witness the take off of Apollo 11 in the Phoenix bar, into the extraterrestrial world”(83). James Schiff observes: “More significantly, the Apollo 11 moon mission, experienced through television, becomes the novel’s central metaphor, linking thematically as well as linguistically to the lives of Updike’s characters” (138). The protagonist exhibits a state of powerlessness in his admission which refers equally to the moonshot and to Janice’s flight: “I know it’s happened but
I don’t feel anything yet” (Redux 100). Newman notes that technology, both old and new, has a dehumanizing effect of fostering on Rabbit “dependence and emotional deadness” (49). Since the personal events at the terrestrial level affect him far more deeply, the day of moon landing with its focus on the empty space does not enthuse Rabbit much. Nevertheless, it has significance for he attains self-realization, a sort of enlightenment like Buddha: “Thirty six years old and he knows less than when he started with the difference that now he knows how little he’ll always know” (Redux 22). But the awareness that he knows less stands as a great self-illumination because the panel talks of experts on T.V seek to endow the event with a bloated significance that would endure for the next five hundred years.

Rabbit finds that the whole space business is “all about emptiness” (Redux 22). In contrast to the experts enthusiasm in according significance and importance which paralleled Columbus’s discovery of America, “Rabbit can see its exact opposite: Columbus flew blind and hit something, these guys see exactly where they’re aiming and it’s a big round nothing” (Redux 22). Therefore, the most momentous technological event of the century touted as a metaphor for aspiration, according to Grenier who opines in The Other John Updike, “ends not in transcendence but with the exploration of space, emptiness, and a dead bulk which can only reflect light” (69). Updike foregrounds the moon shot to perform multiple functions, signifying the nothingness against space-time reality.

Analyzing the relationship between space and time, one gets the view that Updike places a premium on the existential experience of living. In contrast to Heideggerian
notion of pre-eminence of time over space, he emphasizes the uniqueness of the geographical reality and not the mere presence occasioned by time. Quentin Miller’s observation that, “Setting is never merely a background in John Updike’s fiction. His characters are so intertwined with their settings that their very identities adhere to certain places” (15), proves the point. This is foregrounded in Rabbit’s introspection on life. Being at the lowest ebb of spirit, he expresses his failure poignantly towards the conclusion of the novel: “No house, no wife, no job. My kid hates me. My sister says I’m ridiculous” (Redux 373). In his youth, the very presence of brick front houses set amidst maple trees gave an excitement which mingled “with the magic of his own existence” (Redux 373). Hunt says, “In Rabbit Redux, Rabbit… reflects that he alone experiences guilt because ‘women and nature forget’ ” (213). He is unable to forget because nature is invested with the significance of being a witness to his life and it was around this one particular place of the universe that his life revolved which invested a special meaning to that place: “These mundane surfaces had given witness to his life; this chalice had held his blood; here the universe had centered, each downtwirling maple seed of more account than galaxies” (Redux 373). What is ordinary becomes extraordinary by the physical and geographical existence of the individual Dasien.

But the unpleasant experiences of the past had erased the charm as he finds himself caught in a twisted and weird ambience of the sixties. The individual centred place loses its special association in memory and becomes like millions of American streets that hold millions of lives whose existence is neither noticed nor the loss mourned. Updike observes that even the very geographical realities are finally erased for they “do not even mourn
their own passing but instead grimace at the wrecking ball with the same gaunt facades that have out weathered all their winters” (Redux 373). This seems to suggest that even physical realities devoid of a spiritual orientation do not have ultimate significance.

Analyzing the position of the major characters of the novel from the Keirkegaardian stand point, one finds Jill alone coming out as a Keirkegaardian knight of faith. In her commitment to the socio-political philosophy of the 1960’s in what is termed as liberalism, she is very authentic and becomes a martyr to her convictions. Her death by fire is a symbolic affirmation of the price one has to pay for the choice one makes. A pertinent query now is, will not imputing religious faith to a hippie and a flower girl amount to a travesty of fact? Analysis of what is meant by religious sphere in Kierkegaardian terms shows that it involves a contradiction. Patrick Gardiner quotes Kierkegaard thus:

The aesthetic sphere is the sphere of immediacy, the ethical the sphere of requirement …, the religious the sphere of fulfillment, but please note, not a fulfillment such as when one fills an alms box or a sack with gold, for repentance has specifically created a boundless space and as a consequence the religious contradiction: simultaneously to be out on 70,000 fathoms of water and yet be joyful. (29)

Applying the above rubric, one finds Jill undergoing the contradictory experience of joy in the midst of sorrow which undoubtedly qualifies her for the religious sphere. Besides that the trajectory of the individuals in Kierkegardian universe is never final for they move in and move out among the spheres as in the case of Abraham. Flynn
observes when Abraham, “descends the mountain where the sacrifice of Isaac was to have taken place, he is returning to the ethical sphere.” Therefore, “in the final analysis … the individual is above the universal. Standard moral rules are no longer absolute in the sense of demanding to be followed by all and always” (Flynn 35). This apparent violation of moral code is validated in the Existentialist’s code.

If aesthetic sphere is the sphere of immediacy, in *Rabbit Redux*, one finds Rabbit perplexed by external circumstances and always falling inwards unlike in *Rabbit, Run* where the impulse was to run. He wants to return to somewhere and this is made clear in the title of the novel which is very intriguing. The word ‘Redux’ means ‘led back’ and figuratively ‘cured’ (Campbell 130). If Rabbit is cured then what is he cured of or where is he led back? Updike implies that Rabbit does have a realization that unlike in *Rabbit, Run* when he was sure that if he had the guts to be himself others would pay the price for it, he is now aware that he is no more than a speck in the vast universe and the meaning of living is the recognition of the demand of others. This realization voiced through Peggy, one of the minor characters foregrounds that, “living is a compromise, between doing what *you* want and doing what *other* people want” (Redux 109). The entire action of the novel is oriented towards this realization through the external circumstances that confronts the protagonist and his final capitulation to Janice is a manifestation of the new insight.

The issue then is whether a Hegelian resolution of the dialectical interplay of self and society would account for peaceful resolution of societal problems. But there cannot be a linear approach to the problems of the world without reckoning the question
of the transcendental. Updike notes that the society is not merely a sum total of individual aspirations which can be tempered by the recognition of the boundary limits of the individuals. There is a powerful external force which has its impact on ordinary life. That’s why Rabbit poses the question “What about what poor old God wants?” to Peggy whose belief lies in the Hegelian synthesis of life as a compromise (Redux 109). A startled Peggy poses the counter question that “People should be regarded as God” which invites Rabbit’s meaningful retort, “No, I think God is everything that isn’t people” (Redux 110). By stressing the difference between God and people, Updike gives expression to the Barthian concept of wholly other God and simultaneously critiques the socialistic views that were creeping in America which would require people being accorded the primacy of God.

Reverting to the existential question of why do people run and the theological question of where they run to posed at the beginning of this chapter, one finds that both get resolved in Rabbit’s answer that God and man are different. Barthian concept requires God’s unilateral act of saving and this requires conviction in miracles, in the sense that happening of unnatural events are perfectly within comprehension. Here, the characters are mostly ideology driven, ideologies that emanate from the immediacy of external circumstances and are immune to the presence of grace outside. The reason for men to run stems out of man’s breach with God and where they run to is also without comprehension, lacking proper orientation. This perplexes and in effect paralyses Rabbit. Rollo May who analyses the cause for man’s restlessness declares: “It is an old and ironic habit of human beings to run faster when we have lost our way” (15). This is what precisely happens to a bewildered Rabbit.
Rabbit represents the middleness of America, an America which is too feeble to take a leap of faith but too strongly entrenched in materialism that it repels the grace of God. There is no specific act of intervention of the divine in *Rabbit Redux* primarily because all the characters run furtively away from the locus of God, charting out their own territorial and personal exploration. Edward O’Conner’s preface to *Run Baby Run*, an autobiography of Nick Cruz, a gangster recounted in his autobiography from which the title of this chapter is taken, on the miracles wrought by God’s grace in the life of are pertinent: “It is natural to suspect the genuineness of changes that are so radical and abrupt. But there is no theological reason to discount them. God’s grace can take hold of a man in an instant and transform a sinner into a saint” (2). In the absence of robust faith that would enable these characters to acknowledge the intervention of God, it would be too much to expect them to believe in a miracle.

At the end of the novel, one finds Rabbit confronting the same existential problems that engulfed him in *Rabbit, Run* without any obvious solution. Though he seems to be tolerant of others, despite his ideas being in conflict with that of others, he does not take a principled stand. Christopher Butler while speaking of tolerance, considers principled willingness as a pre-requisite. “Tolerance is a principled willingness to put up with the expression and pursuit of beliefs that you know to be wrong, for the sake of some larger ideal” (122). Rabbit lacks such larger vision and his life is in a stagnant state. This gives enough leeway to the novelist to dissect the protagonist’s material and spiritual status in the third novel of the tetralogy, *Rabbit is Rich* which is analysed in the next chapter.