

## FICTIONAL SPACE AND IDEOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENTS IN UPDIKE'S RABBIT, RUN AND RABBIT REDUX

Eduard Vlad

Prof., PhD, "Ovidius" University of Constanța

*Abstract: The current essay considers the ways in which civitas, urbs, and polis, public space and domestic place are "tainted", assuming artistic shape in the complex relationship between the fictional spaces of John Updike's first two novels of his Rabbit Tetralogy and significant developments emerging in the 1950s and 1960s in America. Rabbit, Run and Rabbit Redux, as the first segments of what came to be called John Updike's Rabbit Tetralogy, contribute to a more comprehensive cultural and ideological landscape and the cultural and socio-political world in which the novels were created, published, and received.*

*Keywords: literary cartography, civitas, urbs, polis, ideology.*

Like apparently neutral landscapes, as well as other kinds of scapes, such as Arjun Appadurai's,<sup>1</sup> space and urban place are far from "innocent", showing fluid, but dynamic power configurations featuring conflict and confrontation. Gearoid O Tuathail stresses the "lack of innocence" of the spaces and places of geography as a whole: "Although often assumed to be innocent, the geography of the world is not a product of nature but a product of histories of struggle between competing authorities over the power to organize, occupy, and administer space".<sup>2</sup> Like geographical (and geopolitical) spaces and places, fictional ones are also "tainted" by competing discourses, displaying ideology and power coordinates. Updike's are no exception.

What follows considers the ways in which *civitas, urbs, and polis*, space and urban place are "tainted", assuming artistic shape in the complex relationship between the fictional spaces of John Updike's first two novels of his *Rabbit Tetralogy* and significant developments emerging in the 1950s and 1960s in America. *Rabbit, Run* and *Rabbit Redux*, as the first segments of what came to be called John Updike's *Rabbit Tetralogy*, contribute to a more comprehensive cultural and ideological landscape and the cultural and socio-political world in which the novels were created, published, and received. This involved an ideological framework that shows American experience as affecting an average WASP American citizen, Harry Angstrom, in the decades associated with The Cold War and with the early, defining episodes of what has been called by such people as Henry Robinson Luce "the American Century".<sup>3</sup> That was an age accommodating a variety of perceptions of a world of clashing ideologies whose intensity grew from the so-called conformist 1950s through the countercultural 1960s going through the Culture Wars years and the following decades up to what Francis Fukuyama would describe as "the end of history and the last man" in his

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<sup>1</sup> Arjun Appadurai. "Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy". *The Globalization Reader*. Fifth Edition. Ed. Frank J. Lechner and John Boli. Wiley Blackwell, 2015: 97-103.

<sup>2</sup> Gearoid O Tuathail. *Critical Geopolitics: The Politics of Writing Global Space*. London: Routledge, 1996: 1.

<sup>3</sup> In Eduard Vlad. *Dictionar polemic de cultura americana*. Iasi: Institutul European, 2012: 28-29. According to Luce, the American century did not begin around 1900, but it was to be heralded by America's impending involvement in WW II.

eponymous, and controversial, 1992 book<sup>4</sup>. For the sake of brevity and considering the inevitable constraints of one particular essay, the current essay does examine the whole of Updike's narrative itinerary all the way to "the end of history and the last man", focusing on the first two novels and the first two decades, examining both the connections between representations of space and place on the one hand and attending ideological features of the time associated with these representations on the other, and between these configurations - space, place, inner expressions of ideology - and the defining characteristics of each of these two decades (the "outer" ideology). All this complex and comprehensive literary and ideological landscape displays dynamic and conflicting features and dimensions.

How do the landmarks and overall patterns of urban space in Updike's work contribute to a better perception of ideological clashes and negotiations and in what ways are they linked to the drama and thematic framework of a changing fictional world, which, transcending its inevitable artificiality, is much more about "the State of the Union" in the Cold War decades than about the tribulations, sometimes pathetic, often comic, often unpolitically correct, of one particular character, Harry Angstrom, as seen from a 21<sup>st</sup> century perspective?

The first set of the Rabbit novels (*Rabbit, Run* and *Rabbit Redux*), shows significant developments in Updike's vision spanning, and having to do with, America's first two decades of its postwar history. The two novels link place, space, mapping and character to aspects of American identity in their respective narratives, each of them set one decade apart, providing a comprehensive framework and point of reference. This conjunction stresses the importance of what Robert T. Tally, Jr. describes in terms of "literary cartographies". "Literary cartographies" is the title, while "spatiality, representation, and narrative", showing the above-mentioned conjunction, is the subtitle of the 2014 volume that Tally edited.<sup>5</sup> Most, if not all, novelists are literary cartographers, and John Updike is particularly conspicuous as far as his "cartographic impulse" is concerned.

*Rabbit, Run*, published in 1960, has more to do with a response to, and an attempt made by a young man to escape the middle class conformism of the previous decade. The main points of "cartographic reference", so to speak, are the geographic relationships between the town of Mt. Judge, where Harry Angstrom lives at the end of the 1950s, and the adjoining city of Brewer, Pennsylvania, where he works. In which ways are the meanings associated with *civitas* and *urbs* relevant to Harry Angstrom and his identity narrative in this first Rabbit novel?

Yi-Fu Tuan, in his "The City as a Moral Universe", notes the main meanings that the city has had since ancient times, as well as a perceived tendency, which he significantly describes in the past tense: "Since classical antiquity the city has had two principal meanings in the West: human relationships (*civitas*) and built forms (*urbs*). For a long time the former was dominant".<sup>6</sup> That is, integration, cooperation, human progress were seen as the highlights of the Enlightenment project of modernity. This project, for obvious patriarchal reasons, neglected unresolved conflicts, tensions and injustice having to do with one central area of human relationships: gender. The civic sense, civility, as well as the Protestant work ethic grew together in the shape of *civitas* in urban settlements. Then, in an age of combined affluence and anxiety (consider the name of Angstrom), the increasing appeal of consumerism, as the new opium of the people, to borrow Marx's famous phrase. In addition

<sup>4</sup>It is worth noting that Fukuyama's volume and its title's apparently apocalyptic statement (*The End of History and the Last Man*. Free Press, 1992) was significantly preceded by a mid-1989 article, published in *The National Interest*, assuming a less assertive title: "The End of History?"

<sup>5</sup>Robert T. Tally Jr, ed. *Literary Cartographies: Spatiality, Representation, and Narrative*. New York and Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014.

<sup>6</sup>Yi-Fu Tuan. "The City as a Moral Universe". *Geographical Review*. Vol.78. No. 3 (Jul., 1988): 316.

to human relationships and built forms, which might justify the “moral universe” of urban settings, in addition to the city of Brewer (mainly featuring work and human relationships) and its suburb, the town of Mt. Judge (home address, family and neighbors), Updike’s narrator adds another important, ominous presence: the mysterious form of relief that gives its name to the town: the mountain. The presence of the mountain will add an irrational, anti-Enlightenment dimension to Rabbit’s narrative and Updike’s cartographic designs, encouraging psychoanalytical readings.

Before the mountain Mt. Judge is mapped into *Rabbit, Run*’s cartography, the reader first sees Harry Angstrom clowning around with a bunch of kids playing basketball in his neighborhood. On his way home, he catches sight of the children, grabs the ball, engages in a short match, shows how good he still is at the game. The kids are unimpressed, though. Who is this stranger who is spoiling their sport? By this short intimation of the past prowess and fame Harry had had as a teenager, one will soon see, and the protagonist will soon be painfully aware of this condition, his present, unheroic failure as a young adult with a glamorous sporting history.

For the time being, Harry, or should one already call him Rabbit, picks up his folded coat and starts running up an alley, past a deserted ice plant which already sets the coordinates of a post - T.S.Eliot waste land, not in April, the cruellest month, but in March, which might show promise, as one might anticipate from a hint in these lines: “Ashcans, garage doors, fences of chicken-wire caging crisscrossing stalks of dead flowers. The month is March. Love makes the air light [...] Things start anew”.<sup>7</sup> For a moment he feels “the fresh chance in the air” (Ibid.), throws his pack of cigarettes. What follows is his optimistic running uphill, thus territorializing part of the topographic space of the neighborhood in which he lives.

He goes up Wilbur Street, then past a block of homes, pictured as “small fortresses of cement”(Ibid.), obviously suggesting not the integrative power of *civitas*, but an expression of individualism. On his way, he walks past another development of frame homes going uphill, symbolically each one surpassing the previous one by a tall man’s height (six feet) like a staircase (social ladder?), but without preserving the optimistic connotations of the protagonist’s initial ascent. The urban picture turns bleak: on the steep slope, with each house rising above its neighboring dwelling on this topographic and social staircase, each house features a pair of “wan windows, wide-spaced like the eyes of an animal”, while the fronts are “scabby clapboards, once white”(8). This is an urbanscape or suburbanscape which, initially suggesting competition and social mobility, acquires the connotations contributed by “wan”, “scabby”, and the eyes of a desperate (trapped?) animal.

Rabbit soon reaches his own home, which looks like the ones below and above it. Like the previous perceptions of specific neighborhood features, “His downstairs neighbor’s door across the hall is shut like a hurt face”(Ibid.). Some other details might convey an even more pronounced symbolic significance, though: “The wood steps up to it are worn; under them there is a cubbyhole of dirt where a lost toy molds. A plastic clown”(Ibid.). The clown might have something to do with his clowning around a little earlier, or maybe soon afterward as well. As for the “cubbyhole of dirt”, which obviously has little to do with either *civitas* or *urbs*, one might associate it with subsequent images of one particular “heart of darkness”.

The family scene which ensues in the private space of the home is obviously meant to justify Rabbit’s imminent flight from his domestic duties. The cluttered inner space as place is dominated by two presences: a television and a woman avidly watching it. The centrality of

<sup>7</sup> John Updike. *Rabbit Angstrom: The Four Novels*. New York/London/Toronto: Alfred A. Knopf, 1995: 7. Henceforth, all references to *Rabbit, Run* and *Rabbit Redux* will refer to this edition, consisting of simple, parenthetical page references.

television in the private place of the American home had become unquestioned by the time in which the novel was set, as Martin Halliwell notes: “Nearly 90 per cent of homes had a TV set by 1959 and as a cultural artefact it was virtually impossible to avoid”.<sup>8</sup> It should be said from the beginning that, in the rhetoric of this patriarchal novel, the television is not meant to tear husband and wife apart, on the contrary. Rabbit and Janice have both replaced books and the radio with TV viewing as main mass-cultural activity, although the protagonist is shown to be fed up with excessive Tootsie Roll advertising: “He’s seen it fifty times and this time it turns his stomach”(10).

Janice, Harry’s wife, is shown to be pregnant, drunk, chain smoking, enslaved by television, the new, stultifying propagator of mass culture and its inherent consumerism. She is not trying too hard to avoid becoming both an alcoholic and a shopaholic. She appears to be fond of shopping and of getting all sorts of useless stuff. What’s more, “poor, innocent” Harry is reproached by his wife for his immaculate ways: “You don’t drink, now you don’t smoke. What are you doing, becoming a saint?”(Ibid.) A little later, the narrator explores Rabbit’s consciousness to show his predicament. Like the wan, exhausted and hunted animal image suggested by the suburban environment, the protagonist becomes painfully aware of his condition, or at least imagines himself to be a victim of it: “Rabbit freezes, standing looking at his faint yellow shadow on the white door that leads to the hall, and senses he is in a trap. It seems certain” (18).

Author and narrator conspire, in the novel’s rhetoric, to show their male solidarity with the protagonist. This is technically done with increasing doses of free indirect discourse with Harry becoming the focalizer, one timid sample illustrated in the short quote above. Sainly Rabbit has reasons to break free, to run, and there is ample self-justification for that in a male author’s narrative about “*son semblable, son frère*”, to use Baudelaire’s form of addressing the reader in “Au lecteur” in his *Fleurs du mal*. However, Baudelaire, or his poetic persona, in the same famous/notorious poem, openly states his, and his brothers’ undeterred descent to Hell:

the Devil’s hand directs our every move  
the things we loathed become the things we love;  
day by day we drop through stinking shades  
quite undeterred on our descent to Hell.<sup>9</sup>

Unlike Baudelaire’s damned poetic persona, Updike’s Rabbit climbs down his hill, not to Hell, but towards more civilized urban places. He does it on the laudable pretext of recovering his son from his mother’s place and his car from his mother-in-law’s. On his way down, *civitas* and *urbs* combine their features to show the protagonist the right path, with poetical images of mailboxes and telephone poles suggesting communication and secular communion:

At the corner, where Wilbur Street meets Potter Avenue, a mailbox stands leaning in twilight on its concrete post. Tall two-petaled street sign, the cleat-gouged trunk of the telephone pole holding its insulators against the sky, fire hydrant like a golden bush: a grove. He used to love to climb the poles. To shinny up from a friend’s shoulders until the ladder of spikes came to your hands, to get up to where you could hear the wires sing (15).

The descent, like the previous ascent, meticulously maps the geography of the human and natural setting that will provide a justification for the protagonist’s behavior. Rabbit goes past a narrow gravel alley, the “blank back side of a box factory”, reaching “a truly old stone farmhouse”, which is foregrounded, along with an adjoining building seen as a sinful place (alcohol and cards), offering shelter to Rabbit’s former basketball coach:

<sup>8</sup>Martin Halliwell. *American Culture in the 1950s*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007: 147.

<sup>9</sup>Charles Baudelaire. *Les Fleurs du Mal*. The new translation by Richard Howard. Boston: David R. Godine, Publisher, Inc., 1983: 5.



This farmhouse [...] still retains, behind a shattered and vandalized fence, its yard, a junkheap of brown stalks and eroded timber [...] The entrance is made ominous by a strange shed, the size of an outhouse, erected each winter across the door, to protect the bar from the weather [...] The first floor was a bar and the second was full of card tables [...] Alcohol and cards Rabbit both associates with a depressing kind of sin, sin with breath, and he was further depressed by the political air of the place. His old basketball coach, Marty Tothoro, who before scandal had ousted him from the high school had a certain grip on local affairs, lived in this building [...] The thought of his old coach crouching in there frightens him (16-17).

There follows the scene which maps the town of Mt. Judge and the city of Brewer, with the ominous presence of the mountain in between, whose forest appears inaccessible to the town boys, the narrator obviously including Rabbit among them, a space and place configuration reminiscent of the cartographic coordinates of Updike's birth and seedtime that featured the small town of Shillington close to the larger city of Reading, Pennsylvania:

[...] the town of Mt. Judge is built on the east side of the mountain Mt. Judge, whose west face overlooks the city of Brewer. Though the town and the city meet along the highway that skirts the mountain on the south on the way to Philadelphia fifty miles away, they will never merge, for between them the mountain lifts a broad green spine, two miles long north to south, assaulted by gravel pits and cemeteries and new developments but above a line preserved, hundreds of acres of forest Mt. Judge boys can never wholly explore (17).

So, between the *civitas* and *urbs* of the city of Brewer and the town of Mt. Vernon and an unexplored, mysterious space, what Rabbit/ Harry prefers is the second option. Or is it forced upon him by his unconscious, his Id? To see Rabbit's decision in terms of this clear-cut and simple either - or option is obviously a simplification, Updike's cartography is far more comprehensive throughout the novel, and so is a complicated set of human relationships in a far from well-ordered, rational and rationalized urban environment.

In his *Writing the City: Urban Visions & Literary Modernism*, Desmond Harding discusses the disintegration of traditional social relationships in the postmodern metropolis, but his remarks apply to smaller, but equally postmodern, urban visions, like those surrounding Rabbit and his kith and kin: 'The metropolis we are now confronted with is a "de-centered" postmodernist city, the culmination of a progressive devaluation of the Enlightenment idea of the city as the form and symbol of an integrated social relationship.'<sup>10</sup>

Rabbit would agree with Desmond Harding about the postmodern metropolis. Once he surreptitiously recovers his car, parked outside his in-laws' home, he decides to head south, avoiding Philadelphia – "Dirtiest city in the world, they live on poisoned water, you can taste the chemicals"(23). He is determined to drive towards more proper places, cleaner climes of orange groves and barefoot women, probably proclaiming himself, in Freud's words, one of civilization's discontents.

Driving at night, he gets lost and does not reach Florida's groves and women, ending up in West Virginia, in the middle of nowhere. As he drives back, Mark Tothoro's current habitation, the dilapidated building of the Sunshine Athletic Club, which Rabbit used to associate with sin, attracts him irresistibly. After the description of this place of perdition, the reader is in for a surprise. Tothoro does what a priest or a very sensible friend or authority figure should do. He gives Rabbit a moral lesson, reminding him of his domestic responsibilities. A little later, seeing that Rabbit is unimpressed, he will suggest a double date. Tothoro will then help him start his downhill race, in which the mountain is assigned contradictory symbolic significance.

<sup>10</sup>Desmond Harding. *Writing the City: Urban Visions & Literary Modernism*. New York and London: Routledge, 2003: x.

From instinctual, irrational, mysterious to the vantage point associated with God's perspective on the lives of the members of a whole community. In this context, the church and the mountain add their symbolism to the discussions between Pastor Jack Eccles and Harry, the running rabbit. The pastor will try to bring Rabbit on the right path, after the lost sheep slaps the pastor's wife's bottom on his very first visit to the Rectory. It is fair to say that Rabbit has not come to look for spiritual enlightenment, but as a result of the pastor's invitation to a game of golf.

Gardening work on Mrs. Smith's estate will provide some of the restorative power that this American Everyman or this American lapsed Adam needs to run through the suburban Purgatory for several months – from Janice to Ruth, from Ruth to Janice, from Janice to Ruth, from Ruth to Janice - rather than go straight to Hell.

The beginning of the second section of the book shows Rabbit as focalizer waxing poetic, trying to beat Updike at his trade, while working in Mrs. Smith's garden. The cramped suburban environment with which the novel started is replaced by this new, idyllic, Edenic setting. Harry admires and is puzzled by the beauty and natural simplicity of flowers and bushes. The long descriptive scene shows that, although briefly mentioning God and the Church, he remains a natural man in the New Testament meaning (1Corinthians 2:14). Is Updike the Catholic from a shabby house making a religious joke or is he just poking fun, once more, at his faith-tormented, blasphemous character?:

When the first blooms came they were like the single big flower Oriental temptresses wear on the sides of their heads on the covers of the paperback spy stories Ruth reads. But when the hemispheres of blossom appear in crowds they remind him of nothing so much as the hats worn by cheap girls to church on Easter. Harry has often wanted and never had a girl like that, a little Catholic from a shabby house, dressed in flashy bargain clothes (142 – 143).

In addition to being a writer with a strong cartographic sense, so to speak, Updike is obviously both poetically-minded and permanently drawn to irony and humor. He quickly moves from the innocent admiration of the garden to the thought of the flowers that the Oriental *femmes fatales* in the cheap spy stories that his lover Ruth reads. Rabbit, however, falls prey to the less Oriental temptresses that happen to come his way in his middle class, WASP version of Jack Kerouac's Beat flight along America's postwar roads.

At the beginning of the novel, the block of three-story dwellings around his suburban home had been seen in terms of such adjectives as "wan" and "scabby". The novel ends with Harry having to make the final option, since the text is almost over and the reader needs a New Year's resolution, so to speak. This time, he entertains a more useful, socially-sanctioned illusion: "Although this block of brick three-stories is just like the one he left, something in it makes him happy; the steps and windowsills seem to twitch and shift in the corner of his eye, alive. This illusion trips him" (316). He starts running again. This time he is running home, not away from home, with the staircase and windowsills twitching, shifting, looking alive. This illusion, however, will soon be dispelled: the baby that Janice accidentally drowns will figuratively haunt the house, killing any trace of twitching and shifting in the couple's love life. From now on, they will drift apart.

*Rabbit Redux* came out in 1971, but starts its narrative development around July 1969, juxtaposing outer space (the first landing on the Moon), public space (largely mediated by television coverage of the Vietnam War and of the 1969 race riots) and suburban middle class space and place, whose apparent peace and quiet is affected by a new cultural movement. Rabbit does not have to run very fast, this time, as the counterculture will catch up with him, even if he styles himself an ordinary, mainstream American citizen.

In *Rabbit, Run*, Harry was living in the cramped, working class neighborhood up the hill in the suburban Mt. Vernon, while working in the city of Brewer, the two areas separated by the mysterious mountain in between them. Like the previous volume, *Rabbit Redux*

features figurative uses, and mapping of space and place, around the city of Brewer, with one significant addition: Park Villas. Apparently, by moving from the working class suburb of Mt. Vernon to the more affluent upper-class development west of the city of Brewer, Rabbit has climbed up at least one rung of the social ladder. However, the situation is far from unproblematic from the very beginning.

Again, the mountain seems to be an ominous presence, although now, in mid-summer, at the time the narrative starts, there is less unexplored, mysterious darkness casting its shadow over what is referred to as “the stagnant city of Brewer”. The urban space in Brewer, although shown in broad daylight, is equally depressing, with “row houses differentiated by speckled bastard sidings”, with “sooty ginkgo trees” and “hopeful small porches with their jigsaw brackets and gray milk-bottle boxes”(269).

All these cartographic details “wince beneath a brilliance like a frozen explosion”(Ibid.). This is in keeping with character presentation: two men, Harry Angstrom and his father, emerge “pale” from a little printing plant. What’s more, they are seen as “ghosts for an instant”, also blinking in the above mentioned brilliance like a frozen explosion. They are not shown as runners, not even as working class. They are seen as plodders, worse, as captives “released from work” in the city of Brewer, an urban space which is desperately trying to “revive its dying downtown” by demolition, thus creating “a desolate openness, weedy and rubble”, “exposing church façades never seen from a distance and generating new perspectives”, “intensifying the cruel breadth of the light” (Ibid.). The starting point can hardly justify the widespread perception which Joseph George notes in book on postmodern suburban spaces his *Postmodern Suburban Spaces: Philosophy, Ethics, and Community in Postwar American Fiction* about *Rabbit Redux* in particular, about the Rabbit novels in general: “the novel, and in fact all of Updike’s Rabbit Tales, have a reputation for being sexist, racist, and jingoist”.<sup>11</sup> The age of these Rabbit Tales is the age of the tales of JFK and the Rat Pack, among others, and Updike, far from (wholly) identifying with his protagonist, detaches himself from his protagonist through his highly ironic mode, dramatizing, once again, the conflicting forces of the countercultural age, mainstream ‘respectability’ and radical nonconformism assuming memorable illustrations.

The domestic space from which Rabbit was running in the first volume of the Rabbit novels sees the emergence of a feminine presence as a speaking, thinking and performing subject: Janice. She is the one who defines herself in opposition to the subservient role that she had been assigned in the patriarchal cartography of the fictional world. About the same time that Armstrong lands on the Moon, Janice engages in her first outer space odyssey, flying away from the drab, domestic place she shares with her husband Harry ‘Rabbit’ Angstrom to Charlie Stavros, her lover.

Free indirect discourse in *Rabbit Redux* appears to be focusing on Janice in the early sections of the text; the private space of the home is what Janice is running away from: “Janice, run”, the novel appears to say at the time feminism is gaining momentum in the middle and late 1960s. More instances of free indirect discourse will allow Updike to explore the various consciousnesses of his characters, in addition to Rabbit’s, displaying their ideological biases and prejudices, such as Harry’s view on blacks assuming an increasingly more prominent position in the formerly segregated public space.

In the countercultural story in which Harry and his son Nelson get involved, in the absence of “runaway Janice”, who has asserted her individual declaration of independence from Harry for a while, there is an assorted of figures associated with that particular age, the late 1960s and its challenge to mainstream morality: Jill, a rich, white teenage woman who

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<sup>11</sup> Joseph George. *Postmodern Suburban Spaces: Philosophy, Ethics, and Community in Postwar American Fiction*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2016: 107.

runs away from home, and Skeeter, an African American Vietnam War veteran turned drug dealer in the age of “drugs, sex, and rock and roll”. In this story, the house in Penn Park acquires almost supernatural powers, starting from the very beginning. Apparently, it is just one of those middle class new homes, showing their inhabitants’ upward mobility, and Rabbit appears to be one of these typical inhabitants. However, like Poe’s House of Usher, the house in Penn Park, placed down a street of “mock Tudor” is shown from the very beginning as being inauthentic, even flawed, with cracks showing that something is rotten in this neighborhood, or something wrong is going to happen:

Rabbit gets off at a stop in Penn Park and walks down a street of mock Tudor, Emberly Avenue, to where the road surface changes at the township line, and becomes Emberly Drive in Penn Villas. He lives on Vista Crescent, third house from the end. Once there may have been here a vista, a softly sloped valley of red barns and fieldstone farmhouses, but more Penn Villas has been added and now the view from any window is as into a fragmented mirror, of houses like this, telephone wires and television aerials showing where the glass cracked (279).

The windows of Rabbit’s house, like cracked, fragmented mirrors, will show facets of America moving away from the more conformist 1950s to the excesses of the late 1960s. In Janice’s absence, Rabbit will form a commune, the right countercultural thing to do around the time of the Summer of Love, and drugs and free sex will be the ingredients that will accompany the debates on politics, religion, gender and race issues typical of the age, with the Penn Park house accommodating this nonconformist set of characters. If the cracked and gloomy House of Usher crumbles into the adjacent tarn, Rabbit’s house of countercultural perdition is set fire to by one of the scandalized, mainstream neighbors, with Jill being caught and dying in it. Soon, circumstances and twists of fate will bring Rabbit and his wife together again. Ironically, Rabbit is restored to his new condition as a respectable American citizen. It so happens that, if in Rabbit, Run, much in response to the Beat and existentialist ethos of the time, Harry exemplifies an individual’s temporary rebellion and flight from one specific domestic place as one specific response to the general conformism of the 1950s, the domestic place in Rabbit Redux becomes “wild”, an explosion of nonconformism challenging *civitas* in a mainstream – countercultural clash, a “scarlet house” which, like the protagonist’s “scarlet letter” in Hawthorne’s famous novel, draws the mainstream community’s angry disapproval.

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