

Rabbit, run



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Rabbit, Run Rabbit, Run was published in 1960 by American author John Updike. He wrote three more Rabbit novels, one at the end of the '60s, '70s, and '80s. He says these novels became “ a running report on the state of my hero and his nation. ” He won the Pulitzer Prize for the “ final” two books. series continued after Rabbit’s death in Updike’s 2001 novella, Rabbit Remembered. In 2006, The Rabbit series was voted number four on The New York Times list of “ the best work of American fiction of the past 25 years. Rabbit, Run was also selected by Time magazine as one of the top 100 books from 1923-2005. And the novel is also listed by the American Library Association as one of the 100 most frequently banned books in the 20th century. Banned? set in 1959, Rabbit, Run touches on some delicate issues, like prostitution, male and female orgasms, alcoholism, adultery, blow jobs, homosexuality (though only briefly and ambiguously), birth control, abortion, and even accidental. Its 26-year old protagonist Harry " Rabbit" Angstrom even leers at 14-year old girls (though only to make his girlfriend jealous).

Rabbit, Run also has lots of conversations between people arguing about different Christian philosophies, a main character with a bit of a Jesus Complex, a couple of atheists, and even a Freudian. Rabbit, Run was also what some consider a “ biting critique” of America in 1959 The American Dream meant being married with children, and having the latest in modern appliances and beauty products. Many of these issues are barely visible in the novel, but a working knowledge of America 1959 might help us understand the characters a little better. Themes Rabbit, Run Theme of Fear Fear pervades Rabbit, Run, though the novel does provide moments of relief. The main character, Harry " Rabbit" Angstrom thinks he’s caught in a

contracting and expanding " trap," or " web," or " net. " He runs to counteract the fear this trap produces, though he's usually running, literally, in circles. Fear drives Rabbit to run, and to be still – to leave, but to always return. He's afraid the trap he's stuck in is the trap of mediocrity; he's sure something better awaits him. So he runs. Yet, he has obligations to others, and he fears that abandoning them makes him a bad man.

So he goes back and forth. And back and forth, until his final run at the end of the novel. Rabbit, Run Theme of Religion Rabbit, Run is suffused with religious questioning. Much of the religious debate in the novel relates to variations of Christianphilosophy, but Freudianism (treated something like a religion), atheism, and a brief appearance, or rather, disappearance of the Dalai Lama provide interesting contrasts. Some of these perspectives are pretty risky for the McCarthy-ist and Red Scare era 1959 that provides the backdrop for Rabbit, Run.

The drowning death of a newborn baby challenges the religious beliefs of many of the characters, and even provokes her father to dream of founding a new religion, based on " the truth" about life and death. The end of the novel does not tell us if he fulfills the dream's prophecy. Rabbit, Run Theme of Identity Rabbit, Run explores the ways in which individual needs and desires, responsibility, family, religion, popculture, and The American Dream circa 1959 impact the identities of its characters.

The tension between American pioneerism and American conformity results in an identity crisis for the novel's main character, Harry " Rabbit" Angstrom as he runs back and forth between them trying to escape an all pervasive " trap. " The results can be both stunningly beautiful and utterly shattering.

The open ending leaves it to our imagination (unless we read the sequel, Rabbit, Redux) as to what extent the characters' identities are, or aren't, changed by the drowning death of Rabbit's newborn daughter.

Theme of Drugs and Alcohol

John Updike's *Rabbit, Run*, published in 1960, is obsessed with alcohol and cigarettes. But unless you count delivery room anesthetics, drugs are only mentioned on the first page - some basketball playing kids are smoking weed - almost like Updike, writing about 1959, is predicting the '60s and '70s to come. Alcohol is mostly presented as a destructive force; whenever the characters get near it, disaster on small or large-scale results. Cigarettes too are presented as mostly destructive, contributing subtly and not so subtly to the smokers' problems. Though at one moment a cigarette is seen as "a wafer of repentance. So go steal the keys to the liquor cabinet and - oh, you know Shmoop's just kidding!"

Theme of Guilt and Blame

Rabbit, Run is a guilt and blame-fest. This starts at the beginning of the novel when the main character, Harry "Rabbit" Angstrom, runs away from his pregnant wife and his son. But when newborn Rebecca June Angstrom drowns in a bathtub, things get messy. Rabbit's wife Janice admits she drowned the baby while drunk. Yet Rabbit is a prime suspect, especially to himself. He is a suspect precisely because he was not there when the baby died.

All of the other characters in the novel are suspects too - everybody simultaneously feels guilty and wants to blame others. Even the novel's setting, America of 1959, is a suspect.

Theme of Transience

Rabbit, Run's main character Harry "Rabbit" Angstrom is in a perpetual state of transience. He's always on the move, usually on foot, though he's

occasionally found in a motor vehicle. He only stops to sleep and mate, and occasionally, to grab a bite to eat. Why does he run so hard? Because he thinks something better than what he has is waiting for him.

At the same time he's afraid of deserting the people he cares about. He runs back and forth trying to find some kind of balance. Rabbit, Run challenges us to wonder if we are settling for mediocrity when sitting still, or risking everything when we make a move. Genre: Family drama: Families. Drama. Horror or Gothic Fiction: Mysterious traps. Priests. Hallucinations. Fear. Dead babies. Literary Fiction: Fancy prose style. Neurotic. Quest: Somebody looking for something. Realism: True to life. Mystery: Mysterious crimes. Innocent victims. Trying to find the truth. Tone: Degrading when talking about Janice

Sympathetic Many characters in Rabbit, Run say, do, and think harsh things. But a tone of sympathy, and even love pervades. And man are these folks judgmental. Like when Rabbit calls Janice stupid, or when he calls himself a criminal. The tough talking narrator, though it seems to call for a complete overhaul of social norms, also seems to suggest that we are all just people, and people make mistakes. When we are able to identify with flawed or disliked characters, we can sometimes gain real introspection, as well as a deeper understanding of those around us. Rabbit, Run Summary

Twenty-six-year-old Harry "Rabbit" Angstrom runs home one evening to find his wife, Janice, who is seven months pregnant, at home - without their son Nelson and without the family car - drinking, again. They argue, and he leaves to fetch the car and the boy, but along the way decides to permanently hightail it out of Mt. Judge, Pennsylvania and drive until he gets

to the beach. He drives in circles and ends up back in Mt. Judge the next day. Instead of going home, he goes to see his high school basketball coach, Marty Tothero, who introduces him to Ruth Leonard, a sexually experienced woman about his age who has dabbled in prostitution.

Rabbit and Ruth hit it off famously, and Rabbit decides to drop his car off for Janice, grab a few clothes, and shack up with Ruth in the city of Brewer, of which Mt. Judge is a suburb. While leaving his old pad he is pursued by Jack Eccles, the minister of Janice's family's church. Eccles and Rabbit develop a friendship of sorts, which mostly consists of Eccles trying to convince Rabbit to return to Janice while battling (and coaching) him on the golf course – and of Rabbit getting into some heavy flirting with Eccles' wife, Lucy. Two months pass. Rabbit and Ruth are for the most part happy.

Rabbit has left his work as a MagiPeel Peeler salesman and found fulfillment in the widowed Mrs. Smith's fabulous fifty-acre garden. Yet, signs of trouble are emerging in the Rabbit and Ruth household. Ruth is about a month pregnant, but hasn't told Rabbit yet. Ruth and Rabbit go out for drinks one night and things get ugly. Rabbit feels that Ruth took the side of her old lover, Ronnie Harrison, when Ronnie was clearly giving Rabbit a hard time. Rabbit interrogates Ruth as to her sexual history with Ronnie, and then, upon finding out that she gave Ronnie a blowjob, requires Ruth to give him one to make up for her traitorous behavior. She does, and a little later that night Reverend Eccles calls to tell Rabbit that Janice is in labor. He leaves Ruth to go to Janice and soon becomes the proud father of one Rebecca June Angstrom. While Janice is recovering, Rabbit moves back into their old apartment with his son Nelson, and cleans the place up while spending

quality time with the boy. Janice gets out of the hospital, and things are OK. Janice isn't drinking. Rabbit is working for her dad, selling used cars. But after nine days both Janice's body and mind are feeling postpartum strain.

That Sunday, Rabbit goes to Eccles's church for the first time (leaving Janice and the kids at home to rest). He gets into some deep flirting with Lucy Eccles and comes home wanting to have sex NOW with Janice. The baby won't stop crying though, for like hours, and the whole time Rabbit is trying to get Janice to drink (to put her in the mood), chain smoking, and clinging to her in case she suddenly feels like having sex with him. Finally, the baby stops crying, Nelson goes to bed, and Rabbit gets Janice to take a drink.

They get into bed and Rabbit tries to have sex with her. Still sore from giving birth, from her episiotomy, and from Rabbit living with " a whore," Janice rebuffs him. He gets mad and leaves. Meanwhile, Janice really does start drinking, and drinks all day Monday in fact. Frantic and depressed, she slaps Nelson. Her mother calls and upsets her, and then she finds that Rebecca June has somehow gotten baby poop all over herself and her crib. Drunk and full of anger, confusion, and fear, Janice tries to give Rebecca a bath and accidentally drowns her.

Rabbit calls Eccles that night and finds out what happened. He'd spent the night in a motel and the day trying to catch a glimpse of Ruth, but with no luck. He busses back to Mt. Judge full of shame and remorse. Why is he so ashamed? Because he really thinks, most of the time, that he killed his daughter by not being in the apartment at the time of her death. He feels like he took out a hit on the kid when he walked out on Janice. He really

convinces himself, and is disappointed that the law doesn't consider him a suspect.

This guilt makes him more determined than ever to work things out with Janice. To stay with her forever to atone for his sins...but... At the end of Rebecca June's burial service he loudly accuses Janice of murdering their daughter and loudly proclaims his innocence. Humiliated, he runs. He runs to Brewer, finds Ruth, and guesses she is pregnant. She is really nasty to him and threatens to abort the baby if he doesn't divorce Janice so he can marry her. He agrees, but when he steps out to pick up food from the deli, as you've probably predicted, he runs...And the book ends.

950's: experienced marked economic growth - with an increase in manufacturing and home construction amongst a post-World War II economic boom.

1960's : In the United States, "the Sixties", as they are known in popular culture, is a term used by historians, journalists, and other objective academics and pejoratively to describe the era as one of irresponsible excess and flamboyance. The decade was also labeled the Swinging Sixties because of the fall or relaxation of some social taboos especially relating to sexism and racism that occurred during this time.

The 1960s have become synonymous with the new, radical, and subversive events and trends of the period, which continued to develop in the 1970s, 1980s, 1990s and beyond. In Africa the 1960s was a period of radical political change as 32 countries gained independence from their European colonial rulers.

1963 - Martin Luther King Jr. 's " I Have a Dream" speech in Washington, D. C. , on August 28.

1964 - Civil Rights Act of 1964 signed into law by President Lyndon B. Johnson. This landmark piece of legislation in the

United States outlawed racial segregation in schools, public places, and employment.