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978-0-521-43337-2 - New Essays on Rabbit, Run  
Edited by Stanley Trachtenberg  
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NEW ESSAYS ON RABBIT, RUN

Still John Updike's most popular and critically acclaimed novel, *Rabbit, Run* was written in 1959 when the author was only twenty-eight years old; it announced the thematic concerns and stylistic innovations through which the author was to explore the American psyche and gauge the temper and history of its culture over the next three decades. The first of a tetralogy, *Rabbit, Run* introduced the character of Harry "Rabbit" Angstrom, one of those middle-class Americans who, in Updike's view, aren't especially beautiful or bright or urban but about whom there is a lot worth saying. The fallible hero struggles with his own sexuality, his religious feelings, the difficulties of being a son and a father, and with the changes in American society that confuse and excite, and finally seem to suffocate him. Updike's writing is charged with narrative energy and pictorial accuracy that illuminate the present moment as they evoke the tension between the drab compromises we are forced to make with age and the religious mystery that sustains us against them. Written by a distinguished group of international scholars, the essays in this collection examine both the technical mastery and thematic range that make this work one of the most significant achievements in modern American fiction and one which continues to provoke fresh critical insight.

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GENERAL EDITOR  
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 UNIVERSITY PRESS

32 Avenue of the Americas, New York NY 10013-2473, USA

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Information on this title: [www.cambridge.org/9780521433372](http://www.cambridge.org/9780521433372)

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First published 1993

*A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library*

*Library of Congress Cataloguing in Publication data*

New essays on Rabbit, run / edited by Stanley Trachtenberg.

p. cm. – (The American novel)

Includes bibliographical references.

ISBN 0-521-43337-1. – ISBN 0-521-43884-5 (pbk.)

1. Updike, John. Rabbit, run. 2. Angstrom, Harry (Fictitious character) I. Trachtenberg, Stanley. II. Series.

PS3571.P4R335 1993

813'.54 – dc20 93-21806

ISBN 978-0-521-43337-2 Hardback

ISBN 978-0-521-43884-1 Paperback

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## Series Editor's Preface

In literary criticism the last twenty-five years have been particularly fruitful. Since the rise of the New Criticism in the 1950s, which focused attention of critics and readers upon the text itself – apart from history, biography, and society – there has emerged a wide variety of critical methods which have brought to literary works a rich diversity of perspectives: social, historical, political, psychological, economic, ideological, and philosophical. While attention to the text itself, as taught by the New Critics, remains at the core of contemporary interpretation, the widely shared assumption that works of art generate many different kinds of interpretations has opened up possibilities for new readings and new meanings.

Before this critical revolution, many works of American literature had come to be taken for granted by earlier generations of readers as having an established set of recognized interpretations. There was a sense among many students that the canon was established and that the larger thematic and interpretative issues had been decided. The task of the new reader was to examine the ways in which elements such as structure, style, and imagery contributed to each novel's acknowledged purpose. But recent criticism has brought these old assumptions into question and has thereby generated a wide variety of original, and often quite surprising, interpretations of the classics, as well as of rediscovered works such as Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*, which has only recently entered the canon of works that scholars and critics study and that teachers assign their students.

The aim of The American Novel Series is to provide students of American literature and culture with introductory critical guides to American novels and other important texts now widely read

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*Series Editor's Preface*

and studied. Usually devoted to a single work, each volume begins with an introduction by the volume editor, a distinguished authority on the text. The introduction presents details of the work's composition, publication history, and contemporary reception, as well as a survey of the major critical trends and readings from first publication to the present. This overview is followed by four or five original essays, specifically commissioned from senior scholars of established reputation and from outstanding younger critics. Each essay presents a distinct point of view, and together they constitute a forum of interpretative methods and of the best contemporary ideas on each text.

It is our hope that these volumes will convey the vitality of current critical work in American literature, generate new insights and excitement for students of American literature, and inspire new respect for and new perspectives upon these major literary texts.

Emory Elliott  
University of California, Riverside