

## TO BE CONTINUED...

Once the exclusive province of action-adventure movies, the sequel has arrived in the world of literature. Encouraged by the success of *Scarlett* (over 2 million copies sold), the sequel to *Gone With the Wind*, book editors everywhere have been scrambling to find literary "properties" suitable for extension.

Ever wonder what happened to Heathcliff? Now you can read *H: The Story of Heathcliff's Journey Back to Wuthering Heights*, published last month by Pocket Books. Did Huck make it to the territories? An answer can be found in *Mister Grey*, the further adventures of Huckleberry Finn, which Four Walls Eight Windows published last May. *Lara's Child*, a sequel to *Dr. Zhivago*, is due out from Doubleday next year. Occupying a dubious place in the culture, these sequels are literary piecework, created to order and calculated to ride on the success of their illustrious progenitors.

But what if a gifted writer reversed the order of the publisher's priority and depended on an inspiration more aesthetic than commercial? What if the basis for a sequel was merely the pleasure of the literary imagination? With these questions in mind, the editors of *Harp-er's Magazine* invited six distinguished authors to write a sequel to a favorite work of literature.

## RABBIT RESURRECTED

By David Foster Wallace

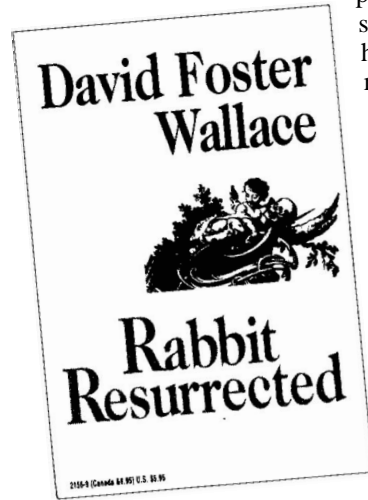
In this sequel to *Rabbit at Rest*, which ended with the hero on his deathbed, beset with transmural infarctions and the consequences of his own appetites, Rabbit Angstrom, ambivalent hero of four Really Big Novels, athlete, adulterer, Republican, duly designated observer of the U.S. scene, and synecdoche of a generation's pathos, negotiates the pitfalls of post-life America in his own erratic way, and learns some very special truths he'd suspected all along...

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The bright bed of happy unfeeling from which his son's straining face recedes has not deserted him, Rabbit Angstrom feels. The bed merely tilts at the foot and erects itself, rising, Rabbit with it. Behind his eyes the red cave he had thought was the exit reveals itself to have been his brain's own color, its red music; darkness now flows like spilled ink in at all sides until the color shrinks to the frozen star of a television's last point of light, then out. Not darkness but whatever is its absence. Rabbit hears earlessly the blank whine of the heart monitor and his family's Kabuki cries of self-concerned grief, the *chud* of defibrillation paddles trying to stun what is no longer his. He is not his body—can I keep my

prick in heaven? is his first wild thought, and on its heels the toothier question of heaven itself, of just where is he off to, floating.

Instead of the cacophony of his big body's constant reminders, Rabbit's sense of himself is now merely as huge and clean, a white idea, untethered, rising like a red balloon whose red is less the color of candy apples than of a squat, solid Amish barn in the oblique light of a Pennsylvania mid-to-late afternoon. As beneath him the slate roofs of the DeLeon hospital complex first form a pattern of tile with other roofs and then melt into the blue and green gem the Atlantic wears, Rabbit finds the star expanding, his inner vision restored but altered. As an astringent light the same bleached



blue as the Deleon ICU yawns out from both sides of a gassy pink warmth he screams at leaving, as a slap's sharp sting on his tiny plum of a bottom meets the inverted face of the obstetrician who holds him by a heel, replaced immediately by the moon of his mother's face rising and breaking into crescents over the edge of a crib, then the sight of the nubbly rug rushing up to slap him as his first fat steps fail, Rabbit realizes all those fags in sandals had been right, and he was about to re-ex-

perience, in time lapse, every sensuous experience he'd ever had. Here they all are, each minutely described:

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[cont. p. 284]

. . . in air tinged the bloody lavender of a sunrise over an Ipswich dune, Rabbit was heartsore. How quickly, in the dim Cineplex of recall, the associations rose and passed! How little the lyrical metaphors his head conjured for everything he saw, the poetic analogies that had bloomed beside milk boxes and damp screens, pubic

hair and Toyotas, plumber's helpers and Janice's poor slotted mouth, images hovering palsied like the faint UHF ghosts that shadowed televised images before everybody all of a sudden had to have those cable hookups, or like the odd clover's fourth leaf, jutting so vainly with its Valentine creases between what was complete in itself . . . or maybe more like the echo of a yodel in a void, because how damned little they added up to, these unlikely observations of a self-centered clod, these locations of literary meaning in the angle of light on prefab siding in the smooth hiss of a public fart, these strings of pedestrian epiphanies that he had presumed lifted him above the herd of all other self-centered pedestrian clods to become the distillate of an American generation. All ghosts, gone the moment seen.

He is alone, rising erect in the cerulean space above the dazzling frozen gauze of the clouds—boiling, radiant, motionless, terrible, silent, and clumped. He is by himself. No voice booms off his skull or plucks at his gown's sleeve. Rabbit dislikes being by himself. Will there be no one to guide him on a flight that has become less upward than stolidly out, expanding? No one to banter with? To hear his opinions, views? Would there be perhaps some way to get laid, maybe? If disembodied, is he unmanned? His idea of heaven is not wings' flutter or robes' flow. Rabbit's heaven, as ecumenical in its spirituality as Tertullian's hell, comprises an infinity of snatch. He rises, erect, meditative. Would there be vaginas where he was going, vaginas finally freed from the

shrill silly vessels around them, bodiless, pungent, and rubicund, swaddled in angelic linen or straining plump around some Unitarian G-string? The odd breast or two, detached, obliging? Arabs saw heaven as for men, the accredited dead enjoying the spicy favors of black-eyed virgins for all eternity. Was it too late to convert? Would a lapsed Episcopalian who slapped the bottoms of ministers' wives stand a chance at bliss at the top of this rise? Rabbit asks of the airless blue: to Whom will he be held accountable? The well-dressed, sad-smelling God of the Springer's airless church? Some Catholic intercessor with an infant at her tit? Weedy, beaming Eastern gods with hookahs and pelican bellies? Some stem Dutch Reform personage with the black coat and pale dour face of a Hals oil?

And he begins to wonder, as he rises, weightless and squeezed into the navy blue dome, rising like a bubble in beer, less pushed by any pressure than drawn by pressure's absence, rising it seems to some surface where he fears he will, as in life, merely spread, refract light for a while, and disappear with a thin pop, what he will be held to answer for. How stood his accounts? Surely Whoever decided must make allowances for a character damned at conception to act out all America's narcissistic, grimly prurient drama. And surely Rabbit's balance sheet is written in two inks. The sun fills the cone of his upward sight, expands without heat. Surely each late afternoon a Hassy riding a squealing Mim on his handlebars canceled out an occasion on which he'd seen a woman and wondered how she would do instead of who she was. Surely his exasperated kindness toward Nelson the child appeared opposite such snafus as a dead Jill or the briefest of just-once slips with a daughter-in-law who'd been asking for it for years. Only human, after all. Surely Rabbit is headed for a heaven he's never left.

Much bolstered, Rabbit is able to close his eyes; color blooms behind his lids. How sweet to see stars clotted around a lit sun. The stars bum bright and cold as lit ice, and as what is left of him leaves the rest behind, Rabbit sees the stars, and the stars behind the stars, coalesce into the image of a tree. The tree is a rood, and does not visually or metaphorically resemble any other tree, or any other thing, which for obvious reasons disturbs Rabbit a lot. But hung aloft the schematized branches, and subtending the light-spike roots like leafy bracts, hanging and sitting, like baubles, objects for Rabbit's observation and (though not connection) pleasure, is everyone he's ever known who died and rose: Mom, Pop, baby Becky in her tomb of gray water, Skeeter, Jill, old man Springer, Thelma with her rash-covered arms out, poor walleed Peggy Gring, Mr. Abendroth the postman who went house to house like doctors used to, the obstetrician who'd

yanked him from the infinity he dreamed of and spanked him awake, all the rest, more than anyone could ever count: shades: pale wisps of images, as yet insubstantial as lit gauze, as mist off a dawn Susquehanna. It's a solipsist's heaven, full of his own dead perceptions.

Here they all are, Rabbit's tree's decorations, crying out to the white animal who twists upward toward them in an erect bed, crying out to Rab-

bit to be resurrected, reseen, by He whose attention had made them. And Rabbit dispenses mercy, in a heaven he's never left, to these supplicant ghosts of his life's sight. Here they all are: minutely described. Each.

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