

## I. Postmodern Worldview in John Updike

John (Hoyer) Updike (1932-) was born in Shillington, Pennsylvania. Following graduation from Harvard University, he studied art for a year in England. After his return to the United States, Updike became a staff writer for *The New Yorker* magazine during the 1950s, for which he contributes to write poetry, stories and criticism throughout his prolific career. A prolific writer, Updike has published poems, novels, short stories, essays and literary and art criticism. Since 1957, he has lived in Massachusetts. He is the author of fifteen novels along with twenty-some other titles, including five previous collections of poetry. He is internationally known for his novels *Rabbit, Run* (1960), *Rabbit Redux* (1971), *Rabbit Is Rich* (1981), the winner of Pulitzer Prize and American Book Award, and *Rabbit at Rest* (1990), also the winner of Pulitzer Prize. All these four novels follow the life of Harry Rabbit Angstrom, a star athlete, from his youth through the social and sexual upheavals of the 1960s to later periods of his life, and to his final decline.

In *Rabbit, Run* (1960), the book that established John Updike as a major novelist, Harry 'Rabbit' Angstrom plays basketball with some boys in an alley in Pennsylvania during the tail end of Eisenhower era, revealing his past as a star high school athlete. In this novel, Updike has written a moral fable for our times about the self-absorption of a young man who lacks wit, charm and intelligence. He does have consciousness, a sense of something missing, and a physical desire which transcends occasions. Harry Angstrom, or Rabbit, as a former star basketball player on his high school team, has conditioned himself to run. Athleticism of a different sort is on display throughout these four magnificent novels. The athleticism of an imagination possessed of the ability to lay bare, which is seemingly effortless animal grace, the enchantments and disenchantments of life.

Updike continues Rabbit's story against a background of current events in *Rabbit Redux* (1970). The novel begins on the day of the moon shot. It is the late 1960s and the optimism of American technologies is countered by the despair of race riot, anti-Vietnam protest, and the drug culture. Rabbit is nostalgic for the security of the Eisenhower years. But his world is unsettled by the realization that the old way of life is rapidly disappearing, his mother is dying of disease, and his father is aged. Rabbit has become complacent in the face of change. His wife, Janice, with whom he fled in *Rabbit, Run*, and now, flees him and his inertia. His family is falling apart, mirroring divisive problem of the country at large. Rabbit finally overcomes his compliancy and brings 'outsider' into his home, attempting to reconstitute his family. Although some critics were disappointed, Chalres Thomas Samuals and Eugene Lyons among them, just like Brendan Gill and Richard Locke consider *Rabbit Redux* a successful novel.

In *Rabbit is Rich* (1981), which won the Pulitzer Prize in 1982, Rabbit is forty six and finally successful, selling Japanese fuel efficient car during the time of the oil crisis in the 1970s. In this novel Rabbit's son Nelson's failure becomes the counterweight to Rabbit's success. Updike describes an upper middle-class milieu of Caribbean vacations and wife-swapping Nelson revives Rabbit's vice of irresponsibility but without the grace Rabbit possessed in his youth. Rabbit again becomes the source of family salvation. He steps in for missing Nelson to be presented at the birth of his grandchild, in a sense, the loss of momentum represented by the fuel shortage and the consequent slowing of industry, and even the aging Harry Storm, is tentatively renewed by this young life. Updike offers slender hope in a bleak American landscape.

Updike revisited his hero toward the end of each of the following decades in the second half of this American century; and each of the subsequent novels, as Rabbit, his wife Janice, his son Nelson, and the people around him, his characters take on the

lineaments of our common existence. In prose that is one of the glories of contemporary literature, Updike has chronicled the frustration and ambiguous triumphs, loungers, the loves and frenzies, the betrayal and reconciliations of our era. He has given us representative American society which reflects the changing decades of late twentieth century America. *The Centaur* (1963), winner of National Book Award, and *The Farm* (1965) are notable among his other novels set in his native Pennsylvania. Most of his later fiction is set in New England, where he has lived since the 1960s.

*Rabbit at Rest* is the final novel in Updike's highly acclaimed Rabbit tetralogy which presents the condition of 'Rabbit' who, now in his mid 50s, is living in Florida, and has a serious heart attack. *Rabbit at Rest* picks up the story begun in Updike's *Rabbit, Run* (1960) and continues in *Rabbit Redux* (1971), of Harry Angstrom, Rabbit in his mid-forties. His third consecutive novel of 'Rabbit' tetralogy published in 1981 under the title of *Rabbit Is Rich* presents the reality of late 1970s and early 1980s. Rabbit is part owner and sales manager of Springer Motors Toyota, in the fictional town of Brewer, in Pennsylvania. Charlie Stavros, the man who had an affair with Harry's wife, Janice, in *Rabbit Redux*, has developed a close relationship with Rabbit and works with him at the dealership. While working, a teen couple comes into the dealership to look at cars, and Harry suspects that the young girl, Annabelle, may be his illegitimate daughter. And *Rabbit at Rest* brings Rabbit into the 1980s to confront an even grimmer set of problems: AIDS, Cocaine addiction, and terrorism. Rabbit suffers a heart attack and is haunted by ghosts of his past. The fragility of life and the randomness of death are represented for Harry by the Lockerbie tragedy where death becomes as inevitable as falling from the burst-open airplane; and he too is falling, helplessly falling toward death. In these four novels seemingly insignificant life presses

and insists itself upon our consciousness, and we realize that this life has become the epic of common American experience recorded over three decades.

*Rabbit at Rest* is the final novel of Rabbit tetralogy which focuses on their central character Harry Angstrom. In this novel, Harry has acquired heart trouble, a Florida Condo, and a second grandchild. His son, Nelson, is behaving erratically; his daughter-in-law, Pru, is sending out mixed signals; and his wife, Janice, decides in mid life to become a working woman. As through the winter, spring and summer of 1989 America yields to George Bush, Rabbit explores the bleak terrain of last middle age, looking for reason to live.

This novel also presents the human condition as represented by Harry 'Rabbit' Angstrom. The fact, aging, ill Rabbit must also cope with his son's drug-addiction, his wife's troubles, a former girlfriend who turns up suffering from lupus, and the world in general, Rabbit has always have a love-hate relationship to them. Thus, Updike dissects the horrors and failures of American society, while still managing to find hope, if not for Rabbit who dies on the last page- but for the rest of us.

The novel has elicited a host of criticism since its publication in 1991. Updike's texts have been interpreted and analyzed by a host of critics. The great body of literature about this book is concerned with the American life of the 1980s. Issues like the sexually-obsessed thoughts, the confinement of marriage, the realities of marital obsessed Americans, family disintegration, STDs, drug addiction and so on are raised. This research attempts to explore the postmodernist aspects in *Rabbit at Rest*. The novel has been viewed and perceived differently from different perspectives that suggest the complex and equivocal nature of the novel.

In *Encyclopedia of American Literature*, Carl Rollyson argues that Harry's running is to find family order by maintaining the fit with passing time. He says that it

is his compulsion to run from his normal way of life to an alcoholic and sexual adventure. He asserts, “Harry’s running has become a symbol of his new energy as well as the healthy family life craze of the 1980s” (258).

Instead of proper care, other members of the Angstrom family run behind money. His son and even his wife do not care him and want to pass their life in their own way. The clash between father and son is reflected in an interview given to National Book Foundation by Updike himself. Updike remarks:

The father and son’s conflict in *Rabbit at Rest* is just sorts of flowed naturally out of Harry’s aging. He is better with smaller child than with bigger one, I think with bigger children you need a certain set of principles, something to hand a disciplinary on and on, he doesn’t have that system. So with Nelson, Harry is fairly worthless. Maybe parenthood has a certain season and curve, and Harry has run in his curve of fatherhood and feels deep down than he should not have to mess anymore with this child. (2)

Moris Deckstein takes Rabbit novels as Updike’s personal history of America over four decades, always “keyed to national mood: rebellious but frustrated in the late 1950s, apocalyptic in the late 1960s, smugly materialistic in the late 1970s, disrupted by the late 1980s” (26). He further states that America is “bathed in the glow of mismanaged truly disrupted American material world which is shown in *Rabbit at Rest*” (27).

T. Mallon, in “American Spectator,” regards Harry a brutally misogynist, antisocial, and ugly American bastard. Commenting upon the novel, he further says:

*Rabbit at Rest*, the book where Angstrom’s luck begins to go sour, is his masterpiece, a Greek tragedy articulated through the downfall of a

flawed nuclear family. To the extent that he is successful in doing, makes it his best and one of the very best American novels ever written.

(2)

Hermione Lee has commented upon the characters of the novel as figures for American waste and greed. In his own words, “Rabbit’s compulsive junk socking, Nelson’s addiction, the ruin of the business, even granddaughter Judy’s compulsive flicking between TV channels are meant for American new way of life” (34).

Loss of tradition and instability of American life is reflected in Fredrick R. Karl’s remarks: “Those three problems, the need to achieve langness, the uncertainty about one’s own traditions with the fall on set of European modernism, and the fantasies, rapidity and instability of American life causes the novelist to lose his fictional bearing and in many cases, lose the sense of his own career” (348).

John Updike, the novelist himself, takes the protagonist as an everyman who, like all men, is unique and mortal. He says, “The character of Harry ‘Rabbit’ Angstrom was for me a way in – a ticket to the American all around me [These four related novels] become a kind of running report on the state of my hero and his nation ” (Blurb).

Nina Baya assumes that Harry’s incapability to live in present life because of ‘nostalgia’ that always haunts his mind. He is “in love with own past, perpetually lives in a present, he can not abide” (2268). William Jr., Chilton remarks:

*Rabbit at Rest* is not just the best of the Rabbit books, of which it is the final installment; it is probably the best of all its author’s novels. Unless Updike has something surprising up his sleeve, *Rabbit at Rest* is likely to prove his masterpiece. In this novel, Updike has achieved serious writer’s aim: namely, the perfection of his unique peculiarities of his

style, and their perfect reconciliation with one another. This is not to say that Updike has written a perfect novel, but simply that he has developed the technique of his own literary form just about as far as it can be expressed. (322)

Carl Rollyson sees *Rabbit at Rest* in a slightly different way where, according to him, women are presented as sex objects and are commodified as sale products. Women are taught by the mass media to be the objects of men's desires. In *Encyclopedia of American Literature* Rollyson views

Updike writes about sex, as an alcoholic would write about the bottle, as both fascination and flow, as what mires him in and at the same time detaches him from reality. In the same way, his view of this reality as the theatre of his own compulsion is an orchestration around the same theme of himself. People don't just go off and do something else in Updike's novels: or if they do, it is for reasons he gives them. (205)

The novel presents the unhealthy relationship between the couples, Harry and Janice, Nelson and Pru, Father and Son as well which brings disintegration and division in the family. So the novel captures a sense of individual and societal frustration in the life of an aging American man.

Many critics have also expressed objections to Updike's portrayal of women, viewed by some spicy and misogynistic: as graphic depiction of sexual activities which have been faulted as gratuitous; and the grand historical and social backdrops of his fiction, considered by some an exploitative façade for the author's solipsistic concern.

In Introduction of *Rabbit Angstrom: A Tetralogy*, Updike himself observes his works as a reflection of social reality: "I have chronicled the frustrations and

ambiguous triumphs, the loves and frenzies, the betrayals and reconciliation of our era. I have given our representative American society” (5).

Updike’s novels detail the marital tensions, sexual escapes, personal betrayals, professional disappointments, and spiritual crisis that reflect changing attitudes about sexual behaviors, relationship between men and women, and most importantly, religious beliefs in contemporary society.

This research is a discussion of the contemporary American society during late 1980s and early 1990s. This research explores the issues of disintegration, breaking the unity and celebration of the self in postmodern society in John Updike’s novel *Rabbit at Rest*. The significance of this study is that it will enable to comprehend and appreciate the incredible achievement Updike has made in *Rabbit at Rest*. Despite the criticism, Updike remains highly esteemed as a foremost man of letters whose prodigious intelligence, verbal powers and shrewd insight into the sorrows, frustrations and banality of American life separate him from the rank of his contemporaries.



## II. Postmodernism

### General Introduction

Postmodernism is wide ranging cultural movement which adopts a skeptical attitude to many of the principles and assumptions that have underpinned western thought and social life in the last centuries. These assumptions, which constitute the core of what we call modernism, include a belief in the inevitability of progress in all areas of human endeavor, and in the power of reason, as well as a commitment to originality in both thought and artistic expression.

As a cultural ethos, modernism is uncompromisingly forward-looking, and at least implicitly, makes the assumption that present civilization is to be considered superior to that of the past in the extent of its knowledge and the sophistication of its techniques. As an aesthetic, modernism promotes the view that originality is the highest state of artistic endeavor and that this can best be achieved by experimentation with form. Postmodernism has turned such ideas on their head, by calling into question modernist's commitment to progress, as well as the ideology underpinning it, and encouraging a dialogue between the past and the present in thought and art.

Postmodernism has, therefore, involved a rejection of the modernist commitment to experiment and originality, and a return to the use of older styles and artistic methods – even if this is done in an ironic manner. The characteristic postmodernism style is pastiche, with authors returning to a realist style of novel writing, artists moving away from abstraction to figurative painting, and architects freely mixing old and new styles in building.

Jean Francois Lyotard has encouraged us to see postmodernism as a rejection of all encompassing cultural theories such as Marxism, and has argued for a much more pragmatic attitude to political life and artistic expression that simply ignores the

oppressive rules laid down by grand-narrative. Postmodernism is therefore as much an attitude of mind as a specific theoretical position in its own rights.

Postmodernism is typically used in a rather wider sense than modernism referring to a general human condition, or society at large, as much as to art or culture (a usage which was encouraged by Jean François Lyotard's book *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*). Postmodern, then, can be used today in a number of different ways. Lyotard defines postmodernism as to refer to the non realist and non traditional literature and art of the post-second World War period "to refer to literature and art which takes certain modernist characteristics to an extreme state; and to refer to aspects of a more general human condition in the late capitalist of the post 1950s which have an all-embracing effect on life, culture, ideology and art, as well as to a generally more welcoming attitude towards these aspects" (qtd. in Hawthorn 216).

Those modernist characteristics, which may produce postmodernism when taken to their most extreme forms, would include the rejection of representation in favor of self reference – especially of a 'playful' and non-serious, non-constructive sort; the willing even relieve, rejection of artistic aura and of the sense of work of art as organic whole; the substitution of confrontation and teasing of the reader for the collaboration with him or her; the rejection of 'character' and 'plot' as meaningful or artistically defensible concepts or convention; even the rejection of meaning itself as a hopeless delusion, a general belief that it is not worth trying to understand the word – or to believe that there is such as thing as 'the world' to be understood. Postmodernism takes the subjective idealism of modernism to the point of solipsism, but rejects the tragic and pessimistic elements in modernism in the conclusion that if one cannot prevent Rome burning then one might as well enjoy the fiddling that is left open to one. This and other broad definitions of postmodernism allow for the possibility of dubbing

many literary and artistic works of the early part of the twentieth century, or even of previous centuries, as to greater or lesser extent postmodernist: the fiction of Franz Kafka, Kunt Hamsun's *Hunger*, Ezra Pound's *Cantos*, and even Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*. They also open the way to seeing postmodernist elements in the work of various poststructuralist and deconstructive critics such as Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, and Jacques Lacan. Statya P. Mohanty's statement that "I use 'poststructuralist' to refer to the dominant strand of postmodernist theory, whose focus is on language and signifying systems but whose claims are basically epistemological" (28) is representative of a widespread attitude.

To write about postmodernism is to get involved in a variety of problematic issues relating to boundaries and definitions. The five techniques are contradiction [David Lodge quotes a passage from Samuel Beckett's *The Unnamable* which cancels itself out as it goes along (229)]; permutation: postmodernist writers typically incorporate 'alternative narrative lines in the same text' (230); discontinuity: Beckett, according to Lodge, "disrupts the continuity of his discourse by unpredictable swerves of tone, metafictional asides to the reader, blank spaces in the text, contradiction and permutation" (231); randomness or a discontinuity produced by composing "according to a logic of the absurd; and finally excess taking 'metaphoric or metonymic devices to excess to destruction'" (qtd. in Hawthorn 235).

Other commentators have suggested that postmodernism is characterized by a more welcoming, celebrative attitude towards the modern world. That this is one of increasing fragmentation, of the dominance of commercial pressures, and of human powerlessness in the face of the blind technology, is not disputed. But whereas the major modernist reacted with horror or despair to their perception of these facts, in one

view of the issue it is typical of postmodernism to react in a far more accepting manner.

David Harvey argues:

Postmodernism is mimetic of social, economical and political practices in the societies in which it appears; and he compares the superimposition of different but uncommunicating world in many a postmodern novel with the increasing ghettoization, disempowerment, and isolation of poverty and minority populations in the inner cities of both Britain and the United States. (113)

The word postmodern as *Webster's New World College Dictionary* defines: coming after, and usually in reaction to modernism in the twentieth century, especially in the arts and literature; relating to a diffuse cultural and artistic trend or movement, especially in art, architecture, and writing, since the 1950s, characterized by eclecticism in style and content, freedom from strict theoretical constrain, indifference to social concern and so on. It describes further; designating or of various theories used widely in criticism and interpretation, which question or reject claims of absolute certainty, objective truth, and, as in language or works of art intrinsic meaning regarding such claims instead as assertions of privilege, political power and so on. The prominent figure of postmodernism, Jean Francois Lyotard, in his well known work *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, discusses that postmodernism:

Surveys the status of science and technology; and has become something of a bible of postmodernism. For the past few decades science has increasingly investigated language, linguistic theories, communication, cybernetics, informatics computers and computer languages, information storage, data banks, and problem of translation from one computer

language to another. He proclaimed that these technological changes would have a knowledge. (qtd. in Powell 22)

Charles Jencks traces the history of the concept. According to him;

The term postmodernism originally used by the Spanish writer Federico De Onis in 1934 to describe a poetic reaction to modernist poetry. The term was subsequently used, in 1975, by the historian Arnold Toynbee to designate pluralism and the rise of non-Western cultures. In the 1960s the early roots of postmodernism got started by a group of English intellectuals, the independent group, who were fascinated with American culture: TV, movies, advertisements, machinery and commercial culture. They created pop collages of such objects – the first pop art. In America, in the midst of hippies, Andy Warhol cranked out a bunch of images of mass culture. (qtd. in Powell 78)

Postmodernist movement was officially inaugurated in theory – celebrating writers such as William Burrough, Jean Genet, James Joyce and Samuel Beckett, the music of John cage and the futurists Marshall Muluhan and Buckminister Fuller.

One of the symptoms of the postmodern condition is a hyper sensitivity to the ways in which words are strategically defined and polemically deployed. In the early years of the twentieth century, the poets of high modernism seemed each to produce their own virtual thesaurus of the language. Now, towards the end of the century, sociologists and other theorists have been made aware of the constraints imposed by language and engage in related process of linguistic gymnastics.

Remarkably enough, postmodernism like modernism follows most of the common ideas – rejecting boundaries between high and low forms of art, defying rigid genre distinction, emphasizing pastiche, parody, bricolage, irony and playfulness.

Postmodern art favors self reflexivity and self consciousness, fragmentation and discontinuity, ambiguity, simultaneity and an emphasis on the decentered and dehumanized subject. However, postmodernism differs from modernism in many ways. Modernism, for example, tends to present a fragmented view of human subjectivity and history, for instance *The Wasteland* by Eliot, but presents that fragmentation as something tragic, something to be lamented and mourned as a loss. Many modernist works try to uphold the idea that works of art can provide the unity, coherence, and meaning which has been lost in modern life. Postmodernism, in contrast, doesn't lament on fragmentation or incoherence but rather celebrates it. The world is meaningless, so the postmodernist thinkers do not believe that art can make meaning. They enjoy playing with nonsense.

Postmodernism manifests itself in many fields of cultural endeavors – architecture, literature, photography, film, painting, video, dance, music and elsewhere. In general term, it takes the form of self-undermining statement and disjunctive narration.

Friedrich Nietzsche was the central prophet of the postmodern mind, with his radical perspective, his sovereign critical sensibility and poignant anticipation of the emerging nihilism in western culture. Like Nietzsche, the postmodern intellectual situation is profoundly complex and ambiguous – perhaps its very essence. What is called postmodern varies considerably according to context, but in its most general and widespread form, the postmodern mind may be viewed as an open-ended interminate set of attitudes. There is a stress on the priority of concrete experience over fixed abstract principle and a conviction that no single – a-priori thought system should govern belief or investigation. It is recognized that human knowledge is subjectively determined by multitude of factors that objective essences, or things in themselves are

neither accessible nor positable and that the value of all truths and assumptions must be continually subjected to direct testing. The critical search for truth is constrained to be tolerant of ambiguity and pluralism, and its outcome will necessarily be knowledge that is relative and fallible rather than absolute and certain.

Michel Foucault (1926–1984) attempted to show that basic ideas about how people think of permanent truths of human nature and society change throughout the course of history. Foucault's study of power and its shifting patterns is fundamental concept of postmodernism. Foucault is considered a postmodern theorist because his works upset the conventional understanding of history as a chronology of inevitable facts and replaces it with underlayers of suppressed and unconscious knowledge in and throughout history. Texts, according to Foucault, are pawns in the game of discursive transformations and therefore subject to an interrogation of what position they occupy but not of what they mean. Foucault contends that "power is exercised in various local institutions: the prison, the hospital, the asylum, the university and so on. This water-like truth changes as the power structure changes. This unreliable nature of truth, in fact, has a direct association with postmodernism" (Selden 102).

Jean Francois Lyotard (1924–1999), the leading postmodernist thinker, argues the totality, stability and order are maintained in modern societies by means of 'grand narratives' or 'master narratives' which are stories a culture tells itself about its practices and beliefs. Every belief system or ideology has its own grand narrative according to Lyotard. For Marxism, for instance, the 'grand narrative' is the idea that "capitalism will collapse in on itself and a utopian socialist world will evolve" (9). He further explains, "All aspects of modern societies including science as the primary form of knowledge depend on these grand narratives" (11). Postmodernism then is the critique of grand narratives, the awareness that such narratives serve to mask the

contradictions and instabilities that are inherent in any social organization or practice. In other words, every attempt to create 'order' that always demands the creation of an equal amount of 'disorder' but a 'grand narrative' masks the constructedness of these categories by explaining that 'disorder' really chaotic and bad, and that 'order' really is rational and good. Postmodernism in rejecting grand narratives, favours 'mini-narratives', stories that explain small practices, local events, rather than large scale universal or global concepts.

Postmodernism is paradoxical. It resists definition. Rather than trying to explain it in terms of a fixed philosophical position or as a kind of knowledge, an effort has been made in this thesis to elucidate its mobile, fragmented and contradictory nature. In doing so, the major tenets of postmodernism will be explained in detail in the following paragraphs.

Postmodernism or postmodern can mean have different meanings from individual to individual. The ambiguity of the postmodernism is a consequence of different meanings and ways the term has been used to characterize the different fields such as social, aesthetic, economic and political phenomenon. Many writers and critics begin postmodernism having no clear definition of it. Jean Baudrillard claims that contemporary culture is postmodernism. For him, the word 'Postmodernism' suggests fragmentation and trivialization of values. In the field of architecture, the word 'postmodernism' denotes the rejection of the functionalism and brutalism of modern architecture.

In the field of literature and art, postmodernism denotes to a break with or a continuation of modernism. The perceptual difficulty between continuity and discontinuity, unity and fragmentation imply the conceptual problem. To define the



term postmodernism would betray the spirit of postmodernism itself as Lyotard rejects the notion of grand narratives.

Now the postmodernism has become a global phenomenon, a new awareness that characterizes in all fields such as sociological, anthropological and philosophical phenomena of the present context.

As Lyotard celebrates the multiple, incompatible, heterogeneous, fragmental, contradictory and ambivalent nature of postmodern society, postmodernism rejects the depth of subject, accepts chaos and delight in surface. Postmodernism does not seek to rise above chaos. Lyotard, in his essay, "Answering the Question: What is Postmodernism," warns us: "we can hear the muttering of the desire for a return of terror", and suggests us to "wage a war on totality: let us be witness to the unrepresentable" (82). For him, fragmentation or celebration of chaos is deliberately given form because postmodernism happily accepts it.

The way that modern societies go about creating categories labeled as 'order' or 'disorder' has to do with the effort to achieve stability. Francois Lyotard equates that stability with the idea of 'totality' or totalizing system. Totality, stability and order, Lyotard argues, are maintained in modern societies through the means of grand narratives which are stories of a culture tells itself about its practices and beliefs. Jim Powell points out grand narratives as "big stories, stories of mythic proportions that claims to be able to account for explain and subordinate all lesser, little, local narratives" (29). In this respect philosophies of Marxism or narratives of Christian salvation can be the example of 'grand-narratives'. A 'grand narrative' in American culture might be the story that democracy is the enlightened form of government and that democracy can and will lead to universal human happiness. Every belief system has its grand narratives. For Marxism, the 'grand narrative' is the idea that capitalism

will collapse in itself and utopian socialist world will evolve. Lyotard argues that all aspects of modern societies including science as the primary form of knowledge depend on these grand narratives.

### **Postmodernism: A Way of Life**

The term postmodernism remains a confused and vacuous term; it has been in use for long enough to have achieved at least a basic consistency of definition. Most commentators agree that there is a cluster of features which characterizes contemporary culture and which when taken together can be called postmodern. In this era, we pay our money and are entertained by consuming second-hand experiences which once formed the basis of everyday life. To a significant extent we have become tourists in our own cultures. Sunday no longer means a trip to church or chapel, but rather a visit to the cathedral of consumerism. Shopping malls have become major sites of leisure activity; the pilgrimage is enough even without the act of buying.

We no longer conform to the traditions of the occupational cultures and instead we choose a lifestyle. This term, not in itself a new one, was taken by the advertising and designer culture of the 1980s to stand for the individuality and self-expression that were the cornerstone of the free market revolution of that decade. The era of mass consumption, with its emphasis on conformity and similarity, has been replaced by an apparently endless choice and variety of consumer goods aimed at specific market segments.

Perhaps one of the most noticeable areas of growth in consumer markets has been in men's fashion and lifestyle accessories. The male body has been increasingly used in advertising, not simply in a functional capacity, as it would have been in the 1950s, but in a decorative one as well. Men are no longer just portrayed as the expert adviser to women on technical matters such as the choice of washing machine; they are

also at the aspirational heart of advertising style. A casual glance at any news agents show a wide range of fashion and image magazines as well as those devoted to the latest electronic gadgets. Men are the focus of a shifting process of consumerization in which image overrides utility. It has developed through construction like the 'new man' of the 1980s and 'lads' of 1990s, leading to versions of male identity linked to self-conscious playful and sexualized process.

A massive, worldwide industry has developed devoted to assisting us in our responsibilities to maintain our bodies. The healthiness of the body has become products and services trade upon the importance of the cultural values of youth and beauty. In this context youth and beauty are aligned with slenderness increasing popularity and physical fitness, one extremity of which is represented by the increasing popularity of bodybuilding for both men and women. The corollary of this is that the aging body has become a source of anxiety, and the non-exercised and overweight body a source of shame and ridicule. Although we are surrounded by health-promoting message which encourage us to exercise and to eat the right foods, they derive for us to achieve fitness which is related as much to the desire for surface attractiveness as it is to the protective dimension of healthy promotion.

We are encouraged to believe that our leisure time should be devoted to activities which all enhance our potential for healthy longevity. It is an association with the correct attitude as it is actually to participate. Eating low fat foods and other acceptable commodities comprising a healthy diet gives an assurance of risk reduction and adequate body maintenance even if they are consumed in addition to, rather than instead of, prescribed foodstuffs. It is often the case that an emphasis on body maintenance is combined with the celebration of excess and indulgence. Postmodern

fragmentation extends into dietary habits in which contradictory messages can be believed as simultaneously followed.

It can seem as if the efforts of the advertising industry are directed entirely towards the generation of false needs within us all, but one of the great strength of the process of consumerism is that it is able to harness and direct our genuine needs even if the goods and services on over more often than not leave us frustrated and unfulfilled. It is not always easy to grasp the significance of these abstract ideas for everyday life, but what is really a question is whether it is only longer possible to agree on absolute truth:

Since World War II, people no longer believe in these two grand meta-narratives. After all applying science reason to the construction of gas chambers and efficient railroad schedules the Nazis exterminated millions of human beings. Did these people experience freedom and liberation? And did science fulfill Hegel's narrative of increasing knowledge (Powell 30)?

Postmodernism then is the critique of grand narratives, the awareness that such narratives serve to mask the contradiction and instabilities that are inherent in any social organization or practice. In other word, every attempt to create 'order' always demands the creation of equal amount of disorder but a 'grand narrative':

[M]asks the constructedness of these categories by explaining that 'disorder' really is chaotic and bad, and that 'order' really is rational and good. Post modernism, in rejecting grand narrative, favors 'mini-narratives', stories that explain small practices, local events rather than large scale of universal or global concepts. Postmodern 'mini-narrative' is always situational, provisional, contingent and temporary, making no

claim to universal truth, reason or stability. In postmodern societies many mini-narratives are stuck together. This crowd of narrative 'replaces the monolithic presence of one meta-narrative'. (Powell 30)

Thus, mini-narratives reject the universal system of meaning.

### **Postmodern Narrative**

In any piece of work of art and literature narrative implies the written or spoken account of events of fictional or non-fictional stories. The tendency of narrative in postmodern art and literature is quite different from modern narrative.

Postmodern novels can be distinguished in its narrative strategies from the modernist novels. In literature, we expect one quality of writing that is linear narrative or continuity. Many writers and critics organize their scattered thoughts into an ideal order or in its progress from one topic to another without distorting and omitting any important points. This is what modernist narrative writing is based on. Therefore, traditional novelists found historical as well as spatial coherence in their writing.

Postmodernism, as we take as 'post-history', refers not to specific historical development, but to the process of history and the understanding of temporality itself is suspicious of continuity or history many postmodern writers disrupt the continuity of their discourse by making it timeless fable. The ending or existence of the postmodern narrative has multiple meanings. The novel ends with multiple interpretations unlike close ending of traditional novels.

Postmodern novels are avant-garde, experimental in their forms. In these avant-garde novels, narrative experiment has introduced new ways of handling characters, plot, description, dialogue and so on. They deal with the temporal disintegration of the individual. The relation between time and history is understood as a social, but not only individual experience. The postmodernist culture has often shifted in its emphasis from

time to space. Ursula Heise, in her *Chronoschism: Time, Narrative and Postmodernism* says, “[T]he culture of time has changed since the early twentieth century, and postmodern texts and art works do not usually celebrate the interlacing of memory and expectation in the individual experience of time” (1).

Postmodern novels are centrally concerned with experiencing time in the age of ‘posthistory’. Heise in her *Chronoschism* describes the relationship between postmodern narrative structure and transformation in the western culture of time. Western culture after 1960s has changed in their consciousness of time due to the development of science, technology and socio-economic structure. Postmodern texts develop and transform the modernist narrative technique as to create a very different sense of time that in its discontinuity, its fragmentation into multiple temporal itineraries. This technique implies certain characteristics of a culture of time, development in science, technology, and media of production. The fragmented plots of many postmodern novels are to some extent conditioned by the temporal speed of late capitalist technologies of production of consumption. The postmodern fragmented narrative is the result of postmodern theories about the failure of master narratives as well as culture of time, which tends to shape our time. It focuses shortened temporal horizons at the expense of long term planning and coherence.

The shorting of temporal horizons in late twentieth century and awareness of western society of culture due to the technological innovation challenges the official history. Neither the postmodern technological time has relation to any calendar of events nor does it have any collective memory. It has made a permanent present or timeless intensity. (Heise 26)

Like Heise, Jameson and Oromnrth also hold similar views that they have focused on the importance of present in the contemporary time sense. Both writers point out the difficulties of describing more long-term temporal pattern.

In postmodern time, neither the time of individual mind functions as an alternative to social time, nor social time any larger perceived as the flow of consciousness. On the contrary, it is subject to the same division that affects the world and identifies the individual character. An individual mind that is aware of time, experiencing, social, cultural time and at the same time affected by individual experiences. Postmodern narrative, as claimed by Jean Francois Lyotard, is based on such foundation that the end of grand narrative has become basic element in postmodern era. Lyotard says that the overarching narratives of legitimating which justified scientific activity in the past have lost their credibility in the postmodern time.

No doubt, the temporal problems have reflected on the narrative form of the postmodern novels. Time has become fundamental element to organize narrative as Heise says. Devid Harvey, in his book *The Condition of Postmodernity*, says, "Time becomes human to extend that it is articulated through a narrative mode and narrative attains its full meaning when it becomes a condition of temporal existence" (32).

Postmodern narrative in Heise's words differs from modernist novels in two ways:

The differing amounts or flashbacks are not linked to the mind of any narrator or character configured with view toward psychological realism, and they tell event sequences in contradictory and mutually exclusive version that do not infer a coherent story and reality.

(*Chronoschism* 54)

So, postmodernists present different versions of the event they describe or they present a story together from flashback. Postmodern novels project into the narrative present and the past and experience of time.

By dividing and subdividing the time the postmodernist wants to show the multiplicity of possibilities. To do so, they use repetition and experimental typographies. Repetition is a general feature of all kinds of narrative forms. Many postmodern texts repeat the identical scenes and present almost the same words every time. Only slight variations distinguish one description from other. The comparison of different narrators' accounts in a modernist novel usually allows one to form particular picture of the events that lie behind them. But it is impossible for the postmodern reader to reach a coherent image of the actions that underlay the repetitions. This experiment explores the temporal awareness of the crucial scene. It focuses on the microstructure of time. This is the situation in which the reader never is certain whether one thing leads to another or not.

This microstructure of time does not bridge the gap but rather it splits the things. In literary narrative, repetition and recursion are articulated by means of written language. Postmodernist novels focus on the moment or the narrative present at the expense of larger temporal development as Ursula Heise says: "The reduction of temporal scope in the postmodernist novels forms part of a more general culture of time that has become worry of hypostatizing long term historical patterns and developments" (64).

### **Simulation**

Simulation is another way to see postmodernism. The western philosophical tradition of aesthetics has relied heavily on the distinction between the real and its copy. Centuries before Plato argued all the things of the world are not real; they are



twice removed from reality. This way of thinking has given rise to a hierarchical opposition between the real and the copy. The postmodern perspective, however, challenges such hierarchies and shows how the set of values associated with these oppositions can be questioned. Another postmodernist thinker, Umberto Eco states that “technology can give us more reality than nature can” (qtd. in Bennett and Royle 235).

Similarly, common sense tells us that there is a clear and necessary distinction between a photograph of a hamburger. Simulation, by contrast, blurs such distinction saturated by images on computers, television, advertising hoardings, magazines, newspapers and so the ‘real’ becomes unthinkable without the copy. One of the eminent postmodern thinkers, Nicola Defresne argues:

Simulation is characterized by a precession of the model, of all models around the merest fact – the models come first, and their orbital circulation constitutes the genuine magnetic field of events. Facts no longer have any trajectory of their own, they arise at the intersection of the models; a single fact may even be engendered by all the models at once. This anticipation this precession, this short circuit is what each time allows for all the possible interpretation, even the most contradictory – all are true, in the sense that their truth is exchangeable; in the image of models from which they proceed, in a generalized cycle.

(32)

Postmodern societies, dominated by computers and television, have moved into a new reality, as Baudrillard have outlined in the orders of simulacra. According to Baudrillard, “Simulation is no longer that of a territory, a referential being or substance. It is the generation by models of a real without origin or reality; a hyperreal. Henceforth it is the map that precedes the territory” (qtd. in Bennett and Royal 236).

Baudrillard's ideas regarding simulation arise from a fascination with technology. For Baudrillard technology is a paradigm for postmodern society in its entirety, the sense of and the mirror has given way to the screen and the network. In order to deny the idea that art posits its own formal purity, Baudrillard emphasizes the material character of the work. He argues that copying is not an art that possesses unique powers, but an acknowledgement that it is derived from the mechanical and scientific process it ostensibly rejects.

### III. A Postmodern Reading of *Rabbit at Rest*

#### Reality: A Subjective Phenomenon

This chapter focuses on the instances of expressions and elaborations which display the characteristic traits of postmodern fiction such as subversion of narration, celebration of fragmentation, pastiche, dissemination and so on. This chapter will make a detail survey of the text on those aspects which bear relationship with the hypothesis of the thesis. By using the postmodern theories, as elaborated in the previous chapter, the text will be analyzed. A postmodern reading of the texts subverts all such traditional norms, values, superiority and universality. It rejects the originality, totality, fixing and organic unity. But rather it celebrates the fragmentation, alienation and fascination.

Some of the dominant features of postmodern reading such as temporal disorder, the erosion of the sense of time, a pervasive and pointless use of pastiche foregrounding of words as fragmented material signs, the loose association of ideas, paranoia and vicious circles, or a loss of distinction between logically separate levels of discourse and so on are projected time and time again in the bare, bewildering landscapes of a text.

John Updike believes that reality is a subjective phenomenon. In order to exhibit the subjective nature of reality, he presents various perspectives of the characters in the novel. Perspective, which exists in everyone and any reality, in this sense, is a construct of human subjectivity. The perspective differs from person to person, and so does the reality. Therefore, reality is always in the state of flux. It does not have hard-and-fast shape and condition. Because of the flexible nature of reality, nothing can be labeled as the final one.

Throughout the novel, Updike never tries to claim the objective and absolute reality. He has let his multiple characters experience and comprehend the spectrum of

the world in their own fashion. Harry ‘Rabbit’ Angstrom, the major character of this novel stays with surreal images. Florida is made for surreal vision, but even in solid and Brewer Pennsylvania, there is something untrustworthy about the landscape. Updike’s Rabbit dives through his ‘boyhood city’ over and over again, minutely nothing changes from industrial energy to postindustrial decay and renewal; mills turned into factories, railroads into garbages, or dumps, music-stores into running-shoe emporiums, churches into common unity centers, hotels into motor inns. Defunct movie houses and retile restaurants haunt Rabbit’s weary vision of the present: so Rabbit’s memory, which cuts a deep, narrow slice into the American past, fuses with the narrative’s metaphors to make an elegy for our world. Even the tastelessly caricatured Japanese Toyota representative, who has come to pass stern judgment on Angstrom’s American mismanagement of the franchise, ends up sounding like Tasso, in a transformation only Updike could bring about: Things change in the course of time.

Updike’s affluent characters shuttle between semi-rural Pennsylvania and Condo-studded Florida, but Shun Philadelphia is facing the problem like HIV. Updike’s is a conventionally realistic-hero related work, bloated with brand names and socio-economic details, heavily dependent on the author’s virtuous manipulation of visual effects to evoke a corpulent, numbed nation dying of material excess. Its central image of disaster is the rain of doomed bodies caste into icy space from the bland comforts of the passenger plane that blew up over Lockerbie, Scotland.

The realistic prose of *Rabbit at Rest*, like that of Updike’s work in general, remains a pastiche of closely observed detail, together with nuggets of fat and brand and popular culture, but here ‘realism’ is moderated by a careful and elaborate structure of poetic reference, as well as by the sophisticated narrative technique:

President Bush's upcoming speech on the nation's drug problems rouses Washington speculation, can he do a Reagan? Also in Washington, officials are still hopeful that the new born baby. [. . .] Mommy kissing Santa Claus and the naughty lady of Shady Lane [. . .], an ocean white with foam, and listening to it now is like trying to eat double banana split the way he used to. Its all disposable, cooked up to urn a quick profit. They lead us down the garden path, the music manufacture, then turn around and lead the next generation down with a slightly different flavor of glop. (1468)

John Updike reveals the domestic crisis with an unusual pathos. He explores the human body as Eros, he now explores the body, in yet more detail. One begins virtually to share, with the doomed Harry Angstrom, a panicky sense of the body's terrible finitude, and of its place in a world of other, competing bodies: you fill a slot for a time and then move out; that's the decent things to do.

The engine that drives the plot in John Updike's work is nearly always domestic. Men and women who might be called ordinary American of their time and place are granted an almost allure by the mysteries they present to one another. Nelson Angstrom to Harry is so strangely behaving son, whose involvement with drugs brings the family to the edge of financial and personal ruin. Thus, characters like Janice, Nelson and, from time to time Rabbit himself are not very sympathetic- and, indeed, are intended by their resolutely unsentimental creator not to be- one is always curious to know their immediate fates:

Nelson insists him, "I can handle it. I'm no addict. I'm a recreational user."

“Yeah, Harry says, like Hitler was a recreational killer.” It must be the mustache made him think of Hitler. If the kid would just shave it off, and chuck the earning, he may be could feel some compassion, and they could make a fresh start. (1180)

It is quite clear that Updike can write in any version of American he chooses. Why has he returned so often, in between novels of immense erudition and sophistication even perverse match of dumb subject and lyrical fastidious text? The voice of the Rabbit books, so unlike Rabbit's, is wise, mournful, elegiac, telling us wry truths: ‘Life is noise’, or “within a hospital you feel thee is no other world”, or “we grow more ins and outs with age. Rabbit as Everyman? That's easy enough. But the voice does something stranger still. Everything “it looks at...and how much it looks at! [. . .] changes its shape as it gets put in the page” (1210). This is the most metaphorical prose written in American fiction.

Updike's metaphors are products of old American transcendentalist desire that the things of this world should stand for something, and not to be mere junk. And some certain significance lurks in all things. Rabbit's Platonism makes us see everything as meaningful, but also as shadowy and strange. His heart, of course has the star role as shape-shifter: it can be a fist, drum, a galley slave, a ball player waiting for the whistle. But the solid work is also undone by images of floating and drawing so that Rabbit's tumble into the gulf of Mexico, an incident itself rich with metaphor, spills out into the rest of the book as a figure for his morality; his heart floats wounded in the sea of ebbing time.

Throughout the novel, Harry does not take any rest except at the end of this novel. His mind frequently moves here and there. He concentrates especially in the imagination. Through his clear green eyes he imagines vivid and sharp pictures of

every little thing. His reality does not stay in a fixed place but rather moves around past memories and sometimes his thinking reaches in the politics too. He further says, “If you could ever get the poor to vote in this country, you would have socialism. But people want to think to be rich. That’s the genius of the capitalist system; either you are rich or you want to be or you think you ought to be” (1104).

Along with Harry, Janice’s mind also moves with the changing time. She is also not able to concentrate in her fixed goal. She has tension of son’s drug addiction at the same time she is worried about her lazy husband. She also wants to involve into job but due to the familial disorder her desire to get job is deprived. She suggests her son:

You know, Nelson, when you are little you think your parents are god but now you are adult enough to face the fact that they are not. Your father isn’t well and I’m trying to make something of what little life. I have left and we just can’t focus on you and your misbehavior as much as you think we should. You are of an age now to take responsibility for your own life. Its plan to everybody who knows you that your only chance is to stick with this program in Philadelphia. (1337)

Nelson does not realize his mistake; he keeps the extra-marital relation as well as drug addiction. He does not care about his father, mother, Pru and two children: Judy and Roy.

Pru becomes too much worried; have no harmonious relation with her husband; and sexually deprived woman living with spiritual anxiety. In this sense, she is probably the sympathetic person of Angstrom family. She is weak woman for whom Nelson misbehaves a lot. She believes, ‘home is the place where the heart is’, but for her it is impossible to find. From the beginning of novel, Pru has been trying her best to keep the harmony in the family. She often reminds her husband to be careful towards

their children but the nature of her husband is to move other ways. However, she tries to keep the house from falling apart. To keep the family together, Pru is quite harsh.

She once delivers her anxiety in front of Harry:

I'm scared to f\_\_k him, I'm scared to be legally associated with him. I have wasted my life. You don't know what it's like you're a man, you're free, you can do what you want in life, until you are sixty at least you are a buyer. A woman's a seller. I'm thirty-three. I've had my shot. Harry, I wanted it on Nelson. I had my little hands of cards and played them and now I'm folded, I'm through. My husband hates me and I hate him and we do not even have any money o split up! I'm scared, so scared. And my kids are scared, too. I'm thrash and they are thrashed and they know it. (1362)

Pru, henceforth, as a sincere woman in the family is having tremendous pressure and incestuous relation and fear. If she had not seen the precedent, she would not have such fear. This kind of incident is unlikely to occur generally.

But in this fictitious world of Updike, such an astounding incident takes place. Harry, suggests her not to be worried. "At least you're healthy", he tells her. "Me, all they need to do is nail down the coffin lid. I can't run, I can't f\_\_k, I can't eat anything I like. I know well they're going to talk me into a bypass. You're scared? You are still young you have got lots of cards still. Think of how scared I feel. (1362)

On the other hand, Janice is also suffering from mental tension. She is not getting proper love from her husband, Harry. She had passed the dark days during her youth while Harry ran away from the family and kept sexual relation with many women like Thelma. Even in these days Harry has no interest to talk with his wife. In this way,



Janice becomes too much pitiful character throughout this novel. She expresses her dissatisfaction toward her husband.

Truth is constructed subjectively and it differs from person to person in Angstrom family. All the family members are guided by their own individualism by creating their own favorable truth. Family disintegration mainly leads to plurality of truth. The belief system of Angstrom family is not to depend upon other but to create one's own favorable condition.

### **Celebration of Fragmented Life**

The novel *Rabbit at Rest* presents the fragmented life of the people living in the United States of America especially during 1980s and 1990s. The major character of this novel, Harry Rabbit Angstrom celebrates fragmentation and chaos. The novel, at first sight, gives a bizarre picture of America and it presents the mirror image of contemporary American society. Instead of being integrated, the characters are torn apart, but they never lament for their alienated lives. In fact, there is no single value system of truth that governs an individual character. Instead of being paranoiac about the prevailing awful reality, the Angstrom family members seem to be celebrating and resolute in their own worldview. So, the characters living in Florida Condo seem to lack the reality principle.

Rabbit wanders around from wife to friends to old mistress. His car dealerships, save his son's, are widely successful. He has a loving family and a son with a wife and grand children. Yet, he is miserable. Almost brutal towards his wife, he throws a temper tantrum when he finds out that Janice is basically running his businesses. His menders in his son's dealership and family. In what basically is an American Eden, he walks out, complaining that the loud is too big, the light is bright and the wings are too heavy. He finds out the real reason why the dealership is losing money: Nelson's

cracked. Nelson is the child Angstrom abandoned in the first book, the sweet curious boy and teenager in the second and the third has become a sobbing, hypersensitive, drug-addicted bastard, so consumed with his pain and self-pity that he does not mind beating up his wife to numb it:

Janice is distracted these days full of excitement about taking real-estate courses at the Penn State extension. I'm not sure, I totally understand it, though the woman at the office over on Penn Street hasn't that neighborhood gone downhill, since you and your father used to work a variety, she was very patient with my questions. (1250)

Nelson's base head pathos comes to fruition when Pru calls both Rabbit and Janice to pick their son up after a domestic violence incident. The conflict spurs Nelson to go into rehab, Pru to come in closer contact with the family, and Rabbit to lose that majestic luck that come so easily to him for 56 years. Suddenly, everything that Rabbit touches does not turn to gold. More than that, it's destroyed. His friends, long men of leisure and sexual play, start to die off and realize how boldly f\_ \_king miserable their lives were. Janice, the character that Updike is the most sympathetic too, develops her own life to the point that Rabbit seems like an antiquated albatross. And Rabbit brutally undercuts his son and the son, in response, whines like a child symbolizing two dysfunctional schools of male thought that have been pervasive through the twentieth century and twenty-first century.

This would just be dull, post-Reagan disapproval (sometimes it is a bit dull) if Rabbit were not so oddly ambivalent. He is the emblem of the obnoxious age, but he is also outside it, minding about it, alienated by it. Nelson and Janice are more at home in America than Rabbit, and he distrusts the language they use 'Faux', it itself is false word: "False is what they mean". Rabbit spends a lot of time skeptically listening to

'faux' languages, from Nelson's rehabilitated sermons or low self-esteem and Janice's women's group pieties, vindictively ridiculed to the health-speak of heart surgeons. Unlike everyone else in the novel, the salesman Rabbit is losing faith in sales talk. Who likes Rabbit, apart from his author - Sexist, dumb, lazy, illiterate, a terrible father, an inadequate husband, an unreliable lover, a tiresome teacher, a failing businessman, a cowardly patient, and a typically 'territorial' male. Despite the afore-mentioned characteristics, he watches a fair amount of television. It is right there, in front of his face, he finds the facts the old TV shows on NIK impossibly tinny with their laugh tracks.

Inside his fluctuating exterior, Rabbit is tender, feminine, and empathetic at the same time he is more intelligent and complex character who inspired him. Lying in the hospital he thinks fondly of that dead bricklayer who bothered to vary their rows at the top of the three buildings across the street. These men of another century depend upon their scaffold: "Sometimes, eating meat, he can even imagine how it felt to be that animal before it was killed, can apprehend the stupid monotony of a cow's life" (1344) in the taste of beef. He is curious, inquiring, not bigoted or at least his bigotry chosen people:

Harry has this gentile prejudice that Jews do everything a little bit than other people, something about all those generation crouched over the watch-repair tables, they aren't as distracted as other persuasions, they don't expect to have as much fun. It must be a great religion, he thinks, once you get past the circumcision. (1356)

Rabbit's memory, which cuts a deep, narrow slice into the American past, fuses with the narrative's metaphors to make an elegy for our world. Even the tastelessly caricatured Japanese Toyota representative, who has come to pass stern judgment on

Angstrom's American mismanagement for the franchise, ends up sounding like Tasso, in a transformation only Updike could ring about: "Things change, says Mrs. Shimendra, is world's sad secret" (1310).

If everything is at flux, what becomes of us? Rabbit's sensuality, materialism, greed and fear, and his ordinariness have been necessary to Updike because they embody so powerfully his discussion of the soul's relation to the body. Because Rabbit is so fleshy and gross, so tender and frightened, he brings home the human condition:

Janice wakes up early out of nervousness; it is going to be a long and complicated day for her, of seeing Nelson off at none and picking Harry at noon and taking a quiz in British property law at seven, in Brewer extension of Penn State in the renovated disgust elementary school on South Pine Street, a selection, she is not too easy about parking the car at night. (1330)

He does not care about his family. He is just lying on the bed by remembering his previous days. Some times that makes him nostalgic but at the moment he has no any objections about his family.

Updike gradually reveals the direction in which the uncertain saga of Harry, as chronicled in three previous novels composed over a period of twenty years, has actually been headed. In the fourth novel, an overriding preoccupation with morality provides the text with an extra dimension that the previous works, though they two were not strangers to death, lacked. In its shadow, life of Harry 'Rabbit' Angstrom resolves itself finally, not as a farce nor as bitter sweet picaresque but as tragedy. With the perspective provided by this last of the Rabbit tetralogy, we can see throughout Harry's adulthood the oscillation both of his minds and spirit have sown progressively closer, narrowing in a steadily regressive direction.

Harry has nothing to live for except food and sexual fantasy; after it, he seizes to believe in the possibility of his own future, and even its desirability. He refuses bypass surgery and prepares himself for death; as, also not quite knowingly, his wife, Jenice, is preparing herself for life beyond Harry. Taking real-estate courses, making plan to sell the Condo and the house in Brewer and to move into her parents' house with Nelson and his family, they try to leave him alone. While Harry is dying in hospital in Florida, Jenice thinks, "from what Dr. Olman said he would never be alive the way he was" (1486) since he graduated from high school; he was indeed, as his budding widow also reflects, already drifting downhill when she got to know him.

"A man needs an occupation," Harry's cardiologist tells him. "He needs something to do. The best thing for the body is a healthy interest in life. Get interested in something outside yourself, and your heart will stop talking to you" (1415). So, Harry, for the first time in his illness, takes the doctor's advice: He gets interested in something. It is basketball, the only thing in life, outside him, that has ever interested him. In an improvised game with a young street black he collapses on the dirt lot stricken by his final seizure. Either his is in some sense a redemptive death or else, of course, it is not:

The smell of good advice always makes Rabbit want to run the other way. He resumes raising from the chair and takes Dr. Morris many slips of paper out into the towering heat. The few other people out in the parking lot seems tinted smoke rising from their shadows, barely existing. (1426)

*Rabbit at Rest*, in which Harry dresses up as Uncle Sam for a fortune of July parade in Pennsylvania, records a world in which AIDS and drug abuses are rampant and young people, much more than 230 pound Harry, a compulsive gabbler of junk

food are obsessed with their diets. Women are more assertive and independent than they were in Harry's youth and, while he becomes incapacitated, Janice joins a women's group and takes classes on real estate. The Angstrom's practice of television channel surfing and the montage of radio stations that Harry tunes into and out of as he travels the nation's highways make the novel a time capsule of popular music, advertising, and current events for the end of the twentieth century. *Rabbit at Rest* is deftly attentive to the knowing detail, and a denizen of the twenty-first century could do worse than read the book to find out how it was:

God bless technology is f--king the pulsing wet tubes we inherited from the squid, the boneless sea-cunts. He feels again that feathery touch of nausea. Can he possibly throw up? It would jar and jam the works, disrupt the concentrating green tummocks he is buried beneath. He mustn't. He must be still. (1299)

He is worried about the technological development. For Harry, science and technology has not made any clear but it pushes into the jar where everyone passes the life like in the hell.

The novel is a fitting extension and culmination of its three predecessors, but it is also self sufficient. A reader need not have to read the other Rabbit books in order to understand and savor Harry's final months, to be moved by, for example, the grandfather's developing relationship with his granddaughter. Still, *Rabbit at Rest* does offer richer resonances to a reader familiar with its prehistory, who has lived with Harry, Janice Thelma, and the others almost as long as they have lived with another. When Harry reads a newspaper headline about renovation to circus museum 'Circus Redux', he cringes at a term that has frown familiar and dear to most of his readers; he hates word: "[Y]ou see it everywhere and, he doesn't know how to pronounce it"

(1395) while that intertextual jest is apparent to anyone who has merely heard the title of the second Rabbit book.

Harry is more adept at selling cars than formulating philosophy in the previous novel, *Rabbit Is Rich*, but reflecting on the radical transformations to which he has been forced to adjust during an untidy lifetime, he now, in this novel ruminates on the insubstantiality of earthy existences. Rabbit realizes that the world is not solid but rather it is a shabby set of temporary arrangement rigged up for the time being, all for sake of the money. The form that *Rabbit at Rest* and the entire tetralogy takes – deliberate, sober, and cumulative – is at odds with that observation, except that the spectacle of one man's frantic race through his brief appointed time as a reminder of the vanity of human wishes.

Harry's physical concerns intensify his sense of morality. In addition, his and his wife's peace and prosperity are threatened by their discovery that Nelson, who has been managing the family Toyota franchise, has been embezzling from business to support a cocaine habit. Although Nelson eventually agrees to enter an addiction – treatment program and Harry returns from Florida to strengthen things but, the corporation withdraws its franchise. Its Japanese representative trenchantly censures the American people for lack of discipline, Nelson for his immaturity, and Harry for inept parenting. A corollary to this outcome is that the protagonist constantly finds himself at odds with both his wife and his son, who take defensive positions on the matter of Nelson's perfidy and find ways to blame Harry for it.

Nelson refuses responsibility for what he has done to the family business. Janice, unwisely ignoring evidence of her son's shiftiness, lets him remain in charge of the dealership until it is too late. Ensuring financial constraints pressure Harry and his wife to share a house with their son and his family. Harry's family unconsciously

prepares itself to survive him; his wife and son making decisions about the family business that leave him out. Janice enrolls in real estate courses and emerges as energetically businesslike. Harry admires this but notices that she occasionally talks about him in the past tense.

Throughout the novel, Harry is seen as a receptor of cultural and historical changes and events. References abound to the television sitcoms Harry watches and the news events he observes through broadcast media, impressed by the limitless information offered by the media, he muses on news of China, ozone depletion, and the beginning of the fall of communism, he becomes somewhat obsessed with such death-dealing events as the air disaster and the demise of television personalities. Issue of mortality pervades Harry's thinking. While still recuperating from surgery, Harry has a premonition of death while visiting an adorning former lover, Thelma Harrison, who is dying of lupus. It is true for other women with whom he has been involved, he is incapable of feeling deep affection for Thelma. He is later accurately accused of this when encountered by her husband as she lives close to death in a hospital. At the end of the novel and entire tetralogy, Harry dies. Few minutes before the death of Harry, Nelson respects him and wants to share something what he has not shared till then:

Talk to me, Dad, the kid is yelling or trying not to yell, his face white in the gills with the strain of it, and some unshakable question tweaking the hairs of one eyebrow. So they grow up against the grain, he wants to put the kid out of his misery. Nelson, he wants to say, you have a sister.

Well, Nelson, he says "all I can tell you is, it isn't so bad." Rabbit thinks he should may be say more, the kid looks wildly expectant, but enough.

May be enough. (1516)



At the last day of his life also he suggests his son not to worry about his life because he has his mother, wife two children and his business. This suggestion is the last full sentence of his life. And his last word is 'enough'. Updike wrote the word enough at the final word of this novel because all the things are enough to describe.

### **Sexual Perversion**

Updike gives us sexual relationship as a common ground to base our impression on. In our world of child abuse, prostitution, sexually transmitted diseases, rape and so forth, we are able to see the strange sexual relationships depicted in this novel as no more bizarre than what we see going on around us. The development of the characters' sexual relationship is an important tool that leads to better understanding of the individual's lives and experiences while at the same time giving the readers a familiar background common to all human experience. The narrator of the novel explains how Harry spent his entire time by keeping sexual relationship with men and women

Though Harry is lying on bed but his mind does not take rest. He remembers his past while he ran away from one woman to another. Thelma and Ruth are some of the mistresses to whom Harry always had had sexual relationship. Now he expresses it via his exterior monologue:

He is tempted, picturing Thelma in bed naked, her tallowy willing body, her breasts that have nursed three boy babies and two men at least but look virginal and rosy like a baby's thumb tips, not bumpy and chewed and dark like Janice's, her buttocks, glassy in texture and not finely gritty like Janice's, her pubic hair reddish and skimpy enough to see the slit through unlike Janice's opaque thick bush, and her shameless and matter-of-fact mouth. (1234)

His emplaced sense of responsibility plus his crude sexual urges and racial slurs can make Rabbit seem less than lovable. Still, there is something utterly heroic about his character. When his end comes, after all it's the Angstrom family that refuses to accept the reality of rabbit's morality. But the novel presents the bleak picture of Harry's sexual habit.

This kind of incestuous relationship that would be totally unacceptable in our society, but in the novel, it is treated with honesty that makes it seem reasonably acceptable. Similarly, another character of this novel Nelson, son of Harry, also does not hesitate to satisfy his sensual pleasure with his own wife Pru, and runs after Ruth. Pru defends herself sincerely with the astuteness of a wise woman, weaseling her slippery, flexible, and fragment weasel's body as she tries to keep sexual relationship with her husband Harry:

She flicks the blanket back from his lap and touches his drowsy penis in his open pajama fly. "How are we doing down thee"? We never make love any more Janice wants to try sex again but now from the other end of the condo the sound of children can be heard, and of Pru hushing them in her burdened maternal voice. (1130)

Hence forth, though Harry pretends avoiding the sexual relation with his wife, he, in fact, does not resist from inside. As a passionate woman Janice can not tolerate her emotion despite the fact that her counterpart was none other than her husband.

On the other hand Harry is a shameless person who keeps the sexual relationship even with his daughter-in-law:

He taps his jacket pocket for the reassuring lump of the Nitro Stat bottle. He'll take one as soon as he gets away. The night he and Pru fucked, both of them worry and half crazy with their facts, the old bed creaking

beneath them had seemed another kind of nest, an interwoven residue of family fortunes. (1377)

When the other family members know, Janice moves away. Nelson is heartbroken when Pru tells him and even his grandkids come to realization that everyone who has come in contact with Rabbit, has found out that he is a f\_ \_king bum.

On the other hand, Harry's son Nelson goes through the worst trails. Having been left in charge of the car dealership and, like his father, never one for self-discipline, he has developed a cocaine habit which he fiancés partly by siphoning profits from the business and which makes him a danger to his wife Pru and their two children not to mention the entire Angstrom family fortune. It is typical of Harry's impudence that his extramarital sexual activity, a subject of every Rabbit novel, this time extends to his daughter-in-law; while Nelson is trying to clean himself up at a treatment center.

### **Valuing the Surface Appearance**

Updike raises the issues that certainly prioritize the first glance appearance rather than long term vision in this novel. One of the features that emerges throughout this novel *Rabbit at Rest* emphasizes the importance of life style of the people very lightly. The construction of a personal life style of Harry through the consumption of desirable consumer services has little to do with the usefulness of the goods and much to do with image and the way that he appears to others. Along with Harry, his son Nelson also believes on surface appearance over deep meaning.

Rabbit reaches the climax of his career as 'an American man' in this novel by playing Uncle Sam in his hometown, his heart thumping at the feeling that "this is the happiest f\_ \_king country the world has eve seen" (1324). The episode has an uneasy tone, partly ironic but in the surface level he sees the American people are getting God

bless to fulfill their desire. Harry wants to move here and there and, his aim is to spend rest of his life in his own way. Eating sophisticated food, staying with old mistresses, playing with grandkids are some of the desires of Harry. Other members of the Angstrom family also want to spend their life in their own way: Nelson is in business of car dealing but he has a habit of drug, Pru, his daughter-in-law is not concerning about her husband Nelson, and his wife Janice also is not interested to care him but she wants to involve in job. In her mid fifties Janice wants a job like the working girl:

“I want to get a job, too,” Janice says, announcing Harry with her intrusion into Pru’s demure lecture about his very own, he felt, fatty insides. The movie we saw this afternoon, all these women working in New York skyscraper, made me so jealous. Janice didn’t use to dramatize herself. (1151)

In order to show the outer perfection in the Angstrom family she convinces her son, Nelson not to involve in drug addiction but Nelson says that he is not using drug but he is recreational user. Nelson thinks that using drug is not addiction instead it gives new life. During 1980s and 1990s drug addiction was common phenomena in young generation, Nelson is also using drug as other young Americans:

You have never loved me, Harry; you just loved the fact that I love you. I am not complaining. It’s what I deserve. You make your own punishment in life, I am honest to god believed that you get exactly what you deserve. God sees to it. Look at my hands. I used to have pretty hands. At least I thought they were pretty. Now half the fingers look at them! deformed. I could even get my wedding ring off if I tried now [. . .] they’ve all used it, that generation, but Nelson they tell me is really

hooked. As they say the drug runs him instead of him just using the drug.(1232)

Harry is not often good-hearted; however, living as he does so much inside his own skin. Surprised by his loves concern for him, he thinks, funnily of “that strange way women have, of really caring about beyond themselves” (1240). Harry’s wife, Janice, is repeatedly referred to as ‘that mutt’ and ‘that poor dumb mutt’, though she seems to us Harry’s intellectual equal. A frequent noun of Harry’s desire for woman is unprintable. He characterizes women as ‘use and throw’ objects. By this reason, Janice does not concern over her heart trouble husband. He further says: “[T]hese women seem visitors from a slimmed down future where sex is just another exercise and we all live in sealed cubicles and communicate through computers” (1252).

The development of science and technology is another issue what Updike raises in this novel. People use technology for better and comfortable life. He also watches the television and gets relief from it but ironically he does not like the development of science and technology:

He watches a fair amount of television. It’s right there, in front of his face; its wires come out of the wall behind him, just lie oxygen. He finds that facts, not fantasizes, are what he wants the old movies on cable AMC seem stiff and barky in their harshly lit black and white, and the old TV shows on NIK impossibly tiny with their laugh tracks and spray set fifties hairdos. (1317)

He expresses the anger against the technological development. Technology is making the world smaller; the whole world can be viewed on the single computer screen but he is not satisfied with it. He further says, “Godless technology is f\_\_king the pulsing wet

tubes we inherited from the squid, the boneless sea-cants. He feels again that feathery touches of nausea can be possibly thrown up. It would jar and jam” (1129).

Updike presents the bleak picture of late twentieth century American society, characteristics of the people and the general atmospheric condition. People are disintegrating to each other mainly due to the mass production and mass consummersion. Updike further opines:

The greedy consumer society has wrecked the ozone and we'll all be fried by the year 2000, Nelson says Look! He points to the front Myers News press someone has laid on the kitchen table. The main headline is 1988: the dry look and a cartoon show a crazed-looking yellow sun wringing out some clouds for a single drop of water. Janice must have brought about the lifestyle section. Who's f\_ \_king who, who's divorcing who. Normally she stays in bed and lets her husband be the one to bring the proper in from corridor. Lifestyle keeps. (1095)

Harry challenges a lot of imperfection, though he is not getting proper support from his family but he himself tries to maintain his personal quality. He is angry with his son who is hooked on cocaine, the nature of the car business, and his dull and boring marriage. While being angry at his son's addiction, Harry is addicted to food and the comfort commercial America promises him. Updike is saying something deeper about American, about its meaningless materialism and about the things we value.

Harry as a character has not changed much since *Rabbit, Run* but his immutability is part of his appeal. His peculiar thoughts are on the practical aspects of mundane things. A tour guide's chirpy attitudes, the sexual implications of a waitress's hairstyle, the idiosyncrasies of television news anchors are always illuminating. The novel is a vehicle for Updike's commentary, delivered in his inimitably witty prose, on

pop culture as it existed in late 1980s, where is still enough for the memories to flicker in all their pastel- highlighted tackiness.

Updike shows the United States of America in an ironic way. He presents the life style of the people in the late twentieth century. Being highly developed and highly democratic country, the American people are not getting freedom as dogs getting:

In California, dog shot much surprise on me. Everywhere, dog shot, dogs must have important freedom to shot everyway. Dog's freedom is more important than the people. In US, Toyota Company hopes to make Irelands order in ocean of freedom. According to him, freedom is merely the struggle between order and freedom. (1407)

The radio, television, even newspapers are always deliberately barking about freedom. But that freedom is confined of taking guns and shooting others on freeway in random sport.

Although confronted with failure, death, and destruction, in part as a result of his own weakness, Harry Angstrom retains throughout his life the deep inarticulate religious faith. Moderate to abstemious in his approach to liquor and tobacco, owing perhaps to his early indoctrination as an athlete, Harry is nevertheless doubly obsessed with sex and with religion in the mid 50s. His sexual fantasies often merge with the solid bedrock of his unquestioning beliefs to produce a peculiar, honest obstinacy. Harry can rarely look at a woman without disrobing her in his mind's eye, yet he endures his tribulation with the patience and prescience of a modern job, as unquestioning of his suffering as he is of his belief in an underlying principle of order.

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