

**Apocalyptic Vision in the Select Novels of  
John Hoyer Updike: A Postmodern Study**

**A Thesis**

**Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the  
award of the degree of**

**DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**

**IN**

**ENGLISH**

**By**

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**LOVELY PROFESSIONAL UNIVERSITY**

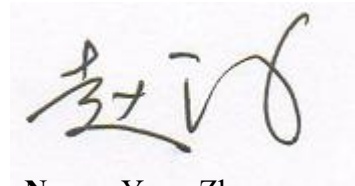
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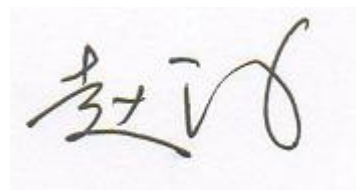
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**Yang Zhao**

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# **PLAGIARISM REPORT**

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## Introduction

John Updike's vision of life and American society is apocalyptic as he wrote novels to depict the present dilemmas of the Americans and the future challenges of the country and the global world. He was also confronted with the riddle of life and existence like Dostoevsky and with a view to find the answers to the mysteries of life and truth he turned to Kierkegaard and Karl Barth who had evolved the "dialectical method" to explore reality and truth. Barth's dialectical method was derived from Kierkegaard who believed that truth is not found in the operation of Hegel's method of thesis and anti-thesis but rather in the dialectical tension between reality and truth. Kierkegaard wrote: "Every truth is truth only to a certain degree, when it goes beyond, the counter point appears, and it becomes untruth" (Kierkegaard, *Word of God and Word of Man* 206). John Updike stated that the purpose of his writing novels and stories is to "examine everything for God's fingerprints." In the 1960's when he started writing his name was associated with other writers such as John Barth, Robert Coover and Thomas Pynchon busy in experimenting new themes and strategies. Updike ignored the main stream of contemporary fiction and distanced himself from the contemporary writers. His mission was to write a new kind of fiction, to create a new kind of world and to depict the new future of mankind the way Karl Marx had done. Updike's 1500 pages Rabbit tetralogy is a coherent and unified work presenting Harry Angstorm portrayed after Bakhtin, a heteroglossic man representing the main currents of American post-war culture. Updike employed the postmodern techniques and literary devices borrowing from Fredric Jameson. The historical development of an apocalypse within history is quite interesting. Edward J. Ahearn in his book *Visionary Fictions* (1996) called the French Revolution as the first apocalyptic event that led to the political and cultural transformation of entire world. Matthew Arnold in *Poetical Works of Matthew* (1905) expressed his apocalyptic vision when he referred to "wandering between two worlds, one dead, the other powerless to be born" (321). Karl Marx published his *Communist Manifesto: Selected Writings* (1977) which became his manifesto of Communism and he remarked that as a result of capitalism, "all fixed, fast-frozen relations, with their train of ancient and

venerable prejudices and opinions, are swept away, all new formed ones become antiquated they can ossify. All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned” (224). Frank Kermode in *The Sense of an Ending* (1968) observed that time has reached a critical juncture, there is a unique importance to the present moment as the world is fast changing and the future of humanity is uncertain. Yeats observed that the twentieth century marked the final days of his apocalyptic gyre, which then would turn renewed, to begin again. T.S. Eliot also forewarned of the cultural catastrophe after the World War II. D.H Lawrence, Hemingway, William Faulkner, Henry Miller and other writers of the twenties and thirties used images of death and destruction of the civilization and expressed their apocalyptic vision in their own way but John Updike expressed his concern for the future of America and for the entire mankind in his novels.

Updike continued making experiments in fiction, he sought inspiration from Frank Kermode’s *The Sense of an Ending* (1968) which initiated the thoughts of twentieth century apocalyptic literature. Kermode argued that the age is very critical and is set for something utterly different. Daniel L. Zins in his research *Rescuing Science from Technocracy: Cat’s Cradle and the Play of Apocalypse* (1986) warns of the absurd nature of nuclear annihilation. In Don DeLillo’s *Underworld* (1967), Lenny Bruce cries out “We’re all gonna to die!” Foucault’s closing words in *The Order of Things* (1970) are also quite alarming. He imagines the notion of man “erased like a face drawn in sand at the edge of the sea” (387). Lyotard, Baudrillard and Jameson locate the apocalyptic transformation of thought and life in developments of technology and global capitalism. Updike evolved his apocalyptic vision of America in particular and the world in general seeking inspiration from James Joyce, Franz Kafka, Karl Barth and Kierkegaard. Updike spent thirty years to complete his Rabbit novels serving as a fictionalized time line of the post-war American experience. Updike doesn’t merely describe the present but he looks at the future destiny of Americans when the nuclear holocaust is threatening and the dark clouds of nuclear missiles are at the gates of America. The Vietnam War, the Korean War and the emergence of terrorism, the attack on The Trade Centre are all the events seriously handled by John Updike. The most important fact of his art is that he has chosen to deal with a world familiar to the majority of people. The heroes of



John Updike are baffled and confused struggling to know the mystery of truth and living in the void like the protagonists of Kafka and Dostoevsky. He is caught between the present and the past.

John Updike is a visionary writer of America whose novels reflect a systematic growth both in themes and techniques and particularly his preoccupation with global issues and the future of mankind. This study entitled: *Apocalyptic Vision in the Select Novels of John Hoyer Updike: A Postmodern Study* is focused on the elucidation of the apocalyptic vision of John Updike from American imperialism to terrorism, in matters of love, sex and religion that obsessed the middle class Americans since World War II. This study broadens the general conceptualization critics and scholars hold regarding Updike's work by exploring the themes and literary devices he used to portray the broader world. James Wood writing a much longer essay in *The New Republic* discussed in detail the "cosmic vision of Updike and his views on American Postmodernity" (25). John Hoyer Updike is a prominent American novelist, short story writer, poet, art critic and literary critic who won scores of prizes including the Booker Prize and Pulitzer Prize for his innovative ideas and apocalyptic vision. He got Pulitzer Prize twice for his understanding of portrayal of the American consciousness in his novels. He won Faulkner Prize for his stylistic techniques and lyrical prose. Updike published more than twenty novels, and he got favorable reviews as he wrote regularly for *The New York Book Review of Books*. His career is pivotal as he is a unique writer personifying the Post World War Era. Updike's career is pivotal. He is one of a handful of writers who witnessed all the events of absurdity, nihilism, explored existentialism and investigated the causes of depression and despair in the middle class Americans. His most famous work is his "Rabbit" series including the novels *Rabbit Run*, *Rabbit Redux*, *Rabbit is Rich* and *Rabbit at Rest* and the novella *Rabbit Remembered*. Harold bloom observes that Updike may have been inspired by Sinclair Lewis who wrote his famous novel *Babbitt* (1922) and depicted vacuity of the middle class Americans. The name Rabbit evokes the themes of Lewis as the main focus of Updike is to expose and ridicule the absurdities of the middle class Americans. In all his novels his prime focus had been to explore the oddities, challenges, the uncertainties and dilemmas of the American middle classes expressing his apocalyptic vision of the

world. Both *Rabbit is Rich* (1982) and *Rabbit at Rest* (1990) were recognized with the Pulitzer Prize. Describing his subject as the American small town populated by Protestant middle class Updike was recognized for his careful craftsmanship, his unique prose style. In this thesis serious efforts are made to examine and investigate the apocalyptic vision of John Updike who gives his own fresh approach to the problems and malaise of the postmodern American society.

## Chapter One

### **Brief Candle: An Insight into the Life and Achievements of John Updike**

The majority of the critics have hailed John Updike as a great literary giant of the postmodern age who spent fifty long years in writing short stories and fiction. Updike is seriously concerned about the problems and challenges faced by the American people. Investigating the texts and themes of Updike Despite in the new millennium, his apocalyptic vision can be conveniently understood. His novels written during fifty years of his writing career provide deep insight into the American culture. After the World War II, a new age was ushered in America and three decades from 1950s to 1970s America made tremendous strides during the rule of two Presidents: Franklin Roosevelt and Kennedy. President Truman and Eisenhower also made drastic changes in culture and society. They brought in America an era consumerism, mass culture and urbanization. Growth of capitalism, industrial unrest and class struggles were new development in America after the World War II. By 1956 a majority held white-collar jobs, working as corporate managers, teachers, salespersons and office employees. More and more Americans considered themselves as part of the middle class during that time. The expansion of suburbs was a noticeable change: easy credit, cheap fuel, mass production and housing and the growth of the automobiles revolutionized American society. David Riesman in his book *The Lonely Crowd* (1953) talks about the alienation of man with the growing prosperity and affluence in America. American society followed conventional values and group norms. Ihab Hassan talks about an image of man from mass society, he is alienated and cut off from the roots. The 1960s brought about optimism in America, President Kennedy initiated an era of liberalism. President Kennedy wanted to exert strong leadership to extend economic benefits to all Americans.

The sexual revolution was another important cultural change in the 1960s. The sexual revolution was a liberation which presented itself “as a bold affirmation

of the senses and of undeniable natural impulse against the puritanical traditions” (23). The limits on sexual expression vanished gradually in the 1960s and 1970s. The parents had no right to intervene in the personal life of their children after their adulthood. Nobody was any longer ashamed to give public evidence of sexual attraction. The prominent writers of this age used the themes of sexual liberty in their fiction. John Updike draws heavily from his own life for the material of his novels depicting his apocalyptic vision for new America. He maintained that middle class experience is really complex and his basic concern is just to explore how people live with and within that compromise and how they die of it. Updike makes befuddled and unfulfilled characters caught in the chasm of murkiness and despondency, unfit to accommodate the contradicted requests of oneself and the general public. Guardians and kids, married couples, darlings and companions face troubles since they can't find some kind of harmony among permit and suppression. In the novels of John Updike this failure is the outcome of sexual avidity and the dilemmas suffered by the characters. All major novels of John Updike are devoted to depict the cultural disintegration and abrogation. John Updike had stood up to the profound emergency in his life as he was undermined by the certainty of death and insignificance of presence. The ideas and philosophy of Soren Kierkegaard and Karl Barth greatly impacted his mind and sensibility. Barth helped Updike to come to grips with his fear and find a basis for faith. No big surprise, strict and religious topics swarm his fiction. His fiction speaks to an infiltrating narrative in the pragmatist method of the changing ethics and habits of American culture. His novels urge the readers to reflect on “the major cultural and political cataclysms” in the middle-class American people. Updike doesn't offer moral doctrines in his novels, but depicts the way people face situations of tensions in which moral debates arise and moral decisions have to be taken. Updike discussed the function of a novel and opined thus: I wrote *Rabbit Run* just to say that there is no solution. It is a novel about the bouncing, the oscillating back and forth between the end of the problem.

John Updike raises his concern for the current modern environment in his novels and his perspective is apocalyptic and postmodernist. He illustrates the existing problems of the truth of life, freedom of sex, family moral responsibility and guilt in his novels. Most of the protagonists of Updike's novel are afraid of

death and he dramatizes the angst and absurdity engulfing the characters. He celebrates America with all its ugliness where people hold on. His characters dread demise and are the survivors of apprehension and social ills of society. He manages sexual freedom delighted in by the Americans portraying the breaking down of scene of America's urban and rural spread, with its inns, cheap food joints and bars. He uncovers contemporary man's profound emergency through the word usage of sex in his books. In his *Rabbit Run* characters are put in a situation of turmoil and must respond to situations that relate to religion, family obligations and marital infidelity. John Updike as one of the most accomplished American writers, and discuss the reflection of the American reality since the 1950s in his fiction, emphasizing the most characteristic features and dominant thematic concerns of his works.

It is quite a fruitful experience to trace out the evolution of John Updike as a writer, both as a professional writer and literary devices employed by him in his novels. Updike's Rabbit novels, each reflecting a certain decade, starting with the 1950s and finishing with the 1970s, with their own social and cultural climate. The vision of John Updike is not limited but encompasses the broader world since his novels transcend time and space as they portray the broader world. Howard Harper averred in 1967 that the work of Updike "has a depth, integrity, and an ultimate concern" (190). Norman Podhoretz described Updike as "a writer who transcends time and space by his apocalyptic vision" (49-52). Robert Detweiler hailed Updike for attempting "to extend the capacities of fiction through many devices at a time when others are pronouncing the death of the novel" (272). He affirmed that Updike has the poetic power to dramatize the internal psyche of the Americans in lyrical prose. Joyce B. Markle (1973) observed that the novels of Updike "establish with clarity and unqualified definition the dynamics of his vision of man" (2). George Hunt interpreted the novels of John Updike with the aid of Jungian psychology while Jeff H. Campbell took an interdisciplinary approach stating that the fiction of Updike is focused on the exploration of myth to replace Christianity. Judith Newman stated that "Updike's novels may be considered as broadly separable into realistic social novels of flights into fantasy and aesthetic allegory" (14). In this study two major concerns of John Updike are investigated: the themes of the decay

of love relations and of the decay of religious life, which are conspicuous in his fiction. Updike wrote novels touching upon all the important issues of the present Americans giving a huge images to depict the contemporary malaise. His approach is sociological in tune with the ideas of William James, John Dewey, Charles Horton Cooley. Updike has given an insight into the middle class American life in a realistic manner. He has depicted the mundane American life, which of course had changed over the years. His fiction is distinguished by its attention to the concerns, passions, and suffering of average Americans. Updike himself argues in an interview with Sukhbir Singh: "Harry is just as I am" (1962). Harry is Everyman of the future who is selfish, uncertain, devoid of faith in God and bound to lead a lonely and desperate life. The apocalyptic vision of Jon Updike is articulated through the instable and selfish character of Harry. The age in which Updike lived was characterized by moral and spiritual decadence. C. Wright Mills (1963) observes that people create meaning themselves and the job of a writer is to create images and supply symbols to articulate reality. Bakhtin also observes that in society each individual has his own vision of life and in the broader society people interact with other, negotiate and often interact with others freely to explore reality. Wright Mills further comments thus:

The first rule for understanding the human condition is that men live in a second hand world. The consciousness of men does not determines their existence, nor does their existence determine their consciousness. Between the human consciousness and material existence stand communications and designs, patterns and values which influence decisively such consciousness as they have. (375)

John Updike's life was full of great revolution and new discoveries when all the major critics examine the decline and absurdity of the present American society. Like the protagonist in John Updike's novel, all American people is suffering from inner discord when the families at that time is keeping united and separating. John Updike depicts the coming consequences of the Americans family would be keeping

united but there is no meaning. The marriage as a sacred institution will cease to exist.

John Updike was born in 1932 in Shillington, a small town in Pennsylvania. He got his early education at the local high school and graduated from Harvard. He was a keen observer of nature as he used all the material of his childhood in his early stories. His home town Cringer frequently appears in his stories. He received a Knox Fellowship and spent a year in Oxford. He was on the staff of *The New Yorker* for two years. He got scores of prizes including the Pulitzer Prize. The career of John Updike is pivotal and historically very significant. He personifies the Post World War II era when the cultural transformation was going fast and he made the smoothest transition from a print world to one dominated by television, then the Internet. Updike surprised his contemporaries by his commitment to writing that enabled him to publish at least one book annually for more than fifty years. Updike was a freelance writer whose long career made him unique in the history of American fiction. In his entire literary career Updike remained committed to the future of America and expressed his concern for the futuristic development of America. He commented thus in *Picked-Up Pieces* (1966) In his own words: "I want to write in such a way that the world, so balky and resistant and humiliating, can in this act of mimesis be rectified, adjusted, chastened, purified"(35). Like Kafka, Updike depicts the modern malaise in his novels. In the words of Roland Barthes "his writing is a unity of the signs in the zones of infra-on ultra-language" (20) and could be called a plunge into reality. In his collection of essays *Picked-Up Pieces*, Updike expressed his social vision as he believes that a writer should write about his people and their lives, and that only depicting the actual life becomes meaningful criticism of life. He says: "We must write where we stand, wherever we do stand, there is life, and an imitation of life we know, however narrow, is our only ground" (32). Updike fulfills his responsibility as a postmodern writer and he is devoted to change the life of the Americans living in big cities and small towns and villages. He doesn't write for the present generation but for the posterities, the contemporary youth is trapped in the abyss of darkness and for the posterities there is no future as the families are disintegration, the divorces are increasing and the youth is getting

lost in the bog of drugs. Updike observes thus: “Anyone dignified with the name of “writer” should strive, surely, to discover or invent the verbal texture that most closely corresponds to the ton of life as it strives on his nerves”(16). Updike writes of average people, shares their sufferings, the loss of love, depression and shattering of dreams and aspirations. Updike is ambitious to “present social protest, and a hope of reforms” (32).

John Updike appeared in the literary scene of America with the publication of his first novel *Rabbit, Run*, in 1960. With this novel he launched the series of *Rabbit* and he wrote four novels, *Rabbit Redux*, *Rabbit Is Rich* and *Rabbit at Rest*. John Updike spent thirty years to complete his tetralogy. Professor Antony Fernandez attempted a sociological interpretation of Updike’s Rabbit Tetralogy. He insists that, “Updike whose fiction has been a bit elusive and ambiguous has boldly come out in his Rabbit Tetralogy as an indefatigable champion of domestic values” (8-9). It is averred that Updike’s Harry, as one who was “done in” by his addiction “to junk food and mindless adultery” and basketball (9). Updike has bestowed on Harry heroic dimensions, for the novel identifies him with the myth of America. He is the historian who has been turned into an object of history. Joyce Carol Oates (1960) in *Contemporary Literary Criticism* compared him with Flaubert and observed: “the being that most illuminates the Rabbit quartet is not finally Harry Angstrom himself but the world through which he moves in his slow downward slide, meticulously recorded by one of our most gifted American realists”(253). Harry Angstrom is the typical postmodern hero of John Updike. As the title of the novel suggests he is always on the run and drives in circle, he sleeps in the hutch of his car, and is let loose by Updike to run only. He impregnates two women and becomes a gardener of a widow and run off into the woods at the end of the novel. John Updike has used all the literary devices of postmodern art in portraying the character and the plot of the novel. Updike crated gallery of characters belonging to different sections of society. Updike merges as a proletariat, his philosophy is based on the justification of the rights of the individual. He thinks that man should take control of life. He emphasizes man’s spirit and defined of the spirit transcends religion. Updike believes that spirit can be used as a weapon to fight against



injustice. In his *Rabbit Tetralogy*, Updike paints the canvas of American reality. He agrees with the ideas of Terry Eagleton who says:

Literature, we are told, is vitally engaged with the living situations of men and women, it is concrete rather than abstract, displays life in all its rich variousness, and rejects barren conceptual enquiry for the feel and taste of what it is to be alive. (196)

Updike's major statement of this concept appears in *The Poorhouse Fair*, but is evident in all his novels. A primary concern in *Rabbit*, *Run*, *The Centaur*, *Of the Farm*, and *Couples* is the disintegration of love and religion. In general, Updike believes that the positive and necessary values realized in love and religion was strong and efficacious in the past, while modern life has witnessed their decay and corruption. Apparently Updike envisions modern love as an antidote to the boredom of the modern society. It is entirely selfish, a for-the-moment-only encounter, not meant to lead to a lasting relationship. Modern love contains none of the qualities of honor, respect, or fidelity that once were so binding in a union of man and woman. Lost also is familial love and the sense of responsibility involved in it. In treating the decay of religion Updike seems especially interested in the loss of significance of traditional religious thought. The ideas and rituals of the past have no place in modern society. Religious symbols are meaningless, they offer no comfort or basis of redemption to modern man. Morality does not exist, God has become nobody, and death is finality. Implicit in Updike's concern for the decline of idealism is a very urgent and very serious appeal to a world that is in danger of forgetting what ought to be cherished. Kenneth Hamilton (1970) feels that *The Poorhouse Fair* is Updike's most direct parable of the relation of the present to the past. Conner "has vowed to bring order and beauty out of Human substance" (3). Conner is the insensitive individual whose only interest is in methodological perfection, without regard for what is actually best.

### **Difference between Modernism and Postmodernism: John Updike as a Postmodernist**

John Updike is a postmodern novelist like Vladimir Nabokov, Flannery O'Connor, Bernard Malamud and John Cheever. The novels of John Updike are packed with postmodern characteristics. He reacts against the modern writers like Hemingway and Joseph Heller who give a fragmented view of history and subjectivity. Postmodernist writers react against the ideas of Enlightenment. Like modern writers Updike also believes that there is no absolute truth so facts and falsehood are interchangeable. Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* (1952) gives the message that there is no such thing as absolute truth. Modernism puts faith in the ideas, beliefs and cultural norms of the west but the postmodern writers like John Updike and Nabokov reject all traditional values as they view life meaningless and all struggles of life futile ending in despair. The modern writers celebrate the adventures of World War II but the postmodern writers don't find any heroism in the contemporary life as in the plays of Harold Pinter and Beckett there are anti-heroes. The writers are impacted by the theories of nihilism and existentialism ideas as they followed the ideas of Kierkegaard and Roland Bathes. In an interview John Updike told that his main protagonist Angstrom was inspired by his reading of Kierkegaard suggesting the pervasive "vogue of angst in the world". Hemingway, Scott Fitzgerald and Joseph Heller portray a unified vision of life and society but the postmodern writers see human experience ambiguous, fragmentary and internally contradictory. Beckett present a "jagged world view", the postmodernist writers sought inspiration from the writings of Georg Lukacs, Theodor Adorno and Fredric Jameson who explored the cult of postmodernism. Jameson writes: "in these circumstances indeed, there is some question whether the ultimate renewal of modernism, the final dialectical subversion of the new automatized conventions of aesthetics of perceptual revolution, might not simple be realism itself "(11). John Barth contended that the realist fiction of the Post World War II of John Updike is a kind of reaction to the realist fiction of the war writers. Jameson in his Postmodernism used the term "late modernism". The modern writers were impacted by the events of Depression, Stalinism, Jewish Holocaust and new concepts of Socialism. Authors of postmodernism are not much concerned with social realism but use the techniques of Dadaism and Surrealism. Malcolm Bradbury avers thus:

After 1945 the novel showed every sign of reasserting its realistic potential, its moral and social concern, its sense of life as progress. The lessons of the great moderns...had been taken, but they were assimilated back into a spirit relative realism, and technical and epistemological questions were not strongly pressed. (10)

John Updike was greatly impacted by *Ecritis* of Lacan, *The Order of Things* of Foucault and *Desire in Language* (1969) of Kristeva. Lukacs lashed at the modern writers in his book *Realism in Our Time* alleging that the writers of the war period distorted reality. In their writings reality is shared as a “nightmare”. He comments thus: “Lack of objectivity in the description of the outer world finds its complement in the reduction of reality to a nightmare”(25). Lukacs condemned Faulkner for his “distorted vision of reality”. Saul Bellow and John Updike belong to the postmodern tradition who dared to depict reality in objective style touching upon the themes of love, religion, sex, alienation, trauma, suicide and escapism. In an interview with Charlie Riley Updike stated thus:

The true novelist is in love with reality. He is a mediator between reality and the reader, and not simply someone who operates in a world of printed words. I suspect that once a writer loses that almost childlike wish to celebrate reality, he begins to churn out unnecessary books. (Charlie 130)

### **Characteristics of Postmodern: Black Humor in the Fiction of John Updike**

Like Kurt Vonnegut, John Updike rejects techniques employed by the modern writers and” evolving his own perception of reality. His sense of visual acuity is unique as the witty style of Kurt Vonnegut is charming. The prose of John Updike has “the sharpness of a surgeon’s scalpel, the precision of a fine watch and focuses on the commonplace like the eye of an X-ray machine” The eye of John Updike is very sharp and he sees with the eye of a bird. John Updike doesn’t depend on the reality of events of the past like Hemingway but he creates a new world as his vision is apocalyptic. Updike created a galaxy of characters mostly belonging to the

middle class America confronting the uncertainties and absurdities of life involved in a world of despair. His protagonists are absurd struggling in a world of science and technology and trapped in a godless universe. In his novel *Rabbit Run* Harry Angstrom is shifting character, a high school football star of twenty six years young boy engaged in the job of selling of kitchen gadgets. He is married to a salesgirl Janice who is pregnant but being confused and bewildered he leaves his wife and is lost in his own helpless detachment and estrangement. The postmodern writers such as John Barth, William Gaddis, Kurt Vonnegut and Bruce Jay Friedman extensively use irony, playfulness and black humor. Updike portrays the modern world as a bleak, barren abyss where human civilization faces its decline. Updike uses black humor to diminish the disgust of the nihilistic modern life. In his novel *Rabbit at Rest* Updike employs grotesque allegory of mythical happiness and success in America. Updike depicts the quest of the American middle class of 1980s for happiness through black humor.

### **Intertextuality of John Updike**

The technique of Intertextuality is very popular among the postmodern writers, the trend started with T.S. Eliot when he published his *The Waste Land* (1922) loaded with the allusions and the textual lines from various great writers including the Hindu Scriptures. It can include an author's borrowing and transformation of the texts of other writers to bring intensity in the scenes and situations. An important element of postmodernism is its acknowledgment of previous literary works. Also, Umberto Eco's *The Name of the Rose* (1980) takes on the form of a detective novel and makes references to authors such as Aristotle, Arthur Conan Doyle, and Borges. John Updike borrowed heavily from Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* (1850), Updike wrote *A Month of Sundays*, *Roger's Version* and *The Witches of Eastwick* under the influence of Hawthorne.

### **Pastiche**

John Updike uses the tool of pastiche to articulate his cosmic apocalyptic vision of American life. In postmodern terminology pastiche means to combine, or "paste" together, multiple elements. In most of his novels John Updike uses the tool

of pastiche to effectively depict the themes of absurdity of the middle class Americans. He has “pasted” elements of previous genres and styles of literature to create a new narrative voice. For example, William S. Burroughs uses science fiction, detective fiction, westerns, Margaret Atwood uses science fiction and fairy tales, Thomas Pynchon, uses elements from detective fiction, science fiction, and war fiction. In *Rabbit Run* there elements of fantasy and romance, in *The Poorhouse Fair*, Updike gives a poor view of the world that technology has created. Updike gives the apocalyptic view of the future of America as the novel is set in 1984. Updike uses the elements of science and fantasy and the novels have an affinity with the anti-Utopian warnings of Orwell and Huxley. Being influenced by Albert Camus and Sartre, Updike uses absurdity and humor to portray America embracing pop culture. He creates a fictional world that creates the sentiments of the middle class Americans. Like Bakhtin Updike uses all tools of irony, satire to burlesque the middle-class characters.

### **Meta-fiction**

Updike’s fiction is considered as meta-fiction and his *Rabbit Tetralogy* is epical in dimension. All the four Rabbit novels deal with the problems of four generations of people. Updike has focused on the mysterious and the uncanny reflecting a world view that is pessimistic and challenging. His novels evince mythopoeia realism. John Irving’s *The World According to Garp* (1978) is a fine example of meta-fiction. Updike imitated James Joyce’s *A Portrait of the Artist* (1916) when he wrote *Rabbit Run* and *Rabbit at Rest*. Linda Hutcheon in her *Poetics of Modernism: History Theory and Fiction* (1988) observes that post-structuralism and deconstruction are the main the obvious theories that contributed to the growth of postmodernism (188). Hutcheon talks about the novels of John Updike that fictionalize the actual historical events and characters. The hero of Updike’s *The Poorhouse Fair* is Stephen Conner who in Cartesian sense is a linear and rational thinker with the scientific approach to an irrational world.

### **Magical Realism**

The Chinese novelist Mo Yan, the Nobel Prize winner wrote *Big Breasts and Wide Hips* (1996) using the technique of magic realism. Salman Rushdie wrote *The Midnight's Children* (1981) presenting his hero Saleem who has supernatural powers. In the novels of John Updike there is a unique mix of brutal incidents, magic realism, the descriptions of the scenes of nature and far flung metaphors. Updike's famous and controversial novel *Terrorist* (2006) presents the protagonist Ahmad Mulloy and who may be regarded as a radicalized Muslim. The novel is an epitome of "essentialist" work of art abounds in fantasy and uncanny episodes. Updike's *Rabbit Run* touches upon all the important issue of the 21th century, there is a fruitful commentary on the AIDS epidemic, the terrorist attack on Pan Am Flight 103 over Lockerbie and American trade war. In *Rabbit at Rest* Updike depicts Harry's moral decay and spiritual lethargy of contemporary Americans.

### **Mastered Irony**

Irony is an important tool used by the poets and the playwrights since antiquity. Mark Antony uses this tool in his famous speech in *Julius Caesar* of Shakespeare and his famous ironical stroke "Well! Brutus is an honorable man" is a memorable in the history of criticism. Irony is a significant tool to expose and ridicule the evils of society and to lash at the vices such as affectation, snobbery and prudery. Morris Niedenthal (1980) in his article "Irony and the Grammar of the Gospel" observes thus: "originates in the perception of an incongruity between what is and what ought to be and it involves a conflict between pretense and reality" (142). Kierkegaard propounded the postmodernist theory of "Mastered Irony" and the novelists such Kurt Vonnegut, Pynchon and Vladimir Nabokov and John Updike used this important tool in depicting the ambiguities and incongruities in the life of their characters. In all the novels of John Updike I selected, the role of mastered irony, paradox and crisp wit is significant. If a hero perceives an incongruity and assumes a personal responsibility for its correction, his response is certainly heroic. But unfortunately in *Rabbit Run*, Harry Angstrom doesn't recognize the role of incongruity in his life and he goes on falling deeper and deeper. Niedenthal further observes: "it can be the exaltation of hero figures or as applied to listeners, people are implored to be courageous, to stand up and be counted, to get involved, to do

their duties, to put their lives on the line, to become heroes of the faith” (Niedenthal 144). Brad Frazier (2004) in his article “Kierkegaard on the Problems of Pure Irony” observes that “it is safe to say that Kierkegaard was preoccupied with irony and its relation to the moral life. His view of irony, though was hardly static” (Frazier 417). Indeed, in his work *The Concept of Irony* (1841) he elaborated the meaning and role of “mastered Irony”.

## **Fragmentation**

Fragmentation is another important aspect of postmodern literature. John Updike uses this literary technique to blend various elements concerning plot, characters, themes, imagery and symbols. The factual details of the plot of the novel are fragmented and dispersed throughout plot. In his novels there is a break in the sequence of events, character development and action. It is very difficult to predict what will follow the next. The purpose of fragmentation is to depict a metaphysically unfounded, chaotic universe. It can occur in language, sentence structure or grammar.

## **Hyperreality**

The postmodernist critics such as Fredric Jameson have discussed in detail the concept of hyperreality. In simple language it is an inability of consciousness to distinguish reality from a simulation of reality in postmodern societies of America. It is a condition in which what is real and what is fiction are juxtaposed together. It is very difficult to find a distinction between where one begins and where one ends. The physical reality is mingled with virtual reality, human intelligence is blended with artificial intelligence in literature. John Updike uses this device in all the major novels as his characters are involved in the hyper-real world ignoring the physical real world.

John Updike wrote the first novel *The Poorhouse Fair* (1958) is based on the single day of the old people’s fair, when they sell their hand made goods to the people. William Peden praised Updike in his review in *New York Times Book Review* for his interest in the common life of people and for the great clarity and

precision of language. He talked of the split between the physical desires and the spiritual longings of the protagonists. Harry and Conner struggle for significance in the harsh and oppressive world where things are changing very fast and faith is replaced by money and sex. In the first section of the novel, the cat is killed and the wall of the Poorhouse is demolished. Both events symbolize chaos and disruption in the modern America. People who crowd the fair are a race of pleasure seekers talking about holidays, illicit affairs and physical ailments. Updike dramatizes the duality of body and spirit in the characters of Conner and Hook, Conner is ambitious manager of the Poorhouse and Hook is aged and dying. The negative influences of science and technology are emphasized like Huxley. Youth and age is vividly depicted in the novel. The apocalyptic vision of John Updike is expressed by Conner who envisages heaven on earth:

There will be no disease. There will be no oppression, political or economic, because the administration of power will be in the hands of those who have no hunger for power. (John Updike, *The Poorhouse Fair* 123)

Stephen Conner is a linear, rational thinker with his apocalyptic scientific approach to an irrational world. He is a visionary thinker looking at the sky's vacuous "breath of blue" of "Hairless cold". He is isolated from others His desire for purity and cleanliness, he creates a tension between ideal and its opposite in the novel. Killing of the lame cat in the opening section symbolizes a "disturbance of accustomed order" (34). In his passion to embrace glorious human future, Conner is obliged to ignore the real sufferings of the present people.

John Updike appeared in the literary scene of America with the publication of his first novel *Rabbit, Run*, in 1960. With this novel he launched the series of *Rabbit* and he wrote four novels, *Rabbit Redux*, *Rabbit Is Rich* and *Rabbit at Rest*. John Updike spent thirty years to complete his tetralogy. Professor Antony Fernandez attempted a sociological interpretation of Updike's Rabbit Tetralogy. He insists that, "Updike whose fiction has been a bit elusive and ambiguous has boldly come out in his Rabbit Tetralogy as an indefatigable champion of domestic values" (8-9). It is averred that Updike's Harry, as one who was "done in" by his addiction



“to junk food and mindless adultery and basketball” (9). Updike has bestowed on Harry heroic dimensions, for the novel identifies him with the myth of America. He is the historian who has been turned into an object of history. Joyce Carol Oates in *Contemporary Literary Criticism* (1992) compared him with Flaubert and observed: “the being that most illuminates the Rabbit quartet is not finally Harry Angstrom himself but the world through which he moves in his slow downward slide, meticulously recorded by one of our most gifted American realists” (253). Harry Angstrom is the typical postmodern hero of John Updike. As the title of the novel suggests he is always on the run and drives in circle, he sleeps in the hutch of his car and is let loose by Updike to run only. He impregnates two women and becomes a gardener of a widow and run off into the woods at the end of the novel. John Updike has used all the literary devices of postmodern art in portraying the character and the plot of the novel. Harry’s wife Janet is a “Springer” and his old coach of football is “Tot-hero” Updike uses the pun in describing the coach of Harry who is also a reputed football hero. He treats in *Rabbit Tetralogy* the problem of man’s survival at a time when neither scientific humanism nor religious dogmas can provide him spiritual sustenance. All the characters are caught in the web of darkness and disbelief. Updike is giving warning to the posterities that in the growing scientific world man will find no clue to the presence of God. In the future it will be difficult for the Americans to survive in the climate of disillusionment, disbelief and death. The time is very near when man will find no way to escape the terror of life and will get no help from within and will be lost in the pit of horror. Howard M. Harper analyzes Harry Angstrom as a “bleak Sartrean existentialist and post-Nietzschean seeker, a kind of ignorant but inspired folk philosopher” (185). The plot is ironical, satirical, ambiguous and absurd. Like *Don Quixote* Harry is in quest for something and that something is never found. Gulliver leaves his city and his quest separates him from his humanity and at the end he is forced to sleep in the stable of the horses. Harry’s flight separates him from humanity, he suffers alienation from his wife and child. The plot is packed with grotesque and bizarre episodes, scenes of deaths of infants, imminent abortions. John Updike uses all the postmodern tools of irony, paradox and black comedy to dramatize these tragic scenes. Harry leaves his home and his wife who is alcoholic and “wants to go south, down, down the map in to orange groves and smoking rivers and bare foot women. It seems simple enough,

drive all night through the dawn through the morning through the moon park on a beach take off your shoes and fall asleep by the Gulf of Mexico” (John Updike *Rabbit Run* 25). Harry is glued to the car radio which soothes him with songs about “Secret Love, Autumn Leaves” Harry is a confused and bewildered middle class American, the characters in the novel have different opinions about him. Harry is stifled in his own house. The imagery of “clutter” and “corrupt dregs”, “rumpled rug”, “the floppy stocks” highlight chaos and disorder symbolizing the disorientation of Harry’s mind who is sick of his flapper wife. He feels that he is not a free individual as he imagines himself “on a cliff, there I an abyss he will fall into” (22). Harry sees a big question mark before him: Why am I me? He wants to lead an independent happy life of a basketball player as he did in his school. He revolts against the middle class style of living and runs away from his pregnant wife. In his house Harry feels “glued in with a lot of busted toys and empty glasses”(86). Harry is selfish, rebellious and adventurous as Eccless tells him: “The truth is You’re monstrously selfish...you worship but your own worst instincts”(134). His mistress Ruth also points out: “He just lived in his skin and didn’t give a thought to the consequences about anything”. The mother of Janice calls him “a spoiled” while his own father thinks “he is the worst kind of Brewer bum” (13).

Updike has given an insight into the middle class American life in a realistic manner. He has depicted the mundane American life, which of course had changed over the years. His fiction is distinguished by its attention to the concerns, passions, and suffering of average Americans. The appeal of *Rabbit, Run* owes a great deal to its true to- life portrait of an American man and his family. Although many of the themes in *Rabbit, Run* also have a universal relevance, this story has obvious roots in the USA. Harry Angstrom is portrayed as a type of average American. While at first glance he may appear childish, pathetic, and not worthy of our attention, the situation he puts himself in raises questions that keep us interested. He is, despite his actions, not all bad, and he has a certain charm that allows us to identify with some aspects of his character. Updike manages to convey Rabbit’s feelings of being trapped in a cage, much like his nickname would suggest. He has nowhere to turn, and when he has a chance to escape his captivity, he runs. The America of *Rabbit, Run* is a stark alternative to the “American Dream” narrative, which presents

America as a place where success is always right around the corner and failure is conveniently left out in favor of a happy ending. In Updike's version, a more realistic one, happiness and fulfillment are harder to find. The culture of America in general and the 1950's in particular, is an important reason for the story's resonance.

Harry-Ruth relationship is based on selfishness to enjoy carnal pleasures. Harry tries to fill his spiritual void with sexual pleasures. Tothero, his school coach inspires him to become a winner in the greater game of life. Harry has no faith in God, he discards the preaching of Eccles and Kruppenbach. He tries to pray but can't, he tries to believe in God but his actions take him away from God. His running is meaningless as he is not running to find any moral or spiritual meaning of life but his search is for something which can help him to know what he is. His journey is cyclical, he leaves Ruth also and comes back to his wife Janice on the pretext of seeing a new baby and to get freedom from the burden of guilt. But Janice gets drunk and the baby is drowned. Harry again deserts Janice and goes back to Ruth who is pregnant. Ruth wants him to divorce his wife:

Now you work it out. You divorce that wife you feel so sorry for about once a month, you divorce her or forget me. If you can't work it out, I'm dead to you. I'm dead to you and this baby of yours is dead too. Now get out if you want to. (246)

The problem with the modern man is that he can't decide, he always keeps his options open and is often caught in a trap. Harry's indecisiveness brings him anguish as he doesn't get anywhere. His struggle for freedom and dignity remain elusive. Harry "Rabbit" Angstrom as his nick name "Rabbit" suggests is, "the frisky international mischief maker," that America represents. Updike himself argues in an interview with Sukhbir Singh: "Harry is just as I am" Harry is Everyman of the future who is selfish, uncertain, devoid of faith in God and bound to lead a lonely and desperate life. The apocalyptic vision of Jon Updike is articulated through the instable and selfish character of Harry. The age in which Updike lived was characterized by moral and spiritual decadence. There was no future and the feelings of uncertainty and terror would become accentuated more and more with the decay

of traditional values. Ihab Hassan gives a clear picture of the growing nihilism and disintegration of culture:

Survival appears indeed both the secret and paramount obsession of contemporary man...Memories of Holocausts from Auschwitz to Hiroshima, a succession of wars from Korea to Vietnam...all these perpetuate a mood of crisis that no writer can entirely ignore. (123)

Caught between desire and necessity, Harry represents the archetypal American male in search of stability and love in the family. John Updike wrote *Rabbit Redux* in 1971 documenting the present and future of the Americans. Harry has grown old and is cured and led back to his family. America is confronted with new social and political problems and the era in which he novel was written is typified by social and philosophical apathy. Eisenhower was the President of America and the tensions were growing in all families because of the dawn of new culture and the pervasive vogue of fashion, glamour, sexual liberty and the growth of feminism. In this novel Harry becomes serious but his Janice performs the role of a flapper, she is demanding and is intoxicated with liberty. Harry rejoins his family and resumes his duties and responsibilities as a father since his son Nelson is of thirteen years. The novel begins in July and ends in October 1969. Each chapter begins with an epigraph and Updike gives the information about American and Russian astronauts. The apocalyptic vision of John Updike is fully revealed in this novel. Rabbit has bought a new house but the discord persists as his house represents a world of disjunction as Harry comments “it is a dry and cold” (John Updike, *Rabbit Redux* 132).

In chapter “Mom/Pop/Mom”, Harry is passive and Janice calls him “the silent majority.” Stavros tell Janice: “He’s is a normal product.... He is a typical good-hearted imperialist racist”(49). Janice tells Stavros that “he is missing something” He is sick of American Dream as he is only a watcher in this novel and not an active participant. Janice is dumb and stupid but she takes the charge, the forces of Feminism and Sexual Revolution transformed her. Harry finds awful vulgarity in her language while he is shaving, she surprises him with crude and

savage vulgarity: “I am just a cunt Harry. There are billions of us now”(37). She talks about rape and sex before Nelson which irritates Harry: “He knows more than you ever will. That’s nothing personal, Harry, it’s just a fact. People are no more sophisticated now than when you were a boy” (41). Janice often scolds him: “You have gotten of upright in your old age”(41). Harry is shocked to find the transformation in the attitude and behavior of Janice. She is a New American woman freely talking of love, sex and rape openly. Her liberated sexual behavior is a new challenge for Harry. Edward Vargo points out thus: “National rage and guilt fuse Janice’s own guilt and love and rage, national fears and dreams merge with Rabbit’s own inadequacy to satisfy her” (152).

Janice expresses her sexual liberty and takes Charlie Starvos as a lover. She finds her family, husband and son unable to give her satisfaction. She is sick of the obsolete mind set of Harry who is old fashioned: “He put his life into the rules, he feels melting away now”(54). Harry doesn’t react and becomes a watcher of the activities of his wife. Janice openly confesses her adulterous affair and tells Harry: “I do, do sleep with Charlie”. Harry’s reaction is mild: “Shit, of course you do” (64). She tries her best to provoke Harry and to excite his jealousy: “I love him. Damn You, Harry. We make love all the time”(64). Harry doesn’t react and remains cool and undisturbed: “sure you do...Keep him. If he makes you happy I don’t seem to, so go ahead, until you have had your fill at last”(70). Janice tries her best to provoke Harry but when she finds him cool and composed she herself experiences mental torture. She tells Harry her plan to forge a new identity in the 1969 America:

Harry, I’m sorry for whatever pain this is causing you, truly sorry, but it’s very important that at this point in our lives we don’t let guilt feelings motivate us...I am searching for a valid identify and I suggest you do the same. (98)

John Updike is seriously exploring the impact of newly attained sexual liberty on the mind and sensibility of American women and he is also concerned about the future of the American family. What will happen if all married women become adulterous and break away from the ties of marriage? He is exploring the impact of the social change and the excruciating pressures on the psyche of women

through the character of Janice. Harry has lost all hopes of Janice who has turned a rebel in her crazy quest for liberty, he brings Jill home who is a runaway from Jimbo's Lounge. He wants to begin a new family with Jill in desperation who is like a daughter and sister to his son. For Harry "life is a sham and John Updike exposes and ridicules the life of the rich middle class American through the sexual adventures of Harry". The disintegration of the family structure is realistically depicted by John Updike through Harry-Janice relationship. "Who will hold families together, if every body has to live. Living is a compromise, between what you want and doing what other people want" (102). The young children like Jill are the most affected people. Jill belongs to a rich family but she hates rules and regulations of a traditional family structure: " I hate it, I rejected it, I ran away, I shit on it"(185). Updike has vividly portrayed the inner turmoil of his sick and distressed protagonists who indulges into love and sex in the vain quest for happiness and security of life.

Sketeer is another lost character, she is given to drugs and is lost into an uncharted territory. The American youth is lost in the world of drugs and dope as they are directionless and leading a boring and unpleasant life. Money culture has destroyed their fine spirits and the decay of values led them to an abyss of darkness and despair. Jill and Harry are at the end of the road and their search for meaning has dried out. Vargo aptly remarks thus: "The rites which Sketeer performs and into which he first drags Jill, then Harry, celebrate a mixture of love and hate, rage and liberation, death to slavery and resurrection to a new life, an ecstasy over a vision that leads to chaos" (716). As the plot progresses Jill and Harry descend deeper and deeper to the abyss of darkness and despair. The neighbors of Harry take a serious note of their illicit relationship and in retaliation they burn the house of Harry. Jill is consumed by the flames but Harry and his son Nelson are unharmed.

The most interesting character of all women characters is Mim, she has adjusted with the new culture of love and sex and has successfully overpowered chaos and emptiness. Her behavior is governed by the rules of the survival. Updike gives the imagery of desert and she says: "there are the survival rule, the rule of survival in the desert" (312). She believes that the American Dream has transformed America into a desert. The time has come when the American youth must take the

challenge to cope with the absurdities of life “the softness of the sex.” She highlights the survival urge of the younger generation thus: “They’re burning it out with dope. They’re going to make themselves hard clean through. Like Oh! Cockroaches. That’s the way to live in desert” (314). Mim returns from the West Coast and takes charge of Angstrom family and sets the house in order. She understands the predicament of Harry and gives love to Nelson, makes serious efforts to unite Harry and Janice who expresses her guilt for the first time to Harry: “I feel so guilty”(352). At the end of the novel Harry and Janice reconciles and reach an understanding

John Updike’s *Rabbit is Rich* (1981) is another Rabbit novel depicting the apocalyptic vision of the novelist. Updike is seriously concerned about the future of America and the institution of marriage, the relationships and attitude of people to love and sex. The main metaphor in the novel is money and all the characters are involved in getting and spending and enjoying the amenities of life. Harry, Janice, Mrs. Springer and Nelson are preoccupied with the plans of making money. Harry and Janice invest money in gold and are seen crazy to become billionaire. The family is considering the plans of extension, establishment and generation of monetary sources. The novel is set in the fall of 1979 when Jimmy Carter was the President in America. Updike also highlights the issue of rising prices, gasoline prices are some of the social realities. Like Scott Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby* (1925), Updike depicts the fast rate of urban culture and the decay of moral and spiritual values. The Americans are lost in the money culture and are discarding the old values of true love, adjustment in the family and sincerity in relationships. He visualizes the decay of American society in the future and the disintegration of the family structure. Harry, Janice are living with void, there is emptiness in their life as they have gone away from God. The plight of the couple is excruciating as they are feeling insecure and are always haunted by fear and death. The disruptive forces of greed and lust engulf them and shatter their peace and happiness.

Now the focus of John Updike is on Nelson who is a young American and the future of America. He is lost in dope and is sick of his parents, his life is horrible and is running toward the grave. He lacks agility, spiritual faith and harmony of life. He is restless, aggressive and lost in the pit of greed and lust. John Updike comments thus: “Spineless generation, no grit, nothing solid to tell a fact from spook

with Satanism, pot, drugs, vegetarianism. Pathetic” (150). Tony Tanner aptly comments thus: “Updike is more the writer of the story concerning marriage, children, the relationship between generations” (John Updike, *Rabbit is Rich* 274). Nelson had living relationship with Pru and she became pregnant like Janice before marriage. He tells his father of the merits of Pru:

I like Pru. I like the way she looks. She is great in bed. She needs me. She thinks I’m neat. She doesn’t think I am a baby. You say I am caught but I don’t feel caught. I feel like I’m becoming a man. (193)

Like his father Harry, Nelson is adventurous and has discarded the sacred rules of marriage. He develops intimacy with another girl Melanie and excites jealousy in Pru who humiliates him thus: “I’m watching you how you act with your family, and you are very spoiled. You are a bully Nelson”(308). His relationship with Melanie becomes the main cause of disintegration of the family of Pru. She warns him in desperation: “I can’t stop you and you can’t stop me, we’re two people even if we did get married. You never wanted to marry me and I shouldn’t have let you” (309). Nelson has to confront a New Woman of America, the femme fatal in the form of Pru. Updike dramatizes the travesty of marriage when Pru becomes demanding from Nelson. His agony is aggravated as he says:

Women. They are holes, you put one thing in another and its never enough, you stuff your entire life in there and they smile that crooked little sad smile and are sorry you couldn’t have done better. (332)

In desperation Nelson runs away like his father Harry to find the meaning of life. He curses his mom and Dad for all the problems and discord. He suffers from angst and longs for an ideal relationship. Harry thinks Nelson is like a rat “to be drowned” Janice is also seriously worried about the family of Nelson. She feels guilty for the disaster of Nelson and Pru relationship. She is totally changed as a mother as she seriously tries to bring order in the chaotic family of Nelson. This novel is a story of affirmation of Harry and Janice. Updike gives the message of orderly married life ruled by sacred rules.



John Updike's *Rabbit at Rest* (1990) is the last novel of *Rabbit Tetralogy* depicting the rejuvenation and reconciliation of Harry family. John Updike dramatizes the tensions and problems of the family of Harry and the major focus is on the married life of Nelson and Pru. Harry is happy that Harry family is growing "life moves through us family after family" (John Updike, *Rabbit at Rest* 121). Harry has become a rich man with a rich wife, and a Toyota agency. Harry's family is affluent with name and fame in society. In Florida Harry plays golf and Janice is busy in parties and her "tennis". She takes keen interest in the matters of family and Harry also praises her skill of management, her agility and vigor. John Updike depicts his futuristic concern about the Americans and vividly portrays the sick society in this novel. The world in which Harry and Janice live is a terrifying world of sickness, death diseases and disaster. Peggy has died of breast cancer, Thelma too has died of kidney failure, Lly is suffering from AIDS, Pru is continually scared of getting AIDS from Nelson. Harry has had a heart attack and doctors have advised bypass surgery. Harry expresses his distress thus: "he too is falling, helplessly, falling towards death" (176). The theme of death is the main concern of John Updike as the chances of death are growing in the 21<sup>st</sup> century America. Money brings disaster in the American families, money, sex and decay of traditional values and the disconnection with God bring about the sufferings in America. Harry's view of death is quite threatening: "Death is not a domesticated pet of life but a beast that swallowed baby Amber and baby Becky"(176). Nelson's family is also on the verge collapse, Janice is sorry to think that her son is "poisonous". He is an addict and has ruined his family. Pru makes serious efforts to know the cause of his anxiety and depression but in vain. Her eight years old daughter reports to Harry: "He gets real mad sometimes for no real reason"(21). Nelson complains to his Mom that Pru thinks: "I'm a wimp. I get none of the things a man is supposed to get from a wife" (154). He is anguished because he doesn't get any assurance from Pru to "make the guy think he's great"(154). He is helpless and lost and in the mood of despair he takes dope to get lost in the world of fantasy. Pru tells Janice: "I've had it. I want out. I've kept the lid on as long as I can and now I've had it"(251). Janice is virtually disturbed and feels guilty of the mess in the life of Nelson. Harry also confronts reality and knows that Pru is preparing to divorce Nelson. She tells Harry:

You don't know what it I like, You are a man, you are free,  
you can do what you want in life, until sixty at least you're a buyer.  
A woman is a seller. She has to be. And she better not haggle out too  
long. I'm thirty four, I've had my shot. Harry I wasted on Nelson...  
My husband hates me and I hate him...I'm scared...so scared...And  
my kids are scared too. (344)

Harris and Janice for the first time are seriously worried about the existence of their family. They are ready to accept the burden, Harry is full of tenderness when he says: "We put him through some pretty wild scene back there in late sixties"(125). Nelson feels guilty and curses himself when Nelson is taken to the Rehabilitation Centre for cure. He admits that his fatherhood has not been good. Janice also feels guilty for the disaster of Nelson, she admits to Harry that she failed as a mother. "I'm the one should have been put in the jail"(322). She narrates the scenes of neglect of Nelson and for which he has suffered the anguish of life. She deserted him at a time when he needed her the most:

It used to be so awful that I ran off with Charlie! Nelson was  
only twelve, he'd come on his bicycle all the way into Eisenhower  
Avenue and would stand there for an hour across the street, looking  
up at our windows...just stand there until he got exhausted and rode  
away. (225)

Janice articulates her pathos and guilt for neglecting her son and the consequences of her adulterous life. Janice represents the Eve of America and John Updike gives a bitter message that if mothers are adventurous in sex and ignores children the future of America will be dark as in desperation the young boys and girls would become the dope addicts. Hamlet is sick of the adulterous deed of his mother, he "speaks daggers: to her. Nelson also confronts Janice with barrage of facts that give chilling anguish to Janice: "You ran away with your oily Greek and crazy Dad brought Jill and then Sketeer into the house and they tried to make me take dope when I was just a little kid ?"(315). Janice tries to strike a balance like a good mother as she consoled Nelson: "You shouldn't sit in judgment of your parents. We did the best we could while being people too" (216).

To conclude, the novel *Rabbit at Rest* ends in a positive note, John Updike is hopeful that the Americans will learn from the issues discussed in the tetralogy. The happiness of man and his family entirely depend on the order and stability and faith in mutual relationships. The modern life is full of uncertainties and absurdities, the survival is essential and to overcome the terrors of life clean and systematic regulated life is the only alternative left for human beings otherwise we shall have more Rehabilitation centers than schools and colleges. Updike populated his fiction with characters that “frequently experience personal turmoil and must respond to crises relating to religion, family obligations, and marital infidelity”. Early in his career, John Updike announced his affinity with the Christian existentialism of Soren Kierkegaard, Paul Tillich, Karl Barth, and others. Because of this, many of Updike’s critics have interpreted his work from within a Christian existentialist context. Yet Kierkegaard and Barth provide Updike with much more than a mere context, for their dialectical thinking serves as the springboard for Updike’s own unique dialectical and apocalyptic vision.

John Updike’s novel *Terrorist* is not only for the present America but for the coming posterities who are destined to confront the virus of terrorism. Michiko reviewed the novel In *The New York Times* raising so many question about the present and future of America. The novel was a surprise to readers of John Updike who is a chronicler of suburban adultery and angst. His tackling of the Islamic fundamentalism is indeed a new experiment. James Wood observed in *The New Republic* that Updike didn’t a convincing background of Ahmad Mulloy that made him a terrorist. But the majority of the critics praised Updike for his passion to deal with the global views.

John Updike surprised the world by his publication of the novel *The Centaur in 1963*. Edward P. Vargo reviewed the novel in his article: “The Necessity of Myth in Updike’s *The Centaur*,” observing that the use of Greek myth to depict the contemporary American situation is a daring act of Updike. Some critics expressed their concerns regarding the utility and relevance of the myth in the novel. They contended that Updike used it just for the sake of novelty. The first impression of the plot is Updike’s concern about the struggles of Caldwell with the Christian vision of the world. However, when critics do explore the function of mythology in *The*

*Centaur*, they tend to focus on the characters's struggling with the Christian vision of the world and with Peter Caldwell's attempt to mythologize the image of his father, George Caldwell. The following analysis attempts at exploring the novel under study by means of Bakhtinian theory that helps to explain the presence of the mythological elements and religious undertones in the novel. According to Galloway "the experiences of Caldwell are wholly psychological but his rebellion is significant against the meaningless of life" (40). The novel is a narration of the mythical legend of Chiron who is considered as the wisest of the centaurs. John Updike gives the name of Olympus to a small town school Olinger High School. Chiron is George Caldwell who is a science teacher dissatisfied with life. He is not happy with the experience of life, he is nihilistic and depressed. His son Peter performs the role of Prometheus of Greek mythology. Caldwell is teaching in the class and he imagines the Greek myth blending fiction with reality. The scene of the class is very interesting and meaningful. He teaches the theory of evolution to his unruly and non-serious students. The teacher is wounded in the ankle by a missile thrown by one of his unruly students. It hurts him a lot, he goes to Hummels' garage who is presented as Vulcan, the mythical blacksmith. He is also insulted by the Principal Zimmerman (Zeus). Caldwell is also worried about his disease and fears his impending death. Michael Novak (1963) observes that Updike takes up the theme of immortality in this novel. Novak in his article "Updike's Quest for Liturgy" published in *Commonweal* points out that his characters launch a rebellion against the contemporary moral order for individuality and immortality. "We in America need ceremonies is, I suppose, the point of great many of the words he has written" (232). Caldwell imposes some order on his actions and for this discipline he turns to Greek mythology to define limit and to clarify his actions. Gileman further points out that the main focus of Updike on the father-son relationship. George Caldwell is in search of truth, his search for meaning ends with his sacrifice for his son. For Gileman Caldwell is a saint: "In his third novel Updike illustrates the far reaching significance of the modern saint's apparently solipsistic experience"(121). He is worried about his family, about the disease of his son who is a victim of psoriasis. Peter is also worried about the anxiety, tiredness, and the health of his father. Caldwell all the time is obsessed by social science, gym, the unruly students and the fear of termination of the job. He is mentally disturbed by the baying,

hooting, laughter and disorder in the class. Updike comments thus: “His students completed the Centaur. They fleshed his wisdom with expectations” (John Updike, *The Centaur* 78). Caldwell is a Chiron, the mythical pattern emerges only in his mind. It is a fantasizing, a self-dramatization with which he clothes the incidents of his life to give them meaning and import. He is teaching science and lecturing on the formation of the universe and the evolution of life on the earth. His wound symbolizes all the wounds of humanity since the dawn of civilization. He acts like a supernatural man when his ankle is injured: “He tried to keep that leg from touching the floor but the jagged clatter of the three remaining hooves sounded so loud he was afraid one of the door would snap open and another teacher emerge to bar his way” (10). Caldwell is sick of the mental slavery of his colleagues. He is much advanced in ideas and vision of life. He thinks them conformists. He doesn’t feel the way other teachers feel or act. Updike has depicted as a man of ideas pertaining to the future of mankind. He believes that mankind can survive only with the values of love and sacrifice, no civilization can progress with backwardness, conformity and rigidity of ideas. He is much advanced and thinks of the future of mankind.

### **Objectives of the Proposed Research**

- 1) To investigate the texts of John Updike from the perspective of apocalypse.
- 2) To apply the theory of Postmodernism of Fredric Jameson on the texts of John Updike
- 3) To examine the causes of absurdity, alienation and human relationships depicted in the select novels of John Updike.
- 4) To explore the postmodern views of John Updike about love, sex and religion depicted in the select novels of John Updike

### **Novels taken in this thesis:**

- 1) *The Poorhouse Fair* (1958)
- 2) *Rabbit Run* (1960)
- 3) *The Centaur* (1963)
- 4) *Rabbit Redux* (1971)
- 5) *Rabbit is Rich* (1981)
- 6) *Rabbit at Rest* (1990)

7) *Terrorist (2006)***Review of Literature of Past and Present**

Bernice Slote (1966) notes that John Updike “learned the great epics so well that all the seas and islands of the ancients are living and real” (35). He has discussed her love for nature and her concern for the growth of American culture and values. John Updike had high imagination and power of the pen and could depict the complex human experiences in a simple and lyrical style.

James Woodress observes that John Updike was passionately interested in the classics and his love sparked at the age of thirteen. His teacher Willaim Drucker inspired him to read classics and old American history. At the university he continued his interest and became a well trained and capable classicist. He used the classical allusions to depict chaos and cosmos, nature and human degradation and the loss of innocence in his novels.

Theodore and Ziolkowski (1993) contend that John Updike came under the influence of Camus and Sartre. He wrote the *Rabbit* series to explore the sufferings of Americans, their loss of innocence and sense of disillusionment expressing his cosmic vision.

Joan Acocella published his *John Updike and Politics of Criticism* (2000) exploring the themes of angst, frustration found in the novels of John Updike. Acocella considers Updike as an idealist who “believes that behind what is essentially the disaster of life there exists disaster, some realm of meaning, that explain and dignifies our life, turns them from disaster into a tragedy” (Acocella 73).

Sharon O’Brien (1987) in *John Updike the Emerging Voice* explores the interest of Jon Updike in the middle class Americans, depicting the hardships of the early people living in the big cities likes Chicago and New York.

Shari Benstock in her book, *John Updike: His Mind and Art* (1992) talks about the stylistic techniques of John Updike used in the exploration of the plight of the early middle class Americans who immigrants of Europe. She opines that

Updike had firsthand knowledge of the middle class culture of the big cities and he used his memories and knowledge in creating the characters in his Rabbit novels.

Edwin T. Bowden has written several important articles on John Updike. He opines in his book *Human Isolation and the American Novel* (1961) that the isolation of the characters of John Updike leads to depression and frustration. They are trapped in the modern absurdity and struggle for stability of life.

Wallace Stegner argues that *Rabbit Run* of John Updike gives an insight into the culture of the middle classes of America. The theme of each of his *Rabbit* novels is absurdity, sex and religion and loss of happiness. Updike was recognized for his careful craftsmanship, his unique prose style, and his prolific output – he wrote on average a book a year. Updike populated his fiction with characters who “frequently experience personal turmoil and must respond to crises relating to religion, family obligations, and marital infidelity”(89).

Terence Martin observes that fiction of John Updike is distinguished by its attention to the concerns, passions, and suffering of average Americans, its emphasis on religion and its preoccupation with sexuality and sensual detail.

Blanche H. observes that Updike’s highly distinctive prose style features a rich, unusual, sometimes arcane vocabulary as conveyed through the eyes of “a wry, intelligent authorial voice” that describes the physical world extravagantly while remaining squarely in the realist tradition. He described his style as an attempt “to give the mundane its beautiful due”.

James E. Miller contends that Updike makes use of rhetorical spaces to influence his readers. What may seem like ordinary places are, through Updike’s writing, imbued with rhetorical significance that sheds light on his contemporary culture and that of his readers. Updike’s writing over the span of two decades provides readers an opportunity to experience culture of two important but seemingly antipodal decades: the 1950s and 60s. Furthermore, by choosing characters that reflect “Middle America” for the first novel and by then integrating

characters from the fringes of society in the second novel, Updike shows that he is keenly aware of his changing society.

William Peden reviewed the novel of John Updike in *The New York Times* and compared him to Chekhov and James Joyce. Updike is a modern novelist of America who depicted all the fears, challenges of the Americans in a simple and lucid style.

Richard Oilman (2009) wrote in his “A Last Assertion of Personal” that John Updike like great authors is the real chronicler of the American society after the Post-World War II . He has touched upon multiple aspects of life including sexuality and adultery and the growing wave of feminism.

Norman Podhoretz (1963) is the only critic in the world who lashed at John Updike stating that there is nothing new in the fiction of John Updike. He condemned the writer saying that Updike has nothing to say and that his emotional range. He was surprised when Updike’s *Centaur* won the National Book Award for fiction, it evoked a mixed critical response. Some reviewers objected to the mythic parallel of the story as irrelevant.

R.S. Sharmar continued attack on John Updike in article published in *Commentary* (1998) alleging that the novel of Updike lacked substance. He conceived characters based on his personal experiences and used fantasy and mythical elements in *Centaur*.

Guerin La Course (1963) published an article *The Innocence of John Updike* observed that the main strength of John Updike is his figurative and lyrical prose. Like Vonnegut he has used the elements of black comedy. He relies on language rather than thought, sense rather than sensibility, wit rather than wisdom all of which afford only temporary harbor.

Dean Doner (1962) gives a critical analysis of John Updike in his article “*Rabbit Angstrom’s Unseen World*”. He is of the opinion that Updike’s novels *The Poorhouse Fair* and *Rabbit, Run* depict the problems and the tensions of the



American society. He has strong understanding to conclude that humanists are consistently projected as antagonists in Updike's works. For Doner, Rabbit becomes the hero victimized by the net of humanism. Updike describes the mind of the modern youth through the character of Harry Updike expresses his passion for sociological and metaphysical issues in his novels.

Arthur Mizener published "American Hero as High School Boy: Peter Caldwell" and reviewed John Updike's novel *Centaur*. He averred that Updike used the myth of the Greek mythology to depict the problems of the contemporary Americans. He has used the autobiographical elements in his novel, the experiences of his father who was a teacher in the school. John Updike has taken up the issues of religion and sacrifice in the text of the American society in powerful mythical language.

Michael Novak is another critic of John Updike who wrote an article "Updike's Search for Liturgy". In this article he reviewed the short stories of John Updike. The critic was fascinated by the new images invented by John Updike to articulate the social, religious and cultural malaise of the American society. He concludes that Updike is attempting to impose meaning on flux that he is dealing with serious issues and is trying to reinforce the significance of religion in America.

Robert Detweiler published "John Updike and the Indictment of Culture-Protestantism" (1982) in which he reviewed Updike's *Rahhit, Run*, Detweiler observes that Updike is seriously concerned to discuss the issues of religion, sex and morality in the plot of the novel. The interesting about the plot is the quest motive of Harry and the social and cultural compulsions to return to his wife Janice. Updike is fighting in the novel the false morals, excessive sexual liberty and the mood alienation.

Reinhold Niebuhr observes that the Restruggles and dilemmas of Harry and his family so the range of all the novels are limited. Rabbit tetralogy of John Updike lack inner resources and all the plots are linked with one family. The novel is about the life and struggles of Harry who is a an adventurous American in the search of a meaning that is not available in the modern American society. His tragedy as a man

without grace is that his crisis does not lead to redemption, yet the critic holds the failure of the community and the institutions responsible for Rabbit's failure.

Thaddeus Muradian(1965) observes that all the novels of John Updike are packed with the elements of pain, depression, absurdity, loneliness and death. He handles the moral, spiritual and religious issues in his novels. He treats death as an inevitable happening in his novels and like a naturalist Norris the issue of death is discussed in a natural style.

Charles Samuels (1969) published the book *John Updike: A critical Essay* gives a detailed analysis Christian interpretation of the religious vision of John Updike. He observes that all the characters conceived by John Updike in his novels are like musical instruments, they remain unturned throughout their life. Each character remains unsatisfied and leaves home for a better life but each comes out as a defeated protagonist.

Alice and Kenneth Hamilton published full length study in the book *The Elements of John Updike* (1970). Both the critics contended that John Updike's vision is metaphysical and transcendental He has touched upon all the major issues confronted by the American in thirty years of period after the World War II .

## **The Research Gap in the Past and the Present Research**

All these learned critics focus on idealism, mysticism of John Updike. But no critic has discussed or explored the apocalyptic vision of John Updike who used postmodern techniques to achieve the epical dimension in his novels. In this study the main focus will be on the apocalyptic vision of John Updike who is concerned not only about the present America but about the future of mankind haunted by the absurdities and present nuclear radiation.

- **Introduction**

- **First Chapter:**

- Brief Candle**

- **Second Chapter**

- Futuristic Uncertainty in *Rabbit Run***

- ▶ **Third Chapter**  
Apocalypse Images in *The Poorhouse Fair*
- ▶ **Fourth Chapter**  
Fragmentation and Chaos in *Rabbit Redux*
- ▶ **Fifth Chapter**  
Human Relationships in *Rabbit is Rich* and *Rabbit is at Rest*
- ▶ **Sixth Chapter**  
Survival of Americans in *The Terrorist*
- ▶ **Seventh Chapter**  
Mythical Depiction Vision in *The Centaur*
- ▶ **Conclusion**
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## Chapter Two

### Futuristic Uncertainty in *Rabbit Run*

John Updike created history in American fiction when he spent three years to write one novel in a year and published his four novels containing 1500 pages, *Rabbit Run*, (1960), *Rabbit Redux* (1971), *Rabbit is Rich* (1981) and *Rabbit at Rest* (1990). The novel is apparently sexy, but not in a good taste, it is violating and basically cynical. All these Rabbit novels depict the postmodernist and apocalyptic vision of John Updike who departed from the traditional conventions and rejected the themes of the contemporary novelists. He was quite aware of the philosophical ideas of Karl Barth, Nietzsche, Jean Paul Sartre, Franz Kafka, and Albert Camus. He seriously contemplated on the contemporary malaise which afflicted modern man after the World War II. He had closely observed the traumatic experiences of the Jews who were exterminated by Hitler and the evil impact of capitalism of America. John Updike is a postmodernist novelist with apocalyptic vision, he experiences religious crisis in 1960 when he wrote his first novel *Rabbit Run* (1960) of the tetralogy. In an article published in *Time* (April 26, 1968) Updike admitted that he “felt a sense of horror that beneath this skin of bright and exquisitely sculpted phenomena, death waits” (67). J.S. Mill turned to the poetry of William Wordsworth for moral and spiritual sustenance, Updike turned to reading of theology to explore the solutions of life. Jane Howard in his article “Can a Nice Novelist Finish First ?” published in *Life* (November 4, 1966) observed that Updike came under the influence of Karl Barth and Nietzsche when he wrote his novel *Rabbit Run*. Updike himself observes that “Barth’s theology, at one point in my life, seemed alone to be supporting it” (21). The plot of the novel examines the problem of man’s existence, his confrontation with the existential realities. Barth was a neo-orthodox theologian representing the extreme conservative movement in twentieth century Christian theology. Barth observes that the only thing that reason can prove about God is that it is absurd not to believe in Him. Beyond that, God is “wholly other” a deity than man can know nothing. Updike believes that if man has faith in Christ, he is free from the obligation to obey the moral law. Updike explores the nature of moral

freedom from the postmodern perspective relying on the philosophical vision of Barth and Nietzsche in his novel *Rabbit Run*. Opportunity is portrayed as opportunity for God and opportunity from God in his first novel. He described his novels as a “kind of running commentary on the state of my hero and his nation. Harry purchases and uses, the pop songs he listens to on his car stereo, and the national events he encounters in the newspapers. The vision of John Updike depicted in the novel *Rabbit Run* is a unique dialectical vision. Barth says: “Sin as an alternative is not anticipated or included in the freedom given to man by God... Sinful man is not free, he is a captive, a slave” (77). It is existential in nature, an interdependent matrix of ethical precepts and theological beliefs. Fredric Jameson in his book *Ancients and the Postmoderns* (2015) observes thus:

If you want to live in a world where everything fits together like the pieces in a jigsaw puzzle, you will probably try to anyone who wants to live differently. Differences of culture, values, life style just make it harder to get all the pieces to fit together. For people who value wholeness above everything else, the best form of society turns out to be a dictatorship. (Jameson 123)

John Updike has manufactured every one of his books on the establishment of these philosophical postmodernist standards. The fiction of John Updike uncovers philosophical suppositions concerning the entire inquiry of uniform reality. Lyotard expresses his views on postmodernism thus as follow statements:

I define postmodernism as incredulity toward meta-narratives. This incredulity is a product of progress in the sciences, but that progress in turn presupposes it. The narrative fiction is losing its function, its great hero, its great dangers, its great voyages, its great goals. (Lyotard 22)

Following the ideas of postmodernism propounded by Fredric Jameson, Updike’s vision is dialectical has organized his “mega-novel” around dialectical relationships of Harry Angstrom and Janice employing the technique of “mastered irony.” Soren Kierkegaard in his *The Concept of Anxiety* propounded the theory of “mastered irony” seeking inspiration from Socrates. He was a Danish existentialist

who coined the term “mastered irony” to describe his own method of presenting two issues and then leaving them unresolved. He was influenced by Socrates and his method of logical arguments and Kierkegaard gave it the name of “irony of deferral” “Mastered irony” is found in the character of Rabbit Angstrom. Rabbit is caught in “the potentially tragic clash between instinct and law, between biology and society.” Updike traces the hero’s “zig-zag of evasion” depicting his lust and nostalgia, affection and fear. When Harry and Janice mention the name of God both “become naturally still, both are Christians. God’s name makes them feel guilty” (9). The very name of Angstrom is ironical suggesting “stream of angst” He is selfish and his pursuit of pleasure are against the code of family and society. Harry learns that his identity as a Magi-Peel demonstrator is an elusive mask that serves to hide his inward existential identity. He is performing a social role and hides the authentic self. Harry lives in a stifling environment where everything is uncertain and threatening. In the first narrative, Updike depicts the causes of the moral dilemma of Harry and his discontentment. He and Janice Springer met at Kroll’s where both were working in a store. Sexual passion led them to develop physical intimacy and soon Janice was impregnated by Harry. All this happened three years ago and soon Janice was forced to marry Harry to avoid social criticism. Janice gave birth to her first son after seven months of marriage. Janice again is pregnant but she has changed and once a pretty girl of twenty six now looks an “aging girl.” She smokes and drinks and behaves like a typical flapper of middle class society and looks clumsy, drunk, messy and panicky. Janice is scary in Rabbit’s eyes: “When confused, Janice is frightening person. Her eyes dwindle in their frowning sockets and her little mouth hangs open in a dumb slot...” (John Updike, *Rabbit Run* 16). He shares his small apartment with his wife and the baby is said to “cling to his back like a tightening net” (14). When Janice, his wife asks him to pick up a pack of cigarette he feels that “he is in a trap. It seems certain” (15). The complex arrangement of the traffic of the city also unnerves him and feels he is in the inescapable trap of modernity. His anxiety increases when he is to choose the car or the son’s knits in front of his son and feels sickened by the intricacy. The various objects that clutter in the apartment stifle his sensibility, he looks confused and bewildered. He is oppressed by the stink of formlessness, fortitude and death: “the old-fashioned glass with its corrupt dregs, the choked ashtray balanced on the easy-arm chair... the kid’s toys here and there

broken and stuck and jammed and so on” (14). Janice’s emotional confusion further increases the anxiety of Harry who finds himself in the chaos. The confusion of the general public and the approaching mayhem of the family holds the soul of Updike and just because he perceives the void inside him. He is developing old with no unmistakable motivation behind life. Updike uses the postmodernist terms as Harry as a single individual is higher than the universal:

He is like the biblical Abraham to whom is devoted, he acts out of faith. And faith itself is the paradox by which God’s will and the will of the individual become one and the same. (55)

John Updike remarked in 1968 that he doesn’t use the tool of satire while delineating his characters but employs “mastered irony” of Fredric Jameson. Matt Lewis (217) in his article “*Rabbit, Run* is about a Rebel we all know” published in *The Guardian* in January, 5th observes that “Harry Angstrom is not a freedom fighter or an intellectual. He is not even oppressed but he is a fighter living in the mundane middle class society” (2). The characters are given total freedom in the novel to pursue their ambitions. Updike comments in *New York Times* in January 1968 issue thus:

I’m not conscious of any piece of fiction of mine which has even the slightest taint of satirical attempt. You can’t be satirical at the expense of fictional characters, because they’re your creations. You must only love them. (4)

Metafiction announces this technique as a textual artifact and examines the very nature of the fiction itself. It describes the multiple perspectives of metafiction and the use of historiography. Harry Angstrom is a postmodern living in the advanced no man’s land of America, denied of God. The society in which he lives is comprehensive and complex set of social norms and he has to struggle against the forces of oppression and spiritual decadence. He enjoys negative freedom of Karl Barth as he gives up his responsibility. David Galloway (1964) in his article *The Absurd Hero as Saint: The Novels of John Updike* published in *Modern Fiction Studies* observes that “Rabbit’s faith frees him from the need to act morally and in community with others” (123). Galloway calls Harry as a saint of John Updike.

Graham Greene (1978) in *The Heart of the Matter* argues that Harry follows “grace in pursuance of Christian metaphysics” (28). Harry should live with his family and he should keep his activity and family together. Being a Christian he is relied upon to think about the emotions and assumptions of others in the general public. However, Harry is a radical, egotistical and narcissistic, he is least made a fuss over the feelings and sentiments of others and least the family when his better half is separated from everyone else and battling with the issues of life. Jack Eccles is an agnostic who puts stock in common duty, in shared issues and shared blame, he says that “We are all responsible beings, responsible for ourselves and for each other”(128). Harry, on the other hand is not fully committed to faith as he expresses his confusion and lack of confidence thus: “God wants me to find something.” His game is basketball, an upward directed game but Jack Eccles loves horrible game of golf. Harry Angstrom is supposed to be “the soul of the novel” but he emerges as “a dead skeleton, a structure which is lifeless unless life is given to it by the flesh and spirit of the scene” (284). Updike has depicted the character of Harry following Jameson’s theory of “mastering irony” Updike wrote his memoir *Self-consciousness* in 1990 in which he traces the trajectory of his failures and achievements. Updike talks about the memories that haunted him and expresses his indebtedness to Karl Barth and Nietzsche and other postmodernist philosophers that shaped his apocalyptic vision of life. Updike comments thus:

My own deepest sense of self has to do with Shillington and the scent of or breath of Christmas. I become exhilarated in Shillington, as if myself is being given a bath in its own essence. (*Self-consciousness*, 231)

Harry Angstrom appears in the novel for the first time at the age of twenty six with a young wife and holding a meaningless job. He is hunted by the old memories of his youth and thinks of his days of basketball glory. The novel begins with the moment of fulfillment and triumph of Harry and Updike talks of his body, mind and his emotional intensity and divided soul. He is free of constraints of society as he enjoys a sense of grace, ease and perfection unlike the traditional heroes of Hemingway, Fitzgerald and Norman Mailer. Harry is a typical postmodern hero caught in the abyss of uncertainty of life and nihilistic anguish. Rabbit Angstrom is



passing through a period of crisis like his creator John Updike who articulates the anxieties and tensions of life in his *Memoir*:

To be forgiven, by God: this notion, so commonly mouthed in shadowy churches, was for me a tactile actuality as I lay in my loathed hide under that high hard pellet, that suspended white explosion, of a tropical sun.... The sun was like God not only in His power but also in the way. He allowed Himself to be shut out, to be evaded. Yet if one were receptive, He could find you even at the bottom of a well. (*Self-consciousness* 70)

Harold Bloom gives his imperious assessment of *Rabbit Run* observing that his novel “scarcely sustains rereading.” John Updike has depicted a confused and bewildered protagonist who is sick of the modern realities of life and wishes to escape from the mundane existence. Harry finds human beings are involved in unsatisfactory net of relations. He gets involved with Janice symbolizing dumbness, and Eccles symbolizing soggy people. He lives in a simple apartment of middle-class people, he always experiences the distasteful. He observes thus:

Harry has no taste for the dark, tangled, visceral aspect of Christianity, the going through quality of it, the passage into death and suffering that redeems and inverts these things, like an umbrella blowing inside out. He lacks the mindful will to walk the straight line of a paradox. (Updike 237)

Harry Angstrom is not a saint, he is a sinner, and he is fully aware of the sin but struggles to know the mystery of his sin. He is not an intellectual hero since he lacks the moral courage to overcome the crisis of his life. His Harry is not a hero of the traditional sense since he lacks the Greek heroism found in the tragedies of Orestes and Sophocles. Updike observes thus:

The idea of a hero is aristocratic. As aristocracies have failed, so have heroes. You cared about Oedipus and Hamlet because they were noble and you were noble and you were a groundling. Now either nobody is a hero or everyone is. I vote for everyone? (75)

The magic realism is used here as John Updike's anxious concern with his past, with his psychic and material origins as an artist, with his family. The plot is loaded with the elements of fantasy and horror. Rabbit as the name suggests is a sensual character. He feels more than he thinks, he is typical postmodernist hero demonstrating the various stages of his life, his loss of self and the vulnerability to changes and transformation of life. He is very sensitive and seeks stimulus. In the plot of the novel he seeks to find some solution to his crisis based on sensual experiences, running, playing games, gardening or making love. John Updike has depicted his sensuality, his sexuality and his creative urge in the realistic style. His is a confused and restless hero, on the one hand he is desperate in his sexual encounters and on the other hand he seeks contentment in his gardening:

He loves folding the hoed ridge of crumbs of soil over the seeds. Sealed, they cease to be his. The simplicity. Getting rid of something by giving it. God himself folded into the tiny adamant structure. (115)

Harry's wife Janie is a middle class woman who occupies the living room. She is not very beautiful and lacks intelligence. The character of Janice is depicted through the point of view of Harry who admits that he "doesn't know her that well. He calls her "dumb" he holds poor opinion about his wife as he says: "Let's not talk about little nuts like Janice Springer". Eccles finds her "a pathetic shadow" John Updike presents Janice thus:

She is a small woman whose skin tends toward olive and looks tight as if something swelling inside is straining against her littleness. Just yesterday, it seems to him, she stopped being pretty. With the addition of two short wrinkles at the corners of her mouth has become greedy, and her hair has thinned so he keeps thinking at her skull, under it. (12)

Harry describes his home through subtle images like T.S. Eliot and Yeats who are postmodernist poets. The homes are "fortresses of cement and brick" with windows like the eyes of the animals, they are "colored from bruise to dung" The door is shut like "an angry face" and he can "smell the furnace's rusty breath and a

“soft decaying in the walls” (19). Updike uses the flood of images following the postmodernist poets to describe his lack of dignity, importance and identity as he explains to Eccles:

I once played a game real well. I really did. And after you are first rate at something, no matter what, it kind of takes the kick out of being second-rate. And the little thing Janice and I had going, boy, it was really second-rate. (90)

Harry Angstrom is not a serious thinker and doesn't really express his fears of death. He simply sees the world, moves around him breaking all the barriers of family life. Mrs. Smith knows what is going on in his mind, she cynically remarks thus: “That's what you have, Harry: life. It's a strange gift and I don't know now we're supposed to use it but I know it's the only gift we get and it's good one” (187). Harry has limited vision of life, John Updike believes that modern man is lost in the machine age and money culture. His first priority in the modern society is to escape from tensions and anxieties of life and to feel safe “inside his own skin”(105). Harry's world is on the verge of dissolution and John Updike very subtle images like Eliot and Yeats to describe the decline of civilization. Harry is worried about the loss of youth and vitality in his wife Janice. The theme of the loss of age and youth and spiritual sterility are very popular among the postmodernist thinkers like Nietzsche, Karl Barth and Fredrick Jameson. Harry is very much worried about the loss of youth of Janice who is growing older:

Since her hair has begun to thin back from her shiny forehead, he keeps getting the feeling of her being brittle, and immovable, of her only going one way, toward deeper wrinkles and skimpier hair. (13)

John Updike had spent his best days in Ruskin School of Drawing and Fine Art at Oxford and there he developed his pictorial style. He employs these special techniques of the postmodernism in his tetralogy. Harry's sense of wonder and enchantment” is conveyed through subtle images of “basketball” and “net”. Paul Doyle (1964) sees in Updike a concern with” precious moments of beauty, joy, and insight into the commonplace events in a realistic style (360). Harry's vision of

dissolution further intensifies his anxiety and this happens to most of the Americans today. Harry dreams about Janice and seriously thinks over the process of aging of Janice and gets mentally disturbed:

Janice has a pink dance dress on, and is crying. He repeats, sick at heart, about his mother, that she was just getting at him but the girl keeps crying, and to his horror her face begins to slide, the skin to slip slowly from the bone, but there is no bone, just more melting stuff underneath, he cups his hands with the idea of catching it and patting it back, as it drips in loops into his palms the air turns white with what is his own scream. (76)

John Updike is postmodernist novelist and he is fully aware of the plight of the Americans that are suffering because of the absurdities and tensions of life. Harry is an Everyman speaking to the youthful Americans disappointed, malcontented, desolate and caught in the pit of haziness. He knows about the inconspicuous world and is inundated by the turmoil of life. He is stood up to with the warring components, his incredible sexual drives, the breaking down of family and the dread of approaching passing. He feels estranged from God and his elegance and is in the grasp of otherworldly emergency. In the very beginning of the novel John Updike depicts his spiritual crisis,

He had been a basketball hero but now he is working in the vegetable store, He is leading a dull and monotonous routine life without any growth. On his way home from his work he begins playing with the boys and soon he feels a psychological pain. He stands there thinking, the kids keep coming, and they keep crowding you up. (7)

He recalls his old days in the high school when he enjoyed the real excitement of life: "That old stretched leather feeling makes his whole body go taut, gives his arms wings. It feels like he's reaching down through years to touch this tautness" (8). He feels exhilarated and tries to explore the meaning of life. It is the month of March and Harry becomes aware of the new stirrings of life in the month of spring: "The month is March. Tone makes the air light. Things start anew, Rabbit

tastes through sour after smoke the fresh chance in the air..." (9). He throws the cigarette and runs home being excited by the fresh air of March. He becomes sick as he sees his wife Janice drunk, aging and unattractive. All his excitement and the fresh fervor of the spring vanishes and he appears tense and gloomy. Harry feels that he is trapped in a situation where there is no escape. John Updike employs the imagery of net to depict his "continual crisscrossing mess, clings to his back like a tightening net" (17).

John Updike is a postmodernist novelist who articulates the serious issues of the contemporary American society through the imagers of "basketball" and "net". Harry's basketball imagery is very effective in conveying the "ascent and descent" of life and social values. Net is also used to trap the rabbits in the cage, the images of net is associated with the loss of Harry's freedom. The image of the circle or whole is a female symbol of sexuality as Rabbit describes the basket as "the high perfect hole with its pretty skirt of net" (35). Theodor Adorno comments thus:

A work of art is not a replica of the world. What a work of art does is that it offers the world what is being denied in the world. While doing this, a work of art rejects the external empirical mode of experiencing the world and it accepts its own mode of experience. (Adorno 10)

Harry Angstrom begins the journey of his life in quest of meaning of life and to achieve grace of God. He gets into his car and determines to drive south to the gulf of Mexico. His journey foreshadows his search for something that could fill the void in his life. His life is paralyzed by the tasteless marriage, the period of excitement and enjoyment is over and now the aging Janice and unhappy marriage with alcoholic and indifferent wife stifles his life. He runs and runs far away to escape from the anxieties and tensions of life. Ironically, his running brings more psychological restlessness as on his way" the growing complexity of lights threatens him. In American old folk culture there are tales of men who long to be free and the novel *Rabbit Run* is an interesting inversion of the ideal of escapism. Harry runs away from his family and home and society to escape from the suffocating effects. Ralph C. Wood interprets Updike's vision of life as "moral passivity" as his

“reluctance to find fault and assess blame, his conviction that our lives are shaped by forces too vast for mere mortals to master” (Wood 190). Harry escapes but “he doesn’t drive five miles before this road begins to feel like a part of the same trap” (25). John Updike gives him freedom to escape from the suffocating society and family but the irony is he feels trapped everywhere. No matter where he goes: “The further he drives the more he feels some great confused system, Baltimore now instead of Philadelphia, reaching for him” (30). The land refuses to change its scenery and everywhere looks like Mt. Judge: “At the upper edge of his headlight beams the naked tree twigs make the same net. Indeed, the net seems thicker” (32). The imagery of net becomes pervasive and forceful in the novel reflecting the struggles of the hero. Harry is confused and bewildered even in his adventurous journey. He is burdened with the mission of his life to explore the mysteries of life and the mystery of life and death. He thinks that there is chaos everywhere and no hope to escape from the stifling environment. He returns to Mt. Judge and being exhausted he sleeps in the car where:

He feels the faded night he left behind in this place as a net of telephone calls and hasty trips, trails of tears and strings of words, white worried threads shuttled through the night and now faded but still existent, an invisible net overlaying the sleep streets and in whose center he lies secure in his locked hollow hutch. (37)

Harry is a rabbit and shares the inclination to win the race but in this novel John Updike depicts the mock heroism of Harry who is running in circles expressing his internal compulsions. Modern man can only run endlessly but without any final destination. In the passage quoted above the imagery of net is significant suggesting the trapped nature of the hero. He is locked as there is no escape from the anxieties of life for him and for the modern man. Harry symbolizes the apocalyptic vision of John Updike. Harry’s journey is circular, he reaches at a point where he started. A gas station attendant gives him the real message of life and its existence when he tells Harry that “the only way to get somewhere, you know, is to figure out where you’re going before you go there” (34). Harry cannot escape his vision either: “Poor Janice would probably have the wind up now, on the phone to her mother....So dumb. Forgive me,” “the boy is crying in backward vision” (24). Harry is always

caught in “yes but” duality, his yes implies his slavery to instincts and sexual passions and freedom and but is for social responsibility and guilt.

The plot of *Rabbit Run* provides a detailed and microscopic study of the day-to-day events of typical suburban-class America. Richard Gileman observes in *The New Republic* that in the treatment of his characters Updike “avoids the supreme task and burden of literature, the appropriation and transfiguration, in one way or another, of suffering, struggle, conflict, disaster and death” (25). Jane Howard points out that John Updike breaks from the traditional novelist in presentation of those ordinary people and ordinary events chronicling thousands of tiny events of daily life. Harry in his quest journey feels that “it missed the whole point and yet there is always the chance that little as it is, it is everything” (34). In an interview with Jeff Campbell, Updike stated that “I meant Rabbit to be a kind of you and me, or a sort of Everyman” (89). Harry figures in his four novels and he recorded the social, cultural and political events through Harry. He belongs to the middle class, Updike presented ideological conflicts as “moral dilemmas.” Larry E. Taylor considers Harry as the central figure in an anti-pastoral satire: “Rabbit Angstrom’s failure can be attributed to his passionate pursuit of this idea-an idea that involves being in harmony with nature rather than knowing one’s relationship to nature” (74). Edward P. Vargo regards Rabbit as a traditional questing character belonging to the old American tradition. Harry finds himself in opposition to the values of the society and like Melville’s Huck Finn and Thoreau left the society to explore new meaning of life (Vargo 456). Kenneth Hamilton observes that Rabbit is an unanointed saint “punished because in all his tenderness he is inclined to love everybody and in ignorance to wound cruelly those whom he loves and who love him” (Hamilton 89). Sister Mary regards him as “the ultimate sinner” as *Rabbit Run* is a “grotesque allegory that Rabbit kills the seed of faith within himself and runs from his own selfhood” (Mary 143). J.A. Ward opines that *Rabbit Run* shows that “there can be no reconciliation between the inner and the outer life and that essentially this novel is existentialist” (Ward 34). John Neary is also of the view that “*Rabbit Run* is the most straightforward presentation of the existential vision of John Updike” (45). All the four novels of John Updike from socialistic perspective and opined that John Updike laid emphasis “on machine, sex and technology.”

Fredrick Jameson in his book *Postmodernism* (1991) observes that an individual text has a manifest main text and several sub-texts. The main text is written to convey the main themes and Jameson gives the metaphor of “a socially symbolic act” of the artist. And this main text contains the “imaginary resolution” of the problems. But in the sub-texts the writer gives his own interpretation of reality. The sub text takes the form of “the aporia or the antimony.” Jameson further avers in his *Political Unconscious* (1981) that the latent ideological issues are discussed in the sub-texts by the writer. Being a postmodernist novelist, John Updike employs the pastiche technique in *Rabbit Run* and the novel appears thematically significant dealing with the “moral dilemmas” of Harry. There are three narrative movements in the plot of the novel each contributing to the resolution of the “moral dilemmas” of the hero. In the first narrative movement consisting half of the novel Updike explores the stifling environment of America, his poor apartment, his aging wife Janice and the psychological plight and anxiety of Harry. The second narrative movement is in the form of interior monologue and Updike examines the various effects on the mind and sensibility of Harry. In the final narrative movement Harry is caught in the double bind depicting the theme of universality of chaos and moral dilemma confronting the Americans. Harry runs away from the family and society to escape from the stifling boredom of everyday life and the entropic process bewilder him since he feels that he has become a part of the junk. He remembers his past when he loved order, refinement and neatness but his life is turning into an object of waste.

Harry has discouraging experiences in his journey, the land remains the same everywhere and he realizes that there is nowhere to go and there is no escape from the chaotic reality. This consciousness of failure deepens his despair as he looks like Sisyphus feeling like an outcast, imprisoned and alienated. Harry represents those affluent middle class Americans who were trapped in the money culture after the World War II. Harry feels that an individual has no life and has no way out of the mass society. Harry feels impulsive to run away as he says: “there’s something that wants me to find it” (80) but he finds no independent space to enjoy the bliss of life. He remarks that “if there’s this floor there is a ceiling, that the true space in which we live is upward space” (96). His religious yearning urges him to run away to seek



personal freedom. Tony Tanner comments thus: “It is the old problem for the American hero of whether he can transform “from” into “towards” like many good men before him. “Harry cannot get beyond enacting a mode of motion-running” (282).

Eccles asks him what he is actually for but Harry fails to give any satisfactory answer. He says: “Well I don’t know all this about theology, but I’ll tell you. I do feel, I guess, that somewhere behind all this...there’s something to find it” (120). Eccles dismisses him by simple remark that “all vagrants think they’re on a quest” (120). Harry comes back feeling guilty but Janice’s mother tells that “Rabbit has no reason to come back if we don’t give him one” and he is given a job as a used car salesman to keep him with Janice. The Springers hate Harry and he knows this and in this section of the novel Updike compares Harry to “an unsteered boat, he keeps scraping against the same rocks: his mother’s ugly behavior, his father’s gaze of desertion” (192). The old coach of Harry Tothero offers him another alternative, he tells him a world where God never existed: “Right or wrong aren’t dropped from the sky. We. We make them” (232). Harry is chilled by the divine revelation of Tothero because he wants to “believe in the sky as the source of all things” (233). Tothero had suffered two strokes in his life and had seen the death very closely. Ruth, the mistress of Harry suggests him other way. She has experienced the death of God in her life when “the whole world trees, sun and stars would have swung into place if she could lose twenty pounds just twenty pounds what difference would it make to God”(77).

In the first narrative of the novel there are two significant episodes as the instinctive feelings of Harry are dramatized. He trusts his feelings and knows what is right or wrong. He wants to perform the perfect performance, whether in sex or sports. When he makes love to Ruth in the first night he wants her to treat him as a husband and insists on being lovers. He doesn’t want a mechanical bout of sex bout with a prostitute but a truly fulfilling experience of love: “crying out against her smothering throat that it is not her body he wants, not the machine, but her, her” (78). He enjoys the real situation and feels “his love and pride revive” (78). The other episode is about the golf game. He gives the proper answer to Eccles using the golf game which serves as a metaphor for human existence, “as if they are together

engaged in an impossible, quest whose humiliations stung them almost to tears, but one that is renewed at each tee” (143). Harry’s sexual experience with Ruth doesn’t give him any spiritual satisfaction though he uses sex therapy to escape from the anxieties and tensions of the mundane world. Basketball and sex are associated when Harry recalls Mary Ann the girl he made love after basketball games:

He came to her as a winner and that’s the feeling he’s missed since. In the same way she was the best of them all because she was the one he brought most to, so tired. Sometimes the shouting glare of the gym would darken behind his sweat-turned eyes into a shadowed anticipation of the careful touching that would come under the padded gray car roof and once there the bright triumph of the past game flashed across her. (106)

Mary Ann was his soul mate in his glorious days but she married someone else while Rabbit served in the army. In his fantasy he always recollected the love and sexual relationship with Mary Ann and felt restless. At last he found Janice and made her his sweet heart. But even after marriage he fantasizes the “tiny advances into age”(13). Harry’s first quest described in the first narrative movement is depicted as impulsive and fantastic. The focus of John Updike is on the libidinal investment of the hero and his impulsive desires and sexual drives. The world he visualizes in his stream of consciousness is only a dream land. Eccles tries to restore his moral order and tells him of his theology. He sees hell “as separation from God” (10). He further tells Harry that his separation from God is because of his “inner darkness” when Rabbit tells about his unhappy marriage Eccles taunts him: “What is it? What is it? Is it hard or soft? Harry, is it blue? Is it red? Does it have polka dots?” (112). Kruppenbach dismisses Harry as a “good-for nothing fellow...one childish husband leaving one childish wife?” (143). Harry also confesses his emptiness and says: “All I know is what’s inside me. That’s all I have” (91).

John Updike is a postmodernist novelist who employs subtle pattern of images and symbols to depict the inner void of Harry in imitation of Ezra Pound and Baudelaire. The symbolist Movement greatly impacted W.B. Yeats and T.S. Eliot and Mrs. Virginia Woolf. In Rabbit Run Janice Harry relationship is dramatized

through very effective images and symbols. Janice is hard, cold and rigid like iron and her behavior is described through ice and her frigidity is represented by the winter of January by Updike. The woods represent Ruth, the natural and warm. The hole as a symbol combines ideas of sex with ideas of home, and thus fits into a complex symbolic pattern. The image of the basketball hoop and hole recur again and again in his stories and novels. "There was you and then the hole, the high perfect hole with its pretty skirt was you and then the hole, the high perfect hole with its pretty skirt of net" (35). In other level hole becomes a link with the pat and the primal sources of life. But in each situation Harry is fear-ridden: "a clangorous horror, as if this ruined evidence of a human intrusion into a world of blind life tolls bells that ring to the edge of the universe" (247). Harry is quite dissatisfied with the suffocating society, he struggles to bring order out of chaos like Hamlet and uses sex therapy to escape from the tensions and anxieties of life in vain. He is aware of the feeble humanity: "he obscurely feels lit by a great spark, the spark whereby the blind tumble of matter recognized itself, a spark struck in the collision of two opposed realms, an encounter a terrible God willed" (247). When Janice goes to the hospital to have her baby, Harry comes back to the world of reality and becomes conscious of his responsibility. He becomes aware of his sin and feels dejected. He resolves to go against the demands of his ego and libido:

He is certain that as a consequence of his sin Janice or the baby will die. His sin a conglomerate of flight, cruelty, obscenity, and conceit, a black clot embodied in the entrails of the birth. Though his twist with the will to dismiss the clot, to retract, to turn back and undo, he does not turn to the priest beside him but instead reads the same sentence about delicious fried trout again and again. (141)

Updike's highly distinctive prose style features a rich, unusual, sometimes inscrutable vocabulary as conveyed through the eyes of hyper real physical world, while remaining squarely in the realist tradition. Guilt ridden, Harry becomes depressed. In his fantasy, his sin becomes a source of psychological torture. "His life seems a sequence of grotesque poses assumed to no purpose, a magic dance empty of belief" (165). He is haunted by the impending fears of death of Janice: "There is no God, Janice can die" (165). Harry becomes skeptic and fears that God may not

exist as his faith declines. He is aware of the unseen world a real and longs for peace and rest. He tries to get happiness in recollecting his sex adventures. He tries to control himself and struggles to forget the tensions of life. He tells Mrs. Eccles, "Last night driving home I got this feeling of a straight road ahead of me, before that it was like I was in the bushes and it didn't matter which way I went" (175).

Janice comes home from the hospital and Harry decides to restore order in his house, he resolves to solve all the problems of the family with a new vigor to win the confidence of Janice. He realizes the futility of his quest: "He feels the truth, the thing that had left his life had left irrevocably, no search would recover it. It was here, beneath the town. in these smells and these voices, forever behind him" (188). Harry's faith is primal and based on instincts, his faith is based on passions and instinctive drives. Updike comments thus: "His feeling that there is an unseen world is instinctive, and more of his actions than anyone suspects constitute transactions with it" (195). He believes in tidiness as he dresses carefully before he goes to the church. John Updike has described his tastes, manners, dressing sense like and dislikes: "He hates all the people on the street in dirty everyday clothes, advertising their belief that the world arches over a pit, that death is final, that the wondering thread of his feelings leads nowhere" (196). Harry's movements can have no constructive goal, no destination beyond that of renewed sexual passion, a new "religion" of empty sensuality does not coincide with his spiritual quest. The society fails to understand Harry and this deepens his alienation.

His relationship with Ruth is based on jealousy and lust and the destructive aspect of Harry can be seen in his treatment of Ruth. Though a little heavy, Ruth is neat, loves to cook and is caring and sensitive by nature. But Harry is insensitive, instinctive and is governed by sexual drives. Ruth comments thus: "That was the thing about him, he just lived in his skin and didn't give a thought to the consequences of anything" (139). He violates the body of Ruth and forces her to perform fellatio out of jealousy. The other important episode in the second narrative movement of the novel is the lustful drives of Harry. Ruth sees the same unsatisfied spiritual hunger in him "in your way you're still fighting". Ruth tries to clear his doubts about love and sex and says bluntly: "There's no way to it. Things just are" (78). But Harry feels "all out of dimension" (78). Harry is presented as "a selfish, a

coward” American worshipping his own instincts, an irresponsible father and husband’ a man the victims of his own anxieties and psychological pressures.

One Sunday after Janice returns home and is still sick. He comes home from church sexually aroused and desires to make love to Janice. Updike comments thus, “Rabbit, hoping to possess her eventually, hovers near her like a miser near treasure. His lust glues them together” (226). He goes on smoking and rocks the cradle making the baby restless and Janice becomes nervous at his behavior. He persuades Janice to drink whisky but when she refuses to meet his sexual demands, he leaves her all of a sudden once again. Janice becomes scared and to overcome her fears and feeling guilty since she couldn’t keep her husband with her she takes heavy dose of whisky and gets drunk. Then comes the climax of the novel, Janice has accidentally drowned the baby Rebecca. This tragedy occurs in the third narrative movement of the novel. The endless fears of Janice are depicted through the metaphor of “wild heart”. She is holding the baby in her trembling arms: “the darkness against her” and drowns the baby while trying to wash it. Harry is compelled to come back again confronting the horror of death and realizing the fall of the nemesis on him. He had sinned in betraying Ruth, Janice and everybody and he is punished. Fredric Jameson observes in his book *Postmodernism* that “characters in the modern fiction respond to what they see, and more especially what they feel, not by taking action, however, but with visions, and dreams, hallucinations and madness” (Jameson, 6). Harry acts as his instincts direct him, he is a slave to sexual passions and fantasies and is certainly away from the truth. He is sick with grief and the sense of his own responsibility. In the cremation ground, Harry is nervous and in dilemma because he fails to understand the mystery of death. He blurts that Janice is the real culprit who killed his daughter. It remains with him, physical, as “a heavy knot of apprehension” (230) or a “hard loop of himself” (224). In a ritualistic manner he drains the water from the tub in which the baby is droned:

He watches the line of the water slide slowly and evenly down the wall of the tub, and then with a crazed vertical cry the last of it is sucked down. He thinks how easy it was, yet in all this strength God did nothing. Just that little rubber stopper to lift.” (230)

Harry runs away from the cemetery and goes to Ruth to get some consolation and to overcome the terrors of life. Ruth tells him that she has become pregnant. He wants Ruth to keep the baby. He doesn't know what to do, where to go and what will happen. Harry is once again confused and feels cut off from everybody, from his wife, from Ruth and from Eccles and Mrs. Springer. John Updike depicts his helplessness thus:

His hands lift of their own and he feels the wind on his ears even before, his heels hitting heavily on the pavement at first but with an effortless gathering out of a kind of sweet panic growing lighter and quicker and quieter, he runs. Ah! Runs, Runs.” (284)

The intertextuality is here used to signify the multiple ways in which the *Rabbit Run* is made up of other texts, by means of its implicit or explicit allusions, citation. In his hour moral crisis and despair, his former coach Tothero tries to give him consolation preaching a humanistic creed. He tells him right and wrong are manmade and they do not drop from the sky. Harry feels sullied and goes to Eccles for some relief. Eccles tells him that guilt is the result of misdeeds. He makes him to confront the reality: “this tragedy, terrible as it is, has at last united you and Janice in a sacred way” (234). But Harry remains confused and directionless as his belief “seems to bear no relation to the colors and sounds of the big sorrowing house” (234). He tries to feel but ideas slip from his conscious mind. As the novel approaches to the end, Harry's nervous intensity increases, his concern with the understanding of death is revealed to him in his dream:

He is all alone on a large sporting field, or vacant lot littered with small pebbles. In the sky two perfect disks, identical in size but the one a dense white and the other slightly transparent, move toward each other slowly, the pale one is they touch directly above the dense one. At the moment they touch he feels frightened and a voice like over a loudspeaker at a track meet announces, cowslip swallows up the elder. (234)

The dream of Harry brings in him new awareness about death but he cannot carry responsibility for long. He hates Janice now as his dream strikes to him a false

resolution: “Immersed in hate he doesn’t have to do anything, he can be paralyzed, and the rigidity of hatred makes a kind of shelter for him” (238). He feels that his daughter has reached heaven and tries to come out of the grief as his sense of liberty is experienced through intense spiritual awareness: “It is as if he has been crowding rocks he has seen a patch of light, he turns and Janice’s face, dumb with grief, blocks the light” (244). Harry struggles to forgive and forget and wants others to join him in the truth. He knows that Janice killed his baby but at the same time he tries to understand that death is uncertain and beyond the comprehension of man. All he gets back is dumb grief and shocked horror at his cruelty. His vision is destroyed: “His face burns, forgiveness had been big in his heart and now it’s hate. He hates her dumb face. She had a chance to join him in truth, just the simplest factual truth, and turned away in horror” (244). Harry feels the need to integrate with the community and this intense sense of community is presented thus by Updike: “He feels them all, the heads as still around him as the tom tombstones, he feels them all one, all one with the grass, with the hothouse flowers, all...” (243).

Updike has employed the postmodernist techniques such as intertextuality, meta-fiction and the pattern images and symbols to depict the moral dilemmas of Harry Angstrom in this novel. The plot of the novel is structured around three narrative movements in a systematic style. The novel is postmodernist in style, in themes and in treatment of the subject matter. Salman Rushdie has rightly pointed out that “this period in American literary history is in fact best be understood not as purely postmodern but as characterized by the coexistence and frequent commingling of high postmodernist experimentation, traditional realism” (528).

Updike’s apocalyptic vision is depicted in themes as he gives the message to the young Americans that discipline in the family is very important to enjoy happiness. Sexual liberty should not be used in a way that the family happiness is destroyed. Harry’s suffering and anguish is the creation of his own false illusions about sexuality. He uses sex as a therapy to enjoy domestic happiness and to escape from the tensions and anxieties of life. Updike’s dialectical vision is influenced by the “Dialectical Theology” developed by Kierkegaard and Barth. Kierkegaard believes that truth must ever be existential. Updike creates ambiguous situations and uses the postmodernist technique of “mastered irony” in the novel. Updike observes

that “Everything unambiguously expressed seems somehow crass to me” (Samuels 85). Updike further observes that “My subject is the American Protestant small-town middle class. I like middles. It is in the middles that extremes clash, where ambiguity restless rules” (Howard 74). Updike shares with Kierkegaard and Barth that “there is no help from within and without, with the natural and supernatural and this world is a pit of horror” (Howard 80). Harry’s dialectical view of life in *Rabbit, Run* is based on the theories of Barth and Kierkegaard. Updike’s dialectics also involves an unresolved tension between freedom and necessity, subject and object, which deprive it of the ultimate reconciliation and justification characteristic of the Hegelian dialectic. Fredric Jameson’s theory of “random stylistic allusion” is applicable in the fiction of Updike. In language Updike has used innovative structure and layers of the images and symbols to depict the moral dilemmas of Harry. He follows the ideas of Jameson discussed in Postmodernism.

To conclude, Updike’s first novel *Rabbit, Run* is a typical postmodernist novel structured around the dialectical theories of highlighting the moral dilemmas of the characters who uses all possible ways to explore the truth, freedom and sexuality. Updike’s favorite themes of love, sex, and religion are depicted in the plot of the novel relying on the postmodernist theories of existence and survival. The habit for Rabbit’s happiness lies in his ultimate faith in the supernatural realm of God rather than in any of his rebellious running. The primary concern of John Updike in *Rabbit, Run* is the growing decay in love and religion in America ushering in the era of futuristic uncertainty and disintegration of culture. John Updike through his novels is giving warning to the American people that sexual liberty is not the answer of their problems. Harry leaves his family twice in the novel but at the end he realizes that disappearance or escape from the responsibilities is not the solution of the domestic problems. Moral discipline and religious faith and grace are important for the domestic happiness. In general, Updike believes that the positive and necessary values realized in love and religion were strong and efficacious in the past, while modern life has witnessed their decay and corruption.



### Chapter Three

#### Apocalypse Images in *The Poorhouse Fair*

John Updike published *The Poorhouse Fair* in 1958 and the novel was rated as a remarkable achievement. He was just twenty-six years old when Updike wrote this novel. The critics observed that the character of Hook was created in his own image, his character is conceived on the bases of the memories of his grandfather who lived with his family. Updike had firsthand knowledge of the poorhouse of his town. Updike transforms all the memories into the plot of *The Poorhouse Fair*. The major novels of John Updike deal with his apocalyptic vision of life and of the future of America. He deals with the theme of mind-body dualism focusing on the alienation and dissociation of sensibility of modern man. His *The Poorhouse Fair* highlights the conflict man's mind and his heart. His *The Poorhouse Fair* got him Richard and Hilda Rosenthal Foundation Award. There are diverse opinions about John Updike who became an international celebrity because of his concern for the future of America. The novel *The Poorhouse Fair* is the first serious attempt of treating society on a wider scale. Updike expressed his views in the New Yorker: My sense of myself was of a sort of a sprinter.

John Updike got the Pulitzer Prize twice for fiction but critics and reviewers are not in accord about the acclaim that he has received. He has been accused of dealing with trivialities of life and particularly his fiction is disregarded because of his sexuality. His *The Poorhouse Fair* is based on realism, his other novels such as *The Centaur* and *Couples* deal with the disintegration of love and religion. He envisions modern love as an anti-dote to the boredom of American life. In most of his novels Updike depicts the collapse of American Dream as he states that modern love contains none of the qualities of honor, respect and fidelity that once were the pillars of man and woman relationship. The religion is additionally rotting as the advanced man has no connection and confidence in religion. He is lost in the realm of material things of life and for his the solace of body is a higher priority than the wellbeing of the spirit. The conventions and ceremonies of the past have no spot in the cutting edge society. The strict images are good for nothing and they offer no

otherworldly solidarity to the people. He lives alone and endures alone and feels rootless in the American culture. Morality doesn't exist, God has become a nobody, and death is a reality in this universe. In most of his novels Updike has depicted the themes of the decay of religion and this loss of faith is afflicting the generations of America. His unique vision becomes distinct in the theme of the decay of religious issues. He observes that there is no meaning in religion signs in American society, they offer no comfort or cause of redemption to modern man. Updike strongly expresses the theme of death in his novel *The Poorhouse Fair*, by definition poorhouse is a place to die. The plot of the novel is packed with the references of death. John Updike came under the influence of Fredric Jameson and tried to explore the dialectical relationship between "Yes" and "No" in which man is trapped throughout his life. Karl Barth stated thus in his *Word of God and Word of Man*:

This way (the dialectical) from the outset undertakes seriously and positively to develop the idea of God on the one hand and the criticism of man and all things human or the other. (206)

John Updike admitted in 1970 interview that: "Essentially, it was my own upbringing, the kind of family and the church I was raised in, which disposed me to fall in love with Kierkegaard in my twenties. I read him quite a lot" (88). Updike realized very early in life that man is always haunted by the fears of death. In most of his novels John Updike depicted the themes of physical and spiritual death. In *Rabbit Run* Updike writes: "There's no God, Janice can die" (John Updike, *Rabbit Run* 165). The imminent of death of Tothero, the death of the infant girl, and the threatened abortion of Ruth overshadow all actions of Harry Angstrom in *Rabbit Run*. In *Centaur* Caldwell fears death from cancer and the sudden death of the hotel clerk intensifies the mood of death and despair. Hook uses his approaching death as the main cause of moral vigilance: "We fellas so close to the Line-have our accounts watched very close" (6). Death communicates the message to Conner as "testament to endure his dying in the world" (127). Amy Mortis who is a friend to death invokes her own death: "I doubt if next year I'll be able to find any patterned cloth but I'll be dead by then anyway, with luck" (101). Mendelssohn who was the former perfect also expresses the relationship and awareness of death:

Can't you picture Mendelssohn now? Amy Mortis asked at another table. "How he'd have us all singing and shouting prayers and telling us how we all must die? (56)

The plot of the novel and all the events span a single day at a rest home for old people discarded by the modern American youth like old furniture. The novel is divided into three parts, each recounting events of the morning, the afternoon and the evening of that single day. Updike gives the clarion call to the people of America that end of the civilization is very near as the old people are going to sleep in darkness. John Updike gives an alarming call to the Americans that the civilization is heading towards destruction. The death-consciousness is a mark of intelligence and dependence. The fear of death is all pervasive and each protagonist of John Updike fight to retain specialness without which they "die." In *The Poorhouse Fair* Updike depicts the scene of the death of Mendelssohn with tender nostalgia: "In his coffin, I remember saying to Mrs. Haines he looks like he's come to the end of a prayer, his nostrils still full of its breath. My heart told me to stoop and kiss his hand, but the line was pushing" (22). They express their visions of heaven in an enthusiastic mood: "I've always thought I'd be a beauty and my mother not. I expect we'll all be about the same age. Heaven will be ...a mist of all the joy sensations have given us" (74). The novel *The Poorhouse Fair* is a book of contrasts. It gives a comparative study of the present and the past, of youth and age, American past and present, religion and sex and Christianity and humanism. Updike has created an atmosphere of confusion but a prevailing optimism. The main concern of Updike is to investigate the contradictory philosophies and social institutions. The approach of Updike is objective as he allows full liberty to the readers to find out their answers presenting both sides of the coin, life and death, religion and sex, light and darkness and nihilism and optimism. Hook is a ninety year old resident of a poorhouse representing the past. He believes in Protestant Christianity, American individualism and belief in sin, punishment, immortality and heaven and God. Updike took inspiration from Fredric Jameson in his book *Postmodernism* (1998) talked of the new styles essential to depict postmodern consciousness:

Modernist styles thereby become postmodernist codes: and that the superfluous proliferation of social codes today into professional and disciplinary jargons, but also into the badges of affirmation of ethnic, gender, race, religious, and class-fraction adhesion, is also a political phenomenon, the problem of micro politics sufficiently demonstrates. If the ideas of a ruling class were once dominant ideology of bourgeois society, the advanced capitalist countries today are now a field of stylistic and discursive heterogeneity without a norm. (Jameson 48)

The plot depicts the concern of the writer of the past and of future but it is the past that contains the elements which are missing in modern America. Updike argues that man will find the values and old rituals meaningful to sustain his life in future offering him the controlling force on which he can base his life. He feels that America's past contains vital qualities which have disappeared from modern society. Kenneth Hamilton (1967) feels that *The Poorhouse Fair* is Updike's most direct parable of the relation of the present to the present to the past. He says: "Updike sets the Man of America's Future against the Man of America's past" (746). Donald Barr in his article, "*A Stone's Throw Apart*" published in *The New York Times* observes thus:

Like all good serious fiction, this novel has a true dialectic. The truth is not in Conner nor his clerk-acolyte Buddy, it is not in the ex-schoolteacher Hook nor in Gregg the old violent man. Neither is it a sickly compromise between the sides, it is in the clash between them. No one is morally annihilated in this brilliant book. No one is a mere convenience of argument. Here is the conflict of real ideas, of real personalities, here is a work of intellectual imagination and great charity. *The Poorhouse Fair* is a work of art. (Barr 3)

Updike has taken up all the serious issues, the poorhouse is the welfare state of America's future and Conner is the wise leader who is dedicated to the welfare of the people. He has vowed to bring order and beauty out of human substance. John Updike gives an updated picture of America and expresses his apocalyptic vision for

he feels that Americans are trapped into “a slavishly conformist” society. McCarthyism in politics had imposed a spirit of conformity in the intellectuals. Ionesco wrote *Rhinoceros* in Europe to depict the conformity of the people in the mad race of following Nazi ideology. Irwing Howe also referred it to the times as “this age of conformity.” David Riesman in his book *The Lonely Crowd* (1953) talks of conformists who are “other-directed” while the pioneers of America are “inner-directed.” Riesman denounces the attitude of “conformity” of the people: “Is it conceivable that these economically privileged Americans will someday wake up to the fact that they over conform? Wake up to discovery that a host of behavioral rituals are the result, not of an inescapable social imperative, but of an image of society...” (Reisman 16). Paul Goodman also indicts the American society in his book *Growing Up Absurd* (1960) lashing at the shoddy goals of American society and the collapse of moral and spiritual values.

John Updike’s *The Poorhouse Fair* is the heart rending tale of a “lonely crowd” fighting against the age of speed and machine, over mechanized and sterile society of a future welfare state. The novel is a graphic picture of a society heading towards the road to destruction and people in the grip of metaphysical despair. John Kenneth Galbraith published his book *The Affluent Society* (1958) in which he condemned the “unwholesome nature” of American society with its private affluence and public squalor. With prophetic insight he pointed out the bleak future of Americans. John Updike wrote *The Poorhouse Fair* with the same spirit pointing out the dangers of science and technology and the growing spiritual decadence. The world of *The Poorhouse Fair* is highly ordered and mechanical structured around affluence and scientific order. The poor houses are well ordered and perfectly managed. Conner is a modern perfect who discards all the rules and system of old perfect Mendelssohn. The health, hygiene and longevity of the inmates is fully taken care of by Conner. He has followed updated health care mechanism for the welfare of the inmates but he has only looked after their body, the spirit is totally ignored and the inmates are reduced to mere cogs of the mechanical system. John Updike depicts the chaos and disintegration in their life as he envisions the bleak future of America. Updike tells that “everything Conner did he did for a reason, is actions were glass.” The setting of the plot is a poorhouse for the aged people in a future

welfare state. The name of the poorhouse is Diamond County Poorhouse getting ready to receive visitors for the annual Fair. The crowd for Conner entering for the fair “bumble like brainless insects and form one living conglomerate, through whose sprawling body veins of traffic with effort circulated: a beast more monstrous than any he had told Hook of” (109).

There are four important and symbolical movements in the plot of *The Poorhouse Fair*. There are four significant sounds which act as summons from the external world. First Conner Christ is a carpenter and Hook observes that “there is no profession so native to holy and constructive emotions or so appropriate for God-made flesh to assume” (79). The sound of the gun that kills the cat in the first section of the novel symbolizes the inevitability of death. Hook sees the cat as a flaw in the world’s order. John Updike seriously deals with the mystery of death and its impact on the mind and sensibility of the people. Gregg also realizes that the life and death of creatures is beyond their own control.

The second sound is of scrape of the truck that demolishes the wall constructed by the old time craftsmen that Hook and the speaker see as so significant. But the wall is discovered to be rotten and empty inside. Not only is the product of craft a fraud, but it is permanent. Updike gives the images of rubble and stones to describe the moral disorder of the universe. The third sound is the thunder which threatens to destroy the well planned fair of the people. The thunder is symbolical of the order of the universe, it highlights the helplessness of man against the transcendental power of the universe. The fourth sound is the dinner bell which summons the people to discuss all the issues concerning man and God, life and death, past and the present. Hook exposes the emptiness of the scientific attitude of Conner. Buddy narrates the tragic tale of the death of his brother by cancer destroying the faith in God: “There can be no goodness...only busyness” (23). John Updike is of the opinion that scientific rationalism is not the real answer to the problems of life. In the final section of the novel John Updike introduces the portrait of the inmate Elizabeth Heinemann. She has been blind since early youth. She is denied the rational vision that separate man from faith. She doesn’t have a clear picture of heaven as she says:

The things you see are to me composed of how they feels, when I touch them, and the sounds they make, for everything has a sound, even silent things, when I draw near an object it says “yes” before I touch it, and walking down a corridor the walls says “yes”, “yes” and I know where they are and walk between them. They lead me, truly. At first, when this sense became to grow, I was afraid to have these voices come into my darkness, this was before I had forgotten what darkness was when I still remembered the light. (69)

John Updike argues that people are so lost in their mechanical world that they have forgotten the bliss of heaven. The Americans are cut off from their roots and have forgotten the old values enshrined in their sacred constitution and culture. Heaven is not a place of vision as conceived by Conner but a place of touch. Updike gives the metaphor of “mist” to describe the significance of heavenly powers as against the mechanical powers created by man. Heavenly powers are transcendental in nature and the mechanical powers enjoyed by man are transitory and misleading. It is a mist “of all the joy sensations have given us. Perfumes and children speaking, and cloth on our skin, hungers satisfied as soon as we have them. Other souls will make themselves known like drops of water touching our arms” (9). The vision and faith of Elizabeth is opposite of the rational and mechanical faith of Conner. She further says “What heaven can there be for our eyes when vision separates, and judges and marks differences for envy to seize on? Why are we taught as children to lose our eyes to pray? In Heaven every one shall be blind” (70). Updike has given a conflict between the old faith and the modern scientific rationalism in this novel. There are references to the existential ideas propounded by Nietzsche, Albert Camus and Sartre, Updike has employed postmodernist techniques to depict the existential vision of art and life. There are three important perceptions depicted in the plot, Hook is portrayed as a man of thought, Lucas as the “man of flesh: and Gregg who is a poet as “a man of flesh” The old age home becomes the centre of interaction of the old and the young, the past and the present of America. The poorhouse is a microcosm of America because all sections of society are expected to arrive. Buddy is the assistant of Stephen Conner who defends him mentioning his achievements: “This home is one of the five highest ratings in the northeastern sector.” Conner in

the Cartesian sense is the rational thinker with a scientific approach to an irrational world. Hook is surprised to find his attempt to order the world:

Onto the left arm of the chair that was customarily his in the row that lined the men's porch the authorities had fixed a metal tab, perhaps one inch by two, bearing MR, printed, plus, in ink, his letter name." (John Updike, *The Poorhouse Fair* 5)

In the last section all the different theories about the past and the future should be scrapped. Updike integrates all the divergent strands, the man of flesh, the man of thought and the man of passion. This integration of many approaches helps to resolve many problems. Hook arises from the sleep "groping after the fitful shadow of the advice he must impart to Conner, as a bond between them, and a test amount to endure his dying in the world" (127). John Updike portrays Conner as the epitome of the rational idealists, he is detached from the human community and his approach to life is empirical. John Updike introduces him thus:

Conner's office was approached by four flights of narrowing stairs, troublesome for these old people. Accordingly few came to see him. He intended in time to change this, it was among the duties of the perfect, as he conceived the post, to be accessible. (12)

The approach of Conner is detached as he remains isolated in the cupola of the poorhouse. He "thought of no one as God" (12). He pronounced the death of a God beyond reason. He is a humanist with a vision for the future of man. His vision is for the future generations and may be called "Utopian vision." He ignores the miseries of the human beings expressing his glorious vision of the future of humanity. He expresses his utopianism thus: "Don't you think we could dispense with Lucas. He learns more than he tells, and physically, you must admit, he's a monstrous error" (18). Conner says: "Everything, potentially, is a science, is it not?" (36). He is a visionary philosopher as he looks at a lone airplane and watches "the sky's vacuous breadth of blue of Hairless cold." He thinks "weather of this "one day would be a judgment on his work" (36). Conner wants to bring transformation in the poorhouse, his desire for purity and "cleanness" creates tension between the ideal and its opposite and causes disorder. Updike gives the image of a cat badly wounded



by a car accident symbolizing the terror of death and uncertainty of life. The wounded cat is called a “disturbance of accustomed order” (3). The cat is finally shot and an effort is made to restore order. The plot of the novel is structured by the four important movements. The first part of the story is the preparation of the Fair. The old inmates set up their booths and put colored lights and arranged their wares in the lawn. The inmates don’t like the new perfect Conner as they give vent to their revolutionary spirit. Gregg’s explosive reaction is worth recording: “Is he putting tags on us so we can be trucked off to the slaughter house (5). The image of the slaughter house is very effective suggesting the chaos in the world of the poorhouse. In the morning another accident takes place, the truck driver of the soft drinks demolished the wall and heavy rain started.

For the wall, so thick and substantial, was rally two shells: what surprised the people standing in silence was that the old masons had filled the center with uncemented rubble, silvers of rock and smooth fieldstones that now tumbled out resistlessly. (46)

John Updike introduces John F. Hook as a foil to Conner in this section of the novel who was once a teacher and involved with people. He exposes the hypocrisy that often underlines altruism. He can’t quit pull “a science out of the air” (51). The inmates dispersed and Conner spent his energies in repairing the damaged wall. The second movement of the novel begins with the fireside discussion, Hook and Gregg get involved in discussion over the religious issues. Conner acknowledges neither God nor heaven. He is a rational modern thinker believing that the universe is structured in a scientific manner. The inmates distrust Conner as their faith is shaken and the religious discussion becomes embarrassing for them. But the old people see it an attempt to crush their identity disrupting the usual pattern of their lives. Confusion follows between the ideal and the real, between the what-should-be and the what-is in the plot. Luckas also expresses his satisfaction as he says: “I read that on the bulletin board. It makes us all proud.” The events of the story go from the morning to the evening of a day. It is the historical day for the home when the old people could show the fruits of their labor through the year: handmade quilts, handmade toys and other useful things.

The third movement begins when Conner orders clearing the heap of stones and wants the repair of the wall done before the Fair begins. Conner handles the wheel barrow but Gregg triggers off a rebellion. He throws a stone hitting Conner. He is upset to know that Hook is the real instigator. The last part of the story is the Fair in which the young and the old mix up, the young men of the town mix up with the old inmates. The youth has come to the Fair “to be freshened in the recollection of an older America, the America of Dan Patch and of Senator Beveridge exhorting the Anglo-axons to march across the Pacific...”(110). The visitors have no vision of the past as they talk about the present. John Updike has portrayed Conner representing America of the future. Conner’s attitude to heaven and the universe is scientific, well-ordered and well-designed. He is a conformist of the community. John Updike has dramatized the conflict between young people and the conformist, between the young administrator and the old inmates. Conner’s conception of heaven is quite different. His conception of heaven is typical:

It is a secular homogeneous heaven for all...no disease...No oppression, political or economic...Leisure for recreation.... Cities will be planned and clean. ...The life span of the human being will be increased. Man will grow like a tree in the open. (75)

Conner’s view of the universe is scientific, he has taken a biological where a man’s life is terminated to the satisfaction to the readers. Conner believes that man’s life is terminated conclusively when the body ceases to be. He argues that there is no God, no heaven and no soul. Life loses its meaning as the narrator describes the social situation thus:

There was to be no war. We were to be allowed to decay of ourselves. And the population soared like diffident India’s and the economy swelled and iron became increasingly dilute...and everywhere was sufferance, good sense, wealth, irreligion and peace. The nation became one of pleasure seekers, the people continued to live as cells of a body do in the coffin. (110)

Connor and Gregg hold different opinions about God and heaven and soul. They enjoy a wide variety of differentiated visions of the old people. Amy Mortis

imagines that in heaven “I’d be a beauty and my mother not”. For another person, “heaven will be...a mist of all the joy sensations have given us and yet another view is that in heaven we’ll all be about the same age” (74). Hook gives a clear picture of his absolute faith, but is not bothered to draw a clear picture of heaven: “Heaven will be something of what each wants it to be”(89). Connor observes that the earth-bound visions are nothing but “the trembling” of human minds, or “shy hallucinations” and “cartoons projected on a waterfall” (110). The old people believe that they enjoy bliss after death and they long to die. It is quite surprising that Conner doesn’t identify with humanity, he is not a lover of nature and he has no interest in the sexuality of women. He lives in the modern world and has no interest in the past memories. He leads an alienated life, he has no friend among the old people and only relies on his assistant Buddy whom he uses as a tool:

Young for the importance of his position, devout in the service of humanity. Connor was unprepossessing...The ignorant came to him and reaped more ignorance, he had no gift of conversation. The theatre of his deeds was filled with people he would never meet...the administrators, the report-readers and beyond these black blank heads hung the white walls of the universe, the listless permissive mother for whom Conner felt not a shred of awe, though orthodox is the way of popular humanist orators, he claimed he did. Yet there were a few friends he supposed. Buddy was one. (12)

The climate of tension and suspicion made by the Cold War in that period may account for the huge usage of paranoia in postmodern novels, here is the best examples of master irony. John Updike has used the metaphor in this novel to explore the turbulent minds of the people, the people display their wares and seem technology –conscious. Their display of crafts is charming but their innocence is lost when they confront the science and technology. Their magical crafts attract the children who admire them. Soon the band in blue uniform, they are as neat and clean and look unreal like the vision of Conner. His predecessor Mendelssohn had “natural faith” (22). These musicians are acting as machines who “clicked off glances of disdain with industrial precision and the band leader wears a face of wooden fixity wrought by economic concern” (86). All members of the band play

their musical instruments in a routine manner to earn money and they are performing this activity since centuries. John Updike gives the metaphor of band to depict the emptiness and hollowness of the people working in mechanical manner. They play patterns as simple as “the colors of the flag” (86). Conner has full faith in humanity and the plan of heaven, his conception of heaven is unconventional.

It is a secular heaven for all...no disease...No oppression, political or economic...Leisure for recreation...Cities will be planned and clean...The life span of the human being will be increased. Man will grow like a tree in the open. (73)

John Updike at the end of the novel parodies Conner’s vision of heaven recasting his hi-tech heaven into a hell. Technology is not an eternal source of happiness to man but it leads to his trapping and eventually man is caught in his own net. Death is a reality and life loses its “meaning, desirability and preciousness.” The view of universe of Conner is scientific and rational. David Seed observes that Conner believe in a biological view of universe where a man’s life is terminated by death and soul, heaven and God are factious things. The main concern of man is to lead a longer life on this planet and to survive in all circumstances. Conner believes that an individual in this universe is set against the vastness of the infinite space. Heaven is just a figment of imagination and it can’t understand the individualistic urges of man. John Updike has portrayed the character of Conner who is an enigma in the novels as compared to Hicks and Gregg and Mendelssohn. He is not a lover of nature, he is lonely and friendless and doesn’t bother to develop any meaningful relationship. He has no friend among of woman and nothing binds him with the past. John Updike has portrayed him thus:

Young for the importance of his position, devout in the service of humanity, Conner was unprepossessing...The ignorant came to him and reaped more ignorance, he had no gift of conversation. The theatre of his deeds was filled with people he would never meet, the administrators, the report-readers and beyond these black blank heads hung the white walls of the universe, the listless permissive mother for whom Conner felt not a shred of awe,

through orthodox in the way of popular humanist orators, he claimed he did. Yet there were a few-friends he supposed. (12-13)

In his first novel *The Poorhouse Fair* Updike uses the apocalyptic vision to depict the system of values of American society and the people's home is a sociological cosmos. Updike argues that the majority of Americans are haunted by the terror of death. The plot depicts dehumanizing linear rationalism of the negative influences of science and technology. The heroes of John Updike are absurd as they get involved in a word of despair and fear of void. Updike portrays the fractured identity of his protagonists, their journey towards emotional bankruptcy favoring indifference and detachment. J.A. Ward (1995) in *Questioning Postmodernism* observes thus:

It is obvious that there are certain elements in the novels of John Updike which are generally noted to be expressive of a postmodern cultural trend. The transformation of reality into images, the used-up-ness of image linked with the notion of the pastiche, the dominance of nostalgia themes and of historical amnesia all of which we find in Jameson's description of the postmodern. (Ward 146)

Conner lives in a world of scientific facts in which God appears dead. In Conner's world perception of reality has taken precedence, it would appear that symbol and metaphor can no longer exist. In his interviews and prefaces John Updike has articulated his apocalyptic vision based on the philosophical ideas of Kierkegaard, Bergson and Karl Barth. The problem with Conner is that he is alienated from his old roots and suffers from the virus of mechanism. He thinks that order and systematic unity can be brought only through science and technology and in this process he is reduced to a mechanical robot failing to understand the emotions and feeling of the visitors and of the inmates of the poorhouse. He has pointed out that all the visitors are "a race of pleasure seekers" and their gossiping involves holidays, illicit affairs, physical ailments and their cure". Hook is the right person who understands the "harmony of forms" (127). He arises from sleep with a glimmering hope: "groping after the fitful shadow of the advice he must impart to

Conner, as a bond between them and a testament to endure his dying in the world” (127). The visitors who visit the Fair are seen chatting on the random issues in the random universe in a schizophrenic isolation looking more terrifying than Conner’s. They are in the grip of metaphysical despair as they look confused and bewildered and John Updike has presented the pageant of the sick and confused Americans lost in the abyss of darkness. The clear argument of John Updike is that American civilization and its people are heading towards the road to decline and the science and technology cannot save them from the inevitable dehumanization. Jameson observes thus:

In one of these worlds, the disintegration of the social is so absolute, misery, poverty, unemployment, starvation, squalor, violence and death that the intricately elaborated social schemes of Utopian thinkers becomes as frivolous as they are irrelevant. (Jameson 123)

*The Poorhouse Fair* presents the landscape of waste land of America. He thus comments on his fairgoers: “Heart had gone out of those...highly neutral, brachycephalic people” (109) and he is talking of man of technology. The modern American is only worried about money and makes only mechanical love far apart from each other. In the mechanical relationships, the universe seems to be doomed by the second law of thermodynamics. John Updike has presented the scene of chaos and disorder engulfing Conner and all the American visitors of the Fair: “Their minds and mouths were committed to stability and deception while their bodies were urging eruption, violence, change” (124). Conner is Anti-Christ who dreams to be a savior of humanity expressing his passion to restore order in the universe through his mechanical designs and strategies. Samuel calls him St. Stephen when the inmates are throwing stones at him near the tumbled wall. In his passion to become a new savior, Conner becomes a real tyrant and a destroyer. He destroys the liberty of the old people during the fair. In the heated arguments with Hook, Conner contends:

We’ve lifted the body in a dozen different direction looking for a soul. Instead we’ve found what? A dog’s house, an ape’s glands,

a few quarts of the sea water, a rat's nervous system, and a mine that is actually a set of electrical circuits. (80)

It seems John Updike has chosen the name of Connor to suggest the secular common man who deprives the American people of spiritual depth and meaning. Despite his intelligence and organizational ability and compassion of his guests, Conner fails to cater the real needs of the people of the Poorhouse. The main focus of John Updike is to know how a man can live in a godless universe and the reforms of Conner are mechanical, heartless and mere "busy-ness" as shown by his religious skepticism and by the sadistic zest with which he orders the shooting of a crippled cat and goes about ordering the lives of his charges. There is no goodness in his heart and the world dominated by science heartless, mechanical and dismal. Charles Smuels (1968) comments thus on the character of Conner:

Two conflicting views of destiny are presented in the novel *The Poorhouse Fair*. The view of Conner is the traditional socialist view: man is matter of his own destiny and creator of the only values, and he should try to achieve a peaceful society with an equitable distribution of wealth and high standard of physical well being and material comfort. (33)

In Conner's mechanical world the highest organisms are "members of the race of white animals that had cast its herd over the land of six continents. Highly neutral, brachycephalic, uniquely able to oppose their thumbs to the four other digits, they bred within elegant settlements, and both burned and interred their dead" (09). Conner has no use for meaningful patterns, he strives to impose simple rigid plans on the random universe. Elliot A (2007) in his book *Concept of the Self* observes that postmodern world require rapid changes and the workers and people need to adapt to the new culture of America in order to survive. Updike argues that this can be both an exhilarating and frightening experience:

When people are inserted into a world of detachment and superficial cooperativeness, of weak ties and interchangeable relationships, and when all this is shaped by the pursuit of risk-taking and self-reinvention, the power of traditional social norms and cultural traditions begins to diminish. This can be potentially liberating: the self finds the parental to define itself anew and create and create fluid and innovative relationships. (Elliott 139)

Updike depicted failed postmodern identity in the novel *The Poorhouse Fair* and the characters of the novel are unfulfilled by their lack of knowledge. They struggle for self-discovery and they to escape in order to learn what the unrealized future can bring them. A typical “character in Updike’s *The Poorhouse Fair* is someone who has already come to terms with the fact that positive human interaction is in vain” (144). Jameson observes that a postmodern man needs to upgrade and reinvent the latest gadgets and be aware of the latest information, products and images. Hook is a teacher for Conner whose work has been to pass the living wisdom of civilization from one generation to another and doesn’t think of man is in the abstract. Conner is an idealist of the age of machine and speed, he thinks that he can build a heaven on earth while at the same time it considers the universe a meaningless absurdity. Hook is a man of multiple experiences and is fully conversant of life and God and heaven quite opposed to what Conner believes. He is the only character in the novels of Updike who doesn’t fumble and his apocalyptic teachings are directed towards the thin skinned Conner. In the world of Conner all things are governed by machine and mathematical calculations. Ward observes thus:

As member of a group. Man is twisted, incomplete, and at odds with himself. Only those without social identity have personal identity. Psychologically those outside the poorhouse would be better off within it. (31)

Conner is lost in the whirlpool of money culture, he seeks sex, money and power. Unfortunately Conner has born in an age of science of technology: “he envied the first rationalists their martyrdom and the first reformers their dragons of reaction and selfishness” (47). He walks the way to hell with good intentions. He is



a humanist without any knowledge of humanity. He is a believer in the advancement of technology. His ignorance of man and of nature is compounded in his utter lack of knowledge. Conner regards Hook as a trouble-maker and blames him for the stoning incident. Hook is a wise old man as he speaks of Conner with kindness and generosity to the other inmates. He passionately tries to save Conner from spiritual bankruptcy by placing in his hands some accommodation to the limits of mortality and the agonizing fact of death. Conner is in a fix to accept the wisdom of Hook. Conner is a liberal idealist “a man dedicated to dynamic: that of man living healthy and unbraided beneath blank skies” (47). His failure is symbolic of the failure of the welfare state as established by modern man. The theme of the novel is concerned with religion entirely outside the context of love. Conner represents modern secularism and if it is allowed to flourish the modern society will go to the gutter as without spiritual values this human life is trash and meaningless. John Updike warns the Americans who are crazy about making money and are least bothered about the moral and spiritual values that pillowed human civilization. John Updike exposes the hypocrisy of the modern people who are crazy about making money. In the annual poorhouse fair the people are cheating others, where “a keen subversive need is demonstrated for an object that showed the trace of a hand, whether in an irregular scam, the crescent cuts of a chisel, or dents of a forge hammer” (28). But while purchasing these artifacts, modern society cheats the artisans. Hook lashes at the modern malaise when he has lost religion, the human family will decay forever. Updike gives an alarming bell to all the people of America:

As the Indian once served the elusive deer he hunted, and lent their society and indispensable temper. Impotent to provide this tempering unit, men would sin lower than women and indeed they had. Women are the heroes of dead lands. (111)

Updike argues that modern American society has been very cruel to the old men and sent them to the old home and have forgotten them. Modern people only think of the present comforts, the old people become burdens for them. The problem with modern youth is their selfish attitude and heartless indifference to their elders. Modern society has turned from Christ who had been a source of moral and spiritual strength since ages. Conner thinks that heaven will be built on earth by man and that

there is no immortality of the soul. Heaven and God are the figments of imagination of man. The nature of the society and world is fragmented according to Jameson Harvey (1992) observes that modernity leaves no room for respect for history:

If modern life is indeed so suffused with the sense of the fleeting, the ephemeral, the fragmentary, and the contingent, then a number of profound consequences follow. To begin with, modernity can have no respect even for its own past, let alone that of any pre-modern social order” (Harvey 11).

Conner believes that the creation is meaningless. He ridicules Hook’s notions of the inheritance of sin and virtue, and of the efficacy of human suffering. But Hook argues that: “there is no goodness without belief” (81). Harper observes that “there must be faith in man’s life. However, irrational and unscientific that faith may be, it offers what modern society’s humanism doesn’t, “a bridge over the great existential void” (165). The novel *The Poorhouse Fair* is written of the present or even the future but it is the past that contains the elements of survival and spiritual magnitude. The past has the treasure of values, traditions and meaning that will offer a controlling force on which he can base his life. Updike has explored the relation of past and the present encompassing the entire American experience. He gives the message to the American people that the past of America is very rich and is an exhaustible treasure of old values and philosophical thoughts that are fast declining because of the growth of science and technology. Kenneth Hamilton (1967) also opines that *The Poorhouse Fair* is Updike’s most direct parable of the relation of the present to the past. He says: “There in Updike sets the Man of America’s Future against the Man of America’s past” (Hamilton 146). Conner and the poorhouse are set against Hook who is a teacher in the novel. The poorhouse is depicted as a welfare state of the future of America and Conner is portrayed as the wise leader who is proud of the knowledge of what is the best for the people. Conner has “vowed to bring order and beauty out of Human substance” (14). Conner is the insensitive manager who wants to bring about methodological perfection, without regard for what is actually best. Updike tells that “everything Conner did he did for a reason, his actions were glass” Buddy, the assistant of Conner tries to defend Conner and asks: “Don’t anybody realize...what Mr. Conner has done here? This home has

one of the five highest ratings in the northeastern sector” (15). Lucas speaks the language of the old people: “I read that on the bulletin board. It makes us all proud. But the eating is only a statement on a piece of paper, meaningless to the old people. When Conner placed metal name tags on the chairs, he explained that he did it in order “to give the residents here some sense of ownership” (16). Hook and the old people only enjoy security and stability of life because they are connected with the past. They are not pathetic inmates waiting for death and according to Richard Rupp (1967) the old people are spiritually strong because “they have a sense of ritual based on ingrained feeling for prosperity...Their strength lies in an insistence on procedure” (Rupp 699). Conner has introduced new system in the poorhouse scrapping all the old regulations passed by the old perfect Mendelssohn who gave full liberty to the inmates. They feel that under Conner they have lost all rituals and traditions, they observe the degenerative effect of the corrosive mechanical policies of Conner. The old people are concerned because they see the loss of their pride men take in their work. Hick often thinks of his labor and the joy He expresses his disgust when he finds the people around him not enjoying the pride in their occupations: “Modern day workmen are not what they were.” He continues:

Depend upon it...there are no workmen new as there were in my day. The carpenters of fifty years ago could drive a stout nail as my finger is in three strokes. The joints that they would fit: pegs and wedges cut out of the end of a beam to the fine fineness of a hair, and not split the wood though they were right with the grain. And how they would hunt for the prongs of the old time carriage, to find a young birch that had been bent just that way. To use the wood of a branch was considered of a piece with driving two nails where one would hold. The cut nails, you know. Then wire became common, and all their thinking was done for them by the metal manufacturers.

(10)

Under the leadership of Conner everything has changed, he has issued instructions keeping in mind the culture of science and technology and disregarding the past traditions and beliefs. When one of the old women complains that the men do not work anymore, Hook explained: “It’s the administration. To let a man choose

idleness or labor, on the ground of whim: why in Mendelssohn's time such a thing would never be seen" The old people want clear guidelines from Conner so that they may lead an orderly life. The climax of the novel comes when Amelia Hortis tells Conner: "You expect us to give up the old ways, and make this place a little copy of the world outside, the way it's going I don't say you don't mean well, but it won't" (16). Gregg had "the thought that here was something glorious. Battles of old swayed beneath such a canopy of missiles" Gregg has the feeling that by attacking Conner "He had shown there were rights" (92). The only right they demand is the right to live as they always had, a way in keeping with their temperament. Updike suggests a victory for the old people have it despite Conner. Hamilton feels at "for Updike this exhibition of America's past gives heart again to an America that has lost its individuality its belief in work and its own history" (Hamilton 18). John Updike has given a confrontation between Conner and Hook. Hamilton points out that "Conner and Hook, arguing their respective creeds, reach back to the basic issue of unbelief and faith: a meaningless universe versus one ruled by a righteous creator" (Hamilton 796), Conner asks as serious question: "What makes you think, God exists?" (56). Hook explains with confidence that "there I what of Creation I can see, and there are inner spokesmen" (58). But Conner I the product of machine and technology, he rebuts the arguments of Hook and argues that "the Creation was just an accident," that "lightning stirred certain acids." He scoffs at the Idea that everyone in the world is worthy of making stars or to scale heights of life: "those monstrous balls of gas." Hook tries to give him the clear picture of creation and proclaims:

This I do know, that that part of the universe which is visible to me, as distinct from that which is related to me, is an unfailing source of consolation. Even a spider set us a lesson. As to the stars which so repel you, they are to me points of light arranged at a random, to give the night sky adornment. I have sometimes thought, had you and your kind arranged the stars, you would have set them geometrically, or had them spell a thought provoking sentence. (80)

To conclude, Updike's novel *The Poorhouse Fair* deals with a conflict between the old and the present, between the age of speed and machine and the

natural life led by the ancestors of America. The conflict is dramatized by the manager Conner and Hook who is an epitome of the apocalypse images. The real cause of sufferings of American is their growing nihilism and their mania to make maximum money. There was a mad race in the cities to enjoy the hedonistic pleasures of life deviating from the religious norms. The nation had become one of pleasure seekers the people continued to live as cells of a body do in the coffin and America was heading towards the road to total annihilation.

## Chapter Four

### Fragmentation and Chaos in *Rabbit Redux*

John Updike wrote his novel *Rabbit Redux* (1971) after eleven years depicting his apocalyptic vision of human fragmentation and chaos. Updike achieved exceptional success by the publication of this novel as the critics and the reviewers were almost unanimous in their opinions about the versatility of John Updike. It is observed that *Rabbit Redux* is the mighty achievement of John Updike in the realm of fiction. Interestingly, the plot of this novel is free from the Christian and classical myths upon which his earlier novels depended. John Updike has chronicled all the political and the social forces that brought America into the limelight in global scenario. The tale is an extraordinary assessment of the social and political and social circumstance in the light of the calamity of the American Dream. The characters of the novel are made to experience an all out change, an otherworldly reestablishment. The universe of *Rabbit Redux* is chaotic and the characters are trapped in the abyss of darkness, there is a cheating wife, building tension between father and son, a deteriorating town, and a nation bogged-down in a war it will not soon win. Updike expresses his bewilderment at the privileged classes who seemed to revel in American foreign and domestic cataclysms. Updike chronicles the historical events of the 1960s as the plot of the novel is historical. In 1968, he was defending poor Lyndon Johnson and his ineffective war machine. He defended President Johnson and the Vietnam War. The central thematic conflict of the novel is freedom versus domesticity and between revolution and preservation. Rabbit tells Charlie Stavros who is the lover of Janice “You’re just like me, the way I used to be. Everybody now is like the way I used to be” (182). Updike tries to achieve a dialectical balance in the novel as the hero Harry Angstrom is struggling to achieve the right balance in the world of chaos and disorder. Harry Angstrom of the fifty is a restless seeker in first novel *Rabbit is Rich* but in the novel *Rabbit Redux*, Harry becomes a sedentary reactionary different from the sixty, Harry has been totally transformed. John Updike observed thus in his “Introduction” to *Rabbit Run*: “Rabbit is, like the underground Man, incorrigible, from first to last he bridles at good advice, taking direction only from his personal, also incorrigible God”(22).

In Updike's *Rabbit* is grown into many stages, in *The Rabbit Run*, the hero is struggling and running for stability of life, in *Rabbit Redux* he is a seeker of freedom, in *Rabbit is Rich* Harry is as greedy as he runs after money and in *Rabbit is at Rest*, Harry remarks to his daughter thus: "Whenever somebody tells me to do something my instinct's always to do the opposite. It's got me into a lot of trouble, but I've had a lot of fun" (22).

John Updike's novel *Rabbit Run* is a dramatization of the bafflement that results from Harry's search for infinite freedom. It is found that the novel *Rabbit Redux* is a sequel suggesting that Harry Angstrom has been led back to his responsibility and health after suffering the malaise of youthful desires. In this novel Harry is "cured" and led back in his family. He lives with his wife Janice and his thirteen years old son Nelson. The family is living in Eisenhower's era typified by social, political and philosophical apathy. Rabbit struggles to create a balance between his desires and demands of the family and he struggles to find out something beyond the age. The novel begins in July on the very day when the American astronauts land on the Moon and ends in October 1969. Each chapter of the novel is introduced with an epigraph suggesting the force of the external events. Updike points out that these epigraphs are meant this novel, Harry has been totally changed, he is passive and is working as a linotypist to support his family. Interestingly, he has reconciled to his fate and sticks to his social responsibilities like a true American. The plot is structured around four books, in Book one Rabbit Angstrom is introduced as serious young man working hard to support his family. Harry has dedicated himself to American ideals, he started working in the company of his father and he has bought a home in the suburbs. Harry's life is disturbed by the rumor that his wife Janice is having an illicit relationship with a salesman. Harry is so much mentally disturbed that he confronts Janice who admits to the affair and faced with the difference of Harry. In the last scene, Harry and his son Nelson visit Rabbit's mother who is dying of Parkinson's disease.

In the Book Two, Harry Angstrom meets a runaway girl Jill at a bar who is of eighteen-years and belongs to a rich family. Harry enjoys sexual pleasures with Jill though in his heart he feels sick and passive. Jill's intimacy with Harry Angstrom grows and they live peacefully together for several weeks. But in book, three the

peaceful life of Harry and Jill is destroyed by the appearance of Skeeter who is a young black from Vietnam and is a revolutionary. Harry Angstrom observes that there is constant tension between the middle-class white man and the black militant. In this part of the novel John Updike raises the issues of the black militancy and corruption and exploitation. Skeeter and Harry share Jill sexually and Jill who is under drugs passively complies. Their unlawful sexual activities create problem as the neighbors raise hue and cry and eventually, Harry's house is burnt. In the fire Jill is burnt alive and Nelson is saved. Meanwhile Harry is getting repeated message from Janice for divorce. Skeeter leaves the city for ever. In Book Four, Harry is dismissed from the job since he is redundant with the arrival of the new machinery. Harry's sister Mim, a Las Vegas call girl, arrives on the scene. She tries to restore the order and counsels Harry who is in the mood of depression because of the tragic death of Jill. All the events of the novel occur against an ominous background of the historical events, there are references of black revolutionaries, the moon landing events of July 1969. Updike claims Vietnam War was a "liberal cause" "an intervention against a Communist bully" begun by Truman. He argued about the Vietnam War with Janice's lover Charlie Stavros and feels "frantic, the thoughts of the treachery and ingratitude befouling the flag, befouling him" (39). Stavros exposes false liberalism of Harry and repudiates his views "as racist imperialism" (40). John Updike chronicles the atrocities committed by the Viet Congo and North Vietnam and portrays the scenes of cruelty and violence. Stavros appears more knowledgeable than Harry Angstrom who observes thus: "I don't think about politics....That's one of my Goddam precious American rights, not to think about politics" (38). Updike also suffuses the novel with space terminology. The majority of the characters are almost ghostly, often dressed in grey and dirty clothes associating with the TV images of the astronauts. The nucleus of the novel is Janice-Harry relationship who are reconciled after the funeral of their daughter and for ten years they have been living together but are leading a mysterious life. Janice gives a shock to Harry and psychologically punishes him having an affair with her coworker Charlie Stavros and starts living with him. She leaves Nelson who is a young teenager of thirteen years. John Updike has chronicled the conflicting views of Rabbit and Stavros. Harry thinks the bus he is riding has so many Negroes and they are like "seeds of some tropical plant". Rabbit knows it's his garden and "that's why



he has put a flag on the back of the Falcon even though Janice says it's corny and fascist" (11). Rabbit thinks the bus he's riding home on "has too many Negroes" and that they are like "seeds of some tropical plant" that are "taking over the garden. His garden. Rabbit knows it's his garden and that's why he's put a flag decal on the back of the Falcon even though Janice says it's corny and fascist" (10-11). The flag decal serves as a source of tension between Rabbit and Stavros that ignites their argument over Vietnam. In this part of the novel, Updike exposes the false patriotism of the American youth. However, Harry Angstrom interjects:

"What's wrong with it" he asks them both. "It's our flag, isn't it?"

"It's somebody's flag. Stavros says. Not liking this trend and softly bouncing his fingertips together under his sheltered bad eyes."

"But not yours, huh"

"I don't get fanatical about this, Janice warns.

"I don't get fanatical, I just get a little upset about people who come over here to make a fat buck..."

"I was born here, "Stavros quickly says, So was my father."

...and then knock the fucking flag. "Rabbit continues, "like it's some piece of toilet paper." "A flag. It's just a piece of cloth."

"It's more than just a piece of cloth to me." (37)

John Updike uses this Fragmentation, the most common literary technique in the postmodern period to blend multiple elements concerning plot, characters, themes, imagery and symbols. The factual details of the plot of the novel are fragmented and dispersed. The disintegration of the family structure is realistically depicted by John Updike through Harry-Janice relationship. Harry places the flag on his car and plants in his garden symbolically, the blacks and the ethnic Americans represented by Stavros are all out to threaten the nation by their subversive activities. Rabbit thinks that blacks are certainly dumber than whites but then think that being smart hasn't amounted to so much, the atom bomb and the one-piece aluminum beer can. And you can't say Bill Cosby's stupid promoting the narrator's tongue in-cheek

remark that Rabbit's "educated tolerant thoughts" lead to "a certain fear" of blacks being "so noisy" (11). Rabbit is concerned about the threat to the country as he says "More and more the country is getting like that. As if it just grew here instead of people laying down their lives to build it" (11). Here Updike foreshadows Skeeter, the black militant and Jill are responsible in ruining the garden of Rabbit.

The novel *Rabbit Redux* chronicles the historical events of the 1960s, the NASA moon shot and the landing of the Americans on the moon and the Civil Rights movement exploring the darkness of the age. Like John Barth, John Updike has depicted the turmoil of the decade as the critics have regarded as the one of the most important documents. Updike recorded the historical and political and cultural events of the sixties thus:

The calls for civil rights, racial equality, sexual equality, freer sex, and peace in Vietnam were in themselves commendable and non-threatening, it was the savagery, between 1965 and 1973, of the domestic attack upon the good faith and common sense of our government, especially of that would-be Roosevelt Lyndon B. Johnson that astonished me. (26)

The novel *Rabbit Redux* displays the evolutionary process of the hero. In the first pages of the novel, Harry is thirty six-years old man who is spiritually tired person who has committed to the collective spiritual emptiness. Updike has described his job as a typesetter and living in his flimsy ranch house in Brewer suburb with his wife Janice and son. He has understood that his rebellion against it is useless as his search for personal freedom has led to alienation. John Updike gives the metaphor of baseball game to intensify the themes of the novel. Harry even attends the baseball game, a sport "whose very taste, of spit and dust and grass and sweat and leather and sun, was America" (83). Harry realizes that there is something wrong, that "a gallant pretence has been abandoned, a delicate balance is being crushed" (83). Neil Armstrong lands on the moon and moon become for Updike a rich metaphor for the America of the 1960s. The technological world of America is regarded as barren, soulless and life less by John Updike. Harry Angstrom is the product of Depression and the Wars and the liberal policies of Roosevelt's

Democratic Party. For Updike the American Dream evokes an image of “God lying sleeping, the quilt-colored map of the U.S.A. coming out of his head like a cloud” (114). Updike feels that America is beyond power as it “acts as in a dream, as a face of God. And wherever America is not madness rules with chains” (47). But the interesting thing is Harry defends America as he feels he is “defending something infinitely tender, the star lit with his birth” (47). Harry is disgusted to find that the old rules have been scrapped by the people and the Supreme Court of America is “nothing but a bunch of old men letting the roof cave in” (106).

Rabbit is convinced that behind all progress there lies vast nothing, that an emptiness has opened up where once there was ripeness. This is dramatized through the opening scene of the novel. Rabbit and his father share a drink at the Phoenix bar. Harry Angstrom clutches two quarters in such a way that he “betrays that they are real silver to him instead of just cut copper sandwich coins that ring flat on the bar top. The old values in the time of the Depression when money was money. Never be sacred again, not even dimes are silver now” (10). Ironically, Harry’s home is a site of the new technological emptiness. He eats TV dinners made from man-made materials, he drinks orange juice that “is not even frozen orange juice but some chemical mix tinted orange” (72). His front lawn strikes “artificial, lifeless, dry, no-color: a snapshot of grass” (298). Harry is a stranger in this world, he thinks of his future while surveying his living room one morning:

The furniture that frames his life looks Martian in the morning light: an armchair in synthetic fabric enlivened by a silver thread, a sofa of air foam slabs, a low table hacked to imitate an antique cobbler’s bench. (72)

Harry is surrounded by the things of decay and when his house is burnt, Rabbit notes that it “burns spitefully, spitting, stinkingly: the ersatz and synthetic materials grudge combustion its triumph” (319). Updike draws a direct parallel between the barren landscape of the 1960s and the new frontier of the moon. Updike chronicles the euphoria of the Americans and calls this “the new America”. Harry Angstrom cries out: “Uncle Sam is on the moon” (10). Updike exposes the blankness of the Americans, the heroic power of the volcanic power is depicted as a

leap toward the void with “ the numbers pouring backwards in tenths of seconds faster than the eye until zero is reached” (7) Markle further remarks that in the opening of the novel Updike the issues of frigidity, promiscuousness, ghostliness and death.

The novel *Rabbit Redux* is packed with the images of emptiness, of the vapid waste of suburban America. Harry looks at the sky when he comes out the drugstore and thinks “The world outside is bright and barren.... Where is everybody? Is there life on earth? ”(90). When Janice deserts, “the spacecraft is empty: a long empty box in the blackness of Penn Villas, slowly spinning in the void” (99). Harry’s home, with its synthetic furnishings, is a :strange dry place, dry and cold:

Penn Villas with its vaunted quarter-acre lots and compulsory barbecue chimneys does not tempt its residents outdoors, even the children in summer...A sky poisoned by radio waves. A desolate smell from underground. (60)

Harry thinks about his television set at one point: “Ought to mash it, poison, he read somewhere the reason kids today are so crazy that were brought up on television, two minutes of this, two minutes of that” (147). The vision of John Updike is very pessimistic and bleak observing that the technological progress is devoid any spiritual strength. Updike rebelled against the apathy and compromised environment of 1960s. The novel *Rabbit Redux* displays the evolutionary process of the hero. Harry is thirty-six years old surrounded by the environment of collective spiritual emptiness. He is leading a humdrum existence engaged in his job as a typesetter. He is living in a Brewer suburb with his wife and a son. Harry realizes that his rebellion against mass society is useless as his search for personal freedom has brought him alienation. In his quest for individuality and spirituality in spite less consumer society Harry looks lost and bewildered. Harry has chosen to adapt to the boredom in the meaningless existence and has become a pale reflection of his self. He complains that “Nobody ever calls me Rabbit” (268). He is aware of sexual revolution the drug explosion, campus demonstration and the emergence of the feminist revolution. Harry revolts against the racial discrimination giving protection to Skeeter. The turbulent times of 1960s provide a context for Harry’s awakening

from spiritual immobility, the images of the novel refer to coldness and frigidity as Joyce Markle observes that such images serve to convey the idea that in a “demoralized society, emptied of belief in anything, the characters are emotionally paralyzed-frozen” (6). Harry observes Brewer as “a gappy imitation of the city” with sad narrow places, empty, dusty windows and colourless sky. Harry is dissatisfied with everything: food, home and Janice. “Things go bad. Food goes bad, people go bad, maybe a whole country goes bad...” (280). But this time he conforms to the environment and lives with “his spirit muffled in pulpy insulation” (235). *Rabbit Redux* is an intense examination of the American Dream in the light of the socio-political forces of the Sixties. The individual event is represented as national history and the novel becomes a paradigm of the American history. The experiences of Rabbit are painful as his impulsive behavior produces a feeling of hopelessness and depression. He realizes that sufferings and frustration cannot be solved by technological sophistication. The divine power also plays vital role in solving human problems and to restore the moral order of the universe. Updike outlines man’s confinement in a hollow material world in the novel *Rabbit Redux*. The world is threatened by mortality and transience in the plot of the novel and the values are fast declining and socio-political aspects seem to exist in a vacuum. The institution of family is examined in its social context highlighting the collapse of family in the contemporary society. Janice deserts her husband and the family of Oliie and Peggy Foschnat is shattered. Updike’s deep concern for the survival of family is highlighted: “Who will hold families together, if everybody has to live. Living is a compromise, between what you want and doing what other people want” (109). Updike argues that the sacred institutions such as religion and family have collapsed and the characters in *Rabbit Redux* are incapable of finding anything of value in the modern world. They are devoid of myths and heroes. Janice observes that Roosevelt President Roosevelt is a crazy old man who launched war against Korea to escape from his personal depression: “It’s a police state run by the Kennedys... That family has been out to buy the country since those Brahmins up in Boston snubbed old Joe” (81). According to Rabbit’s father Nixon is a “poor devil” who’s trying his best, but confides “I don’t have much use for Tricky and Dicky and never have...” (349). Rabbit’s sister Mim is a symbol of the new white generation that lives on pollution

and is hard as cockroaches. Mim entertains the family by cheap performances on the stage, she is emotionally bankrupt and emerges as devoid of belief in anything. Updike's patriotism is revealed in defending the participation of America in Vietnam. He believes that the aim of America's main goal is to make a happy rich country, full of highways and gas stations. He identifies himself with the flag, so that in one argument he holds that "the treachery and ingratitude befouling the flag is at the same time befouling him" (45). Updike investigates into the discord of generations, the drugs mafia of the counter-culture. The white radicals of the middle class were responsible for the chaos in the country. They attacked the campuses and led demonstrations and formed new drug cults in several urban areas. Jill represents this group who comes from a wealthy family and opposes the Establishment: "I ran away from it, I shit on it" (207). She rejects the "old God" and the "angry old patriotism" (228) to which Rabbit represents.

John Updike uses various images in the novel to depict the social concerns of the society, space flights, black militancy and the Vietnam War. The imagery portrays the emptiness of life and collapse of religion and values. The imagery of space effectively describes the emptiness and the void experiences by the Americans. Harry is dissatisfied with everything food, home and Janice. "Things go bad, people go bad, may be a whole country goes bad" (80). He confronts to the dirty and stifling environment and lives with "his spirit muffles in pulpy insulation" (35). He is often tired and looks weak, senses death and calls himself a "weed" which trails upon the ground purposelessly. Harry notices "every day going out....No belief in an afterlife, no hope for it, too much more of the same thing..."(104). Janice observes decadence of faith in him, calls him a stiff ghost, "You were a beautiful brainless guy and I've had to watch that guy die day by day" (74). Buchanon describes Harry as a black typesetter: "You're just turning old, the way you're going now, old and fat and fincky" (103). Harry is growing weak and his loss of vital power is contrasted with the increase of energy in the black militants of America and the rise of the feminist revolution. Harry feels that the whole situation in the country has changed, he feels that the people of America are protesting, fighting and struggling to find new patterns of meaning.

John Updike uses military metaphors. The body of Janice is described as “a barren landscape lit by bombardment silently exploding images...”(68). He refers to his short haircut as “the enemy’s uniform” (68). Harry tells Stavros he won’t bargain with him over the future of Janice: “If you want to pull out, pull out. Don’t try to commit me to one of your fucking coalition governments” (161). Harry has a different opinion about the Apollo mission of America, his estimate is negative: “these guys see exactly where they’re aiming and it’s a big round nothing” (22). The spiritual landscape of America is as barren as that on the Moon. The space exploration was a big thing for the politicians of America but for the common American it symbolized nothingness. Harry is surrounded by the culture of consumerism and philistinism pervading the whole country. He loves his country and can’t “stand to have knocked” He is a loyal citizen and “God he can doubt, but not America” (43). He lashes at other who “come over here to make a fast buck” (43). He doesn’t like buses as they “stink of Negroes and he also admits “it is not quite easy, talking to a black” (101). The word “redux” in Latin language means resurrection or restoration and in medical language it means recuperation. The novel chronicles revivification through Jill and Skeeter who is an angry African American Vietnam.

John Updike has integrated the political and religious issues as Skeeter wants Harry to discard the white man’s faith in the American dream. For Harry the “Good Samaritan and the “Statue of Liberty” are the same things”(358). The white American Dream “was a state of mind from those poor fool pilgrims on” (242). Skeeter exposes the hypocritical faith of Harry on the traditional concept of American Dream by saying that “You say America to you and you will get bulges and stars but it to any black or convince Rabbit that the white industrial worker in this dollar crazy” (232) democracy. Henning Suzanne Uphaus (1980) remarks thus:

The temporary alliance of the rich white radical youth with the black militant to overthrow the System can be seen in Jill and Skeeter. Events of the Sixties are the student revolts, the predominantly white, upper-class youth who led the SDS, and the conviction among black militants that this disruption within the white majority could only benefit the black revolution. Stimulated by drugs

and sexually liberated, the young white radical (Jill) and the black militant (Skeeter) live off the productiveness of the working class (Rabbit) attempting to (Rabbit), attempting to change his conservatism while being sustained by his labor. They urge him to endorse the overthrow of the System. (86)

Skeeter represents the sterility of white America and the dominant imagery is of “coldness.” The coldness is synonymous with a lack of life, frozen love and sentiments in people. Mom Angstrom dreams that she finds a man frozen in the ice-box. Mom’s legs are described as cold and frozen. Updike gives the images of death, coldness and dehumanized humans. Rabbit is frozen and can’t think of what to do. Jill alleges that his thoughts are frozen and he can’t think independently. Janice looks at Harry’s body and sees “a big white body, his spreading slack gut (39). Skeeter charms Rabbit: “the something so very finely turned and finished in the face, reflecting light...like a finely made electric boy...”(251). Skeeter is symbolized as a satanic figure who declares himself as “the black Jesus Of God, Skeeter says that Chaos is God’s body. Order is Harry calls Skeeter as religious-crazy” (328). Harry participates in the nightly seminars of Skeeter along with his teenage son Nelson and the runaway Jill where such topics race, religion and morality were discussed. In this demoralized society young girls of America are enjoying sexual liberty and young boys like Nelson are becoming drug addicts. The values of society and morality are fast declining as parents are negligent about their children. They are wasting their energies in night parties and sexual escapades and the children turn to drugs. Nelson and Jill have become vagabonds. The parents in America seem depressed and frustrated of modern life and they have created the most neurotic, disjointed and alienated generation. The plot depicts the dismal state of modern man surrounded by the dead morality. For Updike man’s highest goal in life is to seek a way that leads to salvation. There is no substitute to God as man enjoys peace and bliss only through faith in God. Marriage, family, sensual pleasure does not resolve the problems of man. Firm faith in God and divinity can provide security and moral strength to modern man. The novel *Rabbit Redux* depicts the search for the patterns of meaning and the solution to the puzzling question concerning human existence. Joseph Waldmeir observes thus:



Updike's real concern is a critical examination of the temptations, the problems, the questions, and the answers as they conflict both inside and outside the protagonist, alternatively promising and denying solutions to the quest. (Waldmeir 16)

Religion failed to help Harry so in desperation he adopted a false faith seeking refuge in sexual pleasures. As religion also failed to help him escape from the anguish of the Sixties, Rabbit adopts a false faith. He seeks refuge in sensual pleasure. He gets involved in the sexual activity to seek spiritual fulfillment. Jill's "cooking has renewed taste for life" (171). Jill's lessons and discussions on God, beauty and meaning of the universe excite Harry and he awakes from dull TV watching every evening. Jill cooks for him and kisses him exciting his to throw away the hard and dull attitudes towards the country, life, sex and religion. But under the influence of Skeeter, Harry indulges into discussion about drug addiction, racial violence and Vietnam War. Skeeter horrifies and shocks Harry who wonders: "Why has he invited this danger?...He is poison, he is murder" (212). But unfortunately Harry is caught in contradictions, he is controlled by dual feelings as Updike uses his interplay of positive and negative connotation. Harry thinks that white men "have to get on with the job, making American great" and declares that:

You haven't turn on television now without some black face spitting at you. Everybody from Nixon on down is sitting up nights to figure out how to make them all rich without putting them to the trouble of doing any work...the Negroes plus the rich kids, who want to pull it all down. (41)

This is named metafiction. We can't read though this technique that attempts to expose our action. In this most representative postmodern technique, we are the subject to the text itself, even though it has already been designed properly. Harry rationalizes that Janice is a victim of Stavros's Greek slickness and social climbing: "he reminds that she is "the boss's daughter" while laying out Stavros's motivations for sleeping with her" (62). He is both arrested and repelled by the various blacks. In many occasions, Harry feels that blacks represent the vital life force that he has lost. He is charmed by the black baby singer, her singing "frightens Rabbit with its

enormous black maw of truth yet unmakes him overjoyed that he is here with their black others, he wants to shout love” (125). Updike contrasts the atmosphere in the bar with Harry’s home: “a strange dry place, dry and cold and emptily spinning in the void of Penn Villas like a cast off space capsule” (132). Skeeter represents the Satanic forces in the novel who announces himself a “the Black Jesus.” He laughs at God and says that “chaos is God’s body. Order is the Devil’s chains” (275). He preaches a secular gospel based on hatred and negation. Harry refers to Skeeter a “religious crazy” (328). Updike’s vision is apocalyptic as he expresses the idea that as religious institutions have failed to provide a stable and peaceful society and its citizens have fallen prey to drugs and sexual adventures. Skeeter emerges as a God of chaos, destruction and despair. Harry, Jill and Nelson partake of marijuana, “the sacrament of the “Church of Skeeter.” Harry feels “the marijuana clutch at him, drag his knees like a tide...her Jesus come at him another way” (253). G. J. Searles observes that in this part of the novel lies the central paradox of the novel as Updike seems to imply that “America has so lost sight of traditional Christian virtue that only through the agency of evil can Harry hope to s recapture his lost spirituality” (26). Updike contends that America has created many problems by permitting social injustice and inequality violating the basic tenets of Christianity. Updike lashes at the racial policy of America: Skeeter’s view of American Dream is nihilistic. The treatment of racial minorities is discriminatory: “this place was newer such a place it was a dream, it was a state of mind from those poor fool pilgrims on, right?” (242). Skeeter indicates that “the laws are written to protect tiny elite” (207). Skeeter rage and weeps in the novel calling upon God represents the morally and spiritually dried-up whites, Rabbit tells Jill that everything is “dead for her because it was given to her: Fear, That’s what makes us poor bastards run. You don’t know what fear is, do you poor baby? That’s why you’re dead” (152). In the *Rabbit Run* the identity of Harry is of a life-giver and a Christ but in the novel *Rabbit Redux* Skeeter is depicted as anti-Christ figure, a Satan who promotes sexuality and chaos. Jill warns Skeeter that the police will “crucify” Skeeter if they catch him. Skeeter’s assessment is damnation of America. Updike has given a sensational turn to the plot of the novel introducing two important episodes, one is the burning of Harry’s house and the second is the tragic death of Jill and disappearance of Skeeter. The fire symbolizes

the rite of purification for Harry. The death of Jill in the fire symbolizes the destruction of the evil forces. Janice appreciates Harry who worked “in that dirty place” for her and there have been “a lot of days when I was sorry you came back that time. You were a beautiful brainless guy and I’ve had to watch that guy die day by day” (63). Harry is responsible for his failure to look after his house and marriage. Since Becky’s death, Harry and Janice’s marriage has been lacking sexually. Janice expresses her frustration to Stavros thus: “Rabbit refused to have another child as a result of Becky’s death” (41). Janice decides to bring order out of chaos and struggles to revitalize her sense of identity in developing her affair with Charlie Stavros. But the thought of marrying him “opens an abyss...A gate she had always assumed gave on to a garden on to emptiness” (66). Rabbit gives her a severe blow when she denies her adultery but later both give in to the changing world of morality and culture. Harry refuses to encourage Janice to return. In *The Rabbit Run*, he had fled Janice but with the passing time her departure pushes him into an empty world. He is always in a dilemma and this is the main reason of his domestic discord. He confesses to Janice that “ever since that happened to Becky, I haven’t been that much for sex” (59). Harry is reconciled to the reality of “second rate marriage and job.” He feels quite settle with a new house and new job in the Verity Press but things “never fail to fail”: the discord persists in his domestic life. His Penn Villas represents a world of disjunction a Harry reflects: “Everything is warm, wet, still coming to birth but himself and his home, which remains a strange dry place, dry and cold emptily spinning in the void of Penn Villas like a Cast-off space capsule” (132).

In the chapter “Mom/Pop/ Mom” Harry is passive and conservative, in fact the cultural and political situation of the Sixties has baffled him. George Hunt (1980) points out that he is a man “displaced by cultural changes and made passive and inarticulate by on rushing political and social currents” (Hunt 165). Harry’s wife Janice calls him the “silent majority.” Stavros tells Janice that “He’s a normal product....He is a typical good hearted imperialist racist” (93). Harry expresses his understanding of the cultural and political transformation of America expressing his apocalyptic vision thus:

America is beyond power, it acts as in a dream, as a face of God. Wherever America is, there is freedom, and wherever America is not, madness rules with chains, darkness strangles millions. Beneath her patient bombers, paradise is possible. (49)

Harry is emaciated and stunned by social pressures. He degenerates into passivity as all the spiritual aspirations have been silenced. It is found that Janice is no longer is a “dumb” and “muted” but she has changed because of the socio-political forces. The growth of Feminism and the Sexual Revolution has transformed her. In fact, Janice has come out of the narrow domestic walls and taken a job at her father’s lot. The behavior of Janice within and outside her family reflects her changed personality. Harry is surprised to observe vulgarity and blunt attitude of Janice, Janice crosses all limits with her bold remarks: “I am just a cunt, Harry. There are billions of us now” (37). She is not ashamed of talking sex and rape even in the presence of her teenaged son Nelson. She tells Harry: “You know what a rape usually is? It’s a woman changed her mind afterwards” (38). She snubs Harry and continues her vulgar talk: “He knows more now than you ever will. That’s nothing personal, Harry, it’s just a fact. People are more sophisticated now than when you were a boy” (41). Janice goes a step forward and scolds Harry: “You have gotten so upright in your old age” and this derogatory remark of Janice baffles Harry” “Not her voice, another voice, another voice, another vice in hers” (38). Soon Harry realizes that he is confronting a new Janice who is liberal and unconventional, the product of new culturalism of America. Her liberated sexual behavior as well as her rage is the result of her new feminism. Edward Vargo (1973) observes thus: “National rage and guilt fuse with Janice’s own guilt and love and rage, national fears and dreams merge with Rabbit’s own inadequacy to satisfy her” (152). Janice’s dispassionate response to Rabbit is quite revealing. She finds the views of Harry old and obsolete as she tells Harry: “May be he came back to me, Nelson and me, for the old-fashioned reasons, and wants to live an old-fashioned life, but nobody does that anymore, and he feels it. He puts his life into the rules, he feels melting away now” (54). Harry just watches and lets thing happen out. Janice’ adultery is the result of her new feminism and for her lust for sexual pleasures. She openly tells her husband and flouts all the norms of decency and Harry surrenders to her completely: “They had become locked rooms to each other, they could hear each other cry but

couldn't get in" (55). Harry doesn't feel jealous of Janice who is sexually involved with Charlie: "Keep him if he makes you happy I don't seem to, go ahead, until you've had our fill at last" (70). Updike exposes the perversion of the domestic life of the American couples through the life of Harry and Janice in this novel. Sex is the only mode of recreation of the American couples and their quest for redemption or salvation is fraudulent. Janice represents the modern American women and her sexual liberty symbolizes the modern wave of feminism and human degradation: Janice tells Harry:

Harry, I'm sorry for whatever pain this is causing you, truly sorry, but it's very important that at this point in our lives we don't let guilt feelings motivate us. I'm trying to look honestly into myself, to see who I am and where I should be going. I want us both, Harry, to come to decisions, we can live with. It's the year nineteen sixty nine and there is no reason for two mature people to smother each other to death simply out of inertia, I'm searching for a valid identity and I suggest you, do the same. (98)

Updike is not concerned with the issue of adultery but is interested in exploring the impact of social change on the familial relationships like a visionary novelist. He observes that modern American have gained sexual liberty at the cost of stability and domestic happiness. Harry has lost his hopes for Janice and he brings Jill at home to fill his void in frustration. He looks confused and bewildered in his relationship with Jill as he sees Jill as a daughter and also as a sister when she lies on his bed. Jill's amoral behavior symbolizes the perversion and lustful attitude of the elite of the country. Updike explores how the family structure is threatened in America: "Who'll hold families together, if everybody has to live. Living I a compromise, between what you want and doing what other people want" (102).

Through the character of Jill Updike describes the desperate and lonely life of Jill who left her home in desperation. Updike is giving a clear message to the young Americans who are lost in abyss of sexual pleasures, the family life is threatened by the anxieties and sexual liberties of the youth of America who have fallen in evil ways. Jill is lost as is illustrated by the following passage:

You think they're talking to you or making love or whatever, and then you realize they'd looking over your shoulders for the next fix. You realize you're nothing. He didn't need me to find God for him, if he met God right on the street he'd tried to hustle Him for money enough for a couple bags. (13)

John Updike expresses his theme of the novel through the character of Mim who believes in softness of the sex that it is the American dream of material comfort that has turned the entire country into a desert. It is unfortunate that the young generation of America is preparing to live in the desert. They are trying to kill "the softness of the sex" and "love" "me" and "mine" and struggling to survive. She expresses the survival urge of the younger generation thus:

They're burning it out with dope, they're going to make themselves hard clean through. Like, oh, cockroaches. That's the way to live in the desert, be a cockroach. It's too late for you, and a little late for me, but once these kids get it together, they'll be no killing them. They'll live on poison. (314)

In this rite of purification, Harry experiences spiritual restoration, he mends his marriage and tries to put his house in order. As Harry and Janice are united, they are compared to space vehicles, "slowly revolving...adjusting in space, slowly twirling....In a space of silence...he feels them drift along sideways deeper into being married" (405). He indulges in free love with Ruth, Jill and Peggy Fosnacht, but does not find eternal happiness. Janice deserts him developing relationship with a Greek, Stavros, in a desperate urge to seek fulfillment and security. Harry takes up Jill's attitude to life: "Let freedom ring" (127). Harry realizes that Jill is a victim of the times, tired of mental confusion. Rabbit tells of Jill:

You're all sucked out and you're just eighteen. You're tired everything and you're not scared of nothing and you wonder why it's all so dead....You have no juice baby. (170)

She is leading a blighted life as both Rabbit and Janice do not find genuine relief in their affairs. But Rabbit realizes that home is the only place to get security

and comfort: “it has been his salvation, to be home again” (349). Gordon E. Slethav reviews the novel *Rabbit Redux* and opines thus:

Americans, implies Updike, need to learn that unrestricted freedom cannot exist, and when one is most free, one may paradoxically become the most enslaved and enslaving. Freedom is only valid when hedged with rules and governed by responsibility. (252)

Harry behaves in a very immature manner as his self-confidence fades away. Janice asks him a question: “Who do you think you are?” Rabbit answers in confusion that “Nobody” (404). Both are leading an empty life and are fear-ridden. Janice is cautious about her sense of guilt as she tries to give confidence to Harry: “Relax, not everything is your fault” (406). Harry’s return provides new psychological, mental and spiritual restoration. Janice deserts her husband and son. The family of Ollie and Peggy Foschnat is shattered. The novel highlights Updike’s deep concern with the family structure that he thinks is being seriously threatened: “Who’ll hold families together, if everybody has to live. Living is a compromise, between what you want and doing what *other* people want” (109). While Rabbit’s flight to Ruth and Janice to Stravros prove disastrous and short-lived, their return becomes a triumph of social and moral values, as they both emerge stronger and competent enough to share their mutual responsibility. Uphaus notes thus:

In describing a wistful retreat into the past, we can see reflected the popularity, in the seventies, of nostalgic films, old-fashioned clothing styles, handicrafts, and natural foods. Moreover, like Rabbit, the middle class early in the seventies seemed to regain its equilibrium as the violence of the sixties dissipated. The “silent majority” reeling from a decade of destruction and disorder, retreated to what seemed to be a reaffirmation of family life and democratic ideals. (Uphaus 89)

Harry expresses his inner thoughts as he observes that he “stands whittled by the great American glare, squinting in the manna of blessings that come down from the government, shuffling from side to side in nervous happiness that his day’s work

is done, that beer I inside him, that Angstrom is above him that the US is the crown and stupefaction of human history” (10). In defending the achievements of America in Vietnam to Stavros, he expresses his nationalism but he expresses his disgust over the loss of liberty and the individuality with the growth of science and technology. Harry’s assumption that the actions of the American government reflect strong will suggests the views of Fredric Jameson’s notion of “situational consciousness of what Bhabha calls national allegory “where the telling of an individual story and the individual experience cannot but ultimately involve the whole laborious telling of the collective self” (Jameson 86). Rabbit is interested only in his private self as Edwin Bowden states: “the private consciousness assumes public significance and flows into a hybrid realm” (Bowden 33). Jill and Skeeter move into Harry’s home and are confronted by the neighbors of Harry. Mahlon Showalter and Eddie Brumbach dislike the presence of Skeeter. Showalter tells Harry that “It wasn’t my idea to get after you, I said to Brumbach. The man has rights of privacy” (251). They confront Harry because “it’s the girl and the black together and liberal” (251). Harry ignores the threat of Brumbach and the neighbors burn the house of Harry killing Jill in the fire. Rabbit blames hippies and blacks for violence, but the news reports document many whites’ fiery resistance to civil rights and black mobility. Furthermore, as evidenced by attacks against Evers, such whites attempt to continue to deny blacks participation in the democratic process. Moreover, Showalter tries to deny blacks their private gardens by dictating the conditions by which they can gain access to the neighborhood. When Rabbit advises that Skeeter should turn himself in because “This isn’t the South,” Skeeter replies that “the South is everywhere. We are fifty miles from the Mason-Dixon line where we sit, but way up in Detroit they are shooting nigger boys like catfish in a barrel. The news is, the cotton is in. Lynching season is on” (180-181).

Janice’s infidelity symbolizes the decline of the family institutions in America. Women in America are turning rebellious and are crazy to enjoy sexual liberties and the rate of divorce is increasing every day. Her infidelity urges Harry to think about his relationship with Janice. He recollects the derogatory remark of his father who compared Rabbit to “human garbage” and “a bum” for deserting his family. Janice’s affair with a Greek symbolizes her lustful nature and sense of her



insecurity of life in America. Stavros confronts Rabbit over his affair with Janice and to find out about Jill and Skeeter. Harry wants “to argue about Vietnam, but Stavros keeps to the less passionate subject” (155). Janice’s rebellious nature and her sexual liberty forces Harry to reconsider his values and to reevaluation of his beliefs. Janice is a direct product of the new decade. She is a flapper of new America anxious to enjoy all liberties. As a woman she is on the receiving end of new liberal programs assuming the role of a freedom seeker. Markle argues that the white characters in the book are “always coupled with a sense of their dissipation and lack of vigor” (296). When Janice looks at Rabbit she sees “a large white man a knife would slice like lard” (296). She is armed with the inheritance of her father she has acquired enough self-sufficiency to make Rabbit wonder Updike dramatizes Janice’s affair, Harry “has a vision sees her wings hover, her song suspended imagines himself soaring, rootless free” (284). Janice earns her freedom by sinning for which Updike applauds her. In betraying Harry, she embraces her sensuality, her decay-ridden, sensibility.

In *Rabbit Redux* Harry’s approach to life, drugs and sexuality is in keeping with the cultural transformation of the Sixties. He begins to live with Jill and Skeeter at the same time enjoying the sexual liberties and falling in a pit of sexual perversion. Jill is a hippie girl who abandons her parents and Skeeter is an African-American Vietnam black calling himself as “black Jesus” (183). Nelson’s life is hellish who observes them drinking and taking drugs. It influences his view on drugs and soon he also becomes a dope-addict. Updike allows Janice to grow in a way to that their marriage will not permit. Harry thinks that her betrayal may lead to her growth. She justifies her love for Stavros as she emerges as a typical American flapper. Does she need me at all? Under these circumstances Skeeter becomes the real teacher of Rabbit. He tells Rabbit:

I got news for you. Your God’s a pansy. Your white God’s queerer than the Queen of Spades. He sucks off the Holy Christ and makes his son watch. Hey Chuck. Another thing. Ain’t no Jesus. He was a faggot crook, right? They bribed the Romans to get his carcass out of the tomb because it smelled so bad right? (183)

Protestant Christians always defended slavery and racism exploiting black labor and even raping black women. Skeeter poisons the purity of Rabbit of his American mythos and dehumanizes his God and religion. But Updike has portrayed Skeeter as the symbol of evil forces in the novel. Updike considers the plight of the blacks in *Rabbit Redux*. Skeeter is a satirical portrait of the black militant movement of the Sixties which involves protesting all things that are white and his hypocritical religion. Now the modern young men like Harry believe in new religion, in which blackness will be worshipped. They believe that they have a soul as they have religious vision and an inner drive. The whites are soulless and feeling-less, they lack religious vision believing that beyond this world there is nothing but empty space. In *Rabbit and Redux*, the “two races are contrasted in terms of similar to Eldridge Cleaver’s primeval mitosis’ theory: all the whites of America have become all sterile, bodiless and the blacks are fertile, sexual and energetic” (157).

Skeeter is highly critical of Christianity in which he was raised: “They had been wicked, when he was a child, to teach him God was a white man” (230). Skeeter argues that things like riots and welfare daily appear in the newspapers and adds that they will now discuss “Afro-American history” (200). Harry takes the bait and asks: “why do so few American Negroes want to give up their Cadillac and excuse the expression, colored televisions and go back to Africa” (200). In his passion to teach Harry, Skeeter says that he loves when Rabbit “gets like this. He is the Man” (196). He inverts the power dynamics as Rabbit becomes a slave and Skeeter becomes the master. In *Rabbit Redux*, Updike outlines man’s confinement in a hollow and blank material world, where values have disintegrated and socio-political aspects seem to exist in a vacuum. At the same time, the characters are also obsessed by the invisible entity that makes things happen and is responsible for man’s thirst for importance in a world threatened by mortality and transience. They are conscious of the edifying power of this invisible force and believe that it offers a redemptive power.

Updike expresses his serious concern for the decline of established institutions of religion, family and the characters in *Rabbit Redux* become incapable of finding anything of value in the contemporary world. Without myths, without heroes and without goals the Americans seem confused and bewildered. They have

no goals, no upward direction. When Harry travels through Penn Park, he thinks that “there is nowhere higher to go than these places” (22). Harry’s sister Mim is also the symbol of new generation like Janice that “lives on pollution and is “hard as cockroaches” (361). Mim entertains the family by doing humorous take-offs on Disneyland mechanical dummies representing Lincoln and Washington. In this typical American scene all the characters are emotionally done up and seem devoid of anything. Edward J Ahearn calls him “a spiritually dead person, he has spent his Sixties becoming a modern-day Bartleby, with no apparent tension in his life, he sits at his linotype machine” (Ahearn 69). Harry expresses his patriotism as he replaced his earlier spiritual quest. He believes that the ultimate goal of America is to “make a happy rich country, full of highways and gas stations” (45). He says of Nixon: “Poor old Nixon, even his own commission’s beat on him...He’s just a typical flatfooted Chamber of Commerce type who lucked his way into the hot seat and is so dumb he thinks it’s good. Let the poor bastard alone” (225). For Harry, the Good Samaritan and the Statue of Liberty are the same things. Skeeter is very critical of the white American dream: “It was a dream, it was a state of mind from those poor fool pilgrims on” (242). Skeeter tries to change Harry’s notion saying: “You say America to you and you still get bugles and stars but say it to any black or yellow man and you get hate right?” (234).

John Updike continues his apocalyptic vision and reinforces his faith in the institution of family as it can alone can give moral strength to modern man. Harry goes to live with his parents after the burning of his house with his son Nelson. He is not at peace with himself as there is he is troubled by a new awareness of his ordinariness and unimportance. His street seems “an ordinary street anywhere. Millions of such American streets hold millions of lives and let them sift through, and neither notice nor mourn, and fall into decay, and do not mourn their own passing” (373). He is haunted by the past when his street “excited him with the magic of his own existence...here the universe had entered” (373). His return to his childhood home marks a return to his childhood habits. He finds in himself “an appetite for boyish foods” (350), he plays basketball and enjoys the warmth and security of his childhood home which eluded him in the past. He remembers Jill and feels grief for her and realizes that he had been harsh to her. Harry’s mother claims

that his return is “worth a hundred doses” (350) of medicine. Uphaus observes that his return to his childhood home is symbolical in the novel as it “reasserts the value of human love, its power to sustain life, if not to defeat death” (Uphaus 89). His return to his childhood home provides him new psychological, mental and spiritual restoration. Uphaus comments thus:

In describing a wistful retreat into the past, we can see reflected the popularity, in the seventies, of nostalgic films, old-fashioned clothing styles, handicrafts, and natural foods. Moreover, like *Rabbit*, the middle-class early in the seventies seemed to regain its equilibrium as the violence of the sixties dissipated. The “silent majority” reeling from a decade of destruction and disorder, retreated to what seemed to be a reaffirmation of family and democratic ideals. (Uphaus 89)

Harry realizes that without the support of the divine forces all problems remain unresolved and man is bound to rot in the pit of horror. He also believes that all problems of life are insoluble and that faith alone can help man to come out of horror and despair. He is shocked to find that lust for material comforts has stripped man of his faith in God and Nature. Man’s actions are good and bad only if the divine power is there to judge his actions. Man cannot be isolated from society and without faith he is bound to grope in darkness, despair and misery. Umberto Eco comments thus:

In Updike’s fiction the human reality I composed of loss of faith, anxiety, loneliness and nostalgia. He believes that a divinely ordained milieu and set up is vital for saving the individual from becoming a victim of his own crippling desires. In other words such maladies can be cured through a participation in certain sets of beliefs that guarantee redemption and deliverance. (90)

To conclude, in the novel *Rabbit Redux*, John Updike explores his postmodern vision of American culture depicting the struggles in the life of Harry who has to confront with the reality of new American culture and the fast decline of traditional values. Updike expresses his deep concern for the American involvement

in the Vietnam War and the conflicts between the blacks and the whites. The character of Skeeter and his anti-Christ stance is a remarkable feature of the novel and the portrayal of Nelson and the sexual liberties and adultery of Janice reveal the fragmentation of the American people and chaos of the society in this novel.

## Chapter Five

### Human Relationships in *Rabbit is Rich* and *Rabbit is at Rest*

John Updike had great historical sense as his fiction and short stories reflect his acute interest in the historical events. He used the material of historical events extensively in his novels and explored the depth of human relations through the prism of historical events. His most of the novels can be placed with precision in time and space through the references in the text as all major events are set in the major events of history of the time in which he wrote the novels. His novel *Rabbit is Rich* loaded with the historical episodes such the Kennedy incident, the Carter era inflation, the Pope's visit, the invasion of Afghanistan, the high price gold, the American boycott of the Olympic games, the Panama canal affair and the falling of the Skylab. *Rabbit, Run* (1960), *Rabbit Redux* (1971), *Rabbit is Rich* (1981), and *Rabbit is at Rest* are among the best examples reflecting his obsessive concern with the integration of the historic into the fictional world. In all these novels John Updike gives exact dates, and even months and days of the action and the exact name of cities where the plots of the novels take place. Most of the actions take place in the towns of Brewer, Mount Judge, Pennsylvania and John Updike has faithfully reported all the historical events such as oil crisis, the war action of Vietnam, the severe economic defeat of America, the hostage crisis in Iran of 1979, the energy crisis of America and the Watergate Scandal of Richard Nixon. Harry Angstrom is Everyman of America representing the American youth and his quest symbolizes the struggles of all the Americans who desperately confronted the cultural revolution of America, the galore of sexual liberties, the decadence of faith and the mad race of making money. John Updike gives a fine blending of history and fiction to achieve verisimilitude creating dramatic interest in the readers. Kenneth Burke in his book *A Grammar of Motives* (1945) observes that the main centre of action of the novels of John Updike is the role of historical events which act as "strong agents" in the life of Harry Angstrom. He argues: "And it is also this focus which makes us realize that the Rabbit tetralogy is not only a story of Harry but of all those who, like him, were and exposed to similar forces" (Burke 8). In an interview with Michael Sragow published in *Picked-Up Pieces* (1974) observed that

“there is no way of escaping the scene, for you are always born into one political contract or another” (489) and all Rabbit novels illustrate realistically. It is found that all actions of Harry Angstrom occur in relation to the reality of his environment generating conflicts, tension, determining his choices and shaping his thoughts. Each historical episode becomes a governing factor of his moods and passions. Like Karl Marx, John Updike believes that the existence of an individual in society is a social existence. In the first novel *Rabbit Run*, Harry is rebellious as he revolts against the imitation of marriage deserting his wife and is always on the run in pursuance of his adventures. In the second novel *Rabbit Redux*, Harry struggles to reconcile with the milieu and the new culture of America which he had rejected and had fled away. In the third novel *Rabbit is Rich* Updike celebrates the success glory of Harry who emerges as a man of world. He is described as “hearty and huge,” looks mellowed and serious involved in the American crisis. His personal cravings, selfish and violent self of youth have dwindled. In *Rabbit Redux* Harry is full of dread and confusion as the world looked to him pale and depressing. Harry was burdened with a dying mother, an adulterous wife, a falling work situation, a burnt house and a dead Jill who was his girlfriend. In *Rabbit Rich* there is no mood of anger, fear and guilt but Harry’s world is bright with the success myth. Thomas Edwards aptly observes thus: “*Rabbit is Rich* is a story of disasters averted Updike teases us into anticipating tragedies that never quite occur (Edwards 100). Harry emerges as a successful businessman enjoying a solid citizenship status. He becomes “a star and spear point” and the “man upfront” (418).

Harry Angstrom is portrayed as a social being and his individuality and identity is conditioned by the socio-political and historical forces. He is a fictional prisoner of the social context, his incapacity to escape as well as his capacity to engage in dialogue to understand the community and to express his national issues form the core of the novels. Harry is portrayed truly according to the Marxian ideology, his lack of control over his actions, his vague sense of purpose and direction and his clumsy way of doing things like an antihero if the avant-garde theatre. His personality is like a table lamp which is controlled by the positive and negative forces of electrical circuit system, He also generates light like the table lamp but only to illuminate that which historical vents dictate. His purpose is not to

change but to preserve what has been changed. He is all the time confused and bewildered and emerges as an anti-intellectual and anti-problematic personality. John Updike wrote *Rabbit is Rich* and *Rabbit at Rest* not with a geographic map in front of him but with a map of socio-economic and political concerns of America in his mind.

After the death of his father, Janice becomes rich due to the inheritance and Harry enjoys the opportunity to become rich as he enjoys Janice's faineances to lead affluent life. He is called "dodgy" by Updike in the broad sense. Harry doesn't mind to take all money of Janice even though he hates the rich people. He also admits being a snob: "He always resented these snobs and now is safe among them" (384). Now he stays with Janice and explains his resolution to lie with her: "But he hadn't left her, and now cannot. She is her fortune" (348). He loses all his ideals when his lust for money gets stronger. This makes her financially dependent on Janice as his confidence is weakened. Laseter calls him a "kind of economic prisoner" due to his dependence on Janice. Harry's new face is depicted by John Updike who assumes: "Still, he cannot dislike this brown-eyed woman who has been his indifferent wife for twenty-three years this past March. He is rich because of his inheritance" (34).

The majority of the critics of John Updike such as Richard C. Burchard, Edward Vargo, Joyce Markle, Suzanne Uphaus are of the opinion that the novels of John Updike are historical and political documents. Edward Hahas documented the life and achievements and the political events of Presidents Eisenhower, Truman and Kennedy while structuring the plots of his novels. Kenneth Hamilton (1967) in his book *The Elements of John Updike* observes that "Rabbit has been judged as a saint of the bourgeoisie society but in reality he remained ignorant of the "patterns of actual existence" (Hamilton 142). Edward Hallett Carr (1961) in his book *What is History* opines that the cause of the actions of Rabbit are "beyond his understanding and control as he simply pay the price for his wrong deeds and remains a victim of socio-political forces" (124). Harry acted only impulsively, he hated Janice for her smoking, her drinking, her cooking, her sloppiness, her waning beauty and her T.V. maniac behavior. He couldn't change according to the changing cultural environment and growing feminism. His lack of adjustment and conformity are the major concerns for the American youth of the Sixties and the Seventies.



*Rabbit Rich* was published in 1981 and the title suggests that Harry is rich owning Springer Motors in the Brewer area. Harry is forty six in age, rolling in wealth, he inherits the automobile business of his father-in-law, invests in gold to earn profits. He is wealthy as he calls himself “he man up front” who like money “to float in” (3).

He has plenty money in the bank and his richness is contributed by financial assets and is built in the shadow of a national economic recession. John Updike has depicted the economic scene of the 70s exposing the lust for money and the eventual degradation of the American youth. Harry speculates with gold and silver and his wealth increases every day. His rich friends at the club waste their precious time in the pursuit of material comforts. His wife Janice spends her afternoons playing tennis and sunbathing “to feed the inner man” (John Updike, *Rabbit is Rich* 240). Harry’s new bible is Consumer Reports as he spends enough time in reading all the business reports. He reads the papers, listens to the radio, watches T.V. and is fully aware of the shares and debentures of the stock market. He has grown in terms of material achievement, he is the employer, the boss, the big business tycoon and the capitalist. This material prosperity is due to the oil embargo imposed by the Arabs and the escalation of the oil prices in America. The Arabs had imposed an oil embargo against the European countries which the Arabs regarded as the supporters of Israel. This led to severe oil crisis in America hurting the economy. The oil shortages distressed the oil companies and many of them were shut down. The increase in oil prices led to the escalation of the prices of food, air, travel and long lines at the gasoline stations became a common feature., In 70s the GDP of America declined by seven percent shaking the economy of America for the first time. There was a deep political crisis in American democracy, the events of the Watergate Scandal shook the political life as President Nixon was ordered by the Supreme Court to surrender the taps and later on was forced to resign. The political and economic uncertainty proved fruitful for Harry who made huge money in speculation and in the silver trade. John Updike has chronicled the mood of unrest, uncertainty, chaos and disorder. It seemed that the country had become lawless in a struggle for the rule of law. There appeared a widening gap between national political ideals and social aspirations on the one hand and political and social

realities on the other. The hostage crisis in Iran in 1979 proved another nightmare for the Americans. It exposed the weak administration of President Carter. America became a trapped giant and the rulers of America failed to handle the crisis to the satisfaction of the Americans. The old system was scrapped and the new system was challenging so the vicious circle of decline started in the 70s. James Joyce comments thus:

There seemed, moreover, to be a new demonic streak in the nations' soul, a vein of madness, that might be explained but never could be understood. The best and most hopeful among us were being killed with an apparent inevitability that could easily be regarded as an expression of some buried impulse in the national will...there was something in us that seemed no longer able to tolerate the demands of grandeur and spirit. (Joyce12)

Updike explores the major themes, energy exhaustion is linked with the running out of spiritual energy. Mobility is paralyzed because of the energy crisis and this historical event is linked with the lethargy of the Americans. Updike reveals that the giant's falling coexists with man's banality. Harry witnesses a messy world at the very beginning of the novel:

The fucking world is running out of gas...the people out there are getting frantic, they know the great American ride is ending...People are getting wild, their dollars are going rotten, they shell out like there's no tomorrow. (3)

This is a picture of mess in which America has fallen and this mess is triggered by the deepening crises, both of energy and spirit. Updike has highlighted a sense of moral and spiritual loss of the American people of the 70s. The price of the gas jumped by 20 percent, schools were closed for a month and most of the leisure activities were canceled. Big lay-offs were seen in the aluminum in electric and auto-sector, Harry confesses: "If you can't get your foot on even the bottom rung of a society geared like this, people are going to lose faith in the systems" (25). The American people raised the slogan: "I'll get mine, and screw you" (8). Charlie is also of the same view:

Some station owner and his wife somewhere in the middle of the state were pumping gas for a line and one of the cars slips its clutch and crushes the wife against the car next in line, broke her hip I think I read, and while the husband was holding her and begging for help the people in the cars instead of giving him any help took over the pumps and gave themselves free gas. (7)

Updike has used the historical oil crisis with the moral decline of the people of America. Harry is on the tight rope like America, the country is suffering from the economic crisis and Harry is suffering from spiritual bankruptcy. Harry finds it difficult to turn his head. Harry is a different person, he reads no books and devotes no time in any sort of metaphysical thinking. In the club, he talks with his friends freely on the subjects relating to money, income tax, and ways of cheating and giving his predictions about the gasoline prices. He is in a fix to think and to find out the solution of the crisis: "at his age turning his head is not so easy and indeed some days he wakes with pains all through the neck and shoulders from no more cause than his dead weight on the bed all night" (19). Harry loves nature, though he can name almost nothing in it, He loves money, He tries to picture what will turn him on, and he's running out of pictures. Harry has accumulated plenty money but he is troubled with the emptiness of his life since there has been no interest and excitement in his life. His daily life is dull and boring and he seems to be sick of the routine life in getting and spending money. Updike depicts the routine life of Harry thus:

Showing up at the showroom day after day, riding herd on the paperwork and the payroll, swinging in his clean suit in and out of Service and Parts where the men work filled with oil and look up white-eyed from the built-in engines as in a kind of underworld while he makes contact with this public, the community, the star and spear point of all these two dozen employees and hundred thousand square feet of working space, which seem a wide shadow behind him as he stands there up front. (4)

The shadow is a symbol of Harry's spiritual bankruptcy, his turbulent inner world. He is a rich partner of Spring Motors but he feels "as though he owns it all" (4), but life tastes to him like "a bitter lemon" (46). For him life is "just beginning on a clear ground at last, now that he has a margin of resources" (89). He gets plenty wealth to enjoy freedom but in reality his is sick at heart because of inner void. He is enslaved by the power of money and is always fear-ridden, he fears to lose money. Money has made him very popular, he has become a member of the Flying Eagle Club, The Rotary Club. He holds that money, law, morals and religion go hand in hand: "God, having shrunk in Harry's middle years to the size of a raisin lost under the car sea, is suddenly great again, everywhere like a radiant wind" (365). Money has made Harry a snob capable of denying support to his old friends because they are not rich like him. He enjoys the "conspicuous vicarious pleasure" of "having a wife who can be at the club so much" (35). His house can no longer be in Penn Villa but is Penn Park, where all those nice divorce lawyers and dermatology. Harry fears that he would lose his money and ironically his own son Nelson is the main rival and contender. He is jealous of Nelson's relationship with his lover Jill. Nelson, Skeeter threatens his position as "the king of the lot" (3). He tells that there is no future of Nelson: "that's where the future is, not selling cars. Cars have had it. The party's over. It's going to be all public transportation twenty years from now. Ten years from now even" (243). Money has become such an obsession with him that he even holds it responsible for the lack of sexual attraction for Janice. Harry has accumulated plenty money but spiritually he is very poor as his wealth leaves him less fulfilled than he has ever been, for he looks sold out. Harry looks "mature and reasonable" at the age of thirty six. The reasonable man looks at the world as it is and tries to adapt himself to suit the world. He is immersed in the groups of America. His own aging is perceptible. He has turned into someone who lives in grey financial suits, he has made great progress in his life, he has sensed "no great cause, no titanic struggle between good and evil, nothing but a scramble for the buck" (11). In fact like Dr. Faustus, Harry has sold out his soul to accumulate money. His son Nelson aptly laments:

Dad doesn't like to look bad anymore, that was one thing about him in the old days you could admire, that he didn't care that much how he looked from the outside what the neighbors thought...he had this crazy dim faith in himself...That spark is gone, leaving a big deal man. (314)

Harry looks worn out and his feelings are worth noting when the police shoot Skeeter, he reacts thus: "a certain light was withdrawn from the world, a daring, a promise that all will be overturned....That part of him subject to Skeeter's spell had shriveled and then overlaid" (33). Harry emerges as a representative of sick and improvised culture. He has no communion with God: "Sometimes he prays a few words at night but a stony truce seems to prevail between himself and God" (131). His loss of faith symbolizes his fear of death and in the plot of the plot of the novel death becomes a central motif along with the economic recession. He is haunted by the fear of death as he starts counting the dead. "They were multiplying. Pop, Mom, old man Springer, Jill, the baby..." (13). The world is heading towards doom as administration of President Carter is running towards "crisis to crisis and Skylab falling and the whole country running out of gas". Updike has used the exhaustion of gas in a symbolical language. There is no gas, no ideals, no God and just gravity in present day America. Updike depicts the widespread feelings of loss and decay and helplessness of the Americans. Harry is obsessed with the thoughts of money, sales and profits and cars, he is lost in the pursuit of material goods. He is completely caught in the dollar mania as his wife Janice tells him: "Money...That's all you ever think about" (44). His son Nelson asks: "Dad, how can you keep thinking about money all the time?" (44). Harry loves money more than the people and the relatives and is afraid to lose his wealth: " I pretty much like what I have. The trouble with that is, then you get afraid somebody will take it from you" (69). Since Harry has lost his soul and there is nothing left for him to lose. The characters of Updike in this novel feel free and satisfied in a materialistic value system. Excess money changes the behavior of Harry who behaves like a serene and complacent seeker of truth. He sees his life as sweet and "just beginning...the stifled terror that always made him restless has dulled down"(92). Pleasure and comfort of life elevate his spirit and he feels "exercised, cleaned and cherished" (60). Updike has given the true picture of Harry thus:

He is a person who has what he wants, a satisfied person, a content person, cases to be a person...I feel that to be a person is to be a situation of tension, is to be a dialectical situation. A truly adjusted person at all. (292)

But at the same time Harry is tortured by an inner struggle, in which he “dodges among more blanks than there used to be” (13). His material happiness and wealth made him more paradoxical than ever before. The material comforts don't give him moral and spiritual strength as he feels that “life is a big T.V., full of ghosts” (161), and “time seeps up through the blades of grass like a colorless poison” (178). The imagery of ghost is very effective symbolizing the fear of Harry who is leading a dull and boring life. Lasch (1978) observes thus in this context:

Man and women begin to fear growing old before they even arrive at middle age. The so-called midlife, crisis presents itself as a realization that old age looms just around the corner. Americans experience the fortieth birthday as the beginning of the end. Even the prime of life thus comes to be overwhelmed by the fear of what lies ahead. (Lasch 210)

Harry expresses his helplessness as he feels that nothing can be done to overcome his inner misery but to be lethargic realizing his life in such a way: “Life. Too much of it, and not enough. The fear that it will and some days, and fear that tomorrow will be the same as yesterday” (354). Harry in *Rabbit is Rich* is neither small nor a larger guy but an ordinary American trapped in the vicious cycle of “getting and spending” as William Wordsworth opines. His frame of mind and thought structure is based on the realities of cultural transformation. His passion for money brought about his spiritual death and the “spiritual diminishment” is a hard reality of the 70s. Kenneth observes that the novel is a mosaic of American life, bringing to the foreground the popular culture of the decade of the 70s. Tomas Edwards claims that *Rabbit is Rich* is clearly “the story of the economic life of America” (Edwards 248).

The plot of *Rabbit is Rich* is situated in time. The plot begins on June 30, 1979 “late in the afternoon of this long last Sunday of June and the first of calendar

summer” (4). John Updike has chronicled all the important historical events. The opening statement: “running out of gas” (1) and the metaphor is ironically associated with the life of Harry which is also running out like the gasoline. The oil crisis is described as an alarm in the American society as the oil crisis is presented as “mother earth is drying out” (5). Charles Stavros gives a detailed analysis of the oil crisis:

Listen, Harry. You know damn well Carter and his companies have rigged this whole mess. What does big oil want? Bigger profits. What does Carter want? Less oil imports, less depreciation of the dollar. He’s too chicken to ration, so he’s hoping higher prices will do it for him. (6)

Stavros exposes the greed, lust, and selfishness of the Americans in making money during the oil crisis. Charlie Stavros argues that the crisis is fabricated just to make money: “Shit, Champ, you never blame anybody. Skylab could fall on your head right now and you’d go down saying the government had done its best” (6). The novel *Rabbit is Rich* the third installment of the degradation of Harry Angstrom as he loses his spirituality and immerses in the faceless mass of society of the 70s. Harry is pessimistic and he believes in permanent nothingness. He senses that his existence is somehow threatened and that “the great shining shoulder of the ocean could shrug and immerse and erase all traces of men”(389). Harry believes that the world is an empty hole, in which nothing is magnificent and freedom is “a radiant wind” formless and elusive. Death is the only reality in this universe. He is getting richer and richer, Harry thinks of death more and more. Harry thinks of “the dead, he has known, the groaningly many” (47). Harry laments that “our lives fade behind us before we die” (47). He feels unsafe and insecure in the universe. John Updike expresses his apocalyptic vision as the individual lives, there comes a stage when a person has to recognize that death is indeed an undeniable fact, and that not everything is possible.

John Updike dramatizes the dilemma of Harry as he feels that America is the best, the only truly free country in the world. In the last section of the novel Harry is at home with a new Sony T.V lying on the bed and dreams: “In his dream he and

Charlie are in trouble at the agency, some crucial papers with some numbers are lost and where the new cars should be in the showroom there are just ragged craters, carefully painted with stripes and stars” (435). He wakes up from the dream feeling as if “somebody had slugged him in the face with a ball of wet clothes” (435). Harry expresses his enthusiasm thus “Energy is people, people are energy!...flashing sheets like tin oil that are supposed to be solar panels” (436). But his nationalism vanishes: “Who needs Khomeini and his oil? Who needs Afghanistan? Fuck the Russkis, Fuck the Japs for that matter we go it alone, from sea to shining sea” (436). Harry has no confidence in the future of America, he is quite upset to realize that he has become “smug and satisfied” and “guiltless” (317). Lasch conducts the investigation of the behavior of Harry and comes to the conclusion that he is a person heading towards moral and spiritual degradation. For Updike death is a spiritual death, a confession of the inadequacy of modern life. We also provided a good analysis of spiritual death that America is dealing death, not only to people to people in other lands, but to its own people. Updike has clarified the position of Harry and Lasch also provides useful information about Harry and his views of death: “the fear of death takes on new intensity in a society that has deprived itself of religion and shows little interest in posterity” (Lasch 209). Charles Reich (1979) also provides fruitful information about the death: “America is dealing death, not only to people in other lands, but to its own people” (Reich 11). Reich wrote *The Greening of America* giving a damaging picture of America:

An individual is systematically stripped of his imagination, his creativity, his heritage, his dreams, and his personal uniqueness, in order to style him into a productive unit for a mass, technological society. (Reich 10)

This was a decade when the confidence of America was at the lowest ebb with its sure defeat in Vietnam War and the tumbling economy. People feel hopeless and sense a serious crisis of confidence. America is caught in the web of dilemma as the Americans begin to live in a way of life with a worship of:



The culture of competitive individualism, which in its decadence had carried the logic of individualism to the extreme of war of all against all, the pursuit of happiness to the dead end of a materialistic preoccupation with the self. (Lasch 15)

Harry degrades into a philistine as he is engaged to improve his status moving upward and in this process his energies dwindle. His passion for basketball is replaced by golf which is in tune with his social status. Harry spends most of his leisure time playing golf and sunbathing with his new friends. Harry emerges as a comprising individual who makes adjustments with Janice and her mother whom he once hated. Updike observes that for the first time since his childhood Harry looks happy, “simply to be alive” (421). In his *Rabbit Run*, Harry had fled from his wife but in this novel he changes his perception of life as Updike writes: “Rabbit is content” This is why he likes domestic peace. Harry sees life “a just beginning, on a clear ground at last, now that he has a margin of resources”(475). John Updike echoes the famous novel of Sinclair Lewis’s *Babbitt* who is given to making money and is a satirical character. Babbitt of Lewis represents the false ideals of the idle class Americans. Harry is another Babbitt of America who gives himself in bringing in cash and is spoiled in view of average quality, bluntness and otherworldly demise. He looks glad yet his joy is a figment as he appears to be pained notwithstanding his financial thriving and palatable existence with his significant other Janice. Harry wishes to run away again but he muses on his fragmented life and realizes he is in middle age and his youth has declined. He has put a strict discipline on himself and his daily life is conditioned by pragmatic approach. He reads no books except consumer reports since he deals with shares and gold. Rabbit is faced with the pressure of reality as he becomes aware of the pressures of reality. Donalds Greiner comments thus: “The ironic soaring of the rocket in *Rabbit Redux* is gone, no one is soaring towards moon in *Rabbit Rich*, each person is just trying to hang on” (Greiner 4). Harry uses money power to enjoy life, he holidays in Poconos, a lake resort where the family owns a cottage. Kakutani expresses the ideas about the middle age of Harry: “Middle age, after all, is a period of consolidation of stock taking, of stasis even, and its peculiar tone and texture are here subtly evoked” (Kakutani 14). Harry emerges as a thinking man in this novel who is seriously concerned with his status

and material advancement. He has no interest no political and religious speculation and most of his issues are about economic advancement and the devaluation of dollar. He is concerned with those issues that can impact his business. He has no passion for the spiritual rejuvenation and is interested only reading Consumer Reports and trading in silver and gold. Thomas Mallon (1981) observes thus: "Updike has in this book caught both the flotsam and the ethos of 1979 with even more exactitude than he bottled 1957 in *Rabbit, Run* and in 1999 in *Rabbit Redux*" (1356). The happiness and complacency of Harry is wrought in dissatisfaction. Updike remarks thus: "a person who has what he wants, a satisfied person, a content person ceases to exist. Unfailing Adam is an ape" (504). Updike has exposed the real nature of happiness of Harry that there's a moment in the organism when its thrust outward into the world and the call to make and the need to make your mark no longer clamor at you, but the body hasn't quite begun to collapse, so in a strange way it's kind of a happy moment. Harry lusts after a younger wife in his social and he worries over his strained relationship with his son. The mood of the novel is gloomy as Harry looks ambiguous.

Harry is passionate to establish sexual relation with women in order to escape from the dullness of life. He knows that Janice is unable to have children and his relationship with her is dwindling. He goes on thinking of Ruth who was his class mate in the ninth class. Mathew Wilson (1991) says that "sex is not mode of revolt or escape in the novel, it is a regression into fantasy" (14). Harry keeps on thinking of Cindy Murkett who is one the wife of his golf partners. His sexual obsession for Cindy shows that he has not left scampering altogether. For Gatsby of Fitzgerald Daisy is a dream girl and for Harry Cindy is his dream girl. He is on the quest to possess Cindy as Greiner (1984) remarks: "unobtainable Cindy represents mystery to Harry evidence for himself as well as the reader that his longing of the unknown has not totally bogged down in expanding waistlines and safe routine" (Greiner 92). In the wife swapping scene on a Caribbean vacation he gets a wrong wife. He is at the age of forty six and he still "has a lot of running left" Janice exposes Harry thus: "You always want what you don't have instead of what you do" (456). Harry confides to her his conjecture about an illegitimate daughter and it is true in this regard as well. He has got an identity, a house, a daughter and Cindy and

a life without Nelson. Harry seeks sexual adventures outside matrimony. He is nourished by murderous thoughts about Janice but the reason behind his changed behavior is the new personality of Janice. She is no longer “mutt and ignorant” but energetic and caring and full of wisdom. She is different from the earlier novels and when it is a question of superiority he accepts her without any anger: “She had a lot of lessons. The decade past her has taught her more than it has taught him” (487). Janice has become mature and her queries are innovative and interesting: “He even admires her physically, Janice has managed to change her personality, she has become slim because of her regular playing tennis. Marriage no more constricts him, but in a way frees him so that he finally feels “not for the first time in twenty years plus...a furtive rush of living her, caught with him as she in the narrow paces life affords” (568). The problems of Harry are not religious, political or economic but are of personal nature. Griener comments thus:

It seems as if Rabbit’s instinctive surge for life has burned out. He is too young to call it quits, but he may be too old to keep it up. The prospect is both sad and frightening, for his internal life shrinks as his external circumstances expand. (Griener 91)

Harry is of a different disposition in the novel *Rabbit is Rich* quite different from the earlier novels. He is always haunted by the fear of death. He is conscious of the end of his own life all the time. He senses that death is at hand since “the earth is hollow, the dead roam through caverns beneath its green skin” (177). He feels incapable and unsafe in the universe. He is growing spiritually bankrupt as John Updike observes:

He himself is aware of his diminishing spiritual life...a lot of topics, he has noticed lately, in private conversation...run dry, exhaust themselves as if everything’s been used in this hemisphere. In his inner life too. Rabbit doges among more blanks than there used to be, patches of burnt out gray cells where there used to be lust and keen dreaming and wide eyed dread. (423)

Gradually he becomes aware how his life is not only his but infected a spooky presence of the dead. The novel moves from light hearted comedy of Harry

lusting after Cindy to what Salman Rushdie (1981) calls “a rather elegant and sad poetry of the spirit, particularly the spirits of the dead who surround and haunt our protagonist” (Rushdie 21). Harry observes thus: “The dead, Jesus. They were multiplying and they look up begging you to join them, providing it is all right...Pop, Mom old man Springer, Jill, the baby called Becky...The obituary page everyday shows another stack of a harvest endlessly rich” (424). Harry is fully conscious of death thinking constantly of all the corpse that lie under the ground he treads. He recollects the death of Skeeter in soot out, recalling Becky’s death by drowning, the death of Jill in fire. Harry also recollects the guilt of his life as he confesses: “There’s no getting away, our sins, our seed, coil back” (590). Harry realizes that life is fun, lurks the leer of death. He doesn’t want to face the death directly in the first part of the novel. He doesn’t think of death as Griener says: “Money allows him to accept his now limited inner spaces so that his need to wander is partly thwarted and he hopes that the beginning of his comfort signals the beginning of his life” (Griener 590). The other interesting issue in the novel is deep antagonism between Nelson and his father and the root of these dates back to the night when their house was burnt down killing Jill. Nelson holds Harry responsible for the tragic death of Jill and the baby sister Becky. Nelson also curses his mother who had been neglecting him engaged in his love affair with the outsiders. He had started taking drugs and his family is on the verge of dissolution. Harry seems to have come to terms with the past, and he will not allow past disasters to disrupt his present success. Nelson is not in a mood to forgive his father. He is unable to understand the cause of his dropping out of college. He remembers smashing of one of his cars and by marrying against his father’s wish Nelson feels suffocated by his father. Nelson says: “He is forgotten everything he ever did to us...He is too smug and satisfied, is what gets me” (570). Harry considers Nelson his enemy as he confides Janice: “I like having Nelson in the house. It’s great to have an enemy. Sharpens your senses” (481). His relationship with Nelson has deteriorated, he feels stifled in his own house this is why he fantasizes about having a daughter. Harry hates Nelson because he lacks co-ordination, order and discipline like Janice. Even Mr. Springer doesn’t like the deviant behavior of Nelson. Both Harry and Nelson are on the wrong track, Harry is responsible for the death of his infant daughter in Rabbit Run and Nelson is responsible for pushing his wife Pru who is pregnant from the flight of stairs in

anger. Nelson deserts Pru like his father three days before the baby is born. Nelson follows his father and impregnated Pru before marriage. Thomas Edwards comments thus:

Like his father Nelson too is frightened by the demands of maturity and human obligation and he too is a runner, but both his behavior and Updike's incursions into his consciousness reveal not Harry's hopeful interest in the terms of his own life but a cynical, surely, grasping, thoroughly stupid, and unimaginative self concern that is not Harry at all. (Edwards 101)

Harry suggests his son to run away and even offers him money. Harry does see his son as himself: "I just don't like seeing you caught. You're too much me" (437). Harry is plunged into depression at the thought that "every blade of grass at his feet is an individual life that will die, that has flourished to no purpose" (437). Nelson lacks grace and this is a conspicuous trait of his personality. Greiner comments thus: "Taking the son through many of the physical misadventures of the father, Updike denies him the spiritual qualities that make such bumbling simultaneously reprehensible and appealing" (Greiner 93). He tries to imitate his father but he stumbles without grace. Nelson plays the role of Skeeter in this novel as he is always threatening Harry's peace of mind and sense of security. Melaine observes that he lacks a "capacity for responsibility" The novel takes a turn with the arrival of Pru pregnant and lonely. Harry protects her and performs his duty as a father. Pru's presence makes Nelson docile though he is impudent and careless. He pours out his grudges against Pru to his father but hope comes in the life of Harry with the birth of a baby. He begins believing in the immortality of life and in God and spirituality. He begins his new search for Annabel, his illegitimate daughter. But Ruth plays the wrong card and says that Annabel is not her daughter. Harry's perception of life, religion and God changes with the arrival of new baby in the house. He devotes himself to look after the baby, Pru and the house. "Her pregnancy promises him a stay against the insistent crowding of the dead" (496).

Transition of Harry from a spiritual explorer to a pursuer of wealth is an indication of his degradation. Harry is impacted by the growing money culture of

America as his priority is money and wealth. He runs for the sake of his health, plans to buy a new house and has multiple love affairs with other women only to show his sexual potency. Harry forms a pessimistic view of life believing that “the world is no longer a safe place” (78). He sees the “world in mixed colors and elements, a boycott of the 1980 Moscow Olympics, an invasion of Afghanistan, building of nuclear plane, spread of drugs, invention of artificial protein interferon, frenzied pursuit of gold” (436). There are political conflicts and uncertainty and Harry is closely observing all these political and global events. Harry is puzzled and feels that “it is cold, a day that might bring now, a day that feels hollow” (437). John Updike uses the sociological binoculars to trace the history of the world events and their impact on the mind and sensibility of Harry. According to Reich, Harry lives the life of a robot in which “man is deprived of his own being, and he becomes instead a mere role, occupation, or function. The self within him is killed, and he walks through the remainder of his days mindless and lifeless” (Reich 129). The main motive of John Updike is to show the fact that money doesn’t guarantee happiness and peace of mind. In this novel Harry is depicted as a business man emphasizing “a state of exhaustion, a mad rush for gold and silver, and awareness of spiritual death. Updike’s story of Harry’s business culture can be compared to the Babbitt culture of Sinclair Lewis. Both Harry of John Updike and Babbitt of Lewis are businessmen, they make money but they lead an empty life. Babbitt lacks appreciation, beauty, truth, joy and passion and wisdom, Harry is also inwardly hollow leading a meaningless existence. John Updike uses subtle images and symbols to portray the loss of self. Harry has mania to make money when the country is passing through political and social crisis. Harry has bought a house which has unpleasant history and appearance:

The house was built in that depressed but scrupulous decade when Harry was born. Suave, gray limestone had been hauled from the quarries in the far north of Diamond Country and dressed and fitted by men who took the time to do it right. At a later date, after the war, some owner broke through the wall facing away from the curb and built in addition of clapboards and white-blotched brick. Paint is peeling from the clapboards beneath the Anderson window of what I now Janice’s kitchen. (452)

The pastiche is generally employed here as Updike copy one of the similar element from his other novels to copy a piece of literary work light-heartedly, but in a respectful manner. The house is building in decay symbolizing Harry's personal life and "aging" spirits. It is a place for Harry to spend what is left of his life, and to "begin to learn about history" (453). He views history which is a "process of rolling himself into a satin-lined coffin" (375). Harry realizes very late in life that golden coins do not nourish human spirit and the whole world is nothingness, and in seeking the material goods "everyone was a clown in costume" (390). His nihilistic approach is described thus: "every step in life is a nail in his coffin" (467). The vision of John Updike is apocalyptic in this novel as he tries to wake the people of America from their dream. He portray America as a place too large and complex to comprehend, a place too much and too much hated. The Americans must realize their potentialities to fight with the forces of spiritual decadence to lead a better and happy life. The journey of Harry is the journey of each American living in the 1960s.

John Updike's *Rabbit at Rest* was published in 1990 which got him the prestigious Pulitzer Prize. The editor of *The New York Times* reported thus: "*Rabbit at Rest* is certainly the most brooding, the most demanding, the most blossoming and fruition of the seed of death" (1). Updike favorable reviews by the critics and the reviewers who praised John Updike for his investigation of the controversial issues such as the AIDS epidemic, the terrorist attack on Pan Am Flight 103 over Lockerbie and the trade war with America and Japan. The plot of the novel is an inclusive and insightful attire of American society of the 1960s. The majority of the critics are of the view that Harry's moral and physical decline symbolizes spiritual lethargy of America. In *Contemporary Criticism*, Joyce Carol Oates compare John Updike with Flaubert and observed thus: "the being that most illuminates the Rabbit quartet is not finally Harry Angstrom himself but the world through which he moves in his slow downward slide, meticulously recorded by one of our most gifted American realists" (Oates 253). Jonathan Raban observed that John Updike's *Rabbit at Rest* is a mighty achievement of the novelist and this novel can be conveniently compared with *Herzog* of Saul Bellow. The portrayal of Harry Angstrom as one who was "done" in by hi addiction "to junk food and mindless adultery and basketball (John Updike, *Rabbit at Rest* 9). Harry has been given the heroic dimension

identifying him with America. Harry was famous for his basketball stardom in America. Harry has been tested and purified by the fire of spiritual renewal. The nickname of Harry is Rabbit suggesting “the frisky international mischief maker” that America represents. The plot of the novel *Rabbit at Rest* is divided into three parts entitled F.L. (Florida), PA (Pennsylvania, and MI (Michigan). John Updike in his article “Why Rabbit had to go” published in *The New York Times Book Review* (1999) observed that Rabbit at Rest is a depressed book about a depressed man written by a depressed man” (1). Updike further observes that the novel *Rabbit is Rich* is an “upbeat book” despite the gas crisis and other American problems but *Rabbit at Rest* portrays the dull life of a retired Harry. The plot of the novel records slow downward plunge of Harry who in third section of the novel follows his instinct to run: “A life know a few revelations, these must be followed when they come. Rabbit sees clearly what to do. He acts take on a decisive haste. He goes upstairs and packs” (435).

Updike identifies Harry Angstrom with America. At the request of his granddaughter Judy, Harry dresses up as Uncle Sam and takes part in the fourth July parade with Judy’s girl scouts group. *Rabbit at Rest* opens with Harry who is 55 and is leading a retired life though physically he has deteriorated and mentally he is passing through depression and alienation. Once he was a big businessman but now he is reduced to a Zero having no way in his house. He is fond of eating junk food and has grown bulky. He suffered massive heart attack but he survived but he knows that he is heading toward the grave. He becomes increasingly aware of his inevitable death. He owns a beautiful apartment in the posh colony of Florida where he spends half the year with Janice. Nelson has taken over the Toyota business relieving Harry from all the responsibilities. But this new life is sickening him as he is not happy with this development. But in this novel Janice is doing very well and it seems she is inspired by the growing wave of feminism of America. She plays tennis and enjoys swimming to keep her fit, slim and beautiful. Nelson is the main source of troubles to Harry as he becomes a drug addict ruining his life. This awareness gives mental torture to Harry who feels guilty and thinks that he is responsible for the moral and spiritual deterioration of Nelson. He has been staling form his own company and pays no serious attention to the growth of his business. Harry’s Toyota business is



running into loss and is on the verge of bankruptcy. Harry has to look after the business when Nelson is sent to the rehabilitation centre. The domestic crisis of Harry is linked with the moral and spiritual crisis in America. The theme of death makes the novel serious and pessimistic. In the opening scene of the novel, Harry and Janice goes to the airport to receive Nelson who has become the father of another son Roy. Nelson behaves like a stranger to Harry and his behavior has totally changed. This is shocking to Harry who is visibly hurt by the insensitive nature of Nelson. The behavior of Nelson is aggressive, he is very nervous, and exhausted and becomes angry very quickly. The novel opens with Harry suffering from angina pain and closes with the massive cardiac arrest of Harry and his death. Updike gradually chronicles all the events of Harry saga till his death in the novel *Rabbit at Rest*. The very title of the novel suggests the theme of death as the word “rest” defines the inevitability of death and Harry is not an exception.

Shakespeare once said that life of man is full of “sound and fury” but signifying nothing. John Updike evokes the philosophical ideas of Kierkegaard and Nietzsche in dramatizing the last phase of life of Harry in this novel. The blossoming and fruition of death is the main theme of the novel and this is introduced in the very first sentence of the plot. As Harry waits for the plane to receive his son Nelson and his family to Florida he broods over the inevitability of death: Rabbit Angstrom has a funny sudden feeling that what he has come to meet is not his son Nelson and daughter-in-law Pru and their two children but something more ominous and intricately his: his own death, shaped vaguely like an aero-plane” (3). This mood of despair reverberates throughout the plot of the novel making the story of Harry touching and heart rending. In this novel Updike explores the human body as Eros as the doomed Harry has a panicky sense of the fortitude of body and of its place in the world: “You fill a lot for a time and then move out, that’s the decent thing to do: make room” (2).

John Updike explores the mystery of death and death is the recurring motif in *Rabbit at Rest*. In his early novel *Rabbit is Rich* Harry is conscious of the presence of the dead with the living as he gives the image of the grass under his feet to a tree having life. In all his early novels Harry hardly thinks of his death. But in *Rabbit at Rest* he is seriously concerned about his death as a human being. The main

metaphors of the novel the airplane loaded with bombs represent Harry with the heart problem. The metaphors connect Harry with the impending doom. Harry is obsessed with the Lockerbie air disaster, with the declining powers of baseball players and the deaths of T.V personalities. John Updike brings historical events of Ronald Reagan when everything in America was falling apart, people engaged making money out of nothing and running into debt. Schopenhauer's definition of walking as "arrested falling" is quite suitable in the case of Harry who is in following a downward journey of his life. His angioplasty episode and loss of potency and the anecdote of open heart-surgery reveal the last journey of Harry.

In Florida Harry notes that "palms grow by the lower branches dying and dropping off" (59) that "friendship has a thin provisional quality, since people might at any minute buy another condominium and move to it, or else up and die" (73). The music at the airport where Harry goes to receive the family is a "kind of carpet in the air, to cover up a silence that might remind you of death" (4). Harry is extremely depressed by his first heart attack as he has nothing to live for except food and sexual pleasures. He ceases to believe that in his future after the heart attack and is always haunted by the ghost of death. Harry is so much nervous and scared that he refuses bypass surgery advised by the doctors and loses himself in reveries and self-pity. He becomes passive and silently waits for his death. The plot of the novel *Rabbit at Rest* gives the vision of an American man consciously preparing for death and looking out at the world in which he soon will not exist. Harry's family is also preparing to face any eventuality as Nelson and Janice are seen taking all important decisions. Janice gives her indolent attitude of two decades and becomes active and behaves like a successful business woman. Harry cannot help noting that "there is this subtle past tense that keeps creeping in her remarks about him" (363). Janice takes up the course in real estate and emerges as a serious career woman of America. She decides to sell her house in Penn Park and the Condo and to move to the house of her parents to solve the liquidity crunch of his company. Harry praises her sense of business acumen but he senses in it her widowhood. Harry suffers the first heart attack while saving his granddaughter Judy from drowning. He undergoes angioplasty and survives but he loses his appetite and most of the time is seen lost in reveries. Matthew Wilson (1991) observes thus:

Harry's physical degeneration, however, is only a sign among many of how he has been thrown back, almost into a solitude even more isolating than that he experiences as a young man in *Rabbit, Run*. (Wilson 17)

Harry suffers alienation because of his physical debility and diminishing sexual potency and retirement from the active business life. He is deprived of the work culture and is denied free interaction with his social circle. Nelson has been managing all the business affairs independently rendering Harry jobless and inactive and left with an even more constricting identity. He couldn't reconcile to this helpless situation and recollects his old position when he was very active and was a "man up front" He remembers his friend Charlie Stavros who was his co-worker and a confident friend with whom he could interact freely on all issues. Harry has been shifted to Florida where he rarely sees him. He meets his group from Flying Eagle country club infrequently. His entire group has dispersed. In his retirement age his social world is dissolved, he tries to reorganize them by playing golf with other retired people but he feels he is an outsider. He notes that everyone in Florida is "cautious, as if on two beers they might fall down and break a hip" (70). He has to play with the Jews feeling cultural difference and his helplessness. Harry feels mentally disturbed when he observes Janice and Nelson ignoring him and taking all important decisions without telling him. He is aware that his world is shattering but he is helpless because of his physical weakness and psychological ailments. Janice and Nelson continue working actively in his absence and take decisions without his consent. Janice doesn't bother to call Harry for weeks, and Harry painfully finds out his neglect and the callous indifference of the members of his family. Harry enjoyed name and fame and was a very dominating figure in the earlier novels but in his present state he has lost all powers and position. His isolation is accompanied by a problem of identity. He is shocked to note that Thelma with whom he had ten years affair has also deserted her: "The reason I never left Janice and never can is, without her, I'm shit unemployable I'm too old All I can be from here on ii her husband" (207). Harry's powers have declined and his sad futility is well dramatized by John Updike. He even breaks his relationship with Thelma after his first heart attack. Brooke Horvath (1970) argues thus:

The novel *Rabbit at Rest* enacts the consequences of Harry's failure as an erotic quester, as he is now disgusted by the wonders he expected throughout his life. In one of his reviews Updike discusses the western love myth, "her concern is not with the possession, through love, of another person but with the prolongation of the lover's state of mind. Eros is allied with Thanatos rather than Agape, love not a way of accepting a way and entering the world but a way of defying and escaping it. (285)

Harry had been engaged in a world of materialism, constrictions and insignificance. In *Rabbit, Run* Harry has been allied to Thanatos as Ruth calls him Mr. Death. He had been adventurous running away from the responsibilities and enjoying hedonistic pleasures and Eros has always been a way of escaping the world. He is so pervert that he even thinks of making love to "a piece of paradise blundered upon, incredible" (346). Harry believes that adultery with his daughter-in-law Pru is not a moral transgression. This is the only incident where Eros is not a mode of escape for him. He in fact, believes in accepting and entering the world of hedonism. Ralph Wood observes that in the novel *Rabbit at Rest*, Harry goes into the past, he recollects his old days of youth. The novel is packed with the elements of nostalgia for the past. Harry recollects myriad event, people and places that shaped his life. Everything is connected to something distant. He constantly remembers his past, his stardom of a high school basketball hero, his marriage to Janice, the deaths that each of them brought about in their own housed time and their friends. He recollects the time when he was a small car dealer and then he got a job as a typesetter. Even Janie used to say the "Harry had a hard time when we were younger giving up his dreams and his freedom but he seems at peace now" (145). Harry envies the wives of his golf partners in the early novel but later he visits Florida alone, an elderly woman is friendly to him. He explores the truth of life and feels that she has been "invading his so he takes two nitrostats to quell his heart" (489). He had enjoyed the company of women in all his life but now his indifferent attitude reveals his hypocrisy and loss of potency. Updike depicts the dilemma of Harry thus:

There was a time, when he was younger, when the thought of any change, even a disaster gladdened his heart with the possibility of a shake up, of his world made new. But at present he is aware mostly of a fluttering, binding physical resistance within him to the idea of being uprooted. (429)

Harry is bewildered by the changes of American society all around him but he is bed-ridden weak and unemployed. Janice has adapted to the new American culture but Harry feels that he is outdated and is marginalized by his wife Janice and Nelson. He struggles to live in the present but fails. He is sad to realize that he is a man in rapid demise, but he tries to face his death with his determination.

To conclude, the novels *Rabbit is Rich* and *Rabbit at Rest* deal with the theme of death and the moral and spiritual problems confronted by John Updike and his apocalyptic vision of the novelist. Updike observes that women will not enjoy social security and domestic happiness if they behave like Janice who develops sexual relations with her love Charlie betraying her husband Harry. Men of America will not be free from anxieties and tensions so long as they behave like Harry who deserts his pregnant wife Janice and enjoys sexual pleasures with Ruth and Jill. Discipline is very important to enjoy domestic happiness. John Updike has cosmic vision, he is not writing the adventurous journey of a young American but the plot dramatizes all the social and political events of America. John Updike chronicles the growing disintegration of American civilization and the moral and spiritual bankruptcy of the age with the growth of money mania.

## Chapter Six

### Survival of the Americans in *Terrorist*

The career of John Updike is pivotal as he is one of those writers who personified the World War era. He wrote for fifty years publishing one novel each year consistently. When a reader comes from the world of Rabbit novels of John Updike and enters in the world of *Terrorist*, he feels a unique experience. In this novel, Updike is managing a worldwide issue of fear mongering that worries the humankind and the individuals of America. Updike has chosen an authentic occasion with his visionary intention to investigate the causes and the arrangement of the malignant growth of fear mongering compromising the harmony and strength of the world. According to C. Wright Mills:

The first rule for understanding the human condition is that men live in a second-hand world. The consciousness of men does not determine their existence, nor does their existence determine their consciousness. Between the human consciousness and material existence stand communications and designs, patterns and values which influence decisively such consciousness as they have. (Mills 375)

The novel *Terrorist* reveals a great American novelist as his full powers as the world around him undergoes a watershed moment. Michiko Kakutani reviewed *Terrorist* in *The New York Times* expressed his surprise to note Updike's interest in terrorism and violence since he has only expressed his taste for love, sex and religion in his Rabbit novels. John Updike is called a novelist of the middle-classes and chronicler of suburban adultery and angst. In his *Terrorist*, Updike deals with Islamic radicalism. Kakutani lambasted Updike for his use of unbelievable phrases such as "one-dimensional stereotype and "lousy job". James Wood wrote a long essay in *The New Republic* flaying Updike for not providing the enough background to show how young Ahmad "developed from fatherless youth to potential terrorist". Ahmad is neither Islamic enough nor American enough. Wood says: "Updike has created a wonderful character offering his resistance to the New culture of America

containing the elements of American postmodern novel” (Wood 25). The critics have not appreciated Updike’s novel *Terrorist*. Kristiaan Versluys considered it is a bad “novel and even a very bad book” (Versluys 170). Mitra Benerjee accused Updike of racial profiling. Many have attempted to ignore the novel as it lacks the vitality, vigor and strength of his Rabbit novels. Richard Gray condemned it a dry and insipid novel of John Updike. Robert Appelbaum (2008) comments thus about the terrorist novel:

The cultural work of the terrorism novel from 1970 to 2001 has been by and large to legitimate the position of innocence occupied by terrorism’s victims and the political society to which they belong...these novels tell us that terrorism is the violence of an Other, it is an illegitimate violence perpetrated from an illegitimate position. (Appelbaum 127)

The shifting vision of John Updike is revealed through the plot of *Terrorist*. He moves beyond the “middle-class mundane” to handle a global problem concentrating on the issues from the wider world to create a new American world view at the critical period of American history. In his interview appearing in *Book*, Updike discussed the rationale for writing the novel thus:

And as a novel like *The Coup* shows, I’m interested in Islam as a more fiery and absolutist and some would say, fanatical brand of theistic faith. So it was not just my happening to have been there but my sensation that I was qualified to speak about why young men are willing to become suicide bombers. I can kind of understand it, and I’m not sure many Americans can. (Updike 12).

The text of *Terrorist* is about the sociological and historical trauma as Updike depicts the fast transforming nature of American culture. Updike ridicules the Americans who trade their physical freedom for freedom to pursue consumerism. Jack argues that “America is paved solid with fat and tar which keeps people bloated and satisfied, but allows religious fanatics and computer geeks free region” (Jack 27). George Washington is portrayed as the hero of the Revolutionary War. C. Wright M explains how the cultural machine is used to create self, calling it “the

lens of mankind through which men see...interpret and report what they see...it's the semi-organized source of their very identities" (Wright 406).

John Updike takes up the contemporary issue which confronts the contemporary American society, the issue of terrorism. The novel is a cultural study as Ronald Grimes observes: "September 11 has become a sacred time, a ritual date. You don't think so, listen to the incessant incantation: 9/11. 9/11. Everyone repeats it, gets the allusion, feels its weight. The date, utterly symbolic in force, binds "us" together and, in so doing defines them" (74). The attack on American Trade Centre on 26<sup>th</sup> November, 2001 shook the world and each politician and intellectual expressed his own opinion about the dastardly killing of three thousand Americans. The attack on America by the militants supported by Osama Bin Laden challenged the survival of American democracy and life of the American people who had been proud of their safety, security and fool proof defense system. Grimes suggest that the American response to 9/11 was a form of religious expression: "Our wars are no less holy than theirs just holy in a different way. Holy war: war for which price is too high. Holy war, the kind that is waged when God is our side" (75). The novel is focused on the scenes of aftermath of 9/11 attack depicting the reactions of the American people. Mary Marshall Clark conducted series of interviews in *The New York Times* after the tragedy. She recorded the mood of hatred, revenge and discrimination, suspicion and disintegration. Updike chronicles the same mood in his *Terrorist*, America turned more patriotic after the tragedy of 9/11 attack and Bush administration took several steps to control the situation and reaffirm the faith in democracy and liberty. Updike wrote *Terrorist* not as a literary piece of art but a political novel dealing with the contemporary situation and expressing his views for the future of America. President Bush geared up the administration and launched a vigorous attack to uproot the network of Al-Qaeda. He resolved to flush all the terrorists from America. He attacked Afghanistan to destroy al-Qaeda headed by Osama bin Laden. When the novel appeared the people were surprised to note that Updike could deal with such a challenging topic. With his experienced imagination, Updike bluntly illuminates the theme of violence and growing threat of terrorism in the contemporary America. In *Book Page Magazine* Interview, he wrote that *Terrorist* performed two functions, it chronicled all the facts about the attack and it



explored the approach and attitude of the fundamentalists toward American democracy. Updike's vision of post 9/11 America centers on the idea of faith and lack of faith in the modern world. He exposed the growing consumerism of American society and the lust of the people for luxuries of life ignoring the demands of the poor and the downtrodden people represented by Ahmad. People have scraped the old ideals of American Dream in their mad race for money, love and sex. Updike laments the impulse to purchase "tawdry junk that fills people's daily lives" (20). The lack of faith, passion, or commitment to "the right path leads to world lead to a world full of nuzzling" (10). In the *Rabbit, Run* Harry's actions wreck havoc on his family, he dehumanizes his wife Janice. The novel symbolizes man's place in the family and in society. But in his *Terrorist*, his perception is focused on the issue of security and stability in the country and the challenges before the country. For the first time the liberty and democratic spirit is at stake and Updike raises the main social and political issues in this novel. In *Terrorist*, Updike's primary concern is not family of an individual but the survival of the community. Characters such as Ahmad and Charlie have ties to the larger world. Now the emphasis shift from the axis of the immediate family to the larger community. The critics found the character of Ahmad problematic and labeled the characters a completely unbelievable individual, cliché, static and one-dimensional stereotype. Ahmad is the main hero of John Updike and he portrayed as an outsider in the American society. He is American-born Muslim and different from the other Muslims. He is not Arabic as the first language and is certainly not a part of the Black Nationalist Muslim movement which has a special mission to control militant activities. Updike is seriously concerned about the survival of people and the consequences of 9/11. Updike has witnessed the scene of the tragedy of the collapse of the Twin Towers. Updike frankly observed that he was fully qualified to speak on the issue of terrorism since he had personally witnessed the gruesome tragedy. "He tried his best to understand the psychology of the suicide bomber" (Mudge, 12). Updike observes that officers are "benign onlookers" more interested in flirting with the beautiful girls than actually guarding the tunnel" Jack tells Ahmad that he will not get past the tollbooth just before the entrance, but to his surprise, there is no one inside. Ahmad is the lone terrorist on his suicidal mission. Updike clearly affirms his faith in democracy presenting his country fighting for the ideals of liberty and democracy.

Updike vividly portrays the scene of the day of tragedy: “people are walking that fateful day as ash drifted from the sky. Freedom...felt palpable. It’s mankind elixir, even if a few turn it to poison” (118). Mitra Benerjee opines that Updike’s religious “discourse occasions the parallel development of a racial one, which appears to some reviewers predictable if not jingoistic” (Benerjee 12). Ahmad emerges as an idealized character obsessed with doubts and suspicions struggling to forge his identity in new America. He unmasks the decay of American society through his moral mission exposing the cultural inertia of his country. The novel is set in a lifeless industrial town of New Jersey ironically called New Prospect. It is a city where economic development is stagnant and life is hellish. He keenly observes the “inner city fields turning into congested slums” (96). Updike has dramatized the pictures of ethnic, cultural and religious differences.

Many novelists wrote about the trauma people experienced on 9<sup>th</sup> November 2001. John Updike’s *Terrorist* and Joseph O’Neill’s *a Netherland* belong to the category of the fiction of violence. Drawing on the postmodernist theory of Fredric Jameson, it’s argued that John Updike differs from the other novelists because his approach is conciliatory. He wants to solve the problem of terrorism and believes that only through love, understanding and religious faith the problem of terrorism can be solved in America. The attack alarmed the Americans who were too much confident and complacent about the security of the people. John Updike’s novel *Terrorist* (2006) deals with the “homegrown” Muslim American terrorist and the problem of militancy expressing his apocalyptic vision. Updike has been examining the social, cultural and political problems of America for fifty years in his fiction, essays and stories. The characters in his novels and stories have demonstrated the desperation and frustration confronting the cruel and oppressive capital system. Updike has given in insight to the psyche of a terrorist examining out the struggle of the Americans to survive in the harsh capitalistic society. The plot of the novel hinges on imagined views about the way America is and the way life goes on America. The plot focuses on a Muslim born American teenager Ahmad Ashmaway Mulloy, who is eighteen years old school boy, half-Irish, half-Egyptian by background. He is intoxicated by Islam taught by Yemeni imam who is his religious teacher. John Updike explores in this novel the Islamic fundamentalism from the

postmodern perspective. He was brought up by his freethinking single mother, he may be regarded a typical of the generation who came of age in the new millennium. The important thing in the novel is Ahmad's chosen identity, that of a radicalized Muslim.

When the novel appeared the critics and the reviewers of John Updike expressed divergent views about the theme and style of the novel. He was called him "essentialist", "cliched" and a "caricature" (219). Charles McGrath reviewed Updike's novel *Terrorist* In *The New York Times* and expressed his opinion of Updike's concern for the future of America thus:

Updike thought he had something to say from the standpoint of a terrorist...I think I felt I could understand the animosity and hatred which an Islamic believer would have for any system. Nobody's trying to see out here a number of ways, but that's what writers are for, may be. (McGrath3)

The religious views of Ahmad presented by John Updike are simplistic and unconvincing while his planned terrorist action is terrifying. In the plot of the novel it seems that Updike is writing the story to humanize the Muslim terrorist by making his cause and actions explicable on the grounds of psychology. The main focus of John Updike is on the exploration of the matrix of violence and terrorism in this novel. There are many definitions of terrorism, Jeff Goodwin observes that "there is no commonly accepted definition of terrorism" (2027). He further argued that "the deliberate use of violence in order to influence some audience's common to most definitions" (2028). He reiterates that certain groups "view terrorism, for the most part, as a political strategy" (2079). The hero of Updike's *Terrorist* is Ahmad who is a Muslim and Islam seems to be his prime reason to carry out violence. He also says: "Islamist terrorism is rooted in the social strains created by modernization, the competition between Islam and other religions, and the growth of secular government" (2079). This kind of terrorism is based on a perceived threat against the religion and its follower's culture and way of living America. Victoroff gives his own rational choice theory and opines that "the terrorist knows what he is doing, their decisions are rational and calculated" (14). There are many reasons which

motivate them to follow the path of terrorism. The majority of the critics are of the view that terrorism means brainwashing and manipulation of the thoughts and actions of others. The actions and thought of Ahmad are manipulated and Carl's actions are controlled by others. Even the thoughts and ideas of Carl are manipulated and influenced by others has grown up. The plot begins with a monologue of Ahmad:

Devils, Ahmad thinks. These devils seek, girls away and sneer and expose their soft bodies and alluring hair. Their bare bellies, adorned with shining navel studs and low-down purple tattoos. (1)

In this dramatic erosion of cultural self-consciousness, the postmodern technique pastiche can be correlated with the advent of postmodernism. In that specific period, unlike early twentieth-century modernism, willfully ignores both history and memory, producing a massive detemporalization of experience. John Updike gives the image of “shifty eyes and hollow voices” to describe the dull and insipid life of the people of New Jersey. The teachers and Christians and the Jews “make a show of teaching virtue and righteous self-restraint” (2). At the outset of the novel, Updike gives description of the chaos in the life of Americans. Men and women “like any others are full of lust and fear and infatuation” (2). The life of the students is horrible, their live away from the school are “disorderly and wanton and self-indulgent” (3). The government servants are paid money to instill virtue and democratic values by the state government down in Trenton. John Updike is a critic of society, he gives a running commentary of the men and the manners of his age. The students believe that machine and lethal weapons manufactured by the business tycoons are responsible for bringing human degradation and the erosion of values held by the Americans. Updike expresses the fears, uncertainty and the loss of individuality thus:

They say that all comes out of merciless, blind atoms, which cause the cold weight of iron, the transparency of glass, the stillness of clay, the agitation of flesh. Electrons pour through copper threads and computer gates and the air itself the air itself when copper threads and computer gates and the air itself when stirred to lightening by the interaction of water droplets. Only what we can

measure and deduce from measurement is true: The rest is die passing dream that we call ourselves. (2)

The purpose of fragmentation is to depict a metaphysically unfounded, chaotic universe. Updike gives an insight into Ahmad's mind who is feeling sick and depressed. Updike give the images of "insects and worms" to describe the death consciousness of Ahmad.: "Their bodies so quickly absorbed by eardi and weeds and road tar, devilishly strive to tell Ahmad that his own death will be just small and final" (3). Ahmad is seen flirting with his girlfriend Joryleen with sexual impulses but he represses them. Ahmad feels solace in the mosque and reads Quran under the instructions of Imam. His mother Teresa Mulloy, an Irish American has abandoned her faith because of her openness toward sexuality and relationships with men. Ahmad hates his mother who is whorish and an object of sexuality. Ahmad idolizes his absent father who was an Egyptian immigrant. His father had abandoned his mother and him when he was three years old. Jack Levy is a reputed suitor of his mother who often visits his house and acts as a counselor of Ahmad. The majority of characters of the novel are cynical about the American culture. Ahmad finds that people in America have lost their communion with God and are running after easy money and the main cause of their depression is the naked greed and lust for money. Ahmad becomes a truck driver on the advice of his Shaikh since he has no taste for academic studies. He loves driving because it gives practical exposure and is full of adventure. Trucking is also the path that leads him toward involvement in a terrorist plot directed against the infidels of Americans. He plans to blow up the Lincoln Tunnel under the Hudson River. He discovers that his accomplices are not in their planned meeting place, so he decides to carry out the mission alone. He drives the truck loaded with lethal weapons alone and blows himself up. Ahmad avoids arrest by Federal official and continues the suicide mission alone. But he meets Jack who dissuades him to carry out the attack. Jack's sister-in-law Hermione Fogel has alerted Jack to be careful of Ahmad who is in a suicide mission. Jack tells Ahmad that he has an affair with his mother. Ahmad begins to interpret Islam and comes to the conclusion that God doesn't want to kill anyone and thus reason prevails and he aborts his terrorist mission. He rides with Jack through Manhattan together towards the George Washington Bridge to return to New Jersey.

Briefly stated, the plot of the novel *Terrorist* is a story of a young man who has grown up with an absent father, and whose search for his father leads him into a tunnel with an armed truck ready to detonate it in the peak hour of traffic. But this tragedy is averted by a Jewish counselor Jack Levy who is also like a father figure. The psychological realism depicted by John Updike is the main strength of the novel. Jack Levy intercepts and enters the truck with Ahmad in the culminating scene. Through his reconciliation Updike strives in creating a sense of understanding for the terrorist. But the critics have lashed John Updike for the logical gaps found in the plot as there are many improbable coincidences that create confusion. Christopher Hitchens (2006) in his scornful review for *The Atlantic* observed thus: “It is highly unlikely that the desire of a “green young Islamist’s fervent desire to learn to drive a truck in immediate post 9/11 New Jersey would set off no bells at all” (123). John Updike gives a broader perspective of a new America as he expressed his apocalyptic vision in *The New Yorker* after watching the fall of the World Trade Center. He wrote *Terrorist* to give hope and faith to the pessimistic Americans. Ahmad also experiences an epiphany:

The pattern of the wall tiles...explodes outward in Ahmad’s mind’s eye in the gigantic fiat of Creation, one concentric wave after another, each pushing the other farther and farther out from the initial point of nothingness. He realizes that God wills life and does not want people to desecrate His Creation by willing death. (306)

René Girard who is a philosopher has argued in a 2008 interview that 9/11 has been “normalized and politicized,” (Girard 20) becoming an ideological item on the agendas of different particular groups: The radicals use this event of terrorism in order to put an end to the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. Charlie is an important character in the novel who is manipulative and uses his influence over the boy to his advantage. In response, Ahmad thinks: “Lebanese (Charlie) are not fine-honed and two-edged like Yemenis (Shaikh Rashid) or handsome and vanishing like Egyptians (Omar Ashmawy)” (175). Clearly, Charlie identifies as his replacement father. Charlie uses the statues to further influence the teen, planting ideas that change the mid-set of Ahmad. He motivates him to become a suicide bomber and he often compares Muslim revolutionary forces in the modern world and refers to Jihad

comparing it with the American Revolutionary troops led by George Washington. Charlie explains: “The old revolutionaries...have much to each our jihad” (183). When Charlie finds that the boy is fully committed to life and death, he calls Ahmad a “good boy” out of ecstasy. When he comes to know that he has made up his mind to serve the Muslim community, he exults: “Madman, you’re a good brave kid” (189). He doesn’t allow to know the mind and the feelings of Ahmad. He thinks and believes that he is on the “Straight path” and he always longs to continue the straight journey of life. He drives the explosive-laden “truck into the New York City after deciding to not detonate his cargo” (309). Ahmad realizes at the end of the novel that “These devils...have taken away my God” (310). In his anguish and turbulent state of mind Ahmad cannot understand his dilemma, he cannot take his step as a symbol of victory. The devils took away his angry, misguided God and replaced it with a God who rejoices in creation and hates destruction. Jack is an important character in the novel, he enters into a relationship with Ahmad’s mother. This diversion has little significance in the plot but it strengthens this association. Jack is a fallible character in multiple ways. He has nihilistic and pessimistic view of life, he is an outsider to mainstream society given his Jewish background. Being a practicing Jew he is an outsider to his faith. It may be said that Jack Levy has lost his way as much as Ahmad has but all these have no relevance in the plot. He is a school counselor having an influence on Ahmad. He plays very significant role to change the mentality of Ahmad. He is successful in healing the deficiency of Ahmad. The socialization of Ahmad largely depends on depends on Levy. He feels compassion for a child ahead of him and chooses not to detonate his explosives.

Ahmad and Jack pass slowly through the streets of the Big Apple with people and automobiles swirling around them in rush to get somewhere. The New Yorkers are unaware about the impending danger waiting for them. Each person is “impaled live upon the pin of consciousness, fixed upon self-advancement and self-preservation” (310). The Americans are lost in the world of consumerism and money culture and are ignorant of the impending doom: “while blips of hope dot the landscape, blind, fat, and stupid America lurches toward the apocalypse, sidetracked by media-generated distractions as the end draws near” (123). John Updike gives

full freedom to the characters to think about the metaphysical questions confronted man in his life. When Joryleen questions whether God's existence and the possibility that no after life exists, Ahmad feels physically ill, explaining: "if none of it is true...the world is too terrible to cherish, and I would not regret leaving it" (72). He longs for his sexuality, despite his religious training, which advocates purity. In the passage, the boy is proud of his height and stands above like "short, ripe girl," catching glimpses of the "tops of her breasts...still glazed with the excitement and exertion of her singing" (67).

In Updike's June 2006 interview with *Book Page* saying: "I thought it was important to show how much Ahmad needed to make his own philosophy, as it were, because the environment wasn't coming up with any" (23). In the same interview Updike argued that religious mania can be destructive in any society. The critics observed that Updike tried to understand and to dramatize his world. Muslims alone are not killing others in America, there are many students who bring guns in the school to kill others out of hatred. In the schools there are many organizations such as Protestantism, Judaism which poison the feelings and thought of the young children in the schools. Kakutani has discussed the vision of John Updike who came under the influence of Joseph Conrad, Fyodor Dostoevsky and Don DeLillio. Updike explores the turbulent psyche of Ahmad and his religious fanaticism. There is a discord inside the mind of Ahmad, he experiences mental anguish and Updike has depicted the spirit of directionless and chaos in the mind of Ahmad. He is moved by the sermon of the black pastor and he is motivated to rethink his suicide mission. He is overpowered by the sexual desires for his girlfriend Joryleen and exhibits his sexual repression. He lashes out at Joryleen as his meeting ends: "You have a good heart Joryleen, but you're heading straight for Hell, the lazy way you think" (73). Ahmad is portrayed as a divided soul, he is trapped in the abyss of faith and doubt as he imagines a "world too terrible to cherish" (72). John Updike depicts the conflict of Ahmad thus:

Ahmad could always sense his teacher's doubts, since it was important to him that there not be any. Now fear invades Ahmad. His



face feels swollen. A curse has been laid on this peaceful place, which had been favorite spot in the world, a waterless oasis. (206)

Ahmad looks confused and bewildered as he fails to overcome the feelings of doubt and despair. In his journey of life, he grows mature as he decides to put off the mission of explosion. It reveals that he has undergone a kind of maturation process. Many critics have applied the theory of trauma of Cathy Caruth and Dominick LaCapra. The attack on World Centre and killing of people is considered as a tragic loss in New York City by the Islamic terrorists. The Islamic fundamentalists consider the non-Islamic people as the "Other". This type of thinking is the product of perverted mind-set and is against the principles of Christianity. Updike has given a fine blend of an Islamic fanatic and self-marginalized eighteen years old school boy with a Jewish Levy, the counselor. Ahmad is depicted as a good but irresponsible boy leading a lonely life in America, fatherless and trapped in doubt and despair. His association with Yemeni Shaikh Rashid lives in a downtown studio fashioned into a mosque. Ahmad is sick of his mother who is "trashy and immoral woman." Doren argues that religion is a "private affair" but the Muslims believe that religion is connected with culture in both spheres of existence. Doran states that the Muslims consider the Westerners as Christians and treat the other Americans as the "Other." (187). Ahmad's fundamental ideas are linked with his fanaticism. Initially he thinks that he is doing the job of his God but when he comes in contact with the Imam his belief in violence is driven away. Updike argues that the growth of capitalism is also responsible for the divide in America. In the early part of the novel, Ahmad is presented attending the mosque, working weekend shifts and loving his job. He tells his classmates: "All America wants of its citizens, your president he said, is for us to buy, to spend money we cannot afford and thus propel the economy forward for himself and other rich men" (72). The readers don't approve the language, attitude and path followed by Ahmad but his courage, commitment and religious fervor is commendable. He is critical of the cultural values of American society as he feels marginalized. Updike reverses the stereotype that promotes violence. Gregory Orfalea pointed out that "we hope that Updike's humanity will not desert us" (Orfalea 190). It is not surprising to note that Ahmad does not kill anyone in the end

of the novel. He has the killing instinct but it is controlled by his teacher. John Updike employs the strategies of inversion and moral displacement in an ironical style to indict the materialism of America. Richard Gray contends thus:

The threat in John Updike's *Terrorist* is not in Ahmad but in the world that seems to challenge and imprison him. Updike captures this: the sense, not merely of not belonging but of not feeling safe, of fearing that the world he inhabits is eating away at the very core of his belief and his self. (Gray 135)

Peter Bailey argues that Updike's main concern is about the importance of faith in life and his hero Ahmad is grappling with the problem of faith. There is a streak of nihilism in almost all his novels. Bailey argues that in Updike's fiction from *Rabbit* tetralogy to the last novel *Villages* his characters withdraw from God. They become seculars abandoning faith in God. No Wonder, like Ahmad, Harry Angstorm, Owen McKenzie lost faith in God and lead independent life. Bailey observes that in all his novels, Updike has described the darkened vision of life, sex and religion. According to Bailey "the chronic unresponsiveness of God has cumulatively darkened Updike's vision" (243). He detects in his novels what he calls "the reluctantly expanding secularism of Updike's aesthetic" (33). According to John Leonard, the story of Ahmad is a swan song of John Updike. Ahmad's mother is doing a dreary job and the plot is about the middle class Americans struggling in mercantile America for survival. Ahmad is a young boy with his white, well-ironed shirt and sexual repression. He has great respect for God, he is pleased to find the trucking "regulations a concern with purity and religious in quality" (75). He represents the experience of spiritual grandeur and fullness of life. Jorg Richter contends thus:

Updike omits any clear-cut judgment of the moral rights and wrongs of terrorism but instead accentuates the paradoxical nature of religious experience within a secular and technologically dominated world. (Richter 483)

John Updike expresses his disgust exposing the hollowness of American "population." Jack Levy is portrayed as a "savior" at the end of the novel, fighting

against the odds and preventing the catastrophe. His humanitarian gesture disavows the violent mania of Ahmad as he reasserts the boys' spiritual innocence. Updike gives his apocalyptic vision contrasting Islam, Catholicism and atheism in the text of *Terrorist*. Updike launches a vigorous attack on the racial discrimination arguing that "if Islamic fundamentalism is a force that can thrive in the "lack of rubbles" of New Prospect, the racial discrimination will also follow. Interestingly, Ahmad firmly holds that religious views are inseparable from his ethnicity. He is proud of his father's "fake complexion" (13) but at the same time he hates his mother's mottled white Irish skin color that appears as that of a leper. He feels embarrassed by the mismatch of her feckless with his dun skin" while walking with Teresa. Updike comments thus: "his taste, developed in his years at Central High, is for darker skins, cocoa and caramel and chocolate" and her dark eyes: "Ahmad regards his mother as a mistake that his father made but that he never would" (170). Updike uses the sexual metaphors to entertain the readers. He imagines having a crush on Joryleen who is an African girl, whose smooth body is described through erotic images. He pictures: "darker than caramel but paler than chocolate, roasting in that vault of flames and being scorched into blisters" (9). Ahmad goes to a black Church and is fascinated by the sermon, energy and songs of the Black Church. Joryleen invites him one day to listen to her solo. The songs often sound sensuous and gratuitous to Ahmad lost in his own future action.. In fact the readers tend to conclude that the blackness of Ahmad's blackness is superior to the rough and the ignorant. Ahmad hates the skin of his mother but is intrigued by the "waxy white" complexion of the Imam "shared with generations of heavily swallowed Yemeni warriors" (13). Ahmad is attracted towards Teresa for her purity and exoticism. Mita Banerjee contends that the novel *Terrorist* is obsessed with what she calls "skin color" (Banerjee 16). Updike is dealing with the problem of racial discrimination after 9/11 attack as the events of racial profiling increased. The plot of the novel is linked with the cultural climate of the tragic events. Racial mania motivates people to commit crime. The novel celebrates individual freedom in the final pages of the novel when Ahmad decides not to carry out his suicidal mission to kill people. At the end of the novel he realizes the difference between God's role as a creator and destroyer on his own. Banerjee argues that biological skin color has become a major tool for the denial of citizenship. But it must be noted that Ahmad is not racist.

Updike has used Ahmad as an eye of the camera projecting the world and the reaction of the people to the great tragedy of the American people. He mistrusts everyone and reasserts his own cultural tradition in loneliness: “Ahmad feels his pride of isolation and willed identity to be threatened by the masses of ordinary, hard pressed men and plain, practical women who are enrolled in Islam as a lazy master of ethnic identify” (177). Ahmad has mixed identity, he is American and the same time he is a young Arab. Ahmad expresses his feelings of being American:

The younger Arab Americans, idle and watchful, have adopted the bulky running shoes, droopy oversized jeans, and hooded sweats shirts of black homeys. Ahmad, in his prim white shirt and his black jeans slim as two stovepipes, would not fit in here. To these co-religionists, Islam is less a faith than a habit, a face of their condition as an underclass, alien in a nation that persists in thinking of itself as light skinned, English speaking, Christian. (244)

John Updike has highlighted the isolation of Ahmad insisting on his superiority as the result of historical situation. He is struggling in the novel to forge his identity in multicultural America. He has also pointed out the flattening Christian society in which Ahmad lives and experiences marginalization and segregation. Teresa abandoned her Christian faith when she was young and admires Ahmad for his staunch faith. She fails to understand the danger her son is putting himself in. Updike gives the description to her “blue veins that wander the through the white skin, Irish white skin” (84). Teresa tells her lover Jack Levy that she has “never tried to undermine his faith. To someone without much of one, who dropped out of the Catholic package when she was sixteen, his faith seems rather beautiful” (85). She also talks about her husband and his ideas about women and servants, saying: “What a pompous, chauvinistic horse’s ass he was, really. But I was young and in love, in love mostly with him being you know, exotic, third-world, put-upon, and my marrying him showing how liberal and liberated I was” (86). Updike has devoted many pages of the novel to give the readers an insight to her troubled psyche. Teresa pretends to be a liberal woman but Updike sums up her personality in one phrase: she is a “white complexion lack of belief”. Levy responds to the confession of Teresa thus: “I know the feeling, I’m a Jew and my wife was a Lutheran. I shouldn’t

have said was. She never changed, she just doesn't go to the church" (86). Updike gives the real picture of Levy thus:

He was a Jew. But not a proud Jew...Jack Levy took a stiff necked pleasure in being one of Judaism's stiff-necked naysayers... Berth was a Lutheran, a hearty Christer denomination...But after thirty-six years together in northern New Jersey, the two of them with their different faith and ethnicities have been ground down to a lackluster sameness. (25)

Jack Levy is an important character in the novel, he is a lover of Ahmad's mother believing in liberation and sexual liberty. He loves Teresa because she is a liberal woman and is leading a lonely life like him. He is not much serious about religion but holds modern views about love, life and sex. Like Ahmad and Teresa, Jack Levy is very critical of the New American culture and the society. He has seen the Americans hating the blacks and in this society he is marginalized like Ahmad. He comments on American society and culture thus:

America is paved solid with fat and tar...Even our vaunted freedom is nothing much to be proud of...it just makes it easier for terrorists to move about, renting airplanes and vans and setting up Web sites. Religious fanatics and computer geeks: the combination seems strange to his old-fashioned sense of the reason-versus faith divide. Those creeps who flew the planes into the World Trade center had good technical educations. The ringleader had a German degree in city planning: he should have redesigned New Prospect. (27)

Jack suffers the loss of identity because of "reason versus-faith divide" and he is leading a disillusioned existence. He and Ahmad are growing nihilistic and pessimistic because of the stifling environment of America. Updike has depicted the moral shallowness of the American society in *Terrorist*. Hermione is another important character, she is sister of Berth and an assistant to the Secretary of Home and Defense in Washington. She is in love with her boss who fails to avert the attack of the terrorists. Updike has exposed and ridiculed the working of the bureaucrats of America who are crazy to make money. He is one of them, he is worried about his

promotion and reputation and not about the safety and security of the people. Updike gives the images of light and darkness to explain the problem of terrorism in America. Hermione reasserts the importance of light over darkness, justice over evil, God over money. Even the Secretary is described with stereotypical “white” American features: “He is a large man, with a slab of muscle across his back that gives the tailors of his dark-blue suits extra-trouble” (45). G.W. Bush in his famous speech mentioned “our country” and “our citizens” to lay stress on the active role of America in propagating freedom all over the world. He praised American values such as freedom, democracy and capitalism. Ahmad is portrayed as an example of cultural reaction to the sleepy, ghostly oppressive atmosphere that Updike embeds in a post 9/11 New Jersey. Ahmad abandons the plan of attack but he doesn’t submit to the surrounding culture. His faith remains untarnished up to the end and he stands out as an uncorrupted hero of the novel. In John Updike’s novel has chronicled the mood of the people and the government officials in a free and frank style thus:

The nightmare is still on. The bodies are beneath the rubble, the last-minute phone calls, remarkably calm and long, many of them are still being reported, the sound of an airplane with our old blasé blitheness keeps receding into the past. (117)

### **Sexual Identity of Ahmad**

Ahmad creates his own sexual identity in the novel, the first part of the novel describes his religious and fundamental approach to sex. His religious studies are at odds with his sexual passions for women. He has no teacher to guide him in the sexual matters. Shaikh Rashid has negative view of sexual relationship as he says: “women are animals easily led” (10). Charlie has a loving wife and family, but wants to hire a prostitute to take virginity of Ahmad. In the first part of the novel, Updike introduces Ahmad as a teen boy with sexual feelings. He chastises the girls in the school for baring their bellies and supporting “low-down tattoos” He asks himself: “What is there to see?” (3). He is seen interacting with his girlfriend Joryleen for the first time, a girl student with her “long body tingles under his clothes” (8) and “the crease between her breasts bothers him” (10). Ahmad wants to be near her but he repelled by the command of the Quran regarding male-female

relationships. He determines that “high school and the world beyond it are full of nuzzling blind animals in a herd bumping against one another, looking for a scent that will comfort them”(10). Ahmad is confused about the sexual relationships and because of sexual uncertainty, he displaces his feelings. He is given the assignment to drive a furniture delivery truck but he feels clean...cut off from the base world, its streets full of “dog filth and blowing shreds of plastic and paper” (157). Ahmad’s relation with his mother Teresa is also very sticky. He views his mother negatively because she doesn’t measure up the standards of Muslim women. He is extremely critical of her revolving door relationships with various boyfriends over the years and her behavior of a whore. He sees her less than one hour a day since she works odd shifts as a nurse in a local hospital. She tells Jack later on that: “the only present he wanted was for her not to look like a whore at the ceremony”(116). He hates his mother who is leading a chaotic life without a husband and without any support. When he begins working, he remains away from his mother. His loneliness motivates him to develop friendship with other people though they are full of vices. He thinks her mother who is “a typical American, lacking strong convictions and the courage and comfort they bring” (167). Ahmad labels Teresa a “victim of the American religion of freedom which enables her to do whatever she likes with no real consequences” (167). He disparages his mother for her lack of convictions and consistency and lose morals. She is portrayed like the heroines of the Restoration Comedy of Manners. Teresa also tells Jack: “I guess a boy needs a father, and if he doesn’t have one he’ll invent one” (117). She brazenly questions why he doesn’t have girlfriends like other boys of his age. Ahmad fires back: “Mom, I’m not gay, if that’s what you’re implying.” (144). He hates her mother for talking sexuality openly. When Jack and Teresa begin their love affair, Jack also inquires if Ahmad is gay asserting that “It doesn’t seem quite right” that a good-looking kid like her son would not have a girl-friend” (166). Teresa tells Jack: “I could be wrong, but I think I’d know, that too” (166). She brings up Shaikh Rashid and labels him kind of creepy apparently equating homosexuality with creepiness. She punctures the morality of Shaikh implying that the religious study over the years between Shaikh and Ahmad is also disturbing. Teresa highlights the innocence of Ahmad in sexual relations, he is quite naïve in males and females relationships. Charlie Chehab gives directions and rules of the road using a political analogy comparing Iraq and the

United States to announce the “bigger better” (157). Ahmad thinks that the political talk is “simply out of tune” and he realizes that “he is in bed with Charlie and submissively settles himself for the ride” (157). The friendship between Ahmad and Charlie appears like older and younger brother. Charlie is obsessed with television commercials and goes into details about the roles the actors play in them. Ahmad clearly identifies Charlie as his replacement father. In turn, Charlie uses the status to further influence Ahmad when he is on suicide mission. After listening to Charlie prattle on about the “sexed-up” actress in a Levitra spot, Ahmad thinks about given entrance to “male talk” (171). Charlie puts courage in Ahmad saying that “The old revolutionaries have much to teach our jihad” (183). He explains in detail his commitment to jihad. He is very much pleased to find out the commitment of Ahmad and his dedication to jihad. The interesting thing about Ahmad is his transformation and understanding about the value of human life. He gets enlightenment about God and his Plan at the end of the novel. John Updike has written *Terrorist* dramatizing his broader perspective as he creates a new America in the process. Updike explores the dialectical relationship between hope and faith, between doubt and despair. Indeed, at the end of the novel, there is a triumph of hand hope and faith and the defeat of the Satanic forces: “He realizes that God wills, life and does not want people to desecrate his creation by willing death” (306). Ahmad’s faith wins at the last and Updike gives a detailed analysis of the psychological working of a terrorist in this novel.

To conclude, Updike’s novel *Terrorist* has significant relevance as it discusses the basic happenings of terrorism confronting humanity today. Updike devises another perspective dependent on his own thinking dependent on truth of adoration, humankind, freedom and majority rule government. Ahmad rises as a representative of secularism confident of a brilliant and prosperous America liberated from racial disdain. Ahmad takes his own decision and becomes his own man and thinker transforming his faith from the “Straight Path” to the “path straight” at the end of the novel. He believes that “each person is impaled live upon the pin consciousness, fixed upon self-advancement and self-preservation” (310). Updike’s new world is that of hope and faith, of liberty and reason, of democracy and equality and not of hatred and militancy. The novel *Terrorist*



envisages the apocalyptic vision of John Updike in simple and lyrical style. John Updike was a versatile genius of America who wrote for fifty years expressing his views on the social, political and religious problems of American society. His vision is cosmic and apocalyptic as he chronicles the events of history of America. His novel *The Terrorist* dramatizes his views on terrorism and the need to end Islamic radicalism. He argues that in the democratic society of America fundamentalism, terrorism and hatred has no place. Updike has handled the sensitive issue in a realistic manner giving an insight into the psyche of the terrorists.

## Chapter Seven

### Mythical Depiction in *The Centaur*

The critics and the reviewers of John Updike noted the complexities of narration and the shifting point view depicted in his new novel *The Centaur* (1963). The novels excited great interest as the plot contains multiple layers and the blending of mythical and real. *The Centaur* got Updike the National Book Award is the third novel of John Updike famous for “a careful recreation of an ancient Greek myth” in the setting of an American town in the 1940s. The plot revolves around George Caldwell who is a science teacher at Olinger High School and his teenage son, Peter. The three novels of John Updike, *The Poorhouse Fair* (1958), *Rabbit, Run* (1960), and *The Centaur* (1963), may be said to constitute three different approaches to a major themes man’s quest for spiritual fulfillment. The protagonists are drawn from three successive generations, the grandfather, the father, and the son. The grandfather is Hook, the ex-teacher who serves as leader in *The Poorhouse Fair*, the father is George Caldwell, the teacher in *The Centaur*, and the son is Harry Angstrom, the young man running in *Rabbit. Run*. Each of these three men is portrayed in his attempt to find some meaning in the life he is forced to lead. Edward P. Vargo in his article “The Necessity of Myth in Updike’s *The Centaur*” “argues that critics expressed their concerns regarding the appropriation of myth in the novel, and alleged that John Updike introduced the mythical structure for the sake of novelty” (Vargo 452). John Updike was seriously concerned about the problems of the Christian world and he had an apocalyptic vision as a writer. He portrayed the characters in this mythical novel struggling with the Christian vision of the world. Peter Caldwell attempts to mythologize the image of father, George Caldwell. The principal section acquaints the principle character with the peruser in a surprising circumstance, the educator gets harmed by a metal bolt shot by one of his understudies while he addresses about the beginning of the universe and the Theory of Evolution.

In *The Poorhouse Fair*, the impersonality of public charity antagonized Hook and his cohorts to the point of rebellion against the manager of the poorhouse,

Conner, who becomes for them the concrete symbol of the otherwise featureless authority they have chosen to despise. Harry Angstrom has never found any satisfaction in life since his days as a basketball star in high school, and his revolt against the fatuity of the life of an ordinary young married man corresponds to Hook's revolt on a different level, George Caldwell, who at the age of fifty can find no meaning in anything he does, resorts to the superimposition of Greek legend upon his own actions in his attempt to refine them into significant gestures. Caldwell applies the mythological structure to his actions seems clear from such scenes as the Chiron-Aphrodite scene in Chapter I, This scene is entirely imaginary:

Then as now, Caldwell stood on that spot of cement alone and puzzled, and now, as then, clashed the stairs with a painful, confused sense of having displeased, through ways he could not follow, the God who never rested from watching him. (John Updike, *The Centaur* 29)

David D. Galloway (1964) defines these transitions from the real plane to the mythical plane as "retreats" into mythology and comes to the conclusion that "George's experiences are almost wholly psychological" (Galloway 121). Galloway concludes, is a deliberate rebellion against "the apparent meaninglessness of life." An understanding of Caldwell's interpretation of his own actions is obviously necessary for an evaluation of the significance of his life and this aspect has been explored in this chapter. Michael Novak, in reviewing *The Centaur*, commented thus:

Updike is often writing about man's search for personal immortality. He sometimes takes Protestant Christianity with ruthless seriousness He is willing to try to understand life in American small towns and suburbs as it is now lived he is not a prophet of dangerous living, nor a preacher of meaninglessness. (Novak 102)

The search for immortality is one of Updike's basic themes, and the action of all three novels does take place in small Pennsylvania towns. There is a good deal of similarity among these small towns, the significance of which lies in their acceptance of a common set of values. Rabbit Angstrom can accept neither the television-watching, whiskey-drinking escapism of his wife nor the pat, dogmatic,

essentially empty forms of religion as personified in Eccles. Caldwell, In *The Centaur*, cannot accept the conformity of his fellow teachers, nor can he find any satisfaction in the doctrine of infinite grace offered by Reverend March. These three towns are the same town, for the poorhouse that figures so prominently in the first novel may be seen from the windows of the school that is so important in the third novel, and the citizens of these three towns share a common reaction toward the actions of the hero, Hook, Rabbit, and Caldwell seem to be in rebellion against a common set of values set against a common background:

Novak defines this revolt of Updike's characters against meaninglessness as a desire for orders that the people in America need ceremonies is that I suppose, the point of a great many of the words he has written. Again Novak has identified an aspect of Updike's work without fully explaining it. It would be a mistake to assign Updike to the position of one seeking patterns for their own sake, the patterns are present, certainly, but their value is not intrinsic. It is their ability to reveal the basic structure of human existence, including all the complex relationships among individuals, and the general patterns of life and death, that constitutes their meaning for Updike. Richard Gilman, speaking of *The Centaur*, also points out this aspect of Updike's works:

What was intended, we may surmise, was a complex structure to house Updike's anxious concern with his past, with his psychic and material origins as an artist, with his family, and, most especially, with his father and the latter's relationship to himself. It is the father's possible death that provides the ground for the novel and such narrative force as it possesses, for Updike this segment of autobiography offers an opportunity to justify his father and attempt an understanding of the relationship of his death to the life that has gone before, and also the life that is to come to the author's own. (Gileman 195)

Updike's *The Poorhouse Fair* in the first novel is a little microcosm, in *Rabbit, Run*. Harry Angstrom had been able to find, meaning in his life only in the highly structured and complex patterns of the game of basketball, and in *The*

*Centaur*, Caldwell's attempt to impose some order on his life results in his use of Greek mythology to define, limit, and clarify his own actions. There is certainly an autobiographical aspect to Updike's work, and raised in a small town in Pennsylvania where he excelled as a basketball player, hence his familiarity and concern with small-town values and his transmutation of the sport of basketball into a symbol for the search for perfect achievement. In a profile it is found that his father was a teacher in a small high school, just as was George Caldwell. But one does not receive the impression that Updike is trying in his fiction to "justify" his father, his grandfather, or even himself. His concern lies more in the area of understanding those lives and applying that understanding to life in general. There is an elaborate application of the mythological theory in *The Centaur*, in which the patterns of mythology are imposed upon the story of George Caldwell to bring out the full meaning of his life. This study deals primarily with *The Centaur*, and the application of Greek mythology is discussed in detail. As Gilman points out above, Updike is here concerned with the precise meaning of the father-son relationship. The novel focuses upon George Caldwell and his search for truth, or the meaning of life. Gilman also notes Caldwell's "possible" death as the source of conflict in the action of the story and goes on to say the relationship of his death to Peter's life is the main focus of the novel. It will be wrong to assume that the death of Chiron signifies the physical death of George Caldwell is to obscure much of the meaning of the sacrifice. The meaning of Caldwell's life as David Galloway sees it is sainthoods "In his third novel Updike illustrates the far-reaching significance of the modern saint's apparently solipsistic experience" (Galloway 121). Galloway sees all three protagonists, Hook, Rabbit, and Caldwell, as Christian heroes engaged in a search for truth. It is the very absurdity of contemporary life that impedes them to explore the spiritual meaning of existence. However, he does gain sufficient insight for his sacrificial gesture to achieve a meaning that he had not yet found in overt action.

Caldwell's dwelling upon Greek mythology becomes a defensive mechanism comparable to Rabbit Angstrom's physical flights "While Rabbit defends his values by running George Caldwell maintains his Intentions in the face of a hostile reality by retreating Into a mythological kingdom in which Olinger, Pennsylvania, becomes

Olympus” (Galloway 121). Just as Rabbit’s running seems not to be so much a defense of his values as a search for values in which he can believe that Caldwell’s mythological fantasizing is to impose some order upon the life. When Caldwell compares himself to the legendary centaur, the parallel establishes a pattern which his own life seems to lack. On one level, the story is told by Peter Caldwell to his Negro mistress years after the primary action of the story. Many scenes, and several chapters, however, are presented from an omniscient point of view. Peter he admits his inability to understand all the ramifications of his father’s actions. There are scenes in which Caldwell appears as Chiron, Galloway argues that Caldwell in his imagination does see himself as the centaur. Updike has imposed the mythological structure on the plot of the novel. In the final chapter, for instance, when Caldwell has been transformed into the figure of Chiron, he thinks of his family and the two planes are superimposed in his minds:

His heart moved in pity for Ocyrhoe, his one seedling,  
with her wealth of hair. Needed a haircut. Poor kid, needed  
everything. Poverty. His inheritance, desk full of debts and a Bible,  
he was passing it on. Poverty the last true child of God. (219)

The postmodern technique intertextuality is used to him who at the age of fifty can find no meaning in anything he does, resorts to the superimposition of Greek legend upon his own actions in his attempt to refine them into significant gestures. That it is Caldwell himself who applies the mythological structure to his actions seems clear from such scenes as the Chiron-Aphrodite scene. Although he is thinking of himself as Chiron at the moment, Caldwell cannot help admitting the existence of reality. The daughter of Chiron never needed a haircut, nor was Chiron’s inheritance a “desk full of debts and a Bible” (287). The identification is just too close and rapid occurring in Caldwell’s mind. The obituary of Chapter 1 is presented from the point of view of an ex-student, as Caldwell imagines it. The picture of Peter as Prometheus is presented in Chapter 1 from Peter’s point of view. Generally speaking, there is a good deal of shifting from one view point to another in the novel. Caldwell does interpret his life in relation to the story of Chiron, that his use of the mythical structure is the product of his own imagination. If Caldwell

consciously compares himself to Chiron, it is because nothing else he has found can replace mythology in imposing meaning upon his life.

In *The Centaur*, Updike shows a genuinely good man living in a small town and surrounded by moral values in which he sees no validity. In his search for meaning in life he is continually disappointed because he fails to grapple with the existential absurdity. Peter performs the role of Prometheus, since he is aware of the complete meaning of his father's actions. The ambiguity remains since he never does become fully aware of all the ramifications. He finally becomes the victim of the randomness of the universe. Caldwell's decision to renounce his own search for fulfillment in favor of Peter's chances for success in life is the main ambiguity in the novel.

In the mythical history, there are several versions of the wounding of Chiron by the poisoned arrow of Hercules. Updike tells of Chiron receiving the wound at a wedding of the Lapithae to which the centaurs had been invited. Maddened by the scent of wine, which was denied there, the centaurs attacked the women present at the feast, Chiron was accidentally struck in the leg by one of the poisoned arrows. Since he had been granted immortality as a sign of special favor, Chiron could neither die nor recover from his wound, and thus he was doomed to perpetual agony. The basic mythological referent of the novel is Caldwell as Chiron. As the centaur, he begins and ends the story, and several of the main scenes within the story involve Caldwell in his role as the centaur. The mythical parallel seems to take place solely within Caldwell's mind. It is a fantasizing, a self-dramatization with which he clothes the incidents of his life to give them meaning and import. Caldwell's own wound is an actual incident perpetrated by one of the delinquents in his class. To Caldwell, it is just one more of the senseless aspects of his dreary life. Caldwell compares his experience to the wounding of Chiron. As the noblest of the centaurs, Chiron had been entrusted with teaching the sons of Hercules, including Jason, Pollux, and Achilles. Caldwell teaches general science in Olinger High School, and in the first sentence of the book, as he turns from the board, he is struck in the ankle by a steel arrow. On the board he had written the number 5,000,000,000, "the probable age in years of the universe" (9). He is delivering a lecture on the formation of the universe and the development of life on earth, and the author seems

to be saying that Caldwell's wound is as old as the universe and has as much significance for modern man as it had for the ancient Greeks who first devised the story. Although Caldwell is a very popular teacher at the school, his pain delights the students. It seems that their gleeful, mocking laughter drives him from the room as much as do the pain and the desire for help. Walking down the hall in search of assistance, Caldwell undergoes his first transition into a centaur. He tries to keep his injured hoof from touching the floor. Caldwell fantasizes himself as the centaur. Caldwell, in trying to protect his injured leg, becomes nervous over the amount of noise he makes:

He tried to keep that leg from touching the floor, but the jagged clatter of the three remaining hooves sounded so loud he was afraid one of the doors would snap open and another teacher emerge to bar his way. (10)

Caldwell actually imagines himself in the role of Chiron in a deliberate fantasizing. Continuing as Chiron, Caldwell leaves the building and moves toward the garage of Hummel, which adjoins the school yard. Hummel had been on the school board when Caldwell was first hired fifteen years previously, had helped Caldwell get the position and has ever since taken interest in Caldwell's career and welfare. Caldwell hurries to Hummel for relief, and he enters "a deep warm darkness lit by sparks" (12). Hummel's garage seems almost like the interior of a volcano or a cave, such as those inhabited by Hephaestus after he was thrown from heaven by Zeus. Hummel also limps, since one leg is shorter than the other as a result of a fall in childhood. Since he is the god of fire, he is forced to employ fire to sever the arrow head so that he might draw out the shaft. As he evacuates the pole, he smells it cautiously to identify any potential hints of toxic substance. The bolt shaft later figures unmistakably in the story, for Caldwell utilizes it in rebuffing an understudy. The injury of Caldwell has been adequate to begin the story proceeding onward its two planes, legend and reality. Updike has sensationalized the life of strain and worry of present day man through the legendary character of Caldwell. Caldwell sees himself as Chiron and others as various figures from mythology. Returning to school, Caldwell sees a fellow teacher watching from a second story window. Phillios is Pholos, another centaur, the one which was killed by the same



arrow which wounded Chiron, Pholos appears in the story several times, usually as Phillips, but later he also appears as Foley, the coach of a rival swimming team which defeats the Olinger team. It is Phillips who later in the story advises Caldwell not to question Zimmerman, the principal, about the missing basketball tickets, just to “make a note for charity and we’ll consider the matter closed” (174). As the plot of the novel progresses, Updike gives a contrast between Caldwell and his fellow teachers. Caldwell revolts against the values to which they subscribe. He feels an obligation to question and to seek which the others do not feel. Phillips believes it is best not to antagonize Zimmerman in any way. Hester Appleton has gained strength to face life only through repetition of a talismanic phrase, “*Dieu est tres fin*” (147). Caldwell asks: “What is the meaning of it all?”(148) Two more scenes in this first chapter are important for their revelation of Caldwell’s tendency to clothe his anxieties in the grandeur of mythology. In the first of these scenes, he passes through the basement of the school on his way back to his room because he wants to avoid encounter with Zimmerman. As he passes the door to the girls’ shower room, he remembers an occasion when he surprised Vera Hummel taking a shower. Vera Hummel is a beautiful red head who teaches girls and who has the reputation of a wanton. Caldwell feels a strong attraction toward Vera and she also reciprocates. However, their relations remain entirely innocent. Caldwell tries to transmute his love episode into an encounter between Chiron and Aphrodite. Vera becomes Aphrodite in the mythical plot. After having finished her bathing, she stands seductively posed in all her naked glory in front of Chiron. They have a long conversation in which she challenges him to justify his faith in the gods. Chiron names them over for her, and she scorns and vilifies each god that he names. Here, Venus seems to assume the role of the rebel and Chiron that of the traditional. Updike puts the old values on trial through this mythical episode. Chiron’s stock responses are demolished by the witty and hedonistic Venus. Caldwell recites a sort of catechism of the names of the rivers of the dead, the daughters of Nereus, and so on. (221). Caldwell rejects the old values in his quest for the real meaning of life.

Finally, Venus offers herself to Chiron. Chiron is shocked and immobilized, and the rebuffed goddess of love disappears. Caldwell is a product of the small-town civilization of the Eastern seaboard, and he is literally afraid of sex. As he and Peter

prepare to leave for school on Monday morning, Caldwell kisses his wife, and Mrs. Caldwell, looking at the ceiling says: "If there's anything I hate, it's a man who hates sex" (56). One of Caldwell's favorite terms for his wife is "femme" and his famous remark is: "If I'd been any kind of man, I would have put her on the burlesque stage when she was young" (58). This reminds of a scene in *The Poorhouse Fair* in which the two girls parade naked in the light from the automobile headlights while the two boys crouch inside the car and watch. The emphasis here, as it is with Caldwell, is on seeing but not touching. Sex tempts Caldwell, as is clear from his reaction to Vera Hummel, but even his own wife deplores his sexual impotency. Caldwell fantasizes yet another major aspect of life that troubles him. Relinquishing his dream of Vera Hummel, Caldwell turns and climbs the stairs to his classroom. Zimmerman who has heard the noise from the class, take charge during Caldwell's absence. On the realistic plain Caldwell is having a good deal of difficulty in keeping control of the class. His authority had been underlined by the incident of the arrow, and Zimmerman had nearly completed the destruction of what authority Caldwell had left by openly ridiculing him in front of the students

Updike gives the real images to describe the chaos in his class room. Students drop books to the floor, sail paper airplanes, and pass notes. Deifendorf has been caressing Betsy Davis's neck and shoulders until she all but purrs in ecstasy. As the end of the hour approaches, Deifendorf grows bolder in his fondling of the girl, until, finally unable to tolerate such cynical indifference any longer, Caldwell loses control of himself, and, walking back to Deifendorf, he strikes the boy several times with the steel arrow shaft he had placed in his pocket when Al Hummel removed it from his leg. The images reveal chaos in the real life of Caldwell. The Principal deliberately refuses to understand Caldwell's explanation or even to notice the wound. He encourages the students to near rebellion. Caldwell militated and cut to size by the Principal. Caldwell notes down the maliciousness of the Principle. Updike has narrated the main cause of hysteria of Caldwell.

As the lesson progresses, Caldwell seems to see the class on two different levels level, on real level and on the mythical level. He sees beneath the surface appearances of each person's actions, interpreting the essential nature of each in terms of mythological referents. Ziaanensan becomes Zeus at his most lecherous,

and the odor of his lust seems to fill the entire room. Knowing Caldwell's hatred and fear of sex, it is this aspect of Zeus's nature that he associates with Zimmerman. Updike has also depicted the acuteness of Zimmerman's character. He is suspected of being the father of Doc Appleton's wife's son. Zimmerman and Mrs. Herzog are seen using the school office as a trysting place. Caldwell's distrust of Zimmerman's sexuality is well-founded. Mrs. Herzog asks Zimmerman if they cannot fire Caldwell. The role of Zimmerman stimulates interest in the readers. The use of mythological pattern enhances the aesthetic interest of the novel. Each episode of the novel is linked with the mythical story borrowed from the Greek mythology. Updike has used the mythological pattern to explore the relevance of the values of modern man about, love, religion and sex. Thus, the first chapter of the novel begins and ends on a note of antiquity, the formation of the universe and the first appearance of human life on earth. During the few hours actually covered by the action of the chapter, we have seen Caldwell's reactions to three of the most basic stimuli of life: pain, sex, and anxiety. Being frustrated, Caldwell shifts on the plane of Greek mythology. In so doing he struggles to get solace from the turbulent world. Everything in the chapter contributes to these ideas the age of the universe, the first appearance of life, the entrance of death into the world, the appearance of man, and the interpretation of existence offered by Greek mythology.

In the chapter, Updike has depicted Caldwell's use of mythology to interpret his own experiences. In moments of stress, he is apt to fantasize harsh reality into an experience that may have mythical overtones. This strategy helps him to escape from the worries and cares of the mundane world. Caldwell is not comfortable in his relations with though he tries to fantasize sex. He considers himself sexually impotent, although he feels a sexual attraction to Vera Hummel. Caldwell imagines an encounter between him himself and Vera also in the mythical level. Caldwell is also stressed about his teaching profession. He feels unfit to be a teacher but he has to teach for the survival of the family. His fantasizing is always defensive, it is a weapon to escape from the mundane reality. When he enters into the hall, the bell rings and "A bird above him released a swift metallic song that seemed to be a signal" (75). The door to his room turns into "the ragged cave mouth" that waits at "the end of the forest path" (75). Under the shade of a huge chestnut tree in Arcadia,

Chiron finds his students gathered for a lesson on “the Genesis of All filings” (78), just as Caldwell’s previous lesson had discussed the formation of the universe. In the previous scene, however, he had emphasized the entrance of death into the world by means of the volvox, which, “by pioneering this new idea of cooperation, rolled life into the kingdom of certain as opposed to accidental death” (37). In the Arcadian scene, Chiron enjoys teaching, and the emphasis is on the birth of love and the idyllic life of men under its reigns:

Men lived without cares or labor, eating only acorns, wild fruit, and honey that dripped from trees, drinking the milk of sheep and goats, never growing old, dancing, and laughing much. Death, to them, was no snore terrible than sleep. (78)

Here, the bizarre classroom of Caldwell is a funny example of mastered irony. Paranoia is a feeling of many protagonists in postmodern fictions and it can be directly linked with the historical context and the society of modern society to a certain extent. John Updike dramatizes a conflict between the real and the ideal, between truth and fantasy. Caldwell is confronted to solve the riddle of his life and he seeks the help of Greek mythology to explore the meaning of life and human existence. In the first scene his fantasies take a horrifying forms people and events assume an import much more menacing than actuality proves. Hating his job as he does, Caldwell in the prior scene makes the situation seem much worse than it really is, just as he does when he diagnoses his abdominal pains as cancer. He attempts to give dignity to his mechanical and boring way of teaching transmuting teaching into the ideal situation of Chiron of the Greek myth. Actually, Caldwell seems to be a very good teacher, his students remember him long afterward with a mixture of amusement and respect. But Caldwell himself is bored by the meaninglessness of it all, “I wouldn’t mind plugging ahead at something I wasn’t any good at, my father said: If I knew what the hell the point of it all was. I ask, and nobody will tell me.” (102). Updike has vividly portrayed the turbulent world of Caldwell and his futile attempt to find meaning of life in the random universe. He interprets his experiences in light of their mythical parallels. Another effect achieved by the application of the mythical to the plane of reality is to emphasize the duality of man’s nature. Caldwell is on the boundary between heaven and earth. Bound to the earth, he rebels against

the straitening circumstance of his existence in seeking some concrete explanation of all. He is forced to endure. The figure of Chiron as half-human, half-divine is perfectly clear, but the duality of Caldwell's nature and the meaning of his quest is borne out in other ways as well. He imagines himself underworld among the Janitors: "It was warmest there, the steam pipes sang, the talk made sense" (21). The people in the depths of the building attract him more than the brooding spirit of Zimmerman/Zeus above, "He always felt securer among the people who staffed the school, who fed its furnaces, the janitors, the cooks" (21). Divinity is incomprehensible to him, it makes him feel uncomfortable. The only time he feels comfortable in the upper portions of the building is when Zimmerman and the students are gone and he is not called upon to function as a teacher. Updike has portrayed Caldwell/Chiron figure, through the symbols of duality. There are two times and two clocks in the Caldwell kitchen. One clock belongs to Pop Kramer, or Father Time, the other is a cheap electric clock bought by Caldwell at a discount. Caldwell seems continually late for school, for his dental appointment, for his appointment with Doc Appleton. Caldwell is a man out of his own time, born too late, with no place in contemporary society. It is, in fact, against the conformity of contemporary society that he rebels. He is attracted, to the days of the pre-Homeric Greeks, when life was casual and simple and satisfying. Thus, time seems to run on two levels, the contemporary level and Caldwell's level, which is thousands of years too late. The anxieties that trouble him are the result of the society he lives in and are not, he feels. He longs to live "without cares or labors never growing old, dancing, and laughing much" (78), and never to fear death. Duality of character in the other figures of the book parallels that of Chiron/Caldwell. Peter frequently accompanied his mother to the Alton museum through park-like surroundings that became "an even older world, Arcadian" (82). Mrs. Caldwell is pleased to see her subjects obeying divine decree, and this accounts in part for her distress at her husband's lack of interest in sex.

Another structural element gained for the book by the use of the myth is that of unity. The conflict of the plot is built upon the possibility of Caldwell's fatal illness, and by adapting the story of Chiron to the events of Caldwell's life. Updike manages to keep everything in focus. We know that Chiron is not susceptible to

curative treatment, because his wound was poisoned, and we know also that he eventually sacrificed himself for the sake of Prometheus. As the story of Caldwell progresses, everything points to the fact that he is preparing for death. At first, perhaps, subconsciously, and later consciously, his actions are dictated by the assumption that he has not much time remaining. Peter notices that his father is preparing for a final journey, although he tends to place the blame on himself: "I'm killing my father. Peter thinks, amazed" (193). At Potteiger's grocery, where it is Caldwell's habit to do the family shopping on the way home from school, he purchases supplies on Wednesday afternoon, when they finally do get back from town, "as if the next day there might be fewer mouths to feed" (210). And in the last scene in the book, Caldwell admits to himself that he had been saying goodbye to everything, tidying up the books, readying himself for a charge reader, along with Caldwell, has been preparing himself for the death of Caldwell. When he hears from Mrs. Caldwell that the illness is not a carcinoma, the reader feels an emotional letdown, until he remembers that the sacrifice has not yet been accomplished. If Caldwell is not to die, the sacrifice must consist of something other than physical death, and thus the way is cleared for Caldwell's final gesture, his renunciation of the spirit. Thus, in applying the mythological structure, Updike achieves a dramatic unity for his plot without surrendering control over the action.

In the novel, the Chiron myth has functional value and significance. Caldwell uses the mythical plane to impose order on his formless existence. By comparing himself to Chiron, he can understand and dignify some of the experiences of his life. At times he reacts defensively, to protect himself from menacing aspects of his life. Galloway sees the application of the myth as serving two functions: "Myth and legend would seem to serve two functions in modern literatures to suggest, after the manner of Jung, archetypical experiences, or to demonstrate, through contrast, modern man's decreased stature and relevance. Updike's use of the Chiron myth serves both functions" (Galloway 121). As Galloway points out that Updike does not dwell upon "the decreased stature and relevance" of man so much as to try to show the opposite in the figure of George Caldwell. Caldwell gains significance through his solitary rebellion against the dictates of contemporary society. It is against the values of Zimmerman, Phillips, Reverend March, and the others that Caldwell struggles, and in so doing he gains a

stature that the others have lost. Galloway goes on to say, “ The result of these fluid transitions (from reality to myth) is that *The Centaur* is not merely a retelling of the myth of Chiron but an ironic suggestion of the mythical dimensions of even the most ordinary contemporary experience” (121). Thus, Galloway too sees Caldwell rising above futility in his insistence on seeking some meaning in his haphazard existence. The mythical dimensions of ordinary experience are placed there by the author to show that the individual search can still impart some meaning to life. Reviewers have remarked upon the brilliance of individual passages and upon Updike’s skill with language. Galloway says:

The refinements and subtleties of language ask us to pause over characters who would ordinarily seem undeserving of our attention, to see drama in conventional middle-class situations which would otherwise seem singularly unromantic. To his characteristic technical adroitness Updike adds a mythological superstructure in *The Centaur* to reinforce the significance of the drama he depicts. (Galloway 122)

The mythical background helps to define the main themes of John Updike and the meaning of life in this universe where Promethean struggle is inevitable for the survival of man.

### **The Father-Son Relationship in *The Centaur***

One of the prominent themes in John Updike’s *Centaur* is father-son relationship depicted in the contemporary situation. One of Caldwell’s principal anxieties is his failure to find meaning of life. The text is full of many examples and gives concrete evidence of Caldwell’s tensions of life. A *good* deal of attention is paid to actual physical movement, Caldwell walks and walks one of his most immediate pleasures is walking. Peter says, “I wonder if any man ever enjoyed walking in the small ugly cities of the East as much as ray father... To walk beside my father down Sixth Street was to hear the asphalt sing” (112). Peter remembers that as a child he had once “stood beside his knees on the brick walk leading to the grape arbor of our house in Olinger and felt him look level into the tops of the horse chestnut trees and believed that nothing could ever go wrong as long as we stood so”

(53). And as a grown man telling the story to his mistress, Peter says, “His upper half was hidden from me, I knew him best by his legs” (201). This emphasis upon the distance between the planes in which the father and son more indicates not only the Idea of the search but the level of the search as, Caldwell’s search is on an entirely different plane from the one in which ordinary life moves. Rabbit Angstrom runs and George Caldwell walks, and in both cases the idea of physical movement serves to denote the search for intellectual values. “Once you’ve sold out your legs, Caldwell tells Peter, you’ve sold out your life” (116). If the self-reliance of walking becomes symbolic of the search for spiritual meaning, then the automobile could well become symbolic of conformity. By giving up walking, or the search, one compromises his values and conforms to the standards which surround him in contemporary society. In several scenes, he is attempting to learn from others the meaning that has eluded him, he questions bums, ministers, alcoholics, fellow-teachers, everyone who will listen, but the fervidness of his manner at first dismays and then embarrasses them, and he is once more repulsed. In one of the earlier scenes, as Caldwell and Peter are on their way to school, they stop for a hitchhiker who has abnormally large feet and peculiarly shaped shoes. On the mythical level, this is Hermes, who served as the herald of the gods and as the patron of roads and travelers, in addition to being a thief. On the level of reality, this character is an alcoholic, a sometime cook, and a homosexual derelict. In such as this, Peter his father brought a cavernous capacity for caring that dismayed strangers. They found themselves involved, willy-nilly, in a futile but arguent search for the truth. This morning my father’s search seemed especially urgent. His encounter with the hitchhiker gives him the meaning of freedom:

What’s your verdict? You’re a man I admire. You’ve had the guts to do what I always wanted to, move around, see the cities. Do you think I’ve missed out? You aren’t missed, a thing. The words curled back on themselves like offended feelers. Have you done anything you like to remember? I was awake all last night trying to remember something pleasant and I couldn’t do it. Misery and horror, that’s my memories. This hurt ray feelings, he had had me. The hitchhiker’s voice scribbled, maybe it was a laugh “Last month I killed a goddam dog,” he said, “How’s that?” (69)



The traditional novelists lay stress on depicting the thing as they are to achieve verisimilitude but John Updike depicts the elements of hyperreality. While this conversation is going on, Peter feels their guest making tentative gestures toward him, until finally the man goes so far as to brush the back of his neck. He deeply resents his father's having placed him in this position, and when, after they have dropped off the hitchhiker and arrived at school, Peter discovers that the man has taken from the back seat the expensive gloves he had given his father for Christmas, his resentment is expressed in an attack on his father. Peter sees his father's desire to learn from even the most casual meeting as a flaw. He finds his father struggling to find a meaning of life. He realizes the purpose behind his father's actions. Irony in the present situation is completely beyond his ability to Interpret.

In a similar scene, a young alcoholic who functions on the mythical plan as Dionysus, the god of wine, accosts Peter and Caldwell as they return to their inoperative automobile from their vain trip to the all-night garage. Trying to blackmail Caldwell, whom he accuses of being a homosexual with lascivious designs upon Peter, the young drunk demands first ten dollars, then five, then one, for his silence, and finally he accepts the thirty-five cents, all the money Caldwell has. Again, Caldwell's gentleness and courtesy are prominent in a situation which normally would bring out the opposite attributes in most men. He seriously considers the drunk's question "Are you ready to die?" (121). Peter is obsessed with his health, burdened with responsibilities and dissatisfied with life, Caldwell has been wondering if death is the only answer to life. He is leading a life full of miseries and feels void in his existence. He experiences complete blankness and is worried about the survival of family. He raises serious questions: "If he should die? Are you ready to die? He asked to drunk. What do you think the answer is?" (12). He refuses to take responsibility like Harry of the Rabbit novels. Caldwell is disappointed since he discovers that his life is just a waste in this random universe. Caldwell's own father had been a minister who had lost his faith at his death at the age of forty-nine. In another important scene we see him attempting to explore the traditional theological approach to his problem. He chooses the worst possible place and time for a conversation and consequently his quest is once more doomed from the intent upon

Vera Hummel, Caldwell takes the opportunity to question March about his faith. March had been a timid, effeminate, sexually uncertain, ineffectual weakling pushed into the ministry by a domineering mother. He had enlisted in the infantry, not the chaplain corps, and had distinguished himself for courageous action in the North African and Italian campaigns. He had returned, from the war as a mature, self-reliant, smoldering man. March's faith had found Justification and strength in his wartime experiences, which had confirmed him in his belief in the God of the Old Testament, a Jealous and powerful god of war. His interest in Vera is decidedly erotic, and she whole-heartedly returns this interest. Since March serves as Mars, the god of war, and Vera serves as Venus, love meetings have mythical significance. When Caldwell thinks of March talking to Vera he gets disillusioned, dispirited, and pain-ridden. He bursts into their bower, where religion has become simply a tool for seduction, to ask about the meaning of life. Caldwell explains:

What I could never ram through my thick skull was why the ones that don't have it were created in the first place. The only reason I could figure out was that God had to have somebody to fry down in Hell. (189)

Caldwell can't accept the conformity of the fellow teachers of the institution, nor can he obtain any satisfaction in the beliefs of infinite grace offered by Reverend March. The magic realism points out this aspect of Updike's works obviously, Caldwell is confronted with the question simply to be punished? Is there nothing else for those that are never going to get it? Caldwell again raises the question: "Can't see how it's infinite if it never changes anything at all" (189). Caldwell is under the impression that he is soon retreating. Caldwell's search for the meaning of life is his relationship with his son. He loves his wife and admires his father-in-law. His love for his son is revealed in his feelings for Peter. His sense of inadequacy toward Peter is so acute that he can seldom look at the boy without a feeling of guilt. He frequently tells Peter that he would not worry about himself, that it is Peter's welfare that concerns him. "You deserved a winner and you got a loser, he tells Peter" (116).

Caldwell thinks he fails to measure up to his standards of such a father as the boy really deserves. It is such emotions as these that Caldwell brings to his relationship with his sons: tenderness, love, humility, self-abrogation and a feeling of inadequacy. Caldwell, inadequate though he considers himself, might do irreparable damage to the boy's life. Granted that Caldwell is one of the non-elect and has no right to hope for success in life, Peter nevertheless certainly deserves a chance for happiness, and the loss of his father could only assure the boy of nothing but more misery. Caldwell never reproaches his son: "If I had your self-confidence I would've taken your mother onto the Burly-cue stage and you never would have been born, this is as close to a rebuke of his son as he ever came" (158). Peter, in his immaturity, can never show the same restraint. As he describes it, "My voice with him was almost always accusing" (61). He is ashamed of his father's actions, his shabby appearance, his too-short overcoat and the knitted cap, which he feels makes his father look like a moron.

Symbolically, Caldwell, in protecting his son from the harshness of life, offers not only his physical presence but his values as well. But Peter's accusing attitude toward his father does not reveal the whole story. His anxiety over his father's health is more of an intellectual than an emotional acceptance until the loss of the gloves shows Peter that his father's life could be lost just as easily and perhaps as casually. In his emotional acceptance of the possibility of his father's death, Peter takes one more step toward the position now occupied by his father. Peter prefers to go with his father to Doc Appleton, because, he says, he has no friends. And as he explains to Penny: "I'm the only person in the world he can talk to...He has no friends, they don't help him" (9). However, Peter cannot resist using his father's illness to serve his own purposes, which is another sign of his immaturity.

Caldwell's closeness to his son leads him into treating the boy in a more adult fashion than is consonant with his age. This also seems to help prepare the way for Peter later to adopt the values of his father, placing adult responsibility on the boy, Caldwell helps shape the boy in his own image intellectually. He shows Peter the copy of Zimmerman's evaluation of his visit to the classroom. Peter, in his clash of wills with Zimmerman, blurts out his knowledge of the report. Zimmerman

reasonably points out that perhaps Caldwell is placing too much responsibility on his son. Peter senses his father's responsibility as an assumption of anxiety for all, Peter, his mother, the students, in addition to Caldwell's concern for his own health, but Zimmerman interprets Caldwell's actions as an attempt to evade responsibility. Galloway sees Caldwell as a Christ-like figure, but "the mythological metaphor of the novel, however, continuously reminds us that the principles Caldwell represents are far more ancient (and in many respects more universal) than those represented by Christ" (Galloway 125). Peter clearly sees that his father is misunderstood and unappreciated by others. In addition to the intellectual and emotional rapport between Peter and his father, there is a very close physical resemblance. If Caldwell is more or less unconsciously preparing the boy as the successor to himself by preparing him to adopt his own spiritual values, Peter seems to be developing both physically and spiritually along the same lines. Johnny Dedman especially notes the resemblance as he sees them standing together in Minor's cafe: "Hey Peter. Wife you and your father standing up there against the light for a second I couldn't tell which was which" (162). Dedman had called, "Like son, like father, huh Minor?" (158). The emotional bond between the two is secure and deep, and the physical resemblance seems to presage the eventual replacement of the father by the son, Peter's querulous patronizing of his father is common behavior at his age, it does not directly reflect his time attitude, and it will pass with time. But Peter will never succeed in sloughing off his father's influence, just as Caldwell was forever after haunted *by* his father's final gesture. Years later Peter confesses that he cannot follow his own desires, that his freedom is limited by the memory of his father. Thus, the generations live on in the succeeding generations, Caldwell's gesture will live on in Peter's life, when we come to a discussion of the significance of Chiron's sacrifice. *The Centaur* explores the nature of human life and experience in a manner that raises the stature of mankind to the heroic levels of ancient mythology. The "littleness" Rowland seems to find in the short stories is certainly not present in the novel.

Several scenes deal with Peter as Prometheus, and Chapter Five is devoted exclusively to a portrayal of the agony of Prometheus. Composed of the details of Peter's day in school from the time he sees his father disappear down the hall. The

first sentence, “As I lay on bay rock various persons visited me” (13), sets the tone for the two parallel traditions at work here, the mythical and the Christian, just as the two are at work in the case of Caldwell himself.

To conclude, John Updike’s novel *The Centaur* is a study of the malaise of the American people who are leading an empty and meaningless life. They are so much obsessed with the mundane problems of life that they fail to find and relevance and meaning of life. John Updike won the National Book Award when he wrote this novel in 1963 because he depicted the helplessness of man employing the intertextual techniques of Fredric Jameson’s postmodernism. John Updike uses the greek mythical samples to explore the inner turbulent world of his protagonists. The whole novel is a typical juxtaposition of reality and fantasy, dream and truth and the modern life and the life led by the religious of Greek mythology. Caldwell interprets his situations and challenges of life invoking the actions of centaur, Venus, March and Prometheus and Zeus. The myth of Prometheus is invoked to comprehend the real cause of human sufferings, like Prometheus man is bound by the wheel of fire and is pitted against the fate and chance. Caldwell and Peter represent the contemporary American men who are destined to live with void. They have to live and struggle to survive in the random universe, in this word love, life and happiness is uncertain and evasive.

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