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Harry Angstrom's Spiritual Dilemma

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to demonstrate how the freedom-safety dilemma embodied in John Updike's Rabbit, Run provides a psychological center from which the motivation for action and the development of character in this novel derives. This dilemma establishes the dialectic between man's inherent drive to achieve satisfaction through individuation and the necessity to avoid isolation and remain safe. This article traces the development of Rabbit's attempt to escape the traps of a confining environment and his quest for a spiritual dimension. And it also investigates how Rabbit's freedom itself becomes a burden.

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The search for the transcendence to fit the needs of modern man is the central motif of Rabbit Run. This book tells how an individual rebels against the entombing society as a snare waiting to catch him everywhere he goes. In the novel the urgencies of sex and death and the tension between freedom and safety provide the fields of force in which the protagonist acts in a zig-zag course, but the problem of the individual in society remains unsolved.

This novel is unanimously recognized by critics to be a novel of the 1950's, with the duly acknowledged setting of a small Pennsylvania town of the time, and the

culture of common experience--popular songs, television shows, and the like. The protagonist of the story is called Harry "Rabbit" Angstrom, a former high-school basketball star, now twenty-six years old and married to Janice Springer, daughter of a used-car dealer. They have a son, Nelson, and live at the town of Mt. Judge, Pennsylvania, The story is divided into three sections. The first section involves Rabbit running away from Janice and his cohabitation with Ruth Leonard. The second section deals with Rabbit's return to Janice after the birth of their daughter, his running again, and the death of the baby. The last section deals with the funeral, Rabbit running from the funeral, and the story ends with his running away from Ruth.

Rabbit's personality is complex and hardly definable. He always takes pride in dressing neatly; he never fouled when he played basketball in his school days; he always carries about with him an undefined spiritual ideal. But his behavior, especially his statements at the funeral, is baffling or even offensive to many readers, especially to Chinese readers, who are profoundly influenced by Confucian ethical tradition. Although a lot of explanations have been made, they seem unsatisfactorily convincing. Consequently, the critical voices in regard to the judgment of Rabbit are widely divergent. In the early years since the publication of Rabbit, Run, many critics condemned Rabbit as an anti-hero for his sin or irresponsibility.[1] However, there are also critics who give positive evaluation. David D. Galloway even admires him as an absurd hero, a saint.[2] Only gradually has the book come to be widely accepted by

1. Edward P. Vargo gives a comprehensive summary of pros and cons of critics before him in his Rainstorm and Fire: Ritual in the Novels of John Updike (Port Washington, N.Y.: Kennikat Press, 1973), pp. 51-5.

2. David D. Galloway, The Absurd Hero in American Fiction (Austin & London: University of Texas Press, 1966), p. 20.

critics and common readers.

In the beginning scene Rabbit flees from his wife and drives aimlessly for a whole night. Then he goes to his old basketball coach, Tothero, in Brewer. In Tothero's apartment, he experiences momentary joy and "feels freedom like oxygen everywhere around him."[3] Freedom is a theme to which Updike returns continually.[4] Updike himself confirms that Rabbit "wants to be both safe and free,"[5]

Freedom, like all other ideas of value, has its inner complexity and ambiguity. Freedom in this book is used both in the positive sense of "freedom to" and the negative sense of "freedom from," and is interweaved with and complementary to such major themes as sex, death, and belief. Rabbit seeks freedom to lead a better, less secular life, to search for religious certainty, and to find communion in the act of love. On the other hand, he wants to be free from the social demands, responsibility, restraints, and fear of death.

However, freedom has its dialectic quality. Freedom allows man power and space to fulfill his individual satisfaction and realization, but it must be achieved by eliminating certain relationship that connects the individual with the world. Individuation results in isolation, fear, powerlessness and doubt concerning one's identity. Thus Rabbit exhibits some factors common in man's nature which are unchangeable: the necessity to satisfy the individual needs and the necessity to avoid isolation, to maintain security. Rabbit's acquired freedom is always accompanied by

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3. John Updike, Rabbit Run, (Conn.: Fawcett, 1960), p. 45. This novel , when referred to, will hereafter be abbreviated as Run, and incorporated in the text. There are two different published texts of Run, and a third which is less variant. All that I quote in my discussion appears unchanged in the aforementioned edition, which is chosen for its easy availability. Randall H. Waldron presents a very detailed account of the alterations in his "Rabbit Revised" in American Literature, March 1984, pp. 51-67.

4. Alice and Kenneth Hamilton, The Elements of John Updike p. 61,

5. Michiko Kakutani, "Turning Sex and Guilt into an American Epic," Saturday Review, Oct. 1981, p.

fear, by a sense of unsafety. It is this contradiction that makes Rabbit oscillate between Janice and Ruth, that makes him escape from and reintegrate into the society. He is oscillating between freedom and safety.

Undoubtedly, Rabbit is on a quest. But at the very beginning, he is escaping from, rather than searching for, something. In the alley basketball game, finding that he still retains his skill and his touch still lives in his hands, he feels elated and "liberated from long gloom" (Run, p. 9), This game awakens his sense of the past glory and makes him feel his present situation unbearable, because his basketball is first-rate, while his marriage is second-rate, which he cannot accept. The imagery of basketball recurs again and again in the development of the novel, becoming part of his source of comfort as well as his source of pain. Returning from the game, he feels that everything goes wrong. Not Only his slovenly, tippling wife, but even the environment on Rabbit's way home, evoked through descriptive imagery, appears hostile, forcing him to escape.

He does not drive long before he finds that the road becomes a part of the same trap, and “the further he drives the more he feels some great confused system, Baltimore now instead of Philadelphia, reaching for him” (Run, p. 30). Later, he becomes hopelessly lost, circling aimlessly through the night. He checks the map, but it doesn't help. The map becomes “a net he is somewhere caught in” (Run, p.34), so he tears the map up and throws it away. Of course, Rabbit cannot find any help from the map, which is symbolic of the social system he is trying to escape from. Dean Doner gives a very illustrative comment on the opening sequence:[6]

> This opening sequence is the whole novel in miniature, for Rabbit's story is a series of encounters from which he runs, intuitively upward, following a "light" which he knows must exist but which he can never truly see and

6. Dean Doner, "Rabbit Angstrom's Unseen World." in his New World Writing 20 (Philadelphia: Lippincott Co., 1962),pp. 63-75. Rpt. in John Updike: A Collection of Critical Essays, ed, David Thorburn and Howard Eiland (N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1979), p. 25,

> never finds. It is possible to say that Rabbit never does decide where he wants to go--it may be impossible for anyone to say that--but there are moments when he almost glimpses his destination. His attempts to communicate this intuition, however, are never successful, and his failure draws the net always closer around him and increases the sense of "crowding" which he fears. The roadmap--the way laid out for him by other people--always leads Rabbit further into the net.

Just as Tony Tanner puts it, "decisions which start in simplicity can end in a renewed thickening of the encircling clutter and confusion."[7] Traps are everywhere around him, fears crowd him, and none of his attempts satisfies him.

Apart from trap and net, the images of door and wall also suggest the confining environment Rabbit tries to escape. For example, in the very first scene as he steps into his apartment, the objects begin to close in. Locked doors irritate him, and again the half-opening closet door interferes with his movements (Run, pp. 10-13). Doors figure prominently in Rabbit's spaces. When he goes again to Ruth at the end of the book, doors stand between him and her (Run, p. 249).

Rabbit is running from a lot of things, away from a compromised society, for one thing. But I would like to agree with Tony Tanner that "it is death that Harry is really in flight from--unwilling to confront or accept the ancient truth that in the matter of man's relation to death 'away from' and `toward' are the same thing."[8] Death is the major source of his fear and his sense of unsafety. The first night he stays in Ruth's apartment, he has a dream in which Janice's face melts down after she is scolded by his mother. The dream signifies the loss of human identity as well as death. The mother as death image will develop more fully in Rabbit Redux.

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7. Tony Tanner, City of Words : American Fiction 1950-1970 (N.Y.; Harper & Row, Publishers, 1971), p. 280.

8. Tony Tanner, p. 283.

According to Joyce B. Markle, the mother simultaneously figuring as life and death is referred to obliquely in Rabbit, Run.[9] Rabbit has an anxiety fantasy that the woman who gave life could take it away: " ... he begun in her stomach and if she gave him life she can take it away" (Run, p. 239). In Rabbit, Run, Tothero as death image is clearly seen, In the beginning of the novel, we read "Next to his mother Tothero had had the most force" (Run, p, 18). The "force" is the force of death. And, then, near the end of the story, we read, "He must blot Tothero and Ruth out of his mind both remind him of death" (Run, p. 192). Tothero, Tod or dead hero, is Rabbit's boyhood basketball coach. And he is dying of cancer when Rabbit goes to hospital to see Janice and his new-born baby. Rabbit's going to Tothero testifies Tony Tanner's statement that in the matter of man's relation to death "away from" and "toward" are the same thing. Tothero is death; Rabbit's going to him means going to death. On the other hand, Tothero is connected with Rabbit's past glory. Going to him is returning to the past. Returning to the past suggests the refusal to grow old, which, in turn, signifies the refusal to accept death. But ironically Tothero himself is death.

The fear of death pervades the novel, and the membrane imagery suggesting the brittleness of life appears several times; "child's sleep is so heavy he fears it might break the membrane of life and fall through to oblivion" (Run, p. 191). And seeing Tothero dying of cancer makes him feel claustrophobic. In fact, most of the major elements of this novel, such as religion, sex, and the past, are connected with Rabbit's effort to be free from the fear of death.

Critics have identified Rabbit's running as a religious quest, a search for meaning beyond the secular world.[10] Rabbit thinks he has a special belief, and by this special belief he can transcend death. He despises those who go to church but accept

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9. Joyce B. Markle, Fighters and Lovers (N,Y,: New York University Press, 1973), p. 99,

10. The most successful discussion of the quest motif is Joseph Waldmeir's "It's the Going That's Important, Not the Getting There: Rabbit's Questing Non-Quest," Modern Fiction Studies, Spring 1974, pp. 13-27.

death as the end of everything. However, this spiritual quality of Rabbit puts him in a dilemma. His religious quest, which partly contributes to his freedom, causes damage to his family and hurts people around him.

The sense of uniqueness in belief renders him isolated and insecure. The church should be able to provide him a feeling of belonging and security, but in the end the unlit church window denies him the hope. The minister, Eccles, tries to help him, but his humanistic position and his dogged persistence in attempts to reunite Rabbit with his family threatens to block Rabbit's freedom of belief.

Rabbit's religious quality is vague and ambiguous. What does Rabbit really want? He does not know. He only feels that "somewhere behind all this there's something that wants me to find it" (Run, p. 107). Yet he does not know what it is. Some critics try to illustrate Rabbit's situation by the epigraph from Pascal, "The motions of Grace, the hardness of the heart; external circumstances." External circumstances bring a weight of responsibility to bear on him. Turning to "the motions of Grace", he must assume "the hardness of the heart" and leave his family. But Rabbit's heart is not always hard. He often thinks of his family while he is away, and he twice returns to Janice, trying to reunite with her.

Summoned by the "something behind all this," Rabbit cannot choose but abdicate the general social norm, which comes into conflict with his personal needs. His vision of sun, moon, and church windows underlies his spiritual illusions. In the first night at Ruth's apartment, at the moment of post-coital sadness, he feels despair and gains comfort by looking at the church window:

> The more wake he gets the more depressed he is. From deep in the pillow he stares at the horizontal strip of stained-glass church window that shows under the window shade. Its childish brightness seems the one kind of comfort left to him. (Run, p. 74)

His association with Eccles is the most evident proof of his effort to be a true

Christian, to be blessed and forgiven. Although he disagrees with Eccles in their beliefs, and although he sometimes feels threatened by Eccles' presence because the minister's humanistic position represents just one more element of control, of restraint to his freedom to believe, he does not reject Eccles; instead he even seeks the minister's friendship. For instance, after he runs from the funeral, the first thing he wants to do is to give Eccles a phone call. During his reunion with Janice after the birth of the baby, he even goes to Eccles' church, listens to the minister's admonitions as a child might listen to his father, and seems prepared to lead a new life:

> Harry is happy to go to Eccles' church. Not merely out of affection for Eccles, though there's that; but because he considers himself happy, lucky, blessed, forgiven, and wants to give thanks. (Run, p. 195)

Unfortunately, this temporary feeling does not endure. His next flight on the same day, which appears unconvincingly motivated, brings an irremediable disaster to the family.

Among those who attend the funeral, Rabbit thinks he is the only one who truly believes in Heaven, and this belief makes him experience a sense of liberation (Run, p. 243).

Rabbit's pursuit of an unseen world has been elucidated by many critics. But to him the unseen world remains undefined, probably because of his limited intellectual ability. He feels it with his heart, instead of reasoning with his head. His inarticulateness, together with his desire to protect himself, blocks his communication with others: "Rabbit doesn't want to tell him anything. The more he tells the more he loses. He's safe inside his own skin, he doesn't want to come out" (Run, p. 105). However, he sometimes does succeed in expressing his feelings, for instance, when he feels safe with Eccles:

> The excitement of friendship, a competitive excitement that makes him lift

> his hands and jiggle them as if thoughts were basketballs, presses him to say. "Well I don't know all this about theology, but I'11 tell you. I do feel, I guess, that somewhere behind all this"--he gestures outward at the scenery; they are passing the housing development this side of the golf course, half-wood half brick one-and-half-stories in little flat bulldozed yards with tricycles and spindly three-year-old trees, the un-grandest landscape in the world--"there's something that wants me to find it." (Run, p. 107)

Much of the novel concerns Rabbit's quest for the "something behind all this." But Rabbit faces a spiritual dilemma here. In the concluding paragraph he articulates his attitude toward life: "Goodness lies inside, there is nothing outside ... " (Run, p. 254). If there is nothing outside, then the quest must happen within the self. Then his running is pointless. His dilemma is acute: he has faith, but he "has no taste for the dark, tangled, visceral aspect of Christianity ... " (Run, p. 197), However, his faith does not seem to be strong enough either.[11] His short talk with Ruth about the church shows this:

> "You don't believe anything?" "No, YOU mean you do?" "Well, yeah. I think so." Her rasp, her sureness, makes him wince; he wonders if he's lying. If he is, he is hung in middle of nowhere, and the thought hollows him … he clings to the thought giddily; it seems a visual proof of the unseen world. (Run, p. 77)

And when he looks at the bathtub where his baby got drowned, a doubt about his faith arises, " ... yet in all his strength God did nothing. Just that little rubber stopper to lift" (Run, p. 230).

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11. Norris W. Yates, "The Doubt and Faith of John Updike," College English, March 1965, pp. 469-72.

As Edward Vargo points out, the most powerful metaphor of the unseen world is the stained glass church window across from Ruth's apartment.[12] And Rabbit repeatedly turns to the brilliantly lit window to keep his vague belief in the transcendent, as he does on the night Eccles calls him back to Janice and on the night of his second flight from Janice. However, in the end, this sign of spiritual reality fails him too. After his final meeting with Ruth, he walks in the street and feels afraid and remembers "what once consoled him by seeming to make a hole where he looked through into underlying brightness." He turns his eyes to the church window, only to see an unlit window, "a dark circle in a stone facade" (Run, 254). The fact that faith fails him indicates the church's place in modern society and the separation of the righteousness of god from that of man. Just as Karl Earth laments: "How difficult it is, with pure heart and in awe of the Holy one, to take even the shortest step with Christ into society! How unapproachably the Divine, when it is really the Divine, veils itself from the human, to which today we would so gladly unite it!"[13]

Sex for Rabbit has its spiritual connotations. Rabbit's association with Ruth embodies his freedom to choose a spiritual life as well as freedom from his dreary marriage and from the confining environment. In addition, sex may be a way of preserving life and of establishing the familial continuity in its connection with the principle of reproduction. (This connection is more evident in Rabbit Is Rich.) The extension of the self partakes of eternity, and with this the fear of death can be allayed. The dilemma is that this continuation of blood entails the responsibility that Rabbit tries to avoid.

Rabbit is really excited by the birth of his daughter Becky, but he does not fulfill his duty as a father; instead, he runs away, for a petty reason--his wife rejects his

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12 Vargo, p. 63.

13 Karl Earth, The Word of God and the World of Man, (New York and Evanstan: Harper & Row, 1957), p. 278

attempt to make love. His sexual demand upon Janice amounts to nothing more than animal lust. When sex is degenerated, to Rabbit, it can become a destructive force. In Rabbit, Run, it brings disaster to Rabbit's family.

Besides, his relationship with Ruth brings an aftermath: when he runs from the funeral and goes to Ruth, he learns that she is pregnant with his child. Rabbit wants Ruth to keep the child. When Ruth admits that she has not had an abortion and that, on the contrary, she has already made arrangements to return to her parents, she confronts Rabbit with a snare:

> "Pregnant's a nice word, it happens to everybody, you don't have to think too much what you must do to get that way, Now I'd like to marry you. I would. I mean whatever I said but if we're married it'll be all right. Now you work it out. You divorce that wife you feel so sorry for about once a month 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." (Run, p. 253)

This is a real dilemma for him. Janice, money, Eccles' phone call, and the look on his mother's face--all these worries clatter together. He cannot work out a way to solve the problem, and once again he runs. There is also an irony to this event. Children are the fruits of love and marriage as well as the hope of future. Rebecca, the result of Rabbit's legitimate marriage, dies as a consequence of his thwarted attempt to make love to his wife, while his adulterous affair results in a link with the future. His desire to preserve life through sex is illuminated by his rejecting Ruth's use of contraception device. And, after love-making, when Ruth goes into the bathroom to wash, he feels depressed: "There's that in women repels him; handle themselves like an old envelope. Tubes into tubes, wash away men's dirt, insulting, really. Faucets cry. The more awake he gets the more depressed he is" (Run, p. 74).

Rabbit seeks communion in the act of love with Ruth. He asks in love for a

moment of full life in which time and eternity unite, and thus the distinction between life and death diminishes: "They enter a lazy space, He wants the time to stretch long, to great length and thinness" (Run, p. 72). This communion, if successfully achieved, may free Rabbit from the fear of death, at least temporarily. On the other hand, it helps to abolish solitude, and provides a spiritual shelter. Unfortunately, Rabbit's sex with Ruth is not wholly satisfactory. Throughout the novel, communion is inaccessible, partly because his strong self-awareness intervenes, partly because the love Rabbit finds in their relationship is pagan, or sheer lust. He still feels isolated:

> As they deepen together he feels impatience that through all their twists they remain separate flesh; he cannot dare enough, now that she is so much his friend in this search; everywhere they meet a wall, (Run, p. 72)

After the sexual release, despair overcomes him. And then he looks at the church window. As sex provides only temporary illusory comfort and Rabbit never feels truly satisfied with it, he turns to religion,

Basketball is very important to Rabbit, though the alley game in the beginning pages of the story is the only time that he actually plays basketball in the course of the novel. When he dines with Tothero and the two prostitutes, he talks about basketball and cannot help becoming enthusiastic: "and I get this funny feeling I can do anything, just drifting around, passing the ball, and all of a sudden I know, you see, I know I can do anything" (Run, P. 58). The frequent repetition of the basketball imagery is highly ambiguous. Joyce B. Markle gives the fullest discussion. Markle associates basketball with sex, religion, and the imaginary trap threatening Rabbit's freedom. It is associated with sex for the obvious image of the circle or hole, a female symbol; it is associated with religion because the light-filled circle of the basket resembles the circular church window where Rabbit looks for the light which attests to God's existence. On the other hand, the net on the basketball hoop suggests

the trap Rabbit tries to escape from.[14]

However, there are some other significances in basketball that are no less important than what Markle has noticed. It is through the sense of his past glory in the basketball field that Rabbit discovers the compromises he has made with mediocrity, and so he embarks on a journey to recover that excellence and to redefine his personal standards. Furthermore, this repeated momentary returning to the past is connected with the cardinal facts of human life: time, death and solitude. One critic points out that the patterns of repetition, especially of the thing in the past, gives us "a sense of Rabbit's spiritual isolation from the past."[15] This is only half true. We already know that Rabbit is isolated in the horizontal connections, the social relationship. Basketball establishes a connection between Rabbit and his past life and this connection transcends his solitude. Also, this returning to the past signifies a kind of freedom from the fixed, one-directional quality of time, and with this an avoidance of death. In fact, another critic, Donald J. Greiner, has pointed out that Rabbit's escape in space is an attempt to avoid time.[16] This desire to escape time becomes more evident in the concluding chapter of Rabbit Redux, where the protagonist muses resignedly: "Time is our element" (Redux, pp. 324-5). However, Rabbit's former basketball coach disappoints him and their meeting reveals that the past glory is irretrievable: "Rabbit sees that Tothero is a fool … " (Run, p. 47). Near the end of the hook, Tothero is dying of cancer.

The pattern of imagery associated with hands is worth notice too. Throughout the whole book, Rabbit's hands are always carefully described. This overtly excessive attention to the hands may seem narcissistic, yet it is with his hands that Rabbit meets his world. The hands touch the door, which symbolize the lack of

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14 Markle, pp.42-5,

15. David M. Cox, "An Examination of Thematic and Structural Connections between John Updike's Rabbit Novels," Diss. Ohio University, 1978, p. 17.

16. Donald J. Greiner, John Updike's Novels (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1985), p. 80.

communication; and they touch the basketball, a symbol of Rabbit's past life. Thus the hand is a medium with which Rabbit establishes connections both with the horizontal dimension of space and with the vertical dimension of time. A few quoted passages would be helpful to understand this. In the alley basketball game, Rabbit "wiggles the ball with nervousness in front of his chest, one wide spread pale hand on top of the ball and the other underneath, jiggling it patiently to get some adjustment in air itself, The moons on his fingernails are big" (Run, p. 8). A few paragraphs later Rabbit feels elated because "his touch still lives in his hands" (Run, p. 9). After the game, Rabbit returns home: "The door is locked. In fitting the little key into the lock his hand trembles ... " (Run p. 10). And then, on the next page, Rabbit presses the door shut: " ... it clicks but then swings open again an inch or two. Locked doors. It rankles: his hand trembling in the lock like some old man and her sitting in here listening to the scratching" (Run, p. 11).

Apart from basketball, Rabbit also devotes special attention to the family life of his childhood and adolescence, much of which Bryant N. Wyatt dismisses as pointless,[17] and J. A. Ward regards as nostalgia,[18] But there are at least two other aspects to this. Rabbit's repeated recollections of his boyhood, together with the basketball imagery, is his means of returning to the past, a gesture of refusing to grow old, Rabbit's fixation to the past, in Freudian terms, alienates the neurotic from the present and commits him to the unconscious quest for the past. And the refusal to grow old is the intermediate term between fixation to the past and the repression of death.[19]

Throughout the novel, we see Rabbit as a solitary, vulnerable being, although

17. Bryant N. Wyatt, “John Updike: The Psychological Novel in Search of Structure,” Twentieth Century Literature, 13 (1967), p. 92.

18. J. A. Ward, "John Updike's Fiction," Critique, 5 (Spring-Summer, 1962), p. 30.

19. Norman O. Brown, Life against Death (Conn: Wesleyan Uni. Press, 1970), pp. 102-4.

Updike avoids reiterating the commonplace neurosis of isolation.[20] Recollections of childhood and adolescence, like the memories of the basketball, establishes the bonds between Rabbit and his life in the past. Since he is isolated in the horizontal relationship, the only possible connections seem to be established in the vertical link of time.

As a solitary and vulnerable being, Rabbit also desires to return to his boyhood so as to be taken care of like a child and be free from the responsibility of adulthood. So when he takes a walk with Ruth on the hill above Brewer and looks out over the city, the thought that someone is dying takes possession of him: "Someone in the house along these streets, if not this minute then the next, dies." He becomes frightened and begs Ruth, "Put your arm around me" (Run, p. 96), And when he finishes making love with Ruth on the first night in her apartment, he holds her tightly and murmurs, "Don't scare me," and snuggles more securely against her side (Run, p, 94).

To Rabbit, to be mature is to grow old, which in turn is to be toward death: "If you're telling me I'm not mature, that's one thing I don't cry over since as far as I can make out it's the same thing as being dead" (Run, p. 90). Updike also uses an eavesdropping scene to present Nelson as Rabbit's alter- ego: "He sees himself sitting in a high chair, and a quick strange jealousy comes and passes. It is his son" (Run, p. 21). Later in the story he hopes that Nelson will become a ball-player like himself, but his mother interrupts him and says that Nelson cannot become a ball-player because he has those little Springer hands. And he feels trapped and hates his mother for making him love the kid a little less (again, the mother as a negative force). Nelson as Rabbit's alter- ego will develop in Rabbit Is Rich as a projection of his self as well as his rival.

Near the end of the book, Rabbit runs from his daughter's burial in the cemetery into a long-abandoned grove of trees. The woods are a primitive

20.Ward, p. 29.

unconscious world in which he is an alien creature, This escape is one of Rabbit's ways of getting rid of the restrictions of instinct and responsibility of civilized modern world. However, according to Freud, his prospects of enjoying this happiness for any length of time are very slender. Civilized man has exchanged a portion of his possibilities of happiness for a portion of security. [21] Thus, once he gets inside the woods, he finds that "he is less sheltered than he expected" (Run, p. 245). Jerry H. Bryant associates this escape into the primitive world with Rabbit's fixation to his boyhood, both of which signify his desire to find a shelter, a protective device: [22]

> Typically, Harry turns to his childhood as a protective device, recalling that he had often walked, as a child, through these trees. But then he had been protected by some kind of magic. Now his awareness exposes himself and the protection he identifies with his childhood has disappeared. He has taken the woods as a sanctuary of comfortable childhood certainty, a sanctuary he has continued to seek as a means of escaping from the abyss of nothingness which constitutes the reality of about consciousness.

Another basic element of struggle for Rabbit is that of identity. But in this respect he also confronts a dilemma. To rejoin the compromised society would be to sacrifice his self identity. Yet if he breaks loose from the entombing environment, he feels rootless, lost, and eager to be stabilized. Individual identity consists in the union of self-realization and sense of belonging. Rabbit fashions his life on running to keep his sense of self-worth alive, but at the same time he feels rootless. For Rabbit the

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21. Sigmund Freud, Civilization and its Discontents Trans, James Strachey, (New York: W. W. Norton, 1961), p. 62.

22. Jerry H. Bryant, The Open Decision: The Contemporary American Novel and Its Intellectual Background (N.Y: The Free Free, 1970), p. 243.

individual identity is a microcosmic speck in a vast universe of potential, drifting between infinite smallness or nothingness and the infinite vastness of the cosmos: "He feels his inside as very real suddenly, a pure blank space in the middle of a dense net ... the thought that he doesn't know seems to make him infinitely small and impossible to capture, Its smallness fills him like a vastness" (Run, P. 254). The name Angstrom--one ten billionth of a meter--suggests the microscopic "I" struggling toward an identity which drifts between the infinite as well as the finite. The sense of individual identity in the infinite space causes fear at the same time, as Tony Tanner points out with insight:[23]

> These feelings of cosmic vertigo seem to feed the basic dread in Updike's work--the fear of death, the face of decay and the inevitable collapse into nothingness. This produces what he once called "a panicked hunger for things" which will stabilize him as it stabilizes his characters. Harry Angstrom in a moment of worry and apprehension reaches out to touch things "to give himself the small answer of a texture."

And just as I pointed out previously, the nightmares that Rabbit has about a crying girl whose face slides and melts also suggests the dread of the loss of human identity. The desire to break loose from the compromised environment, from the material world, and to search for freedom and identity, conflicts with the hunger for things to stabilize him and make him safe. So "Harry sometimes clings to the material world in which he lives; at other times he pulls into a private ideal world. "[24] He oscillates between freedom and safety. Contrasted as well as paralleled to the desire for freedom and the search for identity, fear and guilt are two negative forces under which Rabbit functions and by which he is sometimes repelled from and at other

23. Tony Tanner, pp. 275-6.

24. Vargo, p. 79

times attracted back to the community. The two forces come both from the external circumstances and from the sense of the motions of Grace. Rabbit's constant fear of nets, traps and undefined pressure keeps him running, and keeps the reader aware of the anxiety which motivates the action of the novel. The fear of rootlessness and the desire to be stabilized draw him back to the community. But the fear can not be mitigated by the fulfillment of responsibility, as the fear of isolation still remains. Even after Janice and Rabbit forgive each other for their parts in the accidental drowning of their child, a "heavy knot of apprehension remains in his chest" (Run, P. 231). Not even prayers release the tension: "He tries praying to relax him but it doesn't do it. There's no connection" (Run, p. 230). Rabbit's sense of guilt is assumed in failing to meet human commitments. Guilt is more than an emotional burden; it is the bond between human beings: "Mrs. Springer's attack though it ached to hurt him, is the first thing anybody has said to Harry since this began that seems to fit the enormity of the event .... Until her words he felt alone on a dead planet encircling the great gaseous sun of Janice's labor; her cry though a cry of hate, pierced his solitude" (Run, p. 167), Under the pressure of fear and guilt, Rabbit tries several ways to allay them, for example, sex, religion, as aforementioned, which fail him one after another. In addition, he does make attempts at reintegration into the community. As Rabbit assumes fatherly duties with Nelson at a playground, he thinks and feels his way through the re-entry into the community: "he feels the truth: the thing that had left his life had left irrevocably; no search would recover it. No flight would reach it. It was here, beneath the town, in these smells and these voices, forever behind him. The best he can do is submit to the system and give Nelson the chance to pass, as he did, unthinkingly, through it" (Run, p. 188). Indeed, Rabbit's social commitment is constantly developing, There are two possible reasons far this. He may want to fulfill his social responsibility and allay his fear and guilt; he may want to be stabilized and to gain security.

Rabbit really needs advice and he also makes an effort to establish communication with other people, but no one knows what to tell him. (The door and

wall images suggest isolation and the blockage of communication.) All he hears, whether it' be from Eccles, the Springers, or the old farmer, are cliches and catch-phrases, which for him are traps leading up to spiritual death. For example, the old farmer advises him that the society is goal-oriented, "The only way to get somewhere, you know, is to figure out where you're going before you go there" (Run, p. 27). Rabbit does not agree, And it is natural that the help Eccles tries to offer should lead to nowhere. His attempt at reasoning is not congenial with Rabbit, for Rabbit experiences faith with his heart, instead of reason. The character of Rabbit illustrates Pascal's statements:

> "It is the heart which experiences God, and not the reason.
> "Heart, instinct, principles."
>
> Pascal, Pense´ 278, 281

So Rabbit acts with his instincts, and runs to "shake all thoughts of the mess behind him" (Run, p, 30).

Whatever Rabbit is searching for, his quest is undoubtedly unsuccessful. Critics hold different opinions as to this point. As Edward P. Vargo puts it, "the quest is severely hampered by his refusal to accept any guidance except that of his own uneducated intuition," and "the basic weakness of his liturgy lies in the absence of any definite myth behind the patterns."[25] George Hunt thinks that "Rabbit finds himself plunged into a world of Nothingness; he dreads it but it is the only thing he knows."[26] Norris W. Yates suggests that there is doubt in Rabbit's faith.[27] And Ronald J Greiner stresses the moral ambiguity intended by Updike.[28] All these elucidations are quite to the point, but I would like to add that the dialectic quality of

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25. Vargo, D, 55 and p, 57

26. George Hunt, "Updike's Pilgrims in a World of Nothingness," Thought (Dec, 1978), p. 398.

27. Yates, pp. 496-7.

28. Greiner, pp. 47-72.

freedom, of self fulfillment, also plays an important role.

In the zig-zag course of Rabbit's action, he undergoes a lot of human experiences, the real and tangible world of love, sex, marriage, children, and obligation as well as the intangible world of feeling, faith, fear, guilt, freedom and death. He is not able to pull all of these diverse elements together into one meaningful whole, because they are intricately intertwined with each other. There is no possible solution for the situation. It is hardly possible either to try to set a definite pattern for the situation or for the aforesaid elements. However, we can tentatively string these elements together, with a pole with safety on one end and freedom on the other. These elements are more or less related to the freedom-safety theme and in part turn upon it as on a pivot. Freedom and safety are quite incompatible and,with solitude intermediating in between, form a dialectical relationship. Thus, Rabbit oscillates between the two ends of the pole. This dialectic superstructure can be seen more clearly when we take the Rabbit novels together and read them as a whole.

哈瑞・安斯壯的精神困境

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摘　要

本文旨在探討美國當代小說家 John Updike 的代表作 Rabbit , Run 一書中，自由／安全的矛盾困境作為全書人物發展與行為動機的心理基礎。人們有追求個人滿足的內在驅力，亦有避開孤絕和確保安全的心理需求。此二種矛盾的力量，在主角的心理與行動中具體而微地展現互為辯證的關係。本文集在追索 Rabbit 試圖逃避環境陷阱與死亡的命運牢籠，追求精神層面的心路歷程，而 Rabbit 對自由的追求本身卻成為一種負坦。

關鍵詞：精神困境、自由、安全、死亡、辯證關係、自我認同