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**The Family Roles of John Updike's Harry "Rabbit"
Angstrom**

Bakalářská práce

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Prohlášení

Prohlašuji, že jsem tuto bakalářskou práci “The Family Roles of John Updike’s Harry ‘Rabbit’ Angstrom” vypracovala samostatně pod odborným dohledem vedoucího bakalářské práce a uvedla jsem všechny použité podklady a literaturu.

V Olomouci dne.

Podpis.....

Poděkování

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Introduction

John Hoyer Updike was an American novelist, short stories writer, poet and critic. He began his career “in 1954 when the *New Yorker* published his story ‘Friends from Philadelphia’” (Pritchard 2). He was awarded two Pulitzer Prizes for his novels *Rabbit Is Rich* in 1982 and *Rabbit At Rest* in 1991. They are sequels of *Rabbit, Run* and *Rabbit Redux* and together they create his famous tetralogy. According to Updike, the first part of the tetralogy *Rabbit, Run* “was meant to be a realistic demonstration of what happens when a young American family man goes on the road – the people left behind get hurt” (Redux 357). Each sequel contains the narration of Harry “Rabbit” Angstrom until his death in *Rabbit At Rest*.

The main theme of “Rabbit” tetralogy is the family relationships. Throughout the sequels Harry struggles to create a satisfactory family. He unceasingly runs from his home and returns since he is, typically for many Updike’s characters, “confused” and “unfulfilled” (Searles 2007). On the other hand, Harry appears to be convicted of the necessity to be in motion between his family and lovers. The purpose of this thesis is to explain the urges and reasons of such behavior with respect to family roles that Harry performs.

Therefore, the individual roles of a son, husband and father and their connections will be examined in order to realize what Harry is running from and what he is seeking. In the first part Harry’s relationship with his mother will be observed as it has a huge impact on him and it creates an important basis for his personality. The consequences of their problematic relationship will be demonstrated in the following parts where his roles of the husband and father are discussed. Lastly, as he undergoes several changes during the sequels his self-development will be observed with a focus on the family matters.

1. Son Harry

Mothers are one of the most important elements in children's lives. They form their children's opinions and behavior. Harry and his mother have a very strong bond which seems to be created by her dominant personality. In the following chapters the most influential aspects of her upbringing and their consequences are discussed. She represents an authority for her son, and thus she has a huge impact on his personality.

Harry's father does not appear to be such a significant person to him. Regarding an active upbringing, he does not influence Harry very much. Rather than that, he affects him simply by his position in the marriage which seems extremely submissive.

Nevertheless, the person with a certain paternal attitude toward Harry is his coach Tothero. Both men are described and their impact on Harry's development is discussed in this section.

In order to understand Harry's decisions and reactions in the future it is necessary to understand the nature of his family background. Therefore, the personalities of his parents and idols are an introduction to his following family roles.

1.1 Mrs. Angstrom

A mother is usually the first representative of a female gender in her child's life. All features of her appearance and characteristics are perceived by the child very intensively. Automatically, the child may consider her to be a standard model of a woman and other women are, subsequently, often being compared to her. In Harry's case rather a non-traditional example of a woman was given. It leads to a confusion when deciding what attributes of a woman he desires and therefore, to problems in interactions with women in the future. Eventually, he succeeds to satisfy his partners very little as a husband or partner and simultaneously, he is extremely incapable of finding the satisfaction himself.

Mrs. Angstrom is not typically feminine. Both her appearance and personality resemble a man rather than a woman. She is described as tall and vigorous. Priest Eccles says about her body: "Mrs. Angstrom's packed in a harsh frame. Harry's size must come from her side" (Run 137). Her robustness is generally considered to appear more masculine than feminine. Additional masculine aspects are sharp features in her face.

She has an “extra-defined nose with four-cornered nostrils” (Run 137) that evokes manlike nose instead of the female soft one. Such sharp details in her face decrease the delicate femininity of her visage and they create a rough manlike appearance.

The size and sharpness coincide with her harsh personality and firmness. She is the head of her family as she decides about important family matters instead of her husband. The fact that she occurs in the position which is mostly represented by men emphasizes the lack of femininity in her personality. Even though she knows about her harshness, she chooses not to be gentle. According to her, being gentle signifies weakness. In her view, men are those who are weak, not women: “...poor boy. He is just like his father underneath. All soft heart. I suppose that’s why men rule the world. They’re all heart” (Run 138). In order not to become weak and vulnerable she decides for rigorousness.

As she stands in the position of the person who is in charge of the whole family she is tense and nervous. She seems enormously serious and grouchy to other people. Even with her closest family members she does not cease being serious. When she does so it is very surprising: “Rabbit laughs, and Pop emits an appreciative snarl, and even Mom: the bewildered foolish glaze on her features becomes intentionally foolish, amused” (Redux 314). Harry considers seeing Mrs. Angstrom like this to be an extremely special moment since she rarely enjoys and appreciates some kind of an amusement.

Furthermore, Mrs. Angstrom shows her true affections in an unusually cold way. Hence, Harry is not given enough apparent information of being loved and thus he becomes insecure. According to David Crowe, this deprivation may be the reason of his later struggling for finding himself: “Rabbit's need for affection from his mother becomes a need for adulation from others, including God, and this need becomes the core of his identity crisis” (Crowe, 93). Crowe suggests that the lack of affection from Harry’s mother may be the reason of his problematic self-identification. It is highly probable as Updike often creates “figure of the destructive mother” (Wyatt 92) in his works. In Harry’s case the feeling of insecurity never disappears and he doubts about himself unceasingly. Similarly, he doubts about people in his environment and their intentions.

Since Harry grew up with his mother he obtained a confusing image of women. On one hand, his mother is a traditional suburban housewife. She is nurturing and she performs all tasks in the household such as cooking, washing or cleaning. On the other hand, the

manlike aspects seem to be significant too. The ambivalence mirrors in Harry's relationships with women in the sense that he is very little sure what his priorities are. An example of this inner chaos may be the way of his selection of partners. He decides to marry Janice who satisfies him very little. Dissatisfaction with her is caused by her disability to keep their home neat or to cook for her family. Harry also criticizes her low intelligence and appearance. As he sees the imperfections of hers he has several lovers outside his marriage. Yet, he never chooses another woman as a lover markedly different to her. As if he were unable to do so. Martin suggests that "Rabbit's dilemma...derives largely from his dependence upon instinct which he does not fully understand..." (Martin 104). If the instinct which he does not understand advises him to make choices regarding women, he easily loses his original motivation and he appears in a vicious circle. Still, his mother might have given him such a confusing picture of women that he does not understand them. To him, women are impossible to understand: "With women, you keep bumping against them, because they want different things; they're a different race" (Run 81).

1.1.1 Control

Harry's mother seems to be obsessed with control. She attempts to control everything in her household and everyone in her environment. Right at the beginning of *Rabbit, Run* Harry remembers his mother swearing at their neighbors who do not cut a piece of lawn between their houses. She becomes furious when she talks about the neighbor who cuts grass only in front of his own house: "When I hear that old fool's wheels rattle along his walk so self-righteously, my blood pressure goes up so I hear my ears pop" (Run 19). This is a metaphorical example of his mother's wish to control every slight detail.

As already mentioned Mrs. Angstrom is highly dominant in her marriage. Harry, thus, sees his father in an inferior position in their relationship. Mr. Angstrom has very little strength and he easily conforms to his wife's forcible personality. There are moments when Mrs. Angstrom treats her husband as an object which she possesses. She has lack of sympathy with him and she considers his feelings to be unimportant or pretended. For instance, while Harry is worried about his father being devastated due to the fact that his sister Mim behaves like a prostitute, she says: "He wants it that way, your father has always been looking for excuses to put on a long face" (Redux 169). Mr. Angstrom

is treated like his wife's possession and only she can decide what his true feelings are. This cold attitude is an inappropriate example for Harry since his mother creates a model of a wife who treats her partner with very little respect.

Seeing his father being controlled by his wife, Harry begins to fear his mother's urge to control and possess him, too. He feels an unhealthy bond between them which makes it difficult to grow up and become an adult. He thinks: "She is still trying to call him forth from her womb, can't she see he is an old man?" (Redux 170). Here Harry uses the expression of actual bond of the mother's womb to her child to express the significance of his captivity. This bond is stopping him from becoming mature and deciding freely about adult matters. Moreover, there are plenty of indications of an uncomfortable relationship of theirs throughout the sequels. For example, he is able to precisely recognize her irritation without any visible indicators: "His mother is angry about something; her anger hits his nostrils as soon as he's in the door, like the smell of age on everything" (Run 195). The fact that Harry senses her irritation without seeing her denotes the high frequency of such occurrences and his negative feelings about them. He even calls his mother's love to be "tyrant" (Redux 169) as the power that she has over him is excessive.

When it comes to relationship with women, Harry does not want to be under anyone's power anymore. He is afraid to create another bond to a woman that could constrict him. Nonetheless, as a proper relationship requests occasional mutual suppressing of one's wishes and making compromises Harry often feels manipulated. As a result he constantly avoids women by running from them. He leaves his wife and his mistresses repeatedly. Another result of his possessive mother is a creation of his own defensive system. The core of the system is to begin with the possessive tendencies before a partner has any opportunity to start first. Similarly to Darwinian Theory, the stronger one survives and wins. In a situation with his lover Ruth he enjoys the possession of a human being. His lust is amplified by a repetition of a verb to have: "He has her. He knows he has her" (Run 81). Repeating these words he assures himself that he is the owner and not the owned one. In principle, Harry either avoids women to prevent himself from being possessed or he, like his mother, is the one who possesses and manipulates his partner.

1.1.2 Criticism and praising

As Mrs. Angstrom has the extremely possessive attitude towards her family members and believes in accuracy of her upbringing she loses the ability to see them clearly. In case of Harry she is exceedingly defending and uncritical. He obtains mostly positive reactions and plenty of praising from his mother. Consequently, it seems very difficult to cope with negative reactions that he faces in his adulthood.

Harry's mother is certain about her son's qualities. He is a product of her and also her possession. She believes that all his good qualities were gained thanks to her training. Nevertheless, she is as proud of his successes as she is irritated by his failures. Unable to admit his faults which could suggest mistakes of her training too, she immediately finds another person to blame. For example, when Harry leaves his pregnant wife Janice, she accuses and criticizes Janice, not him: "I never wanted him to go with the girl in the first place. Just to look at her you know she's two-thirds crazy... That girl gets no sympathy from me" (Run 137–139). She uses this unconvincing argument when she calls Janice crazy to prove that Harry is a victim. However, she is capable of using meaner arguments to persuade her view when she points at the fact that Harry and Janice copulated before their wedding. She says to her husband who is reasonable and sees Harry's guilt: "You talk about tarts: they don't become ivory-white saints in my book just by having a marriage license. That girl wanted Harry and got him with the only trick she knew and now she's run out of tricks" (Run 141). Harry's share in their premarital actions is neglected. She declares Harry poor since he was misused and had to marry Janice when "he could scarcely tuck his shirt-tail in" (Run 138). This suggestion that he was abused by Janice proves her wrong judgment on him. Harry's mother promptly reacts with insulting others while he is responsible for the trouble. Moreover, she never considers her behavior to be unfair.

Mrs. Angstrom uses all possible means to punish people who find Harry wrong. Her husband describes her ability to punish when he says that "her tongue can cut people down" (Redux 5). She calls her daughter-in-law "a damp washrag" (Redux 169) when Harry's marriage undergoes a crisis. The reason of insulting Janice in front of him is to suppress his portion of blame and turn it towards his wife. It represents a kind of protection that a mother offers to her son. Later on, it becomes a simple way of managing problems for Harry. He begins to blame others for his mistakes and he

justifies his failings, too. To rationalize own poor acts he thinks: "It felt right" (Run 168). It is his form of self-assuredness similar to the assuredness that he is used to receiving from his mother. However, it causes his struggles to face common problems and accept a responsibility for them. Having being excused during the childhood brings an expectation to be excused in adulthood. Therefore, there is the tendency to behave irresponsibly in personal matters.

Similarly to Harry's disability to solve problems and admit his faults, he cannot bear being criticized. His mother assures him about his perfectness and she hardly ever criticizes him. Hence, he is not used to it and any kind of criticism raises fears and insecurity in him. If there is a serious moment when Harry knows about his guilt he becomes extremely afraid of his mother. He wishes to remain perfect for her. A sample situation occurs at his daughter's funeral. Harry is partly responsible for his daughter's tragic death and thence, he is terrified when awaiting his mother in a church. He thinks: "If she [his mother] comes in and gives him hell he thinks he'll die rather than take it" (Run 248). According to him, his own death does not seem to be as tremendous as facing a critique from her. Crowe comments on this part: "Rabbit tells us that he keeps coming back to the conclusion again and again. Here we find Rabbit torn between genuine repentance and his deep Oedipal need to be viewed as graceful and in the right, viewed in this light especially by his mother and his God" (Crowe 94). As Crowe suggests Harry's mother and God are on similar level regarding authorities that he honors and fears. Naturally, if she represents such an honored authority he does not want to be criticized by her.

Since Harry is very little criticized but overwhelmingly praised he easily adopts an idea of his flawlessness and praising becomes an essential need of his. Egocentrism is obvious from his words "I'm just lovable" (Run 124). Furthermore, he calls himself "saint" (Run 124). He blasphemes and considers himself to be superhuman.

Interestingly, the notion of sacredness is not used by Updike only once. When Harry meets his mother at his daughter's funeral she does not admit his portion of guilt. She is comforting him: "'Hassy what have they done to you?' She asks this loud and wraps him in a hug as if she would carry him back to the sky from which they have fallen" (Run 250). Harry's thought about sky, which is supposed to remind heaven, denotes his

idea of him and his mother being really saint. As his mother treats him like a part of her perfect self he believes that they really are perfect people.

1.1.3 Communication

A communication between Harry and his mother is a representation of their relationship. Even though, they are in contact and they spend comparatively plenty of time together their communication lacks full-fledged interaction. Harry desires to express his thoughts aloud very little. They rarely have a conversation including a full entitlement of both sides which leads to a question whether he is afraid to openly communicate with his mother. Indications of fear can be found in their both verbal and non-verbal communication.

The verbal communication is extremely unbalanced. It is usually Harry's mother who is in charge of speaking while Harry remains rather silent. He perceives her words, yet, he does not create a real dialogue with her. He responds to his mother in his mind, though. Such a kind of reluctance seems to be caused by effusive respect for a mother and fear of her. First of all, there are several moments when Harry wants to utter his thoughts and arguments aloud, nonetheless, he suppresses his wish and repels the idea. For instance: "He wants to say to her, 'What is this anyway? You act like I've gone over to the other side. Don't you know it's the right side and why don't you praise me?' But he doesn't say this..." (Run 195–196). In this example, the hidden desire to express oneself and have a proper dialogue with his mother is demonstrated by following aspects.

The first aspect is the usage of a direct speech in Harry's secret inner thoughts. The direct speech appears more authentic than an indirect one since in text it is identical to an actually pronounced sentence. Therefore, the direct speech adds the importance of a dialogue that Harry is unable to create. His struggling seems more serious when there is the direct speech. The second aspect is the number of questions. In the quotation, Updike uses questions, especially negative questions, to emphasize Harry's urge to know answers and have the dialogue. The fact that he suppresses the urge is probably caused by the respect for his mother. It corresponds to the previous chapters when Mrs. Angstrom as an authority is discussed. Harry respects his mother like God which may be the reason why he does not insist on obtaining the answers.

In a non-verbal communication Harry struggles to keep an eye contact with his mother. It is a very striking fact. He describes her eyes as follows: "...the eyes whose color he had never dared to learn..." (Redux 10). In a relationship of two close people it is extremely odd to avoid such a type of communicating. In this case, Harry certainly avoids it due to fear of her. Respecting a mother with whom a son communicates regularly does not demand strictness of this level.

The communication of Harry and his mother mirrors the situation between them. Mrs. Angstrom displays a huge authority for Harry. Yet, her bossy character leads to overpowering respect and fear. Consequently, as he avoids her he avoids their conversations and communication in general.

1.2 Paternal function - Marty Tothero

As already mentioned Harry's parents are not equally significant with regard to his development. Whereas Mrs. Angstrom represents a huge authority, the paternal function appears to be fulfilled by Harry's basketball coach Marty Tothero. The reason why Tothero is so important is partially the resemblance with Harry's mother. Similarly to her, Tothero as a coach is a highly respected person. In addition, he compliments Harry extremely often even though he rarely deserves it. Therefore, he also encourages him to be selfish and complicates Harry's self-development.

Harry's own father is not a notably influential figure during his early childhood and adult age. As he was comparatively little respected by his wife, Harry himself did not see a reason to respect him. The person who he seems to respect is his coach Tothero. Harry says about him: "Next to his mother Tothero had had the most force" (Run 17). As was already mentioned, Harry's mother has an extreme power over him. Hence, placing Tothero in the position right next to her has a significant meaning. Even though it may be expected that Tothero is respected by his players, Harry keeps admiring him even after the basketball era. Tothero reminds him of the time when he was popular, successful and happy. Once Harry stopped playing basketball his self-esteem was weakened. He admits not to think much about himself at that time (Redux 175) and thus, he seeks Tothero's company again. Tothero praises Harry when he feels desperate about his personal problems: "But Tothero says the perfect thing. 'Harry...wonderful Harry Angstrom.'" (Run, 38). He also reminds his sport successes to other people:

“Fred, this is my finest boy, a wonderful basketball player, Harry Angstrom, you probably remember his name from the papers, he twice set a county record, in 1950 and then he broke it in 1951, a wonderful accomplishment” (Run 46). Understandably, being the object of admiration is extremely pleasant for Harry. With Tothero he feels valuable. Tothero plays the role of a loving and encouraging father.

Tothero, like Mrs. Angstrom, sees Harry errorless and he can rarely be critical to him. This feature occurs when Harry’s wife Janice is being discussed. Tothero gives Harry the idea that Janice is the reason of their problematic marriage. He humiliates her so that Harry feels better about himself: “Janice! Let’s not talk about little mutts like Janice Springer!” (Run 48). Moreover, he encourages him to meet different women and commit adultery. Instead of advising to save the marriage, he suggests: “Do what your heart commands... The heart is our only guide” (Run 47) which may suggest that leaving Janice is perfectly fine if it is what Harry desires. In Tothero’s view, Harry can easily be forgiven if he does what he wishes to. Heart commands seem to be an excuse for behaving selfish and irresponsibly. Tothero as a parent thus does not show Harry any limits. He lets him act according to his own will no matter who may be harmed by his actions.

Apart from the similarity to Mrs. Angstrom, there is another aspect suggesting the paternal relationship. As in a father-son relationship, Harry looks up to Tothero and seems to wish to be alike him. “I would’ve been nothing without him” (Run 55) is how he expresses his honor and gratitude to Tothero. Nonetheless, as he admires his authoritative couch he intuitively shares particular features of his personality which may be seen in similar situations in their partnerships. They both leave their wives, they blame them for their bad marriages and they both become bored of life. Their lives appear so equivalent that Hauhart calls Tothero Harry’s “aging doppelganger” (Hauhart 71). He finds a connection between their behavior in personal relationships and basketball strategy and claims that Harry running away from personal matters is a parallel to Tothero’s motto from basketball era: “Tothero’s comment appears to sum up Harry’s attitude toward life: ‘You can’t run enough’” (Hauhart 71). The motto which Harry used to listen to does not seem to be vanished. The influence of his couch, directly or not, seems to accompany Harry throughout his whole life.

2. Husband Harry

In order to understand Harry's decisions concerning his family life it is important to be aware of the nature of his former family. It seems that Harry seeks a family very different from the one that he had in his childhood. There may be two reasons for that. Firstly, he finds relationships in his family rather cold and distant. Secondly, he is frustrated by their financial situation. Consequently, it seems that he runs away from this unstable environment to run towards a new one that would satisfy his needs. He desires to achieve a unity involving a loving partner and an economic stability. However, since his own experience is overly deep-rooted he is not able to create this unity and home himself. He is incapable of bringing the warmth and closeness to his family. Then, he abandons his loved ones as he feels that he is failing to create what he desires. In principle, he runs away from himself.

Although, in *Rabbit, Run* Harry does not succeed to gain a satisfactory marriage he is determined to do so later in the sequels. He tries to achieve this goal repeatedly. However, he usually surrenders before the proper relationship can be created due to his huge fear of losing the dominant position in relationship. The fact highly influences the selection of partners and creates stark contrasts in his behavior toward women. His desires and acts then contradict. He occasionally acts loyally and protectively toward his partners. Moreover, he has a strong sense of devotion and domesticity. Nevertheless, he becomes violent if he is not satisfied with adjustments in a relationship and he abuses women both mentally and physically. His wicked nature is further depicted in the manners of sexual abuse. Occasionally, he exploits women as he avoids them ruthlessly and uses them as financial sources. It seems that he is never fully satisfied with his partners as he is never satisfied with himself and his abusive behavior is a result of his frustration.

2.1 Harry's desires

Harry is rather possessive toward his partners and this matter of possession influences his criteria for selecting partners the most. He demands his partner to be weak and submissive so that he can be the one in control. He desires his partners to be very little self-confident, strong and intelligent since such women can be manipulated more easily.

Harry's taste in women slightly changes during the sequels, however, the preference of having a submissive partner lasts. Since Harry endeavors not to become a victim of a possessive partner he hardly ever forgives healthy self-confidence of theirs. In *Rabbit, Rest* he becomes irritated when his wife Janice finally stops being insecure: "Janice didn't use to dramatize herself. Ever since her mother died and they bought this condo, she has been building up an irritating confidence, an assumption that the world is her stage and her performance is going pretty well" (Rest 101). Harry is jealous of his wife and he is aggravated since his influence on her might be decreased. Her confidence is "irritating" as he may feel endangered by her strengthening personality. Mentioning Janice's mother Harry admits his intentions to have a weaker partner again since Janice's mother was also an extremely domineering person whom Janice would have never dared to oppose. In his view, her mother was his helper as they both tended to control Janice and deteriorate her self-assurance. Therefore, Janice's mother's death conceives certain insecurity in Harry. He does not wish his wife to be confident. He admits it when she begins working as a real estate: "He preferred her incompetent" (Rest 275). In both examples Harry confirms that he needs to be the domineering partner. He chooses women who are not confident enough to have control over him.

Another aspect of weakness that Harry requests is a lack of intelligence since, naturally, intelligent women rarely let their partners to control them. Even though he always calls Janice "dumb" (Run 13) dumbness is exactly what he desires. For instance, Harry's lover Thelma is not interesting for him as a partner due to her cleverness: "He senses intelligence in her but intelligence in women has never much interested him" (Rich 49). Another woman whose intelligence is not appreciated is Jill. Although she could be a perfect partner in most aspects, according to O'Connell she is too strong for Harry: "She is not easily frightened or coerced. She is not exclusively loyal. He cannot control her mind or her behavior" (O'Connell 150). Harry cannot consider Jill to be a candidate for

his partner since she does not behave submissively. She could become an overpowering partner to Harry.

In *Rabbit, Run* Harry seems to attach importance to Catholic religion when it comes to the selection of partners. For instance, he appears disappointed when he finds that his lover Ruth does not believe in God (Run, 78-79). Yet, he does not wish his partners to be Catholics as they are supposed to be people with warm hearts and fair judgments. He desires only women from one particular part of Catholics. He says that “he has often wanted and never had a little Catholic from a shabby house, dressed in flashy bargain clothes” (Run 118). Such a description corresponds to a girl who is rather incapable and financially dependent. The attribute “little” evokes vulnerability and weakness. Therefore, in this part Harry indirectly summarizes the qualities of women that he prefers.

2.2 Harry's confusion

When analyzing Harry's attitude towards women one must look at it from two perspectives. On one hand, Harry desperately desires to be a satisfying husband and father. He has a strong sense of domestic matters and he wishes to be a part of a satisfactory family that he himself creates. On the other hand, these desires are suppressed by the urge to possess his partners. The possession later evolves in aggression against his partners and both physical and emotional abuse. Understandably, such conflicting attitudes toward the role of a husband bring several confusing moments into his personal life.

The confusion is best visible in Harry's thoughts about Janice. His evaluations of her are often contradictory. A typical example of such confusing behavior is two simultaneous contradictory statements concerning Janice such as: “So dumb. Forgive me” (Run 23). In this situation Harry is leaving his wife and he feels both relieved and guilty to do so. Pleading for forgiveness symbolizes his adherence to the family relationships and swearing at her is supposed to justify his wrong acting. He often blames Janice for being dissatisfied in every way. Blaming her seems to rationalize his bad successes: “The entire squeezed and cut-down shape of his life is her fault; at every turn she has been a wall to his freedom.” (Rich, 36) On the other hand, Harry sometimes understands the negative impact of his mistakes and he is capable of admitting them.

For instance, he says that Janice is “not too bad” as a wife (Redux 121). The confused acting is present in all the four books. Harry abandons and returns to his wife or lover many times. Each abandoning is a result of uncertain decisions coming from confusion. After his return to Janice he considers himself “happy, lucky, blessed, forgiven and wants to give thanks” (Run 201) Even though Harry feels abnormally satisfied he leaves Janice soon after this. Kakutani says: “...Rabbit gave us a carefully shaded portrait of a difficult and incomplete man, torn between his yearnings for freedom and his need for roots...” (Kakutani 29). As she mentions there are two main opportunities which he can choose from. However, he is not willing to desert any of them. Neary who analyzes the repetition in *Rabbit, Run* is interested in Harry’s unstable marriage too: “Indeed, Janice is the dull ‘net’ that the rebellious Rabbit is trying to escape from. But she is also the gift, the ordinary, which he receives again – and again and again...” (Neary 100). The repetition in their relationship suggests confusion and deciding whether to stay in the marriage or not. Harry both needs and refuses his wife since he is unsure about his desires.

Eventually, Harry himself admits that his troubles with women were caused by his own mother. Shortly before his death he is thinking about Janice: “...he was beginning to respect her, it was hard for him to respect any woman, his mother has done that to him, the hateful woman” (Rest 465). The fact that this situation occurs almost at the end of the last sequel affirms that Harry struggled to have a proper relationship all his life and the greatest reason was his mother as it was suggested in the first part of the thesis.

2.3 Caring husband

Although Harry’s choice of submissive partners displays certain despotism he has a sense of partnership and domesticity. He proves to be thoughtful and caring as he is able to share good and bad with his partners. He can also engage in an extremely serious and deep relationship within only little time which suggests a passionate and sensitive personality. Furthermore, even though he has several lovers outside his marriage he usually treats them like wives.

Harry, even though abandoning his family several times, appreciates the family environment. Reverend Eccles who is a close friend to him in *Rabbit, Run* comments on this feature: “The strange thing about Angstrom, he’s by nature a domestic creature”

(Run 135). Being domestic is considered strange since Harry abandons his home repeatedly. Yet, he does not conceive hatred for relationships and home. He often behaves thoughtfully toward his partners. For instance, at the funeral of his lover Thelma he does not want to hurt his wife, who suspects this adulterous affair so he hides his own grief: “Janice snuffles again but Harry keeps his own grief for Thelma tight against his heart, knowing Janice doesn’t want to see it” (Rest 339). Harry appears very thoughtful in this situation suppressing his own feelings knowing that showing them would harm his wife. A similar situation occurs with his lover Ruth who must hold her shoes and walk without them due to an unstructured terrain. Harry reacts extremely sympathetically: “In a fond gesture he takes off his shoes and socks, to share whatever pain there is” (Run 97). Although Ruth does not require such a sacrifice he does so to show devotion and dedication. Moreover, when Harry himself claims that he tries to share pain with Ruth he suggests a particular unity of them.

The idea of sharing appears in the relationships literally, too. Harry tends to share both abstract and real matters with his partners. He shares water in a bathtub with his wife or lovers and in many situations he acts nurturing and caring in the bathroom. He uses the water in the bathtub which was already used by Janice and he finds it perfectly appropriate, furthermore, he kindly dries her back (Redux 28–29). The intimacy and togetherness of the partners appear to be completely natural here. Additionally, as Harry is able to fall into serious relationships almost immediately he treats his lover Jill with similar closeness. They have a bath together and he tenderly washes and dries her body as if she were his wife too (Redux 123). Sharing water and having the nurturing tendencies show how important the connection of two people in a relationship is for Harry.

The reason why Harry tends to act matrimonially towards his lovers is the need to release emotions of love and give them to women. The most examples of such behavior can be seen in his attitude toward his first lover Ruth who is in principle a prostitute. Harry does not seem to change his attitude when he interacts with her. When having sex the night that they were introduced to each other he equates their intimacy to the intimacy in his marriage: “He makes love to her as if he would make to his wife” (Run 73). Harry approaches adultery with similar habits as in marriage. Moreover, it seems that each relationship with his lover is considered more valuable if he acts as a husband.

Since he keeps the routine known from his marital life he implies that he does not want to approach relationships in a different way.

A marriage is a very serious institution to Harry. That is why he never propounds a divorce or why he does not wish to live with a woman who is not his lawful wife. Ruth once right after their first night claims that his behavior evokes behavior in a marriage. He rapidly answers that they should get married (Run 67) which is an odd reply from a man who has just escaped from a marriage. These rapid ideas, though, appear often. For instance, he tries to convince Ruth that awaiting a child is joyful news after he abandoned her for several weeks and she could not trust him anymore (Run 258–259). His desire is a hopeful family but he surrenders everyday troubles and he often begins in a different place instead of solving them. Reverend Eccles summarizes Harry's personal choices similarly: "...for the boy's problem wasn't so much a lack of feeling as an uncontrolled excess of it..." (Run 145). Harry is an emotional person who has the capacity to devote himself to a person and share his life with them. Nonetheless, with his confused mind this capacity tends to become fractionalized into several targets.

2.4 Abusive husband

In intimate relationships Harry uses violence in order to achieve total submission of his partners since he tends to perceive women as objects. He uses several forms of violence. Firstly, he offends women verbally. Secondly, he uses physical and sexual abuse in order to show his superiority and forces them to obey. Lastly, he is passively violent when he avoids his partners if he is not satisfied. He does so by actual abandoning or mental avoidance and disinterest. These forms are usually combined as they are means of controlling and Harry is obsessed with control. In this section the negative part of Harry as a husband is further evaluated.

2.4.1 Verbal offending

Harry offends his partners by uttering harmful proclamations or using harmful vocabulary. Claiming utterances that hurt women he clarifies his powerful position required in a partnership. O'Connell who suggests that the reason is the fear of his mother claims: "He generalizes this fear into a conception of all women as threatening,

and he typically reacts with anger and even violence” (O’Connell 24). Apparently, Harry offends his partners as he is afraid of their possible domineering personalities. Since Harry needs women with low self-esteem, offending them verbally is a first step toward it. For example, he considers his wife to be stupid and this judgment often occurs in his inner thoughts. Occasionally, when upset he expresses what is on his mind directly to her, usually as a part of a dispute: “You dumb bitch” (Redux 55). Such an invective repeatedly appearing in the novels is a direct attack on Janice’s self-esteem which Harry systematically tries to lower.

Interestingly, as quickly he falls in love with women as quickly he is able to act harmful to them. He uses upsetting vocabularies to his lover Jill after a very short period of time. Again, his intention is to control her. In a following example the controlling tendency is even more specific since he forces her to obey his commanding and cook him a dinner: “What the hell kind of piece of ass are you, there’s nothing there anymore? Why do you think we keep you here?” (Redux 257). Understandably, vulgar expressions and rhetorical questions have their function. Due to them Jill should become uncertain and easier to overpower. Moreover, in this situation Harry becomes abnormally vulgar and severe since there is another person in the room, Skeeter. Harry, thus, needs to defend his domination twice that more and uses stronger means.

O’Connell also considers Harry’s behavior a defensive system. He claims: “Rabbit’s defensive response to these dangerous women is to enter the relationships with them only on the basis of domination and control” (O’Connell 24). Understandably, his fear of women’s possessiveness that causes Harry’s subsequent acting reflects in the communication. He uses vulgarity or other offensive verbal means in situations and through them he demonstrates his domination.

2.4.2 Sexual abuse

Harry does not only use verbal abuse to gain power over women. He achieves his dominant position through intimacy and sex. When it comes to sex Harry’s customs are rather perverse. He struggles to stay faithful and he has very few barriers. Additionally, as his attitude toward women is rather possessive he tends to treat them as objects. Thus, he misuses them very frequently.

First of all, Harry has a rather shocking opinion about men and women. It seems that in his view men and women are totally different sorts of people with different needs. He claims that all men are identical in interactions with women: “What are we put here in the first place for? These women complain about men seeing nothing but tits and ass when they look at them but what we are supposed to see? We’ve been programmed to tits and ass” (Rest 428). The statement denotes his disability to understand women and their equality to men. In addition, he suggests that men can pay attention to only women’s secondary sex characteristics. He claims that since men are programmed in this way their main purpose in the world is to take advantage of women. Updike himself says in an interview: “Harry sees women as sexual targets” (Swain, Updike) and Harry proves him to be right when he admits using the services of prostitutes (Redux 59). In his view, treating women like objects is perfectly appropriate since it is men’s purpose. He uses this idea as an explanation of his sexual escapades.

Nonetheless, he does not take advantage of only unknown women or lovers. He has a similar attitude toward his own wife: “A wife can be as strange as a whore, that’s the beauty of male-female relations” (Rest 78). Asserting this he compares his own wife to a prostitute and he finds it beautiful. He prefers Janice to be strange like a prostitute whom he could possess and she would obey him. Seeking for strangeness in a marriage is rather unusual. Nevertheless, as far as sex is concerned Harry really has shockingly perverse manners. For instance, he watches Jill and Skeeter having a sexual intercourse (Redux 244). According to Ahearn, sexuality is an important mean of understanding Harry. He says that Updike “employs sexuality as the most revealing form of social manners and spiritual quest (...) and individuals can feign all manners, but those,” therefore “sexuality can be presented as a kind of ultimate ‘reality’” (Ahearn 63). In such a case, Harry’s customs in his intimate life mirror his generally odd behavior and decisions.

In order to achieve sexual satisfaction Harry emotionally blackmails his partners. As Updike explains, the character is “harsh, selfish and unkind” (Swain, Updike). It is another form of proving his domination in relationships. For instance, after a quarrel with his lover Ruth he forces her into a certain sexual practice. He explains the necessity to her: “Listen. Tonight you turned against me. I need to see you on your knees” (Run 161). In other words, after she did not act as he wished he forces her to

display obedience to him through sex. Blackmailing is his favorite technique and he uses it with Janice too. Right after her child birth he tries to hustle her into intercourse. Understandably, from several reasons she cannot and she refuses. Harry responds: “I thought you might love me anyway” (Run 212). He tries to persuade her with this straightforward reproach. He suggests that by disobeying this request she expresses not enough affection for him and he expects a change of her mind.

2.4.3 Physical abuse

Violence plays an important role in Harry’s life. Mostly, it appears only in his inner thoughts. However, in *Rabbit Redux* he is negatively influenced by the extreme environment and he begins to commit violence in a reality. He abuses not only his wife. He is more aggressive to his lover Jill who lives with him at that time. Physical violence, together with verbal offenses and sexual blackmailing, is another manner of controlling women and having power over them.

Harry is rather non-violent in interactions with women except in *Rabbit Redux*. Firstly, it is the time when Janice abandons Harry. She begins to live with her lover Charlie Stavros and interestingly, Harry is not very jealous or interested. According to Lasseter, he “has more passion for Vietnam war than his wife” (Lasseter 434). Ahearn calls him even “spiritually dead”, he says: “Rabbit has spent the Sixties becoming a modern-day Bartleby; with no apparent tension between anima and res, he sits at his linotype machine...” (Ahearn 69). At that current moment Harry is an employee in linotype manufacture and he is very dissatisfied with the situation. He sees little chance for him to lead a more prestigious life. The dissatisfaction and hopelessness reflect on his personal life in the form of the death of spirit as Ahearn suggests. It can be seen in a situation when Janice admits her affair with Charlie. He does not seem to be upset about the fact that his wife is unfaithful and in love with another man. He is rather angry that she dares to act against him and such aggressiveness leads to the first moments of real physical violence. Although, here he is not as violent as he is later. He “hits her not in the face but on the shoulder, like a man trying to knock open a stuck door” (Redux 55). Nonetheless, such violence does not seem to be committed due to affections that he

has for her or jealousy as he later persuades her to stay with her lover. More likely it is his need to show power.

Soon after that Harry accommodates a war veteran who brings the terror of Vietnam War to his house. Lasseter closer describes the veteran as “black radical Skeeter and his political violence, the political fire that Rabbit courted in *Rabbit Redux*” (Lasseter 434). Consequently, the topics of war and violence are very commonly present there and mirror in the behavior of Harry. Since he lives with his lover Jill at that moment he turns the anger toward her. For instance, he repeatedly slaps her in the face (Redux 145). The motivation of such behavior seems to be Skeeter’s influence on Harry, not his own desire. It may be seen in his thoughts: “He takes her wrist. It is fragile. Chalk. He wants to break it, to feel it snap; he wants to hold her absolutely quiet in his arms for the months while it will heal” (Redux 145). The polarity of these two thoughts is evident. He would like to harm Jill, yet, he would be pleased to take care of her. Skeeter brought to Harry’s home extremely aggressive attitudes and Harry adopts a number of them. Therefore, he often behaves ambivalently. Furthermore, Skeeter’s aggressiveness apparently raises Harry’s inclination to act possessively toward others. He may suggest that hurting her wrist would make her perfectly incapable and he would be able to control her more. He wants to own her as she soon recognizes and she tells him: “You remind me of my mother. She thought she owned me too” (Redux 165).

Physical violence is another form of abuse that Harry uses to control women. Even though it does not seem to be in his nature, he uses this type of abuse in two phases of his life. They both appear in *Rabbit Redux*. Firstly, it is a result of his deep hopelessness and emotional declension. Secondly, he uses physical abuse since he is overwhelmingly influenced by the aggressive company that he keeps in his house.

2.5 Avoiding women

Running from women, especially from Janice, is a reoccurring theme in the “Rabbit” tetralogy. It seems that Harry avoids women frequently since he has fear of them which comes from the fear of his mother. In *Rabbit, Run* he avoids women when he himself abandons them. Later he keeps from his wife indirectly by encouraging her to abandon him or by constant remembering her lover and the time when she was absent in their family. He remembers that with a bizarre nostalgia as if he wished to repeat it.

Harry runs from his wife and his lover throughout the whole *Rabbit, Run*. He is afraid of commitment and he is confused, too. Nevertheless, this literal avoiding does not appear in the following sequels. Later, Harry avoids Janice in a different way. When he discovers her adultery he is extremely benevolent and he almost forces her to keep her lover and abandon him. He tells her entirely calm and serious: “Keep him, if he makes you happy. I don’t seem to, so go ahead, until you’ve had your fill at least” (Redux 62). In this example Harry suggests that this change may be temporary, however, he urges to a great extent in his next conviction. Janice becomes remorseful and suggests stopping her affair, yet, Harry discourages her from doing it: “I said, keep him. Don’t do anything for today at least. Calm down. Have a drink. See a movie” (Redux 67). It seems that losing Janice would not be painful for him. As he is afraid of women and relationships he sees a chance to dispose of Janice. Their relationship seems dysfunctional so he encourages her to depart.

Interestingly, Harry has a special attitude toward Janice’s lover Charlie. He always treats women like a different kind and thus, Charlie displays his own class. According to Harry, as men they are friends and they fight against women. In Harry’s view Charlie is his helper who assists him in controlling Janice. Surprisingly, Harry does not consider Charlie a rival: “...far from feeling Stavros as one of the enemy camp, he counts on him to keep this madwoman, his wife, under control. Through her body, they have become brothers” (Redux 135). It is obvious that Harry sees Charlie positively without animosity since they are both of masculine gender in opposition to females. They are relatives in his view. Later on Harry also calls him “a friend, met through Janice’s body” (Redux 154). Harry perceives the lover of his wife as a friend who may help him control and avoid her.

In *Rabbit Is Rich* and *Rabbit At Rest* Janice and Harry live together again. Nevertheless, Harry tends to remember Janice's affair and he permanently reminds her of Charlie. It appears that he does so to evoke her that good time of hers and probably to dispose of her again. For instance, Harry invites Charlie for dinner after several years and he expects that Janice will be pleased. Moreover, when Charlie arrives he observes their behavior with an odd pleasure (Rich 80). The fact that he invites the former lover of his wife to their house seems like an attempt to begin their affair again. Since that does not happen Harry at least mentions Charlie with connections to their former relationship. When Janice implies to dismiss Charlie in their company and hire their son instead Harry gets furious and he says reproachfully: "I'd think you'd be loyal to Charlie at least" (Rich 109)

From several reasons coming from his wracked childhood Harry avoids women's kind and his wife throughout his whole life. Therefore, he considers Janice's lover his friend as he can help him to avoid her. Besides running away from her he encourages her to leave. His dissatisfaction forces him to dispose of her in many different ways.

2.6 Rich husband

Harry's dissatisfaction with his family background does not only arise from their distant relationships. His family is rather poor which he considers to be his handicap. He resents being poor and therefore, he becomes jealous of rich people. Nevertheless, as he is older he becomes rich thanks to Janice's father. He enjoys being wealthy, yet, he soon realizes that in order to have money he must stay captive in his marriage.

When Harry remembers his childhood it is noticeable that he used to suffer from financial reasons. He comments on their contemporary situation: "They were living in a financial dungeon, back there on Jackson Road, and the fact that everybody else was in it too only makes it sadder. Just thinking about those old days lately depresses him..." (Rest 382). In Harry's opinion the lack of financial support is sad and depressing. As their poverty is such a huge trauma for Harry he starts to consider rich people his enemies. O'Connell suggests that financial status is also an aspect that he accounts when he chooses his partners. According to him, Jill, for instance, is an absolutely desirable partner, however, Harry "cannot forgive her for being wealthier" (O'Connell

150). Apparently, Harry is jealous of Jill's assets and thus, he cannot regard her as a candidate for his partner. Rich people are very little respected by Harry.

Yet, after Janice's father dies she becomes rich due to the inheritance and so does Harry. He enjoys Janice's finances as it is an opportunity to lead a more satisfactory life. Suddenly, his hate for the rich is forgotten. Updike calls Harry "dodgy" (Osen, Updike) in a broad sense. In this case being dodgy is displayed when he does not mind taking Janice's money even though he despises rich people. Later in the last sequel he even admits being a snob: "He always resented these snobs and now is safe among them" (Rest 384). He does not acquire only enrichment but snobbery too. In addition, it is the main reason why he stays with Janice. He explains the impossibility to abandon her: "But he hadn't left her, and now cannot. She is his fortune" (Rich 348). In this example one may see how important the capital is to Harry. He totally loses his ideals since the lust for money is stronger.

Consequently, Harry becomes financially dependent on his wife. He likes their new economic status. However, he realizes that their wealth is Janice's. This situation weakens his confidence as he recognizes that without their marriage he would be poor. Lasseter calls him "a kind of economic prisoner" (Lasseter 436) due to the dependence on Janice. Then, he believes that their relationship is a necessary evil. Accordingly, he 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 her inheritance..." (Rich 34). In order to keep this financial certainty Harry must stay with Janice even if he deliberates about deserting her.

To summarize, Harry did not have enough financial stability when he was a child and thus, it is tremendously important to him in his adulthood. His attitude toward wealthy people is negative, since he is envious, until he becomes rich himself. Nonetheless, as his financial confidence is gained through his wife's family his dominancy is threatened. The excessive reliance on his wife disables him to have control over her.

3. Father Harry

Harry's experience from childhood is also reflected in the attitude toward his descendants. Although he has comparatively good relationships with children of a low age, he considers teenagers and adults his rivals. Due to his controlling and possessive tendency he feels endangered by them. Thus, when Nelson is already an adult Harry treats him in a jealous and irritable way.

However, in the paternal role he seems to be conscious of the importance of a father to children. He even acts paternally to unknown youths, especially during the nineteen-sixties which was an extremely liberated period of time. The era influenced the relationship of Harry and his son too as he became overly liberal and open himself.

3.1 Caring father

Harry was already described as a domestic person concerning his attitude toward marriage. Similarly, he has the sense of domesticity when it comes to young children. The fact that Harry approaches his role of the father seriously can be noticed several times. For instance, he does not take advice from other people including his mother to leave Nelson after Janice disappeared with her lover. His friend Pajasek tries to persuade him to abandon Nelson, yet, Harry resents this idea with certainty. He explains that his own well-being is not more important than Nelson's and thus, it is impossible to leave the country and lead a new life without him (Redux 297). Furthermore, when Janice asks him he admits that Nelson matters more to him than she does (Redux 346). He has strong affections for young Nelson and he acts protective toward him.

Harry creates paternal relationships not only with his own children. Right after his first runaway he is escaping in his car. He stops at a gas station where he meets a young attendant. Suddenly, he feels a strange desire to embrace him: "He gives two dollars for gas to the attendant, a young but tall colored boy whose limber lazy body slumping inside his baggy Amoco coveralls Rabbit has a weird impulse to hug" (Run 29–30). It appears highly probable that Harry tries to transfer the father's role to different children once he does not succeed to be a satisfactory father to Nelson. Furthermore, as he seeks the unity he accepts and welcomes strange people into his home to create it. He enjoys the crowd that evokes a genuine family: "They are rejoicing in brotherhood, at having

shared this moment, giggling and cackling; the house is an egg cracking because they are all hitching together” (Redux 185). Generally, Harry desires having a family and children. Despite the fact that he is not always an acceptable father for his son he tries to act paternally toward other youngsters.

The two strangers accommodated by Harry are Jill and Skeeter. They are two young people in difficult situations and Harry lets them live with him and Nelson. His behavior toward them is oddly paternal. He acts paternal especially to Jill whom he places on the same level with Nelson: “Harry feels protective, timidly. In her tension of small bones she reminds him of Nelson” (Redux 109). Her child’s appearance raises his protectiveness and paternity. Even though Jill is older than Nelson, Harry often suggests her doing activities and visiting places that Nelson likes. For instance, he tells her the night that he firstly meets her and invites her to his home: “Let’s walk across the bridge and hope for a bus. The last one comes around eleven, maybe on Saturdays it’s later. Anyway, if none comes at all, it’s not too far to walk to my place. My kid does it all the time” (Redux 117). He also suggests going to places that are Nelson’s favorite: “My kid loves the place” (Redux 119) as he believes that Jill, like Nelson, should appreciate them. Mentioning his son like this never appears in conversations with other people that much in the tetralogy. After living together with Jill for a few months Harry seems to be forgetting the fact that she is not his real daughter. He suspects her from taking drugs so “he takes her wrist and turns it so he can see the inside of her freckled arm...He can talk to Janice. Then he remembers that Janice is not here, and that only Nelson is their child” (Redux 262–263). Since Harry accepts the idea that Jill is his real daughter, he shows that paternity is a natural matter to him.

3.2 Hippie Era

The critical period of time when Harry accommodates Jill and Skeeter is significant for the United States too. In the nineteen-sixties the country is undergoing a number of changes that have a huge impact on people’s lives. In Harry’s case it is especially the hippie movement that influences him and his home arrangements. It contrasts to the lack of freedom that he had in childhood, and hence, he becomes overly open-minded in sexual, family and political matters. However, his liberal attitude develops into chaos and disorder, especially when it comes to the upbringing of his son. In principle, he

reflects the “Age of Aquarius” as it was also a wildly chaotic and transformative time for American population.

In the nineteen-sixties and nineteen-seventies hippies were people “of a countercultural movement that rejected the mores of mainstream American life” (Britannica). These people began to criticize the conventional life style of most of the Americans. They were against materialism, warfare, traditional arrangements of families, restrictions and regimentation of many kinds (Britannica). One form of their protests was leading totally opposite lives themselves. They had wholly opposite attitudes toward “drugs, sexuality, gender rights or law and order” (Grunenberg qtd. in Poon 157). In *Rabbit Redux* Harry adopts several of them, namely, open approach to drugs and sexuality. Harry begins to live with Jill and Skeeter at that time. Jill is a hippie girl who abandons her parents since they are the prototype of mainstream. Skeeter is an African-American Vietnam veteran who seems to be mentally ill as he declares himself “black Jesus” (Redux 183). Living with these people endangers Nelson physically and mentally.

First of all, Harry allows people taking addictive drugs in his house. He, Skeeter and Jill regularly take drugs or drink alcohol in front of Nelson. It influences his view on drugs and endangers his moral values. Alcohol is considered to be perfectly fine for everyone. At first Harry insists on Nelson having only a half can of beer, yet, later he himself encourages him to have the whole can so that he does not have to share his own one (Redux 148). Furthermore, smoking marijuana becomes a very common activity in their household. Even though Nelson is not allowed to participate in these sessions, he is very frequently present when it is happening (Redux 201). There are even more types of drugs which Skeeter provides Jill. They are used secretly, yet, considering Jill’s frequent indispositions and generally unusual acting Nelson can easily suspect it (Redux 223 237). Harry acts extremely irresponsibly during this time being such a bad example for Nelson. Moreover, he shows him that drugs are not dangerous and thus and it is not necessary to avoid them. The fact may devastatingly influence his decisions concerning drug habits in the future. It may be an explanation of his subsequent drug addiction in *Rabbit at Rest*.

Mostly, Harry endangers Nelson’s moral values and manners by his wild and excessive behavior in the domestic area. Nevertheless, Nelson appears to experience crucial moments outside of his home too. The co-living causes Nelson unpopularity among his

coevals. His class-mates begin calling him racist nicknames such as “Nigger Nellie” and they often terrorize him due to his quirky family background (Redux 255). Moreover, the hate of neighbors could be fatal for him physically. Harry’s neighbors rage and ask him to stop his despicable activities (Redux 248–253). He does not obey and shortly after that his house is on fire (Redux 274). Fortunately, Nelson is not in the house at that moment, yet, he could have been there and he could have died. It is the moment when Harry grows sober and settles down again.

Toward the end of *Rabbit Redux* he evaluates the experience of co-living surprisingly negatively: “I was a fucking Good Samaritan. I took in these orphans. Black, white, I said Hop aboard. Irregardless of color or creed, Hop aboard. Free eats. I was the fucking Statue of Liberty” (Redux 311). Apparently, Harry regrets his decisions and he finally realizes that having these people in his house was both metaphorically and physically destructive. Colgan explains the nineteen-sixties in Harry’s life as follows: “In *Rabbit Redux*, the membrane or borderline between national life and domestic life has become porous” (Colgan, 75). Yet, it is difficult to state whether the use a dichotomous separation is appropriate. These two perspectives are mingled to such an extent that the possible line between them could hardly be found. More probably, it is a matter of hierarchy where the national life occurs higher than the domestic one. The national happenings have a huge impact on Harry’s personal life and not vice versa. That is why he becomes more stable towards *Rabbit Redux*. It is the time when hippie era is coming to its end. The approaching stability in the country mirrored in personal lives of American people too.

3.3 Resemblance with Nelson

Harry and Nelson have similar personalities. They both seem to be scared of commitments and they tend to behave irresponsibly. Nelson resembles Harry perfectly in his attitude toward his wife Pru. He often calls her “silly bitch” (Rich 298) and he also uses physical violence against her when he, for instance, pushes her down the stairs (Rich 305). It is probable that such a behavior is his reaction on coming responsibilities such as being a husband and father. Harry senses this fear in his son and he tries to help him. He can imagine Nelson’s feelings very well so he suggests giving Nelson money so that he can disappear. He offers him solutions that he himself chose when he was

scared of a family life since he believes that Nelson desires what he desired many years ago: “You don’t necessarily need to lead my life...” (Rich 185). Lasseter who also finds this aspect of their father-son relationship claims: “The many resemblances between Rabbit and his son Nelson suggest...important naturalistic idea: heredity combines with environment to thwart the wills of the protagonists.” (Lasseter 438) According to Lasseter, Nelson inherits the frustration that he sees occurring during his whole life. As in other naturalistic novels, the main character’s environment is an infinite cycle in which people are allowed to change their direction toward better very little.

Harry is frustrated due to his inability to find a satisfaction in life and consequently, he considers himself weak. Yet, he does not admit it due to the fact that his mother always judged men who were not strong enough. Nonetheless, Nelson seems to have a rather fragile and weak psyche. Hence, the feature that Harry tries to avoid reflects in Nelson. As a result, Harry perceives Nelson pathetically powerless and even womanlike. In addition, he is overcritical of him: “Nelson looks as if he will cry: the way his eyes sink in and his chin develops another bump. He looks, Rabbit thinks, like a sulky girl” (Redux 149). As girls are generally considered weaker, Harry uses such a comparison for emphasis. In other occasions Harry ascertains: “[Nelson] thinks the world is going to hurt him, so it will. The universal instinct to exterminate the weak” (Redux 196). Moreover, Harry feels uncomfortable in Nelson’s company: “You poor schnook, Rabbit thinks. Why is the kid standing so close? He can hear the boy’s worried breath” (Rich 141). Apparently, when standing close to Nelson, Harry perceives their parallel negative features even more and becomes stressed. Janice can see the weakness of both Nelson and Harry after a few years in *Rabbit Is Remembered*. She says: “They think the country is as fragile as they are” (Licks of Love 311). Their resemblance in this area is unfortunate since Nelson’s insecurity causes insecurity in Harry too.

Their trouble is that Harry sees Nelson make wrong decisions and he immediately recalls his own faulting. Noticeably, Nelson demonstrates his father’s compunction. As a result, Harry’s anger toward himself transforms into anger toward Nelson. Harry, for example, feels embarrassed by his son: “As always when he sees his son unexpectedly Harry feels shame” (Rich 217). Most likely, Harry feels shame for what he has done and he confesses by uttering: “I think one of the troubles between me and the kid is every time I had a little, you know, slip-up, he was there to see it. That’s one of the reasons I

don't like to have him around" (Rich 155). Unfortunately, there is a huge gap between Harry and his son partially caused by this aspect. Wood explains the anger toward Nelson as follows: "Harry is all the angrier because he sees that Nelson is repeating his own sorry history: the son is the father one generation removed" (Wood 54). Their likeness is simultaneously their destruction.

3.4 Jealous father

Throughout the tetralogy Harry becomes jealous of his son and youth in general. He is a possessive husband and father too. Thus, in his relationship with Nelson he behaves extremely envious as they have common relatives, household, wealth and workplace. Regarding his nature Harry does not wish to share any of them.

Seemingly, as Harry has the urge to be in control of his surroundings, he sees young people as enemies who try to occupy his own area. O'Connell suggests that "Rabbit generally has antagonistic attitude toward the young" (O'Connell 22). He seems to believe that the children may endanger his position simply by their presence: "He stands there thinking, the kids keep coming, they keep crowding you up" (Run 5). Another example of such phenomenon is his reaction toward newborn children: "...a granddaughter. His. Another nail in his coffin. His" (Rich 423). Even though, having a granddaughter is supposed to be positive news he appears dissatisfied. Updike claims that one of the reasons why Harry keeps distance from children is that they remind him that "there is nothing beyond parenthood but death" (Osen, Updike). In other words, they remind him of his old age and approaching death. The connection to jealousy may be noticeable here, too. With the age he becomes gradually more jealous and upset toward the youth as the age cannot be controlled. It is out of his reach.

Harry begins with the jealousy gradually when Nelson is a child and the envy increases toward his adulthood. In the first period Harry struggles to see his mother minding his son. Harry obtained an extraordinary care from her when he was a child. Hence, he dislikes seeing Nelson in the position that used to be his: "He sees himself sitting in a high chair, and a quick odd jealousy comes and passes. It is his son" (Run 20). As Nelson grows up Harry becomes even more envious: "...Nelson has swallowed up the boy that was and substituted with one more pushy man in the world...Not enough room in the world" (Rich, 203). Harry has inhospitable attitude toward his mature son since

he is aware that an adult is very difficult to control. He knows that Nelson does not obey his rules anymore. He has no power over him. Soon after, despite Harry's repulsion, Nelson is going to begin working in their family car business. Even though Harry will keep his job, he says: "The kid's taking over the lot Monday..." (Rich 271). He suggests that Nelson intends to steal Harry's job. As he cannot control his son he becomes frustrated. Similarly, as he does not wish to be controlled by his mother or Janice he does refuse to be controlled by Nelson.

3.5 Angry father

Toward the higher age Harry considers young people his enemies as they endanger his dominancy. Accordingly, he behaves hostilely toward younger people including grown-up Nelson. Harry senses that he has no control over Nelson once he becomes mature and his position in their relationship is therefore not dominant enough. As a result, Harry frequently reacts to his son as if to an enemy.

In one of his many interviews Updike describes the attitude of Harry toward Nelson and says: "There is love along with real animosity. You [a father] are both the rival and the protector" (Osen, Updike). Of course, there are several moments when Harry shows that he is able to be the protector and the satisfying father even when Nelson is already adult. On the other hand, the rivalry attitude prevails. Harry feels anger toward Nelson as having a son takes his privileges away. He realizes that with son he should be less selfish and more sharing which stands against his natural characteristics.

In particular, he is aware that he should allow his son working in the family lot and making adult decisions on his own. However, he appears to be incapable of such sacrifice and understanding and he behaves quite the opposite. He expects that Nelson desires to take everything from him, and that arouses fear. He thinks: "His son frightens him" (Rest 20). The fear as if from an enemy may also be observable when Harry receives a letter from Nelson. He is at the university at that time and informs his father about his soon arrival, yet, Harry is not sure whether he wishes to see him: "I don't know... This doesn't feel good to me. I've been too happy lately" (Rich 62). Again, he expects that Nelson's visit will impair his well-being. In extreme situations he even predicts that Nelson will commit crime in the pursuit of destroying Harry. He rejects to

put his money into the safe in their lot. He says: "Nelson will steal' em...He knows the combination now too" (Rich 339). Harry, unable to control his son, prevents his capital from him. He believes that Nelson's desire is to use any means to have power over his father.

In the end, these reactions, full of fear and anger, resemble reactions toward enemies. Harry is aware of his attitude as he ironically claims: "It's great to have an enemy. Sharpens your senses" (Rich 111). In fact, the irony of his statements further emphasizes the significant meaning of it. Nelson is not considered his father's friend. He is more often the rival who endangers Harry by not letting him be dominant and controlling.

4. Cynicism

Approaching the end of the tetralogy Harry becomes exhausted by seeking the stability of everyday life and desperate to maintain suitable family relationships. He seems to be aware of consequences of his mistakes and he regrets them. He regrets his dysfunctional relationship with Nelson. Moreover, he is disappointed with his marriage as Janice represents rather a financial source than a wife. Accordingly, he resigns himself to having problematic relations and he begins to regard them cynically.

Harry aches for the disharmony that appears in his relationship with Nelson. Wood suggests that Harry realizes that he has not fulfilled the role a father properly: “Yet in his frenzy accusation against Nelson, Rabbit remembers that he has hardly been a moral exemplar himself” (Wood 1099). Even though he criticizes Nelson and acts hostile to him in many cases he knows that his parenthood was not ideal. Moreover, he apparently feels guilty when he sees the consequences of his inappropriate upbringing. When Nelson starts drug rehabilitation he considers it an evaluation of his paternity: “His fatherhood hasn’t been good enough. They’re calling in professionals” (Rest 273). Harry blames himself for Nelson’s and their common troubles. He discloses the effects of his faults and feels sorry not only for Nelson but for himself too.

As regards marriage, during *Rabbit is Rich* Harry realizes his financial dependence on Janice. Later on in *Rabbit at Rest* he must rely on her also due to his health state. Therefore, as he needs her so much he finds his situation constraining. He claims: “The reason I haven’t left Janice and never can now...is without her, I’m shit. I’m unemployable. I’m too old” (Rest 187). The seriousness of such statement is certain as Harry is “suddenly near tears” when uttering it (Rest 187). With both Nelson and Janice he feels a gigantic distance. Their bonds have been destroyed: “...he remembers the way they used to be, just the three of them, living together, younger. The kid and Janice still have it between them. He’s lost it” (Rich 317).

As a result of his dissatisfactory relationships he turns into a person tired from too many failures. Hence, since *Rabbit is Rich* he ceased to be interested in family arrangements. He ignores them: “Family life, life with children, is something out of his past, that he has not been sorry to leave behind; it was for him like a bush in some neglected corner of the back yard” (Rest 41). He does not change this stance even when he discovers his potential daughter. He does not desire to uncover whether or not she is his real daughter.

He appears to stay uninterested: “Even if this girl is his daughter, it’s an old story, going on and on, like a radio no one is listening to” (Rest 252). In this example, he likens the possibility to have a new member of the family to the radio which has too little importance. Apparently, as satisfaction with his family happens to be out of his reach in the last two sequels, he becomes a cynic. He takes cynicism to the furthest degree after the affair with Nelson’s wife. Janice, who is devastated, calls Harry by telephone. He is appallingly cynical: “He feels she is beginning to work from a script, saying standard things, and into the vault of his shocked and ashamed consciousness there is admitted a whiff of boredom” (Rest 393). After their call he also adds that Janice “sounded comically like her mother” (Rest 395). He is very little sensitive to Janice and he admits to be bored while she is speaking. There is cynicism in his position of a father and husband too. He becomes cynical in every way.

Lastly, cynicism may be sensed by the reader from stylistics. In contrast to the first two parts Harry is less open in the last sequels. He does not share his feelings, inner thoughts and emotions as frequently and deeply as before. In addition, the lower interest in relationships which was crucial in *Rabbit, Run* gradually vanishes. Toward the end of the tetralogy there is much higher number of financial and business news and events or advertisements. Lasseter confirms it when he comments on the author’s stylistic means: “Updike has learnt the details of automobile dealerships, for instance, and also undergirds the novel with contemporary events such as the energy crisis” (Lasseter 431). As if the lack of emotions and affections in the writing were supposed to reflect Harry’s lack of emotions toward the end.

Conclusion

This thesis demonstrates that Harry “Rabbit” Angstrom is overly influenced by his dominant mother and generally cold family relationships. The experience from his childhood causes his struggling to create his own family of his and fulfill the roles of a husband and father. His permanent running, thus, seems to represent an escape from dysfunctional relationships and a search for an agreeable family at the same time. In addition, the thesis examines Harry’s self development during the sequels. Although he seeks the family satisfaction very intensively when he is young, he becomes exhausted by his constant failures and surrenders to change the poor condition of his family toward his old age. In other words, the man who was full of hope evolves into a cynic.

Nevertheless, not only the development of Harry may be seen in the tetralogy. Every novel from the tetralogy follows a different decade from the nineteen-fifties to the end of the nineteen-eighties. Hence, there are several events at the national level that Updike reflected in his work such as a baby boom, economical boom, American seekers, civil rights movement and hippie movement. The novels reveal what impact the period had on common American people at the current time. The changes in society and politics influenced Harry’s life as they transformed the environment in which he lived and created new opportunities or threats. Updike’s tetralogy summarizes more than a few influential historical moments of the second half of the twentieth century in The United States.

Elements that supported this thesis the most were Harry’s inner contemplations and thoughts. Since Updike “takes us [readers] directly inside Rabbit’s head” (Schiff 255) Harry’s motifs of his behavior and the connections between individual roles reveal. Consequently, a high number of examples from *Rabbit, Run*; *Rabbit Redux*; *Rabbit Is Rich* and *Rabbit At Rest* was used to demonstrate his behavior. Additionally, the short sequel *Rabbit Remembered* written in 2000 was also used as it includes numerous descriptions of Harry from other people’s perspective. The secondary literature provided me both major information about Updike and several opinions on Angstrom. It is fortunate that Updike cooperated with media and was interviewed several times so I was able to gain opinions right from the author.

Resumé

Tato bakalářská práce ukazuje, že Harry “Rabbit” Angstrom je nadměru ovlivněn svou dominantní matkou a celkově chladnými vztahy v rodině. Tato zkušenost z dětství působí Harrymu těžkosti při vytváření vlastní rodiny a také při vykonávání manželské a otcovské role. Zdá se, že jeho neustálé utíkání představuje únik od nefunkčních rodinných vztahů a zároveň také hledání nové, tentokrát fungující rodiny. Dále tato práce hodnotí vývoj Harryho v průběhu románů. Ačkoliv v mládí hledá velmi intenzivně vhodné rodinné zázemí, neustálá selhání ho vyčerpávají, a s přibývajícím věkem vzdává jakoukoliv snahu změnit neuspokojivý stav své rodiny. Jinak řečeno, Harry přestává věřit v mezilidské vztahy a stává se z něj cynik.

Avšak v tetralogii lze nalézt nejen vývoj Harryho. Jelikož se každý díl odehrává v jiném desetiletí od padesátých do osmdesátých let dvacátého století, Updike v románech zobrazuje několik národních událostí, jako jsou například populační a ekonomická exploze, hledačství, hnutí za lidská práva či hnutí hippie. Romány odhalují, jaký dopad měla daná doba na Americkou populaci. Harryho sociologické a politické změny také ovlivnily, jelikož měnily prostředí, ve kterém žil a vytvářely nové příležitosti a hrozby. Z těchto důvodů mohou Updikovy romány sloužit jako shrnutí historických událostí druhé poloviny dvacátého století ve Spojených státech.

Základní prvky, které slouží jako opora této práce, jsou Harryho vnitřní rozjímání a myšlenky. Updike přivádí své čtenáře přímo do Rabbitovy hlavy (Schiff 255), a proto je možné odhalit motivy Harryho chování a také spojitosti mezi jednotlivými rolemi. Konkrétní příklady jsou vybrány z románů *Rabbit*, *Run*; *Rabbit Redux*; *Rabbit Is Rich* a *Rabbit At Rest*. Dále bylo použito krátké pokračování *Rabbit Remembered*, jelikož skrze ostatní postavy zahrnuje líčení Harryho a vzpomínky na něj. Ze sekundární literatury jsem získala informace o Updikovy a několik názorů na Angstroma. Příznivé je, že Updike spolupracovat s médii a účastnil se mnoha rozhovorů, kterých jsem mohla rovněž využít při psaní této práce.

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Anotace

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Harry “Rabbit” Angstrom, literární postava Johna Updika, se objevuje v románech *Rabbit, Run*; *Rabbit Redux*; *Rabbit Is Rich*; *Rabbit At Rest* a částečně také v *Rabbit Remembered*. Cílem této práce je poskytnout detailní rozbor rodinných rolí hlavní postavy a spojitosti mezi nimi. Jedná se o roli syna, manžela a také otce. Tyto role se vzájemně ovlivňují a vyvíjejí během čtyř amerických desetiletí, která se v jejich vývoji také promítají.

Annotation

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This thesis explores the character of John Updike's novels Harry "Rabbit" Angstrom. He is the main character of Updike's *Rabbit, Run*; *Rabbit Redux*; *Rabbit Is Rich*, *Rabbit At Rest* and partly *Rabbit Remembered*. The purpose of this thesis is an analysis of the family roles of Harry and the connections between them. Namely, the roles of son, husband and father are analyzed and their influences are discussed. Moreover, the development of the character is observed with respect to the four American decades which reflect in the family situation too.