

Rabbit Is Rich Study Guide

Rabbit Is Rich by John Updike

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Plot Summary

Rabbit is Rich picks up the story begun in Updike's *Rabbit Run* (1961) and continued in *Rabbit Redux* (1971), of Harry Angstrom, Rabbit, in his mid-forties in the late 1970's. He is the Sales Manager and part owner of Springer Motors Toyota, in the fictional town of Brewer, PA. Harry is at the lot when two young people come in looking for a car. Harry takes them for a test drive and gets the notion that the girl may be his daughter. After the young people have left Harry talks about them with Charlie Stavros, his colleague at Springer Motors, but Charlie has paperwork he is trying to complete, so Harry leaves for the drive home. On his trip home, we are given a tour of several parts of Brewer, PA.

At home, there is great tension because Nelson has written that he is coming home and bringing Melanie. Nobody knows who Melanie is. Bessie is especially upset, but Janice and Harry get her calmed down. A few days later, they are at the pool at their country club and we get to meet their country club buddies. They get a message to call Bessie. It turns out that Nelson and Melanie have arrived. Driving home from the club, Harry tells Janice about the girl he thinks may be his daughter and immediately realizes it was not a good idea. He dreads seeing Nelson; he remembers when his home burned down, a young girl named Jill, whom Nelson had loved like a sister, had died. Nelson has not forgiven him.

Melanie gets a job as a waitress, and Harry takes Charlie over to the restaurant to meet her. They hit it off. The Angstroms invite Charlie to come to dinner where he has another chance to see Melanie. Nelson is out for the evening with Billy Fosnacht (and with Harry's Corona). When he comes back, it seems there has been a small accident and the Toyota has been scraped on the side.

Harry drives down to the farm country around Galilee and locates the farm where Ruth Byer, with whom he had an affair about 20 years ago, lives. She is the mother of the girl who appeared with Jamie Nunemacher in the showroom. He imagines a conversation with Ruth, but gets scared and runs away.

Harry, Janice and Bessie are away in the Poconos. As soon as they get home, Nelson wants to take Harry over to the lot. He has something he wants to show him. It turns out to be three convertibles that Nelson has bought—or has caused the dealership to buy. Harry is extremely critical of the idea and gets on Nelson to the point that Nelson gets into one of the convertibles and rams it into one of the others.

A couple of days later, Harry is at the club. Janice calls to tell him to come home immediately. It turns out that Pru—introduced as Nelson's fiancé, is there and she is pregnant. Planning for a wedding begins immediately. Before the wedding, Harry talks with Nelson about the situation and indicates that if Nelson wants to get out of the whole thing that he will help him do it. Nelson says he is okay with marrying Pru.

Harry buys a few thousand dollars of gold Krugerrands. That night when he shows them to Janice, they end up making love with the coins dripping over their bodies. The



wedding goes off as planned. At a party with their country club friends, Harry suggests that the six of them should plan to take a Caribbean vacation together in January. They agree with some excitement. Harry takes another drive down to Galilee. This time he knows exactly where to go, but again he gets scared. While he is hiding in a line of trees, a big dog comes barking at him. Harry works his way back to his car and turns tail.

Nelson and Pru are at a party at Slim's. Pru is dancing, but Nelson is just sitting down and having a few beers. He falls into conversation with Annabelle, who is there with Jamie Nunemacher. They have moved up to Brewer from Galilee and are living together. As they are leaving the party, Pru falls on the stairs and breaks an arm. She winds up in the hospital where everyone is very worried about the baby, but the baby is fine. Pru gives birth to a little girl not long after the accident. Everyone is delighted.

Harry sells the gold Krugerrands and buys a bunch of silver coins. He has made a nice profit on the gold. They have a meeting with Bessie Springer and tell her that they have been looking at houses.

The day eventually comes when they go to the Caribbean with their friends. They swim, play golf, go sunfish sailing and generally have a wonderful time. At dinner someone suggests they swap wives night-by-night. They have a serious discussion about the idea and work out a set of ground rules to agree on. Harry is picked by Thelma, much to his disappointment. He is really hot for Cindy Murkett, but that will have to be another night. Thelma actually is very fond of Harry—something he had been totally unaware of. She gives him a night of ardent love. The next morning they are awakened by people pounding at the door of their cabana. It seems that Harry and Janice have to return home immediately; Nelson has run off.

Bessie had the good sense to get Charlie, who had been let go to make room for Nelson at the dealership, to come back, so they are still selling cars. Harry makes another expedition down to Galilee and this time gets up enough nerve to actually knock on the door and have an extensive conversation with Ruth. She swears to him that her daughter Annabelle is not his child. They get a postcard from Nelson. He is back at Kent State enrolling for the new semester.

Rabbit and Janice are in their new home. It is Super Bowl Sunday. Bessie and Pru have come over to see the new place and watch the game. While Janice is showing Bessie the upstairs, Pru finds Harry sitting in a wing chair in his den. She puts the new baby, his granddaughter, into his lap.



Chapter 1

Chapter 1 Summary

Harry Angstrom, also known as Rabbit—a nickname from his high school basketball days, stares out the window of the showroom of Springer Motors, one of two Toyota dealerships in the Brewer, PA area. It's a quiet summer Saturday during the time of the Iran hostage crisis. Gas lines are making people behave wildly about their cars, but it has not stopped them from buying. In fact, business has never been better, although there is not a lot action today. Harry is the chief sales representative and owner of Springer Motors; or rather, he and his wife Janice are co-owners of 50%. His mother-in-law, Bessie Springer, widow of the founder, owns the other 50%. Old man Springer ran the place with an iron fist. He would keep the showroom open on a snowy night when Route 111 had not been plowed and he was always grinding away in his high-pitched voice about performance guidelines, washout profits, and whether or not a mechanic had left a thumbprint on a steering wheel. Now that Springer has gone, Harry is more comfortable and likes the place better. He likes the peace of this masculine space spiced by the girls in reception and billing that come and go under old Mildred Kroust.

Harry doesn't like the young people today with all the drugs and draft dodging. He remembers when he was young that old people used to say that life was sweet. He wondered how they could mean it.

Harry strikes up an idle conversation with Charlie Stavros, Springer Motors Senior Sales Representative. Charlie has been at Springer Motors twice as long as Harry has, and is the top producer at the agency. He does not resent the fact that Harry was handed the place by Old Man Springer, his father-in-law. The two men have worked side by side for many years and have a good working relationship, but not really a friendship. Ten years ago, Charlie had an affair with Janice, Harry's wife, but that ended a long time ago—although Harry never completely forgets about it. While they talk about the present state of the oil market and reminisce about wild driving adventures of twenty years ago, their conversations have a way of coming back to allude to Charlie's love affair with Janice, and so die out before any intimacy develops between the two men.

A young man and woman, who appear to be from the farm area at the south end of the county, come in looking for a car.

Harry says, "Can I help you folks?" The boy says they have just come in for some information. Harry, as he is with just about all women, is immediately attracted to the girl and does a quick assessment, staring at her for about a second too long before he switches his attention back to the boy, "This is a Corolla—" and he starts into his spiel. The boy seems put off by Harry's inability to stop talking. He repeats that they are just looking around. Charlie, who has been trying to complete some paperwork and would like some quiet, suggests that maybe the kids would like to take a test drive. They agree reluctantly and Harry goes with them. They drive down the main road for a bit then circle



around back to the lot. In the ongoing conversation, Harry elicits the information that they are from around Galilee (down county as Harry suspected). The girl says she lives with her mother who has a farm, and Jamie, the boy, lives in the same area. Harry gets the boy to sign the customer register, so he has his name, Jamie Nunemacher, but the girl declines. Harry is building up the fantasy that the girl's mother is a woman with whom he had an affair years ago, and that the girl may, in fact, be his daughter. As they are about to leave, the girl asks Harry if he was ever a famous basketball player. He says he was "a long time ago" and asks if she had heard the name. The girl says, "no, he just has that look." After they have left, Harry asks Charlie what he thought of the girl. Charlie says he barely noticed her. They have some more business-related chit-chat, and then out of the blue Harry asks, "Charlie, if I had a daughter, what d'you think she'd look like?" Charlie pretty much ducks that question and comes back with "What d'you hear from Nelson?" This opens the door to a litany of complaints from Harry about Nelson.

After leaving Charlie, Harry goes over the arithmetic of his job in his head: June is the peak month, say 25 units and he has 21 accounted for. That's a gross of \$20,000 for the dealership, minus the 25% they estimate for salesman's compensation, less somewhere between 8 and 10% for other salaries. Harry gets sidetracked into thinking about one of the girls from bookkeeping that he got as far as rubbing bottoms with in the narrow corridors. Then he gets back to the mental bookkeeping again and all the things that cost money out of the gross. He comes down finally to the \$475 a week he pays himself, and then goes on to think of expenses against that, like the three or four suits he has to buy himself each year. Finally, approaching the bottom line, he comes to a net of \$3000, \$1500 for Ma Springer and \$1500 for Janice and him, plus the \$2000 salary. He thinks of his dead dad who used to go off to the print shop at quarter after seven every morning for \$40 a week. Harry wonders what his father would think if he could only see him now, rich.

In another recollection, Harry thinks of Skeeter, a small, furious black man who lived for a while with Harry and Nelson during a period when Harry and Janice were separated. Skeeter was the only black person Harry had ever been close to. Not long ago, Harry received a newspaper clipping about Skeeter being shot to death by police during an incident in Philadelphia. The notable thing about the clipping, apart from the fact that Harry had lost track of Skeeter and did not know of his death, was the fact that it arrived with no identification of who had sent it, giving Harry the eerie feeling that he was being watched.

On his drive home in his 1978 Luxury Edition liftback five-door Corona, he follows his usual route from the lot on Route 111 along the river to West Brewer, where he once lived with Skeeter. He cuts across the Weiser Street Bridge, and then takes a left on Third Street through some semi-residential blocks of ophthalmologist's offices and other stuff to the main drag called Eisenhower. This takes him through the sector of old factories and railroad yards. Brewer was made on coal and railroads. There are smokestacks in this sector that have not issued smoke for half a century. The only new buildings in this city are funeral parlors, government offices, unemployment offices and Join the Army.



Beyond the car yards and the underpass at Seventh, Eisenhower climbs steeply through tight-built neighborhoods of solid row houses built by German workingmen's savings and loan associations, with only the fanlights of stained glass immune to the later layers of aluminum awning and Permastone siding. The Polacks and Italians of Harry's youth have been squeezed out by the blacks and Hispanics that used to be held to the low blocks down by the river.

On up the hill, Eisenhower crosses streets named for fruits and the seasons of the year: Winter, Spring, Summer. For three months, twenty years ago, Rabbit lived on Summer Street with Ruth Leonard. There he fathered the girl he saw today, if that was his daughter.

"Some car with double headlights is tailgating him. Harry, as is his practice nowadays, pulls over to let the car pass. He hopes 'Maybe they'll kill themselves on a telephone pole in the next mile.'"

His route takes him past the Brewer High School, built in 1933, the year of his birth. Locust Street East of the high school is an area of homes with grass all the way around. The bone surgeons, legal eagles and middle managers live here. Locust Street changes to Cityview Drive as it begins to curve through the park. The Pinnacle Hotel used to be there, but it has fallen to vandals. For a while, it was a favorite necking spot and he and Ruth had walked up there a couple of times. The road becomes Rte 422 and curves around the shoulder of Mt. Judge. This is in the neighborhood of his old house, but since his father died and he and his sister, Mim, sold it, he seldom drives by. At that time, he had begged Janice to take the \$7,000 he netted from the sale and buy a new house just for them, maybe over in Penn Park in West Brewer, but Janice didn't think they should desert her mother. The Springers had taken them in just when Harry was starting as an Associate Sales Representative. Part of Janice's thinking was connected to the fire that had killed Jill. Harry had been under investigation at the time, and she thought it would be better just to disappear into 89 Joseph, the Springer's house. Except for the little upstairs room that had belonged to Janice when she was a girl, and then Nelson's for the five years before he went away to college, there isn't any place where Harry felt able to breathe absolutely his own air. As he puts his car in the garage beside Ma Springer's '74 Navy-blue Chrysler Newport and walks into the house, he is strangely conscious of having not one child but two.

Janice is slightly drunk from lying around the swimming pool at the country club drinking vodka and tonics. She has been arguing with her mother, with whom they live, over a postcard that arrived from Nelson. He is due to enter his senior year at Kent State and he has been spending the summer in Colorado. His postcard says that things are not working out in Colorado and that he is coming back to Pennsylvania and bringing Melanie with him. That point is the cause of the argument with her mother. Bessie refers to Melanie as some slut. Janice says that as a friend of her son Melanie is welcome. Harry tries to smooth things out between them, but Bessie storms upstairs to her room. Harry and Janice work on a half-gallon of Gallo Chablis, then head for bed and the kind of drunken sex that Harry has come to expect.



The next afternoon, having drinks around the pool at the Flying Eagle country club, we meet their pals from the club, two couples, the Harrisons and the Murketts, plus a single guy who has a succession of unfortunate girlfriends. The Flying Eagle has only recently been carved out of 300 acres on the lower slopes of Mt. Pemaquid. It fits in the area between the Brewer Country Club, where the doctors and their friends belong, and the Tulpehocken Club, where the mill owners and their lawyers belong. Flying Eagle caters to the young, middle-aged of the retail business and service industries of the town. Harry feels at home there. Their conversation is filled with banter and friendly insults. Bessie gets a message to them that Nelson and his girl have arrived.

On the drive home, Harry tells Janice about the young couple from down-county and that he thinks the girl is his daughter. Janice had known about the old affair but she is disgusted to hear about his fantasy. When they arrive home, Janice asks him to leave her car out front in case Nelson wants to use it.

Going into the house Harry feels the world has taken on a new gravity. Years ago, when Harry's house burned down, a girl named Jill had died in the fire. Harry has forgiven himself, but Nelson never has forgiven him, and Harry knows this. Jill was like an older sister to Nelson. Melanie has an open, friendly air, but Harry, for once, is not turned on by her. The greeting between Harry and Nelson is clumsy; Harry is not able to pull off an affectionate greeting. Bessie dotes on Nelson and seems to like Melanie. She has made up their beds, Nelson's in his old room and Melanie's in what used to be a sewing room. The kids go out to pick up some pizza, giving the parents and Bessie a chance to compare notes about them. Harry asks Bessie what she thinks brought Nelson back home. Bessie thinks it was some disappointment or something not going right for him.

"When the kids come back with the pizza, Janice asks Melanie if she is also a hang glider. Melanie says no, but that Pru used to hang glide with Nelson, which raises the question of who Pru is. Nelson says, 'You don't know her.' Harry responds that if he knew her, he wouldn't have asked."

Melanie gets a job as a waitress at a new restaurant downtown. Harry takes Charlie Stavros over to lunch to have a look at this latest addition to the Angstrom household. Harry says that Melanie does not turn him on or Nelson either for that matter. Charlie has a different view. He invites himself over to dinner to meet Melanie on a more social basis. The two talk about what Nelson should do about getting a job. Harry is concerned that Nelson may be quitting college. Charlie suggests that they could maybe fit him in around the lot, but Harry is against that idea. At any rate, Harry does suggest to Janice that it's been awhile since they had Charlie over for dinner. Janice agrees.

The next week Charlie does come over for dinner, bringing flowers that he hands to Ma Springer. Melanie seems attracted to him and vice versa. He starts to talk about going to Florida for a month in the winter. Bessie begins telling Charlie that Nelson has been inquiring about how the salesmen at the lot are paid. Harry comes out strongly against the idea of Nelson getting into sales at the lot. He suggests putting him on clean-up but Janice, overhearing the conversation, calls from the kitchen that Nelson doesn't want to work on clean-up. During all this discussion, Nelson is out visiting with some of his bar



buddies. Nelson comes in while the family is at dinner and says there has been a mishap with Harry's Corona. It turns out he scraped the right side on a telephone pole trying to avoid a woodchuck.

Chapter 1 Analysis

This first chapter introduces the main themes of the novel and most of the main characters. The city of Brewer itself is an important part of the story. Harry and the others reflect the character of this typical American small city and its middle class inhabitants. We begin to see that Harry is a deeply frightened man, lacking self-confidence in a field where self-confidence is essential. We also begin to see that his relationship with his son, Nelson, is one that he knows he is not good at, but he cannot stop himself from indulging in heavy sarcasm. The competitiveness that made him a star high school basketball player is still strongly at play in his relationship with Nelson. Another major theme is Harry's obsession with sex. With some exceptions, notably Melanie, he cannot meet a woman without going off on a wild sexual fantasy.

Two other issues that are raised that will be resolved in the course of the novel are, Harry's desire to have his own house, and his conviction that the girl from Galilee who came into his showroom is very likely his daughter.



Chapter 2

Chapter 2 Summary

The summer weather is very hot. Melanie has bought a 12-speed Fuji with her waitress wages. On fair days, she pedals it downtown.

"On a hot summer afternoon, Harry drives south toward Galilee, a farming community in the south end of the county. He stops at the Post Office to inquire about the Nunemacher farm on RD 2. He is looking for the farm where his former lover, Ruth, and her daughter (Harry's daughter, too?) live. His only clue is that he once heard that the farmer Ruth had married also ran a fleet of school busses. He finally spots an old school bus tucked in behind the barn of one farm. He gets out of his car and proceeds on foot, the better to scope out the farm. He imagines a conversation with Ruth in which he knocks on her door and says, "Hi, you may not remember me." As he is hiding in a row of trees, a woman's voice calls, "Hey!" Harry becomes frightened, runs back to his car, and speeds away."

A few nights later Harry finds himself alone with Nelson, Bessie and Janice upstairs. They talk about several things—about how Nelson feels about Melanie going out with Charlie Stavros (He doesn't seem to care.) and about the automobile business. Nelson is reading a book he borrowed from the lot that is about the financial end of the business. Harry gives him a summary, but, as usual, it is not a pleasant discussion. Harry gets the idea that there may be a plot to displace Charlie to make an opening for Nelson. Nelson tells Harry an idea he has about buying convertibles, since the carmakers are dropping them. Harry is very critical of the idea. There is a good deal of arguing about the dealership, and about Melanie. Finally, Nelson says he wants to go out. He asks his mother for her car keys and goes. Harry, after making love to Janice, says he can't understand what all the controversy with Nelson is. He says he feels there is something he doesn't know. Janice says there is, but she won't tell him. He also says he likes having Nelson in the house—that it is good to have an enemy because it sharpens your senses.

Harry and Charlie are talking at the lot when Harry asks Charlie how things went on his date with Melanie. Charlie says that they went fine; she is a nice girl. They move on to talk about Nelson. Charlie thinks he wants to come to work at the lot. He recommends that when Harry and Janice go up with Bessie to the Poconos, as they do every year, that Nelson come to work—on salary—no commission. He says he will take him under his wing. He also says that Nelson will never stick in this business, that he's too "twitchy."

With the family away in the Poconos, Nelson and Melanie are in bed together. She asks what he is learning at the lot. Nelson says he is learning a lot of the little things that go on between the dealer and the manufacturer. They talk about Charlie and Nelson encourages Melanie to date him again, although Melanie has some doubts about his



age and poor physical condition. While talking about his dad, Nelson says he can't stand him. They also talk about Colorado and Pru. Nelson is upset because Pru writes him at least two letters a day, sometimes more. He is overwhelmed at the idea of having to reply.

Back in Brewer, Nelson and Melanie talk. It comes out that Pru writes long letters, one or two a day, telling Nelson everything she does. She writes from Kent State in Ohio, although she was out in Colorado with the others. Nelson dreads having to reply. He asks Melanie to write for him.

The old folk arrive back from the Poconos. Janice and Harry talk about going over to the club. Nelson wants Harry to go to the lot with him. He has something to show him. While Harry was away, Nelson has bought three convertibles. Harry gets on him. In the ensuing argument, Nelson also lets it be known that he is not going back to college. They argue heatedly. Harry turns to go back into the building. He hears a crash, turns around to see Nelson has rammed one of the convertibles into another and is backing up to ram it again.

Harry turns the event into a story he tells on himself at the club. He is at the pool now, after a round of golf, waiting for Janice to come over for supper. Thelma Harrison thinks there is a sad note to the story. She says Nelson must be desolated by what he has done. She seeks to make Harry feel better about himself and about Nelson. A phone message comes for Harry and Janice asks him to come right home; that someone is there. When he gets home, there is a young woman there, visibly pregnant. Nelson introduces her as Pru while Janice adds, "Nelson's fiancée."

Later that night in bed, he asks Janice how long she has known. She says about a month.

He's annoyed because they left him out, but he's really quite impressed with Pru and not unhappy to have her join the family.

The Reverend Archie Campbell comes visiting a few nights later to talk about the plans for the wedding and to set dates with Nelson and Pru for meetings to discuss the business of marriage. Nelson is quite unbearable about the whole procedure and insulting to the minister who seems to be pretty used to it. Nelson would clearly prefer to get married by a Justice of the Peace, but agrees to go along with the wedding idea. He really likes Pru.

A day or so later, driving over to the lot, Harry talks to Nelson about the situation with Pru. He says that maybe Pru could have the baby without them getting married and then put it up for adoption. Nelson says she would never agree to that. Harry then offers Nelson money if he wants to take off, but Nelson is kind of insulted by that idea, too. He says he doesn't want to be helped in the way that Harry is suggesting. He says he would welcome it if Harry would stop making it difficult for him at the lot.



Chapter 2 Analysis

We begin to know Janice and Harry's buddies at the club. Thelma Harrison seems to like Harry very much and pays attention when he tells about things in his life, which is more than the others do. Her husband is pretty much of an idiot who has been competing with Harry since high school. Webb Murkett is looked on as kind of the leader of the little group, being a little older than the others are. His wife Cindy is the one that sets Harry wild. She is in her 30's and very sexy. They are all in the habit of tossing friendly insults at each other.

The comment made by Harry about liking to have Nelson in the house because it helps to know where your enemy is, is very revealing. Harry can't just come out and say that he likes having Nelson around. He has to add the little barb at the end.

We also begin to know Nelson better in this chapter. The kid, it turns out, has been in agony over Pru's being pregnant, and hasn't known how to handle the situation. He came in from Colorado mostly to get away from Pru. Melanie came with him almost like a baby sitter. He wants to be seen as doing the right thing regarding Pru, but the thing Nelson wants most is for his father to trust him and help him to be a part of Springer Motors.



Chapter 3

Chapter 3 Summary

Acting on the opinion of one of his country club buddies, Webb Murkett, that gold is going through the roof, Harry buys about \$11,000 worth of Krugerrands. He brings them home, weighing down his coat pockets, to show Janice. She is not home, so he puts the two cylinders of Krugerrands into the drawer of the bedside table where he keeps a spare pair of reading glasses. The drawer is where he used to keep a tin of condoms from the period between when Janice decided the Pill was bad for her and when she had her tubes burned. He thinks he may have imagined it, but at the time he had thought that maybe Nelson had swiped a couple, so he threw the tin away. It was about at that time that Harry began feeling crowded living with Nelson.

Janice and Nelson come home. Dinner has to be early because Nelson and Pru are due for another session with Soupy, as they call Rev. Campbell. Nelson mimics Soupy in a very derogatory way about how the Rev. Campbell talks and acts.

Finally, they go upstairs to bed and Harry shows the gold to Janice. She is very impressed; she likes the idea of being rich just as much as Harry does. They make love with the gold coins all over the bed and over them.

In a conversation with Charlie, we learn that Charlie had taken Melanie down to Florida and had then gone with her out to Ohio. They talk about Melanie and also about the lot. Charlie lets Harry know that he recognizes it is inevitable that Nelson is going to come into the business and that he (Charlie) will have to step aside. He is okay with that.

The town is dark. Harry is running as he started doing on their vacation in the Poconos. He heads uphill from the house, saving the downhill part for the way back home. He imagines that when he gets home everyone will be sitting in their usual places, with Pru on the sofa next to Nelson. Harry is fearful that his sweating might offend Pru. He notices as he approaches the house that Janice's Maverick isn't parked out front.

Later that night, Janice lets Harry know, in one of their bedtime discussions, that Nelson has banged up her Maverick.

At church the next day, Harry falls into the role of greeter because he happened to be out on the front steps as people begin to arrive. Harry's sister, Mim, arrives just as Harry is welcoming Charlie Stavros. She gives Charlie a big hug from behind so he can't see who it is, but Harry gets them separated. When everyone is assembled, the wedding begins.

At the reception, Harry gets stuck for a while with Mrs. Lubell, Pru's mother, but Soupy joins them and after a few minutes, Harry can sneak away to talk to other people. He avoids the group with the Murketts, the Fosnachts and Janice, figuring they will razz him about his crying. The Murketts belong to the new circle in Harry's life; the Fosnachts



belong to the old. Harry does not like to see them interlocking. Bessie is in a deep discussion with Charlie Stavros. Harry eventually ends up with his sister who has been sitting on the couch with a couple of Bessie's friends. The older ladies go off, one to go to the ladies' room, the other to say goodbye to Bessie, leaving Harry and Mim together. They try to give each other a little sense of what their life is currently like, but like many conversations between grown-up siblings who don't see each other regularly, they don't go very deep.

After the wedding, the newlyweds go off for a week in Ma Springer's house in the Poconos. One evening while they are way, Ma Springer calls a little conference in the living room to talk about what to do with Nelson. She has decided, and wants the others to agree, that Nelson should be given a job at the lot. Harry outlines a half-dozen reasons why it is not a good idea, but Bessie has already worked out a deal with Charlie to get him to leave so there will be a spot for Nelson. In the end, the two women inform Harry that they vote in favor of taking Nelson on. Harry says that if he doesn't go along they'll vote to can him too. They don't deny it.

Harry stops by the lot and Charlie tells him that Jamie Nunemacher bought the orange Corolla, which reminds Harry of his daughter in Galilee.

The next afternoon, after Rotary, Harry decides to drive down to Galilee again. He again peers at the Byer house from a nearby line of trees, but is afraid to go to the door. A big old collie, Harry hears people call Fritzie, comes to check him out. Harry is overcome by shyness again and turns tail. Fritzie chases him, but when she catches up to him, she just wants to sniff his pant legs. He eventually makes it back to his car, Fritzie sniffing him all the way, and drives off.

Harry and Janice are at a dinner party at Webb Murkett's house with their country club buddies plus the Fosnachts. The Fosnachts leave first. Peggy has an anti-nuclear meeting to attend at the Unitarian Universalist church the next day. After they have left, the three other couples, Angstroms, Murketts, and Harrisons, decide that this January the six of them will go on a Caribbean vacation together. This is at Harry's suggestion. He is excited by Murkett's wife, Cindy. She is younger than the others are and Harry thinks she is incredibly hot.

On the way home after the party, Janice says that everyone seemed to buy into his idea of a Caribbean vacation in January. She is somewhat rueful that Harry has never shown any interest in going away just with her. She has some harsh things to say about Ronnie Harrison, who is pretty crude. She says she thinks Thelma is really very fond of Harry. He says he never noticed and wonders how it could be. Harry is very thankful Janice doesn't have anything to say about Cindy. He's afraid he would blurt out how he feels about her.

Janice changes the subject to say how very young Nelson seemed, going off with his bride. Harry agrees. He says you sometimes wonder how badly you screwed up a kid like Nelson. Janice says, "We did what we could."



Chapter 3 Analysis

This chapter moves the story along. The love-making among the Krugerrands is an obvious symbol and striking example of how Harry and Janice love the idea of having money. There is something in this too, about the constant urge of Americans to trade up by turning in the old Ford for a Cadillac or turning in the tired old, understanding wife for a sexier model.

The wedding goes smoothly without anyone commenting on the bride's obvious pregnancy. Bessie Springer pushes her idea that a spot has to be made at the lot for Nelson.

The wife-swapping of Chapter IV is foreshadowed here as the Angstroms and their cronies from the country club agree to go on a Caribbean vacation together. It is interesting that this idea is proposed by Harry after an evening of drinking.



Chapter 4

Chapter 4 Summary

Pru is seven months pregnant and huge. They are living at Ma Springer's (Mom-mom) and she is beginning to show signs of impatience. Because of the number of people living together, they have had to use the good china and Pru has dropped a few pieces.

At Kent, Pru was not a student but worked in the administration office. This gave her a special standing in Nelson's view. He liked the fact that she had her own apartment and even her own car, a salt-rotted old Plymouth Valiant. Now in Brewer and married, they get out once in a while. They have friends who hang around the Laid-Back. They sometimes get invited to parties at the apartments of their friends from Laid-Back.

One such party takes place a few nights later when Nelson and Pru go to Slim's apartment for dancing, drinking and meaningless conversation with others. One of the dancers, a little white girl from the south side of Brewer, took off her shirt and now sits in the kitchen making herself sick on Southern Comfort and Pepsi. Pru loves dancing and is dancing wildly with one of the black guys. Nelson doesn't dance. He imagines a time when Mom-mom dies and leaves Mom in charge of the lot, with Dad about as useful as one of those cardboard cutouts you see standing around the showroom. He wonders why Dad doesn't just die. Then he and Mom can run things.

She asks if Nelson dances and he says he just drinks beer and feels sorry for himself. She asks why and Nelson says it's because his father's a "Prick." After a bit more time, the girl gets up and stands by herself by the dancers waiting to be picked up. Nelson signals he is ready to leave by grabbing Pru's wrist. They go into a side room and argue with each other for a while. Pru has noticed that he was talking for a long time to the young girl and accuses him of being ashamed of her being pregnant. They leave the party in a kind of tense mood and going down the stairs, Pru slips. It may be that Nelson gave her the hip as she brushed past him, but at any rate, she falls. People from the party swarm around. Pru is unconscious and is rushed to the hospital. Everyone is fearful about the baby, but the baby is okay, in fact, it seems to be thriving. Pru, however, has broken her arm. The doctors are being especially cautious because of her pregnancy, and they plan to keep her in the hospital for about a week.

Some days later Harry and Janice are having one of their bedroom conversations. Harry says that they have to get out and get their own house. Janice asks a lot of questions about it, but doesn't need much convincing.

Nelson and Pru are driving in Ma Springer's big Chrysler on their way to spend the evening with friends at their favorite bar, the Laid-Back. She asks him if he had sex with Melanie. He denies it, but she claims to know he did. Trying to parallel park, he manages to scrape the right side of Mom-mom's car.



Harry and Janice take a nice profit on the Krugerrands they had bought and convert the proceeds into silver coins—more than they can easily carry, and more than will fit into their safe deposit box. On New Year's Day, they break the news to Bessie that they are buying their own house. Bessie is upset and wonders what will become of her. They tell her that Nelson and Pru will still be with her, but she is still pretty upset. Nelson comes in and sees that something is wrong. He asks what's going on. Janice tells him about the new house. He calls them copout artists and storms out.

Harry and Janice are on their Caribbean vacation with the Murketts and the Harrisons. Although Thelma Harrison suffers from lupus and cannot stay in the sun, she is still game for anything. They rent three Sunfishes. Webb and Thelma go off in one, Ronnie and Janice in a second, leaving Harry and Cindy for the third. Harry has never sailed but Cindy has, so she takes charge. Eventually, she turns the tiller over to Harry after giving him some basic sailing instructions. He is going along okay, but then the wind shifts a bit. He gets confused and manages to capsize the small boat. He and Cindy have a lot of physical contact in the warm water (thrilling to Harry) before she is able to right the boat and they climb back in it.

Chapter 4 Analysis

In this chapter, we get to see the anger that Nelson has been holding in. It seems to reflect and build on the anger shown by Harry that comes out in just about all of his comments—not just about Nelson, but also about people in general. He always uses the politically incorrect term to refer to any racial group.

The Caribbean vacation a major turning point of the book for Harry. He is incredibly changed by his night with Thelma, and even though his dream is that the next night it will be his turn with Cindy Murkett, he doesn't dwell on the missed opportunity when he and Janice get called home.



Chapter 5

Chapter 5 Summary

Bessie had the good sense to get Charlie Stavros to come back to the lot after Nelson took off. On his first visit to the lot since returning from vacation, Harry gives Charlie a big welcome. They chat about Nelson. Charlie says Harry should calm down and that Nelson will turn up. Pru seems to have the same feeling. They talk a little about how things are going at the lot. Charlie admits the books have looked better, but they have moved one of the convertibles that Nelson had bought, and a kid walked in and bought the snowmobile that had come in on a trade.

Harry tells Charlie that he has a date to meet Janice to get some stuff for the new house. He lies to Charlie about the time. He doesn't have to meet Janice until 1:30 and it's now only a little after 11. He heads toward Galilee. This time he is familiar with the way. As he parks the car and gets out he has a momentary urge to run again, but he does not. He knocks on the door and after an age, Ruth opens it. The dog is with her and recognizes Harry. Harry calls her by name and Ruth, recognizing him immediately, tells him to get lost, but he asks her if they can talk a little. Ruth is amused that Harry knows the dog's name. He confesses that he had been there a couple of times before and had once heard the dog called by name. The fact that the dog recognizes him and wags her tail tips the balance and Ruth invites Harry in. He presses her about her daughter, convinced that it is his child. Ruth tells him he is wrong. She had an abortion after Harry got her pregnant and the daughter, Annabelle, is not his child. Harry feels a sense of relief.

He drives back to Brewer to meet Janice at the furniture store. She has news about Nelson. He is in Ohio, with Melanie.

They moved into the new house on Saturday, the day that Pru was coming home from the hospital with the baby, a girl. Harry's friends helped him move, which was not a big job because they had so little of their own stuff at Ma Springer's. In their first mail, there was a post card from Nelson. He is out at Kent State and is enrolling for the spring semester.

Janice talks about Thelma. Janice is convinced that Thelma is going to insinuate herself into their lives because she is in love with Harry, but Harry can't believe it. He hugs Janice, realizing that he will never run away from her again. Janice says that she never wants to have anything to do with Thelma and Ronnie again.

The post card from Nelson talks about the tuition money that he needs. Janice says that Nelson has told Pru over the phone that he'll drive back home as soon as he's registered to take a look at the baby and to return the car he 'borrowed.' Harry doesn't even seem to have the heart to get worked up when he hears about things Nelson has done. He feels Nelson is no threat to him now. Harry feels he is king of the castle.



Harry and Janice spend the afternoon cleaning windows and doing other housework. Bessie, Pru and the baby are coming over to watch the Super Bowl, but they don't show up until the fourth quarter. Janice is showing the house to Ma. Pru comes into the study where Harry is sitting and places his granddaughter in his lap.

Chapter 5 Analysis

The most important scene in Chapter V is Harry's third trip to Galilee, where he finally has a talk with Ruth, after turning tail and running away the first two times. At first, Ruth is not at all friendly; after all, he did walk out on her when she got pregnant almost twenty years ago. However, she eventually opens up and responds to Harry's questions about her daughter. There is no way the girl is Harry's daughter, she tells him. She ended that pregnancy with an abortion that her parents insisted on. She says that Annabelle is not even her first child, that there is an older brother.

We find Janice and Harry in their new house, having been helped there by their friends. Janice indicates that she doesn't think they should be seeing as much of the country club gang as they had been, especially Thelma. She thinks Thelma is much too keen on Harry, and the two anonymous letters that they have received were from her. The idea that someone is sort of watching them gives them an uneasy feeling.

The final scene, where Pru puts her infant in Harry's lap, ends the novel and we see Harry having achieved some type of contentment that he seems to have lacked throughout the book.



Characters

Harry Angstrom (Rabbit)

Harry is in his mid-forties, tall, blond-haired, blue eyed. He was a basketball star in high school, did not go to college and followed his father into work as a linotype operator. When that skill became obsolete, he went to work for his father-in law, Fred Springer, as a Sales Associate at Springer Motors, one of two Toyota dealerships in the Brewer, PA area. At the time of this novel, Harry is the General Sales Manager and part owner of Springer Motors.

Harry was born and raised in Brewer and has seldom traveled outside of that small city. He and his wife, Janice, live with her mother, Bessie Springer, Fred Springer's widow. Harry is quite tall, Norwegian blond, and beginning to get a little heavy. He has never had to work very hard and doesn't now. He spends a lot of time fantasizing about women. In addition, he spends zero time in any intellectual or cultural pursuits. His favorite—perhaps, his only—reading material is *Consumer Reports*. He really likes knowing what the best buy is in any category of consumer goods.

Harry has great difficulty getting along with his son, Nelson. He treats Nelson with great sarcasm and seems to compete with him. Harry has a lot of anger inside and uses politically incorrect racial and ethnic slurs in referring to people of lower socio-economic standing, whom he thinks of as inferiors to the white Anglo-Saxons in the town. In sharp contrast to this is the fact that when he and Janice were separated he invited Skeeter Johnson, a small, radical black man to live with him.

Janice Angstrom

Janice is Harry's wife. She is about 42. Since she and Harry live with her mother, she seems to take no responsibility for the housework, but she does do the cooking for the family. Food shopping is not her thing and she never has much in the way of food in the house, except maybe some old baloney.

Janice is an avid tennis player and spends most afternoons, weather permitting, at the Flying Eagle country club playing tennis, hanging around the pool with the wives of their friends there, and getting a little drunk.

She is very protective of Nelson, taking his side even when he seems clearly in the wrong, such as by causing one fender bender by running a stop sign. She and her mother, who together own 75% of Springer Motors, are not above making decisions jointly without consulting Harry. This is most readily apparent when they arrange for Nelson to work at the dealership even though Harry is strongly opposed.

About ten years prior to the time of this story, Janice had an affair with Charlie Stavros. Everyone seems to know about the affair, but nobody seems to attach much importance



to it now. The affair led to a separation for several months from Harry, and from Nelson who continued to be taken care of by Harry.

Nelson Angstrom

Nelson is Harry and Janice's 23-year old son. He has been attending college at Kent State in Ohio where he is due to go into his senior year. Nelson trusts his mother and talks to her about his life, but he is not able to do that with his father. His inability to talk adult-to-adult with his father leaves Nelson looking like a churlish brat. He has a tendency to whine when he is not getting his way. He shows a total disregard for the property of others, as witnessed by the fact that he wrecks a total of five cars in the time between his return home in late June and the end of the novel in January. This is not to mention taking one that belonged to the dealership when he does his disappearing act.

An important contributor to the strain between Nelson and Harry is the fire that destroyed the house they were living in. A girl named Jill, who was about 16, died in the fire. Nelson must have been about 12 at the time, but he was devoted to Jill. He still holds Harry responsible for the fire and has not forgiven his father for Jill's death.

Nelson seems to have some good ideas for the car business. For example, he is convinced that there is a good market in used convertibles since the major carmakers have stopped producing them. Harry is very critical of this idea but Nelson is proven to have been correct.

Nelson is less than considerate of others when trying to edge his way into Springer Motors at the top level. It does not bother him that Charlie Stavros would have to be sacrificed to make room for him. While everybody knows that Stavros is the most capable employee at Springer Motors, he is not part of the family and therefore easily dismissed.

Bessie Springer

Bessie Springer is Janice Angstrom's mother, widow of Fred Springer, the founder of Springer Motors. She is proud of the Springer name and conducts herself like one of the town's elite, despite the fact that Fred clawed his way up from operating a used-car lot to being an important Toyota dealer. Bessie's pride is also shown by her membership in the Episcopal church, which carries with it a certain social cachet. The fact that she is a big financial supporter of the church doesn't hurt.

Although she has been widowed for five or six years at the time of our story, she still makes most decisions, especially those pertaining to the dealership, based on what she thinks Fred would have done. She is fiercely protective of Nelson, paying considerable attention to his thoughts about the business. She exhibits little or no affection for her daughter, Janice, and at one point, when Harry is complaining about the special treatment that Nelson is getting, tells him that there were those who openly criticized Fred's decision to make room in the dealership for Harry. She is proud of her big stucco



house at 89 Joseph with its trees and space for a vegetable garden. She is proud both of its address and of the fact that it is her house. She is also proud of having the summer place in the Pocono's, another indication of Fred's astute business sense and his devotion to her.

Charlie Stavros

Charlie Stavros is the main producer at Springer Motors where he has worked since it was a used car lot. He is enough of a realist to know that his Greek ethnicity means that he will never enjoy the social acceptance of, say, a Springer. Charlie knows that, and even though he can see that his position is threatened by Nelson, he is willing to take him under his wing to teach him about the business.

Charlie knows a lot of people in Brewer and also knows the car business inside and out. Charlie is something of a ladies man. About 10 years ago, he and Janice had an affair for some time. Although everybody knows about the affair, it doesn't seem to get in the way although he and Harry have to be a little careful to avoid the subject. He is attracted to Nelson's friend Melanie, but refuses to indulge in the kind of scurrilous sexual chit-chat that Harry seems to enjoy. When he likes a woman, he takes direct steps to let her know, and does not waste time in fantasies.

Charlie is a good judge of people. He knows, for example, that Harry talks too much to be an effective salesman and that Nelson is too restless to make a career at the dealership. He also sees that Nelson scares customers away with his eagerness.

Melanie

Melanie is a college classmate of Nelson and a friend of Pru. She comes east from Colorado with Nelson for reasons having to do with matters of her own in Colorado, but also to keep an eye on Nelson on behalf of Pru. She is an independent person; she gets a job waiting tables in a restaurant in Brewer, and immediately buys a 10-speed bike to get herself to and from work. She seems to have an affinity for older men and responds to Charlie's overtures even he is not only the age of her father, but also is in very questionable condition with a weak heart.

Pru

Theresa Lubell, nickname Pru because her high-school friends thought she was excessively prudent, was working in the administration office at Kent State. She and Nelson had an affair there and she got pregnant. Pru is from a working-class family in Akron. She is about an inch taller than Nelson and a bit more than a year older, but he is strongly attracted to her physically—except when she is eight months pregnant and is given to farting and snoring. Pru has an understated manner. Her steamfitter father tended to keep his family scared for their physical safety, which has caused Pru to not be particularly assertive, although she has a good idea of what she wants and doesn't



give up easily. For example, she selected Nelson because he appealed to her protective instincts, and even though she seems to sense that their marriage will not last very long, she is determined, to go ahead and have the baby. She has a more mature view of the relationship between Harry and Janice than does Nelson. She senses a strong attachment between them, whereas Nelson is too close to see that.

Jamie Nunemacher

Jamie Nunemacher is a farm kid from down county. He comes into Springer Motors with a young woman to look at cars and ends up, at a time when Harry is not in the showroom, buying the Toyota that Harry had shown them. He and Annabelle appear at the beginning of the novel as customers, and then toward the end at a party that includes Nelson and Pru. They have moved to Brewer together and have gotten jobs in the city. At that party, Annabelle has a long conversation with Nelson, but moves away sort of in disgust when he starts talking about his father.

Ruth Byer

Ruth Byer had an affair with Harry almost 20 years ago. She became pregnant and Harry walked out on her. She later married a farmer named Byer down in Galilee and had three children with him. Byer died a few years ago. Annabelle is one of her three children. Annabelle is a friend of Jamie Nunemacher and is with him when they come into Springer Motors to look at cars.

The country club friends

These are the principal social contacts for Harry and Janice. They are basically flat characters, having their greatest significance in the novel as a group. Webb and Cindy Murkett; Ronnie and Thelma Harrison; Buddy Ingelfinger and a series of girl friends.



Objects/Places

Brewer, PA

The small city in Pennsylvania where the story takes place.

Springer Motors Toyota

The car dealership where Harry Angstrom works.

89 Joseph Street

Bessie Springer's home, which she shares with Harry and Janice, and also with Nelson and Melanie or Pru.

The Upstairs

Even though the Springer house at 89 Joseph is presented as a big house, the upstairs seems to be divided in an awkward way. There is Bessie's room where her movements and her television programs can be heard through the wall into the Angstrom's bedroom. There is the small back room, which is thought of as Nelson's and the sewing room where Melanie is put. When the old folks are away in the Pocono's, Nelson and Melanie share the bed in the sewing room, and after Nelson and Pru are married, they take the sewing room, which is on the front of the house.

The Vegetable Garden

One of the features of the house at 89 Joseph is that it has a modest vegetable garden fenced off in the back yard. The garden is Harry's responsibility. It features mostly lettuce and kohlrabi.

Cottage in the Poconos

This is a summer cottage on a lake in the Pocono Mountains of eastern Pennsylvania. It was bought by Fred Springer, and is now owned by Bessie. She rents it out for most of the summer, but reserves a couple of weeks for herself and family.

Galilee

The farming community in the southern part of the county where Ruth and Annabelle live.



The Flying Eagle Golf and Country Club

The country club where the Angstroms are members. Harry plays golf there and Janice plays tennis. They both hang out around the pool with their friends.

Gold and Silver

Harry speculates in gold coins on the strength of an opinion voiced by Webb Murkett that gold is going through the roof. When Murkett later suggests that gold is looking less good because everyone is buying it, he sells and turns the proceeds into so many silver coins that they won't even fit in the safety deposit box.

An island in the Caribbean

Not identified, but probably someplace like Jamaica or the Virgin Islands where Harry and Janice go with two other couples from the country club for a winter vacation.

Armchairs

At Bessie's house, the power position is the Barcalounger that dominates the living room. When the Angstrom's are buying furniture for their new house, Harry wants to make sure they have a couple of nice wing chairs for his den.

A series of cars

Harry has a series of Toyotas that he borrows from the dealership. Janice has a Maverick convertible. Ma Springer has a Chrysler Newport. Nelson does not have a car in the course of this story, but he manages to bang up five of them.

Social Sensitivity

Rabbit Is Rich is the third novel exploring the inner life of Harry "Rabbit" Angstrom, a former high-school basketball star in a small Pennsylvania city who finds it difficult to adjust to life outside the limelight of sports stardom. John Updike, also from a small Pennsylvania city much like Rabbit's Brewer, reveals in his introduction to the Everyman's Library edition of the collected novels that Rabbit is his way of seeing the country and American culture through different eyes. Those eyes belong to an ordinary blue-collar man who is driven to live his life in a way that feels right to him. In the first novel, *Rabbit, Run* (1960) Rabbit is twenty-six and searching for redemption and grace in a late-1950s America in which most other young white men are seeking a ride on the wave of prosperity. *Rabbit Redux* (1971) features a thirty-six-year-old Rabbit, abandoned by his wife Janice, raising a pre-teen boy alone and coping with the massive cultural changes wrought by '60s activists. Janice returns and by the time *Rabbit Is Rich* opens in 1979, he has inadvertently become prosperous despite economic chaos in America—gas lines are lengthening as double-digit inflation undercuts the national confidence and spirit.

A social and emotional history of the United States in the late '70s, *Rabbit Is Rich* opens with a sly reference to the verb "run" that has propelled Rabbit into the national consciousness: "Running out of gas, Rabbit Angstrom thinks. The . . . world is running out of gas. But they won't catch him, not yet, because there isn't a piece of junk on the road gets better mileage than his Toyotas, with lower service costs. Read Consumer Reports, April issue." Ironically, the Rabbit who has never been materialistic has now, along with his wife Janice, inherited the lucrative Toyota dealership, Springer Motors. The "rich" in the title forecasts an obsession with money, and Rabbit's interior monologues are indeed often consumed by thoughts of getting and spending. The novel is filled with newsworthy economic events such as rising OPEC prices, the decline of the dollar, and a sixty percent rise in the value of gold, but Rabbit is interested only in how such worldly events affect Toyota sales or his own investments. Rabbit's fascination with establishing a Keogh investment plan mirrors his fascination with finding "it," his word for transcendence, in the original novel. Rabbit's only reading material in the novel, *Consumer Reports*, underscores the consumerism of Americans during the period.

The novel also provides a snapshot of the culture of the late '70s. Skylab falls.

The Amityville Horror, a popular book and subsequent film, is critiqued, as is Warren Beauty's film *Shampoo*. Farrah Fawcett and her television show, *Charlie's Angels*, disco on the radio, Pete Rose batting .400, and dealerships offering a free Chevette with the purchase of a gas-guzzling Cadillac Eldorado get equal time in the narrative with the terrorist murder of Lord Mountbatten. Updike sends Rabbit's son, Nelson, to a college whose very name represents the tumult of the early '70s student protest movement: Kent State. However, Nelson, the first person on either side of the family to attend college, lacks interest in his alma mater's activist history: "As far as Nelson is



concerned, they could have shot all those jerks. During the '77 trouble about Tent City, he stays in his dorm."

Sexuality plays an important role in *Rabbit Is Rich*, as it does in most other Updike novels. Rabbit's thoughts have always been filled with sexual images. In the first novel he confuses the search for physical fulfillment with the search for grace, but he is bitterly disappointed by his wife's drowning of their baby and by his lover Ruth's threat to abort her pregnancy. In the second novel, he still thinks about sex, but is rarely able to perform. In this novel of his middle age, however, the sexually explicit scenes are more numerous than ever, and sex for Rabbit has become fun. When Rabbit invests in South African Krugerrands and brings them to bed to entice Janice, Updike playfully juxtaposes Rabbit's sexual and economic obsessions. "Gods bedded among stars," the couple later panics when post-coitally they count only twenty-nine Krugerrands scattered among the bedclothes. "He does not rest until, naked on his knees on the rug . . . he finds the precious thirtieth."

Updike also captures America's casual attitude toward pre-marital and extra-marital sex during this time before awareness of AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases helped rein in sexual behavior. Nelson, Rabbit's son, who has impregnated a Kent State secretary, nonchalantly discusses marrying her while having intercourse with one of her friends. Melanie, the aforementioned friend, has numerous sexual liaisons going on simultaneously, including one with Charlie Stavros, Rabbit's chief salesman and former lover to Janice. And although sex with Janice is better than ever, Rabbit still longs for Cindy Murkett, the sensual twenty-something wife of his golfing buddy, Webb. This longing precipitates a threecouple swap on a Caribbean vacation, a swap that ironically pairs Rabbit with the prim and seemingly repressed Thelma, not Cindy.

Rabbit is nonetheless quite content with America and his life at age forty-six; "For the first time since childhood, Rabbit is happy, simply, to be alive." *Rabbit Is Rich* is a novel of commonplace domestic issues and events of middle age—financial stability, marriage, family, grandchildren. Between 1969 and 1979 Updike divorced, remarried, and moved to another town. Between 1969 and 1979, Rabbit reconciles with his wife, sees his son marry and produce a beloved granddaughter, and moves into his ideal home in another town. The Rabbit of this novel may make only \$40,000 per year, but he considers himself "rich."



Techniques

Updike continues the use of the literary techniques he has employed in the previous Rabbit novels: the present tense, intricately detailed descriptions of even the most mundane scenes, a narrative uninterrupted by chapter markings. His use of the present tense gives the reader a sense of immediacy, an even stronger sense that we are living Harry's life along with him. In the closing scene of the novel, when Harry, who "resettles himself in one of his silverypink wing chairs," receives his granddaughter, the use of the present tense highlights his bittersweet emotions: "Teresa comes softly down the one step into his den and deposits into his lap what he has been waiting for. . . . Fortune's hostage, heart's desire, a granddaughter. His. Another nail in his coffin. His."

Updike's intricate descriptions, filtered through Harry's decidedly ineloquent consciousness, retain their ability to stun the reader. In this passage, Harry contemplates his failure to grasp the meaning of life, which at forty-six, he believes should have "showed up by now": Yet at moments it seems it has, there are just no words for it, it is not something you dig for but sits on the top of the table like an unopened dewy beer can. . . . A ball at the top of its arc, a leaf on the skin of a pond. A water strider in a way is what the mind is like, those dimples at the end of their legs where they don't break the skin of the water quite. When Harry was little God used to spread in the dark above his bed like that . . . and now he has withdrawn, giving Harry the respect due from one well-off gentleman to another, but for a calling card left in the pit of the stomach, a bit of lead true as a plumb bob pulling Harry down toward all those leaden dead in the hollow earth below.

Updike's technique of allowing the narrative to run with only the occasional spatial break also pulls the reader more and more into the consciousness of his characters.

As befits a middle-aged Rabbit, the breaks are more frequent in this novel than in the previous narratives of the younger, more frenetic Rabbit.

A technique in this novel that has not appeared in the previous ones is the use of a frequent comic touch. Perhaps because Rabbit is financially sound, his sex life is fulfilling and his buddies are often around to build him up, he has the luxury of laughter for the first time in his life. Numerous scenes take place after golf at the Flying Eagle Club, as the crowd swaps jokes and crude stories. However, the laughter in the novel is often at Harry's expense. The night before Nelson's wedding, Janice confronts Rabbit with yet another example of Nelson's incompetence, defending her son who has wrecked her car: "It wasn't his fault exactly, this other man just kept coming, though I guess the Stop sign was on Nelson's street."

The wedding scene is also written with a light comic touch, the minister emerging with a "What? Me Worry? grin" and Rabbit suppressing "a crazy impulse to shout out" when the spectators are asked to speak or forever hold their peace. Another highly comic scene takes place as Rabbit follows Annabelle home, darting from bush to bush to hide from Ruth, now hugely fat and menacing.



Themes

Middle-Class life in America

The hierarchical organization of life in America; the distinction is made several times in the novel about social status. Harry and his friends are on their way upward. Harry's friends, and Harry as well, did not go to college, although their children are all either there or heading there. They come from parents who were less affluent and less prestigious than themselves. Harry's father, for example, was a linotype operator. However, Harry and his friends have not achieved, and will not achieve, the status of the factory owners or their lawyers, or even of the bankers. Upward movement can be noted in Harry's feeling about the Fosnachts who represent the Angstrom's old circle (Ollie Fosnacht is a clerk in a music store) and the Murkett's who represent the new (Webb is a roofing contractor). An interesting side note is that Nelson is friends with Billy Fosnacht. This might seem counter to the trend, except that Billy goes to Harvard where he is studying to become an endodontist, certainly an upward move.

Harry looks down on those he feels are not up to his level (this includes entire groups such as Hispanics or farmers, but also individuals such as Charlie Stavros). He is unduly in awe of those he considers his equals or superiors, for example, Webb Murkett. Harry sets great store by what he takes to be Murkett's astute investment savvy—buying then selling gold on the strength of casual comments by Murkett.

The Importance of the House

While the feeling about property is tightly entwined with the Middle-Class Life theme, it has enough weight in *Rabbit is Rich* to be separated out as a theme. Beginning early in the novel and repeated at several points, we come to understand that Harry wants to move out of Bessie Springer's house. He and Janice have had places of their own earlier in their marriage. They were apartment dwellers, which was a sure sign of a lack of social clout. When they separated at the time of Janice's affair with Charlie, Harry and Nelson lived in a house that Harry owned. The fact that it burned down and that Nelson's friend Jill was killed in the fire, represents a tremendous failure to Harry. Nelson continues to hold his father responsible for the fire. In connection with the insurance investigation, Peggy Fosnacht had to swear that Harry was with her at the time of the fire.

A big element of Harry's contentment at the end is that they finally have a house of their own with a sunken living room just like the Murkett's.

However, House is also very important to Bessie. She gets great personal satisfaction out of her big stucco house at 89 Joseph. The cottage in the Poconos is, to her, a sign of real achievement. Even the premises at Springer Motors fit in with the sense of



house. Its arrangement and decorations still fit the tastes of Fred Springer who had it built, and his presence can still be felt there.

There is a point in the novel where Harry is prowling around the upstairs of the Murkett house. Everybody was there for dinner and Harry excused himself because of an urgent need to find a bathroom. In the course of his snooping, he is overwhelmed by the mirrors in the master bedroom. He also finds in a drawer a set of Polaroid snap shots showing Webb and Cindy in various intimate poses. Later when Harry and Janice are looking for a new house, Harry tries to suggest that it might be nice to find one with mirrors in the bedroom, but Janice is disgusted with the idea.

The Oedipal Struggle

Much of the interaction between Harry and Nelson is an example of the age-old rivalry between fathers and sons, and the rivalry works both ways. Harry has a problem allowing himself to have a loving relationship with Nelson. When he tries to do something fatherly, like shake hands or give the kid a bear hug, Nelson slips out of the way. Harry firmly believes that Nelson is being given preferential treatment by his wife and mother-in-law. He probably hates this in Nelson because it so perfectly mirrors his inner feelings about himself, that he has been the beneficiary of handouts from others. This is pointed out to him on more than one occasion by both Janice and Bessie.

Nelson, on the other hand, is stingingly critical of his father and then complains that Harry won't give him any answers. He is determined to prove to Harry that he has good business judgment, but he undermines his own effort by losing control. In one case he crashed two of the convertibles that he had the company buy and in a second case, he gave up and ran away (although there were other forces at work at that point).

It is worth noting that after Nelson has run off to Ohio to re-enroll at Kent State, that Harry actually expresses his relief at being the king of his own castle. This coincides with his getting his own place at last, but the feeling is mostly based on the realization that the kid is no longer a threat to him. Which raises the interesting question, in what way has Nelson constituted a threat to Harry?

Updike introduces a theme of the novel in the two epigraphs. The first is a definition of the ideal citizen from Sinclair Lewis's *Babbitt*: "At night he lights up a good cigar, and climbs into the little old 'bus, and maybe cusses the carburetor, and shoots out home.

He mows the lawn, or sneaks in some practice putting, and then he's ready for dinner." The second is from Wallace Stevens' poem "A Rabbit as King of the Ghosts": "The difficulty to think at the end of day,/ When the shapeless shadow covers the sun/ And nothing is left except light on your fur." *Babbitt* is an ironic look at the solid middle-class businessman, the role Rabbit plays now as chief of Springer Motors. Sure enough, Rabbit often cruises around in any one of his Toyotas, and after he has checked his garden to make sure the vegetables are doing well, he most often heads to the Flying



Eagle, the golf and racquet club where his social set drinks, swaps stories and hits the links.

Stevens' poem exposes a rabbit that imagines himself puffed up to heroic stature.

Rabbit, too, is somewhat the hero in the midst of a town running down. He is now "King of the lot ... the man up front. A center of sorts, where he had been a forward." With his sports headlines on the showroom walls, "yellowing, toasted brown by time," he still "has that look" of a famous basketball player, according to the young woman he decides may be his and Ruth's long-lost daughter. Rising gas prices have made Rabbit even more satisfied with his fleet of fuel-efficient Toyotas, which "sell themselves," and he likes having this money to "float in," the other guys at Rotary and Chamber looking up to him again as they did when they all played ball back in high school. Rabbit is comfortable in his status, both at the lot and at the country club, where his golf game and storytelling prowess keep him in the center of attention.

However, Harry is not completely fulfilled, and his search for what is missing in his otherwise happy life fuels the action of the narrative.

Harry's quest is no longer for "it," that elusive spark of grace found only in the spiritual world. That was the object of a young man's search. Rabbit's middle-aged quest in this novel is much more down to earth: to be rid of his son Nelson, to bed the exotic Cindy Murkett, to have a home of his own, to find the daughter he has never known. It is as if achieving these goals will stave off the aging process. Although he is happy at the moment, there is a specter of death looming not too far out of reach. In fact, the statement about his newfound happiness follows a paragraph cataloguing his dead friends and family members. Since childhood, aging has troubled him. He remembers grade school in which he had "suffered another promotion, taken another step up the stairs that has darkness at the head." Harry's Herculean task is to secure these desires before it is too late, while he is still among the living.

A principle threat to his happiness is the arrival of his son, Nelson, who has dropped out of Kent State to move into the old-fashioned home Rabbit and Janice share with her mother, Bessie Springer. Rabbit's attempt to rid the household of Nelson's unwanted presence drives the narrative.

Although Rabbit loves his son, he can barely control his animosity toward him. The father has been "blissfully" content both at the dealership and at home until the son demands a job and seems to take up more than his share of the house. Rabbit feels threatened by him, perhaps more so because Nelson is also repeating many of Rabbit's youthful indiscretions. At twentythree, Nelson too gets his girlfriend pregnant, conducts two sexual relationships at once, and finally, runs out on his wife who has just had their baby. But what Rabbit really despises about his son is his lack of grace, his awkwardness, his lack of spiritual qualities. When the young Rabbit made the same mistakes, he was at least in search of redemption; when Nelson runs, it is simply to avoid responsibility.



The father-son conflict pervades the novel, with Nelson's complaining, whining, and shirking weighing more and more heavily on Rabbit. The antagonism is mutual. Near the end of the narrative Updike reveals Nelson's thoughts, "Why doesn't Dad just die? He knows he can manage Mom." But Rabbit cannot die yet, he has to be there to support and protect Pru, his son's wife, when Nelson abandons her just before their baby is born. In the last scene of the novel, Rabbit staves off the specter of death as he cradles his beloved granddaughter in his arms, Nelson safely far away back in Ohio.

As welcome as this child is, however, she forecasts his fate: "Fortune's hostage, heart's desire, a granddaughter. His. Another nail in his coffin. His."

A second quest has similarly bittersweet results. From the first moment that Rabbit spots the bikini-clad Cindy Murkett, his golfing buddy's wife, he is consumed with longing. "It hollows out Harry's stomach, makes him faintly sick, to think what a lucky stiff Webb is ... it isn't fair to have a young wife but no old lady Springer on the other side of the walls." Much later, observing Cindy at the Murkett's home during a party, "the vehemence of his lust dries his mouth." When Harry discovers Polaroid shots of Cindy and Webb in various sexual positions, the urgency of his desire is quenched only by thinking of his other "secrets": "His daughter. His gold. His son coming down from the Pocono's to claim his place at the lot." Thinking of Nelson temporarily blunts his lust, but on returning to the party, he discovers that the shared trip to the Caribbean has been planned in his absence. He is convinced that fate has conspired to award him Cindy on the trip.

When the moment of swapping arrives, however, it is the prim-looking forty-six-year-old Thelma who takes Rabbit's hand and leads him to her room for a long night of uninhibited sex. Cindy is scheduled for the next night, but Bessie calls them home because Nelson has deserted his pregnant wife. Rabbit fumes, "You mean we can't stay here tonight because of something Nelson has done?" Updike cannot allow Rabbit all his desires. So again the quest fails, but Rabbit is not crushed: "That trip was fun. I feel satisfied," he tells Janice as they fly back to Pennsylvania.

Rabbit's desire for his own home, his own space, is a theme of the novel as well.

He and Janice have been sharing Bessie Springer's "old barn of a house" filled with musty antiques and antimacassars for years, and as Janice puts it, "It's a great sacrifice on Harry's part, a man of his income not having a house he can call his own." For Rabbit, the presence of both women is sometimes comforting, but often frustrating: "Day after day, mother and daughter sharing that same house, it's not natural. Like water blood must run or grow scum." Rabbit's need for his own space is also fueled by house envy of the Murkett's modern tasteless ranch coupled with a desire to entertain Cindy and Webb in style. He repeatedly dreams of a "sunken living room" for parties. By the end of the novel, Updike allows Rabbit to move into a home befitting his newfound status, a stone cottage in Penn Park "with all those nice divorce lawyers and dermatologists." Rabbit exults, "I've always kind of dreamed, ever since we used to play them in basketball, of living over there somewhere." But after moving in, even as "the king of the castle" prepares to watch the Super Bowl on his "brand new Sony," Rabbit



feels he and Janice are "trying not to panic here in this house where they shouldn't be at all. . . lost in space . . .

he's ruined himself."

The most pressing quest in the novel is Rabbit's overwhelming need to find the daughter he believes he fathered twenty years previously. Having buried his weeksold daughter, Rebecca, and having watched daughter-figure Jill, from Rabbit Redux, die in a fire, he yearns for a girl child. He needs redemption for these failures even as he longs for a girl to give birth to his offspring.

Convinced he has found her when young Annabelle Byer appears on the lot in the opening scene, Harry immediately feels "an unwitting swimming of her spirit upward toward his." His need to confront his former lover, Ruth, to verify his paternity is a thematic device that pervades the entire narrative. Several times he tracks Annabelle down to a rural Galilee farm, where scenes of Rabbit hiding in the hedges and frantically dodging Ruth's call extend the mystery. At the end of the novel, emboldened by advice from Thelma, Rabbit summons the courage to meet with Ruth, whose protestations about Rabbit's paternity are a bit too much. When she ambiguously tells him, "Suppose she was yours. At this stage it would just confuse her," Rabbit reluctantly lets go of the possibility—for now. In the closing scene, Rabbit again recounts the dead in his life, sadly adding "his daughter Annabelle Byer snuffed out with her whole world . . . like those entire planets obliterated in Star Wars."

Despite the looming specter of death that pervades the novel and the qualified failure of most of his quests, Rabbit refuses to contemplate his own demise: "He sees his life as just beginning, on clear ground at last, now that he has a margin of resources, and the stifled terror that always made him restless has dulled down. He wants less."

In the end, cradling his longed for female offspring, Rabbit may not be running any longer, but he still refuses to give up.

Style

Point of View

The point of view is Third Person, Single Point of View. Events are all seen through the eyes of Harry Angstrom (Rabbit) except for one section of Chapter IV where, Harry not being present, events are seen through Nelson's eyes. Updike handles the third Person point of view with great skill- any observations made are those of Harry, events that take place are described as seen by Harry, even conversations whether or not participated in by Harry, represent the way he hears things. Similarly, in the portion of Chapter IV that tells about the party at Slim's and about Pru's accident, the Point of View shifts effortlessly to be Nelson's.

The third Person, Single Point of View style is particularly appropriate for this novel. The author is not simply telling a story (for which the omniscient narrator would be a good choice). His goal is to put the reader inside the mind of his protagonist (or protagonists, to include the Nelson section).

Setting

Brewer Pennsylvania, Summer, Fall and Winter of 1979. The setting is important from two aspects: locale and time. The author is writing a novel about middle-class America and chooses as his locale a very ordinary small city in the eastern part of Pennsylvania. Cities of this kind, once significant manufacturing centers, are now turned into a mish-mash of small manufacturing and spreading, homogenized retailing. Without major changes, Brewer could be a small city in Illinois or Wisconsin. It just happens that the author reflects his own experience of growing up in a city in eastern Pennsylvania very much like Brewer

The time is equally important to the tone of the novel. We are transported back to the late 1970's. Jimmy Carter is President and there is tremendous inflationary pressure. The hostage taking in the American embassy in Teheran takes place during the time span of the story. More important, however, is the prevailing feeling of open sexuality that had its high-water mark in the late seventies. The clearest example of this is the wife-swapping experiment on the Caribbean vacation. That would be really discordant if the novel was placed in the thirties, for example.

It is worth mentioning the level of detail used by the author in writing about the business aspects of a car dealership. Updike has really done his homework here, and to good effect. Without his devotion to detail, we would be left with no understanding of the most important aspect of the day-to-day work of the protagonist.



Language and Meaning

The language is direct and clear. Much of the story is told through dialog, but there are lengthy sections rich with sensory detail. The use of sensory detail occurs most frequently when a physical place is being described, although it also applies to people and things. For example, after Harry's experience with the dog Fritzie, the reader could pick Fritzie out of a crowd without fail. The platinum-haired clerk at Fiscal Alternatives where Harry buys the gold and silver comes to life in less than a sentence of description.

Since the bulk of the story is told from Harry's Point of View, and since he is a man with strong social stereotypes in his thinking, we find frequent use of derogatory racial terms. Harry never sees any new person without assigning them to their proper social category. When he drives through parts of the city of Brewer, we are told how the racial make-up has changed over the years. This is part of Updike's point. He wants us to see how the town is changing. He categorizes each neighborhood according to the dominant resident. For example, one part of the city is said to be filled with ophthalmologist's offices. Even though we can assure ourselves that a small city like Brewer is unlikely to have more than a handful of ophthalmologists. Incidentally, ophthalmologist is one of Harry's favorite words. He even suggests, when nobody can come up with the right term, that that is what Billy Fosnacht is studying to be.

Structure

The book has five chapters; Chapters I through Chapter IV are approximately 100 pages each. Chapter V is approximately 50 pages.

Each chapter is made up of several sections taking from 5 to 15 pages each. The locale shifts from section to section. There is no transition from one section to the next. They run in rough chronological order, but seldom have much of a hook in place to help the reader make the jump. There might be a phrase like, "The next day□," for example, or "□a few nights later□," but those transition assists are not universally applied. Some sections follow immediately in time, but with or without the clues the reader is not left floundering. It is invariably quite simple to work out what has brought about the transition. Almost invariably, it is that the scene in the first section ends and we move on to another part of the action.

The transition from one chapter to another is somewhat different. Each chapter begins with some sort of orienting phrase such as, "Once the first weekend of riots and rumors is over, the summer isn't so bad□" or "The hostages have been taken." It feels as though the author has paused to catch his breath and is now ready to press ahead. It is interesting to note that nothing really changes about the characters or the situation from one chapter to the next. The changes and movements of the plot all take place within the sections of the chapters.



Quotes

"When he (Springer) was around the lot was like they were all trying to fill some big skin that Springer spent all his time and energy imagining□When he died that skin became Harry's own, to stand around in loosely." Chapter I, page 5.

"These acres of dead railroad track and car shops and stockpiled wheels and empty boxcars stick in the heart of the city like a great rusting dagger." Chapter I, page 33.

"Dark youths thinking in languages of their own stare from the triangular stone porches of the old corner grocery stores." Chapter I, page 33, Harry on his drive home.

"The evening passes in a stale crackle of television and suppressed resentment□Ma Springer, having condescended to share with them at the kitchen table some lumpy mushroom soup Janice has warmed and the cold cuts slightly sweaty from waiting too long in the refrigerator□" Chapter I, page 48, Dinner time at Ma Springer's.

" 'Your mother was an unfortunate woman who caused a lot of devilment. You and Janice when you were starting out would never have had such a time of it if it hadn't been for Mary Angstrom□' Ma has that fanatic tight look about the cheeks women get when they hate one another." Chapter II, page 145, Bessie Springer on the subject of Harry's mother.

" '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. The little twerp knows it, too.'" Chapter II, page 173, Harry talking about Nelson with Thelma Harrison.

"The thing about these Rotarians, if you know them as kids you can't stop seeing the kid in them, dressed up in fat and baldness and money like a cardboard tuxedo in a play for high-school assembly." Chapter III, page 275, Harry's thoughts.

"What's he got to be scared of?"

"The same thing you were scared of at his age. Life." Chapter IV, page 354, Harry and Janice talking about Nelson.

"[Nelson] feels return to him from childhood that old fear of being in the wrong place, of life being run by rules nobody would share with him." Chapter IV, page 331. Nelson's thoughts at the party at Slim's.

"Think of all the problems. Rust. Dry rot. Engines that don't start in the morning unless you take off the distributor cap and wipe the plugs. Without condensation the world might last forever." Chapter IV, page 376. Harry's thoughts.

"Freedom, that he always thought was outward motion, turns out to be this inner dwindling." Chapter 1, page 97. Harry's thoughts.



"□when he bent his face close to old Ruth's in the light of the door, a glitter there, on the tired skin beneath her eyes, and by the idiotic thought, which it seems he should bottle and sell, that our tears are always young, the saltwater stays the same from cradle, as she says, to grave." Chapter V page 451. Harry's thoughts.

Adaptations

The book has not yet inspired any adaptations to other genres. However, in March of 1983, Books on Tape, Inc. published an audio version of the novel.

Key Questions

Although this novel is perhaps the most optimistic of the four with Harry "Rabbit" Angstrom as protagonist, it nonetheless offers many controversial themes and characters that stimulate strong debate. Rabbit's treatment of women and his simultaneous disdain and affection for his son are topics that evoke strong reader reactions. The unflattering portrait of America in the 1970s is another theme that can provoke further study about this decade that for many young readers is merely historical. For those who have read the previous novels, inevitable comparisons of previous themes and characters will emerge naturally. Some specific topics for discussion or debate follow: 1. Although Rabbit is "rich," he estimates his income at \$40,000 a year. Discuss whether the "rich" of the title is ironic.

In what ways is he rich?

2. Rabbit's wealth has been thrust upon him by luck and by economic conditions that are beyond his control. Discuss the circumstances and economic forces that created his good fortune.

What might be the psychological implications of this type of wealth?

3. In Rabbit, Run circumstances always conspired to keep Rabbit from his quest for spirituality. Discuss how circumstances in this novel seem to conspire to favor him.

4. A central character of Rabbit, Run was the Episcopal minister, Eccles. Discuss the role played by Eccles' successor, whom Rabbit refers to as "Soupy." How does he serve to heighten the tensions between father and son?

5. The father-son conflict is the most dramatic clash in the novel. Discuss whether the information readers learn from Nelson's point of view makes him more sympathetic. Is Rabbit justified in his opinions about his son?

6. Many critics have faulted Updike for the attitudes toward women expressed by his characters. In this novel, key women characters are presented more favorably. Discuss how Updike treats Janice, Mrs. Springer (Bessie), and Pru in this novel.

7. The Mt. Judge house plays a significant role in the narrative. Trace its importance in the major conflicts of the novel.

8. Some readers have been put off by the graphic nature of the sex scenes in Rabbit Is Rich. Updike has granted countless interviews in which he argues that sexuality should be treated like any other part of life. Discuss the validity of this belief. What would be lost if these scenes were not included?

9. Although granddaughter Judy does not arrive until the final scene in the novel, her presence is felt throughout. Discuss how her existence propels the action of the narrative.



Topics for Discussion

Why is the novel called *Rabbit Is Rich*?

Does this book stand on its own, or do you need to have read *Rabbit, Run* previously?

What is the significance of Harry being called 'Rabbit'? How does it add to the novel?

Do the sex scenes make a contribution to the book or would it be better with less explicit sex?

In what ways are Harry and Nelson alike, and how are they different?

Melanie appears to be the one female character in the book about whom Harry has no sexual fantasies. What is the significance of this?

Discuss the variation in the point of view of the first section of Chapter IV.

Does Harry change in the course of the novel? If so, in what way?

Literary Precedents

The most closely related literary precedents are the first two novels in the series, *Rabbit, Run* (1960) and *Rabbit Redux* (1971).

In the first, a twenty-six-year-old Rabbit flees his pregnant wife and their toddler son to search for the elusive spark of the divine, or "it," as he so crudely puts it. He is convinced that God does not want him to settle for his "second-rate" life, and so he runs, in ever-tighter circles, ultimately ending the novel back at the starting blocks.

Ten years later, Rabbit reappears in *Rabbit Redux*, a novel which portrays the character struggling to cope with life in the tumultuous '60s. On the jacket flap to the first edition of this novel, Updike gives Webster's definition of his title term, "redux": "Lit., led back; specif. Med., indicating return to health after disease."

For *Rabbit Is Rich*, however, it appears that Updike has turned to two much earlier works of American literature for inspiration. Updike acknowledges his debt to Sinclair Lewis' early twentieth-century satire of middle-class America, *Babbitt* (1922), by including a quotation from the solid citizen George Babbitt as an epigraph. He also appears to have been inspired by Frank Morris' novel about the importance of money in middle-class life, *McTeague* (1899). Critics Donald Greiner, in *Updike's Novels*, and James Schiff, in *John Updike Revisited*, point to scenes in *McTeague* in which the wife takes sensual pleasure in playing with her gold coins, possibly inspiring Updike to create Rabbit and Janice's sex scene with their Kruggerrands. In Norris' novel, the wife is also the one who possesses the money and the couple rekindles their passion for each other by buying a new house'.

In interviews Updike has cited Proust as inspiration for his sentence length and the qualities of the perceptions he attempts to convey. Furthermore, a somewhat obscure English novelist, Henry Green, is the "master of the voice in fiction" and inspiration for *Rabbit Is Rich*'s "pick and roll and quickness," Updike claims in an interview published in connection with the novel's winning the National Book Award.

Related Titles

Updike revisits Harry "Rabbit" Angstrom once more in *Rabbit at Rest*, published in 1990. This novel, winner of the Pulitzer Prize, the National Book Critics Circle Award and the Howells Medal, is a long elegy for the fifty-six-year-old character, who becomes convinced in the opening scene that "he has come to meet. . . his own death." The ending of *Rabbit Is Rich*, with its reference to Harry's coffin, foreshadows the subject matter of this final work in the series, and Updike wanted readers to know that *Rabbit at Rest* would be the final visit to the character's inner life. According to James Schiff, in *John Updike Revisited*, Updike published an essay "Why Rabbit Had to Go" two months before publication of the novel and encouraged publishers to use the image of a tombstone on the book's dust jacket.

Harry's heart, hardened by selfishness in the first novel, has now become physically hardened by overindulgence in junk food.

The novel spans nine months, includes Harry's first heart attack in the opening section, and ends with a scene that echoes the opening basketball scene of the first *Rabbit* novel. Finally in Florida, yet with the specter of Hurricane Hugo hovering, Rabbit joins a rough pick-up game of basketball with a young black man, during which "His torso is ripped by a terrific pain, elbow to elbow. He burst from within."

Harry does survive long enough to enter the hospital, finally sharing conciliatory words with his son "to put the kid out of his misery: 'All I can tell you is, it isn't so bad.'"



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