ACTA UNIVERSITATIS LODZIENSIS
FOLIA LITTERARIA 36, 1993

Agnieszka Salska

PATTERNS OF MEMORY IN JOHN UPDIKE'S "RABBIT" NOVELS

John Updike is a writer for whose work memory in its many forms: as personal memory, as historical record, and as cultural memory, has crucial importance. His imagination thrives on transformation through the selectiveness of memory and depends on the tension between remembering and forgetting, even as thematically the problematics of stability and change is central for his work, especially for the "Rabbit" sequence, especially in the light of the fourth book in the series. The "Rabbit" novels also allow us to look at the problem of how memory transforms and adapts the past for the needs of the moment from which the past is being viewed.

The four novels in the sequence span the four consecutive decades: the fifties in *Rabbit Run* (1960), the sixties in *Rabbit Redux* (1971), the seventies in *Rabbit Is Rich* (1981) for which Updike received Pulitzer Prize, the eighties in *Rabbit at Rest* (1990) with another Pulitzer Prize for the author. By now the documentary inclination of the sequence is clearly visible. Even if Updike himself downplayed the socio-historical dimension of *Rabbit Run* emphasizing instead its religious concern, now that we have all the four novels, each following one bigger than its predecessor, it is obvious that they grew primarily by the expansion of the descriptive, documentary side. For "description expresses love", Updike believes[1]. And so he celebrates contemporary America as he knows her in Whitmanesque detail and eventually, in this sequence, with a Witmanesque sweep.

The reader's problem is that we are shocked and saddened at how much of the scene, how many of the events that his novels recall, we have already

[1] J. Updike, *Self-Consciousness. Memoirs*, ed. F. Crest, New York 1990, p. 243. Subsequent quotations come from the same edition and are identified in the text by the abbreviation SC followed by page number.

forgotten. They do come back as history and for a reader of more or less Updike's age and generation, the writer's skill in chronicling the recent past has special poignancy demonstrating, as it does, how our own lives turn into history subject to research, arrangement, and categorization. Especially the two later novels contain so many references to news making events of the time of action that, on one hand, the extent of Updike's factual research cannot but seem impressive while, on the other, a reader who has lived through those events panics at the realization of the selectiveness of his own memory or, to put it brutally, at the extent of its failure. Yet Updike is aware of the dangers of overburdening his work with factuality, with the merely chronicling function. Reviewing Edmund Wilson's fiction in the *New Republic* in 1975, Updike observed:

> An immensly mobile gatherer of information he [Wilson] wrote no fiction withouth a solidly planted autobiographical base, and his fantasy, when it intervenes [...] seems clumsy and harsh. He drew on journal notations as if he didn't trust his memory, that great sifter of significance; forgetfulness, the subconscious shaper of many a fiction, had no place in his equipment[2].

Even before the sequence of the "Rabbit" novels received its presumed completion in the fourth, most bulky story *Rabbit at Rest*, Dilvo Ristoff wrote a book length study on *The Presesnce of Contemporary American History in John Updike's Rabbit Trilogy* where he argues that it is the scene, not really the hero, that occupies the center of the novels and generates the reader's interest. Harry Angstrom, as he is officially and also later in his life called, and his story are not "the soul" of the series "but a dead skeleton, a structure which is lifeless unless life is given to it by the flesh and spirit of the scene"[3] that is Updike's rendering of the social and historical context of the events in Rabbit's life. In other words, Ristoff's interest is in the documentary, chronicling aspect of these novels at the expense of his interest in the hero. Yet the novels, as even Ristoff's title acknowledges, are given their unity and their very *raison d'etre* by the fact that they trace the life of one character. The vicissitudes of Rabbit's personal life intertwine with the changes in his surroundings and only that interaction gives the sequence its multidimentional fulness and complexity.

Harry Angstrom appears in the first novel of the series when he is 26, with a young family and a meaningless job, nourishing a nostalgia for his days of basketball glory in high school. His nickname "Rabbit" comes from that time. Thus the sequence opens significantly with Harry's moment of fulfilment and triumph already in the past. He associates with grace the

[2] Reprinted in J. Updike, *Hugging the Shore*, p. 196–206.

[3] D. Ristoff, *The Presence of Contemporary American History*, [in:] *John Updike's Rabbit Trilogy*, P. Lang, 1988, p. 143.

kind of experience he had performing as the star of his hig school basketball team; his whole self, body, mind, and emotions integrated, free of constraints, transcending the mundane sense of what is possible in a feat of inspired action. The grace of such achievement, its ease, perfection, and style become Rabbit's standard by which to measure the quality of life, its nearness to God or "it", as Harry calls Him. Rabbit's one hunger, his one over-riding need is that the power and promise of his unique individuality be acknowledged and respected; that he may have his way in life. Thus the memory of the past, of that acstatically fulfilling experience sends him running in quest of its repetition, in the hope that he may recapture and retain the supreme moment. The grace and energy of such inspired performance open for Rabbit a perspective into transcendence, give him a sense of direct access to "it", to some power larger than himself whose availability for him justifies and sanctions his insistance on his own uniqueness and centrality. That is why Rabbit can claim that he has faith. His Faith strikes me as very Emersonian indeed.

Rabbit Angstrom who is only a year younger than his creator takes much from Updike's personal memories of his childhood and early youth in the towns of Shillington and Reading, Pennsylvania. The writer returns to those memories in the essays of *Self-Consciousness* admitting in the last piece of the book:

> My own deepest sense of self has to do with Shillington and (at a certain slant), the scent of or breath of Christmas. I become exhilarated in Shillington, as if my self is being given a bath in its own essence (SC, 231).

Just as Rabbit Angstrom shares with Updike the physical territory of youth and self-formation so he, no doubt, shares with his author the anxieties and revelations of inner life:

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

The latter reflection on the nature of his religious experience and his experience of God, offers a glimpse of the personal origins of Rabbit's flamboyant confluence of sensuality and religious faith[4]. But also, in an inescapable way, Rabbit's sensuously stimulated apprehension of God cannot but remind us of the early Whitman, who similary used and abused his body as the main instrument of access to the transcendent.

[4] Updike suffered from psoriasis for which sunbathing was a cure (cf. *Self-Consciousness*, essay II: *At War with My Skin*).

More generally speaking, Rabbit shares the traditional, instinctive and impulsive bias of so many American literary heroes. To be at his best, to achieve his moment of grace, Rabbit needs to rely on intuition, on impulses of the heart, on the cravings of his senses and in this should, I think, be seen as a direct descendant of the Romantic individualist, our times' version of the Self-Reliant Man. Measured against Emerson's or Whitman's vision of the representative, the divine average man, Harry Angstrom appears awfully diminished. He is dwarfed, first of all, by the shrunk possibilities open to him: his family feels a burden, his job consists in talking people into buying something Rabbit knows to be useless. The job only serves to support himself and the family on a modest level he resents. The strained circumstances of his life become focused in the recurring image of the closet door banging against the television set any time Rabbit needs to reach something out of the closet.

Given his instinctive but also programmatic sensuality, Rabbit turns to sex as the most readily available field of achieving satisfaction, repeating the kind of experience that he had as a basketball star. Unlike many critics, I think that Rabbit does know what he is searching for; it is not a concrete thing or position but a quality of experience, the quality of grace and ecstasy in daily life. Sex, however, as in *The Scarlet Letter*, has social consequences entrapping Rabbitt in the institutionalized family life, the necessity of a regular job, the cumbersome attibutes of respectability. From these he has to run, run for his freedom. This is the pattern established by the first novel in the series, which appropriately, ends in the freedom, the openness of all possibilities restored: "[...] he runs. Ah: runs. Runs"[5].

The running motif as both thematic center and structural support of the novel is something this book shares with other important novels of the fifties: Bellow's *Adventures of Augie March*, Ellison's *Invisible Man*, Salinger's *Catcher in the Rye*, and, of course, Kerouac's *On the Road*. In all those novels the running is defensive, away from the system, in attempts to protect the individual's right to be himself, which invariably means to be free. There is a political side to recording those stories of runners, and in the case of Rabbit – a political dimension to the memory that sets him in motion[6]. Updike acknowledges indirectly his concern with the political dimension of memory. In a review of Milan Kundera's *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*[7] the American writer endorses a formulation by

[5] J. Updike, *Rabbit Run*, ed. F. Crest, New York 1962, p. 284.

[6] That the novel shares so centrally the issues and structural patterns of major contemporary works of fiction seems to confirm the supposition that Updike did not originally conceive of it as the beginning of a series. Another indication in this direction is the title of the second novel *Rabbit Redux*.

[7] Reprinted in *Hugging the Shore*, p. 509–515.

one of the characters in the Czech author's novel: "the struggle of man against power is the struggle of memory against oblivion". A similar struggle of the individual to hold on to memories against the acceleration of social and cultural change constitutes a central thematic concern and structuring device in the series' final novel *Rabbit at Rest*.

When compared to other novels of the fifties *Rabbit Run* stands out because exercising his divinely sanctioned right to "the pursuit of happiness" as unlimited freedom, the book's hero leaves behind a trail of suffering and even death of the innocent partners in the human intercourse. Thus, it seems, that if there is ground for ascribing to Updike social and political conservatism, it is a conservatism ultimately rooted in the Hawthornian recognition of the insatiable egoism in our nature at every moment liable to commit the sin of instrumental treatment of fellow human beings. However, unlike Hawthorne Updike, does not think of this sin as calculated, perpetrated in cold blood and, therefore, unpardonable.

If in *Rabbit Run* Harry Angstrom tries to outrun a limiting, constraining reality, in *Rabbit at Rest* it seems that reality, the changing scene and environment are leaving Harry behind; that he has, perhaps, succeeded in runing for his freedom to the point of terminal loneliness. It is Nelson, Harry's son, who towards the end of the novel confronts his father with precisely such interpretation of their troubled relationship:

> I keep trying to love you but you don't really want it. You're afraid of it, it would tie you down. You've been scared all your life of being tied down[8].

Harry himself, on the other hand, has an increasing sense of being pushed out, of becoming unnecessary and cumbersome. After Thelma's death nobody really needs him. His estrangement from his family grows when Janice and Nelson, who own Springer Motors after old Mrs Springer's death, start running the lot between them and Harry becomes redundant. He is only "Janice's husband", as he puts it ruefully at one point. His sense of importance has been not only questioned but decisively undermined. This, however, applies to other individuals around him. Instability is the main factor contributing to the loss of individual's confidence in his own centrality. Rabbit's sense of becoming obsolete is tied to the accelerated changes in the culture with which he no longer can or wishes to cope:

> Rabbit feels betrayed. He was reared in a world where war was not strange but change was: the world stood still so you could grow up in it. He knows when the bottom fell out. When they closed down Kroll's, Kroll's that had stood in the center of Brewer all those years, bigger than a church, older than the courthouse, right at the head of Weiser Square there, with every Christmas those otherworldly displays of circling trains

[8] J. Updike, *Rabbit at Rest*, ed. A. Knopf, New York 1990, p. 418. Subsequent quotations come from the same edition, page number followes in brackets.

> and nodding dolls and twinkling stars in the corner windows as if God Himself put them there to light up this darkest time of the year [...]. So when the system just upped one summer and decided to close Kroll's down, just because shoppers had stopped coming in because the downtown had become frightening to white people, Rabbit realized the world was not solid and benign, it was a shabby set of temporary arrangements for the time being, all for the sake of money [...]. If Kroll's could go, the banks could go. When the money stopped, they could close down God Himself (461).

Already in *Rabbit is Rich* Harry has to puzzle about the sexual mores of his son's generation. He does not understand the arrangements and configurations between Nelson, his girlfriend Prue, and her girlfriend Melanie. And throughout *Rabbit at Rest* his sense of belonging to another time grows. Nelson points out in one of their tense conversations:

> What you don't realize about a consumer society, Dad, is it's all fads in a way. People don't buy things because they need'em. You actually need very little. You buy something because it's beyond what you need, it's something that will enhance your life, not just keep it plugging along (417).

The cultural and value change that has occurred within the span of his life, within his memory, pursues Rabbit doggedly. When Prue, Nelson's wife, admits in despair:

> 'I'm scared – so scared. And my kids are scared too. I'm trash and they're trash and they know it', Harry tries to object: 'Hey, hey' [...] 'Come on. Nobody's trash'. But even as he says this he knows it's an old-fashioned idea he would have trouble defending. We're all trash, really. Without God to lift us up and make us into angels we're all trash (344).

Against this overwhelming sense of change, against the growing feeling of his own irrelevance, Harry goes back to memories. At the end of his journey, at the close of this last novel, Rabbit finds a black nighorhood in Deleon, Florida. It draws him like a magnet because it evokes for him.

> [...] the town of his childhood, Mt. Judge in the days of Depression and distant war, when people still sat on their front porches, and there were vacant lots and odd-shaped cornfields, and men back from work in the factories would water their lawns in the evenings, and people not long off the farm kept chickens in backyard pens, and peddled eggs for odd pennies (478).

Certainly, there is, in Harry's meditations, a nostalgia for the world of his lost youth but the black neighborhood recalling this word attracts him because time somehow stopped there, because "this ignored part of Deleon is in some way familiar, he's been there before, before his life got too soft" (486). The black section of Deleon presents to Harry the continuity of values that he has betrayed in becoming rich and his millieu has lost, it seems, entirely. Walking in this poor neighborhood Harry somehow transcends the limits of his enclosure in the affluent white middle class life and once more going against the established system's norms, he is "exerting his national right to go where he pleases" (486).

The whole novel *Rabbit at Rest* is divided into three parts entitled FL (Florida), PA (Pennsylvania), MI – not Michigan but Myocardiac Infarction. In its emphasis on the journey motif, on the changing of places until the final dislocation into and through the Myocardiac Infarction, this structure echoes the first novel *Rabbit Run*. In the third part of *Rabbit at Rest* Harry Angstrom again follows his instinct to run: "A life knows few revelations; these must be followed when they come. Rabbit sees clearly what to do. His acts take on a decisive haste. He goes upstairs and packs" (435). He finds himself on the same road South that he took on the memorable night of his ineffective flight from Brewer, Janice, and the constraining circumstances of his family and job at the beginning of *Rabbit Run*.

> Rabbit wants to see once more a place in Morgantown, a hardware store with two pumps outside, where a thickset farmer in two shirts and hairy nostrils had advised him to know where he was going before he went there. Well, now he did. He had learned the road and figured out the destination. But what had been a country hardware store was now a slick little real-estate office, where the gas pumps had been, fresh black asphalt showed under the moonlight the stark yellow stripes of diagonal parking speaces (438).

Rabbit has changed and the country has changed. His return to the same route and the same situation measures the changes in both. For Rabbit now knows where he is going and in his renewed loyalty to the values of his youth (signalled by the return of his nickname; in *Rabbit is Rich* only Ruth called him Rabbit, otherwise he was Harry Angstrom throughout), he is going for good. Running back to the memories of his younger years (driving South he turns on the radio and listens to a concert of songs from the fifties, the same ones that he had heard on the analogous occasion in *Rabbit Run*), running back to the values of his youth that he has betrayed in *Rabbit is Rich* where rather than running, he took to jogging and country club recreation, Harry Angstrom also back to the time of the birth of his nation, the formation of its values and its early triumphs. For the last Christmas of his life Janice gave her husband a book on the American Revolution. Harry takes it with him on his final run to Florida determined to "finish it if it kills him" (435), which in a symbollic way it does. Alone in Deleon he revisits both his own youth walking in the poor black neighborhood and his country's beginnings trying to finish *The First Salute*.

In *Rabbit at Rest* more than in the three earlier novels Updike identifies Harry Angstrom with the United States. At the request of his granddaughter Judy (born at the end of *Rabbit is Rich*), Harry dresses up as Uncle Sam and takes part in the fourth of July parade with Judy's girl scouts group. The incident is undoubtedly based on Updike's personal memories. In *Self-Consciousness* the writer remembers that his father was Uncle Sam in the Victory Parade after World War II, and that it was for him an act

of sincere, convinced patriotism (SC, 31). For Harry Angstrom, Updike's creation, it is a much more ambivalent and strange experience:

> [...] what a precarious weird feeling it is for Harry at last to put his suede-booted feet on the yellow double line of the town's main street and start walking. He feels giddy, ridiculous, enormous. [...]. The tremor in his heart and hands becomes an exalted sacrificial feeling as he takes few steps into the asphalt void, rimmed at this end of the route with only a few spectators, a few bare bodies in shorts and sneakers and tinted shirts along the curb (368).

But as he walks on and the crowd begins to cheer for both Uncle Sam and Harry Rabbit since some inhabitants of Brewer seem still to remember Rabbit from the days of his youthful promise, Harry fully accepts his identification with America:

> Kate Smith belts out, dead as she is, dragged into the grave by sheer gangrenous weight, "God bless America" [...] Harry's eyes burn and the inpression giddily – as if he has been lifted up to survey all human history – grows upon him, making his heart thump worse and worse, that all in all this is the happiest fucking country the world has ever seen (371).

In the course of this novel, Harry's life eventually emerges as identical with the course of American history from the early achievement and promise to the bloated, overweight condition, given to soft living and material comforts, and worried about the mortally sick heart. For as the doctor tells Janice: "Harry's is a typical American heart, for his age, economic status, et cetera" (166). In *Rabbit at Rest* "middle America" is Harry Angstrom's age, well past its prime and finding it increasingly difficult to cope. And viewed in the long perspective, the Rabbit novels contain not only the story of Harry Angstrom or chronicle the successive post-war decades. They also record the struggles, defeats and, it seems, eventual demise of America's most persistent mythical figure – its romantic, individualist hero.

Rabbit's death (assuming that he indeed dies) appears as a conscious or at least semi-conscious choice, an answer to the question implied throughout the novel in Harry's growing perception of the failure of his body and of his redundant status in the family. The question is "how to go"? and in Harry's interpretation it is one of style. The issue gets focused in the debate over the case of Pete Rose's withdrawal from his baseball career. When the quality of his performance deteriorated, Rose forced his club into a financial settlement. His practical way of stepping back is opposed to that of another player, Schmidt, who, when his performance became poor, simply quitted though he could have earned another half million dollars by hanging in until the end of the season. Harry explains:

> [...] like Schmidt himself said, it got to the point where he'd tell his body to do something and it wouldn't to it. He knew what he had to do and couldn't do it, and he faced the fact and you got to give him credit. In this day and age, he put honor over money (351).

Harry returns to the Rose-Schmidt choice several times and his preference is invariably for Schmidt: "If you have to do it with hustle and grit, you shouldn't be out there" (385).

Rabbit dies of a heart failure which overtakes him when he is playing basketball on a street corner field in the black neighborhood of Deleon, Fl., which he had been compulsively visiting for the past weeks. He is playing a one on one game with an accidental black youngster who just happens to be on the spot:

> Rabbit feels a gap, a moment's slackness in the other, in which to turn the corner; he takes one slam of a dribble, carrying his foe on his side like a bumping sack of coal, and leaps up for the peeper. The hoop fills his circle of vision, it descends to kiss his lips, he can't miss.
>
> Up he goes, way up toward the torn clouds. His torso is ripped by a terrific pain, elbow to elbow. He bursts from within [...] (506).

In one of the essays in *Self-Consciousness* there is this reminiscence:

> Shortly after the insurance report, I was playing basketball – we husbands and fathers were still young enough to play this game of constant motion – and I looked up at the naked, netless hoop: gray sky outside it, gray sky inside it. And as I waited, on a raw rainy fall day, for the opposing touch football team to kick off, there would come sailing through the air instead the sullen realization that in a few decades we would all be dead (SC, 100)[9].

In the scene from *Rabbit at Rest* this memory is transformed into a gesture of victory in which Rabbit once more exercises his right of radical freedom that relates Harry to the commitments of his youth and to the central mythos of his once youthful culture. The point is that at the end of the eighties when Harry is 56 and America had gone through the Regan era with increasing anxieties and fears: political, social, economic, medical, moral, and others, the possibilities for both seem drastically diminished. In *Rabbit at Rest* America is Harry Angstrom's age as Updike echoes from within the sadness and a sense of loss of his middle age vision, the Hawthornian confluence[10] of his hero's age and the country's age, his hero's individual history and the history of the country.

Toward the end of the last essay in *Self-Consciousness* Updike meditates during a sleepless night at his aged mother's farmhouse:

> For isn't it the singularity of life that terrifies us? Is not the decisive difference between comedy and tragedy that tragedy denies us another chance? [...] How solemn and huge and deeply pathetic our life does loom in its once-and-doneness, how inexorably linear, even though our revolving planet offers us cycles of the day and of the year to suggest

[9] The insurance report told Updike that his lungs were "slightly emphysematous", an incurable condition as he found out in medical books (cf. SC, 99).

[10] As e.g. in the story *My Kinsman, Major Molineux*.

> that existence is intrinsically cyclical, a playful spin, and that there will always be, tomorrow morning or the next, another chance.
> [...]
> The universe itself we know now to be, like our individual lives, singular in its career, beginning in the Big Bang and ending in entropy [...]. Things in general take on a tragic once-and-doneness, displacing the ancient comedy, bred of ignorance, of infinite possibility and endless cycle (SC, 265).

It is on this pattern of the extension of private memory into collective consciousness and of the parallel darkening of the youthful vision into the middle aged sense of loss and dispossession that the whole sequence of the Rabbit novels, as we have them now, operates. It is this pattern also that puts Updike clearly within the tradition of "the great American novel" in which so many American authors from Cooper and Hawthorne to Fitzgerald to Mailer tried to condense the national experience, the unique American exhilaration with the vision of another chance and the inevitble disillusionment of its loss, into a mythical story of a single life driven by the prospect of possibility and betrayed by the passage of time.

Institute of English Studies
University of Łódź

Agnieszka Salska

STRUKTURY PAMIĘCI W CYKLU POWIEŚCI O „KRÓLIKU" JOHNA UPDIKE'A

Wielorakie formy pamięci: kronikarski zapis, osobiste wspomnienia, mit literacki i kulturowy, mają dla Johna Updike'a, autora czterech powieści o „Króliku", kluczowe znaczenie. W całej tetralogii, a zwłaszcza w jej ostatniej części *Królik się uspokoił* (1990) wyobraźnia pisarza karmi się napięciem między pamiętaniem i zapominaniem, a dialektyka stabilności i zmiany leży w samym centrum splotu jej wątków tematycznych.

Bohater wszystkich powieści, Harry Angstrom zwany „Królikiem", podziela tradycyjną skłonność bardzo wielu amerykańskich bohaterów literackich do kierowania się w wyborach instynktem raczej niż intelektem. Żeby osiągnąć szczyt swoich możliwości, „Królik" musi odwoływać się do intuicji i porywu serca, musi iść za swoimi naturalnymi pragnieniami. Wydaje się w tym względzie spadkobiercą romantycznego bohatera – indywidualisty, współczesną wersją „Self- Reliant Man", człowieka polegającego na sobie.

W porównaniu ze swym emersonowskim czy whitmanowskim pierwowzorem „Królik" wydaje się straszliwie pomniejszony, przede wszystkim przez otoczenie, w którym żyje i przez przyspieszone zmiany cywilizacyjne i obyczajowe, za którymi w ostatniej powieści cyklu już nie ma ochoty nadążać.

W *Królik się uspokoił*, bardziej niż we wcześniejszych powieściach serii, Harry Angstrom utożsamiany jest z Ameryką. „Serce Harry'ego to typowe amerykańskie serce wziąwszy pod

uwagę jego wiek, status ekonomiczny itd." – mówi lekarz żonie „Królika". I kiedy Harry umiera, jesteśmy świadkami śmierci centralnej postaci amerykańskiego mitu kulturowego, za wszelką cenę niezależnego, wolnego bohatera-indywidualisty. Retrospektywnie, cykl powieści o „Króliku" prezentuje nie tylko losy Harry'ego Angstroma, stanowi nie tylko kronikę głównych wydarzeń, przemian i klimatu kolejnych dekad XX w. po II wojnie światowej; powieści te również obserwują i utrwalają walkę, porażki, i, jak się zdaje, ostateczne zejście ze sceny najwitalniejszej mitycznej postaci w amerykańskiej kulturze, jej romantycznego bohatera-indywidualisty.

W finalnej powieści cyklu losy Harry'ego okazują się analogiczne bądź nawet tożsame z dziejami Stanów Zjednoczonych – od wczesnych osiągnięć i wielkich nadziei do stanu nabrzmiałej od nadwagi ociężałości, przywiązania do wygód i zamartwiania się o śmiertelnie chore serce. Cały cykl oparty jest o zasadę rozciągania prywatnego doświadczenia i osobistych wspomnień (z których wiele Harry Angstrom dzieli ze swoim, o rok tylko starszym, twórcą) w ten sposób aby nabrały wymiarów i ciężaru zbiorowej pamięci kultury. Temu procesowi towarzyszy równoległe ciemnienie młodzieńczej wizji nadziei i otwartych możliwości w nieodłączne od wieku dojrzałego poczucie straty i wydziedziczenia.