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recurring motif in the totality of an author’s writing.
The relative absence of sport-related themes in "important"
writing may probably be attributed to several factors:
a somewhat prevailing belief that sport is not related to
the intellectual life, and that it may even be antithetical
to artistic expression because of a supposed mind-body
separation; a genre of Puritan ethic which insists that
sport exists on the periphery of serious matters, and that
it is inherently frivolous in nature; and the possibility
that many writers have not been touched and aroused by
sport due to their lack of real participation in it.
The body of writing in which sport plays either a
major or minor role, however, is revealing and important;
further, the number of sport-related fictional works is
gradually increasing; and such growth has begun to attract
the attention of scholars of physical education/sport and
of literature. Such attention is most appropriate for
theorists and scholars of physical education and sport;
it is important that they acquire a fundamental working
knowledge of sport-related literature because without such
expertise they are unable to comment validly upon a signifi-
cant social-intellectual utilization of sport. Physical
educators and/or sport theorists, who are generally those
most capable of teaching and interpreting sport, should be
among the leaders in explicating its meanings, from the
viewpoint of sportsman himself, in the various socio-
'Apparently he has a basket on his barn wall, with a little asphalt court. He said in the spring, between skiing and tennis, some of the men like to play. They need me to make six, for three on a side' (p. 63).

Foxy and Angela are the only wives who watch the men play. Angela says, "Basketball isn't very popular, you can't do it with women. He's very good. Your husband"(p. 66).

In other words, a game without the element of sex will not be highly regarded; or, further, perhaps a game in which masculinity predominates is for psychological reasons unappealing. In other contexts in the novel, most of the men are presented as at least somewhat effeminate or homosexual; it is only Hanema, whose masculinity is never uncertain, who plays with a loud roughness and enjoys the game fully.

Foxy watched. The neighbor boy, graceful yet ill at ease, was standing aside while the six grown men panted and heaved, ducked and dribbled. They looked clumsy crowded on the little piece of asphalt whose edges fell off into mud softened and stamped by sneaker footprints. Ken and Gallagher were the tallest and she saw Ken, whose movements had a certain nice economy she had not seen displayed for years, lift the ball to the level of his forehead and push it off. It swirled around the rim and flew away, missing. This pleased her, why? He had looked so confident, his whole nicely poised body had expressed the confidence, that it would go in. Constantine seized the rebound and dribbled down low, protecting the ball with an outward elbow. Foxy felt he had been raised in a city. His eyes in their ghostly transparence suggested photographic paper now silver, now black, now clear, depending upon in what they were dipped. His sharp features flushed, little-Smith kept slapping his feet as if to create confusion. He had none of the instinctive
moves and Foxy wondered why he played. Saltz, whom she was prepared to adore, moved on the fringe cautiously, stooped and smiling as if to admit he was in a boys' game. His backside was broad and instead of sneakers he wore black laced shoes, such as peek from beneath a priest's robe. As she watched, Hanema, abruptly fierce, stole the ball from Constantine, braving his elbow, pushed past Ken in a way that must be illegal, hipped and hopped and shot. When the ball went in he jumped for a joke on Gallagher's back (pp. 66-67).

Foxy's curious distaste for her husband is reflected in her pleased reaction to his missed shot. His confidence, his sureness in himself characterize much of his make-up; and seeing that confidence result in failure gives her a unique satisfaction. Piet's illegal move around Ken is an indication of the illicit maneuvers that he will eventually make against him with Foxy. Foxy also understands that Piet's adolescent showing-off is intended to attract her attention to him; thus, sport first makes her truly aware of his presence and of his potential for "sudden explosion of energy."

A particularly significant moment in the game occurs when Freddy Thorne arrives and is brought into the game.

He wore a fuzzy claret sports shirt with an acid-green foulard and hightop all-weather boots such as children with weak ankles wear.

"Hey, big Freddy," Harold little-Smith called from the basketball court. The thumping and huffing had suspended.
'How many points are you spotting us?' Gallagher asked.

'None,' Hanema said. 'Freddy will be all right. He's an asset. He's loose. Take a practice shot, Freddy.' He slammed the ball off the asphalt into Thorne's stomach. 'See how loose he is?'

From the stiff-fingered way Thorne handled the ball Foxy saw he was nothing of an athlete; he was so waddly, so flat-footed, she averted her eyes from the sight. . . . Four on a side was too many. The court, now deep in the shadow of the barn, was crowded and Thorne, with his protrusive rear and confused motions, was in everyone's way. Hanema had the ball. Persistently bumped by Thorne in his attempts to dribble amid a clamor of shouts, he passed the ball on the bounce to the Constantines' neighbor's boy; in the same stride he hooked one foot around Thorne's ankle and by a backwards stab of his weight caused the bigger man to fall down. Thorne fell in stages, thrusting out an arm, then rolling face down on the muddy asphalt, his hand under him.

Play stopped. Foxy and Angela ran to the men. Hanema had kneeled to Thorne. The others made a hushed circle around them. Smearily smiling, his claret shirt muddy, Thorne sat up and showed them a trembling hand whose whitened little finger stuck out askew. 'Dislocated,' he said in a voice from which pain had squeezed all elasticity.

Hanema, kneeling, blurted, 'Jesus Freddy, I'm sorry. This is terrible. Sue me.'

'You didn't do it on purpose,' little-Smith told Hanema.

'But I did,' Piet said. 'I deliberately tripped the poor jerk. The way he bumps with his belly gets me mad.'

Gallagher said, 'He doesn't understand the game (pp. 72, 73, 74, 75).

Thorne's physical clumsiness, his athletic ineptitude, and his annoying manner of play provide the occasion for Piet to hurt and embarrass him purposely. Freddy's inability to participate in the "humanizing" potential in the game is amplified by the wounding he receives from Piet; such
wounding is indicative of the antagonism that Piet feels toward Freddy in other aspects of their relationship. As one of the other players comments about the game, "C'est la guerre." It is Freddy, however, in what becomes a war of the spirit and religious consciousness who is ultimately victorious. In the face-to-face physical encounter of sport, Piet is the stronger; he cannot, however, prevail against the insidious deterioration of himself caused by eventual acceptance of Thorne's interpretation of life.

The basketball game provides one additional insight into Ken Whitman: "Ken, in the lull, was practicing shots, perfecting himself. Foxy felt herself submerged in shadows and cross-currents while he was on high, willfully ignorant, hollow and afloat. His dribbling and the quivering rattle of the rim irritated her like any monologue"(p. 75). Ken's meticulous attention to himself, even when another is injured, and his willingness to make himself "ignorant, hollow, and afloat" exemplify his whole approach to his life and his marriage. Here, as in other instances in their life together, Foxy feels apart from him.

Prior to and during the basketball game, Angela and Foxy, who are the only wives watching, attempt to get to know one another better. They learn that they share a college sport in common.
Foxy said 'Field hockey is my only game.'
'What position did you play? I was center halfback.'
'You played? I was right inner, usually. Sometimes wing.'
'It's a lovely game,' Angela said. 'It was the one time in my life when I enjoyed being aggressive. It's what men must have a lot of the time.' There was a flow and an authority in the drifting way she spoke that led Foxy to agree, to nod eagerly, as the sun drifted lower into a salmon overcast. Keeping their pale faces lifted to the pale light, they talked, these two, of hockey ('What I liked about halfback,' Angela said, 'was you were both offensive and defensive and yet nobody could blame you for anything.'); of sports in general ('It's so good,' Foxy said, 'to see Ken playing at anything. I think being with students all the time makes you unnecessarily old. I felt ancient in Cambridge. '); of Ken's profession ('He never talks to me about his work anymore,' Foxy said(p. 68).

It was Foxy's position in the sport that involves the most aggressiveness, and she carries a measure of combative-ness with her even in her love; in essence, she steals Piet from Angela, whose enjoyment of aggressiveness was demonstrated only on the playing field, not in her relationships with others apart from the game. In another instance, Foxy thought of Angela, "how graceful yet solid she looked, and imagined her as a hockey player standing abstracted yet impenetrable in the center of the limed field, in blue bloomers"(p. 70). This alludes to Angela's spiritual solidity and strength; it may also point to her relative sexual inaccessability to Piet in that she is described as "impenetrable." In any case, the image presented is extremely apt in crystallizing Angela's person.
The conversation between Angela and Poxy also makes reference to Piet; Angela says of him, "He's from inland, you know. I thing the sea intimidates him. He likes to skate but isn't much of a swimmer" (p. 69). This remark might easily go unnoticed but for the fact of an earlier description of Piet: "The world wore a slippery surface for Piet; he stood on the skin of things in the posture of a man testing newly formed ice, his head cocked for the warning crack, his spine curved to make himself light" (p. 24). Angela's analysis of her husband as one who enjoys skating is indeed correct because skating over things is exactly what he often does; he skims over the surface, fearfully, afraid of the depths below that might make it necessary for him to "swim." Yet his anticipation and his fear of a breakthrough is perhaps ironic because to a certain extent he searches for depth, or substance, beneath superficiality. The strength of the image of ice is also seen in Updike's selection of "Thin Ice" and "Breakthrough" as chapter titles.

Sport as a reason for bringing disparate persons together, for generating a togetherness perhaps not otherwise easily possible, began several years prior to the action of the novel, when Piet, and his business partner, Matt Gallagher, "began the round of sports--touch football,
skiing, basketball, sailing, tennis, touch football again—that gave the couples an inexhaustible excuse for gatherings; a calendrical wheel of unions to anticipate and remember, of excuses for unplanned parties" (pp. 116-17). Implied in the "round" of games is the possibility of ritual, an experience that has largely been taken from the lives of these root-less people. A peculiar regret attends the dissolution of these gatherings; Foxy feels it as she and Ken leave the group after the basketball game:

She was to experience this sadness many times, this chronic sadness of late Sunday afternoon, when the couples had exhausted their game, basketball or beachgoing or tennis or touch football, and saw an evening weighing upon them, an evening without a game, an evening spent among flickering lamps and cranky children and leftover food and the nagging half-read newspaper with its weary portents and atrocities, an evening when marriages closed in upon themselves like flowers from which the sun is withdrawn, an evening giving like a smeared window on Monday and the long week when they must perform again their impersonations of working men, of stockbrokers and dentists and engineers, of mothers and housekeepers, of adults who are not the world's guests but its hosts (pp. 80-81).

It is thus apparent that sport creates a rationale for being together in joy and makes possible the arrangement of experience distinct from the unpleasantness of daily reality. Thus sport, in addition to assisting communion, is the tool of escape, perhaps into triviality and away from the necessary viability of national consciousness.

An image of sport as it relates to a sense of nation does appear briefly as Piet momentarily considers
the onrush of population: "His spirits slightly lifted as he passed the Protestant cemetery, fan-shaped acres expanding from a Puritan wedge of tilted slate stones adorned with winged skulls and circular lichen. Order reigned. Soon cemeteries and golf courses the last greenswards. Thronging hungry hordes, grain to India" (p. 89). It appears that the cemetery and the golf course are both aligned and juxtaposed. As greensward, each is a place of serenity and retreat from the "hordes," or, further, each is, in its own way, a place of death—the golf course bearing the connotation because it provides the occasion for escape from life. Their juxtaposition leaves the golf course as a haven of life, a place curiously apart from the clamor which surrounds it but which is most surely at the farthest reach from being like a cemetery. The dual image of cemetery and golf course is extremely evocative and produces a number of puzzling, yet helpful, insights.

Golf is used an additional time insofar as national feeling is concerned. The situation is a match that takes place on the day of the Cuban missile crisis. Particularly notable is the difference in psychological experience of the players during the game:

Piet had had a golf date with Roger Guerin. They agreed not to cancel. "As good a way to go as any," Roger had said over the phone. Storm occasions suited him. As Piet drove north to the course, the Bay View,
he heard on the radio that the first Russian ship was approaching the blockade. They teed off into an utterly clear afternoon and between shots glanced at the sky for the Russian bombers. Chicago and Detroit would go first and probably there would be shouts from the clubhouse when the bulletins began coming in. There was almost nobody else on the course. It felt like the great rolling green deck of a ship, sunshine glinting on the turning foliage. As Americans they had enjoyed their nation's luxurious ride and now they shared the privilege of going down with her. Roger, with his tight angry swing, concentrating with knit brows on every shot, finished the day under ninety. Piet had played less well. He had been too happy. He played best, swung easiest, with a hangover or a cold. He had been distracted by the heavensent glisten of things--of fairway grass and fallen leaves and leaning flags--seen against the onyx immanence of death, against the vivid transparency of the sky in which planes might materialize. Swinging, he gave thanks that, a month earlier, he had ceased to be faithful to Angela and had slept with Georgene. It had been a going from indoors to outdoors; they met at beaches, on porches, beneath translucent trees. Happy remembering her, picturing her straight limbs, Piet sprayed shots, three-putted, played each hole on the edge of an imaginary cliff. (pp. 236-37).

That the game could be played at all in time of such danger might be regarded as a type of symbolic sacrilege, or as a falling-away from the pattern of ever-widening concentric circles into the citizenry that is implicit in the concept of nation. It is significant that Roger's play is quite unaffected by the awesome prospect of destruction; he is able to concentrate on his swing and finishes with a respectable "under ninety." Piet's poorer play, a result of his being "too happy", as he sees the "heavensent glisten of things" and thinks of one of his lovers against a background of potential sudden annihilation from the
skies, is indicative of his sensitive approach to life; his happiness, however, is also most likely a powerful allusion to a death-wish. In his complex entanglements with fears and lovers, death would be a simple answer to all complications. Neither Roger Piet, however, each of whom has "the privilege of going down" with his country, gives the nation's concerns much thought. Roger simply ignores the country's danger, and most of Piet's thoughts turn inward. Each, in divergent ways, is seen as a vagabond of sorts, or, more severely, as a man without a country.

Tennis also is of significance in defining characters and in showing their relationships to one another. The manner of its play, in one instance, reflects the feelings of an adulterous pair toward one another: "Frank absolutely gets choleric when he can't have Marcia as his tennis partner. And when they're across the net from each other, all those cute little pat shots, I could puke" (p. 137). Thus, the true nature of the game and its proper mode of play are intruded upon by the feelings of mutual protectiveness felt by the players.

Another occasion of tennis play includes the Hanemas, the Thornes, and John and Bernadette Ong. (John, a Korean working in U. S. scientific research, is the
cultural milieu in which it exists. As an emerging area of inquiry that will perhaps eventually attain the status of sport sociology and sport psychology, sport literature merits serious consideration indeed.

A careful examination of a number of fictional and critical works has convinced this writer of the significant correspondences that are possible between sport and literature. Sport lends itself to many important literary themes and functions: it provides a unique form of action; it may vividly illustrate characters; it may be a very real type of communication; and, as a symbol, it has the potential to indicate a variety of ideas, values, and ways of being. Because sport is a manifestation of an intensely-experienced life, it is imbued with meanings that are relevant to the questions that man has always asked about his existence. Many of the concepts or meanings that writers have seen, or might see, in sport are considered in the discussion that follows.

The concept, or model, of the "Hero" is often forcefully presented through the vehicle of the sportsman, or athlete. The competition, with its inherent trials and dangers, is of an obvious type, essentially drawn in black and white; in sport there is generally little ambivalence, little question as to right and wrong, and thus the successes and failures of characters moving toward or in the
novel's only foreign-born character. John possess a strong liking for American things, but his inability to transfer himself fully into the mainstream of American culture, or at least its social aspects, is especially apparent in his communication difficulties and in the beating in tennis he takes from his non-Oriental friends. Toward the close of the novel, John dies of cancer and it is highly possible that his death symbolizes a lack of flourishing due to a type of sterility in the country he attempted to adopt as his own.)

John himself, a small bony butternut-colored man, in love with everything American from bubble chambers to filtered cigarettes, was a tennis enthusiast without aptitude; he invariably played in freshly pressed whites, complete to the wristband, and a green eyeshade. His dainty popping strokes, accompanied by himself with a running comment of encouraging cries and disappointed coos, were rudely smashed away by his Occidental friends. Bernadette, however, was a walloper. She and Freddy, who stood comically flatfooted and served patball like a child, opposed John and Angela, whose game was graceful and well schooled and even, except at the net, where she had no sense of kill.

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The Hanemas faced the Thornes. Georgene had put on sunglasses; the rest of her face looked chiseled. The sun was high. Sheen skated on the green composition court. Angela served; her serves, though accurate, lacked pace and sat up pleasantly fat to hit. Georgene's return, one of her determined firm forehands, streaked toward Piet as he crouched at the net; anger had hurried her stroke slightly and the ball whacked the net at the height of his groin and fell dead on her side.

'Fifteen love,' Angela called, and prepared, on tiptoe, to serve again.

Piet changed courts. Opposite him Freddy Thorne
wore loud plaid shorts, a fairyish pink shirt, a duckbill hat for his bald head, fallen blue socks, and rubbery basketball sneakers that seemed too large. Freddy pointed his feet outward clownishly and hoisted his racket to his shoulder like a baseball bat. Angela, having laughed and lost rhythm, double-faulted.

'Fifteen all,' she called, and Piet faced Georgene again. A fluid treacherous game. Advantages so swiftly shifted. Love became hate. You give me my shape. Georgene, eyeless, braced for the serve, gauged it for her forehand, took back the racket, set her chin, stepped forward, and Piet, gripping his handle so hard it sweated, bit down on a shout for mercy (pp. 198-99, 201-02).

John's unskilled play in this context of tennis makes him appear, to some extent, as one who may find it hard to survive in other areas of the Occidental approach to life. Angela is revealed through this sport situation to be consistent with her usual orientation in confrontations with others: "She had no sense of kill," at least up close. The net becomes a most important place of encounter, and she does not, perhaps through an overabundance of delicacy, approach it with all her powers. This foreshadowing of her characteristic yielding points to her eventual rejection of Piet; rather than fight for him, and even his soul, when she faces the fact of his many love affairs, she simply leaves him.

The contest between Piet and Freddy already seen in basketball is shown in this passage as well. Freddy defiles the proper conduct of the game through his clothing and use of the racket in the manner of a baseball bat;
this, of course, echoes his usual clowning, disruptive style in other matters. It is Georgene, however, who competes against Piet with most fervor. He has attempted to discontinue their affair and her angry reaction to him is focussed in her attacks upon him in the game: Here, "love became hate" to such an extent that Piet feels the need for "mercy." The tennis court itself, with the separation of the net between the players, also becomes representative of the human barriers that exist between the players. Later in the novel, tennis becomes an indicator of the near-despairing loss of confidence that Georgene feels: "It's so sad. It makes me so ashamed. I have no self-confidence at anything anymore. Terry and I lost six-two, six-three to Bernadette and Angela yesterday, I suppose she told you, crowing about it" (p. 230). An additional reference to tennis also involves Georgene, when she, attempting to extricate herself gracefully from an intrusion upon Piet and Foxy, says, "When can we all start playing tennis?" (p. 404). This may be regarded as a mere pleasantrty; she might also be asking when she can meet them in a situation where she can symbolically inflict hurt; or, she may be wondering when it will be possible for everyone to meet once again in simply enjoyment of one another's company, free from the aura of intrigue.
The final reference to tennis is made during Piet's visit with John Ong in the hospital:

John was emaciated and, but for the hectic flushed spots, no larger than half dollars, on each cheekbone, colorless. So thin, he looked taller than Piet had remembered him. He spoke with difficulty, as if from a diminished pocket of air high in his chest, near the base of his throat. Only unaltered was the quick smile with which he masked imperfect comprehension. 'Harya Pee? Wam weller mame waller pray terrace, heh?' Bernadette plangently translated: 'He says how are you Piet? He says warm weather makes him want to play tennis.'

'Soon you'll be out there,' Piet said, and tossed up and served an imaginary ball (pp. 446-47).

John's pathetic statement about wanting to play probably means that he views the sport as a potent gesture of life that might bring him back from the edge of death, and that he views tennis, even in his drugged condition, as one of the elements of America that is truly comprehensible to him; in other words, if death can be forestalled, he would again place himself in the familiar, relative comfort of the sport he attempted to master.

The continual utilization of tennis throughout Couples is adequate testimony to its potential as a literary symbol. The sport, with its elements of complexity-in-simplicity, aggressiveness in the guise of gentility, and elegance in the service of power, is an especially appropriate form of play for the characters of the novel because those same elements define many of their relationships to each other. It is most suitable to convey
impressions of love and hate, life as opposed to death, and perhaps even the loneliness and misery that sometimes affect the players.

Basketball is touched upon briefly twice after the lengthy presentation of the game near the book's beginning. The first reference occurs in the context of a discussion of discrimination against the Saltzes, a Jewish couple. Piet says in response to an implied accusation, "Not true. We always asked Ben to basketball. They don't ski or play tennis, whose fault is that. They were always at large parties" (p. 262). It appears that to Piet, in this case, that mere invitation to participate in the men's pick-up basketball games should suffice for more complete inclusion of the couple into the real life of the group. Here, basketball stands as a symbol of half-way, perhaps grudging, acceptance; it is a way of saying, "This is close enough." Basketball also provides Piet with a poignant reflection:

Sunday, bringing his daughters back from a trip to the Science Museum in Boston, Piet was saddened by the empty basketball court. This was the time of year when the young married men of Tarbox used to scrimmage. Whitman was gone, Saltz had moved, Constantine was flying jets to Lima and Rio, Thorne and Little-Smith had always considered the game plebeian. Weeds were threading through a crack in the asphalt and the hoop, netless and aslant, needed to be secured with longer screws (p. 442).

This powerful image of desolation, of a past that will not be relived, and of finality is strong witness to his

impressions of love and hate, life as opposed to death, and perhaps even the loneliness and misery that sometimes affect the players.
feeling that he has been virtually abandoned by his community of acquaintances. The disrepair of the court, originally a place of order and form, connotes the disarray of his situation and his thoughts.

There are several other references to sport in the novel that are not part of a pattern such as those cited above, but which nonetheless appear to be worthy of mention. First, a ski lodge is the place where two of the couples openly switch husbands and wives. The fact that the secrecy attending both affairs was broken at a ski lodge is likely a result of the atmosphere of warmth generated in the comfortable context and by the freedom implied in the sport the persons involved came to enjoy. Second, Freddy Thorne appears at an impromptu party in his skin-diving equipment. The grotesqueness of his wearing the equipment is equivalent to his wearing of ridiculously inappropriate tennis apparel, and it indicates the grotesque nature of the comments he makes at the party. Third, Lyndon Johnson's acceptance of the Presidency, "all humility and rotten grammar" (p. 314). Fourth, a group of the men play touch football, racing, "red-faced up and down the hummocky field, shouting for the ball" (p. 335). This near-idyllic scene is strangely reminiscent of the favorite sport activity of the recently-murdered John Kennedy, but whether it means anything more is quite
doubtful. Fifth, after his separation from Angela, Piet and Foxy take his daughters bowling; Foxy's competitiveness, already mentioned in her field hockey experience, again asserts itself as she beats Piet. And Sixth, Piet goes to the home of one of his employees and notices a new set of expensive golf clubs in the garage; the clubs appear as symbols of an almost repellent materialism and of the type of financial success that Piet never quite achieved.

**Summary**

Sport works in Couples to provide situations in which human communication and separation might be demonstrated. Both basketball and tennis are valuable in conveying the mutual care and appreciation which characterize the moments of communication; and both sports serve equally well to show the aggression, occasional dislike, and sometime aloofness that are inherent in the instances in which separation is apparent. Sport briefly symbolizes both life and death, the nature of individual responses to a national crisis, and, to a certain extent, Piet Hanema's physicality/masculinity. It provides a context in which character revelations are made; it displays the conditions of one's psychological state on occasion; and when abused, or played improperly, it parallels the disjointed relationships of the members of the group of couples. As a
pervasive symbol, it adequately and appropriately serves to communicate much of the sense and feeling of the entire work.
Rabbit Redux resurrects the character of Rabbit Angstrom and places him at a time ten years after the events of *Rabbit, Run*. The novel portrays a greatly subdued Rabbit; his inclination toward flight has largely dissipated through acceptance of responsibility as husband, father, and provider. He appears to be moving toward middle-age in a rather ordinary, non-descript manner; his days are routine, and there is little in his life that provides anticipation, excitement, and hope. Most certainly, he is greatly removed from the unique promise that his high school athletic heroics indicated. Yet he does not seem to be especially unhappy; what dissatisfaction he may feel is below the threshold necessary to engender extreme action, but it is remarkable that the pattern of his life seems to be quite similar to the "net" which he feared and attempted to escape a decade earlier.

Rabbit works alongside his father as a linotype operator, and, perhaps surprisingly, recognizes the craftsmanship instead of the boredom inherent in his job. The pride and satisfaction he feels in his work, however, do not obscure the fact that he is now a recorder of the acts of others, not one who, as in his past, finds that

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others write of his achievements. It is also strikingly ironic that Rabbit, to whom simple physical movement was once so valuable, feels comfortable when working in stationary harmony with his machine.

His family life is mundane and, worse, does not appear to be imbued with a spirit that binds parents and child into a viable unit. An undertone of marital discord is obvious; and his sexual experience with Janice is characterized by shades of monotony, impotence, and even lack of interest. Further, there do not appear to be truly strong ties between father and son.

In essence, Rabbit’s existence is quite unlike what he must have once expected. But the bare facts of work and family presented above only begin to describe the kind of world that Rabbit faces. His home itself, located in an undistinguished development, is notable for the sensations of sterility and cheapness it generates. His neighbors are strangers to him, and he has no particular interest in becoming involved with them. This is, of course, greatly different from the neighborhood he knew while growing up; there, all the neighbors were familiar and known, and his place in the surrounding "community" comprised of nearby streets, yards, houses, and people was secure.

He sees his parents growing older and more feeble;
heroic state are readily evident; the worthiness of a character to be emulated and revered is usually quite clear.

While the heroic model, a hallmark of much classical literature, is sometimes seen in contemporary fiction, it is evident that the anti-hero is seen much more frequently in current writing; this is apparently especially true in relation to a character who is a sportsman. As Robert J. Higgs contends,

Either the athlete lacks strength and wisdom, the two requirements of epic heroes, and is seen to be stupid, mean, dull, proud, unmanly, immature, and immoral; or, when, as a natural or absurd athlete, he does have genuinely admirable qualities, he is rejected by society and becomes crippled and disillusioned. Rarely is there a happy relationship between the athlete hero and his society.

The breakup of classical ideals, strength and beauty, strength and intelligence, and Aidos (a feeling of reverence and a shame that holds one back from wrongdoing) is evident in a number of fragmented types of athlete heroes. . . .

The unfortunate social experience of athletes in literature is also discussed by Wiley L. Umphlett:

. . . the sporting hero of organized sport and urban environment is a distorted type. Lardner's pitcher, Jack Keefe, and Algren's boxer, Lefty Bicek, subconsciously long for the free life of their counterparts above, but the encounter with society denies

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2Robert W. Reising, "'Where Have All Our Heroes Gone?' Some Insights into Sports Figures in Modern American Literature," Quest, XVI (June, 1971), 1-12.

his mother is seriously ill, and the prospect of her being taken from his life weighs heavily on his mind. Without her, the most important person in his background, the person to whom he had given the most of "himself, his trophies, his headlines" (p. 89), his sense of the continuity of his own life stands to be greatly disrupted.

The magnitude of his life and of his ability to direct his own affairs appears significantly diminished by the technological superiority of other men; this is implicit in the attention he gives to the first moon-landing and in the quotations from American and Russian astronauts that introduce each section of the novel. The voyages of the spacemen, in addition to pointing to the existence of a technological structure that is far beyond Rabbit's powers of comprehension, also allude to his inability to continue the flights of his youth; he is earthbound, while they explore the very heavens. It is a technical advance which eventually deprives him of his job; he is replaced by a machine which does his work much more accurately and quickly.

In spite of what seems to be a life-style that is without genuine rewards and that appears stifling in its routine and security, or perhaps because of it, Rabbit possesses the political orientation of a near-reactionary; he is highly patriotic and fervently defends the American
action in Vietnam against opponents of the war. He seems to recognize the situations faced by his black countrymen, but his potential sympathy is overshadowed by an even stronger feeling of suspicion toward them. It is significant that his former religious passion is greatly quieted. Yet Rabbit is most certainly not an evil man; rather, he is a "common" man of his time, caught in currents of violence, hatred, sterility, and alienation that he comprehends perhaps no better nor worse than those who live simultaneously with him. The present, to him, is perplexing, a mirage, not a mirror that reflects what he had long envisioned it might be.

The events of the novel proceed to carry Rabbit from his state of near-deadness to something of a personal rebirth, to a condition in which life is again tentatively dominant over death. The metamorphosis of the new Rabbit is caused by a dramatic reshaping and reevaluation of the foundations of his existence: First, his wife leaves him for a lover she has taken, and during the time of her attempt at "flight" Rabbit stays rooted in his home; and, second, he becomes deeply involved with two members of the youth generation—Jill, a runaway from a background of wealth and unhappiness, and Skeeter, a black Vietnam veteran, who is a fugitive from the police because of a drug charge. Both Jill and Skeeter,
who are, of course, on flights of their own, confront Rabbit with a number of viewpoints that demand response from him. Jill, who rejects the materialism embodied in her past, and Skeeter, who feels intense bitterness over what white America has done to his race over several hundred years and who therefore vents his anger on others in personal and sometimes cruel ways, and who proclaims himself a messiah of chaos and nihilism, cause Rabbit to examine himself and his beliefs more profoundly than he has likely done for years. He learns much from these invaders from another generation and perspective. Jill and Skeeter, with their drugs, their tarnished actions, their beliefs, and perhaps even their self-destructiveness, in essence, give Rabbit himself because he is challenged to respond to the narrowness which has come to characterize his life. The effect Jill and Skeeter have upon Rabbit is, however, overpowering, and it becomes obvious that he is incapable of reacting effectively and quickly when he realizes that Skeeter is abusing and, ultimately, destroying Jill. He does not save her from death, and he is left with the understanding that, in a time of confusion, imbalance, and destruction, he cannot completely accept the orientation of the new era. He must reject most of what Jill and Skeeter represent or fall into the same despair that is evident in
their lives; he, in other words, finds that he must continue to rely upon his middle-class and near-middle-age valuation of order, stability, and coherence in things, even though they may not prevail in the society-at-large that he experiences.

The presence of Jill and especially of Skeeter in Rabbit's home causes such feelings of anger in the neighborhood that the Angstrom home is set on fire. Jill dies in the blaze, and Skeeter, who is suspected by the police of arson, flees, with Rabbit's help. Rabbit has thus faced the loss of his wife, his young friends, and his home; it is soon after the fire that he learns of the loss of his job. He is in many ways something of a reincarnation of Job; and, like him, Rabbit manages to survive. The troubled present does not destroy him, nor does he destroy himself in futile recriminations about what his life might have been had fate been kinder. Rather, he eventually seeks to remake his relationship with Janice, and as the novel closes, they are united for sleep, not sex, in a motel room. The final image is one of quiet peace and rest, perhaps a foreshadowing of an even more significant rebirth to occur after recovery from a painful season.

Rabbit Redux is, of course, a comment on much of the contemporary American condition, as well as a portrayal
of Rabbit Angstrom and his individual experience. He personifies the dilemmas and doubts faced by many of his contemporaries as the world changes and man does not move in easy congruence with it. The picture that Updike draws of the present in this country is not pleasant, but neither is it wholly negative. He seems to be saying that Americans must heed the signs of the seasons of life. As the Hamiltons note,

Rabbit is aware that for him, as for most people today, there is no clear consciousness of the seasons. One day follows another with pallid sameness. Yet the seasons are there. The problem is that men neither observe the individual season nor take the action appropriate to it. . . . if America observes the signs of the times, it will know that this is the season for sleep and the restoration of wasted powers.22

A number of sport occasions and recollections of past athletic glories are placed throughout Rabbit Redux; and their inclusion in the novel works, as in Rabbit, Run, to give the distinct impression of wasted talent and of adult life that is much emptier than the days of adolescent heroics. An important example of this sense of loss is Rabbit's response to Jill's question, "You don't think much of yourself, do you?". He says, "Once the basketball stopped, I suppose not" (p. 200). Sport also works, in contrast to its function as an

indicator of lost potential, as a vehicle for Rabbit's acceptance of himself and his place in the continually disrupting push of time. Sport continues to serve, to a certain extent, as a provider of comfort to Rabbit and as a means of communication for those who experience it in its various forms. The physical nearness and value of sport's movements themselves appear to be of lesser importance in *Rabbit Redux,* however, than they do in *Rabbit, Run,* but this is surely only an indication of his gradual aging and perhaps of his growth away from the romanticism and physicality of youth as middle-age approaches.

The context of athletic endeavor, of both past and present play, adds much symbolic meaning to the novel. Rabbit, through the use of sport as a symbol of great personal potential, becomes a representative of many persons who have seen their unique, valuable abilities rendered useless and who have seen their powers go unused because of situations in their lives they cannot understand or control. Sport also is presented as an indicator of seasons; and, as mentioned previously, the concept of seasonal sway from action to rest is one of the novel's crucial themes.

The quiet confusion and private pain that intrude upon Rabbit's otherwise generally comfortable life are most easily seen through a glimpse into the lethargy
which has crept into this former man-of-action: "He was lying down to die, had been lying down for years. His body had been telling him to. His eyes blur print in the afternoons, no urge to run walking even that stretch of tempting curved sidewalk home, has to fight sleep before supper and then can't get under at night" (p. 103). Obviously, his one-time urges toward sheer running as a means of expressing exuberance and joy and as a way out of doubt and perplexity do not direct him anymore; possibly, he has simply become more rational, but it is apparent that a certain dimension has gone from his life. Yet he fully understands that all his former running was not a completely inane personal statement motivated by immature urges; as he explains to Jill, men often run for reasons that she is incapable of grasping: "You think you're going to make the world over you don't have a fucking clue what makes people run. Fear. That's what makes us poor bastards run. You don't know what fear is, do you, poor baby?" (p. 170) Even though Rabbit himself runs no more, it is not because there is no longer any fear in his life; he must just cope with it in other ways. One manner of staving off such fears as he has is found, as in the past, in the encounter of a game; for example, as he walks into the depths of a club patronized only by blacks, his apprehensions are
allayed when he sees, "In a room obliquely off the main room, a pool table: colored boys all arms and legs spidering around the idyllic green felt. The presence of any game reassures Rabbit. Where any game is played a hedge exists against fury" (p. 115). Rabbit's presence in the unfamiliar club is at the invitation of one of his co-workers at the printing shop; he is introduced largely in terms of his former athletic prowess: "He is an ath-e-lete of renown, a basketball player bar none, the Big 0 of Brewer in his day" (p. 116). Even this accolade, this elevation of Rabbit to the level of a famous black athlete does not dissolve the hostility toward him that Rabbit senses, and he envisions himself escaping as he did in basketball: "He could slip a posse dribbling. Tothero used to flatter him" (p. 122). This time, however, his "escape" is only in his thoughts, because he is convinced to stay, even though he is hardly at ease.

In spite of Rabbit's continued realization of a personal, comfortable security connected with sport, it becomes clear that he finds himself somewhat alienated from what he sees when others play the sports he loves. He sees basketball as, "The game different now, everything the jump shot, big looping hungry blacks lifting and floating there a second while a pink palm long as your
forearm launched the ball" (p. 18). This sense of at least slight separation from the context of the sport he had once known intimately is also evidenced in his reaction to a professional baseball game which he attends with his son and father-in-law:

But something has gone wrong. The ball game is boring. The spaced dance of the men in white fails to enchant, the code beneath the staccato spurs of distant motion refuses to yield its meaning. Though basketball was his sport, Rabbit remembers the grandeur of all that grass, the excited perilous feeling when a high fly was hoisted your way, the homing-in on the expanding dot, the leathery smack of the catch, the formalized nonchalance of the heads-down trot in toward the bench, the ritual flips and shrugs and the nervous courtesies of the batter's box. There was a beauty here bigger than the hurtling beauty of basketball, a beauty refined from country pastures, a game of solitariness, of waiting, waiting for the pitcher to complete his gaze toward first base and throw his lightning, a game whose very taste, of spit and dust and grass and sweat and leather and sun, was America. Sitting behind first base between his son and his father-in-law, the sun resting on his thighs like a board, the rolled-up program like a baton in his hand, Rabbit waits for this beauty to rise to him, through the cheers and the rhythm of innings, the traditional national magic, tasting of his youth; but something is wrong. The crowd is sparse, thinning out from a cluster behind the infield to fistfuls of boys sprawling on the green seats sloped up from the outfield. Sparse, loud, hard: only the drunks, the bookies, the cripples, the senile, and the delinquents come out to the ball park on a Saturday afternoon. Their catcalls are coarse and unkind. 'Ram it down his throat, Speedy!' 'Kill that black bastard!' Rabbit yearns to protect the game from the crowd; the poetry of space and inaction is too fine, too slowly spun for them. And for the players themselves, they seem expert listlessly, each intent on a private dream of making it, making it into the big leagues and the big money, the own-your-own-bowling
alley money; they seem specialists like any other, not men playing a game because all men are boys time is trying to outsmart. A gallant pretense has been abandoned, a delicate balance is being crushed. Only the explosions of orange felt on their uniforms, under the script Blasts, evoke the old world of heraldic local loyalties. Brewer versus Hazleton and who cares? Not Springer, as he watches, his lips absentmindedly move as if sorting out old accounts. Not Nelson, the screen of reality is too big for the child, he misses television’s running commentary, the audacious commercials. His politely unspoken disappointment nags at Rabbit, prevents the game from rising and filling the scared hollow Janice’s confession has left in him. The eight-team leagues of his boyhood have vanished with the forty-eight-star flag. The shortstops never chew tobacco any more. The game drags on, with a tedious flurry of strategy, of pinch-hitters and intentional walks, prolonging the end. Hazleton wins, 7--3. Old Man Springer sighs, getting up as if from a nap in an unnatural position. He wipes a fleck of beer from his mustache. "Fraid our boys didn’t come through for you, Nellie," he says. "That’s O.K., Grampa. It was neat."

To Harry he says, needing to find something to sell, "That young Trexler is a comer though" (pp. 83–84).

The spirit of sport, as he knew it and was enchanted by it, is not as intact as he had hoped it might be; and even a minor disturbance of the intangible magic inherent in games is borne with some pain. There is a shade of betrayal implied in the actions of the fans at the ball game and in the self-seeking attitudes of the players; sport, he surely believes, should remain constant in all of its aspects, even though the other manifestations of culture change and perhaps betray men casually and unmercifully.

The fact of Rabbit’s being somewhat out-of-touch
them identity, and the result is perverted action and alienation. When the hero of organized sport is used primarily for satire, as Roth's Ron Patimkin and Shaw's Christian Darling are, his athletic past is contrasted with the meaninglessness of his present life to show the disparity between ideal and fact in American life.

Figures of urban background who yearn for their athletic pasts, as does Updike's Rabbit Angstrom, are spiritual descendants of Natty Bumppo. This type of the sporting hero is termed "neo-romantic" because his desire for the uncomplicated life of his past reflects the quest to recover innocence and glorify the image of self.4

The fact that the athlete, or former athlete, often is portrayed as being generally incapable of dealing effectively with life in the world apart from the game is, of course, a matter of great consequence. It implies, perhaps, that the person who chooses to become deeply involved in the fantasy of a game is a fool who deserves the wounding he receives when he leaves the arena. It implies that in his attempt to achieve physical perfection, the athlete deceives himself because he surrenders to the "baser," non-thinking aspect of his being. It implies that the athlete is something of a stranger in his own time, who, either because of higher or lower ideals and convictions than the rest of the population, is somewhat enfeebled by being out-of-step. But, most importantly, it implies that the gap separating the boyhood world of sport and its attendant honor and excitement from the adult world

with the manner of the present is exhibited in a brief
session of basketball with Skeeter and Nelson:

. . . Skeeter. Rabbit comes home from work to find
him and Nelson shooting baskets in the driveway.
Nelson bounces the ball to his father and Rabbit's
one-handed set from twenty feet out swishes. Pretty.
'Hey,' Skeeter crows, so all the homes in Penn Villas
can hear, 'where'd you get that funky old style of
shooting a basketball? You were tryin' to be comical,
right?'

'Went in,' Nelson tells him.
'Shit, boy, a one-armed dwarf could have blocked
it. T'get that shot off you need a screen two men
thick, right? You gotta jump and shoot, jump and
shoot, right?' He demonstrates; his shot misses
but looks right: the ball held high, a back-leaning
ascent into the air, a soft release that would arch
over any defender. Rabbit tries it, but finds his
body heavy, the effort of lifting jarring. The ball
flies badly. Says Skeeter, 'You got a white man's
lead gut, but I adore those hands.' They scrimmage
one on one; Skeeter is quick and slick, slithering
by for the layup on the give-and-go to Nelson again
and again. Rabbit cannot stop him, his breath begins
to ache in his chest, but there are moments when the
ball and his muscles and the air overhead and the
bodies competing with his all feel taut and unified
and defiant of gravity. Then the October chill bites
into his sweat and he goes into the house(p. 272).

Rabbit's style of play is old-fashioned, and he is unable
to stop the moves of Skeeter; but his "outdated" mode of
shooting is effective for him, and he does attain moments
of feeling "defiant of gravity." This, of course, indi-
cates the value of his own ways, of his own style at a
time when he has reason to doubt that his past has given
him anything of permanent worth. In essence, his skill
indicates maintained power.

It is questionable whether Rabbit recognizes that
he has the potency pointed to in his play with Skeeter and Nelson; his concept of himself as being capable of significant action has been greatly disturbed by his feeling that the foundations and regulations underpinning his life are gone. As Janice says, "He put his life into rules he feels melting away now. I mean, I know he thinks he's missing something, he's always reading the paper and watching the news" (p. 53). Yet he is told by his sister, Mim, that he never learned any rules. He has, certainly, learned rules, but the escapist mode of conduct that formerly characterized his life often made it possible for him to ignore them when he so desired. As a more mature adult, he is beyond his youthful romantic and irresponsible behavior, but he still understands that the constraints placed upon man are not always easy to accept. He says, "Huh. Any kind of decent world, you wouldn't need all these rules" (p. 373). The most poignant and undoubtedly most symbolically effective allusion to the binding, entrapping nature of rules comes in reference to his desire to move, to experience the world: "He was in love with the idea of travelling, with running, with geography, with Parcheesi and Safari and all board games where you roll the dice and move. . . . Yet travelling became an offense in the game he got good at" (pp. 377-78). Rules hold him tightly, and even
basketball had its way of punishing him if he moved too extensively. Nonetheless, those regulations are accepted by Rabbit as an essential part of the rational conduct of life; when he feels their disappearance, his reaction is at best confused and uncertain.

It is perhaps his reliance on rules and order, notwithstanding his expressed disdain of them, that causes Jill to comment, "You, . . . you've never given yourself a chance to think, except on techniques, basketball and printing, that served a self-exploitative purpose" (p. 228). Jill, of course, has no way of knowing the Rabbit of ten years earlier, the Rabbit who was obsessed with intense feeling and reflection on faith, on love, and on his personal destiny. Yet her words do quite accurately describe the Rabbit that she sees; he has indeed made himself vulnerable to an easy, superficial way of being alive and has permitted himself to become one of the mass of men who react in ineffective ways to the complexity that confronts them. It is most ironic that basketball, which gave him so much personal freedom, so much individual space in which to move, is understood by Jill to be an agent which, through its call for excellence in technique, trained him in the ways of manipulation, or as she says, self-exploitation. In essence, she states that Rabbit's superior command of technique
only made him all the more capable of being subsumed into a mechanistic, non-thinking society of men.

Jill's observation, while extremely intriguing, does not take into account the meanings that Rabbit attached to that wealth of physical skill once available to him. She cannot appreciate fully Rabbit's former immersion in basketball, which was, for him, a special world wrought by the transformation of technical command into winning and honor; she does not perceive the liberating, rather than stifling, influence the game had upon his earlier years, and she cannot see the flashes of sudden freedom he still experiences because of it. Jill's misinterpretation of such a vital aspect of Rabbit's make-up indicates the extent of her failure to understand the complex depths of the man she chastises and criticizes; such misinterpretation also quite possibly points to the tendency of youth to find deadness and hollowness in their elders, when, in fact, the lives of those elders were, and usually still are, filled with their own moments of significance and deep personal meaning.

The multitude of attacks, both internal and external, upon the sport element in Rabbit's background is not enough to bring him to dissuade his son from passing through his own youthful experience in sport. Indeed, he is perplexed and troubled by Nelson's lack of interest in
the games he (Rabbit) once played constantly. Rabbit's concern and Nelson's attitude are illustrated in a conversation between father and son:

He asks Nelson, 'Why don't you stay at the playground any more? When I was your age I'd be playing Horse and Twenty-one all day long.'

'Yeah, but you were good. You were tall.' Nelson used to be crazy for sports. Little League, intramural. But lately he isn't. Rabbit blames it on a scrapbook his mother kept, of his basketball days in the late Forties, when he set some county records; last winter every time they would go visit Mt. Judge Nelson would ask to get it out and lie on the floor with it, those old dry-yellow games, the glue dried so the pages crackle being turned, MT. JUDGE TOPPLES ORIOLE, ANGSTROM HITS FOR 37, just happening for the kid, that happened twenty years ago, light from a star.

'I got tall,' Rabbit tells him. 'At your age I wasn't much taller than you are.' A lie, but not really. A few inches. In a world where inches matter. Putts. Fucks. Orbits. Squaring up a form. He feels bad about Nelson's height. His own never did him much good, if he could take five inches off himself and give them to Nelson he might. If it didn't hurt.

'Anyway, Dad, sports are square now. Nobody does it.'

'Well, what isn't square now? Besides pill-popping and draft-dodging. And letting your hair grow down into your eyes(pp. 18-19).

Thus, sport becomes an agent of distinction and separation between Rabbit and Nelson. It is apparent that the boy recognizes he does not have either his father's natural attributes or his developed talents, and it is likely that he chooses not to become athletically involved because of his fear of failure to match or even approach his father's reputation. More than this, however, his
reluctance to become a serious participant is characteristic of many of his generation; as he later tells Rabbit, "I don't like sports as much as you do, Dad. It's all so competitive" (p. 76). Rabbit replies, "That's life. Dog eat dog." The sport context here becomes a symbol of Rabbit's orientation to life, an orientation that is generally rejected by many young people; it indicates the realistic viewpoint of adulthood and is opposed by the peace-and-love viewpoint of many youth. Just as Nelson's words are incomprehensible to Rabbit, so Nelson misconstrues an essential rationale underlying Rabbit's advocacy of sport. Rabbit's intention is not to see his son in sport just because it may parallel the conflicts and struggles of life or because it may reflect praise and recognition back to him; rather, his concern is, "How can he get the kid interested in sports? If he's too short for basketball, then baseball. Anything, just to put something there, some bliss, to live on later for a while. If he goes empty now, he won't last at all, because we get emptier" (p. 25). Rabbit's simple, unselfish hopes for his son's happiness through sport are not recognized as such, though; thus, Jill, who often misinterprets Rabbit, rebukes him when she explains her way of relating to Nelson: "I treat him like a human being instead of a failed little athlete because he's not six feet six" (p. 191).
As the events of the novel evolve, the separation between Rabbit and Nelson gradually closes; it is appropriate that sport should be an indicator of the change in their relationship.

This fall Nelson has discovered soccer; the junior high school has a team and his small size is no handicap. Afternoons Harry comes home to find the child kicking the ball, sewn of black-and-white pentagons, again and again against the garage door, beneath the unused basketball backboard. The ball bounces by Nelson, Harry picks it up, it feels bizarrely seamed in his hands. He tries a shot at the basket. It misses clean. 'The touch is gone,' he says. 'It's a funny feeling,' he tells his son, 'when you get old. The brain sends out the order and the body looks the other way.'

Nelson resumes kicking the ball, vehemently, with the side of his foot, against a spot on the door already worn paintless. The boy has mastered that trick of trapping the ball to a dead stop under his knees (pp. 254-55).

It is valuable to note that Nelson's chosen sport is not basketball; thus, even though he begins to move toward his father's feeling for sport, he does so in his individual way. It is also helpful to note that Nelson's acquisition of physical skill is paralleled by Rabbit's feeling that he has lost his "touch." This possibly points to the cyclical pattern of youth discovering its powers while adulthood feels its powers slipping away; and, indeed, just as Rabbit feels awkward handling the "bizarrelly-seamed" ball, so he also feels uncomfortable and out-of-touch with the changing reality of the world he experiences.
Rabbit's "rebirth," such as it is, puts him back into a workable alignment with himself, his family, and the events which shape his life. Following the motif of seasons mentioned previously, sport is utilized in several significant passages to demonstrate the shifts in time and space involved in growth toward newness and toward regeneration. Rabbit, for example, is struck by seeing "children with hockey sticks and tape-handled bats diffidently chip at whiffle balls and wads of leather, whittling themselves into the next generation of athletes and astronauts" (p. 113). He most certainly recognizes a pattern, a flow into adulthood that begins in the games of children and that perhaps always causes those games recalled in unusual and unexpected fashions. Likewise, he senses a type of pattern in "Saturday's America":

Rabbit and Nelson finish the lawn. They eat, and toss a football around for a while, and then the boy asks if he can go off and join the scrimmage whose shouts they can hear, he knows some of the kids, the same kids who look into windows but that's O.K., Dad; and really it does feel as though all can be forgiven, all will sink into Saturday's America like rain into earth, like days into time. Rabbit goes into the house and watches the first game of the World Series, Baltimore out-classing the Mets, for a while, and switches to Penn State out-classing West Virginia at football (p. 304).

The pattern implied in the weekly repetition of games, it appears, is one of forgiveness, one of forgetting the injuries of the past and of pushing toward the newness of
the future.

The pattern of Rabbit's "decline" might be viewed in terms of his movement from the strength of youth to the decreased powers of approaching middle-age; for example, Rabbit's meeting with a childhood acquaintance causes him to recall that, "He and Peggy Gring sat in the same classrooms since first grade; she had seen him when he was good, had sat in those hot bleachers screaming when he was a hero, naked and swift and lean. She has seen him come to nothing" (p. 310).

Decline, is not, however, the predominant type of movement implied by sport; rather, the image of sport helps to show Rabbit's passage from impotence and alienation into a condition in which newness might be possible. As mentioned previously, the state toward which Rabbit moves is that of rest; the use of sport to illustrate this movement toward rest is, of course, most ironic because of its connotation of vigorous, intensive activity, but here it works effectively:

He goes into the cellar and finds his old basketball and, more of a miracle still, a pump with the air needle still screwed into the nozzle. In their frailty things keep faith. The backboard is still on the garage but years have rusted the hoop and loosened the bolts, so the first hard shots tilt the rim sideways. Nevertheless he keeps horsing around and his touch begins to come back. Up and soft, up and soft. Imagine it just dropping over the front of the rim, forget it's a circle. The day is very gray so the light is nicely even. He imagines he's on television;
funny, watching the pros on the box how you can tell, from just some tone of their bodies as they go up, if the shot will go in(p. 374).

In essence, his casual play puts him into a situation of familiarity and comforts; he is again at ease in the semblance of sanity provided by basketball court, and significantly, his "touch" returns. Thus, a step back into the past assists him to regain safe footing for the future. The sport-imbued comfort of his youth is also seen in his recollection of his childhood room: "In those days this room was full of athletes, mostly baseball players, their pictures came on school tablet covers, Musial and Dimag and Luke Appling and Rudy York" (p. 377). Further, because most of his clothes were lost in the fire that destroyed his house, he wears his old high school letter jacket. This renewed use of symbolic clothing from his youth is perhaps the most obvious sign of his concern with locating himself in a context of the secure and the known; indeed, he even goes so far as to tell Janice that it still "fits." It is clear that he is seeking his bearings, his points of attachment to the world as it moves. And the understanding he achieves in seeking peace and rest and in seeking his wife, is that he is indeed not a stranger to himself or to his time. In realizing that, "Time is our element, not a mistaken invader" (p. 374), he sees himself as a participant in the flux and flow of life, not as one who continually experiences disengagement
with its intrigues, little dishonesties, and boredom is so great that one who has lived intensely in the former cannot genuinely embrace the latter. The irony of the troubled and wasted human spirit displayed by the "fallen athlete" shows a most distressing situation, whether in literature or real life, and, as such, is a significant comment upon the nature of the times.

Directly related to the ideas of the hero and the anti-hero is what either the individual, society, or nature establishes as a required "Code" of behavior. Sport provides a unique and familiar background for the portrayal of a person in conflict as he attempts to follow this expected code, and his adherence or non-adherence to it is an important indication of character. The consequences of failure to act according to a prescribed norm are of paramount concern both in sport and literature.

To the extent that sport is infused with integrity and honor, it has exceptional potential to serve in relation to the concept of "Idealism." The athlete is often regarded as one who places high value on the meaning of fair-play and honesty. He expects much from himself, perhaps even perfection, and is thus subject to disappointment when he cannot match his hopes. Often, however, he is able to act and achieve in accordance with his desires, and such success provides extensive joy and high valuation of self. Further, he generally trusts that the conduct
and separation from the present because of a greater past. He recognizes that he simply must recover from his wasteful expenditure of energy in trying to regain what he thought was lost balance. In that recovery, sport might serve as a convenient and potent touchstone uniting an entire lifetime; and, in *Rabbit Redux*, it does exactly that.

**Summary**

The significance of sport in *Rabbit Redux* is in many ways similar to its importance in *Rabbit, Run*. It is particularly useful insofar as it provides a situation which makes Rabbit's understanding of the difference between his past and present lives most clear: he believes that his life has come to what he regards as "nothing."

Rabbit's feeling of separation from his past is partially seen in his realization that the style of basketball play itself has changed so much that he can no longer identify fully with the game at which he was once so adept; further, it is apparent that he no longer possesses much continued appreciation of the enchantment he once found in baseball. Obviously, both he and the circumstances which affect him have been significantly altered.

Both a sense of separation and a communication of sorts are signified by sport. Nelson's original lack of inclination to become involved in sports is most clearly an example of the division that exists between a son and
his formerly-athletic father. Jill's inability to understand the real meaning and value of sport in Rabbit's life is an important example of her basic misconception of him and of the resultant psychic, if not physical, separation of them. Yet, such instances of separation do not predominate; they are eventually overcome by occurrences which allude to communication: Rabbit's basketball play with Nelson and Skeeter and Nelson's eventual participation in soccer.

Sport seems to present a remembered world where, somewhat paradoxically, both order and freedom were available to Rabbit, the player. Most certainly, he would welcome stronger evidence of his youthful experience of coherence and liberation in his adult life.

Sport also serves as a "touchstone" which gives his life a certain continuity. In many sport-related situations, he feels comfortable and secure and senses sport's pattern of uniting youth and age; the children "whittling themselves into the next generation of athletes and astronauts" and Nelson, as a soccer player, are effective indicators of such flow. The connotations of newness and regeneration are thus readily apparent.
"Ace in the Hole," in The Same Door, is a brief study of Fred "Ace" Anderson, a one-time high school basketball hero who finds that his present life is not nearly as satisfying as was his past. "Ace" is, of course, the prototype for the character that eventually emerges as Rabbit Angstrom in Rabbit, Run and Rabbit Redux. That Updike apparently considers whatever Ace's character embodies to be of more than minor significance is obvious in his effort to expand and develop that character into Rabbit Angstrom and to stay with him and his personal predicaments through ten years of his life.

Ace is happy neither with his job, from which he purposely gets himself fired, nor with his marriage. It is clear that he feels trapped, mostly because of his wife and daughter, but, unlike Rabbit, he does not run. Rather, he lets himself fill with frustration and anger; his situation is aptly described:

He wasn't hungry; his stomach was tight. It used to be like that when he walked to the gymnasium before a game and could see the people from town, kids and parents, crowding in at the lighted doors. But once he was inside, the locker room would be bright and hot, and the other guys would be there,

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laughing and towel-slapping, and the tight feeling would leave. Now there were whole days when it didn't leave (p. 20).

He tries to move away from the feeling that his life has indeed lost something by envisioning himself as the father of a son, who can become as famous as he once was. Ace tells his wife, "Baby, we got to have a boy" (p. 25), and adds, "Fred Junior. I can see him now" (p. 26). As the story ends, he makes his wife dance with him, in spite of her unwillingness and protestation; and while they dance, "he seemed to be great again" (p. 26). In sum, sport provides a valuable backdrop against which Ace's life appears to be diminished. There are strong connotations of waste and futility, even as Ace and his wife join in their quasi-symbolic dance.

"Intercession," in The Same Door, focuses on the encounter of a man, Paul, and a boy on a golf course. Both are relatively inept newcomers to the game, and neither is able to play with consistent accuracy. The story turns on the styles which characterize the play of each; Paul, who is plagued with personal guilt, is caught up in the web of rules, while the boy says, "I never keep score on the first nine. My father told me, Don't bother. Just concentrate on getting tuned in. That's what I do" (p. 198). The boy also exhibits a certain
naturalness, in spite of a degree of awkwardness, as opposed to the tension seen in Paul's swings. The boy tells him, "Look, be natural. You know how I putt? I'm just natural" (p. 200). The power of his state of mind and, perhaps, of his entire approach to life is evident in his belief that he is "natural" even when he is ungraceful. The most effective illustration of the differences between the two is seen in score-keeping. The boy plays three balls consecutively and counts only the best shots, while Paul keeps his score in traditional fashion. A contest of sorts develops, and Paul is confident that he can beat the boy because he "had primitive faith" (p. 203). In other words, he believes that he deserves to win because he had "committed" himself. Their competition is abruptly concluded when one of Paul's drives inexplicably disappears: "The ball bounced once in the open and, as if a glass arm from Heaven had reached down and grabbed it, vanished" (p. 208). Paul simply walks off the course; the mystery is incomprehensible to him, and he leaves with the feeling that "a fatiguing curse seemed laid on everything." (p. 209).

The story is difficult to interpret, but the explanation offered by the Hamiltons appears to be most helpful: "The story, evidently, is about the issue with which St. Paul wrestled: the curse of the law and the
way of grace which the Father has offered beyond the reach of legalism." This theme is also developed in greater detail in Rabbit, Run, when Rabbit meets the Reverend Eccles on a golf course.

"Intercession" contains several passages about sport-connected moments that are superior artistically. The most striking example of such writing presents Paul's state-of-mind regarding the possibility of miracles and the power of man to experience them merely through an exercise of the will or feeling of desire:

Paul momentarily relented, and addressed the ball. All he wanted was that his drive be brilliant; it was very little to ask. If miracles, in this age of faint faith, could enter anywhere, it would be here, where the causal fabric was thinnest, in the quick collisions and abrupt deflections of a game. Paul drove high but crookedly over the tree-tops. It was dismaying for a creature of spirit to realize that the angle of a surface striking a sphere counted for more with God than the most ardent hope (p. 206).

Clearly, Updike recognizes great artistic and symbolic potential inherent in the working of the sport world; and he is able to use the context of golf to demonstrate even the most crucial manifestations of ways of believing. To be sure, Updike's extensive use of sport in connection with a theme bearing on religious faith, is seldom paralleled in American fiction.

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"In Football Season," in The Music School, asks, "Do you remember a fragrance girls acquire in autumn?"

Updike explains that the fragrance "would be banked a thousandfold and lie heavy as the perfume of a flower shop on the dark slope of the stadium when, Friday nights, we played football in the city" (p. 3). Recollections of the setting for long-past high school games are exceptionally vivid and poignant; they create an image of a youthful time that was filled with special pleasures and friends—valuable things that are not so easily found by "turning the corner into adulthood," where "we find time to be instead a black immensity endlessly supplied, like the wind" (p. 7). The teller of the story concludes by declaring, "Girls walk by me carrying their invisible bouquets from fields still steeped in grace, and I look up in the manner of one who follows with his eyes the passage of a hearse, and remembers what pierces him" (p. 8).

The reference to a hearse is most incongruous with the tone established by the writing that precedes it, and the story has been criticized on artistic grounds for this reason; it does, however, vividly demonstrate the intensity of the writer's feeling for what disparity he finds between adulthood and youth, particularly as crystallized in the fragrance of girls and their flowers in a football stadium at night. The utilization of a stadium
to assist in the conveyance of the meaning of the story is, of course, especially appropriate in view of its weekly function as a gathering place for youth; perhaps only there would the "thousandfold" fragrance be found.

"The Rescue," in The Music School, centers upon a woman's fear that her husband is unfaithful to her, and upon the eventual dismissal of that fear through an experience on a ski trail. The wife, Caroline Harris, is certain that her skiing partner, Alice Smith, is romantically involved with her (Caroline's) husband. At the top of the slope, Caroline, who is not an expert skier, feels quite abandoned; but Alice skillfully guides and protects her on her downward journey:

... she flickered down the height, wavering in her own wind. Alice carefully passed her and, taking long traverses and diagrammatically slow turns, seemed to be inviting her not to destroy herself. Submitting to the sight, permitting her eyes to infect her body with Alice's rhythm, she found the snow yielding to her as if under the pressure of reason; and, swooping in complementary zigzags, the two women descended a long white waterfall linked as if by love (p. 196).

This manner of protection indicates most effectively that Alice is not likely to be one who would destroy Caroline's marriage.

Caroline becomes convinced of her husband's faithfulness to her after an experience in aiding another woman who had fallen on the slope and injured herself.
As Caroline and Alice attempt to comfort the woman and obtain assistance, they learn that the woman and her husband are separated and that her children do not seem to be particularly interested in her. Caroline realizes that this is indeed not the life that she experiences in her relationship with her own husband and son. Her fears of infidelity are completely allayed by the appearance of a youthful member of the ski patrol, who trips, falls, and somersaults through the snow toward them. His happy, grinning reaction to his near-calamitous fall and his joy at being himself and "clearly somebody's son" (p. 202) present such an image of innocence that Caroline is driven to hurry down the remainder of the mountain to "assure her husband of his innocence" (p. 202).

The use of skiing as the context for a story such as "The Rescue" is most appropriate; the whiteness of the snow can be viewed as a symbol of the purity and/or innocence that actually exist, even though Caroline senses deception; Caroline's trip down the slope might be regarded as a descent from feelings of abandonment to the realization that comfort, union, and faithfulness are available to her; and the bodily movements themselves imply the fluctuating, intense, and even dangerous feelings that Caroline experiences.

"The Slump," in Museums and Women, presents the
dilemma of a professional baseball player who has lost his hitting ability. The Kierkegaard-reading ballplayer attributes his slump to getting the "flutters" at the wrong time—just as he steps up to the plate, instead of during the ride to the stadium. He knows that he still cares about baseball and that his lost talent is not merely a result of not being serious about the game; rather, he feels "panic hungry," or "dread" (p. 167).

The existential questions implied by the athlete's concern, of course, go far beyond his personal hitting problems; they extend to the difficulty faced by modern man in his ability to make significant and powerful connections with that which is important to him. Like Rabbit Angstrom, he has no firm conception of his world and his place in it, as evidenced by his troubled state-of-mind as he prepares to bat:

... if you're not hitting, they don't brush you back. On me, they've stopped trying for even the corners; they put it right down the pike. I can see it in his evil eye as he takes the sign and rears back, I can hear the catcher snicker, and for a second of reflex there I can see it like it used to be, continents and cities and every green tree distinct as a stitch, and the hickory sweetens in my hands, and I feel the good old sure hunger. Then something happens. It blurs, skips, fades, I don't know. It's not caring enough, is what it probably is, it's knowing that none of it—the stadium, the averages—is really there, just you are there, and it's not enough (p. 168).

His slump, in essence, is the condition produced by a loss of one's sense of his place in the world and by his feeling
of his opponents in the athletic situation exemplifies the ideals that frequently characterize sport; he thus willingly assumes the best regarding the competition.

The meaning of the "natural man" might be explored in a sport environment because of the potential to situate a simple, uncomplex individual in the bigness, tension, complexity, and seriousness of high-level athletics. That individual's manner of coping with the confusing experiences he has provides a sharp insight into his make-up; whether he is corrupted by what he sees or remains above it—if it is in fact bad—determines the viability of the natural man. Further, the "natural man" is an obvious symbol of what the world has left behind as it rushes toward greater and greater technology and mechanism; the image of the natural man stepping forward out of the past and overwhelming modern man, who has lost touch with his beginnings, has awesome impact, even when the conflict is in sport literature.5

Man has frequently attempted to discover a pattern of unity in the world, and the possibility of the one-ness of all things—man, nature, and God—may be found in those sports which bring one into intimate contact with the natural world. As a hunter, a fisherman, a hiker, and a

of alienation—"just you are there"—from his fellows. This theme, certainly, is echoed many times in Updike's writing.

"The Pro," in Museums and Women, also shows the problems man has in making connections. The sport context found in this story is golf; "Mr. Wallace," who seems to be a sort of Everyman to the pro, is on his four-hundred-and-twelfth golf lesson, and he still makes the same errors with near-remarkable consistency. His game is virtually a failure, yet, because of his desire to master the game, he continues to pay for lessons regularly. The pro functions as a skilled taskmaster who patiently directs "Mr. Wallace's" practice; his method of guiding his pupil toward perfect connection with the ball is significant in that his questions and directions to "Mr. Wallace" assume the nature of a litany, and it becomes evident that this near-ritualistic experience is important to both men.

It appears that the crucial issue with which the story deals is that of "freedom." The pro tells "Mr. Wallace" that he is not free, which explains his problems with his swing; this is precisely how "Mr. Wallace" views his situation, and his solution to his feelings of restraint is to quit lessons for a while: "Let me play a few different courses. You know, get out into the world.
Maybe even try a public course. Hell, or go to a driving range and whack out a bucket of balls. You know, learn to live with the game I've got. Enjoy life" (p. 173).

The pro responds to the request for freedom from the restriction and discipline of the golf course by making a surprising personal disclosure:

"Golf is life," he says softly, and his green eyes expand, 'and life is lessons,' and the humps of his brown muscles merge with the hillocks and swales of the course, whose red flags prick the farthest horizon, and whose dimmest sand traps are indistinguishable from galaxies. I see that he is right, as always, absolutely; there is no life, no world, beyond the golf course—just an infinite and terrible falling-off. 'If I don't give you lessons,' he is going on, 'how will I pay for my lessons?'

'You take lessons?'

'Sure. I hook under pressure. Like Palmer. I'm too strong. Any rough on the left, there I am. You don't have that problem, with your nice pushy slice.'

'You mean there's a sense,' I ask, scarcely daring, 'in which you need me?'

He puts his hand on my shoulder, the hand pale from wearing the glove, and I become a feather at the touch, all air and ease. 'Mr. Wallace,' he says, 'I've learned a lot from your sweet swing. I hate it when, like now, the half hour's up.'

'Next Tuesday, eleven-thirty?'

Solemnly my pro nods. 'We'll smooth out your chipping. Here in the shade' (pp. 173-74).

The pro's belief that "Golf is life," and "Mr. Wallace's apparent realization that "there is no life, no world, beyond the golf course" are significant indicators that the context of the sport provides very real valuable meanings to each of them; it is a separate world, with its unique requirements and directions, yet, in its
distinction from "real life," it provides a type of
security-in-challenge that is necessary to both men.
Both submit willingly to its demands, as if on all-impor-
tant personal quests; even "Mr. Wallace's" plea for a
rest from the rigorous discipline is only temporary.
The fact that both men appear to satisfy a mutual need
during the golf lessons makes their continued subjugation
to the discipline of the game all the more important,
especially in view of the fact that the pro himself--
the expert--proclaims his imperfection. Thus does man
continually strive. In essence, the story raises questions
relating to faith where there might be hopelessness,
to discipline as it both hinders and promotes freedom,
and to the painful, almost inhuman, price of ultimate
perfection. Also implicit in the story, it seems is
Updike's ongoing concern with faith, law, and grace,
but not to the extent seen in "Intercession."
CHAPTER III

THE SPORT-RELATED FICTION OF PHILIP ROTH

NOVELS:

GOODBYE, COLUMBUS, 1959

PORTNOY'S COMPLAINT, 1967

THE GREAT AMERICAN NOVEL, 1973
Goodbye, Columbus portrays the growth and eventual disintegration of a seemingly promising love affair between Neil Klugman, an intelligent, sensitive, but somewhat impoverished young man, and Brenda Patimkin, the daughter of a newly-rich businessman. The brief romance, certainly partly founded upon the interest generated by a poor boy/rich girl situation, provides numerous exchanges of genuine mutual appreciation and love. Neil gradually realizes, however, that Brenda, charming though she is, has significant character flaws that cannot be ignored; he sees that she is vain, proud, unyielding, selfish, and, finally, disloyal even to the love she had once professed for him. He also comes to understand that, for him, survival in the midst of the Patimkins might be a precarious business because he is simply so unlike them; this is clearly evident during a visit he makes to Mr. Patimkin's shop and at the wedding of Brenda's brother, Ron. In both situations, he seems to be something of an outsider who cannot easily embrace an alien pattern.

The relationship of Neil and Brenda is concluded after Brenda has gone back to college in Boston. Neil goes to see her during a holiday, and she confronts him

with letters she has received from her mother and father. The letters relate her mother's discovery of a diaphragm that Brenda had left in one of her dresser drawers; her mother's letter is critical and unkind, and her father's is forgiving, but both make it obvious that Neil will not be welcome in the Patimkin home in the future. The crux of the book lies in Brenda's leaving the device where it might easily be found—to "punish" her mother, whom she feels cares little for her? to punish Neil, who had practically insisted that she buy it? to win assurance of more of her father's love?—and in her ultimate choice between her family and Neil, who is willing to accept events as they stand and to attempt to make the best of them. She tearfully but definitely determines that to stay with Neil would disassociate her completely from her family, and that she will not do. Neil is left only with the realization that she is gone from him, that he can no longer love her because of what she is—but that what he felt for her was indeed real, and that he most surely understands himself imperfectly. In sum, the novel—or, more properly, the novella—is a study of the meanings underlying the ending of the love affair, of the Patimkin family's attitudes and beliefs, of Brenda's relationships with her parents; and of Neil's movement toward a degree of self-understanding.
Sport, as utilized in *Goodbye, Columbus*, provides a number of helpful insights into the relationship of Neil and Brenda and into the concepts that direct the Patimkin family's behavior. Its first function in the novel is to demonstrate Neil's relative inaccessibility to Brenda; their first encounter is at the swimming pool of her country club—to which Neil has access only because he is the guest of a cousin; and Neil's first attempt to phone her results in his being told that she is out driving golf balls. It is thus quickly evident that they exist in different sphere. Their first meeting of any consequence occurs at a tennis court; Neil watches her play against another girl and is struck by the manner of her competition.

I parked the car under the black-green canopy of three oaks, and walked towards the sound of the tennis balls. I heard an exasperated voice say, 'Deuce again.' It was Brenda and she sounded as though she was sweating considerably. I crackled slowly up the gravel and heard Brenda once more. 'My ad,' and then just as I rounded the path, catching a cuff full of burrs, I heard, 'Game!' Her racket went spinning up in the air and she caught it neatly as I came into sight.

'Hello,' I called.

'Hello, Neil. One more game,' she called. Brenda's words seemed to infuriate her opponent, a pretty brown-haired girl, not quite so tall as Brenda, who stopped searching for the ball that had been driven past her, and gave both Brenda and myself a dirty look. In a moment I learned the reason why; Brenda was ahead five games to four, and her cock-sureness about there being just one game remaining aroused enough anger in her opponent for the two of us to share.
As it happened, Brenda finally won, though it took more games than she'd expected. The other girl, whose name sounded like Simp, seemed happy to end it at six all, but Brenda, shifting, running, up on her toes, would not stop, and finally all I could see moving in the darkness were her glasses, a glint of them, the clasp of her belt, her socks, her sneakers, and, on occasion, the ball. The darker it got the more savagely did Brenda rush the net, which seemed curious, for I had noticed that earlier, in the light, she had stayed back, and even when she had had to rush, after smashing back a lob, she didn't look entirely happy about being so close to her opponent's racket. Her passion for winning a point seemed outmatched by an even stronger passion for maintaining her beauty as it was. I suspected that the red print of a tennis ball on her cheek would pain her more than losing all the points in the world. Darkness pushed her in, however, and she stroked harder, and at last Simp seemed to be running on her ankles (pp. 6-7).

She later explains that she rushes the net only when it is nearly dark because of her concern that her bobbed nose might be damaged. Such vanity is not, at this point, particularly distressing; but it does allude to later instances of self-centeredness and displays of egocentric behavior.

Neil is nonetheless genuinely attracted to her, and when their friendship develops to the point where he is invited to the Patimkin home, he notices "sporting-goods trees. Beneath their branches, like fruit dropped from their limbs, were two irons, a golf ball, a tennis can, a baseball bat, basketball, a first-baseman's glove, and what was apparently a riding crop" (p. 15). Aside from indicating the Patimkin family's enthusiasm for sports, the extensive array of equipment points toward a fashion of conspicuous consumption, of the collection of Things.
Neil also perceives that Mr. Patimkin, probably through fatherly overindulgence but perhaps for other reasons, lets his younger daughter, Julie, win when it is not deserved. During his first evening with Brenda’s family, he plays a basketball-shooting game with Julie, and he suddenly understands the ramifications of her expectation to be given special rules while they are denied to others. This is the situation:

Julie missed her set shot, and I admit to a slight, gay, flutter of heart.
'Put a little spin on it,' Mr. Patimkin told her.
'Can I take it again?' Julie asked me.
'Yes.' What with paternal directions from the sidelines and my own grudging graciousness on the court, there did not seem much of a chance for me to catch up. And I wanted to, suddenly, I wanted to win, to run little Julie into the ground. Brenda was back on one elbow, under the tree, chewing on a leaf, watching. And up in the house, at the kitchen window, I could see that the curtain had swished back—the sun too low now to glare off electrical appliances—and Mrs. Patimkin was looking steadily out at the game. And then Carlota appeared on the back steps, eating a peach and holding a pail of garbage in her free hand. She stopped to watch too.

It was my turn again. I missed the set shot and laughingly turned to Julie and said, 'Can I take it again?'
'No!'

So I learned how the game was played. Over the years Mr. Patimkin had taught his daughters that free throws were theirs for the asking; he could afford to. However, with the strange eyes of Short Hills upon me, matrons, servants, and providers, I somehow felt I couldn't. But I had to and I did.
'Thanks a lot, Neil,' Julie said when the game was ended—at 100—and the crickets had come.
'You're welcome.'

Under the trees, Brenda smiled. 'Did you let her win?"
'I think so,' I said. 'I'm not sure.'
There was something in my voice that prompted
Brenda to say, comfortingly, 'Even Ron lets her win.'
'And all nice for Julie,' I said (pp. 20-21).

Because of her family's desire to see her win--almost at all costs--Julie naturally becomes oppressively competitive.
The toughness she exhibits parallels Mr. Patimkin's business technique; he has used it to advantage in moving himself and his family from Newark, New Jersey, to suburban elegance; and it is indeed possible that he feels the need to instill a similar toughness in his children.
It is more likely, however, that his permitting Julie to win all the time is merely another form of spoiling her.
Neil's distaste for this treatment is seen at a later time, when he and Julie play table tennis and he refuses to grant her unearned attempts to score. As Neil says, "I have no excuses to offer for what happened next. I began to win and I liked it" (p. 31). Julie's reaction to losing is sudden and vehement:

'Neil, you gypped me out of a point. You have nineteen and I have eleven--'
'Twenty and ten,' I said. 'Serve!'
She did and I smashed my return past her--it zoomed off the table and skittered into the refrigerator room.
'You're a cheater!' she screamed at me. 'You cheat!' Her jaw was trembling as though she carried a weight on top of her pretty head. 'I hate you!' And she threw her racket across the room and it clanged off the bar, just as, outside, I heard the Chrysler crushing gravel in the driveway.
A camper, man finds himself in a state where his dependence upon nature, and perhaps its Creator, is particularly clear. The drives and needs which may direct one to experience and re-experience life on a more primeval level than he ordinarily touches might easily be regarded as a reaching-out, as a searching for the truth of an ancient world-view: that man is a viable part of an ongoing chain of life, a part of a pattern and flow that maintain themselves only if all of their components, no matter how minute, are regarded with appreciation, reverence, and care. The unity of human beings, or at least their essential similarities, is also evident, to some observers, in the common drives which motivate them to compete in sport: the reaching for personal excellence, the attempting to exceed personal limitations, the working with others toward a tangible, clearly-defined object, and many others. These motivations are so intrinsic to all sportsmen that they transcend circumstances of race, age, nationality, or social background. Indeed, the true sport situation places all players in a position of equality and openness before one another that is seldom experienced in "real-life." For a time, man lays aside the trappings of his background and stands clothed in the highly-symbolic pattern of material that is his "uniform." For a time, he is partially one with even those whom he will attempt to defeat when the contest begins.
'The game isn't over,' I said to her.
'You cheat! And you were stealing fruit!' she said, and ran away before I had my chance to win (p. 32).

Even though sport first serves to show the social distinction between Neil and Brenda, it later becomes a force which brings them together. It seems significant that the two sports which demonstrate the growing closeness are swimming and track, perhaps the most "natural sports in the sense that they are free from the need of equipment. In other words, the sports which they choose to experience together are indeed apart from all the athletic accoutrements that the Patimkin family has collected during its social and economic climb. The times spent together at the track are superb illustrations of love in basic, simplistic terms:

'Do some exercises,' Brenda said. 'I'll do them with you.' She heaped the towel on the grass and together we did keep knee bends, and sit-ups, and push-ups, and some high-knee raising in place. I felt overwhelmingly happy.

'I'm just going to run a half today, Bren. We'll see what I do ...' and I heard Brenda click the watch, and then when I was on the far side of the track, the clouds trailing above me like my own white, fleecy tail, I saw that Brenda was on the ground, hugging her knees, and alternately checking the watch and looking out at me. We were the only ones there, and it all reminded me of one of those scenes in race-horse movies, where an old trainer like Walter Brennan and a young handsome man clock the beautiful girl's horse in the early Kentucky morning, to see if it really is the fastest two-year-old alive. There were differences all right—one being simply that at the quarter mile Brenda shouted out to me, 'A minute and fourteen seconds,' but it was pleasant and exciting and clean and when I was
finished Brenda was standing up and waiting for me. Instead of a tape to break I had Brenda's sweet flesh to meet, and I did, and it was the first time she said that she loved me.

We ran--I ran--every morning, and by the end of the week I was running a 7:02 mile, and always at the end there was the little click of the watch and Brenda's arms (pp. 51-52).

It is also at the track, however, that Neil hears Brenda say, "You know, you look like me. Except bigger" (p. 50). His perceptions tell him that her recognition of some type of similarity is not necessarily what he wants: "We were dressed similarly, sneakers, sweat socks, khaki Bermudas, and sweat shirts, but I had the feeling that Brenda was not talking about the accidents of our dress--if they were accidents. She meant, I was sure, that I was somehow beginning to look the way she wanted me to. Like herself" (p. 50). His inability and unwillingness to submit to the changes she apparently desires in him, of course, are ultimately among the reasons for their break-up.

Brenda's brother Ron is a character of some consequence in the book in that he provides a measure of comic relief and that, more importantly, he too exhibits the ways of Patimkin-ness. He and Neil first meet in the swimming pool; Ron's first words to Neil are, "Want to race?" (p. 14) As Neil explains,

I begged out of the race, saying I had to make a phone call myself, and once upon the tiled blue border
of the pool, looked back to see Ron taking the length in sleek, immense strokes. He gave one the feeling that after swimming the length of the pool a half dozen times he would have earned the right to drink its contents; I imagined he had, like my Uncle Max, a colossal thirst and a gigantic bladder (p. 14).

Ron was a basketball star at Ohio State; and he often relives his college heroics by playing his "Columbus record," which chronicles the highlights of his senior year:

The Voice of History baritoned in again: "But the season was up and down, and by the time the first snow had covered the turf, it was the sound of dribbling and the cry Up and In! that echoed through the fieldhouse..."

Ron closed his eyes.

'The Minnesota game,' a new, high voice announced, 'and for some of our seniors, their last game for the red and white... The players are ready to come out on the floor and into the spotlight. There'll be a big hand of appreciation from this capacity crowd for some of the boys who won't be back next year. Here comes Larry Gardner, big Number 7, out onto the floor, Big Larry from Akron, Ohio..."

'Larry--' announced the PA. system; 'Larry,' the crowd roared back.

'And here comes Ron Patimkin dribbling out. Ron, Number 11, from Short Hills, New Jersey. Big Ron's last game, and it'll be some time before Buckeye fans forget him...'

Big Ron tightened on his bed as the loudspeaker called his name; his ovation must have set the nets to trembling. Then the rest of the players were announced, and then basketball season was over (pp. 74-75).

It is easy to dismiss Ron as little more than a healthy, good-natured boob; but he is more complex than he at first appears to be. The fact that Ron is so caught up in his record attests to the self-centered, self-seeking style of his whole family. Further, Ron abandons his original ambition--to become a "gym teacher"--in order that he might go into business with his father. As Brenda explains, "Now
he has responsibilities" (p. 44). Ron appears ridiculously out of place at his father's shop, and, in a certain sense, it seems that his rejection of his intention to stay with basketball, as teacher, is nothing less than a betrayal of his instincts. Perhaps this is what is sometimes necessary, though, to succeed as a Patimkin.

While, in the end, the meaning of Patimkin-ness is made most clear through sex, sport has previously hinted toward and nearly proclaimed it. The values which Neil has cannot be meshed with what the Patimkins are; and they, similarly, cannot quite accept him. The simplicity and the genuine, meaningful union which Neil and Brenda have on the track is impermanent; it is too fragile to overcome the odds of moral distaste and social distance.

**Summary**

Sport is a means through which Neil gains insight into the self-centeredness that generally characterizes Brenda, Ron, and Julie; and, in illustrating the Patimkins' overbearing manner of competition, it partially defines their toughness and their willingness to bend rules to suit their needs. The implications of the Patimkin manner of using sport are repulsive to Neil, and they cause him to feel a distinct separation between himself and them. Yet sport also assists in demonstrating the genuine communication between Neil and Brenda; at times, their moments together in sport indicate genuine interpersonal sharing.
Portnoy's Complaint, a sustained monologue in a psychiatrist's office, vividly describes and assails the conditions of the childhood, adolescence, and adulthood of one Alexander Portnoy. His pouring-out of long-past and recent happenings details his extensive sexual fantasies and experiences; his relationship with his overprotective, overbearing, and sacrificing-yet-demanding parents; and, most importantly, his attempt to understand his actions and desires in such a way that he might reconcile his wish to live as he pleases with his need to find a meaningful and satisfying niche for himself within a community of friends. As Theodore Solotaroff indicates, Portnoy's problems are rooted in "the maddening debate in his head between the contemporary American male ('everything is permitted') and the ancestral Jew ('look who wants to be an animal')."27

Portnoy's personal dilemmas originate, he believes, to a great extent in the nature of his Jewish upbringing. In his effort to comprehend himself, he attributes many of the frustrations he feels to the repressions, aggravations.


and directions he experienced while a youth—particularly as a youth growing up under the influence of a powerful mother, a weak and harassed father, and an atmosphere that, to him, combined a feeling of religious superiority with an almost incredible sense of fear and guilt. In brief, Portnoy's Complaint, while an exceptionally hilarious and irreverent book, poses serious questions regarding the meaning of an individual's effort to function according to his own instincts and intuitions, rather than in mere response to a myriad of obligations to religion and family. It is a valuable portrait of a man attempting to escape, in spite of his ambivalent feelings about what he thinks he is trying to cast off; and, as such, it is in the tradition of Roth's fiction, in which there is much interest in "one's efforts to extricate oneself, to achieve a mobility that would do justice to individuality."28

The significance of sport in Portnoy's Complaint is evident in a variety of ways: it forms a part of the total picture of Alex's father and the father-son relationship; it illustrates the separation of the Jewish community from the surrounding gentiles and partially defines an aborted romance between a Jewish athlete and a gentile girl; it serves to show Alex fully at peace with himself

28 Solotaroff, "Journey of Philip Roth," p. 66.
as a youth, and it portrays an element of Alex's conception of the life of a typical Jewish man—an element that he would have present in his own life, but which eludes him because of his wish for independence.

Sport first appears in the book as Alex's recollection of playing baseball with his father:

We are on the big dirt field back of my school. He sets his collection book on the ground, and steps up to the plate in his coat and his brown fedora. He wears square steel-rimmed spectacles, and his hair (which now I wear) is a wild bush the color and texture of steel wool; and those teeth, which sit all night long in a glass in the bathroom smiling at the toilet bowl, now smile out at me, his beloved, his flesh and his blood, the little boy upon whose head no rain shall ever fall. 'Okay, Big Shot Ballplayer,' he says, and grasps my new regulation bat somewhere near the middle—and to my astonishment, with his left hand where his right hand should be. I am suddenly overcome with such sadness; I want to tell him, Hey, your hands are wrong, but am unable to, for fear I might begin to cry— or he might. 'Come on, Big Shot, throw the ball,' he calls, and so I do—and of course discover that on top of all the other things I am just beginning to suspect about my father, he isn't 'King Kong' Charlie Keller either (pp. 10-11).

Both Mr. Portnoy's clothing and ineptitude illustrate just how far he is from real participation in a game that his son loves; the man's lack of skill somehow magnifies his vulnerability and weakness to young Alex and poignantly indicates the gap that separates father and son. They indeed exist in different worlds.

Another picture of Alex's feeling for his father occurs at the shore:

He arrives after we have already eaten, but his own dinner waits while he unpeels the soggy city clothes
in which he has been making the rounds of his debit all day, and changes into his swimsuit. I carry his towel for him as he clops down the street to the beach in his unlaced shoes. I am dressed in clean short pants and a spotless polo shirt, the salt is showered off me, and my hair—still my little boy's pre-steel wool hair, soft and combable—is beautifully parted and slicked down. There is a weathered iron rail that runs the length of the boardwalk, and I seat myself upon it; below me, in his shoes, my father crosses the empty beach. I watch him neatly set down his towel near the shore. He places his watch in one shoe, his eyeglasses in the other, and then he is ready to make his entrance into the sea. To this day I go into the water as he advised: plunge the wrists in first, then splash the underarms, than a handful to the temples and the back of the neck... ah, but slowly, always slowly. This way you get to refresh yourself, while avoiding a shock to the system. Refreshed, unshocked, he turns to face me, comically waves farewell up to where he thinks I'm standing, and drops backward to float with his arms outstretched. Oh he floats so still—he works, he works so hard, and for whom if not for me?—and then at last, after turning on his belly and making with a few choppy strokes that carry him nowhere, he comes wading back to shore, his streaming compact torso glowing from the last pure spikes of light driving in, over my shoulder, out of stifling inland New Jersey, from which I am being spared(pp. 29-30).

It is apparent that the memory of his father wading back toward him is indelibly impressed upon Alex's mind: and it generates appreciation and respect, not the "sadness" he felt while playing baseball. Thus, Mr. Portnoy's involvement in two different forms of physical action—one being foreign to the first-generation American who has had little time for the recreations available to his son, and the other being the simple matters of swimming and floating—are important indicators of what his is to his son and point toward the ambivalent feelings that Alex
has toward him.

Sport is used to describe the sense of superiority that Alex's Jewish community felt toward others; as Portnoy comments about the parents' attitude toward "athletics in general, and football in particular;"

... it was for the goyim. Let them knock their heads together for 'glory,' for victory in a ball game! As my Aunt Clara put it, in that taut, violin-string voice of hers, 'Heshie! Please! I do not need goyische naches!' Didn't need, didn't want such ridiculous pleasures and satisfactions as made the gentiles happy ... At football our Jewish high school was notoriously hopeless (though the band, may I say, was always winning prizes and commendations); our pathetic record was of course a disappointment to the young, no matter what the parents might feel, and yet even as a child one was able to understand that for us to lose at football was not exactly the ultimate catastrophe. Here, in fact, was a cheer that my cousin and his buddies used to send up from the stands at the end of a game in which Weequahic had once again met with seeming disaster. I used to chant it with them.

Ikey, Mikey, Jake and Sam,
We're the boys who eat no ham,
We play football, we play soccer--
And we keep matzohs in our locker!
Aye, aye, aye, Weequahic High!

So what if we had lost? It turned out we had other things to be proud of. We ate no ham. We kept matzohs in our lockers. Not really, of course, but if we wanted to we could, and we weren't ashamed to say that we actually did! We were Jews--and we weren't ashamed to say it! We were Jews--and not only were we not inferior to the goyim who beat us at football, but the chances were that because we could not commit our hearts to victory in such a thuggish game, we were superior!

White bread, rye bread
Pumpernickel, challah,
All those for Weequahic,
Stand up and hollah!
Another cheer I learned from Cousin Hesh, four more lines of poetry to deepen my understanding of the injustices we suffered. The outrage, the disgust inspired in my parents by the gentiles, was beginning to make some sense; the goyim pretended to be something special, while we were actually their moral superiors. And what made us superior was precisely the hatred and the disrespect they lavished so willingly upon us.

Only what about the hatred we lavished upon them? (pp. 55-56)

Here, the context of sport works to establish a unity among a small group but, in fact, does little or nothing toward developing a wide-spread tolerance and appreciation of others. The seemingly farcial approach of his high school toward football, a "thuggish" game, reveals, more than anything, "the outrage, the disgust" felt toward the gentiles; it is this type of hatred which Alex hears echoed all about him and which he ultimately tries to put behind him.

The fear regarding the danger of Jewish-gentile romances is seen when Alice Dembosky, the "head drum majorette" and "so blatantly a 'shikse'"(p. 54), becomes engaged to Alex's cousin, Heshie. Alex's remembrance of Heshie is,

... Heshie kept a set of York weights with which he worked out every afternoon before the opening of the track season. He was one of the stars of the team, and held a city record in the javelin throw; his events were discus, shot, and javelin, though once during a meet at School Stadium, he was put in by the coach to run the low hurdles, as a substitute for a sick teammate, and in a spill at the last jump, fell and broke his wrist.
Closely associated with the theme of man's unity with other men and the world is his need to communicate with his fellows; and as a literary motif, "communication" is of particular significance in a highly technical, sometimes impersonal society. Sport, because it is many times one of the few things that diverse persons have in common, may ease man through the difficulty of communication, and it often serves as a starting point from which relationships may be developed. Such communication need not occur merely on the superficial level of facile conversation; rather, those who experience the demands of sport together may find that they have a feeling of mutual trust and concern that extends to aspects of one another's lives apart from the playing field. These feelings of friendship are often so genuine that they endure for a lifetime. Communication may also extend into the area of the non-verbal, where movements, both elemental and complex, speak a special, but very real type of language. Sport, simply as an experience shared with others, encompasses a sensory vocabulary that is fully comprehensible to those who know it and love it, but that is also inaccessible to those who are unfamiliar with and uninitiated into it.

Directly opposed to the belief in the unity of man with man and his world, and in the powers of communication to facilitate and actualize that union, is the
To me, Heshie was everything—that is, for the little time I knew him. I used to dream that I too would someday be a member of the track team and wear scant white shorts with a slit cut up either side to accommodate the taut and bulging muscles of my thighs (pp. 53-54).

As Alex recalls, Heshie’s father puts an end to the relationship by telling the girl that Heshie has an incurable disease; the reaction of the boy, who had “at least the third most powerful shoulder in the state” (p. 58), is violent but brief, and he gives in to his father. The events assume large proportions in Alex’s mind, and he resolves never to allow such a thing to happen to him:

I will not do what Heshie did! For I go through childhood convinced that had he only wanted to, my powerful cousin— Heshie, the third best javelin thrower in all New Jersey (an honor, I would think, rich in symbolism for this growing boy, with visions of jockstraps dancing in his head), could easily have flipped my fifty-year-old uncle over onto his back, and pinned him to the cellar floor. So then (I conclude) he must have lost on purpose. But why? For he knew—I surely knew it, even as a child—that his father had done something dishonorable. Was he then afraid to win? But why, when his own father had acted so vilely, and in Heshie’s behalf? Was it cowardice? fear?—or perhaps was it Heshie’s wisdom? (p. 64)

This picture of the strong athlete humiliated and humbled before nearly unconscionable actions is extremely vivid and effective in creating a picture of the power of the Jewish tradition in Alex’s youth. Even as an adult attempting to live his own life, Alex feels the sense of obligation and pressure that originated when he was a child.
The magnitude of the bewilderment, malaise, and identity crisis which Portnoy faces is contrasted by his recollection of his days as a center fielder; he remembers going

... up to the playground and right out to center field, the position I play for a softball team that wears silky blue-and-gold jackets with the name of the club scrawled in big white felt letters from one shoulder to the other: S E A B E E S. A.C. Thank God for the Seabees A.C.! Thank God for center field! Doctor, you can't imagine how truly glorious it is out there, so alone in all that space ... Do you know baseball at all? Because center field is like some observation post, a kind of control tower, where you are able to see everything and everyone, to understand what's happening the instant it happens, not only by the sound of the struck bat, but by the spark of movement that goes through the infielders in the first second that the ball comes flying at them, and once it gets beyond them, 'It's mine,' you call, 'it's mine,' and then after it you go. For in center field, if you can get to it, it is yours. Oh, how unlike my home it is to be in center field, where no one will appropriate unto himself anything that I say is mine!

Unfortunately, I was too anxious a hitter to make the high school team— I swung and missed at bad pitches so often during the tryouts for the freshman squad that eventually the ironical coach took me aside and said, 'Sonny, are you sure you don't wear glasses?' and then sent me on my way. But did I have form! did I have style! And in my playground softball league, where the ball came in just a little slower and a little bigger, I am the star I dreamed I might become for the whole school. Of course, still in my ardent desire to excel I too frequently swing and miss, but when I connect, it goes great distances, Doctor, it flies over fences and is called a home run. Oh, and there is really nothing in life, nothing at all, that quite compares with that pleasure of rounding second base at a nice slow clip, because there's just no hurry any more, because that ball you've hit has just gone sailing out of sight ... And I could field, too, and the farther I had to run, the better. 'I got it!
I got it! I got it! and tear in toward second, to trap in the webbing of my glove—and barely an inch off the ground—a ball driven hard and low and right down the middle, a base hit, someone thought ... Or back I go, 'I got it, I got it—' back easily and gracefully toward that wire fence, moving practically in slow motion, and then that delicious Di Maggio sensation of grabbing it like something heaven-sent over one shoulder ... Or running! turning! leaping! like little Al Gionfriddo—a baseball player, Doctor, who once did a very great thing ... Or just standing nice and calm—nothing trembling, everything serene—standing there in the sunshine (as though in the middle of an empty field, or passing the time on the street corner), standing without a care in the world in the sunshine, like my king of kings, the Lord my God, The Duke Himself (Snider, Doctor, the name may come up again), standing there as loose and as easy, as happy as I will ever be, just waiting by myself under a high fly ball (a towering fly ball, I hear Red Barber say, as he watches from behind his microphone—hit out toward Portnoy; Alex under it, under it), just waiting there for the ball to fall into the glove I raise to it, and yup, there it is, plock, the third out of the inning (and Alex gathers it in for out number three, and, folks, here's old C.D. for P. Lorillard and Company), and then in one motion, while old Connie brings us a message from Old Golds, I start in toward the bench, holding the ball now with the five fingers of my bare left hand, and when I get to the infield—having come down hard with one foot on the bag at second base—I shoot it gently, with just a flick of the wrist, at the opposing team's shortstop as he comes trotting out onto the field, and still without breaking stride, go loping in all the way, shoulders shifting, head hanging, a touch pigeon-toed, my knees coming slowly up and down in an altogether brilliant imitation of The Duke. Oh, the unruffled nonchalance of that game! There's not a movement that I don't know still down in the tissue of my muscles and the joints between my bones. How to bend over to pick up my glove and how to toss it away, how to test the weight of the bat, how to hold it and carry it and swing it around in the on-deck circle, how to raise that bat above my head and flex and loosen my shoulders and my neck before stepping in and planting my two feet exactly where my two feet belong in the batter's box—and how, when I take a called strike
(which I have a tendency to do, it balances off nicely swinging at bad pitches), to step out and express, if only through a slight poking with the bat at the ground, just the right amount of exasperation with the powers that be . . . yes, every little detail so thoroughly studied and mastered, that it is simply beyond the realm of possibility for any situation to arise in which I do not know how to move, or where to move, or what to say or leave unsaid . . . And it's true, is it not?—incredible, but apparently true—there are people who feel in life the ease, the self-assurance, the simple and essential affiliation with what is going on, that I used to feel as the center fielder for the Seabees? Because it wasn't, you see, that one was the best center fielder imaginable, only that one knew exactly, and down to the smallest particular, how a center fielder should conduct himself. And there are people like that walking the streets of the U.S. of A.? I ask you, why can't I be one! Why can't I exist now as I existed for the Seabees out there in center field? Oh, to be a center fielder, a center fielder—and nothing more!

(pp. 69-72)

It is perhaps helpful to note that Alex's sense of himself and place is somewhat tainted by a rather curious lack of "freedom," in that he seemed overly concerned with "conduct." Yet it is clear that the softball field was obviously a place of perfect peace for the boy; it provided a situation where he felt confident and in control of things, where it was possible for him to "connect" powerfully and meaningfully, and where he might experience himself as one who fully understands himself and his actions. But, even though his body still knows the movements and techniques of the game, such knowledge is of no use to him; and even though he has vivid day-dreams and remembrances of his softball-playing past, they are
insufficient to reconstruct such a condition of satisfaction in his present life; he is simply beyond all of those things. His failure to find anything in his adult life that gives the same harmony and satisfaction is naturally all the more severe because the space created by fulfillment through sport is so great; and his inability to move with ease and assurance as an adult is particularly amplified because of his former graceful movement as a ball-player.

The final use of sport in Portnoy's Complaint helps to demonstrate the dilemma he faces regarding simply merging himself with a community of Jewish men; he remembers when he used to watch the men of the neighborhood enjoying themselves in regularly-played softball games:

On Sunday mornings, when the weather is warm enough, twenty of the neighborhood men (this in the days of short center field) play a round of seven-inning softball games, starting at nine in the morning and ending about one in the afternoon, the stakes for each game a dollar a head. The umpire is our dentist, old Dr. Wolfenberg, the neighborhood college graduate—night school on High Street, but as good as Oxford to us. Among the players is our butcher, his twin brother our plumber, the grocer, the owner of the service station where my father buys his gasoline—all of them ranging in age from thirty to fifty, though I think of them not in terms of their years, but only as 'the men.' In the on-deck circle, even at the plate, they roll their jaws on the stumps of soggy cigars. Not boys, you see, but men. Belly! Muscle! Forearms black with hair! Bald domes! And then the voices they have on them—cannons you can hear go off from as far as our front stoop a block
away. I imagine vocal cords inside them thick as clotheslines! lungs the size of zeppelins! Nobody has to tell them to stop mumbling and speak up, never! And the outrageous things they say! The chatter in the infield isn't chatter, it's kibbitzing, and (to this small boy, just beginning to learn the art of ridicule) hilarious, particularly the insults that emanate from the man my father has labeled 'The Mad Russian,' Biderman, owner of the corner candy store (and bookie joint) who has a 'hesitation' side-arm delivery, not only very funny but very effective. 'Abracadabra,' he says, and pitches his backbreaking drop. And he is always giving it to Dr. Wolfenberg: 'A blind ump, okay, but a blind dentist?' The idea causes him to smote his forehead with his glove. 'Play ball, comedian,' calls Dr. Wolfenberg, very Connie Mack in his perforated two-tone shoes and Panama hat, 'start up the game, Biderman, unless you want to get thrown out of here for insults--!' 'But how do they teach you in that dental school, Doc, by Braille?'

I tell you, they are an endearing lot! I sit in the wooden stands alongside first base, inhaling that sour springtime bouquet in the pocket of my fielder's mitt—sweat, leather, vaseline—and laughing my head off. I cannot imagine myself living out my life any other place but here. Why leave, why go, when there is everything here that I will ever want? The ridiculing, the joking, the acting-up, the pretending—anything for a laugh! I love it! And yet underneath it all, they mean it, they are in dead earnest. You should see them at the end of the seven innings when that dollar has to change hands. Don't tell me they don't mean it! Losing and winning is not a joke... and yet it is! And that's what charms me most of all. Fierce as the competition is, they cannot resist clowning and kibbitzing around. Putting on a show! How I am going to love growing up to be a Jewish man! Living forever in the Weequahic section, and playing softball on Chancellor Avenue from nine to one on Sundays, a perfect joining of clown and competitor, kibbitzing wiseguy and dangerous long-ball hitter (pp. 241-44).

This is a portion of the goodness he recalls; and, in his ambivalence, he would willingly place himself in the
continuity and the community of friendships that the scene presents. It is a part of his past, and it could be part of his present and future, if only he would let it be so. The gathering of men in the enjoyable, yet most earnest, regular play of softball connotes essentially what he seeks; it provides a near-ritualistic experience that firmly establishes the place and relationships of each player; and, further, in permitting the "joining of clown and competitor, kibbitzing wiseguy and dangerous long-ball hitter," it makes possible the union of diverse elements of personality. That he cannot embrace what appears to be good, pleasantly satisfying, and even necessary, through rejection of his over-large individualistic and sexual imperatives, is, of course, part of the reason he finds himself in a psychiatrist's office.

Summary

Sport's most valuable function in Portnoy's Complaint is to portray Alex's exceptional happiness as a young softball player so vividly that his adult discontent appears all the greater by comparison with what he once had. Alex's recollections of his times as a center-fielder and his daydreams in which he emulates the great stars of the sport provide excellent insight into the stability and self-confidence that he sometimes
experienced in his youth. Sport had put him very much in touch with himself, even though he was obviously only a mediocre athlete; and he feels most acutely what it means to be without such a world and a personal position imbued with sense and coherence. Yet, his state of affairs is one of his own choosing. A scene of men playing softball illustrates that the values and satisfactions which Alex found in his adolescent play need not be lost simply because he grows up; they are available to him as long as he desires to involve himself in the patterns of true community. The world implied by the men's softball game indicates that the rewards of Alex's accepting himself and his past would be great indeed; but Alex chooses not to make that step.

Sport also demonstrates a portion of Alex's feelings for his father and, through the example of Heshie, clearly pictures the power of the Jewish influence upon a young man. Thus, sport-related themes in Portnoy's Complaint include both separation and communication and remembrance of the past from the viewpoint of a rather dissatisfying present. Further, an idea developed only slightly is that there is, in Portnoy's case, the possibility of experiencing continuity between youth and adulthood, thereby giving a sort of permanence to the supposedly non-permanent things of the past.
The Great American Novel is a highly comic mock-epic that touches many aspects of current American society. Roth bases the extensive display of humor upon the supposed destruction and consequent erasure from the national memory of the Patriot League, the third major baseball league. Word Smith, an octogenarian former sports writer tells the tale of the league in its entirety—its early history, its heroes, its teams and managers, and its ultimate dissolution through Communist intrigue. He presents a memorable cast of characters: Gil Gamesh, a Babylonian-American who becomes the greatest pitcher the game has known, but who is banned forever from the game at only age nineteen because of his alleged attempt to kill umpire Mike Masterson with a pitched ball; Luke Gofannon, the greatest hitter of all time who is nonetheless annually refused a place in the Hall of Fame; the immortal Base Baal and his son, Spit Baal; Mrs. Angela Whittling Trust, team-owner and one-time mistress of Ty Cobb, Babe Ruth, Jolly Cholly Tuminikar, Luke Gofannon, and Gil Gamesh; Frank Mazuma, the constantly scheming and promoting manager of one of the teams in the league; and

the entire team of the 1943 Port Ruppert Mundys, the one team in the major leagues that has been rendered "homeless" because of the War Department's use of their stadium and therefore plays all 154 games on the road.

The Mundys are the worst of the worst, the most inept team in history (floundering over fifty games out of first place), the perpetual wanderers who are apparently doomed to incredible failure after incredible failure. Their pious manager, Mister Fairsmith, informs them that their fate of constant travel is merely an obstacle that will prove their mettle and is actually a hidden blessing. He directs a line-up that includes a fourteen year-old second baseman; a one-armed outfielder; a one-legged catcher; a pitcher who can barely throw to the plate and whose every pitch pains him so much that he warms up by rolling the ball to the catcher; an alcoholic, degenerate ex-convict first baseman; a midget pitcher; and the league's leading hitter, who is forced by his father to play for the Mundys without pay because of his excessive pride. As the Mundys stumble through their season against such opponents as the Tri-City Tycoons, Aceldama Butchers, Independence Blues, Terra Incognita Rustlers, Tri-City Greenbacks, Asylum Keepers, and Kakoola Reapers, they experience only two genuine high points: they defeat a team
frequently-stated theme of the alienation, or separation, of man from others and the world; in this view, man is essentially alone, and there is little or nothing that he can do that will substantially alter his condition.

In the sport realm, such alienation might exist in several forms: in those men whose sense of superiority leads them to place themselves above the natural world, thereby making it possible for them to have minimal concern for what damage they do to it; in those men who use sport, which almost always establishes the superiority or inferiority of one individual opposed to another, as an agent of proving their distinction from others; and in those men who see sport as a representation of a continual struggle for self-preservation in a world where savagery is too lightly concealed by the traditions of civilization.

Human inner privacy is closely-related to the concept of alienation, and it too is most adequately demonstrated in sport. Even though the sportsman generally is engaged in a group-situation, he may nonetheless be regarded as a wholly-distinct being because the infinite range of thoughts, sensations, and emotions that is called up in his mind-body is unique unto himself; he is a subject accessible to every idea and feeling that his past and present lives can produce in him, and, in that his life's experiences are possessed by no one but
of lunatics from an insane asylum and fall all over themselves with joy; and, at the end of the season, they have an eleven-game winning streak, which is caused by the surreptitious introduction of "Jewish Wheaties" into the breakfasts of the unsuspecting Mundys.

The fumbling and bumbling of the Mundys is abruptly ended the next season when the long-missing Gil Gamesh becomes their manager. He espouses a philosophy of hatred and vengeance to his players:

I think you gentlemen are vermin, cowards, weaklings, milksops, toadies, fools, and jellyfish. You are the scum of baseball and the slaves of your league. . . . You are scum because you do not hate your oppressors. You are slaves and fools and jellyfish because you do not loathe your enemies (p. 342).

He effectively transforms them into winners; but the intent of such vociferous rhetoric is obviously to destroy much of the spirit of the game. It becomes apparent that Gamesh is a Communist agent, and his scheme is finally exposed when a gigantic infiltration of the Patriot League by Communists is discovered. The scandal is so monstrous that baseball's third league is destroyed and forgotten.

During the course of the Mundys' endeavors, Roth manages to poke fun at, among other things, Jews, blacks, midgets, cripples, Communists and Communist-hunters, missionary zeal, sexual infantilism, literature— or "literatoor," the idea of "the great American novel," self-righteousness, pompousness, and, of course, baseball itself.
The fact that baseball can provide the groundwork for as wide-ranging a landscape as that presented in *The Great American Novel* directs attention toward a number of interpretations of the meaning of baseball to the American psyche. As one of the nation's oldest spectator sports, it is replete with a vast array of former star players whose names and reputations are highly familiar to the majority of American males. It encompasses an almost infinite number of traditions, personalities, jokes, heroics, rules and regulations, and disasters; and, as a world of its own, it provides a temporary escape from the minutiae and entanglements of real life. Thus, in the novel, Gil Gamesh is a sensation because he produced such supreme, heroic displays of talent that his fans could forget the present and make his world their own.

In 1933 just about everybody appeared to have become a Greenback fan, and the Patriot League pennant battle between the two Tri-City teams, the impeccably professional Tycoons, and the rough-and-tumble Greenbacks, made headlines East and West, and constituted just about the only news that didn't make you want to slit your throat over the barren dinner table. Men out of work—and there were fifteen million of them across the land, men sick and tired of defeat and dying for a taste of victory, rich men who had become paupers overnight—would somehow scrape two bits together to come out and watch from the bleachers as a big unbeatable boy named Gil Gamesh did his stuff on the mound. And to the little kids of America, whose dads were on the dole, whose uncles were on the booze, and whose older brothers were on the bum, he was a living, breathing example of that hero of American heroes, the he-man, a combination of Lindbergh,
Tarzan, and (with his long, girlish lashes and brillian­
tined black hair) Rudolph Valentino: brave,
brutish, and a lady-killer, and in possession of a
sidearm fastball that according to Ripley's "Believe
It or Not" could pass clear through a batter's chest,
come out his back, and still be traveling at 'major
league speed' (p. 57).

As a game that manifests typical American appreci­
ations for both individuality and teamwork, both complexity
and simplicity, both high seriousness and colorful zani­
ness, and as a unique context for the display of order,
grace, and control, baseball occupies an undeniably strong
position in the national nostalgia. In a certain sense,
it may embody the patterns of an America that no longer
really exists; as Marshall McLuhan contends, "Baseball
is a game of one-thing-at-a-time, fixed positions and
visibly delegated specialist jobs such as belonged to the
now passing mechanical age." And further, baseball, with
its "specialist and positional stress" and its "elegant
abstract image of an industrial society living by split-
second timing" has "lost its social and psychic relevance
for our new way of life."30 Yet the appeal persists,
quite possibly because it is not merely another picture
of the present. Roth understands perfectly the near-magic
drawing power of the game; and the manner in which the
fans in The Great American Novel watch one of the Mundys

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30 Marshall McLuhan, Understanding Media (New York:
pitch is ample testimony of baseball's magnetism for

Most people seemed to find it eerie, rather than amusing or irritating, to watch him work in relief. Invariably it was dusk when Chico, the last bald man in the bullpen, would trudge across the darkening field to pitch for the Mundys, already brutally beaten with an inning or two of punishment still to come. By this hour, the hometown fans, filled to the gills on all the slugging they'd seen, would have begun to leave their seats, tugging their collars up against the cool breeze and smiling when they peered for a final time out at the scoreboard to what looked now like the score of a football game. Two, three touchdowns for the home team; a field goal for the visitors, if that . . . So, they would converge upon the exits, a swarm of big two-fisted creatures as drowsy with contentment as the babe whose face has dropped in bloated bliss from the sugary nipple. Ah, victory. Ah, triumph. How it does mellow the bearded sex! What are the consolations of philosophy or the affirmations of religion beside an afternoon's rich meal of doubles, triples, and home runs? . . . But then came Chico out to the mound, and made that little yelp of his as he tossed his single warm-up pitch in the general direction of Hothead's mitt, that little bleat of pain that passed from between his lips whenever he had to raise his arm above his waist to throw the ball. The fans, clustered now in the dark apertures that opened on to the ramps leading down to the city streets, would swing around upon hearing Chico's bleat, one head craning above the other, to try to catch a glimpse of the pitcher with the sorest arm in the game. For there was no one who had a motion quite like Chico's; in order to release the ball with a minimal amount of suffering, he did not so much throw it as push it, with a wiggling sort of straight-arm motion. It looked as though he might be trying to pass his hand through a hoop of flames without getting it burned—and it sounded as though he wasn't quite able to make it. 'Eeeep!' he would cry, and there would be the ball, floating softly through the dusk at its own sweet pace, and then the solid retort of the bat, and all the base runners scampering for home.
Probably the fans themselves could not have explained what exactly it was that held them there sometimes five and ten minutes on end watching Chico suffer so. It was not pity—Chico could quit and go back to Mexico if he wanted, and do down there whatever it was Mexicans did. Nor was it affection; he was, after all, a spic, closer even to a nigger than the Frenchman, Astarte. Nor was it amusement, for after three hours of watching the Mundys on what even for them was an off day, you didn't have the strength to laugh anymore. It would seem rather that they were transfixed, perhaps for the first time in their lives, by the strangeness of things, the wondrous strangeness of things, by all that is beyond the pale and just does not seem to belong in this otherwise cozy and familiar world of ours. With the sun all but down and the far corners of the stadium vanishing, that noise he made might have originated in the swaying jungle foliage or in some dark pocket of the moon for the sense of fear and wonder that it awakened in men who only a moment earlier had been anticipating their slippers and their favorite chair, a bottle of beer and the lovely memories they would have forever after of all those runners they'd seen galloping around third that afternoon. 'Hear it?' a father whispered to his young son. 'Uh-huh,' said the little boy, shifting on his little stick legs. 'Hear that? It can give you the goose bumps. Chico Mecoatl—you can tell your grandchildren you heard him make that noise. Hear it? 'Oh, Poppy, let's go.'

So home they went (home, to their homes!), leaving Chico, who hardly ever got anybody out anymore, to fill the bases two times over, and the relentless home team to clear them two times over, before, mercifully, the sun set, the field disappeared, and the disaster being played out now for the sake of no one, was called on account of darkness (pp. 128-29).

Roth obviously recognizes the sentimentality and quasi-reverence which often define approaches to baseball, and in his creation of a comic work, he skillfully spoofs much of the aura of hallowedness which seems to have been attached to its stars and to its conventions. Baseball
becomes a huge metaphor for the self-laudatory and ostensibly upright postures that our national institutions sometimes assume in the face of sheer ludicrousness and foolishness. Yet not all is in jest. As Thomas R. Edwards notes,

That mood, of eternal memories mixed with a wondering fear, seems just right. In baseball we rediscover the pastoral world—sunlit grass and complex simplicity in the midst of urban distraction; but it is always pastoral in decline, on the verge of disappearing, doomed in the way that our own remembered childhood is doomed by the simple fact that it is ourselves, grown into wisdom and weariness, who do the remembering. It seems no accident that the good novels about baseball—Malamud's 'The Natural,' Mark Harris's 'Bang the Drum Slowly,' Robert Coover's 'The Universal Baseball Association'—all focus on disaster, on death revealing itself even in Arcadia. The Boys of Summer, as Dylan Thomas and Roger Kahn remind us, are most moving in their ruin, which is also our ruin, individually and perhaps, as Roth mockingly hints, nationally as well.31

There is indeed something strikingly poignant about a team which is always the visitor, which suffers unending humiliation, whose players are without doubt the most fatalistic and hopeless athletes ever portrayed, comedy or no, in American fiction, and whose players eventually find their careers destroyed. The fact of destruction pervades the novel, and the extent to which it might reach is indicated in the book's prologue:

Let me prophesy. What began in '46 with the obliteration of the Patriot League will not end until the planet itself has gone the way of the Tri-City Tycoons, the Tri-City Greenbacks, the Kakoola Reapers, the Terra Incognita Rustlers, the Asylum Keepers, the Aceldama Butchers, the Ruppert Mundys, and me; until each and every one of you is gone like the sperm whale and the great Luke Gogannon, gone without leaving a trace! Only read your daily paper, fans—every day news of another stream, another town, another species biting the dust. Wait, very soon now whole continents will be canceled out like stamps. Whonk, Africa! Whonk, Asia! Whonk, Europa! Whonk, North, whonk, South, Americal! And, oh, don't try hiding, Antarctica—whonk you too! And that will be it, fans, as far as the landmass goes. A brand new ballgame (p. 44).

Utilization of the context of baseball to demonstrate a disaster that might spread until annihilation of even the world is complete is highly effective; the juxtaposition of the seemingly inconsequential realm of sport with the end-of-all-things, while farcically overblown, is most intriguing in its own right; but, further, Roth's picture of virtually helpless and infirm players runs counter to the usual conception of youth and vigor conveyed by a group of athletes. The irony of these incredible creatures stumbling over a child's game, and yet taking all that happens to them with the utmost seriousness, strikes deeply into one's notions about sport and reveals something of the closeness of ridiculousness, decay, and finally, oblivion.

A final observation that might be made about the general thrust of The Great American Novel is that the
enormity of Word Smith's attempt to document the history of a defunct baseball league is itself highly evocative because of the supremely lonely nature of his effort against suppression of the "truth," such as it may be. That baseball can symbolize truth of great significance is treated, certainly, in a mock-heroic fashion; but, beneath the laughter runs a thought that insists that, somehow, Word Smith's crusade has the markings of much more than the work of a simple and senile old man. To Word Smith, baseball symbolizes something that has been taken from the people and kept out of their reach by a multitude of lies; to twentieth-century America, that symbol looms large indeed.

Summary

The Great American Novel presents a number of ball players in a semi-mythic context, yet denies all of them the heroic status that myth often confers. The irony of these imperfect beings acting in a nearly-epic world is indeed humorous; but such humor is tinged with the realization that the condition of the Mundys is perhaps the condition of many contemporary would-be heroes. In other words, beneath the myth lurks the man himself: inept, foolish, possibly deceitful, and close to annihilation.
The status of baseball as the "national pastime" makes it an effective vehicle for conveying both Roth's satiric fun and the gravity of the destruction of truth. Further, baseball's value as a symbol of both foolishness and high seriousness is such that it significantly illustrates a number of American conditions, complexes, and foibles.
CONCLUSION

The fictional works of John Updike and Philip Roth which are considered in this study demonstrate numerous important literary uses of the context of sport; it is certain that both writers clearly recognize and successfully utilize the artistic potential of sport insofar as illustrating a variety of themes and ways of being is concerned. Both authors focus in relatively similar ways on several of these themes, the most important of which is easily the remembrance of the past by an adult who believes that his youth far surpassed his present in joy, satisfaction, and even challenge. To such characters as Rabbit Angstrom and Alex Portnoy, the place of sport in their adolescent years was so prominent that it gave a certain shape to their lives; the fact that they have found nothing to replace what direction, stability, and concept of self which sport gave them while young is a testimonial to and an indictment of the times. Even though they retain in their memories and sometimes in their bodies accurate recollections of the motions, techniques, and pleasures of their former
himself, the state-of-being resulting from his sport encounter can never be fully shared by another person. Further, because the sport condition is such that the players are completely immersed in its proceedings, the conceptions that it causes to arise in each of the participants are of a special type; one is a "different" person when he is acting with the totality of expression called for by sport, and, thus, it might be thought that his private, mind-body "reflection" would be somewhat unlike that which occurs when he is at rest. It follows that an intense involvement with sport may engender such powerful emotions that one is actually, in some ways, a stranger to the self that he ordinarily knows. The inner privacy may be so great, and so peculiar, in sport that one might hardly recognize even himself, not to mention the difficulties of attempting to comprehend the inner-workings of other sportsmen. This fact of the uniqueness of the individual as he is engaged in a sport situation cannot be overstated, especially because many times such uniqueness is simply not seen or recognized correctly; the act of sport, with its combined movements, its necessary team cohesion, and its apparent similarities of dress and even attitude, easily gives a "massed" impression, or a feeling of total "like-ness," when, in fact, the individual privacy that each player maintains is sometimes hardly penetrated.
sports involvement, it is evident that the things of the past are indeed non-permanent and cannot be regained easily; the mature Rabbit might prove to himself that his maintained basketball skill possibly indicates a sustained overall power, and the mature Alex might choose to insert himself into a pattern that includes adult softball play, but neither can recapture completely all that sport once was to him. Perhaps the most striking illustration of such non-permanence, however, is found in the scene of the former athletes in The Centaur; there, the "hushed and hurt" one-time ball players symbolize vividly the effects of time. That sport does attain a certain permanence through their memory of it; is, however, obvious in their recognition of the difference between past and present.

Both Rabbit and Alex occasionally escape into a type of fantasy about the sport aspects of their pasts, but what fantasies they experience appear to be highly realistic recollections. There do not seem to be, in other words, attempts to make oneself seem greater or larger than he really was; apparently, whatever greatness was attained was adequate and needs no expansion through dreams.

The needs that Rabbit and Alex have for freedom and mobility most probably have a part of their foundation
in the experience of sport. Sport, to a certain extent, implies freedom, and it most certainly calls for extensive movement. It is obvious that much of the torment encountered and endured by both Rabbit and Alex results from the fact that the relatively extensive movement that they knew in youthful sport is not really available to them in their adulthood, even though such movement and/or freedom were important determinants of their adult orientations.

Human communication of many kinds is seen in diverse sport situations. There is, of course, the self-communication, or inner harmony, that the athlete who is in touch with himself experiences; the fact that it may gradually erode with increasing age, as it does in Rabbit and Alex, does not obscure its value. Communication between two persons or among more than just two is also facilitated through the workings of sport. In its aura, Rabbit sees Ruth and Eccles more clearly and finds a thread that brings them closer; Peter Caldwell obtains greater understanding of what his father's life signifies; the characters of Couples are brought into greater conjunction; Rabbit comes to know his son better; Neil Klugman and Brenda Patimkin share a brief but intense love; Alex sees and understands his father; and the Port Ruppert Mundys communicate to their fans a poignant situation of impending devastation.
Sport also functions to show several conditions of human separation. Rabbit separates himself from an unsatisfying present partially because his athletic past was so rewarding; having known fame and pride, he cannot accept the mundane, and he therefore disassociates himself from not only his job, but also his family. In *The Centaur*, the scene of the basketball game, at which the players are shown to be most definitely distinct from the fans, demonstrates precisely the separation between persons that George Caldwell's manner of living opposes; he would, if possible, eliminate all such barriers. *Couples* includes scenes of basketball and tennis in which a type of separation is apparent; in such situations, even the dislike and distaste which certain of the characters feel toward others are conveyed; and sport, on occasion, takes on the atmosphere of a place of inflicting pain and gaining revenge. In *Rabbit Redux*, the division that initially exists between father and son is demonstrated through the boy's lack of interest in sports. The sport-related scenes in *Goodbye, Columbus* often clarify the separation that Neil feels from the Patimkin world; Alex's happy experience in softball makes his willful separation of himself from a life in which he might continue that happiness all the more puzzling and distressing; and the Mundys, perhaps because of their separation from the
true style of the baseball world and because of their exclusion from historical record, appear to symbolize, both individually and collectively, a most regrettable, yet humorous, condition of foolishness and humiliation.

Somewhat associated with the fact of human separation is the inner privacy that each individual maintains, to a greater or lesser degree. Even though sport does make possible a wide range of communications and revelations, it does not by any means afford complete access to the thoughts and emotions of the players. Thus, Rabbit's fans, even while cheering him, do not apprehend his interior existence fully; and the Reverend Eccles, even while experiencing a mutual quest through golf with Rabbit, is incapable of perceiving and appreciating the nature of Rabbit's psychic state. It is conceivable that even Rabbit himself is somewhat mystified by the person that he becomes when he is totally immersed in the magic of a game or in running; he does understand, however, that he is sometimes, while so entranced, a different person.

Sport does not elevate any of the characters in the books under consideration to heroic status; George Caldwell perhaps achieves such a status, but sport demonstrates only a portion of his strength and worth. Each
of the other protagonists, however, possesses at least some flaws that make him unworthy of being elevated above other men, at least significantly so. Many of them do possess quite admirable traits, certainly, but their imperfections are equally clear. Indeed, it is more reasonable to regard persons such as Rabbit, Alex, and even Piet Hanema as anti-heroes because of their overall inability to deal with their problems in truly effective ways. Sport is important because it shows that the adult Rabbit and the adult Alex have not succeeded in maintaining the quality of their youth and are forced to reconstruct past joys in their minds; such need obviously points to one who lacks total control, not to one deserving heroic stature. Piet is somewhat diminished through his rather shabby, injurious basketball playing and through the fear he displays while playing against Georgene.

The conditions of "newness, regeneration, and rebirth" are portrayed, to an extent, in certain uses of sport by Updike and Roth. Rabbit, of course, hopes to add new meaning and substance to his life; his former success in basketball provides a part of the motivation for such hope, and his golf play permits him to experience it. In Rabbit Redux, his movement toward rebirth from deadness begins again; occasional moments of sport indicate to him that he is not powerless and that he might yet
achieve understanding and potency. Alex also desires a type of renewal, in that he hopes to find something that will approximate what he once had in sport.

Updike uses sport in several ways to indicate search for spiritual truth and meaning. Rabbit's seeking for the "thing underneath it all" is largely motivated by physical, sport-related intuitions; his body, filled with its unique, powerful instincts, directs him toward something that is "beyond all this." That such internal pressures are closely connected to physical urges does not decrease their importance; rather, they indicate a man struggling to unite himself and to achieve a harmony of body and spirit. Rabbit's ability to approximate the perfect flight of a golf ball with his conception of spiritual reality speaks clearly for the powerful, expressive stature that sport occupies in his life. Several of Updike's short stories are notable for the manner in which sport provides situations for religious experience. "Intercession" and "The Pro" focus upon golf in such a way that the dilemmas of faith are made manifest. Golf proves to be a highly suitable context for the presentation of the difficulty of the quest and to distinguish between the approaches of faith and legalism. "The Slump" illustrates a human condition that necessitates the asking of
questions that have religious-philosophical overtones. The existential situation of the baseball player unable to hit points toward his doubts, his dread, and his realization that, while he is at the plate, nothing else appears real and that he is indeed alone.

The theme of the acquisition of self-knowledge is presented in a number of sport situations. Rabbit most obviously gained a certain insight into himself while he was an athlete; and such knowledge as he came to possess spurred him on toward an even greater understanding of both himself and spiritual reality. Likewise, Alex's days as a center-fielder made it possible for him to experience himself as competent and secure; the knowledge resulting from such experience most surely causes him to feel his adult position with much pain. Perhaps more than anything else, sport gave each of them a special place from which to look into himself; there is no doubting that the "place" fraught with honor, discipline, order, and truths established through physical contacts with others and the life-in-miniature found in games, would establish in large measure a high degree of self-perception. In essence, both Rabbit and Alex, while boys, virtually took the potential meanings of sport deeply into themselves and discovered much about themselves while under their influence. To them, most assuredly, sport
was a way of knowing. Neil's rejection of what the Patimkins represent, as partially seen in the way they conduct themselves in sport, gives him a special insight into himself. And further, the eerie spectacle of the Port Ruppert Mundys at play can perhaps be viewed as a means through which the fans achieved a degree of insight into themselves. Several of the short stories utilize sport to demonstrate a type of growth toward better comprehension of oneself. Caroline, in "The Rescue," realizes through skiing that her marriage is intact; and the golf partners in "The Pro" and the baseball player in "The Slump" engage in sport-related experiences that undoubtedly produce a rather intangible and tentative understanding of their place in the human condition.

The idealism of various characters is illustrated in sport. One learns, for example, that Rabbit "never fouled"; his unwillingness to abridge the rules of sport obviously does not coincide with his willingness to disregard the "rules" of social responsibility, but it is very likely that his idealism, in addition to his search for self-knowledge, directs him to find a way of living that he can accept. George Caldwell's idealism is reflected in his willingness to serve as a high school swimming coach and in his ability to recognize the beauty of high-quality performance. Clearly, he is concerned
with coaching because he believes that, through it, his boys can be given positive direction. Neil's idealistic sense is disturbed while viewing the Patimkin way of sport competition; and such idealism as Alex possesses is related to his recognition that he was once at peace in sport; he finds himself driven to discover if such a state might again be possible for him.

The fact of human physicality occupies a place of prominence in much of Updike's writing. Rabbit is so attuned to his bodily sensations that his actions are sometimes directed by feelings and needs that manifest themselves in physical imperatives. His attempts to escape the "net" by sheer running indicates just how much he trusts the instincts toward movement that his body possesses. To be sure, his reaction to his dilemma is tainted by selfishness and immaturity, but the importance of a man's belief that he can achieve something approaching spiritual insight through his physicality is undeniable; in such a man might wholeness of mind and body be found.

Rabbit's running, especially insofar as it is largely a response to fear, provides him with a type of catharsis. His intense physical efforts, whether rational or not, appear to give him freedom and release from the pressures both inside and outside him. Even the more
complex movements of basketball and golf make it possible for him to purge himself, although only momentarily, of the doubt, tension, and restraint which he feels. It is notable that sport, which gives him such release, is also partially responsible for his being driven as he is. In none of the other characters of either Updike or Roth is such cathartic experience highly evident.

The theme of the "rite of passage" is of relatively minor consequence in the writings under consideration. It is somewhat discernible in *Rabbit Redux* in that Rabbit hopes his son might pass through an experience in sport similar to his own; Rabbit's wish is that, while young, the boy will have the opportunity to put some "bliss" into his life. It is possible, however, that few, if any, of the characters have had a genuine initiation into adulthood, whether through sport or otherwise, because such adulthood as they display is, for many reasons, terribly unsatisfactory. In other words, sport provided no "bridge" at all.

Both Updike and Roth use sport to show part of the reality of day-to-day living, both use it symbolically, and both use it in situations that verge on the mythic or quasi-mythic. While it seldom provides the major focus of any of their novels—*The Great American Novel* being
LEWIS, Robert William, 1944-
SPORT AND THE FICTION OF JOHN UPDIKE AND PHILIP ROTH.
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Education, physical

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In opposition to the idea that sport-related "inner privacy" might be such that it precludes both recognition of self and deeper understanding of others is the theme of the acquisition of self-knowledge. The movement toward comprehension of self, because of its obvious significance as a fundamental humanizing process—a process that extends throughout the entirety of one's life—has great philosophical and literary consequence. Each individual, if growth is genuine and reaching toward completion, continually attempts to discover the limits of his powers and understanding and to fashion a personal scheme of belief which, to some extent, answers the questions he has about the meaning of his existence. While the "truths" that one is able to discern may be only tentative, the significance that they add to the life of each seeker is of immeasurable human import; indeed, the search itself, apart from any possible formulation of thought and understanding resulting there-from, is perhaps the one act that indicates an individual's "human-ness." The quest for, and possibly the acquisition of this state-of-being termed "self-knowledge," may be effectively presented in a sport-oriented setting. Sport provides a framework in which the challenges are concrete, the goals are discernible, and the evaluations of one's merits are easily made and quickly understood. Within this framework of little ambivalence, the athlete in-
the only exception—it is of extreme importance in elucidating many of the themes of the works presented in this study. Without doubt, Updike finds more and deeper meaning in sport—even to the extent of the religious and philosophical—than does Roth; Updike uses it much more extensively, touching upon basketball, swimming, golf, tennis, field hockey, football, baseball, pool, skiing, soccer, and perhaps most importantly, running. Through them, he covers an amazing amount of literary territory, including most of the themes this study has attempted to examine. Yet Roth is by no means particularly exclusive or narrow in his choice of sport situations; he presents experiences in tennis, basketball, table tennis, swimming, track and field, softball, and baseball. Rather than visualizing the sport moment as an occasion or expression of ultimate searching, however, he sees it as an encounter, whether competitive or not, that clarifies the condition of the routine present. Thus, Neil's running does not take on the nature of fearful flight or spiritual quest, as does Rabbit's; instead, his intent is to enjoy the deliciousness of the day in its many and various manifestations: his fatigue, the rush against time, and the feel of the flesh of his lover when his run is finished. Updike, of course, also uses sport in this sense of defining the present lives of his characters.
The ultimate significance of what John Updike and Philip Roth have demonstrated regarding the function of sport in the literary context will not be determined fully until their work is considered in totality. At the present, however, it appears certain that their rather frequent usage of sport adds considerable insight into its potential meanings to the artist.
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evitably comes to a realization of his powers and weaknesses: where he is brave, where he is honest, where he has perseverance, where he is strong, where he has skill, and, of course, where he lacks these qualities. Sport is a structure usually fraught with high emotion, tension, and concern; and in a sport encounter, the participant is so deeply involved that he "loses himself" and drops the mask that often covers his real self in day-to-day living. Concealment of one's true nature in sport is hardly possible, and the athlete is bared to his essential being; he is revealed, to a greater or lesser degree, to other men, but, more importantly, he is made fully visible to himself. Thus, sport, as a situation that calls forth one's powers of self-sufficiency, self-reliance, and self-control, acts as a catalyst toward understanding oneself. Its automatic connections with the themes of inner-resourcefulness and accomplishment in spite of fear—themes which run through all literatures—are easily noted; and the presentation of such themes in a work associated with sport is highly relevant to the experience of many persons. Sport, does not, of course, provide answers to all questions an individual asks about himself and his life; it gives indications and insights toward truth and self-knowledge, perhaps, but because it is so very temporal, so bound to a specific time and place, its utility in answering ultimate
questions about man's destiny and his relationship to God is indeed limited; nonetheless, insofar as the individual has the interest and the capacity to learn about what mysteries and secrets sport possesses relative to his particular involvement in it, it is most surely a way of seeing and knowing.

The themes of the non-permanence of human things and events and the constant transitions that characterize our lives are significant in a philosophical-literary sense, and they are given substance through illustration in sport. Sport stands as a manifestation and glorification of the present, but it is, in fact, a fragile fragment of time. To be sure, each sporting occurrence possesses a solidity and an absolute finality of its own, in that the conclusion of a competition signifies completeness. But the event can never again take place; there can be no real replaying of what has transpired, no matter how momentous or how insignificant. It exists as art that has no power to sustain itself into a future, even though the players may lose themselves in its overwhelming projection of the "Now." The sport event lives only in its own time, that is, as it is being experienced. One's memory can hold it for a while, and his body can retain its muscle-sense, or kinesthesis, of accomplished, skillful movements; but both memory and muscle-sense are only shadowy records of the actuality of past time, and
even they gradually erode. The powers of strength, grace, and endurance eventually fall away, and the reality of past events, long held in one's thoughts, fades with time's passing.

In contrast to the idea that sport exemplifies non-permanence is its possible use in literature as a "remembrance of things past" for the adult world; to the adult looking back to his youth, sport may be associated with feelings of joy and exhilaration and with a type of simplicity that is perhaps no longer a part of his life. He may recall his experiences in sports as being filled with meaning and satisfaction, as opposed to the confusion, doubt, and lack of true purpose which might characterize much of his adult life, regardless of occupation and social situation. He might recall how, as a child, he viewed sport as a realm of certainty, clear responsibility, and, hopefully, even glory; if his adult life has too little to sustain him in a similar fashion, it follows that his reveries on his early years, particularly as they involve sport, will be both satisfying and painful. All such recollections of one's youth do not, of course, necessarily relate to a period of sheer happiness in sports; some adults remember most strongly a childhood filled with rejection, frustration, and general misery; and lack of athletic success, especially for boys, is one important indicator
that acceptance by others, or even by oneself, may have been painful or that it did not occur at all for a particular individual. In literature, as in life, the statement, "He was not good at games," says a great deal toward the description of a character. Assuming, however, that one's experience in sports has been essentially positive, those activities which made him happy while growing up often provide him with a source of solidarity and continuity throughout his life. In his world of change, the adult poignantly observes others play, or continues to play himself, the same sports, played in the same way, accompanied by familiar terminology, and according to the same general rules that he knew while young. The near-ritualistic significance of one's continuing involvement in the recurring patterns of sport becomes greatly magnified when it occurs in a culture that experiences constant transitions and provides relatively little social tradition. As Arnold Beisser says,

In sports, the American boy has a chance to find an activity in which there is continuity between boyhood and adulthood. . . .

In the confusion of obscure identities, sports occupy a unique position. They are a socially accepted activity cutting across lines of development and of social class. They provide an activity suitable to nearly all ages. Baseball can be a peak interest to an eight-year old Little Leaguer, a turbulent adolescent, an adult fan, or a professional player. It is a continuous interest and activity which any American can grasp, whatever his occupation
or class or background. From early ages the coaches emphasize the masculinity of sports, and they themselves are easy identification figures. Sports provide familiar experiences within the anonymity of change. They provide continuity in a series of otherwise disturbing discontinuities in our cultural conditioning.

The nature of man's dreams and fantasies and the possible interpretations that might be attached to them have long been the subjects of scientific investigation and artistic presentation; and, in their searches, both scientist and artist might well consider the world of sport, which is frequently the focus of such dreams and fantasies. Those persons who have experienced sport deeply and who have found the highly emotional, personal feelings of worth and success in their participation return many times to the sport situation in the flights of their imaginations. Indeed, sport is particularly suited for being the substance of fantasy because of its peculiar separation from the "real world"; as sport theorists have usually noted, sport exists in a world of its own, real enough in its own right, but not related in many ways to the demands of day-to-day existence. It takes only a shift of attention and a focus of the imagination for one to escape from the mundane quality of his routinely-organized life and to project himself into a

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sport environment where he is regarded by everyone as heroic, skillful, and valuable. Such dream-wishes are common to both the athlete still in competition and the former athlete who would insert himself into a situation in which real recognition, similar to that which he might have known while younger and still competing, is possible. Even the individual who has found only the barest minimum of success in sport might occasionally engage in reveries that transform him into a "new man"; this last type of person may be most prone to eradicate his dissatisfaction with his performance by visualizing himself as radically improved, in an athletic sense. Regardless of the background of each "dreamer," however, he has much in common with others insofar as the nature of his thought is concerned. Basically, each "dreamer" sees his potential as generally enlarged and his accomplishments expanded to the point where perhaps even the whole world applauds; no feat is too difficult for him, no challenge is too severe, and a sublime obliviousness to the limitations of one's actual, meager powers prevails. Most surely, this glorification of the self, unrealistic as it may be, with only oneself as a witness, is a matter of exceptional significance in both our lives and our literature.

Insofar as the physical aspects of one's person determine much of what he is, at least "outwardly," they
are of genuine thematic value to the writer. Man's physicality, having been largely ignored for centuries because of philosophical and religious concepts that placed ultimate emphasis on the mind and the soul, is now frequently considered by artists to be of essential importance in their attempts to understand and portray the totality, the completeness of man. The "things of the body"—the physical images of man in the world—are often recognized as having a crucial influence on one's psychological make-up, on his understanding and acceptance of himself and others, on his aesthetic interpretations, and on his potential for self-expression; further, man's first and most intimate knowledge of the world is developed only through his elemental movements and touchings in it, and, as he grows, his body, practically a sense organ of its own, continues to reveal the world to him, and him to the world, in its special mysterious ways. Human physicality is, of course, a matter of great consequence in sport. The qualities of strength, skill, and endurance assume much importance because the sportsman acts in a situation in which success in dependent upon wholeness of mind and body, not merely the imposition of the powers of the intellect upon objects and other persons. The significance of physical prowess—which, in a mechanized world, is sometimes forgotten—is here made large; man's animal energy and ability mean something and
are again to be reckoned with. The primacy of the body readily relates to concepts of masculinity and, by natural extension, to sexuality; and it is in the sport context that one may find a situation for the development and demonstration of the characteristics that the cultural heritage has traditionally defined as "masculine." This is particularly relevant in contemporary society, in which there has been a gradual blurring of once-distinct male-female roles.

A discussion of sport as a prominent indicator of man's physicality and of its place in literature would hardly be complete without a consideration of sport's potential function as a catharsis for modern man. It is in sport that the individual may freely give vent to his feelings, constrained only by the minimal repression called for in the rules. The player empties himself, at least temporarily, of tension, anxiety, and frustration, even though the sport context is most certainly productive, in its own way, of these very same states of mind. Even the participant who lacks ability may find a sense of overwhelming release and relief through his involvement with the basic movements and simple joys of sport if he is not forced to feel clumsy and foolish by his fellow players. The cathartic effect may be such that the player is so drained, emotionally and physically, that he is almost a new person; some athletes leave the sport
encounter, in which they have competed to the utmost, feeling somehow cleansed, or purified, because of the pain, fatigue, and perhaps fear, which they have willingly elected to experience. This type of performer undoubtedly regards his sport as eminently worthy of his most sincere endeavors, and his efforts may be aimed toward "suffering" as he encloses himself in the ideal form that his sport is to him. Whether this near-ascetic "purification through pain" indicates a feeling of unworthiness or feelings of guilt that must somehow be expiated is beyond the scope of this investigation, but its semi-religious connotations have significant meaning for both the sportsman and the writer.

Sport might occasionally provide a context in which a type of transcendent experience is possible; obviously, such an event is of great significance to the artist attempting to portray the conditions and truths of human existence. The athlete who is genuinely, completely "in touch" with himself might find through intense pain, or through total personal harmony, or through sudden insight into the sheer beauty that may infuse his sport involvement, that he sees or senses the presence of divinity in or behind or beyond the world. In this writer's view, such occurrences are extremely rare, but they apparently do happen. Such transcendent experience does not, of course, necessarily answer any or all of one's questions...
SPORT AND THE FICTION OF
JOHN UPDIKE AND PHILIP ROTH

DISSERTATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate
School of The Ohio State University

By

Robert William Lewis, B.S. in Ed., M.A.

* * * * *

The Ohio State University
1973

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about his spirituality, but its significance as a glimpse into infinity is undeniable.

An additional aspect of sport that displays possible religious meanings is its ongoing presentation of the possibilities of newness, or rebirth, and of regeneration. Because each game occurrence is whole in itself and is only partially related to prior successes and failures, it offers an infinite number of fresh beginnings. New hope and new faith characterize each attempt to start again; each play or strategy is new as it is employed, each game is new, and perhaps most significantly, each season is new. The past may be left to its own death; the future, with its unplayed games and its honors to be bestowed, moves the athlete in each present moment and calls him to engage himself in the previously unsearched, unperceived, and unlived. Sport thus stands as a positive life force; its continual, almost mythical, cycle of Newness, Preparation, Contest, Outcome, and, finally, Newness again indicates that, at least in its own minute world, there is no death.

Just as sport may be closely associated with all of the aforementioned themes, and with many additional ones as well, it may be used symbolically to represent them; further, sport may be used symbolically to indicate a full range of values and attitudes and even to demonstrate such things as one's life-style and philosophical orientation.
Both sport, as a complex, regulated, cohesive structure, and the individual athlete, alone yet often a vital member of a unified group, can assume proportions greater than their own and stand for man's drives for competition, aggression, and violence. Sport and the individual athlete may symbolize, among other things, the Good, the True, the Honest, the Ideal, the Foolish, the Cruel, and the Deceptive; and they may also symbolize the procedures of a "rite of passage"; this latter point is of particular importance in an industrial society, which generally does not provide its youth with a physically arduous preparation for adulthood, or with a ceremonious initiation into the adult world.

It is certain that the preceding discussion of the potential connections between sport and literature is by no means complete and that several of the themes are in conflict or appear inconsistent with other themes. This latter fact should, of course, in no way detract from the significance of any point-of-view because of the wide range of connotations that might be attached to the sport experience. Each participant's and each writer's perceptions will seldom be exactly alike, and this dissimilarity must be expected to produce widely-differing conceptions about the meaning of sport.

The contention of this writer is that many of the aforementioned themes are not only of potential value to
the author, but that they are also of actual value to a number of contemporary authors who consider sport. In support of this belief, he presents several works of John Updike and Philip Roth, two contemporary American writers who have utilized repeatedly the context of sport in their fictional works to clarify the conditions of living in the twentieth-century. Both writers are evidently well-versed in the language and manner of sport and obviously view it as a situation replete with various inherent meanings and symbolic potential. Both Updike and Roth appear to visualize sport as a life-experience of such import that it may be taken to define characters, interpersonal relationships, and even the quality of one's manner of living. It is likely that Updike and Roth recognize sport, with all its shades and nuances of simplicity and complexity, certainty and doubt, and past and present, as a particularly appropriate symbol for the encounters, both personal and interpersonal, and the dilemmas faced by modern man.

This writer believes that the insights into sport, and the understandings of how sport might function in a work of literature, possessed by Updike and Roth are highly significant and that they should be studied in depth, especially because the motif of sport occurs repeatedly in the writing of both men. The purpose of this study, therefore, is to examine a number of the sport-
related fictional works of these two authors and to
explicate the ways in which the themes presented in
the preceding discussion are utilized in their literature.

The format of the study is a chronological con­
sideration of the relevant fiction of, first, John Updike,
and second, Philip Roth. The major emphasis of the
dissertation is upon direct utilization of the literature,
letting each novel or story speak for itself insofar as
sport functions in it; attention is also given, however,
to critical sources which help to interpret the writing.
A concluding chapter which considers the similarities
and differences in each writer's approaches to sport
is intended to give an overall comprehensiveness to the
study.
CHAPTER II

THE SPORT-RELATED FICTION OF JOHN UPDIKE

NOVELS:

RABBIT, RUN, 1960

THE CENTAUR, 1963

COUPLES, 1968

RABBIT REDUX, 1971

STORIES:

"ACE IN THE HOLE," 1955

"INTERCESSION," 1958

"IN FOOTBALL SEASON," 1962

"RESCUE," 1965

"THE SLUMP," 1968

"THE PRO," 1966

28
RABBIT, RUN.

Updike's most extensive use of sport in his fiction is seen in *Rabbit, Run*, a novel which establishes the world of Harry "Rabbit" Angstrom, a twenty-six year-old former high school basketball star. Rabbit feels that the responsibilities of family, home, and job are entangling him in an ever-tightening net from which there might eventually be no escape, and that the restrictions in his life make it impossible for him to act in accordance with his somewhat instinctive spiritual perceptions. The novel chronicles his attempts to extricate himself from those circumstances which he regards as binding and his efforts to understand himself in relation to his concept of a divine presence behind the face of his world. Sport functions in the novel to illustrate the significance of Rabbit's athletic past, of which he possesses an almost total recall, to demonstrate the discrepancy between Rabbit's happiness as an athlete and his dismay with the direction his life has taken since those days of glory, and to portray his inner feelings as he briefly involves himself in several sport encounters in the present action of the novel and as he remembers special moments that

were associated with sport in his past.

The dramatic tension of the novel derives from Rabbit's attempts to escape, or run, from the situations he believes are destructive to his freedom. He regards both his job as a demonstrator of a kitchen gadget and his marriage to a rather incompetent and, as he believes, stupid wife as less than his potential indicates he deserves. One particular encounter with his wife, Janice, is simply more than he chooses to bear, and he decides to leave her, even though they have a young son and she is pregnant again. This first "run" is an aborted drive to the South, which he romantically envisions as a land of "orange groves and smoking rivers and barefoot women" (p. 25). Instead of driving all night to the beaches on the Gulf of Mexico, however, he gets only as far as West Virginia, where, confused and afraid, he turns back toward home, Mr. Judge, Pennsylvania. He does not return to Janice, though; rather, he runs to Marty Tothero, his former high school coach, for advice and direction. Tothero, however, only momentarily concerns himself with the crisis in Rabbit's domestic affairs; his "help" to Rabbit consists of taking him to a restaurant, where he introduces him to Ruth Leonard, a prostitute. Rabbit is attracted to Ruth because she appears to have a warmth and gentleness that Janice lacks, and Ruth finds Rabbit appealing because he is somehow different from the other
men she knows. Rabbit moves into Ruth's apartment, and they live together for several weeks.

During this time Rabbit is hardly permitted to forget that he has abandoned his family; the Reverend Jack Eccles, the minister of the church Janice's family attends, periodically plays golf with Rabbit in an attempt to know him better and to persuade him that his place is with his wife. Nothing Eccles says has any real effect until he telephones Rabbit to tell him that Janice is having her baby. At this point, Rabbit runs from Ruth to Janice and soon decides that he should resume his role as husband and father.

After he is seemingly reconciled with Janice, he goes to work as a used-car salesman for her father; the fraudulent nature of the work he must do tugs at his conscience, but he does not run until Janice refuses his selfish sexual advances. Hurt and angry, Rabbit tries to run to Ruth, cannot find her, and spends the night alone in a hotel. When Janice awakes to her second abandonment, she attempts to ease her pain with liquor; in a drunken stupor, she tries to bathe her infant daughter and accidentally drowns her. Rabbit runs back to Janice when he learns of the tragedy, and he is once again received into the larger family circle. The family is unified in its common grief, and no mention is made of placing blame for the baby's death on anyone because
all share it together, to a greater or lesser degree. At the cemetery, however, Rabbit turns to Janice and declares that the guilt is hers; the entire group of mourners is horrified by this unexpected cruelty; and, seeing that they do not understand that his words were intended to clarify truth, not merely to indicate blame, Rabbit turns and runs from them. His run eventually takes him to Ruth, whom he finds pregnant by him and contemptuous of him. She demands that Rabbit choose between her and Janice; otherwise, she and the unborn child will "be dead" to him. Rabbit leaves, confused and indecisive, and as the situation overwhelms him, he puts it aside by gathering himself into a run. And the novel ends.

Rabbit's character is vividly defined by the manner in which he utilizes, and has utilized in the past, his body's physical movements as a means of clarifying and expressing himself, of recalling former honor and joy, of escaping from those situations which are unpleasant to him, and even of reaching out toward what he perceives to be spiritual truth. Rabbit's frequent remembrance of sport-related experiences that occurred in his youth also provides a unique insight into his inner states-of-being and reveals his sensitive awareness of people, places, and events.
Sport is so much a part of Rabbit that his introduction in the novel occurs in its context: on the way home from work, he stops to watch a group of boys playing basketball and realizes how "the kids keep coming, they keep crowding you up" (p. 7). Suddenly, the ball lands at his feet, and he picks it up and shoots toward the basket. "It drops into the circle of the rim, whipping the net with a ladylike whisper. 'Hey!' he shouts in pride" (p. 8). His excitement causes him to push himself into the boys' game:

In a wordless shuffle two boys are delegated to be his. They stand the other four. Though from the start Rabbit handicaps himself by staying ten feet out from the basket, it is still unfair. Nobody bothers to keep score. The surly silence bothers him. The kids call monosyllables to each other but to him they don't dare a word. As the game goes on he can feel them at his legs, getting hot and mad, trying to trip him, but their tongues are still held. He doesn't want this respect, he wants to tell them there's nothing to getting old, it takes nothing. In ten minutes another boy goes to the other side, so it's just Rabbit Angstrom and one kid standing five. This boy, still midget but already diffident with a kind of rangy ease, is the best of the six; he wears a knitted cap with a green pompom well down over his ears and level with his eyebrows, giving his head a cretinous look. He's a natural. The way he moves sideways without taking any steps, gliding on a blessing: you can tell. The way he waits before he moves. With luck he'll become in time a crack athlete in the high school; Rabbit knows the way. You climb up through the little grades and then get to the top and everybody cheers; with the sweat in your eyebrows you can't see very well and the noise swirls around you and lifts you up, and then you're out, not forgotten at first, just out, and it feels good and cool and free. You're out, and sort of melt, and keep lifting, until you become like to these kids just one
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more piece of the sky of adults that hangs over them in the town, a piece that for some queer reason has clouded and visited them. They've not forgotten him; worse, they never heard of him. Yet in his time Rabbit was famous through the county; in basketball in his junior year he set a B-league scoring record that in his senior year he broke with a record that was not broken until four years later, that is, four years ago.

He sinks shots one-handed, two-handed, underhanded, flatfooted, and out of the pivot, jump, and set. Flat and soft the ball lifts. That his touch still lives in his hands elates him. He feels liberated from long gloom. But his body is weighty and his breath grows short. It annoys him, that he gets winded. When the five kids not on his side begin to groan and act lazy, and a kid he accidentally knocks down gets up with a blurred face and walks away, Rabbit quits readily. 'O.K.,' he says. 'The old man's going.'

To the boy on his side, the pompon, he adds, 'So long, ace.' He feels grateful to the boy, who continued to watch him with disinterested admiration after the others grew sullen, and who cheered him on with exclamations: 'God. Great. Gee' (pp. 8-9).

It is immediately apparent that Rabbit is fully conscious of the press of age and of his separation, through the necessity of responsibilities, from the loved game of his youth. His business suit, his cigarette, his twenty-six years, his weight, and his eventual fatigue are potent indicators that he is an alien in this world of alley-basketball; and he knows that, to the boys, he is a trespasser from an unfamiliar time, that his former fame is of no consequence in their lives, and that his intrusion, while it elicits grudging admiration, destroys their interest in the competition. Thus, even though his skill still "lives," basketball is now behind him; but the ability his body has retained is a constant reminder
that his days as an athletic hero were far superior to his current existence, in which he has no truly effective way of reliving the control, confidence, and joy he once knew with regularity.

The implications of Rabbit's having been good "in his time" are that his life may have peaked early, and that the present does not continue to be "his time." His personal dilemma is seen most obviously in his dissatisfaction with both the somewhat inane nature of his job and the unsatisfactory quality of his marriage; both work on the idealistic Rabbit in such a way that he feels trapped and headed toward a life which he knows will be dreadful. In explaining his reason for leaving Janice, he says:

It's the truth. It just felt like the whole business was fetching and hauling, all the time trying to hold this mess together she was making all the time. I don't know, it seemed like I was glued in with a lot of busted toys and empty glasses and television going and meals late and no way of getting out. Then all of a sudden it hit me how easy it was to get out, just walk out, and by damn it was easy (p. 89).

Rabbit's attempts to make a clean break through simple flight from his troubles exemplifies his apparent belief in the power of sheer movement to provide a solution for, or, at least, escape from whatever problems he faces. As an athlete, he had undoubtedly understood the supreme importance of movement in his sport, and it is probable that, as an adult, he expects that such physical expression
will continue to serve him well. Such reliance on fundamental bodily actions as a way out of complication and difficulty indicates both Rabbit's naiveté and his tendency to let his instincts guide him; it also, however, points to Rabbit's positive sense of himself. His excellence in basketball had surely made him acutely aware of the truths of his physical perceptions, and, even though he can no longer engage in his sport in the same manner he did while in high school, he nonetheless still retains an understanding of the peculiar sense of power and the feeling of control that comes when his body asserts itself. Even mere correspondences between Rabbit's inner, gut-level sensations and his conscious feelings and thoughts are significant; for example, shortly after Rabbit has left Janice for the first time, he walks along the street with his "stomach singing" and thinks, "Funny, the world just can't touch you" (p. 92). This willingness to turn to his insides and to his muscles perhaps clarifies his character and his predicament more fully than any other aspect of his make-up.

Rabbit's imagination and remembrance of past events also define who and what he is. To be sure, his imagination and recall are often associated with events and thoughts that have little or no connection with sport; but there are also many instances in which sport is predominant in his vision. The first demonstration of Rabbit's
recollection of bygone days of sport occurs, of course, in the opening section portraying his breaking into the boys' basketball game. A further illustration is presented during Rabbit's first "run" from Janice; as he drives toward the South, he forces himself to think of something pleasant, and he conjures up an image of sport; he "imagines himself about to shoot a long one-hander" (p. 24). (Once again, note the connection between the action of the body and a state-of-mind.) The immediate recall of his sport as a source of comfort indicates the extent to which his fantasies must still include sport and, further, points to his probable continued visualization of himself as a player. The relief that this reverie provides Rabbit, however, is only momentary because, as his thought proceeds, "he feels he's on a cliff, there is an abyss he will fall into when the ball leaves his hands" (p. 24). Thus, even the harmony of physical-mental-emotional aspects is not necessarily adequate to ward off fear, particularly when it is of the "abyss." This passage also might be interpreted to mean that because basketball, Rabbit's most important source of meaning while a youth, has been taken from him by time, there remains only the "abyss" because he has not found another locus of significance to replace it.

After Rabbit has turned back toward home, his thoughts again turn to sport, this time in such a way that
his sense of distinction from others is revealed. This feeling was first indicated during an earlier part of his trip, when he sat alone in a diner in West Virginia: "Somehow, though he can't put his finger on the difference, he is unlike the other customers. They sense it too and look at him with hard eyes... He had thought, he had read, that from shore to shore all America was the same. He wonders, Is it just these people I'm outside, or is it all America?" (p. 31). As he drives home, his tiredness amplifies this feeling by calling to mind the final portion of a basketball game:

He has broken through the barrier of fatigue and come into a calm flat world where nothing matters much. The last quarter of a basketball game used to carry him into this world; you ran not as the crowd thought for the sake of the score but for yourself, in a kind of idleness. There was you and sometimes the ball and then the hole, the high perfect hole with its pretty skirt of net. It was you, just you and that fringed ring, and sometimes it came down right to your lips it seemed and sometimes it stayed away, hard and remote and small. It seemed silly for the crowd to applaud or groan over what you had already felt in your fingers or even in your arms as you braced to shoot or for that matter in your eyes; when he was hot he could see the separate threads wound into the strings looping the hoop. Yet at the start of the night when you came for warm-up and could see all the town clunkers sitting in the back of bleachers elbowing each other and the cheerleaders wisecracking with the racier male teachers, the crowd then seemed right inside you, your liver and lungs and stomach. There was one fat guy used to come who'd get on the floor of Rabbit's stomach and really make it shake. 'Hey, Gunner! Hey, Showboat, shoot! Shoot!' Rabbit remembers him fondly now, to that guy he had been a hero of sorts (p. 35)
Rabbit's inward orientation and sense of separation through personal uniqueness are shown repeatedly throughout the book, but they are perhaps demonstrated most effectively in this passage. The crowd knew nothing of his real thoughts in the final quarter; he was in a different dimension, acting only for his own purposes. In this particular fatigue-induced existence, a peculiar determinism characterized his play: either he was "hot" and possessed a special vision, or he was simply not able to score; and neither he nor the crowd, with their cheers and groans, could alter the sense of success or failure he felt in his body even before he shot. (Again, the pre-eminence of Rabbit's physicality is established; it is especially important to realize that his degree of success is apparently controlled by a physical essence over which he has little, if any, volitional direction.)

In spite of the prevailing impression of alienation between Rabbit and those who watched him play, there was a very real communication that persisted between him and the spectators; during the warm-up, before fatigue over­came him, he was very much aware of who was watching him from the stands and of what was said. Indeed, he absorbed his fans in a physical manner: they "seemed right inside you, your liver and lungs and stomach." There was a mutual exchange, a simultaneous satisfaction of need;
Rabbit gave to the crowd, and they in turn gave much to him: "to that guy he had been a hero of sorts." The ambivalence of Rabbit's position is clear; he was involved in a rather symbiotic relationship with the fans, and yet he existed in a world all his own when he played. It is not certain which he preferred, but the "idleness" of the fatigued state, where "nothing matters much," does seem to have had an extraordinary appeal to him. The association of running with idleness indicates the ambiguity inherent in Rabbit's nature and points to the possibility that his somewhat disparate, confused adult desires to possess and to be free, to find himself and to discern his relationship with others and with God, have part of their roots in his unique conception of his basketball play: that the sport, rather than being an elementary exercise defined in simple terms and experienced accordingly, produced a situation notable for its incongruity. Further, if such complexity exists in basketball, it follows that the difficulties in making sense out of life itself will be great in comparison.

Rabbit's thoughts in this passage also assume special symbolic significance. It appears that he establishes a "triangle" of himself, the ball, and the hole, the implication being that he wishes to view himself as successfully acting with spheres and circles, both of which are symbols of completeness, or perfection. It is
certain that the "hole," one of the major symbols of the novel, indicates both Rabbit's sexual and spiritual concerns. With regard to sexuality, it is important to recognize the contrast between his days as a basketball player, when he was usually able to fill the hole with the ball and thereby achieve fulfillment, and his marriage to Janice, which is most unsatisfying, especially in its sexual aspects, to him. In essence, the hole develops into a void as he grows older. According to one critical evaluation of Rabbit's predicament, "Now that Rabbit is too old for basketball triumphs, successful sexual games provide his sole link with those times when he felt much bigger."8 His need to sustain this feeling of success is what drives him from Janice and eventually to Ruth.

The "hole" of Rabbit's spiritual experience and feeling is first seen as he ponders a lighted church window one night: "This circle of red and purple and gold seems in the city night a hole punched in reality to show the abstract brilliance burning underneath. He feels gratitude to the builders of this ornament" (p. 69). For all his frailties and apparent failures, Rabbit is nonetheless deeply concerned with finding the existence

of value behind the world's everyday appearance; his sense of spiritual significance is largely instinctive and results essentially from his special attuning to his perceptions. The naturalness of his quest is tinged with an excess of romanticism and self-esteem, but this is perhaps to be expected in view of the fact that Rabbit is so uniquely in touch with himself.

Sport, sexuality, and spirituality—certainly the major aspects of Rabbit's life—do not stand independently in him but, rather, have many interconnections in his conception of himself and in his search for significant meaning. Indeed, sport, with its intrinsic appeal to the physical appetites of the adolescent Rabbit, must surely have produced in him a keener awareness of and sensitivity to his body's awakening to the appeal of its sexuality; and because his physical completeness and competency, both athletically and sexually, have reached such high levels, he is undoubtedly all the more aware of his spiritual hunger and incompleteness. The sense of Rabbit's growth is a movement from the grace he showed as an athlete to the Grace he needs to receive regardless of the good works he might do; it is a movement from sport, as an experience in time, to faith, as a condition in timelessness.

Rabbit's decision to return to Marty Tothero, his old coach, instead of back to Janice is proof of his
abiding faith in the world of sport as a place of comfort. Even the fact that Tothero, no longer a coach, is alleged to have been involved in illegal business dealings in town does not dissuade Rabbit from seeking his help. It is almost dawn when he arrives at the Sunshine Athletic Association, where Tothero is living; Rabbit waits in his car for Tothero to come out, and, as he sits, he gazes "across the steering wheel and through the windshield into the sky's flat fresh blue. Today is Saturday, and the sky has that broad bright blunt Saturday quality Rabbit remembers from boyhood when the sky of a Saturday morning was the blank scoreboard of a long game about to begin" (p. 37). Here, even nature itself takes on an image of sport as Rabbit watches the new day unfold before him. The "blank scoreboard" he perceives obviously indicates that a new beginning is available to him. In many ways, the "game" that is his future will be radically different from anything that he experienced on the basketball court; yet it should also be understood that the fresh start he undertakes toward self-discovery is essentially little more than a natural progression from the time when he was an athlete and needed to demonstrate courage, harmony, and understanding in his play.

The reunion with Tothero both pleases and displeases Rabbit. His old coach hardly resembles the man he once was, but his greeting to Rabbit could not be
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better: "Harry, the great Harry Angstrom"(p. 38). With those few words, the bond that ideally holds coach and athlete together is quickly re-established. Both appear to need one another: Rabbit needs the maturity of Tothero's experience and advice, and Tothero needs to feel again the sense of "fatherhood" associated with coaching; as he tells Rabbit, "All those years, all those years, all those boys, they pass through your hands and into the blue"(p. 44). Tothero, however, proves generally incapable of providing Rabbit, one of his few boys who does come back, with the moral guidance and firmness he had undoubtedly given him as a coach; even though his initial response to hearing that Rabbit has left Janice is, "I don't believe it. I don't believe that my greatest boy would turn into such a monster"(p. 40), he quickly abandons considering Rabbit's duty and introduces him to Ruth. Tothero thus substitutes immediate pleasures for the rigors of discipline which he must have expected of himself and his players when he was coaching. The total impact of Tothero upon Rabbit is one of tremendous release; he "feels freedom like oxygen everywhere around him"(p. 45)

Tothero is so elated because Rabbit has placed confidence in him again that he excitedly introduces him to the other members of the Sunshine Athletic Association: "Fred, this is my finest boy, Harry Angstrom,
you probably remember his name from the papers, he twice set a county record, in 1950 and then he broke it in 1951, a wonderful achievement" (p. 46). Rabbit quickly realizes that Tothero is regarded as something of a fool by the others and understands that Tothero no longer enjoys any of the renown and respect he once knew as a coach; but Rabbit is also immensely pleased at Tothero's continuing remembrance of his athletic feats. To Tothero, Rabbit's past still has significance, and his recall of those record-breaking years is so complete that he expects as a matter of course that others will remember his boy from the newspaper accounts of his games, now eight years old.

Tothero introduces Rabbit to Ruth as simply his "finest athlete." No mention is made of Rabbit's present life; it is as if the years between the time he was a player and his current status had never passed, as if those years away from sport were of only incidental consequence. Rabbit also adds to this obliteration of time as he defends Tothero against a sudden sarcastic remark; he says, "He's not a bum, he's my old coach" (p. 50). Rabbit's awareness of the sense of protection that ideally exists between coach and athlete is echoed by Tothero as he, in a flash of eloquence, speaks for the work he had once loved to do:
'The coach,' he says, 'the coach is concerned with developing the three tools we are given in life, the head, the body, and the heart.'

'One, The head. Strategy. Most boys come to a basketball coach from alley games and have no conception of the, of the elegance of the game played on a court with two baskets. Won't you bear me out, Harry?'

'Yea, sure. Just yesterday--'

'Second--let me finish, Harry, and then you can talk--second, the body. Work the boys into condition. Make their legs hard,' . . . 'Hard. Run, run, run. Run every minute their feet are on the floor. You can't run enough. Thirdly . . . the heart. And here the good coach, which I . . . certainly tried to be and some say was, has his most solemn opportunity. Give the boys the will to achieve. I've always liked that better than the will to win, for there can be achievement even in defeat. Make them feel the, yes, I think the work is good, the sacredness of achievement, in the form of giving our best.' . . . 'A boy who has had his heart enlarged by an inspiring coach,' he concludes, 'can never become, in the deepest sense, a failure in the greater game of life' (pp. 54-55).

His statement of the ideals that the properly-coached athlete attains makes his and Rabbit's situations appear all the more ironic because it is here obvious how high the expectations were and how far both are from reaching them. To be sure, Rabbit's heart has been "enlarged," but the orientation of its growth is somewhat suspect. Tothero gave an early indication of his concern when he casually referred to Rabbit as a "monster," but he only momentarily bothered himself with it. Rabbit's peculiar ability to cast aside the burdens of responsibility is of much graver significance than Tothero gives it, however; and one of the major questions his thoughts
and actions pose is whether he has, in fact, become "a failure in the greater game of life." Toothero believes that successful living is imminent for his athletes, and Rabbit, with his magnificent self-confidence and trust in the essential validity of his intuitions, appears to prove him right; yet Rabbit's inability or unwillingness to accept the barriers and restrictions that confound him also indicates more than a supreme honesty and refusal to compromise: it points to a serious flaw in his character that makes it possible for him to abandon the community of men whenever he feels its "net" closing in on him. In human terms, of course, such action is tragic. Whether Rabbit's excellence in basketball might have directly influenced him toward simple escape from the traps he thinks he sees is doubtful, but, as stated above, the parallels of reliance on movement are readily apparent; and, further, the sense of distinction gained from being a superb performer might have given him a belief in his aloofness from the patterns that ordinary men follow.

An additional aspect of Rabbit's character that appears as he and Toothero reminisce over long-past games is his idealism. Harry mentions, "I never fouled," and Toothero recalls, "That's right, you never fouled. Harry was always the idealist" (p. 56). Such idealism is
closely related to Rabbit's appreciation of the perfection, and consequent power, which sometimes informed his play:

... we get about fifteen points up right away and I just take it easy. And there are just a couple dozen people sitting up on the stage and the game isn't a league game so nothing matters much, and I get this funny feeling I can do anything, just drifting around, passing the ball, and all of a sudden I know, you see, I know I can do anything. The second half I take maybe just ten shots, and everyone goes right in, not just bounces in, but doesn't touch the rim, like I'm dropping stones down a well. And these farmers running up and down getting up a sweat, they didn't have more than two substitutes, but we're not in their league either, so it doesn't matter to them, and the one ref just leans over against the edge of the stage talking to their coach. Oriole High. Yeah, and then afterwards their coach comes down into the locker room where both teams are changing and gets a jug of cider out of a locker and we all passed it around. Don't you remember? It puzzles him, yet makes him want to laugh, that he can't make the others feel what was so special (p. 58).

It is this combination of idealism, perfection, and power that drives Rabbit to seek the reconstruction of a similar condition in his present life; he feels that he must regain what he once had, and it is because of such intense need that he literally flees from what he sees as the mediocrity and even ridiculousness of his life.

The spiritual nature of Rabbit's flight to find himself is seen largely through his encounters with the Reverend Jack Eccles, the individual who most overtly tries to convince Rabbit to return to Janice. Eccles cannot understand Rabbit's erratic, irresponsible behavior, and he asks him why he considers himself to be
so "exceptional" when many other young couples routinely face the "muddle" of their relationship. Rabbit answers, "You don't think I can tell you but I will. I once played a game real well. I really did. And after you're first-rate at something, no matter what, it kind of takes the kick out of being second-rate. And that little thing Janice and I had going, boy it was really something else" (p. 90). Eccles feels that it is his duty to resolve the crisis in the Angstrom marriage, and his invitation to Rabbit to join him in playing golf is an obvious step toward this end. The context of golf apparently provides neutral ground for both players because neither is particularly adept at the game; in spite of the mutual inability to play well, however, a profound difference in the nature of each player's involvement is observed: "Down in the pagan groves and green alleys of the course Eccles is transformed. Brainless gaiety animates him. He laughs and swings and clucks and calls" (p. 109). Such exuberance and joy in golf points toward his own religious quandry: his inability to do the work of his calling with genuine fervor because he has not really made the leap of faith from common-sense and rationality to boundless belief. Instead, his real enthusiasm is reserved for the challenging, but infinitely safer, experience of golf. Golf provides no such feelings of happiness for Rabbit; indeed,
his performance shames and maddens him. He tries too hard, forces his shots, and fails miserably. His over-riding expectations of perfection in his efforts even cause him to lose the ball: "Somehow Rabbit can't tear his attention from where the ball should have gone, the little ideal napkin of green pinked with a pretty flag. His eyes can't keep with where it did go" (p. 109). His play is also hampered by all the outside pressures that acquire symbolic proportions:

Nightmare is the word. In waking life only animate things slither and jerk for him this way. He's always had a touch with objects. His unreal hacking dazes his brain; half-hypnotized, it plays tricks whose strangeness dawns on him slowly. In his head he talks to the clubs as if they're women. The irons, light and thin yet somehow treacherous in his hands, are Janice. Come on, you dope, be calm; here we go, easy. When the slotted club face gouges the dirt behind the ball and the shock jolts up his arms to his shoulders his thought is that Janice has struck him. . . . with the woods the 'she' is Ruth. Holding a three wood, absorbed in its heavy reddish head and grass-stained face and white stripe prettily along the edge, he thinks O.K. if you're so smart and clenches and swirls. Ahg! when she tumbled so easily, to balk this! The mouth of torn grass and the ball runs, hops and hops, hides in a bush; white tail. And when he walks there, the bush is damn somebody, his mother; he lifts the huffy branches like shirts, in a fury of shame but with care not to break any, and these branches bother his legs while he tries to pour his will down into the hard irreducible pellet that is not really himself yet in a way is; just the way it sits there in the center of everything. As the seven iron chops down please Janice just once awkwardness spiders at his elbows and the ball as he stares with bitten elbows hooks with dismal slowness into more sad scruff further on, the khaki color of Texas. 'Oh you moron go home.'
Home is the hole, and above, in the scheme of the unhappy vision that frets his conscious attention with an almost optical overlay of presences, the mild gray rain sky is his grandfather waiting upstairs so that Harry will not be a Fosnacht.

And, now at the corners, now at the center of this striving dream, Eccles flits in his grubby shirt like a white flag of forgiveness, crying encouragement, fluttering from the green to guide him home.

The greens, still dead from the winter, are salted with a dry dirt, fertilizer? The ball slips along making bits of grit jump. 'Don't stab your putts,' Eccles says. 'A little easy swing, arms stiff. Distance is more important than aim on the first putt. Try again.' He kicks the ball back. It took Harry about twelve to get up here on the fourth green, but this smug assumption that his strokes are past counting irritates him. Come on, sweet, he pleads with his wife, there's the hole, big as a bucket. Everything is all right.

But no, she has to stab in a panicked way; what was she afraid of? Too much, the ball goes maybe five feet past. Walking toward Eccles, he says, 'You never did tell me how Janice is.'

'Janice?' Eccles with an effort drags his attention up from the game. He is absolutely in love with winning; he is eating me up, Harry thinks(pp. 110-11).

Rabbit is obviously unable to escape into the world of pure sport, in which matters apart from the game itself mean nothing. Rather, all the conflicts and frustrations which he faces are centralized in his play on the golf course. The subjective influences of family and love destroy his ability to handle the "objects" of the sport, and he is consequently unable to propel the ball, perhaps "himself," toward the hole, or "home." Rabbit's acute inner turmoil is thus made manifest in inferior play; such correspondence between an interior state-of-consciousness and a quality of sport endeavor has been
pointed to in other instances. In this case, however, Rabbit does not detach himself from external matters, as he so often did in basketball, and does not permit his "touch" to assert its natural powers.

The individual expression and experience inherent in the game of golf make it especially useful to demonstrate Rabbit's wrestling with questions of faith. While it appears that much of his spiritual feeling might be romantic, it is nonetheless indeed genuine and real to him; his instinctive sense of divinity in his world has helped him to perceive that "if there is this floor there is a ceiling, that the true space in which we live is upward space" (p. 96). Such understanding differentiates him from Eccles, as evidenced in their continued play of golf:

Eccles sinks his. The ball wobbles up and with a glottal rattle bobbles in. The minister looks up with the light of triumph in his eyes. "Harry," he asks, sweetly yet boldly, "why have you left her? You're obviously deeply involved with her."

"I told ya. There was this thing that wasn't there."

"What thing? Have you ever seen it? Are you sure it exists?"

Harry's two-foot putt dribbles short and he picks up the ball with trembling fingers. "Well if you're not sure it exists don't ask me. It's right up your alley. If you don't know nobody does."

"No," Eccles cries in the same strained voice in which he told his wife to keep her heart open for Grace. 'Christianity isn't looking for a rainbow. If it were what you think it is we'd pass out opium at services. We're trying to serve God, not be God.'

They pick up their bags and walk the way a wooden arrow tells them.
Eccles goes on, explanatorily, 'This was all settled centuries ago, in the heresies of the early Church.'

'I tell you, I know what it is.'

'What is it? What is it? Is it hard or soft? Harry. Is it blue? Is it red? Does it have polka dots?'

It hits Rabbit depressingly that he really wants to be told. Underneath all this I-know-more-about-it-than-you-heresies-of-the-early-Church business he really wants to be told about it, wants to be told that it is there, that he's not lying to all those people every Sunday. As if it's not enough to be trying to get some sense out of this frigging game, you have to carry around this madman trying to swallow your soul. The hot strap of the bag gnaws his shoulder.

'The truth is,' Eccles tells him with womanish excitement, in a voice agonized by embarrassment, 'you're monstrously selfish. You're a coward. You don't care about right or wrong; you worship nothing except your own worst instincts.'

They reach the tee, a platform of turf beside a hunch-backed fruit tree offering fists of taut pale buds. 'I better go first,' Rabbit says. 'Till you calm down.' His heart is hushed, held in mid-beat, by anger. He doesn't care about anything except getting out of this mess. In avoiding looking at Eccles he looks at the ball, which sits high on the tee and already seems free of the ground. Very simply he brings the clubhead around his shoulder into it. The sound has a hollowness, a singleness he hasn't heard before. His arms force his head up and his ball is hung way out, lunarly pale against the beautiful black blue of storm clouds, his grandfather's color stretched dense across the east. It recedes along a line straight as a ruler-edge. Stricken; sphere, star, speck. It hesitates, and Rabbit thinks it will die, but he's fooled, for the ball makes this hesitation the ground of a final leap, with a kind of visible sob takes a last bite of space before vanishing in falling. 'That's it!' he cries and, turning to Eccles with a smile of aggrandizement, repeats, 'That's it' (pp. 112-13).

When pushed to explain the elements of the intangible truth which he knows, Rabbit responds with a motion of supreme
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skill. The superb tee shot is in perfect congruence with the unwordable things of the spirit, and it speaks for everything he wants to say. Thus, Rabbit, whose body has often provided him with significant personal experience, locates in his physicality a manner of expression that permits him to demonstrate, rather than to articulate ineffectively that which he feels to be real: that "somewhere behind all this there's something that wants me to find it" (p. 107). The quality of Rabbit's statement through golf touches Eccles deeply; most certainly, he is aware of Rabbit's unique gift of perception and desires that they continue to play together as much for his own benefit as for anything that Rabbit might gain.

Golf, especially insofar as it affects Eccles, becomes a microcosm of the existential condition; the game appears as a desperate, yet absurd, "quest" which makes possible an infinite number of new beginnings.

Seated on the bench he feels an adolescent compulsion to pray but instead peers across the valley at the pale green fragments of the golf course where he would like to be, with Harry. He lied somewhat to Mrs. Angstrom. Harry does not play golf better than he. He seems to have trouble in making the club part of himself, to be tense with the fear that this stick of steel will betray him. Between Harry's alternately fine and terrible shots and his own consistent weakness there is a rough equality that makes each match unpredictable. Eccles has found other partners either better or worse than he; only Harry is both, and only Harry gives the game a desperate
gaiety, as if they are together engaged in an impossible, startling, bottomless quest set by a benevolent but absurd lord, a quest whose humiliations sting them almost to tears but one that is renewed at each tee, in a fresh flood of green. And for Eccles there is an additional hope, a secret determination to trounce Harry. He feels that the thing that makes Harry unsteady, that makes him unable to repeat his beautiful effortless swing every time, is the thing at the root of all the problems that he has created; and that by beating him decisively he, Eccles, will get on top of this weakness, this flaw, and hence solve the problems. In the meantime there is the pleasure of hearing Harry now and then cry, 'Yes, yes,' or 'That's the one!' Their rapport at moments attains for Eccles a pitch of pleasure, a harmless ecstasy, that makes the world with its endless circumstantiality seem remote and spherical and green (p. 141).

In this atmosphere of sublime ridiculousness, Eccles must be particularly aware of the "fresh flood of green" at each tee because it is probably as close to spiritual rebirth that he, who must continually preach about it, has come. Rabbit, in spite of his erratic play, does, of course, occasionally succeed in getting through to the divine immanance he senses "behind all this."

Eccles' attempts to do what he thinks is his pastoral duty in unifying the Angstrom family cause him to go to Rabbit's mother, from whom he learns that Rabbit's antipathy for work and responsibility has not always been characteristic of him. It is sport which illustrates this:

People now say how lazy Hassy is, but he's not. He never was. When you'd be proud of his basketball in high school, you know, people would say, 'Yes well he's so tall, it's easy for him.' But they didn't know how hard he had worked at that. Out back every evening banging the ball way past dark; you wondered how he could see (p. 136).
Such meaningful work as he once had, however, is no longer viably available to him, and because he has little concern for much of the remainder of the secular world, he finds himself in many ways an outsider.

A large portion of what genuinely successful human relationships Rabbit has had in the past and continues to have in the present are infused with the influence of sport. His sensitivity to the preciousness of sexuality, as pointed to previously, is likely a direct outgrowth of his understanding through athletics that the body is good and that its instinctive drives are to be valued, not rejected or viewed as degrading; it is for this reason that, even though selfishness sometimes taints his sexual experience, his basic orientation in love-making is to recognize and appreciate the special, personal qualities of each of his sexual partners; he seeks communication as much as mere gratification.

It is a sport context which gives Rabbit a unique insight into his feeling for Ruth:

They have gone on the afternoon of this Memorial Day to the public swimming pool in West Brewer. She was self-conscious about getting into a bathing suit but in fact she looks great, up to her thighs in turquoise water and soaked licks of red hair sneaking out of her bathing cap. She swims easily, her big legs kicking slowly and the water flowing in bubbling transparence over her shoulders and her clean arms lifting and her back and bottom shimmering black under the jiggled green. Sometimes, when she stops and floats a moment, putting her face down in the water in a motion that quickens his heart with its
slight danger, her bottom of its own buoyance floats up and breaks the surface—nothing much, just a round black island glistening there, a clear image suddenly in the water wavering like a blooey television set, but the solid sight swells his heart with pride, makes him harden all over with a chill clench of ownership. His, she is his, he knows her as well as the water, like the water has been everywhere on her body. . . . The air sparkles with the scent of chlorine. He rejoices in how clean she feels: clean, clean. What is it? Nothing touching you that is not yourself. Her in water, him in grass and air. Her head, bobbing like a hollow ball, makes a face at him. Himself, he is not a water animal. Wet is cold to him. Having got wet, he prefers to sit on the tile edge dangling his feet and imagining that high-school girls behind him are admiring the muscle-play of his broad back(p. 120).

He has never turned away from her because of her plainness—indeed, her lack of superficial beauty and pretension must have appealed to him from the beginning of their involvement with each other—and, at the pool, where all plainness must be magnified by the water, he sees only cleanliness in her. The earth's elemental forms—in this instance water, grass, and air—encompass them; and as he watches her move through the water, it appears that the peace and joy are impenetrable. He does not join her in swimming, however, and his failure to share in the experience itself is perhaps an early indication of their ultimate separation.

Two of the other valued and remembered interpersonal relationships Rabbit has known have also occurred in sport situations. He found adolescent love in the hours following his basketball games:
Mary Ann. Tired and stiff and tough somehow after a game he would find her hanging on the front steps under the school motto and they would walk across mulching wet leaves through white November fog to his father's car and drive to get the heater warmed and park. Her body a branched tree of warm nests yet always this touch of timidity, as if she wasn't sure but he was much bigger, a winner. He came to her as a winner and that was the feeling he missed since. In the same way she was the best of them all because she was the one he brought most to, so tired. Some times the shouting glare of the gym would darken behind his sweat-burned eyes into a shadowed anticipation of the careful touchings that would come under the padded gray car roof and once there the bright triumph of the past game flashed across her quiet skin streaked with the shadows of rain on the windshield. So that the two kinds of triumph were united in his mind. She married when he was in the Army; a P.S. in a letter from his mother shoved him out from shore. That day he was launched (p. 166).

And, as a member of a team, he found an intimate, interdependent human community. This latter point becomes particularly clear to him when he meets one of his former teammates in a nightclub; Rabbit dislikes the man immensely, but "still, he remembers the night when Harrison came back into the game after losing two teeth to somebody's elbow and tries to be glad to see him. There were just five of you out there at one time and the other four for that time were unique in the world" (p. 147). Basketball quite obviously gave Rabbit more than just recognition in the newspapers as a high scorer; in its aura, he sensed a special quality in his love, and the team was a circle that enclosed him with a feeling of worth and belonging. But time takes much of this from him.
The feeling of loss is magnified when he sees Tothero, struck down by strokes, left virtually helpless in a hospital. Tothero, too, has suffered and been forgotten with time's passing, and his loneliness is made all the more ironic by the fact that he was once a leader and teacher of so many boys. His wife tells Rabbit, "He's had very few visitors; I suppose that's the tragedy of teaching school. You remember so many and so few remember you" (p. 177). After the death of Rabbit's child, Tothero, partially recovered, visits him and, after claiming that he had urged Rabbit to go back to Janice, says, "You're still a fine man, Harry. You have a healthy body" (p. 233). There is little consolation that Rabbit can find in this because he knows that he is secure in his body; his problems lie elsewhere. He discovers that his supposed spiritual insight and wisdom are of no great magnitude when he awakes from a dream with the realization that he has "nothing to tell the world" (p. 235). Further, just as he suffers the loss of sport, love, child, and even a degree of self-esteem, so he also experiences a feeling of loss in the natural hope of a father that his son's abilities and potentialities might resemble his own. His own mother had most cruelly told him that his son will never be a basketball player because "He has those little Springer hands" (p. 191).
Even his religion is not adequate to comfort and direct him through his distress; indeed, even though his sense of the religious is superior to that of many men, he does not really understand the meaning of his professed belief: "Harry has no taste for the dark, tangled, visceral aspect of Christianity, the going through quality of it, the passage into death and suffering that redeems and inverts these things, like an umbrella blowing inside out" (p. 197). In essence, what Rabbit actually has is "an aesthetic, pagan vision that seeks the illumination of selfhood without consciousness of guilt." ⁹

His running is sometimes sufficient to help him to disengage himself temporarily from his condition—"He runs to keep his body occupied, to joggle his mind blank" (p. 226); but his body itself becomes a source of concern because he is not sure that "he" even exists in it:

The details of the street—the ragged margin where the pavement and grass struggle, the tarry, scarred trunks of the telephone poles—no longer speak to him in a child's intimate, excited voice. He is no one; it is as if he stepped outside of his body and brain a moment to watch the engine run and stepped into nothingness, for this "he" had been merely a refraction, a vibration within the engine, and now can't get back in (p. 236).

⁹Elements of John Updike, p. 151.
Such a fear, of course, indicates the extent to which Rabbit begins to be genuinely afraid.

In spite of his personal losses and fears, however, Rabbit maintains his detachment from others; the ultimate proof that his creed is still, "If you have the guts to be yourself, other people'll pay your price" (p. 125), comes at the cemetery when he turns from his family and runs. He has had an ample number of directions from others and even intimations in his own heart that he must merge himself into the patterns of his own kind, into the responsibilities and duties of adulthood; but, finally, he runs from the hypocrisy it all seems to represent. As Charles T. Samuels notes, at least Rabbit might "escape the deadness of dishonesty. By running, Rabbit comes as close as possible to the sanctity of ultimate truth." 10

After his final meeting with Ruth, when he realizes that the circumstantiality surrounding him presses as never before, he recalls the ease with which he "escaped" in basketball:

Funny, how what makes you move is so simple and the field you must move in so crowded. Goodness lies inside, there is nothing outside, those things he was trying to balance have no weight. He feels his

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inside as very real suddenly, a pure blank space in the middle of a dense net. I don't know, he kept telling Ruth; he doesn't know, what to do, where to go, what will happen, the thought that he doesn't know seems to make him infinitely small and impossible to capture. Its smallness fills him like a vastness. It's like when they heard you were great and put two men on you and no matter which way you turned you bumped into one of them and the only thing to do was pass. So you passed and the ball belonged to the others and your hands were empty and the men on you looked foolish because in effect there was nobody there (pp. 254-55).

He reaches inside himself for simplicity, for a memory of how he fought confusion in sport; and he reassures himself that he is central to everything, even in a "crowded" field. He does not, however, escape his dilemma without exposing himself to the consequences of his symbolic manner of disengagement; as Howard M. Harper, Jr., points out, "The penalty... is that his hands are empty; he is a nobody. This painful paradox is what makes him run." And run he does; his most definitive, articulate response to his fear, to his angst, is to draw himself again into a run; "His hands lift of their own and he feels the wind on his ears even before, his heels hitting heavily on the pavement at first but with an effortless gathering out of a kind of sweet panic growing lighter and quicker and quieter, he runs.

Rabbit's reliance on elemental physical movement as an answer to his moral confusion is fully consistent with the sensual religious feeling and the knowledge of "self, proven on pulse and skin," which he possesses. He most surely runs, however, because of the stronger motivation that basic physical urges toward flight; hopefully, he runs because he is "obsessed by the need for a good enough fate and capable, like Camus' absurd man, of saying no." In his attempts to escape capture and constraint, and to sustain his integrity through complete self-communion, though, he necessarily reconciles himself to the torment of an exquisite, yet terrifying, loneliness.

He has moved far from the world of basketball; he plays no mere game now. He is beyond the grasp of coaches, teachers, and perhaps even rules. But it is largely through and because of sport that his beliefs and expectations are what they are, that he trusts himself so deeply, and that he is able to perceive and appreciate much of both the wonder and the pain of being alive. The meanings of his constant running are,

12Samuels, John Updike, p. 38.
13Harper, Desperate Faith, p. 166.
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The sport and literature of any society often reflect what that society holds to be most true, most valuable, and most worthy. In these two forms of cultural expression, persons, acting either as individuals or as groups, make intense statements regarding their beliefs and commitments, their strengths and frailties, and their joys and sorrows. Both sport and literature appear to be essential to the development and continuing existence of a completely functioning culture: both may serve in the transmission of ideas and ideals; both encourage creation; both call forth the full range of human emotion; both are cultural "documents" relating the heritage of the past to present action; both require honest self-examination and self-evaluation; and both are potentially available to all persons who wish to experience them. It is clear that sport and literature are complex phenomena of the culture which produces them; even though it may appear that sport, because it is so easily and readily observed, does not possess much complexity, it is no less difficult to analyze the possible meanings underlying a sport situation than it
of course, ambivalent, but Rabbit is indeed an ambiguous and perplexing character. He simply is what he is; he attempts to know himself but never really does. Whether he will survive is not clear; but the closing words, "Ah: runs. Runs," are strangely positive, and, as Updike's only use of the author's privilege to intrude into his novel, they speak for the validity and vitality of Rabbit's efforts.

Summary

Sport, as one of the central aspects of Rabbit, Run, provides many illustrations of and insights into Rabbit Angstrom. A surprisingly large number of the sport/literary themes under consideration are found in the novel, including the following: Rabbit remembers the things of his past with great clarity, but is unable to find the satisfaction he knew as a youth in his adult life; this situation applies to Toothero, his old coach, as well. Rabbit indulges in many flights of the imagination and often conjures up recollections of the power and prestige he experienced while a basketball player; but he understands that his past is indeed behind him. His inclinations toward idealism and perfection are found in both references to basketball and golf; associated with Rabbit's idealism, perhaps, is his quest for spiritual truth. His physical nature gives him certain instinctive religious directions and makes it possible
to demonstrate his faith in the existence of divinity behind the world. The religious connotations of rebirth and regeneration are found both in Rabbit's sense of a Saturday morning being a "blank scoreboard" and in Eccles' feeling that each tee in golf provides a new beginning for him in his attempt to comprehend Rabbit's unsteady play and to learn what he can from him. Both the themes of human communication and separation are indicated many times in sport-related situations; and, obviously, Rabbit's attempted movement toward knowledge of self and of the world is defined through his athletic, sexual, and religious experiences and through the connections among those elements of his being. Undoubtedly, sport, or at least sheer movement, acts as a catharsis for the tension and anxiety which Rabbit feels. Rabbit hardly serves as a heroic model; and perhaps because of his unsuccessful efforts to exist at peace with himself, his family and his time he merits being termed an anti-hero. Yet, "anti-hero" does not seem fully appropriate, either. The perplexing, ambiguous nature of the man precludes easy categorization, and it appears most helpful to place him somewhere between "hero" and "anti-hero"; truly, he touches both.
The Centaur, originally planned as a "contrasting companion" to Rabbit, Run, is a statement regarding the significance of a life characterized by unselfish, sacrificial giving to others and of the efficacy of such giving as an answer to fundamental human questions about faith and the prospect of one's own death. Sport functions in the novel to reveal elements of personalities, to indicate the separation that often exists between men, to demonstrate the effects of time's passing, and to imbue some of the characters with a physical prowess that significantly adds to the realistic-mystic roles they play. The main character of The Centaur is George Caldwell, a high school general science teacher whose actions and attitudes are defined by an uncommon generosity and sympathy toward the frailties of his fellow man; the nature of such a life is, of course, vastly different from the self-centeredness and self-seeking displayed by Rabbit Angstrom. As critics Alice Hamilton and Kenneth Hamilton note, "He proves to be the antithesis of the man in Rabbit, Run who is seen as Mr. Death himself. . . .

The Centaur tells the story of Mr. Life. 15

Updike calls upon his own vivid recollection of a "patch of Pennsylvania in 1947" (p. 293) to provide the setting for the novel, and his person is found in the character of Peter Caldwell, George's fifteen-year-old son. It is largely through Peter's view of persons, places, and events that the quality and meaning of his father's life are made most evident, and insofar as Peter's vision is that of the adolescent Updike, whose father was also a teacher, it becomes clear that the book is at least partly an intense personal memoir of a son's feeling for his father.

One of the major themes of The Centaur derives from Peter's growing recognition and appreciation of his father's manner of living. Throughout much of the novel, George's unpatronizing kindness, his lack of even ordinary pretension, and his efforts to help others are sources of embarrassment and aggravation to Peter, and George himself deprecates the value of what he does to such an extent that he believes he is in many ways a failure as husband, father, and teacher. George appears to be the frequent, foolish but of his own attempts to ease the difficulties that others endure: he goes out of his way to give a hitch-hiker a ride on a wintry day.

15Hamilton and Hamilton, Elements of John Updike, p. 158.
and the man assails him and Peter with obscenities and homosexual innuendos and steals George's expensive gloves from the back seat when he leaves; he helps one of his students push a stalled automobile, and, in the process, his own car is damaged; he gives another student, who has no academic ability or even the merest interest in learning, but who is unmercifully pressured by her father to receive good marks in school, practically all the answers to a test which she must take; he gives money to a derelict who accuses him of being with Peter for immoral purposes; and he provides his inattentive, uncomprehending, and seemingly unappreciative students with teaching which causes them to remember and revere him long after they have left high school. In each of these situations, George finds decency and value in persons whose actions do not appear to merit respect. George's capacity to seek out the higher qualities and the inherent worth of each man, even when it is at his own expense, points to the humanistic, sacrificial nature of his life; and it is of such importance as a type of existence that George's life is presented in both mythic and realistic contexts, the former of which elevates the personal conditions and questions that George confronts to the universal level.

On the mythic level, George becomes Chiron, a teacher and noblest of the Centaurs of Greek mythology.
As a half-man, half-horse creature, he moves with the gods but is not really one of them; after he is wounded by a poisoned arrow that causes him continual pain, he offers his immortality to Zeus as an atonement for the sinful theft of fire by Prometheus. His sacrificial request is granted, and he is allowed to die. Peter, of course, becomes Prometheus on the mythic level and is thus the recipient of the gift of life made possible by the sacrifice of Chiron.

The context of myth is alluded to in the novel's epigraph, a quotation from theologian Karl Barth: "Heaven is the creation inconceivable to man, earth the creation conceivable to him. He himself is the creature on the boundary between heaven and earth." Through Chiron, heaven is approached and even touched; in spite of his god-like nature, however, what comprehension he possesses of heaven apparently does not reach fullness until after his death, when Zeus "set him among the stars as the constellation Sagittarius," where "he assists in the regulation of our destinies" (p. 299).

On the realistic level, George's comprehension of the earth through his understanding of science is shown; but, just as Chiron's grasp of heaven is tainted by his imperfection and his ties to mortality, so George's grasp of knowledge of the world proves inadequate to sustain
him spiritually when he senses the presence of death everywhere about him. George is thus truly a creature of the vague middle area between heaven and earth; he apprehends both to a degree, but, as man, his place must be on the "boundary," where comfort can seldom, if ever, be complete. Nonetheless, like most of Updike's characters, he sees "a universe endowed with a rich human meaning," and he feels "a tragic sense of loss at the erosion of that meaning by time and cosmic indifference." But he believes "that a coherent human meaning does exist."16

The painful condition of existence is emphatically declared by George when, in a science class, he presents a lesson on the formation of the earth and the emergence of "a tragic animal . . . called man"(p. 46). Even as he talks, the classroom degenerates into a part-mythic, quasi-realistic scene of chaos and lust. The personal wounding he receives from much that he understands and experiences is of such magnitude that he fears that he is dying. Much of the tension that holds the events of the novel together results directly from the impact this fear has upon George and his family, especially Peter.

16Harper, Desperate Faith, p. 196.
Peter, when forced to accept the undeniable fact of his father's mortality, realizes that those moments of embarrassment caused by George's actions are insignificant in comparison with what the man has given. Indeed, Peter receives the gift of "life" itself from his father, who, as lover of the heavens and earth and also as lover of his fellowman, brings to his son "the sudden white laughter that like heat lightning bursts in an atmosphere where souls are trying to serve the impossible" (p. 269). Both Peter's love and fear for his father are found in his realization that, "My father provided; he gathered things to himself and let them fall upon the world; my clothes, my food, my luxurious hopes had fallen to me from him, and for the first time, his death seemed, even at its immense stellar remove of impossibly, a grave and dreadful threat" (pp. 92-93).

The understanding which George achieves from the closeness of death is adequate to make existence on the "boundary" much more comprehensible and bearable. He recalls that his father, a minister, had once told him, "All joy belongs to the Lord" (p. 296), and he expands the statement to include his present life:

It was half a joke but the boy took it to heart. All joy belongs to the Lord. Wherever in the filth and confusion and misery, a soul felt joy, there the Lord came and claimed it as his own; into bar-rooms and brothels and classrooms and alleys slippery with spittle, no matter how dark and scabbed and
remote, in China or Africa or Brazil, wherever a moment of joy was felt, there the Lord stole and added to His enduring domain. And all the rest, all that was not joy, fell away, precipitated, dross that had never been. He thought of his wife's joy in the land and Pop Kramer's joy in the newspaper and his son's joy in the future and was glad, grateful, that he was able to sustain these for yet a space more. The X-rays were clear. A white width of days stretched ahead (p. 296).

Finally, he believes, "Only goodness lives. But it does live" (p. 297). On the mythic level, Chiron gratefully accepts death, but, on the realistic level, George does not die; rather, he finds life in the midst of death and continues to accept the responsibility associated with being a teacher, father, and husband. As both Chiron and George, he "discovered that in giving his life to others he entered a total freedom" (p. 296).

Sport serves several purposes in The Centaur, the most important of which is to form a part of the total portrayal of George Caldwell. He coaches the high school swimming team, and even though the team seems incapable of winning, he gives his athletes a remarkable level of encouragement and support. The unnecessary amount of self-deprecation which he characteristically exhibits is also seen as he coaches, but, rather than making him appear foolish, it helps to dignify his humility.

In the great tiled chamber where the pool lived, a barking resonance broke everything into fragments. On the little wooden bleachers at the poolside my father sat with a wet and naked boy, Deifendorf.
Deifendorf wore only the skimpy black official trunks; the droop of his genitals was limply defined between his spread thighs. Hair flowed down his chest and forearms and legs and a stream of water was running across the wood where his bare feet rested. The curves and flats of his hunched white body were harmonious but for his horny red hands. He and my father greeted me with grins that looked much the same: snaggled, ignorant, conspiratorial. To annoy Deifendorf I asked him, 'Ja win the breast stroke and the two-twenty?'

'I won more than you did,' he answered.

'He won the breast stroke,' my father said. 'I'm proud of you, Deify. You kept your promise to the best of your ability. That makes you a man.'

'Shit if I's seen that guy in the far lane I'd've taken the two-twenty too. Bastard he sneaked in on me, I thought I'd won it, I was just gliding in.'

'That kid swam a good race,' my father said.

'He won it honestly. He paced himself. Foley's a good coach. If I was any kind of a coach, Deify, you'd be king of the county; you're a natural. If I was any kind of a coach and you'd give up cigarettes.'

'Fuck I can hold my breath eighty seconds as it is,' Deifendorf said.

There was in their talk a mutual flattery that annoyed me.

'What does it feel like to win?' he had asked aloud, speaking straight ahead and thus equally to Deifendorf and me. 'Jesus, I'll never know.'

Everything was over but the diving. One of our divers, Danny Horst, a runty senior with a huge mane of black hair that for diving he did up in a hairband like a Greek girl, came forward on the board, muscles swirling, and executed a running forward somersault, knees tucked, toes taut, so perfectly, uncoiling into the water through a soft splash as symmetrical as the handles of a vase, that one of the judges flashed the 10 card.

'In fifteen years,' my father said, 'I've never seen the ten used before. It's like saying God has come down to earth. There is no such thing as perfection.'

'Thatta baby Danny boy,' Deifendorf yelled, and a patter of applause from both teams greeted the diver as he surfaced, tossed his loosened hair with a proud flick, and swam the few strokes to the pool
is to make a critical evaluation of literary art.

The study of literature has, of course, engaged the curiosity and effort of scholars since the beginning of the art; but the study of sport, by comparison, is relatively new. Indeed, it is only within the past two or three decades that sport has been examined on a fairly large scale. Researchers and theorists have now approached sport and its role as a major portion of physical education from a number of perspectives, most notably the sociological, the psychological, the philosophical, and the traditional physiological vantage points. As a result of numerous investigations, there is today a much greater understanding of sport: we realize that sport permeates all levels of human existence because all people have an innate need to play and to express themselves thereby; that sport serves as a type of communication among individuals, groups, and even nations; that sport can be, either positively or negatively, a source of meaning as one seeks to find his true self; and that sport reflects various aspects of our mechanized and technical culture, but that it may also stand in opposition to that which is complicated, manipulative, and as some contemporary critics would say, not human. It assumes the face and personality of the society in which it exists, thus making it inseparable from daily life; and, yet, as a microcosm or image of the larger reality, it is often representative of the goals and ideals
edge. But on his next dive Danny, aware we were all expecting another miracle, tensed up, lost the rhythm of the approach, came out of the one-and-a-half twist a moment too soon, and slapped the water with his back. One judge gave him a 3. The other two gave him 4s. 'Well,' my father said, 'the poor kid gave it all he had.' And when Danny surfaced this time, my father, and only my father, clapped.

The final score of the meet was West Alton 37½, Olinger 18. My father stood at the pool edge and said to his team, 'I'm proud of you. You're damn good sports to come out for this at all—you get no glory and you get no pay. For a town without even an outdoor pool, I don't see how you do as well as you do. If the high school had its own pool like West Alton does—and I don't want to take any credit away from them—you'd all be Johnny Weismuellers. In my book, you are already. Danny, that was one beautiful dive. I don't expect to see a dive like that again as long as I live.'

My father looked strange making this speech, standing so erect in his suit and necktie among the naked torsos; the vibrating turquoise water and beaded cream tiling framed his dark and earnest head as I saw it from the bleachers. Across the listening skin of the shoulders and chests of the team a nervous flicker now and then passed, swiftly as a gust across water, or a tic in the flank of a horse. Though they had lost, the team was boisterous and proud in their flesh, and we left them in the shower room carousing and lathering like a small herd joyfully caught in a squall.

George's appreciation of a dive that approaches perfection is particularly noteworthy because he associates it with God coming to earth. In his private subconsciousness, such thoughts of perfection and God, as opposed to the "dust, lint, spittle, poverty, stuck-together stuff in gutters—all the trash and chaos behind the made world" (p. 249), must abound; and when a perfect moment is crystallized in a dive, he is totally aware of its meaning and rarity. Indeed, on his next attempt, the diver fails
completely. George's realization of the fleeting, pressing nature of perfection, as well as his sympathy, causes him to applaud for the boy, even though nobody else does.

George appears to be slightly out of place among all the swimmers, but it is not because he has never had any athletic experience of his own. As a college student, he "earned an athletic scholarship that reduced his tuition by half. For three years a guard on the Lake football varsity, he suffered a broken nose a total of seventeen times, a severely dislocated kneecap twice, and a leg and a collarbone fracture once each" (p. 173). His role as swimming coach seems a bit unsuited to him, however, partly because of the suit and tie he wears while talking to the boys on the team, but also because of the fact that he has a hernia and cannot participate in the sport he attempts to teach and direct. The difference between George Caldwell and Rabbit Angstrom, both former athletes who no longer have genuine involvement in their schoolboy sports, is important; whereas Rabbit continues to try to utilize at least sheer physical movement to simplify his life, George no longer seems to have such need. The meaning of the difference in their adult experiences of sport is that it points to their individual approaches to life. "Rabbit, Run" describes the consequences of choosing to live in the aesthetic
sphere. The Centaur goes on to examine life lived in the moral—religious sphere.\textsuperscript{17} Rabbit's intense reliance on and utilization of his body, of course, parallel his aesthetic interpretation of faith, while George has moved to a different level of understanding and no longer turns to his bodily experience in sport for inner peace. The fact that George does remain on the fringe of athletics is noteworthy, however; such proximity between the aesthetic and moral aspects of belief might be interpreted to mean that the latter is, in fact, dependent upon the first, at least to a degree; in other words, the aesthetic, personal feeling of faith necessarily precedes the more mature understanding and acceptance of duties implied in the faith of adulthood.

Sport also works in The Centaur to establish a sense of the separation that sometimes exists between each person and his fellows. A basketball game at the high school provides the setting:

She shouts, a regular lipsticked little fury suddenly, 'Come on.' The JVs, five in Olinger's maroon and gold and five in West Alton's blue and white, looked dazed and alert at once, glued by the soles of their sneakers to tinted echoes of themselves inverted in floorshine. Every shoelace, every hair, every grimace of concentration, seems unnaturally sharp, like the details of stuffed animals in a large lit case. Indeed there is a psychological pane of glass between the basketball floor and the ramp of seats; though a player can

\textsuperscript{17}Hamilton and Hamilton, Elements of John Updike, p. 159.
look up and spot in the crowd a girl he entered last night (her whimper, the dryness in the mouth afterwards), she is infinitely remote from him, and the event in the parked car quite possibly was imagined. Mark Youngerman with his fuzzy forearm blots sweat from his eyebrows, sees the ball sailing toward him, lifts cupped hands and cushions the tense seamed globe against his chest, flicks his head deceptively, drives in past the West Alton defender, and in a rapt moment of flight drops the peeper. The score is tied. Such a shout goes up as suggests every soul here hangs on the edge of terror (p. 229)

The psychological and physical distinction established between the players and the spectators illustrates the near-impossibility of man's truly knowing other men. It is precisely this type of alienation that George recognizes and attempts to break through in his encounters with others. The fact that a basketball game, which might ordinarily be perceived as an event filled with an abundance of communication, even between athletes and on-lookers, is utilized as the context for the "pane of glass" makes the significance of the separation all the more evident.

The crowd's shout that "suggests every soul here hangs on the edge of terror" possibly points to each spectator's innate, but likely subconscious, grasp of the meaning implied by the "pane of glass." Another reading of the "terror" aroused by a tie score in the game is that it stands in direct contrast to the fear that George experiences. An immense incongruity is thus
emphatically declared and is immediately obvious: George fears for the meaning and value of his life, while the crowd, or the mass of men, is enraptured and driven to the very superficial and temporary "terror" found in a close JV athletic contest, an occurrence of minimal ultimate import.

The feeling of separation previously mentioned is at least partially countered by the cheers which appear to unify the crowd. A number of disparate conversations are heard just prior to the game, but the cheerleaders' emotional pleas pull the spectators together in a temporary "kingdom."

The players, exulting in all the space reserved for them, gallop back and forth on their plain of varnished boards. The ball arches high but not so high as the caged bulbs burning on the auditorium ceiling. A whistle blows. The clock stops. The cheerleaders rush out, the maroon 0's on their yellow sweaters bobbling, and form a locomotive. '0,' they call, seven brazen sirens, their linked forearms forming a single piston.

'Ohh,' moans back Echo, stricken.

'1.'

'Hell,' is the answer, deliberately aitched, a school tradition.

'I.'

'Aaiii,' a cry from the depths. Peter's scalp goes cold and under the cover of a certain actual ecstasy he grips his girl's arm.

'Hi,' she says, pleased, her skin still chilly from the out-of-doors.

'N.'

The response comes faster, 'Enn,' and the cheer whirls faster and faster, a vortex between the crowd and the cheerleaders, until at its climax it seems they are all sucked down into another kingdom,
'Olinger! Olinger! OLINGER!' The girls scamper back, play resumes, and the auditorium, big as it is, subsides into a living-room where everybody knows everybody else (pp. 226-27).

The extent to which such union is only momentary, rather than genuinely enduring, is seen at the close of the game: "The JV game is over. Though Mark Youngerman's face is purple, his panting painful, and his body as slippery as an amphibian's, Olinger lost. The buzz of the crowd changes pitch. Many leave their seats" (p. 238).

The game is thus quickly forgotten; it is an almost incredibly transient occurrence, as slippery as the players themselves, and when its conclusion is reached, the unique bond that binds the spectators is quickly broken.

Among the spectators at the game are those men whose presence most effectively indicates the continual onrush of time and change:

They are ex-heroes of the type who, for many years, until a wife or ritual drunkenness or distant employment carries them off, continue to appear at high school athletic events, like dogs tormented by a site where they imagine they have buried something precious. Increasingly old and slack, the apparition of them persists, conjured by that phantasmal procession—indoors and outdoors, fall, winter, and spring—of increasingly young and unknown high school athletes who themselves, imperceptibly, filter in behind them to watch also. Their bearing, hushed and hurt, contrasts decisively with that of the students in the slope of seats; here skins and hair and ribbons and flashy clothes make a single fabric, a billowing, twinkling human pennant (p. 233).

The image of decline and even death seen in the appearance and "bearing" of the former athletes
forms a portion of the total atmosphere of decay that George feels in his world and in his life. The spectacle of "ex-heroes" returning to the gymnasium, their past arena of fame, is especially effective in conjuring up sensations of destruction because of the ironic nature of the situation: the former athletes, who once possessed a superior command of the skills of sport, are reduced to being "old and slack" and "hushed and hurt"; the effects of time are all the more striking in these men who must have once been the epitome of the strength and vigor of youth. George's response to the situation of this particular basketball game is unique to him: "Humanity, which has so long entranced him, disgusts him packed and tangled like germs in this overheated auditorium" (p. 254). He sees "waste, rot, hollowness noise, stench, death" (p. 251). As the novel continues, George moves from this point of near despair to a stance of acceptance and renewed faith.

Many of the characters, both minor and major, of the novel are described as former athletes. It appears that the possession, or at least former possession, of physical skills is significant insofar as physical capability is regarded as an important element of the fully-functioning person. Because the characters exist in the mythic context, where perfection of all human attributes
is approached or attained by the gods, physicality adds a most important dimension.

The sport experience of George (Chiron) has been previously discussed. One of the other teachers, Phillips (Pholos), is a former baseball player: "Pholos had once been a semi-pro shortstop, and the line of the cap still indented the hair above his ears, though his broad forehead was a river of middle-aged wrinkles" (p. 18). The principal, Zimmerman (Zeus), was a high school trackman: "He took a few quick backward steps, his small feet twinkling with the athletic prowess that still lingered in them. Zimmerman's first fame had been as a schoolboy track star. Strong-shouldered, lithe-limbed, he had excelled in all tests of speed and strength—the discus, dashes, endurance runs" (p. 33). Vera Hummel (Venus) is a girls' physical education teacher whose physical charms are amplified by the nature of her work. Deifendorf, the student swimmer, is, as Updike indicates in the novel's mythological index, "now a centaur, now a merman, and sometimes even Hercules" (p. 301). An outstanding former student, Ache (Achilles), is also partially defined by his athletic background:

'Did you hear about Ache?'—pronounced Ockey. A bright and respectful and athletic and handsome student from the late Thirties, the kind that does a teacher's heart good, a kind once plentiful in
Olinger but in the universal decay of virtue growing rare.

"Killed," Caldwell says. 'But I don't under­stand how.'

'Over Nevada,' Phillips tells him, shifting his armload of papers and books to the other arm. 'He was a flight instructor, and his student made a mistake. Both killed.'

'Isn't that funny? To go all through the war without a scratch and then get nailed in peacetime.'

Phillips' eyes have a morbid trick—little men are more emotional—of going red in the middle of a conversation if the subject were even remotely melancholy. 'I hate it when they die young,' he blurs. He loves the well-coordinated among his students like sons, his own son being clumsy and stubborn(p. 222).

Sport appears to have been a factor in the past of the Reverend March, but in a possibly negative manner; this is made evident in his conversation with Vera at the basketball game:

'Hello! Were your girls beaten?'

'Mm.' Already she pretends, and indeed slightly feels, some boredom. She gazes toward the game and makes the golden leaves of her coat swirl with her hands in the pockets.

'Do you always attend boys' games?'

'Shouldn't I? To learn things? Did you play basketball?'

'No, I was extremely inept as an adolescent. I was always picked last.'

'It's hard to believe.'

'That's the mark of a great truth'(p. 235).

The fact that March's mythological parallel is a god of war makes his ineptitude in sport indeed ironic because it is only logical that such a god would have a superior battler in the wars of sport as his realistic counterpart. That a minister is equated with Ares (also, Mars) is somewhat incongruous, though, and it makes this particular
portion of the novel difficult to interpret.

Peter (Prometheus) is not presented as an athlete in any form; he shares nothing of his father's interest in sports, but, in his wish to become an artist, he is directly connected with the aesthetic vision represented by sport. He has the extraordinary ability, however, as does his father, to move beyond the aesthetic sphere. This is accomplished in one especially significant passage by a virtual falling away of the bodily sensations:

On the flat beyond the cemetery the pines fade away and the wind blows as if minded to pierce his body through and through. He becomes transparent: a skeleton of thoughts. Detached, amused, he watches his feet like blinded cattle slog dutifully through the drifted snow; the disparity between the length of their strides and the immense distance to Olinger is so great that a kind of infinity seems posited in which he enjoys enormous leisure. He employs this leisure to meditate upon the phenomenon of extreme physical discomfort. There is an excising simplicity in it. First, all thoughts of past and future are eliminated, and then any extension via the senses of yourself into the created world. Then, as further conservation, the extremities of the body are disposed of—the feet, the legs, the fingers. If the discomfort persists, if a nagging memory of some more desirable condition lingers, then the tip of the nose, the chin, and the scalp itself are removed from consideration, not entirely anesthetized but deported, as it were, to a realm foreign to the very limited concerns of the irreducible locus, remarkably compact and aloof, which alone remains of the once farflung and ambitious kingdoms of the self. The sensations seem to arrive from a great distance outside himself when his father, now walking beside him and using his body as a shield against the wind for his son, pulls down upon Peter's freezing head the knitted wool cap he has taken from his own head (pp. 264-65).
which a society holds up for itself, but is in actuality unable to reach. Thus, sport can signify a world of perfect justice to an imperfect social order of men.

As increased inquiry into sport reveals more of its significance to us, and as one considers that millions of persons involve themselves deeply in sports and find intense importance in them, the fact that sport has not received extensive serious consideration in our literature is most curious. As Rene Maheu says,

... if we take culture in the sense of any of its forms of expression, present contacts between it and sport are extremely slight, in fact practically non-existent. In philosophy, literature, the theatre, even the cinema, in painting, sculpture, and music, works of merit based on sport either in form or substance are few indeed. It inspires only a very small number of works of the mind or of art of any aesthetic significance. ... there have been hardly any worthwhile cultural works with sport as their basis. Conversely, the world of sport is less and less informed with intellect and art.1

To be sure, a number of major contemporary writers have found at least some literary potential in sport, and some have portrayed the athletic world with great perception; yet, for the most part, sport is infrequently a central metaphor in an individual work and is very seldom a

Such an experience, of course, appears to be in direct opposition to the many varied images of physicality—in sport that permeate the novel; but insofar as it is actually a passage through the physical, a passage into and beyond pain, Peter's interpretation of the "phenomenon of extreme physical discomfort" parallels one of the main thrusts of *The Centaur*: the movement from the aesthetic existence into the moral sphere.

**Summary**

Sport, in *The Centaur*, is extremely valuable for the insights it provides into George Caldwell's character; his manner of working as a coach is an important indicator of his desire to give something of himself to others. Insofar as it assists in elevating some of the characters to the mythic level, it has significant relationship to the theme of the hero. Both communication among men and separation of them are demonstrated in sport contexts, although the latter appears to predominate where sport is concerned; the distinctions between the players and the fans and between the fans themselves are extremely effective in illustrating human separation. The picture of the former athletes at the ball game creates a distinct impression of the ravages of time and of the fact of non-permanence. In that George is able to find a semblance of peace within himself, the novel might be viewed as a movement toward comprehension of pattern of
sense and unity in the world; and, his understanding of physical nature of the world and of its Creator is paralleled by the personal unity implied by his involvement in the physicality of sport and by his faith. His idealism, seen most clearly in his desire to view his fellow humans positively, is amplified in his understanding and valuation of a near-perfect dive by one of his athletes. In essence, physicality, however important it may be in *The Centaur* and regardless of the forms it might take, serves most importantly to establish the foundation for the wholeness which the character of George Caldwell exemplifies.
Couples is Updike's account of the quality of the individual and social consciousness of Americans in the early 1960's. He portrays ten middle-class couples living in Tarbox, Massachusetts, a small town south of Boston, and delineates with careful detail the extent to which they have lost contact with their past, their honor, and certainly their faith. The assemblage of characters might be regarded as a complete society-in-miniature: included among the men are two scientists, a dentist, a technician, an airplane pilot, a real estate salesman, a broker, a banker, one individual so wealthy he does not need to work, and a builder. The women are, for the most part, burdened with caring for their houses and their children. Updike regards these persons as being at a point in their lives where "the men had stopped having careers and the women had stopped having babies. Liquor and love were left" (p. 17).

Almost every couple's marriage is notable for its private miseries and its deceptions. There is little expression of genuine love between husband and wife; but when the couples meet as a group, a truly special atmosphere is created. Referring to Freddy Thorne, the

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dentist, Piet Hanema, the builder, tells his wife, "He thinks we're a circle. A magic circle of heads to keep the night out. He told me he gets frightened if he doesn't see us over a weekend. He thinks we've made a church of each other"(p. 12). The atmosphere of love, or at least excitement, is also created when either husband or wife, or sometimes both, acquires another member of the group as a lover. Much of the exterior action of the novel is concerned with explicit portrayal of the multitude of adulteries; and, for this reason, Couples is sometimes regarded as verging on the merely pornographic. The intention of the author, however, goes far beyond simply presenting the vagaries and varieties of sexual behavior experienced by a rather ordinary collection of adults; rather, Updike's purpose appears to be to point to the degeneration into triviality, shabbiness, and sterility produced by a falling-away from both religious faith and national consciousness. The couples find themselves quite out of touch with a reality that transcends their day-to-day experience of catching trains, shuttling children back and forth, making money, and having fun. Few of them attend church--either as a place or as a condition of the soul; they have a party on the evening following President Kennedy's assassination--not out of disrespect, but because it is too inconvenient
to postpone it; and their sense of social communion is not fully intact because, as members of the twentieth-century's technical, specialized culture, they understand little of the complex natures of one another's work. The scientists, for example, have virtually no effective way of conveying even to their wives what their work means. Only Hanema, with his understanding and appreciation of the carefully constructed old houses of the town, appears to have a strong realization of the power of tradition; indeed, many of the characters have actively, intentionally broken the ties of their own pasts. They are thus random persons who freely associate and just as easily disperse, but who, while they are together, attempt to establish a cohesiveness based upon the premise, "Duty and work yielded as ideals to truth and fun" (p. 114). As Alice and Kenneth Hamilton state, "Couples shows what is happening now to the American anima (Hanema) when the ties binding man to the soil and to family traditions have been almost universally broken."

Piet Hanema is easily the most significant character presented. He stands as singular among the others because he has retained some vestiges of faith; because he, in rather ironic conflict with his belief in God, most perceptively feels the fragility of life amidst the

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19 Hamilton and Hamilton, Elements of John Updike, p. 220.
omnipresence of death; and because he, as a craftsman, is closest to the skills of the past. It is Freddy Thorne, however, who is the leader and self-appointed spokesman for the group. He is essentially antithetical to everything represented by Piet, and the two men have a profound dislike for one another. Thorne is often lewd and cruel and proclaims a creed based upon acceptance of man's ultimate insignificance and of his movement toward oblivion. He says, "you're born to get laid and die, the sooner the better" (p. 255). Also, "We die. We don't die for one second out there in the future, we die all the time in every direction. Every meal we eat breaks down the enamel... Death excites me. Death is being screwed by God. It'll be delicious" (p. 387). Thorne is permitted to make these and similar pronouncements along with an unceasing stream of obscenities virtually unchallenged; in effect, he is a death-dealer, and it is obvious that the couples have capitulated to this type of unfortunate guidance.

A certain integrity does inform Thorne's actions, though. His attempts to infuse the conversations and games of the couples with sexuality derives from his belief that sex is the only experience that makes it possible for man to hold off total despair. "Freddy held forth, unable to let go of a beauty he had felt, of a
goodness the couples created merely by assembling...

'People hate love. It threatens them... People are the only thing people have since God packed up. By people I mean sex''(p. 155). And further: "I've seen the light. You all know why we're put here on earth? ... It just came to me. A vision. We're all put here to humanize each other"(p. 158). Such dependence upon the purely temporal state for a type of brief salvation is apparently the highest form of religion comprehensible to him.

As previously mentioned, Hanema appears to be diametrically opposed to thinking such as Thorne's. As Piet's wife, Angela, tells Freddy, "Piet spends all his energy defying death, and you spend all yours accepting it"(p. 388). But Hanema's opposition to the views espoused by Thorne does not leave him free from the taint of corruption and sin. Indeed, his character is notable for its major flaws: his faith is inconsistent and sometimes uncertain, and he eventually stops going to church altogether; and his love for Angela is not enough to keep him from becoming involved in a series of affairs with several women in the group of couples. He ultimately views his adultery not as an expression of life against death, but merely as "a way of giving yourself adventures. Of getting out in the world and seeking knowledge"(p. 359).
A belief such as this signifies that Piet's personal charms, insights, and sense of wonder notwithstanding, he too, in time, succumbs to the power of Thorne's creed of sexuality. It is particularly great because the fall is so great, because one of the best becomes practically no better than the worst.

Piet's fall does not go unrecognized by him. He attempts to comfort himself by saying that all actions are fated, that everything lies in the predetermined plans of a Calvinistic God. He knows, however, that man, in his precarious position between heaven and earth, cannot tamper with God's justice. He tells Foxy Whitman, one of his mistresses, "God is not mocked"(p. 360), and, during a troubled night, he tries to repent: "Forgive me. Reach down and touch. He had patronized his faith and lost it. God will not be used. Death stretched endless under him"(p. 271).

Piet's affair with Foxy, the wife of a cold, aloof, and fastidious biochemist-professor, brings about his complete collapse. She accidentally becomes pregnant by him, and they are forced to use Thorne's assistance in locating an abortionist. Thus Piet and Foxy are directly implicated with Thorne and his beliefs when they consent to the destruction of innocent life. This ironic alignment of Piet and Freddy shows how drastically Piet leans toward
the forces of death. He sees the abortion as the only sensible solution to the dilemma, and, in the superficial story line, this may be true; but, in a deeper sense, he abandons his reverence for life, regardless of its type, and, in essence, acquiesces to the unfeeling, murderous potentiality sometimes present in human nature.

Foxy's unhappiness in her marriage causes her to confess her infidelity and abortion to her husband; acting almost as the predator whose name she bears, she succeeds in destroying both her marriage and Piet's, knowing that Hanema will likely marry her when his own family leaves him. Angela's refusal to continue to stay with Piet, because of his untruth and lack of constant love, is his lowest moment. In time, he does indeed marry Foxy, who is perhaps most adequately attuned to him sexually and who understands much better than Angela the heights and depths of his complex range of perceptions and thoughts. Her "capture," however, of the freedom-seeking Piet is a subduing of much that he once represented. As Updike said in an interview, Foxy is much more suitable for Piet than Angela; with her, he can have "freedom," which explains why he "divorces the supernatural to marry the natural." Yet, "he becomes
a satisfied person and in a sense dies.\textsuperscript{20}

The concluding pages of the novel chronicle the disintegration of the group of couples; some move away, some are divorced, a man dies, and there are no more parties intended to "humanize." Piet sees his old church burn; and he and Foxy move to Lexington, where he obtains work as a building inspector. The final passages evoke strong images of destruction, impotence, and waste and perhaps embody most succinctly the consequences of an ignorance of the sources of light and a separation, through negligence or otherwise, from the roots of meaning.

Sport is utilized many times in Couples; the large number of games enjoyed by the characters indicated their longing for excitement and togetherness, and perhaps even their restlessness, all of which are most dramatically paralleled in their sexual activities. The first presentation of a sport situation is an informal basketball game involving several of the men. Ken Whitman, a newcomer to Tarbox, is invited by Piet to join them:

Ken came back from the phone saying, 'He asked me to play basketball at two o'clock at his place.'

Basketball was the one sport Ken had ever cared about; he had played for Exeter and for his Harvard house, which he had told her as a confession, it had been so unfashionable to do. Foxy said, 'How funny.'