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The Political Allegories in John Updike’s *Rabbit, Run*

Bachelor’s Diploma Thesis

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I declare that I have worked on this thesis independently, using only the primary and secondary sources listed in the bibliography.

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Author’s signature
I would like to thoroughly thank my supervisor for his patient and convenient guidance.
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INTRODUCTION

This thesis aims to point out and inspect the allegorical role of individual characters and the relationships among them in John Updike’s post-war fiction *Rabbit, Run*. It closely analyses the way those aforementioned characters represent various countries and political clusters formed during or influenced by the World War II. Through inquiry of reactions and motivations of this narrow social group, in this case the Angstrom family and its acquainted ones, the book reveals how the author understands the international situation. He uses his findings to foresee the near future development and creates fitting psychological profile for each of the individuals. The point of this thesis therefore is to provide arguments supporting the initial statement that their interactions resemble the post-war era political affairs. Considering the fact that the political situation of the Sixties and beginning of the Seventies was affecting a remarkable part of the world, some non-American countries are taken in account as well in this thesis. However, American influences still have their primacy.

The narrative can be seen as a story about inner problems of a family or as an analysis of current political situation with possible consequences suggested. One of the preconditions of this thesis is an assumption that replacing the political motive by family motive might help to make the story more relatable. It is easier for reader to understand the seriousness of the post-war situation when they can include their emotions and feelings. By showing the possibility of turning worldwide issue into conflicts on the level of interpersonal relationships, the public should understand that this political matter can consequently influence their personal lives.

The thesis is divided into two parts of equal importance, but differently
conceptualized. There are the characters, chosen as the most relevant for the purposes of this thesis, introduced in the first part. This part serves to provide the reader with specific enough information enabling him to comprehend the following analysis. The research about the characters consisted of three steps. The motivation for their actions and deeds were found and their values were derived from them at first. Additionally, fragments of their discourse were compared to their behaviour in order to find out about any eventual contradictions. Similarities to speeches of famous figures of that time were also noted. Lastly, those findings were matched to a relevant event or entity that influenced the post-war era. The following part works with those established character-political pairs and inspects two major historical occurrences. Both are deliberately international to emphasize the stance of America towards the rest of the world. Furthermore, those were chosen for their contrastive nature to provide a clear enough example of how the negotiating procedures vary depending on the situation.

The contribution of this thesis lies in bringing a new point of view into analysis of several characters appearing in the first book of famous trilogy. The objective is to develop a point strong enough to be safely supportable. Lastly, ambition to avoid expressing personal political opinions was followed to recognise the original author’s idea and keep the paper synoptical. Many academic papers were discussed to create coherent and unique text explaining the problematic of political allegories in John Updyke’s *Rabbit, Run.*
1. Individual characters

This chapter aims to provide detailed analysis and descriptions of the individual characters and the countries or political entities depicted by them. They are evaluated based on their self-presentation in the book, but also according to the way the main hero and the narrator perceive them.

1a: Harry and Janice Angstrom

Harry Angstrom, the protagonist, is introduced to the reader as the very first character of the whole book. Furthermore, he represents the only adult person around at the moment of the opening scene. Being the adult element surrounded by aura of autonomy and leadership, his reactions are awaited and mimicked by others – by the children he joined playing basketball (Updike 1) as well as the adults later in the narrative. Despite having asked them, the boys, for permission beforehand, he presumes that they would not deny. He even picks his team. The position of disproportionate power between generations suddenly breaking into on-going affairs at the beginning of the story can be read as foreshadowing of the ethos depicted in the book. In this scene the main character Harry Angstrom is clearly the central point of the focus, his power and macho nature are used as the scaffolding of the first scene.

Ever since this moment he is never left out of the individual scenes – being either the focus of attention or the one whose perception helps to form the notion of the situation he finds himself in. Even though the whole plot is being told in a third person by an unknown narrator, the register of Harry Angstrom is often distinguishable in the speech of this aforementioned narrator. Mainly cuss words and negative notes about his kin sometimes appear among sentences of prefabricated structure, neutral
tone and classy register typical for the narrator. For instance, when Janice Angstrom is described as stupid or clumsy (Updike 16) or when Harry’s feelings are analysed considerably more deeply than a narrator needs to do or usually does, when comes to the other characters:

...that Eccles is known as a fag and he has become the new pet. As he and Eccles walk together toward the first tee he feels dragged down, lame. And the ball feels it too, the ball he hits after a little advice from Eccles. It sputters away to one side, crippled by a perverse topspin that makes it fall from flight as dumpily as a blob of clay. (Updike 60-61)

Moreover, other characters and even anecdotes from his own life are only mentioned according to Harry Angstrom’s consciousness – when he is reminded of them or when he actually meets them. Therefore, while analysing the individuals and the relations among them, the possible subjectivity needs to be taken in account. From the ethical point of view the inspiring motivations are judged based on the position of the main protagonist regardless of their consequences and seemingly good or bad impacts on the others. He puts his own well-being above everything else without feeling any responsibility for the aftermath of his exploits. Following his own dreams without giving his surroundings a second thought, he directly causes fundamental changes in the lives of others. The most outstanding example is, when his absence from home causes the death of his daughter Rebecca June. He is capable of realising that he has the capacity to prevent disasters like that from happening. This becomes obvious from his contemplation about his wife almost having broken the TV set:

One time Janice, who is especially clumsy when pregnant or drunk, got the
wire wrapped around her foot and nearly pulled the set, a hundred and forty-nine dollars, down smash on the floor. Luckily he got to it while it was still rocking in the metal cradle and before Janice began kicking out in one of her panics. (Updike 13)

It is also quite peculiar to inspect the choice of the word used to convey the image of the moment as “cradle” is an expression commonly used to describe a bed for babies. This as well is linked to the death of his offspring he could have averted in a similar way.

Position of young Harry Angstrom strongly corresponds with the position of post-war America in the Fifties. During this era the USA were experiencing economic growth also known as the Golden Age of Capitalism (Ball 45). It was caused by rapid development of manufacturing providing sufficient number of jobs. Bringing the country to economic stability, this phenomenon is widely considered to have had a great international influence in the means of political power. Yet another result of the newly acquired peace and composure is a demographic occurrence called the generation of Baby Boomers. Their lives follow the wave of consumerism that considers material wealth to be the same as prosperity and a way to happiness. Competition in acquiring new possession is encouraged and praised. Family welfare is often linked with wealth in media and this message creates a pressure throughout the whole society. The Angstrom family is also caught in the loop of this social construct, and each of them faces it differently. Janice buys a bathing suit in winter while shopping for fun with her mother, it bears the idea of her beauty. She is grateful for such opportunities and spends the rest of the time watching commercial programs on
TV (Updike 9). She is a model example of a consumer. Harry, contrary, becomes aware of the patterns in people’s behaviour and gradually tries to resist consumer society. At first, he gets angry, because his wife has bought a bathing suit out of the swimming season (Updike 9), later on he decides to quit his job of a trades man (Updike 19). This former job of his consisted of presenting a kitchen gadget for peeling vegetables. It is a utensil mainly bought by housewives, who fall for the advertisement (Updike 3). Whether such an object is truly necessary to be kept in kitchen, or whether it is just a fashion choice, is disputable. Nevertheless, he eventually quits after having discovered this omnipresent fraud:

Rabbit tries it, pinching the mouth together and then the wink, getting the audience out front with you against some enemy behind, Walt Disney or the MagiPeel Peeler Company, admitting it's all a fraud but, what the hell, making it likable. We're all in it together. Fraud makes the world go round. The base of our economy. Vitaconomy, the modern housewife's password, the one-word expression for economizing vitamins by the MagiPeel Method. (Updike 3)

The conflict of identity starts to grow in his mind and he cannot decide whether to accept those new norms. By quitting the job, he also fails to fulfill the task of the head of the family as expected. One of the goals of the Baby Boomers generation was to live a conservative life within their nuclear family unit. The way family comfort life was promoted in the media is a mansion in suburbs, mother taking care of offspring and father being the breadwinner.

Harry Angstrom, after his personal war with the beginning of puberty, becomes successful and looked up to for being a part of basketball high school team.
Among his priorities is belonging to the popular clique, to be widely accepted. He acquires his power by reaching for higher sociometric status. This tendency of his points out sudden expansion of popular culture during that era. Harry, on one side, deprecates the materialism as a social construct, but admires and symbolizes the popular culture on the other. Popular culture was going through such a boom, because it was used as one of the propaganda tools. According to the theoretical introduction to Alex S. Edelstein’s book exploring this topic, Harry is the target of the new propaganda aiming at young people that are aware of being that target. Those people unknowingly help to spread the information by discussing it—whether in a positive or negative manner does not play the major role (11-13).

Being suddenly perceived as successful, he maintains a self-confident approach and as a young adult he starts establishing his sovereign position in society. As Andrew Tolson states in his work *The Limits of Masculinity* “Masculinity is a kind of cultural bribe – a boy’s social commitment is won at the price of his independence,” (46). Harry Angstrom has been mentored and indoctrinated by his coach Marty Tothero, who plays a role that cannot be omitted, the one who can countermand crucial decisions, the leader. Despite being a head of a family himself, Harry occasionally turns to his former coach Marty Tothero. Next to Harry Angstrom’s mother, Marty Tothero is listed as an authority and a fatherly figure (Updike 6).

In the Sixties the left came to play and brought a revolution not only to America, but also to Europe. The essence of it lied in overthrowing the existing social norms and trends and mitigation of socio-economic differences. Each nation approached this revolution of political structural renovation differently. Typical were
two kinds of movements – political and cultural one (Braunstein 70). They usually had similar aims. The hippie movement developed in America proclaiming free love, new philosophies arose and some political ideologists strived to realize utopian ideals. Elimination of sexual taboos as the new phenomenon in the USA is represented as the decline of Harry Angstrom’s and Janice’s discipline at the workplace in order to maintain an intimate relationship with each other. They are going through something they are not experienced in. The concept of free love, or any other of the new trends, if used without a foregoing precaution, can end up in misunderstood or in unintentional result. This time it led to a new generation living in a clash with the previous one, which crystalized into a sever change of certain paradigms. Harry and Janice live in line with the new ideology. Having unprotected intercourse caused Janice getting pregnant. That could have been avoided by taking contraception or, alternatively, by complete abstinence until marriage, as the tradition has it. Parenthood sends them as if the opposite direction than they headed. They suddenly belong to the Baby Boomers generation kind of life. This causes a conflict of identity in the couple and utter chaos in their priorities. Harry finds but a complete irreconciliation of the traditional lifestyle and practices with the new ones. His inability to adapt to the current trends and use them wisely leads to a major moral crisis in his life. Any commitment is avoided by Harry Angstrom’s getaway from his son and wife. He makes all of his impulsive decisions, because he feels unfulfilled, oppressed and drawn back by his own family. The tension in the couple has the same reason as Harry’s personal tension. It depicts the intergenerational conflicts caused by contradictory values and political believes held by those two generations. The older one longs for respectable suburban family lives and conservative politics, whereas
the younger chases change and follows leftist politics. This concludes in gargantuan revolution among the youth and spreads gradually: They looked instead to ‘non-commodified’ alternative revolutionary subjects: to students themselves as a ‘revolutionary class’, to outsiders like prisoners and the chronically unemployed, and to third world peasants and ‘lumpen-proletarians’. (Barker 64)

Some of the new ideologies, which turned up during that era, tend to differ from existing western culture so much they damn this lifestyle and its main pillars. In America, this prevalent inner conflict reflects in McCarthyism and Red Scare. Those are both propaganda concepts against the predominating communist tendencies in Eastern Europe. McCarthyism is described as “a vociferous campaign against alleged communists in the US government and other institutions carried out under Senator Joseph McCarthy” in the Oxford dictionary. It consisted of spreading information about the dangers coming from the eastern bloc without proper evidence, criminal prosecution of citizens convicted of sympathy with the communist and conscious alarming the citizens.

(Even those,) who fought for racial equality were called communists, as were people who wanted to limit the development of nuclear weapons. Employees who had been cleared by loyalty boards were checked again and were often found guilty without any new evidence. (Fitzgerald 59)

The tactics of deliberate deception, and also the contrary – concealing information, was well known to both sides. Since not only the quality and seriousness of the new results were important, it was also the primacy that was indispensable. For this reason both parties resorted to extensive use of the intelligence services and
espionage. Constant paranoia and checking the enemy is executed with respective atmosphere by Updike. In a short episode, Harry Angstrom can be seen making up a strategical plan of staying unnoticed, carefully considering each step: Rabbit stealthily approaches his old home on the grass, hopping the little barberry hedge and the wire meant to keep kids on the pavement. He sneaks down the strip of grass between the two cement walks that go with the two brick walls… (Updike 7) At the end, when he finally manages to reach his destination, he secretly watches through a window what is going on inside. It is him only going to pick his son up, but even such a regular errand is followed by fear and unsubstantiated assumptions.

This plan worked and resulted in a war on communism known as Second Red Scare. It was a common believe that the leftist regimes were trying to infiltrate into American institutions in order to break the system from the inside (Goldstein 27). The pursuits of McCarthyism led to political aggression and Cold War.

1b: Marty Tothero

The character of Marty Tothero, Harry Angstrom’s high school basketball team coach, is remarkable for his position towards the main protagonist. Unlike many others, Marty Tothero is respected by Harry. He is perceived as a fatherly figure or a mentor. The way he puts himself slightly above the younger generation and even calls them “children” (Updike22) only confirms this statement. Furthermore, he expresses his happiness over Harry coming to him to seek a safe place and advice. “Good boy.” he says “That’s all we want” (Updike 16). The plural (we) signals that Tothero does not only speak for himself, but for the whole generation of Baby Boomers, who feel abandoned by their children (O’Connell 53). Harry trusts him as he would trust his
father and lets him have the last say in his personal issues: “Next to his mother Marty Tothero had had the most force” (Updike 17). The mutual adoration has developed during Harry’s young adolescence and lasts as such until the tragic end of Tothero’s life.

Marty Tothero proves to be skilled in dealing with people and dedicated to communication with them: "Do you want to go back now? You must tell me if you do." or “Now, Harry, I'll give you the place to sleep provided, provided, Harry, that when you wake up the two of us have a serious, a long and serious talk about this crisis in your marriage.” (Updike 18, 19). Although sincerity can be doubted, he usually comes out as a light-hearted person with a tendency to create unions and teams, which is his main legacy (O’Connell 53). He always extensively compliments Harry, which, especially during the adolescent years of high school, helps to form Harry’s specific egocentric personality: “Fred, this is my finest boy, a wonderful basketball player, Harry Angstrom, you probably remember his name from the papers, he twice set a county record, in 1950 and then he broke it in 1951, a wonderful accomplishment.” (Updike 19). As it can be observed in this quotation, Marty Tothero uses his rhetorical skills with artistry and grace. He addresses the common people around him and pays attention to them. When speaking about Harry, he proceeds to cherish him for his former status. The position of a leader suits him, he is not afraid to make final decisions as for example in the case of the four of them (Harry Angstrom, Marty Tothero, Ruth Leonard and Margaret Kosko) having a dinner out. Tothero orders chopsticks instead of regular cutlery for everybody without asking beforehand (Updike 23). It is a risk, because this soiree is a tactical negotiation and important contacts are on a line. He, never the less, turns to this way.
Maybe he was driven by the idea of converging equality of the four of them in the situation not exactly in their comfort zone.

Marty Tothero is also the person, who organizes the meeting of Harry with Ruth and Margaret in order to ensure their future interaction. He seems to have it planned just waiting to implement it: “After Tothero’s build-up Rabbit is amazed that Margaret is just another Janice – the same sallow density, that stubborn smallness. Scarcely moving her lips, she says, “This is Ruth Leonard. Marty Tothero, and you, whatever your name is.” (Updike 20) Tothero appears to be rather empathic knowing what Harry wants to hear and see. He discourages Rabbit, as his friends used to call Harry, from resolving the domestic problems and rather directs him to leave them and start working on a similar aim from the very beginning somewhere else. “Janice! Let's not talk about little mutts like Janice Springer, Harry boy. This is the night. This is no time for pity. The real women are dropping down out of the trees.” (Updike 20) Marty Tothero himself, with his loose morals, is rather close to the counterculture of the sixties and as such provides a practical example to Harry, leading to the breakup of his family and, therefore, directing him even further from the conservative ideal of the nuclear family. Marty Tothero, while still married to his wife, is having an affair with another woman – let alone a woman with violent tendencies against men in times when emancipation of women was still in progress (Updike 20). Harry also comes to realization that Marty Tothero does not conceal his fondness of adolescent boys’ bodies, and his standards of living are generally very low (Updike 16). All those are indicators of his inclination to various counter-cultural or even anti-social tendencies. He is aware of his questionable behaviour and asks Harry to do as he says, not as he does. Harry adopts this advice and, being in a similar situation as
Tóthero later on, uses it as a fatherly gesture while talking to his son Nelson to discourage him marrying a woman he got pregnant in Rabbit is Rich (Bellis 446). The behavioural pattern only highlights the importance of this interaction.

Tóthero’s role in the book can be summarized as a leader, friend of people and someone, who initiates contact with surrounding entities. His social choices rather correspond with the left-winged politics. He is the allegory of the former president Harry S. Truman. His love for his fatherland abounds and he is dedicated to his office. Safe guarding the American interests can be found in the book, when Tóthero speaks about Harry Angstrom with some third party. He uses an argument stating that whoever succeeds in sports already knows the “sacredness of achievements” and it is impossible for him to fail “in the greater game of life” (Updike 25 qtd in Bellis 446). Harry S. Truman is an enlighten head of state and he held his post for two consecutive terms.

Though Harry S. Truman makes pacts and enters unions with many countries in order to stabilize the socio/economic post-war situation, he agrees with the usage of atomic bombs in Japan at one point of his governance. This might appear contradictory and against his personal peace-making opinions, especially because he was a well-known human rights defender (Roberts n.p.). The situation with such practical steps taken that are unlikely of the lead figure is present in the book in connection with Marty Tóthero repeatedly. First, the line has to drawn between the entities that are to be protected and praised by him and the others, those that shall be damned. Again the lead figure-either Marty Tóthero, or Harry Truman-is subjected to a moral choice of a huge influence or their task is to state what is ethically acceptable
and what is better to obviate. What links the former president and the basketball
couch is their attitude to sorting out such dilemmas.

The reason why they choose some to protect and deplore the others is a
simple political move ensuring their long-term domination over someone who will
reliably favour them back in return. The enemy, in the book, is not depicted anyhow
dangerously it is more of a catalyst of the plot, an element helping them to develop
and to consolidate their positions. In the book there is a memory of Harry Angstrom
getting into fight over basketball brought up. The incident is not being looked down
on, it still annoys Tothero after many years, he is squeamish when it comes to his
favourite:

“Then what happened, Harry? Did you cream him? I’ve forgotten this whole
incident.” Tothero’s mouth is full of food and his hunger for revenge is ugly.
“Why, no,” Rabbit says slowly. “I never fouled. The ref saw it and it was his
fifth foul and he was out. Then we smothered’em.” Something fades in
Tothero’s expression; his face goes slack. “That’s right, you never fouled. He
never did. Harry was always the idealist.” (Updike 25)

It is again questionable whether Harry truly managed to stay away from
violence on that day, because he is the one, who delivers the story-and can therefore
change it – and also the only one who remembers it. Another example comparable by
its schema to the Korean War might be the aforementioned approach of Tothero
towards Janice Angstrom. The common denominator is picking a side in a conflict
that does not affect them directly. In the same manner as Tothero is the side with
Harry, America determined to get included and come up with a solution.
The presidential office had Truman have a speech written for the rare occasion of forming a new political alliance, the Truman Doctrine. This speech addresses the general public and informs about the benefits of starting a new entity. The style of is insisting and register provokes emotions and empathy. To summarize the information typical of those two linked figures – Marty Tothero and Harry S. Truman it is important to bring up the dubiety and certain deviousness. Their communication skills are used consciously and very often successfully. None of them mentions himself as the central point of their speeches, but by giving them, they admit to have the power to manipulate (Satterthwaite 77). Tothero’s speech to Ruth about his players has a logical structure and begins with an emotional phrase. There are no signs of Tothero’s common language, he uses neither poetic phrases, nor pronounces sentences of such fluency and coherency. Tothero’s speech normally contains a number of vulgarisms and his sentences are short, some of their parts get even repeated twice. It again gives the impression of something prepared, something that has been thought through in advance. There are two examples of Tothero expressing himself, the common situation and the monologue that resembles a political speech full of motivation and praising good leadership: “To eat, Harry, to dine. D, I, N, E. Rise, my boy. Aren't you hungry? Hunger. Hunger.” (Updike 17) compared to “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, young lady, 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 word 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, can never become, in the deepest sense, a failure in the greater game of life.” (Updike 25)

**1c: Ruth Leonard**

Ruth Leonard is rather an independent woman living in the same city as Marty Tothero. She meets Harry, when he comes there during his troublesome times. She is a contrast to many other characters; the comparison is mostly executed in a specifically appropriate literary way fitting each of the characters discussed. Ruth can be identified by more socially disapproved attributes than Harry Angstrom, yet she still somehow attracts less unwanted attention than him or that he is aware of. Even though his deeds are depicted as blameless.

Simmer down. All he’d done was ask for a map. Damn dirt digger – what was so suspicious about that? Somebody was always going somewhere. He better get the oil checked because he wasn’t going to stop again until he was halfway to Georgia. (Updike 8)

Ruth is described as plump or fat frequently in the book not only by herself but also by her acquaintances. Other, positive, descriptions are provided through mind of Harry Angstrom. The perception of her body based on her appearance changes once she enters intimate relationship with Harry Angstrom (Updike 37). He suddenly changes his mind and instead of the hypocrite inspection of her looks and listing her imperfections, as he is used to doing when it comes to other women, he feels affection (Updike 2, 56).
Similarly to Janice, her character is not described in such a detail and very few of her opinions and reactions are featured in the book. Harry proceeds to treat them similarly as they merge for him; he also introduces himself using a nickname to indicate the informal character of their meeting. It is yet hard to distinguish whether he does so to promote the American cohesion or whether he is trying to establish a friendly relationship to benefit from it later.

After Tothero’s build-up Rabbit is amazed that Margaret is just another Janice – the same sallow density, that stubborn smallness. Scarcely moving her lips, she says, “This is Ruth Leonard. Marty Tothero, and you, whatever your name is.” “Harry,” Rabbit says. “Or Rabbit.” (Updike 20)

Her role is to be a stable island, a woman, and eventually a mother. Both the women (Ruth and Janice) are described rather stereotypically. On one hand, they are each other’s opposites. One is tiny and confused, defenceless without a man to take care of her, while the other is plump and voluptuous, not being able to settle down for just one man. One the other hand, the presence of Harry Angstrom in their lives causes that they have to face similar fate. Even such an unfaithful and impulsive man like Harry Angstrom at first rapidly improves the quality of their lives. A pattern of unfortunate events is clearly depicted in the narrative in connection with him. Both the women fall for Harry and get pregnant with the vision of wedding and settled down family life. Harry, as mentioned before in chapter dedicated to him, is internally torn and runs away. The women are than left alone with a baby, an everlasting memory or American influence on various local politics.
Her story strikingly resembles a biblical character of the same name. The biblical Ruth marries a man of different religion when she widows, when she is no longer a virgin. She marries him out of her free will – a detail not so often to be found in ancient texts (Ruth 3.9 qtd in Baker 278). Before the wedding she was indigent, but her husband Boaz saves her. Correspondingly, Ruth Leonard, who is an atheist in Christian America, lets Harry pretend that they are married the first night they spend together: “Yes; let's be.” So quickly her arms don't move from hanging at her sides, he kneels at her feet and kisses the place on her fingers where a ring would have been (Updike 33). Later on in the narrative she finds herself in a desperate situation and unsuccessfully tries to convince Harry to marry her “Now I’d like to marry you. I would. I mean whatever I said but if we're married it'll be all right.” (Updike 135).

Ruth’s role, when applied to the political situation, corresponds with Turkey and the initially mutually beneficial relationship between her and Harry is of the same essence as Truman’s Doctrine. It is quite probable that Ruth is depicted as such a different exotic woman to differ obviously enough, or maybe even in order to touch some prejudgment about the Turkish nation.

**1d: Jack and Lucy Eccles**

Jack Eccles the Episcopal priest symbolizes yet another part of American society and that is the Christians. Since the first settlers that founded this country were Christians therefore American culture is based in the Christian culture. The bible is still commonly used in court proceedings and it is supposable that only truth will be spoken in connection to it. It is, therefore, supposable that even Harry, who feels somewhat connection to God himself, might possibly reconsider having remorse
It is essential to introduce an example from such a background that might have priorities set differently than the main protagonist and his sympathizers. Perceiving the whole text as a certain commentary on relationship, their consequences and moral value, more opinions are certainly needed. After all, consultation seems to be the common practice in times of doubt for everybody: Eccles’ laughter surprises him; it occurs to Rabbit that the minister is an expert on affairs like this – broken homes, fleeing husbands – and that “playing it by ear” has struck a fresh note. He feels flattered. Eccles has this knack. (Updike 46)

The issue about the deeds of Harry Angstrom is that the justness of his decisions is undoubtedly quite subjective. Involving a man of religion, who is well-read in the matter of conscience, sets a mirror to the opinions formulated so far. It might emphasize the importance of Jack even more if the fact that the presidents themselves are commonly perceived as Christians is added as well. The union of faith and executive power has always carried the legacy of American history. The shift in the plot comes when the spiritual truth needs to compromise with the common materialistic self-centred values. Specifically, making sure the parishioners will come to the church to meet their spiritual, but also financial, obligations. Jack Eccles preaches his own inner peace and causing trouble to anyone else makes him uncomfortable – unlike Harry Angstrom. He even hesitates to contact his acquaintances and his wife Lucy Eccles has to force him.

“What's so sacred about the Ferrys? They never do anything for the church. She came on Christmas Sunday and went out by the choir door so she wouldn't have to speak to me.” “Of course they don't do anything for the
church and that's why you should call as you know perfectly well. I don't think anything's sacred about the Ferrys except that you've been brooding about her going out the side door and making everybody's life miserable for months.” (Updike 55)

The most noticeable quality about Jack and Lucy Eccles is their divergence, the diametrically different opinions and views in the means of secular and spiritual questions. In spite of that, the two of them and their children form a family and completely fit into the ideal of the Baby Boomers living the American Dream, the needed contrast. They are the example of understanding, of the family environment bringing up perfect Americans.

Lucy Eccles is a good-looking woman – the fact that she is described in such manner, may only mean that Harry Angstrom sees her this way during the short time of their interaction. It should not be omitted that he used to see Janice as good looking but lost this opinion in the course of a longer time period. In addition, Lucy is also scholarly, informed especially about psychology (Updike 53). The view of her being an intellectually active woman, left alone about topics that are not taken well by many Christians, puts her opposite her husband. As Marshall Boswell states in his work, she also expresses her feeling about fault and blame as outcomes of one’s actions, does not renounce responsibility. Not only she blames Harry for the death of the baby, she does not falter to extend the blame onto her husband, who, according to her perception of this matter, could have affected it as well (Boswell 65). Her husband holds the same believe and while informing Harry about the tragic accident, he even uses the word “us” to address the distressed ones, he feels to be involved.
Needless to mention that her moral values are not shared with Harry Angstrom: “Well he as good as did. Runs off and sends his idiot wife on a bender. You never should have brought them back together. The woman had adjusted and something like this never would have happened.” (Updike 118)

Jack’s figure’s spirituality is expressed by his everlasting good mood caused by his believe in the afterlife, his caring opinions and by his surname. The name Eccles symbolizes his ecclesiastic nature. He identifies with some of the suppositions from the book of Ecclesiastes. As Emmalee D. Baker states in her essay, Jack Eccles prefers enjoyment to work, while neglecting the everyday live duties. She also points out the parallel with the narrator's observations in Ecclesiastes that “everything is futility and striving after wind” (87). He seems to be a bit airy and much less pragmatic, although he is not interested primarily in his own life as the others. The Eccles couple is an example of the scale on which deeds can be judged. Also despite occasional disagreements they manage to live as one unity.

Both the Eccleses are in favour of Harry Angstrom going back to his wife, which is still based on the believes of each of them, though coming from different background, reaching the same result. The difference is therefore marked also between the two of them, as if versed in the matters of ethics, and Harry himself, when Harry is being self-centred and following his instinct like a sort of animal (Trachtenberk 87). The priest still tries to have a reasonable dialogue with him while playing golf. This is a bit of unexpected and troublesome situation for Harry, because he is confronted about his steps and also his reputation of a sportsman might be at risk.
The Eccles family portrays the middle class life attitude and its participation in politics. Accented is the boldness to express an opinion that does not agree with the government (Harry) in such a way it builds up to a decent dialogue. They are evidently informed and educated enough to afford to put themselves into the governmental environment, as can be observed on the dialogue between Harry and Jack:

“She seemed in good spirits on Monday. She was out in the back yard with this other woman, and they were both giggling when I came. You must realize that for a little while, now that she's adjusted somewhat, she'll probably enjoy being back with her parents. It's her own version of your irresponsibility.”

(Updike 61)

Their position in the book outlines the golden mean between the ruthless government and the passive public. They give the simple system and the plot a twist based on contrasts in the views of ethics. This topic is thoroughly debated in the dissertation thesis by Christopher F. Love, as he introduces this topic on page 33:

Although theological readings of the novels of Rabbit Angstrom offer insight into Updike’s intricate understanding of the interplay among Christian philosophy, faith, and art, they tend to do so without juxtaposing the tetralogy’s relationship to American identity portrayed in *Rabbit, Run*, and which he continued to explore throughout the tetralogy. Indeed, in the opening novel, Updike frames Rabbit’s rejection of 1950s consumerism and conformity politically as much as spiritually, and together the novels exemplify Updike’s portrait of Rabbit and America’s shared identity crisis.
2. International Relations

This section is devoted to the analysis of two fundamental political interactions, one with enemy and one with ally. These are described based on the facts in the previous chapter.

2a: Cold War

The tense international relations after the Second World War are known to have been on the verge of a conflict possibly ending in a devastating catastrophe. This rivalry between two political blocks was not an armed conflict anymore, as there were post-war peace contracts concluded. The clash of two opposing superpowers led to series of competitions and deliberately created records of national dominance and superiority on both sides. Mostly cultural and scientific fields were affected by the sudden financial influx from the government which induced steep improvement and growth. Famously, the space programs were given a lot of attention on both sides. This Space Race was just a tool of proving extreme development, but just like Harry’s basketball, it did not really allow the common people to anyhow profit from it. Just a matter of honour.

Tension typical for this era is felt among the characters throughout the whole book, they all seem to be aware of the huge impact of their acts and seem to manipulate and think two steps ahead. It is not uncommon for them to be well aware of the motives of the others which leads either to a well-suited help or advice or, contrary, they turn their knowledge into a deadly argument. Hardly any of them is relaxed when in social interaction. The glaring differences are present even between couples in which cases it can raise questions why such people have ever decided to
connect. Those combinations or allies are better understood when the reader puts together their strengths and qualities. Such symbiosis is encouraged to be formed for the sake of political strategy. Seen in the terms of interpersonal relations, the short-term benefits are not worth taking such a risk.

The probability of divorce and following litigation hanging above some of the couples as the Sword of Damocles is there to draw the attention to possible dangers of relations among subjects with different values and priorities. What might have started as a minor disagreement can end up in a dangerous checkmate situation. There is a symbol for tragedy caused by man created during this era – the Doomsday Clock shall graphically display the forthcoming danger of the end of the world caused by careless human behaviour. Historically, this threat was the atomic bomb in the hands of the eastern bloc agents. As Brian Fitzgerald fittingly glosses on page 50 of his book McCarthyism: the Red Scare: that was a new fear, because until than no one else, except for Americans, had an atomic bomb. It was more than clear from its previous usages that a war fought by such weapons would have been fatal.

The strategy of Cold War also consisted of political propaganda. In this case, it was spreading not necessarily accurate data of a seemingly informative nature. The aim was to arouse reaction among the general public. This should have led to provoking a mass action being spread among the very residents of the countries involved. The dreaded effect was reassuring them about their superiority. Similarly, the intercommunication with the opponent was based on carefully created impression of prosperity and rapid development of the agent concerned, which served for intimidation and misleading of the others (Shaw 67).
Reading the book the reader might find himself sympathizing, or more accurately - feel being pushed to do so, with Harry Angstrom. That is the art of formulating information in order to get an exact reaction. In other words, some parts of the book bear the signs of propaganda on the level, where propaganda really was. The idea of his personal traits being relatable, or even the only correct ones, permeates the whole story. Propaganda, as the opposite of objective and legitimate statement is presented in many different layers of the story. It is consciously applied and highlighted, at times hyperbolized. A very concrete notion was created by the author by the he whole mood and register of the book. Step by step the opinions on specific individuals, substituting political clusters are presented in a certain way – their qualities, intentions and values filtered through the media and simplified in order to be perceived as either morally good or bad. However only in relation to America, which is left out intentionally in order to let the recipient of this information understand the depicted character globally. This conception of a point of view is based in two factors. Firstly, the moral value is highly subjective and therefore must be related to the originator of this opinion. Secondly, this narrative has a certain aim of depicting the stereotypical American mentality, which is embodied in the main protagonist.

As it is already mentioned in the chapter dedicated to Harry Angstrom and his wife Janice, his point of view is crucial. Taking in account that his main features correspond with the American essence of that time, it is necessary to note the parallel between him and the narrator, who as if puts Harry Angstrom into the role of the mediator of the whole process. Despite their similarity, the narrator is unknown and heterodiegetic. The omnipresence of a heterodigenetic narrator in the story cannot be
compared to an active participation at the plot as such (Walsh 504). He presents the storyline in an active voice in present tense. He follows Harry throughout the whole story and in case of describing his actions, the tendency is to explain the reason behind them and focus on the good intentions leading to them. When it comes to the others, the narrator does not hesitate to reach for negative evaluation that does not apply only to the one time deed, but damns the person as a whole and makes sure to keep this label stuck around constantly. This focalisation on Harry Angstrom himself is intensified by occasional merging of theirs minds in the means of opinions and register. This forms dubious reliability of the narrator, for it is not always clear whether given phrase of indirect speech belongs to him or whether it is a mere thought process of the main protagonist.

The move of using a single imaginary entity to transfer the message to the general public is a proven part of American culture. It helps to evoke the feeling of belonging into a community, of not being left out. There can appear a certain duplicity in this unity, though. Usually it is the government creating the ideology and coding it into easily readable messages on one side and the general public accepting those ideas and executing the demanded acts on the other. This message is, however, brought up by an entity coming as if from the ranks of the common people and this makes it hard to recognize the opponent in it, the real author of the idea. One of the early examples of such a symbolic figure used to be Columbia, a woman representing the whole of America. She is often to be seen with her much more famous male counterpart – Uncle Sam, the government. Each of them was created for the needs of wars, to hype the nation into participation and prevent them from feeling bad about committing violent deeds.
This phenomenon of two coexisting and mutually merging layers standing for one united America is to be found in the blended minds of Harry Angstrom and the covert narrator adopting some of his views. To explain the rationalization of this system, this reduced schema might be followed to decipher the distribution of roles on the story: If the government is the body consisting of the educated in the means of international politics, it possibly might also appear to make decisions and take steps incomprehensible to the rest of the population. It, for the same reason, happens to be in charge of judging the performance of the others. The common awareness of the politics and filtration of information about the moves taken and motives is also brought to terms by the government itself. Those characteristics fit Harry Angstrom more than the narrator. His seemingly impulsive conducts might appear random and unpremeditated. His speeches, whatsoever, have the ability to reverse this impression and reveal that his behaviour is fully conscious and triggered reactions in the end work in favour of his tendency. The narrator, therefore, occupies the status of the American society. Autonomy is just partial, but mostly the progression is regulated and thoroughly watched. Agreeing with this theory can be supported by understanding the narration as the testimony of the people.

The newly formed countries building their autonomy and working on their international relations and the ones thrown off economic balance or those with disintegrated internal structure had become an easy target of either of the two superpowers. It was not out of the ordinary for the countries that were sovereign during those unbalanced times to concentrate on obtaining allies. To accomplish this they usually helped them, mainly financially but as well politically, to recover from war.
2b: Truman Doctrine

To provide the theoretical background of Truman Doctrine, and its inseparable portrayal in the books, it is necessary to inspect this chapter of history retrospectively. It is not the first time in the past that a liaison of such has been designed. The pillars are not primarily the similarity of characters and views, but effort of one side to prevent a long-term impact of contemporary events by supporting the other, often weaker, one. Deliberate deals among entities, whose common goal is to sustain stability and protection, can be negotiated on different levels - beginning with simple agreement on mutual anticipation to one-way help or a compromise beneficial to both sides. One of the latter examples can be applied to Truman Doctrine, where the more powerful member of this alliance provided economic support and sheltered his charge using its influencing status. Therefore, while one side, Turkey and Greece in this case, gained instant boost of its economy and a supervising ally, the other one, America, secured stable evolution of extraneous matters and strengthened its influence.

Comparable step had already been taken by America towards Europe in the past. Monroe Doctrine, as it was called, was not of such an active complexion, but rather a preventive measure. The aim was to settle independence and trust among the countries across continents by establishing a policy about no possible intervention of the other countries into American affairs (Kasturi 176). Perceiving the characters as partial factors of political proceedings – specifically, Ruth Leonard as Greece and Harry Angstrom still as America, the evolution of their relationship and its evolution can be considered an ellipsis. Events long past are brought up just to illustrate the link as Harry Angstrom and Ruth Leonard learn that they must have met already at
high school (Updike 21). This early on stadium of their mutual indifference shows
the effect of the Monroe Doctrine that worked alike for both sides. Monroe, actually,
did not intent to impose in Europe either. This specification was later on taken out to
extend the reach of this policy. The Monroe Doctrine became an inspiration of and a
base for the Truman Doctrine (Borchard 886). It is essential for understanding the
following events.

The foretaste of the relationship between Ruth Leonard and Harry Angstrom
is suggested in few symbols at the time of their first meeting as adults. Besides the
fact that they are peers and therefore went to high school during the same era, there is
also the presence of Marty Tothero, who initiated this meeting and consecutive
connection between those two people - Harry Angstrom as the American government,
Ruth Leonard as Greece, her friend Margaret as Turkey and Marty Tothero himself as
Truman. When the old times are discussed there are references to the Monroe
Doctrine. It was initiated by the American president Monroe and three other
politicians – Jefferson, Adams and Madison – who were, regardless of their opposing
views within the American political scene, in charge of the negotiation with Greece.
They all united and accepted this plan (Kaplan 15). Ruth Leonard mentions having
dated three basketball players, having a close relationship based on trust with three
men that are only described by the essence they have in common with the main
character impersonating America. Those three stand for the politicians linked to the
Greece affairs. There are two numerals used in the book in connection to her bond
with Americans – number three as the actual number of her boyfriends and number
four mentioned by Marty Tothero shortly after the number three. For the first sight it
might appear that Marty Tothero corrects her, because she left him (Truman) out of
her calculation (Updike 21).

At the beginning of the post-war era Greece was a strategic point thanks to its geographical position on the border of the Soviet Union. Despite having a stable domestic market and independent government, it was in need of strengthening its international position and defending its own political affiliation (Kaplan 21). There was also Turkey in a similar vulnerable position, being constantly oppressed by the Soviet Union, the Turkish government was forced to engage the army as well. Both those countries kept resisting the left-wing enemy. They very soon got in touch with American authorities that came up with a nonviolent way of helping those countries to maintain decent living standards for their citizens and using American dollar to stop communism – the Truman Doctrine (Borchard 886). Judging this act on a wider scale of the moral spectrum, America is often criticised for financing and getting involved in the war that destroyed Europe in the first place, which disputes their heroism. It is said that America invested money but got back much more than that, priceless power (Satterthwaite 74).

The first meeting of the four (Ruth Leonard, Margaret Costco, Harry Angstrom and Marty Tothero) is organised by Marty Tothero in the role of Truman shielding the whole project as the legal deputy. Leading position has always been typical for him. His rhetoric qualities can be liken to the political figure of Truman as well as the behavioural ones. Ellipsis and repetition is the main link between the official speech Truman gave in the occasion of introducing the plan publicly and Marty Tothero’s use of language.
Ruth Leonard might be understood as Greece during the Truman Doctrine era for the strategic location of her appearance and her independence. She lives in another country than Harry Angstrom and is, therefore, a very convenient associate for him, while he is on the run. She is, on one hand, independent, but on the other hand, she hates her job as a prostitute though it provides her just enough money for life. It creates psychological pressure on her and she seeks help. It is beneficial for both of them to take on this pact if Harry Angstrom contributes by his money, which she actually asks for out of necessity, just as Greece did. He also makes sure to look after her eating habits and exercise (Updike 78). In return, Rabbit gets to set his comfort place for unexpected occasions in future and a network of contacts.

Shall those two be taken as representatives of their high schools, the idea of the evolution of relationship as the time passes can be explained. In both, the memory and during the actual on-going meetings, the motivation is, like in history, calculated and therefore it is no surprise that they also happen to be contrary. The morally ambivalent stance of America towards Europe is crucial – supporting both, first the war and at the later time the peace. In the same manner as Harry Angstrom thinks lowly about Ruth Leonard’s high school and her schoolmates, while he fights for her attention and affection few years later without realising that deprecating a whole means deprecating the individual parts as well. Such an attitude can be seen as hypocritical or unreliable. When Ruth Leonard points this out, Harry objects by stating:

“I'll tell you,” he says. “When I ran from Janice I made an interesting discovery.” The tears bubble over her lids and the salty taste of the pool-water
is sealed into her mouth. “If you have the guts to be yourself,” he says, “other people'll pay your price.” (Updike 140).
CONCLUSION

The primary aim of this bachelor thesis was to point out the allegoric representation of the post-war social and political situation, not only in the United States, in the work of the 20th century American writer John Updike. This paper discusses several relevant characters from the first book of popular trilogy to explore the relationship of the main protagonist towards the people surrounding him. It was not necessary to analyse all the characters from the book as not all of them were equally relevant for the purpose of this thesis. Their characteristics and relationships describe the seriousness of the above-mentioned situation. They are evaluated based on their self-presentation in the book, but also according to the way the main hero and the narrator perceive them.

The main storyline was appointed to be resolving around the main protagonist. The thesis manages to provide solid argumentation supporting the point that each of the characters that appear in the narrative and each their interaction can be read as a political event influencing somehow connected to America, the central focus of the plot.

The sources used were mostly academic papers discussing different kinds of allegory in this author's work, alongside with publications that provide objective and accurate data on historical events. Although most of the characters represented one country each, more than one of them were discovered to stand for America. This is one of the numerous metaphorical depictions of the political ideas. The struggle to overcome the sudden social and political revolution was recognised in the mental
state of the individuals. Besides the plot and the setting, the narrative techniques were strictly monitored and revealed yet another layer of the text.
WORKS CITED AND CONSULTED


Cliques and Fitting In, Sociologists Patricia and Peter Adler


84. JSTOR


ENGLISH SUMMARY

The primary aim of this bachelor thesis is to point out the allegoric representation of the post-war social and political situation, not only in the United States, in the work of the 20th century American writer John Updike. This work discusses several relevant characters from the first book of popular trilogy. Their characteristics and relationships describe the seriousness of the above-mentioned situation. The sources used are mostly academic papers discussing different kinds of allegory in this author's work, alongside with publications that provide objective and accurate data on historical events.

The first chapter aims to provide detailed analysis and descriptions of the individual characters and the countries or political entities depicted by them. They are evaluated based on their self-presentation in the book, but also according to the way the main hero and the narrator perceive them. This section is devoted to the analysis of two fundamental political interactions, one with enemy and one with ally. These are described based on the facts in the previous chapter.

This work represents the concept of understanding the literary work and the arguments supporting this thesis.
ČESKÉ RESUMÉ

Primárním cílem této bakalářské práce je poukázání na alegorické vyjádření poválečné sociální a politické situace nejen na území spojených států v díle Amerického spisovatele 20. století Johna Updika. Tato práce rozebírá několik relevantních postav z první knihy populární trilogie a na jejich vlastnostech a vztazích líčí závažnost výše zmínované situace. Použité zdroje jsou převážně další akademické práce zabývající se alegoriemi v díle tohoto autora, vedle toho také publikace poskytující nestranné a přesné údaje o historických událostech.

První část diplomové práce představuje jednotlivé vybrané postavy a na základě jejich vlastností také jimi znázorněné státy nebo politické celky. Jako takové byly výhodnoceny a s ohledem na jakousi sebeprezentaci v knize, ale také podle toho, jak je vnímá hlavní hrdina a vypravěč. Druhá část práce je pak věnována analýze dvou zásadních politických interakcí, jedné nepřátelské a jedné přátelské. Ty jsou popsány na základě faktů z předchozí části.

Tato práce představuje koncept chápání literárního díla a argumenty tuto tezi podporující.