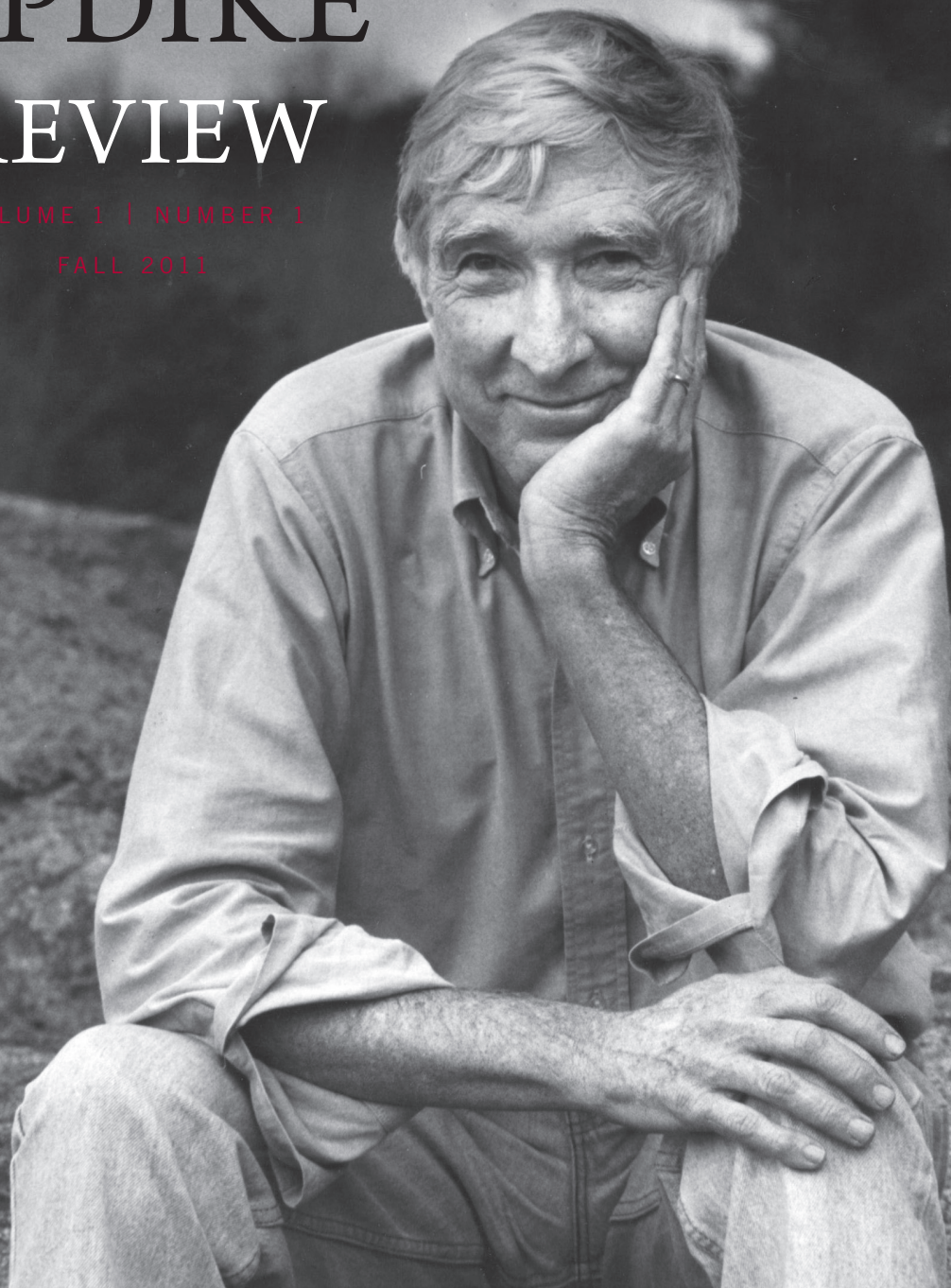


THE
JOHN
UPDIKE
REVIEW

VOLUME 1 | NUMBER 1

FALL 2011





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Introduction

In an era of shrinking library budgets and deacquisition, digitalization and electronic publication, this may not be the ideal moment to launch a new literary journal, particularly one that wishes to highlight its print version. Yet with John Updike as the subject, such an undertaking seems appropriate. Updike was not only one of the major literary figures of our time, but he cared immensely about the aesthetics and tangible feel of books, particularly his own, so it seems only fitting to continue that tradition in how we produce this journal.

Given the magnitude, range, and influence of his writings, there was little doubt that an Updike journal would emerge after his death in 2009. Such journals exist for Hawthorne, James, Hemingway, and others, as well as for contemporary writers like Atwood, Roth, and Pynchon. While the need for a single-author journal dedicated to a writer whose production was relatively small may be questionable, Updike was so prolific that a journal could be devoted solely to his short fiction—200 stories—or his essays and criticism—ten volumes and more than 5,000 pages of prose. Updike's 65 volumes will provide ample opportunity for conversation and debate among writers and scholars for a considerable period.

The question, however, becomes what kind of journal. Most single-author journals feature academic essays that provide new ways of interpreting individual works; contextualize the author's writings historically and culturally; rediscover ignored or forgotten writings; and generally sustain intellectual curiosity and debate about the writer's work. Such contributions will likely comprise the foundation of the *John Updike Review*. In this inaugural issue, we have five academic essays that address a range of concerns: the reception of Updike's writings in France (Sylvie Mathé); the intertextual dialogue between Updike and Kerouac's *On the Road* (Donald J. Greiner); the relationship between religion and empire, the local

and global, in *Toward the End of Time* (Judie Newman); Updike's contrasting attitudes toward the movies (Peter J. Bailey); and the evolving relationship between faith and good works in *In the Beauty of the Lilies* (Liliana M. Naydan).

This journal will also publish extended reviews of books written by and about Updike. In this first issue, distinguished literary critic William H. Pritchard considers Updike's final poems, *Endpoint and Other Poems*, while Robert M. Luscher, who has written as well as anyone on Updike's short fiction, reviews two posthumously published story collections, *My Father's Tears* and *The Maples Stories*. Each of these review-essays is in the range of 3,000 to 6,000 words. Few journals publish such extended book reviews, yet our sense is that the additional space allows informed reviewers to contribute more significantly to the critical dialogue. Given that additional posthumous publications by Updike are forthcoming and that new volumes of literary criticism on his writings appear annually, I anticipate that book reviews will comprise a healthy portion of this journal's contents.

Yet our journal will not consist exclusively of academic criticism and reviews. Updike was, arguably, one of the most important literary critics of our time, composing hundreds of extended reviews and essays about books, authors, and literature from around the globe. To put it simply, he was the kind of author who spent considerable time writing about other writers and their books. Thus, it seems only fitting that a venue should exist where contemporary novelists, short story writers, poets, artists, and editors can write about Updike and his work. To that end, our inaugural issue includes essays and tributes by Ann Beattie, Michael Griffith, J. D. McClatchy, and David Updike, each of whom is known for his or her work in fiction or poetry. Going forward, our intention is to encourage as well as commission work from writers and artists, so that these pages will include the views of practitioners as well as critics.

Similarly, our hope is to publish a range of voices and perspectives. One of the early and unexpected pleasures of editing this journal has been to see where the submissions are coming from. Among the first thirty submissions we received were essays by writers from India, Japan, Poland, France, Ireland, England, Israel, and Canada; nearly half of all submissions came from outside the United States. Accordingly, our first issue includes essays by Sylvie Mathé, who teaches at the Université de Provence, and Judie Newman, who teaches at the University of Nottingham and formerly served as chair of the British Association for American Studies. In addition, we have received submissions from undergraduates as well as graduate students, and I'm pleased to report that our first issue contains

an essay by Liliana M. Naydan, who just this year received her doctorate, having completed a dissertation on faith, religion, and the millennium in writings by Updike, Pynchon, Roth, DeLillo, and others. It seems important, for both the profession and Updike studies, to promote the work of younger writers and critics, which brings me to an announcement: the *John Updike Review* will provide an annual prize of \$1,000, along with publication in the journal, for work about Updike composed by a young or emerging writer (anyone under 40 years of age). Applicants may be scholars, creative writers, or both. Similarly, submissions may be either scholarly or belletristic in nature. We are simply looking for exceptional writing that deepens our understanding of John Updike's work. Essays should range between ten and thirty pages.

A journal emerges through the work of many people. Most notable are those critics and writers who read our submissions (all submissions are read blind, i.e., without knowledge of the author's identity). Our editorial board of twelve is a talented group who know Updike's writings well—collectively they have published more than fifteen books about his work—and come from four countries: the United States, England, France, and Serbia. I am grateful for the important role they have played and will continue to play in selecting the work that appears in this journal. I am also thankful for their early submissions. Approximately half of the pieces in our first issue come from members of our editorial board. While I anticipated that the first couple of issues would rely upon their submissions, my hope is that as the journal finds its way into more hands, our roster of contributors will grow and evolve.

Special thanks go to Nicola Mason, who serves as managing editor of both the *John Updike Review* and the *Cincinnati Review*. Before arriving in Cincinnati, Nicola worked for many years as an editor at the *Southern Review* and Louisiana State University Press. Immensely knowledgeable and resourceful, she has high standards and possesses a keen eye for aesthetics. So much of what is good about this journal is due to Nicola's influence and facilitation. We are also fortunate to have in Gary Kass an experienced and careful copy editor, and in Barbara Neely Bourgoyne a talented designer. Finally, thanks go to our two sponsoring agencies, the Department of English at the University of Cincinnati and the John Updike Society. Russel Durst and Geri Hinkle-Wesseling at the University of Cincinnati have helped greatly with budgetary and other matters, and Jim Plath, president of the John Updike Society, played an important early role in introducing me to the idea of a journal as well as persuading me to serve as its editor. In addition,

through much hard work, Jim has established a strong and healthy foundation of early subscriptions to this journal, approximately 250 to date, which is extraordinary for a new single-author journal.

While most of us are besieged daily by multiple reading options, electronic and print, we hope that this small, modest journal about the writings of John Updike, to be published twice a year, will find a place in your reading life and on your bedside table. As much as any author of his time, Updike left us with an immense trove of elegant, playful, and intensely serious writings that are waiting to be read, reread, discussed, and debated. The conversation on Updike will continue, and we hope to provide space for those wishing to participate.

JAMES SCHIFF, EDITOR

John Updike's Sense of Wonder

ANN BEATTIE

These remarks were delivered as the keynote address at the First Biennial John Updike Society Conference in Reading, Pennsylvania, on October 1, 2010.

The word *elegant* is often used to describe John Updike's writing, which articulately, with often incandescent language, presents an imperfect, messy world created not by people's best—or even most ordinary—thoughts, but by the urgency of their desires. His characters are smart—thinking people—but they are nevertheless tortured by the gap between words and what's really *wanted*; those times they are silent, sadness oozes into what's unsaid. His characters are mortal, created by a writer whose parameters stretch very high and very deep: Updike is as familiar with religion and mythology as he is with psychology. The characters may themselves be “elegant” at times, with their talk of lobsters and champagne, but John Updike has one eye on beauty, sensual pleasure, physical passion, and another eye on the predictable, the banal, the loftiest imaginings slamming into the highest brick wall. The natural world is always present: vivid, even radiant, though Updike's characters are set apart from it. It provides the backdrop for his characters' folly; it becomes the scene-stealer for a sentence or two, before we are denied any more views out the window or authorially manipulated transitions or time changes that pivot on an invocation of the world's inherent radiance. The world is just beautiful—yet this is the way we act.

It is well known that Updike began as a visual artist, though language became his medium. His work is highly visual—something that's usually implied, I think, by calling a thing elegant. Nature is the foreground, but he insists that we look

at it instead of tracking words on a page, trying to understand the character and his or her story. We all know that the sight of an oak tree in autumn can make our little accomplishments pale in comparison, and of course Updike sometimes evokes such images to temper or to undercut his characters' getting and spending. Writing that is hermetically sealed runs the risk of seeming contrived: characters get to speak without the annoyance of the phone ringing, without a bird flying into a window; they get to speak—as we do not—to a conversational partner who is not distracted and who is allowed to give his or her undivided attention. That oak tree is a brass band, once you catch sight of it. Everything that happens, simultaneously or thereafter, is tinged by the context it provides: its otherness; its immediacy; its inevitability.

Another quality of elegance is judiciousness. Updike's eye doesn't race through the forest, but locates some detail or single entity to focus on in the natural world and, usually in a sentence or with a brief allusion, sweeps his writerly paintbrush to pair it with his character. An example of such an allusion is from the story "I Will Not Let Thee Go, Except Thou Bless Me," when a series of thoughts occurs to the main character, a man who has broken up with his lover and will soon be moving with his wife and children to Texas, though he does not want to go: the marriage is unraveling, and we know that his wife dreams that she and the children might go without him.

And Tom, hurriedly tying up loose ends in the city, lunching one day with his old employers and the next day with representatives of his new, returning each evening to an emptier house and increasingly apprehensive children, slept badly also. The familiar lulling noises—car horn and dog bark, the late commuter train's slither and the main drag's murmur—had become irritants; the town had unravelled into tugging threads of love. (564)

The noises are indeed familiar, but the suggestion that the train "slithers" makes the reader conjure up a snake, and the snake of course reminds us of trouble in the Garden of Eden; it is the prototype of what is happening here in microcosm. So work and love, domestic life, are being played for higher stakes—not unusual in the world of John Updike. He sees to it that they also become diminished in cosmic importance by their banality: the powerful, mythic snake becomes a commuter train. Either reading, or both readings, add to the story: the writer is conscious of both implications. To reenact the Fall of Man in suburbia is slightly absurd. Also, the move to Texas—not Updike's usual territory—is envisioned as "a desert of strangers; barbecues on parched lawns" (565). The narrator's physical

passion has resulted in his sentence to a kind of hell, with everything that will be taken in as food, and also found externally in the surroundings, burned.

In fairness to the many allusive patterns Updike weaves in the story, there is the more obvious mention of threads, with the husband, Tom, “tying up loose ends in the city” and the town “unravelling into tugging threads of love.” These bits, these threads, materialize in the clothes worn to the couple’s farewell party, so expressive of the times (“Bugs Leonard had gone Mod—turquoise shirt, wide pink tie”), but especially in the dress worn by Tom’s former mistress. She is simultaneously ascendant, as an angel, and absurd in her costume of a dress: “Maggie Aldridge . . . swung down the hall in a white dress with astonishingly wide sleeves” (565). The dress is seen repeatedly as the story progresses: all white, it is of course a wedding dress for the marriage that will not take place, but it is also the way an apparition would be attired (will Tom be haunted by her?). She has come to the party although she has a cold and—literally and metaphorically—a fever. Could she be the phoenix rising from the ashes? “Softly fighting to be free, Maggie felt to him, with her great sleeves, like a sumptuous heavy bird that has evolved into innocence on an island, and can be seized by any passing sailor, and will shortly become extinct” (567). In this scenario, Tom takes his place as just one of many “sailors,” though it is because of him, because of men, that she “will shortly become extinct.”

Yet, in the moment, they dance. And while they do, they have a strange conversation in which she tells him, “five years ago you were my life and my death, and now . . .” The ellipsis picks up several lines later, when she continues: “. . . you’re just nothing.” In the next sentence we are told that “the music flowed on, out of some infinitely remote USO where doomed sailors swayed with their clinging girls” (568). As this author sees it, the sexes are often at war. Here, though, the men have been deflated: they are not sailors who can drive a woman into extinction, but lonely guys at a dance, no more powerful than men usually are in such a situation. Later, Tom observes that Bugs (hardly an impressive nickname) and Maggie “danced close, in wide confident circles that lifted her sleeves like true wings” (569). “*True wings*”: like them, but not the real thing. Again, the writer directs us to see it both ways, in terms of potential and in terms of potential unfulfilled. One of the truly interesting and puzzling moments of the story comes when Tom and his wife, Lou, are alone at party’s end:

Safely on the road, Lou asked, “Did Maggie kiss you goodbye?”

“No. She was quite unfriendly.”

“Why shouldn’t she be?” (569)

His wife's question lets us know at almost the last minute that she is aware of the affair. Then, Lou—the nickname is masculine; it was explained early on that it is short for Louise—reveals that for a moment, she became Maggie's pseudo-lover: the woman kissed her on the lips. Sexual, yes, but perhaps also a strange benediction, a serious kiss, rather than Lou and Tom's "peck" of a kiss bestowed on Maggie earlier, continuing the bird imagery and reminding us that birds are symbolic of the spirit. Again, possibility is conjured up in order for it not to happen. Everyone is "very tired." Texas awaits.

In this story, Updike giveth and Updike taketh away; he inflates and deflates, yet the unease lingers in a series of visual images, small moments, and an inability to easily paraphrase what the emotional experience of the story has been. Though the "threads" that underlie the story transform the characters and also have their own interior logic as the story's scaffolding, the end of the story is wrapped up more in language and in interwoven visual patterns than in point of fact. It is as if the surface of a lake has suddenly stopped shimmering, and the mysterious shadows and unrecognizable bits of bark or stone or even sunken tennis shoes are revealed to be only what they are. What we have at story's end may be both the mystery retained, because of Updike's imagistic patterns based on visual images that carry recognizable connotations, and a literal ending that suggests that even the characters are tired of the expenditure of energy inherent in their folly.

In "Separating," Updike's insistence on the quality of the moment, instantly recognizable to readers of contemporary fiction, appears as past-tense, cryptic stage directions: "The day was fair. Brilliant" (788). The scene is set, sketched in indelible Updike shorthand that requires certainty on the part of the narrator, and an open-endedness that asks for a subjective response from the reader. The word *fair*, understood in this context as indicating beauty, also carries ethical connotations; the word *brilliant*, too, has many associative meanings and is rather anachronistic (except in England)—it can be used to describe someone's mental abilities as well as the light that comes off an object.

This is a story, not unusual in America and not unusual in the author's work, about divorce. The separating couple has decided to tell their children, each separately—though the husband can't keep to the script. Early in the story we are given the thoughts of Richard Maple (his last name connects him inextricably to the natural world) as he considers the tennis court on their property, remembering when "canary-yellow bulldozers churned a grassy, daisy-dotted knoll into a muddy plateau" (788). Two things that might have been: nature, undisturbed; his dream of a tennis court that has now more or less gone to ruin. Again, an idea—

a lovely idea—almost materialized, but is quickly demystified and made ugly, somewhat analogous to a bandage: “the barren tennis court—its net and tapes still rolled in the barn—an environment congruous with his mood of purposeful desolation” (789). As happens so often in Updike, the best laid plans go astray, though we have no doubt about what they are, and we see them intensely, as the characters do. For the length of a sentence, or illuminated by the descriptive quality of a perfect adjective, they are indelible; we do not need Thomas Kinkade, “Painter of Light,” to understand that those very common daisies (think also: Fitzgerald) are vivid and could not be more clearly seen if we had a painting in front of us. And yet. The specific, even gilded prose seems to make the sentences lift off the page, while the reality—what happens on the nonverbal level—deflates the ideal. Updike’s images have puncture wounds. I don’t see it merely as a matter of sending something up in order to shoot it down. The interplay between the external world and a character’s internal state is a convention of writing. We are familiar with the pathetic fallacy; the mimetic echo of a character’s psychological state explained by projection onto nature; the clarifying, expansive analogy that devolves, finally, when we break it down into its components, into suddenly suspicious words.

Writers distrust words, and no doubt some distrust them in proportion to how great their talent is for manipulating them. Some writers, such as William Gaddis, visually link their text into one snug woven entity, the longest kite cord ever made, then let us watch it unfurl until the body of the kite is out of view—after which the cord continues to unravel and we have only that to look at, the head having disappeared. Gaddis, though, unlike Updike, depends heavily on dialogue, which he runs together by omitting quotation marks. We must do the work of hearing differently, learning slowly, in Gaddis. With Updike, his amazing gift for using language to make a thing stand apart and shine is also just the talent he, personally, won’t settle for. He does not aspire to be a Romantic poet; he attempts to do two things almost simultaneously—to give and to take away, to mystify and to demystify—and, as background intermingles with plot, or foreground, our seeming advantage of having been presented with the transcendent ideal haunts us with possibility gone awry.

Dialogue in Updike, while often clever, is only so many words. What happens happens beneath the surface, which may be why he wants us to see the surface as being so dazzling: it is the entryway, the beginning of the process required of the reader to delve beneath it. The very affecting ending of “Separating” gives us only one word, but a word we had no reason to suspect would be uttered, as the char-

acter does not. Midway through the story, Richard leads his younger son “to the spot in the field where the view was best, of the metallic blue river, the emerald marsh, the scattered islands velvety with shadow in the low light, the white bits of beach far away. ‘See,’ he said. ‘It goes on being beautiful. It’ll be here tomorrow’” (793–94). The appreciated landscape, the usual but nevertheless vivid adjectives, the whole idea provides some sort of reassurance—of course it does—but this is not the end of the story. That comes when his elder son suddenly blurts out the subtext, verbalizes what Richard has asked himself, and tried not to ask himself: The Question. “*Why?*” is the one word his son utters, and with it the boy punctures the balloon. Or, to use another analogy, he metaphorically opens the lock that his father has literally been trying to repair since the story began. It is written this way, as Richard echoes that stop-time word: “*Why*. It was a whistle of wind in a crack, a knife thrust, a window thrown open on emptiness” (798). So his son has the key, and he does not. Both expanding upon his feelings and, by using any analogies at all, trying to distance himself from them, we have the metaphorical “whistle of wind,” extra nice because it alliterates—it has a pattern, a sound that forms its own little logic. More violently, it is the knife that Richard has already turned inward on himself, now only “a knife thrust,” not even connecting with its target, but still “a knife,” as if it can be objectified. And finally, “a window thrown open on emptiness.”

It would be the rare author who could give a character this line of dialogue without irony, or ominousness: “It’ll be here tomorrow.” If writers believed that, they would also write the story “tomorrow,” but as we know, writers’ delaying tactics and their ability to take avoidance to a high art are fanatically cultivated. My husband, a painter, says that he “likes to paint.” He has observed, and I agree, that writers “like to have written.” I can’t speak for John Updike, but I wonder at his sense of wonder. It seems so integral, yet, in rereading his stories, I am struck by how often—true from the beginning of his writing career—he undercuts his own facility. How often he seems to wish that what we see is the story, not its figures of speech, not its clever and astute literary contrivances. I am in awe of what he can conjure up with a sentence or, at other times, with a word—often, a word repeated so that it takes on more weight, vibrates, registering subtly or subconsciously, alerting the reader, who will rarely stop reading to figure out what’s going on at so microscopic a level, to an imagistic pattern meant to express a level of the story that can be pointed to, but the meaning of which always exceeds its boundaries and therefore cannot be caught, or more clearly expressed.

“A window thrown open on emptiness.” It would be odd to think of the world as empty except that this is Updike, and one’s inner state is being projected. (It is a nice touch that the couple plan to tell their eldest daughter about the separation on “the bridge across the salt creek”; at the end of the story, when their oldest son cries while asking “*Why?*” the literal creek becomes a metaphor internalized, a huge thing absorbed, constricting to the small, quite ordinary child’s tears.) The italicized word *Why*, first asked as a question, is repeated by the father without a question mark. And the answer? The text rushes in like the tide and gives us instant metaphors (“It was a whistle of wind in a crack,” etc.) that, while clever, are also transparently an avoidance. What a thing is *like*, when the thing speaks for itself, is unimportant. Which Updike knows, but he is showing us the fatal tendency of being half in love with easeful words. Does their descriptive quality really make you look more closely at the moment, or look away from it? I think the reaction elicited is the latter. You might be seduced; you might not forget what the words point toward, but in certain contexts—this being one of them—they can bedazzle while being powerless. Writers don’t trust words. There are many possible readings of this story, but one would have to do with the fact that however beautifully descriptive it is, language also is a habit, a thing that can protect us, or allow us, if nothing else, whether we are speaking or listening, to bide time. Writers come up with some of their best sentences because there is always the story they are writing, as well as the buried story—the story they do not want to tell. This is why, when questioned, writers often seem so ignorant about their own material, even after originating and carefully editing it. You know, but you don’t know; the same words that dazzle the reader may, for the writer, be a form of desperation: a distracting tactic; a beautiful smoke screen; a way to say something at one remove from the stunning truth the writer flirts with but does not want to acknowledge. Words are also a way to bide time; the writer risks writing a painful sentence because, when cornered, at least it is not the *most* painful sentence. Yet the freeze-frame of this story, as it concludes, gives us a tableau—really, resides in a visual image that is not directly expressed through analogies—that aims for nothing beyond its simple, almost unbearable, existence. It stands alone, to be highlighted by human pain: “*Why*. It was a whistle of wind in a crack; a knife thrust; a window thrown open on emptiness. The white face was gone, the darkness was featureless. Richard had forgotten why.”

Updike trusts the visuals: the bodies pressed together dancing; the moon shining on the field; a father sitting on his son’s bed—all nonverbal forms of com-

munication. In his essay “Why Write?” he mentions receiving a letter asking him to explain one of his stories and uses this as a point of departure to ask himself, in the same exasperated way he has addressed the person making the request:

[H]ow dare one confess that the absence of a swiftly expressible message is, often, *the* message; that reticence is as important a tool to the writer as expression; that the hasty filling out of a questionnaire is not merely irrelevant but *inimical* to the writer’s proper activity; that this activity is rather curiously private and finicking, a matter of exorcism and manufacture rather than of toplofty proclamation; that what he makes is ideally as ambiguous and opaque as life itself; that, to be blunt, the social usefulness of writing matters to him primarily in that it somehow creates a few job opportunities . . . (31)

At the end of Joyce’s “The Dead,” what exactly—since he is an articulate man who now has much clearer insight about himself and his situation—might Gabriel Conroy *say*, as opposed to going into a sort of fugue state in which his thoughts silently intermingle with the world outside his hotel? His epiphany is beautifully expressed, but when all the thinking is done, his wife, Gretta, sleeps on the bed and Gabriel stands alone at the window. At the end of Richard Ford’s story “Rock Springs,” the narrator, Earl, about to be left by his girlfriend, his daughter again solely in his care, out of money and out of luck, wanders—not in his mind, but in point of fact—into a motel parking lot, where he seems to bifurcate, taking an aerial view of himself. Cleverly—Earl is a con man, after all—Ford implicates the reader:

And I wondered, because it seemed funny, what would you think a man was doing if you saw him in the middle of the night looking in the windows of cars in the parking lot of the Ramada Inn? Would you think he was trying to get his head cleared? Would you think he was trying to get ready for a day when trouble would come down on him? Would you think his girlfriend was leaving him? Would you think he had a daughter? Would you think he was anybody like you? (27)

Ford drops the lure and reels us in, until we are caught too firmly to escape. The question answers itself. The writer implicitly asks, Who could feel otherwise? But in this story, the writer performs a sort of visible/invisible magic act: a clever act of conflation, suggesting that the reader stand first here, then a bit more behind the main character—oh, we’re spying, of course, but it’s just our little game—and then suddenly the torch is lit and we are welded to a character who takes on more dimension, as do we, because, unlikely as it might seem, we have become a new entity, seared into Earl. Gabriel Conroy wanders in his mind, sensing stepping-

stones—the snowflakes outside his window—as guides toward perceiving unity; Earl distances himself from himself and asks an unexpected final question that contains its answer but also requires the reader's mind to wander. While I don't think Updike was inordinately under the spell of Joyce, and while I do not see Richard Ford as rooted in Updike, I do notice—among these defining, now famous moments of fiction—that instead of physical action, there is internal action. In Joyce and Ford, to look outward is to see inward. The way Updike writes, the sensibility presiding over the piece—let's be honest: that is *the writer*—colors the material from the first, much the way a landscape painter looks at life, then builds layers of paint on a canvas. But, interestingly, with Updike it is as if the highlights were put in first, over forms that have not yet emerged; the piece begins with something small and inherently eye-catching illuminated, in a few seconds' time made particular and distinct. It is as if the composition were detailed from its inception, as if the quality of light and the textures and color, alone, inspired—and even constituted—the story.

Ah, but think of Updike's respect for opacity. The bright sentences seem to determine things, but ultimately do not—the emotional weight they carry and the characters' precarious movement toward something unknown is not always in sync, and is often at odds. Think of Rabbit's run toward the end of *Rabbit, Run*. We sense the loneliness in the gap between the character and the external world—a negative space, a place of estrangement, for which there are vivid examples, yet no words. I mentioned Joyce and Ford because the gracefulness of their sentences, the way the sentences build to suggest a depth that is ultimately psychological, seems rooted in their strong visual sense. Flannery O'Connor, in one of her essays, says that literature has to come at us through our senses, and in these writers it certainly does. Perhaps Updike was the shy boy, the class poet, the writer with so much power to wow that he became (his word) finicking in his restraint: sketch; highlight; make it indelible; wow 'em with your power of language, then show that that—or any power—contains its opposite, powerlessness. To continue my painting metaphor, the frame in Updike should not go unremarked upon. It is mortality. Each image he dazzles us with dazzles in its own space, for its own moment or moments, but the constant awareness, the borders on the expansive language, are what contains us for that moment—meaning, the moment of the story—but which are not there just for our edification and admiration. They are inventive, beautifully expressed, the world as we rarely see it, but as we recognize it immediately, yet they fail to sustain us—our efforts in the world build no better world. These intense visual realities desert us—and properly so, as

I think Updike would feel—by moving on, by running as Rabbit does from what he thinks of as impossible complacency with the real, until we, too, eventually—in the restricted and in the ultimate sense—move on.

These are the two concluding paragraphs from John Updike's very short story "Archangel," which I had never read until recently, and which comes as close as a story can to becoming a beam of light. I won't emphasize my own points and interests about what the writer observes, and why. What we hear, reading this story, are words directed to oneself, in a private moment overheard: more shorthand, words that point to visual images that cannot themselves be decoded by finding the exact words to describe them. Updike's interest is in what underlies the fabric and texture of daily living, and the ebb tide that is the inevitability of death. Along the way, he makes a little joke by alluding to the title of his first novel, then reverts to his customary humility when writing about the "microscopic glitter in the ink of the letters of words that are your own." He loves his words; he loves their appearance as well as what they denote or connote; he loves the process, as does any happy fanatic. There is also the ability of his eye—a cold eye, sometimes; other times, a poet's evaluative eye, directed toward minutiae that need not be stretched very far to embody the power of metaphor. He is a sensualist who attempts to compare what he sees with what he intuitively—pretty grimly—about the largest, least understood, cosmic questions. He isolates narcissism, yet sees its potential not only for self-deception but as a rallying call for transcendence. This makes him a writer who, at his quite often best, is impossible to paraphrase, one who escapes us on the currents of his words as they lift lightly off the page and become airborne. It's a great disappearing act, because when something is powerfully articulated, you experience the presence of the person speaking so strongly, he remains present: we're all in this together.

Where, then, has your life been touched? My pleasures are as specific as they are everlasting. The sliced edges of a fresh ream of laid paper, cream, stiff, rag-rich. The freckles on the closed eyelids of a woman attentive in the first white blush of morning. The ball rapidly diminishing down the broad green throat of the first at Cape Ann. The good catch, a candy sun slatting the bleachers. The fair at the vanished poorhouse. The white arms of girls dancing, taffeta, white arms violet in the hollows music its contours praise the white wrists of praise the white arms and the white paper trimmed the Euclidean proof of Pythagoras's theorem its tightening beauty and the thin viridian skin of an old copper found in the salt sand. The microscopic glitter in the ink of the letters of words that are your own. Certain moments, remembered or imagined, of childhood. The cave in the box hedge. The

Hershey bar chilled to brittleness. Three-handed pinochle by the brown glow of the stained-glass lampshade, your parents out of their godliness silently wishing you to win. In New York, the Brancusi room, silent. *Pines and Rocks*, by Cézanne; and *The Lace-Maker* in the Louvre, hardly bigger than your spread hand.

Such glimmers I shall widen to rivers; nothing will be lost, not the least grain of remembered dust, and the multiplication shall be a thousand thousand fold; love me. Embrace me; come, touch my side, where honey flows. Do not be afraid. Why should my promises be vain? Jade and cinnamon: do you deny that such things exist? Why do you turn away? Is not my song a stream of balm? My arms are heaped with apples and ancient books; there is no harm in me; no. Stay. Praise me. Your praise of me is praise of yourself; wait. Listen. I will begin again. (649–50)

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Under Gallic Eyes: The Case of John Updike's Ambivalent Reception in France

SYLVIE MATHÉ

I am fairly sure American literature is not where most French readers would like to live, but they love the thrills of repeated visits.

—MARC CHÉNETIER, "American Literature in France: Pleasures in Perspective"

In his 1946 essay "American Novelists in French Eyes," Jean-Paul Sartre declared: "There is one American literature for Americans and another for the French" (114). The reception of authors abroad is indeed an interesting indicator of national preferences and cultural differences. It also can turn out to be a sometimes crucial factor of influence on the reception of artists in their homeland. We may recall here how Poe, Melville, and such modernist authors as Faulkner and Dos Passos were, so to speak, "discovered" and acclaimed in France long before they became classics at home. In the case of John Updike's reception in France, what is immediately obvious is that, even though his works are translated and sell well, he does not enjoy the same kind of privileged status or academic prestige as, say, Philip Roth and Toni Morrison, or even writers like Richard Ford and Paul Auster, whose fame abroad perhaps outweighs their reputation within the United States. So, in keeping with Sartre's categories, is John Updike an American writer for the French?

"THE REAL AMERICAN THINGS IN FRANCE"

Before tackling the question of Updike's ambivalent reception among French critics, it may be useful to briefly survey the general context in which to inscribe it. Marc Chénétier, one of the most prominent American literature specialists in France, once submitted this riddle: "This is a test: in literature, the *real American* things in France are: the hard-boiled novel, Charles Bukowski, John Fante, John Steinbeck, Ernest Hemingway, Raymond Carver, John Irving, Nathaniel Hawthorne. One error has slipped into this list. Find it" (1993, 360). (My own guess would be that the error is Hawthorne.)

Broadly speaking, American literature enjoys the favor of the French public, not just the ubiquitous bestsellers of Mary Higgins Clark, Stephen King, and John Grisham—"railway station literature," as it is referred to in France—but works by Roth, Morrison, Ford, Auster, Fante, Carver, Jonathan Franzen, Jim Harrison, Russell Banks, and Cormac McCarthy, to name but a few of the most popular contemporary American writers.

The French foreign book award, the Prix Médicis étranger, created in 1970 and meant to promote authors whose "fame does not yet match their talent," has been awarded nine times to American novels (three times over the past four years, which seems to indicate a certain acceleration of rhythm).¹ As for the older Prix du Meilleur livre étranger, a French literary prize for foreign books created in 1948, Updike was the first American writer to receive it, for *The Centaur* in 1965—the sole literary prize that he ever won in France.² It has been awarded to American novelists only seven times, John Hawkes and Philip Roth being the only two authors rewarded by both the Prix Médicis étranger and Prix du Meilleur livre étranger.³

The fortunes of a writer may of course be considerably at variance when one considers sales to the general public and the critical reception in the more secluded circles of the academic world. Yet this public-academic dividing line can turn out to be a porous one,⁴ with Paul Auster perhaps the most vivid example of a writer who crossed over from the academy toward the larger reading public. Not only did he stand out in the 1990s as an academic favorite, the subject of university conferences, scholarly articles, and Ph.D. dissertations and required reading for the national competitive examinations (*agrégation* and *CAPES*), but he became a popular phenomenon in France, a celebrity whose translated paperbacks are everywhere to be found in bookstores and whose presence graces numerous literary festivals as well as prime-time broadcasts.⁵ Pondering the discrepancy between Auster's reputation in France and in his homeland, Charles Holdefer

wittily suggests that “[t]he skeptical (or jealous) might cast Auster as a literary Jerry Lewis,” while “[t]rue believers see him as a complex and underappreciated figure who, like Faulkner, will be rescued by the French” (51).

Auster’s case is but one in a long series of this particular phenomenon of American writers gaining in France a reputation not yet acquired at home. If Gertrude Stein could claim, early in the twentieth century, “America is my country, but Paris is my hometown,” the tradition of hospitality to American writers, both literally and figuratively speaking, is an ongoing one. From the Lost Generation through the 1950s—Chester Himes and Henry Miller, Richard Wright and Ralph Ellison—to the present, many American writers have enjoyed in France a critical reception far more benevolent than in their own country.⁶ “Jerome Charyn and John Hawkes,” Chénétier reminds us, “have more readers in France than in the United States” (1991, 93). The trend continues into the twenty-first century: in spite of the fact that for many years he could not find a publisher in the United States, Douglas Kennedy has been a best-selling author in France. An even more peculiar case of French adoption is that of the American writer Jonathan Littell, who writes in French to great acclaim and whose highly controversial second novel, *Les Bienveillantes* [*The Kindly Ones*], the fictional memoir of a Nazi officer, was rewarded in 2006 with the French equivalent of the Pulitzer Prize, the Prix Goncourt, as well as the Grand Prix du roman de l’Académie française.

The role played by French specialists of American literature has of course been crucial in the selection of certain writers and the recognition of certain works that in turn have led to the establishment of certain norms. Over the last four decades, French Americanists have contributed to the building of a serious public interest in American new fictions, starting, from the 1970s onward, with the postmodernist writings of Raymond Federman, Walter Abish, Donald Barthelme, William Gass, and Robert Coover, not to mention Don DeLillo and Thomas Pynchon. The number of Ph.D. dissertations written on these experimental writers in France has far outweighed those written on more classic or mainstream writers.

As for the new fictions of the twenty-first century, two recent issues of the most respected journals in the field of Anglo-American literature have blazed the path and helped start to draw the new maps: first, a 2002 issue of the *Revue Française d’Études Américaines* (*French Review of American Studies*) called *Proses pour le siècle nouveau* (*Writing for the New Century*) and edited by Marc Chénétier included studies of Donald Antrim, Richard Powers, Jonathan Franzen, Gilbert Sorrentino, Rick Moody, Lorrie Moore, David Foster Wallace, and Mary Ca-

ponegro, as well as the lesser-known George Saunders, Rikki Ducornet, Jaimy Gordon, Katherine Dunn, Joanna Scott, and A.J. Verdelle.⁷ This first foray into fictions of the new century was followed by the April-June 2010 issue of the Sorbonne journal *Études anglaises*, titled *Contemporary American Fiction: An Update*, which featured essays on Ben Marcus, Percival Everett, Jayne Anne Phillips, Steve Tomasula, Mark Danielewski, and Shelley Jackson.⁸

Finally, what should also be mentioned in this survey of the terrain is one of the peculiarities of the French university system, namely its close link to the national civil service competitive examinations, the most prestigious being the *agrégation*. As regards the American literature programs for the *agrégation d'anglais*, the lists of assigned works traditionally tend to favor the canon (Hawthorne, Melville, Whitman, Dickinson, Crane, Faulkner, Steinbeck, Tennessee Williams, Arthur Miller, Nabokov, etc.) but also give recognition to contemporary works considered of academic status: these have recently included *Moon Palace* by Paul Auster, *A Multitude of Sins* by Richard Ford, *Carpenter's Gothic* by William Gaddis, and *The Knife Thrower and Other Stories* by Steven Millhauser, as well as Toni Morrison's *Beloved*. For 2012, American literature will be represented by *The Sun Also Rises* and Roth's *American Pastoral*. Symptomatically, over the last forty years, Updike has appeared only once on the *agrégation* program, in 1973, with *The Centaur*, his most "intellectual," Joycean fiction and the very novel for which he had won the French prize for best foreign book in 1965.

TRANSLATION, ENDORSEMENT, DISSEMINATION

Translation of course plays a major role in the accessibility and popularity of American literature within a foreign culture. As a brief survey of landmark translations of American works shows, it has also been instrumental in helping a number of American writers gain status not only abroad but in their homeland, the most famous examples being Melville, Faulkner, and Dos Passos, who "had a name in Europe before their own country paid attention to them" (Chénétier 1986, xii).

Historically speaking, the most singular case of French adoption remains Poe. "Poe has become a French writer," Arthur Ransome wrote in his 1910 critical study of the author. "Poe is read [in France] as if he were a native" (219). Not only did the French, under Baudelaire's incentive, adopt Poe, but this recognition reverberated into the world.⁹ Poe's fortune in France signaled what would become one of the dominant trends in the French critical take on American literature, namely the role played by French writers in the translation, endorsement, and dissemination

of a number of American authors, resulting in a kind of schizophrenic fate for those representatives of American literature elected by the French as their own:

Marcus Cunliffe, his usual witty self, mentions the presence in world literature of two contemporary writers: a Frenchman by the name of Edgarpo and an American better known as Edgar Allan Poe, vituperated in his own country for his light-headed and gratuitous “tintinnabulations.” Edgarpo, much admired by Baudelaire and by Mallarmé, . . . later praised by Paul Valéry, this most intellectual of French poets, stands, somehow, as an icon of . . . the “Frenchness” of critical approaches to the literature of the United States. (Chénétier 1991, 81)

Melville’s is another emblematic case of this “writers’ writer” syndrome: *Moby-Dick* was translated into French and praised by the French writer Jean Giono in 1941, but, as Chénétier notes, “as early as the 1910s and 1920s, in French circles, *the* book by Melville to read was *Moby-Dick* rather than *Omoo* or *Typee*.” Similarly Faulkner, whose novel *The Sound and The Fury* was out of print in the United States by 1940, “was transformed from a regional hick writer into a novelist of Nobel stature under the influence of Maurice-Edgar Coindreau’s translation, relayed by Sartre, Claude-Edmonde Magny, and André Malraux.” And, as had been the case for Poe, “it was Faulkner’s *writing* that launched his reputation [in France], then in the United States” (81-82). While Malcolm Cowley’s 1946 Viking edition of *The Portable Faulkner* is usually understood as the turning point in Faulkner’s reputation in the United States, he was hailed in France as a major novelist in the 1930s by such writers as Sartre, Malraux, and the poet Valéry Larbaud. Sartre praised *Sartoris* before the war, Larbaud wrote a preface to Coindreau’s translation of *As I Lay Dying*, and Malraux wrote one for the translation of *Sanctuary*. Thus “[i]t was most often . . . French writers or highly literary translators—Coindreau taught the French symbolists for over thirty years at Princeton—praising American writers that launched the critical reputation of these Americans” (Chénétier 1991, 82).¹⁰

Inversely, and typical of these cultural crosscurrents, the discovery of the great modernist novelists, the “Big Five” as they were called by French critics in the 1940s and 1950s—Faulkner, Dos Passos, Hemingway, Caldwell, and Steinbeck—came to be seen as the greatest literary development in France before World War II. The “Age of the American Novel” (the title of Claude-Edmonde Magny’s famous study published in 1948) was hailed as a revolution, breathing new life into the art of writing. Sartre, writing about French and American novelists in his 1946 essay, was thus one of the first to acknowledge the debt of a whole generation of French writers to the works of “les cinq grands.”¹¹

CULTURAL "RATES OF EXCHANGE"

It then becomes apparent that the reception of authors abroad involves wide-ranging questions having to do with what Chénétier has called the cultural "rates of exchange" (1986, xi). What do readers read, what are they taught to appreciate, what are the conditioning factors of reception? The answers to these questions can only serve as precious indicators of a given culture's preferences. And foremost among them is the imprint of ideological choices: "[T]he way in which one culture engages another reveals much that would otherwise be hidden or ignored in each of the two cultures, as they saw revealed time and again how in even seemingly nonideological cultural preferences one could see traces of political choices and implications" (Gutman 5).

Relations with the United States and domestic political concerns, along with the importance of national history and ideology, all play a crucial role in these transcultural interactions. Thus the study and reception of American literature abroad becomes an enlightening revelator of national identity and helps to define what Norman Holland called the "identity themes" of the receiving culture (Gutman 16).

So what of Updike, then? If it is true that, as Bruce Allen writes, "he and Philip Roth divide the post-Bellow-dominated American landscape between them" (492), why is it that Roth fares so much better among the general public but even more so in the world of academe? What makes for one writer's fortune and another's misfortune when they are in many ways so close?

The oft-phrased question "Who reads Updike anymore?" is one that is apparently asked on both sides of the Atlantic. Fortunately, the answer to that question is not altogether negative. Updike's works are not only translated and reviewed (mostly favorably), but they sell well as paperbacks, the Rabbit saga and the short stories ranking highest, as might be expected, in the public's favor.¹² However, Ph.D. dissertations and scholarly work on Updike's oeuvre remain scant,¹³ and this disaffection is a baffling phenomenon.

Let us consider the "usual suspects" in the debunking or ignorance of Updike's writings among scholarly critics in France. Are the most frequent criticisms—his choice of subject matter (too traditionalist, bourgeois, and mainstream), his alleged misogyny and narcissism, his conservatism—essentially the same as those formulated in the United States,¹⁴ or do they reflect a different type of critical bias?

David Foster Wallace's notorious dismissal of the GMN, "the Great Male Narcissists of postwar American fiction," namely Updike, Roth, and Norman Mailer, does not seem too helpful a clue to account for the academic reticence in France

toward Updike's works, insofar as Roth and Mailer, as radically absorbed in themselves as they may be, do not arouse the same critical objections as Updike does.

Is it his style, then, that is the main bone of contention? The old critical sing-song "Has Updike anything to say?" (Gingher), which can be traced back to the beginning of his career, has had its ups and downs since then, but it resurfaced in recent years in connection with his *New Yorker* piece on 9/11,¹⁵ giving new life to James Wood's question whether "violent truth" could ever "make his words short-winded" (46). But here again, the usual suspect does not seem to hold up as the real culprit in French eyes. Updike's style may be his "private vice" (Aldridge), but in Flaubert's country, there is great indulgence for such a vice.

If not his style, is it his subjects that are to be incriminated? Updike is reputed to be "the model of mainstream American literature" (Olster 11), the chronicler of middle-class white masculinity and of a mostly WASP East Coast universe, at the expense of a more pluralistic, ethnic, and gendered otherness. Even his sexual liberation novels of the 1960s and 1970s appear by French standards too anchored in a teleology of marriage to achieve the subversive status that would grant his fiction the welcome seal of transgression. As for his concern for godliness and his religious questionings, they remain somewhat alien in a country stamped by Voltaire and Rousseau and the ideals of a lay Republic. So, seen in a transcultural perspective, the "rates of exchange" clearly appear to work in Updike's disfavor.

In the context of the development of American studies in France, we may then submit two hypotheses: one of an aesthetic nature, that Updike's art, brilliant as it may be, has been shadowed by a critical predilection, particularly within the French university, for more subversive and experimental forms of narration (at the expense of social realism); the other, of an ideological nature, that has to do with what Jean Kempf, in his critical review of American studies in France, defines as an often left-wing agenda which tends to give preference to the study of texts dealing with or emanating from the underprivileged, the margins, the minorities.

IDEOLOGICAL CONCERNS

Historically speaking, American studies in France, which had been practically nonexistent or largely overshadowed within English departments, underwent a profound change in the late 1960s.¹⁶ Not only did the study of American literature and American culture gain a more legitimate place in the stronghold of English departments, but the general tonality of academic teaching became violently colored by political considerations. Ideological concerns, in tune with the period,

were foregrounded, and the leftist overtones which dominated not only French intellectual life but the French university entailed a major change within American literary and cultural studies, a shift from what had been so far a form of veneration to a more explicitly critical stance. This evolution from a general feeling of Americanophilia in the postwar period to the development of more critical attitudes toward the United States over the next two decades is related not only to the geopolitical concerns of the period but also to the domestic struggles shaking American society in the 1960s. As a consequence, the stress was laid “more willingly on dissenting views within American literature than on the presentational or the hagiographic” (Chénétier 1991, 84).

In this context, Updike’s perceived conservatism, his avowed love of middle-ness and middles, “where,” in his words, “ambiguity restlessly rules” (qtd. in Howard 11), offered easy targets to his detractors:¹⁷ in terms of rates of exchange, the extremities of Mailer and Roth get better ratings than the ambiguities of middle-ness.

Along with the attraction of a radical America came an exploration of the margins of the culture: postmodernist rather than mainstream fiction; women’s, African American, native American, or Chicano culture rather than white, male, middle-class America. Paradoxically, this venture into an exotic otherness and predilection for an “out there” strangeness came perhaps easier, as Chénétier shrewdly points out, “than to try and come to terms with the infinite complexities of, say, the WASP mentality, in the light of a long and even more alien tradition that one would then have to master, realizing painfully that the apparently closest aspects of the culture are not necessarily what they appear to be” (1991, 85).

How does Updike stand in this ideologically pregnant landscape?

Having survived, as he put it, “the khaki-brown Forties and the grit-gray Thirties” (*More Matter* 25), Updike repeatedly asserted that he was happy in the Fifties and, in many ways, he became identified with the ideology of the 1950s, the period of his literary blooming and a period which indelibly colored the psychology of his most memorable hero, Rabbit. Like his creator, Rabbit is a creature of the Cold War and a staunch believer in the myth of American exceptionalism.¹⁸ This identification—personal, historical, and political—with the world of the Cold War may be what cost Updike the favor of the French critics, generally more inclined toward the radicalism of the Beat writers or the militancy of the African American writers who made Paris their home and the Left Bank the so-called Black Bank (Fabre).

The question then becomes: can a writer “admittedly often distinctly out of sync with his culture” (Olster 2) gain popularity or, more importantly, recogni-

tion? Defining himself as “a sort of helplessly 50’s guy” (“Why Rabbit Had to Go” 24), Updike ruefully admits that the liberal political position by which he defined himself “had unfairly gone unfashionable on [him]” during the late 1960s (*Self-Consciousness* 125). In this respect, his essay “On Not Being a Dove” is probably his most enlightening piece on the cost of his ideological stance on Vietnam: even if there is a gap between “not being a dove” and being a hawk, Updike’s position is clearly a jarring one in the French overall consensus of condemnation of the Vietnam war (following France’s own colonialist war in Indochina, which had turned into a debacle as well).

AN ANACHRONISTIC WRITER?

In Updike’s case, ideological differences are compounded by another Continental bias, having to do with aesthetics. The two flaws, ideological and aesthetic, might be presumed to be unrelated, but they in fact converge insofar as literary criticism, particularly in the 1960s and 1970s, became governed by an ideological take on the literary object and the methodological tools to approach it. The new schools of criticism that evolved in the writings of Roland Barthes, Jean Ricardou, Gérard Genette, Julia Kristeva, Tzvetan Todorov, Jacques Derrida, and Michel Foucault, to name but a few, were themselves “offshoots of, or inspired by, political and ideological choices” (Chénétier 1991, 85). Radicalism in politics was mirrored in the theoretical and critical tools developed within what was retrospectively baptized “French theory.”

In this context, Updike’s allegedly old-school approach, seen through a somewhat simplistic and biased lens, tends to make of him an obsolete writer. He remains associated with a form of realism and an aesthetics of representation that have fallen out of favor since the 1960s. In spite of his own various experiments in the postmodernist mode,¹⁹ he himself brought grist to this mill in an interview given to the French daily *Le Monde* in January 2007 when, referring to the “yea-saying” to the goodness and beauty of the world that characterizes his vision, by contrast with his contemporaries’ prevalent mood of pessimism and black humor, he called himself an “anachronistic” writer in his homeland.

This is where, by way of conclusion, the two hypotheses submitted here meet: the rejection of what is perceived as his political conservatism and his unabashed Americanism branches out from the thematic into the aesthetic. In the end, Updike’s critical reception in France cannot escape the paradigms of our own “identity themes,” revealing as much, or more, about our national identity as about the

defining essence of Updike's writings. Neither "redskin" nor "paleface," in Philip Rahv's typology, Updike falls perhaps into a kind of no man's land that seems to be alien to Continental biases and clichéd perceptions. Interestingly, though, the news of his death brought about an unexpected turnaround: in its homage to the writer, the leftist journal *Marianne* asked why it is that Updike leaves no heir, and the answer was that he remains the unique representative of a totally original fictional form (Liebaert). If we try to reflect upon what makes Updike an original, we may surmise that, prolific as he is, he defies categories; American as he is—certainly an author to be placed "in the American grain"—he is nevertheless unafraid to ruffle expectations and move countercurrent. So, unlike writers who breed epigones, he seems, like J. D. Salinger, to stand in a class of his own. The French novelist Jean-Paul Dubois, a great admirer of Updike's art, concludes that "pour ceux qui n'ont ni foi ni maître et que tenaille l'intranquillité, je dirai simplement que John Updike est ce que l'on peut espérer de mieux au fin fond de la nuit" ("for those who have neither faith nor master and who are haunted by intransquility, John Updike is simply the best to be hoped for in the dead of the night").

NOTES

1. The American recipients of the Prix Médicis étranger are: *Edwin Mullhouse: The Life and Death of an American Writer 1943–1954* by Jeffrey Cartwright (Steven Millhauser, 1975); *God Knows* (Joseph Heller, 1985); *Adventures in the Alaskan Skin Trade* (John Hawkes, 1986); *Leviathan* (Paul Auster, 1993); *The Tortilla Curtain* (T. Coraghessan Boyle, 1997); *The Human Stain* (Philip Roth, 2002); *The Lost: A Search for Six of Six Million* (Daniel Mendelsohn, 2007); *What Is the What: The Autobiography of Valentino Achak Deng* (Dave Eggers, 2009); *Sukkwan Island* (David Vann, 2010). The jury is composed of French writers and journalists.

2. In 1995, Updike received the honorary distinction of Commandeur de l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres. The Order of Arts and Letters, which is part of the Ordre national du Mérite, was established in 1963 by the French Minister of Culture. Its purpose is the recognition of significant contributions to the arts and literature or the propagation of these fields. It is composed of three grades: the highest, *Commandeurs*, include T. S. Eliot (1960), Nadine Gordimer (1991), and Ray Bradbury (2007).

3. The American recipients of the Prix du Meilleur livre étranger are: *The Centaur* (John Updike, 1965); *The Blood Oranges* (John Hawkes, 1973); *The Things They Carried* (Tim O'Brien, 1990); *Theory of War* (Joan Brady, 1995); *American Pastoral* (Philip Roth, 2000); *The History of Love* (Nicole Krauss, 2006); and *Searching for John Ford* (Joseph McBride, 2007). The jury is composed of French critics and publishers.

4. In the conclusion to his review of American literature in France, Chénétier notes that "the osmosis between public and academic audiences is growing" (1991, 95).

5. Auster is an example of Francophilia as well. He lived for several years in Paris, where he earned a living translating various French writers (Mallarmé, Sartre, Simenon) and developed close

links with the literary establishment. His star seems to have waned among French critics in recent years, the novelty of his devices being increasingly perceived as somewhat hackneyed and his late production tending to be judged repetitive.

6. Many sulfurous works such as *Tropic of Cancer*, *Lolita*, and *Naked Lunch* met with the censorship of American publishers and were first published in France.

7. See Holdefer 50. Back in 1986, Chénétier made the point that “many of the authors European academics interested in contemporary American literature may talk about when they visit or teach in the United States will be largely unknown to their students and often despised or looked askance at by their colleagues. Donald Barthelme and Thomas Pynchon might occasionally grace coffee tables along with copies of the *New Yorker*, but few English departments in [the United States] offer courses on contemporary American literature, and writing one’s Ph.D. dissertation on William Gass or Robert Coover is hardly the best way of landing a job” (1986, xii–xiii). Sartre expressed the same kind of disappointment in 1946: “First, it was impossible to meet any of these men [the great modernist novelists] . . . Also, the majority of the cultivated Americans whom I met did not share my enthusiasm for them” (115).

8. In terms of the general public, the 2010 edition of the biennial Festival America, which has been held since 2002 in the Vincennes suburb of Paris, featured, among others, Bret Easton Ellis, Jay McInerney, Dan Fante, Jayne Anne Phillips, Douglas Kennedy, Adam Haslett, Richard Russo, Claire Messud, Nick Flynn, Louise Erdrich, and Richard Price.

9. As Huck Gutman writes, “Baudelaire would read Poe, and the world of letters, not solely in France, would never be the same” (4).

10. Coindreau’s translations for Gallimard before World War II include *Manhattan Transfer* (1928); *A Farewell to Arms* (1932, with a preface by the novelist Drieu La Rochelle); *The Sun Also Rises* (1933, with a preface by the poet Jean Prévoist); *As I Lay Dying* (1934, with a preface by the poet Valéry Larbaud); *Light in August* (1935); *God’s Little Acre* (1936); *Tobacco Road* (1937); *The Sound and the Fury* (1938); and *Of Mice and Men* (1939).

11. Mathy notes that “Sartre was extremely attracted to the American literature of the 1920s and 1930s, perhaps more so than any other French writer of his generation, with the exception of Simone de Beauvoir” (129).

12. All of Updike’s novels and most of his short story collections have been translated (usually by renowned translators) and published by prestigious presses (Gallimard and Éditions du Seuil). *The Same Door*, *Olinger Stories*, and *The Early Stories* have not been translated. Neither have the play *Buchanan Dying* or the poetry collections except *Facing Nature* (*La Condition naturelle*). About half of the critical works have been translated (not yet translated are *Assorted Prose*, *Odd Jobs*, *More Matter*, *Still Looking*, and *Due Considerations*). The title of one of the novels, *Memories of the Ford Administration*, has been substantially altered in translation to *La parfaite épouse* (*The Perfect Spouse*)—a less alien and more appealing catch phrase. For the collections of short stories, the title of the eponymous story has sometimes been changed, as in *The Music School* (*Les Quatre faces d’une histoire* or *Four Sides of One Story*) and *Problems* (*La Concubine de Saint-Augustin* or *Augustine’s Concubine*).

13. To the best of my knowledge, only two Ph.D. dissertations have been written on Updike in France: mine (“The Daily and the Sacred in John Updike’s Fiction,” defended at the Sorbonne in

1980) and Aristie Trendel's ("John Updike's Short Fiction: Promises of Immortality," defended at the University of Strasbourg in 2004). My monograph *John Updike: La nostalgie de l'Amérique* (2002) is the only one on Updike to be published in French to this date. None of the major critical works on Updike have been translated into French.

14. Olster sums up the standard criticisms leveled at Updike in the United States: "[H]is representation of American normativity in terms—exclusively, according to detractors—of middle-class white masculinity and apparent denigration of everyone else in terms of racialized, ethnic, and/or gendered otherness has provoked controversy since the start of his career" (8).

15. The piece ends: "The next morning, I went back to the open vantage from which we had watched the tower so dreadfully slip from sight. The fresh sun shone on the eastward façades, a few boats tentatively moved in the river, the ruins were still sending out smoke, but New York looked glorious" (Updike "Talk of the Town" 29).

16. As Roger Asselineau and Simon Copans write, "American Studies in the French universities did not really come of age until the late 1960s" (58). The first French chair in American literature and civilization was created at the Sorbonne in 1926 for Professor Charles Cestre, the same year that the first panel on American literature was finally allowed to run at the MLA convention (as English 11, "Commonwealth Literature"), after three years of unsuccessful petitions by Fred Lewis Pattee (information provided by Professor James Nagel). Before World War II, only the Sorbonne and the universities of Lille and Lyon were offering courses in American literature and civilization, which remained a very marginal, optional subject. After the war, things changed radically and such courses were taught in most universities but always as part of a degree in English. The growing number of graduates specializing in American rather than English literature as well as in a range of American "civilization" topics—*civilization* being the standard term used in French universities to designate the various fields that make up what in the United States is referred to as "American studies"—led to the foundation in 1967 of the Association Française d'Études Américaines (French Association of American Studies).

17. Such criticism, of course, is not a French exclusivity. In a 2009 essay, Sanford Pinsker, while admitting that Rabbit's political stance on Vietnam, his xenophobia and misogyny "melted into thin air when propped against [Updike's] exquisitely honed paragraphs," nevertheless adds: "Many members of the academy were not so forgiving, and at meetings of the Modern Language Association I found myself defending Updike against those who found him both facile and politically incorrect" (494).

18. See Greiner.

19. See Duvall.

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“Not all characters have a stable referent”: *The Centaur*, Updike’s Mock Mock-Epic

MICHAEL GRIFFITH

I

To my mind, the conventional wisdom that denominates *The Centaur* a “mock epic”¹ falls one *mock* shy of the mark. Of course I agree with the characterization up to a point: John Updike is dressing up the mundane—three snowy days in “a patch of Pennsylvania in 1947” (293)—in the grandiosities of myth, but his intent here is more convoluted and multifarious than, say, Alexander Pope’s in *The Rape of the Lock*. Some definers of the mock epic pretend that it’s a simple, unidirectional operation: By draping dailiness in grandeur, you expose it as silly and smalltime, picayune. But that’s clearly *not* what’s going on in Updike’s novel, and in fact several early critics held that Updike was inverting the mock epic to puff up his book and himself. According to this theory, the mythology in *The Centaur* functions as a pompous masquerade, Updike’s effort to inflate a trivial subject by giving it Hellenic airs. That is, his brand of mock epic is about elevating the everyday at the expense of the mythic, which is cheapened by being put to such use. So does Updike come to praise dailiness or to mock it? Does he intend to celebrate this world of tire chains and luncheonettes and coils of serrated basketball tickets and—to cite one of many examples of dramatic anthropomorphizing of minute details—the post office’s glimpsed back room, “a battlefield hospital where gray mail sacks lie unconscious, steeped in an anesthesia of shadows, prone, mis-

shapen, and disembowelled" (202)? (This reads as if written by the composing team of Walt Whitman and Cormac McCarthy.) Does Updike mean to lend this simulacrum of his hometown some classical glory? Is he glorifying the mythologizing powers of memory? Is he using the mock-epic form to poke fun at his own desire to stagger sextillions of infidels with the miracle of a few mousy gray days in a mousy gray town? Or is he mocking neither the epic nor the everyday, but the misguided belief that holds them to be incompatible? Is he mocking the very basis of the mock epic, the assumption that there exists a distinction between high forms and low, high ambition and low?

The truth, it seems to me, is at least all of these . . . which is why I love the book so much.

II

Many readers and critics have called *The Centaur*, of 1963, both Updike's most autobiographical novel (a portrait of the artist as a young son to a good but hapless man) and his most formally experimental one. Much of the experimentation here has to do with Updike's intermingling of myth-infused and so-called realistic chapters—and I very much admire his refusal to explain away the mythic elements, as some would have him do, by making them excrescences of Peter's nostalgia or by building them into a hermeneutic maze that the nimble reader may thread through in such a way as to "solve" it, and thus to blunt the mystery of the genuinely weird fantastical elements (the arrow removed from Chiron/Caldwell's foot by Hephaestus/Hummel's acetylene torch, and so on) by subsuming them under more realistic terms. In *The Centaur*, the mythic and the humdrum aren't treated *as if* they occupy the same plane; they *do* occupy the same plane. Which dooms a certain kind of hierophantic reader who wants to find a key and turn the tumblers. "Not all characters," Updike twits such readers in a headnote to the Mythological Index he provides at the end, "have a stable referent" (301). Stable referents, dear reader, belong to a different kind of world, but if you want to nose for real truffles in an imaginary garden, then by all means go ahead.

The interplay of large-scale myth and smaller-scale verisimilitude is delightful, but my favorite "experiment" in the book is its intricate and innovative use of point of view. It is now axiomatic (besides being, in my estimation, true) that Peter Caldwell is in one sense or another the narrator in all the novel's modes, not only the first-person chapters (2, 4, 6, and 8) in which he appears *in propria persona* but the omniscient-voiced mythological chapters (1, 3, 7, and 9) and also the suspiciously prolix and lyrical obituary of his father that is the book's central

fifth chapter. Critics including but not limited to Joyce Carol Oates, Edward P. Vargo, James Mellard, and James A. Schiff have explored much more perceptively than I can here the ways in which, as Schiff puts it, “the entire novel emanates from Peter’s consciousness” (24).

I would, though, like to propose one caveat to—or is it an extension of?—that theory. We have Peter as past-tense first-person narrator, living in Greenwich Village perhaps fifteen years hence, a struggling abstract expressionist painter who addresses his meditations to his muse and love, the mute and nearly invisible “Negro mistress” with whom he lives (103).² We have the obituary writer as mask for Peter, a half-imposture we’re supposed to see through not quite effortlessly, but not effortfully either. (It will be the rare reader, I suspect, who makes it all the way through this unorthodox 1,200-word document still needing a fix on its source.) We have the omniscient narrator who seems to derive from the consciousness of the now roughly thirty-year-old Peter (this a deeper concealment, and requiring more interpretive energy to decipher). It seems to me that there’s still one more involution. I would add to these a fourth category in which we see not Updike himself, but a mask for Updike—in old narratological terms, an implied author—who treats Peter in turn as another kind of mask, albeit a deeply complex, multilayered one. Between the autobiographical elements of the story and the novel’s final form, then, Updike interposes a bewildering profusion of personae and distancings. There’s the fact that this is fiction, with the roles of Wesley Updike and John Updike adapted and tweaked and imaginatively transformed into George Caldwell and Peter Caldwell; there’s the further distancing of the intellectualized and massively intertextual experimental form, with its barriers to easy apprehension and transparency. Then there are the fictions attributable to Peter: the way he splits himself into first and third persons and adopts other alter egos as needed; the conceit of the novel as apostrophe to his muse; and so on. But beyond even that, I’d argue, is a certain separation between “Updike” (which is the name I’ll give the implied author) and Peter.

I’ll adduce just a few examples of what I mean. *The Centaur* is everywhere a novel of hybridity, a novel at its base about how we are not either one thing or another—ordinary or mythic, sacred or profane, son or father, fish or fowl, horse or human, and on and on and on—but always and inescapably both. “Updike,” a mature and confident artist, is more comfortable than Peter with the ambiguity and plenitude of that *both-and*. And not only the fifteen-year-old Peter who struggles to negotiate between vermin and Vermeer, who finds it hard to move back and forth, as his life in Olinger requires, between slides of cows with foot-rot

or lumpy jaw and the perfect lambencies of Dutch peinture, but also the twice-as-old, city-dwelling Peter who narrates the first-person sections.

III

I interrupt this train of thought to speak for a minute not of the implied author “Updike” but of Updike himself. Think for a moment, if you will, of Updike as he composes this novel—himself around thirty years old, with six acclaimed books already under his belt (and a seventh, *Telephone Poles*, on the way), in a variety of genres and modes: novels, story collections, poetry, a children’s book. He is a fixture at the *New Yorker*, a prize winner, the *Wunderkind* of American fiction. And now he takes on a novel that invites comparison—really, that demands comparison—to *Ulysses*, perhaps the most celebrated literary work of the twentieth century. He uses the humble materials of his own upbringing, the cough drops and oyster pails of his own parochial midcentury America, as the basis for this work, in which he may be seen to make fun of a certain kind of literary ambition by first embodying it in an inventive way and then suggesting that such a definition of ambition deforms or demeans lived reality, to which he owes his first and deepest allegiance. The grandeur here is that of the school janitor: “. . . Heller goes, gathering under the methodical push of his broom buttons, fluff, pennies, lint, tinfoil, hairpins, cellophane, hair, thread, tangerine seeds, comb teeth, Peter Caldwell’s psoriasis scratchings, and all the undignifiable flecks and flakes and bits and motes and whatnot dust that go to make up a universe: he harvests these” (220).

That last three-word clause may seem like overkill; it can scarcely escape the reader that this bravura passage rests on an extended analogy between the sweeper of motes and the novelist. To some—and it would be churlish to blame them—this looks like arrogance. Face it, it *is* arrogance. But art requires such arrogance. Pity the writer whose reach *doesn’t* exceed her grasp.

I have always been partial to those passages, especially early on in a writer’s career, in which one can see her discovering—with a joy that has spontaneity in it, and often even an underglimmer of shock—just what she’s capable of, and glorying in it. There are many, many such instances here—as always, it’s in the sentences, the fabulous swooping serpentine sentences!—as Updike shows us again and again how the small and the large, the sacred and the profane, the “trivial” and the “significant,” interpenetrate each other (to adapt a verb of special interest to him).

One of my favorite such passages is Peter’s paean in chapter 4 to the scapegrace Johnny Dedman, pinball wizard, swaggerer, troublemaker, wielder of a deck of pornographic cards. An excerpt:

Johnny Dedman was one of my idols. A senior flunked back into a junior, he performed exquisitely all the meaningless deeds of coordination, jitterbugging and playing pinball and tossing salted nuts into his mouth. By an accident of alphabetization he sat next to me in one study hall and taught me a few tricks, how to make a wooden popping noise by pulling my finger from my mouth, for instance—though I could never do it as loudly as he. He was inimitable and no doubt it was foolish to try. He had a rosy babyish face and a feathery mustache of pale unshaven hair and an absolute purity of ambitionlessness . . . The pinball machine never tilted on him; he claimed he could feel the mercury swaying in the Tilt trigger. He played the machines as if he had invented them. . . . In that year, the year I was fifteen, if I had not wanted so badly to be Vermeer, I would have tried to be Johnny Dedman. But of course I had the timid sense to see that you do not will to be Johnny Dedman; you fall into it at birth, ripe from the beginning. (122–23)

For the agonizingly self-conscious fifteen-year-old Peter, marked by psoriasis, balked by lust, tortured by ambition, singled out for his scholastic achievements and his relation to everyone's favorite eccentric teacher, this would have been an as-yet-inexpressible envy. On the other hand, the older Peter narrating here—an artist who still clings to the idea, central to much theorizing about abstract expressionism, that art is about tapping into an inarticulate and inarticulable, primitive, instinctive way of thinking, and thus analogous to the way Johnny Dedman, an artist of artlessness, maestro of the everyday, operates—is capable of recognizing the source of the admiration as a kind of inverted kinship.

I'd like to suggest that for Updike—and for "Updike" the implied author, too—the ode to Johnny Dedman has yet another element in it. If voiced by Peter, this passage has a different tone than if voiced by Updike. It's a bravura passage in which the supremely self-conscious artist, the man dedicated to a kind of mindfulness on which nothing is ever lost, expresses admiration and envy for a mindless ease that is unavailable to him. This is not to say that the passage is insincere or secretly sneering; like Peter, Updike sees in Johnny Dedman a variety of genius, and like Peter he has ambivalent feelings toward his own gifts, which have come about by means (and what teaches this better than ancient myth?) of accommodating oneself to one's fate or one's nature, of turning even one's burdens into treasures. You are who you are, and you work with and around that. (This is what Peter's girlfriend recognizes when, after all his agonies about whether to divulge the facts of his psoriasis, she says that of course she knew about his condition, and thought nothing about it because "It's part of you" [246].)

But there's also pride here, as in the panegyric to good janitorship. Can't one

glimpse, in this introspective, exquisitely artful praise of a boy whose beloved attribute is a blind and heedless exteriority, self-love of a kind? In both cases the flush of pride is specifically literary, the province not so much of Peter, through whose consciousness all this is filtered, as of his maker.

This is the sort of flourish that makes a lot of people chafe. I love it, not least because it shows Updike living up to his injunction (expressed in a well-known praise of Vladimir Nabokov that for years adorned every Nabokov paperback) that one must write prose “the only way it should be written, that is, ecstatically” (*Assorted Prose* 319). I love it all the more because it hinges on luring the unwary reader into a dichotomy that proves to be, like every other dichotomy this book takes up, false: Vermeer versus Dedman, art versus artless, the eternal verities versus motes and skin flakes and comb teeth. Johnny Dedman turns out to be a great and instinctive artist—and is recognized as such by one of his brethren, John Updike, whose own wizardry feels to the envious wannabe and epigone (I speak chiefly of myself here, though writers like Nicholson Baker in *U and I* have expressed similar sentiments) like Dedman’s does to Peter. I wouldn’t be stretching it much if I characterized my feeling as I read this passage for the first time, at twenty-two, in the cramped Manhattan apartment where I lived while I decided whether or not to quit the advertising business and try to write, as “But of course I had the timid sense to see that you do not will to be John Updike; you fall into it at birth, ripe from the beginning. Damn it all.”

IV

To me, the godlike loftiness of such passages as these—indeed, the whole mythological dimension of the novel—belongs not so much to Peter, who can’t yet afford the empyrean point of view, but to that implied author I’m calling “Updike.” This is a distinction that seems pointed to in the Mythological Index appended to the book. That bit of scholarly apparatus brings in—if you treat it as part of the text, as I’d argue you must—a new first-person voice, one that tries to avoid calling attention to itself by shunning the “I” and hiding behind the possessive pronoun “my.” This voice is attached either to Updike or to “Updike,” and so stakes claim to greater demiurgic authority than Peter’s voice. The voice announces first a kind of reluctance to intervene: Gods do not stoop to hermeneutics, and this persona has done so only reluctantly, “at my wife’s suggestion” (301). The mention of a wife here provides another distinction between “Updike” and Peter; the former is both a more successful artist than the latter and a husband rather than

a lover. “Updike” and Peter are both their father’s sons, but they’re *different* sons, and sometimes it’s easy to miss this.

Take one last passage as an example of what I mean. Chapter 8 features Peter’s soul-searching laments about the value of his art and life, about whether he’s lived up properly to his father’s example. There’s a moment in which Peter, meditating on his paternal lineage, remarks, “Priest, teacher, artist: the classic degeneration.” He goes on, addressing his lover:

But at the hour in the afternoon when my father and I would be heading home in the car, I glance around at the nest we have made, at the floorboards polished by our bare feet, at the continents of stain on the ceiling like an old and all-wrong discoverer’s map, at the earnestly bloated canvases I conscientiously cover with great streaks straining to say what even I am beginning to suspect is the unsayable thing, and I grow frightened. I consider the life we have made together, with its days spent without relation to the days the sun keeps and its baroque arabesques of increasingly attenuated emotion and its furnishings like a scattering of worn-out Braques and its rather wistful half-Freudian half-Oriental sex-mysticism, and I wonder, *Was it for this that my father gave up his life?* (269–70)

This is, however rococo in form, a familiar old sentiment: *Am I a failure? Are my artistic strivings vain, futile, and selfish? Am I living up to the legacies and honoring the sacrifices of those who made them possible?* But I’d argue that there’s a split narration here, that Peter and “Updike” have different parts to sing. The substance belongs to Peter, the manner to “Updike.” How often are complaints of artistic impotence delivered with such Olympian aplomb, by way of such “baroque arabesques”? I’m not suggesting quite as neat a split as it may sound: I don’t mean to simply cleave the young man’s ambivalence into two parts and call the self-lacerating part Peter and the self-vaunting part “Updike.” Peter’s access of eloquence and introspection here, courtesy of his alter ego “Updike,” may help convince him to keep on; it is part of him. Likewise, the novelist is not simply lifting himself above the fray by divesting himself of his weaker part, but dividing himself into two: the earnest, earthbound, doubting, but talented Peter and the divinely inspired—but also deeply self-doubting and self-ironizing³—“Updike,” whose soaring rhetoric allows him to stand above and beyond those doubts, at least momentarily and provisionally. Self-loathing *and* self-confidence are necessary to both. But I do think conceiving of the narrator as a composite, rather than a single voice, is useful. This would be a different book if we were to read “Priest, teacher, artist: the

classic degeneration” as sincere and matter-of-fact rather than—and I think “Updike” wants us to do this even if Peter can’t quite muster it—as yet another false and misleading attempt at taxonomy in a world that doesn’t well bear such categorizing. Memories of the father are always at the center here, so *teacher* remains the middle term, but again and again Updike seems to subvert or explode the myth that priest and artist are incompatible. That three-word devolution down the generations has a very different sound in the mouths of Peter and of “Updike,” the one an artist *manqué*, the other an artist who has shed the *manqué* from his back.

v

At the end of the novel’s penultimate chapter, as Peter looks through a window and gets the last glimpse he’s going to get (in the book, at least) of his father, there’s a passage that reads as Peter’s painterly credo:

The stone bare wall was a scumble of umber; my father’s footsteps thumbs of white in white. I knew what this scene was—a patch of Pennsylvania in 1947—and yet I did not know, was in my softly fevered state mindlessly soaked in a rectangle of colored light. I burned to paint it, just like that, in its puzzle of glory; it came upon me that I must go to Nature disarmed of perspective and stretch myself like a large transparent canvas upon her in the hope that, my submission being perfect, the imprint of a beautiful and useful truth would be taken. (218)

It’s here, I think, that the distinction I’m trying to insist upon between Peter’s perspective and Updike’s becomes clearest. What Peter exalts here is an impossible—albeit a beautiful—idealism, one that Updike everywhere and always contradicts, however much he may yearn for it. He contradicts it most conspicuously in the way it’s said: This passage is staggeringly eloquent, meticulously worked (that lovely metrical line at the beginning, with its internal rhyme: “The stone bare wall was a scumble of umber”). Yet its substance is—like the tribute to Johnny Dedman—a praise-song to a kind of art that verges on artlessness. None of which is to say that the implied author doesn’t share Peter’s sentiment: He too might well dream of being a perfect vessel for the truth of Nature, spokesman for his father, chronicler of this patch of turf and this time. But this is the dream of a failed or semi-failed Greenwich Village painter who still adheres to the distinction he used to make between full-color plates of Vermeer and 4-H Club slides of corn pests. An art perfectly “transparent” and “mindlessly soaked” and “disarmed of perspective,” capturing a truth content to stay on the reservation of beauty and usefulness? A lovely ideal, but hardly the kind of art embodied in this paragraph.

Here Updike both celebrates and ironizes young Peter, it seems to me—in a way more than glancingly analogous to the way Peter both celebrates and ironizes Johnny Dedman.

In an interview, Updike called the mythological superstructure of *The Centaur* “a correlative of the enlarging effect of Peter’s nostalgia,” and of course it is (“Art of Fiction” 35). But it’s also, I would argue, a correlative of the enlarging effect of “Updike”’s artistic ambitions. The two “I”s are brothers, inextricably entwined even at the moments when we can most easily tell them apart—and they merge with each other and with their shared father, Chiron/George Caldwell/Wesley Updike, in the brief, lovely, enigmatic final chapter. Perhaps my favorite moment in that final scene is the one in which George feels queasy and weary at the prospect of digging his car out of a snowbank and resuming his daily round of duties:

The prospect of having again to maneuver among Zimmerman and Mrs. Herzog and all that overbearing unfathomable Olinger gang made him giddy, sick; how could his father’s seed, exploding into an infinitude of possibilities, have been funnelled into this, this paralyzed patch of thankless alien land, these few cryptic faces, those certain four walls of Room 204? (297–98)

Note the echo of the “patch of Pennsylvania” Peter mentioned just five pages earlier. Note the phrase “his father’s,” which may send the reader into a fleeting tizzy as she tries to attach the proper referent: George’s father? Chiron’s? Wesley Updike’s? Peter’s? “Updike”’s? Again, I’d say the answer partakes of all of these, though “George’s” is surely the primary and central meaning, and is the antecedent that the reader manages after a moment to attach. Note, too, the way that the narrator and the character chafe under the knowledge that mythological amplitude, that “infinitude of possibilities,” has once again been eroded, dissolved, spilled, and wasted, funnelled into a single set of small, sad, meager circumstances. The passage emphasizes not the ways that mythological scale might represent a puffing-up of dailiness, but the ways that everyday life diminishes and impoverishes something that was, safely *in potentia*, an infinitude. The novel’s reversal of the mock epic is complete: The daily grind being dreaded is that of Olympus, home of “that overbearing unfathomable Olinger gang.”

At which point George, seeing his misshapen reflection in the Buick’s dented fender, has an epiphany, experiences a kind of vocation: “[H]e understood. This was a chariot Zimmerman had sent for him. His lessons. He must order his mind and prepare his lessons” (298). It’s a gorgeous moment, I think, most of all for the way it unites all three principals: George, whose aperçu is being revisited or

reimagined, and his twin sons Peter and “Updike,” who are following and inhabiting him. And all three come, here and now, to a sense of being called: George to teaching, Peter to painting, “Updike” to the making of this fictive tribute. They do so by reconciling what had appeared irreconcilable: father and son(s); the infinitude of myth and the paltry patch of dailiness; art and religion; sacrifice and self-indulgence.

NOTES

1. One smart, incisive example is Suzanne Uphaus’s 1977 essay “*The Centaur*: Updike’s Mock Epic,” from which I have adapted my subtitle.

2. She is a troubling (non)character . . . but that is an issue for another essay.

3. Schiff points out that the phrase “that atrocious ego Peter Caldwell” (201), which belongs to the third-person omniscient voice (perhaps here inflected through the point of view of Minor, the luncheonette owner), reads as self-rebuke, or as Peter “lampooning his adolescent self” (24). Surely Updike is at work here, too, trying to blunt a criticism he knows he’ll hear by anticipating it and turning it to the novel’s advantage.

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Updike and Kerouac: Rabbit on the Road

DONALD J. GREINER

He wonders, Is it just these people I'm outside or is it all America?

—JOHN UPDIKE, *Rabbit, Run*

John Updike set the prototype of Harry “Rabbit” Angstrom in motion before he was graduated from Harvard in 1954. Although he had not at that time thought of his most famous, not to mention most controversial character, he had created two versions of what I call the ur-Rabbit: in the short story “Ace in the Hole” and the poem “Ex-Basketball Player.”¹ He then saw story and poem published in the *New Yorker* before his first book, *The Carpentered Hen*, appeared in 1958: “Ace in the Hole” on April 9, 1955; “Ex-Basketball Player” on July 6, 1957. Both Fred “Ace” Anderson and the poem’s Flick Webb are former high school basketball heroes who foresee a stalled life of diminished fame and restricted possibility. Neither of them is a thinker who can describe the stark, blank wall of the future that awaits him, and thus each hopes to survive on an instinctive combination of recent memories and current movement. For Ace, the motion of freedom is dancing the jitterbug with his wife, who readily follows his lead: “he spun her out carefully, keeping the beat with his shoulders. . . . The music ate through his skin and mixed with the nerves and small veins; he seemed to be great again, and all the other kids were around them, in a ring, clapping time” (*Same Door* 26). Time, of course, is Ace’s enemy. He is baffled, but at least dancing counters his sense of stagnation. “Ex-Basketball Player,” a short poem of comic antics and somber tone, is an on-the-mark observation of a fickle American culture that cannot sustain

its more mundane heroes. Flick Webb, former star of the basketball court, is not forgotten, yet feels the need to remind the townspeople of his glory days. Stuck in a dead-end job at a gas station, Flick dribbles inner tubes for laughs, but, as the speaker comments, “most of us remember anyway” (*Carpentered Hen 2*).

Updike’s skill at fostering the reader’s sympathy for two young men trapped between a futureless life and a momentary motion that will take them nowhere is astonishing when one recalls that he was an undergraduate when he wrote the story and poem in which they appear. He had not yet envisioned Harry Angstrom and *Rabbit, Run* (1960), but all that changed when Jack Kerouac published *On the Road* in 1957. Updike’s short parody of that book and his later comments about Kerouac will establish the context for my discussion of how, in *Rabbit, Run*, Updike challenges not only Kerouac’s myth of “the Imbecile, the Saint” (Kerouac 193) who is forever ecstatically seeking freedom on the road but also the American literary paradigm that defines Kerouac’s novel.

I

The long-lived paradigm I refer to took shape in 1826 when James Fenimore Cooper published *The Last of the Mohicans* to worldwide acclaim. Two or more males abandon the apron strings of the home for the lure of the wilderness. The bonding that ensues while the men pursue an always elusive freedom translates into an avoidance of women. While it is true that Natty Bumppo and his Mohican soul mate Chingachgook take Cora and Alice with them as they leave the domestic safety of the town for the primitive fort in the forest, Cooper’s point is that Cora must die, Alice must return to society to be married, and the two bonded males must continue westward to escape the sound of the axes that are chopping down the trees that will result in the houses that will bring women into the territory.

It is a fact of American literary history that Cooper created a paradigm for subsequent novelists whether they read him or not. Although Natty Bumppo refuses to kill man or beast unless pressed by circumstances, he became both a pristine hero and a figure of anarchy in the American imagination because he obeys not the law of the land but the law of the moment. When the regulations that control societal discourse in the woman-dominated domain of the kitchen and the bedroom squeeze too tightly, the paradigmatic American male lights out for the territory, or for the road, where the law is what he says it is—or, better, where there is no law and surely no women.² Anxiety, or fear, or what Herman Melville’s Ishmael calls “a damp, drizzly November in my soul” prompt the paradigm of male bonding. The irony is that uncertainty, terror, and even death lurk at the heart of the unfet-

tered space beyond the border, despite the efforts of our male novelists to depict the forest, the river, the ocean, the prairie, and the road as beneficent and pure.

The Last of the Mohicans anticipated such iconic fictions as *Moby-Dick*; *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*; *Go Down, Moses*; *Cannery Row*; *Deliverance* and—most important for my purposes—*On the Road* and *Rabbit, Run*. All these books are classic American novels of male privilege as well as novels that formed the basis of such influential critical theories as those proposed by D. H. Lawrence in *Studies in Classic American Literature* (1923); R. W. B. Lewis in *The American Adam: Innocence, Tragedy, and Tradition in the Nineteenth Century* (1955); and Leslie Fiedler in *Love and Death in the American Novel* (1960). In these canonical fictions and the literary theory formulated around them, women represent domesticity, society, and, finally, mortality, while men long for freedom, the far side of town, and, most of all, immortality. Carolyn Heilbrun was surely on target when she criticized these classic tales in “The Masculine Wilderness of the American Novel,” as was Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick when she clarified the kind of male bonding I have outlined as not homosexual but homosocial—that is, as friendship between men being more important than love between men and women.³ Yet what Heilbrun calls “the masculine wilderness,” Lewis defines as “space.” The American literary hero, whether pure Natty Bumppo or fallen Harry Angstrom, longs to be outside of time so that he is located only in space, in what Lewis specifies as “the unbounded, the area of total possibility” (91). Kerouac’s manic Dean Moriarty exclaims to Sal Paradise that they “know time,” meaning that since time limits life, they must always remain on the road in pursuit of an always receding promise (Kerouac 120). Time is the enemy of space for Dean and Harry because if the unbounded is associated with immortality, time is equated with mortality. Women mean expulsion from Eden and the ticking of the clock. Sal Paradise understands that death is forever near, that “somewhere an old man with white hair was probably walking toward us with the Word, and would arrive any minute and make us silent” (55). Worse, Harry meets death head-on when, in one of the saddest scenes in all of American fiction, his wife, Janice, drunkenly allows their baby daughter to drown.

One question, then, is whether these canonical heroes will let their lives be structured by the limitations of time and convention or reject the social contract and run to escape the clock. The friction between the fearful but adventuring male and the requirements of domestic responsibility is a standard trope in the American novel. *On the Road* and *Rabbit, Run* are variations on that trope. Because of Kerouac’s posthumous status as a wandering Beat saint, readers forget

that he would have read the classic American novels when he studied at Columbia University in 1940 and 1942 before enlisting in the Navy during World War II. As for Updike, it goes without saying that he perused the canon as an English major while at Harvard.⁴ His later reading of *On the Road* was a primary factor in the development of *Rabbit, Run*.

II

On February 21, 1959, Updike published in the *New Yorker* a parody of Kerouac's blockbuster, which had made headlines less than two years earlier. The date is significant. Readers today, if they know the parody at all, remember it as part of Updike's collection *Assorted Prose*, which was published in 1965, but Updike composed it in 1959, the year he was writing his breakthrough novel, *Rabbit, Run*. The title of the parody, "On the Sidewalk," would have encouraged the knowledgeable reader to smile, and the subtitle sets a tone of sarcastic dismissal: "After Reading, At Long Last, 'On the Road,' by Jack Kerouac." Updike mocks Kerouac's full-steam-ahead prose, with its piling up of adjectives and exclamation points and its liberal use of capital letters to indicate existential ecstasy, but his primary target is Kerouac's attitude toward life on the road, which equates running away from home with dashing toward life. On a first reading, we think we are following two young boys as they grab scooter and tricycle and careen down the neighborhood sidewalk: "His scooter was out front, the selfsame, the nonpareil, with its paint scabbing off intricately and its scratchedon dirty words and its nuts and bolts chattering with fear" (*Assorted Prose* 24-25). The narrator echoes Dean Moriarty's inarticulate exclamation of joy, "This was IT," and describes his friend as the "imbecile saint of our fudging age" (25). Significantly, he rejects the plea of a neighborhood girl to join them on their sidewalk jaunt, saying, "I didn't have the stomach for it" (26).

At the conclusion of the parody, Updike sharpens his criticism of Kerouac's hymn to male freedom on the American road. Dean Moriarty and Sal Paradise speed back and forth across the entire continent, with a side trip to Mexico for good measure, always searching for the never defined "IT," but Updike's narrator and his bonded buddy have to stop when they reach the corner. Updike slices Kerouac with surgical precision: "Well. In landsend despair I stood stranded. . . . I was not allowed to cross the street. I stood on the gray curb thinking, They said I could cross it when I grew up, but what do they mean grown up? I'm thirty-nine now, and felt sad" (*Assorted Prose* 27). "On the Sidewalk" defines *On the Road* as a novel written from a childish—not "boyish"—point of view.

Given this dismissal, it is significant that Updike continued to comment on Kerouac after the publication of *Rabbit, Run*. Over the next forty years, in interviews and reviews, he conceded the exuberance that Kerouac generates while questioning the substance, the “story,” as irresponsible. In essence, he blunted the razor-sharp tone of his parody. In 1971, comparing Kerouac and J. D. Salinger, Updike said: “Clearly, [Kerouac] is not a man of Salinger’s intelligence, but there is something benign, sentimentally benign, in his work. He attempted to grab it all; somehow, to grab it all. I like him. . . . Kerouac was right in emphasizing a certain flow, a certain ease” (*Picked-Up Pieces* 515-16). Contrasting Norman Mailer and Kerouac in 1966, Updike confessed to having “more affection” for the latter. Yet note the qualifying phrase when he explains that Kerouac, “however unreadably, has kept faith with fiction.” He continues, “I found *On the Road* liberating; it had a contagious love for American actuality” (Plath 17). But that feeling of liberation did not always lead to approval of Kerouac’s style. His conflicted reaction to the way Kerouac writes is unsurprising, given Updike’s superb command of the lyrical prose in *Rabbit, Run*.

It is instructive to recall Kerouac’s own description of his method. Explaining that he learned the technique from Neal Cassady, the prototype of Dean Moriarty, who wrote astonishing letters of as much as forty thousand words—“all first person, fast, mad, confessional”—Kerouac argues: “By not revising what you’ve already written you simply give the reader the actual workings of your mind during the writing itself: you confess your thoughts about events in your own unchangeable way . . . Goddamn it, FEELING is what I like in art, not CRAFTINESS” (Berrigan 541). Another influence, of course, was jazz, particularly the bebop solos Kerouac listened to in San Francisco in the late 1940s: “a tenor man drawing a breath and blowing a phrase on his saxophone, till he runs out of breath . . . That’s how I therefore separate my sentences, as breath separations of the mind” (555).

One cannot imagine a stylist of Updike’s renown approving Kerouac’s theory of spontaneous composition, his insistence that writing is improvisation. In 1968 Updike distinguished between his rejection of Kerouac’s prose in the parody that prefigures *Rabbit, Run* and his response to it a few years later: “Somebody like Kerouac who writes on teletype paper as rapidly as he can once slightly alarmed me. Now I can look upon this more kindly.” Still, he again qualifies his acceptance, this time with the word *maybe*: “Maybe something can get into sloppy writing that would elude careful writing.” His point, however, is that “sloppy writing” loses “the rhythm of utterance, the happiness” of a lovely arrangement of words

(Plath 43–44). Accusing Kerouac of “hurriedly tossing into a sentence all that comes to mind,” Updike speculates that the popularity of books like *On the Road* “must lie in [their] qualities of vernacular epic” (*Hugging the Shore* 554, 573–74).

Updike’s mixed feelings about the exuberant, jam-packed, frantically racing sentences of *On the Road* give way to serious concern when he turns from style to content. The “Special Message” he wrote for the 1977 Franklin Library edition of *Rabbit, Run* is a case in point, as he links his creation of Harry to his skepticism about Dean and Sal:

Rabbit is the hero of the novel, but is he a good man? The question is meant to lead to another—What is goodness? Kerouac’s *On the Road* was in the air, and a decade of dropping-out about to arrive, and the price society pays for unrestrained motion was on my mind. In the end, the act of running, of gathering a blank momentum “out of a kind of sweet panic,” offers itself as containing a kernel of goodness . . . (*Hugging the Shore* 850–51)

“Kernel of goodness” refers not to Dean and Sal but to Ace, Flick, and Harry. Both Kerouac and Updike concede that motion is better than stasis, that trying to blunt time by hoping to find space is a necessary antidote to a hemmed-in life, but only Updike’s trapped characters acknowledge the social restraints on motion—whether that motion is dancing the jitterbug, dribbling an inner tube, or racing toward the illusion of freedom that beckons from the next suburban block.

In 1990, following the completion of the Rabbit tetralogy, Updike extended his criticism of Kerouac’s content when he stated that he read *On the Road*

with some antagonism because it seemed to me to be so very unreal, so very evasive—about these more or less privileged people zipping back and forth across the country with no visible means of support. And I was trying to make the good Protestant point that we’re all involved with our fellow man, and we’re all members of families, and so the basic image of [*Rabbit, Run*] is of a man running or leaving or going on the road and disrupting his own family. (Plath 224)

III

The phrase “good Protestant point” resonates. I read *On the Road* and *Rabbit, Run* as primarily religious novels, mid-twentieth-century variations on the venerable quest story, the never-ending search for the Grail. The Grail at the end of the road may be diminished for Harry and Dean, but it shines brighter than a dingy apartment or a broken-down car. Updike suggests that Kerouac wrote *On*

the Road as a substitute for his lapsed religious upbringing: “For Kerouac, . . . Roman Catholicism had dwindled to a manic spark, a frenetic mission to find the sacred everywhere” (*Odd Jobs* 652). Rabbit runs because he is afraid, but, unlike Dean, he is both running from and questing toward. Having once tasted glory on the high school basketball court, Harry takes to the road not only to escape what he feels are dead-end domestic duties dogging him at age 26 but also to search for the joy, the goodness, the space—the sheer motion—he had when bouncing the ball toward the hoop. Eschewing thinking for feeling, he senses that only by running from the cemetery; from his dead baby; from his lover, Ruth, and another pregnancy, can he momentarily jettison the fear that is closing off his life.

Both Harry and Dean see their motion toward an ill-defined IT in nondoctrinal terms, but whereas Kerouac views Dean as a holy fool, a word-spouting American prophet finally despised in his own land, Updike more perceptively depicts Harry as a traditional Protestant believer who cannot articulate his belief. He is the harassed man of faith swinging between the ineffectual Reverend Eccles’s understanding of the pastoral mission as a kind of beneficent social healing and the sternly stringent Reverend Kruppenbach’s insistence that only faith and belief, as opposed to good works, matter in a fallen world. Kruppenbach’s religious certainty is informed by Karl Barth’s neo-orthodoxy, which Updike studied, and which preaches that there is no way for humanity to reach God. Only God can touch humanity, which He has done in the Incarnation.⁵ Eccles’s approach is based on nothing more solid than the latest popular theology. For all that Harry would like to rely on “how-to” guides to order the chaos that bedevils his life, Updike’s point is that Harry—contra Dean Moriarty—truly believes.

Sal describes Dean as being “out of his mind with real belief,” but Kerouac shows that for Dean, God is the big caretaker in the sky who will protect him so long as he doesn’t, to use his term, get “hung-up.” His ecstasy is both part of his charm and part of his childishness. Here is his confession of faith: “And of course now no one can tell us that there is no God. . . . Everything is fine, God exists, we know time. . . . God exists without qualms. As we roll along this way I am positive beyond doubt that everything will be taken care of for us” (120). What he means is that to escape from linear time, which rushes everyone toward the grave, is to know God, who will “take care” of him despite his joyous acts of casual betrayal. Harry, on the other hand, although he does not realize it, is a neophyte Barthian believer. A key moment occurs when Harry and Ruth first have sex in her apartment, across from a church. Waking beside Ruth on Sunday morning and hearing the church bells, Harry bows his head to pray: “*Help me, Christ. Forgive me. Take*

me down the way.” When Ruth mocks his piety, he responds with a declaration of belief that carries him through the rest of the novel: “Well, yeah. I think so . . . if God doesn’t exist, why does anything?” (78–79). His faith, his assurance, his quest to find “the way” rather than just be on the road, sustains him at his daughter’s funeral when, believing the minister’s words of comfort and “casting every care on thee,” he feels a “strange strength” and finally sees “a patch of light” (253). The irony is that he is the only mourner at the funeral who truly has faith; Eccles merely mouths the words. That Janice then blocks the light does not negate the momentary serenity that lures Harry toward “the way.” As Ruth concedes, “[Y]ou haven’t given up. In your stupid way you’re still fighting” (80).

Fighting in these two novels merges with flight, and thus it is significant that between “On the Sidewalk” and *Rabbit, Run*, Updike published the short story “The Happiest I’ve Been” (*New Yorker*, January 3, 1959). The story recalls the literary paradigm that Cooper created in 1826, as two young males prepare to leave the safety of home and the routine of parental domesticity to drive west from their small Pennsylvania town. They anticipate the long journey as an escape, but Updike is more interested in their delayed leave-taking than in the trip itself. This variation on the paradigm does not involve another ur-Rabbit. Unlike Dean and Harry, not to mention Natty and Huck, these two men are not fleeing women. Indeed, the evening before they leave, they join an all-night party to be with the girls of their youth. Yet the key to this resonant story is that the narrator heads west to meet the woman he thinks he might marry. He is bonded to his friend. They trust each other without hesitation, but the bond will be irrevocably broken if the marriage takes place. The story concludes:

There were many reasons for my feeling so happy. We were on our way. I had seen a dawn. This far, . . . I had brought us safely. Ahead, a girl waited who, if I asked, would marry me, but first there was a vast trip . . . And there was knowing that twice since midnight a person had trusted me enough to fall asleep beside me. (*Same Door* 241–42)

Such an ending is not possible in *Rabbit, Run*. The reason is that after writing “The Happiest I’ve Been,” Updike needed to confront *On the Road*. The legitimacy of religious belief and the presence of women when men light out for the territory are primary issues in both novels, but Updike pointedly distances himself from Kerouac by establishing a contrast between “the right way” and “the good way.” In what I consider to be the most important passage in the novel, Harry ponders this critical fork in the road just before his final flight:

On this small fulcrum [his two-year-old son] he tries to balance the rest, weighing opposites against each other: Janice and Ruth, Eccles and his mother, the right way and the good way, the way to the delicatessen . . . and the other way, down Summer Street to where the city ends. He tries to picture how it will end, with an empty baseball field, a dark factory, and then over a brook into a dirt road, he doesn't know. He pictures a huge vacant field of cinders and his heart goes hollow.

Afraid, really afraid, he remembers what once consoled him . . . (263)

Certain words in this passage—*end, empty, dark, vacant, cinders, hollow*—suggest what awaits Harry if he continues his run beyond the sidewalk, but he also senses that his life will offer nothing but emptiness if he returns to Janice and the eternal tangle of domestic chaos. Preferring thesis/antithesis—faith/adultery, domesticity/territory—to synthesis, Updike explained that he meant for his fiction to say “‘Yes, but.’ Yes, in *Rabbit, Run*, to our inner urgent whispers, but—the social fabric collapses murderously” (Plath 33). In other words, the right way, which is to turn around at the end of the sidewalk and go back home, is inextricably linked to the good way, which is to cross the street and break free. The open-endedness of the conclusion of *Rabbit, Run* reflects this dilemma. The right way and the good way: Dean Moriarty acknowledges only the latter.

Kerouac clearly signaled his intent to model *On the Road* on the paradigm of his literary forerunners—Cooper, Melville, and Twain—when he has Sal Paradise describe Dean as “that mad Ahab at the wheel” (234). Harry, of course, has no bonded brother; he runs alone. Yet even Sal rejects Dean in the final pages when he falls back into linear time and concedes “the forlorn rags of growing old” (310). He will play Ishmael to Dean's Ahab and abandon his companion in order to write the tale. Sal defines the Grail as the completion of his novel, but, conversely, while racing back and forth across America, he also rejoices in what he calls the “purity of the road” and how he “held the car to the white line in the holy road” (134, 138). The allusion to *The Pilgrim's Progress* is unmistakable, but where the pilgrim's Grail is the Celestial City, Sal and Dean specify no destination except motion itself. Early in their travels, a stranger asks a crucial question: “You boys going to get somewhere, or just going?” Sal's reaction is pertinent: “We didn't understand his question, and it was a damned good question” (22). A few pages later, he offers an answer, that “there was nowhere to go but everywhere, keep rolling under the stars” (28), which is a damned good response—if one ignores the right way to focus on the good way.

Updike deliberately alludes to this exchange when he places Harry in a similar

situation at the beginning of his run. A gas station attendant tells him, "The only way to get somewhere, you know, is to figure out where you're going before you go there." But unlike Sal, Harry is no thinker. Rather than consider the advice, he dismisses it with "I don't think so" (26). At this point in the novel, he is fleeing the solidity of his hometown and the messiness of home for an illusory Grail of "orange groves and . . . barefoot women" down south (23), but when he turns the car around, he becomes caught in the net of Updike's "yes, but" dilemma. After all, he is the father of one child and has another on the way, and he surely does not want to create a situation in which "the social fabric collapses murderously." He simultaneously longs to run and resists the longing.

When pressed to articulate his goal, Harry, like Dean, resorts to the abstract term *IT*, the very word Updike satirizes in "On the Sidewalk." Yet in *Rabbit, Run*, Updike eschews satire in order to illustrate the concreteness of Harry's perfectly hit tee shot. The ball

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 its 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 grin of aggrandizement, repeats, "That's *it.*" (115-16)

And what is "it"? A Kierkegaardian leap of faith, fluidity, freedom, and graceful motion in all the connotations of that troubling word *grace*.

Updike established the religious frame of *Rabbit, Run* when he chose the following quotation from Pascal as the epigraph: "The motions of Grace, the hardness of the heart; external circumstances." That is, the right way may lead to grace and the good way may require a hardening of the heart. The paradox that terrifies Harry is that he desires the good way but cannot harden his feelings, as confirmed by his sympathy for Janice and Ruth beyond the lure of sex. Dean needs sex for both ecstasy and communication, but his communication with women is always one-way: "Dean is balling Marylou at the hotel . . . At one sharp he rushes from Marylou to Camille . . . and bangs her once" (42). Women in *On the Road* are no more than an erotic diversion blocking access to the territory, but Updike knows better. Even during Harry's first night with Ruth, he sees that she might join him beyond the border: "They enter a lazy space. . . . now that she is so much his friend in this search" (73). This is the space that Lewis called attention to as the locale of "the unbounded."

Updike wrote *Rabbit, Run* as a direct counterpoint to *On the Road*, but he never entirely stopped thinking about Kerouac. In 1999, he published a short poem in *Poetry* magazine about flying across the country to elude “The tricycle in the hall,” “the dripping faucet and uncut lawn.” As the speaker observes, “the c.v. thrives via the road.” Motion always outshines stasis; exploring the territory always promises more than tending the home. The final word of the poem is “Grail” (*Americana* 10). Updike wrote these lines forty years after “On the Sidewalk.” The title of the poem? “On the Road.”

NOTES

1. See Greiner, “No Place to Run.”
2. See Greiner, *Women Enter the Wilderness*.
3. For an informed discussion of how later critics have responded to the arguments of Lawrence, Lewis, Lionel Trilling, et al., see Ellis.
4. Updike later published essays on such canonical American writers as Hawthorne, Melville, Emerson, Thoreau, Whitman, Howells, Twain, and James.
5. See John Updike, “Faith in Search of Understanding” (*Assorted Prose* 273–82), for an overview of Updike’s reading of Barth. See also Neary for a discussion of the importance of Kierkegaard’s theology in the Rabbit novels, and Jodock for an analysis of how Updike’s Lutheran upbringing shaped his thinking about religion.

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Updike's Many Worlds: Local and Global in *Toward the End of Time*

JUDIE NEWMAN

Ever since *The Coup* (1978), set in the imaginary African kingdom of Kush as its newly decolonized inhabitants encounter the forces of neocolonialism, John Updike demonstrated a keen interest in empire and its aftermath. Apparently disparate novels share a focus on imperialism, whether in the shape of an American empire in decline (*Rabbit Is Rich*, 1981) or under threat (*Terrorist*, 2006), the post-colonial fantasia of *Brazil* (1994), or a satiric take on the new powers of transnational corporatism (*S.*, 1988). In his first novel, *The Poorhouse Fair* (1959), written in 1957, Updike situated events some twenty years later in a socially engineered secular utopia that swiftly becomes dystopic. Global peace has been assured by the “London Pacts with the Eurasian Soviet” but, as a result, America has no cause left to strive for: “Heart had gone out of these people; . . . the conception ‘America’ had died in their skulls” (*Poorhouse* 137).¹ The United States is explicitly compared to the decadent Rome of Nero, as an empire in decline (138). *Toward the End of Time* (1997) is also located in a postimperial setting, in order to interrogate the relationship between empire and religion, and draws on debates in modern cosmology and the work of Lewis Mumford and Elaine Pagels to promote the local over the global and to undermine Manichean images of global conflict. Updike exploits the branching paths of many-worlds theory to transport his readers from America in the near future, Balkanized by global conflict, to ancient Egypt, the Roman Empire, monastic Ireland, and Poland in 1944. As a result, the novel provides a comprehensive investigation of human cultural development

and evolution that locates hope for the future in the marginal and the ordinary, rather than presenting a purely dystopian vision of a centrally directed society.

In the novel, a struggle between rival forms of globalization—Anglobalization and Sinicization—has led to war between America and China and created a postglobal, postimperial America with a renewed emphasis on local conditions, exemplified by the close descriptions of seasonal flora and fauna in Ben Turnbull's diary of a calendar year. Updike drops occasional hints so the reader realizes only gradually that the novel is set in the future. We learn that "the last Siberian tigers perished in the recent war" (*Toward* 5); that the economy has collapsed and the local currency is now called "welders" after Bill Weld, former governor of Massachusetts (8); and eventually that the year is 2020 (22). The economic collapse is the result of the Sino-American Conflict, with Japan on the American side (148). Lest we consider this scenario as recklessly provocative on Updike's part, it is worth noting that it closely resembles the vision of the future projected by Richard Bernstein and Ross H. Munro in *The Coming Conflict with China* (1997), which argues that America should be more willing to oppose Chinese policies and suggests that some sort of face-off might be needed. Referring to Samuel P. Huntington's proposition that the emerging world order will be dominated by the clash of civilizations (Huntington 12), Bernstein and Munro depict China as an emerging superpower with whom conflict is very likely and urge the United States to assist Japan as a counterweight to the growth of China (Bernstein and Munro 184).² In Updike's novel, Japan has become "too ruined to compete" (148), "millions of Chinese civilians" have been killed (101), radiation has badly affected the Third World (286), and Hong Kong has been given back to the British (191). Though relatively few Chinese missiles have hit Massachusetts, its Chinese Americans have been "interned on the harbor islands" (209). In California, Stone Age conditions prevail; there is no communication between the coasts; and the Midwest is so depopulated that there are plans for a new Homestead Act (77). There are no taxes, since the "ghost of federal government [that] exists in Maryland and Virginia" is unable to collect them (119). Because Mexico has remained neutral, its economy is thriving and U.S. citizens are sneaking across the border as illegal immigrants (184). It is not all bad; a vaccine has cured AIDS (146). The overall picture of the future, however, is decidedly dystopian.

A striking image underlines the novel's concern with colonization and empire. Over Ben's town hangs a "second moon," an abandoned space station on which the last colonists have slowly died out, as the government can no longer maintain connection via shuttle ships. Ben notes that "all of us who dwell on Earth are in a

position exactly the same, if on a larger scale" (36). If in one sense the novel gives us global domination reduced to the local, it also expands its focus, with Earth as a dying planet and man's best hope the colonization of other planets and the effective globalization of the universe. Returning home from Boston, Ben is struck by two other emblematic images. He remembers a young woman in the train station who "blew a bubble of bubble gum," expanded it out toward him, and then "wolfed it back . . . into her oral cavity," a small globe contracted into the darkness of a black hole. Looking out of the train window, he sees his own eye reflected back "like the visage of a spy from outer space," as if there were life beyond the globe, looking in on us (29–30). Throughout the novel, images of globes appear and disappear: the two moons; the "plastic wheel in the thermostat" and its "little bead of mercury" (50); even Ben's golf balls, which either soar into the sky or disappear into a little black hole, so that there is a continual expansion and contraction from global immensity to local smallness, from airy heights to fleshy earthiness.

In order to consider the potential extension of empire beyond the globe, Updike engages with debates in cosmology, particularly the many-worlds theory (16) that when a wave function collapse seems to occur, the universe is splitting into parallel worlds, each containing one of the possible outcomes of measurement of a quantum system. In an alternative theory, the observer splits into many selves, as in one of the novel's epigraphs: "We cannot tell that we are constantly splitting into duplicate selves because our consciousness rides smoothly along only one path in the endlessly forking chains." This quotation comes from Martin Gardner's hostile review of John D. Barrow and Frank J. Tipler's book about the anthropic principle, which says our planet was designed to create human beings, implicitly supporting the design argument for God. Barrow and Tipler described the four types of anthropic principle—weak, strong, participatory, and final—under the convenient abbreviations of WAP, SAP, PAP, and FAP.³ In the essay from which Updike drew his epigraph, Gardner comprehensively demolished Barrow and Tipler, cheerfully adding his own fifth principle, CRAP (the Completely Ridiculous Anthropic Principle). Updike was well-read in cosmology and discussed the anthropic principle on several occasions, notably in a review of a book of interviews with cosmologists ("At the Hairy Edge" 585) and in an essay in which he argued that only a harsh God could have adopted "such a lengthy, wasteful, and cruel method as evolution" to breed an intelligent species, and that such a God would be "an inescapable tyrant" ("Future of Faith" 39).

Discussing Paul Davies's account of the likely end of the universe, Updike reviewed the various compensatory theories on offer ("Confessions of a Church-

goer” 3). As that second moon suggests, modern cosmology implicitly supports an imperial or colonial mission that would expand man’s domination to the entire universe. Barrow and Tipler discuss the potential colonization of the universe using machines (Barrow and Tipler 659). Paul Davies proposes that colonization of other planets would likely proceed by planet-hopping, rather as the Polynesians moved from island to island across the Pacific, and that the colonists need not be human (Davies 404–07). Updike takes a less sanguine view of the scenario of an advanced civilization conducting exploration and colonization via self-reproducing intelligent machines. In his novel, he imagines “metallobioforms,” tiny, inorganic but evolving creatures that feed on waste oil and electricity, with heads like chainsaws that they use to attack living beings. Tipler predicts that man will colonize other planets until the entire cosmos teems with life—possibly computer life—and creates a supermind, essentially the Almighty (Tipler). Updike makes use of this idea of an evolving mind in his depiction of a “torus” (*Toward* 151), an apparition in the sky that offers mystical transcendence and seems to offer evidence that somewhere in the universe mind has triumphed over matter. The torus is only a fleeting presence, however, with no lasting effects.

Updike devotes more attention to the idea of many worlds, though his usage of the theories on offer is syncretic and creative. Such worlds have been variously envisaged as flourishing side by side in three-dimensional space and other dimensions invisible to us or as following one another in a sort of supertime, expanding, contracting, and vanishing. Ben appears to exist in different universes. His wife, Gloria, disappears at one point—the possibility lingers that Ben has shot her (41)—and is replaced as Ben’s lover by a deer, or a young woman named Deirdre, who loots his house and sells the valuables. But suddenly Gloria is back, Deirdre is gone, and most of the looted objects have returned. Deirdre, perhaps, exists still in some other universe. Or the story has branched from a universe in which Gloria is dead to another in which she remains alive. On the one hand, therefore, Updike offers a dystopian image of a future where globalization produces conflict and devastation, and on the other hand a utopian image of worlds without end in which there is effectively no death, for the individual or his world.

So is this a utopian or dystopian novel? When Ben enters alternative worlds, his experiences do not support a utopian scenario. There are four scenes in which Ben shifts into a parallel universe, and each excursion involves the end of an empire: ancient Egypt as the pyramids are looted; Rome as the Christians expand in all directions; Irish monasticism during the Holy Roman Empire as the Vikings appear on the horizon; and the Third Reich facing imminent defeat. As David

Malone points out, these passages focus on historical transition, the dying of one power and the emergence of another (Malone 88). They suggest a cycle of resurgent imperialism, as the death of one civilization contains within it the seeds of the next. Each of these parallel universes casts Ben in an ironic light, undercutting American imperialism and, more broadly, interrogating the complicity between religion and empire. Ben is in most respects a thoroughly unpleasant antihero. He is a sexual imperialist, for whom paid sex with Deirdre has “some of the excitement of an auction” (*Toward* 47). Described by Updike elsewhere as having “spent his professional life in a world as opaque and menacing to me as that of Neanderthal hunters, the world of financial investment” (“Special Message” 833), his likeness to primitive man is emphasized in the opening pages as he tracks prints in the snow (*Toward* 4) while his fur-clad wife demands he turn hunter to kill the deer that is eating her roses (9). Ben is fascinated by the extinction of the Neanderthals, which he ascribes to a primal clash of civilizations, a murderous conflict with the Cro-Magnons (26). Updike said of Ben that, like other members of the upper classes, he had managed to “evade many of the historical burdens that crush the less fortunate” and that “global disaster has amounted to minor irritations” for him (“Special Message” 833). In each of his excursions, however, he takes on the role of a lowly, even endangered, figure in a declining empire and must engage with the consequences of global conflict, a tyrant God and technological triumphalism. The alternative-universe scenes thus satirize the overconfidence and pretension of the American capitalist, suggesting that the United States is merely one in a series of empires and offering a corrective to exceptionalist delusions of grandeur.

In the first excursion, Ben is one of a pair of grave robbers looting a pyramid, where “we robbed our victims not merely of life’s passing illusion but of an eternity.” He notes that grave robbing is a skilled craft practiced by whole villages, successfully matching the “divinely inspired technological achievements of the tomb-builders” (*Toward* 62–63). We follow Ben through the intricate passageways of the tomb, which promise either a world of riches if he chooses the right path or death if he encounters a booby trap. Reaching the rubble-strewn entrance to the central treasure chamber, he has an uneasy sense of “the inert weight of the stone” above him (65). Another danger is the possibility of “a sudden draft from an intersecting passageway,” the breath of “the outraged gods” (63), and in a moment of claustrophobic horror his lamp is blown out, leaving him immured in darkness. For Ben, the continually branching passageways lead only to confinement and death, not to an alternative universe that triumphs over death.

Updike's imagined world is informed here by Lewis Mumford's *The Myth of the Machine* (1967), which draws an analogy between America's commitment to technology and empire and the rise of civilization in the great river valleys of the Jordan, Nile, Euphrates, and Tigris in the fourth millennium BC.⁴ Mumford argues that civilization was the product of a "new type of social organization" that was authoritarian, centrally directed and under the control of a dominant elite. Its other major features were an emphasis on mechanical and mathematical order (derived from astronomers' knowledge of the procession of the seasons and the revolutions of the planets) and the replacement of the fallible, local gods of vegetation and fertility by the implacable sky gods of the sun, moon, and planets. As Mumford notes: "The remarkable fact about this transformation technically is that it was the result, not of mechanical inventions, but of a radically new type of social organization: a product of myth, magic, religion, and the nascent science of astronomy" (Mumford 11). The inflexible, predictable order represented by the calendar was transferred to the regimentation of human components in a disciplined and specialized labor force.

Ben's diary of a calendar year in Massachusetts therefore sets the stage for an exploration of Mumford's ideas. Mumford argues that our technological age has its origin not in the invention of individual machines during the Industrial Revolution but in the megamachine, a social machine composed of human parts. At the heart of this type of society was the concept of divine kingship, with a king drawing on the authority of the gods. Cosmic order was the basis of this new human order. Because the sun is the central point of reference in the motions of the planets, the sun king sat at the center of a society conceived as a replica of cosmic order, with all phenomena measurable, controlled, and repetitive. Society became hierarchical, with the many at the bottom of the pyramid supporting an elite class at the apex. The resulting culture was dedicated to expanding its collective power by war and conquest. (Later kingships assumed more modest dimensions, Mumford says, because of the resistance of village communities—essentially, the struggle between local and global that has been playing out since the beginning of civilization.)

Egypt is Mumford's prime example of this new form of power. Only a complex power machine could undertake the construction of a pyramid, which demands knowledge of mathematics and astronomy and the use of manpower on an immense scale. What was a pyramid, Mumford wonders, if not the equivalent of modern space technology, a device for securing passage to an afterlife for a favored few? He draws explicit parallels with the way the modern world has developed:

[T]he ideological fabric that supported the ancient megamachine had been reconstructed on a new and improved model. Power, speed, motion, standardization, mass production, quantification, regimentation, precision, uniformity, astronomical regularity, control, above all control—these became the passwords of modern society in the new Western style. (Mumford 294)

Updike updates Mumford to the era of globalization, presenting America as pyramid in the mordant symbolism of Ben's enormous mansion, situated on top of a hill. He and Deirdre, whom he has described as looking "somehow Egyptian" (*Toward* 43), "explore [its] seldom-visited chambers," where rubble and fallen plaster lie underfoot and the menacing noise of the steam pipes, like the breath of "a captive serpent" (59), creates the illusion that the portraits of Gloria's ancestors, "so confident in their luxurious appropriations, hiss crushingly" (61). Treasures are everywhere, from "Chippendale dining chairs and . . . Meissen and Limoges china" to a room full of jewels and silver dinnerware (60). Earlier, Ben notes scratches on his asphalt driveway: "They seemed ominously ancient, Egyptian, these man-induced grooves, as if slaves had dragged one huge stone across another in the construction of a pyramid so gigantic that death itself would be defeated" (37). Just as the pyramid is filled with grave goods for the afterlife, Gloria's treasures are a mirror image of an imperial civilization. Ben also devotes much time to exploring Deirdre's dark passages, describing her vagina as "that sacred several-lipped gateway to the terrifying procreative darkness" (54). But Deirdre, a villager, represents the local female opponent of imperial male power, looting like a grave robber; in this way, the dark female gods reassert their power over the gods of light and mock the pretensions to immortality of an imperial class. David Malone has drawn attention to the mythological elements of *Toward the End of Time* and sees these references as unsystematic, if richly productive of nonrealistic ways of reading. Arguably, however, they relate to Mumford's idea that the decline of local fertility religions was part of what led to the new order. Cosmic conflict between rival gods of fertility underscores the plotting of the novel, with the male god (Ben) rampant at the beginning of the year with Deirdre, declining in power in the arms of a maiden (the teenage Doreen), and subsiding into impotence at year's end. At the close, he is about to be replaced as king of the hill as the crone (Gloria) brings in a deer hunter (John) with his bow and arrow.

Mumford discusses a change in social leadership between the ninth and sixth centuries BC, with a retreat from the great centers of power to smaller communi-

ties and the emergence of men of humbler, more modest proportions to bring life back toward the village scale—men like Socrates, a stonecutter; Jesus, a carpenter; and Paul, a tentmaker (Mumford 258). In the second excursion, Ben appears as Saint Mark in the first century AD, accompanying Saint Paul as he preaches in Iconium in the Roman province of Galatia, where Paul preached in AD 47–48. Again the emphasis is on empire and its colonists. Iconium was founded by Emperor Claudius as a colony of army veterans and became an important Christian center, though like most of the places where Paul preached, it is so no longer: “From the standpoint of two thousand years later, his travels seem wormholes in petrified wood, the already rotten eastern end of the Empire, dotted lines traced from one set of ruins to another, or to empty Turkish spaces where even the names Paul knew—Lystra, Derbe—have been wiped away by time’s wind” (*Toward* 123).

Paul is characterized as intent on taking advantage of empire to spread the Christian message. He wants “to sail to Ephesus, because he believed that the word of Jesus . . . would spread best from the teeming ports” (126), and to go on to Rome: “Cities are unholy places, but their mobs were needed for the spread of the Word.” (133). The new power of Christianity depends upon the imperial infrastructure—roads, ports, and cities—in order to expand. As in Egypt, there are complicities between religion and empire, just as in Massachusetts Ben’s house recalls his country’s sense of divine mission, the city on a hill of American exceptionalism. Ben reflects that the Roman Empire “made the spread of Christianity possible,” that “Christianity would never have gotten out of Jerusalem without those roads. And it needed to get out of Jerusalem. It would have been squelched by the Jewish establishment. The Jews hated it, though it *was* Jews at first” (121). At an Easter service, he is struck by the contrast in the stained glass windows between the “wistful, genteel Aryan faces” and “the gesticulating poses of Jewish rabble-rousers” (112). In the alternative world of the first century, Mark quarrels with Paul over the question of relations between Jews and Christians and the fact that Paul is taking Christ to the Gentiles. Paul argues that “now that He is come there are Jews no more. . . . Christ alone is the new life, given for all nations” (130). Mark takes a narrower point of view, that Jesus is the fulfillment of the Law of the Old Testament and is *not* “conjuring away all difference, decreed from the days of Abraham, between Jew and Gentile” (134).

In this excursion, Updike draws upon another thinker concerned with the connection of global conflict to religion: Elaine Pagels. In *The Origin of Satan* (1995) Pagels argues, as Updike explains in his review, that while Paul is inclusivist, Mark “sets the story of Jesus firmly in the context of cosmic war,” both in relation

to the struggle of the Jews against Rome and (quoting Pagels) to “the struggle between good and evil in the universe” (“Elusive Evil” 479). He continues:

The Gospel of Mark was composed in the violent years of the Jewish rebellion and Roman suppression, when, Pagels explains, offense to the Romans had to be avoided. Though Mark knew that a Roman governor, Pontius Pilate, had ordered Jesus to be crucified, “the two trial scenes included in this gospel effectively indict the Jewish leaders for Jesus’ death, while somewhat exonerating the Romans” [quoting Pagels].

Pilate, in reality a brutal colonial governor, becomes in Mark’s Gospel a well-meaning weakling intimidated by Jewish priests and the mob. Updike notes that the “three other Gospels progressively . . . intensify Mark’s case against the Jewish high priests and Pharisees, sowing the seeds for two thousand years of Christian anti-Semitism” (“Elusive Evil” 479–80).

Mark also emphasizes the cosmic dimensions of the struggle. If Jesus was the Messiah, his capture and death have to be construed not as a final defeat but as a preliminary skirmish in a vast cosmic conflict. Satan had not been a major figure in the Old Testament; his name in Greek characterizes him merely as an “obstructor,” one who throws barriers across people’s paths. (If the path is the wrong one, the obstruction may have a positive effect.) Mark, however, enlarges the role of Satan from the start, constructing his Gospel in terms of temptation scenes, and casts the Jews as agents of darkness rather than light. Updike notes that the “Manichean image of a universe at war . . . retains great narrative and inspirational force,” as exemplified in “science-fiction fantasies” such as *Star Wars* and *Independence Day* (“Elusive Evil” 480). Thus, in Ben’s second excursion, Updike focuses again on the ways in which religion depends upon and collaborates with empire, with consequences on a global scale—particularly in the demonization and persecution of “the other.”

This point is expanded upon in the excursion to the Third Reich. After a golf game, Ben bumps into his doctor, Aaron Chafetz, in the locker room. Usually when they meet it is Ben who is naked and vulnerable, but not here: “Another universe, thinner than a razor blade, sliced into the sinister locker room. Chafetz was a naked Jew, and I a uniformed good German recruited to guard an extermination camp” (*Toward* 241). Again, an empire is on the point of collapse. It is 1944 in Poland, Allied planes are overhead and America is about to pick up the reins of power. This anti-Semitic universe is the consequence of Saint Mark’s. The shower room from which Chafetz emerges evokes the killing machine that was the product of order, mechanization, and calculation, a successor to the Pyramid Age. Ben

has earlier described the death camps as “orderly” and as having “ended forever Europe’s concept . . . of the Western world as proceeding under a benign special Providence” (20). The imagined scene in the locker room emphasizes technology: “the iron of guns and of barbed-wire fences and of the rails upon which the steam engines dragged their crammed human cargo” (241). The branching passageways of the pyramid, the roads Paul traveled, and the railways of Europe all lead to images of conflict and death rather than to new worlds.

So far, so dystopian. But Ben makes one other excursion, one that casts the relationship between religion and empire in a different light. Shaving, he finds himself altering his usual routine: “It was as when a measurement is taken in the quantum realm of an electron’s position or momentum, and the wave function collapses and another universe floridly sprouts on the spot.” Suddenly he is a young monk in an Irish monastery in the ninth century AD, rejoicing to see the white crests of the waves—“a divine sign of safety,” since they mean the sea is too rough for the arrival of “the fair-faced demons from far Lothland,” the “Anti-christs” who are “eternally condemned”: the Vikings (215, 217). Clearly, the idea of the power of the devil has continued to expand since Mark’s day; the monk describes the Vikings as “fiends” and “the evil from the sea,” operating with the consent of Providence “to test the faithful” so that they may become “angels in the ranks depleted by Satan and his defiant and banished legions.” (216). Satan has been promoted from an obstruction on the path to the leader of a cosmic army. The monk, unfortunately, is overconfident; the dreaded sails appear and he soon faces a Viking axe. The marauder, however, is not a “roaring demon” but a frightened boy: “This instant of time toward which our lives have converged has two sides of terrible brightness. . . . Darkness and light are one” (219, 222). Updike deliberately undercuts the Manichean image and demotes the demonic. But why select this particular clash of cultures? The Vikings are not normally seen as imperialists, and in the monk we see Christianity in humble guise, clinging to a rock off the Irish coast in a subsistence economy. What is this monk’s relation to empire?

The answer lies in Thomas Cahill’s book *How the Irish Saved Civilization* (1995). Cahill quotes the poem by John Scotus, an Irish monk, that underlies Updike’s setting:

Bitter is the wind this night
Which tosses up the ocean’s hair so white.
Merciless men I need not fear
Who cross from Lothland on an ocean clear. (Cahill 216)

Cahill argues that before the Viking attacks, Ireland's position on the margins of empire, preserving the legacy of Western civilization, made it a cultural leader. After the Roman Empire fell and was looted by barbarians, the Irish took on the task of copying all of Western literature. Their scribes served as the conduits through which the Greco-Roman and Judeo-Christian cultures were transmitted to the tribes of Europe. Without the Irish monks, the world would have been quite different: a world without books. Cahill quotes Kenneth Clark: "Looking back from the great civilizations of twelfth-century France or seventeenth-century Rome, it is hard to believe that for quite a long time—almost a hundred years—western Christianity survived by clinging to places like Skellig Michael, a pinnacle of rock eighteen miles from the Irish coast, rising seven hundred feet out of the sea" (Clark 4). The young monk's location on an "island hill" off "the Munster mainland" with its "beehive"-shaped stone huts (*Toward* 215–16, 219) is recognizably Skellig Michael, raided by the Vikings in AD 823. The monks' medicinal herb garden is described in some detail, as evidence of a God who instills all aspects of "His flowering creation [with] peace and love" (218)—a benevolent deity rather than a tyrannical power. At the same time, the monastery is envisaged as a bastion of culture. The monk mentions a fellow monk copying books in the scriptorium, and even though he is himself illiterate he is aware that the herbs he tends were also known to "the pagan Greeks, the king of whose wisdom was named Aristotle" (218). Updike clearly evokes the notion that classical learning survived because of the Irish, who then reexported it, founding monasteries all over Europe.

The Irish here therefore represent the salvatory qualities of the marginalized, an implicit validation of Mumford's locals pitted against a centralized imperial machine. Mumford made much of the role of the monastery in offering civilized order on a human scale, and he argued that the first labor-saving machines came not from the technically advanced centers of empire but from people on the fringes. Monks mechanized work (e.g., grinding) to have more time for prayer (Mumford 269). Ben writes in his journal: "The overlooked corners of the maps and time charts fascinate me—the so-called Dark Ages, for instance, from the fall of Rome to the year 1000" and enumerates the period's breakthroughs: "the crank and the horseshoe, the horse collar and the stirrup" in the ninth century and "the wheeled Saxon plough, wind and water mills, and three-field crop rotation" in the tenth century, developments that "the sages of Greece and tyrants of Rome never imagined." He marvels that "in humble anonymous farmsteads and workshops technological leaps never dared by the theorizing, slave-bound ancients were at

last executed" (*Toward* 278). Once again, the novel validates the progressive role of the marginal as opposed to the centralized totalitarian machine, and demonstrates the possibility of religion as disconnected from imperial power.

An ambiguous light is shed on the local, however, by the parallels in Ben's own world. Ben's excursion as a monk takes place just before Independence Day, and the young hoodlums who have taken up residence on his land tell him that outsiders will be coming through to access the beach. Ben remembers the kind of people that are attracted by the town fireworks: "Bare-chested Vikings, already drunk, lug coolers full of beer" (223). The date also evokes cosmic conflict. The movie *Independence Day* opened on the eve of the Fourth of July in 1996, the year in which Updike said he "transcribed Ben Turnbull's occasional jottings" ("Special Message" 833). In the film, aliens invade Earth from outer space and trigger global conflict. Updike presented "this summer's no brainer-megahit" as an example of the popularity of the "Manichean image of a universe at war" ("Elusive Evil" 480). In response to his local Viking threat, Ben suggests that the hoodlums charge a fee for access, of which he will take a cut. He also suggests ways for them to improve the local protection racket they are running and extort more cash from his neighbors: killing pets, kidnapping children, burning down a beach house. Civilization is indeed precarious; Vikings and monks appear to have changed sides. The hoodlums are about to become more like pillaging, burning Vikings than the "Vikings" they are supposedly opposing. The deal Ben brokers nonetheless condemns his young associates to violent death at the hands of more powerful forces, like the monk in the alternate universe. The Manichean opposition of good and evil may have been deconstructed, but as the novel nears its end Ben's dreams—his excursions into other worlds—are filled with images of atrocity and he feels as if an "infernal machinery of some local or global conspiracy . . . was closing in on me" (*Toward* 287).

The novel closes, as it began, with an image of man the hunter, as Gloria hires an archer to kill the deer in her garden (302). Realistically, a deer hunter in Massachusetts would be more likely to use a rifle, but Updike's weaponry is well chosen. Mumford describes the bow and arrow, invented by Paleolithic man, as the first machine (Mumford 114) and ascribes the initiative, self-confidence, and ruthlessness that kings needed to obtain and hold power to the development of hunting as an activity and the emergence of the hunting chief. Small farmers were an easy target for hunters seeking tribute or protection money, and social violence was the result (217). Mumford writes: "The efficiency of kingship, all through history, rests precisely on this alliance between the hunter's predatory prowess and gift

of command, on one hand, and priestly access to astronomical lore and divine guidance" (171). At the start of the novel, the deer escapes unscathed, but now the arrow—a symbol of time, which flies in only one direction—meets its target. Time is linear once more and Ben's alternative pathways are closed off.

As the novel nears its end, conflict is on the horizon again and the American empire is beginning to regroup. "The Mexican repossession of Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, and lower California" is in the news; Gloria says, "It's about time somebody took charge, before the Mexicans invade" (*Toward* 290). And somebody has: FedEx, which has armed its workers, reconnected the coasts, taken over the protection rackets, and assumed most of the functions of government. The president is rumored to have resigned (291) and America is going to be run by—and as—a transnational corporation. Smaller operators like the local hoodlums have been removed, and most of the roads and airways are under FedEx control or soon will be. FedEx is "working on a way to remote-control the [metallobi-*oforms*], with radio signals," which would be "the biggest thing in warfare since the taming of the horse" (293). "There's even talk," Gloria says, "of their moving the federal government, what there is left of it, to Memphis" (290)—not the capital of ancient Egypt but FedEx's headquarters city in Tennessee, symbolically the site of the next Pyramid Age.

Updike sensibly avoids drawing any definitive conclusions about the future of the universe or man's place in it, though a long view of humanity does not tend toward excessive optimism. In the novel, however, technological triumphalism, centrally directed societies, and religious empires are repeatedly undercut by small, local inventions and an imaginative engagement with the marginalized. What Ben's sallies into alternate worlds demonstrate is not the merit of utopian projects of colonization, global expansion extended across the universe, or a divine mission for humanity, but rather the reverse. The local is at least partly validated in the village worlds of the grave robbers and the marginalized monks, and the religious underpinnings of the discourse of global conflict are undercut. While the primary thrust of the novel is satirical, offering a corrective to American exceptionalism, Updike repeatedly brings life back to a village scale to celebrate the resistance of ordinary people across the centuries to totalitarian forces, and to underscore the importance of local solutions. In his review of Pagels's book, Updike argued that while "the notion of absolute evil" may once have been useful, "the heroic virtues it calls forth must now be somehow summoned on behalf of the more modest goals of stand-off, accommodation, piecemeal amelioration, and forgiveness of one's obstructor" ("Elusive Evil" 480).

NOTES

1. I have used the British editions of Updike's work because editions can vary considerably, so that Americans may be reading a text that is different from what is published in Britain (or in the many British Commonwealth countries). One small example has convinced me to be very scrupulous about citing the edition I actually use. In 1988 John Updike wrote me a charming letter, explaining that in one edition of *Couples* he had been forced to omit, due to the risk of offending libel laws in one jurisdiction, the names of several living characters in a scene in which couples are playing the parlor game Impressions (the scene ends with Foxy Whitman in tears). As a result, the episode became, in his view, "like a blunted spear" (letter, 4 October 1988). There was a similar suppression of a name in *Rabbit Is Rich*, which occurs when Rabbit hears an uninhibited account of a political scandal on the car radio. Updike had asked his publishers to restore the names in later editions, but to no avail. Updike readers will be able to supply these names by comparing editions. Unfortunately, it is rare for contemporary writers to benefit from scrupulously prepared definitive editions. In the case of a writer with a huge international following, there may well be many small differences prompted by similar legal considerations. Whether a critic could be sued for quoting an edition which offended the rules of a particular jurisdiction remains uncertain.

2. For a quite different view of the relation between American and China, see Nathan and Ross.

3. The four principles can be summarized as follows. The Weak Anthropic Principle (WAP) consists in the idea that because we exist the universe must be constructed to allow us to have evolved (the design argument.) The Strong Anthropic Principle (SAP) argues that life would be impossible unless the laws of nature are exactly what they are. If gravity were any stronger the cosmos would have stopped expanding ages ago and collapsed into a black hole; if any weaker it would have expanded too rapidly for the stars to form. The Participatory Anthropic Principle (PAP) holds that no universe can exist without a conscious observer, and the Final Anthropic Principle (FAP) maintains that life may exist only on earth but is impossible to destroy, or the universe would lose all its observers.

4. For Mumford's influence on *The Witches of Eastwick* (1984), see Newman, 127–45.

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“The Bright Island of Make-Believe”: Updike’s Misgivings about the Movies

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Based upon the (admittedly scant) evidence in his essays and criticism, readers might assume that John Updike was a fan of the movies. Yes and no. As his daughter, Miranda Updike, acknowledged at the First Biennial John Updike Society Conference, her father “loved the movies,” but the testimony of his fiction and nonfiction are somewhat more equivocal. He felt real affection for the movies and movie houses of his youth, finding it appropriate that former film palaces, like The Shillington in his hometown, frequently became churches, given that the “spaciousness and elegant details of these deserted theatres of dreams were designed to inculcate a religious mood” (“Old Movie Houses” 641). He continues:

The very décor of the theatre, in its mirrored and gilded extravagance, its Arabian-nights fantasy and palatial scale, lifted the men and women of drab American towns and cities up from their ordinary lives onto a supernatural level. We all tried, in our small ways, to live up to the stars—to dress as smartly, to act as bravely, to love as completely. No wonder so many of the vacant theatres are now churches. We worshipped in those spaces, and for all the frequent shoddiness and imbecility of the mass-market motion picture, there was nothing to prevent grandeur from occurring. (643)

The movies also taught important lessons to adolescent males:

For what did the movies teach a young American boy but a gallant stoicism, a death-defying nimbleness, whether manifested in the costume of a cowboy or an airplane pilot, a knight in armor or a playboy (Cary Grant, Ralph Bellamy) in a tuxedo? And we

learned kissing and smoking: at least we saw how these oral exercises were conducted by giant black-and-white lips on the screen, though when our own time for enactment came there were tastes and dizzy sensations the movies had not described. (642).¹

Updike's gratitude to the movies is very palpable here, but it clearly had an expiration date: "Realer than real, truer than true—that was how the movies loomed to me until the age of twelve or thirteen" (642). For it's at about that age—isn't it?—that the disparity between image and reality (between the stars' incarnation of glamour and the audience members' feeble attempts to reproduce it) and the "imbecility of the mass-market motion picture" become undeniable, and the "young American boy" begins to realize that there are sensations in life deeper than movies can ever convey. It would be fifty years beyond age twelve or thirteen that Updike expressed the following sentiment about Hollywood, and it seems to me that the seeds of it are embedded in his lovingly nostalgic evocation—with reservations—of movie theatres as churches: "The film industry's immense technical and financial superstructure rests upon the evanescent basis of an authentic emotion or a moment of beauty, conjured up on sets where everything proclaims contrivance and falsity: an industry built on lies" ("Legendary Lana" 654). Updike's misgivings about the movies, I argue here, fall somewhere between his perception of them as raising ordinary men and women to a "supernatural level" and his awareness that that lovely elevation is pure illusion. Consequently, his writings about the movies seldom neglect to acknowledge the real delight they bring us, while they no less frequently insist on the falsifications underlying that pleasure. In *In the Beauty of the Lilies* (1996), Updike's only fictionalized movie star, Alma DeMott, christens the movies "the bright island of make-believe" (335); as both she and Updike age, they find it increasingly difficult to forget that the island's brightness is the inextricable product of its being make-believe.

Before sampling more of Updike's writings on the movies, it's necessary to ask "what movies?" (I exclude animation, about which the once aspiring animator had so much to say.)² In a piece on *Samson and Delilah* (1949), Updike admitted that "[t]he critics mocked the film; but when have the critics ever understood the spiritual needs of the mass audience that gathered night after night to forget its troubles at the movies?" (*More Matter* 644). He was less dismissive of critics in discussing novels, of course, and, unlike his approach to writing on art, Updike on movies assumed the stance of non-expert audience member—that, say, of a well-informed and perspicacious fan. Perhaps only in writing about film did he identify with a middle-class audience—presumably the one with which he watched

“the Monday-Tuesday double-bill of B movies, westerns or comedies” he began to attend on his own at age six (“Old Movie Houses” 641–42). Accordingly, the stars (Doris Day, Louise Brooks, Lana Turner, Gene Kelly) and films (*Samson and Delilah*, *The Name of the Rose*, *Overboard*) he addressed were more associated with popular rather than critical audiences. His film writings are, in other words, imbued with the ethos and audience of The Shillington, the theatre at which he watched many of those double features. But because that theatre showed only Hollywood films, Updike’s enthusiasm for the movies, as expressed in reviews, essays, and *In the Beauty of the Lilies*, also retains the stamp of Hollywood, as projected within the walls of The Shillington.

In 1976, Updike began a *New Yorker* review of Doris Day’s autobiography by acknowledging “I have fallen in love with rather few public figures,” two of whom—Errol Flynn and Day—were movie stars (“Suzie Creamcheese Speaks” 791).³ Updike clearly admired Day’s self-confidence: he quotes approvingly her assertion “I have never had any doubts about my ability in anything I have ever undertaken” (791), perhaps identifying with her setback-free ascent to extraordinary professional success. He viewed filmmaking more critically, however, suggesting that “star quality” in actors is nothing more than “an emanation of superabundant nervous energy and that sexiness, in another setting, would be another emanation” (796). Throughout the review, Updike emphasizes not the movie magic that transformed this “girl next door” into “America’s la-di-da happy virgin” (796, 795) but concentrates instead on Day’s professionalism, citing Jack Lemmon’s characterization of her as a “director’s delight,” endlessly capable of replicating the same performance over and over again, while adding that Day (born Doris Kappelhoff), is “[t]horoughly German in her ancestry, . . . a dedicated technician in the industry of romantic illusion” (797).⁴ Only at the review’s close does he resort to the mock-serious religious language of fandom with which he would simultaneously celebrate and satirize the movies via Essie Wilmot/Alma DeMott’s perspective throughout *In the Beauty of the Lilies*: both Day and Flynn, Updike concludes, “brought to the corniest screen moment a gallant and guileless delight in being themselves, a faint air of excess, a skillful insouciance that, in those giant dreams projected across our Saturday nights, hinted at how, if we were angels, we would behave” (801). Updike was clearly impressed by the actors’ film performances, but it seems clear that for him both Day and Flynn were creating onscreen phantoms that had little connection to the lives of the human beings watching them. That paradox delineates effectively, I think, Updike’s contradictory attitude toward Hollywood film: its surface authority and dramatic

compellingness effectively persuade audiences, himself included, to embrace sentimental propositions (“if we were angels”), both about human existence and about Hollywood itself, which inevitably reveal themselves to be only illusions (we’re not angels any more than Day and Flynn are).

Another movies-centered book Updike reviewed was *Lulu in Hollywood*, a 1982 memoir by Louise Brooks, whom Updike described as “a film actress of surpassing vividness and glow” (“Female Pilgrims” 801). By the time Brooks published her memoirs at the age of seventy-five, much of that glow had evaporated, and her book offers a consistently disparaging view of the movie capital. “No love is lost between her and Hollywood,” Updike admits, “and no gratitude or nostalgia softens her portrait of the film industry’s workings. ‘I can state categorically [he quotes Brooks] that in Bogart’s time there was no other occupation in the world that so closely resembled enslavement as the career of a film star’” (804). That Brooks construes Bogart’s era in such negative terms is oddly serendipitous because, in a 1971 interview, Updike described that same period in a very different light:

I was raised on movies, a different kind of experience entirely [from watching television]. . . . And movies of that era were inculcating a kind of Americanism, not of the official sort exactly, but it certainly was a sense. . . . You know, when you saw Bogie stoically shrugging his shoulders, there was a whole world there of what it was to be an American: what was right and what was wrong. (“Updike Redux” 64)

However unintended by Updike, this disparity between Brooks’s and his perceptions of Hollywood in Bogart’s era epitomizes another of his significant reservations about the movies: they constitute a corporate deception, a moralizing fabrication that massages American patriotism while misrepresenting the realities of the industry projecting these self-aggrandizing national virtues. Accordingly, Updike praised Brooks’s memoirs because they “offer precious and amusing information about the workings of a world that has talked mostly nonsense about itself” (807).

Although Brooks was markedly more acerbic toward Hollywood than was her reviewer (insisting, for instance, that her film career was terminated largely because she refused to sleep with Harry Cohn, the head of Columbia Pictures),⁵ Updike’s review seems to indicate that *Lulu in Hollywood* validated some of his own misgivings about the movie industry. He characterizes two of the book’s essays as being “among the best descriptions of moviemaking I have ever read”: one recounts the humiliations to which Brooks was subjected for having an affair with a stunt man on a Hollywood set, the retribution taking the form of “crude pranks”

which she saw as symptomatic of relations between the cast and crew (806); the other extols G. W. Pabst, a European director whose professional mentorship of Brooks is contrasted explicitly with the predatory director-starlet relationships typical of Hollywood. Lastly, Updike's reader can readily intuit his approbation of Brooks's reasons for divorcing her director husband, Edward Sutherland: "[H]e belonged heart and soul to Hollywood; I was an alien there. He loved parties; I loved solitude" (qtd. 807). Updike clearly had his reasons for identifying with Brooks and for sympathizing with her objections to Hollywood; the primary one, which perhaps dictated his decision to review *Lulu in Hollywood*, however, was his sincere admiration for her prose.

The fact that Updike's six collections of essays and criticism contain only ten entries devoted completely to film while two other critical works—*Just Looking* and *Still Looking*—as well as the novel *Seek My Face* deal entirely with paintings and sculpture suggests that he preferred to make a serious study of the visual arts that don't move. Consequently, he remained a film aficionado, reserving his substantial critique of Hollywood's moralizing prevarications for *In the Beauty of the Lilies*.

Then there are Updike's experiences with the movies made from his novels. "I originally wrote *Rabbit, Run* in the present tense," Updike told an interviewer in 1966, "in a sort of cinematic way. . . . I thought of it as *Rabbit, Run: a Movie*. Novels are descended from chronicles of what has long ago happened, but movies happen to you in the present, as you sit there" (Howard 15). In 1970, *Rabbit, Run* became an actual movie, directed by Jack Smight. Updike's judgment on the film (which cast 5'9" James Caan as the 6'3" Rabbit and the slender Anjanette Comer as "pretty plump" Ruth Leonard) basically accorded with the old Hollywood chestnut: "It wasn't released—it escaped." In a 1971 interview with Frank Gado, Updike offered an amusing take on moviemaking as his very limited involvement in the *Rabbit, Run* project introduced him to it:

I discovered that, to make a movie, you are constantly shooting around things. You tell crews to do this or that, and they don't do it. Instead, they go off and get drunk. There are constant fights. As a result of a union dispute, nobody takes any pictures of the car being driven at night in the running away scene. And so they have to use stock shots that consist of fannies and headlights in alternation. (Gado 96)

With all of this chaos, Updike was impressed that a movie emerged at all; but he then asked himself, "Out of what? Out of those little scraps [the director] had left at the end. That's how you do it. You literally piece it together" (97). For a writer who never left a scene to write the next one for fear that he'd lose the rhythm of

the suspended scene in the process, piecing it together at the end could not have seemed an effective way to craft narrative art.

The Gado interview allowed Updike to voice two other reservations about the medium of film that may have dissuaded him from ever writing a screenplay or signing on to a film project. (He offered to write a film treatment of *Couples*, he told Gado, assuring producers it would be written by “a guy who went to a lot of movies” [97], but Hollywood preferred a satiric movie based on the novel, and Updike withdrew from the film that was never to be. He was completely uninvolved in the making of *The Witches of Eastwick*.) “One of the advantages of the kind of writing I do,” he explained, “is that you are your own boss. You shoot your own stock, choose all the scenes, cast all the characters. You’re your own everything, really, and the product, then, is yours. If it plays, great, and if it doesn’t—there are no alibis. You know all about it. You did it. Working in a cooperative art like the movies would just scare me” (98). That doesn’t seem a surprising attitude for the creator of *Rabbit Angstrom*, about whom another character says, “Harry, you’re not actually the center of the universe, it just feels that way to you” (*Rabbit at Rest* 201). Updike acknowledged that European filmmakers such as Fellini and Bergman⁶ had been able to put together enough capital to make films an “authentic individual medium,” and that such films of artistic merit would occasionally emerge from Hollywood as if by accident; by the 1970s, he maintained, no such “authentic products” were appearing on movie screens because films “all seem a hodgepodge, the result of tussles to show how far you can go” (Gado 98). The only films he reviewed at length following that declaration were *The Name of the Rose* (1986) and *Overboard* (1987), the latter a movie many reviewers would have thought complimented by the description “hodgepodge.”

Updike admitted that film had had a major influence on fiction by prompting writers to abandon the mediating authorial voice of the Victorian novel, but he added that with that banishment went a good deal of the introspection that fiction so much more effectively portrays than film can.⁷ It is the absence of introspection in the Rabbit character that makes *Rabbit, Run* such an inert film, leaving James Caan to read lines such as the following as the film’s only means of representing Rabbit’s interior life: “Eccles forgives me, Janice. We talked an hour, and that *thing* I used to talk about? Well he was right. There is no such thing. There just isn’t” (Kreitsek 159). “How incomparably more solid the physical environment became” in the film version of *Rabbit, Run*, Updike acknowledged, “and yet, curiously, the inner story of the book became thin, even nonsensical” (Gado 94). Updike may have been underestimating the extent to which filmmakers had developed tech-

niques for conveying the interior lives of characters—techniques that the *Rabbit, Run* film doesn't exploit—but one need only think about how much of his fiction is devoted to interior monologue to understand why film's difficulty with conveying that element of human character would have seemed to him such a substantial deficit.

Updike accurately predicted that the second film based on one of his novels, *The Witches of Eastwick*, starring Cher and Jack Nicholson, would “bear . . . little resemblance to my text,” and when he subsequently watched the movie, he offered the terse assessment “The less it resembled my book, the better I felt” (“Books into Film” 36n). The release of *Witches* in 1987 prompted Updike to compose a meditation on film adaptations of novels for the *New York Times*, including an expression of his annoyance at the fact that, once he'd watched the movie, thoughts of *The Great Gatsby* inexorably conjured up images of a white-suited Robert Redford. The purpose of the essay, titled “Books into Film,” was to make explicit what nearly all of his ruminations on movies assume: the novel's superiority to film.⁸ He maintained that

the text is always there, for the ideal reader to stumble upon, to enter, to reanimate. . . . Until the continental drift of language turns its English as obscure as Chaucer's, the text remains readily recoverable and potentially as alive as on the day it was scribbled by one's own hand. Not so film: its chemicals fester in the can, it grows brittle and brown, its Technicolor bleaches, it needs a projector and a screen, it is scratched and pocked and truncated by the wear and tear of its previous projections. (37)

Before long, Updike's technological critique would be partially antiquated by VHS tapes and then DVDs, but he had a still more comprehensive objection to the movies: “In a novel, the prose is the hero, the human thing; the author's voice is our foremost point of contact and upholds one side of the shifting, teasing relationship we as readers are invited into. In a movie, the actors and actresses are what win us—these giant faces, all but impassive, like the faces of gods” (38). In “Books into Film,” then, Updike registered two significant reservations about the movies: they are corporate efforts (“my own name will presumably scurry by in the credits” of *Witches* amid rafts of others, he complained [36]), and the heroism of a writer's individual prose is thoroughly eclipsed by Hollywood faces “like the faces of gods.” Updike's readers might recall his similar feelings of resentment and displacement, articulated in *Self-Consciousness*, provoked by the politicizing tendencies of the late sixties: for Updike, the privileged site of American critique had shifted from an individual author's scrutinizing, in the pages of novels and stories,

“nuances within the normal” for signs of tension and spiritual corruption to a national, widely televised debate over American flaws. The “movement” had, arguably, become competition for his self-appointed literary office of “showing’ people, of ‘rubbing their noses’ in our sad human facts” (*Self-Consciousness* 146, 149), political debate displacing him and fiction in general as dominant diagnostician of the nation’s sick character. In both the movement and the movies, then, the intervention of other forms of media was perceived by Updike as usurping the writer’s authority and contesting literature’s sacred—as he construed it—obligation to deliver the harrowing news of the nation’s soul to Americans. As Judie Newman maintains, “Updike mounts a spirited resistance to the hegemony of the visual, and deploys the word in favor of a penetrating critique of American society” (136).

However much resentment Updike harbored toward the movies (“In brief,” he told an interviewer, “we’re jealous because the visual arts have captured all the glamorous people—the rich and the young” [“Art of Fiction” 40]), he was dispassionately consistent in faulting the movies for flattening layered literary narratives and for too transparently pandering to the audience’s desire for gratification and facile closure. In a review of the 1986 film version of Umberto Eco’s *The Name of the Rose*, Updike maintains that “Eco’s text is full of ironies, and motion pictures do not have leisure, generally, to be ironical. . . . [T]he book’s central irony—a succession of murders that do not link up but turn out to be, like the Godless universe itself, the work of many chancy happenings—is lost in the visual tumble, one fright after another, that we as moviegoers expect.” The novel’s literary intricacies, Updike is suggesting, are subjugated to the movie audience’s highly conventionalized expectations. He continues: “The [film’s] set is splendid but its conflagration is relatively perfunctory; the scholarly Eco’s vision of a massive and sickening loss of historic texts cannot be shared by the makers of films, for whom waste—of ‘takes,’ of abandoned and ruthlessly revised scripts, of time, of money—is inextricable from the artistic process. A movie is itself a flickering flame, a piece of visible consumption” (“A Nameless Rose” 40). Having reaffirmed his belief in the ephemerality of film, Updike returns to the essential binary opposition between solitary writer and corporate filmmaking: “[I]n a book, with its negligible budget, the author’s wishes dominate; but in a motion picture the wishes of the audience shape the product” (41). For Updike, there was “nothing like fiction: it makes sociology look priggish, history problematical, the cinema two-dimensional” (*Odd Jobs* 86). As his narrator explains in “Separating,” “the movies cannot show the precipitous, palpable slope you cling to within” (*Problems* 127).⁹

Occasionally, however, Updike could—like many other filmgoers—uncritically relish the Hollywood product that is unapologetically shaped by the studios in conformance to the audience's expectations. In a *Boston Globe* review of *Overboard*, a 1987 Goldie Hawn romantic comedy, he wrote: "We go to movies to see a star, just as they did in the Thirties—a dependably familiar presence mounted in some new, but not disturbingly novel, vehicle" ("Overboard on *Overboard*" 42). After fondly recalling Hawn as the winsome go-go dancer on television's *Laugh-In* ("She and Judy Carne would revolve their bikini-bared bodies, painted with slogans in that heyday of angry graffiti, and it would seem that anger wasn't everything, and that thanks to laughter and bimbos we might survive"), Updike continues in an uncharacteristically unreflective mode, seeking to evaluate *Overboard* for *Globe* readers purely on its own pop culture terms. (Significantly, he watched the film in an old-fashioned Beverly, Mass., second-run house, the theatre putting him in a "nostalgic, tolerant frame of mind," such that "you sit there with the simple heart of a child" [42].) Whereas he often chastised filmdom for its penchant for telling us only what we want to hear, in this review he affirms that "Hollywood has always voted for nature over nurture, for love over social position. In this it confirms us in our wishes, and assures us of the soundness of our instincts" (44). He summarizes the obvious value judgments that *Overboard* imposes on viewers and dispenses to the characters in terms of rewards and punishments, concluding: "We are so persuaded, in *Overboard*, of the moral and sexual superiority of beer over champagne that it comes as a shock, at the end, to learn that the money belongs to Goldie Hawn's Cinderella, and that she will bestow it upon her carpenter-prince. How will he avoid, then, becoming as fatuous and effete as [Hawn's] former husband? Already, one of his sons is heard demanding a Porsche" (44–45). It's important to remember, as we survey Updike's more dyspeptic attitudes toward late twentieth-century movies, that given the right theatre, star, and newspaper audience, he could briefly forget that "a movie is itself a flickering flame, a piece of visible consumption," and try to enjoy the show.

Given Updike's attitude toward film's encroachments upon and eviscerations of his literary territory, it isn't surprising to find that in scenes involving films in his fiction, they are consistently dramatized as vehicles of bad news or as distractions from existential truths. In "Packed Dirt, Churchgoing, A Dying Cat, A Traded Car," David Kern remembers having watched a film as a child of a prisoner being "dragged on rubber legs . . . to the electric chair" (James Cagney in *Angels with Dirty Faces*, most likely), the scene intensifying the boy's terror of death, and his mother subsequently reminds David that his father "never liked [the movies]"

(*Pigeon Feathers* 261, 276).¹⁰ In *Rabbit Redux*, Harry's wife, Janice, arrives twenty minutes late for *2001: A Space Odyssey* after having coffee with her lover,¹¹ and her increasing independence from Harry in *Rabbit at Rest* is reinforced by her viewing of *Working Girl*, a movie Harry can't stick with to the end but which inspires Janice to follow the Melanie Griffith character's example and get a job. Although in "Rabbit Remembered" Nelson and Pru attend *American Beauty* on New Year's Eve, Nelson's near avoidance of a traffic accident after they leave the theatre erases the movie's Lester Burnham and his highly postmodernist fate from their minds.¹² Until *In the Beauty of the Lilies*, movies in Updike's novels are dramatized as diversions carefully embedded in the work's thematic structure while affecting the characters' inner lives fairly minimally.¹³

"The Wallet," a 1985 short story, diverges from that pattern, although it's the experience of watching a movie—not the movie itself—that deeply affects its protagonist, Fulham. Evoking a largely nostalgic affection for movies that resembles Updike's, Fulham recalls that he "loved the black-and-white world that Hollywood manufactured in those years [his childhood]; he took pleasure in following the minor actors, Guy Kibbee and Edward Everett Horton and Adolphe Menjou and Charles Coburn, from role to role, a huge family of familiar, avuncular faces and rapid, mock-furious voices" (*Trust Me* 223). In his later years, however, taking his grandchildren to G-rated movies, Fulham finds little pleasure in the movie house:

Sitting between these small heads in the flickering light, while on the screen some mechanical dragon unfolded its wings or starships did special-effects battle with supposed laser beams, Fulham would be visited by terror: the walls of the theatre would fall away, the sticky floor become a chasm beneath his feet. His true situation in time and space would be revealed to him: a speck of consciousness now into its seventh decade, a mortal body poised to rejoin the minerals, a member of a lost civilization that once existed on a sliding continent. The curvature of the immense Earth beneath his chair and the solidity of the piece of earth that would cover Fulham's grave would become suffocatingly real to him, all in an instant; he would begin to sweat. There was a *seriousness* to human existence, an absolute irreversibility, from which all our social arrangements and entertainments attempt to divert us. No, there was no "us" to it, no "our"—it was *his* existence, his in his totally lonely possession of it, that was so sickeningly serious. (224–25)

Fulham's G-rated nightmare of the inexorability of his personal fate is dislocating enough to his sense of himself that within the week he misplaces his wallet—without which he feels himself "a phantom, flitting about in a house without

walls" (233). In the 1994 story "Grandparenting," Updike reprises Fulham's experience in a sentence: when Richard Maple's ex-wife interrupts the Super Bowl game he is watching with news of their daughter's progress in childbirth, he is "suddenly terrified, as when sometimes in the movie theatre a vast pit of reality and eventual death opened underneath him, showing the flickering adventure on the screen to be a mere idle distraction from his life, a waste of minutes while his final minute was rapidly approaching" (*Afterlife* 308).

Fulham and Maple resist the movies' efforts to distract them from the truth, but Clarence Wilmot, one of four protagonists in the Updike novel—*In the Beauty of the Lilies*—most devoted to illuminating the effect of motion pictures on American subjectivities, embraces movies with a frightening desperation. Clarence enacts and extends the idea of a spiritual void in human lives that the movies provide the illusion of filling, an idea Updike delineates in "The Wallet" when Fulham watches old movies on television: "Fulham was struck by how feeble and cynically mechanical these pre-wide-screen classics were, these creaky old vehicles that once had lifted him far out of himself and whose high moments had lingered in millions of brains like his in lieu of religious visions" (*Trust Me* 224).

The dissolution of "religious visions" with which Updike's ambitious historical novel opens is responsible for Clarence's dependency upon films—an experience of loss which is itself depicted as highly film-imbued. "At the moment when Mary Pickford fainted [on a movie set]," Updike writes, "the Reverend Clarence Arthur Wilmot, down in the rectory of the Fourth Presbyterian Church at the corner of Straight Street and Broadway, felt the last particles of his faith leave him. The sensation was distinct—a visceral surrender, a set of dark sparkling bubbles escaping upward" (*Lilies* 5). The converging of these spatially separated moments establishes the novel's elision of loss of faith and moviemaking; as Judie Newman notes, "It is an emblematic moment, as the crusading Pickford takes over the role of religious inspiration from Clarence, and its visual image replaces the spoken word" (Newman 123). For Clarence, it constitutes a devastating epistemological dislocation:

Life's sounds all rang with a curious lightness and flatness, as if a resonating base beneath them had been removed. They told Clarence Wilmot what he had long suspected, that the universe was utterly indifferent to his states of mind and as empty of divine content as a corroded kettle. All its metaphysical content had leaked away, but for cruelty and death, which without the hypothesis of a God became unmetaphysical; they became simply facts, which oblivion would in time obviously erase. Oblivion became a singular comforter. (*Lilies* 7)

As James Schiff describes Clarence's post-faith condition, "Without God, Clarence is empty and lacks those characteristics—will, energy, confidence, ambition, hope, even voice—which once filled him. God is associated with vitality and drive, and without him one simply stops trying" (1999, 59). Until oblivion quietly erases him from the text in the novel's second chapter, motion pictures become simultaneously Clarence's preferred mode of not trying and his "singular comforter" for the faith he has relinquished.

Clarence's only compensation for the emergence of a Wordless world "gutted by God's withdrawal" (107) is the technological innovation that, Updike suggests, provided for many Americans who suffered religious erosion compensatory images of transcendent wonder. Recalling Updike's "Old Movie Houses" argument, Clarence sees the movie house as "a church with its mysteries looming brilliantly, undeniably above the expectant rows" (105) as the projectionist and piano player manipulate their mediums to channel the audience's emotional responses in much the way that a preacher modulates his tone and rhetoric to lead the congregation toward homiletic epiphany. Rather than inculcating spiritual guilt in its congregation, this substitute church liberates Clarence from it: "Within the movie theatre, amid the other scarcely seen slumped bodies, he felt released from accusation. The moving pictures' flutter of agitation and gesticulated emotion from women of a luminous and ideal pallor licked at his fevered brain soothingly. Images of other shadows in peril and torment lifted his soul out of him on curious wings, wings of self-forgetfulness . . ." (104–05).

That the silver screen can engender a five-cent ascendance lifting Clarence's "soul out of him on curious wings" is dubious enough; that the lifting facilitates "self-forgetfulness" indicates how much the movies constitute a falsifying and alienating self-transcendence. In addition, the movies' ability to have "transported the audience everywhere but to workaday places like Paterson" (105) reinforces the idea that this very American medium is one intended to facilitate diversion, distraction, and escapism.¹⁴ The technological and artistic growth of the medium is not lost on Clarence, who recognizes that "from year to year the camera had grown in cunning and flexibility, finding its vocabulary of cut, dissolve, close-up, tracking and dolly shot. Eyes had never before seen in this manner; impossibilities of connection and disjunction formed a magic, glittering sequence that left real time and its three rigid dimensions behind" (106).

Film creates a new way of seeing, understanding, and constructing the world, then, which is also—like the *Popular Encyclopedia* which Clarence ineffectually peddles door-to-door after his retirement from the ministry—a means of substi-

tuting an alternative world for it. Film's innovative connections and disjunctions can, however, provide no compensatory meaning for one whose eyes once saw the world through the hope of heaven, and therein lies the crux of Updike's vision of the virtues and limitations of the movies. Although movies provide solace to the soul-afflicted Clarence ("He felt himself fading away, but for the hour when the incandescent power of these manufactured visions filled him" [107]), they constitute a merely visual substitute for the spiritual vision he once knew. At the end of the "Clarence" chapter of *Lilies*, the protagonist of the first quarter of the novel is abandoned with this dismal summary: "Though he still walked erect, with a touch of the Wilmot panache, his sandy mustache was so whitened as to scarcely show in his face—the drained face of an addict [of movies] enduring his days for the one hour in which he could forget, in a trance as infallible as opium's, his fall, his failure, his disgrace, his immediate responsibilities, his ultimate nullity." The narrator then offers a closing benediction on Clarence—"Have mercy" (108)—although to whom it is addressed is never clarified.

Clarence's son, Teddy, spends much of his childhood witnessing his father's descent into disgrace and death, and, consequently, his life becomes less an existence than a symptom of abreaction to his father's fate. As his wife, Emily, tells their daughter, Essie, "I wonder how much [Clarence's] death left your dad able to love anybody else, ever. . . . It's as if after whatever it was that happened he just wants to get through this vale of tears with . . . minimal damage. It's as if he won't give God any satisfaction" (269). Teddy exemplifies secularism without poetry; he confronts Updike with the difficult Howellsian challenge of making a thoroughly average American unbeliever a compelling character.¹⁵ Teddy seeks release from the competition and anxiety of his job in a bottle cap factory by going to the movies, though not for the reasons his father had. Clarence sought in the movie palace to lift himself up out of the deep pit into which his life had fallen; Teddy finds what he sees on the screen "a bit menacing, an alarming and garish profusion." Movies, in Teddy's view, "embraced the chaos that sensible men and women in their ordinary lives plotted to avoid. . . . Always these films were trying to get you to look over the edge, at something you would rather not see—poverty, war, murder, the thing men and women did when they were alone together." (Teddy's critique seems a reframing of Updike's view of film hodgepodes whose primary creative purpose was "to show how far you can go.") Movies validate Teddy's naturalistic conviction, inspired by his father's fall, that "we are like a swarm of mosquitoes, crazy with thirst and doomed to be swatted. Life was endlessly cruel, and there was nobody above to grieve—Father had proved that" (147).

Hollywood's products, then, fail to divert Teddy, who realizes about the movies what Fulham and Richard Maple do: "that these bright projections were trying to distract him from the leaden reality beneath his seat, underneath the theatre floor. Death and oblivion were down there, waiting for the movie to be over" (147–48). As Updike would write in "Birthday Shopping, 2007": "In the beginning, Culture does beguile us, / but Nature gets us in the end" (*Endpoint*, 17).

Teddy's anger at the effect that faith had on his father prompts his utter neglect of spirituality in raising his daughter, Essie, and the child compensates for this lack by attributing her sense of wonder in her existence to the only God she can imagine: her "dead, unearthly grandfather"—Clarence:

In his unreality he held a promise of lifting her up toward the heavenly realm where movie stars flickered and glowed and from which radio shows, with movie stars as guests, emanated. When Essie prayed to God, she felt she was broadcasting a beam of pleading upward to a brown cathedral-shaped radio and her shadowy grandfather was sitting in a chair beside it listening. She would make his sadness up to him." (270–71)¹⁶

It is one of Updike's least remarked upon writerly capacities that he could burrow so deeply into his characters' ultimate concerns without blatantly signaling an ironic intent as he disclosed their not always profound beliefs.

As a child, Essie's "favorite pictures were those with women"—Sonja Henie and Ginger Rogers, for instance—"who just skimmed along over everything" (248), and she remains consistent into her late fifties to this affirmation of the superficial, drawing inspiration for the enactment of scenes of cinematic tragedy not from her own emotional traumas but from the daily reversals and existential disappointments of her family and acquaintances in Basingstoke, Delaware, where she grew up.¹⁷ (Her egotism and ambitions notwithstanding, Essie remains loyal to her Basingstoke family, but she knows her link to them is only biological. Once she begins meeting show biz folks, she understands that "[t]hese were her people—show people—like Jack Oakie and Jack Haley . . . She had been cast up on the shore of the Delaware and adopted by nice natives but in her heart knew she belonged to another race and spoke another language; the movies and radio had brought her news of her real people and now she was crossing the border to them" [306]). Another irony of the genesis of Essie's stardom is that it is the product of her compelling dramatizations of how trapped Americans are in a reality completely unlike Hollywood's glamour; Alma DeMott (as Hollywood rechristens her) tends to be typecast as a woman who dreams big and has paid her dues, someone carrying a "wary, wounded pessimism" (342). The stardom these

cinematic portraits creates raises her above the audience's condition, each movie she appears in leaving her "encased in a fine and flexible but impermeable armor; the bright island of make-believe, surrounded by scaffolding and wiring and the silhouettes of those many technicians who operated the equipment, was a larger container, a well-lit spaceship carrying her and the other actors into an immortal safety, beyond change and harm" (335). By the close of *Lilies*, Alma will come to see this container as being "as empty of divine content as a corroded kettle."

As *Lilies* profoundly dramatizes in its inventory of American spirituality over the course of the twentieth century, the loss of belief in universal order spawns in both Alma and her grandmother Stella, Clarence's widow, a compensatory worship of film images and the reconception of human fates in terms of the beginnings, middles, and ends of movies. The process of secularization implicit in the shift of worship from biblical figures to cinematic ones that is dramatized throughout the unfolding narrative of *Lilies* is not without its eschatological re-orientations: Essie/Alma is too oblivious to theology to know that she's enacting a distinctly Calvinist idea in her relationship with a God who exists for her as the source of her thoroughly deserved success in the world; as with Harry Angstrom, but to a greater extreme, her certainty of God's existence is indistinguishable from the magnitude of self-esteem she feels in the moment. For her, God is He who gives her what she wants, whose universal plan it is to reinforce her specialness and superiority by rewarding her with ever greater success, and her early career as a model—and later in the movies—reinforces this conviction: "She had known as a child she was the center of the universe and now proof was accumulating, click by click" (280).

Once Alma DeMott has become a star worthy of her new name, Stella confirms that Alma has fulfilled the goal of familial redemption she had set for herself. She tells her granddaughter:

"When Clarence—when he—fell, it was so sudden and uncalled-for, there had to be something to . . . make it come right in the end."

"Like in the movies," Alma smiled.

"Like a movie, dearest. Oh, exactly. Give us a kiss from those gorgeous lips." (350)

Those lips, Stella is unaware, are gorgeous because of collagen injections, which make Alma feel as if she's been the victim of male brutalization—which, as a Hollywood star, she has. And, as Alma never quite comprehends, it's her negligently raised son, Clark, who, in the novel's final chapter, fully redeems Clarence's fall in a highly cinematic climax.

In the 1950s, when her career is at its height, Alma construes Hollywood's shift from cellulose nitrate to cellulose acetate as ensuring her film immortality: "Most of Mary Pickford was lost utterly, but the world would never lose Alma DeMott. She would always be there, in some archive or rerun, in eternal return perennially called back to life" (336). By the 1980s, her relegation to maternal roles and bad-mom murderess caricatures leaves Alma cursing the career that has largely ended, and cursing as well the medium she assumed would propel her into life everlasting; she bitterly concludes that "what had once seemed to her absolute immortality turned out to be a slow dissolution within a confused mass of perishing images like a colorful mountain of compressed and rotting garbage" (465).¹⁸

The reversal of attitude toward the movies that Alma undergoes in this dense historical novel takes place over thirty years; the conclusions she ultimately draws were signaled throughout much of the fiction Updike wrote that alluded to Hollywood film. In 1989, in the original conclusion of *Self-Consciousness*, Updike described himself as a writer whose "own concern gravitates to the intimate, where the human intersects with something inhuman, something dark and involuntary and unsubmitive to man-created order. After all that Kierkegaard and Barth that I once consumed, it is hard for me to be reverential about the purely human" ("Original Ending of *Self-Consciousness*" 329). For Updike, as delightful as they might often seem, there was nothing more "purely human" than the movies.

NOTES

1. Updike's disaffection with American films of the 1990s was in part the result of their *still* being made for male teenagers: "The Hollywood films of today, with their mechanical violence and computer-driven spectacle, seem made, most of them, for adolescent males—kids who need to get out of the house" ("Legendary Lana" 651).

2. For the importance of comic strips, cartoons, and Disney films to Updike's artistic development, see De Bellis (1995, 170–71) and Schiff (2000, 135). Updike evokes his love of comic strips in the poem "Tucson Birthday, 2004" (*Endpoint* 8). In "Birthday Shopping, 2007," he evokes a sense of the funnies not unlike his ambivalence toward film: "the comic strips, / realer than real, a Paradise that if / we held our breaths, we could ascend to, free" (17).

3. In his 2008 poem "Her Coy Lover Sings Out," Updike affirmed that his affection for Day was undiminished by time: "I still know you're sexy" (*Endpoint* 37).

4. The protagonist of the 1960 short story "Home" watches "a Doris Day movie about that mythical Midwestern town Hollywood keeps somewhere among its sets" (*Pigeon Feathers* 153).

5. Brooks's biographer attributes the termination of her career to a different refusal: director William Wellman offered her the role of the gangster moll in *Public Enemy*, one of Hollywood's most successful films of the early 1930s, starring the little-known James Cagney. "She would make a few

more minor appearances, but turning down *Public Enemy* marked the real end of Louise Brooks's film career" (Paris 359).

6. Given the Lutheran background that Bergman brought to his films, it is surprising that Updike expressed so little interest in Bergman's more naturalistic, religiously obsessed films such as *Winter Light* and *Autumn Sonata*. Updike mentions the great Swedish filmmaker only in passing in his six essay collections.

7. James Schiff quotes Updike on another influence that film has had on the novel: Joyce's *Ulysses*, Updike argued, was one of the "noblest" attempts to "appropriate to prose fiction some of the film's properties—the simultaneous intimacy and impersonality, the abrupt shifts from close-up to boom shot, the electric shuttle of scenes" (2006, 137).

8. In his review of Harold Pinter's *The Proust Screenplay*, Updike resorted to the screenplay format himself to make this argument once again:

But could the movie be comprehended and enjoyed by anyone who had not read the book?

REVIEWER (*circumspectly*)

One wonders.

MARCEL (*expressionless*)

No way.

(*Hugging the Shore* 791)

9. See De Bellis (1995), 173.

10. In *Self-Consciousness*, Updike recalls his father's tendency to leave him and his mother in their seats at The Shillington and retreat to the auditorium's rear, where he would happily converse with the usher in preference to watching the film (32).

11. See De Bellis (1993) for the pervasiveness of *2001: A Space Odyssey* in *Rabbit Redux*.

12. Judie Newman argues that through their debate about the movie, the characters are repeating the rhetorical tendency of their political debate earlier in the novel: "Just as their personal histories dominated the public story of Clinton, reinterpreted through their own hostilities, so the film is subordinated to the Angstroms' personal concerns" (138).

13. Jack De Bellis offers a reading of Updike on film more consistently positive and less ambivalent than mine: "From curtain-raising to end credits, Updike has loved the movies. . . . Clearly, [Updike's] use of film references documents a love of the medium and injects a personal dynamism into all his work" (1995, 169). De Bellis's appendix provides an exhaustive inventory of films evoked throughout Updike's fiction (184–87); it is reprinted in his *John Updike Encyclopedia* (501–11), along with an inventory of film personalities cited in the texts (173–75).

14. De Bellis argues that "Updike's fiction is filled with [a] quest for distraction coupled to a tone of nostalgia for the aesthetic and moral guidance of film" (1995, 176). My argument coheres with De Bellis's second clause in that Updike's disappointment with late twentieth-century film was so frequently expressed in his essays; I perceive the distractive function of movies more negatively than does De Bellis, largely based upon *Lilies*, which appeared after his essay.

15. In "Howells as Anti-Novelist," Updike cites Howells's first novel, *Their Wedding Journey*, on the novelist's responsible creation of character: "As in literature the true artist will shun the use even of real events if they are of an improbable character, so the sincere observer of man will not desire to

look upon his heroic or occasional phases, but will seek him in his habitual moods of vacancy and tiresomeness. To me, at any rate, he is at such times very precious; and I never perceive him to be so much a man and a brother as when I feel of the pressure of his vast, natural, unaffected dullness" (170).

16. Resembling Essie/Alma in so many ways, Rabbit Angstrom thinks of his grandfather inhabiting the skies above the golf course in *Rabbit, Run*, hitting his perfect shot into "the beautiful black blue of storm clouds, his grandfather's color stretched dense across the north" (*Rabbit Angstrom* 115).

17. In "Suzie Creamcheese Speaks," Updike cites Doris Day's reliance upon her painful recollections of beatings at the hands of her first husband whenever she was required to cry on camera (798).

18. The eloquence with which Updike infuses Alma's late-career bitterness toward Hollywood (and the world beyond) draws substantially upon Louise Brooks's similarly self-serving vituperations against everyone and everything throughout *Lulu in Hollywood*, as well as upon Lana Turner's *Lana: The Lady, The Legend, The Truth* (1982).

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Justification by Temperate Faith Alone: Fundamentalism, Fanaticism, and Modernity in John Updike's *In the Beauty of the Lilies*

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Perhaps more than any other work John Updike wrote in his long literary career, *In the Beauty of the Lilies* (1996) is a book about faith. Published on the eve of the third millennium, when millennial anxiety¹ and religious fanaticism² appeared to run rampant in America, the novel is particularly significant because it comprises a reconsideration of the doctrine of *sola fide*, the notion that faith alone will redeem man at time's end. In his early work, best represented by the Rabbit tetralogy, in which the infamous Harry "Rabbit" Angstrom believes devoutly but behaves badly, Updike distinguishes himself as a believer in belief. He argues in accord with Protestant theology that faith alone, not good works, determines what makes a good man³ and suffices as a means by which to attain justification. But it fails to suffice in *Lilies*, which not only juxtaposes faith and good works but dramatizes the debate between temperate and fanatical faith as it emerges over the course of the twentieth century. If the novel is read as an argument about the doctrine of justification, Updike concludes that faith still trumps good works, but he makes a noteworthy shift in his thinking, recognizing that multiple modes of believing exist and suggesting that not every type of belief is inherently good. Only the *right* kind of believer—the temperate one—can be justified.

For Updike at millennium's end and thereafter, fanatical faith is dangerous because it potentially leads to religiously motivated violence. This essay considers the ways in which Updike tracks the parallel rise of Hollywood and fundamentalism in *Lilies*, a novel that begins in the year when the first of *The Fundamentals*⁴ was published and ends in a fictionalized representation of a historical instance of religious violence, the 1993 Waco, Texas, siege. I suggest that Updike comes to view fundamentalists and fanatics who shun modernity as hypocritical; by contrast, he views temperate believers as engaging in a mode of belief that provides a more sustainable future for religion. Indeed, Updike's temperate believers are able to live lives that not only cohere with the teachings of traditional biblical narratives but with modern cinematic ones as well. They are able to accept God's shrouded nature—the fact that in the Barthian world, as in the biblical Book of Esther, God's involvement is never evident—whereas fanatics who attempt to manifest God's Word as deed cannot. Furthermore, just as Updike turns to a Hollywood movie, *Lost Horizon* (1937), for his key message of temperate faith, the temperate believers of his novel turn to Hollywood, determining faithful ways of being that Updike endorses, paradoxically, by deviating from his Barthian tendencies, revealing God's providence as a certitude to the reader alone. Thus, *In the Beauty of the Lilies*, which presents a message that Updike reinforces with the publication of *Terrorist* (2006), comprises more than just the start of an era in which developments in American religious history complicate Updike's understanding of *sola fide*. It also comprises an attempt to bridge the divide that fanatical believers, especially early fundamentalists, created between believing in God and embracing the developments of the twentieth century as fruitful, not mere signs that an increasingly immoral American nation is rapidly devolving in the face of a fast-approaching, apocalyptic end.

THE RISE OF FUNDAMENTALISM AND HOLLYWOOD-DRIVEN MODERNITY

Written in four parts, *In the Beauty of the Lilies* tells the story of four generations of the Wilmot family over the course of the twentieth century and functions very much as a meditation on the emergence of fundamentalist faith and fanaticism alongside modernity. Faith, an “old formula” that invites “hallucination and hysteria” (44), becomes difficult to retain in twentieth-century America as it is represented in the novel because of the dramatic scientific progress and social change that define the times. At the turn of the last century, as Henry Adams suggested, the dynamo, representative, for him, of science in general, comes to supplant the

Virgin Mary, who previously had inspired a sense of mystery and the metaphysical.⁵ As Updike portrays the evolution of the twentieth century, America becomes transformed as a result of technological advancements. Adams's awe-inspiring dynamo gives birth not only to items like refrigerators, telephones, and televisions that become commonplace in households like those of the Angstroms and Wilmots, but the "above all American" Hollywood movie (104), which presents Christian America with what James A. Schiff refers to as an array of "larger-than-life gods and goddesses" (1998, 145) to worship in place of Christianity's one true God and Christ, His son.

The novel begins by dramatizing the conflict between faith and modernity, especially movies, at the moment when Clarence Wilmot, the family's patriarch, falls from grace. His fall, described as "a visceral surrender, a set of dark sparkling bubbles escaping upward" and a "ruinous pang" (5), occurs in 1910, the year that the first of *The Fundamentals* was published in Hollywood's Los Angeles home—and a year that functions as a historical marker for the onset of tension between faith and the twentieth century's technological, scientific, and social developments. The publication of *The Fundamentals* led to the formal emergence of fundamentalist Christianity in America, which involves what is perhaps a more devout belief, conceivably on the verge of something fanatical. That Clarence falls from grace at the moment when Mary Pickford falls in a faint from the spring heat while filming a close-up scene for *The Call to Arms*, a medieval period piece "centered about a lost jewel beyond price" (3), suggests a correlation between the rise of fundamentalism and the rise of twentieth-century media culture.⁶ As Karen Armstrong notes, fundamentalism emerged at a moment when modernity came to challenge faith; hence it constitutes a sort of response to the times. In Armstrong's words, fundamentalists "are convinced that they are fighting for the survival of their faith in a world that is inherently hostile to religion. They are conducting a war against secular modernity" (vii).

As Updike presents it, conservative believers viewed Hollywood as a source of moral corruption. The times, as the novel's narrator puts it, are "Godless" (6), and in a critique at least somewhat evocative of fundamentalism, Stella, Clarence's wife, "blame[s] the moving pictures—those, and cigarettes"—for the deterioration of America's youth (31). Nearly a century later, Jesse Smith, the Christian fanatic of the novel who founds the Temple of True and Actual Faith, rejects modernity in a characteristically fundamentalist spirit, referring to the U.S. government as "King Gog" and asserting that movies and the Hollywood industry on the whole are "the Devil's work" (379, 380). Jesse's critique of Hollywood encom-

passes a critique of modern education, reminiscent of Christian fundamentalists' attack on John Scopes in 1925 for teaching evolution in Tennessee.⁷ Jesse sees public schools as shunning religion. Instead of teaching morality, they teach children "to adore the devil-gods of rock music and licentious television commercials" and to "worship images on a screen until nothing else means squat" (421).

Conservative critics like Stella and Jesse are not wrong in their assessments, per se. Many of the twentieth-century Americans Updike portrays in *Lilies* certainly are depraved as a result of the modern times and, more to the point, as a result of Hollywood. Essie Wilmot, Clarence's granddaughter, may be a true believer in a Presbyterian God, having "trouble understanding how people could doubt God's existence: He was so clearly there, next to her, interwoven with her, a palpable pressure, as vital as the sensations in her skin, as dependable as her reflection in the mirror" (354), but she behaves reprehensibly throughout the novel, particularly when she works to attain Hollywood fame as Alma DeMott. Hollywood strips Essie of much of her identity and enables her to indulge her vain impulses: She changes her appearance and, like her "fair and beautiful" namesake from the Book of Esther, she changes her name.⁸ Essie/Alma's vanity is likely what prompts her to pursue a career in Hollywood, which provides her with extensive opportunities to be watched and admired. When she is striving to launch her career, she uses her sexuality to attain recognition. She makes advances on her own cousin, Patrick, during a visit to New York City, demonstrating her lack of moral limits, and has an affair with an agent, Arnie Fineman, despite the fact that she thinks of him as a "little kike shit" (*Lilies* 316). Most egregiously, and because she remains concerned with stardom above all else, she fails to serve as a good and loving mother to her son, Clark. Alma, whose name, ironically, means "nourishing" in Latin, is "clearly miscast" as a mother (360) and does little to assure a stable upbringing for Clark, who lives a life that is similarly depraved. A failed scriptwriter who operates a ski lift to make a living, Clark drinks, takes an array of drugs, and even masturbates to a pornographic video that stars an actress who resembles his mother. He is a sinner, plain and simple, and, before joining Jesse's Temple of True and Actual Faith in what might be seen as an effort to turn his life around, he has "a profound need . . . to fall and fall into the gauzy substance of oblivion, the bottomless world beneath the waking world" (390–91).

Updike suggests that Protestant fundamentalist fanatics like Jesse are incapable of recognizing the fact that apparently depraved behavior like Alma's or Clark's does not preclude real faith—that real faith, according to the Protestant theology out of which Christian fundamentalism springs, does not, with the end of justifi-

cation in mind, necessitate works of any kind, let alone good ones. Like a typical Protestant, Jesse believes in justification by faith alone, explaining to his followers in his Colorado commune that “faith as small as a grain of mustard seed will see you through, but only faith” (477). But, as Updike suggests, for fundamentalists like Jesse, faith and deeds are one and the same. In other words, fundamentalists are wholly invested in deconstructing the faith-works binary by manifesting faith in the world through human actions. As Malise Ruthven explains, “fundamentalist action involves, almost by definition, the appropriation of the divine will. As a ‘Defender of God’ the fundamentalist militant claims the right to act on his behalf” (93–94). Jesse may *claim* to adhere to the doctrine of *sola fide*, but because deeds are written in prophecy, he inevitably values the actualization of those deeds as well.

Updike is able to explicate the connection fundamentalists make between faith and works by casting Jesse as a fictionalized representation of Branch Davidian religious sect leader David Koresh and portraying the standoff at Jesse’s ranch as a fictionalized representation of the 1993 siege in Waco, Texas, which resulted in a devastating fire that killed seventy-six people. As the son of Seventh-Day Adventist parents, Jesse emerges out of a similar religious background as Koresh, who was raised in the Seventh-Day Adventist Church before joining and eventually leading the Branch Davidian sect at the Mount Carmel Center. Something that distinguished Koresh among religious fanatics was the way in which he read the Bible, and Jesse reads the sacred text in much the same way. Like Koresh, he places a clear focus on millenarianism, the idea that the end as Revelation describes it is nigh,⁹ and he is very much what Ruthven refers to as a “textual literalist” (203), meaning that, like a typical fundamentalist, he believes that the Bible is the actual word of God, a sort of blueprint or script for God’s metaphysical plan as it is being enacted in the physical world.

Jesse repeatedly takes steps to manifest the script of biblical text as reality because he believes, likely because it is the millennium’s end, that “[t]he time had come to convert his faith into deeds” (439). For example, he asks “that white robes be made for his disciples, to be worn at Bible study, in accordance with Revelation 7:9, wherein multitudes stand before the Lamb ‘clothed with white robes’” (435). The robes are made and worn because Jesse requires only the cooperation of his followers, not that of the outside world. However, when he attempts to reenact a dialogue that Christ had with Pontius Pilate when a state trooper visits the ranch asking questions about the children living there, the trooper fails to play his part. The trooper asks whether Jesse is claiming to be “God Himself,” and Jesse

responds with Christ's words from the Gospel of Luke: "Thou sayest it." But the trooper, instead of responding with Pontius Pilate's "I find no fault in this man" (Luke 23.4), simply says, "There's laws against false claims and allegations" (422).

Though Jesse appears to reject modernity and movies, he is, somewhat like fundamentalism as a movement, a derivative of the modern times he scorns,¹⁰ and Updike characterizes him as implicated in all the things he purportedly loathes about Hollywood. He operates his temple according to values that executives in the movie industry might have, glorifying sex and violence above all else, except that he presents his transgressions as the will of God.¹¹ More to the point, like Koresh, who "presented himself not only as the prophet of the imminent apocalyptic drama but also as a crucial actor in it" (Gallagher 202), Jesse sees himself as an actor in God's drama, ushering in if not enacting the Last Judgment according to Revelation 5. When he tells Clark the story of his call to faith, Jesse is "caught up . . . in a movie of his past" (404). Along the same lines, Jesse's vision of himself as God's agent in the Day of Reckoning is evocative of a movie in which he functions as the star. Revelation constitutes the script he enacts, and reporters at the standoff record the event to be televised for the masses. According to Fred Dix, an FBI spokesman with whom Alma speaks, Jesse himself has become a fan of the broadcasts, the media representations of his own life experiences. As Dix explains, the members of the commune have "been dropped a couple Zeniths. Our Jesse over there's become quite an addict, I understand. Their electric bill comes to us, and it keeps going up" (466).

The paradox in which Jesse has involved himself—believing he is an agent of God but not fulfilling prophesy—pertains to the whole of fundamentalism. As Ruthven suggests, "By collapsing myth into history, by taking action for God, fundamentalism paradoxically affirms the supremacy of the human will" (94). In other words, Jesse's will is his own, not God's. Though he makes efforts to usher in the Day of Reckoning, the Last Judgment never comes. The narrator describes Jesse as "disheartened and distracted" when "the convergence of thousands of converts and untold numbers of angels, ushering in the new Heaven and Earth that Revelation promised, had not come about" (471). And even though the masses witness tapes of Jesse speaking, "[t]he world remained insufficiently perturbed. It rolled on, untransformed" (472). Unable to comprehend why God's word is not manifested in deeds in the world, Jesse finds himself "lost amid his texts" (475). In Christian explication of prophecy, Jesse may be the tree from which the branch of David, and so Christ, emerges, but he does not resemble the

root of the tree, nor is he Jesus, even though his name is paronomastically similar; he ultimately functions only as a corruption of Christ and his message.

JUSTIFICATION THROUGH TEMPERATE FAITH ALONE

In *Lilies*, Updike suggests that fanatical perpetrators of religious violence, like Jesse, who value Revelation above all other biblical books and focus on the actualization of the Word as deed are lapsed in large part because they lack an understanding of the sort of world presented in the Book of Esther, a clear source text for Updike's *fin de millénaire* novel. Paradoxically, this very peculiar biblical book, of which Esther "Essie" Wilmot's namesake is the heroine, is less known for what it says—that the Persian queen Esther uncovers a plot against the Jewish people, saves them from it, and enacts revenge against the culprit—than for what it fails to say: that it is by virtue of God's grace that Esther is able to save the Jews. The book, which makes no mention whatsoever of God or His actions, is about what is hidden,¹² and it is theologically important precisely because it keeps God and His work shrouded in mystery.¹³ Indeed, the book presents the world and true believers as Karl Barth and Updike, Barth's nearly lifelong devotee,¹⁴ understood them: The world is "the good but fallen place for God to carry out our redemption," and the true Christian believer is a relatively temperate one in that he "can let the world be the world" (Webb 148). Thus, the Book of Esther teaches a very Barthian lesson that Updike surely valued: that believers must have faith that God works in the world without overt evidence of His divine actions.

In lieu of overt instruction from heaven, in a world like that of the Book of Esther, Updike's believers turn to Hollywood, which, for Updike, is not an institution to be scorned as fundamentalists scorn it, but a quintessentially modern institution to be celebrated.¹⁵ Notably, Hollywood's pantheon of icons does not outright replace Updike's one, true Christian God. When the characters in *Lilies* rely on movies alone as a means by which to attain transcendence, Hollywood offers them only parodies of the authentic experience. For example, after Clarence falls from grace, feeling "hollow" and viewing the universe as "a pointless, self-running machine" (73, 74–75), he seeks voyeuristic solace from the images produced by the movie projector, and, at least to a certain extent, Hollywood delivers. For Clarence, the movie theatre is "a church with its mysteries looming brilliantly" and its "manufactured visions filled him" (105, 107). However, movies by no means replace God for Clarence, who never manages to recover from his fall: He dies an unequivocal disbeliever who lacks God's grace, and the Wilmot

family remains in need of real salvation. Similarly, movies provide Essie/Alma with a mere parody of everlasting life. Essie, whose full first name means “star” in Persian, aspires toward stardom and something great—a “heavenly realm where movie stars flickered and glowed and from which radio shows, with movie stars as guests, emanated” (270–71). When film production companies begin using fireproof cellulose acetate film, Alma attains a semblance of the transcendence she seeks: “the world would never lose Alma DeMott. She would always be there, in some archive or rerun, in eternal return perennially called back to life” (336). Yet as the novel progresses and Alma matures, she comes to recognize that “what had once seemed to her absolute immortality turned out to be a slow dissolution within a confused mass of perishing images like a colorful mountain of compressed and rotting garbage” (465).

Instead of providing authentic transcendence in and of themselves, movies, as Updike portrays them, steer believers in the direction of devout faith and deeds, as best evidenced by the fact that Updike himself appears to have found a model for how to believe in a movie: *Lost Horizon*, a 1937 Frank Capra film (based on James Hilton’s 1933 novel) that tells the story of writer, soldier, and diplomat Robert Conway’s experience in the earthly paradise of Shangri-La. Updike repeatedly makes reference to the film, covertly alluding to it in his discussion of how “the [film] industry had switched from film based on cellulose nitrate, intensely flammable and prone to turn into chemical mush in storage, to cellulose acetate, which does not burn and will last theoretically forever” (336). Notoriously, Capra’s film suffered as a result of the industry’s use of cellulose nitrate: Capra claimed he burned the first two reels of the film after an ill-received preview, and several reels of the nitrate negative had deteriorated by the 1960s. Updike makes explicit reference to the movie when the young (and already vain) Essie is traumatized by the scene “where the pretty woman’s face very frighteningly crumbles into old age when they take her out of their magic valley in the mountains” (237). Updike refers to the woman’s crumbling face on several subsequent occasions (245, 250, 312), and makes a final reference to *Lost Horizon* when Essie observes that it has been remade as a musical (431).

Because *Lost Horizon* traumatizes Essie, the reader is inclined to view these references to the movie as negatively charged. Indeed, the image of the crumbling face, evocative of Walter Benjamin’s argument in “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” (1936), might be understood as commenting on the tragedy of art’s demise in a modern era that distinguishes itself by replacing authentically sacred things with mundane ones. As Benjamin explains, “[t]he cult

of the movie star, fostered by the money of the film industry, preserves not the unique aura of the person but the ‘spell of the personality,’ the phony spell of a commodity” (231). Along the same lines, Updike’s allusion to the movie might underscore the apparent similarity between Shangri-La and the Temple of True and Actual Faith or the historical Texas compound after which Updike modeled it. In other words, Shangri-La can certainly be seen as an early twentieth-century antecedent to the kind of commune that Jesse and his historical counterpart, Koresh, come to lead.

However, because *In the Beauty of the Lilies* attempts to bridge the gap between faith and modernity, not separate the two as early fundamentalists did, I suggest that Updike alludes to *Lost Horizon* because he sees it as providing a model for believing in modern times. Unlike the residents of Mount Carmel or the Temple of True and Actual Faith, who scorn modernity, Shangri-La’s residents embrace it. As the High Lama reveals, Conway’s arrival in the earthly paradise—the result of a plane crash in the Himalayan Mountains—is orchestrated, and he is brought to Shangri-La specifically because of his knowledge of the modern world. As the dying High Lama’s successor, he will be able to connect the oasis with modernity. More to the point, Shangri-La distinguishes itself in Updike’s literary imagination because its residents practice temperance. There is only one mention of religion in the entire film, and it occurs when Conway asks Chang, a Shangri-La resident, about the religion that the people of Shangri-La follow. Chang responds:

We follow many. To put it simply, I should say that our general belief was in moderation. We preach the virtue of avoiding excesses of every kind, even including the excess of virtue itself. . . . We find, in the Valley, it makes for better happiness among the natives. We rule with moderate strictness and in return we are satisfied with moderate obedience. As a result, our people are moderately honest and moderately chaste and somewhat more than moderately happy. (*Lost Horizon*)

In *Lilies*, the seemingly lapsed believers—those who revel in the apparent depravities of Hollywood—are the model ones because they are able to do what twentieth-century American fundamentalists and fanatics like Jesse cannot: They sustain faith in the face of modernity, even in accord with it; they understand Updike’s key message of temperance in all things; they, like Updike, opt against hypocritically scorning movies, looking to them instead as a means by which to approach understanding an unknowable, Barthian divinity and a world like that portrayed in the Book of Esther, where a Barthian God’s providence remains concealed. *Lilies* reaches its fruition as a contemporary Book of Esther when Updike’s

Esther, by fictionalized divine decree, becomes its heroine. The Wilmot family is redeemed through Essie/Alma's prayer for Clark's actions, and that Updike's God prefers Alma's mode of thinking about modernity and faith to Jesse's becomes apparent by way of His response to her prayer.

Understanding the kind of prayer Alma offers and the significance of the point at which she prays in the novel enables an understanding of why Updike's God chooses to answer her prayer. Only *after* Alma comes to grasp more clearly the relationship between the transcendental nature of film and real transcendence, only *after* she tempers her view of Hollywood in accord with what Shangri-La's residents would endorse, does she pray to God, asking Him to save Clark:

Dear God, forgive me for my mistakes, my selfishness. Always I was seeking to do Your will, that my talent not be hidden, that my light would shine forth. Forgive me if I could have done more for Clark. Save him from this sadness, this farce. Give him back to me as he was, helpless and so eager at my breast. Forgive me if I should have nursed him longer, as You know I had committed to [the movie] Cream Cheese and Caviar and [Paul] Newman wasn't available later. Dear Lord, make me again the young mother I was; let me pour into him all the love his little being needed. Heal our lives and take us back and make us all perfect. Do the impossible, Lord, for him, as You have done for me. Rescue him from that terrible house. Reach down, so that none but I can see. I will not tell. Let me love You again. Amen. (467–68)

Alma's prayer may not be perfect in that she continues to express concern for herself, but perfection, per se, is something that the God of the Bible often does not seek.¹⁶ In contrast to Jesse, who essentially attempts to hijack history from God in order to attain personal stardom, Alma does what she has previously failed to do: She tempers her vanity, relinquishing all control to God and coming to see a metaphorical camera lens as focused on something other than herself.

In a conversation with the fallen Clarence early in the novel, Thomas Dreaver, the presbytery moderator, suggests that “[w]hat evaporates can recondense” (81), and by the conclusion of the novel, it does: Updike suggests that God answers Alma's prayer with a “flock of sparkling dark immaterial bubbles,” like the bubbles that previously ascended from Clarence, descending into Clark. Alma may never have taken Clark to church, “except for a crowded funeral or two” (408), but Clark's heroism, as the novel portrays it and, apparently, as God has rendered it, resembles the heroism of an action movie hero, suggesting that cinematic influence—essentially, years of watching movies—guides Clark's faithful actions.¹⁷ Whereas Jesse struggles to manifest the words of Revelation as reality, God's will almost effortlessly manifests itself for Clark, perhaps precisely because Clark does

not attempt to seize the reins of history from Him. After the bubbles descend, Clark attains a divinely inspired “hyperclarity” (484) that resembles a conversion to faith, and he is instantly transfigured into an agent of God. Unlike Esau, his biblical namesake at the temple, whom Clark views as a “rube” (398), and more like Arnold Schwarzenegger, whose movies have taught Clark about the kinds of guns that Jesse stockpiles (400), Clark struggles with Jesse, shooting and killing him before dying from a gunshot wound himself. The bubbles remain enigmatic: They may be grace, they may be faith, they may be divine knowledge of some kind. Updike opts not to specify. But the ultimate function of the bubbles is clear: They allow Clark to bring an end to the standoff and they enable him to redeem the fallen Wilmot family line as a living instrument of salvation.

In an introduction to a special edition of the novel, Updike all but states that he has orchestrated a divergence from his Barthian tendencies, observing that he

was trying through this throng of identities to tell a continuous story, of which God was the hero. I invited Him in, to be a character in my tale, and if He declined, with characteristic modern modesty, to make His presence felt unambiguously, at least there is a space in this chronicle plainly reserved for Him, a pocket in human nature that nothing else will fill. (*More Matter* 831)

Thus, the God of *Lilies* is not quite the Barthian God that Updike has presented in his earlier works,¹⁸ at least for his readers. Paradoxically, Updike portrays evidence of God’s existence to his reader in *Lilies* precisely because he wants, at the millennium’s end, to underscore that authentically transcendent things must remain in the realm of mystery, not be made flesh by fanatical believers like Jesse who futilely aim to hijack history from God by rendering deeds from the stuff of faith. Nonetheless, God’s work in the world remains ambiguous for Updike’s characters, as it does for the characters in the Book of Esther, and Essie/Alma is the heroine of Updike’s book because she understands the sort of lesson that the biblical book teaches: that believers must be able to sustain faith without overt evidence of God’s involvement.¹⁹ Updike does not explicitly indicate that Alma’s prayer has been answered: Alma simply *believes* that God has intervened, as her subsequent prayer—“*Thank you, Lord, for letting my son become a hero at the end*”—suggests (488). And, perhaps as per her original request—“*Reach down, so that none but I can see*”—none but Alma, who sees only through faith that God has helped her, come to know of God’s involvement. As her father, Teddy, turns on the evening news, the events of the standoff are flattened by the television, both literally and metaphorically. The survivors emerge “squinting, blinking as if just waking up”

(491); they emerge, as though out of a movie theatre, aware of reality once again, but unaware of God's active participation in their salvation.

TEMPERATE FAITH IN THE AGE OF TERROR

Perhaps inevitably, Updike's focus on temperance took on a heightened sense of importance after the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, perpetrated by al-Qaeda terrorists who emerged out of an Islamic form of fundamentalism. Because he happened to be visiting family in New York, Updike witnessed the twin towers collapse from the tenth floor of a Brooklyn Heights apartment building. For Updike, the attacks represented a level of apocalyptic devastation that dwarfed both the atrocity in Waco in 1993 and the fictionalized representation of that atrocity that appears at the conclusion of *In the Beauty of the Lilies*. *Lilies* may comprise Updike's first sustained attempt to address the problem that religious fundamentalism and fanaticism create for temperate adherents to the doctrine of *sola fide*, but in the age of terror, Updike reinforced that message of temperance in his work, suggesting for the remainder of his career that *sola fide* failed to serve as a simple solution for the religious masses as he conceived of and fictionalized them.

Ahmad Ashmawy Mulloy, the eighteen-year-old, devoutly Islamic protagonist of *Terrorist*, which Updike wrote following 9/11, may believe that faith alone saves, and the Protestant preacher at his schoolmate's black church may reinforce the notion that "[f]aith in the Lord" suffices (60), but, evidently, it no longer did for Updike. Despite the fact that Jesse and Ahmad emerge from different strains of fundamentalism that appear diametrically opposed by the start of the twenty-first century, they are quite similar.²⁰ Like Jesse, Ahmad is a true believer who scorns the modern times and movies, which, based on his imam Shaikh Rashid's tutelage, he views as "sinful and stupid," mere "foretastes of Hell" (144). Ahmad sees the world as fallen, comprised of "weak Christians and nonobservant Jews" who are "unclean" and "not on the Straight Path" (3). Furthermore, like Jesse, he places a clear focus on ends as many Muslims conceive of them: He longs for the sort of afterlife that is portrayed in the Qur'an; he longs to follow his imam's advice and "[t]ravel light, straight into Paradise" (108).

To a greater degree than *Lilies*, *Terrorist* focuses on what causes a believer to burgeon into a fanatic or even a terrorist, and Updike suggests that immaturity and naiveté are to blame.²¹ The American-born son of Teresa Mulloy, a lapsed Catholic American mother of Irish heritage, and Omar Ashmawy, a lapsed Muslim from Egypt who abandons Ahmad when he is only three, Ahmad turns to

Islamic fundamentalism at the age of eleven in an attempt to find “a trace of the handsome father who had receded at the moment his memories were beginning” (99). He is, according to his own mother’s assessment, idealistic and gullible, able to be “influenced by the wrong people” (239), and his naiveté leaves him susceptible to manipulation by his imam and purportedly faithful Muslims who really just hope to profit at his expense. They recruit him to martyr himself for the one true God by driving a truck into the Lincoln Tunnel and bombing it at its weak point just after the anniversary of the 9/11 attacks, thus providing him with a “shortcut to Paradise” (240). These Muslims are less interested in Ahmad’s faith than they are in acquiring what Jack Levy, Ahmad’s high school guidance counselor, calls “a fall guy” (309). For the most part, they merely value making money from jihad as they misunderstand it,²² not declaring the Shahadah, the first and most important of Islam’s Five Pillars, which unequivocally drives Ahmad’s existence.²³

Divine providence is not evident to the reader of *Terrorist* as it is to the reader of *In the Beauty of the Lilies*, but an array of improbable coincidences suggests that Updike’s Barthian God orchestrates Ahmad’s ultimate revelation that “God does not want to destroy” (306) and that the end of *Terrorist* should be read like the Book of Esther. In part, Ahmad’s intention to commit religiously motivated violence seems to dissipate as a result of counsel from Jack, a level-headed, lapsed Jew who attempts to talk Ahmad out of the bombing after he *happens* to learn of the plan and then *happens* to intercept Ahmad carrying the plan out—functioning, in the bomb-rigged truck Ahmad drives, as an “immaterial, half real” presence for Ahmad that resembles God, the only father he has ever known (297). In his efforts to stop Ahmad, Jack uses temperate counsel, explaining that “we’re all Americans here,” as well as extremist strategies, saying “I fucked your mother” (301). However, the degree to which Jack prompts Ahmad’s revelation remains unclear, as evidenced by the fact that Ahmad remains somewhat distracted while Jack speaks. His revelation may emerge more as the result of two innocent black children that he sees after he *happens* to invite the station wagon in which they ride to “slip in ahead of him into the line that has formed” at the mouth of the Lincoln Tunnel (298).

Updike suggests that unlike Jesse, Ahmad becomes able to acknowledge that goodness exists in the modern world: Elements of modernity pervade his rigid ideology, and, as a result, he opts against bombing the tunnel, never burgeoning into what Kristiaan Versluys calls “the ultimate Other, the terrorist” (156). Ahmad, who had previously “taken to searching television for traces of God in

this infidel society" (196), appears to find in the American media no substantial evidence that modernity is redeemable, as evidenced by the fact that he subsequently proceeds with his bombing plot. But he comes to such a conclusion only because he fails to understand, as Clark does in *Lilies*, that media representations can be instructive. As the children in the station wagon playfully attempt to attract Ahmad's attention from the wagon's boxy back window, which conspicuously resembles a widescreen TV, they by no means constitute a pure expression of the modern media, but they certainly bear a striking resemblance to figures Ahmad has encountered in the good, old-fashioned American television that helped to form these modern times: The girl has "her bushy hair up in two curious round balls, like the ears of that cartoon mouse once so famous" (300),²⁴ and the boy looks like a baseball player in his "imitation Yankees shirt with pinstripes" (303). Watching the children—outsiders, like he is, to WASP American culture—Ahmad seems to cease loathing the modern times he has scorned and the diverse array of Americans who inhabit those times, defining them and being defined by them. In lieu of bombing the tunnel, he waves and smiles at the children, thereby engaging in the modern world that he has previously shunned and metaphorically waving goodbye to his childhood, out of which his naive ideas about modernity had sprung.

At the end of the novel, Ahmad despairs that Americans "*have taken away my God*" (310), but, as Updike presents it, it is only the God of Ahmad's naive, fanatical youth that dissipates. By giving Ahmad the chance to temper his zeal without altogether losing his faith, Updike affords him an opportunity that Jesse never has. If Ahmad is to remain any sort of true believer, if he is to follow any semblance of an authentic Straight Path, Updike suggests, he must do what Jesse cannot: shun fanaticism, not the modern times. More generally, as Updike sees it, the contemporary terrorist, like Ahmad, must see modernity in the new millennium as Alma sees it at the second one's end—as a means by which to broach understanding a wholly other God and His will. Only through engaging in modernity can the fanatic avoid becoming an instrument of corrupt ideologies or a practitioner of those ideologies who attempts to usurp divine agency. Only through believing temperately, in accord with the message of a mid-twentieth-century American movie that helped give rise to modernity, can the twenty-first-century believer even hope to become, as Clark does, an authentic instrument of divinity, a quiet miracle made manifest in a modern world that, like the Barthian one of the Book of Esther, is only apparently devoid of genuinely transcendent phenomena.

NOTES

1. Millennial anticipation if not outright anxiety became part and parcel of everyday American culture in the 1990s, as evidenced, for example, by the media coverage of the Y2K computer crisis and by apocalyptic themes in television shows like *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997–2003) and movies like *Terminator 2: Judgment Day* (1991) and *Armageddon* (1998). Though the millennium by no means signifies apocalypse in theological terms, as Richard Landes explains, “[t]he obviously important role of apocalypticism (signifying imminence) in bringing millennialism to light has tended to blind many to the distinction between the two terms” (10).

2. Most notably, fanatical beliefs that the end was nigh prompted the 1993 siege in Waco, Texas, and the 1997 Heaven’s Gate mass suicide in San Diego, Calif.

3. In the early phase of the Reformation, Catholicism’s doctrine of justification of salvation through good works came into question when theologians focused on the writings of Paul, who argued, in his letters to the Galatians and Romans, that men are saved by faith, not works. Martin Luther, focusing on the individual, asked how the sinner might be able to enter into a personal relationship with God—to lead a sinful life but become “good” by way of faith. Both the Lutheranism of Updike’s upbringing and the Episcopalianism to which he converted later in life adhere to the understanding of justification by faith alone as Luther developed it.

4. A series of twelve booklets, written by conservative theologians and published between 1910 and 1915 by the Bible Institute of Los Angeles, that attempt to outline the fundamental beliefs that a true Christian must have.

5. *The Education of Henry Adams*, Chapter 25.

6. Schiff proposes that “[t]he single moment which yields these two synchronous events is highly symbolic and points to a dominant theme in the novel: the rise of cinema, which through its powerful projection of images has inspired faith and devotion, and the related decline of religious faith” (2006, 141).

7. The Scopes “Monkey Trial,” which is mentioned in passing in *Lilies* (165), proved to be an embarrassment for Christian fundamentalists. They attacked Scopes, who was convicted, but Clarence Darrow and the defense ultimately prevailed: The public supported Scopes, and his conviction was overturned on a technicality. Following the trial, fundamentalists withdrew from the public eye and did not reemerge until the 1970s.

8. Hadassah changes her name to Esther upon joining King Ahasuerus’s harem (Esth. 2.7).

9. Eugene V. Gallagher explains that Koresh “brought a simple but powerful interpretive scheme to the Bible. He first posited the primary importance of Revelation. He then asserted that the Bible, in all of its books, proclaimed the same message. Since the message of the Bible was presumed to be identical to the message of Revelation, Koresh could therefore appeal to any text in any part of the biblical corpus in order to flesh out his reading of Revelation” (200).

10. Armstrong explains, “Fundamentalism is not a conscious archaism, as people often imagine; it is not a throwback to the past. These fundamentalisms are essentially modern movements that could take root in no other time than our own” (viii), and this is evidenced by the various ways in which fundamentalists rely on modern technology, e.g., broadcasting their beliefs via television on Pat Robertson’s *700 Club* (1966 to present) and Sheila Schuller Coleman’s *Hour of Power* (1970 to present).

11. Updike suggests that Jesse uses religion to justify his promiscuity: “He had become obsessed by impregnating as many of the Temple women as he could, so his seed would be richly represented in the hundred forty-four thousand of the saved after the Reckoning” (398–99). Furthermore, Jesse has stockpiled an immense collection of illegally acquired guns. Some have permits, and those that lack them, Jesse observes, “have their permits in the accounting of the Lord of Righteousness, stamped and dated right there where He sits on His Almighty Throne” (397).

12. The root of the name Esther is *hester*, which means “hidden” in Hebrew.

13. As John L. McKenzie explains, “The whole story [of the Book of Esther] exhibits the providence of God, which preserves His people from annihilation. The means by which His providence operates in this book are human plans and actions. The divine action is hidden and no marvels are related. Yet the Jews escape” (247).

14. Experiencing an existential crisis in 1956, Updike read theology to help him cope with the despair he felt, and he came to see Barth as the twentieth century’s most compelling and persuasive religious thinker.

15. For an extensive consideration of the importance of movies in Updike’s life and oeuvre, see De Bellis. According to De Bellis, Updike was always a movie lover, but, more to the point, film “enriches his art”; indeed, Updike “used film as an aid” throughout his career (169).

16. Consider, for instance, how the God of Genesis works with Abraham and Jacob, characters who struggle with him and are less than entirely obedient.

17. Clark appears to perceive his own existence in cinematic terms: “Clark had used LSD and PCP a certain amount before he began to scare himself and the trips had left him with some windows in his head open a crack, so these bright little movies sometimes ran without his asking” (363–64).

18. Prior to *Lilies*, Updike consistently made it a point to leave divinity in the realm of mystery—to leave the ways of God unknown to man and to retain the image of God as Barthian. For example, in *Roger’s Version* (1986), Updike ridicules Dale, an evangelical graduate student, for attempting to prove God’s existence through computer science. In the Rabbit tetralogy, Rabbit repeatedly laments the fact that God does not intervene in human affairs—that He refused to save the Angstroms’ baby girl from drowning. As he observes in *Rabbit Is Rich* (1981), “A volume of water still stood in the tub many hours later, dust on the unstirring gray surface, just a little rubber stopper to lift and God in all His strength did nothing” (225).

19. Peter J. Bailey suggests that the ending of *Lilies* (and hence the novel as a whole) is sorrowful because it “so profoundly dramatizes how unlikely we are to recognize religious epiphany when we see it—in life or on television” (219). By contrast, I argue that the real theological value of God’s silence in the novel can be understood through the lens of the Book of Esther. God’s silence has religious worth because it represents real-world experiences. Believers do not see God’s involvement, yet they continue to believe that God remains a living presence in His creation.

20. This sort of similarity is typical of the real-life fundamentalisms upon which Updike based his fiction. As Ruthven explains, fundamentalist movements from across the religious spectrum “exhibit what the philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein called ‘family resemblances’” (9): “They have similar defining features, most notably a predilection for textual literalism and hostility toward modernity.

21. Interestingly, Updike’s conclusion resembles that of Eboo Patel, an American Muslim from India: “As we [Muslims] grow older and seek a unified Muslim way of being, it is too often Muslim extremists who meet us at the crossroads of our identity crisis. They say, ‘Look how Muslims are

being oppressed all over the world. You, who are living in the belly of the beast and indulging in its excesses, have only one way to purify yourself: to become death and kill” (13).

22. For most Muslims, jihad involves not engaging oppressors in armed aggression, which the Qur’an forbids, but engaging in a struggle with “one’s self” or ego, with “one’s wealth and intellect,” and with “one’s greed, bad intentions, and lust” (Sardar 75–76).

23. To declare the Shahadah is to state that there is no god but God and that Muhammad is God’s messenger.

24. Notably, Mickey Mouse moves Ahmad just as he moved Updike, who indicated that Mickey was his “first artistic love and inspiration” (*Self-Consciousness* 242).

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Into Darkness Undimmed

WILLIAM H. PRITCHARD

Endpoint and Other Poems, by John Updike. New York: Knopf, 2009.

John Updike was never taken seriously enough as a poet, in part because of his beginnings as a writer of light verse, a phenomenon of the 1940s and '50s. In an interview with Helen Vendler in 1977, he confirmed his modest reputation and allowed that he was writing “less and less of what there seems no demand for”—not just light verse but poems generally. Asked by Vendler to say what he thought lyric poems consisted of, he replied that

the poem comes with a perception—a breakthrough into nature, which encircles our numbness day and night. And married to the irruption of nature must be something live that surfaces out of language; the language, even when rhyme and metre and sequence and punctuation are brushed aside, brings a formal element without which nothing happens, nothing is *made*. (*Hugging the Shore* 863)

When sixteen years later he collected his poems, they were separated into sections for regular verse and its offspring, light verse, which he referred to as “cartooning with words.” Even while he had been “working primarily in prose,” he wrote, “the idea of verse . . . stood at my elbow, as a standing invitation to the highest kind of verbal exercise—the most satisfying, the most archaic, the most elusive of critical control.” It may also be that he has been consistently underrated or ignored as a poet because of his great success as a prose writer. (An unconvinced reader might insist that he *can't* also be that good in verse.) Then there is the poetry racket itself, where the humorless, strange antics of a Jorie Graham are applauded, and the ceaseless clowning of John Ashbery wins him a place in the Library of America.

Two months after Updike's unanticipated death in late January of 2009 his final book of poems, *Endpoint*, appeared. The movingly apt title is even more so in that forty years previously, he published *Midpoint*, the title poem of which surveyed his life thus far and ended: "Born laughing, I've believed in the Absurd, / Which brought me this far; henceforth, if I can, / I must impersonate a serious man." The impersonation most seriously fulfills itself in the 27-page "Endpoint," which opens the new volume. This final poem consists of a sequence of unrhymed sonnets, the earlier ones written to mark his birthdays as he aged through his seventies. With its combination of increasingly somber subject and the formal pressures of metrical obligation to line and stanza, there is nothing to rival "Endpoint" in American poetry. Since it overshadows the latter two-thirds of the book, which consist of more traditional Updike ventures, it may be permissible to treat some of the latter poems first, and then confront the poem that precedes them.

"Other Poems," the first of three sections following "Endpoint," contains several examples of Updike's best occasional verse—the occasions being celebrations of remembered popular singers such as Frankie Laine, Doris Day, the doo-wop groups—and the heartbreaking "Bird Caught in My Deer Netting." These poems are about age, death, and loss—the last vividly imagined in "Stolen" when Updike moves into the skin of paintings taken from the Gardner Museum in Boston. In their lonely inactivity, they invite our empathy:

Think of how bored they get, stacked
in the warehouse somewhere, say in Mattapan,
gazing at the back of the butcher paper
they are wrapped in, instead of at
the rapt glad faces of those who love art.

Throughout his work, Updike favored what Robert Frost called "loose" as opposed to "strict" iambs, and the looseness shows here in the rough approximations of a decasyllabic line—seven syllables in the first line, eleven in the second and third, eight in the fourth. Prosody takes a back seat to the clever, inventive idea:

In their captivity, they may dream of rescue
but cannot cry for help. Their paint
is inert and crackles, their linen friable.
They have one stratagem, the same old one:
to be themselves, on and on.

Like other poets, Updike takes upon himself the task of remembering by representing to our minds vanished things and people we had forgotten about—as

in “Frankie Laine,” where a once popular singer from the 1940s and ’50s is given his due in twenty lines (one of Laine’s hits, “That’s My Desire,” begins “To spend one night with you, in our old rendezvous”).

The Stephens’ Sweet Shop, 1949.

Bald Walt at work, “butterflying” hot dogs—
splitting them lengthwise for the griddle
and serving them up in hamburger buns—
while Boo, his smiling, slightly anxious wife
(a rigid perm and excess, too-bright lipstick),
provides to teen-aged guzzlers at the counter
and in an opium den of wooden booths
their sugary poisons, milkshakes thick as tar
and Coca-Cola conjured from syrup and fizz.

A smog of smoke. The jingle at the back
of pinball being deftly played. And through
the clamorous and hormone-laden haze
your slick voice, nasal yet operatic, sliced
and soared, assuring us of finding our
desire, at our old rendezvous. Today
I read you died, at ninety-three. Your voice
was oil, and we the water it spread on,
forming a rainbow film—our futures as
we felt them, dreamily, back there and then.

The atmosphere of the sweet shop along with the “nasal yet operatic” sound of Laine’s voice—exactly the right adjectives for it—combine with the poem’s other details and resonate with felt life. In Updike’s best poems, a living voice can always be detected, especially in this case if one were an American teenager in 1949, loving or being repelled by Frankie Laine. “Her Coy Lover Sings Out,” another poem addressed to a ’40s icon, Doris Day, confirms what Updike had already written about her in prose:

Doris, ever since 1945,
when I was all of thirteen and you a mere twenty-one,
and “Sentimental Journey” came winging
out of the juke box at the sweet shop,
your voice piercing me like a silver arrow,
I knew you were sexy.

These opening lines initiate the march of time and Updike's love still directed at the singer in 2008.

In a different key from these poems of witty tribute is "Bird Caught in My Deer Netting," although, as in so many of these late poems, death is the presiding genius. Its first third describes the bird's arrival on the fatal scene:

The hedge must have seemed as ever,
seeds and yew berries secreted beneath,
small edible matter only a bird's eye could see,
mixed with the brown of shed needles and earth—
a safe, quiet cave such as nature affords the meek,
entered low, on foot, the feathered head
alert to what it sought, bright eyes darting
everywhere but above, where net had been laid.

Its ensuing struggle is imagined by the speaker:

Then, at some moment mercifully unwitnessed,
an attempt to rise higher, to fly,
met by an all but invisible limit, beating wings
pinioned, ground instinct denied. The panicky
thrashing and flutter, in daylight and air,
their freedom impossibly close, all about!

The poem concludes with a question not to be answered, as the man confesses his helplessness, tinged with remorse at being responsible for the netting:

How many starved hours of struggle resumed
in fits of life's irritation did it take
to seal and sew shut the berry-bright eyes
and untie the tiny wild knot of a heart?
I cannot know, discovering this wad
of junco-fluff, weightless and wordless
in its corner of netting deer cannot chew through
nor gravity-defying bird bones break.

From early on, Updike had been responsive and sympathetic to death in the non-human kingdom ("Dog's Death" is a shining example), and this small creature's end is perfectly turned and attuned in the most poignant of these "Other Poems."

There are in addition lighter, more agreeable poems in this section, including one on an unlikely subject. “Colonoscopy” ends with the title procedure completed and the doctor’s satisfied announcement: “‘Perfect. Not a polyp. See you in / five years.’ Five years? The funhouse may have folded.” In “Endpoint,” the book’s sad masterpiece, we observe the folding, gradual in its stages, shockingly sudden in its finality. Its forty-eight unrhymed sonnets combine in the culminating statement of a life: “Birthday, death day—what day is not both?” Updike’s *Collected Poems* includes only a few rhymed sonnets; the sonnet for him, as for Robert Lowell in the scores he turned out, was mainly a convenient mold into which thoughts and feelings could be poured—eight- and six-line groupings with a space separating them. There is no reason to regret Updike’s decision not to rhyme, since he was not gifted with the brilliant and serious use of the technique as practiced by contemporary masters like James Merrill, Anthony Hecht, and Richard Wilbur.

There is no doubt, however, that writing unrhymed sonnets is a risky operation, since the form is so minimal and an encouragement to garrulity. Lowell’s sonnets, for all their occasional success, are more often obscure, disjointed, in willful disregard of discursive clarity. Never one to subordinate clarity to something presumably more important, Updike is less interested in creating resonant lines than in making syntactical sentences that continue over the lines, sometimes even over the white space separating the sonnet’s two parts. Here is an example from “Birthday Shopping, 2007”:

In the beginning, Culture does beguile us,
but Nature gets us in the end. My skin,
I notice now that I am seventy-five,
hangs loose in ripples like those dunes on Mars
that tell us life may have existed there—
monocellular slime in stagnant pools.
After a Tucson movie, some man in
the men’s room mirror lunged toward me

with wild small eyes, white hair, and wattled neck—
who could he be, so hostile and so weird,
so due for disposal, like a popcorn bag
vile with its inner film of stale, used grease?
Where was the freckled boy who used to peek
into the front-hall mirror, off to school?

Where indeed. The opening poem of the sequence, “March Birthday 2002, and After” has the unwilling celebrant enduring

A faint neuralgia, flitting tooth-root to
knee and shoulder-joint, a vacant head,
too many friendly wishes to parry,
too many cakes. Oh, let the years alone!
They pile up if we manage not to die, . . .

The thought of approaching death brings comforting thoughts of boyhood illnesses when he would listen to “The Lone Ranger” from his sickbed and think “that Mother, Father, mailman, and / the wheezy doctor with his wide black bag / exist for him, and so they do, or did.”

This is the familiar, recurrent thought of the sequence: adult time running out; the shock of witnessing himself in a mirror now, “so hostile and so weird,” from which the only escape is in words recreating the lost boy, off to school, catching himself in the front-hall mirror. If there is a readerly objection to this move back to childhood, so often repeated in so many of Updike’s stories and poems, the poet already knows that “I’ve written these before, these modest facts, // but their meaning has no bottom in my mind.” This is what he called “the Pennsylvania thing,” events that weren’t always or often felt as happiness as they occurred but now seem nothing less than bliss, caught out of time. Other scenes revisited include his later life as a writer and the selfish, irresistible pleasure of seeing his words into the magic of print and hard covers:

And then to have my spines
line up upon the shelf, one more each year,
however out of kilter ran my life!
I drank up women’s tears and spat them out
as 10-point Janson, Roman and *ital*.

He accords generous recognition to his editors and encouragers at the *New Yorker*, to his publisher, Alfred Knopf, and to the world of comic books and magazines—of print generally, the love of which kindled and continuously animated his writerly life. Behind all this was his mother and the unfulfilled dream of her own never-completed novel, as she sent out pieces of writing and received back rejection slips in “brown envelopes.” She “knew non-publication’s shame,” while “Mine was to be the magic gift instead, / propelled to confidence by mother-

love.” But he concedes that “hers was the purer ambition, hatched / of country childhood in the silences / of crops accruing, her sole companions birds / whose songs and names she taught herself to know.” As may be noted from the way I have spliced together various poems in the sequence, it’s not the individual line that most counts as a made and finished thing, but rather the cumulative impact of sentences in verse exhibiting what Frost called “the sound of sense,” a sound and a sense not essentially different from that in Updike’s prose sentences.

The birthday poems up through the year 2007 are a litany of questions; minor complaints; worries about sun damage and bodily decrepitude; thoughts of death, with their corresponding flashbacks into younger life; and unillusioned predictions of how or whether his books will live after he is gone: “A life poured into words—apparent waste / intended to preserve the thing consumed. / For who, in that unthinkable future / when I am dead, will read?” Read not just him but, in the post-Gutenberg era, read anything. So he prays to keep the writing life going for a while: “Be with me, words, a little longer; you / have given me my quitclaim in the sun.” A poem from April 14, 2008, “A Lightened Life,” presents him in efficient mode, with proofs of his final novel (*The Widows of Eastwick*) FedExed and his taxes mailed off. Even so, he has failed that morning to remember “the computer code / for the *accent grave* in *fin-de-siècle*, one / of my favorite words,” and the poem ends by asking “What’s up? What’s left of me?”

The nine pages that follow provide the grim answer, beginning with “Euonymus 11/02/08”: “A cold that wouldn’t let go / is now a cloud upon my chest X-ray: / pneumonia.” This poem about finality ends with another question: “Is this an end? / I hang, half-healthy, here, and wait to see.” Three weeks later he is in Massachusetts General Hospital, where his diagnosis moves from pneumonia to cancer, then its metastasis. Visited by his family, he asks the appropriate questions of children and grandchildren, “all the while / suppressing, like an acid reflux, the lack / of prospect black and bilious for me.” As he “uphold[s] the social lie,” he thinks of others he has loved until their deaths and realizes that in his “safe” isolation from the outside world, his old fear of falling has disappeared, since his destination, “terra firma,” will not be reached by a spectacular fall in a crashing airplane but “achieved from thirty inches, on a bed.”

With a sense of his inglorious “fall” to come, he rises to what for me is the most moving moment in the sequence. A half century back, he had written a memoir of growing up in Shillington, “The Dogwood Tree: A Boyhood”—an

early example of his conviction, maintained over the years, that we were put in the world to praise and to pay attention. The middle section of “Peggy Lutz, Fred Muth 12/13/08” embodies this conviction:

Dear friends of childhood, classmates, thank you,
scant hundred of you, for providing a
sufficiency of human types: beauty,
bully, hanger-on, natural,
twin, and fatso—all a writer needs,
all there in Shillington, its trolley cars
and little factories, cornfields and trees,
leaf fires, snowflakes, pumpkins, valentines.

To think of you brings tears less caustic
than those the thought of death brings. Perhaps
we meet our heaven at the start and not
the end of life. Even then were tears
and fear and struggle, but the town itself
draped in plain glory the passing days.

In the culminating affirmation, heaven is redefined as something that existed back then rather than now—something re-imagined and imaginatively finished, rather than something to come, not yet finished. A week or so after this poem, “Needle Biopsy” confirms the cancer’s metastasis.

After this fact, only two poems remain. The first, undated and titled “Creepier,” is a sonnet, sort of, but now not only unrhymed but unpentametered, consisting of shorter, irregular lines of varying syllables, as if to suggest the vine as it lets go its leaves:

as if to say, *To live is good*
but not to live—to be pulled down
with scarce a ripping sound,
still flourishing, still
stretching toward the sun—
is good also, all photosynthesis
abandoned, quite quits.

This last look at one of nature’s products admires its “stoic delicacy” in letting go. The final poem, “Fine Point 12/22/08” (its title a last bit of wordplay) looks to whatever sustenance can be drawn from the Christian myth:

Why go to Sunday school, though surlily,
and not believe a bit of what was taught?
The desert shepherds in their scratchy robes
undoubtedly existed, and Israel's defeats—
the Temple in its sacredness destroyed
by Babylon and Rome. Yet Jews kept faith
and passed the prayers, the crabbed rites,
from table to table as Christians mocked.

We mocked, but took. The timbrel creed of praise
gives spirit to the daily; blood tinges lips.
The tongue reposes in papyrus pleas,
saying, *Surely*—magnificent, that “surely”—
*goodness and mercy shall follow me all
the days of my life, my life, forever.*

This poem affirms continuity from Sunday school to hospital bed, from the shepherds' creed of praise to later ones that, like the works of Updike's lifetime of writing, give “spirit to the daily.” The poem's end is a plea, with words from the Twenty-third Psalm that provoke the poet to interrupt himself in wonder (“magnificent, that ‘surely’”) before continuing with “*all / the days of my life,*” where italicized quotation ends and the poet, from his position at the end of things, adds, surpassingly, “my life, forever.”

The hospital poems may remind us of a now rather forgotten poet, L. E. Sissman, a friend of Updike's whose work he wrote about admiringly. Sissman's “Dying: An Introduction” and “Homage to Clotho: A Hospital Suite” are sterling examples of confronting one's mortal fate without mawkishness or strident self-pity. Updike wrote of Sissman's last poems, “What other poet has ever given such wry and unblinking witness to his own dying? . . . His poetry gave back more generously than he had received, and carried his beautiful wit into darkness undimmed” (*Hugging* 633, 634). Updike's own last poems answer the question by providing one further and unforgettable example of such an art carrying itself into darkness undimmed.

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Marriage, Memory, and Mortality: John Updike's Enduring Legacy in Short Fiction

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My Father's Tears and Other Stories, by John Updike. New York: Knopf, 2010.

The Maples Stories, by John Updike. New York: Everyman's Pocket Classics-Knopf, 2010.

In a tribute shortly after John Updike's death, Cynthia Ozick declared: "A world without Updike signifies literary climate change: his was the air we breathed." Updike, who never had trouble "getting the words out," produced a significant body of work in a variety of genres: verse, drama, essays, art and literary criticism, children's books, short fiction, and novels. Rich and extensive, his oeuvre constitutes an enduring legacy and confirms his status as one of the twentieth century's last true men of letters. Throughout his career, especially in his short fiction, Updike reiterated the theme of art's potential transcendence over mortality. It seems fitting then that two recent posthumous additions to his canon, *The Maples Stories* and *My Father's Tears*, further demonstrate the ways in which art endures, much like the new pipes that the plumber repairing the Maples' house in "Plumbing" asserts will "outlast your time here" (*Maples* 138).

While Updike's novels may be his most celebrated works and alone guarantee his literary posterity, his talents were perhaps best suited to and realized in the short story. There, his elegant prose provides keen glimpses into the yearnings of the human spirit, as well as a social history of the era as substantial as that

provided by his Rabbit novels. Sharp detail, lucid prose, crisp dialogue, and metaphors deftly woven into layered narrative—these are the elements of Updike’s short fiction, which he used fluidly to illuminate the corners of middle-class domestic experience. Updike’s stylistic talents, skillful structuring, keen sense for the revelatory moment, and his unerring instinct for crafting closure all served him well in the demanding crucible of the short story. In a 2005 interview concerning his forthcoming novel *Terrorist*, however, Updike somewhat uncharacteristically expressed doubts about his facility with short fiction:

[Ten] years ago I would have said short stories is where I feel most at home. I’m not sure I do feel totally at home any more, whether I have maybe written all my short stories. . . . In a short story . . . you’ve got to make everything count toward a certain effect at the end. That’s maybe a muscular feat that I’ve lost muscle to perform. . . . But anyway I’m still trying. (Szep)

Glancing back over his earlier work, Updike once remarked that “the quality I admire and fear to have lost is its carefree bounce, its snap, its exuberant air of slight excess” and lamented that “Among the rivals besetting an aging writer is his younger, nimbler self, when he was the cocky new thing” (Updike 41, 42).

Updike’s later stories have been criticized not only for their more muted style but also for containing insufficient variation in character, style, and theme—perhaps ignoring Updike’s conscious attempts to adapt his short fiction to the phase of experience that it portrays. While Updike’s mature short fiction tones down the adjectival energy characteristic of some of his earlier stories and depicts the past from further reaches of memory, his two recent posthumously published story collections illustrate that his mastery of the short story form—if it ever waned—continued with plenty of muscle into his later years, transformed somewhat and focused differently but still able to mine the veins of experience in his trademark epiphanic form. *My Father’s Tears*, which gathers the stories from the last decade of Updike’s life, is a testament to the resurgence of his talents in the genre; in a style reminiscent of the stories in *Trust Me* (1987), he enacts a shift in vision to meditate on mortality from a more intimate perspective. Recalling a rejection from the *New Yorker* early in his career of a story about his grandmother, Updike remembered that the editor scrawled a note that the magazine did not use “stories of senility,” then continued: “Now, ‘stories of senility’ are about the only ones I have to tell. My only new experience is of aging, and not even the aged much want to read about it. . . . Having lived as a child with aging grandparents, I imagined old age with more vigor, color, and curiosity than I could bring to a description

of it now” (Updike 41). Yet these last stories clearly depict, through the lens of mature experience, the inner vigor and variegated colors of the territory beyond middle age, as well as the existential curiosity that surveys the altered landscapes of one’s past and anticipates one’s own mortality.

My Father’s Tears has been rightfully acclaimed as Updike’s return to stride, recalling *Pigeon Feathers* (1962) in its concern with themes recurrent throughout his career: memory, mortality, and their intersection in art. Published four months after his death, this final collection exhibits a slight unevenness, but nonetheless contains stories that rank among Updike’s finest, distinguished not only by their style and control but also by their poignant and self-conscious attention to preparation for death. The older protagonists of these later stories have a larger stretch of memory to explore, and are in less direct contact with the past’s vanished mementoes and with deceased or distant significant figures. Often feeling overtaken by age, they struggle to preserve that past as they return physically or in memory to the sites and objects of their youth, reconstructing from them narrative moments that capture the spirit of bygone eras, distill the past’s vital essence, and momentarily arrest the inevitable receding of memory. While less than half of the stories are set in the familiar Pennsylvania locale that dominates Updike’s geography of memory, that earliest layer of experience often overshadows the rest, with the protagonist who travels in “the tracks of his ancestors”—a phrase from the story “The Road Home”—proving surprisingly adept at reconnection after grappling with memories attached to the land and its legacy.

Most of the collection’s eighteen stories—not surprisingly—appeared first in the *New Yorker*, though eight were previously published in the *Atlantic*, *Harper’s Magazine*, and *Playboy*, a pattern similar to most of Updike’s collections since the 1970s. The acknowledgments draw attention to the fact that the opening story, “Morocco,” written and published in 1979, is based on events that took place in 1969, while the rest of the stories “were composed in the twenty-first century.” Though Updike arranges the stories in the order of publication, his inclusion of the previously uncollected “Morocco” shows his attention to providing some overall arc to the volume, which Updike prepared before his death. A story from the era of *Problems and Other Stories*, it provides an appropriate beginning to the collection, not only in its depiction of an intact family unit, but also in its retrospective focus, tracing how the narrator’s naively planned family vacation yields “a stain upon my memories” (*Father’s* 14). Like a number of the volume’s other stories, the narrative foregrounds nostalgically the distance between the receded past and the present, with the narrator’s concluding apostrophe to his children

affirming how his memory keeps them “still molded, it seemed, forever together” (15), despite the unraveling that has occurred in the interim of a decade.

This vision of familial coherence clashes immediately with the collection’s next story, “Personal Archaeology,” which—like many of the others—focuses on characters who are “islanded” (147) in the present of late middle age, facing their looming mortality and struggling to come to terms with it. The door of memory that Updike alludes to in *Pigeon Feathers*’ epigraph from Kafka remains open; the older characters of Updike’s later stories may experience difficulties moving in “the tracks of [their] ancestors,” but they are often surprisingly adept at reconnecting with the past. The central metaphor of “Personal Archaeology,” perhaps most eloquently elaborated in *The Music School*’s “Harv Is Plowing Now,” foregrounds the dominant quest of many of the collection’s protagonists, though its narrator must infer the past of his Massachusetts property from traces of the former owners. As he wanders the property doing periodic cleanup, his imaginative archaeology intersects with these lives, though the scattered artifacts and trash mounds he finds often present more enigma than answers, as well as disturbing images of time’s erosion. Remnants of his boyhood world occupy his house, “washed up” like driftwood and evoking an “abyss of lost time . . . fraught and weighty as they were with the mystery of his own transient existence” (23). If specific recall of that era eludes him, like many of the volume’s characters he achieves a general reassurance of the “ponderous residue the spirit leaves behind” (25). Yet unlike the younger self frightened by “proof of time’s depths” (25) in similar mounds of trash, he manages to connect serendipitously with “the beginning of his era” on the property (26) and with a more hopeful former self, though the assurance that traces of us remain beyond mortality mingles with an awareness of his own transience.

Rather than depicting the process of memory at work, a few stories focus on previous generations, tracing the persistence of memory over time and distance as important figures from the past die and tangible artifacts disappear. In “The Guardians,” these figures from the secure rural past become configured geometrically in the protagonist’s mind as a protective composite resembling “the four corners of the ceiling far above him” (62). After he becomes the custodian of the past’s tangible memories when the last of these “guardians” dies, the narrative shifts into a long descriptive catalog that ranges through the house, demonstrating the acuity of memory, but concluding with the discomfiting declaration that “only [he] was left to remember any of this” (63). In “The Laughter of the Gods,” the figures of a young Pennsylvania boy’s ancestors take on larger proportion as

the narrative alternates between the narrator's forays into that era and his recounting of periodic visits home to his widowed mother, whose accounts of her life with his late father—often more bittersweet or acerbic than he is comfortable hearing—provide him with glimpses of their personal doubts and ambivalence toward each other unrecognized in his youth. After his mother dies, Benjamin discovers a saved packet of letters from his father, though he is unable to read them straight through, shying away from the direct and full confrontation with that part of his parents' past, preferring to apprehend it piecemeal. The mementoes he finds in her desk seem fragile but still charged with life as well, leading to an epiphany that neatly triangulates the family dynamics of his youth and brings these parental "gods" into focus as more fully human creatures.

The image of the "padlocked and boarded up" train station at the beginning of "My Father's Tears" hints at the difficulty in revisiting the past, whose emblems have receded in both reality and memory but can still be unearthed and reconstituted in imagination. With the consciousness that "time consumes us" (195), the narrator of the title story moves fluidly from the memorable image associated with his departure to a resurrection of the years before his marriage, when he introduces his fiancée to his parents and his Pennsylvania roots, then to the culminating remembrance of his father's death, when his own tears refuse to flow. A slighter story, "Kinderszenen," focalizes the early memories of youth directly through a young boy's consciousness, shunning dialogue to present the detailed ambience of rural life in the Depression era's shadow. After Toby's mother intervenes in a fight that breaks out at a baseball game between him and a stronger boy, the story culminates in a recognition reminiscent of *Pigeon Feathers*' "Flight": "with such a mother he can never be an ordinary, everyday boy" (229).

Perhaps the most accomplished stories, however, are those that bring the young protagonist of "Pigeon Feathers"—David Kern—directly back into contact with what Robert Nadon has called the "rejected rural," traveling the road home to visit old acquaintances and discovering not only the changes made to the landscape but also the memories that still inhere there (Nadon 62). In the *New Yorker* version, the David Kern story "The Road Home" was titled "The Roads of Home," and the revised title's shift in emphasis is telling, foregrounding the process of arriving at a revised understanding of the relationship between past and present rather than simply exploring the routes through the landscape. In inverse motion to the ceremony of farewell he enacts in another *Pigeon Feathers* story, "Packed Dirt, Churchgoing, A Dying Cat, A Traded Car," Kern perceives numerous changes, yet amid them revives a vivid image of his mother as

a little girl when he spies the road she used to walk. Ironically, he is returning from a paper presentation “on the not inconsiderable contemporary relevance of Edmund Spenser” (172) as he encounters the evidence of his own vanishing arcadia, where “a smooth circular driveway” in a landscaped yard has replaced “sandstone steppingstones . . . across a lawn mostly crabgrass” and his old house has been “renovated almost beyond recognition” (173).

As he drives, Kern feels “the tracks of his ancestors all around him . . . laying down an invisible network of worn paths” (173), though he perceives that the “region was changing, gradually consuming its older self” (174). When he visits the old family farm, he senses his new distance from the “[a]ncestral soil” that is now “just mud” (178), threatening to dirty the suit he is wearing to his high school reunion. Now less familiar with the roads, Kern later gets turned around on his way to the country club, squinting to read road signs, with the traffic pressures he feels embodying his anxieties about time’s passage. Yet once inside, the reunion provides the refuge he hopes for, as he is welcomed as “the returned prodigal” (187), vividly in touch with memories that seem to have been lost to the others. Able to lead the conversation because he can evoke the past so fluently, back on the road he is the outsider who must be led, yet after traversing unfamiliar sections of the city and crossing over a somewhat foreboding “strange bridge, high above the black river” (190), he enters more familiar territory, giving rise to vivid memories of associated experiences. For Kern, the geography of the present is still rife with potential for connection to the past that ultimately is not a lost time, and his closing words—“*I know where I am now! I’m here*” (192)—affirm his ability to locate the past in the present, to resituate himself—however fleetingly—in the landscape of his youth.

The other David Kern story in the volume, “The Walk with Elizanne,” illustrates clearly that the nature of the imaginative task has altered with age, given the lessened distance from and increased power of mortality. After a high school reunion encounter with the girl whom he first kissed, Kern revisits that event in his memory, an experience that has, in the “distorting lens of old age . . . loomed as one of the most momentous acts of his life” (50). As he reflects during his physical return to the site of the kiss, “he could imagine no better way to spend eternity than taking that walk with Elizanne over and over,” until all its details become “as clear as letters deep-cut in marble” (51). He understands that his yearning to reestablish meaningful contact based on this shared past occurs in the context of imminent mortality: “*Elizanne, he wanted to ask her, what does it mean, this enor-*

mity of our having been children and now being old, living next door to death?" (52). Whatever effervescence his poignant imaginative recreation of the event contains is commingled with the sense of its fleeting nature; the walk may be recreated in art and memory, and rehearsed perpetually, but ultimately never repeated. With Kern's last words to Elizanne before he heads homeward after their goodbye kiss—a slightly stammered declaration that "We have t-tons of time" (54)—Updike provides closure that simultaneously captures a moment when that sentiment seemed true and evokes an ironic consciousness that, despite success in recreating such timeless moments, time itself can be neither arrested nor possessed.

Instead of using his literary alter ego Henry Bech, the recurrent vehicle through which he had integrated travel into his short fiction, Updike includes a number of stories in which his older characters focalize such experiences. Spain is featured in two stories and India is the locale in "The Apparition," which follows the dutiful tourist Henry Milford on vacation with his wife, paying "wry sideways attention" (237) to a married female tourist, "rejoic[ing] to be tasting lust's folly once more" (243), but at a safe distance and with an awareness of his imminent mortality. "Spanish Prelude to a Second Marriage" replays the scenario of the Maples story "Twin Beds in Rome," only with an older couple who have been longtime companions taking a trip abroad to nudge their relationship in some direction, either toward marriage or a breakup. Its peripatetic chronicle is less engaging than the tripartite structure of "The Accelerating Expansion of the Universe," which begins with Martin Fairchild's metaphysical reflections on the meaning of the cosmos. This opening section bears a resemblance to Updike's fine but neglected early story from *Pigeon Feathers*, "The Astronomer," but the story then shifts to Spain, where Fairchild is injured when a thief snatches his wife's purse. Before the trip, he had succumbed to a depressed sense that known celestial facts point to "an eventual dispersion of everything into absolute cold and darkness" (138), though his "inmost self felt essentially exempt from ruin" (139). Rather than increasing his pessimism, his mishap abroad turns out to be strangely exhilarating because of the physical contact, a commodity he experiences less and less in his universe of accelerating expansion, where children and old friends disperse, and in which he feels increasingly "islanded" (147). Updike adeptly dovetails this section with a third, in which Fairchild, returned home, sets out to move a large cupboard—a family heirloom stored in the barn that carries ghostly memories of his grandparents and contains depressing souvenirs evoking a past of which he is "the last caring witness" (151). When an error in judgment leads to the cupboard being

smashed by a set of falling doors, his narrow escape from fatal injury produces momentary relief amid the shattered furniture—yet another potential disaster that serves as a respite from the sense of imminent dispersion that plagues him.

While memories of the ardor that led to past infidelities persist in some stories, that ardor is now held in check when it arises. In “Free,” the protagonist, a widower, revisits a former mistress at her Florida home, but declines her invitation to swim with her and leaves after a sedate lunch to seek the “repose” of memories of his late wife, who is “wrapped around him like a shroud of gold and silver thread” (36). The penultimate story, “Outage,” takes Evan Morris and his neighbor to the brink of adultery, but his lust abruptly ceases when the power comes back on and the beeping burglar alarm he came to her house to disable now seems to declare him an intruder—a surprising closure given the suburban infidelities that have punctuated Updike’s short fiction throughout his career. “Delicate Wives” recounts how Les Merrill’s fixation on Veronica Horst’s frail constitution and his increasing emotional attachment to her potential needs as she becomes ill spur his resolve to end his marriage; though he never engages in adultery, he sets himself on the course of separation from his wife, only to learn that she has discovered signs of breast cancer, thus leading to the concluding twist that “the intimacy he had coveted” in Veronica’s fragility becomes “legitimately his at last” (136). Updike’s talent at depicting the paradoxical dilemma of desire is still keen, though with older, more vulnerable protagonists, the lens of mortality provides a new angle of vision.

Among the remaining works, the ambitious “Varieties of Religious Experience” examines the tragedy of 9/11, which Updike witnessed from Brooklyn Heights, from four different points of view: a lawyer from Cincinnati visiting the city; one of the hijackers; a bond trader who works in one of the towers; and a passenger on Flight 93. While Updike has been criticized for depicting the fall of the towers with his characteristic lyric language, here he renders the chaos, confusion, and tragedy with realism and sensitivity as he attempts to depict the complex response to the events and to reaffirm the existence of “a shadowy God” beyond the tragedy (111). “Blue Light” moves from the protagonist’s initial amazement at how advances in dermatology can repair the damages of age to his less positive realizations about his own children’s aging and his grandchildren’s status as “centers of potential pain” (263). The moving final story, “The Full Glass,” though featuring a self-proclaimed non-introspective narrator who works as a tradesman, is clearly Updike’s farewell to his readers. Structured in the meditative mode that he used so well throughout his career, the story casts back over the past

to weave together a variety of incidents involving the fundamental pleasures of water and the idea of a full glass, associated masterfully with the memory of being a young boy, “eager for the next moment of life, one brimming moment after another” (281). In the present, the narrator is acutely aware that the routines of living have taken their toll, yet in retrospect his life has been a full glass, one with which “he’s drinking a toast to the visible world, his impending disappearance from it be damned” (292).

Self-consciously broader in scope, the new edition of the Maples stories spans four decades, offering a retrospective of some of Updike’s best stories complemented by an addition to his previously published short story sequence *Too Far to Go* (1979) that brings the Maples forward to a new phase. Updike’s collection charts the course of the couple whose experiences compose the arc of a marriage long in unraveling, yet—as he reminds readers in the foreword—“also illumine a history in many ways happy” (*Maples* 11), an aspect of the original sequence that is reinforced in the added story, “Grandparenting,” which was first collected in *The Afterlife* (1994). The creation of this new Everyman’s edition provides the couple with their own hardcover volume in the same series that assembles the collected works about Rabbit Angstrom and Henry Bech, deservedly placing Updike’s recurrent protagonists on the same shelf as *Rabbit Angstrom: The Four Novels* (1995) and *The Complete Henry Bech* (2001), which merges the volumes of short stories featuring Updike’s literary alter ego with one final uncollected Bech story.

While there may have been no plan originally to gather and link the Maples stories in one volume, the cluster of five stories that Updike placed in *Museums and Women* (1972) acknowledged an evolving coherence. As Updike’s stories repeatedly featured the couple as protagonists, it became clear that they represented the convergence of particular experiences that portrayed the inherent fault lines of a marriage, as well as the pressures arising from the era’s changing mores. The Maples first earned their own volume, as Updike notes in an addition to his original foreword, when he gathered his extant Maples stories in *Too Far to Go* in 1979 to serve as a paperback tie-in to a television production that year. Updike included six previously uncollected Maples stories, plus two with unnamed narrators that, as he remarks in the foreword, “from the internal evidence appear to take place in Richard Maple’s mind,” as well as what he characterizes as “a fragment that cried off completion.” Although Updike offhandedly remarks that the original volume was “quickly assembled,” whatever its genesis, the product is far from haphazard: indeed, Updike availed himself of the framework provided by chronology while depicting the ebb and flow of a relationship, one that embod-

ies, as he notes in the foreword, a “musical pattern, the advance and retreat, of the Maples’ duet . . . ever more harshly transposed” (11–12).

Using the contours of his own marriage to structure the book, Updike created a sketch of a prototypical marriage as affected by the forces at play within an ongoing relationship. Indeed, it is the Maples’ marriage that may be the book’s true protagonist, more so than either Joan or Richard, who struggle to maintain their individual identities—each worn down like the tomb reliefs that Richard notes in “Twin Beds in Rome”—amid an increasing familiarity with the other: as the narrator of “Sublimating” notes, “Their eyes . . . had married and merged to three” (153), so that they see not only through a shared perspective but into and through each other as well. Joan’s “dry female-to-female clarity would always oust his romantic mists” (153), Richard reflects, characterizing the perspectives that generally dominate their behavior—and which perhaps earn Joan (represented by a detail of William Nicholson’s painting *The Misses Margaret and Diana Low*) placement on the front cover, while Richard (represented by Adelaide Cole Chase’s *The Violinist* [*John Murray*]) is consigned to the back cover.

The title of the original 1979 volume comes from Richard’s pronouncement—relatively early in the series—that the Maples have “come very far” in their marriage and “have only a little way more to go” (56)—a pronouncement that errs by ten years and thirteen stories. Over the course of the volume, as their marriage hangs on, the Maples travel various paths, together and apart: vacations, infidelity, sublimating, and finally separation. Until the final story, neither seems to be capable of achieving the physical or emotional distance necessary to disengage, despite their adulteries; nor is either able to make the concessions that would move them closer to lasting reconciliation. Their marriage provides a shelter of “cooling leafiness” (11)—the quality Updike derives from their name—at least during certain seasons together. However, whatever forces pull the Maples together and push them apart, the stories move them artfully and inexorably toward divorce. “That a marriage ends is less than ideal,” Updike remarks, “but all things end under heaven, and if temporality is held to be invalidating, then nothing real succeeds. The moral of these stories is that all blessings are mixed” (11).

Even the volume’s earliest story, “Snowing in Greenwich Village,” conflates the Maples’ shared joy in their early years with the depiction of Richard as susceptible to sexual temptation, finding it easy to come close to adultery. The forces of eros flare more fully in Updike’s choice for the subsequent story—“Wife-Wooing”—one of those “internal evidence” additions. Its vibrant Joycean wordplay and lyrical celebration of desire contrasts with the sedate domestic scene the

narrator hopes to transform, with the result being sexual frustration and resentment, dissipated the next evening with an unexpected reward. Emotional distance becomes the focus when the Maples are consigned to perpendicular tables in "Giving Blood" and separate beds on holiday in "Twin Beds in Rome," the next stories. In the former, which jumps seven years into the marriage, the jealousy and resentment that spur a verbal bloodletting on a trip into Boston give way to a restored tenderness after giving blood, yet such renewed innocence quickly dissipates when Richard's egocentric self-pity emerges to overshadow the aura of shared sacrifice, a transformation that Joan neatly captures in the last lines, summing up the relative marital costs: "We'll both pay" (51). The "kill or cure" trip to Rome ends similarly (57), though their resolve to separate only fuels Richard's desire to cling to the rootless vine of their marriage, perpetuating the "rhythm of apathy and renewal" in subsequent stories (68).

The ever harsher duet of pettiness, doubt, accusation, defensiveness, and infidelity continues in the volume's middle stories, culminating in "Waiting Up," where Joan deals with the repercussions of Richard's infidelity, and "Eros Rampant," with its energetic anatomizing of how "[t]he Maples' house is full of love" (113), in a variety of forms and with turbulent effects. "Eros Rampant" contains the revelation of Joan's infidelities, unsettling Richard, whose anxiety brings him to "the lip of a vortex" (127) and upsets the precarious domestic balance, which endures through the elaborate gamesmanship of deceptions in "The Red-Herring Theory" and Richard's experiment in renewal via celibacy in "Sublimating." This purported cure for their problems turns into an ongoing war of wills: though Richard relishes the control of his power to refuse sex, the sublimated erotic energies that emerge in his merciless pruning of the yews illustrate the destructive effects that outbalance the cleansing derived from enforced sexual hiatus.

A three-year gap occurs between "Sublimating" and "Nakedness," a montage of allusion and memory bracketed by the Maples' encounter with nude sunbathers at the beach and the aftermath that evening in their bedroom. "Separating," Updike's most anthologized story after "A & P," follows with its poignant chronicle of the couple's painful task of revealing to their children that they are embarking on a trial separation. Richard becomes "a Houdini making things snug before his escape" (179), engaging in home repair projects to keep his emotions in check, which he proves unable to do at the dinner during which the details of the couple's plans are revealed to the assembled children. Though Joan assumes control, Richard must carry out the duty with their eldest son, Dickie, who arrives later that evening. Dickie's simple but unanswerable question—"Why?"—gives

rise to a powerful, lyrical ending, evoking wind and emptiness, along with the “knife thrust” of guilt that follows Richard’s epiphany: that after all the inexorable motion and concerted effort to make this separation happen, he can no longer account for their fading love and inability to continue their enduring relationship.

In its final movement, the collection includes “Gesturing,” series editor Katrina Kenison’s inclusion from Updike’s award-winners for *Best American Short Stories of the Century* (1999), which Updike edited. Another story that illustrates Updike’s talents in weaving images into a thematic fabric of memory, “Gesturing” features Richard living on his own, with a view of Boston’s John Hancock building, whose recurrent construction problems seem emblematic of his failed marriage and a counterpoint to those gestures that endure in memory, etched like the bit of wedding vows he finds rendered into the apartment window’s glass. Before the legal separation that provides the original volume with closure, Updike seams in “Divorcing: A Fragment,” in which Richard seems kinder, healthier, and stronger: in most of the collection, Joan fills that role. Finally, however, it is up to Richard to preserve the “numb marching forward” (214)—language evoking the title of an earlier story, “Marching through Boston”—toward a no-fault divorce in “Here Come the Maples,” which ends with a surprisingly gentle inversion of their wedding ceremony. Even as the proceedings finally sunder the legal bonds, the forces that have impacted their relationship—integrated metaphorically with clever reference to an article on physics that Richard finds on the subway—still hold sway: love, habit, time, and boredom all act as vectors of force in contrary directions. Correspondingly, the narrative forces at play in the volume produce coherence and disjunction in their own way within the “collection of linked stories”—as Updike calls it in the foreword (12)—yet the various bonds among the stories are strong enough to weave them into a coherent but disjunctive marital history, one to which “Grandparenting” is easily added as a coda without disrupting the achievement of the original.

Thus, instead of ending with the kiss that Richard bestows upon Joan after their no-fault divorce—a brilliant bit of symmetry—the expanded collection concludes with “Grandparenting,” which picks up the Maples roughly a decade later, together for the birth of their first grandchild. Both have remarried, though their understanding of each other and the nuanced language they communicate in has endured. As Joan describes the birth to him, Richard understands the subtext of her words in a way that her new husband cannot. Richard has a genuine paternal desire to be present for the event, but his problematic competitive streak is at least partial motivation for wanting to share the event with Joan. As

the Maples are brought together once again, they inevitably share memories of their past, with Joan serving for Richard as “a pair of worn binoculars” focused on these shared experiences from “the transparent mass of lost time.” Like the grandchild on the way, these memories are “jointly and privately theirs,” and ultimately this story confirms that the forces that animated their marriage are still strong (241). As the story closes, with Joan on the road home and Richard alone with his daughter, Richard is struck by the realization that—despite the adherence he feels when holding his grandson and namesake—“Nobody belongs to us, except in memory” (255), acknowledging our precarious hold on human bonds but affirming memory’s power to take hold of the past.

“As a lover of short stories,” Susan Minot remarked in a *Granta* tribute to Updike, “I find his Maple stories the most touching of his works,” and this new edition of the stories affirms their central place in Updike’s canon as an integrated record of an enduring though conflicted relationship whose characters deserve recognition on par with the more celebrated protagonists of Updike’s novels. As Jane Barnes has noted, the Maples series contains “the best stories from any given stage of Updike’s developing perception” (87); it is appropriate that the new volume updating them is published nearly concurrently with Updike’s final volume of short stories, and hopefully as a prelude to a second volume of his collected short fiction that at some point will provide us with a companion to *The Early Stories: 1953–1975* for posterity. With most of the thirteen Maples stories composed before 1976 already gathered and dispersed among the different sections of *The Early Stories*, five remain to be given a new context in a similar definitive gathering of stories from the remainder of Updike’s distinguished career, which provided us with a full glass of masterful stories, toasting the small corners of the visible world and shedding new light among the shadows.

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John Updike, 1932–2009

J. D. McCLATCHY

When one of its 250 members dies, the American Academy of Arts and Letters, at a subsequent general meeting, asks another member to compose a tribute in honor of the deceased colleague. The Academy consulted with John Updike's widow, Martha, on the choice of a speaker, and she suggested the poet and critic J. D. McClatchy, who was then serving as the Academy's president. The following remarks were, thus, delivered at the meeting in November 2009. Among the Academy's guests for this occasion were Martha Updike and editor Judith Jones.

John Updike was a member of this Academy for 45 years. He was not quite the youngest person ever elected, but nearly. Over those years he was awarded prizes (including the William Dean Howells Medal and the Gold Medal for Fiction), he served on every conceivable committee, he presided as both Secretary and Chancellor, he gave the Blashfield Address, and he edited *A Century of Arts and Letters*, the Academy's centennial history. I dare say he knew more about this institution than anyone among us today, and loved it enough to both cherish its traditions and gently mock them. On the one hand, he parodied us wittily in his *Bech* books; on the other, he once wrote a magazine squib about 155th Street as his favorite spot in New York City. "Manhattan's claustrophobic closeness lifts in this vicinity," he wrote, "the buildings throw short shadows, and the neighborhood's stately elements—the terrace, the walled cemetery, the Episcopal church across Broadway—stand as a kind of pledge the past once made to the future." And when he wrote about what happens inside this building . . . well, here is his sardonic little sonnet from 1992, called "Academy":

The shuffle up the stairs betrays our age:
sunk to polite senility our fire

and tense perfectionism, our curious rage
to excel, to exceed, to climb still higher.
Our battles were fought elsewhere; here, this peace
betrays and cheats us with a tame reward—
a klieg-lit stage and numbered chairs, an ease
of prize and praise that sets sheath to the sword.

The naked models, the Village gin, the wife
whose hot tears sped the novel to its end,
the radio that leaked distracting life
into the symphony's cerebral blend.
A struggle it was, and a dream; we wake
to bright bald honors. Tell us our mistake.

At my age, I am rarely surprised any longer by newspaper headlines. But I was genuinely shocked, last January, to read of John Updike's death. Why had I thought *he* would live forever, when all of us merely think *we* will? It was only later, reading the work of his last months, that one could see him wondering the same thing, watching with a wry detachment and a sudden fresh upwelling of old memories what had suddenly become his own last act unfold. Just a month before he died, he wrote a poem about two Shillington High School classmates of his who must that day unexpectedly have walked into the lamplight of idle consciousness, and whom he addresses—after a very specific account of their lives a half century earlier—this way:

Dear friends of childhood, classmates, thank you,
scant hundred of you, for providing a
sufficiency of human types: beauty,
bully, hanger-on, natural,
twin, and fatso—all a writer needs,
all there in Shillington, its trolley cars
and little factories, cornfields and trees,
leaf fires, snowflakes, pumpkins, valentines.

To think of you brings tears less caustic
than those the thought of death brings. Perhaps
we meet our heaven at the start and not
the end of life. Even then were tears
and fear and struggle, but the town itself
draped in plain glory the passing days.

This is like a fable of his career: to have taken the types life offers, and rendered them with such detail as to make a moral allegory of the ordinary. And those final phrases—*plain glory* and *passing days*—were his abiding themes, despite the lavish ways he used to evoke them. No writer since his beloved Nabokov had manipulated, massaged, and mastered English prose as John Updike did. He laid down sentences like marble inlay in a grand corridor that led to the inner recesses of the heart. To linger again over those sentences is to admire a virtuosity so rare and exhilarating that we sometimes forget it was in service to something considerably beyond its own giddy pleasures.

But even before they got to the new sentences, writers picking up a just-published book by John Updike would invariably panic. The print size on the list of previous publications got smaller over the years to accommodate his titles. After five dozen of them, I think even the experts were confused about the exact number. Their range was prodigious—the novels and story collections, the poems and essays—as was his instinct to surprise us with a new narrative experiment or with an expertise in something obscure and compelling. But scanning those columns of books, what was most daunting at the heart of them was the Rabbit Angstrom books, long since properly gathered into a single massive volume that stands without question as the greatest novel of postwar America.

Early on, he told an interviewer, “My subject is the American Protestant small-town middle class. I like middles. It is in middles that extremes clash, where ambiguity restlessly rules.” As a realist, he knew that the novelist’s task is not merely the accumulation but the illumination of details. And that, in turn, is accomplished not merely by a keen observation of the murky secrets repressed behind the bright façade, but by revealing that tension between inner and outer in sentences of astonishing lyrical grace and rhetorical power. If sex and religion preoccupied many of his chronicles of American life, it is because he wanted to discover how we cling to the moment and to something beyond the moment, or what he once called “the tension and guilt of being human.”

His least ambiguous faith, of course, was in language itself. But for a novelist who dealt so often with infidelity, he had a religious temperament. In a foreword to one of his favorite novels, Thornton Wilder’s *The Eighth Day*, John said of Wilder that he “kept religion’s bias—its basic gaiety,” and in the novel itself, Wilder says that “faith is an ever-widening pool of clarity, fed from springs beyond the margin of consciousness.” A bias that clarifies, a joy on the margins—these are about as good a definition of a contemporary American’s religion as any. John wouldn’t have wanted to be in any world but a fallen one, and one that had fallen

in a peculiarly American way, with our Puritan roots, with our evangelical fringes, with our restless, greedy, generous ambitions. Even in what we don't know, we know more than we suspect, *are* more than we hope. John Cheever once said that the characters in Updike's novels perform their lives in an environment suffused with a grandeur that escapes them.

In Harry Angstrom, he embodied all of these contradictions. Rabbit is one of literature's great characters—a rabbit and angst-ridden antihero who thought Ronald Reagan was like God in that “you never knew how much he knew, nothing or everything.” In the Rabbit tetralogy, Updike used everything to explore the nothing. “Boys are playing basketball around a telephone pole with a backboard bolted to it. Legs, shouts. The scrape and snap of Keds on loose alley pebbles seems to catapult their voices high into the moist March air blue above the wires.” So *Rabbit, Run* opens, with Harry watching them play. “He stands there thinking, the kids keep coming, they keep crowding you up.” Hundreds of pages later—pages with the amplitude and address of the great nineteenth-century novels—*everything* has happened (happened in suburban beds and convenience stores and cars and sailboats, under copper beeches and on golf courses) until the nothing happens, and we look back on Rabbit's life as our own, our century's, our culture's. It is our great anatomy of desire. In the Rabbit books, Updike wrote of an American's empty dreams and passionate loneliness. The dreams are empty so that there is room to move around in them, to change them. The loneliness is passionate because each of us falls in love with being alone.

Few writers are given the privilege of writing down their time. And beyond his skills at the typewriter, Updike was a true bookman. His longtime editor at Knopf, Judith Jones, remembers his sending in a new manuscript every year, and considering it a point of honor that it make money. But there was never an agent, a contract, or an advance. He cared only about the book. He pestered the art department to design what was in his mind's eye. He had top stain and full-cloth bindings to the end. In the days of letterpress, he would pick up the first copy of a new novel, smell the pages, and run his hand over the type to feel the ink.

He was also a patient writer, a practical one. As *Rabbit, Run*, which appeared in 1960, was being readied for publication, he became privately worried that its raw take on things like sex might get him hauled into local courts across the land. He had a family, after all, and tuitions to pay. So he suggested to Mr. Knopf that the firm's lawyers read the manuscript. They did, and came back with pages of anxious notes. Mr. Knopf telephoned John with the bad news, but was told that John was teaching Sunday school class and couldn't be disturbed. In the end,

much of what readers of the day would have considered to be smut was deleted from the novel, and John waited patiently as, edition by edition, over fifteen years or so, bits of it were folded, like beaten egg white, back into the original batter. By the time the whole original text was finally between covers, the temper of the time had changed, and nobody ever noticed what had been done.

John Updike was, in every sense, our first man of letters, a man made of words which he chose—in ways always surprising and sublime—to give back to us, shaped like ourselves, like our lives, our sorry hearts. He let us see and understand them, love and wonder at their textures and terrors. His books, in the poet's phrase, beheld "Nothing that is not there and the nothing that is."

There is now an empty chair in this room, and always will be.

Tribute to Dad

DAVID UPDIKE

These words were delivered at a public tribute to John Updike that took place in the Celeste Bartos Forum of the New York Public Library on March 19, 2009. Among the twelve speakers were Sonny Mehta, chairman and editor-in-chief of the Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group; David Remnick, editor of the New Yorker; Judith Jones, Updike's longtime editor at Alfred A. Knopf; Lorrie Moore, short story writer and novelist; and Roger Angell, writer and one of Updike's editors at the New Yorker. David Updike was the final speaker in the program.

Thank you for all of those wonderful tributes to my father, and thank you to the organizers for giving me a chance to add my own. I am sure he would agree that his career was blessed with wonderful editors, and you have been fortunate to have heard from five of them. That said, I should tell you, however, that this past fall, when I mentioned to him that something I wrote was being rather lightly edited and I hoped they weren't taking it too easy on me, he said, "That's good—the best editors are the ones who don't want to change a thing."

I want to introduce you to my father's family—his wife, Martha, and her sons Jason, Teddy, and John. My father had four children, of which I am one. My wife, Wambui, is here, as well as my sister Elizabeth and her husband, Tete; my brother, Michael; my sister Miranda and her husband, Donald; and of course, our mother, John's first wife, Mary, and her husband, Robert Weatherall. Five of my father's seven grandsons are also present—Sawyer and Trevor, Seneca and Kai, and my own son, Wesley. Missing are the two eldest, Anoff and Kwame.

Here in spirit, too, are my father's own parents, Wesley Russell Updike, a high school math teacher and coach, and his wife, Linda Grace Hoyer, a bookish farm

girl who gave her only child his first inklings of a creative life beyond their small Pennsylvania town. Their son, *Jahnnny*, as they pronounced it, was not famous in 1950—he was a skinny, brainy boy bursting with creative energy, an aspiring cartoonist who also suffered from asthma, psoriasis, and a stammer, and in the high school hierarchy felt himself a considerable step down from the jocks, the athletes and their glamorous girlfriends.

Despite being ranked high in his class, he was not accepted at Princeton—admissions office take note—and so went to Harvard instead, and flourished there, in class and on the *Lampoon*. But an unexpected obstacle remained to his graduation: all Harvard graduates must be able to swim, and he could not. Inhibited as a child by the state of his imperfect skin, and despite the fact that his own father was, for a time, a high school swimming coach, he had shied away from public swimming pools and never learned. And so he dutifully went to swimming classes in the Indoor Athletic Building, and eventually managed two lengths of the pool—an achievement he seemed as proud of later as graduating summa cum laude. And for the rest of his life he swam with what I would describe as a rather studied but confident dog paddle.

In an art history class in his sophomore year, he met a smart and beautiful woman two years his senior, wooed her with kindness and wit, and spent his senior year in an off-campus apartment as a married man. His writing career began, as you know, at the *New Yorker*, but although he was a prolific Talk of the Town reporter, he was not yet famous then, either, and it took a lot of confidence and courage to pack his wife and two very small children into a car and drive north to set up shop in the small Massachusetts town of Ipswich in 1957. He borrowed money from his not so wealthy parents to buy a house and occasionally drove back to New York to write another Talk piece to bolster his income, but had begun to publish light verse, short stories, one novel, and then another.

Hints of recognition, then fame, began to appear in our small-town life: interviewers from New York, articles and photographs in magazines, visiting Russians in fur coats and funny hats. But for someone who was getting famous, my father didn't seem to work overly hard: he was still asleep when we went to school and was often already home when we got back. When we appeared unannounced at his office—on the second floor of a building he shared with a dentist, accountants, and the Dolphin Restaurant—he always seemed happy and amused to see us and stopped typing to talk and dole out some money for movies. But as soon as we were out the door, we could hear the typing resume, clattering with us down the stairs like a train gathering steam.

As it grew, he wore his fame lightly, as his due, like one of his well-worn sweaters, hanging limply on his frame, thin at the elbows. He loved public institutions: libraries, schools, the post office—letters arriving and departing, the simple act of completion, dropping it in the slot. I did this for him this past January when he couldn't make it downtown himself—a small typed letter, a final correction for an English publisher who was reprinting the Maples stories. He had reread them in proof, he told me, “not without some pleasure.” He was eager that this small letter, a final, important word in their correspondence, get in the mail, the truck, the plane—on its way.

He played in the same poker group on Wednesday nights for more than fifty years, along with the local cobbler, a doctor, the owner of the auto supply store. He learned to play golf on a couple of scruffy local courses and looked most at home there, most himself. Later he joined a fancy old country club, but he always seemed slightly ill at ease there, like someone who had wandered into the wrong cocktail party and was afraid of being found out. He would worry about slow play—about slowing down the stalwart regulars who were coming up behind us—and would sometimes annoy me at the first hint of delay by rushing over, asking them if we were holding them up, and then letting them play through.

In late October we played at the same marshy course where he had learned the game, my brother and father and I and a friend, but he looked a little frail and had a tough time on a long par four, and I watched from a distance as he topped a couple of fairway woods before he finally caught hold of one. “Come on, Dad,” I muttered to myself, “hit the Goddamned ball!” But he had a way of feigning disinterest in a match until it really mattered, and by the last hole, the match tied, I noticed in him a gathering concentration, a newfound focus. Politely competitive and gracious in defeat, he far preferred to be gracious in victory. He hit a good drive and a “useful” second, twenty feet short of the green. Our opponents were up in the familiar, ball-grabbing apple trees and I, after a good drive, had muffed my second into a greenside bunker. I watched him as he bounced a low, workmanlike chip to twelve feet, and while the rest of us bungled our way to sixes, he calmly two-putted for a five. He walked off the course quickly and wanted to get home—no soft drink or potato chips today. He was already ill. When he got home, exhausted and discouraged, he told Martha that it had been no fun and put his clubs away for the season. But I don't think he would mind my telling you that he won the last hole and match he ever played.

Among the last books he was reading was *Dreams from My Father*, by Barack Obama. He read it in bed in a sunny room overlooking the ocean, and I believe

for him it was especially poignant, trying to catch up on the history he was about to miss, that was about to leave port without him. He was well aware too, that Mr. Obama shares with his three eldest grandsons a parentage both of America and of Africa, of Kenya and Ghana, and so connected him in a personal, familial way to this transcendent moment in American history.

Through it all, his unkind illness, he remained, in his wife's words, dignified and noble—continued to be what his own father called a *gen'leman*. And he continued to shave—each day, my sisters noted, even when it was perilous to do so. And as he so often did, he left for us a glimmer, a gift of himself, of his own cherished life on this earth, heart and mind conjoined. This is from his last published story, “The Full Glass,” in the *New Yorker*, May 26, 2008:

As a child I would look at [my grandfather] and wonder how he could stay sane, being so close to his death. But actually, it turns out, Nature drips a little anesthetic into your veins each day that makes you think a day is as good as a year, and a year as long as a lifetime. The routines of living—the tooth-brushing and pill-taking, the flossing and the water glass, the matching of socks and the sorting of the laundry into the proper bureau drawers—wear you down.

I wake each morning with hurting eyeballs and with dread gnawing at my stomach—that blank drop-off at the end of the chute, that scientifically verified emptiness of the atom and the spaces between the stars. Nevertheless, I shave. Athletes and movie actors leave a little bristle now, to intimidate rivals or attract cavewomen, but a man of my generation would sooner go onto the street in his underpants than unshaven. The very hot washcloth, held against the lids for dry eye. The lather, the brush, the razor. The right cheek, then the left, feeling for missed spots along the jaw line, and next the upper lip, the sides and that middle dent called the philtrum, and finally the fussy section, where most cuts occur, between the lower lip and the knob of the chin. My hand is still steady, and the triple blades they make these days last forever. . . .

The shaving mirror hangs in front of a window overlooking the sea. The sea is always full, flat as a floor. Or almost: there is a delicate planetary bulge in it, supporting a few shadowy freighters and cruise ships making their motionless way out of Boston Harbor. At night, the horizon springs a rim of lights—more, it seems, every year. Winking airplanes from the corners of the earth descend on a slant, a curved groove in the air, toward the unseen airport in East Boston. My life-prolonging pills cupped in my left hand, I lift the glass, its water sweetened by its brief wait on the marble sink-top. If I can read this strange old guy's mind aright, he's drinking a toast to the visible world, his impending disappearance from it be damned.

Contributors' Notes

PETER J. BAILEY's B.A. thesis on Updike for the New School of Social Research in 1968 prompted Updike's response, "You've picked me up by the right handle, and I'm grateful"; Updike encouraged Bailey to revise and submit the essay to academic presses. *Rabbit (Un)Redeemed: The Drama of Belief in John Updike's Fiction* was published by Fairleigh Dickinson University Press in 2006. *Reading Stanley Elkin* (1985) and *The Reluctant Film Art of Woody Allen* (2001) are Bailey's other books. He is the secretary of The John Updike Society and teaches American literature, creative writing, and film studies at St. Lawrence University in Canton, N.Y.

ANN BEATTIE, a member of the American Academy of Arts and Letters, has been included in four O. Henry Award collections and John Updike's *Best American Short Stories of the Century*. She has written eighteen novels or story collections. *Mrs. Nixon: A Novelist Imagines a Life*, her most recent book, will be published by Scribner in November.

DONALD J. GREINER teaches American literature at the University of South Carolina, where he has held the chair of Carolina Distinguished Professor of English and has served as Interim Provost, Associate Provost, and Dean of Undergraduate Studies. He has published three books and dozens of articles on Updike, as well as books on Robert Frost, Stephen Crane, John Hawkes, Frederick Busch, and James Dickey. He is an Executive Editor of *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction*.

MICHAEL GRIFFITH is the author of three books of fiction, the most recent of which is *Trophy* (Northwestern University Press, 2011). His essays on literature have appeared in *Southern Review*, *Oxford American*, *Shenandoah*, *Southern Quarterly*, and elsewhere.

ROBERT M. LUSCHER is Professor of English and the department Graduate Program Chair at the University of Nebraska at Kearney. The author of *John Updike: A Study of the Short Fiction* and "Updike's Olinger Stories: New Light among the Shadows," he has also

published essays on Updike and his short fiction in the *Dictionary of Literary Biography* and the *Blackwell Companion to the American Short Story*. Beyond Updike, his scholarship focuses on the short story sequence, on which he has published essays on Ernest Gaines, Mary Wilkins Freeman, Clark Blaise, and Robert Olen Butler.

SYLVIE MATHÉ is Professor of American Literature at the Université de Provence (Aix-Marseille University, France). She is a graduate of the École normale supérieure in Paris, and she has previously taught at the University of Oxford, Yale University, Wellesley College, and MIT. She is the author of *John Updike: La nostalgie de l'Amérique* (Paris: Belin, 2002).

J. D. McCLATCHY is the author of six books of poems and three collections of prose. He has served as the editor of many books, including *The Vintage Book of Contemporary American Poetry*, and has written thirteen opera libretti that have been performed at the Metropolitan Opera, Covent Garden, La Scala, and elsewhere. McClatchy teaches at Yale University and is the editor of *Yale Review*. He lives in New York City and Stonington, Connecticut.

LILIANA M. NAYDAN completed her Ph.D. in English from Stony Brook University in 2011 and holds a lectureship at the University of Michigan. She is presently researching religious faith in American fiction written in the 1990s and in the aftermath of the 9/11 terrorist attacks.

JUDIE NEWMAN is Professor of American Studies at the University of Nottingham. Her recent publications include *Fictions of America: Narratives of Global Empire* (Routledge, 2007), and *Public Art, Memorials and Atlantic Slavery*, edited with Celeste-Marie Bernier (Routledge, 2009). *Utopia and Terror in Contemporary Fictions of America* will be published by Routledge in 2013.

WILLIAM H. PRITCHARD is the Henry Clay Folger Professor of English at Amherst College. A paperback edition of his book *Updike: America's Man of Letters* was published by University of Massachusetts Press in 2005.

DAVID UPDIKE is a professor of English at Roxbury Community College in Boston. He has written two collections of short stories, *Out on the Marsh* and *Old Girlfriends*, and numerous books for children, including a *Helpful Alphabet of Friendly Objects*, a collaborative project that combines his photographs and poems by his father. He lives in Cambridge, Massachusetts, with his wife, Wambui, and his son, Wesley.

SECOND BIENNIAL

John Updike Society Conference

Suffolk University, Boston, Mass., June 13-16, 2012

CALL FOR PAPERS

The Conference: Updike in Massachusetts

John Updike left Pennsylvania to attend Harvard in 1950. After graduating in 1954, he spent a year in England and two in New York before moving with his family to Ipswich, Mass., in 1957. He would make his home there, and in two other towns on the North Shore, Georgetown and Beverly Farms, for the rest of his life. Massachusetts and New England, thus, joined Pennsylvania as the setting for much of his writing.

This conference will combine panels with visits to sites connected to Updike's life and work. While plans are still being finalized, events scheduled at this point include a reception at Harvard University's Houghton Library, which houses Updike's papers; a trip to Salem, in conjunction with panels on the *Scarlet Letter* trilogy; and tours of Updike sites in Georgetown, Beverly Farms, and Boston—possibly even a side trip to Fenway Park, which celebrates its centennial birthday in 2012.

Proposals and Panels

We welcome proposals for papers on all aspects of Updike's life and work but are particularly interested in papers that focus on works set in the region, e.g., *Couples*, the novels of his *Scarlet Letter* trilogy, the *Witches of Eastwick* novels, *The Maples Stories*, or other relevant novels, short fiction, poetry, or nonfiction. One- or two-page proposals/abstracts for 15- to 20-minute papers should be titled **Updike Conference Proposal** and emailed by **November 8, 2011** to Program Director Bernard F. Rodgers, Jr. at brodgers@simons-rock.edu. Decisions will be announced by **December 8**. Papers presented will be considered for publication in *The John Updike Review*.

Moderators are also needed. Members wishing to serve in this capacity should contact Bernie Rodgers.

To present a paper or moderate a panel, participants must be members of The John Updike Society and register for the conference. For membership information, please see the Society's website at <http://blogs.iwu.edu/johnupdikesociety>.



Philip

ROTH

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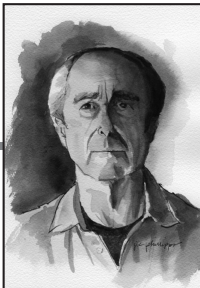
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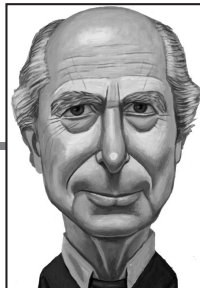
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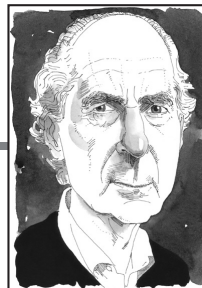
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