



VOLUME 4 | NUMBER 1

FALL 2015



The  
John Updike Review

VOLUME 4 | NUMBER 1

FALL 2015

*The John Updike Review* is published twice a year by the University of Cincinnati and the John Updike Society and is based at the University of Cincinnati, Department of English and Comparative Literature, McMicken Hall, Room 248, PO Box 210069, Cincinnati, OH 45221-0069. Copyright © 2015 by the University of Cincinnati.

ISSN: 2160-097X

ISBN: 978-0-9845038-5-8

Designed by: Barbara Neely Bourgoyne

Copyedited by: Gary Kass

Cover illustration: David Levine

Colophon: John Updike self-portrait. Copyright © The Estate of John Updike

#### **SUBSCRIPTIONS**

To subscribe to *The John Updike Review*, simply join The John Updike Society (<http://blogs.iwu.edu/johnupdikesociety/>). Membership dues for the 2016 calendar year are \$25 for regular members and \$20 for retirees and students. Membership includes a subscription to our biannual journal as well as access to an online database of all published material from the first issue up to the latest. Login information will be provided via email after verification of your payment. By logging into *The John Updike Review* website archives, you can browse the journal's entire list of full-length articles, book reviews, biographical updates, and more.

#### **SUBMISSIONS**

All submissions are welcome. Email your submission using the submit function on the website ([www.updikereview.com](http://www.updikereview.com)) or send directly to [james.schiff@uc.edu](mailto:james.schiff@uc.edu). You may also mail a hard copy of your submission to *The John Updike Review*/James Schiff, Editor/PO Box 210069/Cincinnati, OH 45221-0069.

*The John Updike Review* is available electronically on our website and—for institutional subscriptions—through EBSCO.



# The John Updike Review

VOLUME 4 | NUMBER 1

## EDITOR

James Schiff, University of Cincinnati

## MANAGING EDITOR

Nicola Mason, University of Cincinnati

## EDITORIAL BOARD

Peter J. Bailey, St. Lawrence University

Marshall Boswell, Rhodes College

Jack De Bellis, Lehigh University, emeritus

Biljana Dojčinović, University of Belgrade, Serbia

Donald J. Greiner, University of South Carolina, emeritus

Robert M. Luscher, University of Nebraska, Kearny

Sylvie Mathé, Aix-Marseilles Université

D. Quentin Miller, Suffolk University

Judie Newman, University of Nottingham

James Plath, Illinois Wesleyan University

William H. Pritchard, Amherst College



# The John Updike Review

## ESSAYS

- 1 Male Sexuality in John Updike's *Villages*  
BRIAN DUFFY
- 17 Betrayal by Sandstone Farmhouse: Forgiveness in Updike's  
"Pigeon Feathers" and "The Cats"  
PETER J. BAILEY
- 31 John Updike in Dialogue with J. D. Salinger  
DAVID PENN
- 43 Updike in Love  
DONALD J. GREINER

## THREE WRITERS ON *THE WIDOWS OF EASTWICK*

- 63 Updike's Black Widows: *The Widows of Eastwick*  
JUDIE NEWMAN
- 77 *The Widows of Eastwick: Updike's Book of the Dead . . .*  
*or Rather, Dying*  
JAMES PLATH
- 85 A Second Look at *The Widows of Eastwick: Aging Women,*  
*Assuaging Guilt, and Updike's Sequels*  
JAMES SCHIFF

95    *Updike Bibliography, 2009–2015*  
      **JAMES SCHIFF**

115   **Contributors' Notes**

# Male Sexuality in John Updike's *Villages*

BRIAN DUFFY

A consensus emerged from the reviews of John Updike's *Villages* (2004) that it was one of his weaker novels. The novel did gain the approval of some reviewers ("A graceful panoramic depiction of individuals and their communities," *Kirkus Reviews*; "A very good novel," *Houston Chronicle*) and even from a notable English novelist, Fay Weldon, who praised the novel's "wealth of connections and imagery," as well as the quality of the prose. There was some praise elsewhere, too, but in most cases this was attenuated by the recurring criticism that Updike was reworking too-familiar material, and that the still fine prose could not compensate for an annoying sense of déjà vu. And there were those who found the novel simply to be bad, as was the case with Michiko Kakutani in the *New York Times*, who, having detailed its faults, concluded: "In the end, this all makes for a narrow, claustrophobic novel—a novel that amounts to little more than a weary exercise in the recycling of frayed and shop-worn material." Even Updike scholars have not been enthusiastic. Peter J. Bailey does not "believe it to be among Updike's most successful novels" ("Autobiography" 83), while James Schiff includes *Villages* among the late Updike novels that are "considered, for now, minor," and deems *Villages* itself a novel we are unlikely to remember ("Two Neglected" 45). Probably the clearest sign of the tepid scholarly response is the near absence of academic publications on *Villages*.<sup>1</sup>

Readers will, rightly, disregard an unsuccessful novel, but scholars of Updike would do well to return to the lesser works with, if not their initial keenness on encountering a new Updike text, at least a professional interest in dissecting the work as a valid part of the author's literary output and situating it within that

overall oeuvre.<sup>2</sup> The smaller merits of a work of art do not make it less useful in gaining insights into the meanings and significance of a lifetime's artistic output. Indeed, in the case of *Villages*, it is precisely the flaws identified by reviewers and critics that may well allow refined perspectives of Updike's work to emerge. One failing of *Villages* was deemed to be Updike's returning yet again to the adulterous adventures of the middle-class suburban American male, with the implication that sex is not only the overbearing force but the overriding value in adult male life. Six of the novel's fourteen chapters are entitled "Village Sex," as we follow the protagonist through the three villages that marked the important stages of his life: childhood, early adulthood to middle age, and middle age to old age. Above all, it is the mechanical and compulsive male sexuality in *Villages* that raised the ire of reviewers. However, it is this very sexuality that is worthy of investigation. This essay will consider the representation of male sexuality in *Villages* in order to discover what it might tell us about the evolution in Updike's thinking as he engaged once again with one of "the three great secret things."<sup>3</sup>

*Villages* is narrated in the third person from the perspective of seventy-year-old Owen Mackenzie. One can imagine many themes that might be addressed in a novel about an elderly man—his diminishing physical and mental capacities, his adapting to life when his professional career is over, his mortality, his relationship with his wife if he has one or with solitude if he is alone—and the novel does indeed address some of these typical experiences of an aging middle-class Western male. But Updike has only tangentially written a novel about old age. Owen may be very conscious that each passing day is "one more of a diminishing finite supply" (5), but what is most on his mind, and what Updike is most concerned to explore, is sex. The novel, aptly, is bookended by sexual scenes. It begins with Owen being wakened by his (second) wife in the morning, then trying to find "the way back to sleep." He remembers one of his sexual conquests, "Alissa or Vanessa or Karen or Faye, who shared with him the town of Middle Falls, Connecticut, in the 'sixties and 'seventies. His hand gripping his drowsy prick, he relives having one of them beneath him, beside him, above him" (5). In the final scene, Owen is awake in the middle of the night, his wife asleep beside him. Resorting again to memories of his sexual experiences, he seeks comfort in masturbation: "in his mind's eye he runs the images of those moist, knowing engulfments, those grotesque postures of submission" (320).

This framing encloses a novel in which Owen's sexuality generates the self-defining experiences of his life. After the typical sexual fumbblings and initiations of adolescence, Owen, as an MIT sophomore, begins to intuit his feelings about

sex as he watches, in a burlesque theater, the gyrations of “a glittering woman . . . in fewer and fewer clothes” in a “pantomime of orgasm.” Despite the bawdy atmosphere and the “half-amused” performance of the strippers, their “routines [do] not seem lifeless to Owen”; they are, he feels, “enactments of what was at bottom most real” (79). He will come to see copulation as a “powerful and highly prioritized . . . event” (106), and will go on to pay due homage to its realness and power by drifting away from the responsibilities of marriage and fatherhood and into a series of affairs with married women in Middle Falls, where he lives with his first wife, Phyllis. These are the affairs that earn the title “Village Sex,” in which love, a tenuous factor in Owen’s first affair, gives way to a frenzied pursuit of new sexual experiences. But the affairs are not enough for Owen. Initially chastened by guilt after the first affair, he is launched back into “the sexual seethe” (106) when felled by his business partner’s wife. Seeing the opportunities offered by the changing sexual mores of the late 1960s, “[h]e resolved in his heart to become a seducer” (186). So it is that, in the early 1970s, the affairs are augmented by one-off sexual encounters with young women he meets at business conferences. Although “the sensation of conquest faded, overnight, to nothing,” Owen cannot stop himself from “explor[ing] the opportunities of a night far from home” (225, 224). Back in Middle Falls, he takes advantage of the secluded room he works in to have regular sex with one of his staff, Karen, who, delivering documents to him there, “saw the room for what it was, a chamber for fucking” (251). And when he isn’t having sex, he’s thinking about it, fantasizing in one instance, as he lies awake at night, about a sexual threesome, and masturbating beside the sleeping Phyllis.

This is but a glimpse into the all-pervasive nature of the male pursuit of sex in *Villages*. It may be surprising that Updike, in his early seventies, was interested enough in the topic to write a novel about it, having already covered it so thoroughly in his fiction. But he was, which is reason enough to scrutinize the representation of male sexuality at the core of his protagonist, a sexuality that is seen to determine his ultimate destiny. *Villages* has the added relevance of being Updike’s last extended examination of the topic, and even has a valedictory ring about it: after Owen’s life of village sex, the final chapter is entitled “Village Wisdom,” and we suspect that the wisdom Owen has gained from a life dramatically shaped by his sexual nature is also Updike’s wisdom.<sup>4</sup> Three characteristics of the novel’s representation of male sexuality are prominent: its seigneurial tendencies, its destructive nature, and its importance to male identity.

Updike often discusses male sexuality in seigneurial terms, in other words through a metaphorical language that sees male sex with women in terms of own-

ership, possession, land, territory, power, mastery. In an essay entitled “Women,” Updike considers that, in the budding sexuality of boys and girls, “motionlessness was [the girl’s] essence, and part of the male job was . . . to reduce her to the stillness that permits possession” (*Odd Jobs* 65). Updike’s view of the roles of vigorous male and passive female is echoed in his response to a magazine editor’s request for his definition of female sexuality: “When the sexual functions ripen, the male assignment becomes penetration and distribution, the female duty acceptance and retention.” He continues: “In females, . . . sexuality is more central and more buried than in males. Love, then,” he offers, instinctively assuming the male perspective, “becomes an exploration toward a muffled center, a quest whose terrain is the woman and the grail her deep self” (*Picked-Up Pieces* 17). It’s a small step from the medieval imagery of quest, with its implied conquest of women as territory, to the Reverend Marshfield’s notion, in *A Month of Sundays*, of “the modern American man” as “phallic knight” in his adultery (42).

Elizabeth Tallent, in a chapter entitled “Women and Fields” in her book on Updike, observes how “[c]ertain images prevail throughout a writer’s life,” and remarks that “[f]or Updike, one such central image is the metaphor . . . equating a woman with terrain” (25). She goes on to offer a number of examples from Updike’s fiction, but focuses primarily on *Of the Farm*, citing first this passage: “My wife is wide, wide-hipped and long-waisted, and, surveyed from above, gives an impression of terrain, of a wealth whose ownership imposes upon my own body a sweet strain of extension; entered, she yields a variety of landscapes.” One of these landscapes imagined by the protagonist, Joey, “a gray French castle complexly fitted to a steep green hill whose terraces imitate turrets,” reveals the seigneurial flavor of Updikean male sexuality (*Of the Farm* 46). If, for Tallent (who quotes more extensively from this passage), the swirl of land and landscape metaphors that follow are the narrator’s attempt to seize and fix the identity of his wife, it is also the case that, “[a]s land, she can be conquered as inevitably as the field is mowed” (Tallent 28). As Joey drives a tractor across the field, the terrain imagery feeds his sexual arousal: “. . . and I, rocked back and forth on the iron seat shaped like a woman’s hips, alone in nature, . . . discovered in myself a swelling which I idly permitted to stand, thinking of Peggy. My wife is a field” (*Of the Farm* 59). Peggy, as motionless and passively there as land and nature, is to be taken, used, and mastered.

Tallent is prescient in her analysis: she notes that the images that recur in a writer’s fiction “serve as auguries of future preoccupations as well as reflections of past ones” (25). Twenty years after her book, Updike was writing *Villages*, and his

preoccupations with male sexuality were as intense as ever. Moreover, Owen and Phyllis's wedding night is described in metaphorical terms that echo uncannily the "wide-hipped" passage highlighted by Tallent: "surveying the moonlit field of flesh of which he had taken legal possession that afternoon, . . . he knelt between her legs and combed her luxuriant pussy, now his, as if preparing a fleecy lamb for sacrifice . . . Still kneeling, possessed of the privileges of a husband, . . . he surveyed the glimmering moonlit wealth of her" (*Villages* 108, 109). In the forty-odd years between *Of the Farm* and *Villages*, Updike's imagery of sexuality remained remarkably constant—for some, no doubt, dismayingly so. It is male sexuality as seigneurial in all its wolfishness: Owen, as owner of his property, straddles Phyllis, "with her motionless gaze" (109), who is to be disposed of as he desires. She is "his prize, his captive princess" (107); he is the entitled male exercising his rights and privileges over the prostrate female, the preening landowner intoxicated by the "wealth" of his fertile lands. And all this in the knowledge of his power as master over the sacrificial "lamb" who is powerless to save herself. Phyllis, indeed, has internalized the rules of this patriarchal order and knows she must submit and accept her fate: "His impression grew that he was looking down at someone somehow slain" (109). Victim though she may be, she will not play the part Owen wills on her in his proprietorial *mise-en-scène*: disliking the "[t]heatrical" nature and "showing off" of Owen's foreplay, she tells him, "Let's just do it" (108). The power relations that underpin Updikean seigneurial sexuality are also on view outside of marriage. Dissatisfied with the sexually reserved Phyllis, Owen fulfills his fantasies with the Middle Falls women with whom he has affairs. He regrets that he "failed . . . to use [Alissa's] compliance, her spells of tranced utter slavery, to the hilt" (202), and, seeking to conquer a new neighbor while having an affair with Vanessa, he fantasizes about "bringing this naïve woman to Vanessa like a live doe slung over his shoulders . . . The two women would adore him, vying for him, competing in feats of slavishness" (248–49).

The imperious nature of this Updikean male sexuality takes on a more sinister cast as Owen gives full expression to his sexual compulsions. Indeed, the sinister turn seems to be the necessary and inevitable outcome of the rapacious male sexuality on display in *Villages*. Unchecked by a moral code that would assure his fidelity to Phyllis and commitment to his children, and with a seemingly endless supply of women offering to fulfill his sexual desires, Owen reveals himself ultimately to be destructive: the death that occurs in *Villages* is the direct consequence of his insatiable and aggressive sexual behavior. The victim is Phyllis, and though the "slain" sacrificial "lamb" of their wedding night dies in a road accident while driving

alone, Owen is the perpetrator. The novel's witness to this, and Owen's accuser, is Ed Mervine, Owen's business partner and longtime observer of Owen's marriage, as well as secret admirer of Phyllis. As the two men look down at Phyllis's dead body, Ed leans over Owen's shoulder: "Ed breathed close behind his ear. 'You did this, you fuckhead'" (299).

The reader does not dissent from Ed's judgment, as the novel has carefully laid out the path that leads from Owen as womanizer to Owen as Phyllis's killer, a path signposted by markers of his destructive male sexuality. The first marker is the wedding-night scene itself, which contains within it the portent of Phyllis's death, as if the manner of Owen's possessing her is the beginning of the end of the Phyllis that existed before Owen, and the beginning of her slow spiritual death. It is a scene of quiet farewell as Phyllis lies in her parents' summer cottage, passively awaiting her fate:

What was Phyllis doing, with her motionless gaze? Saying goodbye to the moon? This small bare house, strange to him, to her was full of girlhood summer memories and quaint souvenirs . . . of a bygone family life. . . .

His impression grew that he was looking down at someone somehow slain. The weak moon-shadows of window muntins cast a net over her white form. Her sunken eyes seemed unseeing. (109)

The leave-taking, the white and "slain" body, the motionlessness, the sunken unseeing eyes, the net that suggests a shroud and that anticipates the blanket that covers the dead Phyllis lying beside her overturned car—here is Owen beginning the work that will ultimately kill Phyllis, in a death of a thousand cuts. He is a serial womanizer, humiliating her as he sleeps with the women of their social circle (the novel makes clear that the village knows of his affairs); he is sexually demanding of her, although aware of her reticence ("You seemed to expect alarmingly much," she says as they look back on their failed marriage [289]); and he knowingly allows Phyllis, his intellectual superior, to sink under the drudgery of motherhood and housework ("It's what you've made me," she tells him [165]). Summing up her life with him, she says: "I'm a failure in every respect except that I bore four healthy children" (259). Her physical death is merely the dramatized analogue of her spiritual death, both at the hands of her husband.

Elsewhere, in language and imagery, a violent streak in male sexuality is evident. Entering Alissa from behind, Owen is struck by an image that seems one of self-revelation and self-description: "*This is the neck*, Owen thought, *the executioner sees*" (202). Picking up on a remark by Alissa that "[a] woman would rather be

hit on the head than ignored,” Owen finds that “the idea of [hitting her] fed the brutish tenderness with which he contemplated her back as he pumped away at her” (208). One of the women with whom he has a one-night stand tells him that his over-vigorous sex is “hurting her”; he apologizes, “but in fact he was not sorry, he enjoyed the idea of hurting her with just himself” (233). And with Vanessa, “[h]e had, now and then, an unindulged impulse to twist her wrists, to beat her, knowing she could take it” (247). This is the violence of thought, language, and imagery—where male sex is exclusively a matter of “fucking,” “pumping,” and “hump[ing]” (233)—that paves the way to Phyllis’s death, and to the conclusion that it is Owen’s insatiable sexual appetite that kills her.<sup>5</sup> Ultimately, it is his own guilt that confirms this judgment. Owen dreams of his second wife, Julia, lying dead, apparently a suicide, but “in reality a murder committed by him” (6), and he has further anguishing dreams of losing Julia and of her driving dangerously fast. His second marriage of twenty-five years is “haunted” by the knowledge that “[h]e and Julia wrecked two existing households, and caused a death” (304, 312). Updike did not make a habit of violently killing off the main characters in his domestic middle-class realist novels, telling an interviewer: “I detect in myself a wish not to have *false* violence” (Plath 90). Phyllis’s violent death, then, in Updike’s final novel-length exploration of male sexuality, acquires a powerful symbolic significance.

Donald J. Greiner observes in his invaluable analysis of Updikean adultery that “[f]or Updike adultery is often a social embarrassment but rarely a cause for individual damnation.” The guilt that follows infidelity, says Greiner, “promises not the fires of hell but the pain of anguish” (57). It is instructive, in light of Owen’s acknowledgment of his responsibility for Phyllis’s death, to consider if this conclusion still holds good in a novel written almost twenty years after Greiner’s book. It is certainly the case that the religious sensibilities of Piet Hanema of *Couples* and Reverend Marshfield of *A Month of Sundays* (characters evoked by Greiner) are of less relevance where Owen is concerned. Peter Bailey has explored “the deepening spiritual/theological skepticism in Updike’s fiction” that led through the years to what Bailey terms “the erosion of his characters’ belief in a God-centered universe” (*Rabbit [Un]Redeemed* 21, 43). Owen exemplifies the weakened hold of religion on Updike’s protagonists: religion in Owen’s Middle Falls phase is absent, and, although Owen and Julia, in their old age, attend church “regularly” (269), it seems to be little more for Owen than a social formality and sociological opportunity, an occasion to observe “the rich” (217) exert their privileges and display their success. So if his guilt is to extend beyond “the pain of anguish” and tend toward “the fires of hell,” to a form of “individual damnation,” it will be of a more earthly

variety. Greiner notes that if you “[h]url the charge of sexual transgressor against [Updike’s male protagonists], they will retreat to the next suburb or even to their imaginations” (57). Owen avails himself of such an escape in his move with Julia to the village of Haskells Crossing, and he, too, retreats into his imagination, or rather into his memories and masturbatory fantasies, as he summons up his past sexual experiences. But escape does not bring salvation, as Owen’s sense of guilt has stayed with him in the twenty-five years since Phyllis’s death. His final village is “a good place for lying low”; while Julia lives a full social life, “Owen cowers in the house” (301).

Updike’s working-out of the consequences of adultery in *Villages*, then, takes the form of an anxious struggle in Owen’s mind, a nervous oscillation between the poles of pleasurable sexual memories and guilt-filled dreams, between the reassuring thought that “God killed Phyllis, as a favor to him,” because “she had become inconvenient to him” (305) and blaming Phyllis’s “ghost . . . for his sexual failures with Julia” (306), and between the “comfort and solace” Julia brings him and his clandestine viewings of photos of Phyllis, hidden away by Julia in “a dark cupboard on the third floor” (306). It is clear that Owen has much more to contend with than the anguish and social embarrassment that Greiner identifies in earlier Updikean adulterers; the passing of the years, old age, and his own village wisdom led Updike to portray the price of serial adultery in a less benign light. Piet’s adultery eventually wins for him the woman he loves; Owen’s womanizing kills Phyllis, and leads, in the final pages of the novel, to Owen unable to find the “healing self-forgetfulness” of sleep in the middle of the night; he “sees as if looking down into a suddenly illumined well that his charmed life has been a long torment of fear, desire, ambition, and guilt” (320). Occurring a couple of paragraphs from the end of the novel, this insight seems the ultimate judgment on Owen’s adulterous life. The “torment” may not be that of the fires of hell, but it is a damnation of sorts, a grim and inescapable verdict on the life he has led and the man he has been.

Speaking of the man Owen has been, the final prominent feature of male sexuality developed in *Villages* is its role in the creation of male identity. Bailey considers that “the affirmation of self is . . . the most consistently pervasive thematic element of Updike’s work,” the essential feature of which is what Bailey calls the “identification of selfhood with the sacred” (*Rabbit [Un]Redeemed* 15, 20). The affirmation of self in Updike’s male protagonists is also, of course, inseparable from their sexuality; as Greiner notes, the Updike adulterer “fears that fidelity threatens the integrity of his sense of self” (19). By the time of *Villages*, what Bailey terms “the reluctantly expanding secularism of Updike’s aesthetic” (*Rabbit [Un]Redeemed*

33) has narrowed the realization and expression of selfhood to the domain of the sexual. This raises the issue of the consequences of jettisoning the sacred in favor of the profane, the supernatural in favor of the natural, and God in favor of secular man indulging himself in his “animal walk in the sun” (*Self-Consciousness* 204). What kind of self, in other words, emerges from these transitions? And what are the effects of the uncoupling of selfhood from the sacred and attaching it uniquely to the sexual?

Such a comparative approach leads one to Updike’s 1968 novel, *Couples*, whose important parallels with *Villages* confer on the latter one of the sources of its interest. Both novels are set in small New England towns and focus on middle-class couples in their thirties whose extensive social interactions throw them into proximity and intimacy with their neighbors, leading to sexual infidelities. There are, of course, important differences between the novels: they have very different temporal ranges—*Villages* follows Owen from childhood through old age, whereas the events of *Couples* take place in one year—and *Couples*, focusing on ten couples in the town of Tarbox, explores a micro-society at a particular cultural moment, whereas *Villages* is more concerned with individual destinies. Crucially, however, both novels are constructed around an adulterous male protagonist, Piet in *Couples* and Owen in *Villages*. By considering the meanings attached to the sexual infidelities of both, we may understand better the evolution in the representation of male selfhood and identity in Updike’s fiction.

A useful point of entry into the comparison of the novels are two observations by Updike. In his 1963 review-essay of Denis de Rougemont’s *Love Declared*, Updike proposes: “Only in being loved do we find external corroboration of the supremely high valuation each ego secretly assigns itself” (*Assorted Prose* 233). In a 1993 interview he says: “In sexual encounter, you get the kind of confirmation of your own existence and tremendous intrinsic worth that you don’t get elsewhere” (Plath 256). Both statements emphasize how union with the intimate other acts as external validation of the value of one’s self. Note, however, that the medium of transmission of this validation is not the same: while it is love in the first statement, it is sex in the second. De Rougemont offers two literary myths to capture these different mediations: that of Tristan and Iseult, with its romantic love and the quest for the unattainable other, and that of the libertine Don Juan, the seducer in search of sexual conquests. Much of the critical commentary on Updike’s fiction up to the mid-1980s drew upon his essay on de Rougemont, notably on the relationship he posits between the quest for love and the formation of male selfhood. Greiner observes that for Piet and other Updike protagonists, “[l]ove is always the key to

the re-creation of the self,” and notes that “Piet’s adultery is seriously cast in the mold of spiritual quest” (106, 114), highlighting Updike’s insistence that *Couples* is “about sex as the emergent religion, as the only thing left” (Plath 52). In his study of Updike, George Hunt identifies the “theme of the male’s search for his self and his discovery of it in his simultaneous quest and discovery of the mysterious ‘Other’” (8), and, in his chapter on *Couples* and *Marry Me*, notes that Updike sees adultery as “the only modern equivalent for romantic adventure and spiritual aspiration” (118). An added layer to the existential and spiritual connotations of love and sex in *Couples* is Piet’s fear of death. As James Schiff puts it: “Piet uses his belief in God and sexuality as a way of defying death” (*John Updike Revisited* 68). In *Couples*, then, sex and adultery are presented, in general terms, as more than simple raw nature and basic instinct; rather, they are seen variously as expressions of love, quests for self-realization through the love of another, and a defense against mortality. Which is not to say that the carnality of Don Juan is not also present in the novel. As Robert Detweiler notes: “Piet is sometimes a Tristan, sometimes a Don Juan, and sometimes both at the same time” (112). And Piet notices in himself, at the end of his adulterous escapades in Tarbox, “a nostalgia for adultery itself—its adventure, the acrobatics its deceptions demand, the tension of its hidden strings, the new landscapes it makes us master” (*Couples* 429). This is the language of the seducer, addicted to the excitement of the conquest. For all that, Detweiler, even while noting that “[o]ther characters reinforce Piet’s Don Juan status,” sees adultery in *Couples* as more than instinctive animal coupling; behind all the infidelities lies a profound quest, the attempt “to wrench a meaning out of life through indiscriminate sex” (113).

In his analysis of Updikean adultery, Greiner proposes that, if it were stripped of its spiritual dimension, “the reader might entirely lose sympathy with the wayward husband. Take away the spiritual yearning and the adulterer seems juvenile” (107–08). Which brings us back to Owen and *Villages*. As the novel approaches its end, Owen “remembers his life in Middle Falls nostalgically, as a magical exploration of his male nature,” meaning his male sexual nature (317). Updike, in his final novel-length reflection on adultery, identifies sexuality as the beating heart of male being and identity. The definitive self of Owen comes into being in “the hushed and headlong vault of masturbation” and in his early sexual experiences with his high-school girlfriend, in which is revealed “a core self explored by another consciousness” (64). An illuminating moment occurs with one of his Middle Falls lovers, Alissa: “Once, in a flash of shyness, . . . he put his hands over his flaming erection, and she said, . . . ‘Don’t hide yourself, Owen.’ ‘Yourself’—this sore-

looking blue-veined thing was himself. These hair-adorned nether parts . . . were seats of being” (203). Nothing else in Owen’s life—not marriage, not fatherhood, not professional achievements—reveals his essential identity so thoroughly as the manifestations of his sexual nature. It is this raw, primal, and self-obsessed identity at the heart of Owen that finds its full expression in a moment of sexual ecstasy achieved with one of his one-night stands: “[H]ad he ever been more crazily happy, more triumphantly himself, than when Mirabella was blowing him while he sped at ninety miles an hour into the flat Nevada desert, straight into the rising morning sun?” (230). The elemental nature of this core male identity is intuited by Owen himself: men, he thinks, are “mechanisms with very few levers—a few earthy appetites, an atavistic warrior pride and stoicism” (212).

Even at seventy, it is in his sexual self that Owen finds an existential consolation not available elsewhere. After lovemaking with Julia, she “stare[s] up at him from the pillow with that cloudy face of satisfied desire which puts a man, briefly, right with the universe, all debts honored, all worries unmasked as negligible” (39). Beset by guilt in his old age, it is in his “core self” that Owen takes refuge. Sex with women, he sees, beginning with Phyllis on their wedding night, “let him enter a realm wherein his own mysterious existence needed no explaining” (321). Here is the seducer’s edenic existential perfection, where sex brings world, being, and self into complete harmony, beyond the claims of responsibility, knowledge, thought, reflection, and self-scrutiny.

If Tristan predominates in *Couples*, Don Juan alone reigns in *Villages*. Owen makes a conscious decision “to become a seducer,” acting out the obsession described by Updike in his de Rougement essay: “Don Juan loves Woman under the guise of many women, exhaustingly” (*Assorted* 232). If Owen’s first affair, with Faye, may be explained in part by his not finding in Phyllis the “external corroboration” of his own worth, “that other being in whose existence [one’s] own existence is confirmed and amplified” (*Assorted* 233), his other adulterous affairs and encounters are allowed no other explanation than the pursuit of sexual pleasure for its own sake. The scenes that most distance the carnal selfhood of *Villages* from the spiritual selfhood of *Couples* are Owen’s sex sessions with Karen, who sees that, to Owen, she is just “a piece of ass” (252). Owen may suffer “a sweet sickness of love” in the aftermath of his affair with Faye, but his pining for her is explained by nothing other than what their affair gave *him*, most notably “a freedom of the body” (156). For Owen, loving Faye is about loving himself, which reminds us of the essential selfishness at the heart of Updike’s definition of love in his de Rougement essay, with its emphasis on what the lover gains in “being loved.” Here, surely, is where

one may locate a defect in Owen's moral order; he may exalt the "transcendent value" that even the women of his one-off encounters brought to the "supreme interaction" of sex (321), but this seems merely a self-serving elevation of the sexual self of his "male nature" over a moral self that might have prohibited such adulterous behavior in the first place.

Mention of a moral self invites us to consider for a moment the moral dimension of Owen's behavior, an approach encouraged by Updike himself, who saw his books as "moral investigations of how we live" and "moral debates with the reader" (Plath 258, 50). In these investigations, he says, "[t]he question is usually, 'What is a good man?' or 'What is goodness?'" (Plath 50). Such questions have always seemed less important when it comes to *Couples*, a novel that, through its dramatization of societal transformation, spiritual questing, cultish socializing, and ritualized group play, boldly established its own codes and terms of reference. But it is less easy to resist engagement with Updike's moral standard in *Villages*, in which one person dies as a result of the conscious behavior of another. Phyllis's death and Owen's increasingly frenzied sexual behavior leave such an enormous moral vacuum in their wake that the reader seeks a perspective from which to understand and articulate the defects of a male selfhood realized purely in sexual terms. In this regard, the philosopher Charles Taylor offers some relevant pointers. In his *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (1989), he considers the relation between selfhood and morality, or, as he puts it, "between senses of the self and moral visions, between identity and the good" (x). Taylor grounds his argument in his concept of "strong evaluation" (4), or the discrimination we make between right and wrong, between what is morally higher and lower, better and worse. Taylor calls this evaluation a "framework," which "incorporates a crucial set of qualitative distinctions" that provide "the sense that some action, or mode of life, or mode of feeling is incomparably higher than the others which are more readily available to us" (19). Following from this, the answer to the question "Who am I?" is grounded, for Taylor, in "an understanding of what is of crucial importance to us. To know who I am is a species of knowing where I stand" in relation to the good: "My identity is defined by the commitments and identifications which provide the frame or horizon within which I can try to determine from case to case what is good, or valuable, or what ought to be done, or what I endorse or oppose. In other words, it is the horizon within which I am capable of taking a stand" (27). We know who we are by knowing where we stand morally, and our determination of what is good or bad, right or wrong, is the means through which we articulate our identity.

Where Owen is concerned, Taylor's moral self never seriously comes into existence. Rather than displaying an orientation toward the good, Owen's self is oriented purely toward what is good for him. It is the self as self-absorbed; "helplessly self-centered," Owen seeks throughout his life to "preserve his charmed, only-child sense of life" (168, 311). Where Taylor's framework is "independent of our own desires, inclinations, or choices" (20), Owen places his instinctive trust in his inclinations, in whatever will advance his cause, to the extent, at one point, of conducting a retrospective benefit analysis of what he got from his two wives: "Looking back, he is touched by how completely his two wives delivered what he asked. Phyllis had hoisted him up into Cambridge and the snob life of the mind, and Julia into Haskells Crossing and the life of bourgeois repose" (317). But the primary articulation of self in the novel is, of course, Owen's sexual self, the devil that whispers in his ear and banishes any hope of grounding his behavior in concepts of the good. The ostensible site of the moral self in Owen, or what is left in the vacuum created by its absence, is his sexual self, a congeries of instincts, impulses, desires, calculations, evasions, and performances, the latter indicative of the absence of a framework that would create and inform a stable moral identity.<sup>6</sup> The one constant in Owen's erratic adult sexual life is the steady and irresistible throb of lust, the true site of his identity, where he affirms who he is, and which guides his behavior and tells us where he "stands." In fact, Taylor's definition of moral identity is not that far removed from one offered implicitly, if uncomfortably, by Updike himself. In his essay "On Being a Self Forever," he describes a "piece of local kitsch" that hung on the wall in his childhood home: "It showed an Amishman standing erect with a hammer and a carpenter's square, above the slogan WHAT A MAN DOES, THAT HE IS. I believe it but didn't like reading it" (*Self-Consciousness* 225).

What, then, might we usefully conclude from the different representations of male sexuality offered by Updike in two novels written thirty-five years apart? And what might these differences tell us about the evolution of his views? We can say immediately that male sexuality in *Villages* is obsessive, narcissistic, damaging, and only tenuously connected to love, and that while there is just as much adultery in *Couples*—probably more—male sexuality is presented in that novel as a redemptive quest for identity, spirituality, and immortality, with affection not absent and love often present.<sup>7</sup> Where *Villages* is concerned, and particularly Owen's sexual life, we can justly invoke Updike's comment in a 1976 interview about "the sense of sex as something brutal, crushing, barbaric even" (Plath 87). Given that *Villages* was Updike's last major reflection on adultery from the male perspective (as he surely knew it was likely to be), given that the novel is clearly

offered as the final thoughts in a stock-taking review of a life of sexual promiscuity, and, given, finally, the emphasis on an ultimate wisdom gained, we might well conclude that the indulgent and positive attitude toward adultery in *Couples* gave way to a revised view in *Villages* of its harmful, even destructive, effects. We know from his interviews and nonfiction that Updike was deeply aware of the meanings of his fiction. He had to have been aware, then, that *Villages* portrays both the spiritual poverty of the seducer and the detrimental effects of his sexuality. In this light, *Villages* is a revisiting of the topic of adultery by a writer better placed in his old age to judge its long-term effects. *Villages*, then, is an addendum to *Couples*, a necessary rebalancing: Tristan gets Iseult in *Couples*, and Tarbox heals its wounds; in *Haskells Crossing*, though, Don Juan causes the death of his victim, a wound that can never heal.

And yet.

The reader who sees in Owen's responsibility for Phyllis's death the moral stance of *Villages* will look to the end of the novel for confirmation of Owen's "damnation." And it seems to occur a few paragraphs from the end in Owen's dismaying vision that "his charmed life has been a long torment of fear, desire, ambition, and guilt." This, surely, is the clincher, the final and irrevocable self-imposed verdict on Owen's wrongdoing, with which he must now live out his days. But, consistent to the end, the Updikean male protagonist is allowed to flee unbearable reality. True as always to his sexual self, Owen takes refuge in "[w]hat remains to him" (320)—namely, his sexual memories, in this case his appraisal of the differences and nuances in his mistresses' orgasms. The sacred is no longer needed to provide transcendence; it is to be found in sex: Owen's mistresses, he sees, "brought transcendent value to the [sexual] act, the supreme interaction." The way is now open for Owen's concluding insight on his life: "Things come, for the instant, clear. Owen's past is like a sheet of inky-blue tissue paper held up to a light, so the holes pricked in it shine: these stars are the women who let him fuck them" (321). This coarse and loveless credo of the serial adulterer, morally barren and emotionally puerile, is the final wisdom offered in *Villages* on male sexuality. Is it also, then, the novel's credo? Two interpretive possibilities suggest themselves: Is *Villages* being true to its own artistic order in giving an unsavory character enough rope with which to hang himself, in the manner of Nabokov with Humbert Humbert? Or is allowing a man who has lived a full and prosperous life to conclude that the highlight of that life was "fucking" as many women as he could an indication that this is what the novel ultimately endorses? Sex in *Couples* has a convincing sociological

and cultural resonance; sex in *Villages* is little more than the randy adventures of a male adulterer. And that is exactly what Updike gave us when he returned to the themes of adultery and male sexuality. Through its final provocative wisdom on men and sex—where guilt is evaded and “fucking” women is everything—and in its repetitive, loving, and voluptuous evocation of Owen’s sexual doings, *Villages* leaves us wondering exactly where *it* stands.

## NOTES

1. A search of several databases (accessed 5 Nov. 2014) for the period 2004–2014 produced only a small number of passing references to *Villages*. Bailey’s essay seems to be the only one to have considered the novel in any depth. Updike himself suggested two reasons why his later fiction is not up to the standard of his best work. The first is diminishing mental agility due to aging. In an essay titled “The Writer in Winter,” he wrote: “An aging writer wonders if he has lost the ability to visualize a completed work, in its complex spatial relations. . . . [H]e may arrive at his ending nonplussed, the arc of his intended tale lying behind him in fragments. The threads have failed to knit” (*Higher Gossip* 5). The second reason, given in an interview, inspires less sympathy than the first: “This present novel that will be out—*Villages*—I several times thought it might be a bad idea and kind of abandoned it. So, it was really the habit—the habit of writing that kept me at it in the end. It was like a bad marriage. . . . This is the wife I’m married to here, and I’m going to finish this book. Finishing it becomes the only way to get rid of it” (“Showing Ordinary Life”).

2. Schiff argues that it is necessary and valuable to study the late work, as such a study offers “the opportunity to gain a better understanding of how this work fits within Updike’s oeuvre” (“Two Neglected” 46).

3. In Updike’s autobiographical text “The Dogwood Tree: A Boyhood,” the “Three Great Secret Things” are sex, religion, and art (*Assorted Prose* 142–46).

4. The parallels between Owen’s and Updike’s sexual lives are confirmed by Adam Begley’s biography. Referring to the period in which Updike lived with his first wife and family in Ipswich (the model for Middle Falls, just as it was for Tarbox in *Couples*), Begley states: “Updike slept around in Ipswich, ‘a stag of sorts,’ as he wrote in his memoirs, ‘in our herd of housewife-does.’ And when his success as an author meant that he began to travel around the country and abroad, he permitted himself sexual adventures away from home” (211).

5. Owen is associated with killing elsewhere in the novel as well. When Alissa becomes pregnant, probably by Owen, he thinks of the fetus as a “tiny complicating creature, whom he would have gladly killed if he could” (211). And he sees himself as “his own child’s executioner” (276) as he contemplates the effect on his son of his divorce.

6. Owen’s first mistress tells him: “Don’t do your naïve act,” and his second asks him: “[W]hy do you always play innocent? You’re not innocent” (150, 239).

7. It should be noted that not every reader sees evidence of love in *Couples*. Tony Tanner writes: “Updike surely intends [Piet’s] relationship with Foxy to be a serious love story, but in this world—or the world seen from this point of view—how is sex as love to be differentiated from sex as lust?” (54).

## WORKS CITED

- Bailey, Peter J. "Autobiography, Updike, and the 'Self-Serving Corruptions of Fiction.'" *John Updike Review* 2.2 (Spring 2013): 77–94.
- . *Rabbit (Un)Redeemed: The Drama of Belief in John Updike's Fiction*. Madison, Teaneck: Fairleigh Dickinson UP, 2006.
- Barloon, Jim. "Anatomy of a Post-Tragic Life." Rev. of *Villages*, by John Updike. *Houston Chronicle* 17 Oct. 2004. *Chron.com*. Web. 10 July 2015.
- Begley, Adam. *Updike*. New York: Harper, 2014.
- Detweiler, Robert. *John Updike*. 1972. Rev. ed. Boston: Twayne, 1984.
- Greiner, Donald J. *Adultery in the American Novel: Updike, James, and Hawthorne*. Columbia: U of South Carolina P, 1985.
- Hunt, George. *John Updike and the Three Great Secret Things: Sex, Religion, and Art*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980.
- Kakutani, Michiko. "Another Updike Trip to His Kind of Suburbia." Rev. of *Villages*, by John Updike. *New York Times* 22 Oct. 2004: E33.
- Plath, James, ed. *Conversations with John Updike*. Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 1994.
- Schiff, James. *John Updike Revisited*. New York: Twayne, 1998.
- . "Two Neglected Female-centric Novels of Updike's Late Phase: *Gertrude and Claudius* and *Seek My Face*." *John Updike Review* 3.1 (Spring 2014): 45–63.
- Tallent, Elizabeth. *Married Men and Magic Tricks: John Updike's Erotic Heroes*. Berkeley: Creative Arts, 1982.
- Tanner, Tony. "A Compromised Environment." *John Updike: Modern Critical Views*. Ed. Harold Bloom. New York: Chelsea House, 1987. 35–56.
- Taylor, Charles. *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1989.
- Updike, John. *Assorted Prose*. New York: Fawcett Crest, 1966.
- . *Couples*. New York: Knopf, 1968.
- . *Higher Gossip: Essays and Criticism*. Ed. Christopher Carduff. London: Hamish Hamilton, 2012.
- . *A Month of Sundays*. London: Penguin, 1976.
- . *Odd Jobs: Essays and Criticism*. London: André Deutsch, 1992.
- . *Of the Farm*. New York: Knopf, 1965.
- . *Picked-Up Pieces*. New York: Fawcett Crest, 1977.
- . *Self-Consciousness: Memoirs*. London: Penguin, 1989.
- . "Showing Ordinary Life as Being Worth Writing About." Interview. Academy of Achievement. 12 June 2004. Web. 27 Nov. 2014. <<http://www.achievement.org/autodoc/page/updoint-1>>.
- . *Villages*. New York: Knopf, 2004.
- Rev. of *Villages*, by John Updike. *Kirkus Reviews* 1 Sept. 2004. *KirkusReviews.com*. Web. 10 July 2015.
- Weldon, Fay. "Carnal Knowledge." Rev. of *Villages*, by John Updike. *Washington Post Book World* 24 Oct. 2004: 3. *WashingtonPost.com*. Web. 10 July 2015.

# Betrayal by Sandstone Farmhouse: Forgiveness in Updike's "Pigeon Feathers" and "The Cats"

PETER J. BAILEY

"Pigeon Feathers" (1960) constituted John Updike's first rendering in fiction of an autobiographical circumstance to which he would return, relentlessly and obsessively, in both fiction and nonfiction throughout his career. In October 1945, his mother, Linda Grace Hoyer Updike, against the wishes of her husband and son, purchased "the old Hoyer farm" in Plowville, Pennsylvania, where she had grown up, and moved her family (her parents included) there. Based on the evidence of Updike's memoirs, *Self-Consciousness*, and his other fifty-plus published books, his mother's moving of the family from Shillington, Pennsylvania, to Plowville at a particularly vulnerable point in his maturation was the central emotional betrayal of his life, an experience that provided the inspiration for more novels (*The Centaur*, *Of the Farm*) and more stories (in *The Afterlife and Other Stories* and *My Father's Tears and Other Stories* in particular) than any other event. Adam Begley is very probably right that Updike exaggerated the influence that E. B. White's "One Man's Meat" columns in *Harper's* had on his mother's decision (Begley 34). White, Updike wrote, "gave my mother the necessary courage to buy eighty rundown acres of Pennsylvania loam and turned me overnight into a rural creature, clad in muddy shoes, a cloak of loneliness, and a clinging aura of apples" (*Picked-Up Pieces* 435). But her motives of returning her family to what she saw as paradise and of removing young John from what she viewed as the pernicious effect that Shillington might have on his literary future carried far more weight than White's

monthly columns. Jack De Bellis, in *John Updike's Early Years*, provides a much more persuasive maternal justification for the removal of John from Shillington: "Linda Updike was troubled by her son's boyhood friends for three reasons: she dreaded her boy might become an athlete, a homosexual, or the battered loser of a fight" (3). Accordingly, Shillington to her represented nothing but the threat of distraction from her son's projected destiny, comprising (in Updike's characterization of her telescoped vision of the town), "small minds, small concerns, small hopes" (*Self-Consciousness* 37). Revisiting Shillington in 1980, Updike reflected: "I loved this plain street, where for thirteen years no great harm had been allowed to befall me. I loved Shillington not as one loves Capri or New York, because they are special, but as one loves one's own body and consciousness, because they are synonymous with being" (30). Arguably, Linda Updike's greatest legacy to her son consists in her having provided him with the adolescent trauma of dislocation that generated so much of his most emotionally compelling work. For his protagonists, lacking access to the literary benefaction the move became for Updike, their mothers' relocation of them to the country proves extremely difficult to forgive.

As Updike conceived it, "The underlying thematic transaction [of his 1965 novel, *Of the Farm*] . . . was the mutual forgiveness of mother and son, the acceptance each of the other's guilt in taking what they had wanted, to the discomfort, respectively, of the dead father and the divorced wife" (*Picked* 83). Jay Parini effectively characterizes the mother/son tensions in *Of the Farm*: "'The great effort of her life,' Mr. Updike says of Joey's mother, 'has been to purchase this farm and move us all to it.' The place was her genius, her body, her world, and it beckoned to her son as she beckoned to him; his refusal of it produced feelings of guilt, but he had either to leave the farm or suffer total absorption in Mother and the loss of his own identity" (7).

Updike revisited the familial disputants of *Of the Farm* in "A Sandstone Farmhouse" (1990): "This was the mother Joey had loved," the narrator explains, "the mother before they moved, before she betrayed him with the farm and its sandstone house" (*Collected Later Stories* 441). As the unnamed protagonist of "The Brown Chest" recalls, it wasn't only the farm and house that seemed a betrayal: "Country space frightened him, much as the coal bin and the dark triangles under the attic eaves had—spaces that didn't have enough to do with people. Fields that were plowed one day in the spring and harvested one day in the fall, woods where dead trees were allowed to topple and slowly rot without anyone noticing" (*Collected Early Stories* 507–08). Much of the power of "Pigeon Feathers" is attributable to its evocation of David Kern's bitterness at his mother's banishing him from his

beloved Olinger environs and stranding him in a place that has too little “to do with people” and too much to do with nature’s brutal processes of destruction and renewal, but also to Updike’s guilt over his intense feelings of resentment toward the person most responsible for encouraging him toward a literary career.<sup>1</sup>

In this essay I will discuss two short stories—one early, one late—in which Linda Updike’s removal of the family from Shillington to Plowville is translated into fiction, my purpose being to determine whether the forgiveness that Updike saw as central to the resolution of *Of the Farm* pervades these stories, or whether he continued to resent his mother for “taking what [she] had wanted” and returning her family to a place that represented home to her alone. In order to undertake this project, I need first to cite Updike’s often expressed observation about the autobiographical bases of his short stories. “More closely than my novels, more circumstantially than my poems,” he acknowledged, “these efforts of a few thousand words each hold my life’s incidents, predicaments, crises, joys” (*More Matter* 762). Furthermore, in a note on “My Father on the Verge of Disgrace” (1997), he admitted: “[M]y real father taught algebra and not chemistry, and he never sold china. It was another man . . . who told me about the joys of descending on a strange town and coming away with a tall order. In truth I scarcely know what in this story is made up or not; it delves into a layer of my earthly duration so ancient and fraught that truth and fiction are interchangeably marvellous. Life, you could say, is a tall order” (*More* 777). Although I will make no claim that these stories, cumulatively or otherwise, tell the true story of Updike’s relationship with his mother, I will contend that life’s “tall order” rendered it impossible for him to invoke in these stories’ resolutions a conciliation of the mother/son, Plowville/Shillington friction, since that tension is consistently configured as one between nature and civilization.

Back to “Pigeon Feathers”: Attempting to participate in the structuring of his new life in the country and thereby exorcise his feelings of disorientation, David Kern sorts and shelves his mother’s books, coming across H. G. Wells’s account of the birth of Christianity in *The Outline of History*. Jesus, David reads, was “an obscure political agitator, a kind of hobo,” who somehow “survived his own crucifixion,” this “freakish incident” inexplicably resulting in the formation of a religion founded upon the delusions of superstitious, “credulous” men (*CES* 264). Outraged that such blasphemy can be tolerated in God’s universe, David musters all his Sunday school certainties in an effort to refute Wells’s cavalier dismissal of Christianity’s central constitutive narrative, only to find them too fragile to effectively contest “Wells’s engines of knowledge” (266).<sup>2</sup>

His mother, to whom David turns for eschatological reassurance, offers him only the equivocal comfort of a pantheist God capable of vouchsafing a salvageable soul to the land but not to humans. A sort of all-redeeming earth mother, she offers with a consoling embrace “to receive his helplessness; all her grace and maternal nurturing were gathered into a passive intensity that intensely repelled him” (*CES* 278). The natural world that she both incarnates and moved her family back to takes on a particular form of horror for David shortly after his traumatic reading of Wells. While using the family outhouse (itself one of the rural humiliations of Plowville), David sees the skeleton of an insect projected on the wall by his flashlight’s beam, its appearance precipitating “an exact vision of death: a long hole in the ground, no wider than your body, down which you are drawn while the white faces above recede” (268). The grotesque image reveals to him the awful significance of Wells’s expulsion of God from the universe: “Nowhere in the world of other people,” the narrator explains, appropriating David’s tone of bruised faith and spiritual isolation, “would he find the hint, the nod, he needed to begin to build his fortress against death. They none of them believed. He was alone. In that deep hole” (279).

David’s resolution of his religious crisis takes the form of killing the pigeons his grandmother complains “foul the furniture” from Olinger that is stored in the barn. Many years after its composition, Updike noted that in the story’s conclusion “[t]he notion that killing other creatures relieves the fear of death owes something to Hemingway,” adding: “At the age of sixty-two, I can scarcely improve on the vision and affirmation of the last paragraph” (*More* 768). That paragraph ends with David laying the dead pigeons in a hole he has dug: “As he fitted the last two, still pliant, on the top, and stood up, crusty coverings were lifted from him, and with a feminine, slipping sensation along his nerves that seemed to give the air hands, he was robed in this certainty: that the God who had lavished such craft upon these worthless birds would not destroy His whole Creation by refusing to let David live forever” (*CES* 286). We can argue about whether David discovers in that scene, via the argument from design, an eternal God ensuring him immortality, or experiences instead his own, perhaps retaliatory, capacity for challenging nature’s extermination of him by describing it with a poetic exactitude that will survive him. What seems completely unambiguous is who prevails in round one of the mother/son discord.

“I don’t know why I let Mother talk me into it [having David shoot the pigeons],” Mrs. Kern says. “Their cooing was such a comforting noise.” When David asks if he should get the shovel for her to bury the birds, she responds hotly: “Get it for

yourself . . . They're your kill. And be sure to make the hole deep enough so Copper [the family dog] won't dig them up" (*CES* 285). The hole that symbolized David's impotence before nature subsequently becomes the destination of the victims of his adolescent revenge upon it. Nature, which his mother perceives as "comforting," has been transformed by David's act into the backdrop of his father's "[k]ill or be killed" ethic (282), and as Mrs. Kern goes into the house, David notices that, "[u]nlike his usual mother, she did not look up, either at the orchard to the right of her or at the meadow on her left, but instead held her head rigidly, tilted a little, as if listening to the ground" (285). She listens to the ground because David's gun has divested the sky of its "comforting noise." David's triumph over nature (and his mother's pantheistic perception of it) may be an adolescent's egocentric delusion, but for him it manages to restore order to the universe that Wells had destroyed, a re-embracing of "a promise that in the most perverse way . . . made every good and real thing, ball games and jokes and big-breasted girls, possible" (276). The elder David isn't able to resolve the culture/nature conflict so satisfactorily.

Updike's subsequent "sandstone farmhouse" stories alter names and circumstances, but the identification of the mother with nature and the son's discomfort with it remain consistent. In "The Laughter of the Gods" (2002), the narrator comments: "What was natural, his mother believed, was healthy and good, even though germs and parasites could be argued to come from Nature as surely as, say, spoonfuls of cod liver-oil." Her son, on the other hand, "was drawn entirely to the unnatural: to the radio, the movies, the newspapers, the blimp or skywriting airplane that once in a while appeared in the skies over their small town" (*CLS* 743). Equally consistent in these stories is the son's perception of the move to Firetown as a personal grievance. In "Lunch Hour" (1995), the narrator ascribes this attitude to David Kern in his early sixties: "The people of Olinger were proud of being where they were, and David still felt his initial departure, set in motion by his mother, as a loss" (603). The magnitude of that loss can be gauged in "The Other Side of the Street" (1990), in which Rentschler, visiting the house across the street from the one he grew up in forty years earlier, casts a glance at his former home: "Stepping into the glittery November chill, he was dazzled to see the house on the other side of the street ablaze; the porch light and front-room lamps were lit up as if to welcome a visitor, a visitor, it seemed clear to him, long expected and much beloved" (456). Rentschler's return to this street is, clearly, a homecoming to a neighborhood that, subjectively at least, he never left.

Early stories such as "You'll Never Know, Dear, How Much I Love You," "The Happiest I've Been," "The Persistence of Desire," and "In Football Season" evoke

the Updike alter ego's unabashed affection for Olinger and the peers with whom he grew up, as do the later stories ("The Egg Race," "The Walk with Elizanne," "The Road Home") in which the protagonist—as Updike so loyally did—returns home for class reunions. Nonetheless, Updike's fiction is seldom characterized by monocular visions of positions undeviatingly reasserted, and about the Plowville/Firetown move, too, his fiction projects some ambiguity. A child attending a fair in Updike's first novel wants always, as he puts it, to be "where the people are" (*Poorhouse Fair* 153);<sup>3</sup> the conclusion of "A Sandstone Farmhouse" expresses Updike's ambivalence toward the move when urban resident Joey Robinson, who has been spending his weekends cleaning out his childhood country home, muses: "His mother had made a shrewd investment, buying back paradise. . . . Weeknights, his own rooms, suspended above Manhattan's steady roar, . . . seemed to be flying somewhere. He felt guilty, anxious, displaced. He had always wanted to be where the action was, and what action there was, it turned out, had been back there" (*CLS* 446).

The story that comes closest to comprising a riposte to "Pigeon Feathers," however, is "The Cats" (1996), in which Updike heightens David Kern's negative take on the farm, inspired largely by the forty cats his mother had fed and, following her death, for whose existence he becomes responsible. While she was alive, neighbor Dwight Potteiger tells David, "I used to ask [her], 'What's David going to do, in case you pass on, with all the cats?' She'd say, so serene-like, 'Oh, Davey will find a way. He always has. He's kept me here in style for twenty years'" (*CLS* 627). The autobiographical basis of this plot is confirmed in a 1984 essay in which Updike acknowledged that his mother "has upwards of twenty cats to feed—to feed and to kill, for, in motherly fashion, her responsibilities toward her adopted dependents are conflicted. She began feeding a stray cat to spare the birds around the place; more and more cats appeared at her back door; and now the perplexities of mercy ask that she keep their feline herd thinned" (*Odd Jobs* 68).

Updike's version of this circumstance sounds remarkably less censorious than does David's. "Feeding these half-feral animals," David explains in "The Cats" with ill-concealed impatience, "amused and pleased her—quite improperly, I thought. Their mounting numbers seemed to me a disaster, which grew worse every time I paid a filial visit, in spite of the merciful inroads of various feline diseases and occasional interventionary blasts from the shotguns of interested neighbors" (*CLS* 625). As emotionally compelling as are the other short stories ("A Sandstone Farmhouse," "His Mother Inside Him," "The Brown Chest") about a mother's death and its aftereffects, "The Cats," written five years later, seems more fully ren-

dered, the only one of the four approaching the aesthetic roundedness of “Pigeon Feathers.” Accordingly, Updike embedded in “The Cats” substantial allusions to “Pigeon Feathers,” inviting readers to compare the two stories’ conclusions.

“Moving here when I was a boy,” David comments in the later narrative, “had indeed felt like the loss of civilization. No phone, no electricity, no plumbing: a terrible regress. . . . I could never shake my impression that the farm was a trap, set backward in time, from which my clear duty was to escape” (CLS 626–27). Escape he had: “I don’t live here,” he explains. “I live in New Jersey, I teach Euroлит at Rutgers, I have a four-bedroom house, an elegant wife called Evelyn, and two grown children, one of them with a child of her own. I don’t want to be here, I never did” (625). Significantly, this declaration of independence from the farm is addressed to the cats whose desperate circumstances he must resolve. (His mother had always insisted that the farm’s birds were expressing themselves to her, so David is perversely following her anthropomorphizing example in communicating with the cats.) “And,” he continues, “if you can think of a better place, go to it, because, my fine feline friends, *the dole is ending*. The cat food is down to its last case, and I’m here for just two more days. What are you going to do then? Beats me—it’s a real problem, frankly. Well, you shouldn’t have gotten sucked into the system” (625; italics in original). They shouldn’t have gotten sucked into a system, that is, in which humanity seeks to compensate them for the cruelties of nature, their benefactor in the end having become just another victim.

Throughout the story, David alternates between a desire to rid himself of the ravenous pests and the recognition that they represent his mother’s final interaction with the natural world she loved so intensely. “My boy thinks I’m crazy, feeding all these cats,” the grocer says she told him, “but it’s my only luxury” (CLS 633)—an assertion that costs David considerable guilt as he arranges for the cats’ extermination. His mother had begun feeding them to prevent their pursuing birds, and although pigeons are never mentioned in “The Cats” as being among her protected species, one of the story’s ironies is that whereas David’s saving epiphany in “Pigeon Feathers” arises from killing birds, his cat dilemma is the direct consequence of his mother’s determination to prevent birds’ destruction.<sup>4</sup> (When Potteiger mentions that the cats learned to climb the stable doors to get at the nests, David notes: “I hurried on, away from such sadness” [628].) In his most sympathetic rumination upon the cats, David acknowledges that “the persisting fact of the cats gnawed at me; at night I would wake up, with my mother’s ghost wavering in the room, over where Evelyn had dropped her white bathrobe on the back of a chair, and want to scream, in shame and helplessness. The runny-eyed kittens, staggering

with hunger. Why had they been called into life?" (642). Nowhere in "The Cats" is there evidence of David's belief in "the God who had lavished such craft upon these worthless birds." The answer to the question "Why had they been called into life?" emerges nowhere in the story, rendering David's decisions more fraught.

"My mother," David continues, "with more courage than I had, used to drown them, pressing one bucket down into another bucket half filled with water and their peeping cries" (*CLS* 642). In other words, his mother had devised a more humane method of dealing with nature's heedless proliferation than David, who, despite feeling little sympathy for nature's collateral victims, struggles nonetheless to find a means for their extermination. When opening cans of cat food with an opener he bought her, she had hummed: "My mother's humming returned to me, marking waltz time with the handle's rhythmic chunking noise, and with it the whole sweet-and-sour aroma of the kitchen, the way she had shaped it with her life, all those mornings of rising alone, making coffee and pouring cereal, and ceremoniously feeding the cats, while the mantel clock sounded its gulping gong" (642). The cats are inseparable from David's awareness that supporting his mother's solitary existence on the farm had had both a laudable preservationist motive and an ulterior motive: "If she could not stay on the land, it would likely go under to a developer, and the neighborhood would be changed forever, with septic tanks and fast traffic and higher taxes and a lowered water table. It had suited me, too, to keep her on her farm, out of my life" (629). His dilemma, then, continues to be one of choosing between the farm and his site of escape: "I can't give up my whole civilized life," he tells the cats, "just to keep feeding you ingrates" (626). Perhaps he did keep his mother at the farm "in style for twenty years," or perhaps he abandoned her there for his own purposes in a way that he cannot manage to abandon the cats.

But then, the story makes clear that David's "civilized life" isn't going so swimmingly, either. Teaching "Eurolit" to uninspired undergraduates at Rutgers<sup>5</sup> isn't working for him, and Evelyn is merciless in her putdowns of David's regressive impulses at the family farm, telling their son-in-law, who has offered to drive to the store for them, "He's the country boy. . . . Let's let him go.' To me she said, 'You love those windy old roads'" (*CLS* 631). Revising the story for publication in *Licks of Love* (2000), Updike heightened the tension between David and the family he has brought to the farm to attend his mother's funeral in order to highlight the conflict between his mother's love of nature and their citified tendencies. Consequently, Updike added a line to Evelyn's speech: "You love those windy old roads," having her conclude acerbically, "You can commune with your mother." David's mother had opposed their marriage and Evelyn brings a palpable grudge to the farm, but

the other family members seem petulant as well. "They treated this working rural area as if it were a theme park," David observes irritably, and his offer to return with donuts for breakfast prompts his son-in-law to object, "We don't believe in donuts," and Evelyn to add, "'Get them only for yourself,' . . . as if," David glosses, "they might bring me illicit but delicious mother-comfort" (631–32). When he returns with pretzels instead of donuts, he regrets not having brought back ice cream, which he recalls happily spooning up with pretzels in the farmhouse. "Goodness," Evelyn replies. "You are really reverting" (634).

Given Evelyn's testiness throughout the story, it isn't surprising that when David mentally inventories his problems that don't involve the cats, "dealing with Evelyn" is the first (*CLS* 637). Next is "selling the European canon to students with attention spans the length of TV commercials." At the farm, David's family also watches a lot of TV. As Updike depicts them, they (like the students) fit David Kern's description in "The Walk with Elizanne" of secular twenty-first-century Americans, whether in Massachusetts or New Jersey: "In theistic Pennsylvania, David realized, people developed philosophies. Where he lived now, an unresisted atheism left people to suffer with the mute, recessive stoicism of animals. The more intelligent they were, the less they had to say in extremis" (729). None of David's family members in "The Cats" has a word of condolence or consolation for the loss of his mother, and a fellow accountant of David's dead father is the only mourner at the funeral moved to tears. Identifying himself with the recessive stoics described in "The Walk with Elizanne," David summarizes the funeral: "As for my mother, it is strange, once a life is over, how little there is to say about it. I could feel her in the room, polite but taking sardonic note, for future reference, of our collective failure to quite rise to the occasion" (635–36). That failure is one of the major themes of "The Cats," which closes on nothing like the spiritual epiphany that so resoundingly concludes "Pigeon Feathers."

Evelyn's peevish rejoinder to the contrary, David isn't communing with his mother effectively in making decisions about her memorial service: in the instructions she left behind, which he discovers in her desk too late to act upon them, she requests an inexpensive casket (he has bought the undertaker's second priciest model), and asks that donations be given to the humane society in lieu of flowers. He informs no one in the family of this final communication, nor of the guilt his neglect of her preferences causes him. Communing with his mother would mean running the risk of encountering the sort of reminder with which Amy Stauffer, the humane society director, confronts him: "[S]he always spoke of you as the one who'd take charge. She'd say to me, 'Amy, I know the neighbors think I'm crazy, but I'm

just holding the fort for Davey” (639). In fact, it is Amy Stauffer who takes charge, offering to have a local man set traps at the house and bring the captives to the humane society. Freed from the fort he had no intention of holding, David makes a donation to the society of \$250—which he calculates as about six dollars per cat.

Although he imagines that he’s fallen in love with Amy Stauffer for finding the solution to his dilemma, the would-be trapper never appears, and Amy suggests that there’s nothing to do but let the cats die off from natural causes. In the months that follow, David negotiates from New Brunswick the sale of the farm, backing down when the buyers refuse to accept a clause prohibiting opening the land to development.<sup>6</sup> “I felt guilty, selling the place,” David explains. “My mother had believed it to be a piece of lost Eden and wanted me to live on it for my own good. . . . ‘Tell Evelyn,’ she said, ‘that I’ve never felt right, as a woman, off this place. There’s magic in the soil, I do believe it’” (*CLS* 641). David’s deflated tone throughout the narrative suggests that he finds magic nowhere. His one solace while the house is being readied for sale: those on-site assure him that the cats have vanished.

David’s last trip months later to the sandstone house he inherited and has now sold resounds of balked resolution, of emotional defeat. He completes a few last chores on the property no longer his, calling them “Busywork, to salve my conscience and the wound left when a piece of your life is removed.” He might as well be uselessly listening to the ground. Wearing a coat that his “father used to wear on weekends, and that [his] mother inherited and would wear in winter,” he finds that his dilemma has not resolved itself. The story ends: “As I drifted in my inherited coat across the lank grass, a few shadows filtered out of the orchard and flickered toward the house, eagerly loping. Several more materialized from the direction of the woods. These cats had survived. They thought I was my mother and that good times had returned” (644).

What the cats “think” is less significant than how David feels. He wears the coat that his mother wore in “Pigeon Feathers” (“In the distance a tiny figure in his father’s coat was walking along the edge of the woods. His mother” [*CES* 275]), which places him in a position analogous to hers at the end of that story—as someone, despite the best of intentions, through whom nature has been sacrificed, betrayed. He has initiated the cats’ liquidation as much as she did that of the pigeons, but the surviving cats suggest that the ghost of his mother remains on the land which he no longer owns. Unlike the cats, David fails to perceive a return of good times in his final attempt to escape the farm; like the cats, he “shouldn’t have gotten sucked into the system” that makes everything living a victim. By the story’s end, David still has no answer to the question “Why had [the cats] been called

into life?” but an even more resonant interrogatory posed by the story is whether a son can forgive a mother for sucking him into the system by giving him birth.

At the end of “Pigeon Feathers,” as we have seen, the narrator notes that as David placed the last birds in their grave and “stood up, crusty coverings were lifted from him, . . .” (*CES* 286). The “crusty coverings” recall the “white-splotched tarpaulin” (282) used to prevent the pigeons from “fouling” the Olinger furniture that was consigned to the barn once the family had moved to the farm, suggesting that David’s actions in killing the birds have avenged that terrible subjective dislocation. The narrator continues: “. . . and with a feminine, slipping sensation along his nerves that seemed to give the air hands, he was robed in this certainty: that the God who had lavished such craft upon these worthless birds would not destroy His whole Creation by refusing to let David live forever” (286). David’s culminating epiphany mediates between his father’s ethic—“Kill or be killed, that’s my motto” (282)—and his mother’s pantheistic sense of the spiritually predicated beauty of nature. More importantly, it restores the ordered universe of meaning and purposefulness that David knew before his mother moved the family to Firetown by reinvigorating a Christian “promise that in the most perverse way . . . made every good and real thing, ball games and jokes and big-breasted girls, possible” (276).

For adolescent David, the sacrifice of the pigeons resurrects the good times of his childhood in Olinger; his older self, robed in no certainty but attired instead in the old coat that was once his dead father’s and then his dead mother’s, incarnates an illusion of the good times returned, a fraudulent savior to the cats who seem to embody his mother’s only immortality and whom he had futilely hoped had all died off. For adult David, the conflict between nature and civilization remains irreconcilable, terminal; it is a sadness from which he cannot finally hurry away.

The pain David is feeling at the end of “The Cats” is the same one Updike invokes in the final stanza of the poem “Pain”:

Life is worse than mere folly. We live  
within a cage wherefrom escape  
annihilates the captive; this, too,  
pain leads us to consider anew.

(*Collected Poems* 187)

## NOTES

1. Updike’s poetry, fiction, and nonfiction repeatedly invoke his gratitude to his mother for inspiring (if not creating) his literary aspirations. The narrator of “Museums and Women” says that

his mother “had descended to me from thin clouds of preëxistent time, enveloped me, and set me moving toward an unseen goal with a vague expectation that in the beginning was more hers than mine” (CES 435).

2. Ironically, moving to the Plowville farm had precisely the opposite effect on Updike’s mother than it has on David Kern: “My mother did not go to the small-town [Shillington] church my father taught Sunday school in,” Updike explained, “but in 1944, when she took it into her head to buy back the farm where she was born, she made some kind of inner bargain by whose terms she attended church for the rest of her life—forty-five years’ worth of Sunday mornings” (*Due Considerations* 35).

3. Updike glosses the source of this line in *Self-Consciousness*: “My mother tells a story: I was sitting on [the] curb as a little fellow, watching the traffic, and when she suggested I come into the house I replied, ‘No, I want to be where the people are’” (23).

4. I am assuming that David Kern is the protagonist of both stories. In revising “The Cats” from its *New Yorker* appearance (9 Dec. 1996, 92–102) for inclusion in the 2000 collection *Licks of Love*, Updike changed the protagonist’s name from Frank to David—without ever introducing the surname Kern into the story. (“Lunch Hour,” separated from “The Cats” by two other stories in *Licks of Love*, introduces its protagonist as David Kern in the first sentence; perhaps Updike intended that the David of “The Cats” be taken for the same character.) Lest we believe he sought to precisely align “The Cats” with “Pigeon Feathers,” however, Updike retained the mother’s name as Irma from the *New Yorker* version rather than altering it to Elsie, the mother’s name in “Pigeon Feathers.” Other names were also altered from the *New Yorker* version, including that of David’s wife, Andrea, who became Evelyn.

5. Another revision from the *New Yorker* version to *Licks of Love* changes the protagonist’s employer from Princeton (“the fabled university,” as Frank characterizes it) to Rutgers. Because both versions include the detail that the protagonist’s son, Max, has dropped out of Dartmouth, Updike might have thought that the father/son relationship carried too much Ivy League baggage. Nonetheless, in the later version, David’s son-in-law exudes “a Princetonian complacency that makes me want to kick him” (631).

6. Whereas David appears to be selling both farm and land, Updike expressed his ambivalence about the property by retaining possession of acres of Plowville land, according to an article in the *Reading Eagle*:

Michael [Updike] said that shortly after his father was diagnosed with cancer and following his first chemotherapy treatment, he wrote a letter to his children, which, in part, read: “I’m sorry that my sentimental streak prevented me from selling [the land] in my lifetime . . . but you seem to be the generation that should bring the Pennsylvania family connection to a close.”

“I think he was conflicted [about the land],” Michael said. “I think he was looking out for our financial well-being and didn’t want us to be bound by any of his supposed wishes” (Posten).

## WORKS CITED

- Begley, Adam. *Updike*. New York: HarperCollins, 2014.
- De Bellis, Jack. *John Updike’s Early Years* (Bethlehem: Lehigh UP, 2013).
- Parini, Jay. “All His Wives Are Mother.” Rev. of *The Afterlife and Other Stories*, by John Updike. *New York Times Book Review* 6 Nov. 1994: 7.

- Posten, Bruce R. "John Updike's Children Remember the Time They Spent Vacationing in Plowville." *Reading Eagle* 15 Mar. 2009: n. pag. *ReadingEagle.com*. Web. 4 July 2015. <<http://www2.readingeagle.com/article.aspx?id=129692>>.
- Updike, John. "The Cats." *New Yorker* 9 Dec. 1996. 92–102.
- . *Collected Early Stories*, ed. Christopher Carduff. New York: Library of America, 2013.
- . *Collected Later Stories*, ed. Christopher Carduff. New York: Library of America, 2013.
- . *Collected Poems 1953–1993*. New York: Knopf, 1993.
- . *Due Considerations*. New York: Knopf, 2007.
- . *Licks of Love: Short Stories and a Sequel*. New York: Knopf, 2000.
- . *More Matter*. New York: Knopf, 1994.
- . *Odd Jobs*. New York: Knopf, 1991.
- . *Picked-Up Pieces*. New York: Knopf, 1975.
- . *The Poorhouse Fair*. 1959. New ed. New York: Knopf, 1977.
- . *Self-Consciousness: Memoirs*. New York: Knopf, 1989.



# John Updike in Dialogue with J. D. Salinger

DAVID PENN

About three-quarters of the way through John Updike's *The Centaur* (1963), George Caldwell, a teacher, discovers an instance of vandalized vandalism. A certain four-letter expletive scrawled on the school wall has been written over. He has come across the original graffiti earlier, but now some lines have been added ("the F had been extended and closed to make a B, the U and C closed into O's"); the word that now appears is BOOK. "But who would do such a thing?" Caldwell wonders of the second vandal (247). Updike's crime in including the word so casually in his own work was enough to earn him a slap on the wrist from Orville Prescott in the *New York Times*, who lamented that *The Centaur* "contains numerous obscenities, no more loathsome than in many recent novels, but entirely unnecessary." It is hard to imagine Updike losing much sleep over this judgment. What is, perhaps, most interesting is how this moment in the book brings to mind a similar scene in another work of American literature about a decade prior, one featuring a hunting hat-clad youth trying to scratch out and erase the very same original word, written, as in *The Centaur*, on a school wall. So reminiscent is this scene of one in J. D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye* (1951) that it may be regarded as a commentary by Updike on the peculiarity of Holden Caulfield's wariness of sex. In *Catcher*, Holden attacks a roommate who has slept with a childhood friend, he tangles with a pimp, and he rebuffs the sexual advances of a former teacher. These experiences find their culmination in the moment in which Holden is panicked and angered to find the words "Fuck you" scrawled on the wall of his sister's elementary school: "It drove me damn near crazy. . . . I kept wanting to kill whoever'd written it" (201).

This essay takes for its cue these scenes in *The Centaur* and *The Catcher in the Rye* in which the differences between Updike and Salinger's fiction become rather clear. In discussing these two authors, my intention is to offer up a comparison that keeps root differences at the forefront of analysis and holds aesthetic judgments at a secondary level. My aim is not to choose sides, nor is it to show that Updike and Salinger were perfect opposites; instead I intend to lay out a comparison of their fiction that sheds light on dimensions and nuances that might not be as apparent without this sort of juxtaposition. In Caldwell's bewilderment at the masking of an expletive, we read a reaction that is quite distinctive of Updike. It is with Updike that we find the inclination to depict both the ubiquity of sex and the absurdity of hoping that any "BOOK" could ever cover it up. In the anonymous force "who desecrated the desecration" (*Centaur* 247) we find the perfect evocation of Salinger—a figure inclined to convert trauma into words, to subvert desire into the form of a book.

In his introduction to *The Early Stories*, Updike gives Salinger special credit for teaching him "how the [short story] form, terse and tough in the Thirties and Forties, could accommodate a more expansive post-war sense of American reality" and goes on to observe that the end of his story "Friends from Philadelphia" "owes something" to Salinger's "Just Before the War with the Eskimos" (*Early Stories* x). Another striking parallel is Updike's "A & P," which borrows from *The Catcher in the Rye* a stylized, conversational narrative voice deeply reminiscent of Holden Caulfield (reportedly, Updike's wife at the time was uncomfortable with the resemblance [Begley 213]). The voice isn't a complete match; Holden, for example, would never violate the rules of tense agreement as recklessly as Sammy does, and people whom Sammy calls "sheep" Holden would likely term "phonies." Still, Updike borrows heavily. The story's plot is *The Catcher in the Rye* written in miniature: a male youth attempts to protect young women from the threat of old men, and his quest seems foolish in retrospect. In both "A & P" and *Catcher* it is the stylized narration of a teenaged screw-up that becomes the work's most dominant quality. What Sammy's voice owes to Holden's, specifically by way of its use of interjections, idioms, second-person pronouns, and adverbs like "really" and "pretty," makes it clear exactly how fascinated Updike was with the *Catcher* aesthetic. "Lengel's pretty dreary, teaches Sunday school and the rest, but he doesn't miss that much" (*Collected Early Stories* 319–20). These, Sammy's words, could just as easily have sprung from the mouth of Holden Caulfield.

Of course, this is no indication of an entirely untroubled relationship. Updike's 1961 review of *Franny and Zooey* in the *New York Times*—in which he complained

that the book contained “too many cigarettes, too many goddams, too much verbal ado about not quite enough” (*Assorted Prose* 237)—encapsulates what great differences there would be between these two writers. At the time, Salinger was near the point of disavowing publication altogether; Updike, still in his twenties, already had four books under his belt and was clearly a rising star. From Donald J. Greiner’s perspective, Updike’s negative review was significant in part because it occurred at a time when Salinger was expected to pick up the mantle of the recently deceased Ernest Hemingway. Updike inherited the kind of esteem that might have easily gone to Salinger under slightly different circumstances. According to Greiner, Updike’s review “signaled a refocus of fame from one admired writer to another” (121). Adam Begley reminds us that Updike had a reason to distance himself from Salinger in the early sixties. Updike, Salinger, and John Cheever were becoming deeply associated with what was beginning to be recognized by critics like Alfred Kazin as the *New Yorker* style of writing. Updike wanted his writing to be seen as distinctive, not merely as fitting in with a manufactured style he shared with other authors (Begley 157). It may be that for this reason he used his review to put distance between himself and Salinger. And how did Salinger respond? While we can never know the whole story, it is easy to imagine unwanted feedback (from reasonable critics like Updike) as helping to drive the older author into seclusion. Greiner notes the brief mention of Updike in Joyce Maynard’s memoir *At Home in the World*, in which she recalls that Salinger held “a particular loathing for John Updike, who once published a highly critical piece about his work” (Maynard 87). The notion of Salinger writing in isolation so that he would have no one’s approval to worry about but his own fits the pattern in his fiction of characters disregarding the concerns of an audience. In *Catcher*, Holden complains that “you’re supposed to leave somebody alone if he’s at least being interesting and he’s getting all excited about something. I like it when somebody gets excited about something” (184–85). In *Franny and Zooey*, Zooey tells his sister never to mind the audience’s reaction: “An artist’s only concern is to shoot for some kind of perfection, and *on his own terms*, not anyone else’s” (199, italics in text).

Updike does acknowledge at the end of his *Franny and Zooey* review that “the refusal to rest content, the willingness to risk excess on behalf of one’s obsessions, is what distinguishes artists from entertainers” (*Assorted* 239). Along these lines, it is tempting to look at each writer’s fiction for clues as to what motivated their very different responses to the public. Amid all the running and basketball playing that Updike’s characters engage in, one senses the author himself making a movement toward the reader, engaging her in a way that Salinger seemed to regard as ines-

sential. Updike, in a 2001 interview, suggested that it is the author's job to "tease" the reader along through the story: "You are teasing the reader, you are trying to startle the reader, you are trying to give the reader a reason to keep reading" (Schiff 87). This is significantly different from Salinger's method of creating works so increasingly personal that in time they ceased to regard the reader at all and were written entirely for Salinger's own pleasure, as with the works he composed in New Hampshire and kept hidden. For Updike, though, the artist's self-satisfaction is separate from an honest assessment of merit. As Greiner observes, "Updike *appeals* to readers, issues an invitation, folds them into the tale" (123, italics in text).

Particularly indicative of the differences in approach between the two writers is Updike's observation that Salinger's work misses "the words for things in motion" that we associate with Hemingway. Salinger, he complains, is too "convoluted and static" (*Assorted* 235, 236). By contrast, movement plays an important part in Updike's fiction—especially in the way that it relates to his broader sexual motifs. In many cases, movement becomes an outlet for Updike characters who have grown frustrated with a perceived situational immobility. Updike's earliest written story, "Ace in the Hole," establishes a pattern that he would follow for years. Ace, a washed-up former high school basketball star in an unsatisfying marriage, became the model for Updike's most famous creation, Harry "Rabbit" Angstrom. In both "Ace in the Hole" and the Rabbit novels, the loss of an outlet for physical expression becomes a central tragedy. Ace is in a "hole" in the sense that he cannot move about as he would wish. He has lost his job at a car lot for wrecking a vehicle by backing it into a too narrow space. With this image, Updike suggests the idea of a young man unhappily bound in domesticity (among Ace's worries is that he should not have married his wife). It is important to note the way that Updike conflates the desire for movement and the desire for sex. In *Rabbit, Run*, the first Rabbit novel, Harry recalls a high school sexual encounter with a girlfriend after a basketball win: "He came to her as a winner and that's the feeling he's missed since." Athletic victory and sexual conquest are thus linked for him: "the two kinds of triumph were united in his mind" (*Rabbit Angstrom* 170, 171). The small victories in Updike's world have to do with his characters reaching for occasions of physical expression. Ace and Harry will never regain the satisfaction of being star athletes, but they can still find small moments of satisfaction, as when Ace seizes his wife for an impromptu dance in the living room in the story's final paragraph. As Greiner suggests, "The gesture may be futile, but the motion of dance momentarily counters the stasis of failure" (128). Consider also the sense of his lost identity that Harry regains on the golf course with Reverend Eccles, who attempts to forge a

relationship with the young wanderer in order to guide him back home. Golf would become a major motif in Updike's work. As Begley points out, the game of golf answers, to a degree, Harry's restlessness over the missing component of spiritual health and emotional fullness: "With one miraculous swing of a golf club, he has legitimized, in his own mind, his defection from married life; . . . no mere argument will persuade him otherwise" (Begley 198). After his first strong swing on the tee box, Harry declares, "That's it!"—an exclamation, from Begley's perspective, that indicates Harry has found that component he lamented the absence of when he told Eccles, "Well I don't know all this about theology, but I'll tell you, I *do* feel, I guess, that somewhere behind all this . . . there's something that wants me to find it" (*Rabbit* 116, 110). For Harry, movement is a representation of his waywardness and impetuosity. Even Updike's characters outside of the Harry/Ace mold are characterized by their propensity for movement. The centaur imagery associated with George Caldwell suggests his tireless workhorse qualities, and his propensity to walk instead of drive is consistent with Updike's motif of movement. "My ideal is to walk to my own funeral," he tells his son. "Once you've sold out your legs, you've sold out your life" (*Centaur* 150).

For Salinger, especially in *The Catcher in the Rye*, the connotations are reversed: stillness is naturally desirable, movement is death. This holds especially true if one considers the way Salinger uses the imagery of stasis to illustrate his characters' ideological inflexibility and their disinclination to change. Holden, for example, fondly recalls how a childhood friend always kept her kings in the back row when playing checkers (31–32). The novel's central image of children in danger of rushing off a cliff suggests how movement and fears about the loss of innocence are linked. Whereas Harry's itinerancy answers a deeply rooted impulse, Holden's is presented as a tragedy of displacement. Holden wanders alone through New York City only because he has been kicked out of school, he cannot stay with the roommate he has just fought with, and he is frightened of being around his parents when they learn of his expulsion. Throughout the book, he wanders, looks for company, and is uprooted again and again—he is told he cannot borrow another student's bed, he is attacked by a pimp in his hotel room, and he leaves his former teacher's home when he begins to feel threatened there. The essential Salingerian longing is for a stable place in which to exist without threat of injury or rebuke. It is in this sense that *Catcher* is most squarely the opposite of Updike stories like *Rabbit*, *Run* in which characters must fight the urge to stray, even as they are drawn toward new domestic arrangements. If Harry's animal is the rabbit, Holden's is the duck, a creature routinely forced from home by circumstance rather than

desire (Holden asks a cabdriver, “Do you happen to know where they go in the wintertime, by any chance?” [81]). If Harry is the poster child of restlessness and a young man’s predisposition to wander, Holden represents youth’s inclination to stay put, both physically and ideologically. Salinger depicts Holden as so bound to his unyielding sense of morality that he would nearly rather die than allow himself any philosophical flexibility (never better illustrated than when he incurs injury for refusing to pay the pimp five dollars). Holden bristles at a shape-shifting world and is unwilling to concede, even after some evidence of growth by the novel’s end, that he will ever change. “Certain things they should stay the way they are,” he declares in a passage praising the merits of museums. “You ought to be able to stick them in one of those big glass cases and just leave them alone” (122). Holden associates inconstancy with mortality, insincerity, and the loss of innocence. As with *Catcher*, *Franny and Zooey* depicts characters who are rendered immobile by obsessive intellectual objections. Franny has fallen into an unshakable depression because, among other injustices, she must endure a professor who is “just a terribly sad old self-satisfied phony with wild and woolly white hair” (127). Franny, like Holden, must overcome not the desire to wander, but the temptation to become fixated on one’s viewpoints.

Of course, Salinger stops short of depicting Holden’s fixations as normative; however, as with Updike’s depiction of Harry, he subordinates censure to a wish to “present sides of an unresolvable tension intrinsic to being human” (*Rabbit* xi). Bob Batchelor reminds us that “Rabbit’s complicated and conflicted nature serves as an example of the quintessential Updike hero, though one must use that term lightly” (68). Something similar could be said about Holden and Salinger; in *Catcher*, Holden’s inflexible longings are dissected and critiqued, but never without some degree of sympathy. Holden grows out of his obstinate tendencies by the end of the novel, but he still wears the red hunting hat that suggests his stubborn individualism. *The Catcher in the Rye* suggests that flexibility is a necessity, though perhaps not quite a virtue. Holden swallows his medicine in the end and realizes that, to survive, he must become like his little sister, who has a starring role in her school play as that most famous of traitors, Benedict Arnold. “You *have* to go back to school,” Holden pleads with his sister. “You want to be in that play, don’t you? You want to be Benedict Arnold, don’t you?” (208). Holden, too, will likely return to school and play the part of a betrayer of his own values, which Salinger depicts as a kind of sad necessity.

In Salinger’s fiction one does not observe the lingering and easy fascination with sex that we associate with Updike. “Franny” and “Zooey,” like the other stories

about the Glass family, depict love and affection without a sexual subtext (for this reason, it is hard to imagine Updike writing a story in which all the characters are siblings). Sex is present in *Catcher*, but it is presented with a greater degree of ambivalence than we would expect in an Updike novel. A character like Holden—a quixotic defender of purity, a teenage virgin who turns away a prostitute but pays her all the same—would be alien in Updike’s landscape. In *The Centaur*, Caldwell laments not the presence of an obscenity at his school, but instead the unknowable “psychology of the boy (it must have been a boy) who altered the original word, who desecrated the desecration . . . The mystery depresses him” (247). Updike tended to depict sexual release as fundamental to his characters’ longings (and indeed, only a page earlier, Caldwell’s son, about Holden’s age, discovers, beneath his girlfriend’s skirt, “the secret the world holds at its center”). In *Catcher*, something different is at work. As Edgar Branch points out, Holden’s fears about sex have as much to do with his repulsion at his own desires as with his wariness of the sexual behavior exhibited by others. His “adolescent sexual urges are somehow entangled with what is predatory in the ‘mean guys’ he hates” (145–46). When Holden sees the expletive on the wall of his sister’s school (the one profanity he would never use himself), he worries that his own grave will be vandalized in the same way: “I think, even, if I ever die, and they stick me in a cemetery, and I have a tombstone and all, it’ll say ‘Holden Caulfield’ on it, and then what year I was born and what year I died, and then right under that it’ll say ‘Fuck you.’” Holden, drawing upon associations that are foreign to a character like Caldwell, imagines that sexuality and death are united in some mysterious way (a clue as to why he is so zealous in his desire to guard children from sexual awareness). And, as if to prove himself right, he nearly falls dead only a paragraph later: “I sort of passed out” (204).

Salinger is generally more willing than Updike to grant to his characters a strong articulateness, and this key difference has guided comparisons of the two writers. Richard Lyons, hardly condemning either author, suggests that Harry Angstrom is a parallel to Seymour Glass as he is depicted in Salinger’s “Raise High the Roof Beam, Carpenters,” but for the fact that Seymour has an intellectual and verbal outlet for his restlessness whereas Harry “hasn’t the vocabulary with which to externalize the emotional tinglings which vibrate through his nervous system” (1). Greiner, more willing to take sides, suggests that Updike triumphs over Salinger because “[w]here Salinger lectures and even bullies, Updike muses and invites” (123). Updike himself, in his review of *Franny and Zooey*, characterizes Salinger’s fiction in about the same way: “Few writers since Joyce would risk such a wealth of words upon events that are purely internal and deeds that are purely talk” (*Assorted* 235).

To these observations I would add a word of caution about characterizing the talkativeness of Salinger's fiction as merely superficial—not only because in many cases the distinctiveness of the voice lends the work so much of its appeal, but also because Salinger so often depicts verbalization as his characters' saving grace. The extended scenes of dialogue in "Zooney," along with a long letter that Zooney reads from his brother Buddy, are themselves indications of the story's conflict and steppingstones toward the resolution. What Salinger establishes through even the most "convoluted and static" stretches of dialogue is akin to what Updike establishes through the lingering depictions of sex in a book like *Couples*, in which partnering occurs between friends as casually as it does among lovers. Connections are broken and forged, and so the novel moves forward. In this sense, dialogue is to Salinger what sex is to Updike.

Updike interprets the stationary and loquacious qualities of *Franny and Zooney* as evidence of Salinger's esteem for introversion in the postwar age "where, for most of us, there seems little to do but to feel" (*Assorted* 235). This is valid analysis, but somewhat overstated. Unlike in Joyce's case, to borrow Updike's comparison, where the narrative voice is purely internal, with Salinger there is always a listener as well. Salinger depicts verbalization, not merely introspection, as a remedy for troubling thoughts. For characters like Holden Caulfield and Buddy Glass, the telling itself is an agent of change in the narrative. Salinger creates works in which characters talk themselves out of conflict, such as "Seymour: An Introduction," in which stylized narration and ruminations eclipse plot almost completely. Here again, second-person pronouns abound; at one point, Buddy even offers a gift to the reader: "I privately say to you, old friend . . . , please accept from me this unpretentious bouquet of very early-blooming parentheses" (98). It is the words themselves, the breathless sharing about something deeply felt, that carry the narrator to a resolution at the story's end. Buddy, though wounded, is able, after sharing, to return to the outside world and stand before others as a teacher ("I know . . . there is no single thing I do that is more important than going into that awful Room 307" (212–13)). This method is especially evident in *Catcher*, a novel so rife with second-person pronouns that it is easy to imagine Holden speaking to a specific person, not a broad audience. Early in the novel, as a favor to his roommate who needs to hand in a composition assignment, Holden writes an essay about his late brother's catcher's mitt, and when his roommate rejects it, he tears it up (41). Holden's quest from this point on is in large part a search for a listener. It is implied that he is telling his story to a psychologist, and in the novel's final lines, we are offered a hint that the telling of his tale will play a part in the healing of his wounds:

“Don’t ever tell anybody anything. If you do, you start missing everybody” (214). The suggestion is that articulation defeats the feelings of antipathy that Holden has exhibited throughout the book. He is capable of missing people now, and he has his voice to thank for this small victory. In *Franny and Zooey*, Franny attempts to address her unhappiness through reiteration of a prayer—the Jesus Prayer from the book *The Way of a Pilgrim*—on a constant loop, even when she recovers from fainting: “Her lips began to move, forming soundless words, and they continued to move” (44). Salinger depicts the tendency to transmute pain into words with some ambivalence as Franny repeats the prayer with such compulsive frequency that it becomes worrisome to the other characters and to herself. “Don’t you think I have sense enough to *worry* about my motives for saying the prayer?” she complains to Zooey. “That’s exactly what’s *bothering* me so” (149).

This places Holden and Franny in sharp contrast with Updike’s characters, particularly Harry, who are defined in large part by their inarticulateness. As Batchelor observes, “Rabbit is good at following the MagiPeel script, which he uses to sell the worthless product in his dead-end sales job, but cannot meet the same standards when communicating with people in his personal life, particularly if his emotions are involved” (74). Updike leaves it to a third-person omniscient narrative voice to capture the scope of Harry’s interiority, even when, as in a gardening scene, Harry has thoughts that are “felt without words in the turn of the round hoe-handle in his palms” (*Rabbit* 117). Harry is rarely wanting for listeners the way Salinger’s characters are. He has a varied audience, including his mistress and Eccles, at almost any time. He is more likely to be the one breaking things off, ending the conversation on his own terms rather than seeking out an unwilling listener.

A far more loquacious and verbally adept speaker in Updike is the Rev. Tom Marshfield of *A Month of Sundays*, who is assigned to write a daily journal entry during his stay at a retreat for wayward ministers. The premise is that writing down his thoughts will save Marshfield (although it is unclear whether Updike even depicts him as needing help). What hints there are, though, of a recovery for Marshfield have less to do with the therapeutic nature of writing than with his sexual endeavors and his bonding with other men over golf. He marvels at “[t]he way a golf swing reveals more of a man than decades of mutual conversation” (190). He is reluctant to define his problem in anything but sexualized terms: “A common fall, mine, into the abysmal perplexity of the American female. . . . [T]he case needs for cure another woman” (201). And Updike, in offering Marshfield in the final chapter a coupling with the manager of the retreat, Ms. Prynne, doesn’t appear to disagree. After all, Marshfield was already a man who made his career

with words, and the prospect of writing oneself out of anguish is never taken as seriously by Updike as it was by Salinger. "I've been a fun boy," Marshfield writes gamely, "faithful to my vows of obedience, full of the right camp spirit . . . I want my merit badge" (223).

Although Updike doubtless understood the therapeutic nature of putting pen to paper and speaking up, such a characterization of writing is curiously absent in his fiction. That Updike had an outlet to vent his frustrations and his characters do not is, as Begley points out, perhaps the greatest difference between him and figures like Richard Maple, who are, in other respects, deeply autobiographical portraits. "There is," writes Begley, "one crucial distinction between the character and his creator: unlike Richard, Updike hoarded his experience as a husband and father for use in his writing. . . . His undoubted affection was accompanied by an opportunistic urge to make use of what he was witnessing" (331). Even Henry Bech, Updike's writer character, seems happier keeping his typewriter silent. "Maybe I have a beautiful gift for stagnation," he wonders (*Complete Henry Bech* 77). Bech's reluctance to share is always presented as comical; it is generally secondary to his conflicts. When, after a long period of silence, he finally writes a best-seller, his mood hardly matches the clearheadedness of Holden at the end of *Catcher*. To the contrary, he is dismayed by the words of his erstwhile mistress, who tells him before a romantic coupling, "It was cranked out, Henry. Even where it was good, it felt cranked out" (284).

Updike's populism is evident here. It is likely that Updike eschewed fiction about the act of writing in order to better connect with a nonwriting readership. In his preface to *Golf Dreams*, he writes that he imagines the book's ideal reader as being "too busy perfecting his or her swing to be wallowing in my oeuvre" (xvi). While we may praise Updike for writing fiction that captures a broad swath of the public—Greiner says Updike's characters are "as ordinary as [Salinger's] are unusual" (125)—we should remember that Salinger's success is evidence of his own kind of resonance with the general, even nonliterary, public. There is no reason that a middle-America reader of Salinger would not recognize in, say, the narrator's clumsy effusiveness in "De Daumier-Smith's Blue Period" something of his or her own tendencies.

Careful readers will observe that Salinger's garrulousness to the point of excess anticipates criticism, that every instance of misguided sermonizing is intended to be subject to the same gentle censure that we apply to each instance of Harry Angstrom escaping from home. For all their differences, perhaps what Updike and Salinger share most distinctively is the sense that an excess of the cure is still not

quite enough. In Buddy Glass's futile attempt to capture his grief and fondness for his lost brother with the gushing "Seymour: An Introduction," we sense both the desire to transmute feelings into words and the limited capacity of language to capture the full scope of human emotion. Silence follows the end of every Salinger story; there occurs what Buddy refers to as "some playwright . . . slamming down his silly curtain" (*Raise High* 212) and we are reminded of the limits of language, the boundaries of art. Likewise, with every escape or sexual romp in Updike's landscape there is a reminder both of movement's value and the impossibility of it being forever sustained. Each time Harry darts around the corner, mortality, it seems, is still nipping at his heels, until in *Rabbit at Rest* we find Harry at last immobilized. Though their responses to it are different, each author recognizes with a special clarity the provoking force that prompts one either to speak or to move—as well as the tragic fact that no words or movement can spare us from the universal pain that prompts us to words and movement alike.

#### WORKS CITED

- Batchelor, Bob. *John Updike: A Critical Biography*. Santa Barbara: Praeger, 2013.
- Begley, Adam. *Updike*. New York: HarperCollins, 2014.
- Branch, Edgar. "Mark Twain and J. D. Salinger: A Study in Literary Continuity." *American Quarterly* 9.2 (Summer 1957): 144–58.
- Greiner, Donald J. "Updike and Salinger: A Literary Incident." *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction* 47.2 (Jan. 2006): 115–30.
- Lyons, Richard. "A High E. Q." *John Updike: The Critical Responses to the "Rabbit" Saga*. Jack De Bellis, ed. Westport: Praeger, 2005. 1–4.
- Maynard, Joyce. *At Home in the World: A Memoir*. New York: Picador, 1998.
- Prescott, Orville. "The Centaur." Rev. of *The Centaur*, by John Updike. *New York Times* 4 Feb. 1963: 7.
- Salinger. *The Catcher in the Rye*. 1951. New York: Little, Brown, 1991.
- . *Franny and Zooey*. 1961. New York: Little, Brown, 1991.
- . *Nine Stories*. New York: Little, Brown, 1953.
- . *Raise High the Roof Beam, Carpenters and Seymour: An Introduction*. New York: Little, Brown, 1963.
- Schiff, James, ed. *Updike in Cincinnati: A Literary Performance*. Athens: Ohio UP, 2007.
- Updike, John. *Assorted Prose*. New York: Knopf, 1965.
- . *The Centaur*. New York: Knopf, 1963.
- . *Collected Early Stories*, ed. Christopher Carduff. New York: Library of America, 2013.
- . *The Complete Henry Bech*. New York: Everyman's Library, 2001.
- . *The Early Stories: 1953–1975*. New York: Knopf, 2003.
- . *Golf Dreams: Writings on Golf*. New York: Knopf, 1996.
- . *A Month of Sundays*. New York: Knopf, 1975.
- . *Rabbit Angstrom: The Four Novels*. New York: Everyman's Library, 1995.



# Updike in Love

DONALD J. GREINER

The hero is always returning, from hundreds of miles finally.

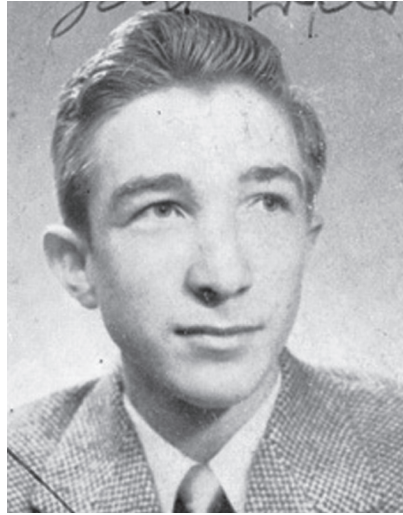
—Foreword, *Olinger Stories: A Selection*

In 1987, Martin Amis commented on the unusually close relationship between John Updike's life and canon: "[M]odern fiction tends towards the autobiographical, and American fiction more than most, and John Updike more than any" (15). The same observation is true of his poetry: for example, "Midpoint," which he wrote in 1968 to acknowledge that he had now lived one-half of his biblically allotted threescore years and ten, and "Endpoint," the poignant series of poems completed as he lay dying in late 2008. While the alter egos in his short stories—Allen Dow, David Kern, and William Young among them—often undergo discoveries, disappointments, and epiphanies as Updike experienced them, he either changed the descriptions of his friends and acquaintances who served as models for his writing or created composites to forestall accurate identification.

Asked in 1968 whether his neighbors, past and present, "get upset" when they think they have spotted themselves in his fiction and poetry, he replied: "I would say not. I count on people to know the difference between flesh and paper, and generally they do. . . . [T]here are rather few characters in those Olinger stories that could even remotely take offense" (Plath 25). The fine line between his life and art was drawn as early as 1943 when, at age ten, he wrote two all but unknown and unpublished love poems in which he identified the girl who caught his fancy in the fifth grade: Jackie Hirneisen. Fifteen years later in the short story "The Alligators" (1958), he dramatized the rise and fall of his schoolboy crush on Jackie but changed



Jackie Hirneisen, “the blondest streak in school.” Senior-year photo in *Hi-Life 1950*, the Shillington High School yearbook. Courtesy of Governor Mifflin High School, formerly Shillington High School.



John Updike, senior class president, voted “the wittiest.” Senior-year photo in *Hi-Life 1950*, the Shillington High School yearbook. Courtesy of Governor Mifflin High School, formerly Shillington High School.

her name to Joan. Updike spent his adulthood detailing the domestic, erotic, and spiritual complexities of the eternal dance between male and female, but his artful variations on the theme of man wooing woman date from his grammar school days in Shillington, Pennsylvania. Jackie Hirneisen Kendall, eighty-two years old at this writing and married to Carl Kendall, agreed to an interview about the poems, “The Alligators,” her schooldays in Shillington, and her lifelong friendship with the boy and man who wrote lovingly about her. The two poems are the earliest known examples of Updike’s creative efforts to write for an audience other than his family and teachers.

I

The context for reading the two poems and “The Alligators” is Updike’s decades-long need to refashion the memories of his youthful courtships in Shillington into art. Adam Begley observes of Updike’s attachment to his small hometown: “Though he once insisted (unconvincingly) that the Shillington he used in his fiction was more a stage in his ‘pilgrim’s progress’ than an actual spot on a map, his instinct was always to borrow the signature detail from the bricks and mortar



Jackie Hirneisen Kendall and John Updike before the 50th reunion of the Shillington High School class of 1950. Photograph supplied by Jackie Hirneisen Kendall.

of the town” (5). In *Self-Consciousness* (1989), Updike clarified the bond that, for the rest of his life, never ceased pulling him back to the days of his boyhood: “I become exhilarated in Shillington, as if my self is being given a bath in its own essence” (220). Yet, though as a writer he was both celebrated and condemned for his clear-eyed focus on the various incarnations of women to be loved, he also revealed that he was never a ladies’ man in Shillington. His “only girlfriend” (37) during his public school years was Nancy Wolf, the prototype of such fictional portraits as Molly Bingaman in “Flight” (1959), who is nostalgically described as looking “dumpy and prematurely adult, with a trace of a double chin” when seen from a distance. But “up close she was gently fragrant . . . She had beautiful skin, heartbreaking skin a pencil dot would have marred, and large blue eyes equally clear” (*Collected Early Stories* 226). Wolf’s house in Shillington was a short walk from Updike’s.

His affection for the classmates and school years of his “pilgrim’s progress” is pointedly expressed in two poems written specifically for his childhood friends. As president of the Shillington High School Class of 1950, he always returned for the organized reunions: “I never miss a high-school class reunion, and never come away without a story” (*Due Considerations* 645). Updike’s attachment to the school was shared by the teenagers who were graduated with him in 1950: “[T]he Class of ’50 was big on class loyalty. Some of us went to kindergarten together . . .

It's fascinating to see time work its wonders on people you've known since they were 5" (Plath 151). To commemorate the fortieth gathering in 1990, he wrote the uncollected and untitled occasional poem "Full forty years have flown, no less." Approximately one hundred copies of the poem were privately printed for distribution to Updike's classmates. A photograph of the school building graces the top of the sheet: "Our spirits feel as keen / As when we flashed at seventeen / Down varnished halls. . . ." Yet between the 1990 reunion and his death in January 2009, "varnished" slipped into vanished. The high school building was torn down and the friends began to die. In December 2008, aware of his own impending death, he wrote "Peggy Lutz, Fred Muth 12/13/08" in which he no longer generalized the girls and boys of his youth but named them. His sweetheart was never Peggy Lutz: "cheerleader, hockey star, May Queen . . . she was too much girl for me." The core of his canon, he reaffirmed as he was dying, was centered back there, in Shillington, with its "pumpkins" and "valentines":

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, . . .

(*Endpoint* 26)

Peggy Lutz may have been "too much girl" for Updike, but Nancy Wolf was not. Remembered as Molly in "Flight," as the unnamed girlfriend in "The Walk with Elizanne" (2001), and as Elsie in *Villages* (2004), she was memorialized as Nora in *Self-Consciousness*:

I was often in love but didn't have a *real*, as they say, girlfriend until my senior year. She was a junior, called Nora. Though my only girlfriend, she was enough—sensitive, nicely formed, and fond of me. It was courtesy of Nora that I discovered breasts are not glazed bouffant orbs pushing up out of a prom dress but soft poignant inflections, subtle additions to the female rib cage, . . . She was as fragrant and tactful and giving as one could wish; . . . (37)

But his mother's conviction, if obsession is not the better word, that her son was special, that he was destined to fly away from Shillington, quashed his adolescent romance. Fearful that he would marry a local girl and thereby be forever grounded in the small town she detested but he loved, Linda Updike rejected Nancy Wolf

just as Mrs. Dow repudiates Molly in “Flight.” Later, when he began publishing accounts of his mother’s objections, Updike did not shrink from expressing the connection between the negation of young love and the recalcitrance of his parent: “I was not allowed to be a normal boyfriend but had always to be sneaking and breaking up and saying goodbye” (38).<sup>1</sup> Trapped between not feeling good enough for Peggy Lutz and being taught that he was better than Nancy Wolf, he lost both girls in Shillington but found them again in art.

Updike never forgot Nancy Wolf. She remained one of the foundations of his memory to such an extent that he was still thinking of her near the end of his life.<sup>2</sup> Shortly after his fiftieth class reunion in 2000, he wrote “The Walk with Elizanne,” which he described as “a religious story, of course—at least it tries to evoke that ineluctable strangeness of human existence in which religion takes root” (*Due* 646). For Updike, however, the religious embraces the erotic. When David Kern sees Elizanne at a high-school reunion and thinks back to his boyhood walk with her (“She was not for him”—an allusion to Peggy Lutz), he reminisces instead about the girl who was “for him,” another rendering of Nancy Wolf: “Before too long he got his first real girlfriend, from the class below theirs, who let him hold her breasts, and partially undress her, slick as a fish in the parked car” (*Collected Later Stories* 735).

He wrote his fullest fictional remembrance of his “only girlfriend” just five years before he died. The Elsie Seidel of *Villages*, his most thoroughly nostalgic novel of sweethearts, wives, and mistresses, is Molly and Nora writ large.<sup>3</sup> And explicitly: kissing and rubbing with her boyfriend Owen progress to oral sex but not consummation. In the parlance of teenage courtships during the late 1940s, nakedness in a parked car with its sexual experimentation and attendant excitement permitted “heavy petting” but prohibited “going all the way.” Like Molly with Allen, Elsie with Owen is more mature, more confident of what her body can offer, more willing to give. Although one can never identify precisely the demarcation between what happened in the lover’s lane with Nancy and Updike and his later fictional refashioning of their moments together, one understands that her impact on him led to more than a puppy-love crush. Elsie is “always smartly turned out” in the right clothes and correct make-up, while Owen “stand[s] by, in a flannel shirt whose sleeves were too short, in scuffed laced shoes that looked oafish”—much as the adolescent Updike was remembered as a poor dresser (*Villages* 61, 65). Still, “with Elsie in the car, he had real nakedness to deal with. . . . Yet there was more, both knew it, and as his senior year ran out they groped to find it without committing sins so dark and final their lives would be forever deformed. Elsie was less afraid of

this than he; he refused to test how far she would let him ‘go’” (64, 68). The nudity and groping shaped by a combination of longing and fear as recalled in *Villages* form the context for the well-known comic line in *Couples* (1968), “Welcome . . . to the post-pill paradise” (52, italics in the original). Pregnancy was the snake in the garden. For teenagers stuck in the pre-pill world that Updike describes in these fictions and in which he himself had lived, pregnancy would deform the present and threaten the future. Once again the mother looms. Now an adult, Owen remembers that “[h]e didn’t want his mother to see; his mother didn’t want him to go with Elsie at all” (*Villages* 62).

Molly, Nora, and Elsie were for Updike what readers of F. Scott Fitzgerald have immortalized with the phrase “the golden girl”—Rosalind Connage (*This Side of Paradise*), Judy Jones (“Winter Dreams”), Daisy Buchanan (*The Great Gatsby*), Ailie Calhoun (“The Last of the Belles”), and Nicole Diver (*Tender Is the Night*) among them—sexually alluring, always lovely, never won. As Begley notes, “the altered, fictionalized story, now freighted with significance, displaced the less dramatically compelling reality” (15). At the conclusion of “Flight,” Allen Dow concedes victory to his mother: “All right. You’ll win this one, Mother; but it’ll be the last one you’ll win” (*Collected Early Stories* 234). The martial language is clear. This was an intra-family battle fought in both life and art. Updike’s take on this scene is instructive: “I think especially of that moment in ‘Flight’ when the boy, chafing to escape, fresh from his encounter with Molly Bingaman and a bit more of a man but not enough quite, finds the mother lying there buried in her own peculiar messages from far away. . .” (Plath 28).<sup>4</sup> Yet for Updike, unlike Allen Dow, art triumphed. His eventual victory was complete when memory conjured the golden girls of his boyhood and brought them forth to glow in his books. Jackie Hirneisen was the first to shine.

Begley comments that “all through elementary school, [Updike] loved one classmate in particular, a freckled girl with pigtails and green eyes. This love went unrequited” (26). Jackie’s pigtails and green eyes suggest that, as soon as she joined Updike’s fifth grade class as the new girl from afar, she became the object of his affection. The love was not reciprocated because Jackie found Updike “plain looking” (*De Bellis* 67). She later resisted her parents’ suggestion that she date him. Unlike Elsie, she preferred boys who knew how to dress, who combed their hair, who cared about how they looked—all signposts of courtship that Updike was either unaware of or consciously rejected. Further, although several classmates described his skill at jitterbugging as a reason for his popularity, Jackie remembered him as a poor dancer, the kind of boy with whom she did not want to share the last dance (*De*

Bellis 67–68). One can only speculate about Linda Updike's reaction had her son's attachment to Jackie in the fifth grade been rewarded and then matured in high school, but it is likely that Jackie's indifference spared her the force of a mother's wrath. And yet the ten-year-old Jackie kept the two love poems Updike wrote for her until her eighties. She resisted his attentions but retained his art. Behind Elsie stand Nora and Molly as projections of Nancy Wolf, but behind these four girls stands Jackie.

## II

The two love poems Updike wrote at age ten are in holograph and signed.<sup>5</sup> Printed with pencil, "Jacqueline" is composed of one stanza of seven lines with a rhyme scheme of AAABBCB. At the top of the sheet Updike drew a portrait of Jackie Hirneisen in which her face and mouth resemble a heart. He made the *J* of the title into another heart. The poem elevates Jackie's permanent beauty above the ephemeral glow of moonlight and sunset. Also written with pencil but in cursive, "Mush" is composed of three stanzas for a total of sixteen lines following a dedicatory line. The rhyme scheme—ABCB ADEDEFGF HIJI—is impressive for a boy in the first stages of his development as an artist. Once again he celebrates Jackie's loveliness when contrasted with nature's variety: flowers, national parks, heavenly lights, the universe itself. She is, in effect, his queen. Despite misspellings and the occasional awkward rhyme, the poems are charming. That he even wrote the two lyrics and then dared to present them to her confirms both his attraction to his classmate and his innocence.

"The Alligators" features a protagonist named Charlie (Updike's alter ego), a fifth grader who focuses on Joan (Jackie's alter ego), the new girl in his class who has matriculated at his school after moving from Baltimore. The story, a subjective third-person narrative, follows Charlie's misreading of both his own feelings for Joan and the way his classmates treat her. At first, he joins in what he takes to be the popular gang's uniform dislike of the girl because of her hair, her clothes, and her nerve in speaking up to the teacher, Miss Fritz. Yet after he dreams that Joan is being pursued by alligators and that he can be her only rescuer, he begins to compliment her with the thought that they will become leaders of a new gang, drawing the other classmates to them. He realizes too late that the rest of the class has adored Joan from the moment she entered the school and that their torment of her was their way of demonstrating a bond with her that he fails to achieve.<sup>6</sup>

Eager to discuss the poems, the story, and their context, Jackie Hirneisen Kendall answered questions via mail and telephone in November 2014.

**GREINER:** Where were you born? If not in Shillington, when did you move to Shillington?

**KENDALL:** I was born in Shillington, but moved from there when I was four years old and didn't return until I was ten years old—in fifth grade.

**GREINER:** In “The Alligators,” Charlie says that Joan joined his fifth grade class from Baltimore. Did you live in Baltimore? If so, when did your family move there? What grades did you attend in Baltimore?

**KENDALL:** We moved to Baltimore in 1942. My father went to work at Glenn L. Martin [Company]. They manufactured parts for and built airplanes. My dad was unhappy there, so I went only to fourth grade in Baltimore, and part of fifth grade, at which time I came to Shillington and the infamous class—headed eventually by John Updike as president. It was at my time of arrival that John wrote the “love poems” and passed them to me during class.

**GREINER:** Adam Begley writes that in elementary school Updike loved a girl with freckles, pigtails, and green eyes, but the love was not reciprocated. Who was this girl: Nancy Wolf, Peggy Lutz, you, or someone else? How aware were you of his “love”?

**KENDALL:** I had pigtails and green eyes, but, alas, no freckles! Also, I didn't join the class of 1950 until fifth grade. When I received the “love poems,” I must have been impressed since I saved them and was not really a saver. However, at age ten I didn't have the emotional development to think much about it.

**GREINER:** Except for your time in Baltimore—your father was sent there because of World War II—were you in Updike's classes throughout grammar, middle, and high school?

**KENDALL:** Yes, World War II, for the war effort. I was with John throughout grammar and middle school and some high school classes.

**GREINER:** Updike occasionally mentioned responding to the nickname “Chonny.” What did you and your classmates call him?

**KENDALL:** “Chonny” was a Pennsylvania Dutch form of “Johnny.” His family was *not* Pennsylvania Dutch and therefore I must conclude that they did not call

him “Chonny.” We all called him “John.” I don’t recall any of us ever really calling him “Johnny.”

**GREINER:** Jack De Bellis reports that you and Updike were members of a big gang and that Updike was a leader [De Bellis 42]. What are your memories of the “gang”?

**KENDALL:** Our gang at ages of probably ten to fourteen went to Grace Lutheran Church, except Nancy March LeVan, who went to the United Church of Christ up the street, and Joan Venne Youngerman, who went to the Catholic church. After church, we met at Ibach’s Drug Store and decided what we would do that afternoon. Walks to the museum or airport—things like that. On one walk to the airport it rained, so—we all had umbrellas and the guys threw ours over the fence at the airport, and we spent an hour trying to retrieve them—silly stuff like that. Once we went to Dick, nicknamed “Mandy,” Manderbach’s and played strip poker—*didn’t get out of hand*. At birthday parties we played spin the bottle—we loved kissing. When the bottle pointed to you, you and the guy went into the closet for the kissing. When I turned fifteen I started dating the high school quarterback and didn’t see much of the guys, but was close friends with the gals forever—to this day. I wouldn’t say John was the leader—none were leaders in my estimation.

**GREINER:** How would you describe Updike as a friend during your grade school years? How close was your friendship in grade school, or was he just another classmate?

**KENDALL:** John was part of the gang. He was funny, entertaining, and included in all the birthday parties and everything else we did. He was definitely more than “just another classmate.”

**GREINER:** What was your reaction to the poems? Was he shy around you in 1943 when he wrote them?

**KENDALL:** I was ten years old in 1943. I really can’t recall my feelings, but I must have been pretty darn impressed to have stashed them away. John was never shy. All the teachers adored him. He really enjoyed people—never a loner type.

**GREINER:** Did he give the two poems to you at the same time?

**KENDALL:** No, definitely at two different times. He passed them to me in class. We were just kids—puppy love.

**GREINER:** I find it delightful that you kept the poems throughout your life. What prompted you to do so? What did you think of the “portrait” of you that he drew on one of the poems?

**KENDALL:** I stashed them away with my other special memorabilia. Everyone was aware that John was *special* so that anything he did was worth keeping. As for the “portrait,” I really don’t recall my feelings.

**GREINER:** During school, how social were you and Updike: meeting at parties, sitting with each other at church, visiting one another’s houses?

**KENDALL:** Social—yes! All parties, church, etc. I was never at John’s house. I lived at the opposite end of Shillington. John was at my house for parties. In fact I have a letter from John that I will share, as well as the copy of *Chatterbox* [the high school newspaper] to which he was referring. The letter is dated June 11, 2003. John mentioned four of our Shillington classmates. He included a photocopy of the March 9, 1945, issue of *Chatterbox* which features a two-paragraph story about the party I hosted in celebration of my twelfth birthday. The write-up begins, “Jacqueline Hirneisen, 7A, was hostess to friends in honor of her twelfth birthday on Friday, February 23. Decorations were carried out on a patriotic theme of red, white and blue. Games were played and refreshments were served.” There’s a list of my guests, which includes Peggy Lutz and John. He called the party a special function.

**GREINER:** Your caption in *Hi-Life*, the high school yearbook, describes you as running “the gamut from attractive to zealous . . . the blondest streak in school” [*Hi-Life* 1950, 22].<sup>7</sup> Clearly, your popularity was not limited to a single class but was schoolwide. Updike likely wrote many of the captions since he was known throughout the school as a writer and was closely involved with the production of the yearbook. What was your reaction?

**KENDALL:** I don’t know who wrote that, but I will tell you what he wrote in my copy of the yearbook when he signed it: “To a gorgeous, intelligent, talented, versatile, witty, attractive, adorable, kind, etc., etc. girl, John” [31]. He also wrote that he fully expected me to go to Hollywood, since I had the lead in both the junior and

senior class plays. John also had parts in the plays. Gosh, he was so complimentary that I had to watch out not to let it get to my head—just kidding.

**GREINER:** The Shillington High Class of 1950 scheduled reunions every five years. Updike returned to Shillington to attend them. How easy was it to pick up the conversation with him after those five-year intervals? How well remembered were the love poems?

**KENDALL:** Very easy. John loved to talk and so did I, so conversation flowed easily. When he was going through his divorce, he said to me that being alone was an empty feeling and that when you are with your spouse, even though you may not be side-by-side—it is still a different feeling. I understood what he was saying. There is a picture I want to show you that was taken of the two of us at a pre-reunion party. When I spoke to him about the poems, he was amazed that I had saved them but he remembered that he had written them.

**GREINER:** Were the poems the only time he directly expressed his affection?

**KENDALL:** The poems, yes!

**GREINER:** Your classmate and lifelong friend Joan Venne Youngerman commented at the 2014 Updike Conference in Reading, Pennsylvania, that none of the girls “wanted to go with John.” Why was that so? Updike has stated that during his school years he had only one girlfriend—Nancy Wolf.

**KENDALL:** Joan is correct. Unfortunately, in your immature years people like John were not thought of romantically. He was not good looking, not athletic—stuttered pretty badly in school, so we just never thought of him in that romantic way. Some of this comes through in “The Alligators.” Actually, I never knew Nancy Wolf or anything about that love affair, though I was happy for him later when I heard about it.

**GREINER:** Updike published “The Alligators” in 1958, less than a decade after your graduation from Shillington High. What was your reaction when you first read it? How closely did you see yourself as Joan and Updike as Charlie?

**KENDALL:** I arrived on the scene from Baltimore, so that was factual. I may have spoken up to Mrs. Fritz, though I don’t recall. I hope I wasn’t too out of line, as I

adored Mrs. Fritz, as we all did. It was probably a week or two until I was accepted into the gang. I knew that John liked me. As for his dream, I was certainly never aware of that.

**GREINER:** As well as you remember, which characters in the story were based on teachers and classmates?

**KENDALL:** I was Joan. Charlie was John. Miss Fritz was Mrs. Olive Fritz, our fifth grade teacher. Stuart Morrison was Stewart Sonen, our classmate. We met in his garage. He raised rabbits. Miss Brobst was Kathryn Brobst, the other fifth grade teacher. Carl was Carl Leh, the town cop and our crossing guard.

**GREINER:** How did your friends react to the story?

**KENDALL:** They enjoyed it, but one or two were a bit envious. Natural, I suppose.

**GREINER:** What was your reaction to seeing yourself described in the first paragraph as having “a thin face with something of a grownup’s tired expression,” “long black eyelashes like a doll’s,” and the “crust to actually argue with teachers”?

**KENDALL:** I didn’t see myself like that at all and hoped John had taken *a lot* of literary privilege.

**GREINER:** Charlie says Joan wore “show-off clothes” and kept her hair long instead of “cut or braided” like the other girls.

**KENDALL:** My clothes were all “hand-me-downs” that my mother altered [as a dressmaker]. I did have pigtails till the end of sixth grade, at which time I took a scissors and cut them off because Mother wouldn’t allow me to have my hair cut. I didn’t want to go to middle school with braids. I was in deep trouble.

**GREINER:** How accurate is Charlie’s claim that the students resented you—Joan—at first because you had experienced the world beyond Shillington?

**KENDALL:** One friend told me that I went up to the map and pointed to Texas and said, “This is where I am from.” What a brat! I was definitely trying to impress them, I guess.

**GREINER:** For one of the two poems Updike wrote for you at age ten, he drew a portrait. In “The Alligators,” Charlie mocks Joan with a drawing he titles “Joan the Dope.” How embellished is this fictional account of the drawing? Were you upset by it?

**KENDALL:** Very embellished, but I wasn’t upset. *I liked* it [the story].

**GREINER:** Were you mocked, as Joan is, when the students noticed your newly cut hair? In the story the classmates call Joan “Baldy-paldy from Baltimore.”

**KENDALL:** Fiction. I recall none of that.

**GREINER:** The pathos in “The Alligators” is generated not by Joan’s mistreatment but by Charlie’s loneliness. Declaring his love for her is his means of establishing a bond with the girl he has all along misperceived as an outsider. He begins to show off, complimenting her new hair style, balancing his umbrella on one finger, walking backwards. Is this the Updike you recall from fifth grade—taking pratfalls, playing the role of the clown?

**KENDALL:** John was definitely a clown. At the Updike Conference in Reading, I told you the story of my meeting him the summer after his first year at Harvard with his disheveled appearance, shoes untied, wrinkled shirt, my almost not agreeing to have lunch with him. Also, he had a very large bag that he was bouncing, in which, I later discovered, was a new basketball. We did go to lunch, and it was great—conversation and lots of laughs.

**GREINER:** With his “rescue” of Joan in the dream, Charlie plans to form his own gang: organizing touch-football games, changing his hair style, learning to swim, escorting Joan to the dam. In short, he will become the king of the class with Joan as his queen. When you first read the story, what was your reaction to these plans and hopes?

**KENDALL:** Hilarious. We did all swim, every summer, almost every day, at the poorhouse dam, which in August had green slime on top which we took a stick to and made a hole to dive through. No pools in Shillington at that time. We all loved the “Porky” as we called it. When I read the story, I felt so sorry for John since I didn’t have a clue about his feelings.

**GREINER:** Charlie's epiphany is poignant: "that far from hating her [Joan] everybody had loved her from the beginning, and that even the stupidest knew it weeks before he did." He will never be king, but she is already "the queen of the class." How did this lovely conclusion strike you?

**KENDALL:** To say I was flattered is putting it mildly.

**GREINER:** How often did Updike mention "The Alligators" when he returned to Shillington?

**KENDALL:** The first time we knew he read it aloud [in his hometown] was at the Shillington Library about fifteen years ago. I was not there, but some of my classmates were, and they asked, "John, is that Jackie"? And he said, "Yes." He also read it at our Town Hall civic meeting. There were hundreds of people attending. Our Junior League sponsored it, after which my husband, Carl, stood up and said, "John, the heroine of that story is sitting here beside me." I was embarrassed. I told John that I had saved the poems. He was amazed. At one point I sent him stuff that I had saved about him and his mother. He sent me a letter and said that he was surprised I had saved all that stuff. He really appreciated the articles about his mother—some of which he had never seen.<sup>8</sup>

**GREINER:** What was the reaction of your classmates to Updike's depiction of the fifth grade class? For example, how did Updike's friends Joan Venne Youngerman and Harlan Boyar respond to the story?<sup>9</sup>

**KENDALL:** Neither one spoke to me about it. I guess we all thought of John more as a friend than a celebrity.

**GREINER:** As you look back on your long friendship with the great writer, what do you especially recall about him during those school years?

**KENDALL:** I remember John as very witty, his writings as creating pictures with words (many adjectives), brilliant, great artist, headed for greatness, fun to be with, nice guy, pleasant, frugal, and certainly outstanding. He was never "full of himself." I think the psoriasis and stuttering kept him grounded. As he himself asked in *Self-Consciousness*, Why am I stuck in this body? My husband grew up across the street from John on Philadelphia Avenue. He says that John often visited an

elderly couple on Philadelphia Avenue that he really liked to chat with when a little kid. Their name was Ohlinger. Carl thinks that's where the name for Shillington [Olinger] in John's stories came from. Who knows?

III

Updike continued to revisit in his short stories the theme of boy loves girl, boy does not get girl that began with the two poems for Jackie. Three years after "The Alligators," he published "A & P" (1961), a wry parallel to and variation on the theme of the earlier story: naive boy falls for unobtainable girl, expresses his infatuation, and learns to his chagrin that while she may notice him she does not care. The third-person innocent voice of the grammar school Charlie becomes the first-person wise guy voice of the teenaged Sammy, but both stories end with an epiphany that signals defeat: in Sammy's words, he realizes "how hard the world was going to be to me from here on in" (*Collected Early Stories* 322). Older than Charlie but hardly more mature, Sammy can verbalize what the preteen kid can only suspect: "You never know for sure how girls' minds work" (317). When the girl of Sammy's dreams walks into the grocery store where he works and lifts a dollar bill from the top of her bathing suit to pay for the groceries—"it just having come from between the two smoothest scoops of vanilla I had ever known" (321)—he sacrifices his job which he knows he needs in order to protect her even though he has sarcastically imagined her family sipping drinks "with olives and sprigs of mint in them" while his folks are left with cheap beer (320).

The combination of sexual longing and class resentment that drives Sammy is the other side of Charlie's innocent desire to be paired with Joan in the playground gang. In both cases, quixotic gestures of hoped-for heroism result in revelations of loss. Charlie's fantasy of rescuing Joan from the jaws of alligators as if he were Tarzan saving Jane becomes Sammy's decision to defend the scantily clad girls against Lengel, the grocery store manager, as if he were Sir Lancelot saving Queen Guinevere. His nickname for the uninhibited teenager is Queenie. In Sammy's parlance, he is an "unsuspected hero," but his heroism is ironic (321). The girls do not need saving.

For a final variation on the theme of love lost in Shillington that preoccupied Updike in many of his more or less autobiographical stories, I cite "A Sense of Shelter" (1959) in which he moves the location of the naive boy smitten by the elusive girl from grammar school and grocery store to high school. William Young, Updike's stuttering alter ego, strolls through the classroom "like a king and seemed to move to his seat between the bowed heads of subjects that loved him less than

he loved them” (*Collected Early Stories* 246). But his regal bearing is an ironic, defensive pose. With William Young, Updike turns again to his schoolboy years bracketed by Jackie Hirneisen in the elementary grades and Nancy Wolf in the upper grades: “He was not popular, he had never had a girl, his intense friends of childhood had drifted off into teams and gangs” (247). “A Sense of Shelter” focuses on William’s decision finally to confess to classmate Mary Landis that he loves her, but my point here is that Updike created Mary as a composite of Jackie (“green eyes,” 247) and Peggy Lutz (“she starred at hockey and cheerleading,” 248). Both Jackie and Peggy were members of the cheerleading squad and the field hockey team in high school, as confirmed by the descriptions of them in *Hi-Life 1950* (22, 24). William seeks a queen, a girl of his own, as Updike makes clear when William croons a verse from “Lavender Blue,” a popular song of the day: “Eef I were king, dilly, dilly, / You would be queen” (249). “[A]t the center of whatever gang was the one” from grammar school into high school (250), Mary is another rendering of Joan/Jackie, just as William personifies Charlie/Updike’s longing to anoint a girl and himself as the royal couple of the class and playground.

The comforting sense of shelter William feels in the classroom protects him from the deepening sense of defeat he suffers elsewhere. Updike makes William’s diminishment palpable when the boy reveals his love to Mary: “Yuh-you were such a queen and I was such a nothing” (255). Mary may be beyond the reach of a gawky boy like William, but she is not a “queen” in the sense that the other golden girls are. It’s her reputation of being sexually active that attracts him. The variant in this story is class: William feels superior to Mary because of the whispers about her and thus sees her primarily as an erotic object. Aware that she has an older boyfriend from the world outside high school, he feels free to blurt out that he knows she is not a virgin. Dodging his awkward attempt to kiss her, she walks away from the school into the cold. “The Alligators,” “A & P,” and “A Sense of Shelter,” all written in a three-year period, are fictionalized equivalents of Updike’s later observation in the poem “Peggy Lutz, Fred Muth” that certain school-aged females were “too much girl for me.” Similarly, the love lyrics he wrote to Jackie, charming as they are, were the quixotic gestures of his own childhood.

Two of the central questions Updike considered in his long and distinguished career were who loves whom and what obstacles stand in the way of love. As he argued in “More Love in the Western World” (1963), an essay-review published just a few years after “The Alligators,” “A & P,” and “A Sense of Shelter,” “Only in being loved do we find external corroboration of the supremely high valuation each ego secretly assigns itself” (*Assorted Prose* 299). For Updike, the search for an

outward sign that he was valued by someone other than family and teachers first manifested itself when, as a grammar school student, he turned to art and wrote the poems to Jackie. Shaping that experience into fiction, he wrote “The Alligators” to illustrate the height of a young lover’s hope and the fall to disillusionment. Later, in “The Future of the Novel,” a speech he delivered to the Bristol (England) Literary Society in 1969, he quoted Dr. Johnson, who “defined the word ‘novel’ as ‘a small tale, generally of love’” (*Picked-Up Pieces* 18). He continued, “Not to be in love, the capital N Novel whispers to capital W Western Man, is to be dying” (20). Charlie’s realization of his mistake, of his innocent misreading of Joan’s impact on his classmates and himself; Sammy’s discovery of “how hard the world was going to be to me from here on in”; and William’s spurned, stuttering declaration of love are early illustrations of Updike’s insistence that “[t]he bourgeois novel is inherently erotic, just as the basic unit of bourgeois order—the family unit built upon the marriage contract—is erotic. Who loves whom?” (*Picked-Up* 402).

“Not to be in love”: Charlie, Sammy, William, Allen Dow, David Kern, and Owen Mackenzie of *Villages* pursue what turns out to be the unobtainable girl in hopes of avoiding that life-denying state of negation. The obstacles are many—lack of interest (Joan, Mary), dismissal (Queenie), a mother’s opposition (Nora, Molly, Elsie)—but these are the varied obstacles Updike himself confronted as a boy, exacerbated when he realized that he was “not allowed to be a normal boyfriend.” To be in love in Updike’s fiction and poetry is to be not dying, yet for him art joined love as gateways to the eternal. He wrote the love poems to Jackie Hirneisen when he was a child. Little wonder that Updike was “amazed” when, late in their lives, she revealed to him that she had saved them. That she held on to the two lyrics for a lifetime testifies to the power of art and the feeling behind it.

#### NOTES

1. Linda Updike’s unyielding objection to Nancy Wolf extended even into Updike’s freshman year at Harvard. In December 1950, he received what Begley describes as “a maternal broadside against Nancy”: “I am no longer amused by her flutterings . . . Daddy adds the last straw by saying that ‘she’s got him.’ Be that as it may, don’t ever forget that she ain’t got me and I can sputter just as long as she can flutter” (80).

2. Wolf died on Valentine’s Day, 2009, just after Updike’s death on January 27, 2009 (De Bellis 145).

3. Although not as expansive, other fictional portraits of Wolf include those in “The Blessed Man of Boston, My Grandmother’s Thimble, and Fanning Island” (1960), *The Centaur* (1963), “The Beloved” (1971), and “One More Interview” (1983).

4. Begley observes: “Like Allen Dow, Updike had to cope with the complicated business of having a powerful, fiercely possessive mother who was simultaneously tightening her grip and pushing him up and out into the world—even as she herself was retreating from it” (20).

5. The Updike estate denied my request to publish the poems in this essay. They may be examined in my collection.

6. By 1990, "The Alligators" was so respected that it was published separately in hardback thirty-two years after its original publication: *The Alligators*. Mankato, MN: Creative Education, 1990. Today rare book dealers describe this edition as "scarce."

7. Quotations are from Jackie Hirneisen Kendall's copy of *Hi-Life 1950*, the Shillington High School yearbook, which may be examined in my collection.

8. On February 8, 1987, Updike wrote to Jackie and Carl, humorously commenting on the "torrid" affair he and Jackie had in the fifth grade and, more important, confirming that the "affair" was the subject of "The Alligators." Twenty years later, on May 5, 2007, he wrote again to Jackie and Carl, complimenting Jackie for being the most attractive person in the photographs taken at the 2005 reunion of their high school class. Updike's sense of Jackie's specialness remained vibrant from the time he first saw her until the end of his life. These two letters may be examined in my collection.

9. Joan Venne Youngerman was the prototype for Thelma in "Friends from Philadelphia" (1954). Eighty-two years old when she spoke at the 2014 Updike Conference in Reading, Pennsylvania, she humorously assured the audience that she no longer wore the "quite short shorts" that entice the protagonist of the story, John Nordholm, another of Updike's adolescent alter egos. She was included in the "gang," as was Peggy Lutz. Updike named Harlan Boyer in the poem "Upon Becoming a Senior Citizen" (1997), describing him as "my birthday twin" (*Americana* 37). Boyer and Updike were born on the same day in the same hospital.

#### WORKS CITED

- Amis, Martin. "Updike's Version." *Observer Review* 30 Aug. 1987: 15–16.
- Begley, Adam. *Updike*. New York: HarperCollins, 2014.
- De Bellis, Jack. *John Updike's Early Years*. Bethlehem: Lehigh UP, 2013.
- Hi-Life 1950*. Shillington, PA: Shillington High School, 1950.
- Plath, James, ed. *Conversations with John Updike*. Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 1994.
- Updike, John. *Americana and Other Poems*. New York: Knopf, 2001.
- . *Assorted Prose*. New York: Knopf, 1965.
- . *Collected Early Stories*, ed. Christopher Carduff. New York: Library of America, 2013.
- . *Collected Later Stories*, ed. Christopher Carduff. New York: Library of America, 2013.
- . *Couples*. New York: Knopf, 1968.
- . *Due Considerations: Essays and Criticism*. New York: Knopf, 2007.
- . *Endpoint and Other Poems*. New York: Knopf, 2009.
- . "Full forty years have flown, no less" (untitled poem). Shillington: privately printed, 1990.
- . *Olinger Stories: A Selection*. New York: Vintage, 1964.
- . *Picked-Up Pieces*. New York: Knopf, 1975.
- . *Self-Consciousness: Memoirs*. New York: Knopf, 1989.
- . *Villages*. New York: Knopf, 2004.

---

## Three Writers on *The Widows of Eastwick*

---

This section of the *JUR* provides space for three invited writers to compose responses to a single Updike story, novel, poem, or essay. The objective is to bring attention to a range of Updike's writings, particularly ones that have been neglected, and to provide a forum in which a range of writers—critics, scholars, fiction writers, editors—seek to better understand an individual work.

---



# Updike's Black Widows: *The Widows of Eastwick*

JUDIE NEWMAN

"Widders are 'ceptions to ev'ry rule."

—*The Pickwick Papers*

*The Widows of Eastwick* (2008), John Updike's last novel, received a lukewarm reception from reviewers, and to date has attracted little critical attention. Only a few reviewers were wholeheartedly positive, notably Alison Lurie in the *New York Review of Books*, who highlighted Updike's keen interest in women throughout his writing career, an interest which to his credit included women in old age. Indeed, Updike's later work features old women prominently and includes a large cast of widows from Janice Angstrom in "Rabbit Remembered" (2000) to Gertrude (albeit widowed very briefly) in *Gertrude and Claudius* (2000), Hope Chafetz (twice widowed) in *Seek My Face* (2002), and in his last novel, in addition to the eponymous widows, at least three others: Iona Tinker, Gina Marino, and Greta Neff. Recently in these pages Kazuko Kashihara has explored treatments of aging in Updike's fiction, particularly the widowed Mrs. Mortis of Updike's first novel, *The Poorhouse Fair*, and James Schiff has delineated how woman-centred novels emerge in the late phase of the Updike canon from *The Witches of Eastwick* (1984) onwards. Lurie noted that Updike's tone in the novel as omniscient narrator is sympathetic to the witches, or at least nonjudgmental, in strong contrast to the first-person frame narrator, and she reminded her readers of an essay in which "Updike remarks that 'witchcraft is a venture, one could generally say, of women into the realm of power,'" a power which animates Updike's prose in the second

and third chapters of the novel.<sup>1</sup> Once the witches are back in Eastwick, “the story takes off as if on a storm-whipped broomstick” (Lurie 6). The first chapter, “The Coven Reconstituted,” however, came in for criticism from reviewers. In *Publishers Weekly* these first 100 pages were dismissed as “tedious travelogues covering the widows’ travels to Egypt and China” (Newfield 48). William H. Pritchard in *Commonweal* saw the travelogues as entirely irrelevant to the plot, and even Lurie found them lackluster, often sounding “like the kind of tour guide who constantly explains more than most listeners want to know about the history and geography of places they have no connection to and will never see again” (Lurie 4).

At the risk of taking on the role of just such a tour guide, it is my contention that the places the widows visit—Alexandra on a tour of the Canadian Rockies, Alexandra and Jane in Egypt, all three in China—offer an important intellectual framework for the subsequent action of the novel. These are not merely instances of travelogue, with Updike mining his own trips to the Rockies (2006), Egypt (1968, 2008), and China (1998) for material, but relate to his consideration of the relationship of technology to nature, with specific reference to the writings of Lewis Mumford, whom he had engaged with previously in *The Witches of Eastwick* and *Toward the End of Time* (1997). Updike’s widows, who were chastened at the end of *Witches* and retired from magic into safe, conventional marriages, get a second outing to represent the continued opposition to and critique of a repressive social system. In the process Updike goes some way toward revising their previous image, converting at least Alexandra and Sukie into white witches, engaged in reparative magic to heal the ills of the past and restore fertility to a sterile culture. Reconciliation and healing are the order of the day, white magic repels black magic, and Updike kills off Jane, the only witch to practice maleficium and the killer, it is strongly suggested, of Sukie’s husband. In a sense, in writing a sequel to the original novel, Updike reverses the spell.

The fictional events in Canada, Egypt, and China, particularly in such locations as Sanson Peak, the temple of Philae, the Great Wall, the excavation of the Xian warriors, and the mausoleum of Mao Zedong, draw directly upon Mumford’s understanding of the continuum between the ancient and the modern world. Updike engaged with both Egypt and China in *Toward the End of Time*, set in 2020 after war between China and America has devastated most of the world.<sup>2</sup> The novel exploits many-worlds theory to send its central character, Ben Turnbull, on a series of time-traveling excursions, in one of which he is a grave robber looting a pyramid. As he glimpses the rubble-strewn entrance to the central treasure chamber, he has an uneasy sense of the crushing weight of stone above him, and in

a moment of claustrophobic horror his lamp is blown out, leaving him immured in darkness. The pyramid, designed to secure passage to the afterlife for a favored few, is a deathtrap. Updike's imagined world is informed here by Mumford's analysis of the Pyramid Age in *The Myth of the Machine: Technics and Human Development* (1967), which draws analogies between America's commitment to technology and empire and what is usually thought of as the rise of civilization in the great river valleys (Jordan, Nile, Euphrates, Tigris) in the fourth millennium BC. Mumford argues that the rise of civilization was the product of a new type of socio-religious organization—authoritarian, centrally directed, and under the control of a dominant elite. Its major features were an increase in mechanical and mathematical order (derived from the use of astronomical knowledge to plot the procession of the seasons and the revolutions of the planets) and a replacement of the gods of vegetation and fertility (often female) by the implacable sky gods—sun, moon, and planets. Mumford writes: “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” (*Technics* 11). The inflexible, predictable order represented by the calendar was transferred to the regimentation of human components in a disciplined and specialized labor force. In Mumford's argument our technological age has its origins not in the invention of individual machines in the Industrial Revolution, but in the megamachine, a social machine composed of human parts. At the center of this new type of society is the idea of divine kingship, as kings draw on the authority of the gods. Cosmic order is the basis of the new human order. Because the sun is the central point of reference in the motions of the planets, the sun-king occupies the center of a society conceived in its regularity as a replica of cosmic order, with all phenomena measurable, controlled, and repetitive. Society therefore became hierarchical, in the shape of a social pyramid, with many at the bottom supporting an elite class at the social apex. The resulting culture was also dedicated to expanding its collective power, by war and conquest. Egypt was Mumford's prime example of the new form of power. Only a complex power machine could achieve the construction of an immense pyramid, which demands knowledge of mathematics and astronomy and the use of manpower on a large scale. Mumford drew explicit parallels with the way the modern world had 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. (*Technics* 294)

In Mumford's argument the decline of fertility religions was part of the new order. In *Toward the End of Time* the dark female gods reassert their power over the gods of light, in the traditional image of the three-faced fertility goddess, with the male god (Ben) rampant at the beginning of the year with Deirdre (the lover), declining in power in the arms of Doreen (the maiden), and ultimately impotent against the powers of his wife, Gloria (the crone). Updike's three witches, therefore, have a long pedigree in prehistory. *The Witches of Eastwick* also draws upon Mumford, referring to the link between the abandonment of female earth religions in favor of a male sun god and the emergent creed of technological and capitalist growth. Women, associated with raw, uncontrollable nature, become subject to the male principle, identified with order and control. In *Witches* the three women are essentially neo-pagans, celebrating nature and female power, reflecting the anthropologist Margaret Murray's argument that modern witchcraft represents a survival of ancient fertility rituals, together with more contemporary feminist understandings of witchcraft as a reaction against patriarchal Christianity. It is only when the women come under the spell of Darryl Van Horne that they turn to black magic. Van Horne embodies the traditional equation of the devil with technology and fire, in his electrical experiments, his technological fervor, and his forthright description of nature as inherently needing to be controlled and mastered by man.

Updike begins his final novel by dramatizing the attractions inherent in the conquest of nature, in the emblematic location of the Rockies. The landscape is presented as entirely hostile. Mount Robson, dwarfing human beings at 4,000 meters, "like a pyramid," is "faceted as if the peak had been carved to a point like a flint weapon," an image of prehistoric violence (*Widows* 10, 11). Canada, with "its tundra and icefields and miles of forest pressing its population down tight against the forty-ninth parallel," seems to compress and dwarf the human being. Its committed environmentalism signally fails to enchant Alexandra, for whom the slogan "Bring Back Nature" rings hollow: "Nature had been her ally in witchcraft, but still she distrusted it, as a conscienceless killer, spendthrift and blind" (8). When she sets out for a walk she is annoyed at being turned back from the green splendor of a well-tended golf course, toward the dark forest. "Banished from this artificial paradise," she is plunged into thick woodland, including "a thick stand of lodgepole pines, . . . some of them, suffocated by their own shade, fallen into the lake" (16). Told that the "pines need fire, to crack open their resin-sealed cones,"

she finds it “horrifying, . . . how complacently Nature accommodates violence,” meanwhile glancing nervously around her for bears (18). The origin of the Rockies, “limestone, laid down by . . . aquatic creatures,” then “crumpled and folded” into “tilted layers and sharp peaks, honed and whittled by wind and abrasive glaciers,” is also disquieting. The aquatic animals who made this possible are “tiny creatures as keen to live, as self-important and ultimately insignificant as she” (17).

The scene is even less Wordsworthian at the Athabasca Glacier, where the footing is treacherous, the ice is dirty, and there are hidden crevasses from which there is no hope of rescue. After a vertiginous descent in a bus called a Snocoach, Alexandra is reduced to hanging onto her fellow tourists to ease her sense of endangered balance and vulnerability, as if they “all are swaying on the makeshift rope bridge that society suspends above the crevasse” (*Widows* 21). Even worse, as a post-menopausal woman, she sees herself as “on Nature’s trash-heap,” just like the aged elk, worn out by rutting and dying “of Nature’s furious will to propagate” (25, 24). It is important that Alexandra’s vision is located in the Canadian stretch of the Rockies. Where American writers (Thoreau, for example) incline toward a positive attitude to nature, Canadians tend to portray it as hostile, terrifying, or at best indifferent. Updike makes the point overtly: Canada’s “dramatic landscape did not flatter the rapacious vanity of the United States” (7). Northrop Frye argues that Canadian poets express a deep terror of the soul in relation to nature and see it as a denial of human and moral values, creating “a poetry of incubus and *cauchemar*” (Frye 36). Margaret Atwood also argues that in Canada nature is often seen as actively hostile to human beings, betraying their expectations by not living up to the conventional European literary tradition of the Romantic or picturesque. The last stop on Alexandra’s tour hammers home the message that nature needs to be tamed and controlled by a superior civilized knowledge, involving calculation and measurement. Updike sets the scene with a paean to the sun rising over Mount Victoria, his prose lyrical and evocative of a less threatening, pink and gold, picturesque tradition: “The rosy tinge slowly broadened and turned golden; daylight came to reign over the glassy surface of the uncannily blue lake, where the burning apparition of the dawn-struck peak hung suspended, upside down, like a chunk of gold in a New World’s cerulean Rhine” (*Widows* 27). Earlier, we are told: “Alexandra’s relation to Nature had always puzzled her; she leaned on Nature, she learned from it, she *was* it, and yet there was something in her, something *else*, that feared and hated it” (17). Now, however, she rises above it. After a gondola ride up Sulphur Mountain, she walks along the boardwalk toward Sanson Peak, feeling as if she is “treading air,” “flying” above the mountains (29). The board-

walk brings her to an emblematic location, a weather station famous for the fact that the meteorologist Norman Bethune Sanson (for whom the peak is named) climbed up to it “more than a thousand times, to record weather observations” (30), attending to the recording equipment for some thirty years and publishing his reports in the Banff newspapers under the pseudonym “Seer Altitudinous” (“Banff Gondola”). In short, and perhaps somewhat obviously, Updike dramatizes here the evolution away from nature and toward the sky gods. Alexandra has gone up into the skies, to a place where nature can be measured and calculated, its terrors to some extent mastered, by the astronomer-seer. Civilization—human society, human knowledge—asserts itself over the natural world.

After this it is no surprise to find Alexandra and Jane in Egypt. Updike sets the scene artfully with a debate about the measurement of time and the relationship of the human being to it. Both women are jet-lagged upon arrival. Alexandra, listening to her body, wants to keep to its natural rhythms and go to sleep; Jane, however, argues that “Egyptian time is now your body’s time” and drags Alexandra into the streets of Cairo (*Widows* 51). Time is not so easily mastered, however, as the ancient Egyptians believed. For Jane, the Great Pyramid exemplifies futility, “all that labor and engineering so one man could imagine he was going to cheat his own death” (57). The triumphalism of a colossal statue of Ramses II, “his gaze locked in the stark sky of his divinity” (59), is undercut in the museum by his “shrivelled, pathetic” mummy, “its skull snapped back like a stargazer’s” (59–60). Akhenaten, the advocate of monotheism and sun worship (in the form of Aton, the solar disk) is depicted as repulsively fat; King Tutankhamun, the poisoned boy king, is reduced to a jumble of treasures, “the detritus of a magical system as elaborate as it was useless” (59, 61). The futility of the grandiose monuments is heightened by the references to lazy gravediggers, unfinished murals, and misplaced sarcophagi. Jane’s reaction to Egypt is consonant with Mumford’s view of the system as an elitist megamachine, and she rails against the exploitation and oppression of the ordinary people by the priestly caste: “What did the guide at Edfu tell us? The Temple of Amun at Thebes was given fifteen hundred square kilometers by Ramses III alone? Ten percent of all the cultivable land at the time?” (65). Meanwhile Alexandra emphasizes the persistence of female belief systems in ancient Egyptian culture, as exemplified in the love of nature expressed in the delicate tomb paintings of reeds and flowers. The former religion was based on women “before men came in and took it over just like they took over midwifing . . . It was a nature religion that never died” (58). The two women admire the ceiling painting of Nut, the sky goddess, and the memorial temple of the female pharaoh, Queen Hatshepsut.

At Philae, the last place the pharaonic religion was practiced, they see the carved image of Isis suckling Horus, which was transformed into the Virgin Mary suckling Jesus when the temple became a church. As the guide explains, “She was the perfect widow, collecting fourteen pieces of the fifteen of her husband’s body” (64). When her husband, Osiris, was murdered and dismembered, Isis used magic to restore his body to life, becoming the goddess of health and marriage, an ideal wife and mother, and patroness of magic and nature. The image looks ahead to Alexandra’s white magic, restoring fertility to Veronica Marino, and to Sukie’s similar success in putting fresh life into Tommy Gorton’s mangled hand. Nonetheless, women remain under threat in modern Egypt. Both Alexandra and Jane wear long-sleeved garments and long skirts, as “[a] revived religious faith as monolithic as the Pyramids” is held only “at partial bay by the government’s military” (57). Alexandra remembers how “that Nobel Prize–winner”—a reference to Naguib Mahfouz, the author of a novel that argues for continuities between Judeo-Christian and Islamic traditions—was knifed in a Cairo street, and that Mohamed Atta was Egyptian (52, 43). Although the Pyramids may be crumbling, Islam shadows the women’s excursion with the subtext of the risks of an authoritarian faith. The trip ends on an ominous note. Infuriated by Egypt’s ancient triumphalism, Jane practices her magic arts for the first time in years, randomly slaughtering a bat. When the two women part company, somewhat tired of each other, Alexandra suggests that they bring Sukie along next time, then catches herself: “But she’s still married.” “Is she, though?” responds Jane, with an enigmatic half smile (71). As the reader soon learns, Sukie’s husband dies suddenly despite being in good health, and Jane comes back into Sukie’s life “almost as if she foresaw it coming” (74).

Sukie is now free to join the trip to China, where the witches finally come together to practice magic again, expressing their opposition to a repressive modern order, the successor to the ancient megamachine. In *The Pentagon of Power* (1971), the second volume of *The Myth of the Machine*, Mumford argues that although once banished, divine kingship was resurrected in the modern age and made more effective by the technologies of mass control. By terror and electronic magic, the personality cult of the leader elevates him to the status of god. Mumford illustrates his thesis with three juxtaposed images: Mao Zedong magnified in an enormous poster, an Egyptian mummy, and Lenin’s embalmed body displayed in his mausoleum. For Mumford the pathology of the power complex expresses itself particularly through magnification and multiplication. To achieve the same effect as the colossal statues of ancient Egypt, the absolute rulers of our time employ blown-up photographs, radio, and television. The leader becomes inescapable because of repetition and

multiplication: “But the end product of this fraudulent inflation is a mummy: a corpse preserved in the Egyptian fashion, placed in a tomb for public worship. Even Lenin, who according to his widow ‘wanted no memorials to him,’ could not escape this ignoble deification” (*Pentagon Image* 9, following page 180). As the three witches learn, in China “the past was in the present tense and visitors who obeyed all the rules would come to no harm” (*Widows* 78). At the tomb of Mao in Tiananmen Square, Alexandra finds “her eyes actually resting on the globally famous face, the implacable Other, absolute ruler for twenty-seven years of a quarter of the world’s population.” But his monumental stature is firmly undercut. His face is smaller than expected, “evenly coated with orange makeup . . . , deflated and generic,” the face of “any stolid Chinese man immobilized by taxidermy.” Even worse, Mao suddenly winks at her. Sukie and Jane, irritated by Alexandra’s look of fake solemnity, have worked their magic to undermine the spectacle and dignity of the Great Helmsman. Alexandra’s alarmed grunt annoys the young couple behind her, “their sacred moment with the corpse marred by a female barbarian” (94). As the term suggests, despite the regimentation there are always barbarians within the walls.

At the Great Wall, even more monumental than the Pyramids, the guide underlines the pointlessness of the edifice. On the Wall, Alexandra feels “the same sensation of lightness, of being *on high*, that she had felt [at] Sanson Peak.” The Wall, she recalls, “is the only work of Man that could be seen by observers on the moon” (*Widows* 88). But despite being “stuck together with blood, and broken backs,” the tour guide says, “[t]he fact is, it never worked” (85). He continues: “As history makes clear, there is no keeping barbarians out. They always eventually win. Energy comes from below, from the excluded and oppressed” (86). The facts that Updike supplies via the infuriatingly jokey tour guide reinforce the image of the ancient megamachine. Qin (Ch’in in the old orthography), the first emperor of China, conscripted a fifth of China’s total workforce to build the wall, “standardized its script, its weights and measures, its coinage . . . [and] organized the empire into administrative units” (85). Qin was “a legalist [who] believed people were basically evil . . . and had to be restrained by . . . laws, ruthlessly enforced. He was a totalitarian . . . of doctrine” (85–86). But his was “a one-man dynasty” (85). In his account of his own trip to China, Updike discusses Qin, pointing out that his reign was followed by widespread rebellion. Updike also describes modern China as offering “gargantuan evidences of effective authority” (*Due Considerations* 19). Because the emperor “was meant to be a divine instrument of universal power” (*Widows* 91), it was his role to standardize time and measurements, and even to fix

the calendar. Modern China, despite extending over five time zones, has a single standard time. The Forbidden City reflects the emphasis on calculation, regularity, and symmetry, with “[a]ll the courts . . . built on a north-south axis” (91). Even “the huge portrait of Mao” in Tiananmen Square conforms to the pattern, “squarely on the imperial axis,” with Mao’s “facial mole . . . realigned” (93). Nonetheless, as the guide quips, the elite precincts are now full of “tourists, barbarians,” and feature a Starbucks franchise (91).

Up to this point Alexandra has resisted the temptation of magic, all too aware that she is superior in her powers to the other two, “a broader conduit into the subterranean flow of Nature, that dark countercurrent to patriarchal tyranny which witchcraft drew upon” (*Widows* 90). But the Xian warriors force her hand. Massed in serried ranks as the guardians of Qin’s enormous tomb, the terra-cotta warriors exemplify magnification, multiplication, and military regimentation. Although the statues show some “attempt at individualization,” as distinct from “the art on Egyptian tombs [where] everybody but the pharaoh and his queen is interchangeable, standardized” (97), they are mechanically formed as if produced on an assembly line, out of separate legs, arms, torsos, and faces. When the tour guide unwisely makes a joke about widows, suggesting that they might like a terra-cotta warrior as a husband, Alexandra takes action. A parodic Isis, she reanimates them. As the tour guide watches, the “ranks of clay soldiers advancing towards them, in battle order” (97), begin to assume “a tinge of menace” and suddenly they are actually moving, “advancing like oceanic waves,” shaking their weapons and shouting “Fight, kill, blood, death” as they march toward slaughter (98). The jokes are over: “That was China, he perceived—millennia of slaughter, war, famine, floods, torture, of being buried alive, being skinned alive, being worked to death, but there was never enough death to relieve the land of its burden of people” (98–99). The guide sees the advancing army as “epitomizing the atrocious history of mankind” but also the enormous numbers of people in modern China, the emerging global superpower (99). The scene lacks the comedy of Mao’s conspiratorial wink, and hints ominously at future conflict. Led by Alexandra, the three witches have come together to cast this particular spell and become once more a coven, reconstituted in the face of a renewed threat of regimentation and oppression. Xian, Updike reminds us, is the “site of matriarchal neolithic settlements dating back to 4500 B.C.” (96). On the whole, we are told, “China delighted the three women,” not least because it almost entirely lacks the “Christianity that had persecuted witches with the fury of its own denied desires” (100). When they return to America, it is with their powers restored.

At the site of the Xian warriors, Alexandra calms the frightened guide by suggesting that the Chinese have created holograms of the soldiers, and the guide is reassured by the idea: "The new Chinese. They love high-tech toys" (*Widows* 99). Electronic magic holds no terrors for him. But Alexandra's words turn out to be prophetic. When they return to Rhode Island the witches come under the threat of electronic magic, in a standardized and regulated world that is hostile toward them from the start. Nature is clearly losing the battle in America. Sukie notes that in Connecticut all the towns run together and there are no truly wild spaces, as there used to be in Rhode Island: "even the woods they set aside as natural Nature places seem weeded" (73). When Alexandra drives north from Taos to her childhood home in Colorado, she finds that the "open country she had known as a girl was unrecognizable, unfenced grassy acres . . . given over to tract houses" and irrigated golf courses (107). Eastwick too has changed, the downtown sidewalk's "squares levelled, its shade trees wrapped in all-year Christmas lights. Dock Street had been broadened and straightened, and high granite curbs" introduced to delineate pavement from street. Rhode Island, once a haunt of bootleggers and "a haven for apostasy and piracy," has been straightened out in every sense (129). Jane says she finds the town "homogenized, all smoothed out," its "young mothers driving their overweight boys" to sports, its "young fathers . . . helping itty-bitty wifey with the housekeeping." For Jane, "[i]t's the Fifties all over again" (139). The Lenox mansion in which the coven and Van Horne had indulged themselves has been remodeled into cramped condo units, and the town is much more bureaucratically ordered. Conformity and regimentation are the norm. Eastwick may not compare with the congested cities of Hong Kong and Shanghai, also on the widows' tour itinerary, but "[t]here are more and more people to regulate" (138). The Eastwick Public Library is dominated by computers, and its subterranean concert hall has "stifled acoustics" (143). The voice of dissent is muted. There is no longer a newspaper; its offices have been filled by a health center with "people on treadmills . . . [w]ith headphones on, like a row of zombies" (166). Opposition to the Iraq war is so weak that a planned protest has to be postponed (302). Sukie laments: "People adjust, is the frightening thing. They forget, generation by generation, what it ever was to be free" (138). Without an awareness of sin and evil, the inhabitants seem to Jane like "soul-less sheep" (139). The image recalls Updike's comment in his introduction to a book called *Soundings in Satanism*, where he sees excessive order as a threat to freedom, and sin as an inevitable reaction: "[T]he more completely order would enclose us, the greater the threat to our precious creaturely freedom, which finds self-assertion in defiance and existence in sin" (*Picked-Up Pieces* 90). Whereas in

*Witches* Darryl Van Horne preached a sermon on the subject of evil, in *Widows* the pastor preaches against self-assertion (*Widows* 181).

In this environment, the widows fail to flourish. Soon after the threesome return to Eastwick, Jane takes sick. Formerly a sun worshipper, effortlessly tanning in summer, she begins to feel affected by “the sickening sun,” which seems to “hit her with a somehow radioactive force,” even through the pinholes of her straw hat, “pelting her face with a buckshot of photons.” Updike provides a catalogue of the technological pollutants that contribute to Jane’s malaise: carbon monoxide from cars, “electrons leaking from . . . neon tubing,” gamma rays from the ATM camera, and voltage from cables, all culminating in an electric shock from a transformer in the street (*Widows* 153). The shocks continue, bafflingly, over the following weeks. Alexandra’s son-in-law, an electrician, says that “electricity is a funny devil” (160). The comment is all too apposite. In *Witches*, Darryl Van Horne had experimented at “[t]he interface of solar energy and electrical energy,” attempting to develop a paint that could convert a house into “an enormous low-voltaic cell” (*Witches* 46). In the Lenox mansion he had installed a laboratory, working “under batteries of overhead sunlamps” (204), and in *Widows*, after his departure, the residents of the condo report strange crackling noises from their painted window sills, and wasps dead of shock. Van Horne had run off with Chris Gabriel—brother of Jenny, on whom the witches had cast a murderous spell—who has now been summoned back to Eastwick by Greta Neff for revenge. As Chris later admits to Sukie, he used the knowledge he gained from Van Horne to deliver the electric shocks, targeting Jane first. The action becomes a battle between technological magic, strongly associated with the sun, and female magic associated with regeneration and fertility. Alarmed by Jane’s sickness and Chris’s reappearance, Alexandra calls the coven back together for a final ritual, a witches’ Sabbath of one hundred percent white magic. Alexandra is looking for forgiveness, healing and harmony: “Years ago we grabbed what we wanted from the town and then left. Now we’ve returned to give something back” (*Widows* 186). She enjoins the witches to petition the Goddess on Jane’s behalf and also to say that they are sorry for what they did to Jenny. For the ritual the women remove their wedding rings, transforming from widows back into witches, and select in turn a tarot card on which to focus their energies. Alexandra and Sukie opt for regeneration in the footsteps of Isis. Alexandra reaches for the Queen of Cups, symbolizing Veronica, the childless daughter of her old lover Joe Marino, whose widow, Gina, had begged her to help her daughter conceive. Sukie chooses the Page of Coins and prays for the healing of her former lover Tommy

Gorton, his hand maimed in an accident. But Jane is unrepentant, denying any responsibility for Jenny's death, and when she reaches for the Diabolo card (the death card), is immediately struck down. Appropriately perhaps, her funeral is presided over by her centenarian mother-in-law, Iona, another widow and a member of the Boston elite, who is described as resembling "a carefully packed mummy." Iona descends to her guests, "a veritable *dea ex machina*," via an elevator, its shaft descending through the turns of a staircase "like a staff through the snakes of Mercury's caduceus" (213). (Mercury is the conductor of souls into the afterlife.) Machines and mummies win the day. Jane has been swallowed up by the established order. At her memorial service, conventionally Episcopalian, it is clear that nobody in the congregation much liked her: "Only other witches could have liked Jane, in their collusion of rebellion against the oppressions of respectability" (221–22). The two survivors, however, see their efforts rewarded. Veronica conceives at last, feeling and movement are restored in Tommy's hand, and Sukie deploys her wicked sexual arts to seduce Chris Gabriel and spare their necks.

One more widow remains to be taken into account: Georgiana du Pelletier, the heroine of the historical romance that Sukie is writing at the close of the novel. While in some respects a hilarious parody of the genre, from its exotic location on a slave plantation in the Caribbean to Georgiana's "dulcet alabaster epidermis" (*Widows* 293), Sukie's novel also reaffirms the transgressive nature of the widow, in revolt against a repressive society. Georgiana is sexually voracious and satisfies her passions with her black slave, Hercule, a muscular underbutler in tight-fitting knee breeches. Genre fiction of this nature has rigid conventions, and there is a firm taboo on overt sexual descriptions, but Sukie is adept at bending the rules and substitutes descriptions of food in their place. Georgiana's breakfast-in-bed involves a variety of sticky finger foods, much licking of honeyed bananas, and the ingestion of the suggestively named pastry "*les cornes du diable*." The coffeepot has a "round-bottomed body and [a] rod of a handle" and dispenses coffee with the diabolical "consistency of tar" (292). Georgiana's husband had warned her that if she was ever widowed "she must run the plantation with an iron, unflinching hand," but Georgiana has "forbidden use of the lash [and] manacles" and under her humane management the plantation is flourishing. "[R]evolt and conflagration" lie ahead in the plot (298), and Georgiana and Hercule are destined to end up in each other's arms forever, an idealized image of freedom from accepted convention. The romance is something of a compensatory fantasy, since Sukie's relationship with Chris is not entirely satisfying. She is the breadwinner and holds the purse strings while he (a second Hercule) is the cook and housekeeper. Though Georgiana and

her slave seem destined for a rosy future, Chris is soon to abandon Sukie. The novel within a novel underlines Updike's belief that fiction can be used to question and break the rules of society, and it also suggests, in the different outcomes for the lovers, the ways in which fiction may rewrite and revise events, as in Updike's sequel.

As Dickens's Sam Weller remarks, "Widders are 'ceptions to ev'ry rule" (*Pickwick Papers* 307). In literature they are often characterized as transgressive or as embodying unseemly sexual voraciousness (Shakespeare's Gertrude, Fielding's Lady Booby, and, in the brevity of her mourning, Petronius's widow of Ephesus). Updike's widows may be less powerful than in their heyday, but they offer a challenge nonetheless to the regimentation and technological domination of their society, now far more conformist than in the past. The change is obvious in the shape of the first-person narrator who appears in both *Witches* and its sequel. In the last lines of *Witches*, that narrator looks back on the legendary events years before with some wistfulness: "[T]he rumors of the days when they were solid among us, gorgeous and doing evil, have flavored the name of the town in the mouths of others, and for those of us who live here have left something oblong and invisible and exciting we do not understand" (*Witches* 307). As Alison Lurie noted, however, the narrator in *Widows*, apparently representing one of the conventional churchgoers of Eastwick, is meaner and much more spiteful than his or her predecessor, categorizing the women as "accursed" (*Widows* 185), "unholy wantons" (307), and "seasoned accomplices in evil-doing" (101), and falsely asserting that their husbands (of some thirty years) "did not prove durable" (3). But the narrator does not have the last word this time. Alexandra renews her ties with her family and regains her faith in nature: "Nature, behind her back, in spite of her, had been bringing to ripeness her true self-fulfilment, her offspring and their offspring" (274). One of the last things she is seen doing is putting back together a clay statuette of the baby Jesus from her Christmas crèche that has been accidentally smashed by a grandchild (307), an image that harks back to Isis and processes of healing and regeneration. Sukie recounts how on one of her last days in Eastwick, walking close to the site of the old Puritan meetinghouse, she suddenly "stepped into the most awful darkness," "bottomless" and "antique," left over from the original forest when the first settlers huddled terrified in their cottages. For a moment Sukie feels "how lightly civilization sits on this continent. There is this darkness waiting to sweep in again" (303). Order is not immutable, and nature remains untamed, as are the two widows. The novel ends with Alexandra's question to Sukie, "Where shall we go together this year?" (308). It is our loss as readers that the answer remains unknown and that Updike did not live to create a further sequel.

## NOTES

1. The quotation occurs, in slightly different wording from Lurie's, in the "Special Message" for the Franklin Library edition of *Witches*: "Witchcraft is the venture, one could say, of women into the realm of power" (*Odd Jobs* 855).
2. The following discussion draws on my essay "Updike's Many Worlds: Local and Global in *Toward the End of Time*."

## WORKS CITED

- Atwood, Margaret. *Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature*. Toronto: Anansi, 1972.
- "Banff Gondola." *eParkGuide*. Web. 17 Aug. 2015. <<http://eparktours.com/tours/114/pois/3042>>
- Dickens, Charles. *The Pickwick Papers*. London: Penguin, 2003.
- Frye, Northrop. *Northrop Frye on Canada*. Ed. Jean O'Grady and Daniel Staines. Toronto: U of Toronto P, 2003.
- Kashihara, Kazuko. "It Isn't So Bad': Acceptance of Aging in Updike's Fiction." *John Updike Review* 3.1 (Spring 2014): 31–43.
- Lurie, Alison. "Widcraft." Rev. of *The Widows of Eastwick*, by John Updike. *New York Review of Books* 15 Jan. 2009: 4–6.
- Mumford, Lewis. *The Myth of the Machine, Vol. 1: Technics and Human Development*. London: Secker & Warburg, 1967.
- . *The Myth of the Machine, Vol. 2: The Pentagon of Power*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1971.
- Newfield, Paul. Rev. of *The Widows of Eastwick*, by John Updike. *Publishers Weekly* 28 July 2008: 48.
- Newman, Judie. "Updike's Many Worlds: Local and Global in *Toward the End of Time*." *John Updike Review* 1.1 (2011): 53–67.
- Pritchard, William H. "Toil & Trouble." Rev. of *The Widows of Eastwick*, by John Updike. *Commonweal* 19 Dec. 2008: 20–21.
- Schiff, James. "Two Neglected Female-centric Novels of Updike's Late Phase: *Gertrude and Claudius* and *Seek My Face*." *John Updike Review* 3.1 (Spring 2014): 45–63.
- Updike, John. *Due Considerations: Essays and Criticism*. London: Hamish Hamilton, 2007.
- . *Odd Jobs: Essays and Criticism*. New York: Knopf, 1991.
- . *Picked-Up Pieces*. New York: André Deutsch, 1976.
- . *Toward the End of Time*. New York: Knopf, 1997.
- . *The Widows of Eastwick*. New York: Knopf, 2008.
- . *The Witches of Eastwick*. New York: Knopf, 1984.

# *The Widows of Eastwick: Updike's Book of the Dead . . . or Rather, Dying*

JAMES PLATH

“If you’re an ancient Egyptian, your *ka* is created at the same time you are, on a different potter’s wheel, . . . It’s not exactly the same as the *ba*, your spirit,” Jane Tinker tells her former fellow witch and now widow Alexandra Farlander in *The Widows of Eastwick* (2008). The *ka*, Jane says, is your “soul, . . . although it’s rather more practical and complicated than that” (*Widows* 48).

That’s about as deeply as John Updike ventures into the *Egyptian Book of the Dead*, which he references in *Widows* before Jane and Alexandra travel together on a package tour of the Nile—a tour that allows them to see the Pyramids and Luxor, famed city of pharaohs and queens, with its monuments, temples, and tombs.<sup>1</sup> But the Egypt passages are more than tourist guidebook trivia or details added merely to enhance the novel’s realism. Updike has the two widows board a Nile tour barge named *Horus*, after the Egyptian sun god, son of Osiris and Isis, whose eyes guided the dead on their journey to heaven (*Egyptian Book of the Dead* lxxvii). It’s as if Updike is inviting us to consider Alexandra’s journey throughout the novel as a loosely parallel one.

For the ancient Egyptians, as Paul Mirecki notes in his introduction to the E. A. Wallis Budge translation of *The Egyptian Book of the Dead*, the concept of “self” was indeed complicated:

[T]he whole man consisted of a natural body, a spiritual body, a heart, a double, a soul, a shadow, an intangible ethereal casing or spirit, a form, and a name. All these were, however, bound together inseparably, and the welfare of any single one of them

concerned the welfare of all. For the well-being of the spiritual parts it was necessary to preserve from decay the natural body. (lxxv)

Updike aficionados know that the author's strength is an equally complex interweaving of often heady researched information, observations of human nature, expressions of natural (i.e., sinful) desires, detailed poetic descriptions of the everyday world, and whatever philosophies and religions seem to apply to a particular topic. In this novel, although specific correspondences may be tough to pin down and there are only scattered allusions to ancient Egyptian beliefs—as when a dying Jim Farlander is described as having a jaw that “showed shadows” or Jane and Alexandra are “[l]ike spectres viewing their own corpses” as they tour a museum displaying artifacts from the tomb of Tutankhamun (*Widows* 5, 61)—the *Book of the Dead* nonetheless provides a controlling metaphor that directs readers to view the widows as experiencing what Alexandra imagines as “this last life stage, a sprint to the grave in widow’s weeds” (28). The Egyptian view of the self placed a great deal of emphasis on preserving the body and avoiding decay and the body’s worst enemy: “the worm” (cxxxiv). And in *The Widows of Eastwick* there is a great emphasis on the body’s decline and decay from within. At one point Alexandra admits to a “feeling of discouragement. A sense . . . that the cells of my body are getting impatient with me. They’re bored with housing my spirit” (271). Earlier we are told: “The curse of it [having willed cancer on her rival Jenny in *Witches*] was always there, inside Alexandra, even when she didn’t close her eyes, a sour gnawing. As negligible as a worm . . . during the daylight hours, at night in her dreams the curse grew large” (11). Readers will recall Alexandra’s fear of cancer from *The Witches of Eastwick* (1984), but in *Widows* it’s even more pronounced, with more dejection and a greater emphasis on the body’s deterioration, something she can sense happening to her:

Her worst fears were of cancer—your own cells turning evil, multiplying, blocking your organs with senseless scarlet cauliflowers of flesh, attacking even the intestines that had kept your excrement out of sight and smell, adding shame to pain, an artificial exterior bag to the rotting body. (146)

Updike’s widows see cancer everywhere, even in Eastwick, where Jane finds “the Old Stone Bank twice the size it was, like some big bland cancer gobbling up everything” (139).

*The Widows of Eastwick*, Updike’s sequel to *The Witches of Eastwick*, was published on October 21, 2008. Less than two weeks later, Updike would write a very

personal poem in which he explained: “A cold that wouldn’t let go / is now a cloud upon my chest X-ray: / pneumonia.” Then, on November 6, he wrote: “A wake-up call? It seems that death has found / the portals it will enter by: my lungs” (*Endpoint* 21). The literary giant would die of lung cancer within three months, on January 27, 2009, at the age of seventy-six.<sup>2</sup>

Like the two books Updike assembled after he knew he was dying—*My Father’s Tears and Other Stories* and *Endpoint and Other Poems*—his last novel has an elegiac and nostalgic feel, with a tone that vacillates between a pained acceptance of the inevitable and, in the case of his three revisited protagonists from *The Witches of Eastwick*, relatively meek and halfhearted outbursts of protest, as if even their feistiness and playful spirits have been eroded or eaten away from the inside. As Michiko Kakutani wrote in her *New York Times* review:

The passage of time seems to have mellowed the witches and their creator as well, and *The Widows of Eastwick*, while deeply flawed, is a less tendentious, more emotionally credible work than its predecessor. . . . The mood here reflects his characters’ realization that the past now weighs more than the future in the scale of their lives, and that the noisy imperatives of sex, which once got them into so much trouble, have given way to whispered worries about bodily ailments and medical woes. (C8)

It’s true. *The Widows of Eastwick* doesn’t have the same “spriteliness,” to use Updike’s word (Plath 261), that the original novel possessed. The death that occurs in it isn’t as shocking, and talk of electromagnetism and such scientific things just don’t seem to have the same crackle of energy as when devil figure Darryl Van Horne (absent from the sequel) bubbled with infectious enthusiasm—whether he was in the hot tub with the witches or on the tennis court. Likewise, the magical realism that uplifted *The Witches of Eastwick* has been reduced to a few perfunctory insertions of spells that reveal both the witches’ (and a would-be warlock’s) waning powers, and perhaps Updike’s waning interest in the whole business of magic and witches. He is, as Kakutani observed, more interested in describing the less-than-glamorous alchemy of aging that has beset his witchy heroines. As Kakutani implies, this is the novel’s strength, and Updike is spot-on in his observations of men and women dealing with the inevitable.

After her second husband died, we are told, Alexandra’s “instinct, as with so many a wife suddenly liberated into solitude, was to travel” (*Widows* 3). Why not? Her late husband’s “idea of a trip had been the hour’s drive south to Santa Fe” and he “hated foreign countries, even the Virgin Islands” (4, 9). Updike, who

was criticized throughout his career for not being able to craft credible-enough female characters, really gets into the heads of his now-older witches—as when he describes Alexandra as she brings Jim to the oncology waiting room: “She felt the other couples idly pawing at them with their eyes, trying to guess which of the two was the sick one, the doomed one; she didn’t want it to be obvious. She wanted to present Jim as a mother presents a child going to school for the first time: as a credit to her” (6). Updike speaks to an entire culture of widows and widowers in American society when he also perceptively notes:

The socialization forced upon her—interviews with doctors, most of them unsettlingly young; encounters with nurses, demanding merciful attentions the hospitalized patient was too manly and depressed to ask for himself; commiseration with others in her condition, soon-to-be widows and widowers she would have shunned on the street but now, in these antiseptic hallways, embraced with shared tears—prepared her for travel in the company of strangers. (6–7)

Passages such as these remind us that Updike was still one of the most insightful commentators on American life and lives, and that whatever interest or energy *The Widows of Eastwick* generates comes from such penetrating observations rather than a facile plot that can be summarized as a series of trips followed by a forced and hurried reunion in Eastwick and a confrontation with Chris, brother of the young witch, Jenny, that the three witches may have killed with their spells in *The Witches of Eastwick*.

In his review of the novel for *The Guardian*, Adam Mars-Jones complained:

The first part of the book, in which the women re-establish their connection, is by some way the weakest. First Alexandra goes on a train trip of the Canadian Rockies by herself, then she joins Jane to explore the Nile. Finally Sukie joins the other two on a package tour to China. Updike is a meticulous observer, but these pages are still too close to travelogue for comfort.

That may also be true. There are moments in the first section when one feels that Updike is writing in the tradition of nineteenth-century travelogues or real adventures thinly disguised as novels, as literary giants Herman Melville and Mark Twain did before him. To a greater degree than Melville and Twain, however, Updike uses the opportunity to explore the essence of human nature, and he uses the structure in the first section to suggest the essential core of his schematics and thematics for *Widows*.

For one thing, there’s a progression in the first section that most readers, like

Mars-Jones, will notice—from one witch to two, and finally three. But if one considers Updike's mention of the *Book of the Dead* (*Widows* 61) and his references to ancient Egyptians' beliefs about death and the afterlife, it's also clear that there is a pattern of similarity as well. Alexandra is a reluctant traveler, but the three places she visits all have one thing in common: their monumental, centuries-old permanence. Two of them were marvels of human engineering and effort. "Imagine all that labor and engineering so one man could imagine he was going to cheat his own death," Jane remarks of the Great Pyramid of Cheops. "But hasn't he?" Alexandra, Updike's alter ego, responds. "We know his name, all these years later" (57). Likewise, we're told that the Great Wall of China was built by "an estimated one million people, about one-fifth of China's total workforce," with some sections "built as long ago as the seventh century B.C." (84). It stands still, as a monument to not just the dynastic rulers who caused it to be built and fortified but the men and women whose hands built it. The emphasis is on achievements that survive beyond the lives of the workers. "The Forbidden City is quite a survivor," the tour guide says. "It has survived fire, war, civil war, and the Cultural Revolution, which not much else historical did" (91).

As Updike breaks it down, even the Canadian Rockies, an act of nature, is the result of the work of many and stands as a memorial to them:

The mountains were made of limestone, laid down by unthinkably many small aquatic creatures armored in delicate shells. . . . Sediments transported by vanished Mesozoic rivers accumulated and were compressed, and a change of direction in plate drift about two hundred million years ago crumpled and folded the great sheets of solidified sediment, thrust them upward, and piled them into the tilted layers and sharp peaks . . . It was all . . . as challenging to belief as the most fantastic dogmas of religion, but accepted by everybody sane in the modern world. (*Widows* 17)

Such thoughts of great lasting monuments built by people and living organisms are on Alexandra's—and Updike's—mind.

In *Widows*, Alexandra is somewhat like the deceased in the *Book of the Dead* who make a final journey to heaven, and the trips she takes in the first section of the book gradually move her farther and farther from her condition of the past thirty years. The *Book of the Dead* is an interesting combination of ritual recitation of the names of those who have died before, prayers to be recited to help the deceased move onward toward heaven, and a narration of the mythological creatures and demons that the deceased will encounter along the way. The way the novel is structured, Alexandra indeed feels like a pilgrim whose progress we're following.

Alexandra may not be deceased, but she's certainly conscious of her body's gradual decaying and the fact that each day brings her closer to death. Updike may have only been trying to refresh his readers' memory, but in having Alexandra remember the dead from *The Witches of Eastwick* and the husbands the witches took after the events of that novel, he also sets up a *Book of the Dead* recitation of those who went before. Also like the deceased, Alexandra encounters various figures along the way that move her closer to heaven—or, in her case, lead to a resurrection out of the funk she's been in and a renewed sense of appreciating what life she has left.

From a Japanese couple that feels inserted for comic relief in the Canada section, Alexandra learns that “[c]ompanions however incidental keep us focused on the fretful nag of living. We all are swaying on the makeshift rope bridge that society suspends above the crevasse” (*Widows* 21). Alexandra while traveling with a group “had tried to avoid conversations, and the other women sensed in her an electric aloofness—a negative charge of potential social disruption, a witch’s scorn of normal, tame order” (25). However, a gay man who has lost his partner as well keeps pushing her until she comes a little bit out of her shell so that she’s ready for the blunt-spoken Jane and their Egypt adventure.

“Listen, doll: we’re ancient,” Jane tells Alexandra. “It’s the inner woman that matters now” (*Widows* 35). Jane also challenges her assumptions about what’s real and what’s not in the matter of hocus-pocus and mumbo jumbo. Alexandra complains during their trip, “It makes you tired, doesn’t it? . . . All this superstition and oppression, and so long ago, when the world should have been still innocent,” but Jane replies, “You could just as easily be cheered up by the fact that the Pyramids are still here. Think of it. What in the United States is going to still be there forty-five hundred years from now?” (50). Later, when the subject turns to Van Horne and Alexandra pronounces him a hoax, Jane counters, “Darryl was, and Horus wasn’t? Really, *ssweetie*, those old Egyptian priests must have laughed themselves silly, thinking of the nonsense they put over on everybody, not for a day or a week but for *millennia!*” (65). Finally, Jane admonishes, “Lexa, you must grow up. That part [drugs and sex], for us, is over. Even Sukie can see that for her it’s over,” to which Alexandra inquires, “So, Jane, what’s left?” and Jane replies, “Being wise is left, darling. Seeing the world is left. Using your eyes and ears is left. Just think—you have consciousness, isn’t that amazing, all those neurons?” (107).

With Sukie, who joins them for the China trip, Alexandra is exposed to youthful enthusiasm once more: “There in the airport Sukie cried in her high, faintly breathless voice, ‘We’re going to have such *fun!*’” (*Widows* 81). “Lexa, let’s be *happy* here!” she gushes (83). Soon Alexandra’s point of view begins to brighten: “China

delighted the three women. Each day dawned with a new bauble, a fresh sight or two to see, in colors as fresh as wet paint” (100). Sukie is also the impetus behind the women renting the old Lenox mansion, where Van Horne once entertained them. In Eastwick, they meet all sorts of survivors—including some of the children they neglected in the first novel. As a result, whereas the first novel revolved around gossip, the sequel, with its emphasis on dying and tying up loose ends, focuses on frank conversation. Even when Alexandra talks with the widow of her former lover, she is far more sincere than she has ever been before. “I have nothing against Veronica, or you,” she tells Gina, referring to Gina’s daughter. “As I say, Joe loved you both.” Such intimate conversation from a woman who had avoided it earlier surprises Gina, and it “may have been too much to say, too close to mutual exposure. As if fearing where further talk might take them, Gina turned her back and melted in her baggy dark short-sleeved dress into the furious sun” (128).

Following Jane’s death, when Alexandra meets Jane’s mother-in-law, Iona Tinker, at the funeral party, the “ancient woman” speaks in terms that

made death seem comfortable and limpid and natural, the fruit of year upon year, decade upon decade, its fall finally met with a vanished era’s stoic upper-class manners. Detecting Alexandra’s interest in the topic, Mrs. Tinker told her, “We must all come to the end.” Yet she said this with the lightness of one to whom it did not apply, and with a smile of startling elasticity in the mummified brown face—a stretch that tugged her scored cheeks with a darting, almost girlish tension. (*Widows* 214)

By the time that Alexandra meets Chris, “[t]he kid brother Darryl kidnapped” who is “determined to kill” them (264) and who “more and more resembled Darryl Van Horne” (254), she has progressed to the point where she seems finally ready to face the unknown and the hereafter. As Sukie reminds her, “There’s no hiding now. You yourself said, ‘Screw him’” (239). And in the spirit of survival, when Sukie phones, Alexandra says cheerily, for the novel’s last line, “Where shall we go together this year?” (308). Alexandra does not journey to heaven, as do the deceased in the *Book of the Dead*, but she arrives at a more heavenly place than where she was at the beginning of the novel. It’s as if she has taken to heart something she had said to Jane in Egypt: “To them the afterlife was *this* life, going on forever. That’s what the Pyramids say: Give us more life. More, more, *please*” (58). And it’s as if Updike arrived at a different place himself, realizing that monuments like the Pyramids might be out of reach, but, as Alexandra realizes upon hearing her grandson refer to her impending death, “in the child’s saying the unsayable Alexandra saw that right here, in front of her, was one answer to death—her genes living on” (273).

## NOTES

1. In the fall of 1968, during the year he spent in London with his family following the publication of *Couples*, Updike visited Egypt alone. In March 1984 he spent a week in Kenya and a week in Egypt with his second wife, Martha, and her youngest son, Ted (Michael Updike, e-mails to the author, 18 June 2015 and 19 June 2015). He made a final visit to Egypt with Martha in February 2008, shortly after completing *The Widows of Eastwick*.

2. Updike was initially diagnosed with bronchitis in September 2008, according to his son Michael Updike. "He went on a West Coast *Widows of Eastwick* book tour, and there are recorded interviews where you can hear the coughing of a distressed respiratory" (Michael Updike, e-mail to the author, 18 June 2015).

## WORKS CITED

- The Egyptian Book of the Dead: The Papyrus of Ani*. Trans. E. A. Wallis Budge. Introd. Paul Mirecki. New York: Barnes & Noble, 2005.
- Kakutani, Michiko. "Old Black Magic Is Old, and So Are These Witches." Rev. of *The Widows of Eastwick*, by John Updike. *New York Times* 20 Oct. 2008: C1, C8.
- Mars-Jones, Adam. "Withered Witches on the Wane." Rev. of *The Widows of Eastwick*, by John Updike. *Guardian* 1 Nov. 2008. <<http://www.theguardian.com/books/2008/nov/02/widows-eastwick-john-updike>>
- Plath, James, ed. *Conversations with John Updike*. Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 1994.
- Updike, John. *Endpoint and Other Poems*. New York: Knopf, 2009.
- . *The Widows of Eastwick*. New York: Knopf, 2008.

# A Second Look at *The Widows of Eastwick*: Aging Women, Assuaging Guilt, and Updike's Sequels

JAMES SCHIFF

Though still early, perhaps, when it comes to assessing an oeuvre as replete as John Updike's, I doubt I would get much pushback if I called the author's final novel, *The Widows of Eastwick* (2008), his weakest. A similar claim could be made for *S.* (1988), *Seek My Face* (2002), or *Villages* (2004), yet I'd rather not facilitate such a competition. Better to try to understand each novel on its own terms—what worked, what didn't, why—as well as assess how that novel contributed, for better or worse, to the author's career.

My initial reading of *Widows* in 2008 is not memorable. I recall being disappointed, though Updike's death came so soon after, three months later, that there was even more reason to forget the novel. A quick flip through my proof copy turns up few marginal comments or other evidence of engagement. A year or two ago I heard someone describe *Widows* as a book about old people traveling, which sounded not only right but confirmed for me, I confess, the novel's lack of appeal. On a second reading, I discovered that almost two-thirds of the novel takes place in Eastwick, a sign of my own early carelessness as a reader. That said, it's doubtful I would have ever returned to *Widows*—that is, until I was needed to fill in, at the last moment, with this assignment.

Rereading *Widows*, I see there are clearly problems. The witchcraft, which felt so lively and appropriate in *The Witches of Eastwick* (1984), seems silly and forced in the sequel. The travel scenes that dominate the novel's first third are perfunctory

and predictable: a camel ride around the Great Pyramid, a cruise down the Nile, a visit to China's Great Wall and Xian's terra-cotta warriors. Though these travelogues are elegantly described and contain insightful observations on history, death, and religion, it feels as if Updike was simply unloading impressions from his own travels to Canada, Egypt, and China, rather than integrating these places substantively into his novel. In addition, the revenge plot, in which Chris Gabriel, aka Christopher Grant, uses electricity to avenge the death of Jenny Gabriel, is strained and belabored. In contrast to the bulk of Updike's fiction, where plot often seems loosely designed and almost accidental, *Widows* feels contrived. Finally, the novel suffers from the absence of Darryl Van Horne, who was such an animating and provocative force in *Witches*, leading the three women to temptation and mischief. Relatedly, the heterosexual push and pull between characters that is central in so much of Updike's writing is mostly absent in *Widows*, and for that reason, as well as others, the novel suffers.

Yet *Widows* is not without merit and is more engaging on a second reading. There is much I missed or gave little thought to initially: the juxtaposition between the grand wonders of the world (the Canadian Rockies, the Pyramids, China's Great Wall) and the small, quotidian lives of three declining women; the implied contrast between America and the ancient civilizations of Egypt and China; Sukie's continued appetite for writing and sex, as well as her peculiar domestic arrangement with the androgynous Christopher Grant; the surprising ending of guilt assuaged, redemption, and goodness. Most important, however, is how this novel dovetails with Updike's career-long mission to shed light on that which goes ignored—here, the lives of three elderly women—and to document the various passages of life, from small-town childhood to young married life, adultery, divorce, and ultimately old age.

Having lived as a child in very close quarters with his maternal grandparents, Updike knew older people intimately, and he used them as the central characters of not only his final novel but also his first novel, *The Poorhouse Fair* (1959), which depicts the inhabitants of a poorhouse/retirement home. The two novels, which serve as bookends to his career, reveal his interest in the lives of the elderly. In *Widows* he picks up the story he began in *Witches* by focusing on three women in their late sixties and seventies, whose existence is marked by loss. Sukie, Alexandra, and Jane have all lost their husbands as well as their vigor, sexuality, attractiveness, and supernatural powers. Given the ways in which American culture is fixated on youth, vitality, and beauty, as well as on acquisition and consumption (rather than loss), the elderly are often invisible, seldom featured on the many screens that in-

creasingly dominate our lives. This holds true for women even more than men, in spite of the fact that women live longer and, if married, usually outlast their spouse. Nearly a century ago Virginia Woolf observed that there were not enough stories about the quotidian lives of women, and there are even fewer about the lives of elderly women. One can hardly imagine Updike's male contemporaries—Philip Roth, Don DeLillo, or Cormac McCarthy—writing a novel about friendship among elderly widows, yet Updike was drawn to such a story and eager to write about characters that society tends to ignore.

Over the final twenty-five years of his career, Updike wrote increasingly about aging, the loss of vitality, and living nostalgically through memory. This is hardly surprising given the autobiographical nature of his writing. Yet what is noteworthy about this stage in Updike's career is how, as I've discussed elsewhere, he turns, in his novels, toward a female sensibility, and how his fiction, typically focused on heterosexual coupling, becomes increasingly about living alone, women bonding with other women, women as survivors, and non-hetero domestic/sexual relationships (Schiff, "Two Neglected Female-centric Novels," 47). Perhaps Updike desired to explore territory he had not yet tapped into, or maybe his own aging made him feel more marginalized, such that adopting a female perspective felt more relevant. While some reviewers have argued that his later work simply rehashes his early writing, such thinking is misguided. These final works of fiction were not always successful, yet they demonstrate that Updike was continuing to take chances, pushing his writing to a slightly different place.

In featuring female protagonists, *Widows* contrasts in significant ways with, say, the Rabbit novels. As family patriarch, automobile dealer, and former sports hero, Harry "Rabbit" Angstrom has freedom and agency as he stands surrounded by family, friends, and lovers. In contrast, *Widows* features characters who are marginalized and peripheral because of their gender, age, and marital status. In *Widows*, Alexandra says, "[W]e're *old*. Nobody wants us, except our grandchildren for the first half-hour of a visit," and though she goes on to argue that aging is also "freeing," Sukie later responds, "[W]hat good is freedom if nobody's watching you have it?" (*Widows* 46, 76). No longer part of a couple or a domestic situation, the women are alone, their husbands dead and their children distant. On her trip through the Canadian Rockies, Alexandra, surrounded by couples, is continually "conscious of the vacancy at her side" (8). As elderly widows they have few options; as Sukie says: "I just don't fit any more. . . . I'm utterly unimportant to everybody. I can see why the Indians—the Asian ones, not ours—invented suttee" (104). In

contrast, Rabbit and Updike's other male protagonists are rarely without a wife, and when they leave their wives, they tend to run to a mistress or eventually back to their wives. Unlike Huck Finn, they do not "light out for the Territory" in hopes of escaping women and domesticity; instead, their sense of identity comes from being part of a heterosexual couple. The widows no longer have that and clearly miss it, though with the exception of Sukie, they lack the motivation to recouple. Alienated and no longer engaged in the world around them, they feel like outsiders, their existence marked by silence, absence, monotony, and a lack of human touch. Their identity is further problematized by being repeatedly called by the wrong surname—Sukie as Mrs. Rougemont and Alexandra as Mrs. Spofford—despite the fact they have not been married to their first husbands for decades. Their economic standing is also outside their control, having been determined by the achievement, or failure, of their former husbands.

In writing about these widows, however, Updike had trouble creating a compelling narrative. Solitude and marginalization can be fascinating in a Marilynne Robinson novel, but in Updike the story does not fully gel, in part because he mostly avoids exploring the emotional depths of the women's estrangement. Nor does he compose what Barbara Frey Waxman has called a *Reifungsroman*, or novel of ripening, a term she coined in 1985 to designate a genre of fiction, composed by such writers as Doris Lessing and May Sarton, that "rejects negative cultural stereotypes of the old woman and aging" by positing characters who forge new identities and, in Sarton's words, are "ripening toward death in a fruitful way" (Waxman, *From the Hearth*, 2). While Updike depicts, in a non-stereotypical manner, elderly women grappling with aging, there is little in his novel to suggest that the women experience a ripening of intellect and spirit—for that to happen would require a level of didacticism that one does not typically find in Updike's writing. Further, his fiction had always relied upon the heterosexual push and pull his characters feel within marriage, torn between the desire for a lover and the duty of remaining with a spouse. In *Widows*, where none of the protagonists is married, there is not sufficient tension to sustain engagement. There is also not anyone, be it a lover, child, or close friend, who is particularly important in the lives of the widows, which feels odd. Though perhaps realistic, the widows' detachment from everyone around them—in contrast to *Witches*, where the three women were quite close as well as competitive with one another—makes it difficult for substantive narrative tension to develop. As for children, the widows are continually disappointed in and disconnected from their daughters and sons, whom they neglected thirty years prior in *Witches*. Jane, in fact, goes into a long rant against the younger generation,

the “toned-up young mothers” and “the young fathers castrated namby-pambies” who are conscientiously devoted to their children, and she concludes: “People go around mourning the death of God; it’s the death of *ssin* that bothers me. Without *ssin*, people aren’t people any more, they’re just *ssoul-less sheep*” (*Widows* 139). Though her cultural critique of the younger generation is perceptive and demonstrates how the widows, unlike their children, continue to resist social norms, the passage also points to a problem with *Widows*—namely, that it, too, suffers from a lack of sin.

Sin and transgression are crucial in Updike’s writing. So many of his male protagonists are driven by sexual instinct, eager to seduce women and push up against the restraints of society. That component, however, is largely missing in *Widows*. Except for Sukie, the widows are not interested in sex or romance. Further, they have little desire for sin or temptation; instead, they wish, somewhat surprisingly, to redeem past wrongs and transgressions, which I’ll discuss shortly. Sukie, though, is unique among these three women in continuing to enjoy sex, the act itself as well as writing about it. Her relationship with Christopher Grant, initiated at least in part to save Alexandra, is one of the odder couplings in Updike’s oeuvre. Now in her late sixties, Sukie sets up house in a New York City apartment with the much younger, gay actor who once worked in porn films. Sukie, who according to her former lover Tommy Gorton used to be “crazy” in bed (*Widows* 247), seems currently more interested in women, particularly Debbie Larcom, Eastwick’s Unitarian parson, about whom she fantasizes: “Sukie entertained a vision of this gracious woman naked, that compact, precise body bared as as white as virtue itself” (150). When Tommy offers himself to her, Sukie resists, thinking “[s]he’d rather go down on Debbie Larcom, the black triangle where her white thighs joined” (247). Some may argue that Updike is simply projecting a male fantasy onto Sukie, but that doesn’t tell the whole story. Possessing a strong sex drive, Sukie is bisexual or pansexual. Late in the novel Updike composes a five-page fellatio scene, in which the elderly widow is blowing the younger gay man in a motel room. Although Sukie’s fantasies are about Brenda rather than Christopher, she likes the challenge as well as the satisfaction of getting him off. She also views Christopher as a vehicle for her to move to New York and share an apartment, “acquir[ing], in a sense, a wife” (295). Though their relationship is problematic, it also satisfies something inside of them:

Her sex with Christopher . . . was a charade but knowingly so, enacted sometimes with cross-dressing costumes and comical plastic gadgets, against perhaps the deep grain of their given natures but stealing strength from perversity, from a sensation of trespass

and a mechanical persistence that substituted for youth's sentimental excitement and illusion of discovery a cool knowingness itself exciting. (296–97)

Given Updike's tendency to describe everything, often in graphic detail, one wonders how the cross-dressing sex scene might have played out. Yet he resists. Instead, he suggests something quite interesting, that Sukie and Christopher's sexual coupling satisfies a desire for trespass, perversity, and knowledge. Though heterosexuality is Updike's domain, he strays slightly in his Eastwick novels, to the point that sexuality becomes less binary, more complicated and nuanced. He also reminds us that the widows are in need of touch, particularly with one another. As Waxman writes, "elders are touch-starved," and this lack of touch can lead to feelings of invisibility ("Linking Women" 27). What is odd about *Widows* and somewhat uncharacteristic of Updike is that while the widows desire touch, they generally refrain from acting upon that desire. Mostly, they wish simply to talk and share one another's company, which is perhaps how Updike saw old age. Theirs is a desire mostly for friendship and communication, a characteristic that pushes the novel closer toward *Reifungsroman* status.

While this need for connection among women is crucial in both Eastwick novels, one is struck by the tremendous differences in how the women are depicted in the two novels. In *Witches* Alexandra, Jane, and Sukie are young, newly liberated, sexually active, loquacious, and at the height of their supernatural powers. In *Widows* they are roughly seventy, their lives marked by decline, loss, absence, and deterioration of their bodies. Time has taken its toll. Similarly, the wicked exuberance, vigor, and playful artistry of the former novel give way to the decline and relative calm of the latter. *Witches* is not only the better, more engaging novel, but it is one of Updike's more highly charged and innovative fictions, pulling together "an elaborate network of themes and issues involving gender, nature, music, art, creation, death, witchcraft, gossip, science, telepathy, and the nature of evil" (Schiff, *John Updike Revisited*, 75). Composed near the end of a particularly fertile period in Updike's career, when his powers of imagination were at a peak—he had just published *The Coup* (1978), *Too Far to Go* (1979), *Rabbit Is Rich* (1981), *Bech Is Back* (1982), and *Hugging the Shore* (1983)—*Witches* was a popular albeit controversial success which drew praise from Margaret Atwood and Harold Bloom. In contrast, *Widows* received mostly negative reviews and little subsequent academic commentary; as Larry Mazzeno writes, "both the characters and their author seem to have suffered something of a deceleration in the intervening years" (Mazzeno 175).

In spite of being the weaker sibling, *Widows* offers something surprising and

new in Updike. From their sense of loss emerges a desire on the part of the women to come to terms with the past, assuage their guilt, and do good deeds. As Joseph Bates writes, “This surprising sequel . . . is as stricken by conscience as its predecessor seems absent of it” (195). Instead of indulging in wickedness and self-interest as in *Witches*, where they employed witchcraft to kill Jenny Gabriel, the widows now, countering social expectations, strive to atone for their sins by practicing white magic. Their “attempt[ed] resurrection of their supernatural skills” is initially designed to heal Jane, who has been receiving painful electric shocks from Christopher Grant (*Widows* 185). Though their efforts to save Jane prove unsuccessful, the two remaining widows make a conscious decision to pursue goodness: Sukie employs witchcraft to heal Tommy Gorton’s maimed hand; Alexandra uses her powers to bring fertility and a new child to the daughter of her former lover Joe Marino. As Alexandra explains: “Years ago we grabbed what we wanted from the town and then left. Now we’ve returned to give something back” (186). Once again, *Widows* bears some resemblance to a *Reifungsroman*, where aging characters strive to come to terms with their past through reconciliation.

Though Updike’s first published short story in the *New Yorker*, “Friends from Philadelphia” (1954), concludes with a neighbor generously purchasing an expensive bottle of Bordeaux for the unknowing protagonist’s family, the desire to do good is not particularly pervasive in Updike’s writing. If anything, his characters opt for feeling good over doing good, and Updike has long been criticized for this kind of self-absorption. Yet, in his later work, such as “Rabbit Remembered” (2000), *Seek My Face*, and *Widows*, Updike seems increasingly conciliatory, which could be a function of aging. It is worth noting that prior to writing *Widows*, Updike reviewed two exceptionally compelling novels about aging women who, near the end of their lives, strive to atone for earlier sins: Margaret Atwood’s *The Blind Assassin* (2000) and Ian McEwan’s *Atonement* (2002). Perhaps the enormous success of these two novels influenced *Widows*, driving Updike to create aging women who, in their later years, were drawn to atonement and reconciliation. Kazuko Kashihara, who has written about aging in Updike, points to a moment in another later work, *Rabbit at Rest* (1990), where the semi-retired Harry, who previously was guided by self-gratification, finds meaning through the belief that he has saved his granddaughter, Judy, from drowning (Kashihara 37). Perhaps Updike is suggesting that with age comes selflessness and redemption. Or maybe he is expressing personal regret over his own adulterous, transgressive behavior during the 1960s and ’70s.

What is most surprising about *Widows*, however, in contrast to Updike’s other sequels, is how the novel ultimately fails. Updike was a master of the sequel, pub-

lishing four novels and a novella about Rabbit Angstrom, eighteen stories about Richard and Joan Maple, twenty stories about Henry Bech, and multiple stories about other characters such as David Kern. In addition, his sequels often succeeded despite great risk. *Rabbit, Run* (1960), for instance, was enormously successful, one of the major American novels of its time. When Updike decided to return to that material with *Rabbit Redux* (1971), and then again on three additional occasions at ten-year intervals, he jeopardized his early achievement. Yet the risk paid off. While the first novel was good, the final two Rabbit novels, *Rabbit Is Rich* and *Rabbit at Rest*, represent his finest work, and the five-volume project stands as one of the most ambitious and significant literary works of the late twentieth century. The same is true of the Maples stories. “Snowing in Greenwich Village” (1956), the first Maples story, is good; however, “Separating” and “Gesturing,” both written in 1974, are considerably better and rank among Updike’s finest short fiction. In contrast, the Eastwick novels reveal a rare diminishment. Why?

Updike’s sequels generally work well for several reasons. First, they are sharply focused on a single character (Rabbit, Bech) or, in the case of the Maples, a single marriage. With each new iteration, the reader renews acquaintance with a familiar character or couple. Though the focus is slightly diluted in the Eastwick novels because there are three central characters, the general principle governing his other sequels holds true. Second, Updike’s sequels, particularly the Rabbit novels, are largely about the passage of time and how lives unfold over time. We watch Rabbit and America evolve over four decades, and the intervening decade between the composition of each novel allows the characters as well as the author to age. Again, the Eastwick novels adhere to this principle. They reveal the significant changes that time has wrought upon the three women, whose lives we witness at roughly the age of thirty-five, and then again at seventy. The contrast between their early exuberance and later diminishment is striking. Third, in Updike’s sequels common situations, themes, conflicts, and other narrative elements recur. For example, the Maples stories continually return to a familiar situation, i.e., the problematic state of the Maples’ marriage and whether it can be saved. In the Rabbit novels, there is not only a central situation—Harry caught between desire and the social contract—but a series of familiar narrative elements: the close third-person narration, also called free indirect speech; the detailed focus on quotidian existence; the integration of news headlines, radio, television, and other media into the text. Again, the Eastwick novels mostly hew to this principle as the three women are in a relatively familiar situation in both novels, i.e., detached from the men in their lives, they are free, which enables them to bond with one another. In addition, various

narrative elements recur: *Widows* offers variations upon the chapter titles from *Witches* (“The Coven” becomes “The Coven Reconstituted,” “Malefica” becomes “Maleficia Revisited,” and “Guilt” becomes “Guilt Assuaged”); both novels utilize, usually at the beginning or conclusion of a chapter, a first-person plural narration that speaks from the perspective of the town of Eastwick; and so on.

The Eastwick novels generally adhere to the core principles that govern Updike’s other sequels, yet there is one significant point of departure. While the sequels tell a continuous story, Updike gives himself something close to a blank slate when he begins each new installment, freeing himself to tell a new story without being overburdened by details from his prior fictions. For example, though the action in *Rabbit Redux* is significant—Janice Angstrom leaves Harry for another man, Harry welcomes into his house a teenage runaway and a black militant, the Angstroms’ house burns down—those events are ancient history by the time *Rabbit Is Rich* rolls around, where the focus turns to new issues: the OPEC-induced gasoline shortage, Harry’s desire to be an informed consumer, his fear that he is losing his mojo, socializing with the Murketts. *Widows* diverges from the other, more successful sequels in that Updike does not truly give himself a blank slate. In *Widows* Updike ties his entire novel to an earlier plot element from *Witches*, the supposed murder of Jenny Gabriel. This is problematic—in part, because Updike seems to care more about this prior event than do his readers, not to mention his characters. The witches’ ostensible murder of their younger rival has not been of great importance to them over the intervening three decades—not, for instance, in the same way that, say, Briony Tallis’s early transgression in McEwan’s *Atonement* shaped the course of her life. That the widows are now guilt-stricken and eager to make amends reads like a plot contrivance. Staking his novel on the witches’ desire to undo their previous mischief and atone for their sins seems like a mistake as well as a distraction which prevents deeper exploration of the widows’ estrangement.

Rereading *Widows* reminds me that a major literary figure like Updike is capable of writing what some would call a bad novel—*bad* seems further than I’m willing to go, but *weak* and *mediocre* feel right. Yet I’m also aware of the fact that I can at times be a less careful reader than I would otherwise wish—there’s clearly much I missed in this novel the first time around, and surely more that escaped me the second time. *Widows* has also alerted me, despite Updike’s career-long interest in depicting older characters, to the peculiar invisibility of the elderly in literature and culture. While we are living longer and becoming an increasingly gray population, literary fiction is still more interested in the young and middle-aged, and its treatment of the elderly has not been particularly widespread or compelling. As

Caro Spencer, the elderly narrator of May Sarton's *As We Are Now*, writes, "The trouble is that old age is not interesting until one gets there, a foreign country with an unknown language to the young, and even to the middle-aged" (23). I doubt I will read *Widows* a third time. I feel and hope that I'm done with Updike's final novel. Yet if Sarton's Spencer is correct, I may eventually find myself returning to its pages, hoping to better understand the world into which I'm advancing.

#### WORKS CITED

- Bates, Joseph. "Sympathetic Magic." Rev. of *The Widows of Eastwick*, by John Updike. *Cincinnati Review* 6.1 (Summer 2009): 194–97.
- Kashihara, Kazuko. "'It Isn't So Bad': Acceptance of Aging in Updike's Fiction." *John Updike Review* 3.1 (Spring 2014): 31–43.
- Mazzeno, Laurence W. *Becoming John Updike: Critical Reception, 1958–2010*. Rochester: Camden House, 2013.
- Sarton, May. *As We Are Now*. New York: Norton, 1973.
- Schiff, James. *John Updike Revisited*. New York: Twayne, 1998.
- . "Two Neglected Female-centric Novels of Updike's Late Phase: *Gertrude and Claudius* and *Seek My Face*." *John Updike Review* 3.1 (Spring 2014): 45–63.
- Updike, John. *The Widows of Eastwick*. New York: Knopf, 2008.
- . *The Witches of Eastwick*. New York: Knopf, 1984.
- Waxman, Barbara Frey. *From the Hearth to the Open Road: A Feminist Study of Aging in Contemporary Literature*. Westport: Greenwood, 1990.
- . "Linking Women across Generations: The Journals and Letters of Lessing and Sarton." *Communication and Women's Friendships: Parallels and Intersections in Literature and Life*. Ed. Janet Doubler Ward and JoAnna Stephens Mink. Bowling Green: Bowling Green State U Popular P, 1993. 27–43.

# Updike Bibliography, 2009–2015

JAMES SCHIFF

The preeminent bibliographer in Updike Studies has been Jack De Bellis, who, with Michael Broomfield, published *John Updike: A Bibliography of Primary and Secondary Materials, 1948–2007* (New Castle: Oak Knoll, 2007). The work of De Bellis and Broomfield is comprehensive, and there is hope that at some future date they will continue their work by publishing a bibliographic supplement. In the meantime, the *John Updike Review* is committed to keeping scholars and readers aware of the latest writings to have appeared on Updike and his work.

For this relatively brief bibliography I am using as a start date 2009, which is the year the John Updike Society was formed as well as the year of the author's death. The *John Updike Review* was established shortly thereafter, and our initial issue appeared in November 2011. Because these pages are being prepared before the conclusion of 2015, I am able to list only those publications which appeared or were announced by July 1, 2015. Going forward, the *JUR* will continue to provide bibliographical updates, perhaps every one or two years. These installments are not meant to be comprehensive but rather to provide readers and scholars with a selection of some of the more important writings that have been published during the time period indicated.

For readers interested in up-to-date news about the writings, books, and life of John Updike, the John Updike Society website, managed skillfully by James Plath, offers a steady stream of useful, engaging posts. In addition, the JUS website provides a bibliography as well as information upon a range of topics, including the John Updike Childhood Home, library collections which hold Updike materials, permission requests, the *John Updike Review's* Emerging Writers Prize, and much more: <https://blogs.iwu.edu/johnupdikesociety/>.

## WORKS BY UPDIKE

### Short Stories

*My Father's Tears and Other Stories*. New York: Knopf, 2009.

*The Maples Stories*. New York: Everyman's Library, 2009.

*The Collected Stories*. Ed. Christopher Carduff. 2 vols. New York: Library of America, 2013.

*Olinger Stories*. 1964. New York: Everyman's Library, 2014.

### Poems

*Endpoint and Other Poems*. New York: Knopf, 2009.

*Selected Poems*. Ed. Christopher Carduff. New York: Knopf, 2015.

### Essays and Criticism

*Hub Fans Bid Kid Adieu: John Updike on Ted Williams*. New York: Library of America, 2010.

*Higher Gossip: Essays and Criticism*. Ed. Christopher Carduff. New York: Knopf, 2011.

*Always Looking: Essays on Art*. Ed. Christopher Carduff. New York: Knopf, 2012.

## BIBLIOGRAPHIES

Plath, James. "Select Bibliography." *John Updike Society*. Illinois Wesleyan U, n.d. Web. <<https://blogs.iwu.edu/johnupdikesociety/books-by-john-updike/>>

Schiff, James. "John Updike." *Oxford Bibliographies*. Oxford UP, 29 Aug. 2012, updated version forthcoming 2015. Web (subscription only). <<http://www.oxford-bibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780199827251/obo-9780199827251-0032.xml>>

## BIOGRAPHIES

Begley, Adam. *Updike*. New York: Harper, 2014.

De Bellis, Jack, with David Silcox. *John Updike's Early Years*. Bethlehem: Lehigh UP, 2013.

## CRITICISM

### Books

Batchelor, Bob. *John Updike. A Critical Biography*. Santa Barbara: Praeger, 2013.

Crowe, David. *Cosmic Defiance. Updike's Kierkegaard and the Maples Stories*. Macon: Mercer UP, 2014.

- Mazzeno, Laurence W. *Becoming John Updike: Critical Reception, 1958–2010*. Rochester: Camden, 2013.
- Morley, Catherine. *The Quest for Epic in Contemporary American Fiction: John Updike, Philip Roth and Don DeLillo*. New York: Routledge, 2009.
- Rezq, Farouq. *Africa's Politics and Religion in John Updike's The Coup*. Saarbrücken: Lap Lambert, 2015.
- . *Multiculturalism or Islamophobia? A Critical Analysis of John Updike's Terrorist*. Saarbrücken: Lap Lambert, 2014.
- Rodgers, Bernard F., Jr., ed. *Critical Insights: John Updike*. Pasadena: Salem, 2012.

#### Essays, Articles, and Book Chapters

- Altomare, Francis X. "Science contra Religion in John Updike's 'The Invention of the Horse Collar.'" *Explicator* 72 (July-Sept. 2014): 228–32.
- Ashford, Joan Anderson. "Freud, Bakhtin, and Rabbit: An Ecocritical Look at Totem, Animism, and the Rogue in John Updike's *Rabbit, Run*." *Ecocritical Theology: Neo-Pastoral Themes in American Fiction from 1960 to the Present*. Jefferson: McFarland, 2012. 29–46.
- Bailey, Peter J. "Autobiography, Updike, and the 'Self-Serving Corruptions of Fiction.'" *John Updike Review* 2.2 (Spring 2013): 77–84.
- . "Betrayal by Sandstone Farmhouse: Forgiveness in Updike's 'Pigeon Feathers' and 'The Cats.'" *John Updike Review* 4.1 (Fall 2015): 17–29.
- . "'The Bright Island of Make-Believe': Updike's Misgivings about the Movies." *John Updike Review* 1.1 (Fall 2011): 69–87.
- . "Granting the Individual Soul Its Due." *Critical Insights: John Updike*. Ed. Bernard F. Rodgers, Jr. Pasadena: Salem, 2012. 235–47. Rpt. from *Rabbit (Un)Redeemed: The Drama of Belief in John Updike's Fiction*. Teaneck: Fairleigh Dickinson UP, 2006.
- Barnes, Julian. "Sleeping with John Updike." *theguardian.com*. Guardian News and Media, 23 Jan. 2010. <<http://www.theguardian.com/books/2010/jan/23/julian-barnes-new-short-story>> Rpt. in *Pulse: Stories*. New York: Vintage, 2012.
- Beam, Alex. "John Updike's Trash Is Everyone's Treasure." *Boston Globe* 6 Sept. 2014: A11.
- Beattie, Ann. "John Updike's Sense of Wonder." *John Updike Review* 1.1 (Fall 2011): 5–15.
- Bickerstaff, Jeffrey. "The Education of Harry Angstrom: *Rabbit Redux* and the Charge of the Kerner Commission." *Studies in American Fiction* 41.1 (Spring 2014): 77–101, 147.

- Blair, Elaine. "American Male Novelists: The New Deal." *New York Review of Books* 12 July 2012: 19–21.
- Boswell, Marshall. "Inside America." *Critical Insights. John Updike*. Ed. Bernard F. Rodgers, Jr. Pasadena: Salem, 2012. 248–57. Rpt. from *John Updike's Rabbit Tetralogy: Mastered Irony in Motion*. Columbia: U of Missouri P, 2001.
- Brauner, David. "Much Ado about Nothing: Boredom, Banality, and Bathos in Late Henry Green and Early John Updike." *Yearbook of English Studies* 42.1 (2012): 186–203.
- Briggs, Ward, and Biljana Dojčinović, "The Bulgarian Poetess: John and Blaga." *John Updike Review* 3.2 (Winter 2015): 1–36.
- Buell, Lawrence. "Chaos Configured? Morrison and Updike as Great American Novelists." *The Dream of the Great American Novel*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2014. 60–67.
- Camacho Ramos, Juan Manuel. "Tristan and Iseult: John Updike's Medieval Method or an Ancient Mirror for Modern Man." *Revista Canaria de Estudios Ingleses* 60 (Apr. 2010): 135–41.
- Carduff, Christopher. "'Hub Fans' Redux: John Updike, Ted Williams, and the Great American Essay." *Huffington Post*. TheHuffingtonPost.com, Inc., 28 June 2010. Web. <[http://www.huffingtonpost.com/christopher-carduff/post\\_587\\_b\\_556285.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/christopher-carduff/post_587_b_556285.html)>
- Colgan, John-Paul. "'This Godless Democracy': Terrorism, Multiculturalism, and American Self-Criticism in John Updike." *American Multiculturalism after 9/11: Transatlantic Perspectives*. Ed. Derek Rubin and Jaap Verheul. Amsterdam: Amsterdam UP, 2009, 2011. 119–31.
- Crowe, David. "Young Man Angstrom: Identity Crisis and the Work of Love in *Rabbit, Run*." *Religion & Literature* 43.1 (Spring 2011): 81–100.
- Däwes, Birgit. "'Close Neighbors to the Unimaginable': Literary Projections of Terrorists' Perspectives (Martin Amis, John Updike, Don DeLillo)." *Amerikastudien/American Studies* 55.3 (2010): 495–517.
- De Bellis, Jack. "The Critical Reception of John Updike." *Critical Insights: John Updike*. Ed. Bernard F. Rodgers, Jr. Pasadena: Salem, 2012. 85–104.
- Dickinson, David. "Keeping Faith: The Troubled Preacher in Updike and Lodge." *The Novel as Church: Preaching to Readers in Contemporary Fiction*. Waco: Baylor UP, 2013. 65–82.
- Dill, Scott. "Affection for the Affected World: John Updike on Emotion, Sense, and Style." *Critique* 54.4 (Sept. 2013): 395–409.

- Dodou, Katherina. "America after 9/11: Ethnic Diversity and Patriotism in John Updike's *Terrorist*." *Transcultural Identities in Contemporary Literature*. Ed. Irene Gilsenan Nordin, Julie Hansen, and Carmen Zamorano Llena. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2013. 177–200.
- Drouin, Roger Real. "Cubism in John Updike's 'A Sense of Shelter.'" *Explicator* 70.2 (2012): 75–77.
- Duffy, Brian. "John Updike's Narrative 'Secrets': Hidden Ekphrasis in 'Made in Heaven.'" *John Updike Review* 2.2 (Spring 2013): 59–76.
- . "Loss of Trust as Disconnection in John Updike's *Trust Me*." *Revue électronique d'études sur le monde anglophone* 9.2 (2012). *E-rea*, 15 Mar. 2012. Web. <[http://doras.dcu.ie/16913/1/bduffy\\_updike.pdf](http://doras.dcu.ie/16913/1/bduffy_updike.pdf)>
- . "Male Sexuality in John Updike's *Villages*." *John Updike Review* 4.1 (Fall 2015): 1–16.
- . "Motifs of Loss in *The Afterlife*." *John Updike Review* 2.1 (Fall 2012): 31–49.
- Freeman, Bradley. "Threatening 'the Good Order': West Meets East in Cecil B. DeMille's *The Cheat* and John Updike's *Terrorist*." *Journal of Transnational American Studies* 3.2. *eScholarship*. California Digital Library, 2011. Web. <<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/6p3o6627>>
- Fromer, Yoav. "The Liberal Origins of John Updike's Literary Imagination." *Modern Intellectual History*. *FirstView Article*, Cambridge UP, 27 Aug. 2015. Web. <<http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S147924431500030X>>
- Gamal, Ahmed. "'Encounters with Strangeness' in the Post-9/11 Novel." *Interdisciplinary Literary Studies* 14.1 (2012): 95–116.
- Garcia, Janelle. "John Updike's 'Should Wizard Hit Mommy?'" *Explicator* 70.1 (2012): 61–62.
- Gardner, W. David. "Updike's Passing Recalls Brush with Murdered Computer Designer." *InformationWeek*. UBM Tech, 13 Feb. 2009. Web. <<http://www.informationweek.com/desktop/updikes-passing-recalls-brush-with-murdered-computer-designer/d/d-id/1076620?>>
- George, Joseph. "Interior Space Invaders: Disruptive Neighbors and the Relational Self in Updike's *Rabbit Redux*." *Critique* 55.3 (May 2014): 260–71.
- Giles, Paul. "Lost in Space: John Updike." *The Global Remapping of American Literature*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 2011. 154–61.
- Gill, Patrick. "'The Drops which Fell from Shakespeare's Pen': *Hamlet* in Contemporary Fiction." *Alicante Journal of English Studies* 25 (2012): 257–68.

- Gopnik, Adam. "A Fan's Notes: On Updike's Long Game." *Critical Insights: John Updike*. Ed. Bernard F. Rodgers, Jr. Pasadena: Salem, 2012. 333–40. Rpt. from *Humanities* 29.3 (May/June 2008): 11, 48–49.
- Greiner, Donald J. "John Updike: The Artist as Reluctant Critic." *John Updike Review* 2.2 (Spring 2013): 43–57.
- . "John Updike and the Film Version of *Rabbit, Run*: Novel, Script, Movie." *Critique* 53.2 (2012): 174–84.
- . "The Lace of Updike's 'Leaves.'" *John Updike Review* 3.1 (Spring 2014): 71–78.
- . "Starting Out at *Chatterbox*: The Apprenticeship of John Updike." *John Updike Review* 3.2 (Winter 2015): 39–55.
- . "Story into Novel: The Genesis of Updike's *Couples*." *John Updike Review* 2.1 (Fall 2012): 1–10.
- . "Updike and Kerouac: Rabbit on the Road." *John Updike Review* 1.1 (Fall 2011): 41–52.
- . "Updike in Love." *John Updike Review* 4.1 (Fall 2015): 43–60.
- . "Updike Revised: The Authoritative Edition of *Gertrude and Claudius*." *John Updike Review* 3.1 (Spring 2014): 1–14.
- Griffith, Michael. "'Not all characters have a stable referent': *The Centaur*, Updike's Mock Mock-Epic." *John Updike Review* 1.1 (Fall 2011): 31–40.
- Haddox, Thomas F. "John Updike's Rhetoric of Christian American Narcissism." *Hard Sayings: The Rhetoric of Christian Orthodoxy in Late Modern Fiction*. Columbus: Ohio State UP, 2013. 85–124.
- Hamilton, Alice, and Kenneth Hamilton. "Introducing the Maples." *Critical Insights: John Updike*. Ed. Bernard F. Rodgers, Jr. Pasadena: Salem, 2012. 162–95. Rpt. from *The Elements of John Updike*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970.
- Hartnell, Anna. "Violence and the Faithful in Post-9/11 America: Updike's *Terrorist*, Islam, and the Specter of Exceptionalism." *Modern Fiction Studies* 57.3 (Fall 2011): 477–502.
- . "Writing Islam in Post-9/11 America: John Updike's *Terrorist*." *Culture, Diaspora, and Modernity in Muslim Writing*. Ed. Rehana Ahmed, Peter Morey, and Amina Yaqin. New York: Routledge, 2012. 135–48.
- "Harvard Acquires the John Updike Archive." *Harvard University Library Letters* 2.7 (Fall 2009): 6–8.
- Hauhart, Robert. "'Ah: runs. Runs': The Principal Theme Symbolized in a Minor Character in *Rabbit, Run*." *Explicator* 73.1 (2015): 69–72.
- Haynicz-Smith, Kathryn M. "Critiquing 'A Vast Unconscious White Pride': John Updike's 'The Doctor's Wife.'" *Explicator* 70.3 (2012): 153–56.

- Heddendorf, David. "The Modesty of John Updike." *Critical Insights: John Updike*. Ed. Bernard F. Rodgers, Jr. Pasadena: Salem, 2012. 320–32. Rpt. from *Sewanee Review* 116.1 (Winter 2008): 108–16.
- Herman, Peter C. "Terrorism and the Critique of American Culture: John Updike's *Terrorist*." *Modern Philology* 112.4 (May 2015): 691–712.
- Hewitt, Avis. "'Nothing Real Succeeds': Domestic Dissolution in John Updike's *The Maples Stories*." *John Updike Review* 2.1 (Fall 2012): 11–29.
- Hurst, Mary Jane. "Language and Gender in the Academic Communities of Ann Beattie's *Another You* and John Updike's *Memories of the Ford Administration*." *Language, Gender, and Community in Late Twentieth-Century Fiction: American Voices and American Identities*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011. 51–75.
- Jarraway, David R. "Future Interior: Subjective (A)voidance in John Updike's 'Rabbit' Novels." *Canadian Review of American Studies* 40.1 (2010): 45–62.
- Johnson, Barb. "John Updike Writes like a Girl." *Southern Review* 49.4 (Autumn 2013): 656–60.
- Kashihara, Kazuko. "'It Isn't So Bad': Acceptance of Aging in Updike's Fiction." *John Updike Review* 3.1 (Spring 2014): 31–43.
- Keener, Brian. "The Fiction of John Updike: Timely and Timeless." *A Companion to Twentieth-Century United States Fiction*. Ed. David Seed. Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010. 462–70.
- Kirschenbaum, Matthew. "Operating Systems of the Mind: Bibliography after Word Processing (The Example of John Updike)." *Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America* 108.4 (Dec. 2014): 380–412.
- LaFrance, Adrienne. "The Man Who Made Off with John Updike's Trash." *Atlantic*. Atlantic Monthly Group, 28 Aug. 2014. Web. <<http://www.theatlantic.com/features/archive/2014/08/the-man-who-made-off-with-john-updikes-trash/379213/>>
- Lee, Hermione. "The Trouble with Harry: *Rabbit at Rest*." *Critical Insights: John Updike*. Ed. Bernard F. Rodgers, Jr. Pasadena: Salem, 2012. 223–34. Rpt. from *New Republic* 24 Dec. 1990: 34–37.
- Ludwig, Jeffrey. "Roommates and Rivals: John Updike, Christopher Lasch, and a Harvard University Fellowship." *John Updike Review* 2.2 (Spring 2013): 3–25.
- Luscher, Robert M. "Motions of Meaning: John Updike's 'Gesturing.'" *John Updike Review* 3.2 (Winter 2015): 113–21.
- Manqoush, Riyad, Noraini Md. Yusof, and Ruzy Suliza Hashim. "Metatextuality of Transnational Marriages in Updike's *Terrorist*." *International Journal of Literature and Arts* 2.1 (2014): 10–15.

- . “The Use of Historical Allusion in Recent American and Arab Fiction.” *GEMA Online Journal of Language Studies* 11.1 (2011): 57–68.
- Mansutti, Pamela. “Ethno-religious Identities and Cosmopolitan Echoes in John Updike’s *Terrorist* (2006) and Joseph O’Neill’s *Netherland* (2008).” *Altre Modernità* 2011: 105–23. *Other Modernities*. U of Milan, 2011. Web. <<http://riviste.unimi.it/index.php/AMonline/article/view/1297>>
- Mari, Francesca. “Texas Man Treasures Finds in Updike’s Trash.” *New York Times* 22 Nov. 2014: A37B.
- Mathé, Sylvie. “Under Gallic Eyes: The Case of John Updike’s Ambivalent Reception in France.” *John Updike Review* 1.1 (Fall 2011): 17–30.
- McGrath, Charles. “Tribute to a Hero in Twilight.” *New York Times* 26 Sept. 2010: SP1–2.
- Moraru, Christian. “Engineered Transpositions; or, Updike’s Tropical Romance.” *Cosmodernism: American Narrative, Late Globalization, and the New Cultural Imaginary*. Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 2011. 279–83.
- Moreno, Marta. “Narrative Chromaticism of Youth and Age in John Updike’s *Seek My Face*.” *Journal of Aging, Humanities, and the Arts* 3 (2009): 175–98.
- Nash, Geoffrey. “Fixing the ‘Islamic Terrorist’: Ian McEwan, Don DeLillo, John Updike, Mohsin Hamid, Laila Halaby.” *Writing Muslim Identity*. New York: Continuum, 2012. 93–116.
- Naydan, Liliana M. “Justification by Temperate Faith Alone: Fundamentalism, Fanaticism, and Modernity in John Updike’s *In the Beauty of the Lilies*.” *John Updike Review* 1.1 (Fall 2011): 89–106.
- Newman, Judie. “Updike’s Black Widows: *The Widows of Eastwick*.” *John Updike Review* 4.1 (Fall 2015): 63–76.
- . “Updike’s Many Worlds: Local and Global in *Toward the End of Time*.” *John Updike Review* 1.1 (Fall 2011): 43–67.
- Norton, Sue. “The Regulating Daughters in John Updike’s Rabbit Novels.” *John Updike Review* 3.1 (Spring 2014): 15–30.
- Oates, Joyce Carol. “Updike’s American Comedies.” *Critical Insights: John Updike*. Ed. Bernard F. Rodgers, Jr. Pasadena: Salem, 2012. 145–61. Rpt. from *Modern Fiction Studies* 21.3 (Autumn 1975): 459–73.
- Pasewark, Kyle. “Cold Comforts: John Updike, Protestant Thought, and the Semantics of Paradox.” *John Calvin’s American Legacy*. Ed. Thomas Davis. New York: Oxford UP, 2010. 257–66.
- Penn, David. “John Updike in Dialogue with J. D. Salinger.” *John Updike Review* 4.1 (Fall 2015): 31–41.

- Plath, James. "Shaping Graces: John Updike, Middleness, and the American Experience." *Critical Insights: John Updike*. Ed. Bernard F. Rodgers, Jr. Pasadena: Salem, 2012. 49–64.
- . "The Widows of Eastwick: Updike's *Book of the Dead* . . . or Rather, *Dying*." *John Updike Review* 4.1 (Fall 2015): 77–84.
- Poissant, David James. "On 'Leaves,' a Consideration of Happiness, Righteousness, and Grace (with Digressions)." *John Updike Review* 3.1 (Spring 2014): 85–91.
- Posten, Bruce R. "Will the Real Harry Angstrom Please Stand Up?" *Reading Eagle*. Reading Eagle Company, 1 Feb. 2009. <<http://www2.readingeagle.com/article.aspx?id=123669>>
- Pritchard, William H. "The Pennsylvania Thing: *Pigeon Feathers*, *The Centaur*." *Critical Insights: John Updike*. Ed. Bernard F. Rodgers, Jr. Pasadena: Salem, 2012. 107–44. Rpt. from *Updike: America's Man of Letters*. South Royalton: Steerforth, 2000.
- . "Updike Posthumous." *What's Been Happening to Jane Austen: Readings of Novelists and Critics*. Northampton: Impress, 2011. 157–79.
- Raab, Josef. "Mythologizing the Exotic: Brazil in Twentieth-Century U.S. American Literature and Film." *Transnational American Studies*. Ed. Udo J. Hebel. Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag, 2012. 401–422.
- Ravi, Vidya. "'Outdoors to Indoors, Detail to Detail': The Domestic Topography of John Updike's *Couples*." *John Updike Review* 2.2 (Spring 2013): 27–41.
- Read, Sara. "'An Expected Gift': Literary Resumption of Marital Intimacy from Donne to Updike." *Notes and Queries* 60.2 (June 2013): 299–302.
- Rodgers, Bernard F., Jr. "Going South: *Bech at Bay* and Before." *Critical Insights: John Updike*. Ed. Bernard F. Rodgers, Jr. Pasadena: Salem, 2012. 277–85. Rpt. from *The World & I* 14.2 (Feb. 1999): 274–79.
- . "On John Updike." *Critical Insights: John Updike*. Ed. Bernard F. Rodgers, Jr. Pasadena: Salem, 2012. 3–17.
- Roiphe, Katie. "The Naked and the Conflicted." *New York Times Book Review* 3 Jan. 2010: 1, 8–9.
- . "Rabbit at Rest." *In Praise of Messy Lives*. New York: Dial, 2012. 133–37.
- Roper, Robert. "The *Paris Review* Perspective." 2012. *Critical Insights: John Updike*. Ed. Bernard F. Rodgers, Jr. Pasadena: Salem, 2012. 25–30.
- Royal, Derek Parker. "Gentile on My Mind: Updike, Bech, and the Limits of Ethnic Representations." *Critical Insights: John Updike*. Ed. Bernard F. Rodgers, Jr. Pasadena: Salem, 2012. 33–48.

- Savu, Laura Elena. "In Desire's Grip: Gender, Politics, and Intertextual Games in Updike's *Gertrude and Claudius*." *Critical Insights: John Updike*. Ed. Bernard F. Rodgers, Jr. Pasadena: Salem, 2012. 294–319. Rpt. from *Papers on Language & Literature* 39.1 (Winter 2003): 22–48.
- Schiff, James. "John Updike." *The Cambridge Companion to American Novelists*. Ed. Timothy Parrish. New York: Cambridge UP, 2013. 250–59.
- . "A Second Look at *The Widows of Eastwick*: Aging Women, Assuaging Guilt, and Updike's Sequels." *John Updike Review* 4.1 (Fall 2015): 85–94.
- . "Two Neglected Female-centric Novels of Updike's Late Phase: *Gertrude and Claudius* and *Seek My Face*." *John Updike Review* 3.1 (Spring 2014): 45–63.
- . "Updike and Howells." *Critical Insights: John Updike*. Ed. Bernard F. Rodgers, Jr. Pasadena: Salem, 2012. 65–84.
- . "Updike, Cheever, and Short Fiction." *Critical Insights: John Cheever*. Ed. Robert A. Morace. Pasadena: Salem, 2012. 73–88.
- . "Updike's *Scarlet Letter* Trilogy: Recasting an American Myth." *Critical Insights: John Updike*. Ed. Bernard F. Rodgers, Jr. Pasadena: Salem, 2012. 258–76. Rpt. from *Studies in American Fiction* 20.1 (1992): 17–31.
- Scott, A. O. "God Goes to the Movies: *In the Beauty of the Lilies*." *Critical Insights: John Updike*. Ed. Bernard F. Rodgers, Jr. Pasadena: Salem, 2012. 286–93. Rpt. from *Nation* 12 Feb. 1996: 25–28.
- Sengupta, Pradipta. "Engendering Pleasure: Śringāra Rasa in John Updike's *S*." *John Updike Review* 3.2 (Winter 2015): 83–99.
- Shipe, Matthew. "The Long Goodbye: The Role of Memory in John Updike's Late Short Fiction." *John Updike Review* 3.2 (Winter 2015): 59–81.
- . "Middle-Age Crazy: Men Behaving Badly in the Fiction of Raymond Carver and John Updike." *Critical Insights: Raymond Carver*. Ed. James Plath. Pasadena: Salem, 2013. 107–23.
- Shostak, Debra. "Biography of John Updike." *Critical Insights: John Updike*. Ed. Bernard F. Rodgers, Jr. Pasadena: Salem, 2012. 18–25.
- Silver, James. "The Problem of Omniscience in John Updike's *Roger's Version*." *Notes on Contemporary Literature* 40.3 (May): 4–6.
- Singh, Sukhbir. "Fire, Sun, Moon: Kundalini Yoga in John Updike's *S: A Novel*." *Comparatist: Journal of the Southern Comparative Literature Association* 38 (Oct. 2014): 266–96.
- Sitman, Matthew. "Did Updike Sell the Resurrection Short?" *Daily Beast*. Daily Beast Co., 5 Apr. 2015. Web. <<http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2015/04/05/did-updike-sell-the-resurrection-short.html>>

- Strickley, Sarah A. "The Abstract-Personal Mode: An Extrapolation." *John Updike Review* 3.1 (Spring 2014): 79–83.
- Sulzman, Dario. "‘I Feel like I’ve Given Birth to a Black Hole’: Existential Motifs of Bachelorhood in John Updike’s ‘Gesturing.’" *John Updike Review* 3.2 (Winter 2015): 123–30.
- Tanenhaus, Sam. "Man in the Middle." *New York Times Book Review* 18 Nov. 2012: 31.
- . "Write, Rewrite, Publish Tweak: A Record of John Updike at Work." *New York Times* 21 June 2010: C1, C6.
- Tatum, Karen E. "Drawing the Eczema Aesthetic: The Psychological Effects of Chronic Skin Disease as Depicted in the Works of John Updike, Elizabeth Bishop, and Zelda Fitzgerald." *Journal of Medical Humanities* 31.2 (2010): 127–53.
- Thomas, Samuel. "Outtakes and Outrage: The Means and Ends of Suicide Terror." *Modern Fiction Studies* 57.3 (Fall 2011): 425–49.
- Trendel, Aristi. "The Author and His Double in John Updike’s Bech Stories." *Baltic Journal of English Language, Literature and Culture*, vol. 2. Riga: U of Latvia P, 2012. 94–102.
- . "An Ecobiographical Perspective: Reading Updike’s *Toward the End of Time* as an Eco-Novel." *John Updike Review* 2.1 (Fall 2012): 51–60.
- . "The Resurgence of the Repressed in John Updike’s Homecoming Stories ‘The Sandstone Farmhouse’ and ‘The Cats.’" *Psychoanalytic Review* 97.1 (Feb. 2010): 163–74.
- Ulvydiene, Loreta. "Literature after 9/11: John Updike’s *Terrorist*." *Respectus Philologicus* 23.18 (2010): 64–73.
- Verduin, Kathleen. "Gestures of Reflection." *John Updike Review* 3.2 (Winter 2015): 131–43.
- . "Imprinting Mortality: Updike Reading Books." *Modern Language Quarterly* 71.3 (Sept. 2010): 329–66.
- Wilson, Matthew. "The Rabbit Tetralogy: From Solitude to Society to Solitude Again." *Critical Insights: John Updike*. Ed. Bernard F. Rodgers, Jr. Pasadena: Salem, 2012. 196–222. Rpt. from *Modern Fiction Studies* 37.1 (Spring 1991): 5–24.
- Wolff, Martina. "Self, Identity and Terrorism in Current American Literature: *American Pastoral* and *Terrorist*." *Literature and Terrorism: Comparative Perspectives*. Ed. Michael C. Frank and Eva Gruber. Amsterdam: Brill/Rodopi, 2012. 103–22.

#### TRIBUTES UPON UPDIKE’S DEATH

- Allen, Bruce. "Updike and the Past Recaptured." *Sewanee Review* 117.3 (Summer 2009): 490–92.

- Amis, Martin. "He Took the Novel onto Another Plane of Intimacy." *theguardian.com*. Guardian News and Media, 27 Jan. 2009. Web. <<http://www.theguardian.com/books/2009/jan/28/johnupdike-usa>>
- Angell, Roger. "The Fadeaway: An Editor's Note." *New Yorker* 9 Feb. 2009: 38–39.
- Baker, Nicholson. "Letter to John Updike." *New York Review of Books* 15 July 2010: 23.
- Barnes, Julian. "Remembering Updike." *newyorker.com*. Condé Nast, 27 Jan. 2009. Web. <<http://www.newyorker.com/books/page-turner/remembering-updike-julian-barnes>>
- . "Remembering Updike, Remembering Rabbit." *Through the Window: Seventeen Essays and a Short Story*. New York: Vintage, 2012. 198–214. Incorporates "Remembering Updike," "Running Away," and "Flights" (see Selected Reviews).
- . "Running Away." *theguardian.com*. Guardian News and Media, 16 Oct. 2009. Web. <<http://www.theguardian.com/books/2009/oct/17/julian-barnes-john-updike-rabbit>>
- Boyle, T. Coraghessan. "Remembering Updike." *newyorker.com*. Condé Nast, 27 Jan. 2009. Web. <<http://www.newyorker.com/books/page-turner/remembering-updike-t-coraghessan-boyle>>
- Byock, Lila. "Remembering Updike: John Cheever." *newyorker.com*. Condé Nast, 27 Jan. 2009. Web. <<http://www.newyorker.com/books/page-turner/remembering-updike-john-cheever>>
- Caldwell, Christopher. "Man of Letters." *Weekly Standard* 9 Feb. 2009: 46.
- Davis, Wes. "Requiem." *newrepublic.com*. *New Republic* 31 Jan. 2009. Web. <<http://www.newrepublic.com/article/books-and-arts/requiem>>
- Dickstein, Morris. "Remembering John Updike." *Dissent*. *Dissent Magazine*, 2 Feb. 2009. Web. <[http://www.dissentmagazine.org/online\\_articles/remembering-john-updike](http://www.dissentmagazine.org/online_articles/remembering-john-updike)>
- Dirda, Michael. "John Updike, 1932–2009." *Chronicle of Higher Education* 13 Feb. 2009: B2.
- Doctorow, E. L. "Remembering Updike." *newyorker.com*. Condé Nast, 28 Jan. 2009. Web. <<http://www.newyorker.com/books/page-turner/remembering-updike-e-l-doctorow>>
- Eugenides, Jeffrey. "Remembering Updike." *newyorker.com*. Condé Nast, 29 Jan. 2009. Web. <<http://www.newyorker.com/books/page-turner/remembering-updike-jeffrey-eugenides>>
- Ford, Richard. "Remembering Updike." *newyorker.com*. Condé Nast, 28 Jan. 2009. Web. <<http://www.newyorker.com/books/page-turner/remembering-updike-richard-ford>>

- Goldstein, Ann. "Remembering Updike." *newyorker.com*. Condé Nast, 20 Mar. 2009. Web. <<http://www.newyorker.com/books/page-turner/remembering-updike-ann-goldstein>>
- Gopnik, Adam. "Postscript." *New Yorker* 9 Feb. 2009: 35–36, 38.
- Greiner, Donald J. "John Updike: The Literary Vermeer." *Critique* 51.2 (Feb. 2010): 177–84.
- Grossman, Lev. "Updike at Rest." *Time* 9 Feb. 2009: 19.
- Haberman, Clyde. "Thoughts on the City by a Master of Suburban Angst." *New York Times* 30 Jan. 2009: A21.
- Hawthorne, Mary. "Remembering Updike: The Gospel According to John." *newyorker.com*. Condé Nast, 29 Jan. 2009. Web. <<http://www.newyorker.com/books/page-turner/remembering-updike-the-gospel-according-to-john>>
- Heddendorf, David. "The Pennsylvanian." *Sewanee Review* 117.3 (Summer 2009): 487–90.
- Hitchens, Christopher. "Farewell to a Much-Misunderstood Man." *Slate*. Slate Group, 2 Feb. 2009. Web. <[http://www.slate.com/articles/news\\_and\\_politics/fighting\\_words/2009/02/farewell\\_to\\_a\\_muchmisunderstood\\_man.html](http://www.slate.com/articles/news_and_politics/fighting_words/2009/02/farewell_to_a_muchmisunderstood_man.html)>
- Jen, Gish. "Updike Remembered." *newrepublic.com*. New Republic, 30 Jan. 2009. Web. <<http://www.newrepublic.com/article/books-and-arts/updike-remembered>>
- "John Updike: 'He Gave the Impression that He Had More Writing to Do.'" Tributes from John Banville, T.C. Boyle, E.L. Doctorow, Richard Ford, David Lodge, Ian McEwan, Toni Morrison, Joyce Carol Oates, David Remnick, Jane Smiley, Zadie Smith, and Tom Wolfe. *theguardian.com*. Guardian News and Media, 27 Jan. 2009. Web. <<http://www.theguardian.com/books/2009/jan/28/johnupdike-fiction>>
- Klinkenborg, Verlyn. "John Updike." *New York Times* 29 Jan. 2009: A26.
- Leach, Ben. "John Updike: Ian McEwan and Martin Amis Pay Tribute to U.S. Novelist." *Telegraph*. Telegraph Media Group, 28 Jan. 2009. Web. <<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/books/4370264/John-Updike-Ian-McEwan-and-Martin-Amis-pay-tribute-to-US-novelist.html>>
- Lehmann-Haupt, Christopher. "John Updike, a Lyrical Writer of the Middle-Class Man, Dies at 76." *New York Times* 28 Jan. 2009: A28.
- Lethem, Jonathan. "Remembering Updike." *newyorker.com*. Condé Nast, 28 Jan. 2009. Web. <<http://www.newyorker.com/books/page-turner/remembering-updike-jonathan-lethem>>
- McClatchy, J.D. "John Updike, 1932–2009." *John Updike Review* 1.1 (Fall 2011): 131–35.

- McEwan, Ian. "On John Updike." *New York Review of Books* 12 Mar. 2009: 4, 6.
- McGuane, Thomas. "Remembering Updike." *newyorker.com*. Condé Nast, 28 Jan. 2009. Web. <<http://www.newyorker.com/books/page-turner/remembering-updike-thomas-mcguane>>
- Messud, Claire. "The Alchemist of the Mundane." *Newsweek* 9 Feb. 2009: 66.
- Moore, Lorrie. "The Complete Updike." *New York Times* 29 Jan. 2009: A27.
- Nelson, Antonya. "Remembering Updike." *newyorker.com*. Condé Nast, 27 Jan. 2009. Web. <<http://www.newyorker.com/books/page-turner/remembering-updike-antonya-nelson>>
- Oates, Joyce Carol. "Remembering Updike." *newyorker.com*. Condé Nast, 27 Jan. 2009. Web. <<http://www.newyorker.com/books/page-turner/remembering-updike-joyce-carol-oates>>
- Packer, ZZ. "Remembering Updike." *newyorker.com*. Condé Nast, 28 Jan. 2009. Web. <<http://www.newyorker.com/books/page-turner/remembering-updike-zz-packer>>
- Pinsker, Sanford. "John Updike, Harry (Rabbit) Angstrom, and I." *Sewanee Review* 117.3 (Summer 2009): 492–94.
- Posten, Bruce R. "Hundreds Pay Respects to Shillington Native Updike." *Reading Eagle*. Reading Eagle Company, 3 Feb. 2009. Web. <<http://www2.readingeagle.com/article.aspx?id=123827>>
- Pritchard, William H. "Remembering John Updike." *American Scholar* 78 (Summer 2009): 115–17.
- Saunders, George. "Remembering Updike." *newyorker.com*. Condé Nast, 27 Jan. 2009. Web. <<http://www.newyorker.com/books/page-turner/remembering-updike-george-saunders>>
- Schiff, James. "Updike's America." *Newsday* 1 Feb. 2009: A35.
- "Slate Bids Updike Adieu." *Slate*. Slate Group, 29 Jan. 2009. Web. <[http://www.slate.com/articles/arts/culturebox/2009/01/slate\\_bids\\_updike\\_adieu.html](http://www.slate.com/articles/arts/culturebox/2009/01/slate_bids_updike_adieu.html)>
- Stern, Richard. "On John Updike." *Sewanee Review* 117.3 (Summer 2009): 494–95.
- Theroux, Paul. "Remembering Updike." *newyorker.com*. Condé Nast, 28 Jan. 2009. Web. <<http://www.newyorker.com/books/page-turner/remembering-updike-paul-theroux>>
- "A Tribute to John Updike." Kennedy Library Forum at the John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum, with Tom Putnam, Christopher Lydon, Nicholson Baker, Stephen Bergman, Charles McGrath, Anne Bernays, William Pritchard, and Elizabeth Updike Cobblah. C-SPAN. National Cable Satellite Corp., 7 June 2009. Web. <<http://www.c-span.org/video/?286892-1/tribute-john-updike>>

- “A Tribute to John Updike.” Celeste Bartos Forum, New York Public Library, with David Ferriero, Sonny Mehta, David Remnick, Judith Jones, Lorrie Moore, Roger Angell, Adam Gopnik, Ann Goldstein, Chip McGrath, Deborah Garrison, ZZ Packer, and David Updike. *Live from the NYPL*. New York Public Library, 19 Mar. 2009. Web. Video: <<http://www.nypl.org/audiovideo/tribute-john-updike>> Transcript: <[http://www.nypl.org/sites/default/files/events/3.19.09transcript\\_0.pdf](http://www.nypl.org/sites/default/files/events/3.19.09transcript_0.pdf)>
- Updike, David. “Tribute to Dad.” *John Updike Review* 1.1 (Fall 2011): 137–40.
- “Updike and I.” Tributes from Peter Conrad, Siri Hustvedt, Anne Enright, Geoff Dyer, and Lionel Shriver. *Observer*. Guardian News and Media, 31 Jan. 2009. Web. <<http://www.theguardian.com/books/2009/feb/01/john-updike-tributes-authors>>
- “Updike Remembered.” Reminiscences and reflections by Edmund White, Garrison Keillor, Jane Smiley, Colm Toibin, Lionel Shriver, Charles Baxter, Oscar Hijuelos, Jennifer Egan, Steven Pinker, Alain de Botton, Troy Jollimore, David Kirby, Jerome Groopman, David Lodge, Susan Minot, Bernard Cooper, Norman Rush, Alan Taylor, Kate Christensen, Cynthia Ozick, David Bromwich, Arthur Danto, Emily Barton, Jeffrey Renard Allen, Anne Fadiman, Jean Strouse, Sue Miller, and Hal Crowther. *Granta*. Granta Publications, 12 Feb. 2009. Web. <<http://granta.com/updike-remembered/>>
- Wolff, Tobias. “Remembering Updike.” *newyorker.com*. Condé Nast, 30 Jan. 2009. Web. <<http://www.newyorker.com/books/page-turner/remembering-updike-tobias-wolff>>

#### INTERVIEWS AND PANEL DISCUSSIONS

- de Wilde, Gervase. “John Updike’s Last Interview.” *Telegraph*. Telegraph Media Group, 29 Jan. 2009. Web. <<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/journalists/gervase-de-wilde/4386473/John-Updikes-last-interview.html>> Abridged version of 2008 interview of John Updike. Mick Brown, “John Updike: Descent of Man.” *Telegraph*. Telegraph Media Group, 26 Oct. 2008. Web. <<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/donotmigrate/3562574/John-Updike-descent-of-man.html>>
- Eberhart, John Mark. “Updike on *The Widows of Eastwick*: An Old Interview Surfaces.” *John Updike Society*. Illinois Wesleyan U, 3 July 2012. Web. <<https://blogs.iwu.edu/johnupdikesociety/2012/07/03/updike-on-the-widows-of-eastwick-an-old-interview-surfaces/>>
- Halford, Macy. “American Centaur: An Interview with John Updike.” Interview by Zvonimir Radeljković and Omer Hadžiselimović. *newyorker.com*. Condé Nast,

- 27 Oct. 2009. <<http://www.newyorker.com/books/page-turner/american-centaur-an-interview-with-john-updike>>
- Kohn, Rachael. "John Updike on God, Sex, and Witches." Transcript of radio interview with Avis Hewitt, James Plath, and James Schiff. *The Spirit of Things*. Australian Broadcasting Corp., 1 Mar. 2009. Web. <<http://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/spiritofthings/john-updike-on-god-sex-and-witches/3168106#transcript>>
- Orr, Matthew, and Sam Tanenhaus. "A Conversation with John Updike." *NYTimes.com*. New York Times Co., 27 Jan. 2009. Web. <<http://www.nytimes.com/video/books/1231546398585/a-conversation-with-john-updike.html>>
- Plath, James. "Updike Family Panel in Pennsylvania." *John Updike Review* 2.1 (Fall 2012): 79–92.
- Royal, Derek Parker, ed. "Contemporary American Fiction and the Confluence of Don DeLillo, Cormac McCarthy, Toni Morrison, Philip Roth, and John Updike: A Roundtable Discussion." *Philip Roth Studies* 7.2 (Fall 2011): 145–69.
- Zanganeh, Lila Azam. "Updike Redux." Interview with John Updike. *Guernica*. 15 Nov. 2010. Web. <[https://www.guernicamag.com/interviews/updike\\_11\\_15\\_10/](https://www.guernicamag.com/interviews/updike_11_15_10/)>

#### SELECTED REVIEWS

- Allen, Brooke. "Updike's Farewell." Rev. of *Endpoint* and *My Father's Tears*, by John Updike. *Hudson Review* 62.3 (Autumn 2009): 521–28.
- Bailey, Peter J. "Be True to Your School." Rev. of *John Updike's Early Years*, by Jack De Bellis. *John Updike Review* 3.1 (Spring 2014): 101–05.
- Banks, Eric. "John Updike, Art Critic." Rev. of *Always Looking*, by John Updike. *www.chicagotribune.com*. Chicago Tribune, 7 Dec. 2012. Web. <[http://articles.chicagotribune.com/2012-12-07/news/ct-prj-1209-john-updike-always-looking-20121207\\_1\\_art-critic-john-updike-winslow-homer](http://articles.chicagotribune.com/2012-12-07/news/ct-prj-1209-john-updike-always-looking-20121207_1_art-critic-john-updike-winslow-homer)>
- Barnes, Julian. "Flights." Rev. of *Endpoint*, *The Maples Stories*, and *My Father's Tears*, by John Updike. *New York Review of Books* 11 June 2009: 8–10.
- Batchelor, Bob. "Updike and His Critics." Rev. of *Becoming John Updike*, by Lawrence W. Mazzeno. *John Updike Review* 3.1 (Spring 2014): 107–11.
- Boyle, T. Coraghessan. "The Road Home." Rev. of *My Father's Tears*, by John Updike. *New York Times Book Review* 7 June 2009: 11.
- Cassuto, Leonard. "The Art and Craft of Baseball." Rev. of *Hub Fans Bid Kid Adieu*, by John Updike. *John Updike Review* 2.1 (Fall 2012): 61–65.

- Davenport-Hines, Richard. "A Lord of Thin Air." Rev. of *Higher Gossip*, by John Updike. *Spectator* 19 May 2012. [www.spectator.co.uk](http://www.spectator.co.uk). *Spectator*, 19 May 2012. Web. <<http://www.spectator.co.uk/books/7850433/a-lord-of-thin-air/>>
- Delbanco, Andrew. "How Updike Judged." Rev. of *Higher Gossip*, by John Updike. *New York Times Book Review* 13 Nov. 2011: 10.
- Deresiewicz, William. "Controlled Rapture." Rev. of *Updike*, by Adam Begley. *New Republic* 15 Sept. 2014: 38–43.
- Douglas-Fairhurst, Robert. "Higher Gossip: Essays and Criticism." Rev. of *Higher Gossip*, by John Updike. *Telegraph*. Telegraph Media Group, 21 May 2012. Web. <<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/books/bookreviews/9272409/higher-gossip-essays-and-criticism-by-john-updike-review.html>>
- James, Clive. "Final Act." Rev. of *Endpoint*, by John Updike. *New York Times Book Review* 3 May 2009: 15.
- Kaiser, Wilson. "John Updike, Now and Then." Rev. of *Becoming John Updike*, by Laurence W. Mazzeno; *John Updike*, by Bob Batchelor; and *John Updike's Early Years*, by Jack De Bellis. *American Studies* 53.1 (2014): 141–53.
- Kakutani, Michiko. "Last Notes from a Man of Letters." Rev. of *Higher Gossip*, by John Updike. *New York Times* 29 Nov. 2011: C1.
- . "Memory Arpeggios in Updike's Sunset." Rev. of *Endpoint* and *My Father's Tears*, by John Updike. *New York Times* 25 May 2009: C1, C5.
- Luscher, Robert M. "Marriage, Memory, and Mortality: John Updike's Enduring Legacy in Short Fiction." Rev. of *My Father's Tears* and *The Maples Stories*, by John Updike. *John Updike Review* 1.1 (Fall 2011): 117–29.
- Mars-Jones, Adam. "Higher Gossip: Essays and Criticism." Rev. of *Higher Gossip*, by John Updike. *Observer*. Guardian News and Media, 24 May 2012. Web. <<http://www.theguardian.com/books/2012/may/24/john-updike-higher-gossip-carduff>>
- Mathé, Sylvie. "Updike, Time Present and Time Past." Rev. of *Critical Insights: John Updike*, ed. Bernard F. Rodgers, Jr. *John Updike Review* 2.1 (Fall 2012): 67–77.
- McQuaid, Cate. Rev. of *Always Looking*, by John Updike. *Boston Globe*. Boston Globe Media Partners, 11 Dec. 2012. Web. <<https://www.bostonglobe.com/arts/2012/12/11/book-review-always-looking-essays-art-john-updike/ybb2xiFupoLjWoPjcHh28I/story.html>>
- Menand, Louis. "Imitation of Life." Rev. of *Updike*, by Adam Begley. *New Yorker* 28 Apr. 2014: 70–76.
- Newman, Judie. "A Well-defended Life for Writing." Rev. of *Updike*, by Adam Begley. *John Updike Review* 3.1 (Spring 2014): 93–99.

- Pamuk, Orhan. "Updike at Rest." Rev. of *Updike*, by Adam Begley. *New York Times Book Review* 20 Apr. 2014: 10–11.
- Plath, James. Rev. of *Cosmic Defiance: Updike's Kierkegaard and the Maples Stories*, by David Crowe. *John Updike Society*. Illinois Wesleyan U, 15 Mar. 2015. Web. <<https://blogs.iwu.edu/johnupdikesociety/2015/03/15/review-of-cosmic-defiance-updikes-kierkegaard-and-the-maples-stories/>>
- Pritchard, William H. Rev. of *Higher Gossip*, by John Updike. *Boston Globe*. Boston Globe Media Partners, 28 Oct. 2011. Web. <<https://www.bostonglobe.com/arts/books/2011/10/28/review-higher-gossip-essays-and-criticism-john-updike/Imnec1G6017ccxmn5x6WZK/story.html>>
- . "Into Darkness Undimmed." Rev. of *Endpoint*, by John Updike. *John Updike Review* 1.1 (Fall 2011): 107–15.
- . "Teller of Tales." Rev. of *Collected Stories*, by John Updike. *Weekly Standard* 21/28 Oct. 2013: 28.
- . "Updike's Story." Rev. of *Updike*, by Adam Begley. *Weekly Standard* 21 Apr. 2014: 30–33.
- Prose, Francine. "Updike on Art." Rev. of *Always Looking*, by John Updike. *New York Times Book Review* 2 Dec. 2012: 54.
- Robson, Leo. "What Made Rabbit Write." Rev. of *Updike*, by Adam Begley, and *Collected Stories*, by John Updike. *Wall Street Journal*. Dow Jones & Co., 4 Apr. 2012. Web (subscription only). <<http://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424052702304886904579473764230570746>>
- Schama, Simon. Rev. of *My Father's Tears*, by John Updike. *FT.com*. Financial Times Ltd., 11 July 2009. Web. <<http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/fbfb70a-6ceo-11defaf56-00144feabdco.html>>
- Schiff, James. Rev. of *Updike*, by Adam Begley, and *Collected Stories*, by John Updike. *Christian Science Monitor* 21 & 28 Apr. 2014: 40. [www.csmonitor.com](http://www.csmonitor.com). *Christian Science Monitor*, 8 April 2014. Web. <<http://www.csmonitor.com/Books/Book-Reviews/2014/0408/Updike-and-John-Updike-The-Collected-Stories>>
- Shipe, Matthew. "Updike at Bay: Rethinking John Updike's Late Work." Rev. of *John Updike: A Critical Biography*, by Bob Batchelor. *John Updike Review* 3.2 (Spring 2014): 145–49.
- Spiegelman, Willard, "John Updike's Deathbed Poems." Rev. of *Endpoint*, by John Updike. *Hopkins Review* 4.4 (Fall 2011): 484–97.
- "Three Reviews of *The Widows of Eastwick*, by John Updike." Michael P. Kardos, "Witches: The Reunion Tour," 185–89; Marshall Boswell, "Minor Magic,"

190–93; and Joseph Bates, “Sympathetic Magic,” 194–97. *Cincinnati Review* 6.1 (Summer 2009): 185–97.

Wilson, Robert. “The Bard of Suburbia.” Rev. of *Updike*, by Adam Begley. *American Scholar* 83.2 (Spring 2014): 100–02.

#### DISSERTATIONS

Ashford, Joan Anderson. “Ecocritical Theology: Neo-Pastoral Themes in American Fiction from 1960 to the Present.” Diss. Georgia State U, 2009.

Batchelor, Bob. “Running toward the Apocalypse: John Updike’s New America.” Diss. U of South Florida, 2009.

Boulanger, Jennifer. “‘Lettirs of golde’: The Transformative Power of Writing in Arthurian Literature.” Diss. Southern Methodist U, 2013.

Bowers, Abigail Leigh. “As Un-American as Rabies’: Addiction and Identity in American Postwar Junkie Literature.” Diss. Texas A&M U, 2011.

Chandler, Aaron. “Pursuing Unhappiness: City, Space, and Sentimentalism in Post–Cold War American Literature.” Diss. U of North Carolina at Greensboro, 2009.

Davies, Ben. “Exceptional Intercourse: Sex, Time, and Space in Contemporary Novels by Male British and American Writers.” Diss. U of St. Andrews, 2011.

Farmer, Michial. “New Skin for the Old Ceremony: Ritual in Postwar American Existentialism.” Diss. U of Georgia, 2013.

Fleming, David J. “Religious Experience and the Contemporary Novel.” Diss. Victoria U of Wellington, 2014.

Fromer, Yoav. “Man in the Middle. The Political Imagination of John Updike and the Decline of Postwar Liberalism.” Diss. New School, 2015.

Fticar, Sonja. “The Theme of Death in John Updike’s Rabbit Cycle” (Tematika smrti v starih romanih o Rabbitu pisateja Johna Updike). Diss. U v Ljubljani, 2012.

George, Joseph A., II. “Neighborhood Associations: Security and Hospitality in American Suburban Fiction.” Diss. U of North Carolina at Greensboro, 2013.

Jansen, Todd Edward. “Blissful Realism: Saul Bellow, John Updike, and the Modern/Postmodern Divide.” Diss. U of Arizona, 2014.

Kohler-Golly, Katja, “‘Location Is Everything’: The Concept of Space in John Updike’s Rabbit Tetralogy and Richard Ford’s Bascombe Trilogy.” Diss. U des Saarlandes, 2014.

Li, Kangqin. “Vision and Form in John Updike’s Short Fiction.” Diss. U of Leicester, 2014.

- Love, Christopher Steven. "Updike, Morrison, and Roth: The Politics of American Identity." Diss. U of Southern Mississippi, 2013.
- Rosen, Jeremy M. "Minor Characters Have Their Day: The Politics and Popularization of a Contemporary Genre." Diss. U of Chicago, 2011.
- Zwart, Jane. "The American Initial at the End of the Twentieth Century: Rewriting *The Scarlet Letter* and the Romance of American Origin." Diss. Boston U, 2009.

## Contributors' Notes

**PETER J. BAILEY** is the author of *Reading Stanley Elkin, The Reluctant Film Art of Woody Allen*, and *Rabbit (Un)Redeemed: The Drama of Belief in John Updike's Fiction*. With Sam B. Girgus, he co-edited *Companion to Woody Allen* for Wiley/Blackwell, published in 2013. Bailey is the secretary of the John Updike Society.

**BRIAN DUFFY** is recently retired from his position as lecturer in English literature at Dublin City University, Ireland. He is the author of *Morality, Identity and Narrative in the Fiction of Richard Ford* (Rodopi, 2008), and has published articles on Richard Ford, Samuel Beckett, John Banville, Martin Amis, John Updike, and Albert Camus.

**DONALD J. GREINER** is Carolina Distinguished Professor of English Emeritus, and Dean and Vice Provost Emeritus at the University of South Carolina. He has published three books and numerous essays on John Updike as well as books on Stephen Crane, Robert Frost, John Hawkes, Frederick Busch, James Dickey, and other books. He is Executive Editor of *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction*.

**JUDIE NEWMAN** is Professor of American Studies at the University of Nottingham. Her recent publications include *Utopia and Terror in Contemporary American Fiction* (Routledge 2013), *Public Art, Memorials, and Atlantic Slavery* (with C-M Bernier, Routledge, 2009) and *Fictions of America: Narratives of Global Empire* (Routledge, 2007). Together with Celeste-Marie Bernier and Matthew Pethers she has edited the *Edinburgh Companion to Nineteenth-Century American Letters and Letter-Writing* (Edinburgh University Press, forthcoming 2016).

**DAVID PENN** teaches high school English in San Diego. In 2014 he earned his MA in British Literature from San Diego State University. His essay on *Great Expectations* will appear in the 2016 issue of *Dickens Studies Annual*.

**JAMES PLATH** is R. Forrest Colwell Chair of English at Illinois Wesleyan University and president of the John Updike Society. He is currently finishing *Native Son: John Updike's Pennsylvania Interviews* (forthcoming from Lehigh University Press) and working on *Critical Insights: Casablanca* for Salem Press and *The 100 Greatest Fictional Characters in Literature* for Rowman & Littlefield.

**JAMES SCHIFF** is the author or editor of five books on contemporary American fiction, including *John Updike Revisited*, *Updike in Cincinnati*, and *Understanding Reynolds Price*. His work has appeared in *American Literature*, *The Southern Review*, *The Missouri Review*, *Tin House*, *Critique*, *Studies in American Fiction*, *The South Atlantic Review*, and elsewhere. He teaches at the University of Cincinnati and serves as the editor of *The John Updike Review*.



# The John Updike Review

## A Prize for Young Writers

*The John Updike Review's* Annual Emerging  
Writers Prize

Congratulations to past winners:

Matthew Shipe, Jeffrey Ludwig, and Vidya Ravi.

**ELIGIBILITY** Anyone under 40 years of age

**PRIZE** \$1,000, along with publication in the journal

**GUIDELINES** *The John Updike Review* is looking for an essay by a young writer or critic that deepens our understanding of the work of John Updike. The writing may be scholarly or *belletristic* in nature. Academics, critics, graduate students, assistant professors, novelists, poets, and short story writers are encouraged to submit essays, which should be ten to thirty pages in length.

**DEADLINE** Submissions are open and rolling. Depending upon the quality of submissions, one or more winners will be announced annually.

**SEND  
SUBMISSIONS TO**

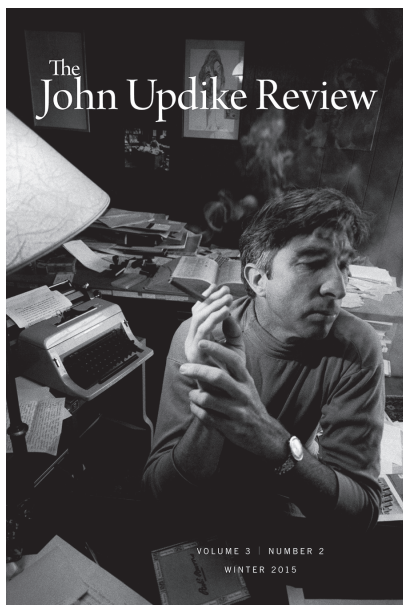
Professor James Schiff  
Editor, *The John Updike Review*  
james.schiff@uc.edu  
(513) 556-0930

For more information about the journal, visit our website:  
[www.updikereview.com](http://www.updikereview.com)

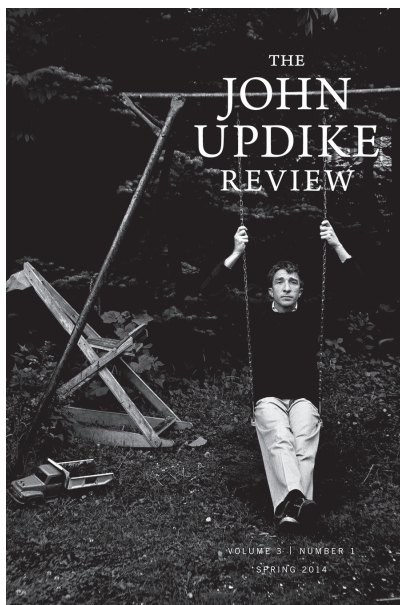
# The John Updike Review

BACK ISSUES AND LIMITED EDITION

Back issues of the *John Updike Review* are available for \$12.50, or \$10 for members of the John Updike Society. To order back issues, please contact James Schiff at either: james.schiff@uc.edu, 513-556-0930, or 248 McMicken Hall/Department of English/University of Cincinnati/Cincinnati, OH 45221-0069.



**JUR 3.2 (Winter 2015).** Essays by Ward Briggs and Biljana Dojčinović, Donald J. Greiner, Matthew Shipe, and Pradipta Sengupta. Responses to “Gesturing” by Robert M. Luscher, Dario Sulzman, and Kathleen Verduin. Review by Matthew Shipe. Includes Updike’s story “Gesturing.”



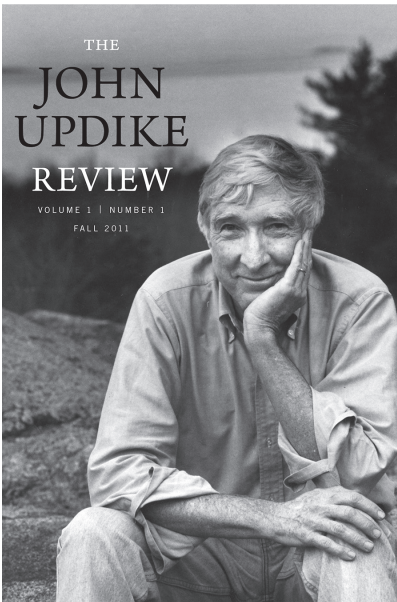
**JUR 3.1 (Spring 2014).** Essays by Donald J. Greiner, Sue Norton, Kazuko Kashihara, and James Schiff. Responses to “Leaves” by Donald J. Greiner, Sarah A. Strickley, and David James Poissant. Reviews by Judie Newman, Peter J. Bailey, and Bob Batchelor. Includes Updike’s story “Leaves.”



**JUR 2.2 (Spring 2013).** Essays by Jeffrey Ludwig, Vidya Ravi, Donald J. Greiner, Brian Duffy, and Peter J. Bailey.



**JUR 2.1 (Fall 2012).** Essays by Donald J. Greiner, Avis Hewitt, Brian Duffy, and Aristi Trendel. Reviews by Leonard Cassuto and Sylvie Mathé. Family panel discussion moderated by James Plath.



**JUR 1.1 (Fall 2011).** Essays by Ann Beattie, Sylvie Mathé, Michael Griffith, Donald J. Greiner, Judie Newman, Peter J. Bailey, and Liliana M. Naydan. Reviews by William H. Pritchard and Robert M. Luscher. Tributes by J. D. McClatchy and David Updike.

**LIMITED EDITION**

A limited edition of our inaugural issue, *JUR 1.1*, was published in cloth with a book jacket and an attractive slipcover. The edition was limited to one hundred copies. The price for this volume is \$30, or \$25 for members of the John Updike Society.

## THE JOHN UPDIKE REVIEW IS ACCEPTING SUBMISSIONS

*The John Updike Review* is a peer-reviewed, scholarly journal published by the University of Cincinnati and The John Updike Society. The journal specializes in scholarship on the writings, life, and literary and cultural significance of John Updike.

*The John Updike Review* welcomes all critical approaches and publishes full-length articles as well as shorter notes, book reviews, bibliographical updates, and professional postings about conferences, calls for papers, scholarships, and other items of interest pertaining to Updike.

### ESSAYS AND INQUIRIES SHOULD BE ADDRESSED TO:

Professor James Schiff, Editor

*The John Updike Review*

P.O. Box 210069

Cincinnati, OH 45221-0069

EMAIL: [james.schiff@uc.edu](mailto:james.schiff@uc.edu)

TELEPHONE: 513-556-0930

Electronic submissions, via email (as attached Word files), are preferred. Receipt of your manuscript will be acknowledged. Decisions take between 8 and 12 weeks.

### FIND FURTHER DETAILS AT:

[http://blogs.iwu.edu/johnupdikesociety/?page\\_id](http://blogs.iwu.edu/johnupdikesociety/?page_id)

THE  
JOHN UPDIKE  
REVIEW

## IN THIS ISSUE

---

Peter J. Bailey

David Penn

Brian Duffy

James Plath

Donald J. Greiner

James Schiff

Judie Newman

---