THE UNIVERSITY OF OTTAWA

JOHN UPDIKE: THE QUEST FOR IMMORTALITY

by

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INTRODUCTION

Almost without exception, the main character in each of John Updike's short stories and novels is preoccupied with thoughts of the deterioration of time and the imminence of his own death. It is the intention of this thesis to demonstrate this preoccupation along with its causes and effects; it will also attempt to outline the manner in which these characters resist and, in some cases, overcome, the psychological effects of the awareness of the deterioration of time and the finality of death. It is hoped that in the process of this demonstration, a general picture of the Updike protagonist and his posture in relation to society and the cosmos will emerge.

Elements of the absurd, the existential, and the religious will be discussed as the Updike protagonist moves, in his search for meaning, from the security of ignorance, to the anxiety of knowledge, to the joy of revelation. This is the progression that determines the order of the thesis, the development of its ideas, and the selection and sequence of the primary sources used.

This method, as opposed to one treating each novel or short story separately, was chosen because it facilitates the presentation of a more or less typical Updike Protagonist.

Both critical admiration and critical disdain centre

on Updike's distinctive style. His detractors call it "precious" or claim that its beautiful lyrical quality is wasted on trivial subject matter. Other critics perceive Updike's underlying themes and his efforts to transcend the trivia of every day life; but with few exceptions, their comments are too cryptic. It is part of the intention of this thesis to add scope and detail to some of their groundwork.

One of the exceptions mentioned above is the first full-length critical work on Updike called The Elements of John Updike by Alice and Kenneth Hamilton. This book became available a short time before the completion of this thesis and adds support to some of its arguments. The Hamiltons state succinctly the critical attitude they wish to refute:

> The vitality, sensitivity, and intelligence of Updike's writings are generally admitted. The principal objection raised against them is that they are too slight and decorative, too narrowly restricted in range, and too concerned with life's little problems to engage in full seriousness with the human situation....

Their purpose is mine also.

I Alice Hamilton and Kenneth Hamilton, The Elements of John Updike (Grand Rapids, 1970), p. 243.

I: TIME THE ENEMY

> He had months and not years to live. This was the fact. By measuring with his mind (which seemed to hover in fear some distance from his brain) the intensity of certain sensations obliquely received, he could locate, by a kind of triangulation, his symptoms in space: a patch of strangeness beneath the left rib, an inflexible limitation in his lungs, a sickly sweet languor in his ankles, which his mind's eye located just this side of the town wharf. But space interested him only as the silver on the back of the mirror of time. It was in time, that utterly polished surface, that he searched for his reflection ....He wondered why the difference between months and years should be qualitative when mere quantities were concerned .... Everything in his life had been ordinary except its termination. His 'life.' Considered as a finite noun, his life seemed unequal to the infinitude of death. [1]

These are the anxious thoughts of a man lying sleepless in a dark bedroom. He is the narrator of the short story, "The Dark" by John Updike. In his novels and short stories, Updike sees time, in its distorting, disintegrating, and ultimately destructive capacities, as man's natural enemy. The effects of time, and its final instrument, death, constantly threaten his protagonists' peace of mind. In the face of the implications of time and death, their thoughts and actions, their very lives, seem to be rendered meaningless. They are plagued by thoughts of the actual death around them,

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I John Updike, "The Dark,"The Music School (New York, 1966), p. 154.

and by the imminence of their own. "Each of our bodies is a clock that loses time .... I wake at odd hours and in the shuddering darkness and silence feel my death rushing toward me like an express train."[2]

But death is only the final horror--the end of the frightening movement of time. The Updike protagonist is tortured by the awareness of his inexorable physical decline as, for example, when decaying teeth send him reluctantly to dentists. He is tormented by memories of loved ones who have died, of past successes which time has proved inconsequential, of past experiences which he feels have valuable lessons to teach but which have been distorted or bedimmed by time. He is disappointed in the attempt to re-live past love affairs or reclaim former athletic prowess. He watches flowers wilt, pets become diseased, parents grow senile, childhood homes fall apart.

Paul West considers the erosion of time a dominant American theme[3] and Frank Kermode goes further by claiming that men write in order to resist that erosion.

> Men, like poets, rush 'into the middest' in medias res, when they are born: they also die in mediis rebus, and to make sense of their span they need fictive concords with origins and ends, such as give meaning to lives and to poems. The End they imagine will reflect their irreducibly intermediary

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2 Updike, "Lifeguard," Pigeon Feathers (Greenwich, 1962), p.148.

3 Paul West, The Modern Novel, 2 vols. (London, 1963), II, p. 281.

> preoccupations. They fear it, and as far as we can see have always done so; the End is a figure for their own deaths .... We project ourselves ... past the End, so as to see the structure whole, a thing we cannot do from our spot of time in the middle.[4]

In the final analysis, Updike accepts, resists, and in some cases, overcomes the tragic effects of time through certain of his characters; but most of his writing deals with the long prelude of struggle.

Doctors and dentists appear often in Updike's work and the decaying of teeth becomes a symbol of a more general disintegration of the body as it plunges through time. Freddy Thorne, a dentist in Couples, is a dirty-minded scandal-monger who arranges an abortion that has traumatic effects upon the protagonist, Piet Hanema. Freddy acts as a kind of sinister high priest who presides over and helps to sustain the Tarbox coterie in a system of inverted, perverted values. In "Dentistry and Doubt," a clergyman, afraid of pain and troubled by thoughts of "waste spaces" in an infinite universe, sits in a dentist's chair watching black birds from the window: "They kept falling out of the sky and the treetops, but he noticed few ascending."[5] As the decay of his teeth seems to indicate, life is a decline, a movement downwards. The process

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4 Frank Kermode, The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction (New York, 1966), pp. 7-8.

5 Updike, "Dentistry and Doubt," The Same Door (Greenwich, 1959), p.42.

of bodily disintegration is not only painful, but, in the face of a vast universe in constant flux, seemingly insignificant, seemingly final. Updike himself has said, "I wouldn't want to pose as a religious thinker. I'm more or less a shady type improvising his way from book to book and trying to get up in the morning without a toothache."[6]

In "The Persistence of Desire," the protagonist visits his eye-doctor. He is particularly aware of his receding youth because he is visiting the town of his childhood. He notices a new clock in the waiting room.

> The one new thing, set squarely on an orange end table, was a compact black clock constructed like a speedometer ....Already it was 1:29, and while he watched, the digits slipped again: another drop into the brimming void. He glanced around for the comfort of a clock with a face and gracious, gradual hands.[7]

(The wish for a clock with a "face" and "hands" is a desire to "humanize" time -- a concept which will be considered later.) His doctor tells him he has "middle-aged eyes." He then makes an almost desperate pass at his teenage sweetheart whom he had met in the waiting room. More because of her present unhappiness than his appeal, he is successful; and because of this success, when he leaves the office,"..he became a child again in this town, where life was a distant adventure, a rumour, an always imminent joy."[8] Like nostalgia,

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6 "View from the Catacombs," review of Couples by John Updike, in Time, April 26, 1968, p. 67.

7 Updike, "The Persistence of Desire," Pigeon Feathers, p. 17.

8 Ibid., p. 26.

love--even promiscuous love--thus provides a temporary respite from the pressures of time. This accounts for the desperateness, the quality of escape in many of the Updike-drawn love affairs. Sex to the characters in Couples is "...their sole and pitiable shield against the awareness of death."[9] Piet Hanema precipitates himself frenetically into one sexual liason after another. Rabbit Angstrom in Rabbit, Run finds comfort only in the arms of a prostitute. Piet is plagued by memories of his parents' sudden death and Rabbit lives a hum-drum life that feels "second-rate" compared to a glorious adolescence as a basketball star. Neither is able to accept the harsh inevitabilities of time.

As he does in "The Persistence of Desire," Updike often combines the two relief-providing elements--love and nostalgia. In his essay, "Tillich," he says:

> What is it that shines from Iseult's face but our own past, with its strange innocence and its strange need to be redeemed? What is nostalgia but love for that part of ourselves which is in heaven, forever removed from change and corruption? A woman, loved, momentarily eases the pain of time by localizing nostalgia: the vague and irrecoverable objects of nostalgic longing are assimilated, under the pressure of libidinous desire, into the details of her person.[10]

Hence, the "pain of time" compels a search for worlds "removed from change and corruption." But the relief found in love is only "momentary", and perhaps, illusory as well; that found in

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9 "View from the Catacombs," op. cit., p. 62.

10 Updike, "Tillich," Assorted Prose (Greenwich, 1965), p. 187.

an escape into the past is certainly illusory.[11] In "The Persistence of Desire," the former sweetheart coldly accepts the protagonist's advances in defiance of an unemployed husband--so in this case, even the love is illusory; the man's sense of a return to childhood wherein life was "a rumour, an always imminent joy," is obviously so. The Hamiltons note that in the short story, "Twin Beds in Rome," the husband and wife enjoy that ancient city because it returns them to their past and "...they find a local anaesthetic to deaden present pain."[12]

In Updike's work there are many trips back "home." They are rarely fulfilling because time has effected changes that jar painfully with the visions of the returner's memory. In Of The Farm, an advertising consultant returns on a visit to the farm of his boyhood. At the first sight of his mother he is disturbed by fresh signs of her old age. In his childhood home he looks at old photographs, medals, news clippings (all connected to his promising youth) and gifts he had sent his mother over the years:

> I felt these gifts, however expensive, to have been cheap substitutes for my love and my presence, and it was as if entering the remembered interior expecting to find my austere youth, I found instead the scintillating dregs of my corruption .... I was

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11 H.M. Harper, "John Updike: The Intrinsic Problems of Human Existence," Desperate Faith (Chapel Hill, 1967), p. 188.

12 Alice Hamilton and Kenneth Hamilton, The Elements of John Updike (Grand Rapids, 1970), pp. 68-69.

so abundantly memorialized it seemed I must be dead.[13]

Beck: A Book offers another instance of a return to the past which serves only to reinforce a sense of loss. In his youth Beck attended, in an impressive theatre, a mass meeting of the public gathered to honour the country's artistic greats.

> The bright stage far below them supported a magical tableau. On a curved dais composed of six or seven rows a hundred persons, mostly men, were seated ... each had suffered the crystalization of fame ... the flower of the arts in America ... souls who while still breathing enjoyed their immortality.
>
> The surface of their collected glory undulated as one or another would stand ... seize the glowing lecturn, and speak .... all of them unified, in the eyes of the boy Beck ... by their transcendance of time ... exempted themselves from the nagging nuisance of growth and its twin ... decay. He childishly assumed that ... they sat like this eternally, in the same iron arrangement, beneath this doomed ceiling of scrolls and stars.

The "ceiling of scrolls and stars" became the vault of a universe unaffected by time and the scene had a lasting effect upon the aging Beck, though he "never dared hope to join that pantheon." Over thirty years later, without realizing it until he is actually there, he finds himself at the same ceremony--but this time on the stage. As a writer, he is amongst those being honoured. The building is dingy; he is surrounded by aged, diseased and perverted

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13 Updike, Of The Farm (Greenwich,1965), p. 17.

artists, and he himself feels far from immortal.

> A shadow plumped brusquely down in the chair on Beck's right; it was--O, monstrous!--Josh Glazer.... He was deaf, his hair was dyed black, and his teeth were false too .... Beck looked away and saw everywhere on this stage dissolution and riot. The furrowed skulls of philosophers lolled in a Bacchic stupor. Wicked smirks flickered back and forth among faces enshrined in textbooks. Eustace Chubb, America's poetic conscience throughout the Cold War, had holes in his socks and mechanically chafed a purple sore on his shin. Anatole Husac, the father of Neo-Figurism, was sweating out a high drug, his hands twitching like suffocating fish.[14]

In short, the returning figure never finds what he expects--especially if he has been nursing a romanticized view of his past. Time works with indifference and impartiality.

Another common figure in Updike's work is a victim of time in another way. He is faced with the contrast between unpleasant present circumstances and a happy but unreclaimable past. Harry Angstrom in Rabbit, Run is the prototype. He was one of the best basketball players in his high school's history: he loved the game and took pride in his skill; he was admired and played with confidence according to the orderly rules of the game. But although Rabbit "... strives for the same perfection and skill in life that he had known on the basketball court,"[15] his life a few years later is a study in pathos. He is estranged from wife, family, religion and society in the true fashion of the absurd hero.[16]

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14 Updike, Beck: A Book (New York, 1970), pp. 177-85.

15 D.D. Galloway, "The Absurd Man as Saint," The Absurd Hero (Austin, 1966), p. 28.

16 Ibid., pp. 27 - 28.

> Rabbit's broken connection with his school is illustrated in the inability of the townspeople who had adulated him as a sports star, to even recognize him any more, and in the exposure of his old school coach, who had been his ideal, as a sexual masochist.[17]

New stars have taken his place, and he has simply outgrown the one thing he really did well. Past time has been painfully lost. In future time he anticipates nothing but a growing family he can't support and a wife who is losing her physical appeal and becoming an alcoholic. Rabbit talks to a minister who is trying to patch up the marriage:

> I once played a game real well. I really did. And after you're first-rate at something, no matter what, it kind of takes the kick out of being second-rate. And that little thing Janice and I had going, boy, it was really second-rate.[18]

As for the present, job after job slips through his fingers and he lives in a state of constant agitation. He has only one instinctive recourse--to run.

> The fear of Rabbit Angstrom, Updike's hero, is that he may be no more than mortal, and the goal of his quest in the novel, his running, is to find external corroboration for his vague feelings of immortality.[19]

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17 R. Detweiler,"John Updike and The Indictment of Culture Protestants, Four Spiritual Crises in Mid-Century American Fiction (Gainsville, 1963), p. 18.

18 Updike, Rabbit, Run (Greenwich, 1960), p. 90.

19 J.C. Stubbs, "The Search for Perfection in Rabbit, Run," Critique (Vol. X, 1968), p. 94.

Stubbs goes on to point out that one of the few pieces of "external corroboration" that Rabbit, a purely instinctive man, is able to find, is this "funny feeling" he experienced when a basketball fell cleanly through the hoop years ago. Time has robbed him of all but the memory of that feeling. Rabbit's situation is strikingly similar to that of other nick-named young men in Updike's work: Flick Webb in the poem, "Ex-basketball Player," and Ace Anderson in the short story, "Ace in the Hole." Flick now works in a garage. "... he hangs around Mae's luncheonette ..." and watches the "...bright applauding tiers / Of Necco Wafers, Nibs, and Juju Beads."[20] Ace is also an ex-basketball star and has just lost his job as a car salesman. A newspaper article, referring to his old records, calls him Fred. "... it used to be Ace."[21]

Portions of this thesis will deal later with the re-vitalizing functions of the memory in Updike--as opposed to its use as an escape mechanism--but this positive use is often inhibited by a distorting or dimming caused by the passage of time. Frequently, the protagonist simply cannot remember well enough. On the fly-leaf of an anthology, Updike quotes Kafka:

> In revenge, however, my memory of the past has closed the door against me more and more. I

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20 Updike, "Ex-Basketball Player," Verse (Greenwich, 1963), p. 16.

21 Updike, "Ace in the Hole," The Same Door, p. 23.

> could have returned at first ... but as I spurred myself on in my forced career, the opening narrowed and shrank before me; ... the strong wind that blew after me out of my past began to slacken ... and the opening in the distance, through which it comes and through which I once came myself, has grown so small that, even if my strength and my will power sufficed to get me back to it, I should have to scrape the very skin from my body to crawl through. [22]

Kafka saw that he had allowed the pressures of the present and of his outer, social life -- "the world of men" -- to be too demanding. His memory, which would have provided vital knowledge about himself, atrophied.

"Walter Biggs" is an Updike story about a man and wife who try to remember details about their honeymoon--details they both realize are important to their marriage. The husband is anxious and lies sleepless until he remembers. Time, and the endless trivia of everyday life, had obscured things of his past that he didn't know were important until it was almost too late. (The details remembered and the reasons for their importance will be discussed later.)

To contemplate and attempt to combat the disintegrating effects of time is a natural preoccupation of man. Before it is possible to resist those effects however, it is necessary to accept their reality. Many of Updike's protagonists, such as Rabbit, either refuse, or are unable to do so. As a consequence, they live lives of frustration

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22 F. Kafka, "A Report to an Academy," quoted in Pigeon Feathers by John Updike.

and pathos. The actual process of acceptance is a painful one, and Updike's own life, as he tells of it in "The Dogwood Tree," may be used to exemplify.

> ...the walnut tree out back has been cut down. My grandparents are dead ... The trolley cars no longer run ... The poorhouse has been demolished ... It has taken me many shocks of many returnings, more and more widely spaced now, to learn what seems simple enough, that change is the order of things.[23]

The sense of death casts a black shadow over Updike's pages. He himself has confessed to times when he felt a "... sense of horror that beneath this skin of bright and exquisitely sculpted phenomena, death waits."[24] He defines the word, "xyster" in a short poem:

> "An instrument for scraping bones"
> Defines the knife.
> The word is rarely used - but why?
> What else is life?[25]

Death is time's ultimate instrument of destruction. To Updike's protagonists, its less final ravages--physical deterioration and the sense of loss due to a receding past--are merely symptomatic of the end towards which they move. Even the implication of the change of seasons can be a cause of fear and bitterness. "I hate nature. It reminds me of death. All Nature seems to me is garbage and confusion and the stink of skunk - brroo!"[26] These are the sentiments

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23 Updike, "The Dogwood Tree," Assorted Prose (London, 1965), p. 64.

24 "View from the Catacombs," op. Cit., p. 67.

25 Updike, "Xyster," Verse, p. 98.

26 Updike, The Centaur (Greenwich, 1963), p. 216.

of George Caldwell, the central figure of The Centaur. Of all of Updike's characters, he is the most imbued with a sense of the imminence of his own death (and the most heroic because he functions in spite of it).

The "brimming void," or the simple-complex, mind-boggling immensity of the cosmos is yet another reminder of death for Caldwell and for other characters. They fear their own insignificance in the face of it; they fear its suggestion of a nothingness to come when their physical existence is terminated. Men of science, men who often come into contact with the cosmic immensities, are compelled to face this particular kind of reminder often. In Updike's short story, "The Astronomer", the protagonist "fears the visit" of a learned astronomer. "Brilliant, he rarely deigned to publish papers, so that his brilliance was carried around with him as an undiminished potency."

> .....
>
> We ate dinner by the window, from which the Hudson appeared a massive rent opened in a tenuous web of light. Though we talked trivially, about friends and events, I felt the structure I had painstakingly built up within myself wasting away; my faith (existentialism padded out with Chesterton) my prayers, my spiritual void of the inner city reigned above the fragile hats of a dozen old ladies and the minister shook my hand at the door with a look of surprise on his face), all dwindled to the thinnest filaments of illusion, and in one flash, I knew, they would burn to nothing. I felt behind his eyes immensities of space and gas, and seemed to see with him through my own evanescent body into gigantic systems of dead but furious matter, suns like match heads, planets like cinders, galaxies that were whirls of ash, and beyond them, more galaxies, and more, fleeing with sickening speed beyond the rim that our most powerful telescopes could reach.[27]

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27 Updike, "The Astronomer," Pigeon Feathers, pp 127-8.

We find later that the astronomer himself, who has inspired such fear in his host, is a victim of the same fear.

George Caldwell is also a man of science, a high school teacher who daily forces himself to the brink in the classroom.

> 'Right,' he said to the class, 'the Sun. Now here's a figure.' He wrote on the blackboard 6,000000000000000000. 'How would you say it?' He answered himself, 'Six,' and looping back to the trios of zeros, 'thousand, million, billion, trillion, quadrillion, quintillion, sextillion. Six sextillion ... the weight of the earth in tons. 'Now the sun,' he said, 'weighs this much more.' He wrote 333,000 on the blackboard saying, half to the class, half to the slate. 'Three - three - three oh, oh, oh. Multiply it out and you get' srkk, scrak, the chalk chipped as he carried the ones - 'one nine nine eight followed by twenty-four goose eggs.' He stepped back and looked; his work sickened him: .... 'Do these figures mean anything to you?'
>
> Deifendorf said, 'No' .....
>
> 'They don't mean anything to me either. They remind me of death. The human mind can only take so much.'[28]

Caldwell "... is a teacher, yet his knowledge as a man of science, dedicated to removing superstition, has simply left him with a universe from which human meaning has vanished."[29]

The concept of an infinite universe and its traumatic effects upon "the human mind" reappear often in Updike's work, especially in connection with its religious implications. Suffice it to say here that, if man's significance in the

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28 Updike, The Centaur, pp. 33-34.

29 Alice Hamilton and Kenneth Hamilton, op. cit., p. 170.

cosmic scheme of things is seen as trivial, death looms more terrible in the human consciousness. Paul West feels that conception and death are man's only significant contributions in terms of what he calls "cosmic power."[30] To the Updike protagonist, such a thought brings despair.

The thought of death never completely leaves the consciousness of George Caldwell. Physical pain, even more than thoughts of nature or the vastness of the universe, reminds him of the imminence of his own death. Caldwell's mythical namesake, Chiron, is immortal but is condemned to eternal suffering after being struck by a poisoned arrow. Caldwell is struck by an arrow shot by a student.

> The pain scaled the tender core of his skin, whirled in the complexities of his knee, and swollen broader, more thunderous, mounted into his bowels. His eyes were forced upward to the blackboard, where he had chalked the number 5,000,000,000, the probable age in years of the universe .... The pain extended a feeler into his head and unfolded its wet wings along the walls of his thorax.... The pain seemed to be displacing with its own hairy segments his heart and lungs; as its grip swelled in his throat, he felt he was holding his brain like a morsel on a platter high out of hungry reach.[31]

Here, the inexorability of the pain is like that of death itself; and like death, it appears as almost deliberately and consciously malign. Such occasions seem to be inspirational for Updike. He is also at his lyrical best when he describes Caldwell's pain in the dentist's chair. As the former passage united pain with the notion of an infinite universe, this couples pain with Caldwell's sense of aging and bodily decay.

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30 West, op. cit., p. 284.

31 Ibid., p. 1.

> A tree of pain takes root in his jaw. Wait, Wait! Kenny should have waited a few minutes more on the novocain. But this is the end of the day, the boy is tired and hurried. Kenny had been one of Caldwell's first students, back in the Thirties. Now this same boy, badly balding, braces one knee against the arm of the chair to win more leverage for the pliers which are grinding around the tooth and crushing it like chalk even as they try to twist it free .... Truly, the pain is unprecedented: an entire tree rich with bloom, each bloom showering into the livid blue air a coruscation of lucid lime-green sparks. He opens his eyes in disbelief that this could go on and on and his horizon is filled with the dim pink of the dentist's determined mouth .... The kid had tried to become an M.D. but he hadn't the I.Q. so he had settled upon being a butcher .... A vague, numb sense of loss afflicts him. Another day, another molar.[32]

Caldwell's pain makes his fear of death almost tangible, as death becomes something more than a vague phantom. The bathos of "Another day, another molar," comes from his typically self-derogatory attempt to diminish his own importance and therefore diminish the importance of his death.

Ultimately, the fear of death is a self-centred thing, but Caldwell's is not wholly so. He is afraid he has cancer and will die leaving his wife, and especially his son, destitute. They are part of the reason he hangs on to life at all; and his own sacrificial nobility, which he himself only dimly perceives, is Updike's main positive assertion in the novel. Caldwell tells a class that, biologically, primitive cells are immortal:

> "Amoebas never die .... But the volvox ... by pioneering this new idea of cooperation, rolled life into the kingdom of certain - as opposed to accidental - death .... It dies sacrifically

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32 Updike, The Centuar, p. 163-65.

> for the good of the whole. Those first cells who got tired of sitting around forever in a blue-green scum and said, 'Let's get together and make a volvox', were the first altruists. The first do-gooders. If I had a hat on, I'd take it off to 'em.[33]

Caldwell's position is analogous to that of the volvox cells because he functions in spite of an acute fear of death (and a temptation to submit to it) for the sake of his son. He is also like Chiron who gave up immortality to atone for the sins of Prometheus.[34] He struggles on; nevertheless, his fear endures. By the end of the novel, Updike builds him into a tragic and heroic figure.

The deterioration of time, physical pain, and a sense of man's insignificance in an infinitely vast universe have all been cited as reminders of one's own imminent death, but it is the death of a loved one that brings the fear closest to home. Peter Caldwell, the teacher's son, narrates The Centaur and his father's fear gradually becomes his own. The same father-figure -- apologetic, self-deprecatory, socially inept, but always self-sacrificing--constantly reappears in Updike's stories. The son, like Peter, often becomes aware of the sacrifice and feels guilty because of it. "I'm killing my father, Peter thinks, amazed."[35] The guilt is compounded by the simple fear of losing his father together with the realization that it is inevitable.

> As my father and I strode along the pavement that divided the school side lawn from Hummel's alley, a little whirlwind sprang up before us and led us along. Leaves long dead and brittle as old butterfly wings ... hurried in a rustling revolution before our eyes; a distinctly circular, invisible presence outlined itself on the walk .... my instinct was to halt but my father kept striding.

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33 Ibid., p. 37.

34 Galloway, op. cit., p. 41.

35 Updike, The Centaur, p. 193.

Peter has become aware of the fatal inevitability, the "invisible presence" towards which he and his father must move; he is also beginning to realize his father's courage in facing it--a courage he as yet does not possess.

> ...I closed my eyes. When I looked behind us, the whirlwind was nowhere to be seen.
> In the school we parted. A student, I was held by regulations to this side of the wire reinforced doors. He pushed through and walked down the long hall .... Smaller and smaller he grew ... at the far door he became a shadow, a moth, impaled on the light he pressed against. The door yielded; he disappeared. With a grip of sweat, terror seized me.[36]

Peter's father has, symbolically, passed through the rim of life into the nothingness threatened by death. Peter is afraid for him--and for himself.

Like Caldwell and his son after him, Piet Hanema of Couples is obsessed with the thought of his parents' death.

> For Piet Hanema alone, the chase into neighborly beds comes close to the course of tragedy. Unlike the others, he is hounded not only by lust, curiosity and boredom but by a terrible sense of time fleeing. He is haunted by the past ... most of all by his parents' death in an automobile accident .... Death for Piet is not a future moment in time: it is time itself, and life is what Updike calls 'a series of little losses' leading toward the dry well.[37]

Like many of Updike's characters, Piet has trouble sleeping. He lies awake and his thoughts leap from details of his latest love affair to the scene of his parents' car accident years before. "God help me, help me, get me out of this. Eek ik, eeik ik. Dear God put me to sleep. Amen."[38] The sound is made by his daughter's pet hamster as it runs end-

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36 Ibid., p. 130.

37 "View from the Catacombs," op. cit., p. 64.

38 John Updike, Couples (New York, 1968), p. 16.

lessly through the night in a turning wheel--a mocking parody of Piet's own flight (running, like Rabbit) through his short allotment of time. The wheel as an image of time implies a monstrous sameness, an endless force that turns back upon itself like seasonal nature, "chasing its own tail."

Piet's daughter has taken on part of his fear and proclaims defiantly that she will never die. The hamster does die and Piet is unable to protect her from her fears, his own being too much with him. It is not surprising that the man he dislikes most is Freddy Thorne, the dentist (who happens to be impotent). Piet, "...rarely ate candy, out of fear for his teeth." [39] He lacks Caldwell's courage and, unable to find much solace in his religion, seeks it in orgasm. The Freudian overtones are apparent:

> Harshly abused by the world into which we are ushered by the unforgivable trauma of birth, we carry with us the inextirpable memory of that blessed peace; and often symbolically seek it, waking and dreaming ....

Paradoxically, in spite of their fear of death, both Piet and Caldwell are drawn to it because of its promise of relief. "In the Freudian account the craving for death is a project for peace: it is the peace of the womb-life rather than the peace of absolute nullity." [40] It is the possibility of "absolute nullity" after death that the Updike character fears.

There are other Freudian elements in Updike's work, such as the importance of childhood (and past events in general) to the human psyche. Dreams also take on symbolic

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39 Updike, Couples, p. 228.

40 J.N. Hartt, The Lost Image of Man (Louisiana, 1963), p.122.

meaning. But to call Updike 'Freudian' is over-stating the case.

In Updike's work, Piet's daughter is an exception. The child's awareness of death is rarely traumatic; he is simply too immature to be aware of the full implications of death. Updike's autobiographical writing in Assorted Prose gives his most clear and direct view of the preteen's reactions to death. He speaks of a pet cat:

> Tommy came to us increasingly battered and once did not come at all. As if he never existed: That was death.[41]

Next door to the Updikes, was a poorhouse (no doubt the source of The Poorhouse Fair)which served as a grim reminder to Updike senior, but not to the young John.

> [It was] ... surrounded by a sound stone wall that was low enough on one side for a child to climb easily but that on the other side offered a drop of twenty or thirty feet, enough to kill you if you fell .... at the time it seemed perfectly natural, a dreadful pit of space congruent with the pit of time into which the old people ... had been plunged by some mystery that would never touch me. That I too would come to their condition was as unbelievable as that I would really fall and break my neck.[42]

The child does see old age and decrepitude as "dreadful," but as something remote from himself; therefore, the young Updike could "never picture" the accidental death of a man near his house though he knew "the exact patch of asphalt" where it happened. He went to holiday parades near the town cemetery and played "leapfrog over the tombstones."

It is in adolescence, if the individual has enough mental maturity, that the full implications of death strike home. Fiedler sees this realization as a kind of

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41 Updike, "The Dogwood Tree," p. 54.

42 Ibid., p. 56.

initiation especially evident in American literature.

> In the U.S. it is through murder rather than sex, death rather than love that the child enters the fallen world. He is not asked, to be sure, to kill a fellow human, only an animal, deer or bear, or even fish, some woodland totem, in slaying whom he enters into a communion of guilt with the natural world in which hitherto he has led the privileged existence of an outsider. (He gains afterwards) ...the knowledge that was to make us gods and taught us only that we die.[43]

Updike's short story "Pigeon Feathers," in an anthology of the same name, deals explicitly with this initiation. The boy is first unsettled by reading H.G. Wells' account of the life of Jesus:

> This was the initial impact - that at a definite spot in time and space a man black with the denial of Christ's divinity had been suffered to exist: that the universe had not spit out this ball of tar but allowed it to continue in its blasphemy ... write books that, if true, collapsed everything into a jumble of horror,... He tried to supply out of his ignorance objections that would defeat the common place march of these black words, and found none.[44]

For the boy, to deny the divinity of Christ was to deny the possibility of everlasting life. Death became final. The boy has a grandmother who is severely crippled and the thought of her begins to trouble his thoughts. He has begun to understand the full implications of certain arguments that are typical of his mother and father. In one, as they talk of men dying young, his father denies the existence of the human soul. With a "formless dread"

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43 L. Fiedler, "The Eye of Innocence," Salinger (New York, 1962), pp. 263 - 64.

44 Updike, "Pigeon Feathers," Pigeon Feathers, p. 86.

David takes a flashlight to the outhouse where, "For once, his fear of spiders there felt trivial."

> Without warning, David was visited by 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. You try to reach them but your arms are pinned. Shovels pour dirt into your face. There you will be forever ... blind and silent, and in time no one will remember you, and you will never be called .... And the earth tumbles on and the sun expires, and unaltering darkness reigns where once there were stars.
>
> Sweat broke out on his back.[45]

Nevertheless, in spite of these preliminary shocks, David still feels "too small to be crushed" and the vision passes.

Back in the house his parents' argument continues--now about the relative merits of organic and chemical farming. Echoing Caldwell in The Centaur, David's father puts a finish to the debate by saying, " 'This reminds me of death.' It was a phrase of his that David had heard so often he never considered its sense." In bed, he does so, and thoughts of his own death return. To the fear of a purely physical death, is now added, with increasing impact, the fear of a nothingness afterwards. The next day he attends a catechetical class and is angered, frustrated, betrayed by the minister's vague answers to his questions about immortality. He reacts similarly to his mother's words when she discovers him, reading alone for the first time, the family bible.

> 'Mother, good grief. Don't you see' - he rasped away the roughness in his throat - 'if when we die there's nothing, all your sun and fields are all, ah, horror? It's just an ocean of horror.'[46]

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45 Ibid., pp. 88-89.

46 Ibid., p. 98.

These experiences constitute David's youthful introduction to the possibilities of death--a ritual repeated often in Updike's work. In this particular story the crisis--the end of the initiation process--involves David's killing of nuisance pigeons in his barn some months later. However, the resolutions of such crises are more properly the subject of another chapter.

The first fearful contact of the adolescent with the "horror"of death produces effects that reverberate through the rest of his life. With Updike it is here, in adolescence, that time really begins. Its passage, marked by the new awareness of death, is now discernable. Inklings of its movement touch the teenager in the form of skin diseases (Peter Caldwell has psoriasis) and the rapid changes of his physical make-up. "A Sense of Shelter" is the story of a boy who subconsciously resists the initiation, tries to stop time from beginning by prolonging the sense of shelter he feels inside the high school after hours. It is cold and stormy outside, so he lingers in the warmth and familiar security of the school. He has confessed his love for, and been rejected by, a worldly-wise classmate. She has just left him by walking out into the storm. Even though "the long dark space" of his open locker threatens to make his fears conscious, he continues to resist.[47]

William Young is his name--aptly chosen because he prefers the secure ignorance of youth to the fearful knowledge of maturity. He "...decides that the path of the lover is not for him, since it leads out into the sun and the storms. Safety is remaining in the dim underworld.[48]

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47 Updike, "A Sense of Shelter," Olinger Stories (New York, 1964), pp. 84-100.

48 Alice Hamilton and Kenneth Hamilton, op. cit., p. 113.

In Updike's portrayals, there is a distinct difference in the reactions of the various age groups to the awareness of the implications of death. The child reacts with little more than curiosity because he is immature and death seems so remote. Like David's, the adolescent reaction is the piercing, hot flash of a new and threatening discovery. A trend is continued into old age wherein death is received somewhat more stoically, though its presence is more sustained, more consciously felt. Speaking of the inmates of Poorhouse Fair, Harper says:

> ...Their attention is focused upon the ultimate fact of life which becomes larger now than any other, and which fills them with anxiety. The former prefect, Mendelssohn, had recognized that 'here they lived with death at their sides, the third participant in every conversation, the third guest at every meal.'[49]

Death is more imminent for the old, less far removed from their own selves than is the sight of a decayed barn or even the loss of a loved one. Since they have been aware of the terrible possibilities of death for so long, they are more accustomed to its presence; therefore, thoughts of death preoccupy them more but with a pain that is less sharply felt.

It is natural that the old, more so than the young in Updike's stories, seek refuge by escaping into the past.

> The identity which the younger generation seeks from the fulfillment of a public role the poor effortlessly attain through their recollections of the past. Their undiscriminated memories, bitter as well as fond, not only arm them against the intrusions of the harsh outsiders, but also define them .... Time is often a terror to those

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49 H.M. Harper, op. cit., p. 30.

> who must look to the future, but it is a comfort to those who have no future; it ties them to something larger than themselves - their past.[50]

It is "...only after their exile to the poorhouse [that] these Americans recognize the void that their formerly busy lives had shielded them from.[51] The memories of the old are often absurdly trivial because they will use anything to pull them out of the present, out of thoughts of the only thing the future has in store for them. "We grow backward, aging into our father's opinions and even into those of our grandfathers."[52]

Nevertheless, the inmates of the poorhouse do not always use the past as a place of refuge from the present. The fair allows them an opportunity to assert the lasting value of those skills of former years which they still possess--even if only that of carving peach-pits. One of the inmates, Mrs. Mortis (whose name suggests the nearness of her fate), has an offer from a buyer at the beginning of the fair to purchase all of her hand-made quilts; but she refuses because she prefers the satis-faction of selling them one at a time to appreciative customers. Besides, doing it her own way gives her some sense of control over her time of life. But she fails to sell the quilts and is disillusioned.

> 'Well,' Mrs. Mortis said to the dealer from Trenton, 'I sold one by giving it away. You can have the rest I guess.' She has lapsed into her chair, her little head, in its stiff bonnet, sunk on her goiter.
>
> 'This is wonderful news missus. I bought from your friend down the line some of these trinkets.' He showed a handful of Tommy Franklin's carved peachpits. 'In my profession you never know what people will buy. Now let us see. I said a hundred

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50 J.A. Ward, "John Updike's Fiction," Critique (Vol. V., 1962), p. 30.

51 Harper, op. cit., p. 163.

52 Updike, The Poorhouse Fair (Greenwich, 1958), p. 112.

> dollars for six, so for five that would be, oh, eighty-five dollars.'
>
> 'Whatever is fair. These are my last. I won't do any more.'
>
> 'It kills me to hear you say that. Suppose I send you cloth?'
>
> 'Send it care of my casket.'[53]

The Hamiltons call Mrs. Mortis'attitude "sturdy realism" because she "sees no value in prolonging life" in a state such as hers.[54] They have missed the point. She can face death; but, as her words here indicate, not without bitterness. She has given up her handicraft because she has been unable to establish its value in the present; she has also relinquished a last handhold on life.

Lucas, another inmate, is always jabbing painfully into his ear with a matchstick. Galloway sees this as an attempt to "defeat monotony."[55] But David's father in "Pigeon Feathers" has the same habit and his anxiety is not caused by monotony. Perhaps these characters,reassured by a limited amount of physical pain, feel they are still alive and have a separate identity. "I hurt, therefore I am." As the attitude of the Updike protagonist towards death is ambivalent (both fearing and lured by it), so is that towards pain. In Couples, Piet's last mistress says to him: "At first I thought you fell down stairs and did acrobatics to show off. But really, you do it to hurt yourself."[56]

In speaking of the Updike protagonist's reactions to the implications of death, the terms "fear" and "anxiety" have been used more or less interchangeably. Tillich, a theologian who has had a strong influence on Updike, points out the psychological distinction between the terms:

> ...anxiety is the state in which a being is aware of its possible non-being .... anxiety is the

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53 Ibid., p. 122.

54 Alice Hamilton and Kenneth Hamilton, op. cit., p. 129.

55 Galloway, op. cit., p. 26.

56 Updike, Couples, p. 197.

> existential awareness of non-being ... it is not the realization of the universal transitoriness, not even the experience of the death of others, but the impression of these events on the always latent awareness of our own having to die, that produces the anxiety. Anxiety is finitude, experienced as one's own finitude.

Tillich goes on to say that fear, unlike anxiety, has a definite object "... which can be faced, analysed, attacked, endured." Anxiety has no discernible object. Its symptoms are "... loss of direction, inadequate reactions, lack of 'intentionality' .... because the source of the threat is 'nothingness.'"

Tillich's words aptly describe a psychological phenomenon in the Updike protagonist.

> This situation drives the anxious subject to establish objects of fear. Anxiety strives to become fear because fear can be met by courage. It is impossible for a finite being to stand naked anxiety for more than a flash of time .... This horror is ordinarily avoided by the transformation of anxiety into fear of something, no matter what.[57]

So the Updike protagonist "transforms" the anxiety caused by the threat of his "non-being" after death into the fear of objects such as tooth decay or the change of seasons.

The basic question facing the Updike Protagonist is this: What is significant, has meaning, in the face of the ravages of time and the threatened oblivion after death? Old Hook, a main character in The Poorhouse Fair, believes in an afterlife and his religious convictions are strong enough to sustain his peace of mind.

> Like Polonius, Hook is a pompous, windy bore; yet his instincts are right, and his philosophy meets the deepest human needs ... it offers what Conner's

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57 Paul Tillich, The Courage To Be (London, 1952), pp. 44 - 47.

> humanism does not; a bridge over the great existential void.[58]

Conner is a technologist and he intends to use his position as the poorhouse administrator to further his dream of a perfect (but sterile) society. He, in contrast to Hook, lives a life of constant insecurity; but he says confidently to Hook: "The chief characteristic of the universe is, I would say, emptiness. There is infinitely more nothing in the universe than anything else." He sees creation as an "accident." Hook retorts:

> Indeed, you propose to extinguish re-ligion [sic] by measuring quantities of nothing. Now why should no matter how much nothing be imposing, when my little fingernail, by being something, is of more account?[59]

Hook's philosophy is more comforting; it gives him mental security partially because it does not depend upon logic alone--and logic cannot explain away the "great existential void." In Hook's words, "there are the inner spokesmen." But this is not to say that Hook's belief s constitute a possible solution for the Updike protagonist--he is a horse of a different colour.

Some of the Updike protagonists do find "a bridge over the void," and their methods will be treated later. However, as the deteriorating effects of time must be accepted, so must the implications and fact of death; without this acceptance, nothing positive can be accomplished in terms of overcoming them. At the end of The Centaur, Caldwell (in his mythical guise) looks upon the "abyss" and makes an act of will.

> Chiron came to the edge of limestone; his hoof scratched. A bit of pale pebble rattled into the abyss. He cast his eyes upward to the dome of blue and perceived that it was indeed a great step. Yes, in seriousness, a very great step, for which all the walking in his life had not prepared him. Not an easy step nor an easy journey, it would take an

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58 Harper, op. cit., p. 165.

59 Updike, The Poorhouse Fair, p. 79.

> eternity to get there .... The whiteness of limestone pierced his eyes. His will, a perfect diamond under the pressure of absolute fear, uttered the final word .... Chiron accepted death.[60]

Chiron's acceptance of death is literal, Caldwell's figurative. The triumph of human will is that such acceptance is made "under the pressure of absolute fear." This frees Caldwell to go beyond the threatened edge of the abyss in his search for meaning in life. By accepting death, he is able to accept life.[61]

Caldwell's character takes on tragic significance. He invokes pity in us because he is a better man than most, because he feels more acutely the death pangs that every man feels, and because he sacrifices himself for the good of others who are, perhaps, less worthy than he. He invokes fear in us because he awakens that emotion as a natural consequence of our own awareness of the implications of death. His tragic flaw or tragic error in judgement is that he underestimates his own value. Nevertheless, we must admire his courage in denying the notion that life is a waste.

That here is hope, if one accepts the implications and fact of death, is also seen in "Pigeon Feathers." David finally consents to shoot the pigeons and gives in to his mother's demands that he bury them. ("They're your kill.") The fact that he consents to becoming an agent of death is a sign of the beginning of his acceptance of it. He then makes a sudden discovery:

> ... 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.[62]

But a relapse will occur. "Actuality is a running impoverishment of possibility."[63] The moments of revelation are temp-

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60 Updike, The Centaur, pp. 221-22.

61 Harper, op. cit., p. 181.

62 Updike, "Pigeon Feathers," p. 105.

63 Updike, Beck: A Book, p. 170.

orary; they vanish almost in the same instant they are apprehended. The Updike protagonist must continually seek other such moments.

II: SEARCH

Any way the Updike protagonist finds to overcome his fear of death and oblivion is inextricably connected to a belief in a divine being. The existence of God militates against any 'accidental' theory of existence that limits life to an all but meaningless passage from 'nada to nada.' This view of a life bounded by nothingness is the one towards which science tends to draw the Updike protagonist. This has been noted briefly in connection with "The Astronomer" and is implied by Updike through his narrator in "The Music School."

> We spoke of matters where all men are ignorant - of politics, children, and, perhaps, religion. I have the impression, at any rate, that he, as is often the case with scientists ... had no use for religion .... these men confine their cleverness to their work .... they seem to have solved, or dismissed the paradox of being a thinking animal and, devoid of guilt, apparently participate not in this century but in the next. [1]

It is perhaps because such men (like Conner in The Poorhouse Fair) work for the future that they have a substitute for, an illusion of, immortality. The Updike protagonist, like Rabbit, is different.

> As a star basketball player, Harry was an idealist who never fouled and usually won. Unlike the idealism of Conner, Harry's is based upon devotion to an inner conviction 2

Like all of Updike's protagonists, Rabbit is an idealist to the extent that he hangs on to a belief in something beyond the concrete. Beck is repulsed and frightened by a vision of the young females at a girl's school as purely scientific phenomena.

> He looked around the ring of munching females and saw their bodies as a Martian or a mollusc

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1 Updike, "The Music School", The Music School, p. 139.

2 Galloway, op. cit., p. 28.

> might see them, as pulpy stalks of bundled nerves oddly pinched to a bud of concentration in the head, a hairy bone knob holding some pounds of jelly in which a trillion circuits, mostly dead, kept records, coded motor operations, and generated an excess of electricity that passed into the hairless side of the head and leaked through the orifices, in the form of pained, hopeful noises and a simian dance of wrinkles. Impossible mirage! A blot on nothingness. And to think that all the efforts of his life - his preening, his lovemaking, his typing, boiled down to the attempt to displace a few sparks, to bias a few circuits within some random other scoops of jelly that would, in less time than it takes the Andreas Fault to shrug ... be utterly dissolved. The widest fame and most enduring excellence shrank to nothing in this perspective. As Beck ate, mechanically offering votive bits of dead lamb to the terror enthroned within him, he saw that the void should have been left unvexed, should have been spared this trouble of matter, of life, and, worst, consciousness.[3]

With only this measuring and weighing type of outlook, existence to the Updike protagonist becomes ugly and meaningless. Yet science is consistent; two plus two always equals four, and men like Beck are disillusioned because it seems that nothing else takes on such certainty. The narrator of "Intercession" plays golf:

> All he wanted was that his drive be brilliant; it was very little to ask. If miracles, in this age of faint faith, could enter anywhere, it would be here, where the casual fabric was thinnest, in the quick collisions and abrupt deflections of a game. Paul drove high but crookedly over the treetops. It was dismaying for a creature of spirit to realize that the angle of a surface striking a sphere counted for more with God than the most ardent hope.[4]

Again, God is the keynote. If He exists, the notion of a final mortality is absurd; a man's thoughts and actions (unlike

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3 Updike, Beck: A Book, pp. 115-116.

4 Updike, "Intercession," The Same Door, p. 151.

Beck's fears) then have some cosmic significance and the 'void' becomes the illusion rather than heaven. Conventional religion, such as the orthodox Christianity of Hook, does offer such a God. These believers live secure lives in Updike's stories; their problems are profane ones and, though they sometimes have flashes of doubt, they possess an inner calm that most of Updike's heroes lack. The cleric in "Dentistry and Doubt" has such flashes but it is evident that his religious convictions always sustain him in the end. The divinity student in "Lifeguard," in his egotism, has few doubts indeed.

> My own persistence beyond the last rim of time is easy to imagine; indeed, the effort of imagination lies the other way - to conceive of my ceasing.
> .....
> The tides of time have treacherous undercurrents. You are born continually towards the horizon. I have prepared myself; my muscles are instilled with everything that must be done. Someday my alertness will bear fruit; from the horizon there will arise, delicious, translucent, like a green bell above the water, the call for help, the call, a call, it saddens me to confess, that I have yet to hear.[5]

This young man works his summers, ironically enough, as a "lifeguard." But he is so secure in his own salvation that he cannot help others. Like the Puritan regenerate, he considers himself one of the chosen--apart from the rest. The Hamiltons seem to disregard the lifeguard's egotism (as it radiates from his look-out chair above the crowd) and the significance of his last words. They quote Kierkegaard's pronouncement, "the crowd is untruth" and assert the lifeguard's "individuality."[6] But Kierkegaard also said, "You are not concerned at all with what others do to you, but only with what you do to others ...."[7] The lifeguard

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5 Updike, "Lifeguard," Pigeon Feathers, pp. 150-51.

6 Alice Hamilton and Kenneth Hamilton, op. cit., p. 90.

7 L.M. Hallander (trans.), Selections from the Writings of Kierkegaard (Garden City, 1960), p. 28.

does nothing to others; he waits for them to come to him. The Hamiltons condemn them for not coming.

The Updike protagonist lacks one essential quality necessary to bring the comfort enjoyed by the good Christian -- a sustained faith. This is a gift of grace that some possess and others do not. Faith is not unknown to the Updike protagonist, but it only comes to him as doubt comes to the good Christian -- in flashes. Perhaps the lifeguard does have this gift and is therefore truly one of the chosen; but he lacks the humility of one who receives such a gift.

In any case, the Updike protagonist, like the golfer of "Intercession," has an "ardent hope," but cannot always make the 'leap of faith' needed to transcend his fears and doubts and the material realities of science. "Swimming offers a parable. We struggle and thrash, and drown; we succumb even in despair and float, and we are saved."[8] The implication is that if we can accept without question the existence of God and His divine plan, our faith will lift us above the abyss, hook-like. It is not a coincidence that Hook is the name of the devout old man of The Poorhouse Fair who remains self-secure even at the brink of death. Hooker is the divine studied by the cleric in "Dentistry and Doubt"; Hooker is also the name of a Vicar's dog in the "The Doctor's Wife."

> 'Now he ... used to swim far out into the bay, he and his great black dog Hooker. Vic would swim straight out until he couldn't move a muscle, and then he would float, and grab Hooker's tail, and the dog would pull him in. Honestly, it was a sight, this fat old English gentleman, his white hair streaming, coming in on the tail of a dog. He never gave a thought to sharks. Oh, he'd swim way out, until he was just a dot.'[9]

He swims"way out" without fear because it is God, not some impersonal, naturalistic force, that is involved in his destiny. He is secure

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8 Ibid., p. 147.

9 Updike, "The Doctor's Wife," Pigeon Feathers, pp. 137-38.

in his faith. Without the gift of conventional faith, the Updike protagonist must find more arduous ways to God; he must seek the unconventional, more temporary kind of faith spoken of by Kierkegaard: that which is earned through "fear and trembling," thereby adding an element of human merit and making it less purely a gift. Caldwell achieved this kind of faith at the end of The Centaur.

> When we trust ourselves to an encounter with this God, an encounter which is more than a safe flirting, there is death to be faced. The qualitative distinction between time and eternity is one we can contemplate only, in Kierkegaard's phrase, with 'fear and trembling' .... We cannot bask forever in the miracle of the sun's movement, or bathe childishly in protected shadows. Yet launched out into the deep, we can also know that in the terrifying flux around us are things that testify to something 'steady.' Even where death faces us, deep and opaque and alien, there is a goodness by which we are silently upheld.[10]

The influence of Kierkegaard and others has produced many existential qualities in Updike's protagonists. One of these is the rejection of outside help. "For Kierkegaard, the relation with God must be a lonely agonizing experience of a man's inner solitude."[11] The Updike protagonist must "scourge God into being." His revelations--the brief moments in which he feels the presence of God and is therefore freed from the presence of the void--are dearly bought. The narrator of "Packed Dirt" explains:

> ... of these intimations of divine joy that are like pain in that, their instant gone, the mind cannot remember or believe them .... Belief builds itself unconsciously and in consciousness is spent.[12]

Time has a hand in destroying even one's awareness of God. Since "belief builds itself unconsciously," the rational mind alone is

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10 Alice Hamilton and Kenneth Hamilton, op. cit., p. 92.

11 The Reader's Encyclopedia (New York, 1965), p. 547.

12 Updike, "Packed Dirt, Churchgoing, A Dying Cat, A Traded Car," Olinger Stories, p. 157.

insufficient to find a path to God. The existentialist realizes that there are both mysteries he must live with, and ways of knowing that will confound his reason. Updike's poem, "Fever" will serve as an example:

> I have brought back a good message from the land of 102°:
> God exists.
> I had seriously doubted it before;
> but the bedposts spoke of it with utmost confidence,
> the threads in my blanket took it for granted,
> the tree outside the window dismissed all complaints,
> and I have not slept so justly for years.
> It is hard, now, to convey
> how emblematically appearances sat
> upon the membranes of my consciousness;
> but it is a truth long known,
> that some secrets are hidden from health.[13]

Kierkegaard also points out that there is no possibility of rational proof in terms of religious truths.[14]

As his nickname implies, Rabbit Angstrom's way of knowing is instinctive, pure feeling. He seeks what feels 'good' and runs from what feels 'bad.' He is the antithesis of the rational man.

> Reason - any attempt to make sense of things - is a hoax in the novel, and the irrational man, Rabbit, comes closest to living an honest and 'clean' life.... Rabbit alone can be honest with himself at the distressing price of being virtually mindless.[15]

The failure of some of Updike's protagonists to "make sense of things" puts much of his work within the school of the absurd; but as Galloway points out, he avoids the nihilism and stylistic extremes of many of those too "obsessed with the meaningless."[16] In any case, Updike is not advocating "mindlessness" as a way to truth or even to self-honesty. Rabbit's mindless but penetrating instinct

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13 Updike, "Fever," Verse, p. 163.

14 Hallander, op. cit., p. 31.

15 Ward, op. cit., p. 35.

16 Galloway, op. cit., (Foreword).

is merely the existentialist's recognition of another way of knowing. Rabbit's anguish is the existentialist's recognition first, of the suffering of all men; secondly, of the difficulty of pursuing a course dictated by personal, inner conviction; thirdly, of the failure to accept responsibility for one's actions. A little more rational thought would have helped Rabbit to foresee some of the consequences of his actions. His lack of reflection does help him to keep his integrity. He is honest to himself but his pure, instinctive acts hurt others. Here, Updike poses an existential problem. Though it is extremely difficult to combine self-honesty and responsibility to others, the attempt must be made. Updike demonstrates the possibility of such a combination in George Caldwell. To deny responsibility for the effects of one's actions upon others is to deny one's control over them. This is tantamount to a denial of one's free will. In Rabbit, Run, Updike has shown how a partial success (Rabbit's self-honesty) amounts to failure (in the pain of others). Rabbit is not meant to be a model.

> ...Updike would never exalt the inside at the expense of the outside .... Where existential philosophy since Heidegger has taught that man finds meaning only within himself, Kierkegaard's existentialism insists that the subjective understanding is valid only when it coincides with objective truth.
>
> Rabbit's problem is that he trusts too blindly in the intuitions of a heart that has not been sufficiently, in Kierkegaard's phrase, 'educated to reality.'[17]

Evidence of God must be constantly sought, His existence continually reasserted. In the process, pain, doubt, fear, cannot be avoided. This is Kierkegaard's "fear and trembling" and the 'angst' of Rabbit's last name.

"The Christian Roommates" is a story about college students, several of whom are profoundly affected by ideas and ways of life radically different from the cosy religious and social environment of home.

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17 Alice Hamilton and Kenneth Hamilton, op. cit., p. 142.

> By April, Orson was on the verge of going to the student clinic, which had a department called Mental Health. But at this point, Fitch relieved him by having, it seemed, his nervous breakdown for him. For weeks, Fitch had been taking several showers a day. Toward the end he stopped going to classes and was almost constantly naked, except for a towel around his waist. He was trying to complete a humanities paper that was already a month overdue and twenty pages too long .... The Watertown police had picked Fitch up as he was struggling through the underbrush on the banks of the Charles four miles away. He claimed he was walking to the West, where he had been told there was enough space to contain God, and proceeded to talk with wild animation to the police chief about the differences and affinities between Kierkegaard and Nietzsche. [18]

Fitch had succumbed. The search was too much for him. His compulsive cleanliness and nakedness is perhaps symbolic of an attempt to purge himself of the earthly as he sought his God.

Updike's poem, "Comp. Religion" (a good name for one of Fitch's courses), presents part of the posture of the modern existentialist in terms of religion.

> It all begins with fear of mana.
> Next the A comes the love of tribe.
> Native dances, totems, ani-
> Mism and magicians thrive.
>
> Culture grows more complicated.
> Spirits, chiefs in funny hats,
> And suchlike spooks are sublimated
> Into gods and ziggurats.
>
> Polyarmed and polyheaded,
> Gods proliferate until
> Puristic-minded sages edit
> Their welter into one sweet Will.
>
> This worshipped One grows so enlightened,
> Vast, and high He, in a blur,
> Explodes: and men are left as frightened
> Of mana as they ever were. [19]

The cruel cycle of time is once again emphasized. "Mana" is something

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18 Updike, "Christian Roommates," The Music School, p. 118.

19 Updike, "Comp. Religion," Verse, p. 123.

close to that impersonal, destructive force that Hardy called the Immanent Will. It denies both free will and immortality. Man's actions then become truly absurd. In "The Covergence of the Twain," Hardy describes the imminent will preparing an iceberg to meet the unsinkable man-made Titanic. Updike quotes Tillich on the fly-leaf of Couples: "There is a tendency in the average citizen ... to consider the decisions relating to the life of the society to which he belongs as a matter of fate on which he has no influence."[20] The image of swimming "way out" is an act of defying a naturalistic fate. The Updike protagonist does this continually. In spite of his fear of death, Caldwell always drives recklessly and courts illness by refusing to dress properly. Joey Robinson's father in Of The Farm, a man very much like Caldwell, drove his tractor at reckless speeds. By defying the power of fate, they hope ultimately to deny it. The Hamiltons speak of a warning sign in a garage that Caldwell notices:

> In the sign, instead of the word 'Eyes,' is a drawing of two eyes. The drawing of eyes recurs throughout the book, and is linked in Chiron-Caldwell's mind with the suffering of life lived under the eyes of the gods.[21]

The Hamiltons' interpretation is a good one (the same image recurs in other works by Updike) except for their subsequent claim that part of Caldwell's problem is his failure to accept and acknowledge his subservience under the god-figure, Zeus. These are not the eyes of the real God; they represent the threat of the possibility of domination by a naturalistic fate which Caldwell is trying to deny. This is an impersonal, destructive god, which, the Updike protagonist hopes, does not exist.

The fear of "mana" too, is one that must be borne alone. Others cannot do one's own thinking. Beck explains to an interviewer:

> Write him down, if he must write him down as something, as a disbeliever; he disbelieved in the Pope,

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20 Paul Tillich, The Future of Religions, quoted by John Updike in Couples.

21 Alice Hamilton and Kenneth Hamilton, op. cit., p. 164.

> in the Kremlin, in the Vietcong, in the American eagle, in astrology .... Nor did he disbelieve overmuch in his disbelief. He thought intelligence a function of the individual and that groups of persons were intelligent in inverse proportion to their size. Nations had the brains of an amoeba whereas a committee approached the condition of a trainable moron.[22]

Kierkegaard, as interpreted by Hallander, presents a strikingly similar argument. "... the individual is the measure of all things ... we do not live en masse ... both the terrible responsibility and the great satisfactions of life inhere in the individual ...."[23]

Aside from his lack of conventional faith, this is another, though secondary, reason why orthodox religion is so difficult for the Updike protagonist to accept. Dr. Eccles in Rabbit, Run is devout and has faith, but, try as he might, he cannot help Rabbit. Updike's stories abound with clerics who fail (as in "Pigeon Feathers") to help those who come in agony for answers. In Couples, Piet watches his church burn down.

When one of "those intimations of divine joy" is apprehended in church, it remains a private experience created only by the atmosphere of the setting. The narrator of "Packed Dirt" has such a moment while "... the wind howled a nihilistic counterpoint beyond the black windows ...." But the minister is "hopelessly compromised by words" and the narrator is essentially alone.

> The congregation seemed The Others, reaching, with quarters glittering in their crippled fingers, toward mysteries in which I was snugly involved .... It is of the essence to be a stranger in church.[24]

A sense of immortality, which is, in effect, a sense of God, is felt by Rabbit Angstrom at his daughter's funeral. Here again, revelation comes in the midst of religious orthodoxy, but

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22 Updike, Beck: A Book, p. 158.

23 Hallander, op. cit., p. 31.

24 Updike, "Packed Dirt," pp. 157-59.

without any connection to the orthodox believers.

> "The Lord is my shepherd; therefore I lack nothing." Eccle's voice made fragile by the outdoors; ..... Rabbits's chest vibrates with excitement and strength; he is sure his girl has ascended to Heaven. This feeling fills Eccles' recited words like a living body a skin. "O God, whose most dear son did take little children into his arms and bless them ....
>
> Yes. That is how it is. He feels them all one, all one with the grass ... all gathered into one here to give this unbaptized baby force to leap to heaven ....
> .....
> ... he feels full of strength. The sky greets him. It is as if he has been crawling in a cave and now at last beyond the dark recession of crowding rocks he has seen a patch of light; he turns, and Janice's face, dumb with grief, blocks the light. "Don't look at me", he says. "I didn't kill her".

The family gatherers are shocked by his attitude and even his wife and mother fail to understand that "forgiveness had been big in his heart," and that they are too blind "to join him in truth." "A suffocating sense of injustice blinds him. He turns and runs."[25] Eccles, a warm-hearted humanitarian, is the only one who gives chase, but he represents a group philosophy, an institutionalized religion, and he cannot catch the speedy, fearful Rabbit who heads for the woods away from the pain of misunderstanding, and towards he knows not what.

Rabbit is also running away from responsibility; but he is right in one respect: to follow unthinkingly religious or social law is to fail to exercise the free will -- a capacity the existential man believes he possesses and one which may help him 'bridge the void'.

> Responding to those inner voices which warn him that escape from the pretensions and inconsistencies of the world is the only course by which he can maintain his integrity, Rabbit, like Huck

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25 Updike, Rabbit, Run, pp. 243-44.

> Finn, lights out for the wilderness .... The love of integrity which Rabbit offers is so antithetical to their world that it appears poisonous. [26]

It is the isolation itself that causes part of the suffering of the questor. With few convictions, estranged from social mores, and without conventional faith, he is cut off from the things that provide comfort to the ordinary man. "The Hermit" is a short story about a man, who, sensing that his mundane life is unfulfilling, enters the woods and lives there alone. As a result, he is called a madman by the townspeople and is harrassed by the scolding visits of his friends and family. Ward says of Rabbit, Run:

> Here as in The Poorhouse Fair there can be no reconciliation between the inner and the outer life. Thus the socially responsible are less alive than Rabbit. They are seen as denying their inner reality for the sake of mass delusions .... they seek comfort and clarity by superimposing neat theories on the intelligible outer world ....[27]

Hence, the Updike protagonist is committed to seek, in fearful isolation but with "ardent hope", those momentary glimmerings of the immortal or the divine. The fatally ill narrator of "The Dark", during his sleepless imaginings, thinks of it in terms of 'lock-and-key' imagery.

> It seemed a childhood ago when he had moved, a grown man, through a life of large rooms ... a mansion with visible end. In one of the rooms he had been stricken with a pang of unease. Still king of space, he had moved to dismiss the unease and the door handle had rattled, stuck. The curtains had stopped blowing. Behind him, the sashes and archways sealed. Still, it was merely a question of holding one's breath and finding a key. For a lock without a key is a monstrosity, and while he knew, in a remote way, that

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26 Galloway, op. cit., p. 40.

27 Ward, op. cit., p. 34.

> monstrosities exist, he also knew there were many more rooms; he had glimpsed them with their white painted and polished corners, their invisible breeze of light.[28]

This is why the Updike hero, even in the depths of despair, never commits suicide. He is able (sometimes through a simple act of will), at the darkest moments, to apprehend a force from without that gives him a sense of shelter. There are two recurring images in Updike's work that give form to this sense: spots of light penetrating the blackness (suggested in the passage above), and the impression of a large protective hand. The situations surrounding these images also recur--the most common one is that of an insomniac who lies always on his back.

> To turn to either side was to tip himself toward the edge of a chasm; to roll over onto his belly was to risk drowning in the oblivion that bubbled up from the darkness heated by his own body.[29]

So the man tries to induce sleep by playing word-games with the alphabet (i.e. each letter beginning the name of a "world savior"). But sleep only comes when he wills himself into the fantasy of the "massive hand."

> It was time to imagine the hand.
> He, who since infancy had slept best on his stomach, could now endure lying only on his back. He wished his lids, even if they were closed, to be pelted and bathed by whatever eddies of light animated the room. As these eddies died, and the erosion of sleeplessness began to carve his consciousness fantastically, he had taken to conceiving of himself as lying in a giant hand, his head on the fingertips and his legs in the crease of the palm. He did not picture the hand with total clarity, denied it nails and hair, and with idle rationality supposed it was an echo from Sunday school, some old-fashioned print; nevertheless, the hand was so real to him that he

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28 Updike, "The Dark", p. 153.

29 Updike, Beck: A Book, p. 116.

> could stealthily double his pillow to lift his head higher and thereby fit himself better to the curve of the great fingers. The hand seemed to hold him at some height, but he had no fear of falling .... this hand seemed something owed him, a basis upon which had been drawn the contract of his conception, and it had the same extensive, impersonal life as the pieces of light that had populated, before the town went utterly still, the walls of room .... Still safe in the hand, he dared turn, with cunning and gradualness, and lie on his side ....[30]

The sense of shelter given by the benevolent hand is still imaginary, a sign of the hope of divine protection rather than that of protection itself. The image of light in darkness indicates a similar hope:[31]

> I feared I would be physically sick and lay on my back gingerly and tried to soothe myself with the caress of headlights as they evolved from bright slits on the wall into parabolically accelerating fans on the ceiling that then vanished: this phenomenon, with its intimations of a life beyond me, had comforted wakeful nights in my earliest childhood.[32]

The most obvious natural source of light penetrating darkness is paradoxically associated with the fearful immensity of the universe that plagues the Updike hero: this is the dim light of the stars that pierces the blackness of the night sky. Ambivalent feelings of fear and hope, or pain and hope, directed toward the same object, are not uncommon in Updike's stories. Rabbit felt all of these emotions at his daughter's funeral; at times, they become almost indistinguishable. There is an old saw: "Where there is life there is hope." The existentialist would add, "Where there is hope there is anguish."

In contrast to the image of natural stars, is that of man-made stars.

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30 Updike, "The Dark," pp. 155-56.

31 This writer discovered that the Hamiltons also make note of these two images, with a slightly different interpretation.

32 Updike, "Packed Dirt," p. 167.

> One of (Updike's) recurring symbols of modernity is the garish, flashing neon-sign - the man-made light that eclipses the light of the stars not made by man and in its jerky movements parodies the marvelous flight of birds. In his novel The Centaur Updike shows us Peter ... preparing for bed in a hotel room whose windows look out on a neon owl that advertises pretzels. This symbol of the wisdom of the city draws Peter into a vision of the future. The vision promises greatness - but then he realizes that he is growing smaller and smaller ...
> .....
> The mechanical world shrinks us.[33]

The owl is also one of Updike's symbols of death. It is the sound in the night that frightened small children in Beck: A Book.

The neon sign, the man-made star, also represents the inadequacies of science - inadequate because, contrary to the belief of many, it hints at, rather than denies, man's oblivion after death. Nevertheless, as has been noted, science is consistent and understandable. Again, two plus two equals four.

> Above its winking, the small cities had disappeared. The black of the river was as wide as that of the sky. Reflections sunk in it existed dimly, minutely wrinkled, below the surface. The Spry sign occupied the night with no company beyond the also uncreated but illegible stars.[34]

This passage is preceded by a parody of Genesis in which Updike placed the corporation executives of 'Spry' in the position of God. But though it is the natural stars that offer real hope, they are "illegible" and not so bright; those man-made are the less fearful, seemingly more certain, but ultimately false, hope of science. The narrator of "The Music School" tells of his idea for a science-fiction novel in which 'Echo' revolved overhead:

> Echo is the artificial star, the first, a marvel; as the couples at a lawn party look upward to it, these two caress one another .... His halted body seemed to catch up in itself the immense slow revolution of the earth, and the firm little white star, newly placed in space, calmly made its way through the older points of light,

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33 K. Hamilton, "John Updike: 'Chronicler of the Time of the Death of God,'" Christian Century, (June, 1967), pp. 745-6.

34 Updike, "Toward Evening," The Same Door, p. 56.

> which looked shredded and faint in comparison.[35]

The narrator-writer irritably rejects the whole idea. A heaven on earth, with or without the help of science, is not possible; nor, as the Hamiltons put it, is Conner's dream of "a society of perfect health and orderliness." They also cite rain and snow as images of heaven-sent "messages"--Updike's "transcendental mail"--and point out that Conner's vision of Utopia is "under blank skies."[36]

The Updike protagonist cannot accept any 'group' answers to the threat of oblivion. As Rabbit says, "there are several ways" to the answer, but it is the essence of free will that each man find his own; furthermore, the exercise of free will is part of every answer because it helps to establish a sense of identity. ("They do that. I am he who chooses to do this.") It also helps to disperse the fear of "mana." In "The Hermit," a former mistress visits the recluse in his wood. Upon leaving, she says, "You're pouring yourself down the drain."

> 'I'm just like you in the trailer,' he said, smiling ....
>
> 'No,' she said ... 'It's been forced on me. But you're choosing.'
>
> How grateful he was, after all, to his visitors! - for each of them left him something to clarify the situation. He was choosing, yes, and, treading back through the woods, welcomed by the calls of unseen birds and the gestures of unnamed plants, he sought for some further choice .. He smashed the mirror ... Insomnia ceased to visit him.[37]

Many of Updike's protagonists find themselves in front of mirrors. This serves as a reminder of the aging process; it serves as a reminder of the useless vanity of surface appearances; finally and most important, it increases the looker's sense of self and reminds him that what he sees is not his real self.

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35 Updike, "The Music School." p. 141.

36 Alice Hamilton and Kenneth Hamilton, op cit., pp. 106-18.

37 Updike, "The Hermit," The Music School, p. 187.

When you look	kool uoy nehW
into a mirror	rorrim a otni
it is not	ton si ti
yourself you see,	ees uoy flesruoy
but a kind	dnik a tub
of apish error	rorre hsipa fo
posed in fearful	lufraef ni desop
symmetry ..	.. yrtemmys 38

The real self must be sought inwardly; therefore, the hermit smashes his only mirror. The "apish error" in the mirror is usually what the looker pretends to be, tries to be, or, through self-delusion, thinks he is. Still another kind of apish error is seen by Beck: it is that which he has become in spite of himself. But he is better off than most because he knows that it is not his real self.

> In the bathroom mirror he saw that she was right. The blood had drained from his long face, leaving like a scum the tallow of his summer tan, and a mauve blotch of sunburn on his melancholy nose. Face he had glimpsed from a thousand pits, in barbershops and barrooms, in subways and airplane windows above the Black Sea, before shaving and after lovemaking, it witlessly smiled, the eyes very tired. Beck kneeled and submitted to the dark ecstasy of being eclipsed, his brain shouldered into nothingness by the violence of the inversion whereby his stomach emptied itself, repeatedly, until a satisfying pain scraped tears from his eyes, and he was clean.[39]

The search for self-knowledge is a truly existential quest. Galloway sees Rabbit's running as a quest for his real self.[40] The constant movement of the Updike protagonist towards an elusive, ill-defined goal is the reason for all of the ambulant imagery in Updike's stories. Rabbit runs, Piet Hanema flits with nervous energy from woman to tennis court, Caldwell can't sit still long enough to watch a movie, and each is forever behind the wheel of a car. Updike says of his own father:

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38 Updike, "Mirror," Verse, p. 88.

39 Updike, Beck: A Book, p. 93.

40 Galloway, op. cit., p. 29.

> I feel now how my own father roved the streets, seeking good to do, because he was possessed by disgust with every place in which he used to be and desire for every place he had not reached.[41]

Once free from the demands of society and conventional religion, from the distractions of a purely mechanistic world, from the lure of science; once the fact of physical death is accepted, the Updike protagonist is capable of finding both himself and at least one of the "several ways" that denies oblivion.

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41 Updike, "End of Boyhood," Assorted Prose, p. 105.

III: DISCOVERY

The Updike hero achieves some success in his quest for the meaning of his own existence and in his attempt to discover grounds to deny the threatened oblivion after death. He takes one or more of several paths--paths running parallel or joining and re-joining--that lead in the same direction toward that success. None of the paths is wide or clear or straight; all of them have the propensity to disappear often enough and so completely that the traveller must spend much more time in anguished search than he does, in renewed joy, actually following the faint trail. "Our contact with the world brings us knowledge, but a knowledge which remains inaccessible to the intelligence and so evades us...."[1] But the few moments the questor has before the way becomes obscure once more, are enough to keep him going. Ultimate success is the certainty of immortality, the preservation of self; the paths leading towards it are the 'external corroborations', the pieces of evidence, in the reality of this world, that intimate immortality and thereby give meaning to individual existence. The discovery of any single piece of evidence constitutes a discovery of the eternal in the temporal. The devices the Updike protagonist sometimes uses to find them are memory and art.

However, it is possible to 'stumble' onto welcome paths in the middle of a wilderness, ("We are rewarded unexpectedly"[2]) and these chance discoveries will be considered first. A few have already been noted in passing: Rabbit experienced one at his daughter's funeral and another many years before that in a particular basketball game.

> "... I get this funny feeling I can do anything, just drift around, passing the ball, and all of

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1 Germaine Bree, Marcel Proust and Deliverance from Time (New York, 1955), p. 6.

2 Updike, Olinger Stories (Foreword), p. vii.

> a sudden I know, you see, I know I can do anything. The second half I take maybe ten shots, and every one goes right in, not just bounces in, but doesn't touch the rim, like I'm dropping stones down a well." [3]

"This is the sensation that Rabbit tries over and over to recover and hold."[4] This is also what Mizener calls the "intensely felt experience"[5] in Updike that enables the individual to transcend the trivia of ordinary life. In Rabbit's case, the experience is not followed by rational thought, but this does not effect its validity. Rabbit is an instinctive man; his essential self is made up of a greater part of instinct than is that of most men. That he has tried to affirm his essential self is obvious from the fact of his rejection of social-religious influences; therefore, for that moment, he was wholly engaged, existentially, in reality.

> The existential attitude is one of involvement in contrast to a merely theoretical or detached attitude ... participating in a situation ... with the whole of one's existence .... And it includes the finite freedom which reacts to these conditions and changes them ....
> .....
> ... the attitude of participating with one's existence in some other existence.[6]

(The "theoretical or detached attitude" seems to eliminate the scientist as an existential in Tillich's view.) Here Tillich also emphasizes the cost of the freedom necessary to the individual if he is to become totally 'involved'. The involvement demonstrates to the experiencer that he exists. "I am he who is taking this shot." Rabbit can never forget the experience and uses it as a model, a measure of what is good, from that time on. He had 'participated' for a moment,'locking in' his existence with something in reality. In so doing the individual is made a significant part of the universe in flux; his existence is therefore meaningful and a connection with the infinite that lies behind that universe in flux, is inferred.

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3 Updike, Rabbit, Run, p. 58.

4 Stubbs, op. cit., p. 97.

5 Mizener, op. cit., p. 257.

6 Paul Tillich, op. cit., pp. 124-5.

The example of Rabbit's feeling while playing a particular basketball game was chosen deliberately because the incident seems so insignificant and because the cognitive plays such a small part in it. This will make the examples to follow clearer in comparison because the protagonist usually makes an attempt to articulate his existential experiences.

In "The Hermit", a man named Stanley has been alone in the woods, away from distracting influences, for some time. He is "waiting."

> Now, each morning, he awoke with a sense of having been called ... the unheard voice gathered to itself impressions of masculinity, of infinite gentleness and urgency. It was distinct from any dream; he knew what dreams were, and this call clove through them ... so that the phantoms transported from his memories of humanity were mocked and made doubly phantasmal, performing in patterns constantly twisted and interrupted by an unsympathetic pressure .... He sat up as if in answer to a command spoken in the room and perceived that the call was a condensation, like the dawn dew, of a reality that existed continually, that persisted through daylight. He felt it, saw it, as an overwhelming fineness in things; the minute truth of bark textures, the many-layered translucence of leaves ... all bespoke something that wanted to be answered, a silence unsure of itself. But it was so shy, so tactful, that to hear it distinctly would be like - as Stanley had once read of counterfeiters doing - dividing a dollar bill edgewise with a razor blade.
>
> Though he turned aside ... the sensation remained, singing in the spaces between the axe strokes, permeating the day. It was within reach, the graduation he sought, the final clarity, a tissue width removed from apprehension; it was waiting for him to be totally still. Then, he knew, this vaporous presence would condense into words and pour itself lavishly into his mind ... the sound beneath the silence approached. Stanley leaned his back against the woods, wondered vaguely which was which, and relaxed into a joy indistinguishable from fear.[7]

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7 Updike, "The Hermit", pp. 190-91.

At this crucial moment, "the forest shattered" as Stanley's furious brother arrived to chastise him, and destroyed his growing sense of communion with a reality "that continually existed". The "sound beneath the silence" is like Eliot's "unheard music" or even Hopkin's inscape -- "news of God" that waits under the surface of things. But necessary to the sense of communion had been solitude -- an isolation that renders human society "phantasmal" in comparison to this new awareness. Ordinary life, in retrospect, seemed to be full of people" ... performing in patterns constantly twisted by an unsympathetic pressure .... ". 'Mana' again. Stanley was interrupted in the midst of the revelation that '... man is able to transcend, in knowledge and life, the finitude, the estrangement and the ambiguities of human existence."[8]

Stanley's experience is made more accessible to reason, more articulate than Rabbit's, but both constitute an apprehension of the timeless in the temporal made possible by the participation of "one's existence with some other existence."

It must be noted too that what Stanley felt was "a joy indistinguishable from fear." The joy is a result of his glimpse of the eternal; the fear is a result of the recognition of a new and powerful force. Compounding the fear is an awareness that the glimpse is ephemeral, rationally unproveable, and all but incommunicable. When Rabbit tells his old coach and two prostitutes about his "funny feeling," "It puzzles him, yet makes him want to laugh, that he can't make the others feel what was so special."[9]

In order to catch the glimpse of the something eternal within the universal rush of change, the Updike protagonist must always seek a special kind of essential contact with the things around him. This requires what Tillich calls "self-affirmation" -- the awareness and assertion of one's own existence; otherwise, contact with

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8 Tillich, op. cit., p. 125.

9 Updike, Rabbit, Run, p. 58.

other existence is not possible. Beck speaks about an intuition:

> ... that self-aggrandizement and entrepreneurial energy were what made the world go and that slogans and movements to the contrary were evil dreams, evil in that they distracted people from particular, concrete realities, whence all goodness and effectiveness derive.[10]

Contact is to be established with these "particular, concrete realities"--a contact of the self and the material. Updike says of the world, "it must be chewed." "The muddled and inconsequent surface of things now and then parts to yield us a gift."[11] As a result of the contact, the seemingly trivial becomes a means of delivery for the questing Updike protagonist, and this is his modicum of grace. He feels a temporary, but burning faith in God's existence and his own immortality. So it was with Rabbit's basketball game; so it is with David Kern's response to a path worn in the earth.

> Different things move us. I, David Kern, am always affected - reassured, nostalgically pleased, even, as a member of my animal species, made proud - by the sight of bare earth that has been smoothed and packed firm by the passage of human feet .... The earth is our playmate then, and the call to supper has a piercingly sweet eschatalogical ring.
> .....
> ... I noticed that where my path had been lopped the cliff no longer existed; feet ... had worn the sharpness away and molded a little ramp by which ascent was easier.
>
> This small modification, this modest work of human erosion, seemed precious to me ... because it had been achieved accidentally, and had about it that repose of grace that is beyond willing .... As our sense of God's forested legacy - like those feet of statues of saints which have lost their toes to centuries of kisses. One thinks of John Dewey's definition of God as the union of the actual and the ideal.[12]

Whether expressed as a "union of the actual and the ideal," or as

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10 Updike, Beck: A Book, p. 158.

11 Updike, Olinger Stories (Foreword), p. vii.

12 Updike, "Packed Dirt," pp. 154-56.

the conjunction of the eternal and the temporal, this apprehension was made possible through a vital contact between an essential self and "particular, concrete reality." The call of death is then reduced to the "piercingly sweet" call of a mother bidding her child home.[13] The image of the path is combined by the narrator with similar experiences. Speaking of a moment of revelation in church, he says, "The expectantly hushed shelter of the church is like one of those spots worn bare by a softball game in a weed-filled vacant lot."[14] The collage-like stories, "The Blessed Man of Boston, My Grandmother's Thimble, and Fanning Island," and "Packed Dirt, Churchgoing, A Dying Cat, A Traded Car," are attempts to interweave three or four of these precious moments in order to multiply and sustain the effect of each.

Harper calls Updike's preoccupation with seemingly unimportant particulars an "inductive" approach:

> ... the concepts arise naturally from the specifics of the situations and Updike's themes are inherent in the themes of life itself. It is the selection of the proper specific details which makes all the difference: 'Details', he says in Pigeon Feathers, 'Details are the giant's fingers. He seizes the stick and strips the bark and shows burning beneath, the moist white wood of joy.'[15]

It is precisely because Updike dwells upon what appears to be trivial things--insignificant objects, common people, ordinary situations--that he is the object of some harsh criticism. It is said that he wastes an elaborate style on meagre subject matter; that "... the splendid incidentals cannot be properly so called because there is nothing much for them to be incidental to."[16] Aldridge is perhaps the most harsh.

> (Updike's work) ... has an annoying way of slipping out of the mind before one has had time to take hold of it, and bending it back into the commonplace and

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13 M. Novak, "Updike's Quest for Liturgy," Commonweal (May 10, 1963), vol. 78, p. 193.

14 Updike, "Packed Dirt," p. 159.

15 Harper, op. cit., p. 187.

16 D.J. Enright, "The Inadequate American: John Updike's Fiction," Conspirators and Poets, (London, 1966), p. 140.

> banal surfaces of reality which are so monotonous a part of our daily awareness that the mind instinctively rejects them as not worth remembering.
> .....
> Mr. Updike has nothing to say.[17]

Ironically, Aldridge, in pointing out what he sees as a weakness, is hinting at one of Updike's profoundest strengths. Aldridge is looking for murders in the night; Updike is looking for solutions to one of the most important problems of the human condition. His attempt to express existential contact with reality elevates the commonplace beyond what some critics (in their ignorance of his motives) consider appropriate. In answer to the 'style-but-no-content' criticism, Kauffman says:

> That charge involves the fallacious assumption that techniques are abstract tools with which a small-scale writer could handle large-scale subjects, if only he had the gumption.
> .....
> [Updike] ... likes the story of humdrum lives suddenly galvanized by a commonplace event that is nevertheless outside the humdrum and therefore "real".[18]

Updike's 'motives' will bear restating. His protagonists wish to escape the bondage of time, gain self-knowledge, and find evidence of their immortality. To do this, they must assume an existential attitude and establish vital contact with particular reality as it, and they, change. They seek, in Eliot's words, that "... point of intersection of the timeless/ With time". The awareness of participating in a continuing but patterned change provides a sense of the eternal force underlying that change as well as a sense of the continuity of their own lives. ("I can see how what I am now, is a result of what was added to what I was a moment ago.") More will be said later about continuity

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17 J.W. Aldridge, "The Private Vice of John Updike," Time to Murder and Create, (New York, 1966), pp. 165-70.

18 S. Kauffman, "Onward With Updike," New Republic (Sept 24, 1966), p. 15.

in connection with Updike's use of memory.

The sense of timelessness, though implicit in the examples already given, can be seen more clearly in another experience of the narrator of "Packed Dirt." He has been made anxious by a visit to the hospital to see his sick father and is now driving home.

> It began to seem a miracle that the car could gather speed from my numb foot; the very music on my radio a drag on our effort and I turned it off, obliterating time. We climbed through a space fretted by scattered brilliance and bathed in a monotonous wind. I had been driving forever .... And through these aeons my car, beginning as a mechanical spiral of molecules, evolved into something soft, and organic and consciously brave. I lost, first, heart, then head, and finally any sense of my body. In the last hour of the trip I ceased to care or feel or in any sense see, but the car, though its soul the driver had died, maintained steady forward motion, and completed the endless journey safely. Above my back yard the stars were frozen in place.[19]

Amidst the sense of timelessness is still the impression of change--present through the motion of the car, its 'evolution' and the death of "its soul the driver." The apprehension of an eternal force underlying the process of change is inherent in the notion of the car continuing on after that death and in the paradox of the words, "completed the endless journey safely."

> The interplay of dualities and the experience of life as a series of paradoxes bulk large in Updike's fiction .... He sees existence as that which simultaneously hides and reveals the truth about itself, since truth ultimately lies beyond the bounds of space and time and yet must be grasped by creatures who are temporarily and spacially limited.[20]

Love--the love of a man for a woman--is a human situation wherein the Updike protagonist seeks evidence of immortality.

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19 Updike, "Packed Dirt," p. 184.

20 Alice Hamilton and Kenneth Hamilton, op. cit., p. 22.

It has already been noted that even promiscuous love provides momentary relief from anxiety. But, almost in the same way that the body builds up an immunity to a drug, the feeling of relief gradually becomes shorter-lived. After their affair has progressed for some time, Rabbit's mistress thinks of their love-making:

> But then after all it turns out he's not that different, hanging on you all depressed and lovey and then sick of you or less just bored really when its done. It's getting quicker and quicker, more like a habit, he really hurries now.... [21]

Piet Hanema, Henry Beck and many short story characters also find in sexual passion an antidote that numbs anxiety; but most discover its diminishing effectiveness and its inadequacy. Sexual love is found to be, at best, a temporary escape--in effect, a short blacking-out of painful symptoms.

> For the first time, on that ride home, I felt what it was to bury a humiliation in the body of a woman,... With a shudder of shame I'd hide my face on her shoulder and in the warm darkness there ... I felt united with Hitler and all the villains, traitors, madmen and failures who had managed to keep, up to the moment of capture, a woman with them.[22]

Seeking escape, the Updike hero, quite willingly, will accept sexual solace indiscriminately. If he is married but without a satisfactory love-life, he will become adulterous. Beck realizes this at the time of an almost paranoic fear of death while a guest lecturer at the girl's school. He refuses to make love to a woman to whom he has quickly grown attached. He has managed to summon up the courage to reject the urge to "... let her apply to his wound the humid poultice of her flesh."[23] But this relationship had not developed into full love. Beck had simply realized the futility of escape into sensuality.

The more complete love of man and wife does some-

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21 Updike, Rabbit, Run, p. 125.

22 Updike, "Flight," Olinger Stories, p. 75.

23 Updike, Beck: A Book, p. 130.

what more to quell the anxiety of the Updike hero since it is the attempt of one existence to participate in another existence--a union that must take place on other levels as well as the physical. Hallander explains Kierkegaard's view of marriage:

> ... love and no other consideration can justify marriage. But whereas to the aesthetic individual love is merely eroticism, viz., a passing self-indulgence without any obligation, the ethical individual attaches himself to the woman of his choice by an act of volition, for better or worse, and by his marriage vow incures an obligation to society. Marriage is thus a synthesis of love and duty.[24]

Seen in this light, marriage, if it be an "act of volition," does not hinder the freedom of the individual simply because it is a social-religious institution. Kierkegaard says that man's primary function is "... not to transform the existing social order, but to transcend it."[25] It is for other reasons that married love, in the final analysis, fails in Updike's work to provide much comfort for his anxious protagonist. In the marriage situation, the trivial becomes even more difficult to transcend. Dirty diapers remain dirty diapers. "The nigglings and nagglings of daily existence are the inevitabilities of marriage ... life - the living of day to day - was not made for love."[26] The many petty jealousies and conflicts inhibit any progression out of the material. The Updike protagonist cannot achieve the solitude necessary to escape the triviality of married life. His essential self is too bound up with another self. Mizener speaks of Updike's imagery in "Wife-Wooing:"

> Here we catch a glimpse of why Updike is so deadly serious about his literary elaborations of homely experience; that red reflection cast by the kerosene stove ... is the image of his deflowered wife and his cathedral's rose window, the image of the price we pay for our homes.[27]

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24 Hallander, op. cit., p. 20.

25 Ibid., p. 28.

26 Kauffman, op. cit., p. 17.

27 Mizener, op. cit., p. 257.

Part of "the price we pay for our homes" is the reduction of love to the daily, mechanical routines that are almost inevitable in marriage. "Courting a wife takes tenfold the strength of winning an ignorant girl."[28]

Marriage therefore, makes Tillich's "self-affirmation" a very difficult thing. It seems logical that two people both asserting "the courage to be as oneself" through the thousand intimacies of marriage would usually be working at cross-purposes. In "The Crow in the Woods," a man breakfasting with his wife is precipitated, by a view from the window, into an existential experience.

> Something happened. Outdoors a huge black bird came flapping with a crow's laborious wingbeat. It banked and, tilted to fit its feet, fell towards the woods. His heart halted in alarm for the crow, with such recklessness assaulting an inviolable surface, seeking so blindly a niche for its strenuous bulk where there was no depth. It could not enter. Its black shape shattering like an instant of flack, the crow plopped into a high branch and sent snow showering from a quadrant of lace. Its wings spread and settled. The vision destroyed, his heart overflowed. 'Clare!' he cried.

The man has experienced a moment of revelation in which he has seen, first the difficulty, and then the distinct possibility, of participating meaningfully with the "inviolable surface" of the world. The wife's reaction? "Eat your egg."[29] They can not often be on the same wave-length. The same is true in Updike's works for couples who, though unmarried, live lives which are too closely bound together.

The experiences of marriage, even that of love-making, are too often repeated and a stasis, not to say a stagnation, sets in. In "Giving Blood," Updike says, "Romance is, simply, the strange, the untried." The married couple in the story fought at the beginning, but later felt a rare moment of communion made

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28 Updike, "Wife-Wooing," Pigeon Feathers, p. 81.

29 Updike, "The Crow in the Woods," Pigeon Feathers, p. 155.

possible by an experience new for them both--giving blood.

> It was unusual for the Maples to be driving together at eleven in the morning. Almost always it was dark when they shared a car .... He felt tender toward her in the eggshell light, and curious toward himself, wondering how far beneath his brain the black pit did lie. He felt no different.... Something certainly had been taken from him; he was less himself by a pint and it was not impossible that like a trapeze artist saved by a net he was sustained in the world of light and reflection by a single layer of interwoven cells. Yet the earth, with its signals and buildings and cars and bricks, continued like a pedal note.[30]

With its sense of timelessness within time, this moment is similar to other such moments in Updike (love mellows the feeling here) and helps to quell the husband's fear of the "black pit." But these moments become increasingly rare within the marriage situation. The Maples quickly lose their feeling of communion as the sense of newness and adventure leaves, and the old routines and attitudes reassert themselves at the end of the story.

Finally, to live with the same partner over the years is to watch someone dear slide toward death along with you; therefore, married love is earthbound--tragically, partners can help each other, but cannot use each other as bridges over the void.

There is a third kind of love--spiritual or platonic love-which does fulfill the Updike hero's particular needs. Kauffman explains Updike's belief in "possession by loss:" "... the purest and highest love is that which is not realized and which is therefore not soiled by the thumbprints of daily life and the deterioration of time."[31] This is the kind of love that must be fashioned quickly, go unconsummated, and be sanctioned by separation

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30 Updike, "Giving Blood," The Music School, pp. 129-30.

31 Kauffman, op. cit., p. 16.

before the marriage-type love has had time to develop. "Four Sides of One Story" is made up of four letters: those of two lovers, the husband of one, and the wife of the other. There has been no physical contact, though it was desired, in the affair. Divorce has been initiated on both sides, but the male lover has mysteriously decided to go away. The characters are modern but the narrative is cast in the form of the Tristan-Iseult legend. Though 'Tristan' feels the pain of separation and unconsummated love, he says at the end of his letter:

> Yes, had we met as innocents, we could have indulged our love and let it run its natural course of passion, consummation, satiety, contentment, boredom, betrayal. But, being guilty, we can seize instead a purity that will pass without interruption through death itself .... By saying No to our love we become, you and I, gods. I feel this is blasphemy and yet I write it.
>
> The distance between us increases .... Let us live, forever apart, as a shame to the world where everything is lost save that which we ourselves deny.[32]

In his denial, Tristan has felt something absolute. This is why he left.

> This theme of consummation as spoilage, of parting as preservation ... is a theme rooted in genuine religious belief. It postulates a Perfect Love and that this love is the very one that is unrealizable. The belief in that love depends upon belief in its reality after separation and in the end of separation after death - or at least its continuance after death in the consciousness of both. And, following from this, this belief predicates a Judge who sees what the world does not see, who understands and assures, who underwrites the secret, unfulfilled contract.[33]

"What is the past, after all, but a vast sheet of darkness in which a few moments pricked apparently at random, shine?"[34]

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32 Updike, "Four Sides of One Story," The Music School, p. 74.

33 Kauffman, op. cit., p. 17.

34 Updike, "The Astronomer," Pigeon Feathers, p. 129.

As this particular image of light piercing darkness suggests, memory is a human capacity vital to the Updike hero's quest for immortality. For instance, without it, he could not keep in his mind the picture of his spiritually sustaining 'Pure Love' which necessitates separation. Nor would Rabbit have a measure with which to gauge his experience without the memory of his 'funny feeling.' Memory is a device with which Updike's characters (not always deliberately) sometimes establish a revealing connection between the present and the past. This function of the memory is distinct from the sentimental nostalgia used as an escape from the present as in "The Persistence of Desire." It does, as one of its effects, reverse the process of time which the Updike hero finds so fearful. The revelations resulting from the contact of past and present through memory are similar to those already treated: they provide evidence of immortality through the apprehension of the timeless in the temporal. Speaking of Updike and Salinger, Mizener says:

> ... both writers have a strong impulse to mix memory and desire and make them come alive in the present. Behind this common impulse is a common concern for the double nature of reality.[35]

Some of the earlier examples cited, in which the "double nature" of reality was apprehended, involve the memory process; but the memory is only needed when specific elements of the character's past are essential to a particular apprehension. Revelation is also possible in the present alone.

Updike's use of this memory process demands a narrative technique that puts special importance upon point of view. Generally, a narrator is made to assume a particular stance in the present and thinks, or speaks, about a particular situation in his past. Some stories begin and end with the narrator's comments on his present circumstances; the middle bulk of the narrative is devoted to his memories of the past. This is the case with "Walter Biggs." However, it is more common for Updike's narrator

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35 Mizener, op. cit., p. 247.

to speak almost entirely about the past with a present situation implied throughout.

In a long work, Updike may have his narrator make short leaps, sometimes only a few words long, from memories of the past back to present circumstances. This is the case in The Centaur with Peter Caldwell as narrator. The Peter of the present is a struggling artist in his thirties who is disappointed in his efforts as a painter. The novel is actually in the form of a dramatic monologue because he is relating his memories to his silent mistress as he lies with her in Greenwich Village. Reminiscent of Conrad's Youth are such phrases as "My Love, Listen" interrupting the main narrative in order to keep the framework fresh in the reader's mind. Shifts in tense accompany the time changes.

Proust has had a tangible influence upon Updike--an influence especially evident in the manner in which he treats the memories of a narrator. These are Bree's comments on Proust's technique:

> By means of a psychological analysis based upon the play of involuntary memory, Proust can introduce into his story the perspective he needs. His narrator can recall his past in all its richness while at the same time he examines and judges it with the disillusioned mind of the mature man who has seen his life deteriorate and has forgotten what was significant. Proust has thus to construct his world on three superimposed levels: first, as the narrator thought he was living it at the time ... second, as he was living it a long time later; and third, as he discovers it at the end.
> .....
> Between the world of the past and that of the future the narrator catches a glimpse of the edifice of his own life, fashioned by time. This life is a joyous denial of that double void; it exists, it asserts its own existence, it is itself beautiful.[36]

The phrase "involuntary memory" describes an 'automatic' process of the mind which takes the rememberer to a specific point of past time. The particular memory is precipitated out of the subcon-

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36 Bree, op. cit., pp 22-23.

scious without being summoned by the conscious. The reaction is spontaneously triggered by something in the present (invariably some sensuous experience with Proust) which causes the memory to function around something of related importance from the past. The combination of the two points of time, now in the conscious mind, brings Updike's rememberer new knowledge about himself,and, if he can grasp the full implications of that combination, an apprehension of immortality.

Updike's use of his characters' memory has several basic functions. The simplest has been noted: to keep alive the glimpses of immortality gleaned in the past. One of the others requiring more documentation is the use of the memory to re-live past experiences whose import had been underestimated, forgotten or totally unrecognized at the time. These may be classed as missed opportunities to which the narrator discovers he must return. In some cases, apprehension was inhibited at the time because the present was clogged with extraneous pressures; in others, the narrator simply lacked the maturity necessary to recognize his opportunity. The latter is one of the reasons why Updike's narrators return so often to the period of adolescence. Since it is in that period when thoughts and actions first take on existential importance (due to the new awareness of the implications of death), it is in that period that apprehensions of immortality first become possible and are most likely to go unrecognized. Therefore, the reception of spiritual sustenance in the adolescent period of crisis is apt to be a subconscious one. It is rarely made conscious or articulated until many years later when the rememberer has the words to express, and the wisdom to understand, why that particular experience was, and is, important to him.

These spiritually valuable past experiences are then received and retained subconsciously. This accounts for the rambling, sometimes seemingly pointless prelude as the narrator begins to uncover a particular memory, digging deeper and deeper for the more important details and their significance. Again, critical comment about

Proust's methods serve to describe Updike's.

> ... the precious moment of pure time can be caught in static form ... by the process not of the immediate capturing and recording of the epiphany, but by the slow, deep search of memory through film upon film of association. (Proust was)...as addicted to analysing a moment as we would analyse a year .... His purpose ... was a search for universal laws, for Time - not the time which we see ticking its way mechnically across the face of a clock, but that Time which sometimes makes five minutes seem like a day ....[37]

(This is not meant to imply that Updike does not succeed in capturing "in static form" such moments without the use of memory). Time is experienced subjectively. The story "Walter Biggs," will exemplify the process.

Walter Biggs is the name of a man two honeymooners meet at a summer resort. Five years later the couple are driving home from a party and playing a game in which they try to remember the names of the people they had met at the resort. Many names and details pop into their heads, but one man's name illudes them. The game ends when they arrive home, but in his continued search for the name, the husband lies awake in bed and, as details accumulate, he remembers, feels again, the tender freshness of his new love. His feelings mount to a climax with his memory of how he read Don Quixote in the evenings.

> ... he had read that, in half hours, every dusk, and in September cried at the end when Sancho pleads with his at last sane master to rise from his deathbed and lead another quest and perhaps they shall find the Lady Dulcinea under some hedge, stripped of her enchanted rags and as fine as any queen. All around the cabin stood white pines stretched to a cruel height by long competition and the cabin itself had no windows, but broken screens. Pausing before the threshold, on earth littered with needles and twigs, he unexpectedly found what he wanted; lifted himself on his elbow and called 'Clare' softly, knowing he wouldn't wake her, and said, 'Biggs. Walter Biggs.'[38]

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37 Leon Edel, The Modern Psychological Novel (New York, 1955), p. 105.

38 Updike, "Walter Biggs," p. 16.

The thought of the nameless man had acted as a trigger, prompting the husband to remember, randomly at first, details of his honeymoon. Intuition directed his memory to his reading of Don Quixote. The Updike narrator is never able to plunge decisively into the past and dredge up nuggets of joy. He must filter the details as they rise into his consciousness from the rushing welter of past time. In this case, the filtering culminates in the reading of Cervantes' romance about a man who believed in the 'Perfect Love,' in things pure and eternal in the face of a 'sane' world. Broken-down hostelries were grand castles and waifs were queens, just as the husband now realizes (the realization is signified by his remembrance of Biggs's name) that their broken-down cabin was the site of a love that was enduring, eternal, even though it can now only be experienced in memory. Sancho also realized that, if sanity meant death amidst the reality of an ugly, material world, then insanity amidst the beauty and timelessness of an imaginary world is preferable. The latter had sustained his master in his quest; the former had broken him, made him gaunt, like the trees around the cabin, "stretched to a cruel height by long competition." In any case, the timeless must be sought. This is precisely the quest of the Updike hero. "The essence of matter ... is dread."[39] Rather than material reality, it is the "intensity of feeling" gathered around it which is true reality.[40]

The husband's experience at his honeymoon cabin can only be fully understood and appreciated by him after five years of married life and added maturity. The same is true of Peter Caldwell. It is fifteen years later that he feels the compulsion, amidst fears of his failure as an artist, to think about himself and his father during his adolescence. From this vantage point, he can see the true nobility of his father's character. He remembers their walk through a snowstorm.

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39 Updike, Beck: A Book, p. 110.

40 Mizener, op. cit., p. 257.

> The sensations seem to arrive from a great distance outside himself when his father, now walking beside him and using his body as a shield against the wind for his son, pulls down upon Peter's freezing head the knitted wool cap he has taken from his own head.[41]

While his father was alive, Peter was more often irritated or embarassed by his father's social ineptitudes (like striking up conversations with beggars), his painful self-deprecation, his fears and his aptitude for getting into awkward situations.

There are other dimensions to Updike's use of his characters' memory. Thinking of the past can also provide both a sense of identity and of continuity.

> ... A slowly accumulated past lives in the blood -whether in the concrete image of the old house stored with visual memories or in the conception of the house not built with hands, but made up of inherited passions or loyalties.[42]

If a man can recognize the continuing influence of both his own and his inherited past, he proves himself a part of the changing universe whose movement has purpose. The resulting sense of continuity goes hand in hand with a sense of purpose. The narrator of "Packed Dirt" is a writer. Near the beginning of the "A Traded Car" section, he is asked by a hitch-hiking sailor, "What's the point?" of his writing. He cannot answer even to himself until after he has put together important elements of his past. He re-discovers his purpose in writing --a purpose known before, but only intuitively. At the end of the story he says, "We in America need ceremonies, is I suppose, sailor, the point of what I have written."[43] These ceremonies are the outward forms, the means of expressing the timeless in the temporal. It will be seen later how the artist creates these ceremonies.

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41 Updike, The Centaur, p. 198.

42 West, op. cit., p. 285.

43 Updike, "Packed Dirt," p. 185.

Rabbit has a purpose which he keeps alive in his memory; to recapture his "funny feeling." Caldwell has a purpose: to provide for his son.

> But Peter is not the only beneficiary of Caldwell's selflessness. A whole generation of high school students, while taking advantage of his kindness and disorganization, nevertheless has responded inwardly to his deep and real concern for them. For instance, Deifendorf, the satyr, and 'obscene animal,' later becomes a teacher himself because of Caldwell's example.[44]

But Peter is the main beneficiary. Harper goes on to use Caldwell's words, "Only goodness lives." Caldwell's particular kind of goodness is love and a tolerant interest in everyone. This is his legacy, his bequest to his son and his students. He succeeded in passing it on, intact, just as his father had passed it on to him.

> ... it was a Saturday and the men from the sulphur works were getting drunk. From within the double doors of a saloon there welled a poisonous laughter that seemed to distill all the cruelty and blasphemy in the world, and he wondered how such a noise could have a place under the sky of his father's God .... he remembered his father turning and listening in his backwards collar to the laughter and then smiling down to his son, "All joy belongs to the Lord".
>
> It was half a joke but the boy took it to heart. All joy belongs to the Lord. Whenever in the filth and confusion and misery, a soul felt joy, there the Lord came and claimed it as His own; into barrooms and brothels and classrooms and alleys slippery with spittle ... whenever a moment of joy was felt, there the Lord stole and added to his enduring domain. And all the rest, all that was not joy, fell away, precipitated, dross that had never been. He thought of his wife's joy in the land and Pop Kramer's [Caldwell's father-in-law] joy in the newspaper and his son's joy in the future and was glad, grateful, that he was able to sustain these for yet a space more .... he discovered that in giving his life to others he

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44 Harper, Op. cit., p. 175.

> entered a total freedom .... Only goodness lives. But it does live.[45]

Though, "The essence of matter ... is dread", it is ultimately rendered into "dross that has never been". Goodness and joy are eternal.

Caldwell's goodness and joy is passed from teacher to student, from father to son. As an artist in his thirties Peter recognizes (thanks to memory) and accepts the responsibility of his inheritance, thereby maintaining the purposive continuity of three generations and gaining a token of immortality. In his negro mistress, Peter had sought the temporary escape of sex; but he is able, as a consequence of his memories, to recognize it as escape and reject it.

> Hey. Listen. Listen to me, lady. I love you. I want to be a negro for you ... and forget everything but the crooning behind my ribs. But I cannot, quite. I cannot quite make that scene. A final membrane restrains me. I am my father's son. In the late afternoons while the day hangs in distending light waiting to be punctured by the darkness that in arrows of shadow rides out from the tall buildings across the grid of streets, I remember my father and even picture - eyes milky with doubts, mustache indecisive and pale - his father before him, whom I never knew. Priest, teacher, artist ....[46]

He remembers his father moving in an atmosphere of laughter where "... souls are trying to serve the impossible". He too, like the platonic lover and Don Quixote in other ways, must try to do so in his painting."What is bread in the oven becomes Christ in the mouth."[47] Peter had discovered spiritual roots--a continuity that began in him with his conception and is sustained by memory.

The theme of inheritance, the concept of an immortality of the blood, is a common one in Updike's work. In

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45 Updike, The Centaur, p. 120.

46 Updike, The Centaur, p. 201.

47 Updike,"Harv is Plowing Now," The Music School, p. 132.

"The Music School," we see the sustaining value of the inheritance principle from the father's point of view. Like Caldwell, he can accept death at the end because he will live on in his offspring.

> I am content here in this school. My daughter emerges from her lesson. Her face is fat and satisfied, refreshed, hopeful; her pleased smile biting her lower lip, pierces my heart, and I die (I think I am dying) at her feet.[48]

The same is true of the protagonist (a man much like Rabbit Angstrom) of "Ace in the Hole."

> ... Ace Anderson, a former basketball star, disillusioned with small town life and his job as a car salesman ... Ace is rejuvenated by the thought of producing a son whose grip and dexterity will match his own.[49]

These two examples however, do not involve the memory since the intent is to pass on to the future rather than receive from the past.

The situation in "Packed Dirt" is like that of The Centaur because part of the memory process, as the narrator searches for his inheritance, involves the death (or the imminence of the death) of the protective father-figure. "My father's place was between me and heaven; I was afraid of being placed adjacent to that far sky."[50] Death must precede inheritance--even that of goodness--so the memory process is often a painful one.

Perhaps even more than Caldwell, Beck is the Updike character whose fear of death is the most poignant, but the latter has less success in overcoming it. One of the reasons is that he has no son. He has "spilled his seed upon the ground." His own inheritance had been small and, like his father, he had failed to prevent it from diminishing.

> Now that she was too aginal and arthritic to live alone, he had stuck his mother into a

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48 Updike, "The Music School," p. 143.

49 Galloway, op. cit., p. 29.

50 Updike, "Packed Dirt," p. 174.

> Riverdale nursing home, instead of inviting her into his own spacious rooms, site of his dreary, sterile privacy. His father, in his position, would have become his mother's nurse. His grandfather would have become her slave. Six thousand years of clan loyalty were overturned in Beck.[51]

Joey Robinson, the narrator of Of The Farm has also failed to accept the responsibility of his inheritance. He is an advertising consultant who visits his mother on the farm with his new wife, Peggy, and step-son, Richard. He had recently left his former family and divorced his first wife.

> (The farm) ... to Mrs. Robinson ... is the symbol of her own freedom, of the freedom she believes she has conferred upon Joey and of their heritage; Peggy sees it as a trap for Joey and a menace to their marriage; Richard sees it as a brave new world full of fascination. Joey sees it as all of these things, and finds himself unable to reconcile them.[52]

Joey's inheritance is in jeopardy because he contemplates parceling the farm into lots for sale. The difference between his attitude toward the farm and his mother's, can be seen in the way each mows the hay.

> My mother's method, when she mowed, was to embrace the field, tracing its borders and then on a slow square-spiral closing in until one small central patch was left, a triangle of standing grass or an hourglass that became two triangles before vanishing. Mine was to slice, in one ecstatic straight thrust, up the middle and then to narrow the two halves, whittling now at one and now the other, entertaining myself with flanking maneuvers acres wide and piece-meal mop-ups. I imitated war, she love. In the end, our mowed fields looked the same, except that my mother's would have more scraggly spots where she had lifted the cutter over a detected pheasant's nest or had spared an especially vivid patch of wildflowers.[53]

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51 Updike, Beck: A Book, p. 118.

52 Harper, op. cit., p. 183.

53 Updike, Of The Farm, p. 47.

The sexual imagery--the masculine taking, destroying, the feminine giving, creating--reinforces the difference that Joey understates. Nevertheless, although Joey makes no final decision, the memories stimulated by his return to his old home give him a sense of his inheritance and he becomes more and more unwilling to destroy it. In spite of the fact that neighbouring farms fall victim to re-development or have been parceled off for sale, the Robinson farm remains relatively unscathed by time. Joey notes that his mother's dishes are always the same ones--that they are never damaged or broken in his mother's hands. Such moments of realization obscurely impress him. Updike leaves open the possibility that Joey may yet reclaim the lasting values that manifest themselves in the farm.

> An imaginative man, such as Joey still is may learn ... the tragic consequences of the wrong choices he has made. Nevertheless, these wrong choices cannot be reversed. Since weak men have renounced their responsibilities, they have laid upon their sons burdens too heavy for their small shoulders - making them homunculi. Joey wonders whether his Charlie will become 'like Richard, a little husband.'[54]

It is Caldwell who teaches us that one must not taint the concept of freedom by using it as an excuse to escape responsibility. He knows, as Rabbit does not, that "... freedom is not an absolute, but something that is known solely when the limits upon freedom are first recognized and accepted.[55]

Since one cannot be sustained without the other, the sense of continuity and the sense of identity are barely distinguishable. Harper says that Mrs. Robinson's farm "... has a rich legacy of associations, [and] to lose it would be to lose her identity."[56] It is in keeping with Updike's largely existential out-look on life that his protagonists' quest is also a search for

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54 Alice Hamilton and Kenneth Hamilton, op. cit., pp. 191-92.

55 Ibid., p. 46.

56 Harper, op. cit., p. 183.

identity. What is sought is an inner, rather than a social identity; therefore, if the questor fails, there is nothing between him and utter disorientation. This adds a feeling of meaninglessness in life to the fear of death. The inescapable consequence of this paradoxical clash of negatives--a rejection of the value of life with the fear of death--is despair. But the Updike protagonist is never driven quite to this ultimate. Even pain, with characters like Caldwell, does provide some sense of identity; the moments of revelation do so in a much more profound way, and especially if these moments are experienced through the memory process.

If the Updike hero can discover what he was, he has found a clue to what he is. The connection between the two supplies the continuity.

> We have one home, the first, and leave that one. The having and leaving go on together.[57]

> (Updike) ... is preoccupied with a feeling about the past that is characteristic of the nineteenth century romantics ... "the spirit of the Past/ For future restoration" (is) ... a precise description of Mr. Updike's almost irresistable impulse to go home again in memory to find himself.[58]

It may be of interest in passing to note that Updike finds a sense of continuity lacking in American society as a whole. Galloway says of the town citizens of The Poorhouse Fair: "... they attempt to regain something of America's once vital heritage by collecting objects of early Americana and almost anything else which appears to be handmade."[59] Piet Hanema of Couples admires the skill and confident composure of his two old carpenters--members of a diminishing breed who can still identify themselves by work rooted in inherited values. These two cannot be ordered to do work quickly or leave out essentials. Joey Robinson can only say, "I am an

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57 Updike, "Shillington," Verse, p. 154.

58 Mizener, op. cit., p. 256.

59 Galloway, op. cit., p. 27.

advertising consultant," and Rabbit, "I am an ex-basketball player." Updike says it himself.

> My novels are all about the search for useful work ... So many people these days have to sell things they don't believe in, and have jobs that defy describing. It's so different from the time when men even took their names from the work they did - Carpenter, Farmer, Fisher. A man has to build his life outward from a job he can do. Once he finds one he's got eight hours of the day licked, and if he sleeps eight more, he's two-thirds golden.
> .....
> ... I will try not to panic ... and to work steadily, even shyly, in the spirit of those medieval carvers who so fondly sculpted the undersides of choir seats.[60]

Eight hours are unaccounted for.

There is a final way in which memory serves the Updike protagonist--through art. In one sense, all art is autobiographical: the artist is giving expression to parts of his experience--sensory, emotional, intellectual--which he has stored in his memory. Even a painter working on a landscape before his eyes, adds to his canvas elements of experience gained a moment, or a year, before he started the actual painting; otherwise, he would need only take a photograph. What distinguishes art from autobiography is the new combination in which the artist's experiences appear in art. He places them in new chronologies, new settings, new situations, and the result is something that never existed before. In his selection and ordering of his many experiences, the artist exerts a free will unsurpassed within the human condition. Speaking of American novelists in particular, Poirier quotes Emerson in pointing out the extent of the artist's freedom:

> 'Build therefore your own world.' .... To 'enclose' the world as Emerson puts it, so that 'Time and

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60 Life., p. 6.

> space, liberty and necessity, are left at large no longer.'....
> .....
> [Writers] ... resist within their pages the forces of environment that otherwise dominate the world. ... as if historical forces cannot possibly provide such an environment, as if history can give no life to 'freedom,' and as if only language can create the liberated place.[61]

After a careful selection of the concrete realities with which he has come in contact and the impressions they have made on him, the artist can then re-order them into new combinations to create his own time, his own space, his own liberty.

Updike is regarded as strongly autobiographical in his work; but this is only to say that when he writes fiction, he puts his personal experiences into new combinations that are not radically different from the way they actually happened to him. In other words, he makes few (or very subtle) changes in the order of his actual experiences as he transforms them into fiction. A less 'autobiographical' writer makes more obvious or more numerous changes in the order of his experiences.

The Updike protagonist is often a painter or a writer whose art provides an advantage in the quest for evidence of immortality. He can give tangible form to a moment of revelation that might otherwise elude the understanding. If such a moment is not grasped immediately or as a result of the memory process alone, then the shaping power of paint or words may help. "The reality in which the artist offers participation is condensed in an image and is not otherwise available."[62]

Peter Caldwell speaks of a scene from his adolescence when he watched his father head out to school after the snowstorm:

> In time my father appeared in this window, an erect figure dark against the snow. His posture

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61 Richard Poirier, A World Elsewhere (New York, 1966), pp. 3-5.

62 Hartt, op. cit., p. 4.

> made no concession to the pull underfoot; upright he waded out through our yard .... The trees took white on their sun side. The two telephone wires diagonally cut the blank blue of the sky. The stone wall was a scrumble of umber; my father s footsteps white on white. I knew what the scene was - a patch of Pennsylvannia in 1947 - and yet I did not know, was in my softly fevered state mirdlessly soaked in a rectangle of coloured light. I burned to paint it, just like that, in its puzzle or glory; it came to me that I must go to Nature disarmed of perspective and stretch myself like a large transparent canvas upon her in the hope that, my submission being perfect, the imprint of a beautiful and useful truth would be taken.[63]

This is a moment of potential revelation that must pass in its "puzzle of glory" because the young Peter lacks the artistic ability to give it understandable form in the shape, texture and colour of paint. Though Peter cannot apprehend them, many of the elements of fully realized morents of revelation are present here. Peter's father resists the pull of the snow, and, like the foot-worn paths of"Packed Dirt ...", his footprints 'humanize" nature. The suggestion of telephone poles invokes another of Updike's images of the assertion of the self, of a more permanent human presence, felt upon the course of the ever-changing world. These are the last lines of "Telephone Poles":

> Yet they are ours. We made them.
> See here, where the cleats of linemen
> Have roughened a second bark
> Onto the bald trunk. And these spikes
> Have been driven sideways at intervals handy for
> Human legs. The Nature of our construction is in
> Every way a better fit than the nature it displaces.
> What other tree can you climb where the birds' twitter,
> Unscrambled, is English? True, their thin shade is
> negligible,
> But then again there is not that tragic autumnal
> Casting-off of leaves to outface annually.
> These giants are more constant than evergreens
> By being never green.[64]

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63 Updike, The Centaur, pp 217-18.

64 Updike,"The Telephone Poles," Verse, p. 139.

Art is superior to nature in the sense that it eliminates the flux of nature that hides the underlying permanence.

Recurring in Updike's work is the image of the shaping of wood, which, like the shaping of a path, is a manifestation of man and nature in vital contact. The man-made star, "Echo" is outside of nature. The Hamiltons take note of Updike's "fascination with the skilled matching of natural and man-made patterns..."[65]

Also in the scene viewed from Peter's window is a reminder of the necessity for accepting the fact of change and death in Peter's "submission" to nature. Finally, we are reminded of the notion of ways of knowing which are outside the sphere of reason because Peter is sick in bed at the time and sees everything in a "softly fevered state" like that of the poem, "Fever."

Art, like the memory, halts the rush of time and does so with more rigidity and in a more intelligible way.

> It was this firmness, I think, this potential fixing of a few passing seconds that attracted me, at the age of five, to art. For it is about that age, isn't it, that it sinks in upon us that things do, if not die, certainly change, wriggle, slide, retreat, and, like the dabs of sunlight on the bricks under a grape arbor on a breezy June day, shuffle out of all identity.[66]

This, to the Updike hero, is the important element of art. When a part of the changing universe is rendered into a stasis by art, it can be examined, and the timeless pattern underlying the flux can be apprehended. Again, a still photograph will achieve stasis; but it lacks the necessary involvement of the human element; there is no sense of the existential participation--which is incorporated into the art form--that is part of the process of illumination. In a visit to a museum, young Peter Caldwell undergoes an experience which may have been inspired in Updike by Keats' famous ode.

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65 Alice Hamilton and Kenneth Hamilton, op. cit., p. 39.

66 Updike, The Centaur, p. 51.

> ... a naked green lady, life size, stood in the centre of a circular black-lipped pool. She was a fountain. She held to her lips a scallop shell of bronze and her fine face was pursed to drink but the mechanics of the fountain dictated that water should spill forever from the edge of the shell away from her lips. Eternally expectant ... she held the shell an inch away from the face that seemed with its lowered lids and parted lips asleep. As a child I was troubled by her imagined thirst, and I would place myself so I could see the enduring inch that held her mouth from contact with the water .... The patience of her wait, the mildness of its denial, seemed unbearable to me then.[67]

It is the artist's control of, and involvement with his subject that enabled him to mix the timeless ("the enduring inch") with the temporal (moving water) in the form of his statue. The child in Peter felt only obscurely a part of what the sculptor felt. He was puzzled, fascinated without knowing fully why. The older Peter remembers and becomes fascinated again; but this time, the mature artist in him comes to an apprehension similar to that of the sculptor.

The problem for the artist is to find the precise way to express the moment of revelation because it cannot be fully grasped until a particular form makes it intelligible.

The religious analogy of the rendering of the eternal within the temporal into form, is ritual. Sacramental images such as the Eucharist--the presence of Christ within the most mundane of foods--recur in Updike's work. But since the Updike protagonist is denied the more conventional faith, he can only appreciate the meaning of the host without being able to believe in it literally. Such is the position of the narrator-writer of "Music School" in both religion and music. Without the skill to create musical forms, he is denied the "vision" of the latter.

> Vision, timidly, becomes percussion, percussion becomes music, music becomes emotion, emotion becomes - vision. Few of us have had the heart to follow this circle to the end. I took lessons for years, and never learned. .....

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67 Ibid., pp 199-200.

> I am neither musical nor religious. Each moment I live, I must think where to place my fingers, and press them down with no confidence of hearing a chord.[68]

He has also failed because of a lack of skill in his own field. He has had to reject his plans for a science-fiction novel as unuseable. When he tries to express in writing the remarkable character of his dead grandmother, the all-important form eludes him: "O Lord, bless these poor paragraphs, that would do, in their vile ignorance Your work of ressurrection."[69] It is only in his daughter's promise of musical talent and in the hereditary continuity of father and daughter that he finds solace.

Peter Caldwell also has problems in trying to find the elusive form.

> I glance around ... at the earnestly bloated canvases I conscientiously cover with great streaks straining to say what even I am beginning to suspect is the unsayable thing, and I grow frightened. I consider the life we have made together, with its days spent without relation to the days the sun keeps and its baroque arabesques of increasingly attenuated emotion and its furnishings like a scattering of worn-out Braques and its rather wistful half-Freudian half-Oriental sex-mysticism, and I wonder, Was it for this that my father gave up his life?[70]

Peter decides to reject the escape of sensuality (the life he leads with his mistress) and continue his search for the form that will say "the unsayable thing" because he must accept the responsibility passed on by his father who also struggled "to serve the impossible." The Hamiltons seem to feel that Peter makes no such decision.

> The Centaur leaves Peter's dilemma unsolved .... By so doing the book is in itself a partial answer to the question of whether the aesthetic vision must inevitably remain closed to the moral and religious dimensions of life.

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68 Updike, "The Music School," pp. 140-42.

69 Ibid., p. 157.

70 Updike, The Centaur, p. 201.

They refer here to Kierkegaard's three levels of existence: the religious, the moral and the aesthetic--with the aesthetic as the lowest order because it means concern only for the self and a philosophy based upon sensual pleasure. The Hamiltons ask:

> Yet, can the aesthetic vision ever capture a truth either beautiful or useful ... if it does not embrace the possibility of self-sacrifice and of a love that reaches beyond earth to heaven?

Perhaps the Hamiltons are too anxious to equate Kierkegaard's "aesthetic" life with artistic life. The "vision" at the window involves Peter's recognition of his father's self-sacrifice and it has already been shown that his "aesthetic" life was taken up precisely because of what he considered failure in his artistic life. He now recognizes the responsibilities of his heritage and rejects the escapism of a sensuous existence. The question is not, as the Hamilton's put it, "... how the pursuit of the artist's vocation and the demands of mature responsibility in the individual existence are to be reconciled,"[71] but whether or not Peter has the artistic skill to fulfill "the demands of mature responsibility."

The narrator-writer of "The Blessed Man of Boston" explains metaphorically why the search for form is so difficult:

> But we would-be novelists have a reach as shallow as our skins. We walk through volumes of the unexpressed and like snails leave behind a faint thread excreted out of ourselves. From the dew of the few flakes that melt on our faces we cannot reconstruct the snowstorm.[72]

The universal flux is too voluminous, too rapid, too separate from ourselves to capture in stasis more than the smallest part of it. Then too, the individual may be distracted, confused by the myriad of non-essential impressions demanding his conscious attention; or

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71 Alice and Kenneth Hamilton, op. cit., p. 180.

72 Updike, The Centaur, p. 201.

what is worse, his senses may fail to register a detail that is integral to apprehension. Hence, the artist must often be content with only a hint of success.

> Our bodies are in Nature; our shoes, their laces, the little plastic tips of the laces - everything around us and about us is in Nature, and yet something holds us away from it, like the upward push of water which keeps us from touching the sandy bottom ....
>
> A blue jay lights on a twig outside my window. Momentarily sturdy, he stands astraddle, his dingy rump towards me, his head alertly frozen in sillouette, the predatory curve of his beak stamped on a sky almost white above the misting tawny marsh. See him? I do, and, snapping the chain of my thought, I have reached through glass and seized him and stamped him on this page. Now he is gone. And yet, there, a few lines above, he still is, 'astraddle,' rump' dingy,' his head 'alertly frozen.' A curious trick, possibly useless, but mine.[73]

The assertion in this passage of the artist's separation from nature and the difficulty of rendering it intelligible is reinforced by the presence of the glass window. Even when the artist enjoys some success and manages, momentarily, to reach through the glass and witness testimony of his immortality, there is still a nagging suspicion: that all was an illusion, "... a curious trick, possibly useless." Paul West, on his part, has no doubt whatsoever about the aspirations of artists.

> It is, of course, deluded, but hearteningly so, to think that we cheat time by incessantly imposing our will upon circumstances - by precipitating change, revolution, novelty and crisis. Such impositions of will necessarily exist within time, however much we magnify or minimize them .... no amount of juggling with careers or events can humanize time.[74]

But J.N. Hartt presents the alternative outlook--with which man is left--if indeed the artist cannot "humanize" time.

> Perhaps the dream is but illusion, a trick played by

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73 Updike, "Leaves," The Music School, p. 44.

74 West, op. cit., p. 284.

> corrupt memory or corrupt hope; and if memory and hope be corrupt shall any important part of human life escape taint, distortion and disfigurement?[75]

It is here that the Updike protagonist exhibits his kind of faith. The narrator of "The Blessed Man of Boston" has been speaking of his outline for a planned novel:

> For I thought that this story, fully told, would become without my willing it a happy story, a story full of joy; had my powers been greater, we would know. As it is, you, like me, must take it on faith.[76]

The implication here is that the truly great artist who has succeeded more completely in giving form to a moment of revelation has no need of faith. He has discovered for himself incorruptible evidence of immortality and his work remains for others to discover it if they make the effort.

The exerpt from Wallace Stevens' "To the One of Fictive Music," chosen by Updike for the fly-leaf of The Music School, will serve as a basis through which to clarify the function and the attitude of the artist as Updike sees them.

> Now of the music summoned by the birth
> That separates us from wind and sea,
> Yet leaves us in them, until earth becomes,
> By being so much of the things we are,
> Gross effigy and simulacrum, none
> Gives motion to perfection more serene
> Than yours, out of our imperfections wrought,
> Most rare, or ever of more kindred air
> In the laborious weaving that you wear.

"The One of Fictive Music" is the poet whose art--the "laborious weaving"--gives form to a "perfection" by re-molding the realities of a universe that resists, by its very nature, intelligibility. With Stevens this perfection lies in the function of the imagination itself; with Updike it underlies the reality of nature as well and provides evidence of an eternal force. The music is "fictive" because the "simulacrum" of nature in flux is arrested, changed, imbued

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75 Hartt, op. cit., p. 54.

76 Updike, "The Blessed Man of Boston," p. 167.

with a part of the poet himself as he, out of his "imperfections," apprehends perfection by giving it form. In so doing, he is made "kindred" with nature, a part of its flux, and, for Updike, a part of the element of eternity which underlies it. In making his "music," the poet does not create in the strictest sense, because all of the elements necessary for the making of a particular form are already present; he actually 're-creates' because it is in the selection and combination of images gleaned from nature and processed in his mind that the building of the form is made possible.

The error made by the Hamiltons when they suggest the incompatability of the artistic life and the religious life can now be made more clear. This is the basis of their argument:

> The free man is supremely the man who has learned that self-will is slavery, since it is the desire to create the real rather than to respond to it.[77]

This may well be true; but it does not apply to the artist. The artist does "respond," to the realities of nature. He must become "kindred" with nature in order, not to create, but to re-create its realities into some intelligible form. Ironically, the Hamiltons applaud Updike's literary efforts quite brilliantly for the same reasons that they condemn the attitude of his character, Peter Caldwell.

> For Updike, to live is to move creatively within existence. It is to apprentice oneself to life - for the pleasure it brings and the demands it makes .... The most obvious way to describe the created world is to say that it is a web of vast, complex, interlocking glorious patterns. Each short story ... concentrates on a striking example of such patterns. The pattern 'without error' traced on the plumage of a pigeon finds its parallel in the intricate pattern woven by the musician. Thus art, expressing nature's pattern in a pattern of its own, creates a vision that leads to 'giving God, God the maker of unmade things, the glory.' ... Updike sees both life and art as culminating in an act of thanksgiving .... The pattern of heavenly work is echoed in earthly work ....[78]

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77 Alice Hamilton and Kenneth Hamilton, op. cit., p. 61.

78 K. Hamilton, op. cit., p. 745.

The anxieties and struggles of the Updike protagonist are not without point or reward. It is fitting then to conclude on an optimistic note with an exerpt from Updike's work, "Archangel." It is a curious work because it denies formal catagorization. A benign, immortal being seems to be coaxing reluctant man, urging him to accept gifts--gifts that are precisely those that reappear in Updike's stories bringing his characters "glimmers" of immortality.

> Where, then, has your life been touched? My pleasures are as specific as they are everlasting. The sliced edges of a fresh ream of laid paper, cream, stiff, rag-rich. The freckles of the closed eyelids of a woman attentive in the first white blush of morning. The ball diminishing well down the broad green throat of the first at Cape Ann. The good catch, a candy sun slatting the bleachers. The fair at the vanished poorhouse .... The microscopic glitter in the ink of words that are your own. Certain moments, remembered or imagined, of childhood. Three-handed pinochle by the brown glow of the stained-glass lampshade, your parents out of their godliness wishing you to win .. .. The Lace-Maker in the Louvre hardly bigger than your spread hand.
>
> Such glimmers I shall widen to rivers; nothing will be lost, not the least grain of remembered dust, and the multiplication shall be a thousand thousand fold; love me. Embrace me; come, touch my side, where honey flows. Do not be afraid. Why should my promises be vain? Jade and cinnamon: do you deny that such things exist? Why do you turn away? Is not my song a stream of balm? My arms are heaped with apples and ancient books; there is no harm in me; no. Stay. Praise me. Your praise of me is praise of yourself; wait. Listen. I will begin again.[79]

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79 Updike, "Archangel," Pigeon Feathers, p. 118.

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