

# JOHN UPDIKE AND OTHERS

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**LUO CHANGBIN**

**HENAN PEOPLE'S PUBLISHING HOUSE**

Zhenzhou • Henan

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# 论厄普代克

罗长斌 著

责任编辑 刘玉军

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## PREFACE

Paradoxically John Updike's books challenge his readers to the same extent as their criticism. The difficulty arises partly from the huge bulk of existing comments and essays on him and his works, which need elucidation, and partly from confusion resulting from misinterpretation of his works on the part of commentators. Therefore every new essay or book of criticism can be assumed, either to deepen the misunderstanding, or to be guilty of carrying coals to Newcastle.

In the present book on Updike the approach is direct and unequivocal, reflecting its author's critical research within six years. Focusing on the first two novels of the

## Preface

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Rabbit series, this book explores the changes in social relationships over decades, explaining Updike's ideological development through his fictional characters all of whom are credible in the America of 1959 and 1969. The focus is also critically directed to the unique techniques Updike uses in his creation of pseudo-realistic world out of the realistic world of radio messages, TV programs and daily routines, the juxtaposition of different writing styles and its special effects.

Literary criticism analyses literature for its meaning, but it also furnishes literature with meaning. *John Updike and Others* offers meaning in literature and criticism as well as critical methods.

Zhao Fa  
Ningbo University

# EVERYMAN REVISITED

## A Preface

Horse or rabbit: getting into harness and pulling your load until you drop, or the dodgy approach to the game of life, this was Updike's original concept for *The Centaur* and *Rabbit, Run*. Yet man emerged in each as both horse and rabbit; the books reverberate with the conflict between good and evil, life and death, exposing a morality unchanged since medieval times, unaltered by Atlantic migration. They focus on a dual personality: Everyman.

*Rabbit Redux* carries Harry Angstrom to the point where he yields to the enticements of fallow affluence, dismissing his zest for that cognition which has eluded him. Between *Rabbit Is Rich* and *Rabbit at Rest* there exists an undeniable affinity, partly attributable to Updike's reaction

to the scathing reviews of *Rabbit Redux* by critics who did not have the benefit of having read the full scenario before passing judgement. In the first pair Rabbit tries to understand himself and life whereas in the latter two he exploits every opportunity to eat, drink, cheat and make good cheer especially with lusty women, until he is abandoned by his fellows and kindred and left to die ingloriously.

Throughout the quartet there are constant echoes of *The Centaur* and its protagonist Caldwell, also Everyman, who pulls his load until he drops. Thus these works are bonded into an 'Everyman quintuplex' in which *The Centaur* is the overture anticipating each of Rabbit's movements while remaining detached from the central theme, but absolute in literary homogeneity.

Updike as author does not obtrude onto either plot or his characters' personae, however a study of his published works of autobiography shows there are parallels between the man and his incarnations of Everyman. As Harry becomes more familiar, so does Updike.

This delimitation of the present work to the part of the quintuplex in which the anti-hero searches for the dawn of self, is to be commended. Rabbit's intellectual death comes at the end of *Rabbit Redux* and it makes a natural break in the saga; from then on he is less 'horse' and his identity



wanes in significance. Exploration of internal conflict in a very ordinary man is accompanied by compassion and comprehension that the fear of death has not remained a universal emotion. Man now has data with him always changing him so that his reliance on the favour of God is no longer crucial, and 'Knowledge' \* has become an external abstraction.

Neville Houghton  
Gisborne, Australia

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\* 'Knowledge' is one of the characters who abnegates the responsibility of accompanying Everyman as he faces death, in the medieval miracle play *Everyman*.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Chinese critics have published fourteen, or so, articles on John Updike in the past sixteen years, and this hardly proclaims him as an author who is taken seriously in this country; so it has been necessary to study foreign works to find the ‘bricks’ for this ‘skyscraper’. Prominent in evaluations of Updike is George W. Hunt who has provided challenging enlightenment.

Thanks should be expressed to such critics as Randall H. Waldron, Miriam Y. Miller, especially to Updike’s friend, George W. Hunt—— they have challenged my perception by highlighting differences in interpretation of the texts. I would like to thank Prof. Jiang Jiajun and my tutor Prof. Zhao Fa for their guidance in literary criticism

## Acknowledgements

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when I was studying American literature in Chongqing, and especially my Australian friend Neville Houghton who has worked as my research assistant, advisor and editor for six years; I have to confess that this work would not have been accomplished without Neville's investigation of many esoteric sources not available to me.

Finally, thanks should be expressed to Foshan College of Science and Technology , where I have been working, for its financial support.

L. C. B.  
Foshan City

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# **PART ONE**

## **ON JOHN UPDIKE**